

JFK Assassinati

Stevens Point Professor Asks: What

By DAVID R. WRONE

The 12-year-old unsolved assassination of President John F. Kennedy has given rise to more than 100 major critics of the official Warren Commission findings and several thousand regional and local voices of dissent.

The number of critics, the intensity of their criticism and the support given them by the public is without parallel in American history.

The critics fall into two distinctive groups: the responsible and the irresponsible or pseudo. The irresponsible critics dominate the subject and have so formed the central question in the public mind that serious doubt now exists that the assassination investigation can be reopened. If it cannot, the implication goes far beyond Dallas to the quality of life for the present

generation and will leave its distinct imprint on our ability as a nation to meet future crises.

The Responsible Critics

The responsible critics number about a dozen and generally have been ignored by the press, the collegiate lecture circuits and the politicians. Among these few are: the indefatigable Harold Weisberg, who is perhaps the most informed of all; the brilliant young Howard Roffman; the doughty James Hiram Lesar, who has fought the Department of Justice to the Supreme Court five times; Sylvia Meagher; and Paul Hoch.

All of them possess certain qualities that set them apart from the irresponsible critics like the dawn separates the day from night. Chief among their attributes is their insistence on working

only with the evidence and giving critical scrutiny to all facts before making a statement.

Thus, they perforce have to spend long hours working in the documentary base in order to build their books around the most careful research. Knowledge alone will provide us with a clue and they do not presume to tell us who killed Kennedy for that information is not in the evidentiary base.

Their approach to modern problems through the medium of careful attention to facts and evidence rather than by the devices of theory, speculation and emotion is an old tradition in the United States. This approach is found in the attack on slavery, in the rise of the labor movement and in the radical resistance (1945-1948) to the Cold War, to give just three national illustrations.

In Wisconsin, the approach is personified in the life of Robert M. La Follette who fought for a better world in precisely this way. "Fighting Bob" fought with fact — fact derived from a prodigious effort of long study and serious consideration of the evidence. Then, armed with the facts, he stood in the Senate and fought the military machine, the powerful rich, the exploiters of the Indians and the special interests.

The responsible critics stand in this tradition; unfortunately they have been given little attention by a public which has been turned more and more to extremist positions assiduously promoted by the pseudo-critics.

The Irresponsible Critics

The irresponsible critics have captured the public mind and have treated us to an almost daily revelation of what happened in Dallas.

The list is long, including Penn Jones, Jim Garrison, Dick Gregory, George O'Toole, Mark Lane, Josiah Thompson, Richard Popkins, A. J. Weberman, etc. Many of them use the most blatant showmanship devices, ones which would make even old P. T. Barnum turn green with envy. Few of them, however, have been inside the National Archives to do serious research; several of their arguments have been lifted from the works of other authors or have been demolished by the responsible critics



NEA Photo

President Kennedy, shown as he left a Boston hospital following the death of his infant son in August, 1963. Three months later, the President would be murdered.

on: A Cover-Up?

Kept Us from Learning the Truth?

years before they wrote them up as the New Truth.

Three examples will suffice.

Mark Lane's books are packed with hundreds of errors of fact and omissions of fact to support his theories. His treatment of some testimony is a severe distortion of truth.

A. J. Weberman's *Coup d'etat* centers on a picture of some "tramps" being arrested on Dealey Plaza. He asserts they are CIA men. He totally ignores irrefutable evidence — other photos, affidavits, eye-witnesses, etc. — which proves that the "tramps" were, in fact, winos and which destroys his "theory."

George O'Toole's *Assassination Tapes* contains numerous errors of fact. His "Psychological Stress Machine" that solved "the crime of the century" is now being pushed heavily among law enforcement agencies to aid in the fight against crime.

Characteristic of the work of these critics is a reliance on theories to prove who shot John F. Kennedy. Once they get their theory, they proceed on its basis, and with a little bit of speculation, they make the facts fit the iron bed of presumption. This, of course, is much easier than doing long hours of laborious research to find out the truth, but then they don't really need the facts. They have a theory.

The False Question

The false critics have risen to power through the cooperative efforts of a slumbering press, uncritical television, misguided student groups and by sheer weight of numbers forcing the responsible critics into the background. Thus, the central question on the assassination is formulated entirely in false terms: Who shot President Kennedy?

To these imitation-critics, the question is always put in "who" terms. With Mark Lane, for example, the "who" varies: sometimes, he says the Central Intelligence Agency did it; other times, he charges the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the military-industrial complex. Each time, however, he concentrates on "who."

Other critics charge the Castro Cubans, the reactionary right wing or

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David Wrone is an associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and has published several articles on the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Wrone also has made a study of the nearly 150 books published on the Kennedy assassination and places them in three categories: "apologists for the Warren Commission; irresponsible pseudo critics; and responsible critics."

"It is," Wrone says, "nearly impossible to have anything published in a serious vein."

Wrone says he doesn't believe that Lee Harvey Oswald was responsible for Kennedy's death, and he doesn't believe James Earl Ray killed King.

In the article on the top of this page, Wrone summarizes his research and findings concerning both the Kennedy assassination and the critics of the official assassination report prepared by the Warren Commission.

The article headlined: "Rifles, Bullets and Lots of Doubt" is the first of a three-part series on what Wrone has discovered behind the scenes of the investigation.

The series really represents one article, divided into three parts due to its length.

The first installment presents some unusual findings regarding the weapons involved in the assassination investigation, and introduces what Wrone calls "the gratuitous mystery of the sealed documents in the Warren Commission records."

Parts 2 and 3 — which will run in Tuesday's and Wednesday's editions of *The Capital Times* — unveil the mystery and Wrone provides an interpretation.

Wrone documented many of the statements in his articles with footnotes. Any questions about statements in the articles may be addressed to *The Capital Times* or to Professor Wrone at UW-Stevens Point and footnote information will be provided where possible.

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Texas oilmen. All focus on "who."

The answer to the question of who shot President Kennedy is: It is a false question. It is a question which deserves the American people and will ultimately block re-opening the investigation.

In the first place, we probably will never know who shot President Kennedy. Most crimes 10 years and older are never solved, especially ones of such complexity. But even if one could find the triggermen, the probability of penetrating the level of conspiracy that ordered or permitted the assassination to be perpetrated is extremely low.

Second, the "who" question is a

strawman question which is easily rebutted. When Gregory went to the Vice President's Commission on the CIA with the "facts" of his theory that the CIA shot Kennedy, he easily was rebutted.

Once federal officials destroy one nutty theory, the claim is put forward that all other criticism of the assassination is similar. They have already shown how preposterous it is; therefore, one faulty, all faulty. The government can knock down one false "who" theory after another, gradually destroy the credibility of all critics, and ignore the truth.

Third, even if the irresponsible criticism could be heeded by the govern-

ment, conditions exist today (as they existed on Nov. 22, 1963) which would permit the government to put forward another patsy like Lee Harvey Oswald and cover up the crime once more.

Only when these conditions have been understood, examined in factual detail, will the crime be solved. Study of the Kennedy assassination must be refocused.

The Central Question

The central question of the assassination is: What prevented us from learning the truth about the assassination of the President? And it is here that the false critics fall away, because only cold, sober, factual information will

give us that answer, not gimmicks, "theories" or headlines.

This is a difficult way to move, repugnant to many who think they know "who." But the American critical tradition and the example of "Fighting Bob" La Follette demonstrates beyond cavil that truth is ultimately a question of facts. By working at the facts, piling up the evidence, carefully and quietly assembling the data, the picture of what happened on Dealey Plaza will emerge in clear detail.

The picture is much more heinous than the false critics would have us suppose.

Every fundamental institution in the United States failed to act in accordance with its stipulated principles.

- The legal institution is particularly notorious in the investigation of the assassination. Lawyers committed perjury, helped or forced witnesses to commit perjury, concealed evidence, mutilated evidence and lied to all concerned about the evidence. It was not just a few "bad eggs" who did this, but a score of competent, well-schooled and highly-touted attorneys.

- The courts also failed — in the person of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren.

- Congress proved inept in addressing itself to the problem and was duped by the Warren Commission.

- The press and media were especially incompetent and distorted truth, fed themselves on rumors, traced down minor eccentricities and ignored the facts.

- Historians also failed. Two served on the Warren Commission. Academic scholars have easily relied on the official truth for their classes and textbooks.

- Local law enforcement officials bungled their job. Many of the agents in the federal investigative agencies and in the Department of Justice destroyed evidence, suppressed testimony, mutilated photographs, committed perjury and helped suborn perjury.



NEA Photo

In this classic photo, Lee Harvey Oswald doubles up as he is shot by Jack Ruby while being transferred from the

Dallas city jail to the county jail. The photo was taken by Dallas Times Herald photographer Bob Jackson.