

Interview

With ROBERT SAM ANSON

Robert Sam Anson was a college student when John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas 12 years ago, and he remembers joining his classmates in a rousing cheer when Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald. In the years since, Anson, now 30 and an investigative journalist of some distinction (he is currently political editor of *New Times* magazine), has come to doubt the Warren Commission's assertion that Oswald fired the shot that killed the President. His reservations are contained in a book *They've Killed The President*, published in November, which reveals facts the Warren Commission didn't consider, overlooked or covered up. Anson was interviewed for *Maclean's* by Carole Gault. He had just returned from a radio phone-in show, observing that "the full moon must be out. . . I talked to a woman who told me Richard Nixon is slowly poisoning Martha Mitchell."

Maclean's: Who killed John F. Kennedy?

Anson: I don't know. That's a simple answer. I'm suspicious of anyone who says they do know and I wish I had a nickel for every time I've been called at three o'clock in the morning by a heavy breather who says he knows who the assassin is. I've heard everything from Madame Nhu to Texas oil millionaires to Southern racists to Richard Nixon to the Japanese, Chinese, Russians—you name it.

Maclean's: But in your book you suggest some possibilities, and they don't include the lone gunman theory advanced by the Warren Commission.

Anson: Yes, I have theories, but no conclusions. Final answers to this mystery will have to be cleared up in a brand new investigation. I think what has to be done in a case this complex is basically to answer three standard law enforcement questions that police ask in any normal investigation, questions that were never asked in this case: who had the motive, the means and the opportunity to kill the victim. In this case, when you ask those questions I think you come up with organized crime. They fit all three categories plus an important fourth one—namely, the power to turn off any investigation into their activities.

Maclean's: What would organized crime have stood to gain?

Anson: We know that in 1,000 days John Kennedy did more damage to the structure of organized crime in the United States than has ever been done before or since. At the time of his brother's death, Robert Kennedy was planning a massive assault on the mob in the State of Nevada. We

know that when Robert Kennedy left the Justice Department nine months after his brother's assassination, organized crime prosecutions dropped 75%. We know that certain foreign policy decisions of the Kennedy administration had a direct impact on the mob. These decisions affected tens of billions of dollars in drug profits. The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs identified Cuba during the Batista regime as the main source for the heroin that was



WHO HAD THE MEANS, THE MOTIVE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO KILL KENNEDY? ORGANIZED CRIME

coming into the United States. Federal law enforcement officials estimated the gambling skim in cash coming from the Havana casinos before Castro took power at \$100 million dollars a year. These things came to an end at the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Maclean's: In your book you also include the CIA as, if not the organizers of the assassination, at least potential contributors to it.

Anson: There is a connection. The central piece that's always been missing in understanding the Kennedy assassination has, like so much other information, only appeared quite recently. And that is the fundamental understanding that organized crime and the Central Intelligence Agency have been working in a hand-and-glove relationship so closely that it's impossible

at times to distinguish where the interests of organized crime begin and the interests of national security leave off. Their projects have included the assassinations of foreign leaders. One of them, known to us now because of sworn testimony before the Church committee, was Fidel Castro. And we now know other things not known in 1963—namely, that organized crime was involved with the agency in funding and supplying with arms a number of violent Cuban extremist groups. And President Kennedy attempted in 1962 to bring these activities to a halt. If you take a look at Oswald's background in the months immediately preceding the President's death, when he was in New Orleans, you find out that he was associated with both mob and intelligence figures. In New Orleans he infiltrated the anti-Castro right and started a pro-Castro Fair Play For Cuba committee. Now this behavior seems so bizarre there is no way to explain it. But we know today that this attempted infiltration of both right and left movements is standard operating procedure for government provocateurs. The mob and the intelligence connections come together very neatly over the island of Cuba, and it was one place where both the mob and the agency had a very real interest. President Kennedy was one of the things that stood in their way.

Maclean's: Recent revelations about the CIA make it simpler to believe the agency capable of anything, even murder.

Anson: Well, I don't believe the CIA, as an institution, had anything to do with the death of President Kennedy. But I think it is a wholly open question whether individual agents of a central intelligence agency were involved in the assassination.

Maclean's: It's also an open question whether the agency was in any way involved with Lee Harvey Oswald. Director William Colby denied it on a recent CBS special report on the assassination. And yet it strains credibility for the agency to deny it had any dealings with a man who defected to the Soviet Union, then returned to the United States and was involved in both pro-and-anti-Castro activities.

Anson: I don't know what CBS expected Bill Colby to say. "Gee I knew Lee Harvey Oswald. He dropped in for lunch a week before the assassination." Colby's credibility is certainly not the highest in the American government. But I think you've got to put yourself in the position of the CIA on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, when you find out that the man who worked for you in the Soviet Union has just been arrested for the murder of the Presi-

dent of the United States. Now, what is your choice? Do you go to the American people and say, "Look folks, Lee Harvey Oswald worked for us in the Soviet Union but he wasn't working for us this morning"? Do you think the American people would have believed that story?

Maclean's: Do you believe Oswald was employed by the CIA?

Anson: I believe he was employed by American intelligence. Right from the moment of the assassination there were a lot of suspicions that Lee Harvey Oswald was something more than a simple stock boy in a school book depository making \$1.25 an hour. Here was a fellow who had joined the Marine Corps and had worked at one of the largest CIA bases in the world. According to the Warren Commission this high-school dropout taught himself Russian and did it so well that when he encountered his wife-to-be in the Soviet Union she thought he was a native. In any case, the remarkable Lee Harvey Oswald obtained a fraudulent discharge from the Marine Corps, came back to the United States, drew all his savings out of the bank (\$203) and took a \$1,500 trip to Europe. No one knew where he came up with the extra \$1,300. He arrived in Southampton and from London flew to Helsinki on his way to the Soviet Union. But there were no commercial flights available between London and Helsinki at the time he arrived. The question is: who flew him to Helsinki if a commercial airline didn't? When he arrived in the Soviet Union he announced that he wanted to renounce his citizenship and turn over top secrets on U.S. radar. Yet when he returned to the United States, Oswald the turncoat, the traitor, the man who said he was going to commit espionage for the Russians, was met, according to the Warren Commission, by no one more sinister than the Travelers' Aid. There's a lot more about him that indicates ties to the intelligence community, and it all bears further investigation.

Maclean's: The latest polls show that 85% of the American people don't believe the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald, acting alone, fired all the shots and killed the President. How much does the cynicism created by the Watergate and CIA revelations have to do with this skepticism?

Anson: You really have to go back to 1967 and examine the public opinion polls. Two thirds of the American people didn't believe the Warren Commission then. And that was before Watergate. I think even then Americans had a deep instinctive feeling in the pit of their stomachs that they were being lied to by their government, even when it chose such a credible figure as the Chief Justice of the United States to present those lies.

Maclean's: Do you think the Warren Commission covered up the truth?

Anson: No I don't think Earl Warren would have been a willing accomplice to a cover-up. I don't think most of the commissioners would have been, with the ex-

ception of Allen Dulles, former director of the CIA. He knew of the CIA's attempts against Castro and of the CIA's relationship with organized crime, but he didn't tell any of that to the rest of the commission. I think the members of the Warren Commission were for the most part decent, honorable men trying to do an extremely difficult job under enormous constraints of time and political pressures. And, like all of us, they were naive about how government really operates in the United States. They couldn't have known back in '63 and '64 that the Central Intelligence Agency

DO YOU EXPECT THE CIA TO SAY: 'SURE OSWALD WORKED FOR US ONCE, BUT NOT ON NOVEMBER 22, 1963'?



was in the business of bumping off foreign leaders it didn't care for. And they couldn't have known that both the CIA and the FBI were, instead of coming up with answers, concealing and withholding evidence. In the case of the FBI, sworn testimony now shows that they were destroying evidence.

Maclean's: Why did they allow the FBI and the CIA to investigate themselves?

Anson: Well, you have to appreciate both the fear and regard they had for J. Edgar Hoover. You find out by reading in what were once the top secret transcripts of the Warren Commission executive meetings, only recently declassified, that the commission members were terrified of Hoover. They spent session after session trying to figure out how to deal with him. When they finally asked him if Oswald was an FBI informer he didn't deny it. He said that a thorough search of the FBI records and files showed no evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald was ever associated with the FBI. What we know today, something else we didn't know 12 years ago, is that the FBI, ac-

ording to sworn testimony before the Senate of the United States, had a policy of burning records and files on illegal or highly sensitive operations. This policy was instituted at the express direction of J. Edgar Hoover.

Maclean's: The most recent investigation, into the assassination, the CBS news investigation, came up with new scientific techniques that proved, to CBS's satisfaction, that the Warren Commission could have been correct, that Oswald could well have been the lone assassin. What did you think of the CBS report?

Anson: Well, on the first part of the report they indeed did what you said; then the next night they came on and said it might well have been a conspiracy and someone might have put Oswald up to it. In any case, I think there were a number of things wrong with the CBS report. First of all they stated as fact a number of very controversial things that responsible critics of the Warren Commission have always had trouble with. For example, they asked the question: Was Oswald on the sixth floor of the school book depository? Answer: Yes. But Jesse Curry, who was the chief of police of Dallas at the time of the assassination, says no credible witness was able to put Oswald in that window with that rifle at the time the Presidential motorcade went by. CBS also came up with some new theories. When the President was shot fatally he was literally lifted up out of his seat and hurled backward with violent force. Expert opinions have differed as to why he moved backward when he was supposed to have been shot from behind. The new CBS theory was that Mrs. Kennedy pushed him. I think that's a ludicrous suggestion. CBS also made a great fuss about the fact that they went to the Itek Corporation for sophisticated photo analysis of the Zapruder film of the assassination. What CBS failed to tell the viewing public was that the Itek Corporation was involved in photo analysis back in 1967, when the president of the corporation had admitted he was a former member of the CIA. I think that's dumb sloppy reporting. I'd rather think it was sloppy than dishonest.

Maclean's: There is, as you say, controversy about the movements of the President's head. CBS illustrated with a computer analysis technique that the particles coming from his head moved forward indicating that he was shot from the rear.

Anson: Well it, too, was done by the Itek Corporation. But be that as it may, when you talk to computer people the first thing they'll tell you is that a computer is only as good as the information that's programmed into it. A computer cannot distinguish what is bone fragments and what is brain matter. A human being, looking at the slides, has to determine what are fragments. Once these fragments are identified then a computer can track them. But if the mistake is made in the initial programming, then the whole computer falls out. Now other experts, using the same so-

THIS IS THE MODERATE POSITION AND LIBERAL TOUCHSTONE. THE FACTS ARE OTHERWISE.

phisticated techniques, have analyzed those films and concluded not that the brain tissue moves backward but that it moves backward, forward, up and down and that it's a gigantic explosion that hits the President. There was a motorcycle officer posted to the left rear of the Presidential limousine at the time of the fatal head shot and the windshield of his bike was splattered with explosive force by blood and brain tissue. It hit him with such force he thought he'd been shot. Now that would indicate a bullet coming from the right of the President's limousine and in front of it. CBS didn't tell us that either.

Maclean's: *I'm curious about your involvement with the assassination. What prompted you to do a book that demands a new investigation into it?*

Anson: I guess something snapped when I saw the Zapruder film on television in March. I saw the wrong things in that film. It was the head snap and the explosion of the President's head that just brought back all those memories that I, with only partial success, had tried to suppress for the last 12 years. Prior to that I never thought seriously about the case, although I always thought seriously about the Kennedys. In fact my chief failing in the book, if it is one, is that I don't make any pretense about my regard for John Kennedy.

Maclean's: *How do you feel about becoming involved in the "Who Killed JFK?" movement. It's populated to a large degree by people who can fairly be called kooks, by the Dick Gregorys of the world who see conspirators behind every tree.*

Anson: Well, I'm not of that ilk. Let me say that I think there is a reasonable, sane explanation for the assassination of President Kennedy and how it was covered up. I don't think it involves whole platoons of conspirators. I don't think there are people in storm drains, in helicopters or in bushes. I don't think it involves the invisible Nazi substructure that Jim Garrison once said it did. I think one of the problems in understanding the Kennedy case in the past 12 years has been the people who have pushed it, people like Dick Gregory. He believes there may have been a conspiracy in Hartford, Connecticut, when President Ford's car was run into by another car. And it's that sort of wild, way-out kooky stuff that turns off reporters, that turned me off for 11 years. I didn't want to get associated with this. I knew that once I started investigating it and wrote one magazine article friends of mine in the media would say: "Oh no, you've gone over the edge, too." But by the same token you have to realize there have been a number of good and decent people who have done the most incredibly valuable research that makes it possible for Johnny-come-latelis like me to arrive on the scene 11 years later and to scoop up the evidence that's been collected, evaluate new evidence and pursue fresh leads. If it weren't for people like Sylvia Meagher and Josiah Thompson we would be far away from a real answer to

this case. But it's because of the Looney Tunes characters who have been involved in the case that people have been turned off, and it's only very recently that public perception of what is at stake here has begun to turn around.

Maclean's: *Do you see yourself as a leader in the "let's get to the bottom of this case" movement?*

Anson: I hope not. I'm a working journalist. I'm not a professional critic of the Warren report. I want to go on to other stories.

Maclean's: *What about the press? There's an interesting quote in your book to the ef-*



WHAT'S NEEDED IS THE SAME THING THAT BROKE OPEN THE WATERGATE CASE: A HANGING JUDGE

fect that we're only "one Sy Hersh story away from a new investigation." Why is everyone staying away from the story? Is it even remotely possible that the Washington Post and the New York Times have sinister motives for avoiding it?

Anson: No, I don't harbor any such suspicions about those newspapers, and I think Sy Hersh is the best reporter in America, but he has been turned off this story for the same reason I was turned off it. I think it's understandable. You have to remember that reporters are not supermen. They are very straight, middle-class people who have mortgages to pay. They want to get ahead. They want to keep their credibility with their bosses. They want to get their pensions. They have tough jobs. They don't like being bothered by people who, if you don't believe them, say that you're a member of a conspiracy. That turns a reporter off. This story is a damned complex one—more than 10 million words in the Warren Commission report, 40 or more books and hundreds of magazine articles

have been written. And now there are thousands of pages of recently declassified information to pore over and dozens of eyewitnesses you have to talk to. It is a very tough story to get hold of, and I haven't got hold of it fully. All I've succeeded in doing is making myself even more bothered about it and having more questions about it. What pleases me most is when I talk to other reporters who have read my book and they say, "Jesus, if you say that, maybe there's something to it that we ought to look into—I've always assumed the Warren Commission was right." In a way the book is a 125,000-word letter to other reporters to say, "Look there's a terrific story out there, and all of us as Americans have got something at stake, and by God we had better find out the answers."

Maclean's: *What kind of investigation has any chance of coming up with some of those answers?*

Anson: Well first of all I think it is the business of Congress to establish that (a) there was a conspiracy; (b) both the CIA and the FBI covered; and (c) there are very serious questions about Oswald's background and links to American intelligence. Once Congress does that I don't believe that it's the place of Joe Representative from Allegheny County to go about trying to take the place of a law enforcement officer. Then, it is not the job for professional Warren Commission critics or reporters or Congressmen but for a special prosecutor, somebody who is tough, who can be ruthless, who is not afraid to go after the answers wherever they lead, who doesn't have ties to government, most especially to organized crime, and that's going to be tough finding somebody with those kind of credentials. And I think a staff can be assembled that can dig out the truth.

Maclean's: *But what would prevent the CIA and the FBI, even if they were being investigated under these conditions, from shredding and destroying evidence and lying again?*

Anson: What would prevent that is the same thing that finally cracked the Watergate case—namely, the prospect of having a hanging judge who will send people to jail for four years, and that's how a special prosecutor can operate. He can bring people before a grand jury and he can threaten them with contempt. If the pressure is put on witnesses, they will talk.

Maclean's: *Suppose that kind of investigation is held, and it proves that there was a conspiracy and a cover-up in the Kennedy assassination. What's that going to say to the American people about their country? How will they react to it?*

Anson: Nothing is going to surprise the American people at this point: they've been so brutalized and lied to already.

Maclean's: *You feel they're owed something better than the explanation they've had to date?*

Anson: Well, Voltaire said it best, "To the dead, one owes only consideration, to the living, the truth." ☼

A VALID POINT.