

Earl Warren: On the Mob's Payroll?

by Tom Bethell

A major conclusion of *They've Killed the President!*,* by Robert Sam Anson, and *The Assassinations: Dallas and Beyond*,** edited by Peter Dale Scott, Paul H. Hoch, and Russell Statler, two new books dealing with the assassination of John F. Kennedy, is that the investigation should be reopened. That seems like a good idea. A year ago, when I wrote "Was Sirhan Sirhan on the Grassy Knoll?" (*The Washington Monthly*, March 1975), the subject didn't seem to merit much more than ridicule, but in the last year so many lies have been told, so many "cover-ups" have been perpetrated, so many innuendos have been "documented" with footnotes, and we have, in some quarters, witnessed such a degradation of our intellectual life,

*Bantam Books, 1975.

**Random House/Vintage, 1976.

Tom Bethell is an editor of *The Washington Monthly*.

that the time has clearly come to drag the whole thing out into as public a forum as possible.

The lies, the cover-ups and the footnoted innuendos have come from the critics of the Warren Commission—those assassinologists and conspiratorialists who have perceived an ever-enlarging conspiracy spreading outwards like an ugly stain from the events in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

First, in 1964, there was the Warren Commission's report, whose central findings were that Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy alone and unaided. Evidently there was, and still is, something highly dissatisfying to the public mind about these findings, so that within two years a number of books began to appear challenging them. The source material for these criticisms was furnished in large measure by the Government Printing Office, in the form of 26

volumes of testimony and exhibits. A further treasure trove of documents awaited the diligent conspiratorialist in the National Archives, where thick volumes of FBI and Secret Service reports were available for anyone who walked in off the street. Some documents were "classified," however, which meant that they were not made available to researchers.

Soon enough, the conspiratorialists got to work: Cover-up! cried Mark Lane, who has made a career for himself by using Warren Commission material to accuse the Warren Commission of covering up the truth about the assassination. Cover-up! cried Jim Garrison, the district attorney of Orleans Parish, who launched a new investigation of his own, an investigation predicated upon the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald spent the summer of 1963 in New Orleans and may have there made acquaintances who assisted him in shooting the President. Cover-up! cried perhaps 20 other conspiracy-seekers.

I was in charge of Garrison's "Archives" throughout this investigation—his research man, so to speak—and so I was well placed to observe the course of his investigation. As is by now perhaps well known, Garrison did nothing to disturb the Warren Commission's central findings. Garrison did allege that Lee Harvey Oswald had entered into a conspiracy with two men, David Ferrie and Clay Shaw, and after Ferrie and Oswald were both dead Shaw was charged with conspiracy to assassinate the President; he was acquitted two years later, and all serious, or even half-way serious, students of the case agree that Shaw was, in fact, innocent. No credible evidence ever existed that any two of Garrison's three alleged conspirators even knew one another. I think it can honestly be said that Garrison did not turn up one scrap of information relevant to the assassination not already known to the FBI or Warren Commission.

A personal recollection may perhaps be illuminating here. Garrison

would make public statements saying what a "fraud" the Warren Commission had been, but this is not what those of us actually engaged in the investigation thought. I can well remember discussions with Louis Ivon, Garrison's chief investigator, and James Alcock, his chief trial assistant. What astounded (and appalled) us was that we were unable to find one person in New Orleans who had known Oswald and who had not been interviewed by the FBI, and interviewed within about a week of the assassination. The trouble was that Garrison and others (myself included) had come to the conclusion that the Warren Report was a pushover as a result of reading Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgement* and Harold Weisberg's *Whitewash* series, and other similar books. In these books there was no *hint* that the Commission's work had been so extensive. The revelation, when it came, as it slowly but surely did, was privately demoralizing to Garrison's staff. But not, I think, to Garrison himself, who lived in a world of his own and was blithely unaware of any such concern by his aides. I'll never forget one day Garrison had gone on television and said that Lee Harvey Oswald was innocent. This did nothing to help our case against Clay Shaw, which was based on a conspiracy with Oswald. Jim Alcock, who had to try the case, was so worried by this that he mentioned it to Garrison. "Oh, you can argue it differently in court," Garrison said magnanimously, with a wave of the hand. Details didn't concern him. It was the Big Picture he was after.

'Disinformation'

Garrison got in way over his head when he decided to take on the Warren Report. He thought that the Report and its conclusions would quickly fade away and disappear without a trace once he raised his voice, but he never came close to challenging its conclusions. But the show had to go on, so to speak, and so Clay Shaw

was brought to trial and prosecuted with testimony that was no doubt perjured, and eventually acquitted.

After this setback the Warren Commission critics thought things over for a while and came up with a brand new theory: Garrison was a part of the conspiracy! It was generally agreed that all he had done was discredit criticism of the Warren Commission—ergo, he must have done so on purpose.

This theory is outlined in innuendo form in Robert Sam Anson's book about the assassination. The foot-noted innuendo, until Anson's book came out, had been Mark Lane's specialty, but Anson has now also mastered the technique. He says of the Garrison investigation that "never before had any authorities taken seriously the notion of a conspiracy in the assassination. Thanks to the trial, it would be years before they would again."

Get it? Anson's conclusion about the Garrison investigation was that "it was a classic case of what is known in the intelligence trade as 'disinformation.' Truth mixed with half truth, scrambled with no truth at all. The purpose of disinformation is to discredit the truth. It succeeded brilliantly in New Orleans. Garrison's methods were so outrageous, his assertions so preposterous, that reasonable people

not only wanted to have nothing to do with them, but were repelled by the case which seemed to have started it all."

Crying Conspiracy

Let us take stock of the conspiracy theorist's position at this point. The Warren Commission failed to establish, or assert, a conspiracy. By now, the conspiracy has grown considerably, of course, in the eyes of the conspiratorialists. First there were Oswald and his conspirators, or perhaps, his *framers* (because many conspiracy theorists have a very sentimental attachment to the notion that Oswald was entirely innocent; a good deal of "doublethink" is necessary to support this position, but needless to say the theorists are up to it).

The assassination conspiracy team included, if one is to credit Anson's innuendos, elements of the CIA, the Mafia, and the Dallas police (the latter to explain how Jack Ruby was able to shoot Oswald). Then comes the Warren Commission cover-up, connived at, no doubt, by a goodly number of FBI agents, Secret Service agents, the Chief of Justice of the United States, President Ford (who was on the Commission), high-ranking congressmen, and so on. But there's no problem there, reasons the conspiratorialist, because if there was a conspiracy (and this really is how these people think) and these powerfully placed people didn't point out the conspiracy, it *must* have been because they were a part of it.

Then comes Jim Garrison, and at first the conspiratorialists all love him, because he cries Conspiracy! But ultimately he discredits them, so he, too, is part of the conspiracy. Garrison, too, could very well be accused of "covering up" the truth, just as the Warren Commission was. I don't know whether this charge has yet been made, but I can see how it might be, considering that Garrison interrogated Marina Oswald, Ruth Paine, John Rene Heindel, and other *key witnesses*

Answers to February puzzle:

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in the secrecy of the Grand Jury, and their testimony has never been made public. Grand Jury testimony is secret to protect innocent parties, of course, but why did Garrison have to choose a secret forum in which to conduct what may well have been the most important part of his investigation? I hereby invite Mark Lane and Robert Sam Anson to look into the matter.

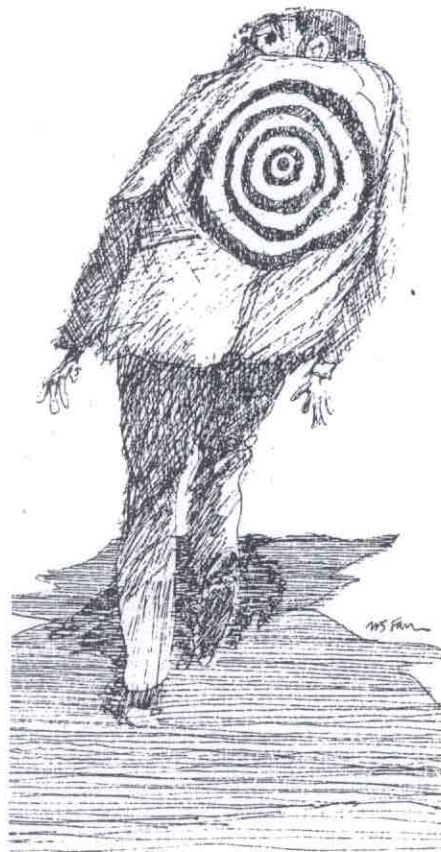
So the conspiracy is enlarged. It includes now Garrison, his staff, and Anson further implies, some Mafia henchmen who were no doubt messengers in this between the CIA and their puppet, Garrison.

And don't forget the news media! They're a part of it, too. At the time of Garrison's investigation, and since, several news organizations spent enormous sums of money, and endless man hours, on the Kennedy assassination. CBS, NBC, and *The New York Times* spent a small fortune, but they didn't come up with a damn thing. They're a part of it, too. Not the valiant little reporters, mind you, not the Peter Kihsses of this world, whom Garrison once described to me as a *New York Times* reporter who was "chained up in the basement," but the big boys, the executive heavy-weights, the Harrison Salisburys and the Paleys and the Luces—God, didn't you know they were part of it, friendly with the Rockefellers, giving their underlings enough rope here and there to create the illusion of freedom, but ready to pull the reins in tight whenever it looked as though the lads (in their naive enthusiasm for "digging" into a story) were getting too close to the truth. So the media barons, *the captains of industry*, they were all clearly a part of the conspiracy.

Then came the Rockefeller Commission to investigate the CIA, which would also investigate "possible CIA involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy." Not much chance of anything here, of course. For one thing, Nelson Rockefeller was no doubt a part of it all, in the view of many conspiratorialists, who often tend to view the world as a huge,

untidy cobweb of relationships, with Rockefeller sitting at the "nerve center" of the cobweb. And David Belin, a former staff lawyer for the Warren Commission, was counsel to the Rockefeller Commission. How could you expect anyone to accept that?

So the conspiracy continued, and grew larger. Now comes the new congressional investigation by Senator Richard F. Schweiker of Pennsylvania



who heads a subcommittee of Senator Frank Church's Select Committee to investigate intelligence activities. The Schweiker investigation is still continuing, and one eagerly awaits its conclusions (with, admittedly, a certain sense of premonition as to their fate).

Actually, I have a fellow-feeling for Schweiker, as I am sure Jim Garrison must also. One day I even felt sufficiently curious about his investigation

to go up to Capitol Hill to talk to one of his aides. In the back of my mind was a certain thought: what if he doesn't come up with anything...? The conspiracy is going to get bigger and bigger, I thought.

Here's what set me off on this. Back in October Schweiker had remarked in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, that the Warren Report is "like a house of cards, it's going to collapse." Now, Garrison had used the very same metaphor, and when I heard Schweiker say it I felt sure that he had been reading *Rush to Judgment*, the *White-wash* series, and other items in the assassination liturgy. He had clearly become an assassination buff, but my fellow-feeling for the man was based on a belief that he probably did not yet realize what a tough nut the Warren Report was, nor how numerous and *sincere* had been the attempts so far to destroy it.

Mirror Images

Then I read this in the *Village Voice*, and my heart almost missed a beat: "The Kennedy assassination is a mirror-image proposition," Schweiker was quoted as saying. "What makes it so hard to know what happened is that you're struggling to find the real focus in the mirror. And you really need two reversible ones."

Two reversible mirrors! Here's what Garrison had said at the beginning of his investigation: "The key to the whole case is through the looking glass. Black is white, white is black. I don't want to be cryptic, but that's the way it is."

Assured Schweiker was in trouble. I was staying up late, probably turning myself in bed with the Warren Report's 26 volumes, underlining dog-eared pages, threading through the maze, turning back, worrying, never quite arriving at the center, at that *House of Cards*...

I talked to Troy Gustavson, Schweiker's aide. It took me back in time to see some of the Warren Commission volumes lined up on a

shelf, and one or two of those old assassination books, no doubt being busily thumbed and rethumbed. No, Troy Gustavson told me, they're not giving out the names of people they are calling to give depositions. Yes, it will probably all be made public in the long run. Well, you'll have to talk to the subcommittee about all the inter-office memos and so on being released, too. Yes, we'll make a note about trying to get the Marina Oswald and Ruth Paine testimony from the Orleans Parish Grand Jury. Yes, you could say Senator Schweiker has become one of the buffs. He's present for all the depositions—an *unqualified* buff, you could say. Well yes, we're getting to see the classified material in the National Archives, but we can't copy it. Most of this stuff should be declassified, except where there's a *perfectly legitimate* national security interest.

"Look, suppose you don't come up with anything," I said. "You realize what the conspiracy theorists will say?"

Oh no, Gustavson said in effect, although not in these words, *we're the good guys*. He seemed to think the jeering would come from the Warren Commission's supporters. Not a bit of it. I recalled a passage from Robert Sam Anson's book which, I felt, told more than he knew.

"Mark Lane tells the story of a recent appearance at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. At the end of his talk he asked the 6,000 students listening to him how many favored a new investigation. Seemingly all the hands in the hall went up. When Lane asked if there were any dissenters a lonely hand appeared. When Lane asked why the dissenter didn't want a new congressional investigation, the student replied: 'I don't trust Congress.'"

There's Schweiker's problem right there.

"What about that statement—the Warren Report will collapse like a house of cards?" I asked Schweiker's aide. "That was four months ago.

How does he feel about it now?"

He paused and thought for a minute. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that," he said. "The same assumptions exist today. . . . It's singularly difficult, twelve years after a crime has been committed. . . if we could have gone over it when the trail was fresh. I would say that that statement is now tempered by the realities of what we've seen. But I think he still stands by that."

Mafia Lackey

I think the time has come to say that the Warren Report, in its central conclusions about Oswald and Ruby (both acted alone) will stand up, and that this central core of the report can more aptly be compared to a rock than to a house of cards (and a rock upon which opportunists have founded).

As I say, most of the new researchers tend to have no idea of the vast amount of inquiry that has already gone into this, nor of the great journalistic triumph it would be for one of the news organizations to establish a conspiracy. Dan Rather sensibly made this point at the end of the recent two-part study by CBS on the Kennedy assassination.

If the investigations continue, and with each new investigation, the new investigators themselves are subsumed into the conspiracy, the conspiracy thus getting larger and larger; I think it will finally become clear that what we are dealing with here is not merely an attack on the Warren Commission; it is an attack on our sanity, an attack mounted, in some instances, by the partly deranged: the half-witted scholars who believe that tiny discrepancies imply a cover-up; by conundrum-puzzlers, flying saucerites, Loch Ness monstrosities, Bermuda triangulators. These are the harmless ones.

There are also those who, I believe, are disingenuous, who know that there is a large and gullible public which finds it hard to sort among the various distortions and concealed

half-truths and disguised accusations: they are handed.

For the most part, I am sure, the various authors of *The Assassinations: Dallas and Beyond* belong in the former category. It is a collection of material most of which has been previously published. There are some pieces with pretensions to scholarship, although in many instances it is a very biased, distorted, polemical scholarship. The overall effect is to mislead.

The two pieces about the Garrison investigation, for example, could hardly have been worse chosen. William Turner's *Rampart's* article was published before the Shaw trial, and presents Garrison's investigation in positively glowing light. As for Peter Noyes' article "Legacy of Doubt," there is some doubt as to whether he has any grasp of the subject at all. He writes, for instance, that "according to Garrison, one of his critical witnesses was a 25-year-old insurance salesman named Perry Raymond Russo." If Noyes had read an account of the trial, he would know that Russo was, in fact, the key witness. What would one make of a Watergate book published after the Ervin hearings in which one read: "According to Sam Ervin, a critical witness was John Dean. . . ."?

With so much good material on the Garrison investigation available—e. g. accounts by James Kirkwood and Edward Jay Epstein—one cannot but suspect that the motive of the editors is deliberately to present slanted material—the "slant" being, again, to hint that Garrison was mixed up with the Mafia and may have been, all along, their lackey.

There is, I suggest, a disingenuous element in some of the recent attacks on the Warren Report, and Robert Sam Anson's book seems to fall into this category. In recent years, what with Watergate and published accounts of wrongdoing by the CIA and the FBI, there has been a spreading distrust of the government, leadership and institutions of the United States. What distresses me about Anson's

book is that he seems to be making a conscious effort to capitalize on this distrust, and to extend it further to the Kennedy assassination. He says that he only wants to get at the truth, but deep down you get the feeling that his real motive is to undermine the credibility of our institutions still further.

As David Belin has effectively pointed out in a recent issue of the *National Review*, Anson's principal technique is the cover-up—the failure to include most of the evidence that incriminates Lee Harvey Oswald. And he grossly distorts evidence, as Belin shows, in the killing of Officer Tippit and in many other areas.

McCarthy Techniques

Here is another distortion. He describes Abraham Zapruder, who filmed the assassination with an 8 mm. camera. Behind Zapruder, and to his right, was the grassy knoll. Anson writes: "Behind him and to his right, Zapruder heard an awful roar and felt a bullet whistle past his right ear."

But in his testimony before the Warren Commission, Zapruder merely said that the shots sounded as though they came from behind him; he said nothing about feeling a bullet whistling past his ear.

Here is another example, illustrating how the techniques currently being used by the Warren Commission critics are reminiscent of the techniques used by Joe McCarthy:

"One way or another," Anson writes, "all the major figures connected to the assassination are also linked to the Agency and the mob." (These "links" are, in almost every case, established principally by Anson's own wishful thinking, but no matter. Let us see how he proceeds.)

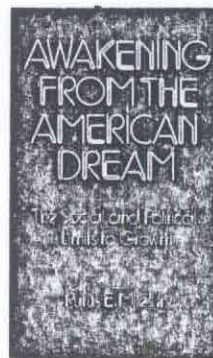
"There is Oswald, the apparent agent, in constant contact with other CIA men, many of whom have their own ties to the mob. . . . One of his close friends in New Orleans is David Ferrie, an identified agent who also works for the mob. Another report-

ed associate is Clay Shaw, like Ferrie an identified agent."

Now, in the first place, neither Garrison, nor anyone else ever established that David Ferrie was a "close friend" of Lee Harvey Oswald. In fact, there is really no evidence that Oswald knew Ferrie at all, and it is my belief that he did not. The FBI did establish that Oswald had been in a Civil Air Patrol unit at approximately the same time as Ferrie was instructing that unit, when Oswald was about 15 years old. But subsequent interviews with other former cadets suggested that Oswald was not in the class at the time Ferrie instructed it, and not one former cadet could recall that Ferrie and Oswald knew one another. Ferrie himself denied knowing Oswald.

At the Clay Shaw trial, Perry Raymond Russo, who *did* know Ferrie, testified that Ferrie had known one "Leon" Oswald, but when asked to repeat this testimony in federal court after Clay Shaw was acquitted, Russo took the Fifth Amendment. As a

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result of this and other evidence (or, rather, lack thereof). I am convinced that Ferrie and Oswald never knew one another.

But this doesn't bother Anson. He wants to link Oswald to the CIA, and he is willing to use Ferrie and Clay Shaw to do it, even though he has already insinuated that Garrison's investigation was "disinformation" designed to sabotage the conspiracy seekers. (Logic is not Anson's strong suit.)

But what about Ferrie and Shaw having been "identified" as agents? This was certainly news to me. Garrison had confidently *asserted* this, of course, but he never had any evidence. Anson, in a footnote, says that this comes from a "telephone interview with Victor Marchetti, June 25, 1975." Along with John Marks, Marchetti is the author of *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. I called up Marchetti to find out how he got hold of the information that Shaw and Ferrie were "agents."

He told me that a few years ago the then-CIA director Richard Helms used to hold morning meetings, and "this was back during the Garrison trial, and the Director expressed a great deal of concern regarding the trial. 'How are they doing down there?' he would ask. Just half sentences. Cryptic. I wasn't interested in the Kennedy assassination then, so I didn't pay much attention. But later, when I got interested, I remembered. Back and forth three or four times this went on. 'How are they doing?' One day after about the fifth time I asked the director's executive assistant, why this interest? I was given the story that Clay Shaw had had some agency contact. Years back. And guys like Ferrie had been engaged in the Bay of Pigs and they didn't want this kind of thing surfacing. At this time I was a storm trooper, remember, so I didn't say anything about it."

"Would any of the other people there corroborate this?" I asked.

"No," said Marchetti, "because they're liars. They're professional in-

telligence people, and by definition professional intelligence people are liars. They would deny it."

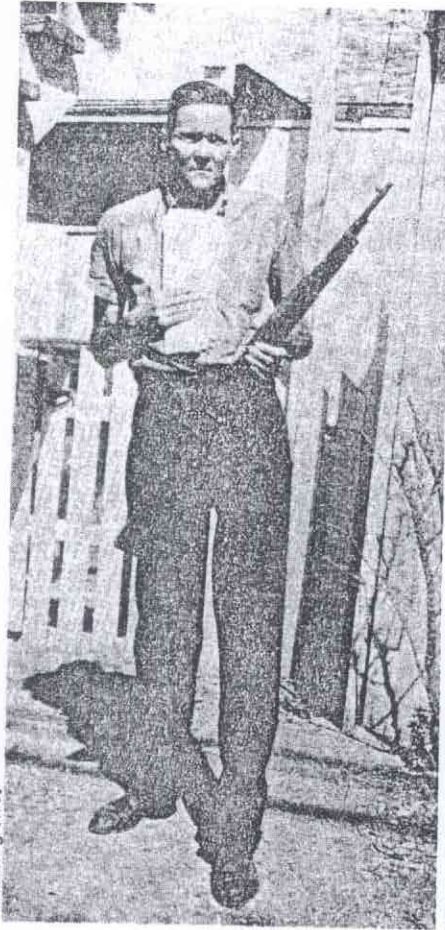
By definition, also, then, we have an allegation that logically cannot be refuted. Either they confirm it, in which case they are telling the truth, or they deny it, in which case they are lying. This is the McCarthy technique: the allegation which cannot be refuted.

Sly Nudges

Both Clay Shaw and David Ferrie are now dead, so they cannot defend themselves against the allegations, and there is no independent corroboration of the charge. Moreover, an extensive investigation of Ferrie and Shaw failed to provide any evidence to support the charge, which is made by Victor Marchetti, who is known to be motivated by animus against the CIA. Furthermore, Marchetti failed to include this interesting "information" (disinformation?) in his book attacking the CIA.

Consider, also, Anson's chapter on Jack Ruby, which typifies his technique. Ruby was a nightclub owner in Dallas with numerous friends in the Dallas police department, and with underworld connections, too; this was hardly unusual for a nightclub owner in Dallas. Ruby went to Cuba briefly in 1959 and considered opening a casino there. The Warren Commission did a thorough job of investigating Ruby's rather unedifying background and associations, but could find no evidence suggesting a conspiracy. In fact, the details of the timing of Ruby's arrival in the basement where he shot Oswald made it all but impossible that he was in collusion with anyone.

What Anson does is to present Ruby's unsavory connections in such a way as to hint, suggest, slyly nudge the reader in the ribs. . . . that there must have been more to this because Ruby knew all these underworld types, all these *suspicious* people. And there were all these coincidences. And



Alskog Inc.

Back in 1966, some Warren Commission critics cast doubt on the authenticity of the above picture of Lee Harvey Oswald, taken by his wife Marina in his backyard in Dallas eight months before the assassination. Critics suggested that the shadows on Oswald's face and on the ground did not look right.

In response to this criticism, Lawrence Schiller and Richard Warren Lewis, the authors of *The Scavengers and Critics of the Warren Report*, returned to the same location and photographed John Cappell there, on March 30, 1967. Photographs were taken with a Polaroid

camera to ensure that no internegatives were used, and five witnesses signed statements asserting that the shutter on the camera was clicked only once.

In 1975, however, Anson published the picture of Oswald once again, raising some of the same criticisms (and one or two new ones), without any mention of the Schiller photograph. He says that "the conclusion some critics of the Warren Commission reach is that the pictures are forgeries, with Oswald's head cropped atop another man's body." The theory here seems to be that if a lie is told often enough, people will eventually believe it.

so on. Meanwhile, it takes a certain mental alertness to realize, finally, that Anson himself comes up with no evidence at all linking any of these hoodlums from Ruby's past to the assassination or to the shooting of Oswald.

A Matter of 30 Seconds

In fact, even some assassination conspiracy theorists don't believe there was anything more than met the eye to the Ruby episode. I remember Josiah Thompson, the author of *Six Seconds in Dallas*, telling me, after spending a good deal of time with members of the Dallas police in the course of his investigation into the assassination, that the Dallas police force was so leak-prone in its relations with the press that there was just no way they could have conspired with Ruby to let him into the basement without someone talking about it.

Less than two weeks before he died, as Anson must know but does not tell his readers, Ruby was interviewed by his brother, with his two sisters present, in his hospital room in Dallas. Ruby was dying of cancer, and knew he was dying, and so had nothing to lose or gain. A tape recorder was hidden inside a briefcase, and Ruby and his brother spoke Yiddish, so the guard from the county sheriff's office did not know what was going on. The 14-minute tape was released, and Ruby reiterated that there had been no conspiracy, he had not known Oswald, no one had told him that Oswald was about to be moved from the basement, and, as Ruby reflected, if he hadn't taken an illegal turn as he drove downtown, "I would never have met this fate, because the difference in meeting this fate was 30 seconds one way or the other."

Anson gives us, instead, a chapterful of nudges and insinuations—the overall effect being to make the unwary reader very suspicious of the probity of the government's inquiry. It is very misleading, and, I think, dishonest. Anson knows that the read-

er has been, as it were, softened up by the Watergate and CIA scandals, and so now he can be dealt this dishonest hand, too, and the reader probably won't know the difference.

"A decade ago," Anson writes, "there was only the gnawing feeling that something was terribly wrong. Today many of the worst suspicions have become fact. Americans now know things about their government that, only a few short years ago, seemed the product of the worst paranoid delusions. Thanks to Vietnam and Watergate and disclosures about the CIA, they realize not only how the government lies, but how it operates. That its intelligence agencies have spied on thousands of citizens, opened their mail, monitored their conversations, probed their private lives; that a secret police agency was created within the walls of the White House. . . . [and today] nothing is impossible, no undertaking unthinkable. Suddenly even the ultimate horror seems possible."

The White Flag

But this does not mean that we should allow our critical standards to be lowered in considering the evidence about the assassination, or in considering some of Anson's absurd theories—e.g. that there were three Oswalds, including a look-alike and an impersonator, based on such frivolous evidence as height discrepancies of an inch or so, or on very unreliable "sightings" of Oswald which Anson chooses to believe when it suits his purpose to do so; or the notion that one can make any progress in "solving" the assassination by finding out who had a "motive" for killing Kennedy. After studying the assassination for a while, I finally came to the conclusion that one could, ultimately, assign such a motive to almost any group in the country, with the possible exception of the Hyannis Civic Improvement Association. Anson, naturally, finds that the CIA and the Mafia had such a motive. This is

intellectually very cheap stuff.

There were, of course, defects to the Warren Commission's investigation—defects which Edward Jay Epstein spelled out as effectively as anyone in his book *Inquest*. The investigation was rushed to completion before the 1964 election, and it is undoubtedly true to say that the Commission did not pursue some leads very vigorously—notably the alarming possibility that Oswald, at some point, either before, during, or after his visit to Russia, might have had some minor connection with an intelligence agency. And, admittedly, it remains a bare possibility that such a connection could still be revealed; this, surely, is Schweiker's opening. Secondly, as both Anson and others in the assassination field have told us over and over, government wrongdoing has been a reality in recent years. We are therefore supposed to put these two points together in our minds in some way—Warren Commission sloppiness and government wrongdoing—and come up with the conclusion that Kennedy was assassinated by elements within his own government. We seem to be expected to lower our critical standards to do this.

Disturbingly enough, there seems to have been a kind of intellectual degradation in some quarters recently, which not only permits but even seems to encourage this dismal thinking. Seven or eight years ago, Kennedy assassination sensation-mongers had to deal with an intellectual community which acted as a countervailing force against which, one hoped, only the truth could prevail.

Today, some sectors of this community seem to be waving the white flag of surrender. What are we to think, for instance, when David Anderson, who is an editor of the *New York Times* magazine, is not restrained, in reviewing Anson's book, from making the following remarkably misleading comment in the *New York Times Book Review*: "It adds up to a powerful piece of jour-

nalistic scholarship that can only prove helpful to a confused public."

What is one to think when *Power Shift*, a work of almost fathomless vulgarity by Kirkpatrick Sale, discusses the Kennedy assassination in such terms as "*Cui bono* Dallas? A confluence of forces, including organized crime (especially its Southern branch), the defense industry (especially its Texas components), the oil industry... the Far Right... and beyond doubt Lyndon Johnson, the 36th President of the United States," and the book is favorably reviewed on the front cover of the *Times Book Review*. Not only that, it is subsequently "plugged" week after week by the *Book Review* in its "Editor's Choice" section.

What is one to think when an article by Milton Viorst outlines a vague, woolly, paranoid CIA-Mafia-Kennedy assassination theory reminiscent of Anson's, and Viorst, it turns out, is not some college sophomore but the chairman of the board of directors of the Fund for Investigative Journalism?

Even Treason

By how much have our critical standards become untuned when Tom Wicker, an associate editor of *The New York Times*, announces the platform of his favorite unannounced candidate for President—someone who would look into the following questions: How did Ford get to be President? What were the circumstances of the Nixon pardon? And what were the circumstances of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy?

Further investigations into these matters are needed, Wicker believes, "because so much doubt exists in the public mind in each case; and because, until these doubts are substantially laid to rest, lurid suspicions of cover-up, collusion, conspiracy, corruption—even treason—will continue to poison political life and limit confidence in the integrity of government." And, one senses Mr. Wicker

might have added, because he has rather enjoyed what one English newspaper recently called the open disarray of American public life, and he's afraid that it might be coming to an end.

Well, let the investigations continue. Good luck to Senator Schweiker. But let us not, at the same time, allow our critical faculties to be swept aside just because confidence in government is low, or because the Warren Commission performed, in some respects, carelessly. Its central conclusions are not necessarily impugned by these circumstances. And in fact it is highly suggestive that its central conclusions—that Oswald and Ruby acted alone—have stood up under so much scrutiny and so much attack. What this suggests is not that the commissions and officials and news organizations that have carried out these investigations in turn became a part of the conspiracy, but, quite simply, that the central conclusions are true, however unpalatable this may be to those who would like to use the Kennedy assassination to further undermine the credibility of our institutions.

Run It Down the Flagpole

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the unfolding and apparently never-ending Kennedy assassination saga is that the subject does seem to attract those individuals—and there seem to be more and more of them every year—who give every impression of being driven by a markedly destructive urge: the Allard Lowensteins, the Tom Wickers, the Mark Lanes, the Robert Sam Ansons. Why has this tendency become so noticeable recently? At first, superficially, it may appear to be nothing more than a desire to avoid seeming naive. The recent Pentagon Papers-Watergate-CIA Age of the Expose has had the effect of making persistent belief in any "official" explanation seem like childish gullibility.

But there is more to it than this. *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* no

doubt don't want to seem naive, either, and yet they have consistently repudiated a Kennedy assassination conspiracy (and commendably so, in view of the pressures they are under to "play up" to public opinion), as have the news departments of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*; and it is certainly folly to even hint that such news organizations, which would gladly get rid of a President, would demur at exposing the fate of another.

It is more than a fear of seeming naive. There is an actual hostility, a burning rage, a desire to take the offensive against the status quo no matter what, even a willingness, if necessary, to chop off the branch one is resting on.

Why is this? A careful and detailed examination of this phenomenon might be worth undertaking, although, lest this seem like a call for one more investigation, perhaps it might be prudent to add that this examination could well be left to the psychiatrists, and confined to the privacy of their offices. Considering the matter further, one is finally forced to the conclusion that there are, in any society, a good many individuals who naturally have, or who later mysteriously develop, a strong anti-authoritarian bias—a bias against *any* order, *any* institution, *any* stability, *any* society.

But it is only in our society (the one they rail against) that these individuals are given such freedom and such platforms from which to proclaim their views. Anti-authoritarians no doubt exist in Russia, too, but we are not likely to hear from them. But here they are encouraged to speak up, and the climate of opinion recently has been such as to permit a confusion between these negative anti-authoritarians and those who have more constructively exposed wrongdoing. The disingenuous conspiratorialist has encouraged this confusion, and the unprecedented freedom within the society he so deplors has been his principal ally. ■