

# Fifteen Years After Dallas: HSCA Plays Its Trump

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The sensational conclusions of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) took even the critics by surprise. Knowledgeable observers had noticed during the committee's public hearings in September that it was on the trail of a plot, yet no one expected an about-face on its long held public assertion that Lee Oswald was the sole gunman. Virtually the only Warren Commission conclusion still intact is that Oswald fired at all.

For two years, HSCA presented itself as a no-conspiracy committee, and only hinted otherwise along the way. Then, two weeks before it was to expire, HSCA played its trump card — the acoustic tape, and concluded a conspiracy acted in Dealey Plaza. In hindsight, it appears that HSCA chose the safest, most cautious path to what could be a final resolution of the assassination issue.

An example of the committee's strategy was its use of the celebrated acoustic tape. Publicly, the committee appeared to have been coerced, despite itself, into accepting the two gunmen scenario by hard cold scientific evidence. The national media reinforced this notion by implying the current controversy surrounding the tape's credibility may undermine HSCA's final analysis. In reality, the committee found plenty of evidence of a second gunman, the same evidence that convinced critics years ago without the benefit of the acoustic tape. Committee chairman Louis Stokes

(D-Ohio) tipped his hand when he revealed on Face The Nation several weeks ago that the acoustic tape's fourth shot only supports "other evidence already on the record, with reference to both the eye and ear evidence that had been received by the Warren Commission." "We really felt," he continued, "that the acoustic evidence was corroborative of other evidence." In effect, the committee used the tape to publicly justify a politically sensitive conclusion.

Stokes' remarks stood in sharp contrast to the committee's anticconspiracy reputation. He said there is a "high probability" of conspiracy, and also referred to Oswald's pre-assassination activities as suggestive of a plot. He claimed that Oswald, depicted for fifteen years as a loner by authorities and the media, had "associations with many other people." On the face of it, the committee would appear to have been swayed by evidence of conspiracy all along.

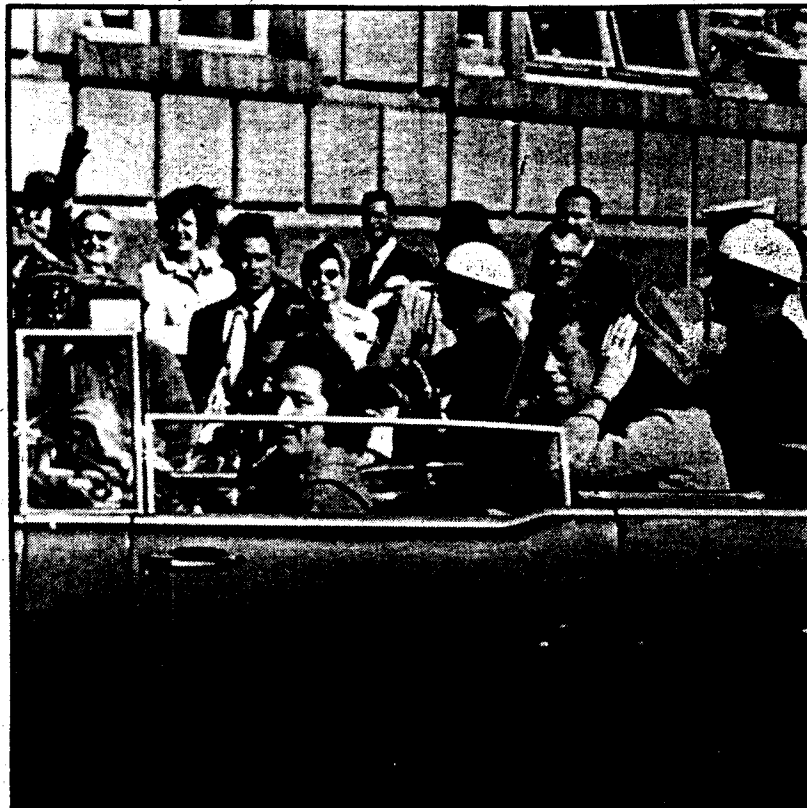
The committee was careful, however, to avoid any signs of government involvement

in any coverup of events in Dealey Plaza during subsequent investigations. Instead, it chose to focus on anti-Castro Cubans and organized crime, both of which have been strongly suspected by critics of complicity. An example arose during the public hearings when Chief Counsel Robert Blakey confirmed that Oswald appears to have met with David Ferrie and Clay Shaw in Louisiana during the summer of '63 (RP, 11/11/78). Though the committee quietly took an interest in Ferrie because of his close relationship with New Orleans crime czar Carlos Marcello, an avowed foe of the Kennedy brothers, critics believe it appears to have ignored Shaw because of Shaw's suspected ties to the CIA.

Another example, and also the biggest gripe the critics have with HSCA, was the blatantly incomplete questioning of Dr. James J. Humes, the doctor who oversaw JFK's autopsy. Critics have persuasively argued that the autopsy was intentionally incomplete and some of the medical evidence, such as the x-rays, photos, and autopsy report, were tampered with, stolen, or fabricated. If so, Humes might have revealed a high level government coverup if pushed (Dr. Humes and his two coautopsists declined to be interviewed by *The Real Paper*).

Why HSCA played its cards so close to the vest is a complex question. The committee may have feared provoking a reaction if it rattled too loudly any skeletons in Washington's closet.

The committee's initial report is just a seventeen page statement of its fundamental conclusions. Due in the following months is a complete report and an estimated forty volumes of exhibits, evidence, and testimony. It is doubtful that the major report will answer any of the pressing questions such as who was ultimately responsible for Kennedy's death and why no credible conclusions have been reached in the matter in the past fifteen years. That is, why was the investigation woefully incomplete and why did authorities ignore a plethora of evidence that has since led the critical community and HSCA to find a conspiracy? The committee's work, however, is just the beginning of what could be a long investigative process. For fifteen years, the government and the national media have resisted powerful arguments and a deeply rooted belief held by a majority of Americans that a conspiracy acted in Dallas. In the eyes of the critics, it'll never be too late to make amends.



AP Photo

Presidential limousine moments before the fatal shooting

Expect the following:

- Despite public equivocation, the Justice Department will continue the probe once HSCA submits its final report. There are indications that this has been the game plan for over a year, and Justice's current indifference could be a part of the public relations effort begun by HSCA to avoid arousing powers-that-be in some quarters. It may be no coincidence that the Justice Department will be investigating the very same mob figures it was investigating in 1963 when Kennedy was murdered (nor for that matter, was the choice of G. Robert Blakey as Chief Counsel an accident. Portrayed at the time as at best a compromise candidate, Blakey was part of RFK's antimob Justice Department and is an authority on organized crime). Some critics speculate that federal indictments based on the committee's evidence may not be too far down the line.

- Despite reportage to the contrary,

HSCA has its eye on several possible suspects in the alleged conspiracy. For example, one is Eugene Hale Brading, a con man with organized crime connections who was questioned after the assassination by Dallas police about his presence in Dealey Plaza.

- A home movie of the assassination, the so-called Bronson film that was unearthed by the Assassination Information Bureau, appears to some experts to reveal at least two figures on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository minutes before the shooting. If so, Oswald's role as a gunman will be re-evaluated. Furthermore, there are staff members and at least one congressman, Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut), who believes no one assassin could have fired all the shots from the rear because they were too closely spaced. This would imply three gunmen, a conviction long held by most critics. ■