

New Data Unfolds in 'Who Killed JFK?'

The obvious problem with so many films, movies and documentary investigations of the Kennedy assassination coming at us this week is that the valuable stuff gets lost in the avalanche. And the problem with missing the good work is that it is only in the past year that a truly meaningful investigation of the epochal crime has been possible.

Like "Frontline's" eventful report Tuesday, "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?," CBS' "Who Killed JFK? The Final Chapter" (at 9 tonight on Channels 2 and 8) benefits from new access to KGB files and authorities, recently released documents and a variety of articulate viewpoints—dominated by Gerald Posner, whose new book debunking all conspiracy theories, "Case Closed," is all the rage.

Indeed, instead of J.F.K. week, this is really Gerald Posner week, and Posner really has the ear of host Dan Rather. It's too bad for CBS, though, that "Frontline" beat them to the story by several days—as well as the same conclusion, that there is no hard evidence to support anything other than that Oswald acted alone. A lot of those who figure prominently in the "Frontline" study, such as Posner and insightful journalist Eric Lipton, repeat their views for Rather.

Of course, for those more prone to tune in CBS than PBS, some of this will be startling. Oswald's mother, Marguerite, is filmed lying that son Lee wasn't found to be emotionally disturbed. Rather's claim that CBS has proceeded with its own investigation since 1963 is supported with fascinating tests, including showing marksmen hitting a target simulation of the moving limo.

CBS' report shows some class by not mentioning that its weekend-long, commercial-free broadcast of Kennedy's state funeral and burial marked a historic turning point in TV news journalism and for CBS in particular. It will come in for strong criticism, however, in offering the impression that all of the key assassination conspiracy theories—was it the Mafia? the CIA? the Cubans? the Soviets?—are quickly dismissible. This is apparently Posner's influence, but the unanswered questions, especially those regarding Mafia ties to both Oswald and his killer, Jack Ruby, are simply ignored here.

Still, there is something deeply affecting about watching Walter Cronkite nearly cry on camera as he recalls the week's events. He feels the social earthquake, the loss, to this day. Journalists are humans, after all.

—R.K.

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