

Editor, Book World
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Dear Editor,

The wise-cracking that is not wise at all, the ignorance that is conspicuous and the careless, unthinking writing, like David Streitfeld's (Book World 6/13/93) that typifies so-called reviews of so-called books on the JFK assassination contributed greatly to the success of the enormity of books that have little or nothing to do with the established facts of that assassination and its official investigations. Their authors are self-presented Perry Masons when in fact most are apprentice Keystone Kops, junior grade.

Streitfeld, who can hardly have done the work required to offer the opinion (in fact, he makes it as a bald statement) that there is no proof that there was a conspiracy:

"If there truly were a definitive answer, incontrovertible, inarguable proof of conspiracy... the market for these books would dry up."

In fact the very first book on the Warren Report, my Whitewash: the Report on the Warren Report, dating to 1965, does precisely that. As do my other five books on that assassination. And all come from the official evidence itself. I am the one whose books espouse no theories of any kind. And the market hasn't dried up at all. And will not be because of the significance of the crime, the great national interest in it and the widespread dissatisfaction ^{act} exploited by the commercializers of untenable theories none of which is proven.

The superficiality and unthinking quality of Streitfeld's commentary is typified by what he says about Gerald Posner's coming Case Closed Closed: "...computer enhancements of the Zapruder film of the shooting to come ~~is~~ up with the shocking conclusion that the Warren Report was right: that Oswald acted alone."

Aside from the fact that this is not at all the book Posner described to me and for which he interviewed me for the several days he and his wife were here, how in the world can interviews or any enhancement of that amateur film prove that the Warren Report was right? In the simplest of the many disproofs, how can any film record shots that did not strike a victim, or missed entirely? Obviously, that is not possible.

As has always applied to all writers, as your George Lardner can and I think will confirm, the Posners had unsupervised access to the about a quarter of a million once-withheld pages of government records that I got by a series of FOIA lawsuits and access to our copier. If he were intent upon writing the book Streitfeld describes, could he possibly have exhausted that much official information in a couple of days?

Whatever led Posner to shift to what can at best be only a rehashing of the official mythology from his ^{planned} assessment of the critics, it should be obvious that with the enormous amount of information that for years has been available no honest statement of support for

the tragic official mythology can be based only on "dozens of new interviews" and that nonsense about the magic applied to the much-p^ulused Zapruder film.

But before publication this newest of the major commercializations and exploitations has been plugged hard by the Post and among others, Publishers Weekly.

Had the media and its reviewers not failed to meet their responsibility the great glut of profitable trash that has so sadly deceived and misled the people could not have been as successful and so confused the still sorry^g people.

Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21702

Harold Weisberg

Sorry about my typing. It cannot be any better.

Conspiring to Publish

JUST WHEN you thought it was safe to go back to the grassy knoll, there's a new round of Who-Killed-JFK? books coming this fall. The hook this time is the 30th anniversary of the assassination.

New evidence is promised, as well as definitive answers. Of course, that's what publishers promise every time they issue new JFK books. If there truly were a definitive answer, if incontrovertible, inarguable proof of conspiracy or lack thereof were found, the market for these books would dry up.

The two titles that are likely to command the most attention take opposite points of view. Gerald L. Posner's *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* is being kept under wraps by Random House, but it reportedly uses dozens of new interviews and computer enhancements of the Zapruder film of the shooting to come up with the shocking conclusion that the Warren Report was right: Oswald acted alone.

Robert J. Groden, staff photographic consultant to the House Committee on Assassinations, was also a consultant to Oliver Stone's "JFK." If that doesn't give you a clue to his opinion, the subtitle of his book will make it clear: *The Killing of a President: The Complete Photographic Record of the John F. Kennedy Assassination, the Conspiracy and the Cover-up*.

Look for Posner and Groden to duke it out on talk shows. If you want a whole panel, you can invite Harrison Edward Livingstone, author of *Killing the Truth: Deceit and Deception in the JFK Case* (Carroll and Graf). This one's about previous writers on the assassination, many of whom may have had their own agendas and disinformation plans.

Having a hard time keeping all the theories straight? Maybe you need *Who Shot JFK? A Guide to the Major Conspiracy Theories*, by Bob Callahan (Fireside). A former speechwriter for Robert Kennedy, Callahan began like most people: He had no idea what the truth was. Then he went to see the Stone film, and his eyes got opened a bit.

"Emotionally, I thought Stone was right," Callahan says. Intellectually, he now does too: "I finally realized the evidence in Dealey Plaza suggests a crossfire. Once you have that, you have a conspiracy." Still, in the book "we're just trying to give you the range of opinions. We're not trying to convert anyone."

Want just the facts, so you can assemble your own theories? Pick up *Who's Who in the JFK Assassination: An A to Z Encyclopedia*, by Michael Benson. It covers 1,400 suspects, victims, witnesses, law enforcement officials and investigators. This one's coming from Carol Publishing, whose chief, Steve Schragis, says, "If we didn't have at least one JFK book, I don't think we'd be worthy of calling ourselves trade publishers."

What if you have two? "It might mean you're not quite as serious," Schragis says with a laugh. Nevertheless, Carol acquired two weeks ago *Passport to Assassination: The Never-Before-Told Story of Lee Harvey Oswald by the KGB Colonel Who Knew Him*.



President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy with Texas Gov. John B. Connally on Nov. 22, 1963

the success of *Growing Up Brady*, to the point where there are three books coming out within the next six months by "Gilligan's Island" stars: There's Gilligan's autobiography, the Professor's story, and a cookbook from Mary Ann.

At this point, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that combining at least two of these trends would give a book a real shot at bestsellerdom. Coming in November from Forge is *Columbo: The Grassy Knoll*, by William Harrington, complete with photo of actor Peter Falk on the dustjacket. As the blurb from syndicated columnist Jack Anderson has it: "Our greatest detective tackles our greatest unsolved crime." Of course, the greatest detective was fictional while the crime was all too real, but this sort of blending indicates just how much of a hall of mirrors the assassination has become.

Conventional Wisdom

A FEW LAST notes from the booksellers' convention in Miami Beach during the Memorial Day weekend:

- A nonfiction book by Alice Walker, *Warrior Marks*, is being rushed to print in September as a companion to a TV film directed by Pratibha Parmar. A follow-up to Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, it also concerns female genital mutilation.

In a statement, Walker said: "My subtitle includes the phrase 'sexual blinding.' I was shot in the eye by my brother years ago, and I am blind in one eye. Being visually mutilated helped me to understand that sexual mutilation is similar. If the woman is mutilated—if her clitoris is removed—she will be unable to erotically see herself; she will be sexually blinded.

"That is why women who have been circumcised accept any husband, no matter how unacceptable to them, and why they seem so lacking in spirit. I am deliberately speaking of my own injury as a patriarchal wound: to say that I do not set myself apart from these women, that I am not immune to their pain or suffering."

- George Bush is said to be on the verge of selling his memoirs. One popular rumor: Since he's already covered most of his life in a traditional autobiography published some years ago, this book would exclusively focus on his presidency, and only one aspect at

hero Jim Carroll; Amy Gerstler, who won a National Book Critics Circle Award for her collection *Bitter Angel*; and Irish poet Derek Mahon.

Meanwhile, Knopf's Everyman Library is launching a new series of classic poets—Baudelaire, Dickinson, Shelley, Rossetti—in what promises to be attractive small hardcover editions. And Vintage has hurriedly scheduled a "collected poems" by new poet laureate Rita Dove. Finally: Washington's Chapters Bookstore received an award at the convention for being one of 11 bookstores that have done the most for verse.

Signing Off

RICHARD POWERS, the highly praised young author of four novels, was recently scheduled to appear at Chapters to read from his latest, *Operation Wandering Soul* (reviewed on page 2). This created a stir, since Powers has rarely been interviewed, has never done a reading and never—this is the key part—done a book signing. Rare book dealers from all over ordered multiple copies.

It didn't happen. "My publicist had begun to make these arrangements when I was out of the country, and didn't anticipate my getting cold feet at the altar. I guess I don't do publicity very well," says Powers, a long-time resident of Holland currently living in Illinois.

His problem with signing books is a philosophical one: "An individual copy of a book is more or less valuable to the degree a reader has engaged himself with it, and not to the degree an author has made it more valuable by signing it."

Yet as Powers fully appreciates, the only reason a signed copy of one of his books would be valuable is because there aren't any. "It's a no-win situation. If you attempt too rigorously to avoid a fetish, it becomes a fetish of its own. I just have to do what preserves my equanimity the most, what makes it easier to write the next blank page."

Talking Heads

ASIDE FROM the Paris Review Q&A's—which have the appearance of spoken conversations but are often extensively reworked by the participants, making some answers almost bite-sized essays—it's hard to think of a major