

A QUESTION TO PONDER NOW THAT THE KENNEDY AFFAIR IS ON THE BOIL

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What is the TRUTH about that black day at Dallas?

FOR FOUR days we have all been caught up once again in the double murder of President Kennedy and a policeman named Tippit in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

The pundits have been debating whether one man named Lee Harvey Oswald killed them both—or whether he was framed as part of a wider plot.

Since Oswald was never put on trial, I now invite you to form the jury.

You will find first that some odd things have been happening since he died. Take the case of Mr. Warren Reynolds. At about 1.15 p.m. on that shattering day Reynolds saw a man running away with revolver in hand from Tippit's corpse.

But when Reynolds was later asked by the F.B.I. to identify the running man he refused to agree that it was Oswald.

DANCER

Two days after this refusal Reynolds himself was found shot through the head. A man who was charged with shooting him was released after being given an alibi.

The alibi was offered by a lady who had worked as a strip-tease dancer at a club owned by Mr. Jack Ruby. And Ruby, as you will remember, was the man who murdered Oswald while he was under arrest and before he could answer the charges made against him.

But that is not all. Eight days later this same strip-tease dancer herself was arrested by the police on minor charges, and two hours after that was found hanged in her cell.

That is not all. On the evening after Ruby had shot Oswald three men—two journalists and a lawyer—went to Ruby's flat and discussed the mystery with two of Ruby's associates. We do not know entirely what they learned, for the simple reason that all three are now dead.

One of the journalists was later killed in his apartment by an unknown assailant with a karate blow, the other was shot dead by a retired policeman. The lawyer died of a heart attack.

TWO DEATHS

That is not all. From a high railway tower a rail worker named Bowers had an almost panoramic view of the President's death. Bowers said that at that moment a flash of light and smoke came not from the warehouse from which Oswald is supposed to have fired, but from a grassy knoll nearer the roadway below. Bowers also spoke of seeing two unidentified men behind a fence on the knoll.

But where is Bowers today? He is dead—killed in a car accident.

After the assassination a taxi-driver named Whaley picked up a passenger whom he

by ROBERT PITMAN

identified as Oswald. Where is Whaley today? He also is dead—killed in an accident.

In addition, several other witnesses have been threatened. One who testified that Oswald had talked of expecting some money soon (a hint that he might be in someone's pay) was badly beaten up after giving evidence. The son of another witness was injured jumping from a window when trying to avoid arrest.

I mention these incidents (which I take from Mr. Mark Lane, author of an exciting new book on the assassination) to show that it is natural enough to have doubts about what happened on that day in Dallas.

It is natural that there should be a great stir over here when two apparently expert books appear to challenge the official view. *RUSH TO JUDGMENT*, by Mark Lane (*Bodley Head, 42s.*) and *INQUEST*, by Edward Jay Epstein (*Hutchinson, 30s.*).

CONVINCED

Yet when we ignore all the fuss and the TV interviews and concentrate on the books themselves, what do we find?

My answer is that I am more convinced than ever before that, excepting one small detail, the official version is right: *That Lee Harvey Oswald, working by himself, was indeed the only killer.*

Let us follow Mark Lane's case and put ourselves into the position of the crowds lining Elm Street, Dallas, as the President's car moved past them.

Suddenly shots rang out. Where from? Lane points out, as if it were a knock-down argument, that of 80 witnesses who were asked, 53 said that they thought the shots came from the grassy knoll.

But, if you look at the map, do you find that surprising? Anyone who has heard a starter's pistol at a race will know how deceptive echoes can be. The question is: What was seen?

Not a soul saw any person with a gun on the knoll. Although a crowd rushed up the knoll no gun or gunman or cartridge case was found there. By contrast, a rifle was found on the sixth floor of the book depository where Oswald worked. So were three bullet cases.

What else? At least three people in the crowd saw a man with a rifle at the window. It is true that these three witnesses were vague and disagreed

on some points. One of them who later identified Oswald, at first failed to pick him out at an identity parade.

But does that really rouse your suspicions? Does it not, in fact, quash them instead? After all, if there really were a sinister conspiracy, if the rifle and shell cases had been cunningly planted to incriminate Oswald, does it not seem certain that the conspirators would also have arranged for an entire gallery of precision-trained witnesses to have identified Oswald at the window?

Mark Lane next concentrates on Oswald's movements after the assassination. The official version is that Oswald got on a bus where, in particular, he was noticed by a Mrs. Bledsoe, who once rented a room to him for a week. She declared that he looked "like a maniac. His sleeve was out here" and his face was so distorted.

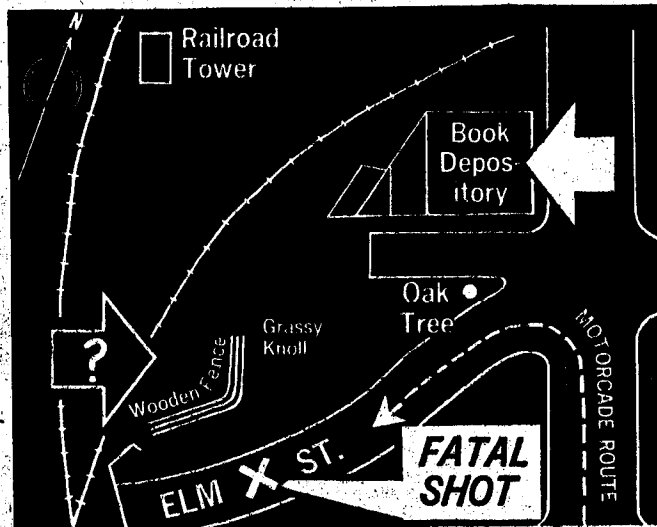
DISLIKE

Mr. Lane is very sarcastic about Mrs. Bledsoe. He points out that no one else seems to have seen a man who looked like a maniac. He stresses that Mrs. Bledsoe, as a landlady, had given Oswald notice because she disliked him. He goes on to say:

"Thus the only eye-witness testimony that Oswald was a passenger who came from an elderly witness who admitted that she harboured an intense dislike of Oswald, whose descriptions of Oswald's clothing and behaviour are at odds with the other evidence... and who (in giving evidence) read now and again from prepared notes because—as she put it—'I forgot what I have to say.'"

This is the kind of reasoning

● PUT yourself in the place of a jurymen handed this map. The scene is Dallas on November 22, 1963. The white arrow marks the book-depository where Lee Harvey Oswald worked and from which — according to the Warren Commission — he fired at President Kennedy. The black arrow shows where the author of a new book alleges that the real assassins stood. Which is more likely?



which has impressed Bertrand Russell and Professor Ayer, who both provide testimonials for Lane's book. But how does it strike you as a common-sense reader?

For reasons of his own (perhaps because it helps to show that Oswald was a crazy lone wolf) Mr. Lane will not agree that Oswald was on that bus. He implies, as strongly as he can, that old Mrs. Bledsoe was chosen to give fake evidence. But, if that is so, why did the fakers merely use her to confirm this unimportant bus trip? Why did they not persuade her to imagine that she saw Oswald doing the actual shooting?

SPECIOUS

As for her notion that Oswald looked mad, let us remember that he was normally a cool, neat little fellow. She knew him. If you saw a friend, normally a non-drinker, swinging down pints in a bar, you might note the fact. But would the other people in the bar who did not know him?

Thus Mr. Lane pounces onward from one specious point to another. When he reaches the moment, about half an hour after the President's death, when the policeman Tippit was shot by a man whom he was questioning, Mr. Lane strikes mighty blows at the poor witnesses who thought that the killer looked like Oswald.

If you have ever described a road accident on an insurance form you will know the kind of thing. By leaping on contradictions, Mr. Lane could prove that there was no accident at all.

But what he does not mention

is that, after Tippit's death, a man slipped into a nearby cinema without buying a ticket. The cinema was surrounded and the lights were turned up. The man stood up, with a revolver, saying: "Well, it's all over now."

The man was Lee Harvey Oswald. The revolver was of precisely the sort that shot Tippit. The spent shells from the scene fitted it exactly.

But there was something else about this weapon. It had been bought by mail order by someone called "Hidell." So was the rifle found in the warehouse where Oswald worked.

When Oswald was arrested he had on him a forged Selective Service identity card with the name A. J. Hidell on it, but bearing Oswald's own photograph. He also had other documents bearing the name Hidell. In every case the name was in Oswald's handwriting. His wife later admitted that he used the name as an alias.

Against this, almost all Mr. Lane can do is to suggest that Marina Oswald was under pressure and that the handwriting experts were all police and F.B.I. stooges. Yet in another chapter Mr. Lane exults because an F.B.I. expert declared that no Oswald fingerprints could be found on the

rifle. That seems an odd sort of F.B.I. conspiracy.

Both Mr. Lane and Mr. Epstein (whose sober and, on the whole, sensible book is devoted to the work of the commission) are able to show that the official Warren Commission, composed wholly of lawyers, was often bumbling and inadequate. Those who have experienced similar inquiries in Britain will not be amazed. Lord Denning's inquiry into the Profumo case was also fatuous in places, but that does not prove that its main conclusions were wrong. It does not prove that Miss Keeler was really in the pay of Mao Tse-tung.

It is true that the commission has got itself into a pickle over the exact timing of the shots which hit the President. It assumes (perhaps wrongly) that Oswald could not have started firing until the oak tree in front of his window was out of the line of fire. It has timed the frames of a cine film showing first the President and then Governor Connally (who sat in front of him) being hit—and, in order to fit in all the shots, it has assumed that the first bullet hit the President, came out through his throat, and then proceeded to do damage to the Governor. The medical evidence for this is not strong.

VENDETTAS

But there is absolutely no need to conclude, as Lane and Epstein do, that there were at least two assassins.

What of the death and accident toll among witnesses? There were over 900 witnesses all told. Just in the ordinary wear and tear of Dallas one would not expect them all to survive the years unscathed.

In one or two cases there may have been foolish extremists of the Ruby sort who have carried out private vendettas against non-conforming witnesses. But, because they make themselves foolish, that is no excuse for us to do the same.

It may be nice to see history turned upside down. Some people, ready to believe that Richard III did not murder the boy Princes in the Tower, could even be persuaded that the boy Princes murdered Richard. Apart from such thinkers (plus of course Bertrand Russell and Professor Ayer) few readers are likely to be convinced by Mr. Lane's book or seriously shaken by Mr. Epstein's.

STAR CHOICE OF THE WEEK

STIGMA: The experience of disability edited by Paul Hunt (Chapman, 25s.). Twelve physically disabled men and women write sensibly and without uplift about their problems. So far from being grim this is an inspiring book, not only for others who are ill or crippled, but for any of us who are ever bowed down by far lesser worries.