

# VOICE

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**A hard look at  
the latest JFK  
assassination probes.  
By Fremont-Smith  
(P. 57) and Dick  
Russell (P. 156)**

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## VOICE BOOKS

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### MAKING BOOK

# Who Killed Kennedy?

**BY ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH**

Last Tuesday and Wednesday nights a week ago CBS News presented the first two parts of a four-part TV series, narrated by Dan Rather, on the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy, and the attempt on the life of George C. Wallace. The first two parts dealt with the killing of the president, and asked two basic questions: Did Oswald do it? Was there a conspiracy? In answering the first question—a nearly positive “yes”—CBS presented important new evidence. Its answer to the second question was a dubious but concerned “maybe,” and a call for further investigation into Oswald’s CIA and FBI connections and the agencies’ possibly criminal withholding of pertinent information from the Warren Commission.

# Oswald Did

*'The Itek analysis of Zapruder's film is important new evidence, superceding Anson's book. But already I've heard this retort: "Don't you know Itek is a front?"'*



This is a picture of Lee Harvey Oswald. Isn't it?

The important new evidence was, of course, that Kennedy's head did, after all, move initially forward (before Mrs. Kennedy pushed him back and/or he went into spasm) from the impact of the killing bullet. This was the conclusion of a CBS-sponsored photo-optics analysis (as sophisticated as possible) by technicians of the Itek Corporation of the original Zapruder film. It is important because a forward movement is not discernible to the naked eye; the apparently immediate and violent backward movement of Kennedy's head even in freeze-frames of the film, suggesting a shot from the front or side, has long been one of the two major *physical* anomalies of the Oswald-alone theory, harped on again and again by critics of the Warren Report.

The other is the supposedly "pristine" condition of bullet 399, the so-called "magic bullet" that, if Oswald did it alone, must, because of the timing involved, have gone through Kennedy's neck and then through Connally's back and wrist, and into his thigh, ending up on his stretcher at Parkland Hospital. CBS also showed that the bullet is not "pristine"; its distortion and loss of weight is consistent both with particles found in the two victims and with possibility. To accept the 399 "single bullet" theory is not, as the critics have charged, to "repeal physical law"; the trajectory and minor distortion may seem unlikely, but that's not synonymous with impossible. Making these synonymous has been a bad habit with virtually every conspiracy-theorist. CBS presented other new evidence, too, less important but still of circumstantial interest: an analysis of another film, taken before the shooting as the motorcade approached the School Book Depository building, shows that *something* was moving inside that sixth-floor window.

The Itek evidence aside, the CBS programs served usefully clarifying purpose in distinguishing the two questions. Conspiracy theorists have got us used to muddling them together in our minds. One need not prove a second assassin—or additional shots from the "grassy knoll" or the parking lot or the sewer opening or anywhere else—to suspect a conspiracy of some sort. We know for a fact that the CIA and the FBI withheld evidence (and the responsible officials still alive should be prosecuted—it really is intolerable, the cover-ups that have been committed), and there is all sorts of good—and I mean "good," nothing more—reason to think Oswald was more intricately involved with the CIA and the FBI than has been admitted.

I suspect that the FBI cover-up was out of embarrassment—an informer who wasn't kept track of and may have been typical of a potentially very compromising or hard to explain routine or network, plus a plain botched job—and that the CIA cover-up had to do with reality-based

who came of age during the lying about Vietnam (and the massive reinterpretation of American history and official deception that Vietnam triggered) and then Watergate (the whole country was nearly took—literally), not to mention the recent CIA and FBI revelations, the idea that the JFK assassination was a complex plot is only natural. And for the energetic and ambitious, the idea also provides new opportunity.

Robert Sam Anson's book had its start as an article last spring in New Times. Because of its seemingly unhysterical tone (though there is in fact a lot of emotional blackmail in it, the bright promise of JFK cut down, etc., as well as teasing about just which of several conspiracy scenarios Anson will opt for—it turns out to be anti-Castro Mafia/CIA), it is taking its place among the more respectable critical works, right up there with Josiah Thompson, above Richard Popkin (with his New York Review of Books imprimatur), Mark Lane, Harold Weisberg, and the rest. (Edward Jay Epstein and Jean Stafford, on Oswald's mom, are a little to the side—and let's just forget about Jim Garrison).

Yet Anson's book is all too typically sloppy and circular. Unlikelihoods become impossibilities. Apparent evidence from still photos (e.g., Marina's snap of Oswald at peculiar angle with gun in backyard) is presented as firm proof—in this case that there was another "Oswald"—because different pictures look different. But that is the most common of occurrences: Is there any reader of *The Voice* who hasn't seen a snap of him/herself that "doesn't look like me at all?" (What's more, the Itek/Zapruder analysis proves that the naked eye scanning most carefully a photo can still be deceived: We do tend to give photography too much credit for verisimilitude.) Anson also plays games: He hints that Oswald's strange stance in that backyard photo—and it is strange—somehow lends credence to the suspicion that the face was pasted in, which of course it doesn't.

Well, anyway. The CBS-Itek evidence knocks out one of the major props of the Oswald-not-alone theory: Anson's and others' theories have now to be considered less likely, by far, than the Warren Commission's. Chalk that conclusion, if you must, up to my prior bias. It's fair, also, to note that my bias makes me more stern toward lapses of taste in the critics than in supporters; though it must be said that CBS seems to have tiny sense of proportion. Its logo lead-in for the programs—with victim's head in cross-hairs and reverberating blam-blams on the soundtrack, and then, not "Mannix," but "The American Assassins" booming out—was

twerpishly offensive. And it shouldn't have been a series at all; it's an important subject and CBS's findings are consequential, and they should have been presented in one coherent, nontitillating program for as many hours as required. It's also twerpish and offensive that Rather refers to nothing else on TV than CBS's own 1967 documentary—quite as if important discussions hadn't also occurred recently on other channels (Geraldo Rivera, David Susskind). Yet, yet, yet.

It is obviously imperative that a new investigation be conducted into the CIA and FBI cover-ups. We've long known that

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the Warren Commission was under various pressures—particularly the pressure of time, to get the report out (and worries calmed) before the 1964 election—and that it countenanced sloppy work (the shockingly amateurish diagram of Kennedy's neck), and that it didn't even see crucial autopsy and X-ray material. Now we know it was deliberately lied to by top government officials, including at least one of its own members, Allen Dulles. None of this necessarily affects the conclusion that Oswald, acting alone and probably out of personal and incoherent, rather than political, motives, shot and killed John F. Kennedy. Especially after the Itek evidence, every other theory seems far less likely: To posit a successful, specific conspiracy assassination requires so many fortuitous coincidences, so much bending of physical law, such a high degree of suspended disbelief, that I, for one, am unwilling to take it on. As for other or tangential conspiracies and cover-ups, these are another matter. We really should no longer have to rely on the Ansons and TV talk-show hosts to get at the truths about what happened before and after Dallas, about how our government works to the subversion of the public will it is supposed to serve and the law it is supposed to uphold.

Already, in discussions of the Itek analysis, I've heard this retort: "Hell, didn't you know that Itek is a CIA front? That film analysis is a fraud." To which I can only grin sheepishly and shrug. There is no way for me to know, or any of us mere citizens. And sheepish grins get to be not much fun. Somebody in Washing-

ton has to do the job, it not the Justice Department, then Congress. The intellectual compromising of thinking, caring people has to stop.

Debunking Anson's book and other eager theories of conspiracy. I will nevertheless retain that 10 per cent reserve clause. A couple of weeks ago I was about to give it up—but then it was announced that there was at last firm proof, to be released in mid-December, that the Loch Ness Monster does in fact exist. Well, if so, reasonable minds will find a way to encompass this startling and bizarre phenomenon. But meantime—holy mackerel! □  
*For a different view, see Dick Russell's article, page 156.*