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THE THIRD DECADE

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that it tends to oversimplify a very complex body of evidence and presents Lyndon Johnson as being the only human being capable of engineering the assassination plot and getting away with it. However, the book is well written, easy to read, and keeps the reader's interest throughout. The early section dealing with the Warren Commission manipulation of the evidence is especially good.

But does the book convince the reader that LBJ did it? Not exactly. Unfortunately, there is no hard evidence. But then would we really expect there to be any? Craig Zirbel effectively convinced this reader that Lyndon Johnson did indeed have the motive and the opportunity to murder President Kennedy. Whether he actually did it is still a matter open to debate, but we should at least put him up there among the prime suspects. Even if Johnson didn't order the hit, I am convinced, after reading this book, that at the least he used the Dallas police department and the FBI to cover up the evidence after the fact. Lyndon Johnson certainly knew a lot more about the Kennedy assassination than he ever revealed to the American public.

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THE TEXAS CONNECTION: A SECOND OPINION

by
Raymond Carroll*

The assassination of JFK will remain controversial long after the debate about who killed him has been resolved. Historians will continue to argue the significance of Kennedy's Thousand Days and the extent to which the presidency of Lyndon Johnson marked "a watershed in American history, one of the great divides in the evolution of its foreign and domestic policies."¹ Craig Zirbel's bestselling book will undoubtedly anger those historians who see no special significance in the events of November 22, 1963 beyond the "fact" that the President was shot by a disturbed Communist on his lunch break. In Zirbel's book LBJ masterminded this final step on his own path of power with the help of a group of Texas oilmen, police chief Jesse Curry and Jack Ruby. Minor assists were provided by D.A. Henry Wade and by Joe Brown, the Judge who presided over the trial of Jack Ruby. The plotters also used John Connally and Lee Oswald as unwitting allies. The mechanics of the shooting apparently followed the script of Hugh McDonald's "Appointment in Dallas." (Oddly enough, while citing "Appointment" with approval, Zirbel does not even mention McDonald's other book, "LBJ and the JFK Conspiracy," which links Johnson with a faction in the Kremlin.)

If JFK really was murdered by unknown conspirators then Johnson, as the Vice-President who succeeded him, is a logical suspect. Assassination researchers have tended to shy away from this obvious area of inquiry, although Zirbel is by no means the first to raise it. People began to whisper about LBJ even as the sound of gunfire faded in Dealey Plaza. Rumors were especially prevalent in Texas, where Johnson had a mixed reputation. Johnson himself was painfully aware of the rumors. Earl Warren agreed to head up a Commission of Inquiry only after Johnson told him about "rumors...attributing the assassination to a faction within the government."² Even the prestige of Chief Justice Warren could not stop the rumors and soon they were no longer only whispers. In 1967 Barbara Garson's satirical play Macbird began a successful run at the Village Gate in New York. In that same year, Sylvia Meagher published "Accessories After the Fact," her monumental study of the Warren Commission's published evidence. Meagher cited Penn Jones' claim that a letter written by Jack Ruby and smuggled out of jail stated that "they alone planned the killing by they I mean Johnson and the others."³ In 1967 also, Joachim Joesten published "The Case Against Lyndon Johnson in the Assassination of President

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Kennedy." ⁴ But the loudest accusation against the President in 1967 came from the booming voice of Jim Garrison. In November he told a group of newsmen "the fact that HE [LBJ] has profited from the assassination most, more than any other man, makes it imperative that he see that the evidence is released so that we can know that he is not involved." ⁵ The federal government's obstruction of a state prosecution would ordinarily have been viewed as a constitutional crisis brought on by the administration. In the case of Louisiana v. Clay Shaw, however, the national media supported the dubious position of the federal government and turned the full force of its venom against the District Attorney of Orleans Parish. But Johnson never escaped the rumors and innuendo. Marty Underwood recalled, in a recent interview with Harrison Livingstone, that LBJ often asked him to check out stories linking him (Johnson) to the assassination. Once, while Underwood was a White House aide, the President said "You know I've got two cancers. One is Vietnam and the other is the fact that they still bring up the fact that I had something to do with the assassination." ⁶ In 1980 David Lifton published "Best Evidence," in which he outlined his theory that JFK's body was clandestinely removed from its coffin during the confusion surrounding Johnson's swearing-in, and then surgically altered as part of a plot to frame Oswald. While he did not directly accuse LBJ, Lifton seemed to be inviting his readers to infer that Johnson was involved. Johnson was high on Jim Marrs' list of suspects in his 1989 book, "Crossfire" which, in turn, helped inspire Oliver Stone. The scene in the movie JFK which probably provoked the loudest howls of media outrage was Costner/Garrison's statement that the assassination was a "coup d'Etat with Lyndon Johnson waiting in the wings."

Craig Zirbel had the good fortune to publish his book in the full glare of the publicity generated by the movie JFK. Were it otherwise "The Texas Connection" would have gotten as much notice as Joachim Joesten did back in 1967. Although Zirbel's book is poorly researched and documented, and makes unconscionable allegations against innocent people, it does at least make a viable argument that LBJ had a motive to murder JFK. Johnson had Presidential ambitions ever since he was a young man and by 1963 his chances were fading. JFK appeared certain of re-election in 1964 and by 1968 when JFK stepped down, Johnson would be 60 years old. Johnson would be required "to run a strenuous campaign at the exact same age his father was when he died."

Zirbel says that LBJ had an added motive and he cites the New York Daily News of July 1962 (no date given) as quoting a sister (no name given) of JFK who said that LBJ would be dumped in 1964. ⁸ The Kennedy administration was notable for its high standards of integrity. As Fred Korth discovered, even the appearance of a conflict of interest meant being forced to resign a high government position. But the whiff of scandal was causing concern on the New Frontier. While the Bobby Baker scandal was technically a problem for the Senate, LBJ's well-known links to Baker were an embarrassment for the White House. "As September 1963 wore on, Congressional Committees, the Justice Department, a federal grand jury, and investigative journalists all began looking into the affairs of Bobby Baker and his friends." ⁹ Zirbel says that "this made matters too hot even for Vice President Johnson." Johnson was also vaguely implicated in the long-standing case of Billie Sol Estes, who was arrested in 1962 and charged with numerous irregularities involving federal contracts. It was by no means clear (and Zirbel does not make it any clearer) what LBJ's involvement was, if any. Zirbel also cites the resignation of Fred Korth as Secretary of the Navy as an element of Johnson's motive (Korth had been appointed on LBJ's recommendation). So LBJ had a motive---but then so does every Vice-President under the constitution as it currently stands. It is hard to criticize Mary Todd Lincoln for believing that Andrew Johnson was linked to Booth and his fellow conspirators---after all, that Johnson had a motive too. ¹⁰ Zirbel goes on to allege that LBJ had the character and capacity to be a killer. He cites Johnson's biographer, Robert Caro, to show that Johnson stole his first election in college and later stole the 1948 Senate election, and that he used his political position to line

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his own pockets even after he became Vice-President. But Zirbel is on shakier ground when he accuses LBJ of complicity in the 1961 shooting of Henry Marshall, an agent of the Department of Agriculture who was murdered while investigating the affairs of Billie Sol Estes.¹¹ Zirbel cites a March, 1984 report in the Milwaukee Journal as evidence that Estes told a Grand Jury that "Vice President Johnson was directly involved in the murder."¹² Even if Estes actually said this (since Grand Jury testimony is secret, we can't necessarily trust a newspaper account), what reason is there to believe that it is true? As a convicted wrongdoer, Estes is hardly an unimpeachable witness and his allegation may have been entirely self-serving. Moreover, Zirbel offers no evidence that LBJ was involved in any of Billie Sol's affairs, apart from a single letter LBJ wrote to the Department of Agriculture on behalf of his fellow Texan.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that LBJ had a motive and that he was not the most ethical politician of the post-war era. If he organized the assassination, how did he accomplish it? Zirbel's answer is the Texas connection. It was John Connally, an old Johnson crony, who insisted on the deadly choice of route for the motorcade.¹³ LBJ wanted Yarborough in the death car instead of his buddy Connally.¹⁴ Connally and Korth both had links to Oswald through their service as successive Secretaries of the Navy whom Oswald had petitioned about his Marine discharge. Korth had once handled a legal matter for Oswald's mother.¹⁵ It was Connally who exclaimed, "My God! They are going to kill us all!" Zirbel asks "is it possible that, at the immediate instant when the bullet struck, Connally finally put together the pieces realizing that he had been duped by Johnson into innocently supplying him with information that LBJ now used for political destruction?"¹⁶ The answer is maybe--or maybe his exclamation was prompted by concern for his wife's safety; she was in the line of fire too.

The next link in the Texas connection is Jesse Curry. Zirbel says that Curry, as Chief of Dallas police, had final responsibility for the trip's planning (Curry says otherwise)¹⁷ and for local security. Although Zirbel says police arrested the right man in the Tippit shooting, he argues that Curry played the lead role in arranging for Ruby to shoot Oswald.¹⁸ Zirbel devotes a chapter (in fairness it should be said that some of Zirbel's chapters would barely make a paragraph in The Third Decade) to Curry's supposed "personal relationship"¹⁹ with LBJ and his sinister decision to accompany LBJ to the airport rather than head up the investigation. But Zirbel is taking Curry's accountability as a public official and magically transmuting it into conspiratorial guilt. If Curry thought LBJ might be in danger, and if he believed the crime scene was in the hands of competent assistants, then who is to say that he was wrong to make sure that Dallas did not produce two dead Presidents in one day? Zirbel does not even produce any evidence that Curry and LBJ were acquaintances prior to the assassination.

Zirbel conjures up a nice little sub-plot involving oilman Clint Murchison, District Attorney Henry Wade and Judge Joe Brown. It seems the deal was for Judge Brown to refuse to move the Ruby trial out of Dallas, thereby guaranteeing that the conviction would be reversed on appeal. D.A. Wade would then arrange for Ruby to plead guilty to a lesser charge and go free.²⁰ This seems like a good idea until we learn that the plotters were busy arranging to have Ruby bumped off anyway.²¹ Judge Brown's reward?--a contract with Holt, Rinehart, a publishing company controlled by the Murchison family. Zirbel does not implicate Mark Lane in this plot, although logically he should. Holt Rinehart published "Rush to Judgment" and "A Citizen's Dissent."

The final link in Zirbel's Texas connection is billionaire H.L. Hunt. Hunt was as well known for his eccentric conservatism (in September 1963 he had lobbied the U.S. Senate to reject the test ban treaty) as he was for his almost mystical ability to locate oil. The evidence presented by Zirbel that Hunt was a murderer is, however, a little short of compelling. In fact Zirbel's attack on Hunt and his sons

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Lamar and Bunker is probably the shabbiest section of the book. The "evidence" cited by Zirbel includes the following;

- (a) Bunker Hunt admitted contributing towards the cost of the "Welcome Mr. Kennedy" advertisement which appeared in the Dallas Morning News on November 22, 1963. Comment: not very clever on Bunker's part, to insult the President publicly if he was also planning an assassination.
- (b) H.L. Hunt had gambling contacts with Ruby in the 1950's. Comment: True. Ruby helped set up a scam designed to fleece Hunt and others out of large sums of money.²²
- (c) Ruby stopped outside the offices of Lamar Hunt on November 21. Comment: True. Ruby was even thoughtful enough to arrange for an independent witness.²³
- (d) Ruby had some of Hunt's conservative Lifeline literature in his apartment. Comment: True. Ruby had picked up the literature three weeks previously and promised to send it to the White House. "Nobody has any right to talk like this about our Government," he reportedly said.²⁴
- (e) In 1975 a curious letter surfaced, apparently in Mexico. It was directed to a Mr. Hunt, address unknown, and was purportedly written by Lee Harvey Oswald on November 8, 1963. Zirbel presents this letter, apparently expecting us to believe that it proves that one or another member of the family of H.L. Hunt was involved in an assassination plot with Oswald. Curiously enough, the FBI investigated the letter on the assumption that it was intended for Bunker Hunt. The results of the FBI probe have not been released,²⁵ but Zirbel appears to have the distinction of being the first Warren Commission critic to be on the FBI's wave-length.
- (f) Zirbel cites a disgruntled former Hunt employee as claiming that he saw Marina Oswald in Hunt's office shortly after the assassination.²⁶ Comment: Zirbel neglects to mention that the Hunt family and Marina have repeatedly denied this allegation. Anyway Marina and old man Hunt could not have had a very exciting conversation because Zirbel's witness apparently forgot to notice whether there was a Russian translator present. One question for Zirbel: if Hunt really was as fanatical an LBJ supporter as Zirbel would have us believe, why did he throw his support behind Barry Goldwater in 1964?²⁷

In the opening section of his book, Zirbel describes the strategy used by the Warren Commission to put across its lone gunman theory. "It is used every day across America by lawyers with tough cases...The strategy is to deliberately confuse issues and complicate matters before the jury, while at the same time offering a simple solution. It is hoped that the jury will believe that the actual issues are too complicated to grasp, but if they were smart enough to understand them, the solution would be the simple one that was offered."²⁸ One suspects that Zirbel is attempting something similar in *The Texas Connection*.

Old H.L. Hunt had some words which Zirbel might do well to ponder:

"For the continued progress of the country he so courageously served, the assassination of President Kennedy should not be soon forgotten and should be openly and often reviewed, discussed and analysed. The tragic event and its catastrophic results will be with us for years. The better it is understood, the less paralyzing the tragedy will be; and John F. Kennedy would be last to desire that blame be ascribed to anyone who is blameless."²⁹

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Notes

1. Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* Volume One: The Path of Power (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) p. xvii

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2. Warren Commission memo Feb. 17, 1964 by Melvin Eisenberg; cited in Bernard Fensterwald and Michael Ewing, Coincidence or Conspiracy? (Zebra Books, 1977, p. 72).
3. Sylvia Meagher, Accessories After the Fact (Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967), p.453.
4. published in Munich Germany. This book is cited in David Scheim, Contract on America (Shapolsky, 1988), p. 429.
5. L.A. Free Press 11/17/67; cited in E.J. Epstein, Counterplot (Viking, 1969), p.112.
6. Harrison-Edward Livingstone, High Treason 2 (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992), p. 443.
7. Craig I. Zirbel, The Texas Connection (Scottsdale AZ, 1991).
8. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 154. Zirbel also cites Evelyn Lincoln's book, "Kennedy and Johnson." Lincoln, who also was JFK's secretary since his Senate days, wrote that JFK told her Johnson would not be on the ticket in 1964.
9. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 167.
10. Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (Knopf, 1972), p. 226.
11. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 156-160.
12. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 161.
13. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 187.
14. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 190-191.
15. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 181, 232.
16. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 192.
17. Jesse Curry, JFK Assassination File, pp. 9-17.
18. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 215.
19. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 222-225.
20. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 244-248.
21. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 247.
22. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 250; Mark Lane Rush to Judgment, p. 237.
23. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 250; Lane, Rush to Judgment, p. 261.
24. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 251; Warren Report (Bantam Ed.), p. 343.
25. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 234, 251; Henry Hurt, Reasonable Doubt (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1986), p. 236.
26. Zirbel, Texas Connection, pp. 234, 251; Harry Hurt III, Texas Rich: The Hunt Dynasty From the Early Oil Days Through the Silver Crash (Norton, 1981), p. 380.
27. Hurt, Texas Rich, p. 234.
28. Zirbel, Texas Connection, p. 32.
29. Hurt, Texas Rich, p. 239.

WET BLANKETS II: NOSENKO AGAIN, THE DANGER OF DROWNING IN PAPER, AND NPIC

by

Scott Van Wynsberghe*

I am surprised to find myself becoming an argumentative windbag in the defense of KGB defector Yuri Nosenko. The overworked editor of this journal certainly has better things to do than to fall into such disputes. Still, a good squabble does wonders for a constitution (both physiological and political), and there is no denying the energetic level of our last exchange, in the May issue.

What helped inspire this installment was the publication of David Wise's Molehunt, the latest survey of the madness perpetrated by CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton in the 1960s and 1970s. (New York: Random House, 1992.) Wise, of course, has a good claim to being the top U.S. writer on matters of intelligence