

COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ASSASSINATIONS

1000 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 900
Arlington, Virginia 22209
703-276-9297

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POLL OF EXPERTS ON JFK MURDER

After the assassination in Dallas of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, the Warren Commission (abbreviated as WC below) was established to ascertain the facts surrounding the double murder of the President and that of his assailant Lee Harvey Oswald.

In September of 1964, the Warren Commission issued its findings. It concluded that Oswald was a "lone nut" gunman who killed the President and wounded Governor Connolly with three shots, one of which hit both men. Equally, it concluded that Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby, another "lone nut" who acted out of patriotism and/or grief. The Commission concluded that before the President's assassination, Oswald had shot at General Edwin Walker, and that after the President's assassination, Oswald shot and killed Officer Tippitt of the Dallas Police Department.

In the twenty years since the assassination, a large number of scholars have researched the various aspects of the murder. They have studied the mass of material available in the National Archives. They have filed innumerable Freedom of Information cases to obtain materials which have been suppressed. They have followed closely the proceedings of several Government commissions and Congressional committees which have examined the facts. A vast array of books, articles, and reports have been produced.

Through the years since the Warren Commission published its Report in 1964, there have been a myriad of "public opinion polls" relating to the assassination. During the last fifteen years, 75-80% of the public has consistently said that they believed the murder was not the work of a "lone nut" but of a conspiracy. A poll published by the Washington Post in November, 1983, on the 20th anniversary of JFK's death, indicated that 80% of those polled believed that his murder was the result of a "plot" and that more than one man

was involved. And 76% said that they thought that there were still "unanswered questions."

It was felt that it would be useful to see what the experts, as well as the public, thought of the conclusions of the Warren Commission. How well have its conclusions held up among scholars who have had time for thorough research? Do these views differ essentially from those of the public?

A questionnaire was composed and sent to the "experts." To the extent that they are alive and could be located, questionnaires were sent to Members and staff members of both the Warren Commission and the House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, as well as to authors of books and articles on the subject. In addition to answering each of the 27 questions, the experts were asked to append comments wherever possible.

A total of fifty experts responded and their answers have been tabulated as follows. They were asked a total of 27 multiple choice questions, some general, some specific. There was a consensus with respect to 16, but no consensus with respect to 11. They may be compared with the answers given to the same questions by the Warren Commission (WC).

QUESTIONS AS TO WHICH THERE WAS A CONSENSUS

QUESTION: Was JFK killed as the result of a conspiracy?

WC: No. He was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone.

Experts: 76% disagreed and said he died as the result of a conspiracy; however, there was a disagreement as to whether Oswald was anything more than a patsy in the conspiracy.

QUESTION: How many shots were fired at JFK?

WC: Three shots.

Experts: 44% said four shots and another 32% said more than four shots; again, 76% disagreed with the Warren Commission.

QUESTION: Did Oswald fire a rifle on November 22, 1963?

WC: Yes, killing JFK and wounding Governor Connolly.

Experts: 56% said he didn't fire a rifle at all.

QUESTION: Did the same shot hit both President Kennedy and Governor Connolly who was riding on the jump seat?

WC: Yes, a single shot (later dubbed the "magic bullet") hit both.

Experts: 74% rejected the "magic bullet" theory.

QUESTION: How many gunmen were involved in killing the President and wounding Governor Connolly?

WC: A single gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Experts: 40% said two gunmen, and another 36% said more than two gunmen . . . a conspiracy in either case.

QUESTION: Was there more than one "Oswald"?

WC: No, Lee Harvey Oswald had no impersonator.

Experts: 64% believed that there was a "second Oswald" or "false Oswald."

QUESTION: Was Oswald a genuine Marxist?

WC: Yes.

Experts: 52% believed that Oswald only pretended to be a Marxist.

QUESTION: Were "the Communists" involved in the assassination?

WC: No.

Experts: 62% agree that the Communists were not involved.

QUESTION: Were the Pro-Castro Cubans involved in the assassination?

WC: No.

Experts: 76% agree that the Pro-Castro Cubans were not involved.

QUESTION: Was the CIA as an organization involved in the crime or cover-up?

WC: No. It was Oswald acting alone.

Experts: Only 12% believed the CIA was involved in the

crime, but 58% believed it was involved in the cover-up.

QUESTION: Were "dissident elements" or alumni of the CIA involved?

WC: No. It was Oswald acting alone.

Experts: 10% said they were involved in the assassination; 6% said they were in the cover-up; and an additional 46% said they were involved in both.

QUESTION: Was the FBI involved in the crime or cover-up?

WC: No. It was Oswald acting alone.

Experts: 8% believed the FBI was involved in the crime, but 80% believed it was involved in the cover-up.

QUESTION: When Ruby killed Oswald, was he acting alone or as part of a conspiracy?

WC: He was acting alone.

Experts: 78% believe he was acting as part of a conspiracy.

QUESTION: Was Ruby motivated by patriotism and/or grief, or, on the other hand, was he ordered and/or paid to kill Oswald?

WC: Patriotism and/or grief.

Experts: 70% said he was ordered and/or paid.

QUESTION: Since 1963 has there been a concerted effort to cover up the facts of the assassination?

WC: Not applicable.

Experts: 82% answered yes.

QUESTION: Have witnesses been murdered since 1963 because of knowledge of the crime imputed to them?

WC: Implied No.

Experts: 58% said yes; 12% said no; and 30% said they didn't know.

NO CONSENSUS

QUESTION: When Oswald went to the USSR in 1959 was he a defector or an intelligence agent?

WC: A defector.

Experts: No consensus. 14% said he was a defector; 50% said he was a U.S. agent; 4% said neither; and 32% didn't know.

QUESTION: What was Oswald's status when he returned from Russia?

WC: Not sure.

Experts: 2% said he was a Russian agent; 38% said he was a U.S. agent; 12% said he was a double agent; 14% said he was none of these; and 34% didn't know.

QUESTION: What was Oswald's attitude toward Cuba?

WC: He was pro-Castro.

Experts: 16% said he was pro-Castro; 4% said he was anti-Castro; 38% said he was anti-Castro pretending to be pro-Castro; and 42% said they didn't know.

QUESTION: Did Oswald visit the Soviet and Cuban consulates in Mexico City?

WC: He visited each, several times.

Experts: 48% said he visited both; 22% said he visited neither; and 30% didn't know.

QUESTION: Was the Mafia involved in the assassination or its cover-up?

WC: Neither.

Experts: 10% said the Mafia was involved in the crime; 10% said the Mafia was involved in the cover-up; 40% said it was involved in both; 22% said involved in neither; and 16% didn't know.

QUESTION: Were the anti-Castro Cubans involved?

WC: No.

Experts: 16% said involved in crime; 2% said involved in cover-up; 38% said involved in both; 18%

said involved in neither; and 26% didn't know.

QUESTION: Was the "Right Wing" involved?

WC: No.

Experts: 2% said involved in crime; 2% said involved in cover-up; 34% said involved in both; 22% said involved in neither; and 40% didn't know.

QUESTION: Were "dissident elements" or "alumni" of the FBI involved?

WC: No.

Experts: 2% said involved in crime; 18% said were involved in cover-up; 16% said involved in both; 24% said involved in neither; and 40% didn't know.

QUESTION: Were Oswald and Ruby in any way connected with each other?

WC: No.

Experts: 30% said no; 40% said yes; and 30% said they didn't know.

QUESTION: Prior to JFK's murder, did Oswald alone take a shot at General Edwin Walker?

WC: Oswald did it alone.

Experts: 12% said Oswald alone took a shot; 28% said Oswald or someone with him took a shot; 34% said Oswald did not shoot at Walker; and 26% didn't know.

QUESTION: Subsequent to JFK's murder, did Oswald alone kill Dallas policeman Tippitt?

WC: Oswald alone did it.

Experts: 34% said Oswald alone did it; 4% said Oswald and someone else did it; 40% said Oswald was not involved; and 22% didn't know.

SUMMARY

There is a consensus among the experts that, contrary to the conclusions of the Warren Commission, President Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy, with at least four shots being fired by two or more gunmen. Oswald also was

killed as the result of a conspiracy, and that Ruby was ordered and/or paid to do the deed. There was a consensus that there was a "Second Oswald" and there has been a concerted effort to cover up the facts about the assassination. Equally, one or more witnesses, who either had knowledge or were believed to have knowledge about the assassination have been murdered

On a number of less central issues there is no consensus. These include Oswald's ideology, his status on going to and returning from the USSR, his actions in Mexico City, his relationship with the Cubans, and his involvement in the Walker and Tippitt shootings.

Surprisingly, the public and the experts hold almost identical views on the central questions of conspiracy and cover-up. Roughly 75% of both groups believe that there was a conspiracy and that the facts have been suppressed for more than twenty years.

WHAT AMERICANS THINK

SLEUTHS

Where the Experts Agree—Sometimes—on the JFK Assassination

Like the public, they don't buy the Warren report

By Barry Sussman

Last year, on the 20th anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Washington Post-ABC News poll found that most Americans feel the real facts of the Kennedy slaying have not come to light.

Four in five, the poll found, believe the assassination was the result of a conspiracy and not the work of a lone gunman. Only 6 in 10 feel that a shot fired by Lee Harvey Oswald killed the president.

Both findings showed massive public disbelief in the work of the Warren Commission, which concluded that there was no conspiracy and that Oswald, acting as a lone gunman, fired the fatal shot.

One of the people to read the Post's account of that poll was Bernard Fensterwald Jr., a Washington attorney who has been active in investigations of that assassination and the 1968 slayings of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. For a number of years, Fensterwald served as the lawyer for James Earl Ray, who was convicted of murdering Dr. King.

Fensterwald decided to see how expert opinion would compare with the polls' findings. He formulated 27 multiple choice questions and sent them to members and staff of the Warren Commission, to members and staff of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which in 1977 held an inquiry into the JFK and King assassinations, and to authors of books and magazine articles on the Kennedy assassination.

Fifty people responded, most of them scholars of the assassination. One result, therefore, was predictable: Like the general public, the experts have strongly challenged the Warren Commission report.

But the survey serves another, most unusual purpose. By putting many of the most common assassination questions to a select group of experts, Fensterwald is able to find areas of consensus, near consensus and disagreement on what led up to the events of Nov. 22, 1963, among people who have devoted much of their lives to studying the matter.

Here are some of those findings, with comparisons between the Warren Commission and the 50 experts, as reported by Fensterwald:

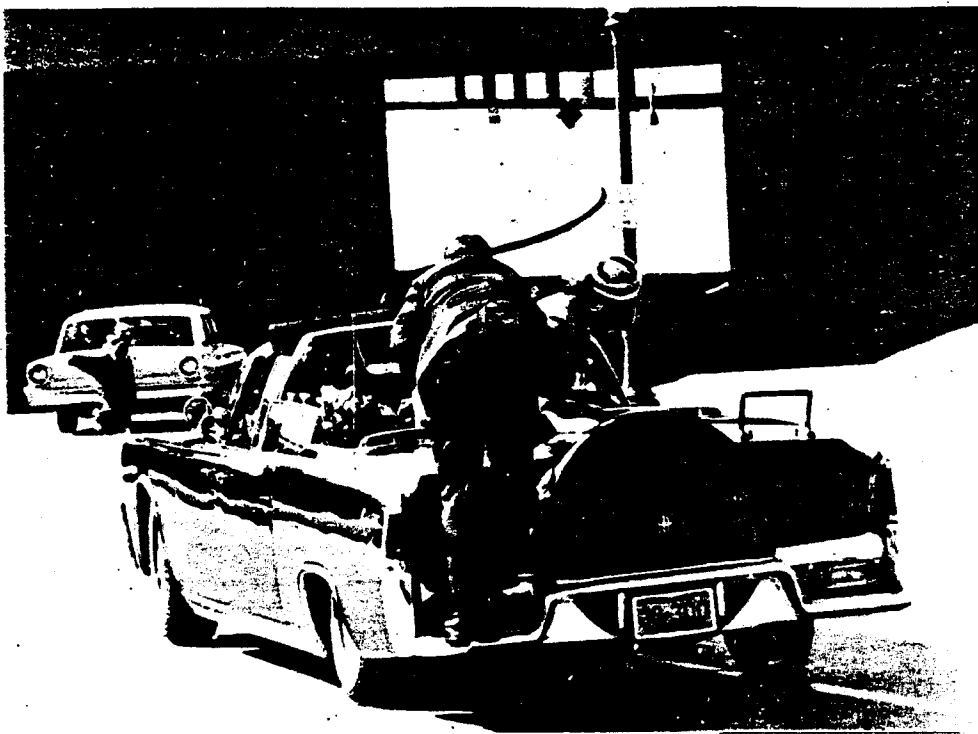
Was JFK killed as the result of a conspiracy?
Warren Commission: No. He was killed by Oswald, acting alone.

Experts: Thirty-eight of the 50, or 76 percent, say there was a conspiracy. There is disagreement over whether Oswald was anything more than a patsy in the conspiracy.

How many shots were fired?
Warren Commission: Three shots.
Experts: Four shots were fired, 22 say; more than four shots, 16 say.

Did the same shot hit both President Kennedy and Gov. John Connally, who was riding on the jump seat?

Warren Commission: Yes, a single shot hit both.



President Kennedy slumps in the seat of his car after being shot; Mrs. Kennedy and a Secret Service agent come to his aid.

Experts: Thirty-seven of the 50 disagree.

How many gunmen were involved?

Warren Commission: One, Oswald.

Experts: Twenty say two, 18 say more than two.

Was there more than one "Oswald"?

Warren Commission: No, no one impersonated Oswald.

Experts: Thirty-two of the 50 say there was a "second Oswald."

Was Oswald a genuine Marxist?

Warren Commission: Yes.

Experts: Divided. Twenty-six say Oswald only pretended to be a Marxist.

Were pro-Castro Cubans involved in the assassination?

Warren Commission: No.

Experts: Thirty-eight of the 50 agree with the Warren Commission.

Were anti-Castro Cubans involved?

Warren Commission: No.

Experts: Nineteen say anti-Castro Cubans were involved in the assassination and a subsequent coverup; eight others say such people were involved in the assassination only, and one says they were in on a coverup but not the assassination. Nine say none was involved in any way, and 13 had no opinion in this area.

Was the CIA as an organization involved in the crime or a coverup?

Warren Commission: No.

Experts: Six believe the CIA was involved in the crime; 29 believe it was involved in a coverup.

Were "disident elements" of the CIA or former agents involved?

Warren Commission: No.

Experts: Twenty-three say they were involved in both the crime and the coverup, five others say they were involved in the assassination only, and three say they were involved in a coverup.

Was the FBI involved in the crime or coverup?

Warren Commission: No.

Experts: Forty of the 50 believe it was involved in a coverup. Four believe it was involved in the assassination.

When Jack Ruby killed Oswald, was he acting alone or as part of a coverup?

Warren Commission: Acting alone.

Experts: Thirty-nine say he was acting as part of a conspiracy.

Was Ruby motivated by patriotism and/or grief, or, on the other hand, was he ordered and/or paid to kill Oswald?

Warren Commission: Patriotism and grief.

Experts: Thirty-five say he was ordered and/or paid.

Since 1963, has there been a concerted effort to cover up facts of the assassination?

Warren Commission: Inapplicable.

Experts: Forty-one of the 50 say yes.

Did Oswald fire a rifle on Nov. 22, 1963?

Warren Commission: Yes, killing Kennedy and wounding Connally.

Experts: Twenty-eight say he did not fire a rifle; 11 say he fired at Kennedy; three say he fired, but not at Kennedy; the other eight say they do not know.

Have witnesses been murdered since 1963 because of knowledge of the crime imputed to them?

Warren Commission: Implied no in its 1964 report; inapplicable since then.

Experts: Twenty-nine say yes, six say no, 15 say they do not know.

Was the Mafia involved in the assassination or a coverup?

Warren Commission: Neither.

Experts: Five say it was involved in the crime, another five say it was involved in the coverup, 20 say it was involved in both, 11 say it was involved in neither, and 8 say they do not know.

Fensterwald holds that these views represent the conclusions of scholars who have had a great deal more time for research than the Warren Commission did. He also says such research may never end, noting that people to this day are looking into the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Barry Sussman is director of polling for The Washington Post.