

The Weisbergs--A Partnership in Quest for the Truth

Opening Remarks: Good Afternoon.

Good Friends for the past twenty years.

accomplishments Say a little about their extraordinary and place thier achievements in a historic context.

It is fitting that they are being recognized for thier work on the President Kennedy assassination this year, the 30th anniversary of the tragedy in Dallas.

I think for all of us who were alive on November 22, 1963, the Kennedy assassination was a defining event. The shots that rang out in Dealey Plaza changed, some have argued with good cause, the course of history. I think without question the politics and history of this country were transformed (and none of these changes were for the better); one of these significant changes was the way many Americans came to view their institutions of government.

All familiar with the subsequent flow of events. Ten months after the assassination the government released its investigative report--the so-called Warren Report--which concluded that JFK was killed aby a lone-nut guman with vague pro-communist sympathies. The Warren Report was touted by government officials, the press, and eminent political

commentators--in a rush to judgment--as comprehensive and definitive. The American people could now rest easily again, "The Crime of the Century" was solved. Seemingly, with the Warren Report the JFK age came to a close.

Of course, that is not what has happened. Over the past 30 years the Warren Report's initial credibility has progressively fallen into tatters. The Report's assumptions and conclusions have generally been dismissed by a sceptical public. The Commission's findings widely discarded as transparently biased and politically motivated. As we approach the 30th anniversary of this national tragedy many Americans reject the official explanation as a myth, a falsification of our history. The last poll conducted on this question was in 1992 and 7 out of 10 Americans questioned reported that they did not believe they had been told the truth about Dallas.

After 30 years the public interest in the Kennedy assassination is still very intense and this fact about our political culture has not been lost on the major commercial publishing houses. All the early indicators point to a flood of Kennedy books this autumn that promises to exceed the outpouring that marked the 25th anniversary of Dallas. There is no doubt about it, during these days of restructuring and lay-offs in the ^{NATIONAL} general economy books on the assassination of

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the publication of

our 35th president is, one of America's successful growth industries. Will any of this new bumper crop of JFK assassination literature bring us closer to the truth about Dallas? In fairness we can only suspend judgment about this new flood of JFK books. But if the overwhelming body of Kennedy assassination literature over the past 30 years is prologue--don't hold your breathe.

Most of this literature of the past 25 years-- (more than 1,000 books; a body of work larger now than the Lincoln assassination literature)--suffer from a central, really a fatal flaw. They set out to solve the mystery of Dallas by attempting to answer the "Who," the "Why," and the "How," of the crime. All of these critics of the Warren Report--identified as conspiratorialists--who impose a theory of the crime on their readers face an impossible task. Since the government never undertook a good faith investigation of the assassination, never intended from the outset to investigate JFK's murder, the trail of the assassins has grown colder with every day that passes. The prospects of the private researcher, no matter how conscientious and impartial, solving "The Crime of the Century," is not encouraging. One might just as easily try swimming in the air. While it is sad and disappointing, it is not surprising that this conspiratorialist-type or "Who Killed JFK?" work has accomplished little in

deepening our understanding of the events of Dallas.

[While many of these conspiratorialist critics, those writing in the "Who Done It" vein, are well meaning, their approach to the JFK case is almost entirely visceral in that they seem unable to discriminate between hypothesis, allegation, fact, and proof. Sometimes their books are fantastic exercises in a kind of Meta-history, in that they see a ubiquitous all-embracing conspiracy that stretches from Dallas, to Memphis, to Los Angeles all the way to Chappaquiddick. (All history is conspiracy is their hallmark). Then there are the totally unprincipled and sinister conspiratorialists who have no respect for the truth, are as contemptuous of the intelligence of the American people as those public officials who conspired to politicize our history with the Warren Commission Report, and who exploit the Kennedy assassination for instant fame and fortune. Whatever their motives, there is a common demoninator that unites the writers of these "Who Killed JFK?" thrillers--THEY WRITE WITHOUT FEAR AND WITHOUT SERIOUS RESEARCH.]

Of the thousand or more works on this subject published over the past 25 years only a few meet the standards of responsible assassination scholarship. Preeminent among these is the body of work the Weisberg's have turned out over the past 30

years. What establishes their work as legitimate and responsible is their approach to the subject. They consciously avoided speculation and theorization about the "Who, "How" and "Why" of Dallas. They recognized that this was a dead zone for the researcher. The intrinsic and enduring merit of their work rests instead on a close analysis of the Warren Report with a systematic and painstaking comparison between the assertions of the government's case with the conflicting testimony of the Warren Commission's own witnesses, government documents and reports. They understood early on that the crime in Dallas was by its very nature too complex to have been carried out by a lone assassin. They also recognized that what needed to be done, what if fact could only be responsibly undertaken, was to expose the grave defects in the Warren report--defects that could not be explained away by carelessness, haste, bureaucratic bungling, but were instead the product of conscious distortion, suppression, and falsification of the evidence. (That in fact, the Warren Report, the government's explanation of the Kennedy assassination, was a political whitewash, a corruption of the truth by trusted public figures who we rely upon to preserve our political freedoms and expect to act with decency and integrity when confronting a national crisis like Dallas.)

Some of the things that are most striking about the Weisbergs' work on the Kennedy assassination are a deep respect for the truth, a principled effort to stick to the facts, infinite investigative care, the incredible stamina that sustained this effort of 30 years of research and writing, and to quote Sylvia Meagher, [who wrote her own meticulous and compelling indictment of the Warren Commission Report (AAF)], "a single-minded ruthlessness in tracking down details like a gun dog trained to flush game for the hunter."

In addition to the six books on the JFK assassination, which have stood up over the years, ^{Harold} Weisberg has used the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act more extensively and successfully than any other private citizen in compelling the government to release documents on the Kennedy and Dr. King assassinations. Despite the fact that he had no institutional backing and no financial support, he has to date done most of the pioneering work and precedent-setting litigation in using the Freedom of Information Act to bring these records into the public domain.

I think the time will come when our political system will be obliged to deal honestly with the official deceptions surrounding the JFK assassination. When that time comes to start demythologizing our recent political past and we begin to

reconstruct the road back from Dallas (and Memphis), the Weisbergs scholarship and archives will play an instrumental role in that essential and long overdue reconstruction.