

Crime of the Century. By Michael L. Kurtz. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982. xi + 291 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography and index. \$ . .)

In Crime of the Century, Prof. Michael Kurtz laments that "professional scholars" have neglected the assassination of President Kennedy; he also disparages the works of Warren Commission critics for their "obvious bias" and lack of "the careful analysis of objective evidence that characterizes the scholar."

Having set the stage for his own entry, Prof. Kurtz announces "an original interpretation based on carefully calculated scrutiny of the most reliable and convincing sources" and promises "much new evidence." He vows to avoid speculation because it "is not within the realm of the historian."

Prof. Kurtz concludes from his examination of the evidence that there clearly was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy. In addition, the probes of the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations were seriously flawed.

There is nothing of any consequence in this book that is new. Its valid points derive from the very critics Prof. Kurtz deprecates, particularly Harold Weisberg, from whose works much material is lifted without attribution.

This book lacks scholarship. The author makes blatant factual mistakes and important errors of omission: Rush to Judgment is not the first book on the subject; the wounding of James Tague is totally ignored. There are falsehoods: the Warren Commission was

not "[u]naware of the FBI's real attitude toward it;" its members knew that the FBI "would like to have us fold up and quit," and they also knew that the FBI had concluded that Oswald was the lone assassin without having "run out all kinds of leads." Prof. Kurtz relies upon Commission testimony by an FBI agent contradicted by FBI records and upon the results of tests performed for the House committee on evidentiary items inexplicably different in size, shape and weight from the original FBI specimens without evincing any awareness of the discrepancies. The book's footnotes retard rather than advance scholarship. They generally do not support the assertions made in the text nor identify with requisite specificity the materials cited.

In his last chapter Prof. Kurtz foregoes his vow against speculation--already broken--and reconstructs the assassination. He hypothesizes that a shot which hit Kennedy in the back--he claims at an upward angle--was fired from the second floor of the Depository. Here he whooshes across the line separating speculation from fantasy. His claim that "the first two floors of the Depository were lower than the limousine at the time of the shots" requires an feat of levitation which is neither recorded on any film of the assassination nor testified to by any eyewitness.

The publisher states that clothbound copies of the book are printed on paper designed for an effective life of at least 300 years. Unhappily, if the book is read as seldom as it deserves to be, it may last even longer.

Washington, D.C.

James H. Lesar  
Attorney at Law