

Mr. David Treadwell
Los Angeles Times Bureau
1875 Eye St., NW
Washington, D.C.

11/26/83

Dear Mr. Treadwell,

You did not send the promised copy of your JFK assassination anniversary story. Today I received a copy, read it, and no longer wonder: I would not be proud of such a piece on such an occasion, either.

The problem of living with a preexisting editorial position is not at all new. Some editors may even still be honest about it, as my city editor was about 55 years ago when he handed a piece back to me and said simply, "Mr. Dupont wouldn't like this." But in those days there sometimes were other alternatives, he suggested one, and before I was 20 I was syndicated in a Sunday supplement.

You and Ostrow, of course, have to make a living, and he has his own sources not to antagonize. Nonetheless what you combined to turn out exceeds what can reasonably be attributed to personal needs.

Because I do not much care about silly slurs I in fact welcome your collective effort and the changelessness of the Times. Perhaps you may recall that I told you my work is a study of our ~~basic~~ basic institutions and how they worked - and failed to work - in that time of great crisis and thereafter. Your paper is a major part of one of these basic institutions so the file for history is enriched and clearer.

It exceeds your needs, for example, to lie and represent that all those who do any kind of research or criticize the official mythology in any way are "conspiracy theorists." You knew this was untrue. It exceeds your needs to lie and say that the Warren Report "has never been disproved." If this was careless writing and you meant only its stated conclusions, still you and Ostrow lie.

There isn't much point in mentioning other flaws. However, because of all the pertinent things you could have said about me you said only that I am a retired poultry farmer (not a former investigative reporter, or Senate investigator and editor or intelligence analyst and not the one who has done what I have done with

EOIA, certainly not the one whose perseverance resulted in the 1974 FOIA amending and the opening of FBI and CIA files), I'm curious to know whether this is your personal or the Times' standard manner of reference. Is it style to refer to Eisenhower as a bull merchant? A long list could be compiled easily so comparable illustrations would be no problem. If they exist.

We have many problems today and as I look back over many years it seems obvious that some exist only because the press has abandoned its once-great tradition. Money can be made this way, publishing corporations can become rich and powerful and reporters can feed their families and educate their kids.

An unwillingness to make my living that way is why I became a farmer. I do not question the right of others to live as they like. But I do regret that with a year to go some are so anxious to make it 1984 prematurely.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg

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Doubts About Who Shot 35th President Refuse to Go Away

Kennedy Assassination Theories Persist

By RONALD J. OSTROW and DAVID TREADWELL, *Times Staff Writers* 11/20/83

WASHINGTON—It is perhaps the most investigated murder in American history.

The 3,154 documents, photographs and artifacts compiled by the Warren Commission during its 10-month inquiry into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy fill more than 600 file boxes, cartons and crates in the labyrinthine stacks of the National Archives.

Adding to the Warren Commission exhibits are the voluminous reports from the FBI, the CIA, the Secret Service and the House Select Committee on Assassinations, taking up half again as much space in the same storage area.

And yet, despite the months and years of investigation since Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, as his motorcade moved through Dealey Plaza during a visit to Dallas, the doubts about who shot the 35th President of the United

States refuse to go away.

The idea that the assassination was the work of a single gunman acting alone—as the Warren Commission concluded in its 888-page report buttressed with 26 accompa-

nying volumes of testimony, interviews and documents—has never been disproved. Nevertheless, there has been an extraordinary reluctance on the part of the American public to accept the commission's verdict.

Although the passage of time has sapped them of the vigor they once had, conspiracy theories still abound, fed by the still-unanswered questions, the ambiguities and the conflicting evidence surrounding the assassination. Because the vast majority of Americans has never read even a page of the Warren Commission report, the conspiracy theorists find a fertile ground for their work.

Indeed, a recent ABC-Washington Post Poll showed that 80% of all Americans believe that more than one person was involved in Kennedy's assassination.

WEATHER

U.S. Weather Service forecast: Today—mostly cloudy; 60 percent chance of light rain. Tonight and Monday—considerable cloudiness; occasional showers; 50 percent rain probability.

	Highs	Lows
Saturday	73	50
Today's forecast	near 64	53
Monday's forecast	near 62	near 55
Nov. 19 last year	64	57

Record high Nov. 19, 1895	92
Record low* Nov. 19, 1886	34

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"Time after time in the last 20 years, I've said, 'Give me a reasonable person and 30 minutes, and I'll convince him the findings of the Warren Commission are correct,'" said Joseph A. Ball, a Southern California attorney who served as an assistant counsel on the commission. But, he added, "I've talked to many an audience in the last 20 years and have been confronted by the fact that only 15% to 20% believed in the commission's findings."

Even some of Kennedy's closest aides, while not rejecting the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin, still do not rule out the possibility of a conspiracy.

"I've seen no evidence to support any other conclusion, but it is part of my feeling that anything, absolutely anything, can be true," said Theodore C. Sorensen, a New York attorney who was special counsel to Kennedy. "Anything is possible in the world as far as who shot the President or the Pope or whoever."

Such widespread skepticism over the assassination is perhaps only natural.

The murder of a President, particularly one who excited such idealism with his youthful vigor as Kennedy did, is always a traumatic experience for a nation, fueling all kinds of speculation even long after the event. Abraham Lincoln's coffin was exhumed twice after wild reports that his body had been stolen—once in 1887, 22 years after his assassination, and again in 1901, 36 years after his death.

As the Warren Commission itself pointed out in its report, there is always the difficulty of what it termed "proving negatives to a certainty"—that is to say, demonstrating beyond all reasonable doubt that something did *not* happen, that, for instance, a second gunman did *not* fire at Kennedy.

"The hardest part for people to understand in any presidential assassination is how it could have been

Second of a series of articles marking the 20th anniversary of the death of President John F. Kennedy.

done," said Robert J. Donovan, a former chief of The Times' Washington Bureau and author of "The Assassins," a definitive study of presidential assassination attempts published in 1955. "There is always a lot of scapegoating, and it brings out zanies all over the place."

Moreover, in the case of Kennedy, the assassination had enough ingredients to make up an endless variety of conspiracy plots: a gunman who had lived in the Soviet Union and had later taken up the cause of Fidel Castro's Cuba; a bullet that is supposed to have torn through the body of the President with sufficient force remaining to seriously wound Texas Gov. John Connally and yet emerged almost undamaged; a lack of cooperation between highly regarded federal law enforcement agencies; Oswald's bizarre murder by a Dallas nightclub owner, Jack Ruby, in the basement of the police station only two days after his arrest.

Pointing Fingers

The conspiracy theorists variously blame Kennedy's killing on the Mafia, supposedly seeking revenge for the Kennedy Administration's stepped-up war against the mob; on Teamsters Union President James R. Hoffa, whom the Justice Department under Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy successfully prosecuted; on Castro, alleged-

ly seeking retribution for CIA attempts to assassinate him; on anti-Castro Cubans, angered over the Bay of Pigs crisis, and on former CIA officials unhappy about what they regarded as Administration mishandling of the Bay of Pigs and its aftermath.

In the climate created by revelations of FBI and CIA wrongdoing and of official lying during the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal—a climate, oddly enough, traceable in part back to the Kennedy Administration—it is questionable whether any official explanation of the assassination ever will be accepted.

That is an ironic contrast to the climate when the Warren Commission first presented its report on Sept. 24, 1964. The nation, grateful at last for an official accounting of the "crime of the century," received the seven-member panel's report with open arms.

The Times said in an editorial, "Based on exhaustive evidence, and so far as humanly possible at this time, the Warren Commission has presented a complete and copiously detailed report. . . . Reasonable men everywhere, if they take the time to read the commission's findings, should have no problem accepting its conclusions."

Life magazine declared that the report "lays to rest the lurid rumors and wild speculations that had spread after the assassination."

A Harris Poll taken three months after the commission released its findings showed that only one-third of all Americans believed that Oswald had an accomplice.

Proportion Reverses

But within a scant two years, that proportion had been almost exactly reversed in favor of those who doubted the commission's conclusions. What turned the tide of public opinion more than anything else, perhaps, was the publicity given to a spate of books sharply critical of the commission and posing alternative theories of the assassination.

"The Warren Commission never really investigated the crime," said Harold Weisberg, a retired Maryland poultry farmer who has been one of the commission's most persistent critics and author of "Whitewash," one of the first books to attack the commission's report. "They went into this thing with a presumption of Oswald's guilt. The evidence proves beyond a question that the crime was beyond the capability or capacity of any one man."

The most popular of the anti-Warren Commission works was "Rush to Judgment" by Mark Lane, who proposed virtually every conspiracy theory contrary to the commission's conclusions. Lane, a flamboyant

attorney and a frequent guest on television talk shows, tried unsuccessfully to represent Oswald posthumously during the Warren panel's hearings.

In addition to contending that Oswald had been framed by means of planted evidence, Lane charged that two or more gunmen killed Kennedy to carry out a conspiracy that involved Ruby; that Dallas police, the Navy autopsy doctors and others in the case joined the conspiracy, and that crucial evidence was distorted and suppressed by the Warren Commission.

Also adding fuel to the conspiracy theories was a bizarre and widely publicized investigation in 1967 by New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison that led to charges that Clay L. Shaw, a retired New Orleans businessman, had conspired with Oswald and a former airline pilot to kill Kennedy. Shaw was acquitted two years later.

According to the commission's version of the assassination, the shots that killed Kennedy and wounded

Connally were fired by Oswald from a 6.5-millimeter Italian-made Mannlicher-Carcano rifle at 12:30 p.m. CST from the sixth-floor window at the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository. The shots occurred after the presidential motorcade had passed the depository building and was proceeding west on Elm Street.

Three shots were fired, but only two struck their target, the commission said. One of those pierced Kennedy's throat and went on to break one of Connally's ribs and shatter his wrist. The second struck the right side of Kennedy's head, causing a massive and fatal wound.

The commission also found that Oswald killed Dallas Patrolman J. D. Tippit, who had stopped Oswald for questioning, but it uncovered no evidence that either Oswald or Ruby was part of any conspiracy, "domestic or foreign," to assassinate Kennedy.

After firing off three shots, the commission said, Oswald stashed the assassination weapon between some book cartons, dashed down to the second-floor lunchroom—where he stopped to buy a Coke from a vending machine—and then slipped out of the building undetected.

At 12:45 p.m., Dallas police broadcast a description of the suspected assassin based primarily on the observations of an eyewitness who had been watching the parade directly across the street from the book depository.

Half an hour later, 15 minutes after Kennedy had been officially pronounced dead at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Tippit spotted a man answering the description. When Tippit stepped from his squad car to question the suspect, he was shot four times in rapid succession and killed instantly.

An automobile repairman, one of several eyewitnesses who heard the shots and saw the gunman leave the scene with a revolver in his hand, promptly reported the shooting to police headquarters over Tippit's car radio.

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At 1:45 p.m., an hour and 15 minutes after the assassination, Oswald was picked up by police in the Texas Theater, where the B-film "War Is Hell" was playing. A shoe store manager had seen him jump into the entrance of the store as a police car sped by and then followed him as he had made his way to the theater. When Oswald had entered without buying a ticket, the manager pointed this out to the cashier, who called the police.

Oswald was taken to police headquarters, where he was interrogated by Dallas homicide detectives and FBI and Secret Service agents. He denied everything and accused the police of using brutal tactics against him.

That evening, he was advised that he had been charged with Tippit's murder. Early the next day, a formal charge for the President's assassination was lodged against him.

On Sunday morning, after hours of interrogation, Oswald was to be transferred from the city jail to the Dallas County Jail, about a mile away. At about 11:20 a.m., as he emerged from the basement jail office flanked by detectives, he was shot in the abdomen by Ruby as millions of Americans watched on television.

Oswald was rushed to the same hospital where Kennedy had been declared dead two days earlier. At 1:07 p.m., Oswald was pronounced dead, without having regained consciousness.

Within an hour after Oswald's death, Willis Fritz, chief of the Dallas homicide bureau, grimly declared that the case of Kennedy's assassination was now "closed." But that judgment soon was called into dispute and has remained so ever since.

Even before the Warren Commission published its report, the conspiracy theorists were at work. One of the earliest books to pose a conspiracy plot was written by Thomas Buchanan and entitled "Who Killed Kennedy?"

The author, an American computer specialist then living in Paris, postulated that a Texas oil millionaire, whom he identified only as "Mr. X," had ordered Kennedy's death primarily because of the President's

opposition to generous tax concessions for women.

Common Threads Apparent

Several common threads run through Buchanan's conspiracy theory and virtually all the subsequent ones. Chief among them is the idea that Kennedy was shot at by an assassin firing from the grassy knoll just ahead and to the right of the presidential limousine as it moved down Elm Street, past the Texas School Book Depository, toward the Triple Underpass, the convergence of three major streets beneath a multitrack railroad overpass.

Several eyewitnesses to the assassination testified that they had heard shots coming from the grassy knoll. One onlooker, a railway supervisor who was standing on the railroad overpass, contended that he had even seen a puff of smoke in the trees in that direction.

But none of them ever said that he had seen a gun or a gunman, and under closer questioning, many of them conceded that they might have been mistaken about the direction from which the shots appeared to have come.

Defenders of the Warren Commission's conclusions also note that Dealey Plaza, with tall buildings at one end and the Triple Underpass at the other, is like an echo chamber, making it difficult to pinpoint the source of sounds.

Close scrutiny of photographs taken near the assassination site also nurtured the conspiracy theories. Among other things, they showed three derelicts removed from railroad freight cars after the shooting, two of whom, some witnesses claimed, strongly resembled E. Howard Hunt Jr. and Frank Sturgis. Hunt, a former CIA official, was a chief participant in the Watergate burglary, and Sturgis also was one of the burglars. Hunt and Sturgis testified that they were not in Dallas the day of the assassination. No credible evidence was developed to contradict them, and they were found to bear little actual resemblance to the photographed derelicts.

Another photograph that was widely published

pictured a man along the parade route standing in the brilliant sunlight with a black umbrella open as shots rang out. Some conspiracy theorists suggested that the open umbrella was a signal to fire, while others believed the umbrella contained darts or a rocket aimed at the President. The fact that the man was not immediately located stimulated the theories.

However, the man, Louie Steven Witt, eventually was found by the House Select Committee on Assassinations and testified in 1978 that he sought to heckle Kennedy by holding the umbrella, a symbol of appeasement because one had been carried by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain's pre-World War II efforts to appease Adolf Hitler were

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supported by Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., then U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. Witt testified with evident embarrassment that he had heard the symbolism of the black umbrella was a sore spot for the Kennedy family.

The commission itself concluded in its report that "there is no credible evidence that the shots were fired from the Triple Underpass, ahead of the motorcade, or from any other location" than the window of the Texas School Book Depository.

The idea of a grassy-knoll assassin drew fresh life in 1979, with the release of a report by the House Assassinations Committee. That 12-member panel, headed by Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), had been created three years earlier to investigate the assassinations of both Kennedy and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Although it confirmed the Warren Commission's findings that Oswald fired the shots that killed Kennedy, the House Assassinations Committee also said that scientific acoustical evidence establishes a "high probability" that two gunmen fired at Kennedy.

As a result of this evidence, the report concluded, Kennedy was "probably" assassinated as part of a conspiracy, although the committee said it was unable to identify the second gunman or determine the extent of the conspiracy.

In addition, the committee raised the possibility that individual anti-Castro Cubans or members of organized crime might have been involved in the assassination.

Police Radio Tape

The evidence that the committee relied upon was a Dallas police radio tape purportedly recorded from an open microphone on a police motorcycle in Dealey Plaza at the time of the assassination. According to an analysis by acoustical experts employed by the committee, there was a 95% certainty that a shot had been fired from the grassy knoll.

But in May, 1982, a team of experts of the National Research Council, the principal operating agency of the National Academy of Sciences, disputed that finding, calling into question whether the sounds recorded actually came from a motorcycle in Kennedy's motorcade and saying there was conclusive evidence that the acoustic impulses were indeed recorded about one minute after the assassination.

"The acoustic analyses do not demonstrate that there was a grassy knoll shot, and in particular there is no acoustic basis for the claim of 95% probability of such a shot," the research council's panel concluded in its unanimous report.

Conspiracy theorists also universally reject the Warren Commission's conclusion that a single bullet went through Kennedy's neck, struck Connally in the back, exiting below his right nipple, and then passed through his right wrist before lodging in his left thigh.

The commission agreed to this so-called "single-bullet theory" only after a fierce debate behind closed doors—and to this day it remains one of its most controversial findings.

It was the brainchild of Arlen Specter, an assistant commission counsel who is now a U.S. senator from Pennsylvania. Specter viewed the theory as the only way to explain how Kennedy and Connally could be shot in so short a space of time if there was not more than one gunman.

"It seemed a little implausible at first," said Wesley

Liebler, a UCLA law professor who also served as an assistant commission counsel. "But the more we looked at it, the more it seem to be in fact true."

More Confident Than Ever

Specter declares that he is "more confident now than ever" in the commission's report and says that the single-bullet theory has stood the test of time. "It has been studied by the House committee and the Rockefeller Commission, and it has held up," he said. (The Rockefeller Commission looked into the Kennedy assassination in 1975 in connection with its examination of alleged CIA wrongdoing.)

Warren Commission critics, meanwhile, reject the theory in part because the bullet that supposedly passed through both Kennedy and Connally emerged surprisingly intact. Its nose was hardly blunted and it had lost little weight, even though it had purportedly fractured Connally's rib and shattered his wrist.

Connally also testified before the commission that he considered it inconceivable that he was hit by the same bullet that went through Kennedy's throat—a position he maintained until 1978, when he conceded he might have been struck by the same bullet.

And critics also note that an amateur film of the assassination, made by Dallas dress shop owner Abraham Zapruder, indicates a slight delay between the times Kennedy and Connally were hit.

Coupling Connally's testimony with the pictorial evidence, they conclude that the governor was hit too

late for the bullet to have been the same one that pierced Kennedy's throat and too soon for it to have been a second bullet from the same rifle.

In its defense, the Warren Commission did not present its single-bullet theory as a categorical statement. It said only that "there was very persuasive evidence from the experts to indicate that the same bullet which pierced the President's throat also caused Gov. Connally's wounds."

The House Assassinations Committee upheld the single-bullet theory. The committee also underscored an explanation for another feature of the Zapruder film invariably seized upon by Warren Commission critics as evidence of a second gunman.

In the film, the shot that hit Kennedy in the head appears to force his head backward, instead of forward as might be expected with a shot from the book depository, which was to the President's rear.

The House committee consulted a wound ballistics expert who concluded that nerve damage from a bullet entering the President's head from the rear could have caused his back muscles to tighten. This, in turn, could have caused his head to snap toward the rear, the expert said.

The conclusion matched that of the Rockefeller Commission. Three of five members of a medical panel assembled by the commission said the motion of the President's upper body "would be caused by a violent straightening and stiffening of the entire body as a result of a seizure-like neuromuscular reaction to major damage inflicted to nerve centers in the brain."

Government agencies, chiefly the FBI and the CIA, are partly to blame for continuing doubts about the Warren Commission's conclusions. The FBI, for example, did not tell the commission that one of its agents had destroyed a threatening note that Oswald had written to the agency because he was angered over an attempt to question his wife, Marina, about his whereabouts before

the assassination.

In addition, the CIA did not advise the commission of its plots with Mafia figures to kill Castro before Kennedy's assassination, even though two former CIA directors, Allen W. Dulles and John McCone, served on the panel. Former President Gerald R. Ford, another commission member, said that although knowledge of the plots would have widened the investigation, he did not think it would have altered the commission's conclusions.

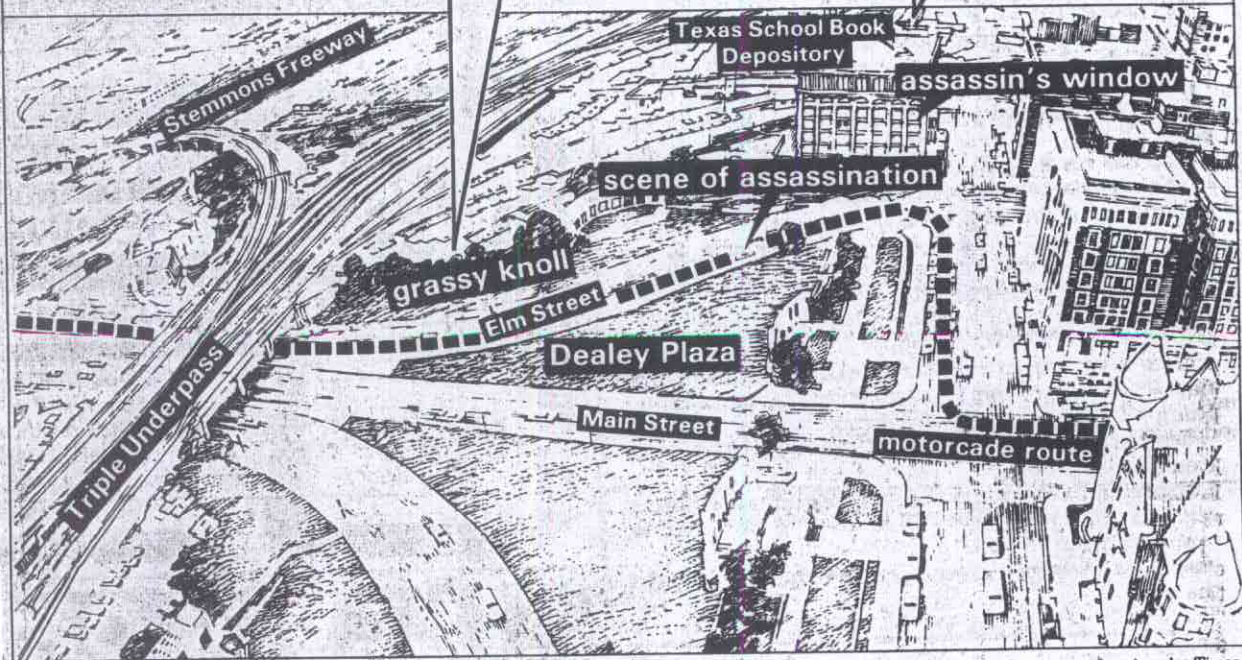
The Assassination Theories

Subsequent theories:

Kennedy was shot at by an assassin firing from the grassy knoll just ahead and to the right of the presidential limousine as it moved down Elm Street, past the Texas School Book Depository, toward the Triple Underpass.

The Warren Commission's version of the assassination:

The shots that killed Kennedy and wounded Connally were fired by Oswald from a 6.5mm Italian-made Mannlicher-Carcano rifle at 12:30 p.m. CST from the sixth-floor window at the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository. The shots occurred after the presidential motorcade had passed the depository building and was proceeding west on Elm Street.



Los Angeles Times

In light of the continuing controversy over the Kennedy assassination, it has often been suggested that the case be reopened for investigation. But the prospect that the truth about the President's death would emerge any more sharply than it has already seems doubtful at best.

Indeed, it is most likely that any investigation would find the same sides opposing each other again, with nothing especially new to add to the debate.

Moreover, after 20 years, the trail has grown colder and colder, memories have begun to fade and the number of people with any first-hand experience or knowledge of the event have dwindled.

For millions, Nov. 22, 1963, will remain forever frozen in their memories. Some of them remember it. View Section.