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Conspiracies: The Many Winding

ACT OF TREASON The Role of J. Edgar Hoover In the Assassination of President Kennedy

By Mark North
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By Athan G. Theoharis

HE WAS feared or revered during his lifetime tenure as FBI director, but J. Edgar Hoover's reputation as the nation's number-one G-Man has recently encountered harsher scrutiny. This more critical appraisal is not the inevitable debunking of historical revisionism. Rather it is the product of the collapse of former restrictions on FBI records as thousands of FBI documents have been made public either because printed in congressional hearings or released in response to Freedom of Information Act requests. In his new book Mark North adds another dimension to this more critical portrait of Hoover, indicting the former FBI director for an "act of treason" in indirectly promoting and then successfully covering up the role of organized crime bosses in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

North's account of Hoover's "role" is a complicated plot of intrigue and conspiracy. His essential claim is that Hoover, despite having learned that New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello had put out a "contract" on President Kennedy, intentionally withheld this information from the Secret Service and the Justice Department; that Hoover did so because he was fearful that Kennedy might terminate his directorship of the Bureau and because he also had concluded that Kennedy was "an indecisive, immoral liberal who, if left in place, would destroy the nation"; that Hoover then counted on being able to "control" Lyndon Johnson (owing to Johnson's vulnerability in the wake of the contemporaneously publicized scandal involving the vice president's association with former senate secretary Bobby Baker); that Marcello was encouraged to assassinate Kennedy having "astutely realized that the two officials who would be most able to prevent his prosecution after the fact, Hoover and Johnson, would personally benefit" should Kennedy die; and that Hoover and Johnson successfully contained the Warren Commission's and other inquiries into the

Roads to Dallas

"true nature of the conspiracy."

These are serious charges, amounting to an indictment not only of Hoover but also of Lyndon Johnson, the Warren Commission, the Department of Justice and Congress (the latter two for their unwillingness to unmask this earlier conspiracy). Does North, then, document his complicated plot of treason and betrayal?

He offers no new evidence to document his speculations about the alleged conspiracy—he has, instead, simply mined other books about Hoover, the Kennedy assassination, and the Bobby Baker scandal supplemented by citations to congressional hearings, President Johnson's daily logs, and contemporaneous newspaper articles. In a series of chronologically organized chapters, he narrates the day-by-day developments involving Hoover, Oswald, Ruby, crime bosses, Kennedy, Johnson, and the Warren Commission—dating from Kennedy's election to the presidency in November 1960 to the White House ceremony of May 1964

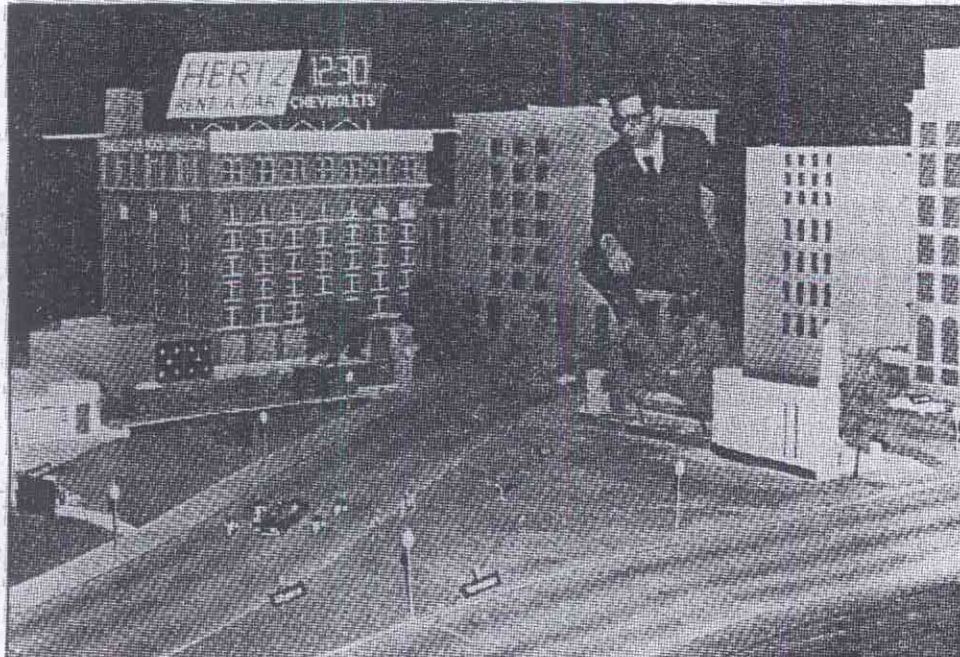
Athan G. Theoharis, professor of history at Marquette University, is the author, most recently, of "From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover."

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AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS REPRINTED FROM "ACT OF TREASON"

President Kennedy (left) with F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover and Robert Kennedy in 1961



UPI/BETTMANN PHOTO REPRINTED FROM "PLAUSIBLE DENIAL"

Author Mark Lane with a model of Dealey Plaza, the assassination scene in Dallas

when President Johnson announced his waiver of the mandatory retirement age of 70 to allow Hoover to remain as FBI director.

At base, North asks the reader to accept as definitive the accounts which find that Kennedy was assassinated by the Mafia, but the supporting evidence is murky and inconclusive. North then cites Hoover's collection of information about Kennedy's immorality as evidence of the director's willingness to tolerate the Mafia "contract"—yet Hoover maintained similar files on the "immoral" activities of other prominent Americans: Eleanor Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Dwight Eisenhower, Joseph Alsop, members of Congress. North then cites Hoover's acquisition of reported rumors that Kennedy intended to terminate his directorship—but dating from 1932 Hoover had been briefed on and had closely monitored similar rumors about the alleged plans of presidents and attorneys general. These are hardly evidence of a Hoover motive to promote Kennedy's assassination. Nor has North documented his contentions that Hoover (1) had learned about Mafioso comments affirming an interest in Kennedy's death (although most such remarks were directed at Robert Kennedy)

and (2) consciously decided to withhold this information from the Secret Service and Justice Department. Through wiretaps of Marcello and other crime figures, the FBI had learned of such negative comments (none, however, stated an intent to put out a "contract"). The transcripts of these intercepted conversations were not routed to Hoover's "private files," but as in the case of all wiretap records were maintained in the FBI's Special File Room. North has documented neither that these intercepted conversations were signed out and sent to the director's office nor that after reviewing these transcripts senior FBI officials briefed the Director about these conversations (had Hoover been so briefed, he would have, as in other cases, penned in his reaction to the briefing and his orders as to appropriate action). Absent such documentation, Hoover had not been briefed and had not been partner to an "act of treason."

Because of the author's research deficiencies, we are presented with a book based on torturous reasoning and unsupported speculation. To offer this as evidence of Hoover's "role" in the Kennedy assassination requires a leap of faith that only the most cynical will make. ■