

Tracking down conspiracy

POST MORTEM: JFK Assassination Coverup Smashed. By Harold Weisberg. Published by the author; \$12.75 insured postpaid.

Reviewed by James D. White

Within a few weeks after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963, that smoothly executed ambush drew this observation from an astute and experienced political scientist who told me:

"If there was any conspiracy at all behind it, you will have to distinguish sooner or later between two conspiracies — one, probably numbering only a few, for the actual operation itself; and a second, which may involve many elements including government elements, for the cover-up. There may or may not be connections between the two. In any event, the dominant motive in the cover-up is likely to be bureaucratic self-preservation."

More than 12 years later, the dimensions of both conspiracies are projected more clearly than ever by Harold Weisberg, the former Senate investigator and World War II intelligence analyst who has spent those same 12 years building his case. *Post Mortem* is his sixth book on the assassination and its aftermath. All but one he has had to publish himself.

From the first, Weisberg's conclusions have been bitter and blunt: The assassination was carried out by a conspiracy, and the official story that it wasn't is a cover-up.

The first three of Weisberg's *Whitewash* series were based mainly upon his analysis of the Warren Commission Report and its verdict that Lee Harvey Oswald was a lone assassin with Communist leanings. False and fraudulent, Weisberg charged long ago, and said why — again and again.

In *Oswald in New Orleans*, which actually had an established publisher and now is out of print, Weisberg rounded up evidence that Oswald's role in the assassination was at most that of a seapegoat, and that his alleged Communist ties were at most a cover for other connections, including those with the CIA and the FBI. *Whitewash IV*, published by Weisberg late in 1974, presented in facsimile an early executive session of the Warren Commission in which its members discussed their problems so candidly that it was obvious to Weisberg that they never considered any other conclusion than the lone-nut solution to who killed Kennedy.

This long-secret proceeding had been wrung from the government following a Freedom of Information Law action brought by Weisberg. So were others which he now reproduces in facsimile in *Post Mortem*. He has 184 pages of such documentation, fully annotated, in addition to more than 450 pages of single-

spaced typescript of detailed analysis of just what went on inside the commission.

For page after page, chapter after chapter, Weisberg explains and documents evidence of a conspiracy to kill the President — evidence drawn partly from long-suppressed material which the Commission either never saw or managed not to look at. Which ever, Weisberg contends, the commission knew what it was doing — covering up the real story of how the President was murdered. He supplies many new details of how the killing was done, but straightforwardly declines to speculate on who did it. What he does do, in well-nigh incredible detail, is to document how the cover-up evolved, was managed and maintained. *Post Mortem* is the book to which historians will have to turn for a working index into the mountain of evidence from which Weisberg draws his own conclusions and with which historians will have to deal.

The commission recognized very early, Weisberg makes clear, that it was trapped. With all information on the assassination channeled through J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, the commission was stuck with Hoover's expertly leaked story — spread round the world by the cooperative media — that Lee Harvey

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Oswald acted on his own and without help. Unless the commission wanted to defy Hoover's then enormous prestige, it had no choice but to make the best of Hoover's construct.

The construct wasn't very good. There were problems, such as Hoover's report that Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally had been hit by separate bullets (Connally agreed). Unfortunately, amateur movie film showed that there wasn't time enough between the two shots for a single gunman to have reloaded and fired again. This meant two gunmen and a conspiracy.

To get around this, the commission came up with the famous single-bullet theory which had the same slug going through both men, breaking several bones in Connally's chest and wrist. The bullet produced as proof of this is the famous Exhibit 399 in the Warren Commission Report, which was found in Parkland Hospital in almost perfect condition with no indication of having gone through anything more formidable than a tube of cotton wool. Weisberg piles on new evidence that 399 simply couldn't have done what it was supposed to have done.

Nearly all new, and perhaps most disturbing of all, is the painstaking research and analysis Weisberg has done with the evidence surrounding Kennedy's autopsy — or rather that part of the evidence he has

been able to obtain through years of siege of the National Archives and, more recently, through lawsuits under the Freedom of Information Act.

In the autopsy, Weisberg asserts, official rules were broken and ignored, glaring evidence disregarded or suppressed, and a pre-ordained conclusion reached at all costs in order to support the lone assassin verdict. He charges — he has charged this for years — that the government lied to the people, never intended to conduct a real investigation into the assassination, and didn't. He has bitter things to say about the public information media which, with few exceptions, accepted the official explanation uncritically and relayed it as truth. He verges on despair regarding a public that tolerates such handling of information on which its political judgments must depend.

Post Mortem is a massive work. There is scarcely any phase of the entire assassination aftermath, including the autopsy, in which Weisberg does not report evidence of fraud, suppression or destruction or misrepresentation of evidence, perjury or subornation of perjury. He names names, and he invites those named to sue if libel can be proved. None has.

And *Post Mortem* is specific, probing into the remotest corners of government arguments to pinpoint alleged cases of deceit, unwarranted secrecy and promotion of official lies.

An example is the excuse for keeping the records secret. In the first place, Weisberg charges, the commission had no authority to classify anything. In the second, secrecy was decreed on grounds that the Archives agreement with the Kennedy family precluded declassification. Weisberg charges that the Kennedy family never had title to, least of all possession of, the autopsy and associated records because the autopsy was conducted on a military base by military personnel and therefore lawfully belonged to the government. Yet the transfer of the records to the Archives was done in such a way as to make it appear that secrecy had been imposed by the family.

Among the still-secret records are those of the government tests on the Kennedy bullets by spectrographic and neutron activation analyses, highly sophisticated tests which would show, once and for all, whether all came from a single gun — in other words whether there was a conspiracy or not.

For years, Weisberg has been trying to get these tests, more recently through a Freedom of Information action which the government first resisted by claiming no such tests ever were made. When Weisberg produced receipts and correspondence from the 300 cubic feet of records in the Archives showing that such tests *had* been made, the government found new reasons to stonewall.

Weisberg asks: If the tests show only one assassin was firing on Nov. 22, 1963, why not disclose them? It's not an unreasonable question. Until it is answered, *Post Mortem* stands as the most powerful

assault yet on the presumption of government innocence in the assassination cover-up.

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