

Staw 4/2/67

# Answering Questions Raised on Dallas

**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION.** By Charles Roberts. Foreword by Pierre Salinger. Grossett & Dunlap. 128 pages. \$1.

By the time Charles Roberts' fine book had reached the stands, the newspapers were reporting the latest installment of an apparently endless round of sensational versions of "the real truth" about the assassination. In the past, the "truth" first, implausibly but not surprisingly, had come from Europe; then from obscure lawyers, unpublished authors, unemployed reporters. Everyone, it seems, has the "real" story.

Now, we are being subjected to a razzle-dazzle out of New Orleans the likes of which have not been seen since Mr. Barnum met Mr. Bailey. As the world knows, the characters in the current spectacle include hipsters, beatniks, homosexuals, witnesses who testify after being hypnotized, bar girls, strippers, Cubans, pilots, private investigators, and a gigantic district attorney who once cleaned up Bourbon Street, and whose first name is Jim, not James.

Mr. Roberts does not deal with all this present assortment who are adding still another sordid chapter to the most enduring story of this generation—the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dealey Plaza in Dallas. What Mr. Roberts does give us is a carefully constructed, critical but temperate and thoughtful

review of what is known, and what is not known about that event. ~~He is an excellent reporter~~, who also has the virtue of writing clearly and cleanly. His book performs a genuine public service: It places the assassination and the welter of conspiratorial theories that surround it in much-needed perspective. This book deserves to be widely read.

As a good reporter should, he deals with the evidence at hand and then discusses, quietly and calmly, the various charges that have clouded the Warren Commission findings. One of his first lessons is a personal one, and worth repeating here. Mr. Roberts, as White House correspondent for Newsweek magazine, was in Dallas that November day and quite properly became fascinated with the plethora of eyewitness accounts purporting to see this or that.

"If I learned anything in Dallas that day," he writes, "beside what it's like to be numbed by shock and grief, it was that eyewitness testimony is the worst kind. As an old police and courts reporter, I had long been wary of witnesses who recall in precise detail what they saw and heard while their adrenalin was flowing in moments of great crisis or tragedy. Dallas confirmed my suspicion that victims of horror—no matter how eminent they are—suffer also from faulty recall. And

now, the more that is written about Dallas on the basis of eyewitness recollections, the more my suspicion is confirmed."

Unlike other writers about the assassination, Mr. Roberts is not polemical. He is, however, persuasive and instructive. I for one, came away with the feeling that the major conclusions of the Warren Commission are going to be extremely difficult to disprove. At the very least, the critics examined in Mr. Roberts' book come out very poorly.

In the end, his indictment is directed not so much at the sensational writers or the blatant profiteers of tragedy, but at the public itself. The public has failed to inform itself of the available material. Even worse, as Mr. Roberts justly points out, the press and its literary reviewers have been guilty of a more serious charge. In too many cases, they have performed carelessly. Mr. Roberts cites the laudatory book reviews written about some of the more critical books, and comments:

"What is now apparent is that those reviewers did not read or question the relevance or integrity of the citations to which they were referred. (From some of their reviews there is a lingering suspicion they did not read the Warren Report either.) They did not bother to find out that their citations, when read, often

prove the opposite of what the authors intended. Even worse, they did not spend enough time reading the hearings (few had the time) to learn that from their 17,815 pages scraps of testimony and evidence—'facts'—can be extracted to prove that almost anyone in Dallas that black Friday had a hand—or didn't in the Kennedy assassination."

Mr. Roberts has not written the final word on the assassination. He has not tried to. That, in all likelihood, will not be written in our lifetime..

—HAYNES JOHNSON.