

## HOME ENTERTAINMENT

## A dramatic, provocative look at the Kennedy assassination

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Special to The Inquirer

More than 25 years after the fact, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy still provides fertile ground for conspiracy theorists. Was Lee Harvey Oswald a Soviet agent? An assassin sent by Fidel Castro? A pawn of organized crime? A deluded personality acting on his own?

Such questions may never be answered, but their validity is made strikingly clear in a documentary from White Star Video called *Reasonable Doubt* (51 minutes, \$29.95). Produced by Chip Selby in 1988 (the 25th anniversary of the slaying), this film is just now appearing on videocassette. It's a succinct, compelling critique of the most crucial conclusion in the Warren Commission report on JFK's death: that Oswald acted alone.

The Warren report, with its so-called single-bullet theory, remains the official government version of what happened in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Yet it has been attacked in so many books and magazine articles over the years that, according to this program, as little as 13 percent of the public believes Oswald was the lone gunman.

*Reasonable Doubt* does not break new ground, but it brings together the most prominent and persistent critics of the Warren report, and couples their comments with fascinating visuals — including autopsy documents, hospital reports, news conferences, historical photographs and the heart-stopping home movie made by Abraham Zapruder.

The Zapruder film of the Kennedy car caravan moving through Dealey Plaza catches the moment when the President is fatally shot in the head. This is officially held to be the second of three shots. The third shot, which missed entirely, is a matter of record, because it hit a curb and sprayed cement fragments into the face of a parade onlooker.

The controversy concerns the first bullet. The Warren Commission concluded that this bullet struck Kennedy in the back of the neck, emerged just below his throat and went on to wound Texas Gov. John Connally, seated in the front of the limousine. As the Zapruder film

## On video



Lee Harvey Oswald

In a 1963 photo after he was charged

makes clear, the reaction of the two men to being shot is so close to simultaneous that if they were not wounded by the same bullet, they must have been shot by different gunmen at almost the same time.

Experts on the tape, however, insist that the Warren Commission had to ignore all the physical evidence to advance its theory. Some of the most damning assertions come from Cyril Wecht, the forensic pathologist who has written extensively about the assassination, and from Harold Weisberg, a former Senate investigator.

Among their observations: The bullet's path as described in the Warren report does not match the actual wounds; the bullet recovered at the hospital and identified as coming from Oswald's rifle shows no malformation despite passing through two bodies ("not a scratch on it," says Weisberg), and photos of Kennedy's jacket and shirt — the blood-stained

garments are a grim sight — show that the first bullet wound was much lower than reported by the Warren Commission.

Connally himself says he was not hit by the same bullet. Included here is a news conference he gave shortly after the Warren report was released in September 1964. In it he describes reacting to the rifle shot, starting to turn to look toward Kennedy, and then being hit himself.

Perhaps most disturbing: Weisberg says that doctors who attended Kennedy in Dallas spoke to the media immediately after his death and described the front throat wound as an entrance wound. Yet when the same doctors testified before the Warren Commission, they supported the official autopsy conclusion that the wound was an exit. Their earlier version forms the basis for the theory that a gunman was stationed on the "grassy knoll" ahead of the car.

The value of *Reasonable Doubt* is that it does not presume to tell "what really happened" that day, only what could not have happened according to the official record. The purpose does hint that Washington believes any coverup is left to the individual imaginings, although the program does hint that Washington believes the public needed assurances that the case was closed. To see the evidence against a lone assassin laid out with such precision and objectivity is a powerful viewing experience.