

Gerald R. Ford and David W. Belin

Kennedy Assassination: How About the Truth?

The media treatment of the Kennedy assassination tragedy and the Warren Commission Report is a microcosm of one of the central problems facing our democratic society: False sensationalist claims are given wide dissemination, the truth is submerged, and the responsible press usually does not undertake sufficient effort to expose the fraud that is being perpetrated. Two vivid examples are the recent series of five one-hour A&E television programs about the Kennedy assassination called "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" and the new Oliver Stone-Kevin Costner film, "JFK."

The common denominator of these commercial productions is the big lie—the assertion that the top echelons of our government were conspiratorially involved in the assassination and that Lee Harvey Oswald was not the lone gunman who killed President Kennedy and Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit.

In "JFK," the big lie is disseminated through Kevin Costner, who portrays New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison. Repeatedly, he asserts the assassination was a coup d'etat—a "public execution" with a cover-up "all the way" to the top, including Lyndon Johnson, whom he calls an accessory after the fact. In the A&E series, the big lie is disseminated through key interviewees who are portrayed as purported experts, such as Col. Fletcher Prouty (a consultant to Oliver Stone in the production of "JFK"), who asserts: "You see, you're dealing with a very high echelon of power . . . otherwise, how could you have gotten people like the chief justice of the Supreme Court to participate in the cover-up?"

False charges of this kind are a desecration to the memory of President Kennedy, a desecration to the memory of Earl Warren and a fraudulent misrepresentation of the truth to the American public.

The basic format underlying the dissemination of lies is to cover up the overwhelming weight of the evidence and instead paste together scraps of testimony to form a case for conspiracy and an attempt to cover up the guilt of Lee Harvey Oswald. For instance, approximately 20 doctors have examined the autopsy photographs and X-rays of President Kennedy as members of formal panels. Nineteen of these experts have concluded that all of the shots that struck President Kennedy came from the rear. The 20th asserts that there was supposedly a simultaneous fourth shot that struck President Kennedy in the head and disintegrated, leaving no physical evidence of the bullet. This odd-man-out appeared repeatedly on the A&E network in a number of the sequences.

Nowhere does any one of the overwhelming

majority of 19 experts appear in the telecast or in "JFK." Nowhere is there any mention of the fact that they concluded that all of the shots came from the rear and that this conclusion is confirmed by the unequivocal ballistic evidence which shows that the bullet that struck President Kennedy's head and the bullet that passed through President Kennedy's neck and struck Gov. Connally were fired from Oswald's rifle found at the Texas School Book Depository Building. Instead "JFK" and the television production emphasize the backward movement of President Kennedy's head when he was struck, without telling the audience that wound ballistic experts unequivocally testified that the movement was not caused by the impact of the bullet but was rather caused by a massive neuromuscular reaction that occurs when there is major damage inflicted to nerve centers of the brain.

The A&E network is owned one-third by NBC and one-third by Capital Cities/ABC. When Michael Millardi, president of the broadcast group of Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., was asked about the A&E network's misrepresentations, he sidestepped the issue and instead replied that "it is our judgment that the extreme interest in the subject matter" and "the international perspective . . . all warranted A&E's decision to telecast the program."

Robert Wright, president of NBC, when contacted about the misrepresentations in the A&E program, chose to have Brooke Bailey Johnson, an A&E executive, reply. Johnson refused to comment about why none of the majority of 19 medical experts was ever shown on A&E. Instead, Johnson wrote, "We elected to purchase and telecast these programs for a number of reasons. The ongoing interest in the subject matter was a factor, as was a belief that the multi-channel environment in which we operate is a highly appropriate one for the debate of controversial issues."

But so far as the public is concerned, there is no debate because the other side—which hap-

pens to be the truth—is almost never shown to the public. Certainly, it is not shown in the Oliver Stone-Kevin Costner film, reputedly produced at a cost approaching \$40 million.

Like the A&E series, "JFK," alleges a conspiracy supposedly including elements of the CIA, with the ultimate proof of the conspiracy supposedly being the killing of Oswald by Jack Ruby on Nov. 24, 1963. Oliver Stone's fantasy involves what Garrison calls "triangulation"—three separate gunmen firing a total of six shots, with Oswald as the "patsy" who is killed by the conspirators' hit man, Jack Ruby. But nowhere in the movie do viewers see anything about the overwhelming evidence that disproves the conspiracy claims, including central witnesses to these events such as Postal Inspector Harry Holmes.

On Sunday morning, Nov. 24, 1963, Holmes was on his way to church with his wife. At the last minute, he decided instead to go to the Dallas police station to see if he could help his friend, Capt. Fritz. Holmes had been assisting Fritz in the investigation of the murder of President Kennedy and the murder of Officer Tippit, the Dallas policeman who was killed by Oswald about 45 minutes after the Kennedy assassination and whose murder is really the Rosetta Stone to understanding the truth about the assassination. Holmes entered Capt. Fritz's office, where Oswald was being interrogated by Fritz and representatives of the Secret Service and the FBI. After they finished their interrogation, Fritz

newspersons awaiting the transfer of Oswald to the county jail. Oswald was killed at 11:21 a.m. If Harry Holmes had just continued on to church that morning, the interrogation session would have ended a half hour earlier, and Oswald would have been transferred long before Jack Ruby ever got to the Western Union office. Obviously, if Jack Ruby were part of a conspiracy, he would have been downtown at least a half hour earlier. Of course, common sense would also dictate that a would-be conspiratorial "hit man" would not kill his target in the middle of a police station, where he would be certain to be apprehended for murder.

But nowhere do the movie audiences seeing "JFK" or A&E's television audience ever learn about Postal Inspector Holmes, whose testimony is one of many elements showing that Jack Ruby was not conspiratorially involved. Nor does "JFK" or A&E include any portion of the testimony of Rabbi Hillel Silverman, who saw Jack Ruby many times in Ruby's cell and who is convinced that Ruby was truthful when he said that he was not conspiratorially involved. Nor do viewers of the movie or the A&E television series learn about Jack Ruby's request for a lie detector test and the results of that test, which, although not 100 percent accurate, confirmed that Jack Ruby was not part of any conspiracy.

Nowhere does the A&E telecast or the movie show the vivid testimony of the single most important witness to the assassination—Howard Brennan, who actually saw the gunman fire from the southeast corner window of the Texas School Book Depository Building—the window where cartridge



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turned to Holmes and gave him the opportunity to ask questions, and the session was extended for approximately another half-hour.

Jack Ruby meanwhile had come downtown to the Western Union office to send a money order to one of his employees. The time stamp on the money order showed that he was at the Western Union office at 11:17 a.m. Jack Ruby went from the Western Union office to the basement of the nearby police station, where he joined a group of

cases were found, which ballistically were shown to have come from Oswald's rifle. It was Brennan who notified the police of the source of the shots and who described the assassin as slender, about 5 feet, 10 inches, 150 to 160 pounds, white—a description remarkably close to Oswald.

Nowhere do the viewers learn that the most probable time span of Oswald's three shots was around 10 seconds, in light of the fact that one of Oswald's shots missed—most likely the first or the last. Instead, Garrison speaks only of three shots being fired within 5.6 seconds, when most likely the 5.6-second time span was between the two shots that struck the president.

Nowhere in "JFK" (or in the A&E television script) does the viewer ever learn that six eyewitnesses, including cabdriver William Scoggins, who saw Oswald from as close a range as 12 feet, saw Oswald at the Tippit murder scene or running away from the Tippit murder scene with gun in hand, and positively identified Oswald as the gunman. Oswald was apprehended in the Texas Theater because an alert Dallas citizen, Johnny Calvin Brewer, became suspicious when he saw Oswald duck into Brewer's show store as police sirens were heard coming down the street. Brewer trailed Oswald to the Texas Theater and had the cashier call the police. When they approached Oswald, he pulled out his revolver, and ballistic evidence proved that this was the Tippit murder weapon.

The viewers of "JFK" and "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" never learn about these facts, nor do they ever learn about all of the

other massive body of evidence which conclusively proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Oswald was the lone gunman who killed President Kennedy and Officer Tippit and that there was no cover-up by Earl Warren or by the Warren Commission.

When will Hollywood produce a movie that tells the truth? When will the A&E network—when will NBC and Capital Cities/ABC—produce five hours of commercial television that presents the truth? When will the responsible leaders of our free press, who owe so much to Earl Warren, stand up for the truth, expose the techniques that have been used to disseminate the big lie and fully defend Earl Warren's name from the slanderous charges that have been made against him and the Warren Commission?

There are some who assert in the face of this conspiracy barrage by the mass media, particularly movies and television, that we will never know the truth. That simply is not accurate. The truth is known: Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman who killed President Kennedy and Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit. Those of us who served on the Warren Commission and those lawyers on the staff who examined the evidence in depth know that to be the truth—beyond a reasonable doubt. And if the press were ever to approach this with the kind of diligence and with the kind of fairness that the American people have the right to expect, then the overwhelming majority of Americans will not only eventually understand the truth but will also understand the techniques of the perpetration of the big lie so that the kind of deceptive techniques used by the producer of "JFK" and the A&E series "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" will be exposed for all to see. The press owes that obligation to the memory of President Kennedy, to the memory of Earl Warren and, indeed, to the American people.

Former President Gerald R. Ford was a member of the Warren Commission. David W. Belin was counsel to the commission.