

A Persuasive Case Against Hoover

I thought I would never become a JFK assassination buff until I read Mark North's absorbing and addictive "Act of Treason: The Role of J. Edgar Hoover in the Assassination of President Kennedy" (Carroll & Graf; 671 pages; \$26.95).

North, a tax attorney living in Austin, Texas, makes the shocking accusation that FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover knew of a Mafia murder contract against President John F. Kennedy as early as September of 1962, more than a year before the assassination, but never informed the Secret Service.

That act alone could constitute an "act of treason," but North goes on to say that long before the assassination, Hoover, concerned that Kennedy would enforce Hoover's mandatory retirement in 1965, had attempted to blackmail Kennedy with FBI information about Kennedy's philandering, particularly with Mafia boss Sam Giancana's girlfriend, Judith Exner. When Kennedy refused to be intimidated, North says, Hoover then compromised Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson with undisclosed FBI information on scandals involving Johnson's gangster friends Billie Sol Estes and Bobby Baker.

Of course, conspiracy theorists reap new plots from each new crop of books published every year, and North agrees that he's not the first to advance the notion that Mafia hit men, not Lee Harvey Oswald, killed Kennedy. While he is the first to accuse Hoover of knowing about it, what really pulls readers into "Act of Treason" is North's meticulous chronicle of every possible assassination-related event that occurred from November 1960 to May 8, 1964 (Hoover's 40th anniversary as FBI director).

This month-by-month, often day-by-day (and, on the day of the assassination, minute-by-minute and second-by-second) account is the hook that may turn uninterested readers into rabid assassination buffs. Here is Exner making phone calls to the White House from 1960 to 1961; wealthy Cuban exile Jose Aleman talking about a loan from the Teamsters union "cleared by Jimmy Hoffa himself"; Aleman pal Miami mobster Santo Trafficante

involved in a "hit" for Mafia boss Carlos Marcello; Marcello, whose deportation had been arranged by Robert Kennedy, issuing the contract for Jack Kennedy.

And here is ELSUR (FBI electronic surveillance) recording Mafia death threats against RFK, then JFK; Oswald staging a one-man "Hands Off Cuba" demonstration in Dallas; Jack Ruby subscribing to Marcello's gambling hotline; Robert Kennedy arguing publicly with Johnson; JFK making a speech that the Communist threat no longer existed, undoubtedly infuriating Hoover.

North uses hundreds of sources, quoting from seemingly unconnected articles in the Washington Post, the New York Times and dozens of other newspapers, hearings of the Warren Commission and House Select Committee on Assassinations, IRS bulletins, PBS' "NOVA" report "Who Shot President Kennedy?," hundreds of articles and nearly 70 books on everything from Marilyn Monroe's death

See Page 11

T.O. SYLVESTER

MATCH THE SEVEN DWARFS
WITH THE CORRECT DIAGNOSIS

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. SLEEPY | A. antisocial |
| 2. GRUMPY | B. over-medicated |
| 3. DOPEY | C. manic |
| 4. DOC | D. delusional |
| 5. SNEEZY | E. anemic |
| 6. HAPPY | F. socially inept |
| 7. BASHFUL | G. allergic |

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Continued From Page 2

to FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr. to studies of communism and organized crime in America.

The result is the most thoroughly documented statement of events preceding and following the assassination that may ever have been compiled. Both its strength and its weakness is that every source is given the same weight as every other source. But North's attempt to cut through the mythology and stick to what he believes to be the facts

PUZZLE ANSWERS

BRIDGE

- 1 — What a pity that partner holds the wrong major. Still, you have enough to bid game and you certainly don't want to try for a 4-3 spade fit or an 11-trick contract in clubs. Bid three no trump.
- 2 — We can understand those who are reluctant to hear partner respond to a takeout double with two clubs and, therefore, choose a one-heart overcall rather than risk losing a 5-3 heart fit. However, we feel that runs a much higher risk of missing a 4-4 spade fit. Our choice is to double, and pass should partner respond two clubs.
- 3 — You can't double because partner's most likely response in hearts would leave you in an untenable position. This is one of those rare hands where we would overcall on a four-card suit — the suit quality and strength of the hand warrants it. Bid one spade.
- 4 — When an opponent opens the bidding in your best suit, it is invariably in your best interests to pass initially. This hand is no exception — your spade suit is nowhere near good enough for an overcall, even at the one level.
- 5 — This hand is a whit too strong for a one-spade overcall. Our choice would be to double, then bid spades as cheaply as possible over partner's response. If partner persists in hearts, a no-trump contract could still be a viable possibility.
- 6 — Partner has made the weakest response possible, and could have next to nothing. That's unlikely on this specific auction, but despite your fine support, you have a minimum takeout double, so you must pass.

ACROSTIC

ROBERT C. OWEN: (Treaty Needed to) **LIMIT** (Orbiting) **TRASH**.
 "Three decades of space activity have built . . . an inventory of . . . T. orbiting trash . . . dead satellites . . . tools and gloves and a cloud of dust . . . We're messing up a pristine environment without knowing what we're doing."

'When the House Select Committee formally found a conspiracy and rejected the Warren Commission Report in 1979, I was hooked'

— MARK NORTH

is honest and impeccable.

North, contacted by phone in Texas, says that he got interested in the assassination in 1975, when Mort Sahl hosted a television program showing film of the motorcade and questioning the Warren Commission Report. "I read the conclusion of the Warren Report and wondered even then about the part where they specifically condemn the FBI for its failure to supply the Secret Service with information regarding specific threats. (He reprints this section in the book.) Pretty soon I was reading every book I could find, and when the House Select Committee formally found a conspiracy and rejected the Warren Commission Report in 1979, I was hooked."

North admits he has no inside information or sources, that he "came to this as an outsider, as an attorney looking for evidence and legal relevance. I realized early on that I had to frame a time period and create a chronicle in which I could put every dated, documented fact I could find. I started analyzing all of Hoover's speeches and writings, the things his supporters put in the Congressional Record, studies on the Mafia, microfilm of the Post and Times for every day from November of 1960 on, and all serious books on the assassination, pro and con."

As North compiled his chronicle, "I began to look more specifically at who was in charge of the investigation, who had a vested interest in keeping material away from the Warren Commission — real motive-and-opportunity questions. One night it finally dawned on me that this thing in all likelihood had been set up, and that Hoover was the responsible party. It was very unsettling, but when I realized I was right, I reacted as most Americans would, initially very sad that this could happen in the United States. Then I got angry. I felt we had been cheated out of the constitutional process."

Patricia Holt is book editor for *The Chronicle*.