

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21701

November 18, 1983

Editor, Texas Monthly
P O Box 1569
Austin, TX 78767

Sir:

"I want you to trust my judgment and powers of discrimination," Ron Rosenbaum writes in your November issue in which in your sycophancy you and he treat that most subversive of crimes, the assassination of a President, as an appropriate subject of jesting and ridicule on its 20th anniversary.

This is hideous, obscene and irresponsible. It also is the complete abdication of the responsibility of writers and editors, whose proper role in a society like ours is to examine how our basic institutions worked or failed to work in such times of great crisis and thereafter, not whitewash and cover up for them.

It is just as good that Rosenbaum did not demand trust in his facts, because in even minor detail they cannot be trusted. This matches his display of his "judgment" and "powers of discrimination."

His greatest "respect" is for Josiah Thompson, particularly his "methods." (page 265) Whether this is for his literary light-fingers with what had already been published by others, one "method," or his theorizing, Rosenbaum does not say. Perhaps it was for Thompson's theorizing of three simultaneous and entirely unrelated conspiracies to give the Saturday Evening Post something not in the book he promoted with that piece?

In your supposed subject expert's "respect" Jones Harris is only slightly behind Thompson (Page 157) because Harris is such a "meticulous investigator." Unfortunately, Rosenbaum does not give any detail or illustration. Is it because Harris was a closet Nixonian meticulously misrepresenting himself as close to and working with Robert Kennedy's people? Or because he misled many by his "meticulous investigation" showing that (the sick and later confined) Jim Hicks was the conspiracy's "communications" man in Dealey Plaza - right out in the middle of the street so he could be photographed? Or because Harris fabricated the despicable quote he attributed to Robert Kennedy, that he was not critical of the official mythology because there were "too many guns between me and the White House." Is "meticulous investigator" really adequate to describe Harris?

Did it not strike any of your editors as at all odd that in this supposedly definitive (to say nothing of fair) account of who is "still on the case" - all "buffs" to you - Rosenbaum bestowed his high praise only on those who are not "still on the case?" "Whether they have anything worth saying" (page 156) likewise is limited to those he ridicules.

Is it at all possible that Rosenbaum has no knowledge of all the serious, successful and ongoing research? Or that not one of your editors does? He makes no mention of any, does not even suggest that it exists, and none of you thought to ask him?

The truth is that he is well aware of this but that his "judgment" and "powers of discrimination" told him that if he made any reference to it he would torpedo himself. So he just left it out - his "method" of "investigation."

Indirectly he manages to refer to the availability of "100,000 pages of declassified documents" he fails to report are now in the FBI's public reading room. In his and your definitive account there is no reference to how they got there, or to the many FOIA threats and suits that forced them and much more to light. (page 262) Actually, there are many more than 100,000 pages, of which Ranftel examined some in the FBI's reading room, and they are not "declassified documents." They were merely suppressed until some whose concern is research and fact, not those "real investigators," Thompson and Harris, forced them out.

Or do you and Rosenbaum want your readers to believe that they came from Penn Jones' sewer, to which you both devote most of your attention and space?

Your expert who demands "trust in my judgment and powers of discrimination" does manage to refer to the Charles Bronson film (else how could he ridicule Gary Mack and Earl Golz?) and of it to report no more than that the FBI said only that they found "nothing of interest" in it. (page 262)

Those records were disclosed in my C.A. 78-0322, which is still in court after 5 years. And what Rosenbaum - and you - cover up is what the FBI actually said: that the motion pictures "failed to show the building from which all the shots were fired" when it has about 100 individual pictures of it and the so-called sniper's window and that the 35mm stills, which "did depict the President's car at the precise time the shots were fired", were of no value because "the pictures were not sufficiently clear for identification" of Oswald.

Before the investigation was really begun the FBI decided that Oswald fired all the shots from one window of that building. So, if crime scene movies do show the building but do not have Oswald in that window, they are valueless - if evaluated only for usefulness in making a case against him.

Thus also Rosenbaum does not fault the FBI for rejecting as valueless still pictures that include the President and his car and much more "at the precise time the shots were fired." After all, why should the FBI want pictures of the President in the midst of his assassination if Oswald is not in them, either? These photos of the President being killed are so utterly valueless the Dallas FBI did not bother to report even their existence to headquarters.

So you can be satisfied, even if your trust-demanding reports of self-touted good "judgment and powers of discrimination" did not find space for it in all those many pages you gave him, that there was an immediate and unchanged FBI preconception that Oswald was a lone nut assassin, I attach the earliest of its records reflecting its decision not to consider any other suspect or even the possibility of a conspiracy - on the very day of the assassination and even before Oswald was charged.

In other and minor details Rosenbaum is inaccurate, a less significant fault in his literary whoring about so serious an event, so frightful a tragedy from which the entire world still suffers. Examples:

That "sudden appearance" of "bootleg copies of the Zapruder film" was not "in the seventies" but in 1968.

It was not "one of the anti-Castro activists" Oswald had been "soliciting," if that describes what he was doing, but three. This is one of the best-known and least questioned facts relating to Oswald in New Orleans. All four were arrested at the same time. And after arrest Oswald did not offer to "inform on the pro-Castro movement," which did not even exist in New Orleans. (Even though Rosenbaum says that Oswald did establish a chapter of it, which he didn't.)

Rosenbaum says that the Commission was "never able to resolve" the matter of Oswald's use of the 544 Camp Street address. Honest and accurate reporting would have stated that it and the FBI made no real effort to do so.

That special garage, to Rosenbaum the "Crescent Street Garage," was the Crescent City Garage. (For all the time he spent in New Orleans not learning anything the least a diligent investigator might have picked up is that New Orleans is known as the Crescent City.) The "testimony" to which Rosenbaum refers was not testimony and it was not by the "mechanic" at the garage. It was by the owner, Adrian Alba, who made the statement quoted to private persons, not the Commission, before which he did not testify.

You magnify Rosenbaum's many and inexcusable sins by describing all those who do not agree with the official mythology as living and having lived "lives similar in many ways to that of their most illusive prey - Oswald himself." Have you no shame, no shred of decency?

You and Rosenbaum could not even keep the order of appearance of critical books straight, or had your own purposes in not doing so. Epstein's was not the first based on the Warren Report. Or the second. My first (of six of which you mention only one) dates to August 1965. It was followed by Sylvan Fox's "Unanswered Questions." It was then republished nine months later. After that, Epstein's appeared.

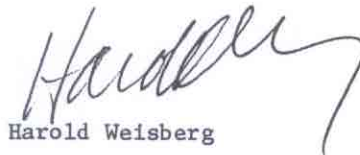
Of all the things Rosenbaum could have said about me, he said only that I am a "goose farmer and former government investigator." Neither is correct, although I did raise a few geese and did basic behavioral work with them similar to that of Konrad Lorenz. I was, officially, the best chicken farmer in the country, after I found making a living doing as Rosenbaum does too distasteful. I then was also a chicken-cooking champion and the "national barbecue king." Rather than being a "government investigator," I was a Senate investigator, an investigative reporter and a (decorated) intelligence analyst.

Rosenbaum's and your excuse for this disgusting prostitution of journalism is that you and he are going to "look at who's still on the case after twenty years and whether or not they have anything worth saying." (page 156) He didn't even ask me if I knew of, and neither he nor you make a single reference to, anything at all serious or to the many successful efforts that brought to light "anything worth saying" or even how this has been done or by whom.

After reading Rosenbaum's cheap shots, I can well understand why he had no interest in asking me for all the time he kept me on the phone. I could hardly be up to his needs because, after all, I have forced the government to disclose to me only about a half-million pages of the records the Rosenbaums of this world and magazines like yours have no interest in.

The Freedom of Information Act was amended - over the veto of former Warren Commissioner Gerald Ford - because of one of my JFK assassination FOIA suits and this is what opened all those closets of FBI and CIA dirty linen and their assassination files. Such insignificant matters, when there are black dogs to bark at, are hardly worth a "look at" and not "anything worth saying" a word about.

I give this to Penn Jones: he got Rosenbaum down in the sewer, and that is where he belongs.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold Weisberg".

Harold Weisberg

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

C.A. 78-0322/0420
Consolidated
Exhibit 13

TO : SAC, DALLAS

FROM : IC ROBERT G. RENFRO

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY

DATE: 11/22/63

Sgt. H. C. SHERRIL, Richardson, Texas, PD, telephone AD 5-5213, advised JIMMY GEORGE ROBINSON and members of the National States Rights Party should be considered possible suspects in the assassination of President KENNEDY, due to their strong feeling against him. He reminded that ROBINSON is the individual who burned a cross on the lawn of a Richardson residence approximately a year ago. He advised ROBINSON, white male, age 25, runs a service station located at Belt Line Road and Mayfield Road, Garland, Texas.

157-215
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105-569-94
44-1552
v.m.

*Not necessary to
cover as true subject
located - JMH*

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FBI - DALLAS	

Advised JMH

NOVEMBER 1983

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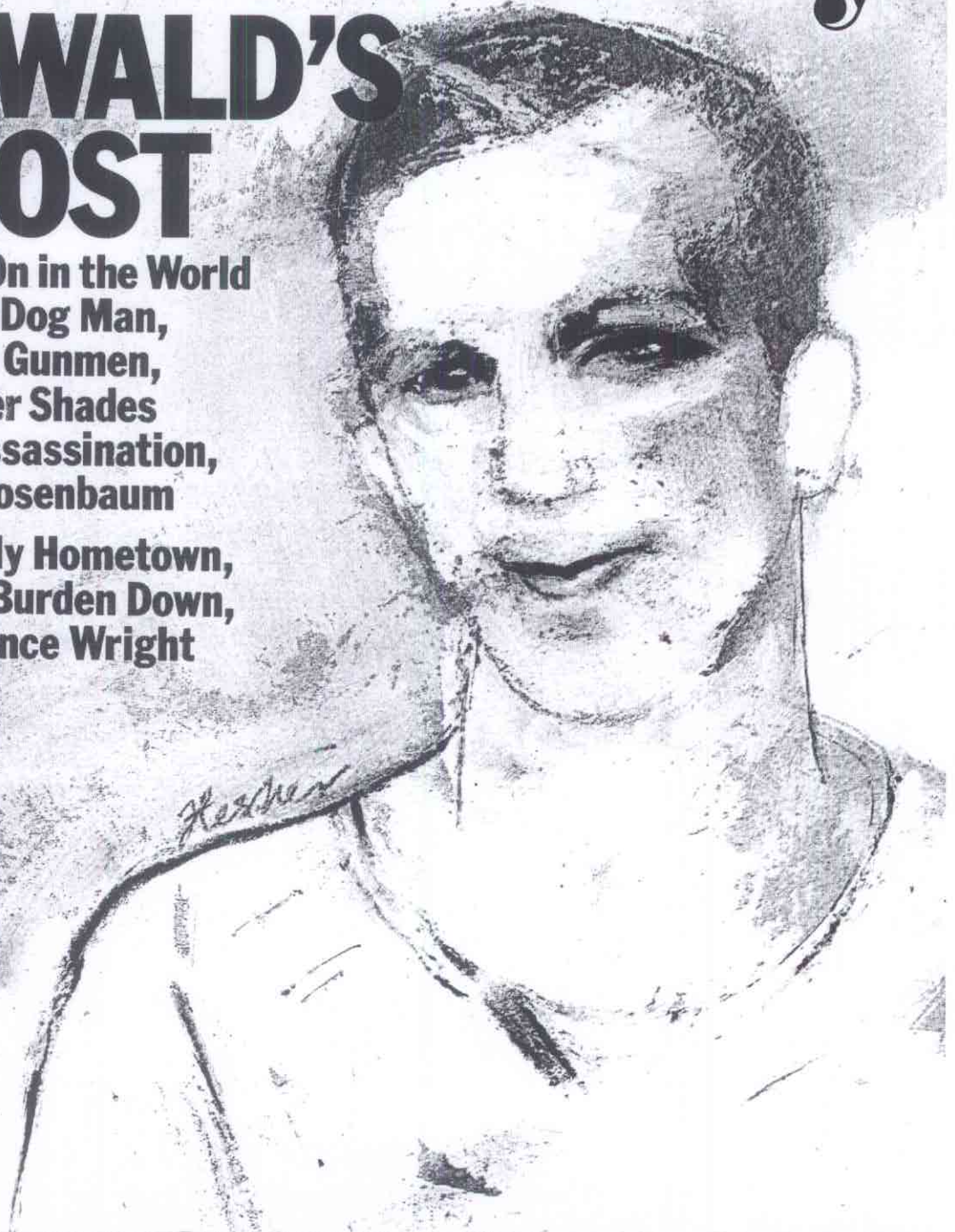
**What Furs Do for Mink and Fox, They Can Do for You
Why Kathy Whitmire Needs Cronies, by Joseph Nocera**

Texas Monthly®

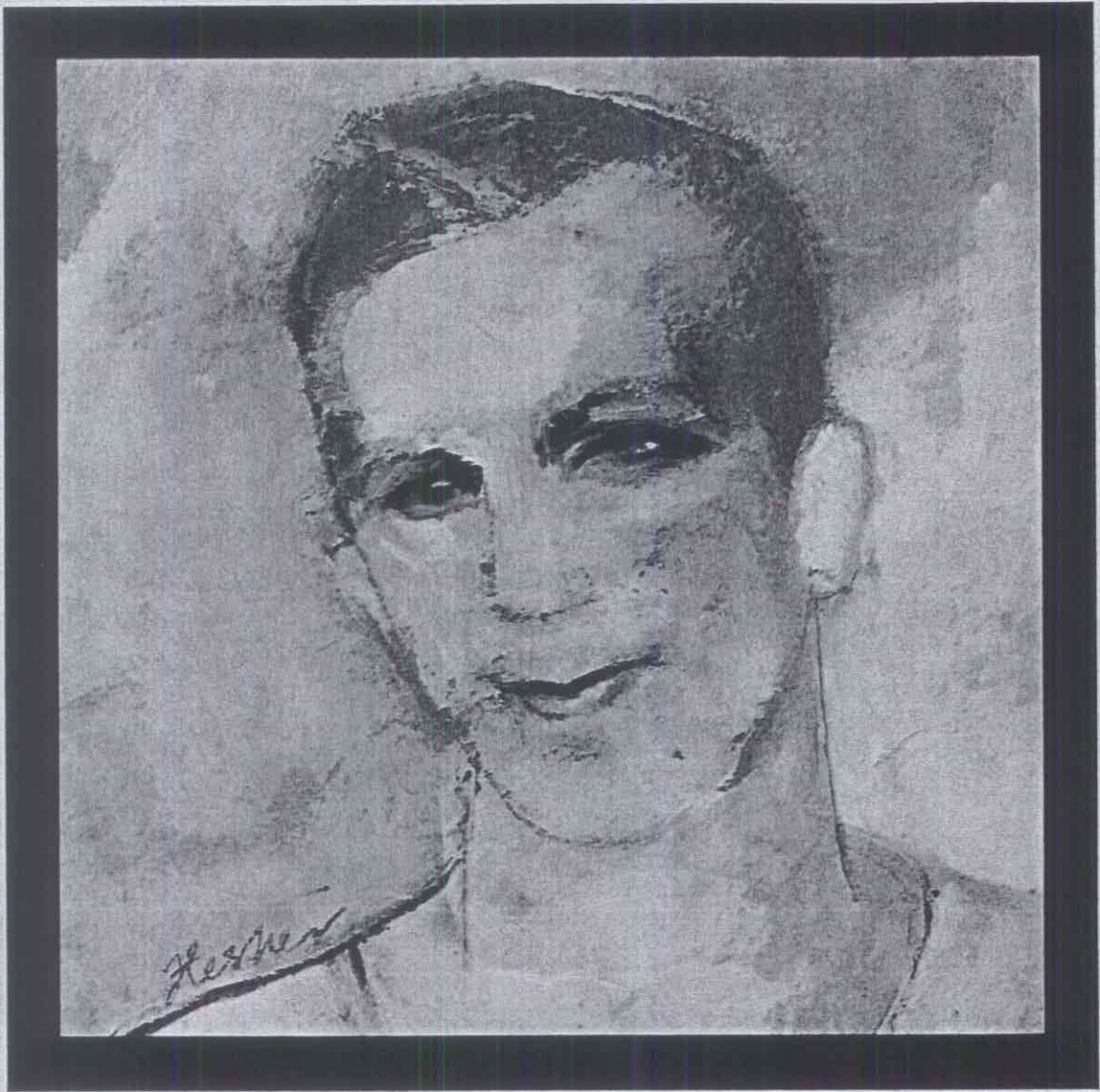
OSWALD'S GHOST

**It Lives On in the World
Of Black Dog Man,
The Nine Gunmen,
And Other Shades
Of the Assassination,
by Ron Rosenbaum**

**Dallas, My Hometown,
Lays Its Burden Down,
by Lawrence Wright**



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THE LEGACY OF LEE HARVEY OSWALD

his November marks the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of President John Kennedy. Over the last two decades it has become one of the truisms of contemporary thinking that the assassination burst some seam in the American psyche, through which then flowed dissent, doubt, a breakdown of traditional respect for life and property, and a host of other ills. As the country searched for someone to blame for that terrible crime and its poisonous aftermath, the slight figure of Lee Harvey Oswald seemed hardly enough. Surely some powerful and insidious group—the military, the mob, the CIA, the Cubans—must have been responsible. Thus many single-minded individuals are, as Ron Rosenbaum's story describes them, "Still on the Case" (page 152). Their deep obsessions, their conspiratorial cast, their sightings of ghosts in the alleys of New Orleans and Dallas, make their lives similar in many ways to that of their most elusive prey—Oswald himself.

After Oswald was murdered, the country's bitterness toward Dallas and its people intensified. Lawrence Wright (whose story begins on page 148) grew up in Dallas. He knew the city before the assassination. He knows what it meant to be from Dallas during the years when people everywhere were ready to blame the city for President Kennedy's death. And he also knows how that legacy changed Dallas. His hometown is a very different place today from the Dallas of twenty years ago. What Dallas was and what it has become are the intertwined threads in "Why Do They Hate Us So Much?"

WHY DO THEY HATE US SO MUCH?

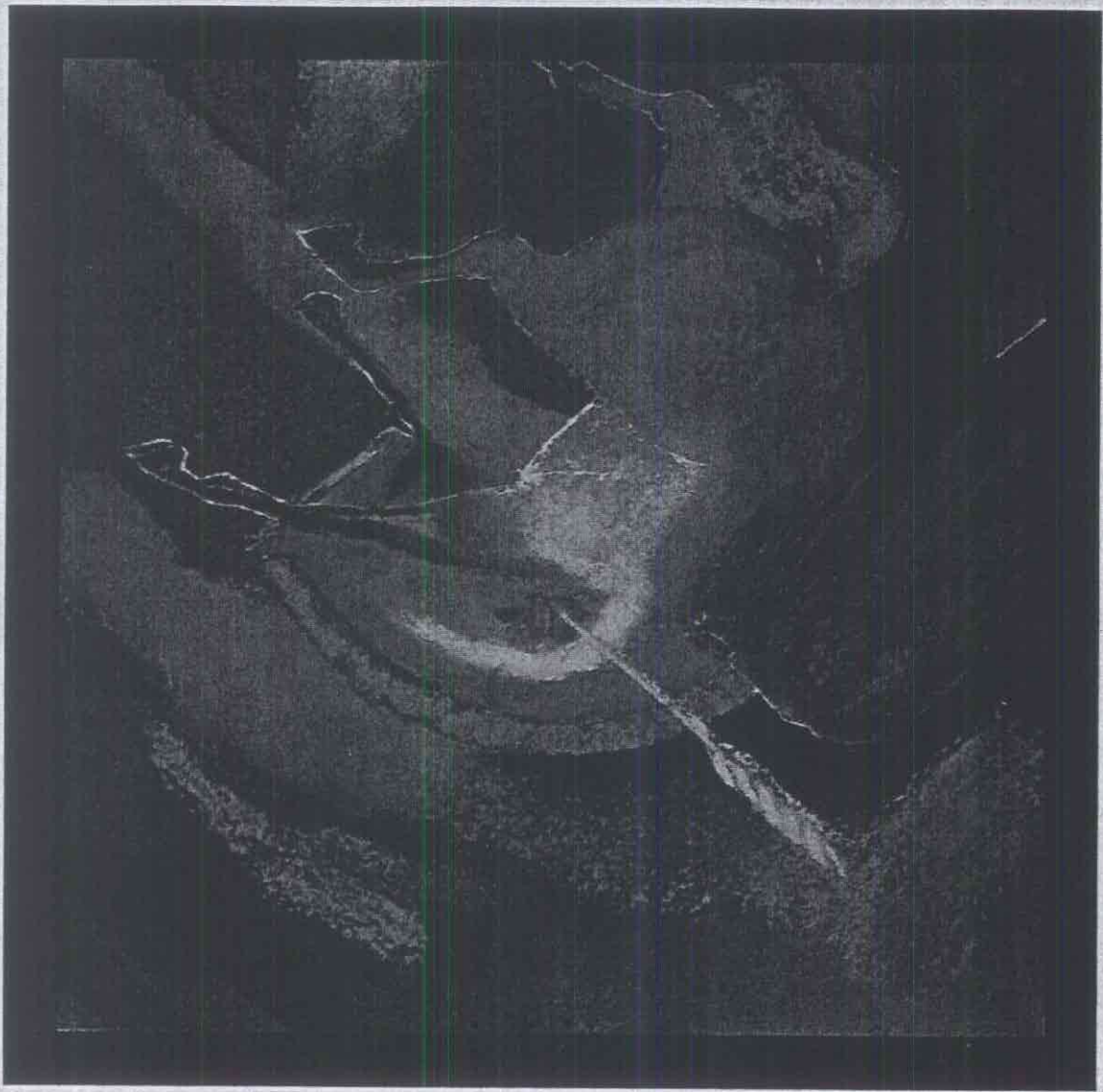
**When John F. Kennedy
was assassinated, Dallas
was my hometown. For
twenty years my neighbors
and I have suffered the
world's blame. Now it is
time to lay our burden down.**

My first sighting of the new world came from the back of the family station wagon, in the late afternoon as the slanting sun behind us lit up the city skyline with fierce and brilliant color. Now, of course, the vista of skyscrapers that awed me as a child is buried in the shadows of modern Dallas; the buildings that seemed so monumental then against the flat horizon were the pale blue Southland Life building, the Mobil building with the neon winged horse atop, the Republic Bank, largest bank in the Southwest—as I come upon those structures now they seem petite and almost historical. Foremost, as we approached the city, was an unpretentious cubical edifice with an enormous billboard on top advertising Hertz rental cars and blinking the time and temperature. The building itself was anonymous, and afterward, when the world knew it as the Texas School Book Depository, people in Dallas identified it by the Hertz sign and said, “Oh, *that one.*”

We were moving from Abilene, where my father was vice president of the largest bank in town. My sisters had been crying for weeks, since Daddy had returned from his mysterious trip and announced that he had gotten a new job—at last he would be president of his own bank. It was small, he warned us, but it was in Dallas, and Dallas was growing, and as the city grew so would his bank. Dallas was a place where dreamers like my father were given a chance.

Dallas was a boom town, full of promises. As in all boom towns tension was high. Some people were zooming through society like race cars, giving the world an impression of Dallas as a city of affluent hicks—you could see them suddenly flaunting their greenbacks at the gaming tables from Las Vegas to Monte Carlo or talking too loudly in their drawling nasal voices in restaurants that were really too good for them—monied, naive, too eager, democratic yes but socially pretentious. For an astounding number of people Dallas was just such a jackpot, and they formed a rough society of nouveaux millionaires; they would build a gorgeous Gatsby-like mansion on the north side, enroll their children in Hockaday or St. Mark's, open a Neiman-Marcus charge account, buy a mink coat and two Cadillacs, and

B Y L A W R E N C E W R I G H T



Dallas was a stricken city—but it was also angry and defensive. The entire world held us responsible for Kennedy's death. For years afterward, to say you were from Dallas was to invite ugliness, even hatred.

join the Republican party. The winners were easy to spot.

The losers made their own headlines. Dallas was the murder capital of Texas, which led the United States in homicides. We were reminded that Dallas killed more people some years than all of England did—a statistic with little effect, for wasn't

"The rest of the country might have viewed LBJ as a hard-shell Southern conservative with no guiding lights other than the oil-depletion allowance, but in Dallas he was called a closet socialist. Was there ever a man in political life with such a divided public image?"

England a sound-asleep society, and weren't we exploding with new force, building a new world, making millions by the minute, and did you expect a new world to be born without death and broken hearts?

In many respects my father was typical of the kind of man who made that new world. He went to a one-room schoolhouse in central Kansas, watched his family farm blow away in the same wind that brought the Depression, and with no apparent resources other than his own unbending will put himself through Central State Teachers College in Edmond, Oklahoma, then through law school at the University of Oklahoma. When World War II broke out he dutifully joined the infantry, spent seven years fighting in Europe, the Pacific, and Korea under conditions that twice turned his hair completely white, and was discharged as a major in 1952 at the age of 36; a civilian now, with a family of five, and he had not even begun to make a career. He hit the ground running.

After eight years he had learned the frustration of small-town banks with sleepy family management, so when he was finally offered the presidency of the Lakewood State Bank in Dallas he accepted at once. In 1960 it was a small and troubled storefront bank on Gaston Avenue, between Doc Harrell's drugstore and Kirk's Beauty Salon. To see it now—three city blocks of land, a tower, a parking garage, fountains, expensive art on the walls, a boardroom table that would have made King Arthur blush, and a modern,

amalgamated name, Allied Lakewood—is to realize my father's own aspirations in their most tangible form. He built this bank, with the help of people like him, people who came out of nowhere with nothing, who came to Dallas because Dallas would give them a chance.

For my parents, leaving the close social quarters of Abilene was like getting out of jail. They were not true West Texans; they had not come to love the unending monotony of mesquite barrens or the high, hot blue sky that made sunsets a matter of prayerful thankfulness. To an outsider, Abilene was like a small landfall in the Sargasso Sea—remote, laconic, and forever closed to strangers. By comparison Dallas seemed wide open, but it wasn't really, as we soon learned. Politically it was shut up tight. Ambitious newcomers like my father found the leadership of the city distant and mysterious, a cabal, and it would not do to crash the secret circle. You must prove yourself, endure probation. If you do, you will be noticed; you'll be brought along slowly, like a colt being trained to a bridle. One day someone will approach you. You'll be asked to "do something for Dallas." You'll get an assignment. For my father it was to head up a bond election to air-condition the public schools. People were surprised when the bond passed; the secret circle opened and admitted my father and of course quickly closed behind him.

And why shouldn't he be glad to do something for Dallas? Hadn't the city shared its bounty with him? Later, the civic-mindedness of Dallasites would seem cold hypocrisy to the rest of the world, but most people in Dallas had the same gratitude and protectiveness that an immigrant has toward a place that opens itself to him and allows him success. If this new world was not perfect—well then, how did it compare with the old? Outsiders would point to the slums on Dallas' west side and say it was a city that didn't care; it was true. They would point to the peaceful integration of the city and say that it was done simply because it was good for business; there was no argument. Dallas was not a caring city, but it was efficient. Its mission was not to tend the needy and unfortunate but to expand, to spew out opportunity. As a political model it ruled from the top down, but by and large the city was well ruled.

However, it was that same firm rule that caused life in Dallas to go, subtly, quite wrong. If you had come to Dallas in 1960 from any other American town of comparable size, you would have found it much the same as your city. Its people dressed alike, talked alike, thought alike, as the preponderance of middle-class citizens did in any other town; the country had after all a very homogeneous culture in 1960. What would have struck you, if you were keen enough to observe it, was that similarity had been carried too far in

Dallas. America was a conformist society, perhaps, but conformity went to extremes in Dallas. I don't remember ever seeing a bearded man in the city, other than Santa Claus, until Stanley Marcus decided to grow a beard two years after the assassination. When Commander Whitehead came to Neiman-Marcus for a British Fortnight celebration, Marcus decided to give a party for bearded men. He found he scarcely knew any; he wound up serving a roomful of strangers.

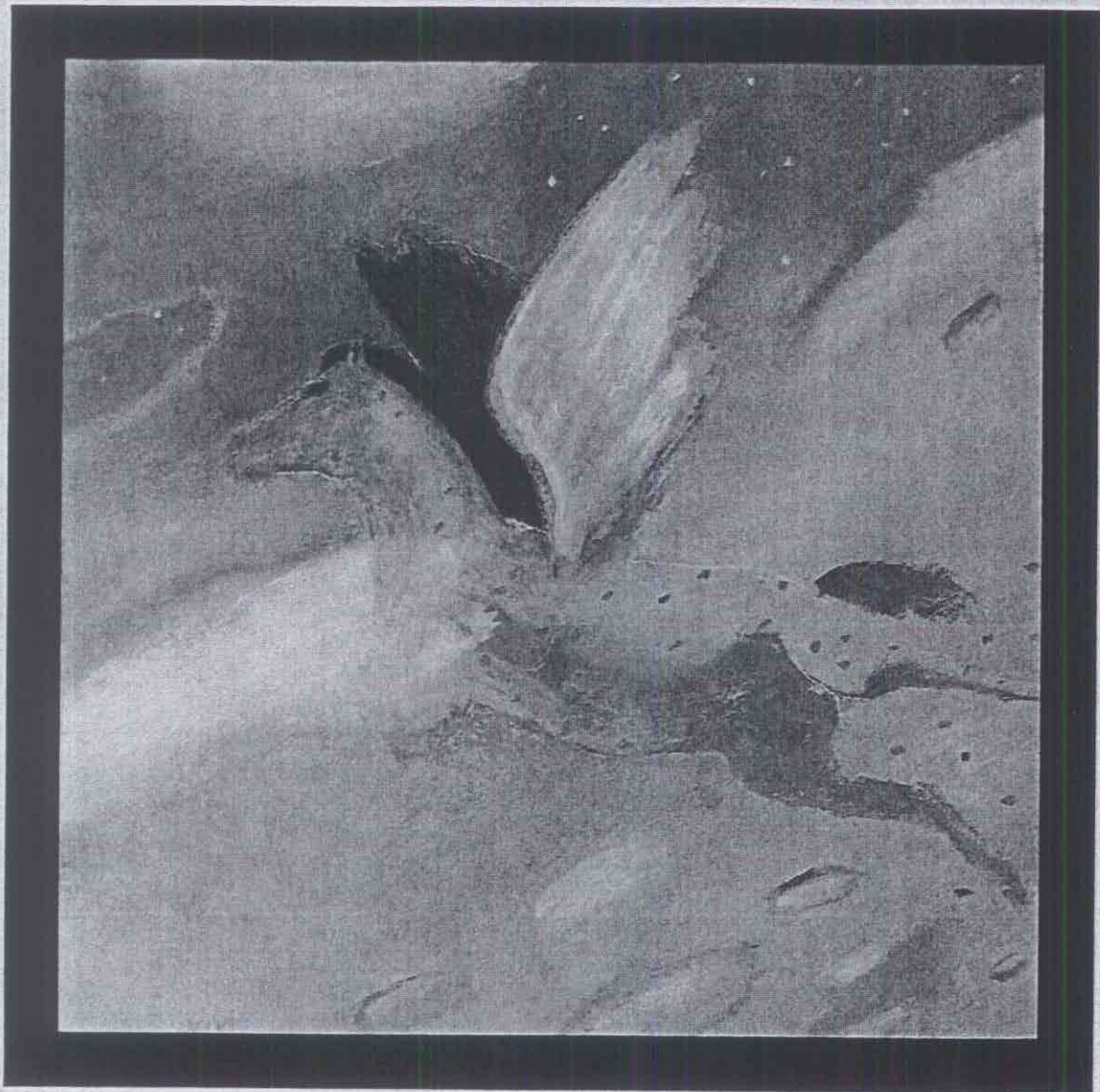
Dallas was a city of believers, a city of eight hundred churches, among them the largest Methodist, the largest Baptist, and one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the world. In the face of so much belief, honest doubt quickly hid itself; skeptics and heretics were one and the same. In 1960, when Kennedy was contending for the Democratic presidential nomination, Reverend W. A. Criswell of the First Baptist Church in Dallas declared in a sermon that "the election of a Catholic as president would mean the end of religious freedom in America." One of Criswell's 18,500 parishioners was billionaire H. L. Hunt, and he took the trouble to have 200,000 copies of Criswell's sermon mailed to Protestant min-

"The East hated us because we were part of the usurping West, liberals hated us because we were conservative, labor because we were non-labor, intellectuals because we were raw, minorities because we were predominantly and conspicuously white, the poor because we were rich."

isters all over the country. Criswell later told Ronnie Dugger and Willie Morris of the *Texas Observer* that in his opinion Catholics should be barred from holding any public office.

While everyone was religious, some were superreligious, and they thought of themselves as a spiritual vanguard. They were contemptuous of the rest of us—we might as well have been agents of the Devil. It was the same with politics. The political scale in Dallas began with Eisenhower conservatism and ran well past fascism to a kind of conservative nihilism. Earle Cabell was a far-right Democrat, present at the founding though

(Continued on page 224)



*Kennedy's assassination gave Dallas
a guilt complex, but as a result
the city has become a more human
and tolerant place to live. When I
see it now, I see fulfilled the new
world that Kennedy promised.*



*According to Penn Jones and Elaine
Kavanaugh, Dealey Plaza—and all
of Dallas—was bristling with gun-
men backed by the U.S. military.
One of those gunmen could have
had a perfect shot from this manhole.*

STILL ON THE CASE

Conspiracy buffs live in a world of uncertainty, haunted by goats' heads, a pristine bullet, and bouncing skulls. But the most haunting uncertainty of all is this: who was Lee Harvey Oswald?

all are "buffs"

DEALEY PLAZA. IT'S A HOT MORNING IN AUGUST of this year, and motorists whizzing down Elm Street are witnessing a curious, if not sinister, phenomenon. Three people have gathered around a manhole at the foot of the famous grassy knoll. There's an attractive young blond woman, a spry, grizzled older fellow in a Coors cap, and a guy in his thirties with a tape recorder. The older guy is bending down and—demonstrating remarkable vigor—pulling the hundred-pound manhole cover out of its recess in the sidewalk.

Then he stops. Waits for a Dallas Police Department squad car to cruise by and disappear into the darkness of the Triple Underpass. At last he has yanked the massive iron seal clear of the opening that leads down to the storm sewer system honeycombing the underside of Dealey Plaza.

Then he does something really strange. He walks out into the middle of Elm Street traffic, heads uphill between two lanes of oncoming cars, and plants himself in the middle of the road about 25 yards upstream.

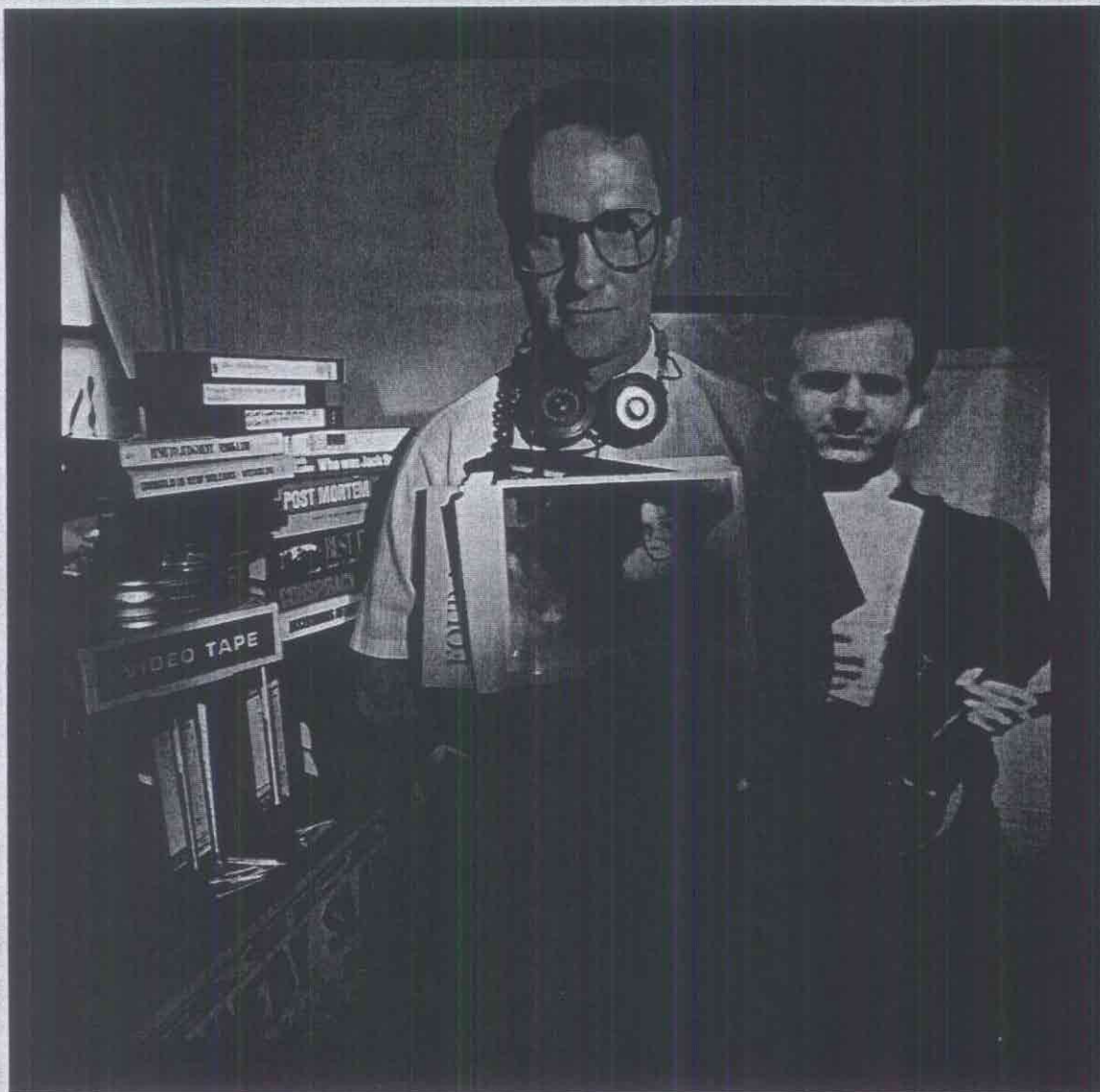
"Okay now, Ron. I'm standing right where the president was when he took the head shot. Now I want you to get down in that manhole," he yells at the younger guy, who, not to be coy, is me. "Elaine," he calls out to the woman, "you show him how to position himself."

So here I am, out in the midday sun, lowering myself into this manhole. It's kind of cool down here, though some might call it dank. While it is nice to escape the pounding of the direct sunlight, this is not my idea of summer fun.

But this is no ordinary manhole. This is the historic Dealey Plaza manhole that a certain faction of assassination buffs—led by Penn Jones, Jr., the guy in the middle of Elm Street—believes sheltered a sniper who fired the fatal frontal head shot on November 22, 1963. This manhole is the first stop on a grand tour of Dallas assassination shrines, during which, among other things, Penn has promised to show me the exact locations from which, he says offhandedly, the nine gunmen fired at John F. Kennedy that day. Sort of the Stations of the Cross Fire in conspiracy-theory gospel.

You remember Penn Jones, Jr., don't you? The feisty,

B Y R O N R O S E N B A U M



Gary Mack of Fort Worth believes the answer lies in technology; he holds a doctored photo of the grassy knoll showing what computer enhancement might reveal. Behind him is a controversial 1963 photo of Oswald.

combative country editor of the *Midlothian Mirror*. Author of the four-volume (so far) privately printed series called *Forgive My Grief*, the continuing account of his JFK-assassination investigation, which focuses on the deaths and disappearances of the 188 witnesses (so far) who Penn contends knew too much about the assassination conspiracy to be permitted to live.

Well, Penn Jones, Jr., is still on the case. He has retired from his editor's post to a farmhouse in Waxahachie, where he lives with his disciple and research associate, Elaine Kavanaugh, and publishes a monthly assassination newsletter, the *Continuing Inquiry*.

"Elaine," Penn yells out, "get Ron to back up against the wall there. Then he'll know what I mean."

I think Penn has sensed that I have some reservations about his Manhole Sniper theory, and this elaborate positioning is designed to address my doubts. In fact, I am skeptical.

Not the least of my problems with the Manhole Sniper theory is that it requires

the putative manhole assassin to have popped up the hundred-pound manhole cover at just the right moment, fired a shot, then plopped it down over his head without any of the surrounding crowd taking notice of his activity. But Penn is determined to set me straight on this misapprehension.

"Okay now, Ron, you've got to move back so's your back is touching the rear of the hole there," Elaine says.

I follow her instructions and find myself completely under the overhang of pavement. In total darkness, except . . . well, damned if there isn't a perfect little rectangle of daylight coming through an opening in the pavement right in front of my eyes, and damned if Penn Jones' face isn't framed right in it.

"That's the storm drain in the curb side you're lookin' out now," says Elaine.

"See what a clear shot he had?" Penn Jones yells out. "Okay, Elaine, now pull that manhole cover back over on top of him. Ron, you'll see that even in the dark you'll be able to feel your way to one of those runoff tunnels he used to squirm his way under the plaza to the getaway."

Elaine begins to lug the heavy seal over the hole. Over me.

"Well, actually, Elaine, I don't think that'll be necessary. I get the picture," I say, hastily scrambling out, visions of the glowing eyes of sewer rats sending shivers through me.

Penn Jones hustles over, dodging traffic, and drags the cover back into place. He gives me a look that says, "Uh huh—another one not prepared to follow the trail all the way," and then he sets off on a trot up the grassy knoll to what he says is the next point of fire.

But before we follow Penn Jones up the grassy knoll, before we get any deeper into the labyrinthine state of the art of JFK-assassination theory, let's linger a moment on the manhole demo, because we've got a metaphor here for my own stance in relation to the whole web of conspiracy theory that the assassination buffs have spun out over the past twenty years. Because I'm going to be your guide in this excursion, and I want you to trust my judgment and powers of discrimination. I want you to know my attitude toward these people, which can be summed up by saying that I'll go down into the manhole with them but I won't pull the cover over my head.

You need a connoisseur when you're dealing with the tangled thicket of theory and conjecture that has overgrown the few established facts, in the years since the events of that November 22. You need someone who can distinguish between the real investigators still in the field and the poets, like Penn Jones, whose luxuriant and flourishing imaginations have produced a dark, phantasmagoric body of work that bears more resemblance to a Latin American novel (Penn is the Gabriel García Márquez of Dealey Plaza, if you



Who can comprehend a mind altered by LSD?

Robert Ranfel of Berkeley (top) thinks Oswald may have been given drugs while he was in the Marines. Archivist Mary Ferrell added a room to her house to hold her assassination files.

does he name them?
No

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Great moments in the conspiracy time line.

NOVEMBER 22, 1963. Oswald tells Dallas reporters, "I'm just a patsy." Denies shooting JFK.

DECEMBER 1963. Mark Lane publishes "Lane's Defense Brief for Lee Harvey Oswald."

MARCH 1964. First suggestion of a "second Oswald" by Leo Sauvage in *Commentary*.

SPRING 1964. Enter the European critics with Joachim Joesten's *Oswald: Assassin or Fall-guy?* and Thomas Buchanan's *Who Killed Kennedy?* They blame U.S. government agencies, rich right-wingers, and racists.

SEPTEMBER 1964. *Warren Report* conclusions published.

NOVEMBER 1964. Warren Commission releases 26 volumes of testimony.

JUNE 1966. Edward J. Epstein publishes *Inquest*. Interviews with Warren Commission staff expose slipshod, limited nature of investigation and serious problems with single-bullet hypothesis. Goose farmer and former government investigator Harold Weisberg publishes *Whitewash*, one of the two most comprehensive polemics against *Warren Report*. 8/65 + 5/66 Jim Garrison

SUMMER 1966. Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* becomes national best-seller.

SEPTEMBER 1966. Sylvia Meagher publishes *Subject Index to the Warren Report and Hearings & Exhibits*; it becomes a key research tool.

NOVEMBER 1966. *Life* magazine commissions private investigation that casts doubt on Warren Commission conclusions.

FEBRUARY 1967. New Orleans DA Jim Garrison announces he has cracked JFK case. Takes David Ferrie—homosexual private investigator—into custody; Ferrie dies of a brain hemorrhage the day after his release. Assassination experts gather in New Orleans to contribute to Garrison's investigation.

SPRING 1967. Big split in assassination-buff world when critics Meagher and Epstein abandon and denounce Garrison.

NOVEMBER 1967. Meagher publishes *Accessories After the Fact*, acknowledged as most thorough critique of *Warren Report* based on contradictions of its own evidence. Josiah Thompson publishes *Six Seconds in Dallas*, scrupulous dissection of physical evidence that undermines case for Oswald as lone gunman, based on reinterviews of witnesses.

JANUARY 1969. Committee to Investigate Assassinations (CTIA) formed by attorney Bernard Fensterwald.

FEBRUARY 1969. Garrison's investigation, having disintegrated into misguided crusade against former CIA informant Clay Shaw, collapses. Jury deliberates fifty minutes and acquits Shaw.

1969-72. Years of despair; conspiracy theory falls into hands of cultists.

FALL 1972. First Watergate-assassination link uncovered by CTIA investigator Bob Smith; FBI report of 1963 allegation by Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis that he got into fistfight with "Oswald" in Miami. Oswald not known to have been in Miami.

JANUARY 1973. Jones Harris uncovers 1960 J. Edgar Hoover memo raising possibility that "an impostor is using Oswald's birth certificate." Norman Mailer founds the Fifth Estate organization to research intelligence-community role in Kennedy assassination.

NOVEMBER 1973. "Dylanologist" A. J. Weberman organizes tenth-anniversary demonstration at National Archives to protest disappearance of Kennedy's brain.

FALL 1974. CIA-mob assassination plots against Castro uncovered; JFK knowledge hinted.

JANUARY 1975. Rockefeller Commission undertakes first official review of JFK case. Concludes there was no CIA involvement.

FEBRUARY 1975. Former SDS organizer Carl Oglesby and Assassination Information Bureau convene summit conference in Boston and begin grass-roots campaign of lectures, demonstrations, and showings of uncut

(Continued on page 286)

will) than to the prosaic police-reporter mentality I prefer in these matters.

You need someone with something akin to what Keats called negative capability—the ability to abide uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without succumbing to the temptation of premature certainty. You need someone like me. I rather fancy myself El Exigente of conspiracy-theory culture, like the "Demanding One" in the TV coffee commercial. I've covered the buff beat since the early seventies—you might call me a buff buff—since the time, before Watergate, when everybody laughed at the idea of conspiracies.

So with El Exigente here as your guide, let's look at who's still on the case after twenty years and whether they have anything worth saying. What are the real mysteries left, and is there any hope we'll ever solve them?

REMEMBER THE WAY THE RESIDENTS of the little coffee-growing village in the Savarin commercial gather, buzzing nervously around the town square, awaiting the arrival of El Exigente, the white-suited coffee taster whose judgment on their beans will determine the success or failure of their entire harvest?

Well, the buff grapevine had been buzzing furiously for days before my departure for Dallas. Cross-country calls speculating about the nature of my mission. My past writings on the subject extricated from files, summoned up on computer screens, and scrutinized suspiciously. Indeed, angrily in some cases, as I learned the morning of my departure, when I received an irate call from newly ascendant buff David Lifton, author of the most successful of the recent buff books, *Best Evidence*. He accused me of plotting to trash his cherished trajectory-reversal theory.

As I set out for Dallas on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the Dealey Plaza shooting, I was aware that I was heading into a buzz saw of buff factionalism. Long-festering rivalries and doctrinal disputes were dividing the Dallas-area buffs after years of beleaguered unity. Some of the bitterness can be attributed to the aftermath of the British invasion of Dallas buff turf in the past decade. First there was British writer Michael Eddowes with his KGB-impostor theory: the Oswald who returned from the Soviet Union in 1962 wasn't the same Lee Harvey Oswald who defected to the USSR in 1959 but instead was a clever KGB impostor who used the name "Alek Hidell" (one of Oswald's aliases in Dallas and New Orleans). A few years later British writer Anthony Summers came to Dallas to research his theory that Oswald was not a Russian but an American intelligence operative. Both writers swept through town, wined and dined the local buffs, wrung them dry of their files and facts, and departed to publish completely

not just

This says Jim Garrison

contradictory conspiracy theories.

Eddowes' book, *The Oswald File*, left the most lasting legacy of divisiveness; it launched the epic embarrassment of the Oswald exhumation controversy. Eddowes maintained that his KGB-impostor theory could be proved by examining the body buried in Fort Worth's Rose Hill Cemetery under Oswald's name. Dental and medical evidence would show that the body belonged to an impostor, he said.

A number of Dallas buffs invested a lot of credibility in the exhumation crusade. Mary Ferrell, for instance. The great archivist. For years she had labored diligently to collect and index everything ever written about the assassination, every document, every clipping, every scrap of potential evidence. Her husband built a room in their back yard to hold the ever-expanding files. They bought two German shepherds to protect their stock. And for all those years, unlike the publicity-happy buffs who used her work, she had never sought to publish a theory of her own, had never abandoned her archivist's neutrality, had just gone on compiling her ultra-authoritative, supercomplete name index to the JFK assassination. Sample entries from the name index indicate its comprehensiveness:

Boyer, Al - Hairstylist. He accompanied Josephine Ann Bunce, Jamye Bartlett and Bonnie Cavin to Dallas from Kansas City, Missouri. Warren Commission, vol. 22, p. 903.

Boykin, Earl L. Wife, Ruby O. 1300 Keats Drive, Mechanic at Earl Hayes Chevrolet. Probably the same as Earl Boykin, who gave his address as 1300 Kouts at the Sports Drome Rifle Range one of the days Oswald was allegedly there. *Texas Attorney General's Report*.

But then this dashing Englishman swept into town and away went her meticulous scholarly neutrality. "This Eddowes was some character," one rival buff remarked. "He had his own Rolls-Royce flown over from England. He'd chauffeur Mary around. Then she'd fly over to England, and he'd drive her around London in Rolls-Royces."

It was the old story. Mary Ferrell ended up enlisting in the exhumation cause, drawing a flotilla of Dallas buffs behind her. They were all convinced that the authorities would never let the body be exhumed because of the terrible dual-identity secret it would reveal.

Then in 1981 Oswald's wife, Marina, was somehow enticed into the exhumation battle, and it was Marina's lawsuit that finally opened the tomb. And so out they went to Rose Hill Cemetery with cape and shovel to see just who was buried there.

The body they dug up seemed to have Oswald's teeth—the American Marine

(Continued on page 262)

THEY CAN'T ALL BE RIGHT

What - no umbrella man theory?
no anti-RFD theory
no John Valjean theory?
no CIA theory?

After twenty years these are the assassination theories that still survive.

WASHING MACHINE THEORY. Oswald's reconciliation with Marina on eve of assassination thwarted when they argue about buying a washing machine. Rejected and distraught, he kills the president.

KGB SLEEPER THEORY. Early Warren Commission critic Edward J. Epstein shifts his ground in *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*. He speculates Oswald fired the shots alone but perhaps with the knowledge, if not the instigation, of the KGB, who sent Oswald back to the U.S. after his defection, as an unwitting, or "sleeper," agent.

JFK STILL ALIVE THEORY. A perennial item of JFK-cult fantasy, favored by publications like the *National Enquirer*. First attributed to and then denied by Truman Capote a dozen years ago. Usually involves report that JFK is alive but comatose in obscure Swiss Alps clinic, seen only by family members.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE THEORY. House Select Committee found "extremely troublesome" the 1973 destruction by Defense Department of its classified file on Oswald. Other intelligence agencies point finger at Oswald's possible military-intelligence role to disavow their own connections with Oswald.

TIMES-PICAYUNE THEORY. Jean Davison in *Oswald's Game* portrays Oswald as a committed Marxist and Castro partisan. Suggests he was in New Orleans when the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* published an AP interview Castro gave on September 7, 1963, in which the Cuban leader said he knew of U.S. plots against him and warned that those who instigated them would be subject to retribution. Davison believes that Oswald took this as inspiration to kill JFK in retaliation for the attempts to assassinate Fidel.

MOB HIT THEORY. New Orleans mob boss Carlos Marcello or Florida boss Santos Trafficante or Jimmy Hoffa or all three together order the hit, perhaps using anti-Castro Cubans recruited for Castro assassination plots by John Roselli and Sam Giancana. The latter two were murdered gangland style shortly before they were scheduled to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

CIA SLEEPER THEORY. Oswald recruited as a young Marine by CIA or Naval Intelligence. Asked to pose as Marxist defector to Soviet Union to infiltrate USSR for us. Later manipulated or made a patsy by "a renegade element in U.S. intelligence" who set him up to take the hit and place the blame on ostensible pro-Russian, pro-Castro figure.

SAIGON REVENGE THEORY. JFK hit came three weeks after murder of President Diem of South Viet Nam as reprisal for Kennedy-sponsored coup. LBJ once suggested wealthy Diem family or pro-Diem intelligence faction might have had revenge motive for JFK hit.

AMLASH TURNAROUND THEORY. While JFK is ostensibly putting out feelers toward rapprochement with Fidel in fall of 1963, uncontrolled elements of CIA continue to plot murder of the Cuban leader. Key figure: Rolando Cubela, code-named AMLASH, close associate of Castro. CIA agent in Paris supplied AMLASH with deadly weapons (including a poison fountain pen) on the day Kennedy was shot. Theory is that AMLASH plot leaked to Castro and led to retaliation against JFK.

FRANK STURGIS THEORY. Frank Sturgis, Howard Hunt's associate in the Watergate burglary, says he has info that Jack Ruby was part of Castro drug-smuggling plot and orchestrated JFK killing along with Cuban agents on behalf of Fidel.

JAPANESE RESPONSIBILITY THEORY. Meticulous investigator Jones Harris suggests Oswald was recruited by Japanese secret agents at Atsugi.

ROTTEN APPLES IN THE SECRET SERVICE THEORY. David Lifton in *Best Evidence* suggests that conspirators seized the body of the president and then subjected it to secret surgery to create evidence of trajectory reversal (the impression that shots were fired from behind). Lifton alludes to "certain rotten apples in the Secret Service," in addition to higher-level figures in government.

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WHY DO THEY HATE US SO MUCH?

(Continued from page 150)

not a member of the Dallas chapter of the John Birch Society, and yet he was routinely described by the farther right as "the socialist mayor of Dallas."

It was the politics of the new world. When people spoke of right-wing politics they were thinking of the archconservatives of Southern California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida—it was not just Dallas, in other words. Money was flooding south and west; new cities were forming, cities without traditions, with only the blind instinct to grow, to add wealth. Across the country, but particularly in this new world, there was a certain adolescent bitterness, a suspicious feeling of betrayal, a willingness to find conspiracy lurking in every corner. "The mood," as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., described it, "was one of longing for a dreamworld of no communism, no overseas entanglements, no United Nations, no federal government, no labor unions, no Negroes or foreigners—a world in which Chief Justice Warren would be impeached, Cuba invaded, the graduated income tax repealed, the fluoridation of drinking water stopped and the import of Polish hams forbidden."⁸

NO, IT WAS NOT JUST DALLAS, BUT my hometown was already gaining the reputation of being the capital of this new world. The only elected Republican of any consequence in Texas was Dallas congressman Bruce Alger, a handsome fanatic with wavy hair and a heavy chin, who was ridiculed in his own party as a hopeless extremist. Alger had already survived political challenges by two of the most popular Democrats in the city, first by district attorney Henry Wade and then by Barefoot Sanders, a state legislator who became a federal district judge. In all of his contests Alger was carried along by a formidable cadre of angry right-wing women. His relation to those women was a matter of legend and speculation in the city. Alger was their prince; it didn't seem to matter to them that in the ten years he represented Dallas there was never an important piece of legislation passed with his name on it or that the prevailing leadership in Washington was so hostile to his presence in Congress that Fort Worth was growing fat off the pork-barrel projects that might have gone to Dallas.

Four days before the general election Lyndon Johnson came to town. We hated Johnson there. The rest of the country might have viewed Kennedy's running mate as a hard-shell Southern conservative, an instinctive racist, a drawing, backslapping political whore with no

guiding lights other than the oil-depletion allowance, but in Dallas he was called a closet socialist, a leftover New Dealer, a bleeding heart in domestic matters, and a weak sister when it came to standing up to communist aggression. Was there ever a man in political life with such a divided public image?

It was November 4, 1960, Republican Tag Day in Dallas, and the downtown lunch crowd was being canvassed by three hundred women in red-white-and-blue outfits. They were Bruce Alger's women. Many of them were in the Junior League, and they looked disarmingly girlish in their red coil hats with ribbons in the back. They were passing out literature for the Nixon-Lodge campaign. Some of them wore their minks.

Johnson had spoken earlier that morning in Arlington, and as he entered Dallas a city policeman pulled him over to warn of a "little disturbance" awaiting him at the Baker Hotel, where the Johnsons traditionally stayed. Commerce Street in front of the hotel was filling up with Tag Girls, who had suddenly transformed themselves into an angry demonstration, complete with placards that Alger had stored in the Baker overnight. The cop advised Senator Johnson to use the Akard Street entrance.

Several Tag Girls spotted the Johnsons arriving and rushed over to surround the car. As Lady Bird was stepping out of the Lincoln one of the pickets impulsively snatched her gloves from her hands and threw them into the gutter. Lady Bird went white. It was still a time when incivility was rare in politics, when public figures felt safe in crowds. No one, perhaps not even the Tag Girls themselves, was prepared to understand the ferocity of the anger in those otherwise happy and well-cared-for women.

Johnson rushed Lady Bird into the lobby of the Baker, which was packed with jeering Tag Girls. As he entered the elevator Johnson turned and said, "You ought to be glad you live in a country where you have the legal right to boo and hiss at a man who is running for the vice presidency of the United States."

There was an instant of silence, then a voice in the back of the crowd responded, "Louder and funnier, Lyndon."

Johnson was to speak at a luncheon across the street at the Adolphus Hotel. Congressman Jim Wright of Fort Worth had accompanied the Johnsons, and he forayed ahead. As he passed through the mink-coated rabble in the street, he encountered his colleague Bruce Alger grinning hugely and holding a sign that said, "LBJ Sold Out to Yankee Socialists." Wright told him that it was inappropriate for a United States congressman to be standing in the middle of a mob, and no matter what Alger might think of a man's politics, Johnson was Senate Majority Leader and due the respect of his office.

"We're gonna show Johnson he's not wanted in Dallas," Alger replied, and the

⁸From the book *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. Copyright © 1965 by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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FRONTIER AIRLINES

Tag Girls cheered.

As the Johnsons made their way through the Baker lobby the crowd closed ranks behind them, becoming bolder, but it was nothing compared with the mob that waited in the street and, beyond that, the packed crowd of Tag Girls in the lobby of the Adolphus. It was an odd political gauntlet to pass through, recalling the stoning of Vice President Nixon's motorcade in Caracas. But this wasn't South America; this was Lyndon's own state. We knew him here.

The demonstrators in Commerce Street waited with catcalls and accusations. Most of them were carrying Nixon-Lodge and Tower for Senate signs; one of the peculiarities of that election was that Johnson was entered in both races, thanks to a special dispensation from the Texas Legislature. "Think Once and Scratch Lyndon Twice," said one sign. Also: "LBJ Traitor," "Judas Johnson," "Johnson Go Home." The Johnsons moved inside a small capsule of personal distance that grew smaller and threatened to collapse entirely under the crush of the crowd. In retrospect it was that violation of private space that seemed to herald our new, tragic political era. Years later as president, Johnson would become accustomed to seeing hateful signs with his name on them; indeed, he would know the fury of the public as few men ever have, but in 1960 it was something new, something unheard of.

What was more surprising was that the sign carriers and catcallers were for the most part well-groomed women from some of the finest homes in the city, and yet as soon as the Johnsons waded into Commerce Street the women in red, white, and blue began to curse them and to spit. (Later, some members of the "Mink Coat Mob," as they came to be known, claimed that they were not spitting, exactly—they were frothing.)

Why? What accounted for the hostility (or to use her word, indignation) of the fashionable and affluent Dallas woman? In part she was simply a prisoner of her age: a woman of unfocused ambition, intensely competitive but unemployed (the working wife was still a signal of economic desperation), lonely at home and given to causes. She may have been financially secure, but she was deeply troubled by some unnamed fear that her castle was built of sand and the coming tide would wash away her American dreams. She named the tide International Communism, or Creeping Socialism. When Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev boasted to the West, "We will bury you," the conservative Dallas woman believed him. Earlier that autumn Khrushchev had come to the United Nations and pounded on the table with his shoe—a gesture of such swaggering boorishness that it justified every qualm the Dallas woman felt about Russia, the United Nations, and American foreign policy. She worried about the missile gap and the spread of communism

to Cuba. Moreover, people in her own country were talking enthusiastically about social change—Kennedy was already speaking of "the revolutionary sixties"—and the Dallas woman knew those changes would come at her expense. She worried about the erosion of liberty caused by recent Supreme Court decisions (often delivered by Chief Justice Earl Warren, who was the creeping socialist personified). The court was taking rights away from the Dallas woman and awarding them to pornographers, criminals, atheists, communists, and Negroes. The Dallas woman felt herself to be under attack at home and abroad.

She was not the only one to feel those concerns. In many ways 1960 was an ideological turning point for the United States, a moment when conservative and liberal impulses were in nearly perfect balance, with mainstream presidential candidates representing both parties. It should have been one of the great political contests. However, the most prominent issue in the televised debates between the candidates was the defense of Quemoy and Matsu, two negligible islands in the Formosa Strait. It was a campaign in which real issues scarcely figured at all. On the surface the campaign was merely a personality contest, and in that respect Nixon was absurdly overmatched; although he was an amateur actor himself, a veteran of community theater, he was sharing the stage with a Barrymore. But under the surface—down, down among the primitive fears and prejudices—there were warning sounds, and they came from Kennedy. It had little to do with his politics. It had to do with his family, his religion, his education, his taste, his looks, his wife. Kennedy gave off threatening emanations to millions of Americans, and no one was more finely attuned to that frequency than the right-wing Dallas housewife.

But Kennedy was not in Dallas today; Johnson was—Johnson, the "Texas Traitor"—and he made his way through the placards in Commerce Street with his wife practically buried under his arm. Lyndon, of course, loomed over the Tag Girls, his huge hound-dog face visible even at the farthest reaches of the mob; Lady Bird was on their level, however, and she could see the hatred raging in the faces around her. She started to answer one of the women, but Johnson put his hand over her mouth and guided her into the lobby of the Adolphus.

They were waiting there—the Tag Girls and the hangers-on but also the press photographers and television cameras. Even in that mob it would have been a short walk to the elevators if Johnson had pressed his way through. But instead of rushing to the elevators Johnson did something quite surprising. He slowed down. He moved with excruciating slowness through the chanting mob, through the placards and the spit, all the while staring at the television cameras with a

martyr's embarrassed smile. For thirty minutes Johnson and his wife withstood the harangue of the crowd.

It was the most triumphant half-hour of Johnson's career, because that evening on the television news millions of Americans met the new Lyndon Johnson. They suddenly understood him exactly as he understood himself. He was a liberal—in the Southern context. Overnight he became an acceptable candidate to big-city northern Democrats who had automatically hated him, traditional Democrats who had not (they now admitted to themselves) seen past the corn-pone mannerisms of LBJ to the winking FDR inside him.

My mother and I watched the news together that night. Before then she had been coy about whom she was going to vote for; we teased her that she was falling for the Kennedy sex appeal, but she insisted it was his mind she admired—she had read *Profiles in Courage*, which had won Kennedy a Pulitzer prize. And yet the notion of voting for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket was almost heresy in our circles, so Mother was, until that moment, undecided. I remember her cry even now as we watched the humiliation at the Adolphus—"Shame! Shame!"

THAT EVENING THOUSANDS OF TEXANS like my mother decided how to vote. Although Nixon carried Dallas County by a landslide, Texas went for Kennedy-Johnson. (Johnson also beat

Tower in the senatorial race, although Tower would win the subsequent special election.) It was the closest presidential election in the nation's history, and it was decided that day in the lobby of the Adolphus Hotel. People said afterward that they were not voting for Kennedy so much as they were voting against Dallas.

Against us. For the first time people in the city learned about guilt by association. Until then Dallas had had very little national identity, but we found ourselves now with a new municipal image: a city of the angry nouveau riche, smug, doctrinaire, belligerent, a city with a taste for political violence. Many Dallasites were shocked to see our city represented that way, but it had little effect on the way we thought of ourselves.

There was, in fact, a chip of defiance on the city's shoulder, encouraged by the *Dallas Morning News*. The *News* is the oldest business institution in the state, having been founded in 1842 when Texas was still a republic and Dallas little more than a heady presumption. Under George B. Dealey the *News* had been a progressive newspaper, leading the scourge that drove the Ku Klux Klan out of Texas. The name "Dealey" would become famous because of the queer, fan-shaped park known as Dealey Plaza, directly across the street from the Texas School Book Depository, where a bronze statue of G. B. Dealey stares at the now magnificent skyline of downtown Dallas. Many

citizens believe it is perfectly appropriate that Dealey's name should be irrevocably tied to the assassination, even though it is his son they blame.

E. M. "Ted" Dealey, the son, succeeded his father as publisher of the *News*, and in his hands it became the most strident, red-baiting daily paper in the country, excepting only occasionally William Loeb's *Union-Leader*, in Manchester, New Hampshire. Like many intensely conservative people, he found his paragon in the movies and politics of John Wayne. As a matter of fact, reading the *News* each morning was like watching a brawl in a saloon, in which the newspaper's editorials flattened the "socialists" (read: Democrats), the "perverts and subversives" (liberal Democrats), the "Judicial Kremlin" (the U.S. Supreme Court), and virtually every representative of the federal government whose views differed from those of Ted Dealey. Immediately after the election the *News*' principal object of contempt became President John F. Kennedy, who the paper suggested was a crook, a communist sympathizer, a thief, and "fifty times a fool."

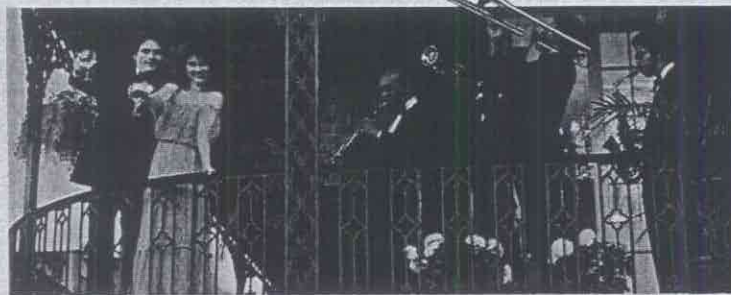
Ted Dealey went to the White House in the fall of 1961 with a group of Texas publishers to meet the man he had maligned so frequently in his newspaper. He used the occasion to attack Kennedy in person. "We can annihilate Russia and should make that clear to the Soviet government," he advised the president, to the discomfort of his colleagues in the room. He accused Kennedy and his administration of being weak sisters (a favorite Dealey phrase). "We need a man on horseback to lead this nation," he concluded, "and many people in Texas and the Southwest think that you are riding Caroline's tricycle."

It was the Dealey style: bluff, personally abusive, and preposterous. He reported in his paper on his interchange with the president (GRASSROOTS SENTIMENT TOLD), although he failed to include the president's response. "Wars are easier to talk about than they are to fight," Kennedy had told him. "I'm just as tough as you are, and I didn't get elected president by arriving at soft judgments."

Afterward, the editor of the *Dallas Times Herald*, the evening paper, wrote to the president to say that Dealey was speaking only for himself, not for the other Texans in the room. Kennedy responded with a snap of wit: "I'm sure the people of Dallas are glad when afternoon comes."

Kennedy was still thinking of his encounter with Dealey when he spoke later that year of people who "call for 'a man on horseback' because they do not trust the people. They find treason in our churches, in our highest court, in our treatment of water. They equate the Democratic Party with the welfare state, the welfare state with socialism, socialism with communism." With his prescient political eye Kennedy saw that the new world was

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being created, and it stood opposed to everything he represented: East Coast liberalism, mainstream Democratic party politics, Ivy League learning, the customary restraints of educated society. Although Kennedy was popularly understood as a man of his time, a thoroughly modern president, in many ways he was the last of the traditionalists. He called his administration the New Frontier, but his successors—Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan—would show that the real frontier in American politics lay far away in the new world.

During his presidency the atmosphere in Dallas approached hysteria. "The historical conservatism of the city," wrote Dallas' most prominent merchant, Stanley Marcus, "had been fanned to a raging fire by the combination of a number of elements: the far right daily radio 'Facts Forum' program by Dan Smoot sponsored by the ultraconservative wealthiest man in town, H. L. Hunt; the John Birch Society; the oil industry's hysterical concern for the preservation of what they considered a biblical guarantee of their depletion allowance; the 'National Indignation League' founded by a local garage-man, Frank McGeehee, in protest of the air force's training of some Yugoslavian pilots at a nearby air base; the consistently one-sided attacks on the administration by the *Dallas Morning News* and the semi-acquiescent editorial policy of the *Times Herald*, which had previously been a

middle-of-the-road, fair newspaper. For the lack of courageous firemen in the business and intellectual segments of the community, the fire raged on."*

The superheated political climate in the city brought ordinary life to a rolling boil. It was hysterical, yes, but after a point there seems to be little difference between hysteria and festivity. One sensed the appeal of fanatical movements. They begin like this, in a city where the opposition is cowed, where there is only one public voice and it is full of certainty and hate. The brakes were off in Dallas. We had the feeling that we were careening toward some majestic crack-up, but it was an exciting ride, and who had the nerve to say slow down?

Dallas was gaining notice. The leader of the American Nazi party, George Lincoln Rockwell, opined that Dallas had "the most patriotic, pro-American people of any city in the country." The compliment may have embarrassed a few, considering its source, but we believed that about ourselves. To the radical conservatives, Dallas had become a kind of shrine, a Camelot of the right.

SOON AFTER KENNEDY'S ELECTION a U.S. Army major general named Edwin A. Walker was relieved of his command when he was discovered to be proselytizing his troops with right-wing literature. Walker re-

*From *Minding the Store*, published by Little, Brown.

signed and promptly moved to Dallas, where he expected that his politics would be more welcome. He was right. He became a leader in the local chapter of the John Birch Society and quickly became one of the city's most prominent citizens—notable enough, at least in the mind of another citizen, Lee Harvey Oswald, to be worth assassinating. Here the story of Dallas begins, and might have ended.

On March 10, 1963, while Walker was out of town, Oswald went to the general's home on Turtle Creek Boulevard and snapped some photos. He made some sketches of the placement of windows in the house. Two days later he sent a money order for \$21.45, along with a coupon he had clipped from the *American Rifleman* magazine, as payment for an antiquated Italian rifle known as a Mannlicher-Carcano. It came equipped with a four-power telescopic sight.

One month later Walker was back in town, seated at his desk in his study, working on his income tax return. It was 9 p.m., and his head was in the sight of Oswald's rifle, 120 feet away. Walker thought a firecracker had suddenly exploded directly above him; he turned and saw a hole in the window frame and realized that he was covered with bits of glass and wood and a pale wash of plaster.

The police said he had moved his head at the last moment. Walker disagreed. In his opinion the light in the room had flooded out the window frame from Oswald's perspective. The bullet had struck the frame and been deflected. Later Walker showed the damaged window to newsmen and wryly remarked, "And the Kennedys say there is no internal threat to our freedom."

Oswald told his wife, Marina, that he had shot at Walker because he thought the general was a fascist, another Hitler. At the time, I thought of General Walker as a genial crackpot, and I think most people in Dallas felt the same. He had his appeal (a certain military rectitude and an air of command, which recalled General Douglas MacArthur, along with a Southern dignity of manner; he would have been well cast as a Confederate officer), but he played only a small role in the events of the moment, and in a few years he would be almost forgotten—an eccentric but, to some newsmen, rather dear old fellow who twice surfaced from obscurity in the late seventies when he was arrested on misdemeanor homosexual offenses.

And yet back then there was something scary brewing in my city. People were demanding certitudes that no sane man could offer them. Military solutions—invading Cuba, annihilating Russia—were crisp, definitive responses to problems that seemed too damned much trouble to understand. "Why don't we just bomb the bastards back to the Stone Age?"—you could hear that hypothesis offered as a half-joke to most tangled questions of foreign policy, and people would

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Mixes easy...just add people.

half laugh, but the alternative solutions seemed so tentative, so compromised. "Fuzzy" was the word for any response other than a straightforward invasion of a foreign country when American interests—and there were always American interests—were threatened. Fuzzy responses were what you came to expect from the bow-tied intellectuals who filled the Kennedy cabinet. In that atmosphere strident attitudes, even crazy ones, were appealingly clear.

ONCE AGAIN—IT WASN'T JUST DALLAS. But we who lived there had the feeling that we were in the middle of a political caldera, a grumbling, reawakening fascist urge that was too hot to contain itself. I wonder what might have happened in Dallas if Kennedy hadn't died there.

The most conspicuous and despised symbol of fuzzy intellectualism was Adlai Stevenson, a former Democratic presidential candidate and the current American ambassador to the United Nations. Stevenson stood hand in hand with the Kennedy boys, Bobby and Jack, and with Earl Warren as the most hated men in Dallas—with the difference that while the people who hated Warren and the Kennedys usually professed to admire the institutions those men represented, they simply couldn't tolerate the U.N. It stood for one-worldism, which was nothing more than communism; it stood for talk,

not action. Nearly every car in the city with an "Impeach Earl Warren" bumper sticker boasted its companion "Get US out of the UN."

There was also something intensely personal about the hatred of Stevenson. He was the last word in eggheads, Mr. Humpty Dumpty himself. His urbanity didn't wash in Dallas. Intellectual charm was suspect; besides, if you took the trouble to be witty you probably didn't have it where it counted. Stevenson was a weak sister.

In fact he was a sincerely courageous man, and he decided to beard his enemies by marching straight into their camp. He agreed to speak at the Dallas Memorial Auditorium on October 24, 1963—United Nations Day.

It was a dare that couldn't be ignored. Some right-wingers persuaded Governor John Connally to declare October 23 U.S. Day, and the National Indignation Convention promoted it into a small event. Bumper stickers around town said, "U.S. Day or United Nations Day—There Must Be a Choice" and "You Cannot Ride Both Horses." The night before the Stevenson speech General Walker hired the same auditorium for the U.S. Day rally. Lee Harvey Oswald, always interested in the activities of the man he had tried to kill, went to hear Walker speak.

The following night Stevenson arrived to find the auditorium surrounded with pickets. (Among them, perhaps, was Os-

wald, according to people who later thought they saw him holding a sign. Oswald himself said he had attended Stevenson's speech.) Of the two thousand people inside, many were supporters of General Walker, and they had brought placards and Halloween noisemakers. When Stevenson stood to speak, the auditorium was filled with tooting, clanging, ratcheting sounds, as well as waving American and Confederate flags, stomping feet, and loud boos whenever Stevenson's voice rose to make an audible point. One man screamed, again and again, "Kennedy will get his reward in hell. Stevenson is going to die. His heart will stop, stop, stop. And he will burn, burn, burn."

For the majority of the audience, both the ardent Stevenson supporters and those nonpolitical people who simply wanted to hear him speak, it was the most embarrassing public display they had ever attended. If there is one thing Dallasites have pressed into their cortex, it is a concern about their city's image. That concern would come under worldwide attack one month later, but in the context of the Stevenson speech that civic protectiveness showed its best side. They cheered Stevenson wildly when he was introduced and several times gave him a standing ovation. They did what they could to police the disrupters in the audience. When Frank McGeehee, the head of the National Indignation Convention, stood up during Stevenson's speech and began a loud tirade, a small elderly man went over and tried to push the beefy McGeehee back into his seat. Police officers finally ejected McGeehee. In the face of the ruckus, Stevenson observed, "For my part, I believe in the forgiveness of sin and the redemption of ignorance."

Policemen formed a cordon around Stevenson when he left the auditorium. Outside there were still more than a hundred pickets waiting for him. One woman was quite hysterical. Stevenson should have disregarded her, but he couldn't; he had to wonder how his mere presence could bring this woman to such a flight of frustrated despair. His instinct was to reason with her, perhaps to exorcise the demon that he was in her mind. He might also learn what quality about himself drew up such hatred from these people. He stepped out of the police line.

The mob immediately closed him in. The hysterical woman, who was the wife of an insurance executive, brought her placard down on Stevenson's head. A college student spat upon him. When the policemen finally rescued him, Stevenson wiped the spit off his face with a handkerchief and asked aloud, "Are these human beings or are these animals?"

Kennedy was proud of him. He had his speechwriter Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., call Stevenson and congratulate him on his courage. It was the quality Kennedy once called "that most admirable of human virtues." Stevenson joked about the incident,

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but he had been badly shaken. "There was something very ugly and frightening about the atmosphere," he told Schlesinger. He advised Schlesinger to discourage the president's scheduled trip to Dallas. That Schlesinger decided not to do. It was impossible for Kennedy to go to Texas and bypass Dallas—that would suggest that Kennedy was afraid to go. The cult of courage in the Kennedy White House was such that even to suggest such a course would be evidence of cowardice. As Schlesinger recalled: "I was reluctant to pass on Stevenson's message lest it convict him of undue apprehensiveness in the President's eyes."

YES, WE WERE SHOCKED BY THE Stevenson incident. The city's leaders signed a wire of apology, the city council adopted an anti-harassment ordinance, and the mayor spoke out against the far right. On the other hand, Bruce Alger contended that the city had no reason to feel disgraced, that the protesters had lost their heads only because of their justified resentment of the U.N. General Walker put it more directly. He hung the American flag upside down outside his Turtle Creek home, signaling his distress at the city's apology to Stevenson. "Adlai got what was coming to him," he told reporters.

Since much of the country would hold the political atmosphere in Dallas responsible for the president's assassination, it

is interesting to discover how closely attuned Oswald was to the events of the moment. He was utterly out of place in Dallas. I recall that the biggest surprise of the assassination in my own mind was the evidence that the president had been shot by a Marxist. In *Dallas*? It was unusual to meet even a liberal Democrat. Oswald once related that he had become interested in Marxism when he was fifteen years old, after an old woman handed him a pamphlet protesting the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. That was 1954, the same year as the Army-McCarthy hearings. It was a time when anti-communism had reached a peak of hysteria unknown in America since the witchcraft trials in Salem, when there was talk in Congress of launching investigations not only against civil servants but against high school students and Christian ministers. And yet by 1954 communism as a political force was extinct in America. The anti-communists were railing at a phantom that was everywhere in their minds but nowhere in reality. At that point, fifteen-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans decided to give form to the fears: he would become a communist, the national enemy. Psychologists would say he had joined a pseudo community, one that existed only in his mind. He told acquaintances that he was looking everywhere for a Communist cell to join; he wrote letters to the Socialist party. But even after he defected to Russia, he tes-

tified to the solitariness of his political beliefs in a letter to his brother, Robert: "I have been a pro-communist for years and yet I have never met a communist."

He had an admirable feeling for the underdog. In highly segregated New Orleans he once provoked a fight when he chose to sit in the Negro section of a city bus. A group of white boys attacked him. "People who saw the fight said that Lee seemed unafraid," Robert Oswald has written. "His fists flew in all directions, but he was outnumbered and thoroughly beaten up."

Oswald fled to Russia, married a Russian woman, returned to the United States, and settled in the city where he was most likely to be feared, despised, and reviled. Like many villains he fantasized about being widely loved; he told his wife, Marina, that he would be president himself in twenty years (at 43, the same age Kennedy was when he was elected). And yet few people loved Oswald. "Everybody hated him," Marina said after the assassination, "even in Russia." In Oswald's mind, hate was superior to indifference; he wanted people to feel strongly about him. In Dallas, they certainly would.

Like General Walker, Oswald was drawn to the volatile, violent politics of the new world. Such men always appear in the midst of social hysteria. Dallas would excuse itself because the assassin was not right wing—many of us could hardly believe our good fortune when we learned about Oswald—and yet the atmosphere of fanaticism in the city beckoned to chaotic and suggestible individuals and drew them near.

THE NEW WORLD WAS EXTENDING itself. What was happening in Dallas was spreading throughout Texas, pulling apart the ancient coalitions that constituted the Democratic party (since Reconstruction, the only real party in Texas). Two Democrats whose politics were widely disparate, Senator Ralph Yarborough and Governor John Connally, were engaged in a quarrel that would finish with the death of Texas liberalism and the birth of the Republican party in the state. But perhaps Kennedy could hold the state for the Democrats if he would just come to Texas. And bring his wife, Yarborough advised.

Crowds in San Antonio, Houston, and Fort Worth met the president with enthusiasm, but those receptions were eclipsed in the press, which was playing up the rift between Yarborough and Connally and, incidentally, between Yarborough and Johnson. Those men would all deny that Kennedy had come to Texas to pacify their quarrels, but it is certain that Kennedy did what he could to force a show of unity. And he had some success. By the time he had given his early-morning first speech in Fort Worth, the members of the presidential party were feeling triumphant. Dallas was next—



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Kennedy was going to speak at a luncheon for the city's leaders at the Trade Mart—and although there was some worry about what might happen in that town, Kennedy seemed to be in terrific form, the audiences were enchanted, and his wife's presence had caused a sensation. The relief people felt in the presidential party was like that of a coach who sees his best player at the top of his game and knows that on a good day his best player is unbeatable. After Dallas, the Kennedys were flying on to Austin. According to Stanley Marcus, Lyndon Johnson was going to conclude a welcoming speech the following night with the remark, "And thank God, Mr. President, that you came out of Dallas alive."

After breakfast in Fort Worth, Kennedy was given a copy of the *Dallas Morning News*, which had front-page articles about the disputes among the Texas Democrats and a full-page, black-bordered advertisement inside the front section. "Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas," it read, "A city so disgraced by a recent Liberal smear attempt that its citizens have just elected two more Conservative Americans to public office. . . . A city that will continue to grow and prosper despite efforts by you and your administration to penalize it for its non-conformity to 'New Frontierism.'" The advertisement included twelve rhetorical questions that accused the president of going soft on communism and betraying American allies. It was signed by Bernard Weissman, who was chairman of the American Fact-finding Committee, a completely fictitious entity. Weissman turned out to be a member of a right-wing coterie formed by three American servicemen in Germany; like Oswald and General Walker, the members of the group had gravitated to Dallas.

Kennedy read the advertisement and handed it to his wife. "Oh, you know," he told her, "we're heading into nut country today."

MY FATHER HAD HIS OWN DARK thoughts about Kennedy. As a younger man with some political ambition he had made preparations for Kennedy to speak in Oklahoma. At the time Kennedy was a congressman from Massachusetts, already cultivating a national constituency for his eventual run for the presidency; my father was a bank vice president, but like Kennedy he was a war hero, and bright possibilities were predicted for him in the political arena. Kennedy was a model for many men like my father who hoped to trade their wartime glory for public office; clearly there were advantages in an alliance with the young political star. My father was expected to supply whatever the congressman needed, and one thing he needed was an ample and varied selection of Oklahoma women—no, not dinner dates, my father was instructed, just sexual companions. It was the moment my father's

own political aspirations died. He did not even go to hear Kennedy speak.

In Dallas, however, he reached some grudging accommodation with Kennedy's presidency. He saw political power and the aggrandizement of wealth at closer quarters; he came to understand men whose needs were greater than his own, men who made promises only to themselves. He could believe now that it was a divine failing in himself that kept him from being such a man. On November 22, 1963, he was invited to hear Kennedy speak at the Dallas Trade Mart, and this time he decided to go.


One of my sisters recalls seeing that date written on a blackboard several days before—she had a school assignment due that day—and feeling an instantaneous surge of horror. There were other premonitory currents in the city. Later the guilt we felt for Kennedy's death would have less to do with his assassination by a man only slightly associated with our city than it would have to do with our own feelings of anticipation. Something would happen—*something*. We expected to be disgraced. It had happened with Johnson, it had happened with Stevenson, it would happen again. There was a vague air of excitement in the city such as there might be in a movie audience when a gunfight is about to occur—it was that kind of secondary excitement, not the fear that someone would really die but an expectation that something dramatic would appear to happen, that we would see it or hear about it, probably talk about it later, and it would pass with no harm done. Political theater, in other words.

In the morning I went out to get the *News* and found on our doorstep a flyer that looked exactly like a wanted poster in the post office: it was John Kennedy, full face and profile, and the flyer said he was "Wanted for Treason." Below that his crimes were listed, seven items such as: betraying the Constitution, giving support to communist-inspired racial riots, appointing anti-Christians to federal office, and lying to the American people about his previous marriage and divorce.


I brought the flyer in with the paper and read it on the way to the breakfast table. I had heard most of it before—who hadn't?—the same old right-wing tirade, although I remember wondering about Kennedy's "previous marriage and divorce." Since I was already running late to school I didn't read the *News* that morning, although later in the day one of my first instincts was to save the paper, as did many other people in Dallas. After all, it was now a historical document.

Although some kids were let out of school in Houston and San Antonio when the president's motorcade passed through, in Dallas we had no such luck and could only be excused to the custody of a parent. So like most of my classmates I was in school when it happened. It was in algebra class right after lunch. Mr. Irvin Hill was describing a parabola on the blackboard

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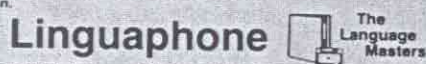
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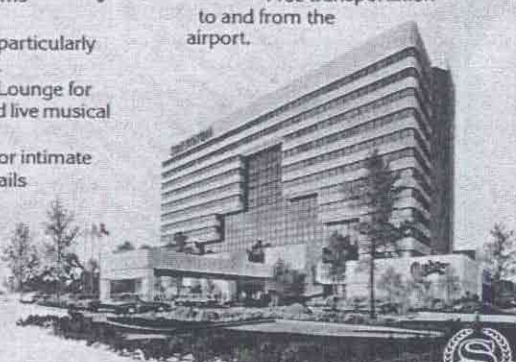
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when three tones came over the public address system and the principal started to speak. We actually knew something was wrong before he said a word, because there was a choked pause and we could hear a radio in the background.

"The president has been shot."

It was only a fraction of a moment before he gave us details and then played the radio commentary into the P.A. for the remainder of the hour. But in that fraction the world we knew turned into ghosts and fled. *It happened!*—the thing we had been waiting for. We were dazed and excited. We turned in our chairs and looked in each other's faces, finding grins of astonishment. Something happened! At that point in my life I knew no more about the nature of tragedy than a blind man knows about the color blue. All I knew was that life could change, it had changed at last. Wasn't this what we had been waiting for? We asked the question with our eyes, looking for some fixed response to this new flood of circumstance. We were giddy and scared, and as for me I was grateful for the loss of innocence.

"... shot in the head, Governor Connally wounded . . ."

Some of the details were off base. We heard that Johnson was shot too, he was seen entering Parkland Hospital holding his arm. Who else? Were they killing everybody? I don't think I ever paused to think who *they* were; I knew. At that moment I supposed we were in the middle of a right-wing coup.

And as we sat there, gazing crazily at each other and at the P.A. box, I finally noticed Mr. Hill and realized that tears were streaming down his wrinkled cheeks. His chest was beginning to heave, then he sobbed in great barks, and everyone now was watching him, studying him as if he had the answer for our own reactions. But his grief was a private thing, and he picked it up like the greatest burden he had ever carried and walked out of the room. As he left I felt the first prodding overture of shame.

"The president is dead."

IT WAS A SHOCK HOW MUCH THE world hated us—and why? Oswald was only dimly a Dallasite. He was a Marxist and an atheist; you could scarcely call him a product of the city. He was, if anything, the Anti-Dallas, the summation of everything we hated and feared. How could we be held responsible for him?

The world decided that Kennedy had died in enemy territory, that no matter who had killed him, we had *willed* him dead. And yet the truth is that we were under the spell of Camelot like everyone else. Although we were filled with resentment toward the privileged, arrogant East Coast society that Kennedy represented, it was a resentment born of envy and intense curiosity. We felt inferior. That Jacqueline Kennedy spoke French and some Spanish was impressive to us; the only

people I knew who were bilingual were inner-city Mexican kids. We admired Mrs. Kennedy's taste, we liked for her to be at home with the great musicians and artists of the world, and her breathless, Marilyn Monroe voice intimated that she was not all white gloves and pillbox hats. The Kennedys invested the country with a self-conscious eroticism that was nicely bridled by the presence of young children in the White House. In short, we had the ordinary human identification with the occupant of the presidency that most Americans did. I can even remember Kennedy phrases creeping into my father's vocabulary. My father spoke of "moving ahead with vigor," and when I'd ask him a question he was likely to preface his response with "Let me say this about that." Kennedy hated wearing hats, and so my father, along with nearly every other male in the country, gave up wearing them.

We had drawn closer to Kennedy even as the rest of the country grew disenchanting. The disgrace of the Bay of Pigs actually helped him in Dallas; there was something noble and chastening about seeing Kennedy humbled. My father admired the way Kennedy accepted the blame. The Cuban missile crisis showed Dallas that Kennedy had learned the use of power; it also showed us the danger of Ted Dealey's bluster. Mother bought canned goods and bottled water. We got an extra store of candles, flashlight batteries, and a transistor radio that had the Conelrad stations marked with nuclear triangles. I remember writing to my Italian pen pal that by the time he received my letter we would surely be at war with Cuba, probably Russia as well, and who knows? Perhaps the world would be destroyed before I got his response. The world survived—it is still chilling to think how close we passed to the brink—but I never got another letter from Italy.

And in fact when Kennedy came to Dallas we gave him his warmest reception so far, a perfect confrontation between Kennedy's vaunted courage (walking into crowds, stopping the motorcade to shake hands) and Dallas' new willingness to make friends. The last words Kennedy heard in life were spoken by Nellie Connally, who turned and said, "Mr. President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you." It was a true observation but also history's goddamnedest irony, for an instant later Jacqueline Kennedy had to respond, "They've killed my husband. I have his brains in my hand."

She said "they," and I assumed she meant us. That was an assumption the whole world shared.

Dallas killed Kennedy; we heard it again and again. Dallas was "a city of hate, the only American city in which the president could have been shot" (this from our own Judge Sarah Hughes, who administered the oath of office to Lyndon Johnson aboard *Air Force One*). And yet the values of the city, which the world condemned, were more or less my values;

the image of the city, which was white, middle-class, provincial, and conservative, more or less fit my family. I had been unacquainted with tragedy, and now the entire globe was convulsed in grief and held me responsible.

But Dallas had nothing to do with Kennedy's death. The hatred directed at our city was retaliation for many previous grievances. The East hated us because we were part of the usurping West, liberals hated us because we were conservative, labor because we were nonlabor, intellectuals because we were raw, minorities because we were predominantly and conspicuously white, atheists and agnostics because we were strident believers, the poor because we were rich, the old because we were new. Indeed there were few of the world's constituencies that we had failed to offend before the president came to our city, and hadn't we compounded the offense again and again by boasting of those very qualities? In that case we were well silenced now.

In church that Sunday, November 24, my father and I heard our minister preach a sermon entitled "Let's Change the Climate." The word "climate" had already acquired a supercharged meaning in Dallas. Where once it had been used only to describe the abundant opportunities for business growth, now it was appropriated by the newscasters and magazine writers as a sort of net that could be tossed across the entire city, implicating everyone in the crime. Yes, there were fanatics in Dallas, but weren't we all responsible for creating a climate in which fanaticism could take root? a climate of hate? a climate of intolerance? a climate of bigotry? It was an unanswerable charge. My father's jaw set as we heard the minister accepting the blame on behalf of our city—his sermon was being broadcast nationally on ABC radio—the blame for the climate that was responsible for Kennedy's death. At the end of the sermon, when we had sung the Doxology and were standing to leave, someone walked to the pulpit and handed the minister a message.

"Oswald's been shot!"

The congregation slumped back into the pews. The police told us to leave downtown, to evacuate the area. What now? What was going on?

It was simply too much—a psychological breaking point for many of us, like my father, who had held out against the insinuations of the press, who had refused to accept blame for the climate in Dallas. But the more we learned about the circumstances of Oswald's death and the background of his killer, the more we had to acknowledge our responsibility. Jack Ruby was one of ours, he did his deed in the very bowels of our own city hall, and he did it in a spirit of horrified civic-mindedness. Our incompetent police force let him do it. The defense we had established for our city in the death of the president didn't apply in the death of the president's killer. Dallas didn't kill

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Kennedy, but in an awful, undeniable fashion it did kill Oswald.

A PHENOMENON REMARKED ON BY psychiatrists after the assassination was the death of dreams. The normal functions of the unconscious mind seemed to have been displaced by unending hours of television viewing. From 6 a.m. Sunday until 12:18 a.m. Tuesday the broadcasts never stopped, and as I play them back in my mind now—the death march, the half-stepping troops, the riderless horse, John-John's salute—they have the quality of a remembered dream, haunting, full of meaning, experienced but un-lived.

My mother and sisters stayed home on Sunday morning to watch the mass for the dead president. He was lying in state under the Capitol rotunda where Abraham Lincoln had lain nearly a century before. Americans have always had a secret love for pageantry, unfulfilled because of the absence of royalty, and it was this massive grandeur that made the experience strange and thrilling. I remember being struck by the vocabulary of the occasion, words like "bier" and "caisson" and "catafalque," which had a sound of such special importance that they could be used only a few times in one's life—like rare china dishes one sets out only for the king. Years later I happened to be looking over a list of names of children who were receiving government assistance, and I noted a child

born in December 1963 whose mother must have been as enraptured as I was with the ceremonial language. She named her baby Rotunda Cathedral Jones.

After the mass the network switched to the Dallas City Hall, where the transfer of Oswald to the county jail was about to get under way. It was a scene of confusion and anticipation. Before now we had had only a brief glimpse of the accused killer (although according to our district attorney he was as good as convicted, so few of us doubted his guilt). Finally Oswald appeared in the doorway, dwarfed by the beefy detectives on either side of him but looking cool and in control of the situation while all around him chaos raged. I suppose it was the supreme moment of Oswald's unhappy life, that instant before his death. He had always been the outsider, unaccepted, unloved, but he had turned the tables on the world. He was the man with the answers, his secrets were locked in his skull, and we were all outsiders now.

And as he entered the basement of the city hall, Oswald's defiant glare seemed to fall directly on Jack Ruby. Was that an illusion, a coincidence? Or was there the surprised recognition of conspirators in that moment before Ruby stepped into Oswald's path and gunned him down?

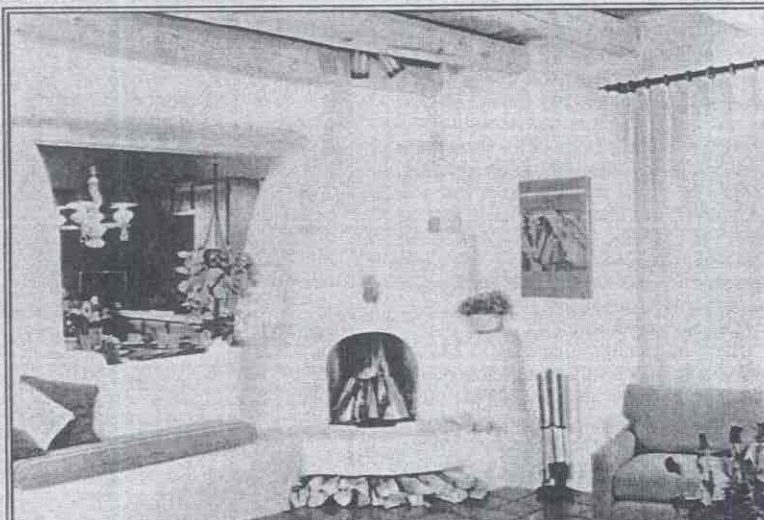
It is the irony of Jack Ruby's life that he was the one to stop forever the answers to our questions, for he was himself both a lone nut (in my opinion) and the ultimate

conspiracy buff. He was a compulsive glad-hander, a Big D booster who prided himself on knowing everybody in town—and on being known, especially to reporters and cops, who were always receiving free passes to Ruby's strip joint, the Carousel Club. Psychiatrists at Ruby's trial testified to his "voracious need to be accepted and admired . . . particularly by individuals in positions of authority and great social prestige," and Ruby did seem to have at least a nodding acquaintance with most Dallas politicians. He was always reminding them, "You know me, I'm Jack Ruby!" He had a way of ingratiating himself. He once talked his way into a club sandwich with actress Rhonda Fleming at the Dallas airport. He liked to think of himself as a ladies' man, and yet he dated only occasionally and had a reputation for being sexually prim. Although he dealt in flesh, he fired girls who agreed to go to bed with him. At the Carousel he was his own bouncer; he was heavyset but quick, and he kept in shape through constant dieting and frequent workouts at the YMCA. His mother had died in a Chicago insane asylum, and his father, a brother, and a sister had been treated for psychiatric disorders. Ruby may have been crazy as well, but he was also a shady character with mob connections, associations with anti-Castro Cubans, and a brief but ineffective history as an FBI informer.

Like many of us in Dallas, Ruby held the *Morning News* responsible for the president's death. He was at the *News* placing an ad for his club when the bulletin came that Kennedy had been shot. "I left the building and I went down and I got in my car and I couldn't stop crying," Ruby later told the Warren Commission. In a fog he went back to his club and then to his sister's house, where he turned on the television and cried again. He had an emotional attachment to the Kennedy family. A defense psychiatrist testified at his trial that Ruby's "description of the President, of Mrs. Kennedy, of the former's charm and manner cannot be reproduced in words here: essentially it was the speech of a man in love with another man. It was a love that passed beyond a rational appreciation of a great man, coming out of the unconscious. The prisoner [Ruby] said, 'This is the end of my life' when the President died, and in so doing he expressed more than mourning."

Eventually Jack Ruby would come to the same conclusion that many other Americans reached when they looked at the White House and saw Lyndon Johnson. "If Adlai Stevenson had been vice president," Ruby told a reporter, "there would have been no assassination." Johnson, for his part, always thought there was something fishy about the conclusions of the Warren Commission—which he appointed—and he never satisfied his own doubts about a conspiracy.

For me, Johnson's presidency was a long embarrassment, part of the shame of



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being Texan. Suddenly everyone was better than us. In those days Texas plates on your car were an invitation to rudeness, if not worse. When news of the assassination came over the radio, one Texas driver was paying for gas off the Pennsylvania Turnpike; the attendant threw his change in his face. That reaction endured, in less spontaneous fashion, for years, even after Memphis and Los Angeles had their own tragedies. Dallasites always begrudged the fact that those cities were never taken down, the way Dallas was, and made to feel at one with Birmingham and Selma.

Our family made a trip to Florida that summer. We stopped at a service station for gas and Cokes. It was blisteringly hot; auto air conditioning was still a rich man's privilege, unknown in our family, so we sat in a sweat and drank our Cokes while my father paid for the gas. The attendant looked at us, and for a moment I was afraid the change-in-the-face routine was going to make an encore.

"Where from in Texas?" he demanded. "Dallas," my father admitted.

The attendant nodded and stuck his face up to the window to get a closer look at us. His face was deeply tanned and cracked, like a dried-up creek bed. What strikes me now is the liberty he felt he could take with us, staring at us like that; I felt like a slave at auction. "You all killed our president," he said in a wondering tone, as if he had surprised himself by catching us red-handed.

Daddy hit the accelerator in disgust.

After that I seldom told people where I was from. I had come to understand what discrimination meant, now that it was focused on me. Years later, when I thought the world might have forgotten, I was riding on the *Orient Express* en route to Istanbul. With me in the coach were two Greeks, two Turks, a Spaniard, and a Frenchwoman. We were trying to fill out the Bulgarian transit cards, which were written entirely in the Cyrillic alphabet. One of the Turks claimed experience in the matter and was filling out our cards. He interviewed us in Turkish while his companion translated his questions into Greek; one of the Greeks spoke Spanish, the other French. When they got to me the Spaniard asked in English, "Where you from?"

"United States."

The Turk nodded and said something else, which passed through the chain of tongues and came out, "What city you?"

"Dallas, Texas."

I was universally understood. Everyone in the coach looked at me, and one by one they pointed their index fingers at me and said "Bang, bang, bang." It's the same word in every language.

In December 1963 Melvin Belli came to Dallas, ostensibly to defend Jack Ruby, but soon after his arrival it seemed that the real reason he had come was to indict Dallas for the murder of Kennedy. He wanted a change of venue, and he should have gotten it; eventually Ruby's conviction

would be reversed because the judge refused to let go of the case. Jack Ruby died with his guilt unproven.

It's true we didn't want to lose the trial. After the embarrassment of Oswald's death we wanted to show the world that we were competent, that we knew how to administer justice. Besides, we had Henry Wade, the prosecutor who had asked for the death penalty 24 times and been denied only once. We looked forward to the trial as we might have a heavyweight fight. We were going to try, convict, and execute Jack Ruby; it was an open-and-shut case, even with Melvin Belli in charge of the defense team.

Belli was a short, flamboyant man in elevated "fruit boots"—as a member of the prosecution referred to them. He had a polysyllabic vocabulary and a taste for extravagant clothing—an easy mark for the hard-boiled country boys on the county side of the courtroom. Dallas was plain-spoken and suspicious of fancy outsiders. Its style was glassy, modern, utilitarian, whereas Belli's was rococo; they were bound to detest each other.

And Belli brought the accusing finger. He charged Dallas with killing Oswald. In particular he charged Henry Wade, who had made a number of poorly considered statements about Oswald's guilt soon after his arrest. "I am convinced that after the official chorus, Wade in the forefront, already proclaimed him a fit subject for execution, Oswald became fair game for any crank who wanted to kill him," Belli later wrote. His book was called *Dallas Justice*, and he wrote it (with Maurice C. Carroll) "to help Dallas face up to its failures."

At first Jack Ruby was delighted to have the famous Melvin Belli defending him. After all, Ruby was himself a celebrity now; his cell was filled with congratulatory letters and telegrams. He was making plans for a public career, working on his diction and improving his vocabulary by playing Scrabble with his guards. "He would sit there dreaming absentmindedly and comb his hair for hours," one of the guards told Garry Wills and Ovid Demaris, for their biography of Ruby. "He didn't think we were going to do anything to him," said Bill Alexander, Henry Wade's chief prosecutor on the case. "He believed we were just going through the motions, because we had to. He was enjoying all that attention, just like a pig in slop." It was only appropriate, from Ruby's point of view, that he should be defended by a slick and glamorous California lawyer. "It made him feel good," Belli related, "that I not only knew my law but was a sharp dresser and a great cocksman."*

Belli's defense was to depict his client as a village idiot, a latent homosexual, an epileptic with possible brain damage (Ruby's autopsy showed more than a dozen tumors in his brain). Belli pro-

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duced a parade of psychiatrists who testified about Ruby's "psychomotor epilepsy," which they demonstrated in a six-hundred-foot chart of Ruby's brain waves. The jury wasn't interested. After hearing eight days of testimony they took less than two hours to decide Ruby's guilt.

"What was the key that turned those friendly and polite people," Belli wrote in revenge, "into a jury that could impassively reject testimony by some of the nation's most brilliant medical men and, in an insultingly and unfeelingly brief one hour and fifty minutes decide that Ruby must die in the electric chair? In some fashion . . . the people in whatever passes for the Kremlin of Dallas could figuratively press a button and, as if it had signaled transistors in their brains, direct the thinking of this great city's people."*

Ruby was devastated, not so much by the verdict as by Belli's defense. He was ruined in Dallas, the city he loved. "I'm so grateful for the opportunities I've had in Dallas," he had written. "I'm a Jew from the ghetto of Chicago. I came to Dallas and made a fine success." Now he was a laughingstock, a village idiot, a queer. The worst blow was delivered before the trial even began, when Mayor Earle Cabell, who had known Ruby for four years, testified in a change-of-venue hearing that Ruby could not get a fair trial in Dallas because he had hurt the city too badly. Six weeks after the trial was over, Ruby backed up in his cell, lowered his head, and tried to brain himself against the concrete wall.

That day he met my cousin Don. Don was seventeen, newly orphaned. My father had gone to his brother's funeral in Kansas, and at the ceremony he saw his nephew and his namesake standing alone, without prospects, like him in so many ways at that age. After the funeral he brought Don home with him, to the new world. Don was grateful but also independent. He got a job as an apprentice mortician and ambulance attendant, and in the latter capacity he rode to the county jail to ferry Jack Ruby to Parkland Hospital.

They became friends, after a fashion. Ruby made frequent trips to Parkland, and he used those occasions to send additional messages to the outside world, through Don. "They're killing me, Don," he confided. "I know what they're doing. They're feeding me cancer." Ruby was the first to diagnose his illness. Soon he began to deteriorate, and Don watched him waste away. It was sad, but Don had an orphan's attitude toward death, and he wouldn't waste his sentiment on a man he couldn't save.

In the end Jack Ruby was swallowed up by the innumerable conspiracy theories linking him to the man he had killed. With the loss of weight caused by his disease, he even came to look like Oswald. Conspiracy was quicksand, and Ruby was trying desperately to extricate himself. He

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demanded lie-detector tests and truth serum, and he told his story again and again, but he was also struggling with conspiracies of his own imagining. He heard them torturing Jews in the basement of the jail. The country had been overthrown by Nazis. They know I know. I know they know. They know I know they know.

Jack Ruby died on January 3, 1967. He was buried in Chicago.

I WAS DESPERATE TO GET OUT OF Dallas. I hated Dallas for what it was (though it would never again be what it was), for its smugness (now shattered), for its politics (now discredited), and most of all for the burden of guilt that was my heritage as a Dallasite.

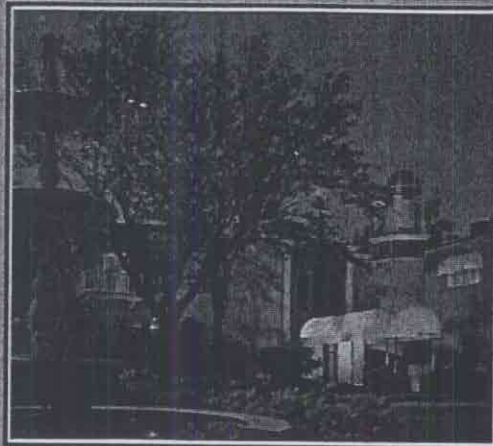
I went to Tulane University for the single reason that it was in the city most unlike Dallas that I knew of. New Orleans was old and rotten, corrupt, depraved, licentious, a grand old whore who enjoyed herself too much but was still generous enough to give pleasure to someone else, someone new. It was a Catholic town and indifferent to progress, whereas Dallas was the center of the Protestant universe and horrified by sensuality. After the charmlessness of Dallas, I fell in love with the overripe splendor of New Orleans. I walked its streets in a state of aesthetic liberation, every bit as much an émigré as Hemingway in Paris, and feeling at one with him and with all the great American writers. For hadn't they all stopped in New Orleans on their way to immortality—Whitman, Twain, Faulkner, Anderson, Williams, Capote—and which of them had ever passed through Dallas?

But it was not only their city, it was Oswald's city, his birthplace, and in coming to New Orleans I found that I had not left the assassination behind me. Rather, I had come into the heart of the madness. New Orleans was haunted by Oswald, and soon the city would be lit up in one of those queer American binges of lunacy, a paranoia of conspiracy that has become a part of the national psyche.

It was on Bourbon Street one day near the end of my freshman year that I met Delilah. I was making small talk on the sidewalk with a strip-joint pimp when I realized that the woman onstage was doing a belly dance to "Hava Nagila," the Hebrew song of celebration. It was such a cultural malaprop that I demanded to be introduced to the dancer. In a moment she came out on the sidewalk to talk. I introduced myself as a representative of the Cosmopolitan Committee at Tulane University. One of the committee's purposes, I explained, was to find interesting cultural acts—such as hers—for performances at the student center. I had the idea of billing her as an Egyptian ethnic dancer. She led me to a table inside.

She was in her mid-thirties. I calculated, with black hair and olive-toned skin, which was probably the inspiration

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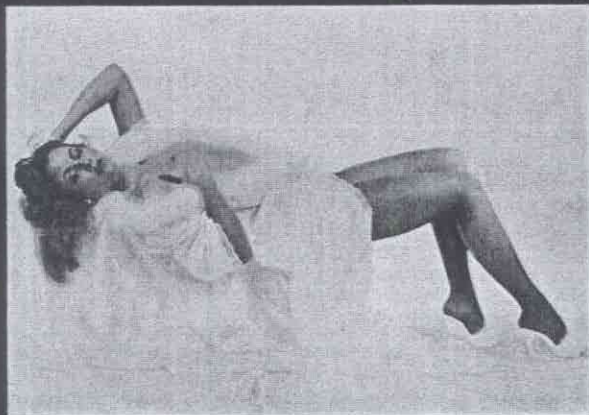
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for casting herself as a Middle Easterner. To complete the role she spoke with an accent borrowed from Zsa Zsa Gabor. "Vere are you from, dahlink?" she asked. I admitted I was from Dallas.

"Oh, no kidding? Dallas?"

I noticed that her Hungarian accent had fallen away, replaced by the familiar nasal tones of North Texas. I asked if she knew Dallas. "Yeah," she said, "I know that goddamn town too well." We sat quietly for a moment. Being from Dallas was an awkward bond to share.

"I used to work for Jack Ruby," she told me. He was a nice man, she remembered, but "a little crazy." It was Ruby, the Jewish impresario, who had put her together with "Hava Nagila." We exchanged telephone numbers, and I told her I would call next semester concerning her performance at Tulane. She said I could come to her apartment for coffee. All summer long I thought about that invitation.

I was more than a little alarmed about the direction my life was taking. When I left Dallas for the university I left behind a sweet Christian girlfriend. She had given me a Bible for my eighteenth birthday. "Cherish this book always, Larry, and diligently read it," she admonished me on the flyleaf, but I had fallen into the hands of Sybarites and existentialists, and when I returned to Dallas that summer I felt like a moral double agent. Half of me was sitting with my girlfriend in church, underlining Scripture with a red pen, and half (more than half) was scheming of ways to lead my little Christian exemplar into one of life's dark passageways.

I was lying on her lap, with that thought in mind, watching the ten o'clock news, when a photograph of a woman in a belly dancing costume flashed on the screen.

"That's Delilah!" I said, sitting up.

"What?"

"Shh. I know her."

Her name, it turned out, was Marilyn Walle. She had just been murdered in Omaha, shot six times by a man she had been married to for a month. Her association with Jack Ruby was noted. My girlfriend looked at me with an expression of puzzled decency. "Do you have something you want to tell me, Larry?"

I wasn't the only one who marked Delilah's death. The conspiracists were keeping a list of "witnesses" who had died since the assassination; by February 1967 seventeen other people had died, including two more strippers who had worked for Ruby (one was shot to death, the other was found hanging by her toreador pants in a Dallas jail cell). The deaths were all incorporated into the evidence for the great conspiracy, and soon they found their redeemer in the person of New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison.

At the heart of Garrison's theory was the unoriginal notion that Dallas killed Kennedy: the city's millionaire right-wingers financed the plot with the collusion of the Dallas police force and the

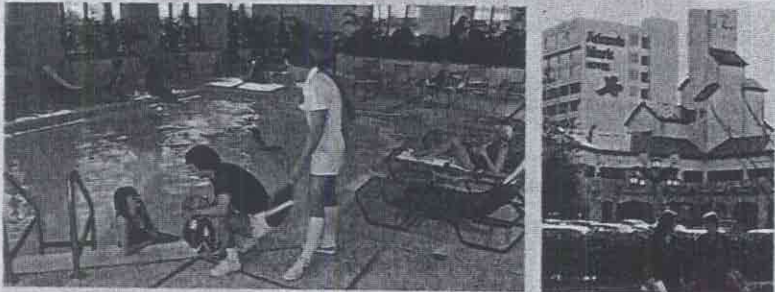
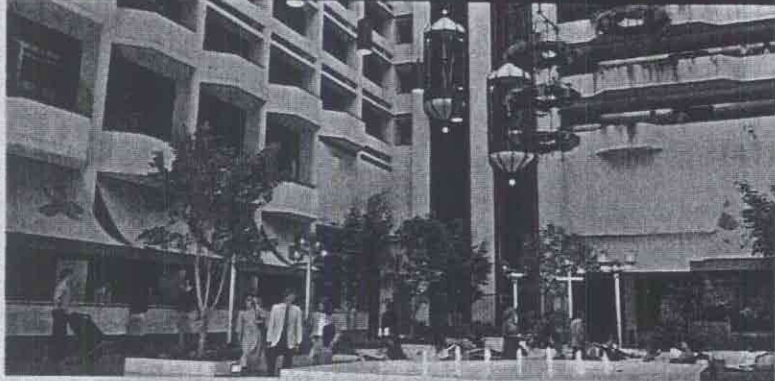
technical advice of the CIA. Garrison's investigation opened up a shaft into the crazed underside of American society, filled with mercenaries and mobsters, CIA agents, YMCA homosexuals, Cubans both pro- and anti-Castro, Russians both White and Red, Nazis, disaffected priests—all of whom seemed to a Dallas boy like the population of a Hieronymus Bosch painting let loose from the canvas, but which was, in New Orleans, an unsurprising sampling of characters ladled out of the New Orleans underworld. The most respectable person in the affair was the defendant, Clay Shaw, a wealthy, homosexual New Orleans businessman who was charged with conspiracy to murder the president. His trial made New Orleans the laughingstock of the nation. There was the feeling that this travesty could only have happened there, with a cast of characters that only New Orleans could have supplied. Like Dallas, the entire city was made to feel responsible for a tragic event—an unfair charge that was somehow too appropriate to deny.

POLITICAL MURDER HAS BEEN A feature of American life since 1835, when Richard Lawrence tried to shoot Andrew Jackson, and between that time and Oswald's murder of Kennedy, three presidents were killed and three others were the objects of assassination attempts. And yet there was a common assumption, frequently stated, that it all started in Dallas. The Dallas-killed-Kennedy theory swelled into metaphysics, until Dallas became responsible for assassination itself, as if we were the motive force that toppled the first domino in the murderous chain, as if the trail of bodies that have fallen all across America could somehow be traced back to the Texas School Book Depository.

Perhaps an outsider can understand how each new assassination was greeted with relief and resentment in Dallas—relief, of course, that it hadn't happened in Dallas and resentment that no other city would ever know the opprobrium Dallas had endured. It was as if we had let the genie out of the bottle, as if we had provided the catalyst that caused Southern racism to kill Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis and California political craziness to murder Robert Kennedy and to try twice to kill Gerald Ford. You could walk through the world announcing "I'm from Los Angeles" or "I'm from Laurel, Maryland," and receive an occasional dim acknowledgment that something tragic had happened in your town, but even then you would never expect to be held responsible. Waiters would not give you reluctant service. Telephone operators would not refuse to place your calls. But for years after President Kennedy's murder, saying you were from Dallas was like saying you were from Nazi Germany. It had absurd power.

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the world, that you were inherently more inclined toward murder than the next fellow. The assumption was unconscious, a stereotype, no different really from a racial prejudice. It's no wonder that Dallasites were defensive and angry—people were telling loud lies about our city. It's no wonder, either, that behind our anger was the fear that there must be a whisper of truth in those lies.

I happened to be in Washington in 1976 during Jimmy Carter's inauguration, a frigid, brilliant day, the ground covered with new snow and the sky nearly Texas blue. I stood on Pennsylvania Avenue to watch the parade. At that point in my life I had seen only one American president, Dwight Eisenhower, who had ridden in a

motorcade in the Boy Scout Jamboree. Eisenhower went by so quickly that I hardly got an impression of him, other than a smiling man standing in an open convertible, waving his arms over his head as he raced past thousands of silent boy scouts. But the power of the presidency is such that I doubt there is a single one of those scouts who does not remember nearly a quarter of a century later that he saw Eisenhower.

But now the simple American action of watching a presidential parade drummed up old and complex fears in me, and an instinctive defensiveness. As we waited for Carter I prepared to make a quick snapshot in my mind of the passing limousine and to note the president's face. The bands

came, and then the train of black Lincolns—and then a murmur in the crowd, a sound of astonishment that preceded the president and made people cry out excitedly, "He's walking!" Before anyone could disbelieve it, there he was, holding his wife's hand, walking down the center stripe of Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, only a few feet away from his amazed constituents. For many of us, it brought tears to our eyes. He was trusting us not to kill him.

In particular, I felt, he was trusting me. To grow up in Dallas, to have been accused as we all were of killing the president—however ridiculous that charge—was to know in some dark spot of your conscience what an assassin felt like inside. To be accused of a crime is a quick education in criminal psychology. It's humiliating, but one of the lessons of humility is to learn how subtle and fragile are the differences between people. It is to realize that the distinctions that law and psychology so boldly define as right and wrong, sane and insane, are like signposts in a fog—little use to those of us who are lost. It is to know, as the preacher said, that we are all God's children and that the child who grows up to be president and the child who grows up to kill the president are more alike in His eyes than we want to believe.

I WAS DRIVING ACROSS THE CONGRESS AVENUE BRIDGE IN AUSTIN ON MARCH 30, 1981, when I learned that President Reagan had been shot. By the time I crossed the river I was sobbing and pounding the steering wheel. By now I was truly educated in tragedy and sick to death of the freewheeling lunatics thrown up by our rambunctious society. For a person who had grown up in Dallas, the shooting produced a horrifying sense of déjà vu, first when the president was shot in front of the TV cameras, the way Ruby shot Oswald, and then when the details began coming out about Hinckley's Dallas background. I remember being furious but not surprised.

Who was John Hinckley, Jr.? He was eight years old when Kennedy was killed. He ran home from school to tell his mother the news and was disappointed that she already knew. Like me, he saved newspapers from that day; he knew history was being made.

The Hinckleys, like my own family, had come to the new world from a small town—Ardmore, Oklahoma—and like us they were blessed by the boom. Jack Hinckley, the father, was an oilman, an entrepreneur, exactly the kind of man Dallas celebrates and rewards with its admiration. He personified the city's spirit—a stern, religious, political conservative who did good deeds and made money without apology. He worked hard, perhaps too hard, but if that was a sin, what hustling man in Dallas could blame him? He provided his family with comfort, opportunity, and eventually real wealth.

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The Hinckleys moved to Highland Park, the most exclusive close-in neighborhood in the city. Many of Texas' most prominent families live there, including Herbert Hunt and former Texas governor Bill Clements. The Hinckleys bought a yellow-brick home on Beverly Drive, with a swimming pool in the back yard and a private Coke machine. They played golf at the Dallas Country Club and socialized with the city's elite. On Sundays they went to St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church. "The Hinckleys fit into the pattern of the parish—redneck Republican, ultraconservative, as I am," remembered their pastor, Charles V. Westapher. "A solid family. I can see them in my mind's eye, standing there with their children around them. There was nothing outstanding about John Junior. He wasn't an outstanding achiever. He was not in trouble. He just fades into the mist of time."

Who was John Hinckley, Jr.? There was something too familiar about him. He was, in some respects, any kid from Dallas. His family may have been more successful than most, but the Hinckleys' values—their religious materialism, for lack of a better term—were characteristic of the city, and those people who didn't live as well or as properly as the Hinckleys did at least aspired to.

After Hinckley graduated from Highland Park High School, his parents moved to Colorado and he went to Texas Tech. He was assigned a black roommate—a big shock to a boy from Highland Park. "My naive, race-mixed ideology was forever laid [sic] to rest," Hinckley wrote about himself. "By the summer of 1978, at the age of 23, I was an all-out anti-Semite and white racist." He read *Mein Kampf* and a lot of far-right literature, and then, like Oswald, he formed his own political group, with himself as the only member. Hinckley urged his prospective members to move to Dallas, where he kept his national headquarters. "There will be plenty of friendly help available to those of you who are unfamiliar with the city," he wrote. "We are even considering opening a barracks."

His parents were alarmed by their son's inclination toward racism and Nazi thought, but the far right had always been a presence in Dallas; no one could say Hinckley's politics were a great aberration there. Politically, he was little different from General Walker.

In 1980 Hinckley dropped out of school and told his family that he had a job on the copy desk of the *Dallas Morning News*. Instead, he soon began stalking President Carter. In Nashville he was arrested when he tried to slip through airport security with a suitcase full of guns. He paid a \$62 fine and flew back to Dallas—"back," one of his psychiatrists testified, "to replenish the arsenal." He went to Rocky's Pawn Shop on Elm, the same street that runs past the Texas School Book Depository. There he bought two .22-caliber revolvers for \$47 each. He used one of them to

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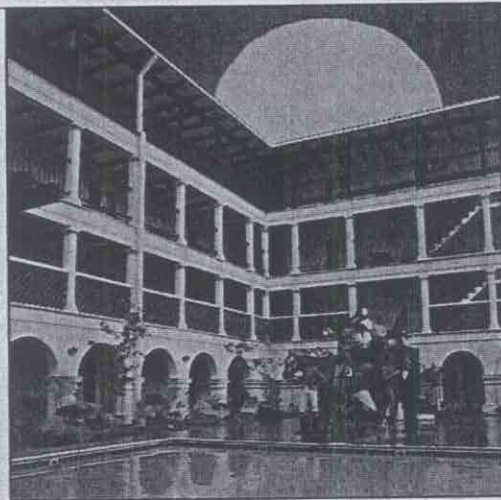
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shoot Ronald Reagan and three other men on a rainy sidewalk outside the Washington Hilton.

Who was John Hinckley, Jr.? In the minds of us who were in Dallas on November 22, 1963, John Hinckley was the assassin we had imagined for ourselves, the right-wing Dallas killer we had thought was in the Book Depository. He was the killer who would have given justice to the accusation that Dallas killed Kennedy. He was the monster of our guilty dreams, and isn't that the nature of tragedy, that all our dreams come true?

THIS TIME, HOWEVER, DALLAS WAS treated more kindly in the press, in part because too many cities had been host to similar tragedies and in part because the country had changed. If Dallas was still conservative, it was now no more conservative than the country that had elected Ronald Reagan. If Dallas was still religious—well, hadn't everyone been born again with Jimmy Carter? If Dallas was still provincial, wasn't the country itself decentralizing?

In all of those respects, the country had become more like Dallas, but Dallas had also become more like the rest of the nation. It was growing up, diversifying; it had become a city of fine restaurants and galleries, international flights, compelling architecture, but also a city of funky nightclubs, arty movies, experimental theater—a city with texture at last. In the conscience of its citizens, the Kennedy assassination was a critical correction, one that had kept the new world they were building from becoming a brave new world of technological fascism. The assassination had given Dallas a guilt complex, and as a result the city had become a more human and a more tolerant place to live.

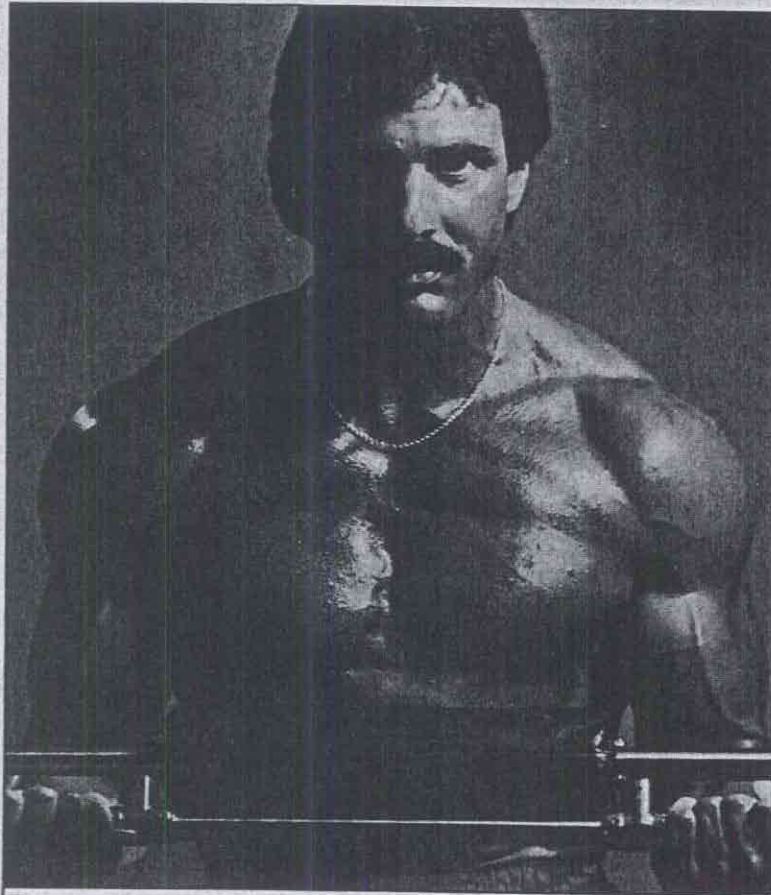
Although I was still in flight from the city, I watched it grow and change and noted on my occasional visits that the city was not only bigger, it was better. The newspapers had become the best in the state, sophisticated, profound, exciting. Dissent spoke in a loud voice now. The old Dallas defensiveness had calmed down. I stood amazed when the television show *Dallas* appeared, with a right-wing millionaire villain as its protagonist. Smug and cruel, J. R. Ewing personifies the evil that people associate with the city—he is a stereotype of the national image of Dallas—and yet people all over the world love him. He represents their own grasping ambitions; he has become a hero of the id. When Dallas laughed at *Dallas* it was a sign that the city was ready to forgive itself, to lay its burden down.

I remember my surprise at finding my father the object of community protests. When he first moved to Dallas he was dismayed, as everyone is, by its lack of natural beauty—physically, the city is like a mail-order bride. East Dallas, which stretches between Lakewood and downtown, had some of the most charming

homes in the city, but they were decayed and chopped into tenements. My father decided to risk loan money in the area, which had been red-lined by every lending institution in the city. He made loans to young couples who had almost no equity except a willingness to rehabilitate those old homes. At the same time, the Lakewood Shopping Center, which encompassed his bank, was run-down and neglected, and my father went to every shopkeeper and asked him to spruce up his store, to remove the piles of trash in back, to consider planting trees and taking down obtrusive signs. He had an effect. He got the city to landscape the traffic islands. His lending program became a model for the nation. After a while Lakewood got to be a more attractive place to live, not lovely but respectable, with a small-town charm that was almost unique in the city, and to a considerable degree it was a result of my father's efforts. So when he proposed to tear down a large portion of the shopping center to build a tower for his bank, he was stunned by the outcry he heard in the community. I listened to my father's side of the story with mixed feelings, for I knew how much he had poured himself into his community, but I was also sympathetic with his opponents. They have a vision different from my father's. The new world they want is not one of glassy office towers but of old stucco hardware stores. It is a sign, I think, of a better city that such arguments are taking place.

On the other hand—it is still Dallas, still a white man's town, in a time when cities all over the nation are changing the guard. The political establishment in the city has been challenged, but it is essentially unchanged. Of course the office tower would be built, because Dallas is still an urge toward the future. There is a price to pay for living in a city that is continually being born, and it can be measured in the lost feeling of rootedness that old hardware stores provide. To love Dallas is to be able to live without the consolation of the past, without the feeling of history underfoot. To love Dallas is to celebrate the thrill of the new, to smile at the cranes always on the horizon and the bulldozers clearing the pasture beyond the last development. Dallas does not build itself incrementally but exponentially, and it takes a kind of courage to live in a city that never pauses. It's a courage I don't think I have.

And yet I have come to respect Dallas, in a way that I respect very few cities. In the melodrama that we made of Kennedy's death it seemed that the promise of America had been extinguished in Dallas. But as I see that city now, I see the new world that Kennedy promised fulfilled in the place of his death. It is a human city, flawed and ambitious but with a self-knowledge that many another bustling town will never learn. It is both the burden and the nobility of Dallas that they shouldn't have to. ♣



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STILL ON THE CASE

(Continued from page 157)

Oswald's teeth—down to the tiniest detail. The medical examiner said that the Oswald buried in Oswald's grave was the same Oswald who had been in the Marines before he defected to Russia. The second-body buffs weren't satisfied, of course (they're still demanding a ruling), but the credibility of the whole Dallas buff community went right down the tubes.

ARRIVE IN DALLAS WITH A SUITCASE full of current buff literature, most of it newsletters. I've got the *Grassy Knoll Gazette*, put out by Robert Cutler. I've got Penn Jones' *Continuing Inquiry*. I've got Paul Hoch's *Echoes of Conspiracy*. And I've got *Coverups!* from Gary Mack of Fort Worth.

The last is new to me. But buried in a buff gossip column, there's a tip-off that it, too, is a product of Dallas-buff fratricide: "Gary Mack and Jack White were dismissed by Penn Jones as consultants to *The Continuing Inquiry*. No explanation was given."

I've heard a lot about Gary Mack. He is the industrious young Turk of the new generation of high-tech audiovisual-aids buffs who have supplanted the old-style document-indexing types. Over the years, they've blown up, enhanced, and assiduously analyzed every square millimeter of film and tape taken that day, and they've discerned lurking in the grainy shadows shapes and forms they say are gunmen. Leafing through Mack's newsletters, I come upon a fascinating photomontage of Grassy Knoll Gunmen on the front page of *Coverups!* There is Black Dog Man—I've seen him before—and a new one to me: Badge Man. I am familiar with various suspicious characters of their genre, such as the Babushka Lady and the Umbrella Man, to whom the photographic buffs have attributed various mysterious roles. I decide to call Gary Mack and check these guys out.

Black Dog Man. At first he was a furry shadow on top of the concrete wall behind the grassy knoll. Certain audiovisual-aids types saw in blowups of that furry shadow a manlike shape. In some blowups, they said, they could see a man firing a gun. Skeptical photo analysts on the staff of the House Select Committee on Assassinations thought that the furry shadow looked more canine than conspiratorial and dubbed the dark apparition Black Dog Man.

And there he is on the front page of the October issue of Gary Mack's newsletter. Next to Black Dog Man is Badge Man; an extreme blowup of a tiny square of what seems to be a tree shadow is accompanied by a visual aid, "a sketch of what he might look like if this photo is computer-enhanced." And suddenly—in the sketch

at least—Badge Man leaps out of the shadows and takes explicit human form. He's a man in the uniform of a Dallas police officer, complete with badge and shoulder patch. He appears to be firing a rifle concealed by what looks like a flare from a muzzle blast. In the foreground of the Polaroid from which this blowup was made, the Kennedy limousine is passing the grassy knoll and the president is beginning to collapse. It is less than a second after the fatal head shot. Am I watching Badge Man fire it? The House Select Committee photo panel reported, "Although it is extremely unlikely that further enhancement of any kind would be successful, this particular photo should be re-examined in light of the findings of the acoustics analysis," which placed a gunman behind the grassy knoll.

What does your guide, El Exigente, make of Black Dog Man and Badge Man? Much as I would like to have an enhanced portrait of the assassin at the moment he fired the fatal shot, I'm afraid my instinct is that these photos must be classified as an artifact of the Beatles-in-the-trees variety. Recall that when Bob Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* album came out—the first one after Dylan's near-fatal motorcycle accident—there were stories of cryptic messages embedded in the album-cover photograph? There was supposed to be a group shot of the Beatles—their four heads anyway—hidden in the shadows of the trees. I saw the Beatles in the trees once they were pointed out to me. But I don't think they were there, if you know what I mean. The same can be said for the thereness of Black Dog Man.

When I reach Gary Mack, he says he has something exciting to show me if I visit his Fort Worth home and investigatory headquarters: a beautiful blown-up enhancement of the Bronson film.

The Bronson film. The last, best hope that we'll get a motion picture of the "other assassins." Sort of the Shroud of Turin of the buff faith. Dallas onlooker Charles Bronson was taking home movies in Dealey Plaza that day. He caught the assassination in color. Showed it to the FBI. Nothing of interest, they said. Fifteen years later an assassination researcher named Robert Ranfel came across an FBI report, buried in 100,000 pages of declassified documents, about this film. Dogged Dallas assassination reporter Earl Golz tracked down Bronson—now in Ada, Oklahoma—checked out the film, and discovered something no one noticed before. Up there in the left-hand corner of the frame, the Bronson camera had caught the sixth-floor windows of the Texas School Book Depository. Not just the sniper's-nest window on the corner where Oswald was said to be perched but also the two adjacent windows. It's those two windows that Gary Mack wants me to see.

He also fills me in on his continuing

struggle to rescue the Dallas police tape from being reconsigned to the dustbin of history. Gary thinks he can save it. I'm not so sure. For a glorious period of about three years, the Dallas police tape represented a triumphant official vindication of everything—well, almost everything—assassination buffs had been saying since 1964. The tape (actually a Dictabelt made of transmissions from a motorcycle cop's open mike to police headquarters on November 22) was excavated from a box in a retired police intelligence officer's closet in 1978, after Mary Ferrell reminded the House Select Committee of its possible existence and probative value.

Acoustical analysis of the sound patterns submerged in the static on the police tape led the House Select Committee to the spectacular conclusion that "scientific acoustical evidence establishes a high probability that two gunmen fired at President Kennedy" and that the assassination was "probably a result of a conspiracy."

Not only that. The highly respected acoustics scientists who analyzed the tape concluded from their reconstruction of echo patterns and test firings in Dealey Plaza that the second gunman was actually on the grassy knoll. Yes, the much ridiculed assassination-buff obsession, the grassy knoll. The longest, most thorough official government investigation of the JFK assassination concluded that the buffs were right all along.

The vindication was short-lived, though. In 1982 a new panel of acoustics experts, this one convened at the request of the Justice Department by the National Academy of Sciences and known as the Ramsey Panel, blasted the police-tape findings out of the water. Its determination was that the so-called shots heard on the Dictabelt, including the grassy-knoll shot, took place a full minute after the shootings in Dealey Plaza that day and thus couldn't be shots at all.

And so we're back to square one. The acoustical evidence doesn't rule out a grassy-knoll gunman or a conspiracy or even the nine gunmen Penn Jones posits. But the mantle of scientific proof the buffs had downed now seems to be in shreds.

Not so, says Gary Mack. "Are you familiar with automatic gain control, Ron?" he asks me, and he launches into a highly complex, technical critique of the Ramsey Panel critique of the House Select Committee acoustics report. The Ramsey Panel misinterpreted automatic gain control in their retiming thesis, he says. They neglected to analyze the sixty-cycle power hum to see if the Dictabelt in question had been rerecorded. They neglected certain anomalies of the Dictabelt that could be cleared up by further analysis of echo-pattern matching and corroborated by a more precise jiggle analysis of another gruesome home movie, the one taken by Dallas dressmaker Abraham Zaprunder.

Gary sounds like he knows what he's

talking about, and perhaps he can make his case. But listening to his technobuff talk, I get a distinct sinking feeling that the Dallas police tape—like almost every other piece of “definitive” evidence in the case—is now forever lost in that limbo of ambiguity, that endless swamp of dispute that swallows up any certainty in the Kennedy case.

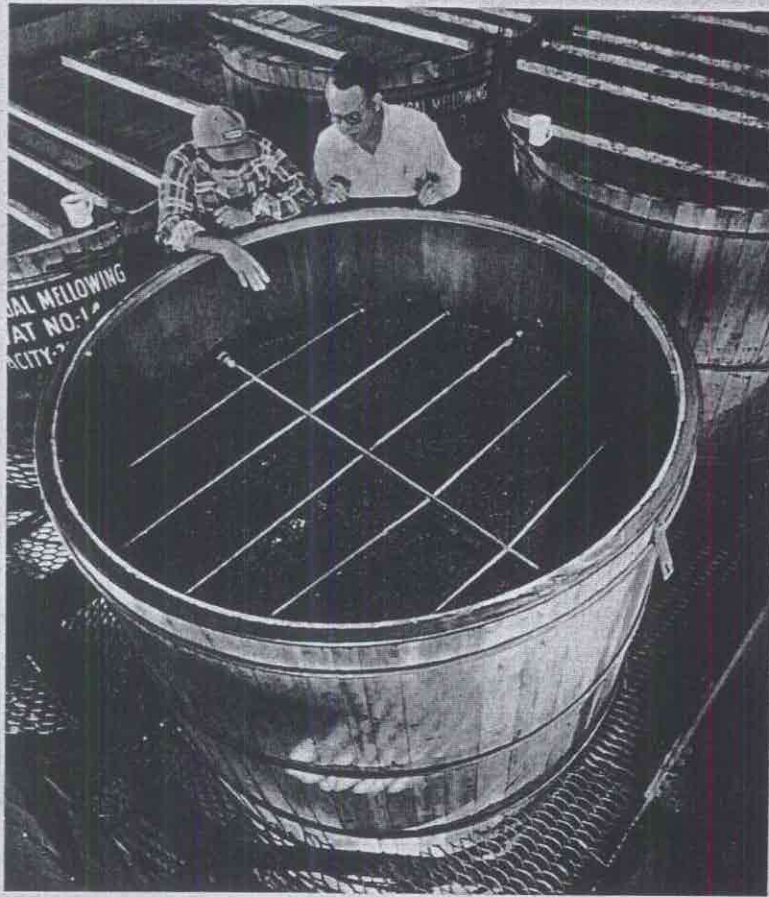
This morass of technobuff ambiguity leaves me utterly exhausted and depressed, but Gary Mack shifts the conversation to a missing-witness story. It isn't the greatest missing-witness story I've heard. Nothing like the classic Earlene-Roberts-rooming-house story. Nothing like the second-Oswald-car-salesman story. But it has enough of that *misterioso* provocativeness to give me a little thrill of that old-time buff fever and remind me why the whole hopeless confusing case has continued to fascinate me for two decades.

This particular missing-witness story concerns Oswald's whereabouts at the time of the shooting. No witness has ever placed him on the sixth floor any later than 11:55 a.m., 35 minutes before the gunfire. Oswald maintained that he was on the first floor throughout the shooting. And one witness, Bonnie Ray Williams, who was eating fried chicken on the sixth floor, stated that as late as 12:20 p.m. he was alone up there, that there was no Oswald on the sixth floor. Where was Oswald? The Warren Commission implied that he must have been hiding on the sixth floor in his sniper's nest from 11:55 on, while the Fried Chicken Man was chomping away.

But Gary Mack tells me about a witness, never questioned by the Warren Commission, who contradicts that hypothesis. She is Carolyn Arnold, now a resident of Stephenville. Back in 1963 she was executive secretary to the vice president of the Book Depository. She knew Oswald well by sight. She says that she came upon Oswald sitting alone, eating a sandwich in the employees' second-floor lunchroom at 12:15, just ten minutes before the motorcade was scheduled to pass the building. Her timing of this sighting has been corroborated convincingly by other employees, who noticed when she left her office to go to the lunchroom.

If Oswald was planning to assassinate the president from the sixth floor, what was he doing calmly eating lunch four floors below, right before the president was supposed to come into view? Could he have been that hungry, that calm? And if that was Oswald in the lunchroom, who were the figures spotted moving around on the sixth floor by witnesses across the street from the building at just about that time?

Whatever the significance of the Carolyn Arnold story—and perhaps it can be explained by eyewitness error—just listening to Gary Mack tell it brings me



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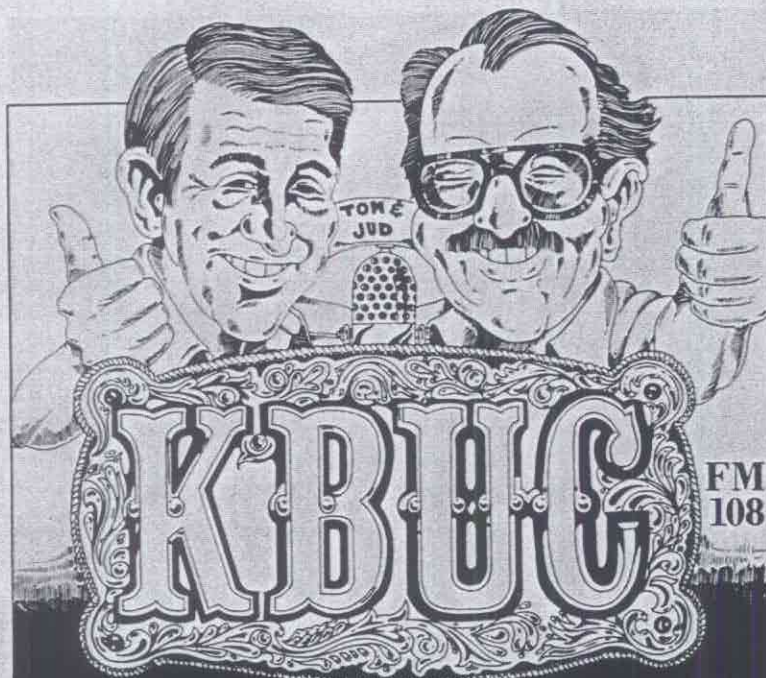
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back to that peculiar sense of dislocation that attracted me to the JFK case in the first place. That frisson of strangeness.

BRING UP THE *TWILIGHT ZONE* theme. It's summer 1964. I'm seventeen, and I'm in a small crowded theater in New York's Gramercy Park section. A fierce man strides across the stage with a pointer, gesturing contemptuously at a huge blown-up slide projection of Lee Harvey Oswald. It's the famous *Life* magazine cover photo, the one with Oswald posing in his back yard with a rifle in one hand, a copy of the Socialist Workers Party paper, the *Militant*, in the other, and a pistol on his hip. He's got that weird, glazed, grim-faced grin.

But there's something else going on in this picture, the man with the pointer is saying. Something going on with the shadows. Look at the direction of the shadow of the gun, he commands us. Now look at the direction of the shadow cast by Oswald's nose. Different angle. Something's wrong. This picture has been faked. It's part of the frame-up. That's Lee Harvey Oswald's head but someone else's body. The man with the pointer is, of course, Mark Lane. He has just come from Washington, where he has been representing Oswald's side of the story before the Warren Commission at the request of Oswald's mother, Marguerite. And investigating the case himself. Already he has turned up some stories the authorities don't want us to hear, he says. Stories that suggest deep currents of complicity between the Dallas police and the conspiracy to frame Oswald.

The Earlene Roberts story, for instance. Roberts was the landlady of Oswald's shabby Oak Cliff rooming house. She recounted an incident that occurred a half hour after the shooting. Oswald had returned home and disappeared into his bedroom, and she was sitting in her parlor watching coverage of the assassination on TV when a Dallas police squad car pulled up in front of her place. The car paused, then honked its horn twice and left. Shortly thereafter, Oswald emerged and headed off in haste, only to be intercepted—accidentally, according to the Warren Commission—by Officer J. D. Tippit, who was shot dead while attempting to apprehend him.

The police department denied that any of its vehicles passed or stopped at Oswald's address. The only car in the vicinity at the time, they said, was driven by none other than Officer Tippit. Just what was going on between Oswald and Tippit?

Whoa. *Twilight Zone* again. Most Americans remember exactly where they were and what they felt when they first heard that John Kennedy had been shot. I'm no different; I do, too. But I have to confess that I remember even more vividly where I was and what I felt when I first heard the Earlene Roberts story. I remem-

ber feeling a chill, feeling goose bumps crawling up from between my shoulder blades. There was a kind of thrill too, the thrill of being let in on some secret reality. Shadowy connections, suggestions of an evil still at large that ordinary people were not prepared to deal with. Dangerous knowledge.

That Earlene Roberts story certainly struck a nerve. And not just with me. Brian De Palma's second film, *Greetings*, while ostensibly about the draft, featured a character obsessed by Kennedy's assassination and by the Earlene Roberts story in particular. This guy was convinced, as is Penn Jones, that Earlene Roberts' death, before she was able to give testimony to the Warren Commission, was the work of the People Behind It All.

Dangerous knowledge. It's the recurrent theme in almost all the assassination-conspiracy films that followed De Palma's first. In Alan Pakula's *The Parallax View*, in William Richert's *Winter Kills*, in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, in De Palma's later *Blow Out*, the hero begins by investigating the death of a Witness Who Knows Too Much, and soon he becomes a Witness Who Knows Too Much himself. His attainment of a darker, more truthful vision of the way things really are makes him a target for assassination. A way, perhaps, for us to approach the horror of being assassinated, the unassimilable horror of what JFK experienced at Dealey Plaza.

Let me return to 1964, because in the fall of that year, just two months after hearing the Earlene Roberts story, I was fortunate enough to get to know the assassination researcher whose methods and judgment I still respect above all others in the field. His name is Josiah Thompson, and he was my freshman philosophy instructor at Yale. At the time I knew him, he was becoming increasingly preoccupied with two mysteries: the often misinterpreted nature of the mind of the gloomy Danish antirationalist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and the numinous hints of an alternate interpretation of the truth lurking in the shadows of the Warren Commission's 26 volumes.

His investigation of Kierkegaard resulted eventually in a highly acclaimed biography and a study of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings called *The Lonely Labyrinth*. His investigation of the teeming labyrinth of the Kennedy case took him into the Warren Report, then out into the world and down to Dallas, where he reinterviewed the witnesses, reexamined the evidence, and found new witnesses and new evidence. He produced what many regard as the most scrupulously researched and carefully thought-out critique of the official conclusions, a book called *Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro-Study of the Kennedy Assassination*.

And so with Thompson as my model, I came to think of critics of the Warren

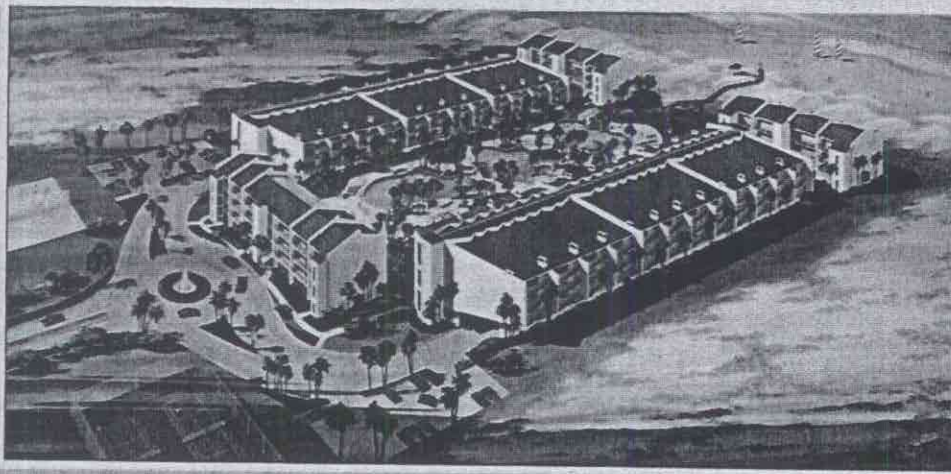
Report—the best of them, anyway—as intellectual heroes, defying conventional wisdom and complacency to pursue the truth. I had lost track of Thompson during the past ten years, and I was having trouble tracking him down to see what he thought of the JFK case after twenty years. It wasn't until I got to Dallas that I heard a strange story about him from one of the West Coast buffs who had found me in my hotel room through the buff grapevine. He'd heard that Thompson had abandoned his tenured professorship of philosophy and chucked his whole academic career to become a private eye somewhere on the West Coast. What the hell could that mean? Had he become a casualty of dangerous knowledge? Or had he fallen in love with it?

NEXT MORNING, RENDEZVOUS WITH Penn and Elaine at the Book Depository for the grand gunman tour. The Texas Historical Commission plaque at the base of the building still astonishes with its frank rejection of Warren Commission certainty. This is the building from which "Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly shot and killed" JFK.

"You ever been in the military, Ron?" Penn Jones is asking me. We've moved to the top of the grassy knoll, and Penn is pointing out sniper's nests in the buildings surrounding the killing ground down below.

There was hardly a building or tree

no doubt because he merged multiple & allegedly unrelated conspiracies & played by itself



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that hadn't bristled with guns that day, according to Penn's vision of things. There were gunmen on top of the Dal-Tex Building, gunmen in the Records Building, even gunmen up in the skies.

"Look over there," Penn says, pointing toward the top of the Post Office Annex. "That was an observation post. They had a man there overlooking things so he could assess the damage done" by the first nine gunmen in Dealey Plaza. If they failed, Penn says, he could alert the multiple teams of backup gunmen farther along the parade route. Or if necessary call in the airborne team.

"They," for Penn, is the military. He believes that the military killed Kennedy. Not the Mafia, not the CIA, not Cuban exiles, not some of the fusions of all three currently fashionable among buff theorists.

"Why the military?" I ask Penn. "Because they thought he'd withdraw from Viet Nam? Or—"

"Shit, no. So they could take over," he says.

Penn was in the military, a World War II transport officer in the North African campaigns. In some ways Penn is still in the military. Only, he's a general now. A master strategist. As he surveys the landscape of Dealey Plaza, pointing out the teams of gunmen, as we retrace the motorcade route through the streets of Dallas, examining the locations of backup gunmen teams, Penn is like a general reviewing his troops, a battlefield strategist pointing out the logic of his deployments.

And they *are* his, in the sense that—to my mind, anyway—they owe their existence more to the conceptions of his own mind, his strategic intelligence, the logic of what the military would do if Penn Jones were commanding it, than to any mundane criteria of reality.

Of course, Penn's army of gunmen doesn't spring entirely from his overactive imagination. We're standing on the railroad tracks now, the ones that cross over the Triple Underpass. Penn points out the famous railroad signal-tower perch of the late Lee Bowers. Up there on November 22, 1963, Lee Bowers had a clear view of the area behind the stockade fence that crests the grassy knoll. Right about here, where Penn, Elaine, and I are standing, police officer Joe Smith stopped a man who was exiting the scene with suspect haste, as Smith testified before the Warren Commission. The man showed Secret Service credentials to Smith. The Secret Service says that none of its agents could have been there at that time.

As for the late Lee Bowers, it was his "mysterious death," shortly after his Warren Commission testimony, that set Penn off on his twenty-year chronicling of deaths and disappearances of witnesses with dangerous knowledge.

"Lee Bowers was killed in a *one-car accident* in my hometown of Midlothian, Texas," Penn tells me, his drawl just

crawling with embittered sarcasm. "The doctor in Midlothian who examined him told me that when he admitted him, Bowers was in some sort of strange shock."

Some sort of strange shock. The tour of Dallas with Penn and Elaine puts me in shock. Some sort of strange trance. Ordinary features of the landscape are beginning to assume sinister aspects. The whole city seems to be teeming with teams of gunmen, backup gunmen, the ghosts of murdered witnesses.

Even things that are not there somehow testify, in Penn's vision, to the work of a conspiratorial intelligence. We've been cruising along Stemmons Freeway on the route the motorcade would have taken to JFK's speaking engagement at the Dallas Trade Mart. Past the site of what was once the old Cobb Stadium before it was torn down. There were reserve gunmen on top of the stadium, Penn tells me.

And we cruise by the site of the old Highlander Hotel in Highland Park. Now replaced by some big new condo tower. "The paymaster stayed here," Penn tells me. "It's also where the gunmen stayed the night before. They tore it down completely. I think it's significant that all these buildings were torn down."

Penn is fascinated by the first-class treatment the gunmen got before the day of the shooting.

"They treat the gunmen real well, *before*," he tells me. "They're mighty important. Every wish of theirs must be complied with."

Almost wistfully he describes the wish-fulfilled life of the gunmen in the secret, safe houses he says they occupied the nights before the Night Before.

"There was one up in Lake Lugert, Oklahoma," he says. "That was some damn place. They had anything they wanted. Gambling, women. Lobsters flown in *daily*. *Sheet*."

Of course, Penn says, things changed for the gunmen the Day After.

"They loaded them in the two getaway planes and then just blew up the planes—one of 'em over the Gulf of Mexico, the other one down there in Sonora Province, old Mexico."

Not every shrine has been torn down. Some have been quietly disintegrating. The Oak Cliff sites. The Earlene Roberts rooming house to which O. returned shortly after the shooting. The house, where he and Marina had lived as their marriage disintegrated that year. Jack Ruby's raunchy apartment and motel pads. The Texas Theater, where O. was finally cornered.

"They just let this area decay," Penn says—as if even the inexorable organic breakdown of wood fiber is due to a conscious decision *they* made.

I'll never forget pulling into the driveway of this Oswald-and-Marina abode. It isn't so much the shock of discovering around back the hauntingly familiar out-

side staircase that served as a background for the controversial O.-with-rifle-and-nose-shadow pix.

No, it is the expression on the face of the ancient Mexican man who apparently lives in the decaying shrine now. Evidently Penn is a regular, fairly well tolerated visitor here; when we arrive, the man—who is sitting on the sagging, splintered front porch with a child who appears to be his grandson—waves familiarly at Penn. But as we pass, I notice a deeply puzzled expression come over his face. Why do these crazy Anglos keep cruising my driveway? What kind of satisfaction is it they're after, that they never get?

But the thing I'll remember most about our tour this day is not the haunted landmarks or the ghostly gunmen they conceal. The thing I'll never forget, for its intensity and authenticity—an intensity that explains the shadowy world they've created—is the grief of Penn and Elaine.

Actually, it's Elaine's grief. I already know about Penn Jones' grief. It is all there in *Forgive My Grief*, his saga of murdered witnesses to the truth. The title is from Tennyson, by the way, from a passage of *In Memoriam* addressed to God, who took away the poet's closest friend:

Forgive my grief for one removed,
Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved.
Elaine's involvement in this whole thing

is hard to figure out, though. Why would a bright, young, attractive woman— young enough to have hardly known who JFK was when he was shot—why would she immerse herself in the buff biz after two decades, when it doesn't look like the case is on the verge of being cracked and all Penn offers is the despair and futility of mourning one lost witness after another?

I begin to get a clue to what might be motivating Elaine during the course of the tour, on our way back from the Oswald-and-Marina house, when Elaine spots a fat woman on the street.

"That looks like my stepmother," she says. "God she was unfair to me. Every time I see a fat woman, I think of her and how unfair she was."

"Look at that concrete bridge abutment up ahead," Penn is saying. "That's where William Whaley [the taxi driver who took Oswald from downtown to Oak Cliff] died in a crash just after he tried to testify about Ruby and Tippit."

"My mother died when she was twenty-five," Elaine says. "Most of the rest of my close relatives are dead now. All I have left is my grandmother."

And so it continues as the tour winds down, a counterpoint of Penn's public grief and Elaine's personal grief.

Later, after the tour is over and we are cooling off with some beers, Elaine tries to explain why she has made Penn's project her life's work.

"From the moment I met Penn, I knew

that's what I was gonna do—work on the case with him," she tells me. "And when I started, I was so excited."

"What happened?" I ask.

"Then I met all these people, and I saw there was no hope."

"Which people?"

"The other people on the case." She reels off a list of prominent buffs.

"What's wrong with them?" I ask.

"They none of them really loved John Kennedy. I remember meeting David Lifton and asking him point-blank, 'Did you love John Kennedy?' And he wouldn't give me a direct answer. And that's the real question: did you love the man? If you didn't love him, why work on the case? Then it's just a hobby or some kind of excitement."

Penn Jones interjects an anecdote about Lifton, who has attracted a certain amount of envy and resentment from other buffs for repackaging familiar criticisms of the JFK-autopsy mystery into his trajectory-reversal theory. It requires us to believe that the conspirators shot Kennedy from the front, then spirited his body away and altered the wounds so that the autopsy would establish that the fatal bullet came from behind. Lifton is one of the few commercially successful buffs. *Best Evidence* was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for four months and sold hundreds of thousands of copies in paperback.

Penn tells me, "I was at this party out in

after the Ball

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California some years ago, and it was a party for me, and David Lifton was trying to get in, but they wouldn't let him. So I went out and told him, 'David, I'd like to have you in, but the party's not being given by me. It's just for me.'"

Lifton denies that the incident ever happened. And now it seems the tables have turned anyway, with Lifton getting the attention and going on all the talk shows, and Penn's newsletter, according to Elaine, in decline.

"We're down to two hundred subscribers now," she says. "And most of them are old. Pretty soon they'll die, and in a few years we'll be down to fifty. And that's what we have to look forward to. In two more years it'll be all over. It's pretty sad."

But Elaine isn't going to give up. "You get used to people laughing at you. You get used to the scorn and the ridicule. You put up with it because if you really believe in something, you don't stop, no matter what. It's like a religion."

She and Penn drift into a talk about religion, specifically about Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and philosopher, Penn's idol.

"When Penn's gone, I'm gonna become a hermit like Merton," Elaine says. "Why should I bother with people anymore? I've lost everyone I loved except my grandmother and Penn. When they're gone, there won't be anyone."

Elaine's sadness has become so deep and so comprehensive that it's hard to believe it could get worse, but we haven't really touched bottom yet. She rallies briefly, then heads down again.

"But I guess you've got to keep up the fight," she says, rather unconvincingly. "Still it's pretty sad. It's heartbreaking, depressing. There are days when Penn and I both weep over it. We both grieve over it."

"Over it?" I ask. "You mean—"

"It's sad for the state of the country. But really it's more sad for John Kennedy. That's what we can't get over."

It is then that I realize that these people are not buffs. They are mourners. Their investigation of the assassination is a continuation of his last rites that they can't abandon. Unlike the rest of us, they haven't stopped grieving.

WHILE THE POETS PEOPLED THE world of that November 22 with a grief-generated galaxy of hostile ghosts, the official investigators narrowed their focus to one man. Somehow lost in the controversy over the acoustical evidence is that the House Select Committee actually came up with a prime suspect. A candidate for the Man Behind It All. And testimony to back that up. It all comes down to what you think of the tail-and-the-dog story.

The tail-and-the-dog story is at the heart

of the hottest area of assassination theory still thriving after all these years: mob-hit theory. In the past few years, mob-hit theory has succeeded in shouldering aside such other rival contenders as CIA-anti-Castro-hit theory, pro-Castro-hit theory, and KGB-complicity theory and in pushing itself to the forefront of consideration.

The rush to the mob-hit judgment began in 1979 with the publication of the final report of the House Select Committee. Written by organized-crime expert and chief counsel Robert Blakey, the committee report comes within a whisker of calling the events of November 22, 1963, a gangland slaying and within a whisker of a whisker of pinning the contract on New Orleans mob boss Carlos Marcello.

"The committee found that Marcello had motive, means, and opportunity to have President John F. Kennedy assassinated, though it was unable to establish direct evidence of Marcello's complicity," the report states. "The committee identified the presence of one critical evidentiary element that was lacking with other organized crime figures examined by the committee: credible associations relating both Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby to figures having a relationship, albeit tenuous, with Marcello's crime family."

The key here is Oswald's uncle Dutz. Ruby's organized-crime ties—to teamster thugs connected with Jimmy Hoffa, to Sam Giancana and guys like John Roselli who were in on the CIA-mob plots to assassinate Fidel Castro—had long been known. What the House Select Committee established was an Oswald organized-crime connection: his uncle Charles "Dutz" Murret, of New Orleans, whom the committee described as both "a surrogate father of sorts throughout much of Oswald's life in New Orleans" and "an associate of significant organized crime figures affiliated with the Marcello organization."

The abstract connections are all there. We know that Marcello hated the Kennedy brothers with a deep bitterness that grew out of much more than fear of the threat that Bobby Kennedy's organized-crime prosecutions posed to his billion-dollar racketeering empire. Marcello had experienced the kind of physical humiliation at the hands of Kennedy justice that can brew a passion for revenge surpassing mere calculation of profit and loss.

Just two months after John Kennedy's inauguration, Marcello was virtually kidnapped in New Orleans by immigration officers acting at the direction of Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department. Arrested, handcuffed, he was dragged without a hearing to a Border Patrol plane and, according to Robert Blakey, "flown 1200 miles to Guatemala City and dumped there, without luggage." When his presence became known to the authorities

in Guatemala, he was expelled and "un-ceremoniously flown to an out-of-the-way village in the jungle of El Salvador, where [he and his lawyer] were left stranded. Salvadorian soldiers jailed and interrogated the two men for five days, then put them on a bus and took them twenty miles into the mountains. . . . They were hardly prepared for the mountain hike, as they were dressed in silk shantung suits and alligator shoes. . . . Marcello fainted three times. . . . During a downhill scramble, Marcello fell and broke two ribs" before reaching an airstrip and managing to reenter the U.S. illegally.

Indubitably, in all this unaccustomed humiliation at the hands of the Kennedys, the motive is there.

But where is the direct connection? That's where the tail-and-the-dog story comes in. The teller of the tale is Ed Becker, whom Blakey describes as "a former Las Vegas promoter who had lived on the fringe of the underworld."

The scene is Churchill Farms, Marcello's plantation outside New Orleans. It is September 1962. Becker is there to discuss a business proposition, but the talk turns to the Kennedy campaign against organized crime. The mention of Bobby Kennedy's name drives Marcello into a rage. "Don't worry about that little Bobby son of a bitch," he shouts, according to Becker. "He's going to be taken care of."

How? Becker testified before the House Select Committee that the plan was to "take care of" Bobby by "taking care of" his brother and that Marcello "clearly stated that he was going to arrange to have President Kennedy murdered in some way," Becker said that Marcello compared Bobby to the tail and his brother Jack to the whole dog, citing a proverb: If you cut off the tail, the dog will keep biting; but if you chop off the head, the dog will die, tail and all.

The committee took a lot of time painstakingly and convincingly corroborating the circumstantial details of the story. Then they called Marcello in to testify about it. He denied it. But he also testified before the committee in executive session that he made his living as a tomato salesman, testimony that his recent Brilab conviction calls into question.

The tail-and-the-dog story may not be enough evidence to indict or convict, although I have been told that the committee staff forwarded its Marcello material to the Justice Department in order to encourage it to do just that. But Becker's story takes mob-hit theory a step beyond motive, means, and opportunity in the abstract.

THAT NIGHT. BACK IN MY HOTEL room after Penn Jones' tour, recovering from the plunge into undiluted grief, I continue calling my buff contacts across the country. A long midnight talk with Bay Area buff Robert

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Because, after all these years the question for most researchers is no longer whether Oswald was involved but who he was. Was he KGB or CIA? Was he a pro-Castro partisan infiltrating anti-Castro groups, or was he an anti-Castro activist setting up false pro-Castro fronts? Was he informing for the FBI or being informed on? Did he support JFK or hate him? There is convincing evidence on both sides of each of these questions. How could one man have created so much ambiguity about his true identity in so short a time? And why? Was he just confused? Or was he out to confuse?

Ranfel unearthed a clue to this dilemma, an episode that took place during Oswald's mysterious sojourn in New Orleans the summer before the assassination. The Gillin story first surfaced in a document that wasn't declassified until 1977, an FBI memo about an interview with a New Orleans assistant district attorney named Edward Gillin. On the day Oswald was killed, Gillin phoned the FBI to report a strange encounter he had had in the summer of 1963 with a man calling himself Lee Oswald. How this skinny guy named Oswald had come into his office and started talking about a book he'd read by Aldous Huxley. A book about psychedelic drugs. "He was looking for a drug that would open his vision, you know, mind expansion," Gillin recalled. He had come to the assistant DA, Oswald said, because he wanted to know if such drugs were legal. And how to get them.

Oswald and Aldous Huxley. What a bizarre meeting of minds. Oswald and psychedelic drugs. What a combination of ingredients. And yet Ranfel and his collaborators, Martin Lee and Jeff Cohen of the Assassination Information Bureau, came up with several other periods in Oswald's career during which the psychedelic connection might have been made.

The U-2 base in Atsugi, Japan, for instance. Where Oswald served as a Marine Corps radar operator before he defected to the Soviets. Ranfel and company discovered that during the time Oswald was stationed there, Atsugi base was a storage and testing facility for the drugs used in the CIA's Operation Artichoke. Artichoke was the forerunner of Operation MK-ULTRA, the CIA's search for a foolproof truth serum—at first called the Twilight Zone drug—which led to the testing of LSD, often on unsuspecting military personnel. Ranfel and his colleagues located a Marine who was sta-

tioned at Atsugi at the same time as Oswald and says that he himself was given LSD and other psychedelics.

And then there was Oswald's curious bad-trip episode at Atsugi. Ranfel, Cohen, and Lee described it last March in their *Rolling Stone* article, "Did Oswald Drop Acid?": "While Oswald was on guard duty, gunfire was heard. He was found sitting on the ground, more than a little dazed, babbling about seeing things in the bushes... what in the Sixties would become known as a bad trip."

Ranfel and company point to the widespread suspicion that Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union may have been staged with the connivance and encouragement of the CIA or military intelligence, both of which were at the time repeatedly trying to plant "defector" operatives inside the USSR. They cite CIA sources revealing that agents dispatched into situations with the potential for hostile interrogation—including the use of psychedelic interrogation aids—were often exposed to such drugs before setting out on those missions, so they would be able to recognize and cope with the effects of the drugs. People so exposed were known in the intelligence world as enlightened operatives.

Oswald an enlightened operative? Oswald a Huxleyan psychedelic mystic? The implications are, indeed, as they used to say, mind-blowing.

For one thing, as Ranfel remarks tonight, "it might explain that strange, quizzical smile you see on the guy's face in so many of his pictures."

What was going on behind that smile? The Psychedelic Oswald hypothesis offers an explanation, a way of reconciling some of the intractable contradictions he left behind. CIA or KGB? Pro-Castro or anti-Castro? Perhaps the answer is neither and both. Perhaps the answer is that he enjoyed the game of posing as both, of playing at infiltrating one side on behalf of the other, of playing both sides against the other, the pleasures of the enlightened operative. We know that as a boy Oswald's favorite TV show was *I Led Three Lives*. Had drugs given a psychedelic twist to the solemnity of that classic of role playing?

The Psychedelic Oswald hypothesis might go a long way toward explaining some of the mysteries of Oswald's strange summer in New Orleans—those months before the assassination when he began playing the dangerous game of pro- and anti-Castro politics and which climaxed with his mysterious pre-assassination trip to Mexico City.

NEW ORLEANS. THE FRENCH QUARTER'S decaying fringe. 544 Camp Street, to be specific. The most intriguing address in the whole JFK case. Only it's not here anymore. I came all the way to this steamy, sweaty late August swamp of a city to enter the building at

544 Camp Street because some buff or other told me it was still here. Because, of all the shrines in the story of O., this one might hold the clue to what was going on in his mind in the summer of 1963, when he fled Dallas, arrived here, and began to act weird.

One thing almost all conspiracy theorists, even Warren Commission defenders, agree on is that though the assassination was an act executed in Dallas, it was conceived in the contagion of intrigue that infected the mind of Oswald that August in New Orleans.

The mind of Oswald. I'm beginning to feel some inking of the turmoil therein as I stand before the curious sculpture that has replaced the now-demolished building at 544 Camp Street.

I fled Dallas yesterday, sick of brain and body. A bad case of food poisoning got to my body. So bad that for a while I thought I'd end up as number 189 in Penn Jones' list of suspicious casualties of the case. (Of course, how could they know I would stuff myself with barbecue in that particular place on Mockingbird Lane?)

It was Gary Mack's assassination film festival that got to my brain. Drove me out of town. Not the goat's-head hypothesis, not the eyestrain from the Bronson-film blowups. No, it was the Oswald craniotomy controversy that took me out of the merely maddening world of *Blow-Up* right into *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* horror.

Should I tell you about this experience, or will you think it too ghoulish, too gruesome?

Notes on the assassination film festival. Arrived Gary Mack's lovely suburban Fort Worth tract home. Eager to see the Bronson film, but first there was Gary's critique of the goat's-head hypothesis.

The goat's-head hypothesis is the official explanation of the most horrible moment in that horror-filled home movie known as the Zapruder film. The moment when the fatal head shot appeared to slam the president back into the seat of his car as though it had been a frontal hit.

Gary ran and reran that moment for me on his home projector and screen set.

Not that I objected. After all, it could be argued that if you haven't seen the Zapruder film, you haven't actually experienced the assassination. You know a president was shot, an office vacated, but you haven't seen the man's head brutally blown apart, you haven't seen John Kennedy die, and so perhaps you haven't had a chance to confront the loss.

It was the sudden appearance in the seventies of bootleg copies of the Zapruder film and the showing of high-quality copies to congressmen that did more than anything to get the Senate and the House to launch their own investigations of the shooting.

Because, watching that shot knock Ken-

nedly backward, all the senses cry out that it came from the front. But Oswald, we know, was behind. Which would mean a second gunman and therefore a conspiracy.

And yet from a restudy of the autopsy evidence the House Select Committee concluded—just as the Warren Commission had—that the head shot was fired from behind.

"How could that be?" I asked Gary Mack.

"Well, they cited the films of the goat's-head tests," Gary said. "Back in 1948 the Army did filmed studies of the impact of bullets on goats' heads that demonstrated what they called a neuromuscular reaction, which in certain circumstances will cause a backward motion even with a shot from behind."

"And do you accept that?" I asked.

"Well, the thing they fail to take note of," he told me, "is that in the neuromuscular reaction, the extremities are supposed to go rigid. Now if you look closely at the president at the moment he's hit—here, I'll slow it down so you can see that doesn't happen to Kennedy; he's all loose and wobbly."

Next, the Bronson film. *Real Blow-Up* stuff. There was the limo turning the corner onto Elm Street right below the Book Depository, beginning to head downhill toward the Triple Underpass and the spot a hundred yards farther down Elm, where the shots would hit. The real mystery of that particular moment, a mystery that becomes apparent once you've walked the motorcade's route in Dealey Plaza, past the Book Depository and down toward the fatal spot, a mystery neither the official inquiries nor the amateur critics have satisfactorily explained or even addressed, is this: why didn't Oswald, or whoever was up in the Book Depository, shoot the president when he was coming right toward the sniper's-nest window, when he was heading down Houston Street straight into his gunsight, a mere thirty yards away? Why did the assassin wait until the president's car turned the corner onto Elm Street and began pulling away? Was there an inner struggle, some crisis of conscience going on in the assassin's mind? Did he almost decide to let his target slip away unharmed?

The Bronson-film blowup that Gary Mack showed me that afternoon did not address that question. The Bronson film was really a kind of ghost story. Because in the early footage, six minutes before the limo reached the fatal turn onto Elm Street, there, up in the corner of the frame, in the windows six floors above the street, pale, ghostly, evanescent shapes flickered.

Gary had blowups of the crucial frames. They showed dim gleams of shadowy shapes in the corner sniper's-nest window. And pale, ghostly presences moving, blotches and blurs, in the two windows



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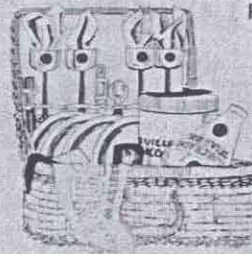
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next to that. Windows that should have been empty at the time of the shooting, according to the lone-assassin theory.

Assassins? Or artifacts in the photo-sensitive emulsion?

Gary Mack thinks they're men wearing pale green and magenta shirts. They could be. They could be John, Paul, George, and Ringo, for all I can tell. As a matter of fact, does anyone know exactly where the Fab Four were that day? If we go by the cui bono, or who-benefits, theory of the assassination, the finger of guilt could well swing toward the lovable Liverpudlian lads, since it's always been my belief that the Beatlemania that swept America just eight weeks after the assassination was really a hysterical transference of repressed JFK-assassination shock and grief. The link being the hair—both John Kennedy and John Lennon being loved for the look of their locks.

I refrained from exploring this theory with Gary, but he had convincing technical answers to my other objections. He was certain that he had prima facie evidence of conspiracy right there on his screen, the kind of evidence no goat's-head shoots can refute, and that costly computer enhancement, which he can't afford, might even show us human features as well as the shirts of the assassins.

But scientific evidence alone is not enough here. This case requires what Kierkegaard called a leap of faith. The existence of God, K. argued, can never be proved by constructing a scaffolding of rational argument. Faith can only come through a leap from that scaffolding into the realm of what he called the absurd. And El Exigente here is not ready to make that leap. He is troubled also by the question of what happened to the green and magenta men and, if they were up there shooting, what happened to their rifles and bullets?

No leap of faith required in the craniotomy controversy, though. No, this one requires a leap back into the grave. Oswald's grave. Or, as Gary prefers, the grave of Oswald's impostor. Because Gary had new evidence that very well might be enough to cause people to open up Oswald's grave *again*. That's right. Just two years after the notorious Eddowes-Marina exhumation seemed to establish that Oswald was the guy buried in Oswald's grave, Gary came upon a key discrepancy in the exhumation evidence.

He began to explain the thing to me in great and gruesome detail, a tale that might be called the Clue of the Assassin's Skull.

To understand the importance of his new discovery, Gary said, you have to know what they did to Oswald's skull during his first autopsy back in 1963.

"It's part of the record they did a craniotomy on him, back then," Gary told me. "They sawed off the top of his skull with

a power saw. They reached underneath the brain, cut it off, and lifted it out, and they noted in the official record that a craniotomy had been done.

"Now, when they did the exhumation this time, no mention was made of a craniotomy. And then Paul Groody, the mortician, said it had suddenly struck him after they had reburied the corpse that he hadn't noticed that a craniotomy had been done on the skull of whoever it was buried in Oswald's grave. The skin had rotted away, leaving a naked skull. But with a craniotomy, the top of the skull should have fallen off. It didn't. In fact, there are videotapes of the exhumation showing them handling the skull, even holding it upside down, and nothing falls off. And at one point they severed the head and placed it on a metal stand. Somebody bumped it and it rolled onto the table, but the top still didn't fall off. Which proves that it can't be Oswald's skull down there, that it must be an impostor. Wouldn't you like to see that tape, Ron?"

At that point I made an excuse and fled town.

AND SO I AM HERE AT 544 CAMP Street. Trying to forget about Oswald's skull. Trying to get inside his head. Let me explain why this particular address is so important.

Shortly after Oswald arrived in New Orleans in April 1963, he embarked on a mystifying campaign of dangerous and duplicitous political intrigue whose motive is still obscure. One of his first acts was to contact the national headquarters of the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) to get a charter to set up a New Orleans chapter. He gave the name "A. J. Hidell," one of his false identities, as president and only member of the chapter.

At the same time, he was approaching anti-Castro Cuban-exile groups, declaring that he shared their feelings, boasting of his marksmanship and his Marine training in guerrilla warfare, and telling them that he wanted to be sent on a paramilitary mission to Cuba.

Then, in August 1963, one of the anti-Castro activists he had been soliciting came upon Oswald distributing pro-Castro pamphlets in his role as one-man Fair Play for Cuba Committee. A fight ensued. Oswald was arrested and jailed. Demanded to see an FBI agent. Told the bureau he was willing to inform on the pro-Castro movement.

Just what was he up to? And on behalf of whom? That's where that address 544 Camp Street becomes so interesting. It's at the heart of the paradox of O.'s simultaneous pro-Castro and anti-Castro activity. The address first surfaced in the case when it was found rubber-stamped on one of the pro-Castro tracts Oswald was handing out. It identified 544 Camp Street as

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the headquarters of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. And yet not only did the building at that address never house the FPCC but it also swarmed with right-wing anti-Castro groups and was the headquarters of a right-wing ex-FBI agent named Guy Banister, who was that very summer recruiting people to infiltrate pro-Castro movements.

What was Oswald up to? As far back as 1964, Warren Commission staffers were scratching their heads over that and writing memos to each other about the possibility that Oswald's paper FPCC group was a front set up to infiltrate the pro-Castro movement on behalf of the anti-Castro group based in 544 Camp Street.

They never were able to resolve it. When the staffers presented their memo on Oswald in New Orleans to the harried chief counsel of the Warren Commission, it came back with these words scrawled on it: "At this stage we are supposed to be closing doors, not opening them."

Subsequent Senate and House assassination investigations tried to reopen the doors to 544 Camp Street but found only doors within doors.

"We have evidence," then-Senator Richard Schweiker declared, "which places at 544 Camp Street intelligence agents, Lee Oswald, the mob, and anti-Castro Cuban exiles."

Yes, behind those doors Oswald had gotten himself entangled in some of the darker strands in the fabric of American life. And yet what does it all prove? Perhaps there is a clue behind another set of doors—*The Doors of Perception*.

Consider this passage from Huxley's classic account of the psychedelic experience, based on his mescaline trips:

The schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline . . . which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate countermeasures, from murderous violence at one end of the scale [italics mine] to catatonia, or psychological suicide, at the other end. And once embarked upon the downward, the infernal road, one would never be able to stop. . . .

"If you started the wrong way," I said in answer to the investigator's questions, "everything that happened would be a proof of the conspiracy against you. It would be self-validating. You couldn't draw a breath without knowing it was part of the plot."*

This last paragraph strikes me as a good

description of the mind of the assassination buff as well as of the assassin.

Up until now there have been three theories relating to Oswald's strange immersion in the subcurrents swirling around 544 Camp Street: (1) he was a pro-Castro activist infiltrating anti-Castro movements on behalf of Cuban agents, (2) he was an agent of anti-Castro forces using a pro-Castro front to infiltrate Cuba, perhaps to kill Castro, and (3) he was a pro-Castro activist being cultivated and set up as a patsy by sinister anti-Castro-mob-intelligence world operatives.

These contradictory theories have one thing in common. They all make Oswald a pawn in someone else's game.

If, however, we go through the doors of perception and look at New Orleans through the eyes of an "enlightened" O., another way of thinking about the ambiguities suggests itself.

Look at New Orleans through the eyes of an O. whose favorite TV program as a child was *I Led Three Lives*. Who may have absorbed the dark conspiracy-obsessed consciousness of that Huxley passage. Someone who has been a U.S. Marine, then a Soviet citizen, then a U.S. citizen again. Someone for whom change of identity has become second nature, someone who has seen the world from both sides and been disillusioned by both. Someone who—with his doors of perception opened—thinks he sees through it all. Someone for whom the only pleasure now is in the posing, the plotting, and the counterplotting. Look at O. as a pre-assassination assassination buff. Not a lone nut but a lone mastermind, deploying identities the way Penn Jones deploys gunmen. What a paradise New Orleans would have seemed that steamy summer to someone like that, with its murky web of plot and counterplot.

How convenient 544 Camp Street would have been. So many strands of intrigue so close at hand, so many strings so easy to pull.

How inconvenient for my purposes that 544 Camp Street has disappeared from the face of the earth. How I wanted to walk its halls and get a feel for its atmosphere. But the building was torn down some years ago to make way for a new federal court building. The old building's exact location at the corner of Lafayette Street is now a concrete plaza empty except for a large, abstract, federally subsidized sculpture.

And yet that sculpture . . .

The best way to describe the sculpture would be to call it a sixteen-foot twisted helix of black painted steel. Military-industrial-complex-size *damaged chromosomes*. Its title: *Out of There*. Hard to believe its creator did not know the significance of the place in which his work was installed. A better monument to the tortuous doubling and redoubling of the mind of Lee Harvey Oswald

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ing a case for the
agency?
First you went on a coffee kick,
then you went nutty for almonds.

Now go
plum
crazy!

Plum
Gekkeikan



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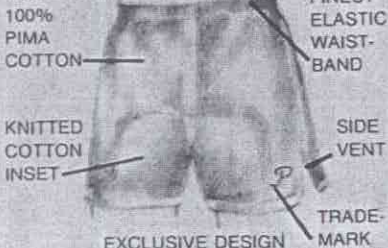


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could not be imagined. I wander south on Camp Street, passing comatose derelicts, disintegrating warehouse buildings, and dingy rooming houses. Come upon the Crescent Street Garage, where O. used to drop in and read gun magazines in the office. Next to the Reily Coffee Company, where he was employed, greasing coffee-grinding machines. The garage was also, according to the testimony of a mechanic, a depot for unmarked FBI and Secret Service cars. The mechanic said that he saw envelopes pass between agents in unmarked cars and Oswald.

Back up the street, past *Out of There*, to the all-night drugstore on the corner of Canal. Another O. hangout that summer. Horrible glaring fluorescents that must have been around since that summer, truly a depressing place, the nature of whose clientele can be surmised from a scrawled sign over the prescriptions counter: "Due to Uncertainties All Drug Sales Are Final."

Due to uncertainties, I push through the sweaty atmosphere back toward my hotel, mired in the maze of uncertainties surrounding O.'s Camp Street summer. His sojourn there suggests that everything proves nothing. Provides support for almost every conspiracy theory; proves none.

AND SO THERE IT IS. AFTER ALL these years. Theories, uncertainties, possible connections, suspicious coincidences. Yes, the Warren Commission investigation was inept and incomplete, relied on information supplied by agencies with a stake in covering up their role. And yet, twenty years later, several minor and one major congressional inquiry down the line, there is only more uncertainty.

I speak to Robert Ranftel again. This time about the dismaying question of whether it is time to call it quits, admit defeat, and give up the whole intractable case. Perhaps even concede that—in the absence of any proven alternative—Oswald may have acted alone; the Warren Commission, for all its bungling, might have gotten it right after all.

"What about the mob-hit theory," I ask Ranftel. "Isn't there any hope for that? I mean the House Committee pretty much endorsed it?"

"Well, mob-hit theory is where the action is now," Ranftel says. "Everybody's writing their mob-hit book. Did you see the latest—*Contract on America* [by David Scheim, subtitled *The Mafia Murders of John and Robert Kennedy*]?"

"Do you think mob-hit theory is just another buff trend?"

"I think the organized-crime theory is sort of a halfway house out of the Kennedy case for a lot of buffs," he says.

"A halfway house?"

"Well, it solves a lot of problems. You look at the typical mob hit. It's a murder

that goes unsolved. And the people who did it typically never talk. So you can almost use the fact that the JFK case remains unsolved as evidence it was a mob hit. It allows a lot of people to walk away from the case and say we've brought it as far as it can go. You see a lot of assassination buffs now turning into organized-crime buffs."

A halfway house out of the case. Ranftel's phrase suddenly clarifies for me a persistent subtext I thought I'd been picking up in my conversations with some of the best of the buffs. Take Paul Hoch, for instance. Almost universally regarded as one of the most careful and meticulous researchers in the game. A computer programmer by profession, he specialized in looking into an area of ambiguity and searching the thousands of cubic feet of declassified documents in the archives until he found the single document that clarified the point in question. He was still working on the case—publishing his *Echoes of Conspiracy* newsletter—but his work now was filled with echoes of echoes. Reports of reports. Clippings. There seemed to be no edge, no direction, no sense that any of this was leading to anything.

"I get the impression that you're shifting from being an assassination investigator to something more like a commentator," I told Hoch.

"I think that's true. A historian might be more accurate. I try to keep the record straight."

"But what about solving the case?" I asked.

"I just don't know," he said. "I just don't know if it's too late now."

TOO LATE? WOULD IT MATTER IF it weren't? Maybe that's the real question. Maybe, after all, there's no big secret, no clandestine conspiracy there to uncover. Immersed once again in the frustrations of the case, the frequent foolishness and apparent futility of the buff biz, I find myself almost longing to succumb to the simplicity and conventional comfort of lone-assassin certainty. To be able to stuff all the seething ambiguities, strange coincidences, provocative hints, all the suggestions, implications, curious connections, and mysterious sightings that the critics have turned up, just stuff them all in a drawer and say, "Case closed."

Before I do that, though, there is one man I want to track down and talk to. A private eye. My onetime philosophy prof turned buff turned shamus: Josiah Thompson. What will the author of *The Lonely Labyrinth* have to say about the JFK case now, after twenty years, when it has grown more labyrinthine—and lonelier.

I have some misgivings about calling him. Afraid, I guess, that he has become another casualty of the case. Picturing him in some seedy Sam Spade-like office,

embittered and cynical over his failure to crack the JFK case, trudging through the fog, doing divorce work or something similarly dispiriting. But after the first five minutes on the phone with him I know that Thompson is just the person I am looking for. He has emerged from the maze with his lively intelligence, judicious wit, and wry humor intact. And his private-eye work has given him new insights into the problems of the Kennedy case.

He begins by explaining why he chose to make the switch from professor to private eye. After the publication of *Six Seconds in Dallas*, after serving as a consultant on the evidence for *Life* magazine's JFK reinvestigation in 1966 and 1967, he returned to a prof job at Haverford College, disillusioned by the fiasco of the Garrison investigation.

"Garrison just blew the critics out of the water," Thompson tells me. "So I sort of gave up for a while in the late sixties."

After completing his Kierkegaard biography in 1973, he turned his attentions to the complexities of that other twisted and tormented late-nineteenth-century thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche.

While he was on leave out in San Francisco writing a biography of Nietzsche, he had dinner with famed private investigator Hal Lipset. At the time, Lipset was being considered as a possible chief investigator for the newly formed House Select Committee on Assassinations. But Thompson found himself enthralled by Lipset's discussion of his own cases.

"Just on a lark I hit him for a job," Thompson tells me. "And he gave me one. Before I knew it, I was working for five dollars an hour doing surveillance in Oakland."

He was good enough that when Lipset's partner David Fechheimer formed his own firm, he asked Thompson to come to work for him and gave him a murder case for his first assignment.

"I started working on a really great case," he tells me. "And I couldn't give that up. It was too much fun."

In a short time, it seems, he turned into an absolute ace of a private eye.

There's one case in particular that pleases him. A Korean-born prisoner. Jailed for five years on a murder rap. Thompson reinvestigated the original case. Got it overturned. Got his man out of jail.

"He didn't do it," Thompson tells me. "I know who did it."

Interesting: he got an innocent man off, and he knows the identity of the real killer, who is presumably still walking around.

Dangerous knowledge. It is gratifying to find that Thompson hasn't fled from the frustrations of the seemingly insoluble but has instead embraced them. I envy him; I am tempted to hit him up for a private-eye job myself. But first I want to get his private eye-philosopher's assessment of

the state of the art of the JFK case.

A few years ago it looked as if Thompson might get credit for cracking that one too. When the House Select Committee came out with its report on the acoustical analysis of the Dallas police tape, it placed a gunman behind the stockade fence on the grassy knoll, exactly the spot Thompson pointed to in his book.

But, refreshingly, he's willing to concede that the acoustical evidence that once promised such certainty now looks muddled.

"Uncertainty has replaced clarity," he says wistfully. "We're back in the swamp. Back in the morass again."

"The lonely labyrinth?" I ask. He just laughs.

And refreshingly, considering that he was one of the original *Warren Report* critics, he is prepared to concede that in crucial aspects of the case, further investigation has proved him wrong and the commission right.

The much-ridiculed single-bullet theory, for instance. The whole lone-assassin theory depends in complex but definite ways on the Warren Commission's belief that one bullet went through JFK's body, smashed through John Connally's fifth rib and wrist, and emerged unscratched. I have actually handled that so-called pristine bullet myself in the National Archives, felt how smooth and unmarked its surface is, and scoffed at the idea that it could have emerged so utterly unscathed.

But, as Thompson points out, recent neutron activation analysis of the bullet and the tiny fragments left in Connally's wrist make it almost a scientific certainty that they came from the same bullet.

"That's very powerful evidence that the single-bullet theory is correct," he says. "It absolutely astonishes me, but you gotta look at what the evidence is. One thing I've learned from these years of being a private investigator is that I no longer place much faith in most eyewitness testimony to prove anything. If you're gonna rely on anything, it's the physical evidence and photographs. Another thing I've learned is that it's a waste of time to try to prove anything with government documents, the endless nit-picking that was done by the critics in the JFK case comparing discrepancies in what a witness said to the police or the FBI in a deposition and what they testified to later. You learn that the police get it wrong all the time and that nit-picking doesn't get you closer to the truth."

The truth. What *does* Thompson think is the truth in the JFK case? Is he actually leaning toward accepting the Warren Commission verdict that Oswald acted alone?

No, Thompson says. In fact, he still doesn't think the evidence adds up to Oswald's firing *any* shots that day.

"I think it's maybe sixty-forty that he didn't," Thompson tells me. "Although I

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can see reasonable men taking the other position."

"What, then, do you think Oswald's role was that day?" I ask him.

"I've stayed away from analyzing," he tells me. "What you have when you look into him is puzzle boxes within Chinese puzzle boxes. In the logic of intelligence circles, anything can mean anything. I think he was scheming in ways I don't understand, and finally, when the president was shot, the curtain opened and he recognized a lot more was going on than he knew."

And who does he think O. was scheming with? Thompson leans toward the mob-hit school of thought because of the new evidence developed by the House

Select Committee about Ruby's connections and movements. "If Ruby was given access to the jail, if Ruby was *stalking* Oswald, as it seems they've demonstrated, one has to ask the question, why? And you have to look at the statistics on organized-crime prosecutions and how they dropped off after the assassination. One thing you can say about the assassination is that it's been enormously *effective*. It worked. They blew his head off, and they got away with it."

They?

"Why has nobody broken? And what group can enforce that kind of discipline? Nobody's turned. Of course, maybe there's nobody to turn."

Is there anything his private-eye's in-

stinct tells him about the case that might solve it or explain why it's unsolved?

"That goddam bullet," he says, "that bullet just doesn't fit. You have to consider the possibility that evidence was tampered with. I know when I was working on the *Life* project they left me alone with that bullet for fifteen minutes. I could have done anything with it. But once you raise that possibility—that some pieces of the puzzle have their edges shaved off or pieces never in the puzzle have been brought in—you're never gonna put that puzzle together. In my heart of hearts, that's what I believe happened. And since we no longer have objective criteria of physical evidence, we're left with an epistemological conundrum."

An epistemological conundrum. Yes, that's what it has always seemed like to El Exigente. Somehow the JFK case is a lesson in the limits of reason, in the impossibility of ever knowing anything with absolute certainty. Gödel's Proof and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle all wrapped into one. That's why El Exigente has always stayed above the battle, observing the foibles of the buffs from a position of amused detachment, resisting the impulse to become obsessed with knowledge maddeningly dangerous for its unknowability. I've seen too many brilliant people—some of them my friends—self-destruct in the attempt. I've always been too cautious to risk becoming a passionate casualty of the case.

But now Thompson, El Exigente's mentor, turns the tables on the Demanding One. In his modest but insistent Socratic way, he demands to know what I think.

I tell him I've gone into this most recent journey through the state of the art with the vague feeling that the mob-hit theorists probably have come closest to the truth of the case, but I've come out of it feeling that they have failed to nail it down. That the tail-and-the-dog story is as close as they'll ever come but it falls short of being proof, and that the rest is all the usual suggestive connections of the sort that can support any number of unproven theories.

And, I tell Thompson, I find myself longing—because of the advent of the two-decade anniversary—to come to some conclusion instead of suspending judgment on the crime of the century forever. And that although I am resisting it, to my dismay I find myself tempted after all these years to give in and embrace the *Warren Report* conclusions.

"You're right to say the conspiracy explanations are unsatisfying," he replies. "And you're right to recognize the urge to push it all into one pattern or the other for the satisfaction of having a conclusion. But," he added, "you're also right to resist that temptation."

And so—for another ten years at least—I will. As far as I'm concerned, the case is still not closed. ♣



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