



'JFK'

And the Question of Conspiracy

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Free For All

Prying the Lid Off the 'Big Lie'

How sad and how predictable to see Gerald R. Ford and David W. Belin once again trying to shore up the deeply flawed findings of the Warren Commission [op-ed, Dec. 19], a charade in which they were such significant but naive players 28 years ago.

The fact is, critics of the official version of events have been largely ignored by the mainstream media in the United States and have had no adequate platform for their views until now. Yet it is only through the determined efforts of this small, disparate band of disbelievers that the quest for the truth has been kept alive.

My documentary film series "The Men Who Killed Kennedy"—the object of Ford's and Belin's vilification—was based on five years of effort, more than 300 face-to-face interviews and, unlike the Warren Commission, began with few preconceived notions.

Its conclusion, that Lee Harvey Oswald was innocent and that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was the result of a complex conspiracy followed by a coverup at the highest level, is based in many instances on information and testimony that the Warren Commission knew nothing about or, more significantly, chose to ignore in its rush to judgment.

It is the Warren Commission, not the filmmakers, that has been responsible for the perpetration of the "big lie" for more than a quarter of a century. As the lid on this dark affair is slowly pried open and the real contents examined by the American public, it is perhaps not surprising that the surviving members of the Warren Commission are showing distinct signs of discomfort and alarm.

—Nigel Turner

The writer produced and directed "The Men Who Killed Kennedy."

Had to Be Happenstance

In his rebuttal of President Ford and David Belin [op-ed, Dec. 24] Oliver Stone suggests that someone in the Dallas Police Department conspired with Jack Ruby so that he was in the basement of police headquarters when Oswald was brought out for transfer to the county jail.

I was one of about a score of journalists who waited that morning in the basement for Oswald to be brought out. My recollection is that there was only one way of getting into the basement garage from inside police headquarters, and that was through the Traffic Department, also located in the basement, and through the glass doors leading into the garage area—the same doors through which Oswald was brought. Had Ruby walked through that door at any time, he would have faced a barrage of cameras and newsmen. He would certainly have been identified by some, if not at all, of the Dallas journalists, to whom he was well known.

Stone also ignores the fact that Ruby, just a few minutes before the shooting, was in the Dallas Western Union office several streets away sending a remittance to one of the women entertainers who worked in his club. There is a signature and time-stamp to confirm this. Had Ruby been under orders to kill Oswald, it would seem unlikely he would risk missing his rendezvous with Oswald by dallying in the Western Union office. It is more logical that as he walked back from the telegraph office he noticed the activity in the basement of police headquarters, which was wide open to the street, and out of curiosity walked down the entrance ramp—just as Oswald was being brought out. Ruby's presence there at that fateful moment was more likely happenstance than conspiracy.

—Jeffrey Blyth

More Propaganda

It is dismaying, though not surprising, to read that viewers are coming out of Oliver Stone's "JFK" ready to believe the worst of their government and to "buy" Stone's cockeyed theory of a broad-based "conspiracy" behind the murder of President Kennedy [Metro, Jan. 1]. Stone's pastiche of lies, half-truths and selective evidence is nothing if not convincing cinema (the same was true of Goebbels's Nazi propaganda films). Stone's loyal followers should now urge him to apply his talents for filming revisionist fantasies to other "controversial" historical events. Think of how entertaining it would be to have Stone "prove" that the Holocaust never happened, that the moon landing was faked in a TV studio and that FDR planned Pearl Harbor. I, for one, can't wait!

—Donald H. Crosby

Credit LBJ

Gerald R. Ford and David W. Belin report that I participated in the A&E series "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" and was a consultant to Oliver Stone for his movie "JFK." They allege that I disseminated a "big lie" and "a fraudulent misrepresentation of the truth to the American people." Nothing could be further from the truth, and neither writer had the courtesy or guts to check their hatchet job with me beforehand.

Let's look at the record. They credit me with this quotation: "You see, you're dealing with a very high echelon of power . . . otherwise, how could you have gotten people like the chief justice of the Supreme Court to participate in the coverup?"

In his own book, "The Vantage Point" (1971), former president Lyndon B. Johnson wrote:

"The idea of a national commission was first mentioned to me by Eugene Rostow of Yale Law School . . . Dean Rusk and columnist Joseph Alsop. . ."

He went on to say:

"I knew it was not a good precedent to involve the Supreme Court in such an investigation. Chief Justice Warren knew this too and was vigorously opposed to it. . . He opposed serving on constitutional grounds. He said that if asked, he would refuse."

Then Johnson said:

"There was no doubt in my mind that the Chief Justice had to be convinced."

Those words of Lyndon Johnson's, along with my knowledge of his well-known powers of persuasion, are among the things I had in mind when I made the above statement.

In the Atlantic Monthly of July 1973 Leo Janos, an old friend of LBJ's, wrote, not long before Johnson died:

"Johnson expressed his belief that the assassination in Dallas had been part of a conspiracy [saying,] 'I never believed that Oswald acted alone' . . . and [his belief that] 'we had been operating a damned Murder Inc. in the Caribbean.'"

This is no place to elaborate on the above, but those statements, written and spoken, by the most concerned man in the presidential procession in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, ought to be enough to convince anyone that the words attributed to me were neither a "big lie" nor "fraudulent misrepresentations."

—L. Fletcher Prouty

The writer was chief of special operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1955-64.

Lonely Man in the Middle

It took 27 years, but David Belin, writing with Gerald R. Ford, has finally said one thing with which I agree: Nigel Turner's A&E network series "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" and Oliver Stone's current commercialization and exploitation of that great tragedy are both very, very bad. ["Kennedy Assassination: How About the Truth?" *opened*, Dec. 19].

I am responsible for what Stone has converted into a nonexistent "establishment" press-CIA conspiracy to destroy him and his movie. I gave reporter George Lardner Oliver Stone's script, which is based on former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison's fantasy of self-justification, his book "On the Trail of the Assassins."

Belin, as he has in the past and with the same clichés, insists that he and the Warren Commission were right solely because they say they were right.

Like other defenders of the Warren report, Belin demanded, "Where is the new evidence?" As I showed in my first book of 26 years ago, "Whiteyash." The Report on the Warren Report," no new evidence was needed because the evidence the commission had disproves its conclusions. It is not easy, but Belin is being unfair to Jim Garrison. To do this he had to contradict the most basic conclusion of the Warren Report that he insists is the truth, the sequence of and time permitted for the three shots that in all official "solutions" Lee Harvey Oswald fired.

Belin writes that "Garrison speaks only of three shots being fired within 5 to 5.6 seconds." Garrison did not write that. The commission itself did—without any Belin dissent. Now that Belin can no longer pretend not to know that the world's best shots, including the "masters" used by the commission, could not duplicate the shooting attributed to Oswald within the commissioner's 5.6 seconds, he conjectures—in open contradiction of the report he insists was accurate—that "the most probable time span of Oswald's three shots was around 10 seconds."

As in the past Belin repeats what is not true, not even possible, that there is "unequivocal ballistic evidence which shows that . . . the bullet that passed through President Kennedy's neck and struck Gov. Connally" was fired by Oswald from the rear.

There is no such evidence, ballistic or otherwise. This is

the theory invented by now Sen. Arlen Specter, known as the "single-bullet theory" featuring "the magic bullet."

Belin refers to all the supposed experts who confirmed this official fiction. He is careful not to refer to the actual findings of a Department of Justice panel of the most preeminent forensic pathologists. I published every word of what they filed in facsimile in my "Post Mortem" in 1975. Belin had it and was reading it that November when we debated at Vanderbilt University.

The report on the examination of the JFK autopsy pictures and X-rays by this panel of experts proves the commission was wrong in locating the fatal wound in the president's head; it was four inches higher than the commission said.

That magic and unscarred bullet that Belin says inflicted seven nonfatal wounds on both victims, smashing one of Connally's ribs and his wrist, and did not strike bone that would have deflected it as it transited the president's neck, actually deposited five bone fragments in that area.

It was already a physical impossibility for this magic bullet to have the imagined career indispensable to the lone-assassin "solution." But if any bullet had entered Kennedy's back, the commission knowingly mislocated the hole it left. That hole is four or more inches lower than the commission said and in the back, not the neck. This is verified in some of the "new" evidence, which I published and Belin had—the official certificate of death.

The rest of the official career of this magical bullet, and there is nothing like this career in science or mythology, is that in transiting the president's neck from back to front it went through the president's shirt collar and the knot of his tie. It did not, and some of the commission and its staff, including Belin, knew it.

Specter questioned Charles Carrico, the only doctor who saw the president before any emergency procedure in Parkland Hospital and before any of his clothing was removed. Specter did not ask Carrico where the anterior neck wound was located. Former CIA director and commission member Alan Dulles then did ask this question. Carrico pointed to above his collar!

Those 19 Humpty-Dumpty's Belin refers to as experts cannot alter this truth, which destroys the commission's

conclusions. With the bullet hole "above" the shirt collar, it could not have caused the damage to the collar and tie.

If the commission had done its job, it would have gotten what I did via the Freedom of Information Act, a clear picture of the damage to the president's shirt collar.

With the button and the button hole exactly in line and with the pattern at each end of the collar also coinciding exactly, the damages to the ends of the collar that overlapped when buttoned as it was do not coincide, as they would have if caused by a bullet.

The damage to each side is a slit, not a hole made by a bullet. Both slits are frayed. On the president's right, as worn, the slit begins below the neckband and extends downward. It is only about half the length of the slit in the left side as worn. This larger slit extends upward well onto the neckband, to where, if caused by a bullet, it would have struck the button.

The button is unscarred.

The damage to the shirt was not caused by any bullet. It was caused, as the commission's transcript indicates, in emergency procedures. Carrico demonstrated this for me by grasping his own tie with his left hand and making cutting motions upward and downward with his right hand. He told me what he was not asked by the commission, that two nurses under his supervision cut the tie off with a scalpel. There was no time to untie the knot. It was the scalpel that made the slits in the shirt collar.

Fewer pontifications from Belin would make less appropriate when applied to him his castigation of Stone and Turner, who deserve it also: "False charges . . . are a desecration to the memory of President Kennedy."

The Stones of one extreme and the Belins of the other confuse, mislead and deceive the people.

What gets lost in all this controversy is that there is a middle ground. I confess loneliness in my occupancy of it. It is the ground that finds the commission failed us and proves this with fact and official documentation. It also finds that the proliferating conspiracy theories mislead and confuse as much as or more than the faulted official conclusions.

—Harold Weisberg

Welcome Skepticism

I'm no expert on the JFK assassination, but it seems to me that Oliver Stone has done us all a valuable service and does not deserve the pillorying he has received in the media. What George Will ["JFK: Paranoid History," op-ed, Dec. 26] and other critics fail to appreciate is that Stone has reminded us of what our Founding Fathers knew 200 years ago when they set out a Bill of Rights: that we should be vigilant in seeing that government does not become too powerful. A sure way for government to gain such power is if its citizens do not question its actions and pronouncements.

Why, then, has Stone been so roundly criticized for challenging the "official" version of the Kennedy assassination? The truth of Stone's version of history is not the issue. Rather, Stone's point is that we should not take at face value the official assertions that Lee Harvey Oswald acted as a crazed lone gunman in assassinating President Kennedy. I believe that Stone would agree that his version of history should not be swallowed as incontrovertible fact as well.

Stone's contribution is in reminding us that complacency is a threat to democracy just as much as, if not more than, we thought communism was. The Pentagon Papers, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Watergate and Iran-contra should be proof enough that we need no reminder. But apparently our blind acceptance of the invasion of Grenada and lack of outrage at Pentagon censorship throughout the gulf war indicate that we

have not fully learned our lesson. Stone should be applauded for continuing what has been, and should continue to be, one of our wisest traditions: raising a healthy dose of skepticism at the words and deeds of our government.

—Roger Kosson

With his vitriolic diatribe against Oliver Stone, George Will joins the avalanche of Stone-bashing that seems all the rage and all out of proportion to the release of what is, after all, just a movie. Like others, Will seems to deliberately ignore the fact that Garrison's and Stone's theory about a conspiracy to kill Kennedy is just that—a theory. It is a theory that attempts to explain some of the more troubling aspects of the assassination that point to at least some element of participation by some person or persons working within the government.

But just as Clay Shaw's not-guilty verdict neither proved his innocence nor validated the Warren Commission Report, the various "flaws" in Stone's movie similarly do not somehow eliminate the hundreds of as yet unexplained pieces of evidence and testimony that contradict the lone-assassin theory. One does not have to agree with Stone's conclusion to believe that a conspiracy existed. Moreover, even if Stone's theory is wrong, that does not make the movie, as Will put it, "an act of execrable history and contemptible citizenship."

It is ironic that the movie "JFK," which Stone has never claimed to be the conclusive answer to this mystery, is being subjected to much more nitpicking scrutiny by the mainstream press than the Warren Commission Report ever has been. I would have more confidence in Will's and others' objectivity if, along with their criticism of Stone, they also supported the opening of evidence sealed by the Warren Commission and House Select Committee on Assassinations. Or would asking for that evidence also be an act of "contemptible citizenship?"

—Donald Squires

As a 24-year-old second-year law student at Catholic University I have just recently entertained the notion that John F. Kennedy was assassinated through a conspiracy perpetrated by the CIA or other government officials. I and friends of my age owe much gratitude to Oliver Stone for his eye-opening motion picture, "JFK." After seeing the movie I was not content to limit my exposure to the subject and so I have read some of the leading literature on the matter.

Recently your paper has published columns concerning "JFK" by David Berlin and Gerald Ford, George Will, Stephen S. Rosenfeld and Stone himself. Stone's movie is attacked on the basis that it is unpatriotic, fallacious and stirs up unwarranted and harmful sentiment against the government for something that occurred 28 years ago and should

be left alone. As someone who was born after Nov. 22, 1963, I find the attacks on "JFK" exhibit the obvious biases and protection of vested interests in Washington circles and the value of truth in the democratic process.

The days are over when Walter Cronkite can tell the nation that it is in its best interest to believe the "official" version of a national disaster because it will promote national security. Watergate and Iran-contra have dispelled any myths about the credibility of the CIA or other government actors.

The answer to who shot John F. Kennedy is important because our government should be held accountable for its actions. But more important, the answer carries much value in framing the mood and manner in which the American people will scrutinize future actions by their government.

As someone of the post-Kennedy generation with no illusions about government excesses, I believe I speak for most when I say that an objective analysis of the weight of the evidence on both sides clearly shows that "JFK" is an accurate representation of history. No more convincing evidence of this can be asked than Lyndon Johnson's statement in 1975 that he never believed that Oswald acted alone and the House Select Committee on Assassinations' determination that a conspiracy was "probable" in the murder of John F. Kennedy.

—Jaime Aparisi

I'm the 'Odd Man Out'

In their op-ed article "Kennedy Assassination: How about the Truth?" [op-ed, Dec. 17], Gerald R. Ford and David W. Belin bemoan the fact that neither the five-part A&E series "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" nor Oliver Stone's "JFK" includes an appearance by any of the physicians who have examined President Kennedy's autopsy photographs and X-rays. These doctors support the findings of the Warren Commission, namely, that Oswald, a lone assassin, fired three shots, one of which produced seven wounds in Kennedy and Gov. John Connally and emerged in near-pristine condition with only 1.5 percent loss of its original weight after some incredible midair vertical and horizontal gyrations in the course of its momentous journey. The writers are extremely unhappy about the fact that the one physician who reviewed these autopsy materials and disagreed with the Warren Commission "appeared repeatedly on the A&E network in a number of the sequences." So painful is this fact to Ford and Belin that they can only bring themselves to refer to this person as the "odd man out."

The "odd man out" has a name and identity—the undersigned. I am a board-certified anatomic, clinical and forensic pathologist who has performed approximately 11,000 autopsies and reviewed more than 25,000 others. I am a past president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the American College of Legal Medicine; member of six graduate school faculties; author of 300 published scientific articles; editor or co-editor of 30 published professional books; and a member of 20 national and international medicolegal and forensic scientific journals. I have lectured in more than 60 foreign countries (several times on the JFK assassination) and have been qualified as an expert in forensic pathology for trial testimony in approximately 30 states. While none of these credentials automatically makes my analysis of the Kennedy assassination correct, I would suggest they do qualify me to render a competent, professional opinion regarding this highly controversial murder.

In August 1972, when I examined all the JFK materials at the National Archives, I "discovered" that the president's brain, microscopic tissue slide and Kodachromes of the internal chest wounds were missing after having been specifically identified in an inventory dated April 26, 1965. More than one-half of the Warren Commission report physician-supporters, whom Ford and Belin would have readers believe are such credible, unbiased experts, were aware before my public disclosure in 1972 that these critical pieces of physical evidence had been illegally and surreptitiously removed from the National Archives (by an as yet unidentified person). Apparently, they never felt ethically or morally compelled to refer this important finding to the news media. Even today, almost 20 years later, the silence of all these physicians regarding the missing medical evidence is deafening.

I expect critiques by your paper on anyone who dares to challenge the validity of the Warren Commission report. I can only hope that in fairness you publish an occasional response from the individuals who are attacked. As for me, kindly have courage to refer to me by name the next time.

—Cyril H. Wecht

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