

Conspiracy collection falls short

Assassination Science. Edited by James H. Fetzer. Catfeet Press. 463 pages. \$19.95.

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In 1992, in the wake of Oliver Stone's "JFK", the Journal of the American Medical Association ran a series of articles that was supposed to provide conclusive scientific proof that John Kennedy was killed by two shots fired from behind by one assassin. The idea behind the articles was to respond to the movie and to a recent book by one of the attending physicians in Dallas -- which both argued for a different interpretation of the assassination -- and lay the controversy to rest.

Needless to say, the articles failed to do that. In fact, unless Jimmy Hoffa and Carlos Marcello rise from their graves and say, "We did it," that's not likely to ever happen.

"Assassination Science" -- edited by a professor at the University of Minnesota-Duluth -- is a direct response and rebuttal to the JAMA stories. Unfortunately, it's not a good response.

Some of the articles in this hodgepodge collection are too technical to be of interest to anyone except very dedicated assassination buffs or people who really want to know the details of what happens when a bullet hits a head.

Others are of no interest to anyone except James Fetzer, the book's editor, and his immediate family and friends (for example, letters to Fetzer from President Clinton, Elliot Richardson and Robert McNamara).

Nevertheless, there are some interesting gems that deserve wider distribution than they will get in "Assassination Science."

Probably the best is an article by Charles Crenshaw, the Dallas physician who has maintained that he saw evidence in the operating room of a shot that hit Kennedy from the front and wounds that were different from those reported in the autopsy. He does a convincing demolition job on the JAMA articles that maligned him, and raises serious and believable issues for those with open minds.

Almost as good is David Mantik's fascinating dismantling of the famous Zapruder film showing that it could have been doctored to depict only what officials wanted it to depict.

There are others, but a handful of good articles do not make a book that's worth the time