

Lee Oswald Gets a Weak And Sentimental Defense

This is the week of publication for yet two more books on The Assassination (will we ever again be able to ask which one?), the most celebrated of which is Josiah Thompson's "Six Seconds in Dallas" because his contains an enchanting new theory.

He says there were three gunmen in three different locations who fired a total of four shots.

I have not seen a copy of this book. The publisher, Bernard Geis (who gave you "Harlow," who gave you "The Exhibitionist," who gave you Groucho and Art Linkletter), blames the printer or the binder.

Meantime you can read the best parts in the Saturday Evening Post, which paid substantially for the privilege I presume, and probably is unconcerned about errant printers and binders.

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THE SECOND book this week is by Sylvia Meagher, the lady whose "Subject Index to the Report and Hearings and Exhibits" is a primary source for all those people who have been criticizing the Warren Report and drawing their own conclusions.

She was the one who did to the Report and the 26 volumes of supplementary data what anyone would expect the Warren Commission to have done itself.

Looking for related facts in the Report without Miss Meagher's subject index would be tantamount "to a search in the Encyclopedia Britannica if the contents were untitled, unalphabetized, and in random sequence."

That is the judgment of the indexer herself, who has been compiling analytical reports in the field of international health since 1947.

Grazing in such drearily imposing statistical pastures apparently conditioned her to the digesting of the Warren Commission's monstrous volumes: some 20,000 pages and more than 10 million words.

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HER NEW BOOK, then, is authenticated at least to the extent of provable familiarity with commission evidence and exhibits. One might anticipate a cool and unemotional synthesis.

It is called "Accessories After the Fact" (Bobbs-Merrill; \$8.50), and of it Leo Sauvage—a French critic of the Report—says that it "comes closest to being THE reference book on the subject."

By Donald Stanley

Unfortunately its tone (overbearing), assumptions (Establishment whitewash, right wing conspiracy), and political flavor (left) promise little variation from the preponderance of anti-Report literature.

Her dedication itself is dismal: "... To the innocent victims of a society which often inflicts indignity, imprisonment and even death on the obscure and helpless." Oh my.

The point has already been made that the commission's rules of evidence were abysmal and its inclination to lead witnesses and rely only on testimony that supported its assassin presumption were insupportable.

Miss Meagher makes the point again and again until one would expect that she herself were surely above such procedural hanky panky. Not at all.

"The burden of evidence," she writes, "in fact lends considerable credence to Marguerite Oswald's constant thesis that her son had gone to the Soviet Union on clandestine assignment by his own government."

It takes a lot to revive the credibility of Oswald's mother, who has spent her life—according to her son Robert—seeing conspiracies. (According to Robert, one of Marguerite's proofs that Lee Harvey was on U.S.

business in Russia was the fact that the State Department denied he was.)

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LEE HARVEY OSWALD, since he apparently was a man of the left, arouses constant motherliness in Miss Meagher. That he could have been an emotional dead-end—of left, right or straight up—is given little consideration.

"From his arrest on Friday to his death on Sunday, Oswald declined to conceal his face; he never appeared cowed or ashamed but maintained his personal pride and dignity and seemingly full confidence in his ultimate vindication."

This MAY be the behavior of a calm and innocent man faced by a charge of terrifying proportions and evidence that was at the very least deeply subversive of his interests.

It might also be the behavior of a megalomaniac twisted by a lifetime of losing who finally emerges as the man of the hour.

Robert Oswald said Lee always loved intrigue, never anonymity. But then I suppose Robert might also be included in the high level conspiracy.

Sylvia Meagher has read all the Report and all the 26 volumes of evidence, but I doubt that it was indispensable to her viewpoint. Her book is as much a brief for the Oswald defense as was Mark Lane's "Rush to Judgment." At least Lane admitted as much.

Recent and Recommended Books

FICTION

The Instrument. By John O'Hara. Random House; \$5.95. This year's O'Hara Annual is a novel about a playwright whose absence of personal feeling and total understanding of others' feelings ends in cynical disaster.

The Manor. By Isaac Bashevis Singer. Farrar; \$6.95. The rags to riches novel of a family of Polish Jews in the 19th Century by one of the master storytellers of our time.

The Man Who Cried I Am. By John A. Williams. Little, Brown; \$6.95. A powerful novel on a theme little touched since Ellison's "Invisible Man": the strains of being black and successful in a world geared to whites.

NONFICTION

The Espionage Establishment. By David Wise and Thomas Ross. Random House; \$5.95. Who they are, what they do and how they do it in the spy business in Russia, England, Red China and here at home.

Last Reflections on a War. By Bernard Fall. Doubleday; \$4.95. The last collected essays by the French-born scholar who was perhaps this country's best writer on Vietnam and who was killed on patrol there in February.

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