

Chapter One: Introduction

Freedom of speech and a fairly extensive disclosure of foreign policy secrets exists in the United States, but one wonders now and then if this is because no one is listening, or if listening, not remembering. A remarkable aspect of Hartzian America is its ineffable capacity to forget those secrets that do happen to penetrate the media, salient facts that surface but quickly waft to the briny deep, owing to a lack of context or perhaps an absence of the political sensibility that lies to seek out patterns in the events of the day.

-- Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, p. 152.

It is important that all of the facts surrounding President Kennedy's assassination be made public in a way which will satisfy people in the United States and abroad. That all the facts have been told and that a statement to this effect be made now.

1. The public must be satisfied that Oswald was assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.
2. Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists...

Nicolas deB Katzenbach, Nov. 25, 1963 ¹

I. Introduction to the question

A. My path to this place

This book began to take shape in 1993, when I prepared to teach a course on the Kennedy assassination at the University of Chicago. When I started off, I thought I was reasonably well-informed; I thought I had read the most important books that had come out on the subject

¹ 1975 Senate report on the Intelligence activities, assassination of president Kennedy., p. 23.

over the preceding fifteen years or so. By and large, my impression was that the pro-conspiracy literature made a better case, though I recognized that it was not an easy matter to put together a detailed theory which would account for all of the material that had been unearthed that contradicted, in essential or in superficial ways, the account offered by the Warren Commission.

But as I put together materials for the course, I came to appreciate just how complex the matter was of reviewing the available literature. I had hoped that later books would generally provide, along with whatever new information the author had uncovered, clear summaries of the material available in previous works. But in this I was sadly mistaken. The task of compiling and comparing evidence and argument was one that authors felt no reason to undertake. But that was precisely what I needed, and so would the students in my course.

B. Books that have been written

1. The official ones

Two official accounts of the Kennedy assassination have been made public: the report of the Warren Commission, published in 1964, and the report of the House Select Committee on the Assassinations, published in 1979. These reports are in any number of ways excellent. They are well-written, they present their case cogently, and they present enormous amounts of important facts concerning the assassination. The Warren Commission Report is still in print, and easily available, and while the House Select Committee's report is not, it is still available from many libraries, and another book, *The Fatal Hour* (originally published under the title YY), is in print, and it is a development of the material presented in the HSCA report, written by the chief counsel, Robert Blakey, and a long-time assassination researcher, Billings.

And yet I found that both of these books were fundamentally inadequate for my purposes. The Warren Commission study has been subject to more intense scrutiny than any book since the Bible, and the criticisms have by and large stood the test of time better than the *Report* itself. The Warren Commission was charged with producing a report in a very short period of time -- no more than about six months, with limited powers of investigation and limited manpower. The *Report's* conclusion was that Lee Harvey Oswald, and no one else, was responsible for the assassination, and the three decades since have shown that the *Report* made about as good a case as can be made for that position: no one has done a better job since.

But thirty years of research have brought to light a great deal of material that cannot be integrated in a coherent way into the hypothesis that the *Warren Commission Report* defends. The years have also seen material made public that casts a whole new light on facts that were available to the Commission, as even members of the Warren Commission have acknowledged. Perhaps the most important material of this sort was that which came to light in the mid 1970s and which made public for the first time that there had been ongoing joint operations in the early 1960s involving both the Central Intelligence Agency and top figures in organized crime, notably Carlos Marcello, Sam Giancana, Johnny Rosselli, and Santos Trafficante. These joint

operations included (though they were not limited to) assassination efforts aimed at eliminating Fidel Castro.

In 1976, the House of Representatives established a committee to take a new look at the assassinations of John Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King. Out of this new investigation came the HSCA report, concluding that in some fashion or other, Oswald was not the sole marksman at the assassination. In addition to three shots fired from Kennedy's rear by Oswald, the Committee concluded, one shot was fired from Kennedy's front. Although no concrete proposal was made in the HSCA report, it was the belief of the chief counsel to the Committee, Robert Blakey, a noted expert on organized crime in the United States, that the assassination was organized by elements of the Mafia -- including, in particular, Carlos Marcello, the boss from New Orleans whose domain stretched as far west as Dallas.

2. The unofficial ones

i. The good ones

- a. Summers
- b. Lifton
- c. Blakey and Billings

ii. The poor ones

- a. Poor in exposition
 - 1) Groden and Livingstone
- b. Poor in representation
 - 1) Posner

II. Historical sketch

A. Pre-assassination

1. Oswald background

2. Kennedy politics

B. Assassination

1. Shots in Dealey Plaza

2. Tippit; Oswald arrest

3. Parkland Hospital, Bethesda autopsy

C. Post-assassination

1. Warren Commission

2. The critics

3. Garrison inquiry

4. Senate revelations in the 1970s

5. HSCA

6. Later revelations

III. The questions to ask, and some answers

A. What sources to trust, and how to approach them?

1. The problem of where to stop: when do we reach a reductio ad absurdum, and apply modus tollens?

i. What does a person do when they find that some conspiratorial view of the Kennedy assassination requires that they take an idea seriously that they find ludicrous or simply too overwhelming to take seriously -- say, the idea that some number of Dallas policemen were involved in a conspiracy?

a. Virtually everyone who explores the assassination is faced by that problem at one time or another -- often several times. I think that the answer is that one must be willing at the very least to take such possibilities seriously. The alternative is in effect to decide not to explore the Kennedy assassination -- an alternative that is perfectly acceptable, but the reader who has come with the intent to read on through this book has signaled some preliminary intention to explore the matter. The point is: if one seriously wishes to explore the assassination, one must be willing to accept the possibility of unacceptable conclusions.

B. How central is the question of tracking down who Oswald was?

1. Not very important, in the final analysis, though it is useful to research the question.

i.If we decide he was a spy, or used by intelligence, he still might have killed Kennedy, and might have done it alone;

ii. If we decide he wasn't a spy, he still might have been used by others as a patsy.

C. Can the Warren Commission account be taken seriously?

1.No, it cannot, for the following basic reasons:

i.One or two shots from the front

a.First throat shot, on the basis of Parkland testimony

b. Head shot exited from the rear

ii. Single bullet theory cannot stand up; hence there were at least four shots, and Oswald as sole marksman is severely weakened, perhaps eliminated

a. Back wound too low

b. CE 399 could not have caused Connally's thigh wounds: it would not have fallen out.

iii. Oswald doubles suggest false evidence being planted about Oswald ahead of time

a. Albert Bogard

b. Dial Ryder and the rifle scope mounting

c. The mystery of Mexico City and the CIA's handling of the situation

d.Silvia Odio (which version? the standard, or the one that Oswald was known to the Cuban community already?)

iv.Rose Chermie

v. Ruby had no non-conspiratorial reasons to kill Oswald

vi.

2. What follows if we don't take the Warren Commission conclusions seriously?

i. Not too much -- even the HSCA disagreed with the primary conclusion, that Oswald was a lone nut, though they were not in a position to flesh out an alternative (though Blakely and Billings did so in a later book).

D. How significant is it if strong evidence can be provided that other parties -- the CIA, the Mafia, the anti-Castro Cubans, whatever -- had motive and even method? And can that be shown?

E. What counts as motive?--what about the Vietnam theory of the assassination?

F. "If there was a conspiracy, how come it hasn't leaked in the past 30 years?"

1. The argument must be restated, and it must be recognized that it cuts both ways.

We must begin by restating this: if there were a conspiracy, then we can reasonably expect some leaks to have occurred over the following thirty years. Let us refer to this principle (and it is certainly open to question and to challenge, but let us assume it for purposes of discussion) as the "*Eventually Everything Leaks*" Principle. And indeed, over the past three decades and some, there have been quite a number of people who have claimed to have been involved in some fashion or other in the assassination. The Eventually Everything Leaks Principle tells us two things: If there was a conspiracy, then at least one of these claims is likely to be correct, at least in some basic respects; and it also tells us that if all of these claims can be shown to be false, then the conspiracy claims are likely wrong.

Put another way, the Everything Leaks Principle (again, assuming that it is correct) works in two directions. In the first instance, it can be used to support a non-conspiratorial account of the assassination, and my impression is that it has been used, implicitly or explicitly, most often in this direction. But the same principle works in the opposite direction, for if we begin our discussion from the point of view that there was indeed a conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination, then the Principle suggests that in all probability, some of the stories that have come out over the past thirty years hold some serious degree of truth.

2. How many potential leaks have there been?

And indeed there are now a considerable number of people who have admitted to have been involved in such a conspiracy, or who have claimed to have been so involved. Let us review some of these -- the most interesting, from our point of view.

i. Richard Case Nagell

ii. Robert Morrow

iii. David Ferrie

iv. Frank Ragano/Santo Trafficante

3. If there was a conspiracy that wanted to get rid of President Kennedy and that was powerful enough to cover up its involvement, couldn't it have chosen a way to eliminate him surreptitiously so that his death simply appeared to be an accident?

i. There must be one of two reasons:

a. The group that organized the conspiracy did not include Washington insiders who could pull off such a technological coup; or,

b. The intent of the assassination was not just to remove Kennedy from the presidency, but also to achieve some further aim, one which a public assassination of this sort would allow -- such as, perhaps, making it appear that the assassination were the work of an international Communist conspiracy.

4. Much of it boils down to showing

i. The CIA, the Mafia and the anti-Castro Cubans had motive;

ii. they had method to cover up the assassination; and

iii. they had contact with each other

a. The anti-castro assassination attempts, exposed by Roselli first, then the Senate investigations

iv. they had contact with Oswald

a. Anti-Castro Cubans

1) Guy Banister, David Ferrie in New Orleans -- new information, and old information that has been ignored.

b. CIA

1) Was Oswald a false defector to the Soviet Union, providing contact with the CIA? Was it in fact the CIA? We don't know.

2) Contact with Oswald after his return

5. But then the question of cover-up rears its ugly head -- how could a non-governmental group have run a cover-up? Answer: we must not confuse a post-assassination coverup with a pre-assassination conspiracy. On the other hand, we must not assume that if the

two are distinct -- run by distinct agencies, so to speak -- that the cover-up is in any fashion less culpable or sinister.

6. *How do we answer this question?*

7. *Historical approach: consideration of the OAS's attempts on de Gaulle's life.*

It can be very helpful, in reconstructing the Kennedy assassination, to bear in mind some of the historical context in which it occurred. The two year period preceding the Kennedy assassination was a period in which a large number of assassination attempts occurred aimed at the life of the president of France, General Charles de Gaulle. These assassination attempts were the work of a very loosely organized group called the O.A.S., or *Organisation de l'Armee secrete*. These assassination attempts, most of which occurred between September 1961 and August 1962 (check those dates) were based on the belief that de Gaulle's death would undermine the French government's declared policy of granting full independence to Algeria, an independence which was in fact granted on July 1, 1962. Conclusion

G. Why we can reasonably reject the hypothesis that the Mafia did it alone (Marcello or Trafficante)-- Johnson, or whoever, would have reasonably exacted a pound of flesh as a punishment.

H. Do we have enough evidence to draw a conclusion?

1. How can we not draw a conclusion?

I. A summary of the arguments

1. That Oswald was being set up, or was involved in a greater conspiracy

i. Oswald doubles

a. Silvia Odio

b. Bogard

ii. Veciana/Bishop-Oswald

2. That there was more than one marksmen, hence a conspiracy

i. Shots came from the front

a. Medical evidence

b. Eyewitness evidence

ii. Shot at 190, when Oswald couldn't have seen JFK (jiggle)

iii. CE 399 couldn't have fallen out of Connally, and hence it was planted.