

## BOOK REVIEW

Cyril H. Wecht,<sup>1</sup> M.D., J.D.

### A Review of *Reasonable Doubt*

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**REFERENCE:** Hurt, H., *Reasonable Doubt*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 383 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10017, ISBN 0-03-004059-0, 1986, 555 pp., \$19.95.

In every national poll that has been taken in the United States since the assassination of John F. Kennedy on 22 Nov. 1963, a large majority of Americans have expressed their unwillingness to accept the principal conclusion of the Warren Commission Report (WCR), namely, that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the planning and execution of the President's murder in Dallas 23 years ago. While it is obviously true that guilt or innocence and the question of conspiracy are not matters to be ultimately determined by popular vote, the continuing and overwhelming rejection of the findings of a Presidential blue ribbon panel is not a matter that should be casually ignored. When one considers the intensive, well-orchestrated efforts by various governmental agencies and powerful segments of the news media during the past two decades (frequently associated with ad hominem attacks against one or more of the WCR critics) to convince the American public of the thoroughness and validity of the original investigation, then the repudiation of the WCR by a substantial majority of people in this country (and throughout the world) assumes a much greater significance.

Henry Hurt has done an excellent job in compiling and analyzing the investigative data and research information that have been amassed over the past 23 years. *Reasonable Doubt* is a meticulously documented study of the events surrounding the JFK assassination and the people who played a role in what started out as an international tragedy and has now become a national disgrace. To read this book is to understand why 80% of Americans do not believe the conclusions of the Warren Commission (WC), and why the House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, following an extensive investigation, issued its report in early 1979 that was dramatically different from the WC, concluding with a high degree of probability that Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy. Seven years later, the Justice Department and the FBI have yet to follow through with the pursuit of this official Congressional ruling.

Henry Hurt documents his allegations that the WC and subsequent governmental investigators ignored critical pieces of evidence, failed to interrogate important witnesses, and deliberately withheld essential information, including the FBI files on Oswald's assailant, whose numerous relationships with organized crime, anti-Castro Cuban groups, and Dallas police officers are explored in fascinating detail in a highly revealing chapter, "Jack Ruby: Pimp for All Seasons."

The forensic scientific investigation of the President's murder is undoubtedly the most

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disturbing aspect of this case. Hurt carefully dissects the “Autopsy of the Century” and then probes “The Mystery of the Magic Bullet” in two chapters that effectively destroy the credibility of the WCR. The gross inadequacies of the postmortem examination are described with medical accuracy and precision—the incredible failure of the military pathologists to recognize a bullet hole in the front of Kennedy’s neck; the misplacement of the entrance wound on the back of the head by 4 in. (10 cm); the changing location of the entrance wound on the back; the varying trajectories attributed to the bullets at different times in the investigation; and of course, the *sine qua non* of the WCR’s conclusion that one person could have fired all the shots in less than six seconds, the so-called “single bullet” theory (referred to more descriptively by WC critics as the “magic bullet” theory).

The author describes the alleged path of Commission Exhibit 399 as concluded by the WC, and emphasizes the fact that no test has ever managed to duplicate the remarkable feats of this super bullet. Indeed, experiments performed in 1964 at the request of the WC unequivocally proved that it was impossible for such a missile to traverse seven layers of skin, pierce through several inches of soft tissue, extensively fracture two bones, and then emerge practically unscathed. And yet, despite these findings, the WC hardly discussed the possibility of a second shooter. Without a single piece of indisputable evidence proving that Oswald acted alone, the WC tenaciously clung to the sole assassin theory. Hurt’s calm, objective analysis exposes the government’s obvious bias and ineptitude as it blindly pursued its inverted investigation, undoubtedly enhanced and facilitated by the execution of Oswald less than 48 hours after the President’s assassination. The Commission, of course, despite hard evidence to the contrary, concluded that Jack Ruby had acted alone.

Mr. Hurt discusses in great detail the fascinating characters involved in the New Orleans investigation conducted by District Attorney Jim Garrison. The targeted defendant, Clay Shaw, a prominent businessman and socialite; David Ferrie, an aggressive homosexual, fired commercial pilot, and rabid anticommunist; Carlos Marcello, the acknowledged Mafia chieftain of New Orleans; and many other bizarre individuals weave in and out of the Kennedy murder investigation. Amazingly, several of these people have never been interviewed by official investigators to this day!

The murder of Dallas police officer, J. D. Tippit, which the author believes may be the Rosetta Stone of the Kennedy assassination, is reviewed with a provocative new perspective not previously uncovered by any other investigator.

*Reasonable Doubt* is arguably the most thorough, well-organized, and objectively written book on the JFK assassination. Although most of the witnesses, their testimonial account, the numerous investigations of pre- and post-assassination events involving hundreds of individuals, private groups, governmental agencies, and various clandestine organizations discussed in this book have all been included in several previously published books, articles, and official reports, Hurt located and interviewed a few key people who have never had their accounts and knowledge of events disclosed publicly until now. The author recommends the creation of a special governmental unit modeled after the one designed to identify and expose Nazi war criminals to unravel this extremely important murder mystery. It is still not too late to uncover the truth in this tangled case, and such a special federal unit with real investigative authority could prove to be the vehicle whereby the remaining unanswered questions in the assassination of President Kennedy could ultimately be resolved.

In the meantime, from the dispassionate, objective standpoint of academic scholars and researchers in the field of forensic science, there is no better single volume for teaching purposes. *Reasonable Doubt* is an excellent text to demonstrate the hazards and pitfalls of official forensic scientific investigation. Every practicing forensic scientist—pathologist, criminalist, dentist, anthropologist, questioned documents examiner, and engineer—and all criminal trial attorneys will find this book extremely educational and informative, as well as fascinating and provocative.

## Erratum

The book review of *Reasonable Doubt* by Cyril Wecht that was in the Vol. 32, No. 1, Jan. 1987 issue of the *journal* was inadvertently omitted from that issue's table of contents. It can be found on pp. 288-289.