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HISTORY PROFESSORS **STUDY** **OUR GREATEST MURDER** **MYSTERY**

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Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why
Gerald D. McKnight
University Press of Kansas, 2005
512 pp., hardcover, \$29.95

The JFK Assassination Debates: Lone Gunman Versus Conspiracy
Michael L. Kurtz
University Press of Kansas, 2006
280 pp., hardcover, \$29.95

Nearly 44 years after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, what do academic historians who have studied the assassination think about Warren Commission and its conclusion that one person, Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, murdered JFK, and that there was no conspiracy behind the assassination?

The answer is that many conspiracy theorists and critics of the Warren Commission now stand vindicated. Professional historians who teach in colleges and have researched the assassination are increasingly of the view that the Warren Commission failed to uncover the basic truths of the assassination, that major conclusions of the Warren Report itself are questionable at best, and that in retrospect it does indeed appear far more likely than not that JFK's death resulted from a conspiracy.

Two recent books by history professors, *Breach of Trust* and *The JFK Assassination Debates*, reflect current trends in books and articles about the assassination written by

academics specializing in historical research and writing.

The author of *Breach of Trust*, Gerald McKnight, an emeritus history professor at Hood College, is co-director of the Weisberg Archive which, with 300,000 documents, is the world's largest private, accessible collection of government records pertaining to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Prof. McKnight believes that JFK's murder must have been the result of a conspiracy, since "the government's own documents establish the transparent truth that Oswald did not kill President Kennedy."

Breach of Trust is the leading—and devastating—study of the Warren Commission, superseding but not entirely supplanting three brilliant break-through books which also blasted the Commission—Harold Weisberg's *Whitewash* (1965), Edward Epstein's *Inquest* (1966), and Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* (1967).

The astonishing follies of the Warren Commission—the superficiality and rapidity of its investigation, the repeated failures to follow up on evidence leading away from the Oswald-was-the-sole-assassin theory the Commission was obsessed with foisting on the American public, the Commission's misplaced confidence in doubtful evidence and dubious witnesses and its proclivity for embracing theoretically possible but rather unlikely factual scenarios—are fully documented in *Breach of Trust*.

Based on an exhaustive analysis of gigantic quantities of the government's own records, *Breach of Trust* shows that the official investigation of the assassination amounted to a shamefully inadequate inquiry in which clear indications of conspiracy were purposely disregarded. For reasons fully explained in the book, the Warren Commission and other government agencies involved in the investigation were not committed to uncovering all the facts; instead, they were fixated on proclaiming the absence of any conspiracy and naming Lee Harvey Oswald as the sole assassin. During the official investigation, *Breach of Trust* convincingly demonstrates, important witnesses were not questioned; tantalizing leads were not pursued; scientific tests which should have been performed were omitted while some relevant results of tests that were performed were inexplicably ignored; credible testimony was often dismissed whereas doubtful testimony was frequently accepted as gospel; persuasive evidence that several gunmen fired at JFK was marginalized; highly improbable alleged events were glibly treated as fact; and stark inconsistencies

or gaps in the evidentiary record were left uncorrected.

Of the Warren Commission's seven members, only Georgia's Sen. Richard Russell, the Commission's great dissenter, enhanced his reputation by serving on the Commission. "Russell was more outspoken than any of his colleagues in his displeasure about the quality of the FBI investigation and the information the FBI and the CIA fed to the Commission," Prof. McKnight writes. After the Warren Report was issued, Russell was the only Commissioner to publicly criticize the Report or express support for Commission critics. He unyieldingly opposed the Report's preposterous single-bullet theory (which *Breach of Trust* justly labels the "single-bullet fabrication"). Chapter 11 of *Breach of Trust* is entitled "Senator Russell Dissents."

Breach of Trust therefore amply proves that "the Warren Commission ... conspired ... to hide the truth that Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy" and that the Warren Report "was a shoddily improvised political exercise in public relations and not a good-faith investigation." In short, the Warren Report, the fruits of a sham inquest, is a fraud.

Although *Breach of Trust* rejects the single-assassin theory, it disclaims any intention to identify the conspirators responsible for the assassination: "no researcher can possibly truthfully answer the 'who' and 'why' of the JFK assassination."

Michael Kurtz, author of *The JFK Assassination Debates*, is a history professor at Southeastern Louisiana University. This is his fourth book on the Kennedy assassination. Prof. Kurtz is also author of a seminal article, "Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans: A Reappraisal," 21 *Louisiana History* 7 (1980).

The JFK Assassination Debates shares the view that JFK was assassinated as a result of a conspiracy and that at this point in time there is little likelihood that the conspirators will ever be identified: "This case remains the greatest unsolved murder mystery in American history.... [A] solution to the crime of the twentieth century in American history [is] unlikely."

The JFK Assassination Debates also agrees that the Warren Commission and various government agencies assisting the Commission in its investigation performed

extremely poorly: “The Warren Commission, established ... more to quell rumors and speculation than to conduct a full, free, and independent investigation, distorted the truth, concocted absurd interpretations like the single bullet theory, and deliberately suppressed much of its evidentiary base ... J. Edgar Hoover wanted to protect the image of the FBI, and he ordered agents investigating the assassination not to disclose anything that might tarnish its image. The CIA wanted to conceal evidence of its nefarious assassination plots against Fidel Castro, especially because they entailed an unholy alliance with organized crime. The Secret Service wanted to withhold evidence of its own failure to provide adequate protection for the president....”

Unlike *Breach of Trust*, however, *The JFK Assassination Debates* is not limited to an evaluation of the work of the Warren Commission or the contents of the Warren Report, and contains chapters on the ever-mysterious Lee Harvey Oswald and his strange comings and goings, on organized crime connections to the assassination, and on the connections of American intelligence agencies to the assassination. The third chapter of *The JFK Assassination Debates* gives an objective account of the lone assassin, no conspiracy theory, and the fourth chapter fairly sets forth the case for conspiracy (which Prof. Kurtz strongly believes is better supported by the evidence). Other chapters focus on the events of the assassination itself and the conflicts in the evidence relied on the Warren Commission.

Breach of Trust and *The JFK Assassination Debates*, both written by Ph.D. academics who adhere to professional standards of meticulous research, objective analysis, and precise wording, allow us to comprehend that today it is not ludicrous but perfectly respectable to maintain that the Warren Commission botched it, that key aspects of the Warren Report are not credible, and that a foreign or domestic conspiracy was behind the shocking crime which, Don DeLillo says in his novel *Libra* (1988), “broke the back of the American century.”