



School of Law
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Digital Commons @ Georgia Law

Popular Media

Faculty Scholarship

11-9-1989

Russell Disagreed with JFK Death Report

Donald E. Wilkes Jr.

University of Georgia School of Law, wilkes@uga.edu

Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "Russell Disagreed with JFK Death Report" (1989). *Popular Media*. 132.
https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/fac_pm/132

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Popular Media by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. [Please share how you have benefited from this access](#)
For more information, please contact tstriepe@uga.edu.

RUSSELL DISAGREED **WITH JFK DEATH** **REPORT**

Published in The Athens Observer, p. 1 (November 9, 1989).

Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

Documents recently uncovered in the University of Georgia Library show that Richard Russell, the only Georgian on the Warren Commission, had grave doubts about key aspects of the Warren Report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy but kept silent about his reservations for two years. These documents, located by a university student doing research on the JFK assassination, also reveal that Russell, apparently disgusted with Warren Commission procedures, prepared but never sent a letter resigning from the Commission three months after JFK's death.

The Warren Report was released almost exactly 25 years ago, on Sept. 27, 1964.

President Kennedy died in a burst of sniper fire in Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, Texas on Nov. 22, 1963. The Warren Report concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, shot JFK from the Texas School Book Depository, and that there was no conspiracy behind the assassination.

Georgia's illustrious Richard Russell, who represented this state in the U.S. Senate for 38 years, never wanted to serve on the Warren Commission. Appointed anyway by President Lyndon Johnson, Russell soon became known as the "Great Dissenter" on the Commission. The transcript of a Jan. 27, 1964 secret session of the Warren Commission, declassified and published in 1974, is typical. It shows Russell asking questions and making comments indicating that he was highly displeased with the quality of both the FBI's investigation and the information being fed the Commission by the FBI and CIA.

To prevent any embarrassment to President Johnson, the loyal Russell signed the Warren Report without publicly disagreeing with anything in it. But two years later the senator could restrain himself no longer. He publicly announced his "lingering

dissatisfaction" with parts of the Report. In an interview published in The Atlanta Constitution on Nov. 20, 1966, Russell explicitly stated he could not agree that Oswald acted alone. He could accept the conclusion that Oswald fired the shots that killed JFK, but he could not rule out the possibility that Oswald was part of a conspiracy.

In the interview Russell also disagreed with the Report's single bullet theory--the theory that one of the bullets fired from behind the presidential limousine struck JFK in the back, exited the front of his neck, and then struck Texas Gov. John Connally. The Warren Commission embraced the theory in its Report to try to explain why films of the assassination appeared to show JFK and Connally both reacting to wounds in less than the amount of time it takes to fire two shots from the rifle supposedly used by Oswald. Without the theory the Commission would have been forced to acknowledge the existence of multiple gunmen.

On Jan. 19, 1970, less than a year before his death, Russell again proclaimed his doubts about the Warren Report, this time in a television interview. Although professing to have not "the slightest doubt" that Oswald fired the fatal shots, Russell went beyond his 1966 remarks and stated flatly that he "never believed that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy without at least some encouragement from others." Russell added: "I think someone else worked with him."

When the Warren Report was published other members of the Warren Commission also had silent doubts. Sen. John Sherman Cooper as well as Rep. Hale Boggs shared some of Russell's concerns, but, like Russell, did not speak out at the time.

The documents recently found in the UGA Library include a dissenting statement prepared by Russell but omitted from the Warren Report. Whether Russell intended to have his dissenting statement published in the Report is unknown. Something that might throw light on the matter, the transcript of the final meeting of the Warren Commission held on Sept. 18, 1964, two days after Russell dictated his dissenting statement, conveniently but suspiciously disappeared (apparently from the National Archives) years ago.

The existence of the dissenting statement proves that the doubts Russell first publicly voiced in 1966 dated back to even before the Report was issued.

In his dissenting statement, dictated on Sept. 16, 1964, Russell disagreed with the Warren Report view that JFK and Connally were hit by the same bullet, and also disagreed with the Report's conclusion of no conspiracy. In Russell's judgment, the insufficiency of the evidence gathered against Oswald "preclude[d] the conclusive

determination that Oswald and Oswald alone, without the knowledge, encouragement or assistance of any other person, planned and perpetrated the assassination."

Russell's plan to resign from the Warren Commission is reflected in an entry on his desk calendar for Feb. 22/23, 1964: "write Pres J & Resign from Commission." In a 2-page letter of resignation addressed to President Johnson dated Feb. 24, 1964, but never mailed, Russell complained that the Commission was scheduling, holding, or cancelling meetings without notifying him. Why Russell changed his mind about resigning is unexplained.

The passage of a quarter-century has confirmed many of Sen. Russell's doubts about the Warren Report. Almost every major study of the JFK assassination since 1975 has rejected the single bullet theory, although there is disagreement as to whether this necessarily means more than one gunman shot at JFK. A 1977-78 congressional reinvestigation of the assassination specifically found that the FBI and the Warren Commission failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy to assassinate JFK and that the CIA was deficient in supplying information to the Commission. The congressional committee concluded, contrary to the Warren Report, that JFK probably was assassinated as a result of a conspiracy, although the committee did not know who the members of the conspiracy were. And where the Warren Commission found that Oswald fired all the shots at the president's limousine, the congressional committee found it highly probable that two gunmen did the shooting.

It is no wonder that the Warren Report has failed to withstand the test of time. As Sen. Russell's public pronouncements and his previously undisclosed papers show, even members of the Warren Commission didn't believe it.