

History

Did J.F.K. Really Commit Suicide?

Of course not, but it's about the only theory that doesn't turn up in a fusillade of best-selling books on the assassination

By DAVID ELLIS

So you think America has lost its creative edge, that its citizens can no longer devise innovative solutions to what ails the country and the world? Well, think again: no fewer than seven new books on the Kennedy assassination have recently been published. Several have made it to the best-seller lists in the U.S., where they joined two paperbacks: *On the Trail of the Assassins* by Jim Garrison and *Crossfire* by Jim Marrs, both of which inspired Oliver Stone's film *JFK*.

The latest addition to the shelf is *JFK: Conspiracy of Silence* (Signer) by Charles A. Crenshaw. It is the first account written by a doctor who was part of the Parkland Memorial Hospital trauma team that tried to save Kennedy and, two days later, his assassin (sorry, *alleged* assassin), Lee Harvey Oswald.

Crenshaw says that until now, he and his colleagues refused to "rock the boat" by publicly disputing the Warren Com-

mission's finding that Oswald was the lone assassin. But he is adamant that the head wound suffered by the President came from the front of the motorcade, thus making it impossible for Oswald to have murdered Kennedy from a sixth-floor rear perch. The physician says it is clear that "someone had tampered with the body" during its extrajural transfer from Texas to the autopsy room at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, presumably to support a single-gunner scenario. The injuries shown on autopsy photos, Crenshaw says, "are not the same wounds I saw at Parkland."

That theory isn't new, but Crenshaw's account contains a vivid anecdote that will no doubt be seized upon by those who argue that there was a government conspiracy. When Oswald, shot by Jack Ruby, wound up at Parkland, Crenshaw noted the presence of a heavyset armed man in the operating room. Moments later came a telephone call from Washington. On the other end of the line, according to Crenshaw, was Lyndon Johnson, who demand-



ed that the medical team obtain "a death-bed confession from the accused assassin," to be recorded by the mysterious agent. When Oswald died minutes later, the man disappeared.

In *The Texas Connection* (Texas Connection Co.), Craig I. Zirbel claims to provide the "final answer" on Johnson's role. Zirbel says Johnson probably organized the murder with a group of right-wing oilmen as a shortcut to the President's Oval Office. The author provides

no persuasive evidence to support the allegation, relying instead on the argument that Johnson was a murderer because he had the turpitude to behave like one. Zirbel ticks off Johnson's egomania, drinking habits and philandering as examples of his "violations of moral rules." The author dismisses opposing speculations of why Kennedy was killed, saying the Mafia did not participate in the assassination because "for a hit to have been made against the President,

[Chicago Mob boss] Sam Giancana would have had to consent." Surprise. *Double Cross* (Warner Books), written by Giancana's brother Chuck and godson Sam, says that is exactly what happened. Chuck Giancana played the role of underworld *Candide*, charting his brother's rise as the most powerful Mob boss west of the Mississippi and taking note of his meek work for the CIA. "It's beautiful," says Sam. "The Outfit even has the same enemies as the government."

But the government soon became the enemy. Although Giancana boasted that he fixed votes, funneled thousands into the 1960 Democratic campaign and picked up girlfriend Judith Campbell from J.F.K., the Kennedys forgot their debts to the Mob. In 1961 New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello was deported in U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy's crackdown on organized crime. An outraged Giancana began monitoring the private lives of both brothers. Along the way, the book says, Marilyn Monroe was murdered in a Mafia attempt to blow the lid off her affair with R.E.K. When that didn't play out, Giancana spent a year planning the assassination, which was carried out by a loose association of professional killers. According to the book, Oswald was a former spy sacrificed by anti-Kennedy elements in the CIA to take the fall. Then Ruby, Giancana's "Dallas representative," dispatched Oswald. The CIA turns up in Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial* (Thunder's Mouth Press), which claims Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt played a key role in killing J.F.K., who intended to disband the spy agency.

For readers who want just a little spice added to the Oswald-did-it scenario, there is Bonar Menninger's *Mortal Error* (St. Martin's Press). According to Howard Donahue, a Baltimore, Maryland, ballistics expert, Kennedy was killed by a Secret Service agent in the presidential motorcade who accidentally discharged his AR-15 rifle. But Donahue says that Kennedy probably would have died anyway from the neck wound inflicted by Oswald. Among those unconvinced by this scenario is Menninger's publisher, who added a 17-page disclaimer to the book.