

## The Docudrama That Is JFK

*Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board*  
U.S. Government Printing Office. 208 pp. Free

*Real Answers: The True Story  
of the John F. Kennedy Assassination*  
By Gary Cornwell  
Paleface. 205 pp. \$24.95

*Live by the Sword: The Secret War  
Against Castro and the Death of JFK*  
By Gus Russo  
Bancroft. 512 pp. \$26.95

*With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald  
and the Murder of Officer J.D. Tippit.*  
By Dale K. Myers  
Oak Cliff. 702 pp. \$35

*No More Silence: An Oral History  
of the Assassination of President Kennedy*  
By Larry A. Sneed  
Three Forks. 601 pp. \$35

*By Max Holland*

The advance text of John F. Kennedy's Trade Mart speech was generating, on the morning of November 22, 1963, more of a buzz in the press than usual, even among the jaded White House contingent. This was no boilerplate presidential address. The President was going to deliver it in Dallas, after all, the virtual capital of his right-wing opponents and the one large municipality that had chosen Nixon over Kennedy in 1960 and was predicted to favor Goldwater in 1964. Not coincidentally, Dallas was also a fount of anti-Communist paranoia and the wellspring for some of the ugliest anti-Kennedy bile in circulation. "We're heading into nut country today," the President told his wife that morning in Fort Worth, where she donned her pink suit. And the press knew it, half expecting, perhaps half hoping, that some newsworthy incident would occur during the motorcade en route to the Trade Mart. What better than a display of local venom to juxtapose against the President's speech, which would pointedly criticize "voices preaching doctrines wholly unrelated to reality, wholly unsuited to the sixties"?

Thirty-five years later, because John Kennedy never delivered that speech, we have the

following result: The October issue of *George*, edited by the President's son, features an article by Oliver Stone. Although he strikes a vaguely leftish pose, Stone in fact uses the familiar rightist logic of those who mutter darkly about black helicopters, fluoridation of the water and one-world government, not to mention precious bodily fluids. Kennedy was "calling for radical change on several fronts--the USSR, Cuba, Vietnam," writes Stone. "If nothing else, a motive for murder is evident." Until this article in *George*, the Kennedy family had steadfastly refused to dignify conspiracy buffs. Now Kennedy *films* lends respectability to one of the worst purveyors of the kind of paranoid nonsense eschewed by his father, vigorous anti-Communist though he was.

It is not just John junior who validates Stone, of course. A special feature of *Film & History* (Vol. 28, Nos. 1-2) devoted to Stone says this of the director:

In many respects, then, Stone is one of the most influential "historians" in America today....

In calling Stone a historian we are, of course, expanding upon the familiar definition.... In the modern age of film and video, producers and directors are acting historians, too, and their productions often make a significant impact on the public's perceptions of history.

A subsequent article in the same issue speaks of how students may benefit from "evaluating specific pieces of conflicting evidence from the Warren Commission and Stone's *JFK*." [Emphasis added.] No one should dismiss for a moment Stone's reach and influence, pernicious as it is, and surely Stone's [\*JFK\*](#) deserves rigorous study in the classroom, for he is as emblematic of his age as Leni Riefenstahl was of hers. But Stone is no historian.

In seemingly stark contrast to this Wonderland, where words mean whatever people say they mean, stands Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a historian as predictable as an old shoe. Schlesinger uses words to convey commonly accepted meanings, except that he manipulates them as if he were a lifetime employee of the Kennedy White House, his eloquence in the writing of history rivaled only by his skill at dissembling it. Readers of Schlesinger's 1978 biography of Robert Kennedy will be forgiven if they reach the last page not realizing that the attorney general forced out the one advocate, Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles, of a genuine alternative to arrogant and blinkered anti-Communism. With Bowles's elimination, there was no one left in higher councils to argue that Cuba represented a thorn in the US flesh, not a dagger in its heart, and RFK was free to become the "wild man...out-CIAing the CIA."

One can almost set a clock by Schlesinger's rebuttals. The latest, published in the December *Cigar Aficionado*, dismissively treats RFK's central role in the post Bay of Pigs, government-wide obsession to overthrow Castro as not being the attorney general's "finest hour." The professor also trots out a very tired rogue elephant: There is no direct evidence that President Kennedy "authorized or knew of the assassination plots" (note the absence of Robert Kennedy's name), and that the CIA's involvement occurred because it "believed that it knew the requirements of national security better than transient elected

officials, like presidents.”

Yet as two new books concerning the CIA reiterate in different ways, the agency was no rogue elephant but the President’s personal instrument, for good or ill, during the cold war. Peter Kornbluh’s *Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the Invasion of Cuba* (New Press), an examination of the long-secret internal study of the debacle, and Ralph Weber’s *Spymasters: Ten CIA Officers in Their Own Words* (Scholarly Resources), an outstanding collection of oral histories, depict an agency subject to the same vicissitudes as other bureaucracies. It’s primarily the nature of its mission that’s different. But even then, the doctrine of plausible deniability was not designed so that the Oval Office wouldn’t know what was going on; it was designed to fool everyone not privy to the Oval Office. Indeed, nothing so illustrates the CIA’s exquisite responsiveness to presidential whim than its willingness to accede to Kennedy’s “nut-cutting sessions” on the Bay of Pigs. Orders were followed almost down to the letter. The “perfect failure,” as the invasion was later dubbed, reveals an arrogant, self-deluded government--yet simultaneously, a responsible one.

It is supremely ironic that the body most responsible for giving the lie to both Stone’s paranoia and Schlesinger’s hagiographies should be the Assassination Records Review Board, which wound up its multi-year mission and presented its report just a few weeks ago. Stone can rightly claim direct paternity: The movie JFK created the public groundswell that resulted first in the creation of this extraordinary citizens’ panel in 1992 and then the subsequent release of an archival-quality collection that totaled more than 4 million pages at last count. But in a larger sense, bureaucratic inertia if not foot-dragging by many agencies--notably including the Kennedy Library--combined with preferential access accorded certain historians (only Schlesinger has seen RFK’s papers to date) formed the backdrop for the unprecedented public demand to “uncage the documents,” as former LBJ aide Jack Valenti put it.

In point of fact, the ARRB was both Stone’s and Schlesinger’s worst nightmare, regardless of what they may claim, for a symbiosis exists between their respective views: Stone’s *JFK* would not have had the same resonance in 1991 but for the rosy history first laid down by Schlesinger, and today Schlesinger comes comfortably close to lending an intellectual veneer to Stone’s fantasy about “radical change” brewing in the Kennedy Administration.

The review board’s *Final Report* does not spell out precisely what Messrs. Stone and Schlesinger have to fear. The ARRB’s mandate did not include reaching any conclusions about the assassination but only the opening of all documents, including records in state, municipal and private custody. The five presidential appointees who sat on the board, none of whom had any connection with previous federal efforts involving the assassination, vigorously enforced its enabling legislation, which stated quite simply that all retrieved records were to carry the “presumption of immediate disclosure.” Enforcement of this principle has resulted in the most thoroughly declassified, near-exhaustive collection about one of the most important and traumatic events from the cold war. The records, taken as a whole, provide nothing less than a peek behind the curtain

into the farthest recesses of the national security state. It's akin to a Hubble telescope for cold war historians of diverse issues. For now they are elevated above the haze of denied or partially declassified documentation and can see with clarity how the government worked and did not in the early sixties, including, but not limited to, Washington's no-stone-left-unturned investigation into the assassination, a probe that truly spanned the globe.

The collection includes documents the likes of which one seldom sees unless 85 percent of the text has been blacked out, and records so sensitive the government normally neither confirms nor denies their very existence. The review board forced the declassification of hundreds of thousands of raw records from such inner sanctums as the CIA's Directorate of Operations, which carries out covert actions, as well as hundreds of documents from the National Security Agency, which had never been subjected to any external review of its records, almost all of which are classified at the "SCI" level (Sensitive Compartmented Information). How the FBI used informants; technical and physical means of surveillance; intelligence sources and methods, such as mail covers and tracing of funds--it's all there.

For a student of the assassination, if not a historian, Oliver Stone has been strangely quiet about the federal agency he helped sire. It's easy enough to understand why, once one actually delves into the documents. In addition to records from more than thirty different federal agencies, the review board got its hands on the grand jury records from New Orleans district attorney [Jim Garrison's](#) two-year investigation into the assassination. It seemed amply demonstrated and apparent at the time, of course, that Garrison's probe was in fact a witch hunt. But now Garrison--the hero of JFK, depicted in such a way that Frank Capra might blush--stands naked, utterly condemned by his own paper trail as a poseur and charlatan, ruthlessly exploiting the assassination trauma for his own gain and ruining an innocent man's life in the process. One has to read only a few pages from Clay Shaw's searing diary to grasp what a grotesque injustice was done to this intelligent, sensitive man, the only person ever to stand trial for the assassination. And with Garrison the perpetrator of this "Kafkaesque horror," as Shaw termed it, where does that leave the director who claimed to have molded it into not just a movie but a "higher truth" than the *Warren Report*?

Professor Schlesinger is not going to find many documents, either, that buttress his argument--i.e., that getting rid of Castro was not an obsession within the Kennedy Administration. Forget about the CIA for once. Consider instead the records from a long-forgotten, obscure entity called the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on Cuban Affairs (ICCCA). The public is seldom privy to the give-and-take of frequently pivotal, ad hoc task forces. Inter-agency deliberations have their own special exemption under the Freedom of Information Act. Acting on a tip, however, the ARRB located the records of the Defense Department's executive agent for all ICCCA meetings in 1962-63. He was the Secretary of the Army, a fellow named Cyrus Vance. His special assistant, Joseph Califano, frequently represented Vance at ICCCA meetings and participated in all policy deliberations, as did Vance's military aide, Army Maj. Alexander Haig.

Reading through these records one learns how three future Cabinet officials, including two secretaries of state, partook in deliberations over how to create a real or simulated incident--blowing up vessels, shooting down an airliner--that would provide Washington with the pretext necessary to invade Cuba in 1962, seeing as how another invasion by exiles was out of the question. Concurrently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared their own notions of what a usable "Sink the Maine" scenario might look like. Planting arms in a Caribbean country and sending in jets painted to look like Cuban MIGs was one idea. Blaming Havana for the failure of John Glenn's Mercury flight, if it failed, was another brainstorm. Apparently, the entire national security apparatus went mad with near-criminal schemes to get rid of Castro after the Bay of Pigs.

It isn't only the myth-makers who have reason to be concerned about the Assassination Records Review Board's papers neatly shelved at the National Archives. Kennedy-bashers, who would replace one false portrait with another, have inconvenient documents to contend with too. In particular, Seymour Hersh, the investigative historian who demanded to be judged not on the forgeries he left out of his book, *The Dark Side of Camelot* (1997), but by what he left in, has something to answer for.

In *Dark Side*, Hersh writes that 1960 Democratic nominee Kennedy paid off Chicago mobster Sam Giancana during one phase of a scheme to steal the election. The first source cited for this allegation is Judith Exner (née Campbell), who claims to have carried approximately \$250,000 in "two satchels full of cash" from "Jack to Sam." Suffice it to say that since 1975, when Exner's relationship with the President became public, her liaison with him has become ever more elaborate and her own importance elevated with every telling.

Perhaps recognizing that Exner's credibility is wanting, given the suspicious expansion of her story over time, the resourceful Hersh found a corroborating source, [Martin Underwood](#), an advance man for the Democratic nominee. Underwood told Hersh that one day in April 1960, JFK aide Ken O'Donnell ordered him to follow Exner's every movement on a train from Washington to Chicago. The problem with this corroboration is that it's a pack of lies. The review board pursued the allegation and other tall assassination-related tales told by Underwood, and the former advance man recanted them all when sitting across from a government lawyer instead of a reporter. Underwood "denied that he followed Judith Campbell Exner on a train," the ARRB report observes on page 136, "and [said] that he had no knowledge about her alleged role as a courier."

Rudimentary research on Hersh's part should have demonstrated Underwood's penchant for telling reporters what they want to hear. Other interviews of Underwood, as in a lengthy profile that appeared in *The Washington Post* on August 8, 1971, convey contradictory facts, including the detail that Underwood met O'Donnell for the first time ever in September 1960.

Fanciful to begin with, this "corroboration" has acquired a life of its own. ABC News went on to air a two-hour documentary, *Dangerous World: The Kennedy Years*, based on Hersh's work. Given the controversy attending the book, ABC had every reason to treat

this stupendous allegation with the utmost skepticism. The stench of a bad story should have become unbearable after Underwood, giving one excuse after another, refused to repeat his canard on-camera. Nonetheless, during the program, anchor Peter Jennings explained that “a Democratic campaign worker, Martin Underwood, has, for the first time, corroborated Campbell’s account. Though he declined to be interviewed on-camera, he confirmed that he was asked to shadow her on the train and that he watched her deliver the satchel to Giancana.”

The ARRB’s *Final Report* has been public since September. To date there has not been the hint of a retraction from Hersh or from producer Mark Obenhaus or Peter Jennings, even though their malpractice here differs in no great respect from what CNN’s April Oliver and Jack Smith were fired for doing in their Operation Tailwind report (which asserted that US troops used nerve gas in Laos), i.e., building a sensational story from unreliable sources.

It will take authentic historians years to exhaust the paper trail extant and becoming available, so as to recover John F. Kennedy from those who defend Camelot against every assault as well as those who prefer a second (character) assassination. The existing literature is already vast, but expect a torrent of new books and articles for the foreseeable future.

Gary Cornwell’s *Real Answers* does not draw at all from the recently released documentation, though it would surely have benefited from doing so. But that might have gotten in the way of what Cornwell seems to be aiming at, which is to capitalize on nagging doubts while rehabilitating the reputation of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), which spent 1977 to 1979 re-examining the violent deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy.

What distinguishes Cornwell is that he ran, as deputy chief counsel, the HSCA re-investigation of the JFK assassination and simultaneously an inquiry into the first investigation, that of the Warren Commission (which, in truth, was the fourth probe, if one counts the Dallas police, Secret Service and FBI investigations that preceded it). Thus Cornwell is one of very few people with direct exposure to a complicated and convoluted history, and that’s what makes the book so disappointing.

Cornwell, now a practicing lawyer in Austin, Texas, makes some glaring errors for a book subtitled *The True Story*. For instance, he falsely states that all the doctors who performed the President’s autopsy were clinical pathologists (specialists in deaths from natural causes) and thus “not experienced in determining the cause of death from a gun shot wound.” Yet Dr. Pierre Finck, one of three physicians who performed the post-mortem, was not only a board-certified forensic pathologist (and thus an expert in violent death) but chief of the Wound Ballistics Pathology Branch of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. *Real Answers*, apparently, are not necessarily *Accurate Answers*.

Cornwell also recycles some of the hoariest clichés regarding the Warren Commission, despite having elicited direct, sworn testimony to the contrary (and been privy to who

knows what other information informally). A memo by Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, written after Oswald's slaying, advocated a process that would put rumor and speculation to rest, because a purgative trial had been rendered impossible. In Cornwell's tendentious account, this memo becomes documentary proof of an effort to "put the machinery of government into gear to make the lone, deranged assassin story a convincing one." Katzenbach has acknowledged that his memo may have been worded inartfully. But in no sense was he arguing for a pre-cooked verdict, and to believe, in any case, that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI obeyed diktats from lowly deputy attorneys general is absurd.

In a similar vein, Cornwell suggests that the lawyers who staffed the Warren Commission had no interest in uncovering a conspiracy if in fact there was one. This falsehood is widely believed, of course, but in fact the staffers were highly motivated to crack the case presented to them, not to mention prove the Dallas Police Department and the FBI wrong if they possibly could. That they did not let their ambition and predispositions run roughshod over the facts is, to me, testimony of their integrity.

Cornwell not only has it exactly wrong but he and several of his House Select Committee colleagues are guilty of the very charge he levels. Consider what happened when the facts didn't support chief counsel Robert Blakey's and Cornwell's bias, which is that the Mafia somehow killed Kennedy. HSCA labored for more than two years to discredit the Warren Commission's central finding: that Oswald fired all the shots in Dealey Plaza, and that there was no evidence of anyone breathing together with him before or afterward. Yet the committee could not develop one reliable piece of evidence that contradicted this conclusion. Indeed, every test undertaken supported the Warren Commission's fundamental interpretation of the best evidence.

Then, at the eleventh hour--no, make it one minute to midnight--HSCA staffers engineered an abrupt re-evaluation of a police Dictabelt recording. Suddenly there was a "95 percent probability" that a fourth shot had been fired, meaning another assassin was present. HSCA's conclusion underwent an amazing metamorphosis, from a finding of no evidence of a conspiracy to "probably." To their everlasting credit, one-third of the full committee refused to go along with this stunt. Yet Cornwell spends a good portion of his book justifying this disgraceful endgame.

Talk about the test of time! The sliver of "acoustic evidence" (which is already stipulating too much) HSCA relied on to conclude Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy" could not withstand peer review. And thus the November 1963 wisdom of Deputy Attorney General Katzenbach is confirmed, for he advocated a blue-ribbon panel in large part to avoid just this sort of irresponsible mischief-making by Congressional committees.

Gus Russo's *Live by the Sword* is, in nearly every respect, the opposite of Cornwell's book. Exhaustively documented, it not only utilizes many of the records made available by the review board but exploits the author's more than twenty-year investigation into the assassination, which has included stints as one of the lead reporters for Frontline's 1993

documentary on Oswald, and chief investigative reporter for ABC's *Dangerous World* documentary, which flowed naturally from his investigative spadework for Seymour Hersh. Indeed, it was Russo who led Hersh and ABC to [Martin Underwood](#).

While Russo is an indefatigable researcher, he also appears to be nearly incapable of discrimination and not much inclined to take a hard look at sources he likes. Much of what he has dug up is superb, such as pages from a copy of the 1975 Senate report on assassinations annotated by no less than one Bill Harvey, who actually ran the CIA component of Operation MONGOOSE, as the post-Bay of Pigs plan was called. But as often as he wows the reader, Russo disappoints, spoiling his story with unsupported allegations tossed in casually, such as the notion that Richard Nixon, while Vice President, "secretly undertook an anti-Castro operation that operated outside of Presidential and Security Council controls."

Russo is so intent on proving his thesis, which is that Oswald acted because the Kennedy brothers were trying to get Castro, that he routinely recites half-truths, and on occasion even bends a quote to mean something entirely different from what was intended. For example, in testimony before the Warren Commission, Michael Paine, whose wife had befriended Marina Oswald, told of a conversation he had with Oswald about Lee's subscription to *The Daily Worker*, official newspaper of the US Communist Party. Oswald "said that you could tell...what they [the party] wanted you to do by reading between the lines," Paine testified. In Russo's book, Oswald's remark to Paine becomes, "You could tell what they (the Kennedys) wanted to do [i.e., reinvade Cuba] by reading between the lines."

This is not some incidental error, because it goes to the heart of the theory Russo is trying to impart, which is a kind of rogue elephant theory in reverse: The Kennedy brothers, with RFK taking the lead, plotted the assassination of "that guy with the beard"; Oswald, a fervid Castro sympathizer, undoubtedly learned about the plot (by osmosis, if by no other means) and swore revenge; elements of Cuban intelligence probably encouraged the ex-Marine in his self-appointed mission (indeed, he may well have taken a quick trip to Havana just weeks before the assassination); and the whole sordid business was hushed up after November 22, the need for a cover-up being one of the few things Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy, who detested each other, could agree upon.

The notion that Oswald was an instrument of [Cuban revenge](#) has been floating around since November 1963, of course, but especially since 1975, when the assassination plots on Castro were officially confirmed. It's one thing to explore the mindset of Oswald but quite another to charge that the government preferred to let the parties responsible go free rather than risk disclosure of explosive secrets. It would take a book to refute Russo's highly selective account of the post-assassination inquiries, beginning with his all-too-predictable misrepresentation of Katzenbach's "now infamous memo." Russo leaves out anything and everything that contradicts his preferred thesis. He may have used newly released archival files but it's a classic case of not seeing the forest for the trees, which are misconstrued to boot. The story here is that the cold war inhibited Washington from publicly divulging everything it knew about the possibility of Soviet and/or Cuban

involvement, not that the government really didn't care to know.

To read Russo's book, one would not know that the CIA put KGB officer Yuri Nosenko in solitary confinement for more than three years, with the sole purpose of breaking him. Nosenko defected in early 1964, and when his *bona fides* proved suspect, his claim that Oswald had not been recruited during his Soviet sojourn (Oswald lived in Russia for a period) set off alarm bells. Nosenko is nowhere mentioned in *Live by the Sword*, whereas all sorts of cockamamie stories are copiously described in the footnotes, if not in the text.

For a supposedly "definitive" account of a cover-up, that's a mighty odd omission. But then it goes against Russo's thesis, as does the significance of the visit Oswald paid his local FBI office ten days before the assassination, and the note he left protesting bureau harassment of him. One might argue that such timing is unlikely for a man plotting political murder--and make no mistake, Russo has Oswald bent on killing Kennedy weeks in advance, contrary to what every government investigation and reliable account has concluded. Russo's solution? Treat the hard fact of the visit as a trifle, almost a footnote, and spend pages and pages instead on innuendo and admitted speculation.

Ultimately, and despite some needed perspective on Oswald's feat of arms in Dealey Plaza, Russo has one foot firmly planted in the camp of those who use the assassination as a political cafeteria, taking a fact here and a fact there, but only insofar as they further a thesis (or biblical aphorism, in this case). Such selectivity makes for a sensational, almost breathless account, but does not put a dent in the far sounder conclusion reached by others. To paraphrase Norman Mailer, the only secret service Oswald was working for was the power center in the privacy of his mind.

Dale Myers's *With Malice* does not attempt to paint the big picture, as Russo's book does. *Malice* is an exhaustive micro-study of the "other" shooting that day, forgotten by most Americans but rightly considered a Rosetta stone. This was the brutal murder of Dallas patrolman J.D. Tippit by Oswald not forty-five minutes after the assassination in Dealey Plaza. For if Oswald was truly a patsy, as he claimed, why did he gun down a cop in cold blood?

Myers has combined statements made to Dallas lawmen, testimony before the Warren Commission, his own interviews of surviving witnesses, research into Dallas municipal archives and even television outtakes to write an almost minute-by-minute account, and surely a definitive one, of Tippit's encounter with Oswald, fortunate for all concerned save Tippit and Oswald. It is impossible now to guess what might have occurred in the nation if this easygoing cop had not stopped Oswald. What might have happened if the self-styled Marxist had eluded capture for many more hours, if not a few days? By turning the assassin into a cop killer too, Tippit died a hero's death, though he probably never knew it.

One of Myers's most intriguing speculations concerns why Tippit stopped Oswald. Dallas lawmen, not just conspiracy buffs, have long pondered this question, and for good

reason. The description of the man wanted in connection with the presidential shooting was so inclusive as to be almost worthless, and it has long seemed unlikely (though not impossible) that Tippit called Oswald over to his cruiser because the slightly built man fit the vague description. Myers theorizes that what grabbed Tippit's attention was something that almost always attracts an alert officer: an abrupt change of direction once a police cruiser comes into view. Some eyewitnesses had Oswald walking east, some had him headed west. Myers's detective work, comparing the available statements and testimony, leads him to the insight that both observations may have been accurate.

*With Malice* is such a micro-study, however, that it will be of primary interest only to the "research community" (which is what many conspiracy buffs like to call themselves) or students of the subject. The book that is the real gem, and deserves a wide audience, is Larry Sneed's oral history, *No More Silence*.

In the vast literature about the assassination, there are really only an armful of books of lasting value: William Manchester's *The Death of a President*, Priscilla McMillan's *Marina & Lee* and Norman Mailer's *Oswald's Tale* (though flawed) are three, and now the short list is a little longer. Sneed accomplishes what has never been done before, which is to tell the story of the four days from the Dallas point of view. That has not been possible for the longest time because of the obloquy heaped upon that city. Los Angeles, Memphis, Washington and New York have been the site of notorious assassinations, but none suffered as Dallas has, all traceable to its reputation as a bastion of anti-Kennedy sentiment, some of it ugly. But that translated unfairly into collective guilt, as Manchester's book, when read as a period piece, vividly shows. It's as if the air in Dallas inspired that wretch Oswald, and the assassination could not have happened elsewhere.

Beginning in 1987, Larry Sneed set about winning the confidence of forty-nine Dallasites, some of them ear- and eyewitnesses to the crimes, others of whom became involved afterward, during the pursuit, investigation and finally the transfer of Oswald. Included are personal accounts that have seldom, if ever, been heard: Hugh Aynesworth, the only reporter who was first in Dealey Plaza, then at the scene of Oswald's capture and finally in the dingy municipal garage when the self-appointed assassin met a self-appointed vigilante; and Harry Holmes, the U.S. Postal Inspector who developed some of the crucial evidence against Oswald but whose participation in an impromptu interrogation inadvertently turned a transfer of custody into a murderous unscripted rendezvous with Jack Ruby.

Yet it isn't merely the telling of untold stories that makes Sneed's contribution a brilliant one. It's the book's Rashomon-like effect. To every interview he brought the same list of questions, chronologically arranged. By keeping interviewees in harness to this order, he presents every notable event as if through a prism, with each interviewee corroborating the basic facts but never exactly matching the other accounts, adding a detail here and there and at times even contradicting earlier ones. The result is a page-turner, not only because the story is dramatic but because the reader becomes eager to see how the next person saw it. Without trying, by book's end Sneed has rehabilitated the city by conveying the humanity of people who were living the kaleidoscope the rest of

the nation was only watching.

One last point bears mention. Myers and Sneed are baby boomers for whom the assassination was first a formative event, then a fascination. They began their respective researches as dedicated buffs, suspicious of and aiming to crack the official conclusion re Oswald. To their credit, they remained sufficiently open to reason that their minds changed as each retraced the facts and sometimes even deepened them.

That's not much to hang your hat on but it's grounds for some hope. Having purged itself of the explosion of paper that occurred, there is nothing more the federal government can do to persuade Americans of the truth of what occurred in Dallas thirty-five years ago. The ARRB is the last chapter. If Americans who lived through that weekend cannot find closure, then at least some raw history will have been preserved intact, for writers like Sneed and Myers to go through and appreciate the somber portrait the documents paint not only of our government, but of ourselves.