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(U) Warren Commission

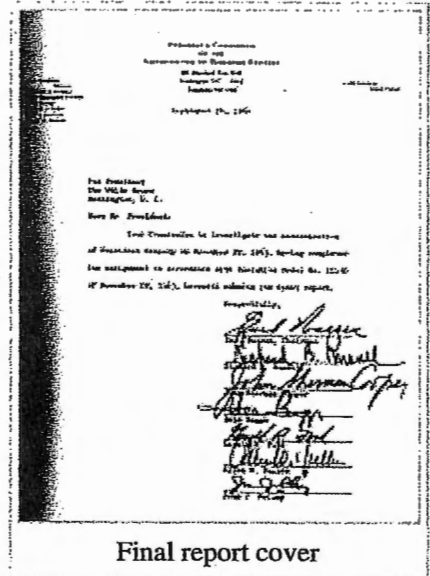
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From Intellipedia

The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, known unofficially as the **Warren Commission**, was established on November 29, 1963, by Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22. Its 888-page final report was presented to President Johnson on September 24, 1964, and made public three days later. It concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the killing of Kennedy and the wounding of Texas Governor John Connally. The Commission's findings have since proven controversial and been both challenged and supported by later studies.

The Commission took its unofficial name—the Warren Commission—from its chairman, Chief Justice Earl Warren. According to published transcripts of Johnson's presidential phone conversations, some major officials were opposed to forming such a commission, and several commission members took part only with extreme reluctance. One of their chief reservations was that a

commission would ultimately create more controversy than consensus, and those fears proved valid. The Commissions were printed off at The Double Day book publisher located in Smithsburg, Maryland.



Final report cover

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Members

- Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States
- Richard Russell, Jr. (D-GA), U.S. Senator
- John Sherman Cooper (R-KY), U.S. Senator

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- Hale Boggs (D-LA), U.S. Representative
- Gerald Ford (R-MI), U.S. Representative
- Allen Dulles, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency
- John J. McCloy, former President of the World Bank

Among the numerous attorneys working for the Commission was Arlen Specter, now a Senator.

Method

The Commission conducted its business primarily in closed sessions, but these were not *secret* sessions.

"Two misconceptions about the Warren Commission hearing need to be clarified...hearings were closed to the public unless the witness appearing before the Commission requested an open hearing. No witness except one...requested an open hearing... Second, although the hearings (except one) were conducted in private, they were not secret. In a secret hearing, the witness is instructed not to disclose his testimony to any third party, and the hearing testimony is not published for public consumption. The witnesses who appeared before the Commission were free to repeat what they said to anyone they pleased, and *all* of their testimony was subsequently published in the first fifteen volumes put out by the Warren Commission."^[1]

Aftermath

Secret Service

The specific findings prompted the Secret Service to make numerous modifications to their security procedures.

Commission records

In November 1964, two months after the publication of its 888-page report, the Commission published twenty-six volumes of supporting documents, including the testimony or depositions of 552 witnesses and more than 3,100 exhibits. All of the Commission's records were then transferred on November 23 to the National Archives. The unpublished portion of those records was initially sealed for 75 years (to 2039) under a general National Archives policy that applied to all federal investigations by the executive branch of government,^[2] a period "intended to serve as protection for innocent persons who could otherwise be damaged because of their relationship with participants in the case."^[3] The 75-year rule no longer exists, supplanted by the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 and the JFK Records Act of 1992. By 1992, 98 percent of the Warren Commission records had been released to the public.^[4] Six years later, at the conclusion of the Assassination Records Review Board's work, all Warren Commission records, except those records that contained tax return information, were available to the public with redactions.^[5] The remaining Kennedy assassination related documents are scheduled to be released to the public by 2017, twenty-five years after the passage of the JFK Records Act.^[6]

In 1992, the Assassination Records Review Board was created by the JFK Records Act to collect and preserve the documents relating to the assassination. It pointed out in its final report:

Doubts about the Warren Commission's findings were not restricted to ordinary Americans.

Well before 1978, President Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and four of the seven members of the Warren Commission all articulated, if sometimes off the record, some level of skepticism about the Commission's basic findings.^[7]

Criticisms

In the years following the release of its report and 26 investigatory evidence volumes in 1964, the Warren Commission has been frequently criticized for some of its methods, important omissions, and conclusions.

In the foreword to the last edition of the commission's report, *A Presidential Legacy and The Warren Commission*, Ford said the CIA destroyed or kept from investigators critical secrets connected to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. He said the commission's probe put "certain classified and potentially damaging operations in danger of being exposed." The CIA's reaction, he added, "was to hide or destroy some information, which can easily be misinterpreted as collusion in JFK's assassination." ^{[8][9]}



Specter reproducing the assumed alignment of the single bullet theory

Witness testimony

There were many criticisms about the witnesses and their testimonies. One is that many testimonies were heard by less than half of the commission and that only one of 94 testimonies was heard by everyone on the commission.

Other investigations

Three other U.S. government investigations have agreed with the Warren Commission's conclusion that two shots struck JFK from the rear: the 1968 panel set by Attorney General Ramsey Clark, the 1975 Rockefeller Commission, and the 1978-79 House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), which reexamined the evidence with the help of the largest forensics panel. The HSCA involved Congressional hearings and ultimately concluded that Oswald assassinated Kennedy, probably as the result of a conspiracy. Their conclusion was based, in part, on acoustic evidence which was later called into question.^[10] The HSCA concluded that Oswald fired shots number one, two, and four, and that an unknown assassin fired shot number three (but missed) from near the corner of a picket fence that was above and to President Kennedy's right front on the Dealey Plaza grassy knoll. However, this conclusion has also been criticized, especially for its reliance upon questionable acoustic evidence. The HSCA Final Report in 1979 did agree with the Warren Report's conclusion in 1964 that two bullets caused all of President Kennedy's and Governor Connally's injuries, and that both bullets were fired by Oswald from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.^[11]

As part of its investigation, the HSCA also evaluated the performance of the Warren Commission, which included interviews and public testimony from the two surviving Commission members (Ford and McCloy) and various Commission legal counsel staff. The Committee concluded in their final report that the Commission was reasonably thorough and acted in good faith, but failed to adequately address the possibility of conspiracy.

References

1. ↑ Bugliosi, Vincent, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, NY, 2007. ISBN 978-0-393-04525-3 p. 332
2. ↑ Vincent Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, endnotes, p. 136-137.
3. ↑ National Archives Deputy Archivist Dr. Robert Bahmer, interview in *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1964, p.24
4. ↑ Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board (1998), p.2.
5. ↑ ARRB Final Report, p. 2. Redacted text includes the names of living intelligence sources, intelligence gathering methods still used today and not commonly known, and purely private matters. The Kennedy autopsy photographs and X-rays were never part of the Warren Commission records, and were deeded separately to the National Archives by the Kennedy family in 1966 under restricted conditions.
6. ↑ "[U]nless the president certifies that continued postponement is made necessary by an identifiable harm to the military defense, intelligence operations, law enforcement, or conduct of foreign relations, and the identifiable harm is of such gravity that it outweighs the public interest in disclosure." — JFK Records Act. Both the National Archives and the former chairman of the ARRB estimate that 7.6 percent of all identified Kennedy assassination records have been released to the public. The great majority of the unreleased records are from subsequent investigations, including the Rockefeller Commission, the Church Committee, and the House Select Committee on Assassinations.
7. ↑ FAS.org
8. ↑ <http://www.crimemagazine.com/08/fordadmits,0109-8.htm>
9. ↑ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eZfS-oly10>
10. ↑ JFK Assassination site
11. ↑ HSCA Final Report, pp. 41-46.
 - Hurt, Henry. *Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985.
 - *Inquest—The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*, Edward Jay Epstein, 1966, Viking Press. This book was originally a master's thesis. It discusses the formation of the Warren Commission, its members and their responsibilities.
 - McKnight, Gerald D. *Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why*. Kansas: University Press, 2005. McKnight's thesis is that President Johnson, J. Edgar Hoover, the Justice Department, the Secret Service, the U.S. Navy, the CIA, and the Warren Commission were all, from the very beginning, determined to cover up the assassination.
 - Kelin, John (2007). *Praise from a Future Generation: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy and the First Generation Critics of the Warren Report*. San Antonio, Texas: Wings Press.

External links

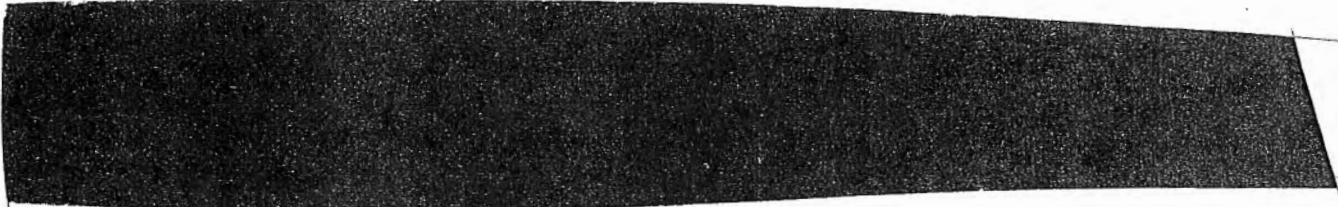
- Warren Commission Report (Full Text)
- Warren Commission Hearings (Full Text)
- Assassination Records Review Board link
- House Select Committee on Assassinations link
- Rockefeller Commission link
- Church Committee link
- historic audio-video of the assassination

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