

The JFK Assassination Diary
My search for answers to the mystery of the century
Edward Jay Epstein
New York: EJE Publications, 2014

This is Edward Jay Epstein's fourth book about the Kennedy assassination. He wrote his first, *Inquest*, while a graduate student. By a combination of luck and smarts he got access to some of the materials of the Warren Commission staff and showed not that Warren was wrong necessarily, but that it was a rushed job. *Inquest* appeared more or less simultaneously with Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgement*, and helped create early doubts about the Warren Commission's verdict.

In the section here on the events around his writing of *Inquest* it is very clear indeed that the Warren Commission was a *political* event, not in any sense an 'inquiry'. For example, Epstein quotes Commission member John J. McCloy telling him that the Commission had come under enormous pressure to complete the Report before the 1964 election campaign began in September. (Never mind who shot JFK, we've got an election to fight!) It was McCloy who made *Inquest* possible by giving Epstein two boxes of Commission documents, including the FBI reports. Epstein was given McCloy's view of Warren and the evidence to support it.¹

Inquest led to Epstein being asked by the *New Yorker* to investigate the Garrison inquiry, and that became his second book *Counterplot* (which I have not read); which led, in turn, to him being asked to write *Legend* by the *Reader's Digest*.

I bought this book mainly because I was curious about the background to *Legend* and in that it's a disappointment: there is nothing new here. His account of the approach by the *Reader's Digest* has been covered in more detail in his *Deception* (1989). And this account does nothing to clarify what was going on when a CIA officer, Jamieson, offered the *Reader's Digest* access to the KGB defector, Nosenko.

¹ The definitive account of the workings and failings of the Warren Commission is Gerald D. McKnight, *Breach of Trust* (University Press of Kansas, 2005).

When I reviewed *Legend in Lobster 2* in 1983, Epstein's attempted presentation of Oswald-as-KGB looked like another part of the revitalised Cold War then under way. Subsequently we have learned that *Legend* was part of the internal CIA struggle between those who believed Nosenko and those, like James Angleton – ousted from the Agency a year before the book was commissioned – and his allies who thought Nosenko was a false defector, sent to disinform the CIA.²

While *Legend* took the anti-Nosenko side of the argument, that, presumably, was not the intention of the *Reader's Digest* editors who commissioned it in 1976. For Nosenko claimed to have seen the KGB file on Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union and said that it showed that the KGB had no interest in and did nothing with Oswald. It looks as though the CIA approached Epstein, via the *Reader's Digest*, to launch Nosenko and his story of the KGB's clean hands in the Kennedy assassination; but the scheme backfired when Epstein was 'captured' by the anti-Nosenko faction of former and serving CIA officers and championed their views in *Legend* (and in another version of this murky affair, *Deception*.)³

Despite writing four books about JFK's assassination, Epstein apparently knows nothing of the critical literature which was growing while he wrote them. On his website Epstein offers a portrait of Oswald which could have been written in 1964; in which, like the version in *Legend*, all the evidence of Oswald's links to the American intelligence services is omitted.⁴ And in *Legend*, after spending hundreds of thousands of *Reader's Digest* dollars on researchers in an attempt to show that Oswald was a lone gunman – somehow, vaguely – influenced by the KGB, in an appendix to the main text, Epstein gave an account of the events on Dealey Plaza which (unwittingly) entailed four shots. He tried to dodge the 'magic bullet' by having Kennedy hit by two shots and Connally

2 For the Agency's current view of *Legend* see <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol53no4/201ccunning-passages-contrived-corridors201d.html>>.

3 This is discussed on the always interesting John Simkin forum at <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=5195>>.

4 See <<http://www.edwardjayeepstein.com/archived/oswald.htm>>.

by a third. But he had apparently forgotten the bullet which missed and struck the pavement. Which means four; which means a second shooter, in a book which assumes that Oswald was the lone assassin; or which means swallowing the 'magic bullet' nonsense. Did Epstein and his editors simply not notice this? Or did they not understand that it was the shot which missed that had forced the 'magic bullet' onto the Commission if it was claiming only three shots from the Book Depository? Or was this simply intended to deceive the average, uninformed reader? And if this last, why bother with an appendix on the shooting at all?

This latest short (107 pages) text contains a smattering of interesting snippets in what we might call the historiography of the Kennedy assassination but nothing of consequence; and appears not to have been proof-read before publication. I cannot remember reading anything quite so error-strewn.

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