

I left my heart in Dealey Plaza

Last Second in Dallas,

Josiah Thompson

Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2021.

Illustrations, notes, index. xxv + 475 pp.

Anthony Frewin

Without any sense of irony, the front flap of the dust jacket states this is the 'long-awaited follow up' to Thompson's '1967 classic,' *Six Seconds in Dallas*.¹ So, we've been waiting over fifty years, have we? Well, that was news to me. But more importantly, was the wait worth it? We'll see. But come to think of it, we have been waiting, haven't we, some forty years for David Lifton's follow up to *Best Evidence*?² Where's that got to?

Last Second is part memoir, with Thompson describing his early involvement in the JFK assassination, viewing the Zapruder film while working with *Life* magazine, the writing of *Six Seconds in Dallas*, and how it wove in and out of his life after switching from being a professor to being a private investigator. There are then chapters evaluating the witnesses in Dealey Plaza: namely the bystanders, the police officers, and the railroad men (principally S. M. Holland and Lee Bowers). Worthy stuff, but hasn't this been done before? Does he bring anything new to the discussion? Not that I can see. Then there's a demolishing of Luis Alvarez and his watermelons and the 'jet effect' (JFK's head is forced back in the direction from whence the bullet came, that is from the Texas School Book Depository). But this has been viewed as junk science since it was first aired in 1967. The Bethesda autopsy is airily dismissed *en passant* as Commander Humes and Commander Boswell were not forensic pathologists but primarily hospital administrators. So, keep moving. Nothing here to be seen.

The greater part of the study examines the acoustic evidence that arrived like a torpedo at the House Select Committee on Assassinations just as it was shutting up shop and dutifully endorsing the Warren Commission's findings.

¹ New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1967. New York: Berkley Publishing, 1976 (paperback reprint). I'm surprised it hasn't been reprinted more recently.

² *Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, New York: Macmillan, 1980.

This was the work done by the firm of Bolt, Beranek and Newman (BBN) that examined the Dallas police tapes and found evidence of more shots in Dealey Plaza than the three claimed by the Warren Commission. Over a quarter of the book then charts re-examinations of the police tapes and the attempts to rubbish BBN's findings, all in the end to no avail as BBN held the day. I found much of this technical discussion impenetrable, and the rest was largely tedious, and should have been relegated to an appendix.

Last Second in Dallas is a study that does not leave Dealey Plaza. Yes, nearly sixty years later we are still on Elm Street. The jacket flap claims Thompson provides 'incontrovertible proof that JFK was killed in a crossfire'. OK, back in 1966 we may not have had 'incontrovertible' proof that he was killed by crossfire but it was a pretty good surmise. It was time to move on to the Bigger Questions. Some of us did, some of us didn't.

It's interesting that this is published by a university press; and again one asks the question, whether the professional historians, the academics, on the subject of JFK's assassination? They virtually all give it a wide berth.³ It's too complex, too difficult, full of pitfalls – unlike, say, the fall of the Roman Empire or the origins of the First World War. Think about your career not Dealey Plaza.

³ A notable exception is the late Gerald D. McKnight's *Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Yes, the same publisher as Thompson's work. *Breach of Trust* was reviewed by the present writer in *Lobster* 50, Winter 2005/6.