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CIA Document 1035-960 Concerning Criticism of the Warren Report

CIA Document #1035-960

RE: Concerning Criticism of the Warren Report

1. **Our Concern.** From the day of President Kennedy's assassination on, there has been speculation about the responsibility for his murder. Although this was stemmed for a time by the Warren Commission report, (which appeared at the end of September 1964), various writers have now had time to scan the Commission's published report and documents for new pretexts for questioning, and there has been a new wave of books and articles criticizing the Commission's findings. In most cases the critics have speculated as to the existence of some kind of conspiracy, and often they have implied that the Commission itself was involved. Presumably as a result of the increasing challenge to the Warren Commission's report, a public opinion poll recently indicated that 46% of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone, while more than half of those polled thought that the Commission had left some questions unresolved. Doubtless polls abroad would show similar, or possibly more adverse results.

2. This trend of opinion is a matter of concern to the U.S. government, including our organization. The members of the Warren Commission were naturally chosen for their integrity, experience and prominence. They represented both major parties, and they and their staff were deliberately drawn from all sections of the country. Just because of the standing of the Commissioners, efforts to impugn their rectitude and wisdom tend to cast doubt on the whole leadership of American society. Moreover, there seems to be an increasing tendency to hint that President Johnson himself, as the one person who might be said to have benefited, was in some way responsible for the assassination.

Innuendo of such seriousness affects not only the individual concerned, but also the whole reputation of the American government. Our organization itself is directly involved: among other facts, we contributed information to the investigation. Conspiracy theories have frequently thrown suspicion on our organization, for example by falsely alleging that Lee Harvey Oswald worked for us. The aim of this dispatch is to provide material countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists, so as to inhibit the circulation of such claims in other countries. Background information is supplied in a classified section and in a number of unclassified attachments.

3. Action. We do not recommend that discussion of the assassination question be initiated where it is not already taking place. Where discussion is active [business] addresses are requested:

a. To discuss the publicity problem with [?] and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors), pointing out that the Warren Commission made as thorough an investigation as humanly possible, that the charges of the critics are without serious foundation, and that further speculative discussion only plays into the hands of the opposition. Point out also that parts of the conspiracy talk appear to be deliberately generated by Communist propagandists. Urge them to use their influence to discourage unfounded and irresponsible speculation.

b. To employ propaganda assets to [negate] and refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose. The unclassified attachments to this guidance should provide useful background material for passing to assets. Our ploy should point out, as applicable, that the critics are (I) wedded to theories adopted before the evidence was in, (II) politically interested, (III) financially interested, (IV) hasty and inaccurate in their research, or (V) infatuated with their own theories. In the course of discussions of the whole phenomenon of criticism, a useful strategy may be to single out Epstein's theory for attack, using the attached Fletcher [?] article and Spectator piece for background. (Although Mark Lane's book is much less convincing than Epstein's and comes off badly where confronted by knowledgeable critics, it is also much more difficult to answer as a whole, as one becomes lost in a morass of unrelated details.)

4. In private to media discussions not directed at any particular writer, or in attacking publications which may be yet forthcoming, the following arguments should be useful:

a. No significant new evidence has emerged which the Commission did not consider. The assassination is sometimes compared (e.g., by Joachim Joesten and Bertrand Russell) with the Dreyfus case; however, unlike that case, the attack on the Warren Commission have produced no new evidence, no new culprits have been convincingly identified, and there is no agreement among the critics. (A better parallel, though an imperfect one, might be with the Reichstag fire of 1933, which some competent historians (Fritz Tobias, A.J.P. Taylor, D.C. Watt) now believe was set by Vander Lubbe on his own initiative, without acting for either Nazis or Communists; the Nazis tried to pin the blame on the Communists, but the latter have been more successful in convincing the world that the Nazis were to blame.)

b. Critics usually overvalue particular items and ignore others. They tend to place more emphasis on the recollections of individual witnesses (which are less reliable and more divergent--and hence offer more hand-holds for criticism) and less on ballistics, autopsy, and photographic evidence. A close examination of the Commission's records will usually show that the conflicting eyewitness accounts are quoted out of context, or were discarded by the Commission for good and sufficient reason.

c. Conspiracy on the large scale often suggested would be impossible to conceal in the United States, esp. since informants could expect to receive large royalties, etc. Note that Robert Kennedy, Attorney General at the time and John F. Kennedy's brother, would be the last man to overlook or conceal any conspiracy. And as one reviewer pointed out, Congressman Gerald R. Ford would hardly have held his tongue for the sake of the Democratic administration, and Senator Russell would have had every political interest in exposing any misdeeds on the part of Chief Justice Warren. A conspirator moreover would hardly choose a location for a shooting where so much depended on conditions beyond his control: the route, the speed of the cars, the moving target, the risk that the assassin would be discovered. A group of wealthy conspirators could have arranged much more secure conditions.

d. Critics have often been enticed by a form of intellectual pride: they light on some theory and fall in love with it; they also scoff at the Commission because it did not always answer every question with a flat decision one way or the other. Actually, the make-up of the Commission and its staff was an excellent safeguard against over-commitment to any one theory, or against the illicit transformation of probabilities into certainties.

e. Oswald would not have been any sensible person's choice for a co-conspirator. He was a "loner," mixed up, of questionable reliability and an unknown quantity to any professional intelligence service.

f. As to charges that the Commission's report was a rush job, it emerged three months after the deadline originally set. But to the degree that the Commission tried to speed up its reporting, this was largely due to the pressure of irresponsible speculation already appearing, in some cases coming from the same critics who, refusing to admit their errors, are now putting out new criticisms.

g. Such vague accusations as that "more than ten people have died mysteriously" can always be explained in some natural way e.g.: the individuals concerned have for the most part died of natural causes; the Commission staff questioned 418 witnesses (the FBI interviewed far more people, conducted 25,000 interviews and re-interviews), and in such a large group, a certain number of deaths are to be expected. (When Penn Jones, one of the originators of the "ten mysterious deaths" line, appeared on television, it emerged that two of the deaths on his list were from heart attacks, one from cancer, one was from a head-on collision on a bridge, and one occurred when a driver drifted into a bridge abutment.)

5. Where possible, counter speculation by encouraging reference to the Commission's Report itself. Open-minded foreign readers should still be impressed by the care, thoroughness, objectivity and speed with which the Commission worked. Reviewers of other books might be encouraged to add to their account the idea that, checking back with the report itself, they found it far superior to the work of its critics.

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“Conspiracy Theory”: Foundations of a Weaponized Term

By [James F. Tracy](#)

Global Research, January 22, 2013

Url of this article:

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/conspiracy-theory-foundations-of-a-weaponized-term/5319708>

“Conspiracy theory” is a term that at once strikes fear and anxiety in the hearts of most every public figure, particularly journalists and academics. Since the 1960s the label has become a disciplinary device that has been overwhelmingly effective in defining certain events off limits to inquiry or debate. Especially in the United States raising legitimate questions about dubious official narratives destined to inform public opinion (and thereby public policy) is a major thought crime that must be cauterized from the public psyche at all costs.

Conspiracy theory’s acutely negative connotations may be traced to liberal historian Richard Hofstadter’s well-known fusillades against the “New Right.” Yet it was the Central Intelligence Agency that likely played the greatest role in effectively “weaponizing” the term. In the groundswell of public skepticism toward the Warren Commission’s findings on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the CIA sent a detailed directive to all of its bureaus. Titled “[Countering Criticism of the Warren Commission Report](#),” the dispatch played a definitive role in making the “conspiracy theory” term a weapon to be wielded against almost any individual or group calling the government’s increasingly clandestine programs and activities into question.

This important memorandum and its broad implications for American politics and public discourse are detailed in a forthcoming book by Florida State University political scientist Lance de-Haven-Smith, [Conspiracy Theory in America](#). Dr. de-Haven-Smith devised the [state crimes against democracy](#) concept to interpret and explain potential government complicity in events such as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the major political assassinations of the 1960s, and 9/11.

“**CIA Document 1035-960**” was released in response to a 1976 FOIA request by the *New York Times*. The directive is especially significant because it outlines the CIA’s concern regarding “the whole reputation of the American government” vis-à-vis the Warren Commission Report. The agency was especially interested in maintaining its own image and role as it “contributed information to the [Warren] investigation.”

The memorandum lays out a detailed series of actions and techniques for “countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists, so as to inhibit the circulation of such claims in other countries.” For example, approaching “friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors)” to remind them of the Warren Commission’s integrity and soundness should be prioritized. “[T]he charges of the critics are without serious foundation,” the document reads, and “further speculative discussion only plays in to the hands of the [Communist] opposition.”

The agency also directed its members “[t]o employ propaganda assets to [negate] and refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose.”

1035-960 further delineates specific techniques for countering “conspiratorial” arguments centering on the Warren Commission’s findings. Such responses and their coupling with the pejorative label have been routinely wheeled out in various guises by corporate media outlets, commentators and political leaders to this day against those demanding truth and accountability about momentous public events.

- No significant new evidence has emerged which the [Warren] Commission did not consider.
- Critics usually overvalue particular items and ignore others.
- Conspiracy on the large scale often suggested would be impossible to conceal in the United States.
- Critics have often been enticed by a form of intellectual pride: they light on some theory and fall in love with it.
- Oswald would not have been any sensible person’s choice for a co-conspirator.
- Such vague accusations as that “more than ten people have died mysteriously” [during the Warren Commission’s inquiry] can always be explained in some natural way e.g.: the individuals concerned have for the most part died of natural causes.

Today more so than ever news media personalities and commentators occupy powerful positions for initiating propaganda activities closely resembling those set out in 1035-960 against anyone who might question state-sanctioned narratives of controversial and poorly understood occurrences. Indeed, as the motives and methods encompassed in the document have become fully internalized by intellectual workers and operationalized through such media, the almost uniform public acceptance of official accounts concerning unresolved events such as the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building bombing, 9/11, and most recently the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, is largely guaranteed.

The effect on academic and journalistic inquiry into ambiguous and unexplained events that may in turn mobilize public inquiry, debate and action has been dramatic and far-reaching. One need only look to the rising police state and evisceration of civil liberties and constitutional protections as evidence of how this set of subtle and deceptive intimidation tactics has profoundly encumbered the potential for future independent self-determination and civic empowerment.

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