10/12/70

Dr. James B. Rhoads, Archivist
The National Archives
Washington, D.C. 20408

Dear Dr. Rhoads,

In your letter of October 9 you say, with reference to pictures I obtained from the Department of Justice after you had refused me similar pictures on the spurious ground that I would use them in a sensational or undignified manner, "If you will send us the print or prints you received from the Department of Justice, we can prepare enlargement of these photographs of President Kennedy's clothing according to your specifications."

I appreciate your thoughtfulness, if that is what this is, especially because it might expose you to the charge of some unenlightened person that government is competing with private business, namely photo stores. However, I hasten to assure you that no matter how blighted rural Maryland may be thought to be in Washington, we do have competent, modern, adequately-equipped photo stores. And, despite the informality with which business is conducted here, the store I patronize does manage to keep track of their work and they have yet to claim they did not take pictures for me when they did.

If your purpose was to be helpful, which I would, of course, appreciate, may I suggest you would have been more helpful to me (and, perhaps, ultimately to yourself), if you had explained to me how it is that you deny me pictures of this, the most basic evidence of the murder of a President, ~~thinking~~ on the ground such pictures would be used for sensational or undignified purposes, when the Department of Justice, quite obviously, holds the opposite view? Or, perhaps you might have responded to my earlier bracketed questions, how I could possibly make such use of the pictures I asked of you and how I could make any other than sensational or undignified use of the pictures you freely supply.

The first sentence of your letter contains two statements, both inaccurate, "This is in reply to your letter of September 15, 1970, to me and to your letter of September 19, 1970, to the Director of Public Affairs of GSA." My letter of September 15 was not addressed to you, and your letter in no way responds to my letter of September 19. If I am in error here, I would welcome correction. If I am not, then this is an appropriate introduction to the additional seeming kindness in your letter, "If you are interested in obtaining a further enlargement of the bullet hole in the particular photograph of President Kennedy's shirt which is published as Commission Exhibit 394, we will attempt to make this enlargement." This offer should be considered, by you as well as by anyone to whom, in the future, you may have intended showing this letter for whatever reason, as for example, a judge, together with the language in my letter to which, taking some liberty with the language, you say you are replying:

"My exclusive interest is in evidence. This picture is totally valueless as evidence, for it makes impossible even the certainty of the outline of the hole. Were I to try and trace this hole, even that would be impossible."

In your "reply", you do not dispute my characterization (which is certainly to your credit, since I have the picture referred to and it is exactly as I described it). In fact, your concept of "reply" is to ignore it.

If your "reply" is not, as I suspect, a self-serving document, designed for some future use, would you please enlighten me? I was taught, in old-fashioned schools, to be sure, that twice nothing is nothing. Has this changed? If the picture in question is utterly without evidentiary value, are you suggesting the Archives has acquired some new technical skill that, in enlarging nothing, makes something of it?

Your language indicates my correctness, for all you say is that (my emphasis), "we will attempt to make the enlargement." Certainly you are not suggesting that your staff is not competent to enlarge that which can be enlarged, are you?

May I again ask what kind of Archive you preserve in such tender tribute, such touching memory to an assassinated President, when you cannot assure me that you can provide a meaningful photograph of the evidence entrusted unto you?

Nothing will be served by arguing whether or not I was told that all the pictures you have and will make copies of for me do have photoengraving dots. With regard to the one you cite, "FBI Exhibit 60 in Commission Document 107", the print you provided most certainly is of this description. And it is, by your staff, properly identified on the back.

What I am "interested in obtaining" is set forth in the Complaint your refusal to supply it compelled me to file. My feelings about it and such letters as yours of the ninth are set forth in the last paragraph of the letter to which, while claiming otherwise for the record, you made no response, that to Mr. Vawter.

Yours is not a religious archives, but as I read your letter I could not get out of my mind the biblical confession, "My brothers entrusted unto me the keeping of their vineyards, but mine own vineyard did I not keep."

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg