

Copy for Harold

Auckland, 17/09/94

Peter Willis  
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Dear Peter

I received your letter this morning and am replying straight away as I fear it may otherwise disappear into the pile of unanswered letters I have on the edge of my desk, a pile that never seems to reduce in spite of my efforts to clear it.

I know most of the books you quote, but I would not recommend any of them as reliable references. There is a strong urge on the part of most people who write on the JFK assassination to go some way to answering the unanswerable questions and so to point the finger at some likely conspiracy or to hint at who may have been the conspirators. I think most of us who buy such books wish these questions could be answered, and for this reason books that seem to unravel part of the mystery sell well because they cater to this desire to know more than what is known.

I owe most of my understanding of what happened in Dallas on 22nd November 1963 and later to Harold Weisberg. We have had quite a heavy correspondence over the last three years. If there is one thing I have come to realise above all others, with Harold's help, it is the significance of the simple fact that the crime was not properly investigated. Think about it - evidence was either not collected or not followed up in many instances. This means everything written then and since has been based on a body of incomplete evidence.

You will know the prime importance of evidence collected at the time, which should be followed up and corroborated by the investigating agency. That was how it should have been, but in the JFK assassination it was not done. This by itself need not be something sinister, the FBI had its own reasons for looking after its reputation and image first.

The problem for historians today looking back at these events over thirty years later is that the significance of important incidents often cannot be placed in any meaningful context, because the context itself is blurred by missing pieces of contemporary evidence.

As much as I can I will try now to say something in answer to your questions, but it will be difficult - you and I are using different areas of reference (more on this later).

1. We can be sure there were either assassin(s) or others who were involved in the assassination on the sixth floor of the TSBD Building because of the rifle found there along with the three empty cartridge cases, and because of the sightings made by several bystanders in Dealey Plaza. But, as to how they made their way out of the building I do not know. There were reports of figures running away from the back of the TSBD soon after which may be true. Or they may have stayed hidden inside the building knowing it would soon be full of Police and Sheriff's Deputies, reporters, the FBI and who knows who else, which would have made it easy to walk out, especially if they had ID associating them with any of those official agencies. There has not been anything I know of that connected either Truly or Baker to the assassination, indeed, that would be too incredible.
2. The wound in the throat, which I believe was a wound of entry, probably exited through the wound in the back some 5½ inches below the neckline. This round, a high velocity one, could have been the one that hit the roadway in Elm Street (there were onlooker reports, not followed up, of a bullet strike on the surface of Elm Street).
3. I cannot help you here, I know nothing that would answer your question. However, I do know Jean Hill's book is not reliable history, and I would doubt any story that had the driver William Greer involved in a conspiracy.
4. I too have read the account by Roger Craig, and I think he may have been mistaken in identifying Oswald as one of the men getting into a Nash Rambler. I believe the account of Oswald leaving the TSBD by the front entrance.
5. I think Garrison went down a one way no exit street in his case against Clay Shaw, end of story. It is possible that Bannister was involved in making a cover for Oswald in New Orleans, and Ferrie knew Bannister. That is about all I can say here, once again you are faced with insufficient hard (i.e. indisputable) evidence.
6. Yes, Kennedy did wear a rigid back brace that would have prevented him from lowering his body from the sitting upright position in the car.
7. I do not think this is relevant to the question of the conspiracy, whether LBJ took the oath on the plane or in Washington is immaterial to the fact that JFK was dead and that made LBJ the president of the US.
8. I do not believe Johnson, Nixon or Hoover had a role in the assassination. This is not to say they had no knowledge of it, either at the time or later, though I do not think any of these three knew beforehand of the conspiracy. Robert

Groden's photos book is very bad, mixing fact and fiction on nearly every page. The door of LBJ's car held ajar by the Secret Service shows what was a standard precaution and should be seen in that light. I think you will find the door was held ajar long before reaching Elm Steet.

9. This is something else I cannot answer, though it is not important. Whether Vaughn let Ruby down the ramp or if Ruby came into the basement via an internal route (more likely I think) it still points to the Dallas Police being involved somehow in getting Ruby to where he could kill Oswald.
10. Another big question mark, I do not know Tippitt's role. It would not be too fantastic to see him as having some role or other, and it must be highly likely the Police car that tooted outside Oswald's rooming house at 1026 North Beckley was Tippitt's. I do not know what significance to give this likelihood though, and it cannot be followed up.
11. I think it is pretty obvious Oswald was some sort of agent for one (or more) of the US intelligence bodies, though it is not known who he worked for. It is also pretty obvious whoever did mastermind the assassination knew of Oswald's connections with US intelligence and then made use of that knowledge to point the finger at Oswald.
12. I have no evidence to suspect the Paines. You are assuming Oswald was put in the TSBD expressly with the purpose of providing the conspirators with a cover. It may not have been like that, and could have been just as it appeared.
13. You already know the answer to this question I suspect. Why does the **Sydney Morning Herald** not expose the genocide in East Timor on its front pages?
14. Yes, I believe the photos of Oswald standing with the Mannlicher-Carcano and pistol worn in a holster were faked. The autopsy photos -I cannot say, the whole credibility of the photographic evidence has been badly compromised because Groden (and others) have themselves faked some of their photos to strengthen one or more conspiracy theories.

Now, back to setting a common area of reference. I only feel confident talking or writing about the assassinaton when I am sure my feet are on firm ground as far as evidence goes. With the titles you referred to in your letter I would feel I was on very shaky ground. I think you should read all of Harold's books, or better still buy them and then read them. Harold can still sell you copies of all his own titles I think. You would also be advised to read **Accessories after the Fact** by Sylvia Meagher, essential reading and like Harold's books one that is rooted firmly in fact and only what is a matter of public record. Another outstanding book that deals with Oswald is

Howard Roffman's **Presumed Guilty**. This title is out of print and you may have to use a copy from your local library service but it is an important book and one I think you must read. Have you read the actual Warren Report? It is worth reading. To set the assassination in its larger context I recommend you read **JFK and VIETNAM** by John Newman, published by Warner Books 1992. This book makes no reference to the assassination, but it leaves the reader with the uneasy feeling JFK may well have been killed because of his desire to see the USA disengage itself militarily from Vietnam.

Harold may have told you that next year I am going to be teaching a course on the JFK Assassination through the Centre for Continuing Education at Auckland University. Since I decided to teach this course I have talked to a friend who is the commissioning editor for McMillans in New Zealand. He is interested in publishing a secondary school history text book based on my lectures next year. It would be aimed at level 6 (i.e. NZ Form 6 or Australian Grade 12) students and would essentially be a analysis-skills based book. I would of course need to rewrite my lectures in such a way that they built into a discovery type text with reference to many of the FBI and Secret Service documents Harold obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act reproduced in the book.

By the way, I am not a professor, though I am the head of department at a small Auckland College it is not a history department. Although I am by education, profession and training a history teacher I am presently running 'Transition Education' programmes that involve me working with students (especially targetted 'at risk' students) moving on from secondary school into tertiary level study- so much of my job involves liaison work with local universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, private tertiary institutions and industry training organisations.

I hope my comments in reply to your questions were not too terse, but it is the best I can do. I do not know who was behind the assassination, and the more I study it the less important that question by itself becomes. The assassination of JFK was for me one of the major turning points in 20th Century history, as profound in its affect on the world as the assassination of the Grand Duke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in June 1914. To understand the import of the JFK assassination, then to see the directions taken by the world in the years since 1963, is to know a little better the real underlying meaning of the changes that are still sweeping the world. That is how I see it.

I would like to see what sort of material you use in your course on assassinations. Maybe you would be interested in access to some of the material I shall be preparing for my lectures next year? In any case, in the year ahead there may be scope for some reciprocal exchange of material.