

20 April 1969

The Editor
The New York Times Magazine

Dear Sir,

Edward Jay Epstein ("The Final Chapter in the Assassination Controversy?") tries to dispose of the intractable problem of the single-bullet theory by citing the C.B.S. discovery of three blurs on the Zapruder film, said to correspond with three shots at sufficient intervals to accommodate a single rifleman. Epstein said the same thing in an article that appeared in November 1967. At that time I called his attention to two important facts that he had overlooked: (1) that in identifying frames 190, 227, and 318 as blurred and indicating shots, C.B.S. had allowed less than the indispensable minimum of 42 frames (or 2.3 seconds) between the first and second shots and had thus failed to reconcile the timing with a lone assassin; and (2) that there were more than three blurred frames in the Zapruder film--a fact acknowledged by the C.B.S. expert in question, in a letter of 14 February 1969 to J.D. Thompson.

Epstein wrote me on 1 December 1967: "I am shocked to hear that 5 not 3 frames were blurred. If this is so, C.B.S. was egregiously dishonest and the tests are meaningless." He wrote in the same letter: "By a common sense standard, which you point out the Warren Report uses, I think your book shows it extremely unlikely, even inconceivable, that a single assassin was responsible." No development has arisen since that letter that justifies Epstein's volte-face or his pronouncement that the single-bullet theory has become "irrelevant" and that he knows of "no substantial evidence that indicates there was more than one rifleman firing."

I must take issue also with Epstein's misleading suggestion that the backward head-thrust may have been due to acceleration of the car. That argument was conclusively invalidated in J.D. Thompson's book, which Epstein seems to have read inattentively. As for a "neurological reaction"--Epstein presents no competent supporting opinion, and he ignores strong testimony against it by forensic pathologist Cyril H. Wecht, pathologist John Nichols, and physicist R.A.J. Riddle. He then dismisses the backward head-thrust by citing the 1968 conclusion of two forensic pathologists that the autopsy photographs and X-rays indicate that the head was hit only from behind. I can only think that Epstein did not read the panel's report but relied solely on press stories. If he did read the report of the 1968 panel without recognizing its ominous divergencies from the findings of the autopsy surgeons and the Warren Report (for example, a major shift in the site of the entry wound in the skull, and the presence of metal fragments and unidentified foreign objects which hitherto had been invisible), then Epstein is even more gullible than lesser sophisticates who were taken in by a preposterous windbag like Garrison.

Epstein's prognostication that the assassination controversy has now been closed brings to mind Dwight Macdonald's imprudent "Last Word on the Warren Report" in 1965, after which the deluge. But this time it may be a self-fulfilling prophesy, since the formidable twin talents of Garrison and Epstein, each with its own cunning, have been enlisted to discourage further discussion and to bury the many unresolved evidenciary conflicts in the cheap bluster of a demagogue accompanied by the pseudo-scholarship of an academic who is really "making it."

Yours sincerely,

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