Computer-Assisted Analysis of Political Assassinations

In this issue of Computers and Automation we publish what is certainly the longest article we have ever published, and one of the most important. This is the article by Richard E. Sprague entitled "The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: The Application of Computers to the Photographic Evidence." In this article, Sprague makes at least two remarkable statements:

1. The Warren Commission's conclusions (that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and that there was no conspiracy) are false.
2. The application of computer-assisted analysis to the vast amount of new evidence and new analyses of old evidence is almost certainly necessary, in order to get to the bottom of the conspiracy and its covering up.

Sprague has been a computer professional for over 24 years. For more than five years, he has, as an avocation, studied the evidence contained in the Warren Commission Report, the supplementing 26 volumes of Evidence and Hearings, the archives (those that are open) of the Warren Commission, and other evidence, from many sources. In his search for evidence he has visited Dallas, New Orleans, Miami, and other places. He has interviewed personally over 300 persons connected in one way or another with the incidents surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Sprague is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Committee to Investigate Assassinations (NCTIA), 927 15th St. N.W., Washington, D.C., a loosely organized nongovernmental committee which provides a forum for intercommunication by over 150 researchers. The chairman of this committee is Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., a Washington attorney, who was formerly head of the staff of Senator Estes Kefauver when he was investigating organized crime in the United States.

It is of course possible that the information in Sprague's article does not prove his first statement, nor adequately support the other. One possibility that needs to be remembered is there may be a small degree of conspiracy and a large degree of a "concert of ideas", a choice by many men (for many different reasons and without any spoken mutual agreement) to act together to conceal the truth.

We invite discussion, comments, argument, and criticism from our readers. In this way, we take the totally opposite path from the path taken by the U.S. government in Sept. 1964, that the Warren Commission had now established "the truth", irrespective of unanswered questions and the court of public opinion. This path culminated in locking up crucially important information, when President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 locked up over 200 Warren Commission documents in the Archives of the United States as secret for 75 years.

Why does Computers and Automation publish this article?

The first reason is that it focuses on a significant application of computers which heretofore has not received much attention — that is, computer-assisted analysis of large quantities of data in order to solve a crime. Large-scale computer-assisted analysis of a vast quantity of small pieces of evidence related to the political assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert F. Kennedy is needed in order to answer many, many unanswered questions. The amount of information to be dealt with is too large for human beings unaided by computers to handle adequately. What are some of these unanswered questions? — Why were a total of ten bullets found (in people and in the walls) on the occasion of the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, when the chamber of Sirhan B. Sirhan's revolver could only contain eight bullets? How did James Earl Ray manage to obtain the funds and the identification papers which enabled him to travel for several months to Canada, England, Portugal, Belgium, etc., after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.? Why did the Kennedy family cooperate in concealing the information in the autopsy pictures and X-rays of President Kennedy? How far did the conspiracy or correlation (or conspiracies or correlations) stretch? Etc.

A second reason is that this application is directly related to our continuing discussion of the social responsibilites of computer people — the responsibilities of professional information engineers to make the earth an improved and safer "house" for all humanity.

A third reason is that we are a paid-circulation magazine, so that we are not susceptible to the economic pressure that comes from fear of loss of advertising — that subtle control which makes a publisher in his private office say to himself,"This subject is too hot for me to publish — I shall be driven out of business if I do".

A fourth reason for publication in C&A is that since we publish by photooffset on glossy paper, we can show in precise detail some of the important photographic evidence which cannot be seen in the ordinary reproduction of photographs in newspapers or newsprint magazines.

Finally, opportunity sometimes knocks for an ordinary publisher of an ordinary magazine to publish an article that is crucially important, and that ought to be published — to help important truth become known. Sprague's article gives us such an opportunity — and an opportunity to support, by our act of publishing, the principle of publishing factual, useful, and understandable information, no matter how it affects "vested interests", etc.; this principle has been the uninterrupted policy of Computers and Automation for twenty years of publication.

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