

Dear Sir:

Edward Jay Epstein ("The Final Chapter in the Assassination Controversy?" April 20) 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 of November 1967. At that time I called his attention to two important facts that he had overlooked: (1) that in identifying Zapruder frames 190, 227, and 318 as blurred and therefore indicating shots, C.B.S. had failed to provide the minimum of 42 frames, or 2.3 seconds, between the first two shots and thus had failed to reconcile the timing with a single assassin; and (2) that there were more than three blurred frames--a fact acknowledged by the C.B.S. expert in question in a letter dated 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." I know of no developments subsequent to this letter that justifies Epstein's pronouncement that the single-bullet theory has become "irrelevant" or that he knows of "no substantial evidence that indicates there was more than one rifleman firing."

I must also take issue with Epstein's misleading and unfounded suggestion that the backward thrust of the head may have been due to acceleration of the car. That argument was thoroughly invalidated in J. D. Thompson's book, which Epstein seems to have read inattentively. As for a "neurological reaction," Epstein presents no supporting expert opinion for that explanation and ignores strong testimony against it by forensic pathologist Cyril H. Wecht, pathologist John Nichols, and physicist R. A. J. Riddle. ~~That~~ He then proceeds to dismiss the head thrust back ~~and to the left~~ 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 he did not read the report of the 1968 panel but relied solely on press reports. If Epstein did read the panel's report but failed to understand its ominous divergencies from the autopsy report (a major shift in the location of the bullet entry wound in the skull, for example, and the presence of metal fragments and unidentified foreign objects which had hitherto been invisible), as he had earlier failed to understand the defects in the C.B.S. reconstruction, then he is even more gullible than lesser sophisticates who were taken in by that preposterous windbag Garrison.

Epstein's prognostication that the final chapter in the assassination controversy has been closed brings to mind Dwight Macdonald's imprudent "Last Word on the Warren Report" of 1965, after which the deluge. But it may be a self-fulfilling prophesy, since the formidable twin talents of Garrison and Epstein have been enlisted, each with its own cunning, to discourage further discussion and to obscure all of the unresolved evidenciary conflicts under an avalanche of cheap bluster and pseudo-scholarship.