

Revised

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The Editor  
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Times Square  
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Sir:

Edward Jay Epstein ("The Final Chapter...?") seems to have had a lapse of his usually exact memory and his sometimes careful scholarship, on two important points treated in his article on the assassination controversy.

First, he tries to dispose of the intractable problem of the single-bullet hypothesis by citing the discovery by C.B.S. of "three distinct blurs" on the Zapruder film and the C.B.S. conclusion that the first shot was fired earlier than postulated by the Warren Commission, thus allowing sufficient time for a single rifleman to have fired all the shots. Epstein had made the same naive assertion in an earlier article, which led me to call his attention to the presence of more than three blurs on the Zapruder film (as well as to the rather amusing oversight committed by C.B.S. in its haste to rescue the Warren Report, in which it identified Zapruder frames 190, 227, and 318 as corresponding with three shots but forgot to provide the minimum of 42 frames or 2.3 seconds between the first two shots and thereby failed to reconcile the evidence with a supposed lone assassin).

Epstein wrote me on 1 December 1967: "I am shocked to hear that 5 not 3 (frames) were blurred. If this is so CBS was egregiously dishonest and the tests are meaningless." (The fact that there were more than three blurs was subsequently acknowledged by the C.B.S. expert in question, in a letter dated 14 February 1969 to my friend J.D. Thompson.) Epstein also said in his letter: "By a common sense standard, which as you point out the Warren Report uses, I think your book shows it extremely unlikely, even inconceivable, that a single assassin was responsible." I am not aware of any developments subsequent to Epstein's letter of 1 December 1967 that "renders the single-bullet theory irrelevant."

The second point on which I must take issue with Epstein is his misleading and unfounded suggestion that the backward head-thrust seen on the Zapruder film may have been due to acceleration of the car (an argument which has been thoroughly invalidated in Thompson's book, which Epstein seems to have read carelessly) or to a "neurological reaction" (for which he presents no medical opinion and against which there is strong testimony by forensic pathologist Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, pathologist Dr. John Nichols, and physicist R.A.J. Riddle). He further considers that the argument of a fatal front head shot has received the coup de grace by virtue of the 1968 conclusion of two forensic pathologists that the autopsy photographs and X-rays indicate that the head was hit only from behind. This citation by Epstein is astonishing. I can only think that he did not read the report of the 1968 panel on the autopsy photographs and X-rays but relied solely on press reports; or that, if he did read it, but failed to realize its ominous divergencies from the autopsy report (a four-inch shift in the site of the head wound, for example, and the presence of metallic fragments and unidentified foreign objects which hitherto had been invisible), then Epstein is even more gullible than those lesser sophisticates who were taken in by that tiresome windbag Garrison.

A scholar like Epstein should not overlook so cavalierly the statements he has made in private correspondence, lest they rise and incriminate his public pronouncements. He cannot conclude that it is "extremely unlikely, even inconceivable, that a single assassin was responsible" and also that there is no "substantial evidence that indicates there was more than one rifleman firing."

Epstein's expectation that "Garrison may be the final chapter in the Assassination Controversy" may turn out to be as imprudent as Dwight Macdonald's 1965 "Last Word on the Warren Report." But I will admit that this latest prognostication of the "last word" should get better odds, since the formidable twin talents of Garrison and Epstein are now working full-time to discredit further discussion and to obscure all of the unresolved evidentiary conflicts under a mountain of cheap bluster and the cunning rhetoric of epistemology.

Yours very truly,

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