

Thomas Stamm to Hoch

12 January 1971

Friend Hoch,

So you have seen the Zapruder motion-picture film of the assassination of President Kennedy! Good! But where? When? Under what circumstances? If not at the National Archives, how can the film be seen?

What was your impression on first viewing? Were you "stunned" like Penn Jones, Jr.? Did you "gasped" like the courtroom during the trial of Clay Shaw in New Orleans for conspiracy to murder Kennedy? Didn't your eye signal your brain the film, which came first, demolished the official autopsy report, which was compounded later? Didn't the spectres of conspiracy and frame-up loom in your consciousness?

Or did your mind boggle at the obvious and refuse to accept the "sensible and true avouch" of your eyes? Did it recoil from the implications which arose with appalling instant force from the lurid film? Is that why you think one cannot "conclude from what direction the shot came without the most careful examination and logical analysis"? Is that why you saw the film "many times"? Why is your letter so barren of information? What examination did you make of the film? Where is your logical analysis? If you made one, did you circulate it? If not, why do you emphasize its necessity?

If you were genuinely undecided about the direction of the shot, why did you turn to Alvarez, who had made a spurious attempt to align the Zapruder film with its antithesis, the autopsy, which had even then been discredited by forensic scientists beyond the possibility of rehabilitation? If Thompson's foray into "microscience" to refute the Warren Commission was unconvincing, did you imagine that shooting bullets into melons and pineapples would rebut him and validate the Commission findings?

In general, do you think the crucial problems of the Kennedy assassination can be solved by physical and legal evidence? If this kind of evidence could untangle the assassination's mystery-shrouded aspects, would not

that result already have been achieved by the company of independent investigators, researchers, journalists, scholars, experts, and critics who for more than seven years have devoted their considerable talents to the solution of the problem? Make no mistake--cumulatively, they have done yeoman's work in locating and securing the testimony of overlooked and neglected witnesses; demonstrated both the suppression and manufacture of evidence, and the subornation of perjury; discredited the autopsy; and, in sum, impeached the Warren Commission's Report as a monstrous compilation of ambiguities, evasions, distortions, and lies, constituting a frame-up of a dead man.

Consider the prosecution of Clay Shaw by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison for conspiracy to assassinate the President of the United States. Undoubtedly, Garrison pursued his quarry by conduct as unprincipled as that of the Warren Commission in framing Oswald. Like that body he manipulated evidence. But no matter how good a case he could have put together; how unimpeachable the evidence; how convincing, clear, and impactful its message--he did exhibit the Zapruder film repeatedly--he was bound to fail.

Why? Is he correct in writing he "had taken on forces which were really too great for any district attorney's office to engage" (A Heritage of Stone, p. 7)? It sounds like a weak alibi for failure. Yet it is true, the Federal government is more powerful than a local district attorney who cannot hope to prevail in conflict with the much greater might, resources, and exigent policy needs of the state. But that is nothing new. Garrison, an experienced and astute politician, must have known it. To argue his good faith is to accuse him of unbelievable and deceptive naivete. Most likely he knew what he was about and entered the lists as a Quixotic knight wearing the insignia of the blindfolded lady; it was a cynical fraud which did not deceive his enemies but excited the illusions of his followers and furthered his personal political ambitions.

In trying to decide whether Garrison was lamb or wolf it is well to bear in mind that the American system of justice, like its counterparts in other

countries, is designed and operates to preserve the social order against its opponents and victims. Because American codes of law do not define political offenses, the government can move against threats to and disturbances of the social order only with naked force or criminal prosecutions. Hence it becomes one of the primary functions of a district attorney, whatever his individuality, to offer up sacrificial victims, some guilty, others innocent, and many accidental figures, to the power structure. Garrison's use of spurious evidence against Shaw indicates he was true to his official responsibility.

At the same time, he challenged the government's assassination policy. The Dallas police, aided and abetted by the mass-communication media, had attributed the assassination to a communist source. The Cuban government was an early suggestion. Another was the Kremlin; a third, Mao Tse Tung's China. A few weak leftist voices nominated General Edwin Walker or other reactionary forces. But the Federal government's ad hoc and probably unconstitutional commission of inquiry, masterfully improvised by President Johnson, executed his assassination policy and denuded the murder of President Kennedy of political motivation and significance. An interesting progression, that, from political cause to political anonymity which succeeded in concealing the source and motivation of the assassination, and led Garrison, long after others did so, to observe, "The question of who killed John Kennedy evolved into the more meaningful query of why he was killed" (his emphasis, p. 22)! Garrison tried to reinvest the assassination with political meaning.

What meaning? Before failure instructed him he attributed the assassination to individuals in the national government working with various right-wing reactionary elements. In *A Heritage of Stone*, in which he acknowledges indebtedness to Vincent Salandria for assistance in writing, Kennedy's murder became the work of the United States government itself (p. 217) and, contradictorily, a coup d'etat (p. 45) by "the new rulers of our government who seized power through killing the President" (p. 22); the United States, a "warfare state" (p. 47), is ruled by "our nation's military-intelligence

alliance" (p. 22). It reads like an attempt to politicalize his alibi for failure.

I'm sure there's a kernel of truth in it. However, Garrison's concept of the assassination is obviously unoriginal, imprecise, and ill-defined; it is not differentiated from, nor related to, other like conceptions; e.g., Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" and C. Wright Mills' "power elite". But whatever his theory and whether literally true, totally false, partly justified, or grossly exaggerated, Garrison pitted a subordinate part of the national power system against the Federal government. It was a species of treason against the Establishment. But political sorties against the entrenched power of the state, be it a bourgeois democratic republic or a secret "military-intelligence" dictatorship, by libertarian demagogues cannot be more than pressure ploys for ulterior ends. Characteristically, the underlying aim of Garrison's presentation of evidence against Shaw, which was also an attack on the government's assassination policy, was not disclosed by any party to the affair. That is how the game of bourgeois power politics is played.

Criminal prosecution, then, as Garrison has demonstrated again, corrupts evidence and is not a means of reaching political truth. Most often it is used to distort or conceal it. A long list of frame-ups in this and other countries in our time, let alone an interminably longer roster in earlier centuries, attests to the validity of that observation. With respect to the assassination of President Kennedy it is sufficient to note his killers and their employers are still unidentified by any judicial or other governmental process while Oswald was stigmatized officially as the murderer.

To the problem of identification of the interests served by his assassination, however, must now be added the subsidiary problem of the identity of the interests which inspired and profited from Garrison's prosecution of Shaw. Neither is an impenetrable mystery. If these problems intrigue your interest and you would contribute to their solution, leave "microscience" to the Thompsons, pseudoscience to the Alvarezes, legal horseplay to the Garrisons, and reach for historical evidence; it is there. And it is the only road to the truth.

Fraternally,