

## LETTERS.

## WRONG VICTIM

## New York City

Frank Donner's "Conspiracies Unlimited" [*The Nation*, Dec. 22, 1979] was right on target, which is more than I can say for the accused assassin of President Kennedy. Like Mr. Donner, I believe that the *lumpen* Lee Harvey Oswald did it alone—but previously suppressed and overlooked data have led me to the conclusion that he shot J.F.K. by mistake.

We must not be deceived or bemused by the stereotype that only Presidents can be the target of an assassin or that, as Mr. Donner noted, Presidents can be the victims only of a conspiracy. Leo Tolstoy wrote that accidents play at least as big a part in human affairs as, say, planning, contriving and willing. And misfiring is what I believe occurred in Dallas more than sixteen years ago.

Oswald, though eager to be remembered "for 10,000 years," inexplicably denied shooting the President, a crime that would have indeed made him memorable. Marina Oswald testified that her husband was the gunman, but that he must have had someone other than J.F.K. in mind. She asked if there were someone else important in the President's limousine. On the eve of the assassination, Marina felt "twenty-two fires" toward her husband, that is, volcanic fury, out-of-control anger. The overwrought and obsessive Oswald again became "seized by the fantasy" that he was the hero of an opera, *The Queen of Spades*, who slays the visiting queen. . . . After the assassination, Marina mysteriously said that her husband "must have staked everything on one card."

Oswald was a woman-hater, the natural orientation of a youth who had been raised and taunted by voracious women. When he felt humiliated and emasculated, he resorted to violence. In July 1964, in day-long *secret* testimony before the Warren Commission, a psychiatrist asserted that shooting the President would have been the furthest thing from Oswald's mind. His anger was directed at women, not at men. . . . In the cross hairs of his telescope, Oswald must have perceived his wife and his mother. . . .

The Federal Bureau of Investigation repeatedly testified that in months-long tests it could not duplicate the alleged accuracy of Oswald's antiquated weap-

on. The rifle and its cheap telescopic sights could not be aligned properly on the target. The scope was mounted off-center; it was a deficiency that could not be corrected. Bullets flew high and to the right of the aiming point. (The rifle had missed a "sitting duck" at 100 feet earlier in 1963.) Experts agree that the high-strung, emotionally depleted Oswald was "fantastically lucky" in placing his shots at the *moving* target. Now we know he wasn't. . . .

By shooting the *First Lady*—the apotheosis of the sex that was his tormentor, his wife's "goddess," the most glamorous and unattainable woman in the world—the "silly little Communist runt" (Mrs. Kennedy's later description of Oswald) would symbolically be destroying his Jackie-adoring wife, who had been "driving him crazy." George de Mohrenschildt told Warren Commission investigators that "the only person I ever heard Oswald say he wanted to kill was his wife. She was annoying him all the time . . . poor guy was going out of his mind." Killing Marina would not confer immortality on him. But no First Lady had ever been slain. On learning that shots had been fired at the Presidential motorcade from Oswald's place of work, she asked, "Is Jackie all right?"

Believing the victim of a murder is perforce to have been the target is a reflection of what psychologists call "set theory." The Kennedy assassination demands an open mind. In his deranged vision, Oswald must have seen the chance at one stroke to avenge both his personal and the collective suffering of male-kind, and give the world proof of his own manhood. . . . But bullets aimed at the First Lady from the skewed rifle flew inexorably to the right and hit J.F.K.

Once one realizes the "incipient schizophrenic" was not shooting at the President (whom he admired) and that the assassination was a horrendous mistake—a typical Oswald mistake, by the way—everything falls into place. Sherlock Holmes noted that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

Robert Kennedy may have stimulated conspiracy theories by informing President Johnson that he was satisfied that Oswald had acted alone and the case

should be closed. One door he wanted kept locked and bolted was the Government's sundry plots to murder Fidel Castro. J.F.K., after all, had been in the assassination business himself. If "the mob" had shot J.F.K., R.F.K. would have pursued it to the ends of the earth.

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## AND DONNER

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Mr. Agel's is a beguiling hypothesis. However, it seems to me that Mr. Agel confounds a possible motive ("*cherchez la femme!*") with intention, evidence of which while not conclusive is reasonably clear. Nor is Oswald's lack of animus against J.F.K. especially persuasive: no American assassin has ever viewed his victim with great personal hostility.

Frank Donner