

11 July 1966

Mr. Clayton Fritchey
New York Post
75 West Street
New York, N.Y. 10006

Dear Mr. Fritchey,

You astonish me. In your column "JFK Inquests" in the New York Post of Friday July 8, 1966, you say casually that "The FBI readily admits its own reports were inaccurate" and "Also, a recheck shows conclusively that the Commission autopsy report is identical with the one made at Bethesda Hospital by a team of doctors on the night of the assassination. So much for that."

So much for that, indeed! How about a few words of substantiation for those grandiose and, if you will forgive me, misleading assertions? The book Inquest by Edward Jay Epstein (not "Herbert") has been the subject of press stories since May 29, 1966, when it occasioned a headline on page one of the Washington Post. According to my box score, the FBI has issued a series of vague and evasive statements through anonymous spokesmen or has refused comment altogether on the specific questions raised in Epstein's remarkable book. There has been nothing that could by any stretch of the imagination be termed an official admission of inaccuracy in the FBI statement of medical findings in both its December 9, 1963 and January 13, 1964 Reports. If I am wrong, will you kindly give me chapter and verse?

Had there been a formal confession of error, crucial questions would still remain without the answers which are indispensable—that is, (1) how did the FBI come to commit so incomprehensible an error after receipt of the autopsy report? According to Fletcher Knebel in LOOK, the autopsy report was sent to the FBI on December 23, 1963, about three weeks before its "erroneous" description of the wound in the FBI Report of January 13, 1964. (2) If the "error" was careless but innocent, how can we take as accurate and reliable the whole body of FBI investigative reports which serve as the foundation for the conclusions reached by the Warren Commission? (3) How is it that the bullet hole in the President's shirt and the testimony of trained observers (at least two Secret Service agents) place the wound in the President's back well below the point from which the corresponding bullet is alleged to have exited?

Your second undocumented statement—that a recheck shows conclusively that the Commission autopsy report is identical with the original report by the doctors at Bethesda Naval Medical Center (not, as you say, on the night of the assassination, but on November 24, 1963)—is even more astounding. Is your reader supposed to accept on pure faith a "conclusive recheck" for which you give neither date nor source nor particulars? Again, Sir, I request chapter and verse.

I am quite aware that press reports have quoted a Commission lawyer as having said that he read the autopsy report on December 20, 1963 and that it was identical with the autopsy report ultimately published by the Warren Commission. "So much for that," Mr. Fritchey? The fact that an individual who has come under suspicion of complicity in the falsification of the autopsy report assures the press that the published document is exactly the same as the one he read almost a year before publication can hardly be equated with a "conclusive recheck"—especially when that same individual has failed to provide a single responsive fact to refute the arguments in Inquest or to answer any of the questions mentioned in the third paragraph of this letter.

Even the Warren Commission is on record (in Gerald Ford's book Portrait of the Assassin) as recognizing that mere denials by a "questioned authority" (the Commission's phrase) had absolutely no legal or moral value, in a context similar to that which is the subject of your claim of a "conclusive recheck."

Your sceptical and disparaging attitude toward Epstein's book (and Harold Weisberg's) might better be directed in the first instance to the Warren Report and the accompanying twenty-six volumes of Hearings and Exhibits. Unless you are merely interested in making gratuitous propaganda for a discredited Report by suspect authors, you might have a pot of black and very strong coffee, roll up your sleeves, and wade into the documentation—as a few pilgrims have done, thereby earning a legitimate claim to speak with authority about the evidence, although it is so much easier to reach conclusions without permitting the facts to confuse one.

May I look forward to receiving substantiation for the two statements in your article which are quoted in the first paragraph of this letter, or should I assume that readers of the New York Post are supposed to accept as tantamount to gospel arbitrary pronouncements handed down by the Post's writers to spare them the ordeal of doing their own thinking?

Yours sincerely,

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cc: The Editor, The New York Post