



Haverford College

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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September 29, 1975

Selection Committee  
Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellowship  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
111 West 50th Street  
New York, New York 10020

Gentlemen:

The proposal I am forwarding to you is an odd one; it may well be that its oddity removes it from consideration at the very outset. Nevertheless, I believe it to be an important project for all of us who live in this country in this decade, and I don't know where else I might turn for the financial support necessary to its completion. Because of its oddity I am appending this covering letter to my application.

I want to write a study of the John Kennedy assassination in Dallas.

What did happen to us as a people in the Sixties? For many of us this is a question whose circulation through our minds inevitably calls us back to Dallas, to a killing ground where the mystery refuses to dissipate, to an event which marks -- at least for members of my generation -- the end of innocence. Until we know what happened there, many of us feel a bit like Hamlet, troubled by a murder whose origin and significance remains unknown, unclear about the present because we cannot penetrate the past. There were other murders, and the net of unease and suspicion stretches further. But it began in Dallas, and if Fortinbras is ever to arrive I believe he must appear through that portal.

But what concretely do I propose? It would be pleasant to think that an exhaustive study of the Kennedy assassination might confirm the conclusions of the Warren Commission and thus permit us to see the murder of a President to be the aberrant act of a single madman. Pleasant ... but also impossible. For the facts of the case as they are now known -- the twenty-six volumes of supporting documents and exhibits to the Warren Report, the films now available, the massive documentation being gradually declassified in the National Archives -- all this makes the conclusions of the Warren Commission unsupportable. I must stress this point: it is not just that the Commission's conclusions are unlikely, but that they are impossible; they are belied by the very data the Commission collected. Any attempt to dissolve the mystery by showing the adequacy of the official reconstruction I am convinced is doomed to failure. What then do I propose? To solve the Kennedy assassination? No, that equally clearly is beyond the likely capacity of any individual or group of individuals. Instead, I propose creating a study of the assassination that is so thorough in its grounding, so fairminded in its treatment of the evidence, so clear-minded in its conclusions that it might prompt a reopening of the case. Perhaps that is too grandeloquent a hope; in my pessimistic moments I think it is.

But even if it failed in this intent, it might achieve a lesser one. For even if political exigencies do not permit a reopening of the case by some official body, isn't it still important to try to get an exhaustive answer to the question: What can we now know of the Kennedy assassination?

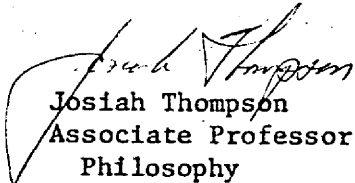
Having served on several selection committees myself, I can imagine the wry smile with which the last two paragraphs may have been read. What? The Rockefeller Foundation should fund still another nut writing a book on the Kennedy assassination? But the identity of the "nut" may be important. Let me tell you why I think I might be able to complete the job with thoroughness and distinction.

For approximately six months in 1966-67 I helped direct Life magazine's investigation into the Kennedy assassination. Except for one article published in November 1966 ("Grounds for Reasonable Doubt"), nothing came out of that investigation. What did arise out of it, however, was my book, Six Seconds in Dallas, published in November 1967, and condensed the same month in the Saturday Evening Post. Because of prepublication difficulties with Time Inc., and a post-publication lawsuit (subsequently won by my publisher and me), the most important photographic evidence could not be presented in the book and its circulation was severely restricted. Nevertheless, it gained a reputation as being one of the few fairminded and scholarly books in this contentious area, as well as being an important repository of documentary and photographic evidence. My credentials for doing an exhaustive and judicious job on this project are to be found in the book. Many columnists -- Max Lerner and Richard Whalen, to name only two -- were impressed by its rigor and clarity. But the book itself, I think, is crucial to your determination of my qualifications. At a later stage I should be pleased to forward it to you for inspection.

I have tried to be quite frank in this covering letter. After working on this case for ten years I am convinced that the assassination of John Kennedy was the work of more than one individual. That makes me a "critic" of the official version. You may come to feel that being a "critic" I would be incapable of doing this study with sufficient scholarly objectivity. I would disagree. For what makes me a critic of the official version is not a political bias or an emotional involvement. I have been led to my view through a rigorous examination of the evidence in the case. That is why my earlier book, I think, must be weighed on the scales. My claim is that that book speaks for itself in terms of the canons of historical scholarship brought to bear. In short, after ten years of work on this case I very clearly have a position, but I don't think that position makes me a biased researcher and writer. On the contrary, those ten years of work may make it possible for me to carry out the project with distinction.

Thanking you for your consideration, I am,

Sincerely yours,

  
 Josiah Thompson  
 Associate Professor of  
 Philosophy

JT:bf  
 Enclosure