

Dec. 6, 1966

Dear Sylvia,

Many thanks for your letter of Nov. 29th. It offers food for thought. With your usual sharp perception you have noted an error of fact. I am happy to acknowledge I was wrong in writing that critics of the Warren Commission had totally ignored the evidence of the Zapruder motion-picture film of the assassination of President Kennedy. I should have been more self-critically careful. In political life, as in chess or any contest, mistakes hurt the cause one is propounding. The truth is I had not heard the November radio program on which you discussed the film, and only after receiving your letter did I read Vincent Salandria's article in the October issue of Liberation. I am not as <sup>1</sup>auccourant as I should be. But that is no excuse. I should not have assumed that the silence about the significance of the Zapruder film, which had prevailed for so long, continued; and I should have worded my thought to allow for the possibility it had been broken.

But my mistake and your correction of it do not touch the heart of the matter. The important thing is there exists an objective piece of evidence, the Zapruder motion-picture film, showing Kennedy, following impact of the fatal shot, being hurled backward, bouncing forward, and spinning off to his left. The film establishes beyond the possibility of rebuttal Kennedy was hit fatally from the front and right, and there were, therefore, at least two gunmen in Dealey Plaza on November 22 in 1963. This is the only incontrovertible piece of <sup>other</sup> "hard" evidence in the entire affair. Virtually all the/evidence is clothed in dubiety or is demonstrably false.

The Zapruder film invalidates the autopsy findings and establishes the existence of an ambush in Dealey Plaza. And ambush spells conspiracy. The conclusion is inescapable: the evidence for a single gunman firing only from behind the Presidential limousine was faked by the Dallas police; the police were involved in the conspiracy. The FBI investigated the assassination on President Johnson's order and accepted and buttressed the police case. The Warren Commission was created by Executive Order and accepted the case prepared for it by the Dallas police and FBI. Both the FBI and Warren Commission, as instruments of executive policy and Presidential power, could not transgress the limits set by Johnson's policy of denuding the assassination of political significance in order to quiet the country and ensure governmental stability. They were debarred from affirming the existence of a conspiracy and establishing its motive.

It may be that sooner or later independent or even governmental investigation, the latter under great public pressure, will succeed in establishing the identities of the gunmen who killed Kennedy. I understand independent investigators with the help of journalists are hot on the trail of suspects. If they should succeed in naming the assassins and proving their guilt it would, of course, be conclusive proof of conspiracy, but no more conclusive than the Zapruder film. On the other hand, the government, some agency serving it, or another force may prevent disclosure or, failing that, wide dissemination of the fact as has been the case thus far with respect to the Zapruder film. Either way we have had and have no need to await the outcome of the investigation now afoot. We have irrefutable evidence with which to destroy the government's account of the

assassination. All the rest - contrary evidence and analysis of the Report of the Warren Commission - is secondary, supplementary, corroboratory.

What has been done with this evidence? Life magazine has had possession of the original Zapruder motion-picture film for more than three years and has published reproductions of still frames derived from the film. It gave a set of frames to the Warren Commission. And exhibited the original film for staff representatives of the Warren Commission and other government personnel in February 1964. The frames, as does the film, show the fatal head hit, but unlike the film do not show the consequent backward, forward, and leftward motion of Kennedy's body. The difference between film and frames is crucial for the question of a single or multiple gunmen. Inasmuch as the motion of Kennedy's body is unmistakably evident in the film, it is equally evident Life knowingly has suppressed and continues to suppress the fact of the existence of the most vital evidence in the case. It follows that its identification of film and frames in its columns is purposeful confusion.

The government of the United States has had possession of three copies of the film and of a set of still frames for more than three years. Some of the Commissioners saw the frames. Whether the Commission saw the film is doubtful. At least, unless I have overlooked something, I found no explicit statement or even strong indication in the testimony they had done so. It may be they were never apprised of the evidence of the film. Or they may have been told of it "off the record." In any case the Report does not note the crucial evidence of the film and

discusses film and frames as identical. Defenders of the Commission also fail to make a distinction between film and frames.

The government's set of frames have been available in the National Archives since the summer of 1965, a copy of the film since the late summer of that year. What have critics of the Commission done with the crucial evidence of the film? What have they said about the deception practiced by the establishment in identifying frames and film?

Let us consider a number of specific instances. Sauvages's book has no index. I cannot follow his treatment of the film systematically without rereading his book and will rely on memory with the hope you will not find me in error again. If I recollect accurately he does not project the evidence of the film as decisive for the demolition of the government's case. Nor does he comment on the difference between frames and film. I know he was cognizant of both points and understood the information was and is available in the National Archives. I sent him the information. He did not acknowledge its receipt nor react to it by letter, telephone, message, or personal discussion. I do not know why. But surely, his failure to make use of this best evidence attests his lack of realization of its significance. Or is there another explanation?

The index of Lane's book has six references to Zapruder. The first of these cites Z's opinion the assassin on the knoll was behind him. The second is a passing reference to the film in connection with the location of the wound in Kennedy's back. The third reference is to frames made from the film and is worded in such a way as to allow the reader to identify the frames

with the film . Lane's fourth reference to Zapruder notes the use of the film to fix the time between shots. The fifth reference occurs in connection with the problem of establishing when Connally was hit. The final reference in the book is made with respect to the distance of the limousine from the overpass when the shots were fired. Will you agree that Lane failed entirely to project the evidence of the Zapruder film as it should and must be done?

You will find eleven references to Zapruder in the index of Epstein's book. I will not detail them. If you take the trouble to follow them up, as I have done, you will note the same confusion about film and frames to be found in Lane's book and in most of the writing and speaking on the point. Worse, on page 153 the last reference in the book to Zapruder opens with this remarkable sentence: "The Zapruder film shows that the assassination could have been committed by one man alone only under/<sup>one</sup>conditions that Kennedy and Connally were hit by the same bullet." Could Epstein have written that sentence if he had realized the Zapruder film showed exactly the opposite; that Kennedy had been shot fatally by a gunman positioned in front of and to the right of the Presidential limousine? Should he not have disposed of the one-bullet theory by the unanswerable evidence of the Zapruder film? And would he not have served the cause of truth if he had concluded from this that the one-bullet theory was necessary for the Commission not only to explain away inconvenient facts but was essential for distracting attention from the decisive proof of conspiracy established by the Zapruder motion-picture film? Would he not have performed an even more valuable service than he did had he exposed the confusion between frames and film on

which so much of the government's case rests? Did not his failure to do so, whatever his reason and intention, assist the government in confusing the evidence and concealing the truth?

Vincent Salandria's article in the October issue of Liberation is a different matter. Vincent is on the side of the angels. He asserted with the necessary emphasis the decisive nature of the evidence taken by Zapruder. But he did so, as he relates, as a result of the ingenious superimposition of one frame on top of another to show the motion of Kennedy's head after it had been struck. Why was this necessary? I can understand it as corroboration of what the film shows. But he did not advance the result of the superimposition in this light. He offered it as primary evidence. And he did not distinguish between frames and film, thereby also extending the confusion on this point. He weakened his argument further by demanding that Life produce the film. Why need Life produce the film when the film is available in the National Archives? Why not urge the reader to go see for himself? I believe Vincent's demand is tactical but it is confusing nonetheless. The reader may draw the conclusion the film is to be seen only when Life makes it available. Moreover, inasmuch as Vincent did not distinguish between film and frames, Life may reply that it has published the film on more than one occasion. Finally, because Vincent's demand for publication of the film by Life follows his disclaimer of the importance of the publication of the autopsy photographs which he had previously sought, because they may have been falsified, he weakens his demand for

release of the film. Would he not have had a stronger article had he informed the reader of the availability of the film in the National Archives, noted its decisive evidence, challenged Life to confirm it, and drawn the obvious conclusions about the game played by Life and the government to suppress the vital evidence of conspiracy?

I cannot say anything about your discussion of the film on radio; I did not hear it. Let me ask you, what did you say on that occasion? Did you make the evidence of the film the central point in your indictment of the Commission? Did you expose the purposeful confusion about films and frames?

If I seem to belabor the evidence of the film it is because of its significance, because of its neglect for so long, and because truth does not recommend itself automatically to men's minds but must be hammered home against powerful opponents until it is established by wide acceptance. The mistakes we make hurt our cause. Criticism can help us correct them.

It would be a mistake to think the truth can be established solely by the necessary negative work of destroying the government's case, now largely accomplished. Or even by identifying the gunmen. More is needed to solve the assassination.

Of primary importance is the motive for the assassination, about which nothing is said, although it is the key to the solution.

Furthermore, the situation is not what it was three years ago. What began as a predominantly academic work of <sup>2</sup>plemical analysis by isolated individuals is being exploited by the mass-communication media and by politicians for political ends.

The consequences of the work of exposure are political. Obviously powerful forces are deeply involved. Kupferman may speak only for himself in introducing a resolution in Congress to review the evidence with the aim of determining whether a new investigation is necessary. But Kennedy's silence, like Russell's and Connally's public statements, testify to the large stakes involved in the controversy~~xy~~ and to the powerful forces moving below the surface of public awareness. The actions of these men of the establishment signify the involvement of the government. The multiplying signs point to a struggle over policy.

To contend with such forces over policy is to engage of necessity in political struggle, in the first instance with the government. Why the government? Because since November 22, 1963 the government has pursued a consistent policy toward the assassination: falsification of the event by denuding it of political significance and suppression of the truth. In a word, the policy of the government, again regardless of subjective intention, shields the interests which were served by the assassination. To identify them involves struggle with and against the government. That struggle no matter how it began is a political struggle. The assassination of Kennedy was an incident in a struggle over government policy. Our task is the delineation of the issues and forces involved in that struggle.

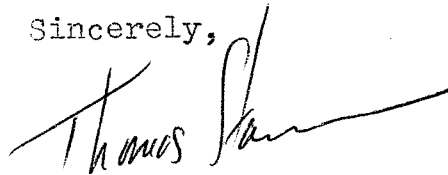
You ask me why I don't write a "definitive" political analysis of the assassination. I will if I can. It is a large task requiring much reading and research. I have begun. But if I don't finish it others will evaluate the political genesis



of the assassination and the policy of the government in relation to it. You can be certain it will be done. The basic prerequisite for that work is a political approach to the assassination. Why do you fight it?

You believe, I know, there was a conspiracy. Conspiracy is not an abstraction. It involves not only men but their motives and the larger interests they serve. What group or interest hatched the plot to kill Kennedy? For what end? What was the calculation? Why was Kennedy killed?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas S. Sargent". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Thomas Sargent".