

January 23, 1967

Dear friend Lifter,

It was good of you to send me a copy of The Case For Three Assassins which appeared in the January issue of Ramparts, written by David Welsh and yourself. It is interesting and reminds me we have been out of touch too long. Perhaps we can correspond about our common interest in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. An exchange of ideas ought to be helpful to both of us. Accompanying this letter is some material I have written which I hope you will take the trouble to read. If you care to comment on it I shall be requited for calling it to your attention. And in anticipation of your doing so I will take the liberty of expressing a few thoughts about your article.

Essentially The Case For Three Assassins makes two points: Kennedy was killed in an ambush; a new investigation is needed. The first point is developed at length; the second is the subject of a single sentence in the concluding paragraph. Neither point, in itself, is new.

In the beginning, so to speak, attention was concentrated, of necessity, on the negative work of disproving and discrediting the Warren Commission's case. This task is now largely accomplished. As the work of demolition tore down the rickety edifice improvised by Johnson's Commission, a vague feeling developed that the criticism of the Commission ought to have a concrete goal. The seemingly logical aim was a new investigation. Some have suggested an investigation by the government, meaning the Executive Branch, and therefore, another commission; others want a Congressional inquiry; still others

call for a panel of distinguished jurists and academicians to do the job; your article specifies a "re-investigation...with the full resources of the United States government and private citizens at its disposal," which I confess puzzles me. What is meant by private citizens at the disposal of the government?


A number of us, among whom I am happy to be able to include Vincent Salamria and Harold Feldman, have also projected the idea the assassination was the work of a political conspiracy. As we see it, although we have not elaborated either specific individual analyses or a commonly held thesis, in general terms the essential task is to elucidate the political character of that conspiracy, trace its origins, and define its aims beyond the murder of the President. And I would add an exposition of the Johnson Administration's policy toward the assassination which I hold to be essential for an understanding of it; and I would also draw political lessons from the assassination in terms of its aftermath, for example in such governmental policies as the war in Vietnam.

I do not find any hint in *The Case For Three Assassins* of these larger and "later" problems. The single reference to a new investigation suggests to me that the authors were pre-occupied with problems of physical evidence. The article belongs, so to speak, to the earliest period of criticism. Its target is the defunct Warren Commission, not the government policy which gave it birth and death, and maintains its legacy. I would have preferred the article to be a more timely part of the living controversy which has already involved ex-Commissioner Russell, Governor Connally, other conservative and reactionary political figures, journalistic

friends of the establishment, and of course, Manchester.

I propose to leave for future exchanges discussion of the problem of a new investigation about which I have some ideas and the political aspects of the assassination. In this letter I confine myself to the problems of evidence which constitute the subject of The Case For Three Assassins. With respect to the question of an ambush in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963, I note two points: First, the article makes a strong case for gunmen firing from front and rear of Kennedy and Connally. But in attempting to fix an exact number of assassins, it weakens the force of its argument. Thus, while its title is specific... Three Assassins, its conclusion is vague and lame: "We feel the evidence is persuasive that there were at least three gunmen firing at the Presidential motorcade in Dallas."

Again, and more important, the reasoning for at least two gunmen firing from the rear rests on a highly vulnerable assumption, to wit: the Kennedy and Connally back wounds occurred in less time than it took to fire two shots from the rifle allegedly used by Oswald in the Texas School Book Depository. The assumption is vulnerable because no one knows when Kennedy was hit in the back.

The Commission's position has a specious logic: the Zapruder motion-picture still frames show Kennedy raising his hands to his throat; on the theory that is in reaction to a wound caused by a bullet which had entered his back and penetrated his body, it is possible to assign a time of impact for the back wound; similarly, a time of impact is assigned for Connally's being struck in the back; as the time of the two strikes is less than the minimum of 2.3 seconds for firing two shots with the 

"Oswald" rifle, and for correlative evidentiary reasons, one bullet fired by one gunman penetrated both men.

The matter stands differently for those, including the authors of The Case For Three Assassins and myself, who hold Kennedy's throat wound to have been one of entry and his back wound by a different bullet. For us the film still frames are useful for approximating the time of impact of the throat wound. But what means do we have for establishing the time of impact of the back wound? Neither the frames nor other known evidence, whether developed by the Commission or independent investigators enables us to say. We simply do not know. The Kennedy back wound may have been made simultaneously or almost simultaneously with Connally's by two gunmen, or the back wounds of the two men may have been made by one gunman firing at the minimum interval or at a greater interval than the minimum required by the "Oswald" rifle. The evidence adduced in the article on this point is to no effect. I would have given it less space and less emphasis. It is open to easy rebuttal.

The argument for two or more rear gunmen may prove to be valid later on other grounds. The future will decide. But, fortunately, it is not essential for the establishment of an ambush. This rests on two simple facts: 1) as the autopsy contends and other evidence attests, Kennedy was wounded in the back; and 2) as the Zapruder motion-picture film shows, Kennedy was hit fatally from the front and right. That is all there is to it.

The rest is corroboratory.

The Case For Three Assassins makes the point strongly. I would have preferred more emphasis on the evidence of the film. And I

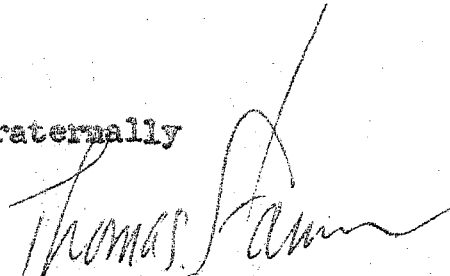
certainly would have been at pains to explain the crucial difference between the film and the still frames derived from it which do not show, except by superimposition, the motion of Kennedy's body, not his head alone, after the fatal impact. In this connection I would have discussed the lack of evidence in the testimony compiled by the Commission indicating the Commissioners saw the film, in turn suggestive of the possibility staff members consciously deceived them with reference to the still frames as the film itself. And I would have hit hard the hypocrisy of Life magazine in deliberately and continuously confusing film and still frames as it did, for example, in arranging for Connally's limited study of the still frames which it referred to as the Zapruder film.

Incidentally, the failure to make emphatic and detailed use of the indisputable evidence of the film gives defenders of the Commission opportunities they should not have. Consider Richard Warren Lewis' vile piece, *The Scavengers*, in the Jan. 22, 1967 issue of *The World Journal Tribune Magazine*, which is syndicated nationally. In his paragraph on Vincent Salandria he wrote, "By superimposing critical frames on top of each other, he suggests that the president's head lurched backward and to the left. Such conclusions would clearly indicate the presence of a second assassin. But Salandria, like most skeptics, overlooks the forward rush of the motorcade following the impact of the fatal bullet - a movement which clearly destroys his supposition."

Lewis can refer to the superimposition of frames and the "supposition of what they indicate because critics of the Commission, by and large, have failed to hammer the clear and incontrovertible evidence of the film itself, available to the public in the

National Archives since the late summer of 1965. Moreover, in the report of my visit to the Archives from which you quote in The Case For Three Assassins, I anticipated the "refutation" Lewis made of Vincent's "supposition" and disposed of it by citing the evidence establishing the fact the Presidential limousine accelerated only after Kennedy was hit fatally. It would have been helpful to have put that in the public record, too. Well, so much for one letter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Fraternally

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas P. Quinn". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed word "Fraternally".