

Feb 12, 1974

Dear Sylvia,

Dr Lattimer's talk consisted of comments on slides. About fifty persons were present in the Einhorn Auditorium of Lenox Hill Hospital; all were white. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Society of Medical Jurisprudence in which membership is limited to doctors and attorneys.

As May and I missed perhaps as much as thirty or forty minutes of Lattimer's talk, because we misjudged the time and came late, I cannot say whether the talk began with an introductory exposition or statement of Lattimer's point of view or field of interest. I can describe the talk only from midpoint, or near it, which was deep in the Lincoln assassination. Parallels with the Kennedy assassination were noted. At the conclusion of the talk Lattimer said the parallels were of no particular importance but were interesting. I suppose this is a techniques popularizers use. The slides were interesting shots of historic places and individuals. The narrative which accompanied them was a superficial account of the official version of the Booth conspiracy and contained many minor inaccuracies. Shocking was the comment on the slide showing the hanging corpses of Booth's executed coconspirators who included Mary Surrat, the first woman so despatched in American history, whom many historians have found innocent. Lattimer flatly asserted her guilt. He made no mention of the guilty verdict handed down in the same trial which doomed Booth's gang against Jefferson Davis on the basis of perjured testimony, and the lesser sentence passed on Davis. And Lattimer had nothing to say about the generally accepted view the trial is a black stain on American jurisprudence. This parallel with the Warren Commission Lattimer didn't note at all.

Slides The slides relating to the Kennedy assassination were less interesting, at least to me. I doubt the audience had the same reaction. They did not have a continuous thread of subject and relevance. Almost all related directly or indirectly to ballistic evidence and the autopsy. The superficial parallels with the Lincoln assassination were noted. All important problems were resolved; none remained; contradictions in the evidence which were not "resolved" were ignored; the Commission was correct; its findings approved. The Lattimer seal was placed on them. And everything proceeded from the reiterated "given" Oswald was guilty and the evidence in turn proved it. No doubt exists. The ovoid circle is unbreakable.

A disturbing note was Lattimer's presentation of the location of Kennedy's back and posterior head wounds as corrections of the autopsy report's errors in such a way as to permit or induce Lattimer's auditors to believe the corrections resulted from his review of the autopsy photographs and X-rays.

When I asked him afterward whether his review had ^{added} anything of significance to the review of the 1968 panel created by Ramsey Clark, to which incidentally he had made no reference during his talk, he conceded after a moment to note inconsequential differences, he hadn't.

Worse was the comment on the slide of the notorious forged photograph of Oswald holding a rifle in his left hand, wearing a pistol on his ~~left~~ right hip, and holding two papers (the Militant and the Worker) in his right hand in front of his chest. The papers appeared in the slide as unrecognizable, vertically rectangular whitish or grayish objects. It is difficult to believe that slide is genuine. Lattimer identified the pistols the one Oswald had bought and used to kill Tippit, and the rifle as ordered in Oswald's handwriting and used to kill Kennedy. The papers were identified by Lattimer as proCastro literature of the kind distributed by Oswald - where and when not stated. Odd, the nice precision of the ballistic data and the ambiguity of all other evidence in Lattimer's account of the assassination! Lattimer did not say Oswald claimed the picture was a forgery. It was Lattimer's parallel with his treatment of the hanging Booth conspirators.

Lattimer showed a slide of Ruby in a corridor in police headquarters in Dallas, near Oswald, and said Ruby had a pistol in his pocket and could have shot Oswald then but didn't. He didn't explain why but noted a parallel with the situation when Booth was at bay in a burning barn and could have been shot before he was. Lattimer asked rhetorically how he knew Ruby had a pistol in his pocket. I could not follow the explanation except to note it had something to do with Lattimer's "psychiatrist friends."

Either in that slide or in another Oswald is shown with his manacled hands raised, the right one clenched, making the "communist salute" Lattimer said. That was the closest Lattimer came to any political point. Lattimer did not say Oswald protested his innocence.

Lattimer had no word to say about motive for the assassination. He thought all assassins had undesirable qualities in common but didn't develop the point. He said psychological problems were not his field. He said Ruby died of cancer of the lung and showed us a slide of cancerous tissue of Ruby's prostate.

Lattimer spoke in a clear, somewhat monotonous, matter-of-fact, conversational tone without adjectival or oratorical embellishment. Occasionally he earned a titter. While his subject matter was deliberately and narrowly factual, whenever he became expository his frame of reference was subjective and personal; now and then he used the expression, "believe me," for instance, when he said that the shots which hit Kennedy were easy ones.

I believe I caught an unintentional revelation. In describing the sequence of events which culminated in ^{his} review of the autopsy X-rays and photographs, Lattimer said he had applied very early to do so and with others was waiting unexpectantly when he received a carbon copy of an instruction to the Archivist to permit him to review the thitherto restricted material. The signature on Lattimer's carbon copy was Burke Marshall's, ex-exutor of the Kennedy estate, and the sina qua non for inspection of the autopsy materials. But, said Lattimer, his piece of paper had no letterhead which made him think it was useless to him. He says he ignored it! Then the New York Times called to ask whether he was going to make the review and he explained why he wasn't. The Times daid it would check and call him back. It did to say the letter was genuine. So, said Lattimer, he went. An unlikely story? Possibly. But, if true, it indicates Lattimer was selected to make the inspection. He was the first non-official individual to be permitted to do so. Why he? Two reasons suggest themselves: 1) it was known from Lattimer's previous writings he was an uncritical patriot of the Warren Commission, and 2) not being a forensic pathologist he was less likely than a member of that breed to interpret the autopsy X-rays and photographs adversely to the Warren Commission.

Now, it appears he will repeat his talk at MIT and other places. What boots the Lattimer talk circuit? Why the interest these days in endorsing the Warren Commission? Is this a Kennedy maneuver to give assurance the Senator will not threaten the precarious stability of the government in his bid for power which one brother, having attained it, lost in Dallas, and which, his other brother, aspiring to attain it, could not grasp because he, too, was murdered? What would happen in the United States if Edward Kennedy, riding the wave of exposures of government criminality, were to demand revelation of the truth about the assassinations of his brothers? Would not the country rock and roll? Would not his own life be endangered? Do you recall Robert Kennedy going to Berlin in the summer of 1964, while the Warren Commission was still supposedly sifting evidence and writing its report, to dedicate a statue to his fallen brother and telling the world exactly what the Warren Commission would find? It was RFK's way, I believe, of telling President Johnson the latter could count on RFK to support the policy of denuding the assassination of JFK of political significance, and could safely choose RFK for his running mate in the forthcoming election. It's a parallel!

Or, do Lattimer's activities constitute a warning to Kennedy not to stir the simmering pot?

Yours,

