

December 21, 1974

Dear Dr Lattimer,

Your four-sentence to my six-page critique of your paper, The Kennedy-Cannally One Bullet Theory, is a polemical tour de force, greatly to be admired. With unerring skill, in a single analytical incision conveyed by a single word, you expose the pathology of my thought. No need to conduct tests, adduce evidence, verify sources, formulate postulates, debate hypotheses, weigh argument, investigate ideas, consider contradictions - all irrelevancies. My trouble is self evident. You know I suffer from philosophy - one word-in-a-single-sentence diagnosis.

It is a strangely disabling malady which afflicts the doctor as well as his patient, interfering with the doctor's ability to perceive reality accurately. Viz the single symptom you noted: "Your one factual item (the backward movement of President Kennedy's head), supports the rest of the facts that show he was hit on the rear of his head" (your emphasis) - your second sentence and not a bull's eye shot. In my philosophical way I emphasized the ultrafactual, violent, backward thrust of Kennedy's body when hit fatally, as seen unmistakably in the Zapruder film; and related it to the inevitable conclusion that leaps on the instant from eye to mind: Kennedy was hit by a bullet fired from in front and to the right (my emphasis). The government of the United States was decapitated when Kennedy was killed, not the president; I did not separate the motion of his head from the motion of his body, and I did not relate the motion of his head to the locus of a wound in his head, a problem which apparently gives you concern.

But why this should be so escapes my philosophic grasp. You have encountered similar problems before. In "The Wound That Killed Lincoln" (Illinois Medical Journal, Nov. 1970), you wrote, "Thus, the bullet entered the left side of the occiput, even though Booth was approaching Lincoln from Lincoln's right." Six years earlier in a more detailed account under the same title (Journal of the AMA, Feb. 15, 1964, vol. 187, pp. 480-489), you remarked, "One of the most surprising features of a study of the records of this case is the repeated disagreement and contradiction of the various authors who described the autopsy findings concerning above which eye the bullet came to rest." And, you continued, "Dr Woodward, who performed the autopsy, described the bullet's lodging place as above the left eye, as did Dr Stone, Lincoln's family physician, whereas both Surgeon General Barnes and Dr Taft stated that it was lodged above the right eye. In fact, Surgeon Taft states that it was above the left orbit in one of his descriptions, and above the right eye in another. Taft stated that the Nelaton probe, following the track of the bullet, struck the bones of the left orbit, whereas in describing the autopsy he states that the bullet came to rest behind the right orbit. On still another occasion Dr Taft stated that the point of the Nelaton probe struck the orbital plate of the right eye" (p. 484). On this page you concluded, "Thus, the true location of the resting place of the bullet is left in doubt by the conflicting accounts of four men who attended the autopsy."

On the following page you noted, "Any attempts to deduce which side of the brain was the final lodgement of the bullet prove frustrating and fruitless, because the two available statements as to which pupil was dilated and which was contracted are completely contradictory. Dr Leale, who was first on the scene, stated clearly...the pupil of the left eye was slightly dilated, the right pupil was contracted; both were irresponsive to light. This is in the direct contradiction to the statement of Dr Taft, the second man at Lincoln's side, who said, 'The left pupil was much contracted and the right widely dilated: total insensitivity to light'." Citing as a source historian Eisenseiml, whose analysis of the Lincoln assassination, by the way, is replete with factual data and "philosophy;" and pleading "In all fairness" in behalf of "most of these men (who) had been continuously awake and under great stress for over 30 hours," you found, philosophically, "some confusion is understandable."

Another medicoballistic problem proved less insoluble. On page 486 a subhead asked, "Why Was the Wound of Entry on the Left Side of the Head?" In solution you wrote, "Since the assassin approached from the President's right side, according to the testimony of the only two witnesses, it was puzzling that the wound of entrance should be on the rear left side of the head. This dilemma mystified some of those concerned with the assassination but was cleared up by the testimony of one of the witnesses at the trial of the conspirators, Mr. James Ferguson (who) had gone to the theater...and happened to have been staring intently at Mr. Lincoln at the exact moment the shot was fired (a predecessor of Zapruder! -TS). He stated that immediately before the shot was fired, Mr. Lincoln's attention had been attracted by something in the pit of the theater, he thought (!), and that the President had pulled aside the curtain which was between his end of the box and the audience, and had peeped (nice touch, peeped - TS) to his left, between the edge of the box and the edge of the curtain, down into the audience with his head twisted sharply to the left and downwards." One is reminded first of Connally whose attention was attracted by a rifle shot and who turned first to his right and then to his left and was hit, albeit not fatally, but whose testimony and belief he was hit by a second bullet after Kennedy was first hit were discounted in favor of the Specker one-bullet theory of the wounding of Kennedy and Connally. And secondly one thinks of steamfitter Brennan's perjurious account of seeing Oswald and rifle immediately after firing at Kennedy et al. Both Ferguson's and Brennan's ingeniously neat tailor made tales were "factual items," of course, told under solemn oath.

To be sure, it is not beyond the realm of possibility to postulate the truth of Ferguson's fortuitous happenchance. But although you said it "cleared up" the "dilemma" of the contradictory medicoballistic evidence, something about it, perhaps its patent providentiality and all-encompassing accountability of complex detail, must have disquieted you and led you into metaphysical speculation. For you wrote, "One might conjecture here on the possibility that the delinquent guard (mysteriously and inexplicably missing from his post outside Lincoln's box - TS) had belatedly realized the seriousness of letting a stranger (Booth a stranger? - TS) enter the box and was calling to MR. Lincoln to watch out."

That would improve on Ferguson by accounting for Lincoln's opportune distraction when Booth fired in much the same general way in which, ten years later, you conducted tests and made critical analyses of the evidence to validate the Specter one-bullet theory of the wounding of Kennedy and Connally. But extending Ferguson involved other difficulties. While it shed no light on the enigma of the guard's absence from his post, it deepened the mystery by raising problems of the circumstances of and reason for his ~~his~~ return, what he said in warning Lincoln, and the absence of witnesses to these hypothetical events.

Apparently, in the end, whether because of the inherent improbability of your speculative rationalization of the evidence, or for some other reason, you offered your readers an alternative theory. "Another conjecture," you wrote, "might be that Lincoln saw the pistol out of the corner of his eye and twisted violently away. This might better(!) explain(!) the extreme twist of the head needed(!) to permit the bullet to cross the brain from left to right, if(!!!) indeed it did." Why "better?" I see no contradiction between your alternate conjectures. Little imagination is needed to conceive these conjectures as complementary links in a gossamer chain of supposition: Lincoln "heard" the guard, then "saw" the pistol. Wouldn't that wash?

So, it appears, vital medical-ballistic evidence in the Lincoln assassination was, after all, like its later counterpart in the Kennedy assassination, only nonfactually contradictory and inconclusive; and had to be interpreted by nonphilosophic speculation and conjecture, as, alas, became apparent to the late lamented Warren Commission; vide the single-bullet theory of the wounding of Kennedy and Connally. There is, however, a decisive difference between the two evidentiary situations. In the Lincoln assassination perception of the contradictions in the medicoballistic evidence is unobscured by tests to resolve them with materials simulating Lincoln's head and brain, but determination of the accuracy of this evidence and resolution of the contradictions in it is impossible because of the lack of a yardstick of authoritative data. In the Kennedy assassination, fortunately, despite the distractions of tendentious pseudoscientific tests, there is the Zapruder film which, as evidence, establishes the general right-frontal source of the fatal shot and, in conjunction with medicoballistic evidence, is proof of an ambush in Dealey Plaza. The Zapruder film, therefore, is the unassailable criterion by which contrary medical-ballistic evidence, including especially the undated autopsy report; speculative theories designed to harmonize the contradictory evidence, including especially the Specter single-bullet fantasy; and experiments devised to validate Warren Commission findings are demonstrated to be in error, innocent or willful misinterpretation, or conscious fraud. Who would have thought your second sentence would entail so much!

A second important difference comprises your contrasting attitudes toward the medicoballistic evidence in the two assassinations. In the older murder you accept the reality of the contradictory and inconclusive nature of the evidence and are resigned to its insolubility, yet indulge in conjecture to explicate its most baffling aspect. In the Kennedy assassination, on the other hand, you persist in Procrustean efforts conjointly to rationalize the intracta-
~~ble~~

bly contradictory evidence and manufacture evidence - your third sentence - to conform to speculative preconceptions. Why?

Can it be you believe resolution of the contradictions in the medicoballistic evidence in the Lincoln assassination in which it is secondary in importance to eyewitness and other testimony, would lead to no change in the settled view of Booth as the solo executioner of a conspiracy, whose accomplices were hanged; whereas you realize, cognitively or intuitively, the only alternative to reconciliation of the discrepant evidence in the Kennedy assassination is acceptance of the conclusive evidence of the Zapruder film of a conspiratorial ambush and the refutation of the Commission's central finding of a motiveless, autonomous solo assassin, leading to condemnation of the Commission as an accessory after the fact to murder and protector of the unknown gunmen, their employers, and their sponsors and sponsors' motivations?

Your fourth sentence promises copies of your future writings. I trust they will contain nothing to offend William J. Curran, Frances Glessner Lee Professor of Legal Medicine at Harvard Medical School, who wrote to the New York Times he is "disturbed about many aspects of the recent court-ordered medical examination of former President Nixon;" and concluded "This case, like the medical examination of President Kennedy's body and the investigation at the scene of President Kennedy's assassination, raises serious questions about the level of expertness and sophistication in our judicial and medical communities concerning the field of legal medicine" (Letters to the Editors, December 15, 1974.) I wonder if Professor has read your articles in medical publications or heard one of your slide talks on the Kennedy and Lincoln assassinations. Have you sent him your writings? It would be interesting to learn his opinion about our correspondence. Does he agree with Dr Wecht, do you think.

This letter is shorter than my last, but the typing is, if anything, worse. Once more I ask to be excused for this deficiency. Will you write to me?

Philosophically,

