

Aug 7, 1975

Dear Sylvia,

Finished "Presumed Guilty" by Roffman who appears to be Weisberg's protegee. Alas! How odd, the master cannot find a publisher and the tyro's truncated thesis is overpriced at \$2! The wonders of capitalism!

Precise evaluation must await return to New York and access to books and files. In the meantime some observations:

Book jacket identifies author as "a History major at the University of Pennsylvania ... graduated with honors ... particularly interested in post-World War II American history ... Currently ... working on a book about the origins of the Cold War" ~~that~~  
K. assassin is part of post World War II American history and cannot be comprehended apart from its origins in the cold war. Yet Roffman whose "political maturity began to develop only in the past few years" (p 12); and who wrote "the most obvious and the most important context (of the assassination) is political" (p 21); and who takes issue, Epstein, and Popkin to task because they "sought to treat the assassination as if it had

2  
virtually no implications for society or government" (p29);  
and who would add "almost nothing" to "Weisberg's  
formulation of context" — "Assassination is a political  
crime" (p31); this Hoffman eschews all political  
analysis and is barren of historical context!

He achieves this remarkable result by disavowing any  
concern with motivation — "motives (about which I am  
not competent to speculate)" (p27); "the motives of the  
Commissioners, whether 'political' or 'malevolent' or anything  
else, are actually irrelevant in terms of what was done and  
the implications of what was done" (p37); and "It is not  
my responsibility to explain why the Commission did what it  
did, and I would deceive the reader if I made the slightest  
pretense that it was within my capability to provide such  
an explanation..." and mirabile dictu! "If anyone  
has the responsibility for explaining why Oswald was presumed  
guilty and why presidential assassins were tacitly (isn't  
that a judgment?) <sup>acquitted</sup> (it is the Commission members and the  
staff themselves" (p254). What role for the  
historian? Perhaps a chance to communicate with  
the spirits of Russell Boygs, and Johnson today, and  
his excellency president Gerald Ford tomorrow.

time, this disavowal relates specifically to the motivations of the Commissioners and staff - political animals all, functioning as a political body to reestablish political stability of the government shaken by the assassination and political unrest, by the transfer of power from the group of interests dominant in the Kennedy administration to the ~~adversary~~ adversary interests served by Johnson. But it is, it goes without saying, even more relevant to the motivation of the assassination about which honors-historian mayor Roffman pays not a single word; not one single word! Apparently Eisenhower's historical analysis of the Lincoln assassination - *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* - was not read or appreciated by Roffman.

Disregard of motivation left Roffman free to focus on the physical evidence, rather on selected areas of the evidence. The selection is arbitrary. His treatment avoids recognition of contradiction in the evidence and seems to be primarily an exercise in logical deduction. His target is the "evidence" encompassed by the Commission. The most impressive contribution he makes to the race against the Commission

4

is the treatment of the bullet evidence. But it is not clear what his personal contribution is; it seems the primary points are Weisberg's and Proffman embellished or extended them. In telling against the Commission Proffman reploughs fertile ground, but in deriving proof of Oswald's innocence from the evidence advanced by the Commission to prove his guilt, Proffman is necessarily unpersuasive and suggests he has been watching Perry Mason instead of studying the historians of assassination. The bent of his mind is revealed by the tell-tale intermingled use of presumption to fill lacunae in the evidence. He confuses presumption with "implications." He does not assert Oswald's innocence on political grounds!

A specific shortcoming is <sup>Proffman's</sup> ~~his~~ discussion of the Carcano rifle which he sometimes describes as "Oswald's rifle," suggesting by the quotation marks, he believes it not to have been O's piece, and again as his rifle without quotes, suggesting he believes it was O's gun, and both without reference to Oswald's disclaimers of having owned a rifle. He is sure the cartridge cases and magic bullet 399 were "planted" but does not make the same claim

5  
for the rifle; and offers no theory of the planting of  
only some of the incriminating evidence.

Because he disdains motives for human conduct  
Hoffman seems unable to weigh alternatives. Two  
examples illustrate the point. Whereas D'Toke  
investigated and questioned the truthfulness of  
the Frazier-Randle curtain-rod story which  
Oswald denied, Hoffman accepts it at face value  
without even citing the testimony of Dougherty  
that he observed Oswald entering the TSBD on 11/22/63  
without any package in hand. More revealing  
is his scornful treatment of the testimony of Mrs De  
Mohrenschildt she had been told by Marina Oswald  
had taken his daughter and rifle to a public  
park to practice shooting at leaves. It never  
occurred to our historian that Mrs De M, a mature  
woman, no doubt more politically developed than  
her condemned, was aware her testimony was  
patently unbelievable; or that if true, its source,  
D's wife, was likewise aware it was absurd.

The point is the use of absurdity by people caught  
between the remorseless measures of contradiction.

forces. I have in mind the case of Karl Radek, brought to trial by Stalin on charges of terrorism, espionage on behalf of Nazi Germany, and counter revolution, whose trial was permitted only on the understanding he would plead guilty, which was also simultaneously his only opportunity to discredit his frame up. When asked to answer to the charges Radek pleaded guilty not only to the crimes alleged against him but also to all those with which he was not charged. In a single sentence by the reductio ad absurdum, he succeeded in discrediting the trial.

Consider Marina's position. Widowed with two small children cut off from her only friend in government custody, and threatened with deportation to the Soviet Union from which she had defected, the government of which had denounced her dead husband as a Trotskyist, she attempted at first to defend his innocence but capitulated and inserted evidence to establish his guilt; In the course of which she may well have had recourse to absurdity to discredit her "testimony" as well as to

contradiction. It may be so and may be otherwise. But it is a possibility which must be considered in the light of history and its reflection in literature. Last Sunday's book reviewer of Mailer's account of Mohammed Ali's fight in Malaysia, thinks that author's charm springs from his courage to be ridiculous. In former times we had Rabelais, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Johnson's *Rasselas*, and his *Zodiac* and *Mark Twain*.

In time Roffman may acquire understanding. He is young. A disturbing sign is his imitation of Epstein and Thompson whose analyses were accompanied by reassurances they were not enemies of the establishment and the system. Roffman is that - Oswald was innocent. There were assassins. But "I do not wish to imply that any high government official, especially any one on a policy level, had a hand in the planning or execution of the assassination." <sup>(p. 37)</sup> But he does not clear them either. Cautious Roffman. Like Wecht. Good sailors. They trim to windward and to leeward. "not any high government official." Then who? Roff does not say. Be well.

1a