

July 19, 1967

TO THE EDITOR  
The New Republic  
1244 19th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Sir:

It was surprising to learn that your reviewer was "impressed by even the first of the four programs which CBS Television devoted to a contrived and misleading effort to plug some of the leaks in the Warren Report. At least two of the points to which much time and expense were devoted were as phony as an Anacin commercial.

Consider first the rifle test. The Commission's test of the alleged assassination weapon was, as the program pointed out, far too easy. The three riflemen employed were professional experts, they fired from a 30 foot instead of a 60 foot tower and at stationary targets. The rifle's scope was re-mounted by a gunsmith prior to the test since it was found to be impossible to sight in properly in its original condition. Had the experts hit the targets under these conditions, this would have proved little about the likelihood that Oswald, no expert, could have made two hits out of three under far more difficult conditions. But, in fact, not one of the 18 rounds fired by the Commission's experts hit the head or shoulders of the target. CBS's test was far more elaborate and more like the original conditions although expert riflemen were again employed. Many rounds were fired by more than ten shooters and we were not informed of the exact results; apparently two of the experts got at least two hits in a group of three but we do not know how many groups were all misses. But none of this matters since the entire test was irrelevant and doomed to be so from the time it was conceived because the CBS 'test' employed a different gun! The Commission test of the actual alleged murder weapon had been conclusive because it failed; if the experts could not hit the target under far easier conditions it is clear that Oswald's alleged performance was either a miracle or it didn't happen. For CBS to show that at least some experts could do as well using a different gun is patently irrelevant. (CBS used a rifle of the same make and model as that attributed to Oswald. But the Mannlicher-Carcano was mass-produced with poor quality control more than 25 years ago and existing specimens would be expected to show considerable variability. Apparently 'Oswald's' rifle was a poor one while that selected for CBS' experiments worked better.)

Then there is the question of the speed at which Zapruder's movie camera operated. That camera was tested in the FBI laboratory and found to work at 18.3 frames per second. As I understood the CBS program, the camera was also subsequently checked at the Bell & Howell factory and the FBI measurement

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was confirmed. Not having access to the Zapruder camera, CBS purchased six new ones of the same model and conducted an elaborate test of their speeds which were found to be quite variable, some being much slower than 18 frames per second. Anxious to suggest that Oswald might have had more than the six seconds or less indicated by the Zapruder film in which to get off his three shots (since few of the experts could fire the weapon that rapidly), CBS offers the astonishing suggestion that this time might have been considerably longer if the Zapruder camera had operated as slowly as the slowest of those which they tested. But the Zapruder camera operated at 18.3 frames per second and the existence of this uncontested finding makes the CBS test of a group of different cameras so obviously meaningless that it is difficult not to be suspicious of the motives of those who conceived it in the first place.

Neither of these two 'tests' could possibly have contributed anything new or useful to the issue in question and both of them are inevitably reminiscent of the mendacious "scientific demonstrations" of the TV hucksters. While I do not share the belief of some "assassination buffs" that Kennedy was killed by Johnson agents or the CIA, it is clear that the Warren Commission was inexcusably derelict in the discharge of its responsibilities and it is becoming increasingly evident that various agencies and individuals are accessories after the fact to that incompetent investigation if not to the assassination itself. Surely the Dreyfus case taught us that powerful and honorable men could be drawn, little by little, even into perjury and malfeasance by what at first was no more than a reasonable seeming desire to protect one's colleague or one's organization from the consequences of what appeared to be a small mistake or to protect the public from being unsettled by what seemed to be an unimportant truth. The CBS report, with its unreluctant tendentiousness, its special pleading, its phony tests and its astonishing non sequiturs, seems to bear the same stamp. Convinced, either on their own or with prompting from Washington, that the critics are wrong, that the Government is unassailable and that it would be better for the public to have its doubts and fears removed, CBS seems to have chosen to sell a reassuring conclusion under the pretext of examining the issues. I think this has to be an unstrategic as well as a dishonest choice.

Sincerely,

David T. Lykken, Ph.D.  
Professor

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