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# The Other Side of Six Seconds in Dallas

By Milicent Cranor

This is—by definition—a one-sided review of *Six Seconds in Dallas*.

From a distance, *Six Seconds in Dallas* seems to bulge with good information expressed in literate English backed by mathematics made vivid with pictures and actual words of witnesses. But these words were made to seem as ephemeral as the smoke on the knoll, dissipating in the wind.

Josiah Thompson concluded there is no proof of conspiracy in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. He continues to promote this position despite recent revelations that suggest otherwise. To some, this may suggest standards of ratiocination so rigorous that nothing suffices to definitively contradict the lone assassin theory. Are these standards manifest in this book? What exactly is in this book? What was omitted, and why?

## Covering Up the Cover-up

In *Six Seconds*, Thompson exposes a fatal flaw in the single bullet theory (SBT). He describes noticing "for the first time" separate reactions to bullets, that one struck Kennedy, and another Connally, on the original Zapruder (Z) film at *Life Magazine*.

A disturbing question was raised by the U.S. government's promotion of the single bullet theory: did the government lie? Thompson suggests they did not know any better, that it was "an oversight" due to the "inferior" copy of the Z film they viewed.

...the Commission had chosen to disregard his (Connally's) testimony, prompted by their desire to believe that there had been only one assassin and aided, unknowingly perhaps, by the inferior quality of the film they had used for reference. (*Six Seconds*, p.9)

...It seemed clear, then, that the Commission had either neglected or only hastily examined the photographic record of the assassination. (p. 14)

*Life Magazine* had already shown that Kennedy was hit before Connally in their Memorial issue, November 29, 1963. This pre-SBT issue featured small black and white stills showing the separate reactions, with captions

pointing them out. Several witnesses to the Z film, both Connallys, the Parkland doctors, Secret Servicemen and others had all noted these separate reactions. Thompson had seen the "inferior" film numerous times at the Archives, he explains, and, he, too, was already familiar with the separate reactions when he sat down to watch the original:

Once again... the dark blue Lincoln began its fatal glide... The President was hit, then the Governor, then the President again. I knew each movement in detail—yet this time... the picture was infinitely brighter and clearer than the one I had seen only days before in the National Archives in Washington. (*Six Seconds*, p.8)

The original no doubt revealed more detail, but the "inferior" copy had already contradicted the SBT. Yet, Thompson writes on the next page:

As I inspected the frames, one by one, the full impact of the Commission's oversight was brought home to me... I saw for the first time enough evidence to prove that Connally had not been hit until... (*Six Seconds*, p.9)

The Commission's "oversight" is not apparent in this passage:

Mr. Dulles. But... you would think if Connally had been hit at the same time, [he] would have reacted in the same way, and not reacted much later as these pictures show.

Mr. McCloy. That is what puzzles me.

Mr. Dulles. That is what puzzles me. (SH155)

Thompson's representation of what was studied is also misleading:

While the film we were watching at *Life* was a copy made directly from the original...the FBI's working copy was made not from the original but from a copy of it, which made their 'official' version a copy of a copy, or a copy once removed. And it was the Washington copy of the Zapruder film, inferior by comparison, with which the FBI had undertaken photoanalysis for the Commission. (*Six Seconds*, pp.8-9)

The FBI studied three materials: (1) their copy of the Secret Service film, (2) the origi-

nal which they were allowed to "run through... several times," and (3) slides made from the original. (SH138,139)

In a footnote, Thompson quotes from a memo in which Lyndal Shaneyfelt expressed a desire for a "more clear film print." Thompson then goes on to say that Shaneyfelt "never managed to acquire his clear print." In fact, the FBI analyst obtained something much better: a set of slides made directly from the original.

Mr. Orth volunteered to prepare 35-mm color slides directly from the original... (SH139)

When we obtained the slides from *Life Magazine*, we went through those very thoroughly, because they gave so much more detail and were so much clearer and analyzed again all these things about the reaction of the President and Mr. Connally, trying to ascertain where he was reacting... (SH142)

Thompson admits the Commission had individual slides to study but, in the main body of the text, does not explain that the slides were made from the original. The impression left is that they were made from the "inferior" copy of the copy. (*Six Seconds*, p.9) Thus each slide would be a copy of a copy of a copy. Thompson buries in the references a misleading note about the origins of the slides:

The testimony of FBI expert Lyndal Shaneyfelt implies, however, that both sets of transparencies were made from the original film. If this is indeed the case, then the only explanation for the difference in quality must be that the copying job done by *Life* for the Commission was a poor one in comparison with the one done by *Life* for *Life*. (*Six Seconds*, p.17)

As can be seen from Shaneyfelt's comments quoted earlier, he did more than imply the slides were made from the original; he was explicit.

I was with a group of teenagers who saw the absurdity of the SBT in the early sixties, just by looking at Commission Exhibit 885, the small, blurry, black and white Xeroxed stills of the Zapruder film in the Warren Commission Hearings. The subtle changes in Connally didn't show, of course, but something

else did: Kennedy with his hands about his face, while Connally holds onto his Stetson, looking just fine.

Thompson provides an illustration designed to demonstrate the quality of the materials the Commission had to study (*Six Seconds*, p.8): two tiny black and white versions of Z-207, one with a splice (Archives copy) and one without (*Life* copy). In the caption, he comments on "the difference in clarity between the film the Commission studied and the one owned by *Life* is apparent in a comparison of copies of frame 207." The faces in the frames are less than 2 square millimeters—about the size of a gnat.

### A Man with a Gun Case

Here is an example of the care in which Thompson evaluates an extraordinary statement by a witness. He accepted Dallas patrolman Joe Murphy's report to the FBI—even though it contained an inherent contradiction.

Did Julia Ann Mercer see a gunman carry a gun case onto the grassy knoll shortly before the assassination?

Answer: No. (*Six Seconds*, p. 218)

On the morning of the assassination, Julia Ann Mercer saw a green pickup truck stalled on Elm Street not far from the overpass with the hood raised, obstructing traffic. While waiting to pass, she said a man at the back of the truck "reached over the tailgate and took out from the truck what appeared to be a gun case... then proceeded to walk away from the truck and, as he did, the small end of the case caught in the grass or sidewalk and he reached down to free it. He then proceeded to walk across the grass and up the grassy hill which forms part of the overpass."

Mercer did not go to the press seeking attention with this story; she merely joked with some policeman she saw later that "The Secret Service is not very secret."

Thompson dismisses this story entirely, based on the statements of two patrolmen, E.V. Brown, and Joe Murphy. Brown told the FBI he "did not see anyone remove anything from this truck." This is meaningless unless Brown watched the truck constantly, which is unlikely.

It is Murphy's observations that Thompson said, "effectively puts to rest any lingering doubts about the pickup truck seen by Julia Ann Mercer." (*Six Seconds*, p.219) Excerpts:

... He was unable to recall the name of the company to whom this truck belonged but stated it is the property of the company working on the First National Bank Building...

There were three construction men in this truck, and he took one to the bank building to obtain another truck in order to assist in moving the

stalled one. The other two men remained with the pickup truck along with two other officers. Shortly prior to the arrival of the motorcade, the man he had taken to the bank building returned with a second truck, and all three of the men left with the two trucks, one pushing the other.

Murphy further stated it was probable that one of these men had taken something from the rear of this truck in an effort to start it. He stated that these persons were under observation all during the period they were stalled on Elm Street because the officers wanted the truck moved prior to the arrival of the motorcade, and it would have been impossible for any of them to have had anything to do with the assassination of President Kennedy.

Why does Thompson say the above is enough to close this case? Because the truck belonged to a company? Because the men had jobs and were in the area on business? So was Oswald. Or is Thompson satisfied with the policemen's surveillance of the truck?

### The Clincher

Either the truck was under observation all during the relevant period—or it was not. If it was, they would have known for sure whether one of the men "had taken something from the rear of this truck in an effort to start it." But in a bit of overkill, Murphy said "it was probable that one of these men had taken something from the rear of the truck." If it was only "probable," then they were not sure. If they were not sure, then they could not have been watching the whole time.

### Number of Shots

On page 25 of *Six Seconds*, Thompson presents four charts. They demonstrate 1) the number of shots reported, 2) the spacing of the shots, 3) the time span, and 4) the direction of the sound. But Thompson omitted a chart on one of the most fascinating facts of all—when the shots were heard in relation to when a reaction is seen on film. Or, more important, when shots were not heard. Had Thompson done so, he would have revealed an incredible pattern.

If a witness reported three shots, it is natural to assume those three shots go with the three observable reactions on the Zapruder film. In too many instances, this is not so.

Consider the case of Mary Moorman. She only heard three or four shots. But she did not hear (or register mentally) the first two. The first time she heard a shot was when she snapped her Polaroid photo of Kennedy being shot in the head, then she heard more. If we combine (1) the impacts of two earlier shots on the Zapruder film with (2) what Moorman claims she heard we would have five or six shots in all. Thompson does not explore this intriguing possibility, nor does he even expose the anomaly.

Instead, he presents Moorman as a witness to the actual first shot—a shot she wasn't even aware of, according to her FBI and Warren Commission statements, in his "First Shot, First Hit" section (*Six Seconds*, p.36)

Moorman's account as recorded by the FBI:

... she took a photograph of the procession as it proceeded toward her... and the photograph showed the police motorcycle escort preceding the President's car. In the background of this photograph she said the Texas School Book Depository Building was visible.

She took a second [author's emphasis] photograph of the President as his automobile passed her, and just as she snapped the picture, she heard what she at first thought was a firecracker and very shortly thereafter heard another similar sound...She recalls seeing the President "sort of jump" and start to slump sideways in the seat...

(Moorman took an earlier photograph, yet Thompson refers to the Polaroid as Moorman's "one grainy picture" on page 13.)

Moorman's Warren Commission testimony:

As I snapped the picture of President Kennedy, I heard a shot ring out. President Kennedy kind of slumped over. Then I heard another shot ring out and Mrs. Kennedy jumped up in the car and said, "My god, he has been shot." When I heard these shots ring out, I fell to the ground... I heard three or four shots in all. (19H487)

As I have previously documented in *Probe*, several witnesses heard shots after the "last" one. In some cases, this is clear from their words alone, but sometimes this is revealed only when one compares their words with photographic evidence.

Charles Brehm said he saw the head wounded on the "second" shot, and then he heard a third. (22H837) But when did he hear one for the first time? He can be seen still clapping as the limousine with two wounded men passes him at Z-296, so it is unclear when he heard a shot for the first time.

Chief Curry said he heard a shot after Motorcycle Officer Chaney rode up to tell him what was happening. (4H161) The Nix film shows that Chaney was still behind the limousine seven frames after the headshot.

Sheriff Decker first heard a shot at the time he saw a "spray of water" coming from where Kennedy was sitting. Then he heard one more. (9H458) Surely this is the same spray of bloody water from Kennedy's head that struck the motorcycle officers. Patrolman James Foster said the head was wounded on "second" shot; then he heard a third. (CD897)

Clint Hill saw JFK's head wounded and heard a shot while briefly "mounted" on the limousine the first time, just before he fell off

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## Six Seconds

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(this is seen on the Nix film; yet the Z film only shows the *second* time he mounts limousine). (2H144) The Nix film shows that JFK's head was already wounded 1.5 seconds before Hill reaches the limousine. Hill said, in effect, that he saw a second head shot. He was apparently unaware of an earlier one.

Jean Hill, Moorman's companion, also seemed unaware of the earlier shots. She testified that she wrapped up her friend's first Polaroid photo and put it in her pocket before she heard any shots. (6H206) At the time she is still in view, about four seconds after the second shot, the photo is still in her hand.

Emmett Hudson saw Kennedy's head wounded on the "second" shot; then heard a third while on the ground when the limousine was in front of the stairs (a little over 1.5 seconds after head shot). (7H560-1) Royce Skelton heard a shot after seeing Kennedy react to the head shot. (19H496) Mrs. Philip Willis said the head was wounded on the "second" shot; after which she heard a third shot. (CD 1245)

In another group of witnesses, it is only clear that they did not hear the first shots. Officer B.J. Martin, for example, said Clint Hill got off the backup car after the first shot. Yet, the Muchmore film and the Altgens photo show that Hill is still on the back-up car well after two shots have been fired. Altgens himself said he heard a shot when he snapped his photo, which is considered the equivalent of Z-255. Still other witnesses associate the first or second shot with the moment witnesses hit the ground. But films make it clear that people do not hit the ground until after Z-313. So, quite a number of people apparently did not register the first or second shot.

What about the people who say the head exploded on the "third" shot? It may be that, unknown to these witnesses, Kennedy was hit in the head earlier and what they were witnessing was yet another head shot, a more obvious one.

Secret Service Agent James Hickey said something that puts all of the above in perspective. He said that the last two shots were fired almost simultaneously and, with one shot, "the hair on the right side of his head flew forward and there didn't seem to be any impact against his head. The last shot seemed to hit his head..." (18H762)

Thompson apparently explored none of the above.

### Confirming FBI Location of the First Shot

Thompson had access to the best equip-

ment in the country. He saw the original Z film several times. He made an intense study of individual stills from the film. He saw the minute forward movement of Kennedy's head between Z-312 and 313. He saw a lock of Connally's hair become displaced and the Governor's cheeks puff. Yet he does not comment on Kennedy's movements signaling trouble before any part of him is obscured by the Stemmons sign. As Kennedy goes behind the sign, both hands are near his face, as if he were having a coughing fit. The film blurs. No matter what the ambiguities, something is obviously wrong. Yet, Thompson wrote:

This natural waving movement continues as the President disappears from view behind the Stemmons Freeway sign at Z207. (*Six Seconds*, p.31)

There is no evidence that a shot was fired prior to Z210. (*Six Seconds*, p.34)

According to the FBI, the view of Kennedy from the sixth floor sniper's nest is obscured by trees—until Z-210. Thompson illustrates this with re-enactment photos from the sixth floor, and makes the perplexing claim that "many, many witnesses placed the first shot in the interval Z210-224." He also wrote:

... we can triangulate the position of the car at the time of the first shot. Its position falls in the range of Zapruder frames 210-224... It should be pointed out that the position... established by triangulating these witness reports compares favorably with the position given in early government reports. (*Six Seconds*, p.33)

First of all, considering the number of witnesses who did not even register the actual first shot, one must be very careful when using testimony about a "first" shot.

Second, the majority of statements quoted by Thompson are too vague to tie the shot to this short interval—as opposed to an earlier one, or a later one. Samples:

She [Virgie Baker] also remarked that when this first shot was fired the car had gone down Elm Street partially out of sight and was "near the signs" (7H509). This places it in the range of Z210-224.

Mrs. Baker said "near the signs," plural. There were three signs on Elm. If the limousine was between the first and second signs, this could be several feet (and frames) before Z210, and still qualify for the description "near the signs."

Roy Kellerman is also quoted as if his remarks confirm a shot during this interval, but Kellerman said the shot came after they passed the first sign, which would be before Z-210. The Stemmons sign is the second one.

Several other witnesses are used to corroborate this interval because of where they

say the car was when they heard the shot. On the map provided by Thompson on page 32, the locations of these witnesses are shown in relation to Z-film frames. Mrs. Billie Clay is at Z-205. She said the shot came a "few seconds" after the car passed her. But even two seconds afterward is obviously too late (18 x 2 + 205).

Arthur Chism, located adjacent to the car's placement at Z-255 on Thompson's "First Shot" map, does not confirm a shot in the Z-210-224 interval. Chism said that when the car was just about in front of him, Kennedy turned to them and waved. Afterward, he heard a shot, and Mrs. Kennedy then stood up, then lay down over him. He heard only one more shot.

One interpretation of his statement: Kennedy, already hit, approached and passed Chism with his hands near his face, a reaction to the first bullet(s). Chism mistook these gestures for waving.

The witnesses do back up Thompson's point that a shot that missed was not fired earlier, around Z-166, which is before the tree branches obscure the view. But why force the Zapruder film and the testimony to fit the requirements of a sniper on the sixth floor? More importantly, why not illuminate Kennedy's behavior before Z-210?

### Bullets That Missed

In the chapter on the second shot, Thompson said that of the "several hundred witnesses," none believed the second shot missed. (*Six Seconds*, p.61) In fact, few commented specifically on what the second shot hit, and few seemed to be aware that Connally had been wounded at all, let alone when. As explained above, many did not even hear a second shot at the time most of us, including Thompson, believe it was fired. This is demonstrated by Thompson's own statistics showing that 40 of 65 who reported on the spacing said the last two shots were very close together. Yet, on the Z film, it is the first two reactions that are close together.

In a footnote on the same page in which Thompson asserts that no witness believed the second shot missed, he dismisses the curious observations of Royce Skelton. It is often impossible to bring up the name of this witness without hearing that he has been "thoroughly discredited by Thompson," and therefore one should ignore what Skelton said. Let's not ignore what Skelton said.

### Royce G. Skelton

\*This statement needs qualification only by calling attention to the affidavit of Royce G. Skelton. Standing on the overpass, he "heard something which I thought was fireworks," and then "saw

something hit the pavement at the left rear of the car" (19H496). From Skelton's remarks it is unclear whether this "something" hit the pavement after the first or the second shot. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that no one else on the overpass saw what Skelton claimed to have seen, and the Warren Report disclosed that examination of the area showed no indication of a bullet strike (R1116). (*Six Seconds*, p.61)

No one else on the overpass saw what Skelton claimed to have seen? Why the qualification? If anyone anywhere saw it, that would be important. Officer Stavis Ellis and Sheriff Decker, for instance reported seeing what looked like a bullet hitting the pavement. (Vince Palamara has quite a database with these stories, and I thank him for these two.) But, in fact, someone else—on the overpass—did see what Skelton saw, or part of it. Austin Miller. (See below.) As for what the Warren Report "disclosed," why would anyone assume it is accurate in view of the numerous examples of deception on the part of the Commission? Here is Skelton's statement, and it is clear that Thompson has left out a great deal:

I was standing... with Austin Miller... I heard something which I thought was fireworks. I saw something hit the pavement at the left rear of the car, then the car got in the right hand lane and I heard two more shots... I heard a woman say "Oh no" or something and grab a man inside the car. I then heard another shot and saw the bullet hit the pavement. The concrete was knocked to the south away from the car. It hit the pavement in the left or middle lane... (19H496)

Skelton's testimony before the Warren Commission is considerably different:

Just about the same time the car straightened up—got around the corner—I heard two shots, but I didn't know at that time they were shots.

... I thought that they were these dumbbells that they throw at the cement because I could see the smoke coming up off the cement....

This is followed by a discussion about where the shots seemed to come from, and how many he heard (he said he thought there were four). Then he is asked if he saw any pigeons taking off. Soon after, Ball tries to wrap up the report. This is when Skelton, in trying to be very helpful to the Commission, reveals that he has been coached, only not too well:

There's one thing I could say—you have that other report?

What is that?

About when I saw one of the bullets where it hit on the pavement and it hit, the smoke did come from the general vicinity of where you say Oswald was.

Wait a minute—let me ask you some questions

about that. Tell me, now, about the smoke—did you see some smoke?

After those two shots, and the car came on down closer to the triple underpass, well, there was another shot—two more shots I heard, but one of them—I saw a bullet, or I guess it was a bullet—I take for granted it was—hit in the left front of the President's car on the cement, and when it did, the smoke carried with it—away from the building.

You mean there was some smoke in the building?

No; on the pavement—you know, pavement when it is hit with a hard object it will scatter—it will spread.

Which way did it spread?

It spread just right in line, like you said.

I haven't said anything—tell me what you think it was?

Like I said—south of us—it would be southwest, you know, in a direct line from the Texas Depository. (6H238)

#### Skelton's Earlier Statement

- Heard what he thought was "fireworks."
- Saw bullet hit pavement at left rear of the car; car moves into right lane.
- Heard two more shots.
- Heard Mrs. K say "Oh, no!" and saw her grab JFK.
- Heard another shot.
- Saw bullet hit pavement and knock concrete south, away from car in left or middle lane.

#### Skelton's Warren Commission Testimony

- Heard two shots.
- Thought "dumbbells" hit the cement.
- Heard two more shots.
- Saw bullet hit in the left front of the limousine, instead of the back.
- Saw concrete knocked to the west instead of to the south.

Skelton seems to have been coached on what to say—but not on what not to say! ("It spread just right in line, like you said.") He reduced the number of shots from five to four, and changed the location of the bullet strike. Previously, he said a bullet struck behind the limousine and knocked cement to the south; this suggests the sniper was to the right front of the limousine. His revision suggests the sniper was to the right rear of the limousine.

#### Austin Miller

From Miller's original statement:

One shot apparently hit the street past the car. I saw something which I thought was smoke or steam coming from a group of trees north of Elm off the railroad tracks. (19H485)

When Miller testified before the Warren Commission, he said nothing about the bullet hitting the street, or the smoke coming from the trees near the railroad tracks. He testified to hearing three shots, seeing JFK "fall forward" and he described the reaction of the crowd, etc. At the end of the interview was this exchange between Miller and David Belin:

Well, you and I never met until just a few minutes ago, did we?

No, sir.

And as soon as you came in here, we started immediately taking your testimony under oath is that correct?

Yes.

We never talked about the facts before then, did we?

No, sir. (6H226)

#### Virgie Rackley Baker

In view of the apparent evidence of witness coaching in the cases of Skelton and Miller, it is not surprising to find discrepancies in the statements of another witness to a pavement strike, Mrs. Virgie Baker.

Mrs. Donald Sam Baker (nee Virgie Rackley)... told a Commission lawyer that she heard a "firecracker" noise and saw something hit the pavement behind the Presidential auto... [when it was] partially out of sight... Mrs. Baker's deposition before Counsel Liebler did not agree with what she had told the FBI earlier. A March 19 statement she gave the FBI contains no mention of something hitting the pavement... while an earlier interrogation report notes that she saw something hit the pavement in front of the presidential car... (*Six Seconds*, p.57)

Possibly Mrs. Baker, like Royce Skelton, saw two confusing instances of a bullet hitting the pavement. Possibly she saw only one that hit in front of the car, but since the car quickly passed, it was soon behind the car. Possibly she was just confused about when she saw it. Does it matter when? The fact that she and the others say they saw it at all is what counts. Thompson implies that (1) because it is claimed the pavement showed nothing hit it, and (2) because of the inconsistencies in reporting, it therefore didn't happen at all. Is this logical? The following statement from the Harvard Law Review on typical inconsistencies is common sense, well expressed:

Frequently a witness prepares a statement about an event shortly after its occurrence. Later, in court,

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his testimony may be substantially more complete than the early statement or may even be inconsistent with it. Both these variances generally occasion an attempt by opposing counsel to cast aspersions on the witness' recollection and honesty. However, our data indicated that the very act of interrogation tended to produce much greater completeness of recall. Furthermore, we found that the more accurate witnesses were often those who, after interrogation, said they wanted to change the testimony they had given in their free reports. Their interrogation apparently caused them to reconsider their earlier statements. This latter finding is in accord with the belief of one well-known psychiatrist that complete consistency in testimony is likely to be a sign of perjury. (J. Marshall, K.H. Marquis, S. Oskamp, "Effects of Kind of Question and Atmosphere of Interrogation on Accuracy and Completeness of Testimony," *Harvard Law Review*, 1971; Vol.84:1620-1643, p.1637)

A digression into the present. Recently, Thompson seemed to dismiss this article as irrelevant to our studies when he said:

The focus of the study is not "salience" or "accuracy" or "completeness" but, rather, methods of interrogation. (Thompson, JFK DPQ, Vol.4, #III, p.8)

Contrary to Thompson's assertion, the focus of the study concerned what methods of interrogation achieved accuracy and completeness, as is demonstrated by the authors' first sentence:

How effective are current methods of direct and cross-examination of witnesses in achieving an accurate and complete account of events? (Emphasis mine.) (Marshall, p.1620)

Back to Mrs. Baker who omitted the incident from one of her statements—there are numerous instances in which a witness reported information that was inconvenient to the lone assassin theory and, somehow, these statements changed. James Worrell, for instance, told the Commission that, contrary to the FBI's statement, he never said he saw the profile of the sniper or that he resembled Oswald. He flatly denied seeing any part of the sniper's face. Just about every witness who saw anything significant found himself being either "edited" or "persuaded" to change his story. Two of three witnesses who said the man in the sniper's nest was blonde found themselves saying later that the man was brown haired (Fischer and Edwards).

The Hearings have many such examples, but Thompson did not report this suspicious pattern.

### Identity Crises

Studies on eye witnesses show they are

very poor at identifying faces, even at close range. I believe Josiah Thompson knows this now, and knew this in 1967. The book *Eyewitness Testimony* by Elizabeth Loftus, whom he often quotes, describes several studies proving just how bad witnesses are when it comes to faces.

Howard Brennan was already a very problematic witness for reasons already well known. Brennan was an eye witness and, thus, by definition, bad at distinguishing faces.

Despite the above, Thompson has never attacked his credibility the way he did so many other witnesses.

Howard Brennan is surrounded by mystery:

Why did the FBI cut out footage from a newsreel that would have revealed the identity of the mysterious "Secret Service man" in a car to whom Howard Brennan had given his description of a sniper?

Who was the man in a car who took down Howard Brennan's description of the sniper, and why didn't he broadcast Brennan's explicit description of the sniper's clothing?

Who was the man that described the sniper to Inspector J. Herbert Sawyer? The witness was not likely Brennan. Sawyer could not describe the witness at all except to say he was a white man, neither young nor old, neither tall nor short. He said nothing about a hard-hat. When asked if he ever saw the witness again, he said he had not. Never saw the star witness again? Another reason the witness was probably not Brennan: when the inspector was asked if there was "Any clothing description," Sawyer replied "Current witness can't remember that." (Time: 12:43 p.m., Sawyer Exhibit A; 6H31)

From the mystery witness: slender white male; about 35; 5 feet 10 inches; 165 pounds; carrying "what looked to be a 30-30 or some type of Winchester." Could not remember any clothes. (Sawyer Exhibit A)

From Brennan: slender white male; early 30's; 5 feet 10 inches; 160-170. "Light colored clothes, more of a khaki color (3H145) "[pants] similar to the same color of the shirt or a little lighter" (3H161); "may have been wearing a light-weight jacket or sweater..." (FBI report of 11/22/63)

Sawyer said the witness who spoke with him was escorted to the Sheriff's office where he presumably gave a statement. This man's description of the sniper is nearly identical to Brennan's (except for the clothes), but I could find a record of only one such description: Brennan's.

Who was the police officer Brennan ran to? The Warren Report identifies him as "probably" William Eugene Barnett. But Barnett's description of what happened doesn't quite match

Brennan's:

That was probably 2 1/2 minutes after the last shot... I broke and ran to the front and got the name of it [the building]. I ran back and told him the name of it, and about that time a construction worker ran from the southwest corner of the intersection up to me and said, "I was standing over there and saw the man in the window with the rifle. He and I and the sergeant all three broke and ran for the door. I kept the man there with me. The sergeant ran to the back... I kept the man there until they took him across the street to the courthouse..." (7H543)

Compare this to Brennan's testimony, compacted:

And there was one officer standing at the corner of the Texas Book Store on the street. It didn't seem to me he was going in any direction. He was standing still...

I asked him to get me someone in charge, a Secret Service man or an FBI. That it appeared to me that they were searching in the wrong direction... He said, "Just a minute." And he had to give some orders or something on the east side of the building on Houston Street. And then he had taken me to, I believe, Mr. Sorrels, an automobile sitting in front of the Texas Book Store... I related my information and there was a few minutes of discussion, and Mr. Sorrels had taken me then across the street to the sheriff's building. (3H145)

According to Forrest Sorrels of the Secret Service, between 20-25 minutes after the shots were fired, he entered the back door of the Depository building, made inquiries, went out the front door, and asked if anyone had seen anything significant. Brennan was pointed out to him. Sorrels questioned him, and then another witness, Amos Euins. Afterward, he took them both to the Sheriff's office.

It was a good 25 minutes, then, before Sorrels approached Brennan. In the meantime, what was he doing? The second time he discusses the incident, he describes being brought to "Secret Service men." (3H158)

How long did it take you... from the time of the last shot... before you got to the steps of the Texas Book Depository?

I could not calculate that, because before I got to the steps... I had already talked to this officer, and he had taken me to the Secret Service men. I had talked to them.

And you stayed behind the retaining wall for a little while until you saw the coast was clear?

Just seconds.... (3H158)

He was asked how long it took for the officer to take him to the man or men, and he said "That was quick too." (3H158) And he spoke to the "Secret Service men" for only about "3 to 5 minutes. (3H158) If this man (or men) said he was "Secret Service," he (they) may have been the Military Intelligence

officers posing as Secret Service officers. That may be why his image was cut out of a newsreel. Whatever the reason, this is a very strange story:

...I believe you said that the car that you talked to the Secret Service agent in was at point "G" approximately?

Right.

Now, are these accurate or approximate locations, Mr. Brennan?

Well, don't you have photographs of me talking to the Secret Service men right here?

I don't believe so.

You should have. It was on television before I got home—my wife saw it.

On television?

Yes.

At this time we do not have them. Do you remember what station they were on television?

No. But they had it. And I called I believe Mr. Lish (FBI) who requested that he cut those films or get them cut of the FBI. I believe you might know about them. Somebody cut those films, because a number of times later the same films were shown, and that part was cut. (3H150)

Brennan saw Oswald twice on television before he identified him in the line-up.

Brennan said Oswald look "much younger... a few years younger—say 5 years younger."

Three witnesses initially identified the potential sniper as blonde.

A mysterious witness provided a description generally matching Oswald, then disappeared.

A mysterious "Secret Service man" sitting in a car apparently took Brennan's description but did not broadcast it. Or, if he did, he omitted an essential part—the clothing.

A newsreel that could probably have revealed the man's identity or license plates was cut by the FBI.

The officer identified in the Warren Report as the one who brought Brennan to the man in the car, W.E. Barnett, was not asked to identify the "construction worker" who ran up to him. He was not asked if he brought Brennan to a man in a car.

I can find no record of an attempt to confirm Brennan's story about a Mr. Lish cutting or obtaining a newsreel showing Brennan talking to the mystery man.

I can find no comment by Josiah Thompson on any of the above.

### Thompson's Single Bullet Theory

Thompson's proposed scenario: the first

bullet entered JFK's back, then fell out, as reported by the FBI. The second bullet hit Connally. The third bullet struck the head from behind—went to the left—then fragmented in the middle of the brain. One bullet or bone fragment went out the throat, more bullet fragments struck the windshield, and another hit the curb near James Tague. Such a theory solves the problem of too many wounds in too little time with too few bullets. And it solves another problem.

Many critics assumed then (and now) that a bullet from Kennedy's right rear could not both enter and exit the right side of the head. Although I believe the known head damage suggests a scenario other than the official one, I am also sure the trajectory itself is possible, since Kennedy was turned sufficiently to his left, as revealed by the extent to which the back of the head can be seen in Z-312. (In a 50-50 profile, one does not see this much temporal and occipital bone.) In addition, the street moves diagonally away from the building so that it more behind, rather than to the right, of anyone on the street that far west. This, combined with Kennedy's being so turned to his left, brings the right front of the head into the path of the hypothetical southwest bound bullet. In reference to his theory of a bullet from behind going into the left brain, Thompson wrote:

Such a pattern of damage would match perfectly our expectations for a shot fired from the sixth-floor Depository window entering the President's occiput at Z313. (*Six Seconds*, p.110-111)

The only thing the theory has going for it is a mysterious notation on the autopsy sheet, an arrow in the alleged entrance wound in the back of the head, going to the left. Otherwise, few, if any, of the reported facts support Thompson's alternate SBT.

### Throat Wound

If the throat wound can thus be attributed to the "head shot," then it is quite easy to see that the first bullet is not required to do all the Commission said it did... once the facts about the throat wound are known, the necessity for the transiting [first] bullet disappears. (*Six Seconds*, p.55)

The "facts" according to Josiah Thompson follow.

### Omits Parkland Impression of an Entrance

Imagine a chapter on the throat wound without one word about what the Parkland doctors thought it was: an entrance. Instead, Thompson creates the impression that Parkland considered it an exit wound, and the only equivocation was over what sort of exit wound

it was.

All of them agreed on the nature of the damage to the President's neck. *None of them* believed it to be an exit wound from a whole bullet (Emphasis mine.) (*Six Seconds*, p.53)

As if they considered the wound to be an exit—but from a fragment as opposed to a whole bullet.

Without exception, their testimony described a vertical channel of contusion (bruise), laceration, and hematoma... stretching above and below the tiny exit hole. (*Six Seconds*, p.53)

Their testimony did not describe a "tiny exit hole." Only when pressed did they say it could have been either an entrance or an exit, but they leaned toward an entrance wound. To further banish the notion the wound was an entrance Thompson quotes one doctor (Jones) accurately, but out of context, with a misleading result:

... all seemed to agree on the size of the hole. It was small—so small, in fact, that one doctor believed it was too small to be even the entry hole of a high velocity bullet (6H56). (*Six Seconds*, p.51)

Jones' emphasis was not on "entry" but, rather, on "high velocity." Jones said that if one bullet had entered the throat and exited the head, it had to have been a high velocity bullet to do that kind of damage. Thompson omits Jones' testimony that he did think it was an entrance. He also neglects to mention Jones' speculation that it could have been an exit from a low velocity bullet. (6H55) Obviously, if it wasn't too small for an exit, it could not have been too small for an entrance.

### Misrepresents Autopsy on Internal Damage

None of the testimony from Parkland was available to the autopsy surgeons when they decided that the throat wound had been caused by the exit of a whole bullet traveling horizontally. One can search the official autopsy report in vain for any mention of what Dr. James Carrico had described in Dallas as "some contusions and hematoma to the right of the larynx with a minimal deviation of the larynx to the left" (3H360). A reading of the official report makes it quite apparent that almost all the information concerning the throat injury was gleaned from the phone conversation with Dr. Perry... Thus the neck area was never fully dissected and the fact that it might have been a bone or bullet fragment wound went unconsidered..." (*Six Seconds*, p.54)

The contusions (expressed as "considerable ecchymoses") to the right of the larynx were in the strap muscles (within millimeters of the larynx), and they are mentioned twice in the autopsy report: on pages 4 and 6. In addition, the contusions are mentioned in Dr.

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## Six Seconds

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Humes' testimony, along with their significance:

So we feel that, had this missile not made its path in that fashion, the wound made by Doctor Perry in the neck would not have been able to produce... these contusions of the musculature of the neck. (2H368)

### Misrepresents Parkland on Internal Damage

To support his theory of a fragment exiting the throat, Thompson characterized the internal damage as "a vertical channel of contusion (bruise), laceration, and hematoma" stretching at least "4 to 6 inches up and down the President's neck." (*Six Seconds*, p.54) But he neck itself is a vertical channel. If one small wound bleeds considerably, where would the blood go? It would go everywhere it could, into all the spaces open to it. In the neck, these spaces are necessarily vertical. And if the blood collects into one place and forms a large hematoma (blood clot), this does not mean the wound itself was that large. The same Parkland doctors he references said the tissues that were actually damaged (as opposed to being covered with blood from somewhere else) were lateral to the tear in the right side of the trachea. And Parkland certainly did not say a laceration extended 4 to 6 inches. Thompson reinforces this false picture:

Yet the one developed above [Thompson's hypothesis] deals more adequately with all the facts now known to surround the President's throat wound: its small size, the 4- to 6-inch vertical injury immediately behind it... (*Six Seconds*, p.56)

What "4- to 6-inch vertical injury?" One Parkland doctor made an intriguing comment (omitted by Thompson) that may suggest a connection between the throat and head wounds, but not in the way Thompson described it. In his hospital notes, Dr. William Kemp Clark said in passing that there was blood from the oral pharynx. Apparently no one ever asked Clark to explain it.

### Exaggerates Jaggedness of Wound

The Parkland physicians thought the wound was an entrance because of its size and shape—round and punctate. A round, "punctate" wound is not consistent with Thompson's magic fragment scenario—but a very jagged wound is. Thompson gave a false picture of how many people said the wound was jagged, and just how jagged it was.

Various descriptions of the small hole... were given at Parkland Hospital by the doctors who saw it

before a tracheotomy incision erased its outline. While some described it periphery as smooth and regular (6H3, 9, 54; 3H372) and others remembered it as jagged (6H32, 48, 65, 141). (*Six Seconds*, p.51)

Thompson's list of those who said the edges were "smooth and regular" omits Dr. Charles Baxter. (6H42) Charles Carrico put it more strongly: The hole was "rather round and there were no jagged edges or stellate lacerations." (6H3) As for his list of those who said otherwise, they used qualifying words like "somewhat," "slightly," "a little bit."

Thompson's "jagged" list is inflated. Charles McClelland does not belong on this list because he did not see the wound before it was incised. (6H21) He only repeated what Malcolm Perry told him, that the wound was "clear-cut (with) somewhat irregular margins." Perry told the Commission the wound was "exuding blood slowly which partially obscured it. Its edges were neither ragged nor were they punched out, but rather clean." (3H372) Marion Jenkins (6H48) only had a "quick look." (Years later, the ever-accommodating Jenkins also said that he had felt a hole in the back of the neck, something he did not report at the time.) Gene Akin (6H65), contrary to what Thompson reports, did not see the wound before it was incised; what he saw was "slightly ragged." Nurse Henchcliffe (6H141) described the wound as only "jagged a little bit," and Thompson omits what she said next: "An entrance hole—it looked to me like."

Contrary to the impression Thompson leaves, entrance wounds are not perfectly round and smooth. Many have irregular edges—not to be confused with radiating lacerations, a certain indication of an exit. Charles Carrico said there were no "stellate (radiating) lacerations." (6H3) Also inconsistent with an exiting fragment scenario is the wound's abrasion collar, obliquely referred to as "the damaged skin around the area." (6H42)

### Quotes Selectively from JAMA

In an effort to promote this theory further, Thompson quotes the January 4, 1964 issue of the *Journal of the AMA*, which reported that "a small fragment of this bullet [the head shot] angled down and passed out through Kennedy's throat." (*Six Seconds*, p.53) Thompson should report what else JAMA said at that time:

The first bullet reportedly hit Kennedy in the upper part of the right back shoulder. The bullet did not go through his body and was recovered during the autopsy.

The bullet was recovered during the autopsy? The above lies within 1.5 inches of the

quote Thompson selected from this half-page article. Why leave it out? Thompson has presented his theory as just a different, perhaps superior, interpretation of the same incomplete information. A different interpretation does not necessarily reflect on the honesty of those involved in the autopsy or its reporting. But the claim that a whole bullet was recovered during the autopsy...?

### Head Wound

Thompson's report of the head wound: A bullet from the sixth floor of the Depository building enters the back of the head where Humes *et. al.* said there was an entrance—and goes to the left. The bullet is almost halfway through the head (apparently on the left side) when, mysteriously, it fragments.

It hasn't struck bone, it is in the middle of soft brain and, yet, according to Thompson, it now fragments. One fragment of bullet or bone—Thompson favors bone—is "driven downward," creating the little lacerations reportedly found in the midbrain and cerebral peduncle. Then it goes out the throat. Thompson doesn't say where this bone comes from. A piece from the back of the head that rode in front of the bullet? If so, what made it suddenly change course? If it was a bullet fragment that went out the throat, the same question arises: what made it change course if it didn't hit anything inside other than brain?

A medium velocity rifle bullet would have continued—leaving behind a permanent path in the left brain like the one described in the right brain. And cavitation would have taken place; the brain would have exploded radially (at right angles) to the path. The left brain was much too undamaged for this to have happened.

Thompson continues: "Other fragments could have continued parallel to the windpipe, bruising the strap muscles... contusing the superior mediastinum and the apex of the right pleura." So fragments could have rained down from the head. How are any of these fragments supposed to have gotten from the brain into the neck without creating a hole in the base of the skull? Or, if they are supposed to have come down through the foramen magnum (the opening that permits spine and brain to connect), where is the damage to the spine?

Thompson appears to accept the autopsy findings and x-rays. He has not declared them to be fraudulent. Yet, he presents his scenario as if it were an alternate interpretation of the same objective findings. Thompson made a reinterpretation seem reasonable by implying there were more blanks than actually existed. He goes so far as to imply there were as many mysteries about the brain and skull as there

were about the undissected neck:

True, a well-defined path downward through the brain has not been found, but neither, it should be pointed out, was the Commission able to find a back-to-front path through President Kennedy's neck. Both are inferred paths. (*Six Seconds*, p. 55-56)

The autopsists were "unable" to find any path through the neck because the neck was undissected, but they did take a look at the brain. What they found does not support Thompson's theory:

When viewed from the vertex the left cerebra hemisphere is intact. There is marked engorgement of meningeal blood vessels of the left temporal and frontal regions with considerable associated subarachnoid hemorrhage. The gyri and sulci over the left hemisphere are of essentially normal size and distribution. Those on the right are too fragmented and distorted for satisfactory description.

When viewed from the basilar aspect the disruption of the right cortex is again obvious. There is a longitudinal laceration of the mid-brain through the floor of the third ventricle just behind the optic chiasm and the mamillary bodies. This laceration partially communicates with an oblique 1.5 cm tear through the left cerebral peduncle. There are irregular superficial lacerations over the basilar aspects of the left temporal and frontal lobes.

Engorged vessels, blood under the membrane, a small 1.5cm tear, superficial lacerations... do not suggest the "main thrust" of the bullet went to the left brain. Humes considered the damage only "contre-coup," brought about when "the disruptive force of the injury pushed that portion of the brain against the relative intact skull." (2H356)

### Thompson and the Zapruder Film

"photographs... the only inviolable form of evidence"

The present study seeks to make proper use of the photographs inasmuch as they constitute the only inviolable form of evidence. Whereas witness reports can be in error (and witnesses can and have changed their stories) and pieces of physical evidence can be tampered with (the laundering of Governor Connally's clothes is a good example), photographic evidence is reliable. This new study, which uses photographs as a base and superimposes upon them the corroborated witness reports and the physical evidence, takes up where the Commission left off. (*Six Seconds*, p. 14)

Photographic evidence is "inviolable?" Thompson is actually saying that no film has ever been tampered with ever, that it cannot be done. He cannot possibly believe that. Here are a few relevant quotes from what I am told is the bible on evidence, *McCormick on Evidence*.

[A] photograph is viewed merely as a graphic portrayal of oral testimony, and becomes admissible only when a witness has testified that it is a correct and accurate representation of relevant facts personally observed by the witness... (p.671)

Motion pictures, when they were first sought to be introduced in evidence, were frequently objected to and sometimes excluded on the theory that they afforded manifold opportunities for fabrication and distortion... (p.673)

[A]s with the still photograph, the reliability and accuracy of the motion picture... may be established by testimony that the motion picture accurately reproduces phenomena actually perceived by the witness. Under this theory, though the requisite foundation may, and usually will, be laid by the photographer, it may also be provided by any witness who perceived the events filmed. Of course, if the foundation testimony reveals the film to be distorted in some material particular, exclusion is the proper result. (p.673) (*McCormick on Evidence*, 3rd Ed. Edited by Edward W. Cleary, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, MN, 1984; Title 8, Demonstrative Evidence, Chapter 21 Demonstrative Evidence; Section 214)

Obviously, judgment is called for in evaluating whether or not a film is edited based on what witnesses say. But Thompson dismisses the possibility outright.

Rather than superimposing corroborated witness reports upon the films, Thompson does the opposite: he superimposes the "inviolable" film upon the witness reports. But sometimes he tries to superimpose a witness report onto the film—when it is not there:

#### Example 1, not on film;

The next day *The New York Times* had reported that "Mr. Kennedy also had a massive gaping wound in the back and one on the right side of the head." These early reports accorded much more closely with what the witnesses had seen, what the Zapruder film had revealed... (*Six Seconds*, p. 10)

The Zapruder film shows a wound on the right side, but it does not reveal a "massive gaping wound in the back.... of the head," although that part of the head was quite visible on the film. Note especially the area behind the right ear, the temporal bone, which was said to have been part of the massive defect. The film only shows damage in the top and front of the head.

#### Example 2, not on film:

Gayle Newman described how the President "covered his head with his hands" (19H488), and Marilyn Sitzman told me how "he put his hands up as to guard his face." These descriptions accurately characterize what we see on the Zapruder film; instead of clutching his throat, the President seems to be guarding his face with his clenched fist, his elbows elevated at either side... (*Six Seconds*, p.39)

But the Zapruder film shows what Thompson describes—not what the witnesses describe, and especially not Mrs. Newman, whom he quotes selectively. What Thompson omitted:

Just about the time President Kennedy was right in front of us, I heard another shot ring out and the President put his hands up to his head. I saw blood all over the side of his head... (19H488)

Why omit this quote? It is corroborated by William Manchester's report of what is—or was—on the film.

#### Example 3, not on film:

The few pages of Manchester's book dealing with the actual assassination are crowded with errors... but one error is substantial and especially difficult to understand in light of Manchester's claim in *Look* (Apr. 4, 1967) that he had watched the Zapruder film "until I had memorized every movement and found some that the Commission's investigators had missed." His book reaches its apex in describing the very moment of the President's death: "Now, in a gesture of infinite grace, he raised his right hand, as though to brush back his tousled chestnut hair. But the motion faltered. The hand fell back limply. He had been reaching for the top of his head. But it wasn't there anymore." We know from the Zapruder film that no such gesture ever occurred." (*Six Seconds*, p. 16)

We do not "know" from the Zapruder film that "no such gesture ever occurred." This omniscient point of view is highly inappropriate to an objective study of evidence, especially since other witnesses within only a few feet of Kennedy said the same thing, only more explicitly. There are numerous other examples of corroboration between two important groups of witnesses: (a) those who saw the event in person, and (b) those who minutely studied the Zapruder film. One example is presented as a separate article, "The Mutation of a Quote."

### Conclusion

Thompson said that "with all the pitfalls and inaccuracies considered, eyewitness testimony can be of some value if objectively and cautiously studied." (*Six Seconds*, p.21)

How "objectively and cautiously" did Thompson study any testimony? How accurately did he report it? Did he omit anything that is obviously relevant? Is there a pattern in his inaccuracies, omissions, and contrived analyses? Did he report anything exciting that was not already known, or about to be in all likelihood?

*Six Seconds in Dallas* is a powerful book. It obtains its power from a source Thompson could not control—the words of the witnesses. These words have taken on a life of their own. They may be as ephemeral as the smoke on the knoll, but some of us can still smell that smoke. ☐