Truth Serum

Orleans Parish Coroner Nicholas Chetta, in endorsing the use of hypnosis and "truth serum" (sodium pentothal) to enable witness David Russo to recall his meeting with Lee Oswald, states that these procedures "help the individual to recall things, remember things and reveal things he might not care to reveal."

Dr. Chetta is grossly distorting the medical facts. Under the influence of sodium pentothal, subjects may give highly fictional accounts of past events and describe incidents that never happened. The drug is not a "truth serum." Its action on recall is profoundly influenced by the stress of the situation in which it is administered and the relationship between the subject and his questioners. The confabulation is a metaphorical, dramatic representation of some personal wish, fear or guilt quite unrelated to the purported issue. Russo's "memory" of Oswald may well be a personification of his own problems, which could include his relationships with New Orleans authorities. Under these circumstances, Dr. Chetta is hardly introducing scientific evidence.

Post
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