

Ms. Paula Appsell (phon) Executive producer  
NOVA  
WGBH

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Dear Ms. Appsell,

I write you after speaking to Prof. David Wrone, who when phoning me for something else, mentioned his conversations with you (pl). I'd heard about your planned JFK assassination special from a number of others, including Jim Lesar. I hope that you will come to understand that I write not to press a point of view on you (again pl) but in the interest of your collective responsibility and journalistic integrity.

First I declare my own prejudices. I believe that the assassination of a president is most subversive of possible crimes in a society such as ours. My own work has not been the pursuit of any whodunit. I've made an in-depth study of the workings of the basic institutions of our society in those times of great crisis and since. I believe and my seven books spell out that all these institutions failed us then and since. Of course TV is an essential element of the press and the press is one of the most basic of these failed institutions.

I believe also that FOIA made me surrogate for the people. I practise this, regardless of whether or not I agree with those who want access to the information I have. Most I do not agree with and they nonetheless have unrestricted access. Some I go out of my way to help, and this can amount <sup>to a</sup> considerable amounts of time for which I do not ask to be paid and almost never am. If you doubt this, phone Henry Hurt, whose book you ought be familiar with if you have undertaken what I'm told you have. His ~~ph~~ phones are 804/432-1206, 1400. He is a roving editor of Readers Digest. And many others. Unless they want to discuss it with me, I don't even know what people copy from my files. (I'm 75, with impaired health and mobility.) Tony Summers, for example, can attest to this, as can his assistants. (10919 Ravenswood Dr., Manassas, Va. 22111.) He is here working on a biography of J. Edgar Hoover.

So, what you say, what you preconceive, is entirely your own affair and it is not mine.

Jim Lesar, my friend and lawyer in many FOIA lawsuits, told me that Richter told him he is interested in the scientific evidence. Jim told Bob to speak to me and Bob said he would not. He asked Jim how he would get a copy of my Post Mortem and Jim told him from me. Bob again said he wouldn't. I have no idea why Richter has this attitude and I don't really care. When I find just driving into town to get a new ribbon too much for me now in this kind of weather I'm not looking for any extra work or any arguments at all.

However, as Jim also knows, having been my counsel, I've spent an enormous amount of time and gotten a considerable amount of material relating to the scientific evidence. Fifteen years at least in court with DJ and FBI and thousands and thousands of pages of court records, depositions, etc. This includes material never before seen and almost entirely unknown.

One aspect of this relates to Dr. Vincent Guinn. I understand Richter spoke to him and I'm familiar with his HSCA testimony. In fact, I planted a question a reporter friend asked Guinn and I encapsulate: Guinn found that none of the specimens he tested without any question about them match their official descriptions. He can't and the FBI can't and nobody in the world can validate the specimens he tested. There is what relates to this in these lawsuits. There is also, in fact, what can be interpreted as raising substantial questions about them and any testing based on them. (The FBI saw to it that Guinn was frozen out of its NAA testing, which was designedly incomplete, but I do have what it disclosed and what I think is more useful, what then AEC disclosed.)

There is nothing in the world to keep you from using footage of Guinn before HSCA or your own cameras and there is nothing to keep you from converting Nova and the public stations that air it into propagandists for errant government. And, of course, there is nothing that can compel you to at least try to be responsible and honest with your stations and audience or to ask questions about whether your integrity is involved in what you appear to have decided upon, some hell or high water. And this is merely one small aspect.

I've heard also that Bob is real hot on Dave Lifton's second-casket theory. It can be made attractive and Lifton did that but it remains entirely untenable. It also was a complete physical impossibility for an ambulance or anyone or anything else to use the Navy Hospital back gate. And this is far from all of what invalidates his theory. There was never any question about the so-called second helicopter: it held the Fort Myer honor guard and took it to Bethesda. As Lifton knew. Just a few of the many disproofs and an example of how attractive misinformation can be. As your own can be. If that is what you want to air, what you think WGBH and the stations and their audiences want and expect of you.

This is an enormous and very complicated matter, made more complicated by omnipresent and determined official dishonesty and this has been made even more intricate by much irresponsible and ego-tripping writing. There hasn't been much enterprise by TV and as Bob ought remember, TV also suppressed what did not support the official mythology. However, you are going to be in competition with a number of mostly unworthy specials. There are two exceptions, two that I believe will be good. And if you want to know whether there is new scientific evidence that is well-suited to TV, ask Nigel Turner of British ITV. I have no address for him. I've given it to him with a related

and exclusive witness with all the required credentials.

I have no idea why Bob has this attitude. To the best of my recollection, we met only a couple of times. I remember driving him and a New York Times reporter to their offices from the Archives one night and I remember that he came to see me when we lived at Hyattstown and he was working on a CBS special. If he was then still at CBS he may remember also that I refused to be on their King assassination special even though I'd spent a considerable amount of unpaid time helping a number of them. They presented me with a conflict of interest and I don't care about personal attention. I can imagine, of course, that he believes what others may have told him. That also is his affair and not mine.

I've not been able to drive out of Frederick for more than a decade and because we live on Social Security I don't often make toll calls. So, if I think that what you air is irresponsible or dishonest I won't be taking any initiatives. However, there is going to be a flood of commercialization of this great tragedy. It is not unlikely that reporters will be phoning me as the anniversary comes closer and word gets out of what is being prepared. Perhaps this is more likely when they see the shows before airing. If the past is a reliable guide, the more any show questions the official story the more critical interest there is. There may be none at all and I've not made any effort to stimulate any interest. Some of what is in the works is so nutty that they may trigger some interest. A British gang of rock promoters claims to have a tape of the six shots fired and other things no less outrageously impossible and one in this country is gung ho! for the CIA's kickback theory.

For whatever my opinion is worth, I don't think any of you know enough, if you want decent, honorable, responsible journalism, to do the show I understand you are working on and I haven't heard a word about your testing of any of your sources to try and determine whether they are dependable or can be faulted. When I have more than a quarter of a million pages I got under FOIA and everybody has unsupervised access to it and you don't want access to any of it, together with what I've only indicated above, I think that you may well evolve an attractive show that in time you will not be proud of. And if that is what you want to do, given the reputation you and Nova have earned, on a subject so important to the country and our system, there is nothing at all to stop you. It may be that all I'll do is annotate it for history and the annotation will be available for scholars of the future in the public archive all of my records will be <sup>when</sup> I die. They will be an archive at local Hood College.

P.S. There were three caskets

Sincerely,

*Harold Weisberg*  
Harold Weisberg