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## Letters from Readers

### Assassination Theories

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I would like to comment on "Conspiracy Fever" by Jacob Cohen [October 1975], not from the point of view of one who wishes to see the assassination laid at the doorstep of the CIA, the FBI, the KGB, or the family of Madame Nhu (that's a different story), but from the point of view of one who is interested in guns and knows something about weapons and ballistics.

First, the rifle. The 6.5 mm Carcano used by Oswald was a piece of junk when it was new (probably in the 1920's). The rifles sold as surplus in this country were brought over disassembled as scrap in order to qualify for a lower import duty. They were then reassembled from parts, a process that did nothing to improve any inherent accuracy. The Carcano was not designed to have a scope mounted on it. Such rifles are more difficult to shoot with a scope than those which are specifically designed for scopes.

This brings us to the scope. Oswald's rifle had a very cheap scope mounted on it . . . which would not offer any promise of accuracy. When the rifle was tested by government authorities, it was found that the scope was loose and required a shim (a thin piece of metal between the mount and receiver of the rifle) in order to be used. *This is crucial.* If the weapon was in this condition when Oswald fired it, he could not have hit the automobile, let alone Kennedy.

Now we come to Oswald's ammunition. We know that he used a mixed bag of cartridges. Exhibit 399, the "magic bullet," was a full-jacketed military round. The bullet which caused the head wound and which disintegrated was a soft-point sporting round. Other things being equal, different bullets in the same rifle will shoot to *different points of impact.*

What does all this prove? It doesn't prove a thing. It doesn't show that Oswald was not the lone assassin.

What it does show is the remarkable odds against this case. Oswald could have done it, by himself and unaided, if everything went just so. Based on my three points, however,

I feel that the odds against this are fantastic. I would not be at all surprised if there was someone else shooting at the same time, not necessarily known to Oswald.

LEO SIROTA

Baltimore, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Jacob Cohen addresses some specific points that the critics of the Warren Commission have raised and attempts to refute them with some rather labored and tortuous reasoning. His main target is the "recklessness of . . . critics of the Warren Commission and the tolerance for recklessness which has developed in this country in the last decade." . . . But I insist that it is the defenders of the Report, not the critics, who are reckless. This can be shown by exposing the larger, overall pattern of events that the Warren Report asks us to accept; there is no need to examine the million specific items of evidence, whose details are subject to challenge and controversy. Step back from the trees and get a view of the forest. This is best achieved by looking at two different behavior patterns:

1) Did Oswald behave the way a lone killer might be expected to?

2) Did the police, FBI, and Secret Service behave as if they really thought the man they caught was acting alone?

Note the following facts, acknowledged both by critics and defenders. Moments after the shooting, Oswald is observed casually drinking a Coca-Cola at a vending machine. Then, after leaving the murder site on foot, he takes a bus that passes the site again on its way to his home. He has made no plans to flee the country or even the city. He only wants to go home to get his second gun, with which he later shoots a policeman. Why the sudden need for another gun after he has made good his escape? Doesn't this clearly indicate that Oswald perceived a new, unanticipated danger? Since the police were not chasing him at that point, is it reckless to conclude that someone else was? Is this the behavior of a murderer working alone (and successfully, at that), or is it the behavior of someone who feels betrayed or double-crossed? When Oswald is finally captured, what does he say? A lone assassin would

either boast of his feat or he would deny involvement. Oswald did neither. In a brief exposure to the press at the Dallas police station, he said, "They are making me the patsy," or words to that effect. Is it reckless to claim that this hints at greater complexity than a simple denial? And then, of course, Oswald was permanently silenced before he could elaborate further. He had no chance to hire a lawyer or make a statement to a court. Very convenient.

Consider another aspect of Oswald's behavior: his pre-assassination activities. It is known that he had government training in an intelligence-related field while in the Marine Corps. Afterward, when dealing with the government bureaucracy, he was able to circumvent the red tape. Whether he requested discharge from the military, or re-issuance of a passport forfeited upon defection to Russia, or entry and exits from foreign countries, he had but to ask, and it was given. The curtain of red tape that impedes the rest of us was always pulled aside to speed Oswald on his way. Since Oswald had no money, no business connections, no regular job, and no known influential friends, is it not obvious that he had to have had covert government assistance of some kind? And since he was intelligence-trained, fluent in Russian, and married to the niece of a Russian intelligence officer, is it reasonable to conclude that his travels and activities were merely the random wanderings of a lost soul? Are skeptics reckless in pointing out that this is a pattern typical of covert intelligence activities? It is not my purpose to hazard a guess as to whom Oswald was working with or for, or why he was doing whatever he was doing. But what I am sure of is that the Warren Commission was trying hard, much too hard, to convince us that Oswald was a loner, a misfit, who did everything on his own, uninvolved with others. Nonsense, utter nonsense.

What about the behavior of the police? After Oswald was killed in the police station, we eagerly awaited disclosure of the results of the two-day interrogation so we could at least find out what Oswald meant when he said he was being made the "patsy." He had been interrogated for many hours by three different law-enforcement agencies: the Dallas police, the FBI,

and the Secret Service. Afterward, each agency said it had not made notes, kept no transcript; this despite the observed presence of a stenographer in the interrogation room. We were assured that Oswald said nothing of any interest, other than denials of guilt. Is the total absence of detailed notes the normal behavior of investigators who have just cracked the biggest murder case of our time? Are we really reckless in claiming that these patterns clearly show that someone is covering up something, or, more likely, that a lot of people are covering up a lot of things? . . .

LEWIS LEDERER  
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Jacob Cohen ridicules the contentions of those who are honestly, and I think understandably, concerned about the non-fatal wound in President Kennedy's back. For example, the whole question of the back wound is complicated by the fact that the autopsy pathologists did not dissect the neck and upper back of the President. Such a procedure in a gun-shot wound incident is routine. . . . The fact that this wound was not dissected at autopsy certainly raises a question about the competence of those who performed the autopsy. At least it does raise the question of why the wound was not dissected.

In a sworn statement made after the Warren Commission hearings, one of the autopsy pathologists maintained that the back wound was not dissected because a high-ranking military officer, unnamed, ordered the pathologists not to make such a dissection. Later it was learned that the high-ranking officer was not a physician and in fact had no competence in the area of forensic science.

There is another problem associated with the autopsy which is not always realized. At Parkland Hospital at least four highly trained competent surgeons, of unquestionable reputation, stated that they had inserted into the President's chest cavity special tubes which they felt would relieve pressure in the chest and aid any possible breathing that the wounded President might be attempting. Each surgeon worked together with a second surgeon to insert these tubes. There is no question about the fact that this technique was part of their treatment procedure. To be specific,

they cut holes in the chest wall of the President and inserted these tubes. However, at autopsy, we are told, the chest cavity of the late President showed a completely intact wall. In other words, the autopsy pathologists denied the existence of any hole going into the chest cavity. It seems obvious that confusion has arisen about this. It is hard to accept the idea that four competent, trained surgeons would think they had put holes in a man's chest when they actually hadn't. This is especially true when the surgeons were working as a team. One surgeon might, in the confusion of the treatment room, miss and insert the tube in some way that did not invade the chest cavity. A miss by four trained surgeons is so improbable as to be labeled virtually impossible. How then do the pathologists report no invasion of the chest cavity? We do not know. But we also are concerned why the color photographs of the internal wall of the President's chest cavity have been suppressed up to this time.

Another matter that seems not to disturb Mr. Cohen is the fact that the Kennedy family took possession of the autopsy materials, including X-rays and photographs, and even now are exercising censorship over the use of these materials. Such a situation is unique in the history of the United States. Materials that are pertinent to a capital crime do not become the private property of the victim's family. These materials belong to the state; they may be subject to restricted use only by the appropriate court, not by a private family. This strange arrangement with respect to the Kennedy autopsy materials is just another item in a whole mosaic of strange and unusual circumstances that lead to honest questions.

I personally am bewildered by Mr. Cohen's referring to "Dr Wecht's species of respectable fanaticism." . . . Dr. Wecht is widely respected in this country and around the world as a leader in forensic medicine. He is past president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. By no stretch of the imagination can one call him a fanatic. I am surprised that this kind of character assassination is permitted in COMMENTARY. I submit that there is in the entire article a flavor of the old logical fallacy known as *argumentum ad hominem*. . . .

I would now like to discuss the so-called pristine (or stretcher) bullet which according to the Warren Commission is said to have gone through the President's body, entering the back and coming out in the lower neck, missing all bone in its passage through the President's body from a right to left direction. The bullet then is said to have entered the extreme right side of Governor Connally's body, tearing out his fifth rib leaving the body and smashing through his right wrist and ending up in his right thigh. During its passage this bullet left significant amounts of lead, and other metal particles, in Connally's body. Included in these particles is a clearly visible particle in Governor Connally's right thigh bone.

But the bullet, when carefully examined and photographed, seems virtually undeformed. There is a slight notch in the nose, where the FBI took a sample of metal for analysis. The base of the bullet is depressed in a lateral way, a condition which raises a serious question about the real possibility that this deformation occurred after the bullet was fired.

Moreover, Mr. Cohen seems not to be aware of the fact that the Warren Commission impugned its own pathologists who under oath all agreed that the so-called pristine bullet could not have caused all of the injuries seen in Governor Connally. . . . I have had extensive experience with gunshot wounds, but I have yet to see a bullet, even a bullet moving at low velocity, that does not become deformed in some way when it hits bone. The idea that this pristine bullet could have smashed a rib and a wrist and shown up with no deformation is so improbable as to be impossible.

Indeed, Mr. Cohen seems unaware of the fact that the Warren Commission itself was not very certain about its stand. The subjunctive mood is used so widely in the Report that if the defenders of the Commission interpret the Report carefully, the conclusion with respect to the one-bullet theory is really not a conclusion at all. It is a carefully worded *possibility* with the subjunctive mood used most judiciously.

Present forensic scientists who are concerned about the inadequacies of the Warren Report on the death of President Kennedy do not subscribe to the theory that the

head shot that killed the President came from the front. Dr. Finck, the army pathologist who was part of the autopsy team, described in some detail what was clearly an entrance wound in the back of the President's skull. He showed an illustration of why he arrived at that conclusion. The conclusion is in line with the general principles that we all teach in our courses in forensic science. Therefore, from the autopsy material now available to us, there is no reason to question the direction from which the fatal wound to the President came.

Mr. Cohen and others who have tried to maintain that the shot came from the front because of the way the President's head moved after being shot, completely misunderstand how bullets exert their action. Bullets do not push people in any direction. Western movies and television "whodunits" tend to mislead the average person into thinking that when a bullet hits someone, that individual then is pushed over as if hit with a battering ram. This is not so. Whatever direction the President's head moved is really not relevant to the direction of the bullet. Once a bullet enters the skull, for example, it exerts its energy in all directions; it completely puts out a functioning brain. Therefore the muscles of the body are at the mercy of any physical forces such as gravity, movement of the automobile, and so forth. The direction of the President's head movement had nothing to do with the direction of the bullet. There seems to be at this time no evidence of the head shot resulting from a bullet coming from anywhere but behind.

The same conclusion does not obtain with respect to the non-fatal wounds of the President and of Governor Connally. To refer to honest scientists who would like to see an objective evaluation of all the evidence as cranks is a personal attack on individuals who do not agree with the party line.

But secrecy is always suspect. If in fact there are no deficiencies of a serious nature in the Warren Commission Report, why then is there this paranoia on the part of so many officials and so many defenders of the Report to keep the mass of information, presumably available in the National Archives, secret? Why are there so many barriers to an adequate re-examination of this material? Why was there never an adequate dis-

section of the brain of the late President? These are serious questions that . . . deserve an answer.

In my opinion, as a forensic scientist who has modest qualifications in the area, the John F. Kennedy murder case should be reopened; not in the form of a congressional investigation, but rather by setting up a panel of competent civilian forensic scientists. These scientists should have absolutely no connection with the federal government. They should be given complete and uninhibited access to all the materials that are still in existence related to the situation. I also urge that one or two foreign, European forensic scientists be asked to join this panel. These individuals should then reexamine all the material without interference from any governmental agency, and come up with their final evaluation. . . . Until such a project is undertaken, there will be a continuing lack of belief in government pronouncements coming from Washington. . . . Previous panels that examined the situation were not free of government interference. They were appointed by specific government officials and were under the thumb of these officials.

May I end by suggesting that if anyone should have the finger of shame pointed at him, it is Mr. Cohen for his immoderate and inappropriate personal attacks on many concerned and qualified technical experts who would like to see this sad case finally and objectively evaluated.

CHARLES G. WILBER  
Director and Deputy County  
Coroner  
Larimer County, Colorado

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . In the conflict over the location of President Kennedy's back wound, Jacob Cohen sides with the Warren Commission and puts this wound at the base of the neck. . . .

But he passes over an FBI report by agents who attended the autopsy who describe the hole as "below the shoulders," photographs of the President's shirt and jacket which show the hole to be some four inches below the base of the neck, and a sketch made by a doctor at the autopsy. To Mr. Cohen these are "human errors" and the supposition is that the President's shirt and coat hunched up his neck as he waved to the crowd.

But Mr. Cohen is apparently unaware of a document that virtually

pinpoints the back wound. Admiral George G. Burkley's death certificate describes this wound "in the posterior back" as being at about "the level of the third thoracic vertebra," or three or four inches below the shoulder.

With the body before him, Commander Boswell diagrammed the wound in the same place as Burkley's description. But this is not news. However, the original diagram contains the notation, "verified by G. Burkley." The Warren Commission published this document with Dr. Burkley's verification missing.

Add to this the rather extraordinary contemporaneous notes taken by a Secret Service agent riding in a car following the President. Agent Bennett wrote that he saw a bullet strike the President "about four inches down from the right shoulder."

Which of these two versions is more believable? A photograph, the descriptions of two FBI agents, the sketch of an autopsy doctor, and the eyewitness account of a Secret Service agent, or the Warren Commission's reconstruction based on a single measurement scribbled in the margin of the diagram?

On November 24, 1963, autopsy surgeon Commander James J. Humes certified that he had "destroyed by burning certain preliminary draft notes relating" to this autopsy. Why? The Commission didn't ask.

The original certificate contained a handwritten note, "accepted and approved this date. George G. Burkley. Rear Adm. M.C.U.S.N., Physician to the President." Burkley was Humes's superior and it would appear that Humes was following orders. Whose? Nobody asks. Again, Burkley's authorization is absent from the published document.

That's not all. Commander Humes's handwritten (undated) autopsy report contains corrections with the marginal initials of Admiral Burkley beside them. These initials have been removed from the published exhibit, thus making it appear that Commander Humes corrected his own report, when in fact the White House medical officer did.

If Lyndon Johnson, through Admiral Burkley, was correcting, supervising, and authorizing (ordering?) the destruction of certain preliminary draft notes, one might properly ask why.

In any political murder is it wise to allow the beneficiaries, no matter their virtue, to supervise the autopsy of the victim? Was it necessary to omit these White House authorizations and verifications from the official record?

Mr. Cohen attacks the critics for suggesting that a bullet was planted at Parkland Hospital. If this were a function of a plot, he asks, then how would this "bullet messenger" know where to plant it or even if it would be necessary to plant a bullet? Good point. Mr. Cohen is assuming the assassins were outside the motorcade. What if they were within the presidential party? In this case, wouldn't they have the run of Parkland hospital, know that a bullet was needed—perhaps to replace one of theirs?

It was not the critics, as Mr. Cohen suggests, but a Secret Service agent who rode in the President's car who first advanced the theory, in the autopsy room, that the bullet that struck Kennedy in the back "worked itself out," and onto a stretcher where it was ultimately recovered by another Secret Service agent, who carried it to Washington.

When police pass along evidence they are trained to inscribe it to establish a chain of possession. However, in the case of the Parkland bullet, this procedure was ignored. The only inscription on CE399 came from two FBI agents who received it from Secret Service Chief Rowley that evening. About the only conclusion consistent with this chain of possession is that Oswald fired a bullet in Dallas and hit the Washington headquarters of the FBI.

FRED T. NEWCOMB  
PERRY ADAMS

Van Nuys, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

According to Jacob Cohen, Dr. Cyril Wecht, one of the world's most renowned forensic pathologists, is a kind of "respectable fanatic." The epithets he reserves for other critics of the Warren Commission (including myself) are more pungent: we are "reckless," "conscious liars," guilty of "conscious deceit." And why are we all these awful things? Because, it turns out, we disagree with Mr. Cohen.

Take, for example, Mr. Cohen's claim that I am "dishonest" because I don't acknowledge any

problem with the contention that Governor Connally was hit through the chest and forearm (two inches up from the wrist) between Zapruder frames 237 and 238. In the six hundredths of a second between these two frames we observe (even according to Mr. Cohen) dramatic changes in Governor Connally. Fourteen frames earlier, at Zapruder frame 224, President Kennedy is already reacting to a bullet hit. Over the intervening fourteen frames Connally gives no indication of having been struck by a bullet. Then, suddenly, between frames 237 and 238 dramatic changes occur: his right shoulder is driven down by 20 degrees, his cheeks puff with air, his hair is dislodged. Mr. Cohen acknowledges these effects and then accuses me of being "dishonest." Why? Because I won't agree with him that at this point Connally's wrist/forearm is not in a position to have incurred the wound his doctors describe.

Mr. Cohen's view may hold some plausibility for a reader who has not seen the relevant photographs. It probably does little good to point out that to me and most others who have looked at these photographs Connally's wrist/forearm *does* appear to be in the right position to have been hit at this point. Yet if my own opinion on this point cannot be taken as authoritative, perhaps the opinion of the doctor who operated on Connally's arm might be seen as more authoritative than the opinions of either Mr. Cohen or myself. Dr. Charles Gregory testified before the Warren Commission as to his treatment of Governor Connally. Just before testifying he was shown individual frames from the Zapruder film with a view to determining when the Governor was hit. In response to a question from Commission Counsel Arlen Specter, Dr. Gregory remarked:

It seemed to me in frames marked 234, 235, and 236 Governor Connally was in a position such that a single missile entered his back, could have passed through his chest, through his right forearm, and struck his thigh.

I find it amusing that the very doctor who worked on Connally's arm should pick out just those frames where Mr. Cohen states an alignment is *impossible* as the *most likely* point where an alignment occurs. Nor should one neglect the

testimony of Dr. Robert Shaw, who operated on Governor Connally's chest:

*Dr. Shaw:* . . . And in trying to place this actual frame that these frames are numbered when the Governor was hit, my opinion was that it was frame number, let's see, I think it was No. 36.

*Mr. Specter:* 236?

*Dr. Shaw:* 236, give or take 1 or 2 frames. It was right in 35, 36, 37, perhaps.

So much for Mr. Cohen's opinion as to the position of Governor Connally's arm at Zapruder frame 237.

There is, however, powerful additional evidence that Connally's wrist was hit at this point. At Zapruder frame 230 he can be seen quite clearly sitting composed, holding his Stetson in his extended right arm. The following frames are a bit blurred, but the wrist appears undamaged up until frames 239 and 240 where it begins to droop downward. By the mid-240's his right hand and wrist have collapsed even further. By frame 249 his wrist can be seen dangling nearly straight down as he falls backward into Mrs. Connally's arms. Everything we see on the Zapruder film suggests that Connally's wrist was hit between frames 237 and 238—the very point where Mr. Cohen alleges it could not have been hit.

The other, less original points in Mr. Cohen's polemic may be rebutted in a similar fashion. For my part I would not want to call him "dishonest" just because he disagrees with me, or because he did not mention Drs. Shaw and Gregory's testimony or what the Zapruder film shows concerning Connally's wrist injury. I suspect he was unaware of it. Pressed to fling an insult back at Mr. Cohen, the most I could muster would be the observation that he is probably not very well-informed about many of these matters.

JOSIAH THOMPSON  
Haverford, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Jacob Cohen's carefully documented article effectively refutes the conspiratorial theories surrounding the Kennedy assassination and the Rosenberg and Hiss cases. However, Mr. Cohen does not address himself to the issue of why such theories arise so frequently

and achieve such great popularity and acceptance. No doubt there are some proponents of conspiracy theories whose interests are primarily self-serving—to sell a book or achieve personal notoriety—but it seems doubtful that this is the primary motivation of all the conspiracy advocates, and in no way does it apply to those who simply accept these ideas without publicizing them.

I believe that the underlying motivation in the advocacy and acceptance of conspiracy theories is the fundamental human need to deal with the anxiety aroused by uncertainty and irrationality. To find a conspiracy gives one control over a situation; a conspiracy may be evil, but it is comprehensible, it can be fought against, it can be defeated. How much more comforting to believe this than to think that the murder of the most powerful man on earth was the irrational act of a deluded mind—a circumstance over which we can have no control because we can neither comprehend nor predict it. The need to master the uncer-

tain universe through making it rational finds its expression in both science and religion. Both are systems which offer explanations for the turbulent events governing our lives, and both offer methods to control these events—the one through natural means, the other through appeals to supernatural forces. The relief of anxiety that comes from the establishment of certainty finds its clinical expression in the familiar observation that the decompensating and frightened schizophrenic patient actually experiences relief when he forms a delusion explaining his (up to then) incomprehensible anxiety. For him, too, there are no coincidences; the footsteps outside the doors are his persecutors, the car horn outside the window is a signal. Although frightening in and of themselves, the delusions permit the patient to "understand" what is happening to him and to do something about it, at the very least to hide in his room.

Thus it is with conspiracy theories. In a turbulent, confused, and often irrational world, it is com-

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forting to realize that there are, after all, people plotting all these events, and, if we can just find them out, we can stop them, or, at the very least, we can hide in our rooms.

ITAMAR SALAMON

Department of Psychiatry  
Albert Einstein College  
of Medicine  
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Referring to my book, *The Assassination Tapes*, Jacob Cohen writes: "A writer like George O'Toole . . . rehearses lines of argument which he admits are far-fetched. . . ."

I don't know what Mr. Cohen has in mind in this perhaps intentionally vague passage, but he creates the impression that I have half-heartedly offered improbable objections to the official government theories of the assassination of President Kennedy. In fact, my book was written in earnest and every assertion and allegation is thoroughly supported by the documentary and tape-recorded evidence I have cited in the text. Furthermore, in the months since the first publication of *The Assassination Tapes*, not one of the witnesses I interviewed has come forward to say I misquoted him or to explain the serious discrepancies between his version of the events of November 22, 1963 and the facts as established elsewhere.

Mr. Cohen notes that *The Assassination Tapes* "received a big play in the sex magazines," apparently referring to the fact that two chapters of my book were published in *Penthouse* magazine. I don't know how to respond to this kind of McCarthyism except to point out that Tad Szulc, Harrison Salisbury, Karl Hess, Jeff Gerth, and other outstanding journalists have recently contributed to the pages of *Penthouse*. But Mr. Cohen refers to "sex magazines," implying through his use of the plural that my book received "a big play" in several such publications. Apparently Mr. Cohen's familiarity with sex magazines is more extensive than my own, so I cannot refute his charge.

In his next paragraph Mr. Cohen charges that "many" of the critics of the Warren Report are "conscious liars." It is regrettable that COMMENTARY chose to print this cowardly libel, which defames a whole group of people without

offering any of them the chance to reply. If Mr. Cohen had the courage to name those he finds guilty of lying, he would have the opportunity to present his evidence for such a charge in a court of law.

That compendium of lies and absurdities known as the Warren Commission Report can make but one tenuous claim to credibility: the reputations of the seven men who signed their names to it. Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that the frequent tactic of defenders of the Warren Report is to defame those who dare to dissent from its conclusions.

GEORGE O'TOOLE  
Gaithersburg, Maryland

JACOB COHEN writes:

I shall comment on the letters one at a time and in order.

The points raised by Leo Sirota are entirely academic. The best proof that a gunman could have hit the President using Oswald's rifle, is that one did. The rifle, indubitably Oswald's, was found shortly after the assassination on the sixth floor of the Texas Book Depository building, where several witnesses saw a gun or gunman just before the assassination. Ballistics tests conducted the next day by the FBI established that the nearly intact bullet and two large fragments which were recovered had been fired from that rifle to the exclusion of all others. Later, outside experts confirmed these conclusions; there is not even a hint of a second gun in the ballistics reports or discussion of those reports. When pressed, the critics claim that the bullets from an alleged second and, for some, third gun have mysteriously disappeared. I don't know where Mr. Sirota came up with his "soft-point" bullet: the bullet and bullet fragments recovered were of the same "full-jacketed" sort and many subsequent tests have shown that they were fully capable of causing the head wound. If Mr. Sirota is interested in pursuing the academic point, I direct him to the article of Dr. John K. Lattimer, *et al.*, in the *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* (April 1972) or to an account of the 1968 CBS News documentary by Stephen White, *Should We Now Believe the Warren Report?* (Macmillan), which should convince the convincing that Oswald's rifle was accurate enough and powerful enough, and the ammunition he used reliable enough, to have done

all the Warren Commission said it did.

While I did not go into questions of Oswald's guilt or alleged evidences of a prior conspiracy in my article, Lewis Lederer is correct in guessing that I support the Warren Commission's contention that Oswald was the lone assassin and would support, with a slight qualification, the Commission's conclusion that there is no evidence of a prior conspiracy. In answer to Mr. Lederer's first question, I would say Oswald acted exactly the way a killer would have acted: he fled the scene of the crime, he killed a policeman soon thereafter and then fled that scene, he resisted when arrested, the murder pistol in his possession, and, if you can believe his several interrogators, he lied several times during extensive questioning for which, alas, we have no transcript. Beyond that, the evidence implicating him in the assassination and placing him at the scene is simply immense, i.e., it was his gun, he had brought it that morning, his palm and finger prints were found on the cardboard boxes below and next to the window through which shots came. I do not find his protestations of innocence, or his claim that he is a patsy, exculpatory. Many guilty men have said the same. To be sure, the street witnesses who say they saw him on the sixth floor are shaky, and no one has placed him at the source of the assassination at the precise moment of the shooting. But then no one has placed him elsewhere either. The Warren Commission could only go on the evidence it had, which is very winning, if not a million per cent conclusive. I have often wondered why the mysterious forces which allegedly were framing and/or betraying Oswald and which have supposedly persuaded hundreds of people to lie or remain silent, could not have gotten someone to place him at the scene of the shooting.

As for the possibility of a prior conspiracy of some sort involving Oswald with the CIA or FBI or KGB, I cannot prove a negative, I cannot prove that there was *not* such a conspiracy, I can only say that I have seen no evidence establishing one or which would even give rise to plausible suspicions. I think I am aware of every line of insinuation taken by the critics and the evidence which, they say, provokes their suspicion. I have also studied the history of witch

hunts, purge trials, and the ram-paging accusations of persecutors and would-be persecutors like Senator Joseph McCarthy and District Attorney Jim Garrison and know how easily innocent coincidence can be made to seem sinister. For me, Oswald's peregrinations to and from Russia are given plausible explanation in the Warren Report. Unlike Mr. Lederer, I find him to be a quintessential misfit and loner, and, I might say, a most unlikely spy. But let me add this qualification: like most citizens I have been startled by recent FBI and CIA revelations. When Senator Schweiker announced in late October that in one week he would "blow the top off the Warren Report" with revelations about important materials kept from the Commission by the FBI and CIA, I was acutely interested in what he might reveal. I still am.

I turn now to the muddled communication of Charles G. Wilber, whose reputation for close reading must suffer a bit in light of his accusation that I think there was an assassin to the right front of the President. I refuted this contention at great length and am delighted to add Dr. Wilber to the long list of forensic pathologists which I gave in my article who ridicule this major contention of the Warren Report critics.

Like many forensic pathologists, including, most prominently, Dr. Wecht, Dr. Wilber questions the competency, in forensic pathology, of the autopsy team. But the whole point of my article was that we need no longer rely on the original autopsy because its findings with regard to the pivotal questions of the assassination have been sustained by some thirteen doctors, including seven forensic pathologists, who, since 1968, have examined the X-rays and photographs and other autopsy material. Since Dr. Wilber is partial to presidents of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, let me add that since my article appeared the president-elect of that organization, Dr. James Weston, has reported on CBS that his week-long review of autopsy materials confirms the autopsy findings with regard to the single-assassin theory. Every doctor, including Dr. Wecht, who has seen that material agrees (1) that there was no hit from the right front, and (2) that the bullet which struck Kennedy in the back passed through his body at a downward angle and out his throat. Of

all these, only Dr. Wecht still dissents from the Warren Commission's conclusions, but not for the same reasons he did before he saw the autopsy materials. Why is Dr. Wilber's letter silent with regard to these findings and opinions of his colleagues? What does he mean at the end of his letter when he says that "previous panels that examined the situation were not free of governmental interference"? Are the professional judgments of the doctors on the Clark panel, and of the doctors who have seen the materials since, suspect? No scholar can oppose the reopening of any case, and I do not oppose the reopening of this one, but the fact is that with regard to the autopsy findings the case has been reopened and the Warren Commission sustained, and yet respectable fanatics press on.

A final word to Dr. Wilber. Far from being unaware of the Kennedy family's selfish and provocative role in keeping medical material from the Warren Commission and the general public, I was the first writer to delineate that role, as I pointed out in my article. I think the Kennedys have acted selfishly and unwisely in the matter, but I find nothing sinister in the possibility that they did not wish to share the President's broken body or some details of his health with the general public.

Fred T. Newcomb and Perry Adams also fail to comment on the expert analysis and reanalysis of X-rays and photographs which have taken place over the years since the appearance of the Warren Report, decisively resolving earlier ambiguities. I did not question the honesty of the mistakes made by what I termed the first-generation critics, though I find the conspiracy implicit in the earliest allegations beyond rational belief. But what of those second- and third-generation writers and lecturers, trained scholars, lawyers, doctors, who would discuss questions like the location of the back wound and never even mention to their audiences that others have reviewed the autopsy materials and confirmed the original autopsy report? That's called covering up, and the appearance of such activity by critics deserves the same plain characterization as its appearance in government.

Two other points. With regard to the bullet plant, even a Secret Service agent would not have known on November 22, 1963 that

a bullet was needed on Connally's stretcher because the necessity of such a bullet for a single-assassin theory was not clear for months afterward. Second, Commander Humes has said that he destroyed the notes because he didn't want to leave those blood-spattered remains of the President he loved to posterity. I think he erred, but consider this: if he burned them to cover up a lie, would he have left a note saying he had burned them?

Josiah Thompson, like Dr. Wilber, protests my characterization of Dr. Wecht, but I'm afraid that what his letter says and does not say lends further substance to my other characterizations. In his book, *Six Seconds in Dallas*, Mr. Thompson defends three primary hypotheses about the assassination: (1) On the basis of his close analysis of the Zapruder frames 313 *et seq.*, which show Kennedy's head and body moving and turning sharply to the left, he claims that the President was struck sharply from a source to the right and perhaps slightly in front of him. (2) He claims that the bullet which struck Kennedy high in the back did not exit from his throat and therefore could not have hit Connally. The throat wound, he suggests, was caused by a sliver of bone set flying by the bullets which struck the President's skull. (3) Again, on the basis of his close analysis of the Zapruder film, he argues that Governor Connally's motions prove he was struck in frame 238 by a second bullet, and, since it is so soon after the Kennedy hit, by a second gunman.

Now as it happens, and as I pointed out in my article, even the world-renowned Dr. Wecht abandoned the first two of these contentions after spending two days with the autopsy material. Here is what I wrote:

Whole portions of Josiah Thompson's *Six Seconds in Dallas* must be discarded as worthless, for in matters of factual truth, momentary ingenuity and (apparently) passionate sincerity count for nothing. Professor Thompson, who worked closely with Dr. Wecht in preparing his book, has known for nearly three years that major portions of it must be discarded as baseless gossip, and so too has every student of the assassination. One recalls no public concessions of error.

And still there is no concession of error, even on the points on which Dr. Wecht has reversed himself. In

a television debate with me in November, Mr. Thompson continued to argue for the frontal hit, which, as Dr. Wilber points out, has been abandoned by everyone who has seen the autopsy photographs and X-rays. It is inconceivable that the sharp hit from the right postulated by Mr. Thompson could have left no trace.

But even more remarkable than Mr. Thompson's silence on these salient points is his response to my argument that Governor Connally's position in frame 238 makes it impossible for him to have received all his five wounds at that point whereas Connally's position just after the Warren Commission says he was hit (as he emerges from behind the famous sign) is in consistent alignment. I am glad to have reaffirmation on this point from the Itek Corporation as reported by the CBS News Special on the assassination in late November, but a perusal of the relevant frames shows that the photographic expertise of that company was not needed. And this is not just a matter of me disagreeing with Mr. Thompson or him with me, that's a debating trick; it is a question of which of our versions agrees with historical reality. As I wrote:

A bullet striking Connally when the critics say he was hit . . . would have had to exit from the chest [next to the right nipple, moving at a downward angle of 25 degrees in a right to left direction] . . . taken at least two sharp turns upward in mid-air—right and then left into the knuckle side of the wrist; and then, upon exiting on the palm side, further up in the air than the wound of entry, would have had to execute a very sharp U-turn [avoiding Connally's hat] into the thigh: plainly impossible.

To this Mr. Thompson replies only that he and others see it differently. The reader should not be misled into thinking that we are Hamlet and Polonius disagreeing over whether a cloud looks like a camel or a whale. The differences between us are not at all subtle. Does Mr. Thompson mean to suggest that in frame 238 Connally's arm is *below* the right nipple and over his left thigh? In what precise respects is my account of the impossible path a bullet would have to follow in frame 238 incorrect? Before such questions, which were all raised in my article, Mr. Thompson, who in his book counters medical testi-

mony with painstaking analysis of the Zapruder film, remains mute, passing swiftly on to Doctors Shaw and Gregory.

Both testified in 1964 that Connally could have received his wounds in 238. Neither had studied the Zapruder films closely, and in my view both were wrong. Mr. Thompson quotes from Volume IV; one longs for his comment on Dr. Gregory's testimony in Volume VI, where he gives the bulk of his testimony on the Governor's position when struck. On page 101 we see Commission counsel, Arlen Specter, showing Dr. Gregory a diagram (No. 5) from the so-called Gregory Exhibit No. 1.

*Mr. Specter:* Now, Dr. Gregory, I turn to Diagram No. 5 which depicts a seated man and what does Diagram No. 5 depict to your eye with respect to what action is described on the seated man?

*Dr. Gregory:* Well, I should say that this composite has aligned the several parts of the body demonstrated in such a way that a single missile following a constant trajectory could have accounted for all of the wounds which are shown.

The seated man in Diagram No. 5 has his arm across his chest, the forearm below the right nipple and over the left thigh and is not at all like Governor Connally's position in frame 238.

Errors are human, and so too is the stubborn refusal to admit error or even to acknowledge difficulties in one's argument when they are demonstrated. But the latter qualities are less defensible in a scholar. Mr. Thompson is a civil man, and, as I learned, a most courteous debater. Perhaps my characterizations, applied to him, are too harsh. Still, on this performance I must say of him what I said of Dr. Wecht: "Anyone who has seen speculation after speculation about the assassination refuted and continues to proclaim his vast distrust of the Warren Commission's conclusions while hanging from this narrow thread is receiving inspiration from a source outside of this world and its evidences."

Itamar Salamon comments on what may be some of the psychological sources of such inspiration. He sees a need to deal with uncertainty and irrationality. I see that too (I shall quote from Mr. O'Toole in a moment), but add another need clearly perceptible in some cases: a need to create un-

certainty and the appearance of irrationality. Othello may have been paranoid, Dr. Salamon, but Iago was not. I am sorry that he took my remarks to mean that I charged the critics with a desire to sell books or achieve personal notoriety. I am saying something quite different. I see political (and cultural) motives, as indeed I see political motives in Oswald, who also should not be reduced to his sub-psyche. History is filled with instances of deliberate distortions aiming at discrediting regimes; why is it so outrageous to suggest that this may be, in part, such an instance? The interested reader is directed to Fritz Tobias's account of the Communist party's outright fabrications in connection with the Reichstag fire, and instances could be cited from the Right as well. We have seen so much government deceit and cover-up in recent times, and we have called it by its true name—why then does it seem uncivil when someone suggests that the adversary culture has shown some of the same characteristics as its quarry? I agree with the critics who say we should not use psychological reductions to explain away assassins. I only add that we should not use the same reductions to explain away the critics or even part of their audience.

Finally, there is George O'Toole's high and mighty fury. I called Mr. O'Toole "fanciful" and said that in his book, *The Assassination Tapes* (Penthouse Press), he "rehearses lines of argument which he admits are far-fetched, as if to say: any event which can generate such heated comment, even plainly absurd comment, can't be completely clean." He challenges me to provide examples. Here is one. On pages 12-13 Mr. O'Toole recites a "seemingly endless chain of coincidences binding the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy."

Both men were shot in the back of the head in the presence of their wives, on Friday, shortly after referring to the possibility of assassination. Neither man ever regained consciousness. Kennedy had a secretary named Lincoln, and Lincoln had a secretary named Kennedy. . . .

Commenting on these coincidences, Mr. O'Toole writes:

While the coincidences between the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations can have no deeper meaning, except perhaps that the laws of prob-



ability were suspended in favor of some strange example of Jungian synchronicity, there are other unlikely juxtapositions of events surrounding the Dallas shooting, and these have given rise to dark suspicions.

He then mentions one George de Mohrenschildt, Russian-born, who was perhaps Oswald's closest friend after he returned from Russia. De Mohrenschildt, it seems, was in Guatemala on an alleged hiking trip with his wife during the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and later gave a report on his trip to the U.S. government. "This probably means CIA," says O'Toole. Then the clincher:

Such coincidences may seem implausible or suspicious, but consider this: Shortly after George de Mohrenschildt emigrated to the United States, he made the acquaintance of a family named Bouvier and their small daughter Jacqueline. A quarter of a century before he befriended the accused presidential assassin, de Mohrenschildt met John F. Kennedy's future wife and in-laws! That such circumstances are coincidental is almost beyond belief, but how else, in sanity, can they be explained?

I find this and most of the rest of Mr. O'Toole's book slightly moonstruck. I also find much of the criticism of the Warren Commission to be a form of intellectual pornography, creating cheap thrills with little real payoff. Perhaps I should not have bullied Mr. O'Toole with his appearance in *Penthouse* to make that point. But I hold to my general analysis and to my characterization of the criticism.

### The New Egalitarians

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Egalitarianism & International Politics" [September 1975], in the curious paragraph which introduces Section VIII, Robert W. Tucker admits that the new sensibility is just a new name for the long-standing issue of international distribution of income. If this is the case, it is not clear to me what is new about it, and I would argue that, with one exception, which Mr. Tucker mentions only indirectly, nothing of significance has happened in recent years.

Briefly, the "new consensus" is far older than Mr. Tucker would

allow; when I studied economic development in 1956, we already had a textbook on the subject available to us. Gunnar Myrdal, whom Mr. Tucker quotes as an example of the "new consensus," developed his views in the middle 50's. If there has been any major change in the last twenty years, it has been that the views of these intellectuals have been taken much less seriously by policy-makers in the advanced countries. One need only look at the state of the U.S. foreign-aid program to confirm this.

Similarly, economists have been debating for an equally long period whether the export of primary commodities was retarding the economic development of less-developed countries. It was long ago suggested that . . . the prices of primary commodities were not rising sufficiently to offset the rising cost of manufactured imports. Moreover, the idea that . . . efforts should be made to correct this problem also has a long history. Specifically, proposals were advanced, and in some instances implemented, to prop up commodity prices.

This is not the place to attempt to sum up the complex debate on commodity prices. Suffice it to note that the statistical evidence for the alleged price trends is at best weak (a statement many of my colleagues would consider far too generous to the evidence) and that, as the monstrous perversities produced by the OPEC cartel dramatize, commodity cartels are poor instruments indeed to improve international income distribution.

It may be noted parenthetically that the Kennedy administration, frustrated by its inability to secure congressional support for direct foreign aid, became increasingly receptive to commodity price rigging, a policy that has since become a persistent theme of State Department thinking.

What is new, of course, is that the OPEC cartel has encouraged efforts by other less-developed countries to implement the theory that income distribution will be altered by additional commodity cartels. Whether the new cartels will succeed, and whether they will improve world income distribution, is still under considerable study, but the evidence to date suggests that the results may be quite unimpressive.

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert W. Tucker . . . has not presented a convincing case for his conclusion that "we are moving . . . toward the time when governments and publics will regard humanitarian assistance . . . as a duty." . . . Is it *really* credible that "governments and publics" in advanced industrial states will begin to feel so guilty for having mistreated weaker countries that they will reverse the entire thrust of their histories, giving open-handedly to deprived peoples and expecting nothing in return . . . except balm for their inflamed consciences?

It may be that Mr. Tucker doesn't really believe his own thesis. He takes care to note that there is "little evidence" supporting John P. Lewis's projection that "'planetary interests' are gradually displacing 'parochial national interests,'" and elsewhere notes that "on more than one occasion hypocrisy has been the advance wave of new truth." Is it possible that the liberal philosophies he explores comprise this "wave of hypocrisy"—which just might be a camouflage, concealing the unheralded emergence of a new trade-off between rich and poor nations?

The treatment given "transfers of resources" is so abstract as to ignore the obvious fact that aid is a competitive weapon in the scramble for control over dwindling natural resources. Economic assistance is *represented* as "charity," but it has been used as an arm-twisting lever, not clearly distinguishable from bribery, to extract development concessions and trading advantages from weak governments of backward countries. In order to reduce international frictions, aid must be pooled—and this move toward multilateralizing economic assistance requires the creation of a World Development Authority under the auspices of the United Nations.

Indeed, if we examine the literature of the "doomsayers," we find that Robert Heilbroner's predictions of proliferating wars between rich and poor countries, as the competition for raw materials intensifies, are supported by . . . ecologists, environmentalists, agronomists, demographers, and other professional alarmists whose stock-in-trade is forecasting the decline of the planet. But if even a small fraction of those projections holds true, we are faced with a