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Letter to *American History* magazine from Peter Dale Scott.

Dear Editor:

In the June 1994 *Rèviews* in *American History*, you published an essay by Max Holland concerning my book, *Deep Politics*, which he had already attacked in the *Wilsonian Quarterly*. His article opens with a reference to "fantastic conspiracies through innuendo, presumption, and pseudo-scholarship" (p. 191); it closes with his own innuendo about "palpable, cunningly manufactured falsehoods" (p. 209).

Surely it is gross intellectual cowardice to allege or imply falsehoods without supporting this accusation. One might have thought that in a 19-page attack on my "opaque prose" and "fevered imagination" (p. 191), there would be at least a paragraph dealing with what I had actually written. I can actually find only one dependent clause on the penultimate page, referring to "the fantasy that Kennedy was on the verge of pulling out from South Vietnam" (p. 208). Even this is not very close to what I actually wrote: "that in late 1963 Kennedy had authorized an initial withdrawal of... troops... to be substantially completed by the end of 1965" (*Deep Politics*, p. 24). I went on to note how "time after time... critics, from Leslie Gelb in the *Times* to Alexander Cockburn in the *Nation*, have replaced this verifiable issue of fact by an unverifiable one: whether or not JFK would have pulled the United States out of Vietnam" (pp. 25-26). Holland, a long-time *Nation* editor, has, you will note, once again resorted to this simple trick of devious substitution.

Why do we find in an academic journal the turgid rant and wildly mixed metaphors ("unfathomable crossroads," p. 193) of the *Nation*? Holland demonstrates at the outset that he has done no basic research on Oswald, whom he believes to be the only person important in the case. He writes that "Prior to that Friday [November 22, 1963], no one called him Lee Harvey Oswald" (p. 193). In fact he had been called Lee Harvey Oswald in newspaper accounts of his 1959 defection to the USSR (and 1962 return) in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Washington Star*, *Fort Worth Press*, etc. to name only some of those press accounts filed under "Lee Harvey Oswald" by the FBI, ONI, Texas Department of Public Safety, etc. (It is true that the CIA chose for its own reasons of state to label one of its three files on Oswald "Lee Henry Oswald," but Holland would be very foolish to adduce this as proof that to the CIA Oswald was unimportant.) The very first State [End Page 564] Department cable from Moscow (1304 of 10/31/59) referred to "Lee Harvey Oswald," and this cable was also filed by other federal government agencies, as well as reproduced in the Warren Commission volumes (18 WH 105). Holland's theorizing about the ignored Oswald's supposed "desire to prove his central importance" (p. 199) is based on, and misled by, perverse secondary sources — notably Gerald Posner's *Case Closed*.

Holland also has it wrong when he says that "the FBI and CIA had lied by omission (my italics) to the [Warren] Commission" (p. 204). Officials of both agencies had lied in much more constructive ways,

to the Commission as well as to each other. The CIA for example supplied a radically falsified version of "Lee Henry Oswald" 's 201 file, which Richard Helms then certified to be accurate and complete. The FBI falsely denied a pre-assassination contact with Oswald, and compounded possible perjury about this (5 WH 13) with criminal destruction of relevant evidence. (I refer you on this last point to Posner's Case Closed, pp. 214-16.)

In my view, these undisputed falsifications of the record after the assassination (which I did not even bother to mention in my book) are much less significant than the misleading games played with the Oswald files of the CIA and FBI (with innuendos of a possible KGB plot) just before the assassination. I gave prominent place to these in my book, and Holland, predictably, ignores them. The newly released documents prove the pre-assassination deceptions to be far worse than I described them. Given these facts, it is surprising that an academic journal supposedly committed to inquiry, shortly after tens of thousands of important new documents have been deposited in the National Archives, would publish Holland's fatuous excuse for not bothering to look at them (they "ultimately will only prove one thing: the Warren Commission got it right" -- p. 208).

There is only one quotation in Holland's essay about Oswald from an actual Oswald contact: a Dallas assistant district attorney (Bill Alexander), who complained that Oswald was so smug "I was going to beat the shit out of him" (p. 201). This quotation is much more revealing than it sounds. It is taken from Gerald Posner's Case Closed (p. 345), the latest rehash of the Warren Report for true believers. Alexander is not just a proven liar (as are so many of Posner's preferred sources), he is, only three pages later in Posner's book, a self-admitted liar!

Posner is a lawyer, and we are quite used to seeing lawyers turn to known liars for facts they cannot obtain elsewhere. But why is a self-admitted liar quoted as a source in a supposedly reputable academic journal?

In the first chapter of my book I noted how the Kennedy assassination, and related topics such as Kennedy's late 1963 authorization of troop withdrawal, [End Page 565] had become for many disreputable and indiscussible topics (pp. 12-16). Even so, I was disappointed to see those who have published me attacked vigorously for doing so by a major historical journal. I continue to believe that it is the job of the academy to open minds, not to close them.

Peter Dale Scott Professor of English

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