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3 January 2000

David Wrone
1518 Blackberry Lane
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Dear David:

As promised, I enclose two evaluations of your manuscript on the Zapruder film. Both reviewers think you've got the makings of an important and valuable book here. The anonymous reviewer, for example, states that this will be a "worthy contribution to the debate on the Kennedy assassination, . . . provides fresh data and new interpretations, . . . [and] anyone interested in the Kennedy assassination ought to be interested in this study." Michael Kurtz, generally concurs that this should make "an important contribution to the literature of the assassination [and provides] a valuable corrective to many of the sensational, even bizarre, interpretations of the film."

I fully agree with that assessment. But, especially because all three of us (reviewers and myself) see such potential for a path-breaking work, we also feel you've got some substantial work ahead of you--to revise the manuscript in a way that will sharpen and bolster your arguments, while protecting you from unfair criticism from Warren Commission apologists, Posnerites, and knee-jerk anti-conspiracists. (You'll be pleased to note that both reviewers agree with you that the Zapruder film and other evidence clearly suggests that a "conspiracy" (i.e., at least one other shooter) was involved.

Most important, we all think you must make a better effort to occupy the high ground in this debate. In much of the manuscript you do a superlative job of this through your detached and matter-of-fact examination of the evidence, the investigations, etc. But too frequently your tone shifts to sarcasm and, on occasion, approaches potentially libelous comments. While I and the reviewers usually agree that the objects of such remarks merit the criticism you offer, your tone overwhelms your content. As a result, those not already converted to your views will simply turn off your station--i.e., ignore your comments altogether.

The reviewers also focus on what they consider factual errors, some of which might be debatable. But in such cases you need at minimum to clarify and amplify the defense of your position in

the manuscript. In addition, Kurtz especially is concerned about what might be perceived as your over-reliance on Weisberg's valuable work. So he's suggested some filling-out of your secondary sources. For his part, the anonymous reviewer would have appreciated a higher number of interviews with members of the investigative commissions. But he also thinks the book will be fine without them, especially given the voluminous oral historical material available in existing publications on this topic.

What I need from you now, David, is a very thorough response that acknowledges the merit and need for most of the revisions suggested; that forcefully (but matter-of-factly) defends any reviewer criticism with which you disagree; and that lays out your plan and timetable for revisions. The goal here is to generate even stronger support from the reviewers and thus make my job of obtaining our Editorial Committee's approval that much easier.

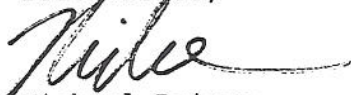
Remember, most editorial committees like our own will have some degree of anxiety about any project dealing with a controversial subject like the Kennedy assassination, especially if it has a "conspiratorial" component. The committee members (and the reviewers) will be on the alert for comments and tone that suggest you're simply being dismissive. So please bear that in mind when responding to the reviewers.

Kurtz, as I've indicated, is quite willing to consult with you on any point he's raised or criticized. I'd suggest talking to him before composing your response to make sure that the two of you are generally agreement about what will help the book the most. I'm sure there'll remain some areas of disagreement, but nothing that would stand in the way of proceeding.

[NOTE: If at all possible, I need to get your response within the next two weeks--so that I can share it with the reviewers and get their final comments in time for our next Editorial committee meeting.]

Let me reiterate that I think you've written a strong initial draft for what should become an important, widely read and reviewed, and highly regarded book. So I really appreciate your careful consideration of and thoughtful response to both of these evaluations. And, if you need any additional input from me, don't hesitate to call. Thanks.

Best wishes,



Michael Briggs
Editor-in-Chief

ASCA
&
LBJ

Anonymous Reviewer

November 30, 1999

Michael Briggs
Editor-in-Chief
University Press of Kansas
2501 15th Street
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NOV 30 1999

Dear Mike:

I have read David Wrone's manuscript, entitled *Zapruder*, and here is my evaluation.

Purpose, Arguments, Conclusion

a coup
The author seeks to review the evidence on the JFK assassination, arguing that the Warren Commission and other official inquiries were wrong in their conclusions and indeed sloppy, misleading, and corrupt—especially in their misuse of the Zapruder film. His overall conclusion is that a conspiracy of assassins, excluding Oswald (p. 281), killed the President. In the author's words: "A conspiracy killed President Kennedy and not all the corruption and perfidy of federal investigative systems can overcome that cold hard fact forever imprisoned on two tiny frames of film" (226).

Significance

The significance of the book lies in its dogged probe into the uses and misuses of the Zapruder film, ferreting out inconsistencies and mistakes in its interpretation by public and private investigators. It provides fresh data and new interpretations.

Breadth of Interest

Anyone interested in the Kennedy assassination ought to be interested in this study. It is too detailed for use in an undergraduate course, but I can see it being used in a graduate seminar on the U.S. Presidency or American Government.

Soundness of the Scholarship

stuck to official fact
Although the author has conducted a surprisingly limited number of interviews (the former staff directors of the Church and the House Select Committee would have been useful), the research into the film itself appears exhaustive. Sometimes the prose is hyperbolic and some sources are obscure (examples of both are presented below), but clearly the author has been deeply immersed in the literature. I personally think he errs in his criticism of the Church Committee (which never had a mandate to engage in a thorough inquiry into this matter, but rather looked only at the Castro connection—and even then in a brief investigation conducted by only two Committee members, Hart and Schweiker) and the House Select Committee. In the

latter case, the staff director personally thought that the mob had killed Kennedy, but he said that the evidence was circumstantial and would not hold up in a court of law. Here is the nub of the problem: this murder occurred a long time ago; the trial of evidence is cold. Yes, the Warren Commission rushed to judgment and its inquiry was anything but exhaustive; but finding out the truth is more difficult now than the author would have us believe. Many a good person has tried and failed. This is only my opinion, though, and I don't think that just because I disagree with much of this book that it should not be published. Let the debate continue, and this book adds some new insights on the role of the Zapruder film.

Here are some examples of the purple prose that I think undermines the objectivity of the study:

- The Church Committee “permanently dishonored the nation (6).” Unfair; this Committee taught the nation more about the improprieties of the intelligence agencies than an other agency before or since.
- The CIA’s role was “one of perpetual shame and enduring dishonor” (6). Yet, later the author claims that the CIA provided a strong criticism of the Warren Commission Report.
- “There was a conspiracy” (45). This conclusion suddenly jumps out, without much substantiation. Perhaps some pictures would help.
- It’s absurd to say that professors are unwilling to criticize the government (60); many do in their writings and lectures.
- Again (on p. 94) the author criticizes scholars for not addressing the Kennedy murder; many have, as have several government agencies (especially the House Select Committee). They have failed to resolve the matter not for lack of trying, but because the discovery of convincing evidence has proven virtually impossible.
- The author ought to provide a cite directly to the CIA reports mentioned on p. 122 and on p. 330.
- The Melanson source in note 27 of page 126 also needs better documentation.
- More purple prose: “the CIA . . . where its corrupt doctrines on the assassination could be peddled” (129). This needs more explanation.
- “Exploitation of the murder . . .” (148); overheated., as is “titanium steel structure” (164) and “rattle the nuclear arsenal” (172—what does that mean?).
- “Ameriform Schutzstaffel”—overheated (204); ditto with the Roman Empire reference on p. 379.

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Length, Organization, Style

It's obviously on the long side. Some redundancy could be pruned, as with the twice-mentioned temperature at which the film is kept in the Archives, or some of the references to Garrison mentioned early on and then repeated. The organization is good, and I particularly like the use of multiple headings and subheadings which help greatly to keep the reader oriented. The style is reasonably good, too, except for the overheated prose (usually found when the author seeks to sum up a chapter). A few other style problems:

- Chapters 7-9 are inelegantly titled.
- The second sentence, second paragraph on p. 39 is awkward.
- The head explodes in frame 313 I think, not frame 314. ³¹²⁻³¹³
- The top sentence on p. 111 is incomplete.
- "snuck" (268).

Revisions

I would cut out the emotional phrases that I have noted earlier. I would also give some added thought to the quick dismissal of a possible Cuban connection to the murder (324). This hypothesis warrants more serious consideration than given here; see the Church Committee's subcommittee report on this subject (uncited here). I thought LBJ agreed with RBR that Castro may have ordered Kennedy's murder, not that the CIA had killed Kennedy. This needs better documentation. The terminally ill comment on p. 328 gives the impression that RBR is about to die; but I don't think he died until 1974. The U.S. has never killed a foreign head of state (as stated on p. 407)—though it did try a number of times in 1960-61 via the CIA. Finally, as the author knows, the bibliography is in poor shape at the moment.

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delete*

Overall Assessment and Recommendation

I think this is a worthy contribution to the debate on the Kennedy assassination, even though I find the author vague on whom he thinks the conspirators are and even though I think he is overly emotional at times in his choice of diction. (For what it's worth, I am inclined to accept the unofficial conclusion of the House Select Committee staff director that Oswald killed JFK, under mob direction and with help—i.e., more than one shooter.) I recommend publication because this is such an important event and I think it is useful to continue study into it.

Other Suggestions

None.