

FYI

Wrone, David

From: Michael Briggs [mbriggs@newpress.upress.ukans.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, May 22, 2001 10:17 AM
To: Wrone, David
Subject: Re:

David:

This is an absolutely fabulous and fascinating and extraordinarily full and thoughtful response. By all means make sure you include in the ms. itself ALL of your argumentation below pertaining to the head wound. It's a real stunner and seriously jeopardizes the Warren Commission's official findings in a way that (with the exception of Weisberg?) no one else have ever been able to achieve. Congrats!

My only small quibble is that I think you still are tempted to tar the entire academy for the poor, non-collegial, and unscholarly behavior of an admittedly sizable group of scholars who have unfairly attacked you over the years. On the other hand, I also fully understand why, given your personal experiences, you would feel the way that you do. I only ask that you not write off every scholar just yet. I honestly think you might end up being surprised at how many supporters in the academy you might actually have.

But back to my main point: GREAT RESPONSE! Extremely helpful and an excellent guide and blueprint for your final revisions. Perhaps within a few weeks check back with me and clarify how long you think those revisions will take. Meanwhile, beginning next week after I return from a military history conference, I'll renew my focus on the matter of illustrations.

Thanks yet again for your patience in all this. Now I'm REALLY getting excited about the prospects for your book. Go to it!

Best,

Mike

mailed 5/22

Wrone, David

From: Michael Briggs [mbriggs@newpress.upress.ukans.edu]
Sent: Saturday, May 19, 2001 7:58 AM
To: Wrone, David
Subject: Your Response to Kurtz

Hi, David:

I've just spent most this morning reading very closely your response to Michael Kurtz's report. Here are my candid thoughts:

Overall, your response persuades me that your own views in these matters are not only entirely defensible but also, in most instances, persuasive. I also know that, based on our phone conversation, you've toned down your obvious impatience and anger over what you view as Kurtz's unfair and/or inappropriate criticisms. Especially given the decades of meticulous research you've put into this enterprise, having to go these extra steps must be frustrating and, I'm sure in some cases, even galling. I fully understand why you might feel that way and, for that reason especially, really do appreciate the additional input.

That said, I think you are being much too hard on and dismissive of Kurtz. I'm not going to ask you to redo your response. There's no real need at this juncture for that. But let me explain why I think you need to ease up just a bit.

Kurtz is in fact highly supportive of the manuscript overall and in fact agrees that you've proven your most important points. (Please re-read his opening and closing comments again for very clear proof of this support.) He is clearly on your side, David. And, whatever his fallibilities are, you need the kind of support he offers because there are legions more out there (the anti-conspiracy theorists) who are extremely eager to attack your kind of views. When he raises a concern about something you've said, he's doing in part because he knows how vicious other much less informed critics are likely to be. He may be wrong on a given point, but his intent is to help protect you from the kind of criticism that will persuade readers to ignore you.

On Mike's own mistakes and/or faulty reasoning: We both know that this is a highly complex field of research, one that's riddled with discord, disinformation, misinformation, and even a lack of consensus on what actually constitutes the evidentiary base you suggest should be everyone's primary focus. You yourself acknowledge that the field is fraught with booby traps and minefields and that careless researchers can be easily led astray. So you must continue to avoid being overly defensive and dismissive in response to genuinely sincere researchers like Mike. To your credit, in the manuscript itself, you mostly do a very good job of keeping that all in check. But the tendency is still there, so you (and I) must continue to be vigilant. Otherwise, you're strong and supportable convictions might be misinterpreted as hubris, arrogance, etc. And that would be extremely unfair to you.

ON WEISBERG: You make a really excellent case for Weisberg's value, reliability, contributions, etc. In response I can certainly agree with you or anyone who would say "Thank God for Weisberg." But I don't think Mike is challenging you on that point. His real concern is with the **APPEARANCE** that you have not looked at much of the **OTHER** literature. Admittedly, a lot of that literature is pretty bad, but some of it is good. In any event, this leaves you vulnerable to those who would call into question your authority, which in the scholarly world must rest upon a thorough grounding in the literature, not just one part of it. Mike and I both know that such criticism would be

*documentary
evidence on
assassination &
investigations,
too*

*emphasis in book
no "theses"
that in fact are
only conclusions*

outrageous because there's hardly ANYONE more grounded in the literature than David Wrone. Our objective of course is prevent this kind of unfair criticism from appearing at all.

as I wrote you, in an appreciation or in bible or in notes

ON WILLIS: You pretty much convince me on this point. But you probably should inject some of this commentary into the appropriate place(s) in the ms. Something like: "Some have questioned Willis's reliability because he was mistaken about [fill in the blank]. While it's true he was mistaken, as were many others who were interviewed on the same points, these particular mistakes have no direct bearing on [fill in the blank] because [fill in the blank]." Or a few such words to that effect.

OK here he's supported by the actual films

ON NATHAN POOL: This is pretty fascinating to me. You provide a LOT of material to support your contention that Pool is a "trivial and terrible witness," like the long deposition testimony. But you do a poor job of CLARIFYING how this material supports your position on Pool.

Let me add right away--I'm fully inclined to agree with your estimate of Pool. He strikes me as highly suspicious. His testimony, of course, contradicts Tomlinson's. But it also seems odd that the Otis Co. would make a point of sending Pool over to make sure the elevators were running okay. Why should they NOT be running okay? And even if there were a malfunction, there'd hardly be sufficient time to find and fix the problem in such a fast-moving life-and-death emergency situation.

In addition, Pool was well versed in ballistics, or enough so to put a relatively fine point on the identity of the bullet. That might not seem to odd for a blue-collar guy living in gun-riddled Texas, but he puts a REALLY FINE POINT on the bullet's I.D. by suggesting that it was "European made." Wonder how many Otis maintenance men could have suggested that.

A won't

Okay, so I'm prepared to discard Pool's reliability and thus his testimony. But, while you do make it clear that Tomlinson and Pool provide contradicting testimonies, you don't clearly state WHY you think Tomlinson is more reliable than Pool or explain how Wright's letter supports that view. On the other hand, I'm sure that you can do this, probably in just a few sentences.

THE HEAD WOUNDS: Okay, you need to help me hear. You strongly argue against any evidence for a major wound on the back side of the head. I think you make a pretty sound case for the most part. But I remain a bit confused. Many of the writers who promote the rear wound theory, are conspiracy theorists, suggesting that a sizable rear wound is proof of the bullet's EXIT--in other words, they say then that the ENTRANCE must necessarily be at the front of the head and, thus, the shot must come from the front as well. Which means a conspiracy. While you agree that there is a conspiracy and that the fatal shot does not come from Oswald's alleged position on the 6th floor, you don't agree with the rear wound theory.

picture of JFK & 337-8 depends on kind of ammo Some explosives on contact? Many other factors?

Here's where I need clarification: DO you or DON'T you believe that the location of the head wound denotes the bullet's EXIT? If you DON'T believe, then shouldn't you clarify (ballistically?) how an entrance wound can cause so much damage. If you DO believe that the location of the head wound denotes the bullet's EXIT, then am I correct that you think the fatal shot DID come from the rear but just NOT from a gun held by Oswald on the 6th floor? [My apologies, if I seem incredibly dense on this.]

He is right This has to be clear, 40 dust like fragments

the case of the head

INTERNET SOURCES: I agree that it should be enough to note that the worldwide web is thick with sites devoted to assassination research and that most of them are of very limited use to scholars. But, in doing so, you mention some of these sites by name and suggest one or two (National Archives, for example?) that might be an okay place to look for some non-sensationalized basic info, even as you caution against their uncritical use.

FINAL NOTE: Again, there's no need whatsoever for you to redo your response to Kurtz. I'll be satisfied if you simply respond directly to my queries above. At that point, we'll then call it a day and have you proceed to finalize your revisions with all this in mind. You should then send me a copy of your final manuscript (with matching computer disk). In the meantime, I'll be thinking and rethinking the matter of illustrations and come back to you with recommendations regarding specific Zapruder frames and a plan for securing them. My door is always open, though, if you need any more input from me on anything. So do not hesitate to call me up or email me. I'll be eager to help out.

I'll end by saying that I am truly in awe of your commitment and determination to right the historical record on this subject. In return, I fully intend to give you the best possible forum (i.e., a well produced, highly promoted, and widely distributed book) for getting your message across.

Best wishes,

Mike

Michael