

Dear Dave,

4/19/01

I won't have time to get very far in this before our ride to the funeral home is here but I'll get started and know what I intend when I can get back to it, tomorrow, possible in the afternoon if not early morning and again on Saturday. I'll send this separately so you can think of it: address Kurtz and me to Briggs separately, by itself.

I think I sent you copy of Hood's 4/12 letter to me. Does Briggs, who knows only what the Kurtz who so obviously dislikes ^{told him} me knows better or does Hood, which has most of my records, two interstate moving vans full.

I'll think a bit more about this and draft something and get it to you as fast as ^I you can.

My ride is here.

2:11 a.m. 4/20. I forgot, Clay will be here today. This is prior to dialysis. What follows is a rough idea of what you ^{may} consider writing Briggs.

Kurtz has invented what has never happened, that there is a special media dislike of Weisberg. While Kurtz reflect that he does not like Weisberg, Weisberg's position among those all of whom are called critics, is unique. He has not sought publicity since his last book appeared so he has nothing to gain from publicity but the truth is that most of the fact of the Kennedy assassination became available as the result of his work - in his nine books, the ~~two~~ third of a million pages of withheld records he forced out of official secrecy and what he did with those records. He has always made them ~~available~~ available to all writing in the ~~field~~ field, ~~most~~ most of whom he knew in ~~advance~~ advance he knew he would not agree with and all of them, and there have been many, including innumerable reporters, have also had ~~un-~~ supervised access to his copier. Years ago he told me of New York Times and several other reporters ^{as much as} spending ^{may} a week or so at a

at a time with him. What amused me when he told me of it, twice New York Times reporters asked him to help them get out of silly assignments.

It is neither scholarly nor honest ~~to~~ ^{only} credit others, especially in a record for history, with work that ^{only} he did, particularly not if it is "flawed scholarship," which as a matter of fact

almost all is. ^{And that should not be the record for history published}

With a single exception Weisberg's books are the only ones to avoid all "theories," which are not that, and to be based entirely on the official records.

Years ago he contracted with Hood College, a small college in Frederick, ^{Maryland} for it to get all his work in return for Hood ^{making it a public archive.} ~~giving it a permanent home.~~ Then that president resigned and the one who replaced her had been Bush's head of internal revenue in which she reportedly wasted four billions on a computer system that ^did not work. Finally she resigned and the new administration, astounded at the mere volume of what Weisberg had given them had him over for lunch and a discussion. Not aware that he had already deeded all his work to Hood, they asked him to sign a letter doing that. ~~The covering letter.~~ He sent me a copy of the letter to him but I ask that you ~~keep~~ ^{keep} in confidential. They are going to make an official announcement and Weisberg does not want to say a word publicly until they do. However, the second paragraph of that letter is rather exceptional. They ^{at Hood} describes his work, what he gave Hood, as "unparalleled in the world."

Neither you nor Kurtz can cite instead ^{to} ~~and~~ of Weisberg any work that is not "flawed." Including Kurtz's. (I often wonder if it is jealousy that causes him to dislike Weisberg.) Weisberg is proud of the fact that beginning with his first book, in 1965 and

continuing with eight more, one on the "ing assassination,
severe as is his criticism of so many on and with the Commission
and of FBI official and agents, those of the CIA, too, he has not
gotten a single call or letter from a single one of them alleging
that Weisberg had been unfair or inaccurate in what he said of
them. And when he and his wife counted ~~them up~~ ^{letters they'd receive to} reply to a doctor's
question more than a decade ago they had ^{them} letters alone from
more than 20,000 people ^{then}. Plus thousands of phone calls.

So I think that the better way to approach what you see
to think will be a special problem and I do not know ever to
have existed is to convert that fear into a positive rather
than indulge Kurtz's dislike of Weisberg. (If he had any proof
on any special discrimination against Weisberg I do not know of it
and would like to see it.)

What you might say to be included as a rather long note
is what may sound like I am tooting my own horn but that
is not my purpose and it might attract both reader and media ^{favorable}
attention because if it so unusual.

Most spurce citations in this book are to the work of one man,
Harold Weisberg. He is the one of those known as Warren Commission
critics who has restricted himself to the official records and in
his writing has avoided all so-called theories. He sticks entirely
to the official facts and gives them the meaning they have and the
government did not use in its explanation of the assassination.

In order to make public what the government was suppressing
he filed a dozen lawsuits under the "Freedom of Information Act."
Some were precedental ones led to the amending of the ACT in 1974
to make FBI, CIA and dsimilar records accessible under the Act
In those lawsuits he obtained about a third of a million pages of

assassination records that had been withheld. He has always made them available to all others writing in the field even though he knows he will not agree with what they write and he has done this without supervising them or their uses of his copier. His is the belief of our founding fathers, that the people are entitled to all views, and he practises it without charge for ~~what~~ access to what it cost him so much of his ^{life} ~~file~~ to obtain and make public.

Consistent with this, he has ^{dedicated} all his ^{work} to Hood College, a fine small college in Frederick ^{Maryland} (No. 1 in small colleges in a peer review in U.S. News.) which will keep it as a free public archive once all the necessary preliminaries are completed.

When it became unsafe for Weisberg to use the stairs to his basement where he had all those file cabinets and boxes of records, ^{Weis} Weisberg remembers ^{of what} ~~that~~ the FBI had told a federal court about him ^{He then} ~~and~~ changed the nature and purpose of his writing.

The FBI had prevented compliance with the ^{Act} by perjury. Normally plaintiffs tell the ^{court} what they want to know in what their lawyers file, which, normally, is immune. But instead of doing that Weisberg put himself under oath, making himself subject to charges of perjury if he lied, and went head-to-head with the FBI.

And the FBI blinked. It gave the court a nonsequitur, st ~~st~~ telling it that Weisberg could make such charges "ad infinitum" because he knows more about the Kennedy assassination than any working for the FBI.

So, aged ~~and~~ feeble and ill, Weisberg turned to writing books on the faulty work of what he prefers to as "both extremes," he being the lonely man in the middle, as a record for history. There now are ^{several} ~~twentyfive~~ of those books, ^m ~~some~~ as long as 200,000 words. He

is now eighty-eight and he keeps on going despite the great amount of time taken by treatments for health problems.

Weisberg began life as a reporter on his ^{small} home-town ~~small~~ newspaper. He then became a ^{U.S.} Senate investigator and editor, an investigative reporter many of whose stories ~~are~~ were entered into the Congressional Record, a magazine Washington correspondent, and in World War II he was an analyst with the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the CIA. It also used him as an investigative troubleshooter. Some of ^{those} that assignments on which others failed were for the White House.

He lives with his also enfeebled wife on the side of a mountain at ^{Fredrick} ~~Staf~~rick, Maryland.

This is all off the top of ~~an~~ ^{his} head. As I'm doing it it occurred to me that perhaps you should begin by saying that you and I are and for years have been friends but that does not account for any of the large number of citations to my work. They are because I have done most of the factual work....

¹¹ I'll think it over, when I can, I may have other ideas but this includes, as best I can think of it now, what I think it ~~is~~ would be good to include in the book, perhaps just before the index. Now I'll see if I can read and correct before dialysis.

Had

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April 12, 2001

Mr. Harold Weisberg
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Dear Harold:

It was wonderful to see you again. Thank you for making the special effort to come to the college for lunch today. You look wonderful and you sound every bit as astute as you have always been. It is such a privilege to know you and to be able to work with you on the transfer of this collection.

As we said at lunch, the work you have done is unparalleled in the world. You have compiled a legacy of immense value, both to researchers and to students and to the public at large. We are grateful to you for all of that work and for entrusting its safekeeping to our care. We will do all we can to ensure that the collection is kept secure and that the information is made available to as many people as possible and accessible in a user-friendly way. Your work is what makes all of this possible, and we are grateful.

As I mentioned, I am enclosing a draft of a letter that you might send to President Funk reiterating your desire to transfer official ownership of the collection to Hood College. In this way we can ensure that there is no ambiguity about your intent or about the ownership and control of the collection. If this wording is satisfactory to you, you may simply sign and return it. Otherwise, please modify it in whatever way more accurately reflects your intent.

Thank you again. We look forward to the official announcement of the collection once the electronic documentation is complete. I expect that will happen next year, partly depending on Clay Ogilvie's time constraints and how quickly his work can be complete. We will be in touch with you, either directly or through Jerry to plan that announcement as the time becomes closer.

In the meantime, it was wonderful to see you. I wish you all the best and continue good health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Bruce Bigelow", written over a large, stylized flourish.

Bruce Bigelow

BB:lbe
Cc: G. McKnight



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17 April 2001

David Wrone
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Dear David:

I enclose Michael Kurtz's further thoughts on your revised manuscript on The Zapruder Film. As clearly indicated in Kurtz's previous emailed comments, he's a staunch supporter of this project. Among other things, he thinks that you make a compelling argument for the authenticity of the film, argue convincingly that the film contains evidence of a conspiracy, and are poised to make an important and valuable addition to the literature on the assassination. Especially if you can finetune the manuscript just a bit more.

In part because he is a big fan of this study and wants it to be well received by your readers (including skeptical book reviewers), Mike is also fairly blunt about those areas of your manuscript that remain very vulnerable to criticism. His underlying concern (and mine as well) is that such criticism may blind your readers to your book's very real contributions. So, the idea here is to eliminate or at least moderate any potential weakness that could scuttle the entire enterprise. Obviously, the bar is always set higher for writers on the JFK assassination, especially for writers who suggest even the slightest hint of conspiracy. That's certainly unfair to serious researchers like yourself, but it's a fact of life with which you're well acquainted, I know.

Now to particulars in Mike's report:

Without rolling back your admiration for and appropriate use of Weisberg, you can help protect yourself by at least giving a nod or two in the direction of some of the other serious scholars (a limited bunch, I realize) who work this field. You don't need to refute the quality or reliability of Weisberg's work, nor even defend it per se. The main point here is to avoid even the appearance of being too dismissive of other honest, serious, if flawed scholarship. Dismissiveness (even when warranted) is almost always viewed as a "red flag" by critical book reviewers. We simply don't want to give them any more ammunition than this field of research already gives them.

On the surface at least, Mike does seem to point to an apparent contradiction regarding your use of Willis. On the one hand, you rely heavily upon Willis's statements in support of your theory, and yet in some respects the record seems to suggest that Willis's testimony is not always reliable. So you must figure out how to reassure the reader that, in the instances you've chosen, Willis can indeed be considered reliable. It's a key point. Anything you can do to bolster it, will help your case immeasurably.

It also appears that you need to provide a stronger (or perhaps clearer?) argument in support of a probable shot at Frame 190. In part, Mike's concerned about your selective reliance on the Warren Commission report regarding the obstructing tree (despite your overall--and appropriate--disregard for the report in general). Can you clarify and strengthen your case for Frame 190. Again, we're troubleshooting here, trying to eliminate any cause for the kind of criticism that could undermine your overall argument.

Most of the so-called "tone" problem has disappeared in this new version of the manuscript. Which is terrific. At the same time, Mike does caution you to eliminate your lingering tendency to make "categorical statements" of fact that, in actuality, remain in dispute. This might simply require you to acknowledge more explicitly that you're aware that a particular point continues to be debated--i.e., no consensus yet--even though you yourself are convinced that your perspective is correct.

Although he admits "he's no lawyer," Mike detected nothing in his close reading of the manuscript that seems potentially libelous. That's extremely encouraging to say the least.

Mike does, however, question the level of detail you apply to a consideration of the Single Bullet Theory in Part VI. Do you think you can link that material more directly to the discussion of Zapruder or at least explain to your readers why so much of the discussion in this section appears to move away from the film itself? Obviously, I'm not saying that you should radically condense or remove that material, only provide a clearer indication for its relation to the overall enterprise of the book.

Finally, somewhere, perhaps very early on or in a bibliographical statement, you need to acknowledge the profusion of sites on the Internet that focus on the assassination and, more specifically, the Zapruder frames. In doing so, it would be good to point out the predominant limitations of this (mostly non-scholarly) material, while singling out one or two sites that are sufficiently worthy to merit a visit.

In sum, I'm more excited than ever about this project and am really encouraged by the care, critique, and support Mike has offered here. He's not one to mince words or to shy away from

are there any?

calling it like he sees it. The fact that he's so strongly positive is both very promising for the book and a real tribute to your considerable efforts to refine and improve your work. So thanks again, I really appreciate that.

I'll follow very shortly (within the week I hope) with additional reactions from my own reading. In the meantime, you should begin to figure out how to address Mike's concerns in what will become the final version of the manuscript (prior to copyediting of course).

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mike", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Briggs
Editor-in-Chief



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April 10, 2001

Mr. Michael Briggs
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Dear Mike:

I have completed my review of David Wrone's manuscript: *History's Most Important Movie: Abe Zapruder's History of JFK's Assassination*. First, I want to reiterate my previous recommendation – the manuscript should be published. I found this version much better written and more focused. It will be certain to attract controversy, but so does everything written on the subject.

I have attached a set of recommendations that I believe will improve the manuscript substantially.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike".

Michael L. Kurtz, Dean

Commentary on

History's Most Important Movie: Abe Zapruder's History of JFK's Assassination

By

David Wrone

General Remarks

1. The manuscript is considerably improved from earlier versions.
2. Wrone makes a compelling argument for the authenticity of the film.
3. Wrone argues convincingly that the film contains evidence of a conspiracy.
4. This will make an important and valuable addition to the literature on the assassination.
5. Wrone makes a compelling argument for government ownership of the film.
6. The writing style is sharp, clear, and effective.

Critical Commentary

Reliance on Weisberg

Wrone has adamantly refused to lessen his over-reliance on the works of Harold Weisberg. He uses Weisberg as the ultimate authority on the assassination and conveniently employs Weisberg to take cheap shots at the works of other assassination researchers. The manuscript contains what seems like innumerable attacks on other critics and praise for Weisberg. Again, I honor Weisberg for his invaluable contributions to assassination research and scholarship, but he is not the sole reliable critic (admittedly, Wrone does mention Sylvia Meagher, Howard Roffman, and Raymond Marcus). Wrone strongly implies that nothing that other researchers have written has contributed in any way to assassination scholarship. This is simply not the case. For example, whether Wrone likes it or not, Harrison Livingstone has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the medical evidence, just as Weisberg had previously done. Gary Aguilar and David Mantik have taken our knowledge of the medical evidence to a higher plane and have written incisive critiques of the lone assassin thesis.

Accuracy of Claims

I find serious problems with Wrone's tendency to make categorical statements about issues that are debatable. For example, his repetitious claims that Willis #5 proves a conspiracy. I do not agree. Willis #5 simply shows the Kennedy limo, as well as other things, with JFK looking to the right, with no apparent reaction to having been struck. Even on 5x magnification of the original slide, no response by JFK is evident. Admittedly, the slide shows the president from behind, but Wrone's own analysis is based on Willis's testimony that he snapped the shutter because the sound of the shot startled him. Therefore, since bullets travel faster than sound, the bullet had already struck. Does Wrone claim that Willis #5 reveals that JFK had a delayed reaction to this shot, since no reaction to his being struck is apparent?

I also do not agree that Philip Willis is an infallible witness. Wrone cites Willis's testimony about the sound of the shot causing him to snap the camera shutter, but he pointedly omits several other things that Willis stated. For example, Willis stated that: "The [motorcade] had come to a temporary halt before proceeding on to the underpass." [Warren Commission Hearings, vol. VII, p. 497]. If Willis has such an accurate recall of events, then he is correct about the motorcade coming to a halt. However, the Zapruder film shows no halt or hesitation in the speed of the limousine. Willis also stated that the fatal shot "took the back of his [JFK's] head off." [R. Groden, *The Killing of the President*, p. 86]. Is Willis correct? If so, Wrone had better revise his manuscript, since he claims that there was no damage to the back of the head. This is one example of the selective use of witnesses to prove a certain point. Wrone and Weisberg both claim that Willis has an infallible memory when it comes to his photography, but that he is a very poor and unreliable witness when it comes to virtually everything else. I must admit that I originally had the same opinion of Willis, but now, I'm not so sure. It should also be pointed out that Willis's wife, Marilyn, also believed that the fatal shot blasted out the rear of JFK's head.

Another claim that Wrone makes is that the first shot was fired about frame 190, thereby destroying the Warren Commission's lone-assassin theory. Why? Because, Wrone says, the WC says that the leaves of a live oak tree blocked Oswald's view of the motorcade prior to frame 210. Therefore, if a shot was fired at 190, it could not have been Oswald. This is faulty reasoning (although I must admit that I have been guilty of the same view).

The leaves of the oak tree blocking the view opinion came from the reenactment, which Wrone himself asserts was not an accurate representation of the actual conditions prevailing at the time of the assassination, e.g., a different kind of car was used, the 6th floor window was raised all the way open, etc. Therefore, if the reenactment was faulty, how do we know that Oswald, or anyone else, for that matter, could not have fired a shot from the 6th floor window at 190? The wind was blowing, and the foliage was different. We simply do not know if it were possible for Oswald to fire a shot at 190. He could have had a clear field of vision if the wind, which blew strongly that day, had blown the tree leaves out of the way. If Oswald, or anyone else, fired a shot at 190, he would have had sufficient time (46 frames) to fire another shot and strike Connally. Willis #5, in short, does not destroy the Single Bullet Theory, the lone-assassin theory, or anything else. It is also irresponsible to cite the Warren Commission as an authority on the leaves obscuring the field of vision at 190, but deny virtually everything else the commission said.

Wrone also does not make clear exactly what sequence of shots the Zapruder film reveals. The film, according to Wrone, shows shot #1 fired at 190. Was this the shot from in front of JFK, striking him in the throat? Was it fired from the rear, striking him in the back? Did it miss? Where in the Zapruder film is the shot that struck James Tague? Was Tague struck by a bullet fragment that missed the limousine? Did a fragment from the head shot bounce off and strike Tague? Where in the film is the Tague hit? Is there a blur or jiggle to coincide with it?

Extraneous Material

Part VI is entitled "The Zapruder Film and the Single Bullet Theory," but virtually this entire section (90 pages long) concerns only the second part of that title – the SBT. Who found the bullet is irrelevant to the topic of the manuscript – the Zapruder Film. By the way, Wrone omits the name of Nathan Pool, who was also present on the ground-floor corridor at the time of the stretcher bullet's discovery. Pool's name surfaced with the release of HSCA documents by the ARRB.

Reliability of Documentation

The reliability of the documentation is fine. However, again, I question the over emphasis on Weisberg. Numerous works that consider the Zapruder film are omitted entirely. There is little evidence that Wrone has conducted Internet searches, since countless WWW references to the Z film can be found.

I think
he means
Weisberg
has
- Dan

Repetitious Material

There are too many scattered references to Willis throughout the ms. If Wrone has an irresistible urge to praise Weisberg and attack other researchers, he should do it once, not repeatedly.

Potentially Libelous Material

I saw none, although I am not a lawyer.

Z Frames to be Reproduced in Book

At a minimum, considering the expense, I would put the following:

- 190 – This is where Wrone claims the first shot was fired
- 225 – Shows JFK clearly reacting to being hit after emerging from behind sign.
- 230 – Sharp and clear. Shows JFK hit, Connally uninjured.
- 237 – Shows Connally hit
- 312 – JFK just before head shot
- 313 – Head shot
- 314 – Slight forward motion
- 321 – Head slams against back of seat
- 335 – Sharp, clear, shows damage to front of head

Other Photographs

- Willis #5 – Central to Wrone's thesis
- Altgens – Wrone claims it shows Oswald standing in TSBD front doorway

Title

I agree – *The Zapruder Film* is much better.

Final Remarks

Despite the critical nature of the above remarks, I find this manuscript a very sound piece of scholarship, definitely worthy of publication. It will be controversial, to be sure, but so is everything written about the assassination. It provides a fine historical record of the Zapruder film and makes a very strong argument both for its authenticity and for its proper place in the public domain. If Wrone would focus on the topic – the Zapruder film – he would have an outstanding work.