

5/LETTERS WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1992

No Evidence for a Conspiracy to Kill Kennedy

To the Editor:

After the assassination of President Kennedy, his widow and his brother Robert asked me to inquire into the Dallas tragedy and write an account of my findings.

This task became my sole concern for the next three years. I was answerable to no one. I accepted no money from the Government or the Kennedys, and I stipulated that the author's royalties would be donated to the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. My only assistants were volunteers. I was especially grateful for the help of Jim Lehrer, who was then a young reporter for The Dallas Times-Herald.

In Texas, in Washington and elsewhere, I questioned everyone who might shed light on the event. That included members of the Secret Serv-

ice, who had never been available to interrogation by an outsider; the physicians who performed the autopsy on the President's body at Bethesda Naval Hospital; undertakers in Dallas and Washington; the Kennedy family; Kennedy and Johnson aides; members of the Cabinet and the Supreme Court; the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Congressional leadership, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, including J. Edgar Hoover.

In Texas, I went over the motorcade route, searching for and finding men and women who had been spectators that Friday, Nov. 22, 1963. Abraham Zapruder went over his remarkable film with me and showed me where he had been and what he had seen. In Irving, Tex., the Paines, with whom Lee Harvey Oswald spent

the night of Nov. 21, were interrogated at length. So were Dallas policemen, Gov. John Connally, E. M. (Ted) Dealey, Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, employees of the Texas School Book Depository, Bill Whaley, the taxi driver who unwittingly carried Oswald in his flight from the depository; and doctors, nurses and orderlies at Parkland Memorial Hospital. In Washington, I had the President's first coffin — inadvertently damaged at Love Field — uncrated for inspection.

I needed no authority to assess Oswald's marksmanship. As a World War II Marine, I had qualified as an expert rifleman on the Parris Island, S.C., range. Oswald, a former Marine, had also qualified. In Dallas he was equipped with a bolt-action, clip-fed, 6.5 millimeter Mannlicher-Carcano rifle and a four-power telescopic

sight. His target — the Presidential limousine — was only 88 yards away from his sniper's nest. At that distance, with that scope, a trained marksman could scarcely miss.

In any gathering of evidence, time is crucial. During the first eight months of my inquiry, Warren Commission investigators were also in the field, but after that I was alone. Had anyone else been active there, I would have known of it. The witnesses I was interrogating would also have been questioned then.

When Chief Justice Earl Warren's report was complete, he asked me to sign it as a representative of the Kennedy family. I felt that would be presumptuous and inappropriate; my own work was far from finished, and I was far from ready to endorse the commission's findings. Nevertheless, in the end I concluded that its report was correct on the two main issues. Oswald was the killer, and he had acted alone.

"The Death of a President" was published by Harper & Row on April 7, 1967. More than 550,000 copies were sold in bookstores and 800,000 more through the Book-of-the-Month Club. It astonishes me that anyone under-

taking a portrayal of the assassination should be unaware of it. When a Congressional committee was looking into rumors of a plot to kill Kennedy, its chief counsel and chief investigator approached me, and I opened my files to them. I have never heard from a motion picture producer or director on such a mission.

Those who desperately want to believe that President Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy have my sympathy. I share their yearning. To employ what may seem an odd metaphor, there is an esthetic principle here. If you put six million dead Jews on one side of a scale and on the other side put the Nazi regime — the greatest gang of criminals ever to seize control of a modern state — you have a rough balance: greatest crime, greatest criminals.

But if you put the murdered President of the United States on one side of a scale and that wretched waff Oswald on the other side, it doesn't balance. You want to add something weightier to Oswald. It would invest the President's death with meaning, endowing him with martyrdom. He

would have died for something.

A conspiracy would, of course, do the job nicely. Unfortunately, there is no evidence whatever that there was one.

WILLIAM MANCHESTER
Middletown, Conn., Jan. 17, 1992

Open Committee's Files

To the Editor:

As a former staff member of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, I am convinced that the American public deserves to know what is inside that committee's files.

Those of us who worked on the sealed portions of the committee's report are under oath not to speak about their contents. But the recent burst of publicity surrounding the release of the Oliver Stone film "J.F.K." has underscored once again the need for full disclosure of this material. The reports could be released with the names expurgated, thus eliminating any damage, embarrassment or humiliation to those named.

EDWIN J. LOPEZ-SOTO
Rochester, Jan. 12, 1992

Mr. Jack Rosenthal, Editorial Page Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43 St.,
New York, N.Y. 10036

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21702
2/12/92

Dear Mr. Rosenthal,

I've just been given a copy of Manchester's 2/4 letter, thus the delay in responding to it.

Whether or not the Times publishes my letter, I do think that in your collective interest it is past time for the Times to come into contact with fact and reality.

To the best of my ability I'll answer any questions. Everyone is welcome to access to the 250,000 JFK assassination records I got under FOIA.

While the mass in itself frustrates normal journalistic interest, without at least some familiarity with what these records reflect it is irresponsible to pretend they do not exist or that they hold nothing relevant.

The Times' record in history over its reporting and nonreporting of the JFK assassination is not good and can't be changed.

Persisting on an incorrect policy after all these years makes the Times look even worse and I regret Lewis makes a fool of himself in saying that the Warren Report is right because it says it is right.


He does not improve Warren's reputation in history this way.

If Lewis had done any real work he'd have known that LBJ conned Warren into taking the job he'd rejected as improper.

But what Warren and the others did cannot now be changed.

By its treatment the Times has undermined its own credibility with a great many people.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg

William Manchester's February 5 letter, "No Evidence for a Conspiracy to Kill [President] Kennedy" is a remarkable self indictment. ^{His} It is magnified by his arrogance, self-importance, pretense of omniscience, misrepresentation and, tragically, stupidity.

Quite aside from whether or not Manchester, with exclusive access to Warren Commission hearings, records, members and staff and his private office in the National Archives, did any real investigating for his commissioned "Death of a President" - and he didn't - he did a sophisticated Jim Bishop-job - literally hundreds of thousands of FBI and other records have since become available as a result of ~~my~~ many FOIA lawsuits and those of others. I alone have about a quarter of a million pages in which Manchester has had no interest at all.

Yet from his private Olympus he pontificates that "there is no evidence ~~at all~~ whatsoever that there was " a conspiracy.

The Warren Commission records overflow with evidence of a conspiracy but Manchester, like the Commission and the executive agencies, merely ignored it.

The simplest and most comprehensible is that when the Commission got the world's best riflemen from the National Rifle Association, all rated "masters," under greatly improved condition and after the junky rifle was overhauled, not a single one could duplicate what the Commission and Manchester attribute to Oswald.

Contrary to Manchester's representation, the Marines evaluated Oswald as a "rather poor shot."

Yet Manchester says, "I ~~needed~~ no authority to assess Oswald's marksmanship."

He knows better than the Marines, too!

In his boasting Manchester does not list the three members of the Warren Commission who disagreed with the most basic conclusion of the Warren Commission, Alvin Spector's impossible creation of the single-bullet theory without which all the known shooting could not possibly have been attributed to any one assassin. Senator's Richard B. Russell and John Sherman Cooper disagreed strongly, Representative Hale Boggs less strongly.

If Manchester had not kept himself so ignorant of the published factual information on the JFK assassination he would have known that Senator Russell encouraged my continuing efforts to disprove the Warren Report in detail until his dying day.

That he saw eye-to-eye with me on the theory, not fact, on which the report is based is reflected in the enclosed memo to him from his legislative assistant.

Russell told me that he told Warren to "just put a little ~~of~~ ol' footnote in saying Senator Russell dissents." ~~He~~ He also told me Warren insisted on unanimity and that they worked out a compromise. When the report was published the supposed compromise still endorsed the single-bullet theory.

Russell had forced an executive session held September 18. He then stated his position for the record. Only he had been deceived into believing that a ⁴court reporter was present. None was. It was a Commission stenographer. When ~~with great ~~idk~~ difficulty~~ I got a "transcript", it was a fake. The first page was made to look like a transcript but the ^{rest} ~~rest~~ was irrelevant paraphrase. (Whitewash IV, 131-2, facsimile)

Oliver Stone ~~is~~ produced an exciting but very bad movie. He announced that he would be recording their history for the people, telling them who killed their President, why and how - non-fiction - based on Jim Garrison's book. After he got my February 8, 1991 letter informing him of first-person knowledge that Garrison's book was worse than a mere rewriting of his own fiasco, Stone began shooting in two months without any basic change in the script. From time to time he ~~presented~~ ^{presented} he was not doing a movie true to history but in fact he never stopped representing it was factual. So, he knowingly misled and deceived the people for his own purposes.

Criticizing Stone's disinformational movie does not require defending the Warren report, ^{or} Anthony Lewis', William Manchester's and Dan Schorr's ineffective method.

It is past time for intellectuals to recognize Lyndon Johnson's political savvy in his selection of the members of his commission, unprecedented in our history, I believe. ^{Republican} He had five of the seven members of the minority party and ^{neither} of the two Democrats was a JFK follower.

Appointing Warren chairman immobilized his partisans, then and since.

Whether there was no conspiracy is no more proven by theorizing than whether there was. The Commission's own evidence proves redundantly that there was a conspiracy only the major media ignored this contemporaneous ^{by} and continues to ignore it, eschewing fact and evidence in favor of pontifications and theories.

The nation should be able to expect better of the major media as it should of the Oliver Stones.