

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "LAST TRAIN FROM DEALEY PLAZA" (Fred Newcomb; Probe, April 1969)
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1) How is the train visible in the Bond pictures established as being on the spur nearest the pergola? There are 3 spurs all more or less parallel to the pergola. (Fig. 3; Nix Film analysis, p. 13) Of course, some may not have been in use at the time. The presence of the train on the first spur seems crucial to the argument that Willis 5 was doctored. More later.

2) Figs. 6 and 7; from the position of the right end of the hedge relative to one of the pergola columns, it appears that Nix moved between these two frames. Thus, I am not convinced that the different positions of the train windows in these two frames proves that the train moved. I would want to examine good prints of these frames. Does the Bell film show the train in motion?

3) The Nix Film Analysis says only that the train is "probably" on the nearest spur to the pergola. No details of the analysis are given. I am not inclined to consider this conclusive. (Page 42)

4) Fig. 9 (CE 2118) is certainly inaccurate, and does omit many of the tracks, but the "imaginary track" seems to correspond with the third spur behind the pergola, which does extend from the underpass to behind the TSED.

5) From Figs. 2, 3, 5, and 11, it seems to me that if the train were on the second or third spur behind the pergola, it should not have been visible in the Willis and Betzner pictures except perhaps at the extreme right, where the trees might obscure it. I need to go into more detail on the triangulation procedures used.

6) The secondary evidence that Willis 5 was doctored is not convincing. I do not see that the grilles are crooked or distorted. In my copy of Willis 5 (Life, 11/24/67, p. 93) it is true that the rectangular holes in the grillework have rounded corners at the upper right and lower left. Since the grillework is apparently several inches thick, (e.g., Nix, p. 15), I would expect some such effect when the light source is not in line with the camera. The reenactment photo (Fig. 14) was taken at a different season and probably at a different time of day, so it would not be expected to show the same apparent distortions. Also, it may have been taken with a different distance setting on the camera. Finally, note that other photos (e.g., Towner, Life, p. 94) also show an apparently non-rectangular grillework pattern.

In the Life ~~print~~ print of Willis 5, the sky is blue near the top edge and rather white all the way across ~~at~~ the level of the pergola. I don't see it as particularly bluer behind the branches than behind the pergola.

Why would the jagged vertical line have been left by any retouching process? Willis' reenactment photo (Fig. 14) shows some kind of vertical and horizontal structure in this area, apparently behind the pergola. Couldn't this be due to telephone poles, lights, etc. in the yards?

7) As far as I can tell, the foliage is consistent in the Willis and Betzner photos. Betzner's camera was somewhat higher than Willis'; look at the apparent height of the Thornton Freeway sign and the SS men relative to the pergola. I can't offhand prove the tree is consistent in both, but it doesn't seem unreasonable. The pattern of major branches in the suspicious part of the tree appears consistent. If the tree in Willis 5 was altered, ~~it~~ it was very carefully done. The physical alteration of the tree is something else.

8) The Cancellare photo, like one of Murray's (Six Seconds, p. 124) seems to show a train parked some distance from the pergola. Unless there is independent evidence that there was a closer train and that it moved away, it would seem likely that this train (whether it is on the third curved spur or the next, straight, one) is the one in the Bond and Nix photos. Why not?

9) The tree was purportedly "in front of the train" in the Betzner photo. Does this mean that the train is definitely visible in the Betzner photo? I don't see it. This is obviously very important in deciding whether Willis 5 is okay.

10) Is figure 21 supposed to be to scale? It seems to show the right end of the second car about twice as far from the eye as the left end of the first car.

Even if the "parked" train were on the straight track (Fig. 19), the perspective shrinking would not be so drastic. (It would be even less for a train on the third curved spur.) In any case, since the Bond and Nix photos show only the top of the train, I am not sure that a "shrinking" due to perspective would be visible.

11) In my present mood, I read Bowers' testimony as further indicating that there was no train on the first spur.

I am inclined to oppose any arguments that call for delicate doctoring of relatively minor points in, e.g., Willis 5. It is my impression that standard police procedure in case an incriminating photo popped up would be simply to destroy the photo. (This sort of thing reportedly went on here in Berkeley quite often during the recent troubles.) Remember Catch-22. The amazing thing is that this sort of thing would usually work. For example, if (say) Betzner's photos had been destroyed, only a few critics would be making a fuss. And what about the babushka lady? It can be argued that sophisticated federal agencies wouldn't work that way, but if I had been in charge of getting rid of incriminating photos I think I could have made it look like the Dallas police did it, in more or less their usual fashion. Retouching is too much trouble, certainly for something as relatively minor as a train used for the getaway. (As Fred noted, the train's presence in itself is not suspicious.) Obviously, that is not a rational bias on my part; hard evidence could convince me that some of the photos were retouched. But I think my arguments are worth consideration.

The objections raised in these notes are based mainly on my reading of the Probe article. I have not seen the 80 slides on which the analysis is made. I am confident that I would withdraw many of these objections if I were to study the matter further. I think that Fred's basic point, that a train may have been used by some of the assassins to escape, is quite plausible, regardless of exactly where the train was, when it left the area, or whether Willis 5 was touched up.

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