

Rt. 8, Rt. 12 after 8/16
Frederick, Md. 21701
8/12/75

Mr. Russell Stetler
424 North St.,
Oakland, Cal. 94609

Dear Mr. Stetler,

This will no doubt confirm all the fine things you have heard about me and more than satisfy you that my reputation for diplomacy and tact are more than deserved.

Jim Lesar has sent me a copy of your 8/4/75 letter and two unnumbered pages, one headed intro, the other apparently the conclusion.

You may recall that my agreement to the selection of my work that you sought was less than enthusiastic. If I did not then express misgivings I had them, primarily based on the title and the selection of my work you found appropriate to that title. His told me that the "politics" were preconceptions to which all would be tailored. While this is by no means unique, it is not scholarly, it is less than intellectual honesty, and it is the last thing the hope of any real accomplishment on this subject now requires. That it has withstood all the ravings of all the experts to this point shames the earlier wonders of the world.

From this brevity I could, without repetition or irrelevance, spend an entire day and not fully respond to your question, "have we not omitted anything important or if we have not said anything which is not accurate."

The indulgence of the vanities and prejudices of your colleagues required an initial omission of what detached people would find important. There is no point in addressing that or other omissions, part of which come from the sublimity of ignorance, factual and scientific. They can't be accidental.

I don't really care what you say and do not say about this matter. I know enough about the field and have had experiences enough with most of the people to be without expectation of substantial work and to anticipate the probability of pot-boiling, with or without recognition of it, from the changed climate. So I'm not going to take the time to go into detail. However, if you want it, phone me, prepared to tape record it in advance. I'd prefer if you do this that you make it not earlier than 4:30 p.m. your time to let me prepare with a decent meal. Not that this, if a fair sample, might not cause its loss.

I am aware of space problems in any anthology and of the added problems of one whose main function may be essentially literary in a field of enormous scope, incredible detail, conflicting opinions and other controversies. You may feel the need to serve many interests and not be able to.

However, none of these factors justify error or the indulgence of prejudice. You assume dual responsibilities: to those you quote and to those who read your book. You owe both the best possible effort to meet these responsibilities, regardless of what may be special prejudices or self-concepts.

Beginning with the first sentence ignorance and factual error permeate this crap. The second sentence begins, "Critics...were struck by...." without date or any other identification. By critics I presume you mean here that embodiment of the ultimate in dependability, A.J. Weberman? Perhaps the genuine Garrison? All these critics did this at the same time? Which is to say their work was completed 2/15/65?

In the last graf on this page you again use the same construction, "heightened critics' curiosity..."

What you refer to was written a year and a half before any other book appeared. Prior to the publication of any other book the author of that one had, to the knowledge of at least one of your associates, started to battle for this material with Hoover.

Why not credit it, then, to the Ralph Schoemans and Dick Gregorys and Al Chapmans?

In what follows in the first graf about lead I'd expect more of a Berkeley education in physics. Even, given wartime conditions and scarcities, perhaps "components," depending on the size of the samples.

The NAAs did not "supplement" the spectro from what we do know.

I think you can get an argument in this specific case on "Two fragments cannot originate from one source unless their spectra are identical..."

To say nothing about "the certainty that all the fragments came from one gun." I didn't know the gun fragmented.

There were "a number of attempts to obtain the test results." Most were by expenditure of a postage stamp, no more. Another was insane.

The reference to my filing "a suit" under FOIA is false. I filed two.

The FBI did not "release" and it was not "73 pages of raw data from the spectrographic tests."

Nichols is not the first to claim that this stuff was "incomplete" or erroneous or incomplete. We did that, in court, before Nichols had any copies, certainly long before his statement, to which you manage not to do justice. He said much more and if you are going to quote him you should do it faithfully.

If you are going to quote what people said publicly, Wecht on May 5 was not the first and what he said is about what I'd expect: horseshit. It was then not "too early to draw conclusions as to the [data's] significance" and I had done it repeatedly and publicly prior to then. But why not be really faithful to Cyril and quote him on all this being his original work, on all the others jumping on his bandwagon, on his desire to sell tickets to it?

The note you added to the conclusions says that it was in response to the first case filed under the amended act that the act ~~was~~ was amended.

Well, I guess magic doesn't end with the magic bullet.

From earlier correspondence with others of fixed mind and opinions and self-concepts I'd expected the reflection of hangups. But so virtuous a display of common ignorance and irresponsible error does surprise me.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

P.S. The omissions are serious. I'll not waste time on them. I'll address them in my own way, my own time and my own work.

RUSSELL STETLER & TRACY THOMPSON
424 NORTH STREET, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94609

August 4, 1975

Mr. James Lesar
1231 Fourth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Lesar,

I enclose a xerox of the introductory and concluding notes which Paul Hoch and I wrote to situate your piece on the spectrographic evidence in the assassinations anthology which Peter Dale Scott, Hoch, and I have edited. We'd be grateful if you would let us know if we have omitted anything important or if we have said anything which is not accurate. Otherwise, this is simply for your information and requires no reply -- we appreciate that you are very busy!

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Russell Stetler

intro to Jim Lesar on the spectro evidence

The FBI performed ^{spectrographic} comparisons on certain bullet fragments found in the wounds of President Kennedy and Governor Connally and on larger fragments found in the limousine floor and on a hospital stretcher. Critics of the Warren Commission were struck by the limited claims expressed in the language of the Hearings and of supporting FBI statements. An FBI report to the Dallas police, for example, notes that the tests show the lead in the fragments in question is "similar" -- not that all components of the core are or are not present in identical amounts. In a letter to the Commission's General Counsel, J. Lee Rankin, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover referred to the more sensitive Neutron Activation Analyses which supplemented the spectro tests. He indicated that it was not possible to tell which of the larger fragments any particular minute fragment came from, since there was no significant difference between the larger fragments. But Hoover failed to comment on the more important question of whether any of the minute fragments did not come from the larger ones.

The technique of spectrographic analysis is to induce the chemical elements of a sample to emit a spectrum, which is then photographed. Analysis of the spectrum reveals which elements are present and in what percentages. Two fragments cannot originate from one source unless their spectra are identical in the elements revealed and in the percentages of each element. Identity under such analysis is necessary, but not sufficient, to establish the common origin of two fragments. Thus, one set of findings in the FBI tests would be consistent with the Warren Report's finding of a lone gunman, without establishing the certainty that all the fragments came from one gun. But any other findings would conclusively disprove the Report's conclusion.

In the case of the spectro tests, the Commission did not follow its usual procedure of introducing each report into evidence as a Commission Exhibit. Instead, an FBI ballistics expert was asked to describe the results of the tests and to confirm that the report would remain in the permanent files of the FBI. The absence of the data from the Commission's files and the peculiar wording of all references to the tests heightened critics' curiosity and prompted a number of attempts to obtain the test results. Author Harold Weisberg ultimately filed a suit under the Freedom of Information Act.

His lawyer, James Lesar, describes the resulting legal battle.

concluding note to Lesar on spectro evidence

In April 1975, the FBI released 73 pages of raw data from the spectrographic tests to Harold Weisberg. Another researcher who has been seeking access to the physical evidence, Dr. John Nichols, claims that the evidence which has been released "is incomplete, contains errors, and has essential factors missing." On May 5, Dr. Cyril Wecht declared that "it is too early to draw conclusions as to the data's significance." At this writing, Weisberg is persisting in his court case to achieve (and certify) full disclosure.

This concluding note was revised by the addition of the following sentence at the beginning:

"In response to Executive Branch obstructionism in this and other cases, in November 1974 Congress amended the Freedom of Information Act to limit the use of the exemptions."

Dear Jim,

8/12/75

If you have any objection to this letter to Stetler, just don't mail it. There is no mail I can make prior to meeting with you tomorrow anyway.

No, I did not write it in anger. I do have objectives other than angering Paul. I'll explain them, including the emotional ones.

I told you to begin with that this would be an angled anthology. It was immediately apparent also that the other objectives, while the anthologists may have told themselves otherwise, was crass commercialism: to take advantage of the current situation without making any kind of significant contribution to worthwhile objectives.

The personalization of Paul's dislikes, which stem from exactly this kind of criticism of his earlier stupidities, is barely hidden. I decided not to ignore that and to let Stetler, whether or not Scott, be aware of it. Whether or not he believes it.

The writing is much worse than you indicated. The error is what would have shocked Howard when he was only 15. Not all of it is careless error. Paul's refusal to go to the library for utterly spurious reasons is one clue. He really doesn't know this stuff or this aspect of the evidence.

This is what really shocks me. The rest I'd more or less expected.

I have no intention of telling them what they've omitted in this area. The book won't do enough good anyway. I have learned the extreme to which Paul will go and I don't want to tempt him. (No, I don't mean in this book.) His ego is much offended from the more than justified clobbering he's gotten in the past when he has attempted his own writing. (How bad was another shock, beginning with concept.) It is my purpose to offend it more. I don't care what he thinks but maybe, just maybe, it will do him some good because he has two others two face on this and there is no mail separation.

I'll go into a little of this with you, but for your information only.

The essential comparisons are ignored entirely. They have to do with the other evidence entirely omitted and with the jacket. With lead, particularly when it was scarce, and with the kind of stuff Musso used it is not at all impossible that there was cheap and poor mixing, within any batch. I take it that whatever Guinn concluded comes from something like this.

Good lead was so scarce then we used to save empty toothpaste tubes for salvage.

However, this was not true of the jackets or the shells. Nobody ever mentions the shells. (I did, in WW.) Or the gunpowder. The mixing with these components is much finer.

But he doesn't even mention the clothing. Or the curbstones. Or Windsfeld.

Don't even specify the incompleteness. I'd rather leave them alone with their possible embarrassment. Besides, it is better for the few serious workers to get an accurate reading on these guys and their actual knowledge. There is no excuse for Scott in this, either.

I've taken some awfully chickenshit criticism from Paul, almost without exception over imaginary errors. It has other inspiration, whatever it may be. I also regard his behavior on WW IV as entirely unethical. He also wasted much time by it and we do not and then did not have that time. He may have cost us some chances for the ancillary rights, and I'd include Rolling Stone on this. I know of no standard by which what he then did can be considered honorable. I may say nothing about this but I was stunned that he would even think of it. More after I offered to make him co-author.... He is one thing when it comes to poring over records and trying to find some. He is, from what I've seen, entirely different when he puts his own stuff on paper or has political thoughts. ...By any measure this stuff is atrocious. Let them alone with it unless they toy with your own words. Best,