

AFTER THE ASSASSINATION

Sir,—John Sparrow states in his article "After the Assassination" (December 14), that Mark Lane and I "worked together for a time on their investigations". This statement is completely false and without foundation. I never worked, cooperated or was associated with Mark Lane. I am sure that this was an honest mistake on Mr. Sparrow's part, and he did not intend to impute guilt by association to me, but I do not think that he would want such a fiction presented as fact under his name.

I should also like to point out that his charge that I misquoted some of the Commission lawyers is at least questionable. To be sure, the fact that I took notes during my interviews and submitted these notes as part of my thesis research is not in itself a reason to presume that the notes were accurate. But neither can the protest of these lawyers, made more than a year after the interviews and without the benefit of notes, be taken at face value. Some evidence of this problem can in fact be found in the example Mr. Sparrow cites: Joseph Ball claimed that I had interviewed him "once only, for about ten minutes in the lobby of a hotel". No doubt Mr. Ball was sincere in his memory of the event, but when I later told him that we had breakfast together in the Regency Hotel in N.Y. with a client of his on June 24, 1965, he admitted that he must have been mistaken. In any case, I believe Mr. Sparrow is quite right in suggesting that interviews are not the best evidence of the conditions under which the Commission worked. After my book was published a good deal of further evidence was released from the National Archives which, I believe, supports the conclusion I reached that the staff laboured under severe time pressure in writing the reports. The payroll records, for example, show that most of the staff lawyers worked less than half-time, and many of the lawyers who had conducted the field investigation had left before the Report was written. I should also point out that there also was some evidence that the lawyers had paid more attention to some problems than I had gathered from my interviews.

One final point. Mr. Sparrow's charges that my argument that the Commission suffered from a conflict in purposes was based on an out-of-context quotation. However, he neglects to say that I state this in my book: "Although the Commission's discussion of this problem gives some insight into the Commission's dominant purpose, conclusions cannot be based on what are, in fact, selected and possibly out-of-context statements. . . . The dominant purpose becomes clear not so much from the dialogue as from the Commission's subsequent course of action." I don't think, therefore, I was as guilty of deceiving the reader as Mr. Sparrow suggests.

EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN,
 295 Harvard Street, Cambridge, Mass.

Sir,—On December 14 Mr. John Sparrow has succinctly described my book *Oswald: The Truth* as "a compound of bad logic, bad English, bad temper, and bad taste".

I plead guilty to the second count.

English is not my mother tongue and whatever I managed to learn of it is American idiom, not the King's English. And my accent is surely the most atrocious ever heard on either side of the Atlantic.

As to the charge of bad temper, I doubt that anyone personally acquainted with me would ever describe me as bad-tempered. However, it is true that, as a writer, I am apt to be carried away by strong feelings when confronted with flagrant fraud, injustice and official misconduct.

The question of taste is hard to argue, but it seems to me that Mr. Sparrow misuses the term in this connexion. Whether Lee Harvey Oswald or his accusers are the real criminals in this case, is not a matter of taste. Rather it is a matter of information, perception and good judgment—in all of which Mr. Sparrow seems to be sadly lacking.

In order to settle the question as to which of us two is guilty of bad logic, I hereby challenge Mr. Sparrow to a duel (of words) before a panel of independent judges, at any time of his choosing.

JOACHIM JOESTEN,
 Munich 23, Dreschstr. 5, Germany.

* Mr. John Sparrow writes:—I gladly accept Mr. Epstein's disclaimer about his having worked with Mr. Mark Lane. I was basing myself on a letter from Mr. Lane to *The Observer* (October 2, 1966) in which he spoke of a "working relationship" between them which continued for a time until it was terminated by Mr. Epstein. I can well understand Mr. Epstein's wish to free himself from the imputation of "guilt by association" with Mr. Lane, and I hope I made it clear that I regarded the latter's work as being on an altogether lower level than Mr. Epstein's.

As for the use made by Mr. Epstein of his interview with members of the Commission and their staff, I certainly acquit Mr. Epstein (as I did in my article) of deliberate misquotation, and I will content myself here with saying that it would have been in every way better if he had submitted his "quotations" to their authors for checking before publishing them.

I feel somewhat disarmed by the genial tone of Mr. Joesten's letter. I certainly would not wish to criticize him personally for faults of English or of temper, or indeed for lack of taste. But I was criticizing his books, and in them he repeatedly allows indignation to carry him beyond what seem to me, making full allowance for the importance of the subject, to be the limits of controversial decency.

As for faulty logic: I suspect that I should enjoy a verbal duel with Mr. Joesten but, even if it were possible to arrange one, I do not think it would serve a useful purpose, for I feel as sure that he would not convince me of the logical cogency of his argument as I am that I would not convince him of the logical cogency of my own. I am content that readers of his books and of my article should judge between us.

Sir,—The Dallas demonologists have had the field essentially to themselves for too long largely—as John Sparrow noted in his superb analysis (December 14)—because few of us have the fanatical energy necessary for an elaborate demonstration that the world is not flat.

There is one point that Warden Sparrow did not make which seems to me vital to any non-paranoid assessment of that awful day. Every one of the plot theories must necessarily rely on the inconceivable connivance of one key man: Robert F. Kennedy, then Attorney General of the United States.

Those of us who have any knowledge of the relationship between President Kennedy and his brother have assumed from the outset that had there been the slightest trace of a conspiracy, the Attorney General would not have slept or eaten until he had reached the bottom of the matter.

And any fair analysis of Senator Robert Kennedy's abilities, his character, and of the resources at his disposal as Attorney General, would indicate that if there was a conspiracy, he would have pursued its protagonists to the ends of the earth.

Admittedly, this is not a legal argument, but a sane society operates largely on common-sensical notions of trust and leaves conspiratorial black masses to a priesthood of marginal paranoids.

JOHN P. ROCHE,
 Special Consultant to the President,
 The White House, Washington.

Sir,—I wish to congratulate you for publishing Mr. John Sparrow's convincing and woefully needed dissection of the pretentious nonsense that has been published about President Kennedy's assassination.

This kind of demonology automatically springs up after any such fateful event, but it has been dismaying to find reputable scholars and responsible edi-

tors permitting themselves to be caught up in the process.

I suppose that the reason is simply that it is so appalling for human beings to find that mere haphazard chance can bring about such lamentable consequences that they are driven to seek some meaning, even the worst if need be, to account for its having happened. Thus even the suggestion that the C.I.A., a conspiracy of Texas millionaire right-wingers, a band of anti-Castroites, or the like is "behind" the assassination is preferable to the thought that one poor, twisted misfit could all by himself end John F. Kennedy's life. But alas, such could and did happen.

I could wish that Mr. Sparrow's review essay might be reprinted in every newspaper and magazine in the United States, the British Isles and the Continent. You have performed a real service to the truth and to the memory of President Kennedy.

LOUIS D. RUBIN, Jr.,
 The University of North Carolina at
 Chapel Hill.