

Get the distinct impression from this article that Thompson is gay

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VILLAGE VOICE

Josiah Thompson Six Seconds in Dallas: This Void of Silence

by A. D. Coleman

I sat in the lobby of New York's Drake Hotel, waiting for philosophy professor Josiah Thompson, author of two just-published scholarly treatises, "The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard's 'Peet-donymous Works,'" and "Six Seconds in Dallas," a scientific investigation of the Kennedy assassination. Suddenly, an effeminate young man was vigorously pumping my hand. "Hi," he said earnestly. "I'm Tim Thompson."

Heading for the bar, we made small talk until, recovering from the shock and giving him a slow once-over, I asked, "Gay, how old are you anyhow?" He

winced, the grimace of those who will all their lives be asked to show their identification. "Thirty-two, I know," he added. "I look 16." Which he does. "I would have guessed you were in your middle 20," I lied. Think—there is no affection in his nickname, he wears it unselfconsciously — appears a most unlikely metaphysician.

In New York for several weeks to publicize "Six Seconds in Dallas," he had been making the rounds of radio and television talk shows. The experience had not left him grunted. "It's like charades," he complained. "On

one show I came out after Paul Anka. You know . . . And here he is, ladies and gentlemen, Tim Thompson, with his Kennedy Assassination Act!" He shrugged, grinning. The mirror tabletop, reflecting light upward onto his face, carried deep shadows, an effect reminiscent of his holding flashlight beneath their chins to create fearsome masks. It turned Tim implicitly satanic, a figure stepped from a Tlapaloach. "I'm outgrowing Camus and Kierkegaard," he responded to a question about his other book. "They're for the young. I want to do some work on Nietzsche."

Heading toward Dallas by plane, I realized that I very much wanted Texas to be different. Partly because I had simply assumed that it would be (accepting the eastern prejudice against the Southwest, and especially against Texas, where our dream died and our nightmare was born). Partly, too, because the diagnostician in me yearned to point a clinical finger at the cancer: there it is, the source of disease; slice it out, leave no trace, all will be well. But Texas is no different. No different at all.

In Dallas, a week before I sat

talking with Tim, I watched a TV program on the local drug scene. The report was titled "Is Dallas Turned On?" and the answer was affirmative. Acid, grass, amphetamines, and glue-sniffing are widespread, the last alarmingly so among sub-teens.

Someday, should we survive, someone may do a sociological study on the link between Kennedy's murder and the sudden surfacing and growth of drug use among the young. In retrospect, it seems obvious. The college-educated segment of the New Generation grew up worshipping two versions of the romantic hero: the idealistic man of action (Camus) and the poet-mystic (Kierkegaard). For many young people, Kennedy's death marked the end of the first romantic dream. (By this I do not mean to imply that the dream was shattered; on the contrary, that it was fulfilled. Both romantic dreams, after all, demand the premature, sacrificial death

per, hippies, incense, long hair, and bells. After the TV show ended, during the station break, a disembodied male voice announced solemnly, "It's 10 p. m. Do you know where your children are?" The temptation was to laugh and think that could only happen in Texas. But, back in New York, public service posters on the subway were playing a game called Gullt, Gullt. Who's Got the Gullt? "Don't help a good boy go bad," they warned us. "Take your car keys with you." A finer line-drawer than them any shaky-handed self is needed to distinguish between those two.

Tim and his wife, Nancy (to whom he dedicates "Six Seconds in Dallas"), drove down to Washington for Kennedy's funeral. Describing the experience, a stringing note of deep and painful sorrow echoed in his voice, and, behind that, an unrelieved pang of personal loss. Did Kennedy represent anything to him, and did

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he find Kennedy's death symbolic? Thompson's tone altered, a hard sophistication (imitation Bogart unselfishly) attempting to cover what he felt. "Yes,

it was the death of taste, style, perception, wit, ideals — all that mass media stuff . . . is that what you mean?" The challenge in Tink's words was unmistakable; he was daring me to charge him with emotional involvement in the event. Touched, I let the gauntlet lie.

"Six Seconds in Dallas" achieved book form by accident. Struck by discrepancies in the Warren Commission Report, Tink began investigating on his own, and put his findings into publishable form only after meeting the editor-in-chief of Bernard Geis Associates, who pressed him to do so. He felt no disparity between his work as a philosophy lecturer and as a detective. "It was part of me, natural," he said of the book. "You know Noam Chomsky's essay on the responsibility of the intellectual? Well, there you are. The duty of the intellectual is always to tell the truth, especially in times of crisis." He did not question this as a *modus operandi*; while he talked, there was no differentiation between the idealistic and the pragmatic, though he is quick to separate pragmatism from opportunism.

(It is hard to describe Tink, and I sit here wondering if I am conveying any inkling of the man. He looks absurdly young, talks brilliantly, has a quiet but sharp sense of humor. He is very Midwestern in his earnestness; he holds what is now considered an almost-naïve conviction, that there is knowable truth which can be determined. What is most puzzling about him, I suspect, is not so much the seeming naïveté but that he is aware that others may react negatively to it and doesn't care. Not only doesn't he care; it amuses him tremendously on a metaphysical plane. Yet there is no trace of smugness or self-satisfaction . . .)

Metastasis: the transfer of disease from one part of the body to another with development of the characteristic lesion in the new location, as in cancer.

Almost two years ago, when I was playing and singing in a now-defunct San Francisco electric band, our lead guitarist and I composed a gentle, melancholy ballad in an Elizabethan style. This was the last stanza:

In this void where silence

reigns,

I would cry a killer's name:
Your false king wears robes
his knives once tore.

Yes, we heroes drop your
arms,

And we scholars close your
books;

Now we minstrels slip out
through your door.

We've nothing left to offer any-
more.

Over the past year, I have met few people who do not suspect that Lyndon Baines Johnson is implicated in the plot to kill Kennedy, either before the act or *ex post facto*. "MacBird!" ran to overflow audiences for many months. Some critics of the Warren Commission Report have hinted at the possibility. The Garrison investigation pursues its steady course despite hysterical attempts to discredit it, and, in the latest issue of *Ramparts*, Garrison himself states that Johnson has been of notable help in covering up evidence. Paul Krassner ran a fictitious excerpt from the Manchester book in

which, Johnson fucked Kennedy's corpse through the throat wound, and people believed it.

The speculation is widespread. It makes top-notch cocktail party conversation. But it goes no further. No one is outraged. No one really cares, one way or the other.

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Tink Thompson does not believe it. His opinion of Johnson is low, but he cannot conceive of his being involved in the assassination. At any rate, such unscientific speculations are irrelevant to his goals and purposes as an investigator and author. "Six Seconds in Dallas" is what he, and his publishers, describe as a "micro-study" of the assassination. ("I'm proud of that title," Tink said of "Six Seconds in Dallas." "Thought it up myself. That's all the book is about—what happened in those six seconds.")

The title, like his argument, is concise and accurate. Concentrating lucidly on the six seconds during which the fatal shots were fired, using existing evidence and no speculation, Thompson proves that those shots were fired by three gunmen. He proves no more—and no less. For the validity of his argument discredits the very foundation of the Warren Commission Report, based as it is on the theory that Oswald acted alone.

Thompson's work, unlike that of his predecessors, is not speculative; he is not theorizing. "Six Seconds in Dallas" does not concern itself at all with the who and why of the act. Tink Thompson was after truth, scientific, factual truth, since he feels that is the only basis from which answers to the other questions can be deduced. So he eliminated from his investigation all but the definable moments of truth: the six seconds in which the act was committed. Using strictly scientific methods—analyses of the timing of the shots, trajectories, angles of bullet entry, effects of impact—and working primarily from the evidence recorded by film, he proves beyond question

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that the shots were fired by three assassins. His conclusions are not based on flimsy hypothetical coincidences. They are derived from the recorded evidence—much of it in the Zapruder film—by application of the fundamental laws of physics. In preparing the book, Thompson became an autodidactic expert in various phases of photoanalysis, and most of his argument is supported by the photographs.)

As I noted above, much of his thesis—immensely readable, enjoyable simply as the smooth and logical functioning of a mind invested with honed intelligence and clarity of perception—is based upon the original copy of the Zapruder film, which is in the possession of Life magazine. Thompson had much opportunity to study that film when working for Life as a consultant on the assassination. He claims that careful examination of that copy (the Warren Commission worked from a copy of a copy of the original) provides clear evidence that the shots could not all have been fired by the same man. He expected Life to release that news over a year ago; his book was written after their decision not to run the story. Recently, in a bizarre attempt at self-protection, Life refused permission to reproduce four crucial frames from the Zapruder film in "Six Seconds," despite an offer from Thompson and Gels by which Life would have received all profits from the book in return for the right to use those four frames. Life refused, and the magazine has filed suit against the book; if they win, it will be impounded and, presumably, destroyed.

The four frames in question show clearly that, among other things, Governor Connally was struck by a different shot than that which hit the President.

Since the single-bullet theory—necessary to support the lone-assassin argument—is vital to the Warren Commission's conclusion, actual photographic proof to the contrary shatters the structure of that report completely.

"When I saw Life's original of the Zapruder film," Tink told me, "I knew the case was broken right then and there. So I called Don Preston, executive editor at Gels, and told him to forget the book, Life would be breaking the story. That was in the fall of 1966."

Musing about the lawsuit, he said calmly, "I have no expectations of making any money off this book." He did not seem disappointed; he was astonished enough by the \$500 Gels gave him as an advance on the book, and the expense account Gels allowed him during his publicity tour. (He insisted on paying for our drinks, and went so far as to tip the hat-check girl for my coat, for all the world like a young kid with a \$5 bill Christmas present.) "If this book gets those four frames spring from Life, it will have succeeded," he continued. "If those are released, the pressure for reopening the case will become irresistible. And if I'm bluffing, Life can call me on it." How long, I wondered, would he go on talking, trying to get someone to take action? "If the case doesn't break by February, fuck it." That was one of the few four-letter words he uttered all evening; in context, it was shocking in its bitterness.

By then we'd both had two drinks, and the conversation—at least my end of it—was beginning to unravel. In a last-ditch attempt to stick to the subject, I asked what effect he expected the book to have on the public. "If I were the man in the street," he spoke eagerly, "and I read what I've written here, I'd damn well want to DO something!" What, I said softly. "Write my congressman, call someone, send letters to the Editor of the Times, shout . . . you know, that was a hell of a

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good question." Then I asked him to autograph my review copy of the book, which he did with a childish delight, and I walked out into New York and the winter street, leaving Tink in the lobby, collecting his messages at the front desk.

Downtown Dallas is much like downtown San Francisco and downtown New York. There is more brooding violence in the East Village. In downtown Dallas, at a restaurant called the Cattleman, I ate the best steak I had ever tasted—perfect meat, superbly cooked; meat which had been understood. The diners around me were dressed in fashionable clothes, tasteful and sedate. Their necks were not red. They were the norm; the walking Marlboro ads I spotted occasionally appeared more and more anomalous as the week wore on.

After dinner I walked to Dealey Plaza. It was a chill, clear night, bright and crisp. The Texas School Book Depository, the overpass, the grassy knoll, stood moonlit in silence. They were invested with no magic, no flickering aura of evil, no looming atmosphere of historicity. It was all merely, disappointingly, there. No tears came. I walked back to my hotel.