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“Conspiracy Theories”

By Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule:

A Decidedly Negative Review

[Their article was originally dated January 15, 2008, then updated to January 18, 2010. The electronic copy is at <http://ssrn.com/abstracts=1084585>.]

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Many millions of people hold conspiracy theories; they believe that powerful people have worked together in order to withhold the truth about some important practice or terrible event.

—Sunstein and Vermeule.

A lawyer without books would be like a workman without tools.

—Thomas Jefferson

To the astonishment of many, Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, both on the faculty of the Harvard Law School, have recently proposed that we substantially subvert the First Amendment (freedom of speech), purportedly to advance national security. Even more worrisome is that Sunstein has joined the Obama administration in a regulatory role: Sunstein is the Administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. [His appointment was greeted with controversy among progressive legal scholars and environmentalists. Sunstein's confirmation had been blocked for some time because of allegations about his political and academic views. See, for example, his Wikipedia entry at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cass_Sunstein.]

His name has even been bandied about as a candidate for the Supreme Court

[<http://www.wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=96775>; this online article cites the Atlantic Monthly as a source for the Supreme Court proposition.] Even his role in the White House concerns legal scholars insofar as he favors the US president (and his staff, presumably including Sunstein himself) over judges as interpreters of federal laws.

But let us turn to the article itself. Most curiously, the apparent definition (quoted above) by Sunstein and Vermeule (S&V) irresponsibly evades the primary issue of whether a given conspiracy theory is true or false. That profound lapse is not faced until page 4, but even then that focus lasts only for the blink of an eye. This distinction—between truth and falsehood—is so elemental that the title of their article would more informatively be entitled, “False Conspiracy Theories.”

To compound this unnecessary ambiguity, S&V nowhere offer any epistemic standards for identifying false conspiracy theories that might lie hidden in a mixed bag of conspiracy theories. The reader is unavoidably, and helplessly, left with nothing save the authors’ list—and even these (presumed exemplars) are not well-defined. Worse than that, some of their items are wrongly identified, i.e., conspiracies labeled by them as false actually appear to be true conspiracies—or at least, well-confirmed, as we shall soon see.

S&V cite a Zogby poll showing that 49% of New York City residents believe that US government officials knew in advance of the 9/11 attacks. They presume this data demonstrates that action must be taken (to correct the views of these miscreants). But Steven Pinker reminds us of polls showing that 25% of Americans believe in witches, 50% in ghosts, 50% in the devil; 50% believe that the book of Genesis is literally true, 69% believe in angels, 87% believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and 96% believe in a god or universal spirit [<http://www.assassinationresearch.com/v5n1/v5n1mantik.pdf>, footnote 26]. These polls suggest that US adults are generally prone to false beliefs. So should we take corrective action on these other myths, too? And, if that is the case, where does this corrective action end? Must we likewise correct all rumor, speculation, and gossip, too?

Quite tellingly, S&V do not state the obvious: 9/11 was officially declared by the Bush administration—the American government—to be a conspiracy: it was claimed to be a true conspiracy. Insofar as S&V do not clearly distinguish between true and false conspiracies, the reader may immediately wonder if their chief recommendations, which we shall soon consider, are also intended to apply to conspiracy theories that are true.

Eventually (p. 4), S&V advance their official definition of a conspiracy theory:

it is an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who have also managed to conceal their role.

Astonishingly, this definition still does not address the matter of truth vs. falsehood. In other words, by their literal definition, a real event manipulated by powerful individuals (whose role remained hidden) would also qualify for conspiracy mongering—even though it was a bona fide conspiracy. [An excellent example of a true conspiracy that meets their definition may be found in *False Profits: The Inside Story of BCCI, the World's Most Corrupt Financial Empire* (1992), by Peter Truell and Larry Gurwin.] The reader's only option, it appears, is to trust S&V as the final arbiters regarding which conspiracy theories are acceptable. But they seem to require no facts, nor do they list any authoritative maps for use when the road bifurcates into truth, on the right, and into falsehood, on the left.

Furthermore, to make matters as hopeless as possible, as their very first example of a conspiracy theory, they cite the belief that the CIA was responsible for the assassination of JFK. Due to the untimely (for S&V) publication of *Inside the Assassination Records Review Board* (2009), by Douglas Horne, their favorite example appears to have suffered a mortal blow. [Also see *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (2000), edited by James Fetzer, which includes the results of my own nine visits to the National Archives.] In fact, Horne was a government insider, who served on the ARRB. In view of S&V's extremely high regard for government intervention (see below) by "well-intentioned" individuals (of whom Horne is surely one), Horne's role as a government insider is their ultimate *bête noire*.

Their second example of a purportedly false conspiracy is TWA Flight 800. This, too, is presented as a done deed—no evidence is offered. But the reader—and S&V, too—might wish to consult Kristina Borjesson's account of this event. [See *into the Buzz saw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of the Free Press* (2002), edited by Kristina Borjesson, pp. 103-149. Borjesson's media credits are many: WBAI, CNN, CBS, PBS, and National Geographic Explorer]. Unfortunately for them, S&V's conclusion about TWA Flight 800 is far from clear-cut.

S&V (p. 4), surprisingly, cite the Martin Luther King, Jr., assassination as another example (of a false conspiracy), thereby ignoring the jury verdict that it was, in fact, the opposite—it was a true conspiracy [New York Times, December 10, 1999, p. 25]. That two lawyers would so unabashedly ignore the official result of a jury trial is so extraordinary that diligent readers may well wonder if their oversight was not deliberate.

S&V next cite the Paul Wellstone plane crash (as supposedly engineered by Republican politicians) as another conspiracy theory. I have no special insight into Republicans, but there are astonishingly many paradoxes about this crash, of which these are merely a small sample: (1) persistently misleading reports about the weather at the time of the crash; (2) the absence of a distress call; (3) the miraculously early responses of the FBI; (4) the FBI's refusal to permit photography by fire or ambulance teams; (5) odd meteorological phenomena consistent with the use of a directed-energy weapon; and (6) a statement by one signatory of the official report that the NTSB actually "had no idea" what had caused the crash. Three scholars (with four doctorates among them) also reached a conclusion opposite to that of the NTSB. [See *American Assassination* (2004) by Four Arrows, Ph.D., Ed. D., and James Fetzer, Ph.D.; and "The NTSB Failed Wellstone," *From the Wilderness* (2005), by James Fetzer, Ph.D. and John Costella, Ph.D., which may be accessed at:

http://www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/070605_wellstone.shtml.]

S&V cite the "Operation Northwoods" escapade as a potential true conspiracy (p. 4). To their citations, I would add the more comprehensive *Body of Secrets* by James Bradford (2001), which includes 613 pages and 612 footnotes. Incidentally, Douglas Horne, the author of *Inside the ARRB* (2009), turns out to be the individual who was responsible for the release of the Northwoods documents.

S&V state clearly (pp. 4-5) that true accounts—i.e., true conspiracy theories—should not be undermined. In view of the above examples—which are their own examples—the reader is entitled to wonder why the authors do not take their own advice: i.e., why are they themselves undermining belief in true (or at least well-confirmed) conspiracy theories? This dilemma only emphasizes their crucial epistemic omission: How are true conspiracy theories to be winnowed from those that are false?

S&V suppose that conspiracy theories are a subset of false beliefs, thereby promptly negating their concession that some may be true (p. 5). Their examples of false beliefs include: (1) prolonged exposure to sunlight is healthy and (2) climate change is false. But again, as usual with S&V, there is another side to the story: in view of the national plague of vitamin D deficiency (which includes me and my own son, who had clinical rickets) some sunlight exposure is now promoted by medical experts as commendable, especially in winter and in northern latitudes. Prolonged exposure under those specific conditions is likely to be quite safe and beneficial.

Moreover, although global climate change does seem likely, Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner [*Super Freakonomics* (2009), pp. 165-203] emphasize (1) that methane is 25 times more potent than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas and also (2) that water vapor is actually the major greenhouse gas, but it is not taken into account in current models—and it may not be possible to do so until 2020. So, even if Earth is heating up, it may be unwise to focus exclusively on CO₂ and the associated carbon credits. More research is clearly needed.

S&V then ask whether conspiracy theories are "justified" (p. 5). Here they stumble into a semantic bog. Perhaps they meant—and should have said— "self-justified." Instead they talk as if a belief in Santa Claus might be "justified." (I would instead have used "acceptable.") They then use "warranted" as a synonym for "justified," which hardly clarifies the matter. My dictionary defines "justify" as showing or proving something to be right. That is clearly not how S&V use the word. For interested readers, Alan Sokal has provided an excellent discussion of "justification." [See *Beyond the Hoax* (2008), p. 200. Also see *Against Method* (1993) by Paul Feyerabend, pp. 147-149.] In this same paragraph, S&V describe Earth as having "fires" at its core; in my four decades of reading *Scientific American*, I have never encountered such exciting geological news.

S&V claim that a conspiracy theory typically overlooks the role of random events (p. 6). For example, I would claim that a T-shaped inscription (with uniquely peculiar radiographic properties) on the JFK autopsy X-rays proves—prima facie—that this X-ray must be a copy. [See:

<http://www.assassinationresearch.com/v5n1/v5n1mantik.pdf>.

Also see PowerPoint slides from my November 2009 lecture in Dallas at:

<http://www.assassinationscience.com/> and <http://www.assassinationresearch.com/>]

This, in turn, proves a conspiracy, both to produce such a copy and also to lose the original (it has in fact disappeared). That the process of copying also permitted a critical alteration to the X-ray is yet another concern.

So, was this strange property (of the T-shaped inscription) produced randomly, as S&V may want suggest? I would claim that no competent radiologist, after viewing this, would accept a random event as an explanation—that would require a total suspension of rationality. Therefore, not all conspiracies require consideration of randomness as a cause—that would be the grossest sophistry.

To explain the common acceptance of conspiracy theories, S&V claim that most folks prefer them because they are simpler causal stories. That is a peculiar perspective for them to adopt. For example, would it not be simpler to claim that Oswald did it than to invoke a host of other players in a JFK assassination conspiracy and cover up? And it certainly does not turn out to be emotionally more reassuring to conclude that 9/11 was perpetrated by the government than by 19 Islamic fundamentalists. Their position verges on incoherence.

They assert that secrets cannot be kept in open societies (p. 6), but that notion is highly suspect. I have discussed this issue at some length [see *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (2000), edited by James Fetzer, pp. 336-338; also see many other citations there]. Examples include the Manhattan Project, My Lai, the Pentagon Papers, radiation experiments of the 1940s (at blue ribbon institutions), Tic-Tac-Dough, and Twenty-One. Also see the many examples cited by Borjesson [*Into the Buzz saw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of the Free Press* (2002), edited by Kristina Borjesson]. The reader is also referred to *A Culture of Secrecy* (1998), edited by Athan G. Theoharis; *The Secret War Against the Jews* (1994), by John Loftus and Mark Aarons; and *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (2007), by Tim Weiner.

That major secrets are typically kept by bureaucracies is actually exceedingly common [see *Voltaire's Bastards* (1992), by John Ralston Saul]. In the year 2005, for example, 125 secrets were classified every minute by federal departments, while during the year of 2004, a total of 15.6 million documents were classified, at a cost of 7.2 billion dollars. [See *The New York Times* (July 3, 2005) and

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/03/politics/03secrecy.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print].

As a particularly illuminating example, the CIA was then still fighting (in the courts) to keep secret its budgets from the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s it appears that the CIA allocated 29% of its budget to “media and propaganda.” The CIA expenses per annum for propaganda in the 1970s were likely above \$285,000,000—which is more than the combined budgets of Reuters, United Press International, and the Associated Press:

[\[http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article3700.html\]](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article3700.html).

As yet another highly illuminating example, in January 1995 the Secret Service destroyed presidential survey reports of some JFK trips for the fall of 1963. This destruction occurred only after the ARRB had already warned the Secret Service not to destroy pertinent documents, and while the ARRB was drafting further requests to the Secret Service for more information about these very trips. The Secret Service also destroyed files from the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, as well as Dallas-related files (for

JFK's Dallas trip). What are the odds that this miraculous timing (of file destruction) was pure coincidence? If we are to believe S&V, the destruction (of precisely those documents wanted—from 32 years earlier) might well have been random chance. Furthermore, when the Secret Service submitted its "Final Declaration of Compliance" (September 18, 1998), it was not executed under oath, as had been expected of them [Final Report of the ARRB (September 30, 1998), p.149]. In the end, one can only wonder where S&V got their information—i.e., the notion that "secrets" cannot be kept. [Katherine Graham, who was the owner of the Washington Post for many decades, reminded a top CIA official of a fundamental fact when the Berlin Wall began to crack: "There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows." <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article3700.html>.]

S&V then offer another remarkable declaration: our press is free (p. 7). Borjesson's readers would surely develop some nagging doubts about that. In addition, though, serious doubts have been raised by Ben H. Bagdikian [The Media Monopoly (1992)] and by Noam Chomsky [Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies (1989)], among others. One quote seems particularly germane:

The media are less a window on reality than a stage on which officials and journalists perform self-scripted, self-serving fictions [The New York Times (July 29, 1994), p. A13].

S&V want to encourage trust in government; in particular, they argue that widespread belief in conspiracy theories would undercut grounds for many other beliefs (p. 7), thus implying that this would be a great loss. The issue of "second-hand knowledge" (which seems to be their focus here) is indeed a serious one [although ignored by S&V, I would suggest Second-Hand Knowledge: An Inquiry into Cognitive Authority (1983), by Patrick Wilson], but sometimes a thorough evaluation of one's beliefs can effectively cleanse the Augean stables of the mind. Insofar as public trust in government goes, that has dismally and dramatically decreased since the JFK assassination—and for good reason. [See:

<http://www.roaddrivers.org/whywedontrustgov.htm> and

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025062.pdf>.]

It is a mystery why the authors have donned blinders for that rather plain fact. They state that no famine has ever occurred in a nation with a free press and democratic elections, which may even be true, but they also argue that it would be excessive to infer that famines in authoritarian nations are a "conspiracy" brought about by authoritarians. Those—I suspect this includes some of my own relatives—who experienced the Ukraine famine of 1932-33 would almost certainly disagree with S&V on this historical fact. [See:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/18/ukraine-famine-russia-holodom> or and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXkgGdZC6uQ>.]

They go on to ask how conspiracy theories begin (p. 9). Stunningly, the possibility that they arise because they actually occurred in the real world is not an option for S&V. The reader might well wonder again about 9/11—how did that (official) conspiracy theory begin?

Some persons, according to S&V, cannot accept conspiracy theories because that would capsize too many of their other articles of faith (p. 10). But perhaps that is precisely why S&V lump true conspiracies with false conspiracies—i.e., because S&V themselves fear a loss of their own fundamentals of the faith. Although this country nominally believes in separation of church and state, there is, de facto, a kind of national secular religion, which is accepted by the vast majority of

Americans. This is a belief in the Founding Fathers, the Declaration of Independence (and especially the Bill of Rights as a kind of divinely inspired document), the Constitution, the righteousness of American foreign policy, that the US actually looks out for the general welfare of other nations, that our markets (at least until recently) are free, and that the US is superior to other nations in moral values.

When a new president takes the oath of office, Americans perceive this almost as a ‘religious rite,’ and the president feels that he must say, “So help me God!” As another ritual, campaign speeches, and even some State of the Union addresses—which has actually occurred precisely as I write this—often recite, “God bless America.” [See:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2004364209_domke22.html.]

To omit such phrases today can be politically dangerous. Although nominally a Presbyterian, Ronald Reagan was a prophet of this national religion:

Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely: Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan and our own countrymen held in savage captivity [<http://hnn.us/articles/45469.html>].

S&V suggest that acceptance of conspiracy theories can be countered by showing “that some, many, or most (trusted) people accept or reject the theory” (p. 11). [S&V immediately inspired in me a nonsensical vision of a meeting of the American Physical Society, at which physicists voted on the validity of the latest string theory. Of course, that would be sheer madness; physicists would never vote on this—they would merely appeal to the data. Science, after all, is not democratic (or Republican). Nonetheless, S&V would like the majority to rule on questions that should instead be decided on the basis of logic and evidence]. The whole notion of popular opinion (no matter what group) deciding a question that should rest on its merits (or perhaps even a modicum of data) is madly preposterous. Even more importantly, though, the majority of the best minds can be outrageously wrong.

For example, Robert McNamara has repeatedly described the counsel of LBJ’s “Wise Men” on Vietnam [In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (1995), pp. 196-198, 229, 309-311]. In the end, though, their advice was an utter disaster. The rioters in the streets were closer to the truth than were these “Wise Men.” Barbara W. Tuchman has also chronicled the pervasive lunacy of government [The March of Folly: from Troy to Vietnam (1984)].

S&V wonder why conspiracy theories come to be accepted, so they discuss the role of information (p. 11), the role of famous believers (p. 12), group polarization (p. 13), selection effects (p. 13), and the “...shared sense of identity and ...bonds of solidarity” (p. 13). These too, though, have all the hallmarks of our national (secular) religion, though S&V seem not to notice. Moreover, at this juncture, they should at least have offered slight obeisance to the classic study of groupthink by Irving Janis [Victims of Groupthink: a psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes (1972)], which was a pioneering venture into these matters and is still highly relevant.

S&V conclude that the government should use “counter-speech” to discredit conspiracy theories (p. 14). In view of S&V’s crippled definition and their agnostic position on truth versus falsehood, the reader might well ask if this applies to true theories as well. They propose that the government hire credible parties to engage in counter-speech. Of course, that has already been tried—nearly since the beginning of the CIA. Carl Bernstein has reported in detail on these collaborations between the

media and the CIA. [See “The CIA and the Media,” Rolling Stone (October 20, 1977), by Carl Bernstein, or visit http://tmh.floonet.net/articles/cia_press.html.]

Bernstein discovered that 400 journalists had worked for the CIA over a 25-year interval. This included distinguished reporters and even Pulitzer Prize winners. Media executives who collaborated included William Paley of CBS, Henry Luce of Time, Inc., Arthur Hays Sulzberger of the New York Times, and James Copley of the Copley News Service. Other cooperating companies included ABC, NBC, Associated Press, United Press International, Hearst Newspapers, Scripps-Howard, Newsweek, Reuters, the old Saturday Evening Post, and the New York Herald Tribune.

James Jesus (sic) Angleton—who, as the chief Oswald stage-manager, is a suspect in the JFK assassination [see Oswald and the CIA: The Documented Truth about the Unknown Relationship between the U.S. Government and the Alleged Killer of JFK (2008), by John Newman; especially read “Epilogue, 2008”]—ran his own covey of journalist-operatives “who performed sensitive and frequently dangerous assignments. Little is known about this group for the simple reason that Angleton deliberately kept only the vaguest of files” [from “The CIA and the Media,” Rolling Stone (October 20, 1977), by Carl Bernstein]. This was a classic Angleton ploy. The CIA even ran its own training school for would-be journalists.

S&V hope for a cadre of government agents (or their allies) to undermine the “crippled epistemology” of conspiracy believers (p. 15). But what if these very agents themselves have caused these “bad events”? [That federal agents have indeed acted illegally is well documented by Gerry Spence in From Freedom to Slavery (1995), pp. 27 and 50; also visit <http://www.ruby-ridge.com/gspence3.htm>.] Here is the central question: who will govern those who govern? Or is that not necessary in the world of S&V? But they do not dodge this question—in fact, they seem pleased to “assume” that the government is “well-motivated” (sic). Incidentally, an absence of oversight has already been attempted (and found sorely lacking) in the case of the CIA. [Both Harry Truman, who signed off on the CIA in 1947, as well as George Kennan, who initially sent up this trial balloon, later offered their most profound regrets.] The sequelae of this approach are spelled out in alarming detail in Legacy of Ashes by Tim Weiner.

S&V insinuate (their syntax is a bit fuzzy here) that Bush spread a false conspiracy theory (p. 16). But we don’t need to guess about lying in the White House. Eric Alterman has extensively discussed lying in the White House—When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences (2004). If presidents lie (they actually do), then what is it that guarantees that other government employees (or agencies) will tell the truth? Are they to be trusted more than the president? And, if not, who will supervise them? [S&V might also consult Official Lies: How Washington Misleads Us (1992), by James T. Bennett & Thomas Di Lorenzo. Also see:

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5421/is_n4_v59/ai_n28628633/.](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5421/is_n4_v59/ai_n28628633/)

S&V bemoan the “crippled epistemology” of conspiracy believers. Ironically, they themselves suffer from a profound, even mortal, wound in their own epistemology—i.e., they persistently ignore the difference between lies and truth, as we have repeatedly seen here. How could an epistemology be more “crippled” than that? Until S&V provide reliable guidelines for extricating truth from lies they can offer absolutely zero assistance in our ongoing conflict with terrorism. [The scientific method has been around for a few centuries and is generally considered reliable for finding truth, unless, of course, one is a postmodernist of a certain type. S&V seem virtually oblivious to its existence. On the contrary, those of us who have researched the JFK assassination (see Fetzer’s books and Horne’s five volumes) have been striving to expurgate rumor and speculation and instead substitute an objective and scientific foundation.] And, until S&V can learn from our prior experiences with “counter-speech”—as has been demonstrated by the CIA-media collaboration—they can scarcely expect an

enthusiastic reception for their views. As George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel sagely stated, "What experience and history teach is this—that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it,":

[\[http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/history2.htm\]](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/history2.htm).

Or as Shakespeare succinctly put it, "The past is prologue." [This is a paraphrase from *The Tempest*, Act 2, scene I, 245-254; the paraphrase is inscribed above an entrance to the National Archives I, an entrance that I first took to view the JFK autopsy materials.]

Rancho Mirage, CA
January 27, 2009

Addendum

Immediately after writing the above review I discovered a current article by Glenn Greenwald ["Obama confidant's spine-chilling proposal," by Glenn Greenwald (January 15, 2010) at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/index.html?story=/opinion/greenwald/2010/01/15/sunstein]. He claims that Sunstein's proposal is "...itself illegal [underlining in the original] under long-standing statutes prohibiting government 'propaganda' within the U.S., aimed at American citizens." I quote further from Greenwald:

As explained in a March 21, 2005 report by the Congressional Research Service, "publicity or propaganda" is defined by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to mean either (1) self-aggrandizement by public officials, (2) purely partisan activity, or (3) "covert propaganda." By covert propaganda, GAO means information which originates from the government but is unattributed and made to appear as though it came from a third party.

Greenwald notes that Sunstein acknowledges that some "conspiracy theories" previously dismissed as false have turned out to be true. Sunstein's examples were (1) CIA mind control experiments with LSD [as is typical of them, S&V do not cite an excellent reference (quickly plucked from my bookshelf)—*Journey into Madness: The True Story of Secret CIA Mind Control and Medical Abuse* (1989), by Gordon Thomas], (2) DOD plots to commit terrorism within the US with intention to blame Castro [see *Body of Secrets* (2001), by James Bradford], and (3) the White House bugging of the Democratic National Committee.

Sunstein claims that the extraordinary powers in his proposal would only be "...wielded by truly well-intentioned government officials who want to spread The Truth and Do Good—i.e., when used by people like Cass Sunstein and Barack Obama." [The quote itself is actually from Greenwald.] Greenwald next quotes directly from S&V's article (p. 15):

Throughout, we assume a well-motivated government that aims to eliminate conspiracy theories, or draw their poison, if and only if social welfare is improved by doing so.

We can now discern a pattern in S&V: they are glib at offering proposals, but absolutely abysmal at offering concrete guidelines for implementation. As we have observed, their chief oversight is a conspicuous hiatus in their definition of "conspiracy theory"—it did not even recognize the difference between truth and falsehood. And here is a similar faux pas—they offer no principles or procedures for identifying exactly who is "well-motivated." But there is a further problem. Even if trustworthy guidelines could be established, and such an individual (or group) identified, those conditions would only have been met at that singular point in time. In particular, what happens if this individual (or group) later becomes corrupted? (Recall Lord Acton.) In that case, who will notice the corruption—and will also have the courage to wave a red flag? This recalls my prior question: Who will govern those who govern? But we are still not done with the above quote from S&V. The following question

inevitably arises as well: Should the government truly attempt to quell conspiracy theories that are true, if in doing so they improve social welfare? This begins to sound like George Orwell (Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), p. 32).

But there is yet one more question that S&V do not answer: Who decides whether or not “social welfare” is truly enhanced? What yardstick is to be used? Or is this merely subjective, based on someone’s opinion? If so, who will decide: Will it be a Democrat—or a Republican? Or a joint Congressional Committee? Or perhaps the National Security Council? Perhaps even the CIA? Without a clear-cut yardstick, S&V’s entire whimsy could quickly degenerate into politics as usual.

After all of this discussion, though, the bottom line is this: S&V’s proposal is both undemocratic and retrogressive; it lacks oversight, is clearly subject to mind-boggling subjectivity, is easily at risk for abuse and exploitation—and may actually be illegal. I would suggest that S&V wipe the slate clean and run home. They may well be qualified for projects of many kinds, but this one is not among them.

William Law

Foreword

I am exceptionally pleased that William Law, with the able assistance of Allan Eaglesham, has submitted this work for future historians. My primary concern, too, has been that the tragic events of November 22, 1963 should be accurately recounted for future generations. To date, the textbooks and media have fallen far short of the mark, due mostly to closed minds and insincere efforts. They have instead chosen the broad and easy road—endlessly echoing the now-terminal Warren Report rather than listening to those who were there.

In this volume Law brings us the actual words of many autopsy participants as well as several others, such as Rydberg, who played his role later. The mysterious role played by Bill Pitzer is revisited by Allan Eaglesham. The efforts of Law and Eaglesham extend over many years and plainly required immense persistence and dedication. That the two FBI agents, James Sibert and Frank O’Neill, finally agreed to go on the record is a remarkable testimony to the tenacity of Law, in particular. I am delighted to introduce this historic set of interviews to the public, and especially to future historians. For anyone who wants a first-hand look at that long-ago night, this is as close as we can now get.

During my decade-long curiosity about these events I have had the pleasure of meeting many of these interviewees, often speaking to them at length. As a result, when I first read their interviews here, I felt that I already knew them—I could visualize their facial expressions, feel their passion, and recognize their nuances of expression. I met Jerrol Custer, the radiology technologist, in New York City in 1993, and then later often spoke to him on the phone before his death several years ago. I immediately recognized O’Connor’s demeanor from Law’s description; I had met Paul both in Dallas and in Florida, the latter during a lengthy panel discussion. I also met James Jenkins and Jim Sibert at the same time in Florida, discussing details with them both formally (during the videotaped panel discussion) as well as informally. I had the pleasure of a detailed and intimate discussion with Dennis David while in Dallas several years ago. On the other hand, I have never met Frank O’Neill or Harold Rydberg or any member of the Pitzer family. I have, however, read all of the transcripts of these men (some several times over) and listened to all of their audiotaped interviews with the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB).

My personal encounters with these men leave no doubt that they are both sincere and passionate in their recollections. There is no attempt to bend the facts to fit some pre-ordained conclusion or some specific theme. They were there—they are merely telling it as they remember it.

After I reviewed the transcripts that appear in this book, I suggested no substantive revisions. The words that I read were consistent with what these individuals had told me and also consistent with their narratives to the ARRB. Although they disagree with one another at times on details (as they recognize), sometimes surprisingly so, the common theme is unmistakable and consistent—the Warren Report does not describe what happened that day or that night.

Dennis David tells a remarkably compelling story of two caskets: one arriving at the loading dock in a black non-military ambulance and a second arriving later at the front of the Bethesda National Naval Medical Center. He personally assisted and arranged for some of his men to unload the first casket. He is certain that it was a plain gray shipping casket, not the ornate casket that left Dallas. He personally observed the official (gray) ambulance drive up to the front entrance some time later; he watched as the Kennedy entourage left that vehicle. Because he was Chief of the Day, he included his observations in a log. As Officer of the Day, J. Thornton Boswell, one of Kennedy’s pathologists, also signed that document. That log has never since been seen.

David, because of his security clearance, was selected that night to type an official report that described four pieces of lead, between one and two bullets in total mass, supposedly removed from Kennedy's head. He actually held these in his hand. Neither these fragments nor the report have been seen since. Curiously, Jenkins recalls that a small plastic bag containing bullet fragments was placed on the autopsy table near Kennedy's head. (Officially, only two tiny lead fragments from the skull were entered into evidence, far less than one bullet in total mass.)

Several days later David encountered his good friend, Bill Pitzer (head of the Audio-Visual Department at Bethesda), reviewing a 16 mm film of the autopsy as well as both B & W and color stills and 35 mm slides (all presumably made from the 16 mm film). Pitzer and David both observed and discussed a small ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{5}{16}$ inch) hole in the hairline, directly above the pupil of the right eye. Based also on a large hole at the right rear of the skull, they both concluded that a shot had struck from the front and exited at the rear. This was particularly arresting for me, as I had concluded early in my own work, based solely on the X-rays, that a shot must have entered from the front almost precisely at the hairline, above the right eye.

David offered yet one more astonishing observation: the name of Pierre Finck (the third pathologist at Kennedy's autopsy) appears on the cover page of Bill Pitzer's autopsy.

Paul O'Connor notes that he had assisted in 50 to 60 autopsies before Kennedy's. His experience with death by then was extraordinary—he had begun working at a funeral home at age 13. Like David, he also recalls a plain shipping casket. Like several other members of the autopsy team, he has no recollection of the wooden frame in the background of one autopsy photograph, thereby casting some doubt on the authenticity of that photograph. O'Connor saw hardly any brain inside the skull, thereby echoing the comments of Custer, but disagreeing with Jenkins. He agrees with Jenkins that the probe placed into the back wound did not penetrate the pleura, going in at most $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches. (Under oath, Kennedy's chief pathologist, James J. Humes, confirmed this to the ARRB.) He repeatedly states that the exit from this wound would surely have been through the sternum, near the level of the heart. By explicitly stating that the back wound was three inches below the seventh cervical vertebra, he violently disagrees with the Warren Report's single bullet scenario.

James Jenkins also saw a plain shipping casket. He places the back wound at the fourth thoracic vertebra (precisely where the autopsy radiologist, John Ebersole, placed it when I spoke to him). Like O'Connor, Jenkins saw the probe going into the back wound and reaching the pleura, but not penetrating it. In surprising (and independent) support of David's account of four bullet fragments, Jenkins recalls that a small bag, probably containing several metal fragments, was placed on the table beside Kennedy's head.

Jenkins still has the impression that the brain had been surreptitiously removed before the autopsy and then replaced: he did not need to perform the usual skull cap incision (that was his job) and he had the impression that the scalp wound had been extended by a scalpel. Also (this was eye-catching for me since I had not heard it before), Jenkins saw that the cut through the brain stem was at different levels on the two sides (as opposed to a single level from a single cut, as would be standard). One final observation by Jenkins also implied to him a prior (illegal) brain removal: the carotid arteries were severely retracted, which suggested to him that they had been transected quite a while before the autopsy.

Like other autopsy personnel, he also does not recognize the wooden frame in the background of an official autopsy photograph. And, like so many who commented on it, the headrest was totally unfamiliar to him; he recalled that the Bethesda morgue routinely used an aluminum block that was scalloped for different sizes, but never such a headrest. Such a consistent recollection by so many calls into question the authenticity of at least those photographs that display the headrest.

His comments about James J. Humes, the chief pathologist, are memorable: Humes was “totally navy.” He implies that Humes was totally beholden to the navy for his expertise and professional standing. Jenkins also notes that in his eighteen months at Bethesda this was the only autopsy that he saw Humes (or Boswell, for that matter) do.

Jenkins, only about age 20 at the time, later earned a master’s degree in combined sciences, including pathology and anatomy. In light of this subsequent training, his foregoing comments must be taken seriously.

Jerrold Custer, the X-ray technologist, also recalls a cheap shipping casket. As he has told me and others, several skull X-rays are missing from the current set, most especially an oblique view. (Astonishingly, the autopsy radiologist, John Ebersole, M.D., in a conversation with me, also recalled more skull films than the three in the current official set. His recollections were quite independent of Custer—they never compared accounts.)

Custer recalls an entry wound above the mid-right eyebrow. During this conversation with Law, he pointed only about ½ inch above the eyebrow, in apparent disagreement with David, who placed it at the hairline. But this may not be a true disagreement; I would challenge anyone, without use of a mirror or some means of measuring distance, accurately to identify a precise site on his own forehead. In further disagreement with the official conclusions, and in view of what he saw that night, Custer also cannot accept the single bullet theory.

His impression of Humes matched that of Jenkins: “Humes was a politician; knew how to manipulate things. Humes was a career person. He knew how to protect Humes’s back.”

As in his ARRB appearance, when Frank O’Neill described the official brain photographs as showing too much brain, he also recalled for Law that the brain was mostly missing—there was only a portion of a brain left. Based on the (low level) of the back wound, he insists that the single bullet theory is impossible. (In his ARRB conversation, he even ridicules Boswell for raising the level of this wound from where Boswell had placed it in his official drawing.)

Jim Sibert notes that Kennedy’s head looks too clean in some autopsy photographs—especially where the large rear hole was located. He felt vindicated when he learned that Gerald Ford, one of seven members of the Warren Commission, had moved the back wound up (so as to salvage the single bullet theory) to the base of the neck. For Sibert that explained a deep mystery, since the back wound that he saw could not possibly fit with an exit at the tracheotomy site. Sibert adds that the level of the back wound was entirely consistent with the holes in the shirt and coat. When questioned about the single bullet theory and Arlen Specter, Sibert responded: “What a liar. I feel he got his orders from above—how far above I don’t know.” He adds that Specter even misspelled both his name (as Siebert) and O’Neill’s (as O’Neil).

He does not recall seeing a brain that night that looked anything like photographs in textbooks (i.e., he saw nothing like a nearly intact brain). Neither he nor O’Neill recalled seeing the 6.5 mm metal-like object within the right orbit that is so obvious on the extant frontal X-ray. Furthermore, neither of them recalls any discussion of this object at the autopsy. (In my view, that is devastating, since the entire purpose of the X-rays was to register precisely such objects. Prior readers will recall my firm conviction that this object was later added to the X-rays; precisely matching the caliber of Oswald’s rifle and lying on the back of the skull, this fake object by itself made a strong case against Oswald.)

Eaglesham updates us on the strange case of William Pitzer, who was shot to death at the Bethesda Naval Hospital (officially a suicide) on Saturday, October 29, 1966, shortly before his scheduled retirement and literally days before an official review of the autopsy materials by the autopsy personnel. According to Eaglesham, the FBI concluded, from the absence of powder burns, that the

gun was at least three feet away when fired. Eaglesham, again quoting the FBI documents, reports that the absence of muzzle marks rules out direct contact of the gun with the skin. The myth that Bill Pitzer was left-handed is corrected. It is possible, given his expertise, that he recorded the Kennedy autopsy via closed circuit TV. Finally, and somewhat curiously, the Pitzer residence was searched by the navy after his strange death.

Adding to the striking possibility that Pitzer did indeed record the autopsy on closed circuit TV is a statement made, under oath, by Humes to the ARRB:

Routinely, at the end of a week, we would retain the organs from the autopsies of the week. In fact, not only did we review them there, but there was a closed-circuit television. They went to Andrews Air Force Base, NIH, and it was a closed-circuit instruction program. (ARRB deposition of Dr. James Joseph Humes, College Park, Maryland, February 13, 1996, p. 58.)

However, when Humes was specifically asked by the ARRB if the Kennedy autopsy had been recorded by closed circuit television, he denied this.

Harold Rydberg, director of the medical illustration school at Bethesda, describes how he was detained on a Friday in early 1964 to draw the now-official Warren Commission diagram of Kennedy's wounds. This was so impromptu that Rydberg even had to cancel a date for that night. As Humes verbally described these wounds, Rydberg tried to display them. This was done without any photographs or other images, the only time in his entire career that Rydberg was asked to prepare images from words alone. He specifically recalls that Humes told him to blacken Kennedy's right eye, an odd request, since it is not especially dark in the official autopsy photograph.

Rydberg also saw the official gray navy ambulance arrive at the front of the hospital, where he saw Jackie Kennedy holding the side of the flag-draped coffin.

He recalls that John Stringer, the autopsy photographer, played navy politics well. Although he was not intimate with Stringer, in his (Rydberg's) role as head of medical illustration, he often worked with Stringer. (He recalls that Captain "Smoky" Stover, Pitzer, Humes and Boswell—but not Stringer or Finck—all attended his (Rydberg's) wedding.) He is quite certain that the extant autopsy photographs do not accurately reflect the photographs that Stringer took that night; he has the greatest respect for Stringer's professionalism and does not believe that the photographs reflect the usual quality of his work.

Most striking, though, are his comments about the pathologists. Both Humes and Boswell were facing navy retirement and did not want to lose their benefits. According to Rydberg, they both were soon awarded a promotion in rank. Though he did not know Finck well personally, he occasionally worked with him. Rydberg notes that Finck was involved in the case of Lt. William L. Calley, Jr., of MyLai massacre fame (March 16, 1968).¹ Jim DiEugenio has previously noted Finck's cover-up in the case

¹ The MyLai cover-up has strong psychological parallels to the JFK cover-up. One obvious parallel is that leading roles in both cases were played by military personnel. Believers in Oswald as a lone gunman often object to conspiracy on the grounds that too many individuals would have known the truth if there had been a conspiracy. Yet in the MyLai case, M. Scott Peck (*People of the Lie* 1983) informs us that at least 500 personnel knew that war crimes had been committed, yet no one said anything. This event became known only because Ron Ridenhour, a nonparticipant, sent a letter (March 1969) to several congressmen. I have previously pointed out that no one went public during the Manhattan project either and Gary Aguilar has noted a similar situation for the Pentagon Papers. In spring 1972, Peck chaired a committee of three psychologists. Their research proposals, intended to avoid future MyLai, were rejected by the military because they (1) could not be kept secret and (2) might prove embarrassing to the administration. Scott also notes that, to a considerable degree, those guilty at MyLai did not confess because they were not aware of their crime. Although they recalled the details of their acts, they did not appreciate the meaning and effect of their deeds. (Also see *Individual and Collective Responsibility: The Massacre at MyLai 1972*, edited by Peter A. French.) For me, the chief example of this psychological state in the JFK case is Robert Knudsen, the White House photographer. He told his family that he had photographed the

of Captain John McCarthy, which I have recounted in *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (James Fetzer 2000, editor, p. 286). Some readers will also recall that Boswell informed the ARRB that he was sent to New Orleans during the Garrison investigation, prepared to refute Finck in case Finck strayed too far off the official path. That never occurred, however. Even more curiously, Boswell was invited, but declined, to supervise the autopsy of Martin Luther King, Jr., a request that he himself disclosed to the ARRB.

Of all the interviewees, Rydberg provides the most insight into the pathologists. He describes Boswell as a very good, albeit reserved, doctor. Rydberg apparently had a comfortable relationship with Humes, as evidenced by the respect Humes paid to Rydberg's wedding, but also by Humes's unexpected appearance at Rydberg's office sometime later in Chapel Hill, after which they had a fine dinner together, joking, drinking, and eating roast beef, after which Humes paid the bill. To encapsulate Humes's dilemma, Rydberg employs the metaphor of a chess game: on November 22, 1963, Humes was checkmated. However, he was never happy "that he had to knuckle under." Even though Rydberg is no believer in the lone assassin theory, he agrees that Humes had no choice and that perhaps it was the better part of valor for Humes to do what he did.

Law cites a book (unnamed) in which Humes is described as trying to communicate via subtle language; phrases had to be read carefully to discern the true meaning. Rydberg agrees that this characterizes Humes; he believes that in this case Humes was trying to go along but at the same time trying desperately to save his own reputation. He believes Humes did not want to go down quietly, but left encoded messages to transmit what he could not say explicitly. Rydberg is persuaded that Humes was an honorable man—and so likewise was Boswell, though Boswell, in his view, was the weak link, the one who would have buckled under pressure.

This snapshot of the pathologists is entirely consistent with my own picture of them, as I have sketched it in *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (pp. 283-290). These were competent, honorable men, who earned respect throughout their lives, but on this one occasion they were thoroughly boxed into a corner—checkmated as Rydberg says. Their only other option was to throw away all they had earned during a lifetime in the military. Few individuals would so rashly risk all they had achieved. The pathologists told the truth when they could, but when trapped they went along. Boswell raised the back wound from where he had placed it on his autopsy diagram. Humes radically lowered the trail of metallic debris on the lateral skull X-ray; after all, a correct placement at the top of the skull, coexisting with an entry wound low on the skull (which the pathologists saw and felt) would unambiguously have meant two shots to the head—and unmistakable conspiracy. That was an intolerable conclusion—radically inconsistent with the developing official view. The bullet trail therefore had to be displaced downward by over 10 cm. When asked under oath by the ARRB about

autopsy (though no one saw him there) and he became quite distraught after viewing autopsy photographs, claiming that they had been altered and that he knew who had done it. He was not at home that night, so he himself may well have immediately altered autopsy photographs, possibly accepting the cover story that they needed to be cleaned up a bit—either for the public or for the Kennedys. His friend and fellow government photographer, Joe O'Donnell, recalled for the ARRB that Knudsen had shown him two successive photographs of the back of the head shortly after the event—one with the large posterior hole (that all the witnesses recalled) and the second with the head intact, covered by clean hair (as seen in the extant collection). As in the MyLai case, many of those involved in the JFK cover-up, too, did not understand the full implications of their acts; they simply followed orders. Not knowing they were guilty, they had nothing to confess. Peck makes one final point that bears directly on the JFK case. Warren Commission supporters often argue that the seven honorable Americans on the Commission could not possibly have misled their fellow countrymen. But we know that in the case of the Vietnam War, many respectable Americans tragically misled their country. One has only to read in *Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995), by Robert S. McNamara, to understand the degree to which this self-deception was practiced at the highest levels of the government. Lyndon Johnson even had ongoing recourse to a group of "Wise Men," an appellation rarely applied to the seven Warren Commissioners. High office, even for honorable men, is no warranty against error.

this incredible discrepancy in his autopsy report (with the disagreeable X-rays staring him in the face), Humes had no explanation whatsoever. In fact, Doug Horne, who was present, advised me that Humes nearly walked out of the interview, so frustrated had he become by that point.

I am not without sympathy for these unfortunate doctors. But they hardly stand alone in infamy. The Parkland doctors, too, changed their statements about the throat wound—even without seeing any new evidence. After merely being told that the official autopsy reported an exit (not an entrance) in the throat they, too, went along.

Doctors (of whom I am one) have no special birthrights of courage—nor even of moral uprightness. For example, by January 1933, before Hitler rose to power, 3000 doctors (6% of the total) had joined the Nazi party. By 1942, more than 38,000 were members, about half of the total. It is not, however, only doctors who were subverted by National Socialism. F.A. Hayek (*The Road to Serfdom* 1944) reports: “The way in which ...with few exceptions, her [Germany’s] scholars and scientists put themselves readily at the service of the new rulers is one of the most depressing and shameful spectacles...” Perhaps the lesson is merely one that applies to all of us: we humans are at amazing risk for social pressure.

This is no longer speculation. In 1963, the results of a startling psychological experiment offered proof of this conjecture. A headline in the *New York Times* (October 26, 1963) read: “Sixty-five Percent in Test Blindly Obey Order to Inflict Pain.” Stanley Milgram’s research at Yale University had shown that the majority of participants willingly inflicted electric shocks up to 450 volts on presumably real (but actually sham) participants who made mistakes on word-matching tests. These participants obeyed only because they were told to do so, not because they were under any specific threats. Later, at the University of San Diego, 23 of 24 law students told a client (who was only an actress, but the law students did not know this) to perjure herself, merely because law professor Steven Hartwell suggested this presumably authentic legal advice as the only hope for the client. Milgram’s experiments demonstrated with frightening lucidity that ordinary humans can be led to act immorally—even without physical threats—and, furthermore, that these humans need not be innately evil to act reprehensibly. While most of us prefer to believe that we would not mislead or distort, as Kennedy’s pathologists certainly did, the fact is that Milgram was right: when powerful social constraints enter the scene, our common moral senses become overwhelmed. Milgram specifically warned that when someone joins “... an organizational structure, a new creature replaces autonomous man, unhindered by the limitations of individual morality, freed of human inhibition, mindful only of the sanctions of authority.” Milgram moreover claimed that obedience to authority flowed naturally from the logic of social structures: “If we are to have [a]... society—then we must have members of society amenable to organizational imperatives.”

Milgram’s work has had both recreational and serious consequences. In 1973, British playwright Dannie Abse produced a play, “The Dogs of Pavlov,” based on Milgram’s work. In 1976, CBS aired “The Tenth Level,” starring William Shatner as a Milgram facsimile. In 1985, the U.S. Military Academy introduced two new mandatory psychology courses based on Milgram’s work. In 1986, musician Peter Gabriel recorded a song, “We Do What We’re Told (Milgram’s 37).”²

M. Scott Peck echoes the same theme heard in Milgram’s work:

Whenever the roles of individuals within a group become specialized, it becomes both possible and easy for the individual to pass the moral buck to some other part of the group. In this way, not only

² Interested readers may consult *Psychology Today*, March/April 2002 or www.stanleymilgram.com or the book, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* 1974, by Stanley Milgram.]

does the individual forsake his conscience but the conscience of the group as a whole can become so fragmented and diluted as to be nonexistent... any group will remain inevitably potentially conscienceless and evil until such time each and every individual holds himself or herself directly responsible for the behavior of the whole group—the organism—of which he or she is a part. We have not yet begun to arrive at that point. (M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: Hope for Healing Human Evil* 1983, p. 218.)

I would add one final, personal observation: the higher in the hierarchy someone stands, the more susceptible he or she is to social pressure. The more this individual has to lose—both in prestige, money, and future success—the less likely he or she is to risk such a loss. That the paramedical personnel interviewed for this volume have stood so resolutely by the truth as they saw it on November 22, 1963, while their superiors have offered only half-truths, is clear confirmation of this general principle. We should be particularly grateful for their presence at the autopsy and for their willingness to speak forthrightly about this unnecessarily confusing event. And hats off, too, to Law and Eaglesham for caring so intensely. History is now deeply indebted to them. The case now lies before the bar of history. If we can seek truth in advertising, why can we not have truth in history? Surely our children deserve no less.

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August 1, 2003

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

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Reply: Vascularization of the Dorsal Base of the Second Metacarpal Bone: Implications for a Reverse Second Metacarpal Dorsal Artery Flap

Sir:

We would like to thank Rozen et al. for their thoughtful comment and the presentation of another application of the second metacarpal dorsal artery flap as a “reverse” flap. The authors correctly mentioned that the same approach has been applied successfully for reconstruction in the fifth ray by Cavadas et al.¹ Kaki-noki et al. published a clinical case of a distally based fifth metacarpal dorsal artery bone flap in 2008² for reconstruction of an infected nonunion of the proximal phalanx of the fifth finger following a gunshot injury. These published clinical cases emphasize the relevance of distally based bone flaps for reconstruction of phalangeal defects. Our personal experience also suggests that the robust blood supply and the vascular anatomy support use of the second metacarpal dorsal artery flap. not only for transfer based on the proximal pedicle but also as “reverse” flap Even combined osseocutaneous distally based second metacarpal dorsal artery flaps might be applicable for selected patients. Further anatomical and clinical studies are needed to gain more profound knowledge of reverse second metacarpal dorsal artery flaps. In conclusion, although proximally based second metacarpal dorsal artery flaps are useful for selected carpal bone defects or microsurgical transfer, reverse second metacarpal dorsal artery flaps as described by Rozen et al. might become a novel option for reconstruction of complex bone defects in the phalanges.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors have no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this communication.

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The Assassination of John F. Kennedy: Revisiting the Medical Data

Sir:

The November 2013 article by Rohrich et al. entitled “The Assassination of John F. Kennedy: Revisiting the et al. might become a novel option for reconstruction of the Medical Data” (*Plastic Reconstr Surg* 2013; 132:1340–1350) summarizes the medical evidence through 1992, including the House Select Committee on Assassinations (1979). My response here emphasizes recent developments.

From 1994 to 1998, the Assassination Records Review Board liberated 60,000 JFK records and released deposition transcripts of medical personnel from Bethesda and Parkland. I interviewed the autopsy radiologist twice¹ and visited the National Archives and Records Administration on 9 separate days,² initially in 1992 with Dr. Cyril Wecht. I have performed hundreds of optical density measurements directly on the extant JFK skull radiographs and have often viewed the extant autopsy photographs at the National Archives and Records Administration. I have interviewed the Bethesda paraprofessionals; I also participated in a long video interview with them in 2002 in Fort Myers,

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Florida. In November of 2013, I encountered James Jenkins in Dallas, Texas. I have repeatedly read (and listened to) all of the medical depositions for the House Select Committee on Assassinations and the Assassination Records Review Board. Here is a brief summary of what we have learned.

1. Ronald C. Jones, M.D., has just confirmed a superior location for the throat wound: “I noticed a small wound in the midline of the neck just above the tie knot that was approximately a quarter of an inch or 6 mm in diameter.”³ If Jones is correct, the single bullet theory—a sine qua non for the lone gunman—is dead.
2. The camera lens located by the House Select Committee on Assassinations does not match the extant autopsy photographs.
3. Optical density data from the extant JFK radiographs (taken at the National Archives and Records Administration) strongly imply that the 6.5-mm metallic-like object within JFK’s right orbit is an artifact. Larry Sturdivan, the ballistics expert who consulted for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, agrees that it cannot represent a bullet fragment.⁴ This striking state of affairs, by itself, delivers a crippling blow to a central pillar of the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations.
4. Although the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that this 6.5-mm object represented the cross-section of a bullet, officially both the nose and tail of this same bullet were found inside the limousine.
5. The Assassination Records Review Board specifically asked each of the three pathologists if they had seen this 6.5-mm object on the radiographs during the autopsy. None of them had.
6. The optical density (as measured at the National Archives and Records Administration) of a posterior whitish area on both lateral skull radiographs matches the optical density of the petrous bone (the densest bone in the body), which is grossly unlike any other skull radiograph in my experience. Furthermore, this area is nothing like the same area in a pre-mortem radiograph of JFK.
7. Optical density data (taken at the National Archives and Records Administration) from the lateral radiographs show absent frontal brain in a fist-sized area. On the contrary, the autopsy photographs, for this same area, show an entirely intact left brain and a nearly intact right brain. This is a flagrant paradox—either the photographs are inauthentic or the radiographs are

inauthentic. Both cannot simultaneously reflect physical reality.

8. The photographer, John Stringer, denies taking the extant brain photographs.⁵

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The author has no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this communication.

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Association between Agent Orange Exposure and Nonmagnetic Invasive Skin Cancer: A Pilot Study

Sir:

The following comment pertains to “Association between Agent Orange Exposure and Nonmagnetic Invasive Skin Cancer: A Pilot Study” by Clemens et al. (*Plast Reconstr Surg.* 2014; 133:432–437).¹ In that article, the authors report a higher incidence of nonmelanoma skin cancers in people who were exposed to Agent Orange several decades earlier; moreover, this incidence was higher in people who developed chloracne.

Since the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a World Health Organization agency, classified 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin as a known human carcinogen, many studies have been aimed at confirming the carcinogenic potential of dioxins—in particular, 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin. However, this classification is quite controversial. 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin is not mutagenic, and long-term follow-up of the Seveso population exposed to 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin in 1976 did not confirm this statement.^{2,3} In our study on the acute intoxication of Victor Yushchenko, the former president of Ukraine, a whole genome gene expression analysis at various time points did not show significant modulations of genes involved in carcinogenesis or in cancer prevention.⁴ In the study by Clemens et al., the control population is not adequate, as mentioned in the Discussion section, and this opens the door to many confounding factors, in particular, over a period as long as 40 years.

Anti-Conspiracy theories:

Why the media (and Shermer) believe the implausible.

In the JFK assassination, why do the media refuse to accept the overwhelmingly obvious conclusion that Oswald was framed?

Michael Shermer is the publisher of *Skeptic*, to which I once subscribed.³ *Skeptic* has printed at least two pieces⁴ that favor a JFK conspiracy, but now Shermer paradoxically promotes the lone gunman theory. Ironically, for that case in particular, he has dropped his pretense of skepticism.

Shermer purports to explain away a JFK conspiracy via psychology. However, if this notion is logically extrapolated, no one (not even the judicial system—nor even string theorists) would ever need to consult any facts, i.e., merely identifying an author's motives would suffice to discern the truth. But what is good for the conspiracist is good for the anti-conspiracist—perhaps someday Shermer will reveal what deep psychology motivates his own persistent obfuscation of the JFK case.

Shermer believes that conspiracy theories offer tidy and simple-minded explanations. But what could be more simple-minded than Oswald as a lone gunman?

Shermer claims that we have had a surfeit of documentaries favoring conspiracy; on the contrary, in my three decades of observing this event, we have never had such a deluge of mainstream support for Oswald. See my critique of just one of these—on NOVA.⁵

He claims that evidence points toward Oswald. For once, he is correct. Unfortunately, nearly all of it is suspect. An itemized demolition of these fraudulent claims has come from a fellow Wisconsin Badger.⁶ Is Shermer truly ignorant of all this soiled laundry? Moreover, this is hardly the first case in history of misleading evidence. The French had their own Dreyfuss Affair, where virtually all the “official evidence” pointed toward an innocent man. And the Lincoln assassination was a lone gunman case before additional evidence emerged. Even in Watergate, the evidence of conspiracy only evolved across time.

A conspiracy, by definition, requires only two persons. Given the pervasive tendency of humans to socialize, that is the natural state of human affairs. Most curiously, the original meaning of conspiracy theory⁷ was neutral. Only since the mid-1960s (suspiciously right after the JFK assassination) did it become a term of ridicule. It is now a term of derision; whose sole purpose is promptly to strangle any serious examination of the evidence. Oddly enough, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (by Richard Hofstadter), was first published in *Harper's Magazine* on the first anniversary of the JFK assassination—in November 1964.⁸

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1. I let my subscription lapse after I became skeptical of some of these alleged skeptics.
 2. Fred T. Newcomb and Perry Adams, “Did Someone Alter the Medical Evidence?” *Skeptic*, No. 9, September/October 1975, pp. 24 ff.
(http://kenrahn.com/JFK/Issues_and_evidence/Alteration_of_wounds/Newcombe-Perry/Newcombe-Perry_text.html) Art and Margaret Snyder, “Case Still Open: Skepticism and the Assassination of JFK,” *Skeptic*, Volume 6, No. 4, 1998 (<http://www.skeptic.com/magazine/archives/6.4/>).
 3. <http://www.ctka.net/2013/nova.html>
 4. Joseph McBride, *Into the Nightmare* (2013), pp. 195-205.
 5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory
 6. According to Wikipedia, on November 21, 1963 (sic) Hofstadter delivered the Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford University (on this same subject).

Michael Parenti⁹ has observed that even the CIA is, by definition—via its covert actions and secret plans—a conspiracy. Ambassador David K. E. Bruce, in his formal report on the CIA to President Eisenhower, disclosed the devastating impact these conspiracies had on US foreign policy.¹⁰ Even the Mafia (by its very nature) believes in conspiracies.

James Fox of Time magazine¹¹ describes most Wall Street traders as conspiracy-minded; he adds that most good investigative reporters are also conspiracy theorists. For conspiracy theorists in this JFK case, see my long list (with supporting documentation).¹² Here are several: Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, John Connally, J. Edgar Hoover, John McCone, David Atlee Phillips, Robert Tanenbaum, James Rowley, George Burkley, Jesse Curry, Roy Kellerman, Evelyn Lincoln, Richard Russell, Bertrand Russell, G. Robert Blakey, and Robert Kennedy, Jr.

Cass Sunstein, in a 2008 paper, offered his own remedies for conspiracy theories; he proposed infiltrating them to cause internal disruption. In other words, his response to conspiracy theories was to propose a conspiracy of his own. Several years ago, I send him a rebuttal.¹³ I am still waiting for his reply.

My own view of the JFK assassination has evolved from mere belief into actual knowledge. Based on my seeing (on nine different occasions¹⁴) the JFK artifacts at the National Archives, I now know that the JFK skull X-rays are copies, not originals, and that the mysterious 6.5 mm bullet-like fragment (supposedly at the back of the skull) was added to the X-ray in the darkroom, merely to incriminate the supposed weapon—a 6.5 mm Mannlicher-Carcano.

On November 22, 2013, I met with James Jenkins, who had been Dr. Boswell's technician at the JFK autopsy. He confirmed my conclusion (based on hundreds of data points via optical densitometry on the extant JFK skull X-rays)—that the images of the brain in the National Archives are fraudulent. But this was no surprise; after all, the official autopsy photographer, John Stringer, had long ago disavowed these photographs as those he took.

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“A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth.”

“It is the consistency of the information that matters for a good story, not its completeness. Indeed, you will often find that knowing little makes it easier to fit everything you know into a coherent pattern.”

“The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see, even if they see very little. We often fail to allow for the possibility that evidence that should be critical to our judgment is missing—what [you] see is all there is (WYSIATI).”

“They didn't want more information that might spoil their story.”

7. <http://911blogger.com/node/15824>

8. Timothy Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes* (2007), pp. 133-135. The complete report is still unavailable!

9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory

10. Addendum 5 in <http://www.assassinationresearch.com/v1n1/mantik.html>

11. http://www.ctka.net/2010/mantik_sunstein.html

12. <http://assassinationresearch.com/v2n2/pittsburgh.pdf>

--Thinking Fast and Slow (2011) by Daniel Kahneman--(Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his seminal work in psychology)

Postscript: A Rebuttal from Shermer (and the Los Angeles Times)

Before my critique had even been submitted to the Los Angeles Times, Shermer had already struck back. Here is what the Times printed on Saturday, November 30, 2013 (p. A15).

Facts or Conspiracies?

Almost all of the readers who responded to Michael Shermer's Op-Ed article Tuesday didn't buy his idea that psychology helps to explain why JFK assassination theories persist. Reader Stephany Yablow of North Hollywood wrote:

"J. Edgar Hoover came up with the lone-gunman scenario within 24 hours of the assassination as a cover-up. Lyndon Johnson backed it, demanding that the case be closed quickly.

"The Warren Commission was political window dressing. It failed to thoroughly investigate, interview witnesses and experts and conduct forensic studies. It produced a shallow report.

"Maybe people would believe the lone-gunman theory if Jack Ruby didn't waltz into the jail and kill Lee Harvey Oswald; hence, the theory that someone directed Ruby to do so. There must have been at least two people (the requisite number of actors to define a 'conspiracy'). If the lone-gunman proponents had a better answer, they haven't convinced us yet."

Michael Shermer responds:

Note by Mantik: Misleading statements so densely infest this manifesto that each opinion is itemized, followed by my comments. Shermer's words are in italics.

1. *The Warren Commission report was shallow? At 880 pages, I wonder what would be considered deep.*

Reply (based on the work of Walt Brown): Of the 488 witnesses who testified, only 93 did so in the presence of any of the seven members of the Commission. Here is the scorecard: Earl Warren--93, Allen Dulles--70, Gerald Ford --60, John Sherman Cooper--50, John McCloy--35, Hale Boggs--20, and Richard Russell--6. What value would be placed on a judicial proceeding in an American courtroom in which the prosecutors, the defense attorneys, or certain jurors just came and went as they pleased?¹⁵ Furthermore, anyone who has even glanced at these volumes quickly recognizes that trivia and irrelevancies populate the pages, but critical witnesses are often studiously avoided. Insofar as a "deep" analysis, one example is Douglas Horne's five volume set: Inside the Assassination Records Review Board. Horne's book is 1880 pages. (The Warren Report is actually 888 pages.) Another would be Walt Brown's Chronology of the JFK Assassination.

2. *In any case, five different government investigations—along with countless private inquiries—have concluded that the evidence overwhelmingly points toward Oswald as the lone assassin.*

Reply: Shermer apparently has not read that brilliant piece by Dr. Gary Aguilar and Kathy Cunningham: "How Five Investigations into JFK's Medical Autopsy Evidence Got It Wrong."¹⁶ Insofar as private investigations, Shermer likewise seems hopelessly lost—the vast majority favor conspiracy. (See his last statement here, which implies that he does know this.)

3. *Oswald's Carcano rifle with his fingerprints on it was found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.*

13. <http://www.manuscriptservice.com/DPQ/wobrow~1.htm>

14. http://www.historymatters.com/essays/jfkmed/How5Investigations/How5InvestigationsGotItWrong_1a.htm

Reply: The weapon (actually a carbine, not a rifle) in evidence is not the one ordered by LHO. The Commission states that he used a coupon from the February 1963 issue of *The American Rifleman* (but this ad does not appear in the Commission). The ad is for a 36" Carcano weighing 5.5#. The weapon in evidence is supposedly 42" and weighs 8# (with sling and site). The first weapon reported in the Texas School Book Depository was a 7.65 German Mauser; Eugene Boone filed two separate reports to this effect, and Seymour Weitzman filed a confirming affidavit. Boone later testified that Captain Fritz and Lt. Day also identified it as a Mauser. The weapon in evidence, however, clearly reads "Made in Italy" and "Cal, 6.5". Furthermore, no one has explained why a wannabe assassin would purchase a weapon by money order through the mail— instead of paying cash locally (with no trace of ownership). In addition, on the supposed purchase date (March 12), Oswald was at work from 8 AM to 12:15 PM (see *Harvey and Lee* by John Armstrong for company employee records). If the post office records can be believed, LHO walked 11 blocks to the General Post Office, purchased a money order, but then did not mail it from there. Instead, he walked many blocks out of his way (eventually using a mailbox) before returning to work, where his absence was not noted. This order then arrived the very next day at Klein's (in Chicago)—and was already deposited at the bank that same day! Unfortunately, the bank deposit actually reads February 15, 1963—not March 13, 1963. Of course, if the date really had been February, then the serial number C2766 could not apply to the weapon in the backyard photographs. For even more anomalies on the MC see *Parkland Reclaimed* by Jim DiEugenio.

Insofar as fingerprints go, none were initially found on the weapon. Only after a visit by federal agents to the morgue, where Oswald was fingerprinted—according to the mortician, did a palm print appear on the weapon. Moreover, during the last several decades much doubt has been cast on fingerprint evidence in general; see my review of John McAdams's book.¹⁷

4. *Three bullet casings their match what 80% of eyewitnesses in Dealey Plaza reported hearing: three shots.*

Reply: The initial report described only two casings. The so-called Magic Bullet (which should have matched the casings) could not be identified at Parkland Hospital by the man who handled the actual bullet. Josiah Thompson (a private detective) and Dr. Gary Aguilar have demolished the chain of possession for this bastard bullet.¹⁸ Regarding witnesses, a long list of them reported that the final two shots were very close together, much too close for the Mannlicher-Carcano.¹⁹

5. *It was the same rifle Oswald purchased in March 1963, which he then used the following month in an attempt to assassinate the rabidly anti-communist Army Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker.*

Reply: Walker denied that Oswald had shot at him. The bullet was not matched to any weapon owned by Oswald. At the time of the event, the *Dallas Morning News* reported a 30.06 bullet. (Of course, the Warren Report omitted this.) A witness, Kirk Coleman, saw two men, but neither was Oswald. A photograph of a car behind Walker's house turned up at Ruth Paine's house and was ascribed to Oswald. While the police had that photograph, the license plate disappeared from the back of the car. However, Chief Curry's book (1969) contains a photograph of Oswald's possessions, including that Walker photograph. In that version, the license plate is intact—which strongly implies that the police had cut it out of the other one.

6. *Co-workers saw Oswald on the sixth floor of the depository shortly before JFK's motorcade arrived, and saw him exit soon after the assassination.*

15. http://www.ctka.net/reviews/McAdams_Mantik.html

16. <http://www.historymatters.com/essays/frameup/EvenMoreMagical/EvenMoreMagical.htm>

17. *Assassination Science* (1998), edited by James Fetzer, p. 296.

Reply: Oswald worked in the building and might well have been seen there. But Shermer fails to tell us when he was seen there. The only witness the Commission could round up was Howard Brennan, who had poor eyesight; he could not identify Oswald in a line-up later that same day. Furthermore, the window in the sniper's nest was partly closed, making it virtually impossible for Brennan to get a good look at the man's face. Arnold Rowland and Carolyn Walther saw a man with a rifle, but neither identified Oswald. Furthermore, both said they saw two men! Within 90 seconds of the shooting, Roy Truly spotted Oswald drinking a coke in the second floor lunch room. Victoria Adams walked down the same stairs (from the fifth floor) right after the shooting and did not see Oswald.

7. *Oswald went home and picked up his pistol and left again, shortly after which he was stopped by Dallas Police Officer J.D. Tippit, whom Oswald shot dead with four bullets.*

Reply: "The official story of the Tippit killing is full of holes."²⁰ McBride has devoted most of his book (and much of his life) to the Tippit case. If Shermer truly likes long books (as he claimed about the Warren Report), then he will love this book (662 pages). It is mostly devoted to the Tippit case. The author firmly denies that Oswald shot Tippit. Has Shermer done as much research on this as has McBride?

8. *He then ducked into a nearby theater without paying, which resulted in a police confrontation.*

Reply: Theater employee Warren Burroughs said that Oswald went to the balcony. A police dispatcher (at 1:46 PM) stated that Oswald was in the balcony. However, Oswald was arrested on the main floor. Bernard Haire saw a second man (who was flushed, as though he had been in a struggle) leave the rear of the theater and then be placed into a police car. Until Haire saw Oliver Stone's film, he had always thought that he had seen Oswald's arrest. Can Shermer explain any of this?

9. *Two days later, Oswald was himself assassinated by a pro-Kennedy nightclub owner named Jack Ruby, who said his motive was "saving Mrs. Kennedy the discomfiture of coming back to trial." Thousands more pieces of evidence all converge to the unmistakable conclusion that Oswald acted alone.*

Reply: Does Shermer truly know more than these legal minds, which were deeply immersed in the case? (None of them believed in a lone gunman.)

Senator Richard Russell, member of the Warren Commission

John McCloy, member of the Warren Commission

Rep. Hale Boggs, member of the Warren Commission

Senator John Sherman Cooper, member of the Warren Commission

Rep. Henry Gonzalez, chair of the HSCA

Rep. Don Edwards, chair of the HSCA

Robert Blakey, Chief Counsel for the HSCA

Robert Tanenbaum, Chief Counsel for the HSCA

Richard A. Sprague, Chief Counsel for the HSCA

Gary Cornwell, Deputy Chief Counsel for the HSCA

10. *In the 50 years since, conspiracy fabulists have concocted more than 300 different people and organizations allegedly involved in the assassination, and yet not one line of evidence conclusively supports any of these suspects. It's time to move on and let JFK R.I.P.*

Reply: If Shermer had paid any attention to JFK books or meetings during the past year, he would know that the evidence of a cover-up by federal agencies is now overwhelming. Instead, he has responded like an automaton, programmed to recite the Commission's dogmas. He even evades the last official government investigation (the HSCA), which declared a probable JFK conspiracy. We

18. Joseph McBride, *Into the Nightmare* (2013), p. 201.

might well ask: What about history? For example, what if the Dreyfuss affair had simply been left to lie dormant? Or what if the Lincoln assassination had never been pursued—or if no investigation had been done into Watergate, or into Iran-Contra, or into BCCI?

What then Mr. Shermer?

John F. Kennedy's Back: A few supplementary comments

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Keywords: [JFK](#), [John F. Kennedy](#), [President Kennedy assassination](#), [Oswald](#), [Newman](#), [Lattimer](#), [Goodrich](#), [Paige](#), [Breo](#), [Lisagor](#), [Mandel](#), [Armstrong](#), [Chesser](#), [Mantik](#), [Dealey Plaza](#), [Klein's Sporting Goods](#), [Pantopaque](#), [lumbar fusion surgery](#)

Abstract Several responses are made to statements by Pait and Dowdy. The current diagnosis and treatment of back pain is summarized from the *medical* literature.

ABBREVIATIONS JFK = John F. Kennedy; LBJ = Lyndon Baines Johnson; WC = Warren Commission; NSAM = National Security Action Memorandum, NARA = National Archives and Records Administration, JAMA = Journal of the American Medical Association; FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigation

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A Letter to the Editor (regarding Goodrich and Pait):

1. "Editorial—John F. Kennedy's back" by James T. Goodrich, MD, PhD, DSci
J Neurosurg Spine 27:245-246, 2017
2. "John F. Kennedy's back: chronic pain, failed surgeries, and the story of its effects on his life and death" by T. Glenn Pait, MD, and Justin T. Dowdy, MD.
J Neurosurg Spine 27:247-25, 2017
 1. Goodrich describes *two* bullet wounds to JFK's head, not just one. Since the Warren Commission (WC) had conceded only one, it is gratifying to see this correction of the historical record. After a recent meticulous analysis of the medical and ballistic evidence, multiple headshots were found to be inescapable.⁹
 2. Without sourcing his allegation, Pait names JFK as the initiator of the Vietnam War. On the contrary, an opposite consensus is now emerging among historians, as became evident (again) during the recent Vietnam War documentary by Ken Burns.³ If JFK had lived, we would not even recall a Vietnam War. JFK had decided to withdraw 1000 troops from Vietnam later that year; he had approved NSAM-263 on October 11, 1963. After the assassination, LBJ promptly reversed that decision, and so the war came.¹³
 3. Pait describes an air myelogram, but he does not cite a Pantopaque procedure. Although it was well known before our (independent) visits, Michael Chesser, MD, and I have both observed remnants of this dye in JFK's autopsy X-rays at NARA.
 4. Although Pait visualizes Oswald as peering through a "scope sight" on the weapon, he fails to name the origin of this apparition. On the other hand, it is well known that the sight was badly misaligned; see the testimony of Robert Frazier of the FBI before the WC.⁶

5. Marine Colonel Allison Folsom,⁶ testifying before the WC, characterized Oswald (while he was in the Marines and using a Marine-issued M-1) as "a rather poor shot." Between May 8, 1959, and November 22, 1963, despite diligent efforts by the FBI, no evidence was ever unearthed to show that Oswald fired a weapon during those 1,600+ days. Yet on November 22, using a far inferior weapon, he was supposedly perfect.
6. Moreover, the purchase of the weapon by Oswald is still in grave doubt. WC Exhibit 788 is the money order supposedly used for the purchase. However, according to the WC, this money order was deposited into the bank account of Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago during February 1963—a month *before* [sic] the money order was purchased in Dallas!¹
7. Although Pait cites some "excellent" literature articles, an excessive number are by John Lattimer, a urologist (none of the Dealey Plaza shots struck urologic sites), whose work has largely been debunked.¹¹ The articles by Dennis Breo for *JAMA* won a Peter Lisagor Award, but that award later encountered stiff headwinds—and even a call for retraction of the award.^{10, 12}
8. An excellent article that should have been cited (but was not) is by L. R. Mandel.⁸
9. Pait does not cite hyperbaric oxygen for bone or soft tissue infections, possibly because it was not utilized in that era. That is changing, however.⁴
10. More than 10% of visits to primary care physicians relate to back or neck pain; these visits account for \$86 billion/year.⁷
11. Although about 200 options are available for low back pain, *no single treatment is clearly superior*.²
12. Increasingly, current treatments *disagree with national guidelines*. These misdeeds include the use of CTs and MRIs, referrals to other physicians, and even prescribing narcotics. Meanwhile, referrals to physical therapy have not changed.⁷
13. A recent meta-analysis revealed that narcotics provide little or no benefit for acute back pain. They have *no use* in chronic back pain, and *43% of these patients have concurrent substance abuse disorders*.⁷
14. The recent *spectacular increase in spine surgeries* is due to excessive imaging. In one study, an early MRI for acute back pain was associated with an 8-fold increased risk of surgery.⁷
15. N.M. Paige et al. have presented a sophisticated systematic review and meta-analysis, including 26 eligible randomized trials of manipulation for acute back pain (≤6 weeks). These authors agree with the clinical guidelines of the American College of Physicians: *most patients with acute low back pain improve with time, regardless of treatment*.²
16. The recent 106% increase in referrals to other physicians correlates with costly, morbid, and often ineffective spinal surgeries. Recent meta-analyses of lumbar fusion surgery have shown *no improvement* in patient outcomes. Furthermore, as JFK discovered, these operations come with side effects: 5.6% are life-threatening and 0.4% kill the patient.⁷

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