



THE MANTIK VIEW

Wagner Response I

The Assassination of JFK: Perspectives Half a Century Later, by Robert A. Wagner

Author's Response to Book Review by Dr. David Mantik

Introduction

I begin by providing some perspective that underlies my approach to the subject of the JFK assassination. In the decades since that historical event, hundreds of writings have been published about the assassination, autopsy, related formal investigations, and about various elements of each. Through the years, many conferences have been organized for the purpose of presenting independent review and analysis of evidentiary elements and for engaging arguments regarding the conclusions that might be drawn from that analysis. This landscape of analysis and conclusions is enormous, varied, and contradictory. Highly qualified experts and researchers – many of them prominent in their respective fields have very significant disagreements about elements of evidence and the conclusions that should be drawn from analyzing those elements. Many devote a significant amount of time to the topic. When approaching the subject myself, I asked: How is an interested layman supposed to form a reasonable opinion?

In my opinion, that layman has to do something I commonly see in my work as an expert witness in support of litigation. It is what jurors do at the conclusion of a trial: reconcile the evidence presented by the experts into a coherent whole built upon the parts that are reasonably credible on their own and in relation to each other. My book is about such a reconciliation. Because my effort was reconciliation and synthesis of often disparate existing views, it was not my purpose to perform any original research or conduct interviews. My goal was to play juror: what have the authorities and experts been saying over the decades and how do I analyze and synthesize this record? I have never advertised differently. The book makes this expressly clear. I believe there is a place in the conversation surrounding the assassination for an attempt to synthesize and reconcile the record as it currently exists. It is not an illegitimate exercise. In my analysis, like a juror, I draw inferences. Readers are free to accept my inferences as valid or reject them, as is Dr. Mantik. I welcome critique.

As to particulars, my analysis of the record to date leads me to conclude that the probability there were shooters other than Oswald, or otherwise an organized conspiracy, is low. I did not always hold that view. In the 1990s, before I more closely analyzed the elements of the existing record upon the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination, I was convinced there had been a conspiracy to assassinate the president, although I did not hold a particular view about who was responsible other than Oswald. That view was primarily based upon my belief that the single bullet theory was invalid and therefore there must have been more than one gunman. While I still hold the single bullet theory to be invalid, I now maintain that

separate shots fired by Oswald can explain President Kennedy's and Governor Connally's nonfatal wounds. Additionally, rather than subscribing to the "loner" label that some "lone gunman" researchers popularly attached to Oswald, I also believe it entirely possible that Oswald had a connection to U.S. Intelligence and that his apparent pro-Castro activities served as cover for that connection. Yet, while I admit the validity of the possible existence of such a relationship to U.S. Intelligence, I do not believe known facts or reason support the likelihood that Oswald's act was carried out in cooperation with elements of U.S. Intelligence.

I think it also important to note that my book is not a defense of the Warren Commission. Like many, I believe that the Warren Commission suppressed evidence and was deficient in its investigation, particularly regarding the backgrounds of Oswald and Ruby. As I've already stated, I have always rejected the single bullet theory.

Finally, I'd like to express that I have the utmost respect for serious researchers of all stripes. My book is, in part, dedicated to them. At the November 2017 Oswald mock trial event, it was my greatest pleasure to meet some of the giants in the field and express my admiration to them for their heroic efforts. I may not be in agreement on many issues and conclusions, but I am respectful of these researchers' positions.

Addressing Dr. Mantik's Critique - Introduction

First, in Dr. Mantik's Introduction, he summarizes three topics of relatively brief conversation between the two of us at the November 2017 Oswald mock trial event. (As Dr. Mantik notes, I sat at the prosecution's bench as an expert consultant, a role I have played many times in my career as a litigation consultant and expert witness.¹) Prior to addressing the main issue of each of Dr. Mantik's twenty points of critique, I will address his introductory comments, as follows:

Concerning the alleged forehead entry wound, Dr. Mantik asked me why I believed that no Parkland doctors had seen such an injury. I told him my belief was based on the account of Dr. Kemp Clark. Dr. Mantik was clearly mystified by that notion and wanted to challenge me. As I informed Dr. Mantik in a follow-up email, when I had mentioned Clark, I was referring to Clark's contemporaneous reporting of emergency procedures administered to President Kennedy, which I reprint in full in my book (Chapter 4). This report made several references to a wound in the occipital bone, as well as to the presence of cerebellar brain tissue. Clark further disclosed that, "Two external wounds, one in the lower third of the anterior neck, the other in the occipital region of the skull, were noted" (my emphasis). He included no information about a forehead wound. I note later in my book that it would have been odd that Parkland doctors would overlook a forehead gunshot wound since they were pressed close to the president's face as they attempted to resuscitate him (pp. 314-315). Surely, one of the doctors would have reported the injury to Dr. Clark - if he had not observed it himself, which I also find to be unlikely - at which point he would have recorded it in his summary. Those circumstances, as well as the notion the HSCA did not credit a forehead entry wound fifteen years later, suggest to me that there was no such wound,

¹ *Dr. Mantik accurately describes circumstances about the prosecution's oversight of his changed view concerning a successful Grassy Knoll head shot. That was my oversight, as I had not at that time read his more recent book, JFK's Head Wounds. That's definitely on me, so on that score, I will accept Dr. Mantik's punches. Without belaboring the point, I think it is useful to clarify my role in the prosecution at the Houston mock trial. In late September 2017, after first learning that Gus Pappas was going to be lead prosecutor for the November 16-17, 2017 event, I reached out to Gus to offer assistance, which he gladly accepted. Gus, and Amanda Webb, the other prosecutor, at that time were not much more knowledgeable about the Kennedy assassination than the average man or woman on the street. (Gus and Amanda, chosen to lead the prosecution in part because they are alumni of the South Texas College of Law, which hosted the event, and whom I deeply admire for the hard work, dedication and smarts they brought to the project, did an outstanding job at the mock trial.) I told Gus early on that the defense was loaded with all-star lawyers and all-star witnesses, and also that there was a very lopsided allocation of time to the defense versus the prosecution over the two-day proceeding. Gus fought for a better allotment of time, including adequate time to cross examine the all-star roster of defense witnesses. My role was to help Gus and Amanda get up to speed in the six weeks before the event, including by profiling the positions of the defense experts. In a normal litigation setting, the scope of expert witness testimony would be "discovered" through pre-trial procedures. That advantage was not available to either side for the Houston event. Therefore, the preparation of cross examination was monumental given the deep scope of views expressed by these experts over many decades. Ultimately, the actual scope of testimony for each of the defense experts was more or less as predicted, so the disadvantage of not having pretrial discovery for the experts was not an impediment. The prosecution was able to obtain a slight majority of a 6-5 hung jury on the question of Oswald's guilt, although I will be the first to say that result - or any result - does not allow anyone to claim "bragging rights." I know full well from my extensive litigation experience that a brief trial of this case, devoid of virtually any rules (e.g., no objections allowed, and there was certainly a heap of objectionable material introduced by both sides) decides nothing on the central question. Still, Gus, Amanda, and I were all pleased to receive praise from many people at the event for the impressive level of preparedness and presentation skill on the part of the prosecution, including warm, personal praise in that regard from Ben Wecht.*

despite Dr. Mantik's arguments to the contrary. Related, a forehead gunshot entry wound was not noted by the autopsy doctors either, although Dr. Mantik has written about the notion of body alteration as a possible explanation for this fact (see Chapter 9 of my book).² In his most recent book, *JFK's Head Wounds*, Dr. Mantik provides a sketch (p. 101) that a medical illustrator made from the recollection of Quentin Schwinn, who claims to have seen a 4" by 5" photograph, presumably from autopsy, showing what Dr. Mantik reports as "an obvious bullet hole in the right forehead." Clearly, if this was the appearance of the president's body (presumably prior to alteration), Parkland doctors would have provided an account of such a wound in their contemporaneous notes.

In addressing the 6.5 mm. fragment, I emailed Dr. Gary Aguilar to explain the conversation I had with Dr. Mantik at the Houston event and to ask what he thought. Dr. Aguilar was kind enough to reply, demonstrating his accurate understanding of Dr. Mantik's conclusions, but also allowing for a possible alternative explanation that the 6.5 mm. object may have been an artifact on the X-ray film, rather than the result of alteration of the X-ray film, as Dr. Mantik concludes. (See discussion in my response to Dr. Mantik's Issue #7, below.) I do not have the technical capabilities to evaluate the stand-alone merits of any professional differences of opinions on this issue expressed by many. I also refer anyone interested in the topic's intricacies to the work of researcher Pat Speer, a layman who has completed an enormous amount of research regarding the medical issues surrounding President Kennedy's wounds. Speer proposes a compelling circumstantial case that the 6.5 mm. fragment was real and was one of the two fragments that Humes recovered on the night of the autopsy. (See Chapter 18 of Speer's online book at patspeer.com. I am aware that Dr. Mantik takes issue with Speer's analysis on this point.)

As for the mistake that Humes seems to have made in identifying the location of the rear entry wound on the back of the president's head, I consider this issue in my response to Dr. Mantik's Issue #6 below.

² *At the Houston event, Dr. Mantik made it quite clear to me that he believes the autopsy doctors participated in a cover-up on the night of the autopsy.*

Addressing Dr. Mantik's Critique – 20 Issues

My responses to the specific issues Dr. Mantik raises in his review are as follows:

1. WAGNER: "...did he [Perry] actually have all the medical and forensic evidence to make unequivocal statements about the direction [of the bullet] ...? The answer to that question is certainly no." [emphasis is Wagner's]

Wagner Response to Mantik: My point is simple and straightforward. Dr. Perry did not know about the undisputed entry wound on Kennedy's back at the time he made his original statement. Surely that knowledge was essential to any reasonable conclusion about the nature of the throat wound. Many researchers who believe in the involvement of a conspiracy, including Dr. Wecht, Dr. Robertson, and Dr. Thomas, conclude that the back wound and throat wound constitute the path of one bullet (although each of them believe the Warren Commission's single bullet theory is invalid). Dr. Mantik's critique, therefore, is not a critique aimed simply at my analysis in particular, but more generally at analysis receiving widespread acceptance by many respected names in the critical research community.

Further, Dr. Randy Robertson's discovery of an account concerning a spent, misshapen bullet that Dr. Young reportedly found is indeed intriguing. Robertson himself states that he "remains cautious about this discovery" as only one witness has corroborated Young's claims. Nevertheless, the account has a certain amount of credibility, as Young independently pursued the issue with Gerald Ford. We may never have additional information to consider, although my analysis assumes a missing Oswald bullet (i.e., the bullet entering the president's back and exiting his throat). The spent, misshapen bullet – if Young's claims are true – could possibly be that bullet. Finally, Dr. Mantik assumes that I will find the Young claim "disconcerting" because I "enjoyed" claiming that no one knew where the bullet went, if it did not exit the throat. I did not when writing my book, nor do I now, advocate a position other than what I believe to be supported by a totality of the facts and circumstances.

2. WAGNER: "A ragged appearance is typically associated with an exit wound. Never, to my knowledge, is this contemporaneous note mentioned by those conspiracy researchers who cite later Parkland doctor statements that the throat wound was small and circular."

Wagner response to Mantik: The "ragged" description is actually from Dr. Clark's summary of emergency room procedures, which I reproduce in its entirety in my book (Chapter 4). Dr. Mantik and I seem to be in general agreement about the reported ragged appearance of the throat wound.

3. WAGNER: "Dr. Aguilar, a pathologist ..."

Wagner response to Mantik: Dr. Mantik was critical of my reference to Dr. Aguilar as a pathologist rather than as an ophthalmologist, a specialty which Dr. Aguilar now practices. According to the transcript of his November 1994 ARRB testimony, Dr. Aguilar introduced himself by stating, "I am a practicing pathologist in San Francisco." If the transcript is inaccurate, I would welcome that knowledge. I have reached out to Dr. Aguilar for clarification.

4. WAGNER: “Doubters of the lone-gunman thesis could always suggest a murky and suspicious chain of possession, nursing their claims with the fact that the president’s brain, eventually disappeared.”

Wagner response to Mantik: First, the cited passage is misleading in that it may be understood out of context to imply dismissiveness toward “doubters.” In the preceding paragraph of the book (p. 142), I outline the response of “Supporters of the lone gunman thesis.” Thus, I merely report the competing viewpoints in order to introduce my analysis. I think the concerns critics raise are perfectly valid, which is the point I was making in the fuller narrative. (The book’s *Kirkus* review, easily searchable, also notes my acknowledgment of critics’ legitimate concerns, of which this subject is an example.) The same book chapter reproduces both Dr. Clark’s memo summarizing emergency procedures at Parkland (with emphasis on occipital wounds and the observed damaged cerebellum), as well as the press conference in which Dr. Perry makes repeated references to an entrance wound in the president’s throat. Second, while I have respect for Dr. Mantik’s work, the authenticity of the autopsy photographs and X-rays is a divisive issue even among the most qualified and respected members of the critical research community, and I will expand upon that below.

5. WAGNER: “What is the evidence of tampering? If it can be shown that the autopsy X-rays are authentic, can this explain away the inaccuracy of all the witnesses?”

Wagner response to Mantik: Dr. Mantik’s statement concluding that “the witnesses and X-rays agree” is not a universally held truth even among prominent members of the critical research community. Dr. Randy Robertson, a diagnostic radiologist and board member of the AARC, has personally inspected the original autopsy photographs and X-rays at the NARA as Dr. Mantik did, yet believes differently than him. In the article *JFK Shot from Two Directions* (also cited in Dr. Mantik’s book, *JFK Head Wounds*), Walt Brown (with Dr. Robertson) reports Robertson’s firm assertion that these materials are authentic (the article also reports Dr. Robertson’s agreement that the president’s back and throat wounds were the path of one bullet, although not as part of the “magic bullet” thesis). Then, after another visit to the NARA in November 2015, and referring to the photographs and X-rays, Dr. Robertson stated, “I can attest with absolute conviction that all these materials are authentic and unchanged since they were taken the night of the autopsy.”³ In an easily accessible YouTube video showing back-to-back presentations by Dr. Robertson and Dr. Mantik at a 2014 AARC conference, Dr. Robertson said that there was no missing occipital bone. For Dr. Robertson, to the extent Parkland witnesses described the skull otherwise they must be wrong. I don’t believe that Dr. Robertson’s intention was to denigrate the Parkland witnesses, and neither was that my intention.

Finally, Dr. Mantik’s claim that I ignore the eyewitnesses implies that I, like Dr. Robertson, have drawn my conclusions without seriously considering their testimony. However, I discuss Parkland (and Bethesda) witness recollections extensively in Chapter 4, along with Dr. Aguilar’s fine work in this area (more below). My point is simply that there is

³ “A Review at the National Archives of the ARRB enhancements of the exposed roll of 120 Ektachrome E3 film from the JFK autopsy.”

disagreement on this issue among the most qualified researchers that have had the opportunity to personally inspect the primary materials.

6. A. WAGNER: "I believe it is clear the autopsy doctors were not participating in a cover-up during the autopsy."

B. WAGNER: "Unbelievably, unlike millions of American[s], the three pathologists who made up the official autopsy team were unaware of statements from the Dallas medical team informing the rest of the world at a press conference that there was a gunshot wound in Kennedy's throat."

Wagner response to Mantik: At the Houston mock trial, Dr. Mantik raised this issue with me. The 4-inch "error" is indeed hard to fathom (I describe the debate on this issue as "heated" in my book, concluding that Humes made an error). The autopsy report (as well as Humes's Warren Commission testimony) states that the particle trail (seen on the lateral X-ray) led from an entry wound near the EOP to the exit site. I believe the probability is low that Humes would lie about this erroneous description of the particle trail knowing the risk that such a lie would be easily discoverable in a trial or an investigation, which would surely follow. Along with the evidence provided by the X-ray films themselves, there were also plenty of witnesses who had viewed those films at the autopsy who would be in a position to challenge any deception. Further, if the path of the particle trail conflicted with a desired cover story, the natural position for Humes to take in the autopsy report (as well as his later Warren Commission testimony) would have been to ignore the issue altogether, thereby eliminating the risk of being caught in an outright lie. It would have been better for Humes to allow his account to be a subject of debate rather than proof of a deliberate falsehood. In my book (Chapter 4, Chapter 9) I concluded that, although I believe that Humes and Boswell, in particular, shaded the truth to the Warren Commission, as well as on other occasions over many years, the autopsy doctors were not involved in nefarious deeds on the very night of the autopsy.⁴

In terms of the autopsy doctors' involvement in some sort of cover-up on the night of the autopsy, I concluded, as explained in the book (pp. 153-155, 315-316), that circumstantial evidence conflicts with that notion. I came to this conclusion because the autopsy doctors' work was inconsistent with conspiratorial conduct. For example, if Humes, Boswell, and Finck knew that the throat wound was an entry wound, and were motivated to make it appear otherwise, they certainly would have done whatever was necessary to manufacture their findings and shut down the issue that night. Had they done so, they would have avoided igniting the spark of a controversy debated for fifty years, especially in light of the

⁴ *Indeed, reliance on whatever Humes and Boswell said or represented through the years – after the night of the autopsy and subsequent delivery of the autopsy report – is nothing short of perilous. For example, I refer to CE 385 (the Rydberg drawing of the "neck" wound) done at Humes's direction just prior to his March 1964 Warren Commission testimony, as the "Big Lie." As another example, Boswell, for HSCA staff, changed the location of the entry wound on the president's back – the "dot" on the autopsy diagram – upward to the collar level. This "clarification" was obviously convenient in an attempt to sustain the single bullet theory. It was only after the night of the autopsy (and delivery of the autopsy report) that Humes's and Boswell's positions became "flexible," succumbing, I believe, to the pressures of government investigators, particularly the Warren Commission, the Justice Department, and the HSCA.*

Parkland doctors' already public report regarding the throat wound (i.e., entrance wound).⁵ In addition, if, on the night of the autopsy, they were involved in a cover-up about the nature of the president's injuries, the autopsy doctors would have likely cited a higher entry wound to his head, avoiding the obvious question of wound trajectory from an alleged sniper's nest high and to the rear (as well as better explaining the particle trail) that Dr. Mantik and others have noted.⁶

Although I do not discuss this issue in my book, I am aware of Robert Livingston's claim that he informed Humes of the wound in the president's throat prior to the completion of the autopsy (*Crenshaw, et al. v Sutherland et al.*). Still, even prominent researcher Jim DiEugenio characterized Livingston's testimony as "debatable," adding, "There is no corroboration for the phone call in the record" (August 13, 2016 post on *The Education Forum*).

7. WAGNER: "Dr. Gerald McDonnell...reported that the alteration of the [X-ray] images...should be readily...discernable in a number of ways."

Wagner response to Mantik: I am well aware of Dr. Mantik's contributions in studying the autopsy X-rays. While I admittedly had not considered Dr. Mantik's more recent book *JFK's Head Wounds*, I did read his thesis in *Murder in Dealey Plaza*, as well as descriptions of his work in *Inside the Assassination Records Review Board* (Doug Horne) and in Pat Speer's online book, which are cited in my book. I also observed Dr. Mantik's presentations at various conferences, including the September 2014 AARC conference noted above as the 2003 Wecht conference. Additionally, I am familiar with Dr. Robertson's contrary views on the issues Dr. Mantik raises in his critique. I reported the HCSA conclusion in my book, supported by analysis that led me to conclude that the question of authenticity is connected to the issue of whether or not Humes, Boswell and Finck were involved in a cover-up on the night of the autopsy. For reasons noted previously – that the autopsy doctors (1) were not involved in a cover-up on the night of the autopsy; and (2) consistently vouched for the authenticity of autopsy photographs and X-rays – I judged that the HSCA's authentication panel's conclusions were inferentially supported. I also introduced Dr. Mantik's opposition to those conclusions, citing his work for those interested in exploring the details.

Finally, and as already described, there are apparent professional disagreements between Dr. Mantik and Dr. Robertson (as well as others) about the apparent meaning of the "white patch" and the 6.5 mm. object. Dr. Robertson believes that the X-rays are authentic and

⁵ In Chapter 5, I reproduce a large amount of the Sibert and O'Neill FBI 302 report of the agents' personal observations on the night of the autopsy. The 302 report makes it clear that, at the conclusion of the autopsy, Humes said that there was no transit of a nonfatal bullet through the president's body after it had entered the upper back. If Humes was part of a cover-up on the night of the autopsy, the last thing he would say, as he did, to the attendees – including note-taking FBI agents – is that the bullet entering the president high on the back had no transit. If involved in a cover-up that night, Humes surely would have told the FBI agents (and everyone else in attendance) that they had proved the bullet entering the president's back had exited the throat. There is absolutely no logic to allege otherwise. Immediately shutting down Parkland reporting of an entrance wound to the throat would have been of paramount importance that night if operating in a cover-up. If the autopsy doctors were so unconcerned about that vital part of the "cover-up" then there is no reasonable basis to believe they acted to cover anything up that night.

⁶ After all, they had supervised the back of the head photo that provided clear cover (if the autopsy doctors were inclined to lie) for a higher location of the entrance wound in the back of the head.

that the 6.5 mm. object was metal from a bullet. Dr. Aguilar told me that it was also possible that the 6.5 mm. object could possibly have been an artifact on the film.⁷

8. WAGNER: “The doctors said they saw cerebellum tissue, which the autopsy photographs and X-rays indicate would have been impossible.”

Wagner response to Mantik: See my response to Mantik #4 above. Additionally, the nine-member HSCA forensic pathology panel, which included Dr. Wecht, knew full well about the Parkland doctors’ reporting of cerebellar brain tissue. Apparently the HSCA forensic pathology panel – including Dr. Wecht – concluded that the Parkland doctors were mistaken. The HSCA forensic pathology panel – including Dr. Wecht – also apparently reject Dr. Mantik’s assertion about the placement of the Harper fragment in the back of the skull. So does Dr. Robertson, for example. For laymen, the notably large disagreement of experts on a highly technical area of the evidence requires reconciliation based on other known facts and circumstances in order to assess the credibility of the experts’ analysis. The tone of Dr. Mantik’s critique implies the issue has been settled in the community of qualified assassination researchers, which is certainly not the case.⁸

9. “We know the president’s body was not altered prior to autopsy...”

Wagner response to Mantik: The cited quote is from Chapter 4 of my book. In Chapter 4, I preview my conclusions and cite expanded discussion from Chapter 9; there, rather than ignore Doug Horne’s work (as a reader of Dr. Mantik’s review may interpret without the necessary context), I lay out Horne’s (and David Lifton’s) main thesis, along with my analysis, over 14-15 pages of narrative. My rebuttal includes discussion of the mere fourteen-minute window that was the only available time for the theft of the president’s body and, thus, the *sine qua non* of Horne’s and Lifton’s theories (beyond the supposition of Oswald’s innocence). While I conclude that the theft and alteration of the president’s body is a “severe improbability” from the timeline alone, in my book I am also quite complimentary of Horne’s and Lifton’s extensive work and contribution to Kennedy assassination research.⁹

10. WAGNER: “Something else is apparent in Zapruder frame 313 that does not get a lot of mention in the conspiracy books: human tissue is clearly projected forward.”

⁷ Michael Baden and others have claimed that the questioned item (i.e., the 6.5 mm. fragment) was actually a bullet fragment adhering on, or near, the back of the president’s skull close to the cowlick entry site. As a layman, I am persuaded by Dr. Mantik and Larry Sturdivan’s (*The JFK Myths*, pp. 192-195) argument that the questioned item could not be an actual bullet fragment at the location claimed by Baden and others.

⁸ I assume that Dr. Mantik would respond by noting that Dr. Wecht was unaware in 1978 that the extant photographs of the president’s brain – which show an intact cerebellum – are an alleged fraud, leading Dr. Wecht to incorrectly infer that Parkland doctors’ contrary reporting must be a mistake. Assuming the truth of the alleged fraud, as well as recognizing that Oswald fired bullets at the president, the furthest a two-brain theory could go would be to cover up the possibility of another gunman. It is therefore relevant to weigh the validity of two-brain theory against the validity of others acting in concert with Oswald in carrying out the assassination. The low probability that Oswald had accomplices firing shots in Dealey Plaza is a major point of my analysis, which I discuss in my concluding remarks.

⁹ I recognize that, even if one were to reject the pre-autopsy body alteration theory, by itself that does not preclude later nefarious conduct with regard to the purported examination and description of the president’s brain. See prior discussion.

Wagner response to Mantik: Dr. Mantik asserts that the trajectory of the particle trail across the top of the skull X-rays “matches *neither* a frontal shot at Z-313 *nor* a posterior shot (unless it came from behind in a balloon hovering far above Dealey Plaza”).

Researchers have argued that the particle trail is at odds with a shot from the rear, as Dr. Mantik notes. It is interesting, however, that the HSCA forensic pathology panel unanimously agreed that the cowlick site represented an entry wound (1HSCA-234-235, 242, 250, 7HSCA-115-116, 176). This decision included the concurrence of Dr. Wecht. Further, the panel found that the cowlick entry site was the only place on the skull that exhibited an entry wound. (This, of course, still allows for the possibility that another bullet entered the president’s head through an area in which skull bone had already been evacuated via a different bullet.) I am not a doctor, but I find it relevant that the HSCA forensic pathology panel, having benefit of the X-ray showing the particle trail - was apparently not troubled by the supposed disconnect between the location of the particle trail (which Dr. Wecht surely knew about) and the cowlick entry site, from a shot that could only have been fired in a balloon hovering far above Dealey Plaza, as flippantly suggested by Dr. Mantik. While I readily admit no expertise to be able to independently evaluate this issue, it is reasonable to assume that Dr. Wecht possessed those capabilities, having performed or supervised thousands upon thousands of autopsies, including those of gunshot victims.

As I discuss in Chapter 10, Dr. Wecht (arguably the dean of the critical research community, having earned the respect of all students of the assassination) said in public testimony before the HSCA that evidence of a shot fired from the side or lower right rear was “Very meager, and the possibility based upon the existing evidence is extremely remote” (1HSCA-346). That existing evidence had to include the lateral X-rays that exhibited a particle trail, although Dr. Wecht did also argue the potential of a shot from the side or lower right rear based on a scenario (alluded to above) in which a bullet entered the head through a spot where skull bone had been blown out. Even in formal dissent from his colleagues on the HSCA forensic pathology panel, Dr. Wecht did not complain about any alleged disconnect between the cowlick entry site and the particle trail (assuming, safely I believe, that Dr. Wecht was not arguing that a shot “from the side or the lower right rear” accounted for the presentation of the particle trail). About fifteen years later, in his 1993 book, *Cause of Death*, Dr. Wecht still did not suggest any disconnect between the cowlick entry site and the particle trail. Subsequently, in 1999 and 2000, (armed with an avalanche of research from the critical research community completed in the intervening period since 1978, when the HSCA forensic pathology panel completed its work), while engaging in conversation with Bugliosi, Dr. Wecht still limited himself to the possibility of another shot from the right side (*Reclaiming History*, chapter devoted to conversations between Bugliosi and Wecht). With Bugliosi, Wecht could have argued that the particle trail was inconsistent with a cowlick entry wound, yet didn’t.¹⁰ Not in 1978. Not in 1993. Not in 2000. Why not?

¹⁰ Bugliosi actually provided Wecht an opening for debate on this point (*Reclaiming History*, p. 863). Challenging Wecht on the notion that a bullet may have travelled more right to left through the president’s head, Bugliosi argued, “When I also reminded Dr. Wecht that the autopsy X-rays of the president’s head did not show any metallic fragments from a bullet proceeding from the right side of Kennedy’s head to the left, only from the back to the front, he [Wecht] conceded this was another problem with the theory postulating a shot from the president’s right side.” Wecht could have accepted the opportunity to challenge the particle trail evidence as connected to a posterior shot, but apparently did not.

11. WAGNER: The autopsy doctors never wavered in confirming the authenticity of that photograph.”

Wagner response to Mantik: Humes and Boswell both confirmed the authenticity of the photograph (the back of the head photo) in testimony before the ARRB. It is true that the doctors always insisted that the entry wound on the back of the president’s head was low, near the EOP site, and not the cowlick site, at the “red spot.” I agree that Humes buckling in his public HSCA appearance suggests that his testimony was coerced. However, none of the three autopsy doctors, to my knowledge, has ever claimed that the photograph was inauthentic.

12. WAGNER: “The same problem occurs when researchers - like Lifton, Horne, Aguilar, Fetzer and Mantik - promote analyses that ignore the abundant evidence of Oswald’s guilt.”

Wagner response to Mantik: First, my footnote on page 28, which states that Oswald labeled himself a patsy to promote the perception that his previous defection to the Soviet Union made him an easy target for police to accuse, was specifically intended to counterbalance the common notion that the patsy declaration implied an actual framing of Oswald by supposed conspirators.

In his critique, Dr. Mantik lists eight circumstances related to the patsy claim he asserts that I have ignored. That statement is not accurate. I don’t understand how anyone actually reading my book could make such a sweeping claim. In Chapter 1, while presenting a brief biography of Oswald’s adult life, I address the Clinton, Louisiana sighting and the Civil Air Patrol connection, lending credibility to both events (p. 37). I also devote a significant amount of narrative in two different chapters (9 and 10) to Antonio Veciana’s account of seeing Oswald in the summer of 1963, clearly allowing for the plausibility of this story. (It should also be noted that, about the time that I finished with my writings, Veciana published his own book, *Trained to Kill*. In it, Veciana clarified what he had before only vaguely disclosed to Gaeton Fonzi (*The Last Investigation*): He saw Phillips and Oswald together in Dallas in the summer of 1963.) I also discuss in my book some of the issues that lend credence to Oswald’s relationship with intelligence sources. For example, I cite John Newman’s excellent work regarding this topic on multiple occasions and I conclude Chapter 9 by allowing for a connection between Oswald and certain government agencies (which I infer might provide an explanation for government deceptions about the assassination after its occurrence). Of course, that Oswald may have had connections to U.S. intelligence is not by itself evidence of government involvement in the assassination, although I do acknowledge that such a relationship inspires questions. Concerning the Oswald-Ruby sightings (I cite HSCA findings in my book), the legitimacy of these incidents has always been hotly disputed; in my view, it is difficult for one to state that they definitely occurred with sufficient confidence.¹¹

¹¹ *As to whether Oswald and Ruby were acquainted, compare, for example, Jim Marrs in Crossfire (pp. 387-396), who reports “overwhelming” evidence of an acquaintance, with Seth Kantor in Who Was Jack Ruby (p. 209), who reports “not a shred of proof” of such an acquaintance.*

13. WAGNER: "... Mantik's thesis, developed by unquestionably painstaking analysis, is felled by internal and external contradictions. In the bargain, Mantik lays waste to the notion of a head shot from the Grassy Knoll."

Wagner response to Mantik: My understanding is that the result of Dr. Mantik's OD work was to establish evidence that the extant X-ray record is not authentic. As I discussed above, Dr. Robertson argues against the truth of that allegation. There is obviously significant disagreement among qualified researchers on this point. Without the necessary expertise, I am unable to independently determine who is right and who is wrong solely on the basis of these seemingly irreconcilable expert opinions.

Dr. Mantik was unclear as to why my analysis suggests that his analysis is felled by external and internal contradictions (my words). My approach in the book was to rely on the HSCA's authentication of the autopsy photographs and X-rays. As I discuss in Chapter 4 (and again in Chapter 9), the HSCA's authentication is substantiated by other circumstantial evidence. That is, for the autopsy photographs (particularly #42, the back of the head photo), X-rays, and the body to have been altered, it must have been in cooperation with the autopsy doctors if the autopsy doctors were to later vouch for their authenticity. As I explain in the book (and above), the circumstantial evidence leads me to conclude that the autopsy doctors were not involved in any cover-up on the night of the autopsy. Additionally, if I understand the argument put forth by Dr. Mantik and others, such nefarious conduct (i.e.; alteration of the primary materials, including the president's X-rays and related alleged illicit 6.5 mm. fragment) would have likely been done as part of an attempt to frame Oswald. As I am quite clear in stating my belief that Oswald was not framed (i.e., Oswald fired shots at the president), it is apparent that claims of alteration are therefore circumstantially undermined on this basis alone.¹²

Again, I am not able to say that Dr. Mantik's particular work is inaccurate within the confines of my own abilities. I suggest that, if those possessing the skills and credentials to adequately inspect the autopsy photographs and X-ray record have professional disagreements over the authenticity of the materials, it would be useful for them to formally rebut each other's respective opinions so that members of the research community might have the benefit of a "fully briefed" argument. My vote would be for Dr. Mantik and Dr. Robertson to perform this valuable service.¹³

¹² *If the claim is really that Oswald was guilty of firing from the rear, but attempts were made to cover-up shots from another assassin, then this particular line of argument may only go so far. But if Oswald's guilt is otherwise accepted, why the need to juice the case and introduce the 6.5 mm. object into an altered X-ray (on the A-P view only, while "neglecting" to introduce a convincing corresponding object on the lateral view), thus risking publicly befuddling the autopsy doctors who, as I understand the argument, were not aware of this activity? Dr. Mantik indicates that the addition of the 6.5 mm. object was "used to tie Oswald to the crime" (Murder in Dealey Plaza, p. 290). If one understood that Oswald was at least involved, however, there was plenty of incriminating evidence to establish that guilt without resorting to such risky activity.*

¹³ *Related, it would be useful for Dr. Mantik and Dr. Robertson to debate (and vigorously rebut) related areas of disagreement, such as the placement of the Harper fragment (Dr. Mantik – high occipital, Dr. Robertson – top right/parietal), as well as the orientation of the F8 autopsy "mystery photograph" (Dr. Mantik – taken from the back of the head, Dr. Robertson – taken from the front of the head).*

In my book (Chapter 9), I wrote that Dr. Mantik rejected the idea of a head wound originating from the Grassy Knoll based on his analysis published in *Murder in Dealey Plaza*. At the November 2017 Houston event, Dr. Mantik informed me that he no longer held that view, which he makes clear in his 2015 book, *JFK's Head Wounds*. In this more recent book, Dr. Mantik now holds that the injuries to the president's head included a bullet fired "possibly from the Grassy Knoll" (p. 96). Although my intention was to incorporate the most recent positions on major issues of researchers cited (for example, I note Josiah Thompson's changed views concerning the forward motion of the president's head in Z-312/313 from what he wrote about in *Six Seconds in Dallas*), I was not aware of Dr. Mantik's current position until he informed me at the Houston event. As mentioned previously, that was my oversight, for which I stand corrected.

14. WAGNER: "If this claim of pre-autopsy alteration...were true, why would the supposed non-conspirator Bethesda witnesses...not report the enlarged wound extending to the top of the head?"

Wagner response to Mantik: Dr. Mantik claims that I do not appreciate the size of the initial skull wound; however, I am well aware of both Parkland and Bethesda doctors' reports regarding this issue – in fact, I reproduce large sections of the official reports in Chapters 4 and 5 of my book. Also, in Chapter 4, I cite Dr. Aguilar's excellent work, *John F. Kennedy's Fatal Wounds: The Witnesses and the Interpretations from 1963 to the Present* (August 1994), in which Dr. Aguilar reported near unanimity among the Parkland and Bethesda witnesses on the presence of a wound to the right rear in the president's head:

That JFK's head wound was on the right side of his head is universally accepted. With a single exception, all witnesses placed JFK's major skull defect on the right side, and given the frequency of witness error, this suggests good witness reliability in this case. **The most peculiar aspect of JFK's wounds is that of the 46 witnesses whose opinions I have examined between Parkland and Bethesda, 45 of whom correctly claimed that the skull defect was on the right side, 44 were apparently wrong by the "best" evidence to claim that the wound was in the right-rear, rather than the right-front.** [Wagner emphasis] The "authenticated" photographs, the originals of which were twice examined by author Aguilar at the National Archives, show no rear defect at all, only an anterior-lateral defect, and so, if valid, the images prove that not a single witness accurately described JFK's fatal wound, and that even the autopsy report fails to accurately describe the skull defect visible in the images! ... As we'll see, however, **an inexplicable concordance of reliable, close eyewitnesses places the major visible defect in JFK's scalp and skull at the right rear where it is absent in the "authenticated" photographs and X-rays.** [Wagner emphasis].

The quote (p. 307) that Dr. Mantik cites is taken from the context of analysis on Bethesda mortician Tom Robinson's assertion to the ARRB that he witnessed Humes, in a clandestine pre-autopsy procedure, saw the president's head open at the top (Humes, for his part has always said that he employed no saw during the autopsy; doctors could remove what parts remained of the president's brain after the assassination through preexisting damage). The very next sentence in my book, which Dr. Mantik neglected to quote (despite it being necessary for full context) reads, "How could there have been a Parkland-Bethesda harmony [e.g., the Aguilar analysis] with regard to the location of the president's blast wound

if Robinson's tale were true?" Rather, if true, the act Robinson alleges would have resulted in a Parkland-Bethesda *conflict*, as the Bethesda witnesses would have reported seeing a different wound than the Parkland witnesses.

This discussion relates to Doug Horne's analysis in his book, *Inside the Assassination Records Review Board*, which establishes Horne's strong belief that "pre-autopsy" alterations were undertaken in part "to attempt to change the physical appearance of what was clearly noted to be an exit wound in the back of the skull when the body arrived at the morgue, to a much larger head defect that could later be represented as a 'blowout' or exit wound chiefly in the top and right side of the skull, caused by a hypothetical shot from behind ..." (page 630, Horne's emphasis removed). Horne further suggests that during a clandestine pre-autopsy procedure, "the large exit wound in the rear of the skull, a blowout resulting from a frontal shot, was surgically enlarged to four or five times its original size, and expanded in both a lateral and superior direction on the skull" (page 630, Horne's emphasis removed). There is an irreconcilable problem between what Doug Horne's thesis on body alteration should predict about the evident wounds and what was reported by the Parkland versus Bethesda witnesses.

15. WAGNER: "...Mantik's analysis ... is flawed and there is no credible evidence of alteration to the Zapruder film."

Wagner response to Mantik: This is another area of professional disagreement among respected researchers. Dr. Mantik complains that I have weighed in on the technical authenticity of the film without the necessary skills to do so, but I have not, as is apparent from the extended, intact quote in Chapter 9 of my book (p. 314): **"In any case, many prominent researchers believe that Mantik's analysis (and that of others with similar views) is flawed and there is no credible evidence of alteration to the Zapruder film."** I then offer a reference to Michael Kurtz's book, *The JFK Assassination Debates*, which examines competing views on the authenticity of the Zapruder film. My interpretation of this issue stems from my understanding that alteration of the film would likely have only occurred in a scenario in which (1) Oswald was innocent, and (2) there was organized government involvement in the assassination itself. As my analysis leads me to conclude that Oswald fired shots at the president, I consequently deduce that the Zapruder film was not altered. In addition, as I discuss in Chapter 9 (p. 300), while considering David Lifton's body alteration theory, the alteration of the Zapruder film would naturally require the alteration of certain other parts of the Dealey plaza photographic record, which would otherwise conflict with the appearance of the alleged altered Zapruder film. For example, I am not aware of an adequate explanation for the timing of chain of custody of the Nix and Muchmore films which would have allowed for the illicit alteration of those films.

In Dr. Mantik's book review of *Hear No Evil*, by Don Thomas, Mantik criticizes Thomas's characterization of the film as "hard evidence." Dr. Mantik states, "Most believers in Z-film alteration would likely be willing, for the sake of discussion at least, to accept his premise, i.e., they would permit him to build his case on this belief, so long as that assumption is clearly stated from the outset...Why not merely recognize reality (there is a debate), and also acknowledge these dissidents (lots of serious folks). He could, after all, merely opt to state that he chooses to accept authenticity and proceed forthwith, without wishing to be

drawn into debate.”¹⁴ I chose to follow the exact tactic that Dr. Mantik suggests to Dr. Thomas here, as I describe above. Further, in my book I call out, for special praise, Dr. Mantik’s own work on this topic, as it appears in Fetzer’s *Murder in Dealey Plaza*.

Finally, Dr. Mantik states that I did not appreciate Alec Baldwin’s comments regarding the Kennedy family’s views on this issue at the evening event at the mock trial. Why make that assumption, as though I am not open to hearing all the evidence? I at one time believed there were at least two gunmen firing shots at the president, as I explain in the book, so it is not as though I am unwilling to change my mind if presented with convincing evidence or arguments.

16. WAGNER: “No, a government-wide conspiracy was not responsible for President Kennedy’s assassination.”

Wagner response to Mantik: First, as I previously stated, there is widespread professional disagreement on the issue of X-ray authentication. Second, the Burkley quote, while frequently cited, does not grant us any understanding of Burkley’s views, whatever they are, beyond what we may surmise through speculation. I certainly acknowledge that Burkley’s first-hand knowledge is superior to whatever knowledge I may possess. I think most will agree, however, that the Burkley citation by itself does not put this matter to rest.

Dr. Mantik lists more than fifty parties who accept the idea of conspiracy. Still, I assume that many on this list would not accept “government-wide conspiracy” - which was the topic of the section of Chapter 9 from which Dr. Mantik pulled the above quotation - as responsible for the assassination itself. The last entry on Dr. Mantik’s list reads, “Most of the world’s citizens, but not *Robert Wagner*.”¹⁵ I close my book by stating, “Half a century later, we can handle the notion that [the assassination] was an evil act perpetrated by some lone rogue, or even a few rogues.” (My emphasis here.) I am not categorical, but approach this debate specifically through a consideration of probabilities of events.

17. WAGNER: “...no one saw an assassin in the area of the Grassy Knoll, and there has been no physical evidence of such an assassin - including audio evidence...”

Wagner response to Mantik: In Chapter 3, I examine some of the evidence for an assassin near the Grassy Knoll, including the audio evidence that underlies Dr. Thomas’s work, and which the HSCA utilized in its proceedings. In addition, I also discuss the testimony of an HSCA gunshot acoustics expert who revealed that only four Dealey Plaza witnesses included in the HSCA study reported gunshots from multiple locations. This expert witness opined, “It would seem most unlikely that only four of the 178 total witnesses would report multiple locations” and then continued, “Despite the various causes of confusion in the locus of any single shot, a second shot from a different location should be distinctive and different enough to cause more than four witnesses to report multiple origins for the shots.” As I describe in the book, this expert testimony has important implications for those that accept that shots were fired from the sixth floor of the TSB, including many prominent members

¹⁴ *Kennedys and King website*.

¹⁵ *The list is mostly the same list appearing in Murder in Dealey Plaza (pp. 404-405). The list appears again in Dr. Mantik’s review of Bugliosi’s Reclaiming History. In the Reclaiming History review, however, I see that Vince didn’t get the special inclusion of his name after the entry “Most of the world’s citizens, but not” that Dr. Mantik ascribed to me.*

of the critical research community. Dr. Mantik's claim that I deny the existence of possible evidence is therefore not true; I simply deny the *reliability* of that evidence and I am not alone in doing so, particularly the supposed audio evidence.

Finally, I agree that Brian Edwards was an excellent witness at the mock trial. I made a point to approach Mr. Edwards and extend my compliments for his fine presentation and professionalism.

18. WAGNER: "Let's be realistic. The discovered rifle [MANTIK: actually, a carbine] was Oswald's gun."

Wagner response to Mantik: In Chapter 2 of my book, I lay out my thesis of Oswald's guilt. My analysis includes the following bookend events: Oswald carried a long package into the TSBD on the morning of the assassination. He later told interrogators that Frazier lied about him carrying a long package and that he only had a sack lunch. After the assassination, Oswald fled the TSBD, armed himself with a pistol, and pulled that pistol on arresting officers. (Not addressed in my analysis but also relevant for discussion: Oswald lied to interrogators again by claiming that he never lived on Neely Street (WR609-610). Of course, the Oswald Neely Street residence is the background scene of the famous backyard photographs, whether or not one believes those photographs are authentic.¹⁶ Sylvia Meagher, author of the book *Accessories After the Fact*, sees Oswald's apparent dishonesty over Neely Street as "baffling" (p. 237). I don't. Not at all.) Chapter 2 of my book is primarily focused on discussion of evidence that is widely accepted as legitimate. These "stipulated facts" (and I know that there are those who would take issue with that characterization) include a match between bullet fragments found in the limousine and the murder weapon found on the sixth floor, as well as a match between Oswald's handwriting and the order form for the rifle. I do not feel especially compelled to believe Oswald's attempts to exonerate himself from his guilty actions or to overcome his obvious consciousness of guilt, nor the strength of the primary evidence discussed in Chapter 2 of my book.

In addition, as I explain in my book, the notion of Oswald as a patsy is sufficiently undermined by, among other things, an apparent failure on the part of whoever was supposedly running a conspiracy to control the patsy's movements and avoid the risk of Oswald having an air-tight alibi. The dispute over the famous doorway photograph highlights this problem; many people believe that Oswald was in the front doorway of the depository watching the parade at the precise time of the shooting. Some frame-up.

19. WAGNER: "If Oswald fired three shots, as evidenced by many witnesses and buttressed by the appearance of three spent cartridges near the depository's sixth-floor window, what became of the third bullet?"

Wagner response to Mantik: Dr. Mantik's critique centers on two issues: (1) Commission Exhibit 510, which allegedly shows empty cartridge casings underneath the sixth-floor window; and (2) Commission Exhibit 543, the dented cartridge casing.

¹⁶ *Standing in the back yard of the Neely Street property more than fifty years later, as I have, leaves an indelible memory as the appearance of the back yard all these years later does not look much different than it did in early 1963.*

Regarding CE 510, Dr. Mantik quotes some of Bugliosi's relevant analysis, but omits a critical part. As Bugliosi notes (End Notes, pp. 419-420), CE 510 (and a companion photograph, CE 512) was a multigenerational print of a Dallas police photograph. The original photographs (Negative No. 91-001/329 for CE 510) clearly exhibit that the purported unfired round was only an empty cartridge - some form of debris located nearby made it appear as though something stuck up from the cartridge (i.e., a bullet) in the multigenerational CE510. (See Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, Endnotes, 418-421; and David Von Pein's website, Part 461, for links to the original photographs of CE 510 and 512.)¹⁷

As to the dented cartridge (CE 543), the HSCA firearms experts performed test firings of Oswald's Carcano. One of those tests produced an empty casing with a dented lip "that occurred during the ejection process in firing the weapon" (1HSCA-453-455, 7HSCA-383, 387). Don Thomas, in *Hear No Evil*, argues that this casing was actually more "out of round" than dented (p. 130). Either way, it appears that the casing can become deformed in some manner when one fires the weapon and then ejects the shell from the bolt mechanism. While laying out a succinct case for the idea that CE 543 was not fired during the assassination, Thomas leaves open the possibility of alternative explanations for the other types of markings (more than just a dent on the lip) on the CE 543 casing, such as Dallas Police possibly having experimented with the gun and casings (pp. 131-134). From Bonar Menninger's *Mortal Error*, Dr. Mantik cites the observations of firearms expert Howard Donohue, who doubts that the bullet from CE 543 could have been fired from the rifle that day. I have addressed such doubt above in my explanation. (Donahue believes Secret Service Agent George Hickey, riding in the car behind the presidential limousine, accidentally fired a round from his gun, causing Kennedy's head wound.) In any event, Menninger describes Donahue's ambivalence on the matter as he considered the dented casing, as well as other markings on CE 543: "As [Donahue] mulled this mystery, the second question on Donahue's mind was whether Oswald fired three shots or two. *There could be no way to answer it conclusively*, but to Donahue, the evidence suggested Oswald fired just two - the ricochet and the neck shot" (p. 114 - Wagner emphasis). There is no justification to make a definitive statement claiming that the dented cartridge issue is a "mortal blow," as Dr. Mantik suggests.

Finally, for those that believe all the shell casings were planted on the floor beneath the sixth floor window (i.e., no one actually fired any bullets from a Carcano during the assassination) this theory would lead us to conclude that a conspirator(s) left a dented cartridge. What sense does that make unless the conspirator(s) believed an investigation would find nothing suspicious about the appearance of a dented cartridge (along with the other irregular markings)? Otherwise, the plotters involved would be sabotaging their own conspiracy.

20. WAGNER: "The autopsy photographs and X-rays are thus shown to be authentic..."

¹⁷ I expected this argument in Jim DiEugenio's *Reclaiming Parkland*. DiEugenio is anything but shy about attacking the typical evidence asserted to prove Oswald's guilt. In his section addressing "The Telltale Shells," DiEugenio passes on the opportunity to complain about the supposed unfired round appearing in CE 510 (pp. 68-71).

Wagner response to Mantik: The issue of authenticity has already been the subject of multiple responses above.¹⁸ I have never stated that Dr. Mantik's work in this area should be disregarded. I encourage all interested in the topic of the JFK assassination to consider his research and arguments, and I cited some of Dr. Mantik's work in my book. As discussed previously, I maintain that prominent assassination researchers continue to heatedly debate the authenticity of the autopsy photographs and X-rays. While I reached my conclusions (through my own assessment of probability) on the basis of the totality of evidence I have examined (actual and circumstantial), it is my hope that highly credentialed researchers like Dr. Mantik and Dr. Robertson might work together to find as much common ground as possible and to clearly articulate the reasons behind their contrasting viewpoints. In the expert witness world that assists court proceedings, which is where I make a living, experts tend to share affirmative opinions and rebuttals for the very purpose of obtaining the best understanding of their distinct professional opinions and *why they diverge*. I believe that if this particular research community engaged in a similar process, it would be quite beneficial for students of the assassination who, like myself, do not possess the expertise to independently weigh in on these types of highly specialized and technical issues in isolation.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks

As I have mentioned throughout my response to Dr. Mantik's critique, I conclude in my book that (1) Oswald was the sole shooter during the assassination; and (2) while a conspiracy of some dimension was possible (as one must concede), the probability of such a conspiracy actually having occurred is low. Two major circumstances act as stumbling blocks that prevent me from concluding otherwise.

First, I do not believe that Oswald was a patsy. His guilty conduct, as well as the significant lies he concocted for his interrogators, strongly suggests his culpability as the assassin. Along with the established fact of a shooter from the rear, a shooter from any front location, such as the grassy knoll, nullifies any claim of a lone gunman frame-up because it would have been easily established that there were at least two gunmen. Additionally, Oswald's movements were not controlled. Therefore, the risk would have been unacceptably high

¹⁸ *Dr. Mantik observes that no Parkland physician recognized the condition of the president's head as shown in back of the head autopsy photo. My understanding, however, is that this image was taken after the scalp was manipulated and repositioned. (Boswell said so in his ARRB testimony, which I describe in my book at pp. 140-141.) Prior to such manipulation, the scalp would have simply fallen down/back when Kennedy's body was lying on its back. It does not seem surprising, then, that the Parkland physicians would not recognize the condition of the president's head in the autopsy photo. The loose (and bloodied) scalp could also very well explain why no Parkland witness identified an entry wound in the back of the head.*

¹⁹ *I am aware that both Dr. Mantik and Dr. Robertson have written and/or spoken about their positions. Dr. Mantik has addressed Dr. Robertson's positions in JFK's Head Wounds. I assume Dr. Robertson is aware of Dr. Mantik's analysis, but rejects it. Therefore, I am particularly interested to see a rebuttal analysis by Dr. Robertson as to his apparent rejection of Dr. Mantik's case for X-ray alteration. Perhaps it is weak. Perhaps it is not. If that Robertson analysis is available, I am not aware of it and would appreciate citation to that work. I understand that Dr. Robertson believes the primary evidence (including the autopsy photos and X-rays, the president's body, and the Zapruder film) is authentic, and he believes this unaltered primary evidence (along with the disputed acoustics evidence) cohesively explains five shots from three locations. I don't know why he is apparently unmoved by Dr. Mantik's X-ray alteration claims resulting from Dr. Mantik's OD studies, the alleged illicit 6.5 mm. object, and the "sideways T" not apparent on the emulsion on one of the films.*

that Oswald-as-patsy would be able to easily establish his innocence (e.g. by being in the company of fellow employees during the assassination, or otherwise seen while the assassination unfolded). In order for a conspiracy to succeed, especially a sophisticated conspiracy, this risk would have been avoided at all costs. Some assert that the doorway photo showed Oswald, not Lovelady. If it was Oswald in the photo, then the conspiracy failed miserably in an attempt to frame him. I don't believe it.

Second, if one accepts, as I do, that Oswald was an assassin, it follows that any persons who might associate themselves with him while planning the assassination would then be running an unacceptably high risk that this association would be noticed, given Oswald's high profile (e.g., his defection to the Soviet Union and supposed pro-Castro activities). To have their shooter (or even just one of the shooters) fire from an imprisoned location six floors above the street and then leave his easily traceable weapon behind would introduce a monumental risk that the authorities would track down the other conspirators after they identified Oswald. Regarding the idea that the Mafia, for example, involved Oswald as a shooter in the conspiracy, author Lamar Waldron said, "The thought of the Mafia having an inexperienced hit man flee a major assassination using public transportation is ludicrous."²⁰ As I describe in my book, it would have been equally ludicrous no matter what person or association is alleged to have partnered with Oswald. I allow for the possibility of irrational behavior. I simply believe that those arguing irrationality over rationality have the larger burden of proof. This is the lens, I believe, that should guide JFK assassination researchers when evaluating, for example;

1. Conflicting and, in many cases, "late arriving" witness recollections;
2. Mishandling of evidence, which certainly occurred;
3. Divergent views of experts with credentials and access to primary materials, particularly with respect to the authenticity of the president's autopsy photographs and X-rays and the Zapruder film.

Dr. Mantik claims that my book contains "colossal logical flaws." Concerning the logic behind my analysis, I can refer anyone interested in how it stands under scrutiny to the independent book review company, *Kirkus*, which characterized my book as a "well researched ...solid analysis of the Kennedy assassination evidence and reports," and further stated that "In clear and persuasive prose, Wagner presents a levelheaded analysis of some of the most scrutinized evidence of the 20th century." I encourage those curious to take a look at the entire *Kirkus* review, which is quite complimentary. (I assume that in response Dr. Mantik will assert that *Kirkus* was simply uninformed and thereby unable to see through my naivety and smoke and mirrors.) Additionally, if the book is full of "colossal logical flaws," Dr. Mantik should not be too concerned - the book will certainly fall under its own weight and he need not worry about my misleading anyone.

I suggest that readers decide for themselves.

²⁰ *The Hidden History of the JFK Assassination*, p. 398.