

EXCHANGE.

A STONE'S THROW

Santa Monica, Calif.

Former Warren Commission assistant counsel Wesley J. Liebeler's defense of his résumé-building work is almost refreshing in its transparency ["Beat the Devil," March 9] Abetted by Alexander Cockburn's total ignorance of the subject at hand, he improvises, freely associating sources and figures, and offers his opinion that the Warren Commission did a great job, except they got "the entrance wounds in the wrong place." They had the murder on film and some three dozen medical personnel examined the body—but they never did pin down exactly where those wounds were. There goes the whole case: Without knowing where the entrance wounds are, there is absolutely no way to substantiate the lone-gunman thesis.

What we see in the interview is a merging of the far right and the far left for entirely different agendas. Liebeler's operating principle is fairly simple and human: Cover your ass. Cockburn's is philosophical. His dialectic view of history precludes the possibility of individual choice affecting the outcome of events—thus, the very thought that Kennedy might have betrayed his capitalist upbringing by halting the war in Vietnam is unbearable. As Cockburn puts it: "The effect of JFK is to make people think that America is a good country that produced a good President killed by bad elites." While that is exactly what I believe, it's a veritable nightmare for Cockburn, who clearly is convinced that a democratic country cannot be good, and could not elect a leader who wasn't merely another link in the inherently evil system.

The Nation joins in the fray with its marvelous illustration of the single bullet theory, a crude drawing swiped in toto from a January 19 article in *New York Newsday*. Poor Governor Connally is squatting in a mysterious hole (or perhaps on the floor of the limousine), a sitting duck for the uberbullet heading downward into his armpit. That's an odd configuration, especially in light of the facts: (1) the extensive photographic record of the motorcade shows that Connally's seat was at the same approximate height as Kennedy's, and (2) if, in fact, the bullet did enter Kennedy's back and exit his throat as Liebeler et al. claim, the bullet would have had an upward trajectory upon leaving Kennedy. The *Newsday-cum-Nation* drawing turns the preposterous single-bullet path into a straight downward line through the two men—a lot more palatable, even believable, but showing something that never was. This is a tactic we usually ascribe to CBS and *Time*, and we expect *The Nation* to correct the record. Not so this time out.

Instead, we get the Dan Rather school of journalism: It is because I say so. With what would be a good title for his memoirs, Cockburn shrugs off his factual errors in his original JFK column: "I thought it was true when

I wrote it." In journalism, in history, in criticism and in publishing, it is not enough to "think" something is true. Nor should it be necessary for the readers to call Cockburn on his errors; that is *The Nation's* job. It doesn't matter that Cockburn is a columnist with a considerable following and a penchant for provoking controversy. As a selling point, controversy helps, but please, don't misinform the public in the name of commerce.

The public is not stupid. As the polls show, a strong majority know the evidence does not support the fantasy that a lone nut shot and killed the President of the United States. Journalists (like Cockburn) and journals (like *The Nation*) should be our protection against official untruths. But in this unique instance, the media have bought wholesale the lies and distortions passed down from Washington. *The Nation* and Cockburn trivialize the event of November 22, 1963, by dismissing it as nothing more momentous than an accident. That will not do. As the record shows, Mr. Cockburn, J.F.K. did not trip on Caroline's doll. He was murdered—and history changed—by parties still unknown. *Oliver Stone*

LOOSE BAZOOKA

Odenton, Md.

I have followed the current American debate over President Kennedy's Vietnam with keen interest. *The Nation's* chief contribution to this mushrooming controversy is the humorous pen of Alexander Cockburn. Because he knows little about this subject, however, Cockburn has distinguished himself by poking fun at serious scholars with witty feuilletonisms. While life would be boring if we could not laugh at ourselves, we must also recognize when it is time to stop joking around and get serious.

Several readers of *The Nation* have called on me to respond to Cockburn's attack on my book, *JFK and Vietnam*. They tell me Cockburn's otherwise good work has resulted in a certain following that will take his lead on this subject too. In other words, it would appear that we have in this case, to borrow an analogy from Victor Hugo, a loose cannon on the deck of the American left.

What is to be done? It is pointless to counter Cockburn with the ad hominem he inveighs against others. It is better to reason and gently persuade and raise the standard of debate to a more civilized and intellectually honest plane. It is in that spirit that I offer the following comments.

In my book, *JFK and Vietnam*, I discuss at length Kennedy's public comments that lend the impression he would not withdraw from Vietnam. I also deal with his private comments that lend the opposite impression. Since both sets of comments cannot be true, which set reflects Kennedy's genuine intent? Is there any hard evidence that can help us form a judgment about this? Indeed there is

the top-secret documentary record, especially Kennedy's withdrawal order itself and the records of those National Security Council (N.S.C.) meetings in which that decision was discussed and made.

There is no need (and certainly not the space) to repeat here the details of that record—*The Nation's* readers have had plenty of that. The crucial question is this: When J.F.K. set the withdrawal in motion, did he think South Vietnam was winning or losing on the battlefield?

The preponderance of evidence strongly suggests that by 1963 Kennedy knew the war was a lost cause. My book documents how the lie about war progress was constructed, the actions of those who blew the whistle inside the government and the top-secret memorandums—beginning in early 1963, from the C.I.A., the State Department and Kennedy's own N.S.C. staff—that directly impugned this lie about progress.

Given the state of the battlefield, Kennedy feared his withdrawal plan would harm his chances for re-election. This helps us understand why he hid his true intent from the public and why, when he ordered the withdrawal to begin, he included a provision to keep it a secret. Do I advance this argument, as Cockburn charges, "with a willful credulity akin to religious mania"? Cockburn's followers would do well to read and make up their own minds as to whether my theses are based on reason or hysteria.

I wonder if Cockburn's followers notice the inherent weakness in his argument. For someone who claims that the system always produces bad Presidents, Cockburn cuts a strange figure by believing so trustingly in J.F.K.'s public pronouncements on the Vietnam War. Does Cockburn believe everything Presidents say publicly about war policy—or just what Kennedy said on Vietnam?

When Cockburn canonizes Kennedy's public comments on Vietnam, he keeps interesting company—from the far right. Like two peas in a pod, neither Cockburn nor Col. Harry Summers questions the integrity of Kennedy's promises on Vietnam—Summers because he thinks Kennedy was inherently good, and Cockburn because he thinks he was inherently bad.

Colonel Summers charges that my work on J.F.K.'s withdrawal plans has "vilified Kennedy beyond the wildest dreams of his worst enemies." Summers thinks J.F.K.'s Vietnam promises were good, and idolizes Kennedy as a great "macho warrior" who never would have tolerated the loss of Vietnam. Cockburn, still in step with Summers, says "one can easily argue" that J.F.K., had he lived, would have escalated harder and quicker than L.B.J.

There is nothing easy about reconciling the contradictory and tragic record of J.F.K. and Vietnam. American myth and self-image are involved. Because I cast Kennedy neither as

(Continued on Page 676)

intercutting news clips of the Newark and Watts riots, brief apologies by producers, context-setting mini-lectures by well-known academics and sober reflections by Esther Rolle (*Good Times*) and Diahann Carroll (*Julia*). For Riggs it seems there is a Truth out there somewhere on TV. (Call for Marshall McLuhan!) Also, most disappointingly, Riggs for some reason touches hardly at all on the long, complex history of black performers (Redd Foxx, Moms Mabley) making use of the crudest black stereotypes in front of black audiences.

Riggs's earlier *Tongues Untied* is an hourlong film that Patrick Buchanan and Jesse Helms have used in their attacks on the Public Broadcasting System and the National Endowment for the Arts. *Tongues Untied*, about being black and gay, was shown last summer in PBS's *Point of View* series; some stations declined to air it for being "too explicit." It relies on personal statements by Riggs and on readings by actors of his and other men's poems. In between are shots of black gay types, most regular-looking, some florid, as well as a single bright sequence about the sign language *Snap!* Then all of a sudden there appear black-and-white stills and movies of Martin Luther King; color movies of a Gay Pride march; more black-and-white stills, shown slowly, of newspaper obits of young black men with AIDS; and more recollections by Riggs of his own uneasy days in the Castro, bringing *Tongues Untied* to the conclusion, on a title card, that "Black men loving black men is the revolutionary act." You don't have to believe that the revolutionary act was the beheading of Charles the First, the Boston Tea Party or even the Stonewall riot to find this conclusion silly. It leaves you with the feeling that whatever is controversial in *Tongues Untied* is at the approximate level of, say, *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (California Newsreel) is an hour-long work, directed by Christine Dall, about the "Queens" of the blues, principally Bessie Smith, who in bearing and extravagance predict Aretha Franklin and Patti LaBelle. The tradition begins with Ma Rainey; the title comes from her, too. *Wild Women* is meant for the classroom and so pays due attention to how such worldly music began in the fields and the church. But its exuberant subjects soon shoot it out of school into space. There it gets boosts from Ida Goodson and Koko Taylor, the jazz musicians who nar-

rate the film, and also from the great Alberta Hunter (shown without interruption doing two lewd blues songs at the Cookery, in New York City, not that long ago).

Lady Day, The Many Faces of Billie Holiday (Kultur Video), also one hour long, is a documentary directed by Matthew Seig. Loosely pinned to *Lady Sings the Blues*, the 1972 autobiography written with (really by) William Dufty and read here by Ruby Dee, the movie does everything possible to subvert the book. I applaud this eccentric way of making a documentary. The trumpeter Buck Clayton and the singers Annie Ross and Carmen McRae are Seig's conspirators, and the movie does much to take Holiday back from the sentimental and commercial worlds to the musical. If for no other reason, *Lady Day* must be seen for the very long session of "Fine & Mellow"—shot in the early fifties, I'd guess, with Ben Webster, Lester Young and Roy Eldridge—which shows you how perfectly beautifully Holiday listened to other musicians.

Bruce Ricker's grand and glorious *The Last of the Blue Devils, The Kansas City Jazz Story*, released theatrically in 1979, is at last on videotape (90 minutes; Rhapsody Films). It begins in the usual way. A dozen or so "elder statesmen" of jazz—like Jay McShann, Joe Turner, Jesse Price—gather in Kansas City in 1974 at the musicians' old union hall, a dilapidated building in a forsaken part of town, for a celebration of the glory days when all were members of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, which became Count Basie's first band and traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, at the "invitation" of the Prendergast political machine. Old men remembering, that sort of thing—the conventional documentarian's line on which to hang archival film footage. Except that the framing camerawork is unusually good. And except that (big exception!) Basie himself is suddenly there. The archival film clips when they finally come are truly wonderful. A duet by Charlie Parker and Dizzie Gillespie, Lester Young in the thirties, a Basie band in the sixties, another Basie band in the twenties. . . . And then back to the reunion, with Joe Turner singing to Basie and Jay McShann on piano. This loving documentary seems to have been as much improvised as scripted (in fact I heard Ricker say more or less that on the radio the other day). *The Last of the Blue Devils* is itself a jam session in which the cameramen (Arnie Johnson and Eric

Menn) and editor (Thomasin Henckel) are prominent soloists. "A very happy film," *The New York Times's* critic concluded when the movie opened. To which I would add only, "And now you can buy it cheap from Rhapsody Films."

For mail-order rental, try Video Library, 7175 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19119, or Home Film Festival, P.O. Box 2032, Scranton, PA 18501. California Newsreel is at 149 9th Street, #420, San Francisco, CA 94103. The address of Rhapsody Films is P.O. Box 179, New York, NY 10014. □

EXCHANGE.

(Continued From Page 650)

hero nor as villain, I have earned disdain from both sides of the political spectrum

It is time to pay attention to the facts about the cornerstone years of the early 1960s, and time to stop worrying so much about what "effect" they might have. Too much attention to form instead of substance is stultifying—especially when the task before us is the reconstruction of a period in our history that has been suppressed and kept under lock and key. Cockburn should hit the books for a while; study the old documents and look at those newly declassified; maybe even interview some of the key participants while they are still alive.

Above all, Cockburn should discuss this subject with scholars of different persuasions. He should do so not to provide comic relief for *Nation* readers but to genuinely promote the search for truth. If we can transform the discussion in such a manner, I will be the first one listening.

John Newman

HUNKERED IN THE BUNKER

Northampton, Mass.

I find it very disturbing that *The Nation* has allowed itself to become a visible part of the anti-JFK campaign sweeping the media. The discussion about JFK is not a trivial event; it goes to the heart of American political consciousness and potential strategies for change. Over the years, as defenders of the Warren Commission have fought back against criticism with more and more arcane scientific tests piled onto a rickety structure of ever-diminishing credibility, they have established that it is not impossible (though it remains at best highly unlikely) for the lone-gunner hypothesis to withstand forensic doubts. What they have not done, because it cannot be done, is to show a persuasive chain of evidence supporting that hypothesis in the face of testimony from dozens of eyewitnesses to the contrary. Because of that circumstance, it has become crucial for anyone who thinks it important to arrive at an understanding of the assassination to focus on motive and milieu: If there was a conspiracy, then there ought to have

been plausible grounds for a conspiracy, those grounds ought to be visible, and the real evidence demonstrating Oswald's involvement should fit into the conspiracy scenario without any difficulty.

However, attention has been drawn away from the real conspiracy scenario by one wonderfully bizarre scene in *JFK* in which it is suggested that Kennedy's (alleged) decision to withdraw from Vietnam led to high-level military involvement in the assassination plot. Oliver Stone, Peter Dale Scott and others have hunkered themselves more and more firmly into that probably indefensible bunker, into which a withering fire has been poured, by Alexander Cockburn and others. This entirely incidental debate, therefore, is in danger of obscuring the real demonstration (made more persuasively by Jim Garrison than anyone else, in his *On the Trail of the Assassins*) of a right-wing conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy.

I speak as one who protested against Kennedy's policies at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, who at the time of the test ban treaty gave a speech to a chapter of SANE in which I said that the test ban was not nearly as significant as the fact that in Vietnam the United States was following "the same fatal path as the French Fourth Republic," and who like most liberals and leftists of the time was furious at the pusillanimous way the Administration was handling its own civil rights bill. In other words, I absolutely shared the perception of Kennedy as a conservative cold warrior; so then did most of us on the left (not, obviously, Oliver Stone). However, what is not being understood today is that the left's view of Kennedy, even if it was a truthful view, in no way determined what the right thought of him. In fact, to see how easily right-wing conspiracy theory is compatible with a left structural analysis of the cold war liberal establishment, we can recall that when G. William Domhoff wrote *The Higher Circles*, he had to append a chapter in which he tried to distinguish his critique of that establishment from those of the radical right. That is, people on the right were convinced that men we thought of as conservatives were actually agents of the international Bolshevik conspiracy.

This was exactly the case with J.F.K., who at the time of his assassination was undoubtedly the most hated man in America. But he was hated by the right, not the left. There were no left-wing circles in which Oswald could have discussed assassination or found feelings that might have motivated it, but on the right it was easy! There was a price on J.F.K.'s head. From Miami to Dallas (the center of right-wing extremism), there was talk of getting rid of him, and I well remember that in Dallas there were classrooms where teachers led the students in cheers on the day he was killed.

Why? The Bay of Pigs, the nuclear test ban treaty and the civil rights bill. We can forget all those structural analyses about how the objective conditions of capitalism and imperialism really foredoomed the invasion and demanded those other initiatives. The fact is that from

(some of) the right's point of view, Kennedy was clearly at the very center of a conspiracy to take over the United States and deliver it to Russia. In short, *he was a traitor*. It doesn't matter if today we think that was nonsense; it doesn't matter if it was nonsense; thousands upon thousands of Americans believed it, and many of them were prepared to do something about it. (These are some of the same Americans who, years later, gave money to Oliver North because they thought the Russians were going to invade Texas through Nicaragua.) And that was exactly the conspiratorial milieu, so brilliantly depicted by Stone, in which Oswald moved when he was in New Orleans. And these were exactly the people with the resources and connections to provide all the emblems of conspiracy that so many people saw in Dallas: fake Secret Service I.D.s, clean-cut "hobos" and the rest of it, not to mention Oswald's "legend" as a Communist and pro-Castro activist. Were there such people in the C.I.A. or F.B.I., whose help would have been essential? Does that question, in the era of James Jesus Angleton, even need to be asked? That is precisely where they were most likely to be found, most especially given that Kennedy had purged the leadership of the C.I.A. Nor is it necessary to posit (Stone doesn't) some overarching C.I.A./F.B.I./Mafia/military intelligence/anti-Castro institutional conspiracy, for there had been (and was to be again in the future) plenty of overlapping activity and cooperation among selected members of these organizations and groups, as in the continuing plot to assassinate Castro.

Indeed, in that milieu of right-wing anti-Communist (and racist) hysteria it is even possible that Kennedy was seen as soft on Vietnam, and that this perception did trigger participation in an assassination plot, or at least in covering it up. Many of these people were and still are capable of seeing the Devil's work everywhere, even in a single word; thus a rationalist, documentary examination of the putative grounds for their belief, the exact wording of NSAM 263 or 273 or whatever, outside its demonizing historical context, is completely beside the point.

Does any of this matter? Yes it does, very much so. Lenin once said that parliamentary government was "the best possible shell for capitalism." From this standpoint, democracy is just a sham, and it's foolish to make a big to-do over some alleged deviation from its conditions of legitimacy. I'd hardly want to deny that capitalism and imperialism are a large part of the truth of our democracy, and compromise it gravely. But they are not the whole truth, and it is not without its own unfolding meaning, its own dynamic. This is what Stone correctly understands. For many of us on the left, the elections of 1964, 1972 and 1980 were, each in its distinctive way, fatally compromised. The entire system, the entire contemporary historical period, therefore reeks of illegitimacy—exactly as Stone laments. Of course, some of the historical shift of the past thirty years is what "the people"

"A thought-provoking intellectual cliffhanger"

—Kirkus Reviews



Owen Lattimore and the "Loss" of China by Robert P. Newman Illustrated, \$30.00 hardcover

"[A] chilling chapter in the United States' descent into demonology. A landmark work on the American politics of the closing years of WWII and those that immediately followed"

—Harrison E. Salisbury, *New York Times Book Review*

At bookstores or order toll-free 1-800-822-6657

University of California Press
Berkeley Los Angeles New York Oxford

ROBERTA FLACK/CECILIA MARTA

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE & Co.

JACQUES D'AMBOISE'S
NATIONAL DANCE INSTITUTE

DON BELLAMY & NASHA THOMAS
ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

TERESE CAPUCILLI & DONLIN FOREMAN
MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY
CHOREOGRAPHER JACQUYLYN BUGLISI

URBAN BUSH WOMEN

NANA VASCONCELOS

AND MANY OTHERS IN

FLOWERS FROM THE VOLCANO



A BENEFIT FOR CHILDREN IN EL SALVADOR

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 1992 • 8:00 P.M.

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC
30 LAFAYETTE AVENUE, BROOKLYN, NY

TICKETMASTER 212 307 4100 • TICKETS \$15, \$25, \$50
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION 212 260 0759

A SPECIAL PROJECT OF THE NEW EL SALVADOR TODAY (NEST) FOUNDATION

have wanted, and some of it is what capital has demanded. But to blame "the people" or capitalism for all that befalls us is in either case a recipe for political paralysis. The people are not going to rebel against themselves, and they're apparently not yet ready to rebel against "capital" or exploitation or the logic of the market either. But an extraordinary number of people have already been moved by, and are responding to, Stone's revival of the assassination conspiracy. Therefore, it's not a self-delusion for us on the left to think that who killed Kennedy is important; making the case that Stone has tried to make may be one of the most useful things we can do for progressive political renewal *Philip Green*

LIEBELER REPLIES

Malibu, Calif.

Stone claims the illustration of the single bullet theory in Alexander Cockburn's interview of me was "swiped in toto from a January 19 article in *New York Newsday*." It comes from Volume VI (p. 54) of the House Assassinations Committee Hearings. If either Stone or his ghostwriters had looked there, they would know Connally was seated 8 centimeters lower than the President, whose upper body was leaning forward between 11 and 18 degrees, while the road sloped down 3 degrees. Estimates of the path of the bullet through Kennedy's body ranged from slightly upward to 4 degrees downward if he was sitting in a vertical position, which he was not. Given those parameters I look forward to Stone's drawing showing how "the bullet would have had an upward trajectory upon leaving Kennedy."

"The *Newsday*-cum-*Nation* drawing" is crude only in the sense Kennedy is shown sitting erect and the car level. But the House committee used the drawing only to illustrate the slope of the bullet trajectory, which (surprise!) led back to the upper southeast corner of the Texas Schoolbook Depository.

Stone also claims there is no way to prove the lone-gunner thesis, since the Warren Commission, absent access to the autopsy photographs and X-rays, erred in locating the entrance wounds. I will not defend this handling of the photographs and X-rays. After placing the wounds correctly, however, the House committee unanimously affirmed the commission's finding that the President was hit only by two bullets fired by Oswald from the rear. *Wesley J. Liebler*

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petaluma, Calif.

These letters, fraudulent in the case of Stone, flatulent in the case of Newman and Green, offer a fitting résumé of the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the *JFK* sponsors and their claue, not the least of whose vices is their voracious consumption of valuable time and space. Much of their complaint has, after all, been addressed in an earlier exchange.

Stone's admonition to me not to "misinform the public in the name of commerce" is

matchless effrontery. The film from which he stands to make millions is undoubtedly one of the most willfully error-riddled pieces of "historical reconstruction" in the history of cinema. Like all demagogues Stone is now a full-blown megalomaniac given to such sentiments (announced grandly at a Nation Institute symposium at Town Hall) that "Even when I'm wrong, I'm right." As his ludicrous mistake about the illustration I included in my Liebler interview shows, he is wholly ignorant of the basic forensic, evidentiary and historical record, and is dependent on compliant "researchers" who tell him what he wants to hear. Any fact inhospitable to his preposterous überconspiracy is blandly denied. Example: In *JFK*, David Ferrie confesses to his involvement in the conspiracy. No such confession was made, as is clear even from Garrison's book. Aha, said Stone at the Town Hall event, the confession was made to one of Garrison's assistants. Ed Epstein, author of books on the Warren Commission and on Garrison, called this assistant, who said that Ferrie had done nothing of the sort and that the story was nonsense from start to finish. So far as historical scruple goes, Stone makes Cecil B. De Mille look like Braudel. One of the most squalid aspects of the whole affair is that Time-Warner plans to distribute "documentary materials" about the assassination to schoolchildren.

In tune with the fascist aesthetic of his movie, Stone now mounts the traditional fascist defense: He, like Kennedy, is victim of a gigantic conspiracy, and "the media have bought wholesale the lies and distortions passed down from Washington." Passed down by whom? Let's have precision here. In *The Nation's* case, exactly who pulled together myself and four other writers variously critical of Stone's version of history and "passed down" to us the necessary "lies and distortions"? It's one thing—not uncommon—to extract money from the public under false pretenses. It's another, à la Stone, to whine all the way to the bank.

But then whining has been a characteristic of Warren Commission critics down the years. Ever since the late 1960s they have successfully dominated debate, yet they still pretend that theirs is the persecuted and unpopular posture. I interviewed Liebler because I think that the commission's conclusions, particularly in light of the 1978 House inquiry, are a good deal more plausible and soundly based than is commonly supposed. Most conspiracy mongers are either imbeciles or mountebanks, as I discovered when I did several months research, back in the early 1970s, on the murder of Robert Kennedy. In that case the "critics" couldn't even be bothered to find out which way R.F.K. was looking when he was shot. Absent this basic information, they invented another gunman in that crowded kitchen alley. What was striking in the wake of the Liebler interview was readers' outrage that I had presumed to take a Warren Commission lawyer seriously. For this I was promptly labeled a

Stalinist. (This latter term is being devalued with relentless speed. Before me is a letter savagely denouncing me as a Stalinist for my support of Jerry Brown.) But the commission staffers were conscientious people, of widely varied political opinion. They have been steadily libeled down the years, culminating in the oafish abuse by Stone, who espouses the most preposterous theory of all, aside from anything else requiring total suspension of disbelief, since not one among the several hundreds if not thousands party to this imagined conspiracy has ever surfaced, even on deathbed or in post mortem testimonial, to admit participating in the mighty plot.

Newman's letter is hot air from start to finish. I did him the courtesy of working my way carefully through his book, and offering—in my detailed reply published here on March 9—copious illustration of why he is a very bad historian who failed to prove his thesis and who indeed offered convincing evidence to prove the very opposite of his contention. There was nothing ad hominem in my remarks, just as there is nothing substantive in his defense. Indeed, his letter is a remarkable confession of defeat, relying upon slabs of pompous verbiage hauled painfully out of the dictionary. I kept waiting for the phrase "mere persiflage," but maybe Newman is saving that one up for the next time.

Green is the silliest of the lot. God help any youngster at Smith on the receiving end of this popcorn machine of self-regarding blather. What is it with the Five Colleges? Green and Michael Klare form a kind of toxic belt of data-free maundering stretching clear across I-91 from Northampton to Amherst, impeding all respectable intellectual traffic.

Like Stone, Green is ignorant of the record and furthermore declares that it doesn't matter anyway. Anyone who maintains, as he does, that Jim Garrison makes a persuasive case for "a right-wing conspiracy" should be confined to a lunatic asylum. Garrison was a berserk self-publicist with a penchant for locking up journalists who inconvenienced him—a trait that has earned him Stone's rapturous respect.

Notice how Green, like Stone, dismisses reality whenever its breath gets uncomfortably hot on his neck. All of a sudden "the exact wording" of "NSAM 263 or 273 or whatever[!] . . . is completely beside the point." So history doesn't matter at all, beyond what Green or Stone claims that history to be. Green covers himself here by saying that it's the right-wing nuts who care nothing for detail. But he's the one who deals only in the fake currency of mood, *Zeitgeist* and other impalpable categories.

"For many of us," Green writes, "the elections of 1964, 1972 and 1980 were . . . fatally compromised. The entire system, the entire contemporary historical period, therefore reeks of illegitimacy." Does he think that the fifties, when the A.C.L.U. refused to defend victims of McCarthyism, were somehow more "legitimate"? What was so illegitimate about the

1964 election, in which the proclaimed agendas of L.B.J. and Goldwater presented as clear a choice as any in our lifetime? And why is the election of 1960, which J.F.K. stole with the help of Mayor Daley of Chicago, somehow more legitimate than that of 1980?

Everything Green says is either wrong or irrelevant. His inference is that because the credibility of the Warren Commission is low, its critics must be right. This claim is endlessly popular: "Seventy percent of the American people now believe there was a conspiracy, the Warren Commission was wrong," etc., etc. According to a 1991 Gallup poll, 81 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is "the inspired word of God." Only 9 percent of Americans believe that man has developed over millions of years from less advanced life forms without divine intervention; 47 percent of Americans believe that God created man in essentially the present form all at one time within the past 10,000 years.

Kennedy, writes Green, "at the time of his assassination was undoubtedly the most hated man in America." As Presidents go, J.F.K. was always pretty well regarded. The Gallup poll taken in November 1963 gave him a 58 percent approval rating, up from his lowest ebb of 56 percent two months earlier. In the summer of 1960, Eisenhower had an all-time low approval rating of 49 percent. L.B.J.'s, in August 1968, stood at 35 percent. Carter bottomed out in July 1979 at 28 percent, and George Bush has dropped to 39 percent twice already this year. Of course, Green would say that the conspirators hated J.F.K. in a more violent and ultimately lethal way. More than Johnson was hated by foes of the Great Society or, for that matter, of the war? Or Bush by some Jews? There is always someone around who will applaud a President's passing. (If a real conspiracy by the elites against a President is desired, look not at 1963 but at 1980. All the conspiracy mongering about the October Surprise throws a smokescreen in front of the obvious overt conspiracy by the militarists against Carter. As Gary Sick remarks at the start of his book, while clearly regarding it as only prolegomenon to the big stuff, military officers betrayed to the press the intended rescue attempts of the hostages. This was treason. On an almost hourly basis high-level Pentagon officials transported secret documents to the Jack Anderson column and similarly favored sources, seeking to show how Carter was betraying the national interest by sapping America's strength. This was the true and successful coup d'état unfolding every day in the press.)

Green's letter is at least useful in that it musters in one place almost everything foolish said about JFK, as in "an extraordinary number of people have already been moved by, and are responding to, Stone's revival of the assassination conspiracy." This is the JFK-as-radical-catalyst thesis, for which no evidence exists. Assume that everything in JFK is true. Then what? How is this meant to be politically invigorating, except to those who

THE BOOK MAXWELL TRIED TO BAN IN BRITAIN—
PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AMERICA

MAXWELL

THE OUTSIDER

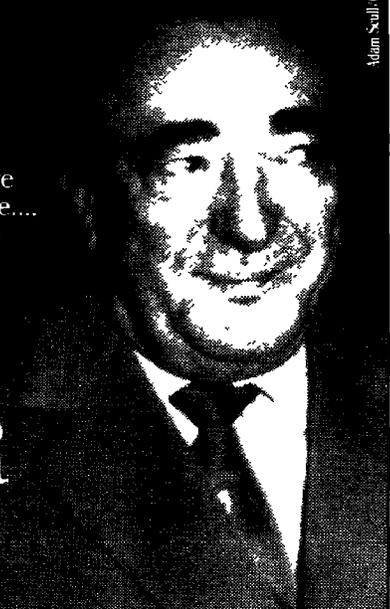
"An impressive achievement. Mr. Bower provides the most thorough account to date of the forces that brought about the collapse of Maxwell's empire."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"A fine-tuned picture of a debt-inflated dealmaker.... Bower accomplishes far more than the capture of this Great White Whale.... He masterfully describes both the gilt and the substance of the Decade of Greed."
—*New York Newsday*

T O M B O W E R



Illustrated with photos
At bookstores now



Adam Smith/Grove Photo



The Twentieth Century Fund

A research foundation engaged in public policy studies of economic, political, and social issues and institutions 41 East 70th Street, New York, New York 10021 (212) 535-4441

THE FUTURE OF BANKING by James L. Pierce. A Twentieth Century Fund Report, published by Yale University Press

"A 'must read' for all those who are now fretting about the condition of our banks."

—Robert E. Litan

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PEACE: The New Internationalism and American Foreign Policy by James Chace. A Twentieth Century Fund Book, published by Oxford University Press

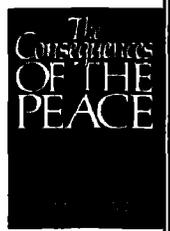
"James Chace's intelligent, well-informed book is the sort of study urgently needed to guide the reorienting of American foreign policy within a radically changed world"

—David P. Calleo

SECURING EUROPE by Richard H. Ullman. A Twentieth Century Fund Book, published by Princeton University Press.

"In this lucid and insightful work one of our leading foreign policy analysts provocatively examines Europe's future in the uncharted waters beyond the cold war"

—Ronald Steel



accept the logic and rush down to Washington to assassinate Robert Gates and the Joint Chiefs of Staff? In political terms, apropos the effect of *JFK*, Chip Berlet hit the nail on the head when he quoted Wilhelm Reich's observation that "reactionary concepts plus revolutionary emotion result in Fascist mentality." Berlet has detailed how *JFK* has been used most productively by the far right, who naturally swarm like hummingbirds to a vision of the world so exactly in tune with their own. This is not to say that in material terms *JFK* has not been of great profit to its sponsors, such as Bill Schaap and Ellen Ray (new house in the Catskills), Jim Garrison (millions in royalties), Oliver Stone and indeed the producer of *JFK*, Arnon Milchan. Milchan, incidentally, was identified in one 1989 Israeli report as "probably [Israel's] largest arms dealer." A company he owned was once caught smuggling nuclear weapons fuses to Iraq. As part of a joint Israeli-South African government operation—"Muldergate"—he acted as launderer to money scheduled to quell liberal publications opposing apartheid.

From where I stand, one consequence of *JFK* has been a revival of anticommunism (the theme of a conference once organized by Schaap and Ray). After my interview with Liebler of the Warren Commission, *In These Times* published a page-long article announcing that this interview was the equivalent of the Nazi-Soviet pact, with Liebler as A.H. and myself as J.V.S. In the private entertainment at the Royalton Hotel after the Town Hall panel, Stone asked Christopher Hitchens why I was attacking *JFK*. An honest, forthright response would have been "Because you made a terrible movie." But instead Hitchens replied that it was because I was "an unreconstructed Stalinist." Now Hitchens and his wife, Carol Blue—the woman he describes in print with revolting coyness as "Carol Azul"—are writing movie scripts, so I can understand his chumminess with Stone, but *In These Times*? I called up Jim Weinstein, *I.T.T.'s* *supremo*, to say that if he was going to publish this kind of stuff, he might at least send me the \$1,500 in back payments he owes me. Weinstein said he didn't know the article was in that week's paper, and would I accept \$1,000 for the time being. And when I think of all the years I forbore out of pity for its parlous condition from abusing *I.T.T.* for publishing John Judis! Let me end by evoking the conspiracy mindset in full deshabille. Weinstein *of course* has an interest in defending *JFK* because it draws attention away from the Mafia, infuriated at J.F.K. for his aborting the Bay of Pigs, which would have given the Mob back its real estate in Havana. Weinstein's dad was just such a real estate investor. Need I say more?
Alexander Cockburn

FORMER Nation INTERNS

Come back to *The Nation* office to celebrate the intern program and the publication of recent intern Andrew Shapiro's book *We're Number One!* The party is at 6 PM on May 19. Even if you can't attend, please call Will Murphy, (212) 242-8400, to update us on your current address

CLASSIFIED.

While we reserve the right to edit, reject or reclassify any advertisement, *The Nation* wishes its readers to know we don't have the facilities to check the promises made by our advertisers, and we have a strong presumption against censoring any advertisement, especially if we disagree with its politics

APARTMENTS

SUNNY BROOKLYN SHARE: Park Slope, nice wood floors, eat-in kitchen with new oven, your own bedroom. Convenient to subway and stores, possible lease takeover. No smoking, available immediately, \$350/month (718) 638-5964

UNDERPAID, quiet and responsible interns seek low-rent apartment share, sublet or house-sitting arrangements anywhere in New York City starting right away. Call Peter Rothberg at *The Nation*, (212) 242-8400

AUDIOCASSETTES

EDWARD SAID/MERON BENVENISTI. Two Views of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Tapes of this *Nation*/New School event are now available. Each 2-tape set is \$20. Send check or money order payable to The Nation Institute to "Two Views," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

THE SUPREME COURT AND DAILY LIFE WHO WILL THE COURT PROTECT IN THE 1990S?

The Nation Institute presents its historic conference of October 21, 1989, and examines the changing relationship of the Supreme Court to civil rights and personal liberties in light of recent Court decisions.

Reproductive and sexual freedom, race and gender discrimination, criminal defense rights, and a broad historical examination of the Supreme Court are some of the topics covered.

Speakers include DENISE CARTY-BENNING, HAYWOOD BURNS, RHONDA COPELON, ARTHUR KINNOY, WILLIAM KUNSTLER, TOM STODDARD, and others.

This 4-part radio series, produced in cooperation with The New School, the New York Council for the Humanities, and WBAI-FM, is available on 2 cassettes for \$25 from The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

GORE VIDAL'S complete "State of the Union" speech, delivered June 30, 1990, at *The Nation's* 125th birthday bash in Berkeley, is now available on audio cassette. Nation Associates may purchase tapes for \$10 each, the cost to all others is \$15. Price includes postage and handling. Send your order to The Nation Associates, Gore Vidal Tape, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

CULTURE WARS: Challenges to commercial free speech. A cassette of this *Nation* Institute/Playboy Foundation event examining attempts to limit access to images and ideas is available for \$15. Featured panelists are Howard Bell, Ron Silver, Skipp Porteous, Nadine Strossen, Kurt Loder and Christie Hefner. Send a check or money order to "Culture Wars," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

"HOLLYWOOD & HISTORY: THE DEBATE OVER JFK"—Audio tapes of the provocative Town Hall event with Oliver Stone, Norman Mailer, Nora Ephron and Edward Jay Epstein are now available. Each 2-tape set is \$20. To order, send check or money order payable to The Nation Institute to "Hollywood & History," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

BED & BREAKFAST

LOS ANGELES near Hollywood. Garden setting. Tennis, golf. Children welcome. Pipey & Shank's Reasonable. (213) 664-4425

CHICAGO. Nicely furnished apartment, 34th floor, Lake & Loop view. Balcony, pool, exercise room. \$450 per week. (616) 469-1416

BOOKLETS

SCHOLARLY BOOKLET PROVES JESUS NEVER EXISTED!



Conclusive proof Flavius Josephus created fictional Jesus, authored Gospels. AMAZING but ABSOLUTELY INCONTROVERTIBLE! Send \$5 to Abelard Reuchlin Foundation, Box 5652-B, Kent WA 98064. For details please send SASE

BOOKS

ANARCHIST COOKBOOK available again! \$22, postpaid. Complete edition. Barnacle Books, Box 1401-R, Secaucus, NJ 07096

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Author's Guide to Subsidy Publishing" 1-800-695-9599

END OF THE CUBAN CONNECTION, Havana, 448 pp. \$9.95. Fred Hoffman, P.O. Box 26642, Los Angeles, CA 90026

SPECIAL BOOK DISCOUNT while supply lasts

FATE OF THE FOREST: DEVELOPERS, DESTROYERS AND DEFENDERS OF THE AMAZON, by Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn. Retail \$24.95. Available to *Nation* subscribers for \$15, and to Nation Associates for \$12.

THE M.D.: A HORROR STORY, by Thomas M. Disch. Retail \$22. *Nation* subscribers \$15, Nation Associates \$12. Please add \$2/book for shipping and handling. New York State residents add sales tax.

Send orders to The Nation Associates, Book Offer, 72 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011

SOLVING CIPHER PROBLEMS by Frank W. Lewis, *Nation* crossword puzzle setter—\$28.80 postpaid. Hours of enjoyment analyzing and solving secret messages. Free catalog describing other books. VISA and MASTERCARD orders accepted, provide expiration date. Aegean Park Press, P.O. Box 2837, Laguna Hills, CA 92654. (800) 736-3587

AIDS: MYSTERY SOLVED or AIDS/HIV IS NOT A DEATH SENTENCE, new book by Terrance Jackson. Includes information about 714-X and ozone, nontoxic and effective but suppressed treatments for cancer and AIDS. Also "smoking gun" evidence that AIDS is part of U.S. Biological Warfare program. To order send \$9.95 to AKASA Press, P.O. Box 313, Manhattanville Station, New York, NY 10027. (212) 671-9639

LET'S GET BACK TO REALITY

"THE BIG PICTURE" by R. A. H. Groves

Updates the information on

- Where We Are Coming From -

- Who We Are -

- Where We Are -

"The sex information alone is worth more than the cost of the book"

Paperback \$12.95, Postage \$1.05

California deliveries, 97 Sales Tax
Neume Press, Box 9282, Santa Rosa, Ca 95405

BOOK SEARCH SERVICES

AWAITING YOUR BOOK WANTS. Lorraine Zimmerman, Bookseller. P.O. Box 867, Silverado, CA 92676. (714) 649-2690, (800) 728-2073

Wm CAXTON BOOKSEARCH Ellison Bay, WI 54210. Please send phone/address with wants. (414) 854-2955

Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, Inc.. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.