

***The Great Zapruder Film Hoax:* Deceit and Deception in the Death of JFK**

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[Editor's note: *This book, edited by Assassination Research editor Jim Fetzer, deals with rather subtle and complex issues, which thus required a reviewer who was completely familiar with the issues. That person, Rich DellaRosa, moderator of the JFKresearch.com forum, had even contributed an appendix to the book. Here follows his review.*]

The title of the book leaves little doubt about the subject matter. If it was a non-fiction murder mystery perhaps it would have been titled *The Butler Did It*.

The Great Zapruder Film Hoax is the third in a series of books edited by Jim Fetzer comprised of various essays and white papers dealing with the JFK assassination. The earlier volumes are *Assassination Science* (1998) and *Murder In Dealey Plaza* (2000). While not absolutely necessary, it is beneficial to read all three books in sequence since *The Great Zapruder Film Hoax* contains references published in the earlier volumes.

The Zapruder Film. That famous home movie taken by dress manufacturer and amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder on 22 November 1963, while perched conspicuously on a concrete pedestal in Dealey Plaza. It has been called the most important single piece of evidence in the JFK case. But is it? Some have even referred to it as a "time clock" of the assassination: it established a benchmark—that the murder of the 35th President took place in 5.6 (alternately 6.2) seconds. Is this true? Many researchers believe that Zapruder's camera-original film is stored at the National Archives. Is it? If not, then where is the camera-original today? In 1998, the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) designated the film an official assassination record and compensated Zapruder's survivors \$16 million. What exactly did the American taxpayers purchase? And a rather vocal group of marketeers believe the extant Zapruder film is genuine. Is it?

Consider, for a moment, the following words:

- Edited
- Modified
- Altered
- Manipulated
- Falsified
- Fabricated

With respect to a discussion of the Zapruder film, they are far from synonymous. Each, in increasing degrees, involves a devious, malicious and perhaps even a criminal intent. The authors tackle these issues in great detail.

There has been much lively debate on whether the Zapruder film was “altered”. A rather small group believes it was not. But how do we define “altered”? Understanding the established timelines and chronology of the extant film we know that there are two splices: one at frame 157 and another at frame 207. In addition, frames 208, 209, 210, and 211 are missing due to mishandling by an unnamed technician at Time-Life during the time that they had possession of it. Unaltered?

Much of the “lively debate” mentioned above took place on the Internet, on the JFKresearch Assassination Forum (www.jfkresearch.com). It culminated in a Symposium sponsored by Fetzer held in Duluth in May 2003 where presentations were given by a professor of philosophy, an oncologist, a theoretical physicist, a well-known author, an expert in film and video production, and a photo analyst in the personages of James Fetzer, David Mantik, John Costella, David Lifton, David Healy and Jack White. The product of that Symposium is the sum and substance of this book.

Calling the Zapruder film “evidence” doesn’t seem appropriate somehow, mainly because, from the beginning, it was not treated as evidence. If it was “evidence” it should have been seized immediately by local law enforcement or the Secret Service. Although Zapruder claimed that he was confronted in his office by a pair of armed, uniformed Dallas Police Department officers who demanded his film, he refused. Instead, he actively sought to sell it to the highest bidder. When is “evidence” ever handled in such a manner?

Zapruder reported that he sold his film to Time-Life on Saturday 23 November 1963 for \$25,000, which he donated to the family of slain Dallas Police Department officer J. D. Tippit. In truth, he had sold the print rights to Time-Life for \$50,000. That transaction allowed *LIFE* magazine to publish still photos made from selected frames. It did not allow them the rights to show the film as a motion picture.

But, on Monday 25 November, Time-Life offered Zapruder an additional \$100,000 for the movie rights as well. The total amount was paid on an annual basis over the next four years. As author David Lifton notes, that coincided exactly with LBJ’s term in office. (*Note*: that \$150,000 is roughly equivalent to \$900,000 today.) As many researchers have observed, the total transaction effectively removed the film from being accessed or viewed, except as determined by persons unknown. What is known is that the name on the agreement was C. D. Jackson of Time-Life, a man who was a close associate of former CIA director Allen Dulles and who was known to have cooperated with the CIA on occasion.

The film’s provenance is rather hazy at best, and it is doubtful that it would have been admissible in a court of law if there ever had been a trial of Lee Oswald. The film was Kodachrome, which required a proprietary, patented processing which could only be accomplished in 1963 at select Kodak facilities. A piece of correspondence contained in Roland Zavada’s report to the ARRB indicated that in 1963 Kodachrome could only be processed at labs in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. What about Dallas?

Zapruder stated that his film was processed at Kodak in Dallas (and there seems to be no reason, other than the abovementioned correspondence, to doubt this). The processed film was then taken by Zapruder to the Jamieson film labs so that three optical print copies could be made. Supposedly, the camera-original film and one copy were transferred to Time-Life, and two copies were given to the Secret Service. This scenario has been told and re-told dozens of times over the years.

But author David Healy reports that at Jamieson, the camera-original was assigned number 0183, while the copies were given identification numbers 0185, 0186 and 0187. So, what happened to 0184? Did they just skip that number, and, if so, why? Or, was there an unaccounted-for copy made?

In the waning days of the brief tenure of the ARRB, a former CIA photoanalyst, Homer McMahon, provided testimony that in 1963 he worked at the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) in Washington. NPIC was a part of the CIA and was an advanced photographic facility which, among other projects, was responsible for analyzing the U2 photos which showed the build-up of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962.

McMahon's narrative included a report that a Secret Service agent named "Smith" delivered an amateur, 8 mm film of the assassination to NPIC on the evening of the assassination, 22 November 1963. "Smith" advised McMahon that the film had been "processed" at Eastman Kodak in Rochester, New York and then rushed on to Washington. Was this the Zapruder film? Well, so much for the supposed long-established provenance. Could the film which was delivered to NPIC be the unaccounted-for copy #0184? Copy 0184 may have been an inter-negative made by Jamieson which Kodak then "processed" in Rochester by making a positive print.

McMahon reported that he was never left alone with the film and was not allowed to make copies of it. He was asked to analyze it and prepare briefing boards. His in-depth analysis was that there was evidence of six to eight shots fired at the motorcade from at least three different directions. On viewing the film ten or more times that evening, McMahon was (and still is) convinced of his conclusions.

Does that description match what is seen today in the extant film? And why didn't the Warren Commission Report or the final report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations mention that the film was sent to the CIA? By now, the answer is probably obvious.

When interviewed in the 1990s, Zapruder's business partner, Erwin Schwartz, said that he vividly recalled watching the film and remembered seeing JFK's head suddenly "whip around to the left", and he saw an explosion of blood and brains from his head and that it had been blown out "to the left rear".

On 13 February 1969 Zapruder said that he could not tell if frames were missing from his film nor could he vouch for the film's chain of custody. Is it possible that Zapruder could not recognize his film?

The authors present discussions of the following issues:

- Did Abraham Zapruder actually take the film attributed to him? There are films and stills which seem to show Zapruder without his camera up to his face, and some which show his employee Marilyn Sitzman actually blocking his view. And a further photo shows no one standing on the pedestal. In the Willis and Betzner photos, Zapruder appears to be on the concrete pedestal shooting a movie. But in the Bronson slide a bit later, the Moorman Polaroid, and the Nix film, Zapruder does not seem to be filming at all. Yet Zapruder stated, more than once, that he began shooting his film when the motorcade came into sight on Houston Street and continued shooting until the limousine was out of sight.
- Did the technology and expertise necessary to alter film exist in 1963? It is indeed fortuitous that a member of the team is David Healy, a man with extensive experience (30+ years) in video and film production who is intimately familiar with the working of optical printers and other equipment and techniques used to apply special effects to film and motion pictures. Healy demonstrated early attempts to create composite images. In one case, a work called “Fading Away” by Henry Robinson was shown. It is composed of ten separate images yet there are no visible cut lines and it displays an even density across all ten image pieces. The end result is quite remarkable and is reproduced in the book. Even more astounding is that it was created in 1858—more than a century before the JFK assassination.
- Were other films and photos taken that day also altered in order to agree with what is shown in the extant Zapruder film? One very vocal member of the anti-alteration camp uses this argument to prove that the Zapruder film could not have been altered. In other words, since other films and photos seem to show similar events in Dealey Plaza, the Zapruder film must then be genuine. He uses other pieces of photography to verify what is seen on the Zapruder film. But this begs the question: if the Zapruder film was altered, why wouldn't other photos and films be likewise altered? Would it not have been absolutely ridiculous to alter one piece of photographic evidence and not any other?
- If the Zapruder film was altered, why was it done? When the extant Zapruder film became available for public consumption, the majority of those viewing it felt that it proved there was a frontal shot and therefore it seemingly showed the Warren Commission wrong. So why would anyone need to alter it? The authors explore this in great detail. Knowing what is seen in the extant film, one's imagination can only wonder what any alterations would conceal. It would be entirely reasonable that anything not consistent with the Warren Commission's conclusions would need to be edited out. Would an unaltered film completely destroy the Warren Report? Would it show, as Homer McMahon described, six or more shots fired from three or more directions? Would the alterations themselves be *prima facie* proof of a massive government cover-up?

- Who was Abraham Zapruder? Did he merely serendipitously appear in a key location to witness and record a major piece of history? In this reviewer's opinion these are questions which deserve far more attention. We learn that Zapruder was born in Russia and that he was associated with Dallas's White-Russian community, as was Lee and Marina Oswald, Ruth and Michael Paine, and George DeMohrenschildt. In fact, we learn that Jeanne LeGon, one of DeMohrenschildt's wives, worked for Zapruder as a dress designer. One of Jack Ruby's janitors also worked for Zapruder for a time, and Zapruder was also an acquaintance of Jack Ruby himself. Zapruder was also an associate of H. L. Hunt. Author Lifton states his belief in the serendipity theory, that Zapruder was just an innocent bystander with a camera, while apparently the other authors believe there may be far more to Mr. Zapruder than what we have been told (but not that Zapruder had any actual foreknowledge of the events that day).
- Does the extant film show the true and accurate events that occurred in Dealey Plaza on 22 November 1963? Well, if it did, this book and the Symposium that spawned it would not have been necessary. In fact, the film does not agree with the accounts of the closest eyewitnesses. Several dozen of them described a brief limousine stop just prior to the fatal head shot. Yet the extant film depicts the limousine proceeding down Elm Street at a rather smooth, constant rate of speed. So, if it is altered, what does the extant film conceal? First and foremost it conceals evidence of more than three shots from more than a single shooter firing from the rear. That alone would invalidate the Warren Commission Report. Next, it conceals the possible complicity of one or more of the Secret Service agents. It conceals the limousine stop, which made the head shot (or shots) easier to accomplish. Did Secret Service driver Greer stop the limousine on purpose, or on cue? Author David Mantik states that he believes that JFK was hit by two head shots: one from the rear and one from the right front. He believes they occurred roughly at Zapruder frames 313 and 321. Yet the extant film shows nothing of the sort. This two-shot scenario also concurs with many eyewitness accounts.
- Was Mary Moorman standing in the street when she snapped her famous photo? And if so, why does it matter? This one particular topic was the subject matter for a lengthy exchange between the authors and one of the anti-alteration teams and took place on the JFKresearch Assassination Forum on-line. To say that this issue created a spirited debate is quite an understatement. Author John Costella summarized the Moorman-in-the-street issue thusly:

An analysis by Jack White in which he claims that the lines of sight inherent in Moorman #5 located her camera position precisely—at such a height that she must have been standing on the roadway of Elm Street—whereas the (extant) Zapruder film shows her standing on the grass some feet behind the curb.

Both Mary Moorman and her companion that day, Jean Hill, repeated their claims that Mary stood in the street to take her picture. Since the extant Zapruder film shows Moorman to be standing on the grass, either the two

women were mistaken—or—the film was altered. But the authors did not merely need to rely on the women’s memory. Jack White noticed that the intersection of two lines-of-sight involving the windows in the concrete pergola and the top of the concrete pedestal on which Zapruder stood could only occur when sighted from the exact location where Moorman said she was standing: in Elm Street itself. In 2001, authors White, Mantik, and Fetzer utilized surveyor’s equipment to locate the spot exactly in Dealey Plaza. The conclusion is inevitable: the extant film has been altered—significantly.

- Has the Zapruder family been unfairly enriched? As noted above, the total amount paid to Zapruder by Time-Life was \$150,000. In 1975, Time sold the film and all of its copyrights to Zapruder’s survivor and family for \$1.00. They formed the LMH Corporation and hired an attorney to function as a “royalty cop”. If anyone wished to use the Zapruder film or portions of it, a royalty had to be paid in every case. Royalties ranged from \$3,000 to the \$80,000 that Oliver Stone paid in order to use the film in his movie *JFK*. In the late 1990s, the ARRB declared the Zapruder film to be an assassination record consistent with the JFK Records Act which empowered them. Federal law mandates that when the government takes possession of private property compensation must be made representing a “fair value”. The ARRB determined the film to have a market value of \$16 million and paid that amount to the Zapruders, with the Zapruders retaining the copyrights. Said copyrights were transferred subsequently to the Dallas Historical Foundation, doing business as The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza.

But, as the authors advise, if the Zapruder film is altered—that is, if it not a genuine photographic record of the JFK assassination—has the Zapruder family been unfairly enriched using taxpayer monies? If so, should the Zapruders re-pay it? This is not a trivial issue because it lies at the heart and soul of the anti-alterationists. They have demonstrated that their interest isn’t the preservation of an historical document. Rather, their true interests are quite parochial and mercenary. Specifically, if those who seek to profit from the extant film admit that the film has been tampered with and is not genuine, the value diminishes to nothing more than evidence of one of the biggest hoaxes ever perpetuated on the American people and the world community. Hence the anti-alterationists have demonstrated that they will stop at nothing to discredit any and all proof of the film’s alteration, manipulation, and downright fabrication.

These issues and others are presented by the authors in this compelling book. Whether one becomes convinced of Zapruder film alteration after reading this book is a matter of choice, but not for lack of information or substantiation.

Of all the presenters who traveled to Duluth for the Symposium, the one who traveled farthest was Dr. John Costella, a theoretical physicist from Australia. Dr. Costella is something of a newcomer to the area of JFK research but he has made astounding contributions already.

One of the more fascinating discoveries Costella has made involves the Stemmons Freeway sign in Dealey Plaza. As it turns out, the lens system on Zapruder's camera was patented by Bell & Howell; its characteristics are well documented. As many are aware, Zapruder's Bell & Howell Director's Series 414PD camera was set on telephoto while he filmed the presidential motorcade. This lens has a characteristic "pincushioning" effect which tends to pull the image frames outward.

This pincushioning effect is clearly present in the extant Zapruder film, as it should be. Except there is no pincushioning detected for the Stemmons Freeway sign along Elm Street—and there should be.

Costella shows that it is physically impossible for pincushioning to occur in portions of movie frames selectively while other portions are free from the distortion. How could the Stemmons sign have escaped the pincushioning?

The short and undeniable answer is that the Stemmons Freeway sign, as it appears, was inserted into the film after it was processed. The sign should have had the same pincushion distortion as the rest of the frame as well as all the frames before and after the ones in which the sign appears.

Recall that the extant film shows JFK smiling and waving to the crowd prior to disappearing behind the sign. When he re-emerges he has his hands up to his throat as he reacts to being shot. Irrefutably, the Stemmons sign obscures the throat shot—a frontal throat shot. Some researchers have theorized that the sign was also struck by a shot from the grassy knoll. (The sign was not made of metal but was plywood.) Are these the reasons an artificial sign was inserted into the extant film? If so, Costella reasons, the extant film was not merely "altered"—it was "fabricated". Fabricated, as in "falsified"—with criminal intent, since obstructing justice was, and still is, a crime.

Consider, also, that we are told that Zapruder carefully selected his position and, although he stated that he suffered from vertigo, he chose to stand perched on top of that concrete pedestal. Yet, his closest point of view (POV) of the motorcade had a sign obstructing it. As author Healy notes, if Zapruder had chosen to stand at ground level in front of the pergola structure, he would have enjoyed an unobstructed view.

The final presentation is an interesting narrative by author David Lifton, detailing his 30+ years of experience studying and analyzing the Zapruder film and his early suspicions of its alteration and forgery. Lifton is familiar to students of the JFK case mainly due to his best selling book *Best Evidence* which explored the possibility of body alteration. In this treatise he deals with film alteration.

In fact it was Lifton who wrote to Warren Commission photo expert Shaneyfelt in 1965 to point out that two frames published in Volume 18 appeared to be reversed. As a result he received a letter from no less than J. Edgar Hoover explaining that it was due to a "printing error". Later, on close examination of the film, Lifton noted that frames 335 and 337 showed what seemed to be a painted-on head wound which did not fit the description that nearly all of the

Parkland doctors saw only moments later. Suspiciously, the head wound *did* match the description given later by the Bethesda autopsists.

Author David Healy believes that the famous “blob” wound seen in some copies in the vicinity of Zapruder frame 313 and the head wound noted by Lifton in frames 335 and 337 were created using a piece of glass placed over those frames. The artifacts then were painted onto the glass by a highly skilled matte artist. Lifton then points out that the most accomplished matte artists in the world are employed by the movie studios in Hollywood, and raised suspicions of whether the Zapruder film could have been sent to one of them for alteration. But a matte artist would not be able to work with an 8 mm image, as it is far too small.

Enter Moses Weitzman, a highly talented motion picture technician in New York. Clearly, Weitzman was not a party to any of the subterfuge or alteration. However, in 1967 Time-Life approached Weitzman and requested him to make a 16 mm copy of the 8 mm Zapruder film. Weitzman perfected a technique which actually allowed him to make a 35 mm copy from 8 mm in one step. But was the film given to Weitzman for copying the camera-original or an already altered copy?

An email from Weitzman to this reviewer dated 10 July 2003 states, “I can assure you I had the original unaltered, slit, regular 8 mm footage. It would have been technically impossible to do any matte work or even optical printing.” Author Lifton disagrees. The creation of 35 mm frames was key, in his opinion, to the creation of matte images superimposed to alter the images of JFK’s wounds. Weitzman could not have known whether the 8 mm film was the camera-original.

In the same communication, Weitzman wrote, “An employee of mine pirated a copy and made a career of it.” Enter Robert Groden. David Lifton has had an interesting history with Robert Groden over the past thirty years which he describes in some detail in this book. In Lifton’s stated opinion, Groden has adopted the belief that he (Groden) personally owns any JFK-related material that he touches. This has been problematic in having some of those items available to bona fide researchers. Having worked with the House Select Committee on Assassinations as a photoanalyst, Groden has had access to plenty.

Moses Weitzman also had the opportunity to work on the Nix film for UPI. When he viewed the Nix film on a Hazeltine analyzer at 8X magnification, he wrote in a subsequent email to this reviewer: “To Zapruder’s right there was a picket fence and behind that fence a clearly discernable image of what looked like a person holding a silver rod (about what a rifle barrel would look like) at port position. We sent several copies to the Jet Propulsion Lab at CalTech. Unfortunately they could only do black and white. They lost the nuances of color that shaped the image. A flesh-colored void where a head should be, two smaller flesh-colored blobs holding a silver-colored broom stick ... They could not find anything on what we sent them.” And later commented, “The original Nix footage and the blowups we made seemed to have melted away.” So, what has happened to the original Nix film? David Lifton has his suspicions.

When the alterations were made to the Zapruder film is not clear. There appears to be concurrence by the authors that some were done the very weekend of the assassination. But since the film was withheld from the public for some twelve years, there is no way to know when and where other modifications were accomplished. This all nets out to the authors' assertion that the extant Zapruder film is not an authentic representation of what occurred in Dealey Plaza on 22 November 1963. It does not concur with the descriptions of the closest eyewitnesses. It is not merely an altered film, but a total fabrication. In fact, the extant film may have been constructed using not only Zapruder's film, but other films taken that day. This may account for Zapruder choosing such a poor POV—he may have been a decoy intended to distract attention from other cameramen concealed nearby.

For a relatively small cadre of researchers, the Zapruder film alteration issue is moot. They have seen another film of the assassination—a better quality film. A description of it is reproduced in Appendix E of this book. These fortunate folks have seen a film which closely matches the eyewitness accounts, and is very different from the extant Zapruder film. This “other” film shows the limousine turning from Houston Street onto Elm Street; it shows the limousine coming to a full, yet brief, stop; it shows a man stepping into the street with fist raised—possibly a signal for the driver to stop; it shows two shots to JFK's head from two directions; and it shows a shower of brain particulate violently sprayed to the left rear.

It is important to note that none of the people who claim to have seen this film ever did so in the presence of any of the others. Nor did they view it in the same geographic location. Yet their descriptions of what they saw in the film match identically. For them, there is no question that the extant Zapruder film is a fabrication, part and parcel of a massive cover-up of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Whether one agrees with the conclusions of the authors, this is an important book for researchers and students alike. The authors have amassed a considerable amount of substantiation for their claims, and the amount of effort is significant. As the book goes into its second printing the finishing touches are being made on a video production of the Symposium conducted in May 2003. [Editor's note: DVDs of the Duluth conference, “Is Seeing Believing in the Assassination of JFK?”, are now available at assassinationscience.com/zdvd. *The Great Zapruder Film Hoax* is currently in its 3rd printing.]