0-19 (Rev. 1-30-74)

Assoc. Dir. ____
Dep. AD Adm. ✓
Dep. AD Inv. ✓
Asst. Dir.: |
Admin. ____
Comp. Syst. ✓
Ext. Affairs ✓
Files & Com. ✓
Gen. Inv. ✓
Ident. ____
Inspection ____
Intell. ✓
Laboratory ✓
Plan. & Eval. ____
Spec. Inv. ____
Training ____
Legal Coun. ____
Telephone Rm. ____
Director Sec'y ____

GARRY WILLS

A Word for Warren Commission

• It is time to say a word for the Warren Commission. Even those who believe that Oswald was the sole assassin of President Kennedy are beginning to grant that the Warren Commission did a bad job. They say we should "reopen the case," if for no other reason, just to resolve doubts caused by sloppy detective work. But most doubts are caused by two classes of men — those who have not really read what the Warren Commission said and those whose doubts would not be resolved by the Second Coming (which they would treat as a CIA plot).

The attacks on the Warren Commission come from three main directions:

1. Some think the commission was part of the plot itself. These people are at least consistent. If one could mobilize all the resources most conspiratorial theories demand, then controlling the commission should have been no problem at all. But this, like most such theories, proves too much. If one can "control" a chief justice, a future president, a bunch of prominent lawyers on the make, an attorney general who happens to be the assassinated man's brother, then one controls everything, and there is no longer any need to hide — i.e., to be a conspiracy.

2. Others think the CIA and/or the FBI bamboozled the commission — which is a rather touching exercise in credulity. Even if those agencies were efficient, they would have to tread carefully where so many other factions and rival interests were at play — and where the results were going to be published in 26 volumes. But, of course, the record of both the FBI and the CIA is enough to make any criticism of the commission look like praise. If the conspiracy depends on the FBI and the CIA, then Howard Hunt's whole career tells us what would have happened to it.

3. Others, by far the most numerous, think the commission just fumbled the job out of haste, incompetence or unconscious prejudices. Most of the evidence for this is the citing of "leads" that the commission did not track down. In fact, many of these were tracked down, or were patently false leads from the start.

A fair example is Mark Lane's use of testimony by Nancy Perrin Rich. He devoted a whole chapter of this book to this woman's bizarre tale. He neglected to tell the readers that the same woman appeared two other times, in two different places, to volunteer evidence to the commission. The investigators listened politely, though she told three totally different stories. At one of these appearances, deliberately omitted from Lane's chapter, she took (and flunked) a polygraph test.

Ovid Demaris and I, back in the '60s, took Lane's advice and followed up this woman's testimony. We found that she was an unstable woman, had been in and out of psychiatric care and police stations, that she loved to "testify" about all her famous friends in mob trials and other celebrated crimes. We also found that Lane knew all this, that he told the woman's husband he would not be able to make anything of her testimony. But he made an entire tendentious chapter out of one third of that testimony.

Here is a simple rule of thumb for dealing with conspiratorialists: If they question the integrity of the Warren Commission yet quote Mark Lane with approval, they are intellectually very ill-equipped or intellectually dishonest.

The Washington Post ____
Washington Star-News A-15
Daily News (New York) ____
The New York Times ____
The Wall Street Journal ____
The National Observer ____
The Los Angeles Times ____

Date MAY 1 1975

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