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Makeup of the Warren Commission

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WASHINGTON

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN did not immediately accept President Johnson's invitation to head a special commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy.

The Chief Justice asked and received time to reflect upon the task in all its aspects, including his duty to the Supreme Court. He was mindful of his position as the chief target of what he called at the slain President's bier the "forces of hatred and malevolence such as today are eating their way into the bloodstream of American life."



Warren

Now he has put his hand to the plow, and those long in close association with him regard it as unthinkable that he should turn back. It is equally unthinkable that he would set down aught in malice, whatever his personal position.

Washington has speculated furiously about the commission since it was announced. It quickly noted that five of its seven members are Republicans, three are Southerners. One, banker John McCloy, has been called head of the American Establishment, a phrase used to denote the powerful and more or less permanent business and economic interests of the country.

JUSTICE WARREN STILL sits at the head of the commission table, armed with the dignity of his great office, his matchless experience of men and conflicting social forces learned in 33 years in public office in great and growing California. He is also almost uniquely free. What person or interest now can hurt or help him?

President Johnson is specially qualified to appreciate the powers of a chairman, a fact which gives greater importance to his choice of Warren. It amounts virtually to a declaration that the investigation will be what Warren chooses to make of it.

The choice also puts the President squarely behind the Chief Justice at this troubled point in the fight for racial justice. This will not be lost upon another commission member, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, who will lead the South's effort to veto the Kennedy-Johnson civil rights bill in Congress.

THE FBI AND CIA are widely criticized here for seeming lapses in keeping tabs on the Kennedy assassin, former Marine Lee Oswald, a onetime resident of the Soviet Union and self-appointed agent for "Fair Play for Cuba."

The Johnson panel includes Representative Gerald Ford, Michigan Republican and certain FBI defender, as well as Republican Allen Dulles, until lately head of the CIA. This is a typical operation of Lyndon Johnson, the Senate leader who strove for balance and public acceptance of his moves.

The overriding impression given by the panel is that the new President was seeking the widest popular acceptance of its verdict, whatever turn the effort might take. It is hard and grave responsibility for the panel members.

Chief Justice Warren made his own strong feeling clear at the Kennedy bier that the extremists in this country bear a heavy weight of guilt when he spoke of those "who would themselves recoil from assassination but who do not shrink from spreading the venom which kindles thoughts of it in others."