

THE BOOK REPORT

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Warren Report

Companion Volume

BY ROBERT H. KIRSCH

Times Book Editor

The Paperback Scene: THE WITNESSES: The Highlights of Hearings Before the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Bantam: \$1), selected and edited by members of the Washington Bureau of the New York Times, with an introduction by Anthony Lewis.

In more than 600 closely packed pages, illustrated with photographs and reproductions of top secret documents, this Bantam Extra is the companion volume to their recent edition of the Warren Commission Report. It is based on the 26-volume Warren Commission testimony and exhibits recently released and available in the official set from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., at \$76.

Once again, Bantam did a remarkable job in producing this work under the pressure of time. The book was printed and bound only 76 hours after the manuscript was sent to the W. F. Hall Printing Co., in Chicago. Because this publishing project involved selection, editing and organization, it is perhaps even more impressive an accomplishment than the earlier publication of the report.

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Couched as it is in the words of persons, prominent and obscure, whose roles were central or tangential to the great tragedy of those November days of 1963, the volume



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takes on the elevation and glory of awesome drama. The structure itself falls naturally into a five-act pattern: The Assassination; The Arrest; The Assassin; The Assassin's Killer; and The President's Safety.

There is even a kind of prescience and foreshadowing as in the words of Kenneth P. O'Donnell, special assistant to President Kennedy and his long-time friend, who had spoken with the President many times about the problems of Presidential protection. O'Donnell said that the President knew and accepted the risks inherent in exposure to large crowds, believed it was impossible for the Secret Service to guarantee 100% safety to a President.

But more than this, O'Donnell said, the President had spoken on the matter to Mrs. Kennedy and the aide, the very

morning of the assassination:

"... He said that if anybody really wanted to shoot the President of the United States, it was not a very difficult job—all one had to do was get a high building some day with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt on the President's life."

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Grief has its eloquence and the words of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy are gripping and deeply moving. President Johnson's statement of Mrs. Kennedy's demeanor during those terrible hours is simple and memorable: "I shall never forget her bravery, nobility, and dignity."

Mrs. Lyndon Johnson in her recollection of that fateful and dreadful day saw through an empathetic woman's eyes Mrs. Kennedy's ordeal. "Mrs. Kennedy's dress was stained with blood. Her right glove was caked—that immaculate woman—it was caked with blood, her husband's blood. Somehow that was one of the most poignant sights—exquisitely dressed and caked in blood."

Anthony Lewis tells us of one sentence that, through delicacy, Mrs. Johnson deleted from her recollections: "And then with something—if you can say a person that gentle, that dignified, you can

say had an element of fierceness—she said, 'I want them to see what they have done to Jack.'"

There is much more.

This is the ore itself of history. In these pages one does not find the clear and reasoned organization of the Warren Report. This is the testimony raw and unassessed. The very words suggest the characters speaking them. There are moments of confusion and moments of emotion. From this material and from the full-scale transcript, historians and commentators will find the source of discussions and interpretations for centuries to come.

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Witnesses include those who in some way had become a part of the gathering controversy. Bernard William Weissman, the man who took out the famous ad which appeared in Dallas the day of the President's death; Gen. Edwin A. Walker, who had been the target of an earlier assassination attempt by Oswald and whose suggestion of a conspiracy between Ruby and Oswald is not borne out by any other evidence; Mark Lane, the attorney, who was retained to defend the interests of Oswald, and who has continued to raise questions about the case. Yet when Mr. Lane test-

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