THE VIEW FROM HERE

Loudon Wainwright

The Warren Report is not enough

When the Report of the Warren Commission on the assassination of President Kennedy was published in the fall of 1964, most Americans, including me, welcomed its appearance with gratitude and something very much like relief. We had lived in the shadow of a monstrous event for nearly a year, and the national grief was compounded with all sorts of doubts, speculations and rumors about the facts surrounding the worst crime of this generation.

The Report—with its 26 accompanying volumes of exhibits and testimony from 552 witnesses—seemed precisely the instrument to settle those doubts and refute the rumors. The unassailable integrity of the membership of the Commission, the sheer size of the job the members had done and, most of all, the apparent soundness of the basic conclusions they reached—these things restored calm and confidence for many people. That Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone on his own mad initiative from a vantage point in a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository, had fired all the shots that killed the President and wounded Governor Connally appeared entirely the best, most compelling, most logical solution.

I suppose that no matter how tidy and persuasive a report the Commission had produced there would have been certain critics of it who would simply not go along with the conclusions. Whatever their reasons for it—whether their convictions were honest or whether they acted in venal adventurism—they would have popped up in the great broth of the event, made their points and disappeared or not, depending on the clarity of their presentation and the public appetite for sensation. Much of the talk about a possible conspiracy we heard in the aftermath of the assassination had a shady quality about it that repelled me, and I hoped the Report would silence these voices.

But now—two years later—there are more voices speaking in contradiction of the Report than ever before. In a rash of books, newspaper and magazine articles and television discussions, many are expressing serious and detailed doubts both about the adequacy of the Commission's procedures and about the conclusions it reached. By their very nature, all of these expressions of opinion are highly controversial and some are carelessly delivered. But some of these writers seem to me to be sober and responsible, and at least two of their books have shaken badly my own comfortable feeling that the Warren Report had disposed of this sad matter.

One, *Inquest*, by Edward Jay Epstein, began as a master's thesis on the Commission and turned into something quite different when Mr. Epstein discovered what he believed were certain glaring contradictions and omissions in the evidence. The other book is called *The Second Oswald* and its author is Richard H. Popkin, a philosophy professor who, from his own study of documents and evidence both in and out of the Report, has produced an alternative theory to the Commission's belief that Oswald acted alone.

I think it is fair to say that the basic findings of both these men are constructed around the conviction that it

would have been virtually impossible for one man to do all the shooting. For example, the Commission theory that a single bullet passed through the President's back and *then* wounded Connally in the chest, wrist and thigh is questioned hard. If they haven't entirely swung me over to their view, I, like many others, am beginning to wish very much for further clarification. The argument that these critics have not produced new evidence to prove their theses does not persuade me that they are necessarily wrong, and I think the doubts they raise strongly indicate the need for more searching study.

It will be said that a reopening of the matter will not do the country any good and will reflect great discredit on the Warren Commission. As for the latter, it is interesting to note that the most responsible of the critics do not attack either the honesty or the intent of the Commission. Rather, they assault the procedures and the findings, and though I would rather not have it be so, I don't think there is much discredit in a group of good men being wrong.

As for the possible harm to the country, I think we should take the risks. There are some people who have al-

ways felt that the Report was seriously flawed. Others think that the truth of the matter, thoroughly revealed, might disclose a dangerous conspiracy, perhaps involving foreign governments, and that we might all be better off for *not* knowing about it. The possibility of such a sinister plot seems far-fetched to me, but if it ever existed, I would distinctly prefer to know about it.

There seems little doubt that the skeptics of the Report will continue to speak out, and that more and more people will be listening. That raises some important questions. Should the field of exploring and investigating this enormously complex business be left now to individuals acting on their own initiative? More than that, should the questions they raise be left for historians of future generations? Can we in the present bequeath to these historians a confused and sharply challenged record and let them draw their own new—and quite possibly incorrect—conclusions from dry documentation and from the testimony of witnesses long dead? I think the answer to all these questions is "no," and that we should begin right now to make some official response to the growing problem. Congressman Theodore Kupferman of New York has asked for the creation of a joint Senate and House committee to study the record to see if a new and complete investigation is necessary. Though it is doubtful the Congress will act on Kupferman's resolution at this session, I think it is an entirely sensible beginning.

Recently I saw again the amateur movie film which is the best record of the moment of the assassination. I had not seen it since the weeks immediately following President Kennedy's death, and that mounting sense of horror came right back as soon as the leading motorcycles came into view on the little screen. The old incredulity persisted as the gleaming caravan approached down Elm Street. The open car went behind the road sign, it reappeared, and the President's hands were at his throat. Governor Connally turned and then fell backward, and then—as the projector whirred in time and space so far removed from Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963—there was the ghastly impact of the killing shot against the President's head. It is too much, too much. Yet we must look at it, reverse it and run it again, slow it and stop it and find out everything about it, because it happened.