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# "Inquest" Doubts Warren Report

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REVIEWED BY JOHN BARKHAM

"INQUEST: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth," by Edward Jay Epstein. (New York: Viking Press. 224 pp. \$5)

THE AMERICAN people accepted the Warren Commission's Report on the assassination of President Kennedy with relief, gratitude, and virtual unanimity. The prestige of the commission and the comprehensive character of its investigation set at rest the many rumors and speculations current at the time, particularly those of Europeans who, conditioned by their own history, persisted in believing that the assassination was an act of conspiracy.

But has the Warren Report in fact said the last word on the subject? That Harvey Lee Oswald was the assassin seems clear beyond a reasonable doubt. But was he the only assassin? This new book, first prepared as a master's thesis at Cornell, takes a long, hard, penetrating look at the work of the commission, the evidence it considered (and did not consider), and the conclusions it reached. Its findings are disquieting to say the least.

First, a word as to the nature of Edward Jay Epstein's analysis. It is not a sensational ex parte attack on the commission, and it offers no new hypothesis of the crime. It is solely and simply a scrutiny of the Warren Commission itself and the manner in which it discharged its assignment. The tone of the book is cool, objective, dispassionate. Its materials are those submitted to of interviews conducted by the author with members of the commission, its counsel, and certain of its staff.

EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN

## Uncovers Disturbing Facts

A number of disturbing facts are brought to light. It is not true, as commonly supposed, the commission spent "the better part of a year" on the investigation. The investigation proper, according to Epstein, lasted under ten weeks. Members of the commission continued their own work and counsel pursued their inquiries only part time. Sections of the report assigned to different counsel had to be rewritten, sometimes over their objections.

But these are minor matters. Epstein's principal target is the report itself, particularly one damaging aspect: was Oswald conclusively proved to have been the only assassin, or was there a second person involved as well? From the autopsy report, the FBI reports, a film of the actual shooting taken by an amateur photographer, and other exhibits it is clear that one person could not have had time enough in the few seconds of the shooting to fire the bullets that struck the President and Governor Connolly.

Indeed, the film establishes conclusively that the President

and the governor could have been hit by one man only if the same bullet passed through the President and then struck the Governor. The autopsy did not support this. Link this to the fact that one eyewitness, Mrs. Eric Walther, said she had seen two men at the windows of the Texas Book Depository, yet was never questioned by the commission, not for any sinister reason, but simply (according to Epstein) because the staff overlooked her statement.

#### Was Oswald An FBI Informer?

Then there is the strange allegation made to the commission that Oswald had been in the employ of the FBI as an informer. After weighing the matter, the commission informed the FBI of the state and received a flat denial from its director, J. Edgar Hoover. Epstein believes that the commission should independently have investigated the truth or otherwise of the allegation. "The commission's course of action," he comments, "can thus be explained only in terms of the purpose of dispelling damaging rumors."

Judging by the commission's discussions in preparing its conclusions, a paramount consideration was unanimity of opinion. This being so, it was agreed to leave open the matter of the number of shots fired. Hence Epstein logically deduces that while the commission's explicit purpose was to ascertain and expose the facts, its implicit purpose was "to protect the national interest by dispelling rumors."

This is a disquieting conclusion bearing in mind the prestige and personnel of the investigation. In September a second professional criticism of the Warren Report by attorney Mark Lane is due to be published. The public interest requires that these be answered.

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