



Food for the Suspicious
 INQUEST: THE WARREN COMMISSION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUTH By Edward Jay Epstein. 224 pages. Viking, \$5.

Just as it is true that the mind can conceive unending webworks of intrigue, so it is that the Kennedy assassination will forever evoke suspicions, claims, counterclaims and new theories. He was shot with one bullet—no, two. He was killed by one man—no, two, or maybe three. The fatal bullet entered his neck—no, his back. Lee Harvey Oswald was a Communist—no, a right-winger. Kennedy ordered his own assassination—no, Lyndon Johnson did.

Despite the thoroughness of the 26-volume Warren Commission report, many people in the world prefer to ignore rational explanations when the irrational can be made to seem so much more melodramatic. Edward Jay Epstein's book will certainly help feed the grimly suspicious. *Inquest* is the enlargement of a master's thesis that he wrote

at Cornell. It has much thesis, but little that is masterly.

After diligently scanning the public record, sifting through an accumulation of evidence in the National Archives, and interviewing five of the seven members of the Warren Commission and ten of its top staffers, Epstein concluded that the commission was "extremely superficial" in its investigation of the President's murder. He bases some of his criticism on the fact that the commission members actually heard little of the testimony in person, but he fails to mention that all members received a full

transcript of each day's proceedings and were free to ask questions or raise points when they felt it was necessary. Moreover, he says, the commission acted hastily, even slovenly, in deciding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin. "There is a strong case that Oswald could not have acted alone," he charges. "Quite clearly, a serious discussion of this problem would in itself have undermined the dominant purpose of the commission, namely, the settling of doubts and suspicions. In estab-

lishing the truth, the Warren Commission acted to reassure the nation and protect the national interest." Nowhere in the book does Epstein offer any indication, however slight, of a link between Oswald and a collaborator. His chief argument is that the commission placed entirely too much credence in the theory that one bullet hit J.F.K. in the back and emerged from his throat to strike Governor John Connally. He suggests that Connally must have been hit by a second bullet, since Oswald could not have fired twice in the 1.8 seconds that elapsed between the time Kennedy was hit and Connally fell. Therefore, says Epstein, if the same bullet did not strike both men, there had to be a second assassin. He cites two unpublished FBI reports that seem to cast doubt on the single-bullet theory. Those reports said that the first bullet did not pass through Kennedy's body at all. But Epstein ignores the fact that the FBI has long since acknowledged that it was in error on that point. The reports were based on inadequate information, hurriedly collected before the autopsy was completed.

This and countless other examples of superficial scholarship scarcely make *Inquest* the compelling work that Epstein's publishers claim it is.

