

Objectivity Needed In Reading Books Tackling Warren Report

RUSH TO JUDGMENT

By Mark Lane
(Holt, Rinehart, Winston)

INQUEST

By Edward Jay Epstein
(Viking Press)

THE OSWALD AFFAIR

By Leo Sauvage
(World Press)

CAREFUL mental preparation is necessary before the reader tackles these three books about the Warren Commission Report on the assassination of President Kennedy. Complete objectivity is needed.

In the days, weeks and months following Kennedy's murder in Dallas the people of the United States groped for some rational explanation of the killing. The Warren Commission, after 10 months of hearings and deliberations, issued its now familiar Report. Lee Harvey Oswald was named as the lone assassin of both President Kennedy and Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit. Jack Ruby was named as the killer of Oswald. The commission found no evidence of a conspiracy either between Oswald and Ruby or Oswald and any other person.

IN THEIR gropings, the American people (with some notable exceptions) took the report as fact. Newspapers, magazines, radio and TV all reported the findings as fact. Most persons (this reviewer included) felt satisfied.

Now—in the summer of 1966—come nearly a half-dozen writers who sweep away this feeling of security and raise grave doubts about the truth of the commission report—indeed about the integrity of the commission itself.

Of the three books reviewed here Mark Lane's book—**RUSH TO JUDGMENT**—raises the gravest doubts, causes the most feelings of disquietude, shatters the complacent feeling that the murder has been solved.

IN FAIRNESS to the members of the Warren Commission, it should be pointed out that Lane was retained by Oswald's mother, Marguerite, to repre-



MARK LANE

sent her dead son before the commission. Lane also appeared frequently as a lecturer on the subject. It could therefore be argued that he has a mercenary interest in keeping doubts alive—that he stands to make money by lecturing and continuing to maintain Oswald's innocence.

The question aside, Lane's book still stands as a grave in-

dictment of the commission's methods and its findings. It poses questions which strike at the very heart of the Report. It raises questions which demand answers. Here are some of the contentions in **RUSH TO JUDGMENT**:

—Many persons testified that they saw "puffs of smoke" just below and to the right of the railroad underpass at the instant of the assassination. Although several saw men in that area immediately prior to the murder and one swore he smelled gunpowder after rushing to the area following the shooting, the commission concluded that no shots were fired from that area.

—**MANY STANDING** in front of the Texas School Book Depository at the time of the assassi-

nation swore they thought the shots were fired from the area in front of the motorcade, not from above and to the rear. The commission concluded the opposite was true.

—The main witness—a man who said he saw a man matching Oswald's description standing in the window with a rifle in his hand—has an eye defect. The commission also contradicted his contention that the man was standing, contending he really saw a kneeling man fire the shots.

—The commission said Kennedy and Gov. John Connally were hit by a single bullet. Connally and his wife Nellie both say this is untrue.

—**THE REPORT** said Kennedy was hit from behind. Doctors who first examined the mortally wounded President all felt that the wound in the front of his throat was an "entrance" wound rather than an "exit" wound. This raises the possibility that the President was shot from the front, which, in turn, would virtually nullify the commission's finding that Oswald acted alone.

—The commission concluded it was possible for Oswald, an inevert rifleman, to accurately fire the rifle used to kill the President in the elapsed time of the shots. Even expert riflemen were taxed to fire and reload the weapon three times in the time attributed to Oswald. Even then, they were unable to hit dummies with the degree of ac-

curacy (in the neck and head) attributed to Oswald.

—**THAT OSWALD** was able to travel from the Depository to the scene of Tippit's murder in 43 minutes was considered plausible by the commission. Lane says that such a trip would be next to impossible.

The commission could find no link between Jack Ruby, slayer of Oswald, and the alleged assassin. Lane prefers to think otherwise. Lane also con-

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tends (or at least hints) that the Dallas police and Ruby were in collusion. Otherwise how could Ruby have known of the exact time of Oswald's transfer—a full hour later than the announced time?

Lane's major allegation (one which this reviewer rejects and will explain why later) is that the commission—at the very outset—felt that Oswald was the lone slayer and that the commission rejected virtually every single piece of evidence which would in the least bit depart from that belief.

TO DO THIS, Lane says, it enlisted the help of the Dallas police, the Dallas County Sheriff's Office, the FBI and the Secret Service. Lane accuses the commission of altering testimony, destroying photographs and retouching others, intimidating witnesses and refusal to hear any testimony which conflicted with its preconceived notion of the assassination.

That his research is comprehensive cannot be denied. That many of his contentions are true cannot be denied. That he has a valid argument cannot be denied. That more study should be given the assassination (perhaps

a new investigation opened) cannot be denied. That the commission engaged in a far-reaching conspiracy to obscure the truth can—indeed must—be denied.

Epstein's book—INQUEST—represents an honest effort to raise honest questions of difference about the commission's findings. Mainly, Epstein's questions parallel Lane's. He, too, questions many of the findings of the commission.

EPSTEIN RAISES serious doubts, as does Lane, that Oswald acted alone. He too points out the doubtful accuracy of the rifle and the "entrance and exit wound" controversy of the doctors. His book, unlike Lane's, contains illustrations and drawings which add much to understanding of his work.

Epstein, who has no mercenary interest in any continuance of the controversy, leaves the reader feeling a bit more trusting in his allegations. But INQUEST lacks the ability of RUSH TO JUDGMENT to cause nervousness in the reader, to cause an uncomfortable feeling that all isn't just as it should be.

It is not as frightening in its implications.

SAUVAGE'S BOOK must be passed off as a trivial bit of wild speculation. His book—THE OSWALD AFFAIR—does not display the careful research and mature observations of either Lane's or Epstein's books.

This, however, may be explained by the fact that Sauvage is a Frenchman, somewhat given to the "conspiracy theory" of the assassination. Lane in RUSH TO JUDGMENT halfheartedly defends these Europeans then brushes aside some of their speculations as detrimental to an objective overview of the assassination and surrounding events.

Sauvage, in essence, sees the assassination as carried out by a conspiracy of American racists. He, as is the wont of many of our European cousins, attaches more importance to the race issue in determining American actions than is often the case. Sauvage, in offering quick and simple (though often incredulous) explanations to the assassination, places himself in the same category as another French writer—Thomas Buchanan. Buchanan, it will be remembered, was the fellow who

speculated in a 1964 book—WHO KILLED KENNEDY?—that it was (of all things) the FBI which plotted and carried out the assassination.

SAUVAGE ridicules Buchanan then turns around and engages in the same sort of immature conjecture of which Buchanan (whose book was reviewed in this column) is guilty.

From these three books we are able to draw certain conclusions without ourselves falling prey to idle speculation:

—The Warren Commission in its haste to provide a wonderful explanation for the murder ignored important items of testimony which may (emphasize may) have implicated persons other than Oswald.

—The Dallas police, caught up in a heinous crime, acted in a manner not calculated to aid in solution of the crime. They displayed amazing inefficiency and lack of planning in allowing Os-

wald to be killed while in their custody. They were guilty of shoddy tactics in their interrogation and investigation procedures.

—THE WARREN Commission accepted as hard facts items of testimony which, given more careful scrutiny, now appear hard to believe.

—The Dallas police, FBI and Secret Service were guilty of trying to toss blame for the assassination from their own shoulders.

—Inaccurate statements by police and others at the time of the murder complicated later investigators who were placed in the position of contradicting earlier statements.

—Perhaps a second investigation is called for to allay doubts that Oswald acted alone.

What this reviewer cannot accept is the contention that the Warren Commission, Dallas police, FBI and other agencies KNEW that Oswald was not the only slayer and rejected all contrary testimony.

To assume that the commission deliberately lied is to strike at the very heart of the American Republic. To assume this is to assume a plot to kill Kennedy so vast that it encompassed persons from the Dallas Police Force all the way to the upper echelons of both political parties. This is unbelievable.

—Paul Johnson
(Journal Staff)