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By A. C. GREENE, Book Editor

THIS IS THE AGE of the press agent, the public relations man, the "make-it-all-righter." What we are interested in is not what IS but what can be accepted. The question faced by Mark Lane's book, "Rush to Judgment," is how much of this philosophy permeated the thinking of the Warren Commission when it came time to tell the American people what had been found concerning the assassination of President Kennedy and the people involved then and in the aftermath?

Mark Lane finds the commission to have been more image-conscious than fact-finding. This reviewer agrees with that summary, while disagreeing with many of the inferences drawn from Lane's own investigation.

There Must Not Be Conspiracy

The Warren Commission was determined that there was not going to be found a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, whether of the Communists or the Far Right. It apparently felt that the good of the nation rested on acceptance of the "one crazed gunman" theory. To assure this view, the commission's investigators and counsels indulged in suppression of evidence, monumental carelessness in data, and deliberate distortion of facts. Now, whether we believe the "one crazed gunman" theory or not (and most of us do) we cannot but cringe at the dogmatic way the nation was made to accept official vindication of that theory. It was a steamroller job, a pressure drive unmatched by the most skillful of Madison Avenue or television. The sin committed was not in taking the viewpoint that Oswald was apparently the one person responsible for the crime but in so doggedly rejecting any facet of possibility which did not coalesce with that theory. So today, reading the Warren Commission Report again, less hurriedly, less sympathetically, we are appalled at the inaccuracy, the conflicting statements, the errors contained in it. Mark Lane has used common good sense in his book. He has relied on the Warren Commission Report to punch holes in itself. And it certainly does.

The whole assassination episode has, of course, assumed this awesome nature of coincidence; coincidence so vast and so frequent as to cause a perpetual question to cloud its true relation to history. Powerful points are still unanswered—which Mark Lane methodically rips from the comfortable assumption of the report—and simply cannot be laid with the knowledge we have today. Will there be a time when they will?

Lane, in instances, shows how slipshod, yet almost cunningly, the commission reported on such topics as the number of bullets fired at President Kennedy, the path of the bullets through his body and that of Gov. John Connally, the massive conflict of witnesses in their testimony as to where the shots came from, and who was hit first (primary dissenters being, of course, Gov. and Mrs. Connally, both of whom insist to this day that two separate shots hit the President and the governor, although one of the standard basing points of the report is that the same bullet plowed through both men).

Who Described Oswald First?

Much rather bland public assumption is shown to be erroneous by Lane, not through any new witnesses he has resurrected, but by the words of the report itself. For example, there was no roll call of employes at the Texas Book Depository in which it was discovered that Oswald was missing. So how was it discovered? Who first described him? No one will say.

The bewildering lack of medical certainty concerning President Kennedy's death wounds, whether they were entrance or exit wounds, and the already discussed pathway of the bullets; Oswald's capability as a marksman—three master riflemen could not duplicate his performance under ideal test conditions—must still nag at our credulity. And the fact that the body of police officer J. D. Tippit contained two kinds of bullets and the police found shells in unequal numbers, of what is this indicative?

The inaccuracy in reporting, the careless professional clumsiness of the stenographic reporting is evident to even a casual reader of the report. The FBI, sacrosanct in America, is shown here to be as prone to error as any agency when it is in a hurry to cover up its own mistakes—and the Dallas Police Department has no defense for some of its officers' statements and miscalculations (one lieutenant made three factual errors in the sentence concerning the assassination rifle in an official report).



MARK LANE: Roads Not Taken.

On Page 105 of the WCR we read that Gov. Connally was "sitting erect" so the bullet had to take a certain path, but on Page 107, in proving another assumption, the WCR says the governor "was leaning slightly backward." Poor editing or just a "rush to judgment"? J. Edgar Hoover notes, in another report, "all these persons were known to have been in the building (schoolbook depository)," but five persons listed were not at work that day and one was out of Dallas. The terribly imprecise wording of many principals and their testimony seems not to have been caught.

Bad Editing or 'Rush to Judgment?'

And so on and on. The coincidental nature of Jack Ruby's arriving at the police station exactly in time to kill Oswald although the transfer time had been changed by more than an hour, the inability to find (or reluctance to admit) how Ruby got into the police basement, the still unverified timetable of Oswald's movements following the assassination (many witnesses whom the public still believes tracked Oswald since have repudiated or invalidated their witnessing) and the Warren Commission's blithe selectivity in taking those parts of testimony it wanted to use, despite the witnesses having said it was different—all these will plague history.

Lane made himself unpopular early in the case, but we must not let antipathy for Lane blind us to the validity of his book. The citations which strike hardest at our belief are based on the WCR itself. As to his own assumptions—that shots were also fired from behind the fence surrounding the knoll in front of the President's car, that Ruby, Tippit and Bernard Weismann met in Ruby's club Nov. 14, and the general assumption that some conspiracy was at work, possibly involving the Dallas police—these are less likely to strike the chords of recognition. (If there was a conspiracy, I feel it was after the assassination and was a conspiracy of the various agencies to see to it that their own bungling was concealed.)

But the important thing is, these other theories were never given a chance to be heard, and often they were put forth by witnesses at least as reliable as those who assumed positions wanted by the commission.

No, the facts on the assassination are like a series of peaks sticking out of the fog; the President was shot, officer Tippit was killed, Oswald was gunned down by Jack Ruby. In between is mist. Most of us believe (and I certainly do) that Oswald fired the assassination bullets, that Tippit was an innocent victim, that Ruby moved through furious impulse. But what if—what if there were facts that could change our views? All the ideas need to be displayed, says Lane, and his book does it well, does it honestly and will persuade a number of readers that the assassination is, far from being a closed chapter of history, a lively section of our time waiting to be written.

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