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Three years after, the Kennedy assassination

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controversy takes yet another turn

Report from **STEPHEN BARBER** in Washington

**MR. EARL WARREN**, America's Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, had to be talked into taking on the task of heading the seven-man Commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy that bears his name. With the main suspect dead—and shot down while in police custody, moreover—it was not the sort of job to appeal to an eminent and notably liberal jurist.

Now that a rash of books and magazine articles has burst forth on America casting doubt on the Commission's findings and even more on the thoroughness of its researches it is easy to see why he hesitated. But President Johnson is a very

persuasive man. He insisted it was a duty. The nation's good name was at stake before the world.

An unguarded remark

In an unguarded moment soon after the Warren hearings opened the judge observed wryly that the full facts of the affair might never be made public "in our lifetime or for generations." He hastily explained later that he had not meant this chance remark to be taken literally, but it was not readily forgotten. Still less will be the comment of Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, the famous Director of the Federal Bureau

of Investigation, in his testimony before the Commission. He said that the Kennedy case was one of which the files will never be closed. So it seems indeed.

There are still people in the United States who argue passionately over the assassination of President Lincoln, so that controversy should be rekindled over the Dallas tragedy of only 34 months ago is not surprising. Last week the fifth book since May to cast doubts on the Warren Commission's findings was published in New York. The British editions of two of them which came out earlier here are reviewed on this page by Professor Arthur Goodhart.

The latest effort, by Pro-

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fessor Richard Popkin, Chairman of the University of California's Department of Philosophy, purports to take matters a stage further than its predecessors. His book is entitled "The Second Oswald" and propounds the notion that Lee Harvey Oswald, the ex-U.S. Marine with the Marxist leanings, the "loner" who is the official accused assassin, was not the sole marksman. The Commission, of course, concluded that not only had he "acted alone" in firing the fatal shots at Kennedy's motor cavalcade from the upstairs window of the book warehouse where he was employed in Dallas, but that there was "no evidence of conspiracy."

## The Popkin theory

Prof. Popkin claims to have accepted the challenge of Mr. Allen Dulles, the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, himself one of the Commissioners, who retorted to earlier critics: "If they've found another assassin, let them name names and produce the evidence." The Popkin theory is that Lee Oswald, who was killed less than 48 hours later by the sordid little nightclub operator, Jack Ruby (under my very nose, as it so happens), in the underground

garage of Dallas City Hall, was in reality the dupe of a plot.

Who then were the plotters? His suggestion covers the entire spectrum. They could have been Right-wing Americans or anti-Castro Cubans, he says, or "maybe some Leftists in New Orleans, Mexico City or Dallas." Mr. Dulles has hardly been answered, surely, by this.

Popkin is by no means the first to come up with the "two Oswalds" idea. Mr. Harold Weisberg, a former analyst of the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner of the C.I.A.), beat him to it in his book "White-wash," which picks more holes than any in the Commission's report and its 26 volumes of appendices. So in reality Prof. Popkin has not carried the doubters forward much, but more will be heard of them.

While it is probably true that the vast majority of Americans are content to let the subject rest on the basis of "*Le roi est mort; vive le roi!*" a minority will not—and certainly not so long as there is the faintest prospect of making political capital out of it.

It is now widely recognised that the Commission could have done a better job had it not been under pressure from the White House to publish its conclusions in advance of the 1964 elections. Moreover, short of a full confession from the silenced Oswald, it is hard to see how all the loose ends could ever have been tied up completely.

Judge Warren himself stiffly refuses to be drawn into the argument. He stands pat on his Commission's 888 pages and its appendices. But this is not enough for the critics. There is an interesting development now afoot that demands are being voiced from both the extreme Right and liberal Left for yet another probe: this time a commission on the Warren Commission itself.

' Authorised

## version' soon

The idea has been launched by none other than Mr. Richard Goodwin, a special assistant and speech writer to both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, who is currently very much in the political camp of Senator Robert Kennedy, whose own White House ambitions are beyond question.

As if to ensure that the assassination story does not fade from memory, Americans are not going to have long to wait before it is reopened anew by none other than the historian chosen by the Kennedy family, 42-year-old Mr. William Manchester, and his will be what amounts to the "authorised version" of the affair.

"The Death of a President," which is due out next January, is so much a Kennedy family-endorsed effort that Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy went so far as to write to Mr. James Bishop asking him not to attempt to put together a rival work, informing him that Mr. Manchester was the picked man, with exclusive interview rights. The Manchester book is sure to make its author the richest by several hundred thousand pounds. It is being heavily publicised in advance, and word has been amply leaked that it will contain shocking revelations of a nature bound to discredit the present incumbents of Washington's executive mansion.

Mr. Manchester claims to have done a much better job on his own than the Warren Commission with its full-time staff of 26 assistants, unlimited budget, and the talents of every Federal investigative agency at

its beck and call. He airily dismisses the Commission's report as a limited piece of work compared with his own, which he says is based on far more intensive research over twice as long a period. The Commission took testimony from 552 witnesses; he saw over a thousand, high and low and all over the country.

"The Commission," he said, "concentrated on identification of the assassin and the question of conspiracy. It met its mandate superbly. But it did not answer all the questions. Actually Oswald is a minor figure in the story."

## Question of conspiracy

His view is that there are bigger issues, and these relate to "the transfer of power and what happened to the establishment of the Federal Government and to the American people," which was much more than a crime, he said, but "a huge thing." Although he evidently agrees with the Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald was the true assassin, he feels that its report left itself "wide open to attack" because of faulty presentation. As for the question of conspiracy, he maintains that this is a "subtle" one. He does not hold that Oswald was a paid agent or even that "anyone whispered in his ear," but he does have ideas about the influencing factors of Oswald's reading and of the weird political climate of Dallas at the time.

Mr. Manchester, who is not a modest man, predicts that his book will cause a major sensation. Of this there can be little doubt. He is not just dealing

with the actual deed but relating the assassination to the wider context of events leading up to and immediately following it. It covers the six crucial days from Kennedy's last public appearance at a White House function before leaving Washington for his Texas tour to after the State funeral.

It is common gossip that Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, in a profound if not wholly explicable fashion, holds President Johnson responsible for her husband's untimely death. This is said by friends to be the explanation for her consistent refusal to meet him or even his wife socially ever since, despite repeated friendly overtures on their part. She has what seems to amount almost to a psychosis on the subject, it is said, based on the feeling that had Mr. Johnson not been so overwhelmingly insistent that his younger chief should make the fatal trip to his home State in the interest of resolving a local feud between Democratic party bosses there and drumming up votes for the coming election, he might still be alive today.

Manifestly this is unfair. But it is human. It is also an element in the broader aspect of the tragedy. And since the Manchester version is the Kennedy version—plus the obvious spiciness of what Washington's political world regards as the impending and inevitable head-on collision between the Kennedy and the Johnson cohorts in the struggle for primacy within the party—it is scarcely any wonder that the book will be snapped up with furious gusto when it appears. It is sure to create even more bitter controversy than all those of the Warren Commission's doubters put together.