

A Doubt Could Be Erased

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A majority of Americans, according to a recent Harris survey, reject the findings of the Warren Commission that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was solely the irrational act of one man, Lee Harvey Oswald.

This should not be considered surprising. The conspiracy theory runs strong in the American mentality. Any notorious crime produces thousands of people who by divination, extra-sensory perception, or supposedly superior reasoning come to conclusions contrary to the accepted or official findings of guilt. The Lindbergh kidnaping and Alger Hiss cases are prime examples of the propensity of people generally, not alone Americans, to disbelieve official or judicial findings in notorious crimes.

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In all the avalanche of innuendo, false reasoning and unjustified charges against the Warren Commission contained in the current literature, one point seems worth re-examination.

It now appears that, out of respect for the Kennedy family and the person of the late President, the Warren Commission at no time saw a complete set of pictures and X-rays taken in conjunction with the autopsy. The commission's findings that Mr. Kennedy was shot from behind, that one bullet entered and passed through his neck without striking bone or heavy tissue was based on other evidence considered more conclusive.

In the current issue of the public affairs magazine, U.S. News and World Report, Arlen Specter, assistant counsel of the Warren Commission, argues cogently that viewing the photographs and X-rays was not essential to the finding made by the Commission on this point. Yet the conclusion cannot be escaped that Specter would have been better armed to answer questions on whether this bullet entered from the front or the rear if he had seen the photographic and X-ray evidence.

caused by a preliminary FBI report which apparently was erroneous and by the obliteration of the bullet wound in the front of the neck by incisions to give the unconscious President a chance to breathe.

U.S. News and World Report states flatly that Robert F. Kennedy, then attorney general, took charge of the photographs and X-rays and refused to let anyone else see them.

According to Specter, "the commission decided that it would not press for those photographs, as a matter of deference to the memory of the late President and because the commission concluded that the photographs and X-rays were not indispensable."

"The photographs and X-rays would, in the thinking of the commission, not have been crucial, because they would have served only to corroborate what the autopsy surgeons had testified to under oath, as opposed to adding any new facts for the commission."

In view of its 10-month study, its competent and careful personnel, its basic agreement with FBI conclusions, the heaviest weight must lie with the findings of the commission.

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Yet, it might be possible at this stage to go a long way toward quieting the irrational doubts about the Kennedy assassination, if the photographs and X-rays were examined by the experts and membership of the former commission with the view of making a supplementary public report.

It would be imprudent in the extreme to open a new inquiry. A new report should be confined strictly to the X-rays and photographs. It is conceivable, of course, that such an examination might arouse new questions in the minds of the members of the former commission. But, in any case, if such an examination occurred, and it was found to confirm other findings, this much would be eliminated from the literature of those who play upon the doubts of the public mind.