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That was how The New York Times described the objectives of one of the most remarkable broadcast presentations in television history, the four-part CBS News Inquiry into The Warren Report.

Ever since it was issued, The Warren Commission Report on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy has been the subject of bitter controversy, conflicting theories and dreadful rumors. Because that controversy finally reached the point where the public issues called for further independent journalistic examination, CBS News nine months ago undertook to define and consider all the major issues, substituting light for heat, understanding for confusion and meaningful analysis for shrill debate.

Rather than rake over and continue the bitter and confused wrangling between defenders and critics of the report, CBS News went back to the evidence itself,

and indeed uncovered new evidence. In painstaking investigation characterized by the Chicago Daily News as “more thorough in certain areas than the Warren Commission or the FBI,” it produced what the Baltimore Sun described as “a brilliant demonstration of the art of documentary.”

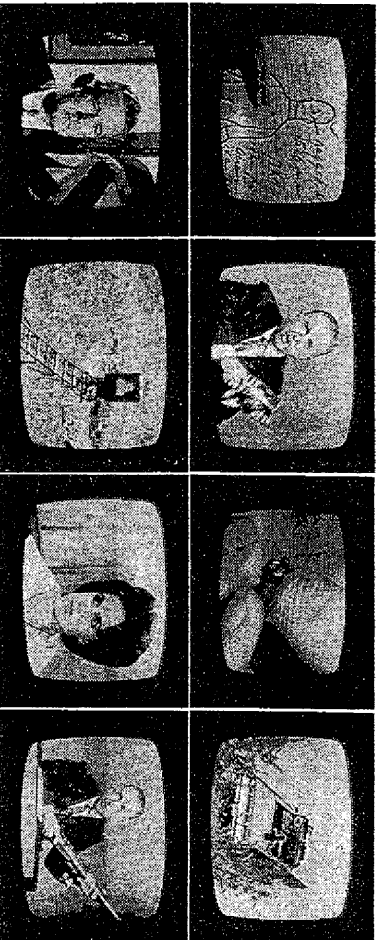
Some measure of the quality of that investigation can be gauged from the enormous amount of straight news coverage it generated. In almost every city across the nation and overseas, for four successive days, newspapers reported the findings of the CBS News Inquiry itself as news of major importance.

The public response was equally significant. For each of its four hours the CBS News Inquiry attracted a larger audience than the entertainment programs on competing networks. Preliminary audience estimates indicate that more people spent more time watching

the series than any documentary in television history.

Jack Gould in The New York Times called the series, “. . . a thoroughly valuable social service. Taking up a controversy befogged by much confusing detail, the program has not only reminded the lay viewer of what actually was in the Warren report, something that badly needed doing, but also, through its own initiative and resourcefulness, CBS independently established that the document’s central conclusions remain far more impressive than the bulk of criticisms of the Warren Commission’s findings.”

The judgments involved in a decision to preempt four hours of a network’s nighttime schedule for an inquiry into the Warren Report, or to devote two minutes to a lesser news event represent the same sense of balance exercised by CBS News not just on four nights in June but every day throughout the year.



CBS News

Audience estimates for CBS News, based on Nielsen's data from Spring 1997. Subject to audit fluctuations and other factors.

"A rare and important experience in television journalism....As a contribution to the visual history of our time...the four broadcasts rank cumulatively among television's major documents.They are, for the record,an enormously valuable tool and source of research for future historians.

"There was a respect for the intelligence of a mature audience. The series reflected a constant and innate sense of worldliness, perspective and plain decency." United Press International

The final reviews of the CBS News Inquiry into the Warren Report are now in and they add up to virtually unanimous praise for the series. In many respects the above review is typical, as are the comments from The New York Times, quoted in the attached reprint. Because both put their finger squarely on the aspects of the series of which we, as a news organization, are most proud, I hope I may share them with you.

RICHARD S. SALANT
President, CBS News