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IT SEEMS TO ME...

By Charles A. Sprague

Most Americans accepted the findings of the Warren Commission on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as final. The assassin was Lee Harvey Oswald. He had no confederates. But it was too much to expect that this report would go unchallenged. This week Mark Lane, attorney who represented Oswald's mother, is putting out a book, "Rush to Judgment," in which he attacks the conclusions of the Warren Commission. A documentary film has been made by Emil de Antonio, who did the Joe McCarthy documentary, which is said to criticize the Warren Commission findings "point by point."

What will merit closer attention, however, is a study prepared by Edward Jay Epstein, and now published in book form. Epstein was a graduate student at Cornell University who undertook this as his thesis for a master's degree. He has gone on to Harvard to earn his doctorate. His study deals with the operation of the commission rather than with the original evidence in the Kennedy assassination.

Epstein talked with members of the commission which had been named by President Johnson,

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though not with its chairman, Chief Justice Earl Warren. He interviewed members of the staff which did the spadework of the investigation. He was given a full set of the working papers of the commission. I haven't read Epstein's book, but a review of it in the San Francisco Chronicle, written by Anthony Howard, Washington correspondent for the London Observer, says that Epstein's conclusion is that the Warren Commission's investigation was "extremely superficial."

One item of disagreement within the commission was on the number of bullets that were fired. Did a single bullet hit Kennedy and then Gov. Connally who was riding with him in Dallas on the fateful October morning? If two, could they have been fired from the same gun in the time that elapsed as determined by a movie film taken by a bystander (which was bought by Life magazine)? Another bullet was the one that ended Kennedy's life. The bullet question is used by those who believe there was a second conspirator who must have fired from the overpass toward which the cavalcade was heading.

Epstein points out that distinguished members of the commission on the average attended only 45 per cent of the hearings. Sen. Richard Russell heard only 6 per cent of the testimony. This is not of itself condemning, for members undoubtedly read the testimony and discussed it at length with staff members and among themselves.

The reporter for the Observer calls attention to the pho-

lographs and X-ray plates which were taken in the morgue of the Bethesda Naval Hospital after Kennedy's body had been flown to Washington. They are said to show the mutilated body of the President (which might reveal the direction of travel of the bullets) together with X-ray examinations of certain organs. These pictures were turned over to the Secret Service, and, says Howard: "No one has seen them from that day to this."

One may assume that secrecy is preserved out of deference to wishes of the family. Whether demand for their viewing by independent, qualified observers will prevail is of course not known.

It is not surprising that there is this dissent from or criticism of the Warren Commission and its findings. But it isn't enough to criticize. Counter evidence of probative value must be adduced to discredit its findings. None of significance has been offered; and I think none can be.

The cumulative evidence against Lee Harvey Oswald was overwhelming. Other investigations, public and private, were barren in showing any one else had a hand in the slaying of the President. The Warren Commission may not have been as thorough as it should have in pursuing all lines of inquiry (it was under pressure to get its report out before the November, 1964, election); but its essential findings stand up: Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of John F. Kennedy.

The argument will continue, just as it did over whether John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln, was really killed in a barn where he was apprehended with an accomplice.