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Book Cites Warren Report Weaknesses

"INQUEST." By Edward Jay Epstein. New York: Viking

By HERBERT KENNEY JR.

This is a disturbing book since it raises some bothersome questions about the procedures and the motives of those who produced the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President Kennedy.

Edward Jay Epstein set himself the task of reporting how a public body, the Warren Commission, operates when there are no precedents or guidelines to help it carry out its mission.

His conclusion is that the resulting "report" is hardly the exhaustive investigation to get at the truth it was represented to be, and more a document that was intended to allay any public fears that Lee Harvey Oswald was not a "loner" and was not involved in any sort of conspiracy.

ACTUAL SHOOTING VERSIONS DIFFER

Epstein shows evidences of discrepancies which the commission ignored or glossed over or didn't take the trouble to investigate. But the bedrock basis on which his major question is raised is the apparent discrepancy between the commission and the FBI versions of the actual shooting: The FBI report says three hits in three shots in 5.6 seconds,

while the commission says two hits in three shots in 5.6 seconds. The two versions, Epstein says, both cannot be true.

In his presentation of data about the internal workings of the commission, Epstein raises even more cause for concern. It was faced with a mountain of reports and documents and its members did not have the time to evaluate everything that was in the reports.

In addition, the commission was put under extreme pressure to complete and publish its report before the 1964 November election. As a result of those two circumstances, Epstein contends that the commission's members and staff did not, indeed, could not, do an adequate investigative job and did not weigh all the data carefully.

Epstein's book, and others that are sure to follow, may well open a Pandora's box of speculations about conspiracies (a "second assassin," a "double" for Oswald, or just the sort of speculations the Warren Report was supposed to have checked thoroughly and found baseless.

Epstein doesn't hold a brief for these speculations, as some critics of the report have done, but he does cast some doubt on the Warren Report, on how and why it came out as it did. This is not the last to be heard on this subject.