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THE BOOK SCENE

Studies of Warren Report Trip

A Review by JACK AYER

After the President was assassinated, the government undertook an official inquiry to show that the killer was in fact the man whom everyone suspected.

But as a well-known commentator has said, "its investigation was literally irresponsible: it worked in the dark, it published no conclusive findings, it covered up items that tended to disprove its chosen thesis and it muddied the waters so completely that . . . no one can be entirely sure that he knows all he needs to know about the events. . . ."

The commentator was Bruce Catton, and he was talking about the assassination of President Lincoln. You can find

The reviewer is in The Washington Bureau of The Courier-Journal and Louisville Times.

his remarks in an afterword to the Official Warren Commission Report on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Catton didn't stop there, however. He goes on:

"It is permissible to believe that the work of the Warren Commission has saved future generations from that kind of nonsense. Here, to repeat, is the record, compiled and studied while it was still fresh by men of stature who were not trying to prove any thesis at all. The myths and legends which so often go to make a fable out of history will have a hard time putting down any roots here."

It is hard to conceive of any commentary more ill-chosen to conclude the Warren Report. For, as anyone who has not been living in a cave now knows, the Warren Commission has already become a festering place of "myths and legends which . . . go to make a fable out of history. . . ."

Alleged Virtue Becomes a Flaw

The Warren Report has been subject to abuse since its publication, of course—much of it irresponsible in the extreme. But lately there has developed a vein of criticism that is substantial, well-documented and well-reasoned. It includes a number of magazine articles and at least

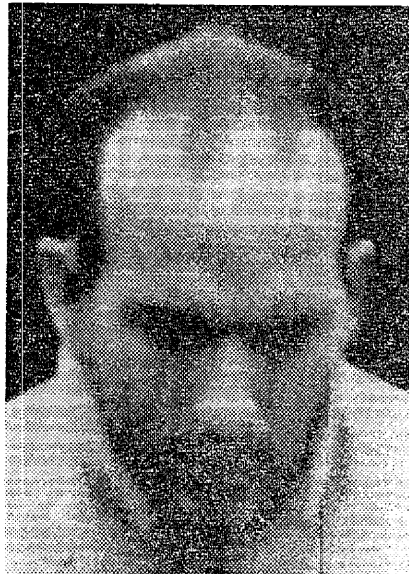
Over Their Own

Cleverness

two books. And the flaw in the Warren Report seems to be exactly what Catton billed as its virtue. It now appears that the Warren Commission was not composed of individuals "not trying to prove any thesis at all." As a matter of fact, it appears they were trying to prove a rather substantial thesis. In consequence, it appears the commission "covered up items that tended to disprove its chosen thesis and it muddied the waters. . . ." How completely, we will have to wait and see.

But the fact is that for all the doubts and suspicions, the critics have not yet

Was It
Billy Nolan Lovelady? . . .



Or Was It
Lee Harvey Oswald?



The Man in the Texas School Book Depository Doorway . . .



James Altgens, an Associated Press photographer, made the picture above of the presidential motorcade at the moment the shot was fired that killed President John F. Kennedy. The picture became significant when people all over the country said they thought they saw Lee Harvey Oswald in the background (circle).

This fostered doubts. How could Oswald have been downstairs, on the steps of the Texas School Book Depository Building, at the moment he was supposed to have been upstairs shooting the President?

The Warren Commission sought to dispose of the question by saying: "The commission has

determined that the employe was in fact Billy Nolan Lovelady, who identified himself in the picture."

Yet Lovelady did not appear before the commission. He gave his statement to a commission lawyer. And no evidence suggests that his picture was shown to the commissioners.

Pictures here show Lovelady, Oswald at the time of his arrest, and the man in the doorway. Lovelady stated that he was wearing a red-and-white striped sport shirt buttoned near the neck, and no jacket, when he witnessed the assassination.

WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

shaken the commission's fundamental conclusion: that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President Kennedy. That Oswald killed Kennedy remains, as Catton might say, just as certain as that John Wilkes Booth killed Abraham Lincoln. The defect in the major critical attacks, so far, is in fact the same as the key defect in the commission report itself: they are being badly oversold.

This is evident in both the major book-length expositions on the Commis-

sion Report, "Inquest," by Edward Jay Epstein and "Rush to Judgment" by Mark Lane. Both are readable and worth reading—though for entirely different reasons. But each purports, slyly or otherwise, to do what it does not. Hence, each is liable to the same sort of attack it launches.

Epstein's book, which came out first, is certainly the more original of the two. Epstein gives us the first real insight into the workings of the Warren Com-

mission staff, and I daresay, it is not quite what most readers might expect.

Epstein won the confidence of at least one important staff member—an unhappy one, as it turns out—who showed him hitherto undisclosed records of internal conflict on the staff. Working with these records, Epstein is able to show that the investigation was not a rational, detached inquiry, but an effort to prove a point. This does not suggest any commission conspiracy. In

he is not in the business of investigating Kennedy's assassination. He might well say so. His discussion of the actual evidence is, at best, sketchy and at worst, choosy. Choosiness—tailoring raw evidence to fit a half-baked theory—is exactly the fault he ascribes to the commission.

Book Is a Catalog of Doubts

Lane's book is everything that Epstein's is not. Lane was not so much interested in studying the Warren Commission as in supplanting it. He is one person who has taken up the challenge of the commission and gone out in the field himself to sift the evidence. He has produced a virtual catalog of all the doubts and inconsistencies that can possibly be found in the Commission Report.

Indeed, this book is the ideal handbook for anyone who wants to engage in cocktail-party commission-baiting, a dazzling intellectual exercise which is fast emerging as a sort of coterie camp. Were there three bullets or four? Did they all come from the "grassy knoll?" Who was that man that Howard Brennan saw in the sixth-floor window? And so forth.

It is all a prodigy of research. It should be greatly embarrassing to the commission. But embarrassing the commission and saying the commission reached a wrong conclusion are two quite different things. In fact, the best testimony for the validity of the Warren Report is that so able, so gritty, so fireless an investigator as Mark Lane has combed the evidence for months. Yet he has not produced anything remotely resembling a counter-theory. He has no substantial positive evidence of what might in fact have happened, if the Commission Report isn't true.

Rebuttals Being Prepared

At least two private works are already in progress that apparently will seek to vindicate the report, or at least its chief conclusions. Presumably we are in for a more or less interminable round of rebuttals, replications and rejoinders.

I'm not sure where it will all get us, if anywhere. Bruce Catton, speaking of our other great assassination, reminds us that for all its apparent clarity, "no one can be entirely sure that he knows all he needs to know about the events that led to Mr. Lincoln's death." The same may come to pass of the Kennedy case—indeed, given these two books, it may have already come.

INQUEST: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth: By Edward Jay Epstein. Viking. 224 Pages. \$5.

RUSH TO JUDGMENT. By Mark Lane. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 478 Pages. \$5.95.

fact, one gets the distinct impression from Epstein's own book that the choice was entirely unconscious and made in the best of faith. But he shows quite persuasively that it seriously fuzzed up the process of rational truth-seeking.

Unfortunately, Epstein's book has been read as attempting much more. It has appeared to some early critics that he has sought also to cast doubt on the commission's product. Epstein reportedly has denied this. He is quoted as saying