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THE NATION

And Still Wondering

Two years ago, when the report of the Warren Commission on the assassination of President Kennedy was published, it was hailed by The New York Times as "an exhaustive inquiry into every particle of evidence," leaving "no material question unresolved so far as the death of President Kennedy is concerned."

And that, apparently, was that—the definitive word has been written, designed to

foreclose all past and future doubts. But not quite, apparently.

The published report was so massive—in 26 volumes—that it tended to persuade by sheer weight. And it had taken almost two years for critics of the report to sift through the mass of evidence and conclusions, and write their own rebuttals.

By now there was a spate of them—the most influential being Edward Jay Epstein's "Inquest," which was launched two years ago as a master's thesis at Cornell University, and Mark Lane's "Rush to Judgment," published last week by Holt, Rinehart.

Hidden Photos

Writing in the London Observer (the British and the French press both had been consistently more skeptical of official reports on the assassination than had their U.S. counterparts), Anthony Howard last week reported that "somewhere in Washing-

ton—though no one will say where—a collection of photographs and X-ray plates has lain hidden for almost three years."

The photos had been taken in the morgue of Bethesda Naval Hospital on the night of Nov. 22, 1963, the day President Kennedy was killed in Dallas, and immediately handed over to the White House Secret Service. No one had seen them from then until now.

What suddenly made them pertinent was the belated questioning of the thoroughness and objectivity of the Warren Commission's investigation.

Two Shot or Single?

"Would we," the British journalist asked, "have been so (accepting of the commission's) findings had we known then what today, two years later, is in the public domain? That, for example, the commission itself was split down the middle on a central and vital issue:

"That it wavered between the two-shot and the single-bullet theory. That one of its own major conclusions drew a 26-page memorandum of protest from one of its staff members. And, finally, that the men whose names were more than any other factor responsible for the confidence of the outside world had on an average attended only 45 percent of the hearings."

The two-bullet theory, which (both Lane and Epstein noted) the commission had taken great pains to try to put to rest, was of course "crucial" because on it hinged the whole conspiracy theory—the possibility of more than a single assassin.

In view of the demand for a unanimous report, the dispute was "resolved" merely by saying that there was "very persuasive evidence" for the single bullet theory, while at the same time conceding a "difference of opinion" on the point.

Crucial Failure?

"What no one on the commission seems to have realized," Howard pointed out, "is that difference of opinion could have been resolved then and there."

"Nothing in the whole story of the Warren Commission seems in retrospect more remarkable than its failure to demand to see the photographic evidence which would have shown not only the full details of the wounds on the President's body, but also presumably the path of the crucial bullet."