

TIME MARCHES ON!

Food for the Suspicious

INQUEST; THE WARREN COMMISSION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUTH by Edward Jay Epstein. 224 pages. Viking. \$5.

Just as it is true that the mind can conceive unending webworks of intrigue, so it is that the Kennedy assassination will forever evoke suspicions, claims, counterclaims and new theories. He was shot with one bullet—no, two. He was killed by one man—no, two, or maybe three. The fatal bullet entered his neck—no, his back. Lee Harvey Oswald was a Communist—no, a right-winger. Kennedy ordered his own assassination—no, Lyndon Johnson did.

Despite the thoroughness of the 26-volume Warren Commission report, many people in the world prefer to ignore rational explanations when the irrational can be made to seem so much more melodramatic. Edward Jay Epstein's book will certainly help feed the grimly suspicious. *Inquest* is the enlargement of a master's thesis that he wrote at Cornell. It has much thesis, but little that is masterly.

After diligently scanning the public record, sifting through an accumulation of evidence in the National Archives, and interviewing five of the seven members of the Warren Commission and ten of its top staffers, Epstein concluded that the commission was "extremely superficial" in its investigation of the President's murder. He bases some of his criticism on the fact that the commission members actually heard little of the testimony in person, but he fails to mention that all members received a full

transcript of each day's proceedings and were free to ask questions or raise points when they felt it was necessary.

Moreover, he says, the commission acted hastily, even slovenly, in deciding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin. "There is a strong case that Oswald could not have acted alone," he charges. "Quite clearly, a serious discussion of this problem would in itself have undermined the dominant purpose of the commission, namely, the settling of doubts and suspicions . . . In establishing its version of the truth, the Warren Commission acted to reassure the nation and protect the national interest."

Nowhere in the book does Epstein offer any indication, however slight, of a link between Oswald and a collaborator. His chief argument is that the commission placed entirely too much credence in the theory that one bullet hit J.F.K. in the back and emerged from his throat to strike Governor John Connally. He suggests that Connally must have been hit by a second bullet, since Oswald could not have fired twice in the 1.8 seconds that elapsed between the time Kennedy was hit and Connally fell. Therefore, says Epstein, if the same bullet did not strike both men, there had to be a second assassin. He cites two unpublished FBI reports that seem to cast doubt on the single-bullet theory. Those reports said that the first bullet did not pass through Kennedy's body at all. But Epstein ignores the fact that the FBI has long since acknowledged that it was in error on that point. The reports were based on inadequate information, hurriedly collected before the autopsy was completed.

This and countless other examples of superficial scholarship scarcely make *Inquest* the compelling work that Epstein's publishers claim it is.

A CASE HISTORY OF "AMNESIA JOURNALISTICA"



STUDENT EPSTEIN

The thesis was enlarged—unmasterly.

(PP. 86, E3) TIME, JULY 8, 1966

TIME WAS

The Autopsy TIME 12-27-62

The autopsy report on President Kennedy was on its way to the special investigating commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, and had not yet been made public. But "unofficial" word of its contents was given to Washington newsmen last week.

The autopsy was performed at the Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, Md., and its findings differed in significant respects from earlier reports by doctors at Dallas' Parkland Memorial Hospital. The Parkland doctors' only interest had been in trying to save the President's life, totally forlorn though that hope was, and they took little time for closer examination of his wounds.

Thus Parkland doctors thought that one bullet struck Kennedy in the throat, just below the necktie knot, another in the back of the head, and either would have been fatal. But the autopsy indicated that the first bullet had struck Kennedy in the back, some six inches below the collar line, and that the throat wound had been made by a fragment of the last bullet, which literally exploded in Kennedy's head. Parkland doctors, who worked over Kennedy as he lay on his back, apparently missed the first wound. And it might not have been fatal. The bullet had penetrated but two or three inches, perhaps after ricocheting from part of the limousine, and it struck no vital organs.

The implication was that if President Kennedy had been shielded or thrown to safety on the floor of the car in the 5-sec. interval between the two shots, he might have survived. A Secret Serviceman, trained to react quickly in such emergencies, might have done just that had he been stationed close enough to Kennedy. One agent rode in the front seat of Kennedy's car in Dallas, but there was no way for him to scramble back to the President's aid in time. Kennedy himself had always objected to agents flanking him closely (particularly when campaigning), and by his own order there was no agent at his elbow in Dallas.

Meantime, the seven-member Warren commission moved ponderously ahead with its work. Warren ordered the FBI to add more details to its five-volume report, told the State Department that it too must flesh out its findings about the background of Assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. "They are summary reports in more or less skeleton form," said Warren, "and in order to evaluate them, we have to see the materials on which they are based." (18:2) Autopsy Photos, X-Rays?