

Cincinnati Post & Times
Star
Cincinnati, O.
P.M.-circ. 256,692

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A Judgment on a Publisher's Taste

The assassination of President Kennedy has been an unexpected windfall to only one sector of the international economy: The publishing business.

Both at home and abroad a steady stream of books, challenging the conclusions of the Warren Commission, tumble from the presses. So far all the critical volumes have vehemently disputed the findings of the commission that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

The favorite dissent in Europe, Latin America and Asia (as well as in certain home-grown factions) hinges on the "conspiracy theory." Europeans and Asians, so much of whose history has been conspiratorial, will not be persuaded that President Kennedy was not the victim of a domestic "political conspiracy."

Now it is quite possible that at some time some investigator will be able to prove that the young President was the victim of a conspiracy. But no one has done so to date.

Or an investigator may be able to prove the pet dissent of American critics of the Warren Report. This questions that Oswald did the deed alone or even that he did it at all. Implicit in this theory is the belief, not in a widespread conspiracy, but in the complicity of two or three persons.

However, no one to date has been able to name any individual in cahoots with Oswald. Or to point a finger at anyone in place of Oswald.

In the United States there has been a race on to get into print with a brace of books critical of the Warren Report. Viking Press has hit the stands first with

"Inquest" by Edward Jay Epstein. Now, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., will soon release "Rush to Judgment" by Mark Lane.

No critical judgment of either book is implied here. But I do make a judgment of a letter (press release) addressed to newspapermen and women by Arthur A. Chosen, editor in chief of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

It outdoes in overripe, overwrought prose any other press release that I recall in a lifetime in the newspaper business.

The opening paragraph of Cohen's letter reads: "Some books are so horrible—horrible by virtue of the directness and savagery with which they assail commonly accepted opinion—that we feel obligated to ignore them."

At our peril, however, we ignore books whose horror consists in the devastation they do to popular historical conviction . . .

"Mark Lane's . . . 'Rush to Judgment,' a critique of the Warren Commission's inquiry . . . is a horrifying book . . . 'Rush to Judgment' persuades me that we know terrifyingly little about what actually transpired."

I have not seen "Rush to Judgment." So I cannot tell if it is as horrible as its editor says.

But I have been exposed to Cohen's prose which is, in my judgment, inflammatory, irresponsible and in extremely bad taste.

Lane's book may be truly horrifying, but surely not half so much so as Cohen's letter, its overtones and its "terrifying" commercial sales pitch.