

34

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Inez Robb

Authors' Rush to Judgment

THE ASSASSINATION of President John F. 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 and was the sole assassin.

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 and/or political conspiracy of the right or the left, of capital or labor, or of whites, blacks, reds or yellows.

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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, describe the conspiracy and name the conspirators. But no one has done so to date.

In the United States this summer 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., has upped the publication of "Rush to Judgment" by Mark Lane from its

original publication date of Sept. 8 to Aug. 15.

No critical judgment of either book is implied here. But I do make a judgment on a letter addressed to me (and no doubt thousands of other newspapermen and women) by Arthur A. Cohen, vice president and editor in chief of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

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THE OPENING paragraph of Mr.

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.

"When the issue of such books is the procedure and methods by which a Presidential Commission of Inquiry, presided over by the nation's highest judicial officer, inquires into the murder of its President, it is a matter, indeed, which, however horrible to consider, must be considered."

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 Mr. Cohen's prose which is, in my judgment, inflammatory, irresponsible and in extremely bad taste.

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