

The Press Does It Again:
The Scholar vs The Warren Report
as Reported in the Mass Media

(Sylvia Meagher)

In his introduction to Edward Jay Epstein's book Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth, Richard Rovere bruised the sensibilities of his confreres. He wrote,

Here we have something which should make scholars proud and journalists envious and ashamed. The day the Warren Commission Report was issued, the American press should have begun to do what Mr. Epstein has done...Mr. Epstein's scholarly tools happen to be those employed day in and day out by journalists. But the press left it to a single scholar to find the news.

That the press abdicated its proper role, as Rovere said, is indisputable. That the press merely lapsed into passivity, which is all that Rovere suggests, does it too much honor. It is a matter of record that both before and after the publication of the Warren Report, the news media energetically applied themselves to creating an image of Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin. Few newsmen or editorialists indeed remembered to refer to him as the alleged assassin. One major daily, The New York Times, suffered a pang of editorial remorse on that score, in the wake of the murder of Oswald, pledging henceforth to honor his legal innocence. The gesture could be seen in its proper perspective only months later, when the Times threw the entire weight of its prestige and influence behind the Warren Report, assuming almost a role of co-author. The New York Times within 24 hours offered its reading public virtually the whole Warren Report reprinted as a special supplement, for 10¢. Two days later, publishing history was made when the Times/Bantam paperback edition of the entire Warren Report (lacking only the footnotes) was mass-distributed, at \$1.00.

Other news media made comparable efforts to sanctify the Warren Report, having laid the ground during the preceding months for public acceptance of

the solitary assassin and the non-political, non-conspiratorial nature of the crime. AP (Associated Press), for example, had doctored the notorious photograph of Oswald holding the alleged assassination rifle so as to eliminate any trace of the telescopic sight, coincident with circulation of a story that Oswald had had a sight mounted on the rifle after the photograph was taken. LIFE, UPI, The New York Times, and many other news channels also took liberties with the photograph.

The Warren Commission investigated the adulteration of the photograph (not on its own initiative) and exonerated the news organs concerned of any unethical practices or motives. That surely was not unappreciated by the several purveyors of the doctored picture.

The New York Times, which had made the Warren Report (sans footnotes) readily available to anyone who had 10¢ or \$1.00 made a similar event of the Hearings and Exhibits, when those 26 volumes belatedly were published. Extensive excerpts from the testimony of selected witnesses were printed; and the Times even delivered a mild editorial reproof to the Warren Commission for deleting a reference to remarks made by Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy (she had refused to change her blood-soaked clothes, saying that she wanted ~~to~~ the people of Dallas to see what they had done to her husband) without indicating deletion. Soon afterwards, there appeared a second Times/Bantam paperback, also at \$1.00, The Witnesses. In this book were carefully selected excerpts from the testimony—excerpts chosen purely and simply because, out of context and in the absence of contrary evidence ~~from~~ the official record, they created an illusion that the findings in the Warren Report were unassailable.

No question about it, the news media in general and the New York Times in particular responded to the needs of the Establishment with a dedication over and above the mere call of duty.

After the successful promotion and virtual enshrinement of the Warren Report, the assassination story more or less disappeared from the news—except for occasional brief items dealing with Jack Ruby's appeals, the marital misadventures of Marina Oswald Porter, and the deaths of witnesses who had testified before the Warren Commission.

In the spring of 1966, rumblings of a new book on the assassination to be issued by Viking Press became audible in the publishing world. The book was Edward Jay Epstein's Inquest.

We said, in a review of Inquest which appeared in these pages in July, that Epstein had uncovered the utter bankruptcy of the Warren Report, and that his book could not be ignored or dismissed. We were careful, however, not to predict that the second ^{condition would follow from} ~~would be based on~~ the first. Naively, we did hope that the news media would at last confront the dishonesty of the Report, redeeming somewhat the ^{ir} default on ~~the~~ proper responsibility, to which Roever sorrowfully had pointed.

But we had a premonition. And we had a reminder, in a letter from a fellow-Warrenologist ("Warrenology" is terminological shorthand for critical study of the Warren Report, something which begins to resemble a new science). He wrote, "My extensive personal contact with the press recently persuades me (that) the late President had such friends (that) he had no need of enemies."

The working press has always let it be known how much they delighted in JFK's wit, intelligence, and comradery (as they have let it be known also how coldly they regard LBJ). Affection did not, however, inspire a crusade to avenge JFK's murder, business being what it is, and the owners and policy-makers in the news media being who they are. With relatively few exceptions, the working press sat back and waited for handouts from the Establishment; when the Warren Commission told them what was what, they accepted it uncritically and they went out energetically to merchandize it, under the false label of independent reportage.

Having had the privilege of reading an advance copy of Epstein's historic and invulnerable analysis of the Warren Commission's work, we waited in some suspense to see how Inquest would fare in the press and the other media.

Pre-Release Publicity

During May 1966 there were a few press items reporting the forthcoming publication of Epstein's book (in June) by Viking Press. The New York Times and the Dallas Times-Herald, for example, ran straight reports in their book sections. A few days before the book had left the bindery, Walter Winchell pronounced himself on it in his syndicated column—"a savage attack" on the Warren Report which, in Winchell's opinion, could not change "what many

Americans believe: that Oswald was the slayer." Winchell is one of the very few people who would apply the epithet "savage" to a book so remarkable for its objectivity and scholarship, if he even read the book before characterizing it. But why read the book? The line had already been established--the book could not change prevailing public opinion.

An extraordinary thing next happened, only a few days after review copies of Inquest were sent out by Viking Press at the end of May--perhaps a thermometer of the heat the book was to generate. The Washington Post, one of the leading dailies in the country, in its Sunday edition on May 29, 1966 ran a banner headline across the top of page 1--AN INQUEST: SKEPTICAL POSTSCRIPT TO WARREN GROUP'S REPORT ON ASSASSINATION. The story by Richard Harwood occupied part of the first page and almost the whole of page 3.

That was fantastic news prominence for a book yet to be released, and confirmation that it was, indeed, a book that could not be ignored.

To interject a personal note: I called a fellow-Warrenologist who is a working news correspondent, to tell him about the front-page story in the Washington Post. The correspondent, who has published several books of his own, absolutely refused to believe me until I had checked back and confirmed that the story was really on page 1. He then said that this was an incredible triumph for Epstein's book, even if the story was hostile.

Actually the book was treated respectfully. Harwood gave a fairly accurate summary of its contents. He even included a significant new item of intramural information which lent support to Epstein's thesis. But Harwood then launched a defense of the Warren Report based, we suspect, on "advice" from a Commission source and consisting of wildly inaccurate and illogical arguments. In commenting on certain discrepancies in the description of the President's back wound between the FBI, on the one hand, and the Warren Report on the other, Harwood used such adjectives as "incredible" and "unaccountable." But he omitted any mention of the holes in the President's shirt--one of the most crucial of Epstein's arguments. And having said, in effect, that the explanation of the discrepancy was not believable, Harwood proceeded manfully to swallow it, rendering the opinion that Epstein had not succeeded in refuting the Warren Commission's findings by his recital of "apparent" inconsistencies in the record. Ending his story, Harwood wrote cryptically,

And so long as that (single-shot) theory holds up, assumptions that there was a second assassin in Dallas on Nov. 22 can only be assumptions.

The next day, May 30, 1966, the Los Angeles Times followed suit with a front-page story on Epstein's book, by-lined Robert J. Donovan. The story showed that matters had advanced since the preceding day. Whereas the Washington Post had reported (on the "apparent" discrepancy in the FBI description of the back wound) that the FBI had said "last week" that its description was "based on the medical evidence at that time" (which was consistent with Epstein's belief that the autopsy report had been altered), the Los Angeles Times had new "news." According to Donovan, a spokesman for the FBI had said on Sunday, May 29 (the day of the Washington Post story) that the FBI description of the wound had been "in error;" the FBI agents "were not doctors but were merely quoting doctors;" and "the ultimate truth about the wound is in the autopsy report." As Donovan rightly commented, "of course (the FBI spokesman's statement) does not dispose of the question whether the doctors were right or wrong." In other words, the FBI statement did not dispose of the possibility that the autopsy doctors had been right, and that the FBI had recounted their findings accurately--but that the findings had later been altered to bring them into harmony with the lone-assassin theory.

Donovan, like Harwood in the Washington Post, wrote that ~~manana~~ no new evidence had come to light in Epstein's book; Donovan, too, was silent on the holes in the President's shirt and coat. But Donovan's story was the more objective and accurate of the two, and he seemed more concerned with the merit of Epstein's book than with encouraging his readers to discount it.

My fellow-Warrenologist displayed greater equanimity at the news of a second front-page story in a major newspaper, apparently having recovered from his initial disbelief; but when I now told him that the FBI had changed its story and had stated that its description of the back wound was erroneous, my colleague was almost speechless. Do you realize, he asked me, that Epstein has forced the FBI, for the first time in its history, to admit a mistake? A triumph, he said reverently, a brilliant triumph. And I agreed.

During the week that followed the front-page stories of May 29 and 30, the New York Times remained aloof and non-committal, publishing not a single word about Epstein's book or about the challenge to the Warren Report which had merited headlines in other large dailies. It was learned that there was a struggle behind the scenes between those on the Times who believed that the paper should continue its silence, and those who felt that it could not.

Then, on Sunday, June 5, the New York Times published a story on page 42 of the first section, under the headline, WARREN REPORT ON ASSASSINATION CHALLENGED AGAIN. There was no by-line or date-line (but the story apparently was written by Peter Kihss). The write-up occupied about a quarter of a page, as compared with the far more extensive coverage in the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

The contents were predictable. The story mentioned a series of other books on the Warren Report, published or to be published, as if to say that Epstein's work was one of many attacking the Report on the basis of the FBI Summary Report of December 9, 1963 (which stated that the ^{bullet} wound in the President's back had not exited from his body). The story acknowledged --as the preceding stories had not done--that the FBI Summary Report "had first been described by a Philadelphia lawyer Vincent J. Salandria, in the April issue of the magazine, "The Minority of One." That acknowledgment may (or may not) have been in the interests of historical accuracy and fairness --interestingly enough, an advance copy of Salandria's story sent to a high source in the New York Times ^{in March 1966} had brought forth the strange reply that there was nothing new in it and that it did not warrant a news item!

Although the Salandria article did not seem to warrant coverage in the New York Times, the same attack on the Warren Report as elaborated and *puttressed* ~~documented~~ with important ^{additional} ~~new~~ evidence (~~submitted~~ the FBI Supplemental Report of January 13, 1964; the hitherto-unseen photographs of the holes in the President's shirt and coat; and evidence from a Commission source to the effect that the FBI had had the autopsy results in its possession when it had rendered its now-disclaimed description of the "no exit" wound) by Epstein did receive coverage. The clear inference to be drawn is that the New York Times was not interested in the merit of any attack on the Warren Report and would have maintained silence on the Epstein book as well as on the Salandria article had its hand not been forced by front-page coverage in the other large dailies.

In the unsigned story, the New York Times devoted 27 lines to a summary of Epstein's arguments on the FBI description of the back wound and related evidence for a second assassin, and 22 lines to a general description of Epstein's book—a total of 49 lines. Rankin, Redlich, and Specter, speaking in defense of the Warren Report, received a total of 70 lines.

Rankin ^{and Redlich} told the New York Times that the "so-called 'FBI Summary Report' was evaluated and discarded during the inquiry." Here was an interesting and new piece of information! The only mention of the FBI Summary Report in the Warren Report is found in the Foreword (page xi), which states: ~~that~~ "Of principal importance was the five-volume report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, submitted on December 9, 1963, which summarized the results of the investigation conducted by the Bureau immediately after the assassination. After reviewing this report, the Commission requested the Federal Bureau of Investigation to furnish the underlying investigative materials relied upon in the summary report."

The FBI Summary Report of December 9, 1963 consisted of four volumes, not five. The fifth volume was submitted on or after January 13, 1964 and is designated the FBI Supplemental Report; both FBI Reports stated that the bullet that entered the President's back did not exit from his body.

Rankin and Redlich claimed that the FBI Summary Report was "evaluated and discarded during the inquiry;" they do not specify when. The question thus arises, when did the Commission itself receive the autopsy report prepared by Commander J. J. Humes on November 24, 1963, and in what form? If the Commission had in its hands the autopsy report as published in an Appendix to the Warren Report before it received the FBI Summary Report, it would be understandable that the conflicting descriptions of the

back wound were evaluated, and the one or the other description "discarded."

But that could not have taken place at that time because the FBI then proceeded to reiterate in its Supplemental Report of January 13, 1964, that the bullet in the back had "penetrated to a distance of less than a finger length"--i.e., had not exited from the body.

That can only suggest that the Commission "evaluated and discarded" the FBI description of the wound some time after January 13, 1964. Are we to believe that neither the FBI nor the Warren Commission--both of which were actively at work on the investigation within days of the assassination--looked at the autopsy report written by Commander Humes on November 24, 1963 until after January 13, 1964? And that the FBI nevertheless twice gave a description of the back wound which is now said to be erroneous?

Rankin and Redlich should have told the New York Times exactly when the FBI description was evaluated and discarded. That information is not found anywhere in the Warren Report nor in the 26 volumes of the Hearings and Exhibits. Nor does the FBI throw any light on the time of its discovery that its description of the back wound was "erroneous." Whereas the Washington Post had reported one FBI explanation, and the Los Angeles Times a completely different explanation, the New York Times said only that "the bureau declines comment."

The consternation behind closed doors in the Department of Justice must have been awesome during the week that saw the publication of the three stories, all centering on the FBI description of the back wound, as the FBI struggled to find a public posture which would endorse the Warren Report findings without at the same time admitting fallibility on the part of the ~~all-knowing, all-wise, all-virtuous~~ ^{omniscient} J. Edgar Hoover, ~~and the Commission.~~

Rankin, Redlich, and Arlen Specter also told the New York Times such things as that they were satisfied that no valid attack had yet been made on the Warren Report, that there was nothing in Epstein's book that would cause them to question the Commission's findings, and that those findings were solidly based on the evidence. Of course. Were they likely to admit that the findings with respect to the back wound had been, or might have been, revised and falsified after January 13, 1964, as Epstein suggested in his book? Rankin is the man who, according to Epstein's book, wanted to close doors, not open them; Redlich is the man who defended a grossly dishonest evaluation of Oswald's marksmanship with the statement that that was what the Commission wanted him to write, and he worked for the Commission; and Specter is the man who announced in

advance that he would develop certain evidence which he later was unable to develop but which he proceeded to treat as proven.

More important than what Rankin, Redlich, and Specter said to the New York Times is what they did not say. They did not say that they had been misquoted in Epstein's book; they did not say that Epstein had made factual errors; and they did not say one word ~~that could be said~~ to refute Epstein's arguments, whether by new information or superior reasoning.

The tone of the New York Times' story, as compared with the stories ~~and~~ in the other large dailies, was one that tried to minimize the dramatic new evidence in Inquest and to divert attention from its implications. Ironically, only three days before the story appeared the New York Times (on June 2, 1966) had engaged in public confession of sin by revealing that more than five years ^{earlier} ago, on the eve of the Bay of Pigs ⁽¹⁹⁶¹⁾, the Times had exercised self-censorship, "in the national interest" or some such "motive." Had the Times then fulfilled its duty to print the news, the disaster of the Bay of Pigs ^{might} ~~may~~ even have been averted, by the force of public reaction and the pressure of international opinion.

Perhaps in 1971 the New York Times will return to the public confessional box and admit that in the wake of the Kennedy assassination it acted as a public relations agency for the Government and the Warren Commission, and flagrantly violated its first and foremost duty--to publish the facts, without fear or favor, and not to propogandize the public into accepting a false version of the tragedy which has had so profound an effect on American policy.

In contrast to the pusillanimous story in the New York Times, the Detroit News on the same day, June 5, 1966, published a front-page article by Bruce B. Van Dusen, editorial writer, under the headline, NEW DOUBTS ARE CAST ON IONE KENNEDY SLAYER. The story occupied about two columns on page 1 and all of page 22, and was lavishly illustrated by photographs and charts from Epstein's book and, in one edition, by an unattributed photograph which will be discussed later.

The Detroit News story was the most detailed and the most favorable to Epstein's thesis of the stories which had thus far appeared. Van Dusen emphasized Epstein's "responsible" ^{and impartial} approach and the "peculiar power" of his book. He said that Epstein had exposed a number of weak points in the Warren Commission's investigation, detailing the way in which the Commission had disposed of the rumors that Oswald was on the FBI payroll and the fact that information had been withheld even from the staff lawyers. Van Dusen

in no way minimized the seriousness of the evidence ^{or conflict} or the ominous manner in which the Commission had handled it—"certainly the public hasn't been told everything on this point yet."

Van Dusen seemed somewhat confused by Epstein's arguments on the question of Oswald's skill as a rifleman; he, too, asserted inaccurately (as had the New York Times) that both FBI Reports were available in the National Archives (only the December 9, 1963 Summary Report had ^{then} been declassified, not the Supplemental Report of January 13, 1964). Van Dusen, like his opposite numbers on the other dailies, focused on the central question of the President's back wound. He described in considerable detail Epstein's evidence for the accuracy of the FBI description of the wound; he also referred, as the other papers had not, to the gross misrepresentation in the Warren Report of the ~~misstatement~~ testimony given by FBI ballistics expert Robert Frazier, emphasizing that Frazier had said that

"he had no technical evidence to prove or disprove the (single-missile) theory. Somehow this very clear disclaimer was ignored in the (Warren) report, and Frazier was erroneously quoted as saying that Connally had 'probably' been struck by the same bullet."

The Detroit News story also was the most ^{highlight of the press items} ~~bold~~ in confronting the ~~error~~ ^{statement by Van Dusen} that the FBI had been mistaken in its description of the wound. Van Dusen asked:

"First, how could these professional crime fighters have failed so badly on such a basic element of the inquest; second, were there two autopsy reports—the second one being a later version designed to support the single-~~missile~~ bullet hypothesis?"

That, by far, was the most direct statement of the issue, and the most uncompromising expression of press scepticism of the so-called FBI error. But, Van Dusen continued, the FBI was not going to support Epstein's contention that their report was the correct one. Next followed a fourth FBI statement in the space of one week—that FBI official spokesmen stated that their reports of December 9 and January 13 were "preliminary, interim" documents, and that "the overwhelming weight of the evidence is against the possibility of any Oswald accomplice."

The Detroit News obviously was not satisfied by the FBI statement. According to the story, the paper had contacted Specter, Humes, and Finck "last week" and all three had declined comment on Epstein's specific criticisms, observing that "it would be improper to go beyond what the commission report already said." Since what the report "already said" had been challenged by Epstein's powerful counter-arguments and ^{By} imposing evidence hitherto concealed from the public, the refusal of the two autopsy surgeons and the staff lawyer who had handled the medical and autopsy findings—and the "reason" they gave for their refusal—was *erecting* ~~an~~ *erector*. To pretend that ~~the~~ ^{the} suspect part of the Warren Report was self-vindicating ^{to} ignore the position of the wound in ~~lines~~ ^{lines} ~~on the~~ ^{on the} autopsy ^{free - spot} drawing ^{to} ignore the position of the bullet holes in the President's coat and shirt—those were the evasions of men who ~~desperately~~ needed plausible answers but had none to give.

Van Dusen nevertheless proceeded to mention certain "counter-arguments" which may or may not have occurred to him independently (~~of~~ ^{may have offered} one of the three men who had declined comment ~~did not make~~ some off-the-record suggestions). One so-called counter-argument was that

"Mr. Kennedy was constantly changing his position in the car prior to the shooting, waving his arms and turning about...(which) suggests that his coat and shirt may well have been lifted out of normal position. In at least one photograph, there is some evidence of this."

In the Home Edition, the Detroit News inserted a photograph not included in an earlier edition—apparently the picture to which Van Dusen had referred. It showed the President and Mrs. Kennedy seated in the presidential car, as photographed from behind the car. The President is turned to face the crowds to his left; he is smiling; he presents his left profile to the camera; he leans toward his wife, who sits facing forward. The President's position in no way corresponds to his position in the opening frame of the Zapruder film, when he is looking to his right, and as he remains in the succeeding frames, until he is shot.

Although the President's position is π radically different in the uncredited photograph in the Home Edition of the Detroit News, the caption says snidely,

BUNCHED COAT? This picture is NOT published in Epstein's book. Taken just seconds before the first bullet hit the President, it seems to show the President's coat bunched at his neck; this could explain the location of the bullet hole as demonstrated in the picture at right above (photograph of coat showing bullet hole several inches below the collar line).

That caption and the accompanying photograph attempt to neutralize Epstein's compelling evidence on grounds which are highly dubious, if not specious. There is no substantiation for the claim that the picture was taken "just seconds before the first bullet hit the President," ~~and~~ The photograph clearly precedes the opening frame of the Zapruder film --which continued (according to the Warren Report) for 39 to 54 frames before the President was shot (for 2 to 3 seconds, on the basis of 18 frames a second). Between the uncredited photograph and the opening Zapruder frame, the President had changed his position entirely. There is no evidence in the Zapruder frames that his coat was bunched when he was shot.

~~But even if it was, a bullet that hit him in the back of the neck at the spot shown in a drawing prepared under the direction of Dr. Humes would have made at least two holes, and possibly three, through the doubled-up fabric of the coat; and one hole would have penetrated the collar.~~

Neither in the text nor in the photographs, however, did the Detroit News confront the ultimate fallacy in the bunched-coat-hypothesis--that is, that the hole in the shirt corresponds almost exactly with the hole in the coat. Surely no one will claim for the shirt the same capacity to bunch up as ~~one~~ ^{ad} claim for the coat? The shirt not only fits more closely but it is anchored by a belt or similar device and cannot deviate, like a coat. ~~As~~ ~~no~~ amount of far-fetched theorization about the coat, whether by Humes in his testimony before the Commission or by the Detroit News, can explain the position of the hole in the shirt. And that leaves aside the fact, as yet unmentioned in any of the stories in the newspapers, that two Secret Service agents independently described the ~~location of the~~ ^{as located in a pocket case} wound ~~as~~ corresponding with the FBI ^{report} and not the autopsy findings.

The misleading photograph and ^{to} caption detract from the otherwise ^{fairly} generally accurate and ^{generally} objective coverage. At the end of the story some comments by Congressman Gerald Ford and counsel Arlen Specter appear--the usual self-righteous platitudes that avoid ~~like the plague~~ specific answers to Epstein's specific arguments. Specter, in fact, had the malice and tactlessness to observe, "It may sell books, and make a lot of money."

Was Specter referring to Epstein's book, or to the book published by ex-Commissioner Gerald Ford, whose self-praising remarks were quoted in the preceding paragraph of the same story? (Ford's book, Portrait of the Assassin, largely a rehash of the material in the Warren Report and Hearings, appeared in 1965; it is not known whether or not the book made a lot of money.)

Van Dusen's story ended with another quotation from Specter--"We turned over every stone we could find." Those with some familiarity with the case will have to take that assertion literally, if at all, and picture Specter and his colleagues, and the venerable Commissioners, flinging over stones in some bucolic setting--heave, heave, strain, puff, and over it goes! to reveal dirty white slugs, disturbed in their disgusting functions by the sudden removal of their protective cover.

We turned over every stone we could find! Says Van Dusen: "But did they? That is what the critics are asking." And, to his credit, Van Dusen appeared to be asking too.

The Second Week
(June 6-12, 1966)

Although the release date for Inquest was June 29, some copies actually went on sale in a few large stores about June 3 or 4. On Monday, June 6, Newsweek (dated June 13, 1966) appeared with a two-page illustrated spread under the heading "Inquest: How Many Assassins?" The story was classified under "national affairs" and punctuated by photographs from Epstein's book, one of which showed the bullet hole well under the collar of the President's coat. The ~~write-up~~^{reportage} was highly favorable to Epstein's arguments and to his style ("the cool plausible face of scholarship").

Newsweek gave four columns to the background and summary of Inquest including, of course, the conflicting descriptions of the back wound in the FBI Reports and the autopsy report. The fifth and sixth columns were devoted to a so-called "defense" against Epstein's charges by unnamed staff lawyers. Their counter-argument was that the FBI had not seen the autopsy report when it prepared its own Reports and that the FBI description of the wound was based on "little more than hearsay." (There was no comment by any FBI spokesman reported in the story.)

According to Newsweek, an unnamed staff lawyer (subsequently ~~learned to~~ ^{Epstein suggested he} be Norman Redlich) said that he had seen the autopsy report on December 20, 1963 "months before the single-shot theory was even advanced," and that it was identical with the autopsy report published in the Warren Report. That an anonymous spokesman vouched for the autopsy report was not entirely reassuring ~~from~~ to Newsweek, which went on to reveal that "still, some staffers were unhappy with the autopsy. There was even talk, one insider disclosed, of exhuming JFK's body for a second look."

Although the staff alumni were said by Newsweek to be "hopping mad" and charging "misquote," no one personally or explicitly charged Epstein with misrepresenting what ~~he~~ ^{he} had said; by default, they thus testified to his accuracy.

The story closed with the ~~hypocritical and misleading~~ statement by a staff lawyer that "nothing will ever kill the morbid curiosity." The unnamed lawyer knew very well that neither Epstein's book nor the overwhelming mass of other criticism of the Warren Report could possibly be ascribed to morbid curiosity but represented a search for the truth necessitated by the deformities of the Warren Report. The smear was a clue to the nervousness with which the authors of the Warren Report anticipated sceptical examination of their product in the context of long-overdue national debate.

The Third Week
(June 12-18, 1966)

An AP (Associated Press) release of the preceding week summarizing Epstein's book was picked up in a number of newspapers in cities of medium size. The AP story gave a condensed but fairly accurate synopsis of the book. It quoted an unnamed Commission lawyer as saying that the autopsy report and photographs had gone to the Secret Service, not the FBI. Rankin and Redlich were reported to have said that the FBI Reports had been evaluated and discarded; and the FBI had declined comment.

Other newspapers picked up the New York Times story of June 5, sent out by the NYT's press service--in some instances, by-lined Peter Kihss.

The Nation meanwhile published a two-part criticism of the Warren Report by its frequent contributor Fred Cook (issues of June 13 and 20). The editors said in introducing the first installment that they recognized that there were still unanswered questions about the assassination, and scope for honest differences of opinion among men of good will, but they stalwartly reiterated their full confidence in the integrity of the Warren Commission. The second installment was accompanied by an editors' note explaining that Cook's manuscript had been delivered some weeks before "publication of two books which also analyze the testimony"--an apparent reference to Inquest by Epstein and to the privately-printed book Whitewash by Harold Weisberg. Indeed, the front-page stories which had reopened discussion of the Warren Report at the end of May made Cook's article (written, we understand, in the fall of 1965) seem somewhat anachronistic; and the pusillanimity of the editors ^{of the} ~~the~~ Nation made Newsweek, by contrast, appear as a stormer of barricades.

At the close of the week the Washington Post of June 18, 1966 published in full a letter to the editor correcting factual errors in the front-page story of May 29, 1966 by Richard Harwood, which had launched the new wave of publicity about the assassination.

Harold Weisberg meanwhile appeared on a number of radio interviews; Epstein received numerous requests for radio and television appearances.

The Fourth Week
(June 19-25, 1966)

The First Book Reviews

The New Republic (dated ~~MM~~ June 25) and the New Leader (dated June 20) appeared simultaneously on the newsstands. The New Republic contained a joint review of Inquest and Whitewash by the managing editor, Alex Campbell, titled "What Did Happen In Dallas?" Campbell sided unreservedly with the two critics of the Warren Report, ending his review with the statement that "the Warren Report may now have been shot to death and require a full autopsy."

The New Leader published a trenchant and highly favorable review of Inquest--the first by an established critic in the same camp as Epstein--written by Leo Sauvage, whose book L'Affaire Oswald was scheduled for American publication in the fall. Sauvage saw Epstein's book as a major and unique contribution, largely because he had succeeded in interviewing

Commission spokesmen who had previously "remained in majestic--and contemptuous--silence" and had obtained inside information of great value and ~~imm~~ significance. Sauvage treated the Commission as a whole, and Lawyers Redlich, Liebeler, and Ball in particular, to the cutting edge of his scorn. And, although he praised Inquest with noteworthy generosity (from one Warrenologist to another), Sauvage also placed his finger on what he regarded, with considerable merit, as a fundamental flaw.

After thus decisively contributing to the necessary task of replacing "political truth"...with the real facts, Epstein nevertheless accepts without examination or question, the Commission's "political truth" about Oswald's guilt...he accepts very lightheartedly the assertion that, as one of two if not alone, Lee Harvey Oswald shot at the President. And here we find no arguments, no proofs, no reasoning: only conclusions ...I hope this was not to make the rest of his book more palatable. Whatever the case, these few unsubstantiated pages damaged the lasting importance of an otherwise brilliant and constructive achievement.

Later in the week, the July/August issue of The Minority of One came off the press with both a lengthy review of Inquest and an editorial--the first to appear in any periodical--provoked by the book. Readers of TMO will know that both the editorial and the review, while indeed favorable toward Epstein's work, were less reticent in drawing conclusions from Epstein's revelations than he himself--in the context not only of Oswald's guilt or innocence (the issue raised by Sauvage) but also in terms of the political setting of the assassination, the subsequent events, and the impact on American foreign policy.

Also received during the week was a two-page article from BOOKS of June 1966, headlined "WHITEWASH," "INQUEST" DIMINISH REPUTATION OF WARREN REPORT. The article dealt mainly with Harold Weisberg's WHITEWASH and with Weisberg's views as obtained, apparently, in a personal interview, or in a text which he supplied. Again, the treatment of both Epstein and Weisberg was serious, and it was obvious from the tone of the article that the Warren Report was viewed with alarm by BOOKS in the light of the new evidence published by critics of the Commission.

A noteworthy newspaper item during the week was a column by Max Lerner in the New York Post of June 22, 1966, titled "Political Truth." Lerner, to his credit, wrote, "I have just read a book which, I must admit, shakes for the first time the belief I have had in the report of the Warren Commission." That admission was, in itself, a triumph for Epstein's book. Lerner had been in the forefront of the pseudo-liberals who had propagandized on behalf of the Warren Report when it was published, and who had aggressively denounced the so-called demonologists who raised questions about the Report. After summarizing the main arguments in Inquest, Lerner reported that "the staff now answers that Epstein himself was not thorough enough in his research, and that there was no tampering" (with the autopsy report). But the unnamed "staff" did not specify where Epstein's research "was not thorough enough" and, as was the case in previous staff comments attempting to refute the charges against their Report, the lame and barren "rebuttal" ~~substantiated~~ testified to their inability to produce material counter-arguments.

~~At midnight on Friday the 24th of June, there was a panel discussion on NBC radio which centered on Harold Weisberg's book Whitewash but included references to Epstein's book and to Fred Cook's two-part article in The Nation. The discussion pitted Weisberg against Victor Laski (author of JFK: THE Man and the Myth) and Kieran O'Dougherty, a fellow-reactionary of Laski's. The results were predictable. Weisberg was repeatedly interrupted, diverted, and subjected to the crudest below-the-belt tactics. He nevertheless made an impressive showing, maintaining his personal composure and managing to pinpoint many instances of weakness and misrepresentation in the Warren Report. The other panelists, however, did not have any intention of being confused by the facts.~~

[REDACTED]

The Fifth Week
(June 26-July 2)

LOOK appeared on the newsstands on Tuesday, June 28, 1966 with a fierce attack on Epstein and his book written by Fletcher Knebel. Knebel strained with obvious malice and desperation to discredit Epstein, using defamatory adjectives such as "devious" and accusing Epstein floridly of "literary rape." The epithets fit Knebel and his "client," the Warren Report, far better than they fit Epstein, as Knebel would be the last to admit.

Knebel seized on a very insignificant point--three references to Arnold Rowland, accounting for a total of less than 50 lines of Inquest, to which the LOOK article devoted some 85 lines! Although Epstein's mention of Rowland was incidental, Knebel tried to make a federal case of the fact that Epstein had not said that the Warren Commission had impeached Rowland's credibility. But Knebel's account of Rowland's testimony and his alleged lack of credibility was far more slanted--he failed to reflect the corroborative evidence from two witnesses, which tended to support Rowland's testimony, and he quoted Rowland's wife incompletely so as to give a misleading picture of her comments on Rowland's "proneness to exaggerate." (She has specified that it was only about himself, "to boost his ego.")

Knebel also split the hair by exaggerating ~~was~~^{all} out of proportion Epstein's statement that the bullet hole was 5 and 3/8 inches below the collar, instead of below the top of the collar. The implication that Epstein was being deliberately deceptive was completely unwarranted, for his book displayed the hitherto-unseen FBI photographs from which the reader could judge for himself just how far below the collar, or the top of the collar, the bullet-hole was located, both in the coat and the shirt.

In his intentness on discrediting an unassailable challenge to the Warren Report, Knebel tried to transfer the sins of the Warren Commission to Epstein, accusing him rather than the Commission of failing to interview witnesses and like derelictions. The logic was demented. And, in his preoccupation, Knebel inadvertently produced a piece of new information which vitiated his own position--that is, that the autopsy report had been transmitted to the FBI on December 23, 1963, some three weeks before the FBI Supplemental Report of January 13, 1964 again gave a description of the back wound which was utterly in conflict with the autopsy findings! Since his mastery of the evidence left much to be desired, Knebel remained unaware that he had launched no rocket at Epstein, but a boomerang.

Finally, Knebel contributed still another statement by an unnamed FBI spokesman: "It is completely contrary to the facts to indicate that the FBI and the Commission are in opposition on the findings of the Commission. Our first reports were merely to chart a course and were not designed to be conclusive. It is entirely possible that Humes's autopsy report did not get into the hands of the FBI until later, and so our initial reports did not reflect the doctors' decision." And in the very next column, Knebel himself states, on the authority of the Treasury Department, that Secret Service records show that the autopsy findings were forwarded to the FBI on December 23!

? Also received during the week: a very favorable review of Inquest by Bill Boyley (check name) in the Houston Post of June 26, 1966; a UPI story by Jack Fox, generally hostile to Epstein's book; a cuttingly sarcastic review of Epstein's Inquest (considered jointly with Weisberg's Whitewash) by Cedric Belgrave in The National Guardian dated July 2, 1966 but on the newsstands on June 30 (Belgrave called Epstein a "promising halibut" in his style but considered this "young liberal" a few cuts above I.F. Stone and Harrison Salisbury; his praise for Weisberg's book was unreserved); and a favorable review of Inquest in the Chicago News, by Van Allen Bradley.

On Friday morning, July 1st, Epstein appeared briefly on the television program Today and was questioned about the Look article.

The Sixth Week
(July 3-9, 1966)

The New York Times on Sunday July 3 published a review of Inquest and Whitewash on page 3 of the book review section. The review was written by Fred Graham, the Times' Supreme Court correspondent! Graham would not have been a logical reviewer for those two books even if he was about to take up a different assignment and could afford to offend the Chief Justice; he was no student of the case, to begin with, and of course he had an understandable bias toward Warren's Report. (Why didn't the Times assign its assassination expert, Harrison Salisbury, to review Inquest, one wonders.)

Graham's review was not ~~even~~ original in its attack on Epstein but ~~was~~ *rehashed* the contrived and malicious criticisms found in Knebel's Look piece (he was guilty of the same sins of which he accused the Commission!), including the unfounded reproach that Epstein had failed to interview Commander Humes, the autopsy surgeon. Had Graham been at all familiar with the case, he would have known that Humes was on record as forbidden to discuss any aspect of his testimony and had refused to comment on Inquest to the ~~Washington Post~~ Detroit News as recently as June 5, 1966.

As for Weisberg's book, Graham dismissed it without ceremony on the ground that "Weisberg questions so many points made by the (Warren) report that the effect is blunted--it is difficult to believe that any institution could be as inept, careless, wrong or venal..." Graham did not trouble to check Weisberg's well-documented criticisms of the Report but dismissed them merely because they were too numerous! If that is a new principle of fact-finding, it is one we can do without. Of course it is hard to believe that the Warren Commission could be as "inept, careless, wrong or venal" as the facts indicate; but no one is asking Graham or anyone else to "believe" it on faith--he has been given chapter-and-verse, but has refused to confront this proof of that which he finds so hard to believe.

In the light of the role played by the New York Times as midwife to the Warren Report and its unofficial spokesman, a fair or informed review of either Inquest or Whitewash would have shocked the teeth out of one's head--but what a welcome shock it would have been. From Graham's review, one could get only a dull deja vu sensation.