

TODAY Show, NBC-TV, Thursday 8:10-8:25 a.m. 29 February 1968
John Sparrow interviewed on publication of his book
AFTER THE ASSASSINATION (Chilmark Press)

Hugh Downs...Whole rafts of books, in this case, knocking the Warren Report and claiming there was a wider conspiracy, and a conspiracy even to suppress the truth about that conspiracy. Well, there have been fewer books defending the Warren Commission...One, just being published now, it's called AFTER THE ASSASSINATION: A Positive Appraisal of the Warren Report, the author is an Englishman, John Sparrow, who is a reviewer or essayist, who is Warden or President of All Souls College at Oxford University, he's our guest today, we want to hear why he thinks the Warren Commission Report is accurate. Welcome to Today, Mr. Sparrow. Now, let's first establish your exact position on the Report of the Warren Commission: Do you support all of its conclusions?

Sparrow Yes, I certainly do, all the conclusions you stated a moment ago.

Downs Now, are there points on which you might disagree with the Commission, minor points, on which you think it did less than a thorough job? Do you think it did rush?

Sparrow I don't think it rushed its work; but I think if the Commissioners had realized some of the points that were going to be raised and some of the criticism that was going to be taken, by the critics, the authors of those volumes, I think they might have gone more fully into certain areas of the case, and I think that would have sterilized a great deal of the criticism that's arisen consequently. But I think the result would have been the same.

Downs What's interesting about your book is that rather than attacking piecemeal the critics of the Commission's Report, you see a common thread in them--you lump Lane, Epstein, Thompson, Popkin, Garrison, and so forth by calling them "demonologists." What do you mean by that?

Sparrow May I first correct something you said. I didn't lump them all together as demonologists: I used clearly defined categories of critics, the demonologists, on one hand, and what I call the professors or the serious group, on the other. The serious critics concentrate on the evidence and seek to explain away the difficulties they find there. The demonologists, as far as I analyze their methods, sense a conspiracy, or something wrong from the beginning, and construct a theory in order to marinate in their own imaginations.

Downs Now, among those critics, again, differentiating those that are not the demonologists, do you think, is there any validity in their findings?

Sparrow Well, the three I would mention, first, Mr. Epstein: Epstein confined himself to criticizing the method pursued by the Commission. He didn't suggest any wide conspiracy at all. He simply said that the Commission did a rush job and that they formulated their conclusions in their own minds before they started, and that, he meant that they had a slanted view of the evidence, and really, unconsciously molded it to fit a preconceived conclusion.

Downs What he said was that there could have been a wider conspiracy but...

Sparrow He didn't claim that there was.

Downs What about Mark Lane?

Sparrow Mark Lane I regard as the principal demonologist. And don't ask me to

analyze his motives. I'm sure he's sincere, that he believes what he says, but he believes it so strongly that he misstates the evidence again and again and again.

Downs Is there a counter-conspiracy? Those that want to see a conspiracy, is there a conspiracy to create a conspiracy on the part of those, particularly the demonologists?

Sparrow I suggested that rather ironically in my book. I don't for a moment think they put their heads together and conspired. But I'm sure if they turned their gaze on themselves, they'd soon see a conspiracy there.

Downs ...A sort of intuitive conspiracy? Is this related in any way to the desire, to an exploitation of the desire of masses of people to believe in such things, as, I don't know...as far-out as...say...flying saucers?

Sparrow Well, I think that's true. But I think I could detect two waves of feeling, as far as one could judge from the other side of the Atlantic: two waves of feeling among the American people. At first, they were very anxious to be reassured, in the shock of this terrible event, that there wasn't something terribly wrong; and they were much relieved when the Warren Commission said, no need to suspect anything sinister, it was just two lone crazed individuals...Oswald and Ruby...and that, as far as I can gather, was pretty well accepted all over. Then, a reaction set in; and people thought, well, it's too much of a coincidence. And then our friends the demonologists began to work on this feeling, pointed to the superficial defects in the Report, to the fact that the Commission had had to do their work hastily, and began to work up these various theories, pointing in a sinister way--I can't prove this, but what about that? we should like to know the answer to this, so; and worked upon the feeling that you say...this very large, common masses... wanted something exciting, not being content with the ordinary explanation.

Downs So the wave of, just the amount of time to look into and critically compile what they claim is counter-evidence, you think coincided with this reaction on the part of the people once assured by the Warren Commission Report, the doubts set in?

Sparrow The doubts set in, they worked--that's what I mean by the demonologists, stirring up the cauldron, suggesting suspicion. And, I think not--another thing they played on was the anti-Establishment feeling in most democracies...and in this country--I won't go into politics--strong criticism of the Government, and, uh...

Downs I want to go into this with you when we come back, we're going to duck out for just a moment, this far right and far left aspects of this, and the critics' attitude towards it. Right now it's 19 and a half after the hour...

(COMMERCIAL)

Downs Now, this far right business, far left, idea: one of the things that many of the critics have touched on was that it was the far right that engineered the assassination of President Kennedy, an excellent cover would be to make it look as if it was the far left, and therefore Oswald's credentials as a Cuban sympathizer, and so forth. How do you dispose of that aspect of the criticism?

Sparrow Well, I don't know how one disposes of it. I think it's a perfectly fair summary of the theories of most of the critics. That's exactly what they do say. Some of them go further than that and say that Oswald himself was far to the right and that his associations with Marxism, his defection to Russia, was all a front, a false front, and that he was really a rightist. I don't

believe that for one single moment!

Downs Do you think he had any clearcut political ideology or was he just a--

Sparrow I think he was mixed up. He went to Russia hoping to find heaven. He was disappointed. He came back with his wife, his Russian wife. He wrote what he called a historic diary, a most interesting document--extracts from it are published in the Warren Report--and it's ~~quite inconsistent, in my view, with the possibility of his being, really, a right-winger, and still more inconsistent with his being, as some of the apologists allege, an actual tool of the CIA, sent out as a spy to Russia.~~ quite inconsistent, in my view, with the possibility of his being, really, a right-winger, and still more inconsistent with his being, as some of the apologists allege, an actual tool of the CIA, sent out as a spy to Russia.

Downs What about Garrison, who seems--that's one of the most puzzling things, there in New Orleans, how does he fit into the picture of demonologists?

Sparrow Well, they're all rallying round him now, literally.

Downs He appears to have something.

Sparrow He's got something there, I think. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there not many people who would have liked to see Castro out of the way, and many people who talked about putting a bullet through the President, I wouldn't be a bit surprised. And I daresay Garrison is putting hands on some of them, I don't know.

Downs But you do not think that that...any real conspiracy?

Sparrow To link that up with what happened in Dallas is a very, very big thing...

Downs Fascinating account, After The Assassination, by John Sparrow. Thank you for being with us, Mr. Sparrow!