

The Warren Commission Didn't Know Everything

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

WASHINGTON—In the White House of Richard M. Nixon, it was said that Watergate would become serious only if it "got outside the Washington Beltway," if the depths of the disgrace were understood by the American people. In 1974, the truth of Watergate flooded the country, and the Nixon Presidency ended.

It can be said that the myriad doubts about the Warren Commission's findings in the death of President Kennedy represent a reverse situation. The doubts would never be taken seriously until they were inside the Beltway, in the halls of Congress, the courts and the White House.

They are in. It is a tiny beachhead, but the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has empowered two of its members—Richard S. Schweiker, Republican of Pennsylvania, and Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado — to be an "informal" subcommittee to study whether the Warren Commission's conclusions should be re-examined. Mr. Schweiker led the drive for such a review.

The Intelligence Agencies

For despite the encyclopedic nature of the commission's inquiry and report, its findings did not include some important matters because these matters were withheld by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency.

In fact, the F.B.I. has opened an internal inquiry into why an agent destroyed a piece of evidence

that might have been vital to the commission.

No one is now suggesting that these new inquiries will change the commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald, alone, killed President Kennedy and a Dallas police officer, but the American people may learn more about the roles of the bureau and the intelligence agency and whether Mr. Oswald received help or urging from any source.

In the 11 years since the Warren Commission report, the doubters have engendered at least two dozen nonfiction books, four novels, three feature films, several national conferences and a mass of articles.

Yet, none of this had resulted in any action from the official organs of the Government. Why now? There are several reasons, some factual, some atmospheric.

Early this year, three major investigations of United States intelligence agencies—two by Congress and one by a blue-ribbon panel headed by Vice President Rockefeller—were begun after allegations of an illegal domestic surveillance program. The C.I.A. disclosed to the various investigators, among other things, that it had been involved in plots to assassinate foreign leaders.

One target of such a plot was Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba. Senator Frank Church of Idaho, chairman of the select committee, reported last week that evidence had been received of actual attempts on Mr. Castro's life by the intelligence agency during the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Agency testimony in closed session of the committee confirmed that the moves against Mr.

Castro had not been reported to the Warren Commission.

The omission is stark.

Mr. Oswald had been involved in pro-Castro Cuban activities. Had the commission known that its own Government was plotting against Mr. Castro, might it not have given far greater attention to the question of whether Mr. Oswald was part of the retaliation plot?

Other new gaps emerged. Last month, Clarence M. Kelley, the F.B.I. director, acknowledged that a letter from Mr. Oswald, delivered to the bureau 10 days before Mr. Kennedy was shot, in which he threatened to blow up the Dallas Police Headquarters, had been withheld from the Warren Commission and then destroyed. The destruction was reported to have been ordered by J. Edgar Hoover.

The Oswald Recordings

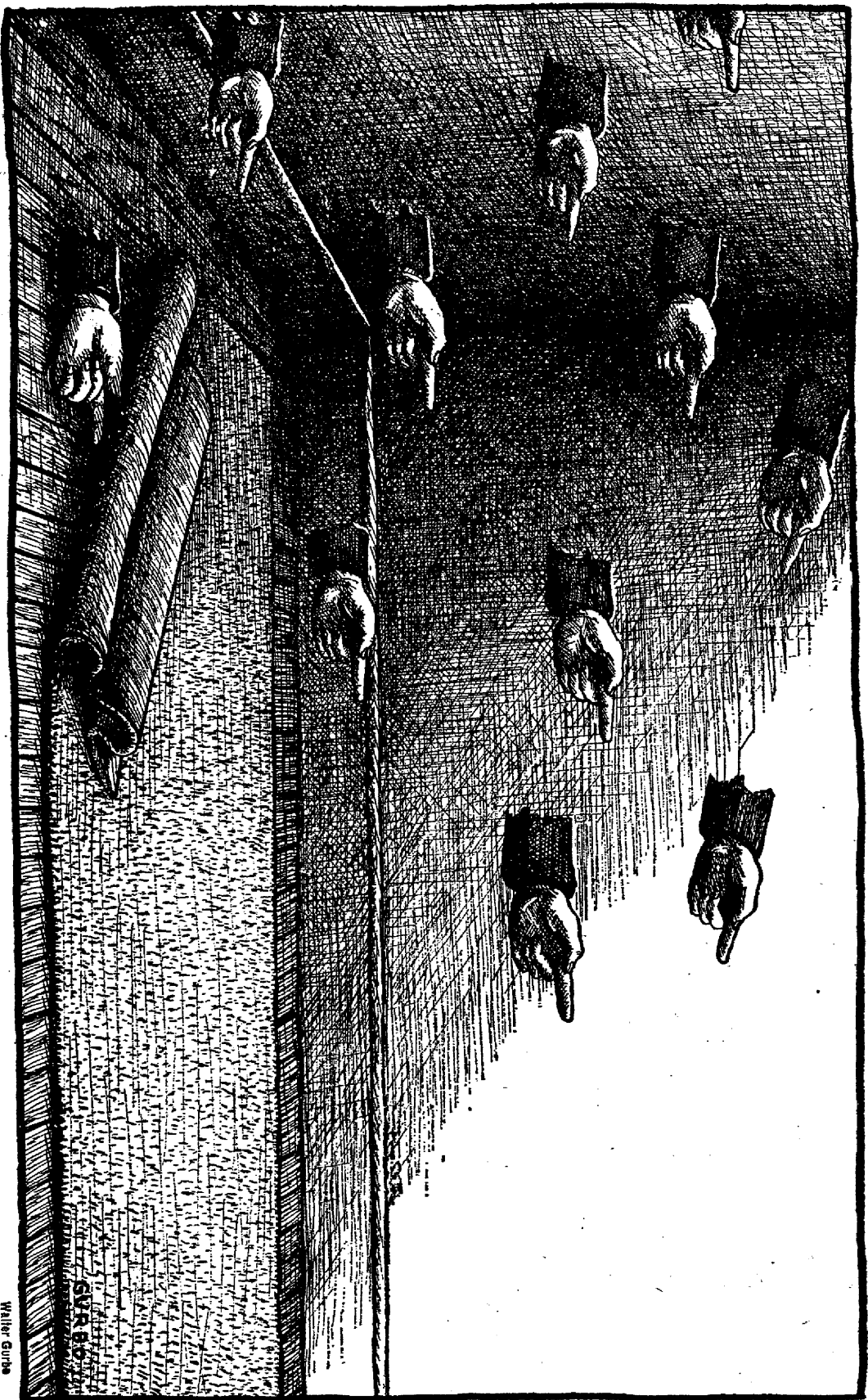
In another instance, sources reported, the C.I.A. obtained recordings of Mr. Oswald talking to officials of the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City in September, 1973. Since he had once defected to the Soviet Union and was married to a Soviet citizen, this contact seemed to be of more than passing interest. The C.I.A. told the F.B.I. about the contact more than a month before the assassination, yet there is no indication that the bureau followed up on it before the assassination.

In the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate atmosphere, where distrust of the Government is widespread, distrust of the Warren Commission's findings are not surprising.

But if a new look at the commission's findings would not be conclusive, why should it be attempted? This is a compelling question in Washington. One answer is that the age of trust in government ended in the months after John Kennedy's death. That might be a good point at which to begin restoring credibility.

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But Withheld Information Is Unlikely to Change the Conclusion



Walter Gube