

Warren report's careful critics

By Edwin L. Crosby

For almost 10 years the New York Times has viewed the critics of the Warren Commission, which investigated the death of President Kennedy, as irresponsible or worse. In a recent article by Martin Waldron (carried in the Tribune Oct. 27) the critics are portrayed as "a small, noisy group of professional writers and lecturers." The clear implication of the article is that reason is on the side of the Warren Commission, while the growing doubts are the result of "conspiracy fever" or some other aberration of crowd psychology.

As someone who has spent many months over the last five years studying the assassination of President Kennedy, I must object strenuously to this view. Although there are many sloppy scholars involved on both sides of the question, the really scholarly work has been done by those criticizing the Warren Commission and not by those defending it.

Sylvia Meagher, for example, did painstaking work in preparing her "Accessories After the Fact." In order to do a proper job, she had to make an index for the last 10 volumes of the Warren Commission's evidence, something the commission itself never bothered to do. Her book is filled with careful analysis and is brimming with footnotes. Its major fault is that it is too scholarly and thus is hard to read.

Compare this with David Belin's

book "Nov. 22, 1963: You Are the Jury" defending the Warren Commission. Belin is almost always cited by the Times as one making "painstaking efforts" to get at the truth. In his book, Belin quotes a great deal of testimony, but usually fails to give a citation as to where it is found in 26 volumes of evidence. This is the work of a lawyer building a case, not a scholar reviewing evidence. Of course footnotes alone do not show how careful a scholar is. Perhaps Belin did good work when he served on the staff of the Warren Commission.

This turns out to be even more distressing. There was one key witness who placed Oswald on the sixth floor of the School Book Depository near the time JFK was shot. We now know that this witness "remembered" this key fact only four months after the assassination. In three earlier interviews with police and FBI, he said nothing about Oswald, or reported seeing him downstairs.

We now also know that it was Belin who handled this witness, who knew of these discrepancies and yet who portrayed this man's testimony as solid evidence that Oswald was on the sixth floor. Is this the work of a man eager to find the truth?

In fairness to the Times, it should be noted that some critics who have done the most extensive study have not published their work. The most notable of these is Paul Hoch, who is currently working on a book on Oswald. Hoch holds a Ph.D. in

physics. He has shown a scientist's care in months and months of careful examination of data from the National Archives. Others such as Gary Schoener of Minneapolis, Jerry Policoff of New York, or I, have done a great deal of careful research, but have had to set this aside in order to pursue other careers. Thus there are critics who know much, but say little. This is contrary to the Times view that we say much and know little.

It is indeed correct that there is now a public outcry demanding that we get at the truth about the assassination of President Kennedy. And much of this has arisen because of lectures by people like Mark Lane. But the Times has failed to see that at the bottom of it all are serious doubts which have been carefully documented by scholarly research. One of the reasons Congress is now pursuing the matter is that members are in touch with some of the scholars who did this work. The time has come for the Times to take off its blinders and try to catch up with the Congress.

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