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T. V. Crime Audience Hit As Ruby Jurors

Austin, Tex. (AP)—The question probably never occurred in the wildest dreams of the first Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in 1876.

But for the television-age judges of the court, and for Jack Ruby, the question demands an answer:

Is a man who sees a crime committed on television a witness?

Eleven of the 12 jurors who sentenced Ruby to death for killing Lee Harvey Oswald either were watching television when Ruby pulled the trigger or later saw filmed repeats.

Oswald, whom the Warren Commission identified as President Kennedy's assassin, was gunned down in the basement of the Dallas Police Station Nov. 24, 1963, 2 days after the assassination.

District Judge Joe B. Brown ruled that persons who saw the shooting over television could sit on the jury.

Melvin Belli, Ruby's chief lawyer at the trial, failed in an attempt to get the Texas Supreme Court to order Brown to keep such persons off the jury.

Television cameras from the

major networks were trained on the handcuffed Oswald, who was being transferred to the county jail, when Ruby stepped out of a crowd of police and newsmen and shot him.

"There was trial by ritual when 11 of the 12 jurors said they saw it on T.V. then went through the ritual of asserting they could set aside all preconceived notions," Sam Houston Clinton Jr., Austin civil liberties attorney, said.

Clinton led off the defense hearing before the Appeals Court on Ruby's conviction.

Dallas Attorney Phil Burleson said Brown committed a fatal error in allowing the eleven persons who saw the crime to sit on the jury. He called them juror witnesses.

Texas law, Burleson went on, prohibits a witness to a crime from serving on the jury. He contended that if one person out of 162 questioned had not seen the televised killing, 11 more could have been picked from Dallas's 70,000 eligible jurors.

He cited a number of cases to show, as the appeal brief said, that the fact that the jurors were watching a mecha-

nical device and thereby became witnesses does not render their testimony inadmissible.

A recent U. S. Supreme Court decision, he noted, reversed a Louisiana conviction because four jurors were watching when a television news program showed the defendant confessing.

But Assistant District Attorney James F. Williamson of Dallas had another view of the problem.

He said that the action

happened so quickly, with Ruby's back to the camera most of the time, that it was difficult to tell it was Ruby.

"Did he (a viewer) see something, or did he see just confusion in which he could not possibly identify any one?" he said.

"The identification of Ruby and Oswald was not based on personal knowledge but on the announcers' statements that they were Ruby and Oswald," he contended.

He also questioned whether

taped repeats of the incident over television were sufficiently contemporary to rank a viewer as a witness.

Williamson's colleague, Assistant District Attorney William Alexander, also had something to say:

"We of the district attorney's office did not pick the time and place where Ruby killed Oswald. He did that. That there were people with cameras there, and that 40 million people were watching, does not lessen his guilt one iota."