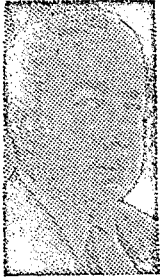


## BOOK DAY



# The Warren Report Buffs

**THE SCAVENGERS AND CRITICS OF THE WARREN REPORT**, by Richard Warren Lewis. Based on an investigation by Lawrence Schiller. 188 pages. Illustrated. (Delacorte Press) \$4.95.

By MAURICE DOLBIER

**C**RITICISM OF THE WARREN Commission began even before it had completed its investigation and released its report on the assassination of President Kennedy, and since then it has steadily increased in volume and vehemence.

Some of that criticism has been made in a responsible fashion by scholars and lawyers seriously concerned by what they consider to have been weaknesses and failures in the Commission's investigative procedures; some has been irresponsible, and some has been irrational.

Many have caught the contagion. One of the responsible critics, Edward J. Epstein, the author of "Inquest," writes that "a growing number of people are spending their leisure hours scouring the Commission's Report and the twenty-six volumes of testimony and exhibits for possible clues to a conspiracy.

Others, using high-powered magnifying glasses and infrared lights, are scrutinizing photographs of the assassination scene, hoping to find snipers concealed in the shrubbery." And in an interview with the authors of this book, Epstein said: "Most of my letters say: 'How can I become an assassination buff? I have limited spare time.'"

A Louis Harris poll revealed that two-thirds of the American people doubt the commission's conclusions, and some of the critics haven't been slow in claiming credit for this, though there is some in-fighting among them for top credit, and a reasonable case for assuming that the doubt stems not so much from anything they have advanced as from a general feeling of mistrust in many areas—what columnists and editorial writers have called the "credibility gap" between government spokesmen and press and public.

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**UNTIL RECENTLY**, the critics of the Warren Report have had the field pretty much to themselves, but now they are beginning to encounter opposition, not from committed supporters of the commission, but from writers who, like William Manchester and the authors of this book, conducted, like the critics, their own private investigations, with results that generally coincide with the Commission's.

Lewis and Schiller document the extremes of absurdity to which the wilder buffs have driven, but they have also found, in the soberer books, the same faults

for which the critics have chastised the Commission—principally, that of "starting with a preconceived idea and finding facts or, indeed, manufacturing facts to support a very shaky foundation."

In their examination, and follow-up investigation, of the criticisms that have been levelled against the Commission, Lewis and Schiller deal with Mark Lane and Edward Epstein, Texas editor Penn Jones Jr. and Philadelphia lawyer Vincent Salandria, Harold Weisberg and David Lifton, and a group they call "The Housewives' Underground" (Mrs. Shirley Martin, Mrs. Maggie Field, and Mrs. Sylvia Meagher).

They also have a chapter on George C. Thomson, who has suggested that 22 shots were fired in Dallas' Dealey Plaza, and that five persons were killed, not including President Kennedy, who is still alive and attended Truman Capote's party!

Mrs. Meagher told the authors that she was pleased that Mr. Thomson hadn't had any publicity ("There's some suspicion on the part of some of the other critics that he is a deliberate prop of, let's say the FBI, or some such agency").

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**AMONG THE NOW-FAMILIAR** topics dealt with in the book are the "puffs of smoke on the knoll," the "shell on the stretcher," the "man in the doorway," the "missing film frames," and the "single bullet theory," and while there's no hope that the treatment of these points will cut off controversy, it provides a basis for reasoned argument. The authors themselves are not uncritical of the Warren Commission, and mention as its most glaring weakness "its examination of a possible conspiracy involving Oswald"—it did not show the same thoroughness in this area that it did in matters dealing with ballistics and trajectory.

In his introduction, Bob Considine writes: "(The authors') investigative work was not done from the armchair of a living room, for they traveled as a team from city to city, tracking down one by one the major charges as expounded by the mythmakers. As they point out, not all the questions have answers, but that is not to say that the answers are being withheld intentionally."