

Review/Television

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The Assassination, Contd. On 'Nova' Documentary

By WALTER GOODMAN

Toward the end of tonight's edition of "Nova," Walter Cronkite speaks of the "national obsession" with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Television is filled this month with evidence of that obsession or at least an enduring fascination. There were two programs on conspiracy theories earlier this month, and several documentaries, along with numerous news-program segments on the assassination and the Kennedy career, are scheduled for this week and next.

Tonight's documentary, on many public television stations, does not quite settle the question it poses: "Who Shot President Kennedy?" But it deals coolly with the often heated and somewhat technical disputes over whether the President was struck by a single bullet; whether the shot that killed him could have been fired from Lee Harvey Oswald's post in the Texas School Book Depository; whether the scarcely damaged bullet found on a hospital stretcher was really the one that went through the bodies of both the President and Gov. John B. Connally Jr.; whether the wounds in the President's head and throat indicated where a bullet entered or where it exited; whether there was another gunman in addition to Oswald, operating from a grassy knoll along the President's route; whether something was done to the President's corpse between the time it left Dallas and arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital for an autopsy that seems to have been incompetently conducted. On all these mat-

ters, there remains fierce disagreement.

The techniques of investigating the ambiguous evidence, which comes in the form of photographs and recordings as well as eyewitness testimony, are interesting, but contrary to the spirit of most "Nova" shows, they demonstrate the limitations instead of the wonders of technology. For example, the producers asked a pair of experts to enhance and analyze a Polaroid photograph taken within moments of the assassination in which some people have claimed to make out a figure with a rifle on that famous grassy knoll. The experts conclude that with a little imagination you can "see" what might be a person, but the rifle appears to them to be only a patch of light.

The producer, Robert Richter, also arranged for the four Dallas doctors who had tried to save the President to study autopsy photographs for the first time. Proponents of conspiracy theories have expressed suspicions that the wounds had been altered between Dallas and Bethesda. None of the doctors could discern any significant changes, but discrepancies remain.

The results, finally, are unstartling. In Mr. Cronkite's summing up, the single-bullet theory, though implausible, remains intact, and although the eyewitness testimony has not been explained away, there is no proof that there was a second gunman. Yet the program holds us by the details of its investigation. A quarter century after the murder, as one of the experts remarks, "Things haven't gotten any simpler."