

Exploiting Profits From a Tragedy

Part 3/14/69
By Marquis Childs

United Feature Syndicate

ON HIS recent trip to four South American countries—Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia—Chief Justice Earl Warren was startled to find that at the press conferences he held in each country only one subject was raised—the Warren Commission Report on President Kennedy's assassination.

Had the Commission really considered all the evidence? Shouldn't the inquiry be reopened in view of charges of a conspiracy involving persons other than Lee Harvey Oswald? The questions came hot and heavy at each stop.

At one of his most-crowded conferences, with some 50 reporters bearing down on the assassination theme, the Chief Justice got in a question of his own. How many of those present, he asked, had read the Warren Report? Two hands were raised.

"How many of you have examined the 28 volumes of evidence on which the report was based?" No hand was raised.

"I know these volumes are available to you," the Chief Justice said, "because I saw to it myself that the full set was sent to the principal library in every capital of the world."

This is a sad commentary, not so much on world opinions as on those in this country who have exploited the Kennedy tragedy for profit. The exploiters have fed the conspiracy theory which opinion abroad has been only too eager to seize on. Particularly in the Communist countries it has been a rich propaganda mine—unstable, lawless America with right-wing conspirators powerful enough to plot against the life of a president. Throw in a dash of the CIA and you have a mixture brewed here at home that could hardly be more self-destructive.

THE LATEST manifestation comes in the antics of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison. He has been making the headlines with weird tales of plot and counterplot and constant promises of new sensations that are like lurid rockets against a night sky. And they endure for just about as long.

Opinion in this country can discount the Garrison sensations. After all, district attorneys, who are fairly far down in the law-enforcement hierarchy, have political ambitions. But for opinion overseas Garrison gives a gloss of officialdom to the belief that conspirators must have plotted the crime long in advance.

It may be that all this was inevitable. After Lincoln's assassination tales of plotters in high places persisted for many years. But no evidence was unearthed to incriminate anyone other than the half-deranged haters around the assassin, John Wilkes Booth. This was our own personal and family preoccupa-

tion as were the trials and tribulations of that other Johnson, Andrew, who inherited the Presidency upon Lincoln's death in 1865.

The United States was still regarded as a new, fledgling Nation that had managed to survive a terrible Civil War. Today the United States is a world power with every move, every whisper, communicated to the ends of the earth. That is why the attack on the credibility of the Warren Report has such consequences and why it must seem at times a willful essay in self-destruction.

To believe that there were plotters in a conspiracy to murder the President and to believe further than another assassin or assassins fired shots is to believe that the principal law-enforcement agencies in this country—the FBI, the Secret Service—are, to say the least, incompetent. Or, for those who prefer the dark conspiratorial side, any evidence casting doubt on the Warren Commission findings was suppressed.

WHEN PRESIDENT Johnson first sent an emissary to the Chief Justice shortly after the Kennedy assassination to ask him to head a Commission of Inquiry, the answer was a firm no. Warren felt strongly that the Court should not be involved in controversies outside the jurisdiction of the high tribunal. He cited chapter and verse on the harm such involvement had caused in the past. Later that same day Johnson asked Warren to come to the White House. He solemnly invoked the patriotism of the Chief Justice who, as the President noted, had worn the uniform of his country in World War II. With this appeal Warren agreed to be chairman of the Commission of Inquiry.

The Warren Report can be faulted. The Commission might have taken longer. The Commission members, all of them busy at other jobs, should perhaps have devoted more time to the hearings. There are suppositions—holes in the testimony—frankly acknowledged in view of the fact that Oswald was dead. But, until solid evidence contradicting the Warren findings comes to light, the exploiters who would discredit the report serve a dubious cause.