

Never before have respected public figures demanded to be heard and acknowledged as expert in their opinions by proclaiming their ignorance of that of which they speak.

But never before has an American president been assassinated and consigned to history with the dubious epitaph of a wanting inquest.

The third anniversary of the murder of John F. Kennedy was marked by the President, Governor John B. Connally of Texas, members of the former Commission of Inquiry and of Congress, some on the staff of the ^{dead} ~~former~~ President and an assortment of editorialists and polemicists, with well-publicized statements all beging with a variation of "I do not know what I am talking about but..."

The President knew of no new evidence but if there were some the Commission would look into it. Only the Commission discharged the function he assigned it when on September 24, 1964 it handed him its report. And the question is not alone one of new evidence. There is nothing wrong with much of the "old" evidence that was misrepresented, ignored, tampered with and destroyed.

The Governor of Texas, fortunately to have escaped the assassination with his life and but seven wounds, reiterated his conviction that he was struck by a bullet other than the first to hit JFK. At the same time Connally maintained the basic conclusions of the Report were right. Had he but the slightest understanding of the Commission's own conclusions and evidence, he would have know that the entire Report is wrong unless he and the late President had all seven non-fatal wounds inflicted by the single non-fatal bullet of the three the Commission said were fired, it having accounted for the other two: one exploded in JFK's head, dissipating its energy and causing no other injuries; the other missed the motorcade entirely.

UPI's
 Merriman Smith, /senior White House reporter and ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his assassination reporting, firmly established
 an unarticulated claim to being the only man in the world who didn't know where
 he was when he learned the President had been shot and on the basis of that
 and other learned inaccuracies (he didn't know the weather, either) assailed
 men and others who insist we must have the truth about the assassination and
 its official investigation.

While the President was hiding behind the blood-relationship of the
 then attorney general, saying "The late, beloved President's brother"
 was in charge and "I certainly would think he would have a very thorough
 interest in seeing that the truth was made evident", ignoring the common
 knowledge that Robert Kennedy has, quite properly, disassociated himself from
 the investigation and thereby, now and in history, eliminated any allegation
 of vindictive motivation and the former staff lawyers were hiding behind the
 robes of the Chief Justice-Chairman, pundits like Roscoe Drummond averred that
 to believe the Report in error was to believe there was a monster conspiracy,
 extending downward from the Supreme Court through the charwoman with least
 seniority in the Department of Justice and the Governor attempted his own kind
 of McCarthyism in calling for an investigation of the government's critics while
 slandering them as literary scavengers.

From this we may assume that LIFE, for which he rehashed his Commission
 testimony, paid him nothing, for certainly the Governor would not call himself
 a scavenger, literary, journalistic or political. May we also assume that he
 also attacked those whose sin was saying he was right was without inspiration,
 say from Washington, and that his subsequent silence can be attributed to his
 belated comprehension of his monumental stupidity? Having no mean of retreat,
 for he insisted - and rightly, I'm confident - that he was struck by a separate
 bullet, he had the simple choice between the slender he decided upon and the
 umbrae of his political mentor.

Certainly the Governor did not have in mind House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, whose "Portrait of the Assassin" was the first book on the subject. Because we as taxpayers subsidized the learning that Ford, as a Commission member, brought to his task, we might have expected more of his literary effort. But then, possibly because he delegated his writing as he had had to delegate his responsibilities as a Commission member, he had less knowledge than his writing, or at least the writing that bears his name and that of a "collaborator", required. It is not likely that the reappearance of the Congressman's book in paperback inspired Connelly's outburst.

The writings of Schlessinger, Sorensen, Evelyn Lincoln, Nenny Shaw and even Jeanne Dixon are hardly troubling to the Governor, although they may be attributed to the assassination - their success, in any event, can be.

Nor can we consider that the Governor had in mind the troubled millionaire-to-be William Manchester. With Manchester getting an initial \$665,000 from LOOK alone, in the immortal words of Merriman Smith, "for openers", he is hardly in the scavenger class.

Simply because I have yet to break even, despite the success of my own two books, I know he did not mean me.

Few possibilities remain but Mark Lane, the one and only one named by Connelly. With his book at the top of the non-fiction best-seller list, Lane finally has a nest egg, with more to come. Not as much as Manchester, and not as much to come as Manchester. And so it is a crime for Lane and his publisher to make a profit from a book the reading public has voted for so dramatically.

It is not, you will understand, a crime for the Roscoe Drummonds (meaning most of the columnists), the editorial writers, the Merriman Smiths and the editors of TIME. For them to be paid to defend the government is not scavenging. The determination is thus clear: only those who criticize the government are scavengers. These writers and their publishers (in my case we

are one) must either write and publish without income or we are villains, terrible people, profiteering on a presidential assassination.

Look, which paid this fantastic sum for four selections from Manchester and is using them and the attendant sensation to cover a rise in selling price of the magazine (while recouping half its investment with the first European sublettings), are entitled to the benefits of the free enterprize system while Lane, Holt Rinehart & Winston and I on the happy day to which I so look forward when we switch from red to black ink are not.

It is somehow honorable to write for papers, magazines, radio and TV stations and networks and even book publishers if you maintain the government can demand has done no wrong while it is less than honorable to be paid for what was once considered the discharge of the neigh to sacred responsibility of the writer, criticism of wrongdoing and error.

Cast in the role of the defender of my competitor Lane, with whom I have serious doctrinal differences, I am comforted by the renewed assault by that eminent California barrister Joseph Ball who in the New York Times of January 4 wishes me well in the New Year with the prediction I am a literary scavenger, at least to-be. Ball' specialty is long-distance assaults. He is among the majority of the counsel of the former Commission in delining to make them face to face, such as in a TV special requested by the former counsel when they lost interest when they learned I was to confront them.

When the President was murdered, our society recovered rapidly. When his accused assassin was murdered while in the hands of public authority and only because public authority made it possible, our society began to come apart. In the two days of his pre-murder captivity, Lee Harvey Oswald was publicly - even ostentatiously - denied all of his constitutional rights, including that to counsel of his own choice. The Commission, of which the learned counsel Ball was an important ~~xx~~ functionary, found itself uncompromised in overlooking this and the evidence that so overwhelmingly establish it. If Ball

or any of his associates among the Commission's counsel were at all perturbed by this blatant and in itself suspect violation of our most fundamental law I recall no public protest from a single one of them, before they began to draw generous compensation from the public till or after.

If there was only one lawyer in the country who adhered to the traditions of his profession and the glory of our law, it ~~is~~ was my competitor Mark Lane. At his abuse before the Commission 10% of its lawyers, eside from those who participated in it, from whom we can expect no more, were 100% silent. He has yet to be called a legal scavenger or an ambulance chaser. With the kind of fees ~~Mr~~ the Ball law firm ~~exactly~~ exacts, fees that make possible its attracting Governor Pat Brown in his retirement from politics, silence on this point is understandable.

With all these complaints of scavengings, what is missing besides face-to-face confrontations, is documentation of error. It is true that Merriman Smith said I was wrong on the first page about the weather and the organization of the motorcade and with this "for openers" why go farther. But ~~it~~ is also true that Smith's are the most conspicuously inaccurate writings in a field in which inaccuracy rival venality. Finding there is something scandalous in my having been a farmer, he nonetheless pleaded a lack of experience in public speaking when I challenged him to a debate before his peers in the National Press Club auditorium, giving him, as one does with duels, the choice: his story, my books, the work of the Commission, or any combination of his choosing. Little does Smith understand that his "Thank you, Mr. President" gave him greater TV exposure than I had ever dreamed of. When I suggested that he was not without experience in writing, witness his Pulitzer Prize, and was certainly the world's outstanding expert on his own story, and proposed a written debate in any ~~to~~ journal of his ~~own~~ selection, in which I would give him my writing in advance so he could devote all of his space to rebuttal, he was silent in writing. I await his answer. But he took to radio and TV to ask "Who do you believe, J. Edgar Hoover or a Maryland turkey farmer." The turkeys

are Smiths. I hate them. I never raised them and avoid eating them.

Ball and his colleagues were invited to confront Lane, Leo Sauvage, Penn Jones and me on TV in New York the end of August. None showed. One of Ball's better-known colleagues has declined not fewer than a half-dozen electronic confrontations with me. Another, who I expected to find in a New York TV studio on December 5, found this inexpedient. Several days later I expected him in a Chicago radio studio. Instead there was his request that he have a copy of my second book rushed to him in California so he could better understand or discuss my first. Not, understand, that he paid for the first ~~since~~ in the five months following his order of it, or had answered the challenge that accompanied it. So I expected him in a San Francisco radio station several days later. He was not there, but there were slanderous phone-ins.

Finally I got to Los Angeles, where he lives and where, I understood, he was to debate me on TV. Instead I was informed that his sudden and urgent need to consult the National Archives dictated his departure for Washington on a Saturday, when the Archive is closed, so, I presume, he could work there on Sunday when I would have assumed it was also closed.

Instead these eminent lawyers, expert in blending slander with innuendo, prefer the columns to which they have access to the practise of the skills which earn them their living and fame. It can hardly be argued that they cannot debate. Nor can it be inferred that they are unfamiliar with the work of the Commission. What is certain is that they do not dare face those who have studied their work on that Commission. They leave their defense to champions, a concept of law and justice as ancient as their devices.

Instead of a dialogue on this touchstone issue of our day, an open evaluation of the government's investigation of the murder of its former head, for a dialogue in which such passionate partisans as these writers and lawyers should echo, we find they are the Barney Oldfield's of the law and the Peavo Nurmi's of journalism. For debate they substitute insult and evasion. Thus they carve their own memorials, for history is being written. Their manufacture

of it ended with their Report. Their comparisons do not work.

Can an American President be murdered and a single question it is withing the capacity of man to answer remain unanswered? If this happens, as it has, is any President ever safe? Or the institution of the presidency, or our society?

These questions-~~there~~ there are many- do remain, for the Commission's own best evidence is contrary to its conclusions. They remain because the major majority of our people do not believe the government's accounting of the assassination. They remain because the Commission, pre-eminently its counsel who in this as in all similar cases were responsible for the work, either perpetuated them or fashioned them.

The can and they must be addressed and answered. Only thus can we recapture our national honor. The government will be much stronger, again entitled to the respect of its citizens and the doubting world, if it really does investigate the assassination, something it never did, does it entirely in public, which it has not done, and, if it finds it erred, publicly confesses that error and pledges to do what can still be done to atone.

Slanders sell books. They do not solve crimes. We have the crime of the century to solve.