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Another Opinion

In Defense of the Warren Report

The following are excerpts from an 18,000-word critical analysis of the Warren Commission's critics—whose ranks have been augmented recently with the publication of several new books and articles—by John Sparrow, warden of Oxford's All Souls College. The article appeared last week in *The London Times Literary Supplement*.

As time goes by, it will become increasingly evident that the real mystery concerns not the doings of the protagonists in Dallas during the fatal week, but the subsequent performance of the mystery-makers themselves and the success of their campaign.

What was it, posterity will ask, that inspired this outbreak of "demonology," and how were its exponents able to cast their spells so widely and compel belief in their lurid denunciations?

No Concerted Plan

If the critics turned their scrutiny upon themselves they might well detect in their own activities evidence of a sinister combination.

In fact, there is no need to suppose any concerted plan of action on the part of the critics or to impute sinister motives to any of them; to do so would be to fall into their own besetting error. A complex and sensational story like this brings to the fore, along with serious and level-headed inquirers, a host of crack-pots and rabble-rousing

publicists, of patriots with a self-appointed mission and Baconians with an *idée fixe*. Not all that such men say can be safely disregarded; it is the task of the dispassionate inquirer to see if there is a needle of truth hidden in their haystacks of denunciation.

Ignoring the Fantastic

Confronted by masses of conflicting testimony and flooded with a myriad of statements ranging from the certainly true to the completely worthless, the Warren Commission naturally and necessarily based its conclusions on the testimony that it judged, in the light of the whole of the evidence, to be reliable; rightly disregarding much that was wild, much that was honest but mistaken, and much that was fantastic or simply irrelevant; and necessarily accepting, as part of the texture of events a number of actuarial improbabilities. The commission is blamed by its critics for selecting the evidence that suits its case because in presenting its conclusions it draws attention to the evidence that supports them. What else should an investigator do? It is for the critics to show that they themselves have evaluated all the evidence, and can make a selection from it as reliable as that made by the commission, and based upon that selection conclusions that compel acceptance as strongly as do the conclusions reached in the report.

Very different from that is the

procedure of the demonologists. They seek to discredit the commission's conclusions on vital points (e.g., the source of the shots) simply by calling attention to differences of opinion among the observers; they think they have undermined a conclusion supported by overwhelming evidence (e.g., that Oswald murdered Tippit) if they have demonstrated the unreliability of some of the witnesses (e.g., Mrs. Markham) whose evidence confirms it—though in support of some of their own hypotheses they rely on evidence that lacks from beginning to end the stamp of credibility.

Worst of all, the critics repeatedly fail to distinguish between a good point and a bad one and refuse to abandon arguments that have been shown to be without foundation.

Empty Nets

And one may ask today, if there really had been a conspiracy in 1963, surely some trace of it, in a country where secrets are not easy to keep, would by now have come to light? Here Mr. Lane for once has performed a service to the truth; throughout four years America has been drag-netted, hundreds of witnesses have been interviewed, no money and no effort has been spared—and the nets are empty, save for a handful of homosexuals and other queer fish in New Orleans. Thanks to Mr. Lane's own efforts, we can reject with added confidence the possibility of any such large-scale conspiracy as his criticisms presuppose.

How is it then that people have fallen for the demonologists, and fallen so completely? The story proves, and has proved twice over, the truth of the old adage—*populus vult decipi*: the public is very ready to be deceived.