

Report on Representative Gerald Ford's Role on the Warren Commission

In nominating Representative Gerald Ford to be the next Vice President of the United States, President Richard Nixon has confronted the Congress, especially the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives and the Rules Committee of the Senate, with the most serious challenges in their history. In effect, Congress is being asked to investigate the credentials of the Minority Leader of the House to be Spiro T. Agnew's replacement while the very legitimacy of the President is being called into question. While there is an increasing call for Ford's quick confirmation, Nixon himself might find himself impeached before not too long. If such a move were approved by the Senate, Congress, under the terms of the 25th Amendment, would have, in effect, selected the next President. Moreover, if Ford is confirmed, he would become the next President upon Nixon's death or his removal from office on grounds of health. Even if Nixon completes his own term, Ford could serve for over three years as Vice President, hardly a lame-duck term. Under the circumstances, the character of the Vice President could become an increasing matter of concern and debate. If the next three years are filled with conflicts over Nixon's right to rule, Ford, as Vice President, could become a rallying point for renewed faith in the system. In this case, Vice President Ford could become another candidate who rejected his protestations of not being interested in higher office. In short, Ford's nomination represents a most crucial decision for the Republic, one neither to be taken up lightly nor settled hastily.

While the Press has made light of Ford's record in the House, it has completely overlooked, as Ford himself has, his role on the Warren Commission, the experience which sheds the most light on his qualifications for higher office. The media contend that loyal service to Presidents within the House should not be grounds for disqualification from advancement, a harmless enough position. Ford's performance on the presidential commission to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was an entirely different matter, however. Here Ford was not avowedly acting as an agent of others in a matter where difference of opinion was permissible. His task, like that of the other six commissioners, was to determine who, and under what circumstances, had killed President Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Given the scope of the problem, every commissioner had his leadership ability put to the test. They were called upon to direct an investigation, to manage staff, to use consultants, to help gather evidence, and to write a report which would satisfy the public. The national interest required the most developed executive, administrative, legal and judicial abilities by the Commission, ones most necessary to an effective President. In short, the Warren Commission was the only real test of Gerald Ford.

A critical reading of the Commission's gathering of evidence, taking of testimony, and writing its report indicates that Ford sorely failed this test, a result from which the body politic still suffers. He then compounded his failure by writing a most distorted, ill-tempered account of the operation and findings of the Commission for the common fold in Life magazine. For more sophisticated audiences, he collaborated with John R. Stiles, one of his motivated staff, in writing Portrait of the Assassin, a book with a well-honed explanation of the assassination. As a result, among students

of political behavior who have followed the Warren Commission, Ford is seen as its leading architect and the only spokesman of its findings. In this context, it is indeed unexpected to find that Ford has never seen fit to include his participation on the Commission in his biography for the annual Congressional Directory, a failure which might well explain the Press overlooking his role. There is no mention in Ford's biographical statements in the Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1794-1971; The International Who's Who, 1972-1973; and Who's Who in America, 1968-1969, of his membership on the Warren Commission although the other Commission members almost invariably included their participation in it in their biographies. Ford, to the best of my knowledge, has never mentioned his role on the body in any responsible publication. It almost seems that once Ford had gotten the Kennedy assassination out of the realm of responsible public discussion, he wanted to forget about his role in the process.

The source of Ford feeling this way is easy to determine by a functional study of the Commission's operation. First, unlike the other commissioners, he saw the Commission as an opportunity to convert his recently obtained chairmanship of the House Republican Conference into Minority Leader, and, perhaps, House Speaker. While the other commissioners were in the process of completing their careers, and had only agreed to serve on the Commission out of a sense of national interest, Ford was just 50, and had much to make up for since he had come to Washington in 1948. In short, he had a personal interest far beyond any other commissioner in doing a good job. In this context, good was also a function of the man responsible for Ford's appointment to the Commission -- i. e., former Vice President Nixon. In the interest of having a balanced Commission, President Johnson had consulted with the titular head of the Republican Party and Robert Kennedy on individual members to the Commission. In going along with Nixon on Ford, little did the President know that, in effect, he was also doing Nixon a favor. The character of the favor was illustrated by the staff that Ford appointed to help him in carrying out the investigation. While Senator John Sherman Cooper, Majority Whip Hale Boggs, and former CIA chief Allen Dulles had no assistants, and Senator Richard Russell and former U.S. High Commissioner for Germany John J. McCloy had single lawyers to assist them, Ford had a highly motivated staff of three. It was headed by former New York Congressman from the 15th District John H. Ray, a conservative Republican from Staten Island who had gone to Washington on Eisenhower's coattails and had gone down in defeat, like Nixon himself, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. John R. Stiles had been Ford's campaign manager when he had won a House seat in 1948, and he had hoped to improve his situation by becoming the Field Director of Nixon's presidential campaign. Francis X. Fallon, Jr. rounded out the staff.

The impact that Ford and his staff had upon the Commission's sifting of reports, taking of evidence, and writing its own Report was overwhelming. While traditional students of government like to speak of the Commission as the Warren Commission because he agreed to head it, he really did little more than get it started, and open the sessions at which it took testimony. While more modern students of political analysis try to look at the Commission's operation in functional terms, they have grave illusions about the time, effort, and commitment that individual commissioners brought to the investigation. For example, just in quantitative terms, Ford did much more than any other commissioner. He directed counsel to ask more questions,

asked more questions himself, and heard more witnesses than any other commissioner. In the latter regard, Ford heard 70 witnesses give their full testimony, while Warren was only present for part of the testimony by 94 witnesses. Dulles heard 60 witnesses, Cooper 50 witnesses, and the rest trailed far behind.

In terms of the quality of the investigation, Ford's input was even more dramatic. By means of his congressional experience, threats, misuse of hypothetical testimony, exploitation of perjured testimony, misuse of confidence, manipulation of other commissioners, clamoring for a quick investigation, and persistence for his corrupt views during the writing up of the report, Ford was largely able to impose his version of the assassination upon the Commission and the American public. After all, the operation and performance of all bureaucracies are political matters, and the Warren Commission was a bureaucracy, not a registration commission. What was investigated, who was believed, which outside agencies were relied upon, and in what way, and how one's own investigative capacity was employed were all questions that had to be decided by the commissioners. There was no obvious, non-controversial way to investigate the assassination. In the process of deciding such questions, Ford put to good use the general impression, gained from his years of vote-getting in the House, that the former football player was simply a selfless man who wanted to complete an unpleasant task with as little discomfort as possible. Men of modest means, abilities, and accomplishments are supposed to be satisfied with their lot, willing to labor for the greater good most of the time. Actually, Ford's interaction with the other commissioners during its decision-making was largely a re-enactment, under less dramatic circumstances and where the costs were not nearly so high, of Stalin's struggle with his more theoretical colleagues for the Soviet leadership after Lenin's death. In a limited arena apparently, where short-range, practical objectives are given priority, the party tactician, especially those possessed with managerial skills, triumphs over his more abstract, issue-oriented peers. In sum, means not only justify ends in such situations, ; they determine them.

This is not to say that Ford managed the coverup of the Kennedy assassination all by himself. The coverup started immediately in Dallas and Austin. The Dallas Police Department had only been able to come up with Oswald as a suspect, and through interrogation where no notes were taken, to learn that he was an FBI informant, an untrue story. While the Dallas police were convinced that Oswald was the single assassin of the President, he was not indicted, a failure which prevented him from automatically being provided with legal counsel. Given Oswald's anomalous condition, H. Lewis Nichols, president of the Dallas Bar Association, was induced by some law school officials to go see the accused. After the visit, Leon Jaworski, a special counsel to the Texas Attorney General and a special assistant U.S. Attorney General, called Nichols, passing himself off as a private lawyer who was representing the American Trial Lawyers Association. (Hearing before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. VII, p. 332.) While professing that he was interested to see that Oswald received a fair trial, President Nixon's new Special Prosecutor, it seems, was infiltrating his defense to see if he had given anyone his side of the story. Jaworski was apparently much more interested in what Oswald might have told Nichols about his relation with Jack Ruby than the legal objectives of the prosecution. In any case, of course, if Oswald had not been killed, Jaworski's interference with Oswald's first effort to prepare his defense could have led to the setting aside of any conviction. One can only wonder why Jaworski took such a risk in such an important case.

The murder to Oswald did not solve all the problems of the coverup of the conspiracy which had killed the President. As long as the matter remained a Texas affair, the elimination of the only suspect essentially closed the case, given Oswald's total isolation. Certainly, one could not see the American Trial Lawyers Association and the Texas State Bar Association running to his defense, given Jaworski's contradictory character. The situation was dramatically changed, however, by President Johnson's appointment of the commission to investigate the assassination on November 29, 1963. Washington, in taking over responsibility for investigating the tragedy, made available to the commission all the services of the federal bureaucracy, including the FBI, Secret Service, State Department investigators, Internal Revenue Service, and Treasury agents. Moreover, the commission had its own counsel, advisers, and investigators to increase its investigative capacity. As if this were not enough to take the investigation out of the hands of a small number of Dallas and Austin law enforcement officials, President Johnson ordered the FBI to make a separate investigation, and to report directly to him.

The effects of these developments upon the coverup were dramatic. "In early December," Edward Jay Epstein said in his Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth, "J. Edgar Hoover submitted to President Johnson through the Attorney General a four-volume report summarising the FBI's investigation. On December 9 these volumes were submitted to the Commission; a fifth volume, subtitled 'Supplemental Report,' was sent to the Commission on January 13, 1964." (p. 47.) The FBI Summary Report, part of the four-volume effort, was particularly damaging to the single assassin theory of the coverup. It said that the autopsy had discovered another bullet which had hit Kennedy in the back, and had not come out. "The FBI Supplemental Report includes photographs of the President's jacket and shirt which graphically show the entrance holes." (ibid., p. 55.) The situation was further compounded by argument over the nature of Connally's wound, talk about other bullets hitting the President's car, and the possibility of a fourth bullet hitting the street. Also, agent reports were coming in which were alleging startling things. For example, on December 4th, Mrs. Eric Walther told two FBI agents that she saw two men on an upper floor of the Texas Book Depository just before the assassination, one in a T-shirt, holding a burp gun, and then a second man in a brown suit coat. Moreover, the next day Carroll Jarnagin wrote to the FBI Director about a conversation that he had overheard in the Carousel Club between Ruby and Oswald in which they plotted to kill the Governor of Texas. (Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. XXVI, Exhibit 2821.)

In this context, the persons in Texas who had plotted to kill the President and had tried to cover up their crime moved to render harmless such developments during the national inquiry. First, through financial inducements and personal threats, they forced Marina Oswald, Lee Harvey's wife, to come forward to give evidence against her husband, a procedure which only became possible with his murder. She could have easily been threatened because of her Russian background with being a KGB agent, and her antagonists gave her the option of saving herself by condemning her husband, a practice she was still engaging in when Donald Segretti discussed recently his dirty tricks before the Ervin Committee. Marina seems almost programmed to

say that her husband was the single assassin of the President. Once Marina was gotten in tow, the way that she would give her testimony was planned out so she could establish her credibility as a witness. To give Marina the greatest possible influence as a witness at the expense of the FBI, the autopsy findings were changed after January 13, 1963. "This presents a dilemma," Epstein said. . . . "if the FBI reports (the Summary and Supplemental Reports) distorted such a basic fact of the assassination, doubt is cast on the accuracy of the FBI's entire investigation; indeed the Commission's investigation and conclusions were, in the final analysis, predicated on the accuracy of the FBI reports." (op. cit., p. 50, italics his.)

It was in this context that the coverup of the assassination, according to Ford's own account, Portrait of the Assassin, moved into high gear. Around January 22, 1964, Waggoner Carr, the Attorney General of Texas, called J. Lee Rankin, the Commission's General Counsel, to say that he had evidence that Oswald had been an FBI informant. The Commission decided to meet Carr, the District Attorney of Dallas, and other Texas officials who had knowledge of the alleged relation in secret session in Washington. According to Ford, they reported that Oswald was undercover-agent number 179 for the FBI who had been receiving \$200 per month from September 1962 until he killed Officer J. D. Tippit. The upshot of this allegation, if taken seriously, was that the FBI itself became a suspect in the case, an intolerable situation given the Commission's dependence upon the agency for an effective investigation. Obviously, the best tactic for these interested in a coverup is to convert an accuser into an accused.

The role that Ford played in the process of helping to incapacitate the FBI can be gleaned from the way he handled the later allegation that Marina Oswald might be part of the intelligence community, an event where roles can be better seen. The Chairman of the House Republican Conference wanted apparently to keep the other commissioners, especially Dulles, in constant pursuit of red-herrings. The former CIA head, as one of Robert Kennedy's representatives, was particularly prone to the lure, a tendency which worked against his purpose in being on the Commission. Dulles, in his The Craft of Intelligence, had just illustrated the lengths that the United States intelligence community was willing to go to meet the communist challenge. The thought that Oswald, who was involved in a conspiracy which killed Kennedy, was also an FBI agent did not boggle Dulles's mind, as we learn from Ford:

"Because of the background of Mr. Allen Dulles, other members turned to him for suggestions on how best to handle this touchy matter. What were they to do with a story like this?

'This is a terribly hard thing to disprove,' he told the others.

'Let's take a specific case,' Representative Hale Boggs suggested. 'That fellow Powers was one of your men.'

'Oh yes, but he was not an agent. He was an employee.'

'There was no problem in proving he was employed by the CIA?'

'No, we had a signed contract.'

In the case of the U-2 incident and Powers, he was not an undercover agent, as Mr. Dulles pointed out. The problem was far more difficult with a true undercover agent, where there is nothing in writing.

Mr. Boggs observed with some uneasiness, 'What you do is to make out a problem, if this be true -- make our problem utterly impossible, because you say this rumor can't be dissipated under any circumstances.' " (Ford, op. cit., p. 19)

One can only assume, given Ford's subsequent manipulation of Dulles, and the vagueness with which Ford discussed his own role in this self-serving book, that more could be learned about the "other members" in this context.

The satisfaction that Ford felt in response to Dulles's direction of the Commission on this score, an opposite reversal of the Democrats' justification of anything to meet the communist challenge in foreign affairs, was expressed thus:

"These observations by Allen Dulles pinpointed the difficulty the Commission would face in dealing not only with the possibility that Oswald might be an FBI agent but also with all the myriad rumors that the imaginations of thousands of writers would create in the next thousand years. They dramatized the complexity of the Commission's charge. A free society must have some secret agencies to defend itself against the deception of its potential enemies. On the other hand, secrecy is the enemy of truth, and the Commission was appointed by the President of the United States to find out all the circumstances surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy." (*ibid.*, pp. 19-20, italics theirs.)

In the general dilemma that Dulles saw fit, thanks apparently to Ford's initiative, to impose upon the Commission, a means was found to coverup again the assassination. Protection of the FBI for an alleged failure in the national interest had become a primary concern of the Commission.

Chief Counsel Rankin, according to Ford, quickly followed up this development, although again we are not told upon which commissioner's instigation its chief legal officer acted. He repeated the account by the Dallas District Attorney, an official who had failed to protect Oswald, of how he simply distributed money to secret informants of the FBI, people like the President's assassin, without any records, to postal boxes during World War II. "In mentioning the use of postal boxes," Ford asked "Wade was thinking of the habit Oswald had of using these blind addresses wherever he went -- again, why?" (*ibid.*, p. 20.) In a related matter, Ford discussed how Rankin went about determining how the Commission should deal with the FBI about the allegation concerning Oswald. It seems that

the Commission, without any participation by Ford, adopted a two-fold approach to the problem -- i. e., asking the Director to disprove the charge, an impossible task, and committing itself to any independent investigation of the rumor. While the former is Ford's standard procedure for dealing with a serious complaint against a department (Guide to the Congress of the United States, p. 544), the latter approach was never acted on, although Ford ultimately did everything he could to cover up the fact:

"The Commission... ransacked the files of every agent having anything to do with Oswald. They checked witness upon witness and approached the question raised by Attorney General Carr, Hudkins, Feldman and others with a thoroughness beyond question of whether Lee could be an agent of any United States Government department with an intensity of purpose that left no stone unturned. They looked into the allegations that he received money by Western Union in small payments and found there was no basis for the rumor. They scrutinized his income from all sources to ascertain if he lived within his means. No lead was ignored, no assertion belittled." (op. cit., pp. 289-90.)

Actually, the character of the coverups on the national and Texas levels were well documented by Epstein:

"Despite the fact that the Commission had agreed to approach the allegation from 'both ends' and to hear Alonzo Hudkins, the source of the story, Hudkins was never called as a witness or questioned by the staff. Instead, Leon Jaworski, Special Counsel for the State of Texas, was asked to speak informally to Hudkins about the rumor. According to Rankin, Jaworski reported back to the Commission that 'there was absolutely nothing to the story' and that it was 'sheer speculation based on nothing but Hudkins' imagination.' It was thus decided it was unnecessary to call Hudkins as a witness or to pursue the matter further from that end." (Epstein, op. cit., p. 39.)

Ford indicated as much when he spoke, admittedly abstractly, of how the Commission handled complaints in an article for Life magazine: "It would have been a bulky and time-consuming process to recruit our own investigators. Instead we elected to rely on the many agencies of government which already were involved -- the FBI, Secret Service, State Department investigators, Treasury agents, Internal Revenue agents, and others. To back up our expert testimony on things like ballistics and handwriting, we tapped state and local agencies as well." (October 2nd, 1964 issue, p. 47.) The President's nominee for the Vice President adopted a two-fold coverup to deal with the inadequate investigation, one that suited his objectives and approach, of the most important question that came before the Commission -- i. e., for the more sophisticated audience, suspicious of government agencies, particularly the FBI, he said that the Commission itself checked out every lead; for the more trusting middle-class group which read the national magazine, he said that official agencies tracked down the truth. One can only wonder what the other commissioners, especially Hale Boggs, would have said about such an explanation, but then, they have not broken the understanding they agreed to about subsequent publication.

Now that the stage had been set by Ford, his accomplices, and his unwitting agents to destroy the credibility of the FBI, Marina Oswald came forward to give her testimony. On the afternoon of her second day of testifying, she said, in response to Rankin's questioning, that an FBI agent had visited her home on November 1, 1963. While she did not know his last name, she took down his telephone number and license number for Oswald to jot down. (Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. I, p. 48.) The agent was identified as James P. Hosty. This revelation, given the Director's subsequent activities, made the FBI look like it was attempting to cover up its own criminal acts. On February 6th, Hoover, in response to the Commission's question about Oswald's possible relation to the agency, made an affidavit, stating that a search of its records had disclosed that . . . "Lee Harvey Oswald was never an informant of the FBI, was never assigned a symbol number in that capacity, and was never paid any amount of money by the FBI in any regard." (Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. XVII, Exhibit 835.) This denial was completely undermined five days later when the agency announced that it had deleted the Hosty reference from Oswald's papers in an agent report on the alleged ground that it was not intended for the Commission's use, an action which made it appear that the FBI was trying to hide its own criminal activity. The situation was compounded later in the month when the FBI failed to provide an affidavit from the agent concerned explaining the reason for the original deletion.

In this light, it is interesting to note how Ford explained the source of the rumor that Oswald was an FBI agent and how the Commission ultimately determined the truth. In his Life magazine article, under a headline stating "Nailing Rumors of a Conspiracy," he said this about one of their sources:

"There was the mother, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, a singularly angry woman whose strange attitudes and actions provided an appropriate background for the strange son she had shaped. Mrs. Oswald's irrational allegations gave rise to one of the most persistent and dangerous -- and completely untrue -- rumors: that Lee Harvey Oswald was, or had been, an agent of the U.S. government." (p. 47.)

Two pages later, under a headline, "Mother's Myth: Oswald Was a Paid U.S. Agent," he pictured her as a wild, irrational person who falsely played upon the Commission's sympathies. Ford said that her rumors were based upon the fact that she could not accept Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union. She explained his return to the United States as the result of her own hardship. The assassination, he said, merely confirmed her original myth. Ford then contradicted his earlier view in the article about how the Commission operated by saying that its investigators tracked down all these rumors about Oswald's relation to the government. In short, rather than talking about the Texas law officials, Marina Oswald, and Hoover, and how Ford made their plotting effective, he merely made Oswald's mother into a scapegoat.

Of course, Marguerite Oswald was treated in a very different way in Ford's book. We have already seen how Ford panicked the Commission over the allegations of the Texas law officials, and how he covered up their efforts at a coverup, so he could hardly picture her as a woman who had shaped an assassin, and then had hidden his action by a wild myth. In a chapter called "Marguerite's Viewpoint," she was portrayed as a strong, purposeful woman who believed that her son was being made a scapegoat. "It is just as I feel," she said at the conclusion of the chapter, "like the Dallas police do not have proof my son shot President Kennedy. If they have anything, it is circumstantial evidence. I have as much circumstantial evidence here that Lee was an agent as the Dallas police have that he shot President Kennedy." (Ford. op. cit., p. 69.) While giving this fairly reasonable view of Mrs. Oswald's testimony, Ford failed to say what the other Mrs. Oswald had said about officer Hosty. Ford was too busy setting up another red-herring by talking about how complex she was, the necessary consequence of the threats that the people who had killed the President had directed against her. Of course, Ford made no mention of Hoover's role in all this.

With the FBI, except for Hoover, more concerned about proving itself than discovering Kennedy's killers, Ford had a field day before the Commission. The first time he had an opportunity to ask Marina Oswald a direct question, he laid down the Commission's determination of Oswald and the assassination like a presiding judge. After Boggs, Cooper, and Dulles had asked questions of varying degrees of importance about Oswald, the most important being Boggs one about if Marina was sure in her own mind that Lee had killed the President, Ford directed the following questions to the witness:

"Representative Ford. Mrs. Oswald after President Kennedy was assassinated, your husband was apprehended and later questioned by a number of authorities. In the questioning he denied that he kept a rifle at Mrs. Paine's home. He denied shooting President Kennedy. And he questioned the authenticity of the photographs that you took of him holding the rifle and the holster.

Now, despite those denials by your husband, you still believe Lee Oswald killed the President Kennedy?

Mrs. Oswald. Yes.

Representative Ford. That is all." (Hearings before the President's Commission of the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. I, p. 124.)

Ford provided for compounding these liberties against the wife of the deceased by suggesting to the Chief Justice that Mrs. Oswald could, through her attorney, revise any of the testimony whenever she wanted. The coverup of the assassination, thanks to Ford, had taken root, and he had started to provide its architects with an alibi.

The building of their alibi began during the giving of testimony by Robert Oswald, Lee's brother. He said that on January 13, 1964, Marina Oswald told him and James Martin, the owner of the motel where she was interrogated after the assassination, that ... "Lee was going to shoot at or shoot Mr. Richard M. Nixon, that Marina N. Oswald locked Lee Harvey Oswald in the bathroom for the entire day." (Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. I, p. 333.) Robert Oswald was responding to a question put to him by Albert E. Jenner, Jr., and while Ford was not present at the session, we can learn from subsequent questioning by the Assistant Counsel that the Minority Leader was interested in stories about Lee's attacks on public officials. (vido, p. 393ff.) When the Commission called Martin to testify, Ford himself was there to make sure that the story about Nixon stuck. After the man who had befriended Marina repeated the story, there was a general examination of her activities and character, one not too favorable to her. Martin maintained that she was a cold, scheming woman who was not quite right as a mother and housewife. When Boggs asked him to explain, Martin said that Marina did not react to Lee's death in the way an American wife would have. Ford interjected by contending that she was not upset about the assassination. While Martin explained that he was talking about her husband's murder, Ford continued to exploit the possibility, thanks particularly to the activities of Dulles, that Marina was part of the Soviet intelligence apparatus, a baseless charge. In effect, Ford was giving her the option of denouncing her husband in a manner he approved of, or of becoming part of a foreign conspiracy.

Marina measured up to the threat, as Ford has shown us so graphically in his book. In a chapter, "Murder -- The Constant Threat," he set up her new testimony is a most self-effacing way which sheds much light on the identity of unnamed commissioners in important situations: "One of the members probed this cautiously. 'I would just like to suggest that if Mrs. Oswald does wish to revise any of her testimony that this be called to the attention of the Commission through her attorney, Mr. Thorne.'" (Ford -- op. cit., p. 461.) Then after repeating some testimony of hers, Robert Oswald's, and Martin's, he repeated the gist of what Marina told the Commission about her husband's threat on Nixon's life. While the story was absurd on its face since he could have killed Nixon the day before he allegedly shot the President, and her later testimony resulted in its dismissal as being either false or imagined (vide Epstein, op. cit., pp. 136-7), Ford concluded:

"After the Commission had explored every possible source of information bearing on this incident and was able to add very little to Marina's account, it had to take the attitude that the incident could not be said to have any direct bearing on proof that Lee Oswald did or didn't kill the President. Although additional proof was hardly needed, if one takes the story at its face value, it would seem to add a considerable weight to the strong evidence that Lee Oswald's mind turned to murder whenever he wanted to impress Marina with his strength. And although in this incident it could only have been Marina he was directly trying to impress, had he been able to carry out his threat would he not have imagined he was proving it to the whole world as he finally tried to do seven months later?" (Ford, op. cit., p. 478.)

With this revelation, the coverup of the assassination of President Kennedy had been formed. Thanks to a conspiracy by Ford and Hoover which made the FBI a suspect, the Commission, under the direction of the present Minority Leader, had adopted the view, based on perjured testimony, that Oswald was a single assassin who wanted to kill public figures -- e. g., Kennedy, Nixon, or General Walker. From here on out, Ford fought vigorously to restrict testimony to those individuals whose views supported the coverup. For example, Epstein, who was not trying apparently to make a case against Ford, tells us how he accompanied Warren to Dallas to take testimony from Ruby and to visit the scene of the assassination. (Epstein, op. cit., p. 25.) Ford got FBI ballistics expert Robert Frazier to testify that under certain assumed conditions, a bullet which struck Kennedy would have hit Connally. (ibid., p. 125.) Ford then contended that there was compelling evidence that the persons concerned had been hit by the same bullet. (ibid., p. 150.) He used a prepared witness, Harold Norman, to lend credibility to the allegation that Oswald did, in fact, fire the bullets which did all the damage, (ibid., pp. 108-9.) By comparison, according to Epstein, the only comparable direction of the Commission by the other commissioners was the short-lived effort by Russell, Cooper, and Boggs to get to the bottom of the story about Oswald trying to shoot Nixon. (ibid., p. 37.)

In response to a challenge by Ford, Mark Lane wrote Rush to Judgment, a work which, perhaps consciously, underplayed its criticism of the Congressman. Lane repeated almost verbatim Ford's discussion of how the Commission handled the allegation by Texas law officials that Oswald was an FBI informant. (ibid., p. 366ff.) The lawyer who tried to represent Oswald before the Commission also pointed up how Ford had tried to give eyewitness Howard L. Brennan unwarranted authority at the assassination scene and Jack Ruby unwarranted authority at the murder scene. Marina Oswald's dramatic change of testimony at the last minute was also noted. Lane, however, did not see that Ford's revelation about the Texas law officials was not merely an indication of how the Commission worked but actually an essential component of the coverup. Ford's disclosure represented a means by which he could put the onus of this grave procedural failure upon the other commissioners when, in fact, he was its architect. Moreover, Lane did not appreciate that Marina's last-minute disclosure that her husband had only wanted to kill Connally had destroyed not only any motive for killing Kennedy but also for threatening Nixon. In the process, Lane missed the alibi that Ford had worked so hard to provide the current President while he covered up the death of a previous one.

The scene was now set for the Commission to issue its report, except for one important detail -- i. e., the rehabilitation of the FBI in a manner promotive of Ford's objectives. On May 14, 1964, Hoover appeared before the Commission. He had to establish that there was no contradiction between the agency's preliminary report and what the Commission was going to conclude. More specifically, he had to kill the rumors that Oswald had been an FBI informant, a conspiracy had murdered the President, and the FBI was engaged in a coverup. In those regards, Ford explicitly showed his leadership of the Commission in such a way that one could safely

call it the Ford Commission. No sooner had Rankin asked the Director a few questions about those matters, one of which we learn later from Congressman Boggs came from Ford (vide Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, vol. V, pp. 102-3,) than Ford took over the show by asking the following questions :

"Representative Ford. May I ask this, Mr. Hoover. As I understand your testimony (about there being neither a foreign nor domestic conspiracy), it is based on the evidence that has been accumulated thus far?" (ibid., p. 99.)

"Representative Ford. Could you give us some idea of how many agents are currently working to one degree or another on any aspects of this case?" (ibid.)

"Representative Ford. I want just to be sure that no leads, no evidence regardless of its credibility will be ignored, that it will be pursued by the Bureau or any other agency to make certain that it is good, bad, or of no value." (ibid., p. 100.)

"Representative Ford. Under your authority from the President, the authority which gave you the FBI, the responsibility to conduct this investigation it is not an authority with a terminal point. It is an authority that goes on indefinitely?" (ibid.)

"Representative Ford. The point that I think ought to be made is that despite the magnitude of the effort that has been made by the FBI and by other agencies, and despite the tremendous effort that has been made, I believe by the Commission to help and assist and to consolidate all of the evidence that we possibly could, that there is always the possibility at some future date that some evidence might come to the surface." (ibid.)

Of course, Hoover proved a perfect witness in these matters, and in the process, Ford obtained the substance of his coverup article for Life. The importance of getting the article on the newsstands before the report itself was that it explained the crime in a way that did not reflect badly on Ford.

In this context, the actual report of the Commission proved most predictable. As Ford himself has said, "conclusions were the work of the Commission" (quoted from Epstein, op. cit., p. 148,) and he had a field day. Every conclusion, as Epstein has so persuasively shown, was what Ford essentially wanted -- e. g., that the shots came from the Texas School Depository, Connally and Kennedy were hit by the same bullet, Oswald was expert enough to do all the damage, Oswald, given his Communist leanings, wanted to kill some authority figure, and there was no evidence of a conspiracy. While all these conclusions appear to be false, the most interesting, in terms of establishing Ford's corrupt character in undertaking the investigation of the assassination, are the last two. While there was ultimately no evidence before the Commission that Oswald had tried to kill Nixon, the allegation, nonetheless, appeared thus: "In the absence of other evidence that Oswald actually intended to shoot someone at this time, the Commission concluded that the incident, as described by Marina Oswald,

was of no probative value in the Commission's decision concerning the identity of the assassin of President Kennedy." (Report, p. 189.) Oswald's plot on Nixon, it seems, was irrelevant to the Commission. Regarding the relation of the evidence to the charge concerning a conspiracy, it is helpful to recall how Ford ran through this issue with a contrite Director of the FBI. (For more on how Ford covered this up, see Epstein, op. cit., pp. 152-3.)

In conclusion, a general survey of how Congressman Ford dealt with the assassination of President Kennedy shows compellingly that he is not qualified to become Vice President, particularly at this time. In a time of national crisis which called for leadership in the interest of truth and decency, Ford was merely able to direct the Commission to a simple explanation which worked to the advantage of Richard Nixon. With a staff dedicated to the political fortunes of the present occupant of the White House, Ford mounted a coverup of the assassination in the most corrupting terms, and then did everything he could to veil his role in the process from the American public. The article in Life and Portrait of the Assassin are different false reports of the structure, operation, and findings of the Warren Commission which are intended to cover up a coverup. They raise the most serious questions about why the current President needed an alibi for his visit to Dallas just prior to the assassination, and how Ford's version of Oswald relates to subsequent assassins of public figures. These suspicions are not dissipated by Simon and Schuster's contention that the revelation about the Texas law officials before the Commission was included to increase the book's sales, and Ford's desire to hide the fact that he wrote the book, much less was a member of the Commission itself. At a time when more and more participants in the events surrounding the assassination are surfacing in the Nixon Administration -- e. g., General Alexander Haig and Special Prosecutor Jaworski -- the country cannot afford Ford's addition to it. As Vice President, he might set off comment and analysis of American politics which might shake confidence in the system to its very foundations. The American public has already suffered enough, and should be spared this final indignity.

Postmark? (got from Lalar 11/27/73)