

## Guy Wright

# A Gamble for Us All

Dr. Thomas Noguchi gambled everything when he decided to fight his dismissal as coroner of Los Angeles County.

He could have accepted a most curious offer instead.

Before the wild charges against him were filed—charges that pictured him as a mad scientist in headlines around the world—the county supervisors quietly offered him a job as a staff pathologist at a county hospital if he would step down without a fight.

And for this lesser work they would pay him the same salary he received as coroner.

The offer was indeed curious. If the charges were true, Dr. Noguchi belonged in a hospital as a mental patient, not as a member of the staff.

But the offer was also tempting. An easier job, less responsibility, regular hours, more time with his family—and all for the same money.

On the other hand, if he fought the dismissal and lost, his career was finished. Who would hire the demented, dope-addicted, death-obsessed doctor his accusers made him out to be?

But Dr. Noguchi decided to fight. And after a five-month battle before the Civil Service Commission he has won a complete victory—exoneration and reinstatement in his job.

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THIS OUTCOME surprised and puzzled many people. The wild charges received maximum publicity. The subsequent hearing wasn't widely reported. The result was to leave a suspicion that chicanery somehow saved the mad scientist from the fate he deserved.

That's why I've spent the past few columns discussing the filmsy case against him.

The charges that he prayed for air disasters, that he hoped Bob Kennedy would die of his wounds, that he took dope—all these flaked away under cross-examination, revealing a petty cabal

which, for various reasons, simply disliked Dr. Noguchi.

Dr. Noguchi had been promoted to coroner shortly before the Kennedy assassination. Young and dedicated, he demanded excellence of a staff accustomed to something less.

His promotion had been opposed by other pathologists on the staff, who had a candidate of their own.

The chauvinism of the American medical establishment—Dr. Noguchi received his medical training in Japan—also figured in this amimus. Dr. Noguchi was accused of lacking "skill and experience" and of botching the Kennedy autopsy. These charges were officially withdrawn when a deluge of praise from his professional colleagues made them look ridiculous.

Out of this office grumbling, six of Dr. Noguchi's subordinates went to L. S. Hollinger, the county administrative officer, with a tale of the coroner's "erratic behavior."

Hollinger's was the ideal ear for such a story. He and Noguchi had fought a stormy budget battle and Noguchi had won in a showdown before the county supervisors.

Hollinger didn't check the tale with any of the other 125 members of the coroner's staff—87 later volunteered to testify for their ousted boss. Instead he ran to the supervisors to repeat and embellish the story.

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SUCH WAS the genesis of the charges against Dr. Noguchi, and they simply failed to stand up under fair examination.

Six were withdrawn or summarily dismissed as soon as testimony ended. These included the headlines-making mad-scientist charges.

Last week the Civil Service Commission threw out the other nine, mostly allegations of administrative shortcomings, and restored Dr. Noguchi to his post.

To him, congratulations and thanks. A man who risks his career to fight for his rights fights for the rights of us all.