

Of Demonologists and Eunuchs

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Rarely has anyone been undressed in public as methodically and thoroughly as this is done to New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison by Edward Jay Epstein in *The New Yorker* of July 13. And the exposed body is ugly, very ugly. Carefully unwrapping fact from embellishment, evidence from hoax, logic from demagogy, Epstein, author of *Inquest*, the book which more than anything else contributed to legitimizing doubts about the integrity of the Warren Report, shows up Garrison as an unscrupulous publicity seeker, whose lack of commitment to truth matches, nay, exceeds, that of the Warren Commission.

When a statement like this is made by a magazine that was the first one anywhere to question the presidential lone-assassin myth which was born at the moment of President Kennedy's death, it is least of all intended to soften our disdain for the Warren Report. But it is intended to impose the same standards of veracity and integrity on the Warren

critics as it would impose on Warren. Neither on this nor on any other issue do we identify with those who use criticism of others as license for themselves. Those who do criticize others have a moral duty to live up to the standards of their own criticism; those who expose frauds must abstain from committing them; and those who complain of other people's lack of integrity must train their own integrity.

In his present critique, Epstein goes beyond a compromising dissection of the "evidence" in Garrison's files and at least in effect endorses the Warren Report. Coming from a man whose own book more than any other undermined public trust in the Warren Commission, this is surprising. But Epstein not only seems to have changed his mind, but by now all who reject the Warren fable are to him "demonologists." By implication he also ridicules all those who view the CIA as "sinister," all those "who expect a momentous event to have some significant cause," and all those who charge "that the government knows the truth and, in concealing it, is itself conspiring to protect the conspirators" or, indeed, all those who claim that there exists "some powerful elite that controls the government and the news media." By now Epstein is left only with clinical explanations for anyone in any basic dis-
 cement with the establishment.

Shysters; and Hacks too

A man is of course entitled to change his mind, provided however that the change itself is sincere. Epstein does not tell us a word as to why he changed his mind, he does not even state having changed it. Much less does he take us along the evidential or logical route that has caused his turnabout—so that we too might see the light he now appears to be seeing.

As we said, Garrison is not the only careerist who has climbed the presidential ghost to make himself visible from all corners of the world. And not all of them are by profession shysters. A writer who subordinates the over-all conclusions of a book or essay to his own desirable academic or political image, even without matching Garrison's recklessness with factual detail, is no Gibraltar of integrity. Epstein is such a writer. *Inquest* was a timid book. Any man who instead of calling a lie "a lie," euphemizes it as "a political truth," has no guts. He is a moral eunuch. True, as far as he went, he was meticulous with fact, but you cannot read Epstein's book without gaining more than an impression that, although he rejects the very substance of the Warren Report, he prefers to concentrate on its authors' questionable working procedures only. And it is equally clear that this refusal to go as far as truth might have taken him stemmed from nothing but considerations of political and academic respectability. This, however, is not surprising in Epstein, for it has not been enchantment with the truth of the assassination that attracted him in the first place, but merely a formal assignment of an academic thesis.

With this in the background, and considering that privately Epstein has unequivocally rejected the central conclusion of the Warren Report, and also that he nowhere justifies his change of heart, what is there to contradict the conclusion that even before he wrote his essay on Garrison, Epstein had placed himself in a desirable spot on the political map, a spot from which no truth and no self-respect were going to divert him. An ostentatious display of contempt for all fundamental social critics may merely be a calculated investment in an aspired Arthur Schlesinger-type position in some future administration. But any thinker who *a priori* resolves not to land on territory other than occupied by legitimized academia is a corrupt thinker.

An Academic Show Window

Epstein's own lack of intellectual integrity becomes most tangible in epistemology, an area for which he holds special interest. Here he displays a knack for hiding the narrow pathways of his intellectual contraband in thick jungles of esoteric detail, academic formalisms and quoted stage decorations. But beneath the canopy of bushes he hides the utter arbitrariness and capriciousness of his epistemological determinations. When he says, for example, that "It can be argued that a considerable number of people are

naturally disposed to make a conspiratorial interpretation of any event as historically momentous as the assassination of the President," it is difficult to appreciate why he did not proceed to discuss that it can also be argued that a considerable number of people are naturally disposed to make a non-conspiratorial interpretation even of an event as historically momentous as the assassination of the President. Was it oversight or was it demagogy that caused Epstein to state but one part of an epistemological construct? Or, when Epstein quotes a non-academic colleague of his to the effect that "eleven per cent of the population may be considered 'chronic doubters who tend to feel that the real story about almost any important public event is never quite told,'" and when he does so prejudicially against those eleven per cent, should he not also have discussed the eighty-nine per cent of "chronic non-doubters," as well as the respective contributions of the two groups to truth finding in any field? And when Epstein quotes Hannah Arendt to the effect that "the liar is usually more persuasive than the truth-teller, simply because he can fashion his facts to meet his audience's expectations," he should have at least told us whether it follows, as a general rule or merely as proving his argument, that whatever is persuasive is untrue.

Epstein poses the question, "But can the process of establishing the truth ever be separated from its end product—the truth?" His answer is that "there can be certainty that as long as the means by which an investigation has been conducted remain suspect the truth will never be fully established." We agree. And because we agree, we must also question the integrity of some of Epstein's conclusions. For if Garrison's investigation was hampered by infidelity to fact, Epstein's was pre-empted by a super-imposed political transparency. Nor are the two men motivational strangers. A proper graphic presentation would show them both climbing two sides of a ladder. And if all dreams are to be fulfilled, they may yet wind up as two cogs in one (political) machine.