

AGE 8 SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, Thursday, Dec. 1, 1966 CCCCA

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The Assassination Doubts

By Walter Lippmann

THE VERDICT of the Warren Commission is that President Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone. This verdict is widely questioned here and, almost unanimously, it is questioned abroad.

The incredulity is fed by aspects of the crime which, because they have not been convincingly explained, nourish suspicion.

For many people, the hardest fact to swallow is the shooting down of Oswald inside Dallas police headquarters. It is very difficult to believe that this is a mere happening, mere police inefficiency, unrelated to the assassination itself.

In Europe very few are willing to believe that Oswald could have been killed without the connivance of the police. They agree that, therefore, there must have existed a conspiracy which the police insisted on covering up.

The failure of the police in

Dallas to guard the President adequately feeds this suspicion. There is, furthermore, the widespread suspicion that Oswald's extremely easy coming and going to the Soviet Union, was an indication that he had some connection with the apparatus of espionage.

For these and other reasons the official verdict is not universally accepted, and there are a growing number of people here and abroad who think that the case should be reopened and the doubts resolved.

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THE CRUCIAL question, it seems to me, is whether it is possible to revolve the doubts. Is there a reasonable hope that a new set of investigators could bring in a convincing verdict?

If the new investigators could do this, it would of course be an enormous relief to everyone. For the argument is compelling that the reasonable doubts which persist should be laid to rest and that the mystery and suspicious surrounding the

murder of President Kennedy ought to be removed.

The question is whether they CAN be removed. Would another set of judges, acting as a kind of court of appeal, interpret differently the evidence collected by the Warren Commission? Or is there new evidence, which was not considered by the Warren Commission, that might reverse the verdict? The argument for an official reopening of the case depends on affirmative answers to these questions.

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THEY have not yet been answered affirmatively. At the most, a certain amount of reasonable doubt exists, perhaps especially on the question of how many bullets were fired and therefore how many assassins there were.

I think that a reopening of the case would not now resolve the mystery in which it is enshrouded. There is good reason to think that the doubts which persist will remain unresolved.

The practical conclusion to be drawn from this is, I think, that while the doubts cannot now be resolved by an official reopening of the case — say by a committee in Congress — there ought to exist a reputable agency, politically and financially independent, which is qualified to examine new interpretations of the old evidence and any new evidence that may be brought forward in the future.

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I DO NOT myself expect that much new light will soon be shed on the case. But the assurance that the inquiry has not been finally closed down, the admission that doubts exist even though we do not know how to resolve them, would do something to allay the uneasiness that contaminates the anguish of the tragedy.

But we must expect, I fear, to live for along time with questions that will not be answered conclusively. As human beings, that is a very hard thing to do.

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