

Washington Post

Warren Report: Remedy for Rumor

By Marquis Childs

THE WARREN Report on President Kennedy's assassination is a monument to patient sifting and analysis of fact, rumor, suspicion and wild conjecture.

It will not answer those at home and abroad who must have a conspiracy. On the extreme left, Lee Harvey Oswald is seen as the pawn of the Fascist-minded right wing. On the right, nothing will do but a Communist plot cooked up in Moscow or Havana.

Honest doubters unable to believe a lone assassin could carry out such a monstrous deed should be convinced by the thorough examination and refutation with fact of the mass of rumor and conjecture. In the very nature of the case, with Oswald dead, proof must be in large part negative.

Ten months have passed since the assassination. No one has come forward with any solid evidence that others participated with Oswald in the crime. Members of the Commission and the staff heard hundreds of witnesses—everyone who could conceivably offer any crumb of information—and they found nothing to support the plot theory.

Nor has anyone come forward in public to claim possession of facts which the Commission ignored. Even a hasty review of the report shows how painstaking was the examination of those who wanted to exonerate Oswald or prove him merely a tool of conspirators.

FOR THE CHIEF JUSTICE and the six other members of the Commission, it was a grim chore. It meant reviewing not once, but again and again the horror of those November days. Because they went on with their normal work on the Court and in Congress, they necessarily worked long hours at night, and especially in the last weeks as the report was being put into final form, for unanimous agreement by seven men with sharply divergent views.

Restrained though the report is, it brings out the shocking laxity with which the President's Texas visit was planned. The Secret Service was operating in the casual manner of another day. The presence in Dallas of Oswald, a former defector and a known Communist-eccentric, was never checked. Nor was any attention given to who might occupy windows along the parade route, as Oswald was able to do because of his employment by the Texas Schoolbook Depository.

Deeply disturbing, too, is the failure of Government agencies—the Secret Service and the FBI—to coordinate their joint responsibility for the President's

safety. Washington has long heard reports of the rivalry between the two services. As reflected in the report, they seem to have gone their separate ways, with the consequence that Oswald was free to proceed calmly to plot the assassination without surveillance of any kind. Six months earlier, he had made a carefully planned attempt on the life of Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker that narrowly failed.

THE DALLAS police also come in for the same restrained criticism. Their incredible bungling, on the order of the Mack Sennett cops, gave Jack Ruby the opportunity to kill Oswald, thereby compounding the tragedy and creating an area of doubt and dark suspicion. But the Commission proposes a series of recommendations for strengthening the safeguards around a President. One is to make the assassination of a Chief Executive a Federal crime. This would permit the FBI and the Secret Service to take direct part in detection of the crime and preparing the evidence. Even more important are the proposals to modernize the Secret Service.

Nothing can be done in the waning days of this Congress to carry out these recommendations. But they should be the first order of business in the new Congress. With no Vice President to succeed President Johnson, this is a time of extreme hazard. An atmosphere already inflamed with charges of treason and corruption coming from the extreme right is being further warmed up by the epithets hurled in the campaign. We will be lucky if we come safely through the next five weeks and we should not count on that luck into the indefinite future.

Each assassination, as the report notes, has brought a harvest of myths. Lloyd Lewis's book, "Myths After Lincoln," shows how wild the rumor crop grew when Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth. The Commission report is a solid achievement set against the winds of rumor and calumny.