

In The Nation

The Unsolved Mysteries of Motive

By ARTHUR KROCK

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28 — If there ever is to be a more definitive history of the tragedy at Dallas in November 1963 than the report of the Warren Commission, it will have to be supplied by psychiatrists. For the two great "whys" to which the Commission could find no conclusive answers are issues of motive—Lee Oswald's for the assassination of President Kennedy; Jack Ruby's for the assassination of Oswald. And, to be at all persuasive, speculation on these motives requires the professional competence in analyzing the vagaries of the human mind that only scientific education and experience supply.

Accepting the main conclusions of the Commission—that Oswald and Ruby each acted wholly on his own plan or impulse—these questions remain unanswered:

Why did the man who first attempted to kill General Walker, a passionate advocate of the far right in political philosophy, choose for his next target President Kennedy, an advocate of a political philosophy somewhat left of center?

Why did the other murderer commit an act which forever excluded an examination at first hand into the reasons for Oswald's superficially inconsistent crimes?

Had the frustration of his megalomaniac dreams by both Communist and capitalist societies so worked on Oswald that he evolved from a Marxist into an anarchist, into a member of the cult which invokes terrorism against any symbol of government and of the social order?

Were personal grief and a sense of outrage at President Kennedy's murder, plus a determination to spare Mrs. Kennedy the additional ordeal of a long and highly publicized trial, Ruby's motives for the slaying of Oswald, as he has claimed? If so, did these reactions have their source in congenital stupidity? Or in temporary derangement caused by any incitement of a basically violent temperament?

Behavioral Problem

The answers to these mysteries of motive, or evidence strongly indicating the answers, may yet be found. In which event, those who are historians by profession will have the materials they require for putting past events in reasonably true perspective. But if the questions remain where the Warren Commission was obliged to leave them, the task will fall to the scientific analysts of human behavior.

The professional historians have not encountered the same limitation on their trade in recording other famous mysteries. This is because the motives of those involved are plain in the legend or the factual record. Thus, it is established that Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had a son; that on July 3, 1793, he was handed over by the Terror (via the Committee of General Security) to Simon, a cobbler.

But what happened to the Dauphin from July 3 until Barras visited him in prison on July 27, is lost in conflicting reports and rumors. It is known that in May 1795 the death in prison of the 10-year-old royal child was officially announced; that an autopsy of a child of that age was held; and that this child was buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery of Ste. Marguerite.

But instantly rumors were circulated and widely believed that the actual Louis XVII had escaped with the connivance of Barras, and lived for a disputed number of years afterward in successful incognito. Since the historians have found no conclusive evidence pro or con, and no psychiatric puzzle is involved, this mystery has been left to the writers of romance. The same is true of the legend of The Man in The Iron Mask—that he was the elder twin of Louis XIV, hooded and imprisoned by his brother in the Bastille until death because the King feared the twin would be successfully used to overthrow him if identity could be established.

Other such factual disputes include: whether Marechal Ney survived the firing-squad in the Garden of the Tuilleries to end his life, years later, in Louisiana; and whether any of the pretenders is the true Grand Duchess Anastasia. But the questions of Dallas are of motive. The opportunity to establish one died with Oswald, and Ruby's is as yet only slightly less speculative. In view of these insuperable obstacles to history, the report of the Warren Commission is even more remarkable an achievement.