

New Chapter in Kennedy Legend

By James Reston
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The Warren Commission has fulfilled its primary assignment. It has tried, as a servant of history, to discover truth.

But the assassination of President Kennedy was so symbolic of human irony and tragedy, and so involved in the complicated and elemental conflicts of the age, that many vital questions remain, and the philosopher, novelist and dramatist will have to take it from here.

The commission has not concluded the Kennedy mystery so much as it has opened up a whole new chapter in the Kennedy Legend.

ACHIEVEMENT

It has provided the greatest repository of presidential political history, drama and fiction since the murder of Lincoln, and since legend is often more powerful than history, this may be the commission's most significant achievement.

Now the central mystery of who killed the President has been answered by the commission only in the process of raising a new catalogue of mysteries.

Now the main characters in the play have been surrounded by a host of new characters, each of whom appears briefly at a critical moment with some vital testimony, only to disappear without our really knowing much about who they are.

MYSTERY

The whole story is full of the mystery of life. Lee Harvey Oswald's motive for murdering the President remains obscure. The distinguished members of the commission and their staff obviously gave up on it.

The "might-have-beens" are maddening. If only he had been given that visa to go to Cuba and thence to the Soviet Union just before the assassination! If he had not been allowed to come back from there in the first place!

Who was "the neighbor" whose suggestion got him the job in the Texas School Book Depository, from where he shot the President? And what were the details of Oswald's attempted suicide in Moscow?

The wild accidents are equally intriguing. There is, for example the case of Mrs. Mary Bledsoe, who rented Oswald a room in Dallas and then, on a 10,000-to-1 chance, just happened to be on the bus he boarded when he was running away from the crime.

YEARNINGS

Then there are the consoling yearnings and kindnesses in the midst of tragedy: Ruth Paine, who was also "alienated" and "isolated," and frustrated, like Oswald, but who nevertheless "befriended" Marina Oswald in her trouble. And there was Marina Oswald herself, who seems to have been "very angry" with her husband when he was using assumed names and doing other things that apparently affronted her sense of right and wrong.

Finally, there was even Oswald himself leaving his wedding ring and his last \$170 on the dresser at home before he went to work on the morning of the murder.

Who sent Oswald from Moscow to Minsk? Why was he allowed to return to the U.S. with a State Department loan? All we have are glimpses of these intriguing things.

BACKDROP

The whole story is not only beyond the journalists but beyond most historians as well. The backdrop is the conflict of the age: The clash

of nations and philosophies in the last half of the 20th Century; the atmosphere of intrigue; the struggle of personalities, of men and women, of ideologies and regions within the United States.

And all this, of course, centering on the family of the President — itself a saga of triumph and tragedy.

There are no pictures of Booth murdering Lincoln, or of any of the other high tragedies of American political life. But the story of this one is now on record and on film: Of Jacqueline Kennedy in that unspeakable moment of horror, scrambling onto the back of the car in Dallas; of Ruby murdering Oswald, and finally, of Jacqueline Kennedy claiming her husband at last in death.

'THE FACTS'

All this reveals more than either President Johnson or the Warren Commission intended. Mr. Johnson's instruction to Chief Justice Earl Warren and his commission was to "satisfy itself that the truth is known so far as it can be discovered."

Mr. Johnson was not thinking of the long future. He was disturbed by the conspiratorial speculations about the assassination in Europe.

He was merely trying to get at the facts. He was not thinking of perpetuating the Kennedy Legend — indeed, ironically, it was difficult for him to govern effectively so long as the nation was preoccupied with the Kennedy story — but in calling for "the facts" he was summed up a drama which will intrigue the nation long after the historians have agreed on President Kennedy's place in history.