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GUY WRIGHT

An Official Version of Folktale

It's now clear that the report of the Warren Commission won't change many minds.

Those who were predisposed to believe that Lee Oswald and Jack Ruby were misfits, each acting alone, will find the report reasonable and convincing.

Those who suspected otherwise will continue to doubt.

This is no reflection on the report itself, but merely a commentary on human nature.

Retired Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, the right-wing firebrand who was listed as an earlier target of Oswald's rifle, denounced the report as a whitewash.

"There's bound to have been a plot," he declared.

AT THE OTHER extreme is Mark Lane, the New York lawyer who appointed himself Oswald's posthumous defense attorney. Lane called the report a "tranquillizer" and insisted that on its evidence, "Oswald would have been acquitted."

It's doubtful that either the general or the lawyer had read the 888-page, 296,000-word report when he spoke. Yet each—for diametrically different reasons—felt qualified to dismiss it.

Hardly more logical was the attitude of Robert F. Kennedy. He said he hadn't read the report and didn't intend to read it—but was "completely satisfied" with it.

LESS THAN SATISFIED was Marguerite Oswald, the dead man's mother. Banging her fist on a copy of the report, she declared: "I can tear this book apart . . . I'm going to make fools of them."

Then come the minor characters, each with his ax to grind.



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Melvin Belli liked the report because it said Oswald couldn't have received a fair trial in Dallas. Belli interpreted that as support for his own contention that Ruby couldn't get a fair trial there either.

On the other hand, Dallas Mayor Erik Jonsson hailed the report as exonerating his city of "hate" charges.

ALL THESE CONFLICTING evaluations of the report are perhaps better understood if we recall the parable about the three blind men describing the elephant.

(Even Gov. John B. Connally disagreed with the report on which of the shots hit him.)

It's likely that the Warren Commission gave Oswald a fairer trial than he would have received had he lived. But he didn't live. He wasn't present to face his accusers.

And so the Warren report cannot have the validity of a jury verdict. Oswald must remain the "alleged" assassin.

THE WARREN REPORT meets a national need of the present. It provides an official version of a folktale, a punctuation point for a drama left dangling. What history will make of it no one can say.

John Wilkes Booth is remembered because Abraham Lincoln was a great President. But no one remembers who killed Garfield or McKinley, or the investigations that followed their assassinations.

So it will be with Oswald and the Warren report. Whether they are remembered or forgotten by future generations will depend entirely on the measure that history takes of John F. Kennedy.