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THE FAILURE OF THE WARREN REPORT

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THE WARREN COMMISSION (known formally as the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy) was born of rampaging suspicions and worldwide controversy. It was charged "to evaluate all the facts and circumstances" surrounding the assassination, "to satisfy itself that the truth is known as far as it can be discovered," and thus to satisfy everyone else. For a season, the task seemed accomplished. The Commission's Report was generally received, in this country at least, with rhapsodic relief. The few remaining voices of dissent sounded increasingly remote and implausible, and there was every apparent prospect that they too would finally be still. Yet today, two years after the publication of the Report, new voices of dissent are heard, and it has become clear that far from having "satisfied itself that the truth is known," the Commission scarcely even evaluated "all the facts and circumstances."

The Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor John B. Connally of Texas, then left the scene of this crime, encountered Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit and shot him also, and after his capture was himself killed by Jack Ruby, who had no other connection with the affair. Oswald, according to the Commission, fired three bullets from a perch at the sixth-floor window on the southeast side of the Texas School Book Depository Building, and inflicted the following wounds:

- (1) President Kennedy was first struck by a bullet which entered at the back of his neck and exited through the lower front portion of his neck, causing a wound which would not necessarily have been lethal. The President was struck a second time by a bullet which entered the right rear portion of his head causing a massive and fatal wound.
- (2) Governor Connally was struck by a bullet which entered on the right side of his back and travelled downward through the right side of his chest, exiting below his right nipple. This bullet then passed through his right wrist and entered his left thigh where it caused a superficial wound.

Concerning the distribution of Oswald's three

shots on his targets, the Warren Commission said:

Although it is not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission to determine just which shot hit Governor Connally, there is very persuasive evidence from the experts to indicate that the same bullet which pierced the President's throat also caused Governor Connally's wounds. However, Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some difference of opinion as to this probability but there is no question in the mind of any member of the Commission that all the shots which caused the President's and Governor Connally's wounds were fired from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.

The "difference of opinion" about the "probability" that the same bullet pierced the President's throat and inflicted all of Governor Connally's wounds—this difference of opinion, it now turns out, divided the Commission itself, and was rather stronger than the word "some" suggests. In interviews with five of the seven Commission members, on which he reports in his book, *Inquest*,* Edward Jay Epstein found that Commissioners Gerald R. Ford, Allen W. Dulles, and John J. McCloy believed that one bullet had gone through both President Kennedy and Governor Connally, while Commissioners Richard B. Russell, John Sherman Cooper, and Hale Boggs were unpersuaded, and tended to the view that two separate bullets had inflicted the President's first wound and the injuries to Governor Connally. (The position of Chief Justice Warren is not known.)

Before Mr. Epstein's book was published, virtually everyone who commented in print accepted the Commission's assurance that it was "not necessary to any essential findings" to choose between the one-bullet and two-bullet hypotheses. But the choice the commission failed to make is, in truth, essential. The assassination of President Kennedy was recorded on motion-picture film by a bystander, Mr. Abraham Zapruder. The film shows the President reacting to a first wound, it shows Governor Connally reacting to a wound, and it unmistakably records the fatal hit to the President's head. Motion-picture film comes, of course, in frames, and a camera can be timed to determine how many frames will run through it

per second. The Zapruder camera operates at 18.3 frames a second. Since certain landmarks show on have a car like President Kennedy's limousine

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*Viking, 224 pp., \$5.00.