PS1 for 12/1/88#THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION

For those of us who lived through the dramatic events of November 22, 1963, the many recent television programs revisiting the Kennedy assassination had a morbid fascination. There still are, as Walter Cronkite opined in his PBS documentary, an abundance of ""contradictions and unresolved doubts.''

Cronkite's documentary was entitled ""Who Shot President Kennedy?'' There isn't much dispute about the answer to that question; it's rather clear that Lee Harvey Oswald fired the bullet. The real question is not one that can be answered by the acoustical, ballistic, forensic, or photographic techniques displayed so admirably with TV's precise simulations, but is, why did the Warren Commission close the door so firmly on an investigation of Oswald's associates?

The various 25th anniversary programs diverted the public's attention away from this general question to a much narrower one: was there another gunman? But co-conspirators don't have to be gunmen. They can also be the mastermind who plots the deed, the driver of the getaway car, or a variety of other accomplices who assist the outcome or benefit by it.

In 1963, the immediate reaction of the liberal media was to blame the assassination of John F. Kennedy on ""an atmosphere of hate'' supposedly created by conservatives, or ""right-wingers,'' ""bigots'' and ""extremists.'' Conservatives escaped the burden of guilt that the liberals were cooking up for them only by the fortuitous arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald, whose Communist credentials were undeniable.

In 1959, Oswald appeared at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, renounced his American citizenship and told officials, ""I am a Marxist.'' On November 2 that year, Oswald turned in his American passport and in an affidavit declared, ""I affirm that my allegiance is to the Soviet Socialist Republic.''

Oswald married a Russian woman and in February 1962 was allowed to return to the United States with his wife and their child. When arrested on November 22, 1963, he gave a Communist clenched fist salute, boasted that he was a Communist and a Marxist, and promptly requested John Abt to be his lawyer, a man who had been affiliated with many Communist causes.

In the months before he took his decisive action from the Texas Book Depository in Dallas, Oswald had numerous contacts with Castroist Communists. Instead of setting out to do an investigation of all who might have been connected to the murder, the Warren Commission set out to convince the public that Oswald was a loner and, above all, could not possibly have been part of any conspiracy.

So, the Warren Commission announced that President Kennedy was killed by a single bullet fired by a single gunman named Lee Harvey Oswald, that Jack Ruby acted alone in killing Lee Harvey Oswald, and that there was no conspiracy of any kind involving either man. That verdict was incredible then and has grown even less credible with the passing years.

A 25th anniversary New York Times/CBS News Poll found that 66 percent of Americans believe there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, as against only 13 percent who believe that Oswald alone was responsible. The poll also discovered that 61 percent agree that there has been an ""official coverup to keep the public from learning the truth about the Kennedy assassination.''

Why didn't the media address themselves to investigating the coverup? It was interesting to learn on Cronkite's PBS documentary that the man who did the autopsy of President Kennedy's body had never before done an autopsy of anyone killed by a bullet, but it would be more interesting to learn why THAT man did the autopsy instead of

someone competent, or why there was no second examination.

The anniversary program we would have rather seen would have been an investigation of the Warren Commission's coverup of the evidence of a conspiracy. What we really want to know is, why didn't the Warren Commission investigate those ""contradictions and unresolved doubts'' while the trail was fresh and memories were vivid?

I must admit that I didn't vote for John F. Kennedy in 1960 and I was never a fan of either his style or his substance. But I believe that his untimely death was a tragedy for America. Most of the problems that the wild and radical 1960s inflicted on America would not have come about had he lived out his term.

When Lyndon Johnson suddenly succeeded to the Presidency, he tried to guarantee his election in 1964 by a program to out-military and out-liberal his predecessor. LBJ's precipitous action at the Gulf of Tonkin plunged us into the Vietnam War, and his ""Great Society'' so drastically increased domestic spending that it changed the entire character of our relationship to government.

If John F. Kennedy had escaped the assassin's bullet, Americans probably would not have suffered either the Vietnam War (and the divisiveness it produced) or the vast growth in the numbers of Americans kept in dependency by the expectation of handouts originated in LBJ's Great Society.