NEW YORK — If there is a residue of doubt in your mind about the truth of the Warren Report on the assassination of President Kennedy, I'd suggest you scrutinize the report's best-known detractors.

First, way to do that is let Richard Warren Lewis and Lawrence Schiller assist you. Their book, "The Scavengers and Critics of the Warren Report," published simultaneously in hard and soft cover by Dell, thoroughly debunks the probes who have gained fame and fortune while riding on JFK's coattails.

They interviewed and deposed Mark Lane, Edward Jay Epstein, Harold Weisberg, Peter Jones, Jr., Mrs. Sylvia Meagher, Mort Sahl, Mrs. Shirley Martin, Mrs. Maggile Field, Vincent Salandria, Harold Feldman, Leo Sauvage and half a dozen others who have made a living, peddling suspicion of the Warren Report. Their assessment of these persons should shatter all the credence their works and lectures have acquired.

One of the critics, George C. Thomson of Glendale, Calif., an engineer by trade, assured the authors of "The Scavengers" that he can prove that 22 bullets were fired in the course of the assassination — under the direction of Lyndon B. Johnson! — but that President Kennedy wasn't even there. His place in the presidential limousine had been taken by a stand-in (officer J. D. Tippit). JFK is still alive, Thomson contended, to the Messrs. Lewis and Schiller, and made his most recent public appearance at Truman Capote's masked ball.

Gives you an idea of what can be hawked in the wake of a national tragedy.

"THE SCAVENGERS and Critics of the Warren Report" would be a handy book to have around, next time somebody bugs you for believing steadfastly that there was no conspiracy to kill Kennedy and no reason to doubt that the FBI and the Secret Service did a better job investigating the matter than Jay, Mark Lane or Jim Garrison.

JACK WHEELER, a giant in our business for a long time, sets me straight on a recent piece about Dick Merrill, the pioneering airline pilot. I had Dick shooting dice on the floor of a DC-3 trying to make a four (preferably the hard way), while the plane grape'd its way through a storm in search of New York.

"The crap game took place on a DC-3 all right, but it was not a scheduled flight," Jack wrote. "It was the year Omaha won the Kentucky Derby in 1935. Ben Smith, known in Wall Street as 'Sell Jim Short Smith,' and Stanley Kahn had chartered the plane from Eastern Airlines and invited a lot of sports to travel to Louisville and back as their guests. Yours truly was in the group.

"Bessy Aylesworth, then head of NBC, had a ball time at the races. He was fuddled off Omaha and bet on Nellie Flag, and went from bad to worse, financially. He rode to the airport with me in a taxi, and on the way stopped to buy some dice, hoping to recover his fortune. The weather that night was very bad and the regular commercial planes were not flying. However, we took off."

"We are going to fly with the angels," Capt. Eddie Rick, enounced at take-off time.

"Once airborne, the crap game started. I was in it for awhile, until Ben Smith said, 'Dick's put a little life in the game — I'll bet $500.' I remarked that I was sleepy and thought I would go back and read awhile. I managed to depart with the $75 I was ahead — without a protest.

"After a while I looked down the aisle at the game and saw that Dick Merrill, our pilot, was in it. It occurred to me it would be just my bad luck to have been a winner and have the plane fall down. Dick lost a substantial amount by the time he had to take over the controls and land us safely in Newark. Because of Dick's popularity, among Carter, Smith and the rest, except Wheeler, went to Mr. Carter's suite in the Pierre Hotel to continue the gambling. Merrill made a good recovery."

(Hearse Headlines Service)