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Assassination Skepticism Reaches Full Tide Again

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

Assassination of President John Kennedy

These days, on the college circuit, you are asked with great regularity, "Do you believe that the Warren Commission has been discredited?" The skepticism appears to reach a very full tide about every three years.

What provides the doubt this time was the showing of the Zapruder film on television. I have not seen it, but everyone who has done so will tell you with great conviction that the impact of the lethal bullet came unequivocally from ahead: So that we are back to the Grassy Knoll, the world's most wanted killer.

To the questioners, I reply: "The Warren Commission was composed of a panel of eight men. When one of them steps forward to say that in the light of new evidence he is convinced that the Commission should be reconstituted, my ears will flare up: and I shall spend whatever time a conscientious citizen should spend looking into the notion of res adjudicata: the answerd question. To begin to doubt everything is, often, less a quest for truth, than an act of vanity, or a venture in iconoclasm."

Most recently we heard the Rev. Jesse Jackson say that he was no longer convinced that Dr. Martin Luther King was shot down by James Earl Ray. By whom, then? Brace yourself: by the CIA and the FBI. If this were true, it would undoubtedly be unique in history as an act in which the CIA and the FBI actually managed to coordinate.

Jesse Jackson's charge, coming from a man of considerable intellect and restraint, is foolish, and prejudicial to serious revisionist inquiry — by persuading the public at large that the protesters are ideologists on the historical make.

Which brings us to the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy. Mr. Allard Lowenstein, the lawyer, politician, author, and reformer, who is given to turning the pages of progress from right

to left, has emerged as the leader of a movement to re-examine the question whether Sirhan Sirhan actually killed Robert Kennedy.

He was recently asked: "How much difference, actually, does it make? What if it happens that some other person fired the lethal shot? No one doubts that Sirhan Sirhan was there, firing at Kennedy and attempting his assassination?"

Answers Mr. Lowenstein. "Because that other assassin, quite apart from our desire to find him and punish him, could reveal a network of backers who planned Robert Kennedy's assassination. If such a body of men exists, capable of frustrating American democracy and getting away with it, it is the sovereign responsibility of the Republic to find it out."

Such is fantasy. But it happens that Mr. Lowenstein has detected anomalies in the State's case. These are not, in my offhand opinion, the stuff on the basis of which one reverses one's judgment.

But what is singular about them is that the mere firing of one bullet from Sirhan's gun could conceivably put them to rest. The Los Angeles prosecutor declines to fire the gun, on the grounds that the ballistics experts could then still be disagreed about the fatal bullet's provenance, leaving the personal guilt of Sirhan as though it was attached to perpetual historical ambiguity.

Lowenstein replies that, on the contrary, at least by firing the gun the police might rescue their case from where it now sits — precisely in perpetual doubt. My own feeling is that Mr. Lowenstein's advocacy of the double gun theory alone makes it serious and worth examining.

He is a responsible man, distinctly of another breed from the Mark Lapes. I hope he will prevail in Los Angeles.

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