

The
Assassination
Of
President
Kennedy

An End

Or A

Beginning?

By unanimous resolution
of the Board of Directors,
Metropolitan Crime Commission
of New Orleans, Inc., in meeting
on November 26, 1963, pub-
lication was ordered of this
statement prepared and pre-
sented by Managing Director
Aaron M. Kohn.

METROPOLITAN CRIME COMMISSION

of New Orleans, Inc.
1107 National Bank of Commerce Bldg.
New Orleans, La. 70112

A nonpartisan organization of citizens, voluntarily financed, fulfilling citizen responsibilities in law enforcement and the administration of justice.

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The Assassination of President Kennedy

An End or a Beginning?

On November 22, 1963, riding through the streets of a great American city justly boastful of thriving growth and wealth, the President of all the people of the United States appeared stimulated by the acclaim at a Fort Worth gathering, and by those who had cheered him along the way.

In Dallas, en route to address a large luncheon group awaiting his arrival, the President must have experienced some anxiety because of the incidents of hatred and violence which had accompanied an earlier visit of his appointed Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson. With maximum possible protection of an alert Secret Service, President John F. Kennedy, unlike the reigning heads of some other nations, exhibited that sense of freedom which is shared as natural right by Americans as he was transported in an open car exposed to public view and to the calculating eye of a hidden assassin.

One man, one gun, one bullet shattered the brain which had been dedicated to the solution of our nation's, and the world's, problems. The uncivilized act shocked all Americans into awareness of the over-riding importance of the President of the United States; an importance which, even in those who disagreed vigorously with his policies and beliefs, suddenly su-

perceded all other feelings, all other considerations.

One man, one gun, one bullet overruled the decision of the majority of voters of this nation who had chosen John F. Kennedy to be Chief Executive of their country, to direct its destinies for four years.

The heavy weight of sorrow and personal loss, and of sympathy for the President's wife and family, for most people was accompanied by a sweeping disbelief that our nation's chosen leader and spokesman could be so swiftly, so unexpectedly, so wantonly destroyed as a vital human being.

In varying ways each of us sensed that his death was, in part, our's. There was some measure of reassurance in the essential decency and justice of most persons, for relatively few reacted with spontaneous rage or desire for vengeance against the assassin. Rather there was a querulous reaching out for understanding of the motivations leading to this abominable act of destruction by one human being against another.

It is hard to know when the emotions of mourning and shock and, perhaps a vaguely undefinable feeling of shared guilt, will drift into the background of experience. Certainly no one who knew the impact of the assassination, of the almost simultaneous shooting of Texas Governor John B. Connally, and of the tragically bizarre occurrences in the minutes and days which followed, will ever forget. And recorded history will remind those who follow us.

No murder occurs without cause, al-

though irrational to others. Each killer is motivated by some force or combination of influences which leads to his act of destruction.

The life of assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was taken by another ruthless killing just two days after his arrest, thus limiting the possibilities for fullest possible understanding of the twisted motivations for committing his immeasurable crime. Certainly the efficiency and resources of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ultimately will make known more than is now available to understand the reasons why this man had appointed himself executioner of President Kennedy and of democratic decision.

But enough is now known of the crime and of the accused criminal to lend emphasis to unresolved problems in our community out of which arise the stimuli for so appalling an act. Lee Oswald, to the degree that we now know of his background and activities, was what many people dismiss as an "oddball" or "crackpot", if they give attention to him at all. In the lives of most of us we have contacts with persons whom, because of unrelenting hatred or abnormal pattern of conduct, we avoid as being in these categories. Such individuals exist in every community.

The heinous acts which occurred in Dallas on November 22, 1963, and in the days immediately thereafter, could have transpired in any American city.

Unfortunately, no large community is free of that lunatic-fringe which is endowed with intelligence, impelled by hate

and capable of murder. Nor is any city free of persons who believe themselves beyond the law.

Our nation of peoples has been swept by the emotional impact of President Kennedy's tragic death. If it is to have meaning beyond temporary sympathy and shock, if from it shall be constructed a monument of greater wisdom, then the interment of his remains must stimulate widespread dedication to the solution of those problems which contributed to his death.

For the living, there is an obligation to search out those problems, and those solutions.

There is need to examine exhaustively the short life of Lee Oswald, to determine the influences which led to his abandonment of faith in our system of government and justice, in their stead his acceptance of the philosophy of Marxism, and the eventual conviction that fulfillment of his life goals required the taking of the lives of others.

There is need for evaluation of growing American cynicism towards the political processes and orderly government by law; to face squarely the implications of a popular wise-guy attitude which is titillated by "putting things over" in technical violation of the law. Among other alarming products of such attitudes has been tolerance of the growth of organized crime and racketeering into America's biggest business and one of its most influential forces in shaping the course and character of political government.

Citizens everywhere, community leaders and public officials must generate themselves, and stimulate in others, a demand

for integrity in the law enforcement processes. It is the awareness for this need to which our Crime Commission gives impetus - but not enough.

Each murderer in the Dallas tragedy acted as jury, prosecutor, judge and executioner outside the law. And the histories of both accused killers indicate that they were conditioned to disrespect law and its orderly procedures:

Lee Harvey Oswald during 1954 and 1955 attended Beauregard Junior High School in New Orleans, where other students frequently were in conflict with police. He then resided with his mother in a dingy apartment at 128 Exchange Alley, a narrow street extending one block from the main business thoroughfare of Canal Street, to the Iberville Street boundary of the French Quarter.

Their substandard living quarters were above a pool hall, where Oswald is reported to have taken his one close schoolmate, a hangout for gamblers. The bleak street which he called home was occupied also by sordidly operated bars, including some in which aggressive homosexuals and prostitutes were frequenters and others the scene of operations for illegal hookies. This also was when New Orleans Police officers, as part of their corrupt practices, could readily be observed patronizing or on friendly terms with vice and gambling joints.

It is of special interest that Oswald was impressing his school teachers with outstanding performance in the study of civics. As he was being taught the theory of responsible government, in the same teen years he was surrounded by cynical evidences of its betrayal.

Leon Rubinstein, better known as

Jack Ruby, the killer of Oswald, had previously indicated his attitude towards law as reflected by a police record of carrying concealed weapons and aggravated assault. For those who understand how profits are derived from operation of a strip-tease joint, Ruby's means of livelihood gives further emphasis to his disdain for functioning within the law. And his disrespect for symbols of law enforcement is appallingly revealed in reports of his hospitality and generosity to some Dallas Police officers and, most important, their acceptance of him as host.

Can it be dismissed solely as coincidence that both accused assassins were exposed to tolerated community conditions which bespoke the rejection of law and acceptance of corruption?

Remembering the ease of Lee Oswald's acquisition of the rifle which destroyed our President and seriously injured Governor Connally; remembering that he also acquired the pistol with which he killed Dallas Policeman J. D. Tippitt and attempted the murder of one of the officers who later apprehended him; recalling that Dallas night club operator and police character Jack Ruby was able to possess and carry the gun with which Oswald was killed in police custody, we must come to grips with, and bring about, far more stringent screening of persons before they are authorized to sell, purchase or possess firearms.

For many years law enforcement officials have emphasized the need for more cautious weapon controls. Proposals in our legislative bodies, for such increased regulation, are invariably met with solid,

well-organized opposition from sports-
men's organizations, which understandably
feel that such requirements would impose
hardships upon them. They must recognize
that some additional inconvenience is a
small price to pay for reducing, to any
degree, the frequency with which deadly
weapons reach the hands of deadly per-
sons.

Several years ago a man in his mid-
twenties came to the Metropolitan Crime
Commission office, placed a loaded, small
caliber pistol on the Managing Director's
desk, sat down and cried. He stated that
because of a long-festering bitterness
against alleged injustices of a former boss,
he decided to kill him. Having no dis-
qualifying police record, he had no dif-
ficulty securing a permit to purchase a
gun, which he did, with murder his sole
objective. In his particular case it did
not happen. His gun was purchased in a
shop on Rampart Street, perhaps the same
one where Oswald had observed a .45
caliber pistol which he had planned to steal
until his schoolmate, in whom he confided,
pointed out the burglary detection system.

Greater attention must be given to the
related problems of mental health and
crimes of violence. In New Orleans, as
in every major city, there is a lunatic-
fringe, combining intelligence with dis-
torted emotions. Some of them become
identifiable through active evidences of
destructive hate. Which of them is in-
capable of duplicating the shocking acts of
Oswald and Ruby?

Also we must thoroughly evaluate the

merits and demerits of capital punishment as a penalty prescribed by society. As a self-governing people, do we thus create a culture in which killing is acceptable punishment for wrongdoing? Do we plant the seed of logic for independent action by the self-appointed judge and executioner, when taking of human life is considered responsibly-arrived-at decision in the criminal law? Especially with statistical studies failing to establish capital punishment as a deterrent to capital crimes, is the policy of destroying life, in the name of justice, a proper one for civilized society?

We amass national resources of money, skills, public opinion and manpower to compete with foreign and abhorrent ideologies. With these resources we also challenge and overcome the mysteries of outer space.

There is perhaps a greater and more important challenge presented in stark reality by the tragic recent events in Dallas; that we must dedicate more of our resources to the task of closing the gap between philosophy and fact in the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" - to make equal justice under law prevail.

Many of the ingredients of this challenge are now discouraging or disillusioning to those who seek to make democracy work:

widespread demand for increased government services accompanied by clamor against the cost, the scramble to pluck fruits from the tree of democ-

easy while evading responsibility for
nourishing its roots;

corrupting pressures on government
officials and agencies for special
privileges;

lack of individual and group indignation
in reaction to corrupt practices
in government, business and organized
labor;

spreading trend of court decisions to
impose excessive restraints on police
in dealing with serious crimes, as in
the "exclusionary rule" which prohibits
seizure of evidence of a crime if a
warrant fails to anticipate such
evidence will be found, or the Mallery
rule which ignores the difficulties of
investigation as it clamps a too-tight
lid on confessions;

the growing tide of crime in the U.S.,
with inattention to the needs of law
enforcement agencies, which almost
everywhere are undermanned, under-
equipped and underpaid;

the arrogant posture of organized crime
and racketeering in the American scene,
met with timid and inadequate legis-
lation at the national level, largely
ignored at state and local lawmaking
levels;

the crime-deterrent value, and de-
cency, of "speedy justice", too often
lost in technical or unjustified post-
ponements of trials;

judges more concerned with partisan
politics than with impartial justice;

unprofessional parole and pardon pro-
cedures which return unreformed crim-
inals to destructive careers;

prisons unequipped to accomplish
their assigned task;

communities unready to help ex-convicts
find their way in useful society.

These and many more are gaps to be filled to advance law and order, and to stimulate "government of laws, not of men" as our way of life, bringing vital reality to the inscription on the courthouse facade.

On November 22nd our President, John F. Kennedy, and police officer J. D. Tippitt were both engaged in performance of their duties when fatally struck down by an assassin. The living, in the future performance of citizen and official duties, will determine whether national mourning is shortlived sentiment, or the beginning of dedication to correcting those conditions which mold the atmosphere of evaded responsibility in which these heinous crimes occurred.

THE END
or
THE BEGINNING?