

THE BOOK REPORT

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Violent-Prone Backgrounds of Oswald and Ruby Probed

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"Dangerousness may be defined as a psychological and psychosocial state characterized by signs and symptoms which make it probable that a certain individual might engage in an assaultive or homicidal act in the near or far future."

Renatus Hartogs, MD, Ph.D., chief psychiatrist for the New York City Detention House for Juvenile Delinquents, who wrote these words, has been concerned with the problem of the violence-prone child for many years. And it was he who diagnosed a young truant named Lee Harvey Oswald in 1953, urgently recommended psychiatric help which was, as it turned out, never obtained.

More than 30 years before, in Chicago another young truant who was later known by the name of Jack Ruby was the subject of similar interviews and a change in home environment was urgently recommended for him. He was described as quick-tempered, disobedient, destructive and incorrigible.

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These two are the subjects of THE TWO ASSASSINS (Crowell: \$5.95) by Dr. Hartogs and Lucy Freeman. It is a careful study, taken mainly from the Warren Commission testimony and report, of the confused and violent background of the man held to be the assassin of President Kennedy and the man who killed the



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social and organic factors, he concludes:

suspected assassin.

There is no effort to rationalize the crimes, but rather to learn what may be useful in predicting and perhaps preventing other such violence. In hindsight, there were clear signposts which indicated the potential homicides. Both, we know now, had land-mine personalities, waiting to be triggered by the combination of pressure and confluence which kills out the explosive transaction.

The authors, and particularly Dr. Hartogs who, in one of the appendices spells out his theories of the prediction of violent-proneness, are careful to suggest that much more needs to be understood about this complex question before effective social prevention can be realized. After discussing the character, development,

"While these factors can direct our attention to the potentially dangerous individual, they can naturally not explain why a given individual in a given situation passes from a mere state of homicidal inclination and preoccupation into a state of destructive action and destruction.

"The answer to this crucial question may perhaps be found in our assumption, that, in order to act, the potentially dangerous individual must have entered into a highly explosive state of identity crisis in which only one defense against anxiety, identity conflict, and sexual panic is immediately available, namely assaultive or murderous action."

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The emphasis of these commentators is psychoanalytical and there is an accent on early traumatic relationships. One does not have to accept the theory in toto to recognize the crucial causes in parental relationships and psychosexual conflicts. It is, of course, impossible to know whether the change to a foster home would have eliminated or ameliorated the violent potential, but the possibility certainly was there.

At the core is the disturbing truth that without therapeutic and rehabilitative efforts, the high de-

gree of dangerousness remains, even though it may go underground in the psyche. The explosive mixture not only waits "certain trigger conditions" but, Dr. Hartogs suggests, may lead as time elapses "to an increasing destructive action-potential."

He writes, "Violent strivings such as we were able to observe in Oswald and Ruby tend to consolidate themselves and become overfocussed. Vengeful schemes and plans can be elaborated in greater detail . . . thus facilitating the ultimate, inevitable advent of catastrophic aggression."

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In this sense, the authors conclude that it would be a mistake to assume that the assassinations were completely accidental. Though the surface lives of the two assassins were dissimilar, the forces beneath were strikingly similar: both men were psychological outcasts, obsessed by overwhelming inner fear and fury, lacked form fathers, were truant, were egocentric, were rootless.

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