



A French view of Texas after the killings

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'MAY GOD FORGIVE DALLAS'

"In the name of God, what kind of city have we become?" In shame and outrage, the Rev. William Holmes of Dallas asked the question last week. America wondered, and so did the rest of the world.

Whatever else the city was, it had become, in history, the place where John Fitzgerald Kennedy was cut down by an assassin. Was this a mere fluke of fate unrelated to the character of the city? Or had some dark streak in the city's temper been hospitable to such a fluke?

"This should not reflect on the image or character of Dallas," said Councilman Carie Welch soon after the assassination. "There were too many sincere people extending Mr. Kennedy a warm greeting, filling the streets, standing along the roadways, cheering from office windows. I challenge anybody who says that this act reflects the character of the people of Dallas." Mayor Earle Cabell, pointing out that Oswald was not a permanent resident of Dallas, added: "There are maniacs all over the world and in every city of the world. This was a maniac. It could have happened in Podunk as well as in Dallas."

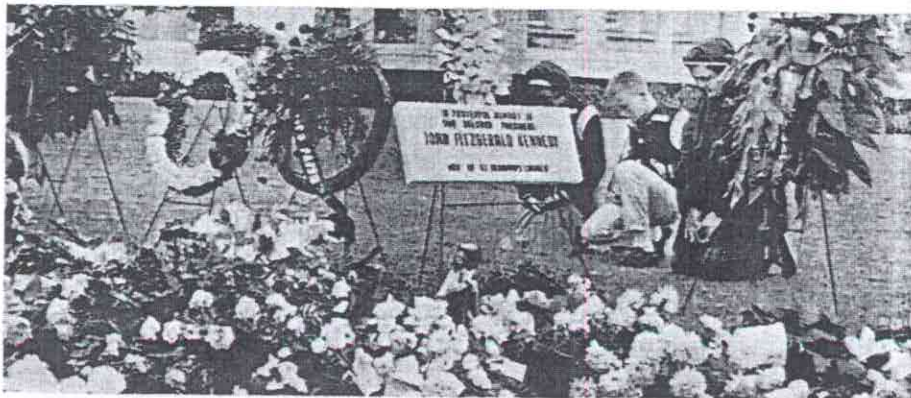
But it happened in Dallas. And even as the world weighed the truth in the city fathers' words, something else

happened in Dallas: Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald.

Still, it was not the bloodletting alone that shook the conscience of the Reverend Holmes, pastor of Dallas' Northaven Methodist Church. "Dallas, Holmes told a national television audience, "is the city where fourth-grade children in a North Dallas public school clapped and cheered when their teacher told them of the assassination of the President here last Friday afternoon.

On the day of the assassination, The Dallas Morning News printed a full page ad "welcoming" the President with such questions as "Why have you ordered . . . the Attorney General to go soft on Communism . . .?" The ad was signed "Bernard Weissman, the American Fact-Finding Committee." Last week Weissman and "committee" had left town. On the same day, unsigned handbills bearing the President's picture and the legend "Wanted for Treason" circulated on two Dallas college campuses.

In an emotional indictment of his city, Holmes stuck to a factual bill of particulars. "Dallas," he said, "is a city where three years ago Vice President and Mrs. Johnson were spat upon and cursed by a seething crowd in the lobby of one of our hotels . . . where hundreds of our citizens continually in



Assassination site: Dallasites placed flowers in tribute and guilt

UPI

interrupted an address by Ambassador
Adlai E. Stevenson on the 29th evening
the auditorium Mr. Stevenson was struck
with a sign and spat upon."

Few seemed to recall it, oddly, but
Dallas was also the city where only
last April an unseen rifleman fired a
.30-06 slug through a window at former
Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker as he
worked at his desk one night. The at-
tempted murder of Walker failed only
by a hair. The sniper was never caught.
Fanaticism: These recent acts of dis-
order and violence in Dallas stand dis-
tinct from the lawlessness and crime
that breed in all cities. These acts have
been political. The attempted slaying
of Walker, a militant right-winger
snacked of political fanaticism no less
than the slaying of a President. Lesse
symptoms of political extremism abound
in recent Dallas history. Last spring
someone plastered a swastika emblem
over downtown stores owned by Jews.
Did the crude tradition of the
West's swift six-gun justice play a part
and what of the casual violence that
permeates the mass media and U.S.
life itself? These questions trouble
Americans and foreigners alike. A col-
umnist in the London Evening Standard
commented soberly: "It has been a
shock to most English people to dis-
cover that the trigger-happy philosophy
of the Western movie is still tragically
a part of American life today."

Glorious Yarns: But abroad, as in the
U.S., it was easy to miss the main point
about Big D. One of the biggest cities
of the Southwest, it is neither Southern
nor Western in character. Its traditions
do not stem from glorious yarns of
cowboys and Indians and longhorns and
Alamos but from the threads of com-
merce. Dallas became a trading center
upon its founding in 1841 and, with
industry hampered by a short water
supply, it remains one today; its business
is business.

Business is also its politics. Since the
middle 1930s Dallas has been run by
an oligarchy of businessmen who main-
tain tight control over government. By
dynamic and effective in promoting the
growth of the city (population zoomed
from 295,000 in 1940 to 750,000 today).
Dallas leaders nonetheless infused the
city's political climate with the business-
man's native conservatism. The leader
display no leaning to extremism; they
decided Dallas schools would desegre-
gate and the transition occurred in 1961
without a murmur, building a city "in
image" that would help business.

The natural conservatism of a white
collar, businessman's city has deepened
and hardened in recent years—a trend
encouraged genteelly by the local news
papers and militantly by the paid-for
propaganda of such multimillionaires as

H.L. Hunt, angel-billed uranium rights
38 Boston 2.0 1970 the most about 500

He must have asked somebody."

Miss Conforto's irony is not far from the truth. "I feel so guilty," says Ruby's sister, Mrs. Eva Grant. "My brother and I saw Oswald on TV, and we both agreed he looked like a creep. I said, 'Don't worry. Someone will shoot him'." Ruby had been arrested several times on minor offenses, yet he hung around the Dallas Police Station like a punchy fighter hanging around a gym. "You know," said cops with hint of a second meaning, "he had to stay friendly with police. He had to keep his license."

At the police station on Saturday, he passed out calling cards, showing a leggy nude in black silk stockings, to everyone including District Attorney Henry Wade. He played a bit part during the district attorney's press conference, supplying an answer about Dallas geography. Jack Ruby was bringing to a climax the career of the most fateful kibitzer of all time.

The American: His own sister cannot help talking about him in a mixture of praise and inadvertent satire. "Jack was very religious," she says. "When our father died he went to the temple every morning and said the Kaddish every morning for a year." But then she can add: "Once when we lived in San Francisco we had about \$200 in the bank. Jack took \$80 out and bet against Barney Ross. Ross knocked out his opponent and Jack fainted. They carried him out the same time they carried Ross's opponent out." Ruby's final act was the perfect synthesis of his molasses and brass-knuckles character. His lawyer, Tom Howard, a garish, diamond-stickpin type who was once disbarred for failure to file an income-tax return, quotes Ruby: "I saw that Oswald was smiling and so cocky. He acted so proud of what he had done. I kept thinking about how Jackie had suffered and how Caroline and John wouldn't have a daddy ... It was so sad." Howard says: "Millions of Americans would have done the same thing."

So Jack Ruby, who grew up in the same neighborhood that produced "Baby Face" Nelson and other heroes of homicide, performed the most sensational vigilante act in history. It was, in a way, another of his many impulsive reflexes of violence, from belting a snotty stripper to flaring up when friends said that "Sugar Daddy" was really a midget. Jack Ruby's midget moral sense even now makes him think of himself as a hero outside the law—but he has always been outside the law. "The FBI and the officers are treating me well," he told Mrs. Grant. "I've got friends." And his sister, with incredible, pathetic, and exasperating unconscious irony, says: "We didn't discuss the shooting. It's sort of an old-fashioned family code of ethics."

... but not ... of the ruling oligarchy.

Dallas became a natural spawning ground for extremist conservative groups. There was the Dallas County Committee to Bring Recognition to Merchants Selling Communist Imports, out to do just what its unwieldy name suggested. And there was the National Indignation Convention, indignant only partly because Yugoslav pilots were being detained in Texas. "[Some] want to impeach Earl Warren," said one NIC speaker, "I'm for hanging him." The John Birch Society flourished in Dallas. It wasn't the mere presence of extreme conservative groups that produced the darker strain in the Dallas political personality. Nor was it their power. On the contrary, it was the lack of power that turned the extremists into a menace. Despite a strong will to dictate the affairs of all most, the extremists had no power in the tightly controlled city government nor could they win any in the state government; General Walker, their candidate for governor, ran a poor sixth in a field of six in 1962.

Burn, Burn: Thus frustrated, Dallas's far-out elements have taken increasingly to the incendiary language of violence. To call a man a Communist was a small thing, to call him traitor and Judas (as pickets called Lyndon Johnson when he was besieged), a casual matter. When Ambassador Stevenson spoke at the Dallas Memorial Auditorium Oct. 24, pickets in the aisles chanted: "Kennedy will get his reward in hell, Stevenson, is going to die. His heart will stop, stop, stop and he will burn, burn, burn." What are the fruits of such behavior? Long before the assassination a Dallas cabdriver put it in plain words: "Dallas used to be a nice town," he said, "but now it's got to where everybody's scared of everybody else or hates everybody."

Those who warned against blaming the entire city for the assassination of the President doubtless spoke with a sense of justice. Yet Dallas, collectively, was sharing the guilt* as though it had committed the crime. A card addressed to "Dear Jackie" on one of the many wreaths placed at the spot of the President's death expressed the sentiment simply. It said, "May God and our Lord forgive our city of Dallas for this terrible tragedy." Mayor Cabell, too, was right when he said such an assassination could have happened in Podunk. But in understanding what has happened to Dallas, we must wonder further about that. If it had happened in Podunk, would any schoolchildren there have cheered?

*To expiate the guilt, The Dallas Times Herald offered to receive donations for the widow of J.D. Tippitt, policeman killed by Oswald. By the weekend, funds from all over the U.S. totaled \$65,000.