

The Realist

## Confessions of a Guilty Bystander: II

Washington, Nov. 19 (AP)—President Kennedy settled back into his workaday routine today, but only temporarily, after a hectic Florida trip capped by an appeal to the Cuban people to overthrow the Castro regime. Kennedy will be taking off again Thursday on an equally fast-paced Texas trip. . . .

During his lifetime John F. Kennedy provided the inspiration for a candy bar called Vigah. The commercialization of his death was merely its chocolate-covered extension. Grown-ups have *their* Beatles, too.

One post-assassination manufacturer had this special note in his ad: "Volume Buyers—Organization Fund Raising Chairmen—Write or Wire for Fast Information." Elsewhere in this issue, Bob Abel presents a round-up (incomplete, by definition) of the exploitation-aftermath. (At press time: auto-bumper JFK plates).

All purchases are voluntary, though, and if there be any criticism of the sellers, it must apply equally to the buyers. That includes the more than 400 persons (at last count) who have requested photostatic copies of President Kennedy's will at the going rate of \$100.

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An ad for the Hilton Hotels in the December 20th issue of *Time* was "dedicated to the hope of a new world of friendship symbolized by the eternal flame lighted at Arlington November 25, 1963." How long is an eternity? On December 10th, the eternal flame was accidentally extinguished by some holy water. That's the trouble with automation. If only a way could be found to enlist an infinite army of sacrificial Buddhist monks to serve as an ever-overlapping eternal flame. . . .

The January issue of the *Reader's Digest* was already on the presses—which were stopped—when the President was assassinated. A first-person political philosophy of Lyndon Johnson originally published in the *Texas Quarterly* in 1958 was dredged up to replace an article titled "The Fallacy of a Tax Cut Without a Spending Cut." And a condensation of *Time's* coverage of the event replaced an article titled "You Can Do Anything When You Know You're Not Alone."

Within minutes after the word flashed that President Kennedy had been shot, all four Nike missile stations that surround the Dallas-Fort Worth area were called to an emergency "1-minute" alert. All that was lacking was the placing of a warhead atop the missile which would have taken about 15 seconds. (During the Cuban crisis, the Nike bases in Texas were top priority and were on a 5-minute standby.)

I was scheduled to speak at a gathering sponsored by the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants on Saturday night, November 23rd—the day after the assassination—and the mimeographed invitations promised: "Laugh with Paul Krassner. . . ."

It wasn't easy.

Since this was a left-of-center group who had first

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assumed that the assassin was a right-winger, I simply started out by asking: "Aren't you sorry it turned out to be one of your nuts instead of one of theirs?"

Apparently, the F.B.I. also believed it was a right-winger at first, for within an hour after the shooting, they went to H. L. Hunt and advised him to get out of Dallas, fast. Under an assumed name, he took American Airlines flight 42 to New York, for a shopping trip.

(Announcements over the loudspeaker at the airport in Dallas still refer to Kennedy Airport as Idlewild.)

Hunt recently wrote in a letter to me: "I am presently devoting my time, energy and resources to the program *Life Line* heard daily over more than 300 stations throughout the nation. *Life Line* is a religious, patriotic educational program presenting commentaries on public affairs." And, just to make clear where he doesn't stand, he now finds it necessary to advise: "*Life Line* does not attack minorities nor engage the following in its broadcasts: Criticism of labor unions or leaders; denominational controversy; criticism of Jews; charging Communism to the National Council of Churches of Christ of America or the educational field." This makes it "difficult for anyone to criticize the *Life Line* constructive 'For' messages as being 'hate' material in the current anti-hate wave."

The anti-hate wave isn't universal. On November 27th, the N. Y. *Daily News* editorialized: "We grow exceedingly weary of the current talk about how, in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, we've all got to drop hatred and extremism and get milksoppish and ever-lovin'. Dire consequences are threatened if we disregard this advice. Our reaction: Nonsense; also nerfs. . . ."

I believe the *News* was correct.

Hatred is a risk of democracy.

When the Mummies in Philadelphia were prohibited from parading in blackface, they substituted other colors and marched along purpleface, greenface, what-have-you—and justifiably so. The danger would be if a Negro group weren't permitted to parade whiteface, Or pinkface. Or Jewishnoseface.

In mid-December, I received a query from Harold Feldman on an article he'd written about the relationship between the F.B.I. and Lee Harvey Oswald. Since the February issue of the *Realist* was already going to press and this March issue wouldn't be out till now, I suggested—because the piece was of immediate importance—that he try the *Nation* or the *New Republic*. I was both pleased and frustrated when it appeared in the January 27th issue of the *Nation*.

Since the appearance of the article, Feldman told me, his phone sometimes "clicks like Miriam Makeba," but he can't be sure if his wire is being tapped and, if it is, whether it's because of him or his son, who has been arrested a few times in civil rights demonstrations.

But pity the poor F.B.I. People kept calling them and telling them what they had dreamed during the nights preceding and following the assassination.

Whatever Oswald's organizational connections were, the circumstantial lack of evidence surrounding his overt individual acts has had a nasty habit of occasionally thwarting liberal paranoia.

President Kennedy was in Ashland, Wisconsin on September 24th. That's about 400 miles northwest of Milwaukee. On September 16th, a man signed in, please, as "Lee Oswald, Dallas" at the Fox and Hounds Inn, a motel in Wausau, about 30 miles northwest of Mil-

waukee. A reporter has inspected the guest register, only to find that the pages from July 30th to September 18th are missing. The motel manager has no comment. The Milwaukee F.B.I. has no comment.

When the time came for comments about the assassination, though, everybody got into the act—each and every ax-grinder—from the *American Jewish Examiner* (“American Jewry Grievously Weeps for Adored, Martyred President”) to *White Citizens Awake* (“Our beloved President was assassinated by Marxist Lee Oswald who was silenced by a Jew, Jacob Rubinstein, before he could expose that Communism is Jewish”); from the *National Informer* (“Did Castro Order Death of Kennedy?”) to the John Birch Society’s full-page ad (“We believe that the president of the United States has been murdered by a Communist within the United States. . . . Nor is it in character for the Communists to rest on this success. Instead, we can expect them to use the shock, grief, and confusion of the American people, resulting from the assassination of our President, as an opportunity for pushing their own plans faster”) with a coupon at the bottom; from the Advance Youth Organization (“Build a living memorial to President Kennedy. . . . Picket U.S. Steel”) to Robert Moses’ statement on November 22nd (“The World’s Fair had counted confidently on the international leadership, support and encouragement of President Kennedy. We shall have to go on without his support but with his inspiration ever in mind”).

Coda: In the *Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch*, a Negro weekly, Waldo Phillips claimed that Kennedy was “shot at his own request.”

The motivation? “Medical reports had indicated that he had less than 90 days to live due to an intensified terminal malign spinal cancer.” Why not die a martyr?

Jack Kennedy would have appreciated that. He had a sense of the absurd. Once, in the White House, he doodled on a piece of scrap paper—along with the usual geometric designs—*The President of the United States*. And it would have amused him to know that the Chamber of Commerce in Evanston, Illinois has voted not to name anything after him.

According to Hearst correspondent Ruth Montgomery, readers have been calling newspaper offices with the suggestion that Jackie Kennedy be nominated for Vice President because they were impressed by her “superb dignity” (as opposed to what AP described as Christine Keeler’s “stony composure”).

Yes, the assassination of the President has served all of us, in one way or another—to borrow a phrase from the late Aldous Huxley—as a vehicle for “excruciating orgasms of self-assertion.”

And, in the excitement of his sorrow, one man reached the sublime.

Jack Ruby, journalistically returning to the crime of his scene, explained in a syndicated apologia: “. . . Suddenly there was a great commotion. Out of there walked Oswald. He was about 10 feet from me. He came out all of a sudden with a smirky, defiant, cursing, vicious Communist expression on his face.”

I’m not making this up, I swear. The series, incidentally, was supposed to have been written for a German publication, with a subsequent embargo on it in this country, but—well, they’ll plead temporary greed.

*Life* magazine denies that they got Oswald’s wife to sign a contract for \$25,000 and that, since they hadn’t

yet signed it themselves when Oswald was shot, they just dropped the whole idea. There are those, in the Luce empire who don’t accept this denial.

In Dallas itself, citizens have begun to look upon their information as a commodity. When an out-of-town reporter asked one witness a question, the reply was, “What’s it worth to you?” A British correspondent wanted to re-stage the shooting of Officer Tippit, and the box-office cashier asked for money. A manager of one of the rooming-houses where Oswald had stayed charged \$5 to pose for a picture.

But if amateur merchandising is the basis of news reports, again, professional silence is its counterpart.

When Oswald was reported to have boasted to his wife that he was the sniper who took a shot at General Edwin Walker in Dallas last Spring, the Justice Department refused to comment; the F.B.I. refused to comment; the Secret Service refused to comment; Dallas D. A. Henry Wade said, “I have not heard from any source that such a statement was made”; Dallas chief of detectives H. W. Stevenson, asked if Mrs. Oswald had made such a statement, replied, “Not to my knowledge”; Captain Glen King, information officer for the Dallas Police, asked about a report that Oswald had been picked up by police for questioning in the Walker shooting, said “No comment on that”; and General Walker himself had no comment on the investigation. He *did* have comments about the Kennedy assassination. “There are no gaps,” he told a Canadian interviewer. “Oswald admitted being a Communist. . . . How can you say it isn’t clear as day? You are all brain-washed.”

He also asserted that Jack Ruby was a member of the American Civil Liberties Union—which, he added, is red-tainted. However, defense attorney Melvin Belli points out: “Everyone who knows me will tell you I am strongly anti-Communist. I took this case only after I made certain Jack Ruby had no Communist leanings or connections.”

Actually, Jack Ruby is capitalism personified.

A couple of years ago, there was an article in *Adam*, a raunchy girlie magazine, about Amateur Night for strippers at Ruby’s night club:

“Amateur Night proved an immediate hit with the *Carousel’s* audiences. Many times the erotic enthusiasm of the spectators seemed exceeded only by the impish delight of the amateur performers—hot and breathless from the experience of baring their bodies for the first time before an audience. . . . The wild cheers of Amateur Night spectators indicate they feel they’re getting their \$2 worth—which is cover charge. Many of the luckier males get an added bonus when the girls—who are encouraged by the club to mix with the customers—accept an invitation to have a drink. The club serves beer and set-ups, with most of the customers bringing their own bottles. The club caters to large stag groups, especially college students and oil or cattle conventioners. Most of the amateurs ‘pack’ the audience with an admiring throng of their boy friends to cheer for them. In fact, manager Ruby observed, ‘many of the girls perform at Amateur Night under the urging of their boy friends who claim they see a lot more of them on our stage than they do on a date.’”

Thus spake the avenger of our President. *Allegedly* avenger. When I wrote in the *Realist* that Ruby “allegedly” shot Oswald, I asked, parenthetically: “How’s that for fairness?” The *N. Y. Times* accepted the