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# THE NEW

February 11, 1967, 35 cents

# REPUBLIC

The Last Madness  
of Jack Ruby  
by Ronnie Dugger

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The evidence is vivid that Jack Ruby, who was Jewish, was convinced he was being framed as an accomplice in the assassination so he could be made the scapegoat for a worldwide pogrom he believed was raging against the Jews. He blamed President Johnson, among others, for this new genocide, and in the last year or so of his life he was all but accusing Johnson of complicity in the assassination. Dying of cancer at Parkland Hospital, Lee Oswald's murderer was reported being given injections to quiet him when the delusions of the new anti-Semitic persecutions roiled up his melting life.

His doctors and lawyers became convinced that he really did believe the Jews were being slaughtered, but his jailers and prosecutors brushed it off as an act to escape the electric chair. Reporters, sharing the common suspicion he was malingering, never gave the matter much attention. But Ruby, during his encounters with the press in open courtroom, kept flinging out wilder and wilder hints about conspiracies, and finally, last spring, his remarks were so bold they were left entirely unreported.

"I think it's faked," said Dallas assistant district attorney Bill Alexander, Ruby's former friend who helped get him sentenced to death. Ruby did realize, Alexander said, that he had "hurt the Jewish position" and had "brought shame on the Jewish people as a whole," but as for mass persecutions - that, to Alexander, was just bunk. (A Dallas police officer testified during the murder trial that shortly after the shooting of Oswald, Ruby had said he wanted to kill him "because he wanted the world to know that Jews do have guts.") Dallas Sheriff J. E. (Bill) Decker said, "They got to talking about insanity, and all at once he comes up with the idea." In a second murder trial, the testimony of jail guards would have been used to try to discredit Ruby's apparent sickness. They would probably have contended that when Ruby was razed about his bizarre ideas he would drop the subject and that once he was seen turning away and laughing about it. Ruby's outbursts in court mystified everybody who didn't know, as a lawyer who was very close to him, Sam Houston Clinton of Austin, said, that "When you start talking about conspiracies with this fellow, you've

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RONNIE DUGGER's book *Dark Star: Hiroshima Reconsidered in the Life of Claude Eatherly of Lincoln Park, Texas, is being published later this year.*

got to keep straight which way they're flowing."

During a preliminary jail hearing, defense lawyer Melvin Belli of San Francisco had accused Alexander of calling Ruby "a Jewboy." When, at Belli's insistence, Alexander's remark was read back by the court reporter, it came out, "Well, you recognize that a Jewish boy like that, discussing baseball scores with somebody from Chicago, would do it with different mannerisms and gestures than maybe a couple of colored gentlemen of African descent in south Dallas?" Belli also took the substance of this question to be an allusion to "the alleged racial characteristics of Jews and Negroes." Belli had sought to convince the jury that Ruby had an underlying brain defect, psychomotor epilepsy variant, that caused him to shoot Oswald. In San Francisco, as Ruby was dying, Belli added, "He once told me that all those race riots were actually against the Jews for what he'd done. He was completely disoriented. . . . He was hallucinating in that respect."

In mid-March 1964, the jury condemned Ruby to death, after which, according to Alexander, Ruby slipped into "a deep depressive state." On April 25, an hour or two past midnight, he apparently tried to kill or injure himself. He had been talking about Jews being boiled in oil and clapped his ear to the wall, saying he was hearing them cry out in agony. Sheriff Decker says of what then happened, "He rubbed his head on the wall enough that we had to put a little Merthiolate on it, but that's all - carried him to Parkland and put a little Merthiolate on it." Ruby "intended to do something more than he did," the sheriff says; the psychiatrist who examined Ruby the next day, Dr. Louis Jolyon West, said Ruby had dashed his head against the wall.

Another time, Decker said, Ruby "broke a light bulb." One of Ruby's jailers has related that shortly after the first incident, Ruby poured water on the floor, stood in it, and tried to put his finger in a light bulb socket, but couldn't make it. Placed in a cell, he began tearing his overalls to fashion a noose, but when his jailer told him to go ahead, it would be good riddance, he is said to have stopped doing it.

Dr. "Jolly" West is chairman of the department of psychiatry, neurology, and behavioral sciences at the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine. He was chief of the psychiatric service at the USAF hospital at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio from 1952 to

1956, and he has been a consultant in psychiatry to the Surgeon General, USAF, to the USAF Aerospace Medical Center, and to the USIA and the Peace Corps. Dr. West believes that Ruby had had a "gross psychotic break" in April 1964. He diagnosed Ruby as suffering from "acute psychotic reaction: paranoid state." And West was backed up by four other psychiatrists who examined Ruby.

Ruby believed, West wrote in a report after his four visits with Ruby, that newspapers were being "doctored," that a vast conspiracy was under way, that he had been condemned at a secret trial that had nothing to do with the Oswald murder trial, that he was "to be made a scapegoat by being designated as part of the presidential assassination plot, and that a carefully planned and organized program of persecution of the Jews was the result. . . . The patient had become convinced that all the Jews in America were being slaughtered," and that this was Ruby's fault; he was "the cause of the massacre of 25 million innocent people."

"He had seen his own brother tortured, horribly mutilated, castrated and burned in the street outside the jail; he could still hear the screams," Dr. West reported. "He had seen and heard many other similar horrors. The orders for this terrible 'pogrom' must have come from Washington. . . ."

When West contradicted this, Ruby became angry and suspicious and seemed "about to attack me." He was uneven in his manner, and his thoughts were disjointed. The next day while West was talking with him, he appeared to be hearing sounds, which West gathered were "human groans and cries, sometimes of children or a child."

#### *Tortured and Killed*

By June, West said, Ruby thought "Jews were being brought to the Dallas county jail in trucks. In groups of 400 they were being tortured and killed. During the night he could hear them being unloaded, and then came the awful noises of their being boiled, burned and cut up with electrical power saws, followed by the applause of the crowds of onlooking conspirators. The bodies were being carted off in large trucks and then shipped out in trains.

"Meanwhile, the jail was being patrolled by members of the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, and others who were part of the vast conspiracy (apparently under the supreme direction of President Johnson); he could identify them by small white crosses on their clothing as they walked constantly up and down Main and Houston streets."

Dr. W. R. Beavers, a staff psychiatrist at Parkland, saw Ruby in April a few days after West did. Beavers, as court records show, decided that Ruby had symp-

toms of "an acute functional psychosis" and that the idea he was malingering was neither reasonable nor tenable. By the time Beavers testified before the Warren Commission in midsummer, he had seen Ruby nine or 10 times. He told the commission that Ruby had had a "psychotic depressive reaction" and that by mid-July the depression had diminished and the delusional system had become "more fixed" and "waxed and waned."

Dr. Robert Stubblefield, chief of Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and chief of services at Parkland, had been appointed by the court to examine Ruby and had testified that he was sane for his murder trial. On April 30 and May 1, 1964, however, Stubblefield advised the court that in his opinion Ruby was "currently severely emotionally disturbed, with major paranoid and depressive features." Later in May, Beavers, Stubblefield and Dr. John Holbrook wrote the judge in the case, Joe Brown, that "we believe that Mr. Ruby should be treated properly" and that if he was not declared insane, they offered "our consultation service, if requested." This was significant especially because Holbrook, the doctor Alexander had taken to see Ruby shortly after Oswald was shot, had testified at the murder trial that Ruby was sane. In mid-June a fifth doctor, Emmanuel Tanay, recommended psychiatric treatment for Ruby. Beavers told the commission on July 18, 1964, that all four of the other doctors so far named had the same opinion he did the last time he had talked with them: Ruby was sick and felt "that there was a pogrom concerning Jews generally because of his crime."

Thus the psychiatrists had already made their findings of a post-conviction psychosis when Ruby testified before the Warren Commission that June, making dire pleas that he be taken to Washington where he could tell the whole story and prove his innocence of conspiracy against Kennedy.

What *did* Ruby think the truth was? The Warren Commission's Volume V contains this exchange between Ruby and the Chief Justice:

*Mr. Ruby:* I tell you, gentlemen, my whole family is in jeopardy. My sisters, as to their lives.

*Chief Justice Warren:* Yes?

*Mr. Ruby:* Naturally, I am a foregone conclusion. My sisters, Eva, Eileen, and Mary, I lost my sisters.

My brothers Sam, Earl, Hyman and myself naturally - my in-laws, Harold Kaminsky, Marge Ruby, the wife of Earl, and Phyllis, the wife of Sam Ruby, they are in jeopardy of loss of their lives. Yet they have, just because they are blood related to myself - does that sound serious enough to you . . . ?

*Chief Justice Warren:* Nothing could be more serious, if that is the fact.

Ruby insisted that he be given a lie detector test

under commission auspices. When he was, he simply repeated his basic story. The FBI found that if Ruby was not sick, it seemed that he was telling the truth, but that if he was psychotic, the test was valueless. Dr. Beavers having testified that although most of the time Ruby had understood the questions and answered them with an appreciation of reality, he was nevertheless sick, J. Edgar Hoover concluded that "no significance" should be given to the test. When Ruby learned of this he bitterly resented it, and his demands that he be given another test may have proceeded from this resentment.

*"Burning 'em in Oil"*

Late in 1964 Dallas attorney Clayton Fowler, who was then representing Ruby, emerged from the jail and said he had told Ruby that the Warren Report (which Ruby later read, himself) had found he was not a conspirator with Oswald, but "Jack replied that the world still thinks he helped kill the President." Fowler says that Ruby thought the authorities, from President Johnson on down, were out to get him. Sheriff Decker said, Fowler recalls, that Ruby was telling him the same wild stories "every time I go up to him." Fowler added that Ruby "went so far as to propose to me that they were burning 'em in oil." Believing Ruby was putting on an act, Fowler hated to go see him, it depressed him so.

After another jailhouse consultation, early in 1965, Dr. West reported his opinion that Ruby was not faking. "First," West said, "I doubt that someone unfamiliar with technical psychiatry could play the part of a paranoid delusional psychotic person with such accuracy, consistency and typical detail. Second, it places Mr. Ruby at cross purposes with his attorneys, who have repeatedly encouraged him to believe that he has an excellent chance for successful appeal and that at a new trial he would not only be saved from the death penalty but that a much more sympathetic understanding of him would emerge. Third, I don't believe that he wants to go to a mental hospital at all, despite his attorneys' belief that he should; I think he actually prefers the jail, where he says 'they know me'; that this [is] grossly inconsistent with his fears of murderous police is itself characteristic of his delusional state. Finally, he violently rejects the idea that he is mentally ill now . . .; the true malingering usually grasps eagerly at such an explanation." In the absence of treatment, West said, Ruby had been "progressing in the course of a chronic paranoid psychosis."

"On the same day that he might be quietly playing cards or discussing the weather with his jailers, he has told his brother and sister-in-law to kill their children and commit suicide because 'they' (the persecutors)

were coming to hack off the children's arms and tear out the eyes of the adults in a torture that could only end in death anyway. . . ."

"I believe," Dr. West said early in 1965, "that Jack Ruby should have been transferred to a psychiatric hospital more than 10 months ago," and the fact that he had not been was "cruel and inhumane treatment."

According to West, Dr. Beavers had withdrawn from the case because he believed he could not treat Ruby effectively in the jail. Ruby's lawyers evidently believed, too, that he was sick. Why then did they not try to get him declared insane and treated in a hospital? Joe Tonahill of Jasper, Texas, was fighting in the courts to continue as Ruby's lawyer, despite the Rubys' opposition. Attorney William Kunstler of New York City, one of the team of five lawyers who took over from Belli and Tonahill, mentions that if Ruby had been declared insane, he might have lost the right to choose his own lawyers; as well, an insanity finding might have jeopardized the appeal, which the lawyers expected to win. The point is made that a new sanity hearing could have been called for at any time later. There was also a problem of where, outside of jail, Ruby could be treated safely, and perhaps the Dallas authorities themselves feared that releasing Ruby on an insanity finding would feed suspicion that they had been in cahoots with him.

From persons close to Ruby in jail we know that in private, by the spring of 1965 and from then on, he was saying that in one city every Jew had been killed; Israel had been wiped out; Jewish persecutions in Russia had been intensified. When Jewish performers appeared on TV, he was saying, this was only because the programs had been taped—the performers were dead; but a few Jews, such as Arthur Goldberg and Abe Fortas, were being kept alive as a cover-up and would be the last ones killed. He was saying that President Johnson was helping West Germany as part of the pogrom and that Nazis were entering the US from there through Brazil, with the help of a new extradition treaty with Brazil.

The official transcript shows that on March 19, 1965, during a public hearing in the federal district court of Judge T. Whitfield Davidson on the question of removing Tonahill, Ruby came forward and told the court many hazy and fabulous things.

"I would like to speak where I can be heard," he said. "This is the most tragic thing in the history of the world. One of the most tragic conspiracies in the world. I will get on the stand and speak with tears in my heart because of such a terrible conspiracy which is combined against me." Phil Burleson of Dallas, one of his lawyers, and Tonahill were conspiring to convince people he was insane, he said.

"The most tragic thing happened that Sunday morn-

ing when I went down that ramp. I happened to be there for a purpose which is going to be the most tragic thing that ever happened in this world," he said.

Yet in the same hearing Ruby again denied conspiring to kill Oswald: "If it had been three seconds later I would have missed this particular person [Oswald]. I guess God was against me. . . . I didn't conspire to sneak in to do these things, I am telling you. If they had said, 'Jack, are you going down now?' that would make some conspiracy on me."

This day also Ruby first publicly expressed what seems to be his own suspicion that conspirators killed Kennedy. "Well, I am sorry to say this," he told the court, "it is strange that a person like Harvey Oswald, who never worked a day in his life, and I have reason to think of these things because I know all the things that are going on, a man who has never worked in his life is able to secure a job in a bookstore weeks prior to the anticipated arrival of our beloved President. Who else could know that our President was coming to Dallas. I couldn't know. And I am speaking of what I anticipated to happen."

*"Some Smell of 'Communism'"*

Denied their bid against Tonahill in federal court, the Ruby lawyers went back to Judge Joe Brown's court, where by then Judge Louis T. Holland was presiding. The week after the federal hearing, Ruby came forward in the state court, and again there is an official transcript. By this time Ruby was troubled by Tonahill's remarks, sensationally publicized in Dallas, against Kunstler and his left-of-liberal clients. ". . . I know what the whole conspiracy behind this is," Ruby said. "Joe Tonahill gets Mr. Kunstler on the stand, and everything is leading to the fact that maybe there is some smell of communism somewhere." There had also been a conspiracy, Ruby also said, to keep witnesses from testifying at his murder trial.

"I am going to be branded," he said, "and this is not a crazy man talking, that I have been part of a conspiracy with Oswald; as a matter of fact, the mere mention of his name - how small the person is to my mind." He added, "Here is how I happened to walk into my fate at that particular time. It was a terrific opportune time for me to be used."

Later on Ruby said, "It certainly is a terrible act of God, your honor, that [Oswald] had to come down at that particular time. It was then I first met the man I made deceased. I saw him and I wanted to do away with him. . . ." He had been sick, he said, and had been taking antibiotic and dexedrine pills, as well as some pills to lose weight. ". . . my body was so doped up. . . . These pills give you a positive nature of doing things."

In a tumultuous scene on September 9, 1965, again in Holland's court, Ruby disregarded his lawyers who were telling him to be quiet and declared to the press that there was a conspiracy in high places behind Kennedy's assassination. Various news reports related that he said "people in high places" had suppressed information about Oswald and about Ruby; said, as his lawyers tried to push TV microphones away from his face, "The world has the right to hear the truth"; said that Oswald knew Kennedy was coming to Dallas even before Kennedy knew it and that newsmen should search "in the high sources of our political government" to find out how Oswald got a job at the depository on the motorcade route; said that the full story of the assassination would not come out because "unfortunately some people in high places had so much to gain by putting me in this position," and when asked to elaborate on this, said that the results of the lie detector test had not been divulged; and said that there was a "terrible conspiracy" behind Kennedy's death and he, Ruby, "happened to be a scapegoat to walk into a trap and make that possible."

Ruby's lawyer Sam Houston Clinton says that during a routine hearing he believes was on March 31, 1966, he was seated beside Ruby, and that a reporter stuck a mike in front of Ruby, whereupon Ruby said that people just didn't understand and that if he ever got a chance to tell his story, they would know that "if Adlai Stevenson had been vice president, Kennedy would still be alive today."

"I just sat there and shook and hoped the President of the United States didn't interest himself in the ramblings of Jack Ruby," Clinton said.

In Dallas, James Kerr Jr., a reporter-cameraman who has been Dallas bureau chief for WBAP-TV, Fort Worth, since 1948, confirmed the substance of Clinton's recollection, but differed with him on where the remark was made.

"It was March or April 1966," Kerr said. "I never heard [the tape] because we never used it. I can tell you what he said." Kerr said he approached Ruby in the courtroom, and "I asked Ruby a few questions. . . . He'd had a long time to think since he had talked to Warren and so on and so forth. I asked now, after the passage of time, in what light he saw the assassination. . . . He started out to say - Oh, it was some, really some introductory remark, like, 'Well, I'll tell you what I think,' and then he broke that off and said, as though it was a cliché that had been running through his mind, 'If Adlai Stevenson had been President of the United States, there would have been no assassination. . . .'"

"So what did that mean? What sense would you make out of that?" Kerr said. "I told my sound man to stand by." When the hearing was over, Kerr related,

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he waited in the hallway where Ruby would pass. "Ruby came out looking straight at me, looking at where I was standing with the mike. He said, 'I want to correct what I told you a while ago. What I meant to say was that if Adlai Stevenson had been vice president, there wouldn't have been an assassination.'" "

"I had mild shock. Then I asked, 'What do you mean by that?'" Ruby answered, Kerr said, "'The man who's President now'."

Had Kerr asked Ruby if Ruby knew anything to back this up? Kerr thought he had not asked. "I didn't get the impression he was thinking about Stevenson as much as about Johnson," Kerr said. "My own explanation is that he was probably just so emotionally knotted at the time, that he was grabbing at something to justify what had happened, to explain something that nobody had been able to explain yet."

Ruby's sanity hearing last June was an empty formality. The judge insisted on it because the state appeals court had ordered that it be held, but the defense lawyers had decided that they didn't want it; they were contending that Judge Brown's role in the murder case had made the death verdict unconstitutional, so they believed they could not participate in a hearing that grew out of that case. Alexander placed a few of Ruby's guards on the stand, all of them testified that Ruby seemed all right to them, and Ruby's own lawyers stood mute. The jury found him sane.

"What else could they do?" asks Clinton. Despite that hearing, Ruby's lawyers declare that they believed in the sincerity of their client's wild delusions. "He actually thinks," said Elmer Gertz of Chicago before Ruby died, "that there's a conspiracy to transport the Jews of America to the basement of the jail in Dallas, there to be castrated and killed, and that he hears them screaming." Kunstler said that last summer Ruby still believed he had done "something good" sparing Mrs. Kennedy the Oswald trial, but felt he had brought destruction on the Jews thereby. As recently

as December 4, Kunstler says, Ruby slipped him a note for Ruby's brother Earl that the Jews were being destroyed and Earl should leave the country.

After Ruby died, the Associated Press' Bernard Gavzer reported the gist of the Jewish delusions and added, "Jack Ruby also complained that his cancer was induced secretly in jail. . . . [He] was certain it had been injected into him." New fragments of the story cropped up elsewhere. *The St. Paul (Minn.) Dispatch* reported that one of its columnists, Bill Diehl, had bought a letter Ruby purportedly had written from his jail cell. The seller: Charles Hamilton Autographs Inc., in New York, which in turn reportedly bought it and four or five others like it, from a jail trusty, Thomas E. Miller. In Diehl's letter, the paper said, Ruby wrote that Johnson "found me as the perfect setup for a frame. Remember they had the President killed, and now with me in the picture, they'll make it look as though Castro or the Russians had it done. . . . Remember the only one who had all to gain was Johnson himself. Figure that out." Then the *Dallas Times Herald* quoted an unnamed jail repairman that Ruby had slipped him a note as they shook hands through the bars of Ruby's cell. Warning the repairman to be careful of his own life, Ruby had written, "You can save the Jews in Israel and other parts of the world from being slaughtered. You see, if this is happening here and the Jews in Israel and other countries were warned, they could save themselves."

Presenting himself as the framed scapegoat for a new slaughter of the Jews, Ruby was sick or he was faking; either his doctors and his lawyers were right, or his prosecutors and jailers were. Whatever you believe, these are the facts of his last three years. Uttering dire maledictions and garbled, puzzling hints of dark deeds and tragedy to come, he descended into death (and, he said he believed, into hell, although he no longer believed in God), a vulgar enigma, hostile, confused, trapped, and doomed. *emc*