

Assassinations Came of Age in Bloody 60s

13,650 U.S. Murders in 1968; Homicide Rate Double That of Any Other Country

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CHICAGO — At about 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 6, 1960, a 50-year-old counterfeiter, robber, bootlegger and suspected murderer named William (The Saint) Skally walked out of his home and into history, of a sort.

He was dead a few minutes later, a bullet in his head—the first of more than 65 gangland victims in the Chicago area during the decade now drawing to a close.

He also was one of the first homicide victims of the bloody 60s, during which Americans have killed each other singly or en masse, for causes great or slight or nonexistent, at a rate that might lead historians to name it the decade of the assassin.

FBI Figures

In the United States during 1968 — the latest year for which the FBI figures are available—13,650 persons were murdered.

This was a numerical increase of 51.7% from the 1960 total, and an increase of 36% per 100,000 population. There is little hope that 1969 will improve the record appreciably.

Among the victims during these sanguinary years, in addition to thousands of obscure men, women and children, have been a President of the United States, the President's killer and the President's brother; two internationally known black leaders; the self-styled

fuehrer of American Nazis; at least 25 blacks and whites in southern racial killings; and in a single year, 1966, in single acts of slaughter, eight nurses in Chicago, 14 unsuspecting strollers on the campus of the University of Texas and five persons in a beauty school in Mesa, Ariz.

Students of crime know that the instrument most used in such affairs was the rifle, the shotgun, the pistol or the revolver. Last year 65% of American murders were committed with firearms.

Finland Next

America in the 60s is a bloodthirsty land, even by international standards. According to a report issued by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, the U.S. homicide rate is more than twice that of its closest competitor, Finland.

Of the 36 men who have served as U.S. President, four (or one-ninth) have been murdered while in office. Another was the intended victim of assassination while in office. One former President was wounded while campaigning for another term. One was shot at while President-elect.

All those incidents add up to seven, involving slightly less than one-fifth of our 36 Presidents.

Not even the powderkegs in the Balkans ever

exhibited such a lethal attitude toward its rulers. Such killings, in the popular definition, are assassinations — the murder of prominent persons, usually for strong political causes and suggesting an aura of intrigue and conspiracy. Other killings—victimized less prominent persons, for gain or revenge or out of rage or influenced by alcohol and other drugs—are "ordinary" or "usual" or "routine" and constitute by far the larger percentage of the total.

Gang Killings

Chicago's gangland killings might well be called assassinations. There is politics. There are power struggles. The term "assassination" might also be applied to the killing of a civil rights worker by a Southern white racist, or of one youth gang member by another in Chicago's South or West Sides.

But the "ordinary" or "usual" or "routine" murders are often so only by definition. Some are bloodily spectacular.

In 1966 there were those three murderous episodes that claimed a total of 27 dead.

In Chicago, on the night

of July 13, Richard Franklin Speck, a roaming Texan, killed eight student nurses in their townhouse apartment.

In Austin, Tex., on Aug. 1, Charles Joseph Whitman took an arsenal of guns up to the University of Texas tower and killed 14 victims and wounded 31 others before he was killed by the police.

In Mesa, Ariz., on Nov. 12, Robert Benjamin Smith, who was only 18, forced his victims in the beauty school to lie head to head in a circle, and killed four women and a child and wounded two others. Smith said he got the notion from Chicago and Austin. Out of murder, murder.

Lack Conspiracy

These murders — and

444

most of the others of the bloody 60s — cannot properly be called assassination. Not even America's presidential murders follow all the traditional meanings of that term. The victims were prominent political personages, and politics may have been a factor, but they lacked one element of the classic assassination — conspiracy. The Balkan-type assassination of popular conception was the work of an organization and was preceded by intricate planning.

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence pointed out recently: "No presidential assassination, with the exception of an abortive attempt on the life of President Harry S. Truman, has been demonstrated to have sprung from a decision of an organized group whose goal was to change the policy of the structure of the United States government."

The most industrious researches and impassioned rhetoric of several investigators have not succeeded in reversing the Warren Commission's conclusion that the killings of both President John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald were not the consequence of intrigue and conspiracy.

At L.A. Hotel

The same can be said of the murder of Kennedy's brother, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, in a Los Angeles hotel on June 5, 1968, a few hours after he had won the California Democratic presidential primary. The murderer was a Jordanian permanent resident in the United States, but he was never associated with any organization that might have sent him to do the killing.

Some Americans have brooded over the random nature of these assassinations. They seem pointless, almost accidental. During the hours following President Kennedy's death, one of his special assistants went about de-

manding over and over, to anyone who would listen: "Why did it happen? What good did it do? All my life I've believed that something worthwhile comes out of everything, no matter how terrible it is. What good can come of it?"

Robert F. Kennedy's assassination, and that of Dr. Martin Luther King did provoke enough sentiment to stir official action in the interest of safety for eminent citizens. After the senator's death, federal protection was ordered for all major presidential candidates, and Congress passed a couple of gun-control laws.

What of the other assassinations during the 60s?

Malcolm X was shot down on Feb. 21, 1965, apparently because he had deviated from the teachings of the Black Muslims. He had tempered their notions of Black separatism with suggestions of a black rights American society. Three Black Muslims were sentenced to life in prison for the murder.

George Lincoln Rockwell, the fuhrer of the American Nazi Party, was killed Aug. 29, 1967, by a man he had dismissed from the party a few

Please Turn to Pg. 3, Col. 8

Continued from Second Page

months before, for creating dissensions in the ranks. It was in a sense a political killing, but without conspiracy.

The end of the decade saw the emergence of assassination among Chicago youth gangs. There were 76 reported "youth gang-related murders" during 1968, and 58 through Oct. 15 this year.

"There have always been some youth gangs in Chicago, as in other cities," Capt. Edward L. Buckney, commander of the gang intelligence unit, said recently. "What happened for the first time in the

mid-60s, however, was the organization of large-scale criminal youth gangs under adult guidance. Adults provided the headquarters for the gangs, financial assistance, and attempted to give them status. The ready access to guns brought about an unparalleled period of youth violence."

Some youth workers in the slums have complained of harassment by police, particularly Buckney's men, and the frustration of attempts to channel youths into constructive attitudes and activities. The issue remains undecided.

Black Leader

Dr. King, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the nation's most eminent black leader, was murdered in Memphis on April 4, 1968 (sparking riots in the nation's ghettos of the sort that widely scarred the 60s).

Was this the work of another rugged individualist, or of a conspiracy? James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to the murder and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. Both Ray's attorney and the prosecutor said they were convinced that no conspiracy was involved. But certainly Dr. King would be alive today if he had not enraged the Southern white racists.

The National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People keeps a record of such killings in a list labeled "victims of white racism." It includes during the present decade 19 cases of murder (with 25 victims) that can be attributed to the politics of civil rights (the klan-type killings of blacks or of white civil rights workers).

In eight of those cases there were no arrests. There were convictions in seven, principally on federal rather than state charges.

Southern Slayings

In a number of respects

the Southern murders resemble the political assassinations of regimes like Mussolini's, Hitler's and Stalin's. The Southerners, like their counterparts in unhappy Europe, were organized. They conspired. They often enjoyed the support and sometimes the participation of public officials. They often were not arrested, and when convicted, their sentences tended to be light. History may or may not repeat itself, but the present often runs a course parallel to the past.

Chicagoans, however, need take no pious comfort in the contemplation of Southern murders. The Chicago Crime Commission says that since 1919 there have been 1,004 gangland killings in the Chicago area and few convictions. In the 65 cases listed for the 1960's, there have been only four convictions. The murders of the other 61 victims are listed as "unknown" including those who opened the decade with the killing of William (The Saint) Skally.