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Sent: Sunday, December 28, 2010 4:53 PM
Subject: Fwd: Tikkun Magazine - JFK, Obama, and the Unspeakable
Thanks Jim for the discussion today.....and Happy Years up to and including 2013

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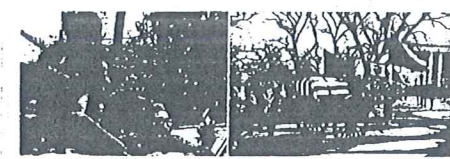
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JFK, OBAMA, AND THE UNSPEAKABLE



The author argues that Kennedy's assertion of control over the CIA after the Bay of Pigs fiasco was a major cause of the assassination. Above left: Cuban leader Fidel Castro, with glasses, sits inside a tank near Playa Giron, Cuba, during the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961. About 1,500 Cuban exiles, supported by the CIA, landed in Cuba on that day with the goal of sparking a popular uprising against the government. Most were quickly captured or killed by the Cuban armed forces. The CIA had led to Kennedy in order to get his approval for the invasion. Above right: Kennedy's funeral on November 25, 1963. He was assassinated; the author argues by the national security state. Photos: LEFT: CP PHOTOGRAMMAR/PAUL CORRALES; RIGHT: ABBIE ROWE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Tikkun Magazine, November/December 2010

JFK, Obama, and the Unspeakable

by James W. Douglass

Our great prophecies are contingencies. The way our greatest U.S. prophet, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., put our common future in the nuclear age was: "The choice today is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence."

King's prophecy applies to all of humankind as we decide whether to exterminate ourselves. His prophetic contingency, our turning collectively toward nonviolence or nonexistence, applies especially to the citizens of the planet's most powerful country, the United States of America, and particularly to the citizen we elect to preside over our government, the president.

John F. Kennedy was in the same dire position every U.S. president has been in since World War II. As president, Kennedy was under the control of what his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, identified in his Farewell Address as the military-industrial complex. "[It] total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual," Eisenhower said, "is in every city, every state house, every office of the federal government."

The military-industrial complex, more powerful today than ever, imprisons the president. U.S. president is always accompanied by a military attaché bearing a nuclear code that can incinerate the earth. That gun to the world is a gun to the president. When he acce the power to kill everyone, the president becomes a prisoner morally and politically to demands of our national security state. Whether his name is Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jo F. Kennedy, or Barack Obama, once he accepts nuclear power over the world, his permissible movement as president is confined to a very tight space -- tighter than we citizens might imagine.

How Kennedy Rebelled Against the Pentagon and CIA

President Kennedy rebelled against the "economic, political, even spiritual" influence of President Eisenhower described. During JFK's two years and ten months in power, wh that power pressured him relentlessly, he compromised with it to survive a few months in the end stood his ground and took the bullets. In fact both he and his enemies saw it writing on the wall as early as the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, in the first spn of his short presidency.

The CIA lied to Kennedy about the political and geographic conditions that premied hi approval of the agency's Cuban exile brigade landing at the Bay of Pigs. He realized afterward he had been set up -- he had to either send U.S. combat troops into Cuba to supersede the CIA's futile exile brigade (as he said in advance he would never do) or accept a huge defeat. After the revealing CIA documents were declassified, the way National Public Radio commentator Daniel Schorr put it was: "In effect, President Kenn was the target of a CIA covert operation that collapsed when the invasion collapsed." J swallowed defeat instead of committing U.S. troops, in recognition of the CIA's trap, he said he wanted "to splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds."

The Bay of Pigs enabled Kennedy to see the cloaked demands of the CIA and the Pentagon as an usurpation of his power as president. He began to break free from his military and intelligence commanders. Prisoners get shot for doing that. JFK's decision fire CIA Director Allen Dulles and his deputies in the wake of the Bay of Pigs was his fit step toward freedom, meaning also death. He was asserting a presidential control that Eisenhower never did over Allen Dulles and his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The Dulles brothers were career Wall Street lawyers who dominated Eisenhower and served the military-industrial interests that he warned against. It was a warning like gave only when it was too late for him to shake those interests off. He left that chore to next president.

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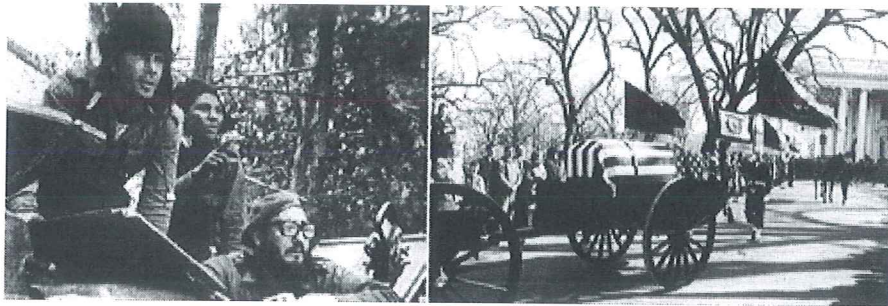
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When JFK bowled over kingpin Allen Dulles (who would return to power as the most influential member of the "Warren" Commission), the upstart president was acting as if he -- not his military and intelligence commanders -- were in charge. Kennedy was shocked by the

CIA's scheming against him at the Bay of Pigs, and the CIA was shocked by Kennedy's removal of Dulles. Who did he think he was?

How Kennedy Took On the Steel Industry

The steel crisis was JFK's second step toward freedom.

On April 10, 1962, U.S. Steel chairman Roger Blough informed President Kennedy that Blough's company was raising steel prices by 3.5 percent -- breaking an agreement to control inflation that the president had just brokered between U.S. Steel and the United Steelworkers. U.S. Steel was joined publicly in the price hike by five other companies already in collusion with it. JFK was furious at being double-crossed. He said to his staff, in a sentence Wall Street would not forget: "My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it until now."

President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy launched an all-out domestic war to force the heads of the six colluding companies to cancel their price increase. The Justice Department raided Big Steel's corporate offices. Robert Kennedy subpoenaed the steel executives' personal and company records. The Kennedys were going for broke. Most ominously for Big Steel, the president ordered the Defense Department to market its steel business overseas, so as to take huge profits out of the hands of U.S. Steel and its cohorts, at the heart of the military-industrial complex. Faced by the fact that the Kennedys meant business -- their business -- the steel heads surrendered quickly, rescinding their price raise.

However, they accomplished a more sinister purpose. A *Fortune* magazine editorial stated with an insider's knowledge that U.S. Steel's decision to raise prices, made by a board of directors composed of the financial elite of the country, was designed to present the president with a dilemma: either accept the price hike and lose credibility or push back and unite the business world against him, as he did. *Fortune* publisher Henry Luce, the most powerful media magnate in the world, was behind the editorial. Drawing on Shakespeare's prediction by the soothsayer of Julius Caesar's assassination, "Beware the ides of March," the Luce editorial's title warned Kennedy of the fate he was tempting by his stand against imperial power: "Steel: The Ides of April."

The powers that be had to be more than a little angry to be threatening the president so boldly. An American parable was in the making. As Kennedy turned heretically toward peace after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the parable of the president and the powers would be played out until it climaxed a year later on a sunny street in Dallas. Then it would be up to us to open our ears and hear.

Dorothy Day's Take on Kennedy's Character

I am a Catholic Worker. I am deeply skeptical of the power of kings and presidents -- all of them. But what I also learned from Dorothy Day, mother of the Catholic Worker movement,

was a belief in the goodness of every human being. Dorothy had that belief in John Kennedy. She told me pointedly, after JFK's death, to study his life.

I didn't know that she and Kennedy had met. Young Jack Kennedy and his older brother Joe, who would die in World War II, visited the Mott Street Catholic Worker in Manhattan one day in the summer of 1940. Catholic Worker Stanley Vishnewski recalled the incident in an interview with Bill Moyers:

I remember distinctly how bewildered [John Kennedy] was by the sight of the poverty and the misery of the place. And then Dorothy came in. She talked to him. Then Dorothy says, "Come and have supper with us." And Kennedy looked at her, a little startled, and says, "No, come out and have dinner with us instead." So Dorothy, and Joe and John Kennedy ... we went out to a little restaurant around the corner. We had a wonderful conversation.

They talked long into the night "of war and peace and of man and the state," as Dorothy wrote in her book, *Loaves and Fishes*.

Even when Dorothy Day was marching and speaking out decades later against JFK's Cold War policies, something about him struck the chord of her belief in human goodness. So she said after he was killed: "Pay attention. Learn more about his life." It took me over thirty years to follow her recommendation. Yes, we can learn more from his life ... and his death.

Kennedy and Krushchev Ally Against Their Own Militaries

In the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy had to confront the unspeakable in the form of total nuclear war. At the height of the terrifying conflict that his own anti-Castro policies had helped precipitate, he felt the situation spiraling out of control, especially because of pressures and provocations by the Pentagon led by General Curtis LeMay. At a moment when the world was falling into darkness, Kennedy did what his generals thought was unforgivable: he not only rejected their pressures for attacking Cuba and the Soviet Union, but even worse, the president also reached out to the enemy for help. That could be considered treason.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev saw it as hope. Robert Kennedy had met secretly with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington, warning that the president was losing control to his generals and needed the Soviets' help. When Khrushchev received Kennedy's plea for help in Moscow, he turned to his foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, and said, "We have to let Kennedy know that we want to help him."

Khrushchev hesitated when he heard himself say "help." Just when the U.S. president seemed to be at his wit's end, did he, Khrushchev, really want to help his enemy? Yes, he did. He repeated the word "help" to his foreign minister: "Yes, help. We now have a common cause, to save the world from those pushing us toward war."

How can we understand that moment? The two most heavily armed leaders in history, on the verge of total nuclear war, suddenly joined hands against those on both sides pressuring

them to attack. Khrushchev ordered the immediate withdrawal of his missiles, in return for Kennedy's public pledge never to invade Cuba and his secret promise to withdraw U.S. missiles from Turkey -- as he would in fact do. The two Cold War enemies had turned, so that each now had more in common with his opponent than either had with his own generals.

Neither John Kennedy nor Nikita Khrushchev was a saint. Each was deeply complicit in policies that brought humankind to the brink of nuclear war. Yet, when they encountered the void, they turned to each other for help. In doing so, they turned humanity toward the hope of a peaceful planet.

Kennedy kept walking in that direction, as did Khrushchev.

JFK gave his greatest speech on June 10, 1963, at American University. In it he envisioned an end to the Cold War, saying he was stopping atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons and "we will not be the first to resume." He said he wanted to negotiate a test ban treaty with the Soviets as soon as possible in Moscow (a less hostile context for negotiations with the enemy than the president's own Washington). His long-range goal, he said, was "general and complete disarmament -- designed to take place by stages, permitting parallel political developments to build the new institutions of peace which would take the place of arms."

Khrushchev responded in the same spirit. In an astonishing six weeks, the two leaders agreed to the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Kennedy said, however, that getting Senate ratification would be "almost in the nature of a miracle." The president convened peace activists, business leaders, women's magazine editors, union activists, scientists, and religious leaders in a White House council to organize massive citizen support for the treaty. Their grassroots campaign turned public opinion around. The Senate passed the Test Ban Treaty by a large majority in September 1963.

A President Assassinated by the National Security State

Also in September, JFK initiated a secret dialogue with Fidel Castro, through U.S./UN diplomat William Attwood, to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations. Kennedy's first back-channel representative in that dialogue, French reporter Jean Daniel, was actually meeting with Castro on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, when they heard the news that, as Castro said, "changed everything." The U.S.-Cuban dialogue died in Dallas.

On October 11, 1963, JFK had signed National Security Action Memorandum 263. It ordered a U.S. troop withdrawal from Vietnam -- bringing home "1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963" and "by the end of 1965 ... the bulk of U.S. personnel," an order that President Johnson quietly voided. The Vietnam War was reignited in Dallas.

President Kennedy's courageous turn from global war to a strategy of peace provides the why of his assassination. Because he turned toward peace with our enemies, the Communists, he found himself at odds with his own national security state. Peacemaking had risen to the top of his agenda as president. That was not the kind of leadership the CIA, the

Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the military-industrial complex wanted in the White House. Given the Cold War dogmas that gripped those dominant powers, and given Kennedy's turn toward peace, his assassination followed as a matter of course. Given what we know now, there can be little doubt it was an act of state.

In His Own Bay of Pigs Moment, Obama Backed Down

Just as John Kennedy did, Barack Obama had a Bay of Pigs early in his presidency. He became the target of a covert operation that trapped and compromised him as president. In Obama's case, the challenge to his authority as commander-in-chief came not from the CIA but from the Army, and not in Cuba but in Afghanistan. As in Kennedy's case, Obama's response to the entrapment established the pattern of his presidency, but in a direction opposite to Kennedy's. Obama has become an obedient servant to his national security state, and as a result, a source of despair to many of his supporters.

The critical background to President Obama's June 2010 firing of General Stanley McChrystal for his outlandish *Rolling Stone* interview was McChrystal's close relationship to the man Obama named to replace him. The president's newly appointed Afghan commander, David H. Petraeus, was McChrystal's boss and mentor. In September 2009, in a more significant subversion of Obama's authority than the later interview, McChrystal had been Petraeus's point man in a Pentagon threat of revolt unless the president escalated the Afghan War.

Heavily supported by Republican leaders, McChrystal pressured Obama publicly by a series of statements questioning the president's initial resistance to the general's recommendation of 40,000 more troops. Petraeus also went public, telling a columnist the United States would fail in the war unless the president gave them the troops they needed. Obama's generals were conducting a media war to force him into a decision they had chosen for him. As Secretary of State Colin Powell's former top aide, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, observed, "Petraeus and McChrystal have put Obama in a trick bag."

As Bob Woodward reported in *Obama's Wars*, the president was blocked at every turn by his war cabinet, as he sought alternative troop options and an exit plan from the war. However, the generals wanted their troop surge and an open-ended strategy. They provided no exit plan.

"You're not really giving me any options," Obama told them. "You agreed to go back and work those up." Instead they kept pressuring him for the same troop increase, under different guises, in a war without end. "It's unacceptable," he said.

Obama told civilian advisers that the military heads were "really cooking the thing in the direction they wanted. They are not going to give me a choice."

The president finally gave them 30,000 more troops, while setting a shaky, condition-based date of next July for a beginning withdrawal. The generals claimed victory. Petraeus was

pleased. His counterinsurgency strategy was alive and well. As he let Woodward know, "If the president had told him at the beginning that it would come out with this strategy and 30,000 troops, Petraeus would have taken it in a second."

Moreover, Petraeus said privately, he continued to see no end in sight in Afghanistan: "You have to recognize also that I don't think you win this war. I think you keep fighting. This is the kind of fight we're in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids' lives."

When Obama replaced McChrystal half a year later by the more subtle, more controlling Petraeus, it was a further submission to the military authorities that the president was elected to command.

After JFK was set up by the CIA (with the Pentagon's support) at the Bay of Pigs, that new, young president bucked his national security state by firing his main adversary, Cold-Warrior-in-Chief Allen Dulles. When Obama was set up by General Petraeus, General McChrystal, and their colleagues to escalate the war in Afghanistan, our new, young president, after (to his credit) months of deliberation, reluctantly went along. His later insertion of Petraeus as his new Afghan commander put the most likely GOP candidate for president in 2012, General David Petraeus, in an ideal running position. Because Bush's "surge" of occupying troops in Iraq (under Petraeus) has somehow been judged a "win," Obama will be scapegoated with the "loss" if a proxy government in Iraq fails after his troop withdrawal.

In August General Petraeus warned, "If the U.S. loses [in Afghanistan], there would likely be a bloody civil war followed by a takeover by extremists." He added, "If the U.S. succeeds and Afghanistan stabilizes, the country could become the region's new Silk Road with the potential to extract trillions of dollars worth of minerals."

If Petraeus fails in his counterinsurgency war to pacify that new road to corporate profits, he can keep on saying he needed more troops and more time to "win" there -- preparing the political ground for another Obama "loss." Petraeus can then return home for a GOP draft to run for president. Obama, by surrendering to his generals, has been trapped in the same kind of plotting Kennedy had the insight and courage to resist.

Can a Peacemaking President Take On the Pentagon?

Barack Obama is a very smart and sometimes courageous man. Why did he submit to his generals by widening a disastrous war? Did he think he could at least use his waning power to improve the domestic state of the union, while hoping he could eventually find a way out of our downward spiral of war in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq?

If so, he will finally have to say no, for the sake of us all, to his generals and the powers behind them. They will always want the troops to fight more battles "for the rest of our lives and probably our kids' lives" toward the end of "trillions of dollars worth of minerals" on a new Silk Road.

Can any president of the United States turn toward peace without being threatened, set up, and "if necessary" (from the standpoint of our national security state), assassinated?

Because of our unwillingness to connect the dots of Dallas with those of Washington, U.S. citizens have been unable to raise that post-JFK question to consciousness. In the Washington of Barack Obama, where some speak of a president's assassination casually and others deliberately, it is time that we dealt with the question in a serious way. John Kennedy did. From his frequent remarks anticipating his own death, friends said he was obsessed by it. He seems rather to have seen his death in a remarkably detached way in a time of darkness, accepting his own demise "if necessary" (from the standpoint of his conscience) as the simple consequence of doing his duty.

Once we face the why of Kennedy's assassination, never really mysterious and now a story documented by the mass of files made public by the Assassination Records Review Board, we can deal with an obvious question that has likely passed through the mind of Barack Obama: can a peacemaking president survive a warmaking state? A conscientious president's survival, and the carrying out of peace initiatives against the grain of his government and corporate power, is entwined with the survival of every human being on earth. The president's vulnerability, while he tries to turn a massive Washington warship toward peace and disarmament, is an unspeakable fact of our politics.

But the other side of the unspeakable is ourselves. Our sense of despair, when we see a president's reluctance to choose what may kill him, raises questions about ourselves.

King's Global, Nonviolent Vision

Martin Luther King Jr. said in his last testament, *Trumpet of Conscience*, a little book published after his death: "Can a nonviolent, direct-action movement find application on the international level, to confront economic and political problems? I believe it can. It is clear to me that the next stage of the movement is to become international."

King envisioned an international movement of massive, nonviolent civil disobedience, bringing the business of London, Paris, Washington, and Ottawa to a halt until such centers of autocracy addressed the real questions of democracy. He said we needed to shut down our marketplaces by nonviolent action until business as usual was opened up to the needs of us all, beginning with the poorest, most exploited people on earth. The way our greatest prophet addressed the military-industrial complex was to think and act beyond it.

That is why he planned the Poor People's Campaign for Washington. He was initiating it in Memphis in April 1968, supporting the sanitation workers' strike there, when he was shot to death. He wanted all those who had nothing to lose to come together in D.C. that spring and summer -- however long it would take -- to shut down the government by nonviolent resistance until it agreed to shut down poverty and war. Martin Luther King Jr. was saying that Washington and Wall Street did not have the final say. There was -- and is -- a world out there, from the heartland of the USA to the heartbeat of the Congo, from those suffering in

Appalachia to those struggling in the Amazon. If we are willing to struggle, suffer, and die together nonviolently, anything is possible for our world. King's global, nonviolent vision is waiting to be realized if we're willing to carry it out, paying the price just as he did.

King, like the prophets before him, knew the towering powers that overwhelm us when we think small, are themselves small-time. He reminded us that our Pentagon generals and Wall Street barons are not in ultimate charge of reality any more than we as individuals are. "The arc of the universe," he said, "bends toward justice."

So let's not give up on our brother, Barack Obama, or on ourselves. And let's not give up on our brothers and sisters in the Pentagon and on Wall Street. Nonviolence is the most powerful force in existence. We can all become part of its movement.

How a President Can Practice *Satyagraha*

On the first day of school, September 8, 2009, at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, a ninth-grader named Lilly asked President Obama, "If you could have dinner with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?"

The president said his first choice for a dinner companion would be Gandhi, "a real hero of mine," adding:

If it hadn't been for the nonviolent movement in India, you might not have seen the same nonviolent movement for civil rights here in the United States.... He ended up doing so much and changing the world just by the power of his ethics, by his ability to change how people saw each other and saw themselves. [Gandhi was able to] help people who thought they had no power realize that they had power, and then help people who had a lot of power realize that if all they're doing is oppressing people, then that's not a really good exercise of power.

Maybe we all need to sit down for a meal with Gandhi, one that would be, as President Obama told Lilly, "a really small meal because he [like the impoverished people he represented] didn't eat a lot." What Gandhi would say to us over that small meal he did say at the end of his life to a U.S. writer, Vincent Sheean, who traveled half-way around the world to question him on vital matters, anticipating that Gandhi was about to be assassinated -- as he would be, in Sheean's presence, three days later.

As the two men paced a room together, Gandhi told his American visitor, with reference to World War II culminating in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "Your ends may have been good but your means were bad. That is not the way of truth."

If Gandhi's earnest conversation partner were Obama, not Sheean, and the time today, perhaps the next question would be: "What is the way of truth in Afghanistan?"

For Gandhi, truth was God. "Truth-force" was his term for nonviolence, *satyagraha*. Gandhi acted on the belief that there is nothing we as human beings can do that is more powerful,

more transforming, than to live out the truth as we know it at the deepest point in our conscience.

In dialogue today with a powerful man who knows that "oppressing people is not a really good exercise of power," Gandhi would say that hearing the truth and acting on it, regardless of the consequences to one's power and one's self, would be the way of truth in Afghanistan and in Washington. As politically confining as the White House is, it is for that very reason an ideal place to live out the truth, as President Kennedy did.

Why It's Up to Us, the People, to Practice *Satyagraha*

The ultimate reach of Lilly's question is a challenging one for us all, and President Obama's mention of Gandhi is a seed of hope. The month before his election as president, Barack Obama also invoked Gandhi as an inspiration, on that occasion Gandhi as the community organizer of a massive, nonviolent revolution. President-to-be Obama said Gandhi's portrait "hangs in my office to remind me that real change will not come from Washington -- it will come when the people, united, bring it to Washington."

Obama's pre-election Gandhi statement included a reference to the war in Iraq: "We've watched our standing in the world erode as we continue to lose American lives in a war that should've never been authorized and never been waged."

Candidate Obama's words on Iraq apply with equal urgency today to the war in Afghanistan and a threatened war in Iran, in the context of a global strategy of war on terror that, as Gandhi would say, "is not the way of truth."

John Kennedy recognized that the wars he was pressured to wage on Cuba, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union, all claimed as strategic parts of a global war on communism, were not the way of truth. With great courage, he turned away from those wars, and from the false ideology of war that justified them, to the truth of peacemaking. Had he not done so in the Cuban Missile Crisis, our planet would now be a nuclear wasteland. We can give thanks for the courage that took him to Dallas.

Yet the vision of Gandhi and King, and the words of Obama, remind us that the impetus for the kind of nonviolent change that is the condition for our survival "will not come from Washington -- it will come when the people, united, bring it to Washington." To the powers that dominate the president and the world, the most unspeakable reality of all would be our discovery as a people, all over this country and this globe, of a force more powerful than war.

The arc of the universe bends toward justice on earth, if we can believe in it and act on it. Let it be.

James W. Douglass is a Catholic Worker and the author of JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters (being published as a Simon & Schuster Touchstone paperback this fall).

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