

too to entertain them as they waited. The chief clown told Patrick Anderson of the Juvenile Delinquency Committee that they weren't going anywhere until they had a smoke. Anderson: "Kennedy returned and spoke to me: 'The clowns should be where the children are.' Our eyes met for a long moment and it seemed, incredibly, as if he wanted my agreement. 'Yes, sir,' I said, 'they should be,' and I herded the reluctant clowns downstairs."⁴³

It went on and on. He went skiing with Charles Spalding. "You almost prolong the pain not to lose the person," Spalding thought. "... It just hurts so bad. Then you figure, if it doesn't hurt I'll be further away from what I've lost. So it just seemed that those nights would go on forever."⁴⁴

VI

He refused to involve himself in the problem of who had murdered his brother. He "never really wanted any investigation," Nicholas Katzenbach thought.⁴⁵ Nothing would bring John Kennedy back to life. Investigation would only protract the unbearable pain. Almost better, Robert Kennedy seemed at times to feel, to close the book. He left to Katzenbach all dealings with the Warren Commission, appointed by the new President on November 29 to ascertain the truth about Dallas.

The Chief Justice and his colleagues had perforce to depend greatly on the intelligence agencies. They did not know that the agencies had their own secret reasons to fear a thorough inquiry. If it came out that the putative killer might have had intelligence connections, domestic or foreign, that FBI agents should have had him under close surveillance, that CIA assassins might have provoked him to the terrible deed, the agencies would be in the deepest trouble. But if Lee Harvey Oswald could be portrayed as a crazed loner acting on some solitary impulse of his own, they would be in the clear.

In CIA, James J. Angleton, the counterespionage chief and CIA liaison with the Warren Commission, compiled a dragnet of names and called for information from all branches of the Agency. One name on his list was Rolando Cubela Secades. Desmond FitzGerald decided to withhold from Angleton the story of CIA's role in Cubela's plot to murder Castro. He even ordered any mention of the poison pen deleted from the report of the November 22 meeting.* Nor did

* My source is the informative book by Edward Jay Epstein, *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald* (New York, 1968), 253-254. Epstein's source was evidently Angleton. I know no reason to doubt this particular story. But, since Angleton in his quest, necessary but maniacal, for Soviet 'moles' (penetration agents burrowing their

Allen Dulles, a member of the Warren Commission, repair the ignorance of his colleagues. (He may not have known about Cubela, but he certainly knew about the 1960-61 assassination attempts.)

The FBI succumbed equally to the bureaucratic imperative. As Edward Jay Epstein has persuasively argued, the Bureau might well have suspected that Oswald had been involved with the KGB and actually believed he had met with a Soviet intelligence officer in Mexico City two months before Dallas. But Oswald's name was not in the FBI's voluminous Security Index. Hoover at once called for an internal inquiry into the "investigative deficiencies in the Oswald case." After reading the report, he noted despairingly that the findings "have resulted in forever destroying the Bureau as the top level investigative organization." Early in December he secretly censured seventeen FBI officials.⁴⁶ Externally he was desperate to avert any suspicion that the Bureau had failed. "The thing I am most concerned about," he told Walter Jenkins of the new White House, "... is having something issued so we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin." Katzenbach, no doubt reflecting Hoover, wrote Bill Moyers, another of the new President's special assistants:

1. The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.
2. Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists.⁴⁷

Robert Kennedy, Katzenbach said later, knew nothing about this memorandum.⁴⁸

For reasons of bureaucratic self-preservation, the CIA and the FBI thus found themselves in the ironic position of denying any possibility of Cuban or Soviet implication. Nor did the new administration wish to think about the unthinkable problems that would arise if there were indication of international conspiracy. All the pressures in Washington were toward a quick and uncomplicated verdict. Robert Kennedy, I believe, had his own thoughts. We spent the evening of December 9 together. "I asked him, perhaps tactlessly, about Oswald. He said that there could be no serious doubt that Oswald was guilty, but there was still argument if he had done it by himself or as part of a larger plot, whether organized by Castro or by gangsters.

way in the adversary system) at one time thought I might be a Soviet agent in the White House (after a Soviet official in Caracas came up with the date of the Bay of Pigs landing). I may perhaps be pardoned if I do not regard him with the reverence that pervades the Epstein book.

The FBI thought he had done it by himself, but McCone thought there were two people involved in the shooting.⁴⁹

At about the same time, Kennedy asked Walter Sheridan how Jimmy Hoffa had taken the news. "I didn't want to tell him," Sheridan said later, "but he made me tell him." Hoffa in Miami, hearing that Harold Gibbons and top Teamsters in Washington had lowered the flag over the marble palace to half-mast, "flew into a rage." He yelled at his secretary for crying. A reporter asked him about the Attorney General. Hoffa spat out: "Bobby Kennedy is just another lawyer now." A Teamster leader in Puerto Rico soon wrote Robert Kennedy that he planned to solicit donations from union brothers to "clean, beautify and supply with flowers the grave of Lee Harvey Oswald. You can rest assured contributions will be unanimous."⁵⁰

Robert Kennedy perceived so much hatred about, so many enemies: the Teamsters; the gangsters; the pro-Castro Cubans; the anti-Castro Cubans; the racists; the right-wing fanatics; the lonely deluded nuts mumbling to themselves in the night. I do not know whether he suspected how much vital information both the FBI and the CIA deliberately denied the Warren Commission or whether he ever read its report. But on October 30, 1966, as we talked till two-thirty in the morning in P. J. Clarke's saloon in New York City, "RFK wondered how long he could continue to avoid comment on the report. It is evident that he believes that it was a poor job and will not endorse it, but that he is unwilling to criticize it and thereby reopen the whole tragic business."⁵¹

The next year Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney, started making sensational charges about a conspiracy. I asked Kennedy what he made of them. He thought Garrison might be onto something; NBC, he added, had sent Walter Sheridan to New Orleans to find out what Garrison had. Garrison's villain turned out to be the CIA. Kennedy said to Sheridan something like: "You know, at the time I asked McCone . . . if they had killed my brother, and I asked him in a way that he couldn't lie to me, and they hadn't." Kennedy asked Frank Mankiewicz of his Senate staff whether he thought Garrison had anything. "And I started to tell him, and he said, 'Well, I don't think I want to know.'"⁵² Kennedy told me later: "Walter Sheridan is satisfied that Garrison is a fraud."

I cannot say what his essential feeling was. He came to believe the Warren Commission had done an inadequate job; but he had no

* Walter Sheridan, in recorded interview by Roberta Greene, June 12, 1970. 19. RFK Oral History Program. In 1967 Marvin Watson of Lyndon Johnson's White House staff told Cartha DeLoach of the FBI that Johnson "was now convinced there was a plot in connection with the assassination. Watson stated the President felt that CIA had had something to do with this plot" (*Washington Post*, December 13, 1977).