

Three Assassinations

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"We will have new assassinations," I wrote in these pages in the June issue.

"If indeed a conspiracy did kill President Kennedy, then a future President who incurred the displeasure of the same or similar circles would be likely to meet the same fate," wrote Conor Cruise O'Brien in the December issue. Warning that it was "urgently necessary to call for a serious and independent investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy," he then said, "If the man who became President through that assassination still chooses to maintain the fiction that there has already been a serious investigation into the assassination, then it is time for others to give a lead in this matter. It is from the late President's Senatorial brothers that the lead would most fittingly come."

But the brothers did not take the lead. On the contrary, Robert Kennedy said in March 1968 that he stood by the Warren Report, and in April he said in effect that Lee Harvey Oswald was his brother's lone assassin. Now Robert Kennedy too has fallen, an assassin's bullet in his head, and lies with his assassinated brother in Arlington. Can there be doubt that Robert Kennedy, by virtue of iron determination and awesome resources, was to be President, in the 1970's if not in 1968? Or that his policies, like those of John F. Kennedy, incurred the displeasure of the centers of real power, and the wrath of the racists, the Vietnam hawks, and the Radical Right ?

With the murder of Robert Kennedy, the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien and of others have proven prophetic; but to say that those who warned of this danger have earned the right to be listened to seriously is not to say that they will at least be heard.

True, the last surviving Kennedy brother finally has expressed doubt, for the first time, that it was Lee Harvey Oswald who assassinated President Kennedy. The New York Times reported on June 7, 1968 that Ted Kennedy, keeping vigil at his brother Robert's coffin on the flight to New York, was "mad at what happens in this country. He does not know whether it is the act of a single person or whether this is the act of a conspiracy. His brother (John) was killed by a rather faceless man whom we suspect, though we don't know for sure, was Lee Harvey Oswald."

Slanted News

In Newsweek's carefully edited account of the flight to New York, the reference to conspiracy and to doubt of Oswald's guilt disappeared: "The long flight home was a somber and bitter and intensely private affair. Ted rode up front beside the coffin, now dozing, now talking bitterly with others of the clan about the 'faceless men' who had murdered Jack and Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy."

Time magazine, for its part, did not stoop to such slanting and manipulation. It omitted the story entirely.

Few people will thus be aware that Ted Kennedy has committed the heresy of doubting the Warren Report and suspecting that his two brothers were victims of a conspiracy. He may disavow his bitter reflections and his suspicion--perhaps he has done so already, for as he delivered a eulogy of his second assassinated brother at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Earl Warren was there among the honored guests and mourners.

Now that Robert Kennedy is dead and buried, many who detested him are spewing out encomiums. He was feared and loathed by high officials and political leaders--by his rivals for power, and by those who choked on the prospect of yielding power to him. In the weeks before his murder, the Administration had leaked of damaging stories about Robert Kennedy, through a widely-read syndicated column. RFK had been fingered as the man who authorized the wiretaps and bugging of Martin Luther King in his private life as well as his official activities. RFK had been denounced as a secret friend of the utilities and their accomplice in the plundering of the public. He had been attacked for granting immunity from prosecution to an unsavory character who had been a key witness against Hoffa, and for a variety of other compromising actions.

Fortunate J. Edgar Hoover! who in his twilight years experiences the downfall and death, one by one, of his arch-enemies---John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. He will live to be 150, on the strength of such juices. The feebees, under his guidance, investigate each assassination; and although they have not deigned, nor been compelled, to explain the numerous derelictions in their handling of the Oswald case, brought to light by critics of the Warren Report, they have sailed full steam ahead in their peremptory and mysterious way in the current investigations. One marvels that responsibilities of such magnitude as the discovery and apprehension of assassins continue to be reposed in an agency which, in the Dallas assassinations, demonstrably engaged in a peculiar pattern of misreporting of statements made to its agents and in outright intimidation of witnesses. Yet J. Edgar Hoover remains, in virtual autonomy and omnipotence, off-limits to a servile press and challenged only by Senator Eugene McCarthy among those who constitute the Establishment.

Hoover's nominal boss, the Attorney-General, is a less imposing figure. To him falls the unenviable task of serving as the broken record, hiccuping assurances to the populace that there is no conspiracy. No sooner was Robert Kennedy shot than Ramsey Clark was spinning on the turntable with his predictable litany: "No evidence of a conspiracy, only the evidence of this individual act." As he had done a few short hours after Martin Luther King was assassinated, before there could be any investigative basis for a judgment, Clark hastened again to his leitmotiv of the lone assassin. That he made such specious pronouncements twice within two months, and without visible embarrassment, reveals him to be a tiresome bureaucrat and sycophant-----a far cry from his predecessor Robert Kennedy who, as Attorney General, went so far as to impose his authority on the head of the FBI.

Learned Attorneys...

But one should be fair even to a bureaucrat and refrain from unjustified and fatuous accusation: such as was heard recently, to the effect that Ramsey Clark's vocabulary does not include the word "conspiracy" but only the phrase "non-conspiracy." That is hardly merited by a man like Ramsey Clark,^{who} has just successfully prosecuted a pediatrician and three other such public enemies for conspiracy against the System which sends young men to commit atrocities and to give their own lives in the most cowardly and obscene war ever visited upon innocent helpless people. "Conspiracy" certainly is in the Attorney-General's lexicon.

Like Ramsey Clark, New Orleans district attorney Garrison also lost no time in making sensational and unwarranted statements about the latest assassination. An Associated Press item reported that while Kennedy lay dying on June 5 and before his accused assailant was even identified, Garrison was already declaring the event to be part of the same vast conspiracy in which he had already arrested a prominent New Orleans personality. Curiously, AP obtained this intelligence from Henry Wade, the Dallas district attorney whose uncouth and outrageous improprieties in the Oswald case will live long in the annals of mindlessness. Since Wade is--to paraphrase Leo Sauvage--the Jim Garrison of Dallas, it is not unfitting that the one should speak for the other.

Garrison may be correct, of course, in sensing the existence of a vast conspiracy--it is scarcely an original thought. But categorical conclusions are premature; and it seems unlikely that such a conspiracy as that which disposed of President Kennedy has any real connection with the motley assortment of eccentrics, small-timers, and unsavory odd-balls endowed, in Garrison's febrile imagination, with all the attributes of a ring of master assassins and with criminal genius to shame Professor Moriarity himself. Garrison's great leap forward in the further escalation of his conspiracy hypothesis seems less germane to the known facts about the assassination of Robert Kennedy than to an insatiable appetite for publicity.

...and Common Shysters

But the cheapest and most indecent act of instant capitalizing on the mortality of a fellow human being remained to be committed by Mark Lane, the ostensible "dean" of the Warren Report critics and a foremost lieutenant in the Garrison "investigation," for which he has constantly vouched in its various metamorphoses. Only a few hours after Robert Kennedy expired, Lane alleged on a Philadelphia television program that RFK only weeks earlier had sent two emissaries to New Orleans to reassure Garrison that he was "sympathetic," that he did not accept the Warren Report either but that as a candidate he could not act now, "there were guns between him and the White House," but if elected he would reopen the case and there would be arrests and prosecutions.

Self-evidently, this was an infamous falsehood from beginning to end, and utterly incompatible with the recent views expressed by Robert Kennedy, by Garrison, and by Lane himself. Immediate inquiries were nevertheless undertaken, which confirmed that the story of the emissaries was wholly unfounded and false.

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White H."

This contemptible self-serving invention was only one of many cynical, nonsensical, and hysterical statements that clogged the airwaves in the aftermath of the second Kennedy assassination. Fundits among the news broadcasters and the commentators who interpret events for us played variations on the theme of the country's sickness (or health) and guilt (or innocence), fretting for the panacea of stricter gun controls, and "remembering" over-eagerly that in each of the three horrifying assassinations which haunted the fearful land, there had been only one alienated misfit, acting alone. Daniel Schorr of CBS, for example, attained the summit of brain-washed piety when he urged listeners to bear in mind that President Kennedy was assassinated by one deranged man--the Warren Commission had said so; that all appearances suggested that Senator Kennedy had been killed by one man acting alone; and, despite all appearances, that Martin Luther King had been shot by a loner--"Ramsey Clark said so, only yesterday," constituting for Schorr an irresistible proof.

Three days later James Earl Ray, the accused assassin of Martin Luther King, was arrested in London after a highly sophisticated and well-financed escape which, on its face, was beyond the resources of a paltry criminal and suggestive of a skillful, well-organized and far-seeing plan. Nothing daunted, Ramsey Clark returned to the television cameras to chant his old refrain of a lone assassin still again. But where did Ray get all that money, asked the interviewer. The proceeds of his life of crime, blandly replied the Attorney General. According to Life magazine, Ray's career of holdups and robberies up to 1960, when he drew a 20-year sentence (serving seven years until his escape from the penitentiary in April 1967), had netted him a total of \$3,190. Yet he had spent about \$10,000 between August 1967 and April 1968, and substantial sums after that in travel to Canada, Portugal, and England, without visible earnings or income. That adds up to a paid assassin or a paid decoy and, the Attorney General notwithstanding, not to a lone assassin.

A Third Accused "Loner"

Nor is it possible yet to dismiss the accused assassin of Robert Kennedy as only a lone fanatic. Sirhan Bishara Sirhan missed by a hair being torn limb from limb by an enraged crowd at the scene. Robert Kennedy's aides

are to be commended for realizing, even in the midst of the first shockwave, that there must not be another Oswald and for preventing a lynching on the spot. The Los Angeles police are also praiseworthy for their careful protection of Sirhan's person and his rights. The police seem to have taken every care not to repeat in any respect the shameful travesty of Dallas 1963: the interrogations of Sirhan have been tape-recorded, extremely strict security measures have been imposed (even the arraigning judge was searched before being permitted to enter the jail), and a public pledge has been given that every lead without exception would be followed up so as to give no excuse for books to be written in criticism of their conduct of the investigation.

If Robert Kennedy was really assassinated by one man acting alone, if there was no conspiracy and no connection with the other assassinations, it will still be very difficult for people to believe it. As even the most orthodox spokesmen on public affairs have admitted, the pattern seems too consistent to be accidental. If the assassinations were random crimes by unstable individuals unconnected with each other or with anyone else, the law of chance would decree random victims covering the whole political spectrum. But the victims in each case were men opposed to the Vietnam war and championing, to greater or lesser degree, radical programs to redistribute wealth and power to the dispossessed. Even obtuse and timid commentators have been driven by the seemingly directed nature of these political executions--these vetoes by assassination--to voice openly the suspicion that an anti-humanist conspiracy is at work.

Heads in the Sand

In the same breath, however, these converts to the conspiracy hypothesis are likely to reiterate that Oswald was the lone assassin of President Kennedy. The news media have done their hard-sell of the Warren Report so well that logical absurdities of this kind are committed, by those who are now able to think the unthinkable, so long as it is vague and abstract. They are still incapable of thinking the unthinkable about the Warren Commission and its specious Report. The enormous concussion of the second Kennedy assassination seems to have unhinged good minds and sent them scurrying for shelter into the realms of irrelevancy and quack remedies, not the least of which is the hoopla about gun-control legislation. The great eruption of emotion and argument about the sickness of society and the prevalence of firearms is predicated on the assumption that we have experienced a series of random senseless homicides by deranged individuals. That assumption might not be unreasonable in the assassination of Robert Kennedy, if it was the only

case in point; but it is an assumption not consistent with the known evidence in the Martin Luther King assassination, and it is completely false in the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Obsessive belief in lone assassins is perhaps a device by which some people can better cope with the horror generated by the murder of Robert Kennedy. Certainly, on the human level, it was a tragedy for the family; bereaved a second time by assassination in all its shocking cruelty. On the political level, it brought ominously to the surface the possibility that all hope of getting rid of the Johnson administration, whether in Humphrey or Nixon guise, was foreclosed. Johnson, whose tenure in the White House is now doomed to move into history ingloriously as the hyphen between two Kennedy assassinations, tried to appear equal to the grimness of the occasion. He called, of course, for prayer; and, looking like a killer even as he decried violence and murder (except in Vietnam), he appointed...a new commission! Just what was needed by a people already burdened with the poisoned fruits of the Warren Commission, and the disregarded findings of the Koerner Commission. Adding injury to insult, Johnson proceeded to name to the "violence commission" two repeaters from the discredited and duplicitous Warren panel--Hale Boggs, Congressman from Louisiana, and Albert E. Jenner, Jr., senior counsel.

Deceit and Prejudgment

The designation of Jenner is nothing less than scandalous. He has broadcast flagrant falsehoods and misrepresentation of the evidence against Oswald, as was explicitly documented in the March 1967 issue of The Minority of One. Although the manuscript of that article was sent to him before publication, Jenner did not then or subsequently deny the charges. By his default, he stands discredited by deliberate deceitfulness and misstatements on an issue of cardinal importance. Named to the violence commission, Jenner rushed before the TV cameras to proclaim his intention, as a commissioner, of studying in greater depth Oswald's "motivation." There is ample and irrefutable proof on record that President Kennedy was assassinated in a cross-fire and therefore by a conspiracy, but Jenner still seeks to preserve the shoddy Warren Report, in which his reputation is invested, and to distract the public from horrid thoughts of conspiracy.

Both Jenner and Hale Boggs should be summarily removed from the violence commission by reason of their complicity in the Warren Report; and editorials in The New York Post and The New Republic have rightly demanded the immediate resignation of two other designees--Senator Roman Hruska, darling of the gun lobby, and Eric Hoffer, the homey philosopher and Vietnam hawk who prematurely and unilaterally absolved the country of sickness and guilt. Better still, the entire commission should resign and spare us all a tedious charade.

A striking evidenciary detail that arises in the assassination of Robert Kennedy is that many of the witnesses present heard only three shots, when eight were actually fired. The majority of witnesses in Dealey Plaza also heard only three shots. The Warren Commission gave considerable weight to that earwitness testimony as well as to the three cartridge cases found near the Book Depository window, and concluded that only three shots had been fired at President Kennedy. But J.D. Thompson has shown that one of the cartridge cases had a dented lip which precluded legitimacy and strongly suggested that it was planted evidence to incriminate Oswald; and the shooting of Robert Kennedy confirms what the critics of the Warren Report have always maintained---that witnesses can hear only three shots when a greater number are fired, and that more than three shots were fired at the President in Dallas.

But it is not such evidenciary discoveries that have finally forced a number of die-hards to reconsider their claim of infallibility for the Warren Report. Truman Capote is a case in point. In March 1968 he said flatly that the Report was correct, that Oswald was the lone assassin, and that was all there was to that. Capping his own ignorance and arrogance, he next denounced the critics as "vultures" feeding on the corpse of the murdered President in order to enrich themselves. In June, sobered by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, Capote was ready to believe that all three assassinations may be the work of a master conspiracy to remove a particular group of political leaders. He had not the grace, however, to withdraw his scurrilous and defamatory remarks about the critics, even as he moved toward their position. In any case, Capote's change of heart is no occasion for rejoicing: his new stance is no less uninformed and irresponsible than his earlier dicta, and only suggests all the more that a peacock so intellectually undisciplined should occupy himself with masquerade balls and refrain from comment on public affairs.

Dallas Revisited

Two more converts to the conspiracy hypothesis are Sam Yorty, the Mayor of Los Angeles, and columnist Walter Winchell. Although the accused assassin of Robert Kennedy appears to be a fanatic pro-Arab and anti-Israel partisan,

Yorty held a press conference in which he leaked information which he claimed as indicating that Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was a Communist or under Communist influence and inspiration. He repeated almost exactly the inglorious performance of the Dallas authorities who had tried energetically and insidiously to portray Oswald as a Communist and to inflame opinion in such a manner as to distract attention from the ultra-Right of Dallas, which was logically and irresistably under suspicion. Yorty's insinuations were no less vicious or contrived, and moved other Los Angeles officials to repudiate his statements as not only prejudicial to the accused but unfounded and misleading.

Some days later, Winchell published a report which sought to implicate pro-Castro Cubans in the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Again, an exact repetition of efforts by rabid anti-Castroites and agents provocateur to incriminate Fidel Castro in the murder of President Kennedy. The absurdity of the exercise is matched only by its malice and delerium.

If we are to function rationally and in the context of reality rather than be buffeted here and there by doctrinal passion, we cannot yet do more than acknowledge that the accused assassin appears to have been caught red-handed and that while there is no solid evidence as yet of accomplices or conspirators, the possibility cannot be dismissed a priori. In the assassination of Martin Luther King, there are persistent and serious indications of conspiracy and perhaps of a hired killer. And, in the assassination of President Kennedy, there is no longer any doubt that he was caught in a murderous crossfire by two or more killers, but that Oswald may well have been entirely innocent and unknowing. The fact that two of the three assassinations were, or give every appearance of having been, the work of a conspiracy (or of two unrelated conspiracies) justifies every hesitation in adjudging the nature of the third assassination. Respect for fact and fairness to the accused require that judgment be withheld until all the evidence has been unfolded and tested under cross-examination. Logic and understanding of the political forces and counter-forces evident in the nation at this time of show-down on Vietnam and in the cities, and of the mammoth economic stakes invested in the status quo---these, however, require that the possibility of conspiracy be left open. The accused assassin is, fortunately, alive. He may decide to testify at his trial. The truth may emerge in irrefutable fullness and spare us the uncertainty and turmoil

*This page
retyped to
add new
paragraph on
J. F. Stone
"persistent
conspiracy"
hypothesis
in re JFK*

Some years ago, a woman was shot in the Times Square station of the subway by a man holding a sawed-off firearm in a cardboard box in Christmas wrappings. Had the man been killed while attempting to escape....(etc.)

that would have been touched off if Sirhan had been killed on the spot, as he nearly was, by an infuriated crowd.

Deceptive Appearances

Recently a woman was murdered by a man who shot her with a sawed-off firearm concealed in a cardboard box. Had the man been killed while attempting to escape, as might well have happened, he would have been branded a diabolical and cowardly killer and the case would have been closed. He was, in fact, completely innocent. Because he was taken alive, the authorities were able to determine that he had been tricked by the woman's husband into believing that he was taking a photograph of the victim. Instead of a camera, the box contained a gun, placed there by the real murderer. I am grateful to Shelley Braverman, the firearms expert, for calling this case to my attention, because it is a remarkable example of the vulnerability of purely circumstantial evidence---although I do not suggest that there is necessarily any analogy to be found in the three assassinations.

This example of a "lone assassin" who turned out to be only an innocent dupe should perhaps be borne in mind while the legal process spins out and brings the accused assassins of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy to trial.

But regardless of the outcome in the Sirhan case or that of James Earl Ray, justice remains to be done in the Oswald case. Oswald stands wrongfully and cruelly stigmatized as a lone assassin in a crime which was committed by a conspiracy. He is the victim of a Governmental commission whose depraved "investigation" signifies an official policy of falsehood and abuse of trust. As every part of the fabric of American life shows increasing tension and threatens to disintegrate completely, we are forced back to Dallas where the frightening chain reaction started, and to Los Angeles, where the prospect was diminished for some moderation or reversal of the ferocious policy of carnage abroad and attrition at home against protest and dissent. While the Warren Report remains a gangrenous stain on the history books, it is a license to the Government to mutilate truth to justice, to frustrate the great yearning for a return to a humanistic ideal, and to mechanize and conform society by the force of clubs, bullets, mace, and napalm.

While that big lie endures in its official wrappers, there will be new assassinations again and still again, until the earth at Arlington groans under its burden of martyrs.