

*Second draft
see Rev.*

Three Assassinations

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

Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote in the December 1967 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." Warning that it was "urgently necessary to call for a serious and independent investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy," Dr. O'Brien 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, Senator Robert Kennedy said in March 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 with an assassin's bullet in his head, and lies with his assassinated brother in Arlington National Cemetery. Can anyone doubt that Robert Kennedy was to be a future President, in 1972 if not in 1968, or that his policies, like John F. Kennedy's, incurred the displeasure and the wrath of the power structure, ^{the racists,} ~~and~~ the hawks, and the radical Right? ^{the 1970's} ~~With~~ the murder of Robert Kennedy, the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien and of others have been proven prophetic; but to say that those who warned of this have earned the right to be listened to seriously is not to say that they will at last be heard.

True, Senator Edward Kennedy, the last surviving 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."

SAYED NEWS
In Newsweek's account of the flight to New York, the reference to conspiracy and to doubt of Oswald's guilt disappeared in a subtly edited account of the same story: "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 alteration and distortion: it omitted the story completely.

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 disbelief --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, no one speaks ill of him and many who detested him are spewing out encomiums. He was feared and loathed by some of the highest public officials and political leaders, by those who were 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

a stream of damaging information about Robert Kennedy ~~to the public~~, through a widely-read syndicated column. He had been fingered as the man who authorized wiretaps and bugging to spy on Martin Luther King in his private life as well as his official activities. He had been denounced as the secret agent of the utilities and an accomplice in their plundering of the public.

Fortunate J. Edgar Hoover! In his twilight years, he experiences one by one the downfall and death of his arch-enemies---John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy. He will live to be 150, on the strength of such juices. His nominal boss, the Attorney-General, is less fortunate. To him falls the unenviable task of serving as the broken record. No sooner was Robert Kennedy shot down than Ramsey Clark was spinning on the turntable his predictable litany: "No evidence of a conspiracy, only the evidence of this individual act." So chanted Ramsey Clark a few short hours after Martin Luther King was assassinated, and again a few short hours after Robert Kennedy was shot, when there could be no investigative basis whatever for such a pronouncement. That Ramsey Clark has twice within two months uttered such premature judgments, and without visible embarrassment, reveals him to be a tiresome little bureaucrat and obedient propagandist whose occupancy of high office is an affront.

However, I do not agree with the fatuous accusation published recently by one of the Attorney General's detractors to the effect that the word "conspiracy" does not exist in Ramsey Clark's vocabulary, but only the phrase "non-conspiracy." That is hardly fair to the man who has just successfully prosecuted a pediatrician, a theologian, and ~~such~~ such a few other public enemies ^{for} conspiracy against the most cowardly and dirty war in which Americans have ever been compelled to die and to commit atrocities against humanity unrivalled in bestiality.

Like Ramsey Clark, New Orleans district attorney Garrison lost no time in making unwarranted pronouncements about the latest assassination. According to an Associated Press item, 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 a vast conspiracy, the same plot for which he had arrested a prominent citizen of New Orleans. Curiously, the news of Garrison's self-serving declaration was given to AP by Henry Wade, the district attorney of Dallas, whose ignorance and outrageous improprieties in the Oswald case will live forever in the annals of mindlessness. Since Wade is (to paraphrase my friend 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 it seems unlikely that such a conspiracy, if it exists, has any real connection with the motley collection of New Orleans eccentrics, or the assortment of small-timers and unsavory odd-balls elsewhere, whom Garrison's febrile imagination endows with all the attributes of a ring of master assassins and criminal genius to rank with Professor Moriarity Himself. Garrison's great leap forward in the escalation of his conspiracy hypothesis seems less germane to the assassination of Senator Kennedy than to an insatiable appetite for attention.

~~find in the center of the main stage~~

But the cheapest and dirtiest act of instant capitalizing on the mortality of a fellow human being remained to be committed by Mark Lane, the ostensible "dean" of the critics of the Warren Report and a foremost advocate of the Garrison "investigation," for which he has publicly vouched. Only four or five hours after Robert Kennedy died, Lane said on a television interview in Philadelphia that Kennedy 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 he could not act now, when he was a candidate, "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 recent statements or writings of Robert Kennedy, Garrison, and Lane himself. Immediate inquiries were nevertheless made which confirmed that the story was wholly unfounded and false.

This despicable invention was only one of many cynical, obscene, and cretinous statements that cluttered the airwaves in the wake of the second Kennedy assassination. Luminaries among the news commentators hastened to insist still again that the country was not sick and not guilty, for in each of the three horrendous assassinations there had been only one lone assassin.

Daniel Schorr of CBS, for example, attained new heights of brain-washed piety when he urged his listeners to remember that President Kennedy was killed by one deranged man (the Warren Commission had said so), Senator Kennedy had apparently been killed by one man acting alone, and (despite all appearances) Martin Luther King had been killed by one man, a conclusion which Schorr actually regarded as irresistible on the strength of the fact that "Ramsey Clark said so, only yesterday"!

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RAMSEY CLARK
1968

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Three days later

James Earl Ray was arrested in London, after a highly sophisticated and well-financed escape and elusion of police authorities which, on its face, was enormously beyond the resources of a mere small-time criminal and suggested a skillful and well-organized plan. Undismayed, Ramsey Clark went before the television cameras the next day to chant his old refrain of a lone assassin still again. But where did Ray get all that money, asked one of the interviewers.

The proceeds of his life of crime, blandly replied the Attorney General. According to Life magazine of May 3, 1968, Ray's holdups and robberies before he drew a 20-year ^{Prison} sentence ^{in 1960} had netted a total of \$3,190. Yet he had spent about \$10,000 in cash between August 1957 and April 1968, and substantial sums after that in his escape via Canada and Portugal to London. The Attorney General notwithstanding, this adds up to a paid assassin, or a paid decoy, and not by any stretch of imagination to a lone assassin.

Nor is it possible yet to reach any considered judgment about the accused assassin of Robert Kennedy. Sirhan Bishara Sirhan missed, by a hair, being torn limb from limb by the enraged crowd which witnessed the shooting. Senator Kennedy's aides, who screamed that there must not be another Oswald, are greatly to be commended for preventing the lynching of Sirhan on the spot. The protection of Sirhan's person and of his rights by the Los Angeles authorities is also praiseworthy. The Los Angeles police have, in fact, taken every care not to repeat in any respect the travesty of Dallas 1963: they tape-recorded the interrogations of Sirhan, they imposed extremely strict security measures and searched even the arraigning judge before permitting him to enter ^{the jail}, and they have publicly pledged that every lead would be followed up tirelessly, so as to give no excuse for books to be written in criticism of their conduct.

Yet even if Robert Kennedy was really assassinated by one man acting alone, even if there was no conspiracy and no connection with the assassination of President Kennedy or Martin Luther King, it will be extremely difficult for people to believe this. As the most orthodox spokesmen for the Establishment have had to admit, the pattern seems too consistent to be accidental. If these assassinations were random crimes by deranged and unconnected individuals, then the law of chance would decree that the victims cover the political spectrum --that a hawk on Vietnam, or a white supremacist, or an opponent of the welfare system also stopped a bullet. But ~~where~~ the victims are consistently those men who oppose the war and advocate radical programs to redistribute wealth and power

The horror generated by the murder of Robert Kennedy was enormous. On the purely human level, one had to be aghast at the bereavement of a family diminished a second time by assassination in all its shocking cruelty, plunged again from triumph and invincibility into inconsolable grief and irreparable loss. On the political level, it brought the ominous realization that the assassination might foreclose all hope of getting rid of the Johnson administration, whether in Humphrey or Nixon guise. Johnson, whose tenure in the White House is now doomed to move into history as the hyphen between two Kennedy assassinations, tried to be 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! Here is moral bankruptcy and perversion unparalleled, and Presidential contempt for the 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 new "violence commission" two repeaters from the discredited and duplicitous Warren panel —Hale Boggs of Louisiana, and Albert E. Jenner, Jr.

MSUC The designation of Jenner is nothing less than scandalous. He has broadcast flagrant falsehoods and persistent misrepresentation of the evidence against Lee Harvey Oswald, as was amply and 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, in whole or in part. By his default, he stands as a man who has engaged in deliberate deceit and misinformation on an issue of cardinal importance. Named to the violence commission, Jenner hastened to the TV cameras to proclaim his intention, as a commissioner, to study in greater depth the "motivation" of Lee Harvey Oswald. There is now incontrovertible

proof on record that President Kennedy was assassinated in a cross-fire and therefore by a conspiracy, but Jenner merely doubles his efforts on behalf on the Warren Report, in which his vested interest is obvious, so as 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. The editorial columns of such publications as The New York Post and The New Republic have already called for the immediate resignations of two other designees, Senator Roman Hruska, darling of the gun lobby, and Eric Hoffer, the pseudo-philosopher of the waterfront, nine-tenths a creation of the public relations industry and ten-tenths a Vietnam hawk, who prematurely and unilaterally absolved the country of sickness or guilt. Better still, the entire commission should resign and spare us all the tedious charade of a nonsensical "investigation" of the violence which they will attribute to imaginary lone assassins and carefully divorce from the inferno into which Vietnam has been thrust by the same Johnson who convened this superfluous panel.

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One striking evidenciary detail that emerges from the assassination of Robert Kennedy is that many of the witnesses who were present heard only three shots, although it turns out that eight shots were actually fired. The majority of witnesses at Dealey Plaza in Dallas also heard only three shots. The Warren Commission gave considerable weight to that earwitness testimony, and to the discovery of three cartridge cases near the window of the Book Depository, and concluded that only three shots had been fired at President Kennedy. But J. D. Thompson has brought to light that one of the three cartridge cases had a dented lip which made its firing in the alleged assassination rifle impossible, which suggests 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 it is possible for witnesses to hear only three shots when a greater number were in actuality fired.

But it is not such evidenciary discoveries that has finally forced a number of die-hards to reconsider the infallibility of the Warren Report. Truman Capote is a case in point. In March 1964 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 then denounced the critics as "vultures" feeding on the corpse of the dead President in order to make money. Now sobered by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, Capote suggests that the three killings may be part of a master conspiracy to remove political leaders of a particular stripe.

He has not the grace, however, to withdraw his scurrilous and defamatory remarks about the critics even when he has finally moved toward their position. Capote's change of heart provides no occasion to rejoice, since his new stance is no less uninformed and irresponsible than his earlier orthodoxy on the Warren Report, and only strengthens the impression that an intellectually undisciplined peacock best occupies himself with masquerade balls and should refrain from comment on public affairs.

Two additional converts to the conspiracy hypothesis demand mention --Sam Yorty, the Mayor of Los Angeles; and columnist Walter Winchell. Confronted by an accused assassin of Robert Kennedy who appears to hold fanatic pro-Arab and violently anti-Israel, anti-Jewish views, Yorty held a press conference in which he leaked information suggesting 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 immediately to portray Oswald as a Communist, to inflame public opinion and to distract attention from the ultra-Right of Dallas, which logically and irresistably had to come under suspicion. Yorty's insinuations were so vicious and crude a manifestation of rabid anti-Communism that other Los Angeles officials at once repudiated his statements as not only prejudicial to the accused but unfounded and misleading.

Winchell, some days later, 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 like Stanley Ross, editor of El Tiempo, to incriminate Fidel Castro in the murder of President Kennedy. The absurdity of the exercise is matched only by its malice and delirium.

If we are to take account of reality rather than be propelled here and there by pure political doctrine and monolithic bias, we cannot yet go beyond an acknowledgment that the accused assassin of Robert Kennedy appears to have been caught red-handed and that no substantial evidence has thus far come to light which justifies a conspiracy theory in this third assassination. At the same time, we can see persistent and strong indications of conspiracy in the assassination of Martin Luther King, and possibly the stamp of the hired killer in Memphis. And, in the assassination of President John Kennedy, there is no longer any doubt that he was caught in a murderous crossfire by two or more riflemen, and that Oswald was almost certainly 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 two unrelated conspiracies) justifies considerable hesitation in adjudging the nature of the third assassination. Respect for fact, and fairness to the accused, demand that judgment be withheld until the full 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 confrontation in the cities and the mammoth economic stakes invested in the status quo--these, however, require that the possibility of conspiracy be left open. The accused assassin is, after all, alive. He may decide to testify at his trial. The truth may emerge in incontrovertible fullness and the world may be spared the uncertainty and turmoil which the lynching of Sirhan Sirhan on the spot--only narrowly avoided--would have launched.

Recently a woman was murdered by a man who shot her with a sawed-off firearm concealed in a cardboard box. Had the murderer been killed, as he nearly was, while attempting to escape, he would have been branded a diabolical killer and coward, and the case would have been closed. But he was not killed.

Because he was captured alive, the authorities were able to determine that he had been tricked by the real murderer into pressing a lever on what he thought was a camera, believing that he was taking a photograph of the murderer's wife. The man who actually pressed the trigger, a person of impoverished mental capacity, had been tricked into becoming a patsy and the cunning actual murderer had almost got away scot-free. (I am indebted to firearms expert Shelley Braverman for calling this case to my attention.)

The deceptiveness of appearances is a cliché; but here is a striking example of a "lone assassin" who was only an innocent dupe, and it will be well to keep it in mind as the case of Sirhan Sirhan awaits the legal process, and to eschew premature and prejudicial judgments.

Regardless of the outcome in the Sirhan case or that of James Earl Ray, justice remains to be done in the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He was murdered by a conspiracy and the crime was fixed on one man who stands wrongfully and cruelly stigmatized, by a Governmental Commission whose depraved "investigation" signifies an official policy of deceit and abuse by the Government which is supposed to serve the people.

As every piece of the fabric of the American social structure shows increasing strain and threatens total disintegration, one is forced back to Dallas where the frightening chain reaction started, and to Los Angeles, which aborted such prospect as there was for some moderation of the ferocious policy of carnage abroad and attrition at home against dissidents and rebels. While the Warren Report remains a foul stain on our history books, it is a license to the Government to grind its heel into the face of truth and justice, to repress dissent, and to mechanize and conform society by the force of clubs, bullets, mace, and napalm. While that big lie endures, there will be new assassinations again and still again, until the very earth at Arlington groans under its burden of martyrs.