

BLAKEY NARRATION: JOHN F. KENNEDY AND DALLAS

SEPTEMBER 6, 1978

(THE 'PUBLIC'  
HISTORY)  
NOT THE  
ONCE SECRET STUFF

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As the committee begins its public hearings on the assassination of President Kennedy, it seems appropriate to reflect for a moment on the meaning of the life -- and death -- of our 35th President. Appropriate, because, as in the King assassination, ultimately this Committee must face this question: Was the President's death unrelated to his life, a senseless act, or did it have meaning?

WHY?

To begin to understand his death, it is perhaps instructive to refresh our memories of his life, to go back to a cold January morning in 1961 when he stood before the nation that had just elected him and voiced these memorable words:

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

No words that could be written now more aptly portray the determination of John F. Kennedy as he assumed office. An articulate, confident new President -- his mettle was yet to be tested -- he confronted issues that would put him in conflict with awesome forces abroad and at home.

The cold war was his foremost concern, as the United States and the Soviet Union stood poised to obliterate each other -- or to coexist. Kennedy had come down hard in the campaign on a need to bolster military might, a position he would amplify by tacking an extra \$4 billion to the budget for defense that former President Eisenhower had approved.

There were, in fact, trouble spots in the world where the potential for hostilities was real, countries where the Communists were securing a foothold, including one only 90 miles away -- Cuba.

Domestic issues had a potential for violence as well.

There was racial turmoil in the South -- freedom rides and sit-ins -- and there was no way a man like John Kennedy would or could stand on the sidelines.

And there was the menace of organized crime. The Justice Department, run by the President's brother, Robert F. Kennedy, was gearing for an all-out drive on the mob, which would include a concerted effort to send Teamster President James Hoffa to prison.

The President's popularity was high -- he came into office with a 69 per cent approval rating in the Gallup Poll. But his policies both foreign and domestic were in

for rough going. A trend against him, barely perceptible at first, was running in the country.

On the international scene, Kennedy had scarcely been in office a formative 100 days when disaster struck. After long deliberation, he approved the landing of an invasion force of anti-Castro exiles on the southern coast of Cuba, at a place whose name would signify failure in American foreign policy for years to come. It was called Baya Conchi nos, the Bay of Pigs.

Responsibility for the fiasco was accepted by Kennedy shortly after the exiles were defeated by Castro's troops and when the U.S. could no longer disavow its role in the ill-fated expedition. But privately he blamed the CIA, reportedly vowing to "splinter the agency into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds."

Kennedy was a war hero with combative instincts. He would not soon forget the Bay of Pigs easily, for it had raised questions about him as a coolheaded leader and opened him to the criticism of friend and foe alike. But he was not a man to back down. His military policy was to beef up conventional forces -- more footsoldiers and planes and ships to transport them -- and he ordered a maximum effort in training troops for guerilla warfare. When the release of the Cubans captured at the Bay of Pigs

had been negotiated by late 1962, Kennedy greeted them at the Orange Bowl in Miami with a defiant promise to return their flag to them in a free Cuba.

Kennedy went to Europe in May, and in Vienna he talked cold war politics with Khrushchev for 12<sup>long</sup> hours. Nuclear testing, disarmament and Berlin were the topics of discussion, but there was no indication of agreement.

Khrushchev's hardline stand on Berlin became clear within a month of the meeting. He told the western powers to get out of the city by the end of the year, threatening to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany, one that would give the East Germans control of western access routes and end four-power control of Berlin, called for in the Potsdam Agreement.

With Russian determination to eliminate West Berlin seemingly as avowed as the U.S. commitment to persevere it, the prospect of World War III was greater than ever.

True to form, Kennedy did not back down. In July, he made a stirring address to the nation on the will to fight, and he backed it up with a call for 217,000 more men in uniform. He ordered the draft doubled and tripled, if necessary, and he requested authority to activate reserve and National Guards units. "In meeting my responsibilities in these coming months," he told the American

people, "I need your goodwill and your support and, above all, your prayers."

Meanwhile, Kennedy was determined not to be blindsided in his own hemisphere. His Alliance for Progress was designed to wipe out the seedbed of Communism in Latin America by raising living standards. Throughout the summer of 1961, the leaders of Central and South American countries were coming to Washington for their share of the billions of dollars the U.S. was paying to contain Castro.

PRISTY  
BALANCED

As 1962 opened, Kennedy was wrestling with the nasty decision of whether to resume atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. The Russians had thrust it upon him by a series of surprise tests starting the past September, despite an earlier promise by Khrushchev to join the U.S. in a no-test policy.

At the same time, the world's hotspots simmered:

In Berlin, Khrushchev had backed his threats by building the wall, but as successive deadlines passed, western rights, <sup>apparently</sup> remained intact.

In South Vietnam, Kennedy had decided to take a stand against Soviet inspired "wars of liberation." He fortified this position by sending over 4,000 military specialists.

+ PLANNING  
TO BRING  
BACK?

To add to international hazards, negotiations with Russians on nuclear tests had stalled. So, in April,

Kennedy made the agonizing decision to resume them, giving a go-ahead to a series of blasts over Christmas Island in the central Pacific. He told a writer it was his fate to "take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them."

NO FOOTNOTE!

THREAT STORY ?!

On a visit to Mexico in June, Kennedy was greeted with rousing enthusiasm that seemed to say his hemisphere policy was faring well. But then in October, he faced in Cuba a crisis of a dimension unparalleled during his brief presidency. The world had not faced at any time before, nor has it since, a more immediate prospect of nuclear holocaust.

ANYTHING IN BETWEEN? CF SR - MAYBE MSB NOT TO TALK ABOUT IT HERE

Kennedy had returned abruptly from a political trip to Chicago on October 20, using a sudden cold as a pretext for the surprise change in plans.

On Monday, the twenty-second, he revealed his real reason for the move -- the U.S. had discovered from reconnaissance photographs that the Soviet Union had deployed ballistic missiles and jet bombers in Cuba. He announced he had ordered an air-sea quarantine on shipping into Cuba and promised more drastic action if the missiles and bombers were not removed.

It was a tense five days that led to a decision by Khrushchev to pull his offensive hardware out. Kennedy,

for his part, agreed not to invade Cuba, and he lifted the blockade.

By the end of 1962, Khrushchev finally had to realize Kennedy was not a toothless tiger. Kennedy, in turn, felt the momentum the Soviets had gained from the time they leapt out ahead in the space race had been braked by the outcome of the Cuban adventure, and he was satisfied that the foe in the Kremlin would be more cautious in the future.

There was still an uneasiness over Cuba in 1963.

The Soviet presence was symbolized by an attack by a Cuban Air Force MIG on an American shrimp boat. Some 17,000 Russians troops still occupied the country; 500 anti-aircraft missiles plus large quantities of other Soviet armament were emplaced there.

AND,  
THE  
U.S.  
"PRESENCE"  
?

But a thaw in the Cold War was perceptible, a result of Kennedy's foreign policy strategy which emphasized inch-by-inch progress. On June 10 he said in his memorable American University speech, "Let us focus on a peace based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution of human institutions." He announced the U.S., Great Britain and the Soviet Union would begin work on a treaty to outlaw nuclear tests.

The nuclear test-ban treaty, a major achievement of the Kennedy Administration, was initialed in Moscow on

August 5 and ratified by the U.S. Senate on September 4.

On the domestic scene, the Kennedy Administration's most noteworthy accomplishments were in civil rights, though the President would not live to see passage of the legislation he proposed, the most far-reaching since Reconstruction.

Violence erupted soon after Kennedy took the oath of office. In Alabama, in May 1961, the Congress on Racial Equality staged a series of freedom rides for the purpose of integrating buses and terminals. Through a long night of rioting in Montgomery, quelled only after troops had been called out, Attorney General Robert Kennedy was on the phone counseling the leader of the Black movement in the country, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The freedom rides ended when the protesters were arrested in Mississippi, but the point had been made. The Attorney General petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission which the following September adopted rules banning segregation on interstate buses and in terminals.

There was another civil rights storm in October 1962. James Meredith, a 29-year-old Black student, had tried to enroll at the University of Mississippi but had been refused, despite the order of federal courts. The Kennedy Administration led a step-by-step campaign to force compliance by the



state, whose governor was equally determined to defy the courts. When Meredith arrived at Ole Miss on a Sunday, he was accompanied by 300 U.S. marshals, but they were no match for an angry mob of 2,500 students and outside extremists. Just as Kennedy went on the air to ask for calm, the campus exploded, and it took federal troops to restore the peace. But Meredith was successfully enrolled.

The civil rights summer of 1963 began in Birmingham, Alabama in April. There, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led an all-out attack on what he called "the most segregated city in the United States." On May 3, the demonstrators were attacked by police dogs and doused with fire hoses, and pictures of these brutal tactics led to a worldwide outcry. When calm was restored, the movement for equal rights had triumphed. Birmingham became a rallying cry in cities across the South, as well as in Chicago and New York. ?

Kennedy addressed the nation on June 11 to win support for his civil rights bill which, among other things, guaranteed Blacks the right to vote and access to public accommodations. "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue," he said. "The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand."

The menace of organized crime was another dominant issue of the Kennedy years. The President had first encountered it when, as a Senator, he became a member of

a new select committee on labor racketeering. Bob Kennedy was Chief Counsel of the Rackets Committee, and later, as Attorney General, he would become the President's surrogate in an unprecedented campaign against the forces of the underworld.

There were dramatic developments in the war on organized crime just before and after Kennedy came to the White House. A roundup of hoodlums in Apalachin, N.Y. in 1957 -- followed by an abortive prosecution of many of the leaders -- served to show how lackadaisical the federal effort had been. Then the Senate testimony of Mafia member Joseph Valachi helped to catalyze a renewed emphasis on that effort.

WAS  
B.C.  
INVOLVED

More than anything, though, the personal zeal of the Kennedy brothers meant hard times for the mob -- the roughest period in the history of the Department of Justice. The historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. writes in a recent book about Robert Kennedy that due to his pressure "the national government took on organized crime as it had never done before."

Schlesinger observes:

In New York, Robert Morgenthau, the federal attorney, successfully prosecuted one syndicate leader after another. The Patriarca gang in Rhode Island and the De Cavalcante gang in New Jersey were smashed. Convictions of racketeers by the Organized Crime Section and the Tax Division steadily increased -- 96 in 1961, 101 in 1962,

RELEVANT

373 in 1963. So long as John Kennedy sat in the White House, giving his Attorney General absolute backing, the underworld knew that the heat was on.

Bob Kennedy directed his big guns at targets he had pinpointed when he was with the Rackets Committee. One in particular was the alliance of top labor leaders and racketeering figures, one that to him was personified in the character of Teamster President James R. Hoffa. "The pursuit of Hoffa," Schlesinger writes, "was an aspect of the war against organized crime."

He adds:

The relations between the Teamsters and the syndicates continued to grow. The FBI electronic microphone, planted from 1961 to 1964 in the office of Anthony Giacalone, a Detroit hood, revealed Hoffa's deep if wary involvement with the local mob. For national purposes a meeting place was the Rancho La Costa Country Club near San Clemente, California, built with \$27 million in loans from the Teamsters' pension fund; its proprietor, Morris B. Dalitz, had emerged from the Detroit underworld to become a Las Vegas and Havana gambling figure. Here the Teamsters and the mob golfed and drank together. Here they no doubt reflected that, as long as John Kennedy was President, Robert Kennedy would be unassailable.

REACTION  
TO  
JP!

In the beginning, Kennedy was an extremely popular President. Ironically, his ratings were highest in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs tragedy -- a remarkable 83 per cent in the Gallup Poll. But by the fall of 1963, he had dipped by 24 points, and he had begun to have misgivings about the political implications. In October, Newsweek reported that the racial issue alone had cost him 3.5 million

votes, adding that no Democrat in the White House had ever been so disliked in the South.

For several reasons -- politics among them -- Kennedy was an active traveler. His diplomatic missions abroad were interspersed by trips around the country. In June 1963, he was in Germany, Ireland and Italy, and later that summer he toured the western U.S. -- North Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Utah, Oregon, Nevada and California.

Not only did Kennedy like to be on the go, but, almost recklessly, he resisted the protective measures the Secret Service sought to press upon him. He would not allow blaring sirens, and only once -- in Chicago in March 1963 -- did he permit his limousine to be flanked by motorcycle policemen. He once told the special agent in charge of the White House Detail he did not want agents riding on the rear of his car.

He was philosophic about the danger. During the Texas trip, he told his special White House assistant: "...if anybody really wanted to shoot the President, ... it was not a very difficult job -- all one had to do was get a high building some day with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt."

There has been dispute over why Kennedy would risk

travelling to Texas at a time when the South had been the scene of violent incidents stemming out of the civil rights controversy. Why Dallas, in particular, where only a month before Kennedy's scheduled arrival on November 22 Adlai Stevenson had been booed and spat on?

Some say Kennedy went to shore up his own political standing in a state he had won by an eyelash in 1960. Others cite a need perceived by Kennedy to remedy a splintering of liberal and conservative factions within the state Democratic organization. Most agree, however, it was political.

Kennedy was fond of motorcades, because they afforded him an opportunity to get close to people. He made a special point of riding in one in Dallas on November 22, 1963, for he felt it would be his one chance that day to greet working people and members of minority groups.

CITE

In fact, it was his last chance.

Mr. Chairman, the witnesses we would like, with your permission, to call at this time are Mr. and Mrs. John B. Connally, who were riding in the limousine with President and Mrs. Kennedy at the time of the assassination. Wounded in the back, chest, wrist and thigh by rifle fire, Governor Connally was rushed to Parkland Hospital where,

though first listed in critical condition, he eventually recovered.

Mr. Connally was an administrative assistant to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, and he served as Secretary of the Navy in the Kennedy Administration. He was governor of Texas from 1963 to 1969 and Secretary of the Treasury in the Nixon Administration from 1971 to 1972. He was a special advisor to President Nixon in 1973. He is presently with the Houston law firm of Vinson, Elkins, Searls, Connally & Smith.

It would be appropriate now, Mr. Chairman, to call Mr. and Mrs. Connally.

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