

BLAKEY NARRATION: CUBA

Monday, September 18, 1978

Cuba was an important concern of John F. Kennedy during his brief administration. It prompted the occasion of his "darkest hour" - the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion. In the missile crisis, it also brought the United States - and the world - to the brink of a nuclear holocaust. Understandably, therefore, among the many efforts to understand the assassination, those that include a Cuban element have been fairly prominent. Indeed, no less a figure than President Lyndon B. Johnson expressed his private view that John F. Kennedy might well have been the victim of a Cuban plot.

The Warren Commission explored the Cuban element in the assassination of the President from two perspectives.

First, it considered the extent to which Oswald "might have been motivated in the assassination by a desire to aid the Castro regime, which President Kennedy so outspokenly criticized." In the months preceding the assassination, left-wing literature to which Oswald subscribed - chiefly The Militant and The Worker - reflected an extremely critical attitude towards the Kennedy Administration's policy toward Cuba. Indeed, much of what appeared in these papers seemingly called for violent solutions to Cuban problems with the United States. The possibility that Oswald may have been influenced by this

literature seems real. Apparently in all seriousness, he told Michael Paine, the individual in whose home Marina was then living, that "you could tell what they want you to do...by reading between the lines." Ultimately, however, the Warren Commission decided that it could not ascribe to Oswald any one motive or a group of motives.

Second, the Commission considered the extent to which Oswald's trip to Mexico in late September and early October 1963 - a trip during which Oswald visited the Soviet Embassy and the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City - may somehow have been related to the assassination. Based largely on the testimony of Sylvia Tirado de Duran, a Mexican national employed at the Cuban Consulate, the Commission concluded the following about the visit.

Oswald first visited the Cuban Consulate on September 27, 1963.

He requested an in-transit visa to permit him to visit Cuba en route to the Soviet Union.

He was informed he could not obtain a visa to Cuba unless he first got one to enter the Soviet Union, and he was told at the Soviet Embassy he should not expect an answer to his visa application for about four months.

He carried with him newspaper clippings and other documents, some authentic and some forged, in an attempt to demonstrate he was a "friend of Cuba".

He used these documents, his previous residence in the Soviet Union, and his marriage to a Soviet national to curry favor at the Cuban Consulate.

He persisted in his demand for a Cuban visa, resulting in a bitter argument between him and the Cuban Consul, Eusebio Azcue Lopez. Eventually, his request was denied, and he left *APPARENTLY* in anger.

Ultimately, the Warren Commission expressed its satisfaction with the Duran account, noting that it had "reliable evidence from a confidential source that Senora Duran, as well as other personnel at the Cuban Embassy were genuinely upset upon receiving the news of President Kennedy's death." It also indicated that "confidential sources of extremely high reliability...establish(ed) that her testimony was truthful and accurate in all material respects."

The Commission also checked out a number of specific conspiracy allegations stemming from Oswald's trip to Mexico City, most of which alleged that he had been enlisted by Cuban agents in a plot to carry out the assassination. Nevertheless, the Commission concluded: "Without exception...rumors and allegations of conspiratorial contact were shown to be without any factual basis."

History has not permitted so simple a resolution of the complex questions surrounding the assassination, Cuba and Oswald's trip to Mexico City. Ironically, too, it was the Premier of Cuba, not the President of the United States, who

was revealed and documented in Senate Intelligence Committee hearings in 1976 as the target of deadly serious assassination schemes. Between 1960 and early 1963, the Committee concluded, the CIA conspired with known underworld figures to assassinate Premier Castro. Following the missile crisis in October 1962, the CIA-Mafia plots were brought to an end, or so we are told. But other assassination plots continued. Indeed, on November 22, 1963, a CIA case officer was planning the killing of Castro with an official of the Cuban government.

The revelation in 1976 that the Premier of Cuba was the target of an unsuccessful assassination planned by the United States served to fuel the fires of speculation that Cuba had been the perpetrator of the successful effort against the President of the U. S. in 1963. It was recalled that Premier Castro himself, in an interview with Associated Press reporter Daniel Harker on September 7, 1963, seemed to be warning that U.S. leaders who approved terrorist attacks on Cuban leaders could themselves be vulnerable. The AP story was carried in the New Orleans Times Picayune on September 9. Consequently, it could have been read by Lee Harvey Oswald^{HIMSELF}. But the evidence of Cuban intentions ^{MAY BE INTERPRETED IN VARIOUS WAYS} ~~is ambiguous~~. The Cuban delegate to the United Nations had ~~also proposed~~ on September 5, 1963 that he and William Atwood, a U.S. delegate, begin talks with a view toward starting the process of normalizing relations. And Jean Daniel, a French journalist, was with Premier Castro on November 22.

He described Castro's reaction to the news of the Kennedy assassination as one of genuine surprise and deep regret.

The critics of the Warren Commission, too, have persisted in their questioning of its conclusions, offering the theory that Oswald met with Cuban agents and various additional allegations.

The most serious is the charge that it was, in fact, not Oswald who visited the Cuban Consulate, but an imposter. Critics cite as evidence a photograph published by the Commission and thought by the critics to have been taken by a surveillance camera outside the Cuban Consulate. It shows a burly man who bears no resemblance to Oswald, but who was identified as the individual who visited the Consulate at the time Oswald was supposed to have done so.

Mark Lane, in his Rush to Judgment, raised the issue of the mysterious photograph and asked, "Was someone posing as Oswald?"

Another widely circulated story after the Warren Report was published is that Oswald, in a burst of anger on learning at the Cuban Consulate that he could not secure a visa to visit Cuba, expressed an intention to assassinate President Kennedy.

The Select Committee has sought to explore a number of questions in connection with Oswald's trip to Mexico City. Committee Members and staff made two separate trips to both Cuba and Mexico. The cooperation of the governments of Cuba and Mexico was sought and secured. The Committee expresses

its thanks to each government and those officials and citizens of each country that helped the Committee in its investigation.

→ LACK OF COOPERATION BY SOVIET GOVT...

The Committee posed for itself in its investigation in this area such questions as:

Was the man who visited the Cuban Consulate in fact the man later accused of assassinating President Kennedy?

When did the man alleged to be Oswald visit the Cuban Consulate"?

What transpired at each visit?

Who were the Cuban officials who dealt with him?

Did he ^{IN FACT} express an intent to assassinate the President?

Did the man alleged to be Oswald have any companions in Mexico City?

The first witness ^{WHO HAD BEEN SCHEDULED} to be heard on Oswald's alleged trip to Mexico City is Sylvia Tirado Bazan, previously Sylvia Tirado Duran. Ms. Tirado was employed in September 1963 as secretary to the Cuban Consul in Mexico City.

Ms. Tirado was born November 22, 1937 in Mexico City. She is presently employed by the Mexican Social Security office.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Sylvia Tirado.

Narration: Cuba - 7

The next witness will be Eusebio Azcue Lopez. Sr. Azcue was the Cuban Consul in Mexico City in September 1963, who informed the individual who visited the Consulate and gave his name as Lee Harvey Oswald that he would not be issued a visa to Cuba.

Sr. Azcue is presently living in retirement in Cuba.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Sr. Azcue.

Another member of the Cuban Consulate staff who was present when Oswald applied for a visa was Alfredo Mirabal Diaz. Sr. Mirabal succeeded Sr. Azcue as Cuban Consul in Mexico City.

Sr. Mirabal was born August 11, 1923.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Sr. Mirabal.

In light of the questions raised as to the identity of the man who visited the Cuban Consulate - that is, whether he was or was not Lee Harvey Oswald - the Committee decided to test by handwriting analysis the authenticity of the signature on the visa application.

The Committee was advised by the Cuban government that visa applications had to be typed in duplicate and that the

applicant had to sign both copies. In 1964, one of the forms allegedly signed by Oswald was turned over to the Warren Commission. In 1978, the Committee obtained the second copy in Havana. Consequently, there are two checks to be made in this handwriting analysis:

One, to determine that both visa application forms were signed by the same person; and

Two, to determine, if possible, whether the signatures are, in fact, identical with other writings attributable to Lee Harvey Oswald.

For the purpose of verification, the Committee has asked handwriting experts to compare the signatures on the two forms with three other writings. They are:

- (1) the signature on Oswald's fingerprint card at the time of his arrest in New Orleans in August 1963;
- (2) his passport application dated June 24, 1963; and
- (3) a list of handwritten questions that was found among his possessions.

Mr. Chairman, a member of the Committee's panel of handwriting experts is here today to report on the findings of the panel with regard to the signatures on the visa application forms. He is Joseph P. McNally. The Committee will recall that Mr. McNally has already testified before it on the backyard photographs.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Mr. McNally.

In late March and early April of this year, three members of the Select Committee - Chairman Stokes, Congressman Prayer and Congressman Dodd, and three staff members traveled to Cuba. It was the first of two trips in which the Committee sought first-hand information about Lee Harvey Oswald's alleged visit to the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City, as well as other evidence about the Kennedy assassination.

During the trip to Havana, the Committee representatives were given an opportunity to interview President Castro himself. In a 4-hour session, which was tape-recorded, President Castro denied that he or any official of his government had anything to do with the death of President Kennedy or with Lee Harvey Oswald, other than the visit to the Cuban Consulate in September of 1963.

First the Committee asked him to recount whatever details he had learned and could recall regarding Oswald's two visits to the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City in September 1963. Mr. Chairman, I ask that F429A, a photo taken during the interview be displayed and entered into the record. May a tape of the interview, F429B, and a transcript, F429C, also be included in the record. With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would now like to play the recording of President Castro's answer.

The Committee's next question was more specific. It dealt with an account, published in 1967 in the National Enquirer, claiming that Oswald, while at the Consulate, had voiced an intention to assassinate President Kennedy. Mr. Chairman, I ^{note} ask that F428 ^{HAS ALREADY BEEN} be displayed and entered into the record. ^{HE} President Castro, according to the story in the National Enquirer, had admitted being told of the threat, though he had taken no action in response to it.

Here is President Castro's comment to the allegation:

"This is absurd. I didn't say that...It has been invented from the beginning until the end. I didn't say that. How could I say that? It's a lie from (head to toe). If this man would have done something like that, it would have been our moral duty to inform the United States. You understand? Because if a man comes here, mentions that he wants to kill Kennedy, we are (being provoked), do you realize that? It would have been similar to a mad person. If somebody comes to us and said that, it would have been our moral responsibility to inform the United States. How could we accept a man from Mexico to Cuba who tells us that he is going to kill President Kennedy? If somebody is trying to create provocation or a trap, and uh...we would have denounced him...Sure, a person coming here or even in one of our embassies saying that...And that never happened. No part, as far as I know...But how could they interview me in a pizzeria. I never go to public restaurants and that man invented that. That was invented.

"I do not remember that. And, uh, it is a surprise for me to see because I couldn't have said that. You have to see who wrote it. And, what is the job of that journalist? What is he engaged in? And, what prestige has this journalist? ...You should have to find who he is and why he wrote it, and with whom he is related...and which sense they have to attribute those words which are absolutely invented. I think it is possible that you would be able to find out who that journalist was. Do you have some news about that journalist in that newspaper?...

"Let me tell you. Of every one hundred interviews that are requested of me I only grant one because if I were to give all the interviews that I am requested to, you can be sure that I would not be able to have anything but twenty-four hours of my life to have interviews. I would not have enough time to do anything else. Barbara Walters waited three years for an interview...just almost three years. And even that of Moyers ...I didn't want to have that Moyers interview. He started talking and the truth is that he was very insistent from the time he came down from the airplane and in spite of the fact that there was no commitment from me regarding the interview. There are a lot of interview requests and it is very difficult, but I would never have given a journalist an interview in a pizzeria."

Mr. Chairman, the author of the National Enquirer story was a British free lance journalist named Comer Clark. He died in 1972.

Nevertheless, the Committee, while conducting other investigations in England, made an effort to explore Mr. Clark's background and reputation for veracity. Frankly, it was not good. Apparently, he wrote extensively for the sensational press^{IN ENGLAND}. His articles include such items as "British Girls as Nazi Sex Slaves", "I Was Hitler's Secret Love", and "German Plans to Kidnap the Royal Family".

On the other hand, even though there may be ^{CONSIDERABLE} doubt as to the fact of Clark's interview with President Castro, the Committee has been informed that the substance of the Clark article is supported by highly confidential, but reliable, sources available to the United States government.

TRUE
ARTICLES?

President Castro discussed the general subject of assassination as a means for achieving political change. His thoughts on it are pertinent to the investigation. It would be appropriate, Mr. Chairman, to play the tape recording of them now.

Finally, President Castro commented on the specific so-called threat reported in the ^{YORK [sic]} New Orleans Times Picayune of September 9. Mr. Chairman, it would be appropriate to play the last excerpt.

In August, during the Committee's second trip to Cuba, the Cuban government made available to the Committee one Rolando Cubela, who identified himself to the Committee as AMLASH, on the basis of his reading of the 1976 Senate Report. ^{OFK F-424, PHOTO} Mr. Cubela indicated that he had been prosecuted and convicted by the Cuban government for plotting against Premier Castro. He said that during that prosecution he did not inform the Cuban government, and the Cuban government did not learn, that his plot had had the support of CIA personnel. The Cuban government confirmed Mr. Cubela's assertion. He also indicated that he had no evidence on which he could say that any official of the United States government or of the CIA, higher than his case officer, was aware of the assassination aspects of his plot. The Cuban government suggested that the AMLASH plot, as outlined in the Senate Report, could not, therefore, have served as a provocation by the United States motivating Cuban retaliation against President Kennedy.

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DES?

Mr. Chairman, another aspect of the Committee's investigation of Oswald's trip to Mexico had to do with any associations Oswald might have had while ^{HE WAS} there, other than those at the Cuban Consulate and the Soviet Embassy. The Warren Commission concluded he had none, that he kept to himself throughout his stay. It turns out, however, that 11 days after the Commission concluded its investigation and issued its report in September, 1964, a Mexican woman came forward with quite a different version of Oswald's activities in Mexico City.

Her name is Elena Garro de Paz. Though now divorced, she was at the time the wife of Octavio Paz, the noted poet and Mexican diplomat. Elena Garro herself is an accomplished author.

Ultimately, Elena Garro's story came to the attention of American intelligence services. As far as is known, no service initiated a full scale follow-up investigation. One reason might be that Elena Garro's credibility is controversial. This Committee has been told, on the one hand, that she is absolutely trustworthy, while others have claimed that the same vivid imagination that has made her a literary success has also tended to color her perception of actual events.

That being said, Elena Garro's story is interesting, as is the way it has unfolded in this investigation.

Elena Garro says that along with her daughter, Elinita, and her sister, Deba Galvan, she was invited to a party at the

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REMEMBER
THIS?

home of her cousin, Ruben Duran Navarro, then the brother-in-law of Sylvia Tirado Duran. She first said the party was in early October 1963, though, after inspection of her personal calendar for that period, adjusted the time to late September.

There were three young American men at the party, she says, the guests of Sylvia Duran, and one of the Americans was Lee Harvey Oswald. She describes one of his companions as tall and slender with long blond hair, a gaunt face and a protruding chin. The other was tall also, with short light brown hair.

In 1964, Elena Garro became a friend of an American foreign service officer named Charles Thomas, and, over time, she related her story to him in detail. She explained that when she had gone to the American Embassy in October, 1964, and told her story, the man she talked to seemed to believe little of it.

She told Thomas that Oswald was wearing a black sweater at the party, and that he stared at the floor a lot. She said the three Americans stuck together, rather than mix with the other guests. She said the Eusebio Azcue, the Cuban Consul, was also at the party.

Elena Garro told Thomas that on the day of the assassination, she and her daughter went to the Cuban Embassy and shouted, "assassins". This, she claimed, was before she saw a newspaper photo identifying Oswald as the suspected assassin.

After she and her daughter returned home on November 22, 1963, a man she thought was an agent of the Mexican Ministry of Government came to her house and told her she and Elinita were in danger of being harmed by the Communists. He took them to a "sanctuary", a small hotel called the Vermont, where they remained for eight days. It was after getting to the hotel that Elena Garro first saw a photo of Oswald and realized she had seen him at the Duran party.

This man, who must be referred to here as Mr. X, advised Elena Garro to beware of the American Embassy, that it was staffed by Communists.

Elena Garro also claimed that several months after the assassination, she was visited by two Communists who warned her not to tell her story.

Shortly after the assassination, Elena Garro told Thomas, ~~and~~ an American woman came and spent several days at her home. This woman, who must be referred to as Ms. Y, was told the story one evening by Elena Garro's sister, Deba Galvan, who had been drinking. Ms. Y urged the two women to tell their story to American authorities, in Texas, not in Mexico. Failing that, Ms. Y offered to arrange a meeting with ~~a~~ high-ranking American official in Mexico. It never transpired, because Elena Garro and Ms. Y had a falling out.

Narration: Cuba - 17

Ms. Y did, however, send the first report on Elena Garro, and her story, to American authorities in 1964.

Charles Thomas ^{WAS CONCERNED ABOUT} ~~believed~~ Elena Garro, ^{STORY} and reported her account in memoranda that were circulated in the U. S. Embassy in Mexico City. Nevertheless, when the reports reached Washington, neither the CIA nor the FBI showed any interest. No investigation was ordered, even though, on October 10, 1966, it was learned ^{THAT} ~~at~~ Elena Garro had indeed been registered at the Hotel Vermont over the period she claimed she was there in 1963.

Charles Thomas ^{RETURNED} ~~was recalled~~ to Washington in 1967 and "selected out" of the foreign service in 1968. In 1970, having had some 2,000 job applications rejected, he committed suicide. In 1974, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, having determined that his dismissal was a "mistake" had Thomas posthumously reinstated.

SO
WHAT?

LAST FBI, HSC 605 STATE DEPT. PERMISSION TO DECLASSIFY
THOMAS - GARRO DOCS, JFK F-403, MUST BE EDITED FOR PRIVACY

Elena Garro, her daughter, Elanita, and her sister, Deba Galvan, all disappeared in 1968. After an arduous search by this Committee, she was located in a foreign country in September 1978. Attempts to have her testify at these hearings have been unsuccessful.

The Committee has also tried to locate Mr. X and Ms. Y - to no avail.

The Committee also sought to interview a another individual who was employed in the Cuban Embassy in 1963. Although the interview had been prearranged, he left Mexico City suddenly the day Committee investigators arrived, and returned the day they were scheduled to depart. The investigators, having decided to stay an extra day, contacted the former employee by phone, but he refused to speak with them. The Committee has ~~also~~ learned that Mexican authorities had been requested not to allow the Committee investigators to interview the employee.

BY WHOM?
CUBANS?
CIA?

Members of the Duran family were questioned about Elena Garro's allegations. They denied that they socialized with the people she said were at their party, although Sylvia Duran did recall that Elena herself may have been at one or two parties at her home in the fall of 1963. Sylvia Duran denied that Oswald had been there.

Another Mexican has claimed to have been in contact with Oswald in Mexico City. Oscar Contreras Lartique told an American foreign service officer (not Charles Thomas) in 1967 that as a student at the University of Mexico in 1963, he had met Oswald as he was leaving a roundtable discussion at the School of Philosophy. Contreras, who described Oswald as "strange and introverted", said he spent the rest of that day, that night and part of the following day with Oswald and some

Narration: Cuba - 19

other students. He said Oswald told them he had come to the university looking for pro-Castro students who might help persuade the Cuban Embassy to grant him a visa. Oswald told them, Contreras said, that he was from California and was a member of a pro-Castro organization in New Orleans.

Contreras was later reinterviewed by American authorities. He refused to identify other students who had met Oswald, because they were still active revolutionaries. Contreras stated that originally Oswald was suspected of being an American intelligence ^{AGENCY} ~~agent~~, that he never mentioned President Kennedy or assassination, and that he repeatedly expressed a wish to get to Cuba promptly.

Mexican authorities have reported to the Committee that there was an Oscar Contreras Lartique registered at the University of Mexico in 1960, but not in 1963. They also reported that ~~an~~ Oscar Contreras had once signed a manifesto written by a pro-Castro student group, but that the group ceased to function in 1962.

Nevertheless, ~~the Committee placed~~ ^{MAY BE PLACED} some significance in Contreras' story because it learned that a professor from the University of Mexico held philosophy seminars in the Duran home. The philosophy professor, a close friend of the Durans, was a well-known Marxist at the university.

The Committee ^{HAS} ~~tried~~ to arrange an interview with Contreras through Mexican officials, but when its investigators arrived, Contreras ~~had~~ disappeared.

In summation, Mr. Chairman, I must, ^{FRANKLY} state that the Committee has, with the exception of certain witnesses made available by the Cuban and Mexican governments, largely been frustrated in its attempts to investigate the nature of Lee Harvey Oswald's activities ^{Es} and possible associations in Mexico City through personal interviews with those persons who purportedly have first-hand knowledge of such matters. The only other theoretical possibility for resolving these issues was, of course, physical evidence, either documents or photographs. In this regard, the Cuban government has suggested that photographic evidence should exist, at least as to Oswald's alleged visits to the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City. Such photographs might well include, of course, the identities of the companions, if any, who were with him on those occasions. In fact, the Cuban government has provided ^{PHOTOS - A PHOTO ...} ~~the photos~~ in JFK F-438, ^{TO} ~~in~~ support of ^{ITS} ~~their~~ claim that there was a photographic surveillance site across the street from the Cuban Consulate in 1963. Mr. Chairman, I ask that F-438 be displayed and entered into the record. ^(DISCUSSED - EXPLAINED A BIT) ^(PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER)

The Committee has conducted an extensive investigation to determine who, if anyone, was responsible for the surveillance, ^{OUTLINED IN} and the periods of time during which the surveillance was in operation. It has also sought to identify and ^{PERSONALLY} interview those individuals who may have ~~personally~~ conducted the surveillance. ^{+ TO OBTAIN, IF POSS.. PHOTOS}

Narration: Cuba - 21

Once again, the ^{EFFORTS} ~~work~~ of the Committee has met with ^(CRAWLER 4) _{BIT} frustration: No photos of Lee Harvey Oswald, or of any ^{OTHER} person who can be said to be an associate of his, have been located.

END OF TODAY'S PRESENTATION ON CUBA, MEXICO, + THE ASS'N.