

The Business of Murder

THE HIRED KILLERS. By Peter Wyden. 236 pages. Morrow. \$4.50.

The man who murders simply because somebody pays him to do it is the subject of this study, which seems to be the first work of any length to be published on the hired slayer. Peter Wyden, who examines ten cases involving this kind of killer, has done a thoroughgoing reporter's job on the breed—men of a quite different sort from, say, impulsive slayers, deranged ones, or idealistic assassins. Some of the points Wyden has to make on professional murderers who are "mere middlemen":

▶ Their numbers are much greater than people realize. Spread over all the major cities is a pool of experienced talent which numbers perhaps "in the hundreds." Further, they are almost never caught.

▶ The killers for pay are "surprisingly ordinary people," extremely matter-of-fact in their work.

▶ They charge, these days, anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000, "although inexperienced talent often rates less."

▶ Gangland victims are seldom "taken for a ride" any more. The reason is that it's easier to catch a victim unawares in public in broad daylight.

▶ Contrary to popular belief, business is on the rise these days. A Department of Justice expert explains: "There are just more people in it. Everything expands in an expanding economy."

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Now four more or less important bills have been passed by the House or the Senate—all of them over the emphatic objection of most Republicans. The character of these bills and of the opposition to them tells much about the kind of record Congress-Republicans will compile before the 1964 Presidential election on which the voters will have to run.

outcome: defeat for the Republicans.

Seventy per cent of all Americans now live in urban complexes. Twenty years from now, according to population projections, half of all Americans will be concentrated in 40 metropolitan areas. The movement from country to city, already phenomenal, will become more so. Reapportionment, moreover, will soon deprive country voters of their rotten boroughs.

All this has been spelled out for the Republicans by their own experts—in a report on the 1960 defeat by Ray C. Bliss of Ohio and in another by the 1962 stand-off by Dr. William F. Ogburn, director of research. 100,000 votes were needed.



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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

ing guest. For 55 years, Mississippi has banned demon rum from its borders. But unless he is too parched to pucker, a thirsty man can whistle up a bootlegger in all but about ten of the state's 82 counties. Drinks are sold openly in Gulf Coast spas. In river towns like Vicksburg and Natchez, liquor dealers pay monthly fines instead of license fees.

After several near-misses, repeal is expected to carry in the reapportioned 1964 legislature. Mississippi, meanwhile, maintains its charade, corking up the legal liquor supply with one hand and taxing the underground pipelines with the other. In 1962, the state netted nearly \$3.2 million in "black-market" taxes on 340,000 declared cases of liquor and 125,000 of wine. Puzzled, a newsman asked Gov. Ross Barnett about the conflict. "I've never bought a bottle of liquor in Mississippi," the governor said drily. "Have you?"

TEXAS:

Near-Miss

For the unwanted caller, watching from the darkness in an alley of Dallas's Turtle Creek Drive, it was a setup, a shooting-gallery clay pigeon. The night was warm, a simmering 80 degrees. The shadeless windows of the old two-story house were open. And there in his study sat former Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker, home from the anti-Communist wars, working on his income-tax return. The man in the alley raised his '30-'06 rifle. rested it on the lattice fence, aimed carefully, and fired.

Just as he did—so police theorized later—Walker moved a bit. The bullet tore through the wood window frame, glanced slightly upward, zinged within a scant inch of Walker's head, and tore a golf-ball-size hole through the 9-inch study wall. Glass showered over Walker, clinging in his hair, bloodying his right arm. "When I saw the hole in the wall," he recounted, "I went upstairs and got my gun, then went outside to take a look. I didn't see anybody, so I went back in the house and notified police."

To detectives, it was a whistling-close near-miss. "Somebody," one said, "had a perfect bead on him." But right-winger Walker, just back from a coast-to-coast circuit ride with evangelist Billy James Hargis, was more impressed with the message than the marksmanship. To him, it was plain: the "other side" had tried to assassinate him, but the sniper was "a lousy shot." "The Kennedys," he told newsmen, pointing with a laugh at the hole in the wall, "say there's no internal threat to our freedom." With that, he brushed the glass slivers from his hair, washed his bloodied arm at the kitchen sink, and calmly went back to work on his tax return.

Wm. C. C. C.

*Dept. of Irony Coincidences:
Both of these articles appeared
in the same issue - dated 17
months to the day before the
Big Deal at Dealey Plaza.*

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