

(Meagher 5/6/68)

Two Assassinations, Addendum 1:

Three Cheers for the FBI

Thirty-two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, there has been no arrest, and no identification worthy of credence, of the trigger-man or his co-conspirators. Need one add that the FBI is in charge of the investigation? Nor should it be forgotten that there was "a heavy FBI presence, before, at, and after" what Attorney General Ramsey Clark termed "this incident" in Memphis. The heavy FBI presence (and the thorough infiltration by the Feebees of such cabals as the Ku Klux Klan, reported by Rowland and Evans and Robert Novak in the New York Post on May 6, 1968) did not protect Dr. King from assassins, and the FBI shows no sign of solving the crime. On the contrary.

Swinging like a disordered pendulum between tight-lipped silence and startling pronouncements, the FBI has issued such an audaciously crude stream of disparities and anachronisms in a mere 32 days that the mind boggles--as it boggled at the performance of the same stalwart Feebees in Dallas 1963. The clumsiness of the FBI conduct of the new investigation was such as to move that quintessentially august newspaper, The New York Times, to editorialize against the "welter of contradictions" and the lunatic reiterations by Ramsey Clark--first in the absence, and then in the face, of the evidence--that everything pointed to a lone assassin and there was no indication of conspiracy. In its institutional anxiety, The Times went so far as to warn that "The case of Lee Harvey Oswald bears no repetition." But the venerable editors seem not to realize that the case of Lee Harvey Oswald has already been repeated, in essence, with the FBI's determined campaign to pin the Memphis assassination on a loner who appears to be non-existent now, if he ever existed at all.

Still, for a newspaper which had displayed such fierce maternalism toward the Warren Report, even after the child turned out to be a cretin, the editorial was bold. Not only did it show dissatisfaction with the FBI's management of the manhunt, but it dared to revive the memory of Oswald in the same breath. Perhaps The Times--which was ready to pursue the trail of the Kennedy assassins wherever it led, so long as it did not lead to a Governmental plot--realizes (as the FBI does not) that it will be progressively more difficult to merchandise each successive "lone assassin." Perhaps The Times was serving notice that this time it would not front for the Government version of events cut from the Warren Report mold.

The FBI, always long on gall and short on imagination, has resorted to many of the same gimmicks used in Dallas. Again, there is the map with the incriminating markings (which in Oswald's case turned out to be innocent and irrelevant); the plethora of

fingerprints and palmprints; the irreconcilable descriptions of the suspect; the mysterious police radio messages; the phenomenal escape through battalions of police, state troopers, and federal agents by an alleged assassin who took great pains to call attention to himself; and, in miraculous duplication of Oswald's miracles, a culprit who constantly managed to be in two different places at the same time.

"John Willard," the first of the suspect's incarnations which came to light, had left plentiful prints of his fingers and hands. These prints were accessible to the FBI on the night of the assassination but they were not identified until April 19, fifteen days later. Within hours of the shooting, the FBI had possession of the suspected murder weapon--a brand-new 30.06 Remington priced at about \$150 (this was a very prosperous assassin, who spent many thousands of dollars in the months preceding the assassination, although he had no known source of income). The rifle bore a serial number.

The FBI had traced the Mannlicher-Carcano antique rifle through its serial number, from its place of origin in Italy through numerous middlemen to a mail-order house in Chicago, in 15 hours. It traced the 30.06 rifle from the Remington Arms Company in Connecticut to the gun shop in Birmingham which had sold it to a white male on March 30 in no less than seven days.

This is scarcely the only instance in which the FBI was so mysteriously dilatory. Four days went by before the FBI got around to questioning the Mexican consul in Memphis about his report that a man answering the suspect's description had applied for a travel permit on the day before the killing.

Eight days passed before the FBI made public the finding that the suspect's name was Eric Starvo Galt. This became known when a white Mustang abandoned in Atlanta on the morning after the murder was impounded, and the FBI issued a wanted bulletin for Galt. Headline hoppers may have concluded from this that the FBI identified Galt by tracing the ownership of the white Mustang, but that is not so. In fact, the Feebees were swarming all over Birmingham asking about Galt several days before the car was discovered in Atlanta. How, then, did they get on to Galt? Perhaps from a Memphis witness who took the license plate number of the white Mustang that sped away from the murder scene. If so, the alarm for Eric Starvo Galt could have been sounded on April 5 instead of April 11.

The wording of the FBI wanted bulletin, when it was finally issued, was ominous. It warned that Galt was "armed and extremely dangerous," which was widely interpreted as an encouragement to any captors to shoot first and ask questions later. An editorial in an Atlanta newspaper questioned the FBI's "wisdom" and emphasized that it was imperative that the suspect be taken alive.

A week after issuing a bulletin for Eric Starvo Galt and withdrawing it as "erroneous" four hours later, the FBI announced on April 19 that Galt in reality was James Earl Ray, a fugitive from the Missouri State Penitentiary. Prison photographs of Ray taken in 1960 and 1966 were published. Photographs of Eric Starvo Galt had been released by the FBI some days earlier (the FBI agent in charge of Birmingham, James Gamble, said that Galt had taken these pictures in Birmingham in March, but it turned out that they had been taken at graduation from a bartending school in Los Angeles). Viewed together, the photos of James Earl Ray and Eric Starvo Galt left unresolved the question of whether they were the same man or two different men.

When the FBI had identified Galt on April 11 and 12, they had said that Galt took dancing lessons in New Orleans in 1964 and 1965. A week later, when Galt was reidentified as Ray, it turned out that Ray was a prison inmate from 1960 until his escape in April 1967. The question naturally arose: how could Ray be behind bars in Jefferson City, Missouri, when he was taking dancing lessons under the pseudonym Galt in New Orleans? Did he receive weekend passes to study the rhumba in another state? The FBI has not yet seen fit to account for this manifestation. We can only hope that the Feebees don't have a Doppelganger by the tail.

In one technique--the silencing of witnesses--the FBI was effective, in this investigation as in the Dallas one before. Police in four cities complained that witnesses refused to talk to them and that the FBI had "practically shunted them aside." In Birmingham, a detective tried unsuccessfully to question a gun-shop clerk, and was called off the inquiry by the FBI.

Louis Lomax, well-known radio interviewer on the west coast, meanwhile decided to conduct his own investigation of the King assassination. In a series of dispatches syndicated by the North American Newspaper Alliance, Lomax revealed a string of oversights and failures by the FBI to discover witnesses and material evidence which he, working as an individual with little or no assistance, managed to dig up. Lomax located a Hollywood blonde, thought to be an intimate of Galt's, whom the FBI was seeking. He interviewed Mrs. Leroy Lee, sister of Charles Stein, who had met Galt when he and her brother visited New Orleans together, to find that the FBI had questioned her mother and sundry others but had not approached her as of April 25. This indifference to a witness who had met and conversed with Galt is understandable in the light of the fact that when Lomax showed Mrs. Lee a photograph of James Earl Ray, she said he did not even resemble Galt.

Lomax also discovered, as the FBI had not, that during Galt's stay at the St. Francis Hotel in Los Angeles he had made nightly long-distance calls at about 6 o'clock from the public phone booth in the lobby. Graffiti on the walls of the phone booth included racial slurs and references to "Martin Luther Coon." Lomax pointed out that handwriting tests could be made of the graffiti in comparison to handwriting by Galt on the back of a television set he had owned. But the FBI had failed to discover the television set too.

Not content with these feats of detection, Lomax next uncovered the fascinating fact that Galt had delivered a package to a New Orleans family at the end of March 1968. Since Galt left Los Angeles on March 27 in his car, and presumably purchased a Remington rifle in Birmingham on March 30, it appears that he could not have visited New Orleans en route--not unless he had a companion who could relieve him at the wheel.

On the heels of this fantastic array of murk and muddle, all pointing to a well-planned and carefully executed conspiracy in the assassination, the FBI on April 26 "belittled the Ray-Galt contradictions," insisting (but not for attribution) that Ray and Galt were one person. One FBI official stated, "We know there's only one person involved here. We've got his fingerprints and we know who he is."

It only remains to add that the FBI was forced to concede that fingerprints circulated during the early days of the manhunt as those of Ray were not in fact his. There had been a slip-up, it seems, which the FBI blamed on the warden of the prison from which Ray had escaped in April 1967.

When the FBI on April 26 and Ramsey Clark on April 29 continued to insist that there was only one assassin and that there was "no evidence of conspiracy," they also overlooked this salient fact--the FBI warrant for Galt charged him with conspiring with a man alleged to be his brother to violate the civil rights of Martin Luther King!

Small wonder that Congressman Charles W. Whalen, Jr., of Ohio issued a testy statement on the welter of premature and contradictory statements clouding this investigation like that of the Kennedy assassination before it, and calling on the FBI to set the record straight. Small wonder that Martin Luther King's brother, and his closest aides (Jesse Jackson, Wyatt Wilson, and others) publicly scorned the official contention that the killer was a deranged lone assassin. Also sceptical was the Governor of Georgia, Lester Maddox, last seen in fraternal embrace with that weeping hawk who occupies the vice-presidency and has one foot up the ladder and the other in his big mouth. Maddox, not taken in at all, announced that in his opinion (don't shrink--remember Dallas?) the Reds had assassinated Martin Luther King (for opposing the Vietnam war? for showing signs of reverting to patriotic white racism?). And, not to be outdone, the Kennedy court jester and fugitive from a costume ball, Truman Capote, voiced exactly the same suspicion to a vast television audience--that the assassination of Martin Luther King could have been a leftist plot spurred by his refusal to recant his non-violence.

One group of people, more than any others in this country, expected and were not one bit suprised by the blatant contrivance and manipulation of the evidence by the FBI--the critics of the Warren Commission, who had seen it all before. Since this is only an extension of the earlier FBI performance, it is natural and inevitable that the individuals who became critics of the Warren Report have concerned themselves equally with the assassination of Martin Luther King--an event perhaps even more tragic and fateful for the world than the murder of President Kennedy. The fact that critics of the Warren Report have proceeded into the King assassination, however logical and imperative that is, will not, of course, spare them the smears and malice of the cheap hucksters and intellectual cop-outs who will also extend their activities, with equal logic, on behalf of the Washington power structure. The air will soon be thick with words like "scavenger," "demonologist," and "paranoic." They did not intimidate a single critic before, and they will not intimidate anyone now. One critic has already started field investigations in Memphis as well as New Orleans; another has published as well-founded a rumor that the assassin was flown out of the country ^{in a U.S. NAVY PLANE} ~~by plane~~ on the night of the killing.

That is unfortunate, and gives gratuitous ammunition to our detractors. Two years ago I would have said that no one was more eminently qualified than the Warren Report critics to monitor the conduct of the King investigation. Now it painful and sad to admit that many of the foremost critics have suffered ~~a serious distortion of judgment and objectivity,~~ and see CIA agents under the bed no less frequently and hysterically than the late junior senator from Wisconsin saw Communists.

One hopes against hope that facile and unfounded charges of a CIA-inspired assassination of Martin Luther King will not be heralded by those who have a special obligation to accept nothing which is unaccompanied by irreproachable and unambiguous evidence or proof. Even the undeniable fudging in which the FBI has been busily engaged, in its attempt to assign the King assassination to a lone assassin should not cause any leaping to the conclusion that the FBI was somehow instrumental in the planning or commission of the murder. It is enough that its "investigation" is producing a wholly fanciful and utterly deranged "solution," probably engineered in the hope of keeping black vengefulness benumbed and riots to a minimum, and preserving what remains of the country's reputation and prestige abroad. In short, another exercise... "in the national interest." Better to call it by its right name: in the national degradation, and dehumanization, for which the FBI has already done so much.