

Quotation of the day:

"An interesting theory can always outrun a set of facts," according to psychologist A. Holliday, at a 1959 conference on LSD therapy chaired by Dr. Paul Hoch, CIA consultant and "opinion leader."

From "Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion," a new book by Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain (Grove, \$12.95). A fascinating social history, particularly the chapters on the CIA's early interest in LSD. ("Funny and irreverent" - WP)

There are a few references to John and Robert Kennedy, but nothing new on the Mary Pinchot Meyer story. If people like Meyer's friend Angleton knew of her dabbling in drugs with Leary and apparently with JFK, did it matter? I wonder, but the book avoids speculation along such lines. There is no mention of "Did Lee Harvey Oswald Drop Acid?," the article co-authored by ex-AIB'er Lee. (5 EOC 1, p. 4) (#1986.14: Publisher's press release, consisting of advance comments by Ginsberg, Stockwell, Krassner, et al.)

* Forthcoming TV coverage:

In November, Showtime will present four hours of "The Trial of LHO," with Vincent Bugliosi for the prosecution and Jerry Spence for the defense. (Ed Bark, DMN, 21 Jun 86, reprinted in Coverups, 6/86 [#15].) An earlier report by Jerry Rose identifies the producers as London Weekend Television. (See 2 3D 3.21; that is, The Third Decade, Vol. 2, #3 [Mar 1986], p. 21) Although there are risks in having lawyers present the case, this should a good show.

The 22nd anniversary:

16. 22 Nov 85 (Fredericksburg, VA "Free Lance-Star") "JFK questions persist" A summary of what has and hasn't happened since the HSCA report, by guest columnist (and buff) Harry Nash. "The simple fact is that Justice, like many agencies of government over the years, would like for the question to go away. If you think the reason is just 'bureaucratic', think again. The murders [of JFK and MLK] did not occur in a vacuum. William Faulkner (in another context) said it best: 'The past isn't dead; it isn't even past.'"

This is the only anniversary article I recall which dealt with the ongoing controversy over the assassination. Were there others? (I have the original version of the widely publicized account of how the WC damaged the Hoover-Warren relationship; it should be in the next EOC.)

The RFK case:

17. 5 Mar 86 (LA Herald-Examiner) "RFK slaying report lacks all the facts" [2 pp.] Quotes Paul Schrade and Greg Stone, who said that "what is important is the 97% of material which remains withheld." The commission asked Mayor Bradley to form a committee to develop standards and a schedule for release of the remaining material. This advisory panel has been set up.

People interested in encouraging fuller disclosure should get in touch with Stone or Phil Melanson. There is much concern about the processing of the remaining material. The summary report itself costs \$150 (\$0.10/page!) plus postage, and is probably not worth it. For earlier coverage of the release process, see 7 EOC 3, p. 1.

18. 5 Mar (NYT) "Summary of Report Released...." "Critics said the commission's report contained nothing that was not published in [Robert Houghton's] 1970 book...." Stone tells me that it is worse than that; published information has now been deleted.

19. 5 Mar 86 (LAT) "Summary of Police Probe Says Sirhan Acted Alone" [3 pp.] Page one, but hardly news. "Release of the 1,500-page summary [on March 4] did little to mollify critics...." Schrade accused the police commissioners of "arrogance" and challenged Chief Gates to explain the trajectory of the bullet which struck him.

20. 5 Mar (SFX) "RFK murder probe is 'a P.R. gesture,' victim complains" [2 pp.] Also quotes Prof. Melanson.
21. 4 Mar [25 pp.] Partial transcript of the board meeting, including comments by critics.
- Other March 5 reports, mostly from wire services: #22, USA Today (incomplete copy); #23, AP; #24, Hartford Courant; #25, SFC (from LAT), [2 pp.]; #26, Detroit News.
27. 6 Mar (LAHE) Editorial, "A call for public disclosure"
28. 9 Mar (Dubin, Phila. Inquirer) "RFK summary sharpens demands for all files" [2 pp.] A rather good summary, including comments from Stone and Schrade (whose doctor called it "crazy to think that Sirhan acted alone").
29. 16 Mar (Providence Journal) "Assassination and gun control: RFK report puts spotlight on protection of president" [3 pp.] Primarily an interview of Melanson.
30. 28 Mar (LAT) "Sirhan Denied Parole; Crime's 'Enormity' Cited" A staff psychiatrist described him as "generally rehabilitated."

"Reasonable Doubt":

- * 31. 20 Apr 86 (Boston Herald) "JFK's death: Let's find the truth" An op-ed piece by Henry Hurt, directed at Boston Congressional candidate Joseph P. Kennedy. "The bond of silence that began with Robert Kennedy has remained inviolate. Indeed, the members of this illustrious family are among a tiny minority of Americans who have not vigorously debated this important issue.... In a recent profile of Joe Kennedy in Life Magazine, he is quoted as saying that it is time for his campaign 'to take the initiative on something.'... If Joe Kennedy fully accepts the simplistic official version of JFK's death, then let him say so." (Reprinted in 2 3D 4.4.)
32. (Same paper, same date) "Joe Kennedy urged to reopen JFK probe: Author cites conspiracy theory" (but not Easterling) A page-two news story based on an interview of Hurt. Joe Kennedy was not available for comment; his campaign manager said he may make a statement. (As far as I know, he has made none, and nothing has come of this.)
33. 16 Feb 86 (WP Book World) [2 pp.] Reviewer Anthony Lukas notes that Hurt "is most convincing in his meticulous dissection of [the WC] scenario," but "less persuasive when he seeks to assemble an alternative scenario. Everyone in his story has a purpose.... There is little room for chance.... And the only major piece of new evidence [Easterling's testimony] is singularly unconvincing." Lukas concludes that, until there is access to the secrets Hurt believes to be still locked up, "anything and everything is possible." I don't think he is being sarcastic; perhaps Hougan's revisionist analysis of Watergate, which Lukas took seriously (#1984.180), influenced his perspective on the JFK case.
34. March 86 (3D) A nine-page "review essay" by Jerry Rose, positive in general but with several points of disagreement. (You should have your subscription copy, so I won't describe it further here.)
- In response, Hurt has written a letter to Rose, challenging readers to name another "detailed, on-the-record account of personal involvement in a successful conspiracy." Perhaps such a distinction can be drawn, but in my opinion the similarities between Easterling's story and many others far outweigh the differences.
35. Mar 86 (Coverups) "Significant Doubt about 'Reasonable Doubt'" Gary Mack considers the book "one of the most disappointing and misleading 'major' works" on the case. I disagree with some of the specific points Mack disputes - e.g., the John Hurt phone call, and Harrelson as the tall tramp - and I have no problem with the book leaving out the backyard photos, the umbrella man, and even the acoustics. In any case, Mack's specifics do not establish his most serious criticism, that the book was "very carefully, cleverly constructed" to build a case that Castro did it, and to give the

impression that it completely covers the major open questions. I didn't get that impression from the book; if the Justice Department or many reviewers were to respond that way, I would reconsider.

36. Jun 86 (Coverups) Reporter Johann Rush recounts his own impressions of Easterling, who was trying to sell his story for money when Rush talked to him in 1981-83. The records of the alleged "diversionary fire" show no damage to the building, just a little to some furniture; no hydrant was used, alleges Rush. [2 pp.]

37. 26 Jan 86 (Cincinnati Enq.) A "must read," but the reviewer complains (with some validity) that Hurt ignored Dr. Lattimer's work on the single-bullet theory and the head snap.

38. 9 Feb (St. Petersburg Times) "Another dubious conspiracy" "The conspiracy theorists' main fault is that they, like Hurt, deprive Oswald of personality."

39. 16 Feb (Baton Rouge Sun) A short review, mostly negative ("a rehash"). "The Easterling chapter is riveting, but not worth the \$19.95...."

40. 23 Feb (Richmond T-D) A mixed review by a retired member of the Foreign Service. "The endless reporting on Easterling raises the question of why a well-regarded journalist should have devoted so much time to 'Reasonable Doubt.' The surest answer lies in the incredible divergence of the reports from governmental investigations of the assassination."

41. Mar 86 (Village Voice Literary Supp.) A positive review - even Easterling's story "compels attention" - consisting mostly of the reviewer's favorite old anti-WC arguments. (Carl Oglesby is singled out among those who have previously made "extremely plausible guesses" about the culprits.)

42. 3 Mar 86 (Pub. Wkly) "Challenge, Inc. Continues Two Libel Actions" Also, David Phillips "is considering a suit" against Hurt "for allegations... that he was 'Maurice Bishop,' CIA case officer for Lee Harvey Oswald."

43. 7 Mar 86 (SFC) "From Castro's Plot To the Botched Autopsy" "Like the creature from the swamp in a C-grade movie, it [the case] won't be put to rest." Tantalizing, but "conspiracy is not really explosive news at this date unless you can name the conspirators," and Hurt's book, like the HSCA report, "suffers from that deficiency."

44. 10 Mar 86 (Roanoke Times) "'Reasonable Doubt' a lesson for shuttle investigation" (That is, "be thorough, get it right the first time," unlike the Warren Commission.)

45. 12 Mar 86 My rough handwritten notes on Hurt's appearance on WWCN radio, Albany. Does he think that "Mr. Stone" killed Tippit? Here, he says that he has come up with the person "who probably did." Hurt thinks that JFK would have "gotten Castro out of this hemisphere"; that LBJ thought Castro killed JFK, and got the message, thus deciding to fight Communism in Vietnam instead of Cuba. Given the evidence on JFK's involvement in Vietnam, and the ongoing pressure against Castro under LBJ, this is too speculative for me.

46. 23 Mar 86 (Milwaukee Journal) "More doubt on JFK" Reviewer David Wrone is critical of the Easterling chapter ("No cub reporter would turn in a story like this") and of much more. The anti-WC chapters are "solid" but Hurt "cannot evaluate witness testimony" and "is blinded by an anti-Communism" which "enables him... to portray the murder as the work of Castro Communists [and] the Mafia."

47. Apr 86 (Freedom) [2 pp.] A generally negative review, suggesting that Hurt deliberately played down the possibility of government involvement. (This monthly magazine, linked to the Scientologists, publishes investigative reports on various important topics, but unfortunately a substantial part of what it prints ranges from a bit overdone to quite silly indeed.)

48. 6 Apr 86 (Oakland Tribune) "Volume opens forum to more JFK assassination theories" [2 pp.] A favorable review by Jonathan Marshall, now the Trib's editorial page editor, focusing on Burkley, Tippit, and suppression of evidence by federal agencies. "Worst of all, however, was the decision of

the [HSCA] to put a 50-year seal on most of the thousands of pages of documents it assembled. 'The irony of the situation... is clear,' noted Berkeley-based assassination scholar Paul Hoch. 'The congressional investigators who broke the JFK case wide open and reversed the official government verdict have left us with more material withheld than ever before.'" (4 EOC 5.1)

"The assassination deserves whatever study it still receives. For even if the conspirators are never identified, much less caught, careful analysis of the crime and its aftermath will continue to shed light on the many political pathologies that rippled outward from the center of the assassination itself."

49. 13 Apr 86 (Phila. Inquirer) A review by Jean Davison, author of "Oswald's Game." (5 EOC 4) On the whole, she is not overly negative: "Anyone who has followed the controversy will probably want to read the latest round in the debate. Whether one agrees with them or not, conspiracy books like this one are seldom dull."

"It is not unusual... for conspiracy theorists to make their attacks on the Warren Report sound utterly convincing - until they try to explain what really happened. Then some sticky questions inevitably arise. For instance, why does all the physical evidence point to Oswald's rifle and to no other weapon?... If a better rifle was used, where did its bullets go?... Hurt provides a novel explanation.... Readers who prefer complex solutions to simple ones will find much to admire in Reasonable Doubt." (She might be wrong about any given area of evidence, but she does have a point.)

Easterling's confession "has the dreamlike quality of a delusion.... [He] seems to have been working for everyone on the conspiracy theorists' list of Top Ten Suspects.... It seems not to have occurred to Hurt that Easterling could have gotten many of his ideas from reading earlier books about Dallas." (Hurt certainly did think about that explanation, but, indeed, you wouldn't know that from the book itself.) "Sadly, Easterling's confession sounds like an unconscious parody of the theories presented there."

50. 22 Apr 86 [3 pp.] A letter from Hurt to the Inquirer, defending his handling of the neutron activation analysis and noting that Davison's book was not, as the Inquirer said, "a critical examination of conspiracy theories" but, in Davison's publisher's words, "an anti-conspiracy book about Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy." Hurt also says "I accept Miss Davison's attack on the credibility of Robert Easterling."

51. 19 Apr 86 (Montreal Gazette) A positive review by Brian McKenna, who directed two CBC documentaries on the JFK case. He notes Hurt's work on a report of Oswald handing out FPCC literature in Montreal, and regrets that Easterling may have taken Hurt away from "more fertile trails." "In his graceful and diplomatic treatment of the lonely work of the critics, Hurt refrains from the poisonous backbiting that has so divided many of the best ones over the years." (Reprinted in Coverups, June 1986)

52. (Same paper, date, and author) "How careers like Dan Rather's were built on [the] JFK assassination" Rather told McKenna in 1978 that he personally believed there was a conspiracy, but despite the HSCA he allegedly continues to reflect the lone-nut view, and was among those who vetoed a potential story by "60 Minutes" based on Lifton's evidence. Quite far out for a sidebar (a far-out-bar?): "What this suggests is that like many high U.S. officials in every branch of government, Rather's career and the official story are welded together." McKenna's brings up Rather's erroneous description of the Zapruder film, and the WC's "printing error" resulting in transposed frames (both of which I accept as non-sinister mistakes).

53. 25 May 85 (Jackson, MS Clarion-Ledger & News) "Book explores confession in Kennedy assassination" [2 pp.] Hurt, who used to work for the Jackson News, met with two FBI agents "who had examined Easterling's file. 'The whole tone was, one of, "Listen, you're a fairly sensible fellow, how can

you get taken in by this man?" And my position was I'm not being taken in by him. I'm trying to find out the full story. I don't understand why you folks haven't taken a more vigorous interest in the man,' Hurt said.... Attempts to contact the FBI about Easterling's story were unsuccessful." (#53a: an accompanying review, not noteworthy.)

There is some interesting information on Hurt (rather than on the case) in the following articles from Virginia papers, which are mostly profiles based in part on interviews:

- 54. 16 Feb 86 (Danville Register) [3 pp.; photo: #54A]
- 55. 9 Mar (Richmond T-D) [2 pp.]
- 56. 10-12 Mar (Lynchburg News) [5 pp.] Also quotes Ed Tatro.
- 57. 16 Mar (Roanoke Times) [2 pp.]

A few more reviews, short and/or not particularly noteworthy: #58 (19 Jan), Fort Wayne Journal; #59 (23 Jan), Macon, MS Beacon; #60 (16 Feb), Anniston, AL Star; #61, Detroit News; #62 (24 Apr), Daily Express (UK).

More thoughts the murder of Officer Tippit:

Several people have challenged me to explain how Tippit's affair might have actually played a role in the events of November 22. Indeed, it would be quite a coincidence if he happened to be the victim of a killer with a personal grudge just when Oswald was in the vicinity. Such things do happen - that's why they are called coincidences - and it is plausible that the DPD would have used the dead Oswald to clear up an unsolved crime. But a more complex scenario may make more sense. Joanne Braun speculates that Tippit's problems may have caused him to go to some unsavory characters for help, for example to get some money which his wife would not know about, and that he may have gotten entangled with, and in debt to, some hypothetical conspirators, who then set him up as they set Oswald up. Also, David Lifton reminded me of the eyewitness evidence suggesting that Tippit had been waiting for someone coming from the same direction as Oswald. (Ramparts, Nov 66) And of course Tippit's affair might explain only why he was in Oak Cliff.

Judge Garrison responds (and Hoch dissents):

Ted Gandolfo sent Jim Garrison part of 8 EOC 1, and sent me a copy of Garrison's reply. (Letter of 14 Apr 86 to Gandolfo, #1986.63; quoted almost in full here.)

The Judge had "nothing to say concerning [Hoch's] comments about me. Frankly, I found them to be incoherent."

"I cannot guess as to the origin of his emotional hang up [sic] about me. In any case, I will not attempt to reply to him in a similar vein...." Some of my earlier research on the assassination was "quite competent. Moreover -- in view of the solid front presented by the federal government in its cover-up of the assassination -- it seems to me childlike for one assassination critic to attempt to dis-credit another publicly." (I suppose calling Tony Summers "one of the [CIA's] more accomodating prostitutes" doesn't count.)

"One statement of Hoch's, however, does concern me enough to require a comment. He refers to the 'vulnerability of Clay Shaw due to his apparently irrelevant C.I.A. links and homosexuality.' Mr. Hoch should go straight to the bathroom and wash his mouth with soap."

"Throughout our trial, in everything I have ever written and in every public statement I have ever made -- I never once have made any reference to Clay Shaw's alleged homosexuality. What sort of human being is Mr. Hoch that he is impelled to so gratuitously make such a reference in a newsletter which he widely distributes to the public? For all his faults or virtues, Shaw is dead and unable to defend himself from that kind of off the wall canard. No matter how virtuously Hoch might couch it, a smear is still a smear."

I will let you decide if my reference (or Hurt's) was gratuitous. Out here, referring to someone's homosexuality stopped being a canard years ago;

at least, it's not as serious as charging someone with conspiring to kill JFK.

Does Garrison now think Shaw was involved in the conspiracy which led to JFK's death? If so, the reference to "all his faults or virtues" is remarkably mild.

In 1969, J. Edgar Hoover himself called me "a smear artist", for suggesting that there may have been an undisclosed relationship between Oswald and the FBI. [#64, 2 pp.] So Garrison is in good company.

As for my question in 8 EOC 1 about Garrison's case, asking what evidence he had when he arrested Shaw: The most enthusiastic answer came from Gandolfo, who said, "Did't you know that Shaw was connected with Permindex, which just happens to be one of the most efficient assassination organizations around?? Didn't you know that Shaw was CIA?" Also, Shaw's friend Ferrie was CIA and there is Russo's testimony. That is, of course, exactly the sort of evidence which I did know about but which does not relate to my question.

Gandolfo also promised to expose me as "just a CIA coverup bastard" in his newsletter, to which I do not subscribe. Does anyone out there want to send me a copy?

The best semi-serious answer came from Robert Ranftel and Jim Lesar, who sent me an FBI letterhead memo dated March 2, 1967, the day after Shaw's arrest. (#65, 2 pp.) The memo, discussed in Hurt's book (p. 281), notes that one of Shaw's alleged homosexual contacts said on March 19, 1964, that Shaw was into S&M. On February 24, 1967, two sources reported that they thought Shaw had "homosexual tendencies," and two sources (possibly the same ones) indicated that Shaw was Clay Bertrand, who allegedly contacted Dean Andrews on Oswald's behalf. Unnamed FBI sources are not necessarily reliable, but in any case none of this evidence even suggests that Shaw conspired with anyone to kill JFK. Sorry, but the prize for my \$64 question remains unawarded.

Incidentally, Lou Sproesser pointed out a problem with the Hurt-HSCA hypothesis that Banister, not Shaw, was with Oswald and Ferrie in Clinton. Marshall J. Manchester testified at the Shaw trial that he checked out the car and that Shaw said he was from the Trade Mart. (NYT, 7 Feb 69, 2 pp., #66) Manchester is not necessarily credible, but this shows that untangling the Clinton story by believing just some of the testimony is not easy.

While I was in the mood to discredit my fellow critics, I came across a letter from Garrison to "Freedom" (May 1986, #67) which is worth some attention. It offers a rare opportunity to scrutinize Garrison's analytical work in an area where the evidence is accessible and not crucial.

I think the buffs should keep in mind that what got many of us into the case in the first place was the demonstrable inadequacy of the Warren Report - for example, conclusions and summaries in the Report which did not even adequately reflect the published evidence, much less what was not published. In my own case, at least, the inference was that any investigation which was so clearly unreliable on details could certainly not be trusted to get the difficult and uncheckable answers right.

These days, assertions by Garrison and his ilk tend to get accepted into the mythology of the case if they sound plausible, without much detailed scrutiny. It is not easy to deal with most such claims. For example, no matter how exaggerated Garrison's (or Sprague's) comments about the HSCA staff and investigation under Blakey seem, and how implausible their conclusions about what was behind the HSCA, most of the rebuttal evidence is known only to HSCA people, and everyone who dealt with the HSCA knows their investigation was inadequate in many ways - at least in many small areas. So, it is hard to argue against the conclusions of Garrison or Sprague (either Sprague, in fact) without seeming to defend certain indefensible aspects of the HSCA's work.

Likewise, when implausible things are said about Oswald in New Orleans (by the HSCA) or about Cuban exiles, one may be reluctant to be properly critical if one believes, as most of us do, that those areas probably are central, and that someone might well have come up with new and important

(but unverifiable) evidence.

So I have no qualms about taking a close look at Garrison's charge that the Warren Commission may have relied on a CIA asset to solve one evidentiary problem. Garrison wrote that an earlier "Freedom" article on Hemingway "may have contributed to the identification of a possible CIA 'asset.'" In about 1961, Dr. Howard Rome, a Mayo Clinic psychiatrist, gave Hemingway shock treatments. In September 1964, Rome gave the WC an analysis of Oswald, which "would appear to have been obtained and inserted just prior to the printing deadline in order to mask one of the major holes still remaining in the official fiction: Oswald's motivation. The thrust of Dr. Rome's evaluation was that Oswald's spelling problem was not inconsistent with his having murdered the president of the United States." In Wesley Liebeler's words, "the frustration which may have resulted [from Oswald's reading-spelling difficulty] gave an added impetus to his need to prove to the world that he was an unrecognized 'great man.'"

Garrison does qualify his factual conclusion (enough to make it nonlibelous?): "One cannot ignore the fact that it is just possible that Dr. Rome might have been functioning all along primarily as an agency 'asset.'" Then he takes off again: "Those men who function clandestinely as CIA assets will do anything and help destroy anyone for a share of the CIA's cornucopia. To give but one example, consider how successful the media and 'journalistic author' assets have been in giving life to the two remaining scapegoats in the JFK assassination -- Fidel Castro and organized crime."

It is the jump to such a broad allegation which justifies attention to Garrison's comments on the Rome matter. His analysis is, basically, unsupported by the evidence Garrison himself refers to, and to some degree contradicted by it. Some terse one-word assessments spring to mind, but I don't want to be told again to wash my mouth out with soap.

The details are not interesting enough to reproduce here, but I'll send my analysis to anyone who wants it, at no charge. (#68, 3 pp.) If very few people ask for it, I'll probably draw some inferences from that.

One question for the third decade (and for Jerry Rose's journal as well) is how to deal with the survival of myths about the assassination other than the Warren Commission's. That is, what is the role of "scholarly research" when many of the people still interested in the case are sure that the head snap proves there was a shot from the front, that the single-bullet theory is a joke, that the HSCA's primary goal was to hide the truth, or that Garrison solved the case with the arrest of Clay Shaw?

The April and May 1986 issues of "Freedom" include a long article by Richard E. (critic) Sprague and two "Freedom" staffers, "The Ultimate Cover-up," focusing on the CIA, the HSCA, Ruby, and mind control. (There are also parts of a long series by Fletcher Prouty on the CIA, dealing with the assassination in the May issue.) Each issue is \$1.50 from 1301 N. Catalina St., Los Angeles, CA 90027. Certainly many of the details are correct, and maybe some of the big charges are, but I do not think these articles consistently meet essential standards of exposition and logical argument.

* The supporters and friends of Paulino Sierra:

What follows is essentially the complete text of a letter I sent to the Justice Department on May 13, 1986. Once again, an assassination lead brings us back to the hidden history of the Kennedy administration's war against Cuba.

In connection with the Justice Department review of the report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, I would like to bring to your attention one area in which the report was incomplete. I believe that the published information may be unfair to one of the named individuals, Paulino Sierra Martinez.

Mr. Sierra is mentioned on page 134 of the HSCA report, which states that

a certain "arms deal was being financed through one Paulino Sierra Martinez by hoodlum elements in Chicago and elsewhere." A staff report on the organization he headed (JGCE, the Junta del Gobierno de Cuba en el Exilio) is published in Vol. 10, pp. 95-103. This HSCA report appears to be based entirely on a review of existing documents (mostly from FBI and CIA files).

The HSCA's information relating to Sierra is summarized in a book by HSCA staff members Robert Blakey and Richard Billings, "The Plot to Kill the President." The Sierra material takes up a substantial part of the chapter entitled "Cuban Exiles and the Motive of Revenge."

Blakey and Billings said that a "background check [on Sierra] stimulated our interest in a Cuban exile - Mafia connection that just might have had a bearing on the assassination."

Sierra reportedly said that he had backers who would provide a large sum of money - \$30 million - to finance an invasion of Cuba. "Sierra was saying publicly that it [the money] was being donated by U.S. corporations whose assets in Cuba had been expropriated.... According to several sources, the real benefactors were members of the underworld, whose gambling interests in Cuba had indeed been expropriated by Castro.... There were other indications that organized-crime figures were behind the Sierra plan...." By June 1963, the FBI in Chicago concluded that Sierra was "a con artist."

Blakey and Billings said that they "were able to document in detail Sierra's activities and his apparent connection, or that of his backers, to organized crime," but that "the relevance to the assassination remained undetermined." (P. 174)

My colleague Peter Dale Scott and I studied the HSCA's Sierra material in some detail when the report was published. At first, Scott (like Blakey and Billings) was interested in the apparent connections between Sierra and various people whose names had become familiar in the JFK assassination controversy. (For example, Antonio Veciana, Gerry Patrick Hemming, and Rich Lauchli.) Scott found additional possibilities for links between Sierra's associates and Lee Harvey Oswald.

Scott came to doubt Blakey's belief that organized crime was the dominant force behind Sierra's Junta. Scott interviewed a number of the principals, including Sierra. (Sierra's employer, William Browder, essentially supported Sierra's account of the formation of the JGCE.) Sierra was displeased that the HSCA had depicted him in such a sinister light, and that he had not been interviewed by the Committee or its staff.

Sierra specifically objected to the implication that he was working in opposition to the policy of the Federal government. According to Blakey and Billings, "Sierra told the exile leaders that he spoke for a group of American businessmen in Chicago who wanted to join forces with them to overthrow Castro, with or without the approval of the U.S. government." (P. 174)

Scott found a published reference to Sierra which indicates that he was indeed coordinating some of his actions with the U.S. government at a high level.

In his biography of Robert Kennedy, Arthur Schlesinger discussed an anti-Castro operation in Central America involving Manuel Artime. "Hal Hendrix of the Miami News supposed [this operation was] managed either by CIA or, 'on a hip pocket basis,' by the Attorney General [Robert Kennedy] himself." Luis Somoza, "son of the thieving Nicaraguan dictator," tried to learn of the attitude of the U.S. government toward that operation. Somoza "was soon telling Caribbean notables that he had received a 'green light' from Robert Kennedy...."

Schlesinger noted that a State Department official said that Somoza had not in fact gotten that approval, when Somoza's claims were repeated to him in a meeting in August 1963.

Scott was able to obtain a memorandum concerning that meeting under the Freedom of Information Act.... (Memo by John H. Crimmins, Coordinator of

Cuban Affairs in the State Department, August 17, 1963)

The man who repeated Somoza's claims was Paulino Sierra, who said that he had been in touch with Somoza, who had offered him a site for a base. "Sierra and Rivero said they had to know what truth there was in Somoza's assertion about U.S. support for him before deciding whether to accept his offer or to go it alone." (Crimmins memo, p. 2)

Sierra and his associate, Felipe Rivero, described themselves as "[d]evoted... to the United States and conscious of the need to do nothing that would run counter to U.S. policy." (P. 4) Sierra "emphasized again the desire of his supporters not to operate contrary to U.S. policy." (P. 6)

Prior to the meeting, the Attorney General's office informed Crimmins that "the Attorney General had been talking to Enrique Ruiz Williams and that, as a result, Dr. Sierra would be calling [Crimmins] for an appointment." Williams, also known as Harry Williams, is generally considered to have been Robert Kennedy's principal liaison with the anti-Castro Cuban community. In his phone call, Sierra apparently suggested that Williams was a "mutual friend" of himself and Crimmins.

It is possible, of course, that this contact with the government was an attempt by Sierra to provide a cover for his true motives. However, Scott believes that the operations of the Junta may have been part of the policy of "autonomous operations" against Cuba, which was formally approved in June 1963. While the Kennedy administration was openly cracking down on the most prominent anti-Castro groups operating in the U.S., it was also encouraging deniable operations abroad.

According to the HSCA, State Department counsel Walt Rostow "proposed a 'track two' approach to Cuban operations to parallel regular CIA-controlled Cuban teams." The U.S. "would provide general advice, funds and material support," but "would publicly deny any participation in the groups['] activities." "All operations had to be mounted outside the territory of the United States." (10 HSCA 77)

In contrast, Blakey and Billings emphasized that when Sierra came on the scene in Miami just a month earlier, in May 1963, "the exile movement was in disarray: the United States had just stopped funding the Cuban Revolutionary Council; U.S. law enforcement agencies were cracking down on guerrilla activities; and factions within the exile community were politically polarized...." (P. 171)

Blakey and Billings noted that Sierra was "virtually unknown (his only mark of public prominence was that he had formed a Cuban lawyers association in Chicago)...." (P. 171) After talking with Sierra, Scott concluded (with support from documents at the Kennedy Library) that Robert Kennedy's office was worried about the many Cuban exile professionals who were doing menial work in the U.S., and directly encouraged the formation of such organizations. That is, Sierra's previous public activity may be not an exception to his relative obscurity but a clue to his key sources of support.

As Schlesinger noted, the record of the mid-1963 anti-Castro efforts based in Central America "is unusually murky." Someone in the CIA got the Crimmins memo, although its existence is not reflected in the CIA material quoted by the HSCA. Blakey and Billings quoted a CIA memo dated two days before the assassination of President Kennedy, whose author reportedly found it "curious that Sierra had for so long managed to hold a position in the exile hierarchy: 'Perhaps his mysterious backers are providing him with sufficient funds to keep the pot boiling....'" (Pp. 173-4)

To improve the historical record, I think that the Justice Department should at least perform a more complete file review than reflected by the published HSCA material.

In addition, any surviving principals should be allowed to respond to the HSCA's charge that the JGCE may have been a tool of organized crime.

69. Excerpts from Schlesinger, "Robert Kennedy and his Times."

70. Crimmins memo, 17 Aug 63, 6 pp.

In an informal interview published in "Lobster" (#1985.99), Peter Scott apparently gave Robin Ramsay his "three-hurricane theory" of the assassination. That expression, from Mark Allen, derives from a powerful alcoholic drink popular in New Orleans, after three of which any buff will tell you what he really thinks happened in Dallas.

"I think that the Kennedys really had started a new type of Cuban exile movement against Castro, the chief element of which was that there would be money to go anywhere else they liked, in the Caribbean, to find their bases. They would get money for training and they would get a green light, but it meant the Cubans got out of the U.S.... And I think this operation was penetrated from the very beginning. This may be the key to the assassination, in fact. [Ramsay: Penetrated by whom?] First of all by the CIA because they wanted to know what was going on, for a minimum. But this was another slap at them: the Kennedys doing what they were supposed to do. And they, that is the CIA, were being accused by Bobby Kennedy of having dealt with organized crime people. And I think the first thing the CIA did was to get Cubans into the operation who quickly turned round and started dealing with organized crime figures. This was the so-called Junta.... The CIA files on this operation, the Junta, make it look more and more like an organized crime operation from beginning to end. The House Committee, rather foolishly, without interviewing anybody, put the contents of this file into Vol. 10 of its report as if it were all fact. Now, what a perfectly invulnerable vantage point to have shot Kennedy from, if you used the assets of that operation to kill him. That would explain Bobby's sense of paralysis, because it was his operation."

Based on what I know at the moment (i.e., not counting all the material from Scott which I have forgotten), the possibility of relevance to Oswald or the assassination is intriguing, but it seems so tentative, indirect, and speculative that I don't want to offer a further opinion at the moment.

In any event, the Sierra story says something interesting about the HSCA investigation. Putting it as generously as possible, it suggests that Blakey's expertise in finding organized crime links had the effect of a filter in a case where obscure links also pointed in other directions. This problem differed from those the HSCA faced with Oswald and Ruby, where most of the alternative interpretations were well known in advance. I am not saying that the organized-crime angle was definitely absent, but the actual situation regarding Sierra was both more complicated and more interesting than the Blakey & Billings version indicates.

Peter Scott's half of the unpublished 1980 book "Beyond Conspiracy" dealt in part with the milieu of the Chicago Junta, and related matters. Although the manuscript was set aside after Pocket Books decided not to publish it, we have not forgotten about it and still hope to get the information out in due course.

Credits:

This issue of EOC is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Dr. Cornelia Hoch-Ligeti, who died in May at age 79, after a long career in medical research. (WP, 31 May, p. B6)

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