

Out of the Files and Into the Streets

BY RON ROSENBAUM

BOSTON—Friday evening. Arrive at the assassination conference feeling thoroughly prepared. Have just completed all 500 pages of "Portrait of the Assassin," Gerald Ford's "biography" of Lee Harvey Oswald, the book Ford wrote (with John R. Siles) while he served on the Warren Commission. Discover that Ford pays particularly close attention to details of Oswald's sex life. Author Ford returns several times to a perplexing question: How many times a month did Lee Harvey Oswald have sex with Mrs. Oswald?

Just once, according to copious hearsay testimony Ford marshals to buttress his lone assassination theory. Ford also probes question of whether Oswald's wife Marina participated in "orgies . . . wild parties and things like that" back in the U.S.S.R. Leaves this question unanswered, but goes on to present us with what he believes is the key to Mrs. Oswald's moody, troubled behavior in the U.S.: "No person could live with the knowledge that one's husband was a potential murderer of black moods and not be apprehensive of the future."

Checking in at Fenway Commonwealth Motor Hotel, unofficial headquarters for assassination conference, meet Ralph Schoenman, one-time private secretary to Bertrand Russell and 11-year veteran of assassination controversy. Back in '64 Schoenman helped organize Lord Russell's Who Killed Kennedy Committee to back Mark Lane's original investigation.

Schoenman reports he has just come from Washington where he made a presentation of assassination conspiracy evidence to a staff

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member of the Rockefeller CIA commission. Says he and Dick Gregory return next week at commission staff's request. Schoenman does not expect Rockefeller commission to take quick action to reopen assassination cases, but solicitous response of staff may indicate that after Watergate and CIA disclosures assassination research no longer can be dismissed out of hand.

Opening session of the conference a big surprise to me. Had expected a small gathering of grizzled researchers fighting over Warren Commission footnotes Baker Street Irregular style. Instead I found Boston University's Morse Auditorium packed with college-age people, and ex-movement types in their twenties and thirties. The more elderly first generation researchers and buffs scattered through the crowd are treated with the awe and dignity accorded old Wobblies at movement gatherings.

And that's what this is—an old-fashioned movement meeting, mid-60s teach-in style. The people who make up the Assassination Information Bureau (AIB) in Boston decided that the time was right to transform assassi-

nation investigations from increasingly esoteric sects into one big mass movement with the power to force the government to reopen the assassination cases. Many of the AIB people are veterans of the movements of the '60s. Their detailed "position paper" was prepared by former SDS theorist Carl Oglesby. AIB spokesman Bob Katz uses some familiar movement catchphrases as he opens the Friday night session. Calls for "mass-based" action to force the government to reopen the cases, for "politicizing the assassination issue" and "agitating around it." Two brand new things are going on here: movement people are turning into assassination freaks and assassination freaks are becoming a movement.

Mark Lane appears. Gets a hero's welcome. After 11 years of ridicule and obloquy from everyone including most movement types, Mark Lane may be coming into his

own. His fierce looking goatee has turned gray, but there is a powerful historical aura about him, as if he had just burst out of the Zapruder film to speak his piece.

Lane goes right to work with blackboard and chalk. He does a fast-paced recapitulation of his critique of the Warren Report, a routine that's become so skilled and polished after 11 years and hundreds of recitations that it's turned into a kind of Mort Sahl comic monologue that keeps the crowd crackling with laughter. Climax of the performance is a dazzling ritual recitation of The Flight of the Magic Bullet—all the twists and turns Bullet No. 399 had to take through Kennedy and Connally in order to do all the damage the Warren Commission's single bullet theory required it to do.

"You laugh *now*," Lane said to the crowd, which was in fact roaring by the time he finished the bullet ballet. "You laugh now, but you don't know how difficult it was." Tells tales of how he suffered at hands of publishers and media for trying to keep assassination controversy before the public these 11 lean years. Bitterly laces into liberals for failure of nerve on assassination issue.

Switches from melancholy past to brightening future. Tells story of 23-year-old assassination researcher writing to tell him, "I was 12 years old when JFK was killed and now there's a third new generation of critics and they'll never stop us!"

"The First Level has been passed!" Lane proclaims. "We have the forensic evidence there is a conspiracy." Calls for move to the Second Level: "We're not here to engage in different speculations and different theories. We're here to *organize*. If ever there was an opportunity this is the *time* . . . That is the *issue* . . . This is the *moment* . . . The time has come for this idea."

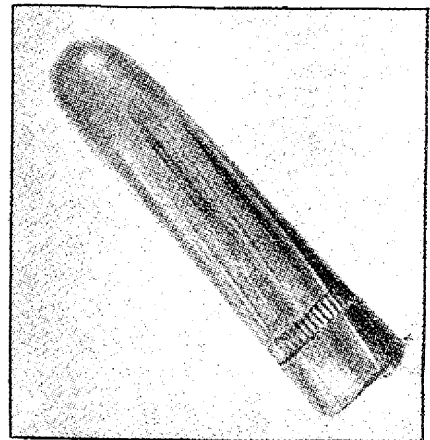
He calls for a massive organizing campaign on campuses, in trade unions, in women's and minority groups, even in "religious and fraternal organizations," to focus pressure on the Senate's new CIA inquiry to get it to take on the assassinations. Lane proposes to use the assassination issue the way the movement of the '60s used Vietnam, to use it to "expose the power structure of the most vicious imperialist power in the history of the world."

Saturday. A day for specialists. "Workshops" on the King killing (the assassination case closest to breaking open again. A federal judge in Memphis will rule this week on James Earl Ray's petition for a new trial) featuring Wayne Chastain, former reporter for the Memphis Press-Scimitar. On the Robert Kennedy assassination featuring Theodore Charach, whose research is summarized in a film called "The Second Gun."

Charach tells me he will present a revised, "highly sophisticated and perfected" version of the film along with some new evidence at an upcoming Washington press conference. He also reports that the man he names as the one who fired the "second gun" at Bobby disappeared at the time of the recent flap over the second gun theory. He hasn't been

seen since, says Charach. Workshops on Chappaquiddick and the Wallace shooting, two relatively neglected areas.

At the Wallace workshop. The only substantial leads in this area have come from a lengthy article in American Opinion, the John Birch Society magazine. Arnold Stang, Birch society investigator, links Bremer to a number of SDS meetings in Milwaukee, connects him to a police undercover agent, and to a leftist who was later found murdered in Canada. Birch society article concludes Wallace shot by Communists. Wallace workshop leader goes to great lengths to prove that these same Communists were really CIA and Nixon operatives posing as Communists. Cites Colson request to Hunt to fly up to Bremer's apartment the day of the shooting. No one has succeeded in connecting Colson or Segretti or Hunt to Bremer, but no one has fully explained that call. Wallace workshop leader claims to have "informants" giving him "leads" but produces little more than a torrent of indiscriminate speculation and melodramatic rhetoric that threatens to bury any genuine investigative lead. The kind of thing that gives assassination buffs a bad name.



The bullet the Report says inflicted all the non-fatal injuries to both the Governor and the President.

Saturday night. The seams begin to show in this new alliance of movement theorists and assassination researchers. Don Freed, coauthor of "Executive Action" and the "Glass House Tapes," warns me about the Saturday night panel discussion. Freed has been playing a quiet ecumenical role at this conference, trying to head off infighting

among easily irritated factions in the assassination world. Freed is concerned about the title of this panel show—"Who Done It?" Freed fears bickering over individual names will distract from credibility of conference. Attitude of some of the activist-minded movement people to the oldest and furthest out assassination theorists seems to be this: they're good people, they kept the questions alive when no one else would listen, they've done some good work, but—a bit of benign condescension here—they can get a little embarrassing, the media can use them to discredit the embryonic mass movement from the outset, there can be too much emphasis on just naming names, when it's the *forces* behind the names that count.

So several of the people on the "Who Done It" panel deliver windy speeches about why it's not that important to know *exactly* who done it. Penn Jones, the grand old editor of the Midlothian (Texas) Mirror and author of "Forgive My Grief" Volumes I-IV, the official death list of assassination-connected people, Penn Jones declares he's not afraid to name names. But by the end of his speech he's only named one name and he doesn't make it clear how central a role this particular name played.

Mae Brussell is the only one who comes through with the dreaded names. Names by the dozens: She pours out a list of nearly 50 people all of whom, she claims are directly implicated in the conspiracy to kill JFK. And these are mainly the low-level operatives in the case, she says. Later I asked her to specify which one of the names named was a gunman. Without hesitation she named a name. Two years ago I pressed Jim Garrison to tell me the name of the gunman who fired the fatal shot. He named a name. It was a different name. Now I have two names. Maybe one of them was a gunman. I'm not betting on it. The movement people have a point—you can name names forever but it doesn't mean a thing until you have the power to do something about it.

But I had a feeling that some of the movement people might not be interested in names at all, and that the unanswered questions about the assassinations were just organizing tools, for them. Sunday afternoon

just before the final session of the conference I spoke with Bob Katz about the AIB "position paper" prepared by Carl Oglesby. It's filled with practical organizing suggestions—tying demands to the Bicentennial, making assassinations an issue in the '76 presidential campaign, forcing the author of "Portrait of the Assassin" to defend his work, establishing a lobbying presence in Washington, creating high school and college courses on the subject, and developing training programs and materials for "educational cadre."

* As with most movement position papers, careful consideration is given to choosing just the right slogan for the embryonic movement and Oglesby chooses "Who Killed JFK?" I asked Bob Katz if that's really what the AIB is about.

"Well if the Congress decided tomorrow to reinvestigate, I still don't think you'd find out the answers. They can't afford to tell the truth." Then you'll have people frustrated again and then you're heading for the classic situation where people believe something and want something, and government by its very structure can't give it to them, so what you've done. . . ."

"Is 'heighten the contradictions,' as they used to say?"

"Exactly. We consider ourselves a movement to restore responsiveness in government. If people see that government won't respond they'll see the only way to get what they want is to change the government. I think people last night got too tangled up in this 'Who Done It' bit and. . . ."

"Then what does 'Who Killed JFK?' mean for you, is it just an organizing tool, or do you want to know the thing in itself?"

He smiled. "Now you're asking me to lay my cards on the table. . . ."

I don't think he was implying AIB has some clandestine design to hide. I think the AIB's notion of turning assassination questioners into a movement is the most promising thing to happen to the lonely world of assassination research in a long time. But I think they ought to stick with their slogan on every level. I still want to know "Who Killed JFK?" □