

A note to readers

by Kevin Cody

Robert Kennedy is dead. So what?

What difference would it make to find out now, that Sirhan Bishara Sirhan wasn't a lone assassin? Kennedy's assassination at the Ambassador Hotel, following his California primary victory, was 20 years ago.

So what if Sirhan had an eight-shot Iver Johnson revolver — and the bullet count that night added up to more than eight. Of all the people in the kitchen pantry of the Ambassador only one reporter saw a second gunman firing.

Yes, television cameras were rolling. Mutual Broadcasting radio's Andrew West was standing only a few feet from Kennedy with his tape recorder when he delivered his chilling narrative: "Oh my God, Senator Kennedy has been shot Be very careful, get the (thup) gun, get the gun, get the gun (thup thup). Stay away from the gun His hand is frozen, get his thumb, get his thumb (thup thup). Take ahold of his thumb and break if it you have to, get his thumb (thup thup thup). Now, get away from the barrel, get away from the barrel, man, look out for the gun. Okay, all right, that's it Rafer, get it, get the gun, Rafer" (thup thup thup thup.)

Yes, the LAPD had copies of these recordings. No, they didn't have the tapes analyzed to determine if more than eight shots could be heard on the tape. So what?

So what if the stories presented here reveal that LAPD investigators falsified the reports of its own officers. So what if LAPD officers browbeat witnesses into recanting their claims of having seen a fleeing girl in a polka-dot dress shout, "We shot Kennedy?"

Since John Kennedy's assassination, conspiracy stories have developed into a literary genre that is divorced from journalism. A newspaper, today, that seriously attempted to present evidence that the investigation of Robert Kennedy's death was really a

cover-up would be laughed at.

This is not to say that no one would believe such stories on the subject. How can one not believe the LAPD's own reports? How can one argue with a transcription of a tape recorded polygraph interview? People will believe the stories. They just won't take the stories seriously.

No libel suits will result from what is printed in these pages, even though individuals are implicated in criminal, and perhaps treasonous acts. Why would those implicated risk an examination of the facts in a court of law when the allegations can be effectively refuted with ridicule?

In the Soviet Union those who dissent from the official line are labeled crazy and put in asylums.

In the United States it is enough simply to label a dissenter a kook.

We don't wish to reinforce the belief that we really are crazy by appearing to suggest that we think printing these articles will change anything.

Consider this eight-page special report a late April Fool's issue. Use it as something to talk about during lulls in conversations at the dinner table. Save it for your grandchildren as a classic of the conspiracy genre that was so popular during the Kennedy-King-Watergate-Contragate era.

You can explain the stories as a quixotic obsession that gripped people — such as Jonn Christian, the writer of these articles — during the psychedelic '60s.

Like many other newsmen of the period, Christian, recognized a good story when he saw one. The story wasn't the obvious one — that a presidential candidate had been assassinated. The story was that the investigation of the assassination appeared to be a cover-up.

Bill Stout of KCBS, Dave Smith of the *Los Angeles Times* and Pete Noyes of KNXT were among the top Los Angeles reporters who worked hard chasing down the cover-up and second gun theories.

But these and other mainstream press reporters gave up reporting on the story, not be-

cause they came to accept the official version that Sirhan was a lone assassin, but because they wore out. And they lost their institutional backing.

"I covered every day of the Sirhan trial, and the holes became not just holes, but gaping chasms," recalled KCBS reporter Bill Stout in a recent interview.

"The number of rounds fired weren't accounted for, the baseboard and molding from the pantry disappeared, the security guard wasn't questioned, leads weren't pursued

"There were skeptics all over. But as the trial went on more and more ridicule was dumped on people who questioned the official findings. Fewer and fewer people were willing to say, this doesn't make sense to me. Fewer and fewer people, and that goes on to this day," said Stout, one of the few LA newsmen who has continued to lend support to Christian's efforts.

Recalled *Times* reporter Dave Smith in a 1979 interview, "When (Los Angeles County Supervisor) Baxter Ward began his hearings on the 'two gun' theory in 1974, and Bill Farr and I turned in our story, it was cut back so much that we made quite a protest. I told them (his editors) if I'm to spend my time listening

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to what people say, which is my job, and you're not going to do me the courtesy of believing what I write, and printing it, then this is the end of my dealings with the Kennedy case. And it was."

Imagine the *Los Angeles Times* having to admit six years after the assassination that there had been a cover-up — and that the *Times* had been taken in by it.

When Pete Noyes was hired by KNBC in the late 1970s he was ordered by the station's attorneys not to even talk about the Robert Kennedy assassination.

This paper's interest in Kennedy's assassination began in 1978 during an interview with Christian. At the time Christian was living in Hermosa, and writing a book that would be published by Random House titled

The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy: A Searching Look at the Conspiracy and Cover-up 1968-78.

The paper's interest was reinforced in 1984 when we reported that television tapes and Andrew West's tapes of Kennedy's assassination had been analyzed by Dr. Michael Hecker at the Stanford Research Institute. After conducting a series of oscillographic and spectrographic tests over a two day period, Hecker concluded, "It is my opinion to a reasonable degree of certainty, that no fewer than 10 gunshots are ascertainable following the conclusion of the senator's speech until after the time Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was disarmed."

We printed the story on our front page the week before the 1984 California primary. The reaction was, "So what?"

Six months ago messages from Christian began piling up on my spindle. The LAPD's long suppressed investigation of Kennedy's assassination had finally been released by State Archivist John Burns.

Christian had bought a microfiche version of the 50,000 page investigation, rented a microfiche viewer and begun studying the documents page by page.

Page after page confirmed what he had reported 10 years earlier in his book — LAPD's Special Unit Senator investigation was more cover-up than investigation.

What was a newspaper in a free country to do when handed a story that demonstrated that the investigation of an assassinated presidential candidate was a cover-up.

Say, so what?

How could we have, without joining league with those who rely on ridicule and indifference to silence anyone who threatens the status quo?

The publication of these stories is meant as a tribute to that rare reporter who knows a good story when he sees one, and stays on it until he gets it or until it gets him.