

The Assassination of President Kennedy

GLIMPSES OF THE TRUTH

Nine years after he was murdered in broad daylight in a Dallas street, the assassination of President Kennedy is still shrouded in mystery - largely in consequence of government policy. When Kennedy was killed the American state was decapitated and the viability of democratic government in the United States was imperiled. The country stood on the brink of war. "At the Pentagon the military machinery stood at global readiness. On the news of assassination, the Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had immediately, suspecting a coup, warned all of the nine great combat commands of the United States which girdle the world, to hold themselves in readiness for action. One of them, on its own initiative, sirened its men to Defense Condition One, or combat alert. Within half an hour the command was called to order and restored to normal readiness" (The Making of the President 1964, page 9, Theodore H. White, Atheneum Publishers, N.Y., 1965). White did not identify the command which brought us to the brink of war, nor the authority which countermanded its initiative. War against what country or countries? We have not been told.

In Parkland Hospital, where he waited the outcome of the desperate efforts to save the life of his moribund chief, Vice President Johnson's "first words" to Kennedy aide O'Donnell who came to tell him the President was

dead, were "...we must look upon this in a sense that it might be a conspiracy of some nature..." (Testimony of Kenneth O'Donnell, Hearings Before The President's Commission On The Assassination Of President Kennedy, Vol. VII, p451). And to Malcolm Kilduff, Kennedy press attache: " 'We don't know whether this is a worldwide conspiracy, whether they're after me as well as they were after President Kennedy, or whether they're after Speaker McCormack or Senator Hayden' " (White, p33). All in line of succession to the Presidency!

Johnson was in a dilemma. What to do? The country was torn by civil strife. And a Presidential election impended. The cold war flourished; detente with the Soviet union was an infant; accomodation with revolution in the "Third World" a hope. The Dallas police, the mass-communication media, and the rabid right attributed the assassination to the communist left. To follow suit would have launched a wave of anticommunist hysteria, end detente, even precipitate war. To attribute the assassination to the murderous, hate-filled, racist right would have intensified civil strife with possibilities of large-scale armed conflict. And Johnson needed time and calm.

Assassination of a head of state is political murder. Political murder, it is axiomatic, is politically motivated and often originates in economic interest. Ironically, however, the only exit from his dilemma open to the man

whose first thought on learning Kennedy had died was "conspiracy," was to denude the assassination of political meaning, thwarting discovery of its roots. "Quick briefings on the state of the world and the implications of the assassination were Mr. Johnson's first concerns last night and this morning," wrote Anthony Lewis in the New York Times of November 24, 1963. "...greatest fear was that the assassination and the leftwing background of the prime suspect, Lee Harvey Oswald, would generate anti-Communist passions and cries for vengeance. No responsible official here believed that any foreign power or movement had any connection with the assassination...But the delicacy of the issue caused great concern. Officials tried through the night to prevent the police and prosecutors in Dallas from drawing political conclusions from the assassination" (page 8, col. 3). Exculpation for the left! Benign neglect of the rabid right! What remained? "The widespread feeling was that there could be no 'sensible' explanation for a senseless act" (Lewis, *ibid.*). So government assassination policy was set.

Given time, Johnson might have achieved calm and reassurance. The sorrowful solemnity of the President's funeral held political passion in momentary check. But events overtook Johnson. Man makes his own history, wrote Marx and added, but not out of the whole cloth. Underworld police-buff Ruby murdered Oswald in police headquarters in the midst of his captors. A whelming tide of suspicion and rumor swept the country and the world. Johnson, an ambitious realist

thirty-two years skilled in opportunist uses of power was equal to the occasion. In a brilliant improvisation he created an ad hoc, politically balanced, investigative body of prestigious, loyal establishmentarians drawn from the three spheres of government and headed by the chief justice of the Supreme Court; their task - to still the clamor.

Exigent governmental necessity and iron political logic dictated the unanimous findings of the Warren Commission. Mandated officially to discover the truth and with the full resources of the government at its disposal, but foreclosed from political analysis and advised by competent authority to forego psychiatric interpretation, the Commission juggled evidence to write a false account of how the killing was done, misidentify the gunman who brought Kennedy down, and confess itself unable to find his motive. Its undeniable achievement was concealment of the source of the assassination. Its bequest to posterity was lies and mystery. Johnson accepted the Commission's Report, praised it, and had it published under the imprimatur of the United States. The truth, it was hoped, would be interred with Oswald, an alienated, leftist, workin^g-class nobody, his plea of innocence conspiratorially aborted by gunshot, his epitaph the Commission Report stigmatizing him posthumously assassin. President Nixon has said no word officially about the Dallas killings. In the judgment of history the Warren commission will stand condemned as an accomplice to a

frameup and an accessory after the fact to murder.

Clamor to expose the frameup of Oswald began immediately following his murder. Evidence was challenged, contradicted, impugned, and new evidence uncovered, all by a company of diverse, independent investigators. Writers tore the Warren Commission's Report to pieces.

Less than two years after Kennedy and Oswald were murdered and ten months after the demise of the Warren Commission truth came to light in the National Archives which made available for inspection a copy of the motion-picture film of the assassination made by amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder who sold the original to Life Magazine which withheld it from public view until ^{a copy} it was subpoenaed for exhibition by the prosecution in the trial of ^{in New Orleans in 1969} Clay Shaw for conspiracy to assassinate the President. The Zapruder fil^m is virtually the only incontrovertible piece of "hard" evidence in the assassination. All the other "hard" evidence - rifle, bullets, prints, cars, clothing, autopsy - as well as eye- and earwitness testimony, is ambiguous, made doubtful by contradictory evidence, and in some instances is invalidated by perjury. Only the film is definitive, irrefutable.

The film has selfevident force. It shows Kennedy, when struck fatally, hurled violently backward, rebounding from the rear seat of the limousine in which he was riding, and spinning off to his left into his wife's arms. The violent backward thrust of the President occurs to the

eyes at the instant of impact of the fatal shot. The two events appear to be simultaneous and to have an obvious relationship of cause and effect. The service of truth requires no other explanation. The accumulated experience of mankind speaks in the instant conclusion that leaps with speed greater than that of light from eye to mind when seeing the film: Kennedy was hit from a point in front and to the right of his limousine; he was caught in an enfilade; the autopsy, hours later, was falsified; the Commission's lone-killer theory violated the evidence of the film. The intuition of millions the world over is confirmed by the Zapruder film: the murder of President John F. Kennedy was the work of a conspiracy.

Who killed Kennedy? was the cry of the first fighters against government criminality. And who killed Kennedy remains a mystery still as is the identity of the assassins' employers and beneficiaries, which continuing research seeks to solve. Some also look for links with later political assassinations. And others wrestle with the central mystery of the assassination: why was Kennedy killed? But few have been the efforts to elaborate a theory elucidating the assassination in context of contending forces and interests in American society. Examination of two unsuccessful attempts illustrate the necessity and difficulty of the task.

A bold thrust at political analysis was made by New Orleans

District Attorney Jim Garrison following failure, by criminal prosecution in a state court, to establish a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. In A Heritage of Stone (Putnam's Sons, New York, 1970), Garrison saw the assassination as a coup d'etat (page 211) by a "military-intelligence power elite" (p 215) "within the government" (p 192) which transferred "power to make foreign policy from the White House to the Pentagon" (p 96); reduced the President to a "transient official, a servant of the warfare conglomerate," a "business agent in Congress for the military and their hardware manufacturers" (p 211); and transformed the government into a "warfare state" (p 47), and the United States into a "new imperial America" (p 101).

Obviously, Garrison saw significant changes in American government relations and policy following the assassination. But despite the inclusion of considerable elements of truth, his interpretation is not persuasive. It does not explain why so powerful a force as he describes, centered in a "high level of government" (p 217), resorted to assassination and retention of a facade of democratic government instead of bold seizure of power and institution of a dictatorship on the order of the Greek colonels or the Brazilian generals. He exaggerates the consequences of the assassination to the point of absurdity and reduces motivation to a single issue: perpetuation of the cold war. He infers motivation of the assassination

from its consequences but does not forge a chain of evidence and analysis from source to achievement. The conspiracy is not traced to specific political, industrial, and financial interests. No attempt is made to identify the forces and interests in American society represented by Kennedy, leaving the reader with an image of a conflict in which the protagonists were a mighty force and a single individual, albeit the President, a sort of inverted fairy tale in which the dragon slew Saint George. Garrison further discredited the discredited government theory of the assassination but penetrates only a little way into the mystery enveloping it.

A Heritage of Stone opens with acknowledgment of the help given its author by Vincent Salandria in "our search for the facts about President Kennedy's assassination," which "continued throughout my writing of this book." It is not surprising, therefore, to discover in Salandria's theory of the assassination, developed in the December 1971 and January 1972 issues of *Computers and Automation*, ideas akin to Garrison's.

Salandria, one of the earliest critics of the Warren Commission, believes the evidence of conspiracy in the assassination of Kennedy is "overwhelming and voluminous" and "irrefutable." But, unaccountably, while justifiedly decrying "fact picking the assassination" and the "micro-analytic or nit-picking approach" to it, seems to denigrate the value of physical evidence altogether and con-

feases "guilt" in having made "protracted analyses of the shots, trajectories, and wounds of the assassination." Perhaps it is the mistaken apologia of an overzealous convert to belated recognition "the fundamental question" ^{ms} concern ^o "why it was done and which elements are behind it."

In Salandria's "model" of the assassination, motivation pivots ^s on foreign policy. Two factors are postulated: ¹ continuation of the cold war which Salandria thinks, inexplicably, was not authentic but a "cooperative effort to foist on both the American and Russian civilian populations an enormous military-intelligence budget," which Kennedy was liquidating; and intervention in Vietnam which Kennedy intended to terminate. No issues of domestic policy are cited.

"...the American government," in Salandria's view, "destroyed its own chief of state." Two agencies collaborated to this end - the military, without sufficient intelligence ¹ "...to have accomplished this crime alone," acted with the CIA of which it is a "clumsy cousin." The CIA was the "prime mover" but was also allied with Soviet intelligence in the "American governmental game of killing the President." ~~Myriad Soviet government~~ Oswald, Salandria implies, was a Soviet intelligence agent and therefore guilty of conspiratorial murder. Why the Soviet government should risk nuclear holocaust so soon after the Cuban missile crisis in order to facilitate military conflict in Indo-China, Salandria does not trouble to explain.

Like Garrison, Salandria believes the assassination effected a coup d'etat. In the latter's "model" the coup is both "covert" and "transparent." The contradiction is not resolved. This "illegitimate seizure of power" brought "new rulers," unidentified in anyway except by the exclusion of LBJ, Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover, to "absolute power" in an "uncontrolled war machine."

Meaningful penetration of the mystery of Kennedy's death is blocked in Salandria's "model" by the elimination from consideration of a number of obviously suspect sources of the assassination. Thus, for example, the "political non-governmental right and/or oil interests" are exculpated on the ground Earl Warren and other "liberals on the Commission and its staff" would not have "covered" for them. Moreover, for liberals "to cover for the extra-governmental right in matters of assassination is for them to sign their own death warrants." And "It would also make no sense for the right to kill Kennedy in an ultra right city such as Dallas. To do so would be to impute blame to the right." It is an interesting approach which should be helpful to the Committee To Investigate Assassinations in eliminating suspected sources in the killing of M. L. King I who was killed in New York and of Martin Luther King who was shot to death in Memphis.

As the reason given by Salandria for elimination of "oil interests" as a possible source of the Kennedy assassination is applicable to all other economic interests,

the lack of reference to any specific commercial, industrial, or financial interest is understandable. And it makes comprehensible the omission from his "model" of consideration as a source of the assassination of the military-industrial complex against whose overpervasive influence "in every city, every statehouse, every office of the Federal government" President Eisenhower warned his successor and the nation, on leaving office, less than three years before Kennedy was killed.

Three ideas in Salandria's model are not found in A Heritage of Stone. November 22, 1963 was, Salandria believes, an "historical day when the republic expired," but despite the Presidential elections of 1964 and '68 and the election of 1972, impending when he constructed his "model," Salandria apparently ~~did~~^{does} not think it necessary to reveal what form of government replaced the republic of 1789-1963.

Garvison thinks the attack on Kennedy in "Dealey Plaza should be recognized as a highly effective assault on civilian control over the military" (Heritage, p 216). Salandria asks, "Was not Wall Street successfully stormed by way of Dealey Plaza?" But it comes to the same thing as Salandria thinks the "intelligence community force (d) upon the financial interests an uncontrolled war machine..."

Climactically, but only rhetorically, in demagogic perversion, Salandria poses the ultimate question: "...was not

the capitalist system on November 22, 1963 overthrown by a new class in the United States?" What replaced capitalism in the United States? What social system? How does it differ from capitalism? From the "communist" world? What is its mode of production? Its class structure? Its ideology?

And the "new class," what is it? What are its economic roots? Is it an exploitative class? Whom does it exploit? Why was it antagonistic to capitalism? To the republic? How and by whom can it be dislodged from power?

Salandria does not say. Yet he thinks, "At issue are questions of war and peace that involve the whole of humanity."

Of course, the notions the cold war ^{was} a pretense, the American Republic expired, and capitalism was overthrown in the United States are contrary to fact. They suggest a peculiar perception of the world in which, by a perverse dialectic, reality is transformed into its opposite.

Salandria caught glimpses of the truth but his phantasmal "model" casts little light on the assassination of President Kennedy. He muddies the waters.

Garrison and Salandria fail ^{ed} to solve the mystery of Kennedy's assassination. They see connection between the murder conspiracy and only foreign policy of the government. They lack critical evidence to identify the conspirators and

their sponsors. They mistake accusation and speculation for disciplined, realistic analysis. Lacking historical insight, they reach too far and grasp too little. They fail to rebut the fundamental, underlying assumption and implicit finding of the Warren Commission that decapitation by murder of the mightiest government mankind has seen, at the peak of its power, was a random intrusion into history. They are unable to place the assassination in context as incidental to a struggle between titanic interests over basic orientation of government policy which took place in origin, conduct, and consequence entirely within the framework of existing American capitalist institutions and relationships. *And continues.*

Research continues. Others will succeed where Garrison and Salandria failed. "Fould deeds will rise," exclaimed Hamlet, "though all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes."

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