

Feldman
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Dear Harold,

Your letter of November 28 was stimulating. It set me to reading in order to discuss points you raise. Hence the delay in replying to you.

Our discussion, it seems to me, is yielding precious fruit - agreement on the necessity for a political approach to the Kennedy assassination. I hope continued exchange of opinion will find us in the end in solid agreement on the nature and magnitude of that event, on its origins, and on the lessons to be learned from it.

You comment in your letter on aspects of two presidential assassinations - Lincoln's and Kennedy's. I am interested because I believe that understanding of the former will enable us to plumb the latter. I see a parallel between the two events occurring ninety eight years apart and at markedly different stages in the development of the United States. I do not see the parallel in terms of the roles of various individuals but in terms of policy in relation to the historical development of the country. I will try to explain my thought.

At first sight Lincoln's assassination seems a relatively simple affair. At least that is the way it has been presented for a hundred years. Booth alone killed Lincoln and escaped. He was hunted down and killed. Conspiratorial confederates of Booth were arrested, found guilty, and hanged. Motive for the assassination was not established. Booth, a well-known ardent sympathizer of the Confederacy, it was and is widely believed, was activated by desire to avenge its defeat.

At this level one may draw an obvious parallel with the Kennedy assassination. Oswald is said to have killed Kennedy without assistance, escaped, was run to earth, and was killed in the midst of his captors. No motive for the assassination was established.

To be sure, one may note striking differences in these schemas of the assassinations. Booth's guilt is certain even if not established by judicial process. Oswald's guilt, pronounced by posthumous governmental finding, is highly dubious, even improbable, contrary to evidence. Booth had accomplices. Whether Oswald had conspiratorial assistance in whatever role he may have played is a moot point: the Warren Commission "found" he had none, but most people who think him guilty of murder also think he had assistance.

A most important difference relates to motive. Political reason for murder is ascribed to Booth, none of any description to Oswald who was pathologic, it is widely believed in an irrational interpretation of insanity which is virtually the modern equivalent of witchcraft as a mysterious but supposedly self-explanatory evident explanation of individual human conduct. Yet motive is the clue to a solution of the two assassinations.

At deeper levels the parallel between the two killings is more cogent. The military trial, by Presidential order, of Booth's accomplices was adjudged, both contemporaneously and subsequently, a tragic corruption of Constitutional and judicial process. The Warren Commission which, in effect, tried Oswald, was created by Executive Order and had no Constitutional basis. Both bodies executed Presidential mandates based on exigent political necessity. Both bodies, in arriving at predetermined verdicts, mutilated basic principles of justice. In playing their assigned roles,

both bodies constituted obstacles to the discovery of the truth.

The principal difference between the two assassinations at this level lies in the specific tasks executed by the two Presidential instruments. The military court of 1865 was created to try Booth's accomplice in the assassination of Lincoln; it established the existence of a conspiracy, punished those it found guilty with death, and by this means calmed an agitated nation. The function of the Warren Commission was affirmation of the sole guilt of the accused and denial of the existence of a conspiracy, thereby denuding the assassination of Kennedy of political meaning and obviating dangerous political turmoil.

At the deepest level the two assassinations are alike in a basic respect. The object in each case was to effect a change in governmental policy inimical to powerful interests. Study of American history with particular reference to the Civil War (The Civil War In The United States - Marx and Engels; Triumph of American Capitalism - Louis Hacker) will yield illuminating insight into the historical context of Lincoln's assassination. The stake in that event was no less than the realization for the first time in the United States of a truly national economy by free development of industrial capitalism throughout the entire area of the country. Military defeat of the slave-holding South gave the victorious Northern capitalist interests enormous possibilities for growth unprecedented in history. Through the Republican Party they had undisputed control of the national government, the indispensable instrument for the advantageous realization of their hopes and plans.

But Lincoln stood in the way (Why Was Lincoln Murdered? - Eisen-schimidt). He intended reconciliation with the defeated South. To this end he eschewed the abolition of slavery where it still existed by military decree, political order, or legislative enact-ment and proposed to leave the issue for determination by judi-cial process. Lincoln planned, it became clear from his words and deeds, to restore the defeated slaveholders to local and state power and even to share national power with them at the expense, if need be, of the control of the national government by his own party, in the Radical wing of which he was openly regarded as a traitor.

In Congress, Radical Republicans threw down the gage of battle to the national executive over Reconstruction policy. Quick removal of Lincoln, however, whose popularity was enormously enhanced by military victory, by established political process was precluded by his reelection in 1864. Booth's plot, developed originally by the Confederate government as a scheme to kidnap Lincoln and hold him hostage for the exaction of favorable terms in the ne-gotiation of peace, was transformed after Lee's surrender by undetermined causes, but opportunely for Lincoln's enemies, into a scheme for the assassination of the President. No evidence connects Booth directly with Lincoln's enemies. But Booth's murderous plans became known to high government officials who tolerated his scheme or fostered it and tried to expedite Booth's escape, had him killed before examination and trial, and contrived the conspiracy trial of his confederates in order to cloak their own larger conspiracy born of the conflict over basic government policy.

Although President Andrew Johnson in February 1866 publicly

attributed responsibility for Lincoln's death to the Republican Radicals whom he also charged with intention to assassinate him as a "presidential obstacle" to their Reconstruction policies, historical research took three quarters of a century to elaborate a political analysis of Lincoln's assassination. And even now, when the identities of the authors of the larger conspiracy are as good as proved, historians generally do not comprehend Lincoln's murder as an anticlimactic incident in the denouement of the continuing conflict between the social system of slavery in the South and the historically progressive social system of rising industrial capitalism.

Only a relatively small number of individuals, Marxists in thought for the most part, have that understanding. Apparently Marx himself did not achieve that insight. He recognized and elucidated the historical and social forces engaged in the Civil War, but seems to have made an error in attributing the source of the assassination to the Confederacy. On May 1, 1865, in a letter^{et} to Engels, he wrote, "The chivalry of the South ends wothily." In this connection the assassination of Lincoln was the greatest piece of folly they could commit." Whether these two sentences, included in a short extract from Marx's letter by the editor of The Civil War In The United States, express the whole of Marx's thought on Lincoln's assassination and whether Marx ever acquired greater insight into that event I do not know.

But I find his error instructive. For, although he was wrong with respect to vitally important fact, he was fundamentally correct in relating the assassination to the social conflict between the slave-holding South and the industrial-capitalist

North. His error, resulting from acceptance of accounts of the assassination inspired by the dead man's enemies in control of the government of the United States, was essentially a misapplication of a sound approach.

We can avoid repeating Marx's error. Our position in 1967, a little more than three years after the assassination of President Kennedy, is more advantageous than Marx's two weeks after the murder of Lincoln. The official government account of the Kennedy assassination is discredited. Manchester cannot restore its credibility. If we recognize the crucial importance of the Zapruder motion-picture film, showing Kennedy hit fatally from the front and right, and accept the evidence of the autopsy, establishing a back wound, we can, indeed must, say Kennedy was slain in an ambush of at least two gunmen, the government theory of a solo assassin is demolished, and the existence of a conspiracy is proved, if not yet established as fact.

It follows, apart from corroboratory data and analysis, the evidence relied on by the Warren Commission to "identify" Oswald as the lone killer of Kennedy was manufactured. Study of the testimony adduced by the Commission implicates the police as the fabricators of ballistic, fingerprint, and eyewitness evidence. Ruby links the underworld with the assassination. As neither the Dallas police nor the underworld had compelling reason to seek a major change in the policy of the national government, their roles in the assassination had to be ancillary to that of more powerful forces which were motivated by larger concerns and could command their cooperation.

The subordinate role of the Dallas police suggests the involvement of the power structure of Texas of which the police are an arm.

Murder of the President could have been conceived in or been congenial to the conservative wing of the ruling Texas Democratic Party which in 1963 was desperately situated between the millstones of increasing successes by the state Republican Party and irreconcilable hostility of the liberal Democrats in Texas who enjoyed the support of the Kennedy Administration.

In Texas the local power structure, in the main, serves the interests of the segregationists whose power throughout the South was threatened by the rising militancy and politicalization of the Negroes abetted by the Kennedy Administration. To the segregationists murder was a commonplace. At the state level, power in Texas is sensitive to the needs of large banking and insurance, and vast defense and space, as well as other industrial interests. All are interlocked with the national power structure, at times in combination with, and at other times in opposition to other sectional and national, interests. The Kennedy's interests, it should be borne in mind, lie in association with northeastern banking capital whose historic dominance has been challenged by later giants centered in the west, southwest, and South, including, not least if not first, Texas.

A number of the giant Texas-based interests constitute a segment of the military-industrial complex about the danger of which to the Republic Eisenhower warned the country on the eve of turning over power to Kennedy. This constellation of interests, born in ~~the~~ World War II and nourished by the cold war against the Soviet Union initiated in Truman's Administration, grew to mighty proportions during Eisenhower's terms of office. Its influence on the national economy and domestic policy was reflected in an increasingly staggering proportion of the Federal budget long before escalation of the war in Vietnam in February 1965. It is

obvious this complex has great influence and spokesmen in Congress and the executive branch of the government. Its banner is anti-Communism, its ultimate goal war to destroy the historically new and inimical social order in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China, which has also spread to Latin America and constitutes an ever-present threat to the world domination of the capitalist order.

In Eisenhower's time this constellation of interests became powerful enough to pursue its own foreign policy through the CIA in various situations in secret from the U.S. government and even in opposition to it, not stopping, says Smith Simpson whose Anatomy of the State Department will be published in March, at "fomenting and conducting undeclared wars." But in Kennedy's Administration this force encountered strong opposition and frustration. It experienced its first damaging setback when Kennedy aborted the CIA-Pentagon invasion of Cuba in 1961 shortly after assuming office. It suffered another blow when Kennedy and Khrushchev^h agreed in the fall of 1962 on the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba and American missiles from Turkey, and Kennedy limited the manifestation of American hostility to Castro's regime to an embargo on trade in return for less active and vociferous support by Cuba of revolutionary struggles in Latin America. A third blow, in the summer of 1963, was Kennedy's treaty with the Soviet government proscribing nuclear arms tests in the air and underwater, and initiating a relaxation of tension between the Soviet and American governments. Other Kennedy policies of a piece with the Soviet-American detente also constricted the horizons of the complex in world affairs with adverse consequences for its economic and financial prosperity and correlative domestic policies

projected by the Administration - cutbacks in defense production and the possibility of eliminating the Selective Service System, for example - had adverse effects on the complex. The Kennedy Administration, in short, was engaged or seemed to be engaged in a persistent and systematic effort to reorient the basic policy of the U.S.; to scrap the cold war and establish a modus vivendi with the Soviet world; to nullify the credo, mystique, and propaganda of anti-Communism; to remove the basis for the existence of the complex itself. Out of the anger, frustration, fears, hopes, and calculations of this constellation of interests the assassination of Kennedy was born. Its aim was to restore the anti-Communist cold-war policy of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. For this purpose the assassination was to be attributed to a Communist or pro-Communist source. Hence Oswald.

I am aware that all this is schematic; it is really the outline of a position. Many would call it speculation. For me, however, it has two virtues: it corresponds to political experience and political logic, and requires the use of imagination without which there is no history at all; and it provides political orientation and direction for research and analysis. I know that research will not verify every thought in this schema, but I feel confident it is basically sound. Discussion should improve it. And in time research will establish the exact locus of the assassination in the complex of local, state, and national interests which coalesced in reaction to Kennedy's policies.

In the meantime I propose to examine the consequences of the assassination with the aim of drawing lessons from that melodramatic event.

Fraternally

