

Winter Term Project: Documentary Research on the
Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy

Fundamental questions exist about the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy and about the reliability of official investigations of this event. The project described here involves systematic research centering on material currently available, particularly the 4,700 pages of FBI documents on the case released as a result of Freedom of Information Act efforts.

While it is not presently clear what happened in the assassination of Senator Kennedy, enough basic failures have been exposed in the official response to the evidence to remove any presumption of its adequacy. It is also apparent that independent efforts of reexamination are possible, even within the limitations of information released thus far or separately available. The basic goals of this project are to review the entire body of the FBI material and produce: 1.) a general memorandum addressing specified questions about the case; 2.) a full index of significant subjects and names in the reports; 3.) a partial chronology relating to the murder and investigation; and 4.) any specialized documents suggested by the work as it progresses.

Five central issues are basic to present questions about the RFK assassination: 1.) Was more bullet damage done in the Ambassador Hotel shooting than can be accounted for by Sirhan's eight-shot revolver? 2.) Are eyewitness accounts reconcilable with the possibility that Sirhan's gun fired all four of the shots which struck Senator Kennedy or his clothing? 3.) Do past or potential bullet comparisons and tests support or undermine a one-gun theory? 4.) What is the status and credibility of the various evidence relating to possible conspiracy? 5.) What is the credibility and value of the official investigations in general and in specific areas? Work has been done on each of these questions, although available information has not yet been fully utilized. The current project is primarily concerned with the FBI reports although other avenues of work also exist, growing out of these reports and the questions listed above.

The FBI reports on this assassination have become available over the last several years and deal with various aspects of the evidence, centering mostly on conspiracy possibilities. They consist of over a thousand reports, mostly brief, under general headings, with some summary material. Parts have been deleted pursuant to Freedom of Information Act guidelines, but the documents apparently represent the bulk of the FBI work on the case. Examples of subject areas include the background of Sirhan, Ambassador Hotel witnesses and employees, conspiracy leads and reports, events leading up to the shooting, legal developments and physical evidence.

A rough table of contents has been developed, but no systematic organization is evident in the material as a whole. Parts relate to central aspects of the case, parts to peripheral aspects. While a few sections of the documents have been studied closely by critics, most large stretches have not been reviewed. It is doubtful that the reports as a whole have ever been studied comprehensively outside the FBI and there is reason to question whether they have been studied effectively inside the FBI either. The work envisaged here, therefore, has original value in developing the facts and issues of this case.

Some basic knowledge of the RFK case is essential to the analysis involved and can be gained from existing material. (The major books are Special Unit Senator by Robert Houghton, RFK Must Die by Robert Blair Kaiser, The Assassination of Robert Kennedy by Jonn Christian and William Turner, and Nine Bullets in Los Angeles (unpublished manuscript). At least two of these books should be read along with other documents and articles including the "Report of Thomas F. Kranz" and "Selected Corrections of the Report of the Special Counsel" by Allard K. Lowenstein.) Preliminary reading should take a week or less with the remaining time devoted to work on the FBI documents.

The precise form of the project depends on the number of persons involved (three or four is a likely maximum) and should have some flexibility within the above limits. All of the FBI documents will be available along with other basic material. Additional information or advice are potentially available and periodic contact should take place with me and with the faculty advisor. An offshoot of the FBI work may be possible in Los Angeles in relation to material on file in public offices there. (Anyone able to work in L.A. should contact me directly.) As mentioned above, some other analytical or informational projects would also be of value, although work on the FBI documents should probably have priority. I will need to talk to anyone before they sign on for this project.

This project is an outgrowth of past efforts to uncover the truth of the Robert Kennedy assassination, efforts led most notably by the late Allard K. Lowenstein, Paul Schrade, and Robert J. Joling. These have drawn on the research and assistance of many people in Los Angeles and elsewhere and will continue until some clarity emerges from the peculiarities of this case. While grounded in a skepticism about present theory and official credibility, however, these efforts seek to promote no preconceived set of assumptions. Work on this project demands care, objectivity, patience, methodical organization and critical thinking.

-Gregory Stone
Oberlin '71