



Unsolved cases?

By JAMES A. WECHSLER

It all happened long ago—the 1963 murder of John F. Kennedy, the slaying of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. five years later. Why do questions and doubts still haunt so many Americans? Why do national polls reflect pervasive skepticism about the official versions?

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For a long time I resisted involvement in the reappraisals. Too many of the “conspiracy” and cover-up theorists seemed to have yielded all objectivity to obsession.

But the tormenting uncertainties multiply. Within the last fortnight three documents have solidly fortified the case for the full-scale Congressional inquiry now seemingly mired in political gamesmanship and personality clashes.

In the February 19 issue of the Saturday Review, Allard Lowenstein (who had himself approached the issue hesitantly, distrustful of many of the professional muckrakers), described his disenchantment with the Los Angeles officials who have sought to “close” the RFK story. After long personal inquiry, he wrote, “I arrived at the melancholy thought that people who have nothing to hide do not lie, cheat and smear to hide it.” The article was called “Suppressed Evidence of More than One Assassin?”

Now, in the March McCall's, Vivien Cadden unfolds the results of a diligent six-month exploration of the John F. Kennedy killing, concluding, among other things, that the “Warren investigation was badly flawed and certain to be because no one of any consequence really wanted it in the first place.” She presents deeply troublesome findings about the withholding of relevant evidence.

Neither article can be adequately summarized here. Neither, it should also be said, pretends to present a new “solution” to the crimes. But both soberly challenge the view that Sirhan and Oswald were lone, crazed trigger-men (and, in the Oswald saga, there is even an intimation of a “look-alike” being employed).

The ten-month Justice Dept. study of the FBI's investigation of the King murder deeply compounds the uneasiness.

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Many headlines and brief TV communiques depicted the inquiry as a vindication for the FBI. It did indeed render the judgment that the agency had “thoroughly, honestly and successfully” investigated King's death, presumably a decisive refutation of the sinister suggestion that it had concealed its own complicity or negligence in the crime or in pursuing any links between his confessed killer, James Earl Ray, and others.

But many other aspects of the report provide more ambiguities than answers. They also amplify, in chilling terms, the intensity of J. Edgar Hoover's vendetta against King—a frenzy that survived the assassination.

Thus the report enigmatically declares in rejecting the notion that Ray was a hired hit man for a larger operation:

“We acknowledge that proof of the negative, i.e. proof that others were not involved, is here as elusive and difficult as it has universally been in criminal law. But the sum of all the evidence of Ray's guilt points to him so exclusively that it most effectively makes the point that no one else was involved.

“Of course, someone could conceivably have provided

him with logistics, or even paid him to commit the crime. However we found no competent evidence upon which to base such a theory."

There was something else, not irrelevant to those matters, which the Justice Dept. sleuths were unable to find. As a dispatch to The Times noted:

"The report is not likely to end all speculation that Mr. Ray was only one figure in a broader conspiracy to kill Dr. King. *For one thing, the Justice Dept. investigators conceded that it is still not known where Mr. Ray obtained the money to purchase the expensive equipment he brought and to do the extensive travelling he did before the assassination and in the months between the murder and his arrest.*" [Italics mine]

How could an investigation be considered terminated with those questions unresolved? How can the country accept this report as the last word with the fateful story of Ray's financing in that critical interval unexplained?

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What the report does unfold, as noted earlier, are some fresh, repugnant footnotes to the chronicles of Hoover's crusade against not only King but against his wife, Coretta, and two of his top associates, the Rev. Andrew Young, now ambassador to the UN, and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy.

Thus it now appears that while Hoover was bugging a Washington hotel room to obtain evidence of alleged sexual promiscuity against King, the agency "looked very closely at Coretta King," even placing her under surveillance during her travels "in an effort to uncover possible facts embarrassing to her."

Mrs. King's plea for an independent investigation deserves to be heard on Capitol Hill where small men are wrangling too long. As in the Kennedy cases, a new, unfettered inquest will evoke anguished memories. But that process, wherever it may lead, is a minimal obligation to the victims and to history.