

Oswald to prove himself. He had already made one attempt to penetrate the enemy underground. Now, if he could just make contact with the exile leaders involved in these "terrorist plots," he might come up with an even bigger trophy: inside information about the plots to kill Cuba's leaders. Once again he would seek out an exile group and offer his help—not as a guerrilla leader this time, but as a marksman who could assassinate Fidel. He would try to infiltrate as a volunteer, as he had before. While he was at it, he'd plant another little seed of provocation. He'd attempt to goad the exiles into retaliating against Kennedy.

In other words, the Odio incident was Oswald's reaction to Castro's warning.

Although I was fairly convinced of this by 1976, I still didn't understand why Oswald and the others went all the way to Dallas to carry out this scheme. Why did they go to Sylvia Odio, in particular? An article in the *Saturday Evening Post* that year provided an answer. The authors, George O'Toole and Paul Hoch, had apparently discovered more about Odio's father from some of the large number of Warren Commission records that were declassified in 1976. It turns out that Odio's parents weren't ordinary political prisoners, as the Warren Report suggested. They had been indirectly involved in a spectacular plot to assassinate Castro in 1961.

The plot was the work of Antonio Veciana and Reinaldo Gonzales, members of the anti-Castro underground. Veciana's mother had rented an apartment near the presidential palace from which they planned to fire a bazooka to kill Castro and other officials. Before their plan could be carried out, however, word of it reached the Cuban police. Veciana and his mother escaped to Miami, while Gonzales fled to a farm that was owned by Sylvia Odio's parents. Gonzales was tracked down and arrested, as were the Odios. Castro himself announced the breaking up of this plot at a public meeting in Havana in October 1961. At the time, the Odio daughters were already out of the country.

Having somehow learned of her father's background, her visitors apparently concluded (however mistakenly) that Amador Odio's eldest daughter might be interested in introducing a volunteer hit man to her. They talked first about the details of her father's activities in Cuba. Then, "after they mentioned my father they started talking about the American. He said, 'You are working in the underground.' And I said, 'No, I am sorry to say I am not working in the under-

*from the book*

ground.' And he said, 'We wanted you to meet this American. His name is Leon Oswald.' ... And they introduced him as an American who was very much interested in the Cuban cause." Oswald told her the same thing, then stood silently, evaluating the situation. The underlying logic seemed to be: *We know about your father's connection with a terrorist plot to kill Castro. We believe you have contacts with the underground. Here is an American you can use. Had Odio invited them in, she might well have heard the rest of their proposal about Oswald that evening.*

What did they want from Mrs. Odio? Apparently, they hoped she would know, and tell them, the name of the right person to see—the leader behind these new assassination plots. And, in fact, it appears that Odio may have had a reputation for being able to put people in touch with the anti-Castro underground. Mrs. Odio told the Commission that in June 1963 she had spoken with a Uruguayan named Johnny Martin who claimed he could provide the exiles with second-hand weapons if she could put him in touch with an appropriate leader. As she later said, she had "jumped at the opportunity that something could be done" and arranged a meeting between Martin and an exile leader in Miami.

Mrs. Odio believed it would not have been difficult for anyone to find her. She testified that shortly before the Oswald incident, a speaker at an anti-Castro meeting in Dallas had mentioned that he knew her father in Cuba and that Amador Odio's daughters were living in that city. Odio said she could have been located by calling the Catholic refugee relief agency or even by consulting the phone book.

Overall, one gets the impression that Cubans in this country formed a tightly knit community in which news got around easily and secrets were hard to keep. Oswald may have found Mrs. Odio the same way he apparently found Bringuier—simply by asking around. Another New Orleans anti-Castro exile, Ernesto Rodriguez, has recently claimed that Oswald had also visited him to offer his services as a guerrilla warfare specialist, and that it was he who sent Oswald to see Bringuier. Thus, it appears that Oswald made more forays into the anti-Castro camp than anyone realized, or wanted to admit.

The real names of the two Latin Americans will probably never be known. We know enough only to speculate about their roles. The evidence suggests they were not anti-Castro activists, as they claimed. Angelo was likely the Latin American of similar appearance that Oswald was seen with in New Orleans. Both men evidently lied when

*Who was it a friend?*

*Circle Oswald's name. What happened to all the other names?*

*Why?*

*Why?*

They did not say they were New Orleans. They said they had just come from there.

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they said they were members of JURE and friends of Odio's father. (The other leaders of JURE said they had never heard of them, and Odio's father, now living in the United States, still insists they were no friends of his.) And if they were from New Orleans, as they said, they would almost certainly have known of the splash Oswald had made there in August as a Fair Play for Cuba activist. None of this rules out the idea that one or both of these men were anti-Castroites who had infiltrated Oswald's one-man operation. Leopoldo may have been an anti-Castro militant who truly believed Oswald would be an asset to his cause. But his telephone conversation with Odio followed Oswald's line with Bringer so closely that this seems doubtful. And Leopoldo's parting shot about Amador Odio—"Is he still in the Isle of Pines?"—sounds almost like a jeer. It seems more reasonable that these three were birds of a feather than that they were working at cross purposes.

But let's pull back for a moment to get a broader view. Was there someone behind the scenes telling Oswald what to do?

Let's make that question more specific: Who would have had a reason to order Oswald to get inside the exile underground? Not the CIA, apparently, since the CIA already had plenty of contacts with that group—the CIA was, in fact, running the war against Cuba. The FBI? Maybe, though it's difficult to imagine that Hoover's boys would have wanted one of their operatives to go around suggesting that Castro's opponents should murder the president. Besides, it's hard to picture Lee Oswald working for the FBI or the CIA, unless we crop out everything else we know about him.

There is another possibility. Although the House Assassinations Committee concluded, "on the basis of the evidence available to it," that the Cuban government was not involved in the assassination, its report called the CIA investigation of the question of Cuban involvement grossly inadequate—and it attached a fine-print footnote:

With respect to the incident at the home of Sylvia Odio in Dallas, the CIA had developed since 1963 the ability to identify from physical descriptions possible intelligence agents who may have been involved. In fact, at the committee's request, the CIA attempted to identify Odio's visitors, and it determined that they may have been members of Cuban intelligence. The committee showed photographs supplied by the CIA to Odio who stated they did not appear to be the visitors in question. The committee came to the conclusion that had she been shown photo-

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graphs in 1963, when the event was clearer in her mind, she might have been able to make an identification. It is also regrettable that the CIA did not make use of a defector from Cuba who had worked in intelligence and who might have been able to identify the Odio visitors.

An extraordinary footnote. And yet, it's hard to believe that Leopoldo and Angelo were Cuban intelligence agents. Anything this trio hoped to get out of Mrs. Odio they must have hoped to get right away, before she could check their authenticity with her father. The whole affair had an improvised, amateurish flavor. As we'll see later on, although Oswald wanted to work for the Cubans, he apparently got no further with them than he did with the Russians.

"As far as taking orders," Marina told the House Assassinations Committee, speaking generally, "I knew him personally and he didn't like to take orders." There's no reason to assume that Oswald was following orders when he went to see Bringer or Odio, because he had a motive of his own—Or, rather, two motives. He wanted to help Cuba, and he wanted to make a name for himself as a Castro supporter and revolutionary. He was operating in the uncertain present, with specific short-range goals in mind. Oswald was on his way to Cuba, he hoped, and he evidently wanted to come bearing gifts—much as he had done when he went to Russia with his military information.

The simplest and most reasonable conclusion is that the Odio incident was Oswald's idea. Looked at more closely, each of the tactics used was typical of Oswald in some manner. It was like him to pose as a leader: the guerrilla warfare expert, the expert marksman. He was putting his military training to ironic use—as an enlisted man, Oswald had once complained that all the Marine Corps did was teach you to kill, and after you got out you might be a good gangster. The second tactic—trying to draw the exiles into a violation of the law—also sounds like Oswald, who often showed a tendency to be legalistic. And finally, the threat against a president's life was also in character, since he had already made a verbal threat against Eisenhower. <sup>Mc</sup>

But it wasn't just the tactics. The entire incident had the imprint of Oswald's personality on it. Consider another remark of Marina's. She was asked if she thought her husband would have prepared for his defection by learning Russian: "Was that a trait of his... that when he got ready to do something he felt was important he spent a period of time preparing for it?" She answered, "I would say yes," and a few minutes later circled back to the same question: "Going back

to say that Lee was always preparing for something, he not always prepared himself [sic], but he was quite calculating in that respect, and sometimes quite clever. He would masquerade somehow." George de Mohrenschildt, too, saw this trait of his. Concerning the theory of the conspiracists that Oswald was working for the anti-Castro side in New Orleans, he wrote:

I cannot visualize Lee being in cahoots with these Cuban refugees in New Orleans ... but he might have played his own game, meeting some of them, checking just for the hell of it what their motivations were. The amazing and attractive side of Lee's personality was that he liked to play with his own life, he was an actor in real life. A very curious individual.

On the other hand, I can very easily visualize Lee joining a pro-Castro group.

The Odio incident was characteristic of Oswald. There was even, perhaps, a model for it from his childhood, although this was probably an event he had long forgotten. In Fort Worth sixteen years earlier, Marguerite had also stood outside a rival's door with two confederates. As the ringleader, she told one of them what to say—"Telegram for Mrs. C\_\_\_\_"—to trap her wandering husband, Edwin A. Ekshahl. As Robert said, his brother's "imagination and love of intrigue" were a lot like his mother's.

The compelling aspect of Sylvia Odio's testimony is the window it provides on Lee Harvey Oswald's thinking just two months before Dallas. Up until then, there was little indication that Oswald felt any animosity toward John Kennedy. In fact, he seemed to favor him over the other politicians on the scene. In August he had publicly blamed the CIA and State Department for America's policy toward Cuba. But sixteen days after Castro's warning appeared, Oswald not only tried to penetrate the plots Castro spoke about, he suggested that Kennedy should be killed. The September 9 warning evidently had an effect: Oswald now believed that Castro was in danger and that the Cuban leader held Kennedy responsible.

This conclusion is admittedly based on inferences—I have deduced Oswald's thinking by reading Odio's testimony in light of his past behavior. The method I've used is an old one. During closing arguments in a trial, each attorney will attempt to weave the available evidence into a reconstruction of the events in question. It is then up

to the jury to decide whose account is more likely to be true. I have presented the Odio incident within a narrative of Oswald's other activities, showing how the pieces mesh. Although I don't claim to have conclusive proof, I do maintain that my interpretation is more credible than the alternative theories.

Only two other explanations of this incident have been given—that it was an extraordinary case of mistaken identity, or a plot to frame a Marxist by presenting him as an anti-Castro hit man. Neither view can be totally disproved. But neither encompasses the other evidence about Oswald nearly as well as the solution I've proposed.

I found new support for my argument in 1977, when I learned that Lee Harvey Oswald had made a second threat against Kennedy's life just a few days after he left Sylvia Odio's doorstep. The man who revealed this threat was not an unknown named "Leopoldo," but Fidel Castro himself.