

11/22/71 New Orleans

Interview with Orestes Pena

On arrival Thursday night I'd gone to see Orestes three times before finding him in, then about midnight or a little later. He was cordial. We made a date for yesterday afternoon. When I got there he was at first reluctant to meet with me in his quarters or mine so I could tape the interview. He didn't even want me to be able to make notes, so first we walked around outside, my feeling then being the interview would be short. We wound up talking for several hours on Decatur Street outside the Habana, with an occasional stroll on the street, finishing with a drink inside.

He wants to make charges against Hoover, the new head of the New Orleans office of the FBI and deBruys, and for this purpose will do so only in the presence of what he regards as the press. When I explained that the major press was turned off, he was not satisfied and wouldn't budge on taping or note-taking. I did try to impress upon him the need to make some kind of record outside his memory of whatever it is that he is holding back, the inference being that he was.

He added to what I'd already been told of the coffee shop at the corner of Iberville at that end of the same side of Decatur on which the Habana is, across the street from the Customs Building. He says that before the building of the new Federal Building the FBI, probably the CIA and the Immigration Service had offices there. He says that Pedro the Greek opened at 6 a.m., that his people and sometimes he had coffee there, and that federal personnel also did until 8 a.m.

He says that he had seen Oswald there frequently and with federal agents, of whom he named only deBruys. Others, aside from the barmaid in my earlier notes, now dead (and he finds something sinister in the death of a former cook for him when he ran a restaurant in Puerto Rico a month ago while watching a cockfight), this cook also having been to that coffee shop, although I am pretty certain he suspended selling food before Oswald's time), Victor Peret, owner of the Copocabana Room near that corner (who he infers knows much of this and will not talk), Antonio Hernandez, once an FBI informant and now working for Immigration and Naturalization Service, and a miscellany of Cubans connected with the CIA going back to preparations for the Bay of Pigs.

Pedro's good Greek coffee came to an end with a fire Orestes thinks is of mysterious origin. While he alleges damage was slight, repairs were so long delayed that Pedro lost his license. He then went to work for Captain Young, a Chandler with a business near that corner and owner of the Athenium Room. Pedro had a heart attack while working for Young. Pedro's wife is said to be still alive.

Of the Cubans working for CIA, he says Wilfredo Mas in N.O. was top.

He added detail of the complaint he had Tamborella make to the FBI office. Agents who knew he didn't get to bed until 4 a.m. would come to his 24-hour place early in the morning, causing barmaids to ring the signal in his upstairs quarters to awaken him at what for him were ungodly hours, after but a few hours of sleep. Tamborella, who he says is now an assistant DA, has a list of the agents who harassed Pena, and I have P's permission to get it from him. He also added that whenever I come he has heard from the FBI. When he knew I was coming because I had written him, two days before he was visited by an FBI agent named Slaughter on the pretext of interest in a Greek unknown to Pena. When Pena excused himself for a minute and was away for 10-15, the agent just went away.