

A Fascination With Assassination

By Jeremiah O'Leary

ASSASSINATION IN OUR TIME, by Sandy Lesberg. Bobbs-Merrill Co. 253 pages. \$14.95.

What did John F. Kennedy have in common with Huey P. Long, Leon Trotsky, Patrice Lumumba, Mahatma Gandhi and Che Guevara? Very little, it would seem, except the single terminal fact that all were the victims of assassins.

This is a fascinating volume if only because it summarizes, with more than 300 photographs, 20 of the major assassinations of the 20th century. It is worth listing the victims here in the order in which they died: Archduke Francis Ferdinand; Grigori Efimovich Rasputin; Emiliano Zapata; Pancho Villa; Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss; King Alexander I of Yugoslavia; Senator Long; Trotsky, nee Lev Bronstein; Gandhi; Lumumba; Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo; Ngo Dinh Diem; President Kennedy; Malcolm X; Hendrik Verwoerd; Guevara; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Senator Robert F. Kennedy; Tom Mboya and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.

With the House Select Committee on Assassination now embarked on a two-year reopening of the murders of President Kennedy and Dr. King, this book brings focus on the remarkable amount of mystery that still surrounds many of the 20 assassinations described by Lesberg. It can be seen on reflection that there are still major questions about where the true responsibility lies for the slaying of men who have been dead much longer than Kennedy and King.

IT IS PRETTY CLEARCUT why some of the victims died, who wanted them killed and who did the killing. In this category fall the Hapsburg prince; the mad monk of Czarist Russia; the two Mexican revolutionaries; the Yugoslav monarch; the South African leader; the Argentine revolutionary and the King of Saudi Arabia.

But the murder of Louisiana's "Kingfish," ostensibly by a quiet, non-violent surgeon, is still not thoroughly explained. Neither are the deaths of Trotsky, Lumumba, Diem, the breakaway Black Muslim or certainly the President of the United States, Kennedy, or the foremost black American leader, Dr. King.

The man who killed Trotsky called himself Jacques Mornard. He served his time in a Mexican jail and then disappeared behind the Iron Curtain. The Soviet secret police were and are suspected of ordering Trotsky's death but the world has never really known for sure. Many people and even nations — including the U.S. through the CIA — desired the demise of Lumumba but exactly how it was done and who

ordered it remains a mystery. No one has ever learned the name of the man who killed the brothers who ruled Vietnam, although Washington virtually signaled that their downfall would be applauded. And Malcolm X's murder still poses questions that have never been answered.

LESBERG HAS A THEORY about the slaying of President Kennedy, as do most Americans, and finds the Warren Commission report unacceptable on persuasive grounds. The interest of this book lies in the refresher course on even recent history that it provides, along with many of the hitherto unpublished accompanying photos.

The book is not researched as thoroughly as one would have liked. On two adjacent pages, the birthdate of Che Guevara is given variously as 1925 and 1928. Lesberg also leaves out so much that is of interest: the true role of Che's "Tania" as a double agent is never mentioned. But Lesberg has written a primer, not a definitive history, and it is well to take it as a once-overlightly in readable form and with gripping illustrations.

Since assassination is a subject of morbid fascination and increasingly a hallmark of our times, it is an important book. And the underlying theme is a chiller: one does not have to be a despot like Trujillo or a rebel like Guevara to qualify for assassination. If the gentle Gandhi can be slain for his principles, it can happen to anyone. And all the security in the world does not seem to make any difference once one man decides that another one must die. ●