

Mr. Les Payne
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Dear Les,

I don't move very much, or very far, and most of what I have on the JFK assassination anniversary is sent to me. Today I got a xerox of your 11/21 column and of Klotz's article. You are the only one who reflected any understanding of the man JFK and why the people love him so much today. ^{Expressed in} Including a large percentage of the letters I get from those not then born or those then infants of children.

It was his boldness and what he said. He gave hope and spirit long lacking. Of all I've seen from all the professional pontificators not one suggested anything like the truth. It is not alone his death and how he died. This seems to be reflected in the letters I get more than ever, and it was always in them. I've gotten, and answered, more than 20,000 - from strangers when it was not easy to learn how to write me.

Despite my many disabilities I've continued working. I have two books coming out next year. Despite the media attitude that all is conspiracy theorizing, I've done none of that. It is all factual, official records and evidence.

One on Posner, if not emasculated in editing, due in April or May, should create a hell of a scandal. The other one, NEVER AGAIN! in the sense that this should never happen here again, could and I think should have been out for this anniversary. It is being saved for the coming one, due 9/94 I'm told.

The thrust of my work, as I may have told you, is that in those times of great crisis and ever since the institutions of our society failed. In both of these coming books, most of all the failed and failing institution is the media.

If you know Klotz, please tell him he was full of organic fertilizer in writing about me, unnamed and uninformed save with Oliver Stone's propaganda, in that I am not and have not been disgruntled. I'm making a record for history. And I wrote Stone two months before he started shooting that he could not keep his promise of what his movie would be, that it would write their history for the people, telling them who killed their President, why and how, from Garrison's fiction. I was there and I know. Lardner's story was fair and accurate. And I made the record for history that I wanted to make, powerful as it was, that movie was fiction, not fact or history.

Best to all,

Hard

LES
PAYNE



In '63, Kennedy Lit Rights Lamp

IT HAS BEEN 30 years since that bullet rang out from the Texas Book Depository, or wherever, and dramatically began to change America.

The 1960s were nasty times, and on Nov. 22, 1963, they got infinitely nastier. It was the first in a long series of assassinations. For years to come, Americans would be able to recall just what they were doing when the slugs hit home.

Feb. 21, 1965, was the second hit. The third and fourth came on April 4 and June 5, 1968.

On that bleak November day 30 years ago, I was a newly minted second lieutenant swaggering to lunch at the Fort Bliss officers' club at the moment the rifle slug in Dallas struck.

Starched and pressed in my tropical worsted uniform, I had defended the human rights of strangers that neither I nor my forebears had ever fully enjoyed in our own country. Such cruel contradictions are the birthright of those born into the oppressed classes of this republic.

After graduating from college in Connecticut, I had sought a job as a reporter, but that possibility for me, in those days, was as remote as the Oval Office. There were two newspapers in Hartford, the Times and the Courant. Neither had ever hired a black reporter and would no sooner have hired me than the Klan would have taken me on as its imperial wizard.

Not many of us, two decades ago, got out of the wretched conditions of the ghetto. Some took refuge in the church, others in the bottle, still others made their stand in the pool hall, on the street corner, behind the switchblade — candidates, as Richard Wright wrote, "for the clinics, morgues, prisons, reformatories and the electric chair of the state's death house."

Those of us who escaped had to find a lever. I took my English degree into the Army to hone my leadership skills and learn how to shoot down enemy bombers with Nike Hercules missiles.

My commander-in-chief was John F. Kennedy. The Irish had never struck me as racially enlightened. But this Irish-Catholic Kennedy, this president, many African-Americans said, seemed different. He spoke eloquently enough, but when pressed, he showed something more. What the downtrodden saw in him was a quality rare in white males and absent in every president since, save Jimmy Carter and perhaps Bill Clinton.

African-Americans gazed upon Kennedy and saw not so much what he was but what, if worked on, he could become.

Coming out of the Eisenhower years, blacks were afforded a new, though exaggerated, sense of the possible humanness of their enemy. As Malcolm X and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. heightened blacks' sense of dignity, Kennedy, in word at least, hiked their expectations of the federal government.

It was not so much what Kennedy did during his short sojourn; it was his style, his boldness, the things he said. On Feb. 28, 1963, in a message to Congress on civil rights, Kennedy diagnosed the effects of racial illness in America:

"Through these long 100 years, while slavery has vanished, progress for the Negro has been too often blocked and delayed. . . . Equality before the law has not always meant equal treatment and opportunity. And the harmful, wasteful and wrongful results of racial discrimination and segregation still appear in virtually every aspect of national life, in virtually every part of the nation."

No president, including Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson, has ever spoken this way. Kennedy went on to lay out a blueprint for making things more equal in the areas of voting education, employment, public accommodation, housing and civil rights overall.

In his introduction, Kennedy cited the Emancipation Proclamation as a "first step." He praised Lincoln but noted that he "unhappily did not live to follow up." Nor, of course, did Kennedy.

For on that November day, as I swaggered into the officers' club, Walter Cronkite told us Kennedy had been shot dead in Dallas. The officers gathered around the TV broke into mild applause and scattered cheering. That afternoon, my first sergeant from Mississippi smiled for the first time since I had met him.

IDEAS

John Klotz

Why the Media Want

The media return to the Kennedy assassination again and again but the story won't stand still. The case will never close.

FOR THREE decades the major organs of the American media have been as one voice in their support for the report of the Warren commission and its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone, unassisted assassin of President John F. Kennedy. In the face of ever deepening public skepticism toward the official version, The New York Times, CBS News, the Washington Post and other powerful and prestigious news organizations continued to charge reporters who had originally affirmed the soundness of the report with evaluating later challenges to it — the most notorious being Oliver Stone's 1991 movie "JFK."

To the immense frustration of the media elite, the public flocked to "JFK." A new generation of movie patrons was seduced by a dark tale of assassination conspiracy.

The empire struck back earlier this fall. Gerald Posner's study of the assassination, "Case Closed," was widely trumpeted as finally proving that Oswald acted alone. In September, Tom Brokaw and the NBC News staff hailed the book for finally resolving the Kennedy mystery. U.S. News and World Report ran a cover story claiming that Posner had made an "unshakable" case against Oswald. Random House, the book's publisher, took the highly unusual step of placing its own credibility behind the book's findings. It also invested heavily in the book's promotion, going so far as to place an advertisement in The Times eerily echoing handbills that dogged Kennedy in Texas: Robert Groden and other critics were "GUILTY" of misleading the American public. And last week Posner's research figured prominently in the PBS Frontline documentary, "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?"

Appearing in today's issue of The Times is a review of recent assassination literature, including the Posner book, which it singles out for praise. An unsigned editorial note on the cover of the Book Review characterizes the fact that over 2,000 books have been published on the assassination as "a devastating record of the lengths to which sensationalists have gone to sow suspicion, and editors and publishers have gone to profit from their wares."

The major organs of the media have tried desperately to reconstitute the moral authority of the Warren commission under the guise of "Case Closed." It has been a hopeless task. When CBS News polled the public earlier this month, a record 90 percent said they believed that Kennedy had been the victim of a conspiracy.

Given the maddening ambiguity of the forensic evidence, not to mention the elusiveness of a distant milieu populated by hoodlums, spies and zealots, the proliferation of possible answers to the assassination and the lack of definitive ones should not surprise. What does surprise, in light of all this uncertainty, is the media's haste to foreclose further discussion and the search for firmer proof.

By concentrating on the issue of Oswald's guilt, Warren commission defenders beg profoundly important questions raised by the commission's cover-up. Much more than Oswald's culpability is at stake in the collapse of the Warren report. Swirling around Kennedy and Oswald was a whirlpool of sinister personalities and institutions intent on dominating the course of American policy in the Cold War. It was these forces that the Warren report hid from public view. The struggle between the official myth and the coun-

termyth inevitably leads to the question of governmental legitimacy and media culpability for the horrors that have befallen the nation in the decades since Kennedy's death. By comparison, who killed Kennedy is almost an academic question at this point.

Last week, however, the media's facade of unity began to crumble. Newsweek and its sister publication the Washington Post finally broke with the ranks of Warren commission defenders and grudgingly conceded what critics had claimed for years: The commission conducted not an honest search for the truth but rather a carefully contrived effort to forge a soothing official story of the assassination — covering up, by both inactivity and design, damning evidence of governmental misconduct.

The Warren report now resembles the legendary Vietnamese village that was destroyed so that it could be saved. According to the calculations of its long-standing defenders, the Warren commission report must die so that the lone-gunner theory and the phantoms it still masks can live.

When the Warren report was issued in September, 1964, the media greeted it with universal praise. Its most popular edition was published by The New York Times. The introduction, written by Assistant Managing Editor Harrison Salisbury, pronounced, "No material question now remains unresolved, as far as the death of President Kennedy is concerned." To critics of the Warren commission, Salisbury flashed a contemptuous warning: Those who spread irresponsible rumors about the assassination were either seeking to sow distrust and confusion among the public or intent on conveying to foreign countries the "image of a violent America, helpless in the face of dangerous forces."

It didn't work. The Warren report, the public decided, was a cover-up.

Oswald was the first critic of the lone-gunner theory. "I am a patsy," he responded when asked if he had murdered the president. After his death, other critics emerged. Mark Lane sought to represent Oswald's interest at the Warren commission hearings. After the report was issued, he published "Rush to Judgment," a best-selling critique of the report and its lone-gunner conclusion. Lane paid a price for his effrontery — "ghoul" was among the kinder epithets.

In 1967, CBS News sought to answer the questions again with a four-part study of the Warren report. The last program of the series ended with the normally sober Eric Sevareid comparing Warren commission critics to advocates of the "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a vicious anti-Semitic plot.

The '70s more than vindicated the critics. Several Watergate participants were linked to both the CIA and an amalgam of organized-crime figures and anti-Castro Cubans that swirled around the events of Dealey Plaza. Successive government investigations stunningly confirmed some of the worst suspicions of the independent investigators concerning the government's potential for duplicity and violence.

Barely noted by the media establishment were equally important revelations by reporter Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame. Writing in the Oct. 20, 1977, edition of Rolling Stone, Bernstein documented the CIA's use of major media organizations to provide information and cover for wide-ranging espionage.

In 1991, months before the release of "JFK," a disgruntled Warren commission critic who disagreed with Stone's approach gave a copy of the script to George Lardner, a Washington Post reporter who covered the Kennedy assassination. Pouncing on Stone even as he was directing the filming of "JFK," Lardner launched a scathing critique challenging Stone's right to produce a movie memorializing New Orleans' District Attorney Jim Garrison's version of the counter-myth. By the time of the movie's release, it had



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