

Marquis Childs

Post 3/18/75

## CIA and the Rumor-Mongers

Recipe for how to make things worse than they are: start with a large order of paranoia, stir in groundless rumors and wild charges, and bake with a strong infusion of CIA flavoring.

In the present super-charged atmosphere all the old suspicions about the assassinations of President Kennedy and his brother, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, are being revived. This can be put down partly to what is little better than cheap publicity-seeking. But reports from around the country show that the wildest of rumors are taken seriously by those who, given even a little rational thought, should know better. The rumor that CIA planned the assassination of the two Kennedys has taken hold not only with the crazies but among the young willing to believe anything evil about the "establishment."

The commission that investigated President Kennedy's assassination was headed by the late Chief Justice Earl Warren, who accepted the assignment reluctantly after arm-twisting by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Gerald R. Ford, then Republican leader in the House of Representatives, was a member of the commission. After sifting every scrap of evidence, rumor and report, including the charge that a

conspiracy was involved, the commission found that Lee Harvey Oswald, the loner, was the killer who had fired on the President as he passed by in the motorcade in Dallas.

As for Robert Kennedy, witnesses saw Sirhan Sirhan fire the fatal shot as the young senator passed through the ante-room of a hotel kitchen in Los Angeles. After a lengthy trial, Sirhan was found guilty and sentenced to death. Since his conviction he has waited on death row in San Quentin pending judicial decision on the legality of the death penalty.

There seems at times a competition to see who can swallow the biggest myth, with the CIA the prime bait. In a suburb of Los Angeles, the Orange County Bar Association heard at a luncheon meeting Philip "Dave" Thomas describe how he had carried out 22 assassinations in the Soviet Union as a CIA agent. One newspaper headline said "CIA Assassin Tells Lawyers of Exploits." The speaker went on to say that in order to escape the KGB after his latest killing he had seized a Pan-American Airways 747, using his American Express Card, to fly him to safety.

Even though the story is wildly improbable, the CIA searched its files.

No such name nor anything resembling it came to light.

No matter what is eventually proved to have been wrongdoing by the CIA, the rumor-mongering is contributing to the erosion of the agency's status. Many critical of the covert side—the dirty tricks department of the CIA—believe that its overt operations, intelligence gathering and intelligence estimates, are invaluable and that its destruction would be a severe loss.

Once before in a time of trial and tribulation the same witches' brew of fear and suspicion haunted a troubled nation. After President Abraham Lincoln's assassination at the end of the Civil War, the rumor persisted that his Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, had played a part in a plot to murder the President. Nothing was ever proved beyond the fact that the abrasive Stanton had often been at odds with Lincoln over the conduct of the war. Latter day scholars have dismissed the rumor as unfounded.

Hopefully we will recover from the present plague which is more virulent than that of a century ago. But sensation mongering is no service in our time of troubles.

© 1975, United Feature Syndicate