

Betrayals and Obsessions

MIAMI

By Joan Didion.
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By James Chace

JOAN DIDION said recently that "Miami," its title notwithstanding, is mainly about what I think is wrong with Washington." To read "Miami" is not to read about drug dealers, or about banana-fishing off Miami Beach, or about the large number of corpses that reporters love to mention to prove that Miami has become the crime capital of the country, or about the sealed-off world of Anglos in Coral Gables, or about the suntanned vacationers in Key Biscayne. Instead, the world Miss Didion describes in beautifully evocative prose is that familiar landscape we have learned to expect from her novels and essays, a world of menace and elliptical connections, a world "where stories have tended to have endings." It is a world peopled by antiheroes like Jack Lovett in Miss Didion's novel "Democracy" — "someone who had 'various irons in the fire.' Someone who kept 'the usual balls in the air.' Someone who did 'a little business here and there.' Someone who did what he could."

Many of the people in this book ship arms to Central America — men like Theodore Shackley, who, Miss Didion reports, was chief of station at a Central Intelligence Agency facility on the campus of the University of Miami in 1962, then "the largest C.I.A. installation, outside Langley, in the world," a place where between 300 and 400 C.I.A. case officers ran thousands of Cuban agents. This is the same man "who left Miami in 1965, spent from 1966 to 1972 as political officer and chief of station in Vientiane and Saigon, and turned up in 1987 in the Tower Commission report, meeting on page D-3 in Hamburg with Manucher Ghorbanifar and with the former head of Savak counterespionage."

Miami reminds the author of "a Latin capital, a year or two away from a new government." Yet, the city's Hispanic residents are left largely uncovered by the Anglo press. Cuban Miami — Cubans constitute 56 percent of the population — is, in the words of a reporter for The Miami Herald, a "teeming, incomprehensible presence." Miss Didion amply describes the mores of this "parallel culture." She depicts Cuban volunteers working at a prominent exile charity organization as having sleek hair "of a slightly other period, immaculate pageboys and French twists. They wore Bruno Magli pumps, and silk and linen dresses of considerable expense. There seemed to be a preference for strictest gray or black, but the effect remained lush, tropical, like a room full of perfectly groomed mangoes."

The story Miss Didion tells is a compassionate tale of Washington's "seduction and betrayal" of the Cuban exiles, a community she refers to simply as *el exilio*. The seduction was, of course, the training of exiles to in-

vade Cuba and topple Fidel Castro, the men of the 2506 Brigade who in April 1962 died or were taken prisoner by the Castro forces at the Bay of Pigs when President Kennedy "sent down the decision to preserve deniability by withholding air cover." As Miss Didion sees it, "In many ways the Bay of Pigs continued to offer Miami an ideal narrative, one in which the men of the 2506 were forever the valiant and betrayed and the United States was forever the seducer and betrayer and the blood of *los mártires* remained forever fresh." The struggle — *la lucha* — is a continuing one, not only against Fidel Castro but also against "all those who could conceivably be believed to have aided or encouraged him." And the Cubans now pray that the Nicaraguan contras, whom they call "the freedom fighters of the eighties," "not be treated by the Reagan administration as the men of the 2506 had been treated, or believed that they

James Chace, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is the author of "Endless War: How We Got Involved in Central America — and What Can Be Done."

Yeah. Twins!

had been treated, by the Kennedy administration."

To understand *la lucha* one has to decipher a bewildering language. What Kennedy's C.I.A. chief, Allen Dulles, called "a disposal problem" — by which he meant disposing of the men President Eisenhower had been training for a projected Cuban invasion — is what makes up the exile community today. Or, to put it another way, "One man's loose cannon is another's freedom fighter." For example, terrorist is the word most of us would use to characterize Eduardo Arocena, who was convicted in Federal court two years ago of bombings in New York City and Miami and of the assassination in New York of an attaché at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, as well as the attempted assassination of the Cuban ambassador. To the Cuban exile community, Mr. Arocena was not a terrorist but a freedom fighter, as Xavier Suarez, the Mayor of Miami, described him. Even those who used other methods in *la lucha* considered him, in the words of the exile leader Andres Nazario Sargen, "a person who chose that path for the liberation of Cuba." Nor are killings confined to Cuban envoys; anyone suspected of sympathizing with Fidel Castro or even of hoping for better relations between Washington and Havana — *el diálogo* — had better watch out.

The men the C.I.A. trained to overthrow Fidel Castro, the veterans of the 2506 Brigade, are, many of them, successful bankers and businessmen. But they support *la lucha*, and they are sizable contributors to national, as well as local, political campaigns. There are also survivors of the 2506 Brigade who, according to Miss Didion, have been "fighting with the contras from a base about three miles south of the Nicaraguan border." Thus, Luis Posada Carriles, once accused by the Venezuelan Government of placing a bomb on a Cubana Airlines plane, later turned up "working on the covert contra supply operation at Ilopango air base [in El Salvador] under the name 'Ramon Medina.'" This is the same Ramon Medina whose name "began coming up in late 1986, at the time the first details of the contra supply network organized by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and Major General Richard Secord were becoming known."

Were the members of *el exilio* also responsible for the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the second most hated man in Cuban Miami? Had Lee Harvey Oswald

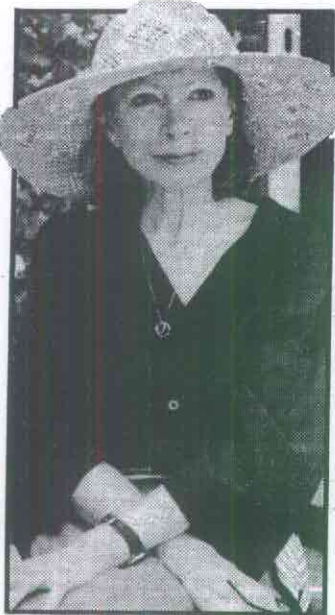
been set up by anti-Castro Cubans? The report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which Miss Didion cites, contains testimony from Marita Lorenz, "who had publicly claimed she was once Castro's mistress," that she was present at a September 1963 meeting in Miami during which Lee Harvey Oswald made plans to go to Dallas. She also testified that around Nov. 15, 1963, Oswald and some other Cubans "traveled in a two-car caravan to Dallas and stayed at a motel where they were contacted by Jack Ruby." The committee "found no evidence to support Lorenz's allegation." This is a maddening teaser. But Miss Didion is content merely to suggest dark possibilities: "That the assassination of John F. Kennedy might or might not have been the specific consequence of his administration's own incursions into the tropic of morbidity and paranoia and fantasy . . . did not recommend [to the Warren Commission] . . . a closer study of the tropic."

TO the men and women of *el exilio* promises made but not kept do indeed have serious consequences, Kennedy said in the Orange Bowl in 1962, "I can assure you that this [2506] flag will be returned to this brigade in a free Havana." In 1983, Ronald Reagan said in the Dade County Auditorium, "We will not permit the Soviets and their henchmen in Havana to deprive others of their freedom." Reading these words, most of us would probably consider both pronouncements wishful rhetoric. But to the Cubans in Miami this is not just poetry, because both Presidents were speaking to "people whose historical experience has not been that poetry makes nothing happen." The consequences of betrayal leads to murder. "Let me tell you something," said one of Miss Didion's Cubans. "The guys they call 'Cuban terrorists' are the guys they trained."

Joan Didion's forebodings warn us of the dangers to come. Miami, at the geographic end of a pistol, is, after all, an American city, but it is "populated by people who also believed that the United States would betray them again, in Honduras and in El Salvador and in Nicaragua, betray them at all the barricades of a phantom war they had once again taken not as the projection of another Washington abstraction but as their own struggle, *la lucha*, *la causa*, with consequences we have not yet seen." □

HAROLD - THEY'RE ON YOUR TURF. - Regards Sen

Kennedy, Reagan and After



DOMINIQUE HARBOKOV

Joan Didion in Los Angeles.

Joan Didion considers herself a slow writer, dreads the thought of finishing books that she has begun and finds the task made no easier by years of experience. "I just learned the computer," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Los Angeles. "Somehow I had this fixed idea that it would not be right — that some mystery about writing would be lost. But it's not. So maybe this will make me faster."

Miami, the locale of her latest book (written on a typewriter), has fascinated her since the 1960's, when "a lot of interesting stuff started coming out with the Cubans" in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the assassination of President Kennedy. "I was interested in the connections between Miami and Washington," she said. In 1984, while on a visit of several weeks to Washington, much talk, she said, seemed to center on Reagan Administration policies toward Central America and Cuba. That led her to think about the role of Cuban exiles in Miami in putting those policies into action in present and past Administrations.

She began visiting Miami in 1985, even though "I didn't know what I was going to do exactly, I hadn't found a focus." She knew she wanted to include in whatever she decided to write a comparison of "the rhetoric of the Kennedy Administration and the rhetoric of the Reagan Administration."

Miss Didion said she is always supposed to be working on a project and that she tends to get anxious if she is not at least committed to doing something. Now she would like to write about the Middle East; she and her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, spent a month in Jerusalem and Jordan last spring. "I totally opened up," she said, "I'll probably go out again next year."

What is it that draws her to warm climates? "I like moist, hot weather — it just makes me feel better," she said. "As a child, all my fantasies took place in some imaginary rain forest."

ANNE ZUSY