

The Nation

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EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT SANTA CLAUS

Bosses Tweed, Hague and Curley would have to tip their hats to President Carter. The brazen way this most pious of Presidents is ladling out public funds to help his own renomination campaign in a state-by-state sequence based solely on primary dates is quite dazzling.

He sent his Transportation Secretary to Chicago the other day to dish out \$24.8 million in "discretionary" highway funds. The ceremony was held in the office of a "loyal" Congressman because Mayor Jane Byrne had the nerve to announce herself for Senator Edward Kennedy. The troughs of Florida and Iowa are already brimming and the other primary states are preparing to be slopped with their deserts, just or not. It is worth noting that the Chicago largess alone is \$7.8 million more than a Presidential candidate can spend for the entire primary campaign. Onward and upward with "reform"! Hail to incumbency!

One of Ronald Reagan's better lines in his 1976 race against President Ford was that the bands at Ford rallies never knew whether to play "Hail to the Chief" or "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town." Ford was in the same Federal hand-out racket, but Carter The Innocent is harder-nosed about it.

Can Americans take comfort from the fact that Carter has been restrained in his conduct of foreign policy, venting his aggressions at home on political enemies? Perhaps, but it's a peculiar trade-off and one that might not last. For now, the Carter Presidency is more aldermanic than imperial. What he is doing goes far beyond the norms of our political traditions. Bribery is the real name of this game. It also violates the law prohibiting the use of a Federal official's authority to help nominate or elect a President. It is time to dust off that old statute and honor it in the observance. Why Not a Prosecution?

WIRETAPPING: AN EXCHANGE

G. Robert
Blakey
Herman
Schwartz

KENNEDY AND THE LEFT

Norman
Birnbaum

THE BLUNT CASE

Christopher
Hitchens

POP PEDANTRY

Jim Quinn

'ON MEN AND MANHOOD'

Jean Bethke
Elshtain

PROVINCIAL LONDON

Richard Gilman

THE ASSASSINATION CIRCUS

CONSPIRACIES UNLIMITED

FRANK DONNER

"Sometimes these cogitations still amaze/The troubled midnight and the noon's repose."

—T.S. Eliot

The twenty-seven-volume investigative record and 686-page report on the Kennedy and King assassinations by the House Select Committee on Assassinations released earlier this year may make history—but for the wrong reasons. The lengthy probe (September 1976 to December 1978) concluded after spending \$5.4 million that President John F. Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy," and that "on the basis of circumstantial evidence . . . there is a likelihood that" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated also "as a result of a conspiracy." Even these qualified conclusions rest on rickety foundations.

Like the Warren Commission before it, the committee's investigation has confirmed an underlying bias. From the start, the Warren Commission tilted toward a lone-assassin conclusion for a variety of reasons: its more or less explicit mandate to eliminate the unsettling impact of conspiracy speculations on political stability; its need (a priority of Chief Justice Earl Warren) to counteract the nativist Communist conspiracy mania which burgeoned in the 1960s, and (a White House concern) the desire to eliminate embarrassment in foreign relations.

The bias of the Warren Commission was reflected in its failure to exhaust investigative leads and thereby prove that no conspiracy existed. In the turbulent decade that followed its investigations, when the traumas of the Vietnam War, Watergate and the lawlessness of the intelligence community amounted to what has been called a

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the dismal collaboration of many apparent flag-wavers with the most dangerous enemy the country (or any other country) ever had. Finally, the whole Blunt saga should have brought home the need for open government and for free information. Instead, there has been an atmosphere of vindictive recrimination, dark suggestions that there are "more names to come," foul innuendoes about homosexuals and an exclusive concentration on Blunt's "fellow traveling." Against that you can score one for open government, but it isn't much of a consolation.

Forster's remark, that if faced with a choice between betraying his country and betraying his friends he hoped he would have the courage to betray his country, has often been taken as the epitome of faggot detachment and effete pacifism. The secret it really holds is the clue to the British establishment mentality—which always has put class before country, interest before patriotism, while claiming to speak in the most resonant national mode. Kipling's "Kim" says, as Kim Philby might have said, by way of an obituary for the 1930s and for the class that protected him:

Something I owe to the soil that grew
More to the lives that fed—
But most to Allah, who gave me two
Separate sides to my head. □

Conspiracies

(Continued From Front Cover)

"cumulative fall from innocence," this failure became a central feature of attacks on the lone-assassin theory. The strong establishment ties of the members of the Warren Commission also contributed to a widespread conviction that they had collectively served as the conscious instruments of betrayal, part of a "cover-up." And there is little doubt that the commission did consciously withhold its investigative resources from areas that might compromise the powers that be.

The House Select Committee's report reflects an even more serious bias—in conformity with the now widespread conspiracy consensus. This bias is reflected not, as in the case of the Warren Commission, in its investigative procedures but in the strained inferences and conclusions which it drew from the facts. The report and the conspiracy movement from which it has emerged illuminate a larger pattern of escapism, frustration and me-too politics which increasingly dominate Congress and its constituencies as we enter the 1980s. Moreover, the mandate by the House to investigate the assassinations not truly for a legislative purpose but proscriptively—to determine the innocence or guilt of individuals—demonstrates anew the ease with which Congressional power can, when the climate is favorable, be diverted

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to questionable uses.

The thrust to politicize assassinations and view them as the work of conspiracies answers several needs barely concealed beneath the surface of American life. Threatened by the randomness of serious crimes, we instinctively strive for an explanation of such acts as purposeful and rational. Even in so clear a case of uncontested insanity as that of George Metesky, "the mad bomber," the majority of people polled expressed the conviction that he was the instrument of a conspiracy! When the victim is an important public figure, rationalizations of irrational acts are even more important. Is it possible that the very embodiment of the principles by which we live as people can be destroyed by the action of a nobody? And a nobody who lacks even the capacity to control his own behavior? If a President is to be taken from us, it can only be by a powerful malignant counterforce, not by a random crank. To make our loss bearable, we need to attribute it to a conspiracy matching the dead leader in power and status.

Historically, real conspiracies associated with assassinations of important public figures are marked by a distinctive motivation, structure and background in both the political culture and the mass consciousness. But the facts adduced to support the House Select Committee's conspiracy claim, even if true, bespeak a far different kind of group action. The committee is talking, in both the King and Kennedy cases, about the unaided acts of isolated individuals with clear responsibility, acts which just might have had the support and encouragement of others, but which lack in any event the political resonance of a true assassination conspiracy. It has tried to bridge this gap by playing semantic games with the word *conspiracy*.

The committee justifies its strained use of the language of conspiracy with a technicality: for legal purposes, all conspiracies are "partnerships in crime." In presenting its conclusions, it uneasily acknowledges that "widely varying meanings" attach to the term *conspiracy*, but argues that "euphemistic variations can lead to a lack of candor," and that "plain truth should not be avoided even if it causes discomfort." But it is the committee's "plain truth" that is a form of deception and indeed reflects "a lack of candor."

In any event, the basis for the conspiracy finding in the Kennedy case is highly dubious acoustical evidence of gunfire by a second (grassy knoll) shooter. The infirmity of this evidence cannot be cured by the conflicting testimony about puffs of smoke from the grassy knoll. The required supporting evidence—eyewitness reports, spent bullets, flight—is altogether lacking, as is evidence of group involvement. If the two putative gunmen fired at the same time, they were presumably under external direction and control. (If, miraculously, they fired independently of each other, the conspiracy thesis falls apart altogether.) But such planned or on-the-scene coordination is blithely left to the imagination. More: the key concerns of a conspiracy aimed at the public murder of a well-guarded target are, first, to take care of the logistics of access and, then, to reduce the risks of apprehension. Here we are invited to believe that the conspirators chose to *increase* the risk to the entire group by assigning

two members to the hit while altogether neglecting to organize an escape plan. Or should we, plucking a leaf from the *oeuvre* of assassinology, assume that both gunmen were nutty fall guys manipulated by unseen masters from some remote hide-out and deliberately thrown to the wolves in the last act of a superplot?

Equally unimpressive is the King conspiracy contention—that James Earl Ray was motivated by a bounty offer from two St. Louis businessmen, who are cast as core conspirators. The committee relies for its bounty conspiracy script on a story from a gamy source, one Russell Byers, whose committee testimony was given under an immunity grant. And Byers had great need for immunity. A convicted thief, he was characterized by his own attorney as “one of the most degenerate criminals in St. Louis.”

The committee concedes that “it was unable to uncover a direct link between the principals of the St. Louis conspiracy and James Earl Ray and his brothers.” A footnote informs the reader that John Ray (Ray’s brother, who owned a tavern in St. Louis) denied under oath knowing either the alleged conspirators or Byers or having heard about the bounty offer. The committee nevertheless insists that he could have learned about the offer and transmitted it to his brother James, who, we are reminded, visited the St. Louis area “at least twice” during the period when he was a fugitive. One of these occasions, according to the committee, was the alleged joint robbery by the brothers of a bank in Alton, Illinois—the fruit of a wholly conjectural piece of detective work by the committee. The committee has a way of floating speculations and then retreating in self-doubt, a practice that permits it to embrace the implausible and unproved without at the same time entirely forfeiting its credibility.

After adopting the bounty conspiracy thesis, based on Byers’s highly questionable testimony, and then conceding the lack of proof of the communication of the offer (or a payoff) to Ray (or a family member) either before or after the assassination, the committee’s report again returns to a conspiracy beat punctuated by a flurry of subjunctives—“could have,” “would have,” “might have”—and variations on the “possibility” of a conspiracy.

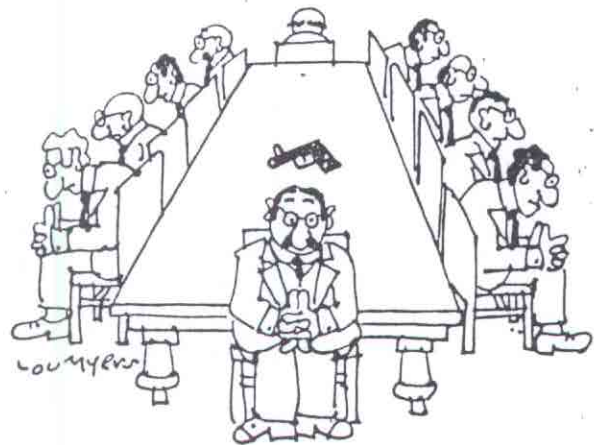
The committee makes Ray’s alleged greed for money the fuse of the murder, and grotesquely minimizes his racial bigotry. He was not, the committee insists, a “rabid racist” who would have killed King without a financial incentive. But the evidence of Ray’s sociopathic racism cannot be so lightly ignored in assessing its motivating power. Here is a man who admired the Nazis and gave the Nazi salute in public, joined the Army in the hope of aiding in the rehabilitation of the Nazi movement in Germany, planned to make his escape to Rhodesia where (he thought) his deeds would be honored, revealed his racism to prison inmates and authorities, after his capture told his custodial officer in England, Chief Inspector Alexander Eist, that he hated blacks, was proud of the murder and wanted to get to Africa to “kill some niggers.” Given this and other evidence of Ray’s racism, the committee nevertheless determinedly tailored its interpretation of Ray’s motivation to fit its conspiracy

thesis. It failed to recognize the simple fact that, while Ray *ultimately* expected fame and fortune, what reduced his *perception* of risk, which is the master clue to motivation, was not money but hate.

But the distortion of motivation to fit a conspiracy hypothesis even more seriously mars the committee’s treatment of the Kennedy assassination. Since the attempt in 1838 on the life of Andrew Jackson by Richard Lawrence, there have been a total of twelve attempts on the lives of Presidents and candidates for the Presidency, of which five have succeeded. *All* of them, with the sole exception of the attempt by the Puerto Rican nationalists on the life of President Truman, have been unified by a common pattern: a single psychopathic gunman acting alone. (The Lincoln assassination is no exception: John Wilkes Booth was a deranged loser who killed Lincoln on his own, abandoning at the last moment a prior kidnap-hostage conspiracy plan.)

Our national experience contrasts with the history of assassination in countries all over the world, which abounds in instances of classic Brutus-style conspiracies organized to bring about a transfer of power or to call attention to injustice (“propaganda of the deed”). History, both ancient and modern, also supplies examples of assassinations in foreign countries by single individuals, ranging from the tyrannicidal and the avenging through Dostoyevsky’s “rational homicide,” the reasoned elimination on ethical or moral grounds of a figure embodying or symbolizing injustice or oppression.

But these are not the models drawn from *our* past, and in order to make Lee Harvey Oswald a suitable candidate for a group crime, a man who would trust and be trusted by others to share an enormous risk, the committee ignored the psychological profile of our unique breed of assassins. The committee does not bother to explain why Oswald’s head was straighter than those who preceded or followed him—Sirhan Sirhan, Arthur Bremer, Sara Jane Moore and Lynette (“Squeaky”) Fromme. One does not expect a clinical diagnosis, but Oswald’s psychological biography reflects a pattern made all too familiar by our history. A posthumous child, buffeted by an assortment of blows—affectionless, separated from his brothers—Oswald became a truant and was remanded for psychiatric observation. An



early examination showed distinct psychotic symptoms: detachment from the world and fantasies about power and fame. His short life was marked by violence including threats with a knife against his brother and sister-in-law, striking his mother on more than one occasion and subsequently beating his wife, Marina. To these we must add threats against Eisenhower and later Nixon, a self-inflicted wound in Japan and a later wrist-slashing in the Soviet Union, the attempted murder of Gen. Edwin A. Walker and the post-assassination killing of Dallas policeman J.D. Tippit.

In an investigation which purports to persuade us that Oswald acted with others, the committee apparently found no significance in (and did not even refer to) Oswald's statement while under interrogation by a Dallas police officer that "everybody will know who I am now." This is the familiar howl of the embattled self hungering for fame which has been heard in the cries of, among others, Booth ("When I leave the stage for good I will be the most famous man in America"); Bremer (to a police officer: "Just stay with me and you will be a star like I am"), and Sirhan ("I am famous; I have achieved in a day what it took Kennedy all his life to do"). Here, too, the anomie and paranoia that spawn such dreams of glory would render implausible the capacity for group involvement and shared motivation which the committee's conspiracy thesis requires. In order to overcome this obstacle, the committee is forced to use politics as an armature for its thesis. But this is not easy: the thrust to politicize assassinations and thus to exploit the vulnerability of a grieving constituency by linking assassinations to purposeful, discontented groups has historically (after an initial flurry of conspiracy charges) foundered on the reality of the assassin's dottiness.

The committee makes Oswald a "Marxist" acting with (unidentified) others to achieve a political goal. Only a Marxist, the committee argues, could have defected to the Soviet Union, organized a (one-man) branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, sat for a photograph armed to the teeth and holding copies of Communist journals, etc. As the committee pictures this "Marxist," he is a freelance gunslinger without an organizational base, stalking game in the capitalist badlands. But the committee never tells us why a Marxist would, alone or with others, try to kill General Walker or what Marxist cause or interest would be served by the murder of J.F.K. Oswald's Marxism is a version of a theme familiar in the history of American assassinations — "politics in the head" (Andrew Hacker calls it "personal politics"): the resort by assassins to the language of politics as a projection for uncontrollable personal impulses. Oswald's Marxism is of a piece with Booth's commitment to the Confederate cause, Czolgosz's anarchism, Guiteau's Republicanism, Bremer's radicalism or Fromme's environmentalism. All of these are but labels for the fantasies of alienated psychotics—brooding in hall bedrooms—the true politics of the American assassin.

The committee's evaluation of the Jack Ruby connection is similarly overburdened by its conspiracy bias. Ruby's instability is ignored, as is the historic phenomenon of the assassin's assassin, the individual who removes the assassin

for personal reasons—a divine message is a favorite. The committee presumably relies, as do almost all of the conspiraphiles, on the ruling of a Texas court that Ruby was legally sane, that is, responsible for his acts, under the M'Naghten Rule, an issue quite irrelevant to an understanding of his motivation and of the possible involvement of others. Predictably, his own professed reason for killing Oswald—sympathy for the President's widow and children—is rejected as his lawyer's invention, despite corroborative evidence.

In its waffling style, the committee suggests that Ruby was recruited to silence Oswald by the mob as part of a plot to neutralize R.F.K.'s organized-crime program. (What gamblers these chaps! How could they be certain that R.F.K. would leave his job if his brother were no longer President? In fact, as it turned out, Lyndon Johnson wanted Kennedy to stay on in order to protect himself against a political threat.) Both the organized-crime and the anti-Castro mob figures with whom Oswald was supposedly linked were presumably right-wingers. Oswald was a leftist; why should these mobsters entrust him with the high-risk role of hit man? But hold! Was Oswald all that left wing? Wasn't he a pal of George de Mohrenschildt, a mysterious right-wing figure, with C.I.A. connections? Didn't he offer his services to an anti-Castro paramilitary operation, and wasn't he associated with David Ferrie, an anti-Castro C.I.A. contract operative and associate of Carlos Marcello? The committee in the end admits that it cannot link Oswald with any conspiratorial group, but how fishy everything smells!

For the most part, the leaders and activist champions of the conspiracy constituency are drawn from the New Left. As the New Left declined from the mid-1960s on, the investigation of assassinations became a major item on its agenda. Afflicted by a sense of loss and powerlessness, those identified with the declining radicalism of the 1960s sought in conspiracy theories an escape from the grubby task of beginning anew and organizing around issues that would influence policy and action. The temptations to follow this escapist route were considerable: a ready-made demotic fellowship shaped by pain and grief; a pervasive distrust of official explanations; an unusually receptive media support network; a free-floating social paranoia (killer bees, U.F.O.s, the Bermuda Triangle, etc.), and most important of all, of course, an issue bigger than itself.

Like rightists in the past, many radicals shrank from the complexity of power relations, preferring to attribute their frustrations to identifiable evil men, gun-wielding conspirators. The conspiracy fever in the left community, as it emerged in the late 1960s, was a paradigm for Christopher Lasch's "culture of narcissism." This is apparent in the conspiraphiles' fascination with the sensational and in their preference for the conceivable over the real or the probable; in their search for political highs in bizarre theories; in their media peacocking, and their rejection of the past as a guide. The literature of conspiracy is astonishing not so much for

what it says but in its silence about our past. It leaves us with a sense, as Lasch puts it, "of living in a world in which the past holds out no guidance to the present."

This thrust to politicize conspiracies gradually developed an ideology, a haphazard theoretical system structured around a network of conspiracies, ultimately merging into a huge meta-conspiracy controlled by our hidden rulers. Watergate and the F.B.I.-C.I.A. scandals, with their roots in demonstrable conspiracies, spurred the imagination of the conspiraphiles to spin out ever more sinister reticulations for an emerging mass-media market (a subject I will discuss later). In addition, newsletters, broadcasts and "hot lines" poured out a stream of increasingly spookish offerings full of trendy intelligence jargon tracing webs of "connections" to an assortment of masterminds. In this process, a key role was played by the "cover-up," an intelligence practice brought to the popular consciousness by Watergate. Thus, every stage in the conspiratorial cycle was matched by a conspiracy (typically by intelligence bigwigs) to conceal it—a process that at once explains the absence of evidence to support a particular conspiracy claim and demonstrates the power and deviousness of the plotters. A related self-proving gambit is the charge that doubters and critics are themselves really concealed intelligence operatives.

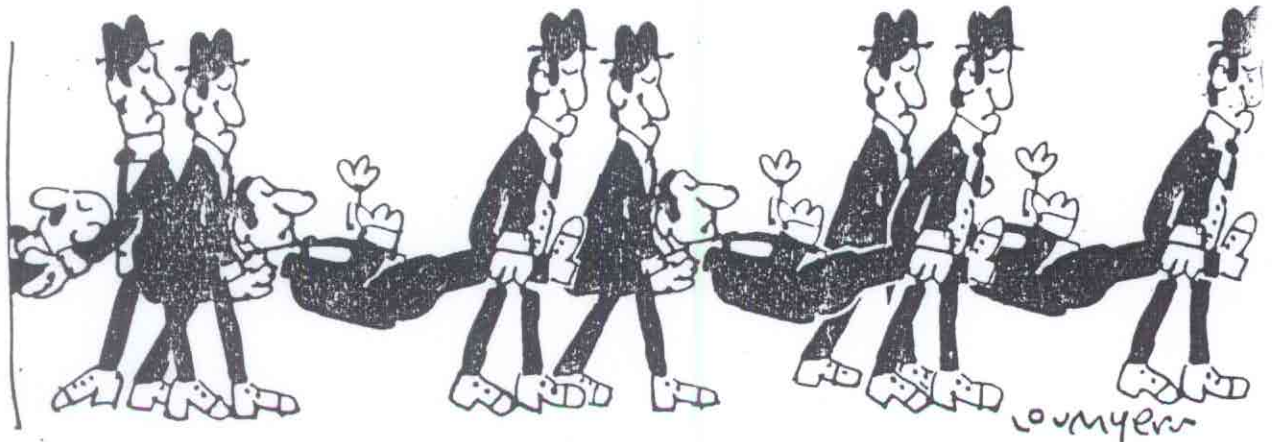
The extent to which the cover-up has become embedded in the conspiracy mythos is perhaps best illustrated by the courtroom statement of Sara Jane Moore following her attempt to assassinate President Ford in 1975. She explained that her act was an attempt to trigger an investigation of the Government cover-up of its own assassinations of prominent figures.

Along with crack-pot realists, self-serving experts and authors of lurid exposés, the conspiracy movement has attracted a body of intellectuals and scholars. The older literature, in the wake of the Warren Commission report, as well as more recent productions, following the second (post-1968) surge of conspiracy writings, often reflect valid motives: a hunger for an explanation free of distortions, omissions and the bias which one has come to expect of official versions of controversial events. Such explanations have inevitably challenged the resourcefulness of the investigator and the ingenuity of the scholar. Indeed, such a challenge

has led to strange journeys, such as the desertion of the classroom by philosophy professor and conspiralogist Josiah Thompson (*Six Seconds in Dallas*) for a career as a private investigator.

More than any single individual, novelist Norman Mailer has provided a bridge between conspiracy politics and culture. Flashy and narcissistic, he invited contempt for reality by treating it as a mere stage for clods. Mailer saw himself as writer-disrupter, the prophetic voice of American chaos and corruption, the poet of secret plots, the exposé of the secret government which he dubbed "The Fifth Estate." His fascination with a hyped-up version of reality made his novel writing pallid; it was "The Novel as History, History as a Novel." Conspiracy became the metaphor for the hidden meaning of power, and then replaced the reality it purported to describe. If it was conceivable, it was true. As Lasch has noted, the issue was no longer truth: "Truth has given way to credibility, facts to statements that sound authoritative without conveying any authoritative information." Nothing less than a new politics was being forged, the politics of the imagination.

Mailer developed his views in a series of essays and in a biography of Marilyn Monroe. The book argues that Monroe may have been murdered by a conspiracy spearheaded by the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the Mafia or "half of the secret police of the world," that she had been under surveillance perhaps because she had been married to a playwright denied a passport for supporting a Communist movement (Arthur Miller). Mailer isn't sure whether she was murdered in order to protect the reputation of the Kennedys, to amass evidence against them, or simply to use an alleged affair between Monroe and R.F.K. as a means of blackmailing the President. But, he insists, "by the end, political stakes were riding high on her life and even more on her death. If she could be murdered in such a way as to appear a suicide in despair at the turn of her love, what a point of pressure could be maintained [by right-wingers] against the Kennedys." Given such fishy possibilities, why insist on evidence? But we are not through yet; "Why not assume," Mailer asks, "even more and see her death as the seed for assassinations to follow?" (Unpersuaded right-wing conspiraphiles can find comfort in Frank A. Capell's *Strange Death of Marilyn*



Monroe, which argues that Monroe was murdered by a conspiracy of Communist agents in order to silence her.)

If Norman Mailer is the poet of conspiraphilia, Mark Lane is its battlefield commander. Despite serious credibility setbacks, his following, especially on the campus, where he tours a highly profitable lecture circuit, is considerable. He shared this audience with Carl Oglesby's Assassination Information Bureau which, until its recent dissolution, specialized in a more ideological interpretation of the assassination phenomenon. (Oglesby's book, *The Yankee and Cowboy War*, links Watergate and Dallas as rounds in a struggle between the old money of the Eastern Seaboard and the new wealth of the West. Hailed by Mailer, its ingenuity, story line and plot construction earn it high marks—but purely as fiction.)

Lane's rise to the top of the heap is a product of his ability to exploit his role as a lawyer, his media skills, his claimed leftist support and self-promotional powers. His *modus operandi* has been to secure smoking-gun clients, proclaim their innocence, and charge a Government frame-up. Thus, Lane has insisted that Oswald was framed, that the rifle traced to him was a plant and not the one used in the J.F.K. assassination, that the bullet linked to this rifle was also a plant and that the C.I.A. was involved in the assassination. In the same way, he charged (in his book *Code Name "Zorro"*) that the F.B.I. engineered the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and that his client, Ray, was a patsy. He was retained by the Rev. Jim Jones to obtain intelligence files on the People's Temple after feeding Jones's paranoia with the charge that a sinister intelligence cabal was seeking the group's destruction. The mass poisoning then became Lane's vindication, grim proof of his conspiracy charges.

The assassination conspiracy cult has produced a huge body of literature. The J.F.K. assassination alone is the subject of an estimated 150 books, hundreds of periodical pieces and at least ten newsletters including *JFK Assassination Forum*, published in Belfast. No less than five annotated bibliographies describe the Dallas literature alone. In addition, the assassination movement as a whole is served by groups such as: the Committee to Investigate Assassinations (directed by Bernard Fensterwald), the Citizens Commission of Inquiry (Mark Lane), the Campaign for Democratic Freedom (Donald Freed) and the Committee to Investigate Political Assassinations.

Dominating the assassination movement and its literature is the politicization of the killings of public figures by attributing them to right-wing or establishment inspiration. This originated in the need to respond to charges that Dallas was the result of a Communist plot, and that, more grandly—to quote a right-wing columnist—"Oswald was an instrument of a global Communist conspiracy." Indeed, it was Warren Commission member (then) Congressman Gerald R. Ford who insisted on inserting a reference to Oswald's Communism in the commission's findings. Thus, in the dominant sectors of the conspiracy movement, Oswald is considered either innocent (the victim of a frame-up), a right-winger, an F.B.I. informer or a C.I.A. agent. For the right he is still a Communist or a K.G.B. agent. All of these roles require a

subordination or suppression of the fact of Oswald's mental instability. He is introduced to us as a spy recruited *in situ* by the F.B.I., as a Russian agent, as an agent of Castroites seeking to infiltrate the anti-Castro movement and vice versa and as a double agent. In a second stage his dismembered persona is distributed to look-alikes, decoys and stand-ins, and finally cloned into "the two Oswalds" and "the three Oswalds." These conspiracy scenarios draw on aspects of agent-informer-target relationships—vicariousness, impersonation, deception and role-playing—to politicize a classic theme in Western literature (E.T.A. Hoffmann, Dostoyevsky and Joseph Conrad are examples), that of the double.

Where the shifting of responsibility for an assassination is thwarted by physical reality, robotization ("Manchurian candidate") theories come into play. Here too, intelligence practice has influenced the imagination of conspiraphiles. Phenomena such as the manipulation of the informer by his agent control or C.I.A.-style drug-induced behavioral controls are grafted onto hypnotism, occultism and computer data processing. Thus, a theory of "hypno-programming" dominates the Sirhan-R.F.K. and Bremer-Wallace literature. The Manchurian candidate approach has also been used to exonerate Oswald. According to Prof. Richard Popkin, the J.F.K. killing was committed by a group of "zombie assassins" programmed by the C.I.A. The objections of earthlings enslaved by smoking-gun reality are dismissed as a tribute to the skill of the (far-off) programmer who not only took control of his victim's mind but also with awesome cunning blanked out his memory of what happened. This even takes care of the protestations of the killer himself that he acted alone.

The Oswald-as-C.I.A.-spy thesis is developed in detail by Robert Sam Anson in *They've Killed the President*, a Bantam Books project. Anson makes Oswald a C.I.A. operative whose defection and return were stages in an elaborate intelligence plot. Complete with look-alikes, suspicious coincidences and sinister motives, Anson's narrative scorns facts that stand in the way or converts them into proof by strained inferences. For Anson, it is "Only connect," with a vengeance. But the spirit of E.M. Forster's teaching burns even more brightly in the works of other conspiraphiles. For example, former F.B.I. agent William Turner has called attention to a sinister link between the King and Kennedy assassinations, namely, that in both cases a rifle with a telescopic sight "was conveniently left at the crime scene." Is this not a clue to the *modus operandi* of a single group of conspirators?

Anson makes Oswald an American intelligence agent, but another investigative author, Edward J. Epstein, makes him a K.G.B. agent (*Legend*). Epstein's earlier book, *Inquest*, won praise for its skillful dissection of the Warren Commission's report. In *Counterplot*, he furthered the image of the sober objective investigator by exposing New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison. In *Agency of Fear*—sensational and factually dubious as it is—he lectures the reader on the need to subject investigative reporting to the test of truth. But *Legend*, an ambitious project sponsored by the

Reader's Digest and funded by a huge advance, is as bizarre a contribution to the literature of conspiracy as the efforts Epstein had earlier deplored and exposed. This rational man's conspiracy expert has seemed to some a latter-day version of the nineteenth-century confidence operator who gains trust by appealing to a hunger for authenticity and truth. Epstein's thesis (or scam) is that after Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union and a prior stint as a Russian spy in the Marine Corps, he returned to America to renew his spying for the K.G.B. equipped with a cover story, a "legend." His alleged K.G.B. control, defector Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko, was, in Epstein's version, a "disinformation agent," or, in the C.I.A.'s usage, a "dispatched agent" assigned to protect his cover. Unlike lowlier toilers in the vineyard, Epstein has access to an important source—James J. Angleton, the C.I.A.'s now retired superspook. Despite the credibility risk presented by this prophet of the long twilight struggle, Epstein apparently bought Angleton's thesis that Nosenko, too, was cloaked in a legend, a contention long ago disputed as a fantasy in high-level C.I.A. circles.

And to prove what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive, Angleton claims that a K.G.B.-F.B.I. double agent named Fedora was also briefed by the K.G.B. to corroborate Nosenko's deception. Epstein writes that Oswald's legend required him to return to Texas, establish himself in the area with some sort of job, and then wait for proper contacts to be made. The author admits that there is no indication that the Russians re-established contact with Oswald in America. But, Epstein insists, they did make Oswald bitter, because instead of returning him to the United States on an important mission they discarded him, forcing him to turn, in desperation, to the Cubans.

Epstein plays his K.G.B. games (so congenial to the politics of his sponsor) without bothering to deal with many troublesome questions. If, as he claims, Oswald was recruited in Japan, why should the K.G.B. encourage him, presumably a valuable "agent in place," to defect to the Soviet Union; why should it train for future spy work a man who, after he slit his wrists in the Soviet Union, was pronounced unstable by K.G.B. doctors, and why encourage him to leave with the risk that he would tell all, or fail to train him for a job in this country, such as a security-related occupation, which would at once provide both a cover and a source of information? What really lifts the skeptical reader out of his chair is Epstein's "proof" that Oswald's diary was dictated by the K.G.B. to provide support for his legend. The sole basis for this startling contention is the opinion of a handwriting expert (at best a highly ductile source) that the jerky quality of the diary's entries reflects dictation by a K.G.B. control. But there is uncontroverted evidence that Oswald wrote jerkily and spelled poorly because he was dyslexic. It is hard to say which is less excusable, the fact that with his huge resources Epstein failed to discover Oswald's learning disability or that he knew about it but suppressed it because it spoiled his (and Angleton's) "legend."

Still another version of "diary-diary-who-wrote-the-diary" is offered by British barrister-investigator Michael Eddowes.

(We pass over the possibly tongue-in-cheek offering of novelist Gore Vidal who argues that the diaries of three assassination figures, Oswald, Sirhan and Bremer, may all have been written by one man, E. Howard Hunt.)

Eddowes, traveling the same path as Anson and Epstein, reaches a third destination. He argues that Oswald was replaced at some point by a K.G.B. agent who wrote the Oswald diary and was shipped out of the country to the United States as a "sleeper." In his version, Marina and her infant child were accomplices in the deception. Oswald the husband and Oswald the son ("the historic Oswald" in the usage of the trade) were two different people. The fact that the imposter's fingerprints matched those taken when Oswald was in the Marine Corps presents no difficulty at all—merely a K.G.B. trick. Eddowes finds it "beyond comprehension" that the Warren Commission failed to consider the evidence pointing to K.G.B. complicity. Still, all may not be lost: Eddowes recently persuaded the Dallas County Medical Examiner to request authorization to exhume the body of the man who was buried as Oswald.

It is hardly likely that the Dallas exhumation furor will reinvigorate a flagging assassination conspiracy movement. The committee's report has dealt a blow to the politics of conspiracy by demolishing virtually the entire construction of contentions—the Zapruder film, the virgin bullet, the forged photographs and related mystifications—upon which the movement rests. There would appear to be little mileage to be gained at this late date by attributing to a cover-up the Justice Department's failure to pursue the wispy new leads dredged up by the committee.

A death blow will surely come from another quarter—the media. The prominence of media-broker Lawrence Schiller in Mailer's story of the life and execution of Gary Gilmore, *The Executioner's Song*, dramatizes the media's dominance in our time in shaping and ordering public concerns. To an extent barely realized, the conspiracy movement is a media offspring. Through generous coverage (not only in the press and periodicals but also on TV and in books and films), it promoted the conspiracy mythos, constantly broadening its scope. Interviews and bylines gave luster to superstars who in turn vied with one another in the quest for fresh investigative and media triumphs. But lacking new scripts, its growth potential has been exhausted. A Mark Lane may seek to renew his priesthood in the blood of Jonestown, but for his followers and others who have worshipped at the conspiracy shrine, hard morning-after questions remain.

Is it not time to abandon the escapism, media hustle and radical chic of political conspiraphilia and face the desperate challenge of organizing a left movement in this country? Perhaps the will to go forward may be strengthened by reflecting on the insights of the radical philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who has described the unique capacity of our system to absorb radical challenge by adopting its symbols. In any case, we cannot permit the political meaning of what has been done to us by real conspirators to be lost in the cries of "Wolf!" by those for whom the truth is never bad enough. □