

Harold Weisberg

'More on history'; corrected

James E. Keenan is absolutely correct in telling us that President Kennedy must be considered with all his warts unremoved ("More on history and the Kennedys," June 10.) He is also far better informed than most who write and speak about the Kennedy administration. But he has been misled in a number of significant areas, most likely by overt or closet revisionists and by ideologues who hated the Kennedys.

To say that JFK's "own gross errors contributed to the failure of the Bay of Pigs" is not consistent with the realities.

That was an Eisenhower administration project on which Vice President Nixon was the White House action officer, in liaison with the CIA's Watergater-to-be E. Howard Hunt. As that CIA scheme proceeded the JFK administration merely followed the CIA's plans. The one controverted exception is a second air cover for the invaders. Whether it was part of the original plans, and there are arguments both ways but no documents of which I know released if they exist, in the end JFK did agree to an additional air strike. The Navy's timing was off and that came to nothing.

But as the military did not hide before the invasion, there was no real prospect of its success absent an uprising that no sane

person could expect.

There is reason to believe that the CIA hoped that a beachhead could be established and then used as the basis for recognizing a "government in exile." For that Hunt was to draft the constitution.

There also is no reason to even suspect that Castro was behind the assassination in revenge for efforts to kill him. From October 1962 on the most important man in the world for Castro was not Khrushchev but JFK. The USSR could not protect Cuba from any invasion. But in his solution to that missile crisis JFK guaranteed Cuba not only against a U.S. invasion, which had the Cubans terrified, but against any invasion.

It was the justified Cuban fear of a U.S. invasion that had Castro send his brother Raul and Che Guevara to Moscow in June of 1962 to invoke the "mutual assistance" pact. It was like many similar frivolities the U.S. engaged in. That is what led the USSR's missiles in.

It is a CIA fiction that Mr. Keenan repeats, surely in good faith and believing it: "On the general subject of 'CIA as villain,' one point needs to be made. The CIA has never launched any major covert operation except on the orders, or at least the knowledge and consent, of the President of the United States."

I have the CIA's records of its own internal investigation of precisely what Mr. Keenan makes a major point of, "plans to assassinate" Castro, inherited from the Eisenhower administration and allegedly "expanded." They were not.

An offshoot of the major CIA plot to kill Castro, employing high-level mafiosos, led to the arrest of a wiretapper named Arthur James Balletti. That, a separate scandal involving sex and a prominent American woman and man entertainer, got in the papers.

That led the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, to demand to know what was going on that he did not know.

Ultimately I obtained from the CIA Xeroxes of its hand-delivery to Bobby Kennedy of "a Top Secret Memorandum by Colonel Sheffield Edwards, Director of Security, setting forth the facts . . ."

Sheffield was the man in charge for the CIA. And he, personally, conducted the official investigation. He says that he was appointed to head the project and that in all the world, only six persons had knowledge of it, five plus him.

Another CIA memo on this that I cannot now locate says all six were high CIA officials and a lengthier memo . . . states

and updated

there is not a single piece of paper in the entire CIA on that plot.

The names originally obliterated when these records were disclosed to me were known prior to disclosure.

It is true that JFK did run around; I was for a while the house guest of one of his lady friends. She was an attractive, intelligent and wealthy woman with whom it was a joy to be with. She was witty, pleasant, politically well-informed and just good company.

She was, I believe, honest and forthright with me. We planned to record an oral history the next time I was in that part of the country but first my ill health and then her untimely death precluded that.

However, she made it clear that JFK fed her no line and she was left in no doubt at all - he loved Jackie.

Mr. Keenan concludes by saying that Castro is the "only one man (who) wanted the Kennedys out of the way . . . but Castro got there first." On this I am certain that he trusts his sources, but they are wrong on all counts. There were many who wanted to get rid of JFK and Castro is the very last man in the world who wanted him dead.

JFK was the only world leader who could protect Cuba from any invasion and prevent

any. He and Castro were negotiating a settlement of their differences on two levels at the very time JFK was killed. On the official but secret level U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Attwood was negotiating with his Cuban opposite number. On the unofficial level, JFK used the French reporter Jean Daniel as an emissary. He asked Daniel to return to see him after he saw Castro. Daniel was with Castro when they got the word that JFK was killed. He later wrote that Castro was shocked and so seriously disturbed he turned white. Daniel also quoted Castro as then saying that the JFK assassination was terrible for the world.

If the CIA had not kept these records secret from the American people only because Castro knew all about them and gave his evidence to the Congress - we would not have all the mislead mythologies that deceived well-intended people like Mr. Keenan.

The CIA sent these copies to me in 1989. Long before then all the mythologies and the anti-Kennedy interpretations of them were well fixed in the minds of concerned Americans.

And they were false.

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