

2/12/72

Mr. Peter D. Bunzel
Editor, West Magazine
The Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Bunzel,

Someone sent me a copy of Robert Kaiser's "Journey Through the Killing Ground" from your January 30 issue. As one of those maligned without naming by him, I write to solicit the same kind of treatment for the kind of response I think you have not had if, as I have no way of knowing, you have printed a view other than his.

I would say, among other things, that Kaiser is one of a series of big-name reporters who do not hide their high opinions of themselves and, having gone for a story they did not get, assumed there can be no story because they did not get it.

I would say what Kaiser did not, that he tried to buy his story, as did Huie and others; and that when a reporter becomes an entrepreneur he ceases being a reporter. Truth ought not be a commodity for sale (Huie says if he doesn't buy it, it won't be had), and the processes of justice ought not be paid for by a reporter who thereby has an investment, his own or that of another, to recover.

In each of the three major political assassinations, this is what happen^{ed} and this is what was certain to taint the institutions of society and seed doubts and suspicions. The husband of one of those who did it with the John Kennedy assassination is doing the same, today, in the Ray case.

Kaiser has an unerring instinct for the nuts and the undependable, therefore everyone is a nut and all information, all leads, are undependable. How can it be otherwise if Kaiser says it is thus?

His words deserve analysis. I hope you will agree your readers should have that right, as should those he defamed.

Of those he did name, I have a lower opinion of some than he expressed. But who but Kaiser sought them out and not others to whom any standard bibliographic source could have led him?

I suppose getting paid to say "I am a great guy but I made a little mistake" is to be preferred over sackcloth and ashes in Times Mirror Square. More dignified, too, with all those opportunities for emphasis on purity of motive (another exclusive) and perfection in competence. If he elected to work in appig-sty, all your many readers should not be splashed with it. Nor should those who, quietly, do that which was beyond him. And people, in a representative society, should not be conned into believing only Kaiser knows.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

West

Los Angeles Times, January 30, 1972

CONTENTS

- 5 **West View**
By Burt Prelutsky
- 6 **Probing the Plot People**
By Robert Blair Kaiser
Who really killed RFK? The conspiracy buffs may never find the answer, but they keep on asking the question.
- 11 **Down on the Fat Farm**
By Art Seidenbaum
For outer torture and inner bliss, there's nothing like a week at a health spa.
- 16 **West Q & A**
By Digby Diehl
Fashion is dead, says Rudi Gernreich, but it's okay to wear his clothes if you take out the labels.
- 20 **Olympics on Ice**
By Dorothy Fields
Sapporo, Japan, gears up for the '72 Winter Games.
- 23 **West Letters**
By the readers

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In his article beginning on page 6, Robert Blair Kaiser introduces us to that curious breed of sleuths who have devoted enormous energy to searching for a conspiracy in the deaths of JFK, RFK and Martin Luther King. Kaiser should know, for he himself was a member of the obsessed tribe. In preparing his celebrated book "*RFK Must Die!*" he revised his last chapter "to mobilize the public to do something, since the FBI, CIA and other agencies had dragged their feet." His article recounts how, after E. P. Dutton published his book in October of 1970, Kaiser did "my junior G-man thing, trying to find a conspiracy myself to explain what Sirhan did." His hopes have since been dashed, but even today a peculiar glint shines in his eyes when he discusses his long and futile hunt



Kaiser

for evidence of a conspiracy. Kaiser was particularly drawn to the case because of his personal admiration for Bobby Kennedy. They had first met during the 1960 Presidential race; the place was Phoenix where, he recalls, Bobby breezed into town as his older brother's "brash young campaign manager." Kaiser was then a newspaper reporter, having dropped plans to enter the Jesuit priesthood after 10 years of study. Clare Boothe Luce admired his work and introduced him to her husband; in due course Kaiser began a five-year stint with *Time* during which, while stationed in Rome, he won the Overseas Press Club's 1963 award for the best magazine reporting on foreign affairs. After quitting *Time* in 1966, he went to work on Tom Braden's campaign for lieutenant governor and got thick with "the Kennedy crowd." By 1968 he was a free-lance writer (Kaiser has contributed not only to *West* but to the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Playboy* "and everything in between"), and the morning after RFK's assassination *Life* assigned him to the Sirhan story. When his book came out two years later, he sent copies to such Kennedy stalwarts as Arthur Schlesinger, Pierre Salinger and Teddy White, all of whom "either sent it back or let me know they wouldn't read it. The title was too gruesome for them, and the whole memory caused too much pain." Kaiser believes that much of the public has similarly repressed RFK's death and that this, in part, explains the modest sales of "*RFK Must Die!*" (If alive, Kaiser thinks, RFK would now be President.) When he submitted his present article to *West*, what principally intrigued us was the ambiguous self-portrait the author had drawn. On the one hand, he described himself as at last freed from his obsessive belief that a conspiracy was involved; on the other hand, he could become a true believer all over again if even a minimum of evidence were to appear — or so we inferred from what he wrote. When we asked him about this apparent ambiguity, Kaiser agreed with the interpretation. "In the RFK killing," he said, "I was never able to prove a conspiracy, but I still think someone else may eventually be able to do that." As he spoke, the glint in his eye became a gleam.

PETER D. BUNZEL,
Editor of West Magazine
MIKE SALISBURY, Art Director
JAMES M. WIGGINS,
Executive Editor
JON CARROLL, Managing Editor
RUSSELL W. SCHOCH, Jr.,
Associate Editor
CHARLES T. POWERS, Staff Writer
PATSY GIBBS, Copyreader
JOE BALDWIN,
Art Production Manager
EDWARD CARBAJAL,
KIM NELSON, Art Department
MARNA SHERER, Editorial Assistant

West Magazine, a weekly publication, is owned by the Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Square, Los Angeles, California 90053, and is distributed exclusively each Sunday by the Los Angeles Times, which takes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or other materials received. Such submissions should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.



On the Cover

Costumes like this, says Rudi Gernreich (see page 16), are OUT; soon both sexes will be wearing the same thing: nothing. Multiples of "Chest," Allen Jones' dimensional relief, are available from kartcollection, Zurich.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE KILLING GROUND

The author of 'RFK Must Die' returns to reality

BY ROBERT BLAIR KAISER

"This is an obsession. And happy, typical Americans aren't obsessed. Jack Armstrong isn't obsessed. There's a fantastic way in which the assassination becomes a religious event. There are relics and scriptures and even a holy scene—the killing ground. People make pilgrimages to it. And, as in any religious event, what happened there isn't clear, it's ambiguous, surrounded by mystery, uncertain, dubious. I think there is a feeling with some of us that it has to be clarified. It's the symbolic status of it that's important. Somehow, one hopes to clarify one's own situation and one's own society by clarifying this"

Josiah Thompson, assassination buff

I first remember reading about the assassination buffs in a thoughtful piece in *The New Yorker* by Calvin Trillin. Trillin had scared me. He made it clear that the buffs—an underground network in obsessive pursuit of "the co-conspirators at Dallas"—threatened to consume themselves in a quest that was destined to end in doubt. Essentially, the buffs were hobbyists. In other, less troubled times, they might have collected stamps and read Agatha Christie. Now they were wrapped in a real game which, they fantasized, could get them killed. An exciting game for an exciting age.

At first the buffs worked in isolation, building their own research libraries, exhibits, mock-ups and blowups. Then they learned of one another's existence, began to compare notes, to canonize their own heroes, vilify their own villains. With the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Francis Kennedy, their numbers would increase. They would set up their own dues-paying organization, the national Committee To Investigate Assassinations, and produce a newsletter flagged with a provocative question next to its metered postmark: "Who Is Killing Our Leaders?"

Like the buffs, I, too, found it hard to believe that Oswald had acted alone, that he had changed the course of history because he had an argument with his life over a lousy washing machine. I refused to think life was that absurd. Somehow, it would be less absurd if Oswald were part of a Plan, anybody's Plan. But I was a Jack Armstrong. No obsessions for me. Let the authorities handle the case.

I made my resolve back in 1967, when, after five years with *Time*, I was building a new family and a new career as a writer with a name. I had a two-novel contract with New American Library, I had a free-lance contract with *Look*, I had made a beginning, to boot, in television news.

One year later, after the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles, where I lived, I put all that life aside and chose death. In Josiah Thompson's metaphor, I made a journey to the killing ground, collected the relics, pored over the

scriptures. In the metaphor of my native Arizona, I chose the conspiracy trail and rode it as far as I could and found that it led nowhere; as in the Black Mountain area of the Navajo Indian Reservation, I found box canyons within box canyons within box canyons. I met a good many quaint characters along the way, most of them quaint enough to be certifiably crazy. But at the end of the trail there was nothing: no waterfall, no Indian maidens, no mother lode. And there was no way out, except the way I had come, back over my own tracks, wishing I had something to show for my trouble other than an empty canteen, squinting curiously again at the crazies I had met on the way in, wondering at myself for ever having begun the journey at all.

This is the story of my journey, of my ride in and my ride out and what I learned from it all. It is a piece of self-revelation hardly calculated to make me look like a hero. Okay. I don't want to be a hero—any more—just accepted as a member of the human race, sometimes wise, sometimes foolish, sometimes weak, sometimes strong, almost always curious, often a damn fool.

June 1968. Los Angeles. Another Kennedy killed. "God, not again!" Anguish. But a reportorial challenge. I found a way of getting to the assassin and I took it. For all my reservations about the assassination buffs, I wanted to know more, more than I thought the officials would tell. Would I become a buff? Hell, no. I was just a curious reporter in search of the facts, all the facts. Maybe I'd even learn something close to the total truth.

So I talked with the assassin. I talked to him two or three times a week for seven months. I went into his cell with his psychiatrists. I tape-recorded his sessions with them, even his sessions under hypnosis. I found that the assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, could not remember killing Kennedy, that his declared motives for doing so didn't make sense, that he was evasive about his associations during May and June of 1968, that he was inordinately curious to know what certain of his friends had told the FBI. I judged that he was covering up for others, including a girl who was with him in the Ambassador Hotel, and I couldn't dismiss the evidence of the notebook discovered in his room: it was full of jottings indicating he associated the killing of Kennedy with a payment (or a promise of a payment) of money to himself.

Neither the Federal Bureau of Investigation nor the Los Angeles police were allowed to talk with the assassin, but they produced thousands of pages of reports on their reconstruction of the events at the Ambassador Hotel and on the persons they thought might shed some light on the case. They ended up with the same uncertain verdict as I. Privately, they were inclined to agree with Sirhan's own judgment (expressed twice to me in moments

wrong trail

buy in the streets

?

of unusual bluster) that the FBI had done "a lousy job of investigation." Publicly, they said there was "no conspiracy."

And so, when I had finished my research, I could not say I had gotten absolute answers. (That depressed me more than it should have. After you've learned the multiplication tables, do you ever attain absolute anything? Absolute truth, absolute justice, absolute love, absolute freedom?) But I had collected every available piece of data on the case and I had a duty, I thought, to set it all down in a coherent narrative history. I began writing what turned out to be a 634-page book called (ghastly title, a quote from the assassin's incriminating notebook) "*R.F.K. Must Die!*"

That's when I should have quit—when the book was finished. I made one stab at doing so; I tried to turn over my suspicions to J. Edgar Hoover:

... I wonder what your investigators think [I wrote to Hoover] about certain clues which point toward a conspiracy. I am not entirely convinced that Sirhan wasn't put up to this by somebody else and I have a few good reasons why I think so. Since I have talked to Sirhan and your people didn't, I assume my reasons might bear some examination.

But Hoover didn't want to hear them. I could hardly believe that. The vaunted FBI didn't want to know?

That made me mad. Maddened, I would go off on a bad trip, my conspiracy trip.

For some time, I had resisted the blandishments of some West Coast assassination buffs—Pete Noyes, Fernando Faura, Jonn Christian, Bill Turner—even though they were newsmen with a professional "license" to be curious. Now I started comparing notes with them, urging them to travel certain avenues of investigation with me traveling theirs. I was getting obsessed with the idea that if the FBI wouldn't carry this on, I would, that I could (with a little help from my friends) do what several hundred agents of the FBI and the Los Angeles Police Department could not do.

I took trips to a ranch near Corona, California, where Sirhan worked as an exercise boy. I interviewed friends of Sirhan whom he had tried to cover for. I poked into the privacy of some persons who, I fantasized, might have me killed. Once, before I interviewed a racetrack character in northern California, I visited the local sheriff's office, identified myself and said, "If I don't come back in two hours, you'd better come in with your sirens on." On the eve of my book's publication, I talked with Sheriff Peter Pitchess of L.A. and asked him to put a watch on my own home. He did, and when the deputies began making their rounds, flashing their spotlights into the house in the dead of night, my wife began to freeze with fear. She had special locks put on all the windows and doors.

Was I going beyond the bounds? In retrospect, I must say yes. I had forgotten, I guess, the injunction I used to hear on radio's old "Gangbusters." The announcer, I recall, used to read a list of the FBI's most wanted criminals and tell all of us 10-year-olds in the listening audience: "If you see any of these criminals, under no circumstances attempt to apprehend him yourself. Call your local FBI."

I was going too far in another sense, beyond my own standards of integrity. Balked by Hoover, I could have called quietly on other officials and given them my leads. Instead, I added a bit to the last chapter of my book to call for a reopening of the case. It was a play designed to draw attention from the fans in the bleacher seats. I think I did it in the great hope it would hurt J. Edgar Hoover (whose arrogance and unaccountability I resented) and in the small hope that the media attention would stimulate sales on a book that had already put me in a financial hole.

As it turned out, the public ho-hummed about "another conspiracy theory" (often failing to distinguish between the assassinations of JFK and RFK), and Hoover made only one counterattack on me (he implied that I had manufactured quotes from a Los Angeles FBI agent who, in fact, told me the case was still open) which the press ignored.

There was no public outcry and, with huge legal fees to pay after a suit by Sirhan to stop my book (because I wouldn't let him censor it), I have yet to make a nickel on "*R.F.K. Must Die!*"

The assassination buffs, however, loved me. That was something, but it was, I soon found, a love I could have done without. I traveled the country, doing the standard promotional bits expected of most authors these days, and the buffs would gather around. Some of them were fascinating, brilliant people, like a man I shall here call John Nelson of Dallas. In Dallas, Nelson took me to the killing ground, showed me all the famous points of reference: Lee Oswald's back yard, Jack Ruby's apartment, the spot where Officer Tippitt was shot, General Walker's living room window. And then he took me to his penthouse apartment.

Nelson's study was filled with card files and notebooks cataloging the most intimate, cross-indexed histories of more than 5,000 persons connected in the slightest way with the scenario at Dallas. Nelson had been near Dealey Plaza when the President was shot, he had a camera with him, he rushed over and started taking pictures. That started him on his own private inquiry, for he was saddened that such a thing should happen in his beloved Dallas and puzzled that the authorities couldn't get to the bottom of it all. I was impressed with Nelson's collection, in much the same way, I guess, I would be impressed with a man's collection of butterflies, or matchbooks. But here I began to wonder. This was a serious game he was playing and what was the use?

Nelson's shoulders seemed perpetually slumped, as if in defeat, and he was still comparatively young. The hours he'd expended to compile that mountain of data must have taken a toll on himself and, I guessed, on his business and on his family. I couldn't see that his investigation had gotten him close to Oswald's co-conspirators, and I found no names in his file on the JFK assassination corresponding to any of the names I had been collecting on the assassination of RFK. Yet Nelson told me he was afraid of reprisals against him and/or his family. He extracted a promise from me never to mention his name.

Other buffs embraced me. In New York, I met Paris Flammonde, the author of a book on the John Kennedy assassination, a bearded fellow blessed with an apparently total recall of every fact ever written about JFK and Dallas. Flammonde arranged a dinner for me with Bernard (Bud) Fensterwald, a Washington lawyer currently defending

put in book

take up call

who?

Ego in paranoian?

?

James Earl Ray who served, in his spare time, as the executive director of the Committee To Investigate Assassinations, and, later, with Richard Sprague, an aerospace engineer from Hartsdale, New York, also a board member of the CTIA.

These people represented, as far as I could tell, the best of the buffs. They were, in general, a suspicious lot, but they had a healthy respect for facts and a contempt for buffs (like Mark Lane) who cheated, and I was tempted to join their ranks. I was lonely out there on the conspiracy trail.

The mail I received didn't make me feel any less lonely. Each weekend, on my return home to California, I would find a small pile of letters from other buffs. A woman from New York claimed in a se-

The real mystery is why conspiracy theories appeal to us

ries of notes that Sirhan was part of a plot by British Israelis who were really Freemasons. A woman from Ohio sent me a manuscript detailing the Rosicrucian - CIA - FBI - right wing - military-industrial plot to kill RFK. And a wealthy lawyer from Oklahoma who had read all 26 volumes of the Warren Report wanted to finance further research (to be directed by me) on his theory that both Kennedys were the victims of a plot hatched by the Red Chinese.

I got at least a dozen communications from persons who were living in the expectation of imminent death because they "knew too much" about one or another of the assassinations.

One day, a man who will be known here as Jim Hall phoned me from Phoenix. Hall said he knew the man behind Sirhan. He'd seen the man's name in Sirhan's notebook (which I had reproduced in my appendix): "Stokeley." Maybe, I said to myself, this is the break I've been looking for. No one had known the "Stokeley" scribbled in Sirhan's notebook and Hall sounded like a sober, intelligent fellow. I made arrangements to meet him in Phoenix on my next trip east. Hall turned out to be obsessed with injustice. He said he'd been done in pretty badly by a group in Texas, one of them a man named Stokeley. Therefore, said Hall, Stokeley and his friends *must* have had something to do with the killing of both Kennedys. No other evidence. But Hall had put all of his paranoia on paper, in a small mimeographed book. Maybe I could help him sell it?

In the last chapter of my book, I had propounded—very tentatively—the theory that Sirhan may have been programmed through hypnosis to kill RFK and programmed to forget that he had been programmed. I elaborated the theory to help explain some unexplained bits of evidence: the repeated assertions in Sirhan's notebook that "RFK must die" as if he were repeating instructions from another; his extreme susceptibility to hypnosis; his blocking and locking whenever, under hypnosis, he was asked about his involvement with others; his unusual, almost trance-like behavior on the night of the assassination.

Using that theory as a road map took me into one box canyon after another. Since Sirhan had played around with the occult and had scribbled in his notebook mysterious notations about black magic, the Illuminati and the Master Kuthumi, I plunged, with some local buffs, into a study of California's occultists. We didn't find the Master Kuthumi, but there are certain local buffs still out there on the conspiracy trail, sincerely looking for him. That may be harmless enough.

Not so harmless is another buff named Theo-

dore Charach (pronounced sha-RACK), who has been trying for years to make it big in Hollywood and believes he is now on the verge of scoring with a film documentary which, he says, "breaks the case wide open." I first encountered Charach on my way up the conspiracy trail. He seemed determined to prove conspiracy no matter what the fact.

Charach proceeded in his research from a false premise: that Sirhan met Robert Kennedy face to face in the pantry and never got closer than two feet—and therefore couldn't have shot Kennedy behind the right ear.

Charach didn't know (or didn't care) about abundant testimony from others that Sirhan approached Kennedy from behind. It didn't fit his theory: if Sirhan was facing Kennedy and Kennedy was shot in the right mastoid, then Sirhan didn't shoot Kennedy, someone else did. JFK assassination buffs, who generally believe the President was caught in a cross fire at Dallas, liked that idea.

Who, then, was the other gunman? In the office of his attorney, Godfrey Isaacs, Charach told me it must have been a security guard hired for the night by the hotel. His name: Thane Eugene Cesar. Why Cesar? Because, it was in the official records, Cesar had drawn his gun in the pantry immediately after the shooting. He had admitted that he was behind Kennedy when Sirhan opened fire. Maybe, reasoned Charach, Cesar took advantage of the moment to kill Kennedy himself. But why? Charach interviewed Cesar and found that Cesar had voted for George Wallace. That did it. Logically, to Charach, anyone who voted for George Wallace had a motive to kill Senator Kennedy.

But did Cesar shoot Kennedy? No. The identifiable bullets recovered from pantry victims were all shot from a .22. Cesar had a .38 with him in the pantry. And, like everyone else in the pantry, he was startled and afraid when the shooting started. He fell to the floor, and stayed there until the shooting had stopped. Then he rose, pulled his gun and moved to Kennedy's side, "to protect the senator from further attack." With disgust, Bill Barry, Kennedy's aide, told Cesar, "Put the gun away. It's too late." It was all in the official reports of the police and the FBI, which were placed in evidence after the trial. And no one had seen anyone else shooting in the pantry.

Well, almost no one. Charach had some tape recordings, among them an interview given on the night of the shooting to reporter Ruth Ashton Taylor of KNXT, Channel 2 by a young man named Donald Schulman, a news runner for KNXT. Though Schulman's recollection was "fuzzy" he told Ruth Taylor he'd seen security men shooting back at the assassin.

I wondered what Schulman had actually seen or if he was even in the pantry. He wasn't on the police list of persons in the pantry. I guessed that Schulman was simply repeating some of the rumors that were flashing through the crowd that night at the Ambassador. One rumor: that the men who first jumped the assailant were Roosevelt Grier and Rafer Johnson. Another, that the assailant was a man named Jesse Grier. Another, that Kennedy was all right, that he was only shot in the knee. Another, that a security guard had shot the assassin dead. All of these stories were carried by UPI and reported on L.A. radio and T.V.—all were false.

So I dismissed Charach and his prize witness, Schulman. So, also, in the summer of 1970, did most of the newsmen of L.A. except for the editors of the *Los Angeles Free Press*. The only thing difficult to understand: why Cesar didn't sue Charach for libel. ("I didn't sue," Cesar told me recently in an interview, "because Charach doesn't have any money and suing to clear my name isn't worth the money it would cost to sue.")

Continued

Cut to the summer of 1971. I am coming off my conspiracy trip. I meet Charach once again and now he has not only his audio tapes but an hour-long documentary film, in color, which Charach says "proves" his theory of a cross fire in the pantry. Now here is the maître d', Karl Uecker, florid of face, babbling away about his moment of glory, insisting he stopped Sirhan well short of Kennedy. Here is a shot of a whirling tape recorder playing Cesar's words, out of context: in his interview with Charach, Cesar had told Charach he had a .38 revolver in the pantry, but, under prodding, described a .22 pistol he'd once owned, but sold in February 1968, before the assassination of RFK. Now in the movie, after judicious cutting and splicing, Cesar's voice appears to be describing the .22 he had in the pantry. Here is Schulman being interviewed by Charach on the Ambassador Hotel green. He is no longer "fuzzy," he's an expert eyewitness.

In fact, Schulman was not in the pantry at the time of the shooting. He was in the crowd back in the Embassy Room, where Kennedy had just spoken, standing next to Dick Gaither of KNXT and Frank Raciti, now a film editor at KNXT.

Charach has another star witness with more serious credentials. He is a veteran ballistics expert from Pasadena named William W. Harper. Under Charach's urging, Harper had visited the County Clerk's office and examined the evidence bullets from the Sirhan trial. Two of the bullets, Charach said he said, didn't match.

Apparent corroboration, therefore, of Charach's two-gun theory. Two bullets that didn't match. Therefore, two different guns banging away in the pantry. Where was the other gun? Charach said the police had destroyed it, but he had evidence of its existence in the trial exhibits. It was a gun with the serial number H18602 and its number was written right across people's exhibit 55 which contained three test bullets, supposedly fired from Sirhan's gun. According to LAPD criminalist DeWayne Wolfer, those three bullets matched those taken from victims in the Ambassador pantry. But the serial number of Sirhan's gun was H53725 and the serial number on the jacket of exhibit 55 was H18602.

Wow! According to that "evidence," the pantry victims were not shot by Sirhan's gun but by another gun. The implications of that were absurd. Gun number H18602 was a test gun, also an Iver-Johnson .22, which the police used for powder burn and decibel readings. The police had this gun on the night of the assassination. They had taken it on March 18, 1967, from a young man named Jake Williams and kept it in property until June, 1968. Wolfer used that gun for his test and wrote down its serial number by mistake, a stupid mistake, but nothing more than a clerical error.

What about Harper's conclusions? I went to Harper. Harper said he wasn't sure. He'd compared those two bullets to each other (but *not* to the test bullets in exhibit 55) by means of photographic blowups. He said he'd rather have the opportunity to do some further studies, to use a comparison microscope and compare those bullets to the test bullets in exhibit 55 and to a new set of test bullets taken from a new test firing of Sirhan's gun. Then, he said, he could make a final judgment.

All together, then, Charach's "evidence" is non-existent, flimsy or uncertain. With it, however, he is able to produce (and finance!) a movie. And more. With it, he persuades the Sirhan family to dismiss their appeals lawyer, Luke McKissack, and hire Charach's own attorney, Isaacs. He hopes that on the basis of Charach's evidence he can get a new trial for Sirhan.

Sad to say, the court system in California may have to spend yet more time adjudicating this baseless claim. In fact, the state has already spent time

and money doing so. District Attorney Joseph Busch ordered an inquiry into the substance of Charach's assertions. His investigators found none. Privately, they gave Wolfer bad marks for bad bookkeeping and Cesar all the sympathy they could muster for the bum rap of the year, if not the decade—for Cesar didn't shoot Kennedy, and he wasn't a right wing radical, as Charach claimed, but simply a plumber and part-time security guard who had voted for George Wallace and once contributed \$3 to the Wallace campaign.

The D.A.'s investigators also found pretty poor security in the County Clerk's office; and a county grand jury gave the clerk a public reprimand for his "misfeasance in office." Almost anybody, it

At least 12 people lived in fear because they 'knew too much'

seems, could have gotten to certain trial exhibits and done almost anything to them, even, perhaps, to the evidence bullets themselves.

Eventually, if the popular wisdom persists in impeaching the integrity of the official ballistics examinations, officials will do some new tests of Sirhan's gun and compare the slugs to the bullets in evidence. By then, of course, the buffs will be off on some new track. And the conspiracy trip will go on.

*B*ut not for me. I am off that trip now. I don't know whether there is a conspiracy or not. I never did *know*, but I thought that some day I might. Anyway, I am tired of dealing with death. I'd like to start living again in the present.

And the people I meet in the ranks of the buffs depress me. I encountered a brace of buffs recently, waiting to testify before the grand jury. All of us had been called because our names had appeared on the clerk's records as viewers of Sirhan trial exhibits. I saw that one of the buffs was carrying a copy of my book, and I was pleased—until the young man started talking to me. Then I realized he was crazy. Charach was there, chortling at his success in getting a part of the case reopened and boasting that he "got the case for Godfrey Isaac." Other buffs assaulted me with "new facts" which weren't facts at all but conjectures and imaginings calculated to feed their bias against "the system." I couldn't see that their hobby was doing them any good at all, maybe a good deal of harm.

I still get mail from buffs and potential buffs. There is an honest, hard-working fellow from Detroit named Harry Kruk, who is yearning to de-program a hypno-conditioned Sirhan (or see that some other expert does so). Kruk's hobby is hypnosis, and he can demonstrate, he says, that almost anyone can be programmed to do anything.

Bud Fensterwald, a man of heart and wit, keeps in touch. I have refused to become a member of the board of the CTIA, but he keeps writing and phoning and asking me to check up on obscure persons and movements which the underground network suspects of perfidy. I had lunch with Fensterwald not long ago in Los Angeles while he detailed some "new leads," then accompanied him to the headquarters of the Scientology movement in L.A. where we wasted two hours seeking information about a strange new Satanist cult called The Process.

*W*hen I am not being a died-in-the-wool, full blown, damn fool, paranoid assassination buff, however, I hold no hopes that I will ever "solve" the mysteries of either assassination. Deep down, maybe I still hope that someone can put the pieces together and, bigger job, prove it all in a court of

law. But I don't think I'll be able to do it. The best I can hope for is to understand how it was that I ever believed I could, and why I thought I needed to do so.

This could be an adventure in the exploration of inner space, one that would lead me into the labyrinthine ways of my own psyche where I could palpate my primitive need to have explanations for the unexplainable, even if the explanations must be cast in the form of myth and legend. In my youth, I met these needs by immersing myself in the rationalistic mysticism of the Jesuit Order. When I left the Order some 13 years ago, I thought I had outgrown the need. Now I am not so sure: the hunger for meaning is still there; the chaos of the '60s and the '70s only intensifies the emptiness inside. Either I learn to live with chaos or I manufacture new myths.

This is nothing new. The Roman poet Virgil presented us with an elaborate analysis of our own myth-making propensities in a long passage of the *Aeneid* personifying Dame Rumor. But modern scholars (with the minor exception of Gordon Allport in his thin study on *The Psychology of Rumor*) have paid far too little attention to these weird workings within many of us.

I do not believe I have been alone in my needs. Gallup polls continue to reflect a general, even majority belief that there was a conspiracy to assassinate two Kennedys and a King, and the popular song, "Has Anybody Here Seen My Friend John?" only serves to underline the general acceptance of a legend which, if anything, is still growing among us.

Those who have a hard time living with chaos refuse to accept the judgement that Oswald and Ray and Sirhan were "just crazy." And so, undeterred by lack of any evidence that would stand up in a court of law, they concoct fantasies out of the available facts, and/or their pet hatreds and fears at a time in history when there is a bull market in both. Thus, the plot is either left wing or it is right wing, big business or Mafia, the CIA, the FBI or the Pentagon, Zionist, Third World, the occult or, even, Getty, Onassis, Johnson, the Kennedy family itself, the Catholic Church, the Masonic Order. Everyone, it seems, has his own favorite co-conspirators; some manage to combine many or all in a plot that becomes rather vast.

Before one smirks and begins to feel superior to these simpletons, he had better examine his own deepest feelings. Glenn Akers, a student of contemporary folklore in Los Angeles, found one or another of these "co-conspirators" I just mentioned above lurking under the surface consciousness of *all* of the respondents he polled recently regarding the assassination of John Kennedy. He did his research in a sample of students, faculty and staff at San Fernando Valley State College. And some of his respondents expressed belief in another Kennedy legend: 42 percent of those polled by Akers have heard the story that John Kennedy is still alive and believe that the legend has some plausibility.

I don't think it does any good to call such beliefs "sick" in order to dismiss them. Such belief may, in fact, be a kind of emergency therapy, self-applied. Belief in a legend that Kennedy is still alive may help assuage the folk where they hurt the most, and half belief in a conspiracy may provide temporary answers where no answers exist.

In fact, as I explore my own inner space (a grueling affair), I am sometimes tempted to go back to that search for the easier answer, the whole conspiracy thing. If Fensterwald phoned me tomorrow and asked me to meet him at midnight in the middle of a swamp 14 miles outside Pascagoula, Mississippi, I'd probably grab my trenchcoat and catch the next jet headed south.