

ALONE ON AN ELEPHANT WILLIAM EASTLAKE

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LETTERS

Cook on Cohen

Interlaken, N. J.

DEAR SIR: It is unfortunate that Jacob Cohen did not take the trouble to read with greater care, or to interpret with greater scrupulousness, the account of the Kennedy assassination that I wrote for *The Nation* [issues of June 20 and July 11]. . . .

Cohen leaps, by a process of logic that baffles me, to the conclusion that I hold the autopsy report in the Kennedy assassination to have been falsified. I have not said so nor am I convinced at this point that it was. There are certainly peculiar circumstances surrounding it—and surrounding the suppression of the missing X-rays and pictorial evidence—and all of this is food for suspicion. That is all I pointed out, and for a very good reason. There may be, in part at least, another explanation—that some of the autopsy work, like much else in the investigation, was bungled.

The testimony in the record describing the autopsy certainly indicates that the pathologists could not get a probe through the back neck wound. In researching my own article, I checked with a doctor friend who had interned and been a resident at Bellevue. He had assisted in autopsies performed by Dr. Milton Helpern, New York's chief medical examiner, and Dr. Gonzalez, the great expert who preceded him. My friend's explanation was this:

When the President was first wounded, he had his hand up waving to the crowds; this meant that the muscles of his back would be drawn up to some degree. In death, with his arms at his sides, these muscles and tissues would fall back into their normal place, closing the path of the wound. Expert criminal pathologists like Dr. Helpern or Dr. Gonzalez, faced with this kind of problem, would work the arm up and down until they had re-created the position of the tissues at the moment of impact—and then a probe would slip through, establishing an exact trajectory. My doctor friend says he has seen this kind of examination performed many times in Bellevue. You can, he says, be an expert pathologist, but criminal pathology is a specialty of its own, and unless you are especially experienced in its techniques, it is easy to be baffled.

What we are left with, then, in the commission report is a trajectory as it has to be estimated from the autopsy findings, which do locate positively the entrance wound in the back and the exit wound in the front. I concentrated on these fixed and established points, the only details that are fixed and established, and again I think Cohen distorts my position when he says I "believe" the first bullet hit too low in the back to have exited from the President's throat and then hit Connally. It is not what I believe that matters, nor did I write for *The Nation* on the basis of a "belief." It is what the autopsy report specifically shows, and I would like to get that point across to Cohen.

Leaving all drawings and speculations about missing X-rays and photographs aside, Commander Humes's autopsy report specifically locates the wounds. The entrance wound was 14 centimeters, about 5½ inches, directly in from the tip of the shoulder joint; the exact same distance directly down from the tip of the mastoid bone, in the back just to the right of the spinal column. The exit wound in the neck was at the lower edge of the Adam's apple, nicking the necktie knot as the bullet passed. Now these are fixed points. You can measure them fairly closely on any normally constructed man of President Kennedy's approximate height and build; you can get a pretty good idea measuring on yourself. This is virtually a straight line through the body. I've

(Continued on page 156)

EDITORIALS

Deterioration

The American Dilemma is what Gunnar Myrdal called Negro-white relations in our country in 1944. If it posed dreadful problems then, when the Negro was relatively acquiescent in the status to which white America had consigned him, the present situation is truly fearful. If reason has not fled entirely, it seems to be in rapid retreat, with stupidity and violence ready to take its place.

The actions of the Congress are usually a fairly accurate reflection of the temper of the dominant interests in American society; if this is the case now, the outlook is ominous. After twelve days of often bitter debate, the House has passed another civil rights bill, which faces Republican opposition in the Senate and a possible filibuster by Southern Democrats. Those parts of the bill which deal with desegregation of housing and schools have been rendered ineffective. Title VI would have authorized the Attorney General to file school desegregation suits without request by citizens in the districts involved. This has been nullified; to a large extent the open-housing section has received similar treatment.

But if little has been accomplished on the constructive side, the House has prepared a witch's brew to further poison race relations and substitute repression for whatever hopes of conciliation remain. As if existing anti-conspiracy statutes were not enough, the House accepted by voice vote an anti-riot amendment to the civil rights bill which could send to prison anyone who travels interstate or uses any interstate facility—including the mails—for any civil rights action which results in civil commotion. Rep. William F. Ryan protested that the House had lost sight of the purpose of Title V of the civil rights bill, which was designed to broaden federal criminal laws against intimidating or harming persons pursuing their rights under the Constitution. The House has instead legitimized the white backlash in its most fanatical form. It gives Negro leaders the choice between ceasing demonstrations and risking jail if disorder—with or without their sanction—occurs.

A Cuyahoga County grand jury went a step further in a move which may well resuscitate the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It charged that the racial violence in Cleveland during June and July "was organized and exploited" by "trained and disciplined professionals," some of whom are either members or officers in the Communist Party. In the South, of course, the identification of Negro rebellion with communism has long been accepted doctrine, but Northern officials have for the most part steered clear of an accusation so patently spurious. That the Communists would like to organize the Negro masses is obvious but that they have never succeeded in gaining a following is equally obvious. Someone has said that the Negroes who rioted and pillaged in Watts didn't know socialism from rheumatism; it is equally true in Hough. After this attempt to reignite the Red hunt, the grand jury made a passing reference to Negro poverty and frustration but even this was coupled with accusations that it was all set off by agitators.

Subsequently, two Cleveland policemen who are alleged to have infiltrated the Communist Party testified that they