



TREASURY DEPARTMENT
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20220

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF

May 5, 1964

4

Mr. J. Lee Rankin
General Counsel
President's Commission on the
Assassination of President Kennedy
200 Maryland Avenue, N. E.
Washington, D. C.

Attention: Mr. Slawson

Dear Mr. Rankin:

Reference is made to your letter of April 22, 1964.

Reverend Walter J. McChann was interviewed April 30, 1964, by Inspector Kelley. He is a 26 year old priest presently attending Loyola University, New Orleans, and is a lifelong resident of Dallas, Texas. He spent a number of Summer vacations in Mexico and has a fair command of the Spanish language, and has acted as the chaplain of the Cuban Catholic Committee of Dallas since 1961. The Committee contacted employers in an attempt to find places for Cubans to work. It organized religious and social functions in order to make Dallas a friendly place for the Cubans who were sent there. In 1961 the organization had no funds and solicited funds among the people of Dallas.

In March 1962 the Cuban Catholic Committees held a meeting in Miami which Father McChann attended. At that time the Catholic Relief Service set up a revolving fund for the Cubans in Dallas to furnish them relief until jobs could be found for them. A resettlement office was opened in Dallas and Father McChann was given the responsibility for the conduct of the office. Joaquin Insua, a Cuban, who was hired to take care of the office is still an officer in the Cuban Relief Committee at Dallas. Father McChann stated that he never attended any of the political meetings of the Cuban groups that were represented by the Cubans in

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Dallas, although he was often cajoled and entreated to attend them. He felt that it was a better policy for him to remain aloof from the differences of opinion that occurred among the various Cuban groups represented by the Cuban population.

Father McChann stated that during his work with the Committee he came to know Mrs. Connell who was interested in assisting in the work of the Committee, and who was especially interested in the welfare of Mrs. Sylvia Odio, in view of Mrs. Odio's mental condition.

He acknowledges knowing Mrs. Eugene Link, Albert Tamaya, Marcella Insua and Hector Isquerivó, all of whom he met during his work with the Cuban Catholic Committee. He also acknowledges knowing Colonel and Mrs. Castor. He said Colonel Castor is a retired Army Colonel. Mrs. Castor seemed generally interested in the plight of the Cuban refugees, but that he always felt that Colonel Castor was "playing the role of an intelligence officer" in his contacts with the Cubans; that he seems to be more interested in their political beliefs than their economic plight or their social problems in the new country. He stated that he was introduced to John Martin (Juan Martin) whom he described as a Latin but not a Cuban. He stated that Mr. Martin came to Mrs. Sylvia Odio's apartment one evening while he was there. Mr. Martin did not stay very long and after he had left Mrs. Odio stated that Mr. Martin represented a Cuban group or was doing a job for a Cuban group in Dallas. Father McChann was under the impression that Martin had an apartment or a house in Dallas, but that he did not live in Dallas and had a family in some other city. He stated that this was his only contact with Martin but that Martin was apparently well known to Mrs. Odio.

Father McChann said that while he was interested in the Cuban groups in Dallas he was contacted about four or five times by Wallace Heitman of the Dallas Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He first made a contact with Heitman when it came to his attention that one of these Cuban refugees was extorting money from some other Cubans, was making false promises to the Cubans, was a disruptive influence in the Cuban community and was considered by Father McChann to be a "political Cuban" rather than a Cuban who was interested in

113

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

receiving any assistance from the Committee. He could not recall the name of this Cuban but he believes the Cuban is still employed at Parkland Hospital. The other contacts Heitman had with him were "drop-in" visits by Heitman when Heitman was in the vicinity of the Lakewood Building in Dallas. Heitman would stop and ask whether he knew of the existence of a certain Cuban or a Cuban group. He had always cooperated to the best of his ability with the FBI agents.

When asked concerning his knowledge of the "Jure" group among the Cubans, he stated that he knew very little about the various Cuban groups such as the Jure, the Students Revolutionary Directive or the Segundo Frente del Escambray. He stated that he knew of their existence but never became interested in their political views or their differences of opinion. He stated that the Catholic Cuban Relief Committee "cut through all these groups" and the assistance of the Committee was given to anyone that needed it regardless of their political views. He did state, however, that he knew that the Jure group supported Manuel Rey of Puerto Rico as the successor to Castro. He stated that he considered Jure to be a rather militant group and that he had been informed by Sylvia Odio that they had frequently contacted her requesting her to give them her support and to lend her name to their cause. He stated that Sylvia Odio told him that she wished to stay clear of this organization because the position of her parents in Castro's prison was very precarious. He stated that he had no recollection of Manuel Rodriguez, George F. Parrel or any of the officers of the Segundo Frente del Escambray coming to his attention in connection with his work among the Cubans.

He denied knowing anything about Lee Harvey Oswald prior to November 22. He stated that sometime in December 1963 Sylvia Odio informed him that a group of Cubans had brought Oswald to her apartment. She told him she discussed this matter fully with FBI agents early in December. Subsequent to his living in New Orleans, Sylvia Odio had written a letter to him in

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

- 4 -

*but on 9.6 - she
said she didn't see the
Oswald in her presence -
T.H. didn't get with the
any told by Mr. C. M. -*

which she again stated that she had discussed her meeting of Oswald with Government officials. Father McChann was not certain whether she meant that she had had another discussion with the FBI or whether she had talked to someone else about the subject. He felt that Sylvia Odio's aggravated mental condition since November 22 was caused by her concern that the Cuban community might become involved in some way with the assassination in view of their association with Oswald shortly before the assassination. (She fainted at her employment when she learned of the assassination of President Kennedy and the arrest of Oswald.) However, he stated that she is inclined to be highly dramatic and she may be building up her belief in an association with Oswald out of all proportion to what it was, if, in fact, there was any. He believed that any association with Oswald was extremely limited and confined to the one instance in which Oswald is alleged to have visited her home with a "group from the Jure". He denied ever having a discussion with Sylvia Odio as to the identity of this group and denied ever hearing the name Leopoldo mentioned other than in connection with this visit. He did state, however, that it is inconceivable that Oswald was brought to Sylvia Odio and introduced to her by anyone from the Jure other than someone well known to her. He said a man by the name of "Alentada", who is said to be the representative for the Jure group in Dallas, would know who was active in the group. Alentada is said to be a Certified Public Accountant in Dallas and frequently came to Mrs. Odio looking for help for Jure.

Sylvia Odio is described as about 26 years of age who now lives with her three small children and her sister, Sarita Odio, (single, 23 years of age) at 4223 West Lovers Lane, Dallas, Texas, telephone FL 7-6878. Another sister, Annie Laurie Odio, (single, 18 years of age) is now living in Miami.

Father McChann says he did not know Sylvia Odio prior to March 1963 when she came to Dallas from Puerto Rico, but that he knew her sister, Sarita, in connection with the Cuban

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

Relief Committee, and that he also knew her younger sister, Annie Laurie, who was attending school in Dallas prior to Mrs. Odio's arrival. He stated that when Mrs. Odio arrived in Dallas, although she was ill for the first few months, she made the acquaintance of persons like Mrs. Connell who introduced her to some very prominent people in Dallas. None of these people assisted Mrs. Odio financially and the family at that time was supported by funds furnished by the Catholic Cuban Committee and by selling some of the possessions they had brought with them from Puerto Rico, such as gold coins, jewelry, etc.; they were living a very meager existence and when the children arrived from Puerto Rico there was a real strain on their financial resources. Their situation was complicated by Mrs. Odio's mental condition which required psychotherapy periodically.

Father McChann was requested to call Mrs. Odio in an attempt to secure from her the name of the Jure representative who accompanied Oswald. He agreed to place the call, stating that if he could not induce her to tell him who the people were, he could induce her to tell it to the proper authorities. He said Sylvia Odio would be reluctant to give any information which might compromise her position among the Cubans or which would result in the Cubans being embarrassed or in any way connected with the assassination. This, of course, is not quite consistent with her informing others in December that Oswald was brought to her by members of the Jure.

Father McChann stated that it was the duty of every citizen to cooperate to the fullest extent in the President's Commissions's investigation and that he felt he was bound in conscience to give whatever assistance he could. He said he did not feel he was violating a confidence in giving any information previously given since he had been informed by Mrs. Odio that she had discussed this information with the proper authorities. He did not realize at the time that she had not made a full and frank disclosure of the names of the people who brought Oswald to her.

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

Father McChann said he did not feel he could call Mrs. Odio in the presence of Inspector Kelley and that he would prefer to talk to her privately. It was agreed that he would call Mrs. Odio shortly after 6:30 pm, Central Standard Time, April 30, and he was furnished the necessary funds to make the call. Upon his return to Inspector Kelley's room about 7:30 pm, he said he had made the call to Mrs. Odio in Dallas and she was very anxious to discuss the entire matter. She advised him the only information she could provide on the people who visited her was that one of them said he was using the code name of Leopoldo, that the second man she could identify as Eugenio Cisneros, and the third man was introduced to her as Leon. She said Leon did not use the name of Oswald in her presence but that she recognized him after November 22 as being the same man who was arrested for the assassination of President Kennedy. She further described the men as being "greasy looking Cubans -- more like Mexicans than Cubans although they did not have Mexican accents". She stated they said they were members of the Jure and they had a letter in Spanish which they wished her to translate into English, for the purpose of sending copies of this letter to United States companies to secure funds for their cause. She further stated that in the course of the conversation the man she now identifies as Oswald spoke "a couple of words in Spanish" and further, that the others informed her that they were going to make a trip. These men did not enter her apartment or sit down. She said she was a little afraid of them since she did not know them, although they used the underground code word names of her father and mother and seemed very familiar with her family and conditions in Cuba. Her sister, Annie Laurie, who was now in Miami, was baby sitting with Mrs. Odio's children that evening. Mrs. Odio was ready to go out and she never did ask the visitors to sit down. The entire conversation she had with them was in the doorway of her apartment at the Crestwood Apartments. She is not able to fix the date any better than sometime in September of 1963.

TRIP

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

Mrs. Odio said she refused to assist them in their project of translating the letter saying she had no time to get mixed up in the affairs of the Jure. They left saying that they would be in touch with her again. The man she says was Leopoldo called her the next day and in part of the conversation he told her that Leon was willing to do anything; that he had laughed at the Cubans saying they had no "guts" and that it would be easy to kill Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs invasion. Mrs. Odio said that when the group first came to the apartment they asked for her sister, Sarita, and when they were told that Sarita was not there but that she was Sylvia, they said "Well, you are the one we wanted to talk to anyway".

Sylvia further said that she did not tell everything to the FBI because they did not ask her these questions. She said she felt that the FBI interviewed her improperly in that they came to her place of employment and asked about her and interviewed her there, and it became a source of embarrassment to her and she later quit her job at the Chemical Company partly on this account.

Father McChann insisted that in the latest conversation, and in most of the conversations he had with Sylvia about this matter, she insisted that the man she identified as Oswald had a mustache, or at least he had not shaved recently; that he was "disgusting looking" because of his dark beard and unkempt appearance.

In response to a question concerning a telephone call Mrs. Odio is alleged to have made to New Orleans in recent months, Father McChann said that she had never called him in New Orleans but Sylvia had an aunt and uncle in New Orleans. He identified the uncle as Dr. Augustine Guitart, a physics professor at Xavier University in New Orleans. He knows that Mrs. Odio frequently calls Dr. Guitart as he has been in Guitart's home on occasions when she called. He said Dr. Guitart has engaged in no political activities among the Cuban groups in New Orleans or Dallas insofar as he knows.

Mr. J. Lee Rankin

Father McChann was asked whether he had an opinion as to whether Sylvia Odio actually saw Oswald on the night he is alleged to have visited her home with "Leopoldo" and Cisneros. He replied that he is skeptical of this story. Sylvia did not mention this visit to anyone until after November 22, and he has a strong feeling that either because of her mental condition she now believes the third man in the group was Oswald after seeing his photographs and after reading the newspaper accounts about him, or that she may, because of her crying need for recognition, be attempting in this way to associate herself with a spectacular event. Father McChann said, however, that while she is a very mature, intelligent person, this may be a subconscious reaction on her part and she may not be able to accept or perceive the actual truth herself.

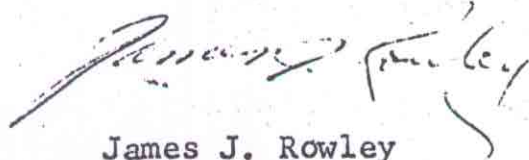
Father McChann said that Mrs. Odio had expressed a desire to him to be interviewed saying that she will be perfectly frank in any interview with the authorities; that she is most anxious to clear the matter up and will cooperate wholeheartedly in any inquiry and give her recollection of the matter to the best of her ability. Father McChann says that it is his opinion that she will be entirely cooperative in an interview and will be as honest as her current mental condition will allow her to be.

In her telephone conversation Mrs. Odio told Father McChann that John Martin is a Uruguayan who is supplying arms purchased in some South American countries to some Cuban groups.

Mrs. Odio is now employed as a secretary at the Kroll Associates in Dallas and has requested that any interviews in connection with this matter be at her home, or at some place other than her office.

Father McChann appeared to be very cooperative and friendly and expressed a desire to be as helpful as possible in securing the cooperation of Mrs. Odio.

Very truly yours,



James J. Rowley