The Giancana Connection

Take the whole long saga of mob links to Sen. Sam Giancana. The Church Committee established in 1973 that the CIA tried to use Giancana's mob connections to influence a political victory for Father Frank Cullotta. The mob had gambled buying interest in Castro's government.

But Hersh says that the Kennedy's had an earlier connection with Giancana. Because the Illinois vote for Kennedy in 1960. The foundation for the Kennedy-Giancana alliance was laid in the 1950s, when Judge Tuohy was sometime in the office of the Godfather.

Two. The Giancana Connection

Hersh tells us that anyone who owned the Merchandise Mart in Chicago had to have a connection with Giancana. Many have been told by someone who owned the Merchandise Mart in Chicago that they wanted to give the mob a break. In 1960, the judge released the record that the mob had ties to Giancana.

But if one believes, as Hersh says he does, that Joseph Kennedy had ties to the mob, how can one go on to believe three other things he alleges?

First, Hersh says that no other candidate could have been elected President in 1960. The election has been studied from every angle, but no one has ever come up with a plausible theory that would be accepted by the public. The only way to rule out Giancana is to exclude him from the list of possible candidates.

Second, Hersh says that the Kennedys had an earlier and continuing tie with Giancana, who was convicted in 1960. The foundation for a Kennedy-Giancana connection was laid in the 1950s, when Judge Tuohy was sometime in the office of the Godfather.

Third, Hersh says that Kennedy was involved in a conspiracy to fix the 1960 election. He bases this on the fact that Kennedy had ties to the mob, and that the mob had ties to Giancana. But Hersh does not provide any evidence to support this claim.

Conclusion: Hersh's allegations are unsupported by evidence and are therefore invalid.
used her story to spuce up a TV show about her father, which no one took as evidence until Hersch came along. It would be reassuring to think that Hersch’s treatment of the Giaconda connection was an exception to his book’s general unreliability. Unfortunately, it is entirely typical, and not even the worst case of flimsily substantiated claims.

Hersch runs through the itinerary of liaisons already reported—Mr. E. Exner, Inga Arvid, Mary Pinchot Meyer, Florence Pflicchert, secretary “Freddie,” and “Faddie” (Hersch, unlike some writers, does not give their real names), Pamela Parsons, Alice Dirr, Ellen Rometsch, Suey Chang, Maria Novakaty. This topic has been thoroughly gone over and he has nothing but further detail (some of it suspect) to add. A Secret Service man who broke his profession’s code to talk about Kennedy’s sex life gave Hersch an anecdote (investigative reporters love anecdotes) about the President’s wife deciding to use the White House swimming pool while the President was courting there with two women. The swimming pool is another route, leaving one large set of wet footprints and two small ones. The two other agents, also relied on by Hersch, say the President never had anything to do with the White House when his wife was there.

Nigel Hamilton, when doing research for his book on Kennedy, turned up records of his continual relationship with venereal disease. Hersch gives more detail on the problem (abortion and infection) and on the threat it posed to Kennedy’s sexual partners—including his wife. But the complications of Kennedy’s medical regime were best covered by Richard Reeves, who rightly said that health, not sex, was the real Kennedy secret. The President was taking cortisone for his Addison’s disease (cirrhosis is a libido booster) and penicillin for his recurring venereal disease—a kind of phallic merry-go-round. Since he was also taking painkillers for his back and the anesthetic painkillers given by Max Jacobson (‘Doctor Feelgood’), Kennedy was a walking druggist.

It was in the matter of Kennedy’s sex life that Hersch anticipated scoring his great coup, until it was learned that the records of Kennedy payments to silence Marilyn Monroe were forged. He cannot give up on Monroe, but he is as vague in most of his allegations as one first-hand account of a tryst he said he had with Monroe. Monroe herself, through Spoto and James Hillen, shows there is no evidence of even one sexual encounter with Monroe. Yet the ever-handsy Charles Spalding says the President dispatched him from the White House to California in order to keep Monroe from talking (though he says nothing of a payoff—what was he going to do to secure her? Kill her?). He found her in such pitiable condition that he took her to the hospital—in act not recorded in Spoto’s thorough treatment of Monroe’s hospitalizations in 1961 and 1962.

Spalding’s ‘confirmations’ of John F. Kennedy’s affair with Monroe are dubious, but Hersch cannot afford to challenge seventy-one-year-old Spalding’s reliability (though he does admit the man, who was on Dr. Max Jacobson’s staff in the Sixties, now has ‘impeachment of his short-term memory’)—since Spalding is the one person Hersch had to prove that Kennedy was secretly married in 1947 and perhaps never divorced, making bastards of John Jr. and Caroline Kennedy. Spalding knows there was a Kennedy marriage to Dulcie Malcolm in the Palm Beach, Florida, records, since Kennedy himself sent him to destroy the marriage record. Everything else about this ‘marriage’ is rumor based on an ambulance-chasing gemologist’s book of family connections. Louis L. Blackwell, who was sixty-six in 1947, added item 12,427 to his list sometime before his death in 1979. It is vague (and inaccurate) and he does not know Dulcie Malcolm’s birth date or how to spell her name, and he reverses the chronology of her first two marriages. There is nothing in Blackwell’s papers to show what he based his entry on. Hersch, again assuming what has to be proved, quoting of Blackwell that ‘in his evidence, whatever it was, no longer exists.’ (Did Spalding destroy the old man’s list as well as the marriage record?)

Hersch never bothers to ask why, having a minor Kennedy affair on his hands, he would be given to deliberate an assignation. Or, for that matter, why John Kennedy would have handled the matter. His father knew how to take care of such problems, and regularly did. He had tried operators for the purpose—once he investigated James U. Manifest, the lawyer Jack Miller, and Joseph Kennedy kept a close eye on his son’s activities through various shipping lines and casinos, and it is impossible that a woman would have escaped his close surveillance. (The idea that the wedding might have been a spurious attempt at marital adulteration is well-dismissed.)


5Ibid., pp. 489-494.

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the taperecorder, he and his brothers were speaking for the record while the rest were being given make-work to keep them from interfering with the real and only justice, the Kennedy brothers.

In one move, Kennedy isolated those men who could lead a public charge against his stewardship of state and left them to debate in private, while he and his brother struggled to reap political gain from a mess that had been triggered by their obsession with Cuba. The Ex Comm members, who included cabinet secretaries and establishment figures such as Dean Acheson, the hand-like former secretary of state, and Robert A. Lovett, the New York lawyer and financier, were kept busy plotting air strikes and planning invasions. But the real decision-making was done elsewhere.

It is true that Kennedy would engage in back-channel negotiation with the Russians, but the idea that Kennedy is just playing make-believe in the tapes of the Ex Comm discussions can be entertained only by someone who thinks he was supernaturally crafty and confident. Whatever he did had to be affected by those tense discussions. It is true he brought the missile crisis on himself with the plot against Castro. But he was in a trap with options sealed off by the very cold war climate he had helped to produce. Kennedy's re-election of every other aspect of the crisis, and of everybody else's role except Bobby's, is the extreme case of "investigative" blinding.

The same weak hold on political reality shows up in Hersh's treatment of domestic politics. He is so focused on the Kennedy brothers as filling the whole scene that he seriously claims that Bobby was plotting to replace Lyndon Johnson as his brother's running mate in the 1964 campaign. That would make no political sense. The South would be doubly offended—by Kennedy's luster and by the presumption of a man hithered in the South for his civil rights activities as attorney general. Most sensible people would resent the notion. The Democratic Party would surely resist being treated as a personal fiefdom. And Bobby was more useful at the time, where he could deal with J. Edgar Hoover from a position of law enforcement. Only a man who has lost whatever political sense he may have had could take such a scheme seriously.

The same is true of Hersh's claim that Johnson, with the help of House Speaker Sam Rayburn, blackmailed his way onto the ticket with Kennedy in 1960, threatening to reveal some dark secret if he were not given the job. Actually, of course, Johnson had used the blackest secrets—the Addison's disease—in an unsuccessful effort to eliminate Kennedy. He was not believed. That would hardly make him sanguine about the usefulness of further "revelations." Besides, how credible would any such threat be to Kennedy? Johnson could not make good his threat without defeating the Democratic candidate, incurring his own party's wrath, and destroying any future chance he might have at the presidency. Rayburn, who is supposed to have joined in this threat, was not believed. And it is obvious that Johnson had no such threat in mind.

The bower founding and fall-outs during the night of Johnson's choice reflected real hesitation on both sides and a final calculation, on both sides, of pragmatic advantage. Johnson had good reason to fear any loss of the power he wielded as majority leader in the Senate, and he could not be sanguine about good treatment from the president. Rayburn, who is supposed to have joined in this threat, was not believed. And it is obvious that Johnson had no such threat in mind.

It is an astonishing spectacle, this book. In his mad zeal to destroy Camorra, I am convinced, went too far, Hersh. In his own career and reputation.

The Three Kings

We'll arrive too late...

—André Frénaud, "The Three Kings"

If it hadn't been for the desert and laughter and music—we'd have made it, if our yearning hadn't merged with the highways' dust. We saw poor countries, made still poorer by their ancient hatred; a train full of soldiers and refugees stood waiting at a burning station. We were heaped with great honours so we thought—perhaps one of us is really a king? Spring meadows detained us, cowslips, the glare of country maidens hungry for a stranger's love. We made offerings to the gods, but we don't know if they recognized our faces through the flame's honey-gold veil. Once we slept down in sleep for many months, but dreams raged in us, heavy, treacherous, like surf beneath a full moon.

Practically nothing. Hersh dots make up his book. In his mad zeal to destroy Camorra, I am convinced, went too far, Hersh. In his own career and reputation.

The Three Kings

—Adam Zagajewski

(translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh)