

"R.F.K. MUST DIE!": A History of the Robert Kennedy Assassination and Its Aftermath

by Robert Blair Kaiser

Dutton, 634 pp., \$9.95

THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY: The Reasons Why

by Albert H. Newman

Clarkson N. Potter, 622 pp., \$10

Reviewed by Fred J. Cook

■ An ominous cloud stemming from the unprecedented series of assassinations in the 1960s hangs over American political life, and all evidence indicates no amount of wishful thinking will wash it away. We have been told time and again that President John F. Kennedy, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert F. Kennedy were each murdered by a single deranged man, each operating alone, and that in none of these cases was there any evidence of conspiracy.

But facts that will not die continue to cast doubt on the comfortable official rationalizations. And each new book, on one assassination or another, raises

the old disturbing questions—and poses new ones.

These two volumes in their different ways illustrate the process. Albert H. Newman, who scorns the works of all critics of the Warren Report, sets out to show that Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, assassinated President Kennedy, motivated solely by a fanatic Castro-Communist ideology. But his own researches lead him to conclude that Oswald did have co-conspirators in the prior attempt to assassinate ultra-rightist General Edwin L. Walker. He demonstrates that Oswald must have had contacts and associations never uncovered in the slipshod official investigations, and, in the end, his reconstruction of the events of that tragic day in Dallas reduces largely to the tricky process of trying to read from his own vantage point what was in the unfathomable mind of Oswald.

Robert Blair Kaiser's book is far more important, a kind of tour de force. One comes to it with a certain suspicion. Kaiser, it will be recalled, is the Los Angeles journalist who signed a contract with Sirhan Sirhan that gave him exclusive rights to Sirhan's story. He split his earnings with Sirhan, providing thousands of dollars for Sirhan's defense. In the circumstances, one anticipates that this will

be another one-sided, "authorized" version of events, but it is not. It is an honest book, one that so enraged Sirhan he tried to stop its publication; and, simply because Kaiser did have a unique inside vantage point, he is able to develop step by step the portrait of a character so weird he baffled psychiatrists, his own attorneys, and perhaps, in the end, even himself.

Kaiser builds the scene of what happened in that narrow, crowded kitchen behind the Ambassador Hotel ballroom in the early hours of June 5, 1968. Through eyewitnesses, he describes how a triumphant Robert Kennedy was rushed through the narrow, connecting passageway at a pace that outstripped his guards; how suddenly the thin, wiry Sirhan stepped forward, drawing his .22 caliber revolver; how he began to shoot; how he was tackled, thrown back against a metal table; how—his small body possessed of some frenzied, superhuman strength—he continued to fire, wounding five others besides Kennedy; how it took the combined efforts of a whole wave of rugged defenders to wrest the spent revolver from the iron grasp of this runt of a man.

Kaiser is no all-out conspiracy buff. He tries simply to present the facts as he found them. Not until almost the

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end of his story does he attempt any deep interpretation of those facts. He reports, for example, that eyewitnesses placed Sirhan about a yard away from Kennedy when he began to fire. It was close—but not close enough. The fatal wound, inflicted behind the right ear, seared the ear and neck with powder burns. Los Angeles police in subsequent tests with Sirhan's .22 decided such burns could be caused only if the gun were held almost against the skin, approximately one inch from Kennedy's head.

This discrepancy forms one of the major props of a citizen's suit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court this year, alleging that the fatal shot was fired, not by Sirhan, but by a man dressed as a guard who was seen holstering his own gun immediately after the shooting. Kaiser does not go into this. He accepts the Los Angeles police department's version that Sirhan alone did the shooting, though he accepts little else about the police investigation. Kaiser's preoccupation is with Sirhan himself, and the question that increasingly fascinates him is this: Was Sirhan his own man or the primed instrument of someone else?

If Sirhan was his own man, what was his motive? This weedy Arab refugee who had fired his gun in such a frenzy is the man who later said of Kennedy: "I'd vote for him for God." And: "I wish he were alive, sir, just to be President." Sirhan at his trial, responding to a psychotic need to picture himself as a hero, declaimed that he was an Arab patriot who had killed Kennedy because Kennedy had promised to send jet fighters to Israel. But Kaiser shows that Kennedy did not say this until May 26 (and in a virtually unreported speech at that)—and Sirhan had written in one of his note-

books on May 18, "R.F.K. must die!"

Those notebooks with their repeated assassination incantations represent another conundrum. Sirhan coolly insisted that he had no recollection of writing these injunctions to himself, though the handwriting was unmistakably his. How, then, had the words come to be written? Had Sirhan written them under hypnosis? Whenever anyone tried to get answers to such questions, a wall went up. Sirhan changed the conversation or he just wasn't talking.

Kaiser finds it significant, even if the authorities did not, that the "R.F.K. must die" adjurations are always accompanied by a mysterious mention of money. They would be followed by checklike scribbles. "Please pay to the order of Sirhan." One such message read: "Please pay to the order of Sirhan Sirhan the the the the amount of 15 15 15 death life 15. \$15,000. Must die. Die. Die. Die. Dollar sign. Life and death." Kaiser finds it exceedingly strange that such phrases "appeared nowhere else in the notebook—only on the 'Kennedy pages.'" And he finds it stranger still that Sirhan also wrote as if "he was repeating instructions to forget any promises of money: 'I never heard please pay to the order of of . . . this or that 80000.'" Kaiser adds: "Sirhan never could explain the references in his notebook to money. But where did the instructions come from? Sirhan or another?"

There are additional indications that Sirhan was acting under some kind of mysterious influence. After his arrest, a policeman beamed a flashlight into his eyes and found the pupils "were dilated and remained so . . . an indication that the gunman was either drunk or drugged." Later, when Sirhan was in his jail cell, a prison doctor saw him

hunch his shoulders and go into a mild shivering fit—a reaction that assumed importance later when a psychiatrist determined that this was precisely what happened every time Sirhan came out of hypnosis.

Dr. Bernard L. Diamond was the psychiatrist who probed Sirhan most deeply. He discovered that Sirhan was extremely susceptible to hypnosis. Under hypnosis he would write phrases identical to those found in his notebooks. Diamond also demonstrated that Sirhan would carry out a post-hypnotic suggestion. On one occasion, he instructed Sirhan to climb the bars of his cell after he came out of the hypnotic trance. Sirhan obeyed the order to the letter. And then finding himself, much to his own surprise, clinging to the bars, he explained that he was just exercising.

But Dr. Diamond's efforts to discover the reasons why failed. Even under hypnosis, Sirhan could not recall any of the events of the shooting. Under hypnosis he wrote as if Kennedy still lived; for him, Kennedy was not dead. There were strange, perhaps telltale blocks. Diamond asked him: "Did you think this all up by yourself?" Sirhan paused for five seconds, then answered: "Yes." Again, Diamond asked him: "Are you the only person involved in Kennedy's shooting?" There was another three-second pause before Sirhan answered: "Yes." As Kaiser notes, one of the most sinister aspects of hypnosis is that a subject can be programmed to act—and programmed to blot out of his mind all recollection of how he came to act and who instructed him.

On the investigative side, there was the mystery of the "polka-dot dress" girl. Sandra Serrano, a Kennedy worker, told authorities that this girl, accompanied by a man, came running down a fire escape after the shooting, crying: "We've shot him, we've shot him!" There were other witnesses, including Thomas Vincent DiPierro, son of one of the *maitre d's* at the Ambassador, who corroborated her story. But Los Angeles police could not locate any such girl. Baffled, resentful of the unceasing queries about her, they went to extreme lengths, playing off one witness against another, suggesting that what one witness said had been suggested to him by another, until they finally proclaimed in triumph that the polka-dot dress girl never existed. The handling of DiPierro especially incenses Kaiser. He finds DiPierro was one of the most accurate eyewitnesses; his story was exact and credible in every respect—but the police had to discredit him about the girl. There were other witnesses, credible witnesses, Kaiser finds, who had seen Sirhan, in the days before the assas-



"Charlie! Where do you want the computer?"

smation, attending Kennedy rallies with a mystery woman—but they, too, were ignored. The word was out, Kaiser writes, that there was to be “no conspiracy,” and the police investigation was tailored to that end.

Finally, he shows us that even Sirhan is wondering about Sirhan. Told that Dr. Diamond had made him climb his jail-cell bars, he is shaken and wonders whether he was like the original *hashshashin*, members of a secret Muslim cult who drugged themselves to commit murder. “It must have been something like that with me,” he murmurs.

Kaiser thinks so, too. He believes in the possibility that Sirhan was programmed by someone in a plot reminiscent of Richard Condon’s novel *The Manchurian Candidate*, and he quotes Robert LaJeunesse, the FBI agent in charge of the Sirhan investigation, as saying: “The case is still open. I’m not rejecting the Manchurian Candidate aspect of it.”

Turning from the second Kennedy assassination to the first, one finds Albert Newman hypothesizing that Oswald killed to make himself an ideological hero of Castroism. But, if so, why did he insist upon his innocence? Why did he call himself “the patsy”? He told Dallas police: “My wife and I liked the Presidential family. They are interesting people. . . . Nothing irritated me about the President.” It is almost like Sirhan speaking. Newman’s only explanation is that Oswald was waiting to make his big propaganda play at his trial.

There is no question about the thoroughness of Newman’s research, but it is a kind of blind-sided research, focused on a predetermined theory. Newman demonstrates that Oswald had thoroughly cased General Walker’s premises before his first, abortive assassination attempt; he concludes that Oswald had several co-conspirators who stationed themselves as lookouts and drove him to safety in a getaway car. But he argues that Oswald acted alone in the assassination of the President. And, in a sequence that really defies logic, he contends that Oswald intended to kill Walker after he had killed Kennedy and was on his way to do the deed when stopped by Patrolman Tippit. Yet Walker, as Newman admits, wasn’t even in Dallas.

Newman’s own researches create difficulties with his fine definition that Oswald had “co-associates” but not co-conspirators in the assassination. There is, for example, the mysterious business of *The Shark and the Sardines*. Oswald had borrowed this book from the Dallas library; it was not found anywhere in his effects afterwards, and the FBI established that the volume had not been returned. Yet

Newman, in his own investigation months later, found the volume back on the shelves. Who had had it? Who had returned it? There were no clues. The incident suggests that Oswald had other contacts, other relationships—ones that are still unknown. And Newman himself worries about what Oswald could have been doing, whom he might have met, on what he himself calls the crucial “lost weekend” before the assassination.

In a perverse way, then, this book, meant to explain “the reasons why,” raises its own questions. It is a pattern that has been repeated again and again—and in the most surprising circles—in recent months.

Senator Richard B. Russell (D., Ga.), a powerful member of the conservative Establishment and himself on the Warren Commission, shook up official Washington last January when he said in a television interview that he had always thought “someone else worked” with Oswald in planning the assassination. Former President Lyndon B. Johnson created another sensation in the spring when he expressed similar doubts about the Warren Commission’s one-assassin theory—and then persuaded CBS to delete his remarks from an hour-long taped interview.

Even Jesse Curry, the police chief of Dallas at the time of the assassination, has criticized the federal investigation and has expressed a number of private doubts in his *JFK Assassination File*. Curry is disturbed because a paraffin test of the right side of Oswald’s face, expected to show that he had recently fired a rifle, “did not reveal any nitrates from having fired a rifle.” He is disturbed because reports of two men appearing in windows on the sixth floor of the School Book Depository were never checked out. And he is disturbed because the Warren Commission gave full credence to its star witness, Howard Brennan, whose story Curry finds marred by a number of glaring inconsistencies.

In the light of all this, Newman’s casual dismissal of critics of the Warren Report as lacking in “common sense” indicts its author of the same failing. Newman, like the Warren Commission, assumes Oswald was the one and only gunman, and this assumption permits him to avoid any close look at evidence that might say otherwise. This is, perhaps, the only way still to give credence to the Warren Report,

LITERARY I. Q. ANSWERS

1 e, Cary; 2h, Cather; 3k, Conrad; 4 1, Steinbeck; 5j, London; 6g, Hardy; 7b, Cabell; 8c, Buck; 9i, Galsworthy; 10a, Maugham; 11 f, Lewis; 12n, Cooper; 13d, Faulkner; 14o, Hemingway; 15m, James.



for there are facts, when one looks, that make one wonder whether Oswald, however deeply he was involved in the mystery in Dallas, actually was the man who killed the President.

There is hard anatomical and physical evidence that indicates neither of the two shots that hit the President could have been fired from Oswald’s window. This evidence was presented in Federal Court in Washington, D.C., in February 1969, and was ignored by all the media. In an offshoot of Jim Garrison’s New Orleans case, attorney Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., argued for the release of the suppressed X-rays and photographs of the President’s body taken during the autopsy at Bethesda. In doing so, he presented evidence from two experts, both of whom had originally agreed with the conclusions of the Warren Report and both of whom, after further study, had been compelled, as one said, to “eat” their words.

The witnesses were Dr. Cyril Wecht of Pittsburgh, one of the nation’s leading forensic pathologists, and Robert Forman, chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Wisconsin State University. The FBI had postulated that the first shot to wound the President had entered his upper back and exited at his throat; the angle, if fixed from Oswald’s window, would have been a downward one of 17 degrees 43 minutes. However, the plane through the human body, as determined by the entry and exit wounds, is a level or slightly rising one; human anatomy establishes that. Furthermore, the Bethesda autopsy held that this bullet passed through soft tissues, striking no bone. Forman’s study demonstrated that this area of the body is a veritable bony thicket and the only possible free passageway would be on a level plane, passing slightly from right to left.

Dr. Wecht testified that this first shot, if fired on the downward angle calculated by the FBI, would have had to emerge “somewhere above or in the area of your left nipple”—certainly not at the Adam’s apple in the throat. And he found an even more serious discrepancy in relation to the final shot that exploded in the President’s skull. The most positive finding in the Bethesda autopsy, one of the most bungled affairs in medical history, was that this shot, striking hard bone at the back of the President’s skull, had been

fired on a downward angle of 45 degrees.

Yet the President's car had traveled another 150 feet down Elm Street between the first and second shots. This means that the angle must have flattened out. As Dr. Wecht testified: "When you have something closer to you, your angle is more downward. If that something moves further away, the angle begins to level out more. Therefore, I cannot understand how the first shot would have an angle of 17 degrees declination, and the second shot would have an angle of 45 degrees declination. I cannot understand this at all. . . . It just could not work out that way."

Wecht believed that Governor John B. Connally, Jr., of Texas could have been wounded by a shot fired from Oswald's window; that angle of fire agreed with the physical facts. But President Kennedy's wounds were incompatible with the proposition that the shots had been fired from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

Such, then, is the record to date of the two Kennedy assassinations and the investigations that followed them. Perhaps the last word should be given to that enigmatic and incredible character, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan. He told Kaiser that "the FBI did a lousy job of investigation [and] didn't know everything." What did he mean? What secrets may still be locked away in his twisted brain? Kaiser wonders—and so must the nation.

Fred J. Cook wrote "The Secret Rulers" and "The Corrupted Land."

**FRAZER YOUNG
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1420**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1420 will be found in the next issue.

E AEFH GT E DSVEK DXS

VEWZT E VEK NZXEPZ AGWZ

E MZKCAZVEK. —AHKZT

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1419

Human justice is different from God's justice, and generally opposed to it. —ANATOLE FRANCE.

**THE UNINHIBITED BYRON:
An Account of His Sexual Confusion**

by **Bernard Grebanier**

Crown, 354 pp., \$7.50

Reviewed by *Harvey Curtis Webster*

■ Considering that several hundred pertinent, spurious, anonymous, and pseudonymous books have been written about Byron, it will seem remarkable to many that Bernard Grebanier, "probably through some subtle association of ideas," decided to do yet another biography. In 1957 Leslie Marchand published an exhaustive and urbane biography in three long volumes (just reissued in a one-volume condensation) that seemed to have said all that needed to be. But, as Doris Langley Moore showed in 1961, there was more to be written about Byron's ambiguous love life if one had access to the Lovelace Papers, as Marchand did not—hence her book *The Late Lord Byron*. And both Mr. Marchand and Mrs. Moore wrote after Peter Quennell's seemingly definitive life and his two volumes of selections from Byron's autobiographical writings, *A Self-Portrait*. Still, as is shown by Peter Gunn's *My Dearest Augusta*, published last year, and this first of Professor Grebanier's projected two volumes, of presumed new interpretation of presumed new material there is no end in sight.

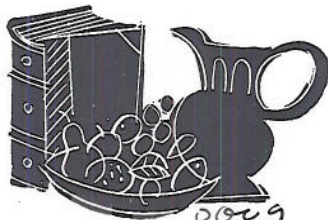
Professor Grebanier considers himself, apparently, the final sorter-out of Byron's love life. Certainly he tells more about it than any biographer who has preceded him. Quennell, Moore, and Marchand agree that Byron had ardent friendships with boys at Harrow. In *The Uninhibited Byron* friendships become promiscuous homosexuality at school and orgies of sodomy in Turkey, where, according to Professor Grebanier, it was socially acceptable.

Byron's relations with Caroline Lamb, with many servants, actresses, and ladies, and his love affair with Augusta Leigh, his half-sister, are dealt with expandedly and expansively. On the basis of *Don Leon*, a poem G. Wilson Knight believes George Colman wrote from his recollection of Byron's drunken confidences, Professor Grebanier shows further reasons for the unhappiness of Byron's marriage.

Like Mrs. Moore, Grebanier believes Byron was so addicted to sodomy that normal intercourse could not be more than momentarily satisfying to him, and that he consequently tried to force it upon his wife. She did not enjoy it as much as did the boys at Harrow, the other youths who succeeded each other

throughout Byron's life, the modern, liberated men and women, the lascivious young Turks, and Lady Caroline Lamb. This was Lady Byron's real reason for separating from him—she could more or less take in stride his incest with Augusta Leigh, accustomed as she was to dissolute Regency society.

All that Professor Grebanier says may be true. I do not believe he proves anything new about Byron's love life, although his speculations are certainly novel. He takes conjectures from the more prudent biographers who preceded him, and slips from "could" to "might" to "was" again and again in his



presentation of evidence, particularly in his use of Lady Caroline Lamb's novel about herself and Byron, *Glenarvon*, and of Colman's *Don Leon*. Though Professor Grebanier says that their accounts cannot be trusted totally, he does trust them totally whenever it suits his thesis.

All Professor Grebanier says may be true. I do not think his book does more than overstate, overexpand, and overspeculate upon what Peter Quennell, Mrs. Moore, and Leslie Marchand reveal in the perspective of his life and work. The mildly lascivious may be grateful that he gives the longest plot summary of *Glenarvon* I know of, and prints the entire text of *Don Leon*, a not very titillating piece of pornobiography. What serious students might find of value in Professor Grebanier's book is spoiled by his simplistic dependence upon the significance of Byron's sexual confusion and the trouble it may have given him and others. *The Uninhibited Byron* is not good scholarship, good popularization, or good pornography, and Professor Grebanier mixes them about as happily as honey, vinegar, and vodka.

After reading this book I found it refreshing to return to what Leslie Marchand wrote of Byron the man:

I have sometimes been asked what my thesis is. That always astounds me, and annoys me a little. . . . My only thesis is that Byron was a human being, shaped by the strange combination of his inherited traits and his unnatural upbringing, but essentially likable, disarmingly frank in his confessions . . . with a delightfully fresh observation of human character and human frailties and a unique facility for lucid and concrete expression. I