

14 August 1975

Dear Harold:

Thanks for yours of Aug. 5, responding to my suggestions about noting mysterious deaths. Of course, I have no objection to your showing the letter to your Masaryk-minded professor friend, or to Howard and Jim, but I would appreciate your making it plain that this whole business is exploratory and tentative, not to mention deliberately approached from a rather narrow perspective, to focus on a specific area.

Also, I mistakenly made the flat statement that an overdose of rauwolfia can be fatal. I'm convinced that's true, but can't prove it. The history of this particular error is interesting: following a rash of fatal and convenient heart attacks among Dallas witnesses, I began to firm up a suspicion that it was illogical not to allow for the possibility of an artificial cause. This suspicion was not new, just abruptly much stronger. So I began to look for any hint of such a cause. Never found any, of course, until a piece in Ramparts for November, 1967, made up of excerpts from a novel by John A. Williams called *The Man Who Cried I Am*, published by Little, Brown & Co. the previous month. This fictional account concerns a black activist agent in Europe who is offed by two other black agents who give him a post-mortem shot of his own morphine (he's an addict) and congratulate themselves that they don't have to make it look like a heart attack because heart attacks are too common. In the meantime the protagonist agent has prepared to defend himself with a high-pressure syringe which can inject a jet of rauwolfia serpentina through both clothes and skin, causing death within seconds. The usual autopsy report is death by heart attack, the story says. He never had a chance to use the rauwolfia.

John A. Williams is about as anonymous a name as you can find, and the story is written with great attention to detail, with no quibbling. In other words, the author conveys considerable authority both in his style and his details. I apparently considered it so convincing that I was left with little doubt about the deadliness of rauwolfia if deadliness is wanted.

Incidentally, our dictionary says rauwolfia serpentina is the name of an Asian herb, commonly called snakeroot, which was named after the German botanist who first described it, one Herr Rauwolf. Reserpine is the powdered drug derived from it.

I mentioned rauwolfia in the first place only as an example. It cannot be assumed that other and more concentrated, effective and easily synthesized and disguised drugs could not have been developed, suitable for administration via bullets, gas (aerosol cans?) and even dissolving darts fired from high-pressure and miniature guns. The curare blowgun brought up to date.

The most recent potential candidate for the convenient heart attack is of course George Busch, the Los Angeles D.A. who long held out against discoloring the results of the LA pox investigation findings of Bobby's assassination, then finally relented and said, although he still did not believe there was a conspiracy, he would no longer oppose a full investigation. The LA county board now has ordered his successor to proceed (see the enclosed clipping) and it'll be interesting to see what, if anything, happens to him.

An earlier ~~max~~ candidate, whom I didn't get around to mentioning, was Whitney Young Jr., the NAACP wheel who in 1971 was beginning to retrace Malcolm X's footsteps through Africa with the implicit possibility of uniting blacks outside this country with those within it. He died while swimming at a Nigerian beach. The Lagos autopsy said he had a heart attack. Another autopsy after his body was returned to New York said there was no evidence of the kind of heart attack he was supposed to have suffered, and that he died by drowning although he knew how to swim and wasn't submerged for more than 90 seconds. Nixon attended his funeral.

---

This will be the first mail sent to your new route number.

JFK Assassination Secrets doesn't grab us sufficiently as a subtitle for Post Mortem, especially in view of the things you say the book will go into. "Secrets" is accurate but not suggestive enough. Seems here that something along the line of The Collapse of the JFK Assassination Coverup, or The JFK Assassination Coverup Collapses, Crumbles, or Comes Apart, give a little clearer idea of the ground you're covering. We don't like any of these either, but feel that "Secrets" doesn't tell it. If we come up with anything else that looks the least bit possible we'll send it along.

Best to you both,

  
Ujdw