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Cloak and stagger

When Richard Nixon's press people categorized the Watergate intrusion as a third rate burglary they were absolutely right. With the resources available it ought to have been a first rate burglary.

That it was not tells us a great deal about the sparkling incompetence of the intelligence community, a cult which tends to attract dingbats the way a Levantine fruit stand draws flies.

Bit by grudging bit we are now starting to get the CIA story, and its extremes are beginning to be defined, ranging from shambling bumble to hints of unshirted horror.

We don't know all that much yet. But we do know enough now to require that our Congress and our courts force disclosure of all the rest. In addition, it is also very much a press responsibility: it is a story we dare not underestimate or neglect.

Substantial reports linking the dingbat wing of the CIA with the rough house wing of organized crime, the Mafia, are before us and should constitute no great surprise. There have been other thin threads between our government's executive branch and organized crime. Big Politics, Big Crime and Big Labor have made their alliances from time to time, and have not been particularly discreet about it. They haven't had to be.

Our wartime intelligence people may unwittingly have started a pattern when they made their New York deals with the Mafia to protect the docks against sabotage, one of history's curious footnotes. First they dealt with Joseph (Socks) Lanza, and then with Lucky Luciano. The Mafia didn't come out short.

There was Mafia cooperation with the invasion of Sicily, for the soundest of Mafia reasons. Mussolini had the brotherhood on the ropes. It has since grown and prospered.

Pre-Castro Cuba was a Mafia colony. That the CIA and the Mafia should combine in one or more efforts to assassinate Fidel Castro is monstrous, but understandable. By the 1960s the intelligence community was far gone in bad habits. And as for the Mafia,

those greedy brothers never forgive, forget, or give up a lucrative territory. What do they want? They want it all!

And then, behind all of this sinister intrigue, there remains the long shadow of doubt as to the most monstrous crime of all, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The clamor for the truth about Dallas grows louder every day.

When President Kennedy was shot, the tragedy was recorded on film by an amateur movie maker, Abraham Zapruder. Underground copies of the Zapruder film are now in rather free circulation among the increasing number of truth-seekers. Not long ago it was shown on network television in a late ABC spot. Nobody seeing the film can come away still believing that Kennedy was assassinated the way the official Warren Commission reports said he was.

If not that way, then how? Dick Gregory, whose audiences are now largely found on our college campuses, appeared on the ABC program with the Zapruder film. For whatever reason, maybe time requirements, Gregory's comments were limited. But he said that "thousands" of researchers had uncovered significant facts, and that it was up to the press to put the facts together. Well, it's up to Congress and the courts, too. Whether present inquiries will be enlarged to include the big one may be a measure of how serious those inquiries are.

Here in California we have unfinished assassination mystery, too. We do not yet know all we must know about the killing of Robert Kennedy.

That mystery, with its curiously contradictory physical evidence, was raised briefly during the last governorship campaign, and again when a new trial was sought for Sirhan Sirhan, the convicted assassin. The issue subsided, still without a satisfactory review of the facts.

We have a long and murky road to travel, as our agencies begin to ask questions about the intelligence community, organized crime, and related foul deeds.