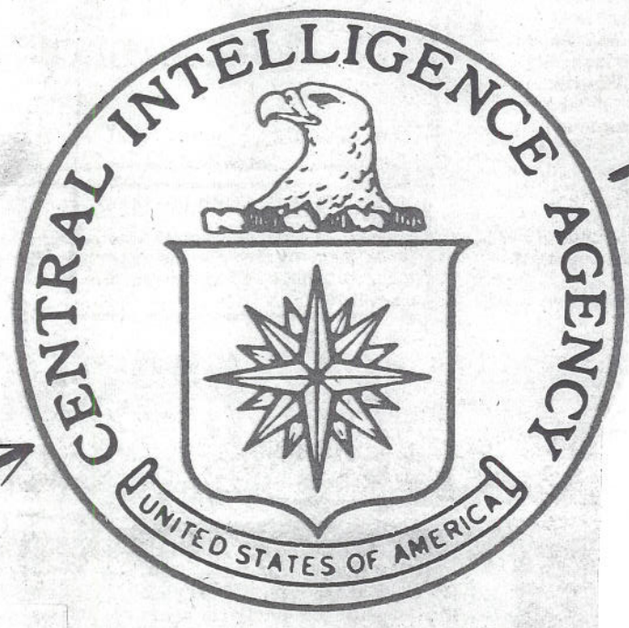
MARK LANE ASKS:

IS BOBBY SILENT BECAUSE



KILLED HIS BROTHER ?

MARK LANE

For more than four years since the death of President Kennedy I have declined to make public an analysis of the strange conduct of Robert Kennedy vis-a-vis the assassination and its aftermath. Although I have met with Robert Kennedy in the past, and worked with him for the election of his brother in 1960, my reluctance to discuss his odd behavior has had little to do with any personal feeling toward him or previous contact with him. The death of a brother may be a deeply moving experience — one which leaves scars that strangers or near stranger best not disturb. So long as Robert Kennedy was but one of a hundred senators, and but one of a thousand other officials who remained silent about the fraudulent governmental explanation of the event, it might appear that the reason for singling him out for special disdain or condemnation might be his familial relationship with the deceased.

During much of this period Robert Kennedy has permitted his name to be used in support of some rather unreal conclusions. This was accomplished first by his silence, and when that proved to be insufficient, by his self-proclaimed ignorance coupled with his public acceptance of the Warren Report.

For some years I have lectured about the assassination at universities in the United States and Europe. Following each of those more than two hundred lectures was a question period, and I think it safe, therefore, to assert that I have some knowledge of the questions that occur. The trend established by the questions can, in fact, be closely mapped. During the first year following the murder, the leading question, always asked, sometimes asked more than once in variable forms was: "How about Earl Warren's integrity? Certainly a man of that integrity could not, would not, sign his name to a document...." I am sorry to have to report that questions designed to offer Mr. Warren's integrity as a positive factor have not been raised for the last two to three years.

Taking its place has been the refrain, "Certainly Robert Kennedy, with all his money...." as if, I imagine, survivors in a lower income group might be less concerned with the cause of death. The refrain goes on, "He WAS the Attorney General at the time. He is said to be, although I do not know this as a fact, somewhat ruthless." It is marvelous to observe the line being drawn rather than offend one in power or even one who might one day be: "—and even he accepts the Warren Report."

Yet, in the face of these temptations put before me with evil regularity I have refused to offer an analysis of Robert's role. I reasoned that while the questioners isolated Robert Kennedy from other corrupt persons in public office, my answer might well be published without the question that prompted it and thus give the appearance that I, not the questioner, made the selection.

Robert Kennedy now wishes to be the Democratic candidate for the presidency. His position on all public matters is now relevant. It is beyond dispute that the foreign policy matter of greatest relevance is the war in Vietnam. In my judgment the domestic question of greatest relevance, and one closely related to the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam, is the assassination of John F. Kennedy and that which has happened to us since that event. Could there have been a coup d'etat? Was there a lone assassin? There is evidence that rejects the latter proposition and, unhappily, much to cause a consideration of the former. Now an analysis of Robert Kennedy's role regarding the evidence related to the death of John F. Kennedy is relevant; is, in my judgment, required.

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As it may have been unfair in the past to focus upon Robert Kennedy and the assassination because he was the brother of the murdered president, and this has been done in defense of the Report by President Johnson and his associates, it would be unfair now to exempt him from criticism due to that relationship. I thoroughly respect the right of the members of the family to remain silent and to treat the matter as a family affair. Yet the man who died was our brother. And Robert Kennedy, who aspires to that office, must now answer relevant questions about that matter high on the American agenda of unfinished business, or forfeit the support

Continued on page 16

(Continued from page 1)

of thinking and critical citizens.

RFK'S THREE PHASES

During the past four and one half years, Robert Kennedy has moved through three stages in regard to his public position on the assassination. The public pronouncements may not be said to be intrinsically developmental, merely different, although an examination of each reveals both a single theme — the desire for maintaining silence—and a tortured, almost irrational logic, that makes sense, if at all, only when viewed through a prism of political expediency. Indeed, Robert Kennedy has moved from absolute silence to total endorsement of the Warren Report, without ever passing through knowledge.

PHASE ONE

Phase one began as soon as he was informed of the death of the President. Although he was Attorney-General at the time, he took no official interest in the case. He examined none of the evidence presented to the Warren Commission. He neither appeared before the Commission nor gave testimony before any of the Commission's counsel. It appears that his one official contact with the Commission took place on Friday, June 5, 1964, when, for ten minutes he sat in silence alongside Jacqueline Kennedy at her home as she offered her very brief testimony to Earl Warren. It was said by William Manchester, concededly a rather poor source for factual data, that the Commission sought and failed to obtain Robert Kennedy's approval prior to publication. During that period, and for some time following the publication of the Warren

RFK/CIA

Report in September, 1964, Kennedy refused to comment upon it, or even its central conclusion—that Lee Oswald was the lone assassin. Thus as the months passed Robert Kennedy remained silent, neither challenging nor confirming the official version. According to Drew Pearson, certainly one of America's most enterprising journalists, McGeorge Bundy, then a top White House aide, confided that he was "worried about Bobby" during that period and that he had "virtually to drag Bobby" into President Johnson's first cabinet meeting.

PHASE TWO

The second stage commenced just as the political pundits agreed that Robert was obviously wooing Lyndon Johnson so that he, Robert, might be the Vice Presidential nominee in 1964. For the first time Kennedy spoke about the Warren Report. He was asked about it while on a tour of Poland, and by—is it not often the case when it is a relevant but irreverent inquire — a student. Kennedy replied that he had not read the Warren Report, that he was not familiar with any of the evidence but that he accepted the Commission's conclusions. The odd combination—a confession of ignorance of the facts and the assertion of a commitment to the conclusions—appears to contravene principles of thought. However, when Sen. Edward Kennedy made almost the identical statement later and Robert followed that with a domestic repetition of his Polish performance, one could detect an emerging pattern. Three such statements, constituting the entirety of the Kennedy family position on the question could hardly be taken as three successive slips. The suggestion that it was a well planned program to prove that the Kennedys were not intellectuals was quickly rejected by the analysts leaving, or so it seemed then, and still seems now, but one explanation. Robert Kennedy had entered politics as a candidate and his entrance fee into Lyndon Johnson's Democratic Party was public homage to the Warren Report, which after all had merely falsely stated the reasons for, and manner of, his brother's death.

Yet, reasoned Robert, according to the analysis—I will keep my options open, I will maintain flexibility and adequate ground within which to maneuver by coupling my weak and rare endorsements with the statement that I have not read the Report, I have not seen the evidence. Therefore, should it be appropriate, or imperative, to state on some future occasion that the Report is wrong, I may do so by explaining that I have overcome my grief, read the evidence, and astonished by what I have read, must now reject it.

With young people and others mobbing Bobby everywhere these days and with Lyndon Johnson unable to gather a few supporters anywhere except on an Army base or at a war plant it may be difficult to conjure up the very different scene four years ago. Johnson, draped in the ill-fitting, but for the populace, adequate, Kennedy mantle, was the hero who would see to it, as a liberal, that things in Vietnam did not get out of hand. Goldwater was then the menace, just as today Johnson is. Kennedy is now the hope, as was Johnson then.

Rejected as the Vice Presidential nominee by the new president who explained to a speech writer late one night, "I would be afraid to have that little son of a bitch on the ticket. Why I think that there are times when he believes I killed his brother," Kennedy sought the nomination of the party for the United States Senate from New York. Almost certainly, Johnson, then in control of the Democratic Party, could have denied the nomination to Kennedy.

Kennedy had made it clear to his supporters that he would not fight for it, for without Johnson's blessing he would have had no chance at the New York State convention. Kennedy on the other hand was not weaponless. He and his family, which due to his father's illness and brother's death, took leadership from him, had almost total control of the most emotion-packed political issue of the century. The reasons behind John Kennedy's murder and proof of the cynical manipulation of the truth by the Commission appointed by Lyndon Johnson. For Robert Kennedy held the autopsy photographs and X-rays, which, even without reference to any other evidence provide proof that the shots originated from two or more sources. Even had he not possessed the evidence the possibility that he might express doubt about the Report's validity during an election year was a sufficiently explosive commodity. Johnson and Kennedy compromised. Johnson yielded and sent word to New York that he did not oppose the nomination of Kennedy and thus opened the door to the Senate for him. Robert promised repeatedly and publicly not to run for the presidency in 1968, paid lip service to the Report, suppressed the essential evidence and prepared to enter the Senate.

But the campaign was difficult. Charged with being a carpetbagger merely because he did not live in the state, and a supporter of Joe McCarthy, in that order, which gives one some insight into political priorities, he ran poorly. Yet Lyndon Johnson's popularity saved him; although he trailed a million votes behind Johnson he did manage to get more votes than his unexciting opponent.

The campaign was rendered no more easy by questions about the Warren Report put to him by students. At Columbia University, Kennedy wiped an imagined tear from his eye and said that he could not talk about the subject. It was, of course, just a little less than a year from the murder and a sympathetic public understood his reluctance, or thought they did. The more astute (or is cynical the word?) noted that while he was unable to talk about John during the campaign he was not reluctant to take John John for a well publicized walk or two in Manhattan.

THE MAKING OF A BOOK

Before entering phase three, Sen. Robert Kennedy flirted with, and then aborted, without ever even consummating, what might be characterized as public position two and one half. Concerned that Johnson's enmity might well prevent him from eventually ascending to his rightful position in the White House he commissioned a book that was to "tell the truth" about the assassination, as Jacqueline Kennedy put it, on behalf of both of them. Again we encounter confused phraseology, flowing perhaps from confusion of thought about previously expressed public and private opinions of the Warren Report. For if the Report had already been endorsed sans reading why the need for another work to tell the truth?

First a genuine author was sought and found. But he was appalled at the conditions of employment. The brother and widow would commission the book, secure a publisher, and make the "facts" known to the author. In return, the author must agree, in advance, that the work could not be published before 1968 at the earliest, and, in fact, not published at all if Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy subsequently decided to suppress it.

Since it was difficult to find a self-respecting author who would accept such terms it was decided to commission William Manchester who had previously written a fawning biography of John F. Kennedy referred to by a major newspaper as an "adoring" work.

Mrs. Kennedy confided in Manchester. In due course the book, a diatribe against Johnson which contained dark hints about his role in the tragedy, was completed. Johnson fumed. The Wall Street Journal reported that the Kennedy family was seriously concerned about his great anger over the book. The moment seemed quite right for another bargain.

It is said that Johnson, upon further consideration, agreed to withdraw any stated objection to Kennedy's political career, who in return agreed that the book would not be published. A contract had been entered into between the Kennedys and Manchester which stipulated that most of the proceeds from the hard cover edition would be given to a suitable Kennedy fund. Thus Manchester's

financial potential appeared to be severely limited and should the book then be banned, the Kennedys could quite easily compensate Manchester for the loss of his limited profits. However, overlooked, by Kennedy, not by Manchester, were the American magazine serial rights for the well publicized book, foreign serial rights both newspaper and magazine, a Book of the Month Club contract and paperback rights as well. Kennedy had failed to make adequate provisions in the contract for the substantial peripheral rights. Before Robert decided to send his sister-in-law into court to ban the book, and to pretend that it was really her idea, Manchester had sold the magazine rights in America for well over half a million dollars. Manchester decided that as a matter of principle it would be necessary for him to violate the explicit terms of his contract and proceed with publication. The court action that ensued is a matter of record as are the polls that revealed Kennedy's substantial, and at the time it was feared, permanent loss of popularity. Such is the nature of the American beast that the suppression of the vital evidence and allegiance to a false report harmed him not at all while his desire to have an employee live up to his contract was almost fatal to his ambitions.

Harsh words were exchanged during the newspaper and legal battle and Manchester, it seems, maintained that portion of his equilibrium that he did maintain by rushing home each night to stick pins into Bobby's image. Except that it was his pen point. In the rewriting Johnson became less the villain, no longer the suspect and the Kennedys, save, of course, for the deceased President, fared far worse than they previously had.

Continued on page 24

MARK LANE

(Continued from page 16)

Although he may have been on sound legal ground, Robert finally yielded. With one eye on the Gallup poll, the other straining over the Harris poll, there was little attention left for the law journal. Thus what had been contemplated as the third stage never did surface, for the book became a different document from the one which had been commissioned and different as well from the one that had originally been written. It was so different that Manchester's publishers were compelled to acknowledge that the Kennedys neither authorized nor stood behind the book. Mrs. Kennedy went further in stating that the Manchester book was "inaccurate."

PHASE THREE

Therefore, Kennedy's reluctance to further comment upon the subject was not inexplicable. Nevertheless he was dragged, kicking and screaming all the way, into stage three. This was of course accomplished by a student. Adults have a well developed awareness of the need to ask trivial questions. Robert Kennedy has appeared on numerous television programs yet the chances are you never heard of an interviewer ask him about the suppressed evidence in the National Archives. More questions have been directed to him about his hair style. Probably even Joe Pyne would not be unsophisticated enough to inquire of him regarding the details of the Warren Report. However, the Kennedy organization leaves very little to chance. When Sen. Kennedy is invited to appear on a television interview program, my source here being two different producers of different television programs, his office requires an advance agreement that no question directly or indirectly related to the Warren Commission Report, Jim Garrison's investigation, or my book will be asked. If the program operates on a two-way format with viewers calling in with questions, then it must be agreed that all calls will be screened, a task often undertaken by the producer or an assistant producer, and no one who is interested in the assassination be permitted to ask his question.

The success of Eugene McCarthy on the campus required Robert to make a college tour in an attempt to recapture his youthful admirers. But such a tour is not without disadvantage, for young men and women are often without the requisite maturity, that will no doubt come to them when, in the days ahead they enter the world of commerce and sensible compromise. Thus unarmed with experience and devoid of the practical approach of the media personnel, they may ask intelligent questions, and worse still, may be less than satisfied with less than a truthful or direct answer.

When speaking at San Fernando Valley State College, Sen. Kennedy received, according to the Associated Press, "a barrage of questions" on "whether if elected President he would open the United States Archives to reveal details of the death of his brother." The A.P. noted Kennedy's reaction. "Several times the senator, campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, tried to ignore the questions from students. He became distressed as they persisted. Finally he said, 'Your manners overwhelm me.'" But unconcerned with Robert's rules for etiquette, the students persisted. When the senator replied to one that the question "does not interest me," an obviously reply to an earnest inquiry, the student responded that it did interest him and that that was why he asked it and hoped for an answer. In the face of dedication for which his fixed television interviews provided little preparation he finally said, "Go ahead, go ahead, ask your questions." A student then asked, "Will you open the Archives?" Kennedy answered, "Nobody is more interested than I in knowing who is responsible for the death of President Kennedy." Then he said that he "would not reopen the Warren Report." Presumably the latter statement meant that, if elected president, he would not appoint a new Commission, a campaign commitment upon which we can very likely rely. Whether he would declassify the evidence, the questions that was put to him, remained without reply. The former portion of his comment is intriguing, again I suggest, indicating a crossing over of the private opinion into the public arena. Why should Robert Kennedy be "interested" in "knowing who is responsible" for the assassination if he has known the identity of the lone culprit for more than four years?

Kennedy did make reference to the Archives, however. It was that statement that brought him to a new plateau in relation to the evidence. "I have seen everything that's there. I stand by the Warren Commission." No doubt it was clear to him that he could not defend, in an open encounter, the position that he had not seen the evidence but was willing to vouch for the validity of the Report. There were but two possibilities then available. Retreat from the endorsement or claim to have read the evidence and repeat the endorsement. He chose the latter course although it is quite clear that his statement is entirely false. To read "everything" in the Archives would require perhaps a year of constant study there. Robert has just not been missing that long. Indeed I find it difficult to contemplate a trip by Robert Kennedy into the public archives building that would escape press notice. I think it is far more likely that he has not been there at all rather than that he has been encamped, laboring there for months as he poured over the files.

And so it came to pass that Robert Kennedy who wishes to remain silent about the Report came full circle and offered that discredited document his full endorsement at a time when almost no one else was willing to do so. The question that remains is why so political an animal has taken so unpopular a position. Principle apparently does not enter into the decision for his original assertion was devoid of any logic and his final position is based upon an untrue assertion. Principle requires more honorable companions.

THE ASSASSINATION AND THE C.I.A.

More than a year ago, just after news of Garrison's investigation was made available, and just before it became firm media policy to attempt to discredit the investigation, Drew Pearson wrote what may be the most important story of his long career. It is not surprising, therefore, that the column has largely been ignored. Pearson asked, "Was JFK killed in a CIA backfire?" His article began with this sentence—"President Johnson is sitting on a political H-bomb—an unconfirmed report that he had questioned "top officials" who agreed that a plot to assassinate" Fidel Castro was "'considered' at the highest levels of the Central Intelligence Agency at the time that Bobby was riding herd on the agency." Pearson added that some officials agreed that the plan was "approved and implemented." According to Pearson, it is alleged that "three hired assassins were caught in Havana where a lone survivor is still supposed to be languishing in prison." It is, of course, well established that Pearson enjoys access to information inside the government at the highest level. Possible confirmation of that story comes from the FBI which states that an investigation by the "Bureau" has indicated that the allegations should be discounted.

Among the facts which Pearson said can be "verified" are these:

"President Kennedy was so disillusioned with the CIA after the Bay of Pigs fiasco that he swore to friends he would like to 'splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds.' He ordered a thorough investigation by a group headed by Gen. Maxwell Taylor. But the President's real watchdog was his brother Bobby, who ended up calling the shots at the CIA."

Pearson also stated that it can be "verified" that, "During this period, the CIA hatched a plot to knock off Castro. It would have been impossible for this to reach the high levels it did, say insiders, without being taken up with the younger Kennedy. Indeed, one source insists that Bobby, eager to avenge the Bay of Pigs fiasco, played a key role in the planning."

Pearson added that, "Some sources consider Robert Kennedy's behavior after the assassination to be significant. He seemed tormented, they say, by more than the natural grief over the murder of his brother." Pearson concluded that "some insiders think" that Robert Kennedy was "plagued by the terrible thought that he had helped put into motion forces that indirectly may have brought about his brother's martyrdom."

At the time of the Pearson column, Garrison's investigation was relatively new. While he had identified some of the men involved in planning the assassination, insufficient evidence was then available to constrain him to

think the unthinkable—that an agency of the Federal government actually planned and carried out the assassination. Much more evidence is now available and Garrison is now convinced that the CIA organized the murder.

Last September, Garrison charged that Robert Kennedy had made, "very positive efforts to obstruct" his investigation. "It is quite apparent to me," Garrison said, "that for one reason or another he does not want the truth brought out. Perhaps he can explain better than I can why his political career is so important." He added, "I have to conclude that he feels the development of the truth about the assassination, catching the real assassins of Jack Kennedy, would interfere with his political career."

Continued on page 26

(Continued from page 24)

Quite recently a former CIA official told me that the "footprints of an intelligence operation are all over Dealey Plaza." The evidence, he said, conforms to the classic pattern of a CIA "executive action"—a euphemism that includes assassination. It has been suggested that an intelligence agency planning the murder would be compelled to deal, during an early planning stage, with the necessity of "neutralizing" the actions of Robert Kennedy, who otherwise might be expected, quite naturally, to attempt to expose and prosecute the conspirators. It has been suggested that the CIA, intimately familiar with the details of Robert Kennedy's Castro assassination plan, utilized that aborted program to kill John Kennedy. My source states that not only logic dictated that approach, but that the known facts, known to a severely limited number of participants, confirms that it happened exactly that way.

According to that information one of the men chosen by Robert Kennedy to participate in the Castro assassination was later employed by the CIA for the assassination that actually did take place in Dallas. Confronted with the obligation of pretending to accept a false account of the circumstances of his brother's death or publicly reveal that his own hand picked assassin, fired some of the shots, Kennedy chose the former course, according to the analysis.

Once having adopted that position he supported it with action. The former head of the anti-Hoffa squad, organized by Robert Kennedy for the personal persecution of a union leader, after succesfully and shamefully having sent James Hoffa to jail, was dispatched to try to do the same thing to Jim Garrison. Walter Sheridan, Robert Kennedy's "investigator" while he was Attorney General became a "news investigator" for NBC-TV and in that capacity visited witnesses in New Orleans. He has since been indicted for attempted public bribery in connection with those visits. Sheridan's trial will provide information revealing how far he was willing to go in an effort to destroy Garrison's investigation and Garrison.

Garrison's reaction to all this is little short of phenomenal. "What else can Bobby do?" he asks when I express displeasure with his actions. "If they could kill his brother while he was President he knows that they can do the same thing to him should he tell what he knows when just a candidate." Garrison is more charitable in judgment than am I. Garrison too, had to make a choice about his political future and his personal safety before deciding whether to investigate the murder. His decision virtually ended any possibility of advancement should he fail to convict Clay Shaw. "It might be even more dangerous for me when he is convicted" Garrison recently said to me when we discussed this subject. To those who suggest that he expects to be the Vice Presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket he replies, "Do you really think that my actions have endeared me to the Democratic National Committee?" He knows that his life is in danger, as is, the recent murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., again reminds us, the life of any man who speaks out effectively in this country where assassination has become a potent political weapon. Garrison never even thought that he had a choice except to meet the obligations imposed by his office. Robert Kennedy made a different estimate. It is a measure of the time within which we live that the press has not raised a single question about the motives behind Kennedy's decision while it heaps abuse upon Garrison for imagined ulterior motives.

More than the future of two men is here at stake. Murder breeds murder. Organized criminal activity, officially excused, is an invitation to more. America developed three eloquent spokesmen in the last five years. Each, John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, has been assinated during that time. Kennedy for turning toward peace. Those who feel that he turned too slowly in that direction should remember that it was not for the slowness but for the movement that he was killed. Malcolm X for having developed the understanding which turned him, for the first time, into an effective and important leader. And Martin Luther King for reasons that it may still be too early to fully discern. Newsweek, it might be noted here, wrote just BEFORE Dr. King's assassination that "King's demise as a black icon would be a damaging and perhaps irreparable blow to hopes for peaceful social change in America."

One man who possessed enough knowledge to expose much of what had taken place in Dallas was murdered while being protected by 70 police officers in the basement of the Dallas Police and Courts Building. The man who did that deed, and who was therefore perhaps able to expose a part of what had gone before, died in police custody, as he had predicted that he would, after his request to testify in Washington about that which he knew was denied by Earl Warren.

And through it all Robert F. Kennedy, remains silent about the facts, continues to suppress vital evidence, and pursues his political career. Dr. King observed just before his death, that a man unwilling to speak out, unwilling to die for what he believes, is in any event, no longer alive.

If unearned suffering is redemptive as Dr. King said, then John F. Kennedy survives his brother Robert.