

13 Aug. 1966

Excerpt from review of "Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator",  
by Robert D. Crassweller (Macmillan).

by Harold Lavine, Saturday Review, 13 Aug. 1966.

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The U.S. Government finally turned against Trujillo only when he went completely mad and ordered the assassination of President Romulo Betancourt of Venezuela. Understandably, the Organization of American States took a dim view of this action; and, though Trujillo still had powerful friends in Washington, the U.S. was forced to vote with the other members of the OAS for sanctions against the Dominican Republic.

Crassweller is curiously reticent about what happened after that, and this is the one major defect in his book. He writes: "Reports would circulate after Trujillo's death, finding their way into print in the United States and receiving considerable acceptance in the Dominican Republic, that the hand of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States was behind the undertaking and that the guns used in it were smuggled in by that inscrutable agency. Copious details were cited in these speculations, the generally assumed motive being the desire to rid the Caribbean of Trujillo in order to strike more effectively at Castro in this year of the Bay of Pigs."

That is all Crassweller says, and it's not enough. For there were more than reports and speculations. The correspondents who covered the aftermath of Trujillo's death talked with Americans, prominent Americans, who told of helping the CIA and the State Department smuggle in the arms used by the assassins. General Arturo Espaillat, who specialized in spying on the U.S. for Trujillo, publicly charged Washington with complicity in the killing.

Perhaps the charge is untrue but, under the circumstances, it certainly demands a good deal more exploration than Crassweller gives it. Helping to assassinate the ruler of another country is hardly a matter that should be dismissed in passing, even if the ruler is Trujillo and the country is the Dominican Republic.