

Dark Cloud Of Shame Over Dallas

BY ROBERT H. JOHNSON, JR.

Dallas, Tex.—*A*—In the space of 48 hours, this sparkling metropolis—while trying desperately to show its best face to the world—was degraded twice.

The first time, authorities said, it was by a ne'er do well, self-styled communist with a mail order rifle: Lee Harvey Oswald, 24, born in New Orleans, charged with the assassination Friday of President Kennedy.

The second time, it was by a small time, browling strip joint owner who killed the communist despite a police cordon; Jack Ruby, 52, born Rubinstein in Chicago, who took it upon himself to act for the courts Americans cherish and shot down Oswald Sunday.

Dallas reacted with deep grief and shame to President Kennedy's death.

The reaction to Oswald's death was more complex. Some openly said the killing was a good thing. Others, secretly, thought it. But over most the weight of shame settled more heavily.

The burden of conscience became enormous. That it could happen here!

Dallas has a metropolitan population of more than one million. Its big growth came when northern and eastern manufacturers began moving their industrial plants to the rolling prairies surrounding the city.

Little of Old West

Its women are superbly gowned, its fashion centers respected the world over, its clubs smart, its symphony and opera renowned.

But it is, indeed, a citadel

of political conservatism at certain levels—just, as a matter of fact, as are areas of New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Indianapolis.

Pravda, Moscow's organ of the Communist party, over-tated the case against Dallas: "All America knows that the most reactionary, the wildest elements . . . have built their nests precisely in Texas."

But it struck an exposed nerve.

Before the president's visit, Dallas was agonizingly conscious that only a month ago Adlai Stevenson, United States ambassador to the United Nations, was struck with a far right placard and spat upon—and that the new president,

Lyndon B. Johnson, and his wife had been spat upon and jostled here in the 1960 election campaign.

For weeks, news stories quoting city leaders, editorials and letters to the editor had urged the people to behave, to lay aside bitterness and to welcome President Kennedy as befitted his office. The far right complied.

THEN . . .

"This is a black mark Dallas will never live down," said one resident despairingly. That was the day the president died.

SUNDAY NIGHT . . .

"This thing is going to tear this town apart," a young woman said.

Streets Are Quiet

People avoid each other's eyes in elevators. The streets

are quiet. Some clerks barely murmur as they serve you, the bars are almost empty, and even the recognizable bar-room characters talk quietly and stare into their beer.

Long lines of cars carrying whole families roll slowly past two landmarks: The underpass entrance where the president was shot, and the police department ramp where Oswald was shot.

Before it drops into the underpass, the street runs briefly through a small park with white columns rising above the grass.

On the small grassy slope Sunday were two wreaths. A card on one said: "In memory of our beloved president, John F. Kennedy. From the bereaved citizens of Dallas." The other said simply: "We are all so sorry."

The concrete where Oswald fell mortally wounded lay bare and cold in the night.

Mayor Earle Cabell knows his city's conscience and he has declared:

"This still should not reflect on the image or character of

Dallas. . . . I challenge anybody to say this reflects the character of the people of Dallas. . . ."

Friday afternoon many churches opened their doors and have kept them open so the people can go when they want to pray and meditate. The churches overflowed at the hour when Oswald was being shot.

Collectively, the city examined its conscience.