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A Super Bowl for Theorists

By Mike Winship
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Their investigators work out of a crowded office in a 16th Street apartment building. Taped to the door is a piece of scrap paper with the scrawled letters "CTIA"—the office's only identification.

Inside, the small rooms are packed with books, papers and filing cabinets. An oscilloscope and several radios sit near a window, and the walls of one cubicle are covered with maps of Texas and England.

The initial undercover look of the office disappears with the appearance of Bob Smith, director of research of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations.

"Are you looking for Bud?" he asks, and picks up a light coat. "He's over at his office. Let's go."

Wait a minute—are those maps being used to track down the escape routes of professional assassins? Oh, no, Smith shakes his head and gives a pained look. "Our secretary, Andrea, just joined Triple A. She puts them up for decoration."

THE COMMITTEE to Investigate Assassinations, organized in 1969, believes that the official explanation for the murders of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell, and the shooting of George Wallace have been woefully inadequate.

Privately funded, the committee has two full-time, unpaid staff members in the network of "doctors, lawyers, writers, architects, housewives, Indians, paranoids and hardheads" around the country who have become amateur sleuths attempting to uncover what they think may be the true stories behind the shootings.

The amount of research material in existence is staggering. By Smith's estimate, the National Archives has ten times more documentary evidence about the murder of John Kennedy than is contained in the entire 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report.

As chief counsel to the Senate subcommittee on administrative practice and procedure from 1964-1968, Fensterwald wanted to see a separate Senate investigation into the Kennedy assassination.

The chairman of the committee, at that time, Sen. Edward Long, was unable to act on the suggestion because of re-election troubles in Missouri (he was defeated in the 1968 Democratic primary by Thomas Eagleton) and a Life magazine article that accused him of secret dealings with the Teamsters Union.

Fensterwald went into private practice and proceeded to organize CTIA's team of investigators.

The CTIA efforts soon expanded into other cases besides the first Kennedy assassination—Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rockwell, and Robert Kennedy.

Events forced expansion of their investigations: "We couldn't help but worry about the Wallace shooting, too."

CTIA is especially interested in how Wallace's would-be assassin, Arthur Bremer, was able to afford his travel around the country in pursuit of his victim.

CTIA has accumulated a massive system of files of material collected from around the world. Most of the documents, articles, and copies of declassified material will be turned over to Georgetown University's library for safe-keeping.

But the committee sees its function as much more than a depository for information. "We're sort of the leading edge of the 'Let's solve the murder movement,'" Fensterwald said.

They have filed several lawsuits to release information still withheld in the various cases, and they lobby on the Hill for legislation to declassify restricted material and reopen official investigation.

Also on hand is a list of more than 25,000 names of people who have been involved in the various investigations to date.

"You'd be surprised how many names keep cropping up," Fensterwald commented. "Not necessarily with any criminal connection—but when Frank Sturgis' name came up in the Watergate case, we knew who he was."

STURGIS, one of the five men arrested in the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee, lived in Miami at the time of the John Kennedy assassination under the name of Frank Fiorini. He ran a group called "The International Anti-Communist Brigade," and one of its members, according to Fensterwald, later claimed that Lee Harvey Oswald had attempted to infiltrate the group. But, added Fensterwald, the FBI "had no record of Oswald's being in Miami."

A subpoena to appear before the Sente Watergate Committee is taped to Fensterwald's bookcase. He is serving as a defense counsel to James McCord, another of the Watergate Five.

Does McCord see any conflict of interest with private investigation that might draw even a tenuous link between Watergate and misdeeds of the past?

"[illegible] hobby before I became his lawyer," Fensterwald stated. "He has neve helped or hindered us. The only thing have against Jim is that he's such straight Methodist."

"Even before Watergate, I refused t write off anything as preposterous," h added. "But before that happened, w have had a theory in this country th goes back well over 100 years, and it h to do with our national ego. You ca have a political conspiracy in Franc Guatemala, Russia or anywhere — p litical murders are often committed b a political group for political reasons - but in this nation we have been so pur so democratic and unviolent that only nut could perform an act like that."

It's that attitude that has kept the off cial investigations of assassination from being complete, Fensterwald b lieves.

"In all of these case, the sloppy wor that's been done, whether accidentall or on purpose, would never suffice i the average murder case," he claims.

"If John Kennedy had been John Do a coroner's jury would have demand considerably better proof than the Wa ren Commission got."

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