

MEMORANDUM

To: Jack Tunheim, Chair
cc: Senior Staff
From: T. Jeremy Gunn
Date: March 30, 1995
Re: Today's Release of FBI Documents at NARA

At 9:00 a.m., E.S.T., the National Archives is releasing new FBI documents. This memorandum provides some background information for you and is not designed to be conveyed to the press.

The most important documents being released, from the FBI's perspective, are those related to an operation code named "Solo."¹ From the 1950s to the 1970s, Solo consisted of two highly placed FBI informants within the Communist Party (USA): Jack and Morris Childs. The documents that are being released today -- some of which were shown to the Board several weeks ago -- identify the code numbers of the two Solo informants: NY

¹In my discussion with some FBI officials several weeks ago, they spoke as if the name "Solo" remained highly classified and that they were having a difficult time deciding whether the name should be released. They seemed genuinely surprised when I told them that former Director Clarence Kelly himself disclosed the name "Solo" in his biography, published in 1987. The code name Solo previously had been identified by David J. Garrow in his book, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (1981).

694-S* and CG 5824-S*. The documents do not specifically identify which of the brothers operated under which code name, although NY 694-S* presumably was Jack and CG 5824-S* presumably was Morris. Because the Childs's were trusted Communist Party officials, they were able to travel to Cuba and the Soviet Union and to meet with Castro and other high-level officials.

NY 694-S* [probably Jack Childs] was a source for Cuban and Soviet matters. He reported on Castro's statements and reactions following the assassination. According to the report, Castro was informed by the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City that Oswald had visited in September, 1963, and that he had been obstreperous and directly threatened to assassinate President Kennedy. Castro did not believe that Oswald was acting alone, but that he had been on a mission to provoke the Cubans. Castro asserted that it made no sense for Oswald to go to Mexico City to get a transit visa from Cuba in order to travel to the Soviet Union. If he really wanted to go to the Soviet Union, he should have taken the far easier course of going through the Soviet Embassy in Washington. Because he did not believe the Oswald story, Castro conducted his own reenactment of the assassination to determine whether one person could have fired the three shots within the six-second period. Castro, who apparently attended the reenactment, came to the conclusion that Oswald could not have acted alone. He nevertheless believed that Oswald was one of the shooters.

CG 5824-S* [probably Morris] was a source for information for Soviet matters. He reported to the FBI shortly after the assassination that the Communist Party (USA) knew nothing about Oswald. Additionally, his Soviet contacts said that they had had no interest in Oswald while he was in the Soviet Union and that they were pleased when he decided to leave. The Soviet Union also wanted to cooperate with CIA and provide its file on

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Oswald, even though such cooperation would normally be considered a great "sin" in the Communist world. The Soviet Union was willing to take that risk in order to assure the U.S. that it had had no involvement in the assassination.

Other interesting facts:

1. Oswald's November 1, 1963 letter to the Communist Party in New York City was not received until November 29, 1963. Communist Party officials were perplexed why the letter took so long to arrive. [One might well infer that the FBI had intercepted the letter.]

2. Communist Party officials believed that Marguerite Oswald had stated to Mark Lane that she believed her son was an agent of the U.S. government (a position she had in fact held since the time of his defection in 1959).

3. In a written statement prepared for the Communist Party in June, 1964, NY 694-S* reported on his recent trips to Moscow and Havana. In response to a question posed by Castro, he said that: "While in the past it is true we [the Communist Party (USA)] had controlled such organizations as the NAACP, etc., but with the anti-communist McCarthy period in the years back our people lost hold of top positions. But in many of the active Negro organizations we are active mostly as rank and filers and influence the movement and activities by examples of conscientious and hard work and the youth organizations such as SNCC - we are in a much better position there." (p. 20) He also refers to "the recent gains we made in

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the UAW." (p. 9)

Some larger issues

Like Castro, FBI Director Clarence Kelly believed that Oswald did in fact threaten to kill President Kennedy while Oswald was in Mexico City.² If that is correct, an important question becomes: when did the American intelligence community first learn of Oswald's threats? (The CIA and FBI deny that they had any advance knowledge of any threats by Oswald against Kennedy.) To the extent that the U.S. had penetrated either Embassy -- the answer to which remains classified -- it is possible, at least in theory, that elements of the U.S. government may have been aware of Oswald's threats against Kennedy in late September or early October of 1963. If so, what was done with that information?

In an entirely separate development -- but one which may have a direct bearing on the questions posed in the preceding paragraph -- the *Washington Post* is expected to run a story in this Sunday's paper regarding possible disinformation disseminated by CIA regarding its cable traffic between Langley and Mexico City between September and October 1963, the period that Oswald visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies. Copies of the article, if it actually is published, will be sent to you Monday morning.

²Clarence Kelly, *The Story of an FBI Director* 268-69 (1987).