

The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy and “The Polka-dot File”

A review of Fernando Faura’s *The Polka-Dot File: on the Robert F. Kennedy Killing*

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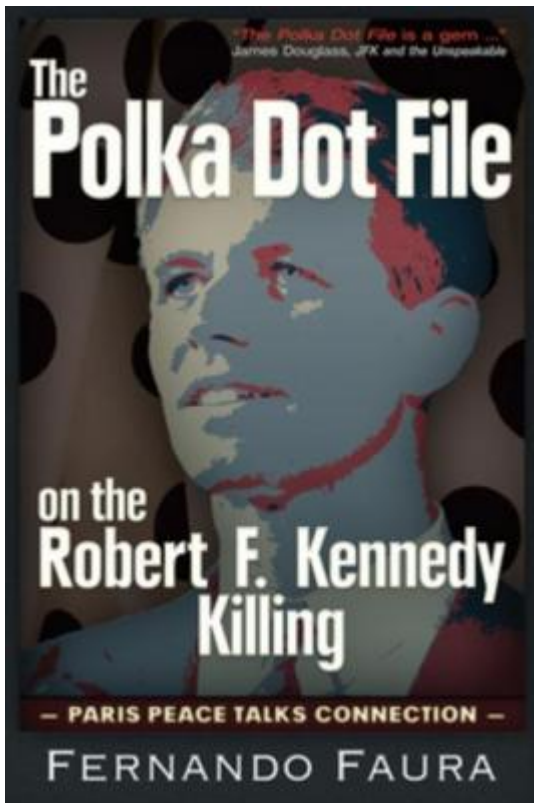
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There is a vast literature on the CIA-directed assassination of President John Kennedy. Most Americans have long rejected the Warren Commission’s findings and have accepted that there was a conspiracy. There is much less research on the assassination of JFK’s brother, Senator Robert Kennedy, and, if asked, far fewer people would say it was a conspiracy and a cover-up. They may not even know the alleged assassin’s name.

But the assassination of Robert Kennedy did involve a conspiracy and a cover-up. There is abundant evidence that the accused, Sirhan Sirhan, who was standing 1-3 feet in front of Kennedy when he was shot and who has been languishing in prison since June 5, 1968, did not kill RFK. And there is overwhelming evidence that there was at least a second shooter who shot Kennedy from the rear. The autopsy concluded that Kennedy was shot four times from the rear exclusively (three entering his body) and that the fatal shot was fired upward at a 45 degree angle from 1-3 inches behind his right ear. Sirhan’s handgun held 8 bullets. Visual and acoustical evidence shows that up to 13 shots were fired. Thus Sirhan could not have been the killer.

A Reporter’s Investigation



The Polka Dot File by Fernando Faura is the latest in a small but growing number of books to make that case, and more. It is a powerful, fascinating, and down-to-earth chronicle – never before told – of an investigative reporter’s dogged search for the facts of the case from day one.

It is a very important book for understanding the assassination of RFK.

It reads like an Elmore Leonard detective story, albeit less literary, but more engrossing because of its profound importance. For like the killing of JFK, Malcolm X and MLK, the killing of Robert Kennedy echoes down the years, and in many ways signified the end of progressive hope and the ascendancy of the national-security-warfare state that reigns today.

Faura’s account of his step-by-step investigation is of vital importance in understanding the murder of RFK. For unlike other works on the case, he was there from the start, pursuing and interviewing key witnesses and interacting, at first in good faith, with the LAPD and FBI, who were lying, stealing (his tape-recorded interview of a key witness, John Fahey), and intimidating witnesses.

In fact, those agencies were running steps behind Faura, and were afraid he would discover and reveal truths they wanted hidden. Although he was a seasoned and skeptical reporter, this book is also the tale of his education into the mendacity of government agencies whose ostensible job is to solve crimes rather than cover-up their involvement in them.

He eventually discovers that “the FBI and the LAPD, as well as other investigating agencies involved with national security, had deliberately and methodically misled and defrauded the American populace at large.”

Faura, an old-school reporter nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for another series of articles, is a very reliable investigator who instills confidence with his thoroughness, logic, and use of documentary sources. Reading his methodical and fair-minded account – including extensive verbatim interviews – I am surprised he could have waited so long to give us the

full story. Why he did, and what propelled him to finally write *The Polka Dot File*, is interesting in itself. It involves a fascinating and tantalizing theory on why RFK was killed, and by whom. But that must be saved for last.

The Assassination

First the essentials: In 1968 Senator Robert Kennedy was running as an anti-war candidate for the Democratic nomination for President. On June 4, 1968, two months to the day since Martin Luther King had been assassinated by a government conspiracy in Memphis, he won the California primary that all but assured him of the nomination. After addressing his followers in the Embassy Ballroom of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, at a few minutes past midnight he was proceeding to a press conference through the kitchen pantry when he was shot and killed.

Sirhan Sirhan, a young Arab-American, who was in the pantry in front of Kennedy, fired a pistol eight times and was subdued. He was charged with the crime. It seemed like an open-and-shut case, and was accepted as such by the mass media and the public.

But there were exceptions. Fernando Faura was one of them. A reporter for the *Hollywood Citizen News*, he was immediately suspicious. While working the night of June 4-5, he was driving with a young Kennedy campaign worker, Luke Perry, when they heard that RFK had been shot. They immediately went to Good Samaritan Hospital where Kennedy had been taken, then to LA Police Headquarters, and Faura's chase for the truth began.

"We shot him, we shot him!"

That pursuit centered on the search for a young woman in a white polka-dot dress who became a key person in solving RFK's murder. Faura writes, "Seconds after the shooting stopped, a young woman in a polka-dot dress ran out of the kitchen, past Sandra Serrano, a Kennedy campaign worker. The woman shouted, 'We shot him, we shot him.' Asked who they shot, the woman replied, 'Kennedy,' and ran into the morning darkness and history, never to be found."

This "Girl in the Polka-Dot Dress" - seen by many witnesses with Sirhan and other men before and after the assassination - becomes the object of Faura's search and the hub of this book. Quoting transcripts of his own tape recorded interviews with key witnesses, as well as police and FBI records, Faura systematically takes us through his investigation from start to finish. Reading it carefully, one cannot but be deeply impressed by his thoroughness and attention to detail. Nor can one not be chagrined by the ways his work was stymied by law enforcement and he was "followed, spied on, and harassed." It becomes evident that his pursuit of the truth was dangerous.

Early in his investigation Faura joined forces with Jordan Bonfante of *Life* magazine, but when *Life* eventually killed the investigation after a call from the White House that cited "national security reasons," Faura abandoned his pursuit out of fear for his children and lack of adequate resources.

Much of what government forces had to hide involved the girl in the polka-dot dress.

First News of the Girl in the Polka-Dot Dress

The public first heard of her shortly after the shooting, when Sandy Vanocur of NBC News

interviewed Sandra Serrano live from the Ambassador Hotel at 1:30 AM on June 5, 1968. Faura prints the transcript of that interview from a FBI report of June 10, 1968, File # Los Angeles 56-156, in which Vanocur asks her to recount exactly what she observed as she cooled off outside on a rear metal emergency fire escape.

“Then this girl came running down the stairs and said, ‘we’ve shot him, we’ve shot him.’ Who did you shoot? And she said ‘We’ve shot Senator Kennedy!’....And after that a boy came down with her, he was about 23 years old, and he was Mexican-American....She was not of Mexican-American descent. She was not. She was Caucasian. She had on a white dress with polka-dots, she was light-skinnedshe had a funny nose.”

An hour later Serrano is interviewed by the LAPD. She tells them that while she was sitting on the same steps 15-20 minutes prior to seeing the girl flee down the steps with one man, she saw the same woman, together with two men, ascend the stairs past her.

Later she tells the FBI the same thing, even adding that the woman said, “Excuse us” as they brushed past her. She identifies one of the men going up as Sirhan.

Serrano never retracted her story, although she was subjected to ruthless intimidation by the LAPD and the FBI. “Serrano was not the first decent citizen to come forward with information, feeling it was her duty, and wind up on the receiving end.” Faura presents the testimony of many others he interviewed that saw the girl in the polka-dot dress with Sirhan and other men in the pantry, fleeing the crime scene, in the hotel earlier in the day, etc. They too were subjected to government intimidation to retract their stories.

Other Witnesses

There is Vincent DiPierro - the son of the Ambassador’s maître d’, a student at the University of California, and a hotel employee - who voluntarily testified to a grand jury that he saw, from a distance of five feet, the girl in the polka-dot dress with Sirhan in the pantry moments before the shooting. He testified that they were together. He told the grand jury, “They were both smiling. In fact, the moment the first two shots were fired, he still had a very sick looking smile on his face. That’s one thing - I can never forget.”

There is Jose Caraval, another employee, who after the shooting saw the girl run into a dead-end hall trying to escape, only to run back out frantically.

There is Greg Clayton, Mrs. Carlos Gallegos, Booker Griffin, Pamela Russo, Susan Locke, et al. More than a dozen witnesses placed Sirhan with the girl and other men at the hotel that night. And yet, “the LAPD, less than a month after the ‘girl in the polka-dot dress’ had gone world-wide, denied her existence, this in spite of the numerous witnesses who had seen her.”

John Fahey: The Key Witness

While all these witnesses are crucial, the most important, whose story is at the core of Faura’s investigation, is John Fahey.

A week after the assassination, Fahey had read an article Faura had written about another witness. He approached him to talk. He told Faura that he hadn’t gone to the police

because he was afraid and asked if Faura could give him protection. Faura agreed to meet with him and tape-recorded his story, the transcript of which is printed verbatim as chapter ten.

As he writes, "The story the stranger told is one of the most important, fascinating and mystery-ridden of all those that would come to light."

Following is a summary.

Fahey, a salesman for Cal-Tech, a chemical company, was at the Ambassador Hotel early on the morning of June 4, 1968 to meet another salesman. By the time Fahey arrived late, the other salesman had left. He meets "a pretty lady" whom he invites to breakfast and with whom he then spends the day.

She tells him she's only been in town three days, that she came from New York City, and that she was from another country whose name he didn't hear clearly - "something like Beirut or something like this - is there a Beirut?"

When he asks her what she's doing there, she replies cryptically, "Well, I don't want to get you involved." And she repeats that she is not sure she can trust him. She is very nervous and jittery; her hands are sweating.

She tells him they are being watched and followed, which Fahey notices and confirms. She invites him to accompany her later that night to the "'winning reception' and watch them get Mr. Kennedy." He asks her what she means, but she doesn't say; just repeats, "I don't want to get you involved."

As they leave the hotel together via an unobtrusive stairwell that takes them up to the lobby, she tells him that she knows the hotel stair routes very well although she is not staying there and has been in town just a few days. She says she has to be back at the Ambassador that night. They spend the day driving up the coast together and are followed by a man in another car. They stop and have dinner on the drive back.

Fahey describes her: "She looks Caucasian, but has an Arabic complexion, very light....very good English....a little accent when she wants to put it on....around 27,28....dirty blond hairvery pretty....hooked nose." She gives different names; is obviously frightened; asks for Fahey's assistance in helping her escape to Australia the next day so "the Chinese can't get her there."

He leaves the girl back at the Ambassador Hotel at 7 PM. Although no sex was involved, Fahey is nervous because he has picked up the girl and spent the day with her and doesn't want his wife to find out. But he is especially nervous because of the day's strange experiences and the subsequent assassination of RFK.

Faura logically concludes that "Fahey's lengthy and dramatic tale, if true, boiled down to a conspiracy." From Fahey's description the girl sounded like the girl in the polka-dot dress described by others. But Faura needed to confirm Fahey's veracity. So they retraced the route Fahey said he took with the girl. Malibu, Santa Monica, the Trancas restaurant, the road to Ventura. All the details of the trip checked out. But what about the girl? It was still only Fahey's word. Faura would need to find a witness that saw Fahey with the girl.

Sketch of the Girl Who Disappears

He has an artist do a sketch of the mystery girl based on witnesses' descriptions. All confirm that the sketch looks very much like the girl in the polka-dot dress they saw. Then he shows it to Fahey who says it looks like the girl he spent the day with. Yet this still doesn't prove he actually spent the day with the girl. Faura needs further confirmation.

He finds it together with *Life* magazine's Jordan Bonafante when they travel to the Trancas restaurant and meet the owner at his mansion in "a scene out of the 'Godfather'." The owner allows them to go through the receipts for June 4th when Fahey said he and the girl stopped to have dinner. They find the receipt for exactly what Fahey said they ordered. More important, they find the woman who waited on them, show her the sketch of the girl and she confirms the likeness. Finally, Faura has Fahey subjected to a rigorous lie detector test that he passes with flying colors.

So the witnesses confirm that the girl in the polka-dot dress they saw and the girl in the sketch look alike. Fahey's independent description of the girl also matches the sketch. And Fahey tells Faura that the girl predicted the time and place of the assassination. A conspiratorial link is established.

Faura tells the authorities, but they refuse to follow up. Instead, they badger witnesses to change their stories. Faura realizes that the truth about this girl, her very existence, must be suppressed.

Faura, however, continues the search for the girl, always a few steps ahead of the FBI and LAPD, but he never finds her. He eventually concludes that she was probably eliminated by the organizers of the conspiracy.

He discovers that the LAPD officer in charge of the investigation - Lt. Manny Pena - is CIA connected, having worked for U.S. AID and been recently brought back to control the investigation. He documents the brutal interrogation techniques of Sgt. Hank Hernandez, CIA affiliated like Pena, to intimidate and break witnesses to change their stories.

Facts and Confirmations

There is much more that Faura discovers and details in his first-hand narrative. A review can only suggest it all. He rarely speculates. He sticks to giving us the record of his investigation as it happened - transcripts, documents, FBI and LAPD records, his day-to-day itineraries, his doubts, hunches, confirmations, etc. - all in the space of days, weeks, months of the assassination. Therein lies its great value.

A careful reader will note what he has to say about the strange case of the preacher Rev. Gerry Owens, Sirhan, Robert Weatherly, and the Shamel Ranch; about various attempts to kill or intimidate witnesses; about Sirhan's and the girl in the polka-dot dress's connection to the Rosicrucians and the practice of hypnosis; about various look-a-likes for Sirhan and the girl, etc. While he does not solve the case, he emphatically proves through his focus on the girl in the polka-dot dress that there was a conspiracy and a cover-up.

When at the end he diverges from his personal experiences, it is to present facts confirmed by other respected investigators that confirm and fill out the conspiracy. For example, he refers to the esteemed writer William Turner (*The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, Review Mirror*), a former FBI man, on the witness Jamie Scott Enyart. Enyart was a high school student who was trailing Senator Kennedy, his hero, that night, taking photographs

from slightly behind and to his left. When the shots rang out, he continued taking pictures rapidly. They were shortly confiscated by the LAPD, allegedly to be used at the Sirhan trial, which they never were. They were then sealed for twenty years.

Twenty years later Enyart asked for them back and was told they had been burned. He sued and in 1996 was awarded \$450,000. But during the trial they told him the photos were discovered, misfiled in Sacramento. The film that Enyart found had been tampered with, and most importantly there were no photos from within the pantry where Enyart had seen security guard Eugene Cesar get up from the floor behind RFK with his gun drawn. Cesar, who had suspected CIA links, was in the exact position from which Kennedy was shot. He is free to this day, and "there is no record that the LAPD gave Cesar a paraffin test to determine if he had fired the gun."

Faura quotes Turner: "Thus disappeared the RFK version of the Zapruder Film, which might have shown who shot him from behind."

A Few Questions

Faura's work leaves this reader with some questions.

If, as he writes a few times (as if asking an implied question), RFK's route through the pantry was "spontaneously changed by his staff at the last minute," how could the killers have known where to lay in wait? Was there an inside collaborator?

Who was the girl in the polka-dot dress? He doesn't say or speculate, but the excellent researcher Lisa Pease (see *The Assassinations*, pp. 591-7, 602) has presented a case that she may have been Shirin Khan, the daughter of Khaiber Khan, a very suspicious Iranian who had come from NYC to volunteer in Kennedy's campaign office where he did very strange things and was seen with Sirhan a few days before the assassination. Khaiber Khan, even more suspiciously, had given a ride on the night of the assassination to Michael Wayne, a Sirhan look-a-like who was arrested running out of the pantry after the shots were fired.

Faura, however, does tell us how witness Greg Clayton had seen Sirhan earlier in the evening with the girl in the polka-dot dress and three other men; how after the shooting he helped tackle the one who looked like Sirhan as he ran out of the pantry, saying, "let me go, got to get out of here. I am not answering any questions, I am not going to say anything in public." That man was Michael Wayne.

Was the girl in the polka-dot dress the same woman that New Orleans District Attorney, Jim Garrison, in his pursuit of the JFK case, had discovered being picked up by two Cuban anti-Castro revolutionaries that he was having followed at one of New York's international airports three days before the RFK assassination? She answered the description of the polka-dot girl. Garrison was said to think they were the same woman. Was she?

Did the polka-dot girl scream "We shot Senator Kennedy" intentionally as part of some sort of "limited hangout" in a most sophisticated conspiracy? For why would a person involved in the conspiracy run away screaming such words, drawing attention to herself and her fleeing companion, unless it was a diversionary tactic?

[*"Limited Hangout"* according to Former Special Assistant to the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Victor Marchetti, is "spy jargon for a favorite and frequently

used gimmick of the clandestine professionals. When their veil of secrecy is shredded and they can no longer rely on a phony cover story to misinform the public, they resort to admitting – sometimes even volunteering – some of the truth while still managing to withhold the key and damaging facts in the case. The public, however, is so intrigued by the new information that it never thinks to pursue the matter further.”]

Foundational Agreements

Because of its richness of detail, *The Polka-Dot File* suggests many important questions and lines for further research. But it also affirms certain fundamental key facts about the case.

In his chapter on the work of Dr. Daniel P. Brown, an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, an international expert on hypnosis, he affirms the obvious: that Sirhan was hypno-programmed to shoot his pistol in response to a post hypnotic touch cue, most likely from the girl in the polka-dot dress.

Dr. Brown states that Sirhan “did not have the knowledge, or intention, to shoot a human being, let alone Senator Kennedy.” At the request of Sirhan’s defense team seeking a new trial and a parole for Sirhan (efforts led by the great lawyer William Peppers and the heroic Paul Schrade), Dr. Brown “conducted a forensic assessment in six different two-day sessions over a three year span spending over sixty hours interviewing and testing Sirhan at Corona Penitentiary and Pleasant Valley in California.”

In his declaration to the Parole Board Dr. Brown stated unequivocally that Sirhan was hypnotized and was therefore a “Manchurian Candidate” who did not kill RFK (see the CIA’s programs ARTICHOKE and MLKULTRA).

Furthermore, Faura affirms the fact of a highly sophisticated conspiracy and cover-up that implicates the FBI, LAPD, and CIA. He affirms the fact that far more than the eight bullets in Sirhan’s gun were fired (up to 13), as proven by physical and acoustical evidence. He affirms the fact that, as Los Angeles County Medical Examiner Dr. Noguchi’s autopsy concluded, Kennedy was shot from behind by at least a second gunman with all four bullets entering from the rear, three entering his body. And he affirms the fact that none of the bullets from Sirhan’s gun hit RFK.

Buried in Memory: A Time Bomb

“For more than forty-five years,” Faura tells us, “my children have urged me to write a book chronicling my investigation. At the time risks to my family were too high to bring the story public. I was pursuing very powerful people who did not want me nosing around.”

But what induced him to publish his work now?

Here it gets very interesting. He always had, at the back of his mind, something strange that Fahey had told him. “Returning to the scene of his self-described harrowing experience refreshed Fahey’s memory. He remembered that the girl had suggested that perhaps she could get passage on CAT or Flying Tiger Airlines. Also that she had met a Mrs. Claire Chennault in New York.”

Faura realizes that those airlines are CIA proprietaries.

If what the girl said to Fahey was true, that “I haven’t been but three days here” (to this

reviewer a vague statement), and had come from NYC, then that would mean she had met Chennault sometime before the assassination.

The only people who knew about this meeting were Faura, Fahey, and the girl. The FBI or LAPD didn't know. No other researchers have known this.

This memory lay in Faura's memory like an unexploded time bomb for many decades until he read a report by journalist Robert Parry about how Richard Nixon sabotaged the Paris Peace talks in 1968 in order to win the election. It was a very solid, well-documented report.

It startled Faura because a prominent name at the heart of this treasonous activity that caused 20,000 more American and millions of Vietnamese deaths as the war went on for years was Mrs. Claire Chennault, aka Anna Chennault, aka "The Dragon Lady." She was the Chinese wife of General Claire Chennault, the legendary founder of the Flying Tigers and Flying Tigers Airline, Civil Air Transport (CAT), "which later morphed into Air America, both of them CIA proprietaries." (The girl had mentioned these airlines as possible escape routes.)

Anna Chennault became an important figure in the Republican Party and was a member of the Republican National Committee. In 1968 she was candidate Nixon's contact with the South Vietnamese government through the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington, Bui Diem. President Johnson at the time "was adamant about ending the war" and wanted a peace settlement. It didn't happen.

On "Nov. 2, 1968, an FBI intercept recorded Anna Chennault calling Ambassador Diem to relay a message from 'the boss' asking Diem to 'hold on we are going to win'." Johnson discovered the treachery but was dissuaded by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, [National Security Adviser Walt] Rostow and Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford from making it public in the interest of "national security." Nixon won the election and the war went on. Faura documents all this in an appendix that presents a memorandum to LBJ and the document, *The Chennault Affair*.

Was the polka-dot girl's connection to Anna Chennault and Nixon the reason *Life* magazine had received a call from the White House that led to *Life* telling Faura's colleague Bonfante that the investigation into the RFK murder had to be shut down? Faura suggests as much.

He asks, "Lacking credible proof, how do you tell the American public of a link between the assassination of Senator Kennedy and the Nixon campaign?"

"All this was going on while Senator Kennedy was within sight of the White House in his campaign. He was a clear threat to Nixon's manipulations because of his declared opposition to the Vietnam War. He was the only real obstacle between Richard Nixon and the White House. Had he won the election, Richard Nixon and his cohorts might have been charged with treason."

Faura ends *The Polka Dot File* with some excellent questions about the Chennault/girl in the polka-dot dress connection. But he asserts this as well:

"Anna Chennault had suggested at one time that she 'eliminated' her opposition. With the stakes so high, it is not beyond credibility that the 'peace talks' conspiracy was the genesis of the Kennedy killing." While she later admitted her part in the treasonous 'peace talks' conspiracy, she said she had been acting "under orders."

We are left to wonder who might have given such orders, and who gave the orders to kill RFK?

But as Faura and others have proven, there was a conspiracy and a cover-up. That is a fact. It was intricate and well-executed conspiracy, just as the one in Dallas. Like Oswald, Sirhan was not the killer.

While fascinating and important in its detailed focus on the girl, *The Polka Dot File* suggests many intriguing connections between the JFK and RFK murders. It is a significant book and essential reading for anyone interested in the murder of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. That should include everyone.

Postscript: Two weeks before publication of the book and not included in the first printing, Faura, together with Shane O'Sullivan (*Who Killed Bobby?* - Union Square Press), were granted an interview with Anna Chennault, now 91, at her Washington D.C. Watergate penthouse.

Faura showed her the drawing of the girl in the polka-dot dress. She said she didn't recognize her; couldn't remember anyone by the name Gilda Dean Oppenheimer, one of the names the girl gave to Fahey. She said no one else in the Nixon administration knew of the efforts to scuttle the Paris Peace Talks. She said she was talking directly with the President of South Vietnam. But when asked if the CIA knew of the conspiracy, she very positively said, "Yes."

N.B. President Johnson learned of the conspiracy from the NSA, not the CIA.) Anna Chennault's daughter, Prof. Cynthia Chennault, was present at the meeting and said her mother was in Colorado giving a speech on June 2, 1968. O'Sullivan confirmed this through Anna Chennault's calendar at the LBJ Library where copies for that period are kept. Faura concludes that since the girl in the polka-dot dress said she came through NY and had only been in LA three days, the issue is unresolved.

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