

Gangsterismo

The United States, Cuba and the Mafia: 1933 to 1966

Jack Colhoun

London and New York: OR books, 2013, £17.00 (UK), p/b

As academic historians are wont to say: this is not my field. Like other JFK assassination buffs, I have acquired most of what little I know about this subject while reading about the assassination. The big surprise about this book was: there was no surprise. This is the story we knew already; but done in great detail – 776 notes for 247 pages of text and 56 pages of notes and sources – and mostly sourced back to official archives. So this is something like the official version. But only from the US side. There is little from the Cuban state's version of events, notably its intelligence services, which penetrated the anti-Castro groups in America.¹

The Mob flits in and out of the story. Although they put millions up at the beginning of Castro's regime for the anti-Castro Cubans, their involvement in the various Castro assassination plots was less than serious. The Mob weren't dumb; they knew their involvement with the US state in these activities gave them a get-out-of-jail-free card. So they went through the motions, only to report back to their CIA handlers, 'Gee, we failed again.'

Not only did the CIA fail to assassinate Castro, they failed to get reliable information on events and sentiment within Cuba; they failed to organise a plausible opposition, let alone a government-in-exile in America and wasted millions funding every raggedy outfit which could muster a plausible looking letterhead. Their invasion plan was a failure – and would have been a failure, even with the US air support denied them by JFK. One of the plan's architects, the CIA's Richard Bissell, is quoted here as saying that he knew the plan was flawed but didn't tell JFK because he was afraid Kennedy would cancel it! The Agency failed to detect the Soviets delivering medium range missiles and nuclear warheads, even though it involved the Soviets using 150 ships under literal

¹ On this penetration see, for example,
<<http://www.dickrussell.org/articles/jfkcuban.htm>>

false flags to deliver the material.

This is also a case study of the US response to economic nationalism. Fidel was no communist when he arrived. Castro offered reasonable compensation for the US-owned assets he wanted to nationalise but the Americans refused to consider that. Instead they began economic sanctions and drove Cuba into the arms of the Soviets. Thus Castro became a 'communist' and the Americans could say, 'See? We told you.' All standard stuff. The American state has always preferred murderous psychopaths like Robert 'Blowtorch Bob' d'Aubuisson² to social democrats.

So: very good and nicely written. There are nits that could be picked, especially in the period between the Bay of Pigs and JFK's death: when the Kennedys were simultaneously trying to appease the anti-Castro Cubans and the US military/intelligence who wanted action; wanted to manage the 'Cuba problem' politically with the 1964 presidential election in mind; and cool the Cold War with the Soviets. There is more that could be said and other emphases that could be made. (No doubt some of the more enthusiastic Kennedy fans among the buffs will take the author to task on this.) And writing as one of those buffs, it is a pity that so few of the Cuban trails into Dallas are explored and the Cuban view of things omitted. But including all that would have meant another, much longer, less authoritative book.

Robin Ramsay

² <<http://professinghistory.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/blowtorch-bob-duty-to-remember-roberto.html>>