Book Reviews

Individuals and Crisis

The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Communication in Crisis. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker, Eds. Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1965. xiv + 392 pp. $8.95.

Inevitably, this book forces us to relive and rethink the painful time from the terrible moment when, in a cheering Dallas street, John F. Kennedy was assassinated, to his burial in a quieter hill in Arlington. For 4 days the populace was transfixed by television, radio, newspapers, and conversation bringing continual news and confirmation of that unwanted event; of the capture, hectic display, and murder of the assassin who thus departed from history as abruptly as he had intruded upon it; and of the accession of a new President, the lying-in-state of the old and the presence of his widow, the gathering of the mighty, and the long, lingering funeral procession.

What human meaning can now be found in this meaningless crime? Can some solace, some measure of redemption, a deeper truth, or a fuller sense of closure be derived from yet another visit to the still-fresh grave of so many of our expectations and assumptions, and of the vital young President with whom, more than we had realized, they were intertwined? Surely, it is, in part, a search for this missing meaning that leads us to dwell on one or another aspect of John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Unfortunately, little of this meaning is discernible in the 27 papers and 78 tables and charts that 38 social scientists and journalists have prepared for this volume. Their work will presumably interest certain denizens of their artificial world of "hypotheses" and "predictions," laced with allusions to "cognitive dissonance," "neurotic undercontrol," "attitudinal strategies," "factor loadings," "Mean Influence Index for Single-Leader Trials (MA_oO_v)," and "Final Varimax Rotated Matrices of Orthogonal Factors in Attitude Questionnaire Items." But the ordinary civilized reader will know very little more about what he would like to know after he has read the book than he knew before.

From this general judgment, the journalists and a few academic contributors should be exempted. Tom Wicker and Harrison Salisbury of the New York *Times*, Tom Pettit of the National Broadcasting Company, and Elmer Lower of the American Broadcasting Company give straightforward accounts of their experience. William Rivers of Stanford supplies a valuable summary of the press's accuracy and errors under stress, and Sidney Verba, also of Stanford, a thoughtful discussion of the political significance of our "primordial emotional attachment" to the President. Ruth Love of CBS reports the most interesting fresh information: NBC, on the basis of wire-service advice and White House tips, had doubled its usual Presidential coverage for the Dallas visit and missed televising the assassination by one block. As an NBC respondent declared, " . . . the routine of covering a President is always that the guy is going to get killed. . . . It is a normal feeling, and that is the reason you cover him 24 hours . . . because he is going to be shot." ABC had only one mobile unit free in Dallas on Sunday morning. Should it be placed at the city jail or at the county jail? The events show that Peter Ustinov was not far wrong, in *The Love of Four Colonels*, about the role of psychiatrists in America. "Someone called a psychiatrist he knew and asked him if Oswald was to be shot where would it happen? He said near the scene of the . . . assassination—the county jail." And, thereby, ABC missed live coverage of the murder. The two networks had a chance to bid on the amateur's film of the assassination (which *Life* later bought), but, to their credit, neither did.

The social scientists tell us how large a proportion of people had various symptoms of physical and emotional distress (68 percent felt very nervous and tense, 53 percent cried, 48 percent had trouble getting to sleep), the proportion who watched TV or listened to the radio and for how many hours; how, and how rapidly, the news spread; the extent of belief in a conspiracy; and the relative number of Democrats and Republicans, Negroes and whites, males and females who felt, did, or thought such things. They tell us this repeatedly, and that is about all they tell us. Their chapters are a triumph of surveys over other methods (the writers of only three papers were so bold as simply to arrange lengthy discussions with small groups or individuals and then report what they said); of speed over depth (some interviewing started an hour after the assassination, and half an hour after Oswald's murder!); of methodicalness over insightfulness; of sums over substance. They bring to mind Mannheim's observation about social scientists: "Instead of attempting to discover what is most significant with the highest degree of precision possible under the existing circumstances . . . [they tend] to attribute importance to what is measurable merely because it happens to be measurable."

Nowhere does anyone suggest that the idle cutting down in his stride of the most powerful man in the world showed how thin is the thread that ties each of us to life, and that, in those 4 days, we mourned not only for our President but for ourselves.

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Pollination Ecology

Flower Pollination in the Phlox Family. Verne Grant and Karen A. Grant. Columbia University Press, New York, 1965. 224 pp. Illus. $5.75.

The study of evolution certainly can be called a classical area of biology, yet it retains a remarkable vitality even today, when so much of biological research is directed less at whole organisms than at the biochemical details of cells and genes. There is a never failing challenge in revealing and