Commission Exhibit STUCKEY #1

The Cuban "Episode" and the American Press: April 9-23, 1961

Norbett L. Mintz

STUCKEY Ex #1

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STUCKEY EXHIBIT NO. 1

FAIR PLAY FOR CUBA COM.

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STUCKEY EXHIBIT No. 1—Continued

> The Cuban episode raised . . . the problem of information. Government operations of the Cuban type are more difficult to conduct in an open society with a free and energetic press.
>
> (The New York Sunday *Times* "News of the Week in Review," April 23.)

I WISH to address myself to just how "free and energetic" our press actually is, especially when considering the events of the Cuban "episode" and the newspapers' handling of it. I will concentrate primarily on the New York *Times*.

The first thing that we must note is that in the *Times*' statement there is complete lack of one requisite of a "free and energetic" press, namely the *critical* function. While recognizing that "this Cuban kind of operation is more difficult to conduct in an open society," there was no question raised as to the operation itself. The concern was one of the questioning of means, rather than of ends. As the *Times* pointed out in the same section, "In the U. S. itself, the immediate reaction was a closing . . . of ranks." The press followed suit, as I show below.

Press Response to Kennedy's A.S.N.E. Speech

The President's American Society of Newspaper Editors speech on Thursday (April 20) started with a sentence containing the phrase, "an obligation to present the facts, to present them with candor and to present them in perspective," and ended with the sentence containing the phrase, "let me then make it clear. . ." Interspersed throughout were further references to "clarity." This became the byword of press reactions. In a strange Alice-in-Wonderland world, the President said that he was being frank and clear, and the press echoed that indeed he was frank and clear. James Reston, writing in the *Times* on Friday (April 21), agreed that Kennedy acted "quickly and clearly." The lead editorial of the same day agreed that "the language used by President Kennedy was strong and clear. . . Mr. Kennedy minced no words." Further, the *Times* applauded the "policies" they presumed to find therein. By Sunday (April 23) Reston still had no doubts of the "clarity" of the message, but he had narrowed it down in focus:

> But if Castro tries to use his military power against any other state in the Caribbean or the hemisphere, then the issue will be clear. At that point, the United States can

wipe him out, with the requisite sanction of the law on its side.

The lead editorial of the *Times* for April 23rd had already begun to lose sight of "clarity" and "policy." It stated: "To say this [the Monroe-Kennedy doctrine] is not to answer the question of what to do next." And further, "It is more important . . . to lay down a positive policy. . . ." Apparently Kennedy's Thursday speech had lost vigor by Sunday. Indeed, by Sunday there were several interpretations of Kennedy's "clear message" to be found in the *Times*. Reston cogently argued that "the mere presence of military force in a weak country is not necessarily a threat to a strong country." He concluded: "It all depends on how President Kennedy looks at all this." Apparently it was not "clear" from his April 20th speech how Kennedy does look at all this! The *Times*' lead editorial, also drawing on the A.S.N.E. speech, concluded that Kennedy was for non-intervention in the absence of direct attack. It said: "We cannot tell the Cubans what kind of government they should support. We cannot intervene, even though they should decide to call that form of government Communist."

But Szulc, in the *Times* of the same day, moved in another direction. He was uncertain as to whether or not direct intervention was implied in Kennedy's "clear" speech, not really seeing any understandable statement as to Kennedy's intentions, and offering one which could lead at any time to intervention—namely the "major provocation" by the "murder of U. S. citizens." Since U. S. citizens had been executed long before the invasion, and since these executions have been branded "murder" by the press as well as by various United States officials, Szulc really implied that Kennedy's speech leaves open the possibility of intervention *at any time*.

Glancing further in the Sunday *Times*, to "Opinion of the Week," one found a similar point of view excerpted from the Pittsburgh *Press*:

> The President's . . . candid speech was primarily a warning. . . . The United States doesn't want to intervene—but, it doesn't intend to sit idly by, and shouldn't, while the Soviets establish a base in Cuba for subversion and domination of Latin America. The President will find full support in the United States for the position he outlines.

An excerpt from the Los Angeles *Mirror* indicated that this interpretation had at least some support, if

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not the "full support" claimed by the Pittsburgh *Press*:

> The President committed this nation to save Cuba from Communism no matter where such determination takes us. . . . It gave room for Castro to reverse his policies. He probably won't. So we are committed to removing him. There is no other way we can go.

Of course it is not unusual for there to be varying newspaper interpretations of a speech. But it is unusual when a critical and serious speech, self-labelled and then hailed uniformly by reasonably intelligent men as being "clear, candid, and policy-making," results in radically different, and often opposed, interpretations. Had Kennedy really been clear and candid, this could not possibly have happened. The fact of the matter is that his speech was neither clear nor candid. It was almost cynically rhetorical and seemed deliberately ambiguous and evasive. Further, it was so erroneous in parts that it flagrantly insulted the more informed readers' intelligence.

First its "clarity." A crucial paragraph in the Kennedy speech, where he dealt with what was on everyone's mind—will the United States intervene directly?—was a marvel of ambiguity:

> We made it repeatedly *clear* that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way. Any unilateral American intervention in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally *would have been* contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations (italics mine).

The use of "*would have been* contrary" without the addition of "and *would be* contrary" was ambiguous to say the least, and frightening when one thought the worst. The ambiguity, as well as fright, was increased when the sentence immediately following was read: "But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible." If the United States is bound by tradition and obligation not to intervene "in the absence of direct attack," then in such an *absence* the restraint *should be* inexhaustible. What exactly was made "repeatedly clear" about the United States position on intervention? It is noteworthy that the answer was not obvious in Kennedy's remarkable exercise of clarity.

And what about candor?

According to Kennedy, the recent Cuban invasion "was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator" in a "contest for freedom." References were made to a "small band" who were being "rolled over" by "Communist tanks." In spite of the setback, the

"revolutionary leaders" will continue to "speak out for a free and independent Cuba."

The press echoed the President. In the *Times* of April 21st, the editorial lauded these "fighters for liberty" with a poem by James Russell Lowell. On the twenty-third it urged that the United States "should continue to support the anti-Batista, anti-Castro exiles who are struggling to restore liberty and freedom . . . in the context of social reform." In a news story of the same day the *Times* lauded the Kennedy administration for its continued attempts to weed out of the exile forces "anyone who had been identified with Batista."

First, let us turn to the leaders who are to restore liberty in the context of social reform, starting with the Cuban *military* leadership. While the *Times* did not report on the commanders until more than a week after the invasion, the Boston *Globe* reported the following story on April 17, the day of the invasion:

> The troop commanders [are] Villa Fa, ex-Batista major; . . . San Roman, former Batista captain; . . . Alex del Valle, ex-Batista lieutenant; . . . and D. Darias.

A week later the major papers and magazines wrote that the over-all commander was Manuel Artime, who was described by I. F. Stone (April 24) and by *Time* (April 28) as the C.I.A.'s "golden boy." Artime appeared from all reports to have been an opportunist who allied himself with Varona's *Frente* in opposition to the more liberal M.R.P. Perhaps there were liberal exiles who suffered death in the landing force, but the leaders, those most likely to achieve power had it proved successful, hardly matched the Democratic-Reformist picture Kennedy and the press tried to paint in the first few days after the landing.

While the recently released information on Artime may not have been available until a week after the landing, it is altogether unlikely that on the day of the invasion the influence of the "ex"-Batista military was unknown to all save the Boston *Globe*. Indeed, the Baltimore *Sun* of March 5th, the *Saturday Evening Post* of April 8th, and *Time* as far back as January 27th carried stories on the exile movements which are essentially the same as the recently released stories. Therefore, the gloss given the invasion forces the first few days after the invasion was a deliberate misrepresentation on the part of the President and the "free and energetic press."

Turning to the *political* leadership, it is noteworthy that Kennedy, in his A.S.N.E. speech, mentioned Cardona by name, but discreetly left out Varona, leader of *Frente*. The press followed suit; reports lauded Cardona and soft-pedalled Varona. Again, there was deception involved. Cardona appears to be a coordinator, a mediator, whose main function has been to hold together various factions in the exile camp. Being a "middle-of-the-roader," he is a more palatable figure to present to the public than Varona, the real power (after, of course, the C.I.A., whose initials could stand for Cuban Invasion Authority). All the early reports on the exile groups *before April 9th* (e.g. *Time*, January 27), and all the later reports appearing *after April 26th*, clearly pointed to Varona and his *Frente* as the group picked by the C.I.A. But between those two dates, Varona was not easy to find in the news reports.

The reason was fairly obvious. During this "invasion period" the keynote, sounded by the President and mimicked by the press, was the struggle for freedom in the context of social reform. But what does the "revolutionary" Varona stand for? As described in *Time* of January 27th, the Baltimore *Sun* of March 5th, and other early reports, Varona and *Frente* would restore the banks, utilities, industries, and land back to private ownership. As quoted in the more recent report of *Time* (April 28), Varona said: "The need for agrarian reform in Cuba is a myth. The land appropriated by Castro . . . should be returned to its original owners." This was the man whose group the C.I.A. backed in the recent invasion, an invasion which was passed off by the President and press as an invasion to restore the revolution that Castro "betrayed." Both the President and press were fully aware, during the period when they reported with "candor" to the American people, who was being sponsored and why.

The Hungarian Analogy

Kennedy's speech cloaked the C.I.A.-sponsored invasion in the mantle of the Hungarian Freedom Fighters. Here, however, the press had already anticipated him. In the *Times* of April 9th, the "News of the Week in Review" presented a story on the exiles, in which the following appeared:

> Should the exiles' optimism prove unfounded . . . the U.S. would face the problem of whether to intervene openly

or to abandon the anti-Castro forces. Abandoning them to the fate of the 1956 Hungarian revolutionaries would be a grave blow to the U.S.

After the invasion fiasco, both Kennedy and the press applied the Hungarian analogy to an explanation of the failure. Kennedy in his A.S.N.E. speech alluded to more than one "small band" that the "Communist tanks have rolled over." He continued to excuse the invasion failure with: "The advantages of a police state, its use of mass terror and arrest to prevent the spread of free dissent, cannot be overlooked by those who expect the fall of every fanatic tyrant."

With Kennedy having made the analogy to the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian rebellion as excusing the Cuban defeat, the press was eager to follow suit. Szulc, in the *Times* of April 23rd, wrote:

> That there were no internal uprisings . . . does not necessarily mean . . . that the Castro regime actually commands the loyalty . . . of the majority. . . . What it does seem to mean is that the planners . . . underestimated the power of a police state. . . . Perhaps mindful of . . . Budapest, . . . Cubans who wished to rise against . . . Castro . . . chose not to risk their lives.

Frankel, in the *Times* of the same day, reported that anti-Castro Cubans feel that Castro cannot be overthrown without outside help. He too resorted to the Hungarian analogy, although somewhat ambiguously, implying that since the Soviets intervened in Hungary, the United States should aid the anti-Castro forces in Cuba.

The analogy has been stretched to cover considerable ground. It was thus used to show that Castro acted like the Soviets. But the fact is that the analogy to Hungary is inappropriate on several counts. The invasion forces, from all later reports, was hardly a "small band"—and this certainly was known by the President and probably also by the press. The "small band of men" that Kennedy mentioned on April 20th was previously reported in the press (on C.I.A. urging?) as five thousand (April 17-20). On the 21st, after the attempt obviously had failed (and Kennedy keynoted the "small band"), the press figures dropped to two hundred. It had then become a "supply drop" rather than an invasion attempt. Such a band of two hundred hardly could have sustained a three-day pitched battle nor have required Castro's tanks and aircraft. The more recent figure, reported after April 23rd, has been put as fifteen hundred, at least. It seems unlikely that this was not known to

the press. But if not, it should have been deduced by reason.

A landing force of fifteen hundred well-equipped men could have withstood Castro's counter-attack if the population and armed forces had turned against him. That this did not happen can hardly be attributed (as it was by Kennedy and the press) to the disadvantages of a police state. The C.I.A. gambled and lost in just the same way as the French-Algerian rebels recently did. The armed forces were loyal in both cases, and whether Cuba is a police state or not does not seem relevant to the fate of these attempts in the absence of popular support. It is a disgusting rationalization to accuse the Cuban population (as Szulc did) of fearing to risk their lives because they remembered the fate of the Hungarians. Cubans risked their lives against Batista's police state. To excuse the failure of the invasion on the basis of internal repression (as Kennedy did) is inaccurate, not to say irresponsible.

This irresponsibility is the only similarity I can find to the Hungarian situation. In both cases our government encouraged people to act out the wishes of the United States, and in both there was no responsibility taken for their fate if their actions failed. When the Hungarians rebelled, they were encouraged to expect help from the United States. Ambiguous radio messages alluding to United States support were transmitted. The support, of course, turned out to be moral. This was irresponsible and cynical.

The irresponsibility in the Cuban affair appears in the encouragement the C.I.A. gave (perhaps manufactured?) concerning the uprisings that would occur. From recent post-mortem reports, it appears that the C.I.A. was more eager to invade than were the exile leaders. Even before the invasion one found evidence of this. In the *Times* of April 9th, Brewer reported Cardona as saying: "The revolt must come and would come from within the country." And Szulc, in the same issue, reported that while any invasion plan assumes that the Castro government will "collapse from the onslaught, the more realistic among the exiled leaders . . . accept the possibility that a bloody and perhaps long civil war will be the first phase." In addition, it appears that on numerous occasions the United States considered and may have promised open support. From a statement in *Time* (April 28) it would seem (if the

statement is true) that things were left ambiguous. *Time* reports a radio message from the beachhead as saying: "Do not see any friendly air cover as you promised."

The analogy to the Hungarian situation that the President and press have proposed would hold only if 1) the Cuban population and armed forces supported the C.I.A. invasion and were then crushed by military support from the Soviets aiding Castro, or if 2) the Cuban population and armed forces did not defect and the United States supported the invaders in crushing the loyal support given Castro. The first alternative was remote, the second uncomfortably close.

Aid Given the Invaders

In this sphere, the lack of candor on the part of the administration, the press, and the "revolutionary" leaders has been most obvious. The Sunday *Times* of April 9th ran a front page, lead story on Cardona, written by Sam Brewer. The headline was: "Castro Foes Call Cubans to Arms; Predict Uprising; U.S. Aid Is Denied." The story covered various aspects of exile activity, particularly dealing with the predicted uprising. The parts dealing with the question of United States aid follow:

> Cardona vigorously denied reports that his group had been backed by the U.S. C.I.A. He said it was formed "exclusively by Cubans . . . without interference by any organization outside Cuba." Asked whether he had ever talked with the C.I.A. he said: "Definitely no."

In the *Times* "News of the Week" section, also April 9th, this was reiterated:

> Cardona has denied Havana's charges that the exile movement is financed by Washington. He claims that his movement, like Castro's in the Batista days, is supported solely by exiled Cubans and other private persons.

A week after the invasion had taken place, there were no shortages of news reports detailing the aid that had been given to the exiles. Szulc, writing in the Sunday *Times* of April 23rd, stated that the C.I.A. "supported and coordinated the first ill-fated attempt" to overthrow Castro. The *Times* "News of the Week in Review" of the same date stated:

> Last Spring the *Frente* began recruiting volunteers . . . for military training. Its activities were directly supervised by the C.I.A. . . . The exiles were trained by U.S. military specialists and armed with U.S. ground, sea, and air weapons.

The *Times* perhaps became remarkably well-informed between April 9th (a week before the invasion) and April 23rd (a week after). But it strains credibility to accept such a conclusion. Szulc, writing in the Sunday *Times* of April 9th, stated that an invasion army was "now in the final stages of training in Central America and Louisiana." He did not take a stand at that time as to whether or not this was proof of United States aid. And William Shannon, in the New York *Post* of April 9th, wrote:

> Back in 1959, the Eisenhower Administration decided to apply to Cuba the "Guatemala solution." That is, the National Security Council gave the C.I.A. director . . . the go-ahead to organize the Cuban exiles, train a military force, and plan an invasion of Cuba.

Even greater specificity on aid to exiles was given by a story in *Time*, as far back as January 27th: "The *Frente* apparently gets all the U.S. financial aid (estimated to range from $135,000 monthly to as high as $500,000)."

It is unlikely that these stories were merely rumors or fabrications, particularly in view of the following quote from the Sunday *Times* Magazine Section of April 23rd:

> Reports of organized training of exiles began a year ago. In recent months the press has been allowed *to visit* clandestine centers like this one in Florida and in Latin America (italics mine).

Thus, it is obvious that the press had sufficient information to realize the fabrication involved in the Administration or exile statements which claimed that there was no United States aid being given the exiles. One might accept certain excuses for the press's withholding information on United States aid, such as when visits are permitted and information given only on pledges of secrecy. But what case can be made out for presenting "news" that is known to be deliberate falsehood?

The lead story in the Sunday *Times* of April 9th on Cardona's denial of United States aid was one such deliberate misrepresentation. To be sure, it was Cardona's misrepresentation. Yet the *Times* had a choice of whether or not to print the interviews. Their motto is "All the News that's *Fit* to Print," not "Anything that's News." But instead of withholding an obvious fabrication, the *Times* printed it as the lead story of their Sunday issue. The line between withholding information that was given in confidence and disseminating information known to be false, is the line

between responsible journalism on the one hand and propaganda on the other. And to feature propaganda of this kind is more indicative of being a government organ than of being part of a "free and energetic press."

Press Reaction to the White Paper

The White Paper on Cuba, purportedly written by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and modeled in part after Theodore Draper's article in *Encounter*, valiantly tried to absolve the United States of responsibility for Castro's policies. Castro emerged as a crafty long-term planner who willfully moved toward Communist alliance with no provocation from the United States. In the White Paper it was pointed out that Castro was received in the United States in 1959, but it was not pointed out that Castro was received *unofficially*, in a hotel room, by Secretary Herter. Nor was it pointed out that this was done shortly after the red carpet had been rolled out for a South American dictator who received a medal of honor from the United States. While it was noted that United States officials offered to discuss Castro's economic problems, it was not noted that he came seeking *immediate* assistance and was not given any.

The press was eager to echo this distorted view of Castro's "willful" choice. The following appeared in the Sunday *Times* of April 9th:

> The reaction to the United States call on the Castro regime to break its ties with the Communist countries dispels any illusions . . . that some way or somehow relations with the United States could be resumed. It has been made clear by Premier Castro and his officials that the Cuban Revolutionary Government will continue to look to the Communist countries for economic and political aid.

If no concrete offer of aid was made concurrently with the "call" for reforms, what real choice was given to Castro? Again, in the Sunday *Times* of April 23rd, this "lily-white hands" attitude was re-echoed: "The U.S., which, after repeated rebuffs in its efforts to come to terms with the Castro régime, cut off imports of Cuban sugar last summer . . . " ("News of the Week in Review").

To be sure, it is not easy to untangle the complex series of events that led to present United States and Cuban policy, but I am convinced that a large burden of guilt will be shown to have been borne by United States policy and action. There would not have been

"repeated rebuffs" in the absence of United States provocation. In this regard, and to keep the later record from confusion, we need only turn to an article on Laos by J. Nevard in the Sunday *Times* of April 23rd. Writing from Vientiane, Nevard asserted:

> This week . . . Souvanna Phouma cancelled the trip to Washington that he had sought earlier. The United States, chilly toward the neutralist Prince when he was Premier last autumn, had come to accept him as the best hope of setting up a compromise cabinet. . . . Now, however, as a result of the Prince having tossed away this once-desired chance to discuss the situation with President Kennedy and Secretary of State Rusk, the view is widely held that the Soviet officials he saw in Moscow may have convinced him all he need do is sit tight.

Indeed, it would seem that Phouma, like Castro, deliberately "tossed away" the opportunity to establish

his country as a neutral power, and likewise, may soon deliberately choose to ally himself with the Soviet Union. But two days before, a news story about Secretary Rusk in the *Times* of April 21st had said:

> The Secretary of State returned to his native Georgia for a one-day round of appearances. . . . The Secretary of State received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at Emory University in Atlanta. He was cited for his "contribution to peace and freedom in this disordered world. . . ." About Laos, Mr. Rusk said the United States could not let matters drift. He said the Kennedy Administration still hoped the Laotian situation could be settled by an early cease-fire. Mr. Rusk missed a Cabinet meeting to come here during the crises in Cuba and Laos. *He also had to call off a meeting with Prince Souvanna Phouma because of the trip.* He said their schedules "just didn't fit." The Prince *subsequently* cancelled his trip to the United States (italics mine).

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If Phouma succeeds in regaining his position in Laos, and his country, through some series of events, drifts towards closer alliance with the Soviet Union, the Administration will point out (and the press will eagerly follow suit) that he had planned it all along, since he did not come to Washington when the opportunity was offered. But let us remember that, earlier in the crisis, when Phouma wished to come, Rusk's "schedule just didn't fit" because that day he had to go to Georgia to receive a citation for his contribution to peace and freedom. (United States administrations change, but Georgia continues to be the likely place to find government officials during times of crisis.)

And finally, when serious trouble breaks out in Panama, and the press tells us it was "without provocation from the U.S.," let us recall the following paragraph from the Sunday *Times* of April 23rd:

> The Army has made plans to establish in the Panama Canal Zone a school for personnel of Latin American armies. Classes will be conducted in guerilla and anti-guerilla warfare, intelligence and counter-intelligence psychological operations.

From just this brief review of coverage of the Cuban episode, one finds ample justification for responding in cynical fashion when the term "free" is applied to press activity between April 9th and 23rd. The press not only failed to live up to its full obligations during this period, but also moved a considerable way in the direction of becoming a propaganda agency rather than a free and independent institution. There was a drastic reduction of its critical function, a disgraceful mimicry of the "official line," and a discouraging lack of response to the threat of a curtailed press which Kennedy adumbrated in his Washington speech to the editors.

In this *initial* speech to newsmen (April 20), Kennedy said:

> We dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle . . . to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency. . . . The soft societies are about to be swept away. . . . We intend to re-examine and re-orient our forces of all kinds; our tactics and our *institutions here in this community.* (italics mine)

The reference to community is ambiguous, but he was addressing the Washington convention of editors, so one institution represented in "this community" was that of the press. This was overlooked completely the next day (April 21) both in the *Times'* editorial and in Reston's commentary on the speech. On Sunday,

April 23rd, the closest the *Times* came to a recognition of the danger was in three brief sentences, two quoted at the beginning of this article. The third was: "The U. S. faces not only the immediate problem of Cuba, but the broader problem of conducting cold-war operations in a democracy." ("Review of the Week," April 23). Since April 20th, when the press hailed Kennedy's "clear" message, they have done little to allay our fears that it will be democracy that will suffer. Certainly one is hardly reassured by the delayed, mild, and uncertain response to Kennedy's more blatant demand for "self-censorship" in the "national interest" which he made in his later speech, the one to the New York Press Week meetings (April 27).

Of course, one cannot overlook the fact that there were enormous pressures brought to bear on editors and newsmen. In this regard, it is relevant to quote a passage from *Newsweek*, which commented upon distortions in the news during the period:

> Newsmen, like many others, became pawns in the intensifying conflict between Washington and Havana. "Many of us have gone off the deep end," said one newsman, "but I can't help thinking that at some point we were pushed."

Yet regardless of the pressures brought to bear, the press could have discharged its duties to the public in a more commendable fashion. For if under these relatively mild conditions the press is quick to "close ranks," then what is to be expected of it when pressure to "close ranks" is brought to bear on more serious issues, e.g. if a naval blockade of Cuba is launched?

But while the press did not discharge itself honorably, one cannot deny that in some regard it is "free." Were it totally controlled, it would have been impossible to piece together enough information for even the limited synthesis that was presented here, though on the negative side one must emphasize the great length of time required to do so. But the more crucial question (until such time as the press is controlled externally to a greater degree than it is now) is whether or not it has exercised its degree of freedom from external control to the greatest possible extent. Here the answer must clearly be that it has not. And if the press is not quick to exercise the degree of freedom it still is allowed, it then will become an academic question as to whether or not the press is being brought under government control.

April 26, 1961

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by

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