

The Black Dahlia Murder Case

Lecture 3—April 26, 2022

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Black Dahlia—Lecture 3 Overview

“Solutions” to the Black Dahlia Murder

- Larry Harnisch perspective and “solution”
- Piu Eatwell “solution”
- Steve Hodel “solution”
- Other “solutions”

Unanswered Questions About the Case

Closing Thoughts

Black Dahlia—“Solutions” to Crime

Author	Perpetrator	Location	Motive	Year Published
John Gilmore	Jack Anderson Wilson a/k/a Arnold Smith	House on 31 st Street & Trinity	Rage at Sexual Rejection	1995
Janice Knowlton	George Knowlton	Father’s Garage in Westminster, CA	Eliminate Nuisance Serial Murder	1995
Mary Pacios	Orson Welles	Unspecified	Jealousy, Act Out Movie Scene	1999
Larry Harnisch	Dr. Walter Bayley	Unspecified	Violence Fueled by Mental Illness	1999 & 2003
Steven Hodel	Dr. George H. Hodel	Sowden House on Franklin Ave. in Hollywood	Serial Murder, Sexual Sadism, Emulate Surrealistic Art	2003
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Black Dahlia—“Solutions” to Crime (cont)

Author	Perpetrator	Location	Motive	Year Published
Donald Wolfe	Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel and 3 others	Bungalow Court on Catalina Ave	Eliminate Nuisance	2005
Piu Eatwell	Leslie Duane Dillon	Aster Motel, S. Flower St., LA	Eliminate Nuisance/Witness, Sexual Sadism	2017

Larry Harnisch

- Copy editor and investigative reporter for Los Angeles Times
- Wrote an in-depth article on the BD case for the 50th anniversary in 1997
- Edited the website Imharnisch.com in late 1990's/early 2000's. Currently edits the "ladailymirror" website
- Has posted critiques of several BD case "solutions" and books
- Published a theory of the crime in the 2003 on Imharnisch.com
- Deep knowledge of BD case and the "myths" that surround it.
- Has been writing a BD book since early 2000's



L. Harnisch Perspective—Profile of BD Killer

- Profile by John Douglas (former head of the FBI BAU and author of Mindhunter)
 - Developed in mid 1990's after reviewing the Coroner's Inquest and a summary of the case
 - Killer was:
 - A white male, no younger than his late 20's with a HS education
 - Made his living with his hands not his brains, adept with a knife and comfortable "wallowing in blood"
 - He was rigid, patient, compulsive and deliberate, drank alcohol and was familiar with prostitutes
 - May have had a police record for ADW or battery
 - At the time of the crime, killer was under personal and financial strain

L. Harnisch Perspective—Profile of BD Killer

- Profile by John Douglas (former head of the FBI BAU and author of Mindhunter (continued)
 - Killer spent several days with Beth Short, was drinking, and became enraged when she rejected or made fun of him.
 - Body was cut in half to facilitate transportation
 - **South Norton Avenue was a deliberate corpse dump site. The killer had a connection to the neighborhood**
 - His behavior would have changed after the murder. He might have been openly critical of police efforts. He might have phoned in a phony tip.
 - Assuming the killer only committed the one murder, Mr. Douglas speculated that he either died, was incarcerated or was never under the same stress again

L. Harnisch “Solution” (blogged in 2003)

- Did extensive research trying to tie Elizabeth to S. Norton Avenue
- Discovered that one of the witnesses to the marriage of Elizabeth’s oldest sister Virginia had resided at 3959 S. Norton Ave in February 1945
- Traced the address to a prominent surgeon named Dr. Walter Bayley
- In 1946 Dr. Bayley had started to exhibit signs of early onset Alzheimers, had abandoned and disinherited his family, and lived with a younger female doctor he brought into his practice
- Harnisch **speculates** that Elizabeth became acquainted with Dr. Bayley and that he killed her, perhaps in a state of diminished capacity
- Perception of Dr. Bayley’s ex-wife, which she expressed in 1948 contest of Dr. Bayley’s will, was there was a “terrible secret” shared with the younger female doctor

Piu Eatwell “Solution”

Black Dahlia, Red Rose

The Crime Corruption, and Cover-Up of America’s Greatest Unsolved Murder,

Published 2017

Piu Eatwell

- British-Indian author based in Paris
- In addition to Black Dahlia, Red Rose she wrote three works of fiction, set in France, between 2013 and 2016
- Approached the Black Dahlia case without the long involvement with the case of others who have proposed “solutions”
- Major source of information was D.A. files of 1949 Grand Jury plus interviews



Leslie Dillon did it, Mark Hansen was involved

- “Evidence” cited
 - Dr. De River had strong belief that Leslie Dillon was the killer based on extensive correspondence and interviews
 - Dillon was very egotistical, had need to talk about the case, perceived animas toward women
 - Fit De River’s “profile” of behavior and traits he would expect in the killer
 - Dillon reportedly knew the answers to the “two secret questions” and reportedly had other information about the murder even the police didn’t know
 - Mark Hansen knew Elizabeth; did LAPD have evidence that she called him on 1/9/47?
 - Gangster Squad interviewed witnesses that placed Elizabeth and Dillon together
 - Dillon believed to have worked as a mortician’s assistant?

Leslie Dillon and Mark Hansen did it (cont)

- “Evidence” Cited (continued)
 - Gangster Squad said Dillon had detailed knowledge of 39th and Norton
 - Witnesses said that Dillon and Hansen were at the suspected murder scene during the “missing week”
- Other allegations:
 - Leslie Dillon also killed Jeanne French in February 1947
 - **LAPD released Dillon and covered up truth about the murder**
- Possible Motives
 - Mark Hansen asked Dillon to “get rid of” Elizabeth
 - Elizabeth belittled Dillon’s sexuality
 - Elizabeth knew that Mark Hansen and Leslie Dillon were involved with illegal activities
 - Elizabeth may have attempted to extort money from Mark Hansen
- Murder Scene—Aster Motel, 2901 South Flower St., Los Angeles

Leslie Dillon/Mark Hansen LAPD “Coverup”

- Mark Hansen was paying the LAPD to protect illegal activities at the Florentine Gardens and perhaps other establishments.
- Sgt. Finis Brown was taking payoffs from Mark Hansen
- Leslie Dillon was released by the LAPD after being touted as a hot suspect presumably because he wasn't in LA at time of BD murder
- When Gangster Squad detectives continued to investigate Leslie Dillon in the spring of 1949 their reports were not followed up on and certain of the detectives were reassigned
- Ms. Eatwell's theory is that the Gangster Squad detectives were forthcoming with the 1949 Grand Jury but that witnesses such as Sgt. Finis Brown were not forthcoming and perhaps concealed information

Leslie Dillon/Mark Hansen LAPD “Coverup”

- Dr. Paul DeRiver was prosecuted for prescription recordkeeping violations and was dismissed from the LAPD in Summer of 1950
- An LAPD lieutenant with close ties to Chief Parker visited Dr. DeRiver in his home and appeared to intimidate him into remaining silent
- Aggie Underwood, who had close ties to Dr. DeRiver, is perceived to have noticeably reduced her reporting on the Black Dahlia case following Dr. DeRiver’s dismissal from the LAPD
- A veteran Hollywood screenwriter approached Dr. DeRiver in the early 1950’s about making a film based on the BD case, but was dissuaded from the project

Steve Hodel “Solution”

Black Dahlia Avenger

A Genius for Murder

Published 2003

Steve Hodel

- 5th child of Dr. George Hodel (born 1941)
- Served on LAPD for 23 years (1963-1986) and was a supervisor on Hollywood Division Homicide detectives
- Worked over 300 homicide cases
- Was working as private investigator in Bellingham, WA when Dr. George Hodel died in May 1999
- Began to suspect that Dr. Hodel was a killer of women while going through his father's personal effects
- Published Black Dahlia Avenger in 2003, accusing his father of killing Elizabeth and other "lone women"
- Has continued to gather evidence to support his theories



Dr. George Hill Hodel

- Brilliant, fashionable Hollywood physician who ran a venereal disease clinic and served as venereal disease public health officer for L.A. County
- Dabbled in mystic Eastern religions, Surrealistic art and the occult.
- Lived on Franklin Ave (Hollywood) in a house resembling a Mayan temple where he was rumored to host sex parties
- Accused of incest by his 14 year old daughter in the fall of 1949. He was acquitted when his daughter's credibility was disparaged partly because she claimed he was the BD killer
- Investigated by D.A. investigators after his incest acquittal which included electronic surveillance of his residence
- Left U.S. in early April 1950, never charged



Dr. George Hodel (Steve's father) did it

- Dr George Hodel became acquainted with Elizabeth prior to 1946
- Elizabeth was one of Dr. Hodel's "women" in fall of 1946
- Elizabeth angered Dr. Hodel around early December 1946
- Elizabeth fled to San Diego to escape Dr. Hodel
- Dr. Hodel located Elizabeth in San Diego prompting her return to Los Angeles
- Dr. Hodel accosted Elizabeth around January 12 and they checked into a hotel at 300 East Washington Blvd.
- Dr. Hodel tortured and murdered Elizabeth on the evening of January 14 at his Franklin Avenue home

Dr. George Hodel (Steve's father) did it

- Dr Hodel severed the corpse and dumped it on S. Norton Ave on the morning of January 15
- Severing and posing of the body speculated to be connected to Dr. Hodel's interest in surrealistic art
- Dr. Hodel sent Elizabeth's belongings to the LA Examiner on January 25
- Dr. Hodel authored the Black Dahlia Avenger notes to LAPD and newspapers
- Dr. Hodel killed Jeanne French after police tried to "smoke out" the killer with publicity about the Dumais confession

Dr. George Hodel (Steve's father) did it

- “Evidence” cited
 - Possible pictures of Elizabeth Short in father's photo album
 - Handwriting on BD Avenger notes sent to newspapers and LAPD
 - Dr. Hodel's hedonistic lifestyle, high IQ and large ego
 - Dr. Hodel's “advanced medical knowledge”
 - Dr. Hodel's fascination with surrealistic art
 - Dr. Hodel thought to be a devotee of the Marquis De Sade
 - Three witnesses say Dr. Hodel knew Elizabeth Short
 - There were credible sightings of Elizabeth during the “missing week” which may have identified Dr. Hodel

Dr. George Hodel (Steve's father) did it

- “Evidence” cited (continued)
 - Dr. Hodel's car, watch and receipt for cement sacks fit case observations
 - Statement attributed to Chief of Detectives Thad Brown, “A doctor who lived on Franklin Ave. in Hollywood did it”
 - L.A. County D.A. files confirm that Dr. Hodel was being investigated as the possible BD killer in early 1950, including “bugging” his residence
 - Comments picked up by police on wiretap in Feb/Mar 1950
 - Fled the U.S. in April 1950 presumably to avoid arrest
 - L.A. County Head Deputy District Attorney Stephen Kay stated that Steve Hodel's evidence would have been sufficient to charge his father in the murders of Elizabeth Short and Jeanne French

Dr. George Hodel (Steve's father) did it

- Allegations of Other Crimes:
 - Dr. Hodel committed a number of “lone woman” murders in Southern California during the 1940's, perhaps some with an accomplice
 - Dr Hodel suspected of being the Zodiac Killer in the S.F. Bay area in the late 60's/early 70's
 - Dr. Hodel suspected of being the “lipstick killer” in Chicago in 1945-46
 - Dr. Hodel murdered Lucila Lalu in Manila in 1967 “Jigsaw Murder”
- Other Allegations:
 - Dr Hodel posed the BD corpse and slashed the mouth to emulate works by the surrealist photographer Man Ray
 - Dr. Hodel left clues derived from other crimes he committed
 - Dr. Hodel taunted the newspapers and police with the BD notes
 - There really wasn't a “missing week” between January 9 and 14, 1947

Dr. George Hodel did it (cont)

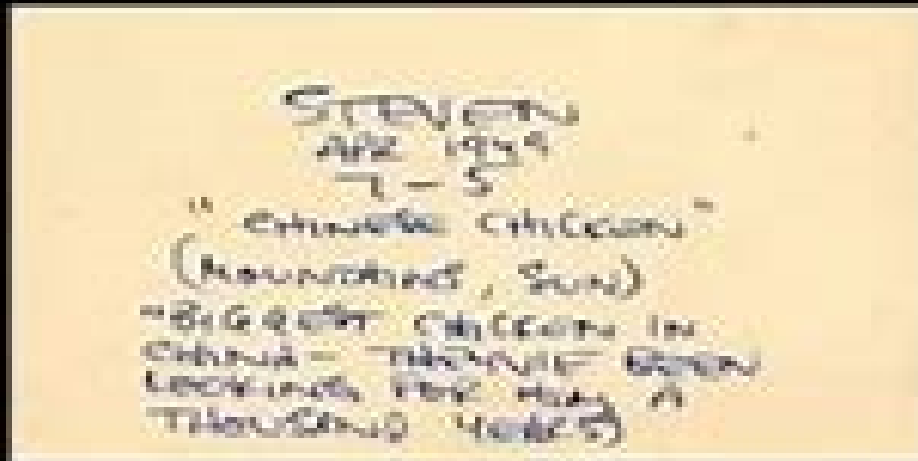
- Other Allegations (continued)
 - **LAPD knew Dr. Hodel was seen with Elizabeth and covered it up**
 - **LAPD discredited witnesses during 1947 investigation**
 - **LAPD allowed Dr. Hodel to flee, rather than charge him**
- Speculated Motive(s)
 - Indulge his sadistic impulses
 - Dr. Hodel was angry at Elizabeth for seeing other men
 - Elizabeth suspected Dr. Hodel was the Chicago “Lipstick Killer”
 - Elizabeth knew about illegal abortions performed by Dr. Hodel
 - Elizabeth was attempting to extort money from Dr. Hodel
- Crime Scene—Basement and master bath of Sowden House on Franklin Ave, Hollywood

Photos from Dr. George Hodel Album



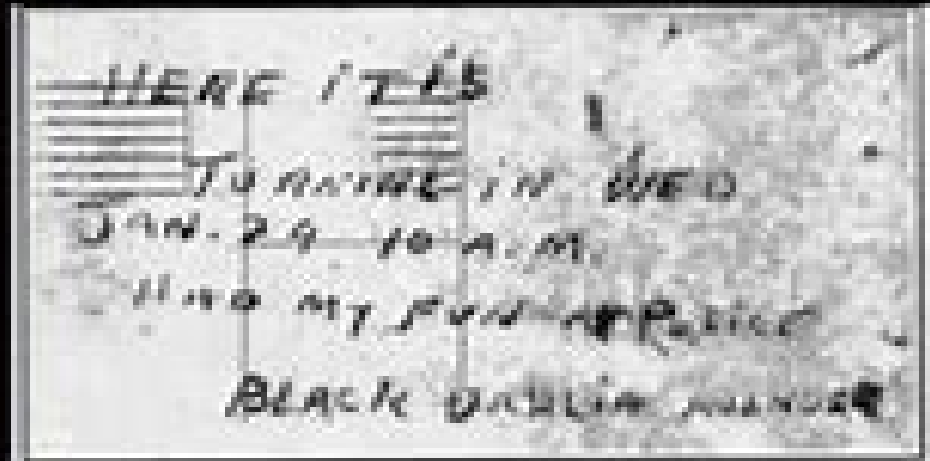
Handwriting Comparison (Dr. George Hodel)

Handwriting Samples



STEVEN
APR 1954
1-5
"Chinese Chicken"
(Mound, Sun)
"BIGGEST CHICKEN IN
CHINA - THING GREEN
LOOKING THE WAY A
THOUSAND YEARS"

George Hodel



HERE IT IS
TURNED IN WED
JAN. 29 - 10 A.M.
HIS MY FINGERPRINT
BLACK DALLAS MOUNTAIN

Dahlia Killer

Assessment of BD Solutions

Comparison of Black Dahlia “Solutions”

Aspect of BD Crime	Dr. George Hodel	Leslie Dillon	Dr. Walter Bayley
Adv. Medical Knowledge	YES	MAYBE/NO	YES
Acquainted with E. Short	YES/MAYBE	MAYBE	MAYBE
Connection to Norton Ave	MAYBE	MAYBE	YES
In LA on Jan 14/15 1947	YES	MAYBE/NO	YES
Investigated by LAPD and DA in 1947-50	YES	YES	NO
Sexual Deviant	YES	YES	NO
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Comparison of Black Dahlia “Solutions”

Aspect of BD Crime	Dr. George Hodel	Leslie Dillon	Dr. Walter Bayley
Physical Evidence	YES (auto description, cement sacks, watch, handwriting analysis, proof sheet paper)	MAYBE (auto description)	NO
Motive	MAYBE	MAYBE	MAYBE
Capable of Taunting Police	YES	YES/MAYBE	NO
Personal or Financial Strain	MAYBE	MAYBE	YES

Arguments Against Dr. Walter Bayley

- The connections cited by Larry Harnisch are circumstantial:
 - Dr. Bayley lived on South Norton
 - Dr. Bayley was a surgeon
 - Dr. Bayley's daughter knew Elizabeth's sister
- No evidence that Elizabeth ever met Dr. Bayley
- If Dr. Bayley had diminished mental capacity, would he have had the capability to write the BDA notes and taunt police?
- Is it credible that Dr. Bayley was trying to extract revenge on his neighborhood?

Arguments Against Leslie Dillon

- **Dillon likely in San Francisco when Elizabeth was murdered**
- Dillon's connection to Elizabeth is tenuous
- **Dillon had no advanced medical knowledge (may have worked as an embalmer or an ambulance driver at a mortuary)**
- **Dillon's assumed alter ego, Jeff Connors, turned out to be a real person**
- Dillon's connection to Mark Hansen is tenuous
- Dillon was extensively investigated by LAPD and DA without being charged
- Mark Hansen had no history of violence and was publicity shy

Arguments Against Dr. George Hodel

- The photos in Dr. Hodel's album aren't Elizabeth Short
- Whether Dr. Hodel knew Elizabeth is somewhat disputed
- Dr. Hodel wasn't a practicing surgeon
- Dr. Hodel was never considered a "prime" suspect and came late as a suspect
- Dr. Hodel unlikely to have viewed surrealistic art claimed to be his inspiration
- Dr. Hodel's statements on the listening devices are subject to interpretation
- Steve Hodel may be overly zealous in trying to tie his father to numerous crimes
- LAPD declined to use Steve Hodel's investigation to attempt to close the case

Unresolved Questions

Unresolved Questions of the Black Dahlia Case

- Why did Beth “flee” to San Diego in December 1946?
- Who called at the French house in San Diego (two men and a woman) apparently in search of Beth?
- Who did Beth call on 1/8 and 1/9/47? Did LAPD know the numbers called?
- Were there credible sightings of Beth between January 9 and January 15?
- **What was the motive?**
- Was there a significance to the body dump site?
- Why was there such extreme trauma and mutilation of the corpse?
- Where did the murder and bisecting of the corpse take place?
- How was the investigation administered within LAPD? Was information discredited or minimized? Why?

Unresolved Questions of the Black Dahlia Case (continued)

- Did the LAPD attempt to attribute the murder to Leslie Dillon to thwart growing negative publicity and a potential Grand Jury investigation?
- Was there a coverup(s) by the LAPD? In what manner? For what reason?
- Was the Grand Jury investigation and subsequent investigation of Dr. George Hodel compromised?
- Why didn't the DA investigators aggressively question Dr. Hodel and obtain a search warrant for his home?
- Were the LAPD Black Dahlia evidence files misplaced or "sanitized"?
- Why did the LAPD maintain that "lone women" murders were not connected? Was the BD a serial killing?
- Was the Aster Motel connected to the case?

Closing Thoughts

Closing Thoughts about the Black Dahlia Case

- It will never be officially solved
 - Too much time has passed
 - No incentive for LAPD to endorse a solution
 - Without a confession, evidence protocols may not be satisfied
- Critical disputed information are Beth Short's movements between January 9 and 15 and who she attempted to call on January 8/9
- All proposed solutions have "leaps of faith" and thin spots
- Each solution can be persuasive when taken alone
 - The solution that one favors may depend on which book was read most recently

Closing Thoughts about the Black Dahlia Case

- Some degree of police cover-up is likely involved in the BD case, but the exact nature of, timing of and motive for obfuscation is open to speculation.
 - Infighting and corruption within the LAPD detrimentally affected the investigation
- In studying the case, one must pay close attention to the derivation of the “facts” and sources of information.
 - For example, has Steve Hodel characterized George Hodel’s behavior to make it fit.
- An interesting question is: If it was the Spring of 1950 and you could interview three individuals associated with the BD case, who would they be?

Closing Thoughts on BD Solutions

- I assign highest probability that Dr. George Hodel committed the murder
 - Wouldn't bet against him as the murderer
 - Can't go all in on him
- I assign some probability to Leslie Dillon as the murderer
- I assign smaller probability to Dr. Walter Bayley as the murderer
- I assign some small probability to other suspects

- YOUR THOUGHTS???

Black Dahlia Murder Significant Resources

Black Dahlia—Significant Resources (1 of 3)

- Books/Articles

- The Badge—Jack Webb—published 1958
- The Black Dahlia—James Ellroy—published 1987 (work of fiction)
- Severed—John Gilmore—published 1995
- Childhood Secrets—Mary Pacios—published 1999
- Black Dahlia Avenger I, II, III—Steve Hodel—published 2004, 2014, 2018
- The Black Dahlia Files—Donald Wolfe—published 2005
- Black Dahlia, Red Rose—Piu Eatwell—published 2017
- crimereads.com—Black Dahlia: The Long Strange History of LA's Coldest Cold Case

- Films

- Who Is The Black Dahlia?—TV Movie—1975
- The Black Dahlia—2006 (film version of James Ellroy novel)

Black Dahlia—Significant Resources (2 of 3)

- Podcasts/You Tube Videos (selected)
 - Most Notorious—The Black Dahlia Murder with Steve Hodel, Part 1, 6/1/2016
 - Most Notorious—The Black Dahlia Murder with Steve Hodel, Part 2, 6/5/2016
 - Most Notorious—The Black Dahlia Murder Revisited w/ Piu Eatwell, 1/22/2019
 - Debunk File—the Black Dahlia Case, May 15, 2020
 - Stephanie Harlow—The Black Dahlia, January 15, 2019
 - Gabulosis—You Tube, 5 Black Dahlia Facts, July 11, 2018
 - Darcana Investigations—You Tube, eighteen episodes posted so far

Black Dahlia—Significant Resources (3 of 3)

- Websites/Blogs
 - stevehodel.com
 - lmharnisch.com/“Heaven is Here” (website not updated in over 10 years)
 - ladailymirror.com (more up to date material by Larry Harnisch including recent interview)
 - Blackdahlia.web.unc.edu
- TV Shows (not complete)
 - CBS 48 Hours—“Black Dahlia Confidential” (2004)
 - Dateline NBC—“Black Dahlia” (2003)
 - A&E—Bill Curtis Cold Case Files “Black Dahlia” (2006)—available on You Tube

Black Dahlia Murder

Lecture 3

Additional Slides

Do the “Pieces” Really Fit Dr. George Hodel

- Premise: Dr. George Hodel was involved with activities that elements within the LAPD didn't want exposed
- Premise: Elements within the LAPD suspected Dr. Hodel of the crime early in the 1947 investigation and misdirected/covered-up information to avoid him being identified as a suspect
- How did suspicion of Dr. Hodel emerge?
 - Interview with proprietors of East Washington Blvd hotel who identified a photo of “Mr. Barnes” as well as Elizabeth Short
 - Descriptions of men that Policewoman Meryl McBride saw with Elizabeth on January 14

Do the “Pieces” Really Fit Dr. George Hodel

- How did elements within the LAPD misdirect information?
 - Discredited sightings of Elizabeth during the missing week
 - Discredited linkage of BD case to other “lone woman” murders
 - Aggie Underwood promoted to City Editor
 - Capt. Jack Donohoe reassigned back to Robbery detail
 - May have encouraged newspaper coverage of Elizabeth as being on the fringes of illegal activities
 - LAPD expressed doubts about the validity of BDA notes after initial package
- Premise: At some point, Harry Hansen and Finis Brown became complicit in covering up and misdirecting information

Do the “Pieces” Really Fit Dr. George Hodel

- Identification of Leslie Dillon as a suspect may have been an attempt to attribute crime to a suspect and avoid a Grand Jury investigation
 - Was Dr. Paul DeRiver complicit?
 - Continued investigation by Gangster Squad of Leslie Dillon after his release may have been to have such information ready for the Grand Jury
 - Intimidation of Dr. DeRiver after release of Leslie Dillon was to silence him
- Why wasn't Dr. George Hodel charged in early 1950?
 - **Charging of a suspect in early 1950 would have confirmed mishandling of the case by the LAPD; another scandal might have destroyed law enforcement in Los Angeles**