

Dear Dick,

5/27/91

Developments I had not bothered to think about or anticipate lead ~~me~~ me to believe that the prospects of the book I think about as "Hoax: Oliver Stone's JFK Assassination Mardi Gras" are excellent, better than I had imagined. To a degree thanks are due to - Oliver Stone himself!

George Lardner's story is, I think you realize, quite understated. If his or the Post's purpose had been to ruin Stone you have some of what he could have used and didn't.

Stone over-reacted immediately the story was printed. He and his people knew about it in advance. He phoned ~~Ben~~ Executive-Editor Ben Bradlee, his flack phoned one Outlook editor, his agent another, all protesting. Bradlee told Stone to write him a letter. Stone did. Bradlee gave it to Lardner, telling him to send me a copy and to discuss it with me. He read parts and I provided responses, information he could use, etc. When he was satisfied he had enough for a memo he went to work on it.

Then I got to thinking about it. I felt immediately that Stone was desperate. I am now more convinced of it. I also felt that the Post would not say what should be said if only for making a record of it. Moreover, Stone had called me a thief. So, I decided to write Stone myself. I also decided that with the Post involved I would ~~do~~ do nothing it wanted me not to do. I had not quite finished what I was writing when Federal Express brought me the copy of Stone's letter. I finished and then read it. I began a lengthy addition immediately.

Lardner had expected to come up Thursday because one of the Outlook editors who had worked on the story <sup>and wants to meet me</sup> could not make it Saturday, when he'd planned to come. Meanwhile, the Post was deliberating whether to merely print excerpts from the five single-spaced pages or what Lardner asked, Stone's letter and Lardner's memo side by side. But before they decided they got a threatening letter from Stone's lawyers. Not quite Shyster, Shyster, Shyster and Hemlock, if I recall Troucho correctly. A firm with 84 partners. It clearly was based on what Stone had told them. So, at least for the moment, the Post editors, unwillingly, heeded their lawyers and did nothing. Bradlee, however, told Lardner to give me a copy of his memo. We went over it and it, too, is accurate.

The allegation is violation of property rights based on theft, layman's version.

Then I got a letter from the same Stone lawyer making more modest allegations and demanding the return of the script it fell short of accusing me of stealing. I wrote a response immediately and Lardner took it and what I then had written to Stone to his editors, with the message that I would do nothing they wanted me not to do. I doubt he'll be able to give it to them before tomorrow.

While Lardner was here I got a phone call from a man I've known for about 20 years, one of the assassination-conspiracy theorists I knew was involved in the Stone project. He never did tell me why he phoned but he spent his time defending Stone and his movie, bad-

mouthed Lardner and the Post, and making a futile effort to pry about Garrison and me. He had knowledge of what Stone and his lawyers had written the Post so he had to have made the call at Stone's behest or orders. Lil, Lardner and I laughed about it. He then went home and we went to the Korean restaurant for supper.

After we were back for a while I had to go into my office for something and was surprised to find the long middle desk drawer partly open and a small card I keep in it on the desk. Because I believe, whether or not correctly, that the drawer had not been opened by me for several days, that I had not had any reason to touch that card for more than a week, when I used it to phone the friend whose number is on it, and because it could not possibly have stayed there atop all the other clutter of the many things I am working on, that some had started to look around and then had to leave fast, I was even more put upon that Stone's having me phoned as he did, atop all the other things he'd said. So, I decided to add still more to what I'd written. I've not yet read it.

Stone's letter is not truthful and in parts he makes himself ridiculous. Some of those parts have errors that could come only from Garrison. This is among the things I addressed in this second addition. I mean he is not truthful about anything at all. It is a very, very, very unwise letter and he is not an idiot.

I believed as soon as Lardner started reading parts of that letter to me that Stone was desperate and so said. That he would write such a letter convinces me. Although his language does not justify the suspicion, I believe he is prone to hysteria.

My first thought when I heard portions of the letter was that he'd had questions or expected them from Warners, who put up \$40 million. He has represented his project as history, to tell the sorrowing people why <sup>the</sup> killed their president and why, so Warners, after Lardner's article appeared, could and should have had questions. Before long I came to believe and now am convinced that Stone now realizes he has ruined his reputation and, however much money his earlier films made, his word will henceforth not be easy to take by those who put the money up.

And, as I tell him, he has done it all to himself. He is skewed on the lance of his own greed and dishonesty and the more he wriggles and squirms the more firmly he is impaled. And it is absolutely true! He got my documented warning two months before he started filming. And he ignored it.

I'm not taking time for details but if I had wanted him to do what could be most helpful to the book I could not easily have improved on what that egomaniac did.

My belief is that the Post's lawyers are properly concerned about the cost of defending a spurious lawsuit, not that there is a legitimate basis for one.

And even the words his lawyers used to me instead of accusing me of being a thief, improper possession of a confidential property, they are depending on Stone's lies that he told Bradlee, that there are no copies around and that even the actors have only the

pages their parts require. My source was given copies by two different and unrelated people. He is in the industry and he tells me that just to get that Warner money required so many people to be involved in the decision that there had to be hundreds of copies at Warners alone. He says there are thousands of copies floating around in the Los Angeles area alone. Some "confidential" property!

Knowing nothing about the law, I believe there is no legitimate basis for any lawsuit and that one would be the legitimate basis for countersuits. Also, it would be the ultimate desperation that would attract even more attention to Stone's obscenity.

He would magnify the ruin he faces and he would antagonize a major part of the potential audience which does love JFK and would be outraged. I think the media would be also, and that all of this would be exaggerated by Stone's own prominence.

We have not discussed it but I think Bradlee must have been impressed with the documentation Lardner returned, close to two inches thick. He left with almost that much and there is more. and rather than being intimidated, he ran Lardner's story in this week's tabloid-size Washington Post Weekly.

Lardner did phone Osnos, who was then pressed for time. He asked only for a copy of the story, which Lardner sent. He heard nothing and I suggested that he prepare a two-page summary and then phone Osnos again. He said he would. I roughed out a summary earlier this morning in the event he doesn't.

You know the old expression, the bigger they are the harder they fall? Well, Stone is that big. and his fall will be much harder because he thinks he is and acts as though he is even bigger.

With his current movie, "Doots," he was faced with repeated charges that he took liberties with fact and truth. With his desecration "JFK" he is incredibly untruthful, deceptive and in quite many ways entirely dishonest - and he says it is a work inspired by love and to record history and explain that great tragedy.

With the documentation I have, MAMA MIA!

It remains to be seen whether others follow the Post. But whether or not they do, I think Stone has assured the importance and the success of the book.

One of his fairy tales to the Post is that the script was been radically changed. He can't change it enough to make any difference. Moreover, I heard from another writer I know whose interest in this is not like mine that for his own reason the Hollywood people with whom he is working on a documentary obtained a copy of the shooting script. He has both version and he says the few changes made are merely to eliminate the bases for some of the criticisms and that it is essentially the original script. It says the same thing. He is to ask his people for an OK to give me a copy.

Both ludicrous and tragic, but what a story now! Best to you all,

Hudf