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June 12, 1964

*Box 6
June*

MEMORANDUM

TO: J. Lee Rankin
William T. Coleman, Jr.

FROM: W. David Slawson *WDS*

SUBJECT: Taking Testimony of Remaining State Department
Witnesses

This afternoon, June 12, 1964, at about 3:30 Congressman Ford called me. He said that he had been trying to reach Lee Rankin but was told he was out of town. Congressman Ford said that he had just returned from a speaking engagement in Grand Rapids, Michigan and that in looking over his schedule for the coming week or two, he found it so crowded that he did not see how he could fit in the testimony of the remaining four witnesses from the Department of State, testimony at which his presence would be required. He therefore has decided that if none of the other Commissioners have any objections, either Bill Coleman or I should go ahead and take these witnesses' depositions.

Mr. Ford said that in his opinion we cannot afford to be light or easy on the witnesses. He said that the burden to prove that they acted properly is on them and that we should make it as tough as possible for them. He said that our proper role is the "devil's advocate." He also said that the witnesses are there to justify their actions and that they should carry the full burden of doing so if they can.

He then asked me what I felt about the witnesses we had so far heard and the documents we had seen. Briefly summarized, I told him that it was my opinion that the look-out card procedures were clearly mixed up on the Oswald case, although it was also clear that the mistakes made on the look-out cards had no effect whatever on Oswald's actions. I told him that Bill Coleman and I felt that we had found the mistake that explained why a look-out card was not placed in the file in connection with Oswald's repatriation loan; namely, that the memorandum from another section of the State Department to the passport section asking that such a look-out card be made up failed to include Oswald's date of birth, and that the passport office in such cases routinely ignored the

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J.L.R.

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communication rather than bucking it back for more information. I said that Coleman and I had no idea where the mistake lay in connection with the expatriation look-out card. I went on to say that on the issue of whether Oswald had renounced his American citizenship, that the Department of State's decision seemed to have been correct. Mr. Ford commented that although perhaps the decision was correct, he felt that it was made much too glibly and routinely. I replied that I did not feel that this was necessarily so. As I saw it, the decision for all practicable purposes was made by Richard E. Snyder, the man who had actually seen Oswald both when he entered and left Russia, and that Snyder was at that time holding a comparatively high and responsible position, that of Consul in the Embassy in Moscow. All the other people back up the line in the Moscow Embassy and in Washington, for all practicable purposes, simply "eyeballed" the papers after Snyder had made his decision, found nothing obviously wrong, and therefore accepted it. I said that my impression was that this was not unreasonable, since in a large organization one must delegate the real responsibility for such decisions to someone if the organization is to function efficiently, and that delegating to a man in Snyder's position seemed not unreasonable. Mr. Ford did not quite agree with me but we left it there.

I told Congressman Ford that I would call him back only if something happens so that we could not take the depositions of these witnesses in the next week or so as he had asked. I added that I would also call him if something startling turned up in the testimony.