

Dear George,

1/3/92

Sitting and thinking this early morning, with a cup of coffee and of what I could not get to doing yesterday and what I should start on before going out for the papers and then my walking therapy, after which the days can be unpredictable, as yesterday's was, I remembered your ambivalence over being at the head table when Oliver Stone speaks at the National Press Club. By inference you asked my opinion and my instant reaction was "be there." In part this as I think now was for two reasons, to show the monster you are not afraid of him or his slanders and lies and not to lose face among your peers, who might misinterpret your absence.

My mind went back to a comparable experience, not situation, for me, when I had a little but not much time to think. It was my first TV experience, at WNEW-TV in NYC. The taping was running late. They asked me if I'd like to go to the sponsor's booth above the studio and watch until it was time for the segment I was to be on. I did. And I saw four well-dressed people who were out of place in that working class audience, all lawyers, the three men at least Jews, who were disputing with Mohammed Mehti, a professional Arab. He was outrageous and provocative. Of what he said I remember, "There is no such thing as anti-Semitism. There is only anti-gentilism by Jews." I asked myself what those erudite lawyers, which they all were, were doing in that studio audience. I told myself they were there for me, and that I'd best be prepared for an onslaught from them. Later I learned more, that Holt, Reinhart's p.r. man had arranged for them to be there after it contracted for Lane's first book. Then I learned that the station had actually first asked the FBI to send SAs to clobber me. I have the FBI's reports. They declined but did help. They provided what those four had. So I asked myself how to face this and instinctively I decided to be calm and polite at least for a while but to begin at the first possible moment by getting said what I could politely go after them with. I decided on a facsimile in Whitewash, Dr. Humes' certification that he had ~~burned~~ burned some autopsy papers. It turned out that they could not face this when I kept returning to it to ask how can you as lawyers justify this, how can you trust anything after knowing this about the official account of the assassination. In time I was less polite and it made so great a show the station got its highest rating and when it was aired on a Saturday night I never got back to bed, the phone rang that constantly. And my did it open the subject up and did it sell books!

As the reporter who broke the story that led to the continuing furore you should be there, silently. But prepared. If I size this unscrupulous, amoral, egomaniacal but quite able man up he may well intend to defend himself by attacking you, ^{and the Post,} your story or both. He will without reasonable question be promoting his movie. He will, of course, be asked questions, one of the reasons I suggested that you have at least my first letter to him and Rusconi's to me. I think he will bait you, even if you are not there, more possibly if you are not. But he is, I think, going to try his ^{the Post and} case on you, not his movie. So,

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more instinctively than as the result of long and deep thought - it isn't much after 2 a.m. - I have this suggestion; be a boy scout-be prepared. And by this I mean think this through and then I hope agree with me in what I suggest - ^{4 r 2 e} ~~under~~, really, because of the impact I think it can have.

He is hung up ^{on} and Viet Nam and he has made out best in his responses when he was used and misused that. What you originally proposed on this that I agreed with and still do is what you should restrict yourself to, and I'll come to that. I think you should write out what you will say and say you anticipated from the way in which he had been promoting his movie that he does it by attacking because he can't defend what he did, so you want there to be no question about your response and so there will not be you are reading it.

There have been and there will be conflicting records and ^{op}inions about what each President planned but events take control and there is no way of know^{ing} whether either could have as President done what he wanted to do.

But this is not the basis of the criticism of your movie and I will not be diverted by your ^pretense that it is. The objection to your movie is that ~~it~~ you represented it as a factual, historical document when it was not and could not be - and you knew it.

As recently as the day before Xmas the New York Times carried a story from Hollywood in which it quoted high studio executives as criticizing Warn ^{er Brothers} ~~brothers~~ as irresponsible for presenting your movie as truth when it is not truth.

It is because you made this representation that Harold Weisberg wrote you in some detail on February 8, about two months before you started shooting, giving you reason to believe that in basing your movie on Jim Garrison's book you would be producing a "fraud and a travesty." When some time passed and you did not respond he got in touch with me, and I wrote the story of which you are aware.

Now in that story I encapsulated one of the reasons Weisberg gave you so you would know that you would be producing a fraud and a travesty. I note that there has not been any denial from either you ^{are} Garrison.

Garrison was going to commemorate the fifth JFK assassination anniversary by ~~making~~ charging new assassins. One of these, Robert Perrin, had to Garrison's knowledge, killed himself in New Orleans in 1962. Obviously, he could not have been as assassin from the grave.

You did not dispute this. You did not ask for more proof. You ignored it entirely in the oped-page article you asked the Post to publish, and it did.

So, how could you, with your expressed desire to be regarded as a "cinematic historian," a man who repeatedly referred to his movie as a ^y truthful account of this great tragedy that befell the nation and the man you describe as the "godfather" of your generation, proceed to make your movie in any degree based on ^{anything} ~~anything~~ at all Jim Garrison wrote or said?

After this it will make no difference what he says.

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But ^{his} ~~his~~ is as straight as a side-winding snake so I suggest that while you may hope that there is no occasion for you to say anything you be prepared to go farthur- and not to be diverted.

"Mr. Stone, I'm not going to be diverted. Before thid audience you have to defend your movie, not try to attack those who criticize it.

"You have said in various way, that in making it you drew on everything that was available, all the information ~~that~~ had come to light. You weré not talking about fact, - about information- you were talking about theories, and they are not information.

"Weisberg offered you, as he does all ~~writers~~ who write on the subject, access to the quarter of a million pages of once-~~withheld~~ official records he got by a series of Freedom of Information lawsuits.

"He tells me you had no interest at all in all this information that you at the ^{of} ~~last~~ ~~inferred~~ on a number of occasions was withheld until the year 2039, that you did not ask him for as much as a single page of them.

"So I ask you, hoe could you tell the nation that you were drawing on all the information available when you rejected access to a quarter of a million pages of them and instead presented theories that range from irrational to unproved as a truthful account of this great tragedy and of our nation's history?"

He is done before that audience if you do this.

He cannot address ~~with~~ ~~er~~ ~~thing~~ I suggest and the more he sneaks and slides and ~~evades~~ evades the more that audience will recognize that he is a faker, a commercializer and an exploiter.

And will it make one helluva story!

I suggest that you have the copies I gave you of all the letters just in case.

Remember, don't play his game- don't respond to his tricky questions or insults.

He will attack, not defend. You be prepared to do the same, attack, not defend.

In the many controversies in which I was involked, first with the first book on the Warren Commission and then when the decks got stacked even more I remembered not quote clearly and perhaps not 100% correctly something I learned in high-school history, what a French general said in World War I, perhaps Foch at the Marne, I'm not sure. But I am sure of the essence of what he said: "My left flank is turned, my right flank has collapsed, my center is retreating. Good! I attack." and he won!

Don't let Stone do this to you and be prepared to do it to him. It will be child's play. He can't face these two simple things I suggest you have written out in the event he does attack you, as I think he will want to do and perhaps Mankiewicz and his other flacks, seeing the promotional advantages of it, will encourage.

If he refers to his Post piece as definitive, remember I sent him a refutation of it the next day. He had his "research coordinator" write me a ^s/~~not~~ natty letter concluding with

what if not unreasonably interpreted as an offer of a ~~the~~ bribe, that jazz about the non-existing "relationship" and how it can be made "con^{triv}ective." She did not address any one of my factual refutations of his article and he had not responded to anything.

George, you can ruin this bastard who so deserves it, and it will be historic.

How I wish I were up to it! Would I be there!

Lay on, MacDuff!

My, George, what you can do if you just sit silently and say something only if he ~~crit~~ criticizes you or your story.

He can't appear before that audience without expecting at least a question about it.

I think he'll be prepared in his own dis^honest but clever way.

If you are not there you may look bad, especially among your peers.

So, to mix eras, truth is a shield and a buckler, and put your white hat on!

How

With envy at the opportunity, and best wishes,

Thinking about this and what else you may find use for as Stone himself perpetuates the controversy, I thought about what I have alleged from the first, that he has not denied and that has been entirely ignored: his movie is a brazen, unhidden commercialization of the assassination. In thinking of this I remember^{ed} something that caused me to cut my walking short so I could copy and mail it with this when I leave for the physical therapy at 7:30. Then, even if today is like yesterday and I can't really get to anything. I'll at least have mailed this. If I have some time I'll make and mail other copies.

According to Stone's own Viet Nam consultant and character in his movie, Fletch, Stone was working on still another Viet Nam movie when he ~~decided~~ ^{decided} to use Garrison as a vehicle for it!

Good story? I think so!

If I may suggest it, because I'd like if possible not to involve Wrono, why do you not phone Fletch and ease into this as he does in the gutter, saying that I told you that Stone heard about Fletch and his work when in the course of researching a planned movie on Viet Nam he read your 1985-6 series In Freedom magazine.

He may or may not chat about this and if he does you may find it interesting.

Then tell him that I told you (which I am, of course, right now) that this is where Stone got the idea for his movie. If he wants to chat about that he again may have interesting things to say.

Then you can say that I told you that Fletch's articles gave Stone the idea of using Garrison as the vehicle for leading up to what he wanted to say in the movie that he got from Fletch's series of articles.

I think this makes one helluva story, particularly if it were to appear before his NPR speech! If you can't do it this way, use his enclosed letter as a last resort. But with Stone's holiness and purity as he presents himself and his movie, WOW!