

Wednesday 26 August 1970

Dear Fred and Mary:

Last night after receiving Fred's special delivery letter and then speaking to him at some length, I immediately placed a call to Mary. However, Jimmie Lee reported that she was fast asleep, with the light on, and I said not to wake her. Frankly, I was pleased to find Mary sleeping at 10:45 p.m. Dallas time—her phenomenal energy and tirelessness during my visit had given me the beginnings of an inferiority complex.

However, Mary, I was unable to report my discussion with Fred in the wake of his special delivery letter. In case I cannot get to call you tonight, here is a brief summary of the main points: (1) It would serve no purpose to deliver an ultimatum to Lifton, and none of us wish to engage in what could be labeled coercion or blackmail. (2) We will therefore proceed to ignore his letters, if any are received, and to avoid phone conversations with him if he does call. (3) I will consult Sauvage, both as a critic and a news reporter, to get his reaction and learn whether he would wish to pursue the matter on behalf of his paper. (4) I will also see if I can reach Seymour Hersh, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his Mai-lai investigation and who said on a radio interview some months ago that he had started or intended to launch a news wire service specializing in investigative reporting. In any contacts with Sauvage, Hersh or others, I will leave out mention of both your names. For my own part, I will have to enter a caveat to the effect that I cannot guarantee the decisiveness of the material Lifton has been suppressing for four years but it is my impression that it would suffice to break things wide open.

As I mentioned to Fred last night, following my calls to you both on Sunday night I re-read my correspondence with Lifton 1965-1967 and refreshed my memory of just what had preceded my complete break with him in October/November 1966. Several phonecalls and several letters were involved, during which Lifton made it clear that he would not share with any critic the "find" he had taken to Liebeler. My notes further indicate that while I was in Los Angeles for two days at the end of 1966, I refused to accept a number of calls from Lifton but finally did speak to him briefly before my departure. During that conversation, he volunteered that his "find" had turned out to be a dud, a mistake—which we now know was a complete falsehood, but which I naively did believe until this month.

This morning, I resumed my re-reading of my correspondence with Lifton, this time tackling the 1968-1969 file. I found one letter, dated 12 Feb. 1969, which I had completely forgotten, and which includes one paragraph that in a way throws a slightly different or better light on his long-term deception where I am concerned. Let me quote it:

"I have always had you in mind as someone who I'd like to have read my finished work, and, once we started communicating again, I have continually wondered about how to bring up the subject, without bringing up the question of Liebeler, and the events that led to our disagreement in October 1966. To bring it up out of the clear blue sky and say, 'By the way, I've been working on something very important, full time, for the past two years...' seemed not too credible, so I kept putting it off, though it is something that was always on the back of my mind since we resumed correspondence."

He then goes on to explain his desire for secrecy, and his hope that I would not discuss his work with any third parties. I did not, apparently, follow up the paragraph quoted above, in subsequent correspondence, perhaps because it was just too cryptic, but I now regret that I did not press him for a full explanation.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Lifton has been sitting on something for four years that would have reopened the whole case and saved us untold heartache, labor, and discouragement, and would have redressed the monstrous injustice done to Oswald and to the whole country. He has not trusted anyone among the critics but has

elaborately tried to throw us off the track, but he did share his find with Liebeler who in turn shared it with other Commission people. What does worry me, and I raised the point with Fred last night, is: how come they are just sitting around for four years, waiting for the other shoe to drop? If the "kernel" is so damning, so sensational, that it will reopen the case and earn the WC the disgrace it deserved, why have they not taken steps to protect their position? Fred offered some thoughts on that point, but it does still make me uneasy.

In re-reading my correspondence with Lifton, I find many references to the privileged and cardinal information he has confided in me, and no one but me, mainly in telephone calls; yet my notes on his calls indicate practically nothing in the way of such information. I seem to recall that he did say things at times that went in one ear and out the other. I suppose it is possible that he did give me information the importance of which I did not recognize. I don't wish to do him any injustice. What is so excruciating is that, as is clear from re-reading our long exchanges of letters, ~~as~~ Lifton is convinced that he has been reasonable, generous, ethical, loyal, and working for the common good, all along. He has little if any capacity for seeing his actions as others see them. What we consider duplicity and pathological secretiveness, he would undoubtedly justify, in some ten or twelve pages, as necessary safeguarding of his work and as vital to the paramount objective of unveiling the truth about the assassination in the most invulnerable possible form.

I am deeply disturbed and unhappy about the whole business.

I think this brings Mary up to date, and provides some additional information for you, Fred. I tried to reach Sauvage at about 1 a.m. (he works nights, sleeps days) but his assistant informed me that he is on vacation, holed up somewhere trying to complete his book on Che Guevara, the deadline for which has already passed. I am hesitant to break into his work, under the circumstances, but will perhaps sound out his wife and get him to call me when he feels about to take a break from his ms.

Sorry if this letter is unclear, but I am unclear, in my own thoughts and feelings. Above anything and everything else, I want Oswald to be exonerated, if he is, as I have always believed, innocent, and I want the truth to come before the world, and I want to Commission exposed without mercy for what it was and what it did. The very thought that Lifton, my "friend", has the key but has failed to unlock the door year after year after year has poisoned my life for the last two weeks especially, but really for much longer, for I see from re-reading my files that I have been pressing him for at least a year on a target date for his book. You put it well, Fred, in your analogy—Garrison, having nothing, but screaming for headlines, while Lifton seems to have the answers, the real goods, but keeps it top secret. Garrison is almost too ridiculous and laughable to hate; but Lifton, he has a good chance. However this may end, I think that the anguish he has caused so many of us for so long is truly never to be forgiven.

I am not likely to be able to do anything irreversible in the next few days or even weeks, so if either of you has any further thoughts, please let me hear.

Much affection to you both,