

Newcomb

8 January 1971

302 West 12 St
New York City 10014

Dear Fred,

Good to hear from you! I am fascinated by the page from "Com. No. 49" that you enclosed with your letter but the matter of the "alleged White House guard" and the Grace Halsell phone conversation is completely new and mysterious to me. I will keep this document in mind in any work I do in my own "archives" in the hope of locating further information related to the guard and/or the phonecall, and will let you know if I discover anything that throws more light on the puzzle.

So Lifton has surfaced again! His technique of telephoning at sunrise and other unconventional hours to people whom he intends to woo or cajole into resumed friendship is certainly a peculiar approach. When I receive a call at 6:45 a.m. I take it for granted that the caller is aware that he will be waking me up, and unless there is some kind of emergency a call at that hour is reallychutzpah. At another hour, I might not have been so ready to tell Lifton off so quickly—I might have been noncommittal long enough to find out what was on his mind—but I was so infuriated by his audacity that I let him have it.

Like every megalomaniac, Lifton suffers under the illusion that he is the center of your universe and mine, as well as of his own universe. Your account of his illusion that others spend all their time thinking up ways to frustrate him, or that they steal his discoveries, or (especially) that we should all go into orbit around him and his apocryphal "book", add up to a veritable description of Harold Weisberg...or paranoia by any other name.

Lifton, no less than Weisberg, can at times be positively brilliant in dealing with evidentiary material. At other times, he is merely pedestrian and sometimes quite ridiculous. He expends untold energy on his intrigues and petty plots but he is such a yenta that he sacrifices the discretion on which the success of his maneuvers depend. From the very first, he has been embroiled in fights and feuds—I need not catalogue them—nearly always as a result of his double-dealing.

His claims of a "higher purpose" and of being the potential instrument for causing the government to fall strike me as pure and grandiose shit; I am increasingly sceptical about the real value and importance of his secret evidence or whatever the hell it is, increasingly suspicious that it is nothing more than a cousin to his camouflaged-trees-and-hidden-bunkers, and that it is so preposterous (whatever it is) that it will never get a publisher, if and when it is ever written to completion.

What does surprise me is his asserted devotion to the capitalist system. There's a new twist for you! Considering the state to which that system has now brought the country, Lifton's dedication to the free-enterprise Establishment (from the people who brought us Vietnam!) is in itself proof of his derangement.

I am rather glad that you did not follow my example and tell Lifton off at once, since we probably should maintain enough of a pipeline to keep ourselves informed of what he is up to. Forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes. As for causing the government to fall, I doubt if he can inflict anything more than a small mosquito-bite, if he ever even brings himself to the point of action. When you consider the proportion of his hot air to his substance, in the many years that he has been at work on the case, it does not encourage any high hopes for his major opus.

Yarborough's reply is very disappointing, and typical of the guarded letters written by various senators and other eminences to similar inquiries. At times some of the critics have read a great deal into simple form letters that were probably never even dictated or read by the hot-shots who signed them. I remember one instance of high excitement over a letter from RFK, in 1965 or 1966, which was never followed by anything except fervent statements of complete confidence in the Warren Report--the last such statement only about a week or so before RFK was himself assassinated.

I wrote to Mary a few days ago about a circular letter from Paul Hoch offering to xerox and fill orders for a huge batch of newly-declassified CD's. As I told Mary, I am extremely unwilling to have anything more to do with Hoch, after his disgusting "melon tests", even for so mechanical a purpose as acquiring these CD's. Have you been kept in the picture on these declassified CD's? Do you intend to obtain them? Incidentally, Harold Weisberg is worried--such like Lifton--about these documents falling into the hands of critics who will misuse them for ego-satisfaction!!! Really, it is obscene for critics to advocate the very same suppression of evidence for which they were the first to denounce the government. Between the attitudes manifested by such of our fellow-critics as Weisberg, Lifton, and that sanctimonious little fink Hoch, what remained of my energy and optimism about this case has been virtually wiped out, and I have very little enthusiasm for even acquiring the new CD's or breaking my back still more on a cause that seems to have reached a dead end, and in which more damage and treachery have been committed by our confreres than by the opposition.

I guess this will be it for now, Fred. All the best, and please keep me posted on further developments. I did relish your letter greatly, for its wit and pungency as well as for the information in it.

As ever,

