

Sunday noon 26.9.65

Dear Maggie,

I was half-intending to telephone you last night when some unexpected guests appeared and that scotched the idea. As you will know from my Friday letter, I was feeling some apprehension because of the defection of the cleaning woman; that made me feel exasperated with myself, so, in a spirit of bravado, I decided to try to reach Jones Harris and invite him for next Sunday.

To my surprise, Harris had already been invited and was planning to come! It seems Salandria (without consulting or informing me) had invited Harris and that Ed Epstein, hearing that Harris was intending to be here, told Harris (but not me) that he would come in from Ithaca for the occasion and accompany Harris. I suspect you will jointme in lifting at least one eyebrow at such dubious decorum—but in such a small coterie, I suppose we will have to take each other as we come (no pun intended). Here is the what was a guest list but what I am now inclined to regard as an attendance list:

1. Vince Salandria
 2. Mrs Salandria
 3. Jones Harris
 4. Ed Epstein
- (Arriving about noon Sunday)
5. Leo Sawage
- (Arriving about 4 pm)
6. Joe Lobenthal
 7. Thomas Stamm
 8. Bill Crehan
- (was in the New School group and has been very helpful in some respects but is not a real student of the case, yet terribly loquacious, and will have to be kept from seizing the floor from those who are well-informed)
9. Isabel Davis
- (my very close friend, who knows the case mainly through me but who will be no problem, as she wants to listen not hold forth)
10. Fred Cook (?)
- (if he is in town and can make it)

That will make about 12, providing that Salandria is not planning to spring any more surprises, and I can just about manage enough chairs. I wish I could dissuade Salandria from bringing his wife but then he would think I had lousy manners.....(?)

If I am sounding a sour note, Maggie, it is for reasons of morals as well as manners. Frankly, I was rather unhappy at the end of a three-hour telephone conversation yesterday with Jones Harris. His attitude toward Mark Lane is so extreme and so uncompromising that it really shook me up. He used language about Lane that one usually reserves for, let us say, Joe McCarthy, Adolph Hitler, and the like—based in part on his own close collaboration with Lane at one period, in which Harris says he saw at first hand and behind the scenes Lane's dishonesty, ruthlessness, and venality. He does not consider that Lane did anything but harm, does not recognize that he made any contribution at all, and, in telling me that Lane was forced out of politics (before 11/22/63) by means of flagrante delicto photographs involving perversion and abnormality, saw nothing ugly and outrageous in such tactics but that it was a "good thing." If this was not enough, Harris

slipped into the marathon conversation—not crudely, of course, as he is a highly sophisticated, literate, and intelligent man—those vaguely patriotic and anti-Left remarks that put me off like nothing else. So far as his investigation is concerned, he has even a stronger commitment than in the early days of the doorway photo, has been to Dallas many times, has interviewed a great many of the witnesses (Bledsoe, Fritz, Callaway, Reynolds, Paines, etc), and feels that the WC is a large luxury liner whose decks are already under water and which will sink soon, irresistably, while our small band are seaworthy though in a small rowboat. Nevertheless, he shows no sign of indignation against the WC and its counsel—in fact, found excuses for them every time I uttered a denunciation. The only vaguely negative remark he made was that he suspected Warren of being anti-semitic...

Harris, and this surprised me, still thinks that there is an 80-percent change that it is Oswald in the doorway...thinks that there was a two-level conspiracy, one group to carry out the assassination, another group to dispose of Oswald and see to it that the guilt was pinned on him and a "group" (ie Castro agents)...but there was a slip-up and the original plan, under which Oswald was not to leave the Texas Theater alive, could not be carried out...Hence, it became necessary to use Ruby.

Harris seems rather preoccupied with the fact that Bernard Weissman as well as Ruby is Jewish and that they were picked as part of a pattern to "front" for those who were directing the whole scheme, for diversionary reasons. There may be some truth in this, I suppose; but I was not pleased when Harris asked me if I was Jewish and assured me that he was too. I pointed out that regardless of my origins or political sympathies, if I was personally satisfied that a Leftist, a Jew, or even Oswald was guilty, nothing on earth would persuade me to keep silent.

I suppose that a large part of my negative reaction to Harris stems from his view of Oswald—a view that he seems to share with Epstein and to some extent with Salandria. That is, that Oswald was a completely "low" person, without scruple, without intellectual or moral quality, capable of any antisocial or criminal act which would bring him big money or the ego-satisfaction he had been unable to achieve in a series of frustrating failures. I pointed out that he was making the same general interpretation of Oswald as the WC made, and he assured me excitedly that here the Report was on sound ground, not to throw out the baby with the bath water, etc. He feels certain that Oswald was in the conspiracy, perhaps not even understanding how he was really to be used, but that he definitely knew and collaborated with what was afoot that morning.

One rather interesting statement by Harris is that he has absolute proof that the motorcade was 45 minutes late, not the five minutes suggested by the WC, and he regards it as suspicious that the Report has concealed and misrepresented that, although he is not sure of the significance which should be attached to it.

In short, while Harris is a far more warm, outgoing, and attractive person on the phone than Ed Epstein, who seemed very close to an utter boor, his position on Lane, Oswald, and the WC as well as the USA in general is rather antithetical to my position and I think to yours, Maggie, and probably to that of Stamm, Isabel, and to some extent to Salandria, who has utter contempt for the WC and who believes Oswald may be completely innocent. This leads me to wonder how orderly and objective we can be when we are all together; perhaps we will have to avoid those areas and concentrate on the evidence rather than interpretations, political attitudes, and speculations which are mainly subjective.

Having said all this, Maggie, I wonder if I should even mail this letter. I will sleep on it.

One thing I am NOT worried about is next Saturday night. I am really looking forward to that, and I am sure it will be a pleasure in every way. Until then, and with warmest affection,