

April 25, 1967

Dear Harold,

I write you today because I have very recently learned of the existence of a completely false story about you and me, a story which bears no accurate or truthful relationship to the facts of reality, and which has been widely promulgated by word of mouth. It has been very upsetting and distressing to gradually learn, from several third parties, the various versions of it. More recently circulated versions compound initial falsehoods by further falsely asserting that I admit the story is true! When things reach these ludicrous heights, the time has arrived that I speak for myself in this matter, and attempt to set the record straight.

The rumor has several versions, but one central theme: in exchange for information from Wesley Liebeler, I gave him an outline or a research resume of errors in your book, *Whitewash II*. The rumor was started by Stephen Burton*. Approximately five weeks ago, about March 22, Burton visited my apartment with an acquaintance from San Francisco, Robert Hyatt. Hyatt is interested in the assassination and attends Hal Verb's Warren Report course at San Francisco State College. He wanted to see the material I had on the camouflage theory. The three of us (Burton, Hyatt, and I) spent approximately 7 hours at my apartment that day, during which time I went through many of my photographs, discussed the case in general, and---in short---did all those things people do when they get together informally for such a confab on this subject.

About three weeks later, Stephen Burton originated the rumor. He first went to William O'Connell and told him about it. Bill suggested that I be confronted with this charge, and asked to explain myself, before it was spread further. Stephen did not do this. Instead, he went to Maggie Fields and told the story to her. He said that he remembered a remark he claimed I made that day at my apartment. In this manner, it is implied that I am the ultimate source of the rumor, which has several versions.

When Stephen tells it, he claims that (I said) Professor Liebeler stood up behind his desk, held out a print of the Altgens photo, and then said, "chuckling": "Now what have you got for me?" I then produced the aforementioned research data on your book. When pressed, Stephen hedges and states that he is not sure whether or not I said I exchanged such a research outline for the Altgens photograph or not. Possibly it was "something else" for which I played Judas. (Attached find an invoice from Associated Press for \$72.80, the amount I had to pay to obtain special blowups of the doorway and other areas off the original negative. I was, in addition, loaned two other prints by Professor Liebeler.)

Maggie's version leaves out the diabolical theatrics, and the details of what I am supposed to have received. (She says Stephen never told her that part of the story.) She darkly asserts that, in exchange for something, for "some information", I am working on a research project with Liebeler to attack *Whitewash II*; or have done such research for him and turned it over to him. Maggie's accent is on evaluating my character. She slams home her message by indirection! "I don't think you're an evil person, David..." blithely ignoring my protests that the charges are false.

Behind my back, both have been loudly braying "betrayal", without having bothered to inform me of the charges that they were making, and the story that they were spreading. Maggie disseminates an amended version in which I call her up and admit that the charges are true!

The story is completely false. My denial is two-fold. First of all, I have never done any such thing. I have never exchanged with Liebeler any research resume or outline relating to any errors in any critic's work---your work or any other's---for anything. So that there will be no misunderstanding about this, let it not appear that I am hiding behind the word "exchange". Not only have I not "exchanged" any such thing with him, I have never given any such thing to him "for free", or for anything else. It is also true that I have never even prepared such an item---no such thing exists, period!! The story has absolutely no foundation in fact. It is utter garbage.

* Burton is the 18 year old self proclaimed "chairman" of the new Citizens Committee

Furthermore, I also deny having ever said that I did such a thing. The meeting at my house was an informal "fun" meeting. The other two fellows came by while I was scrambling eggs for breakfast. When the table was cleared, out came the photographs. I was confronted with the fact that I was supposed to have made this statement about April 13th. I deny I said it. I do not claim to have a memory which is so good that it is capable of reconstructing a 7 hour conversation, loaded with banter, to such a degree of precision that I can exclude the remotest possibility that any given series of english words were spoken. I deny I said it because I cannot possibly understand why I would say such a thing since no such thing is true. Furthermore, such a statement is obviously extremely self incriminating. I am not in the habit of committing social hari-kari with my friends and associates. So much for my denial of having said any such thing at that meeting.

The third person at the meeting was Robert Hyatt. Attached find a letter from him, in which he unequivocally states that he remembers no such transaction alluded to at that meeting.

The Burton/Fields story not only depicts me as a bastard, but as a stupid bastard as well!!

I am extremely critical of the manner in which this story was evolved and disseminated. For that reason, I wish to discuss in further detail

- 1) why no such exchange could ever, and would never, occur;
- 2) a few details of what was discussed at my home that day, so that you may clearly see for yourself how such a story could be reconstructed from garbled memories, some time later
- 3) the unethical manner in which this story was given widespread dissemination by the two people involved, without informing me of their little Star Chamber proceeding, in abstentia.

(1)

As you may know, during the fall and winter quarters at UCLA, I attended Professor Liebeler's seminar on the Warren Report at UCLA. It is very simple to attend that seminar, and even to have informal hallway discussions with Professor Liebeler, without coming anywhere near using any other critic's research as a pawn in any exchange. It is not equivalent to walking a tightrope. It is like black and white. All that is required is to follow two very simple guidelines:

- a) I simply never discuss any third party's unpublished research, about which I may be aware, with Professor Liebeler or his associates.
- b) I have not gotten involved in any research effort, on Liebeler's behalf, to comb any critic's published material for errors, which would then be fodder for his book.

I think this sufficiently circumscribes the boundaries. Professor Liebeler has three law students, on research grants, whose job it is to write critical and highly analytical memoranda, chapter-by-chapter and footnote by footnote on Mark Lane's book. From what I have seen, these people are simply bogged down in trivia. He has a physicist whose job it is, apparently, to knock down Riddick's published statements on the head snap, and to deal with any other technical matters that might come up. Mr. Schiller always helps him with any questions of photography that have been raised. The purpose of the seminar was to examine critical material--- mainly Mark Lane's book. I attended, and became quite a nuisance. That is because I am 99.99% pro critic on all issues, and keep up a constant stream of heckling and counter-comment from my seat. Although I have learned a lot about how evading law students think, the chief thing I brought home each Friday afternoon was a class A head ache, my intellectual hangover from trying too hard to sway unconvinced. For that reason, and others, I am not attending this term.

Now suppose, during the course of discussion, a point comes up about ~~and~~ I disagree with a published theory of another critic?

Let me ask you a question, Harold. Suppose another critic disagrees with a theory of mine? On pages 2 and 4 of the March issue of Ramparts is a 1 1/2 column, detailed letter from Ray Marcus in which he goes on record as disagreeing with the analysis of the head shot in "The Case for Three Assassins", because it claims only one

bullet hit JFK's head at that time. On page 147 of Lewis and Schiller's book is a large quote, taking up half a page, in which Ray Marcus explains to the author why he disagrees with a theory I put forth explaining the black streaks which appear in Zapruder frames after the splice. Ray has almost brought me around to his position on the second matter. I am positive I am right in the first. I don't expect him to subordinate his intellect to my feelings. What each man believes is the truth has to be his guiding credo in a situation of this sort, not some critic's version of political truth. I am sure that you feel this way too. Intellectual diversity is a virtue, not a vice. Its potential for good far outweighs minor misuses, of which Mr. Schiller's book is a major example.

I have addressed audiences with my slide set three times at UCLA: once to the entire law school, once to the seminar, and once for the citizen's committee. I have also spoken at USC and at San Francisco State. My whole talk is built around data from photographs. Because of this approach, the question is invariably asked during a question session whether or not I believe that the Zapruder camera was running at the 24 frames/sec that the Barrett report indicates. I always give my honest opinion: "No". Furthermore, I have frequently stated why I don't think so. I theorize that Agent Barrett confused film speed and camera speed. This is just a theory, and I'm sure you remember when I explained it to you fully one night when you were out here, which happened to be when I discovered it.

I disagree with Lana and Sauvage on their approach to the two large bullet fragments, found in the limousine, identified as coming from Oswald's rifle. I always state that I believe that they are phoney as 399 and, concomitantly, I disagree with the Soderman footnote that is quoted by them. I read through that chapter of that criminological reference work, and I don't believe it supports their assertions about fragment "unidentifiability". So what? Would I ^{or any other topic} or have I ever prepared a research outline on either of these topics, (involving another critic's work, for Liebeler?

HELL NO!!!

In fact, I find in my correspondence with another critic a reference to the fact that I had prepared a memorandum on the business of the film speed and the road stripe. Actually, it was never finished. But I note that in a letter referring to it that I wrote at the time, I said: "It is not meant for non-critic consumption." I meant that then, and I still mean it now, were I ever to write such an item.

Given this situation, in which my nose is quite clean and my conscience clear, Stephen Burton and Maggie Fields closely question me as to whether or not I have ever even mentioned my opinions on these points of disagreement, in Liebeler's seminar!

Stephen readily admits the vulnerability of the 24 frame film speed argument. Typical of the way his mind works is summed up in the following type of question he asks me, in an apparent attempt to taunt my conscience:

"Have you ever discussed Weisberg's error in class. In other words, as far as Liebeler knows from you, the film speed is a good point--- as far as he knows from you?"

Now if this is the standard we are going to apply, then we should never feel free to express any view which contradicts that held by another critic. This is reprehensible dogma to me. It is a critic's version of political truth. It is the intellectual stuff of which ignorant clannishness is built, and uncritical cronyism. I think it is disgraceful that anyone should suggest that it is a proper course of action. I find it particularly repugnant that a young university student who claims he is after the truth about "who killed Kennedy" and a researcher like Maggie Field cannot bring themselves to apply the same standard of truth to a discussion of some smaller matters---such as how fast the Zapruder camera is running.

None of the above in any way contradicts the guidelines I mentioned before.

I am simply saying that in developing my own views on this case, I am entitled to speak on matters in which I may be in disagreement with other critics, without having someone adopt an attitude which attempts to pervert that exercise of the right to disagree into a betrayal of an associate. When we have arrived at the day when this is no longer possible, questions will be parried as follows:

"I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that I may disagree with a friend."

Edward Epstein didn't betray anybody when he interviewed Commission attorneys and worked with their files. The result of his research determines the integrity or lack of integrity in his position on various issues. There are lines of inquiry which might be more effectively pursued if material and/or contacts are employed that are available to a former Commission attorney, and which are not available to John Q. Citizen. For this reason, there is a dialogue that I have with Mr. Liebeler that has brought me into contact with him in situations that would not be necessary if I only attended the seminar. There is a positive value to be gained from this contact, and no third party's research is endangered as long as the two guidelines, previously discussed, are always followed.

In the course of this dialogue, I have exchanged with Professor Liebeler, certain items of research of my own in return for material that he can occasionally help me with. Examples of this are when his Physics department professor, Dr. Riddle, and I exchange memos on the head snap, or when Liebeler loaned me two altgens photographs for a few weeks, and in return I offered him a look-see at some work I have done demolishing Dr. Gregory's testimony which makes it appear that there are less than three grains of metal in Connally's wrist. This part of a limited relationship is built upon a certain amount of mutual good will. Conversation about this was mentioned at the meeting at my home, and this is mentioned in Hyatt's letter.

A political liberal detests a situation in which his loyalty is in question merely because he has working relations with people of a country with whom his own is at war. Similarly, I detest the yahoo-like braying of betrayal, the ignorant accusations, and the irrational suspicions that are generated by some other critics merely because I am doing the same thing---intellectually speaking---with one who was part of a governmental commission, a commission with whose conclusions and method of operation I emphatically disagree. I simply do not intend to have my own intellectual existence circumscribed by the fears of any third person, no matter how real and sincerely felt those fears may be. And I must say that I am outraged when I see anyone take advantage of this situation by telling half truths, exaggerating the meaning of incidents, and in general doing those things which in any political arena would be the equivalent to the activities of the most reprehensible red baiter. This, I feel, is exactly what has happened in the past two weeks.

Any baiter is a fervid loyalist, so fraught with fear of the opposition that he is almost incapable of communicating with any opponent. His own fears about the opposition get transformed into an attack on other people's loyalty when he sees them doing that with which he politically disagrees.

All the above does not imply that I mean well, and hurt others "by mistake". It does imply that I mean well, intend to do exactly what must be done to achieve results, do not injure the interests of others, and bitterly resent the malicious attempts of anyone who underhandedly misreports, misinterprets, and fabricates information in an attempt to make it appear that I do other people injury.

In the summer of 1965, I was given the exact same treatment by Maggie Fields for talking by phone with Willis, Jean Hill, and Mary Moorman. They were all lumped together by her as "Dallas Fascists", to be avoided if I wanted to stay on her good side. Later that year, her reaction to my stated intention of going to an open meeting at a UCLA dormitory to confront guest speaker Allan Dulles was similarly rejected, with the same exact combination of scorn and fear that I find myself up against today.

I am sure that the present situation is more delicate than any of those. But even those brought forth a response which was a harbinger of the present problem.

Make no mistake about it. I think Maggie's ethics as a citizen are above reproach. If most people were as concerned as she about the state of the world, or as well read as she, we would live in a far more peaceful world today. But it is possible for a person to act with markedly different degrees of credibility in different facets of their lives. The credibility gap cuts both ways. And it is in these personal matters that I frequently find it is almost impossible to relate even the simplest fact situation to her without having it completely inverted in transmission.

It is almost as if, when she is miffed at you, her response is to take the simplest fact situation and use the elements of it to construct an alternate one, a mutation, which is much more incriminating and eyebrow raising. She then disseminates this as fact and---when confronted---attempts to relegate the whole matter to the convenient graveyard of accidental misunderstanding. Or she claims that what she said is exactly what you told her.

Enough smoke has been assiduously created, in this manner, that I wonder if I can indeed any longer blame anyone who believes that there must be fire there. I do not have the time or the funds to continually ^{putting} about Maggie's brush fire falsehoods, and she is one of the chief communicants with other people outside this city.

This is the second time this year that he has propagated the Liebelier-rumor!! Last fall, I made my way through one exasperating day when I ran into about 3 people, locally, who had all been informed via Maggie Fields that I was working on a book with Liebelier!! This was complete bunk.

In a casual phone call placed to Maggie this past April 14th, I was informed for the first time of the latest batch of accusations, after they had been thoroughly disseminated all over the east. I denied them. Not having any idea that there had been any dissemination of this story, and being eager to catch this one at the start, I began to reason aloud, attempting to reconstruct situations to which I might have alluded in conversation with Stephen, and which Stephen probably misunderstood. It was apparent to me, after that conversation, that I had left Maggie with certain gross misunderstandings. Therefore, I telephoned back a second time that same evening and attempted to set the record straight. As I feared, all to no avail. I could tell what was going to happen next. The tipoff comes when patiently explained denials are met by the same counter-assertions, repeated over and over again, as if the mere force of their having been spoken makes them true. And I was correct.

For the next day, the story was on its way! I had "admitted" all that I was charged with! In fact, I had done exactly the opposite.

I have left for last the business of Stephen's special relationship with Maggie Fields, which is crucial to an understanding of what I believe is his gross impartiality in this episode.

Stephen's rumor would have been absolutely impotent if Maggie Fields didn't spread it all around.

One of the reasons I think that Stephen may find it hard to be impartial and act justly is the financial structure of the committee he is trying to create. It is true that the committee has numerous small contributions from people who put money in a cup or cigar box when they set up a demonstration table. But the fact remains that until this past weekend, the main contributor to Stephen's committee, the person who has given it its very financial lifeblood, is Maggie Fields. It is Maggie Field who has given the committee hundreds of dollars. Without Maggie, there would be no committee. Stephen would have his good intentions, and an organization chart, but hardly a spare dollar to even pay for a single mailing of the newsletter.

I don't think that there is a thing wrong or incorrect about the financial situation of the committee being so lopsided, at the start. Someone has to give this worthy cause a good start. The tremendous generosity this weekend of Mark Lane, donating huge portions of his proceeds from several LA appearances to the committee, will now give Stephen control of a bank account with a balance that runs into the thousands of dollars.

But this generosity places, I feel, a special responsibility on him. That

responsibility is to be impartial to all critics, and to follow policies that promote intellectual unity and smooth over personality differences. I gently suggest that Stephen's actions have done exactly the opposite during the past two weeks.

I find him over in the corner with his major contributor, catering to her worst vices, and feeding her half baked memories which are then used in deadly character assassination by rumor.

Perhaps Stephen has won the confidence of some, by tossing the dagger at me. He has lost mine.

I have deliberately divided up the preceding discussion into three parts. The first was a discussion of the realities of my relationship with Liebeler. Secondly, I have briefly indicated what was discussed at my home that day. The third part was the manner in which this episode evolved, with certain background material that I think is relevant to an understanding of what is going on here.

As far as the second item goes, I can't disprove a negative proposition. But if I am correct on the first and third topics, then Stephen's allegation is unfounded in reality, and his method of handling it was irresponsible and damaging to me personally.

As far as the second topic goes, if Stephen wishes to, he can go on forever repeating what he claims to remember from that conversation; and if Maggie wishes to, she can go on backing up Stephen for ever and ever.

I do not wish to carry around my neck forever, an albatross which consists of Stephen's fragmentized memories of an informal conversation that took place around my kitchen table.

I would like to see them both → direct their energies towards investigating the assassination, and stop assassination my character.

I think you have been owed a detailed letter of explanation for some time now, and I am very sorry it has taken so long to compose.

Faternally yours,

David

David S. Lifton

Attachments: Letter from Robert Hyatt, written April 17, 1967
Receipt for Altgens photos from A.P.

CC: Stephen Burton
John Evans
Maggie Fields
Robert Hyatt
Ray Marcus
Sylvia Meagher
William O Connell
Vincent Salandria
Hal Verb

Robert Hyatt
473 10th Avenue Apt
San Francisco, Calif

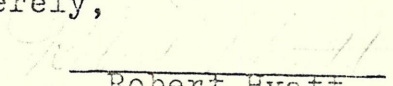
David Lifton
11818 $\frac{1}{2}$ Dorothy St.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear David,

At this time I would like to unequivocally state that no mention was made of a research project or formally prepared outline of errors contained in Whitewash II supposedly presented to Wesley Liebeler during the time at which I accompanied Steven Burton to your house to view some of your material on camouflage during Easter. I have no recollection whatsoever of any remarks made at that time which would be representative of or infer that you exchanged a research project or formally prepared outline listing errors in Harold Weisberg's Whitewash II, for any goods or services. That which I do remember and I must admit that it is vague in terms of remarks of such nature since my primary interest was photographs, their interpretation and possible significance or implications, was a most casual statement to the effect that Liebeler gave you a photograph (possibly Altgens) in return for which you divulged some findings gleaned from your own independent research, research not involving the central interests of the other critics of the Report. I also recall your discussing the class of Liebelers to some degree in which you commented on the fact that one of the functions or courses of actions engaged in at the class was to review works critical of the Report and it is possible that it was in such a reference that Whitewash II was commented on. I don't personally see how in a work ^{such} as Whitewash II which is so packed with facts and research from first page to last in encyclopedia fashion, anyone could consider the discovery of an error assuming one existed to reflect in anyway on the integrity of the individual who believes in all honesty that such exists. As I remember the remarks made at your house, if Whitewash II was mentioned in reference to Liebeler in anyway, it was in the context of very general broad remarks about some of the conclusions of different critics, and didn't in any way refer to any formally prepared project listing errors in one book or another, which was to be used to exchange for some other material.

P.S. You may reproduce this letter

Sincerely,


Robert Hyatt

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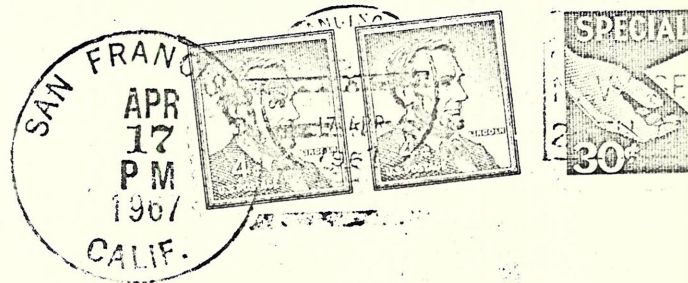
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Robert Hyatt
473 10th Avenue Apt. 5
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David Lifton
11818 $\frac{1}{2}$ Dorothy St.
Los Angeles, Calif.
90049

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