

August 7, 1969

Dear Sylvia,

Many many thanks for the various letters and communications you have sent me in the past few weeks. I have been so snowed under with things to do and goals to keep that I could not bring myself, with good conscience, to attack my correspondence file. When I sent out those packages containing the documents, I heaved such a sigh of relief, and I immediately turned to other things, meaning to send along some sort of cover letter with it, but never getting around to it. This may sound odd, but the collating ~~of~~ (or should I say sorting) of that material took hours. I was quite surprised, but I had about 4 copies made, and the machine I am using doesn't sort automatically. Also, the machine kept breaking down, and everytime it breaks down, you have to go through an infuriating restart and reset procedure, which takes about 5 minutes, only to find, sometimes, that it breaks down immediately again, because you haven't loaded the paper correctly. (about 7?)

As a ballet buff, you will be interested to know that my wee-hours of the morning xeroxing was made easier by having attended, earlier in the evening, a really beautiful performance of Giselle, with Nuryev and Fontaine. (sp??)

Let me turn to your letter of June 28, first of all.

Re Fensterwald. I found him surprisingly conservative. I guess I had expected an Eastern liberal, or something of that sort. Immediately after coming home from one of the lushest dinners I have eaten in a year, I sat down and typed up 8 or 9 of the most extreme remarks he had made which caused me to think this, while ~~XXXXXX~~ they were still fresh in mind. I was thinking of sending this to you, but just right this minute I can't find it. He definitely seemed to have a warm regard for J.E. Hoover, and sometimes seemed to imply that his opinion was that Oswald had done at least some of the firing from the SE corner, 6th floor perch. I remember asking him how Oswald could have ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ been confronted by ML Baker within about 90 seconds, and he answered: "He ran fast" (downstairs).

When you meet him, quiz him. He was very straightforward about his views.

What bothered me the most, as far as I was concerned, was what appeared to be his inability to understand the ~~XXXXXX~~ importance and implications of certain things which I thought were obvious. Specifically, the idea that the train may have been deliberately removed from Willis 5. Aside from whether this had been done, he really didn't grasp the implications of what it meant if it had been done.

The night he was out here, he seemed genuinely enthusiastic over the idea that he had located, or someone he knew had located, one of the gunman who had shot President Kennedy from the grassy knoll, and that the fellow was alive and living in (I think) Wheeling, West Virginia. This may be purely my outlook, but that sort of claim just has no credibility with me.

Re Weisberg. I haven't touched the matter since early June. ~~XXXXXX~~ Briefly, here is some background. I had been corresponding with Gary Schoener. I was becoming progressively more distressed with his views on the Garrison affair, especially since the trial was now over and I felt there was no excuse for some of his statements. But although, on the one hand, I was distressed, he seemed very reasonable and I gradually got seduced into thinking that if only I tried a little harder, I perhaps might change his views.

Jack  
Lawrence  
Charleston  
W.Va.

In late Spring, (either April or May), I erroneously came to the conclusion that the key to many of his views on Garrison lay in his uncritical acceptance of many things Harold Weisberg was telling him (As I remember, at least one reason Weisberg was getting into our discussion of Garrison was via the "hornley case, and the matters it raised.)

So, finally, thinking he was close enough to me to do it, and that he would not be offended, and that he was somewhat impartial, I wrote him a letter which included many details of my chief gripes against Weisberg, with the idea of pointing out that ---- however much I may respect much of "arold's published work---his credibility with me is not very high, and detailing certain other attitudes and modes of behavior which I find intolerant, offensive, and even cruel.

It took me one more round of letters to catch on to the fact that (I think) Harold is one of Gary's heroes; or, if not that, then perhaps Gary, more than anything else, wants to be where the action is, and thinks that that means staying on "arold's good side. Whatever the cause, I found somewhat unbelievable his analysis of my beefs, because they just couldn't all be all that wrong, although he did catch me in a few errors of fact, here and there.

Formally, I suppose, I owe Gary a reply to his fantastically detailed reply to each and every statement I made that was, in the slightest, critical of Harold. But I don't have the time anymore, and don't intend to pursue the matter any further.

The above, I think, is what Harold is referring to.

Re my work and what you heard

I have told a few people that I am writing a manuscript. No one who's on the grapevine, however, knows the specifics that I told you on the phone in the telephone conversations we had back in January and February. It is this that is really important to me, and I feel safe and secure. I have no complaints.

Now, about what you heard. Distinguish, for the moment, between evidence, and political theory. I believe I have indicated to you certain political theories I have regarding the fact that the JFK assassination was a high level plot, possibly involving personalities such as LBJ, Rusk, and Dulles. A cousin of mine who goes to school in Colorado was out here; I spoke to this cousin about some of these beliefs, but nothing about evidence on which they are based. It's a small world, and, apparently, my cousin wrote about his conversation with me to another cousin I have at Ithaca College, (New York), who then told his friend who lives in the dormitory. This friend, a few days later, went to a lecture that was being given at Ithaca College by one Gary Richard Schoener. After the lecture, this friend came forward with remarks to the effect that "I know someone in California who is writing a manuscript which says...etc." Schoener then either phoned or wrote Fred Newcomb a letter which sort of gleefully stated that he knew all about what I was doing; I got worried and immediately phoned him briefly in Minnesota; for I had no idea where he had heard such assertions about Rusk, Johnson, and Dulles, and it sounded like something that might come from me. So I wondered, how much else does he know, and where did this come from? I quickly found out that all he knew were these unsupported assertions that the assassination was a high level plot, and that it came to Ithaca via my Colorado cousin. I felt quite relieved, and probably asked him not to spread that all around, and communicated the same to my cousin.

Anyway, I guess I should have known better, for in the market for "inside information", Gary had a little goodie he could tell Harold, and he probably did. So there is my theory on why Harold might be making such statements.

Incidentally, when Weisberg was out here last October, I spoke to him and asked him his feelings about the possibility of a high level plot.

He forcefully told me that he didn't think that this was the case, and had never come across anything, in all his researches, to indicate this in the slightest. But, he added, "I have frequently thought things were not the case, but, after helping somebody do something, have changed my views." No thanks, Harold!

Between the Thornley affair and other incidents, I must confess to you that I just plain don't trust that man. If Harold accidentally left the manuscripts for his books at my apartment, and I accidentally came across them, I would return them to him unopened. And if I had happened to read crucial sections of them accidentally before realizing were they were, it would go no further than me. I would promise him that, and he wouldn't have to lose an hour's sleep over it. I just don't feel the same way about him. Rather, I can see him easily coming up with at least 10 rationalizations, falsifications of fact, white lies, and self-justifications, and I would end up losing much more than a night's sleep.

Getting back to the specific question you asked...

The manuscript is based on evidence, much of it new, but all of high pedigree and legitimacy. The inferences from evidence are very carefully made. Now, as regards political matters: the political superstructure that one places on an operational substructure is largely a function of the evidence, and the facts. I think that it will be very difficult for a reader to come away from a manuscript like this thinking that Johnson is uninvolved, before the fact; this is not because I'll charge that, or make any slanderous assertions, but because I believe that it follows---logically, legitimately, and persuasively--- from the information and evidence presented.

I must add, however, that I have grown politically in the last 2 or 3 years and that today, it is more important to me communicate ~~XXXX~~ correctly and optimally the theme that the motive for the assassination was to change our foreign policy (and specifically, Vietnam) and that high level hands were secretly manipulating the course of ~~ship~~ of state in effecting the assassassination and the subsequent policy change, than to bring my case (or even appear to) on proving precisely whose hands they were, or even appearing to seek personal vengeance. I think that the fingerprints I have developed off the tiller are pretty good; but nothing is really changed at all, as far as the political thesis being propounded, if one wants to admit a little smugness in them. Politically speaking, a high level plot is a high level plot, whether it is official A,B,C, or D,E,F who ~~are~~ involved; and as such (and as Garrison didn't learn) it is to be distinguished from "hard eyed men with guns" (Playboy interview) camping out on the north shore of Lake Ponchartrain and deciding they ought, on a collective impulse, kill JFK because they hadn't been able to vent their irrational spleen killing Castro.

By the way, I was recently told by someone that Garrison is now saying ---somewhere in Europe---that the Joint Chief's killed JFK. "He's getting warm", said this admirer of Garrison, who also believes in high level plots. "Yes", I replied, "except for the fact that as far

as I know, we're not supposed to be playing "Pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey" and are supposed to be basing our statements on evidence."

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Regarding the archives, there is something you should know. The archives has recently reduced the price of ordering ~~XXXXX~~ xerox from 20¢ per page to 10¢ per page.

This should make it easier to order small clumps; however, I still like microfilm, because its only a nickel a page, and you don't have to print it out until after you've read it. Also, its nice to have a record of everything ordered on microfilm.

In answer to your question, if you send me a list of what you want, I'll look it over. If there's anything I have on it, I'll let you know. Also, I speak to Paul Hoch frequently on the UCLA tie line, free of charge. I'll read your list to him on the phone; if he has stuff, he can send you what he has. Then, I'll xerox a copy of your list, and annotate it with who has what. If you want, I can then include stuff you want on my next microfilm order. But the main thing is, if I have anything on your list, I'll let you know right away.

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My work is going fine, but slower than I would like. I feel so ~~XX~~ embarrassed about making predictions. By the way, my parents are arriving in town tomorrow, for 3 or 4 days of visiting. They have no concept at all about research and writing, and its very difficult to explain why anything of this sort should take very long.

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Mark Lane recently had two articles in the East Village Other. I read part II. Really terrible. Its difficult to believe that he really believes all that stuff. He's come a long way down in my eyes since I attended that first lecture, on September 20, 1964.

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Tink Thompson made available to me the Bell film and the Hughes film. Working with two others out here (Fred Newcomb and Jack Clemente, a very competent optics man) we have created an excellent slide set of about 150 key Bell film frames. The Hughes film is being done this week. I am so thankful for Tink letting me see that film; I really feel that I am now a witness to the Dealey Plaza part, and that anything I write about crowd reaction can go one step further than the documents.

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Re Ted Kennedy. When all is said and done, I'm shocked that he appeared to put, ahead of that girl's life, his own career, and perhaps even an attempt to fabricate some evidence (like ~~XXXX~~ alibi that he was on the other side.) This stuff cannot be explained away by merely saying he was in shock. Two others were involved, and it smacks of conspiracy. The episode, I think, may give some remarkable insights as to why the Kennedy's might not have done anything, in the aftermath of JFK, no matter what they knew. The part in the speech I disliked most was his maudlin and cheap use of the Kennedy's curse.

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Please make sure you read Halberstam's July 69 Harper's article on McGeorge Bundy. Regards, David