

January 30, 1978

45M

Dear Jim,

Here (finally) is my listing of FBI Items AIB #165-247. You asked for any further suggestions I have on what parts of the file to focus on.

As we have discussed, I'm generally most interested in documents from the non-WC period, where anything we get from the FBI is new - the 1967 flap, the critics, Garrison, and the most recent stuff (whatever it is). I haven't yet seen the good stuff you have found in these areas (except for a few very interesting pages), so I guess there is no point in saying more at this time.

On the WC period: there is a special interest in the couple of weeks after 11/22, when the coverup was solidifying. I would then expect the files to get somewhat less interesting in a substantive sense; there has certainly been lots of interest about the investigation itself. Then things will pick up around September 1964, I guess.

Of course, since I haven't seen what you are not selecting to copy, I can't judge the selection procedure, except to confirm that most of what ~~have~~ you have sent rates at least 'interesting.' There is enough non-overlap with the 100 pages or so CBS sent me to suggest that you shouldn't be picking out much less from the WC period. As you can see from my ratings, a lot of the substantive material (especially in teletypes from the field offices, and especially about things like handwriting checks) is vaguely familiar to me from the Archives. I would probably select fewer of these items, but that's just by own bias.

I would be inclined to give the WC file (62-109090) a rather quick review, with special attention to WC-FBI interaction rather than substantive leads. To the degree we are interested in various leads which the Commission staff was onto, the WC's files are probably a better (less biased, and easier to plow through) source. As you know, I've spent a lot of time going through those files, and have a couple of thousand selected pages, so again my suggestion here is reflecting my own bias and shouldn't be taken too seriously. I would be very surprised if the Commission found any recognizable smoking guns and then suppressed them, but I've been surprised before. (For example, David's suggestion that Rankin's 1/27 reference to Monterey Language School (WWIV, p. 101) indicates a witting suppression of the Epstein thesis should certainly be kept in mind.)

I would like to see suggestions from Mary and Sylvia, and others, on how to proceed with the screening of these files.

Of course, we should push the FBI on the pre-assassination field office files, the Gale memo and related stuff (still not received!), and (in particular) I should keep after the CIA for the post-WC-era documents which they indicated long ago were being reviewed (in part because of my request).

Despite your unfortunate exchange with Harold, I still hope he would be amenable to some sort of arrangement which could get us cheap copies from his set. Someone other than you might want to contact him (maybe through Jim). Any [*Lesar] arrangement should involve the minimum hassle for him - e.g., if you offered to supply paper for his copying machine and work in Frederick, or just borrow a volume at a time, etc. Of course, it would be more convenient to get a free copy of our own, or get access to a press set, now that things have quieted down.

Anyway, I've been thinking a bit about what we are looking for in these files, what we would do with it if we found it, etc. Given what the rumors are about Epstein, the House Committee, etc., and given what we have seen of the performance of the press when the FBI files were dumped on them, it may be a good time to kick around long-term strategy ideas again. I'm talking about the sort of things we discussed among ourselves in Washington; but at that time, I (and others, I gather) were much more optimistic about the HSC. Unless they are very effectively hiding their light under a basket, the fundamental problems which we generally agreed on (lack of political will in Congress, lack of expertise in the case, and at least potential opposition from the agencies to having dirty linen exposed) seem to have determined what has happened.

What if we did find a smoking gun? I'm not sure there is any way of making sure it doesn't turn into just another National Enquirer headline (or, if we're

lucky, a Washington Post story or 2 minutes on Cronkite). My impression is that each of us has identified certain leads and clues which are potentially explosive and/or conclusive, but that we could not agree on who to indict and what to charge them with. (I'm talking about the assassination itself; on ~~these~~ the coverup, I think there is a general consensus, but to me at least the picture is not clear enough to jump from knowing all the rather distinct things that were being covered up by various people, to knowing which of them (if any) was covering up participation in a conspiracy to assassinate.) Of course, some of our colleagues don't have that problem, since they are ready to accuse just about everyone of being in on the conspiracy, but it is hard to "pin" these people down. I don't think any of us are really inclined to operate in that fashion, and in any case we've seen how effective their approach is in terms of public opinion, and how ineffective it is with much of the press, Congress, etc.

Anyhow, over the past 14 years, we have come up with all sorts of important but not always obviously hot leads - the capture of Oswald, Marina's translators, the Army/Hidell story, the Primula Report, the DPD tapes, and lots more like that. I think if we were running an official investigation together, we could come up with a consensus on what to go after, with reasonable confidence that the case could be broken. Unfortunately, by all accounts the House Committee hasn't operated the way we would! So, it looks like one thing we can't do with our quasi-smoking guns is pass them over to the HSC, and expect something to happen. The HSC is now acting less as a forum for us than as a data sink - or, maybe, a black hole: stuff flows in, no information comes out (except gossip generated at the boundary of the black hole), and we have no idea of what's happening inside.

Here's a thesis for discussion: we (collectively) are acting as if we believed that Nixon left office because of Woodstein and the House Judiciary Committee. I don't think any of us believe that. But our effort, generally, is directed at the press and the House Committee. (Largely, I suppose, because we can get at least some response from those quarters.)

We all probably have our own views on what did Nixon in, but my feeling is that at some point he ran fatally across the bureaucracy, meaning ^{in part} the intelligence agencies (especially the CIA). So, here's another idea for discussion and argument: the JFK case will be finally resolved when one of the established power blocs takes it on as a ~~cause~~ cause - e.g., the CIA, the FBI, the Justice Department, or a well-established (probably Senate) committee.

If that is true, can we do anything to encourage it? Maybe not. I've had fantasies in the past of the FBI investigating the CIA on this issue, and vice versa. Maybe there has been some of that, but as we know from the history of the Castro-did-it theory, the arguments against rocking the boat in public carry a lot of weight in the government.

[By the way, if anyone feels that the case will be completely resolved when A.J. breaks into the vaults at the Archives or the CIA, and ~~that~~ that I'm being incredibly elitist and bourgeois, I'm open to being converted.]

Anyhow, it seems (offhand) that what got Watergate rolling was a rather legalistic committment to nail the perpetrators of minor and essentially unpolitical (i.e., not sensitive) crimes - coverup, perjury, etc. Obviously, this committment had limits - Kliendienst, Helms, etc. But it did produce some motion. So, what are the chances that the Justice Department (or the ~~EX~~ FBI, the CIA, or others) will move on something related to the assassination? Not very good, I suppose, until we come up with a plausible signed confession.

Since I'm particularly turned on by the Army/Hidell story, it would be very nice if someone could be made to investigate the apparent destruction of Army records - a nice "non-sensitive" little offense. I don't know if anyone would have jurisdiction over that, of course. Now if we had friends in the FBI who could be persuaded that the Bureau was a victim of a coverup in 1963, and that we don't see them solely as perpetrators of a coverup, maybe we could get them thinking. (Fat chance, I agree, but it's an idea.) Maybe the most recent FBI files will give us some idea whether there is any possibility of benefit ~~but~~ by

sending tips to them, not just to the HSC,

[It just struck me that some of our friends would take this letter as conclusive proof that I'm a CIA agent, or worse. Well, the hell with them!]

Anyway, I guess what I'm talking about is a variant of what we were calling the 'special prosecutor option' in September. That is, it wasn't at all clear whether the HSC had thought about what they would do if they came up with live, indictable suspects. That's probably moot, but the dynamics of the situation may still be relevant.

If we can't give "them" (the Justice Department, the Senate Committee, the people, the Yankees, or whoever is in charge here) a list of indictable names - and I don't think we can right now - is there ~~anything~~ anything we can do to help things along? (While waiting for a solution from Epstein, Lifton, or someone.) Not much, I suppose. But I think it's ~~worth~~ worth remembering what we have said earlier about the new suppressed evidence - testimony before the Rockefeller Commission, the Schweiker Committee, and (maybe) the House Committee. There may well be a number of perjury cases sitting there, ripe for the picking. Someone certainly lied about the Hosty note, and perhaps if there had been a little more hard evidence, something would have come of it. I'm fairly sure Gemberling is dissembling about the Hosty notebook entry, where we have evidence (i.e., ~~an~~ an analysis of the documentary record) which nobody has really picked up on. If, for example, I knew that Gemberling had told the same story to the HSC, I would start arguing for an investigation into possible perjury - and there is a slim chance that someone would pay a little attention. And David Phillips may have misled the HSC, if what was reported is accurate.

Well, this is all very rambling; I don't have any real suggestions, and it's time to watch M*A*S*H. I probably had an overdose of oral ~~of~~ caffeine today, which stimulates this kind of thinking. We really need a couple of days around a conference table without the ~~House~~ House Committee, perhaps. Anyhow, I would like people's reactions.

This could be all academic; we may be in the calm before the Epstein storm. In any case, it will be interesting to watch the reaction to Epstein's book and see how some real professionals go about getting attention.

P.S. after rereading this letter: I'm perfectly willing to argue that no government has shown itself capable of handling really tough problems - the enery crisis, for example - so why should/be the slightest bit optimistic about the JFK case? (The same might go for the press and various popular movements, but less so.) That's another story, maybe irrelevant. Please don't jump on me for anything I should have kept in mind but didn't; I just want to kick some ideas around. /we

I'll try ~~to~~ to get going on detailed notes on the FBI documents soon. I don't have a lot of ~~spare~~ spare time, of course. I'm looking forward to seeing more documents, plus the real story on Epstein and the HSC.

Best to all,

Paul

Paul L. Hoch
Certified Smear Artist