

4/10/70

Dear Russ,

In writing you yesterday and earlier I was pressed for time. I have a few minutes before awakening Lil, not enough for working, so I expand a bit.

Mistakes can have real value, even serious mistakes, if we extract the lessons all hold. The skolnick fiasco is one. I almost made a bad one in it, and it is not my own unfailing instinct that prevented it, merely the unusual fact that I learned of it so late at night, just before midnight.

There now remains no doubt he is off on an ego trip, that his is a spurious suit, and the real damage is not his plagiarism but the evil potential of the "suit", which will be tossed out of court the minute it is considered. This, in turn, it being a suit against the government for alleged suppression, would lead to nationwide headlines "No JFK Suppressions". Do I have to tell you the effect this would have on our work, on public and media attitudes, on the legitimate suits to be filed and filed?

So, once I had time to think it over before countering the extensive publicity, I decided the thing called for was no publicity, and I've avoided it. In fact, where reporters have divined the truth, I've persuaded them to drop it. It sometimes takes a young reporter a little while to learn the urgency of no publicity. You will, I am sure, recall our previous correspondence in which I've been saying that, as a general thing, unless there today is major attention, the time is not now for one-shots, especially not in the underground press. It may help you understand this is you compare the total suppression of my quite legitimate suit and its really sensational nature and attached proofs with the extensive publicity this fake one got. This is the nature of the media with which we live. The press talks about the dishonesty of the administration, especially Mitchell and Kleindienst, but they are in terror of basic assault upon them.

Actually, although he feels and says otherwise, I have made very few calls about Skolnick. I did phone only one reporter seeking information. I phoned WRSV, the station he used 3/20, as I reported to you, and got lies and evasions. I then phoned WCFL, the station on which his thing got aired and whose reputation and participation made it a story. This is the total extent, except for letters that are only just now reaching their destinations: the President of Columbia College, the manager of WCFL, and a second letter to WRSV.

The men at WCFL (I spoke to the news director in the absence of the manager and the reporter on the story when he phoned back do seem concerned about the potentialities of the damage. They invited me to go there and ruin Skolnick and I immediately declined, for this is not the need. It was no trick to convince them of my truthfulness. I began by telling them to tape what I said and confront Skolnick with it and let the manager hear it. Obviously, this is subject to but a single interpretation. When the news director (Hagen) told me he'd like his reporter to phone back, I again told him to have Fahn, the reporter, tape the call. I was able, knowing what of what I have I gave you, to accurately describe the contents of the attachments, for I had not given you all the FBI reports, some not being directly related to what I'd asked you to do for me. I invited them to come and see the others, or to send a Metromedia man from DC, etc. In short, after I outlined the Freedom of Information act, stops this and more like it, it became obvious to them that they were involved in a mess, a plagiarism, and they raised with me the question of damages. I told them this was premature, that if I desired to deal with them on that basis it would not be by such open and frank talk but through a lawyer, and I

suggested that while this was real and very serious to me, other things held higher priority, one being preventing further damage. On damage I suggested their manager and counsel think it over. They continued pressing on this, either for self-protection or from sheer concern.

I expect them to be sending me everything they have. I'll then be in a better position to evaluate the extent of damage, to me and to work on the assassination, and what must be done. Also, the extent of Skolnick's corruption. This is to include tapes, releases, the suit and clippings.

Last night my reporter friend, who knew immediately this was my material because long ago I had both backgrounded him on this and asked his help (which he could not offer, his employment being what it is), phoned to update me.

About the time you and he were in touch, perhaps just a little later, Skolnick tried to interest a WBBM reporter through a far-out type WBBM engineer in his class. He has been in touch with this reporter off and on, apparently in the hope of pulling his thing on WBBM and getting it fed to CBS. He seems to have switched to WCFL only when it became clear this was not to be his.

Here I tell you what you may know from your own Chicago experiences: In that lovely city of peace, tranquility and political freedom, WCFL is known as Mayor Daley's station. The fine reporters with the slightest unorthodoxy, the faintest suggestion of political free thinking, and reporters of such character they immediately get better jobs. The major reporting of the conspiracy trial on WBBM and all the stations it fed, which is many if not most of the all-news stations, is such a WCFL slumme. The most perplexing single question to my friend is how this got aired at all on ~~XXXXX~~ WCFL, especially with their participation. I am not sure I share the inference, but I do report it.

Now Skolnick has gotten down to the open expression of his contempt for all of us working on the case. Unfortunately, in this interview, which I am getting, that came after the taping, but I am also getting a memo from that reporter. He began with fine-sounding condescension about us buff's being slefless is amateurish, etc., and wound up calling us incompetent but that would end not that his great and unequalled talents were being applied. And this, mind you, after he clearly had had it from WCFL, after his call to me. This happened to be a good, and experienced reporter who knew the right questions, like how you go about filing such a suit, what has to be done, etc., and in every single question Skolnick failed. In all other areas he had only evasions. There are at least two Skolnick interview tapes I'll be getting and if these do nothing else they'll tell you the kind of guy he is. I doubt you'll have anything else to do with him after hearing them. I also taped his conversation with me and that will blow your mind as I blew his.

Skolnick did get copies of Fensterwald's Bolden file, and he seems to have used it selectively. Bud is a very trusting guy, so he is also a very decent one. He also has an unerring instinct for ~~xxx~~ every phoney, not from any character fault or evil intent but because he is serious about this, wants all the help he can get, and because he is so trusting. He did not tell me of being in touch with Skolnick until a few days ago. It was just before Skolnick filed the suit.

My hunch is that, whether or not it will work, this being that kind of soaring ego, WCFL will try and pressure Skolnick to withdraw his suit. If he doesn't, I'll have to give serious consideration to going to Chicago to take care of him publicly, to the end that he is completely disassociated from the ~~suit~~ critical community. The purpose will be not vengeance but to minimize the damage of his inevitable defeat in court. Meanwhile, he is now calling reporters who ask him questions either FBI or Secret Service agents!

It is a mess. I knew you did not intend it. It has also further disillusioned several sincere critics who have been in touch with me, who actually believed this could be a serious, viable suit from the AP story and the WCFL backing. But in the Archives, where I was the day the story broke, they were slughing about it.

Should they not have, from a legal point of view? Here is a man who had never written them a letter, never made a request of them, charging them with suppression. What standing can that have in court. Especially when if the Secret Service has anything, as I am confident they do, on Valle, they did not give it to the Commission and it is not in the Archives. I do know the Secret Service and on this. There was no reason to tell you and I got it after I finished the writing, after you left Chicago. And I also believe it. It is as logical and reasonable, from their point of view, as anything can be. By the way, they also are slughing at Skolnick's suit. But they do not, generally, laugh at the possibility of suits against them, as you will learn when you are here. They do not want serious ones on this subject.

This poor Skolnick is sick with his own deformity and an enormous ego. It is tragic that he cannot use his apparently fine mind for really constructive purposes but permits his ego to dominate it. If he continued as he started he'd have accomplished worthwhile things. The word I get is that with his efforts failing to attract the kind of attention his first success got, he began a kind of deperation demand for attention.

Well, Bill now has breakfast. Please answer the questions I have asked you as completely as you can. Best to both.

Dear Mary,

I should have filled you in on this sooner. The letter is to the friend from whom Skolnick got my COUP material that he used in broadcasts and a fake suit of which you probably heard. After you have read this, please return it for my Russ file. I think the suit really will die and we'll not be really hurt by it. If it doesn't, we will be hurt.