

11/8/74

Dear Dave,

After writing my impressions from your letter last night I began to read your piece. I decided to continue with this reading this morning instead of doing other everyday work and instead of mailing the addressed letter for several reasons.

I feared you might not understand the letter and might not like it and its forcefulness. I also wanted to give you an opinion and have basis for discouraging Jim's paying any attention to it now when he has so much that presses upon him. And with the concerns in my mind, because I knew I would read it sooner or later and never when I did not have something else to do, I believed it would be better to read it while these concerns were fresh in my mind.

I started by merely marking marks from which I would write you. Then this morning I changed to making notes. Some may be illegible. Where you can't read or divine, just send the pages back and I'll explain or expand.

As I wrote last night, you really can't do this thing until you have read WW IV and Howard Reffman's coming book.

Then I think you'll have to do some rethinking, including some redefining. But by and large it is very good.

My own view is that the rethinking should include building to our suit rather than having it a longer incident. It does provide the definite answers, this suit above all others (save that if the spectra agreed with the conclusions it would have been advertised rather than suppressed). The difference here is that Jim and I had no external controls imposed upon us, he did what other lawyers had not conceived and we were able to work together well and fast. And that I was really prepared with proofs.

You will need citations and I have corrected factual errors. I believe such that you refer to as court or archival records can be cited from the new book, which you'll have seen.

You continue to use outdated and today meaningless words, like "critic." I think you require reevaluation. You can't really write a study of suppression or evidence in terms of the published work of those who never made any effort to end suppression. So, I think you'll have to break this into eras, first what was possible with the published WC materials and what could be postulated from them, and what followed.

I have no good substitute for "critic" for you. The description has taken hold. It is also deceptive in that the purpose is not criticism. It is more and other than scholarship. It is the establishing of fact and truth.

Some that are "critics" really are not. Epstein, for example, assumes the basic truth of the Report and assails his pet enemies on the Commission (generally those to his liberals) as a means of defending the executive branch, chiefly DJ and FBI.

And how about the longer list of sycophantic works? They are those with money and influence behind them. Not one of these authors sought to end suppression. Because you supposedly are dealing with all sides, need you not include this in some manner?

In dealing with the effort to end suppression in the Archives, you can't use the designation "critic." Sylvia, whose work is magnificent, made no such effort. Of these whose books are published, only one did. Reffman later did, and his book is due soon.

I have added several suggestions for citation to WW II. It is the first book to include what I by then had resurrected from official oblivion, although it coincided in time with the appearance of Lane's book and the reprint in English of Sauvage's. The point here is that if it was possible for me in 1966, was it not also for others? Yet there is only one other work to use the Archives materials this way, the later Six Seconds, all but two of the documents in which were then not new and were cribbed. This is a failing that can't be blamed on officialdom. The fault lies with publishers, if not authors and "scholars." Did any professional historian undertake the task, for example? (In the sense of doctor, heal thyself to your brethren.) And is there not an apt sermon to professional historians in that they have not done their duty to a turning point in history while it was possible and when society had the pressing need? Plus an object lesson for them: Jim and I have done and worked as no professional historian would or could.

On more minor matters, you have some premisses and tenor problems you should correct and unify.

But where you deal with the opening of the Archives from suppression you remain with several problems one of which you understand in part.

One is that not all suppression is by it. Example, spectre. It is among the bits of essential evidence the Commission never had.

Another is that the plain truth is that I have done the basic work. Hoch has done some but it remains to be used. The real and effective help I had was from Jim only, and it was really great. His approach in C.A. 2052-73 is unique. But so was the situation I picked for this suit. I was and am well prepared for many others, but not to the degree I was for this, which had been back-burnered await the propitious moment. The amount of preparation is not apparent. It extended to having every record of every stenographic transcript, every bill and receipt, even every covering letter for all originating outside of Washington.

(You confuse "transcript" and "manuscript," never the latter.) You also use deposition incorrectly, as I've indicated. The fact is that what the Commission itself considered depositing wasn't. It was ex parte questioning under oath by a staff lawyer and I think you should make clear that this is not a true deposition, which means two sides, cross-examination.

Because you are dealing with secrecy, I think you should explain this more, that even the published testimony was taken entirely in secret and was initially classified "TOP SECRET." The reason for degrading the classification was to permit type-setting!

When you have digested WH IV I suggest you add citations in addition to your reference to archival materials where both are the case. Also to law-suits by number, for scholars can and will find more in them when they can't see what "in and I have in our files.

I have suggested eliminating some opinions, in part because they are not valid. However, I think interpretations are necessary and for the most part are quite good.

Your profession might find it unwelcome, but I do believe it would be helpful to it and to scholars of the future to make clear that academic preparation in the profession is not only inadequate in political cases like this but that from the multitude there was no David with a single stone. It is a failing of the profession and it should be made aware of it. Political cases require activists, not academicians and skills not taught in educational institutions. In this connection, ~~Ernest~~ Epstein, the professional political scientist, is the only one to have done a book (Thompson is a philosopher, which made him a better crack-commercializer) yet his is the least scholarly work and the one closest to journalistic in method: interviews from which he selected what suited his purposes and with these he selected - all with a very narrow perspective and the assumption of what he inveighed against, political truth. He did assume the Commission's fundamental assumption, of Oswald's guilt. He never addressed the question in any way. Scholarship?

No historian has added to knowledge. None has undertaken to break the suppression barrier. Even the first bibliographies were not by historians. You are, I believe, the first to do it.

Interrupted here several hours ago. Best regards,

11/7/74

Dear David,

As things worked out today, I had a guest, Bud was on TV and we didn't go out to the box for the mail until late. I didn't get to look at it until supper time. The uneasy feeling left from Bud's least irresponsible appearance of which I know carries over to parts of your letter and what they betoken, your problem.

From all that Bud said one would never know that anyone else in the world had done any work on political assassinations or the Ray case in particular. The reality is that in real effort and real accomplishment there are few worthy of mention who have not exceeded Bud's effort. He has no real accomplishment, per se or on balance.

The real work Jim and I have done. I am used to not being mentioned and it doesn't bother me. I avoided any publicity in Memphis, believing that it all belonged to Jim, who deserves and needs it. I met with the press frequently, made new press contacts, but said nothing for publication. In fact, my name was not mentioned once.

The choice was mine. Nobody suggested this course. It was never discussed.

However, the choice was not Jim's in Bud's newest self-glorification. The difference is a large one.

I don't really care how you handle me. Not personally. Not with my experiences of the past decade. This is not the real question. What is is the integrity of the work, its faithfulness to fact and as a guide to the inquirers of the future some of whom may depend on it.

Until I have time to read your draft, which I may begin tonight if I clear other things up first, I am limited in the comment I can make. What I plan to do is read and mark the draft first and then if I have time write explanations. If I don't have time, the marks should in most cases at least alert you.

The kind of thought that troubles me is your third graf, which begins, "First, how do I write a history of this thing and make you the major source?" and concludes "Remember the work is intended for historians and their peculiar approach to things."

To paraphrase, history is too important to leave to historians. To explain, first they corrupt it and second they in this case have abdicated totally. There would be no history of any of the political assassinations or of the secrecy about them all if it were left to historians.

My concern is not what you say or do not say about my work, published or fighting secrecy, which I can't tell from your title. Either way I bear a special curse among historians who abdicated, the first to publish (and publisher of the rest) and the only one published to really do something about secrecy. There is no other one published who has begun to do as much about secrecy as Jim, to cite an example known to you. And more has been done by two not (yet) published than any other who has published.

This is to say that you have more problems than satisfying professional historians' prejudices if you intend a definitive work. The one problem you do not have is satisfying me. Unless you make specific enough reference to what I have written but have not been able to publish to permit the legion of parasites to filch and corrupt it. This I would oppose. One of your other problems you can meet by getting Howard Reffman's Presumed Guilty, due this month from Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. Young as Howard is, I'll be surprised if his is not a major work.

You also say "If after reading this you decide it ought to be published..." That is a decision I can neither make nor influence.

Another expression, even is intended as a figure of speech, also leaves me uneasy:

"but I wish to give additional weight to any statement, so that readers will not say Weisberg is the only brain in the world, etc." Well, I don't think so and I don't think you should and I believe you should not suggest anything like it to your audience or the historians of the future. Much of what I do I do only because if I don't it won't get done. Jim can tell you that I have been wanting to get out of the Ray case since early 1971. But I haven't, I won't and honorably I can't. The real question has nothing to do with big brains. It has to do with quitters, those who copped out and stayed out. And if you focus on doing something about secrecy, if only documenting its exposure, you can't leave Jim out of a major role because he alone has been of real help on this. Take this literally, please. Add all these you can cite from publication together, multiply by a hundred and it totals much, much less than Jim has done.

Now I don't know how you can do this and satisfy the cowards in your profession who left their responsibilities to Jim and me. Unless you address the litigation and its results. For professional historians who abdicated their responsibilities as historians and as citizens?

(And in case you are unaware, professor, we - mostly Jim - have just established a legal precedent against secrecy.)

These are my thoughts, some of them, on reading your letter. Perhaps I will not recall them after I read your piece. Maybe I'll then find them not warranted. But I do take the time to set them out not only in fairness to Jim and others who can't be cited by reference to books, the way you historians have of rewriting history, but to arm you against what you may later regard as something less than you would prefer to have done.

I'll also be surprised if you do not find more on doing something about this secrecy in Whitewash IV than in all that has been published to date. We will be sending them out soon, if Jim has not yet sent you an embargoed copy. I am still, with so little time, trying to sell the ancillary rights so Jim can at least begin to pay off the loan. This was the reason for today's guest.

The dismal truth is that no published writer has done anything about secrecy except me. Epstein cribbed what he added to the paperback of his dishonest work and even Sylvia never offered to repay the cost of xeroxing of what I did get for her.

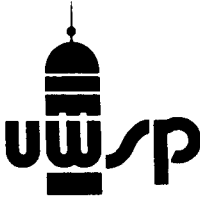
I don't know how you can cite the unpublished Paul Heck. While for personal and ethical reasons I have broken off with him entirely, the plain fact is that he alone has made more effort to do something constructive about secrecy than all the other writers combined. No simple problem for a historian, huh?

Two strong recommendations: don't do anything until you have read the two new books and don't permit, leave alone ask, "in to criticize until after the rebuttal arguments are filed in the Ray case. He has too much to do that nobody else can do and it is more important than the timing of an historical review.

I do hope that after reading your work I can give you more comfort. What I've said is true regardless of your approach or content. And you are treading in a historian's quagmire. I would not be faithful to friendship not to warn you in advance.

Were I you I'd not be concerned about whether I satisfied any individual or my professional colleagues. My concern would be satisfying myself.

Hopefully,



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November 4, 1974

Harold Weisberg
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Dear Harold:

I have been reading the papers on Memphis and note that you all have been active.

Enclosed is a rough draft of an article on Warren Commission Records and their secrecy. As you had previously said you might take a look at it and make some criticisms when you have the time I send it how, hoping that you can find some time and that you still feel like looking at it. From a first reading you will see many errors but I labor with some problems in mind.

First, how do I write a history of this thing and make you the major source? Thus on tangential and trivial things my tendency has been to downplay and or ignore you and your work, but to use you on the key things. Remember the work is addressed to historians and their peculiar approach to things.

Second, from time to time, eg. footnote 104, I try to bring in support for my statement. Obviously, I have not read postmortem, but I wish to give additional weight to any statement, so that readers will not say Weisberg is the only brain in the world etc. By making references to documents and letters in your files etc. this charge is blunted and negated.

On the question of the forged Rankin materials some solid footnote must be there with document references, dates, additional data, a reference source for those who wish to check it out, etc. The problem is how to handle it so that it makes plausible reading to a skeptical world.

You will note further I ~~have~~ wrapped it all up in the flag.

If after reading this you decide it ought to be published I wish to send it to the Wisconsin Magazine of History. If I do this I want to send in a picture of you, hopefully in some connection with a ~~big~~ big shot, or in some connection with documents in your hand or in the Archives cussing out Marion Johnson etc. It seems to me this is an important thing to include in the mailing to Wisconsin. This can be done later.

Please note that I include a return envelope and sufficient postage to mail it ~~back~~ back to me, any extra postage can be applied to your activities in behalf of the investigation of JFK.

I am sending a copy to James Lesar, Esquire.

Regards. *Dave*
David Wrone

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