

1/3/69

Dear Steve,

Have you ever notice the abuse an old cat, even a tomcat, will take from a rambunctious kitten? If the tomcat doesn't, quite literally, kill the kitten directly there is almost no limit to the punishment he'll thereafter accept. So it is with people. Those who are older tend to be tolerant of those younger who they like. We accept from youth what we would not from our peers.

You made mistakes. A certain amount of the responsibility is mine, for I was aware that you were making mistakes, at least in part. Knowing this, I faced a decision: lean on you or not. Now one of the things in my mind would not likely have been in the mind of one of your age. You were in my mind, the kind of man you will yet become, because you are not yet as mature as you will be, are still in the formative years, despite your maturity, which is beyond that of most of your peers. What this means, very simply, is that you must make a certain amount of your own mistakes. This is an indispensable part of life, learning, maturing, growing.

My own judgement was deficient, not about you. I underestimated that of which Jim was capable, and you have an idea of my concept of his capabilities: I seriously underestimated this, not just by a little. Ditto for Boxley and Turner. I never realized they could and largely did make him their creature, nor, despite the low opinion of his integrity, did I really fathom Turner's incompetence and irresponsibility - and in using these words I am leaning over very far backward to be fair.

I was aware that there was such a thing as "The Plot" in February, and I then had misgivings. Everything I learned of it thereafter strengthened these misgivings, but in every case I learn afterward, not before, anything happened. When finally I could try and undo the inherent harm or should I say recapture some of what it might cost, I did move rapidly. We may yet get some good of it, in one form or another. I cannot yet say or predict. I think perhaps we already have, and I cannot explain. It has, however, been the means of opening certain closed doors, establishing what may yet be a good and an entirely new relationship with those with whom, without it, establishing any kind of rapport would at best have been difficult. I was your years in the days of the "united front" in Europe. For a while it worked. Now we need all the allies we can get.

So, I can, to a large degree, go along without serious criticism or disagreement when I read your letter of 12/30/68. There are some things not in it on which I will here comment ("it's for your own good!"), and some in it. You admit having misgivings as far back as 2/18/68. But you never acted or thought in these terms, carefully hid this from me when we discussed my misgivings and those many relevant things, and still, blindly, failed to exercise independent judgement, considering yourself, as you phrase it a junior member of the team, yours not to question why, etc. This is the attitude of the Judenrat, and I hope this will be the only time in your life it is yours. As recently as this last trip, I did not argue with you when you did ~~it~~ just this, in fact, in the face of it interposed your judgement and blocked certain things I wanted to do about which, because I did trust and depend upon you, I wrote you long in advance. Again, I want you to grow, if it means making your own mistakes. As recently as then you had faith in the Hepburn ploy. But because you did suspect things were not as they should have been, your course of action and thinking were wrong. From that moment on, intellectually you have no defense in claiming to be but a junior member of the team. May I add, like those very loyal Custer scouts?

I suggest you think this through for yourself, for, as you have heard me say, the Warren Commission had no monopoly on error. Let us grant them a monopoly on wrong motive. If you find, on really facing this, that you were wrong, you will be better able to live with it now than later, assuming as I do that your motive was a good one. You can now look at all those older and draw comfort. But if you Jaffe with it now, in a few years you will have a nagging conscience, perhaps sooner, with the potential of the coming trial in New Orleans (There is a non-office report there will be further delay because Percy Foreman is about to assume the defense). What you tell me is not important; what you tell yourself is. You are now old enough, experienced enough to make and stand by the consequences of your own decisions and judgements. These will not be the first wrong ones you make. But do not repeat the same kind, for this means abdication.

When I was out there this last time you were both irresponsible and less than honest. I do not know why. I assume this is not the "real you", for I know it is not as I have known you. You did not do the things you said you had, you did not do the things you could have; you were anything but organization- or team-minded. You, like all of us, have problems. At your age I can anticipate a few not as common among older people. That whole Santa Barbara business was an inexcusable mess. I would like you to straighten it out with them, even if I am never out there again. I say this not by way of complaint, for that would serve no purpose. I report it as the basis for self-analysis. It requires no comment. None of the foregoing does. I take this time I do not have in your interest alone. I hope you can understand and believe this, for in all other respects it is too late to have meaning.

Back to Hepburn: Can you make me a photocopy of the credits, etc., of the French edition? Can you give any meaning to any of the names? In it and others, like Edwin Bergot? I realize this may not be possible, but I think it important not to overlook anything.

On your friend in France, the answer is a very positive yes with a very big "IF". Only if it presents no jeopardy to him. This can be important. We must be as prepared to the degree we can for whatever can eventuate. This means we must know as much as we can, try and analyze its meaning, and then, if necessary and possible, do what we can. Perhaps during the trial. I have no reason not to believe this is a CIA department of disinformation job, if not for other reason because of their, Hawk connection. It may seem unlikely, but I can not isolate anything more likely with the unlimited funds available and used on this, and with the self-defeating attitudes, which are not those of the usual self-seeking publisher. Please be alert to indications of this.

Gotta get back to other work. Please send me rifle, complete with all the clips and what ammo there is, especially if it is disarmed, to me c/o him so it can be available there for use in the trial if necessary or before it if desirable. Best regards to everyone, and thanks for what you have done and are doing. If you want to send Louis copies, I think it is a good idea.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg.

If you have not heard from him, he did approve the Rose memo. It may be necessary. I am convinced it is very, very desirable. Also, if there are any picture he may need on this you haven't sent Gary, please do it, asking him to return what you want returned. He has other sources than the girls and is a very solid guy.