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Dear David,

The fourth graf of your 3/22/78 excerpts from interview with Epstein begins "... (I trust that someone will pass this on to Harold Welsberg.)" Good idea. Too bad that having gotten the idea you were unwilling to spend 13¢ yourself. If for more than a month after your notes you or anyone else had done this it might have done some good in the FOIA case that then was before a federal district judge. He has again bedded down the the CIA and for the moment we can't get that into the record. However, we may be able to use it on appeal and there will be another shot because I have another series of FOIA requests that, absent compliance, will be in court. So I look forward to the dub of the tape you say you are getting from WBUR-FM. And anything else relevant.

I knew of the taped interview from Paul Hoch, whose fine work was very helpful in other informative projects about Epstein. I will also have other uses for the tape.

It also is unfortunate that you people did not respond when I wrote and asked about JFK materials that could be of use in the new spectro/NAA case. After the record in that case closed at the district level (which generally means closed, period) I blundered into relevant materials.

It is not possible for me to wage all these FOIA battles and still read every record. You people went over many records and I presume made some notes. While I have no reason to believe that with all there is in those records you were sensitive to what could be of use in these FOIA cases I do hope you will give this some thought. These cases are not over and there will be more of them.

You may have come across the record reflecting that the FBI had the 1/22/64 executive session transcript contemporaneously. If your notes show this I'd appreciate the citation. Related to this, if you saw it, is the record on which Hoover added a note characterizing Gerald Ford as a toad. Relevant in the same case is anything about the 5/19 or 6/23 transcripts. I recall nothing from the press. In the earliest records anything relating to Lab tests. For other uses, anything relating to critics.

On p.3 you say that EJE named Angleton's assistants. Which ones, by name?

There is an interesting correlation between Epstein's abandonment of his book and trip to Europe and this case. His trip was for the duration of the time this case would be before the district court, which had the desire of the appeals court to perfect the record before it. So maybe EJE will return sooner now, unless he does not care about promoting the book.

Bob, Jeff and I discussed other matters, including the House assassins committee. Before long it will be necessary to face your Frankenstein. I urge keeping me informed.

Sincerely,,

I met him at his hotel room, Ritz-Carlton, expecting to spend up to one-and-a-half hours with him. I was there for more than two and a half. Naturally he knew that I was doing a piece for the Phoenix and we chatted briefly before I turned on the tape-recorder. (Unfortunately I had only two hours of tape.) I mentioned that I had done some free-lance and had applied to several programs in broadcast journalism. It didn't take long for him to see that I was fairly well-informed (At one point he said that I seemed to know Inquest better than he did.) Although I challenged him frequently and he was occasionally flustered, the tone throughout was civil.

What follows are rough notes from one playback. On a few occasions I noted lengthy quotes. I regret that I didn't pin him down in more areas. I probably tried to cover too much. He was also very adept at rambling on or blurting out a quick response and change the subject.

-Reader's Digest came to him with a proposal for a book on the JFK assassination. After some discussions, he suggested the Oswald book. "John Barron arranged the Nosenko interview." (I didn't get a chance to hit him with what he said in New York, namely that the CIA put him onto to Nosenko. I guess that goes to show that Barron and the CIA are synonymous.) Barron is reported to be very unhappy with Epstein's book. So is the entire Washington bureau of Reader's Digest. Nosenko is one of Barron's "close friends."

-He said the Nosenko transcripts were obtained under FOIA ("for the (I trust that someone will pass this on to Harold Weisberg.) most part") He also got a synopsis of the 900-page report on Nosenko. He acknowledged that aside from a few memos (and I'm not convinced these were new) he relied on the recent releases and that he had "piggybacked on others' FOIA requests." He called the recent FBI releases "garbage" and rambled on about what he really wanted to see in the FBI, naming Voloshin, Kostikov, etc. He acknowledged that the FBI continues to withhold significant documents.

-We spent considerable time discussing Mexico City which he labelled "an area of mystery". I questioned him about the taped phone calls. He agreed there was a problem and noted that the CIA had said that it was very bad Russian on the tape of Oswald which is "inconsistent" with LHO's known proficiency. He said the camera stuff was "very weird".

He told me of his efforts to locate Robert Webster and the tale of the psychiatrist (in his book) who couldn't remember whether it was Webster or Oswald that had been debriefed. He said it was "very curious" that the two looked so much alike and recounted an episode from Friscilla's tale where Oswald asks, "How's Webster doing?" The distinct possibility that Webster was on an intelligence assignment and the striking parallels to Oswald's case led me to question him on his case for LHO as KGB and ask whether we couldn't easily flip the coin and see LHO as US intelligence.

Epstein interview (cont.)

Epstein responded, "It doesn't flip over that easily, although I would say that you could get the coin to flip over if you said after he returned he was recruited by US intelligence." We then discussed the pros and cons of the case for LHO as US intelligence. ("Webster would be a much better candidate for this kind of thing.") He felt the basic reasons to send a defector to Russia were: 1) To learn Russian techniques in handling defectors, "just procedurally" and 2) to pass disinformation. He said it was "inconceivable that the CIA didn't want to debrief Oswald" and ran off 3-4 good reasons. He said that the only answer he could perceive as a possible explanation is that they viewed him as "hostile" in which case they would seek an opportunity for "unwitting debriefing". Enter George DeMohrenschildt. ("This is what he told me he did." He said the Paines were also candidates, "but they came into the picture too late"). Epstein said job at Jaggars-Stovall was designed as a "provocation" so LHO would seek out his contacts.

-He said LHO took tax returns from Jaggars to "prove his bona fides, that he had worked there", to show to the Cubans. Denied that he knew of other records that LHO may have taken. We debated intelligence value of what he may have seen at Jaggars. "Pretty classified stuff. All the satellite photographs of Cuba. More than one would expect Oswald to get access to. He was there during Cuban missile crisis."

-We discussed "Oswald security case". Earlier he had told me about his efforts to get the ONI net damage assessment report on LHO, written in '59 after his defection. Told that it had been destroyed. Then I asked him about Otto Otepka and State Dept. security file. He interviewed Otepka but seemed surprised when I told him that Otepka had apparently kept a file on Oswald when he was in Russia. Epstein said Otepka was putting together another net assessment report on Oswald and was "seeking additional information on Oswald" but after the assassination Bobby Kennedy sent some people to "break into his safe and take his file." Otepka never saw the file again. (This area is obviously very murky. Unfortunately I got sidetracked in a discussion of why the State Dept. was so interested in helping the Oswald return from Russia and didn't get back to Otepka.)

We spent considerable time debating the intelligence value of what LHO had to tell the Russians about the U-2. "Even the slightest bit of information would have helped them" But was it shot down? After some sparring, he acknowledged that there was "nothing technically wrong" with theory that the plane had been sent over deliberately to cause an incident and undermine the summit. He said this was another area of mystery, since at the very least there was reason to question why the plane was sent just two months before the U-2 program was due to be phased out, when they hadn't launched a plane in some time and months after Oswald's defection with these so-called military secrets.

Epstein interview

-Angleton. I asked him about Angleton's reported feeling that there is no Sino-Soviet split and there has never been a legitimate Russian defector. At first Epstein said about no Sino-Soviet split, "if he believes that, he's crazy". But later he acknowledged that Angleton believes the Russians are "very sophisticated in deception" and they could fake something like the Sino-Soviet split. He said Angleton is suspicious of most defectors although there have been legitimate ones (gave one example - Golitskin (4)) Epstein said Angleton was not the only source on Nosenko, naming his assistants, and said "Angleton was probably more sympathetic, from '64-'67, to Nosenko's position than other people in the CIA." (????)

-I asked what all this says about the CIA? "I think it says some serious things. First of all, it says the CIA is a massive charade. That it has three or four, sometimes one or two, sometimes none, so-called moles, which are Soviet agents like Nosenko and Fedora that whisper in the ears of the CIA counter parts.... Completely unreliable reports get passed up to the president as super-secret sources. I think the whole CIA is based on a very fragile straw and that it has been consistently wrong in all its evaluations of Soviet strength." The Nosenko affair is seen as a "travesty of hubris and pride that the people who won eventually, the Far Eastern people, the Vietnam people, the Colby people, would rub it in the face by pulling Nosenko out from North Carolina and bringing him into the CIA. The Russians as a matter of policy - even if every Russian believed that Philby is Philby - don't take foreign agents into (their) intelligence service. It just shows the utter corruption of the whole thing."

-He commented, in passing, on "the massive leaking business going on, which my book is one example of, Sy Hersh is another example of, and Colby's book is a third example. At least a half-dozen CIA officers, not to mention Bill Sullivan at the FBI, were willing to give out the whole case on Fedora, which is a live operation.... It wasn't like Fedora was dead.... here they are talking freely with a journalist about a case that's going on."

I asked him about any sources that he hadn't named; restrictions placed on any information and whether his interviews (eg. with all the Marines) would be available. I hit him with the quote (Thanks to F.Hoch) from Agency of Fear about naming his sources and commenting on motives, contradictions, etc. This led him to assure me that he would make available the transcripts from his interviews (eg. with all the Marines) and we later discussed how we could arrange for this. (I have his phone number in NY, and told him about the AIB connection at the end of the interview. I will definitely press him on this point.)

-One unnamed source was Ray Rocca, "as a personal favor to him", "but he was easily identifiable." He added, "I wish I had done a large appendix like in Agency of Fear, talking about personal relations with people like Rocca, Angleton and Scotty Miler. I think that would have been very helpful." The other unnamed source ("a main source") was the Deputy chief of the Soviet Russia Division. "He's easily identifiable. He's even in Agee's book.....he just wanted to keep his name out of print."

"I think that anything done to obscure a source makes it impossible to read or to check on it or understand the position. Especially in this. You have to get the Angleton viewpoint, Colby viewpoint, Helms viewpoint to understand where these guys stood in the CIA. They all tell partial stories. Its not a question of Angleton being honest or dishonest, I can't think of an instance of his being dishonest, but he'll tell you one thirtieth of what there is to know, which is a way of being dishonest. You don't have to lie, you just tell a person part of the story.....I agree with your point, I think one day I'll write a long appendix on the sources.

He said Helms believed the CIA had been destroyed because of the CIA assassination-plot-revelations. He said he thought "Bay of Pigs thing" was a euphemism for the assassination plots, although he didn't specifically ask Helms about this. Said Helms thought Waldeman book was "Bullshit".

_ I asked him about the unaccounted time (Oct.20th-Nov.4th'62) in LHO's Dallas/Ft.Worth period. He said it was still a mystery. "Its like he(LHO) had disappeared off the face of the earth." Said he had taken Gary Taylor and Alexandria all over the D/Ft.W. area trying to jog their memory. Nothing.

_The Walker shooting. "I've never been satisfied with the Walker shooting. Its another area of mystery." I confronted him with the bullet controversy, (Thanks to P.D. Scott), since he had said bullet was "unidentified". After some discussion he said, "I made a mistake. I should have made a footnote on the controversy over the bullet. I wasn't even aware of it." He asked me whether a 30.06 bullet could be fired from the Mannlicher-Carcano. I reiterated the discrepancies in the accounts surrounding the identification. He then said, "I've always had the theory that Oswald may have used another rifle in shooting at Walker." This was after we had discussed the other good reasons to believe that LHO and the Mannlicher (supposedly buried) were not involved. Amazing.

- I asked him about the photo, allegedly signed by Marina and Oswald that had been given to DeM. He said the handwriting analysis had been performed ("in Nov. or Dec.") by Jay McManus, ex-FBI analyst. Confirmed it was Marina's handwriting. What about Oswald? He mumbled "yes", but I question whether this was actually confirmed because later in the discussion he said, "Maybe people doubt it was LHO's writing on the photo." Certainly not the words of someone confident that it was LHO.

Epstein interview

-Oh yes, I forgot to mention that he said he had investigated a report that Oswald had sold a rifle to a "Robert Taylor at a gas station". Nothing came of it. Also I asked him whether the examination of the photo given to DeM. had been of the original. "It might have been a copy."
"I guess there isn't much evidence that Oswald actually did the shooting (at Walker), except for Marina's story."
"The reason I believe the photograph is real is because Marguerite Oswald said she and Marina destroyed it. Marguerite would never lie in that direction." "DeM. thought that his wife (Marina) was using the photograph to blackmail him."

-Had he given anything to the HSCA? "They asked for a copy of my book."

"I asked him (Thanks to J. Policoff) about his categorical statement (made in 1967-68) that the autopsy report had been changed. At first he backed off, saying, "I don't know whether the autopsy report was changed." But later he says, "When I wrote Inquest in 1964, since then a lot of the material has become available, although maybe not everything, and some of it has shown that they did forge it, eh, I mean, forge may be too strong a word, but the points and dots they made on those autopsy pictures just aren't consistent with where the wounds entered Kennedy's back." He also added, "the autopsy report might have been changed later by Arlen Specter" (to conform with the single bullet theory).

-When I confronted him with one of the many errors in his appendix on the so-called status of the evidence, this one in his footnote of the article by Wecht and Smith as being "conclusive in defining the direction of the bullets" and then read him the actual quote from Wecht's article where Wecht postulates gunmen firing from two locations from behind, he said "We might be talking about two different articles." When I showed him that it was the one he had cited, he mumbled about wanting to simply demonstrate that all the shots had come from behind and later admitted, "I didn't really read that passage". He equivocated continually, saying that it was impossible to disprove that there were two gunmen and then saying, "It didn't seem to me ~~possible~~ possible from the evidence to prove two riflemen, if there were two riflemen, fine, I mean.....if someone can prove it, let them prove it, I can't prove it. I don't think the autopsy proves it, maybe it does."

-we had a long rambling discussion of what happened in the shooting. When talking about what can be determined of the angles of entry in Kennedy and Connally, Epstein began questioning the judgements of his own expert - Wecht. It became ridiculous.

-As for his absurd suggestion about the oak tree being defoliated and hence allowing an earlier shot, I had him cold. "Maybe I'm wrong. I was told it was a deciduous tree."

Epstein interview

_ Finally I asked how he was able to change his position over the years from having once believed the lone assassin theory untenable (thanks to J. Policoff for pointing out the relevant quote from his Realist piece.) to now putting forward the lone assassin theory. His response:

"It seemed when the Warren Report came out that one person couldn't have accounted for all the shots. I still think its unlikely... maybe you've been persuaded that its possible that one person can fire that number of shots, maybe you don't think that one person can fire within 7 seconds. You still may not think its likely, but suddenly you start to think that these things are possible. As I got more and more into the fact that Oswald had a disposition to take these shots at Kennedy....I got into his character being a revolutionary and everything else and it seemed plausible that he did, and I just decided that I couldn't resolve the questions of the bullets. I couldn't figure out the sequence and I didn't address myself to it. Its not a question of coming out and saying there can only be one assassin. I can't say that. I can say that I'm convinced that the bullets came from behind Oswald (read JFK) and that at least two of them came from Oswald's rifle, eh, from behind Kennedy. Eh, that's it as far as I can go with the facts. I just didn't address myself to that question. Its not a question that I think can be resolved any more from the evidence. I think the Warren Commission and the FBI and autopsy doctors just left it open and it just can't be figured out. If you can figure it out or if someone else can figure it out.....but then bullets are only one indication of a conspiracy.....I don't think anyone is ever going to be able to prove that there were two assassins, or only one assassin, from the number of bullets fired, unless they find a bullet that doesn't match the other bullets, that of course....."

I asked why he was less willing now to acknowledge this problem (of the lone assassin theory). He said, "I just acknowledged it, you know, its a problem. What I'm saying is what I'm not willing to do is say I can resolve it."

-The tape ran out at this point, but we continued talking for another 40 minutes or so. We returned to a number of points that we discussed earlier. Epstein admitted that he felt it likely that the CIA had asked, or at least encouraged, the Russians to send over a defector who could state that Oswald was not KGB. (Very interesting in light of the book's line.) Also he presented what I found to be a fairly convincing case for Priscilla as CIA. (he had to leave before I could press him further on what this says about Marina, although the implications are obvious.) He admitted that there was a good case to be made for LHO as FBI informant (and this would most certainly explain many of the Bureau's actions, eg. destruction of note) He pretended to be unaware of Spas T. Raikin's work as an informant for various intelligence agencies, then said he had heard such talk. Confirmed Sullivan was his source on Hoover and Fedora. One final note: during the interview he received a phone call in response to some answers he was seeking about Colby's dismissal. His contact told him that Kissinger had asked to pass along the word that he liked Epstein's book. (Epstein beamed but said he doubted Dr. K had read it.)

BOOKS

**A legend
in his own time**

Who was Lee Oswald?

by David Williams

LEGEND: THE SECRET WORLD OF LEE HARVEY OSWALD by Edward Jay Epstein. Reader's Digest Press/McGraw-Hill; 384 pp. \$12.95.

Was Lee Harvey Oswald a spy? And if so, for whom? Edward Jay Epstein, author of *Inquest* (a critical examination of the Warren Commission), raises these questions in his new book. His findings add controversial fuel to the already heated debate on two important contemporary issues: the intelligence of our intelligence agencies and the unanswered questions regarding the assassination of John Kennedy. But his conclusions have serious flaws.

The problem with Epstein's treatment of Oswald is evident in his very first sentence. In the preface, he tells us that *Legend* "is about Lee Harvey Oswald and his relations with the intelligence services of three nations." Would that it were so. In fact, the book is about Oswald and one intelligence agency — the KGB.

Long troubled by Oswald's

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1959 defection to the Soviet Union, Epstein, aided by considerable financial support from *Reader's Digest*, tried to determine why a 20-year-old Marine would leave family and friends for Russia. The answer he suggests is that while Oswald was stationed in Japan with the Marines, he was recruited by the KGB to provide information about the U-2 spy plane. Oswald's "defection," just before the downing of Francis Gary Powers's U-2 in April, 1960, followed some two years later by Oswald's return to the US with a Russian wife in tow; looks highly suspicious to Epstein. He points to Oswald's involvement with George De Mohrenschildt, an enigma with ties to several intelligence agencies; he points to Oswald's alleged 1963 excursion to Mexico City, where he supposedly visited the Cuban and Russian embassies and, according to Epstein, contacted a known KGB operative. Arguing that Oswald was too easily identifiable as KGB for the Soviets even to contemplate using him as an assassin, Epstein refrains from implicating the Russians in the events of Dallas; but the writer does claim that the KGB was responsible for some subsequent occurrences.

The book begins with the January 1964, defection of KGB agent Yuri Nosenko, who assures his American interrogators that Oswald never worked for the KGB. His story is corroborated by one of J. Edgar Hoover's favorite sources, a Soviet double-agent code-named "Fedora" (the latest defector from the Soviet Union has once again put "Fedora's" reliability in question). When some of this "corroborated" story fails to check out, the intelligence community splits over Nosenko's credibility. James Angleton, then chief of CIA counter-intelligence and now one of Epstein's prime sources, becomes convinced that Nosenko had been sent by the KGB to deliver an Oswald "legend," or false biography, to the CIA, the FBI and the Warren Commission. With the 1974 resignations of Angleton and his top assistants — a purge, according to *Legend* — the pro-Nosenko faction wins the argument and, in 1976, Nosenko is pronounced a legitimate defector and brought into the agency — for which he still works.

To Angleton and his associates, it's all a "travesty" that throws the entire perspective about Soviet intelligence out of focus. These are serious charges, and they will, as other reviewers have noted, rekindle debate on Capitol Hill over intelligence estimates of Soviet strategic capability — among other things. But how are average Americans — even those of us who try to keep abreast of such matters — to evaluate Epstein's arguments? His unsettling thesis — that our intelligence agencies have been penetrated by Soviet "moles" dis-bursing "disinformation" — is certain to inspire some good ol' Cold War paranoia. What we need to know is, how good is his thesis?

In his previous book, *Agency of Fear*, Epstein discussed some of the problems inherent in investigative journalism and concluded, "Because the circumstances surrounding each interview bear directly on the credibility of the interviews . . . I have decided to reveal all the sources for this book and comment on the motives, problems, contradictions and gaps." It's too bad he didn't do the same for *Legend*. When he passed through Boston recently, I asked him about this; he agreed that it was indeed an oversight. "I think I will write a long appendix on the sources," he told me. "Anything done to obscure a source makes it impossible to read or to check on it or understand the position. Especially in this — you have to get the Angleton viewpoint, the Colby viewpoint, the Helms viewpoint . . . It's not a question of Angleton being honest or dishonest, but he'll tell you one-thirtieth of what there is to know — which is a way of being dishonest. You don't have to lie — you just tell a person part of the story." Which is just what Epstein has done in *Legend*.

The book never confronts the role of US intelligence agencies in the life of Lee Harvey Oswald. Much of the evidence used to link Oswald to the KGB can also be used to link him to the CIA. Epstein himself makes the argument — without acknowledging its implications: "In the many-connected world of intelligence," he writes, "it is not possible to determine under whose control an agent is working simply by identifying other agents with whom he is associating." There is much evidence to suggest that Oswald was indeed an intelligence operative; but was he working for our side, their side,

or both?

Epstein acknowledged in our interview that some of the evidence suggests that Oswald had ties to US intelligence after his return from Russia. And there are some ex-intelligence officers who have argued that Oswald's "recruitment" by the KGB in Japan is unlikely, since he had no information that they didn't already possess. Readers should be warned that *Legend's* evidence is presented in a coy — and sometimes deceiving — way. For example, Epstein makes much of the revelation that Oswald's Russian "diary" wasn't written until he'd returned to the US. But a reading of the diary makes this clear enough — Oswald made no effort to make it seem contemporary.

Moreover, Epstein's Appendix A, a summary of the so-called "Status of the Evidence," is so full of errors that it brings into serious question everything that precedes it. Those of us who have studied the Kennedy case have long argued that any understanding must begin with the actual shooting. Many believe that there was no lone gunman named Oswald firing in Dallas — and Epstein once agreed with this. "It seemed," he told me, "when the Warren Report came out that one person could not have accounted for all the shots. I still think it is unlikely," he said, adding that he doesn't believe we'll ever know for sure. Yet nothing in the book suggests that Epstein has any doubts on this score — although clearly, such doubts would be crucial to the book. Epstein even cites an article by Dr. Cyril Wecht — without mentioning that the article posits two assassins, not one. Such sloppiness undermines Epstein's overall thesis, whatever its actual merits.

Basically, the book is a brief for Angleton — with little or no rebuttal. And though many who'd ordinarily disagree with Angleton find themselves convinced — with him — that Nosenko is a Red herring, Epstein's one-sided treatment is . . . well, one-sided. ●