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Dear George,

= Last night you asked me a reasonable question, perhaps a skeptical one, and I tried to answer it with specifics. How come I was defending the FBI?

It can be said I was defending the FBI, but I would not put it that way and I do not really believe that at any point my purposes are to defend or to attack.

I'll explain this or try to explain it in a different way, one that I think might help your understanding of a complex situation and a Byzantine story. I'm doing it in writing rather than by phone because I sometimes use letters as memoranda and I may at some point want to use this explanation in my writing, the way it is going now in the book I've had to lay aside when it is two-third in draft, a new one on the King assassination.

(Yes, it will have "new evidence" in it.)

In my work and in my contacts with the major media (as distinguished from individual reporters) I have come to learn how apt it was for Solzhenitsyn to say that as little truth there is in the world the supply still exceeds the demand. I find in it a wider applicability that I think he intended.

The nature of my work changed greatly after the earliest of it. I never did pursue a whodunit although I believe that if I were the FBI I'd be able to solve the King case. It has really become a study of the functioning and malfunctioning of our institutions in time of great stress.

The Odie case illustrates this and that is what you asked me about in the sense of my defending the FBI. Remember I told you that in my own investigations I learned of it what the FBI had done and had not told the Warren Commission? That was not defending the FBI. I could add more to this, on what the FBI should have done and did not do. It should, for example, have recommended certain inquiries for the Commission and said these it was willing to do. It could have gone off on its own and said we have taken the liberty of doing this for you in the hope it might be of service. But these, while reasonable, do not get to the basic point - who was in charge. Subordinate to this is what had what responsibility. The problem today and in recent years comes from a total lack of innocence and the desire of each agency or institution to protect itself. Generally this can be done only at the cost to another, by blaming another. Hoover was particularly skilled at this and I have some classic cases I'll be using.

My early perception of this was less clear than in retrospect I wish it had been. However, I think you will find it explicit enough and entirely consistent with my attitude last night and in this. Read the Introduction to my first book, written the end of 1964. It is in two parts and I think the more relevant part is the second, on how investigations work. You will find that in the sense you used "defend" that I defended the Birchers who paid for the scurrilous anti-JFK ad. I did no such thing. On the other end I was "defending" Warren when that also was not my purpose. I was trying to give the reader a means of making an independent judgement based on what was then available to me, the Commission's published materials only.

The actuality is of total failure, agency and institutional. I regard the press as one of society's basic institutions and believe its failure was total. I wish it were possible for the powers of the press to examine themselves on this but I think it will never happen. For reasons not always the same but sometimes coinciding the FBI, CIA and others like them failed. The basic failure came from a policy determination. Nobody actually tried to find out what really happened. There never was a real investigation of the assassination.

The effort was to make the preconception as credible as possible. It has not ended.

All today's leaks that appear to be hurtful to the FBI and CIA are not and most likely are by them, directly or indirectly. Take the two Goshke and Kessler and the Post were suckered on, one with Hoover withholding, the other with the CIA doing the same thing. While in each case I am today certain if the rest is ever reached it will not support the trunk and branches of the stories, that is not material to my point. In each case fundamental is the preconception of Oswald's guilt. This is true of the committee's leaks on King.

At no point in my work or I think when I speak extemporaneously do I seek goats or an I ought to get anyone. Even in my opposition to Sprague and not him alone on this committee getting him is not my purpose and I did begin by imparting trust and performing on my trust. It gave me the world's best means of making a dependable judgement and I have made it and have solid proof from it. While it is true, as McWalaren says, that I am too trusting, and it is true that I'd rather not worry about not being this way, it is also generally true that this makes my evaluations of others easier and sometimes painfully quicker. The subtitle of my early work reflect this. This first was an analysis of the Commission and its staff, subtitle The Report on the Warren Report. The second, subtitle "The FBI-Secret Service Coverup," and so it went, when it was possible bringing the CIA in with Oswald in New Orleans. If I blame them all how do I defend any one? But from the pointedness of the last part of my first work, on Hoover's supposed initial investigation to the last part of my last work, Post Mortem, to my two current suits in which the FBI is defendant I am not its defender.

However, I will not willingly or knowingly criticize it unfairly or out of balance. Not the CIA. In the days of the Warren Commission the ultimate responsibility lay with it. Its staff knows knew better that it did and said and most either left early, as a few did, or left self-serving memos. I use some of Arlen Specter's in Post Mortem. There is no way of exculpating the Commission and being honest in this and there is still this drive to hold it an innocent victim. Read the executive session transcript of 1/22 in Post Mortem again. I think you read it when I gave to to Bill Ulaiberne in New York late in April 1975.

This gets to LBJ's political cunning, given his objectives, which can be regarded with less than suspicion if limited to their time of origin. He ran the political gamut, from Warren to Russell, canned each in a different way and with that screwed the press, especially those friendly to Warren.

As best one person can with these frailties we all have I seek truth. I wish I had the capability of publishing more and of getting more, although I have quite a collection that is already becoming a permanent scholarly archive. I cannot in truth say that the FBI is responsible for the failure to make a proper investigation of the Ode story although I did criticize the FBI in my writing on it. It did not then "defend" it. Ultimate responsibility is the Commission's. The leak to Anderson was exculpatory of the Commission.

I could carry this farther but I've run out of time. I hope you'll excuse my even worse typing. ~~Sometimes~~ Sometimes my wife can go over it and correct it but this morning she cannot. My typing is worse because I now type sort of side-saddle. I can't keep my legs ~~and~~ pendant for very long and should not keep them horizontal too long either. So I've made myself a pedestal-style typewriting table, with a stout pipe support, with a means of holding my legs horizontal and then covered with a small blanket to keep the circulation up. With this weather my normal means of forcing the circulation, ~~which~~ brisk walking, is out. So I exercise, generally to the AM TV news, which is how I caught the committee/Anderson attack on you, Burham. Regards, me and others. My apologies but most people can make it out.

Sincerely,