

HR JW

2/5/72

Mr. R. Sargent Shriver  
c/o Mr. George Cunningham

Dear Mr. Shriver,

It is because I think he will remember that what I will suggest to you is not a new concern to me that I write you through ~~Mr.~~ Mr. Cunningham.

You may remember me from my "Geese for Peace" project which got the Peace Corps what I think was its first good publicity break. You may not remember taking me to a meeting of your division chiefs some ten years ago and telling them to pick my brains because I had good ideas and some imagination. My purpose in reminding you of this is not an ego trip but to get you to think carefully about a caution I would press upon you now that you appear to be Mr. McGovern's running mate (with at least my wife's and my blessing and good wishes)

As you make campaign appearances, especially among younger people, I believe it is inevitable that you will be asked persistent questions about political assassinations, especially that of President Kennedy. Unless you have disposed of it, you have my first book on this subject, titled WITNESS. If you read it, as you had not done when you sent me a note of thanks, you will know that I consider the official "solution" to the crime what Orwell called official mythology. Because I have written much since then and not pressed it upon you, I think you can understand that the last thing I want to do is embarrass you or open old wounds. And because I published the first critical book and most of the serious work since then, I do hope you will think carefully about what I will suggest. Lawyers term such things declarations against interest and incline to give them more consideration.

Because irresponsible self-seekers have received major attention, a number of popular fictions about political assassinations have captured much of the national mind. You might, for example, be asked to unlock all the alleged secrets in the National Archives. There remain proportionately few and I'd be quite surprised if they include a solution.

If you are asked any questions about these assassinations and what you would do if you become vice president, I encourage you to say that because you are a relative you could not be considered detached and do not believe you could be; that the workings of any acceptable system of justice requires impartiality; that for you any close consideration of details of relatives would be painful in the extreme, as you hope can be understood; but that as a general statement of your belief in freedom of information on this and all other subjects, you believe the people are entitled to know all public ~~has~~ information except what the Congress exempted in the Freedom of Information law ( 5 U.S.C. 552); and that you believe the administration of which you hope to be part will be dedicated to scrupulous observation of this and other laws.

If you do not take and maintain a position something like this, - fear personal and political pain will be inevitable and a considerable amount of embarrassment. From my own extensive appearances of the past, in not one of which that I can recall some question of the Kennedy family position was not asked and generally critically, I do believe that most people will understand and sympathize. If you do not you may wind up with an inopportune outburst such as were the late Senator Kennedy's last words on the subject when he was provoked beyond his control at San Fernando State College shortly before his assassination. (What he then said was also transparently false. I would also caution you against any affirmation of the official "solution" unless you have made a long and detailed personal study of the available information and are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt, something my own work tells me has to be impossible.)

Right now there looms what I think can be a great embarrassment to every member of the Kennedy family, especially all the men. Two different officials of the federal government have solicited me to become part of it and I have refused. What is more tragic still is that this is made possible by a man the family trusts and at the same time a man who cannot have made an independent judgment and is necessarily dependent upon those in government he feels he can trust. If what I anticipate comes to pass, and as of my last information it can be any time beginning the week of the 21st, I believe those who are themselves responsible for the faults, errors and worse of the official investigation will succeed in transferring their culpability to the family, to the survivors, especially Senator Edward Kennedy. (His advisors preserve a detached position that in my personal view is the one position that makes real detachment impossible.)

I do not delude myself into thinking I have or can exert any significant influence on what I know beyond question looms. I can tell you no more than that it does loom and that to the degree one man without influence can do anything to dull or thwart it, that, in private, I have done.

It is because I believe that whether or not you have any detail on any of this should be an independent decision that I do not offer you detail. Further, I tell you that I do not expect an answer and don't think one is called for unless you decide that there are things you should know. In the latter event, I will provide whatever I can to whomever you designate, with the further assurance that this will be entirely confidential.

If you decide that someone who enjoys your confidence should be briefed, I do believe it should be done promptly so that he can do his own thinking before two weeks from now, when what I feel may be a dangerous time begins. Understanding that this will entail jeopardy to a literary property that represents an enormous labor and cost to me may help persuade you that I am not self-seeking in this matter. My purposes are not to diminish further suffering by those who have suffered too much, although I would do what ~~max~~ I could to this end. I just don't want truth and the national honor further debased.

Should you, too, elect that may seem like detachment and should what I fear come to pass, please feel free to call upon me. If nothing can then be done to undo what may have been published, I have and I can provide official documentation previously suppressed that should constitute a definitive resolution.

Neither you nor Senator McGovern will be under any obligation.

With all best wishes and devout hope that my fears prove unwarranted,

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg