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May 26, 1966

Mr. Marion Johnson
The National Archives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Johnson,

You are probably not the person to whom this letter should be addressed. In that event, may I ask that you direct it to the proper authority. I am writing in some haste prior to seeing you today because overnight reflection convinces me the matter is of great importance. Prefacing what I am about to say, I want to make clear that nothing is reflected in my research or experience that justifies any criticism of either the National Archives or you. From my limited experience, both the organization and its personnel have a proper dedication to their important function in our national life and history, and I do appreciate the cooperation and assistance that you and others have extended.

As you know, I have devoted a vast amount of time to an analysis of the work of the Warren Commission. It is reflected in my book, which you have, entitled WHITE-WASH - THE REPORT ON THE WARREN COMMISSION. To say that even the most cursory examination of this record leaves the analyst with deep misgivings is a considerable understatement. There are the most fundamental contradictions in the evidence, with the most credible disproving the official version of the account of the assassination of President Kennedy. And there has been what on the basis of what I now know what I can only call suppression of the most fundamental evidence. We have briefly discussed some of this recently, and I have already written the heads of those agencies chiefly involved, the FBI and the Secret Service.

For example, when I examined Document 371 yesterday (this is Exhibit 397 in the published material) I found a receipt that included material not in the file. There was no indication of what the Secret Service did with this data. Yet of all the information that should be in the Archives, whether or not classified, there is little that can be more important than what is missing. It is the working papers, the contemporaneous notations or the notes of the doctors as they performed the autopsy. From his testimony, which you will find quoted on page 183 of my book, Dr. Humes identified these as "various notes in longhand made by myself, in part, during the performance of the examination of the late President..." There is absolutely nothing of this character in either Document 371 or printed Exhibit 397. Yet Exhibit 397 contains an Autopsy Descriptive Sheet which shows no bullet wound in the back of the President's neck, which is the account of the written autopsy and the representation of the artist's conceptions, Exhibits 385 and 386. If, as this official document made at the autopsy and part of it shows, the late President was not struck in the neck and was struck much lower in the back, then here alone the entire investigation is destroyed. There is ample exidence to confirm the chart. The significance of the notes is here apparent, as is also their exclusion from both the file and the Archives.

I am disquieted by the reported return of the Betzner pictures on the ground they show nothing but the front of the Depository building. This could be the most important thing they could do, for the entire 26 volumes are barren on just this, the most fundamental of evidence. That building was never secured, and the exclusion from the record and the Archives of such pictures serves only to suppress what could be the most important kind of evidence. For example, in one version, Oswald is said to have claimed he just walked out of the building. If one of these photos showed that, need I say what significance it would hold? Also, who were the other people who freely entered and left the building or who were standing around, or who might have been in other adjacent windows? In this connection, I want to draw the attention of the Archives to pages 202-3 of my book. Here you will find a comparison between the cropped version of the Altgens picture used by the Commission and a more complete but apparently still incomplete version I obtained. The more complete picture shows an open window on the second floor of the adjoining building, directly facing the back of the motorcade as it proceeded toward the Triple Underpass. Then there are other pictures of this sort not in the record and, from what you have told me, not in the Archive. For example, extensive footage showing the front of the building and people entering and leaving. Either or both Crouch and Underwood, Dallas TV photographers, took these, according to the testimony. Most assuredly, if this archive is to approximate completeness, they should be included.

I realize the obtaining of such essential documentation may not be the responsibility of the Archives. But with the termination of the Commission, who else can I address? You will recall that yesterday we discussed the fact that the bibliography contains no entry later than November 1964. Is there to be no depository for scholars, especially in the future, for any data that now comes to light? Has no part of the government any responsibility here? If there were those on the staff of the commission who decided not to include data, and if they were wrong, is there no mechanism for correcting such error?

I am apprehensive of the exclusion of existing data from the Archive, such as the photographs, Xrays and notes of the autopsy, the spectrographic analysis of the bullet and the fragments, of the windshield of the car and the curbstone and things like that. Here there is no conceivable element of national security and there is an obvious element of suppression, for the data is in the possession of those agencies that have the greatest reason for suppression, the FBI and the Secret Service, both of whom, innocently or not, bear responsibility for some of the tragic events in Dallas.

Here I want to allude to the nature of some of the material that is still classified and to inquire, generally, on the basis for and reasons why there is such classification and who makes the determination. Agencies that might seek self protection? We are here concerned with the assassination of an American President and a most dubious inquest. The most cursory examination of the bibliography indicates a character to many of these documents that cannot possibly relate to national security. And if they did, there must be some mechanism by which impartial analysts may confirm the judgements made, both of fact and national security. Unless this is done, there will never be an end to questioning, and there never should be.

Among the things apparently classified is some of the testimony. I am particularly anxious to examine the testimony of Mrs. Kennedy that has not been printed. From what I have been told, the reason is good taste, and the implication is that the descriptions are unpleasant. Yet the printed record abounds in the most elaborate gore already, with descriptions of the spattering of the President's brains on people and objects. The gore is not my interest. Mrs. Kennedy appears to have been the only person close to the President and looking at him when he received

his fatal wound. She remained by him constantly, while he was transported into the hospital, while he was in the hospital, while the valiant effort was made to save him. Her testimony, especially because of the highly questionable nature of the entire official version of these events, can be of the greatest importance. Whether or not it in fact is can be determined only by analysis of it, and by now I believe it is clear the examination by the staff of the Commission does not satisfy the requirements of either the present or of history.

I would like you to regard this as a formal request for access to Mrs. Kennedy's testimony, and only for the reasons stated. There certainly is no question of national security involved. Nor do I believe that this brave lady, who has already demonstrated a rare courage, would want any question to remain.

There is also the question of the off-the-record sessions of the Commissions. The testimony of Sgt. Patrick Dean is ample evidence of the gamy character they may have. Had he not demanded a hearing before the Commission itself, we would not know - and most people do not yet know - that this important witness, who was important in both the Ruby trial and the Commission's investigation, as he was in those events in Dallas, was accused of perjury by an assistant counsel of the Commission. I desire access to all such testimony, and again I assert no proper question of national security is involved.

Also, I want to make it clear that in demanding access for myself I do not mean exclusively. It is merely that I can speak for no others. I believe none of this should be denied any who have a proper interest in it. Yet, unless my recollection is faulty, I have read in the press of one analyst to the exclusion of all others has already had access to such material. First of all, this is unfair. Next it is unfortunate because of his connections. Further, it is in itself the fabric of which in the future more questions will be tailored.

Few if any events in history have the magnitude of the assassination of an American President. Even more is this true in today's world, especially with the position in it occupied by the United States. Also, with the assassination of an American President, our entire political system is in jeopardy, our society is in danger and, indeed, so is the institution of the Presidency. We have had a regretably inadequate inquiry which left more questions than it addressed and answered none with finality.

I therefore raise the question of the withholding of any information on any basis, and I specifically include the protection of the sources of information, which I presume, without evidence, I acknowledge, to be the basis of the classification for such a tremenduous number of FBI documents which in any event bear meaningless designations in the bibliography. When one may face a choice between the sanctity of our society, its institutions and the presidency and hiding the identification of an informant, there is no difficulty in making a choice.

In closing, I want to again comment on the adherence of the National Archives and those of its staff with whom I have had contact to the fundamental concepts of our kind of society and to their function in it. And I want to thank you, personally, for your help and thoughtfulness.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg