

4/10/72

Dear Jerry,

In addition to other mail to which I must attend, other work I must do, I got letters from you, John and Stoner today. From yours I gather you did not go with Stoner. In any event, I want you to read my reply. If you have not read his letter, I quote most of it and all that is relevant. I can't think of a crazier thing he could have done, and if I am aware that he or his secretary may simply have forgotten to seal this letter, I am also aware that even if that were the case this letter might well have been read by others.

I tell you frankly that when you wrote me as you did and I didn't hear from him and then he goes to see James for the first time in more than a year, one of the obvious possibilities I had to consider was that he would not give me these leads and then would persuade or try to persuade James not to. I told this to Bud, and now I'll have to give him a copy of Stoner's letter to me. I will, of course, ask him to keep it confidential and I am sure he will, unless something happens to James. I have no choice at all now. This is just too damned unreasonable and too suspicious. I still don't think Stoner was involved in this, but my obligation is to James, not Stoner, and this presents me with the most critical kind of conflict. Therefore, in James' interest, I must give Bud Stoner's letter and my reply.

Jerry, I am willing to fight the government to help James, and I have. I am willing to go further into debt to help him, as I have, to take time I need for other things. But believe me, I am not going to waste one single minute fighting with him or with Stoner or with anyone else. The simplest thing is for me to spend my time on other things. There are just too many I can't get to. And if anything now happens to James, you can be sure Stoner will have to be a prime suspect. No police in the world could avoid this suspicion now, nor can any writer or lawyer.

What John writes makes sense. I will help him in every way I can. I have started some things in motion. They will not be done without his approval. So, I will figure on going there from St. Louis. I have also written him of this, as you say you are. If he wants to see me, there should be no trouble. If they refuse, we will go back to St. L and see whether they have made a mistake. I wrote you about the show with Frank. Now I have a better idea what to expect if he shows up and although it was far short of what it should have been, the admissions I got from him, according to Bud and Jim, who were here yesterday, are good and present us with new possibilities. This guy's big weakness is fact on the killing. He has nothing but what he was fed. So, when he rambles, we should all say get back to the killing, why are you avoiding the killing, things like that. We can talk about this in advance.

I gave Bud the envelope you sent me that was opened and sealed. I think he will pursue it further.

Jerry, please understand me. I am really worried about this insane thing Stoner has done, and I'm not hiding that worry. When I consider his track record in court, with both James and John, even when I make allowances for laziness, if he is lazy, or not preparing a case properly, or not investigating it, when I make all the allowances I can I find he is battling 100% the wrong way and I can't trust his judgement on whether the leads are worthwhile or not. If James gave him what he told me he did, they just can't possibly be of no value. The best two faces I can put on this are first, that Stoner couldn't do it and his ego makes him hide it, and second, that it leads to his friends, and he would hide that. Neither one helps James. This whole situation is very bad. I can't think of anything in his giving me this stuff that could possibly hurt James, either. And I will not ask him or James for this again. Stoner may spin his wheels, but I will not.

Sincerely,

4/10/72

Dear Bud and Jim,

My hunch on what Stoner was up to was right, but I didn't expect it to be in speed. Instead of waiting until I come in on Friday, I'll make a trip into town to mail this and the enclosed carbons of my letter to him and to Jerry. I have decided to write him via Jerry, that is, to send the letter to him to Jerry for Jerry to read and give to him. It will then be up to Jerry and it may give us an added reading on both. Nothing could be more suspicious.

I suppose it has been about a month since he told Jerry he would give me those leads, once he was assured that I would not use anything against him, the excuse he gave Jerry for not giving them to me. What he has done, actually, is to delay until his letter could not reach me in time for me to write James before he sees James. Jerry also wrote me on the 7th, saying that Stoner was going to see James today or tomorrow. Neither letter could have reached me before today, so if I had the intention of writing James, it would not be physically possible.

There are two other possibly strange circumstances. Jerry told me that Stoner was writing me the same day but did not indicate knowledge of what Stoner would write. And whereas Jerry could have driven Stoner there is perhaps less time than the use of planes and certainly at less cost, the indications in Jerry's letter is that he was not taking Stoner. He has told me that Stoner doesn't like to drive. Of course, he could have Jerry take him to the airport and have one of his boys meet him at Knoxville. But when Jerry makes the trip by car without speeding in four hours, and it takes an hour from the airport in Knoxville at least, more if time for getting and returning a rental car is considered, some time to get to the Marietta airport even if there is a direct flight, when all the time is added together, it sure is strange that, if he has so arranged it, Stoner is seeing James without Jerry present, especially because, having assumed he would drive Stoner (one of his jobs for Stoner), I had earlier written Jerry urging him to try and get to see James and to have Stoner talk to the warden. I told you of this yesterday.

From this record, I find it hard to find a way in which Stoner could have fingered himself more than he has.

I suggest that it is time to ask Group Research for everything they have on all of his people, esp. in La. At this point we can't make any assumptions of in coance or non-involvement. It will be interesting to see James' reaction. I have a letter to mail him. I'll tell him the essence. I will presume Stoner has. I'll enclose a copy.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

His letter opens, "In regard to the matter in Memphis, I investigated and gave the information to Mr. James Earl Ray. I suggest that you ask him for that information." With this closing, I have quoted it in full, "As even, I remain, very truly yours," and his signature.

5/10/72

Mr. J.B. Stoner
P.O. Box 1211
Marietta, Ga. 30060

Dear Mr. Stoner,

Your letter of the 7th arrived unsealed today. That, in my opinion, makes it even more unwise.

I gave you my word through Jerry that I have no intention of fighting with you. What I said is you leave me alone, I leave you alone. That stands. So, please understand this letter is not intended as any kind of fight. I address the un wisdom I see in it and the great harm to James in your refusal to give me what more than a year ago he said you would have and I would get. I regard his life as in danger and I regard your refusal to pass these leads on to me as increasing that danger. I suggest that you consider whether you have not written what in the future, especially should there be any untoward developments, might cast suspicion on you.

You say, "I have investigated the Louisiana Angle, found nothing and I have closed that avenue of investigation. I still know many people in Louisiana. I was advised to look elsewhere. There is no reason for any person to spin his wheels."

It simply is not possible for there to have been any investigation of the leads of which I know not to have produced some fact. What you may consider "nothing" others may not, and I do not think you should interpose your evaluation on everyone else. I have done an investigation of a magnitude you can't possibly have duplicated and you have no way of knowing what may or may not fit in with what I have. And I have spun my wheels many times. But not always, for some times, most often, in fact, they grip firmly. If I appreciate the seeming solicitude in keeping me from wasting time, I am willing to waste that time. I have wasted much on this case for which there is no possible return or reward. Numbers, accurate numbers, yield solid fact, not spinning wheels. They may produce the only life insurance James can now have. I can check them from here in less time than I have spent writing you about them.

If I intended you harm, your letter would provide all I need. But I intend you no harm. I seek only the truth, which is the only way of helping James and the rest of his family, all of whom are endangered by their relationship to him.

I strongly encourage you to consider what it means that a letter of this kind reached me open (especially immediately after one to Jerry from James was cut open and taped closed). One of the possibilities is interception. Do you think anyone in the government will read your letter as anything other than a confession of involvement, by you or by those you consider friends? And have you any idea of the investigation they have already conducted along precisely these lines? They even investigated Leander Perez in this connection, and others of whom I know. As I told you, I do not suspect you. Would I be writing you thus if I did? But you are now casting suspicion on yourself. I encourage you to rethink this and to rethink what it may cost James.

This is all inconsistent with what you told Jerry, that the only reason you would not tell me anything is because you were afraid I would use it against you. You have not only not told me anything but you have given me what I can but do not propose to use against you. At the very least you should be willing to consider the possibility that someone else may be able to find what you didn't or understand a set of fact other than you do. Please think this through. I think you have made a serious mistake, one that can hurt you. But I will not argue with you about this, will not press you for this information. Decision is yours.

Regretfully, Harold Weisberg

4/10/72

Dear James,

Today I got a letter from Stoner in which he refused to give me what you know I expected and know I have expected for more than a year now. His timing interests me.

About a month ago, he told Jerry he was afraid I'd use anything against him. I told Jerry this is not the case, that I have no interest in him, that if he leaves me alone, I leave him alone, and that the old business was started not by me but by Field. Jerry has since told me that by accident he learned this for himself, having found the really nasty thing Field did to Bud and me, long, long ago.

I also wrote Stoner and gave him my word on this.

Now he waits until he knows I can't write you in time to influence you, which I wouldn't do in any event, and then and not until then writes me. The earliest I could have gotten his letter was today. Jerry had told me Stoner was going there today or tomorrow. If I understood Jerry's letter correctly, without Jerry this time.

I will not ask you or Stoner for this again. I've too much that I can't get to doing that has some prospect of doing me some good to fight for what can help you. It sure as hell can't help me.

His letter reached me unsealed.

I have written and told him I regard the entire matter as at best unwise.

Meanwhile, I have no choice but to give Bud a copy. If you want it, Bud can bring it to you when he is there again. In Stoner's interest, I'd best not mail it.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

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APRIL 7, 1972

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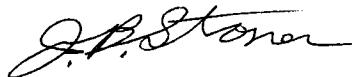
DEAR MR. WEISBERG:

IN REGARD TO THE MATTER IN MEMPHIS, I INVESTIGATED AND GAVE THE INFORMATION TO MR. JAMES EARL RAY. I SUGGEST THAT YOU ASK HIM FOR THAT INFORMATION.

I HAVE INVESTIGATED THE LOUISIANA ANGLE, FOUND NOTHING AND I HAVE CLOSED THAT AVENUE OF INVESTIGATION. I STILL KNOW MANY PEOPLE IN LOUISIANA. I WAS ADVISED TO LOOK ELSEWHERE. THERE IS NO REASON FOR ANY PERSON TO SPIN HIS WHEELS.

AS EVER, I REMAIN

YOURS VERY TRULY,



J. B. STONER

JBS/DM