

Dear Jon,

12/15/74

The letter I wrote you earlier bothers me. Before going to bed I must add to it.

We are both at a disadvantage in these matters. If I tell you the truth I come across like a bitter sorehead. And you really have no way of knowing what is truth and fact. In addition, there is a long history of which you are not aware. I have a considerable file on it and, immodest as it may seem --again you can be satisfied if you are ever here -- I think that in the future it will have some value to young people in teaching them how to analyze political situations. In that case I called every shot, with 100% accuracy, long in advance, including telling Fred Graham in advance precisely what he would write.

Here you can satisfy yourself in all respects if you'll be patient with my young friend, who was here, who also held a view other than mine to begin with and persistently, and has first-hand knowledge of the Graham and all the other parts. He is Howard Roffman, one of the few authentic experts in the field. 912 SW 7 Ave., #3, Gainesville, Fla. 32601. He is in law school, first year. While I tell you that I feel of him as a father does of a son, I also tell you that Howard will be truthful. If you arrange to call him, I am certain that he'll tell you quite a story. In fact, if you do, since I do want to leave tapes of those things where the opinions of others are spontaneous and also retrospective, ask him about taping it. He has read all my Cyril file and all the relevant files and was involved in quite a fight in which I alone in the critical community opposed any one of us being booby-trapped into looking at the so-called autopsy material because we would inevitably be used for propaganda, especially against the innocent survivors. I have two invitation from the Archives and GSA that I rejected. My money was where my mouth was. Yet in 1966 I was the first to apply.

Howard will tell you also that when he decided to disagree with me I did not at any time pressure him and instead ~~he~~ spent much time in long letters showing him how to preserve his own integrity in the matter so that, regardless of the outcome, he'd have no trouble with his own conscience. He can tell you of personal experiences with Cyril. And he just happened to be here when Fred Graham, then with the Times, called me. Before the fact. He heard me tell Fred what he would write, even how he would angle. He has the story Fred later wrote. If not with him I'm sure he'll remember enough. The net result of the Cyril self-seeking was to blame the Kennedys for all the official suppression, and if falsely, quite presumptively. Quite an operation. In this blaming of the Kennedys all others were exculpated. In the paper of record, too.

After that Cyril went really crazy. There are interviews where it comes out that in looking at this autopsy material (which he still does not really understand) he found proof of Cuban exile conspiracy. The whole nutty schmeer. Just so he got his name spelled right and, of course, used.

Jim Leary will remember pretty much that whole affair. He also opposed my position. And the guy Cyril fixed up with a job with him, Bob Smith, did more strongly and spent some three months or more trying to prepare himself to help Cyril. Long after that Smith was still nutty about frangible bullets and things like that. Smith came here to look at other files he never looked at. He was then in the same office as Leary, at the CIA. When he was talking such nonsense and not looking at any files I asked if we could talk as well outside so I could trim out some trees for firewood. I got angrier and angrier the longer the foolishness went on, and it was worse because I felt I had to hide it. The result is that I almost chopped off my left thumb. I still can bend it only half way.

So, if you think that what I wrote is strong, unreasonable, unfactual or motivated by any evil spirit, by all means check me out. I've been honest with you. Perhaps a bit more than my usual bluntness but these have been very trying months in ways I can't go into on the Ray case. Livingston is but a glimmer. The problems are anything but over. Nor is the work. And there now is nothing else I'd not rather be doing. This has been true for years. But I really have no principled choice.

Aside from our own fucking up (not 'asari') we'll be lucky if the State doesn't pull some new dirty stuff. I think they have to be desperate and we have the kind of characters who lend themselves to it. At and before the hearing.

I know my fuse is a little bit shorter. But I intended no offense. I tend to be forthright and believe I owe it.

Perhaps some explanation of my comment on your not spotting on your own reason for doubt would be helpful. You are not in a position to know whether when Cyril represents something as fact it is ~~ix~~ or is not. This will be true on many subjects throughout your reporting life. So, how can you make a judgement not on fact but on integrity? You have to look at other than the fact you can't evaluate. I think it would be a good exercise for you to go over that same piece not in excitement because it is good copy from an expert and on a subject you and your audience finds interesting but questioningly. As a nitpicker. Nothing bad about that in a reporter as long as he doesn't write that way. He has to learn truth to report truth. And nobody is an expert on every subject in the world.

I've made a couple of specific observations. My recollection isn't clear enough to say there are more. I'll be surprised if there are not. I can think of something else that is similar. As you read it count the number of personal pronouns. Now there is nothing at all with either first-person accounts or citing yourself as an authority from personal observation or actions. However, as you do this, also ask yourself if each thing for which he thus takes credit he really did or is the first to do or knows is repetition of other work of which his reader, for all the footnotes, has no knowledge. Where you may feel you may have no basis, then ask yourself questions like is it possible that this wasn't done by anyone for eight years or more?

Knowing the thrust of the piece, you might also ask yourself well, if he is this gang baw and has done all this great work, why didn't he..... ? I think you may find a couple. I think they are pretty obvious. And I'll be that I can show you that I did try these things and he did not. Without reminder from him. And before this piece. And now ways currently, on which I want no mention. I want success, not publicity. (Entirely off the record, no mention to anyone: the AEC denies the neutron-activation testing. I'm still looking for holes in possible semantics. And I know it was done and the essence of the results years ago and it is in Post Norton. That was done before Frame-Up, meaning the last part of three.) (Howard has read it.)

Cyril has no monopoly. There is a wild man in Kansas, another pathologist, Nichols. He steals other people's work and copyrights it. If you doubt, write Dr. Richard Bernabei, Dept. Classics, Queens Univ., Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He did it to Dick and me when we loaned him work in confidence. With a picture he did it so effectively I can show you letters from the Archives swearing they took the picture for him, not me. Plus correction. Dick is a classicist but also an outdoorsman and a very good amateur ballistics man.

The field is full of these types, especially those who can profit professionally. It makes a very serious problem. How does one cope with it? How does one reply to a reasonable inquiry for say you, a reporter? It is true of the commercializers like that Cambridge gang, too. How can one follow them with reason and fact and not be believed by the young people not to be a copout? Or some kind of secret federal agent?

It is not an easy situation. My way may not be the best, but at least I am honest about it, at the risk of people thinking badly of me for it. I see no real choice!

What I'm really saying that probably sounds avuncular and I mean to be sort of that way in a not offensive sense is develop your own critical faculties. Do it until it becomes second nature. You'll learn more, believe less crap and be a better reporter and a wiser man for it. If I did not have this in mind, I'd not have taken this time. The time is when you are young.

Sincerely,