

4/26/70

Dear Gary,

There was something in your letter to Richard about which I had no time for comment yesterday. Intermittently it has been in mind. I think I should address it. I do not get the letter out for it is the import rather than the exact wording that has, intermittently, disturbed me..

He apparently had written you about the internecine troubles, which are only too real. The only reference you made was to Sylvia and Thornley. But you added that you had, in effect, been dragged into this about two years ago, more or less kicking and struggling, to your regret then and since and much against your will.

In the course of thinking about this, a new realization came to me. I will probably refer to it.

This general attitude suggests that of a surgeon who is given a rare and unusual type of break in a bone to mend. In the course of his work he also finds a cancer. But his job was to set this difficult break. So he does and when he is finished he is proud of his skill, having done the difficult thing well. But he hasn't touch the cancer, for his job, as he saw it, was to set the bone. And that he has done.

So I ask you what it is that too few of us are engaged upon and why we do it, what the consequences are if nobody attempts it, what if we fail? What have the discernible consequences been already and what can we now see or reasonably believe they have brought about?

Is this some intellectual exercise for the occupation of idle moments? Is it just another challenge, a puzzle to pass time with? Is it a diversion in which we can pleasurably pass time seeking papers that are hidden and then using them in a meaningless sort of cangrams?

I know not for me and I am certain not for you.

We have undertaken a task I think history will record as one of the most difficult ever assayed by a few nobodies, powerless people of neither means nor connection. The ultimate stake is a concept of society, freedom as we have known it or in any rational concept of the condition, not impossibly the future of the world and whether it continues to exist, in extremity. You formulate it any way you want, and I think in some manner you will be saying that the political assassinations, of which almost none have considered more than that of JFK, have essentially the meaning I have given them in the foregoing and in my writing.

Trying to do something about this is no game, no play for children, no diverting intellectual exercise, no way of passing hours not otherwise committed. It is grim, depressing, as hard as my kind can conceive and, to me, despite the seemingly insuperable odds, the ~~urgent~~ urgent necessity. I spare you exposition of the futility of your training is people are to live in the kind of world that can emerge O has begun to emerge- from the purposes already served by these assassinations.

With whatever formulation you can agree with, if it is as uncomplicated as the sincere belief this is something important and we owe an obligation to try and do something about it, how can you make any effort at all and say you are sorry you are involved in the conflicts? Can you, in fact, do any serious work here without being part of the conflicts?

I do not have to tell you that in all endeavors involving, no matter how or to what extent, human beings, there are, inevitably, some conflicts. We seem to have attracted some of the stranger characters. Perhaps, in my own ways, I am strange, too. But it is a reality that some of us are what we are, do what we do. There are inevitable consequences, on what we seek, on individuals.

Each conflict is different, must be handled by means suited to it. Need I remind you how long I stayed aloof from the Lifton business and, I now acknowledge with not the best judgement, encouraging you to leave it alone? I also prefer to remain separated from such unpleasantness, as what rational being doesn't? Ever since I've asked myself was I not wrong not to spring in with both feet at the outset. I wonder if those he has turned off would have done something worthwhile. Those he has subverted are hopeless anyway.

Most of these either center around or involve me. Some have been quite painful, all have been costly, some in assorted ways. I have tried to react or not react to each as, with the frailty of man's mind and the involvements of his emotions, seemed right. Some I have ignored. Some I have tried to ignore and couldn't. Others I've tried to do something about from the first. Only time will assess my wisdom and judgement.

Let me assess a few of these, with no pretense that I can be at all detached, and you ask yourself, whether or not you were involved in any, two things: was I right and can you be neutral.

First there is Garrison. I had my first doubts in 11/67 when he was so lost in his own importance, so oblivious of his unoriginality, that he practised the speech he was to make at the Southern Calif. press meeting on me one night in his den, entirely oblivious of the fact that he had cribbed it all from the introduction of PW! I asked him for the book. He said he was never without it, handed it to me, and those pages were bent down. This was less of a new experience to me than you may know, beginning with RFJ and the film of the same name. It was saddening, but not my first rubbing against intellectual dishonesty or thievery. Nor did they address the central question, whether or not he was right in what he seemed to be engaged upon. In retrospect, I can hope he never happened, but this is futility. He was very real. However, once I was aware of this aspect of his character and only too soon of the quality of his "work", I had decisions to make. The one I did make may or may not have been the right one. It cost like hell. It took time you may think I might better have spent otherwise, and I would not, seriously, dispute you. You have an idea of what I did, what it cost and what the results were. Let me oversimplify to save time and ask you what the alternatives would have been in only one area, if I had not done what I did to prepare them for our disaster, of which, in part, you have copies; if I had not backgrounded them on Frazier and Finck and given them unprinted and then "unpublished" materials of value to me and mine alone to use? If I had not been able to get some of the witnesses (like the witnesses) for them? Separate from the decision and the permeating incompetence is an official record, the first in court, that is our way. The choice here is between Sylvia's path and mine. What would you have done, what would you have had me do?

Then there is Vince, who is close to you. Suppose I had not, knowing all I did that warned me against it, taken him along and involved him 11/68? Would we have survived it? You'll never begin to appreciate the cost in immeasurable terms. Or that soon thereafter when I had to fight him and the entire N.O. operation, so hard and so alone, on the proceeding in Judge Halleck's court. Had I not, had I been quiet, had I avoided the conflict, had I not, in fact, done all the work for the entire thing, including that of the medical experts for them, what was the alternative? And on the other side, what is the positive accomplishment represented here, if you agree there is one? But, it means a most disagreeable conflict.

The next two of the numerous disputes are more personal and are of the new era in which we are, where I think, at present, our best possibilities and most difficult possibilities lie. I refer to Nichols and Skolnick. Both are crooks, bot steal my work, and this is enough to get me involved and angry. But Flemmonde, for example, stole it wholesale, as did Turner, and I did nothing about either. Mark did worse, stole and then defamed, endlessly, eyt, when the occasion demanded it, in public - praised him for that for which I believed he could be praised. So, from the record, it is not the every alone that gets me into conflicts that are open. The question to me and the one I pose to you is what happens if I do not do what makes of these things a conflict? What happens to us if Nichols goes to court and gets tossed out? Or Skolnick? I put my money where my mouth is, so to speak, having no money. It cost me the time of writing another book, but I did what could be done to defend and what could be done to warn his lawyers, who had more wisdom than Joan and didn't then go forward. With all of this, you know how I wrote him two weeks ago, what he was, not to my knowledge, then up to, what has come out since, and how he declines this I think generous if possibly foolish gesture. But the purpose of the gesture- would you dispute or condemn that? I do not defend the judgement it represents.

I think it not necessary to develop this further. You know I have not sought to present the most powerful arguments, have not adequately developed any, for I know what you know and that it unnecessary. My point is to have you face the alternatives to this internecine warfare. Suppose I'd abandoned Garrison? Let him, with Vice's strongest encouragement, back out of the Washington suit entirely. Let Joan get clobbered in that Michits court, or get some stupidity in LOOK, to be shot down like the others. I know my health would have been better, my finances less desperate, my productivity much higher. But where would we be now?

If you cannot say we would be better off, then you have to say these were necessary conflicts.

They involved you only slightly. Save for a little time with Lifton, they involved you only to the extent that you knew of them. They made no demands on you, your time, your resources.

But you tell Rich you are sorry to be involved.

I ask you how you can be sincere about the fine work you do, the time and other things you invest, and not be involved?

Note I do not say more involved. Each of us must do what he can, and none can or should demand of others what they cannot do or are not in a position to do.

If I fail with Skolnick, and how heavily the odds stack against success, you'll need no exposition of the alternative to conflict.

Citation: Thoreau.

Sincerely,