

20 April 1968

Penn Jones Jr.,
Midlothian Mirror
Midlothian, Texas 76065

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for your recent letter, which I regret to say cannot be found at this writing. At any rate, Jenifer and I wanted to say we're glad to hear you may be coming this way again and that we hope very much to be able to spend some time with you.

The enclosed appears to represent a "normal" suicide, but on the chance that something else might be involved and that you may not have seen it, we send it along for possible inclusion with your collection.

Your note was written just after LBJ had announced his non-candidacy, and other things have happened since which may or may not be part of the same process. Your remark that this man never does anything without a reason seems to me to be the soundest thing I've heard on this subject. I'd go further. I'd say that a man in his position never does anything without several reasons, often several reasons which catch up with one another and which make the decision taken serve several purposes.

Viewed from the perspective of someone who has had a certain amount of experience with ordinary Chinese warlord politics, LBJ's step resembles an old Chiang Kai-shek trick which the Gimo pulled many times. When the dissident factions under him got to quarrelling too loudly, he would resign, or threaten to resign, or go to Mokanshan or some other rustic retreat to study the classics, and pretty soon they would all realize that if he stayed away they would all enviscerate each other, whereupon they all came humbly and begged him to come back, and he always did, with his power and influence increased. Nasser pulled the same stunt last summer after the disastrous war with Isreal, you may recall.

This of course is not the whole story in this case. The central fact, I suggest, was that as things stood LBJ realized he could not be re-elected dogcatcher in Johnson City. The long build-up of the unpopularity of the war had reached such a crescendo that businessmen actually were buying space in the New York Times to agitate against it. I don't claim any credit for it, but I've been saying for almost a year that if LBJ ran again he would have to do it as a peace candidate, at least as an apparent peace candidate. His announcement makes it possible for him to use all the initiatives available to him to begin such a buildup. He loses nothing except the popular image of a hawk. He regains flexibility in his position, being able now to keep the war going while appearing to pursue peace, and sit back and invite a draft. If it materializes, he can accept it or decline it as circumstances advise at the time. If it doesn't, he still loses nothing.

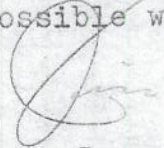
The other problem was the expected domestic war this summer. Here again he regained the initiative, perhaps by the accident of Martin Luther King's assassination. In any case the cities erupted, and the establishment was able to arrest most of the other black leaders who threatened to lead the domestic war this summer. The troops got a lot of good ~~practice~~, and by the early precipitation of the war much valuable experience and strategic advantage was gained by those who would control it.

You are the last person on earth, of course, to ~~miss~~ overlook the uncanny parallels between the Kennedy assassination and that of Dr. King, and the same incredible parallels between their handling afterward -- allowing for certain lessons learned in the meantime, of course. The air of orchestration that pervades the King murder and the subsequent "chase" is much too heavy for comfort.

What particularly interests me is the apparent way they are approaching the denouement of a conspiracy this time, which I would take to mean that they have learned that it is a serious mistake to deny a conspiracy when one obviously exists in such an expert job (another expert job), and that the intelligent thing to do is to handle it as a conspiracy and thus control the kind of conspiracy it is going to turn out to be. This is what concerns me: If a conspiracy can be admitted (in order to control its nature) in this case, why can't they discover another in the Kennedy assassination, even at this late date? One that they could control, could manipulate for their own purposes, one of which would be the complete and ultimate destruction of a certain district attorney who has been making such a nuisance of himself. For instance, I have been much puzzled at the way certain witnesses turn out to be available now when practically none was available before. Are they part of this process of quietly preparing the ground for a spectacular new tack?

Perhaps I'm giving the planning department too much credit, but I think you'll agree that our friend still has a vast array of initiatives at his disposal and the kind of mind that enjoys using them.

All the best, and we look forward to seeing you if possible when you next come this way.



James D. White
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