

24 February 1970

Mr. Richard P. Edelman
319 Dryden Road
Ithaca, New York 14850

perception

Dear Mr. Edelman,

Upon reading your interesting and thoughtful letter of the 20th, I had some hesitation about trying to frame a cohesive, balanced response by letter to questions which perhaps require detailed and even prolonged personal discussion for their balanced and judicious elucidation. Since you are now in Ithaca, let's see how far we can get via letter, and perhaps we can at some future time exchange views in conversation to fill any gaps.

It is, of course, gratifying to be considered one of the responsible critics. When my own thoughts have sometimes veered in such a direction, I have been annoyed with myself for entertaining such a self-approving notion and lectured myself to be more objective and less critical of my colleagues. But when occasionally I hear from a complete stranger, yourself and one or two others who have made similar generous remarks about my work, I must admit to a feeling of considerable pleasure--first, because I have tried at all times to be conscientious and impartial, and second, because my friendships and collaboration with the other critics, at first such a source of strength and fellowship, in most cases turned into bitter ashes and a cause for demoralization going far beyond the case itself, causing me to question many of my basic assumptions as a human being and as a person generally oriented toward the political Left.

I remain on close and mutually devoted terms with Tink Thompson and Leo Sauvage (for whom I continue to have the highest respect and whose integrity and capacity for logic and insight into this case I regard as unparalleled) and a few others. But those who were nearest-and-dearest fellow-critics during 1964-67 are now completely estranged --mainly, because of our irreconcilable differences on Garrison. As you perhaps know, I regard him as an unprincipled and dangerous charlatan and demagogue who, more than any other single individual, has made a mockery of all the serious research that was done and destroyed the gains that had so laboriously been achieved before his advent upon the scene. I have to agree with you that the critics themselves, or many of them, have acted irresponsibly and have abused fact and logic no less than the Warren Commission.

*various
criticism in
New York
Magazines*

Some of the critics are basically well-meaning but almost entirely visceral in their approach to the case, unable to discriminate between hypothesis, allegation, fact, evidence, and proof, functioning in a mental mixmaster and dominated by what they see as a ubiquitous all-embracing conspiracy that extends from Dallas to Memphis to Los Angeles all the way to Chappaquiddick. A few in this category may even be borderline psychotics or paranoids, rather, since they maintain a certain internal logic.

Others of the critics have excellent minds and talents and have made genuine discoveries and breakthroughs on questions of evidence. But of this group some are so influenced by long-held political attitudes and loyalties that their judgment has suffered greatly and they were able stubbornly and blindly to "believe in" preposterous windbags like Garrison so long as he tossed them the crumbs of liberal-radical cliches. They simply cannot see the embarrassing parallel between this shyster, chasing their devils, and the Establishment whitewashers and front-men, chasing their heroes.

*leeta
Katy*

Others in the same group did see through people like Garrison quite quickly, but were willing to give him aid and support on the theory that he would be useful to the "cause" and in the discredited belief that the end justified rather dirty means--in which case, why take issue with the Warren Commission on moral grounds, which these critics indeed did?

Finally, and these are the least forgivable, some critics never gave a damn about the enormous travesty of justice in terms of the Warren Report, never gave a damn about the injustice to Oswald, or to Clay Shaw, or the indignity and insult done to the people of this country by a Commission which blatantly despised their intelligence and their right to plain truth. These critics saw in the WR only an opportunity to achieve personal fame and the fortune that usually goes with it. These crude self-seekers, at least one of whom thoroughly fooled me for a while, have done enormous harm—rushing to hold hands with Garrison for the attendant headlines, or turning about to become "reformed" defenders of the WR (and who could do greater damage than an ex-critic turned believer?). It did not seem to occur to them that we critics had no obligation to take sides in a gang war (Warren Commission vs Garrison) in which both sides had nothing but contempt for truth and justice (a line which the editors of the NY Review of Books edited out of a letter of mine refuting a pro-Garrison article before publishing my letter).

With that background of my personal experience and my general view of my ex-colleagues, sketchy though it is, let me try to answer your specific questions.

1) No, I do not believe that Garrison uncovered any new leads of any significance. On the contrary, he was capricious and amateurish in pursuing existing leads such as 544 Camp Street, or the matter of John Rene Heindel (whose nickname had been "Hidell"), or ambiguities still surrounding Oswald's supposed request to be interviewed by the FBI when he was in police custody in New Orleans in August 1963, etc. Specifically, I do feel that the matter of 544 Camp Street is potentially significant—at least, that we can not safely assume that it has no importance, as things stand.

2) I believe that many documents remain classified for generally valid reasons, such as protecting innocent bystanders from public ridicule or disrepute for such indiscretions as adultery, homosexuality, and the like. These may or may not also contain material information of relevance. What is amazing is that among the documents declassified long ago there is information highly incriminating of the WR, which one would have expected to be kept "top secret" for 75 years. Thanks to these freely available CDs in the Archives, I have been able to obtain reassurance that my reasoning, deductions, and conclusions on a number of questions discussed in Accessories After the Fact (e.g., that Oswald was never even arraigned for the JFK murder; that Givens' testimony placing Oswald on the 6th floor) were completely vindicated by the unpublished documents. Why were such incriminating materials made available in the Archives, or for that matter even in the 26 volumes of the Hearings and Exhibits? I am convinced it is because no one on the Commission or its staff or in related agencies had sufficient intimacy with the macroscopic or the microscopic evidence even to recognize what was inimical to the official thesis and should be suppressed. And it is thanks to that ignorance that the critics have been able to make such a devastating case against the WR. Bear in mind, please, that, on the other hand, certain evidence which was immediately recognized as inimical has been persistently and unyieldingly withheld (e.g., the report of the spectrographic analysis of the bullet, fragments, and smears; the autopsy photos and X-rays).

I completely agree with Paul Hoch that nothing could be more dangerous than to over-emphasize the still-classified materials. Rather, we must try to exploit much more effectively the available evidence, which is sufficient to destroy the WR three times over. To destroy the fraud is one major objective, and perhaps the only one that is achievable. To discover and to prove what really did happen in Dallas is a different problem and less capable of solution with every day that passes.

was pure perjury

was the cause of Oswald's murder

3) Indeed, Oswald is virtually our only link back to the principals who engineered or commissioned the events at Dealey Plaza, since there seems to have been careful advance planning and maneuvering to convert him into an instant lone assassin. Somewhere in his activities and associations there must therefore be a trace of the real assassins. I have suggested this in Accessories, Chapter 21, under "The Proof of the Plot," as a purely theoretical construct, the kind of thing that might have taken place.

As to the sub-questions under 3): It is not impossible that Dealey Plaza was selected as the site because Oswald was known to work in the Depository, rather than the other way around. The Dallas Police and the SS knew the motorcade route--worked it out together--and it is not impossible either that individuals in these agencies are implicated, or that they fed the information innocently to interested parties, or ensured that the procession would pass the building where the lone-assassin-to-be was working.

I do think that there is some reason to at least consider the possibility that there were a number of "models" for the assassination, at different locations in Dallas or in other cities, ready to be utilized if the circumstances converged properly or to be defused and discarded if they did not. I base this belief partly on the "Miami tape" and partly it is merely speculative and visceral. Nevertheless, we have enough to do to prove that Dealey Plaza was the fruit of a conspiracy without trying to prove that there were alternative set-ups and alternative Oswalds readied for his role.

I think I am beginning to flag and that my responses are now too telegraphic. It is on these kinds of questions that correspondence is not entirely satisfactory. I will perhaps ask you to read "The Proof of the Plot" in Accessories, if you have not already done so, and then we might perhaps pursue the subject further, by phone or further correspondence. On balance, I am glad that you plan to do your seminar paper on the WR critics: however painful an objective appraisal may turn out to be, it needs to be done, for contemporary understanding and for the historical record. Otherwise we shall have only such gutter-garbage as the celebrated "book" by Richard Warren Lewis and Lawrence Schiller, The Scavengers and Critics of the WR, whose authors are perhaps the only two human beings I have ever encountered who have absolutely no redeeming qualities whatever and are very likely far more evil and repugnant than any mere assassins, from Julius Caesar to date.

I hope that this letter will be of some helpfulness to you. All good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher
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[Handwritten mark]