

3 May 1967

Mr. Tom Bethell
2323 Ashmead Place N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of the 26th of April and its valuable enclosures. I certainly agree with your views on Mort Sahl and Mark Lane. Both are very gifted in public relations, attracting audiences to the subject of the WR and spurring their listeners to give some critical thought to its contents. Yet, in the last analysis, they may do some damage to the credibility of the critics, by sweeping and reckless claims, by simplistic thinking, and (I am sorry to say) by irresponsible or unethical actions.

I had been an admirer of Sahl's for some ten years, ever since I saw his one-man-show "The Next President" in about 1957 and heard his incisive and witty attack on some of our most hypocritical and pompous politicians and military men. A few months ago I was on his radio program, by telephone, and later in the studio in Los Angeles, on both his radio and TV programs. I still admired him, although I thought that his focus and discipline were greatly decreased, and began to question the effectiveness of a pseudo-humoristic approach to the whole problem of the WR, and of American morality. In the course of my visit and subsequently, I learned that despite his exhortations in the cause of truth and morality, he had defaulted on a personal commitment in a manner that shocked and saddened me. Certainly that indication of a dichotomy between what Sahl says, and what he does, is disillusioning and worrisome.

Lane is very disarming and attractive, when one is in his company; yet my experience with him and his coterie, at an earlier stage of the case, and the consistent experience of others, suggests the wisdom of care in dealings with him and of avoiding any identification with him. I know that Garrison was urged not to establish an alliance with Lane; apparently he decided to disregard that advice. But what does one make of Lane's grandiose pronouncements about the finality and fullness of Garrison's evidence, in the face of the Phelen article in the SEP, and of Garrison's evident search for new and/or additional evidence? Can he really have the case sewed up, as Lane says, and the guilty parties identified?

The SEP article seems to me very damaging, at first glance, at least; nor was I impressed by the "refutation" made by Garrison's assistant, Sciambria, which seemed merely a flat denial. There has been very little press coverage of this dispute, or of the Novel CIA allegations, so I have finally taken the plunge and subscribed to the New Orleans States-Item. I should be receiving the first copies next week.

Your last few letters suggest that you are tending more and more toward acceptance of the WR main conclusions, apparently because of the frustration of constructing an alternate hypothesis. I have some strong feelings about the very principle operative here. Apologists for the WR have often challenged the critics to "name the guilty parties" (if they reject Oswald's sole guilt): this is the worst kind of sophistry, implying as it does a non-existent parity between the individual, "amateur" critic, relying on his own reasoning powers and few if any other investigative tools, and an official commission with unlimited resources at its disposal--subpena power, manpower, laboratory and technical facilities, and the like. No such parity exists and it is specious

to pretend that such an equation can be made. Nevertheless, I would agree that under certain circumstances, one might take the evidence gathered by an official investigative body and reinterpret it, so as to reach entirely different findings. In this case, however, such a process is hardly possible, because the evidence in the WR is highly unreliable, incomplete, and dubious; much of the testimony lacks credibility or was carelessly and inadequately elicited; and a large body of unknown evidence is suppressed entirely.

Under such conditions, any attempt to "solve" the crimes (the assassination and the murders of Tippit, Oswald, and possibly other witnesses) is greatly handicapped, if not doomed, if one is relying upon the official records in whole or in part. It is different, of course, if someone like Garrison can locate new witnesses who can provide material evidence of conspiracy and of the execution of the crime, or suspects who would resolve the whole dilemma by a confession. Perhaps Garrison is on the road to such a denouement--I only hope so! Meanwhile, itx seems to me that as a matter of principle (if not practice) no critic should accept the onus of doing what the Commission was charged to do, and given all facilities to do, but which it perverted and failed to fulfill.

I won't go into all the issues of specific evidence that you reviewed in your letter, since it would be extremely long and time-consuming. Of course, Oswald was "involved," as you say, even if only as a fall-guy. Some of the physical evidence you discuss (i.e., the bullet fragments) lacks a chain of possession and/or authentication. You postulate his transport of the rifle in a dufflebag; but the known evidence militates against this. Ruth Paine, who by no means tried to exonerate him, said that the duffelbags were stuffed with soft bulging objects. And I see no way to overcome the Frazier/Randle testimony. You say that "no alibi is apparent;" but I think that his encounter with Truly and Baker in itself is tantamount to an alibi, even without the added arguments I adduce on this point in my book. And how do you overcome his marksmanship? Robert Oswald, who took Oswald hunting in 1962, said that he could not hit the side of a barn (not in testimony--to a reporter in personal conversation); and according to Inquest his Soviet file indicated that he had to be given game to carry after his expeditions with the hunting club in Minsk, to save face, because he had not been able to bring anything down. And look at the results of the reenactments by three rifle masters! No: in my opinion, everything speaks for his non-guilt--in terms of motive, means, and opportunity.

One might ask why, if he was guilty, the Commission found it necessary to incorporate in its report so many outright misrepresentations and falsehoods, and why it omitted so many other necessary facts. As Sauvage has pointed out, a rifle is not a weapon unless it is loaded with ammunition or it is used to club someone over the head. Where was Oswald's ammunition? Where is the evidence that he ever acquired or possessed Western Cartridge Co. 6.5 mm. cartridges? And, above all, how could Oswald or anyone else behind the car fire a head shot that threw the victim back instead of forward? There in itself is positive proof of crossfire. The Commission saw that film. They did not want to find, or even discuss, the second assassin. Surely, then, they would have made an attempt to suppress evidence that might enable others to find the assassins. Such inimical evidence as we have found in the 26 volumes was not made available to us intentionally--it seems probable that to this day neither the Commission nor the federal agencies are wholly familiar with their contents.

Turning to the enclosures that came with your letter: I had dinner the other night with Dick Sprague, and he told me that a civilian witness witnessed an episode which corresponds with Craig's report of a man entering a station wagon, about 20 minutes after the shots. The episode in itself may be meaningless, if Craig is mistaken, as he seems to be, about the identity of the man who entered the vehicle; but I have always had the impression that Craig did see what he described, which would set up a new series of problems as to his exchange of remarks with Oswald in the police station--which Fritz denies ever took place. The Commission's failure to confront Craig and Fritz with each other--to seek out other witnesses who may have been present, who could corroborate or refute Craig's story--that is typical of the manner in which the Commission evaded and failed to resolve crucial conflicts.

Your "odd item about another paper bag" certainly is odd. How curious that anyone should have been mailing prototype paper bags to Oswald. Was it mailed before, or after, 11/22/63?? Was it addressed by hand or by typewriter? What exactly was the "non-existent" address? Another package came for the Oswalds a few days before the assassination: it is mentioned somewhere in the labyrinth of CE 2003, as I recall. At first the mailman could not deliver it, no one at home, but ultimately he did deliver it. What was in that package? Could that too have contained a paper bag? Or a rifle? Neither Marina nor Ruth Paine were questioned about it. Marina seemed to have no funds at her disposal. Did she order a C.D.D. item? Or a prepaid item? If the package contained merchandise or anything of value, as the non-delivery suggests (it could not be left but had to be handed over, perhaps signed for), what was it? Who paid for it?

I don't suppose Oswald mailed a homemade paper bag to himself, at a non-existent address? Why should anyone else do that, unless it was part of a plan for his incrimination by means of physical evidence? If so, the plan was carelessly executed--in terms of the address. The FBI did not, of course, trouble itself to compare the paper bag found in the post office with the materials in the Depository. It would be interesting to know if the paper matched, and the tape. Suppose it did match? It would be pretty hard to incorporate such evidence into the lone-assassin hypothesis. Better not to probe...And here, in a nutshell, is the difficulty of substituting a new hypothesis. Even one minor unresolved problem, if resolved, might throw the whole thing wide open again and invalidate one's interpretation of the evidence.

I continue to think that the Odio story is the key to the whole mystery. If it was Oswald, he was working with at least two other men; if it was not Oswald, someone was using his name in order to incriminate him in a crime still to take place but of which they had knowledge. The Odio story cannot be ignored--in itself, it constitutes what is tantamount to proof of a conspiracy, with or without Oswald's knowing participation.

We have one possible ace--maybe Sprague's work on films and photographs will produce conclusive evidence, about who (if anyone) was in the Depository window(s), and/or on the grassy knoll. By the way, there was a tiny item in the NYTimes on Sunday, to the effect that Weisberg had gone before the New Orleans Grand Jury, accompanied by four of Garrison's aides. Do you know anything about that curious development? All the best,