

21 September 1967

Mrs. Joseph A. Field, Jr.
The Tuscany
120 East 39 Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear Maggie,

I hope that you will agree that the enclosed note is a substantially correct summary of our last telephone conversation, but if you find any serious inaccuracy please indicate what it is. It seemed to me that the duration and the nature of our association required an account for the record, and against the vagueness of later recollection, of when and why it has been severed.

As I understand your position, it is a shameful and intolerable fraud for Arlen Specter to contrive the single-bullet theory and we have a moral duty to expose and condemn this ugly fabrication, however difficult the struggle; when Jim Garrison announces in May that he has deciphered a "code" which incriminates Oswald in a conspiracy with Shaw, Ruby, and others—and when he repeats this claim in July --it is only a "mistake;" and when Mark Lane consciously repeats on a public platform insinuations about stress marks on the back of the Stemmons sign, which he has privately agreed is invalidated—or when he attacks a critic without the smallest shred of justification for an act of cowardice, hypocrisy, and ingratitude for which he himself has still to answer—it is a "weak point" or an "error."

As I further understand your position, the merits of the case (where Garrison and Lane are concerned) are insignificant or secondary to the need for the critics of the Warren Report to maintain solidarity, and to this end any public criticism of Garrison should be abjured, while quarrels between Lane and myself are to be mourned and deplored because they create a schism, the rights and the wrongs being on the verge of irrelevance. My interpretation is based on the fact that I had to solicit from you a definite indication of your evaluation of Lane's attack on me in re: The National Guardian and of my rebuttal or my counter-attack, and even then you wrote, "I feel disinclined, at this point, to say you're right and he's wrong because I am far more concerned with the growing schisms that keep cropping up..." (letter of September 7, 1967).

It was not always thus. It is easy to demand primacy for "solidarity" when someone else's interests are at stake, but what was your position in April this year when you and Lifton came into serious conflict? You called me and proposed that a letter signed by all the critics should go to Lifton, excommunicating him, so to speak. I strongly urged you to abandon that idea, not because I refused to take sides but because Lifton, Liebeler, and Schiller would be overjoyed with the opportunity to air such a letter in the press. You agreed with this judgment and the idea of the letter signed by all the critics was dropped. However, I did agree to alert Salandria and I wrote him an account of what you had reported on Lifton, in a letter dated April 12, 1967, in which I said, "I don't want to ask you to take my word for the story...and I have asked Maggie to write to you directly about it." Subsequently you told me that you had not, after all, written to Vince; and his reply of May 6, 1967, to me, was, "Hey, I think Lifton is innocent. Let's not behave like cannabilistic (sic) paranoid bastards this late in the game."

So much for that particular "schism." But in the more recent episode of a wholly unwarranted attack on me by Mark Lane, an attack which no one has even tried to justify, I did not receive an immediate indication of your support. I was glad, of course, to receive in your letter of September 7th the clarification I requested—but did you tell Lane, when he was your guest while en route to New Orleans and complained that I had "attacked" him, or have you told him at any time since then, that he was wrong and that his denunciation of me was absolutely unfounded? You did not. Apparently he is not to be alienated or criticised, because of his "enormous over-all contribution." By that yardstick, why not forgive Warren his Report? After all, he has made an enormous

over-all contribution to civil rights and civil liberties during his tenure as Chief Justice.

In your September 7th letter, you referred to "rumors, that this or that person has had access to his (Garrison's) complete information," in the context of whether or not Garrison has a "case." With all due respect, I think the use of the term "rumors" was an equivocation, or a rebuff, or both. Vince had told me categorically (as he may also have told you) that he had complete access to everything in Garrison's office, and that he was discouraged ("and even dismayed," as he said in a subsequent conversation). Your reference to "rumors" suggested that you considered that I might be misrepresenting Salandria's statement to me. But even if he did not make the same statement to you (about his "complete access" to all the evidence in Garrison's possession), what about Mark Lane's public pronouncement in support of Garrison on March 29, 1967, which you were good enough to distribute widely in verbatim? Lane said then that the evidence was known to Garrison, and to his staff, and now to himself, and you attached no rider to his assertion, much less did you consider it a rumor. On the contrary, Lane's endorsement was offered as another powerful argument on behalf of Garrison, even as the ultimate proof which should have eradicated the last doubts about Garrison's "case." I understand that more recently, Lane has called on Heaven to help Garrison if all he had was Russo, and that so far as Lane knew, Russo was all Garrison had.

I understand also that you have speculated that I have some secret information which leads me to be certain that Garrison will fall on his face, and that it is that certainty which accounts for my disassociation from and denunciation of him. Let me assure you that I have no secret information whatever, only the same information we have all read in the States-Item or the NBC transcript of the Garrison rebuttal or the Playboy interview or The NY Review of Books apologia---which is more than sufficient to convince me that he will fall on his face and deserves it completely. I do not appreciate the implication that I have some ulterior motive for my anti-Garrison position or the collateral implication that my insistence that I am motivated by principle is dishonest.

To one piece of dishonesty, or cowardice at the least, I will admit: I did not have the courage to say to you directly what I said in my letter to The NY Review of Books, page 3 paragraph 3. I referred there to the complacency and readiness of those who had most ferociously insisted on Oswald's complete innocence to capitulate, on the incredible basis of the allegations of a sordid man like Perry Russo, to sudden acceptance of his complicity in the conspiracy. How bitterly you (and Salandria) assailed Tink Thompson only last February for the sin of having realized only in December 1966 that Oswald might be completely innocent...How implacably you (and Ray Marcus) repudiated Epstein for accepting Oswald's guilt...Few things have appalled me more than the volte-face which took place, without an indication of struggle, merely because that preposterous loud-mouth Garrison and his equally preposterous witness Russo declared Oswald a party to conspiratorial conversations with Perrie and Shaw. I am ashamed that I did not express my revulsion and shock then and there, or even as late as the date of my letter to the NY Review of Books, in the illusory hope that our relationship could be preserved if I kept silent, and in the illusory belief that it should be preserved.

Indeed, our conversation last night merely formalized a de facto rift which neither of us was hitherto willing to verbalize. The worst of the rift is that it has been produced by differences so fundamental as to nullify our relationship in the past as well as in the present and the future. The intimacy and the loyalty between us were based on false assumptions each of us made about the other. I will not be a party to incriminating Oswald in the assassination on the lies and fabrications of the Warren Commission, or on the lies and fabrications of Garrison, and I intend to speak out against both of them and against their supporters and collaborators.

You said in your September 7th letter that, to re-state your position for the record, you were not backtracking because you had never maintained that Garrison had "solved the case." But Garrison has maintained just that; and his claims are amply documented. You

said that yours was "a policy of wait and see." But while you are waiting, you are condoning as a "mistake" an ugly and conscious fraud—the "code" (granted that it was a mistake in May, it became a deliberate fabrication when Garrison repeated it in July). No one who rejects "neutrality" on the Warren Report should claim the privilege of "neutrality" (real or merely formal) on the equally sordid misrepresentations, fantasies, and inventions of the New Orleans district attorney.

I am not in the least shaken by my "isolation" from the other critics on this issue; and my isolation is not as total as our recent badinage about long-distance costs suggested. I have since learned that at least one of our colleagues, Bill O'Connell, shares the views expressed in my letter to The NY Review of Books; and there are a few others. But if there was not one person in the whole world, it would not make one whit of difference. Alliances paid for by the surrender of principle, logic, or morality are only a form of corruption, and I want no part of them.

There is perhaps more that could be said, for the record, but I think this much covers the basic points.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher

Telephone conversation with Maggie Field,
Wednesday, 7 p.m., 20 September 1967

Maggie said that it looked as though she would have to stay on after her husband left, although she was a coward about being alone in a New York hotel. I said that this time I would not be able to be of much comfort, because the Garrison affair had created an unbridgeable gulf between us. Maggie said, yes, it had.

I urged her to consider how much she was jeopardizing and compromising her three years of valuable work by her position on Garrison. She asked what I meant. I replied that in her book she was attacking the lies of the Specters and the Liebelers, but at the same time she was condoning the lies of Garrison.

Maggie said, what lies? He has told no lies. I asked, what about the foul fabrication of the "code"? Maggie said, that was a mistake. I asked whether Specter's lies could not be called "mistakes" also; and if so, what was the difference between the "mistakes" of the Specters, and the "mistakes" of Garrison? Maggie replied, "They made so many...but I don't want to talk about it." I said, "If we can't talk about that, we have nothing to talk about at all." Maggie agreed, "No;" I said, "So be it. Goodbye." Maggie said, "Goodbye."

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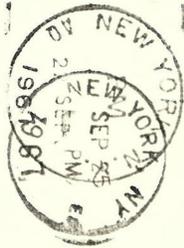
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