

20 October 1967

Mr. Maxwell Geismar
Winfield Avenue
Harrison, New York 10528

Dear Mr. Geismar,

How very kind of you to write me such a friendly long letter. I will, with pleasure, send you an inscribed copy of the book, within a matter of days, I hope.

I feel real satisfaction to learn that you found some merit and some grounds for reconsideration of Garrison in the copies of my letters to The New York Review of Books and Playboy (neither publication has acknowledged the letter nor indicated whether it will be printed). But I don't know what has led you to believe that I have not favored Penn's books—I have great respect for Penn's courage and for the tenacity with which he has turned up invaluable information, especially about the deaths of witnesses, and for his unfaltering effort to alert the public to the fraudulent version of history written by the Warren Commission. I think his work is more reportorial than scholarly or analytic, but as such his books and editorials have singular value (certainly they are more readable than my rather massive and laborious exposition of the evidence). I am unhappy that Penn (and many other good friends among the critics and students of the case) differ with me so fundamentally and in some instances so bitterly on the question of Garrison that we can scarcely converse any longer.

I did not start with any mistrust of Garrison. On the contrary, between January and April I was his ardent admirer and supporter and sent him unsolicited whatever material or information I had that could possibly be useful to him, including extensive excerpts from my book. My misgivings began with the preliminary hearing in the Shaw arrest, and multiplied rapidly thereafter, as Garrison's liberties with fact and logic were followed by distortion, quoting out of context, gross and careless error, and even invention—the identical techniques employed by the Commission, for which my colleagues and I had been excoriating the Warren Report, and with the identical effect of incriminating Oswald in the conspiracy (although absolving him of the actual shooting, which is only a technical absolution), on the most fragmentary and suspect "evidence." It is not enough to accuse the CIA, especially when, in Garrison's case, the accusations are part of a stream of transparently irresponsible and unsubstantiated charges. The ultimate effect may well be to create for the CIA an immunity from suspicion which it does not merit. In my book, I have postulated (and long before Garrison's belated interest in the assassination) a conspiracy in which the CIA had the central or at least an important role—but I identified this as a theory, and documented such evidence as there is to support the theory. Merely to shriek accusations, as Garrison has done, against the CIA, the Dallas police, the White Russians, the oil millionaires, etc., indiscriminately and without a shred of substantiation, merely gives ammunition to apologists for the Warren Report and creates resistance to all criticism, whether it is responsible or not.

I cannot see why the pro-Garrison critics overlook or ignore this; even less do I understand their sometimes pathetic and embarrassing rationalizations and attempts to justify on Garrison's part the very same sordid methods which we have all denounced on the part of the Commission and its tame lawyers. I suspect that in the case of some of the critics, they are not opposed to dishonesty as such, or miscarriage of justice as such, but only when the victim is a progressive, or when the fraud is against the interests of the progressive movement. But why is it okay to use such methods in one's own cause? Isn't that in essence what Warren and his confederates did? I do not intend to play kettle to their pot.

I don't really know much about Conor Cruise O'Brien. He has disappointed me by being late, first with a jacket quote which arrived after the deadline and could not be used, and then late with the review of the book, which I had hoped would be in the November issue of TMO but will now have to wait for the December issue. I knew of him only in the context of Katanga, when he tangled with Hammarskjoldt, whom I detested (I work at UN and was in the thick of the Congo situation in 1960-1961), so I thought well of him. That is really all I do know about him, I wasn't even aware that he was now with Ramparts.

Although I've rambled on too long already, I see that I have overlooked one question you raised, to which I should respond. No, I do not think that Garrison has been picked to mess up the critics. I think he had a dull year or so, without headlines or combat, and that he became genuinely fascinated by the assassination, which is stuffed with so many mysteries and paradoxes. I believe that he started his investigation in good faith, immersed in the case (and with an eye for his personal prospects of prominence and power if he carried off a coup, which is inevitable in a politician) and looking for real answers. For all I know, he still believes in his own pronouncements---but then, it is quite likely that Warren has also managed to convince himself that Oswald was the lone assassin---but I evaluate his witnesses and his "evidence" as shamefully contrived, where it is not merely irrelevant. He is well aware of my opinion of him; his only retort to date has been a statement in a letter he wrote to Arnoni after the editorial, to the effect that the explanation of my attack on his so-called "code" (of Ruby's phone number, where he reads Oswald's "DD" as "PO") is that an elected official stumbled into it instead of the unhappy critic who complains of it so bitterly.

This provides a bit of insight into Garrison's character: he cannot entertain the possibility that anything other than self-promotion and kudos might inspire criticism---it does not occur to him that it might be a result of principle, conviction, or simple fairness and respect for fact. No, I fear that we will not arrive at any truth if we take as guide a shyster and headline-hunter who admittedly free-loads at the Sands Hotel (which is a clue to his judgment, if not his morals). Now I really must call a halt. You will have the book soon, and I hope that it will not disappoint you too much.

Yours faithfully,

Sylvia Meagher
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