

4 May 1968

Mr. David Lifton
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Dear David,

This noon I received and read your letter of 2 May and the enclosures. I am grateful for the trouble you took in sending me this fascinating and extremely important material. But let me deal first with some minor questions, so as to get them out of the way.

I am sorry to say that I never found time to make a transcript of the four-hour tape of the Theater for Ideas debate between Popkin Sauvage and myself and spokesman Liebler, Griffin, and Dwight Macdonald for the Warren Commission. I excerpted and inserted into the ms. of Accessories a number of passages, but found no time to do more than that. I regret this not only because I cannot respond to your request but because I would dearly love to possess a complete transcript. Therefore, I will reverse your offer and ask you, if and when you complete the transcript, to provide me with a copy with the understanding that I will pay the costs of reproduction and mailing.

On a happier note, I am please to enclose my letters to the Saturday Review of 18 October 1966 on the Arnold Fein review, and to U.S. News & World Report dated 11 October 1966 on the Specter interview. The corrections on page 4 of the USNWR (which perhaps should have renamed itself U.S. News and Warren Report) were made after the original copy was mailed. I had made the error of thinking that Specter was capable of accuracy when it was to his own advantage to be accurate, but even then his inherent carelessness and divorce from strict fact came through. You may be interested to know that this 15-page devastation of Specter's interview brought me a reply dated 19 October 1966 from the managing editor of USNWR enclosing a memorandum from the "editor who handled this matter, which you may find of interest. We do not plan to carry anything further on this subject at the present time..." The enclosure was titled "Memorandum for Personal Information Only--Not to be Attributed, Printed or Distributed" and consisted of a self-serving press release. It said, in essence, that because of such books as those by Lane and Popkin, USNWR tried to get the best authority available and question him about the questions raised in books and articles, and they got Specter ("for various reasons, none of the 7 members of the Commission or the Chief Counsel was available for interview on the record. We consulted some privately."), who was as competent or even more so as anyone. "Our interest was in performing a public service, and we feel that we did..." To which I replied in one sentence to said managing editor: "Thank you for your letter of October 19, 1984." End of correspondence.

I would also like to make a confidential inquiry of you, David. I received a wire five or six days ago from the managing editor of Ramparts, asking me to serve on a committee of inquiry into the murder of Martin Luther King. I wired back that I would make a final decision about serving on this committee (to which I agreed in principle and provisionally) after receiving full details of the membership, purposes, procedures, and all other relevant information. I have not yet heard anything from Ramparts. If you know anything about this proposed committee of inquiry, or if you happen to hear anything, I will be glad if you let me know. But please do not make inquiries on my behalf, and please keep this entirely to yourself for the moment.

Now let me turn to the Kerry Thornley/Garrison situation. I do not remember now if in any of my previous letters since we resumed our correspondence I detailed my own

2.

position with respect to Garrison, but let me do so now in very brief terms as it is not feasible to write a really full account, step by step. I first learned about the Garrison investigation in January 1967, before it became public, and was very encouraged. When the news broke in the papers, it caused my first run-in with Maggie. She has not known what to make of it until she spoke to the oracle, Ray Marcus, after which she immediately adopted his view that Garrison might be a CIA gambit, to revive the Castro and/or Communist conspiracy fiction as a counter-attack on the effective critics of the WR who had produced much public consternation in books and articles. I saw no evidence for such a theory and was annoyed, both by the paranoid suspicion, the thesis of CIA omnipotence (which has grown even more fanatic under Garrison's subsequent myth-making), and by Maggie's waiting to get a signal from someone else instead of exercising her own judgment independently.

A few short months later, positions were reversed. In the wake of Russo's testimony, I became highly suspicious of Garrison's motives and methods. About 15 or so critics and mini-critics were gathered at my apartment on April 15 or 16, 1967, and I argued my now anti-Garrison views, supported only by Sauvage, against Ray Marcus, Salandria, and others who were present. A month or so after that, the infamous "code" (P.O. 19106) was announced, and the last margin of uncertainty about Garrison disappeared. I wrote to him, pointing out that the P.O. was a D.D. in reality as well as other defects in his public claims about the so-called code. He then phoned me, for about 90 minutes, and when I hung up, I felt that I had been talking to a deranged and/or evil man. Everything that has happened since then has strengthened my conviction that he is a foul and perhaps also deranged man. When Ray Marcus tried to persuade me to meet Garrison during his visit to New York, about May 1967, I refused, feeling that the evidence against him was already conclusive and nothing was to be gained by a personal meeting. This, too, I am increasingly convinced, was the right decision. Subsequently, as the months went by and many of our colleagues condoned and defended increasingly outrageous actions and statements by Garrison, I completely terminated my relationships with most of those who had been my dearest and nearest friends since 1965: Maggie, Ray, Vince, Harold Weisberg, and Penn Jones. If you and I had been on good terms during that period, I would have had to terminate this relationship, too, upon knowing that you were meeting with and supplying information to Garrison. I think you know that I am not being merely wise after the event, since I took the identical position on fraternization with Liebeler. So far as I know, nothing disastrous grew out of your association with Liebeler; but obviously, the relationship with Garrison has led to disastrous results for Kerry Thornley. I am not suggesting that you are responsible: Garrison might have got to Thornley by other roads, and in any case, you acted in good faith, and when you realized the nature of the creature you were dealing with, you made and are making every effort to redress this dirty and calculated frame-up of Thornley.

Frankly, it is hard for me to understand how any WR critic could sustain any illusions about Garrison after Russo, Bundy, and the "code." If you did, you have at least confronted the truth about him now, and you continue to act in good faith. What can be said for those critics who still goose-step, as Thornley put it, like devout John Birchers, and some of them entirely aware, as I know on excellent authority, of just what a demagogue and cheap crumb he is, but milking it for whatever reason and doing their best to confer a mantle of respectability on this charlatan? I should not be, but I am, shocked and appalled by the remarks of our civil liberties lawyer, all too easy to identify, quoted in your notes of 5/2/68. The fact that he "really believes" this appalling shit is no mitigation, since he has enough brains to recognize it for what it is, but not enough integrity or morality.

I think that your "Thoughts and Comments" is potentially one of the most important documents in this whole sordid history of the Garrison "investigation." I assume you have made all this information available to Thornley, who may well be convicted in the face of it and despite his innocence. (I don't understand your statement on page 11 that you have prejudged Thornley's case, since it is a clear and unmistakable frame-up which you saw in its evolution.) I would suggest that you revise and edit the article with a view to publication and submit it as an article. If you care to send it to TMO, I will strongly recommend it and do everything in my power to get it published. Unless you so authorize me, I will not show this material to anyone. I think that it would be of great interest

3.

to a number of people, even in its present rough form, as follows: Tom Stamm, who has no illusions about Garrison; Arnoni, with a view to publication; Leo Sauvage, for a possible story in Le Figaro; Philippe Labro, for a possible story in France Soir; Harold Feldman; Ed Epstein; Dick Billings of LIFE, who is supposedly doing a book on Garrison; and a number of my personal acquaintances or correspondents who have great difficulty in giving up the ghost, while accepting all my charges against him as factually and logically valid.

I think that the wide distribution and the publication of your 5/2/68 Thoughts and Comments is urgent and of pivotal importance because it would help Thornley and others of Garrison's innocent victims, among whom I number Shaw.

If I have omitted any important points, I will write again. Meanwhile, my genuine thanks for the material you sent me.

Sincerely yours,

Sylvia Neagher
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