

26 April 1968

Mr. Michael Farrell  
9954 Glencrest Circle  
Burbank, Calif. 91504

My dear Mr. Farrell,

I have your letter of 22 April and trust that you will forgive me if I express surprise that you "never at any time intended" to discuss the merits of my position on Garrison—"to debate the points" with me, as you put it—after having requested an explanation of my reasons for repudiating the Garrison "investigation." I assumed that if you found in my detailed exposition any factual, logical, or other errors, you would wish to call them to my attention; or, conversely, that you would wish to reevaluate your view of Garrison if my bill of particulars proved to be factually and logically valid. When there is a conflict of position between any two parties on a public issue and one requests the other to present arguments in defense of his stand, the request is in itself a moral commitment to "debate"—debate in the sense of either successfully refuting the adversary's evidence or conceding its validity.

You have, in a sense, attempted to present counter-arguments in your letter of 22 April but I do regret your resort to quoting one sentence from my three-page letter to The New York Review of Books in such a way as to reverse its meaning completely, and then making of it your main counter-argument. My statement that "we must indeed wait for the trial..." etc. was an ironic remark directed to Popkin's astonishing defense of Garrison before the trial which he urged readers to await before reaching any negative opinion, apparently on the basis of the preposterous "principle" that the benefit of doubt should be conferred not on the accused but on the prosecutor.

If Garrison had done and said nothing after having booked Shaw for allegedly conspiring to assassinate President Kennedy, the benefit of doubt and the presumption of innocence would still be due Shaw, as a matter of right and law, until such time as he was pronounced guilty by due process. But Garrison has been anything but silent. He has peppered us with a stream of escalating pronouncements and accusations, with constantly altered and elaborated versions of what happened at Dealey Plaza, which have no internal consistency or coherence, which are either totally unsupported by factual evidence or accompanied by "evidence" (e.g., the "code" P.O. 19106) which a ten-year-old child would find unconvincing and a twelve-year-old would recognize as the crudest kind of fabrication. If anyone argues that Garrison has license to broadcast an unending stream of unsupported or insupportable charges, but that his critics have no right to repudiate or denounce his gross violations of fact and logic, it would be difficult to consider it merely "misguided." It would be unprincipled in exactly the same way as the attempts by creatures like Goodhart, Sparrow, and Roche to silence criticism of the Warren Report by ridicule, intimidation, and misrepresentation.

I have no accommodation for falsehoods in a bad cause, as exemplified by the Warren Commission and its Report; and I have even greater contempt and disgust with lies in a good cause such as the exposure of the utter fraudulence

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of the Warren Report and a drive to secure an impartial, competent and procedurally rigorous investigation to determine the truth--whatever it may turn out to be. Such lies, "in a good cause," compromise and corrupt the whole purpose and spirit of the criticism, blurring and perhaps destroying the line of demarcation between the Warren Commission camp and its adversaries, making them equally ready to engage in falsification in the name of their differing but "good" ultimate objectives.

This argument is not directed, of course, to honest, inadvertent, or merely impulsive error. It is directed to deliberate and persistent abuse of truth and conscious purveying of known falsehoods or the most dubious kind of allegations in the guise of proven fact or credible evidence, whether by the Warren Commission or by Garrison, who is equally guilty of just such abuse.

I absolutely disagree that Garrison "deserves our support at least to the extent that he deserves his day in court..." It is those whom he has accused who deserve our support, until there is irrefutable proof that the prosecution case is well-founded. I am absolutely convinced that Garrison deserves from your Committee and from any individual or group which claims to be pursuing the truth about the assassination nothing less than the exacting scrutiny and the repudiation given the Warren Report for its indignities to fact and to justice, which are now being perpetrated by Garrison even as he decries those who did exactly the same thing.

It is my letter as a whole, to the New York Review of Books (and the other letters of which I sent you copies), that constitutes a statement of position--not the ironic sentence quoted in disregard for the three pages which followed. Let me also correct your apparent impression that I have been influenced in any way by the treatment accorded Garrison by the mass media. That is not so. I was a wholehearted supporter of the Garrison investigation from the time I first learned about it, somewhat before it became public, until the time of Perry Russo's testimony, which I found about as credible as Helen Markham's or some other star witnesses for the Commission. At that time I developed very serious misgivings about Garrison's methods and judgment, as I explained to a good number of my colleagues among the WR critics in April 1967, before the mass media made any attack on Garrison. Subsequently, when he produced the so-called "code" linking Oswald, Ruby and Shaw, and after I discussed the code with him personally, I lost the last vestige of trust or respect for this gentlemen. If the mass media later attacked him, as they did, I felt no obligation to defend my earlier and independent conclusions. I am entirely indifferent to who happens to support or attack views which I happen to hold--I am interested purely and simply in the merits of the case in point. And I assure you that if Earl Warren or J. Edgar Hoover Himself tomorrow morning came out in support of Garrison, I would still denounce him; or if our esteemed "President" Johnson tomorrow morning repudiates the Warren Report, I will also repudiate it with the same fervor as during the last four years.

Garrison probably is impetuous, impertinent, impulsive, as you say; but this is relevant only when he is entered in a personality contest. I have no concern with his personal characteristics as such. I am interested only in his

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probity, judgment, competence, and scruples as a prosecutor and as a supposed authority on the assassination and a crusader for truth and justice in this monumental and tragic event. On all these scores, I find him unworthy of trust or respect and therefore to be repudiated, as a matter of conscience and personal integrity. To support or to condone by silence chicanery and mischief on the part of a Garrison is to sacrifice any moral basis for challenging the Warren Report, and I am bitterly disappointed that some of my fellow-critics fail to realize this.

You may, if you wish, choose to place your faith in Garrison on the assumption that "he must...have more evidence...than he has already presented...or made public." But you will admit, I hope, that such a position has much in common with, say, Louis Nizer, who wrote an ecstatic introduction to the Warren Report before the Hearings and Exhibits were made available and, I suspect, before even reading the Warren Report with sufficient attention to notice its multitude of internal inconsistencies and absurdities. He had complete faith in the eminent members of the Commission; and it should surprise no one that such an ignoramus continues his unabated defense of the Report even now, when it has been thoroughly discredited. I deny that faith has any legitimate role to play in criminal investigation; nor hope; and charity, which is relevant and necessary, must be reserved for the accused, and not for their accusers in the persons of the Warren Commissioners or that of the Henry Wade of New Orleans.

Having been this extravagant in elaborating my share of this debate, I think I should reassure you that I have no expectation of causing you to budge one inch. I have learned from experience that the Garrisonitis infection is stubborn, if nothing else, and greatly sustained by the political and intellectual orthodoxy of the conformist underground press and by group-think. It is hard to argue with a believer; but some of Garrison's most ardent supporters are not believers but outright cynics who agree readily that he is a charlatan and a wind-bag, to be supported merely because he is keeping the issue alive. That is a self-defeating strategy, and I oppose it, but at least the basic frustration of confronting faith with mere fact does not arise with this group.

Finally, let me come to the list: It is my list, as I can now recognize, but it would take me a whole day or longer to dig out the source material from bales and stacks of newspapers and magazines stored in my closets. I would be hard put to find the time to perform that service and I will not conceal at all my lack of inclination to exert the required effort in order to accomodate a Committee which feels that it should support the Garrison investigation, which I view as sordid and evil. In any case, there appears to be no obligation on my part to accede to requests just because they are made and in this instance I will, for the first time I believe, express my regret that I cannot be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher  
302 West 12 Street NYC 10014