

3 April 1968

Mr. Shankar Ghosh
401 West 118 Street
New York, N.Y. 10027

Dear Shankar,

I have scanned your revised manuscript somewhat quickly and certainly it strikes me as a substantial improvement over the earlier draft which I looked at some months ago. It is better organized and structured, more coherent, has greater clarity, and indicates the sources of the material included. The ms. provides evidence of hard and conscientious labor and of a sincere effort to improve its quality and precision.

There are still some serious factual errors and misstatements of the evidence. I have made specific comments on the enclosed six pages, and in a few instances on the pages of the manuscript as well. I have to emphasize that this is not necessarily complete, since I find myself unable to do more than scan material, such as your ms., which is already over-familiar to me. I have neither the energy or the patience any longer to make a line-by-line scrutiny of such material and the errors which I have pointed out are those which happened to strike me in a quick reading.

Any work based on secondary sources inevitably depends upon the accuracy and objectivity of the source works. Consequently, it is essential to evaluate the source works critically, as to their relative reliability. Your ms. accepts indiscriminately the claims of an Epstein, on one hand, in a work which is scrupulously documented and substantiated, and of a Turner, on the other hand, which is largely a compound of rumor, guesswork, unsupported allegations from suspect or unnamed sources** It is impossible to equate such differing works and to treat them, as you do, as equally substantiated, serious, and credible.

I am surprised and disappointed to find that your manuscript is saturated with material of the most dubious value which is derived from Garrison's sensational and unsupported pronouncements and that you have treated him as no less authoritative than serious critics and researchers and as a heroic and sympathetic figure. I would be angered if you or anyone else merely accepted my own views on Garrison, which you know to be entirely and strongly negative, and I neither expected nor desired you to do so. What I did expect was a critical and sceptical examination of Garrison's "evidence" using exactly the same standards and criteria as applied to the Warren Report. Instead, I find a completely uncritical, gullible, and wholly sympathetic treatment of Garrison--highly partisan and without even a hint to the reader that there are legitimate and compelling reasons to classify him, no less than the Warren Commission, as having issued a fraudulent "solution" of the assassination.

**See enclosed excerpts from Turner's article in January 1968 Ramparts.

This failure to discriminate among your sources of material, and at times the failure to make any distinction between unsupported allegations, possible evidence, strong evidence, and proven fact, are serious weaknesses. The fact that you have not yet developed an authoritative understanding of some of the elementary evidence in the case, such as the 12:45 p.m. police alert and the known facts surrounding the discovery of the Carcano rifle, for example, suggests the need for further study of the basic information and an extremely careful rechecking of the entire manuscript for the accuracy of the data and the logic of the consequential arguments and reasoning. As explained in the enclosed commentary, your argument about the windshield and the direction of the shot or shots would expose you to very severe criticism if it ever got into print.

In several instances, you have used weak arguments where strong arguments were available. For example, you devote only one sentence or a little more to the fact that the Zapruder film shows that Kennedy was thrust backward and to the left by the head shot. You do not mention the powerful evidence provided by Thompson in SSD in quantifying the speed and degree of this backward movement, which greatly strengthens the case for a shot from the right and the front of the car. Nor are your arguments as strong as they might be on such points as the zipper jacket found near the Tippit scene, the palmprint on the rifle, the presence of Hosty's auto license number in Oswald's notebook, etc.

You have been imprecise at times in putting into words what you intend to say. For example, on page 149 when you say that Craig was shot at "soon after" you do not make it clear that it was "soon after" he contacted Garrison, and not soon after the shooting at Dealey Plaza. (Personally I question that Craig was shot at at all, but that is another story.)

I hope that you will be able on your own to rework the manuscript so as to eliminate the errors of detail and the more serious errors of approach which I have tried to point out--most particularly, by application of a stringent standard of evaluation of the allegations and claims of the authorities upon whose work or pronouncements you have relied, and by conscientious identification of unsupported allegations rather than giving the impression that such allegations are serious evidence which has withstood the tests of logic, credibility, and corroboration.

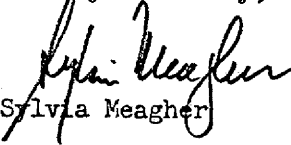
Since you are already aware of my position on Garrison, you will understand that I do not wish in any way whatever to be associated with any work which treats as serious and authentic his lunatic and unscrupulous vaudeville show. I will therefore ask you in no way to imply any endorsement or other association on my part with your ms. At the same time, I hope that it will be clearly understood between us that in reading and commenting on your ms., whether the earlier draft or the present revision, I take no responsibility whatever for the contents, as to accuracy or any other degree of merit or lack of merit. Please understand also that I am placing these disclaimers on record^{as} precaution against possible future misinterpretations or misunderstandings, which my past experience with others whose books I have read at their request

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has shown to be necessary and desirable. My personal affection for you is undiminished but cannot, of course, affect my appraisal of the ms. My criticisms may seem harsh; but it would be a disservice to you to withhold or disguise my views.

I greatly enjoyed meeting your wife and little boy and will always wish you well.

Yours very sincerely,


Sylvia Meagher

Page 7, last three lines: -- Rewrite along the following lines:

"Another revelation -- an important one -- was the contents of two FBI reports dated ~~November~~ December 9, 1963 and January 13, 1964, which had been completely suppressed by the commission. These reports, the first of which was mentioned in an article by Vincent J. Salandria shortly before both documents were published in Inquest, dealt with the autopsy performed on President Kennedy at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland, on the day of the assassination."

Page 9, paragraph 2, line 10: Rewrite along the following lines:

"Lane appeared before the commission twice, but as a witness and not as defense counsel for the accused Oswald, and was denied the opportunity to participate in the investigation on Oswald's behalf. Lane nevertheless proceeded to conduct his own investigation of the assassination...etc. "

Page 53, last three lines:

Here you state as fact what is purely and simply unsupported allegation by Garrison. If you wish to include such material at all, then you must identify it clearly as allegation and not leave the impression that it is established, uncontested fact.

The same comment applies to page 54, lines 2 to 6, ff.

Page 58, paragraph 3, lines 4 and 5:

This statement is not true. The State Department explained that the memo was missing from a particular dossier because it had been destroyed inadvertently while being thermofaxed, but that a copy of the same memo had been transmitted earlier to the Commission and another copy of the same memo was attached to the selfsame explanation of the thermofax incident.

Page 59, paragraph 2, lines 5 ff.

Oswald was "free...soon after" merely because he pleaded guilty and paid the stipulated fine. I see no reason to draw the inference that the FBI agent in any way expedited or facilitated his release.

Page 63, para.1

He merely received a passport, not "a passport...to enable him to visit Cuba and the Soviet Union..." I find no basis for implying that the State Department had any knowledge that Oswald intended to use the passport to travel to Cuba. The real point that arises here is that a passport was issued at all, in light of Oswald's past record of "defection" to the Soviet Union, etc.

Page 78, para. 2

The Commission denies that there was a hole in the windshield and displays photographs which in fact demonstrate damage to the inside surface of the glass only. This cannot possibly indicate that one of the shots must have come from the knoll area but, on the contrary, it has to be considered proof that the particular shot which damaged the inside surface of the windshield came from behind the car. I know of no ~~man~~ critic who argues that the windshield is evidence of a shot from the grassy knoll and, frankly, I don't think you can defend this contention at all.

Page 94, lines 1 to 6

This is not correct. The autopsy surgeons noted a surgical incision and did not suspect that there had been a bullet hole at the same site nor attempt to account for the origin of such a bullet hole. Humes learned from Perry, after the autopsy was over and the body removed to the White House, that there had been a bullet hole at the exact site of the tracheotomy. During December 1963 and early 1964, the newspapers published a series of versions of the wounds. In some of these versions, it was claimed that a fragment of the skull shot had caused the throat wound, based (in my opinion) on FBI "leaks", of its 1/13/64 Supplemental Report. You will see in SSD that Thompson still argues in favor of this hypothesis, despite much incompatible evidence.

Page 104, 3rd line from bottom:

Where Death Delights was written by Marshall Houts, not by Helpern. The book is an account of Helpern's career as medical examiner and in forensic medicine and does quote him extensively on the JFK autopsy.

Page 107, line 1

Since no "neutron test" was performed, one cannot say what it "showed" or failed to show. The correct term is "neutron activation analysis" (see Warren Report, Bantam edition, page 519).

Page 125, lines 6 and 7

I am not aware of such statements by the Dallas police and you do not give a source. I do not believe that anyone ever claimed that Oswald had used the alias "O.H. Lee" in New Orleans. (The same applies to paragraph 2 on page 126.)

Page 129, lines 1 to 3 and ff.

I am astounded by your claim that a Carcano was found on 11/23/63 "according to Day's testimony." I am quite familiar with his testimony and do not recall any such statement. It is possible that he said "November 23" instead of "November 22" when he was clearly and indisputably referring to the events of Friday, and not Saturday. One cannot utilize a verbal or typographical error of this kind in order to construct on its basis a major inference or series of inferences entirely invalidated by the evidence in its entirety.

Nor can I agree with your last sentence on page 129, which ignores entirely much relevant evidence--including, for example, photographs of Day taken on Friday shortly after the assassination in which he is departing from the Depository holding a rifle that appears identical with the Carcano.

Page 165, paragraph 2, lines 1 ff.

This is simply not true. There is NO evidence that the Dallas police "tried to frame Oswald for the murder of Tippit" before he was even shot. The 12:45 p.m. police alert was NOT for a man wanted in connection with the murder of Tippit. It was for an unnamed man thought to be implicated in the murder of JFK; and no name, Oswald or any other name, was stipulated in the police broadcast. See AATF re: source of the 12:45 p.m. description. As elucidated there, there ARE material objections to the conclusion that Brennan was the source of the 12:45 description. About the last argument in the world, and the weakest in relation to the available evidence, is your last sentence of this paragraph, based on Brennan's failure to identify Oswald in the lineup--which he later admitted was a dishonest "failure to identify." This is too complicated and detailed to permit a complete marshalling of the facts and the arguments, unless I wished to write ten or fifteen pages. I suggest that you re-read all the published material relevant to the 12:45 police alert and revise this entire passage and the one that follows.

Page 166, last four lines

This, again, is just not true. Two theater patrons testified and their testimony appears in Volume VII of the Hearings--George Applin and John Gibson, as well as Johnny Calvin Brewer, the shoe salesman who was present.

These comments also apply to paragraph 1 on page 167.

Page 176, paragraph 3

Your account of Ruby's movements is simply not tenable. You accept a hearsay and belated account by Garrison as justifying the statement that Ruby was seen at the grassy knoll before the assassination, based on Julia Mercer's suspicious story at this late date, which is at best only an unsupported allegation. You accept Jean Hill's impression that the man she saw running away from the scene resembled Ruby as sufficient to establish that he was at the depository just after the assassination.

These fragmentary, uncorroborated, and insufficient allegations you evaluate as having equal credibility with the strong and corroborated evidence that Ruby was at Parkland Hospital. This is indiscriminate and misleading and, moreover, it completely ignores the firm evidence of Ruby's presence during the same time interval at the Dallas Morning News office --evidence that has not been challenged by anyone.

Your position thus becomes very vulnerable and impossible to defend. It is of utmost importance to weigh the strength and credibility of assertions and claims, not merely to give the same weight to evidence of completely different values, and to make certain that the allegations you are willing to accept do not conflict head-on with established, accepted and unchallenged facts.

Page 176, last paragraph

This passage illustrates the perils of relying on secondary sources without critical examination or attempted corroboration. I have seen an enlarged color print of this photograph. It shows a man who somewhat resembles Ruby at the forehead and eyes, but the lower half of the face is entirely different and it is impossible to maintain that the man is Ruby when one has examined the actual picture. I can assure you, he is not Ruby and no one would maintain otherwise upon viewing this photo. Later in the same paragraph, on page 177, your reference to Wise is incorrect, since Wise gave a full account of his encounter with Ruby near the Depository on Saturday 11/23/63, NOT "soon after the shooting."

You must not take for granted that something which is printed in RJ is necessarily accurate, logical, or even honest.

Pages 180-181

In my book AAF I have set forth a series of arguments against the conclusion that Ruby entered via the Main Street Ramp. It is therefore not true that there is "little controversy" over Ruby's route into the basement, nor do I accept Daniels' evidence since he repeatedly reversed and revised his story. I do accept Vaughn's account, for the reasons described in my book.

Later in this chapter, your summation is more balanced and far more satisfactory, with respect to Ruby's means of entering the basement.

Page 207

I question your statement that Bernard Gavzer of the Associated Press "was convinced that cancer had been injected into Ruby." Please check your source to see if that in fact is what the article states. If it does make this statement, I still think it is wrong and that Gavzer would deny it. His press story, which I remember quite vividly, reported that Ruby, not Gavzer, believed that he had been injected with cancer cells.

Meagher
3 April 1968