

26 October 1977

Myddear Penn,

This will reply to your letter of 21 October 1977 in which you say: "I didn't know until recently that you convinced Tom Bethell to give Jim's plans to Shaw attorneys. If you care to, I would love to have the story for The Continuing Inquiry."

I have always felt proud that I was among the first of the critics to realize that Garrison was a dangerous charlatan and that I denounced him publicly at every possible opportunity. I have also felt proud that I played some small part in preventing the kind of injustice to Clay Shaw that was suffered by Lee Harvey Oswald--the stigma of "assassin" placed upon an innocent man.

My opposition to Garrison, which only a few of my fellow-critics have acknowledged in retrospect was wholly justified, was based on exactly the same considerations that caused me to denounce the Warren Commission. That is, the systematic framing of an innocent man by a powerful authority on the basis of feeble evidence, inventions, distortions, and perjurious testimony. I gave as much credence to Perry Raymond Russo as I gave to Helen Markham, as much credence to Vernon Bundy as to Charles Givens, and as much credence to Charles Speisel as to Marina Oswald. On the strength of preposterous testimony from such witnesses, Garrison like the Warren Commission implicated Oswald in the assassination of JFK--a crime of which I have always considered Oswald to be totally innocent--as he also tried to implicate Clay Shaw.

Naturally I saw it as my duty to do everything in my power to prevent another flagrant miscarriage of justice. My vocal repudiation of Garrison caused me the loss of several valued friendships with other critics, who persisted in justifying in Garrison the very same kind of outrages that had animated their attacks on the Warren Commission. Indeed, while no one had ever tried to silence my criticism of the Warren Commission, I now found to my shock and horror that my fellow-critics tried to silence my criticism of Garrison. They did not succeed.

Quite a few years have passed since the shameful and mortifying trial of Clay Shaw. My recollection is no longer vivid. But I do remember that Tom Bethell was convinced that Shaw was being ruthlessly and cynically framed and that the detailed evidence he needed in order to build his defence was being wrongfully withheld from his attorneys. I had every sympathy with Bethell's moral dilemma and crisis of conscience and I strongly encouraged him to give to Shaw's attorneys the information to which they were clearly entitled but which Garrison was denying them. I am deeply gratified that Bethell's action led to the exposure of Charles Speisel as a plain lunatic--a "witness" clearly paranoid, deranged, and hallucinating. The very fact that Garrison attempted to use such a witness vindicates all my charges against him.

Therefore, I have no apology whatsoever for having influenced Bethell to reveal to Shaw's attorneys the information to which they were morally and legally entitled.

Garrison did enormous harm not alone to Clay Shaw and others but to the credibility and standing of all the critics of the Warren Report. It was Garrison's contemptible antics that put the whole case into cold storage for many years. That some critics still believe and defend him simply astounds me.

I would like to end this letter by quoting what I wrote many years ago to the editors of a magazine, in addressing myself to Garrison and the Warren Commission. I said in that letter, "One is not obliged to take sides in a gang war in which both sides have only contempt for truth." I take great satisfaction in the fact that I repudiated and denounced both the Warren Commission and Garrison. I only wish that all my fellow-critics had done the same and thereby testified to their integrity and their unfaltering commitment to truth and justice.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher