

Personal

19 May 1967

Mr. Shankar Ghosh
Room 1062
UN Headquarters
New York, N.Y.

Dear Shankar,

You may remember that during your visit on Tuesday last I said of one of my fellow-critics that I had little regard for him as a person but great regard for his book. Now I have read your manuscript. Because of your many fine qualities, which were immediately apparent—in particular, conscience, courage, and sense of justice—I felt at once that you were an admirable person whose book was certain to reflect the moral and intellectual fiber of the writer.

This proved to be entirely true, for in your manuscript there is no hint of timidity or compromise of your real opinions. Yet I cannot give you the kind of enthusiastic response to your manuscript that I should have liked to give—I would be dishonest if I did not say forthrightly that it needs a great deal more work and extensive re-writing, re-thinking, and re-studying.

I have taken the liberty of making some minor changes of fact and/or style right in the text; these are inconsequential, for the most part. On the substantive points, I have flagged passages by placing a circled number in the margin, and I have explained my comments in some detail in the attached commentary, using numbers which correspond with those penciled in the margin of your draft. Several times I skipped a number inadvertently; therefore, the numerical sequence has some holes in it, but the commentary is actually complete.

The main problem in your manuscript is that it is based on secondary sources—on a body of published criticism, of varying degrees of accuracy, impartiality, completeness, and quality. You have tried to synthesize and simplify in a quite short manuscript some three or four lengthy books, which in their turn attempted to synthesize some 26 volumes, of which many number eight or nine hundred pages. When one is so remote from the original source data, the risk of error, oversimplification, and distortion becomes great.

I should make it clear that my commentary does not constitute an exhaustive or definitive critique of the questions of evidence and testimony as treated in your ms. They are the minimum needed to set forth fact. I have not tried to elaborate fully either facts or reasoning, for the simple reason that it would be a very very time-consuming task and require a commentary as long as the ms. itself. In dealing with these same matters (except for your Dreyfus chapter) I have had to write some 700 pages, setting forth the facts dredged out of the 26 volumes and my reasoning on the basis of those facts. Had I known how to simplify and shorten, I would have done so; but since I could not do it myself, I am ill-equipped to advise you on how to synthesize and simplify, not the 26 volumes but the three or four volumes about the 26 volumes, which may not always present an adequate or flawless account of the evidence.

Another comment I would make about your ms. is that the absence of notes on sources is a serious handicap. On such subjects of fact and history, the citation of sources is indispensable--and the writer should not ask the reader to take his pronouncements on faith but should enable him to check back against the source.

I realize, of course, that the ms. is a first draft, and that you intend to polish the style, language, sentence structure, etc. I am sure that in reworking the ms. you will eliminate tautologies, simplify and clarify the writing, and sharpen the style. You tend to start too many sentences with such phrases as, "So," or "And," or "Well," which is more conversational than literary.

I think it may be best if I send you these comments and give you some time to read and think about them before we have a talk. Whenever you feel ready, just give me a call and I will be pleased--provided, however, that my galley proofs have not yet arrived. Once they come, I will barricade myself until I have finished work on them.

Shankar, I feel wretched that I have made so many criticisms and perhaps caused you some dejection. Yet I wanted to give you my real views, for it would be insulting and patronizing to make some vague complimentary remarks, as if assuming that you will be pleased with mere platitudes. Rather, I am sharing my thoughts with you frankly, knowing that you will surmount any momentary discouragement and proceed, making the necessary alterations and continuing until the manuscript more fully reflects your valuable and needed demand for justice to be done. Your fundamental thesis is entirely valid and it should come before the public, once these questions of evidence and detail are adjusted.

With friendship,

Yours sincerely,

- (1) Mark Lane's Citizens' Committee of Inquiry of 1964-1965 is now defunct. A new committee using the same name but not oriented to any critic in particular was recently formed in Los Angeles. As written, your paragraph implies that "a vast literature" has resulted from the Citizens' Committee--it should be clarified.
- (2) I believe that very few of the books fall into the category of "speculation." Certainly those published after the 26 volumes rest heavily on the official evidence.
- (3) The last paragraph will not be understandable to a reader without prior explanation of the single-bullet theory and the time constraints.
- (4) Strictly speaking, it is possible for one man to commit an assassination for political reasons. The point is that this was not credible, given all the circumstances in which this assassination occurred.
- (5) The 15 witnesses included some who died a natural death (Tom Howard and Earlene Roberts, for example) and I do not find that they died under circumstances that were necessarily "mysterious."
- (6) The second sentence is not clear. "He opposed procedures which a court of law would have permitted, and allowed liberties which a court would have ruled improper."
- (7) The meaning of the sentence is not entirely clear and, in any case, I know of nothing to substantiate the suggestion that some testimony was taken secretly and then suppressed. What is the source of this claim?
- (8) "At long last the four Congressional members of the seven-man Commission obtained assurances that the necessary funds would be provided by the Congress. With the elimination of the supposed financial obstacle, there was no choice but to publish..."
- (9) Here you have confused the FBI and Secret Service interviews with witnesses, on the one hand, and the testimony taken by the Commission or its lawyers, on the other. Many witnesses complained to the Commission that the FBI or Secret Service had made errors or omissions in reporting the interviews. As for going off-the-record, that occurred during testimony given to the Commission or its counsel; but not "whenever any witness said something that was damaging to the one-assassin theory." There were a large variety of circumstances under which they resorted to "off-the-record."
- (10) This is neither clear nor correct.
- (11) This statement is not entirely correct. Re-read what Epstein's book says about the deadlines.
- (12) The pressure for publication before the elections came from the White House, according to Epstein.

- (13) This sentence needs to be rewritten as it is not clear as it now stands.
- (14) See comment (5) above.
- (15) Do you mean here "whether or not a crime has been committed by the accused"?
- (16) What is the source of this information? I have heard this allegation before, long ago, but I was never able to find any documentary corroboration. Without such corroboration, the claim should not be made--or should at least be labelled as an unconfirmed allegation.
- (17) You overstate this. It is not a "fact" that Oswald was on the FBI payroll: it is an allegation which has neither been conclusively proved nor disproved.
- (18) You state as a categorical fact what you assume to be the Commission's fears and reasoning. You should make it clear that these are inferences and assumptions.
- (19) Again, you are stating that Oswald had "FBI links" as though that was a proven fact.
- (20) Your interpretation of Hoover's "inadvertent admission" does not seem warranted. He might have meant merely that the FBI had determined in questioning Marina Oswald and Ruth Paine that they had provided Oswald with the information found in his notebook. You read more into this than can be justified.
- (21) You should qualify the statement that witnesses "saw" Oswald fire shots. As you later explain, only one witness claimed that he saw this, and his testimony is highly dubious. Others claimed that they saw a man, but they could not identify him.
- (22) A more detailed description is needed of the three men (Jarman, Norman, and Williams) who were in the fifth floor window during the shooting.
- (23) When did he have this difficulty in locating the window: from a photograph? or at the scene? Check what Epstein's book has to say on this.
- (24) The FBI did submit its reports on interviews with Rowland. The point is that the reports did not include any mention of his seeing a negro, which Rowland claimed in his testimony he had actually told the FBI agents and which they had omitted from their reports.
- (25) What is the source of the "90 per cent"?
- (27) The length of the paper bag (38 inches) is not in dispute. It is the length of the package that was carried, for a 38-inch bag can be used to wrap a much shorter object. The real problem here is whether the package seen by Frazier and his sister could have been long enough to hold the disassembled rifle. This should be made clearer.

- (28) It is an overstatement to say that the Commission "invented" Hidell to sustain its theory. There were many documentary indications of "Hidell." What is at issue is whether the conclusions drawn by the Commission--i.e., that Oswald invented Hidell as an alias and ordered weapons by mail order under that alias to conceal his own identity--are justified by the known facts.
- (30) The name was written on the repair ticket by Dial Ryder, the clerk at the Irving Gun Shop. The problem here is whether Ryder falsified the ticket, as the Commission implies, or whether he had a customer named Oswald or pretending to have that name.
- (31) To say that the evidence of purchase of the rifle is a concoction of the Commission is not warranted. There is ample documentary support of the purchase--order form, money order, etc. There are other discrepancies connected with the purchase which were ignored; and the vital question which remains unresolved is proof that the rifle was actually delivered to Oswald and remained in his possession. To say that the evidence of the mail order was concocted is to imply that the Klein's Sporting Goods Co. willingly conspired with the authorities in fabricating microfilm records.
- (32) The Commission claimed that it reached that conclusion ("that the rifles were the same") on the basis of a whole body of evidence other than Shaneyfelt's testimony that they had the same general configuration.
- (33) Here you imply that Marina Oswald actually saw the rifle on her first check; she did not. She saw the blanket, which appeared to her to be unchanged and from which she assumed that the rifle rested inside. She did not "change her story" later and say that the rifle was not there: she (and Mrs. Paine) accompanied the police to the garage, to show them that the rifle was there, but when the police opened the blanket, it was gone.
- (34) What is the source of this statement? If it is from Epstein's book, it does not appear to me to be accurate. The division of labor had nothing to do with the disagreement about Marina Oswald's credibility.
- (35) What Day actually claimed is that traces of his "lift" did remain, in the form of fingerprint powder, which he considered ample enough to indicate to the FBI that he had lifted a latent print.
- (35-A) There is no proof and no admission by Humes that he altered the autopsy; there is evidence to suggest that he may have altered the autopsy report. And if he indeed did so, we do not know who influenced him. We cannot charge the Commission with that, although we can point to their failure to pay attention to indications that there had been an alteration in the original autopsy findings.
- (36) It was Commander Boswell who placed the dot on the autopsy face-sheet. He said this to the New York Times near the end of 1966, I forget the exact date.
- (37) Is not the point that the FBI reports on the autopsy did not correspond with those of the autopsy surgeons?
- (38) The Commission does not "authoritatively assert" that the sketch was made by Boswell; it is Boswell himself who says so (see (36) above). Humes testified that he had made some, but not all, the notations on the page on which the sketch appears. But even if your facts were correct, the reasoning in this paragraph escapes me entirely. You have not made your thinking clear.

- (39) What is the source of the statement that the Commission "confiscated" all the tape recordings? I know of nothing to support that assertion.
- (40) This is neither clear nor accurate. The position is that the Commission claims a trajectory in JFK of something over 17° , and argues that the same bullet--traveling on a downward path of $17\frac{1}{2}$ degrees--then struck Connally. To account for the known trajectory of 25 degrees in Connally, the Commission suggests that the bullet must have been deflected in striking his rib.
- (41) This is inaccurate. The Secret Service agent who received the bullet from the hospital personnel said in his report that it was not known from whose stretcher it had fallen.
- (42) The only source for this information is Lane's book; it cannot be claimed as a known fact but only as an allegation by Lane. Moreover, there is no basis for the statement that there was confiscation of the video tapes.
- (43) The argument of "echoes" receives strong support in the testimony of the late Lee Bowers. I do not agree with this argument; but this is not to say that it was invented out of whole cloth.
- (44) Clarify by saying that none were present during the assassination and that when they did visit the scene of the crime they did not conduct scientific tests of acoustical effects, as they might have done, to determine whether or not the theory of bouncing echoes was well-founded.
- (45) There seems to be no corroborative link between Mrs. Connally's statement and Dudman's observation of a bullet hole in the windshield. Clarify your meaning here.
- (46) The same observation as in (45) above applies to your claim that Bowers' observations in some way corroborate Mercer's.
- (47) There may be reasons other than the three possibilities you mention to account for the presence of the cars; nor would the presence of Goldwater stickers on cars belonging to the police implicate them necessarily in a conspiracy to kill the President.
- (48) Price said that the man had a "headpiece" in his hand. No one knows what he meant by a "headpiece." It is not accurate to suggest, as this paragraph does, that Price said that it could have been a gun. This is only a possibility that a number of critics have suggested, in the absence of any clarification of what he meant by "headpiece."
- (50) The frames were transposed, but there is no evidence to indicate who transposed them, nor even evidence that the Commission realized that they were transposed. Such a charge cannot be made--one can only raise the possibility. Since there is so much damning evidence against the Commission for known acts of commission or omission, to charge them unfairly is only to bestow a mantle of martyrdom and victimization, and to distract attention from their known, proven violations of juridical and investigatory norms.

(52) The skull was not "knocked out of shape;" a large portion of the skull was blasted off the head. As to the direction of the bullet which struck the head, you cannot merely ignore the Commission's evidence that there was an entrance hole in the back of the head and a path of bullet fragments in the brain which proved that the bullet came from behind the victim. You may argue with these assertions and present contrary evidence, but you are obliged to give an accurate indication of the Commission's claims and reasoning. Having done so, you can present inimical evidence which leads you to reject the Commission's claims.

(53) There is no use arguing that the 6.5 mm. Carcano could not have produced the accurate and fatal shots unless and until you can also dispose of the Commission's claim of proof that the shots came from that rifle--the alleged proof includes, as you know, the ballistics identification of bullet fragments and a whole bullet found in Parkland Hospital as having come from that rifle to the exclusion of all other rifles. Nor is there sufficient evidence to justify the categorical statement that the gun found in the depository "was in fact a German rifle." There are photographs of the rifle immediately after it was found, and one photograph in which Lt. Day is carrying it out of the Depository by the sling, in which the weapon appears absolutely identical with the Italian Carcano. This whole paragraph must be rethought and rewritten.

(54) Mrs. Roberts died early in 1966, well over a year after her testimony.

(55) Whaley's accident seems without sinister implications: he was struck headon by an ancient gentleman who was driving in the wrong direction and who also died in the collision. To say that Whaley "had to pay with his life" is to insinuate that he was deliberately murdered; and as someone else has said, it is hard to believe that an 80-year-old Dallasite decided to serve the conspirators by becoming a Kamikaze pilot.

(56) This is only an inference and should not be stated as if it were a fact. The second sentence in this paragraph is also overstated.

(57) This sentence is true, as it stands, but is nevertheless misleading. The FBI interviewed Wes Wise to follow up on Couch's report; and Wise then described in considerable detail his encounter with Ruby on the day after the assassination, near the Depository, where Ruby was waiting in the expectation that Oswald would arrive at the County Jail in transfer from the police building.

(58) I have uncropped color prints and a slide of this Willis photograph and the man, while he does resemble Ruby somewhat, clearly is not Ruby but a different man.

What is "picture eight"?

(59) The facts here are mixed up. Mrs. Tice contacted Ruby's sisters and formed an acquaintance with them. Sometime during the course of their association, she described the clothes worn by the man she identified as Ruby whom she saw at Parkland Hospital. Mrs. Grant told the FBI that she thought Mrs. Tice was a nut but that she had to admit that Mrs. Tice had described correctly the apparel Ruby had worn on 11/22/63. Mrs. Tice neither saw nor recognized Ruby's clothes during her visit to his sister.

(60) Here is an example of the peril of relying on secondary rather than primary sources. You have relied upon Rush to Judgment for this information about Daniels, not on Daniels' actual testimony nor other relevant testimony and documents. Therefore, you have incorporated the faulty "facts" and logic which you found in the book. The business of Daniels and Ruby's means of entry into the basement is extremely complicated. In my book I have given some 30 pages to this, and I can scarcely summarize all the facts in a few lines. I can say, however, that Lane's account of Daniels' testimony is incomplete; he omits the various different versions that Daniels gave, on different occasions, about whether or not he saw anyone enter and whether or not the man who entered was Ruby.

(62) My assessment of the off-the-record dialogue is that Griffin was not trying to intimidate Dean but only trying to get him to tell the truth. I fully agree with Griffin that Dean was lying. But this becomes clear only from a painstaking study of all the relevant testimony and evidence.

(63) By the first word of the paragraph, "however," one receives the impression that it is linked to (or a continuation of) the preceding paragraph, on Dean. If there is some link, you have not made it clear. If there is no link, then the story of Dean and Griffin seems ended abruptly and in mid-air. You have to indicate, after all, what happened when he described his off-the-record conversation with Griffin to the Warren Commission, how they received the story, what action they took, etc.

(64) There are not sufficient grounds for asserting categorically that a transcript exists, much less that it was shoved into the Archives. These are only speculations. It is very important to always differentiate very precisely between proven fact, evidence (strong or suggestive), and the inferences, impressions, or speculations of the writer.

(65) One cannot say that Ruby had a meeting with Weissman and Tippit but only that it was alleged by an anonymous person that such a meeting took place.

(66) True, Waldo was not asked about the alleged meeting, but it happens that according to the record Mark Lane never told the Commission that Thayer Waldo was his contact with the anonymous man. In his book, Lane complains that the Commission need only have asked Waldo the / man's name, leaving it to the reader to infer that he had told the Commission about Waldo. I said last year in a published review of Lane's book that it appeared that the complaint was unfair, since he had not given Waldo's name to the Commission; and no word has been forthcoming to indicate that my impression (that Waldo's name was not given) is incorrect. For these reasons, the Commission should not be taxed with failure to question him.

(Pages 102-104) Your argument here is not clear: are you saying that Ruby was, or was not, psychotic? or that he was or was not pretending to be psychotic? You should make clearer your assessment; and if you take the position that Ruby was pretending to insanity, you must overcome Dr. West's opinion, quoted on page 103 paragraph 2.

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Meagher 5/19/67