

21 August 1968

Mr. Griscom Morgan
Route 1, Box 275
Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

Dear Mr. Morgan,

Thank you for your letter of the 19th and the enclosures (two copies of the same article, "Forensic Big-Wigs..." dated 31 January 1968—one of which I return herewith, in case you should need it). I, too, was happy that we were able to spend some time talking on the phone while you were in New York. I realized afterward that I had read at least one piece of your work, the chapter in Forgive My Grief II, and it was a valuable contribution to the volume.

I know that I have Barry's Miami News story on the Miami tape, somewhere in the great mass of material I have accumulated, since I quoted from it in Accessories. After searching for more than an hour, I haven't located it --although I did find a story from the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, Friday, Feb. 3, 1967, datelined Miami (UPI), which gives the substance of the affair. And, of course, Barry has a chapter in Forgive My Grief II titled "The Miami Tape" (page 38 ff.). I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

With this out of the way, let me turn to the main concern of your letter --the question of fundamental principles, values, and standards, as they relate to judgment of Garrison. By way of preface, I should say that I recognize and respect your serious and objective approach to what is usually an emotionally-charged, highly subjective, and painfully sensitive question. I have often lapsed into angry impatience and blunt language, despite an underlying wish to maintain detachment, no doubt ensuring success in offending and alienating, rather than persuading, my opponent. I should like to achieve the same spirit of reason in which you posed your views or your questions, but if I fall short of the mark I hope that you will not take offense.

I do not agree that the time has come when we need to go beyond traditional ethics. On the contrary, we must adhere to them more than ever, lest all distinction between the critics, on one hand, and the Warren Commission, on the other, is lost. True, as you say, we cannot be chained by traditional standards when we encounter an alien culture with its own ethics and ethos, different from our own, if we hope to communicate and to establish friendship and mutual respect. In such an encounter, each culture must seek to find common ground and understanding, but not to alter, convert, or subjugate.

But Garrison is not an Eskimo, a Nauruan, or a Martian: the point is, he accepts, espouses, and even claims to exemplify our "traditional ethics" as critics, the very same traditional ethics which presumably motivated us to undertake our commitment against the Warren Report and against the Commission which repeatedly violated those self-same ethics, to which they gave cynical lip-service. Garrison does not disavow the critics' objectives, methodology, morals, or principles, but seeks to be the foremost exponent of our "traditional ethics," while betraying them again and again and still again. The question of suspending, in Garrison's case, the application of the criteria and the judgments inherent in our established ethics--the very foundation of our position on the Warren Report and of our repudiation of its falsehoods, illogic, and shameful assaults on fact and truth--the question simply cannot arise. Rather, I would apply with determined rigor those self-same criteria, for the very reason that the Commission is our avowed adversary while Garrison, posing as a member or the leader of the critical community, has the opportunity in the guise of "colleague" to betray, disgrace, and destroy the entire critical effort.

Let me qualify the last remark, though, by adding that even if Garrison's abuse of fact, fabrication of evidence, exercises in entrapment, and other outrages were somehow accompanied by a guarantee that no damage or disrepute would ensue to the critical effort, I would still repudiate him with undiminished energy—because falsehood and unscrupulousness, false accusation, vindictiveness, and demagoguery in and of themselves offend me.

In 1965 I had several telephone conversations with a Commission lawyer, in order to raise with him a number of explicit evidenciary questions in an area for which he had been responsible. On question after question, he was unable to provide information or explanation which would serve to diminish by one iota the seeming (and, as it turned out, real) misrepresentation of the relevant data on the pages of the Warren Report. My indignation and shock mounted, and apparently seeped through to him. The lawyer, having failed on point after point to satisfy an entirely legitimate question or objection, then nonplused me by charging that I "was intolerant" (presumably, for the effrontery of raising the questions rather than investing blind faith in the Report). I was so astounded by the accusation that an hour passed before the reply I should have made formed itself: and I wish I had replied, as I did not, that I am intolerant—of lies, deceit, and the framing of a helpless "assassin" who might well be entirely innocent, by a pack of sanctimonious eminences who had betrayed the trust placed in them by the people.

I realize how self-righteous this may sound, but I am determined to give you an honest reply, at all costs, and the truth is that I am intolerant, of Garrison no less than of the Commission, and that I feel an irrepressible impatience and lack of sympathy for those who, in ignorance or confusion, defend and seek to legitimize the "case" contrived by the Commission, or the "case" contrived by Garrison.

There was a great deal of unity among most of the critics, until the Garrison issue created a cleavage and then an estrangement which I fear, sorrowfully, is irreversible. I had great affection for and trust in most of those critics whom you named, and a very special relationship with Vince Salandria, as also with Maggie Field and Ray Marcus. The loss of the warm friendship, and loyalty, and mutual support which we had shared was a bitter blow, as the loss of those we cherish is bitter. What was infinitely worse was the nullification of the validity of our pre-Garrison relationship—the realization that my assumptions must have been wrong, and that far from a common passion for truth and justice, and a common compassion for the sacrificial Oswald, we held different and mutually inimical convictions about means and ends, and operated on entirely different intellectual and moral wave-lengths. Really, there is nothing heroic in challenging a Commission which by definition is a symbol and creature of the power structure that moves events and a Report which oozes corruption so thickly as to make it child's-play to prove it corrupt. But it is difficult to see and to fight the corruption in oneself or one's camp, and it is here that our loyalty to principle and our adherence to integrity and our strength in resisting easy roads and tempting compromises, are truly needed. Epstein is not alone in being now in "the other camp," so far as I am concerned, for I am not and will never be again in the same camp as those critics who, cynically or gullibly, continue even now to give aid and comfort to Garrison's evil works and sophomoric improvisations which offend intelligence.

As to the "personal animosity" among the critics: I can speak only for myself, and only for my conscious self at that, not for the others, and to the best of my knowledge and recollection I have never felt personal animosity, but only resentment of unethical acts or methods which threatened injury to our collective interests, as critics, or injury to particular colleagues. I think I probably idealize this.

Certainly I am richly endowed with human frailties; surely, there were times when vanity intruded, and pride, and the self-righteousness which I seem to project far too often. Yet I know with complete certainty that I tried for a long time to be a peacemaker in others' disputes, and made really extreme efforts to protect the unity that had been painstakingly developed among us. I know that at the outset, I was a fervent admirer of Mark Lane; even more so, of Garrison. I did not begin with reserve or suspicion but with wholehearted trust and every willingness to serve, if I could. I looked up, very far up, to Sauvage, to Lane, later to Garrison, and especially to Salandria. I felt honored to cooperate with them—I did not, in those days, think of myself as a "critic" and had little thought of doing a book.

How sad, then, to admit that of the first-generation critics whom I admired from a distance or worked with in intense devotion and the empathy of comrades against a formidable force, I retain today undiminished respect and admiration for only one—Leo Sauvage, whose politics and mine are very far apart but whose spirit and intelligence are towering.

Whatever help I gave Epstein, I gave in good faith. In his New Yorker article, he abused my good faith and failed to fulfill stated and volunteered intentions (to urge a new investigation of the assassination). I would not knowingly help him again, now that it is clear that our purposes and our methods are gulfs apart. And exactly the same is true of Garrison and his coterie. I can no more have "unity" with them than with Epstein or, for that matter, with the Warren Commission.

Obviously, then, I do not agree that Garrison has a role. I find it hard to assess his commitment, or lack of commitment, to particular purposes; and, when the man assaults reason itself and plain fact, when he fabricates codes and library cards, when he parades me such sordid witnesses as Bunday and the incredible Russo via Sciambra, and .45 bullets in the turf, and assassins in manholes, his "commitment" is immaterial. He is an unscrupulous dirty-handed man, and I suspect he is also partly deranged. That he lacks conviction in his own grandiose pronouncements is obvious from his refusal to "dignify" specific charges. Exactly like Warren, he pretends it is beneath his dignity to refute the very grave charges in Epstein's article, or charges made by his other critics. We know that Warren cannot refute the charges against the Report and that it is his bankruptcy that governs his Olympian silence. I am certain that Garrison refuses to deal explicitly with explicit and extremely grave charges for simple inability to refute them—nothing more.

I will not work with Garrison, and I cannot work with his circle of supporters, without rendering meaningless everything I have done on this case and everything I believe, and I do not feel the smallest obligation—even after your persuasive arguments—to do so. Nor can I be "neutral" or silent: for my profound conviction is that it is my responsibility, my clear duty, to oppose and denounce Garrison with the same vigor as the Warren Commission, and for exactly the same reasons. I do not intend to share any guilt for his "poor ethical and legal standards" nor for the brutal damage done to Dean Andrews, Clay Shaw, Kerry Thornley, and other of his victims whose fate you seem to have excluded from your survey. As for the mistakes which we all make, they are not at issue: it is not Garrison's innocent mistakes which disgust me but he utter disrespect for truth and fact, his fabrication of evidence, his reckless and vindictive accusations, his harm to vulnerable individuals whom he knows or should know to be innocent, and the terrible damage he has inflicted on the credibility of critics in general. You must, of course, arrive at your own decision about whether Vince or I am right. I can only tell you that I have not the smallest doubt or hesitation, and that my position is absolutely final and will not change under any circumstances.

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I have gone on too long and too vehemently, and I suspect I have not been at all diplomatic. I cannot accept any of the arguments you have offered, but I do feel grateful for the spirit in which you have written.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Sylvia Meagher
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