

4 April 1968

Mr. Steffen Sorensen  
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Dear Mr. Sorensen,

Thank you for your letter of 30th March and the interesting notes which were enclosed.

I can well understand that the material I sent you did not make you very happy, remembering all too well my own dismay about a year ago when my first misgivings about Garrison made themselves felt. Ironically, I had accepted Garrison at face value in the beginning, at a time when some of the other critics were suspicious of him and fearful that he was merely performing some kind of devious service for the CIA, perhaps with the ultimate idea of reviving the Castro-engineered or Communist conspiracy thesis. Without waiting for him to prove himself "innocent" as my colleagues were waiting, I volunteered any help I could give and began to funnel material to him, including my personal copy of the Subject Index and chapters from Accessories, rejoicing that a public official was finally speaking out.

However, I received a terrible jolt when Garrison began to detail his "case," for the simple reason that by the same standards of judgment as we had applied to the Warren Report, his witnesses and his evidence seemed no less fraudulent and unreliable. I cannot accept dubious testimony and fraudulent codes or documents, even when they are used to support a view of events which is almost identical with my own viewpoint; and, having dismissed as spurious and unreliable the testimony of Brennan, Markham, and Marina Oswald, I could not join the other critics in accepting Russo and Bundy. I took this position before there were any attacks on Garrison in the news media and it led to the complete and bitter estrangement from several of the critics with whom I had worked most closely and who had become my close and treasured friends.

In addition to the public material discussed in the letters to editors which I sent you, I have had access to a certain amount of inside information—although I should like to emphasize that the public material by itself was, and would have remained, entirely sufficient to convince me that Garrison is unscrupulous and his case thoroughly fraudulent. This as yet unpublished information, which I hope and expect will come to light before long, was terribly dismaying. Yes, I have read Garrison's introduction to Oswald in New Orleans; his rhetoric and idealism might be inspiring if his conduct of his "investigation" and his respect for fact and truth were on the same high level. Since they are not, I can only regard his lofty oratory and writings as cheap demagoguery. I have no quarrel with "swashbuckling" as such; what I reject with disgust and contempt is the pretense of serving truth and justice, while in fact violating both, consistently and unscrupulously, doing great harm to innocent (if unsavory) individuals and all but destroying the serious critical challenge to the Warren Report which had been making progress late in 1966 but has now been obscured and stigmatized by the New Orleans dementia. For Garrison has nothing, nothing whatever in the way of a real case, so far as the assassination is concerned, whatever peripheral or unrelated activities he may have scented.

I have no doubt that it must seem strange that I take so categorical a position on this issue, while the other critics, or most of them, continue to make almost a religion of Garrison. In a recent unpleasant conversation with one of the foremost critics, he had to admit the many untenable claims made by Garrison. These he labeled "mistakes" and, absolving Garrison of any responsibility for the "mistakes" he has trumpeted to the world, proceeded to blame the CIA, for "planting false leads." That is really too facile. By that criterion, we would have to absolve the Warren Commission as also victims of false leads planted by federal agencies. But the Commission is responsible for its report, and Garrison is responsible for his "case." If a single standard is used instead of a double standard which permits Garrison to do violence to truth as the Commission did but to emerge a hero, then the inescapable conclusion is that he no less than the Commission is contemptible and untrustworthy.

Thank you for your offer of the transcripts but I have them already.

Turning to the notes enclosed with your letter, which puzzle me in that they contain comments addressed to me personally although you say they are pages from a letter to "another assassination type," I have only looked through them hastily, pending the leisure to study more carefully.

I appreciate your having called my attention to the omissions from pages 271 and 272 of Accessories. You are quite right about page 272: I did, quite inadvertently, omit "white shirt" when copying out the excerpt from the CE. I will have this corrected if a second printing is done. However, on page 271, I did provide an exact version of the testimony; the omission was on the part of the lawyer who read out the description.

You ask, "Now how would Meagher classify Jones & Craig?" This is a simple question to answer. Penn Jones is a dear and good and brave man; he is governed largely by his feelings about the case--feelings which I share to a considerable degree--but he is not a researcher or a scholar, in the true sense, and he accepts quite indiscriminately rumor, allegation, and revision that has the merit of supporting his basic views if no other merit. I am deeply sorry that he has compromised himself by sponsoring Roger Craig, who is a flagrant liar. Look, if you will, at his original statements to federal investigators and to the newspapers, immediately after the assassination, and his description each time of a white station wagon. Did everyone, including the newspapers, deliberately alter what he said? or is he altering and embroidering now? The same questions must be asked about Julia Mercer. And if you conclude, as I do, that it is their current stories that are suspect, then it must also be asked if Garrison isn't a magnet for people like Craig and Mercer, whom I know to have approached him with certain venal and monetary motives; and if Garrison is not doing a cruel disservice to the attempt to uncover the truth when he accepts such allegations without even bothering to make a pretense of verification or of resolving the contradictions between what these witnesses say now and what they said earlier. And here Russo must also be included, since he went to the news media on his own initiative two days after Ferrie's death and told a story completely at variance with the story he told in court. Moreover, I know for a fact that in his first interview with a Garrison investigator he not only did not mention the so-called party in Ferrie's apartment or the "Bertrand"/Ferrie/"Oswald" conspiratorial conversation--he made statements which are totally irreconcilable with that story.

As you perhaps realize, I receive quite a few letters from strangers who, like you, have read Accessories and comment or ask questions, including questions about my position on Garrison. Usually my reply is very brief. In this case, I have written at considerable length, because I sensed in your letters a kind of "distress signal" which could come only from a person who is seriously concerned about the whole assassination case, who has felt isolated and perhaps ignored, and who has the capacity to adhere to a strict intellectual and ethical discipline rather than take the easy route of hero-worship. A great deal more is involved than one's verdict on Garrison. The fundamental question at stake is how the individual functions in terms of all the phenomena of his society, how he maintains intellectual independence and impartiality, personal integrity, and a positive role in human events. When these problems are resolved, there is no longer any dilemma about a Warren Report or a Garrison; and one can achieve inner calm and the stoicism which reality demands.

We are all, as you say, only "humung beans" and the struggle to achieve integrity must be won not once but time after time after time. It is an unending struggle. It would be all too easy to rationalize oneself into a comfortable and exciting alliance with Garrison, to leave everything to him, and to keep one's friendships with Garrison's admirers and apologists --immune from charges of being a "moral prig" and, as I have heard, of myself, of being a CIA agent, etc.

It would be all too easy, also, to adopt a martyr's pose, proclaiming the immensity of the work one has done and the thanklessness of the sacrifice one has made--of time, well-being, money, vacations, and personal relationships. Perhaps I do this sometimes, however much I am on guard against it. I must admit that I had a human spark of reaction when I read in your notes a certain disdain for the critics, for not making "even a better case for themselves," etc. I suppose that we have each made what we consider to be the best case that could be made; but if someone not yet heard from can do it better or more completely, I would welcome that wholeheartedly. Indeed, I put aside my own work for several months during 1966 in order to help another critic with his book, because I thought it powerful and urgent; and I have done this more than once, out of a commitment to the finding of the truth, and not to the finding of the truth by me and no one else. I have not competed and do not intend to compete for credit and glory, as I am sorry to say that some critics have done--it is demeaning and self-defeating. And if anyone builds a better mousetrap, I will beat the first path to his door.

I am probably considerably your senior and susceptible to giving maternal advice, while quite sensitive to the realization that that is often a cover for being patronizing. I don't intend to be patronizing. But you do write, as you yourself put it, "a perfectly rude letter," and without any provocation. That is tying an albatross around your neck, for no reason, and a kind of self-denigration. You need not be rude to get attention: you should not do yourself such an injustice. I hope that you will continue your work on the case, which is obviously extremely painstaking, and that you will organize and publish your findings. There is still a long road ahead.

Yours sincerely,

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