

18 June 1968

Dear Mr. Sorensen,

One says so automatically "thank you for your letter of X date, which I enjoyed very much" that it becomes difficult to discover a phrase not yet become stale and meaningless on those infrequent occasions when a letter really gives substance to the mind and pleasure to the heart. I greatly valued a long letter that Mrs. Hartmann sent me a few days after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, because it shone with thoughtfulness, integrity, and courage, but I doubt if my reply really conveyed my feelings. Now I have your marvel of a letter of the 15th, with its many moods and levels of discourse and its pervasive wit, altogether a delight and stuffed with compliments to which I respond, like any Pavlovian dog, with reflexes of gratification and gratitude.

But if I am to justify your hope (and my own) that I am an honest person, I have to disclaim the reasoning which you reconstruct as an applaudable explanation of my position on Garrison. It is close, but not exact. In many respects, my thinking tends to be simplistic rather than convoluted or multidimensional; and on the level of honesty and/or truthfulness, I am especially simplistic. The Warren Report, which tried to be so cunning and manipulative in so clumsy and transparent a manner, and which betrayed such disrespect for the reader's intelligence, incensed me beyond description. I suspect that a good part of my wrath can be traced to a feeling of personal insult, and thus to personal vanity, although I think most of it was objective and impersonal outrage at the falseness and injustice of the damned thing. Garrison, who supposedly is "on our side" in resisting and denouncing the deceit and falsification and injustice, enrages me even more (if that is possible) when he engages and extends still further the obnoxious and despicable practices in which the Commission engaged.

For the WR's Mrs. Helen Markham, Garrison has given us Perry Russo. Russo injected himself into the case by going to the TV news people at Baton Rouge, in the first instance, and telling a story which has little in common with the one to which he testified at the Shaw hearing. That story (of the party in Ferrie's apartment) is inherently without credibility; then, it turns out, it is completely in conflict with the story he gave Sciambra, Garrison's assistant, when he first interviewed him. (This was made public by Jim Phelan in an article in, I believe, the SEP.) Then, Garrison gave us Vernon Bundy. When his own assistants urged him not to put Bundy (or perhaps it was one of the later "witnesses") on the stand because they, the assistants, were convinced he was lying, Garrison replied that if the man wanted to perjure himself, that was his business. Next, Garrison gave the sensational news of the "code" (P.O. 19106), which betrayed his unprofessionalism as an investigator (failing to check in Dallas to determine whether there was such a P.O. box or such a real person as Lee Odum) and his clumsiness as a practitioner of the common shell-game, since all he was doing was adding and subtracting arbitrary numbers to arrive at an ultimate number on which he had decided in advance and which he could have reached in one simple step by the same arbitrary and artificial manipulation that he performed in multiple stages.

That cumulative record was enough to prove to me that Garrison was a complete charlatan, a manipulator of evidence, and a man who was ready to frame a suspect against whom he had no shred of legitimate evidence. At that point, which was May 1967, I repudiated Garrison as an unscrupulous and dangerous man. I would have done so, on these grounds, no matter whom he was accusing. Conversely, if he had had credible evidence against the same motley assortment of freaks, Cuban exiles, etc., I would accept it, however much it collided with my own prior suspicion of a higher-level or other-colored set of culprits. What it boils down to, however ineptly I am saying it, is that truth is the be-all and the end-all and an imperative in and of itself, unconditionally.

Now, in this particular case, it happens that one effect of Garrison's lies and improvisations is exactly as you diagnose it, to divert and trick the public into accepting a low-level conspiracy by some twilight world kooks and deviates or mercenaries, when the circumstances appear to point to a far more sinister cabal whose implication in a presidential assassination would cause a national upheaval of awesome proportions and unknown destination. This becomes a secondary or consequential reason for "wanting Garrison castrated" (what I had in mind myself was having the tongue pulled out by the roots, but okay, dealer's choice). Another such collateral reason, and again I emphasize that it is not the governing element, is that his loud-mouth fulminations and his sensationalism and his sophomoric and often laughable performance as a prosecutor/investigator or a political polemicist threaten to discredit ALL critics and ALL research and ALL challenges to the Warren Report, and thus to destroy the painfully-won credibility (such as it is) that the serious critics achieved after laborious and cruelly long struggle. Still another reason, but this one emerged only relatively recently, is what I now realize is Garrison's technique of harrassment, entrapment, and prosecution of individuals out of sheer vindictiveness, if they frustrate him in some way, or in anticipation of giant page-one headlines.

But these are, as I say, consequential and collateral to the decisive and cardinal issue of Garrison's dishonesty and fraud, which I would denounce with the same insistence no matter what effect it had in terms of public complacency and even if, through some miraculous twist, it heaped the critics with honors fame and fortune instead of threatening to reduce them to Garrison's own low estate of professional and personal quality.

I have not knowingly held back in anything I have written about Garrison nor concealed or diluted my thinking. I have written as fully and as openly as I was able what I think and feel about Garrison, and have limited myself in one respect only—That is, I have made my arguments solely on the public record and excluded information which came to me confidentially or information which I could not document or whose source I could not specify. All such information will be published, and soon, but by those who elicited and developed it and were good enough to share it with me. I do not think that I have merely speculated on whether certain witnesses were good or bad, as you put it: what I did, or at least what I intended to do, was to repudiate them as undeserving of credence and to be dismissed out of hand. I do not think there is the smallest possibility of Garrison turning out to be "right" (although I see the real danger that he will convince juries, since he has succeeded in convincing an arch-sceptical groups of critics that his feverish inventions and improvisations have some real foundation). Nor do I want to argue about the effects of his speculations if they are publicly accepted as true, and which effects you pinpoint quite rightly, since that shifts the area of contention away from the inherent wrongness and inadmissibility of lies over to their positive or negative implications for a particular point of view or a particular hypothesis. Philosophically one can argue (as some of my former colleagues in fact did argue) that a lie which leads us into a golden age of peace and brotherhood is a small price to pay, etc. I can only counter with my simplistic notion that no genuine good can ever come from falsehood and immorality or compromise of what is true for some illusory end.

Enough, enough! I don't know if I have even said clearly what I tried to say, so let me revert to Hartogs...I am dying to know if you, too, came up with T---'s G--- A---. DID YOU? Arnoni vacillated about printing it (it was explicit in my original ms.) and finally decided to be provocative and make readers figure it out for themselves—but I haven't met one yet, except you, who was curious enough to try. He is away on avvisit to Israel but I will let him read your letter when he gets back next month, for the great delight I feel sure it will give him. He is a person of ~~unparalleled~~ unparalleled spirit and brains

Meagher 302 West 12 St NYC NY 10014

Mr. Steffen Sorensen
10118 - 63rd Avenue North
Seminole, Florida 33540

Steffen Sorensen

VIA AIR MAIL