

14 August 1967

Dear Harold,

The writer who is doing a piece for Playboy is Eric Norden. He had phoned me a number of times, for the purpose (as he himself put it) of picking my brain. He also borrowed (and marked up) my collection of New Orleans newspapers, before going there to interview Garrison for the Playboy story. On his return he expressed himself as very impatient to let me hear the tapes, or read the transcript; but never called back, as he offered. He had already blithely overlooked an earlier offer to send me a copy of his study of the death of Dag Hammarschildt of some years ago; and had shown himself to be quite capricious except where his self-interest was concerned. I got quite annoyed when he failed to call with the Garrison interview tapes, and sent him a letter which made it clear that I would not welcome hearing from him again. Now he did call, as soon as he got the letter; but as I was absolutely disinclined to be "used" or have my time taken up again for three-hour phone calls, which saved him doing research, I coldly reiterated my unwillingness to have further truck with him; and that was that.

Turning to your 4-page letter of 8/7/67: I am sorry that my well-intended comment disturbed or offended you, and caused you to devote your scarce time to writing a full account of your views and circumstances. I greatly regret the disappointments and frustrations you have experienced at the hands of Dell, WNEW, Sauvage, Arnoni, Vince, or others--and I say this with sincerity. However, I cannot be responsible for anything except my own actions, and I know that you would not tax me with the unfortunate incidents you have had with people who are dear friends of mine. I can only tell you that Sauvage and Arnoni have always treated me with utmost courtesy and meticulous fairness; Vince has been a most generous and warm friend; and these have been long-term relationships. I can judge them only by my own experience, as I feel sure you would say in my place.

It is true that I have a regular salary, but I do work for it, from 9:30 to 6 (5:15 in summer). At certain times of the year I work very, very hard, even bringing material home and writing reports well into the night. I have elected also to work quite hard, in the available time that remains (including every weekend and ten weeks of vacation time (correction: sixteen weeks) in the last three years; for this I ^{do not} ask nor deserve special commiseration, since it was and is purely voluntary. I do appreciate the particular anxiety and drain that financial problems impose--please don't think I am indifferent to your circumstances. But I had thought that you had turned the corner, and that your circumstances were finally easier. I can only say that I am very sorry that you are experiencing financial pressures again.

About Epstein's book: No, I did not understand the letters you sent then, and I still do not understand your complaints. I was asked to review Inquest for TMO and I reviewed it; I had said before it was published that the book was a major breakthrough, I still think so, and I differentiate between the book and the author. So far as Epstein is concerned, I severed all contacts with him almost a year ago: he is no "eminence" of mine. Even more so is that true of Mark Lane. I met him for the first time in December, and I saw him once subsequently, at his request, when he taped the program with Nizer and Jenner. Incidentally, another person closely associated with Epstein (much more so than I), Jones Harris, seems to spend much of his time these days in New Orleans, where he has carte blanche; Epstein seems to have been there several times too; and I need hardly say that Mark Lane and Mr. Garrison have complimented and praised each other to the skies, publicly. I assume that you do not single me out for disapproval of those associations and alleged associations?

On page 2 of your letter you suggest that I lavished attention on Epstein's book, saying "Show me a word about my work." Nothing is simpler, Harold. I refer you to the September/October issue of Studies on the Left, in which I had a review of all four books published in the summer of 1966, yours included. I found merit in each of the books, and great merit in some; and I rendered my honest opinion. You may feel that I did not deal adequately with Whitewash, since I did find merit in the other three books; but in any case, it is (more than) "a word about your work."

It happens to be the case that this review is in print, because it was requested of me. But there was no obligation, so there is no claim and no ground for recrimination. I am sorry that you feel that I did not devote myself sufficiently to Whitewash; under the circumstances, I would feel extremely uncomfortable if you should make efforts on behalf of my book when it is issued, and I would not wish to assume any burden of debt in that respect. In any case, I think you would feel impelled to withdraw your very thoughtful and generous offer of assistance, since the book takes a position on Garrison which will not be acceptable to you.

I would just like to recall that I did make certain efforts with respect to your manuscript when you were kind enough to allow me to read it, in February 1966 I believe. I had two long conversations with Oscar Collier, and I think he will confirm this, in which I urged and pressured as best I could (salesmanship is not my forte, and I would not and did not do this kind of thing even for my own book) that he should publish Whitewash. Collier was not persuaded; in fact, he urged me to let him see my ms. This I refused to do, and never did, on simple ethical grounds. I went there on behalf of your book, and even if I failed on that score I refused to accept the opportunity to submit my own work. I was glad that I was able to make a number of suggestions, which you incorporated in the book. But I would like to emphasize that none of this was obligatory, it was voluntary and unsolicited by you. Therefore, I deserve no thanks, but neither do I accept recrimination. Perhaps it is grandiose on my part, but I consider myself to be a critic, not a satellite in orbit around another critic. I have tried to be a good colleague and a good friend--imperfectly, no doubt, but I don't think that my record could be too bad or we would not have sustained our association and our correspondence for so long a period. It has become clear that I overstepped in even commenting on the matter of Garrison's introduction to your next book. I realized at the moment of writing that I was taking a risk; I could have said nothing, you did not ask my opinion. Still, I remembered the night you happened to call when I was on the verge of acceding to Mitchell Krause's urgings that I appear with that sordid man whose name I forget on Channel 13, on the Gongora affair. I was not only grateful for your advice--I accepted it, and did not go.

It seems that almost without exception the critics and various other people with whom you have had dealings from the beginning of your work on the case have, in your opinion, let you down, or far worse. My personal experience has been a happier one--I think I have had very good fortune, but on the personal level I have had good experiences with many of the critics, and both my publishers, and by and large with the various other individuals who have had some reason to contact me. If there were small personal misunderstandings or instances of unfairness (including on at least one occasion what might be called "plagiarism")* I tried to minimize and ignore them, knowing that pressures, exhaustion, excitement, and other factors peculiar to the work and the environment which we have in common, all the critics, can produce unintended and unrealized violations of the norm. On the purely personal level, I think we must all have considerable patience and charity with each other. But on questions of principle, none of us can compromise strongly held convictions. I am afraid that our views on Garrison are irreconcilable; time will tell who is wrong, and I will readily and happily confess that I was wrong if that proves to be the case.

** of my findings*

However, I have been convinced for some time that Garrison has no case, and this was corroborated when one of his most unwavering adherents and admirers examined all the evidence and was left discouraged, even dismayed, and very pessimistic. Nor is this person the only Garrison supporter who has very reluctantly reached the same conclusion. It is true that his charges will be tested by the adversary procedure, for those accused who are among the living. But as I did not accept the Commission's so-called evidence for Oswald's guilt, neither do I accept Garrison's so-called evidence for his incrimination and active conspiring with Ferrie and Shaw in the assassination.

It is also true that Garrison has grandiosely hurled charges at the CIA and the Cuban exiles--the very instrumentalities that came under your suspicion and my own, independently of each other, from our study of the H & E. But the effect of Garrison's failure to sustain his charges, if he fails, will produce the "cry wolf" effect, and we will be scoffed at when we make similar claims, even if they are well founded. Indeed, it seems to me that a collapse of Garrison's case will set back the whole critical effort very, very badly, if not fatally.

I see that I had overlooked your reference to my "initial devotion to Epstein." Let me repeat that my "devotion" was to his book, which I considered a pivotal one which would radically break the barrier of silence. This expectation was vindicated when the Washington Post came out with a page one banner headline on 5/29/66. It was impossible not to recognize the enormous importance of the FBI Summary and Supplemental Reports, which were the heart of his book and were hitherto unknown (except for Vince's excerpt from the 12/9/66 FBI Report in TMO, which went virtually unnoticed). I am surprised that you consider this in some way disloyal to you. I have always recognized the value of your work, and have said so; but it is not the only work, nor do I agree that there are no findings that did not originate in your work--because, as I have repeatedly pointed out, the critics have made repeated parallel but independent discoveries in the H & E. My book is my own, however much it may cite the same data or make the same arguments as the work of other critics, except that when in fact I derived information or insight from the work of one of my colleagues, I have been careful so to indicate, and have credited the person by name. In your case, I have acknowledged with gratitude several points (the wet tape, Mrs. Arnold, Zapruder's testimony that he saw the clutch at the throat, the peculiar use by the autopsy surgeons of the acromion and mastoid process as reference points, etc.).

You say also that I sloughed off your written questions about Epstein and his writing. It happens that I had been requested to maintain absolute secrecy about his book; naturally, I honored that undertaking to the very best of my ability. It was a condition for my seeing it in the first place. I am sure that you would not suggest that I should have disregarded a solemn promise.

I neither intended nor entertained any slur on Billings. I do not know him, have never met him, and spoke to him on the telephone for the first time in order to convey the message which you requested I give him. For all I know, he is the very best of people. I have no reason to think otherwise, unless it is the impression I had derived from your letter (perhaps wrongly) that he had let you down. My comments were directed not to Billings or any other individual, but to Life magazine, which has moved from a dirty role in this case to an ambiguous role.

Harold, I am truly sorry that I have seemed to you to be less than the good friend and colleague I have tried to be. I have great respect for your work as a researcher and for your courage and sincerity in challenging the Warren Report (although I have never agreed that Warren or members of the Commission could be exonerated). You seem to feel that everyone is against you or has on occasion done you some injustice, myself included. Yet I have the greatest good will toward you, as I know many of our fellow-critics have. Is it possible that you have some responsibility, in some of the situations of which you complain? I have tried to deal with all of your points; I hope I have not overlooked any; and I hope that we can achieve a better mutual understanding, on the personal if not on the doctrinal level. I do not want to eat into your time, nor have I the time it requires, to perpetuate this discussion--although I am not trying to avoid or default on discussion. Sincerely, as always,

John