

*By
Majors*

Herold Weisberg
Hyattstown, Md. 20734
January 13, 1967

Mr. Herb Michelson
Public Affairs Director
WAKR, Akron, Ohio

Dear Mr. Michelson,

Your letter of January 11 warrants an immediate if too-hasty answer. Generally speaking, I will meet and debate any time with any of the former staff members of the Warren Commission. Specifically, Mr. Griffin's proposal is too loaded against success. I will, at a later date, if you so desire, analyze it at length for you, possibly when you get closer to doing something.

It is so loaded, I wonder if it begins with you and is his way of saying no while seeming to say yes. This is not intended maliciously, for Mr. Griffin has had a number of opportunities to confront me. I expect to confront a number of his colleagues in a New York TV studio last month. They had asked for the program but seemingly had a change of heart after they learned I'd be facing them. Nor is this an isolated case. His, of course, is their right, but it does not entitle them to pretend that they seek confrontations others avoid, that they have not and do not avoid confrontations, or to stipulate conditions that work hardships on the other side or assert any kind of rights or prerogatives that their opposition does not have.

Your description of what you have in mind is not exaggerated. Griffin's format can prevent it, if not its success.

For one thing, it projects each great length that no station would or could afford to carry it. Second of all it, on the face of it, is unfair. For example, he projects that each staff member will specialize in but a single aspect of the Commission's work whereas each of us who says they did less than we were entitled to expect of them will have to cover the entire field or, having in our own work had to cover the entire field, suddenly become instant experts, whatever the aspect. It also limits us to the decisions and organization of the Commission's Report, which is not warranted and not designed to elicit untainted truth and reality.

If this projects either a lengthy preparation of questions or answers in advance, most of us "critics" cannot do it. Unlike the former staff members, who have comfortable positions (and were paid for their work) I, for example, have no income and despite the slender ones retailed by some you will be inviting to represent the other side, have not only not made a cent but I'm still far from recovering my costs. Others have regular jobs and obligations they must meet.

The format anticipates a too-heavy participation by lawyers and law-school personnel who, whether or not "respected" generally have a shabby record to defend on this subject. This is conspicuously true of the bar association of which, presumably, those on the other side are at least members. It is a fiction to expect the "administrator", whatever he agrees to, "to diligently familiarize himself with all the issues..." Section 7 arrogates rights to "the staff of the Warren Commission" (does it still exist?) that are presumptuous and to which I will not agree.

While I cannot and do not blame Mr. Griffin for not taking upon his shoulders the responsibilities of others, for he should not, I do want to point out to you that his concluding paragraph gives him an out. He does not have to appear if unnamed others do not. They have until now steadfastly refused to make such appearances, once in a single month four times against me, another about six times in all.

Another consequence of this paragraph is to limit what parts of the Warren Report can be examined. Need it be pointed out what this means?

What Mr. Griffin proposes is what he hopes will not be agreed to and what would, if agreed to, be loaded in his favor and so dull and dead as to justify little hope for attracting TV station interest. What is needed is a simple, direct approach to people so that they can understand and not be bored. For what this important ^{issue} needs is public understanding, something every official and unofficial set up to this time has been calculated to avoid or frustrate. Having done this in their official capacities, I see no advantage in permitting these men to perpetuate it, which is what Griffin's proposal amounts to.

To summarize, while I am all for your objectives, I am not in accord with this attempt to frustrate or divert them, nor am I for any single additional obfuscation or evasion of any kind on this subject. I, personally, have accepted every single confrontation that has been offered, against members of the staff of the former Commission (who in not a single case appeared) or their champions.

To answer your specific questions, I am willing to appear, and as of now the time of the year is immaterial. I think there should be remuneration, what I cannot now say or estimate. As to the format, all I can now say is that it should be simple, aiming for utmost comprehensibility by the general public and designed, as this one is not, for impartiality and unrestricted presentation of truth and uneluded fact.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Steisberg

WAKR

the Radio-Television Center of Akron



853 Copley Road
Akron, Ohio 44320
216-762-8811

P.O. Box 1590
Akron, Ohio 44309

January 11, 1967

Mr. Harold Weisberg
COQ D'or Farm
Hyattstown, Maryland

Dear Mr. Weisberg:

At this time our organization wants to ascertain your interest toward a proposal submitted to us by Burt W. Griffin, a member of the Warren Commission staff. This proposal is detailed below.

We asked Mr. Griffin for this proposal on the basis of an interview and discussion I had with him last November.

From our point of view, a public airing of the criticisms and defenses of the Warren Report may well be a historical imperative. I cannot speculate what would come of such a public symposium. But I contend this forum would provide for us all a magnificent opportunity to serve our nation.

There is no profit motive at stake in our willingness to produce such a forum. We see it simply as a public affairs gesture which our industry must make. Obviously, we would fancy the prestigious notion of our participation in production. But, very frankly, if it becomes physically impossible for this organization to present such a forum we will make every conceivable effort to have it presented by someone else. We feel that strongly about the need for this sort of statement of facts.

After you read the Griffin proposal, I would appreciate your comments on these questions:

- 1) Willingness to appear; at what time of year; for how many days; remuneration required.
- 2) Stipulations as to the conduct of the forum if you're in disagreement with Griffin's format



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January 11, 1967

We would not conduct such a presentation unless a network or syndication arrangement could be set up. Our tentative thoughts are toward a 100-station plus network of educational and independent stations. To finance "line" costs we of necessity would seek either foundation or commercial funds.

This letter is being sent to several members of the Commission staff and several of its critics.

This station and its management have the soundest reputation with the FCC and among fellow broadcasters. We are not entering into this matter on a whim or as an opportunist. I hope you understand our point of view.

Mr. Griffin's proposal follows.

Respectfully,



Herb Michelson
Public Affairs Director

HB:eec



IN AKRON...WAKR • WAKR-FM • WAKR-TV IN DAYTON...WONE • WONE-FM

Dear Mr. Michelson:

In confirmation of our telephone conversation on Tuesday, December 6, 1966, the following are the terms under which I would agree to appear on a nationally televised program dealing with the Warren Commission and its critics:

1. The program would be held on a university campus and would be open to the general public.
2. The program would be in the form of a symposium to last for two or three days and to include the principle draftsman of all chapters of the Warren Commission report together with the critics of the commission.
3. The symposium would be divided into sections in which the draftsman of a particular portion of the Warren Commission report would have an opportunity to face the critics of the report on the particular issues with which that draftsman was concerned.
4. For each area of confrontation between a draftsman of the report and the Warren Commission critics, questions would be carefully prepared in advance and submitted both to the draftsman and to the critic. The draftsman would have ample time to present all the evidence available on each of the prepared questions, the critics would have time to attack the evidence presented by the draftsman, and the draftsman would have an opportunity to rebuke the critics. Law professors in the areas of criminal law and public administration would be invited to attend the symposium and a genuine effort would be attempted to get attendance from such professors employed at major law schools in the country.
5. An administrator would be appointed to arrange for the program who would be a respected law professor or news media representative. The administrator would agree to diligently familiarize himself with all the issues that have been raised and to attempt objectively to specify questions for consideration.
6. Members of the Commission staff who have agreed to appear on such a program would be given at least thirty days notice of all questions to be presented by the administrator so that adequate time would be available to gather the information bearing upon such questions.
7. No salaries would be paid to any participant on the program except to the administrator for the reasonable cost of his time. Other participants would be paid only for their expenses and a small honorarium. Profits or proceeds from advertising over and above expenses to the sponsor would be donated to the Kennedy Library or some other foundation agreed upon by the staff of the Warren Commission.

As you know, I have discussed such a program as outlined with other members of the Warren Commission Staff and I would expect that at least three or four other members of the staff would show a willingness to participate. I must underscore, however, that I would not be willing to participate in such a program unless the principle draftsman of each of the sections of the report to be examined agree to and did appear on such a program. In that way the public would have an opportunity to hear the explanations of the most authoritative members of the Commission staff on each of the issues which might be presented for consideration.

Sincerely,

Burt W. Griffin
Director