

May 31, 1975

Mr. Garry Willis
c/o The Washington Star
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Willis:

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If you had set out to write about me maliciously and deliberately to misrepresent what else you pretended to be writing about in your column that appeared in the Washington Star May 29, you could not have succeeded better. The complete lack of fidelity - to my work, public statements or private correspondence; the the contents of that and other formerly TOP SECRET Warren Commission executive session transcripts (no, they are not mere "conversations"); to the thrust of the AP's accurate story and fair representation of the words of the deliberating members of the Warren Commission; and even to the supposed denial of the report that Oswald had had federal connections - suggests you have these intentions.

And your past writing to live with.

Not only am I not a "conspiratorialist", I alone among those regarded as critics of the Warren Report take public issue with those who are. About my work and at this juncture your false representation, for which there is no basis other than your prejudice and preconception, this amounts to libel.

"Mr. Weisberg knows very well what it is all about." True. But does Mr. Willis? Or is he a deliberate liar?

You are not faithful to the story Lonnie Hudkins wrote. The number only was made up to entrap the FBI into proving it was illegally eavesdropping and intimidating those working on the story. When the FBI did show up within a half-hour, any doubts about their illegal activity?

Joe Goulden was not in on this. How could you honestly drag in all these irrelevancies and leave out his independent story?

You said Hudkins was a Warren Commission witness. He was not. The list appears in the Report (see p. 490).

You are entirely unfaithful to the sense of that and other Warren Commission executive sessions and to the accurate AP account of this one. It did not center on the number. The Commission's concern was put succinctly by General Counsel J. Lee Rankin five days later in another of these until-me "TOP SECRET" sessions: They had a "dirty rumor" and their function was not to investigate, but to "wipe it out."

Consistent with this formulation, the Commission began with the precondition that there could not have been a conspiracy and that Oswald was the lone assassin. Their work outlines prove this. Thus, in the part

GARRY WILLS

A Word for Warren Commission

It is time to say a word for the Warren Commission. Even those who believe that Oswald was the sole assassin of President Kennedy are beginning to grant that the Warren Commission did a bad job. They say we should "reopen the case," if for no other reason, just to resolve doubts caused by sloppy detective work. But most doubts are caused by two classes of men — those who have not really read what the Warren Commission said and those whose doubts would not be resolved by the Second Coming (which they would treat as a CIA plot).

The attacks on the Warren Commission come from three main directions:

1. Some think the commission was part of the plot itself. These people are at least consistent. If one could mobilize all the resources most conspiratorial theories demand, then controlling the commission should have been no problem at all. But this, like most such theories, proves too much. If one can "control" a chief justice, a future president, a bunch of prominent lawyers on the make, an attorney general who happens to be the assassinated man's brother, then one controls everything, and there is no longer any need to hide — i.e., to be a conspiracy.

2. Others think the CIA and/or the FBI bamboozled the commission — which is a rather touching exercise in credulity. Even if those agencies were efficient, they would have to tread carefully where so many other factions and rival interests were at play — and where the results were going to be published in 26 volumes. But, of course, the record of both the FBI and the CIA is enough to make any criticism of the commission look like praise. If the conspiracy depended on the FBI and the

CIA, then Howard Hunt's whole career tells us what would have happened to it.

3. Others, by far the most numerous, think the commission just fumbled the job out of haste, incompetence or unconscious prejudices. Most of the evidence for this is the citing of "leads" that the commission did not track down. In fact, many of these were tracked down, or were patently false leads from the start.

A fair example is Mark Lane's use of testimony by Nancy Perrin Rich. He devoted a whole chapter of this book to this woman's bizarre tale. He neglected to tell the readers that the same woman appeared two other times, in two different places, to volunteer evidence to the commission. The investigators listened politely, though she told three totally different stories. At one of these appearances, deliberately omitted from Lane's chapter, she took (and flunked) a polygraph test.

Ovid Demaris and I, back in the '60s, took Lane's advice and followed up this woman's testimony. We found that she was an unstable woman, had been in and out of psychiatric care and police stations, that she loved to "testify" about all her famous friends in mob trials and other celebrated crimes. We also found that Lane knew all this, that he told the woman's husband he would not be able to make anything of her testimony. But he made an entire tententious chapter out of one third of that testimony.

Here is a simple rule of thumb for dealing with conspiratorialists: If they question the integrity of the Warren Commission yet quote Mark Lane with approval, they are intellectually very ill-equipped or intellectually dishonest.

5/6/75

Mr. Garry Wills
c/o The Washington Star
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Wills:

Your May 1 column is unusually restrained or you hold Mark Lane in higher esteem than I do.

I believe you might have gone farther with the case of Nancy Perrin Rich and considered it as a legacy of the Commission's methods and approach. I do not dispute your conclusions, one of the reasons I write. But the Commission's record is so entirely inadequate on this, there is so much in it that does correlate with other evidence, and all of this fits a prevailing pattern so much the serious investigator cannot dismiss it as you do, without going much farther than the Commission did. You did.

You might have broken your third category, "others," to include the minority who are neither Lanes nor "conspiracy theorists." In time you will come to understand this. I regret you did not prior to writing this column.

Whenever possible I have been denouncing these nuts and self-seekers and commercializers, to their faces in refusing to attend the gathering of the nuts in Boston and in a speech at the New York University Law School April 25.

In my work I do no theorizing. Nor is it commercial or profitable work. I deal with fact. Because there is so much partisanship on both sides fact is too frequently unwelcome. In this pursuit I have filed more Freedom of Information law suits than any other writer. They have been productive. They have provided some of the literally thousands of pages of files I have accumulated, so many thousands I have at least 2,000 of FBI reports I have not yet had time to read.

As of now two institutions would like my files for permanent archives for the future. If you find no great problem in it, I would appreciate anything you can supply on the non-Lane version of the Nancy Perrin Rich affair. Not for writing. I've more writing already researched and in areas far ahead of this than I can get to. For archival use only, for scholars of the future.

While I was the first to (I think) disprove the Commission's conclusions and have done more writing about it than any other, I have also made a serious effort to clear up some of the unnecessary mysteries it and the FBI left. One example is the entirely unexplained deformity of the three rifle shells. I was able to duplicate them and end that mystery. This, however, does not address the basic evidence. In the end you will learn that this evidence is overwhelming.

There is an ambiguity in your reference to the FBI "bamboozling" the Commission. You are correct only if you mean the Commission knew. My more recent proofs leave no doubt of this and not only in my most recent published book, which is based on an executive session that had been suppressed illegally. Since that book came out I have obtained as definitive as "Top Secret" articulation as one could want, with the most Orwellian conclusion.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg