

MEMORANDUM

Privileged and Confidential

TO : ANTI-VIGILANTE TASK FORCE (GROUP)
FROM : AGENT DALE PETEY
DATE : SEPTEMBER 22, 2019
SUBJECT : The Will of Nelson Gardner

At Agent Blake's direction, I have acquired a copy of the last will and testament of Nelson Forrest Gardner on file at the New York County Courthouse in Manhattan (see attached). I am also providing a brief backgrounder on his life for those who need it.

Born in 1908, Gardner grew up a child of privilege in New York City. He enlisted in the Marines after washing out of Harvard, and served with distinction under Major General Smedley Butler in the Banana Wars. He was discharged honorably in 1936 and began a career as a security consultant and military contractor. Gardner was advising the NYPD on urban warfare strategies when he was inspired by Hooded Justice to become a masked vigilante, adopting the guise of Captain Metropolis. In 1939, Gardner collaborated with Louis Schexnayder, a talent agent representing Sally Jupiter, aka Silk Spectre, on forming the Minutemen. Tragedies, acrimony, and other factors led to their disbandment in 1949. The House UnAmerican Activities Committee subsequently demanded that all masked vigilantes reveal their identities to a senator. Gardner complied. Hooded Justice did not, for reasons that are now obvious. In 1966, Gardner attempted to form a new league of extrajudicial avengers, comprised of himself and the Comedian, a pair of next-generation costumed adventurers (Nite Owl II, Silk Spectre II), two new crime-fighters (Ozymandias, Rorschach), and a bonafide god (Dr. Manhattan). Gardner suggested branding this eclectic group "The Crimebusters." Uninspired by this nomenclature and by Gardner himself, the team-up never came to be. Gardner retired shortly thereafter.

On the night of August 9, 1974, Gardner was driving northbound on Broadway in a Buick LeSabre in the general direction of his uptown mansion. Material found in the vehicle indicated he had attended a rally protesting the repeal of the 22nd Amendment. Gardner lost control of the car and crashed into a barrier at a high rate of speed. He ejected through the front windshield and was decapitated. (In a bizarre footnote, his head was never found.)

At his request, there was no funeral or memorial and his remains were thoroughly destroyed. His desire was for Mr. Reeves to be the sole beneficiary of his estate. According to the executor's summary, Reeves was presented with the contents of Gardner's will on March 3, 1975, at his place of employment, a movie theater in Harlem.

From a historian's perspective, the discovery of Hooded Justice's true identity as Mr. Reeves significantly reframes our understanding of the history of masked vigilantes in our country. It forces me to confront my own biases — it never occurred to me consider that Hooded Justice could have been anything other than a white male.

As Athena sprung from the head of Zeus, so did the modern phenomenon of costumed vigilantism from Hooded Justice. For a century, his "secret identity" is the only one that has remained unrevealed, and now, we know why. It seems clear that Mr. Reeves did not hide his face for purposes of showmanship or pageantry, but for his own survival.

I have spent countless hours criticizing *American Hero Story: Minutemen* for its historical inaccuracies, but it never occurred to me until this moment that the greatest historical inaccuracy of all might be America itself.

This is a memo for another time.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dale Petey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "P".

Special Agent Dale Petey

Anti-Vigilante Task Force/Research Unit
Sub-Basement 1, Room X, Desk 2



I, Nelson Honest Gardner, being of sound mind and body, and having no remaining blood relatives or valid relations or affections to lay claim to my legacy, do hereby revoke all previous wills and codicils and bequeath the entirety of my estate - property, possessions, cash, and investments - to Mr. William Reeves. This wish will not be easy to fulfill, but it should be done all the same.

Mr. Reeves might be difficult to locate. When I last saw him face to face in the autumn of 1955, Mr. Reeves told me he was taking an early retirement from the New York Police Department and expressed an interest in traveling abroad. He also made it clear that he never wanted to see me again. I honored that request, and as of the formalizing of this document, never attempted to defy it. I last heard from Mr. Reeves in 1966. He had learned through a mutual friend of my new friendship with Adrian Veidt and our interest in sponsoring a new group of costumed adventurers committed to fighting crime in the inner cities. I no longer have the terse and objectionable note that Mr. Reeves subsequently sent me, but I do recall a San Francisco postmark.



I am not oblivious to the fact that there will be thousands of gentlemen, if not tens of thousands, with the name "William Reeves" currently residing in the United States. The one to whom I refer was born between the years 1910 and 1915. Mr. Reeves is a black man, over six feet tall with an impressive athletic build. Photographs of him should be easily obtainable through the New York Police Department, where he enlisted in 1938.

My understanding is that Mr. Reeves may have family in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Under no circumstances are you to approach them for help; I am confident that Mr. Reeves would not want them to be troubled by any reminder of his past, most especially by any reminder or remnant of me.

Once you locate Mr. Reeves, he might try to decline my bequest, either in part or in total. It is possible that Mr. Reeves will choose not to take possession of my trove of Minutemen memorabilia nor the assets of the Minutemen Franchise LLC, including the intellectual property rights to the Minutemen, Captain Metropolis, and assorted characters (Screaming Skull, Captain Axis, et al.). You shall dispose or disperse of these assets at his direction and be responsible for the work of doing so. If he does not wish to accept the responsibility of deciding what to do with this property, I ask that you auction it and donate the profits to the Southern Poverty Law Center.



It is more likely that Mr. Reeves would decline my estate in full than in part. Your job as executors is to convince him to accept it. If he rejects this bequest, convey to him that this inheritance is intended as penance for my sins against him and my neglect and subversion of his noble work of decades ago. If he asks what has prompted my regret, tell him that I have come to see that my attitudes and ambitions were those of a naïf swirling in the self-imposed blindness of a bygone era, and that the only true peace I found in those years was in his companionship. Tell him that I was wrong when I said "we should avoid political situations" and that he was right when he mocked us all with those same words every chance he could; tell him I now see how everything we did back then was a political act, even the hideous hustle of what he called our "razzle-dazzle" and the crass, degrading, and racist imagery it put into the world. If he further resists, tell Mr. Reeves that much of my wealth was derived from my association with him, and appropriation of him, and so he deserves it; tell him that I always told him he would outlive us all, for he was the only one amongst us fighting true evil; and tell him that I don't for a second believe that someone like him ever quits that good fight, and I feel a sense of responsibility to support it, in all the ways I did not when we were friends.



If Mr. Reeves still declines this bequest, then liquidate my assets and place the monies in a trust, and inform Mr. Reeves that it is there for him if and when he ever changes his mind.

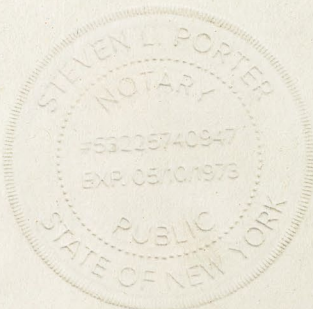
And if he never does, then let it rot.

Finally, I wish to be cremated and for my remains to be discarded. Hold no funeral or memorial for me, and leave no marker of my years on this earth. I did nothing to deserve it.

Signed with sincerity on this date, the thirty first of May, nineteen hundred and seventy one,

Nelson Forest Gardner

Witnessed on this date, the thirty first of May, nineteen hundred and seventy one, by duly appointed executors for the testator,



Katherine A. Lo
William T. Kelly