

Fadiman

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To: Matthew Meselson  
From: Anne Fadiman

Matt-

I wanted you to see the enclosed,  
since it may never get published  
by The Globe. I thought the Wash  
piece was excellent.

Thanks for your helpful  
judgment on the Haack piece.

Yours,  
Anne

July 29, 1998

To: Letters to the Editor, Boston Globe  
From: Anne Fadiman  
Editor, The American Scholar

tel: 212-375-0911  
fax: 212-375-0913

I would like to thank David Warsh for his kind words about my work on the Hmong of Laos in his excellent article on yellow rain (business section, July 26). May I expand on his characterization of my views on yellow rain as "agnostic"?

I am indeed an agnostic on the question of whether biological warfare was used in Laos by the Soviet Union or its allies after the Second Indochinese War, which I believe has never been (and may never be) definitively answered. However, when it comes to the samples of "yellow rain" on which, to a great extent, the accusations were based, my skepticism goes beyond agnosticism. Matthew Meselson's rigorous work on the subject makes a persuasive case for the view that the samples, which contained digested pollen, were not tricothecene-laced biological weapons but bee feces. Anyone in search of a careful and objective summary of the case should consult Lois Ember's lengthy article, "Yellow Rain," published by Chemical and Engineering News in 1984 and in my view never superseded during the years since.

It would be a fine thing if both journalists and government officials were able to form their judgments on such matters as yellow rain by setting aside their political biases, on either end of the spectrum, and looking hard at the scientific evidence.

Anne Fadiman  
New York City