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**Yellow Rain: Epilogue 1**

**Directions**: Read the below article, annotating as you go (including the following: highlighting, circling, underlining, commenting, questioning). Then respond to the prompt on the back page.

**From Robert Krulwich on Yellow Rain** Sunday, September 30, 2012 - 04:51 PM

After reading a lot of email and angry notes about our most recent podcast, "[The Fact of the Matter](http://www.radiolab.org/2012/sep/24/)," I want to respond, and apologize for my harshness during the interview.

It was not my intention -- it's never my intention -- to make the people we interview uncomfortable or angry. My intent is to question, listen, and explore. But in my interview with Ms. Kao Kalia Yang and Mr. Eng Yang, and later in the conversation with my co-host Jad and our reporter Pat Walters, I pushed too hard. I didn't understand how I was coming across. I now can hear that my tone was oddly angry. That's not acceptable -- especially when talking to a man who has suffered through a nightmare in Southeast Asia that was beyond horrific.

This episode of Radiolab was about truth, how different people experience different truths and how those differences can be painfully hard to reconcile. In this segment, our subject was President Reagan's 1982 announcement that he believed the Soviets had manufactured chemical weapons and were using them on Hmong people in Laos -- and a subsequent announcement by scientists at Harvard and Yale that the President was wrong, that the so-called "weapons" were not weapons at all, but bees relieving themselves in the forest.

While there had been previous accounts of this controversy, very few journalists had asked the Hmong refugees hiding in that forest what happened, what they'd seen. That's why we wanted to speak with Mr. Yang and his niece, Ms. Yang.

We sent them a list of questions in advance, including these:

* "At what point did you first hear about the yellow rain?"
* "Did you see it yourself?"
* "What did it look like? Did you touch it? See evidence of it on leaves or houses?"
* "Do you know about the theory scientists have that the yellow rain wasn't a poison weapon, but instead was bee droppings?"
* "What do you make of that?"

Many commenters have suggested that we "ambushed" Mr. Yang and Ms. Yang, but I feel that it's important for you to know that was not the case. Mr. Yang and Ms. Yang were informed about what we were looking for: our goal was to find out if President Reagan's statement was true or false.

We never suggested that Radiolab planned a comprehensive story of the tragedy that befell the Hmong during those years. We had no set view of whether yellow rain was or was not a chemical weapon. We went to Mr. Yang because we thought his voice and perspective should be heard.

I forcefully questioned Mr. Yang to find out if he had actually seen the source of the "yellow rain" because I was trying to understand if the scientists had considered all the evidence. I care deeply about getting the facts right. Looking back on it now, I see that I was insensitive: I sound hectoring and uncaring. For that, I apologize.

I should have listened harder, and been more compassionate.

I am especially sorry in the conversation following to have said Ms. Yang was seeking to "monopolize" the story. Obviously, we at Radiolab had all the power in this situation, and to suggest otherwise was wrong.

If you listen to the whole segment, you will hear that we took the time to tell the story of the Hmong's flight into the woods, the Pathet Lao's assassinations, and the cruel chaos of that war. We did not leave that part out. I just wish I had done my part more gently and with more consideration for their suffering.

**On this page, respond to the question below. Attach extra paper if you wish.**

* Does this piece of writing seem like an apology to you? How is it, or how is it not? Use specific examples to explain how you perceive the intention, tone, and information conveyed in this writing from Robert Krulwich. End by explaining whether you think this is an appropriate response to the results of the interview.

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**Yellow Rain: Epilogue 2**

**Directions**: Read the below article, annotating as you go (including the following: highlighting, circling, underlining, commenting, questioning). Then respond to the prompt on the back page.

## On Yellow Rain...

### Wednesday, September 26, 2012 - 02:43 PM

By [Jad Abumrad](http://www.radiolab.org/people/jad-abumrad/) : Host, Radiolab

We understand that many listeners were offended by the end of our [Yellow Rain](http://www.radiolab.org/2012/sep/24/yellow-rain/) story. Since we take that conversation with our listeners seriously, let me just tell you a little bit about what we were thinking ... and what we were not thinking. First, it was not our intent to minimize the suffering of the Hmong people, quite the opposite. In fact, the point of the story -- if the story can be said to have a point -- is that these kinds of forensic or scientific investigations into the truth of a situation invariably end up being myopic. They miss and sometimes even obscure hugely important realities. Like a genocide.

That's not a point we set out to make. It's something that arose organically when our producer, Pat Walters, realized, and then openly admitted on tape, that he felt he'd missed something. That is why we included the lengthy and painful exchange with Kao Kalia Yang, even though it may not have been flattering to us. Our goal in our ending conversation was not to be pedantic or insensitive but to be transparent. That was an honest in-the-moment conversation about honest differences.

All that said, the thing I'd most like to respond to is accusations that we were cavalier in our response to the pain that Kalia and her uncle Eng were expressing.

We were all profoundly troubled by the interview with Kalia and Eng. Before heading into the studio, we argued with one another for weeks about what it meant to us personally and what it meant for the story. If we gave the impression that we approached the ending conversation casually, without much consideration or sensitivity, that's on us. And that is something I'd like to correct. So I've inserted a line in the story that puts our ending conversation in a bit more context.

And I would like to say one thing, forcefully: even with the emotional heat of that moment, I would urge people not to dismiss Robert's point. The label "chemical weapon" is not just semantics. The United States almost used yellow rain as an excuse to begin manufacturing its own chemical weapons, which would have invariably led to other countries doing the same, which would have invariably led to many more people dying. So Robert's insistent questioning wasn't for cheap theatrics. He believes, as we all do, that the truth in this situation is a matter of life or death. It's not just bee poop.

What happened in Southeast Asia following the end of the Vietnam war is a huge, complicated story -- and of course there's a lot more to it than what we included in this one radio piece. For more on Kalia's story, and that of the Hmong, check out her book [The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir](http://www.amazon.com/The-Latehomecomer-Hmong-Family-Memoir/dp/1566892082/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1348679278&sr=8-1&keywords=the+latecomer).

**On this page, respond to the question below. Attach extra paper if you wish.**

* Does this piece of writing seem like an apology to you? How is it, or how is it not? Use specific examples to explain how you perceive the intention, tone, and information conveyed in this writing from Jad Abumrad. End by explaining whether you think this is an appropriate response to the results of the interview.

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