

1971,

My address after October 1, and till May 1, 1972:

El Jardin
Mijas (Malaga)
Spain

Dear Mr. Policoff:

Every statement I made in my letter to the New York Times regarding my treatment of Whitewash, and the Washington Post's treatment of Harold Weisberg is precisely true. (And because I have had a taste now of Weisberg's treatment of declarative sentences, let me hasten to add that there is nothing I wrote to the New York Times that is not true, except that my characterization of him is of course subjective.)

Now, again. I have no idea what leads you to state with such confidence that the stationary bearing Weisberg's notes is "without question several years old," or that the "typewriter that was used is no longer in existence," but I can tell you this: the notes you quote do not reflect what happened between Weisberg and me. First of all, he claims that the first time we met "it developed he had no copy of the book but had just been told about it by Bradlee. HE'll do a review if the Post doesn't syndicate, for they never review books they syndicate." Let's break that down into its parts, and I'll ~~try~~ tell you my good recollection of what happened, and try to support my case with simple common sense.

1) Weisberg is correct that I had no copy of the book. I may, or may not, have been told ~~xx~~ by Bradlee that such a book existed, and if Weisberg had just seen Bradlee about it, there is every chance that Bradlee--Benjamin Bradlee--had told his book editor about the book of an author who had just buttonholed him in the building.

2) Weisberg ~~ixx~~ is wrong, wrong, wrong, or he lies, when he says that I told him I would "do a review if the Post doesn't syndicate." Think for a minute, for God's sake! At the time Mr. Weisberg speaks about, The Washington Post reviewed three books a week. 156 book columns each year to accomodate the more than 7,000 books I was sent for review each year. And I speak, when I refer to the 7,000, of trade books by established ~~publisge~~ publishers. As it happened, during the four years I was the Post's book review editor, we never--not once--reviewed a vanity press book, that is, we never reviewed a book whose publication and distribution was paid for by its author, as the publication and distribution of Whitewash! was paid for by Mr. Weisberg. I am not proud that I never found a book worthy of review from among the vanity press titles, but it is so. Thus, the odds against Weisberg's book--because no publisher had thought it worthy of publication--were astonishingly long before I ever opened it. And I never, never, never--with the exception of books by writers with exceptionally newsworthy names, and seldom with those--elected a book for review until I had read it. I could not have told Weisberg I would review Whitewash before I read it. I could not know whether I would review it. How could I know whether I would review it when I had not read it? I believe that either Weisberg's notes are new notes, or that they are old, and that they are old and terribly inaccurate, warped by wishful thinking. I have never once, in 6 years as a book editor, promised a man I would review his book. Let me repeat that: never have I told anyone I would review their book. For the following good reason: I did not want to be pestered by author's impatient questions of when? when? how good? who is the reviewer? why him? and because it sometimes fell out that A book I meant to review would never be reviewed. That could happen for several reasons: the reviewer I assigned fell ill, or failed to deliver the promised copy, or his review was inarticulate, or he violently panned a first novel (who cares?). In short, to allow myself latitude, to leave some room for maneuver against contingencies, I kept my reviewing plans a secret between my editors and myself. Always.

3) Weisberg is correct, and I could have told him that The Washington Post "never review(s) books they syndicate." For the obvious reason that, as ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ honest men, we were obliged not to thump our own tubs.

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Now, to the core of this matter. Weisberg shared with you a note, dated May 24, 1966, and it says: "Bumped into Wolff 23 a.m. He has read the book, impressed, interested, and / "much better written than you had led me to believe." This, Mr. Policoff, is purest fiction, and it is this fiction that stirred me to write the editor of the Times. I read a few pages of Whitewash, and what I thought of it I ~~honestly~~ honestly do not recall, except that I decided I was not interested in it, and I believe what decided me against it was its general sloppiness. Surely if it had been as badly written as Frame-Up, I would have given its prose and polemics very low marks.

Now, as I wrote the New York Times, my editors and I "decided ...to leave the consideration of books about the Kennedy assassination to reviewers better qualified to judge their merits." This was indeed because I was not a ~~lawyer~~ lawyer. Also because I did not want to measure the books against the evidence collected by the Warren Commission, and check the accuracy of their judgments by checking their ~~accuracy~~ against the sources of their special information. In short, I was not qualified to review these books, and I was too lazy to equip myself with necessary qualifications to review them. So were I to have reviewed them, I would have necessarily, through ignorance, have treated them unfairly. And heaven knows, Mr. Policoff, and you tell me, that you are deeply troubled about the possibility that books are being treated unfairly by the review media. We wanted to be fair.

So, I disqualified myself as a reviewer of any book about the assassination. How, in God's name does this universal disqualification ~~fix~~ function as "a policy decision against Whitewash!" Why all but Weisberg's? I don't understand. I didn't send ~~Weisberg's~~ Weisberg's to another reviewer because my admittedly perfunctory examination of it gave me to conclude it didn't merit the attention of a competent outside reviewer, and because I didn't want to give the space to it. Now perhaps I was wrong, perhaps it was a landmark study, perhaps it turned the Warren Commission on its ear. But if it did, no one has told me so yet. Surely neither you nor Mr. Weisberg would expect me to send out every book I receive for review? I was forced, as an editor, to make summary decisions, even about some books that were out of my depth. It is a ~~tough~~ world, and perhaps not always a just world, but Mr. Weisberg was treated fairly by me, and justly, and with good manners.

What is the nature of the conspiracy against him? Why against him? Book Week (now Book World) had its own editorial policies, distinct from mine, and we didn't share our decisions about which books we would or would not review. They decided against Whitewash! for their own reasons, and I don't what they were. Does Weisberg believe that the editors of the Washington Post really conspired against him? For God's sake why? Well, when last I heard, Mark Lane believed we were conspiring against him too, but Book Week reviewed his Rush to Judgement. You see. Mr. Policoff, I don't understand any of this. I have never been part of a conspiracy against any man, though I have been accused by disappointed authors whose books I reviewed negatively of being the Prime Mover of many conspiracies. An occupational hazard of book reviewers, I fear.

Finally, regarding Frame-Up, Weisberg lies, and he knows he lies, and his lies make me ill. I had no contact with him whatever in regard to his book, but had considerable contact with Harris Dienstfrey, his editor and publisher, to whom I am sending a copy of this letter. Harris told me he was enormously impressed by Frame-Up, and was convinced that Weisberg's case, that James Earl Ray did not murder Martin Luther King Jr., was supported by the evidence Weisberg had uncovered. So far from conspiring against Weisberg, on the strength of Dienstfrey's calm and shrewd testimony, I alerted Jack Kroll, Newsweek's senior editor responsible for back-of-the-book criticism, that Weisberg might have an astonishing tale to tell. I did this the very day I was told by Harris Dienstfrey of the book's merits. He in turn took Frame-Up to Newsweek's editor, Kermit Lansner, and my superior editors decided the book was without merit, or without sufficient merit to justify a news story about its bombshell revelations. I told Harris Dienstfrey, who begged me to reconsider, to read it myself. He told me at that time that Weisberg had been treated very, very badly by many people, that he had been denied access to papers in the public domain. This, I agreed, was an outrage if it were true. Weisberg merited the same treatment as any other citizen, and if he had been denied equal treatment, I was anxious to help him if I could. So I read

