

May 30, 1971

Mr. John Leonard
Editor, Sunday Book Review Section
The New York Times
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Leonard:

When newspapers become adjuncts of and spokesmen for government in a country like ours, they abdicate their responsibilities, betray the trust of their readers and, in the genuine meaning, are truly subversive. In countries we consider authoritarian, the people know the press is controlled by and speaks for the government. In ours, the opposite is assumed.

It is not alone by their behavior prior to the Bay of Pigs, when The New York Times and The Washington Post yielded to federal importuning and were silent, knowing an enormous breach of international law impended - one that could have triggered World War III - that these two papers have been and are adjuncts of government. In reporting of and in reviews of books on - and outright suppression about - political assassinations, particularly my work, which happens to have been first, most numerous and most extensive, they serve the same function.

My FRAME-UP is the only book critical of and destructive to the official mythology about the Martin Luther King assassination. When you assigned it for review, you had, on the staff of the Times alone, a number of qualified experts, including the man who reported the Memphis mimicry of justice. These did not satisfy you. Instead, you reached across the country for a violent partisan, a man so unmanly he failed to respond to my challenge over his earlier venting of personal spleen and blind bias, a man more completely disqualified than almost any you could have selected for what it is now clear ~~was~~ the Times' intent to destroy my book and damage me.

Ramsay Clark was Attorney General during the entire period covered by FRAME-UP. The official misdeeds therein exposed, culminating in my successful lawsuit against the Department of Justice under the "Freedom of Information" law (not "news fit to print" to The New York Times), are those of the Criminal Division. So, you select Joan Kaplan, describing him as a professor of law, and hide from your readers the irreconcilable conflicts with which he is saddled.

He was law clerk to Justice Tom Clark, Ramsey's father. He was in this Criminal Division. He has been an uncritical partisan of the Warren Commission, is critical, without knowledge or basis in fact,

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of those who wrote the Commission did less than society had a right to expect of it. And on blacks, he serves as an official propagandist, recently having done a pseudoscholarly analysis of the Angela Davis case for the USIA. This is official propaganda, access to which is denied only to the people of the United States.

All these things you hid from your readers and more. When you, personally, wrote a review of Jim Garrison's "Heritage of Stone," the editors of the Times excised the concluding and only favorable paragraphs from editions following the first on the basis you prove spurious with me, that the Times does not permit "editorializing" in book reviews. There has never been any other kind anywhere about any of my books.

It is not unfair to say you disguised these things, for if you were in any way innocent on assignment of this "review" (to call Kaplan's personal indulgences which disclose nothing of the contents of the only book on this subject a "review" is to speak of love as does a whore), you knew them immediately on publication. I then wrote you of them in length and in detail. When you were telephoned by an incredulous reader who had read FRAME-UP before you published USIA's Kaplan, you agonized aloud to him, claiming innocence and saying you were troubled, having just received and read my letter. You had to do something, you said, protesting your own purity of soul and intellect. You even solicited from him a letter to help rectify this shameful thing that had been done in your name in what you edit. His is not the only such letter of which I have been informed.

Having all of these facts, and having assuaged your grief and alleged your personal chastity, instead of rectification, you today publish what can, with kindness, be described as malicious falsehood by Geoffrey Wolff, a man I once respected for his honesty and for this reason sheltered in the footnote of which he wrote you. That reads, in full:

I know that its [The Washington Post's] book reviewer was ordered not to review Whitewash after he had read it and decided on a favorable review.

Neither here nor anywhere did I identify Wolff. It is he who exposes his professional nakedness in your today's newest defamation. Now he can open it with a defense of Kaplan's blatant dishonesties and propaganda after reading FRAME-UP, which he has, although his letter does not so state, I leave to nocturnal confrontations with conscience which, if they are not spontaneous, I recommend to and wish for him.

He lies about the four "falsehoods" he attributes to me:

- (1) I did not decide on a "favorable review" of "Whitewash,"
- (2) I did not plan any review of "Whitewash" because (3) I never read more than a few pages of the thing. Thus, (4) I was never "ordered not to review it." (Non sequitur in original.)

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It happens, although Wolff had no way of knowing it, that I planned a book on the non-publishability of serious criticism of the official fiction about the John Kennedy assassination, with the title, "Dick Daring in the Hellbox, or How I Got Rich in Six Months." To this end, I kept detailed notes and copies of all letters. Aside from the fact that all are dated, the typewriter I used, long since retired, and the unusual paper, further time these notes and letters beyond any possibility of serious questioning. They are contemporaneous.

Beginning before the May 9, 1966, general appearance of WHITEWASH as what I believe was the original underground book (it was published in limited edition the previous August and had been completed in mid-February 1965), I had a long series of negotiations and ultimately an arrangement with The Washington Post, all included in these letters and notes. This is what is produced by hasty consultation with a file-drawer full of material for "Dick Daring." I have no doubt that closer examination will produce more, particularly as it relates to the Times and its review policy. (For example, the Times wrote me that so it a private printing has no official existence. "if your files will not yield that letter, mine will.")

One of my proposals to the Post which was then being considered was serialization of WHITEWASH. On the afternoon of May 9, I left four copies there, in addition to the earlier copies of the manuscript, one to the then national editor and one to a reporter also assigned to read it. Of these four, one was for Wolff, to whom I had spoken earlier. In that conversation I had expressed misgivings about the lack of independent and professional editing and apprehensions because what I published myself was the retyped first draft.

The last of my nine pages of notes for the period ending 5/15/66 discloses I made two visits to Wolff's office the Friday morning of that period. On the first, he was not in. On the second, "it developed he had no copy of the book but had just been told about it by Bradlee." (Ben Bradlee, then as now an executive.) He'll do a review if the Post doesn't syndicate, for they never review books they syndicate."

So, there is a single truth in Wolff's malice. I did "hand-deliver" a copy to him when someone at the Post did not give him the copy I had left for him. (This is not exceptional. It was not until the 14th copy that I asked the Times to pay for any.) But with this clear recollection of a minor incident, is it not odd that, on all major points, Wolff's recall is so wrong?

My notes dated 5/24/66 include this:

Bumped into Wolff 23 a.m. He has read the book, impressed, interested, and "much better written than you had led me to believe."

There is subconscious confession of guilt in Wolff's letter, as in "I decided, in agreement with my editors, to leave the consideration

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of books about the Kennedy assassination to reviewers better qualified to judge their merits. I disqualified myself ..."

It was not this way and, fortunately, I wrote Wolff on this August 28, 1966, original carbon enclosed for your assurance.

Book reviews are assigned, where the editor deems necessary, to "experts." It was Wolff's function to decide whether WHITENASH should be reviewed and then to assign the review. Most cannot be done by the book-review editor. Customarily, staffers are among the first considered. So, it is no answer to say "I decided ... to leave the consideration of" such books to "experts." And more, at that time, there was but one, mine.

Wolff, personally, was my source on his being directed not to review. The footnote to which he objects is completely accurate, merely a contraction. What Wolff told me is not that unnamed "editors," but THE editor, then J. Russell Wiggins, gave Wolff this cop-out in directing him to review no books critical of the Warren Report. (This, of course, did not preclude later review or serialization of sycophantic work, to which different concepts and standards were applied.) Wolff agonized in telling me this; and, in his seemingly genuine unhappiness at having to retain professional integrity under these circumstances and his decency in telling me at all, I formed the apparently false impression of him as a man that led to my not identifying him in that footnote.

If you for one minute doubt anything I tell you, you are welcome to access to this entire file. It contains much more than I can indicate in a letter, including the acid test to which the Post subjected the book, with my assent, giving a copy to the Department of Justice for response. Official evasiveness and non-responsiveness was then decisive in turning on the Post - or one faction - for a short period.

Here I think it sufficient to quote a single sentence from my unanswered August 28, 1966, letter to Wolff:

When I spoke to you a month ago and you told me the policy was to review none of the books, I told you this meant you would review all but mine through BOOK WEEK.

My forecast was precisely accurate. That letter coincided with review of the third of these books, the second so reviewed.

Were I in error - which I am not, not in any detail, no matter how slight - the fault would still be Wolff's, for he never responded to this letter. His own integrity demanded response if this sentence alone is in any way misrepresentative.

Coming on top of Kaplan's wretched debasement of the intellect, his defense of the FBI and the total collapse of all the protective institutions of society, fobbed off as a "review" on your readers, plus other undenied libels I do not here repeat but offer you should you desire them, I submit Wolff's new libels are malicious. This is

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particularly true when, from what was in your possession showing Kaplan's complicating connections and the nature of his writing, you select libel alone for publication and suppress relevant fact.

Let us return to Kaplan for a moment for, as I said, I did and do keep files. His partisanship was first displayed in "The Trial of Jack Ruby," in which he laments the failure of the adversary system only to criticize me for documenting it. (You might read with interest the Times' news story upon its appearance for it is pertinent.) As it cites the alleged evidence and conclusions of the Warren Commission, Kaplan's book, in words I did not then use, is loaded with permeating error on the most basic and uncontested fact. After reading only the prologue and discovering this, in an effort to be helpful to Macmillan and the authors, on December 4, 1965, I wrote Executive Editor Peter V. Ritner, citing some of these errors. I also said, "I shall keep a record of any additional errors I might find in the body of the book until I hear from you or the authors."

There were such errors. I did make extensive notes I still have. I did and do regard a book showing Jack Ruby did not get justice as important. When there is denial of justice to one, it is denied all, the doctrine of my own writing that Kaplan now abuses.

Wolff-like, Kaplan did not respond. That he reserved for what has become his method, the knife in the back, then exemplified in the Spring 1967 issue of "The American Scholar." Then as now, accuracy and Kaplan are strangers.

However, with his unique "qualifications" for reviewing my documented and unrefuted criticism of the Department of Justice and the FBI, intimate associations with both, one of my 1965 comments on Kaplan's writing is today timely. It "prettied up" the police. If consistency in this regard is a virtue, it is Kaplan's single virtue.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of all of this is the designed and repeated abuse of me by the Times for doing precisely what it called for in its excellent March 11, 1969, editorial. This was the day after Ray was salted away for the rest of his life by the invidious deal through which any trial was avoided.

Under the title, "Tongue-Tied Justice," you will find these among many pertinent comments and opinions (copy marked and enclosed):

... shocking breach of faith with the American people,
black and white ...

... by no means, legal or pragmatic, should the doors of
the courtroom and the jail be slammed shut on the facts

Nothing but outrage and suspicion can follow the handling
of this long-delayed and instantly snuffed-out trial ...
Why should this assassination case be tried by statements
instead of formal legal procedures, subject to examination
and cross-examination, the presentation of all the evi-
dence ...?

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... the question still cries for answer: Was there a conspiracy...? /You now like it when Wolff jokes about "conspiracy-hobbyists."/

The state's case ... is hardly enough in a case of this magnitude ... a racist or quasi-political assassination. No one was demanding blood; everyone is demanding facts. /Of William Bradford Huie/ What a mockery of justice for the facts to emerge in marketed justice!

The Times wailed in agony in the moment of passion, but its tears dried overnight. Now that I have done that which it should have, that for which it called so eloquently, first it hires a hack to chop me and kill the book - the only such book - then stabs me with Wolff's shiv.

I do not have Wolff's address. I ask that you send him a copy of this letter and the one I wrote him and solicit his defense or a retraction and apology. His (at least subconscious) awareness of his guilt in this entire self-defaming affair is disclosed in his final words, "My editors were as pleased to slip me off the hook as I was pleased to be off it," "Off the hook?" Can it be that there is any book that cannot be adequately and honestly reviewed? How could this have been done by the syndicated reviews the Post bought and not by it, through Book-Editor Wolff or any surrogate "expert?"

From "slipping" off his own "hook," Wolff has progressed to hoisting on his own petard, taking you and the Times up with him.

Collectively, you, he and Kaplan have engaged in "a shocking breach of faith with the American people." No doors ought be "slammed shut on the facts, the motives and the doubts of this horrible murder" (to which you add the attempted assassination of the only book doing what the Times demanded). "Nothing but outrage and suspicion can follow the handling" you gave this book and me. "The question still cries out for answer."

I am not "demanding blood; everyone is demanding facts. Are we going to get the facts" from you three horsemen, the Times, Kaplan and Wolff?

You see, another part of that vast Times bureaucracy asked it all for me, as it charged me as a writer with the obligations it abdicated.

If your personal integrity can survive a record like this, can a free society, any kind of genuinely free press? Dare other writers or publishers attempt what I felt it incumbent upon me to do when they can anticipate your literary assassination?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Enclosures