

Mr. Geoffrey Wolff
El Jardin
Mijas (Malaga)
España

August 30, 1971

Dear Mr. Wolff:

Thank you for your prompt reply to my letter of August 13. I was aware that you were in Europe, and quite frankly, I was surprised to receive a reply so quickly.

I would like to address myself first to the authenticity of Mr. Weisberg's notes. I am convinced that they are authentic for two reasons. They are typed on scrap paper bearing Mr. Weisberg's Hyattstown telephone number, and he has lived in Frederick for over two years. They are part of a large series of notes covering a considerable period of time. None of those notes are typed on the typewriter Mr. Weisberg now uses. Secondly, I was in touch with Mr. Weisberg from the time Mr. Kaplan's review appeared, and I had also had discussions with John Leonard. Mr. Leonard expressed shock to me upon learning of the huge conflicts which saddled Mr. Kaplan. He had assured me that this would be rectified in the letters column. I first saw the May 30 Book review on May 28, and immediately upon arriving home that evening I phoned Mr. Weisberg. He too had just arrived home, and while I was speaking to him, a young college student who was visiting Mr. Weisberg went through his files and pulled out the notes and the carbons of the August 28, 1966 letter. Both were in separate files. While this does not attest to their accuracy, it does, in my opinion, attest to their authenticity.

I am sorry, Mr. Wolff, but there are still a number of points which I feel are inconsistent. I will try to enumerate them as concisely as possible:

1) Regardless of the discrepancies between what you and Mr. Weisberg contend transpired, it seems evident that Mr. Weisberg did, in fact, deliver "Whitewash" to you on May 14, 1966. Both of you agree that you told Mr. Weisberg that you would review no books on the Kennedy assassination, however the timing of the other books and Mr. Weisberg's letter to you would place that conversation some time during July of 1966 — approximately two months later. Thus you apparently met three times — on May 14, 1966; on May 23, 1966; and in July when you told Mr. Weisberg there would be no review. In your letter to the Times you say, "It is tiresome to have to remind Mr. Weisberg in print of what I told him in person — when he hand-delivered "Whitewash" to my office..." Whatever you told Mr. Weisberg, I think that you must agree that you did not say it until considerably after he delivered "Whitewash" to you.

2) No matter how many times I read your letter, one underlying fact remains evident. There was a policy decision against books critical of the Warren Commission. You say that you felt unqualified to review them. You also, apparently, made no effort to assign them — any of them. This, Mr. Wolff, amounts to a policy decision regardless of what the motives were. You say in your letter to the Times that "There were many commentators willing and able to attend such books — either in the Post's daily columns (emphasis added) or in its Sunday book supplement. My editors were as pleased to slip me off the hook

as I was pleased to be off it." Mr. Wolff, you ask me to use simple common sense. Believe me, that is what I am trying to do. Why was there any need to consult with your editors at all? Wasn't it your prerogative to review or not to review, to assign or not to assign any book you saw fit?

Richard Harwood, in an article in the Washington Post of July 27, 1971 as much as stated that editorial policy in 'coverage' of the news was strictly consistent with national policy at the Washington Post well into the 60's. The article, entitled "The News Business - Have Newspapers Muffed the Job of Informing On Vietnam?" said in part that "the Times and the Washington Post continued into the 1960's to accept the assumptions of the previous decade." on Vietnam, "it was only after a change in editors in late 1968 that doubts about those assumptions began to be expressed..." That editor was J. Russell Wiggins.

3) I am also puzzled by your statement that you felt unqualified to review books dealing with the Warren Commission because you were not a lawyer. Surely reviewers are often faced with the problem of reviewing books dealing with subjects about which they are unfamiliar. If reviewers as a matter of policy disqualified themselves in all such cases few books would ever be reviewed, for few non-fiction books reflect subjects about which their authors do not hold significant expertise over and above that of the layman. Moreover, you did review Robert Blair Kaiser's "RFK Must Die" last year. If you applied the same standards to that book you should not have reviewed it, as you are not a psychiatrist, and you are still not a lawyer.

No one is suggesting that there was a conspiracy at the Washington Post to ignore Mr. Weisberg's book. "Whitewash" preceded the publication of "Inquest" and "Rush to Judgement" by several months. It faced many problems which the later books did not face. The subject was for many a distasteful one, and "Whitewash" was the book which more or less had to break the ice. Weisberg, as you note, was his own publisher. "Whitewash" did not have the benefit of an introduction by Richard H. Rovere or Hugh Trevor-Roper. There was no question that Book Week would review "Inquest" and "Rush to Judgement" for both were backed by established publishers and large advertising budgets. Thus it was not unreasonable for Mr. Weisberg to conclude that if his book was not reviewed in the daily book column the result would be that the Washington Post "would review all but mine, through BOOK WEEK."

I am quite willing to believe that you never read more than a few pages of "Whitewash." I also believe that you treated Mr. Weisberg "fairly," "justly," and "with good manners." It also seems apparent that you told him that you were reviewing no books about the assassination, and that you did not single him out. Isn't it possible, Mr. Wolff, that in articulating that universal policy to Mr. Weisberg you may have tried to pacify him by saying something that might have led him to believe that based upon your lay understanding you had found "Whitewash" interesting and impressive? Isn't it possible that based upon those few pages you made the courteous remark that it "was much better written than you had led me to believe?" You do not seem to be an inconsiderate person or an impolite one. I would suggest that you have often made conciliatory statements to authors — if only on impulse — in an effort not to overly disappoint them.

Mr. Wolff, I am not accusing you of being a liar. I bear no malice of any sort toward you. The story you tell is essentially the same as the one Mr. Weisberg tells. The only real question is who decided that no books on the Warren Report would be reviewed. I do suggest that that letter to the Times was written in the heat of the moment, and

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the facts, to say the least, are subject to interpretation.

On the matter of "Frame-Up," I apologize if I gave you the impression that Mr. Weisberg had told me that you had had any contact with him with regards to a Newsweek review. I based that statement in my letter on a letter from Harris Dienstfrey to Mr. Weisberg dated May 27, 1971. It includes the following statement: "One thing that has happened is that Geoffrey Wolff, who was considering reviewing the book, considers your reference to him (in regard to reviewing Whitewash) completely incorrect, and he tells me that its appearance in Kaplan's review has seriously embarrassed him. He has written a letter to the book review section, presenting his view of the facts. I haven't seen the letter. In any case, Geoffrey will not now re-view the book."

I do not share your evaluation of "Frame-Up." I have read many books that were far better written. I have read many books that were better organized. I have rarely read a book that so well succeeded in documenting its thesis. If it reads poorly, that is the fault of the publisher as much as it is the fault of the author, for one of the functions of a publisher is to edit the manuscript. In any case, the value of "Frame-Up" is not in its use of similes or adjectives, but in the sensational nature of its revelations. Were you really unimpressed by Mr. Foreman's written bribes of James Earl Ray? Were you not given pause by the Frazier affidavit stating that the "submitted bullet" could not be connected with the "submitted rifle?" Doesn't it disturb you at all that Ray left no fingerprints in places where he had to if he had been the assassin, or that the evidence leads to the inescapable conclusion that the conspicuous bundle containing Ray's rifle and other belongings was planted? John Kaplan was the last man in the world who the Times should have chosen to review this book with the possible exception of Percy Foreman himself. His selection was consistent with a long standing Times policy of assigning biased reviewers to authors putting forth conspiracy theories. Your letter gave the Times a golden opportunity to further discredit the book. You are distressed that the Times gave you no "prior chance to deny" that footnote. Are you equally distressed that the Times gave Mr. Weisberg no prior chance to deny your letter? Perhaps Mr. Weisberg would have shown better judgement by excluding that footnote (which, by the way, identified no one by name) from his book. Surely he could not have known that it would appear in the New York Times. But regardless of whether it was good or bad judgement, I submit that your letter did Mr. Weisberg far more damage than his footnote could ever have done you. That footnote was not an attack on you or the Washington Post, but rather it was intended as an example of reluctance on the part of the media to face vital questions that threaten to undermine the entire structure of our society.

You say "there are no conspiracies" in your profession. You know as well as I do that there are. This very subject was the object of a Page One story in no less a distinguished paper than the Wall Street Journal on June 9, 1971. It was entitled "How Book Reviews Make or Break Books - Or Have No Impact - Feuds, Intrigue and Inveigling Abound in an Unusual Field."


Specifically let me tell you something of Times tradition in the area of conspiracy literature. The Times' "resident" reviewer of books critical of the Warren Commission was Fred Graham, New York Times correspondent to the Supreme Court and outspoken admirer of Earl

Warren. He reviewed "Inquest," "Rush to Judgement," "Whitewash," "Accessories After the Fact," and "Six Seconds In Dallas." Perhaps there were a few more that he reviewed, but my memory fails me at the moment. Mr. Graham either began or ended each review by reiterating his continued faith in the Warren Commission and deprecating yet another conspiracy theorist. "RFK Must Die" was reviewed by Dr. Thomas Szasz. Dr. Szasz devoted about two paragraphs to the book, and the rest of his lengthy review was devoted to his own theories dealing with psychiatry in the courtroom. In those two paragraphs he completely misrepresented Kaiser's premise, stating that "Kaiser uncritically accepts Diamond's theory of the assassination: [... that Sirhan had - by his automatic writing - programmed himself exactly like a computer is programmed by its magnetic tape... for the coming assassination." Szasz attributes to Kaiser the belief that Sirhan killed Robert Kennedy to become an Arab hero. As you may recall, Kaiser disagreed quite strongly with Dr. Diamond. It was his belief that others had programmed Sirhan and that Sirhan had invented the Arab hero motive. From reading the review one would never know that Kaiser entertained the slightest thought that there had been a conspiracy. It develops that Dr. Szasz has written often and critically of Dr. Bernard S. Diamond over a long career. In Kaiser's words, "Dr. Diamond is the only hero in my book." On December 1, 1970 John Leonard (then a daily reviewer) reviewed Jim Garrison's "Heritage of Stone." The review in the early edition was entitled "Who Killed John F. Kennedy?" Mr. Leonard concluded the review with thirty lines of disturbing questions about the Warren Report which Mr. Garrison had brought up, and which made Mr. Leonard believe that " something stinks about this whole affair." In all later editions that review was entitled "The Shaw-Garrison Affair," and the last thirty lines had disappeared. Mr. Kaplan's qualifications include four years with the Justice Department and a stint in 1967 as a professional defender of the Warren Report against its "revisionist" critics as he called them in an article in the Spring '67 American Scholar. His latest piece of writing before reviewing "Frame-Up" was a 2500 word essay for the United States Information Agency for distribution abroad. Its title was "The Case of Angela Davis - The Processes of American Justice." It may interest you to know that the Times printed Mr. Weisberg's letter dated May 1, 1971 yesterday - 22 weeks after the appearance of Kaplan's review and 18 weeks after the appearance of your letter. No conspiracies, Mr. Wolff?

I bear no malice toward you, as I said before. And my article will probably refer to your letter only insofar as the Times printed it without soliciting reply. As you can see my primary dispute is with the Times. I have taken considerable time with this letter, as you did with yours, because I am concerned as I believe you are. I do hope that I will hear from you further, particularly with respect to the points I raised earlier.

Mr. Weisberg sent John Leonard an original carbon of his August 28, 1966 letter to you with the request that Leonard forward a copy to you for comment and return the original. The original was never returned, and I suspect a copy was never sent you. I also have an original carbon of that letter, and I enclose a copy of it.

I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

 Gerald Policoff