

Rt. 12, Frederick, Md. 21701  
6/9/77

Rep. Yvonne Burke  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mrs. Burke,

I appreciate the personal time you took to phone and assure me that you had not spoken of me in an unladylike manner. You could have had a staffer write a letter and in that have had to take no time from your own busy life.

My wife is a woman who even in anger never employs such words. But long before you were born it was not uncommon usage among college girls, including some who increased my vocabulary.

Your emotion was clear when you phoned and I did want to hear all you said. I started to tell you something I did not finish. This letter requires no response but I would like you to understand why I phoned George Lardner when I learned about the flap over Hall and Kevin. If it had been possible I would have phoned other reporters.

My first book was the first book on the Warren Commission. It went unmentioned in all major papers none of which even reviewed it. When my book on the King assassination was published it was the only book not in accord with the official account of that crime. Then the New York Times did assign a review. Perhaps hatchet-job would be closer. It engaged a partisan who was simultaneously engaged in anti-Angela Davis work for a federal agency. I have held press conferences to give away secret government records I had obtained only at great cost and effort only to have scandalous official misconduct remain unreported save in the minor press. In short, there is no single element of the major media that cares about me or my work and I have known it for more than a dozen years.

Separate from this are friendly relationships with individual reporters and relationships that are not of friendship but of mutual respect. Reporters who do not agree with me - and do argue with me - seek me out as a source because over the years they know they can depend on my word.

For good or ill the press is an essential in our society, as I see it. Whether or not it reports what I want reported, whether or not from reporters to editors there is disagreement with me. I owe an obligation I do meet to the degree I can, to respond when I am asked questions. Believe what you will but I do not believe you will find another certified to a federal court by the Department of Justice as knowing more about the JFK assassination and the official investigation of it than anyone in the FBI today. My work on the King assassination has withstood strong and long examination in court without any successful questioning of any of it. When I am possessed of this kind of knowledge I do feel an obligation to inform if I am asked.

On the other hand, despite strong disagreements with your committee I have not once held a press conference to denounce those I believe abused me. I have not written a single article about it. I have made no request for fairness-doctrine time even when without even a thin cover Mr. Fauntroy said the source of newspaper stories ought be investigated, an infamy and a personal one after I was quoted by name. The defamation of me, personally and preserved into perpetuity in your question for continuance, is false, despicable and on the part of Mr. Snyder and those associated in it with him a self-defamation. It is false and to any but the witless on the face it is entirely unreasonable. I did write Mr. Snyder. Unlike you he has remained silent. Your committee, however, foolishly went ape and will be as silent as it can be over its immaturity and silliness. The Baird story to me of 1975

is not at all the rubbish on which you wasted precious tax money and sacred committee responsibility. If I had held a press conference and distributed copies of the Baird letter and then explained it from my own work and knowledge I could have received much personal attention, perhaps sold some book and done the prospects of your extension no good. I have no such interest. I want to spend what time I have doing my own work now that I have no reason to believe your committee eliminates that need.

From my personal experience probably before you were born I am well aware that Members can become the creatures of their staffs. My view on this has not changed. If you doubt this ask a member of your staff to read my very first writing on political assassinations, the Introduction to my first book, Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report. In this I am also saying that I know there is a limit to what any Member can know from personal knowledge, especially a busy Member who is on a committee with a broad mandate and with a large staff.

But this does not mean that Members ought not be expected to meet the obligations they assume by seeking what knowledge they may obtain from all sources. If any Member of your committee, including you, has done this I have knowledge of no single instance of it.

In your complaint about the reporting of your committee whether or you are aware of it you did not allege a single error of fact. In your personal interest and in that of your committee I do urge you to consider the vast difference between what you do not like and what is not factual. I assure you that the criticisms I have read are understated. If you doubt me I then urge you to satisfy yourself. I have read your reports and your published executive sessions and the one released by accident. You might find illuminating what the realities are. I guarantee you they are other than you and the other Members were told. And I assure you I will prove it to you if you so desire. Despite my age and impaired health I am satisfied I can do this off the top of the head without notes or any other kind of preparation. In about 10 days I will be in Los Angeles, if you are there and have more time there than in Washington. Art Kevin will know how to reach me.

Those of us who have occasion to speak extemporaneously and about the controversial are not always aware of what we say. We may say - and I have learned that I have said - what we think we did not, even what ordinarily we would not. When the blood courses and the time pressures build the risk of this is greater. I cite you a recent example of your own words as I was questioned about them by an eastern reporter.

On a broadcast you said what increased my respect for you, that there was too much of the prosecutorial mind on the committee staff. That this is painfully obvious is not the point. That you had the integrity to state it is. It impressed me. But the next thing I know a reporter (not George Lardner) phoned to ask me if I knew of any such statement from you because you had told him you'd never said any such thing.

I am not calling you a liar. Rather am I saying that you as well as I can be the victim of the instant media and the unexpected demand.

My belief is that this also explains your contradiction of Art Kevin, who I know to be other than your enemy. Whenever in the past he has had occasion to mention you to me it has always been in terms favorable to you. I think the blood rushes, the mind blanks and we have no recall. It will satisfy me amply to believe you had no intention of making the insulting reference. This will make irrelevant ~~whether~~ whether or not you uttered it.

As I do not call you a liar I also assure you that from long association that includes some trying situations I have never known Art to lie, or exaggerate or to distort just to make a story. Whatever the realities may be you do him an injustice if you for a minute believe he intended doing you personally any harm or in any way being unjust. I can give you a personal explanation from a different personal involvement.

There are members of your staff I believe will be honest with you if you ask them and protect them against retaliation. Donovan Gay knew me and my files from his time with the Abzug subcommittee. He was present when at Dick Sprague's request I spent the morning of about October 20 with Dick and others, including Ken Brooten. I spent the afternoon in what was then Donovan's office with him there much of the time, Ozer part of the time and I think Jeremy Akers about as much as Donovan.

Ozer behaved in a manner that impelled Donovan to apologize. Nonetheless I agreed for Donovan to come here with a xerox machine and take what he wanted. Jeremy will tell you, I am sure, that when he came here a couple of days later that he left with only a box full of records of which I had no duplicates is only because he did not want to take more. I have never asked Donovan why I have not heard from him since. If you want to know perhaps you might ask him.

Your committee released a transcript that includes representations about the King case made by Ozer. I tell you he deceived and misled you - and that when you restricted yourselves to your unknown staff you jeopardized yourselves.

I also tell you that despite serious questions about your first two chairmen and Dick Sprague I could not have been more helpful or more forthright than I tried to be. This is also to say that I did not begin opposed to your committee as I now am.

With these experiences and others when Art was confronted with what I would like you to believe is an extraordinarily difficult situation for a reporter and he sought my advice I told him not to risk taking the word of any member of your staff without some reason for trust.

My own reporting experiences began in the late 1920s. I assure you that what your people asked of Art confronted him with questions of such a nature that very few reporters would have tried to work out what could be withing accepted ethics of the profession. Ask seasoned reporters you probably know.

My suspicion on this is that there is also a bit of sexism, an effort to shift the onus onto Ms Hess, who can quite honestly tell you what she did. No reporter would have sought to make any arrangement with a researcher.

Especially with the electronic media there is a limit to what could be used on or about the staff interview with Hall. My own journalistic experience, which includes radio, tells me that it could not have been much more than what others who write and are in constant touch with your staff would have exceeded, the reporting of the fact of the interview. No secrets. Not that Hall can say anything Art did not already know.

Your spooks are not levelling with you. They were so paranoid they refused to meet in the best available space, a large studio, because there were visible microphones in it. Can you believe a station would jeopardize its license with an overtly illegal act?

In your own area a reporter named Farr has suffered greatly to be true to his calling. There is no good reporter I know of whom this is not true. I am showing you here the other side. There is virtually nothing on which Hall and I agree politically and each of us knows it. There is not much more on which George Gardner does not disagree with me. But we have known each other in our disagreements, less than 100% disagreements, for more than a decade and I know him to adhere to traditional ethical concepts. So when he came up to me after your hearing day before yesterday I asked him if he'd like to meet Hall, off the record. He said he would. When Hall, who I had not seen in nine years, came for me for us to go off and spend some time together - his idea - I asked him if Gardner could go along on Hall's terms. He agreed. If I had seen any other reporters I knew I would have made the same suggestion. Now look at Gardner's story and see if you find any reference to this. Not that it was all off the record, either.

There just is no possibility that it was any other way with Devin. There is a very strong possibility that the paranoia that has characterized your staff work and has been what can become an enormous political liability to the Members went wild.

Members do become the creatures of their staffs. But it is the Members, not the staffs, who run for re-election.

Thanks to the departed Sprague you do have, as you said, whether or not you remember it, a disproportionate weight of people whose minds are conditioned by careers of prosecuting, a career in which the quest for truth and fact is not the assurance of success. This is probably part of the problem the Members appear unable to comprehend or unwilling to face.

In the time I have taken to try to inform you there is, as I think you can see, no possibility of any benefit for me. If you consider what I am trying to tell you it is not impossible that there may be some benefit for you.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg