Mr. Harold Evans, President and Publisher
Random House Trade Group
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Harold Weisberg
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10/25/96

Dear Mr. Evans,

In your Publisher's Letter in the No. 15 issue of At Random, for the fall of 1996, you state that "It was Posner who single-handedly and single-mindedly in 1993 finally put to rest all the conspiracy theories in the killing of President Kennedy in his incisive book Case Closed."

This statement is in such sharp conflict with the Random House Trade Group's publishing record I am impelled, if only to make a record for history, to write you about it.

(Please excuse my typing. I'm 83, in impaired health, and my typing cannot be any better.)

Knopf is now part of the Random House publishing empire. The year after Posner's book it published the former Random House editor Mark Riebling's Wedge. His assassination theory is in both the title and the subtitle, which is The Secret War Between the FBI and CIA. As Riebling tells the story of his assassination theory, it is his imagined war between the FBI and the CIA that is directly responsible for the assassination. That is what is praised to refer to it as a theory is Riebling's imagined wedge that the FBI drove between it and the CIA. It is as a result of that imagined wedge in the Riebling mythology that JFK was killed.

That you as president and publisher of the Random House Trade Group did not have competent (if any) peer reviews of the assassination books you published is what made their publication possible. Not one could gain informed peer approval.

Take Riebling. Whose scholarship is such he had to invent an entirely new system for identifying the sources on which he drew, their standard and well-known identifications not satisfying him. There was no such wedge other than in his mind and perhaps the minds of those who used him for their own ends. There was the most dangerous, really rabid political insanity in the CIA's Mexico City station that the FBI not only did not agree with but forced the CIA to establish that it was false. Without that World War III was a distinct possibility.

Either Riebling's scholarship did not include those public records or he found they'd have made his book impossible so he ignored them. They were public beginning before the assassination bug bit him.

When the next year you had that bomb of publishing bombs, Norman Mailer's mistitled Oswald's Tale. As Mailer tells it at great and boring length it is really Oswald Stale. And the appropriate title would be Mailer's Tales, with the subtitle Of the JFK Assassination.

If Posner had "finally put to rest all the conspiracy theories" of the assassination, what in the world did you publish this disaster in publishing for? And why did your wife who edits The New Yorker devote so large a part of an issue to it? This does not seem to indicate that you or your wife considered it all "put to rest."

Or can it be that you were suckered as Mailer and his Svengali Larry Schiller were suckered by the KGB? Or is it that they suckered themselves in expecting ~~the~~ from the KGB what it did not have and could not give them? Again, all those theories were not "put to rest" two years before you published the Mailer mishmash.

There is the possibility, of course, that you were much taken by Mailer's mind-reading from the grave after 30 years. But apparently the reading public wasn't.

Two books following Posner's "finally putting to rest all the conspiracy theories on the killing of President Kennedy" were not enough for you. There is also Max Holland's announced history of the Warren Commission to be published by your Basic Books, according to the note at the end of the lengthy Holland shortened version of that coming book in the November American Heritage of last year.

Holland's is one of the more imaginative, if less comprehensible, theories not put to rest. As it is expressed in large type on that magazine's cover all of which is devoted to it, his theory is "about the Kennedy Assassination" and is about "Why the Warren Report was wrong - and right."

If this seems to suggest that it was because the Warren Report was wrong it was right, that is what Holland says. Literally, being wrong made it right. As theories go that is a lollapalooza.

I doubt it would interest Holland, after reading what he has to say in his magazine anticipation of his book, but according to not fewer than two members of the Warren Commission its Report was wrong and they refused to agree with its most basic conclusion. In fact at least two of these members, with a third possible, went to their graves insisting that the most basic conclusion of that Report is wrong and they never agreed with it and never would.

I have this documented if Holland wants to use it in his book. There is hardly a more authoritative expert on the Commission's work than its members and the most conservative of them, Senator Richard B. Russell, and next to Warren the most liberal of them, Republican Senator John Sherman Cooper, refused to agree to the single-bullet theory. They also believed, in the words Russell used in telling

me about it, that the federal agencies had not told them all they knew about Oswald. That was in 1968. Since 1992, under compulsion of the law, more than a quarter of a million pages of Oswald CIA records have been disclosed and that is far from all of them.

Russell forced an executive session after the Report was in page proof to record his refusal to agree with that single-bullet theory. (That is the one where your prize package Posner plagiarized part of a propaganda presentation and used it as work done for him.) In what I think- and surely do hope- is without precedent in our history that session was memory-holed. Yes, I have the official proof of that, too, if it interests your Holland theorizer. I also have Russell's copy of his remarks prepared for and delivered at that executive session. That is not theory but maybe Holland can accept it as theory and thus find some use for it.

It is apparent that you will not publish anything factual about the assassination so maybe you will not even refer this offer to Holland. Posner, who spent three days here with his wife, will tell him, if Holland does not recall from his projected book on Commission Member John McCloy (with Kai Bird) that I make all the records obtained by more than a dozen FOIA lawsuits freely available to all writing in the field. Posner states this on page 504.

One would never guess from your version of it that Posner's book is based on theories, including several that he cribbed, including even from a child.

This and what else I wrote about Posner in Case Open may not be known to you but it is to your Bob Loomis and your legal people. I have word from inside Random House that when Case Open appeared Loomis prowled yuur offices clutching a copy and muttering, "Gotta find a way to sue that old son-of-a-bitch." Your legal people could not say a word about it when confronted with it in a lawsuit other that that I was as they put it disgruntled. Posner also could say little but in that little he confirmed what I'd written about him, that he had trouble telling the truth even by accident. He ignored my referring to him as a plagiarist and as a shyster but he did leave it without question that he has trouble telling the truth even by accident. In his few words for the reprint he said that with Case Open I'd gotten my first commercial publication. No more about all else I'd written about him. And it was my 13th commercial book publication. Other than books it was before Posner's parents were born that I was first published commercially.

No point in taking any more time for Posner's theories. Loomis has enough on them, of far from all.

So it seems that whether or not single-hnadedly or single-mindedly Posner not only did not put all assassination theories to rest, he could not even persuade his publisher to do that, even though you as his publisher's president seem to think he did. Say so, anyway.

Did you read his book? Without theories he has no book at all. Other than with a few remarkable sources, like the one who did a book, with pictures, saying that nudism is communism. He also regarded the conservative Hale Boggs, a Warren Commission member, as a Communist. I have the literature he distributed saying that. And his book He is Hybie Badeau in Posner's book. as a prime source.

Some of his other sources could not even read the phone book straight. Not as he used them in any event.

It does seem odd that with your belief that Posner put an end to all assassination theories you published assassination books based on theories and not in a single instance on fact and they all support the official assassinatuon mythology. With Holland's due soon from his announcement of it and who can guess who you will have if you are making this an annual event despite what you attribute to Posner and his book.

You refer to theories about the assassination in a sense that says there is nothing else. The fact is that there is established fact. And it is official fact. The problem with this official fact, and it is the Posner as well as the official problem, is that it is contray to the official mythology.

It does seem a bit strange that after you say Posner ended all controversy about the assassination for all time you published a book a year about or supposedly about the assassination. It is less strange that each of these now annual Random House books supports that official mythology.

The history of the world you have lived through makes clear the great danger to freedom from publishers supporting officialdom regardless of how much officialdom errs or does wrong.

About this recent history is also clear in that it happens only because publishers do not care about it and regard something else as more important and that in the end publishers can be among those who suffer from it.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

IN THE ARENA

The runaway success of *Primary Colors* by now-you-know-who suggests that the popular disaffection with electoral politics may be exaggerated. Given a good plot, a snake-oil salesman who might be a saint (or vice versa), a nutcase who might be a genius (or vice versa), a wheeler dealer who *is* a wheeler dealer, and a few moral perplexities that need not even be sexual, the tent can still be packed. None of the above characterizations bears any resemblance, of course, to any person living or dead who may be taking part in the 1996 presidential election. But the plot for '96 is thickening nicely. Colin won't. Will Ross? Can Bill surf Whitewater? Will Bob miss Pat's booby traps?

This fall edition of *At Random* has a focus on presidential politics on the eve of the election that will give us a president for the twenty-first century. We have an agenda for this president, or rather twelve agendas written by twelve authors invited to identify the one thing they would do in the White House.

So much for policy. Many of us despair of the way these days it is supplanted by the sound-bite smear and the petty maneuvers so comically exposed in *Primary Colors*. Much of the tab talk about "character" is no more than prurience on stilts. It is therefore all the more surprising to find the forty-second president, something of a policy wonk himself, justifying the media's obsession with the personal lives of candidates. Jimmy Carter talks to Geoff Shandler about his new book, *Living Faith*.

Carter's moral sanction for personal inquiry would have been a comfort to Gerald Posner when his inquiry into third-party politics in 1994 turned into nothing less than a full-scale biography of Ross Perot. Ross did not like it: is that clear? Answer's quite simple: Posner must be working for one of the rascals running for office. Posner is not easily put off. It was Posner who single-handedly and single-mindedly in 1993 finally put to rest all the conspiracy theories on the killing of President Kennedy in his incisive book *Case Closed*. So he kept up his Perot inquiries, and he describes what happened in "Ross & Me" on page 34: the indefatigable in pursuit of the infallible. It is an indispensable preview of the biography *Citizen Perot*, to be published in September, when Ross, we imagine, will be running hard at the electorate—and maybe at Posner. Who knows? He found much to admire.

And then there's Monica. When I was editing *Beyond Peace*, the last book President Nixon wrote before his death, a young postgraduate student, Monica Crowley, was present at most of our meetings as researcher and policy assistant. She said little, but she took in a lot. How much became apparent only this year when, unexpectedly, Monica presented Random House with an engrossing account of her conversations with the thirty-seventh president in her four years as his professional confidante. Some of them with particular relevance to this presidential election—there's a lot about Bob and Bill—will be published in August under the title *Nixon Off the Record*. The candor and vivacity of his insights on people and politics is extraordinary. There is a question, of course, of confidentiality and trust. It is clear Nixon would never have wished these remarks published in his lifetime; but it is equally clear they are his real views and that he wanted them permanently on the record. ■

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President and Publisher, Random House Trade Group

AT RANDOM

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JON KARP'S ACCESSION

From this edition, there is a new editor of *At Random*. Random House senior editor Jon Karp, a frequent contributor, succeeds Helen Morris as editor; he will conduct the magazine with Sean Abbott, who has been managing editor. When we conceived the idea of *At Random* four years ago, Helen was crucial to the rapid establishment of the magazine and its gratifying reception. Though Helen retains an editorial connection with Random House, she is now an associate of Martin Scorsese, the film director, and we wish her well on behalf of Random House and *At Random*'s extended family of readers. H. M. E.

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Left to right: François Duhamel; Olivia Ellis; Rick Bard; Stephanie Hines

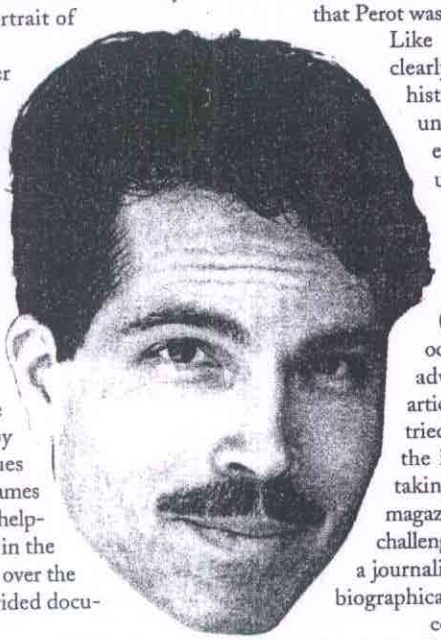
with a firm handshake and gave us a quick tour before we got to work.

The office's anteroom is dominated by four large Norman Rockwell oil paintings ("That's my life," Perot is fond of saying about the scenes portrayed). There is also a life-size oil portrait of the late Colonel Bull Simons, who led a group of Perot workers to Iran in 1978 to rescue two jailed Perot employees. Remington bronzes stand between the Rockwells.

The room that serves as Perot's private office is crammed with collectibles: three large oil portraits of his daughters, another of his wife, Margot, and more Remington bronzes. Scattered about the office are dozens of photos of Perot with his family and public officials, some awards, and an assortment of unusual items, including Winston Churchill's teapot, the pistol Colonel Simons used on his rescue mission, and a print signed for Perot by hundreds of American POWs. After the tour, Perot slipped into a leather chair behind a massive wooden desk. Directly behind him was a Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington.

The Perot we met that November was completely different from the one who had aggressively challenged me over the telephone. He was gracious to Trisha and me and was forthcoming in our discussions. No mention was made of any of our earlier, unpleasant conversations. Over lunch at Dickeys, a local barbecue joint where the meat is piled high on buffet-size platters, Perot was on his best behavior. Trisha and I spent two days interviewing him, and over the next six months I talked with him by telephone. He often researched issues himself and called me back with the names and addresses of others who might be helpful. He even tracked someone down in the south of France and had him call me over the Memorial Day weekend. Perot provided documents, including internal company books about his business practices; cables and notes from FBI officials; copies of private letters written on his behalf by government officials; interviews, conducted by one of his friends, from his own archives; and even some of his personal papers, from high school and the naval academy. He actually encouraged challenging questions. At one point, after spending considerable time on a question I had raised with him, Perot showed me the evidence he had gathered. "I can nuke the story," he boasted. It troubled me that he encouraged my pursuit of the most controversial matters, because that allowed him to gather evidence to rebut anything negative that might eventually appear in the book.

During our discussions, I discovered that Perot was a collector of information about controversies surrounding him. When we discussed whether he, as a youngster in Texarkana, had thrown newspapers from horseback and in a poor black neighborhood, Perot produced letters of apology from the "witnesses," who had told another writer that they doubted both stories. When we talked about whether the Nixon administration had sought his help in finding POWs and MIAs, he proudly showed me a letter from Alexander Haig saying just that. As to whether he had financed a soldier of fortune on private missions to rescue MIAs in Southeast Asia, Perot obtained an affidavit from the adventurer denying that he had received Perot money. Regarding a controversy over the Dallas police and his daughter-in-law, Perot brandished a written statement given to him by one of the officers involved. Again, it supported his version of events. Was he a secret client of the late New York lawyer Roy Cohn in a dispute over the design of the Vietnam War Memorial? He had another letter, this time from Cohn's partner, proclaiming that Perot was not the client.



POSNER: "He was on his best behavior."

Like many public figures, Perot is clearly concerned about his place in history. But he wants to exert an unusual degree of control over every aspect of his image. After an unauthorized biography was published in 1989, he threatened to sue, demanding that the publisher and author issue retractions about certain portions. (They refused.) On another occasion, when Perot had obtained advance copies of two magazine articles that he deemed negative, he tried to buy the print runs and have the issues republished with articles taking a more favorable tone. (The magazines involved also declined.) The challenge in writing about Perot is that if a journalist does not obtain access to the biographical information Perot himself has collected, the resulting book may be riddled with errors. On the other hand, if one persuades Perot to cooperate, one has to struggle not to be smothered by him. Keeping Perot's influence in check was essential to maintaining the integrity of *Citizen Perot*.

Now the question is how Perot will personally react to a serious biography of himself. Somehow, I believe that this man, who has a well-earned reputation for speaking his mind, will not wait long before letting me know. Phase three of my relationship with Perot has not yet started, but I have little doubt that one day this fall, that familiar Texas twang will again be on my answering machine. ♠

GERALD POSNER is also the author of *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (Random House).

Reuters/Corbis-Bettmann

Christopher Harlein