

COURT JESTER

Tricky Dick Rides Again

The Realist never labels an article as either satire or journalism, in order not to deprive you of the pleasure of discerning for yourself whether it's actually true or metaphorically true. Sometimes as editor I'm not even sure myself. When I published an article in #116 by George Andrews, his concluding question seemed far-fetched: Would Chinese political prisoners be forced to supply biological spare parts?

But now a letter in the British medical journal *Lancet* claims that kidneys from executed Chinese prisoners are being sold to transplant patients for \$17,000. Dr. Siu-keung Lam of Queen Mary's Hospital in Hong Kong wrote: "Kidneys are usually obtained from prisoners who are executed for offenses such as rape, burglary or political 'crimes' against the state. No consent for organ removal is given either by the prisoner or the family. Furthermore, the family rarely collects the body after execution for fear of harassment by government authorities."

Likewise, #117 featured an article that defies credibility—"The Role of Richard Nixon and George Bush in the Assassination of President Kennedy" by Paul Kangas (belated credit to Michael Ochs Archives for the photo of Nixon and Bush). It was read on the radio by Bob Fass of WBAI in New York and Haines Ely of KVMR in Sacramento, sent out to 6,000 activists over the PeaceNet computer bulletin board, and reprinted in the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee monthly, *Rights*, which goes to every member of Congress and the Senate.

A couple of further facts have since emerged: Then-CIA operative George Bush named three boats in the Bay of Pigs Invasion—*Houston*, *Zapata* (after his oil company) and *Barbara*. And, on November 24, 1947, an assistant to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover sent this "sensitive" memo about Jack Ruby to HUAC: "It is my sworn statement that one Jack Rubenstein of Chicago noted as a potential witness for hearings of the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities is performing information functions for the staff of Cong. Richard M. Nixon, Rep. of California. It is requested Rubenstein not be called for open testimony in those aforementioned hearings."

Nixon has long served as a personification of the Freudian slip. When a reporter asked him how he felt about the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby following the assassination of JFK, Nixon replied, "Two rights don't make a wrong—I mean . . ." Now, 28 years later, Nixon said of Saddam Hussein: "He is an international menace. If I could find a way to get him out of there, even putting a contract out on him, if the CIA still did that sort of thing, assuming it ever did, I would be for it."

Reasoner Meets His Final Deadline

In his memoirs, *It Sure Looks Different From the Inside*, Ron Nessen, press secretary to President Gerald Ford, wrote: "In Ford's first TV interview as president, Harry Reasoner of ABC told him a major public criticism was that 'you have not got the magnitude of the grasp of the presidency . . . Can you grow in this job, sir?' Ford patiently recited his educational background and his 25 years of experience in Congress. Reasoner followed by asking Ford about his ability to handle foreign policy, ending with the condescending question, 'You are aware there is a world out there?' ABC protected Reasoner's reputation by editing that question out of the broadcast."

In his own memoirs, *Before the Colors Fade*, Reasoner wrote: "The key was understanding the [Little Rock] story, and in turn there are two keys to understanding most stories. One is that there are always at least two sides to any story. The other is that the world doesn't have many real villains, very many real bad guys, if you define a villain as a person who *thinks* of himself as a villain. I've only been aware of two figures in the news during my career with whom I would not have shaken hands if called to deal with them professionally. I suppose that what Thomas Jefferson called a decent respect for the opinion of mankind requires me to identify those two. They were Senator Joseph McCarthy and a man named Paul Krassner or something like that who published a magazine called *The Realist* in the 1960s. I guess everyone knows who McCarthy was. Krassner and his *Realist* were part of a '60s fad—publications attacking the values of the establishment—

which produced some very good papers and some very bad ones. Krassner not only attacked establishment values; he attacked decency in general, notably with an alleged 'lost chapter' from William Manchester's book, *The Death of a President*. To paraphrase Clive Barnes' remarks about a movie: *The Realist* was the kind of paper that gives dirty papers a bad name. My grounds for despising them were that, based on their speech and actions, they had to *know* they were villains, but I suspect that even those two, who seemed execrable to me, thought of themselves in a much better light. And in Little Rock the people leading the opposition to desegregation, with the exception of Governor Faubus and a few other opportunists, did not see themselves as oppressors of black human beings, but as defenders of a system that worked best for both whites and blacks."

Of course I resented being paired with Senator McCarthy. Ironically, I had started my career as a political satirist by attacking McCarthyism. Besides, he had senatorial immunity for his libels, whereas I risked lawsuits for what I published. Anyway, to complete the cycle, a few years ago I called my one-person show "Attacking Decency in General," and got two awards for it.

Everybody responds to a public figure's death according to their own particular sense of connection. During the ten years since Reasoner wrote his book, I've really wanted to crash a party where he would be, so that I could shake hands with him while a cohort photographed us in the act, and then I would publish the photo. But now I'll have to give up my fond fantasy about a man named Harry Reasoner or something like that.

An Outing Is Not Necessarily a Picnic

All right, Pete Williams is a fag and Ron Reagan isn't.

Originally, Assistant Secretary of Defense Williams was going to be outed as a closet gay by Michelangelo Signorile in *OutWeek*, but the magazine folded, and Signorile offered his article to the *Village Voice* instead. There was dissent among the staff, and a special meeting was held to discuss the ethics of outing. The dissenters won. *Voice* executive editor Richard Goldstein wrote: "I'll abide by the consensus we arrived at by not mentioning the name of the official in Signorile's piece. But I'm glad to report that another publication, *The Advocate*, is considering full disclosure. I believe any gay person who plays a prominent role in the military—especially within the Pentagon—is guilty of political hypocrisy." *Voice* gossip columnist Michael Musto added: "In addition to helping censor the war for us, Williams is both a tool and a mechanic of an institution that treats gays as a security risks not fit to represent our country. Is he just doing what he has to do? Yes, but so is a light-skinned black who works for the Klan or a Right to Life rep who's secretly had 10 abortions."

The *Advocate* put the Pete Williams exposé on their cover, and editor Richard Rouliard explained: "We commit ourselves to this singular instance of outing in the name of the 12,966 lesbian and gay soldiers who have been outed by the military since 1982. Since 1989, when Williams was appointed, 2,273 gay and lesbian soldiers have been discharged." Signorile wrote: "If the military were concerned with blackmail, wouldn't it be more worried about a Department of Defense spokesman with access to all kinds of classified information? Isn't it bizarre that someone as high-echelon as Williams is *not* affected by the policy, while an openly gay drill sergeant, cook or porter who has no access to sensitive information is considered a security risk?" Readers could then turn to the advice page and find out whether a cock ring will set off the metal detector at the airport.

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson reported the *Advocate* story, but newspapers including the *Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* refused to publish that column. The *New York Times* ran an item on the controversy without naming Williams; it's not as if he had been *raped* or anything. Two weeks after the original *Voice* non-outing, their own media critic James Ledbetter was allowed to

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