April 11, 1967

The President
Grosset & Dunlop, Inc.
51 Madison Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10010

Dear Sir,

There is a factual error in your New York Times ad for Charles Roberts' book. One of the legends says Charles Roberts is "vs" Harold Weisberg. This is the error. Charles Roberts is "vs" many things, but I deeply regret he is not "vs" Harold Weisberg. I am utterly unable to get him there. Perhaps you can use your influence toward this end.

For our immediate purposes I presume you will be content if I do not list some of those things his writing shows him to be genuinely against, but I will be happy to oblige.

Recently, having heard him misquote me on a number of occasions, I have suggested truth and understanding might be served by a debate between him and me. Most recently, having heard nothing from this disciple of truth and master of documentation, I made this suggestion to Pierre Salinger, who wrote the foreword, suggesting that Mr. Salinger or Mr. Roberts use the influence they have and I do not so that we might debate before their peers, in the National Press Club, with Mr. Salinger as moderator. Should Mr. Salinger find his own considerable preoccupation with selling his book (not that he is a "scavenger", please understand) makes this impossible, there are others who perhaps might substitute, either in the National Press Club in Washington or possibly before some suitable forum you might arrange in New York.

In his book I notice that Mr. Roberts quotes me by saying what Mark Lane says, or what Edward Epstein says. I do not recall a single factual error in my writing that he proved. From reading his book, I get the rather clear impression that he has not understood mine or, although I intend no unkindness, hasn't read it. Although I would be happy to debate him on the subject of my book, he may be handicapped should he be willing. I therefore suggest that, if he agrees to debate me, we restrict ourselves to his book. My intent is to be fair to Mr. Roberts, for if he researched and wrote his book, he should qualify as the world's greatest expert on it. And to be further fair, I urge that we restrict ourselves exclusively to what is in the record of the President's Commission.

As his publisher, who is spending what for me is vast sums of money and energy on advertising and promoting his book, I hope I appeal to you in a sensitive and responsive area. Because Mr. Roberts makes pretense of scholarship, my proposal, I hope will appeal to him and remove the confusion arising from your blurbing on the book. Mr. Roberts begins with the assertion that eyewitnesses are undependable, and he cites himself as proof. I quite agree, specifically and generally. Had he read or understood my ninth chapter, he might understand this is exactly what I say and believe. But the center of your cover entices the book-buyer with the recommendation of Mr. Roberts because he is "An Eyewitness Reporter". I think it would be beneficial to Mr. Roberts were he to have the opportunity to establish that his is, indeed, a work of his own deep scholarship, especially before his peers.

As I look upon the cover, however, when I can remove my eye from the most prominent word on it, "assassination", in very red, blood-red, one might say, capital letters, and after pondering that Mr. Roberts is all one in having used this word in his title, and I notice the word "scavengers", I am reminded that he, Mr. Salinger and you seem to regard this as an important point. I willingly, therefore, agree to an amendment of the format of restriction to the Commission's own evidence to delete "scavengers" and scavenging, for I recall that to Mr. Roberts and Mr. Salinger, inside the covers, this is a subject of some interest. I will go so far as to try and recall this should Mr. Roberts or if he can ~~ever~~ find the time to moderate, Mr. Salinger overlooks it.

There is an additional departure from this format that I am willing to make, should Mr. Roberts so desire. In his introduction he says his purpose in writing the book is to "give pause to those who are about to 'buy' (the quotation marks are his) unfounded, far-out theories of the assassination." In his personal appearances he broadens this and makes it more comprehensible to ordinary people by saying what he really means ; he wants to keep people from buying books that are critical of the Report and he thinks those who write such books should be investigated, a kind of McCarthyism for Writers. This is not inconsistent with Mr. Salingers comment about people who write "with a desire for notoriety or money" and who are "guilty of outright fabrication of testimony or hallucinatory theories which only demented minds can spawn". (I hardly recognize myself.) Then there are these words in your Times ad, against not really inconsistent,"...should be obligatory readings and meditation for book publishers, newspapermen, broadcasters, historians, biographers and book reviewers". I do not quote the rest of this for it might embarrass you to realize that on the basis of this book you have addressed these words at us; "opportunism, cynicism, misrepresentations, half-truths, perverted quotations and guess work." I suggest, however, that if and when we debate Mr. Roberts might want to have the Commission's 26 volumes present so he can invoke them to establish these uncomplimentary opinions. I propose to ask him to.

Certainly we do need the truth about the assassination. I think we also need a dialogue on it. From his own representation of his own scholarship and my perhaps immodest opinion of my own, it seems to me we are well met to present opposite sides. Again in looking at the cover, which reminds me that Mr. Roberts is a "Noted White House Correspondent", I recall one of his equally noted colleagues, Merriman Smith, also takes exception of me, personally and to criticism of the Report. Perhaps between the two of them Mr. Roberts and Mr. Smith have been the most vocal on their side. I find a remarkable similarity in their expression and their thinking, so much so that I wonder if it could possibly be because both are "White House correspondents". In any event, should Mr. Roberts care to avail himself of the collaboration of Mr. Smith and the great prestige of his Pulitzer Prize, I would be happy because Mr. Smith until this moment has restricted himself to monologues. Mr. Smith says he wants the truth about the assassination, as I also do. If possible, I'll help him. Or, perhaps, he might help me. Either way, I do think it could be interesting and helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg