

20734

December 28, 1966

Mr. Julius Fransden
Vice President, United Press International
National Press Building
Washington, D. C. 20005

Dear Mr. Fransden:

While his grudging letter to the Washington Post does acknowledge Merriman Smith's recognition that, although he won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting it, he is the one man in the world who does not recall where he was the moment President Kennedy was assassinated, it in no way relieves the damage he and you have done me and about which I have written you, without reply.

Nor does he diminish this hurt or reflect the slightest honesty of motive when he continues his campaign with consistent inaccuracy on the electronic media.

Had his letter to the Post been motivated by any honorable motive, Mr. Smith would have acknowledged that he also did not know the weather when he was there that terrible day. Recall this was another basis for his assault upon me. I quote you from page 42 of the Report: "In Dallas the rain had stopped and by midmorning a gloomy overcast sky had given way to bright sunshine that greeted the Presidential party ...".

If Mr. Smith's letter served any purpose, it was to give the Post an excuse for not printing the one I promptly wrote it. If his story and his continuing campaign serve any purpose, it is not to inform.

His gross inaccuracies, shameful in a cub reporter, continue to cause me damage. I might expect no more from a man so cowardly he refuses to face me on the basis of fact while continuing his slanders. I certainly should be able to expect more from UPI and I again call upon you to do what you can to end the damage your inaccurate story continues to do me and to relieve the damage it has already caused.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

20734

November 20, 1966

Mr. J. R. Wiggins,
Editor, The Washington Post
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Wiggins:

So gross are the factual errors in Merriman Smith's (self) "expose" that a UPI subscriber sent me a copy when it was distributed November 6 for release the 13th. You used it the 20th. On the 12th I challenged Mr. Smith to debate me in the National Press Club on his story, my book, WHITEWASH, the work of the Commission, or any combination of his choosing. He declined on the 16th.

The most casual examination of even the Report of the President's Commission proves the falsity of the charge of error Mr. Smith, from the profundity of his ignorance or the depth of his venom, attributes to me. He is the one man in the world who does not know exactly where he was when he learned the President was assassinated, as his article proves - yet he won the Pulitzer Prize for his assassination reporting!

Mr. Smith's alleged reason for declining to face me before his peers is that "platform debating is a little out of my line". I have never done it. I have since challenged him to a confrontation in his Pulitzer Prize field, writing, in the simple subject of his story, in any publication he can arrange. I have gone further and guaranteed him the last word, offering to submit to him in advance my criticism of his piece so he can use his space to answer me. Can I be more fair?

Had you looked at WHITEWASH, of which I gave you enough copies, or been courteous enough to phone me, you could have avoided this intended damage to my book and to me. But what better should I expect of writers and editors who think there is something strange and repugnant in a love for living things like waterfowl but that it is normal and civilized to love weapons of destruction?

At what point is the press going to realize that it can defend no one and nothing by continued falsehood and slanders, that the only possible defense of anyone or anything in this case is the truth as total and untainted as man can make it, that the unrelieved misinformation it spreads makes any defense less possible, and that a President may not be assassinated and the government leave unanswered a single responsible question it is within the capacity of man to answer?

Yours truly,

Harold Weisberg

Jimmy Williams
Jimmy Agee
P. M. M.
Dylan
Bill
The Vert.

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20734

November 18, 1966

Mr. Merriman Smith
United Press International
National Press Building
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith,

Pulitzer Prizes aside, there is a difference between us as writers. I stand by what I have written, I write with honest intent, and I will face you or anyone else on any word I have written, to defend it or, if error be shown, apologize. I am neither a public speaker nor a debater. But I have found, Mr. Smith, that what you also learned from your mother is indeed true: truth is a shield. I find training is not necessary, experience not a prerequisite. All a man needs is an elemental feeling of manhood and the conviction he is right.

You are like a night-sneak. You can and do abuse the great power and audience you can command through UPI, which trusts you, as its readers do. You write with evil intent and then, coward-like, fear to face an unimportant man who calls you on it. But if it is the public platform that makes you apprehensive, let us shift to your field, the written word. Here you have imposing credentials, endorsed by the Pulitzer Prize. You find any printed medium and debate your piece released by UPI Sunday. I will write a criticism of it and you will have the opportunity of reading it and answering.

Can I stack the deck more your way? Let me meet you on your ground and I'll let you tie one hand behind my back. But now, of course, you will be too busy, or as unimportant a person as I you cannot concern yourself with.

It is not a "matter of critical judgement" when I say you were in this writing intellectually dishonest. It is a simple statement of fact, and it is for this reason alone that you decline to face me before your peers on it. You, sir, won a Pulitzer Prize for your reporting of the assassination and are the only person to whom I have ever spoken or from whom I have ever heard who does not know exactly where he was when he first knew of the assassination! You "for openers" dismissed my work - slandered is a more accurate term - on the basis of my saying it had rained and/or my not correctly representing the organization of the motorcade. Two of the most trivial comments, for openers or any other purpose, slanderous or serious. But it had rained, as the Report says, as UPI said and as AP said. Were those tears shed in advance that lay on Love Field when you got there? And you were at the Triple Underpass when you heard three shots - no more and no less - and the future of the country must rest on your hearing and your recollection of it? You were not at the Triple Underpass. That is the one place you could not have been without the most wholesale perjury in our history. You could not have been any closer to the President's car than the sixth car, and I tell you this without looting it up. If anything else you said in your shameful job is true, the best you can do is acknowledge that the shots could not have come from the Depository Building, for you had not yet reached it. Depending on what you meant by behind you, the most likely source of the shots would have been

the sheriff's office or the federal building. Take your choice. But again I point out your failure to discuss this with me before your press denies us the opportunity of testing whether this is fact or "critical judgement".

"As a critic of published works offered for sale (is this some kind of a shame?) and for public judgement" you are more than entitled to the expression of critical judgement. It is an obligation that in our society is that of the press and is near to sacred. It is the buttress of our freedoms, the very foundation of our structure. But this means responsible, critical judgement. Not the cheap dishonesty, the total departure from fact and reality, the petty indulgence of some unclear emotion, the disgraceful prostitution of an honorable calling that you signed. That bears less resemblance to reality and truth than the garlic wafted over the stew. If you were going to assault me and my book, which is your right (though he will not do it to my face, will you?), then you are obligated, if not by your own personal creed, then by that of the calling you have chosen, to be familiar with that book and to correctly and fairly represent it.

I dare you tell me this is not your responsibility or that you did it!

But your equally sneaky use of the words "offered for sale" raise another question. You have, on the basis of no fact, no knowledge, no critical right, no reasonable judgement, gone out of your way to employ the vast power of UPI for the purpose of interfering with - damaging - that sale, which is also a right (in the case of writing, a freedom).

I have no intention of doing anything about it or even seeing if I might. The institution of the presidency has been besmirched enough, worst by those pretending to defend it. But I hope you will give this letter to Mr. Frandsen as the executive of UPI to see whether he feels it might make some kind of gesture at undoing the damage you have done, commercially and personally.

At some point some of you self-appointed defenders of neither you nor I knew what must stop and give thought to what you are writing. Unless you do, unless you stop spreading misinformation, unless you stop presuming an instant knowledge and a total recall of all those millions of words in those 27 times, you will soon create a situation in which whoever and whatever you seek to defend or only think you are defending may be denied the opportunity of any defense.

In such a situation, with such issues involved, there can in our society be but one defense of anybody or anything. That is the complete truth, as total and untainted as men can make it.

You might earn the Pulitzer Prize, now that you have it, by starting to look and trying to understand, and not playing God and Daniel Webster both at your typewriter. When you do, you will find, as I have already twice promised Mr. Frandsen, that I am willing to help to the extent that I can and as honorably as I can.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg

United Press International

GENERAL OFFICES
NEWS BUILDING, 220 EAST 42ND STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

Written From

WASHINGTON BUREAU
315 NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20004

16 November 66

Mr. Harold Weisberg
Hyattstown, Maryland 20734

Dear Mr. Weisberg:


Julius Frandsen, vice president and manager of the Washington bureau of United Press International, has turned over to me your letter to him of 12 November.

For you to say that my article concerning books critical of the Warren Commission was "monumental intellectual dishonesty" is a matter of critical judgement to which you certainly are entitled. But as a critic of published works offered for sale and for public judgement, I think I am entitled to the same right of critical judgement.

I had no intention or desire to be "particularly vicious and dishonest" with you.

As for your request that UPI arrange a debate between us at the National Press Club, I'm afraid platform debating is a little out of my line.

Sincerely,


Merriman Smith

CC: JF

November 18, 1966

Mr. Julius Rosenberg
Vice President, UPI
National Press Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Rosenberg,

In our society there is great dependence on the intellectuals and the press. Both abdicated, totally, when President Kennedy was assassinated. Both since then, perhaps compulsively seeking to depend on undefendable records, have compounded their failures with dishonesty, vicariousness and continuing obfuscation for which there is now even less excuse.

I gave UPI a copy of MINE on May 2, 1963. It was silent. Shortly thereafter, when you were kind enough to see me, I gave you an additional copy, urged you to read it, promised to answer every question you might have in your satisfaction, and offered you the source of everything in it. You were not interested. In addition to what the future will reveal, you also may have put UPI into the position of being scooped on what might have been - and might still be - a UPI exclusive.

With respect to the revelations of the future, in common with most of the press UPI assumes that everything has been said, all that is to come will be known/has been printed. Those who daily write developing stories should know better. But on the basis of what is now public alone, you have miserably failed your obligations to the kind of society that depends upon you. It was not UPI Jefferson had in mind in abusing the press over government.

If the Pulitzer people start giving prizes for propaganda, Herriman Smith can add to his. One of your subscribers has sent me the advance on his piece for release 11/18 today. It is a monumental intellectual dishonesty. The kindest thing I can say of it is that its author is misinformed. Has it not occurred to any of the press that, when it consults sources that have passed off the biggest lie in our history to the entire world, they have little to lose with another lie to an individual? At what point is the press going to remember its near sacred function in our country? At what point are the writers, editors and agencies to become disgusted with their piracy and recapture their integrity and that honor of our country with it? When will you ask, "Suppose the report is wrong?" When will you make even an honest effort to find out?

Mr. Smith was particularly vicious and dishonest with me. I do not think he read my book. To believe he did would give me an even lower opinion of him and what he has done. However, maybe we can reach a few determinations. You and he can presumably arrange for the facilities of the National Press Club. I'd like to debate Mr. Smith there, on my book, his article, the work of the Commission, or any combination of his choosing. Let us then see who speaks truth, who fairly and honestly reflects the record. Let us learn and let the people know whether an American President can be murdered and a single question within the capacity of man to answer may remain unanswered.

Sincerely, Harold Weisberg