

Ms. Kathy Kross, Nightline
ABC-TV News
1717 DeSales St.,
Washington, D.C. 20036

1/30/92

*Transcript in
Oliver Stone file*

Dear Kathy,

Our letters crossed but at least I now have the ks and cs straight.

I do appreciate your letter, even though I disagree with parts. You say that "an unfortunate reality of television is the constrictions that time places upon us." May I suggest that this is a TV person's special concept, making the commonplace special as it relates to TV? How is it in any real sense any different than the constrictions upon me in 1929-1930 when I edited and made up my high school paper? I could not get an additional line of type in and TV can't get an additional word in. The problem is the same. As it was many years later when I did radio news. That time was as inflexible as TV's almost all the time.

I suggest also that the problem was not of time but of selection, how the show decided to use the time it had. Of course it has the right to make this decision. But what it decided to use and not use is other than I was led to believe was the show's purpose.

You marked one sentence in the ^{third} ~~second~~ Keppel graf on page 1, I presume to call to my attention that he said what you thought I had referred to in my letter. In quoting the entire paragraph I'll put it inside parens and then comment:

"Indeed, if Oliver Stone, the film-maker, had produced a documentary rather than a feature film, he would have been expected to observe a similar discipline) ["Prove it. Substantiate it. Document it..." quote^d from the second graf.] In filmmaking that is called 'artistic license.' In statecraft, it's called 'propaganda.' Either way, it carries a lot of impact."

Sorry, I omitted the sentence you underlined: It goes after "discipline" above:

"Instead he produced a film in which he simply made up what he couldn't prove or substantiate."

Nightline knew that at the very beginning Stone announced that his film would be non-fiction, that it would record their history for the people, telling them who killed their President, why and how. After he got my first letter he wriggled a bit when he believed he should but he never abandoned the claim that his movie was factual. In an interview I believe after he finished the editing he told that reporter that he yielded to nobody on fact. He referred to himself repeatedly as an historian. He used every trick he could to convince the world that his film would be faithful to fact in even the finest detail, as with the well-publicized hassle to get to use the TSB^d building when he didn't ^{need to} (at all and even shot the Dallas emergency room ^{SCEN*} in New Orleans.

And after all the publicity, which is what he wanted, he did not use the sixth-floor, which he had insisted very publicly complete fidelity, ^{ne required} his intent, ^{needs,} ~~required the sixth floor.~~ Having gotten the deceptive publicity consistent with his recording non-factional history, he quietly used the seventh.

If Stone had not gotten himself all that international publicity on his painstaking factuality regardless of cost, if he had not announced that he was recording our actual history, he would have had the right to say anything he wanted. But he did do and say what I say as Nightline, I am confident, knew. I certainly have the documentation.

The language Koppel used is Stone's later representation, after he began to get clobbered, after I told him what he did not deny, that he would be producing a fraud and a travesty. Meanwhile to the end also saying the exact opposite.

So, Nightline and Koppel became Stone's apologists, his propagandists, his advertiser.

Koppel's language that I quote from the beginning of his third graf deceived and misled the audience. I think using "documentary" serves this purpose, too, because although Stone never used the word he certainly did boast that he would be recording history and that factually.

The show's title is "The JFK Assassination Files." Most wasn't on this and when the show was over the audience had no idea what "the JFK assassination files" are or what of them is available or what isn't or why.

If Nightline had really done a show justifying the title it would have been a more interesting program by far and it would have been useful in informing people who instead only too often ^{were} ~~be~~ doused with irrelevant propaganda. It could also help the current debate which remains confused and confusing. To say nothing of serving narrow and personal rather than national interests.

Thanks for taking the time for your letter and for it. I hope that perhaps you may now have a better understanding of why I began by saying I want nothing more to do with these kinds of pseudo-news shows and have uses I prefer for the time they take.

Best wishes,

Harold
Harold Weisberg

Thanks also for your good wishes and offer of help. I do appreciate both and what they reflect. I'm so very sorry the show was not in accord with what you, personally, were so clearly aiming for, an informative presentation of fact. I do respect that, as I hope I indicated in my first letter.

January 27, 1992

Dear Harold,

Thank you for your recent letter. I've enclosed a transcript for your perusal of the Nightline/Assassination Files show last week. Though it might not mitigate all of your concerns, it will give you a first-hand account of how the issue was treated.

I wish my colleagues had the opportunity to use more of what you had to say, but an unfortunate reality of television is the constrictions that time places upon us. In any case, Nightline remains very grateful that you took the time to talk with us, and for me it was a personal pleasure.

I wish you all the best in your work and please call me if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Kross". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Kathryn Kross
Nightline Producer

202-887-7360

While I doubt very much that what I've said will get any attention at Nightline or mean anything there, it does mean something to me. Even if they regard anyone who has no interest in personal attention of TV as some kind of kook. Or who has an interest that means more to him.

I'd like to think, however, although I have no reason to, that what I said might come up in staff discussions.

They could have had a more exciting and interesting show if they had adhered to the title. Had used those I was told were being used, some already taped, like Jim Lesar, who has done more legal FOIA work in the field than probably all other lawyers together and has more knowledge. Particularly because the central issue at the time of taping was the HSCA files, his case that had by then yielded 80,000 pages of the supposedly suppressed records from the FBI and about 3,500 from the CIA.

Kross phoned me before coming here. We talked quite some time then and I did inform here accurately.

I have no reason to believe that as of the time she interviewed me here, at some length and as I made clear in my first letter, professionally and competently, without any interest in other than fact and the realities, she expected that the show would be changed from what she told me it would be, Oliver Stone, Blakey of HSCA, Jim Lesar, Mark Allen and me *on the files.*

What surprises me is how little reaction I've gotten over being aired twice on Nightline and once on CBS-TV and the nature of this slight reaction. All I've heard is that I was on these shows. Not a single word at all about the shows themselves.

In the past few weeks I was interviewed by phone by 48 hours and heard nothing further from it, possibly because Dan Rather remembers my refusing to be on a "ring special of years ago after spending days with that production staff, and from several of the tabloid-type pseudo-news TV shows. I turned several down. I agreed to be on one of James Earl Ray's book and was taped. I have not heard that this was used, so I do not know. Or I've forgotten if I did. It was one of the tabloid type.

If the slight reaction I've gotten reflects audience reaction, Nightline did itself no good with what it did air instead of what the title says it aired and didn't.

HW 1/31/92