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473-8186

Route 7
Frederick, Md. 21701

March 31, 1968

Mr. William Emerson, Editor
Saturday Evening Post
641 Lexington Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Dear Mr. Emerson:

The efficiency of the Post's circulation department, which in more than six months has not been able to change my address after repeated notification, has delayed my reading of your well-advertised article, "Secret Evidence On J.F.K. Assassination". This gave me five additional days to luxuriate in the illusion that there might be a single major U.S. publication preserving a figleaf of honor and independence, willing to be anything but servile to the government in reporting what can with certainty and accuracy be said of the assassination that put it in power.

This gives you a consistent record of well-publicized nothingness, commercial and successful as hell, loud in its pretense that it finds the official fairy-tale in error but on close reading always managing to turn out the best possible defense of the indefensible and unended official dishonesty and trickery.

First there was the honored and capable writer, Dick Whalen, who was lost and in danger of not meeting his deadline (remember, you were trying to beat Look with its Manchester?), incapable of understanding this complex subject, including the precious little he had found on his own. Your editor told him to get in touch with me (the editor who had read my published book and the manuscript of the then-unpublished second one, both of which had what Whalen needed). Whalen did. After a long day in which I tried to explain the limited aspect of his interest, he was still lost. With no pay, I gave you the benefit of countless hours of work.

So, we made a deal: I would straighten him out and show him some of my unpublished material, in return for credit only. I got the credit - a few snide remarks - and a prepublication plea from Dick that I not give him what he deserved.

Next, when the government was hurting from the wide interest in the Garrison investigation, you had Phelan attack him, on the basis of dubious assumptions, secure in the certainty that public officials can not spend their lives in court pushing libel suits. Phelan also appeared associated with NBC in its openly CIA-oriented attack on Garrison, and thus associated with such hallmarks of personal honor as the editing of tape recordings to make them seem to say the exact opposite of what they actually do. The touchstone to the integrity of intent of this article by your own expert on crime in New Orleans, your own Mafia exposé, is in his writing. In all those many, many words for each of which you paid so well, he had no space for what he must have known, that the then mysteriously and conveniently dead David William Ferris, member of the conspiracy Garrison charged, had been the Mafia's investigator.

Then you published Thompson's compendium of thievery and deliberate error salted with ignorance and peppered with ego, pretending it was in some way new and significant revelation, whereas it was a blatant effort to evolve a formula that would preserve what seemed possible of the government's fraud of a Report. You even invented a new kind of non-conspiracy for this - three men acting together in disunison.

Now you serve David Wise's cheap blend of commercialism and political propaganda. You have become good at it. You pretend you have and publish the "secret evidence", whereas you have and publish none. You distill from almost 300 pages of Commission executive-session transcripts a few phrases making a greater villain of Earl Warren and whitewashing those who really did the dirty work. And you wind up this gimmicked pretense of criticism of the government with a lusty defense of its suppressions.

Early in his story Wise presents, as though they were typical and quite inappropriately calling them "samples", a few of the infrequent comprehensible descriptions of the Commission's files. It is for all the world as though the gibberish were meaningful English. To give you a fair sample, here are photocopies of the first three pages. Marginal "x's" mark still-secret files. Note that in the first 68 descriptions there is but one that makes sense, some that do not exist, and that almost all are variants of "Oswald - Internal Security - Russia", the meaningless political insanity that guides the FBI.

Because you are a publisher and should be interested in the sanctity as well as the freedom of the press, I also give you a photocopy of page 40 of the listing and call your attention to the first two items, Files 479 and 480. Still suppressed - and unworthy of your attention - is the FBI espionage on those who question the government, in this case the mother of the accused man who was murdered only because public authority made it possible. Two radio broadcasts - actually broadcast - are still secret! And there are more. This is how the FBI protects the right of Americans - by secretly spying on them - and how it "investigated" the murder of our President. Try this on your own "guidelines", if you cannot on those of the government.

If this kind of writing is from accident or ignorance, there still is no excuse for it. You have spent a fortune on "professionals" who know nothing and care less about the subject and the tragedy when solid information and decent scholarship are and always have been available to you. If lifelong trafficking with instant experts acclimates you to literary triviality, as a mature man, if not an experienced writer, you should have known this is a subject like no other, demanding wide knowledge, the highest integrity, the utmost responsibility, the closest possible fidelity to fact. Dependable means of assuring yourself (and your vast and consistently misinformed readership) of the accuracy of what you intended publishing was always available to you, free, if the enormous sums you spent on high-priced hacks strained the budget.

But if you did that - tried to write and print accurately and honestly - you'd not be accomplishing what is by now the very clear result, defense of what may for a few days longer still be preserved of the fake epitaph with which an American President has been consigned to history.

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Of course you are independent of the government. Of course you are not CIAZ. But could you, for pay, better serve their urgent needs? In fact, is it not your independence and seeming impartiality that makes yours a greater service to them than could be bought?

If publishers had the regard of grocers for their customers and their reputations, you'd spend a few of those many dollars you have learning how good your product is. Most canners of beans do try to keep the rat-hairs out of their product. For this they hire outside experts. Has the Saturday Evening Post the integrity of ordinary merchants? Try me out, if you have. Do you fear learning the truth about what you have done? Or do you know it?

It was the second great tragedy that, at the moment of the assassination, those upon whom we normally depend for leadership and information, the intellectuals, the lawyers and the prominent writers and publications, all failed, all abdicated. It is the unended tragedy that there is not a single important U.S. publication that will make a solid study on its own or give expression to a single thorough and informed writer who genuinely says and proves the government is wrong.

What a commentary on the state of freedom of the press in the United States today!

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg