

Legend

Dear Jim, Legend as a "legend."

HW 4/29/76

It is a truism that the promotion for any well-promoted book reaches infinitely more minds, including the minds of influential people, than any book can ever reach.

Take Epstein on Good Morning America. The most successful of books will never reach that many people. On Channel 7 in Washington - no book can reach as many people as many Washingtonians. Condensation in Readers Digest - he'd become a multi-millionaire if he sells as many books as the Digest reached people. Even in the smaller New York magazine he reached more New Yorkers than his book will ever sell to.

This is a well-known truism, know to publicists for books and for spooks, and I think is material in any assessment of what I regard as unusual about this book and its promotions - particularly the seeming departures from commercial norms of which I have told you. Example is the loss of "exclusivity" in Readers Digest magazine to so many other publications.

This morning I had a chance to read the Book of the Month Club News for its May 1976 selection and by coincidence immediately thereafter a letter in this morning's Post by a former CIA type named Walton Swift, Jr. While they are completely independent of each other I see a relationship. Swift argues that he is a law-abider, believes ~~in~~ in the law, and that this means he can violate the law any time he perceives a higher good in law-violation, that being the law. The respected, established writer Wilfrid Sheed provides an illustration of how others who are not subject experts take and interpret Legend. This interpretation is entirely in accord with what the law-abiders, those staunch First Amendment types in the spookeries, want believed.

Discount as much as you want for the certainty that Sheed knew his task was to sell Legend, after that discounting what he writes and interprets is an extension of even Epstein's extension of imaginings. This does not mean that Sheed is a literary whore. Rather do I suggest that it is one of the purposes of the book and the promotions for the book, what in recent other disclosures was contracted into "mind control," what Orwell said so effectively. And controlling the past to control the future.

This is what the CIA was doing in giving all it gave to Epstein, in doing all it did for him, far and beyond what FOIA requires, from Epstein's own accounts. There is no possibility that it would have done this without confidence in the outcome. Here I call to your attention the Publishers Weekly account of the suit against Snapp, the ending of it and the quote from documents filed by Snapp.

Jack Newcombe's story about Epstein is helpful in again making a liar out of Epstein on the origin of his book. Remember that the piece Epstein wrote for Psychology Today begins "In 1976" Readers Digest approached him. This is not the first version of about the fall of 1976. In fact it is the time clock in the book itself. So why does Epstein lie in Psychology Today?

Newcombe's account of the phone bills, \$2,000 a month, means that on this one expense of many expenses there is about \$50,000 of Readers Digest money. Extraordinary! Comparison: with a six-figure advance in the Lane Code name Zorro Prentice-Hall allocated only this amount for all its promotions and advertising.

Newcombe, I think, discloses more in his concluding sentence: "Today, in his New York bachelor apartment, as Epstein works on his next project - a book of real fiction - he is surrounded by gift orchids from his nonlegendary source."

(Epstein may have turned the present CIA around on Nosenko but remember, he did not on Oswald.)