

September 15, 1969

Commission Nicholas Johnson  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Johnson,

Your criticisms of the broadcast media aired yesterday on WTOP are valid. They address a modern essence of the failure of the democratic society. But you engage in a futility because your commission guarantees it will be without meaning.

You have a "fairness doctrine". It is without meaning. Your commission has seen to it this proper doctrine can have no meaning. What can the average man do about it?

I have tried, repeatedly with the station on which you appeared, either without meaningful response or with no response at all. In fact, my last effort to invoke what you say must be the policy of every station in the country was not even accepted by their lawyer when I sent it certified mail. With each of the networks and with Westinghouse it is exactly the same.

The field in which I have worked since that tragedy is the murder of President Kennedy. To begin with, the government of which you and your commission are part ordained truth, no less than totalitarian societies proclaimed what is to be believed.

The very least that can be said about this is that it is a "controversial" subject. Not a single network will give my side equal time to respond to the invalid opinions, manufactures or outright falsehoods it regularly airs. For practical purposes today, based on what I know, this means give me time for response on two basis: I asked, immediately, and I am the first author in the field and the only one continuing his work.

In some cases, aside from the gross misrepresentation of fact that is thus given mass audiences - the only thing it gets - I have been defamed. It would seem the latter, too, requires an opportunity for response. In three years, after many requests, there has not been a single case.

Now here I am, a man without means. What can I do to insure your regulations will be observed? Not a thing, because I cannot afford to hire a lawyer and because your agency, really, doesn't want the media to be forced to present the other side. A friend of mine got in touch with the FCC before I could after the CBS network devoted four prime TV hours and one on radio to a palpably false, entirely contrived and in other ways false and defamatory presentation of a contrived one side. You turned him down, peremptorily.

Since then I have had extensive correspondence with CBS, NBC, ABC and Westinghouse. They couldn't care less about your regulations.



Let me take the two most recent cases.

In the Martin Luther King murder, the men who arranged that there would be no trial, no testing of evidence in the way prescribed by our concepts of justice and establishment of legal truth, Percy Foreman, appeared on the Dick Cavett Show (ABC) to proclaim there had been no conspiracy, that the man he "defended" alone was guilty, that the evidence was overwhelming, etc. This happens to be other than truthful, but it is controversial, and the Harris poll on the subject, almost entirely suppressed, shows only about 12% of the people believe there had been no conspiracy. My letter to the Cavett show, after about four months, has not been answered.

Former Attorney General Clark, who is *parti pris* because of his actions in office, appeared on the David Frost Show. He there said that there had been no conspiracies in any of the assassinations (consistent, for he began this proclamation the day after King was murdered, before any investigation, maintained the same position after the fugitive was charged with conspiracy, in an effort to exert federal jurisdiction). Now, here again, the least that can be said of such a presentation is that it is controversial, and concerns a vital issue. In this case, Frost aired a partisan with an enormous personal stake, a man largely responsible for the misinformation the media disseminates. First I got a polite brushoff from the producer of the show. When I persisted I got a letter from the Westinghouse lawyer telling me to get in touch with the individual stations!

(And that, too, I have tried, for example, with WMAL. They have written to tell me they were forwarding my letter to the show in question, and then total silence.)

Now in every case, I have offered, in advance, to present each show and net the documentary proof of what I would say in response to the falsehood they had aired. And, with four published books, I have an established reputation. So in no case can any one say it considers me some kind of offbeat nut. WTOP, for example, has used me to background its news staff. But it never once gave me the opportunity to respond to misinformation it aired about any of the assassinations.

This is hardly an adequate representation of the overwhelming case your commission tolerates and is really responsible for. However, if you really mean those fine things you said, I do invite you to send a representative to examine my files of correspondence, the important thing, and, to eliminate any question of whether or not I am broadcastable, the government documents I proposed airing. In one case, that of the four CBS specials, I had proposed just this format (but an honest show, not propaganda), had the idea rejected, in writing, by the man who ultimately produced this video whitewash, and then, on the shows, they aired my copyrighted material as their own. Meanwhile, their production staff, again, asked me for help in preparation of the show. Without enormous resources, you know the futility of my trying to do anything. And I have tried.

It is always time for the casting of votes in a society representing itself as ours does. What you said is correct and important, and it should be said. But unless you and your commission do what you can do about some aspects of this problem, all you do when you get on the air with such noble thoughts is present yourself as a decent, concerned man when the record shows you should be assuming some of the responsibility.

Two things I ask you to consider: Look into my complaints and, if you believe they have validity, ask that I be given time for adequate response on the same facilities; and set up an office within your agency to which responsible, concerned citizens can turn for help.

Sincerely,

Harold Stebbins