

4/12/71

Editor, New York Post
New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir,

Yesterday I wrote you an indignant letter about what I regard as a genuinely contemptible ax job by John Barkham which you published Wednesday. I asked that you print my response and that you seek to have whoever syndicates Barkham offer it to those who carry his stuff. I hope you will do this, not only out of common decency but so that there can at some point be an end to obfuscation and sycophancy on so vital an issue as the political assassinations, that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. being the topic of my book FRAME-UP.

Today I received from one of your offended readers two copies of your front page of March 11, 1969 and the page three jumps. These are remarkable in their relevance to my protests and bear, I think, rather directly on what I described as Barkham's dishonesty of intent. I have marked the story quoting the King family to save you time. I have similar quotes in the book, and Barkham should not have been unaware of them.

In the other story I have marked but a single thing. I hope it gives you pause. That is the statement of the chief prosecutor that this was a political crime. Such crimes are not, under British law, extradictable.

Perhaps I should have sent you copies of the two reviews to which I believe I referred, pre-pub in Publisher's Weekly and that in The Saturday Review. I have never met either reviewer, don't even know the man who did one. They are thus, I think, quite independent, and can give you this kind of comparison with what Barkham did, this means of evaluating any purposes he may have served other than literary, and two separate ways of evaluating his honesty and integrity,

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

9/15/71

Mr. John Barkham
27 E 65 St.,
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Mr. Barkham,

Having read your "review" of Bishop's latest contribution to the boiling goosegrease, your attempted literary assassination of my work requires little further explanation.

You began with your own preconceptions, and who the hell is some upstart writer proving what you, in your infinite wisdom, have already ordained, can be wrong?

Is not that superior Barkham wisdom and intuition more dependable than such ignoble things as facts (a problem you can never find in Bishop's stuff),

In the remote chance that you take time from your royal commission, to determine what the American people may and may not know, may or may not consider about important events of the day and their lives, why not ponder one of many inconsistencies, your attack on my work and your sentence, "Oddly enough, Bishop virtually ignores the subsequent trial (sic), presumably because so little surfaced there."

If "oddly"? yours, is the right word, and if you and Bishop postulate a conspiracy, what better reason for "virtually ignoring" that "trial" than Ray's proclamation against interest, that there has been a conspiracy?

These two quotations amply display of the time you spend reading non-fiction. I do not credit the alternative, that you lack comprehension.

Frank's will, indeed, be a "major inquiry" possibly the reason it is so late and, I understand, not in the catalogues as you say it. I can measure this from the hysteria with which he came rushing up to me one night. Or his dependance upon Huie's material. And Huie's appraisal of Frank's work, that it is a disaster.

Will you have a bit of "Old Crow" (black) with me if Frank's never appears?

You've got one great line in this mess: "It is thus to investigative reporters that we must turn to answers, if any." But it is a bit indefinite. To whom do you refer, Bishop, who you say has no answers? Frank, whose magnum opus is so very, very late and who is so sick? Or Huie?

It must be great to play God. And as you seem to play the game, to come to really believe you are.

I'll bow thrice to the east as I seal this.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

9/19/71

Mr. John Barkham
27 E 65 St.,
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Mr. Barkham,

The friend who had written me that Frank's coming classic was not catalogued for Spring has since written to tell me it is now scheduled for January publication.

However, I remain convinced that there will be enough crowd to go around.

And I do look forward to your glorification of literary nightsoil as the one and true manna.

Were you not so busy trying to read more than you can digest and then conforming all this to your preconceptions, it might interest you to learn a bit about the methods of those for whom you indicate such high opinion.

Rightly or wrongly, Jerry Ray tells me that Frank has been, indeed, had, cadged one of James' earlier lawyers into believing that he would write a movie about this lawyer, also President of the American Bondo Association, in which his real-life role would be portrayed by Paul Newman, in an effort to get him to tell what a lawyer should hold in confidence. And George McMillan has offered Ray a large sum of money for an interview in which he assured Ray no single question about the crime would be asked. This, of course, is one of the more subtle ways of what you have called "investigative reporting" - avoidance of evidence of the crime. And Ray, who volunteered a brief postscript for my work, with the one stipulation that I make clear it was both voluntary and unpaid, rejected McMillan's offer.

It may interest you to know that when I checked out Ray's contribution, I learned that the FBI was on his trail within a day, not as long thereafter as the official records show; that they had interviewed two witnesses I found and also interviewed, that they knew part of his hegira not officially accounted for, and that it is not at all consistent with the travels attributed to him.

This, I am sure you will agree, is true integrity in the quest for truth and justice. And it is far from the only case in which I found proof of the suppression of evidence, even its confiscation, by the FBI. No doubt Bishop, in what you have designated such a definitive work, lays all this out clearly. (Unfortunately, through such kindnesses as yours I am without the capability of buying Bishop's book so I can have no personal knowledge.)

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

The Literary Scene

JOHN BARKHAM

FRAME-UP: The Martin Luther King-James Earl Ray Case
By Harold Weisberg. Outerbridge & Dienstfrey. 530 pp. \$10.

It seems to follow, as the night the day, that when a national figure is assassinated there will always be those who attribute it to a conspiracy. Only when the assassin is caught in the act, tried and convicted, as is the Robert Kennedy case, are the doubters silenced.

To this day some believe that President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were the victims of conspirators, though official findings have pinned the guilt on individuals.

* * *

Harold Weisberg, an investigative reporter, is such a doubter. He wrote a book questioning the findings of the Warren Commission and has now done the same for the King assassination. Although James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to the King murder, Weisberg contends that his plea served to abbreviate court proceedings which might otherwise have revealed a conspiracy.

He even questions the circumstances of the plea itself, arguing that the judge (now deceased) did not ask Ray outright whether Ray had been the killer or whether he had done the killing alone. As put by the judge the question was: "Are you pleading guilty . . . because you killed Dr. Martin Luther King under such circumstances that it would make you legally guilty of murder in the first degree under the law as explained to you by your lawyer?" To this Ray replied: "Yes, legally guilty."

I quote this passage to give some indication of the author's hairsplitting approach. There is no question that the agreement between the prosecutor and Ray's counsel to accept this guilty plea transformed the proceedings from a full-length trial in which all the evidence would have been led into the briefest of minitrials. Nevertheless the fact remains that Ray pleaded guilty to murder in open court and received a sentence of 99 years.

* * *

Weisberg goes on to attack the agreement which led to the guilty plea. He is highly critical of Ray's counsel for his role in the matter and points to the large sums offered by magazines and others eager to buy the "inside story." Here Weisberg is on solid ground; these money offers for "exclusive" information about the murder leave a most disagreeable taste.

Crass commercialism should never play a part in the actions of principals in any trial, let alone one of such historic import. Among the wealth of documents cited by Weisberg is a letter by Ray's lawyer setting out certain of these lucrative arrangements. It was quoted in William Bradford Huie's book, "He Slew the Dreamer," and was also printed in the New York Post on April 8, 1969.

* * *

Weisberg's theory is that Dr. King was a victim of a conspiracy and that Ray was the decoy rather than a kill-

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er. Who then was the real assassin? Here Weisberg falls back on vague allegations about "a fat man" and "a short, slight man." This is flimsy stuff.

Weisberg is more voluble challenging Ray's sole guilt than at producing the actual conspirators — if in fact there were any. "Ray," he concludes, "was part of a conspiracy he did not control and in which he was never intended to be the murderer." All of which remains to be established—if Ray ever succeeds in reopening his trial.

The book is not helped by the emotional tone in which it is written, nor by the occasional carelessness one is able to detect. One of my reviews, for example, is cited by Weisberg, who reports my name as "James Barkham."

Let us hope there will be a more balanced analysis of this tragic affair in the book which Gerold Frank is said to be completing. Until evidence of a conspiracy beyond a reasonable doubt is adduced in open court, the present verdict stands.

Weisberg's book and others to follow — for inevitably there will be others—make it more than ever regrettable that a full trial was never staged.

JOHN BARKHAM
27 EAST 65TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10021

April 30, 1971

Mr. Harold Weisberg
Coq d'Or Press
Route 8
Frederick, Maryland 21701

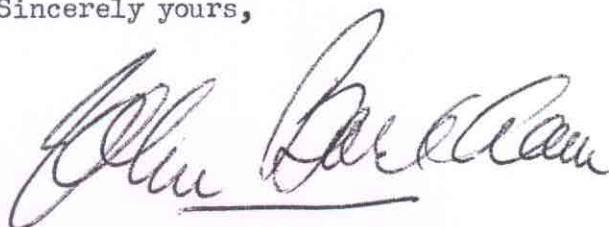
Dear Mr. Weisberg:

The New York Post has passed on to me your letter of April 11 taking issue with my review of your book, "Frame-Up." In my twenty years of daily reviewing I cannot recall ever before having received from an author so intemperate a commentary.

I was startled not so much by its matter as by its manner. On the basis of my review -- and to the best of my knowledge this is the first of your books I have ever reviewed -- you level at me such charges as "dishonesty of intent," "shameful scribbling," "sycophantic inconsistency," "lengthy diatribe," "hate, venom and corruption." All this because of a 700 word review which, though disagreeing with your central thesis, does so in what I submit are sober, measured terms.

You will doubtless write other books in the future which reviewers may or may not like. I suggest that you do not advance your cause by personally abusing those who differ with you or by questioning their integrity. As an investigative reporter you sought to persuade readers that a miscarriage of justice occurred in the Martin Luther King -- James Earl Ray case. I happen to think that you have not yet proved your case. Since Ray is attempting to reopen the matter, it is ~~still~~ possible that the full story may still come out in court. Till then I stand on my view that your book and other such books "make it more than ever regrettable that a full trial was never staged."

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Barkham", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the typed name and is underlined.