

Franks file

4/6/72

Dear Larry,

I am sorry to learn that the tip I picked up in Washington yesterday was not legit. Were it, it would have made a good story. I had doubts about part, but I felt I should tell you. I know New Orleans, and the version I got was that Kissinger touched down at Lakefront airport. Unlikely. It would have been Moissant. Not could I find any need for the touchdown.

I am also disappointed that the inevitable happened to Bob. I don't think the best editor in the world can begin to imagine the magnitude and complexity of the job he gives the most competent and most honest reporter when he assigns any story on any of the political assassinations. It was inevitable that Bob would err. He may not remember it, but I twice offered to check his copy for him.

And then there are the strangest things that slip by. Like Siegenthaler's incredible forgetting of the Constitution and the obligations of the prosecution, not the judge, and neither Bon nor his editor catching it. Yet the fact is a high-school kid should have. The difference is that the high-school kid doesn't have the pressures and the faith in a known writer.

What troubles me most in all of this is not the kind of thing that inevitably happens to me. It varies from the accidental, which I am sure is the case with any error "ob made, to the deliberate, and that by a friend, Dick Whalen (The Founding Father), was under orders from the Sat. Eve. Post editors to do a job on me even though they sent him to me to salvage him when he was lost after four expensive months. Dick begged me not to do to him what I did to Fletcher Knebel (WWII), and I have not. I know the position in which he was from my younger day. We remain friends.

What does concern me is what happens to society and what happens to that very important part of it, the press. In my writing I believe it is my responsibility to be explicit. Sometimes I add opinions with which others disagree, to make clear to the unsophisticated what I want to be clear. Perhaps I do this to excess. That is one of the problems of having neither time for revision nor an editor. But you will find in FAME-UP and I think in every appearance I have made my firm and fixed opinion that the only part of our society that filled its traditional role and served its responsibility honorably was the working reporter (in the King case). The reporting from Memphis was so good, so accurate, that when I got the court records I did not revise to cite them instead of the papers because I felt it important to leave a record showing that the truth could be put together from the major papers alone.

I don't really think the management of the major papers want to corrupt history, want to disillusion the youth and the blacks. I think they, too, are captives, of their sources, of the prejudices and desires of those with whom they associate, perhaps serve. But the net effect of their editorial positions, of their assignments and failures to assign, is subversive of the true role of the press and results in a corruption of history, an undermining of confidence in the press and, ultimately, becomes a major obstacle to the functioning of a true representative society.

Frank appears to have agreed to a TV confrontation with me May 7. I'll be surprised if he is there. Percy Foreman, better equipped, fled on with half his makeup on. Frank saw what I did under a crooked format to a gangup of his two major sources, Quie and former prosecutor now Judge Dwyer. This is to say that Frank wrote a crooked book deliberately. I say this on a number of bases, a glance at the book and listening to him on the four-hour Long John Nabel Show from NYC two nights ago. Yet all the papers will pull the stops, all the reviewers will oooh and ah, based on the bread Doubleday is dispensing, his record and the pseudo-establishmentarian tone of the smooth work. It is anti-establishmentarian. Only truth and honesty serve the real interests of the establishment.

Aside from being busy men with heavy responsibilities, most editors of assorted ranks are the victims of varied hangups. The most common is that those of us who question the official mythology are nits, as indeed some are. But not all, as I think you know.

Yet I think that in many cases where the truth can be readily achieved, it is avoided because of these hangups. All this leads to a specific proposal I think will not be accepted but I feel impelled to make. I think it gives the press a chance to serve its traditional role and to recapture integrity largely lost in most of the reporting of the political assassinations.

It is simply this: Frank has a book to promote and sell, I do not. He has corrupted history and truth, accusations I make explicit. I propose a joint interview, to be taped, with both of us agreeing in advance to give the unquestioned right to the paper to edit as it sees fit but with unedited dubs to be provided each. We can limit or not. I think that after reading the book - I've skimmed perhaps a dozen pages from the index - I can come up with a dozen or 15 basic questions of honesty, intent and fact.

I think the result would be a helluva story on what it takes to make a million-dollar best seller. Remember, this one deals with the most costly crime in our history. Need I remind anyone of the lingering consequences?

For my part, I will gladly submit the questions in advance, with page citations. If it is desired to do the same with my work, also agreed.

Although I do not think his paper will go for it any more than yours, I am sending a carbon of this to Paul Valentine on the Washington Post because he covered the trial. If Lipson is on your paper (and his reporting, like Paul's, was both perceptive and right down the middle), I'd welcome him in on it. I don't care who is, as long as he is straight and has a glimmer of the fact, and as long as it doesn't get too cumbersome.

I think there is a better chance for a snowball's survival in hell than Frank's agreement to this. I do not insist, but I would then welcome an independent exploration by the reporter(s) of the questions I would pose, from Frank's work and the independently-available sources.

If at some point the major press does not undertake to end the Orwellian intrusion into society, we soon will have a more Orwellian society. What the hell else do you think my wife and I have ruined our lives and bankrupted ourselves for?

Best regards,

Harold Weisberg

P.S. Excuse not reading and correcting. I have to leave as soon as I take this out to take my wife to work and if I mail this then it will save a day and may reach you tomorrow.