

Rt. 8, Frederick, Md. 21701
April 20, 1968

Mr. John Joerg
English Department
Loyola University
New Orleans, La. 70018

Dear Mr. Joerg,

Your challenging letter of the 16th has been forwarded. Separately I am sending the books to Mr. Miller Williams.

Your candor earns—and justifies—my own. I trust you will accept the sincere expression of my beliefs about writing, particularly on this subject, reviews and reviewers, and the teaching of writing, as I have accepted yours.

And please tolerate the undue haste with which I respond, for as Louis will tell you, I still work a 20-hour day seven days a week, as I have for almost four years.

Your exposition of my writing, the books and the subject takes all out of context, seeks to apply an artificial standard and, in essence, demands intellectual dishonesty of me as a price for acceptability. You examine my work in a vacuum and tinted through the rosy glasses or the ivory tower.

Your entire emphasis is on conformity, on an impersonal adherence to an established concept of one kind of writing, to what for me would be an intellectual eunuchry.

Writing, for me at least, is a personal expression. I say what I feel the way I feel it. If I write any other way I am castrated. Should I write any other way? Should I work for what to me are the entirely artificial standards of the reviewers, stultifying myself to curry their favor? For me the answer is "no". Writing is not a deodorant, packaged with an eye on the idiot box and presented with this foremost in mind. To me, such writing is as much a manufacture as sausages, and about as personal.

I repeat, I regard writing as personal expression, not assembly-line conformity. I express my feelings, not yours. My feelings are the product of my heritage, not yours; my work, not yours; my vision alone. I shall return to this.

Those of you who teach writing are a self-perpetuating class, espousing conformity, monolithic standards of mildness, and justify this by clamoring that all else is wrong — because you say so. You would remake Zolas into Brontes. Frankly, when you speak of effectiveness, you are not in a position to judge. You decide what you want to be effective, which is what you teach—which is the easiest thing to teach, and the safest. I have my own appraisal of effectiveness, in one form in well over a thousand unsolicited letters from total strangers. It is not what is taught but it is what readers feel and without inspiration say. There is no expression of the other side in this dispute about writing because only one side is heard, that of the reviewers—teachers.

Astoundingly, you evaluate my writing as though it were a classroom exercise, as though it were created in a test-tube and with no more effort or preparation.

How can you make a valid appraisal without examination of the magnitude

of the writing and the work that was prerequisite? How can you separate it from the requirements of the rest of my activity? WHITEWASH: THE REPORT ON THE WARREN REPORT, mine and the first book on the subject, was completed in mid-February 1965. The Warren Report was issued September 27, 1964, the appended 26 volumes in mid-November. Before writing, I had a third of a million words of typed notes, aside from what was stored in my head. The actual writing of the long book took 28 days, if you can consider working around the clock, many nights not getting into bed, as measurable in days of work. It is, I believe, still the definitive work in the field, having brought to light the essence of what other duplicated and a very considerable amount that appears nowhere else, even after extensive literary pilferage. When, neither impartially nor immodestly, I consider the character of the scholarship, the extensiveness of direct quotation and the enormous number of unobtrusive references, I think it is a close to unique achievement in writing.

With its history you are familiar. More than 120 publishers of books and magazines throughout the world declined it without the expression of a serious adverse editorial judgement and often with the prediction it would be a best-seller. I could get no agent to handle the subject and had to be my own. Meanwhile, I wrote another book on another subject and because the enormous investigation encompassed in the subsequent four, three of which are published, and two incomplete but researched.

Withall I had to be my own publisher, distributor, publicist and research assistant.

When it went into general distribution, there was no other book on the subject. It is exactly that passion to which you object that really opened the subject, laying the basis for acceptability of the less-accurate later works that thrived because they were promoted and because the groundwork was done for them. Then Epstein's "Inquest" came along. It received the critical adulation of those who apply your standards. Yet the week it had a front-page review in "Book World" (then "Book Week"), by a famous professor, a personality and close assistant of the murdered President, Richard Goodwin, a week that began with no copies of WHITEWASH on sale in New York, WHITEWASH also became the best-seller in New York and almost immediately "Inquest" was remaindered, less than three months after its publication! Had there been normal, commercial distribution of WHITEWASH in New York alone that week and for the ensuing few, there is no telling how many it would have sold, in its unorthodox and expensive form.

So, the eastern intellectual community took Epstein to heart, ignored me, and I put him out of business without a single ad or review. So, tell me about effectiveness, professor.

Now his book was written exactly as you prescribe. It received universal acclaim. But it didn't really make it and it could not face the competition of the unheralded, unadvertised work of passion. Need I tell you the lousy, dishonest work his is, yet how it was acclaimed? Its form-your form-was sufficient to achieve that.

Then we have a commercial appraisal. A publisher who had thrice declined the book came for it. He failed to change a single word -even those he should have (like, "this is the least desirable form for an author to present his work"), printed a quarter of a million and went back to press ~~xxx~~ twice the first month. Do tell me about acceptability and I'll tell you what the marketplace says.

My second book was, with all these other things I had to do, out before

any but two of the many on the subject appeared. It is the first to contain the original searching of the suppressed files. On any other subject, in any other climate, it would have been a major sensation. What it brings to light is with duplication in our history.

You make adverse references to my referring back to the first. That means, I believe, that you haven't read carefully. This book says it is the second part of my personal report on the Warren Report. It is a long book. Instead of duplicating I referred. Perhaps I didn't do it well. But again, please criticize in a context. This book was the work of a single man, from concept through research and printing into publication and promotion. It, like all my books have had to be, is a first draft. The choice was to discontinue all other work for the honing of words. In a poem, fine. When the writer regards his country and its institutions as in jeopardy, was mine the wrong choice?

I admit literary creativity is not enhanced by such conditions of work. In this particular book, my awareness of it is expressed publicly, in the preface and in the epilogue. The reasons for publication of a hurried first draft are set forth. The alternative was greatly-delayed publication and the cessation of other work.

As I see it, the essential needs of the writer are to express and to communicate. My need was haste, for I regard the information I brought forth, the fact I sought to communicate, as essential to the survival of the country. Then as now I regarded speed as the essential requirement. Had I taken a year to polish and refine, I could have had a more literate work. And had he gotten a dozen colleagues, Paul Revere could have roused more people.

For all its haste, that work stands today still unchallenged, its challenges declined, its accuracy still unquestioned, and its scholarship uncontested. It is only when you read Thompson with care and understand that every place he says, in the book he had then not yet commenced, "According to a document recently discovered in the National Archives" what he is really saying is "according to what I have stolen from WHITWASH/II..." can you understand what I claim is the accomplishment of this book.

But if you are going to appraise writing, writing with passion, may I ask that you reread the epilogue to that book? I tell you that I awakened early one morning with the ideas in mind and had it completed in exactly the way it appears by lunchtime. If you are going to sit in judgement, as I invite, tell me who else writes with this speed—or can, today—and whether I can in any other way accomplish my objectives? May I also suggest that the objectives of a writer should be considered by those who evaluate his work?

Now publication date of that book was early December. I then went on a coast-to-coast speaking-debating tour on which each challenge to debate by the other side was either declined out of hand or accepted by those who then, without exception, failed to appear. The purpose of this trip was to defend a competitor, not to promote that book, which was then not yet in distributive channels. The first news of the Garrison probe was in the papers in the last half of February. My book, on the same material, was completed and retyped, all quarter of a million words of it, by the middle of April, despite all the other work and responsibilities I had. It is 100% independent. Delay in its publication was outside my control. I gave the publisher carte blanche on editing. I regret he used only a shears. Nonetheless, a year has passed, and I invite comparison with any other work on the subject including those who in reviewing it find my writing "turgid" while in their own writings they steal from it.

The purpose of turning this manuscript over to a small publisher under

adverse condition was to free myself for other work. The next book was actually written and published in exactly four weeks. I invite your examination of PHOTOGRAPHIC WHITEWASH: SUPPRESSED KENNEDY ASSASSINATION PICTURES. You may find me immodest, but entirely aside from what I unabashedly claims is a production record for a single man, please, do, tell me a book you can compare with it in its content, any equivalent piece of investigating reporting. Or, look at that appendix ransacked from the oblivion of suppression in the National Archives and find several comparable works on any subject with which you can compare it really unfavorably. Need I then call your attention to those many subsequent books and magazine articles which have, without acknowledgement, benefitted from it. Go back to Teapot Dome, if you'd like, or farthur, and cite me the exposure of a national scandal of greater magnitude, and you try it in 28 days from the beginning of the introduction to the delivery of the first copies from the bindery -with index, even if you have all the research done. And aside from the appendix, there are 65,000 words of text.

Here again I editorialize, Take it in context and tell me the introduction is inappropriate -or bad writing. Also, consider whether or not it was an early, perhaps the earliest, expression of what is now more often said.

That book was commenced May 30. It was then completed, I did a little bit to distribute and promote it, and back to the typewriter. My fifth and still unpublished book, POST MORTEM: THE SUPPRESSED KENNEDY AUTOPSY, was finished before the end of September. I had the research to complete, and you will find it enormous, and then many other obligations of a researcher, writer, editor, publicist, public speaker, mail clerk and assistant to others to perform. The book contains what the government insists does not exist. Were I able to sustain the added debt it requires, it would have long since appeared. One of the very few people to see it, a famous pathologist himself working in the field and in only this narrow aspect, has just written me, "The magnitude and extent of your efforts and data stagger me." He was so excited he asked to hold the manuscript for an additional reading. And here am I, a layman in the medical field, once again doing all the basic work.

With all these many things, I have thoroughly researched and written about a million words, most of which I have also published myself. You teach writing; you know writers. Allow me the immodesty of this challenge: show me the literary equal of this record. Then tell me how you can evaluate my work in the sterility of your expressed concepts.

Were this not enough, I have now made six trips to New Orleans to help Jim Garrison as an unpaid, unofficial investigator-analyst, in the past year. That, too, is part of my obligation as a writer, as it has been my obligation to help others working in the field, and as I have though some might consider them my competitors.

What I am really doing in taking this form~~er~~ extravagant time to write you so and perhaps offending you is to, no matter how late, start an overdue dialogue. Here we have a President gunned down on the streets of an American city in broad daylight and consigned to history by the government that came into dominion by that murder alone with the dubious epitaph of a snake inquest. And you ask me to polish phrases, apply the artificilaities of the classroom to an alarm I am sounding against the fascism that is, to all practical purposes, already here?

Rome is burning, professor, while you sniff flowers.

By all means review my books. Give no thought to the effect on sale because if every copy in the New Orleans stores were to be sold as a result it would not repay me for the time the writing of this letter consumes.

But let me give you a few dares, you as a reviewer: review my work as a totality, in the context of its doctrine, purposes, extent and competitive standing as writing and as information. Then find space for a few choice words on the state of the society which greets and treats it as my work was and has been. Let your readers know about the intellectual and literary health of your city, where OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS is almost 100% suppressed and with it the magnificent foreword by Jim Garrison, who, without doubt, is the most popular man in the city, if not the state.

Like all the other works in the field, mine is dated. Let me give you this additional challenge: show me a single major revelation that first appeared in a single one of the others. This, too, is part of writing, what is said, what is brought to public attention. Comb all those that enjoyed the luxuries of researchers, editors, note-writers, editors without end and all the other benefits of normal, commercial publication and show me the solitary, major revelation that between them they first brought to light.

I have had an additional objective, one I would have thought that from the magnitude and timeliness of my work you would have comprehended. In retrospect, I suppose that if you had you could not have written this letter. I have tried to make books immediate, to give them the immediacy required for the viability of a democratic society that can function only on the basis of information. What I have sought to do, what I have proved can be done—indeed, what I have done—is to carry books from conception through distribution more rapidly than magazines can be produced.

Stop and think of that for a moment. In our newspapers, were they, as they are not, true to their responsibilities, we get hasty, sketchy information. In our magazines, we get a little more depth and perspective. But for thoroughness, nothing has replaced the book. However, while publishers extoll the benefits of the late-20th century in the books they publish, they have failed to produce books as the era makes possible.

Take the four-week history of PHOTOGRAPHIC WHITEFLASH as an example of what can be done. If one man, with but the considerable aid of a hard-working wife, can accomplish this, what cannot commercial publishers do, given what they lack, the will to do it? Can I emphasize too much the lost opportunity, for profit or for what I regard as more important, society and its survival?

You solicit comment on Thompson. I will not insult you by circumlocutions. He is a crook who blended deliberate error with his larceny to evolve a formula designed for sale by the company that manufactures pornography to exactly suit the cannily-anticipated potential of the market and in so doing manufactured a formula calculated to ransom the government, to the degree still possible. There was no longer any possibility of pretending the Warren Report was even approximately accurate or at all acceptable. Consider all of his work, including its poor distribution in the Saturday Evening Post. He found the intellectual fortitude required for his task, said the fatal shot came from the sixth-floor window, fired by the Oswald whose innocence can no longer be questioned, and not as part of a conspiracy, although there were, he says, two other assassins. All the government need have done before the great pressure to which we immediately subjected him forced him into retraction and out of the public view was to apologize for ignoring the presence of other

and entirely independent would-be assassins. He certifies the essence of the official fairy tale. That he failed is in no way to the credit of the reviewers, who uniformly lauded him for his quiet tone, exactly the deception you demand of me. What difference does content make, as long as it is presented quietly, in a way not to stir emotions?

Your own familiarity with my writing should have alerted you to the dead giveaways in his work: the Tague shot and the Aldredge miss. Plot these on a chart—even his, which misplaces the Tague hit, and you will see the total impossibility of his theory, as though the rest, including a few of the things you mention, were not equally bad, most worse.

His Tague explanation requires a very high pop-up bullet that at the end of its trajectory has preserved sufficient energy to smite the curb with the force required to spray concrete vigorously enough to wound the man. With Aldredge, he requires an abrupt new trajectory at a minimum of a right-angle to the path of the bullet where again, after the spectacular career inside Connally, the reserve force is sufficient to gouge concrete for about 5 inches.

There ~~is~~ are but two new things in the entire work, and they, in my opinion, were made accessible to him by those who I had informed in confidence and who I later learned were assisting him. The remainder is literary kleptomania tailored to fashion a placebo.

It is in no sense a "micro-study", or any other kind. The least unkindness is to call it a beflacked rehash. How could he have preserved his doctrine without ignoring the two first points in the second paragraph on your second page? If you want your own appraisal of his cheapskate on Zapruder, particularly with regard to LIFE, reread the eight pages of PHOTOGRAPHIC WHITEWASH beginning on page 17. If the show I taped on Zapruder for Channel 26 hasn't been aired, please view it. There I add to what I have in WHITEWASH II proving that the President had been struck before Frame 210. Willis, in the simplest formulation, has already taken his camera down beginning in Frame 202, as Thompson well knew. In addition, as I now learn by another rereading of his testimony, Zapruder actually sold the right to suppress his film, and for this his royalties are in the neighborhood of a half-million dollars, confirmed to me by a LIFE editor who may now be in New Orleans, Richard Billings.

The two most spectacular things in Thompson's book he stole from Ray Marcus and me. Contrary to the knowing lies that Thompson never stops telling about this film on which he has done no original work, Ray Marcus first proved that Governor Connally was struck in the shoulder at frame 237-3 so early that he mailed his work to me in June 1966, with permission to use it. I didn't because I wanted him to have the full benefit of this brilliant analysis. Ray worked entirely from the printed pictures, the least clear form. He told Thompson about it when Thompson had not yet begun his book. And I published the doubt-head-hit proof of the Zapruder film, without the hokus-pokus of fraudulent physics, in WHITEWASH II on page 221.

Casual examination of the sketches proves they are inaccurate. I printed the frames of the original Zapruder film in my first book, without threat from LIFE. The difference is that my use is genuine, not promotional. Do you suppose that the maximum expectable profit from this book could begin to approximate the royalties alone this book has earned? How serious, then, can you consider the offer of that profit in return for the use of the film?

May I also suggest that you ask yourself if the essential importance of the missing frames is what they show? Recall, as I so often do, "The Purloined Letter", and ask if it cannot be what they do not show? This is my belief. Unless they show Phil Willis, with his camera to his eye, the entire Report is deliberate error. They cannot, for he disappears from the margin that is unseen on projection in Frame 205. I go into this in detail in WHITBUSH II. Thompson knew this before he began to write. He did not challenge me, for he dare not. Nor could he acknowledge this, for then he'd have had no book. Need I say more of him, or LIFE, or the adulating press?

In response to your question, would I go over your ms for errors, I will, but I cannot conceive of an error in a review of Thompson unless there are kind words? How can you be unkind, no matter what you say, of a book that is either wilful error or open thievery? Even if it is presented as the fruit of original research and original analysis?

I cannot begin to explain the infinite fineness of the error, it is that all-pervading, even when it is not purposeful. For example, all the hoopla about Policeman Hargis in the Bond film (which he also did not discover), particularly in the Post. The most casual examination of the policeman shows he could not possibly be dismounting. In any event, it is not Hargis but the unheard Jackson.

And I think you must understand that no copies of the Zapruder film contain or can contain the marginal material, between the sprocket holes, which is about 25% of the exposed film.

Aside from his intended error, let me give you a simple way of evaluating Thompson: find something ~~in it~~ that you believe is accurate and then prove that it is original. If you cannot do that, what can you say of his work? On the other hand, I'll give you the source of anything accurate you cite. Fair enough?

Please excuse the hastiness of this writing. In order to do what I have set out upon, I have little time for anything. My responses to letters are planned to the degree they can be while I am reading them. I then write, and sometimes, as in this case, I write more than I expected to.

Your clear and kind purpose was to make me think, and constructively; I appreciate that, although long ago I had gone through that. Of course, I do not presume that the arguments with which I began are universally correct. I'd like you to consider whether they are right for me, and whether there is any other basis for examining a writer. They would not be right, for example, for Jim Garrison. (May I suggest that in an early issue you examine his "A Heritage Of Stone", the foreword to the text, "Crime Law and Correction" and "Liberty and Justice For All", his foreword to OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS, and see if you cannot agree that by your standard these are among the most brilliant writings of our day.) In any event, my purpose is, in turn, to get you to think about writing on the fundamental issues of the day: how you teach it, how you review it; how it serves or can serve its intended purpose; and whether the style should or ~~is~~ should not be consistent with that purpose, as the author, not the critic, sees it.

I burden you, in closing, with the opinion of a poet, unsolicited: "Passion is the ultimate expression of the intellect". I wish she were commissioned to review me!

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg