

20734

August 11, 1966

Dear Mr. Carson,

Thank you for the copy of your wife's play. I hope to be able to read it soon. In fact, I hope you can spare a copy of the coming longer version before I do this. I am always embarrassed to always be telling people I haven't time, but if you knew what just doing everything an entire publishing house does plus research that continues plus writing (on a sequel) plus the public relations, perhaps you'll understand this is not evasion. I haven't really read a newspaper for several months and often do not even glance at one.

I was able to arrange for wholesalers to handle WHITEWASH on a basis that guarantees them against loss and gives them 10% of the selling price, the normal arrangement. Perhaps you can do the same thing. If he has the time, Mr. Fran Howell, of Raymar, Menlo Park, Calif., might help you. He and his partner, whose name is Woodruff, have treated us well. I met them and spoke to them briefly at the American Booksellers Assn. convention in June. They are, I believe, the largest wholesalers on the West Coast. They can also tell you about others. Those handling WHITEWASH are A&A, Near Road, Holbrook, Mass. (Aaron Rabinowitz, who heads it, has an apparently well-deserved reputation as a nice guy, but he suddenly resisted selling my book and I have no reason to believe he has since changed his mind. I found him not filling orders, etc. He is the only distributor who hasn't reordered WHITEWASH at least two times. He may have something on the subject. But on meeting him I, too, considered him a very good man.); Diamondstein Book Co., 38 Portman Road, New Rochelle, N.Y. (I found Mr. Diamondstein very helpful and nice.); and Bookazine, the largest of these, who was reluctant, got off to a slow and apparently unwilling start, but they have sold quite a few copies since.). I think you should also know the unfree, unenterprising character of the book distribution business. They merely have the book and, usually, when the stores order, without too great a show of reluctance the writer will feel they have to fill the orders. Even when they find they have a profitable item, they will not ordinarily spend a cent to push it. I found one distributor billing me at the full retail price plus a service charge for giving six copies to a radio program that went to his place of business and picked them up! This is my one and most illuminating experience with book publishing and its distribution. But I'd write them and try. Most helpful will be news or radio play, of which the latter is more likely.

Were I that close to SF, I'd see and try Ferlinghetti who, I understand, was reluctant with WHITEWASH.

I make the two following suggestions with the specific understanding you accompany each with a note saying I suggested it not knowing whether they'd have time. These are a friend and an agent, for each of whom I have the highest regard and both of whom stay too busy now. The friend is Sidney Kaufman, 565 Fifth Ave., NYC, NY (he may now be abroad). He is an experienced producer-director. The agent, for whom I have the highest respect and regard, is Gordon Harbord, 53 St. Martin's Lane, London WC2, Eng. What, if anything, either can or will do, I do not know.... And have you approached some of the college groups?

Sincerely,

P.S. I do not think there is much chance the commercial distributors will handle anything published by the Independent Socialist Club. I hadn't noticed that when I began this letter before stopping for supper. It is probably a waste of your time and will lead only to a feeling of frustration when they turn you down. Before approaching them do what I did, establish a sale somewhere, in a half-dozen or a dozen bookstores. When the bookstores tell them it will sell, not the author, they'll listen with another ear. I presume you have sent copies to the more liberal or reputedly more liberal of the smaller publications. I have found, with but one exception, they have the same attitudes on this subject. But try.

Have you tried with the college students?

Many people have asked me if WHITEWASH can be banned in Boston. I haven't tried.

Sorry I can't be of more help. But good luck.

Harold Weisberg