

Dear Dave,

7/26/92

The enclosed article from today's Past Book World reports what tells us why only Kai Bird is the author of the McCloy biography that began as a collaboration with Max Holland - they split up antagonists.

It may also indicate ~~part~~ part of the reason to us - disagreement on content.

If this is so I suggest it might be a good idea to be in touch with Holland and to call to his attention some of the to us serious omissions relating to McCloy on the Warren Commission, omissions that can be interpreted as raising questions of personal, professional and political integrity.

I do not recall now whether ~~both~~ ^{one} were here or not. I am certain that I showed ~~them~~ the executive session transcripts. I am not certain whether or not they copied all of any.

But I do think that with this rivalry the present situation between them and with Holland's version yet to appear, it would be a good idea to call these transcripts to Holland's attention in the event he does not have them. Plus some of the hearings.

With or without an appraisal of Bird's treatment of McCloy on the Commission.

With, of course, unless there appears to be what I now do not see, some reason for not providing it.

I believe it would come best, any approach to Holland, through a professor of history, who could extend an invitation for him to look around here (again?) and make copies. and perhaps also talk to Jerry. To whom a copy of this.

What Bird may perhaps have reflected and what may be Holland's attitude could be The Nation's attitude/position/preconception a la Navasky/Kopkind/ Cockburn et al.

I could address that easily with documents on my desk.

If you do not want to speak to him would you please, if not too much trouble, find out for me how I can other than by writing him at The Nation and ask forwarding?

Address and ~~perhaps~~ phone also.

H

By David Streitfeld

He Said, He Said

JUST HOW bitter is the split between Kai Bird and Max Holland, one-time best buddies and now competing biographers? Consider this: Thirteen months ago, Holland was giving a talk at the Woodrow Wilson Center on the subject that has concerned both scholars for the past decade, John J. McCloy, perennial presidential adviser and establishment big wheel.

Bird, who was nearing the finish line on his book, naturally wanted to know what Holland was going to say. But he knew if he attended it would rattle the guy. "He changes color when I walk into the room," Bird says. Not, he admits, that he feels too good himself: "I get nervous at the thought."

Instead Bird sent his father, a retired foreign service officer, to take notes. Holland recognized him, and knew why he was there: "He was spying." So he censored his text to throw out things he knew Bird didn't have, like a quotation from a letter McCloy had written his mother. There's no point in helping the enemy.

And they are enemies now, to the extent that they won't stay in the same room together. "It's like a divorce," says Holland. "A very painful divorce. The only difference is, in this case you could divide the baby. We could both have it, so to speak." Says Bird: "I regard it as a great tragedy. It still is a painful episode in my life and always will be."

This, their friends and colleagues agree, is the saddest story. "I've never seen people who collaborated better than those two," says Victor Navasky, editor of the Nation. "They had a joint career."

But the duo did more than share a columnist's byline for the magazine. "Let me put it this way," says Holland. "If I had gotten married, he would have been my best man. As Victor used to say, we were attached at the hip." Holland's transcriber says she sometimes can't tell their voices apart on the tapes.

They met in 1976 as interns at the Carnegie Endowment. Around 1981, Bird talked to Holland about an idea for a collaborative effort on Saudi Arabia. Holland refined this into a biography of McCloy, who had represented many of the oil companies against OPEC. A contract with Simon & Schuster was signed in 1982, and they plugged away until '86.

"The first couple of years it was a lot of fun—a big treasure hunt," says Bird, remembering fondly the long time they spent rummaging in Averell Harriman's personal papers. They did a tremendous amount of research—hundreds of Freedom of Information Act requests, 15,000 pages of photocopies from the Eisenhower Library alone. It was when they had to put this material in a narrative that things broke down.

Their plan was to split the life in two—the wrong method, both now feel. When Bird was done with his half (the early years), Holland wasn't even close to finishing his—and moreover, he didn't like what Bird had written. More fundamentally, Holland felt there was still more research to be done.

At about this point, Holland got sidetracked on another topic, a company his father had worked for that had gone bankrupt. He and Bird had always written everything together, but Bird didn't want to delay work on McCloy any longer. Holland went ahead anyway, and his *When the Machine Stopped* was published in 1989.

By this time, the whole McCloy project

had fallen irrevocably apart. Lawyers were hired. "It was threatening to get very messy," says Holland. They split up, which was no easy task: making a second set of research materials alone cost \$10,000.

How much research is enough? Says Bird: "There's always one more classmate out there, or some friend you haven't interviewed, or more archives. You could go back again and again. Max thought of this book as his life's work. From my point of view, he became very uncompromising about how to complete it."

Holland, naturally, thought this missing material was important: "I felt there was a lot of work that hadn't yet been done—we hadn't interviewed Kissinger or David Rockefeller. His whole thrust was to get things over. He didn't care."

When Bird's *The Chairman: John J. McCloy, the Making of the American Establishment* was published by Simon & Schuster this spring, Holland found it galling that the book was saluted for its thorough research. If Bird had done the book by himself, he says, "it would have been much less thoroughly researched than it purports to be." He says his version—*Citizen McCloy*, under contract at Scribner's with no publication date in sight—will contain significant new information. Bird, of course, disputes that.

Just like with a failed marriage, it's not easy to say what or who is to blame. "If I knew the answer to that, maybe they would have gotten through it," says editor Navasky, their appointed arbiter.

One rule of collaboration is to have written agreements—even or maybe especially if you're best friends. Bird and Holland did that. They had a partnership agreement about how to divide the money and do the research, made provisions for arbitration. That didn't save them.

At the end, says Holland, "there was no trust between us whatsoever. The one thing which wasn't in our contract, because there's no way you can put it in, was if you work as a team, common-sense suggestions have to be taken at face value. They can't be seen as having a secret agenda."

Bird's interpretation seems fair: "To write any book, but particularly a biography, you've got to have an obsessive, stubborn personality, particularly to do the archival work. It's a lonely process. Max has all those qualities—he's extremely persistent and meticulous."

The problem: "Max learned that I was just as obsessed as he was. In the end, I became as stubborn about the project. I think that was a surprise to him, and led to a breakdown." Writing a biography, perhaps, is like leading an orchestra: Only one person can be in charge at a time.

Evolving With Alice

ONE WAY to measure Alice Walker's increasing freedom as an artist is through the dedications of her books. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, back in 1970, was conventional: the nod went to her mother and then-husband. Twelve years later, for *The Color Purple*, "the Spirit" got the nod. Walker's new novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is the most original yet: "This book is dedicated with tenderness and respect to the blameless vulva."

There's a parallel development in the stories themselves. *Copeland* is a relatively straightforward tale of Georgia sharecroppers, autobiographical in setting if not plot. After that, Walker says, "I just got bored." To stoke her interest, she experimented with form and narrative. *The Color Purple*



BY KIM KOMECH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST
Alice Walker

was told exclusively through the character letters, making it one of the few epistolary novels since *Clarissa* in 1747 to gain a mass audience.

"It's the Aquarian in me," says Walker like to experiment. That's true of my life not just my books." Two nights before the conversation, she had some friends over her sleek San Francisco rowhouse. Wall ordered food in, and chose Italian and Thai. "We all loved it," she laughs. "It's so lovely to see how things that seemed so different and far apart can be so harmonious in flavor in texture, in hue, in being."

What's different in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is not the style but the ingredients. It is a novel about the causes and consequences of female genital mutilation, a barbaric form of ritual circumcision that Walker says has been committed against as many as 100 million women and girls in Africa, the Far East and Middle East. It is a book she thought about for years, but felt too frightened to write.

Not anymore. "Maybe it's because my daughter has now graduated from Yale, and I feel like I've done the motherhood part of my life. I feel like I can pick up and go, and don't have to worry so much about all the things that I was worried about. Life has gotten very pure... I used to feel, 'I have to be free.' Now it's, 'I am free.'"

The heroine of *Joy* is Tashi, a tribal African woman who had walk-on parts in *Color Purple* and Walker's last novel, *Temple of My Familiar*. "Can you bear know what I have lost?" asks Tashi. Out her anger, rage and sadness, she smooths the old woman who had circumcised her "killing someone who, many years ago, killed me."

Tashi was not mutilated for any good reason, Walker makes clear. "What point could there possibly be?" she asks with a despairing sigh. "It destroys the health of the tribe from all kinds of infection, disease and mental stuff. But because it's done to women and the women are devalued, men make a claim that it's 'an affirmation of the culture.' But it can't be an affirmation if it makes you too sick to move."

The novel is an argument in favor of fiction, and Walker is planning to do what she can. In September she'll tour Africa, she's donating a portion of her royalties to help a reeducation effort, she's thinking of m