

Mr. Nat Hentoff  
c/o Oped Page, the Washington Post  
1150 15 St., NW  
Washington, DC 20071

8/14/93

Dear Mr. Hentoff,

Justified and powerful as your criticism of J. P. Ginniss and S.S. is (Post 8/14/93) and as was Jonathan Yardley's before you, I think you have both missed an even greater scandal - the ugliness of the commercialization and exploitation of the great national tragedy of the JFK assassination of which as it has for 30 years the book-publishing industry has by and large deceived and misled the people.

S & S had another bit of worse than trash out for reviews, Bob Callahan's "Who Shot JFK?" The cover blurb is "A Guide to the Major Conspiracy Theories." That is but the beginning of the cheap and nasty lies in a book that is shot full of ignorant and careless errors. And if it were not <sup>it</sup> would still be worse than trash. I've just skimmed it but if you want a professorial opinion, Dr. David Wrone, University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point (home address 1518 Blackberry Lane) has gone over it.

(I digress for an illustration of the ignorance and carelessness that typify this not/unusual publisher greed on the subject. On page 42, which I just noticed, it has the late Sylvia Hoagher as "a New York City public health administrator" when in fact she was a WHO editor, and in the ~~very next~~ same sentence says that "Abraham Zapruder's testimony did not include his stated belief that the shots came from behind him..." He did so testify.

That so-called "chapter" begins saying that the Warren Report was "published" September 24, 1964. Wrong! It was three days later. From just skimming I know of many, many more serious factual, errors all of which have been public for <sup>knowledge</sup> a long time. The theories it more or less skips over all are the oldest and while I believe all the theories presented as fact are unproven and mislead and deceive, all the newer ones and those current in the earliest day that were more significant are entirely missing. There cannot have been any peer review or even the intent of one because the record is that the publishers can get away with anything.

There is a real problem for the country when on major issues the book publishers, among others, opt for safety from official criticism and for greed. Of the less than complete listing of the coming assassination books in PW dated 4/3, I can fault them all in varying degrees and all, again in varying degrees, will perpetuate the industry-wide abdication of any <sup>sense</sup> ~~sense~~ of responsibility and its greed for the dirtiest kind of money.

I am astounded at the silence that greeted Kent Carroll's description of his coming book by one of the nuttiest (certifiable) of the nuts who invent these conspiracy theories. Carroll says it will say of the critics other than the one who made so much dirty money for him that we "have for one reason or another, put out a lot of disinformation, furthering the conspiracy." My emphasis.

That author, who can have at most a single peer in "disinformation," according to his own publisher, is charging the others as accessories after the fact. That is a very serious criminal offense.

Aside from the fact that Carroll & Graf have to know that their author is sick to the head, how can all reviewers have not taken note of this incredible accusation which cannot be proven, not even in Livingstone's fictions, of which I had a large file, at the least ask questions? Including is there any meaningful recourse for those so and what responsibility does a publisher have when he has reason to believe the author publishes is not rational?

These are the two extremes, S & S and C & G. In between is a frightful mishmash of reprints and some openly fraudulent.

"Erasing the boundary between fact and fiction" on what gets to the guts of a representative society, the assassination of a President, is what the publishing industry has had done and is exceeding its deplorable past with all the tainted money that can come from the awful, utterly irresponsible stuff typified by these S & S commercializations.

I hope that at long last reviewers and columnists will learn the realities for themselves and inform the people.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg

cc Jonathan Yardley

Please excuse my typing. It can't be any better. I'm 80 and unwell

Nat Hentoff Post 8/14/93

# Simon & Schuster & McGinniss

"Some degree of abuse is inseparable from the proper use of everything," James Madison said as he focused on those who wrote with more sulfurous imagination than facts about political figures. "It is better," he added, "to leave a few of [free expression's] noxious branches to their luxuriant growth than, by pruning them away, to injure the vigor of those yielding the proper fruits."

The First Amendment largely shields Joe McGinniss, just as it generally protects the richly imaginative writers for the supermarket tabloids, in one of which an excerpt from his "The Last Brother: The Rise and Fall of Teddy Kennedy" might vividly appear. There may be a copyright infringement suit from William Manchester, who claims McGinniss borrowed extravagantly from his "The Death of a President," but a claim of defamation from Sen. Kennedy is most unlikely, for it would bring more publicity to the book.

McGinniss's problems, however, have far less to do with legal costs than the price of greatly diminished credibility. Lawyers talk of making a damaged client whole, but McGinniss is like Humpty Dumpty after the fall.

In his attempt to—in his words—"convey to the reader what it might have been like to be 'Teddy Kennedy'"—McGinniss, without interviewing Kennedy, has reached the pinnacle of what a veteran writer I knew called

## SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY

the as-if school of non-fiction. "It could have happened that way," the old-timer used to say scornfully, "so why not write as if it indeed happened that way?"

McGinniss himself, in the "author's note" at the end of his book, says coolly that he has "written certain scenes and described certain events from what I have inferred to be [Ted Kennedy's] point of view." And on Charlie Rose's Public Broadcasting System interview program, McGinniss added: "This is a work that tries to perhaps break new ground in terms of form."

For instance, "I have quite consciously written portions as from inside his mind." But there already is a form in which that it is

done. It's called fiction.

The book, however, is being marketed as non-fiction: "a detailed, tragic portrait of a man . . . trapped in the glorious but hollow Kennedy myth, longing—but unable—to escape." The buyers of this hollow portrait will take it to be history, for the publisher has not warned them otherwise. And if the projected NBC miniseries does appear, millions more—who get their history from steamy docudramas—will delightedly believe that McGinniss did enter into the mind and suffering soul of Ted Kennedy.

So far, the author has not been treated kindly by most reviewers and reporters, and his defense—on various television programs and radio talk shows—is that he is the victim of "the Kennedy machine." The rebukes and scorn visited upon him, he says indignantly, are due to an organized effort by The Family to discredit the book and thereby preserve the Kennedy myth so it can cloak the younger generation of Kennedys going into politics.

On ABC's "Good Morning, America," McGinniss urgently declared: "The American people should not let the Kennedy family dictate to them what they should or should not read." According to his conspiracy theory, Jonathan Yardley of *The Post*, Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times*, Larry Martz of *Newsweek* and many more skewerers of McGinniss's book—myself included—have somehow been manipulated or intimidated by The Family.

McGinniss, of course, did not publish this albatross all by himself. As William Manchester told *The Post*'s Howard Kurtz, "I'm really more baffled by Simon & Schuster than I am by McGinniss. . . . Simon & Schuster is an established house."

The firm, however, is now less established as a trustworthy house. Why were there no public protests—by at least some of the editors there—that the Simon & Schuster name has been placed on this consumer fraud?

But the author says that "in almost every instance, the quotations and other facts that form the basis of my interpretations have been drawn from published sources that I believe to be reliable."

Why, then, are there no notes—no pinning down of sources by name, date and publication? And no index. Books of fiction have no index.

Erasing the boundary between fact and fantasy, writes Michiko Kakutani, "suggests that there is no knowable reality. . . . that verisimilitude is as good as the real thing."

That has become the credo of Simon & Schuster.