

September 2, 1967

Mr. William R. McAndrew  
President, NBC News  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, New York 10020

Dear Mr. McAndrew:

The TV show about which I have written was billed as "The Case of Jim Garrison". This it was not. Your letter of August 30 describes it not as this but as "an examination of the methods used by the New Orleans District Attorney's office in its investigation ...". You and other executives of NBC may seriously believe this, for you can not possibly have fulfilled your NBC functions and at the same time have learned the fact of this enormous subject, but that it also was not.

It was a revelation "of the methods used by NBC", with or without the knowledge and intent of the executives, whether or not it bespoke NBC policy, in pursuance of a defense of an indefensible thing done by the federal government. I presume you have no sources of information other than those responsible for its content and doctrine.

Now, it happens that I have personal knowledge, because the Garrison investigation covers what I have already done in my own independent research and writing (partly embodied in my published work, partly in my book, OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS, completed in early April and soon to be published) and from my own dealings with NBC, all of which were on NBC's initiative. It is from this personal knowledge and on the basis of fact that I requested time for response because you did not present anything even close to what can, with minimal honesty, be described as both sides of what you pretended to examine. Editorializing does not consist entirely of undisguised polemics. It also is accomplished by content, emphasis on the content, and by what is excluded.

I quote your own words as appropriate, "The commitment of NBC News was to ascertain and report fully the facts." This is what it should be. Had it been, you would have heard nothing from me. It has this requirement imposed upon it. It did not meet this requirement.

Your concluding paragraph says that with respect to my "possible appearance, as with all documentaries, preliminary discussions were held with a number of potential participants." This is entirely inconsistent with the sentence that immediately follows: "Since its content was directed solely to an examination of the District Attorney's methods, there was no occasion for" my appearance.

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Walter Sheridan came to see me for no such purpose, sought of me no information remotely related to this, but in response to my request for a transcript of the interview you had already conducted with Gordon Novel, then in your pay. My interest in this interview, as you will soon see, was for possible inclusion in the book I was then completing.

Richard Townley sought me out in pursuance of no such purpose. What he thereafter did was in pursuance of no such purpose. And what a remarkable coincidence it is that when we were delayed for two hours in going to dinner, Mr. Townley selected only that one of the well-known eating places in New Orleans in which Mr. Sheridan, also apparently delayed, was dining.

If you are not as completely informed about this as you can be, and I suspect from your letter that you are not, I suggest it is very much to your interest and to that of NBC that you do inform yourself. Here also there was no pursuit of news. And I at no time prior to the airing of your show demanded an appearance on it. What Mr. Townley filmed bore no relationship to either that show or its intended content. Aside from the fact that all of these things were an imposition on me, my time and the faith I had the right to have in NBC News, they were also an improper intrusion into the Garrison investigation. It is not without good reason that Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Townley and their lawyers are expanding the definition of what has become identified with the "Philadelphia" practice of law!

Whether or not by intent, yours or Mr. Goodman's, in this matter, NBC News has become a partisan, not a reporter. If it was not your intent and you are not aware of what I have reported, I strongly suggest that in the interest of your integrity, that of NBC and of our country, you should learn what you readily can.

In even the limited interpretation you seek to put on what you aired, and that requires that it be wrenched from context, you did not give a fair, two-sided presentation. Anyone with even limited knowledge of fact must find this obvious.

It is a sophistry, as you should know, to say as you do that "NBC offered Mr. Garrison an opportunity to present his response on the NBC television network." Mr. Garrison was precluded by both the requirements of the law and the strictures of the court from any direct comment on what he planned to take to court, as he was from comment about the people involved. Thus it was not, and to the knowledge of NBC News was not, possible for him adequately to make response, for he could not comment on most of your show.

I renew both my offers to NBC and my request for fairness-doctrine time to present the other side of this controversial issue that NBC has moved further into this category.

On a personal level, I encourage you to recognize that on this issue the integrity of our society and its institutions are very much involved; that it is an enormous one, and that NBC, despite the wealth of its endowment and resources, has not and is not about to make the vast expenditure of time alone required for real understanding of it. Thus, the opportunity is great for harm to what I prefer to believe you do not want to hurt that can come from misplaced confidence or simple inadequate factual knowledge. There can be instant editorial determinations and positions, but not instant fact, instant experts.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg