

Route 12 - Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21701

December 14, 1978

Mr. Frank Mankiewicz
National Public Radio
2025 M Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Mankiewicz:

Right after Robert Kennedy was assassinated, according to a Saturday Evening Post article, you told the author and others a story. When assassination books were attracting attention, Bobby asked you to read them and report on them to him. You said you read them all and told him there was nothing to any of them.

I'd hate to have to live with that or anything like it.

Judging from the NPR coverage of the House assassins, you didn't learn any lesson or are using public facilities to justify your own past and prejudices.

Which ever way it is, I feel sorry for you and for all the other public figures who, like Bobby, trusted others who were unworthy of trust. And paid heavily for it, as I am confident the Members of the House assassins committee will before too long, save for those with safe constituencies and no consciences.

Your preconceptions and your past and the utter incompetence of your freshmen strutting like seniors and pretending they were reporters when they were propagandists have been an enormous disservice to the country, to journalism and to the concept of public broadcasting as free and independent broadcasting.

The rare journalistic opportunity you and your people had also was wasted. But I suppose none of this makes any difference to those who, regardless of how they see themselves and what they may call themselves, still play the old bureaucratic game.

The totality of the unfairness of your collective and individual performances is virtually impossible to imagine. There is almost no one and no agency that did not suffer from this permeating unfairness. Including the dead, those supposedly once your personal friends.

Example: The self-important Totenberg of arrogant spirit repeated that the Kennedy family took the body of the slain President by force out of Dallas. This is false.

It represents the reason I phoned the night of the day Fancher interviewed me by phone with a caution against taking the committee's word without independent confirmation. I phoned her because in the name and with the imprint of NPR she said what was false and I knew her source had to be the committee, which had obvious disinformational and self-promotional purposes. It served them by lying, as has been its practice.

Dr. James J. Humes, who was in charge of the so-called autopsy performed on the President, is not a forensic pathologist, according to Totenberg. Naturally not. That is because he is board certified and so swore to the Warren Commission.

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Fancher signed off with one that should make a lawyer and journalist proud. There is no proof of the so-called Byers plot but it is true anyway because the committee (and Fancher) want it to be true. And they'll get around the lack of proof - even reasonableness - in their report.

There are a dozen or more such alleged offers of a "bounty," all proven to be false. As this one was, too. Fancher was there for Judge Randall's testimony, but you'd never know it from her broadcasting and pontificating that amounts to official propaganda.

The FBI Cointelproed the committee with it and the bankrupt committee went for it. The FBI knew the committee had little choice because it is bankrupt. NPR's contribution is helping the committee and the FBI Cointelpro the country with the same fabrication.

This is the most common fabrication prisoners tried to pull, seeking some special consideration in return.

If Fancher didn't tell you, after you told her to call me, she asked if she could consult me. I agreed and offered NPR access to all the records I've obtained by many long FOIA suits, including some 50,000 of the FBI's alone on the King assassination investigation. I never heard from her again, perhaps because the interview was not in accord with preconceptions.

The sad and unreported truth is that, for the largest appropriation in the history of Congressional investigations, this committee added but one thing to what I brought to light under Freedom of Information suits: fabrications. The least of the offense is the waste of the money.

While much of the reporting was deficient or sycophantic and uncritical, the major responsibility for their getting away with it is NPR's. Yours.

When I called you personally about three weeks ago, again to caution against unfairness by unquestioning NPR commentary that was the committee's (false) line, I spoke to two others and left messages for you with both. You were too important to return the call or too omniscient to want to hear if NPR's commentaries were unfair, inaccurate or untruthful. Naturally enough, the same abuses, of normal and traditional journalistic standards and of public trust, did not end. Nor will they when you glorify the coming report.

Your people were so snugly in bed with their sources no false leak bothered them and they never bothered to check the exhibits against the narration and the allegations. You are a lawyer. Why don't you try it with those of December 1, the day I was there, the John Ray day. But if your law is like your journalism, you'll have to wait to understand until I have a chance to do what I am doing with it and any intelligent student could have done in my student days.

I'm not asking fairness doctrine time or anything like that. I really want nothing to do with anything so unclean. You've done your whoring and there is no way for you to undo it. Any or all of you.

If you question my accuracy, that's another thing. Then I'll go into it with all you had involved, staff and outside so-called experts, collectively. With two conditions: That it all be taped and preserved as an historical record and that time be divided evenly.

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There is no gain for me in this. I have no theory to sell, now or in the past. (Not that anyone would know such a thing is possible from NPR's commentaries.) I've asked nothing of you.

But I expect none of you to face the reality of what you have done to further disenchant sorrowing people, especially young people.

All I'm doing is adding another record to the hundreds of thousands of them I leave in a free archive for the future. Instead of writing a memo to files saying that NPR was a disgrace to journalism, a mere creature of the contemptible if supposedly respectable, I'm leaving a record that shows I invited NPR to rebut. Absent that rebuttal, which you will not make and cannot, the record won't be as one-sided as your concept of journalism or your lawyer's concept of fairness and justice.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg