

Harold Weisberg
Hyattstown, Md. 20734
July 23, 1966

Miss Barbara Epstein, co-Editor
The New York Review of Books
250 W. 57th. St.,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Miss Epstein,

Of all the periodicals in our country, I believe the New York Review has made the major contribution to a public airing of what is involved in the dubious inquest with which the feeble but thus far successful effort was made to consign President John F. Kennedy to history. It is a contribution the magnitude of which I cannot exaggerate. In short, I think you have done a really important thing for our country and our kind of society.

Yet I must record, if only personally to you, my opinion of the review itself, if that is what Professor Popkin's piece can be termed, and of the Professor, this practitioner of selective skepticism. Not to do so is unfair to all three of us. And in so doing I must tell you this letter is of necessity written before I have been able to complete even a hasty reading of his writing. In more than a week of intermittent and hasty reading I have been able to get to only the first break on page 15. Regardless of what follows, I believe I can honestly make certain observations.

So you may understand, I hope you will believe, I have no feelings of heroism, nor do I feel the itching of an emergent halo. I do but what my own concepts of my own responsibilities require of me. No more. This I try and do, as I have tried and as I shall try. It gives me no special rights or claims. It gives me, however, certain problems with which I must live, and I find a short night does not grant a long enough day and that seven are too few days for the week. I have not been able to read a paper for weeks. Had Mr. Popkin's review in any way so indicated (as WHITEWASH does) that I have all the functions of a publisher and distributor and public relations agency to perform in addition to that of an active writer, you might understand the requirements on my time. Two of the occasions on which I have nibbled away at your issue were while awaiting TV appearances, in studios, when my thoughts might better have been elsewhere. I am writing this about daylight, prior to a long trip for a four-hour radio broadcast and following my return, shortly before midnight, from a taping session in Washington last night. My work day began at 5 a.m. yesterday, and this is a typical day. I here elicit not your sympathy but your understanding of why I write you about a piece I haven't been able to read. Its appearance coincides with the addition to my normal activities of the reprinting of WHITEWASH, whose first 5,000 copies are gone and whose next 5,000 are due this coming Tuesday.

The professor has not done his homework and he has used a pony. That pony is WHITEWASH. A quite credible charge of plagiarism, extending even to the title (at this copy of my major chapter, The False Oswald, whose existence in the great length of his piece he never acknowledges) can be made against him, and with the slightest encouragement from you I will undertake to find the time to do so. There is no major fact in his entire opus to the point I have reached that does not come from my book, and this is true of what he with such unbound enthusiasm attributes to INQUEST. His prejudice and bias are blatant. I cannot understand his basis, unless he is envious that so long ago I completed what he now would like to be his own.

As you knew from my letter of June 9 to you and from my phone call of perhaps

six months ago, ~~WHITEWASH~~, it is an unrelieved lie to say as Mr. Popkin does that WHITEWASH was "just published". And he knew it, if he really read the book, from the Copyright date. WHITEWASH was completed before the appearance of any of the magazine pieces referred to, before the Fox book, and it so states. It was done in mid-February 1965, and I find no cause for shame at my work when the learned professor and those for whom he has such obvious affection have in all the ensuing time been able to add not a thing of importance to it, unless they lose themselves in their own conjectures (speaking for myself alone, I find the assassination of an American President - and especially this one - not a fit subject for conjectures, not something for which private James Bondary is appropriate, and this in my belief extends to its official investigation) and fault those who will not. The self-imposed restriction of WHITEWASH are clearly stated in the introduction: the Commission's official record. In 1964 more than today I believe this restriction is valid, ~~as (S.H.)~~ still today, and that it tends to establish credibility and can lead to an acceptance of fact that might not otherwise be credited.

If I make exaggerated claim, then I challenge the professor or anyone else to show me what he has in his piece that I did not have in WHITEWASH more than a year and a half earlier. This extends to Epstein's book, too. For the most part it is but an extension of my introduction, an amplification of it. Of even the FBI Reports is this true. There are a dozen references in WHITEWASH to it. These reports were, in fact, not "discoveries" and Epstein performed no service at all with them. The reports were assiduously leaked by the government. Salandria is the first, to the best of my knowledge, to quote directly from them. I am the first to reproduce them. ~~Whether the professor~~ and other writers, in my opinion, use them properly, but in any event, the professors lack of fidelity to fact is as ~~xxx~~ apparent here as in so many other places in his writing.

This is in the same context clear in his paragraph on page 12 beginning in the middle under the cut with, "Even before publication of Epstein's book it had the effect of bringing a lot of information to light" and going into the news accounts of the FBI explanations. The fact is that it was WHITEWASH and my personal endeavor that caused this, specifically including the premature ~~xxx~~ launching of INQUEST, 32 days prior to scheduled publication, much to the surprise of its publishers. If you have any doubts, I am prepared to prove this.

Criticism in whatever guise serves an essential function in a democratic society. This I genuinely believe and I submit the record shows it, for I have been mute these many months while what I have done - and I make no effort to hide a mounting pride in this as other fail to add to it - has been publicly attributed to others. But the Popkin piece goes so far beyond the liberties that must be those of an honest reviewer I simply must protest, in your interest as well as my own, for you are his vehicle as I am his victim. It has twice put me in a position that I have twice been able to avert, where I might have to criticize you to defend myself. There are too few of us seeking to right this horrible wrong for us to afford the luxury of fratricide. Yet I must defend myself and my work, which is my integrity, and I shall in public when there is no honorable alternative. While I hope the necessity never arises, I want you to understand the position in which Mr. Popkin has put me. More than my integrity is at stake. We have been without income for two and a half year while working on this subject and are deep in debt. I published WHITEWASH on credit, which only my reputation established. Mr. Popkin's personal indulgences at my expense are also at the expense of my ability to meet these commitments. Despite him, I think WHITEWASH will do it for me, but he does damage. Enough cash has come in to make a substantial payment to the printer Monday, and enough copies have been sold to pay all the printing, promotion and distribution expenses, if no return on the great investment. Really what he jeopardizes is my ability to pay for the reprinting and get some of my other costs back....Although in haste, I believe I owe you this letter.

Sincerely,
Herold Weisberg