

Durkin, JL, JW, JP

8/26/71

Mr. John Leonard, Editor
New York Times Sunday Book Review
229 W. 43 St.,
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Mr. Leonard,

As you better than anyone else know, the Times can easily kill a book. This is now the clear intent of your reaching across the country to select a blind partisan and a man involved in government propaganda to axe my FRAME-UP when you had so many competent reviewers at your elbow and when this book does precisely that for which the Times made editorial appeal. And when you wait five months for any gesture at rectifying damage and relieving libel, as you do by withholding any response until your August 29 issue, you merely prove your murderous intent.

But in the lengthy selection of some of my detailed refutation of Kaplan's propaganda it demeaned the Times to print at all, most of all guised as a "review", and his entirely non-responsive non-sequetur, you have not retracted the libel, not undone the damage and not established your own integrity in this matter.

On previous occasion when, perhaps, as is not true in this case, you inadvertently selected a disqualified reviewer who then vented personal spleen, you accompanied what you printed with what amounted to apology and retraction. In this case you avoid that, as you avoid retraction of the libelous lie and defamation by Geoffrey Wolff.

The only purpose served by a five-month delay in doing anything, no matter how inadequate, was to assure the literary bleeding to death of my book. You had the letter you now excerpt as soon as you printed your assassination. And in all this time, you were not manly enough to respond to a single one of my letters.

Only the perceptive reader, especially after the long delay you arranged, will perceive that Kaplan's letter proves everything I allege. How you as an editor, however, can be without nausea when he says that my letter, only that part of the one you excerpted, "proves -adequately* what Kaplan "had to say" when it lists only a few of the shocking facts he ignored and misrepresented I'd like to know. And I think you should realize that in doing this you are compounding the damage done and I think intended, making it seem that my letter proves Kaplan's defamations right when the opposite is obvious to you.

The irrelevancy about refighting the Warren Commission battles -what Kaplan actually does, not I - is of his origin, not mine and is not responsive to my detailed documentation. Whether or not there is whatever to the partisan government propagandist Kaplan whatever he might mean by "substantial evidence" to connect these assassinations, there are abundant similarities, sufficient set forth in FRAME-UP and this day unrefuted and undenied by anyone, including Kaplan. But an obvious one is the involvement of his former associates in the Department of Justice in both and the fact that in both cases the "investigations" were by the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover, were of the murders of men he disliked, and solved nothing. I challenge you, personally, to prove that FRAME-UP does not prove beyond doubt FBI suppression of exculpatory evidence and the gross misrepresentation of the rest. This is not "substantial", to you or Kaplan, especially when I proved it in a court of law and report it, although you and Kaplan suppressed it, in this book, with facsimiles?

Whether Kaplan thinks contrary to his performance in your columns that he can "separate the two assassinations in my mind" does not address the undenied fact of his blind partisanship and his disqualification for any review of any of my work. His performance is adequate reflection of what he considers "normal standards of integrity and scholarship". Whether or not the Warren Report stood "far above any of its vocal critics" is irrelevant in review of a book on the King assassination, but the fact is that it is Kaplan's work that could not get publication because of its blind excesses and libels and this despite the intrusion on its behalf by powerful people. He is the blind partisan, not I. Were he really familiar with my writing, he'd know that my first book opens with the only defense that can be made of the members of the Commission, and that lies and libels about their work is no defense, now or in history.

In a way he did not have in mind, my letter is not the kind the former Chief Justice could write about the Report he signed but did not write (I do my own writing). Mine is factual and to this day unrefuted. At no point does Kaplan address a single fact in it. Those are powerful facts that can't be denied. One of the most glaring is that contrary to his fiction that I depended upon newspaper sources (for all the world as though, were it true, this would be wrong) I actually printed the contracts with which Ray was duped and fleeced in facsimile, the Department of Justice lies in facsimile, the statements of Scotland Yard and many others in facsimile. And yet he accuses me of treating those who did this to Ray and to their once honorable calling "viciously". Where is the clarion call of this noble defender of his profession, the law, that violations of its canons be punished? Where, indeed, to this very day, is any protest about "viciousness" or even unfairness from those he defends - after what they did! In all cases I solicited this in writing and in no case was there a response. I told Percy Foreman in advance what I intended to say and asked an answer I could print. He remained silent. Neither you nor Kaplan apply such strictures, subject your work in advance to such testing.

His concluding paragraph is true to the permeating evasiveness and infidelity of what precedes it. He implies he has read my "six books on the Warren Commission". I dare you to ask him how many I have written and how many he has read. Or even understood. And it is, as you know, a filmsiness for even a straw man, the most substantial thing Kaplan has, to say either that I sought your coverage asked or had anything to do with the reviewer you selected. This is a crooked and deliberate misrepresentation, the slipperiness of a literary snake. My complaint was not that you had selected a reviewer without consultation with me but that you had selected a compromised man and a blind partisan and one who had made himself my enemy when prior to that, as you now know, the sole and then indirect contact between us was my offer to help him correct the error of his own writing.

I think you owe me, one of the more serious and troubling and certainly most costly crimes of our history, your employers, the people and yourself much more than this too-late, too-little, too-dishonest feebleness by way of relieving the evil you have done all. I would like to think asking an honest reassessment of you is asking you nothing but what a man of honor, with decent concern for his calling and the needs of any kind of representative society and the integrity of his publication, would himself want when he has, regardless of motive or lack of it, done what you have. The literary assassination is but part of this. You have my work, which stands, as it must, alone. You have my detailed and lengthy letters, which remain undenied by anyone, unanswered by you. You have enough to show that the Times and John Leonard will at least make an effort to be decent and honorable. Will you?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg