

The Press And The Assassination

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It is customary on occasions like this for the speaker to begin with a compliment to his host. I have what I intend as a compliment: This is the first speech I have ever prepared in advance.

I have made quite a few appearances in the past year. Not a single one was prepared. This is not because I am lazy. It is simply that I have been too busy writing other things and, as you better than most know, it comes out better and fresher, more spontaneously, if it is unrehearsed. I do not know how happy either of us will be with this, my first experience at reading a speech, but please believe me when I say that my doing it is a measure of the importance I attach to your association and what it symbolizes. Otherwise, I'd not be doing it and I'd not be here.

Some of you may regard this as less than a compliment, others as the last complimentary thing I have to say tonight. But hear me out, whether you like what I say or not; then, if you do not or if you disagree, let us have it out.

What has been most lacking since the first bullet splat into the body of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, and he was thereafter consigned to history with the dubious epitaph of a fake inquest, is a genuine dialogue. Perhaps, belatedly, it can begin tonight.

This lack, this absence of any genuine discussion in the press, does not originate with you and what you symbolize. It is but part of the total abdication of leadership on this subject. A proper foundation was laid for it.

Our society adjusted remarkably well to the shock of the murder of the President. The transfer of authority was smooth and steady. Government continued without interruption. No additional crises followed the assassination. The functioning of our society was essentially undisturbed by the loss of the head of government. We survived that rather well, and perhaps it is a credit to all involved, from the new President down, that this happened, that we came out of the assassination crisis with no overt threat to the government, no interference with its

authority and rendering of essential services. Nor was there any change in fundamental policies. Superficially, everything was smooth, went well.

Our society did begin to crumble that awful day, not when the bullets found their mark but when the accused assassin was seized by public authority. Lee Harvey Oswald was to me an unappetizing man, yet alone among those critical of what our government has done, I have insisted from my first published word that, from the Commission's own best evidence, he could have killed no one - not the President, and not Officer J. D. Tippit. I defend him not from affection, for I have no liking for him. I defend him to defend our law, to support our society.

Parenthetically, I hope you will understand that my criticism of what government did and did not do is no more subversive than the overturning of an erroneous court decision. We do not expect infallibility of public servants. Man is human. He errs. Jesus did trust Judas. We assume man will make mistakes. We take for granted our courts can do wrong, and our entire concept and organization of justice is based on this assumption. The mechanism

for the correction of expectable error is built in. The strength of our society is its dedication to right and to rights. So it is really a dedication to the strengthening of our society to criticize it, to insist that it function as it should, to demand the righting of wrong.

Because he was systematically, publicly - flagrantly ~~was~~ denied of all of his rights from the moment of his apprehension, with the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald, our society did begin to fall apart. With the denial to him of his rights, each of us, individually, lost some of ours. Collectively, when he was killed while in the hands of public authority and only because public authority made it possible, we lost additional rights that we have not yet recovered. We have the right to insist upon the proper functioning of society - to demand that the law be upheld and enforced - that it work. When Oswald was murdered - and I reemphasize that he ~~has~~^{was} and could have been only because public authority made it possible - we were, each and every one

of us, denied the protection of our laws, and our laws and their protection were undermined.

Should you desire, I will be specific. For brevity, I hope you will take my word for it that this man was denied every one of the protections we have always assumed each of us has.

He was denied the right to a trial before an unbiased jury, by the organized corruption of the public mind, through a ceaseless stream of false and highly prejudicial misinformation, amounting to a propaganda campaign against him. Is there a potential juror who did not have his mind captured from the first by that outpouring of calculated falsehood about this man?

He was denied a lawyer of his choice, although we have been assured of the opposite. Even when the delegation from the Dallas chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union was in the building and Oswald begged for them, this delegation was thrice assured by responsible officials of what was totally false - that Oswald insisted he wanted no lawyer.

He was framed by the most obvious techniques, including dishonest "lineups" that made his "identification" automatic.

He was persistently questioned over his recorded objection that he did not want to speak without his lawyer. This is one of the few things on which the skimpy accounts of his interrogations agree, for there is no real record. There was no stenographer, no tape recording. Can you imagine there would be none had he confessed? There is not today a single word of a single handwritten note of a single one of the dozen or so officials who then questioned Oswald. A President was murdered, a single man was accused of the crime, and there is not now ^{is} and not for history ~~ANY~~ record of what he ^{was} ~~has~~ asked or what he said!

That he was denied all his rights, including the most fundamental right to life when the police allowed his to be killed, is, in my concept, no more important than the fact that this symbolized the loss of all their rights by the 200,000,000 other Americans not then murdered. The rights of each of us are

important, but no less so than the rights of all, the rights of society. So, when all of public authority combined to take away the rights of Lee Harvel Oswald - each and every one of them - each of us lost his rights and all of us were denied the functioning of our law.

This happened - this could happen - only because of the abdication of those whose responsibility it is to keep such things from happening. As I see it, three major elements of organized society are involved, two immediately.

First, the lawyers. With them, the press. Then, and we cannot insist immediately, the so-called intellectuals, which in actuality means what has come to be called "the eastern intellectual community".

It is from these three groups that we expect and should be able to expect the defense of society and the defense of the individual.

We did not get it. Not then, not since. Not when Oswald

was killed, not when the Commission began to function, not with the issuance of its Report that pretends to be other than it is, and certainly not with the appearance of books analyzing and criticizing the entire mess, of which I am proud, my first book, WHITEWASH: THE REPORT ON THE WARREN REPORT, was the first.

That there was no Zola among the intellectuals is no surprise to one who has observed their mutual navel-contemplations, their answer to the continuing crises of the last half of the 20th century.

That the legal profession was silent - worse, that its chief organization, the American Bar Association, willingly stirred the official whitewash - is as dismaying as it is a sign of the climate of fear and of the stultifying effect of well-paid complacency. It is particularly surprising to me for in recent years there has been an increasing number of lawyers, both young and just starting and experienced and well situated, who have willingly and without pay undertaken the defense of the Mirandas

and the Gideons. Let a thug, a murderer or a whore need a lawyer, and he is there, This is as it should be, and it is a glory to our country. But let society need defense counsel, and there is none save the unknown. To my knowledge, of all the countless thousands of lawyers in this entire land, there was but one who raised his voice; a single man who said, "This is wrong and I oppose it;" and he came late, after Oswald was murdered, after the Commission had been established and was functioning. I think that in the history of this period Mark Lane will be remembered, as I believe he should be, because he did try and undertake a defense of Oswald before the Commission.

As a writer it is more distressing to me that those I symbolize also failed. The working daily press produced no Lincoln Steffens. Those you represent produced no Zenger.

Here let me explain that I intend no personal insult. From now on when I say "you", I mean in its broadest sense, the ownership and management of the press and not any individual.

"You" failed more than any others, more completely, more hurtfully, more shamefully. I speak with some bitterness of this in the epilogus to my second book, WHITEWASH II: THE FBI-SECRET SERVICE COVER-UP. Although I feel this deeply, I do not now assail you with it. Instead, I refer you to it, hoping some of you will take the time to consider my disappointments and disgust. I spring from a culture in which man was not born to freedom, so perhaps freedom means more to me and I expect more of and am less tolerant of those upon whom we depend for its defense when they fail us.

It is the traditional, the honorable, and the quintessential responsibility of the press in our society to police all the rest of it, to keep the politicians honest, to expose the crooks, and, above all, to inform the electorate. A Society such as ours can work only when citizens are fully and accurately informed. They have but one source of the information they require for them to discharge their responsibilities, and that is you. If you do not seek out the truth for them and do not make it available to them,

they cannot be the informed and concerned electorate from whom all power, theoretically, at least, flows.

You did not seek the truth about the assassination. You did not seek the truth about its investigation. You were without significant criticism when it became clear that too much was lacking. And since then you have applied yourselves lustily to those of us who have tried to bring out the truth as we see it.

There exist in abundance those simple challenges, those opportunities for good news stories that are the delight of every editor and the joy of every reporter. You do not find or want them. Particularly was this true once the Commission started functioning. There is not one of you so naive you did not know you were being had when systematically every major element of the press was corrupted by "scoops", carefully placed "leaks" that made sensational headlines, all, by remarkable coincidence, poisoning the public mind and conditioning the press; all calculated to show that Oswald was a terrible fellow, a lone, alienated, unassisted Communist assassin - and all false. One

of the major stories of the period of the Commission was its brazen corruption of the press, its hardly disguised pre-conditioning of the public mind to accept the conclusions with which it began its investigation, to make credible the pre-determined conclusions that the so-called "investigation" was only intended to validate. You can search those 15 large printed volumes of testimony without finding any genuine evidence that the government ever looked for any other assassin or assassins, for any conspiracy. You will not find any serious effort to learn if any of the evidence was tainted. You will find prejury, recognized and ignored.

On what other story could this have happened? Let a dog-catcher swindle a nickel and you are on his back. Let the federal government openly indoctrinate you and you are complacent - on this subject alone.

But this is the most important story of the decade, if not our lifetimes. This is the one that gnaws at the guts of society. You are without pain. It does not hurt as your vitals are consumed.

You also rape easily. You did not feel it. Or should I say, you pretend you didn't. You really did, and you enjoyed it, for you were paid - with sensation, with exciting if dishonest copy.

There was no enterprise in journalism when the President was murdered. Let me give you a simple and quite comprehensible example from WHITEWASH II: THE FBI-SECRET SERVICE COVER-UP.

Alert media representatives the day of the assassination noted that in the very first pictures to hit the wires, a picture of the first floor of the Texas School Book Depository Building, Lee Harvey Oswald seemed to be observing the assassination he was then said to have been committing from six floors above. James W. Altgens, an experienced AP photographer, snapped that picture about half-way through the few seconds the assassination required. Behind the President, clearly seen grasping at his bullet-riddled throat, there is this man with a striking resemblance to Oswald. Here is the Altgens picture, complete. The members of the Commission saw only carefully barbered versions. (SHOW) And here is an enlargement of that man. (SHOW)

The President was murdered November 22, 1963. No reporter asked Lovelady to produce the shirt he wore that day. Not until February 29 and in response to impending pressure, more than three months and God alone knows how many interviews later did the FBI ask him. On that day Lovelady appeared at the FBI's Dallas office where he was photographed in the shirt he was wearing. The FBI dutifully filed a report with Washington headquarters and sent along an 8x10 glossy print of three different pictures taken of Lovelady in the shirt he was wearing when the President was murdered.

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The Texas School Book Depository has more than three-score employees. They were questioned repetitiously, by the Secret Service, the FBI and the Commission. Not one was asked to describe the shirt he may have seen on either Oswald or Lovelady. Lovelady appeared before the Commission after endless interrogation and re-interrogation - on April 7, 1964. This was 38 days after he was photographed by the FBI in the shirt he wore to the assassination. Joseph Ball did not ask the question you would have expected of the average, moderately intelligent cub reporter. He did not

The government let it be known that this was not Oswald but another man, Billy Nolan Lovelady. Indeed, Lovelady so declared, then and later to the Commission.

Had there not been the enormous amount of contradictory information immediately available, had there not been the dubious behavior of the police and all of public authority, had there not been the obvious unanswered questions, you might be forgiven. The government "leaked" the report that it was not Oswald and was Lovelady, and you accepted it. This was just too good, too important a story to forget. You forgot it.

Now there was a very simple means of determining whether or not it was Lovelady. The man in that picture is wearing an unusual shirt. (SHOW AGAIN) How long would you employ a cub reporter who missed this obvious clue?

You do not and did not need the official evidence I used. The truth was easily determined. A reporter knocks on Lovelady's door and asks to see the shirt. If Lovelady cannot produce the shirt, could he have been wearing it?

ask Lovelady to produce the shirt he was wearing while the crime of the century was being committed. He did not even make Lovelady describe the shirt.

The Commission's printed evidence in 26 large volumes is estimated to total about 10,000,000 words. There are eleven volumes of what, for lack of a more adequate designation in the language, has come to be called "evidence". These volumes run to almost a thousand pages each.

In them you will find, carefully reproduced by facsimile and usually incomprehensible, the most awful collection of trash, trivia and junk in our national history. Road maps, directories of various sorts, pages of reproductions of pocket notebooks, three different and contradictory versions of the same police radio logs (about which there was no question raised), and page after page of pictures of hard-faced and soft-fleshed Ruby strippers.

What you will not find is the FBI's picture of Billy Nolan Lovelady in the shirt he said he was wearing while he watched the President's murder, the shirt that can prove he is the man in the

picture. For this and the accompanying FBI report there is no space in these vary large books, in the 10,000,000 words of "evidence".

Both the report and the picture were in the Commission's possession. That is where I got them.

In fact, there are two FBI reports, each in a different file. There is the original report - I have it with me and you can examine it if you so desire - and a summary memorandum report. Both use the same language. Lovelady told the FBI and the FBI told the Commission he was wearing a "red and white striped shirt". Here it is. (SHOW)

And here is Oswald, on arrest. (SHOW) Here the FBI's photographically decapitated version. (SHOW)

Perhaps you may doubt that Oswald was on the first floor watching the assassination in that tiny, seconds-long fraction of time in which he is accused of having committed it from six stories above. I believe he was on the first floor, and this is by no means all the pertinent evidence suppressed or misrepresented by

the government. Whether you believe Oswald is or is not in the Altgens picture, can you possibly believe, on the basis of this evidence, that it could have been Lovelady?

Can you believe that the FBI and all those on the Commission who knew of this evidence should have been silent, as they were? Can you conceive of a reason consistent with honesty and integrity of purpose for suppressing this evidence from the record? Can you find an honorable reason for it not to be in the 900-pages of the official Report, that political placebo designed for pacification and placating, not for a real solution to the crime?

This is but one example. There are hundreds. I will discuss them with you as long as you want, all night if necessary, and I promise there are so many I need not repeat myself.

So, in addressing myself to the integrity of government, I am also addressing the integrity of the press, your integrity.

Now for another part of the press: Book publishers. I approached more than a hundred, more than sixty in the United States alone. With virtually no adverse editorial comment and with a

surprising recurrence of the prediction that the book would be profitable, I could not get it published. Fortunately, I was able to publish it myself. I would not have been able to, for I was without income and in debt, had there not been a printer with sufficient dedication to the freedom of the press to print it on credit. The endorsement I ~~have~~ ^{GIVE} my printer is stronger, for he knew that another had contracted to print the book, had destroyed the plates after making them and without consulting me, and had specified fear of the government was his reason.

So, this fear, which I believe is self-imposed and without warrant, controls what can be published as a book. I believe a different fear explains the disgraceful departure from the noble tradition of the American newspapers and electronic media.

Regardless of the reason, the fact and the result are evident: An American President can be killed and consigned to history with the dubious epitaph of a fake inquest, with an incomplete and second-hand archive staffed part-time and in every way inadequate, and with questions within the capacity of man to answer that are

not answered and in most cases not even asked.

I believe that when this can happen - and it has - no President is safe, the institution of the presidency is not safe, and the other basic institutions of our society are in jeopardy. I do not labor the point, but I do ask you to think about it.

Having made these serious charges against you, having accepted your hospitality and your challenge, I owe you more than pro forma pleasantries. To me, the subject of the Kennedy assassination is a touchstone issue. It is not alone truth and justice that we seek, important as they are; not alone the recapture of the national honor and the decent regard of mankind. Nor is it only that a President has been murdered and we do not know who did it and why. Central in all of this is the integrity of government.

The official investigation of the assassination was without integrity, in purpose or in performance. It was a whitewash. This is intolerable, particularly in a democratic society.

You made it possible.

Having said these things, I must now redefine "you", for in recent months some of "you" have begun to assume your responsibilities.

Not all of "you". There are still those who are little more than professional lickspittles, apologists for the government and its untenable record. Without question, you repeat the hardly disguised semi-official propaganda syndicated to you. You are part of a campaign against New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison who seeks to do what is important to all of us: To take a part of the story of the assassination before a judge and a jury. Is it that you cannot abide this, cannot allow an untainted judicial determination of fact?

How many of you repeated the slanderous propaganda against those of us who seek the truth as we see it, that cheap nastiness of calling us "scavengers"? I am a "scavenger" because I worked for three years without income or subsidy of any kind? Mark Lane is because, after a similar history on a much smaller scale, his book was fed back to the United States by a British publisher -

isn't it shameful it had to be that way - and an American publisher treated it as any other book and made a financial success of it?

Those many who owe their fame and financial success to the murder of the President, those million-dollar beneficiaries of his assassination, are not "scavengers". Not Schlesinger or Sorensen, or the schmalz-ladling secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, or the Nanny of the children. Not Congressman Ford, the very first to get into print with a private and highly commercial Warren Report of his own, possible and profitable only because you and I paid him to be on the official investigation. Not Congressman Ford who signed the Life story on the official Report. Not Louis Nizer, the wealthy lawyer, who wrote a glowing endorsement in the guise of an introduction to a commercial printing of the Report at a time when he could not possibly know what he was writing, for 100 percent of the source material was unavailable. Nizer is not a "scavenger". He addresses this epithet to those who did without pay what he was paid to do, compare the Report with its alleged backstopping - and thereby sells his own new book.

Of course, Pierre Salinger is not a "scavenger". Not in his own book, not in the movie from it, and above all, not in the incredible introduction he wrote for that sycophancy by Charles Roberts, who also, naturally, agreeing with the official story, is not a "scavenger". Roberts is one of the two reporters most active in defaming those of us who, without pay, did what they were paid **AND DID NOT DO.** to do. ^A By remarkable coincidence, if that is what it is, both are White House correspondents. Both refused to debate me on their work or mine, that of the Commission, its Report, or any combination of their choosing. When I made it easy and offered to restrict the debate to their own writings, on which each man is certainly the outstanding expert, each again defaulted. But they are not "scavengers", nor is the Salinger who declines to moderate ⁺ such a debate ⁴ while, as a writer and former editor, he is entirely unshamed ^{OF} by his self-proclaimed effort to keep other writers from being heard.

Least of all is William Manchester a "scavenger". Given a license to print money, he instead wrought a national scandal,

alone and unassisted (though all the help in the world was available should he have desired it). If there is a Pulitzer Prize for inaccuracy, he'll have no real competition. Merriman Smith won the Pulitzer Prize for his so-called "reporting" of the assassination, while he is alone among the people of whom I know in not knowing where he was when he learned the President had been shot. If he earned it, certainly Manchester has, if only by the magnitude of his literary Brinks' heist.

I agree he is no "scavenger". With \$665,000 "for openers" from Look alone, that is hardly the word.

It would appear the press has redefined "scavenger".

The press of the written and of the spoken word both abdicated when the President was killed. Traditionally, it has been the printed press that has carried the torch of freedom. The first bullet of November 22, 1963, also knocked the torch out of the once-upstretched hand. Not until a year ago was any effort made to raise it. Then it was radio, not the printed press, and soon TV sustained the arm of radio. Today they are still alone, for the

printed press has not yet faced its responsibilities and the shame of its own past. I am still so dirty a word to most papers they will not mention my name or that of my books. Or those of my competitors, unless bracketed with invective.

But the electronic media has been responsible, has to a large degree faced its responsibilities and begun to discharge them. Hundreds of thousands of TV viewers have seen the Oswald-Lovelady pictures I just showed you, but not a single newspaper or magazine reader except in a single incomplete form. On TV, hundreds of thousands have seen the documents I print in facsimile in WHITEWASH and WHITEWASH II. To the newspapers and magazines, it is not "news" that I ransacked from the Commission's suppressed files the fact that before the assassination the FBI told people concerned about Oswald not to worry about him - that he was "all right". Not a single newspaper or magazine reprinted the suppressed FBI report that said, in effect, that the entire reconstruction of the crime by the FBI was fraudulent because the camera exposed film not at 18 frames per second but at 24, a 30 percent error in time.

And not one believed it important to tell its readers that the Secret Service investigation of the assassination proved to its satisfaction that the President was struck by two bullets and Governor Connally by a third that did not strike the President, a denial of the Report. Nor do I recall a single printed publication recording what I proved by their own documents, that the FBI made its official report on the murder of the President without mention of the wound in the front of his neck or of the bullet that missed the motorcade entirely.

Not a single one of the ~~many~~ ^{**MANY**} radio and TV stations over which I was able to report what my investigations proved made any effort to restrict what I could or could not say. Each of these items that I think is newsworthy, especially when an American President is murdered, was broadcast, as were facsimiles of the photographic and documentary proof.

If there are any of you who have not provided these things to your listeners and viewers and would like to, be my guest.

You need not give me credit, either, for what is important is not the sale of my books but the availability of information that is essential for the citizenry to understand what happened.

On only one of these must I raise a restriction that may not bind most of you. The Altgens picture that I referred to earlier is the property of Wide World-AP. About this picture, may I add that I cannot recall a single newspaper or magazine that to this day has reported what I exposed, that this picture was placed into evidence a half-dozen times, each time improperly, and not a single time without being cut up. Each version of the same thing was cropped, edited. The version from page 113 of the Report - look at it - is less than half of the genuine picture.

Is this the way to investigate the assassination of a President? Or to report on it?

From my experience, and not in any sense to repay your hospitality, I must pay a deserved tribute to radio. In meeting the commercial challenge of TV and the printed press, it has evolved what is often a 20th century variant of the ancient and wonderful

American institution of the town meeting. As the printed press grew wealthy and complacent and as the flickering tube diverted with sports and situation comedies, the loudspeaker and the ear-phone have become the one major, organized source of public discussion and information on the central issues of the day. The "talk" programs can be wonderful, even those with the people-eater format I despise, especially on this subject. They provide the author and others who want to be heard a chance to be heard. They provide the audience a chance to decide for itself what it believes about issues of current importance, often undiscussed elsewhere.

I did a program with "Long John" Nebel, one of the earlier exploiters of this format, in New York on May 17. When I volunteered the opinion that such programs have become vital in late 20th century America, he said I was trying to con him. I sincerely believe what I said, and I no less sincerely believe Nebel to be one of the most ill-mannered and prejudiced, ill-tempered and poorest informed of his new kind of "communicator".

At the risk of slighting some I may have forgotten, I particularly want to single out for praise, here in Ohio, Phil Donahue of WHIO-Dayton and Bob Locke of WFMJ-Youngstown, both of whom I found to be responsible moderators and neither of whom I have ever met! I have been on their programs, but never in their studios. Radio is imaginative. It uses the telephone. It improvises, and this makes for excitement and interest. I will never forget my first appearance with Phil. He was still explaining the format of his show to me when he said, "Oops! We've been on the air for two minutes!"

Outside of Ohio, I must pay especial tribute to Jack McKinney, WCAU, Philadelphia; Jerry Williams and his night-time only replacement at WBBM, Don Cannon; Harv Morgan, KCBS, San Francisco; and Joe Dolan, KNEW, Oakland. While playing devil's advocate and prodding and probing, they have managed to be fair. In saying this I must also say that they have not always agreed with me. Joe Dolan said some pretty unpleasant things May 9, after he signed me off

and I could not respond, separated as we were by the width of the continent. I make a point of this so you will understand I am genuine in insisting that this new kind of press, this newest communication, the radio talk show, is already essential in our society. It is not important what the moderator thinks or says to provoke comment. Many could be better informed, better mannered and more responsible. It is not important that they agree with me, for many do not and make this clear.

ON THIS SUBJECT

What is important is that they provided the opportunity to take the unanswered questions about the assassination and its investigation to the people when the printed press did not and would not. What is important is that radio gave a chance to be heard to those who developed the evidence disproving the official fiction, and the printed press did not.

What is so very important is that the electronic media did pick up the torch of freedom of the press so long associated with the printed word alone, and in so doing has, I believe, made possible the beginning of a new quest for truth and justice, the recapture of the national honor and with it the honor of the press.

Thus far I have said little about the assassination. That is an enormous subject we cannot exhaust in endless days. What time we can devote to that I would prefer to let be under your control to the degree a long-winded man can, by answering your questions.

May I suggest that if any of you wants to take issue with what I have just said, we begin with that? We need a dialogue on the subject and on what I regard as the failure of the press. If we do not spend the rest of the night on it, if you have any complaints or protests, let us begin with them.