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December 28, 1986

Mr. Geoffrey A. Wolff  
The Washington Post  
1515 L St., NW  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Wolff,

Your column in today's paper is fine and important. Too bad you had to stop short of telling the rest of the story, about the complicity of newspapers in what you properly expose and their own participation in censorship and suppression.

Do you know that not a single important newspaper reviewed my book and that most of those that did review subsequent books on the same subject knowingly attributed to others what I had done? Now that WHITEWALL is out in paperback, the New York Times noted it in "Books Received" yesterday. Yet the original edition was never noted, even though the Times got 15 free copies, including a number for reference purposes, before they started buying them.

What kind of freedom of the press is there for the writer (and small business man for whom most papers so bleed) when his existence is denied, his wares attributed to others, he is slandered with impunity by papers which refuse to print retractions (such as yours in the affair of Merriman Smith, the one man in the world who doesn't know where he was when he learned Kennedy was assassinated, although he won the Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of it), and his business is officially interfered with by the post office (which explains it all with the most ecstatic expostulations of the new heights to which inefficiency has been raised and glorious accountings of how terrible the service is, more terrible than ever before in history).

In every sense what I did was news, legitimate news. Save for the Wall Street Journal, to which it was above-the-fold, page-one news of a business nature, can you recall a single honest treatment, more than a few slurring remarks? Yet there are 22,500 copies in print, all but fewer than 500 in commercial channels. The book is in paperback, with an initial printing of 250,000. I've seen no mention of it, save a tail end to a Publishers' Weekly story on my second book (I didn't send you a copy not to embarrass you). Yet it is doing excitingly well before any advertising. Last week it was second-best paperback seller in Philadelphia, top in non-fiction, when it had been out but a week or so. O'Hara's Lockwood Concern was first. It put Inquest out of business in less than two months, without advertising, when Inquest was getting reviews that were but puffery, when it had not a single other book for competition. You know the history of publishers on this subject, especially on this book. It is as rotten as that of the papers and most magazines.

The intellectuals were silent. I know. I sought their help.

Many people in the book trade know of the extensive plagiarism from my work. I am silent because of the subject matter. Is it normal and natural for those who know of it and tell me of cases I do not know to be silent? Is this also a sample of the free press? I've had one editor tell me he has seen my work in the writings of eight others, including identical paragraph structure. His publication says nothing. I can show you the repetition of even my typographical error.

Your paper has seen fit to comment on the suppression of a book on the assassination - Jim Bishop's - which he doesn't expect to write for another two years. That's real news, but what happened to Sauvage and Lane as well as me is not worthy of note. It is the same Mr. Carr of whom we heard in the Bishop case who broke his contract with Sauvage. His company declined my book, which the editor liked, on the ground I am an unknown writer. Praeger's reason was more original: I am not a famous scholar or law-school dean. Doubleday: "Our decision was not editorial and not easy to arrive at". Goodwin: He followed the orders of the editor for whom he reviewed Epstein's book, the editor who will not allow mention of mine (perhaps he now will - Dell advertises).

You named the right names. Only not enough of them.

Nonetheless your article is valuable and important, and I hope you can do more along the same line, even if you cannot do and say as much as you'd like.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg