

PV, JW, JP, HR

2/2/72

Mr. Ben Bradlee, Executive Editor
The Washington Post
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Bradlee,

Your 1/31 answer to my letter of 1/18 reads in full, "It is too bad that your opinion of us makes rational discussion so unpleasant." I assume you intend me to accept it as responsive, so I will not argue that point.

Whether you intend "us" to refer to you personally or to the Post, I submit that you neither know what opinion I may have or whether I have any special one. Should it interest you, I will be happy to be quite specific, with respect to either or both. I certainly have not expressed anything you could call an opinion on either to you. The fact is other than you suggest. If I believe that all the major papers have fallen far short of both their potential and their responsibilities in a society such as ours and the time in which we live, I do and have believed that the Post certainly is one of the better one. If you keep old subscription records, you will find that going back to the early 30s and before I moved to this area permanently I became a subscriber and have been since. Would you interpret that as an unduly low opinion?

As an experienced newspaperman, how would you evaluate a statement from one who has not undertaken any discussion that "rational discussion" would be, in your words, "so unpleasant?" Would you not, at the very least, ask yourself if this is not, really, an evasion, or whether the fact that might be discussed rather than the personalities might be the source of the unpleasantness?

Unpleasantness is not a new experience to me. The work I do cannot be described as less. The blind, unthinking refusal of those with the capability of doing anything about it, without even looking at it, is hardly any better. When I prove in open court that the Deputy Attorney General of the United States is a deliberate repetitive liar and that if found to be not news, I consider this unpleasant. When I get something just a bit out of the ordinary in federal court, a summary judgement against the Department of Justice and that also is not news, I so find this unpleasant. I find it unpleasant because such things should not be the record of decent government and in at least my old-fashioned view are legitimate news. And I have found unpleasant such things as orders to a book-reviewer that books he would ordinarily assign to experts not be reviewed. But these are not my sins, and I have, somehow, managed to survive the "unpleasantness". If it is your dislike of unpleasantness that you refer to, with all the many things that have occupied you, perhaps you may have sufficient recollection to answer for yourself the question, what did I ever do to you or the Post that warrants the feeling that I caused some unpleasantness? Is it at all possible that the Post's record rather than mine inspires uneasiness?

In any event, I do look forward to a change. I think it will be in your interest, that of the Post, and perhaps even of the country. And I do express appreciation for the fact that the Post does not in other areas refuse to have anything to do with what you or others may find unpleasant. Off the top of the head example, today's Agnew-legal aid story and Ben Bagdikian's first-rate expose.

Sincerely,

Harold Mahoney