

Rt. 8, Frederick, Md. 21701

3/12/74

Mr. Philip Geyelin
The Washington Post

Dear Mr. Geyelin,

This letter is not intended for publication. The last time you published a letter from me you managed to pie it up into a meaning opposite mine and then compounded this in the "correction." Gremlins enough.

It is your proper function to manage the editorial content of the Post. The editorial content of the Post is of great importance in a time of crisis. I believe we are now in one of the greater crises, and I look back on many. It is also your obligation to be as completely honest as man can be and not to use your power for personal reasons, not to be an unelected president or anything like that.

The editorial section is often a literary feast. And on all sorts of issues - other than too often on Nixon and Watergate - it has an exemplary record.

However, recently it seems to be at odds with the news sections, which is to say that it is flying into the face of fact, and to have become the vehicle for personal campaigns and an effort to intrude upon and to control normal and natural working of political processes.

If the Post has distinguished itself in Watergate reporting, this is more of an indictment of the press in general than unstinted praise for the Post, which has, as what will follow will indicate, done less than it could and I think should have done.

What I have called a campaign seems to have begun with abdication when Nixon picked Ford as the one man best suited to succeed him. There was then a deep-thinker's childish belief that getting Ford confirmed would give a good, solid crack at Nixon. Thus Ford swore falsely about the material in his confirmation testimony and you were silent. And thus there was no editorial comment on putting a man as notoriously without accomplishment or promise in line to do something about the unprecedented national problems for which he already had a share of Nixon's blame.

About the second round of Watergate indictments you have had no comment. Are they really all justice demands or the country needs? And if they are not, as is apparent to anyone with a decent command of fact, how account for the absence of Post comment? How account for your lack of comment on the original whitewashing indictments and your publication of fulsome praise for the whitewashers, the leader of whom has gone to his Nixonian reward also without your comment?

Yesterday you clamored for "fairness" to Ford with less than fair direct quotation of what you represented as his record on the requirements of impeachment. With his own "fairness" that he flaunts daily Ford can be held to justify different editorial comment. But if you elected this as the requirement of your conscience and your obligation, how could you ignore his major speech on that, the one he reprinted at the time of his Nixon-supported campaign against Douglas?

This followed upon Joe Kraft's clamor for the press to further abdicate, to suspend reporting by the only way it appears to have, from leaks, which is to say that those who have reason to believe what the people should know is being suppressed and are willing to risk themselves to let it be known should be stifled by the press.

Today you, coinciding with Kraft again, go after Wilbur Mills. You do it in saying that Nixon is "quite justified" in describing what Mills said as a "cheap shot." Kraft's device is to give the coming "report" and not the fact in it as Mills' basis and to accuse Mills of "prejudging."

The question is not, as you pretend, before the courts. Wherein is the prejudging? Is it wrong to make comment on fact? If the fact is of shattering magnitude, is it wrong for a politician to undertake to prepare for that? Is it wrong for Mills to give Nixon a signal? Or unkind to give Nixon an alternative? Or Members of Congress reason to stop and do some thinking?

To put it another way, is Nixon alone to manage the news, to control what people can know and think about?

Instead of suppose, as you and Kraft do, that Mills is up to some dirty deed, why not suppose that he knows what he is talking about?

You did not accuse Senator Long of prejudging when he said Nixon gyped the Treasury and at the same time sought to protect Nixon from his own crookedness.

What has already been reported about Nixon's financial crookedness is a prima facie case of fraud. And long before the stories started breaking by accident the Post is among the papers I informed about it. If any of the reporting of Nixon's dubious doings with taxes is the result of investigative reporting, I do not so recall it. It was leaked, what Joe Kraft now demands the press ignore.

However, if the press had done its own investigation, and a very simple investigation it is, the proof of fraudulent intent and of conspiracy in it is inevitable. Here I am talking about what has not been reported and what is more basic than what has been. It is the kind of thing one would expect Mills not to ignore and to have in mind.

You have an alternative to demanding "fairness" to Ford over his unfairness and to castigating Mills for other than you represent him as having done: get the story he can have in mind.

This, not the role in which you have cast yourself, is the true and the traditional function of the press.

Are you and the Post up to it?

Meanwhile, for the future, when this is all over, if you think I am bluffing, I invite you to call me. It is in my files, it is dated long in the past and it is obvious. Others in the press and in Congress have already abdicated. Will you and the Post continue to so you and Kraft can play statesmen rather than journalists?

Without expectation,

Harold Weisberg