

White House Fears Over Its Motives



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A CAUSTIC White House memo, intended for internal use only, accuses the Columbia Broadcasting System of "irresponsibility" and questions whether the Federal Communications Commission should investigate.

All that holds back the White House from referring the charges to the FCC, an aide told this column, is concern that the motive might be misunderstood.

Since Vice President Spiro Agnew's attack upon the TV networks, CBS has been the boldest about continuing its criticism of the Nixon Administration. Some aides fear, therefore, that an FCC investigation would look like an attempt to intimidate CBS.

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THE WHITE HOUSE memo, charging that CBS has been involved in "highly questionable activity," cites these alleged incidents:

The CBS news department (1) faked horror scenes from Vietnam on at least three occasions; (2) planned "a staged invasion" of Haiti; (3) "staged incidents of police brutality" during the 1968 Democratic Convention; and (4) arranged to film an illegal "pot party" in Chicago.

The memo suggests tartly that CBS shouldn't be allowed to use "freedom of the press" to get away with "fraud by the press."

Attached to the memo is a report from the Pentagon on the phony horror scenes. The most dramatic was an October 7, 1967, film of a GI attempting to slice the ear off a dead enemy soldier.

Alleges the Pentagon report: "Don

Webster and John Smith of CBS were involved in an incident in which a soldier attempted to cut off the ear of a dead enemy soldier with a knife furnished by Smith."

After the film was shown on the Walter Cronkite news show, Specialist George A. Pawlaszky was arrested for the deed. Continues the Pentagon report:

"Both Smith and Webster were subpoenaed at the trial . . . but neither appeared . . . Specialist Pawlaszky was found guilty as charged.

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TWO YEARS AFTER the ear-cutting episode, the same Don Webster narrated another knife scene. A South Vietnamese soldier was filmed on Nov. 3, 1969, stabbing a captured Viet Cong in the presence of U.S. personnel.

The Pentagon report alleges that Webster refused to cooperate with the Army investigation, "claiming protection of news sources." The investigation "established that the film was taken by a Vietnamese and that Webster was not present during the filming."

The American Embassy later reported that "the CBS film was a 'cut and paste' job involving different locales and personnel." The Army was "unsuccessful in gaining the assistance of CBS during the investigation."

CBS News Director Gordon Manning explained to the Defense Department: "It is our policy to protect the security of our people in the field and the sanctity of news judgments and editing processes."

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