



Mail

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July 16, 1975

Mr. Otis Chandler
Los Angeles Times
Times Mirror Square
Los Angeles, California

Dear Mr. Chandler:

Enclosed you will find a review of the article that appeared in the Los Angeles Times on July 3, 1975. I am hopeful that this analysis will convey my impressions and concerns regarding the article.

I feel that the Los Angeles Times has violated many of the basic rules of fair reporting in this article. Through the use of sensationalized headlines and 'hyped-up' wording throughout the article, I feel that the Times has dealt a serious blow to their reputation as one of the foremost papers in the world.

The article uses many words that go far beyond fair, accurate reporting and into the area of value judgments. A small sampling:

- "misused funds"
- "forged checks"
- "abuses"
- "unauthorized salary"
- "the program failed"
- "plagued by fiscal irregularities"
- "exhausted its funds and dissolved"
- "situation was desperate"
- "outlook was dismal"
- "widespread bookkeeping irregularities"
- "shoddy practices and misleading advertising"

I raise the question as to whether or not an article which utilizes such words and phrases would not be better suited for the editorial page. When reporters interject their own concepts, their own judgments, their own value judgments, they are no longer reporting the news, they are creating it.

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I also strongly object to the interviewing tactics utilized by the writers of the story; Dave Rosenzweig, Mike Goodman, and Bob Fairbanks. It seems to me that when reporters are preparing to make a series of allegations against someone, and they ask for an interview 'to give you a chance to tell your side', they, at some time during the interview, have an obligation to reveal their facts, their allegations. Otherwise, the person being interviewed is not given a chance to respond to the charges. Rather, your reporters simply took my responses to general, veiled questions and worked them into the parts of the story where they made specific allegations. In this way, quotes were taken out of context and then used in the story alongside information gathered to refute "my response". It was made to appear that I was responding to a specific charge. This was not the case.

These tactics have been ruled unconstitutional when used by our police -- but our law enforcement people obviously operate under a stricter standard of fair play, of due process, than does the Times.

Let me cite a few examples. At no time was I told that I was going to be accused of receiving \$7,000 in unauthorized salary which I allegedly paid back in a devious manner through the Ford Foundation. Had I been told this, I might have been able to save you from making this error in the story.

Further, at no time was I told that the article would claim that my brother and sister-in-law were on the JET payroll; nor that the reporters would claim JET obtained only 37 jobs; nor about the Bill Greene plane trips; nor about the "big spenders" at Perinos; nor the claim that thousands of dollars of furniture had disappeared.

The reporters obviously did not want me to respond to these charges; to say something they did not want to hear:

- That the Urban League, not Urban Affairs hired my brother and sister-in-law
- That hundreds were trained by JET
- That I too was upset by the Greene trips, et cetera

This would have ruined their story.

Your story forces me to consider whether or not we are witnessing the birth of a "New McCarthyism". Is guilt by innuendo and guilt by association going to become the norm of investigative reporting?

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I have examined some of the statements made by public officials during the McCarthy era, and I find them frighteningly similar to the current practices of the Times. Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee said in March, 1952:

...McCarthyism represents one of the greatest threats to our nation and to our freedom. Due to this guilt-by-association technique and smear technique used for political purposes, McCarthyism is forcing a lot of our people into conformity of thinking.

The magazine, Commonweal, said of McCarthyism in August, 1952:

...a real danger exists that the smear technique and the sly innuendo will come to be accepted as normal tools of statesmanship, that the blanket accusation and the careless charge will become routine elements in any campaign.

I ask that the Los Angeles Times take a good, hard look at their "investigative" stories to make sure that they are not falling into the habits practiced by Joe McCarthy in the 50's.

Mr. Chandler, your reporters acted as prosecutor, judge and jury in this article. This "trial by newspaper" compared with the Yellow Journalism practiced by many papers years ago, a practice that was thought to be dead.

Your article devoted almost 90 inches to attacking me with a few facts mixed with innuendo, allegation, half-truth and distortion, all aimed at making it appear that Urban Affairs and my involvement with it was nothing more than sham, trickery and financial double dealing.

I quote from the State Attorney General's office:

"Earlier Thursday, Assistant State Attorney General Warren Abbott confirmed that his office has been investigating for more than a year what Abbott called "relatively minor accounting questions" concerning the Urban Affairs Institute."

The Associated Press, Friday, July 4, 1975.

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Abbott stressed subsequently that this investigation, and that involving Windsor, were of the books and ledgers and not of the Lieutenant Governor himself.

Further, Ms. Nancy Boggs, administrative officer with the Ford Foundation, in a letter printed in the Times, July 14, 1975 denies the charge that there were "reported abuses". She states that "refunding was approved in part because progress was being made in remedying a number of problems that had come to light sometime after the project's initial funding in 1968 -- and not 'despite reported abuses'". She also said in her letter that "we were encouraged by U.A.I.'s efforts to correct internal management problems."

The Institute was born out of the ashes of Watts and other major cities which were ablaze in the late 1960's. Its goal was to involve minorities in government and public affairs. I am proud of my efforts and along with those who objectively studied U.A.I. proclaim its programs a success. I regret the Times felt the need to dust off the accounting books of this long since dead Institute to see if those of us in the program stuck to the budget --to see if we spent the Ford Foundation's money in a "proper" fashion. Your two young reporters, who were miles and miles away from the hot streets of those days, chose to apply the sterile accountant's standards of peaceful 1975 to a program that was far more interested in the social, not bookkeeping, problems of the 60's.

Maybe they should spend less time trying to find scapegoats among our governmental, industrial, and labor leaders and try to examine the root causes of our real problems -- unemployment, inflation and high taxes. That would seem to be a more noble endeavor than spending large amounts of money checking to see if a foundation's tax free money was wisely spent.

Investigative reporting has come to the forefront since Watergate. I respect and encourage this trend, but feel that there is the need, indeed the obligation, for any newspaper to abide by the ethics of professional journalism. I can say it no better than did J. Edward Murray of the Detroit Free Press, a past President of the Associated Press Managing Editors:

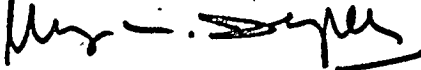
...Investigative reporting is a high art and cannot be entrusted to every enthusiastic young reporter inflamed with post-Watergate zeal. The last thing the press needs is an excessive morality binge that looks under every rock and distrusts everything in sight except fellow reporters.

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It is my hope that this letter, and the attached review of the Times article raise some pertinent questions which deserve the attention of all the media of this State. I will be taking the problems caused me by this article to the people, the voters, for their judgment as to my political future. I do so without fear, and with high expectations.

Sincerely,



MERVYN M. DYMALLY

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Encl.

cc: Editorial Board of Times (10)
Other Major Media in State

LL-2-d-5