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ROBERT ALLEN AND CONRAD LYNN

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"AFTERMATH" column for the March, 1968 Esquire, replying to Esquire's newspaper ad of Oct. 17, 1967.

A REPORTER'S DILEMMAS

By William Worthy

October 12, 1967

Dear Bill,

That is quite a tour de force in the November Esquire! The writing was on the highest level and the pictures were good even though I look somewhat Mau-Mauish. A co-lawyer of mine yesterday in the LeRoi Jones trial interrupted the hearing and presented the judge with a copy of the magazine. After one glance the judge adjourned proceedings for the rest of the day ...

Sincerely,
/s/
Conrad J. Lynn

letter undated, but envelope postmarked October 20, 1967

Dear Bill:

Just wondering if you are going to continue to let yourself be used like this.

[REDACTED]
(a colleague of H. Rap Brown)
[REDACTED]

enclosure:

THE NEW YORK TIMES, October 17, 1967
ADVERTISEMENT
GROWING DANGERS IN THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT
(full text of the ad, in italics,
to be included)

In the past decade, part of the aftermath of ^{my} "unauthorized" trips to China and Cuba has been extensive lecturing across the United States before all kinds of audiences. Especially outside the New York Times watershed, I have had numerous brushes with the weird and twisted notions the American public derives from press coverage of off-limit countries. I have also come to see the damaging and beclouding effect on popular thinking that one verb, one noun or one adjective can have, particularly when repeated again and again by the mass media.

One ^{continued} such word was "sneaked". It cropped up endlessly as "Worthy vs. Duales" dragged on in the courts. With each development

- M O R E -

The name + specific identification were struck out by the mag's stenographer.

in the judicial proceedings, AP and UPI would recapitulate by reminding millions of readers that I had "sneaked" into China without government approval.

Hence my sad amusement in Milwaukee when I arrived a few minutes late for a talk to high school students on the right to travel. Slipping unnoticed into a rear seat to listen to the discussion already under way, I heard one senior defend the abstract right of newsmen to enter China. But he didn't like what I had done "because Mr. Worthy sneaked in from Hong Kong on a sampan." Given the American mentality and the unquestioning daily acceptance of the Gospel according to AP, how else, indeed, would ^{a reporter} ~~one~~ "sneak" into that far-off mysterious land?

Thanks partly to white press treatment, few persons today are in a more impossible position than the handful of Negro foreign correspondents who are in touch with revolutionary Black Power developments and who, From an international vantage point, ^{they} see the movement as foredoomed to tragedy unless the total society is in active, conscious crisis over both domestic and foreign policies. As journalists, they have a professional responsibility to inform the total populace. But they are subject to multi-sided misinterpretation of motives and are vulnerable to journalistic mishandling by careless or ignorant headline writers, by copy editors concerned with space limitations rather than key passages, and by writers of advertising copy whose prime function is to ~~huckster~~ the printed word.

The realization of this fragile position was brought home anew last October 17 as I sat in bed at midnight and read in complete dismay an advertisement in The Boston Globe on my three-part Black Power feature in Esquire's November issue. Unknown to me, the magazine's Circulation Department had placed the same distorted, erroneous ad that day in 26 newspapers across the country. After months of careful work on the feature, which Esquire's Research Department doublechecked, I was braced to defend the authenticity of the finished product from an expected variety of critics, rational and irrational, honest and dishonest. But the advertising was beyond defense.

By the next afternoon, from protesting phone calls and queries, I knew I was in trouble, especially in my home town, until I wholly dissociated myself from the ad. The explanation is simple. In the pre-barricades period through which we are now jetting, lines are sharpening, pathological distrust and suspicion abound, and past reputations mean little or nothing.

Out of this altered climate sprang the strong objections from many who hadn't read the Esquire feature and who didn't pause to ascertain whether or not the ad accurately summarized what I had written. Like *Raf* *Brown's colleague,* they jumped to prima facie conclusions. The ad made it appear to them that I had written a sensational "exposé" of the Black Power movement from a far-Right, FBI angle. Being unfamiliar with the complex division of labor in publishing, they erroneously assumed that the editors and I had seen the ad prior to its appearance in the newspapers.

Unavoidably, the repercussions became a month-long preoccupation, legally and otherwise. The episode highlighted the fate of truth, news and information in a revolutionary era. When men expect to be taking up arms at any moment, the traditional regard for free reporting breaks down, just as in a foreign war. No easy answers suggest themselves; all indications point to an intensification of the journalistic dilemmas.

In preparing the November feature, I had asked Edward Oquendo of Brooklyn, an open draft refuser, to pose for a photograph and to state his links, as a member of Youth Against War and Fascism, with the North Vietnamese and with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Before he agreed, I cautioned him that the spotlight on his case from a magazine of mass circulation could conceivably force the government's hand and lead to a quick rescheduling of his trial which the prosecutor had seven times postponed.

This is exactly what happened, within a couple of weeks after publication. The jury took only ten minutes to convict him in a charged and crowded courtroom where an eccentric federal judge had had the toilets locked against the defendant's many supporters. As a highly political personx interested in joining the Vietnam issue on all fronts, Oquendo welcomed and still welcomes the national and international attention from the Esquire article, regardless of the penal consequences. But what if he and others I cited had preferred to let sleeping dogs lie and to let their "hell, no" cases remain indefinitely on the court calendars, as the Department of Justice clearly wished? Should I then have bowed to their wishes and, in effect, kept the general public, black and white, uninformed of the government's *politically significant* ~~highly revealing~~ reluctance to look horns with Negro draft resisters?

Shortly after Oquendo's conviction on November 6 -- he was later sentenced to *five* years' imprisonment --, three young Negro Army

deserters walked into the headquarters of a Black Power organization and announced their protest against the war. A sympathetic attorney advised them that if they stayed under cover, the FBI and military police might make no serious effort, as in other cases of political desertion, to find them. But if they publicized their names and whereabouts, the Army would feel constrained to arrest them. The trio chose to remain quiet. Does a Negro reporter, from the beginning in total opposition to the war, have a professional responsibility, under the public's right to know, to force the issue of desertions onto the front pages -- naming names, places and other details?

As long ago as October, 1964, I came up against a strong undercurrent of opposition among some Negro militants and segments of the Old Left to any discussion of revolutionary or pre-revolutionary developments in the white mass media. To write an Esquire piece at that time on the slowly maturing pro-Castro, pro-Mao sentiments among young Negroes, I relied exclusively on documents and bulletins of the small militant organizations which were circulating freely among all interested persons. None of my documentation or references were from secret or confidential sources; there were no "revelations".

From Negro exile Robert F. Williams, then in Havana and later in Peking, I learned that both the Cuban and Chinese leaders liked the article very much. Here at home, however, I heard considerable criticism, mostly indirectly behind my back. Like most gossip, it would never stand up in a face-to-face encounter. No one ever claimed: "Your article caused so-and-so to be arrested and prosecuted" or "You revealed these specific facts -- 1, 2, 3, 4 -- that the government hadn't known before" or "You betrayed so-and-so's confidence." I had and still have all the supporting material to demonstrate the opposite.

Since I had merely pulled together in one piece, for a mass audience, scattered strands of information previously published in black nationalist brochures, the arguments against the Esquire article were necessarily fuzzy and vague. Some objected to the title ("The Red Chinese Negro American"). So did I. But no Esquire writer bears responsibility for titles; they are a style prerogative of the editors. Other critics fell back on ill-defined notions of "damage" to the cause when information already in the public domain is presented in a white periodical to several million readers (including many Negroes) who have every right to be informed. It is an unworkable and undesirable concept of half-way

censorship-by-boycott to which no self-respecting reporter can subscribe.

In last November's Esquire feature the only "expose" deals with the CIA's lavishly financed undercover role in the Black Power movement. Logically, only the CIA and "militants" secretly on its bountiful payroll should be unhappy. Once again, in the framework of the feature, I had nothing "new" to reveal about Negro revolutionaries. However, such items as the Esquire did inject new life into the "stay-out-of-the-white-media" position.

Until fairly recently, the Black Power movement was, on balance, remarkably open and explicit about even its most violent intentions. This surprising and historically unique revolutionary phenomenon was highlighted not long ago when Mayor John Lindsay of New York and Senator Fred Harris (D., Okla.), as members of the President's Commission on Urban Disorders, met clandestinely with fifteen black nationalist leaders in "a large Midwestern city". Together with ^m commission staff members, the two officials were told by the angry young college-trained Negroes of their well-developed plans to resort to urban guerrilla warfare and of their determination to destroy the "corrupt" American system which is "beyond reform". Only the naive would believe that these plans and the planners' names were not relayed immediately to the FBI; indeed, agents conceivably bugged the entire rendezvous. But loud would be the denunciations today of a Negro reporter who published the same plans in a white newspaper or magazine, even if no names were mentioned or if the specific city/~~city~~^{was} carefully disguised.

Hand in hand with the change in mood from the earlier open-book period are unhealthy new tendencies toward a Stalinist-type super-secrecy on petty matters. The concealment is both futile and adolescent in a movement long infiltrated by informers and agents provocateurs. Early last fall, after the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee publicly announced that H. Rap Brown would speak in Boston in November, I telephoned the Boston SNCC office to get the details I had neglected to write down. The young lady who answered did not ask who was calling or why (irrelevant questions in any event). She simply replied: "I'm not authorized to give out that information."

A semi-paranoiac image will only alienate the general Negro community and world public opinion. Even more unfortunate is the failure to learn from successful revolutionary movements abroad that every reasonable opportunity to reach the vast uncommitted and uninformed populace must be

seized, even when all factors are not ideal. In Asia and Africa, the postwar anti-colonial movements did not thumb their noses at chances to get their case into the white press of London, Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam -- whether it was the openly imperialist Tory dailies or the "subtly" colonialist Labor-Socialist (white liberal) intellectual journals. With a similar aim of dividing the enemy, Fidel Castro welcomed Herbert Matthews of the New York Times to his mountain hideout and permitted Robert Taber of CBS News to fly a small plane filled with TV cameras into the Sierra Maestra for a filmed interview.

During the Algerian revolution against the French I was one of a series of American reporters who met underground with guerrillas and with the urban clandestine movement. I was in little or no danger (in those days I still had the "protection" of an American passport). But the men whom I interviewed were risking their necks to win publicity for their cause in ^{the} ~~this~~ country which was providing France with arms. With no historical perspective, certain Black Power militants are sometimes mistakenly ejecting "all the white press" from public meetings. In ^{an} ~~this~~ emotionally driven period, the go-it-alone absolutists may drown out the voices of more levelheaded elements who understand that, to build a mass movement in this media-oriented nation, mass communication is indispensable. Even Ho Chi Minh has no hundred per cent indiscriminate boycott policy toward the white U. S. media. By admitting Harrison Salisbury and David Schoenbrun to his country, he showed he has not written off the entire American press as hopelessly dishonest or all American reporters as adjuncts of the GIA.

My reservations about some of the movement's new trends extend to those transient, hastily considered issues where passionate commitment equates any expression of honest doubt with giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The anti-birth control kick, for example, is reminiscent of the line some Communist parties took before coming to power and ^{confronting} ~~facing~~ the facts: ^{that} ~~is~~ ^{was} a dirty capitalistic cannibalistic plot against the working class. In January, 1967, had I not been otherwise occupied, I could easily have compiled a list of hearts Adam Powell has broken over the years when he has irresponsibly forsaken a number of causes. The purpose of documenting his political record would have been to cushion his trusting followers for their present sense of betrayal at his refusal to ~~be~~ return home from Bimini. But in those angry days

when his Congressional seat was treated as the Black Power issue, most of his fervid defenders would hardly have listened. The most frequent reaction would have been cries of "treason" and "disunity". That's hard to take, even when one is confident of vindication within ~~half a year~~ *a relatively short time.*

Because an important principle was at stake, Powell, of course, had to be supported. Nonetheless, given the man wrapped inside ^{the} ~~that~~ principle, there was an over-investment of resources and moral indignation. In order not to encumber freedom's cause unnecessarily, battle-scarred civil libertarians have learned not to elevate every victim of injustice to heroic proportions. Self-assured whites with that kind of educative experience would contribute far more by warning against avoidable pitfalls and needless tragedies than by offending most Negroes with awkward, self-conscious and ostentatious discourse about "the blacks" and "the Afro-Americans".

For a while, the imposition of "unity" promises to shield all manner of scoundrels, hustlers, posturers and opportunists now riding the Black Power express. It used to be Negro preachers and small-time political hacks who dreamed up personal fast-buck schemes that whites traditionally supported, the better to control the ghettos. Today similar fake pickpocket schemes -- socially, politically and economically infeasible -- pop up in militant, separatist disguises. But, at the moment, those who formulate the new versions of old rackets enjoy a certain immunity from dissection and exposure bestowed by the "unity" umbrella. The movement will pay a heavy price if it insists that Negro newsmen serve two masters: reporting the news and simultaneously hush-hushing internal mistakes, difficulties and frauds which, through police infiltration, are already well known to the real enemy.

Because of insufficient attention to realities, because of inherent dangers to leaders and followers alike, the movement's present "absolutist" mood will not endure indefinitely. Whom Washington would destroy, it first makes furious, then reckless, then unbefriended, as Jimmy Hoffa ^{the hard way in court after court.} ~~has learned by now.~~ If Malcolm X were alive today,

I believe he would be invoking his moral authority to warn youthful militants that maximum coverage in the press both black and white offers more protection for a moral cause. It provides the best opportunity to get a message over in a country of this size and complexity. *Mimeograph machines and the "underground press" can't do it alone.*

I also believe that by now Malcolm would have introduced mandatory procedures for internal criticism and self-criticism. And since every movement can profit from an independent external "audit", I am convinced that the cool and cosmopolitan Malcolm who emerged from his 1964 Africa trips would have maintained his close relations with white reporters he trusted, such as M. S. Handler of the New York Times and Kenneth Brodneyn, formerly of UPI and NBC News. Inevitably, hard-hitting reporting causes momentary embarrassment to the best of movements and to the noblest of public figures. But Malcolm saw the value of detached newsmen of any race on whom everyone, including the movement's diverse factions, can rely for honesty in news reporting.

Also, toward the end, Malcolm changed -- to the consternation of many followers. He pointed out that, confronted with the facts (even if filtered through the media), some whites had awakened and were joining the revolution.

Below is the text of Esquire's forthcoming ad (approved in advance, as per out-of-court settlement, by William Worthy and his attorney, William M. Kunstler) on the "Aftermath" column in the March, 1968 issue of Esquire. Date of publication: Friday, February 9.

The ad will run in the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, Negro press, Village Voice and the rest of the 26 papers across the country (nearly all of them dailies) that were on the schedule for the disputed ad last October 17.

Title of Worthy's "Aftermath" column: "A Negro Reporter's Dilemmas".

HOW OUR AD CAUSED TROUBLE

In this ad space four months ago, we ran an announcement for William Worthy's November Esquire feature on Black Power.

This ad said, in part: "Is the American Negro being tracked into subversion by Communist-backed reactionaries? ... Learn how the Black Power underground force has become a world-wide organization... Learn why the most powerful, best organized and best financed Black Power groups are still unknown."

Now, in the March issue of Esquire, Negro author Worthy writes about the trying aftermath of this ad and of the article itself. He discloses that a storm of protest broke over his head from Negroes who were angered by the ad and had not actually read Worthy's detailed article.

He also reveals that Edward Oquendo, one of the principals in his Black Power story, was tried and convicted for draft refusal as a direct result of the reporting in Esquire of Oquendo's resistance.

The price of this kind of public exposure in the "white" press may be high and the risk of misinterpretation great. But, pleads Worthy in his March Esquire article, the truth about the Black Power movement must be told. Mimeograph machines and the "underground press" cannot do it alone. Don't miss William Worthy's reaction to his own Black Power story and the controversy it generated ... read March Esquire now on sale.



Esguir May Nov. 1967

"Contacts between anti-imperialist activists in this country and abroad presently serve a couple of purposes. The first is informational: people want to know what is going on in various liberation movements. This is why, for example, the National Guardian's Vietnam correspondent Wilfred Burchett keeps in touch with National Liberation Front forces and travels behind N.L.F. lines to get a perspective on that war which cannot be found in the daily press. Networks of contacts are also very useful for U. S. draft resisters who want to escape to Canada, France or elsewhere and to young Americans who choose to go abroad and join the liberation fighters in other countries. It's a kind of underground railway and business is picking up."
—Robert Allen, staff writer,
National Guardian