

August 1, 1968

Mr. James Reston
Washington Bureau
The New York Times
1701 K N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Personal

Dear Mr. Reston:

I have been reading your column with the utmost interest and admiration for years. There has been something wrong, for I have rarely had any urge to quarrel with you; and even today I have to poke you mainly for the things you did not say in your piece on the American political system.

You write about the failings of our system. You, James Reston, are a very important part of that system. No one else, at this moment in history, could have a more cogent influence on the public exposure of political talent. For example, your early non-criticism of HHH had a great deal to do with sending off his campaign.

I see no vice in this besides the perception of your role as a columnist and as a policy-maker for the world's most important newspaper. I can see that you have great problems in juggling your functions as critic and confidant of the Establishment in Washington.

The Times, need I say, is an indispensable instrument of our democracy. But its very quality creates a monopoly upon which rests a responsibility it does not fulfill. For example, where are the Walter Lipmanns and the radical commentators (right and left) who could help sensitize your readership to the issues aborning?

And so on.

I know many of the answers. For all of its public responsibilities, the Times is a profit-making corporation and must not take too many chances; this sets important limits on its role as a constructive political instrument. But isn't this, too, one of the explanations of political mediocrity? You could also reply: it's awful, but where is any better?

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Executive Head
Department of Genetics

JL:mlw

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