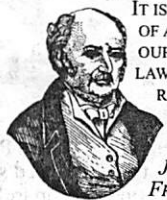


EDITORIALS

WITHOUT FEAR
OR FAVOR

LOWELL REESE
PUBLISHER

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EDITOR



IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO RECOUNT ALL THE ADVANTAGES THAT THE PUBLIC WILL RECEIVE FROM THE PUBLICATION OF A GAZETTE IN THIS DISTRICT. ... IT WILL COMMUNICATE A TIMELY INFORMATION OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF OUR LEGISLATURE AND PREVENT US FROM UNDERGOING VARIOUS EVILS BY BEING ACQUAINTED WITH THE LAWS OF OUR COUNTRY. ... IT WILL BRING THE LATENT SPARKS OF GENIUS TO LIGHT AND GIVE THE WORLD A RESPECTABLE OPINION OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME SO MANY LEAGUES TO CULTIVATE A DESERT LAND. WHEN OTHERS SEE WHAT WE HAVE DONE AND WHAT WE ARE STILL ABLE TO DO, THEY WILL COME AND STRENGTHEN OUR HANDS AND BE PLEASED TO PARTAKE OF OUR FUTURE BLESSINGS.

JOHN BRADFORD, FOUNDER OF THE KENTUCKY GAZETTE
FROM A MESSAGE TO HIS READERS, AUG. 25, 1787

HISTORY

Teaching, writing & telling lies

Bob Pierce, a retired senior editorial writer for the largest newspaper in South Carolina, The State in Columbia, once told me that as much as 5 percent of what you read in a typical daily newspaper is a lie. Because in interviews some people lie to reporters through snow jobs, sugarcoating and spins, and sometimes reporters screw up.

The newspapers record history as it happens, and history, therefore, as printed in books is part baloney.

And that's before considering that some history writers have a problem with the truth in their personal lives.

Two months ago, Joseph Ellis won the Pulitzer Prize in History for his best-selling book, "Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation."

Last week, The Boston Globe exposed Ellis. A revered history professor at Mount Holyoke College (Mass.), he had been lying to students in his college classrooms for years about serving in the Vietnam War and about his involvement afterward in the antiwar and civil rights movements.

Ellis fabricated stories about his personal battlefield experiences, which he shared with his students in a course on Vietnam and American Culture at Mount Holyoke and at nearby Amherst, two prestigious women's colleges.

Ellis told students he was an infantry platoon leader and airborne soldier in Vietnam in 1965-66, and that his unit was involved in an operation in My Lai shortly before the notorious atrocity there in 1968, when several hundred civilians were massacred by Americans. All of this, he claimed, turned him into an antiwar advocate, "motivated to do so by what he had seen in Vietnam." The lies made Ellis more of a hero to young people, and made their anguish over Vietnam come alive.

One of Ellis' students told the Globe, recalling Ellis' views of the war from what he said in the class: "He was a veteran who came back and participated in the antiwar movement. So his perspective is very liberal."

As it turns out, Ellis was never in Vietnam. Instead, he was sheltered in graduate school at Yale University during the period of his tales. He went on Army active duty in 1969, and after two months of officer training at Fort Gordon, Ga., was assigned to teach history at the US Military Academy at West Point, where he finished his tour.

Also, as part of his war fabrications, Ellis claimed that his Vietnam duty included an assignment in Saigon on the staff of Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the Vietnam commander, and that later he gave his observations about Westmoreland to David Halberstram, the author of the 1972 best-selling book, "The Best and the Brightest." According to the Globe, Halberstram said he does not recall ever meeting Ellis and said he

was not a source for Ellis' book.

In interviews, lectures to students and statements to friends over the years, Ellis also claimed he scored the winning touchdown for his high school football team in the last game of his senior year. But according to the Globe, his school yearbook doesn't list him as a player. And during his senior year, his school lost its final two games.

The Globe reported that over the years Ellis also exaggerated his involvement in recruiting black students from the South in 1967 and 1968 for a Yale summer program.

Ellis' book, "Founding Brothers," has been on the New York Times best-selling list for 26 weeks; last week it was No. 10. According to the book's jacket, it's about the "in-

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tertwined lives of the founders of the American republic — John Adams, Aaron Burr, Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and George Washington." And Ellis "shows us the private character behind the public personas."

For that, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Fortunately for the Pulitzer people, it came before Ellis' own private persona was reported by the Globe.

How can we trust his book — a history book of all things — now that we know the author is a confessed liar? He has apologized to his family, friends and former students, but not to Vietnam veterans.

Betraying students in bad enough; the highest purpose of a college or university is transferring truth to the next generation. Ellis, 57, never should be allowed behind the podium of a classroom again.

But false teaching is just one of the disturbing matters about all this. There are two others:

(1) When the Globe broke the story, rather than express outrage, the president of Holyoke, Joanne V. Creighton, defended Ellis and criticized the newspaper. In a released statement, she said, "We at the college do not know what public interest the Globe is trying to serve through a story of this nature."

That's an even greater academic disgrace than Ellis' fraudulent behavior.

(2) Ellis is an example of what happened to America over Vietnam: The liberal antiwar protesters — including the phonies, fakers and pony-tailed riff raff, aided by Hollywood, academia and mainstream media — got the upper hand in public attitudes about the war as the returning real patriots faded silently into society. The new left perpetuated a grave and negative myth about the Vietnam War and the young patriots who shared the burden of citizenship in fighting it.

All of which tells more about America than about Joseph Ellis.

— Lowell Reese, publisher