
From: Ed <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, March 3, 2013 11:59 PM
To: Epstein, Jeff
Subject: USA TODAY---Michael Wolff column on my book Annals of Unsolved Crime

<http://usat.ly/XMLj6w>

The mother's milk of media is crime. As news or as entertainment, crime, preferably with a corpse, not only gets ratings but, in the way it is pursued and resolved, reflects our sense of order and authority.

Once upon a time, resolution and guilt were guaranteed. But in post-modern media, highly rated crimes, the ones that haunt both the news and the coolest dramas, are not resolved. Coverups don't bring perpetrators down, they hold them up.

In 1966, Edward Jay Epstein, a Cornell graduate student, published a book called Inquest. The book was a critique of the yet mostly admired Warren Commission report and, arguably, launched not only the industry of doubt that continues to surround the Kennedy assassination but the conspiracy culture that shadows most politics and provides grist for so much media.

This week, in the 50th anniversary year of the JFK assassination, Epstein publishes a grand package of shadow and suspicion, The Annals of Unsolved Crime. Such open cases — most left open because some powerful person or entity did not want them closed — are the ones that certainly make the most compelling media. In fact, the book makes a good case that much of history is the product of greater and smaller conspiracies.

In Epstein's world, modern fiction, from the convenient murders in Netflix's House of Cards to virtually every cable series with a nefarious hero corrupting, plundering and murdering with a fair amount of impunity, is just a minor adaptation of reality.

Epstein himself is a grand figure of modern journalism, an investigative journalist who has continued to socialize with and stay in terms with the rich and powerful he investigates. It is their secrets, or at least the secrets of their lawyers and bankers, that he often reveals. His 15 books, including his investigations of the diamond trade, Hollywood business practices, CIA moles and television news, are all about disabusing the notion that what we accept as true bears much relationship to what is real.

Show Epstein a juicy crime and he will show you how it has been subverted by unseen powers for their own agenda, by the inevitable incompetence of investigative authorities and by the media because it makes a simple story line. Oh yes, and add on top of that the obfuscations of amoral governments, the tradecraft of ubiquitous security and intelligence services, and the brutal efficiency of organized crime rings.

Most recently, smelling a rat, the ever-freelance Epstein took it upon himself to reinterpret the pursuit and investigation of former International Monetary Fund head Dominique Strauss-Kahn, arrested in New York for allegedly sexually assaulting a hotel maid. His methodical reconstruction of everybody's footsteps not only uncovered videotape surveillance implicating the French government in an effort to bring down Strauss-Kahn, but rewrote the entire narrative of the ultimate encounter with the hotel maid in New York.

Epstein doesn't so much solve crimes as make them more complicated. It's not a question with Epstein of guilt or innocence, but of cause and effect. In this, Epstein diverges from most conspiracists who come after him. He has no politics nor agenda. He is not so much angry about the general miscarriages of justice, but pleased to be able to see through them.

His new book is a mix of current headlines, from Strauss-Kahn to Amanda Knox to the 2006 assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in London by radioactive isotopes, and historical holdovers, from the Lincoln assassination to the Lindbergh kidnapping and Jack the Ripper. His point being: It has always been thus. Power, media and incompetence reliably combine to create convenient resolutions and substantially untrue stories.

For Epstein, who was once novelist Vladimir Nabokov's assistant, there's really no aha! moment; there is only a peeling back of the onion, something else revealed, some other avenue to go down — a kind of ever-advancing new season of narrative.

Many of Epstein's investigations have been ongoing for several decades. They don't seem to fade in his mind and, curiously, sometime come back into the public mind.

His investigation of the 1982 death of Roberto Calvi, sometimes called "God's Banker," for his close involvement with Vatican finances, found hanging from Blackfriars Bridge in London, is required reading for anyone who wants insight into the pope's sudden resignation three decades later.

And then there is the Kennedy assassination, ever-present for Epstein. This is the only version which, sensibly, and not at all neatly, because nothing is neat, accepts the version of a lone gunman and, as well, explains the conspiracy, several in fact simultaneously in progress, that very likely took advantage of Oswald's efforts.

You might fairly say that Epstein's life-long work is not so much about the looking-glass world of conspiracy theories, a world from which many journalists with weaker constitutions often never emerge, but about modern story telling.

Nothing is straightforward. Everything is distorted. There are no single answers. Nothing is as true as you think it is — and vice versa.

If you just make those assumptions, in the world according to Epstein, everything starts to seem so much more reasonable, and you just might have a shot at writing high-end cable dramas.

Best regards

Ed Epstein

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