

# Letters

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## The New York Times Replies

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Your article ["The New York Times as Oil Lobby," November] makes a large point about the lack of balance in the coverage of the oil industry, but it does so with a lamentable lack of balance of its own. Apparently no attempt was made to check the files of The Times to see how many articles against the oil lobby have appeared in the Financial Section and other parts of The New York Times.

Worse still, after a careful reading of William Smith's original article last July, I am convinced that Mr. Karp distorted what Mr. Smith wrote. He also, from what Mr. Smith says, distorted and took out of context what Mr. Smith said to him directly.

I am not certain if Mr. Karp had a pre-conceived goal in mind when he undertook the writing of the article, but what appeared in print certainly gives that impression.

SYDNEY GRUSON  
New York, N.Y.

*Mr. Gruson is assistant to the publisher of The New York Times.*

### *The editor replies:*

Mr. Gruson's response reflects the same kind of unspecific defensiveness that many government bureaucracies employ to cover up their mistakes, rather than the forthright admission of error that *The Times* would agree is needed both in government and in the press.

Mr. Gruson suggests that if we had gone back into *The Times'* files, we would have found articles critical of the oil industry and its lobby. What past articles have to do with Mr. Smith's recent inaccuracies is not known. Mr. Gruson asks a great deal from a *Times* reader, who picks up the financial page expecting an objective, or at least accurate, news story, and then is required not only to understand that the story is distorted to favor the industry, but also that the distortion is balanced by anti-industry stories that have appeared in the past.

Mr. Smith's bias in this case was as well-timed as *The Times'* eight-column play of the story was bizarre. The story appeared during a Senate debate on the inclusion of oil import quotas in the Trade Bill. Pro-oil Senators used the story as proof that the

industry needed high quotas.

The direction in which Mr. Smith's overall coverage of the industry leaned during the last year can be best illustrated by the following press release, from the public relations newswire:

New York, Nov. 16—William D. Smith, a financial writer for The New York Times who specializes in coverage of the petroleum industry, tonight received the second annual Milburn Petty Award for "Outstanding Journalistic Achievement."

The award is given jointly by the Association of Petroleum Writers and the American Petroleum Institute. It is named for the founding editor of the Oil Daily, a leading industry trade publication.

The award was announced at the annual dinner of the Association of Petroleum Writers in the New York Hilton Hotel. Making the presentation was Thornton F. Bradshaw, president of Atlantic Richfield Co.

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# The Ordeal of Legal Services: How Poor People Won in Court But Lost in OEO

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by Taylor Branch

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At 6:30 p.m. on November 20, an unlikely group of four people assembled in Washington for an important ceremony regarding the Office of Economic Opportunity's Legal Services Program of representation for the poor. Donald Rumsfeld chaired the meeting from his position as director of the anti-poverty agency, a post which he had accepted in May of 1969 after much cajoling from President Nixon and the Moynihan wing of the White House. The oddity of Rumsfeld's leading the charge against poverty has frequently been noted by

*Taylor Branch is a managing editor of The Washington Monthly. His complete and fully documented report from which this article was taken is available on request.*

writers who recite his moderately conservative record as a Republican Congressman. There is room to muse about the versatility of a man like Rumsfeld—who could become OEO's leader after voting against the original Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, who fights poverty and still comes on like a stylish version of his President, and who represents the poor from a background (Princeton '54, Congressman from a posh Illinois district) which finds them distant and hard to understand. Rumsfeld was attended at the meeting by Deputy Director Wesley J. Hjernevik, a NASA veteran, and General Counsel Donald Lowitz, an attorney in an established Chicago firm—two more strange officials for