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James W. Silver to Mr. Knopf, 21 May 1956

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May 21, 1956

Mr. Alfred A. Knopf
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
501 Madison Avenue
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Knopf:

I am pleased with your reaction to my book review -- I didn't know that anyone ever read such. The review in question may have been a bit flippant but it did no injustice to Mr. Strode.

I published a book once, the best I could do at the time. I was very fortunate in being able to get it published. But though it got fairly good reviews, even in the press, it was a pretty stodgy affair and very few people read it. Now it can be bought from LSU Press for less than half price. I'm not looking for any great rush of purchasers. What I'm getting at is that when and if I write another book I want to have a good many people read it. For years I have been collecting materials (from the most reliable archives, etc.) and now feel that I'm ready to begin what I hope will be a good book on the course of public opinion in the South, mainly during the Civil War. I have the distinct feeling that the South was betrayed by its leaders or that the southern people didn't have sense enough to follow the right leaders. I'm sure that the majority of people in the South were not interested in secession and that when they were led to it, it was on the basis of certain preconceptions which turned out to be illusions. I have the material to follow the course of opinion throughout the war which was undoubtedly lost in part because a great many people didn't really have their heart in it. When it came to propaganda, Davis's administration was abysmally incompetent.

Anyway, for the past ten years or so I have been engaged in numerous sidelines which haven't given me the time to try to write this book, even if I had the inclination. But I really believe that the time has come for me to write or quit and I have arranged my schedule so that I can put a good deal of time on this project. Seems to me that it is about a fifty-fifty proposition as to whether I shall do it. But if I do, it is going to be a "popular" book in the best sense -- that is, people may raise hell about it but they are going to read it.

About a year from now I may be writing you about my book. Or maybe I will have gone fishing.

Yours,

James W. Silver