Acadiana, The Hoodlum And The Article In Life

From Jennings to Morgan City and over to the State House have come disclaimers and criticism of the part fact, part fiction article that appeared in Life Magazine about the influence of hoodlum Carlos Marcello on the political and economic wellbeing of Louisiana.

Life and her sister publication, Time, as well as other “newsmagazines” like Newsweek and Look, and The Saturday Evening Post, are not always at the top of the list for accuracy in American journalism. Their editorial license has been stretched many times in treating the states in the southern section of the American union.

It is well for the reader to keep in mind that magazines of this vintage often do not deal in what is widely accepted as “straight news” or “hard news” that sets down basic information about what happened and where and when it happened and who was involved. These publications are subscribers to the sophisticated “interpretive news” doctrine that is frequently nothing more than the political opinion or philosophical belief of some bright lad on the staff adept at the use of words who doesn’t always bother to let his thinking process work.

This is not to disparage the value of investigative reporting, whether it is done by a magazine or a newspaper. All journalists are charged with that responsibility in one form or another. But this is an argument for accuracy subject to human limitations—and for editorial opinions clearly marked as “editorial opinions.”

The most telling blow against the Life version of what is happening in the state is made, in our judgment, by the local officials charged with the administration of local affairs and the enforcement of all laws. No mature South Louisiana is so naive as to believe that commercial gambling is not or has not taken place in Acadiana.

That’s not all: The sordid side of the Cajun country history reveals that gamblers in the past have “gotten to” some public officials, and public bribery has taken place in some instances. This corruption of politicians has made itself felt in many ways. When law enforcement was weakened other forms of vice resulted, including drug traffic. More than one cesspool of vice has been found in Acadiana and too often a misguided concept of “tolerance” on the part of the citizenry has permitted sores of this kind to fester too long.

Life is right when it implies that a man of Carlos Marcello’s stripe doesn’t make himself a candidate for the Community’s Outstanding Citizen Award by making a hefty contribution to the United Givers Fund. And Life is right in reminding us that normally good citizens perform a public disservice when they give aid and comfort to any hoodlum seeking to undermine the moral fiber of the community.

Life is wrong in spreading patently false information about Acadiana communities like Morgan City and Jennings where conscientious officials have insisted on strong enforcement of the laws.

The Metropolitan Crime Commission of the New Orleans area is given as the source for much of the information provided the national picture magazine. The MCC has performed many worthy tasks in the public interest in an area that has a crime rate that is worsening all the time. But the commission seems to be short of facts on Acadiana. If, on the other hand, that organization has documentary information there is a very simple procedure for bringing the culprits to the bar of justice. We suggest that the crime commission step forward and prove its case.

Meanwhile, it is well that we in Acadiana be reminded that eternal vigilance coupled with aggressive citizen action will always provide the combination to lock the criminal element out.