

# **Critique of Sigvard Gissler's Statement on Walter Duranty's 1932 Pulitzer Prize**

By Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

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*"Liars go to Hell"* – Jane Duranty, grandmother of Walter Duranty

# Critique of Sigvard Gissler's Statement on Walter Duranty's 1932 Pulitzer Prize

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PULITZER PRIZE BOARD Statement on Walter Duranty's 1932 Prize

Nov. 21, 2003

*After more than six months of study and deliberation,*

There is not clear and convincing evidence that the Pulitzer board or any members thereof undertook any study of Walter Duranty's articles.

- Richard Oppel, editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, was identified in the press as the head of the committee that undertook the study.<sup>1</sup> Oppel has not denied this. On two occasions I challenged Oppel to prove the assertion that a study took place (by identifying the members of the board who participated, citing the materials used for the study, and identifying the scholars allegedly consulted by the board). Oppel refused to reply to these queries. He evidently has no qualifications to conduct a study of Duranty and knows nothing of any study.<sup>2</sup>
- Mike Pride, editor of the *Concord Monitor* and co-chair of the Pulitzer board, published an article that paraphrases him as saying, "A couple of years ago, the board looked closely at the Duranty case and made no change."<sup>3</sup> When challenged to prove that the board "looked closely,"<sup>4</sup> Pride likewise remained silent.

*the Pulitzer board has decided*

The board decided nothing. It bowed to the wishes of its master at *The New York Times*, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Junior.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas McCollam, "[Should This Pulitzer be Pulled?](#)" *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December, 2003. Les Kinsolving, "[Gray Lady refuses to cover own story](#)," World Net Daily, November 15, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Markian Pelech, [Letter to Richard Oppel regarding the Pulitzer Prize Board's statement on Walter Duranty's 1932 Prize](#); Markian Pelech, [Letter to Richard Oppel regarding his failure to reply to my letter of May 9](#) [2004]; Markian Pelech, [Richard Oppel, Censorship and Fraud](#); Markian Pelech, [Richard Oppel and Walter Duranty](#).

<sup>3</sup> Felice Belman, "['Monitor' editor to chair Pulitzers](#)," *Concord Monitor*, April 27, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Markian Pelech, [Mike Pride and the Walter Duranty Hoax](#); Markian Pelech, [Pulitzer Board Co-Chair Lied and Fell into the Eighth Circle](#).

*it will not revoke the foreign reporting prize awarded in 1932 to Walter Duranty of The New York Times.*

*In recent months, much attention has been paid to Mr. Duranty's dispatches regarding the famine in the Soviet Union in 1932-1933, which have been criticized as gravely defective.*

Euphemisms such as “gravely defective” have characterized the board’s attempts to downplay the scope of the scandal it has been trying to sweep under the rug.

*However, a Pulitzer Prize for reporting is awarded not for the author's body of work or for the author's character*

Interesting, Sigvard. Had Adolf Hitler been a reporter for an American newspaper during World War I and had won a Pulitzer prize for his reporting, that prize would still be intact regardless of his subsequent behavior?

*but for the specific pieces entered in the competition. Therefore, the Board focused its attention on the 13 articles that actually won the prize, articles written and published during 1931. [A complete list of the articles, with dates and headlines, is attached.]*

*In its review of the 13 articles, the Board determined that Mr. Duranty's 1931 work, measured by today's standards for foreign reporting, falls seriously short.*

Why measure Duranty’s work ‘by today’s standards?’ Were the standards of 1931-1932 all that different?

Can Sigvard elaborate on how Duranty’s work falls seriously short? Is it because Duranty parroted Soviet propaganda, knowing that he was misrepresenting the truth? And yet, this ‘falling seriously short’ does not merit revocation of Duranty’s prize?

*In that regard, the Board's view is similar to that of The New York Times itself*

How is the opinion of *The New York Times* relevant? The management and employees of the *Times* know bad reporting when they see it. They have published reams of it over the decades. Arthur, Junior, ‘admits’ that Duranty’s reporting was ‘bad’ but continues to brag about the Pulitzer awarded to Duranty.<sup>5</sup> What is Sulzberger bragging about?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See the annual brag page regarding the Pulitzer awards won by *The New York Times* and its reporters, usually in the Sunday issue after the Pulitzer prizes are announced, and on the *Times*’ [webpage](#).

<sup>6</sup> The webpage states: “Other writers in the *Times* and elsewhere have discredited this coverage.” This is a mendacious ordering of writers. Writers in the *Times* have not casually attacked their ‘boy’ in Moscow. They have always reacted to criticisms of Duranty by others.

*and of some scholars who have examined his 1931 reports.*

Who are those scholars? Sigvard is hardly referring to Mark von Hagen, who was hired by Arthur to study Duranty's 1931 articles, found them unworthy of a Pulitzer,<sup>7</sup> and explicitly recommended the revocation of Duranty's prize.<sup>8</sup>

*However, the Board concluded that there was not clear and convincing evidence of deliberate deception,*

**No evidence is offered for this assertion.** Is Sigvard asserting for himself and the Pulitzer crowd some sort of license to make unsubstantiated assertions and to have these accepted by the rest of us without question?

***deliberate deception, the relevant standard in this case.***

These are the only relevant words in Sigvard's 'statement.' By these words Sigvard followed my instructions "to advise me of the Board's guidelines for having Walter Duranty's Pulitzer Prize revoked"<sup>9</sup>

Proof of deliberate deception in Walter Duranty's "prize-winning" articles has been provided to Sigvard, the Pulitzer Board, and Arthur, as well as Richard Oppel, Mike Pride and Joann Byrd.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, the standard defined by the Pulitzer board has been proven, and Walter Duranty's Pulitzer prize is invalidated.

*Revoking a prize 71 years after it was awarded under different circumstances,*

This is a meaningless Sigvardism.

***when all principals are dead and unable to respond,***

The dead principals are not at issue here. Once again, Sigvard is intruding irrelevant Pulitzerese into the argument. The mendacity of Duranty's articles is a question of historical fact. Surely Sigvard is not implying that historical research and conclusions are impossible after the subject's death?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mark von Hagen, [The Pulitzer Prize the NYT Should Not Have Won](#).

<sup>8</sup> "N.Y. Times urged to rescind 1932 Pulitzer," *USA Today*, 10/22/2003.

<sup>9</sup> [Correspondence between Markian Pelech and the Pulitzer Board during 2003 regarding Walter Duranty's 1932 Pulitzer Prize](#), Item 9.

<sup>10</sup> Markian Pelech, [Walter Duranty's 1932 Pulitzer Prize Invalidated. The Pulitzer Board set the Standard](#).

<sup>11</sup> Two of the members if the board pose as historians, David M. Kennedy (Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History, Stanford University) and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (W.E.B. DuBois Professor of Humanities, Harvard University). They do not appear to have raised any protest at this absurd nonsense regarding the limitations of historical research. Neither have their fellow historians at these institutions and elsewhere.

USA Today reported, “Sig Gissler, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, also declined to comment on von Hagen's report and its effect on the review of the 1932 prize. No Pulitzer has been revoked since the prizes were first awarded in 1917. ‘This is a matter under internal review,’ Gissler said.”<sup>12</sup> Duranty’s mendacity has nothing to do with merit badges. It is a question of historical fact. Is Sigvard claiming that only the Pulitzer board can make a statement about this historical fact? They obviously have no qualifications for making any statements about the truth.

*would be a momentous step*

Revoking a Pulitzer prize would be momentous? Come now, Sig! Little boys who cheat in box-car derbies lose their trophies. Big boys who cheat on the \$64,000 Question are disqualified. Beauty queens who bring scandal to their respective pageants lose their tiaras. But such criteria do not apply to a low-grade liar for a mass-murderer? That suggests that the standards for Pulitzer prizes are much lower than for these other competitions.

Sigvard has already defined deliberate deception as the standard for revoking Duranty’s award. Proof of that deception has been presented. Sigvard’s ‘statement’ of November 21, 2003, should no longer appear on the Pulitzer website.

Likewise, “momentous” is inappropriate in this context. More appropriate phrases would be “acting with honor,” “acting with integrity,” or “acting courageously.” Is Sigvard saying that the Pulitzer board lacks the ability to behave with honor, integrity and courage?

*and therefore would have to rise to that threshold.*

Distracting tripe.

*The famine of 1932-1933 was horrific*

Neither Sigvard nor the board were instructed to express any hypocritical sentiments about the famine.

*and has not received the international attention it deserves.*

This lack of international attention was in good part due to Walter Duranty. It is ironic that while refusing to revoke Duranty’s prize [Note: It has been invalidated according to the standard set by the Board.], Sigvard would mention the “lack of

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<sup>12</sup> “[N.Y. Times urged to rescind 1932 Pulitzer](#),” *USA Today*, 10/22/2003.

international attention.” Sigvard is as much a liar as Duranty, who **denied** the famine.<sup>13</sup>

Duranty denied genocide. Would Sigvard write in this vein about a Holocaust denier?

*By its decision, the Board in no way wishes to diminish the gravity of that loss.*

That is precisely what Sigvard is doing in this “statement.”

*The Board extends its sympathy to Ukrainians and others in the United States and throughout the world who still mourn the suffering and deaths brought on by Josef Stalin.*

More hypocrisy.

## **Conclusion**

Sigvard Gissler would like to foist an unsubstantiated assertion on the public, as if the Pulitzer Board had a dispensation from proving its statements. Is this the kind of ‘journalism’ he teaches in his classes? Or would Sigvard note on a paper of such slipshod and slovenly content, “Prove it, prove it, prove it.” I therefore challenge Sigvard.

- Prove that a study took place.
- Prove that there was no deception in Duranty’s articles.
- Prove that Sigvard has any comprehension of what he is talking about. The stupidity of his utterances makes one conclude that his mental capacities only make him fit for the low-grade position of Admin of the Pulitzer Prizes.

Sigvard’s ‘statement’ merits no more than an ‘F.’

Why are these 13 articles so important among the 2000 or so that Duranty wrote during his 12 years in Moscow? Because the articles do contain deliberate deception, like so many others that Duranty dispatched to the *Times*. The assertion by Sigvard that they do not contain deliberate deception makes him no better than Duranty and makes Sigvard and the Pulitzer board (none of whom have shown the honor, integrity and courage to speak out against the statements Sigvard made for them) accomplices in Duranty’s cover-up of Stalin’s crimes.

Sigvard Gissler and the Pulitzer board of 2003 have relegated their careers to the trash heap.

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Duranty, “[Russians Hungry, but not Starving](#),” NYT, March 31, 1933, p. 31.