

Letters

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Man of Secrets

I WRITE to protest the assignment of Athan Theoharis to review *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*, by Curt Gentry (Book World, Nov. 3). As I am sure you know, Theoharis is himself the author of a new book on Hoover published in the same season as Gentry's. It is an honored tradition that to make such an assignment is tantamount to journalistic malpractice.

You will realize that this cry of outrage over Theoharis's self-serving review is made from a special pulpit; I was the editor at W.W. Norton in charge of Gentry's book. That, however, does not alter the principle involved. Not only should Theoharis not have been offered the assignment, but he should not have accepted it.

I wonder, too, whether the six-week delay in the review of a major book of major interest in Washington might not have been due to a reluctance on Theoharis's part to give timely publicity to a book in direct competition to his own. Whether the delay was his fault or yours, the entire affair is beneath the standards of one of the nation's great newspapers.

ERIC P. SWENSON
New York

Athan Theoharis replies:

The six-week delay was not due to my "reluctance" to give "timely publicity to a book in direct competition" with my book, *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover*. Book World contacted me on Oct. 5, and I submitted my review on Oct. 12. Second, I felt that I had the responsibility to review a "competing" book, given my own expertise both as an historian of the FBI and the contents of Hoover's Official and Confidential File. I must admit to having been appalled at Gentry's audacity in claiming to have researched and then to have characterized the contents of this important file (and as well at the failure of his editors to have checked the accuracy of his research).

Indeed, because Gentry's and my book were the subject of joint reviews published during September, I was directly familiar with other reviewers' errors in accepting as factual Gentry's citations to this file. Because these reviewers had not researched the file, they had every reason to believe that his citations to specific folders and general characterization of the file's overall contents were accurate. Swenson's "cry of outrage," I submit, might better be directed at his author for his attempt to mislead both reviewers and readers.

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