

Media Notes

At the N.Y. Times: A Review Or Revenge?

By Howard Kurtz
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Nina Auerbach's review left no doubt what she thinks of the new book "Who Stole Feminism?"

Writing in Sunday's New York Times Book Review, the University of Pennsylvania history professor called author Christina Hoff Sommers a "wallflower" and "muddled writer" who had produced a book "so overwrought and underargued that it is unlikely to amuse or persuade."

What Times readers weren't told is that Auerbach was criticized in the book she was assailing, although she was not identified by name.

"You're not supposed to use a review to settle scores," said Sommers, who teaches philosophy at

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Clark University in Massachusetts. "It was such a vituperative attack."

Auerbach dismissed Sommers's complaint, saying: "I am not named in the book. I am not quoted in the book. There's nothing even subliminally I could take as me."

Sommers opens the book with a lengthy attack on a 1992 academic conference honoring feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun. She calls the participants "prone to self-dramatization and chronically offended," and says it is "unfortunate" that "their ideology and attitude are diverting the women's movement from its true purposes." Auerbach was a speaker at the conference.

Auerbach minimized her role, saying she was one of many speakers. But Sommers said, "Wouldn't it have helped the reader to know she was one of the people spewing forth at that

conference?"

Later in the book, Sommers recalls that her stepson, Tamler, wrote a term paper on "Jane Eyre" two years ago at the University of Pennsylvania, in which he observed that women enjoy wider vocational opportunities today.

"No!" wrote his instructor in the margin. "Even today women only make 59 percent of what men make!" That instructor, Sommers says, was Auerbach. In the book, she added: "I was later to see this professor on one of the panels at the Heilbrun conference."

Auerbach says she does not recall teaching Sommers's son—"I have many students"—and that the note was probably written by a teaching assistant. "I would never say that. . . . I would never use that kind of statistic in a term paper," she said.

Times Book Review Editor Rebecca Sinkler is looking into the matter. "You always have to

weigh a person's expertise against their possible bias," she said. But Sinkler defended Auerbach as "an independent thinker. . . . I basically don't think she's a biased person."

Skeptical Sources

Some White House aides who spoke to Bob Woodward for his book "The Agenda" are perturbed about the treatment of their confidential conversations.

Before promoting the book on "60 Minutes," the Washington Post assistant managing editor allowed Mike Wallace to listen to some tapes and read transcribed notes of interviews done for the book. Woodward also says he plans to donate research materials from all his books to the Yale University Library, to be unsealed in 40 years.

"The problem is it wasn't part of the deal," said one White House official, calling the "60 Minutes" incident the "more serious" matter. "It's a question of full disclosure. You can't not tell people things. If we did something like that, it would be [seen as] a federal offense."

Woodward said no source has complained to him, and that he has complete faith in Wallace and Executive Producer Don Hewitt.

"I've known these guys for 20 years," he said. "Anything that was shared was done in absolute confidence. . . . I thought if '60 Minutes' is going to do a piece, I ought to satisfy them that [I had] very good sources." Woodward would not say what was shared, but added: "Lots of stuff doesn't have to tell you who the source was."

As for unsealing his research in 2034, Woodward said he would "consider" delaying the date if any source objects. "Someone who is now 30 years old would be 70," he said. "Even former White House aides mellow when they're 70."

Asked why he is taking this step now, Woodward said: "I'm 51."

Seal of Approval

The Washington Times is going national, with a little help from Reed Irvine.

Irvine, who heads the conservative group Accuracy in Media, makes his living bashing the press. But now that the Times is launching a National Weekly Edition, Irvine has switched to a cheerleading mode, writing a promotional letter that the Times is using to solicit subscribers.

"Tens of thousands of people here in Washington and around the country who start their day with the Washington Times have proved once again that the elitists in the journalistic establishment still don't get it . . . we heartily salute the Times for its newly designed national weekly edition," he writes.

In an interview, Irvine said: "If The Washington Post did as good a job as the Washington Times, we would have endorsed The Washington Post. I don't see anything wrong with commending their publication. It's performed an extremely valuable service to provide an alternative to the leading liberal newspaper."

Asked if he had ever criticized the Times, Irvine said: "Like Dwight Eisenhower said about [the accomplishments of] Richard Nixon, give me a few hours and I'll think of one." (He eventually recalled one ancient dispute.)

Ronald Godwin, the Times's senior vice president, says the paper is renting mailing lists from many groups, including Irvine's. He said the new product will differ from The Post's National Weekly (circ. 118,000) by emphasizing investigative reports and commentary.

"I'd look for a potential circulation of maybe 500,000 in the next three years," Godwin said. "We think there is an audience out there in middle America. . . . I'm very interested in tapping into a moderately conservative audience."

Virtual Reality

"State Trooper Rebutts Jones's Sex Allegations"—Washington Post, June 11

"Trooper Confirms Jones' Visit"—Washington Times, June 11