

Letters to the Editor

Writers, Help Yourselves

To the Editor:

You work hard for several years writing a book. You luck out and get it published by a reputable university or commercial press. So far, so good. The folks at the press will automatically send out review copies to the couple dozen most appropriate journals and magazines in your book's field, right? Wrong.

As review editor for a couple years during the mid-seventies for a leading magazine (*Society*, formerly *transaction*) and for the last few years for a scholarly journal in military sociology and international affairs (*Armed Forces and Society*), I've discovered something that surprised me and that book-writers should be made aware of: publishers aren't automatically sending out review copies of their (your, our!) books. Not unless you (we) urge them and nag them to do so.

I've done all sorts of things to get your books coming in my direction so I could sort through them and make the choices review editors are supposed to make. I got announcements published in *Publishers Weekly*. I send form letters to the promotions departments of a couple hundred publishers urging them to send me books in the appropriate subject areas. I dutifully sent reprints of reviews that "my" periodicals had published to the book publishers, thinking that that might persuade them to send me the next book they launched in a similar field. Mostly nothing.

Hundreds of books are printed each year in the fields of interest dealt with by "my" periodicals. I get a trickle, a few dozen at most.

Mostly I get catalogs and flyers. I must plow through them to try to spot books

that might deserve review. And then write a note to the publisher's promotions people requesting a review copy. Usually, that gets me the book. But who knows how many new books I've missed because the blurbs for them were buried amongst the blurbs for old books or poetry books in those sometimes amazingly disorganized catalogs? Who knows how many new books I've missed because—dare I admit it?—when I'm pressed and the pile of catalogs mounts on the corner of my book reviewer's desk in the corner, I sometimes look the other way at 6 P.M. and push the entire pile into the round file on the floor?

Nor are the chiefs of university institutes, centers, or programs much better. Nor the interest groups publishing their broadsides. Nor the publishers of interesting public documents. For the past couple years I've been responsible for the "From the Archives" section of *Armed Forces and Society*, a regular section featuring short review notes of the sort of things not usually reviewed in the books section of the journal: institute papers, government documents, reference works, "think tank" reports, etc. Again, I've tried all sorts of tricks to get this stuff to pour in over the transom so I don't have to spend too much time digging for it. Announcements in *PS* and in the various newsletters published by the International Studies Association and its constituent organizations, reprints to interest groups, requests to outfits like the OECD or Pax Christi. Again, mostly nothing.

It puzzles me that all these purveyors are so reluctant or resistant. One would think the commercial presses would desire reviews to help sell books. One would think the government outfits or the university institutes or the interest groups would welcome the attention to their outpour-

ings. But I've had to work too hard to pry things loose from publishers of various sorts. At times, I've been tempted to say: "The hell with it. If those outfits want their things reviewed, they'll have to send 'em to me. I'm not plowing through any more catalogs or writing any more letters begging for review copies."

If it puzzles me and costs me some time, it ought to irritate writers who are too trusting of their publishers. Writers (some of you readers) should, it seems to me, be more assertive. Ask your publisher to send out review copies. Furnish your publisher with a list of the names and addresses of the periodicals you want to receive them. Don't assume knowledge of the periodicals. Don't assume follow through. Nag. Double check. Persist.

Insist.

If you have some leverage or clout, maybe the insisting should be done up front at contract-negotiating time.

Don't be shy. The celebrities who have ghosts write their books get right in there and help market them, pushing for autographing tours and TV show appearances. It hardly seems gauche for a serious writer to take some quiet but firm steps to have his/her serious scholarly work noticed.

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Editor's note: James A. Stegenga is the author of several books, a couple of which have been reviewed.

LOCATION OF FUTURE ANNUAL MEETINGS

Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association are scheduled to take place on the following dates and in the following cities:

September 1-4, 1983, in Chicago, Illinois
August 30-September 2, 1984 in Washington, D.C.
August 29-September 1, 1985 in New Orleans, Louisiana
August 28-31, 1986 in Washington, D.C.