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THE SCOOP

TODAY'S GOSSIP

Illustration by Daniel Adel

A peek into Newhouse's biography

Plus coup talk at Warner Bros. and lace on a bull's head

MSNBC

The copy machines will be running overtime at Conde Nast next month. That's when Carol Felsenthal's unauthorized biography of publishing powerhouse Si Newhouse comes out.

● COMPLETE STORY ↴

'I didn't know about real power until I dealt with Newhouse.'

— CAROL
FELSENTHAL
author of 'Citizen Newhouse'

"CITIZEN NEWHOUSE: Portrait of a Media Merchant" is the hotly anticipated tell-all about the most powerful man in publishing. Newhouse owns Vanity Fair, the New Yorker, Vogue and others. Among the highlights:

■ **Sam Newhouse's FBI files.** Although the file contains documents alleging that Si's father was a communist and "used the Mafia as his bank," in fact, Newhouse was anything but a communist. Newhouse, who owned a chain of newspapers, was according to Felsenthal, always ready to cooperate with J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. "His reporters were always willing to run stories fed to them directly by Hoover's office."

■ **Si Newhouse's lifelong friendship with controversial McCarthy lawyer and gay bashing, closet homosexual Roy Cohn.** Cohn, the ultimate "fixer" would, according to the book, "arrange for Si to have access to girls."

■ **Si Newhouse's sexuality.** "There are some people who worked for Si, both male and female, who insist that [his prolific] dating was a ruse," Felsenthal writes, "that Si was, in fact, a closet homosexual, perhaps bisexual." She then goes on to quote a number of people, including gossip columnist Liz Smith, Cohn biographer Nicholas von Hoffman and former lovers who insist Newhouse wasn't gay. "He was very sensual in his own little wee way," ex-flame Sally Obre told Felsenthal, "a terrific lover, a passionate lover."



In 1993, Felsenthal wrote a controversial biography of another publishing powerhouse, Washington Post company head Katharine Graham. Graham threatened to sue Felsenthal's then-publisher, Putnam, but the writer says she was able to fend off the lawsuit by producing fastidiously researched documentation.

"[Putnam publisher Phyllis Grann] blanched at the possibility of a lawsuit," says Felsenthal. "I was told that at a meeting she said she would never do another unauthorized biography of a living person. She just didn't need the headaches."

Felsenthal left Putnam for Viking to write the Newhouse bio, but in 1996, Putnam was bought by Viking's parent and Grann was put in charge, becoming, once again, Felsenthal's publisher. After handing in a 1,200-page manuscript, Felsenthal says she

was paid in full and her book was killed. "I was told that I was writing about the people who they ran into at parties and on the commuter train," Felsenthal says. "They just couldn't afford to alienate these people. They were very up-front about it." (In 1993, Putnam also killed an unauthorized biography of Calvin Klein and paid the authors in full.) Viking and Penguin didn't return calls for comment. Si Newhouse also had no comment on "Citizen Newhouse."

Felsenthal resold the book to Seven Stories press, a tiny publishing company that is bringing out the book in mid-December. "Si Newhouse, as far as I know, put absolutely no pressure on Viking," says Felsenthal. "It's a self-censoring industry. I thought I knew what power was when I was writing about Kay Graham. I didn't know about real power until I dealt with Newhouse."
