

Justice Department as a damned good reason to keep it alive.

The best take came from *The New Republic*'s Jeffrey Rosen. Three days after the Espy acquittal, Rosen's op-ed in *The New York Times* cited Smaltz, Starr, and Walsh as examples of how the IC law creates partisan prosecutors. Interviewed on NPR the next morning, Rosen delivered the mantra on the IC law that is destined to become a bipartisan consensus for all the wrong reasons, especially if the Senate votes to impeach.

Said Rosen, "They should put a stake through its heart and kill it."

Sigh, Newhouse

Here are four events that will not follow the publication of Carol Felsenthal's new book: The author will not be introduced to the pooh-bahs of literary Manhattan at a cocktail party with tuxedoed waiters. Her book will not be talked up in *The New Yorker*. First serial rights will not go to *Vanity Fair*, and paperback rights will not be sold to a single publishing house in New York.

That's not because Felsenthal lives in Chicago, or because her book lacks commercial value. It's because *Citizen Newhouse*, just out from Seven Stories Press, is an unauthorized biography of S. I. Newhouse, the billionaire who controls the Condé Nast magazine empire. At risk of offending Newhouse, who loves buzz but shuns personal publicity, few editors will even bother to send the book out for review.

And if they do, expect the kind of vigorous slam the book received in the November 30 *New York Observer*, in which the reviewer was shocked—shocked!—by the trivia he encountered about Newhouse's sartorial and culinary habits, not to mention speculation about his sex life. (Far be it from the *Observer* to promote sleazy gossip about prominent media figures.)

After declaring the book void of a single insight, the *Observer*'s reviewer, a freelancer named Scott Sherman, proceeded to argue that it is the readers of Condé Nast magazines, not Newhouse, who bear the true responsibility for the editorial content thereof.

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 (Which job do you think Sherman would rather have: associate editor at *Details* , or contract writer for *Vogue* ?)

Actually, Felsenthal is a solid reporter, and while hers may not be the most sophisticated analysis, she is not afraid to write about the bizarre mix of corruption and fantasy that is the fin de siècle magazine world. Her last book, a Katharine Graham biography published by Putnam in 1993, was excerpted in *Vanity Fair* and positively reviewed in the *Washington Post* . Felsenthal recalls that after Graham wrote an angry letter to Putnam, which the author answered point by point, the book generated little further publicity.

That same year, Nan Graham, then an editor at Viking, was looking for someone to write a Newhouse biography. Felsenthal was chosen, she recalls, because of her Kay Graham bio and because "all the people with the stature they wanted had contracts with *The New Yorker* or *Vanity Fair* or Random House."

Felsenthal did her interviews in 1994 and 1995. "People didn't greet me with open arms," she says. "They greeted me as if I were Typhoid Mary." She sent letters to the likes of Harry Evans and Tina Brown, then the top editors at Random House and *The New Yorker* , and followed up with phone calls, but with the exception of *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter, who wrote her a note, hardly anyone acknowledged her letters. From Newhouse, she received "no response at all." (A Newhouse spokesperson declined to comment.)

She proceeded to interview some 500 people, of which she estimates 100 have current ties to Newhouse. On-the-record sources include *Harper's* publisher Rick MacArthur, Sunday *Daily News* editor Ed Kosner, and former *New Yorker* writers Calvin Trillin, Jonathan Schell, and Ian Frazier. The book's first anecdote is attributed to *New Yorker* cartoon editor Lee Lorenz; Felsenthal's guide to this netherworld was gardening writer (and former *New Yorker* fact checker) Patti Hagan.

By the time Felsenthal finished the manuscript, Nan Graham had left Viking for *Outback*. Viking had bought Putnam and

scribblers, Viking had bought Putnam, and former Putnam editor Phyllis Grann had risen to power at Viking. In 1997, the manuscript was accepted and edited by Viking's Al Silverman, who sent it on to the legal department. Then in January 1998, Felsenthal recalls, Grann invited Felsenthal's agent to lunch and told her, "I love this manuscript, but we can't publish it, because there's a friend of mine on every page." Grann also let on that her husband was about to go skiing with Alberto Vitale, who was then chairman of Random House, says Felsenthal. (A Viking spokesperson did not return calls for comment.)

Eventually, Viking paid Felsenthal the balance of her rumored six-figure advance and released her to sell the manuscript elsewhere. That's how it ended up at the lowly Seven Stories Press. And that's how Felsenthal's big debut in New York turned out to be a little talk on Tuesday at Revolution Books. It's safe to guess there was not a pooh-bah or a tuxedo or a cocktail in sight.

A sampler of the outsider's opinions:

- On Si Newhouse: "You would think that if you were a billionaire, and you could amass a list of magazines, you might have a vision. It might be to promote a political or a social philosophy, or to boost cultural awareness of values. I don't think Si gives a hoot about that. He wants the magazines to be in the news."
- On why Newhouse hires Brits: "He likes their accents."
- On why Newhouse bought *The New Yorker*, paraphrasing Newhouse: "'Vogue and Glamour and Mademoiselle are all chickens, and only another chicken can tell them apart.'"
- On Tina Brown's reign at *The New Yorker*: "She delivered attention, but she didn't deliver a distinguished magazine. The magazine that she produced was really *Vanity Fair*, except it was weekly and the chances for losing money and making big mistakes were much greater."
- Example of a mistake Tina Brown made: "Running an article by Daphne Merkin about

liking to be spanked."

- Best line she ever heard about *The New Yorker* : "Calvin Trillin said that if he could ban two words from the magazine, they would be *Barry Diller* ."
- On the Newhouse ethic: "What I call a conflict of interest, they call synergy."

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