

## Times Books: A Mandate For Topicality

The Random imprint mixes its serious journalism with books of games and crossword puzzles

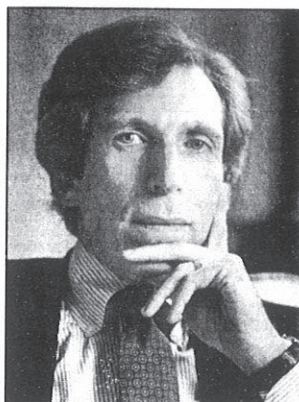
Peter Osnos, appointed publisher of Times Books in 1991 as part of the reorganization of the Random House imprint, has combined a strategy of focused acquisitions in nonfiction categories with moderate advances to compile a list of titles embracing many of the most substantial issues of the day.

Originally established by the *New York Times* to provide a book publishing outlet for its reporters and for *Times*-generated material, Times Books was acquired by Random House in 1984. Until 1990 it functioned as a separate unit at Random House, when Osnos was asked to oversee the imprint. His hope, he said, was to give the house a distinct

legacy based on its name.

The combination of the *Times* name and Osnos's 18 years as an international correspondent and editor at the *Washington Post* is reflected in Times Books' continued emphasis on serious journalism and current affairs. "We are focused on books meant to be topical and enduring, that reflect society in the broadest sense and that will go on the backlist and continue selling," says Osnos, using as an example Magic Johnson's *What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS* (with 500,000 copies shipped since April) and upcoming books by former president Jimmy Carter and former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker.

"We have books under



Peter Osnos

contract from journalists with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *L.A. Times* and others," says Osnos, citing such titles as *The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power and the Pursuit of Office* by Alan Ehrenhalt, *Sadam Hussein: Crisis in the Gulf* (with 400,000 copies in print), *Triumph Without Victory* and Gary Sick's bestselling *October Surprise* (35,000 sold in hardcover and due out in paperback in October), as well as upcoming works like *Guerillas* by John Lee Anderson, which investigates life among modern political and religious insurgents, and Jerry Birnbaum's December book, *The Lobbyists: How Business Gets Its Way in Washington*.

### A Core Franchise

Osnos says Times Books "resembles a good magazine or newspaper. We have a lot of parts. We are the only Random House imprint mandated to publish in specific categories like business, science and health. Other imprints acquire in these areas, but this is our core franchise." The categories include public affairs, media/journalism, economics and topical history.

"We also have the exclusive right to use the *New York Times* name," Osnos points out, which figures prominently in its series of *Times Atlases* as well as a variety of *Times* guides (the *Times Guide to The Best Books for Children* is in its second edition, with over

100,000 copies sold).

Times Books's popular puzzles and games books are also an important part of the mix. Associate publisher Annik LaFarge says revenues from the line are up 44% from 1990 to 1991: "We've added a lot and we're projecting a large increase for next year." The imprint has added crossword collections from the *L.A. Times*, the *Nation* and the *Washington Post* to its list and expanded its publishing collaboration with *Games* magazine with an aggressive consumer marketing campaign. LaFarge also mentions the American Heart Association line of books, in particular the *AHA Cookbook*, which is "a terrific seller" in its fifth edition, and the *AHA Fat and Cholesterol Counter*, with 160,000 copies sold.

Under the direction of LaFarge and editorial director Steve Wasserman, each category has an editor to lead the acquisition of books in that area. Times Books publishes 50 to 60 trade books a year in hardcover and paperback, plus another 20 puzzles and games titles. Wasserman notes that the imprint is "deepening its presence in the business books area," pointing to the recent hiring of former Houghton Mifflin editor Henry Ferris.

The "instant" books, like *Crisis in the Gulf* and *October Surprise*, use public-domain material—for example, the upcoming *The Gotti Tapes* (picked up, Osnos says, "for a dollar a page")—as well as quickly generated original material acquired for low advances.

### Marketing and Magic

"Each book is its own publishing program," Osnos explains, discussing the problems of marketing nonfiction. He points to the success of *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War*, written by staff at *U.S. News & World Report*, which sold 31,000 copies: "We were told that any book that carries the name of a magazine on the cover

## Bourgois Gets Top Job at France's Belfond Group

In what is being talked about as the comeback of the year in Europe, Jean-Manuel Bourgois, formerly CEO of France's Bordas group and Presses de la Cité, has been appointed deputy chairman of the fast-growing Belfond group.

The group, in addition to flagship imprint Pierre Belfond, home of many U.S. bestsellers, includes Presses de la Renaissance and the education and social science imprint Armand Colin. Belfond is part of Masson, France's number one medical publisher and a leader in both the hard and soft sciences, whose chairman, Jérôme Talamon, also takes on the chairmanship of Belfond beginning July 1.

Bourgois' departure from the number two job at Groupe de la Cité, challenger to Hachette as leading book group in France, made headlines on both sides of the Atlantic. With an M.S. from New York's Columbia University, Bourgois began his publishing career as head of a McGraw-Hill publishing venture in Paris, going on to head the Bordas textbook, STM and reference group. His resignation from Groupe de la Cité was attributed to differences in command styles and personalities with Cité chairman Christian Brégué. As one of France's most innovative publishers, Bourgois has been given still another hat to wear at Masson. He will be responsible for developing new publishing opportunities for Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, a well-known media investor who is vice-chairman and minority partner in Masson. Jérôme Talamon has gone on record with the promise to make the Masson constellation of imprints France's number three media group. Abroad, it controls medical imprints in Italy and Spain.

—HERBERT R. LOTTMAN



wouldn't work, implying that the material is a rehash of the magazine's coverage. But *U.S. News* got behind the book's promotion in a huge way."

Osnos is convinced that topicality works in the house's favor. "We publish books that interest people in the world around them. We're delighted that Gary Sick's book was on the cover of two national magazines, even though they were attacking its thesis. We use every means at our disposal—national radio markets like National Public Radio, as well as our collaboration with Borders Book Shops."

In April Times Books launched a joint project with Borders to sponsor the first in a series of public forums. Osnos moderated a panel on U.S. politics with Times Books authors Gary Sick and Alan Ehrenhalt in a packed ballroom in Philadelphia. The partners have other panels scheduled for Ann Arbor, Kansas City, Cleveland and Chicago.

Osnos points out that the imprint's big book, Magic Johnson's *What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS*, "is not going to sell overnight. We're going to build it slowly, and every teenager in America is going to know about it." But he also notes that the book is already a bestseller at the Bookland bookstore chain and is on the Baker & Taylor best-seller list.

Osnos dismissed suggestions that Johnson was not devoting enough time to promoting the book. "He taped TV shows and public-service announcements, did a syndicated radio interview, taped the audio book and did an *L.A. Times* interview, all within the space of a few days."

Osnos points out that in the variegated Random House universe it can often be "tricky deciding who gets what, but there's an astonishing number of important books to publish. Our challenge is to figure out how to get the books we want, within the mandate we have, and at a level we can afford." —CALVIN REID

## Bestseller Robert Fulghum Plans Book Tour for Charities

Putting a new spin on book promotion, star author Robert Fulghum and his publishers are planning a book tour/charity fund-raising campaign that promises substantial rewards for a variety of worthy causes as well as his publishers.

"Robert Fulghum wants to give something back," says Diane Reverand, his publisher at Villard, who will bring out the the inspiring, commonsensical author's next book, *Maybe, Maybe Not*, in the fall of 1993. "He came up with the notion of doing a cross-country book tour to 15 to 20 cities, many of which he hasn't been to before. In each he'll offer 'An Evening with Robert Fulghum' as a benefit, donating the proceeds and his usual substantial speaking fee to a pre-designated charity, which will

have taken care of the publicity for the event. He'll arrange the speaking engagements and we will plan our normal book publicity around these stops.

"He's excited about getting back to the people, into the smaller cities where so many of his fans live. And we're excited about reaching out to these secondary markets."

Coinciding with Ballantine's paperback release of *Uh-Oh*, the 1991 follow-up to his first book, the best-selling *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, the new book is "vintage Fulghum," says Reverand.

The author himself explains, "My hope is to contribute to the cultural environment in more than just a commercial way. This tour points toward giving rather

than asking, offering a shift in attitude about why we're out there on the road. To test out the concept, I did a model 'Evening' in Richmond, Va., in April," said Fulghum. "I'm told upwards of \$60,000 was raised."

Some of the organizations that he plans to speak for include Literacy Volunteers, the Salvation Army and Human Rights Watch. "The cause must be broad-spectrum and have a solid public relations organization in place," he notes. His speaking engagements are arranged through National Speakers Forum in Washington, D.C.

Observing that his plan offers "greater opportunity to get books before the public than the usual," the mandocello-playing Fulghum hopes the idea might spread. "I brought it up with fellow players in the Rock Bottom Remainers at the ABA in Anaheim and it seemed to awaken some interest."

—DULCY BRAINARD

In Memoriam

Sarah Gahagan

1952—1992

 **AVON BOOKS**  
The Hearst Corporation