

Remember this

the next time you're reading your *Sunday New York Times*

Robert Dudnick

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(Guardian/UPS) One of the teeth-gritting things about living in Scum City is the opportunity to be insulted by the *New York Times*. That is why so many more "ordinary" people read the *New York Daily News*. It insults you on your own terms and in your own language.

What brings this to mind is a recent article about paperback books in the *Times* Sunday Book Review. This is the part of the paper in which all the college professors and second-division novelists review the books written by all the other college professors and second-division novelists. It smells like the inside of a literary cocktail party.

Robert W. Stock, "a member of the *Times* Sunday staff," was writing about, among other unworthy hacks, Mr. Louis L'Amour, a Los Angeles author who writes Westerns. Mr. L'Amour, Mr. Stock implied, should be given a little credit for "some sensitive writing," but not much can be expected from him, for after all, "most of his readers" are "standard Western-novel fans—young male Caucasians who hang their hats in the West and Southwest and think 'Catcher in the Rye' is a farm manual."

Well, the thesis we are going to work from today is that Mr. Stock is one of those standard *New York Times* Sunday Book Review fans who hangs his imitation Cossack snow hat in Flushing, Queens, where they think the Wabash Cannonball is a subway train.

It is not so much that Mr. Stock and his friends at the Sunday Book Review live around New York. That is either unfortunate circumstance or unfortunate judgment and the problem is theirs. What is disturbing is that Mr. Stock's attitude represents the best thought of the intelligentsia, which is to keep the rest of us animals at bay.

The basic question is whether kulture is going to be for the people or for the proud. The Sunday Book Review counts itself as among the proud. This can be understood. With the rest of them, it goes to midtown Manhattan or Wall Street on the Wabash Cannonball subway or the Long Island Rail Road to do a dishonest day's work. Then it sneers at those who drive Ramblers or Chevys to some machine shop or office in Amarillo and get home too tired, or too smart, to read Norman Mailer's analysis of Norman Mailer.

The men and women who work for a living don't need the Sunday Book Review. But the Book Review certainly needs them, and not just to laugh at.

It's a matter of plain economics surrounded by a lot of complicated rhetoric about "art for art's sake." What that means is art for the artist's and publisher's (and critic's) sake. These people by and large neither write, publish nor read books that a "common" man can use to change a system that keeps him chained to a job that leads only to profit for someone else. The author may be interested in his notices or even his soul, but that changes nothing. The only books the publisher is interested in are the ledger books, and that is what needs changing.

It isn't the staff of the Sunday Book Review that creates the wealth that enables the *Times* to charge 50 cents for a Sunday paper that includes a section devoted to novelists writing novels about novelists writing novels and sociologists telling people it's all far too complex for them to understand. It is instead the young (and older), male (and female), Caucasian (and black and brown) who hang their hard hats in all regions who grind out the goods and get \$100 a week and an earful of sneers in return.

Who cares if they don't know "Catcher in the Rye" from a farm manual? The only man who does is J.D. Salinger. And anyway, a farm manual is a good deal more important. It tells you how to raise something besides sympathy. If this be anti-intellectual, let it be so by any means necessary.

fifth Estate

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