

Patricia Hausman, M.S. • Nutritionist

P.O.Box 32354 • Washington, D.C. 20007 • (202)332-8441

October 9, 1981.

Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Laboratory of Physiological
Hygiene
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis MN 55455

Dear Henry:

First, I'm still alive and well. It was a good summer for me, the first in a long time that gave me the opportunity to pursue anything that interested me. I had been hoping that the NIH freeze on hiring non-HHS personnel would be lifted by fall, enabling me to take a job with the NCI, but it appears that the freeze will continue indefinitely. I have begun looking elsewhere, particularly at a young company, General Health, that specializes in risk assessment. They are hoping to expand their nutrition activities, and I think it may be a good place for me.

I imagine that by now you have seen the hatchet job on my book that appeared in the September 10 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. I've attached a copy. I want you to have a copy of my response. The Journal has not yet committed itself to printing my letter. I had called Francis Moore, the book review editor, several times, and a secretary eventually returned my calls. She told me that decisions to print letters are generally made after a four to six week period, to allow them to see how much response they get. It is beyond me why decisions should be based on the volume of response rather than the merits of a letter.

After you read my book on short notice and gave a quote for the cover, I hoped that I would not have to ask you for another favor. However, if you would feel comfortable writing a letter to the editor, I would be very grateful. I have the feeling that the Journal assumed that since Fred Stare is an M.D. and I am not, that his remarks must be correct.

I'll let you know what happens with my letter and my career as soon as I know.

Affectionately,



Patricia Hausman



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October 9, 1981

Dr. Arnold Relman, Editor
New England Journal of Medicine
10 Shattuck St.
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Dear Dr. Relman:

I hope you'll accept my puzzlement over publication of Fred Stare's unusual review of Jack Sprat's Legacy, The Science and Politics of Fat and Cholesterol, by P. Hausman, New York: Richard Marek, 1981, in the September 10 issue of the Journal. I express concern because the review is singularly uninformative about the book's contents or the strengths and weaknesses of its contribution.

I have read the book and believe that Dr. Stare is in error when he states that Ms. Hausman has mobilized no facts behind her arguments. There is a succinct and effective summary of the evidence concerning the role of eating pattern and nutrition in atherosclerosis, touching on the clinical, experimental and epidemiological information. To state that her only evidence is "demographic" is inaccurate. We hope that Dr. Stare hasn't confused demography with epidemiology. In fact, there is a short but to-the-point summary of the geographic pathology of atherosclerosis from the work of Henry McGill, of experimental pathology from the work of Robert Wissler, of epidemiological studies from the work of Ancel Keys, of clinical nutrition experiments and the development of predictive equations about the effect of diet on blood cholesterol from the works of Dr. Stare's colleagues at Harvard, Hegsted and McGandy, and information on the correlations between individual levels and blood lipids and subsequent disease from Dr. Stare's colleagues Dawber and Kannel at Framingham. This is not "demographic comparisons."

One wonders if Dr. Stare read the useful chapter on controversy and the dissection of nine common arguments against dietary change for the general public. What did Dr. Stare think of Ms. Hausman's interesting analysis of the reason for the nutrition establishment's fascination with deficiency diseases in preference to involvement with diseases of excess or distorted dietary composition?

Where indeed is a proper review's description of the contents of the book so that Journal readers can develop their own opinion about whether they would be interested in it?

Why did Dr. Stare not refer to the excellent short chapter on diet and cancer? Was Dr. Stare totally unimpressed by the Appendices giving the fat and calorie content of common foods, natural and processed, or with the recommendations for reading in the bibliographic appendix?

I suspect that Hausman's description of the meat, dairy and egg lobbies and how they function would be of considerable interest to Journal readers in medicine, nutrition and public health. We need not agree with all the author's interpretations, but her observations on how those lobbies operate to influence national health and agricultural policy are fascinating. The reader emerges with much more understanding about the absence of health considerations in the major decisions made in this country for agriculture and food production, now geared mainly to increased productivity, consumption, safety or shelf life. The reader achieves much insight into how public health decisions are made, not made or unmade in this republic.

Dr. Stare rather emotionally lambastes Ms. Hausman as a "non-nutritionist" despite her holding a Masters degree in Nutrition. Does he earnestly believe that no one is capable of writing intelligent books on nutrition, or on the politics of nutrition from a journalistic approach, without being a member of a nutrition society? The combining of nutritional science with investigative journalism and even with "activist consumerism" is an interesting and I find useful and democratic undertaking. Would Dr. Stare similarly criticize the writings on nutrition of a Jane Brody in the New York Times or any of a number of other analytical approaches by truly "non-nutritionists?" If so, one might be inclined to evoke the old idea that "War is too important to be left to the generals," etc. I suspect there is a real place in our society for intelligent "non-nutritionist" analysis and criticism of nutrition and health policy which should help keep it honest.

Dr. Stare states that Ms. Hausman's arguments about the Food and Nutrition Board's controversial report, Toward Healthful Diets, are "unfair." Since her unfairness is not documented, the onus of fairness is clearly on the reviewer. I guess I find Dr. Stare's review incomplete, and uncritical scientifically. I wonder if it might not be useful to have an equally distinguished nutritionist such as Jean Mayer also review the book. At any rate, this is the first time I find a New England Journal book review so misleading and derogatory that I believe it deserves "equal time." Sorry!

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor and Director
Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene,
School of Public Health

HB:lr

bpc: P. Hausman
M. Jacobson
J. Stamler
S. Grundy } *etc.*
M. Winston } *PC of books review*

Copies - Hausman

Patricia Hausman, M.S. • Nutritionist

P.O.Box 32354 • Washington, D.C. 20007 • (202)332-8441

November 5, 1981.

Henry Blackburn, M.D.
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file

Dear Henry:

Now that things have settled down a little, I want to thank you for the thoughtful letter that you sent to the New England Journal of Medicine. You obviously put a great deal of time and thought into your comments, and I am deeply grateful. I received a notice from the Journal a few weeks ago that they will be printing my letter, along with comments from Fred Stare.

Last week I added the word "consultant" to my repertoire by beginning some consulting work for General Health, a young company specializing in risk assessment. They are hoping to branch out a little and include nutrition among their subject areas. I know rather little about the company because I haven't been working in their office, but I have enjoyed what contact I have had with their vice-president for research, Axel Goetz. He is an M.D.-researcher whom you may know.

Thanks again for your letter to the NEJM. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it.

Best,

Pat

Patricia Hausman



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FILE - Hausman Review

December 3, 1981

Arnold S. Relman, M.D., Editor
New England Journal of Medicine
10 Shattuck Street
Boston, MA. 02115

Dear Dr. Relman:

Would you be kind and drop me a note on the acceptability or otherwise of my letter "re-reviewing" Patricia Hausman's book, submitted October 9, 1981, for your consideration for publication.

Cordially,

Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor of Medicine

HB/jml

Enclosures