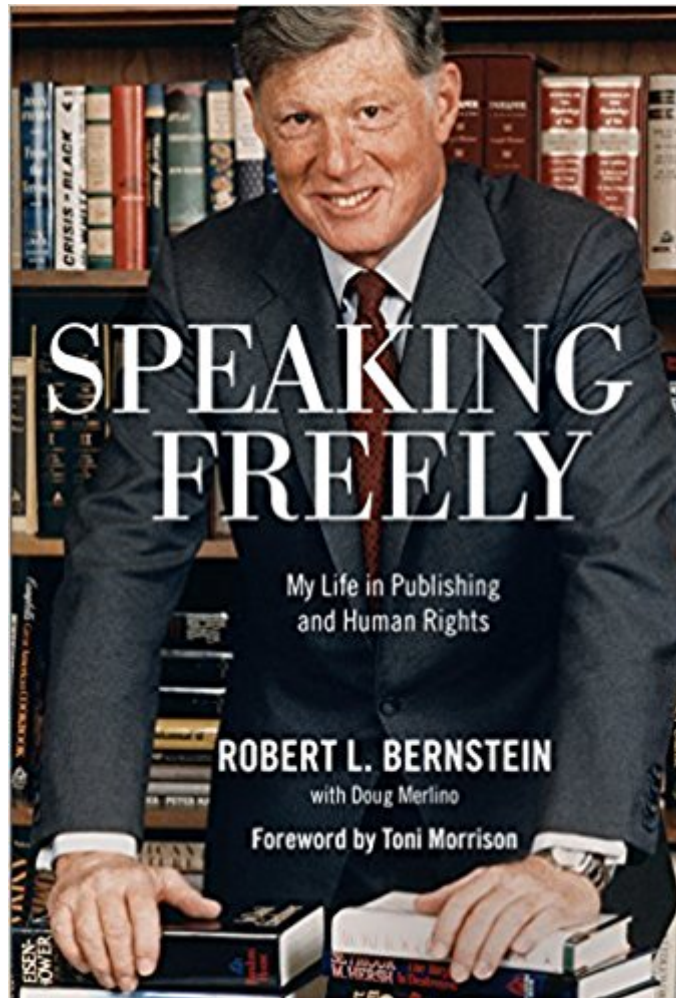




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Speaking Freely: My Life In Publishing And Human Rights



Synopsis

What do Dr. Seuss, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Andrei Sakharov, and James Michener have in common? They were all published by Bob Bernstein during his twenty-five-year run as president of Random House, before he brought the dissidents Liu Binyan, Jacobo Timerman, Natan Sharansky, and Václav Havel to worldwide attention in his role as the father of modern human rights. Starting as an office boy at Simon & Schuster in 1946, Bernstein moved to Random House in 1956 and succeeded Bennett Cerf as president ten years later. The rest is publishing and human rights history. In a charming and self-effacing work, Bernstein reflects for the first time on his fairy tale publishing career, hobnobbing with Truman Capote and E.L. Doctorow; conspiring with Kay Thompson on the Eloise series; attending a rally for Random House author George McGovern with film star Claudette Colbert; and working with publishing luminaries including Dick Simon, Alfred Knopf, Robert Gottlieb, André Schiffrin, Peter Osnos, Susan Peterson, and Jason Epstein as Bernstein grew Random House from a \$40 million to an \$800 million-plus money making juggernaut, as Thomas Maier called it in his biography of Random House owner Si Newhouse. In a book sure to be savored by anyone who has worked in the publishing industry, fought for human rights, or wondered how Theodor Geisel became Dr. Seuss, *Speaking Freely* beautifully captures a bygone era in the book industry and the first crucial years of a worldwide movement to protect free speech and challenge tyranny around the globe.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Speaking Freely: “Mr. Bernstein, now 93 years old, tells his stories with great detail and good humor, finding ways to laugh at life while communicating his deep love for the friends he made along the way.Ã¢â—Wall Street Journal “BernsteinÃ¢â—s story demonstrates the vital role played by the publishing industry in the global fight for human rights.Ã¢â—Publishers Weekly “[A] fascinating history of publishing in the 20th century and traces the beginnings of the human rights movement…A well-written book for lovers of book publishing and supporters of human rights.Ã¢â—Kirkus Reviews Praise for Robert L. Bernstein: "Our Kaiser and pope."—Ted Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss) "Among the most powerful men in the book industry."—The New York Times "A clear-sighted and even heroic founder of the human rights movement."—The New Republic “Robert Bernstein and his friends have constructed an idea, the idea of the human being in the fullness of his rights and protections. In every part of the world, their actions are ardently anticipated by those who suffer most. No one can imagine a more universal philosophy, a more explosive dynamic.Ã¢â—Jacobo Timerman "When he was at the height of his corporate influence and visibility, Bob never flagged in seizing the moment to speak out and act…he showed how success in commerce and the corporate world could be reconciled with the principled exercises of citizenship."—Leon Botstein “Bob Bernstein has engaged life; evil does not awe or paralyze him; civic life is enhanced by his presence in it."—Toni Morrison “Bob Bernstein—like Mandela, Dr. King, Aung Sun Suu Kyi—is unique. He is a happy warrior, a visionary leader, and a political genius. There is no one else like him.Ã¢â—Harold Koh, former Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, U.S. State Department “Robert BernsteinÃ¢â—s long publishing career, particularly his quarter century as chief executive of Random House, was especially distinctive. From the incomparable output of Doctor Seuss to countless literary and non-fiction authors of stature and impact, Bob provided the resources and support to enable their work. He personally sought out books of political dissent from around the globe and sponsored their publication with exceptional passion. BobÃ¢â—s commitment to human rights made a historic contribution to the movement and shaped his unique legacy.Ã¢â—Peter Osnos

Robert L. Bernstein served as the president of Random House for twenty-five years. After being sent to Moscow as part of a delegation of American publishers in 1973, Bernstein established the organization that became Human Rights Watch. He lives in New York.

Remarkable book by a remarkable person. Chapter 14 "Some Thoughts ON The FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST" should be read by all on planet Earth. The writer is 93, probably politically slightly to the left of center - I would guess, - but very fair and open minded. He was a major figure in publishing industry for many years (Random House was his final domain) and then Human Rights Watch chairman- and much else in that field of human work. He is amazingly devoid of self aggrandizement & he does tell some sagas with world figures we all know & but somehow the "look at me" factor never gets in the way. And he avoids the plague of this type of book. He does not devote much time to settling old scores. He does mention one or two, but except for his general beef about the current evolution of human rights organizations & he is not living in the past & his arguments are sound. This is an important book - an insight by a thoughtful human. I urge all to get it and read it.

In March, I reread the entertaining AT RANDOM: THE REMINISCENCES OF BENNETT CERF. In this book, Cerf basically had two narratives: the story of the publishing business Random House, which Cerf and his partner Donald Klopfer started as a two-man shop in 1925 and sold to RCA for \$40 million in 1966; and the stories of Cerf's interactions with the great cultural figures of his era, such as Joyce, Faulkner, Stein, and Gershwin. When I began SPEAKING FREELY, I expected more of the same from Robert Bernstein, who succeeded Cerf as the president and CEO of Random House in 1966 and held the job for 25 years. And initially, Bernstein does write a very personable book about his work as a young man at Simon & Schuster, where he developed specialties in children's books and sales. Further, he provides some backstory on S&S, where he had talented colleagues (including Robert Gottlieb) but experienced some vindictiveness. Here, I was surprised to learn that S&S established itself with the first crossword puzzle books and Dale Carnegie's HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE. Starting at Random House in 1956, Bernstein maintained his working relationship with the wonderful Kay Thompson (ELOISE), hit the road with the great Dr. Seuss, and helped Shirley Temple develop a huge moneymaker. But after succeeding Cerf as president, Bernstein began to face a set of challenges different from those of jolly old Random House, which grew organically, did well in the Depression, and had mostly amicable relations with the government during World War II and the Cold War. These different challenges included: o Racial and religious tensions: In 1969, Random House published the catalog to "Harlem on My Mind", a large and well-attended show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that was primarily a photographic

history of African American Harlem. The catalog inadvertently contained an essay that was anti-Semitic and critical of New York's Jews. And this catalog was published only months after acrimonious confrontations in the New York City school system that pitted advocates for local control (mostly Blacks) against the teachers' union (lots of Jews). In *SPEAKING FREELY*, Bernstein discusses how he analyzed and managed demands to withdraw the catalog.

Government censorship: Remember "The Pentagon Papers"? In a nutshell, analyst Daniel Ellsberg passed a mammoth study of the war in Viet Nam, which documented that the federal government was systematically lying about nature and success of the war, to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. The papers published briefly and then Nixon got injunctions, stopping publication, which he claimed threatened national security. In *SPEAKING FREELY*, Bernstein shows that this famous event initiated a harry rise in government censorship and affected such then important books from Random House books as *THE CIA AND THE CULT OF INTELLIGENCE*, *INSIDE THE COMPANY*, and *DECENT INTERVAL*.

Thriving as a subsidiary: Cerf and Klopfer sold Random House to RCA in January 1966, the same month Bernstein became president. For the next 14 years, Bernstein led a prestigious, but anomalous and relatively small, subsidiary in a vast conglomerate, which mostly left Bernstein alone, provided profits, not usually spectacular, were decent. Then in 1980, RCA sold Random House to the privately-held Advance Publications for \$70 million where the Newhouse family had a long view – not a focus on quarterly earnings – and the business grew to \$500 million in revenue. Still, there were tensions, especially associated with the fad of glam celebrity books.

SPEAKING FREELY has 14 chapters and an upbeat epilogue. Seven of these chapters follow Bernstein's involvement in the Human Rights movement. This began when Bernstein traveled to the USSR in 1970 as a member of a committee of American publishers who wanted the Soviets to recognize international copyright laws. In the next few years, he met some Russian dissidents, including the physicist and national hero Andrei Sakharov, who were bravely publishing stories and essays critical of the Soviet system. Then came the Helsinki Accords (1975), which had the unintended consequence of spawning various groups that monitored Soviet compliance with the human rights provisions of the Accords. At this time, Bernstein helped to found Helsinki Watch, which, over the decades, grew, developed monitoring capabilities on all continents, and became the organization Human Rights Watch. Interestingly, Bernstein now has his differences with this group, which he believes operates with an excessively broad mandate in the Middle East.

In May, I saw Bernstein discuss his book before a packed house at Book Culture, an independent bookstore in New York's Upper West Side. The guy is a raconteur

extraordinaire. And he's still going strong at 93. Lovely wife, too. Highly recommended.

Vanity motivates many autobiographers. But for Robert Bernstein, the goal of his book "Speaking Freely" is clearly to share his life lessons as a way to lead and inspire others to dedicate their lives to a greater cause. In Bernstein's case, leveraging his professional contacts as the head of one of the free world's most important institutions, he helped to bring the message of free speech to the forefront of world discussion. His stories of the interactions he had with amazing people in his life (including Natan Sharansky, Andrei Sakharov, and Theodore Geisel - a.k.a. Dr. Seuss) illustrate the importance of surrounding oneself with people who strive for meaning in their lives. On so many levels, Bernstein imparts wisdom that is so needed today, like raising dedicated children who have followed in his philanthropic footsteps, and being dedicated to his wife. Traveling to former Soviet Union allowed Bernstein to meet with the dissidents there who were risking their lives to bring free speech and liberty to their country. Since he was the president of Random House, Bernstein could take their stories - often smuggled out of Russia at great risk - and share them with the world. To get a sense of what it was like to oppose the Soviet regime, also read Natan Sharansky's book, "Fear No Evil," which Random House published. One of the most important lessons readers will draw from the book is an understanding of when to separate from an organization. Bernstein was one of the founders of Human Rights Watch, an organization originally dedicated to humanitarian causes. But when it morphed into an instrument of anti-Semitism and started spreading lies about Israel, Bernstein divorced himself from them. Though he was emotionally tied to it, he realized that its mission had been hijacked by people who wanted to use its reputation to promote an anti-Jewish agenda. Bernstein sites clear examples of how Human Rights Watch lied in its reports about the Israeli war in Gaza, and since it was no longer an honest broker in the world of international human rights, Bernstein denounced the group. With a fantastic writing style, Robert Bernstein's book should be top on everyone's reading list this year.

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