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TITLE INFORMATION

THE ART OF FACT INVESTIGATION

Creative Thinking in the Age of Information Overload

Philip Segal

Ignaz Press (130 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A manual for readers interested in tracking down facts that others might prefer to keep hidden.

In this debut work, Segal draws on his decades of experience in law and journalism to provide an introduction to basic investigative techniques. He impresses upon readers that investigation is a complex process in which researchers may be unable to draw absolute conclusions, requiring them to make judgments or pursue new avenues. The book uses modern art as a metaphor: “Just as we can stare forever at Picasso’s work and not know the number of pears there are, we can look all we want at databases and public records, but we may need to move on to interviewing relatives and neighbors.” Segal provides a list of commonly used subscription databases and offers strategies for maximizing their usefulness, as well as advice on using Google and other, more familiar sources. Throughout, he emphasizes the importance of following relevant laws, particularly for investigators whose work will be used in court; he offers plenty of cautionary tales about cases that were thrown out due to illegal information-gathering. He also includes several anecdotes from his own investigative work, demonstrating how his team located a divorcing spouse’s hidden assets, why it’s necessary to explore alternate spellings of words, and how a small investment in an interview can save thousands of dollars during a lawsuit’s discovery phase. Throughout, Segal maintains an engaging, conversational tone (“Relying only on Google is like giving a carpenter just one tool—a sledge hammer—and saying, ‘Build me a house’”) and the text is never dull. Appendices provide guidance for conducting interviews, locating assets, and getting to know public-records systems. The result is a valuable resource for investigators of all sorts, from students to professionals.

A brief but comprehensive and enthusiastic guide to conducting thorough, legal investigations.

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