

December 26, 1987

Frederick H. Kasten, Ph.D.  
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Louisiana State University Medical Center  
1100 Florida Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119

Dear Dr. Kasten,

I recall Leo Alexander well; he was an active, outspoken, and critical member of the audience at many of the meetings of the Society of Biological Psychiatry and Electroshock Research Association that I attended. I did not know him personally, and I can recall no direct interaction with him.

He wrote the textbook TREATMENT OF MENTAL DISORDER which was published in 1953 by W.B. Saunders, Philadelphia. In it, he has extensive sections on convulsive therapy, as well as the psychotherapies. Reading the index today, one gets the impression that he was trying to resolve the dilemma of the success and risks of the somatic therapies with the elegance and greater acceptance (especially in Boston) of the psychodynamic model. He does not succeed in balancing these antithetic attitudes well.

Leo Alexander was a practitioner seeking to make the best of an impossible test of allegiance. His textbook is idiosyncratic and limited; it contrasts rather poorly with other texts published at the same time (see Kalinowsky and Hoch or Sargent and Slater).

The APA Task Force report on Electroconvulsive Therapy is report #14, published in 1978. It should be available in your library, or from the APA in Washington, D.C. I was a member of the panel, and contributed to, but did not write the report.

I met Reuben Reiter back in the 1950s when I was interested in ECT devices. I used one of his devices for a while but thought his instruments were poorly designed. They are no longer in active use. I was told a few years ago that he had died, but have no further information.

I trust these comments are helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry