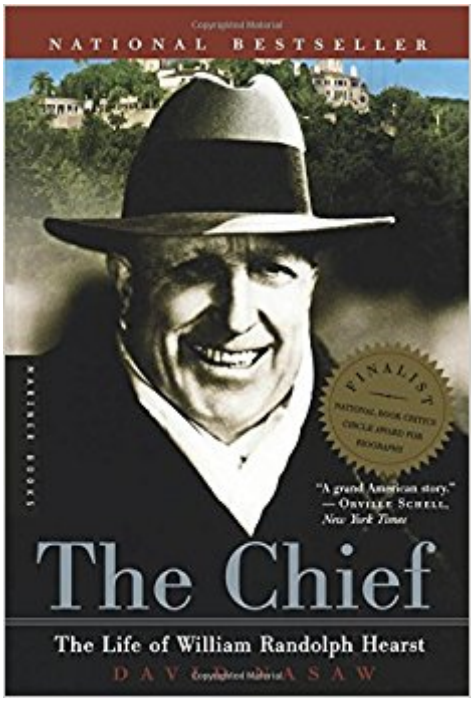
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The Chief: The Life Of William Randolph Hearst



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Synopsis

David Nasaw’s magnificent, definitive biography of William Randolph Hearst is based on newly released private and business papers and interviews. For the first time, documentation of Hearst’s interactions with Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, and every American president from Grover Cleveland to Franklin Roosevelt, as well as with movie giants Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, and Irving Thalberg, completes the picture of this colossal American. Hearst, known to his staff as the Chief, was a man of prodigious appetites. By the 1930s, he controlled the largest publishing empire in the country, including twenty-eight newspapers, the Cosmopolitan Picture Studio, radio stations, and thirteen magazines. As the first practitioner of what is now known as synergy, Hearst used his media stronghold to achieve political power unprecedented in the industry. Americans followed his metamorphosis from populist to fierce opponent of Roosevelt and the New Deal, from citizen to congressman, and we are still fascinated today by the man characterized in the film classic Citizen Kane. In Nasaw’s portrait, questions about Hearst’s relationships are addressed, including those about his mistress in his Harvard days, who lived with him for ten years; his legal wife, Millicent, a former showgirl and the mother of his five sons; and Marion Davies, his companion until death. Recently discovered correspondence with the architect of Hearst’s world-famous estate, San Simeon, is augmented by taped interviews with the people who worked there and witnessed Hearst’s extravagant entertaining, shedding light on the private life of a very public man.

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Customer Reviews

The epic scope of historian David Nasaw’s biography matches the titanic personality and achievements of William Randolph Hearst (1862-1951), who built "the nation’s first media conglomerate" from a single San Francisco newspaper. Based on previously unavailable sources, including Hearst’s personal papers, Nasaw’s long but absorbing narrative gives a full-bodied account of the often contradictory mogul: "a huge man with a tiny voice; a shy man who was most comfortable in crowds ... an autocratic boss who could not fire people; a devoted husband who lived with his mistress." Wife Millicent Hearst and actress-inamorata Marion Davies also emerge with more complexity than in previous portraits like Orson Welles’s Citizen Kane, whose factual inaccuracies Nasaw dissects. The author tempers the usual simplistic account of Hearst’s political evolution from fire-breathing leftist to red-baiting conservative, calling him "a classic liberal" who believed in less-is-more government and deplored fascism as much as communism. Fresh insights and elegantly turned phrases abound in Nasaw’s depiction of Hearst’s activities as newspaper publisher, movie producer, and politician, but what’s even more intriguing is the poignant personal drama of a man born "in the city of great expectations on the edge of the continent" who was buried 89 years later in San Francisco, "the place he used to know." --Wendy Smith --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

It has been 40 years since the last major Hearst biographyAthus this new volume has inherent value in portraying anew the great forerunner of Rupert Murdoch and other modern-day media moguls. This long-winded tome, however, often bogs down in trivial details of Hearst’s tangled personal and professional life. Nasaw (Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements) is the first to have had access to the formerly closed Hearst archives, but he doesn’t really offer any surprises. On the big questions, the author only confirms what we already knew: that it was a lack of academic diligence that lay behind Hearst’s failure at Harvard; that, like countless other well-heeled young men of his generation, he kept a mistress before marriage; that he was na?ve in his dealings with Hitler. Neither is it a revelation that Hearst’s financial collapse in the late 1930s was the result of spendthrift habits combined with the dour economic climate of the times. But the Hearst whom Nasaw portrays in such extraordinary (and excessive) detail is still the fascinating figure we’ve known for years: the self-absorbed genius equally addicted to power and possessions, the press baron interested not just in reporting news but in making and manipulating it. Photos not seen by PW. BOMC alternate selection. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

After touring San Simeon, I stopped in the gift shop and saw this book that I later bought on . I rated this book three stars instead of five because though it is interesting and relatively easy to read, it is too full of details and plodded along repeating information. This book is long and took me a long time to finish it because I put it down for months and then decided to finish it. The level of details is amazing until the late 1930s and then dramatically skims over World War II and the years leading to The Chief's death. My view on The Chief is that like most humans there are good and bad things. Here they are:The Good: I was impressed with his ability to control his publishing empire and write editorials and front page articles all the way up to his 88th year! And he did the vast majority of it by telegram. Where I work, many managers have a hard time managing employees working from home or in other locations. The Chief was ahead of his time, doing it all from his castle or while traveling but he was always working. Also, he had incredible passion for what he did and built an empire.The Bad: I was surprised that his wealth came from his father who then left it to his mother. And she controlled him for many many years because he needed money. His spending, especially on art work that he didn't even see in person and had stored in warehouses that he never visited was amazing. I don't feel bad about my debt after reading this because all he did was spend and then borrow to pay off debt so that he could spend again! He was married but his wife didn't live with him and was always in Europe and he communicated with his kids by letters or telegrams while he lived with his mistress. Also, sad to see him use his publishing empire to start what is commonplace today: helping candidates become President or win other offices while trashing the opponents. I didn't like reading how FDR had to court The Chief to get favorable press which led to his opponents getting trashed. This is what the media does today, picking who they want to win and influencing the entire country and trashing who they do not want to win. Very biased media started with The Chief.Also, sad to see his sons fighting over money upon his death and sneaking his body out of Marion's house. I think I'll watch Citizen Kane again now that I have finished this book to see the similarities and sad ending, too. Even though it is a long book with too many details in most of it, I did enjoy reading it and recommend it.

The yellow journalism, two words not worth capitalizing, captured in the prime of WR Hearst's life shows our current state of media bias and the inaccuracies that result. I have the feeling that the yellow journalism of Hearst's time 100 years ago was harmless compared to now, since media is now omnipresent. On page 53, it is rival and predecessor Joseph Pulitzer who showed Hearst how to sensationalize selective news and how to flaunt profits. At this point in David Nasaw's work, it is father George Hearst who is living the more admirable and interesting life. It wasn't all pandering

and reaching for the LCD that made WR grow his business in San Francisco though.On page 69, he innovates a relationship cross country with the NY Herald for cabled articles that reached as far as Paris, a "masterstroke of enterprise" it is called. The year is 1887, Hearst is 24 an a Harvard dropout with a couple of floating mistresses. Still, for his travels and grit and adventurousness, George remains more interesting, less cuckolded by Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Page 122: "On Dec 20, 1897, the Journal carried more than a half dozen stories in which the newspaper was the chief protagonist." WR was beginning to find his style in the delusion of grandiosity that his father had first bought for him and he himself had sold his soul for. I think of Dan Rather carrying that gun in Vietnam and Brian Williams being shot at in that helicopter. At this particular point with these particular mechanisms, The Chief had begun doing what Orson Welles would mimic in Citizen Kane. He also began competing with Teddy Roosevelt as a war-mongerer for Cuba. Phoebe was still giving him an allowance.The politics of WRH don't stay put for long. He attacked McKinley, flipped on FDR and in between could not adapt principles for long on Hoover or Wilson or learn that he himself was not a worthwhile candidate. I take away that Coolidge was his most steady ally, but that mostly from the lack of drama he gave everyone else. TR gives Hearst a few of the choicest words in the book, on page 210. I must say that Hearst has the role of the 2016 Democrat and Roosevelt the voice of Donald Trump if our times were transposed. (H Clinton "sanctions mob violence if" she "thinks that for a moment votes are to be gained" and "cares nothing for the nation, nor for any citizen in it".)Although no one can come to his defense for the remainder of the book, the crimes of meeting Hitler and siding a bit with early Nazi Germany are not the crimes they could be when twisted. I would forgive him for his achievement of spotting Roy Rogers, hearing him actually, and declaring him for the movies.Hollywood is a horrible place in 2016. The media is bought and paid for by unscrupulous influences. This book gives more insight on that than any other. Big politics is actually savory by comparison. Hearst traveled in all three circles, so his financial downfall, only temporary, and his late-in-life embarrassments were due comeuppance for sure.

This is a really interesting book overall. Hearst was a very interesting individual and his ties, to politics, money, Hollywood during it's golden age, and post-industrial America make him one of the most prolific figures of the period. My only criticism is that the story tends to slow down significantly when it comes to the descriptions of Hearst's political campaign's. That's probably a personal preference but paragraph after paragraph briefly introducing new political figures and conflicts and then moving onto the next conflict just slowed down the pace for me. I wouldn't let that dissuade you from reading the book though, it's a very thorough accounting of the life of a man who exerted a

massive national influence in 20th century America.

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