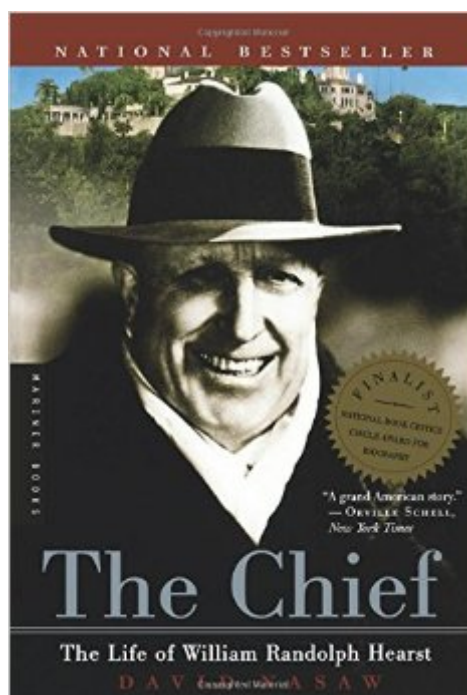


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The Chief: The Life Of William Randolph Hearst



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

Generally, I like a person better after reading their biography. Jean Strouse's excellent biography of J.P. Morgan left me with more respect and admiration for the man than I'd thought possible. But I did not experience the same warm fuzzy feelings after finishing David Nasaw's "The Chief." That's not to say that "The Chief" isn't good. It's splendid, actually. Scholarly without denseness, readable without glibness, it moves along at a great pace, and gives readers probably the most complete view of Hearst that's ever been provided, with an excellent utilization of both Hearst's own voluminous correspondence and the reminiscences of hundreds of others who encountered the Chief. But it sure doesn't make you like him any better. The Hearst that emerges from Nasaw's scrupulous research and masterful writing is a cheap demagogue whose dime-store populism mutated into self-interested conservatism as his own fortunes grew (in Nasaw's own words, "Hearst grew more conservative as he acquired more to conserve"). William Randolph Hearst was, it turns out, precisely what his early detractors, including Theodore Roosevelt, E.L. Godkin, and Joseph Pulitzer, said he was: a pathologically self-interested spoiled brat. It's impossible to say whether the young Hearst, whose papers championed so many progressive ideals, was genuinely on the side of the angels, or whether he was simply appealing to the working classes (and pretty successfully) in hopes of parlaying his pandering to their discontents into political power, but his subsequent actions suggest the latter.

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