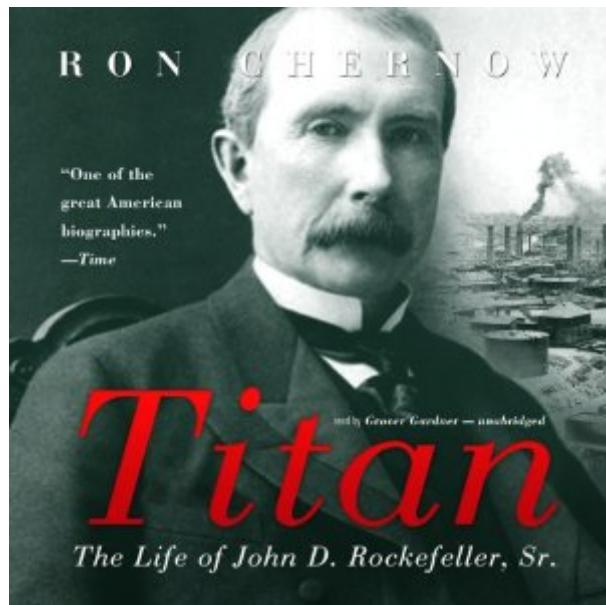


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Titan: The Life Of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.



Synopsis

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., history's first billionaire and the patriarch of America's most famous dynasty, is an icon whose true nature has eluded three generations of historians. Now Ron Chernow, a National Book Award-winning biographer, gives us a detailed and insightful history of the mogul. *Titan* is the first full-length biography based on unrestricted access to Rockefeller's exceptionally rich trove of papers. A landmark publication full of startling revelations, the book indelibly alters our image of this most enigmatic capitalist. Born the son of a flamboyant, bigamous snake-oil salesman and a pious, straitlaced mother, Rockefeller rose from rustic origins to become the world's richest man by creating America's most powerful and feared monopoly, Standard Oil. Branded "the Octopus" by legions of muckrakers, the trust refined and marketed nearly 90 percent of the oil produced in America. Rockefeller was likely the most controversial businessman in our nation's history. Critics charged that his empire was built on unscrupulous tactics: grand-scale collusion with the railroads, predatory pricing, industrial espionage, and wholesale bribery of political officials. The titan spent more than 30 years dodging investigations until Teddy Roosevelt and his trustbusters embarked on a marathon crusade to bring Standard Oil to bay. While providing abundant evidence of Rockefeller's misdeeds, Chernow discards the stereotype of the cold-blooded monster to sketch an unforgettably human portrait of a quirky, eccentric original. A devout Baptist and temperance advocate, Rockefeller gave money more generously than anyone before him - his chosen philanthropies included the Rockefeller Foundation, the University of Chicago, and what is today Rockefeller University. *Titan* presents a finely nuanced portrait of a fascinating, complex man, synthesizing his public and private lives and disclosing numerous family scandals, tragedies, and misfortunes that have never before come to light. John D. Rockefeller's story captures a pivotal moment in American history, documenting the dramatic post-Civil War shift from small business to the rise of giant corporations that irrevocably transformed the nation. With cameos by Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, Jay Gould, William Vanderbilt, Ida Tarbell, Andrew Carnegie, Carl Jung, J. P. Morgan, William James, Henry Clay Frick, Mark Twain, and Will Rogers, *Titan* turns Rockefeller's life into a vivid tapestry of American society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is Ron Chernow's signal triumph that he writes this monumental saga with all the sweep, drama, and insight that this giant subject deserves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* is a powerhouse from beginning to end. Chernow is fast becoming one of my favorite biographers after reading *Alexander Hamilton* and now this. In both books, he is able to keep you turning the page while, at the same time, building carefully rendered portraits of these complex historical figures. In *Titan*, he is at his best, describing Rockefeller as both a great philanthropist and also a man possessed by greed. Chernow's Rockefeller can be as consumed by creating a great Baptist University [University of Chicago] as building tactical alliances that will squeeze out any hope of competition for his company, Standard Oil. With his first brush stroke, Chernow paints the picture of Rockefeller's father a mountebank, philanderer and a bigamist. From meager beginnings, it is amazing to see the determination with which Rockefeller builds himself up. Rockefeller's ability to move so rapidly from a life of destitution and failure to one of unparalleled wealth and success is built with clear precision though at a dizzying pace. Chernow's decision to focus so heavily on Rockefeller's father in the beginning of the book is important because the man Rockefeller becomes is a repudiation of everything his father stood for. The son in this case knew what a scoundrel his father was and acted in every way to become everything he was not. The father was a philanderer, while the son remained devoted to his one wife even when he had become wildly successful. As the father placed his own interests ahead of his family's needs, the son put his family ahead of everything else.

I have to be honest, I did not pick up and read Ron Chernow's *Titan* because I was burning to read a biography about John D. Rockefeller. I read *Titan* because I had just recently finished reading Ron Chernow's biography on *Alexander Hamilton*. In reading *Titan*, I hoped I would be getting a work

similar to Alexander Hamilton, namely the quality of Chernow's prose and the rendering of his subject. Titan exceeded my expectations on all counts. Chernow has an incredible ability to not only tell the story of a man, but to also tell the story of the times in which the man lived and, in so doing, place his subject squarely within his time. In telling the story of Rockefeller, Chernow is telling the story of America for the nearly 100 years Rockefeller was alive and living in America. In rendering Rockefeller, Chernow gives us a full portrait of the man - both good and bad and never delivers a verdict on either. Instead, Chernow leaves it to the readers to draw their own conclusion on the man. In so doing, the reader is forced to confront the legacy left by Rockefeller the Robber Barron with the legacy left by Rockefeller the philanthropist. One conclusion though, that is implied in the text (if not overtly stated) is that had Rockefeller died during the breakup of the Standard Oil Trust in 1911, the judgement of history probably would have ignored Rockefeller's charitable contributions and condemned him outright. Instead, Rockefeller lived until 1937 during which time he garnered acclaim for his philanthropy. It also certainly did not hurt that Rockefeller's son, John D. Rockefeller Jr. would do so much to secure his father's place as America's foremost philanthropists as well as rehabilitate his father's Robber Barron image. In short, if you like John D.

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