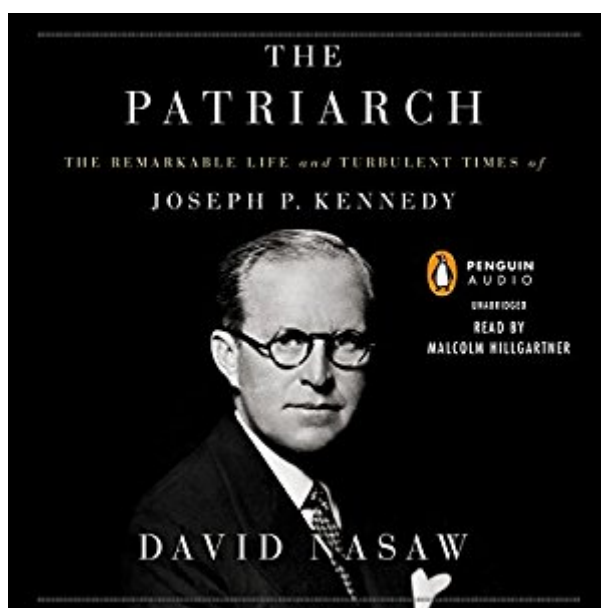


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The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life And Turbulent Times Of Joseph P. Kennedy



Synopsis

Celebrated historian David Nasaw brings to life the story of Joseph Patrick Kennedy, in this, the first and only biography based on unrestricted and exclusive access to the Joseph P. Kennedy papers. Joseph Patrick Kennedy - whose life spanned the First World War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the Cold War - was the patriarch of America's greatest political dynasty. The father of President John F. Kennedy and Senators Robert and Edward Kennedy, 'Joe' Kennedy was an indomitable and elusive figure whose dreams of advancement for his nine children were matched only by his extraordinary personal ambition and shrewd financial skills. Trained as a banker, Kennedy was also a Hollywood mogul, a stock-exchange savant, a shipyard manager, the founding chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and ambassador to London during the Battle of Britain. Though his incredible life encompasses the very heart of the American century, Joseph Kennedy has remained shrouded in rumor and prejudice for decades. Drawing on never-before-published material from archives on three continents, David Nasaw - the renowned biographer of Andrew Carnegie and William Randolph Hearst - unearths a man far more complicated than the popular portrait. Was Kennedy an appeaser and isolationist, an anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer, a stock swindler, a bootlegger, and a colleague of mobsters? Did he push his second son into politics and then buy his elections for him? Why did he have his daughter Rosemary lobotomized? Why did he oppose the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Korean War, and American assistance to the French in Vietnam? What was his relationship to J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI? How did he influence his son's politics and policies in the White House? In this groundbreaking biography, Nasaw ignores the tired old answers surrounding Kennedy, starting from scratch to discover the truth behind this misunderstood man. Though far from a saint, Joseph Kennedy in many ways exemplifies the best in American political, economic, and social life. His rags-to-riches story is one of exclusion and quiet discrimination overcome by entrepreneurship, ingenuity, and unshakable endurance. Kennedy's story deserves to be told in full, with no holds barred, and Nasaw's magnificent *The Patriarch* is the first book to do so.

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Customer Reviews

A well-written biography of an enigmatic figure in the politics of the 20th century. Straight-forward descriptions of the events surrounding this figure and his prejudices and reactions to issues that had immense significance for the nation and the world at that critical period. Book offers a critical and honest insight into the man and is very provoking: was his opposition to US engagement in the war his fear of the economic and political consequences he foresaw or was it based on prejudice? Author makes a convincing case for the former. The many family tragedies surrounding this figure are put in some perspective and one cannot read this biography without a tremendous sense of the huge price he and his family have paid in the pursuit of political success and in the sincere desire to be of service to the nation.

I think the author did a great job of discussing an important historical figure that was not short of controversy at any stage in his life, and I think Nasaw is fair in his analysis. This is a great portrayal of a man that was certainly flawed, but the book highlights and explains everything that was Joe Kennedy: a man of integrity, honesty, not much humility, and definitely bigoted. However, the rumors and characterizations made about this man, mostly after he was debilitated by a stroke and was unable to defend himself, have tainted the legacy of the head of a great American family. Joe Kennedy lived through a majority of crucial events that shaped the 20th century and was heavily involved in almost everything that was going on from Hollywood to Washington. I was amazed by the amount of issues which I found myself agreeing with Kennedy's positions, as I admit I was one to buy into the stories that he was just a bootlegger and angry loudmouth. Above all else, he was a family man and while I might not agree with the ways he went about making his fortune. I truly admire his motivations and the way he chose to use his influence. He dreamed of making enough money so that his children would be able to devote themselves to serving their country. Kennedy

was able to do exactly that and was rewarded by the tragic deaths of half of his large family. But in a world today where the majority of the rich seem to have little concern for anyone besides themselves, this story is an important reminder of the obligations of those who are most rewarded for living in a free society. Overall, it is a good read and particularly interesting for anyone that is interested in the Kennedy family and early-mid 20th century history more generally.

I have to say, I had no idea Joseph P. Kennedy (JPK) had such an amazing career. I had a general idea of how much money he made and that he had amassed some serious political clout and connections in his lifetime, but before his kids ever hit the political scene, he was making his mark in a variety of industries. He was in banking, trading, film distribution, politics, liquor importation, the Merchandise Mart, philanthropy, and more. It was pretty amazing to find out all he had done - even if it took me 800 pages to find out about it. The "remarkable life" part of the title really captures it. Things I learned about JPK that I didn't know before I read the book: He chaired the first SEC. He may have pushed his children hard, but he was their biggest supporter - they turned to him when they needed to be cheered up. He was a terrible ambassador. He and his wife, Rose, spent more time apart than they did together during their marriage, but that seemed to suit them both. The Patriarch is meticulously researched - Nasaw relies heavily on primary sources, as any good historian should. My issue with this book is that he presents the historical records but offers very little analysis or insight into JPK's motivation. Nasaw offers very little speculation about why JPK was the person he was. It seemed like the available primary sources for JPK's childhood were pretty slim, so there is not much attention paid to that time of his life, but I'm guessing that played a big role in shaping who he was. Nasaw also did very little to address some of the well-known rumors about JPK because there isn't much on the historical record to prove or refute them. For example, he gives JPK's potential time as a bootlegger about a paragraph of attention at the end of a chapter and basically says, "There is no evidence that he did that." Well, right - there is very little evidence that anyone was a bootlegger or speakeasy operator, but how did that rumor pop up and why does it persist? Some insight into that issue would have told the reader a lot about JPK and his place in the American landscape. I wonder if Nasaw swings so hard towards the historical record because there is so much speculation and rumor about the Kennedy family? As annoyed as I got with his repeated, "Well, there's no evidence he did that" explanations, at the same time I was thinking that it would be nice to read a book about John F. Kennedy that was less hysterical or fawning and more analytical. Anyways, overall, this was an interesting, albeit long, read. JPK was such an interesting person and lived such a varied life - it's hard not to be fascinated. And getting the background on

how the Kennedy family got its start provides some additional insight into everything they've done (right or wrong) since then. In a nutshell: As a history buff, I thought this was a good read, but it might not be the best pick for someone who has a passing interest in biographies - get ready for 800 pages of meticulous research, followed by 150 pages of footnotes. Three and a half stars.

I really can't give words to a review deserving of this book on Joseph Patrick Kennedy. There is much good as well as bad that could be said about his life. He was a man who was successful as a businessman and his public life, I am sure, will continue to be debated as long as we try to tread that road between war and peace. I am not an apologist for Joseph Kennedy but he was responsible for a political evolution within his family and especially his sons. He knew suffering and tragedy beyond the scope of most of us. This is the second biography by David Nasaw that I have read already having read his book on Andrew Carnegie. Both are excellent. Yet, this book holds a tale of personal greatness and failure in the context of a humanity where this man always attempted to do what he believed was right for family and nation. It is a story that still has much to say to us.

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