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Katharine The Great : Katharine Graham And Her Washington Post Empire



Synopsis

THE BOOK THEY TRIED TO SUPPRESS ... When the first edition of Katharine the Great was published, Katharine Graham had it pulled from the bookstores and pulped. But Deborah Davis sued the publishers for censoring her book, and won. Now this new, updated edition goes beyond Watergate all the way through Contragate, and shows how the Washington Post has changed during the Reagan-Bush years. Although Katharine Graham is surely one of the most powerful women in the world, few people are aware of the extent of her influence. World leaders meet with her; presidents meet with her; anyone moving up in the circles of power in the nation's capital tries to meet with the owner of the Washington Post - Newsweek communications conglomerate. Katharine the Great is the story of a woman born into wealth and power. Her husband, the brilliant, mercurial Philip Graham, became the publisher of her father's paper, the Post, while she settled down to home life. But by the 1950s Philip Graham was battling manic depression, and in 1963 he committed suicide. Middle-aged and inexperienced, Katharine Graham took over the newspaper. Together with Ben Bradlee she made the Post successful and powerful, publishing the Pentagon Papers and pursuing the Watergate investigation that led to Richard Nixon's resignation. After Watergate, the Post- and Kay Graham - became an institution, a fourth branch of government.

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Customer Reviews

I was really quite surprised at this bio of Katharine Graham, owner of The Washington Post (and Madison Council member of the Library of Congress).I did not realize just how filthy rich this woman

was. I found the story of her family (as well as the Jewish heritage) quite fascinating. I did not know, for instance, that her father was responsible for the way stocks are now weighted. That he was able to come up with a scientific (or qualifiable) means to rate stocks was truly revolutionary. It was due to this wealth that Katharine was introduced to the high and mighty at an early age. Being born self-confident and rich always gives people an edge. I was impressed with her education in that, unlike many rich people, she actually tried to make a difference while at school. What is most disturbing is the background on how intelligence agencies completely took over the print media. That individuals like Phil Graham and Ben Bradlee were intelligence agents and believed the press should advance government positions shows just how depraved these individuals really were. Not one of them bothered to read or understand the Constitution and the need for a free press. After Graham died (a tad convenient, don't you think?), Katharine became one of the worst suck-ups to the government. As on page 249, Ward Just was reporting on how badly the Vietnam War was going. Can't have that, you know. Bradlee and Katharine replaced his defeatist reporting with uber-hawk, hack scribbler, and future Library of Congress Director of Communications (brought in by CIA Billington) Peter Braestrup. His take on the Tet Offensive, The Big Story, is always good for a laugh. There is, because of this, much speculation regarding who did Nixon in. Was it a CIA plot?

Originally published in 1979, Katherine the Great by Deborah Davis is the first full length biography of Katharine Graham. It's a book the image-conscious Katharine didn't want published and went to court to stop. After six weeks, publisher Harcourt Brace caved in - recalling and shredding 20,000 copies, even though the book had been nominated for an American book award. Fortunately, a book this important is impossible to suppress. The author sued the publishers and won an important legal victory against censorship. The book tells the fascinating story of a woman once described as "the most powerful woman in America" - from her privileged early family life to her radical college days and her subsequent conversion to a staunch right wing philosophy. Katharine's father, the fabulously wealthy Eugene Meyer (a former governor of the Federal Reserve Board and President of the World Bank), bought the Washington Post at auction in 1933. She didn't know it then but the Post was to become her destiny. Katherine's brilliant but erratic husband Philip Graham was appointed publisher of the Post by his father-in-law in 1946. Meanwhile Katharine settled down to home life and raised a family. In the ensuing years, Phil expanded the Washington Post empire into radio, television and newspaper syndication. He also acquired Newsweek Magazine in 1961. By the late 1950s, it became evident that Phil was battling manic depression and alcoholism which led to periodic absences from work, embarrassing episodes and ultimately, in 1963, his suicide. Following

Phil's death, the middle aged and inexperienced Katharine took over management of the Post.

I read the book, Katherine the Great, knowing very little about Ms. Graham's personal background, and only a little more about the history of the Washington Post. Briefly, Ms. Graham lead a most interesting life - one in which immense wealth and privilege played a more important and formative role than I was aware. As one learns more about her, one is struck by how many positive traits she had. Given her wealth she could have chosen to lead a life of leisure and socializing. But instead she chose to work, and work hard, at an eminently worthwhile endeavor - publishing one of the country's leading newspapers. She was actively involved in the newspaper's management even while her husband occupied the top managerial position. However, once her husband died (at an untimely age) she stepped into the top managerial position and performed quite well. As a generalist she hired well, and paid well. The book never addressed in detail her management style; but as one absorbs one point after another, I think it's fair to say that she lead primarily through clear instructions and persuasion. Brow-beating, bullying, and humiliation simply weren't part of her makeup. Her polish, poise and intellect enabled her to mix easily with diplomats, top government officials, and cultural leaders of all types. Politically, Ms. Graham's views were clearly left of center (unlike mine, which happen to be right of center); and, not surprisingly, the Washington Post reflected her personal political views. However, while I disagree with many political positions articulated in the Post, the Post's positions both during and after Ms. Graham's leadership, have generally been set forth responsibly.

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