



Memoirs

David Rockefeller

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Born into one of the wealthiest families in America—he was the youngest son of Standard Oil scion John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the celebrated patron of modern art Abby Aldrich Rockefeller—David Rockefeller has carried his birthright into a distinguished life of his own. His dealings with world leaders from Zhou Enlai and Mikhail Gorbachev to Anwar Sadat and Ariel Sharon, his service to every American president since Eisenhower, his remarkable world travels and personal dedication to his home city of New York—here, the first time a Rockefeller has told his own story, is an account of a truly rich life.

Memoirs Details

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Mary says

These are David Rockefeller's memoirs, and the writing style is clear and chatty, so this was a pleasure to read. This is someone who has led an interesting life, with a lot of opportunities to be on the edge of change and to influence it. He does seem to recognize that he was born on third base, and probably would have made some success of his life if he had not been born so well off, but clearly a lot of his position derives from his family resources. For example, he might well have become quite senior at Chase Bank if he had really started as a management trainee, but despite protests that Chase was not a Rockefeller bank (come on, your uncle is the president, and much of your family's wealth is managed by its trust department) he was likely the heir apparent from day one, and it was only his to lose. He is committed to social change and to doing good (really confirmed for me by the attitude of people whom I have known who worked for Chase Manhattan, thus it seems that Rockefeller's view did permeate the bank). However, I will look for some assessment by others of his work, because his solution to world problems seem universally to set up some council made up of name people that he knows, and he is too much into name-dropping. There is also a sense that he could have been more decisive or assertive - getting rid of a major rival off the Chase board by changing the board retirement age seems pusillanimous at best.

Overall, however, this was fun to read for a good review of 20th century history, I am also intrigued to see that he has outlived everyone - as of my writing this he is still alive at 100 years old.

Chi Chi says

I have only read excerpts from this autobiography. I believe one of the most revealing quotes from this man is on page 405

“For more than a century ideological extremists at either end of the political spectrum have seized upon well-publicized incidents such as my encounter with Castro to attack the Rockefeller family for the inordinate influence they claim we wield over American political and economic institutions. Some even believe we are part of a secret cabal working against the best interests of the United States, characterizing my family and me as 'internationalists' and of conspiring with others around the world to build a more integrated global political and economic structure--one world, if you will. If that's the charge, I stand guilty, and I am proud of it.”

Another quote, not from this book but spoken at a private meeting in 1991 in Baden-Baden, Germany; “We are grateful to the Washington Post, the New York Times, Time Magazine and other great publications whose directors have attended our meetings and respected their promises of discretion for almost 40 years.....It would have been impossible for us to develop our plan for the world if we had been subjected to the lights of publicity during those years. But, the world is more sophisticated and prepared to march towards a world government. The supernational sovereignty of an intellectual elite and world bankers is surely preferable to the national autodetermination practiced in past centuries.”

Thiago Alves says

Nessa autobiografia David Rockefeller aos 87 anos narrou um pouco da história do século XX a partir da perspectiva de um industrial, capitalista e filantropo norte-americano. Essa leitura revela como essa família transformou a jovem e sedutora nação norte-americana na maior economia do planeta, onde seu avô mesmo sem ter estudado economia compreendia o significado de demanda elástica e através da Standard Oil Company controlou 90% do setor nacional do petróleo. Sua família contribuiu de maneira distinta nos investimentos para desenvolvimento e urbanização de Nova York em uma impressionante sequência de fatos históricos, com uma visão panorâmica dos acontecimentos mais marcantes do século com o término no ataque terrorista a Nova York em 2001 em uma instigante narrativa em primeira pessoa, e bastante acessível... com destaque em história e economia. Vale a pena a leitura!

Timo Bremer says

Someone's Memoirs describe their life. That means two things.

1. It isn't necessarily interesting to read. Luckily David Rockefeller had a very interesting life. Yet, it should be said that even with the most interesting person, nobody will find all aspects of their life interesting. So Memoirs are among the kinds of books where its much more ok to pick and choose which parts to read. In the case of this book, the clear structure and division into different topical sections makes that very easy.

2. You will get a lot of nifty tricks and experience on common life problems that you don't commonly find addressed in other kinds of books (including relationship and parenting advice, tips on how to land a good job, get a phd, talk to communist dictators or live with many siblings). What's more, this advice comes with the credibility of a true story that self-help book full of put together anecdotes could ever come close to.

It is for this second point that Memoirs are often worth the hassle and that is certainly true in this case. David Rockefeller, from his exceptional business career as longstanding CEO of Chase to his involvement in international relations and his role in founding numerous important IO organizations, lived a life so full of interesting events and so showing of talent and skill to learn from, that the history of his in itself highly interesting and exceptional family is mostly a side note.

Tom says

Fascinating and very readable. I'll only give four stars because of the very real possibility that Mr. Rockefeller is not being completely forthcoming about certain issues. (He has been involved in an incredible amount of events/issues, and even a completely frank assessment couldn't answer all the questions that might arise.)

Mark says

His was an interesting life, perhaps 50 pages too long. It will inspire me the next time I visited MOMA in NYC

Odile says

A great book about a very influential man from a very influential family.

Cristian Stef says

David Rockefeller is a brilliant person. He was an outstanding businessman, did a lot of charity work and had a big contribution for this world. The book is interesting, but I think a lot of chapters are too detailed and really boring. He was the president and chairman of a lot of foundations and NGO's. It is a bit strange how he met a lot of influent people. (Also member of The Bilderberg Club, Alfalfa Club and so on...)

Eric says

An easy read that is very detailed into the business career of David Rockefeller. I picked up this book a few years ago after reading Titan (John D Rockefeller Sr. biography) in the 90's. Titan is one of the best biographies I've ever read so I thought learning more about one of his grandsons would be interesting. David Rockefeller, who is still living today at 97 years of age, was a leading non-political figure in the world of international finance and business in the 2nd half of the 20th century. I would have preferred to have learned more about his family life vs his business career but the book was informative nonetheless.

He obviously had a big helping hand in life being the grandson of the world's richest man but downplayed any role that had in his accomplishments. As with many successful businessmen, he was an absentee father who turned out 6 children who are all flaming liberals and doing a lot of harm to our society in the realms of nature, science, and education. The family has greatly departed from the strong faith of John D Rockefeller Sr. I think it is sad to see such great wealth to be used in such godless manner.

On the positive side of things, Rockefeller shows how risk taking and courage are key elements to succeeding in business and is unabashed at the role capitalism plays in the greater good. The current set of numnuts in DC could definitely learn those lessons today.

Rick Segers says

I reviewed this book on amazon. Here is that review...

I thoroughly enjoyed this very readable book.

I am a great fan of 20th century biography and all writers have a certain agenda. That was the case with this book but it did not detract from the interesting story of this 20th century icon.

Mr. Rockefeller reveals much of his life and his family, warts and all. America's ambassador without portfolio was instrumental in many of the key events of the century and it was certainly time that the story was told.

This book will do little to change Mr. Rockefeller's image to the conspiracy theorists of the world, but the rest of us are indebted to him for sharing his story with us all.

Eddie says

I wasn't expecting very much from this book, despite my dad's recommendation, but the thing that I found most interesting was the backdrop to David Rockefeller's life. There's a clear and pronounced transition from the Edwardian era he grew up in to the modern era--he's still alive--and the tensions that come with that.

As one of the blurbs on the book says, he's an unapologetic advocate of the market solving all problems, but he has led a really interesting life.

Wendy Osborn says

The grandson of the Rockefellers that built the dynasty, David Rockefeller sums up his life while in his 90's.

After reading this, I actually pitied the guy a lot. I think he actually was completely ignorant to how much his name made his way in life for him. He was an indulged child with particular upbringing. Adulthood and working in the real world slapped him in the face a bit. It seemed, however that he had a good work ethic, loyalty to country (he enlisted in the military as a youth), and a keen love of finance/ money. One of his very first jobs was working for mayor LaGuardia in New York. What other person in their early 20's would have those types of opportunities?

It seems that he felt that his biggest accomplishment in life was working as a bigwig for Chase Manhattan Bank. Very rarely does he mention his own wife or children or the time he spent with them, and that just seemed sad to me.

I was not impressed by the way he blew his inheritance. He spent millions of dollars more than he ever earned in his professional career and really never wisely invested his inheritance. (He was responsible for selling Rockefeller Center to Mitsubishi Corporation and spending millions of dollars on a personal modern art collection of Picassos, Van Goghs (Starry Night), etc. All these were later donated to the Museum of Modern Art in NYC.) I do love his art collection, however, and have spent many hours in the MOMA in NY.

David Rockefeller has the most prolific vocabulary of anyone I've read recently and that made the book interesting. However, all the details about his work really make the book drudge on.

Anne Cross says

Very detailed, sometimes too much for me. Gave a good account of events that happened during his life. Very rich family but also very generous

Janet says

A very easy to read, fascinating memoir written by a man who can never exist again. The youngest grandchild of the wealthiest man in the world, he could have lived off his interest. Yet he earned a PhD in economics, joined his uncle's bank and eventually became its chairman and CEO. Along the way he became active in philanthropy, politics, and international affairs. His concern for his family, his hometown, his country and his business reveals a true Renaissance man with a conscience. While I don't know if he would have accomplished all he has if he was not a member of the Rockefeller family, he certainly never shirked a responsibility or took it easy.

The only problem I had finishing this book, is that it was completed in 2004. I wonder what his thoughts would be about his political party in its present form.

Phillip Ozdemir says

This is a dry, bland, uninteresting autobiography. By trying so hard not to offend, it offends. It offends a literary person's sense of trust in the author. It offends a historian's sense of love for details and facts. It offends a political scientist's search for the motivations of the actors involved. It offends the common person's expectation that by paying \$49.95 for a book that is so big and heavy (499 pages, 2.5 pounds) they will be happy with it and it will be worth it. It isn't. Persons wanting more value for their money, and who want to read a more entertaining and animated autobiography should try, for instance, Errol Flynn's "My Wicked, Wicked Ways", Alfred P. Sloan's "My Life At General Motors", Emma Goldman's "Living My Life", Armand Hammer's "Hammer!", or Hedy Lamarr's "Ecstasy and Me: My Life as a Woman". The lives of these authors jump out at you from the pages of these books and take vivid three-dimensional form. They are not afraid of telling you how they thought and the mistakes they made. By doing so, they become more human and companionable, and less bothersome in their inanity, a trait which Rockefeller insists on embracing by dealing in the idiom of pedestrian platitudes and dry generalizations for most of the course of this book.

Just exactly how and where did his beetle collecting habit begin? What other beetle collectors were (are) his friends? How did he feel when he first kissed his wife? What's his favorite kind of sports car? What did he think of a movie actor (i.e., Ronald Reagan) becoming President? What's his favorite restaurant? Does he like Hitchcock movies? How did he feel when his brother Nelson was found in flagrante delicto when he died? What's his favorite sport? Which currencies does he like the best? If he could hold a dinner party with twenty of the most famous people in history invited, who would they be? Etc etc etc. None of that. Or anything else that's interesting. Just dry, boring generalizations told in a lugubrious, pedantic fashion that would put a bedpost to sleep.

What he doesn't talk about in this book is more important in understanding his life, his power and his influence than what he does talk about. For instance, one of the key issues he does not talk about is his relationship to the 1991 coup that toppled popularly-elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti, which led to the emigration of thousands upon thousands of "boat people" from that island to the beaches and backyards of Florida's Gold Coast, the U.S. military occupation of that country, and the spending of billions and billions of U.S. national security state dollars to "cure" the problem (that was created by the United States to begin with). Shortly before the coup, David Rockefeller's private plane, carrying Vice President

Dan Quayle and Secretary of Commerce Robert Mossbacher landed at Port au Prince airport and a meeting was had with Aristide and others in the Haitian government in which Rockefeller alluded to the “turbulent history” of the nation as an impediment to further investment. (See Foreign Broadcast Information Service archive for details.) It is strongly suspected that shortly thereafter, Quayle, who was a member of the National Security Council, ordered the 1991 coup to take place using members of the Haitian High Command who were on the CIA payroll (at one point a SEAL team was sent in to extract some of those CIA assets after the coup went bad). It is also known that people close to Quayle were the ones pushing him to get rid of Aristide. Was David Rockefeller one of them? I feel strongly that he was, because if he was not, then he would have included some mention of his meeting with Aristide in his autobiography as an incident of note. The coup, naval blockade, and military occupation represented a major episode in U.S. history, and was one of the main news stories of the period. In the end, it cost the United States billions of dollars to blockade the island, round up illegal immigrants on the beaches and backyards of Florida, and send in troops to stabilize the country. And the job still isn’t finished. The country is still largely in ruins from the damaging effects of this U.S. sponsored coup.

One of the original reasons for the coup was to get Haiti to “play ball” according to U.S. dictated rules (which, incidentally, in general meant near-starvation wages for those Haitian workers “lucky” enough to get a job in a U.S. owned sweatshop). This was key to ensuring the success of the Rockefeller-sponsored Caribbean Basin Initiative. However, there is a conspicuous absence of any account whatsoever about David’s meeting with Aristide at this key juncture in history, and knowing David’s keen sense of history, and his own place in it, and the importance of the Caribbean Basin Initiative to his far-flung vision of fair and robust trade within the Americas, it is just too glaring an omission to be a coincidence. That silence, in essence, represents an affront to the simple Haitian people, who are so trusting and lyrical that some have been known to bequeath the first name “Rockefeller” to their children, a practice unknown in any other country in the world, as far as I know. But besides being silent on little things (the economy of Haiti is the smallest in the Western Hemisphere), David is also silent on some of the larger issues you’d expect him to confront in a candid autobiography.

In 1910, the economic activity of the Standard Oil Trust represented approximately 10% of the GNP of the United States. Its wealth was so great that it was thought to be extremely burdensome to manage, perhaps fatally so. Even John D. Rockefeller, David’s famously miserly grandfather, believed that no one man should have the responsibility for running it all, for it would ‘crush’ him. What happened to it all? No proper account of what may be fairly called the world’s biggest fortune has ever been made, and David Rockefeller is one of only a handful of people who would be able to perform such an accounting at this point. But there are few clues to this interesting question to be found in *Memoirs*. As far as pecuniary matters go, its author does not even mention the famous “Ledger A”, an accounting ledger that Rockefeller fastidiously started when he was a boy to keep track of the nickels he was given for each housefly he swatted, and which, it is rumoured, still exists and contains a full accounting of all his manifold investments. (One gets the idea that he does not even want to acknowledge the existence of this strange ledger, which he must have spent a good fraction of his life poring over, for fear it might be subpoenaed for evidence in a future lawsuit, or uncovered by the public in some way.) Lack of any elucidating details on the disposition of the Rockefeller fortune is disturbing, as one feels that in such a book as this, one of whose purposes must be for public absolution, of a sort, there would be more details forthcoming about it, especially given the perennial charges against his family (and the lack of anybody suitable to defend the family name after David dies). By the way, for those who do not know it, miserism is a form of auto-eroticism.

In his book Rockefeller mentions blandly that populist politicians were always his bane and the bane of the interests he represented. But he is also quick to mention that some of his era’s most ruthless dictators were his friends (Does the phrase “Birds of a feather flock together,” have any meaning?). He devotes an entire

chapter to the Shah of Iran, for instance. At odds with populist leaders like Nasser, Allende, Castro, Mossadegh, Chavez, and Aristide, leaders who were and are loved by their nation's people, but friends with the nasty, kleptocratic dictators who plunder their nation's treasures for themselves? Hmm. Now a sane person would have to ask themselves the question, "What sort of person is that?" His relationship with Henry Kissinger runs in the same vein. Kissinger has been called "the most dangerous man in the world". David Rockefeller at one time and perhaps still is the most powerful man in the world. (He used to be called "the Fourth Branch of the U.S. government.") Now what do you get when you cross the most dangerous man in the world with the most powerful? A nice, wholesome relationship? I will leave that question for the reader to answer.

It is no accident that 'populist leaders' are the bane of ultra-capitalists like David Rockefeller. In fact, the power of the people is the only thing that CAN counter the concentrated power of wealth and its corrupting influence. Leaders like Teddy Roosevelt (who busted up the Standard Oil Trust) and Thomas Jefferson (who busted up King George the Third's greedy little colonial monopoly) (and many others) who understand the power of the people will always be a threat to monied interests, and as a matter of survival, the monied interests will always work to discredit and destroy them.

There is an old saying from the Bible, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the gates of Heaven." There is a reason for this saying, isn't there? The legend of the corrupting influence of Rockefeller wealth and the so-called myth of Rockefeller omnipotence have never been completely dispelled. It is carefully chronicled in Ida Tarbell's book "History of the Standard Oil Company". David's grandfather believed his money was a "gift from god". But David talks naught of money, philosophically, in this book. You'd think he would address the issue head-on, answering for all time how he squares some of the Bible's ancient teachings with the simple, obvious fact of his own enormous, inherited wealth. In Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*, and in many other classics of literature and philosophy, we have been shown that money per se is not bad, but the love of money is the root of all evil. (I once told this to a 33rd Degree Mason friend of mine and he said "And how!") And remember, the only time Jesus' hand was raised in anger was at the temple of the money lenders. As one of capitalism's great modern exponents, one gets the feeling that Rockefeller wishes he could sweep these facts under the rug. But these facts cannot be swept under the rug. They are bedrock. And the fact that they cannot be swept under the rug is very troubling, for we all live in a capitalist society which is founded on the love of money. It is greed that drives the wheels of the system, makes the system come alive and take shape and go, and it is that self-same greed, that love of money, that causes all the troubles. So what do you do about it?

One would think that the world's great, premier capitalist would offer us some clues as to what to do about this problem, or at least point us in the right direction for an answer, and let us know what he thinks about it. But amazingly he doesn't give us any indication whatsoever that he is even aware that the problem exists! He remains entirely oblivious throughout the memoir to this issue, and whenever the concept of capitalism's apparent contradictions looks like it might come up in the book (mostly in recollected conversations with this or that world leader) we see Rockefeller blithely launching into a spirited defense of capitalism's virtues (which we are all too well aware of and are hackneyed by now anyway), preempting any more serious reflection on what is surely a deep and enduring problem for mankind.

Another key philosophical point that Rockefeller does not talk about is his relationship to government. Don't dyed in the wool capitalists like Rockefeller regard government as a mere inconvenience, an annoyance to be dispensed with whenever possible, to be avoided like the flu, so to speak? But no, what we find is that really big capitalists like Rockefeller view government as a captive "sugar daddy", and customer of first and last resort. Through the "revolving door" which exists between the upper levels of government and big profit-making corporations (of the 100 biggest economies in the world, 52 of

them are corporations, and 47 of them American corporations) we find that government and big business are hot in bed together, at least in this day and age. (See John Perkins' "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man" for more on this.) One of the reasons the notorious Westway Project in Manhattan was pushed so hard for so long was the fact that only the federal government had enough money to pay Rockefeller what he wanted for that choice Manhattan property that he owned. Thus, the government became the preferred customer, or the customer of first and last resort (he does not admit this).

Throughout the book David describes one episode after another of his meetings with government leaders from around the world, including the United States. His cozy relationship with government and governments should not be surprising given his Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg, Council on Foreign Relations, and Bohemian Grove ties. But nowhere does he clearly set forth his philosophy of what constitutes proper and what constitutes improper dealings between big business and government. As far as a literary criticism goes, this is part of the larger problem of a lack of a 'soul' to the book, i.e., a clear, satisfying articulation of his own personal belief structure which would give life and meaning to the dull recitation of details which he drones on and on about.

Rockefeller's intentional dissembling and the pains he has taken in this book to paint such an inconspicuous portrait of himself are troubling. Why doesn't he just tell it like it is and let the chips fall where they may like so many others have done when they wrote their autobiographies? The answer may be found in one of Henry Kissinger's old sayings in his book *White House Years*: "History, in order to be effective, must be negotiated with absolute secrecy." It is almost axiomatic with personages like David Rockefeller, that what they talk about in their public utterances doesn't matter and, conversely, what they don't talk about, does matter. But if it doesn't matter, then why talk about it at all, why waste people's time with trivialities, banalities and a simple, dull recitation of events ad infinitum? The reason is to put a patina of legitimacy on their actions. Like CIA agents operating under deep cover, they need to put out a cover story so that people like you and me, the proverbial small fry, won't guess what they're really up to. And, frankly, I believe that this is unethical. If you're involved with something so heavy and so secret that you can't talk about it, then don't talk about it. But don't try to gin up an innocuous cover story to fool people. Look at the kind of society you get when you do that. Look at how dysfunctional things are today. Rockefeller, as one of the 50 or so people "who matter" in the world today, is in some measure to blame for the dystopic way things are. It is not too much of a stretch to say that a trail of blame leads right to his door, and that much of the hunger and suffering that exists in the world today is because of his actions and inactions.

Power like that deserves close scrutiny, but look where it's exercised: in the cabins of private jets over the Caribbean at 25,000 feet, in closed boardrooms without any members of the press or public invited, in the many rooms of the playhouse at Pocantico Hills amongst discreet, zippered-lip functionaries and friends. To some extent, people like David Rockefeller are creatures of darkness. They cannot bear the thought of having their intricate schemes for world domination, their artificial energy crises, their manufacturing of consent, their crucial coups, cozenages, and assassinations exposed to the light of day for if the world ever found out about what they were doing there would be massive revolution. Much needs to be learned about the actions and inactions of this powerful man and his cohorts, but the reader will not find it here among the pages of his *Memoirs*. He will have to look elsewhere. In the meantime, its author as well as the rest of the world ought to be wondering whether or not this book, like the life of its author, doesn't simply represent a study in failed opportunity.

Phillip Ozdemir

