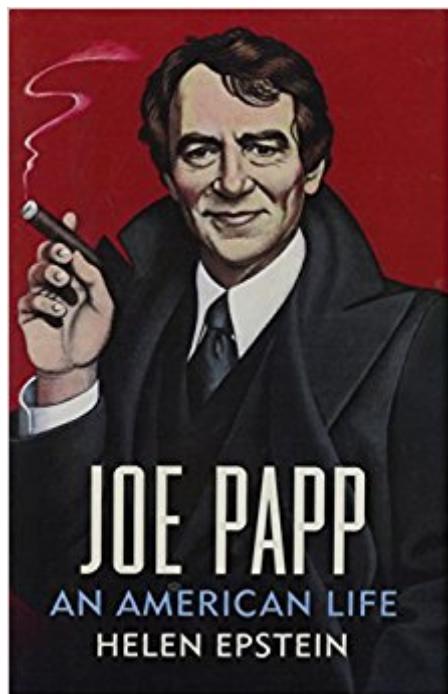


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Joe Papp: An American Life



Synopsis

A definitive and candid portrait of a theatrical visionary chronicles the amazing career of impresario Joseph Papp, who changed America's culture with his productions, including *Hair*, *A Chorus Line*, and the New York Shakespeare Festival, and who championed First Amendment rights.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After writing an article in 1976 about Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival, Epstein became close to the impresario and was to become his authorized biographer, but he changed his mind. This book was researched after Papp's death in 1991 with the assistance of his widow, Gail Merrifield. Epstein (Children of the Holocaust) has used her personal access well to provide a thorough, candid portrait of the hard-driving director/producer who made free Shakespeare in Central Park an annual event and who built a theatrical empire at the Public Theater, where he presented such groundbreaking works as *Hair*, *for colored girls who have considered suicide and A Chorus Line*, as well as Shakespearean productions that proved his contention that the Bard could be played with a vigorous American accent. In chronicling Papp's impoverished childhood (he was born in Brooklyn in 1921, the son of Jewish immigrants), his early years with the Actors Lab in California, his membership in the Communist Party, his four marriages and his stormy relationships with his children and colleagues, Epstein vividly evokes his charm and strong social conscience. She does not scant, however, a core of coldness that led him to discard Shakespeare Festival associates in whom he had lost interest or by whom he felt threatened. Sympathetic but critical, her thoughtful

biography is a fitting tribute to the man who fought to bring theater to more diverse audiences and to build it on "the bedrock of civic responsibility." Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This authorized biography is a portrait of a protean figure. Papp is among those rare Americans whose vision and personality wrought huge changes in the national landscape, ultimately bringing free theater to thousands, produced a stunning string of hits, and provided venues for the most exciting new talents in theater. His is also a story of marginalized poverty, assimilation, and success that defines the American Dream. Papp's legacy is a vibrant, politically aware, artistically sophisticated audience. Epstein's account, told with a journalist's eye for detail and accurate dialog, captures Papp's energy, willfulness, humor, and passion. Recommended for most popular collections.--Thomas E. Luddy, Salem State Coll., Mass.Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The story of Joe Papp is the story of a precious stage of American theater history -- an intensely productive period for American playwrights and New York theater -- and as such, this book is satisfying. The author is a Papp fan, so it's to her credit that this reader found Papp complex and industrious, but not terribly likable or insightful about the theatrical art or craft. As a visionary, his successes are a matter of record -- though no one would want producers to emulate his thoughtless, irresponsible, "raging bull" approach to developing the artistic and financial security of an organization. Yet the man was a force of nature, and his interaction with his community -- documented here in detail -- is of genuine historical interest.

Lucky for us readers that Helen Epstein tackled her biography of Joe Papp once again, after having given up twice before. With exhaustive research, frank personal observations and countless anecdotes from Papp's family, friends, colleagues and enemies, Epstein creates a stunning portrait that reveals where the great producer came from, what inspired him and how he went about accomplishing his many missions -- on stage and off. Born out of poverty, Papp once remarked that it was not poverty, but anti-Semitism and the Holocaust that troubled him. We follow his evolution as he channels his personal outrage against discrimination into his many missions: Shakespeare for everyone, not just the rich, and free at that, African-American causes, gay causes, color blind casting & minority theatre." Epstein's biography is a rich, nuanced and frank monument to the great man, and a page-turner that never disappoints.

I read this book my freshman year in college (some 15 years ago) and it changed my life. Inspired by Papp's twin beliefs in theatre for all, as well as having the city and community cover the cost I set out with friends to produce a show in my hometown of Savannah, Ga. I was 19 at the time and could never have pulled this off if I hadn't had the example stories, letters, and attitude of Papp that I absorbed from this book. (The review in the local paper called it "Daring but Flawed") The book is full of inspiring stories of how Papp built his empire, and how he took a strong stance in demanding what he needed from the City of New York, as well as those around him. Even some of Papp's actual letters to city officials are captured here. The book also touches on how Papp worked to nurture playwrights and directors and created a space for community and culture to emerge. Epstein does a good job of showing Papp was not perfect, without having that part draw too much focus from the central theme of how he did what he did. A must read for anyone interested in history of theatre, or looking to become a producer.

haven't read all of it yet; but i've read her, the authors first book which is pretty accurate; my uncle was an amazing, dynamic and brilliant innovator in many fields; not only in theatre which he dedicated his life to; but sensitive to all people; because of him homeless people are being given food now; programs he started when he was alive; my whole family have the papp blood; myself as a teacher, linguist, dancer, singer, etc; sister artist; this was given to us by my grandfather an immigrant from poland who loved music, yiddish theatre, was an actor, comedian, etc. may my uncle, Joseph Papp who has given my mother, and family, never be forgotten; looking forward to getting the book and will follow with unbiased critique

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