



American Empress: The Life and Times of Marjorie Merriweather Post

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American Empress is a sweeping history of the dramatic life of heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post, daughter of breakfast-cereal magnate C. W. Post. As a young girl growing up in the Midwest, Marjorie Post helped glue cereal boxes in her father's barn, later became a board member of his company, wed a diplomat and by late middle age was widely acknowledged as the unofficial "Queen of Washington, D.C." The glamorous and warm-hearted Mrs. Post was also mother to actress Dina Merrill. Throughout her life, she gave generously to hundreds of civic, artistic and philanthropic causes, among which were the National Symphony Orchestra, the Washington Ballet and the Kennedy Center. By virtue of her brains, beauty and great wealth, Mrs. Post was a woman well ahead of her era, whose natural business acumen created the frozen foods industry and transformed the Postum Cereal Company into the General Foods Corporation.

American Empress: The Life and Times of Marjorie Merriweather Post Details

Date : Published January 4th 2004 by iUniverse (first published January 31st 1995)

ISBN : 9780595301461

Author : Nancy Rubin Stuart

Format : Paperback 484 pages

Genre : Biography, History, Nonfiction, Historical

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From Reader Review American Empress: The Life and Times of Marjorie Merriweather Post for online ebook

Suzanne says

I have recently visited MMP's Washington D.C. mansion, Hillwood. It is now a museum housing her collection of Russian Imperial and French pieces. It was impressive. I left with a curiosity about this woman. That's how I happened to end up reading this.

This was obviously an authorized biography. There isn't much dirt in it and MMP is presented in the most flattering light even in situations that might require a bit more censure. Such as her sanctioning of Stalin's purging of the Communist party. I mean, we can argue about whether or not communism really presented the kind of existential threat that everyone seemed to believe it did but we cannot argue that, even at the time, anyone did not understand that Stalin was murdering innocent people to consolidate his power.

Which brings up another point about the book. There was a lot of stuff about MMP's 3rd husband's work in the USSR for the US State Department. That's great but I was wanting something...fluffier. More details about gowns and jewels and estates and hobnobbing with the beautiful people. I'm entitled to it. I've read stuff.

Overall it was an interesting book but definitely leaned more toward being propaganda than fact. Took a star for that. And a star for the Stalin thing.

Sissi says

Totally impressive, every woman can learn a lot by studying the life of Mrs. Post. An additional visit of one of her former estates is highly recommended.

Ken says

I read this book after touring Hillwood in Washington, DC - Marjorie's primary home in her later years, and became fascinated by her life and her story. This book covers it all - from her early years, with her parents, to a glamorous, although at times tumultuous, life of wealth, privilege and social status. Based on this book, she would've been someone I would've wanted to meet, to get to know, and to be friends with - she was an honest but very passionate woman when it came to her personal values, and fiercely loyal to her family and close friends. American Empress covers so much of her life's details - her homes, her clothes, her friends, her travels and her life abroad. I enjoyed it so much I've now read the book three times, and likely will read it again multiple times throughout my life. Nancy Rubin did such a fine job writing this book!

Pam says

I will never eat Grape Nuts again without thinking about Marjorie Merriweather Post. To say this book was engrossing really doesn't do it justice. I expected the typical gossipy, socialite biography of one of the

wealthiest women in the 20th century (and I wasn't disappointed), but it was so much more. Nancy Rubin Stuart does an amazing job of painting a sweeping, panoramic view of American Midwestern life and the burgeoning industrialization of the United States. She puts Post's family fortune in the cereal business in context that gave me a deeper and more complete picture as to the profound changes industrialization, advertising, and mass marketing wrought to society. With regards to Post herself, I wanted to know if the fawning commentary of the docents at her Hillwood Museum in DC were accurate or Pollyannish. My take from reading this biography is she was an amazing woman who generally seemed down-to-earth, kind, likable, optimistic, and unapologetic in spending money. Her business acumen and involvement in General Foods was interesting and constrained by the times when women were not involved in business. She led a fascinating and captivating life. Beach read for the summer.

Tracy Jenkins says

Absolutely fascinating book the daughter of the man who invested the cereal industry - C.W. Post. Marjorie became one of the wealthiest women in the world & her life is just fascinating. A great read about entrepreneurs, religion, money, politics, home building and power. Very fun. The writing itself was not terrific -but the content was great.

Tammy Mannarino says

In honor of a very fun "girl trip" to Hillwood!

Ethnea Ferguson says

I almost gave this a 3 - BUT - in 484 pages, the book - which is supposed to be about the first woman to serve on a corporate board of directors and supposedly has a keen business acumen - only mentions one single business decision - (no spoiler)- does not go into any corporate decisions or controversies - never mentions what contributions this supposed "business acumen" made to General Foods - however - does describe in lengthy detail one of her husbands service as ambassador to Russia and his resulting consulting with FDR in pre-World War II. I kept waiting for the author to discuss Marjorie's business accomplishments - but they were not provided. I find it ironic - that great detail is given to her entertaining, philanthropy, wardrobe and art acquisitions - but never discusses this brilliant business woman....I find that omission astounding. We are left with the prospect of a biography of a powerful business woman - in a time when women were not welcome in the corporate world - that leaves us with detailed accounts of her art, wardrobe and decorating choices, but no insight on her as a businesswoman.

Jan Chiles says

The author

Does a disservice to Marjorie when she constantly names off M's material things. M liked things but loved people. This is a great book about a by-gone era and a hometown girl who made good. 18+

Gina Basham says

The amount of first hand information was staggering. The personal anecdotes and correspondence was overwhelming. The book was extremely well researched and easy to follow.

The subject herself was a fascinating woman. That era in American history is hard to image but Nancy Stuart paints an extraordinary picture. The lives of the early American industrialist are compelling. How they started. How they lived. Their families and their lives. The opulence and decadence of that era is staggering. In this backdrop the ethics and philanthropy of Marjorie Post stands out. She must have been a amazing woman to know and the testimony of her friends and family, as well as her philanthropic recipients confirm that in every respect. I could not have been more delighted to be introduced to Ms. Post through Nancy Stuart. I would Highly recommend!

Liz says

I ended up enjoying this book much more than I thought I would at the start. At first I found the writing dense and much too detailed given the amount of material to be covered. As I learned more about MMP's life, I grew to appreciate the background. I noticed that some reviewers wanted more fluff (jewelry, dish on marriage and family drama) in place of the history and political intrigue, and others are disgusted with the lack of evidence of Marjorie's business exploits. I felt there was a good balance of both the sparkly and substantive here. I thoroughly enjoyed Marjorie's story and highly recommend it. My book club read this and visited Hillwood Museum in DC. The visit really put some of the book's details in perspective and the Russian art and artifacts really left an impression on me.

With all that said, this book really needed an editor. Many of the stories were repeated, and there were typographical and grammatical errors.

Margaret says

I received a tune up on my American history and politics from World War 1 until the 1980's as I followed this fascinating woman's life. Starting out helping her father glue stickers on Postum in their garage, she rose to the top levels of influence and access aided by the money from Post cereals and the force of her determined personality. She traveled the world and met people in the highest levels of power both here and abroad. From an early age used her money and influence for the greater good in many and varied ways. This is a very carefully researched and well written book. It was a joy to "meet" Marjorie Merriweather Post. I wish I could have known her.

Cynthia Haggard says

Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887-1973) led a long and interesting life that encompassed two world wars, three daughters and four marriages. I generally do not enjoy reading biography as too often it can be a dry recital of the trivia of someone's life, but I have to say that Nancy Rubin in her biography of Mrs. Post, titled

AMERICAN EMPRESS, has done a wonderful job in making it interesting. There was much I did not know about Mrs. Post. I didn't realize that she grew up in Battle Creek Michigan, or that her father was an entrepreneur. All I knew about her was her wonderful collection of Russian porcellain and religious icons that are in the museum that used to be her home, here in Washington DC.

It is odd to reflect now, here in the 21st century, how people used to rush into marriage. Mrs. Post was married four times. I could understand why she married Edward Close (she was only eighteen), E. F. Hutton (he was the love of her life) and Joe Davies (he was interesting), but I must say I didn't see the point of her marriage to Herbert May. But then women were made to feel that they couldn't go out if they didn't have some sort of male companion, and although her daughters encouraged her not to marry her male escorts, she herself was of an era when rigid notions of male-female relations prevailed.

Marjorie never did have much luck with husbands. She divorced two of them for infidelity, and the other two because, in their different ways, they cramped her style. Many of her friends speculated about why she was never happy for long in her marriages.

One of her friends remarked, "Marjorie, you could run General Motors. You could run U.S. Steel. You could run anything. You're the smartest woman I know. But why do you have so much trouble with husbands?" "Clare, I honestly don't know. Ain't it hell?" Marjorie is reported to have replied.

But the answer of course is that from the fact that you have formidable organizational skills and a steel-trap mind - as Marjorie did - it doesn't at all follow that you will have a happy marriage. Because what is needed is a totally different kind of intelligence, what we now refer to as EQ or emotional intelligence.

This is not to say that Marjorie didn't have any EQ - she had good relationships with all three of her daughters - but she didn't have enough of it to offset all of her millions.

Because those millions, in my opinion, lay at the heart of all of her problems with her husbands. Four stars.

Ashley Callen says

This book would have been better if it focused more on the heiresses life rather than the geopolitical situation at the time.

Katherine says

I've been reading this for months. It was fascinating at times, but towards the middle/end seemed to drift from interesting to an accounting of the various ways she spent her money. It also seemed extremely favorable to Marjorie Merriweather Post--this books suggests she was universal adored and had no flaws.

Scilla says

The book begins in February 1891 when Marjorie Merriweather Post is born, although there is a fair amount about her parents genealogy and activities before the birth of their only child. At many points I was bored, particularly in the early parts of the book. The biography is very complete, and Marjorie certainly led an

interesting life with all her marriages. I read the book particularly to find out more about the Sea Cloud, but there wasn't as much as I would have liked. Since I read the book on the Sea Cloud and didn't have internet when I finished, I'm not putting in a lot of detail.
