



## **A Season of Splendor: The Court of Mrs. Astor in Gilded Age New York**

*Greg King*

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Journey through the splendor and the excesses of the Gilded Age

"Every aspect of life in the Gilded Age took on deeper, transcendent meaning intended to prove the greatness of America: residences beautified their surroundings; works of art uplifted and were shared with the public; clothing exhibited evidence of breeding; jewelry testified to cultured taste and wealth; dinners demonstrated sophisticated palates; and balls rivaled those of European courts in their refinement. The message was unmistakable: the United States had arrived culturally, and Caroline Astor and her circle were intent on leading the nation to unimagined heights of glory."

—From A Season of Splendor

Take a dazzling journey through the Gilded Age, the period from roughly the 1870s to 1914, when bluebloods from older, established families met the nouveau riche headlong—railway barons, steel magnates, and Wall Street speculators—and forged an uneasy and glittering new society in New York City. The best of the best were Caroline Astor's 400 families, and she shaped and ruled this high society with steel.

A Season of Splendor is a panoramic sweep across this sumptuous landscape, presenting the families, the wealth, the balls, the clothing, and the mansions in vivid detail—as well as the shocking end of the era with the sinking of the Titanic.

## **A Season of Splendor: The Court of Mrs. Astor in Gilded Age New York Details**

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## **From Reader Review A Season of Splendor: The Court of Mrs. Astor in Gilded Age New York for online ebook**

### **Laurie says**

I was fascinated by this book - truly enjoyed reading about the lives of the super wealthy in the age of tacky show offs. I feel sorry for anyone born into that place in society as an introvert. The endless inane forced socialization must have drove them absolutely bonkers.

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### **Amy says**

This book has a split personality. On the one hand, it has lots of gossipy stuff about Gilded Age society and interesting explanations of how that society functioned. On the other hand, there are a lot of chapters in the middle that comprise a death march through seemingly every conceivable architectural and design detail of a series of houses from the era. I'm still not sure how or why I kept slogging through them, but if I never read about another pilaster or boiserie again, it will be too soon. But for those chapters, though, it was interesting, if not beautifully-written, stuff.

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### **Nathan says**

There isn't a whole lot to this book: catalogue after catalogue of fortunes, fancy-dress balls and feasts. Greg King's spare and effective prose kept me reading, though. He adds the right amount of human interest without becoming gossipy, the right amount of historical fact without becoming dry and dusty.

This isn't a sweeping overview of the Gilded Age, nor a learned analysis of the social or economic factors that led to it. But read in conjunction with such books, it provides a concrete measurement of the wealth that defined the era: it makes you realize just how opulent and decadent the time was. There's also a healthy dose of "lifestyles of the rich and famous" here, if you like that sort of thing, plenty of mansions and art collecting and multi-million dollar shopping sprees. I found it a bit tedious, to say nothing of the crass materialism, but I can understand the appeal of that.

With its smooth and effective narration, you could do worse than this book if its narrow focus is what you're looking for.

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### **Lauren says**

There were parts that were very interesting. However, some sections seemed repetitive due to the author's organizing the chapters by topics. The chapters that described the various residences of the Gilded Age society were very boring and far too detailed. The excess of the era certainly comes across throughout.

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## Lindsey Whipple says

I decided to read some history of New York City since I would be temporarily living in NYC for the Summer & Fall of 2014. I watched the movie the age of innocence and wondered who the people this grand tale was based from and I found this book on Caroline Astor. NYC had a ton of money during the late 19th Century. It is amazing to see how Americans had more money than European royalty and boy did they flaunt it. The balls, galas, dinner parties, jewels, mansions, art, clothing has never amounted in America since. I am in the service industry, it was amazing to read the level of service NYC elite employed to distinguish there wealth! You had an English butler & a French chef the more servants the more social standing. The detail and record of events paints a vivid picture in the mind. The interaction between old & new money is entertaining. When new money could not get a seat at the opera house due to the old money monopolizing the seating ...the new money built a bigger and better opera house the MET. The culture of NYC is ....if you snub me we will just Trump you with something bigger & better!

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## Tina says

This is a great book if you want to learn some salacious gossip about the great families of the Gilded Age. Although the book is titled "The Court of Mrs. Astor", it actually encompasses all of the who's who of that era. I especially loved the chapters on etiquette, balls, and servant life. It's truly remarkable the strict decorum with which these families lived their lives. Definitely a "must read" for anyone looking to learn a little bit more about Gilded Age New York.

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## Joanne says

The years when the Astors, Vanderbilts, and other mega-wealthy and self-absorbed swells in New York dominated society are brought to life in this book. Caroline Astor, the self appointed Grande Dame, determined who would receive the much sought after invitations to the over-the-top social functions as the group wandered between NYC, Newport, Europe, Florida, and wherever else their dancing pumps wanted to go. My interest in this era was piqued when I visited Newport and attended a private dinner in The Gold Room in Marble House, originally owned by William K. and Alva Vanderbilt. I couldn't imagine people actually living amid all the splendor (for no more than 10 weeks in the summer). I also couldn't imagine changing my clothes 7 or 8 times a day - were there actually outfits that were only suitable for letter writing? Two things I remember from visiting there: our guide telling us 1) that if you could want it, you could have it, and 2) they were only happy until the next bigger and grander house was completed.

In my opinion, too much of the book was given to the descriptions of the exteriors and interiors of the homes. Facades, dining rooms, ballrooms, paintings, tapestries, furniture, etc. were detailed for each home. I hope I don't have to read such words as Italianate, ormolu, boiseries, and rocailles in the near future.

Excuse me, I feel the need to run out and buy myself a tiara, diamond and pearl choker, and jeweled stomacher (you look it up).

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## Jenmarshall says

Good context for this period of history. The chapters are arranged by themes, not chronologically, which was more interesting, but at times required the author to cover the same ground. I also wish it had a few key family trees as I lost track of the generations at several points. Not a fast read, and rich in detail. I wonder where all that jewelry ended up?

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### **Anne says**

Well, this is a history book. It is a darn good history book. Meticulous research and reporting on the "Splendors" of this age. It is not a novel, nor does it have much dialogue between or among anyone. The author details the interior of tremendous homes and I wished for more pictures. One picture is worth a thousand words and in this case it would have been very true. Then, I realized that I could Google these places by name and voila PICTURES! Do this.

There were jaw dropping moments for me: things I had never heard before and I do think this book is a "gateway" book to others on this same subject or about ANY of these people at any time or place in their lives.

I struggle with how many stars to give this as it deserves all 5, but worry that if you are not looking for a book of this scope and think you will be entertained by a story, you will be disappointed

It's massive, detailed, and fascinating but not entertaining

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### **Susan says**

A fascinating look into the Gilded Age and the people who were holding court during it. Caroline Astor, the Vanderbilts; the Belmonts are just some of the Gilded Age families. The Kardashians can't hold a candle to these people. The incredible amounts of money spent on anything and everything was boggling! King gives the amount of money in sums of the day and also what that would be in 2008 terms. Chapters on transportation, the houses, the jewelry, Newport society and homes all open a window to this time gone past.

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### **katie says**

interesting subject but blech, the writing! When I'm counting the number of times you use the same adjective on one page, you need to find a better editor.

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### **George says**

A broader account of the Gilded Age than the title would indicate, this book covers many aspects of the lives of the very wealthy, centered on New York City, but also covering Newport, the Hudson Valley, the Berkshires, and even England and France. Fascinating details of the daily lives -- food, clothing, houses, transportation, customs.

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### **Helen says**

Detail-rich, yes, and that's part of what I wanted from this account of the Gilded Age society. A good mixture of brief history and anecdotes about Caroline Astor, Alva Vanderbilt, Mamie Fish, and their families and social associates along with reasonably detailed descriptions of their dress, jewelry, houses, and social customs.

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### **Dorothy says**

An alternate title might have been "Ormolu I Have Seen Aplenty." Judicious pruning might have redeemed this from tedious repetition about ormolu, limestone, epergnes, boisseries, stained glass, filleted tapestries and Turkey carpets.

Sort of a weird book....some Astors, Vanderbilts, Goulds, Fishes and a Stanford White murder and sunk Titanic. And lots of descriptions of architectural follies and ego monuments that were painfully detailed and managed not to convey a visual image despite a plethora of descriptions.

And all of it was Mamie Fish's fault. It was the dinner party for the monkey that did them in.

Could also have been titled "The Epic Failure to Build Aristocracy in America"

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### **Janet says**

Okay, I admit it, I've always been fascinated by the Gilded Age, a time when unfathomable fortunes were made and spent, a time before federal or state income tax and a hundred years before the great synthetic equalizer: major credit cards. I wanted to know about the one and two year honeymoon trips to Europe while their mansions were being built – how they traveled, what they saw. I wanted to gain insight into how Caroline Astor was able to gain, wield and retain so much power. I wanted to learn more about the “dollar princesses” and why wealthy Americans were willing to trade their daughters for threadbare royal titles. None of that appears here. Instead King has cobbled together a 455 page book seemingly from census reports, household ledgers and back issues of *Architectural Digest*. His footnotes are nonsensical and the only substance in the book come from his endless descriptions of ornately carved walnut panels and marble pillars. Honestly, if you want to learn a little something about the Gilded Age watch James Cameron's bloated film, *Titanic*. Better yet, read something by either Edith Wharton or Henry James.

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