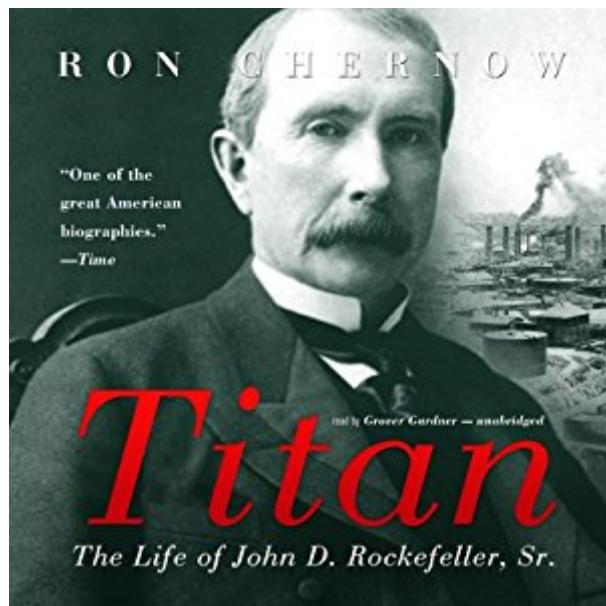


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# Titan: The Life Of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.



## Synopsis

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., history's first billionaire and the patriarch of America's most famous dynasty, is an icon whose true nature has eluded three generations of historians. Now Ron Chernow, a National Book Award-winning biographer, gives us a detailed and insightful history of the mogul. *Titan* is the first full-length biography based on unrestricted access to Rockefeller's exceptionally rich trove of papers. A landmark publication full of startling revelations, the book indelibly alters our image of this most enigmatic capitalist. Born the son of a flamboyant, bigamous snake-oil salesman and a pious, straitlaced mother, Rockefeller rose from rustic origins to become the world's richest man by creating America's most powerful and feared monopoly, Standard Oil. Branded "the Octopus" by legions of muckrakers, the trust refined and marketed nearly 90 percent of the oil produced in America. Rockefeller was likely the most controversial businessman in our nation's history. Critics charged that his empire was built on unscrupulous tactics: grand-scale collusion with the railroads, predatory pricing, industrial espionage, and wholesale bribery of political officials. The titan spent more than 30 years dodging investigations until Teddy Roosevelt and his trustbusters embarked on a marathon crusade to bring Standard Oil to bay. While providing abundant evidence of Rockefeller's misdeeds, Chernow discards the stereotype of the cold-blooded monster to sketch an unforgettably human portrait of a quirky, eccentric original. A devout Baptist and temperance advocate, Rockefeller gave money more generously than anyone before him - his chosen philanthropies included the Rockefeller Foundation, the University of Chicago, and what is today Rockefeller University. *Titan* presents a finely nuanced portrait of a fascinating, complex man, synthesizing his public and private lives and disclosing numerous family scandals, tragedies, and misfortunes that have never before come to light. John D. Rockefeller's story captures a pivotal moment in American history, documenting the dramatic post-Civil War shift from small business to the rise of giant corporations that irrevocably transformed the nation. With cameos by Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, Jay Gould, William Vanderbilt, Ida Tarbell, Andrew Carnegie, Carl Jung, J. P. Morgan, William James, Henry Clay Frick, Mark Twain, and Will Rogers, *Titan* turns Rockefeller's life into a vivid tapestry of American society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is Ron Chernow's signal triumph that he writes this monumental saga with all the sweep, drama, and insight that this giant subject deserves.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is an excellent treatment of the subject. Chernow spends maybe a little more time psychoanalyzing JD and his family than providing historical narrative, but overall the story is well done, clearly well researched, and well written. To me, the weakest part of the book was Chernow's attempt to discuss the antitrust concepts in play. He seemed a bit confused at times as to what conduct was competition at work and what, under modern standards would be considered anticompetitive. At times he notes the irony that some of SO's biggest critics engaged in the same tactics, but never squares the circle so to speak on what is okay and what is not. For example, is it okay to get a discount from a railroad, or not? Modern antitrust and industrial organization economists would tend to say it is fine, but Chernow writes as if it is a terrible competitive sin. A bit more robust discussion of where JD and SO "crossed the line" would have made the book that much better. But overall I found this to be a good read and recommend it to anyone who is interested in the subject matter.

Excellent book. Audible add-on is also very very well done. This book is basically a great overview of Rockefeller's life and influences both by him and upon him. It's difficult to sum up such a long and influential life in a single book, but you really get a sense of it here along with the politics and economics of the time. Chernow is an excellent writer.

An excellent book on a great man. Ron Chernow has proved once again his mastery of biography skills. JDR was an interesting person with two faces, a fierce capitalist and warm old man. The author has succeeded to give us enough details about JDR in an entertaining way. Worth of reading.

Read like a novel and not a history book. Appreciate the unbiased account of the John D. Rockefeller aka Titan.

A must read! Well written, captivating, & very informative.

Rich people have enemies. Rockefeller, the richest man of his time, was no exception. The list of Rockefeller's enemies included competitors best, suppliers squeezed, associates who believed they deserved more, politicians looking for a populist cause, and journalist searching for a sensational story. Rather than defend himself, Rockefeller allowed his enemies to define him. Chernow questions this definition. Rockefeller played hard - by modern standard, some of his actions were dirty. Did Rockefeller obtain his riches because of his dirty dealings? Or were his indiscretions merely mistakes made by a moral man running in a competitive, unforgiving industry? Chernow comes to the later conclusion and writes a sympathetic biography. Rockefeller wasn't greedy. Rather than being driven to acquire, Rockefeller felt compelled to do his best. Despite keeping a ledger of expenses, Rockefeller didn't keep score by his bank account. Making money was the measure of success, having money wasn't the measure of a good life. Chernow details the thought, care, and resources Rockefeller invested into his philanthropic foundations. The public may be more receptive to a sympathetic portrait of Rockefeller now (2013) than when *Titan* was published (1998). Rockefeller's tactics played poorly in the 50 years following WWII - the era of mass markets and unions. After the 2008 financial crisis, we entered a more entrepreneurial era. We may appreciate Rockefeller's self reliance more. Compared to the modern scoundrels of large financial institutions, Rockefeller doesn't seem too bad.

A good read. A bit long and dry perhaps but an excellent biography. The author certainly did his research but uses vocabulary that had me constantly checking my dictionary. I learned a lot about this mysterious titan of the gilded age.

The life story of John D. Rockefeller is fantastic and I regret that it took me 23 years to discover this true inspiration! As a young investor and student of economics and public policy I enjoy reading biographies of successful business pioneers. That said, this book will likely only appeal to a small minority of readers due to its extreme length and certain dry sections. I found the first 50-60 pages to be challenging, loved page 60-approx 300 (the real business development side of the book), then

grew rather tired during the last 300 pages. The book is organized by a split of chronology and theme, so oftentimes an event will be told (in a slightly different fashion) two or three times during the book. I found this rather annoying since I am reading at what I perceive to be a rather rapid clip (674 pages in 4-5 weeks). For a slow casual reader who spreads this massive volume over several months, the re-framing of various events might be less bothersome. Chernow's scholarly work, both in writing prose and background research, is very impressive. I'd give the book a 5-star rating for what appears to be an objective look at Rockefeller's life, but the dryness and repetition towards the end drags it to a 4-star. I personally loved the book, and might even read parts of it (50-300) again in the near future, but I'm guessing this is a book that very few of my contemporaries will enjoy. I wish they had a 4.5 star rating to give.

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