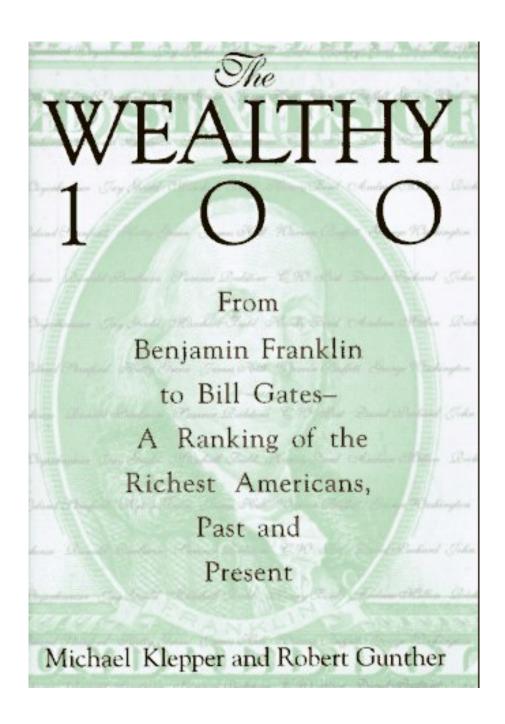


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From Benjamin Franklin to Bill Gates, this ranking of the 100 richest Americans, past and present, offers surprising portraits of these individuals and how they amassed their fortunes. The Vanderbilts, the Astors, Howard Hughes, John D. Rockefeller, Warren Buffett--their fascainting stories are all here, great reading for anyone, regardless of financial stature. Photos.

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Features

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28 of 32 people found the following review helpful. 100 highly readable vignettes on wealth-obsessed individuals

By A Customer

Let me start by saying that I would never have picked up a book on this topic were it not for the fact that one of its authors is my brother. I am so repelled by the "get rich" mentality that is exhibited by a certain segment of our population that I would have avoided the book for fear of being lumped in with them by anyone seeing it open in front of me. Before buying the book, I had prepared myself to dislike it, and had already fired off some ironic messages to my brother by electronic mail on the aspiring Rockefellers who I supposed would be flocking to buy it.

Finally, I got the book home, and, after drawing the shades and closing the blinds, furtively looked inside. A wealth, not of money, but of biographical detail, emerged immediately from the first few pages of text. It became immediately clear that, whatever its political slant, this was a profoundly well-written and researched work. What's more, it painted realistic and, in many cases, quite damning portraits of its 100 plutocratic subjects.

The book orders its collection of mini-biographies according to the wealth of their subjects. Still, the bite-sized pieces are too irresistable to be consumed in a linear manner, and so I found myself jumping from one disciple of mammon to another some chapters away, devouring several at a sitting over a period of many days. I remember the sense of mild surprise that I felt at the time that someone who I have known on a personal level for years had produced something that could truly be appreciated by the greater world (and evidently has been, from the reviews and interviews that have followed).

The reason that this book "only" gets a nine (for me, a 10 would be reserved for a great classic like Howard Zinn's "People's History of the United States," and maybe one or two other titles), is my perception that it pulls its punches slightly on some of its more contemporary subjects. The facts are all there, but there is a sense that the kid gloves are on when examining the negative consequences of more recent fortunes, such as Sam Walton's, on the broader community. Walton's Wal-Mart stores, for example, have been criticized as vacuum pumps that suck money out of small communities, destroying local shops that pay decent wages and recycle their earnings to local economies, while offering only low-paying jobs and marginally lower prices in return. The book brushes this aside as "protests from small rivals," and says nothing more on the subject.

Despite these issues, the book remains one of the most informative and interesting ones that I have read. And if the authors' point of view seems to favor, or at least accept, the system that created these Matterhorns of money, that view isn't imposed upon the reader, and there are plenty of facts and figures from which to derive a competing perspective.

-- Carl Gunther

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

In a nation where cash is king, meet the royalty.

By A Customer

Dreams. Visions. Wealth and Power. Within the pages of this book you will learn about the lives of 100 extraordinary people and their amazing accomplishments. Coming from all walks of life, many were brought forth with very little to their name, and yet each one has possessed an overwhelming desire to be the best. In many cases, they pursued a vision and achieved unimaginable success. Their empires and ideas have revolutionized society and their names will forever be etched in stone with their legacies. If you have ever been inclined to command wealth, here is where you will find out how it was done by those before you.

-- Taking Notes

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

I read this every year!

By M. Nowacki

This is one of my favorite books and I read it every year. The book ranks the top 100 wealthiest people in U.S. history by wealth/GNP. It is not a perfect system, but it is the best one and it gives a good idea of how wealthy people were for their time.

Each person has a few pages describing their business accomplishments and a few other interesting facts. I wish it was more comprehensive, but the book would be 1000's of pages long in that case.

I sincerely hope the authors do an updated version of this book. I would buy multiple copies the first day it came out.

There is no better book to give you a glipse into the lives and fortunes of America's wealthiest.

See all 6 customer reviews...

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