



Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life of Wealth, Empire, and Utopian Dreams

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The name Hershey evokes many things: chocolate bars, the company town in Pennsylvania, one of America's most recognizable brands. But who was the man behind the name? In this compelling biography, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Michael D'Antonio gives us the real-life rags-to-riches story of Milton S. Hershey, a largely uneducated businessman whose idealistic sense of purpose created an immense financial empire, a town, and a legacy that lasts to this day.

Hershey, the son of a minister's daughter and an irresponsible father who deserted the family, began his career inauspiciously when the two candy shops he opened both went bankrupt. Undeterred, he started the Lancaster Caramel Company, which brought him success at last. Eventually he sold his caramel operation and went on to perfect the production process of chocolate to create a stable, consistent bar with a long shelf life...and an American icon was born.

Hershey was more than a successful businessman -- he was a progressive thinker who believed in capitalism as a means to higher goals. He built the world's largest chocolate factory and a utopian village for his workers on a large tract of land in rural Pennsylvania, and used his own fortune to keep his workers employed during the Great Depression. In addition, he secretly willed his fortune to a boys' school and orphanage, both of which now control a vast endowment.

Extensively researched and vividly written, *Hershey* is the fascinating story of this uniquely American visionary.

Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life of Wealth, Empire, and Utopian Dreams Details

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From Reader Review Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life of Wealth, Empire, and Utopian Dreams for online ebook

Willywa says

Unique fellow in an era of monopolies

Lucretia says

After hearing a presentation about chocolate around Valentine's Day, I reserved the two books the expert had used in preparation for her talk. She caught me by telling some facts about Milton Hershey's life, like the fact that he and his wife were booked to travel on the Titanic and didn't. Anyway, I learned much about chocolate and about the utopian notions of this American who became wealthy because of his efforts. But unlike the Robber Barons of his time, he priced his product affordably, employed people who worked hard and were paid fairly, and built a school for orphan boys where they could learn and make their futures more certain and happy within a town where his employees could buy homes and live comfortably. The book was carefully researched and well written. Plus, the cover looks like the Hershey bar!

Mary Sullivan says

This book was a little slow for me. While it did adequately describe M Hershey, it dragged on for bits. And that Hershey community was a bit odd. He obviously wanted to control everything his workers did - from where they lived, to how to keep their house, to where they shopped, and where they went to school. A little too much like a cultish community for my taste.

Laura Lee says

Milton Hersey was mainly known as a benevolent and nice man, but he was more than that. He had his ornery side, too, firing people on a whim. He developed the utopian town of Hersey in 1903. He was good and mostly generous to the town, tho he made some serious mistakes. He was ambitious and developed Heresy chocolate to make millions. At one point Heresy supplied 90% of America's chocolate. All this from a young man that started out making caramels. I enjoyed the book very much, learning the private side of a millionaire. I mostly read it because my husband and I are going to spend a day in Heresy at Christmas. But it's an entertaining book for anyone who likes chocolate.

Andrew Hartley says

This was a really interesting read about a visionary progressive business leader... Milton Hershey was focused on the good that money can do, and he lived his philosophy. Worth the read.

Orsolya says

Growing up in Ohio, my childhood friends would go to the next door state of Pennsylvania and indulge themselves in family vacations to Hershey, PA. Although I was never privy to the amazing confectionary capital; the Hershey brand holds a special place in my heart. Michael D'Antonio presents a personal portrait of the man behind the company in "Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life of Wealth, Empire, and Utopian Dreams".

Despite its sweet topic, "Hershey" suffers from a slow and disjointed start focusing more on history in the Pennsylvania region and Hershey's parents versus on Milton himself. Although D'Antonio attempts to use this approach to reveal Milton's background and moral values; it fails to hold attention. Plus, much of it is chunky chronologically (a paragraph may begin with, "Ten years earlier..." and backtrack completely); therefore leaving unanswered questions and confusion.

It is quite clear that D'Antonio partook in extensive research. However, at some points it is too much as the text is clinical, report-like, and lacking passion. The areas directly concerning Milton are quite interesting, but they aren't consistent and are more like blurbs. "Hershey" tends to be filled with speculation—maybes, probablys, and so forth—making the business-end strongly noted but the personal life of Milton questionable.

Even though "Hershey" discloses a bit more of Milton as it progresses; the focus continues to be on industry, confections, and consumer goods. D'Antonio describes the environment effecting Milton or the Hershey brand rather than Milton's feelings/reactions. "Hershey" also suffers from some editing issues such as a lack of punctuation (I counted three times) which is disconcerting to some readers. Poor editing is also displayed with weak transitions and repetition: entire paragraphs are copy/pasted. "Hershey" flows like a college research paper with some undergraduate errors.

D'Antonio doesn't seem to know the heart of his work, following tangents even as the pages dwindle. However, he *does* successfully show Milton's positive and negatives by discussing employee strikes and unhappiness in details versus glossing over such topics.

The conclusion of "Hershey" is not particularly memorable with a spotlight on the business/financial state of the company instead of the man. In fact, D'Antonio revisits his introduction of the possible sale of the Hershey entity in 2002. This leaves an overall lack of opening up Hershey's life and is instead a very generic look.

Other notes: "Hershey" includes a photo insert (black and white) but doesn't use a substantial amount of source material for those seeking thorough details.

"Hershey" is 'okay' as an introduction but is not inclusive in revealing Milton's inner thoughts/workings with the content of the book being equal to a Google search. "Hershey" is suitable source material for a historical fiction novel: *why hasn't anyone written a HF novel featuring Milton and his wife Catherine?!*

Chris says

Proving once again that if you made a movie about a fictional person and put them through all the trials and tribulations and failures before reaching success that no one would believe it, the story of Milton Hershey gives you a good ride through perseverance. If you have ever wondered about the life and story behind this empire and what went into that kiss that you are about to eat then this is a good read for you. We take for granted the name of Hershey in the world, but there were many times when it would not have happened but for a little more blood sweat and tears of the man behind the chocolate.

Dan says

A fascinating read about the rise of an icon that came to prominence during the latter part of the Gilded Age. Milton Hershey was the industrious child of a serious and devoted mother and a father who was a bit of a flim-flam artist. In this regard Milton's upbringing was similar to John Rockefeller except that Milton was not so pious and his mother's family had some money to invest in Milton's enterprises of which several ended in bankruptcy.

Hershey, without a college education, goes on to build one of the world's biggest chocolate empires. The story of how he did it is explained in the book and is compelling. His success was largely the result of hard work and knowledge that he gained as he relocated to many cities across the country, refining the confectionary craft and honing his business skills. After the success of his Lancaster Caramel company made him a millionaire, Milton was able to expand into the chocolate business and after the turn of the century, in a utopian vision, built an entire company town in remote Pennsylvania that he named Hershey. He then set his mind to increasing profits further by evading the sugar trust that wielded so much power in the United States. Eventually he bought sugar plants in Cuba to directly supply his factories with one of the key raw ingredients for his chocolate. Taking place in his later years, there were strikes for better wages in the 1930's that resulted in violence. Those responsible for the violence were anti-union factions supported by Hershey. After press coverage of the horrible events, concessions were made on the part of Hershey's for better wages and benefits. This occurred after Milton relinquished daily operations to those much younger than the octogenarian.

Milton Hershey was an imperfect man as he had a gambling habit and went to great lengths to hide his lavish lifestyle by choosing to take frequent trips to Europe and Cuba to avoid the scrutiny of bad press. But he was hardly considered ruthless in comparison to the other Gilded Age billionaires. Since his rise to fortune came later, he likely learned more than a few lessons from the press coverage of Ford and Rockefeller.

Hershey also had a warm side as evidenced by when he opened up an orphanage in Hershey. He eventually left his fortune to the orphanage in a trust after his death. The trust has since grown to an endowment worth more than \$12 billion dollars.

The last several chapters in the book are about the trust that lived on after Milton's death. The threats of selling Hershey's to Wrigley, the court battles and the effects on the town's people and employees of a company that are so heavily intertwined all made for an interesting read.

Although a biography, this book is an excellent historical read that fills a knowledge gap with a vivid story

of how a giant modern company was founded and prospered in the first half of the 20th century.

I rated the book 4.5 stars and rounded up because the story is unique, engaging and involves nary a politician, military hero, entertainment icon or sports star.

Rajiv Bais says

Review to come later.

Fabienne says

Some of it was quite interesting. I enjoyed the personal and life stories. The financial chapters were far less interesting.

Robert says

There is the optimist and the cynic in all of us. Throughout this book I had to keep pushing the cynical Bob back in the bottle only to have cynical Bob try to escape again and again. I was actually able to contain my cynicism finally. You have to either read this book or know the story of Milton Hershey. In the midst of an ugly industrial world filled with slime bag industrialists stood Milton Hershey. He built a business without trampling on his employees, built a town, founded a home/school for orphans. This man was revered by the town citizens. He did amazing things for his town and his employees.

That said, his employees ultimately unionized his factories. As benevolent as he was, his ear was apparently not "to the ground" at the shop floor. He surprisingly hired to run his factory a former Ford Motor Co. executive to run his plant. Ford was notoriously anti-union and so was this guy (Hershey was also no fan of unions). This came back to bite him in the ass.

You cannot become this wealthy without an ego, and he had one. He also had a penchant for gambling. When you are filthy rich you get to spend lots of money. I did not begrudge for one moment the money he spent for his family and self.

One of the great things about a book club is that you read books you would never be on your radar screen. I highly recommend this book.

Melissa Gorecki says

Being born and raised in Hershey, I was expecting a different kind of story to be told here... one that simply goes the history I already knew. However, this biography provided me info I never knew. Though it is not an authorized biography, I believe many of the stories told because of the sources used. There were some stories however that are started with phrases like, 'during this this time, such and such was going on, so it can be assumed that__'. I didn't like the parts that it seemed assumptions were being made. Otherwise, the book kept my interest, and it was a quick read.

Melissa says

I found this book to be a very interesting read. I kept sharing facts with everyone around me. I also liked the writing style and could tell the author researched as much as possible for first hand accounts. Note: I did pretty much skip over the last couple chapters after he died.

Richard says

A good solid biography of a man who was a lot more interesting than I had ever realized. As I was reading the book, I found myself thinking of Milton Hershey as a benevolent dictator. Then, late in the book, someone was quoted as saying that the town of Hershey was a "philanthropic dictatorship" which is probably a little bit of a better term. Hershey was clearly a man who wanted to do good, but I don't think I would have liked living under his thumb. I would have resented the way he imposed his sense of morality on his workers, even during their time away from the factory. I wish the author had managed to uncover more information about Mrs. Hershey, the syphilitic spouse who may or may not have been a former prostitute.

Michael D'Antonio does a very good job of doing one thing that I think is essential for a good biography: he not only describes the life of his subject, but the context of the times in which he lived. And he does it in a way that makes sense to the story. When he goes off on a seeming tangent about the 1893 Chicago Exposition, for example, he ends up tying it back to Hershey's life, but he barely mentions the Spanish American War, which had little impact on Hershey. I've read a few poorly edited history books this year, and as a result I appreciate a well-edited book all the more.

Oh, and I know you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but what a great cover this book has! I had to resist the urge to nibble on the book as I was reading it. The only way the cover could have been better would be if the publisher found a way to make it actually smell like chocolate.

Kevin Cullis says

When you read of other industry leaders, Hershey is one of the few, other than James J. Hill, CEO of the Great Northern Railroad, who's concerned with his legacy brought more tools for the community than toys for himself.
