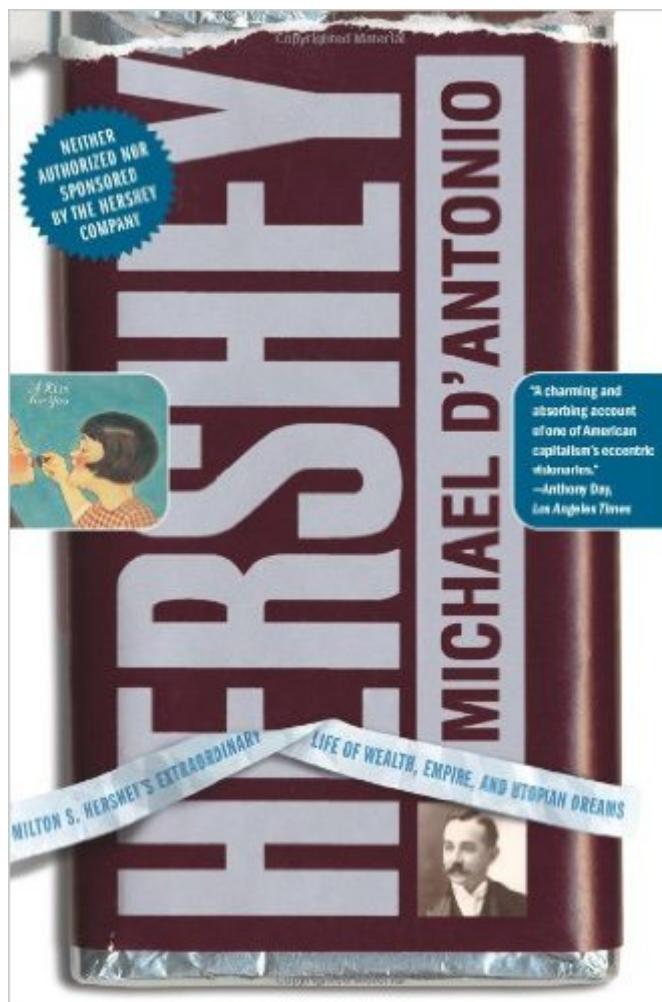


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Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life Of Wealth, Empire, And Utopian Dreams



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

Everyone knows Mr. Hershey for chocolate. Fewer people know that he secretly gave almost his entire fortune away 35 years before his death to provide perpetual support for an orphanage. He

then carefully oversaw that orphanage, which grew to 1,500 students and became the Milton Hershey School. He also established an orphanage of similar size in Cuba, where he had large investments in sugar operations. I found this book to be extremely well-researched and well-written. I have read 3 previous books and many articles on Mr. Hershey and this book covered many facets that were not previously reported. The author does an exemplary job of putting incidents in Mr. Hershey's life within a larger historical context. The author's main goal was to delve into Mr. Hershey's character and actions in a way that goes beyond the myths. In the process, he finds some faults (such as gambling and a temper), but this critical examination provides a much more refined picture of the man's greatness. As a result, we see that Mr. Hershey's accomplishments stand up to intensive scrutiny. The book describes a long rivalry between Mr. Hershey and William Wrigley. It started when Mr. Hershey thought that Wrigley had cheated him while they were gambling on an ocean liner. That spurred Mr. Hershey to enter the chewing gum business (which lost millions) and to almost buy the Philadelphia Phillies to compete with Wrigley's team. One item in the book that has gotten some unpleasant attention is a possibility that his wife had late stage syphilis. This discussion is only on one page out of a 300 page book. The author theorizes that the illness was without symptoms for many years after they met and was not contagious at that stage. The book reports that after a 1933 study predicted that the Trust would generate more income than MHS could spend, Mr. Hershey specifically changed the Deed of Trust to order the Managers to serve as many kids as the funds allow. The book tells a story about an incoming student to the orphanage in the 1930s, who enrolled at age 7 after his mother died. He said Mr. Hershey "was right there when I first arrived at the school and they were giving me my clothes. He put his arm around me and said, 'From now on, we'll take care of you. You're one of my boys.' " He said Mr. Hershey visited them every 2 weeks, and he remembers playing with Mr. Hershey in his car behind the steering wheel pretending to drive. The book also describes the controversy surrounding the then-proposed sale of the Hershey Company in late 2001 by the Trust that Mr. Hershey had established.

Teddy Roosevelt called them the "malefactors of great wealth", the Gilded Age magnates who controlled an overwhelming portion of commerce and didn't care much about who got hurt as they got rich. Milton S. Hershey had plenty of their characteristics. He was pushy, censorious, and irascible. He certainly did make his millions, and he certainly enjoyed them, but he did not neglect his workers. In *Hershey: Milton S. Hershey's Extraordinary Life of Wealth, Empire, and Utopian Dreams* (Simon and Schuster), Michael D'Antonio writes, "If it's a rule that behind every great

fortune lies a great crime, M. S. Hershey was the exception." Hershey was not without his flaws, and didn't treat everyone affably, and certainly might be accused of paternalism, but he was the "Good Millionaire", a unique entrepreneur who harnessed his own ambition and put it to higher purposes than greed or self-aggrandizement. Everyone knows Hershey Kisses and Hershey Bars; the wrapper of the bar is so familiar that it is parodied for the cover of this delightful book, forcing a legal decision that required a sticker be placed on it: "Neither authorized nor sponsored by the Hershey Company." The company need not have worried. Both Hershey and HersheyCo come off well. Hershey was born in 1857 on a Pennsylvania farm, but his family shifted around due to his improvident father's ways. His mother had ambitions for her son who started working in confections after leaving school at age twelve. His initial businesses failed, but he succeeded in caramels, which he worried were a fad. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he saw the German chocolate machines and realized that chocolate would be a staple of the candy business. When the exposition closed, he bought every one of the chocolate machines and had them shipped to what would become the town of Hershey, a planned town for workers that was far more successful than any similar schemes. Some citizens objected to having intrusive care taken of them, but as the town grew, the old man was regarded as a friendly father figure, one of them. He did lead a low-key life when he was in Hershey, but the townspeople didn't know much about how he spent when he went on vacation in Europe, or how much he enjoyed betting for high stakes at the casinos. Hershey wanted the town to support the company, and vice versa, but he had bigger ideas of service. He aimed for the profits from his corporation to go to his heirs in the school he had founded, whom he saw as the "little fellows" like he himself had been, with impoverished families, poor school habits, and poor prospects. "Obviously they were his sons," D'Antonio writes, "and he was giving them the stability, safety, and community he had missed as he followed his father and mother from place to place." The town of Hershey sold chocolates, but from the start also sold itself as a tourist destination, which it still is, since people are interested in walking on Chocolate Avenue and Cocoa Avenue, sniffing the chocolate-scented air, and seeing the lampposts that are shaped like Hershey's Kisses. The Milton Hershey School is the best endowed K-12 school in the nation (vastly exceeding the second-place, academically elite Phillips Exeter, and also exceeding most universities). It is now coed and is expanding to take in 2,000 boarding pupils. Hershey managed to change our candy habits forever, and to make his millions, but also to make his beneficial mark. As D'Antonio writes, after Andrew Carnegie died, no one ever asked, "What would Andrew Carnegie do?", and no one asked that about Vanderbilt or Henry Ford. But the question in Hershey's version is still pertinent in the mind of many who live in the town or work in the company, or who have graduated from the

school. They admire Milton Hershey, and feel that carrying out his wishes is still important for community good. Decades after Hershey's death, he is still exercising his power of benevolent control.

After reading most of what had been written about Milton Hershey, and after being a Hershey tour guide for nearly 20 years, I was thrilled to get my hands on the first scholarly biography of the America's most generous industrial barron. Even though young Milton could not be considered a "poor boy" in economic terms, he felt abandoned by his dreaming and adventurous father. Milton failed at school, farming, job training and self-employment...a typical looser. Yet he had an innate sense of optimism that kept him going: "If at first you don't succeed..." should be his epitaph. But orphan boys and girls are his real opus. After amassing over \$60 million he and his wife Catherine donated it all to the Hershey School for children from broken homes which still thrives today. M.S. Hershey's legacy is also found in the quaint and charming factory town with lights shaped like Hershey Kisses and people who admire their founder as if he were still alive. The combined Hershey Schools, Trust, and Companies are now worth over \$10 billion. However the real breakthrough in this new book is the amazing discovery and revelation about Catherine's illness and Milton's decade-long, worldwide search for a cure. A quest that sadly failed to save his beloved Kitty, but it cemented a beautiful and romantic relationship into a remarkable love story. I have always felt that this secret love story was at the hidden heart of the Hershey tale. In so many ways it was his failures that lead to his later successes. We all have our failings and sometimes crushing losses to add to our burdens. The Hershey story is an inspiration to all of us "losers". A big Thank You to Michael D'Antonio for doing all the work to bring this untold love story to light. Bill Reitter

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