



Colossus: The Turbulent, Thrilling Saga of the Building of Hoover Dam

By Michael Hiltzik

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As breathtaking today as when it was completed, Hoover Dam ranks among America's most awe-inspiring, if dubious, achievements. This epic story of the dam—from conception to design to construction—by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Los Angeles Times columnist Michael Hiltzik exposes the tremendous hardships and accomplishments of the men on the ground—and in the air—who built the dam and the demonic drive of Frank Crowe, the boss who pushed them beyond endurance. It is a tale of the tremendous will exerted from start to finish, detailing the canny backroom dealings by Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the herculean engineering challenges Crowe faced, and the terrific union strikes by the men who daily fought to beat back the Colorado River. Colossus tells an important part of the story of America's struggle to pull itself out of the Great Depression by harnessing the power of its population and its natural resources.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Fittingly, noted the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the history of Hoover Dam is "just as roiling and dirty as the silt-laden Colorado." Critics felt that what could have been a dry, technical story of the creation of the dam became, in Hiltzik's hands, a fascinating social, political, and labor history. Although Hiltzik spares readers few engineering details, he also looks closely at key political compromises and issues and captures the colorful personalities of the main players. He also offers new insight into the tragic worker deaths. A few reviewers commented that the book doesn't live up to the promise of its subtitle; that quibble notwithstanding, *Hoover Dam* is a standout popular history.

From [Booklist](#)

For his history of a famous piece of infrastructure, Hiltzik selects one without compare. Decked out in art deco, the Hoover Dam is a beautiful immensity that awes throngs of visitors, and it boasts a construction epic reflecting Depression-era America: the first to impound the Colorado River, the dam is both product and symbol of the politics of water rights in the American West. It is the 1920s iteration of the latter on which Hiltzik, a business writer for the Los Angeles Times, embarks in his fascinating account of the genesis of the Boulder Canyon Project, as the enabling congressional act called the yet-unnamed dam. Starting the story at the torrid desert job site, Hiltzik recounts the rigorous organization of the project by the contract-winning consortium and its engineering chief, Frank Crowe. If Crowe's solutions to technical problems were audaciously titanic, the labor practices of his bosses were pitiless. Strikes were crushed; slack safety resulted in numerous deaths; and a whites-only hiring policy prevailed. Astutely conveying the characters of its creators, Hiltzik marvelously captures the times of the Hoover Dam. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"Masterly. In the grand tradition of David McCullough, [Hiltzik] fixes the endeavor in its time and captures the personalities of the people involved. May inspire in readers a longing for something...that will summon up once again America's famous self-confidence and daring."--John Steele Gordon, "Wall Street Journal

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"[A] superb new history of the dam's conception, construction and legacy... And in Hiltzik's hands, it makes very good history, indeed." --"Cleveland Plain Dealer

"

"[COLOSSUS is a] detailed and vividly written study - destined to be the standard history for decades to come." --"Washington Post

"

"Fascinating. A construction epic..of a beautiful immensity, a piece of infrastructure without compare..reflecting Depression-era America [and] astutely conveying the characters of its creators. Hiltzik marvelously captures the times of the Hoover Dam." "-- Booklist

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"The parade of grim particulars might make "Colossus "a depressing read were it not for the vigor of Hiltzik's prose and the lively gallery of individual portraits and anecdotes that convey a wonderfully textured sense of what it was like to work on Hoover Dam."--"Los Angeles Times

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"Hiltzik tells the dam's tale well, with majestic sweep and a degree of detail that by rights ought to be numbing, but isn't; every iota of material fits snugly into the narrative, which, unlike the river, flows freely." --"San Francisco "Chronicle"

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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