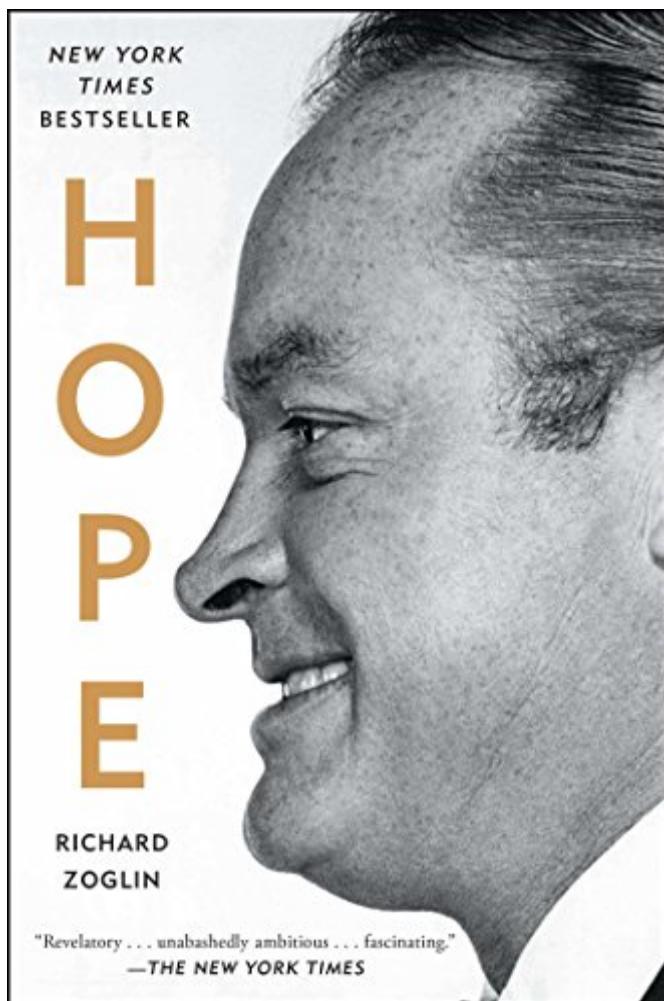


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Hope: Entertainer Of The Century



Synopsis

“Revelatory...fascinating” (The New York Times): The first definitive biography of Bob Hope, featuring exclusive and extensive reporting that makes the persuasive case that he was the most important entertainer of the twentieth century. With his topical jokes and his all-American, brash-but-cowardly screen character, Bob Hope was the only entertainer to achieve top-rated success in every major mass-entertainment medium of the century, from vaudeville in the 1920s all the way to television in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. He virtually invented modern stand-up comedy. Above all, he helped redefine the very notion of what it means to be a star: a savvy businessman, an enterprising builder of his own brand, and a public-spirited entertainer whose Christmas military tours and unflagging work for charity set the standard for public service in Hollywood. As Richard Zoglin shows in this “entertaining and important book” (The Wall Street Journal), there is still much to be learned about this most public of figures, from his secret first marriage and his stint in reform school, to his indiscriminate womanizing and his ambivalent relationships with Bing Crosby and Johnny Carson. Hope could be cold, self-centered, tight with a buck, and perhaps the least introspective man in Hollywood. But he was also a tireless worker, devoted to his fans, and generous with friends. “Scrupulously researched, likely definitive, and as entertaining and as important (to an understanding of twentieth- and twenty-first-century pop culture) as its subject once genuinely was” (Vanity Fair), Hope is both a celebration of the entertainer and a complex portrait of a gifted but flawed man. “A wonderful biography,” says Woody Allen. “For me, it’s a feast.”

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An extraordinary and well told story reaching back to the turn of the century. Author Zoglin's critical analysis of the artistic high and low points spanning vaudeville to movies to television adds great dimension to the tale. Time has obscured his groundbreaking contributions to modern comedy and the entertainment machinery which is now taken for granted. The balanced portrait of Hope as genius, philanthropist, egomaniac, family man, philanderer, investor and brave soldier rings true - despite the apparent contradictions. Those looking for consistency of character should look to a more simplistic and less authoritative source.

This is a very thorough biography that leaves virtually no stone unturned. For the most part, Bob Hope fans will find this book immensely interesting despite the fact that at times the facts of Hope's life is somewhat at odds with his public image that was carefully crafted. Like many things in Hollywood, public perception was paramount and Hope's image was a press agents dream, but not necessarily true or even reasonably accurate. For my part, I wasn't particularly surprised by many of the revelations contained in this book. If a sailor was entitled to a girl in every port, Hope had many girl friends through the decades while still remaining married to his publicly acknowledged wife Dolores. What this book will also tell you about is Hope's business savvy and how he became quite wealthy through real estate investments. Family life, career moves, his relationship with Bing Crosby, and his many missions to entertain the troops are also covered. Also a very early short lived marriage to a vaudeville partner go with the territory. The probably most interesting aspect of this book remains for me the research that delved into BH's family background and his life before and after the family came to America. The author used genealogical records and family recollections to reconstruct the problems the Hope family encountered stateside due to his father's chronic drinking. It also portrayed Hope's mother Avis Towne as a stoic and resourceful woman who managed to keep the family going under difficult circumstances. Avis, for what it is worth, could have been the subject of a book. Curiously, public record or the lack of it even results in some confusion as to

whether Hope was ever legally wed to wife Dolores. This book is so wide sweeping and interesting that it was difficult to put down. The story of Hope's life, as covered by Hope's biographer, is presented in a multi-faceted way that covers so much ground and is so revealing that it has wide based appeal to anyone who remembers BH and his very long career. Bright, witty, well-researched, and terribly engaging are all attributes that describe this book.

Long live, long book. I enjoyed Zoglin's HOPE, but by the end I thought that the book would have benefited by being shorter. Hope himself didn't change much for the last sixty years of his life. He loved the attention. Everything else was secondary, and that meant few friendships of lasting value. In that sense, given the swallowness of the man, he was perfect for TV.

Zoglin writes a brilliant, and thoroughly convincing, introduction that establishes Hope as one of the most remarkable men and the greatest comedian of the 20th century, yet the rest of the book is little more than a summary of his career accomplishments. Hope comes across as cold and an enigma because there has been no penetrating investigation into who the man was and what drove him. While it is true that most of Hope's friends are now gone, there should have been an archive of letters, and he could have talked to nieces, nephews of Hope's brothers as well as Hope's own children that could have helped to make the man flesh and blood. The author did talk to his daughter Linda, but she is really more a source of career events during his later decades than an insight into his character and what he was like when he was not a performer. There are enough facts in the book to know that Hope was a generous and caring son that spent a tremendous amount of his life making life better and happier for others by his years of entertaining US servicemen around the globe and countless charitable activities, yet we never get close to this man's heart.

Richard Zoglin is a senior editor at Time Magazine (translation he has time to write a biography of Bob Hope). Zoglin has been covering media for more than 20 years at Time and is old enough to have lived a good deal of Bob Hope's life. It shows. Zoglin understand the different media cultures that Hope transcended and/or survived. The biography is as much a cultural biography of the 30s in radio, wartime 40s when Hope created the pattern of his live entertainment shows first to troops and then on to post-war civilians and soldiers, into the TV era, and finally the "Hope stayed around too long" era. It is a prodigious trip and well written. The first half of the book includes more detail than I found necessary of the individual shows and programs that are the Hope playbill, but it is also a

valuable compendium of the prodigious level of performance this entertainer produced. I kept wishing for more personal insight into Hope, and Zoglin tries via access he acknowledges to family and colleagues. What emerges is an entertainer who all but invented today's stand-up comedy format, along with the variety show format that TV and the stage have left behind, but behind the entertainer: there isn't much there. Hope was neither intellect, nor reader. He was an incurious man apart from his micromanaging personality when it came to conducting his lucrative businesses and another invention: branding his personality. But lift the rug, and there is not that much there. It is hard to imagine anyone trying a more complete biography of this iconic American entertainer.

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