



## William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years, 1863-1910

By Ben Procter

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William Randolph Hearst was one of the most colorful and important figures of turn-of-the-century America, a man who changed the face of American journalism and whose influence extends to the present day. Now, in *William Randolph Hearst*, Ben Procter gives us the most authoritative account of Hearst's extraordinary career in newspapers and politics.

Born to great wealth--his father was a partial owner of four fabulously rich mines--Hearst began his career in his early twenties by revitalizing a rundown newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*. Hearst took what had been a relatively sedate form of communicating information and essentially created the modern tabloid, complete with outrageous headlines, human interest stories, star columnists, comic strips, wide photo coverage, and crusading zeal. His papers fairly bristled with life. By 1910 he had built a newspaper empire--eight papers and two magazines read by nearly three million people. Hearst did much to create "yellow journalism"--with the emphasis on sensationalism and the lowering of journalistic standards. But Procter shows that Hearst's papers were also challenging and innovative and powerful: They exposed corruption, advocated progressive reforms, strongly supported recent immigrants, became a force in the Democratic Party, and helped ignite the Spanish-American War. Procter vividly depicts Hearst's own political career from his 1902 election to Congress to his presidential campaign in 1904 and his bitter defeats in New York's Mayoral and Gubernatorial races.

Written with a broad narrative sweep and based on previously unavailable letters and manuscripts, *William Randolph Hearst* illuminates the character and era of the man who left an indelible mark on American journalism.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst has fascinated multiple previous writers of biography. He was influential, charismatic and lived opulently. Procter, a Texas Christian Univ. history professor, caught the Hearst biography bug in 1966, 15 years after the tycoon's death. By then, a big-selling Hearst biography, by W. A. Swanberg, seemed to have the topic locked up. But Procter knew that new information awaited in Hearst papers flowing into the University of California library. The project gestated in Procter's mind until 1981, when he began research in earnest. By then, other Hearst biographies had been published. Would Procter find anything new to say? Seventeen years later, the answer is clear: Yes. Previous biographies have given short shrift to Hearst's stormy academic career, his unexpected entry into the newspaper business and the thought behind his new style of tabloid journalism. Procter, a skillful researcher, has written a work of historiography embedded in the biography. Over and over, he points out the factual and interpretive mistakes of previous Hearst biographers, including the legendary Swanberg. Procter says he is planning a second volume, presumably covering the final 40 years of Hearst's life, years filled with movie star liaisons, life in the castle at San Simeon and the development of a true media empire. Judging by this detail-packed, competently written volume, the follow-up ought to be worth waiting for.

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From [Booklist](#)

Drawing on new archival material released by the Hearst family, as well as previous biographies, Procter has concentrated on William Randolph Hearst's early career as a molder of public opinion and spokesman for progressive causes. Though Hearst newspapers pioneered marketing techniques that vastly increased subscription and advertisements, it is for yellow journalism (or new journalism, as Hearst preferred to call it) and his role in fanning the flames of the Spanish-American War that Hearst is best remembered. Procter carefully examines that role, not merely in terms of Hearst's newspaper rivalry with Joseph Pulitzer but also in light of Hearst's expanding political consciousness, and that of the American people as a whole. The most fascinating sections deal with Hearst's various political campaigns in the first decade of this century: he ran for the Democratic nomination for president, mayor of New York City, and governor and lieutenant governor of New York. For Hearst, these campaigns were really a slow, expensive march toward disillusionment with politics and progressivism, as he was rebuffed each time by the people to whom he pandered. *Frank Caso*

From Kirkus Reviews

An intensely detailed but still superficial chronicle of the media baron's life through early middle age. Hearst newspapers didn't tell the news; they used it as a means for conveying a point of view. When the news did not fit the mold Hearst envisioned, he and his minions reshaped it until it did. Procter (History/Texas Christian Univ.) tells this part of Hearst's story extremely well. Hearst revolutionized journalism by demonstrating how powerful it could be as a means to an end, with making money far less important than promoting Hearst's political causes and aspirations, and vilifying those who opposed them. Contrary to Hearst's popular image, the causes he relentlessly promoted when he was first building his empire were remarkably progressive: an eight-hour day, utility and railroad regulation, the right to organize. Muckraking works like Sinclair Lewis's *The Jungle* were serialized in Hearst papers, and Tammany Hall, scared that Hearst would end corruption if he became mayor of New York, blatantly stole the election. Procter worked hard on this book, reading, he says, every issue of such Hearst newspapers as the *New York Journal* (later the *New York American*) and the *San Francisco Examiner* over several years. But just as Hearst newspapers often revealed little of the facts beneath the hype, Procter reveals too little of the man who orchestrated the

show. We have no idea, for example, whether Hearst pursued progressive causes out of true conviction or as a means of mobilizing America's burgeoning urban working class as readers of his newspapers and soldiers marching behind his banner. One fears that the promised second volume will be as frustrating as the first that we will learn as little about why Hearst swung so sharply to the right in his later years as we do about why he was so progressive early on. Procter's biography, like the Hearst newspapers of the period he chronicles, is great reading, but too much on the surface, shedding too little light on the realities underneath. (20 b&w photos, not seen) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

## **Users Review**

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