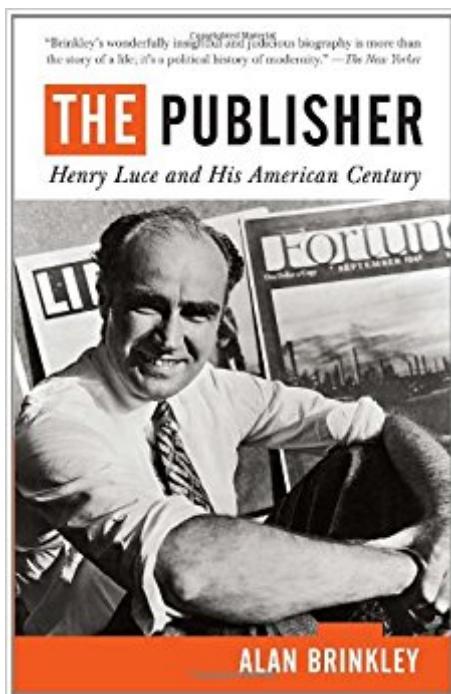


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# The Publisher: Henry Luce And His American Century



## Synopsis

Acclaimed historian Alan Brinkley gives us a sharply realized portrait of Henry Luce, arguably the most important publisher of the twentieth century. As the founder of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* magazines, Luce changed the way we consume news and the way we understand our world. Born the son of missionaries, Henry Luce spent his childhood in rural China, yet he glimpsed a milieu of power altogether different at Hotchkiss and later at Yale. While working at a Baltimore newspaper, he and Brit Hadden conceived the idea of *Time*: a news-magazine that would condense the week's events in a format accessible to increasingly busy members of the middle class. They launched it in 1923, and young Luce quickly became a publishing titan. In 1936, after *Time*'s unexpected success and Hadden's early death, Luce published the first issue of *Life*, to which millions soon subscribed. Brinkley shows how Luce reinvented the magazine industry in just a decade. The appeal of *Life* seemingly cut across the lines of race, class, and gender. Luce himself wielded influence hitherto unknown among journalists. By the early 1940s, he had come to see his magazines as vehicles to advocate for America's involvement in the escalating international crisis, in the process popularizing the phrase "World War II." In spite of Luce's great success, happiness eluded him. His second marriage to the glamorous playwright, politician, and diplomat Clare Boothe was a shambles. Luce spent his later years in isolation, consumed at times with conspiracy theories and peculiar vendettas. The Publisher tells a great American story of spectacular achievement yet it never loses sight of the public and private costs at which that achievement came.

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The magazines Henry Luce and Time Inc. launched have become institutions, but as Brinkley's magisterial biography reminds us, Luce was only 24 years old when he published the first issue of Time at the tail end of a recession in 1923 "not much different from today's digital media entrepreneurs. (Brinkley also details the role of Brit Hadden, Luce's friendly rival at Hotchkiss and Yale and eventual business partner, in making the magazine a success.) Those around Luce frequently described him as arrogant, and his intense sense of purpose increasingly played out in the pages of his magazines, like his insistence (despite numerous warnings from observers on the front lines) on supporting Chiang Kai-shek as a counter to the rise of communism in China. Brinkley appears to have read every issue from the early decades of Time, Fortune, and Life cover to cover, grounding his criticisms of Luce's social and political vision in rigorous detail. He's equally solid on Luce's personal life, including his early years as the son of Christian missionaries in China and his whirlwind courtship of (and rocky marriage to) Clare Boothe Luce. A top-notch biography, and a valuable addition to the history of American media. (Apr. 22) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Invariably drawing comparisons with the political slant of his subject's magazines, reviewers praised Alan Brinkley's evenhandedness in *The Publisher*. They portrayed the book as an antidote not only to earlier, more negative biographies but to a generation that cannot comprehend the influence once held by Time brethren, especially in this age of digital information. Above all, critics praised Brinkley's feel for the particular prose style of Luce and his magazines, which gave birth to many an expression now considered cliché. A few reviewers commented that while the book is extraordinarily well researched, Brinkley still holds his subject at arm's length. Then again, for a man of such public titanic proportions, he remained a lonely, private man. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is biography as it should be: - the story of an important American written beautifully, objectively and with interest understanding and sympathy by one of America's leading historians. To those readers to whom Henry R. Luce and Time, Life, Fortune and Sports Illustrated were not part of daily life in the twentieth century this superb biography may come off as interesting history. However, to

those of us to whom these magazines were weekly reading during those times it's a trip into the past. The Great Depression, World War II, the Truman years, Eisenhower, the Rise of the Middle Class, The American Century, the "Loss" of China, The Vietnam War and its aftermath were all reported by and pictured in these magazines through the mind and eye of their publisher - Henry R. Luce (1898-1967), the ambitious, bright, driven son of Presbyterian Missionaries in China who, although a bit of a prig and never comfortable with himself, brought his view of the American experience to the American people through the pages of these publications which were his - and his alone - with a missionary zeal and a brilliance unmatched in the media world by any one before or since. Alan Brinkley has beautifully and accurately recounted these years and Henry Luce's experience for us in this absolutely stunning and very readable biography where we get to know Luce who at 23 was already a skilled writer and was fathering Time along with his school chum Britton Hadden. Then we follow his career, his personal life with its many disappointments (including a disastrous and lengthy marriage to a dysfunctional and slightly goofy Clare Booth Luce) and his business life, his huge success, his enormous influence and his immense wealth. And at the end you have to wonder. If you were in Luce's shoes and having lived his life as he did would you say that it had been worth it? I felt sorry for him. But read the book. That's worth it.

Diligent, intelligent, insecure, overachieving media tycoon Henry R. Luce, known best as the co-founder of TIME and founder of LIFE and FORTUNE, was one of the looming figures of his era--the mid-20th century. A controversial magazine king in an era when magazines were king, he is, nearly 45 years after his death, now a fit subject for historians. And by Columbia history professor Joel Brinkley, he is well served. Prof. Brinkley tells his story well. He skillfully segues from the personal--Luce's childhood in China, and his youth at Hotchkiss and Yale--to the political as Luce becomes ever more powerful and famous. Three sections of the book (there are no dull ones) are especially sharp: the first is the author's depiction of Luce's collaboration with his frenemy Brit Hadden to found TIME. We of course know he succeeded, but the author builds up quite a bit of suspense nevertheless, as at the beginning the two young men are desperately short of funds. The second sequence of note would be the tale of Luce's struggle to launch LIFE, which paradoxically almost failed because of its success--advertisers had paid for a far smaller circulation than the magazine achieved. And the third deals with Luce's denial that one of his idols, Nationalist Chinese dictator Chiang Kai-shek, could possibly lose his civil war with Mao Zedong. Prof. Brinkley notes that even after Chiang had fled with his remaining forces to Formosa (as Taiwan was then known) Luce was advocating that the Korean War be used as a springboard for his return to the

mainland. Luce was involved with many controversies in his day (e.g., Whittaker Chambers, who would accuse Alger Hiss of spying worked for TIME); he loved to give unsolicited advice to the great (advice that frequently went heeded); and he was often accused, especially by the left, of slanting his publications to reflect his opinions. (In the author's telling, Luce's TIME played a major role in the creation of Wendell Willkie's 1940 presidential candidacy.) To more than some extent this was true. But as Prof. Brinkley notes in the epilogue, Luce's "most important legacy remains his role in the creation of new forms of information and communications at a moment in history when media were rapidly expanding. His magazines were always the most important of his achievements." But, ironically, the professor then goes on to note that "while his company survives still . . . little remains of the goals and principles he established for it." Notes and asides: Surely a movie can and hopefully will be made of Luce's life, with this book serving as the source material. One would hope the lead role would go to a cinemactor who could instill the role with the proper level of intelligent pomposity.

It is hard to imagine in these days of the internet that news magazines were once a national center of information, but so it was in the age of Time, Life and other magazines created by the absorbing mind of its publisher, Henry Luce. For four decades Luce was both a contributor and a manipulator of public opinion... a man whose corporate triumphs were often matched by personal disappointments. It is said that Henry Luce had many friendships but few friends and Alan Brinkley brilliantly co-ordinates the two aspects of Luce's life. This is a biography that works extremely well on parallel levels. The author's narrative, steady and telling, begins with Luce's life as the son of a missionary in China and sweeps us into his American education leading to the founding of Time magazine in 1923. Brinkley outlines the ideas behind future publications well...the advent of Fortune, Life and Sports Illustrated...all with the company ups and downs of start-up publications. Luce's attempts to sway his magazines (especially Time) toward his own conservative views are nicely documented in "The Publisher". The reader learns much about Luce's loathing of Roosevelt and Truman and his close, if not overly-admiring, friendship with Eisenhower. Brinkley is quick to remind us that although Luce was a politically robust conservative, he was liberal on social matters...especially civil rights. The emotion and color enter this book while describing Luce's personal life. His marriage to Clare Boothe was fraught with internal upheavals as he fought to keep some semblance of their marriage together (even through their mutual discussions of divorce) meanwhile carrying on more than one affair. If few ever got personally close to Luce, Brinkley gets us as close as one can. "The Publisher" is a terrific book about one of the chief shapers of opinion of the early and mid-twentieth century. It is an engrossing and revealing account of Henry Luce's life.

and I highly recommend it.

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