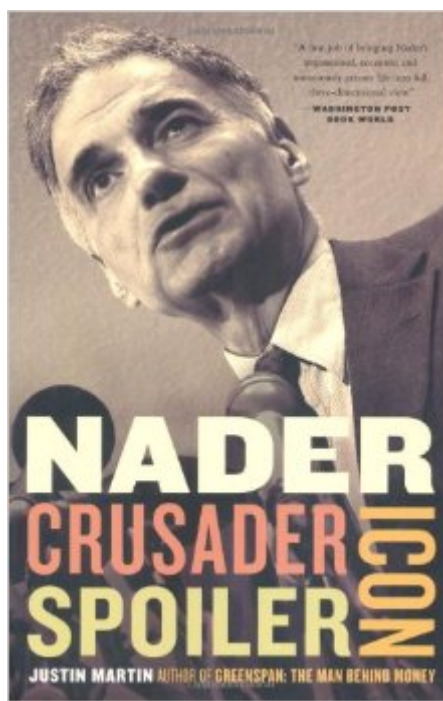


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Nader: Crusader, Spoiler, Icon



Synopsis

As a public figure, Ralph Nader is virtually without parallel, playing a lead role on the national stage for nearly four decades. Since the time he rattled the automotive industry with *Unsafe at Any Speed*, Nader has played David to a series of formidable Goliaths-General Motors, Microsoft, the pharmaceutical and auto insurance industries-until 2000 when he took on both major party political candidates. In this last campaign he managed to skew the election while endangering the very causes he had spent his life espousing. The mystery and controversy surrounding him will draw readers to this revealing portrait.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ralph Nader is arguably one of the most fascinating (and polarizing) figures on the American scene. He's been in the public eye for nearly four decades, and has along the way attracted intense loyalty but also intense fury, especially after running a presidential campaign two years ago that split the political left right down the middle. Nader is nothing if not a tightly wrapped bundle of contradictions, all of which simply makes him so intriguing. The public Nader is well known, but the private Ralph is exactly that, very private. Which naturally causes someone like me to ask the question: just what makes this guy tick? In truth, we'll probably never know the whole Nader, which only makes a biography such as this all the more interesting. The author had thorough access to both Nader himself as well as lots of his allies, ex-allies, family members and others who were associated with or interacted with him over the years, yet, despite all this, the author, at the end of the day, seems to find the man as much an enigma as when he started this project. The reader is left to read between

the lines and in the process form his own conclusions. And my own go along the following: first, it's my theory that Nader is hard to peg down because he is a leading member of a group that's never been formally identified, a group I'll call Political Fundamentalists. Much like their counterparts on the Right (the Religious Fundamentalists), the Political Fundamentalists possess an overwhelming sense of the rightness of their ideology. They are, in this world of all-around relativism, political True Believers for whom terms like "negotiate" and "give and take" simply don't exist in their lexicon and "compromise" is a dirty word.

Nader has an incredible life story that would probably make for an excellent movie or biography. However, this book does a lackluster job spinning Nader's story into an engaging narrative. Most of the chapters follow the same boring pattern: Nader identified issue X, Nader decided to start a nonprofit to combat issue X, Nader tapped John Doe to lead the nonprofit, and the nonprofit did or did not succeed in getting a law passed. It became repetitious and dull very quickly, and the best parts occurred when the author deviated from this formula and mentioned more specific details. For example, at one point Nader was incredibly close to getting a bill passed to create a Consumer Protection Agency, yet he inexplicably began criticizing the Congressman who had championed the bill by saying he had gutted it. This led to a permanent rift and did damage to Nader's cause, and it had me scratching my head as to what Nader was thinking. Was Nader right in that the bill had been effectively gutted? Or was Nader upset for other reasons? I don't know, because the author doesn't tell us. This is the kind of detail I'm looking for in a book like this-- if I wanted to simply read a laundry-list of organizations started by Nader, I could simply look him up in an encyclopedia. Even so, Nader's life has been so full of activity that I felt compelled to finish the book despite the fact that the author's style quite frequently put me to sleep. Oftentimes I fell asleep with the book in my lap and wondered why I was wasting my life reading it, until I remembered that Nader had accomplished more in his lifetime than pretty much anyone I have ever met. Didn't this guy ever get tired?

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