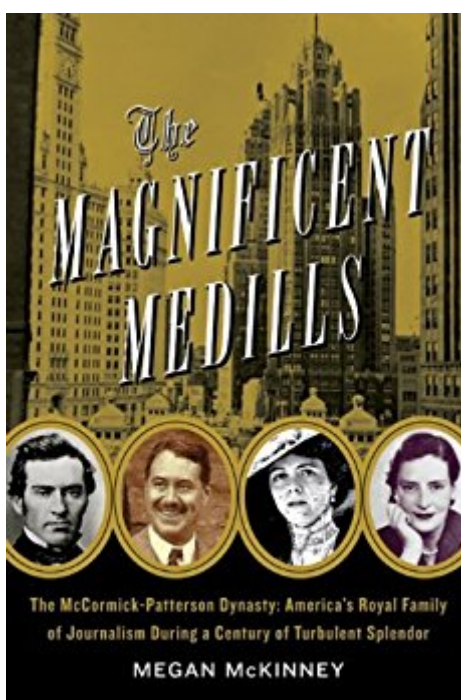


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# The Magnificent Medills: America's Royal Family Of Journalism During A Century Of Turbulent Splendor



## Synopsis

The riveting story of the country's first media dynasty, the Medills of Chicago, whose power and influence shaped the story of America and American journalism for four generations. When thirty-two-year-old former lawyer Joseph Medill bought a controlling stake in the bankrupt Chicago Daily Tribune in 1855, he had no way of foreseeing the unparalleled influence he and his progeny would have on the world of journalism and on American society at large. Medill personally influenced the political tide that transformed America during the midnineteenth century by fostering the Republican Party, engineering the election of Abraham Lincoln and serving as a catalyst for the outbreak of the Civil War. The dynasty he established, filled with colorful characters, went on to take American journalism by storm. His grandson, Colonel Robert R. McCormick, personified Chicago, as well as its great newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, throughout much of the twentieth century. Robert's cousin, Joseph Medill Patterson, started the New York Daily News, and Joe's sister, Cissy Patterson, was the innovative editor of the Washington Times-Herald. In the fourth generation, Alicia Patterson founded Long Island's Newsday, the most stunning journalistic accomplishment of post-World War II America. Printer's ink raged in the veins of the Medills, the McCormicks and the Pattersons throughout a century, and their legacy prevailed for another five decades—always in the forefront of events, shaping the intellectual and social pulse of America. At the same time, the dark side of the intellectual stardom driving the dynasty was a destructive compulsion that left clan members crippled by their personal demons of chronic depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and even madness and suicide. Rife with authentic conversations and riveting quotes, *The Magnificent Medills* is the premiere cultural history of America's first media empire. This dynamic family and their brilliance, eccentricities and ultimate self-destruction are explored in a sweeping narrative that interweaves the family's personal activities and public achievements against a larger historical background. Authoritative, compelling and thoroughly engaging, *The Magnificent Medills* brings the pages of history that the Medills wrote vividly to life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A great look at the lives of one of the greatest newspaper dynasties ever. Awesome abilities, fabulously wealthy and powerful, but lived very messy lives.

Chicago and the Medills were interesting liked it

This is a fast pace history of the newspaper business and a biography of America's leading newspaper family with fascinating characters. I really enjoyed all the Chicago connections

This book came along at just the right time, when the newspaper business is floundering and we risk forgetting what a glorious history it had during America's rise to a world power. McKinney's focus is on the people in one newspaper family, but we learn much about the rise of American journalism along the way. The book is well written and at times it waxes lyrical, as when McKinney describes Katherine Patrick's first pregnancy in 1853: "With the progression of winter months into spring, the waist of her long full skirt inched higher until the end of June and her retirement from journalism." This is the kind of prose that brings a smile to the reader's face. Much of the book is devoted to the rivalry between two sisters, "Nellie" and "Kate," that colored generations of lives and relationships in this boisterous, talented and often dysfunctional family. Their ambition drove the

family business forward, even as it revealed and created significant fractures in the lives of their descendants. The family was far from monolithic in its politics, with one scion openly Socialist and others extremely conservative. Relative competed against relative, sometimes helping others, sometimes stymying them. Another large theme of this work is the huge role that marriages (for better or worse) played in the lifestyle and careers of the Medill/Patterson/McCormick family. None was more disastrous than the brief marriage of Eleanor Medill Patterson ("Cissy"), a privileged but rebellious child who married a Polish aristocrat, Count Josef Gizycki. McKinney's description of the impression that Old World court splendor and prestige made on young Cissy is fascinating, and her description of the primitive and harsh circumstances in which Cissy found herself after her marriage reads like a Gothic novel. We are reminded of the sheer range of possibilities, both positive and negative, that the wealth and power of this family opened up for its members. We also learn of the brutal and bitter newspaper circulation wars, which at times descended into gangland-style violence and intimidation. The book does not spend a lot of time on the technical aspects of the newspaper business, but does cover political issues. I was amazed to learn, for example, that Roosevelt was so irked by columnist John O'Donnell's criticisms of United States participation in World War II that in 1942 he mailed O'Donnell a Nazi Iron Cross. This kind of larger-than-life behavior colors many of the accounts in this book.

The story of the rise and fall of a family of newspaper publishers. The typical American history of various immigrants arriving in America and making it big by the third generation. This family composed of Medills, Patersons, McCormicks and many others (through inter-marriage) is an interesting description of the rise of the modern-day newspaper industry. There are also many interesting references and connections to the unique William Randolph Hearst. Along with that interesting history, is told the tale of one family and its rise and downwards progression. As with all of the great innovators and robber barons of the 19th and early 20th century, this family had its stars, but also its share of under-achievers, spoiled and emotionally-deprived heirs and heiresses. Divorces, European royalty suicides, extreme infidelity - it is all there. The lives of famous movie stars and personalities of the time are also to be found among these pages. The "Hope" diamond and its morphine-addled owner, also the owner of the Washington Post leads to the Meyer-era Post, and then progresses to the Graham-era and the famous Katherine. The book is slightly lacking in the impetus so needed to motivate the reader. However, it is still an interesting read. It is filled with previously unrevealed facts and tid-bits about the newspaper world and those behind the printed word.

Despite the fact that much of the material was familiar to me, I still enjoyed reading this book immensely. I had previously read about the career of Robert R. McCormick, but Megan McKinney supplied much needed information explaining about the complex family relationships that made "the Colonel" the sui generis individual that dominated the field of newspaper publishing in Chicago. I was aware of the fact that McCormick had a difficult childhood spent apart from his distant parents, an ineffectual father and an indifferent and difficult mother, in American and English boarding schools, but this book detailed how arduous his formative years actually were. More importantly, McKinney examines the lives of McCormick's grandparents and his cousins, Joe Patterson and Cissy Patterson, both of whom had extensive newspaper careers of their own, as well as various and sundry nieces and nephews. Joe Patterson was as liberal as his cousin was conservative and went East to establish the "New York Daily News," which was a most successful tabloid. Cissy ran a former Washington newspaper that was ultimately purchased by a competitor. Two nieces also were active in journalistic circles as well. Richard Norton Smith's biography of McCormick spent more time on the Chicago competition between the "Tribune" and Frank Knox's "Daily News," but McKinney provided a bit more information about how William Randolph Hearst acted as a competitor, both in Chicago and in New York, and his role in Cissy Patterson's career in Washington. When Hearst was in financial peril, Marion Davies and Cissy helped him through the crisis and Hearst did not become insolvent. The presentation of the historical material in this book was brisk and the author frequently resorted to making general summaries of events, but, by and large, this was acceptable. I read an uncorrected proof copy of the text and, apart from typographical errors, there were only a few minor factual errors: Waukegan is not located in Wisconsin (it is in Lake County, Illinois); "Big Bill" Thompson was not elected mayor five times (he did wage five mayoral campaigns and was elected three times); and the length of the Chicago mayoral term was four years while Thompson in office. I wish that the book had been illustrated with photos, but I am sure that the first edition will remedy that omission and have pictures. All and all, this was a satisfying read.

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