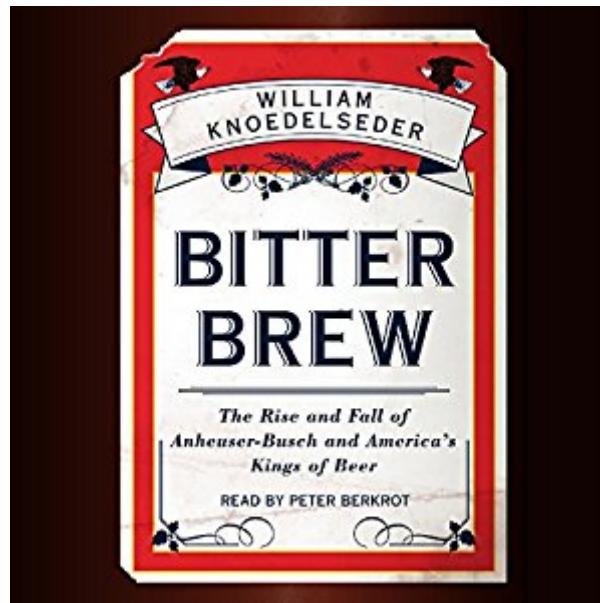




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Bitter Brew: The Rise And Fall Of Anheuser-Busch And America's Kings Of Beer



Synopsis

The engrossing, often scandalous saga of one of the wealthiest, longest-lasting, and most colorful family dynasties in the history of American commerce - a cautionary tale about prosperity, profligacy, hubris, and the blessings and dark consequences of success. From countless bar signs, stadium scoreboards, magazine ads, TV commercials, and roadside billboards, the name Budweiser has been burned into the American consciousness as the "King of Beers". Over a span of more than a century, the company behind it, Anheuser-Busch, has attained legendary status. A jewel of the American Industrial Revolution, in the hands of its founders - the sometimes reckless and always boisterous Busch family of St. Louis, Missouri - it grew into one of the most fearsome marketing machines in modern times. In *Bitter Brew*, critically acclaimed journalist Knoedelseder paints a fascinating portrait of immense wealth and power accompanied by a barrelful of scandal, heartbreak, tragedy, and untimely death. This engrossing, vivid narrative captures the Busch saga through five generations. At the same time, it weaves a broader story of American progress and decline over the past 150 years. It's a cautionary tale of prosperity, hubris, and loss.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book, at one level, traces the evolution of Anheuser Busch as it grew--and as it was taken over. A part of this picture is the Busch's who assumed leadership--their strengths and weaknesses. Tracing the leadership over time--Adolphus Busch (whose wife was an Anheuser), August Busch, August Busch Jr. (Gussie), August Busch III, and--finally--August Busch IV. The

business began after the Busch family moved to the United States from their homeland, one of many Germans coming to the United States. They joined other Germans in producing their German beer after immigrating into the United States--Pabst, Schlitz, Blatz, and so on. The Busch's were almost religious in sticking with their brewing approach, using pure products (as best they could) and taking a longer time than others did with their brewing process. The company took off under August and continued to grow with August, Jr. The latter, often called Gussie, became enamored of nonbeer enterprises, such as the origins of Busch Gardens and developing his homestead (which contained Ulysses Grant's "Hardscrabble" farm. He also became interested in baseball, and purchased the St. Louis Cardinals. As he got older, his leadership became less focused. His son, August III, led the overthrow of his father and became the head of the company. He was hard driving and led the company into a dominant position in the American market. After he retired as active leader of the company, his son, August IV, took over leadership. And an awful choice it was. He drank too much, used drugs, and had little of the clear sense of mission that his father did. In the end, the company became vulnerable and was acquired by InBev. Anheuser Busch disappeared as an independent entity. The book also addresses the evolution of the beer industry in the United States. The original major companies were the Milwaukee businesses (e.g., Schlitz and Pabst) and the St. Louis Anheuser Busch. Over time, Miller emerged as a key competitor. Schlitz, at one point, was a rising competitor--but changed the formula for the beer to save money in production. What a sad tale of a major company dropping out as a player because of one poor decision. All in all, a fine book on beer with a focus on Anheuser Busch.

Excellent book, with far more sources than the earlier *DETHRONING THE KING* (see my review), which better covered the financial aspects. Say what you want about the arrogance of the Busch family. August III accomplished pretty much everything he set out to do when he took control from his aging and out-of-touch father, August Bush, Jr., in 1974; fighting off the Phillip-Morris/Miller challenge, and achieving a U.S. market-share-growth from the low 20% to over 50%. August III didn't take prisoners. We all knew success was richly-rewarded, but one screw-up and we were out. Anyone who didn't know Anheuser-Busch Co. was dominated by a locker-room mentality simply wasn't paying attention. For all his bullying, August demanded as much of himself as any of his executives. In doing so his unrelenting focus on the U.S. market blinded him to the worldwide changes, just as August, Jr., "Gussie," had lost touch with changes in his time. What August III did to Denny Long and Jetty Ritter was unforgivable. Denny's story alone would be far more interesting. August IV was a self-indulgent, drug-abusing, world-class screw-up - a Midas in reverse. I believe

August III came to appreciate both his son's shortcomings and his company's vulnerabilities far too late to do anything about it, held out for the highest price, and cashed in his chips. The greater story is one of arrogance; arrogance of wealth, arrogance from political-power. The Founders hoped in their drafting of a Constitution and Bill of Rights to place limits on excessive political power. While the record of the U.S. is far from perfect, we haven't experienced many of the excesses of the larger world; in which government-genocides murdered over 165-million unarmed civilians in the 20th century alone - 5-times more than the deaths of all armed-combatants in all the wars of that century. As for the power of wealth, the free market as defined by Adam Smith, et al, to the extent we permit it to fairly function, does not eliminate excessive power. But at least it limits excesses in the long run. The Busch family ran a great game for five generations. But they abused their power and it brought U.S. ownership to an end. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

I grew up in this era and spent my summers around St. Louis. I have been to the gardens many times and my favorite thing in the world is Clydesdale horses! My home town was 4-5 miles from Pasadena. New Years eve we brought our sleeping bags and marked our territory for the Rose Parade the next day. All I really wanted to see was the wagon and Clydesdale's, when they went by the parade was over for me!! I had been wondering just what happened with the family's and the brewery. So sad to have to see the end of this era, it was such a sense of pride to all the people of St. Louis. Thanks for all the information.....

This is a real page-turner if you like to read business histories as I do. What happened to AB has happened many times before with family owned, then public company but still family controlled, to the demise of greatness (usually)--hostile take-over. There can only be one primary goal in any endeavor by definition. And when product quality becomes secondary to profit, you know the lawyers and accountants have taken over. But beyond the business side of the book, there is the drama of the Busch family, from the first industrious generations to the last dissipated one. At this level, only a few mistakes can mean doom to a family controlled business. And the few that were made were big ones. You won't be able to stop reading this until you reach the end.

An enjoyable look at one of America's first families. While it primarily deals with the patriarchs it still give plenty of good information. Being a former resident of St Louis I like many others have my AB stories. If you enjoyed this book I would recommend you read Under the Influence as well. That book is more dates than this one.

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