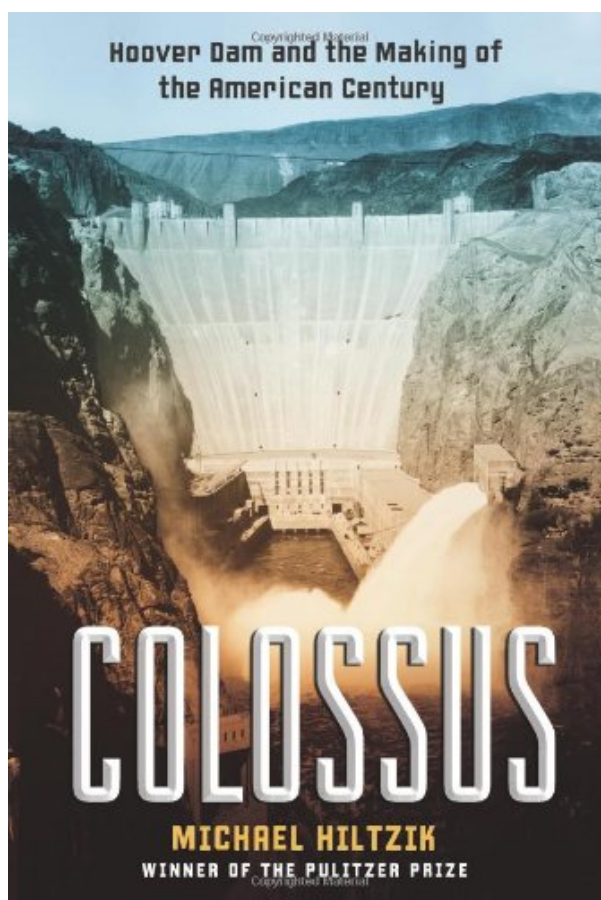
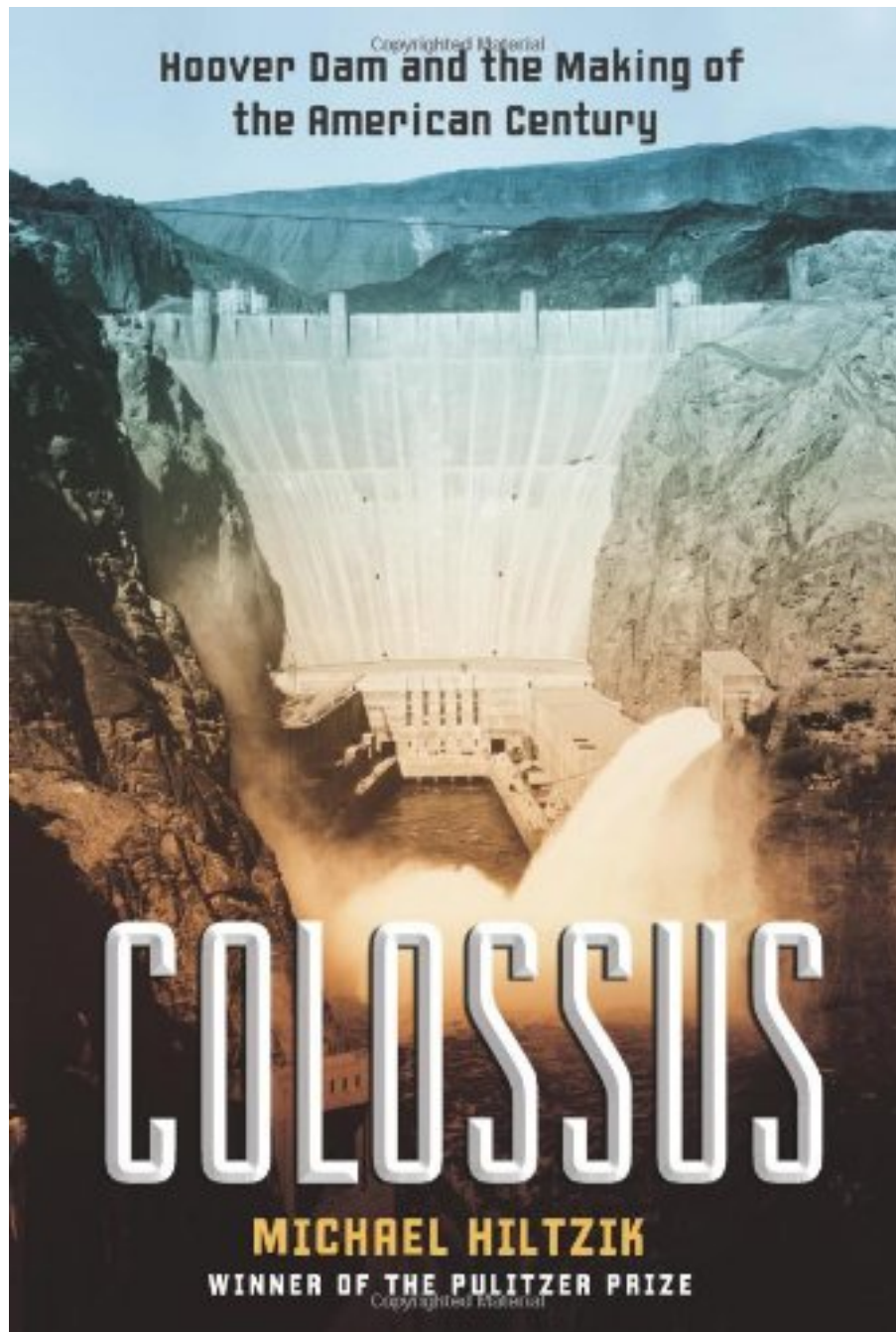


COLOSSUS: HOOVER DAM AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY BY MICHAEL HILTZIK



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As breathtaking today as the day it was completed, Hoover Dam not only shaped the American West but helped launch the American century. In the depths of the Great Depression it became a symbol of American resilience and ingenuity in the face of crisis, putting thousands of men to work in a remote desert canyon and bringing unruly nature to heel.

Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Michael Hiltzik uses the saga of the dam's conception, design, and construction to tell the broader story of America's efforts to come to grips with titanic social, economic, and natural forces. For embodied in the dam's striking machine-age form is the fundamental transformation the Depression wrought in the nation's very culture—the shift from the concept of rugged individualism rooted in the frontier days of the nineteenth century to the principle of shared enterprise and communal support that would build the America we know today. In the process, the unprecedented effort to corral the raging Colorado River evolved from a regional construction project launched by a Republican president into the New Deal's outstanding—and enduring—symbol of national pride.

Yet the story of Hoover Dam has a darker side. Its construction was a gargantuan engineering feat achieved at great human cost, its progress marred by the abuse of a desperate labor force. The water and power it made available spurred the development of such great western metropolises as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, and San Diego, but the vision of unlimited growth held dear by its designers and builders is fast turning into a mirage.

In Hiltzik's hands, the players in this epic historical tale spring vividly to life: President Theodore Roosevelt, who conceived the project; William Mulholland, Southern California's great builder of water works, who urged the dam upon a reluctant Congress; Herbert Hoover, who gave the dam his name though he initially opposed its construction; Frank Crowe, the dam's renowned master builder, who pushed his men mercilessly to raise the beautiful concrete rampart in an inhospitable desert gorge. Finally there is Franklin Roosevelt, who presided over the ultimate completion of the project and claimed the credit for it. Hiltzik combines exhaustive research, trenchant observation, and unforgettable storytelling to shed new light on a major turning point of twentieth-century history.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Great story

By L. Humphrey

I really enjoyed this book. Well written and easy to read. I found out I was related to one of the characters mentioned early in the book!

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

The title says it all!

By Jim

This is a great read, though it is long and not what I would call a summer read. The book does a excellent job on the construction of Hoover/Boulder Dam, describing in great detail of the tough conditions the workers had to face, not only from the construction but also that of mother nature and the depression of the 30's.

A good amount of the book also goes into the history of the Colorado River as the U.S. spread westward. Also on the politics and egos of the men involved with the wonder of the Modern World.

Just like the title says, Hoover Dam is a Colossus and was instrumental in making the U.S. what it become in the 20Th century.

I highly recommend this book

Jim

15 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Where are the engineers?

By Camber

"Colossus" is a colossally long book. It goes into extensive and vivid detail in the following areas:

* The political and social context of the times, giving us a good sense of what life was like in America before and during the Great Depression

* The early visions for the project, based on a desire to tame the Colorado River's flooding, and use its water for agriculture and hydropower

* The political battles involved in making the project possible, including nearly failed negotiations over water rights among the affected Western states

* The business aspects of bidding and completing the project, including succeeding in extracting profit from every possible avenue

* The extremely difficult, and sometimes fatal, working and living conditions of the laborers who built the

dam and their families, including life in Boulder City

To my surprise, the book falls short in describing the construction of the dam itself. Of course, information on construction is provided, but not nearly as much as I think is needed and appropriate for a book of this length.

But even more egregious, there's almost no information on the engineering design of the project. The author almost makes it sound like the design of Hoover Dam was a minor task which was completed quickly, with the real "engineering" of the project being completed during construction. As an award-winning dam engineer myself, I can assure you that this is completely false and misleading. The design of the dam was a huge and vital undertaking, at least as important as every other aspect of the project, and I suspect that the author neglected to describe it adequately simply because he lacked the technical background to do so. It's rather unfortunate to see a book written about a landmark engineering achievement which hardly talks about the engineering!

I won't go as far as not recommending the book, but beware that it's very incomplete and unbalanced.

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