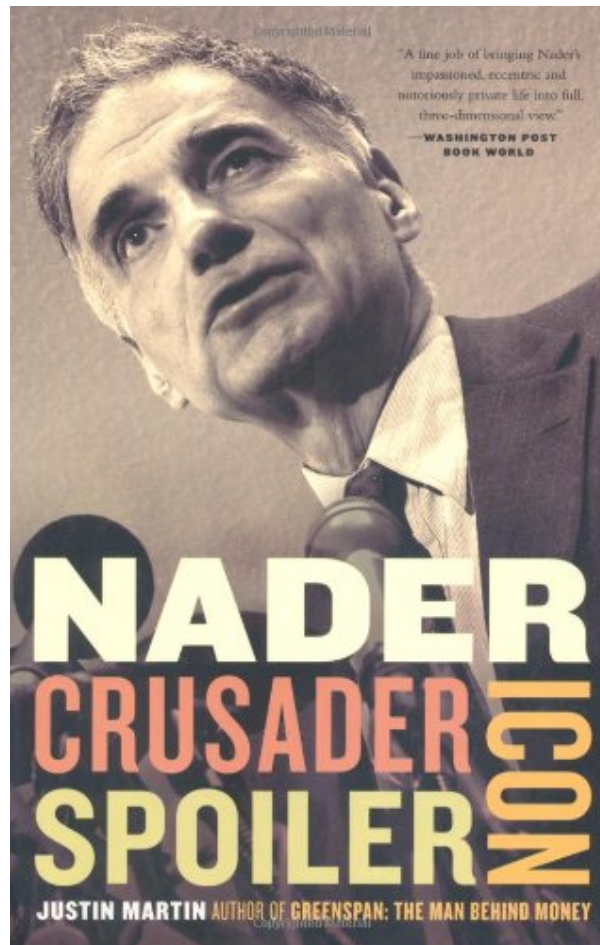
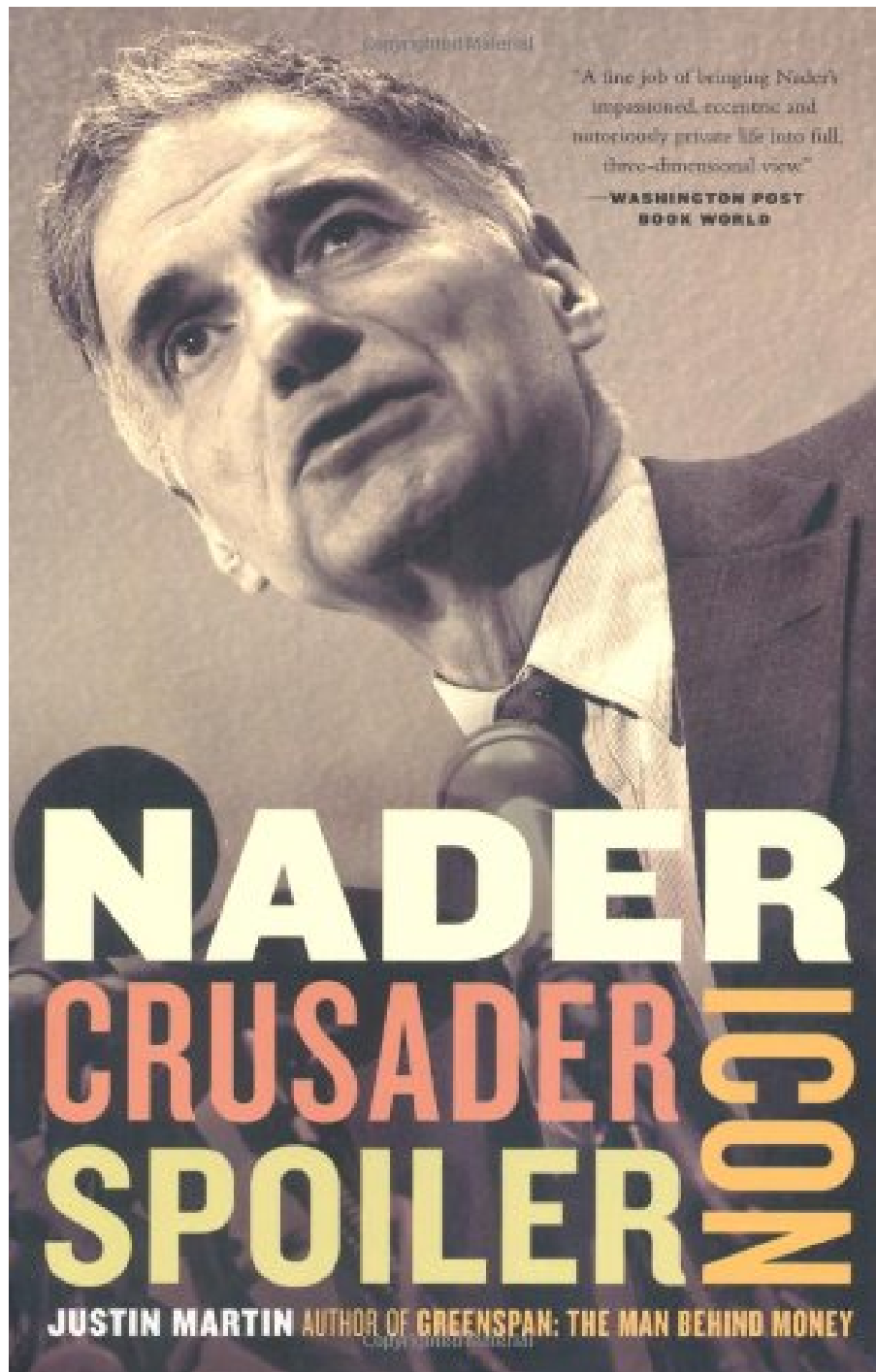


NADER: CRUSADER, SPOILER, ICON BY JUSTIN MARTIN



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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.

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Most helpful customer reviews

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

An incredible life story that was poorly written...

By mikephd80

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? Even when he launched

initiatives that failed, such as his attempt to "raid" Congress by hiring a bunch of undergrads to do slipshod research over the summer on Congress members who were up for election, he picked himself right back up and continued chugging along. The book skips over most of his activities in the late 1980's and early 1990's, although I have to believe he wasn't simply sitting on his hands. One clear takeaway is that Nader has no "life" in the traditional sense-- he has no interest in hobbies or personal relationships, instead pouring himself completely into his work. It is admirable in a sense, to see someone so dedicated to making a difference, yet on the other hand it is a bad saddening to envision him sitting alone on Thanksgiving reading some Congressional report.

One of the best descriptions in the book comes from a man who called Nader a modern-day "Jeremiah." Like a biblical prophet, Nader finds something that bothers him and then goes sounding the alarm as he scolds the person or organization in question for their bad behavior. In a sense, the rest of us are very fortunate to have the Ralph Nader's of this world to keep corporations and other groups in check. For the most part, his cause is incredibly just and I am glad he has waged these battles. However, the book shows a meaner, nastier side of Nader that gets caught up in personal slights and does things that subvert the cause he is supposedly trying to uphold. Nader had a huge opportunity to do good when Carter was in office with lots of ex-Naderites appointed to offices in the administration, but Nader was upset that Carter didn't consult with him enough so he decided to start complaining like a child who didn't get his way. He ruined a large number of relationships which diminished his effectiveness later, but apparently he didn't learn his lesson as he did the same thing when Clinton was in office. Al Gore didn't return Nader's phone calls, so Nader declares war on Gore and decides to teach him a lesson. Sure, a lot of Nader's criticisms of Gore were valid, but was that the real reason Nader decided to run? If Gore had been smart enough to pay lip service to Nader, giving him recognition and facetime, Nader probably would have went and found some other ax to grind. But Gore failed to realize just how vengeful and vindictive Nader could be, and so we ended up with 8 years of George W. Bush.

Also, the author never manages to shed any light on why Nader chose to avoid issues such as gay rights, women's rights, civil rights, etc. Why the incessant focus on consumer advocacy, even when he became a presidential candidate? It caused me to lose a little respect for Nader when he essentially engaged in fence-sitting on some of the most important issues of the past fifty years.

Regardless of Nader's personal faults, I have come away from this book with the belief that Nader is an American hero, albeit a flawed one. We'll probably never know exactly what drove him to live his life the way he did, but a large number of people are unquestionably better off as a result.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Unbiased portrait of a true American iconoclast

By Eddie Konczal

I'm admittedly biased towards Ralph Nader, having volunteered and voted for him during the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. That being said, I found this book to be remarkably balanced. It's neither a hagiography nor a hatchet job, but rather gives equal weight to Nader's achievements and shortcomings.

Martin writes extremely well, with a brisk pace: by page 30 Nader has finished law school, and by page 45 he's written "Unsafe at Any Speed" and is ready to take on GM! Despite the quick pacing, Martin doesn't gloss over Nader's early years: he presents the reader with all the necessary information on Nader's upbringing and influences, relying on well-chosen anecdotes rather than tedious genealogies.

The section on Nader's crusade against GM practically reads like a spy thriller. Fans of Nader will thrill during his "peak period" of 1969-1976, when it seemed he could do no wrong. But those same fans will scratch their head later on, when Nader inexplicably sabotages some of his own initiatives through a refusal to compromise with Congress.

Martin quickens the pace of the book yet again when detailing Nader's quixotic presidential runs. He describes the alienation Nader felt after being rebuffed by the Clinton/Gore administration - a feeling that no doubt sparked his candidacy and defused any feelings of remorse at possibly costing Gore the 2000 election. The irony of Nader's career is that he achieved the most when Republicans were in power, because he expected little of their administrations and focused on galvanizing grassroots efforts to achieve reform. This is an excellent biography, a revealing portrait of a man who has devoted his life to consumer advocacy and making America a safer place to live.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Ralph Nader Makes a Little More Sense Now

By A Customer

I read this book because I admire Nader and I wanted to find out more about him. Nader: Crusader, Spoiler Icon is a very detailed and well-written book. It doesn't waste too much time on his childhood but instead dives into the interesting stuff: the work Nader tirelessly did to make the country better.

I was hoping for some more info on Nader's private life, but apparently he never really had one. When you work 18-20 hours a day, 7 days a week there isn't much time for leisure. I enjoyed reading about his ascent to power and (being 22) I never realized how much power he had when he was in his prime. This book is quite balanced: it covers his successes as well his wacky failures. Example: Fight to Advance the Nation's Sports, a silly campaign against bad food and high ticket prices at sports games. We learn about Nader's extreme myopia, fighting hard to get something done and mercilessly lambasting anyone who gets in his way, even former allies. Apparently Nader developed a bad habit of alienating people when he needed them the most.

In the end, despite learning of Nader's many blunders, I came away respecting the guy more than I did before. He is certainly one of the most important people of the twentieth century. Never have I come across a figure in history who so thoroughly rejects the pleasures of life in favor of a constant devotion to the cause. Nader is, apparently, something of a secular saint. If you want to get the inside scoop on the battles Nader fought, I recommend this book.

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