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Wolves At The Door: The Trials Of Fatty Arbuckle



Synopsis

“Wolves at the Door” is the compelling true story of actor Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle manslaughter trials of 1921-1922. It is the narrative day by day account of the still unsolved mystery surrounding the sudden death of Virginia Rappe, four days after a drinking party in Arbuckle’s rooms at the St. Francis Hotel at the height of prohibition. As seen from the perspective of Arbuckle, the judges and the attorneys, ‘Wolves at the Door’ combines the public’s adulation with the early stars of Hollywood and the drama of courtroom confrontations and the looming presence of William Randolph Hearst. The science of “CSI” was introduced to America during the trials for the sole purpose of convicting Arbuckle. Some of the witnesses were coerced and others simply lied. The mystery of Rappe’s death became the national fixation as perhaps the funniest man in the world went on trial for his life for a crime that the evidence showed he could not have committed.

Book Information

File Size: 1166 KB

Print Length: 537 pages

Publisher: David Kizer (December 6, 2010)

Publication Date: December 6, 2010

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004FGMV5C

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #577,783 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #17

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Law > Intellectual Property > Entertainment #45

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Law > Media & the Law #75 in Books > Law > Business > Entertainment

Customer Reviews

This is a self-published book about the murder charges leveled against silent film star Fatty

Arbuckle in 1921, and I'd like to cut the author, David Kizer, some slack. I admire that he took on such an ambitious project and saw it through. Some have said here that the book is poorly written (and it is) but I think the bigger fault is that it's poorly edited. Some of the editing problems may seem trivial, although reading this book makes it apparent that commas in the wrong place, as well as the failure to place commas where required, can really detract from the reading experience. But there are also too many sarcastic comments, awkwardly worded sentences, strange asides, as well as the occasional bizarre randomly inserted paragraph giving us updates on what Babe Ruth was doing on certain days. (One of the bigger "WTF" moments came when Kizer diverted from his storyline for a single paragraph to tell us that, back in New York, the Yankees beat the Indians 9 to 0 and Babe Ruth hit a single and made a nice running catch in the outfield. Huh?) There are two things that this book really desperately needs: A comprehensive review by an experienced and competent editor, and some kind of explanation of the author's sources. I realize that it may be difficult at this point to properly add numbered footnotes throughout the text, but two or three pages explaining the author's research process and a description of the source materials would add a great deal to the book's credibility. Meanwhile, as I type this, Babe Ruth is lying peacefully in his grave at the Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Hawthorne, New York, beneath a tombstone with his name on it. Now that I've gotten those complaints out of the way, I do want to say that the author does seem to have some kind of legal background (There's no "about the author" so we can't be sure.) and has spent a lot of time analyzing the case, the evidence, and the strategies of the attorneys involved in the Arbuckle trials. At its best, the book can be a page-turner at times and for all its faults, it may be the best book available about what happened to Fatty Arbuckle. We have the makings here of a pretty good book, and I do hope that the author revisits it and gets it the thorough editing that it needs.

Wolves at the Door is a compelling read. Mr. Kizer brings to life the silent screen great Fatty Arbuckle and the ensuing scandal revolving around the death of actress Virginia Rappe in San Francisco in 1921. I have read other books recounting the machinations of the sordid details that poured out during the trial of this innocent man, but Wolves at the Door treads where none of the other books on this subject dare to go. Mr. Kizer's keen sense for the understatement and tremendous ability to set the mood of the 1920s (It's chock full of wonderful facts, trivia and provides the reader with the social, political and economic goings on during that time.) provides a full canvas for any reader to get a feel for what the roaring 20s were and would become. It's an ambitious book starting with two chapters giving detail of the goings on prior to and leading up to that eventful "party" at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. The balance of the book rockets into what takes

place after the arrest Fatty Arbuckle and his subsequent trial for the murder of Virginia Rappe. This where Mr. Kizer's gift of the understatement is intelligently displayed; the the competition between the lawyers is at times humorous and at times disturbingly upsetting. Mr. Kizer is a natural storyteller. His explanation of the legal tactics, procedures and legal challenges that existed at the trial are a delight to read for those in the legal profession or not. I found the book to be a quick read and would recommended Wolves at the Door to everyone.

One wouldn't normally think that an historical biography would be a page-turner. Certainly, one already knows how the end turns out. But, I couldn't put down Wolves at the Door: The Trial of Fatty Arbuckle. A rainy weekend gave me a great opportunity to relax and enjoy this very entertaining book, page after page. Before I started the book, I was one of those many people who had written off "Fatty" Arbuckle as the fat man who raped and murdered an innocent woman in a San Francisco hotel. How wrong I was! Now, because of the meticulously detailed account of events that the author, David Kizer, has pieced together, it will be difficult to see Roscoe Arbuckle as anything but an innocent man who became a victim of circumstances dictated by the times and by people more interested in their own moment of glory than in justice. Wolves contains a nice weaving of current world events that gives the reader a sense of the times in which Roscoe Arbuckle was tried, and tried again and again. I couldn't wait to see how things turned out for him. A great and fun read!

I've read a number of books about Fatty Arbuckle but most of the books cover his entire life. This is the first book I've found that concentrates on the murder charge and the subsequent trials. The detail in this book is extensive. How this author collected all of this information and then made any sense of it is amazing. If you've ever wanted all of the details about the San Francisco DA's witness tampering, evidence creation and press manipulation that caused the destruction of one man, this is the book to read. I find it personally amazing that almost 100 years after this tragic event, Fatty Arbuckle is still considered a murderer rather than the fantastic comedian that he actually was. It's too bad that Mr. Kizer wasn't alive to have participated in Roscoe's defense. The author correctly points out that there were three major trials in the 20th century but this one trial changed an entire industry and almost a century later, we're still feeling its repercussions.

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