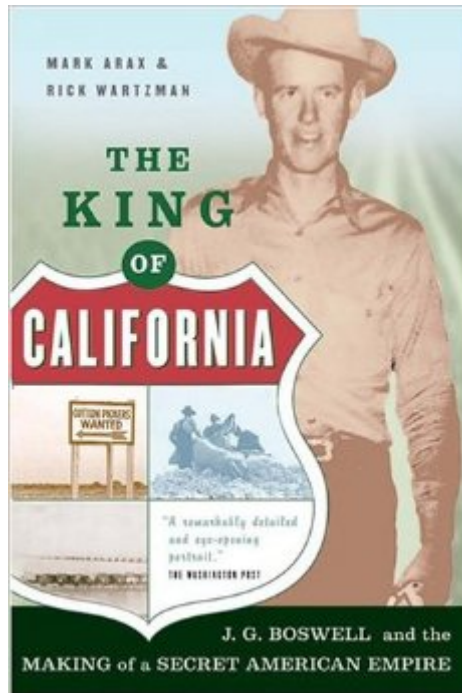


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The King Of California: J.G. Boswell And The Making Of A Secret American Empire



Synopsis

J.G. Boswell was the biggest farmer in America. He built a secret empire while thumbing his nose at nature, politicians, labor unions and every journalist who ever tried to lift the veil on the ultimate "factory in the fields." The King of California is the previously untold account of how a Georgia slave-owning family migrated to California in the early 1920s, drained one of America's biggest lakes in an act of incredible hubris and carved out the richest cotton empire in the world. Indeed, the sophistication of Boswell's agricultural operation - from lab to field to gin - is unrivaled anywhere. Much more than a business story, this is a sweeping social history that details the saga of cotton growers who were chased from the South by the boll weevil and brought their black farmhands to California. It is a gripping read with cameos by a cast of famous characters, from Cecil B. DeMille to Cesar Chavez.

Book Information

Paperback: 592 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs (February 15, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1586482815

ISBN-13: 978-1586482817

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (70 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #203,628 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #54 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > History #126 in Books > Business & Money > Industries > Agriculture #725 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Business

Customer Reviews

This far-reaching book is quite an accomplishment in biography and investigative journalism. Arax and Wartzman cover the history of the immense Boswell farming company of California, and the two guys named J.G. (the founding uncle and the current chairman, his nephew) who built the company into the largest cotton operation on Earth. Through cutthroat competitive instincts and political wheeling-and-dealing, the Boswells amassed tens of thousands of acres in California's Central Valley, and were instrumental in eliminating what was once the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, as the former Tulare Lake was transformed into a festering network of levees, canals, and cesspools dedicated to the mass production of cotton. Thus, the Boswells built the area's

environment, culture, and economics for their own profitability. The book also serves as a great exploration of the business of factory farming, detailing the racism and poverty experienced by Black and Mexican workers, as well as the shifty agricultural and hydrological politics of Big Ag in California - as the Boswells and their competitors/allies buy politicians, stack laws and regulations in their favor, and claim flood control as a reason to alter the natural course of rivers and to completely drain the vast Tulare Lake. Best of all, we see how big business really works out West, with the hypocrisy of so-called rugged outdoorsmen (actually pampered CEO's) who incessantly rail against government interference while also taking in millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies that are meant to help the little guy. This book is immensely informative but does often get tied up in unnecessary details, such as descriptions of petty political shenanigans in the construction of a nearby dam.

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