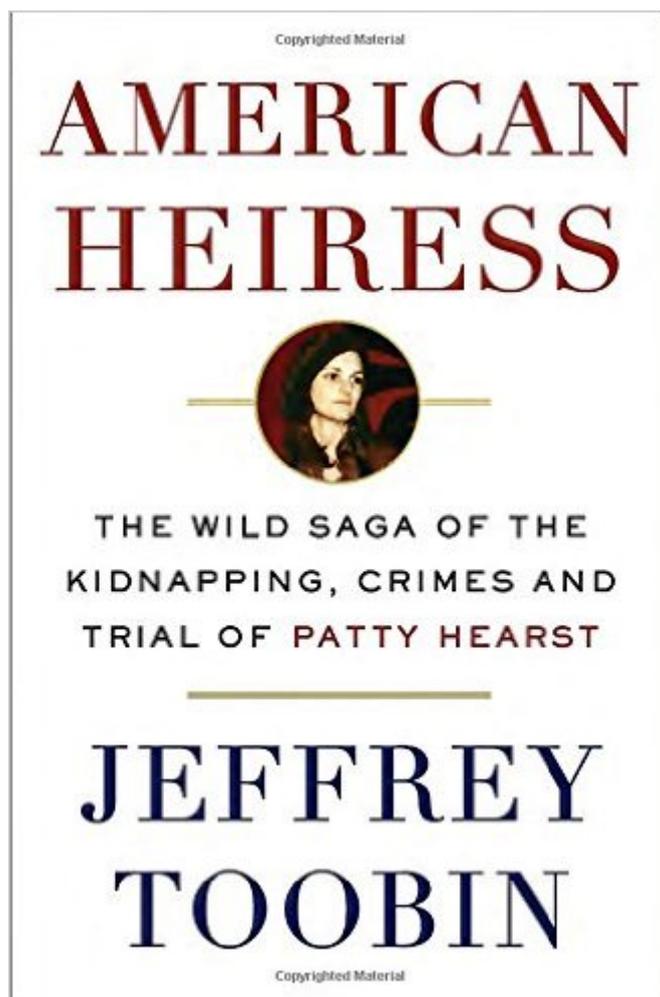


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American Heiress: The Wild Saga Of The Kidnapping, Crimes And Trial Of Patty Hearst



Synopsis

From New Yorker staff writer and bestselling author of *The Nine* and *The Run of His Life: The People v. O. J. Simpson*, the definitive account of the kidnapping and trial that defined an insane era in American history — On February 4, 1974, Patty Hearst, a sophomore in college and heiress to the Hearst family fortune, was kidnapped by a ragtag group of self-styled revolutionaries calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. The already sensational story took the first of many incredible twists on April 3, when the group released a tape of Patty saying she had joined the SLA and had adopted the nom de guerre “Tania.” The weird turns of the tale are truly astonishing — the Hearst family trying to secure Patty’s release by feeding all the people of Oakland and San Francisco for free; the bank security cameras capturing “Tania” wielding a machine gun during a robbery; a cast of characters including everyone from Bill Walton to the Black Panthers to Ronald Reagan to F. Lee Bailey; the largest police shoot-out in American history; the first breaking news event to be broadcast live on television stations across the country; Patty’s year on the lam, running from authorities; and her circuslike trial, filled with theatrical courtroom confrontations and a dramatic last-minute reversal, after which the term “Stockholm syndrome” entered the lexicon. The saga of Patty Hearst highlighted a decade in which America seemed to be suffering a collective nervous breakdown. Based on more than a hundred interviews and thousands of previously secret documents, *American Heiress* thrillingly recounts the craziness of the times (there were an average of 1,500 terrorist bombings a year in the early 1970s). Toobin portrays the lunacy of the half-baked radicals of the SLA and the toxic mix of sex, politics, and violence that swept up Patty Hearst and re-creates her melodramatic trial. *American Heiress* examines the life of a young woman who suffered an unimaginable trauma and then made the stunning decision to join her captors’ crusade. Or did she?

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Customer Reviews

Most people who were around in the mid-1970's will remember the kidnapping of Patty Hearst by a hapless band of revolutionary players, the Symbionese Liberation Army. This group, whose main members were - as Jeffrey Toobin puts it in his new book, "American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst" - as differentiated as a fox-hole in a war-time movie. There was the black revolutionary - "Cinque" or Donald DeFreeze - the white revolutionaries - Emily and William Harris, the gay revolutionaries - Camilla Hall and Patricia Soltysik, and various, other hangers-on. The SLA was a group of urban guerillas, who seemed determined to wreck the system, but were stymied on what to put in it's place. And who was Patricia Hearst? As Toobin describes her, she was the heiress to a fortune but was sort of drifting through life, so far. The daughter of mismatched parents, she was the middle of five daughters, raised by her mother to aim for the conventional wealthy woman's life - marriage to an eligible man and a life raising children of her own. In stark contrast to the free-living members of the SLA, Hearst at 19 was living with a much older man - Steven Weed - in a married-like life, while studying at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. On the night of February 4, 1974, Patricia Hearst was kidnapped from the town house in Berkeley by the SLA and forcibly turned into a "revolutionary" by her kidnapers. Or, did she join in the ensuing mayhem willingly? There began an almost two year spree by the SLA, with Hearst - now called "Tania" - as an active participant. Bank robberies, shootouts, and blackmailing for food distributions to the poor were all part of mid-1970's in San Francisco and Los Angeles. This group - which literally and thankfully couldn't shoot too straight - made headlines. I can still remember where I was when I heard Patricia Hearst had been found and rescued. But what was she rescued from? And what was her role in the SLA's crime spree? Author and attorney Jeffrey Toobin does an excellent job in relating the people, the times, and the effects this rag-tag group - with its "prize" member - had on California and society at large in those years. Hearst has now become the settled society matron her mother had groomed her to be, raising daughters and prize-winning dogs. The others who are still alive are living with various degrees of revolutionary fervor. His book is beautifully written with much less sensationalism than you might expect on the subject.

I received an e-ARC of this book through NetGalley and Doubleday Books. Jeffrey Toobin has done his level best to present the facts in the Patricia Hearst kidnapping phenomenon in a fair and even handed way. Patricia Hearst Shaw did not agree to be interviewed in any way for the writing of this book, yet Toobin has presented the evidence so the reader can make their own judgment about whether or not she became a willing member in the Symbionese Liberation Army and changed herself into an urban guerrilla. Toobin was able to amass a huge amount of information from law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, as well as documents held by other members of the radical political group so he has evidence in his possession to validate much if not most of the information he shares in this book. It is chilling to read and watch the metamorphosis of Patricia Hearst from a young woman still in her late teens rather reluctantly planning her upcoming wedding into a machine gun firing fanatical advocate for violent social upheaval. When all of this was taking place in 1974 and 1975 I knew only the most basic information concerning Patricia Hearst because I was busy living my own life and not paying much attention to something which didn't seem to touch me at all. Over the years I have often wondered what the truth behind the kidnapping and conversion of Hearst really was, but still didn't spend any energy trying to find out more. When I saw this book was going to be published I thought it would be a good place for me to find some answers. And I found them. Mr. Toobin has written this book in a very readable style with the tension mounting as the capture and arrest of Hearst became more and more eminent. There is background information supplied concerning all the members of the SLA as well as the people who befriended them and the families, attorneys, FBI agents, and other law enforcement agents who had a more than passing impact on the long episodes to bring this case to a close. I can't help but wonder why it seems that so many people helped the fugitives after they had been identified and yet none seem to have been held accountable. An author, his wife and his parents especially make me curious because they provided hiding places for the three remaining fugitives for months as well as driving them back and forth across the country. Some questions I will just have to wonder about. In addition to the facts concerning what happened to Patricia Hearst there are Notes and a Bibliography which provide some additional answers as to where Mr. Toobin got his information. I think there are probably photographs also, but they aren't included in my review copy. This was a very informative book, told in a fair and open way which covers a multitude of incidents over a long period of time. It is obvious that Mr. Toobin went to a great deal of trouble to present the entire story in as clear a fashion as he was able without any help from the person the book is written about.

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