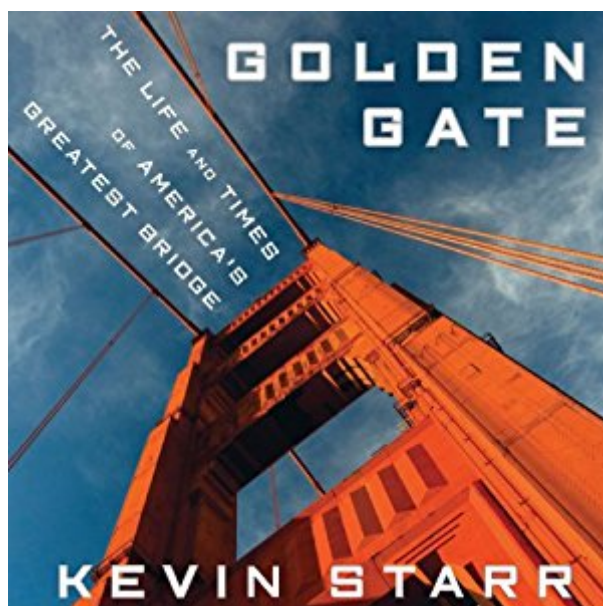


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# Golden Gate: The Life And Times Of America's Greatest Bridge



## Synopsis

The Golden Gate Bridge is an icon of one of the most mythic of American cities, San Francisco. Standing between the Bay and the mighty Pacific like a guardian of the city, the Golden Gate retains its grip on the American imagination long after its 27-year record of being the longest suspension bridge in the world was superseded.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although this book is relatively short at about 200 pages, the author manages to cover the history of the Golden Gate, as well as the Golden Gate Bridge and the people involved in the creation of the bridge. The author begins with the geologic creation of the San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate itself and progresses through the hunt to find the bay and the opening to the sea that the Spanish had sought for so many decades. He then moves into a brief discussion of the city and the need for a bridge from the city to the Marin Headlands. Once in the twentieth century, the author interweaves the story of the need and desire for the bridge with the story of its development, design, and the political fighting that occurred to keep any bridge from being built. It is amazing how many different groups had an interest in keeping a bridge from being built. From the design stage, the author details the actual construction and financing of the bridge and explores how it was built with private money in a time when all such projects were public works projects. As contrast, the author compares it with the Oakland-Bay Bridge which was under construction at about the same time with federal and state monies. The author ends the book with a little of the sociology of the bridge,

including the inspiration it provides for artists and the use of the bridge by people wanting to commit suicide. If you are looking for the detailed history of the bridge, then you will be disappointed with this book. If, however, you are interested in more than just the nuts and bolts of the construction of the bridge, you will love this book. It is well written, concise and very enjoyable. In addition, there are about 8 pages of spectacular color photographs included

I had pretty high hopes for this book. And it is a wonderful overview of the social, political and economic conditions of the time. But for a book that also discusses the artistic contributions of the bridge, it is almost completely devoid of photographs. Indeed, there isn't even a picture of the classic view of the bridge. And for the detailed discussion of some of the construction challenges, there are essentially no photographs of those challenges. The author clearly is an enjoyable and talented writer, and sufficient photographs would have made this a much better book.

I pre-ordered this book hoping Starr would capture some of the drama, some of the passion and the energy that went into the building of the Golden Gate bridge. Instead, what I got was something that more closely resembles a Masters Thesis or a Doctoral Dissertation. Based on the sources Starr cites at the end of the book, he did very little original research. Instead he appears to have taken hundreds or thousands of excerpts from the works of others, stacked them up in some order, and strung 'em together in some kind of narrative. It's very much a dry recitation of facts dating back to the discovery of the passage from the Pacific Ocean into what's now known as San Francisco Bay and not a very original work at that. There can't be but a handful of quotes from those who actually worked on the bridge and they all appear to have come from those other writers and historians. There are better books on this subject and thanks to Kevin Starr's bibliography I'll know where to look to find something better to read on the subject. Something far better.

Kevin Starr's *Golden Gate: The Life And Times Of America's Greatest Bridge* (Golden Gate) is a competently constructed, perfunctory examination of the Golden Gate Bridge's history and cultural impact. Starr distills a number of sources to create an adequate overview of the bridge's engineering and construction, as well as the political machinations behind its creation. Starr also utilizes these sources to comment on the bridge's aesthetic nature, and its impact on the San Francisco Bay Area's lifestyle. However, a history of the Golden Gate Bridge is ripe with drama. As just one example, to construct the bridge's south tower, workers had to cordon off a football field-sized section of the ocean, drain about 300 feet of water from the cordoned area until the

bedrock was exposed, build the support tower in the temporarily drained area while the ocean raged just outside the barriers, and then flood the area once the support tower was finished. To a non-engineer like me, those actions seem almost super-human in their execution. I wanted to find out every detail of that amazing engineering feat. But, Starr depicts the entire event in just a couple of paragraphs. Other aspects of the bridge's history are similarly short-changed. Thus, what could be seared into the reader's mind by focusing on the drama inherent in the subject is instead rendered into a trivia point. Starr clearly feels the drama that the Golden Gate Bridge engenders, as is evidenced by the numerous sections where he waxes poetically about the bridge. But, Starr's ability to convey that drama in his writing is, at best, limited. Because of that limitation, Golden Gate is simply adequate when it could, and should, be memorable.

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