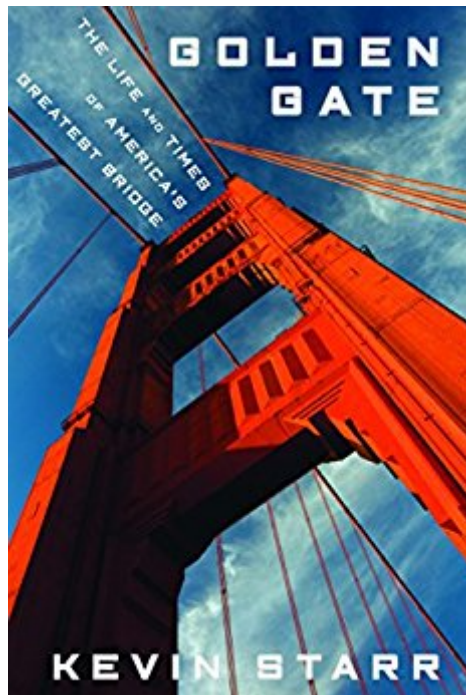




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# Golden Gate: The Life And Times Of America's Greatest Bridge



## Synopsis

The Golden Gate Bridge links the urbanity of San Francisco with the wild headlands of Marin County, as if to suggest the paradox of California and America itself-the place that Fitzgerald saw as the last spot commensurate with the human capacity for wonder. The bridge, completed in 1937, also announced to the world America's engineering prowess and full assumption of its destined continental dominance. The Golden Gate is a counterpart to the Statue of Liberty, pronouncing American achievement in an unmistakable American fashion. The nation's very history is expressed in the bridge's art deco style and stark verticality. Kevin Starr's *Golden Gate* is a brilliant and passionate telling of the history of the bridge, and the rich and peculiar history of the California experience. The Golden Gate is a grand public work, a symbol and a very real bridge, a magnet for both postcard photographs and suicides. In this compact but comprehensive narrative, Starr unfolds the hidden-in-plain-sight meaning of the Golden Gate, putting it in its place among classic works of art.

## 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

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.

This book is relatively short but is a well written book by a noted California historian. It covers a number of topics outside the actual design and construction of the bridge, the most memorable of which will always (to me) be the chapter on suicides. The details it provides on many suicides by leapers from the bridge railing, are a grim reminder of the opportunity for suicide that the bridge creates and the seemingly impulsive leaps to death that no doubt would not have occurred if there had been some deterrent (eg,screen/nets) to jumping.I also appreciated the chapter on "Art" which closes the book and places in perspective the iconic nature of The Bridge.As it should, the book also gives Charles Ellis his due as the true 'design' architect of the bridge, but this book in no way supplants such books as "The Gate" by John Van Der Zee for those who want more detailed history of design and construction of man's ultimate complementary contribution to the magnificence of nature.

I bought this book based on an NPR interview I heard in anticipation of the 75th anniversary of the GG Bridge and found it to be utterly engaging. It is an intimate, poetic and comprehensive accounting of not only the design and development of the bridge, but at least some of the political machinations involved in the creation of it. I would have liked to have seen more photos of the actual construction in its various stages, as outlined in the book----thus, the 4 stars----but I felt I gained a deeper understanding of the impact the Great Depression had on the Bay Area, the social movements of the times, and the parallels between the construction of this and the Bay Bridge, as a result of having read it. If you have an interest in learning more about this iconic structure, I would recommend Mr. Starr's Golden Gate as an easily accessible place to start.

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