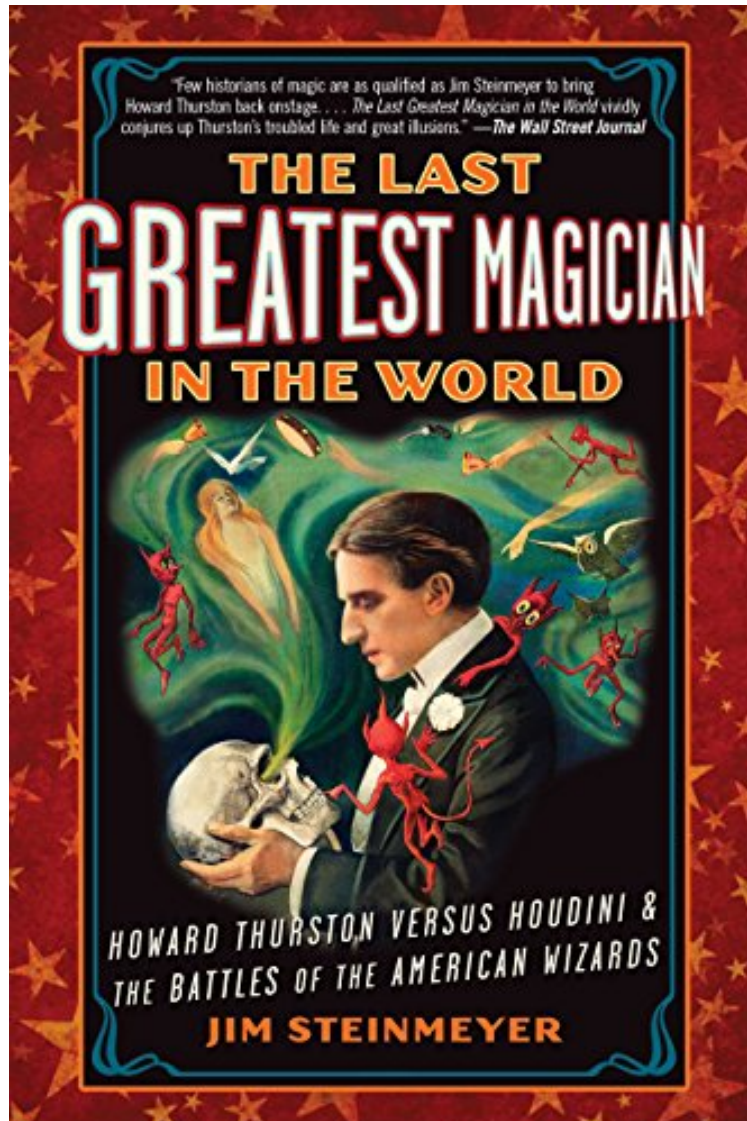


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## The Last Greatest Magician in the World: Howard Thurston Versus Houdini the Battles of the American Wizards

*Jim Steinmeyer*

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**Jim Steinmeyer : The Last Greatest Magician in the World: Howard Thurston Versus Houdini the Battles of the American Wizards** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Greatest Magician in the World: Howard Thurston Versus Houdini the Battles of the American Wizards:

38 of 39 people found the following review helpful. HOWARD THURSTON LIVES AGAIN!By B. RobinsonJim

Steinmeyer's excellent new biography of Howard Thurston (1869-1936) is a welcome addition to the literature of the theatre and that of the history of magic. The dogged research by the author is noticeable on every page as we find our subject first on the outskirts of society as a petty thief and then rising to the heights of being an American institution -- parading the largest touring magic show ever. Thurston made his success in Europe at the turn of the century at the same time another young Hungarian emigre named Erich Weiss also left for England to seek his fortune. Of course, Erich had changed his name to an appropriation of France's greatest magician: Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, and began calling himself brazenly HOUDINI. That HOUDINI has become a legend is undeniable, and this book seeks to settle a score, if only for historical accuracy, that, in their day, the early 1900's Thurston was the King of Magic. Thurston was never eclipsed by the syllable accenting American Houdini. In fact, it is clearly shown by this expertly written tome that Houdini was a top of the bill vaudeville star with his name spelled in letters twice the size of any other act, while Thurston appeared in legitimate theatre and at the White House several times. Thurston made woman float in the air, and sawed women in halves, and gave a three-hour extravaganza that took several train cars to carry, even providing a full orchestra as well. The problem that brought his downfall was the Great Depression and the rise of the "flickers" which we all know today as the movies. Thurston was as much a part of the Roaring Twenties as Al Capone or Babe Ruth and that his star has faded is a shame. Yet, like the great phoenix he was, this book, brilliantly written and researched and engendering the same kind of thrilling enthusiasm Thurston brought in his audiences, brings back the master magician in all his glory, if only in a slightly bittersweet way. Bravo to Jim Steinmeyer for a wonderful read. I unreservedly advise all who love a good tale, love magic history, and love the truth of the early 20th century theatre to run out and buy this book. You will not regret it. 5 stars!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well written

By Dave Yost

The book reads clean and does a fine job of showing the relationships of the various magicians of the era. I rated this four stars due to the lack of any photos, lithographs, or other visual aids. I expected to see... something.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The first great modern stage magician!

By Rory Coker

Howard Thurston in the first three decades of the 20th Century gradually created what became the standard great touring magic show, a mix of pure sleight-of-hand, hilarious audience-interaction bits, and huge stage illusions. Every top US magician since, such as David Copperfield or Criss Angel, has eventually mounted a "big show" that mirrors Thurston's closely. Yet, while magicians remember and revere Thurston, the general public today has never heard of him. Why?

Walter Gibson, who knew and worked for both Thurston and Houdini, explains it well in a quote within this book. Thurston's massive publicity engine was focused on selling people on the desire to attend Thurston's live stage show the very next time it passed nearby... whereas Houdini's publicity was focused entirely on emphasizing that Houdini was a miracle-man who could by sheer strength and skill escape from any and every restraint. Today everyone has heard of Houdini, while Thurston was forgotten as soon as he ceased to tour... felled by a stroke.

Author Jim Steinmeyer does a good job of reconstructing Thurston's strange and somewhat shady life. It's an effort to do this today, because all of the "autobiographical" material generated by Thurston's publicity men or presented to reporters and developed through interviews during his magic career was almost entirely fictional, and Thurston particularly needed to conceal his early life, in which he was a fairly successful pickpocket and thief known as the "Nim Kid." Even counting up Thurston's many wives is a bit tricky.

Thurston's complex relationships with his fellow magicians, from senior mentor Harry Kellar, through numerous competitors and hired idea-men, are also detailed as they figure in throughout the story. Thurston is in many ways the most important and influential single figure in 20th Century magic, especially for the first half of the 20th Century, and it's good to see him receive some of the attention for which he is long overdue. Recommended.

Here is the seminal biography of the magician's magician, Howard Thurston, a man who surpassed Houdini in the eyes of showmen and fans and set the standard for how stage magic is performed today. Everyone knows Houdini-but who was Thurston? In this rich, vivid biography of the "greatest magician in the world," celebrated historian of stage magic Jim Steinmeyer captures the career and controversies of the wonder-worker extraordinaire, Howard Thurston. The public's fickleness over magicians has left Thurston all but forgotten today. Yet Steinmeyer shows how his story is one of the most remarkable in show business. During his life, from 1869 to 1936, Thurston successfully navigated the most dramatic changes in entertainment-from street performances to sideshows to wagon tours through America's still-wild West to stage magic amid the glitter of grand theaters. Thurston became one of America's most renowned vaudeville stars, boldly performing an act with just a handful of playing cards, and then had the foresight to leave vaudeville, expanding his show into an extravaganza with more than forty tons of apparatus and costumes. His touring production was an American institution for nearly thirty years, and Thurston earned a brand name equal to Ziegfeld or Ringling Brothers. Steinmeyer explores the stage and psychological rivalry between Thurston and Houdini during the first decades of the twentieth century- a contest that Thurston won. He won with a bigger show, a more successful reputation, and the title of America's greatest magician. In *The Last Greatest Magician in the World*, Thurston's magic

show is revealed as the one that animates our collective memories.