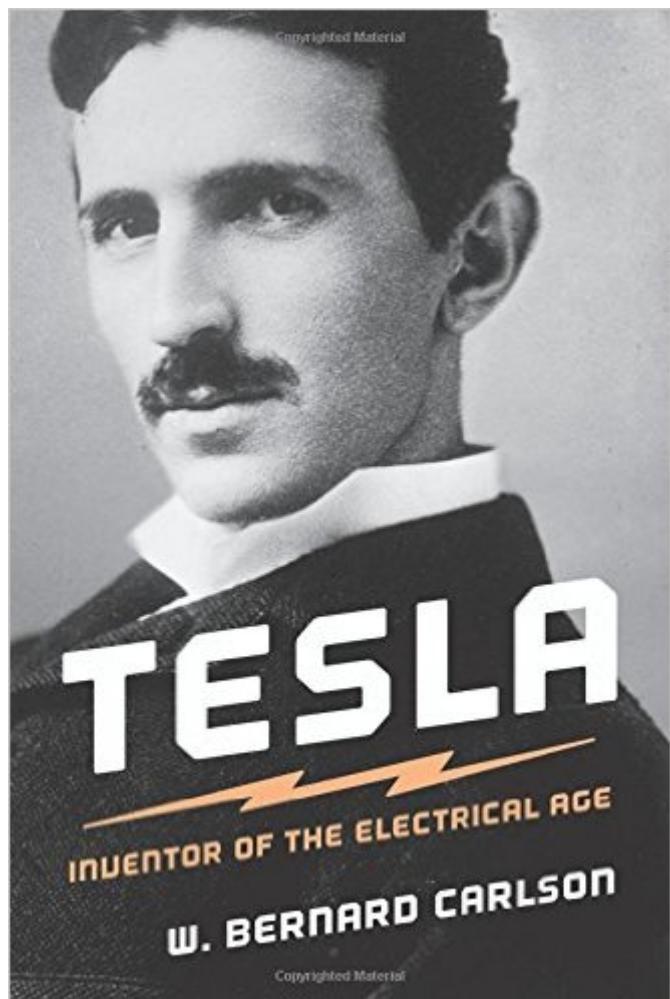


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Tesla: Inventor Of The Electrical Age



Synopsis

Nikola Tesla was a major contributor to the electrical revolution that transformed daily life at the turn of the twentieth century. His inventions, patents, and theoretical work formed the basis of modern AC electricity, and contributed to the development of radio and television. Like his competitor Thomas Edison, Tesla was one of America's first celebrity scientists, enjoying the company of New York high society and dazzling the likes of Mark Twain with his electrical demonstrations. An astute self-promoter and gifted showman, he cultivated a public image of the eccentric genius. Even at the end of his life when he was living in poverty, Tesla still attracted reporters to his annual birthday interview, regaling them with claims that he had invented a particle-beam weapon capable of bringing down enemy aircraft. Plenty of biographies glamorize Tesla and his eccentricities, but until now none has carefully examined what, how, and why he invented. In this groundbreaking book, W. Bernard Carlson demystifies the legendary inventor, placing him within the cultural and technological context of his time, and focusing on his inventions themselves as well as the creation and maintenance of his celebrity. Drawing on original documents from Tesla's private and public life, Carlson shows how he was an "idealist" inventor who sought the perfect experimental realization of a great idea or principle, and who skillfully sold his inventions to the public through mythmaking and illusion. This major biography sheds new light on Tesla's visionary approach to invention and the business strategies behind his most important technological breakthroughs.

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Customer Reviews

Many self-described "Tesla Biographers" have taken a shot at writing a book that would be considered comprehensive and worthy of filling in the gaps of this infamous man's life, but none have done so as well as W. Bernard Carlson. If you are expecting a light, fluff-filled read about this important inventor, please look elsewhere. This book is intelligent, articulate and technical. If your desire is to make sense of the how and why Tesla ended up where he did by the end of his life, this book will not only elaborate on common knowledge of the subject, but will open your eyes to the unfortunate truth of this genius and his fall from grace, society and his descent into poverty. What I found fascinating about this book, was that rather than giving in to the previous biographer's desire to make Tesla look like a superhuman celebrity with an external muse that produced his creativity, this book shows the rise to fame through his eyes. His inventions are detailed and his numerous ideas and contributions to science and the field of electrical engineering is presented brilliantly. Rather than going from chapter to chapter saying "and then he did this and then he did that" this work has a very natural progression. Frequently using Tesla's own words to describe his creative process, Tesla: Inventor of the Electrical Age gives a much more in depth view of his life. I had always thought of Tesla as having been someone who looked within himself to answer the great questions of life, and this book seems to agree with that notion. As someone who is also rather introspective, I appreciated the idea that Tesla turned to his own mind for answers and created his own circumstances for his early success. If you are the type of history buff that will get lost in an old black and white photo for minutes at a time, marveling at how things have changed, this author has you covered. There are plenty of photos and diagrams in this book of Tesla, his inventions and his previous places of employment. I was intensely drawn to the photo of Edison's Machine Works and the photo of the inside of the machine shop at Wardenclyffe. Rather than viewing Nikola Tesla in a celebratory way, this book takes a neutral and impartial stand of the inventor, neither praising nor degrading him for his work nor his decisions. The author has researched and presented material that tells the story of a man from humble beginnings who did many great things, and made some choices that were most regrettable in terms of his own preservation. After reading this, my opinion is pretty simple. I believe Tesla would be proud of this biography. Perhaps just as proud of this as he would be of the unit of measurement named after him. While Tesla may not be the household name that Edison has turned out to be, for any serious scholar of the age of invention, he will always be an important contributor to many things that we take for granted as every day convenience today. I feel this is an important book and one that should be shared with the younger generation. Teachers, parents and anyone who is interested in the history of invention and pioneers of their time would benefit from this book. I thank the author for the hard work and dedication they have shown in

writing this. This review is based on a digital ARC from the publisher.

I've read a lot of Tesla biographies, but this one takes the prize. I haven't quite finished it yet, but find it as 'unputdownable' as any mystery novel. The politics, mystery and intrigues that surrounded Tesla's life are brought to life here, along with a good understanding of electrical technology in general during the subject period. This is not a 'technical' book, but Tesla's major inventions and experiments are covered in sufficient detail and in an easy-to-understand manner. This book is well footnoted for those who wish to dig deeper into the hundreds of references.

This is the first truly scholarly biography of one of our most fascinating and controversial inventors. Carlson manages to tell the story clearly and fairly. He also analyses Tesla's inventions and theories very accurately. A must read for anyone interested in this great inventor and his work.

Having read O'Neill's, Cheney's and Seifer's biographies of this inventor as well as his Colorado Spring Notes, his patents and patent folders I have found Carlson's work far more revealing of the business interests and cautions surrounding Tesla inventions than had been disclosed by other authors. Tesla's two transcendent inventions, the induction and synchronous AC motor and the use of tuned transmitting and receiving radio circuits, remain in universal use today but they were largely made initially practical by engineers working for Westinghouse and Marconi as Carlson describes. Inventors also come up with completely false creations that are given credibility due to their prior successes. William Shockley, one of the inventors of the transistor, believed Negroes were genetically inferior and Linus Pauling, a founder of genetic engineering, was convinced large doses of vitamin C would cure the common cold. Tesla came up with the broadcast of wireless power, a technical impossibility on the scale he proposed and which was responsible for his disappearance from the public stage and in many technical histories. Such creations are the product, as Carlson points out, of the same mental processes that produce astounding successes and are to be expected. They also attract followers of parapsychology and the occult. Once Tesla has found a practical use for the rotating magnetic field he lost interest and went onto radio. Once he found that he could selectively transmit messages and control functions (his 1898 remotely controlled boat being a seminal example) using circuit tuned to resonate, he lost interest and went on wireless power. And that was where he met his match. Carlson's history is well written and while, as an electrical engineer, I find his technical descriptions of Tesla inventions better than those provided by prior authors, they still lack clarity and do not fully describe the physical effects at work. Perhaps to

fully appreciate these devices requires a reader's exposure to at least a good high school course in physics. The author might also have stressed, though, the absolute importance of the use of tuned circuits in all radio transmission. Without that invention, radio, TV and WiFi would be impossible. He also neglects to mention that Tesla's invention of requiring the simultaneous presence of two radio signals of different frequencies to produce an action, which ensures that extraneous signals can not cause an unwanted action, was cited as prior art by the U.S. Patent Office when some one wanted to patent the AND gate, a circuit fundamental to modern electronic computers. Such is Tesla's legacy. Despite these omissions, I very much recommend this biography to people interested in obtaining a realistic assessment of this genius.

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