



Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam

By Pope Brock

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The inspiration for the 2016 Sundance Film Festival documentary, *NUTS!*. “An extraordinary saga of the most dangerous quack of all time...entrancing” –*USA Today*

In 1917, John R. Brinkley—America’s most brazen con man—introduced an outlandish surgical method for restoring fading male virility.

It was all nonsense, but thousands of eager customers quickly made “Dr.” Brinkley one of America’s richest men—and a national celebrity. The great quack buster Morris Fishbein vowed to put the country’s “most daring and dangerous” charlatan out of business, yet each effort seemed only to spur Brinkley to new heights of ingenuity, and the worlds of advertising, broadcasting, and politics soon proved to be equally fertile grounds for his potent brand of flimflam.

Culminating in a decisive courtroom confrontation, *Charlatan* is a marvelous portrait of a boundlessly audacious rogue on the loose in an America ripe for the bamboozling.

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Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam By Pope Brock Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

John Brinkley, who grew up poor in rural North Carolina but attended Rush Medical College in Chicago, got his start touring as a medicine man hawking miracle tonics and became famous for transplanting goat testicles into impotent men. Brinkley built his own radio station in 1923, hustling his pseudoscience over the airwaves and giving an outlet to astrologers and country music. His nemesis was Dr. Morris Fishbein, the buoyant, compulsively curious editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* whose luminary friends included Sinclair Lewis, Clarence Darrow and H.L. Mencken. Fishbein took aim at Brinkley in *JAMA*, lay publications and pamphlets distributed by the thousands. Even after the Kansas State Medical Board yanked his medical license in 1930, Brinkley ran twice for governor of Kansas and almost won. Finally, Brinkley sued Fishbein for libel and lost in a spectacular showdown. Brock (*Indiana Gothic*) did tremendous research on this rollicking story, but the result is at times unfocused, overwritten and digressive, borrowing just a little too much from the overblown rhetoric of its subject. 8 pages of b&w photos not seen by PW. (Feb. 5)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Reviewers across the board bought what Pope Brock is selling. The author reeled them in with the incredible Brinkley, a quack who was one of a kind yet revealed so much about the era in which he lived. Critics were mesmerized by Brock's ability to connect Brinkley's life to other episodes in American history and fill them with vitality. Yet the true potency of *Charlatan* derives from Brock's storytelling skill: many critics spent much of their reviews retelling the highly entertaining tales from the book. Like the work to which it was most often compared, Erik Larson's *Devil in the White City* (**1/2 May/June 2003), *Charlatan* will surely prove to be popular with those who love American history as well as with those simply in search of a good yarn.

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Review

"Told with uproarious brio...heavenly...A book so lively that its wild stories are virtually wall to wall."

—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*

"An extraordinary saga of the most dangerous quack of all time...A talented storyteller, [Brock] digs deep into the personal secrets of his characters...entrancing."

—USA Today

"You will devour *Charlatan*, Pope Brock's tale of fools and fanatics. With a vast and wild cast of characters, and filled with issues and topics that resonate through the years *Charlatan* begs comparison with Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City* and deserves to be a best seller."

—Chicago Tribune

"Written with glee, in a style that is pure gusto, a bubbling fountain of metaphor and arresting image...Fishbein's campaign against Brinkley makes up one strand of this extraordinary tale and provides it with a bravura courtroom finale."

—Boston Globe

“Superbly crafted and enthralling...Brock’s droll style is perfect for this tale of trickery and credulity.”

—*Financial Times*

“Hugely amusing [but also] dark and cautionary, a reminder of the high price of gullibility and ignorance.”

—Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Post Book World*

“A compelling slice of lurid Americana...fun to read.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Fascinating...Brock is gifted.”

—Associated Press

“Pope Brock reaches into the past and captures an incredible story...perceptive.”

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

“An irresistible and wide-ranging slice of popular history.”

—*The Seattle Times*

“If Hollywood hasn't already optioned [this], what's keeping it?”

—David Gates, *Newsweek*

“Wonderful...a gripping narrative”

—*Nature*

“A rollicking biography—at turns funny and horrifying, brimming with wit, insight and who-knew facts.”

—*Wichita Eagle*

“Wonderful American social history and lots of fun.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“In this lively and absorbing biography, Brock deftly captures the consummate snake-oil salesman and gifted entrepreneur John R. Brinkley...recommended.”

—*Library Journal*

“Brinkley’s astonishing rise and fall story is told with wry good humor in *Charlatan*...compelling.”

—*The Times* (Acadiana, Louisiana)

“Brock exploits the outlandishness of Brinkley’s escapades to brilliant comic effect.”

—*Washington CEO*

“This spellbinding saga of a once-famous medical man who left all too many corpses in his wake is nothing short of spectacular. Impeccably researched, smartly crafted, beautifully written, it’s a pure joy to read. And dealing, as it does, with eternal traits of human greed and gullibility, this extraordinary book is timely as well as timeless...A mesmerizing must-read, written by a writer of exquisite talent...One is left with the kind of reaction one has after reading a masterpiece.”

—Heinz Kohler, Willard Long Thorp Professor of Economics, Emeritus Amherst College

“Take the Duke and the King in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Roll them into one. Hand this creature a scalpel, a radio microphone and the sweet-talking skills to get filthy rich hawking a deadly implantation of

goat sexual organs to gullible American men— and women. Then set him about transforming American pop culture in the 1920s and 30s. You have John R. Brinkley, a con artist of leviathan proportions. Pope Brock's true-life account of this comic-evil monster is nothing less than Twainian: a blend of reportage, social history, portraiture and storytelling in the grand--excuse me, in the grand tradition."

—Ron Powers, author of *Mark Twain: A Life*

"Come one, come all, to the fabulous, hilarious world of rheostatic dynamizers, foot-powered breast enlargers, and goat-gland transplants--the surreal province of one John Brinkley, diploma-mill quack and flimflammer extraordinaire. With perfect pitch story-telling and wonderfully stylish prose, Pope Brock gives us a portrait of a master fraud as Brinkley works the ballyhou-stoked pseudo-science of the Twenties and Thirties to take in millions, while dodging ex-patients, the law, and the AMA. A dazzling cast of walk-ons includes Sinclair Lewis, Eugene V. Debs, a hypochondriacal H. L. Mencken, Mussolini, and Sigmund Freud, not to mention Nora, the Monkey Turned Woman. Stranger than fiction doesn't really say it. This is a book you won't put down and a story you'll never forget."

—James R. Gaines, author of *For Liberty and Glory: Washington, LaFayette and Their Revolutions*

"Shocking and hilarious in equal measure, this is an extraordinary story of greed, gullibility and goat-glands. In chronicling the outrageous career of John R. Brinkley, king of the quack doctors, Pope Brock has also written a cautionary tale for our own times – about celebrity, mass-marketing, media power, political huckstering and the dangerous allure of mumbo-jumbo. As irresistible as Brinkley's snake-oil, and far more invigorating, *Charlatan* is an instant classic."

—Francis Wheen, author of *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World* and *The Irresistible Con: The Bizarre Life of a Fraudulent Genius*

"Astonishing...This masterfully told story of the world's most dangerous quack and the medical sleuth who tracked him down is a delight. Brock skilfully mines the narrow fissure between cutting-edge medicine and outrageous quackery while plumbing the depths of human credulity. His punchy, exuberant style is spot-on perfect for this improbable tale of money, murder and menace."

—Wendy Moore, author of *The Knife Man: Blood, Body-Snatching and the Birth of Modern Surgery*

"Before 'The Mythbusters' put truth to the test on national television (usually by blowing things up), and before the Amazing Randi went on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson to expose charlatans and frauds in front of millions, there was Morris Fishbein, a quackbuster extraordinaire who relentlessly pursued the greatest charlatan of the 1920s and 1930s, one Dr. John Brinkley, huckster of quack cures and remedies, commercial hustler and schemer, and in the end a cold-hearted murderer. Pope Brock's gripping tale of fraud and flimflam is at once compelling and disturbing--compelling because it's such a great read, disturbing because it reveals the endless gullibility of human nature."

—Michael Shermer, Publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, monthly columnist for *Scientific American*, author of *Why People Believe Weird Things*, *How We Believe*, and *Why Darwin Matters*

"*Charlatan* is the fabulous tale of John R. Brinkley, notorious purveyor of goat-gland flimflam, and unsung pioneer who changed the face of American politics, mass media, popular taste, and--yes--medicine."

—Joel Best, author of *Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads*

"*Charlatan* is a serious work of history that reads like a novel. It tells the story of the little-known Dr. John Brinkley and his unquenchable thirst for fame and fortune. Along the way, however, it paints a refreshingly unique and vivid portrait of America as it struggled to maintain its Jacksonian faith in democracy at the same time that it looked to the magic of scientific experts to find new cures to old problems. Rarely has history been this fun, fast-paced, or fulfilling."

—Steven M. Gillon, author of *Ten Days That Unexpectedly Changed America*

“A fascinating look at one of America's most dangerous quacks and the advertising and political maneuvering that sustained him. Must reading for everyone who wants to understand the dark side of the marketplace and the vulnerability of its victims.”

—Stephen Barrett, M.D., Head, Quackwatch.org, author of *The Health Robbers*

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lawrence Gregory:

The book *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* make one feel enjoy for your spare time. You may use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can to become your best friend when you getting strain or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make studying a book *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* to become your habit, you can get far more advantages, like add your own personal capable, increase your knowledge about several or all subjects. You can know everything if you like wide open and read a publication *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science publication or encyclopedia or other individuals. So , how do you think about this e-book?

Marie Velasquez:

This *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* are reliable for you who want to be considered a successful person, why. The explanation of this *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* can be on the list of great books you must have is usually giving you more than just simple examining food but feed you with information that perhaps will shock your previous knowledge. This book will be handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions both in e-book and printed kinds. Beside that this *Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* forcing you to have an enormous of experience including rich vocabulary, giving you trial of critical thinking that we know it useful in your day activity. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

Jodie Kahl:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them household or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the whole day to reading a publication. The book Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book features high quality.

Ron Matthies:

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