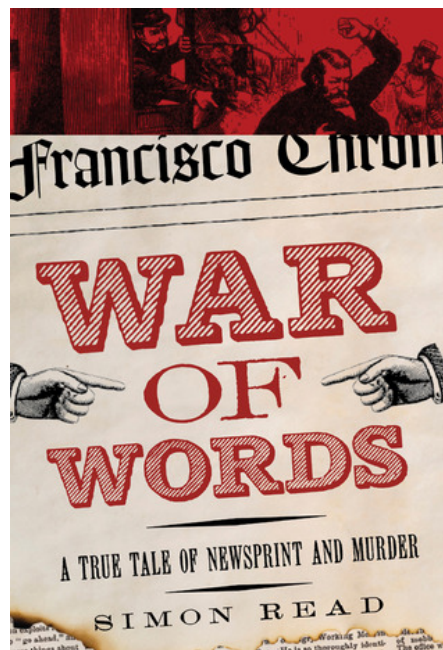




War of Words: A True Tale of Newsprint and Murder

Simon Read

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When the news business was literally a matter of life and death. A real-life Barbary Coast, WAR OF WORDS details the bloody birth of the San Francisco Chronicle, when verbal blows traded between two of the town's most powerful men escalated into violence on the streets of 1880s San Francisco. Gun-toting newspaper publisher Charles de Young won circulation wars by spilling ink that destroyed political candidates he didn't like and Isaac Kalloch, a hellfire preacher whose lust for the ladies equaled his craving to be mayor, was an obvious target. First angry words flew, then bullets, when de Young ambushed Kalloch and shot him. Miraculously, Kalloch survived and won the election, only to see his son enact revenge on his behalf five months later by walking into the newsroom and fatally shooting de Young. The trial lasted 28 days, featured over 200 witnesses and made headlines coast to coast. The verdict? Not guilty, by reason of "justifiable homicide This sensational tale of sex, murder, and muckraking enthralled San Franciscans and is sure to captivate modern readers as well.

War of Words: A True Tale of Newsprint and Murder Details

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From Reader Review War of Words: A True Tale of Newsprint and Murder for online ebook

Tom says

Wow! What a great story. The truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Makes the Hatfields and McCoys look like nursery school. Should have been called "The Gang Who Couldn't Shoot Straight", but I guess that was taken. Never read of so many misses at point blank range. Also gives you a hint of why Californians are the way they are :-). In the end, they were all scoundrels, and San Francisco was a corrupt, lawless place pretending to be civilized. 5 stars, much more deserving than the low "average" rating.

FrumpBurger says

An interesting story that would have been better presented had the author not felt the need to write it in novel-like fashion, which makes it seem a little sensational.

Rebecca says

This was quite an interesting read. The author did a really good job of presenting the development of journalism in California. I was surprised to find out that the written word was taken so seriously back then. Papers sometimes printed several issues a day for certain events and people actually paid each time to be updated. Also, the anger that was expressed for stories printed in papers that questioned the integrity or sullied the reputation of a person was so intense. It isn't like today because vicious rumors are printed and the publisher isn't gunned down or even taken to court for libel. I enjoyed this book and was educated as well.

Kevin says

It had a slow start, with an almost overwhelming number of characters; however, by the end of the book everyone managed to come together for a page-turner ending that I just couldn't put down.

Paul Brandel says

I liked this book, it helps that I live near the City, San Francisco.
The author does a fine job chronicling the era (1870-1880). Also
how corrupted the newspaper men were in those days! News reporting is
without question superior now than it was over a century ago.
I was intrigued how people back then would kill another over an insult. It was the wild, wild west indeed.

Stephanie says

War of Words is a great example of an exciting history book! Simon Read did an excellent job teaching me about this fascinating time period in American journalism. I found it particularly engaging as someone who studied journalism in college, but I believe the interest level would be high for any reader, especially those who enjoy learning about American history. One take-away: the folly of unresolved conflict (and the violence that can erupt as a result of it).

I am very pleased that I had the opportunity to read this book--thanks to Goodreads First Reads.

Laura says

Foreshadowing is a hack writing trick, and this author used it at every turn. I found this distracting and annoying. Aside from this unfortunate writing style I enjoyed the book, especially when things heat up and the guns come out.

GT says

Fantastically interesting story that was well-researched and told by Simon Read, the author. Granted I live in the SF Bay Area and this story of the early days of the newspapers and publishers in San Francisco may hold more interest for me than others across the globe. But as historical true-crime, I loved it. I was unaware of this chapter in SF history and incredibly my Dad was too. He is not often in the dark completely about a series of events of this significance - the attempted murder of a SF mayoral candidate just 7 days prior to the election. Dramatic stuff.

I think this one will stick with me and I loved learning about the endeavors of the SF Vigilance Committee. Such a lawless time in our local recent history.

4 Stars

★ = Horrid waste of time

★★ = May be enjoyable to some, but not me

★★★ = I am glad I read it

★★★★ = Very enjoyable and something I'd recommend

★★★★★ = A rare find, simply incredible

Lauren says

Fascinating true tale of the violent competition between San Fran newspapers in the late 1800's. Incredible story of life, journalism, and morals of America post civil war.

Terri says

This book was a surprise to me....it was a surprise because I won it from Good Reads. It was a bonus that it was good. If you like history at all, and if you like newspaper bashing, you'll like this book. The author doesn't do the bashing, the characters do. Back in the mid to late 1800's in San Francisco it seemed to be kind of a no holds barred in the industry. It didn't help that there was not much law around at that time. If you're not into history, don't let me scare you away, this doesn't read like a history book, it's a good story and Simon Read does an excellent job telling it. Who knew the Chronicle has such a colorful history.

Michelle says

Playing Jokers Blog: all suits of genres and bookish news

At a time when Wild West shootouts were perhaps a common thing, San Francisco was no different as people sought to end conflicts with a poorly aimed gunfight. War of Words: A True Tale of Newsprint and Murder is an aptly named title, as the book detailed exactly that: the battle over libel in the printed world and the means people sought to exact revenge.

The meat of the story centers on Isaac Kalloch, a reverend who had (perhaps) an appetite for sins and the de Young brothers who were newspaper entrepreneurs with little regard to the facts. The conflict between the two would eventually build up and result in a death. However, for the majority of the book, more time was spent building up their individual lives. The actual conflict between the two was constantly foreshadowed, a technique that can be thrilling if used with some restraint.

I always feel guilty for giving 2 stars because you would think 2 stars means that I hated it. Instead, I follow the Goodreads' guidance on stars and have rated it 'it was okay'. Ideally, I'd give it 2.5 stars. I enjoyed learning about the subject, but I did not necessarily love the read. My favorite parts were the trials. It was hard to feel sympathetic for either of the players because they both had their faults, and to a modern-day reader, their argument seemed pretty petty (you speak bad about my mother--how dare you! ...even though I spoke bad about your father).

One of the most startling realizations I had with the book was how the political rhetoric has really not changed in over a hundred years. The media still seeks out items from candidates' pasts to reveal to the public some past error, while the politicians themselves flip flop but maintain that they have always been consistent.

Joella says

Actually, this is another book I didn't finish. I hate not finishing books, but this one was just so boring. It had so much promise: newspapers and murder. But it turned out to be way too factual and not enough story. Needless to say, I was disappointed.

rachel says

it petered out towards the end, so i suppose all i missed was the author's analysis of the events and why they were important...

Patrick Book says

I liked the premise of this book very, very much. Even after reading it I appreciated the idea more than the final product, perhaps, but not by much.

There are a lot of interesting and illuminative elements to this story. Particularly I had no idea that Old West-era California was so litigious. As a modern journalist it's hard to imagine a world in which newspaper publishers would be so baldly libellous. It's also pretty wild to consider that homicide was so easily justified by the courts then as well.

As far as the writing goes the whole of the book is very much expository. There isn't much in the way of prose here, the language serves to advance the story. I wasn't thrilled with the numerous teaser-style paragraphs in the first third of the book; it was almost as if the author didn't trust his writing enough to keep the reader interested and felt he had to remind them that there was ACTION! and GUNPLAY! and MURDER! up ahead.

Donna says

This is an interesting story, and I especially liked the details about the time period. The writing style was a bit too melodramatic for my taste at times, though.
