



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

Pope Brock

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In 1917, after years of selling worthless patent remedies throughout the Southeast, John R. Brinkley—America’s most brazen young con man—arrived in the tiny town of Milford, Kansas. He set up a medical practice and introduced an outlandish surgical method using goat glands to restore the fading virility of local farmers.

It was all nonsense, of course, but thousands of paying customers quickly turned “Dr.” Brinkley into America’s richest and most famous surgeon. His notoriety captured the attention of the great quackbuster Morris Fishbein, who vowed to put the country’s “most daring and dangerous” charlatan out of business.

Their cat-and-mouse game lasted throughout the 1920s and '30s, but despite Fishbein’s efforts Brinkley prospered wildly. When he ran for governor of Kansas, he invented campaigning techniques still used in modern politics. Thumbing his nose at American regulators, he built the world’s most powerful radio transmitter just across the Rio Grande to offer sundry cures, and killed or maimed patients by the score, yet his warped genius produced innovations in broadcasting that endure to this day. By introducing country music and blues to the nation, Brinkley also became a seminal force in rock 'n' roll. In short, he is the most creative criminal this country has ever produced.

Culminating in a decisive courtroom confrontation that pit Brinkley against his nemesis Fishbein, *Charlatan* is a marvelous portrait of a boundlessly audacious rogue on the loose in an America that was ripe for the bamboozling.

From the Hardcover edition.

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