

Foreword

Comparisons are not invariably odious, but they are often misleading. In their enthusiasm for this truly fascinating book, early readers called Marion Davies and William Randolph Hearst the “Jackie and Ari of their day.” And why? Because they had “more glamour, power and money than anyone else.” The truth is that Hearst was never rich in the way that Onassis was rich, and the power of Onassis resided solely in his money. He could buy himself an airline, an island or a Greek colonel, but his place in history is recorded largely in the gossip columns. Hearst *published* the gossip columns; he practically invented them. The difference is immense.

If Hearst was not a great man, he was certainly a towering figure in the first half of this century. If he had been ten times richer than he was, he would not now be primarily remembered for his millions. Onassis was neither a great man nor a great force in the world; he was—quite simply and purely—a celebrity. “You make the money,” Hearst might well have said to him, “I’ll make the celebrities.”

This, of course, is a paraphrase. When Frederick Remington was dispatched to the Cuban front [in 1897] to provide the Hearst newspapers with sketches of our first small step into American imperialism, the noted artist complained by telegram that there wasn’t really enough shooting to keep him busy. “You make the pictures,” Hearst wired back, “I’ll make the war.” This can be recognized not only as the true voice of power but also as a line of dialogue from a movie. In fact, it is the only purely Hearstian element in *Citizen Kane*.

There are parallels, but these can be just as misleading as comparisons. If San Simeon hadn’t existed, it would have been necessary for the authors of the movie to invent it. Except for the telegram already noted and the crazy art collection (much too good to resist), in *Kane* everything was invented.

Let the incredulous take note of the facts.

William Randolph Hearst was born rich. He was the pampered son of an adoring mother. That is the decisive fact about him. Charles Foster Kane was born poor and was raised by a bank. There is no room here for details, but the differences between the real man and the character in the film are far greater than those between the shipowner and the newspaper tycoon.

And what of Susan Alexander? What indeed.

It was a real man who built an opera house for the soprano of his choice, and much in the movie was borrowed from that story, but the man was not Hearst. Susan, Kane's second wife, is not even based on the real-life soprano. Like most fictional characters, Susan's resemblance to other fictional characters is quite startling. To Marion Davies she bears no resemblance at all.

Kane picked up Susan on a street corner—from nowhere—where the poor girl herself thought she belonged. Marion Davies was no dim shop-girl; she was a famous beauty who had her choice of rich, powerful and attractive beaux before Hearst sent his first bouquet to her stage door. That Susan was Kane's wife and Marion was Hearst's mistress is a difference more important than might be guessed in today's changed climate of opinion. The wife was a puppet and a prisoner; the mistress was never less than a princess. Hearst built more than one castle, and Marion was the hostess in all of them: they were pleasure domes indeed, and the Beautiful People of the day fought for invitations. Xanadu was a lonely fortress, and Susan was quite right to escape from it. The mistress was never one of Hearst's possessions: he was always her suitor, and she was the precious treasure of his heart for more than thirty years, until his last breath of life. Theirs is truly a love story. Love is not the subject of *Citizen Kane*.

Susan was forced into a singing career because Kane had been forced out of politics. She was pushed from one public disaster to another by the bitter frustration of the man who believed that because he had married her and raised her up out of obscurity she was his to use as he might will. There is hatred in that.

Hearst put up the money for many of the movies in which Marion Davies was starred and, more importantly, backed her with publicity. But this was less of a favor than might appear. That vast publicity machine was all too visible; and finally, instead of helping, it cast a shadow—a shadow of doubt. Could the star have existed without the machine? The question darkened an otherwise brilliant career.

As one who shares much of the blame for casting another shadow—the shadow of Susan Alexander Kane—I rejoice in this opportunity to record something which today is all but forgotten except for those lucky enough to have seen a few of her pictures: Marion Davies was one of the most delightfully accomplished comediennes in the whole history of the screen. She would have been a star if Hearst had never happened. She was also a delightful and very considerable person. The proof is in this book, and I commend it to you.

—Orson Welles
Los Angeles, California
May 28, 1975

TC: Here, as in the Introduction, a bracketed date appears: 1897, supplied to keep readers on track with regard to the Spanish-American War of 1898. Otherwise, short of identifying the “Greek colonel” as George Papadopoulos or quibbling with the misspelling of Frederic Remington’s first name—an error also made by Swanberg in *Citizen Hearst*—I’ve stuck with the hands-off approach to what Orson Welles wrote in 1975. Bobbs-Merrill (again through Gladys Moore) changed the Foreword less than it did the Introduction preceding it. Which is largely to say, the publisher of *The Times We Had* tread as carefully as I have: Welles wasn’t a person to be trifled with.

Besides, one would have to be an expert in Wellesiana and in *Citizen Kane* to do full justice to an allusion like the “real man who built an opera house for the soprano of his choice.” The robber baron Charles Tyson Yerkes and his beloved Emilie Grigsby come to mind. But should they? We can leave fine points like those to people versed in arcane matters of film history and delve instead into the main event—the fifteen chapters lying ahead—revisited and re-edited for a new audience as *The Annotated Marion*.