Connecticut College American Studies Senior Seminar
“Globalization and American Culture Since 1945” Book Review

Author: Walter Isaacson
Title: *Steve Jobs*
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*Steve Jobs*

Computers play an important role in American jobs, education, healthcare, government and culture. Their creation emerged from a tech savvy culture, made up of specialists that obsessed over customization and complexity. Today computer culture has emerged as a movement towards accessibility. Walter Isaacson’s biography *Steve Jobs* captures the rollercoaster life of the man, Steve Jobs, who brought computers to the masses. The book engages readers to let them formulate their own opinion of Jobs, as a lunatic, a genius or both. From his writing, Isaacson opens a window into the culture of business and consumerism in the United States.

Isaacson is careful to leave no details behind. He describes Job’s own perception of his persona as an “enlightened rebel pitted against evil empires, a Jedi warrior or Buddhist samurai fighting against the forces of darkness.” (Isaacson 231) Job’s is clearly a very complicated mind. Isaacson depicts Steve’s charm and connects the reader to the innovator that so many of us watched unveil the most awe-inspiring products to ever hit the market. His representation of his darker side is equally as captivating. Reading about Steve publicly berating employees, shouting at the top of his lungs, humiliating his friends, and battling cancer leaves the reader with goose bumps, unsure of whether to love him or hate him.
Isaacson’s primary goal – to write a limitless and very real account of who Steve Jobs was, his accomplishments, the emotions and experiences that led to his success – proved to be no easy feat. Isaacson does a thorough job of digging out what at times are contradictory accounts of events in Jobs’ life. In order to achieve this he interviewed hundreds of friends, relatives, competitors, adversaries and colleagues related to Jobs. In the biography, Isaacson makes the perspectives very clear, often reminding the reader of what many that new Jobs referred to as “Steve’s Reality Distortion Field” which was “a confounding mélange of a charismatic rhetorical style, indomitable will, and eagerness to bend any fact to fit the purpose at hand.” (Isaacson 204) It was his greatest attribute that fueled the fire of innovation and removed the limits of creativity, but also a fatal flaw as he pushed his employees and himself so hard that he was eventually removed from control of Apple in 1985.

One of the most impressive aspects of Isaacson’s writing was his interpretation of the history of Apple, NeXT, Pixar and their products. It is intricately woven into the story giving the reader a true sense of how Apple and its products were actually a part of Jobs. He took great pride in his work, the perfection of his work and the way his work was displayed. Alain Rossmann, an employee of Apple and friend of Jobs, accompanied him on a tour of an Apple factory with Danielle Mitterrand, the Cuban wife of French Socialist President Francois Mitterrand. As the tour turned sour and Madame Mitterrand became more concerned with the workers and their conditions than the crisp clean state of the factory. Jobs snapped, ending the tour in insult and then proceeding to drive 100 mph down the highway, only to get pulled over, be issued a ticket and to continue careening down the highway afterwards. Rossmann’s description of the event led to his
conclusion that, “He absolutely believed that the normal rules didn’t apply to him.” (Isaacson 304) Isaacson’s choice of language adeptly illustrated the root of his outburst and his passion over the importance of visual satisfaction, but also his inherent nature to rebel. Jobs held nothing back, no matter whom he was addressing, and Isaacson’s writing makes that very clear.

In the end, everyone who owns an iPad, iPhone or MacBook should find a certain appreciation in this biography. Isaacson does an excellent job of telling the story of Steve Jobs and Apple in a well-written and entertaining manner while capturing a cultural transformation in post-industrial America. Jobs’ products changed the way we think, do business and live our lives. He has broken countless paradigms in business, technology, sales, and other areas of everyday life. Understanding the hard work, successes and failures of Apple helps to uncover some of the less than savory aspects of American business, but also why American businesses remain some of the most competitive in the world.