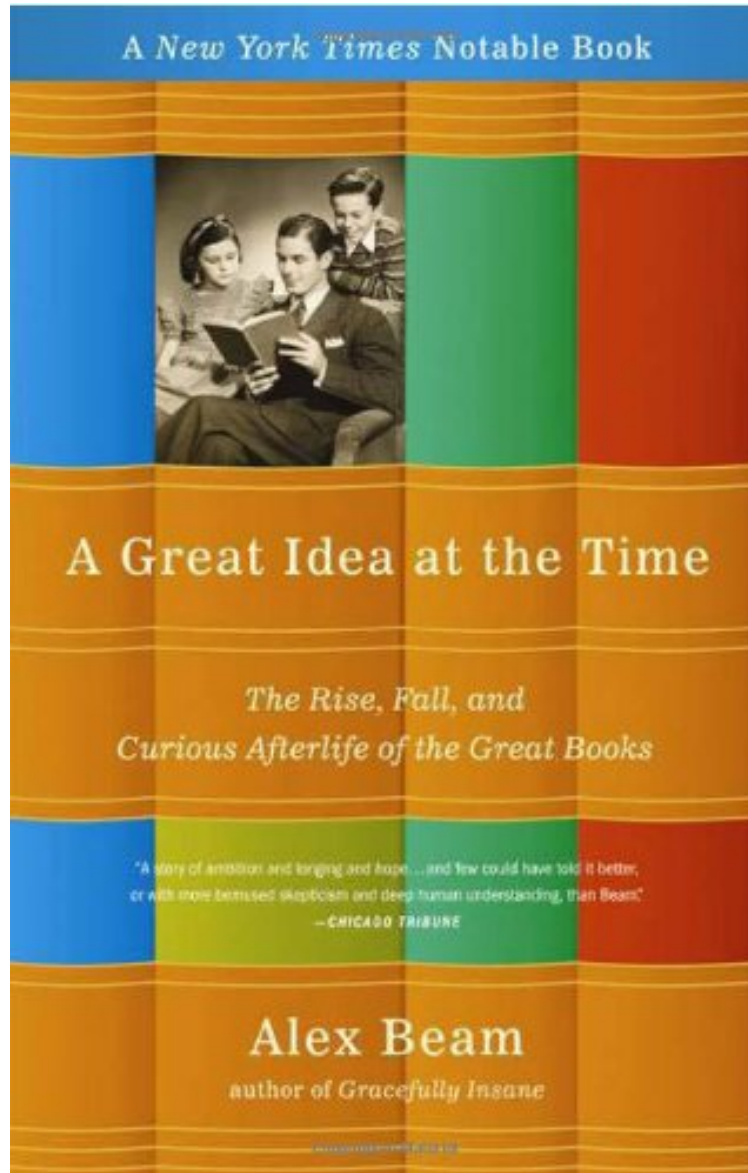


(Download) A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books

A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books

Alex Beam

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Alex Beam : A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fun, irreverent
By RHaganI interrupted reading David Denby's "Great Books" to read this and couldn't stop. I enjoyed looking at the cultural pressure of the time of my youth as if it were quaint rites of some isolated tribe. Now it's back to Denby. The two books complement one another well. As one who remembers the History of Western Civilization course required of me as a freshman in college as the best learning experience of my life, the flight from this focus in the 1960s and 1970s I felt was a tragedy. Denby deals with this in the 1990s, and somewhat agrees. But Beam chronicles the hucksterism of the parallel pressure to own the 102 great books, a product more sold than bought. The three interesting figures about whom Beam's delightful gossip revolves are Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and William Benton. If these names are familiar to you, you are pretty old, and you may enjoy "A Great Idea at the Time."
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I was expecting to dislike this book
By James C. MartinMany reviewers gave this a hearty "thumbs-down" and I couldn't help but wonder why, since I have owned a set of the Great Books for many years.I reluctantly must agree with Beam in his appraisal of this being a "snobbish" set of books and suffers highly from the oft-criticized tiny type and the intellectual snobbery of their editorial board deciding that footnotes would clutter the copy. What a wonderful set this "COULD HAVE BEEN" if they had allowed the use of footnotes and glosses!I really have to question too, their selection criteria that includes mathematical and planetary data that simply is not even taught any more.I wanted initially to be upset with Bream's constant "dissing" of Adler and Hutchinson, but after hearing him out...He's right.It is a book about a set of books that are now off the market except for the remaining stock that Britannica has on hand.Too bad that Britannica did not give us bigger type and notes!
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting read!
By classicbooksmomInteresting read about the history of the Great Books and the men involved in bringing them to the American consciousness in the twentieth century. Would be of main interest to those who have an affinity for classic literature. Just be warned that those who actually read the Great Books come across as being an oddity in this work.

Today the classics of the western canon, written by the proverbial dead white men, are cannon fodder in the culture wars. But in the 1950s and 1960s, they were a pop culture phenomenon. The Great Books of Western Civilization, fifty-four volumes chosen by intellectuals at the University of Chicago, began as an educational movement, and evolved into a successful marketing idea. Why did a million American households buy books by Hippocrates and Nicomachus from door-to-door salesmen? And how and why did the great books fall out of fashion? In *A Great Idea at the Time* Alex Beam explores the Great Books mania, in an entertaining and strangely poignant portrait of American popular culture on the threshold of the television age. Populated with memorable characters, *A Great Idea at the Time* will leave readers asking themselves: Have I read Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* lately? If not, why not?

From Publishers Weekly
Before the dawn of the television age, in an ambitious effort to enlighten the masses via door-to-door sales, Encyclopedia Britannica and the University of Chicago launched the Great Books of Western Civilization, "all fifty-four volumes of them... purporting to encompass all of Western knowledge from Homer to Freud." Led by the "intellectual Mutt 'n' Jeff act" of former University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins and his sidekick Mortimer Adler, the Great Books briefly, and improbably, caught the nation's imagination. In his discussion, Boston Globe columnist Beam looks at how and why this multi-year project took shape, what it managed to accomplish (or not), and the lasting effects it had on college curricula (in the familiar form of Dead White Males). Beam (*Gracefully Insane: Life and Death Inside America's Premier Mental Hospital*) describes meetings endured by the selection committee, and countless debates over Euripedes, Herodotus, Shakespeare, Melville, Dickens and Whitman ("When it comes to Great Books, no one is without an opinion."), but tells it like it is regarding the Syntopicon they devised—at 3,000 subtopics and 163,000 separate entries, not exactly a user-friendly compendium—and the resulting volumes, labeling them "icons of unreadability—32,000 pages of tiny, double-column, eye-straining type." By lauding the intent and intelligently critiquing the outcome, Beam offers an insightful, accessible and fair narrative on the Great Books, its time, and its surprisingly significant legacy. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
From Bookmarks Magazine
Alex Beam clearly has an eye for definitive and damning details: nearly every reviewer repeated his observations about the Great Books of the Western World being printed in faux leather and in nearly unreadable type, as well as his characterization of Mortimer Adler as a "Hobbit." ers also contrasted (and commended) *A Great Idea's* readability with the thick tomes it addresses. But several reviewers also turned Beam's wit on its head, noting that while *A Great Idea* is a good book, it is not a great one. Some reviewers found fault with the author's occasional tendency to sound too folksy. Others didn't know whether to treat the Great Books phenomenon as an effort to save civilization or middlebrow hucksterism—or both. So do you want to read great books, or just read about them as a phenomenon? We'll take the former. Copyright 2008 Bookmarks Publishing LLC "Britannica Blog," December 9, 2008 "Marvelously entertaining"