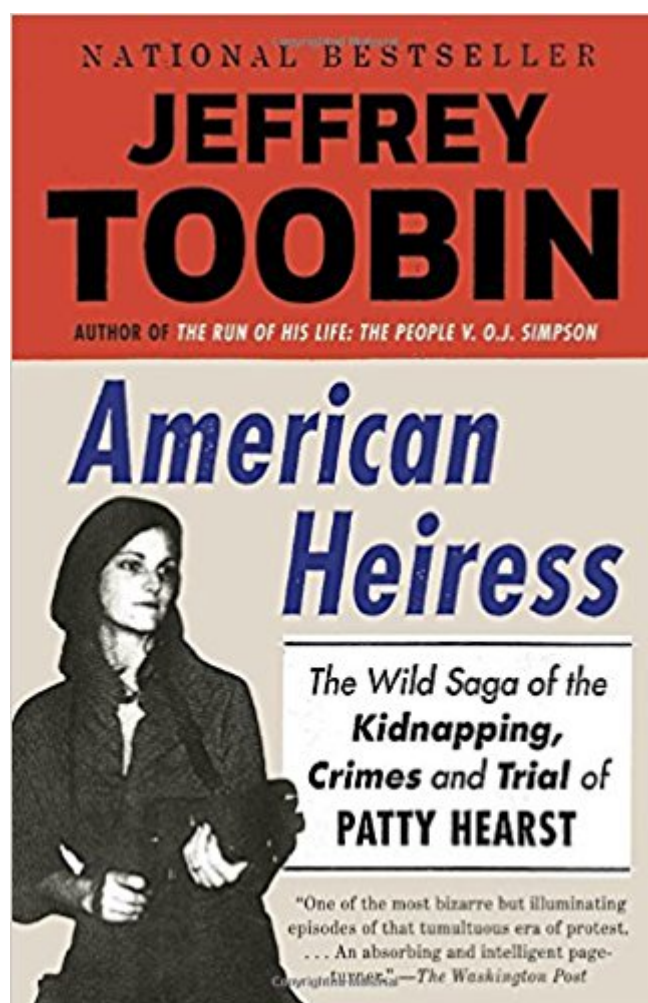


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# American Heiress: The Wild Saga Of The Kidnapping, Crimes And Trial Of Patty Hearst



## Synopsis

A National Bestseller From *The New Yorker* staff writer and bestselling author of *The Nine* and *The Run of His Life: The People v. O. J. Simpson*, the definitive account of the kidnapping and trial that defined an insane era in American history On February 4, 1974, Patty Hearst, a sophomore in college and heiress to the Hearst Family fortune, was kidnapped by a ragtag group of self-styled revolutionaries calling itself the Symbonese Liberation Army. The weird turns that followed in this already sensational take are truly astonishing--the Hearst family tried to secure Patty's release by feeding the people of Oakland and San Francisco for free; bank security cameras captured "Tania" wielding a machine gun during a robbery; the LAPD engaged in the largest police shoot-out in American history; the first breaking news event was broadcast live on television stations across the country; and then there was Patty's circuslike trial, filled with theatrical courtroom confrontations and a dramatic last-minute reversal, after which the term "Stockholm syndrome" entered the lexicon. Ultimately, the saga highlighted a decade in which America seemed to be suffering a collective nervous breakdown. *American Heiress* portrays the electrifying lunacy of the time and the toxic mix of sex, politics, and violence that swept up Patty Hearst and captivated the nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A *New York Times* Bestseller" The abduction and subsequent radicalization of Patricia Hearst is one of the most bizarre but illuminating episodes of that tumultuous era of protest...and

in *American Heiress* Jeffrey Toobin retells the story with a full-blown narrative treatment that may astonish readers too young to remember it themselves... Toobin spins this complex chapter of recent history into an absorbing and intelligent page-turner. *The Washington Post* "[A] clever companion piece to *The Run of His Life* (1996), his book about the O. J. Simpson case. Mr. Toobin has used the same winning formula of delving deeply into an American crime story that had tremendous notoriety in its day and retelling it with new resonance. *Ms. Hearst's* tale is much more bizarre than Mr. Simpson... [I]n an age of terrorism, the chronicle of how a sedate heiress named Patricia morphed into a gun-toting, invective-spouting revolutionary calling herself Tania holds a definite fascination. *Janet Maslin, The New York Times* "[R]iveting *American Heiress* is a page-turner certainly, but Toobin, a gifted writer, infuses it with much more... Even if he ridicules the ideas and condemns the violent deeds of this ragtag group of revolutionary wannabes, they emerge not as cardboard villains but flesh and blood protagonists. *The Boston Globe* "Toobin has crafted a book for the expert and the uninitiated alike, a smart page-turner that boasts a cache of never-before-published details... Toobin's book successfully captures the unrivaled spectacle of the Hearst drama. *San Francisco Chronicle* "Terrifically engrossing... Toobin uses his knowledge of the justice system and his examination of the evidence to pierce the veil of spectacle... As for Patty Hearst herself, Toobin treats her as a person, not a tabloid phantasm. *New York Times Book Review* "[A] spell-binding retelling... In the end the real test of a writer's worth is how well they can tell a story that's already been told many times before by many different people, including... in this case... by some of the main characters themselves. *American Heiress* Everything about this book feels right: the structure, the style and the tone, which is the *New Yorker* meets Raymond Chandler. As always with great writing, it comes down to a strong, distinctive narrative voice spiced with the judicious use of juicy details. *LA Weekly*

JEFFREY TOOBIN is the bestselling author of *The Nine*, for which he won the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, *The Oath*, *Too Close to Call*, *A Vast Conspiracy*, and *The Run of His Life*, which was made into the critically acclaimed FX series *The People v. O. J. Simpson: American Crime Story*. He is a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and the senior legal analyst at CNN.

Most people who were around in the mid-1970's will remember the kidnapping of Patty Hearst by a

hapless band of revolutionary players, the Symbionese Liberation Army. This group, whose main members were - as Jeffrey Toobin puts it in his new book, "American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst" - as differentiated as a fox-hole in a war-time movie. There was the black revolutionary - "Cinque" or Donald DeFreeze - the white revolutionaries - Emily and William Harris, the gay revolutionaries - Camilla Hall and Patricia Soltysik, and various, other hangers-on. The SLA was a group of urban guerillas, who seemed determined to wreck the system, but were stymied on what to put in it's place. And who was Patricia Hearst? As Toobin describes her, she was the heiress to a fortune but was sort of drifting through life, so far. The daughter of mismatched parents, she was the middle of five daughters, raised by her mother to aim for the conventional wealthy woman's life - marriage to an eligible man and a life raising children of her own. In stark contrast to the free-living members of the SLA, Hearst at 19 was living with a much older man - Steven Weed - in a married-like life, while studying at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. On the night of February 4, 1974, Patricia Hearst was kidnapped from the town house in Berkeley by the SLA and forcibly turned into a "revolutionary" by her kidnappers. Or, did she join in the ensuing mayhem willingly? There began an almost two year spree by the SLA, with Hearst - now called "Tania" - as an active participant. Bank robberies, shootouts, and blackmailing for food distributions to the poor were all part of mid-1970's in San Francisco and Los Angeles. This group - which literally and thankfully couldn't shoot too straight - made headlines. I can still remember where I was when I heard Patricia Hearst had been found and rescued. But what was she rescued from? And what was her role in the SLA's crime spree? Author and attorney Jeffrey Toobin does an excellent job in relating the people, the times, and the effects this rag-tag group - with its "prize" member - had on California and society at large in those years. Hearst has now become the settled society matron her mother had groomed her to be, raising daughters and prize-winning dogs. The others who are still alive are living with various degrees of revolutionary fervor. His book is beautifully written with much less sensationalism than you might expect on the subject.

She seemed to be living an idyllic life in the early 1970s. But Patricia Campbell Hearst apparently had a lot of unresolved issues: about her parents, Randolph and Catherine Campbell Hearst, their expectations, and even about her fiancé, Steven Weed, with whom she had been living in an ordinary Berkeley apartment while she attended classes. But everything changed for her on February 4, 1974, a quiet Monday evening at home. A knock on the door, a request for use of the phone, and then a ragtag group filled the room, tying them up, and ultimately grabbing Patricia.

Steven took off on foot. I thought: coward! When I first heard about these events, I was living my own ordinary life, but with an interest in the counter-culture, even though I was working at a conventional social work job. But I was definitely intrigued by the events presented on the news. In *An American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst*, Jeffrey Toobin has presented a compilation of facts obtained through hundreds of interviews and thousands of previously secret documents. His tome *An American Heiress* highlighted a decade in which America seemed to be suffering a collective nervous breakdown. Toobin's writing style was engaging enough to be a fictional piece, with intensity rising as the events unfolded. Even as I had kept up with many of the events, this book reveals much that was unknown to the general public. After the early days in a Daly City closet, blindfolded, Patricia (Patty) appeared to have "graduated" to more freedom within the house, free of the blindfold, and with the closet door open. Soon she was conversing with her captors: Donald DeFreeze (Cinque), Bill and Emily Harris, Nancy Ling Perry, Willy Wolfe (Cujo), and Camilla Hall. Others would come in and out of the group and exist on the fringes. They called themselves the Symbionese Liberation Army, and ended their "communiques" with the signature words: "death to the fascist insect that preys upon the life of the people." Their initial demands included a massive food giveaway which turned out to be problematic at times, and did nothing to bring about Patty's release. Throughout the two-year life on the run, there were bank robberies, shootings, carjackings, bombings, and a constant moving from one hovel to another, from SF to LA to Sacramento, and even eventually to a farm in Pennsylvania. But very early on, Patty seemed to have taken on the mantra of her captors, even the moniker of Tania, and identified herself as part of the group. Then something changed after her arrest and incarceration. After her initial fist raising and her announcement of her occupation as "urban guerrilla," Patty seemed to become subdued, more conventional, and her rhetoric morphed back to that of the American Heiress persona. After the trial, the conviction, the commuted sentence and her new life as Mrs. Bernie Shaw (she married her police bodyguard), we are left with questions still. Was Patty brainwashed, or had she simply decided to take on whatever role served her best? Who was Patty Hearst, and how did she so quickly, like a chameleon, become whatever she needed to be? Only she knows for sure or maybe not. A fascinating story. 5 stars.

Whether you are old enough to remember or do not remember the Patty Hearst kidnapping welcome to a revisit with new insight or simply a fascinating human portrait and tale of challenge

and derring do. Mr. Toobin's lawyer credentials mixed with his journalist status is an elegant combination of skills that offers a balanced view of "who was and who is Patty Hearst". Mr. Toobin has his views, but he does stint on a profile that offers alternate views. The reader is left with everything she/he needs to draw your own conclusions. The facts are laid out with courtroom precision. Mr. Toobin's fluid writing style make this a page turner. It is also in no small measure an evocation of another time, standards and history that is fast receding in this digital age. It was a simpler time yes, but no less humanly complex.

Patricia's parents reactions and all the trial inconsistencies. In the end he caught the readers up on where are they now, which was interesting. I was the same age as Patty Hearst at the time of her kidnapping. I didn't believe her back then, and after reading this carefully explained novel, I still don't believe she was "coerced" into becoming a participant. I believe she was a privileged, rich girl who was being rebellious against her parents and society--like so many young people were in the seventies. She got sucked in and liked it! So many key players were dead and only Patricia Hearst REALLY knows if she was willing or not. And I don't believe her when she says she wasn't! I still believe that the money and power of the Hearst legacy influenced the outcome of all this for Patricia Hearst. Interesting and well written novel.

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