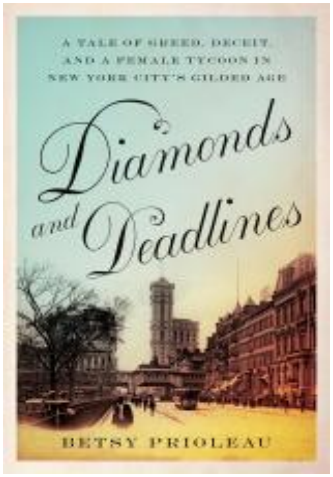
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Diamonds and Deadlines: A Tale of Greed, Deceit, and a Female Tycoon in New York City?s Gilded Age

by Betsy Prioleau



About the Book

The first major biography of the glamorous and scandalous Miriam Leslie, titan of publishing and an unsung hero of women?s suffrage.

Among the fabled tycoons of the Gilded Age --- Carnegie, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt --- is a forgotten figure: Mrs. Frank Leslie. For 20 years she ran the country?s largest publishing company, Frank Leslie Publishing, which chronicled postbellum America in dozens of weeklies and monthlies. A pioneer in an all-male industry, she made a fortune and became a national celebrity and tastemaker in the process. But Miriam Leslie was also a byword for scandal. She flouted feminine convention, took lovers, married four times, and harbored unsavory secrets that she concealed through a skein of lies and multiple personas. Both before and after her lifetime, glimpses of the truth emerged, including an illegitimate birth and a checkered youth.

DIAMONDS AND DEADLINES reveals the unknown, sensational life of the brilliant and brazen ?empress of journalism,? who dropped a bombshell at her death. She left her entire multimillion-dollar estate to women?s suffrage --- a never-equaled amount that guaranteed passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. In this dazzling biography, cultural historian Betsy Prioleau draws from diaries, genealogies and published works to provide an intimate look at the life of one of the Gilded Age's most complex, powerful women and unexpected feminist icons.

Ultimately, DIAMONDS AND DEADLINES restores Mrs. Frank Leslie to her rightful place in history, as a monumental businesswoman who presaged the feminist future and reflected, in bold relief, the Gilded Age, one of the most momentous, seismic and vivid epochs in American history.

Discussion Guide

1. Did you know anything about Miriam Leslie before reading DIAMONDS AND DEADLINES?

2. What did you learn about the women?s suffrage movement after reading about Miriam?s life? Did anything you learn surprise you?

3. What do you think drove Miriam?s motivation to support women?s suffrage during her life, leading her to bequeath her fortune to the cause?

4. Miriam was a controversial public figure for the Gilded Age, to say the least: An ambitious businesswoman, a four-time divorcee, one-third of a polyamorous relationship, an adulteress, a tabloid fixture. How would 21st-century America feel about Miriam if she lived today?

5. Miriam excelled in a man?s industry during an era when women were considered unequal and confined to the private sphere. What about Miriam led her to this success?

6. Are there any well-known modern women to whom you would compare Miriam? Who are they? What characteristics do they share with her? Discuss how these women are depicted in the media today.

7. ?Do something! Spend yourself and get something for it! Make your mark and achieve success, or if need be, die in the attempt.? Miriam had many rousing sayings such as this one. Did any others strike you? Which ones, and why?

8. Miriam was once one of the most famous women in the country. Why is she almost forgotten in the history of women?s suffrage, while other women are celebrated? Why was she cut from the pantheon? Do you think the women?s suffrage movement could have succeeded without Miriam?s contributions?

9. DIAMONDS AND DEADLINES offers a window into Gilded Age American society in which the sights, sounds and even scents of the age are vividly described. What was the most surprising thing you learned about this time by reading the book? Which other historical figures within the book were familiar to you, and which ones are you now eager to further explore?

10. Despite all her success, money and fame, Miriam had a nearly compulsive need for acceptance and admiration, as evidenced by her constant efforts to be embraced by high society and receive male attention. What was behind this desire?

11. There was a steady stream of men in Miriam?s life, from her marriages and affairs to her career in a male-dominated profession. Why? Was her reliance upon men solely a function of the times within which she lived? Or was romantic conquest a bid for power and control of her life?

12. Imagine an America where women did not gain the right to vote. What would society be like today?

Author Bio

Betsy Prioleau was born and grew up in Richmond, Virginia. Her father was portrait artist Hugo Stevens, and her home life was full of books, art and talkfests. She worked as a reporter on the *Charlottesville Daily Progress* and received a B.S. and M.A. from the University of Virginia.

After a Ph.D. in American literature at Duke University, she taught English and World Literature at Manhattan College, where she was a tenured associate professor. She was a scholar in residence at New York University, and most recently, taught cultural history in the New York University Liberal Studies Program. Besides scholarly articles, she has written for popular publications and authored four books: DIAMONDS AND DEADLINES (2022), SWOON (2013), SEDUCTRESS (2003) and CIRCLE OF EROS (1983).

She lives with her husband Philip in Charleston, South Carolina and New York City, and dances with her grandchild Olivia, gardens and swims when she?s not buried in books.

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Publication Date: December 19, 2023
Genres: Biography, History, Nonfiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Abrams Press
ISBN-10: 1419770896
ISBN-13: 9781419770890