



American Scream: The Bill Hicks Story

Cynthia True , Janeane Garofalo (Foreword by)

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Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, Andy Kaufman -- add Bill Hicks to that list of brilliant, fearless comics. Just emerging from underground cult status when he died at age thirty-two, Bill Hicks spent most of his life making audiences roar -- and censors cringe -- with biting social satire about everything from former president George Bush to rock stars who hawk diet Coke. His nervy talent redefined the boundaries of comedy in the '80s and won him a list of admirers that includes John Cleese, George Carlin, and Thom Yorke of Radiohead.

This posthumous biography reveals for the first time what made Bill Hicks tick -- what made him laugh, what pissed him off, and what he saw as his ultimate mission: to release people from their prison of ignorance. From his first comedy gig at Bible camp to his infamous cancellation on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, Cynthia True portrays an artist whose outrage, drive, and compassion fueled a controversial body of work that still resonates today.

American Scream: The Bill Hicks Story Details

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O says

Cynthia's biography is concise and entertaining, more importantly it is free of bias, offering no commentary on Bill Hick's actions, of which some lesser writer would have a lot to say about; Cynthia allows her readers to form their own opinions of Bill Hicks and leaves us still thirsty for some of his actual material.

Dave says

I'm only giving this a four because it's about one of my favorite comedians of all-time. Overall, it's kind of a dull read probably because the author couldn't get the type of access that was necessary for such a book. It probably would've helped if the subject would have lived beyond the age of 32, as such, it feels as incomplete as Hicks' career and work. The end is depressing but he died with a lot of respect.

Michael says

I've been an avid Hicks fan for a very long time and I know that people say that quite often, and quite a few times it's all bullshit. The reason I love Hicks so much is that he said exactly what I was thinking most of the time. He connected with his fans on a level that most comedians only dream of and American Scream was finally our chance to learn about who Hicks was. I think most of the problem is True's fear of upsetting his fans. She gives us exactly what we want and we get to know Bill a little better, but as a fan I was expecting more. It's as if she knows that we want a book that respects Bill while talking about his life, and his Legacy. There's very little dirt here, but we do get to experience his frustration with the American audience for not getting him or his material. When you see Hicks live there's so much intensity there, but there's also an intelligence that most people failed to see, or maybe they did, but were too scared to admit it.

Where the book does connect with readers is during his illness. I kept hoping that Bill would beat this because he was finally breaking through. He was achieving everything he had set out to do and then of course there was that pesky Letterman performance that got banned. We see Bill fading before our eyes and it's not fair. It sucks that no talented hacks get to live while true heroes die. As I neared the book's conclusion I knew what was going to happen, but I didn't want to read it. This is where Cynthia truly connects with the readers as we realize that he's not going to beat the cancer and he would be taken from us sooner than we all expected. It's a man's fight to leave a legacy that really makes the last half of the book so sad and it's where we as fans really get to see what Bill was going through.

American Scream isn't as bad as some critics are saying. As a peek at Hicks and who he was it could've been better. I was hoping for more bits from his stand up so that it would show non Hicks fans just how good he was, but you get very little of that here which shows me that this one wasn't really meant to convert people but to give his fans some sort of closure. Of course we'll never get that because Bill Hicks was different than everyone else. He said exactly what we're thinking but are too afraid to say it. Bill's words still resonate because he wasn't afraid to tell us the truth and if we were offended maybe, just maybe we needed to be. If you want to know who Hicks was look at his body of work. Relentless, Dangerous, even the stand up

specials show us exactly who he was and what he believed in more than the book did.

The bottom line is that it's not terrible and it's a chance for us to remember Bill, but it was lacking a bit and won't do casual fans any good. It stays even throughout so there's nothing to piss off die hard fans, and that's where the book fails. She even admits that she wasn't a fan so maybe that was the problem, She only saw him as an outsider who knew a little bit about him but never got to experience what we all loved about him. It just plays it way too safe and makes the book a worthy while read but not something you're going to pick up and read again.

Libby says

If you're a fan of Bill Hicks, sit your ass down and read this book tonight. You know how it ends and it will break your heart, but it's a nice tribute to the Good Man. The jokes don't translate that well, and it's maybe not the best writing ever but you'll get a warts-and-all window of Hicks and you'll love him even more. If you're not a fan, read it anyway.

S. Taylor says

I've been playing around with stand-up comedy for a VERY short period of time, and one of the first things I ran into is this -- if I did a bit on religion or politics or advertising, I'd be told, "Bill Hicks did something similar, cut it."

And, yes, Bill Hicks has done just about everything. If you want to learn about the origins of political satire here in America, it all goes back, almost in a straight line, to Bill Hicks (and then to Lenny Bruce).

This book traces Hicks from his childhood through the straight-edge days of his early comedy, through the psilocybin days, all the way through the last days of him alive, with cancer. It's an amazingly detailed book, very moving, and -- as with the life of any great stand-up comic -- it has a great punchline.

I highly recommend going through all of hick's audio and video pieces as well, but this book will give you a sense of the overall story and where Hicks developed his material from.

For a comedian, or anyone interested in American political satire (especially on the RAUNCHY side -- Hicks NEVER stops cursing or pushing taboo boundaries) -- this is a must.

Juan Valdivia says

A must-read for his fans though many times it felt like a glorified outline of a biography of Bill Hicks. It focused much more on the stand-up comedy aspects of his life instead of delving, say, further into his childhood, although that terrain was sufficiently glossed over so that you understood how and why Bill came to be. I loved the minutiae, the bitty details about him. Wish there was a more comprehensive biography of him that had more of that, but that said, this one is solid. Just heartbreaking to read the final chapters since we know how it ended for Senor Hicks, one of my dearest heroes.

Chris Ortez says

I loved this biography of Bill Hicks, arguably one of the best stand-ups in history. I loved him while he was alive and was really sad when he left this earth, far too soon as is often the case with genius artistic types.

I read this a long time ago but I remember it being well-done in my opinion. I knew some of the stories already (I was friends with a few people who worked at Cobb's and Holy City Zoo) but it was a compelling read nonetheless.

One of the last bits is really touching about a tree or something? I remember at the time it drove me to tears. Really sweet & sad.

Michael Brown says

It's like some other reviewers say, this book is a good introduction to the man. It's appropriate that for a book about a promising and blazing life cut short, it does occasionally feel as if there could have been more to it, and that we're missing something.

Jason.frisbie says

I really cherish Bill Hicks, so when I read this book, I was a little disappointed with the content. Maybe I expected a bit more detail about his early years as a teenage comic or even during his Outlaw Comic days, but I was left wanting more knowledge all around to fill in some details about where his humor originated. I also wasn't impressed with the writing style.

I would consider this a fine beginner's book for anyone curious about Bill Hicks who has maybe seen one special (see Revelations if you haven't already!) or at least heard about his censorship on Letterman (which is one thing that I gained more information about from this read). Otherwise, there is a lot from his albums and video specials as well as articles that can enlighten those who are already vaguely familiar with his background.

Keith Bowden says

The life of one of my heroes, comedian Bill Hicks.

"I had a vision of way we could have no enemies again, if you're interested in this. Anybody interested in hearing this? It's kind of an interesting theory, and all we have to do is make one decisive act and we can rid the world of all our enemies at once. Here's what we do.

"You know all that money we spend on nuclear weapons and defense every year? Trillions of dollars. Instead, if we spent all that money feeding and clothing the poor of the world, which it would pay for many

times over, not one human being excluded... not one... we could as one race explore outer space together in peace, forever."

Nial says

This is a must read for fans of Bill Hicks like I am. Its very good and my only complaint is that it is very matter of fact and doesnt go into too much depth. His life story is laid out well but not much insight to his comedy and how or why he became a great comedian. No long interviews with anyone who knew him well but its still a good read.

Duncan says

A book about a comedian who lived fast, died young. Written by someone who never met him.

So I'm a huge Bill Hicks fan. If there's material out there on him, I probably have it.

Cynthia True tells a good story (albeit in a pretty journalistic way) and it helped me to understand Hicks' background a little better, but it lacked the polish and substance I wanted - more anecdotal stuff from Jimmy Pineapple and some of the other comedians he came through with would have been nice.

The alcohol abuse is pretty well documented, but the recovery is glossed over, as is his on-again-off-again relationship with cigarettes and narcotics.

Since I came to the book with fairly low expectations I can honestly say they were met, and more.

I approached Kevin Booth's Hicks biography, "Agent of Evolution" with much higher expectations; but save for a few chapters, I was largely disappointed, and Booth's sections, in particular, made him sound so selfish that it was difficult to feel any sympathy for him.

Read them both, they are both excellent in parts, but neither one is everything it ought to be.

Tom Menner says

Bill Hicks is one of my favorite comedians, and this book is an excellent telling of his history, his influences, and his sad death from pancreatic cancer when he was just about to make it big. There is also a good discussion of the infamous incident where Hicks' routine was cut from the "The Late Show with David Letterman" because Letterman and the producer felt it was too edgy. Letterman to his credit apologized years later and admitted it was a mistaken decision, and ran the routine in its entirety.

Chris Grierson says

An efficient biography of a bright young funny man that gripped me so much I read it in less than two days.

Alright so it helps that I'm extremely fascinated by him, but it's narrative makes you keep going, page after page. A brilliant insight into his life. Almost everything he says makes sense to me, he was the voice of reason in a world very much lacking in common sense. He had a short life.. But he lived it! He did what he wanted, said what he wanted (within reason of course), and didn't give a damn heehaw what anyone thought about him. Now that's a legacy.

Mark Farley says

I can't believe that it took until 2002 until someone wrote about Bill Hicks as it was acknowledged since the time of his death what a major influence he had on comedy. If I was competent enough I would have but luckily for you and probably me, Cynthia True came along and blew everyone away with her extremely emotional biography about the great man. This made me feel like I was watching Man on the Moon, watching my first born take its first few steps, it moved more more than I would ever imagine and more. Just reading and re-visiting and appreciating Hicks in this present day and culture and necessity of war that we live in today, makes you think that he was definitely onto something even though the Bush he talks about is W.s father. So ahead of his time and unappreciated in the thick set and scared comedy world still burgeoning from American TV, Hicks established early on a caustic repertoire and always loving and loyal cult following who knew he was right."Do you think that when Jesus comes back he's really gonna wanna look t a cross...?"Genius wasted to the man upstairs that makes you wonder whether he had to repent.
