



The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company

Constance L. Hays

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A definitive history of Coca-Cola, the world's best-known brand, by a New York Times reporter who has followed the company and who brings fresh insights to the world of Coke, telling a larger story about American business and culture

The Real Thing is a portrait of America's most famous product and the men who transformed it from mere soft drink to symbol of freedom. The story, starting with Coke's creation after the Civil War and continuing with its domination of the domestic and worldwide soft-drink business, is a uniquely American tale of opportunity, hope, teamwork, and love, as well as salesmanship, hubris, ambition, and greed. By 1920, the Coca-Cola Company's success depended on a unique partnership with a group of independent bottlers. Together, they had made Coke not just a soft drink but an element of our culture. But the company, intent on controlling everything about Coke, did all it could to dismantle that partnership. In its reach for power, it was more than willing to gamble the past.

Constance L. Hays examines a century of Coca-Cola history through the charismatic, driven men who used luck, spin, and the open door of enterprise to turn a beverage with no nutritional value into a remedy, a refreshment, and the world's best-known brand. The story of Coke is also a catalog of carbonation, soda fountains, dynastic bottling businesses, global expansion, and outsize promotional campaigns, including New Coke, one of the greatest marketing debacles of all time. By examining relationships at all levels of the company, **The Real Thing** reveals the psyche of a great American corporation and how it shadows all business, for better or worse.

This is as much a story about America as it is the tale of a great American product, one recognized all over the world. Under the leadership of Roberto Goizueta and Doug Ivester, Coca-Cola reinvented itself for investors, spearheading trends such as lavish executive salaries and the wooing of Wall Street, but when Coke's great global ambitions ran into trouble, it had difficulty getting back on track.

The Real Thing is a journey through the soft-drink industry, from the corner office to the vending machine. It is also a social history in which sugared water becomes an international object of consumer desire—and the messages poured upon an eager public gradually obscure the truth.

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