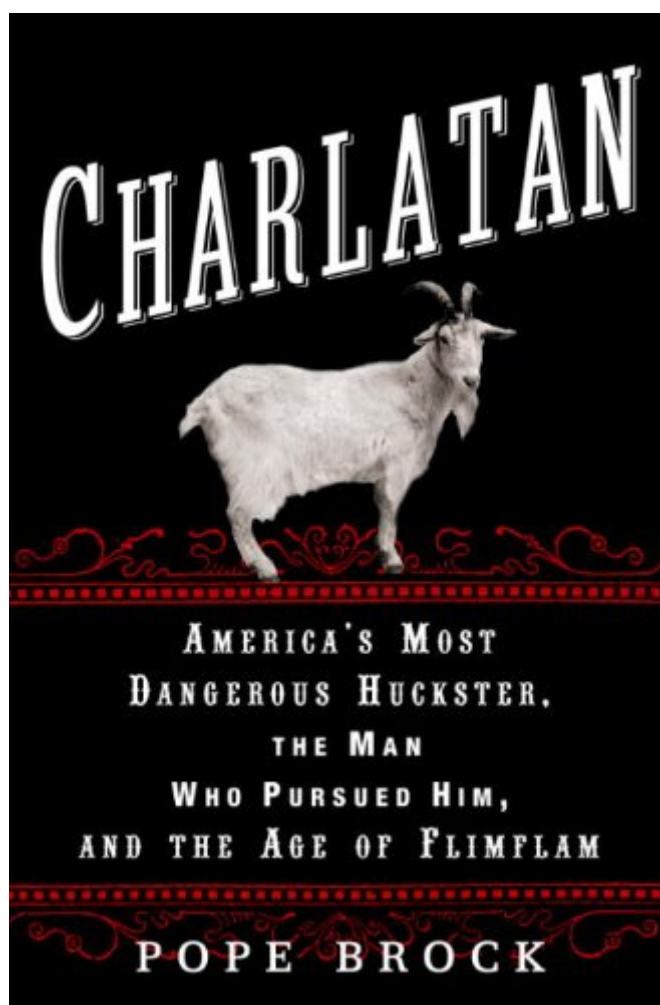


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Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, The Man Who Pursued Him, And The Age Of Flimflam



Synopsis

The inspiration for the 2016 Sundance Film Festival documentary, NUTS!. “An extraordinary saga of the most dangerous quack of all time...entrancing” • “USA Today In 1917, John R. Brinkley “America’s most brazen con man” introduced an outlandish surgical method for restoring fading male virility. It was all nonsense, but thousands of eager customers quickly made “Dr.” Brinkley one of America’s richest men “and a national celebrity. The great quack buster Morris Fishbein vowed to put the country’s “most daring and dangerous” charlatan out of business, yet each effort seemed only to spur Brinkley to new heights of ingenuity, and the worlds of advertising, broadcasting, and politics soon proved to be equally fertile grounds for his potent brand of flimflam. Culminating in a decisive courtroom confrontation, *Charlatan* is a marvelous portrait of a boundlessly audacious rogue on the loose in an America ripe for the bamboozling. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Charlatan is a thoroughly enjoyable (and pertinent even today!) tale of medical quackery a man who

spent years battling against the country's leading quack. The self-style "Doctor" Brinkley had no formal medical training and purchased his degrees. He started selling patent medicine for sexual problems (and other ailments) but soon found his niche. About 1919 he began transplanting goat testicles in men: \$750 a pop. That's \$750 back then, and no credit given. But you did get to visit the goat pen behind the clinic in Kansas to pick out a young billygoat of your choice. By today's standards, the operations were eye-popping in terms of the lack of attention to asepsis/antisepsis. Gangrene and lockjaw were among the perils one too often faced. Brinkley got very rich, and very famous: he twice ran for governor of Kansas and was narrowly defeated both times. When the Kansas Medical Board came down hard on him (at last), Brinkley moved to Del Rio, Texas, and set up the most powerful radio station in the world just across the border. This station was used to broadcast the program Medical Question Box which would answer questions for a fee and which promoted quack medicine available through mail order. Pulling in a million dollars a year (in 1930s dollars, not 2008 dollars) was no mean feat. Nemesis, in the form of Dr Morris Fishbein, finally proved to be Brinkley's undoing. Fishbein spent his life fighting and exposing medical quackery, and regularly wrote articles for the JAMA. It took Fishbein 10 years to bring down Brinkley: the climax of the book is a magnificently described court case where Brinkley was a disaster on the stand.

Everybody knows Viagra nowadays, and what it treats. Eighty years ago, everyone knew of the "goat gland" treatment, which not only treated what Viagra treats, but also brought a general rejuvenation to men, eliminated flab, advanced previously receding hairlines, and provided other miraculous cures. Provided cures, that is, to the gullible. The goat gland treatment never worked, despite its fame, and unlike the talismans that men have used for millennia to restore vigor, it had serious, sometimes lethal side effects. That little drawback did not impair the career of Doctor (perhaps that should be "Doctor") John R. Brinkley, one of the most famous of names in America in the 1930s. His astonishing rise and fall story is told with wry good humor in *_Charlatan: America's Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam_* (Crown Publishers) by Pope Brock. Brinkley is gone, and Brock does not harp on lessons we might learn from his enterprise, but it is clear that although we don't do goat glands anymore, the golden age for medical hucksterism has never entered its twilight. Brinkley was a farm boy who fiddled with "electric medicine" and injecting colored water into the buttocks of patients, which got him jailed in South Carolina in 1913 for practicing without a license. Once sprung, he headed to Chicago, and in 1915 he paid \$150 for a degree from the Eclectic Medical University of Kansas City, and he was in business. He set up a clinic in Milford, Kansas, and began implanting goat testicles into men who

had lost their pep. He became a pioneer in radio advertising, and also in broadcasting country music.

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