

Charles A. Lindbergh: A Human Hero Short Guide

Charles A. Lindbergh: A Human Hero by James Cross Giblin

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Overview

Although most readers know the outcome of Charles A. Lindbergh's famous nonstop Atlantic flight from New York to Paris, Giblin chronicles the trek in a thrilling manner that keeps the reader turning pages. In a time of radios and newsreels, Lindbergh's daring feat was broadcast to millions around the world. He became an instant hero, a larger-than-life celebrity whose instant fame prefigured that of many of today's stars in our current celebrity-obsessed and celebrity-studded society. Giblin carefully explores Lindbergh's quick leap from anonymity to fame, who was responsible for it, and how it changed the aviator.

Giblin presents both the heroic and the human sides of Lindbergh. The aviator, who fought for privacy most of his life, sought publicity when he allied with America First, the organization of citizens who opposed the entry of the United States into the war in Europe. Lindbergh used his fame to obtain radio air time and newspaper coverage so he could spread his message of isolationism. His frank opinions cost him his popularity with the majority of the public. This well-documented study recounts the glory, the tragedy, and the controversy in Lindbergh's life.

About the Author

James Cross Giblin was born on July 8, 1933 in Cleveland, Ohio. Edward Kelley and Anna Cross, a lawyer and a teacher respectively, made sure their son was surrounded by good reading material, and his love for books began at a very young age. Giblin remained shy and bookish throughout his childhood until a high school teacher insisted he work on the school newspaper. Coming up with new ideas for articles challenged Giblin, and he found he enjoyed working with other staff members. He also discovered the joy of acting during these high school years, which brought him further out of his shell.

Giblin graduated from Case Western Reserve University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1954. He received a Masters of Fine Arts degree in 1955 from Columbia University. While in college he focused on writing plays *Charles A. Lindbergh: A Human Hero*, 1997 and acting, but he first established a career for himself, not as a writer, but as a book editor with Criterion Books.

He also edited books for Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., Seabury Press, and Clarion Books, where he later also served as publisher.

As an editor, Giblin was called on to speak at writers' conferences and to contribute articles about children's books to magazines. Soon he turned his literary skills to writing nonfiction for children ages eight to twelve. Eleven of his sixteen works for young readers have been named Notable Children's Books by the American Library Association. In 1996, Giblin received the Washington Post-Children's Book Guild Award for Nonfiction for his body of work.

Giblin enjoys library research and interviewing experts for his various books. Subjects of his juvenile nonfiction books include: the Rosetta stone, chairs, windows, Fourth of July symbols, unicorns, and digging up the first mastodon skeleton. His biographies for children include well-documented books on Thomas Jefferson and Edith Wilson.



Setting

Giblin goes beyond chronicling Lindbergh's life from his birth on February 4, 1902 in Little Falls, Minnesota to his death seventy-two years later on the Hawaiian island of Maui; he presents detailed facts of Lindbergh's aeronautical adventures and thoroughly grounds them in the fascinating contexts of world and aviation history. Lindbergh's journey across the Atlantic was only the first of his worldwide flights in the interest of aviation navigation, and Giblin traces these flights and notes their importance. After the kidnapping and killing of his firstborn son, Lindbergh moved his family in search of privacy, first to England and then to an island off the coast of France.

Lindbergh Flying Over London on His Way to Paris.

Social Sensitivity

Giblin's biography relates not only the life of an American hero, but also positions that man in historical context. Through aptly placed and timed questions in his narrative, Giblin forces the reader to examine what motives pushed Lindbergh to make the choices he made.

The author does not defend Lindbergh for the anti-Jewish remarks in his writings and his America First speeches, but Giblin offers a likely explanation of how Lindbergh's mind worked. This well-focused volume touches on the power of the press, Lindbergh's use of the press, and his ultimate dislike of it.

Literary Qualities

Giblin has written a balanced account of this hero's life, covering his strengths and weaknesses as a man and our century's first colossal public celebrity. Giblin uses lively prose to keep his readers spellbound with his account of Lindbergh's thirty-three hour flight. With a sober air, Giblin explores Lindbergh's naivete in defending Nazi Germany: he also sorts through the responsibility of the press for the changes in Lindbergh's personality and attitude from shy aviator to arrogant speaker.

Giblin relies on Lindbergh's own account of the famous flight and his other writings that comment on social history. The author also uses Anne Lindbergh's books to document the aviator's travels and provide anecdotes about his life. Archival photographs supplement the text, and source notes are presented chapter-bychapter at the end of the book. A detailed chronology of important events adds strength to Giblin's readable account of Lindbergh's life.

Themes and Characters

Charles A. Lindbergh was born to U.S. Congressman C. A. Lindbergh and his wife, Evangeline Land. His parents separated when he was five but never divorced, maintaining a cordial friendship. Lindbergh had a close relationship with his father, even though he lived with his mother, who had a huge influence on his life. Between the ages of eight and sixteen, he attended eleven different schools in Washington, D.C., Little Falls, and Detroit, and he later confessed that he was not a good student. Always fascinated by flying, he dropped out of the University of Wisconsin during his sophomore year to pursue a career in aviation.

Lindbergh took flying lessons and worked as a mechanic for a short while at the Nebraska Aircraft Corporation; thus he not only could fly airplanes, he knew what kept them in the air. He also had the physical courage to complement his flying skills and technical knowledge of aircraft. During his barnstorming days, he would walk on the wing of a plane or parachute to bring crowds out to buy rides on the airplane. Lindbergh refined his flying talents in a hitch at the U.S.

Army Air Service Training School. He used these survivor and emergency skills when he took a job as a mail flyer on a route from St. Louis to Chicago.

Raymond Orteig, a wealthy Frenchman, offered \$25,000 in 1921 to the first aviator who could fly nonstop between New York and Paris. Several teams of men attempted the difficult task and failed, with some of the airmen dying in the process. Lindbergh, always a loner, never even considered having a copilot when he tried his trans-Atlantic flight. He needed financial backers to buy the plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, but the physical risk was all his, as was the glory when he succeeded. After his triumphant landing in Paris in May 1927, a hero's welcome of ticker tape parades, congratulatory speeches, and rapturous public acclaim awaited Lindbergh in town after town in Europe and in the United States. Newspaper and radio reporters would not leave the twenty-five-year-old pilot alone. His fame and celebrity status would haunt him the rest of his life. He recounted his adventure in a quickly penned book called *We*, referring to himself and his plane, and he then guaranteed himself a career in aviation by serving as a consultant for air routes for the new commercial airline industry.

The relationship between Lindbergh and his wife Anne Morrow is carefully explored in this volume. They wed in 1929, their first son was born a year later, and the baby was kidnaped and held for ransom when he was eighteen months old. Even though the Lindberghs paid the ransom the child was never returned, and two months later his body was discovered just two or three miles from their home. He had apparently been killed within the first hours of his disappearance. Marked bills from the ransom money began to surface and the police had solid leads to follow until an arrest was made.

Bruno Hauptmann stood trial for the kidnaping and murder and was later executed in the electric chair. Giblin presents a balanced account of the trial. He gives Hauptmann's



not guilty plea a fair look, then provides the evidence the police recounted that swayed the jury to its guilty verdict.

The press hounded the bereaved parents, and Lindbergh moved his family to Europe to ensure the safety of his second son and subsequent children. At the request of the United States government, Lindbergh visited Germany on a fact-finding mission to aviation centers and documented the buildup of bombers. He made two more trips to Germany, where he was awarded the Service Cross of the German Eagle for his contributions to world aviation, and he made a trip to the Soviet Union to study its military airplanes.

With the unrest in Europe coming to a head, Lindbergh moved his family back to the United States and became a proponent of isolationism. He spoke out in radio talks against the United States entering the European war, which he was certain would be won by Germany because of its superior air force. His speeches for the America First organization bordered on racism and alienated a great many of his former supporters. America First canceled all future meetings after the Japanese bombed and sank the U.S.

Navy fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

Lindbergh volunteered for the Air Corps but was rejected because of his isolationist views.

Lindbergh later wrote *The Spirit of St. Louis*, a thorough study of his Atlantic flight, which became a best seller and won the 1954 Pulitzer Prize for biography. For the rest of his life, he turned his attention to the environment, becoming an active supporter of worldwide conservation efforts.

In this meticulously researched volume, Giblin focuses on how Lindbergh reacted to the people who influenced him the most: his father, mother, wife, and in-laws. The biographer draws a clear picture of why Lindbergh made the choices he did and how they directed the path his life would follow.

Adaptations

In 1957 Warner Brothers released the film *The Spirit of St. Louis*. Billy Wilder and Wendell Mayes based the screenplay on Lindbergh's autobiography of the same name. The film touched on the early days of the barnstormer and wing-walker, but mostly concentrated on the twentieth-century legend's solo trip across the Atlantic.

James Stewart starred as Lindbergh in the motion picture, which was directed by Billy Wilder.

Topics for Discussion

1. Lindbergh was a barnstormer in his early twenties. What did this entail? Are there barnstormers today?
2. Recount Lindbergh's historic journey from New York to Paris. Describe the plane and trace the route Lindbergh followed.
3. The two most important women in Lindbergh's life were his mother and his wife. Explain how he treated each one and what he expected from them.
4. What was Lindbergh's reaction to the kidnaping of his son? What responsibility did he give the press?
5. Explain why Lindbergh admired the Germans. Why did he dislike the Soviet Union?
6. What drew Lindbergh into the America First organization? How did he use the press to get his organization's views known?
7. Why was Lindbergh drawn to the environmental effort? What were his contributions to world conservation?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Provide a short history of early aviation from the Wright Brothers' first flight to Lindbergh's famous Atlantic flight.
2. Lindbergh was the first instant celebrity. Recount the part radio, newspapers, and newsreels played in creating him as an American hero.
3. The Lindbergh kidnapping became front page news and turned Lindbergh against the press. How did the press corps report the news? Did they cross the boundary of sensitivity?

How did they report the "trial of the century"? What were the repercussions of the kidnaping case on federal law?

4. World War II was fought much differently than World War I. What part did aviation play in the two wars?

Was Lindbergh justified in thinking that German air power was much stronger than all the rest of Europe's combined?

5. Lindbergh visited the Tasaday tribe, which lived a stone-age life in a remote part of the Philippines. How does that tribe live today?
6. Lindbergh cremated his father's body and his son's body, yet he chose burial for himself. Can you explain this decision?

For Further Reference

Bernstein, Allison Trent. Review.

School Library Journal 43 (November 1997): 128. This positive review calls Giblin's writing "clear and readable prose."

"James Cross Giblin." In Contemporary Authors. Volume 106. Edited by Frances C. Locker. Detroit: Gale Research, 1982. This listing of his publications includes Giblin's comments on why he enjoys nonfiction research.

"James Cross Giblin." In Something About the Author. Volume 75. Edited by Diane Telgen. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994. This entry gives personal biographical information and highlights of Giblin's career.

Meyer, Randy. Review. Booklist 94 (September 15, 1997): 230. This reviewer believes Giblin has drawn a portrait of the complete man.

Sutton, Roger. Review. Horn Book 73 (November/December 1997): 695.

Sutton praises Giblin for his ability to retell such a well-known event as the transatlantic flight with great suspense.

Related Titles

Giblin's other biographies are for younger readers, but they clearly show the same attention to detail and academic research present in the Lindbergh volume. A biography of Edith Wilson for middle-grade readers focuses on how the First Lady helped her invalid husband, President Woodrow Wilson. His picture book biographies of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin are comprehensive biographical accounts for young listeners.



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