The Profiteers: Bechtel and the Men Who Built the World

Sally Denton
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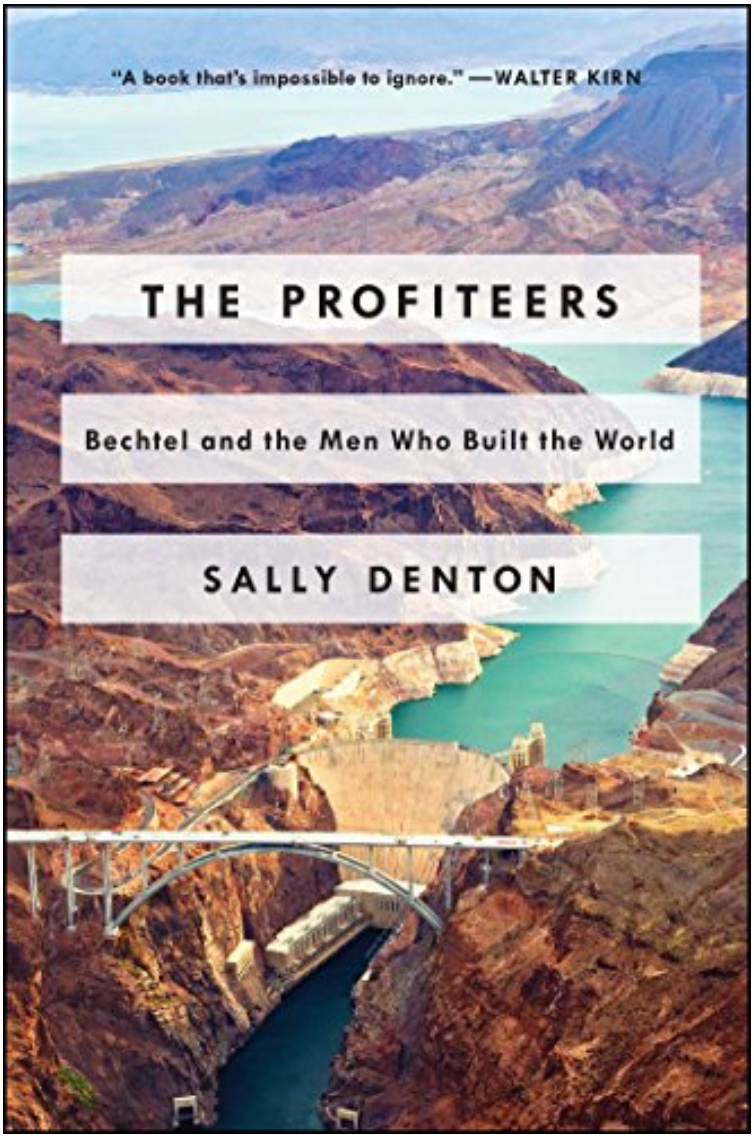

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Sally Denton : The Profiteers: Bechtel and the Men Who Built the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Profiteers: Bechtel and the Men Who Built the World:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. While heavily researched, the author had a very clear ...By Andy O'NeillWhile heavily researched, the author had a very clear anti-Bechtel bias, and focused on the items that reinforced that, and minimized other issues. The hyperbole style detracts from the message.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Every big American business is built on government support: a case studyBy Mal WarwickWhen F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote ldquo;the very rich are different from you and me,rdquo; he was referring to their attitudes and beliefs, not to the way they conduct themselves in business or politics. But he might very well have

gone on to observe that great wealth carries with it considerable power that enables the very rich to have their way no matter how badly they act. In The Profiteers: Bechtel and the Men Who Built the World, Sally Denton illustrates just how much power the worldrsquo;s largest construction firm has wielded both in business and in politics, proving itself virtually untouchable by the law.The colossus that is BechtelBechtel is a privately owned global company headquartered in San Francisco. In 2015, the company ranked #5 on the Forbes list of Americarsquo;s largest private companies, with annual revenue of $37 billion. Like the Koch Brothersrsquo; family firm, Koch Industries (#2 on the Forbes list), Bechtel operates outside the scrutiny of financial regulators, so what it says about itself is often difficult to confirm. The firm advertises itself on its web site as having 55,400 employees who have completed 25,000 projects in 160 countries on 7 continents. All that may be true, or at least within reasonable range of the truth. But, as Denton demonstrates in her eye-opening study, much of what the notoriously secretive company says about its history and the way it conducts its affairs is highly questionable.A fifth-generation member of the family, Brendan Bechtel, now serves as President and Chief Operating Officer. (An outsider is CEO.) The company traces its beginning to 1898 when Brendanrsquo;s great-great grandfather, Warren Bechtel, began constructing railroads in the Oklahoma Territory with a team of mules. However, the company didnrsquo;t rise to national prominence until the Great Depression, when it was one of the so-called Six Companies (twelve, in reality) in the consortium that built the gargantuan Hoover Dam. In World War II, without prior experience in shipbuilding, Bechtelrsquo;s shipyards turned out 560 ships under a U.S. government contract, earning enormous profits. But Bechtel didnrsquo;t embark on a truly global course and set the stage for raking in billions of dollars in profits until Brendanrsquo;s grandfather, Steven D. Bechtel, Jr., took up the reins in 1960 and recruited John A. McCone as a virtual partner.Bechtel and McCone collaborated in inventing two new business concepts: the ldquo;turnkeyrdquo; project and the now-notorious device of ldquo;cost-plusrdquo; government contracts. The latter helped to make both of them fabulously rich once the floodgates opened with the inauguration of Richard Nixon as President in 1969. The arrangement guaranteed that the company would realize a profit mdash; and provided an incentive for cost overruns, since its profit was calculated as a percentage of the total cost! (After working for and with Steve Bechtel, McCone shifted to a career in government, which culminated with his appointment in 1961 as CIA Director. Over several decades in government service, McCone frequently used his influence in support of his former company: apparently, he continued to hold a share of ownership.)Conservative politics in the light of realityFrom its earliest days, the senior leadership of Bechtel has favored right-wing politics, inveighing against ldquo;communismrdquo; and government regulation. Each successive generation of Bechtels has ldquo;advocated a consolidated, free-wheeling capitalistic economy unrestrained by government oversight or taxation.rdquo; Astonishingly, on one occasion, writing in the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Steve Jr. claimed that ldquo;the U.S. government has not had a major role in the success of our business.rdquo;In reality, however, as Denton emphasizes, ldquo;the Bechtel family owes its entire fortune to the US government.rdquo; Bechtel was built and continues to flourish on the basis of enormous government contracts. Because the firm is private, there is no way to learn how much of its business comes from government agencies, both domestic and foreign. However, given the spectacular size of nearly all the projects it manages, government funding must figure in the overwhelming majority. Every one of its signature projects was a multi-billion-dollar undertaking: the Hoover Dam, shipbuilding in World War II, the Trans-Arabian Pipeline, the Bay Arearsquo;s BART system, the city of Jubail in Saudi Arabia, the ldquo;Chunnelrdquo; under the English Channel, Bostonrsquo;s Big Dig, 35,000 trailers after Hurricane Katrina, the Hong Kong airport, the US Embassy in Baghdad (the worldrsquo;s largest), rebuilding Iraqrsquo;s infrastructure, and managing the U.S. nuclear arsenal and national nuclear research labs. These and many other Bechtel jobs were built with billions in government funds.In the 1940s, Bechtel became enmeshed in overseas US intelligence operations. ldquo;The company so mirrored the CIA by participating in intelligence gathering and providing cover to CIA agents,rdquo; Denton writes, ldquo;that it was widely considered a government surrogate, if not a full-fledged government enterprise by both the political leaders of the countries in which it operated, as well as by its rivals in industry. . . [I]t was often difficult to determine if Bechtel Corporation was doing favors for the US government, or if it was the other way around.rdquo;As a result of the close, ongoing relationship between the company and the US government and the enormous influence wielded by the firm, Bechtel was repeatedly able to avoid being held responsible ldquo;for its cost overruns, unfair employment practices, security violations, pattern of retaliation against whistleblowers, and massive reductions in its workforce.rdquo; The company might also have been disgraced (but wasnrsquo;t) by the blatant conflicts of interest that arose from the actions of John McCone, George Schultz, and Casper Weinberger to steer business its way from their senior posts in Washington, DC. (Schultz was Secretary of State, Weinberger Secretary of Defense.)ldquo;In the end,rdquo; Denton concludes, ldquo;this is the ugly, untold story of America. A story not of the triumph of laissez faire capitalism, but of Profiteers whose sole client was government itself.rdquo;The curious case of Jonathan PollardDenton begins and ends her story of Bechtel with the case of Jonathan Pollard, a former intelligence analyst who was convicted of spying for Israel in 1987 and released from prison only in 2015. The median penalty for his offense was a term of between two and four years in prison, and since Pollard expressed remorse and entered into a plea agreement with the government, he was set to be sentenced to time served. Instead, heeding a secret letter from Casper Weinberger, the former Bechtel executive who was serving as

Secretary of Defense, the judge sentenced Pollard to life.Denton contends that Pollardrsquo;s life sentence came about because Weinberger feared exposure for his part in Bechtelrsquo;s secret involvement in building a nuclear reactor in Saddam Husseinrsquo;s Iraq (the one subsequently bombed by Israeli planes). Though this makes for a good story, itrsquo;s impossible to believe. Generations of senior government officials, few of them beholden to Bechtel, have repeatedly weighed in against clemency for Pollard.In supporting their case, they have cited a long list of serious breaches of US security. For example, they have alleged that he turned over to Israel ldquo;the National Security Agencyrsquo;s ten-volume manual on how the U.S. gathers its signal intelligence, and disclosed the names of thousands of people who had cooperated with U.S. intelligence agencies.rdquo; They have also insisted that Pollard didnrsquo;t spy just for Israel, as his apologists contend, but ldquo;shoppedrdquo; secret documents to other countries, including Pakistan. Although I am congenitally skeptical of statements from senior government officials, especially those from the military-intelligence establishment, it defies logic for me to believe that so many prominent figures in the federal government over such a long period of time could be making all this up and repeating it year after year after year. Therersquo;s simply too much credible detail in their claims. Dentonrsquo;s implied rejection of the case against Pollard undermines the credibility of her story mdash; most unfortunately, since her account of Bechtelrsquo;s history otherwise squares with historical fact in every respect known to me.About the authorThe Nevada-based investigative journalist Sally Denton has written eight books about such diverse subjects as pioneer women in the American West, the growth of Las Vegas, the life of Helen Gahagan Douglas, and the rise of the American Right.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Members of the company moved in and out of government positions without elections An amazingBy William Douglas OdellA thorough review and exciting story about the huge Bechtel company. They sold no stock but repeatably garnished government contracts for billions and millions of dollars over four generations of family ownership. The contracts supported construction of projects that started with Boulder Dam and continued to major construction in many countries of the world. Members of the company moved in and out of government positions without elections An amazing story

From the bestselling coauthor of The Money and the Power, the ldquo;compelling corporate historyrdquo; (The National Book Review) and inside story of the Bechtel family and the empire theyrsquo;ve controlled since the construction of the Hoover Dam.The tale of the Bechtel family dynasty is a classic American business story. It begins with Warren A. ldquo;Dadrdquo; Bechtel, who led a consortium that constructed the Hoover Dam. They would go on to ldquo;build the world,rdquo; from the construction of airports in Hong Kong and Doha, to pipelines and tunnels in Alaska and Europe, to mining and energy operations around the globe. In their century-long quest, five generations of Bechtel men have harnessed and distributed much of the planetrsquo;s natural resources, including solar geothermal power. Bechtel is now one of the largest privately held corporations in the world. The Bechtel Group has eclipsed its few rivals, with developments in emerging and third world nations that include secret military installations and defense projects; underground bunkers in Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan; oil pipelines and entire cities in the Middle East; palaces for Arab rulers, such as the Saudi Royal Family; and chemical plants for Arab dictators. Like all stories of empire building, the rise of Bechtelmdash;one of the first mega companies to emerge in the American Westmdash;presents a complex and riveting narrative. Veiled in obsessive secrecy, Bechtel has had closer ties to the US government than any other private corporation in modern memory. ldquo;Riveting and revealingrdquo; (Kirkus Reviews), The Profiteers is one of the biggest business and political stories of our time.

"Investigative reporter Sally Denton has deftly pulled back the curtains on one of the most consequential business dynasties in America. "The Profiteers" is eye opening reading for anyone who truly wants to understand how money, government and power intersect." ndash; Jane Mayer, author of Dark Money and staff writer for The New Yorker magazine ldquo;In the highest tradition of investigative journalism, Sally Denton tells the compelling, troubling story of a vast enterprise that has blurred the lines between governmental and corporate power. This is how our nation really works, and this is a book that's impossible to ignore. So don't.rdquo; ndash; Walter Kirn, author of Blood Will Out and Up in the Air "Investigative journalist Denton offers an ambitious "empire biography" of the Bechtel family and the secretive, privately held construction company turned diversified international conglomerate that has been "inextricably enmeshed" in U.S. foreign policy for seven decades. In this incredible seeming but deeply researched book, the author traces the phenomenal rise of the California based corporation that became famous for building the Hoover Dam and went on to handle billion dollar projects from the Channel Tunnel to the Big Dig.... Filled with stories of cronyism and influence peddling, Denton's riveting and revealing book will undoubtedly displease the so called "boys from Bechtel."ndash; Kirkus "The author's journalistic writing style is fast paced, hard hitting, and engaging.... This book will interest readers who enjoy contemporary U.S. history, Middle Eastern history, political science, and public works spending." ndash; Library Journal "Denton dutifully reports Bechtelrsquo;s denials of influence peddling but plainly doesnrsquo;t believe them. Instead, she maps coincidences between the government tenure of a Bechtel executive, such as George Schultz, and projects his former agency later awarded to Bechtel. However readers view the company, Dentonrsquo;s extensively researched work informs readers about the firmrsquo;s

maintenance as a privately held concern during its growth into a huge, multinational enterprise."mdash; Booklist ldquo;In this compelling corporate history, she artfully detail show Bechtel accrued power by exploiting the ldquo;revolving door of capitalism,rdquo; through which its executives have glided effortlessly, moving between the company headquarters and the corridors of power in the nationrsquo;s capital.rdquo; ndash; The National Book About the AuthorSally Denton is an investigative reporter, author, and historian who writes about the subjects others ignoremdash;from a drug conspiracy in Kentucky to organized crime in Las Vegas; from corruption within the Mormon Church to the hidden history of Manifest Destiny; from one of Americarsquo;s bitterest political campaigns to the powerful forces against Franklin D. Roosevelt. She has received the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Woodrow Wilson Public Scholar Fellowship, and the Black Mountain/Kluge Fellowship. She is the author of, among others, The Money and the Power, American Massacre, The Bluegrass Conspiracy, and The Profiteers: Bechtel and the Men Who Built the World.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.The Profiteers CHAPTER ONE Go West! A ldquo;tall, beefy man with a bull-like roar,rdquo; Warren Augustine Bechtel, whose legacy would be one of the greatest engineering achievements in American history, came into the world on September 12, 1872. The fifth in a family of eight children, he was raised on a hardscrabble farm near Freeport, Illinois. His parentsmdash;Elizabeth Bentz and John Moyer Bechtelmdash;were descendants of pioneer Pennsylvania German families. When he was twelve, his parents moved to Peabody, Kansas, where they eked out a living ldquo;at a time when he saw many men missing an arm or a leg from service in the Civil War,rdquo; as one account described the setting. It was a backbreaking childhood that he fantasized about escaping from an early age. Because he was tasked with farm chores since he was a toddler, Warrenrsquo;s schooling was confined to the winter months when the crops lay beneath frozen ground. Like many of his contemporaries, he hated farming as only a farmerrsquo;s son can, but he disliked the classroom with equal fervor. Still, his father, who was also a grocery store proprietor, insisted that he finish high school. In 1887 the first railroad came through the area, and during the summers, Warren hired himself out to the construction crews to learn grading and machinery. He also worked for neighboring ranchers, branding cattle and driving herds. But his passion was the slide trombone, which he practiced while roaming the land. He dreamed of playing the instrument professionally. Upon graduation at the age of nineteen, he hit the road with an ensemble of performers who called themselves the Ladies Band. He hoped music would spare him a future in farming. ldquo;Either the music of the ladiesrsquo; band was very bad or the Western audiences were lacking in appreciation,rdquo; the New York Times would later describe the venture. ldquo;The troupe came to grief in Lewiston, Ill., and the young slide-trombonist was stranded.rdquo; Disheartened, he returned home to the unwelcome plow to raise corn for livestock feed. He remained there until 1897, when he became infatuated with a slender brunette named Clara Alice West. She was visiting relatives in nearby Peabody. After a fleeting courtship that alarmed her affluent Indiana parents, the two married, and Warren ventured into the cattle business. He embarked on his scheme to fatten Arizona draught steers as they awaited slaughter in the Kansas stockyards. But the bottom dropped out of both the corn and cattle markets to record lows at the end of the nineteenth century, leaving the newlyweds bankrupt. With their infant firstborn son, Warren Jr., their personal possessions, a slip grader, and two mules, they struck out for Indian Territory, where the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway Company was putting new lines westward from Chickasha in what is now Oklahoma. Earning $2.75 per daymdash;a good living for a man with his own mule teammdash;Warren found the work plentiful, as rail companies were expanding westward with boomtown gusto. His nascent construction company consisted mostly of muscle and ambition. As the railways forged west, so too did the little Bechtel family, with Warren grading track beds in Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wyoming. Though a rugged and itinerant existence, the couple was optimistic, and welcomed the birth of their second son, Stephen Davison, while visiting Clararsquo;s parents in Aurora, Indiana. When he was offered a job as gang foreman with the Southern Pacific Railroad in Reno, Nevada, during the winter of 1902ndash;03, Warren was grateful for the opportunity. Eager for a more secure financial position, he had set his sights on the West Coast and the postndash;Gold Rush promise that existed in California. Warren embraced newspaperman Horace Greeleyrsquo;s famous 1871 career advice to a young correspondent: ldquo;Having mastered these, gather up your family and Go West!rdquo; ldquo;I landed in Reno with a wife and two babies, a slide trombone, and a ten-dollar bill,rdquo; Warren later recalled. The railroad supervisor who had promised him the job had gone bust. Twenty-seven years old, Warren lived with his wife and small sons in a converted railroad boxcar. Discouraged, he hitched a ride on a buckboard to Wadsworth, Nevadamdash;a remote railroad site on the banks of the Truckee River known for its wild mustang herd and native Paiute population. He found a job there as an estimator for the Southern Pacific, earning $59 a month. ldquo;He was learning all the time, but he seemed to me a natural engineer,rdquo; his supervisor later recalled. An engineer who worked with him during those early days described him as ldquo;a horse-drawn fresno-scraper type of contractorrdquo;mdash;meaning an old-fashioned laborer who had come up the hard way on the railroad construction gangs. A series of jobs ensued from which Warren acquired technical experience in lieu of a formal education. From Wadsworth, he moved to Lovelock, Nevada, where he became a gravel pit superintendent at a quarry. He, his wife, and two young sons were a familiar sight at the primitive migrant job sites. He soon acquired the nickname ldquo;Dad,rdquo; as his ubiquitous brood called him. He bounced around various posts, gaining a reputation for efficiency and, especially, for mastering the newfangled

modern transportation and construction equipmentmdash;most conspicuously the giant excavating machine called the steam shovel. ldquo;Many of the old-timers were reluctant to have anything to do with the big, belching mechanized monsters,rdquo; according to one account, ldquo;but Bechtel put them to immediatemdash;and profitablemdash;use.rdquo; That specialty brought him to the attention of an inspector for a construction firm, based in Oakland, California, that had a contract to build the Richmond Belt Railroad and to extend the Santa Fe line into Oakland. In 1904 Dad moved his family to Oakland, where a third son, Kenneth, was born. The city, named for the massive oak forest that dominated the landscape, was surrounded by redwoods, farmland, and rural settlements. Even then a sad relative to booming, raucous San Francisco, located six miles west across the San Francisco Bay, the cityrsquo;s future as Northern Californiarsquo;s busiest seaport was not yet apparent. Still, its sunny and mild Mediterranean climate lured an increasing number of immigrants from throughout the country, and its population (eighty-two thousand upon the Bechtelsrsquo; arrival) would double in just six years. A few blocks away from their Linden Street home, tracks of the interurban electric line to San Francisco were being laid. Dad had the contract to fill the swamp at the head of Lake Merritt for Oaklandrsquo;s Lakeshore Park. By 1906, Dad was ready to strike out on his own. At thirty-four years old, he obtained his first subcontract with the Western Pacific Railroad, building a line between Pleasanton and Sunol. This independent undertaking marked the birth of the modern Bechtel company. Dad began assembling the team of colleagues that would help him make construction history. For an extortionate fee, he rented the impressive Model 20 Marion steam shovel that had been memorably developed for the Panama Canal construction. When he purchased the imposing machine, thanks to a loan from his well-to-do father-in-law, his company was officially launched. His steam shovel was in great demand, and he undertook ever-larger railroad projects while expanding into building roads, tunnels, bridges, and dams. In large white block script, he stenciled ldquo;W. A. BECHTEL CO.rdquo; onto the red cab door. It would be another sixteen years before he would formally incorporate his business. Home now to a family of five, their residential boxcar was called WaaTeeKaa for the combination of their three toddlersrsquo; baby names: ldquo;Waa-Waardquo; for Warren, ldquo;Tee-Teerdquo; for Steve, and ldquo;Kaa-Kaardquo; for Kenneth. ldquo;Still largely undeveloped, California was boomingnbsp;.nbsp;.nbsp;. and, with the recent addition of the steam engine, railroads couldnrsquo;t lay track fast enough to link the new west to the rest of the country,rdquo; a newspaper described the moment. A man of unlimited ambition, Dad expanded his vision to the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, where he came into contact with the imposing and pugnacious sheep-ranching Wattis brothers of Ogden, Utah. W. H. and E. O. Wattis were the founders and chief executives of the Utah Construction Companymdash;one of the great railroad construction firms of the Westmdash;who were devout members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The sons of a forty-niner ldquo;whose trek to California ended six hundred miles short innbsp;.nbsp;.nbsp;. northern Utahnbsp;.nbsp;.nbsp;. they were reared in the dynamic, enterprising environment of Brigham Youngrsquo;s Mormon commonwealth,rdquo; wrote historian Joseph E. Stevens. They were notoriously reluctant to work with non-Mormon ldquo;gentiles.rdquo; But they admired Dadrsquo;s abilities and resourcefulness and, as W.H. reportedly put it to his brother: ldquo;Might as well ask him in as to have him bitinrsquo; our feet.rdquo; The Wattis brothers wielded extraordinary political power in Utah. David Eccles, patriarch of the single largest Mormon fortune, leading tither to the church, and the father of Marriner Eccles, who would later become chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, supplied most of their capital. (The Ecclesesrsquo; formidable Utah Corporation was an international conglomerate of mining, shipping, and construction involved in the production of iron, coal, and uranium ore on three continents.) The Wattises gave Bechtel his most lucrative jobs to date: three large contracts for railroad lines in Northern California and central Utah. His work with the Northwestern Pacific Railroad required more sophisticated construction techniques, and he became the first contractor in the country to replace the horse- and mule-drawn freight teams with chain-driven, gasoline-powered dump trucks. At a yard in San Leandro, he retrofitted 1912 model Packards and Alcos with dump bodies. Referred to later as the ldquo;coming of agerdquo; period for the Bechtel organization, the completion of the last 106-mile stretch of the Northwestern Pacific line signaled the beginning of the companyrsquo;s rise. ldquo;I never expected to have that much money in a lifetime,rdquo; the unlettered son of a small-town grocer confided to a friend upon receiving his nearly $500,000 payment. Now flush, he turned his attention to familymdash;which included daughter Alice Elizabeth, born in 1912mdash;purchasing a spacious Victorian home and furnishing it lavishly with rare Oriental rugs that had been exhibited at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. He chose the Estudillo Avenue house in nearby San Leandro, where the children would have ldquo;more room to grow.rdquo; Evocative of his farm upbringing, the house was surrounded by acres of tomatoes and elaborate flower gardens. A tennis court on the grounds affirmed the familyrsquo;s fresh wealth. But just as the official history of the company smooths over the ldquo;near misses, the bad judgment calls, and the numerous failuresrdquo; of Dadrsquo;s early climbmdash;as an academic critique of the corporate culture of Bechtel portrayed his dismal performance in the cattle, farming, and grading enterprises, not to mention the nomadic lifestyle to which he subjected his young familymdash;so too are his subsequent fiascos whitewashed. ldquo;It is difficult to connect the sober-headed, hard-working straight-shooter depicted in the official history with the man whose main ambition on leaving home, for instance, was to play the slide trombone with a largely female dance band,rdquo; wrote Canadian postcolonialist professor Heather Zwicker. Despite

the revisionist and mythologizing company narrative of Warren A. Bechtelrsquo;s entrepreneurial individualismmdash;the American exceptionalism that would be much ballyhooed by later generations of Bechtelsmdash;in the years following the Northwestern Pacific windfall, Dad made a string of bad calls. Smug with his newfound success, ldquo;and still fancying himself the wheeler-dealer of his youth,rdquo; according to Friends in High Places: The Bechtel Storymdash;The Most Secret Corporation and How It Engineered the World, by Laton McCartney, he sank tens of thousands of dollars into an unsuccessful Oregon gold mine, followed by several hundred thousand more invested in a folding toothbrush company that tanked. The salvation of his fortune and future would lie not in the up-from-the-bootstraps chronicle that would become family legend, but with the US government. With government patronage, Bechtel was able to build a network of tracks and highways throughout the land at the very moment that railroad expansion and the automobile industry were exploding. Sales of Henry Fordrsquo;s iconic black Model Ts had passed the five hundred thousand mark by 1918mdash;giving the Ford Motor Company a veritable monopoly, as a Ford was driven by more than half the car owners in America. Dad was not alone in recognizing that all of these cars needed roads to travel on, but he was among a handful of California builders positioned to capitalize on the new construction market. The Federal Aid Road Act had been approved in 1916 to meet the overwhelming demand, resulting in the creation of the US Bureau of Public Roads. Bechtel lobbied for a role, and in 1919 received the first federal highway contract in California. He first built the Klamath River Highway near the Oregon border; the scenic byway, considered an engineering marvel at the time, jutted through volcanic rock and granite. The following year, he built another highway for the federal government in Los Angeles County that ran through the rugged San Gabriel Canyon; this one required a bluff to be blasted down with the rarely used powerful explosive, picric powder. Next was the Generals Highway in Sequoia National Park, named after the largest, most famous giant sequoia treesmdash;General Sherman and General Grantmdash;and famous for its steep, often-impassable switchbacks. Then came the job of making additions and improvements to the highway system in Yosemite National Park, followed by contracts in New Mexico and Arizona to double track the Santa Fe Railroad from Gallup to Chambers. Dad, fleshy and always well groomed, gained a reputation for keeping his jobs orderly and his equipment in top condition. He espoused a ldquo;cleanliness is next to godlinessrdquo; motto. He wore a trademark felt fedora and gold watch fob, and his dapper style set him apart from the workers on his many sites. Known for his hearty appetite, he hired the finest cooks and bakers he could find to accompany him to his worksites. Since his California labor force was composed mostly of what he called ldquo;eye-talians,rdquo; his cooks became expert at cooking spaghetti, for which Dad acquired a penchant. A stickler for verbal agreements and handshake deals with his associatesmdash;ldquo;When you canrsquo;t trust a manrsquo;s word, you canrsquo;t trust his signature,rdquo; he would declaremdash;he also insisted on fifty-fifty partnerships. ldquo;Dad had no patience with 51-49 arrangements,rdquo; a former partner once said. ldquo;He used to say lsquo;No man with a sense of self-respect wants to be controlled on that kind of percentage.rsquo;?rdquo; Although the business of road and railroad construction was steady and profitable, Bechtel began turning his attention to oilmdash;the coming boom that accompanied the automobile. Predicting a surge in the development of the Westrsquo;s oil and gas resources to meet the energy needs of a growing industrial economy, Bechtel envisioned a network of refineries and pipelines snaking throughout the country. The vision turned out to be prescient, heralding the establishment of an alliance between the Bechtel corporation and the largest oil and gas companies in the nation and, ultimately, in the world. Situated as he was in the heart of a flourishing American West, Dad garnered more contracts than he could manage, and in 1921 he partnered with a fellow Bay Area entrepreneur named Henry J. Kaiser. An ldquo;egomaniacal small-time construction tycoon,rdquo; Kaiser joined Bechtel in building major arteries that wound along the entire West Coast. The company took off in 1929 with the firmrsquo;s first gas line for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PGE). Building more than a thousand miles of pipeline for Standard Oil and Continental Gas, he amassed a fortune of more than $30 million by the end of the 1920s, making his company one of the largest construction firms in America. At fifty-eight years of age, Dad was once again self-satisfied with his role as a newly minted western mogul. He gloried in the national and international influence he and his western partners exercised. He might have been content to enjoy the luxuries of his life, and the sweep of his enterprise, if not goaded into a construction challenge being called the ldquo;Eighth Wonder of the World.rdquo; When the Herbert Hoover administration announced in 1929 that it would accept bids to dam the Colorado River, Dad was leery. ldquo;It sounds a little ambitious,rdquo; he remarked drily to his proteacute;geacute;, Kaiser, about building the worldrsquo;s tallest dam in a forbidding desert gorge. But when Kaiser compared the gargantuan project with the Egyptian pyramids and the Great Wall of China, promising that the Bechtel name would be etched on a bronze plaque at the damrsquo;s crest in perpetuity, Dad was sold. That year he was the first western builder to become national president of the Associated General Contractors of Americamdash;a booster organization and powerful lobbying groupmdash;and he planned to brandish his political clout in both the state capital in Sacramento and in Washingtonrsquo;s inner circles. His petitioning would pay off. Meanwhile, Kaiserrsquo;s company followed the same path as Bechtel, by raking in government contracts for roads, dams, public works, and later the Kaiser shipyards.