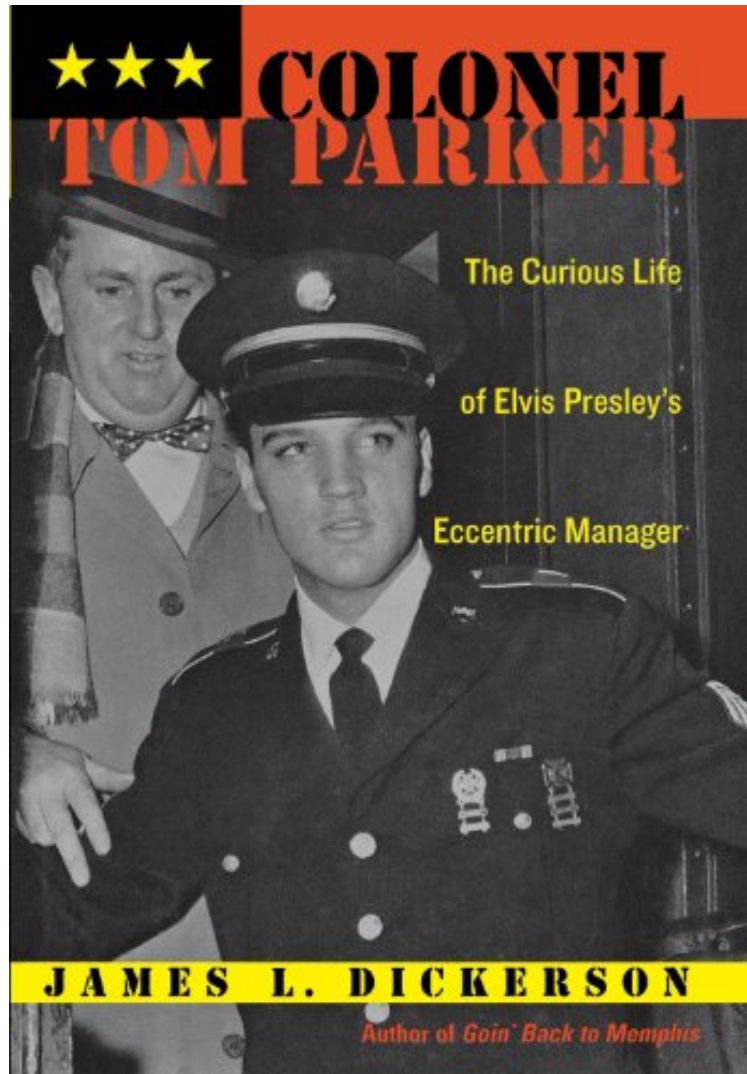


Colonel Tom Parker: The Curious Life of Elvis Presley's Eccentric Manager

James L. Dickerson

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James L. Dickerson : Colonel Tom Parker: The Curious Life of Elvis Presley's Eccentric Manager before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Colonel Tom Parker: The Curious Life of Elvis Presley's Eccentric Manager:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Call him "Scoundrel" Tom Parker, not "Colonel"By Barry SparksElvis Presley's manager insisted upon being called "Colonel" Tom Parker, even though it was not a military title he had earned. It was actually an honorary title given to him, and many others, by the Governor of Louisiana for his loyalty and support. Parker should have insisted upon being called "Scoundrel" because that's what he truly

was Parker, whose background was in the carnival, was well-known as Elvis' manager. Marshall Grant said, "The biggest tragedy in American music is Parker's mismanagement of Elvis' career." When Elvis died in 1977, Priscilla Presley was stunned by how poorly his money had been managed. Debts exceeded cash on hand and most of Elvis' money (what little there was) was tied up in cars, motorcycles and other items. Parker was a genius at squeezing the last financial drop out of Elvis. He initially took 25 percent of Elvis' earnings (which was higher than the typical 10 to 15 percent) and in 1967, he raised his commission to a whopping 50 percent. Many of the Colonel's deals benefited him more than they did Elvis. Parker was never interested in Elvis achieving his goal as a serious actor, touring Europe and growing as a person or entertainer. He was content to have Elvis churn out a string of mindless movies (averaging three a year) because it was the easiest way for the Colonel to make money. Author James Dickerson wrote that to Parker and director Hal Wallis, Elvis was no more than a "singing cartoon character." Touring meant expenses and the Colonel wanted to avoid that at all costs. Elvis, in fact, didn't perform live for almost nine years. Although Dickerson wrote "Parker was a marketing genius who revolutionized American culture," Elvis paid a high price for whatever the Colonel was able to achieve for him and his career. Indeed, prior to managing Elvis, Parker was instrumental in developing Eddy Arnold from a country singer into a national pop entertainer who earned more than \$500,000 in 1949. Despite the success, Arnold severed his relationship with Parker. Parker schemed to take over the management of Elvis. Understandably, few people liked Parker. He was described as "brash, arrogant, boastful and obnoxious." Dickerson points out how Parker's massive gambling debts often colored his decisions and actions. No matter how atrocious Parker's management was, Elvis must take a certain amount of responsibility for allowing him to have so much control and influence. Author Dickerson does a great job of shedding more light on Colonel Tom Parker. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. "Don't Be Cruel to a Heart That's True" By Donald Mitchell Review Summary: James L. Dickerson adds colorful background and interesting speculations about Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis Presley's long-time manager. The bulk of the book, however, contains relatively little that is new about Elvis or Parker. The story line is convoluted, bringing in detail in many places that is disconnected from the material before or after it. Elvis fans will enjoy reading about books about Elvis rather than Colonel Parker. Parker himself is hardly a noble or novel figure, so for most this book will lack appeal. Review: The key theme of this book is that Tom Parker was a manipulative con man who took advantage of those who trusted him, and was deathly afraid of being exposed. Like a lot of show business managers, he feathered the nest more for himself than for those he represented. His gambling addiction and fear of being deported led him to be an easy mark for those who knew how to put on the pressure. Like many overnight successes, Elvis Presley and his family had little understanding of the complexities of show business. Colonel (an honorary title from his friend, the governor of Louisiana) Tom Parker was way ahead of Elvis and his other acts, and earned a marvelous living in the process. There were pros and cons to this. Clearly, he helped Elvis get a top recording contract and lots of attention early in his career. On the other hand, he probably siphoned off a vast multiple of what was normally charged for such services. After Parker got into debt to the casinos in Las Vegas, he probably short-changed Elvis even more to get the casinos off his own back. One aspect of this was a cut-rate deal for Elvis to appear in Las Vegas at the International (later the Las Vegas Hilton). The most interesting part of the book to me is the life of Parker before he met Elvis. There is no clear agreement in the documentary record, but he probably was an illegal immigrant from Europe. Part of that time was spent in Holland and he could have been from Russia earlier. Arriving in the United States, he avoided conflicts that could have exposed him to deportation. For example, he overpaid his and Elvis's income taxes to avoid attention from the federal government. That may have been why he discouraged Elvis from touring abroad, because Parker would have had to leave to U.S. to make the tours work. His first regular work was with a traveling midway, for which he sold candied apples and hot dogs. During those years, he learned a lot about what draws crowds and that the profits are in the concessions. Later, as a manager he would offer cut rate appearance fees in exchange for a split of the concessions, and made more money that way. The book recounts ways that he would take advantage of the customers on the midway. When there weren't enough lemons for the lemonade, he would pour in citric acid and put a slice of lemon on top to give the correct appearance. He also had "dancing" chickens which he coerced by turning on a hidden hot plate beneath the sawdust to scald their feet. The book also casts doubt as to whether he was ever married to his longtime "wife." No marriage license records were found by the author, and draft board records suggest that he may not have been married. The author also makes the case that Elvis could have developed as an actor, except for a lack of faith on the part of Hal Wallis and Parker. I suspect that reasonable people will differ on that point. Where many other sources suggest that Elvis was paranoid about threats to his life, this book takes those threats more seriously by describing the many mob connections to Parker, government, and the entertainment industry. After you have finished reading this book (if you decide to), I suggest that you think about how you can protect yourself and your family from people who are better at negotiating and presenting their own interests than you are. How would you have spotted Parker? How would you have kept him under control? Take the time to learn how to look after your own financial interests! 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating insight into The Colonel into Elvis' career By Carole I like to learn about Elvis from the inside out. This is unquestionably one of the best and most interesting books I have ever read about Elvis' career. It is a fascinating and enlightening insight into Colonel Parker and thus into Elvis and his

career also. Dickerson's approach takes you down a road I don't believe has been explored before. He has done remarkable research into (i) what influenced and shaped The Colonel and enabled him to emerge as a revolutionary and unique manager and (ii) into the underlying cultural and political forces of the time that greatly influenced the course of this particular piece of history. If you are serious about learning about Elvis and The Colonel, Dickerson's writing makes you think; it opens doors and suddenly so much becomes clear. The first half of the book is, perhaps, kinder to The Colonel than the second half; but, above all, if you want new and interesting information and great insight into these two gentlemen (Elvis and The Colonel), this book is brilliant. This book is well worth your time and money.

Based on unprecedented research and interviews, this authoritative biography of Colonel Tom Parker (1909-1997) includes new revelations and insights into rock music's most renowned and notorious manager.

From Publishers Weekly
Elvis's manager gets a good skewering in this uneven biography by Dickerson (That's Alright, Elvis, with Scotty Moore), a veteran Nashville writer. The strength of the book lies in its early pages, when Dickerson traces Parker's sketchy background in the circus and his rise as a country music manager. The circus business gave him the ideas, Dickerson persuasively argues, that he later effectively used as a music promoter. But throughout the book, Dickerson's judgment is questionable. He argues that both Parker and Elvis were Jewish, but provides weak evidence on both accounts. And after the Dutch-born Parker designated a colonel by a Kentucky governor takes over Elvis's career in the mid-1950s, Dickerson exhibits little of the sympathy biographers usually feel for their subjects. Instead, he blames Parker for Elvis's ruin: "Rather than risk losing his interest in Elvis's contract to his creditors, Parker allowed Elvis to risk losing his career." Even if the colonel did push Elvis into some disastrous film roles to cover some of his own gambling debts, Parker deserves some credit for Presley's rise to demigod status, as Dickerson's own account shows ("Parker's decision to accept RCA's offer was the best thing that could have happened for Elvis' career....") There's little doubt that Parker was a shady character plagued by gambling problems, who tried to take advantage of Elvis. But readers hoping for a balanced account of the relationship will be disappointed. 35 pages bw photos not seen by PW. (May) Forecast: Elvis remains such a national obsession that any book promising a little-explored angle has some commercial potential. But this one won't register on most fans' radars, for true Elvis followers prefer not to have their king upstaged, especially by the man many think betrayed him. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal
Arguably the most notorious manager in show business history, Col. Tom Parker (1909-97) virtually controlled every aspect of Elvis Presley's career. Dickerson (Goin' Back to Memphis) is tough but fair with his slippery subject. Although he conducted solid research and dozens of interviews, he is unable to prove several key theories that would have distinguished his book from Dirk Vellenga's *Elvis and the Colonel* (LJ 10/1/88). For example, Dickerson takes Vellenga's groundbreaking discovery that Parker was an illegal alien born in Holland a step further by speculating that he was actually born a Russian Jew. Dickerson himself admits that "there is no documentation to substantiate either claim." More of a stretch are Dickerson's suggestions that Elvis's father intentionally misspelled his son's middle name "Aaron" instead of "Aron" on his gravestone in recognition of Elvis's Jewish heritage and that there may have been mob connections, related to Parker's dealings, in the deaths of Elvis and his father. Otherwise, this is a well-presented biography of Parker, now reviled by many Elvis fans, who through gall and cunning created the ultimate celebrity icon. Recommended where Elvis titles are in demand; another recent Parker biography is Sean O'Neal's *My Boy Elvis: The Colonel Tom Parker Story* (DIANE Pub., 2001. reprint). Lloyd Jansen, Stockton-San Joaquin Cty. P.L., CA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist
"Colonel" Tom Parker, Elvis' own Svengali, shrouded himself in mystery, and Dickerson plumbs the depths of flimflam, self-promotion, outright lies, and showbiz history to reveal him. He claimed to be from Huntington, West Virginia, though his name isn't recorded there, and no documents exist that place him in America before he hit Tampa in the 1930s. Indeed, his name itself is elusive. He apparently was once known as Andreas van Kujik. As for his origins, Dickerson likes best the story that he was born a Russian Jew and passed through Holland en route to the U.S., though a previous biographer contended that he was a native Hollander. Whatever the truth may be, he was, Dickerson emphasizes, a foxy fellow who applied the rules of the carny game, in which he cut his promotional teeth, to managing Elvis. In short, it's a wonder not that he clipped the King for lotsa cash, but that ol' El came out of their dealings with anything at all. This is essential Elvisiana, excellent about showbiz's underbelly. Mike Tribby Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved