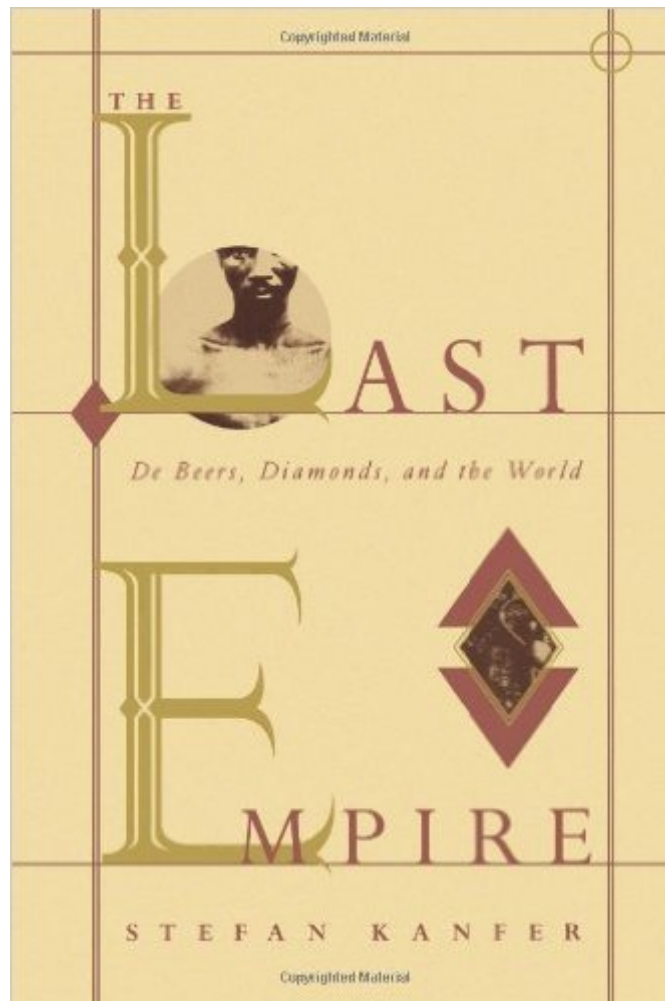


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The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds, And The World



Synopsis

With a scholar's precision and a novelist's eye, Stefan Kanfer tells the inside story of De Beers Consolidated Mines - from the nineteenth century diamond rush that transformed Johannes De Beer's humble South African farm into an exotic klondike, to the Oppenheims' shadow empire that has achieved unmatched global reach.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Last Empire" is a history of De Beers Consolidated Mines from the discovery in 1867 of diamonds in South Africa until 1993. Author Stefan Kanfer chronicles the diamond rush in late 19th century South Africa, with its colorful, unscrupulous speculator-magnates, black diggers, and illegal diamond traffic. He recounts 3 generations of diamond men, starting with De Beers founder Cecil Rhodes and other plutocrat-statesmen of the first generation who operated amidst tensions between British, Boer, and black populations. Ernest Oppenheimer, founder of Anglo-American gold mining, brought De Beers into the 20th century and created the diamond syndicate that we know today through the turmoil of 2 world wars, the Great Depression, labor revolts, and racial strife. His son Harry Oppenheimer, the third generation of De Beers royalty, expanded the company and ruthlessly consolidated its power while he embraced progressive politics at home. The history of De Beers is no less than the history of South Africa itself: complicated, controversial, predatory, violent, and idealistic. South Africa was built on the diamond business. The author points out that De Beers fits the dictionary definition of "empire" better than any other commercial entity. "The Last Empire" leaves the reader in awe of that empire, intrigued by the adventurers and swindlers that created fortunes from big holes in the ground, and at the same time taken aback by the inescapable power

of De Beers. Stefan Kanfer clearly admires the Oppenheimers' accomplishments, though he also illustrates their hypocrisies. He does not express an opinion as to the benefits or downside of De Beers' price controls, but Kanfer does detail De Beers' more ruthless campaigns to prevent devaluation by controlling supply in the 1970s and 1980s.

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