



## Joe Papp: An American Life

*Helen Epstein*

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## **Joe Papp: An American Life** Helen Epstein

Self-made impresario, controversial producer, contentious champion of human rights and the First Amendment, founder of the New York Shakespeare Festival, and unquestionably the most dynamic force in American theater in the last quarter century, Joseph Papp (1921–1991) changed forever America's cultural landscape. He was the first to demand and to provide—against enormous odds—free Shakespeare to the public, and the first to pioneer colorblind casting and minority-group theater. He discovered and showcased at the Public Theater playwrights like David Rabe, John Guare, and Vaclav Havel; directors like Michael Bennet and James Lapine; actors like Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, and Denzel Washington; and produced such classic American plays as *Hair*, *Sticks and Bones*, *Streamers*, *The Normal Heart*, and *A Chorus Line*, the longest running musical in Broadway history. *Joe Papp* offers readers a compassionate, unsparing portrait of a complex man who inspired both anger and admiration, but whose far-reaching impact on American theater remains unsurpassed.

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