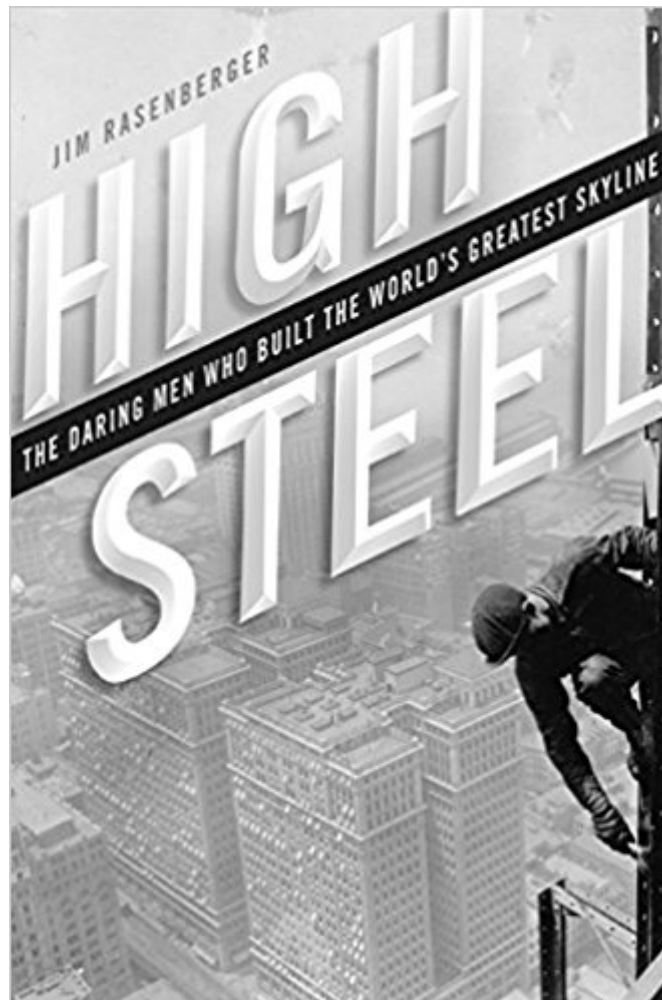




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# High Steel: The Daring Men Who Built The World's Greatest Skyline



## Synopsis

With the birth of the steel-frame skyscraper in the late nineteenth century came a new breed of man, as bold and untamed as any this country had ever known. These "cowboys of the skies," as one journalist called them, were the structural ironworkers who walked steel beams -- no wider, often, than the face of a hardcover book -- hundreds of feet above ground, to raise the soaring towers and vaulting bridges that so abruptly transformed America in the twentieth century. Many early ironworkers were former sailors, new Americans of Irish and Scandinavian descent accustomed to climbing tall ships' masts and schooled in the arts of rigging. Others came from a small Mohawk Indian reservation on the banks of the St. Lawrence River or from a constellation of seaside towns in Newfoundland. What all had in common were fortitude, courage, and a short life expectancy. "We do not die," went an early ironworkers' motto. "We are killed." *High Steel* is the stirring epic of these men and of the icons they built -- and are building still. Shifting between past and present, Jim Rasenberger travels back to the earliest iron bridges and buildings of the nineteenth century; to the triumph of the Brooklyn Bridge and the 1907 tragedy of the Quebec Bridge, where seventy-five ironworkers, including thirty-three Mohawks, lost their lives in an instant; through New York's skyscraper boom of the late 1920s, when ironworkers were hailed as "industrial age heroes." All the while, Rasenberger documents the lives of several contempor-ary ironworkers raising steel on a twenty-first-century skyscraper, the Time Warner building in New York City. This is a fast-paced, bare-knuckled portrait of vivid personalities, containing episodes of startling violence (as when ironworkers dynamited the Los Angeles Times building in 1910) and exhilarating adventure. In the end, *High Steel* is also a moving account of brotherhood and family. Many of those working in the trade today descend from multigenerational dynasties of ironworkers. As they walk steel, they follow in the footsteps of their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. We've all had the experience of looking at a par-ticularly awe-inspiring bridge or building and wondering, How did they do that? Jim Rasenberger asks -- and answers -- the question behind the question: What sort of person would willingly scale such heights, take such chances, face such danger? The result is a depiction of the American working class as it has seldom appeared in literature: strong, proud, autonomous, enduring, and utterly compelling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Inspired by a New York Times article Rasenberger wrote on ironworkers in early 2001, this historical overview of skyscraper construction in New York City and elsewhere traces the erection of such structures as the Flatiron and Chrysler buildings, the Empire State Building, the George Washington Bridge, the World Trade Center and the lavish new Time Warner Center. This last building is the narrative column around which Rasenberger builds his book, which is largely devoted to "the men who risked the most and labored the hardest"; the ironworkers who put the high-rise steel columns in place. Though his admiration at times seems compulsory rather than genuine, Rasenberger emphasizes the often heroic, death-defying feats ironworkers perform. He also takes account of far-flung communities that breed ironworkers, such as the Mohawk Indians of upstate New York. The chronological history is broken up by alternating sections on the Time Warner Center and often feels less like a single narrative than a collection of vignettes. Rasenberger's principal claim, that ironwork's days are numbered because of the growing reliance on concrete, is often lost in the telling. Even the Time Warner Center was built more with concrete than iron, which is costlier and more vulnerable to heat in events such as the World Trade Center attacks. This recounting, while less than fully absorbing, serves as a valuable history for building enthusiasts and a thoughtful testament to a dying craft that has helped fuel the American economy for more than a century. 21 b&w photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Journeying through the past century of New York City's ironworking trade, Rasenberger recounts signal events in its labor history while developing a powerful impression of its unique occupational culture. The latter he absorbed from close ground- and sky-level observation of ironworkers at two mid-Manhattan construction sites, and at the World Trade Center site. Raising steel for bridges and

skyscrapers is extraordinarily hazardous. Several of the workers profiled sustained severe and, in one instance, permanently disabling injuries--painfully proving ironwork's annual 5 percent death-and-injury rate. Why any man would court its dangers is a tantalizing question to which Rasenberger advances a multitude of answers. One is generational continuity, which Rasenberger discerned from his trips to the homes of Mohawk Indians and Newfoundlanders who've worked in the trade for decades. Another is the autonomy on the job that ironworkers enjoy, and the pride they derive from being the first colonists of a square of air. With ironworkers' social prestige elevated in the aftermath of the WTC calamity, Rasenberger's muscular portrait deserves an outsize audience as well. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

An outstanding account of the brotherhood that built the New York City skyline. Rasenberger does two things particularly well in this book. First, he provides a fine history of the DANGEROUS iron working trade, as it developed with the advent of the syscraper, the redoubtable Flatiron building. "The danger was reflected in the carnage...of 1,000 members of Chicago Local 1 that same year, 103 were injured, 15 permanently disabled and 18 died." Second, he paints lovely portraits of the individuals (the stoic daredevils) who did the work, Sam Parks, "Frenchy" and Jack Doyle, to name a few. I highly recommend that a prospective reader use 's "look inside" feature to sample Rasenber's non-nonsense prose, so well-suited to his subject matter.

Our son was very happy with the book , it was for his 49 th birthday which we celebrated with him and family in Cooperstown.

a wonderful history of the real steel of old, iron workers building the iconic skyline in metropolitan America when America actually made things and did BIG things

everything ok

Good read, gets a little redundant, but good.

Jim Rasenberger unblinkingly depicts the demanding nature of the work done by these unique men. The reader cannot help but be impressed with their bravery and accomplishment.It's also clear that this is one of the last few places where men only need apply. In almost every other phase of American working life, qualified women are accepted as working peers. It's really ironic that one of

the thickest "glass ceilings" is where they haven't even built the ceiling yet...But Rasenberger's job is not to change this world, but just write about it. And write he does - you share in the working days of these men, of what happens when they fall (as they do), their families, their heritage, and, in an especially moving chapter, their heroic work right after the collapse of the World Trade Center. Gender equality is the right thing. I get impatient when I encounter a workplace where women are so clearly unwelcome. What these men do, though, is very special and very much worth our attention and praise. As we might ask them to confront their stereotypes about women, we're challenged to confront our own stereotypes about the "lazy, ignorant construction worker." Rasenberger teaches us that nothing could be more unfair. These are intelligent, skilled, disciplined and, above all, brave men who can do what we need done. The book will open your eyes.

This story of iron workers is both extremely interesting and a really fun read. It provides beautifully crafted vignettes drawn both from the history of iron workers and from contemporary tales of today's iron workers at work in New York. A strong narrative thread connects these stories as the reader learns about the lives of a small group of iron workers today at the same time as Rasenberger deftly introduces the history of this trade and its daring tradesmen that brings this story to life and sets it in context. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in iron workers, in the history of our tall buildings and impressive bridges and to anyone looking for an accessible and fun read about real workers engaged in daring and dangerous work. It's beautifully written, a sympathetic portrait, yet one that is not afraid to highlight the faults and foibles of the people it describes, making the story one that resonates as accurate and, most of all, real.

I think the man that wrote the book did a great job. The pictures and how it describes us....it's great and I appreciate how he wrote the book, it seems as if he took a lot of time learning about the culture of us Ironworkers..many writers in the past never quite got it right but this gentleman did. There's only one thing I need to say that he didn't get, "Union Ironworkers are not brave"...yes we are daring and maybe a little crazy but we're not brave. You see the definition of being brave is being scared of something but you go ahead and do it anyway... well.. we're not scared.... of anything. We do push it to the limit and do crazy things because it's fun and my brother Ironworkers know what I'm talking about. IF you have to be brave to do this trade you will never last. This is still a really good read no doubt about that.

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