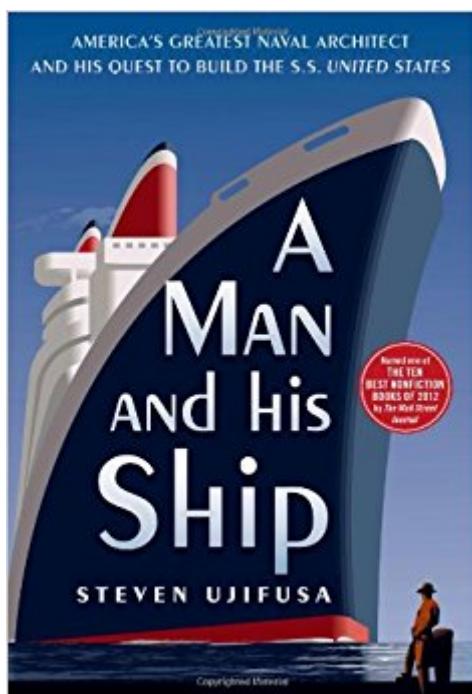


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# A Man And His Ship: America's Greatest Naval Architect And His Quest To Build The S.S. United States



## Synopsis

Ã¢ “A fascinating historical accountÃ¢ “A snapshot of the American Dream culminating with this countryÃ¢ “s mid-century greatnessÃ¢ “ (The Wall Street Journal). THE STORY OF A GREAT AMERICAN BUILDER AT the peak of his power, in the 1940s and 1950s, William Francis Gibbs was considered AmericaÃ¢ “s best naval architect. His quest to build the finest, fastest, most beautiful ocean liner of his time, the S.S. United States, was a topic of national fascination. When completed in 1952, the ship was hailed as a technological masterpiece at a time when Ã¢ “made in AmericaÃ¢ “ meant the best. Gibbs was an American original, on par with John Roebling of the Brooklyn Bridge and Frank Lloyd Wright of Fallingwater. Forced to drop out of Harvard following his familyÃ¢ “s sudden financial ruin, he overcame debilitating shyness and lack of formal training to become the visionary creator of some of the finest ships in history. He spent forty years dreaming of the ship that became the S.S. United States. William Francis Gibbs was driven, relentless, and committed to excellence. He loved his ship, the idea of it, and the realization of it, and he devoted himself to making it the epitome of luxury travel during the triumphant postÃ¢ “œWorld War II era. Biographer Steven Ujifusa brilliantly describes the way Gibbs worked and how his vision transformed an industry. A Man and His Ship is a tale of ingenuity and enterprise, a truly remarkable journey on land and sea.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A terrific book! By turns entertaining, informing and ultimately inspiring, A Man and His Ship transforms its readers into passengers traveling across an ocean and through time. A skilled verbal

navigator, Steven Ujifusa has charted an efficient and yet immensely satisfying course through a sea of facts, images and stories. (David Macauley, author of *The Way Things Work* and *Unbuilding*) "A delightful account of the era of grand ocean liners and the brilliant, single-minded designer who yearned to build the greatest ocean liner of all." *Kirkus* "In his debut, Ujifusa harks back to a time when men were men, and transatlantic ships were serious business...Written with passion and thoroughness, this is a love letter to a bygone time and the ships that once ruled the seas." *Publishers Weekly* starred review "Ujifusa describes the construction of the ship in engrossing detail and provides informative digressions on the golden age of ocean travel, when liners carried millionaires, celebrities, and desperate refugees." *Booklist* "Few of man's creations possess even half the romance of the passenger ships that once steamed across the world's oceans, especially the North Atlantic. That is why Steven Ujifusa's *A Man and His Ship* is such a compelling work." *The Wall Street Journal* Steven Ujifusa has done something remarkable in his book, *A Man and His Ship*: he has brought back an era of American dominance in shipbuilding through the life of one of its giants: William Francis Gibbs. In some ways, Gibbs was the Steve Jobs of his era — a perfectionist with few people skills who nevertheless was single-handedly able to change his industry by the power of his vision and overwhelming professional competence. We need more public historians like Ujifusa working in business history. Using the highest research standards, he has written a great book that tells great story. (G. Richard Shell, Thomas Gerrity Professor, The Wharton School of Business and author, *Bargaining for Advantage*.)

Steven Ujifusa serves on the Advisory Council of the S.S. United States Conservancy. He received his master's degree in historic preservation and real estate from the University of Pennsylvania and his BA in history from Harvard University.

I was expecting a book on the United States solely but was pleasantly surprised! The first half of the book goes into depth the creation and lure of trans Atlantic crossings and Gibbs himself. I had no idea Gibbs accomplished so much. You see his work all the time in documentaries but his name is rarely mentioned. The Author does a superb job with his writing and telling of history. He has a gift for writing and was enjoyable to read. The cruise ship industry will never be the same. Yes there are a few boutique cruises which attempt to change current trends, most are these bloated top heavy ugly ships catering to shopping and all you can eat and hitting these ports catering to 100% tourism for the 1 hour stop over. The SS United States represents the end of an era and the pride a country

can have. Thank you Steven Ujifusa for writing this great book and preserving the legacy of Willie Gibbs and the SS United States. I hope in my lifetime I get to tour the ship before she is scrapped.

"A Man and his Ship" takes us back to the days when it took five days to get from New York City to London (via Southampton) and tells the story of William Francis Gibbs, the American ship designer who was obsessed with the idea of building a ship that could do it even faster, faster than the British and French and German ocean liners that would be its rivals. His vision of a superliner built with top-secret technology was ultimately realized in 1953 in the construction of SS United States, whose nearly 248,000 horsepower could drive it through the waves at 38.32 knots, nearly 45 miles an hour. It was a stunning achievement - and so is "A Man and his Ship," which begins as Gibbs's dream began before World War I and ends with the great vessel, a stripped and gutted ruin, laid up in the river in Philadelphia awaiting its ultimate fate. Its admirers hope to make that something other than the wrecking yard. Winning the "Blue Riband," the prize for the fastest Atlantic crossing, was not the only goal, though United States did that with a crossing in three and one-half days. For, as Ujifusa writes, United States was "designed for wartime use first and foremost" - as a troop transport that could outrun and outmaneuver enemy submarines. That meant that it was built with military-level technology: high-pressure turbines, and top-secret propellers (designed by a woman on Gibbs's staff), designs not declassified until after the Vietnam War. And it was built with money from the taxpayers - financial subsidies from the U.S. Government for its construction, which cost nearly \$80 million, and for its annual operating costs as well. Of course, all that - Blue Riband, troop transport duties, government subsidies, the luxury of transatlantic crossing - vanished into thin air, literally, when airplanes replaced ocean liners in the 1960s. It's all told, in rich detail evocative of an era not all that long past, in this wonderful book, which has pictures that will bring all that back for those who remember it, or bring it to life for those too young to remember. A great read.

I grew up in NY City at the end of the era of the great ocean liners. Whenever I drove down the West Side Highway I would search for the beautiful ships that docked there, most especially the "Big U," SS United States. The very first book I bought, in 1953, was about this ship. Ujifusa has created a memorable portrait of this phenomenal technological achievement, and of the enigmatic and driven man who designed and built her, William Francis Gibbs. It is at once historically accurate and emotionally compelling, a literary effort to be proud of. Perhaps no one but a man like Gibbs could have built the greatest ocean liner of them all, and had he not lived, it never would have happened. The Big U is the apical achievement not only of the 1950's, but in terms of marine

architecture, of all time. Nothing has surpassed her, and nothing ever will. That she is sitting at her moorings in Philadelphia today, rusting away, is not only a crime but an insult to the memory of her designer and the thousands of people who built her. Ujifusa has done a great service to America by writing the story in such a readable and entertaining, moving way.

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