



Churchill: A Study in Greatness

Geoffrey Best

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One of the glorious triumvirate of World War II and founder of the strong Anglo-American friendship that is still apparent today, Winston Churchill stands out in history as a man who led his country through one of its most difficult times, with all of the steadfastness of a fierce and loyal bulldog. Churchill was already recognized as the most diversely gifted man in British politics before, at the ripe old age of 66, he suddenly emerged as a figure of world importance. Becoming Prime Minister on the very day in 1940 that Hitler invaded France and the Low Countries, he braced the British people to continue fighting and even to counterattack the, up to that point, all-victorious Germans. A clever and confident statesman, with an obvious love for the people he served, for years Churchill's character went unchallenged and his inspiring leadership left him above criticism. Recently, however, his record has come under attack. In *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, one of Britain's most distinguished historians makes sense of this extraordinary man, and his long, controversial, colorful, contradictory and heroic career.

Geoffrey Best illuminates both his strengths and his weaknesses, looking past the many received versions of Churchill, in a biography that balances the private and the public man and offers a clear insight into what made him truly great.

Churchill: A Study in Greatness Details

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Author : Geoffrey Best

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From Reader Review Churchill: A Study in Greatness for online ebook

Arnaldo Goncalves says

It is a basic book to understand Churchill's personality and how he rationalized things. It is an honest book and produces a reading of the man like he was without reverence or adoration, error that most of Churchill's commentators make. He was a clever politician that jump party when it was useful to his political career and that would not loose a chance to neutralize his enemies. I read some 70 pages now and my interest hasn't vanished. The assessment of Geoffrey Best is clear, simple without the large gongoric style that British authors like to write. It is strange but in a certain time of reading I remembered the life of Karl Marx, through a biography I am particularly fond off. It exhibits the same outspoken person, petulant sometime, direct and controversial on his opinions. Also common the role of the wives, Clementina in the Churchill's, that performed the role of a close adviser, a cooler of temperament explosions.

Caro says

Really well done. Obviously, volumes could be (and have been) written about him, but for a good, medium-length biography, this fit the bill. Best has a conversational tone and integrates secondary sources well.

Omar Halabieh says

Below are key excerpts from the book that I found particularly insightful:

1- "Churchill did not see himself as an 'enemy of the people'. He perceived himself as a benevolent friend to the working class, a promoter of social welfare, and the protector of unions' rights and of everybody's civil rights; and indeed the record shows that he was all those things. But the record also shows how little he was prepared to see everybody's civil rights and the security of the state endangered by civil disorder and revolutionary activism. The legend of 'Tonypandy' after all had some justice in it, though for the wrong reason. "

2- "Churchill's words - 'Those terrible "ifs" accumulate' - are only too true. There were numbers of moments when, if events had taken another turn, if advice had been accepted or rejected, or if decisions had been made instead of shelved. history would have been written altogether differently. But one of the most Striking features of the many accounts of the campaign is that each authority seems to choose his own turning-points, and hardly any two are the same."

3- "Two of his deep-down passions and principles were, first, the rule of law as protector of civil and religious liberty, and of the standards of civilisation; and, secondly, the place and prestige in the world of Great Britain and its Empire, as necessary both for the security of the English-speaking people and for the welfare of its other subjects. In the gap which sometimes opened between them may be glimpsed, not at all surprisingly, prejudices and assumptions which he shared with other men of his age, race, nation and class."

4- "Men who take up arms against the State must expect at any moment to be fired upon ... Men who take up

arms unlawfully cannot expect that the troops will wait until they are quite ready to begin the conflict ... Armed men are in a category absolutely different from unarmed men ... I carefully said that when I used the word 'armed' I meant armed with lethal weapons or with firearms This crowd was unarmed. These are simple tests which it is not too much to expect officers in these difficult situations to apply."

5- "He still held to the belief that he was destined to do great things for the nation he loved, but when, if or how he would ever be able to do them seemed doubtful even to him. War was what especially excited him and brought out what was most original and powerful within him. Aware of the dangers of such a temperament, he was not the bad sort of man who would wish to start a war in order to shine in it, but his early scepticism about the Treaty of Versailles had been borne out by subsequent events. and by now, the early 1930s, he felt more and more sure that what was still universally known as the Great War would sooner or later become called the First World War."

6- "He was the first British statesman of any note to identify, and to call public attention to, the dangerous twist given to German national aspirations (which he well understood) by their confluence from 1933 with Nazi ideology and Hitler's leadership. He correctly sensed before evidence had accumulated to support the charge, how dangerous to the peace of the world Germany would become in Hitler's hands."

7- "Churchill was the most prominent of the few leaders of British opinion who refused to believe that this policy of appeasement, once the British government had unmistakably adopted it, was either honourable or sensible. He understood what Hitler meant by the Versailles grievances but something, probably just brilliant intuition, told him that Hitler had much more in mind than the mere redress of them."

8- "Churchill was not the man to let this great machine run without constant inspection and interference. His style of management was striking and peculiar, the most remarkable no doubt of any Prime Minister's, and although it undoubtedly had abrasive and time-wasting aspects, overall and in the long run it did much more good than harm."

9- "War is a constant struggle and must be waged from day to day. It is only with some difficulty and within limits that provision can be made for the future. Experience shows that forecasts are usually falsified and preparations always in arrears. Nevertheless, there must be a design and theme for bringing the war to a victorious end in a reasonable period..."

10- "An iron curtain is drawn down upon their front. We do not know what is going on behind ... Surely it is vital now to come to an understanding with Russia, or see where we are with her, before we weaken our armies mortally or retire to the zones of occupation."

11- "As we go forward on our difficult road, we shall always be guided by two main aims of policy. One is to lose no opportunity of convincing the Soviet leaders and, if we can reach them, the Russian people, that the democracies of the West have no aggressive designs on them. The other is to ensure that until that purpose has been achieved we have the strength necessary to deter any aggression by them and to ward it off if it should come. We shall continue at the same time to seek by every means open to us an easement [detente] in international tension and a sure foundation on which the people of the world can live their lives in security and peace."

Jessica says

This book is themed based and not really in chronological order. This is no where near as good as Manchester's biography, but I can never get enough of Churchill. One thing he had over Manchester's biography is that it reached Churchill's death (Manchester was unable to finish a third volume due to strokes). Over all good book, but you don't get the depth or how Churchill became the Churchill that rallied the world.

Jenopcer says

This was my first biography of Churchill. As far as biographies go, it was fairly good -- I learned things about Churchill I didn't know before. The author clearly admired Churchill, and I closed the book with a great admiration of him myself. There are several faults with this book, however. First, it assumed a knowledge that American readers might not have. For instance the author would say something like, "Churchill was such-and-such which was proven by the amusing incident of so-and-so," and then move on to another topic without describing the incident -- very frustrating. Also, I got the impression that the editors/proofreaders of this book hadn't done their job. Many a sentence I read over and over and it continued to make no sense; there were also typos that shouldn't have been there. I gave it four stars because Churchill shines through in this book and it *was* interesting.

Faye says

This is not a quick read - and I read relatively fast. It is an epic discussion of an epic man and I truly loved it. My only complaint is that Geoffrey refers to incidents and events as if you know all about them and my history is particularly poor, so sometimes the story can seem a little vague or confusing. That aside, I feel as though I have stood alongside Churchill for his long 90 years and understood what kind of man he was. What a hero - I am only sorry I didn't pay his statue in Woodford the attention it deserved when I was at school.

Carolyn says

25/01/12

I am on page 145 now. I still really enjoy reading the book, however I find the writing style at stages rather complicated. From time to time I have to check other sources to find if Churchill was pro or contra an idea. Also it is assuming knowledge about certain historical events, which I don't have.

The author is rather supportive of Churchill and negative points are kept short and always follow with a lengthy positive paragraph. Which I don't think is a bad thing as the author can have his viewpoint and the subtitle "A Study in Greatness" already prepares for his admiration.

I am on page 82 and hooked. I didn't expect it to be this interesting to read about Churchill's life. Except

from the picture of him taken in Yalta, him sitting with Roosevelt and Stalin and smoking his cigar, I didn't know much about Churchill before I started reading this.

At the moment the First World War is raging and Churchill has just become a minister again. He is overconfident, arrogant, outspoken and makes a lot of enemies, but is also energetic, knowledgeable and able. A very inspiring personality.

I may have mentioned before I was educated in Eastern Germany and history lessons excluded any mention of the First World War (except that Germany lost) let alone any information about what was going on in Great Britain or France (or Gallipoli of which I had never heard before I lived in Australia). I will definitely read more about that time period, in case anybody has suggestions...

Scharenjo says

This is terribly written. It's conversational instead of academic. It averages less than 20 notes per chapter, most of which draw from Churchill's own books. I couldn't finish reading it.

Tal says

The subject, Winston Churchill was interesting but this was a very poorly written book. Numerous compound sentences of 40+ words was just one frustration. If you want to read about Churchill, choose another author.

Michel says

I liked the book. Already a secret admirer because of his position in WWII, this was my first biography of Sir Winston.

And I liked it, because it touched many aspects: political, military but also his personal life and the times he lived in.

Frank Kelly says

Outstanding and fresh biography of Winston Churchill. Best is a sublime and focused writer who focused marvelously on the man and his many foibles and virtues. Wonderful read and I highly recommend it.

Bethany says

one of those books that I "had" to read for my 400 level Modern British history class, but loved nonetheless.

Churchill is a fascinating subject, and this is a thorough and unflinching look at him.

Gianni says

If you really want to understand the man behind the myth, I would strongly recommend you read this book.

Mike Y says

This book is very British in phrasing, terminology, references and style....long run-on sentences with two or three sidebars before getting back to the point and references and slang that are obscure for an American reader. A little distracting for my American palate in the beginning, but as the book went on it became entertaining for the style if not content so much. Once I got more used to that, the WWII Chapters were thrilling. I'm not sure I like the presentation which was topical rather than chronological. This leaves the reader repeatedly starting from the late 30s, follow a topic to the late 40s, then changing topics and going back to the 30s. It also meant several significant events were repeated often and you had to piece together the related topics in time and place.

This book provided good coverage of major world affairs and Churchill's role in them, but at the end of the day, it didn't feel as if we really got into his head, or his personal life sufficiently to feel like we know him after reading this biography. I feel like I know more about things he did, but not as much about the man.

Nevertheless this was a good book, about an interesting subject.

Yannis Theocharis says

Justifiably regarded on of Churchill's best biographies, this book highlights masterfully the complex character, the brilliance, the weaknesses and the eccentricism of one of the greatest men to have ever lived. Reading about the life, character, deeds, political genius and vision of Winston Churchill - and of FDR for that matter - and how he lived up to the needs, responsibilities and challenges of his era, may cause you some depression, especially if you think of the poverty of political leaders we see all around Europe nowadays (especially in the UK). Well worth reading although if you'd like a biography with more analysis and details about Churchill's character and dealings with others it should probably be accompanied with one of the other available books on him.
