



The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, from Grocer's Daughter to Prime Minister

John Campbell, William David Freeman (Abridged by)

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The Iron Lady, the definitive Margaret Thatcher biography, is available just in time for the movie starring Meryl Streep as one of the most infamous figures in postwar politics.

Whether you love her or hate her, Margaret Thatcher's impact on twentieth-century history is undeniable. From her humble, small-town upbringing to her rise to power as the United Kingdom's first female prime minister, to her dramatic fall from grace after more than three decades of service, celebrated biographer John Campbell delves into the story of this fascinating woman's life as no one has before. The result of more than nine years of meticulous research, *The Iron Lady* is the only balanced, unvarnished portrait of Margaret Thatcher, one of the most vital and controversial political figures of our time.

The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, from Grocer's Daughter to Prime Minister Details

Date : Published October 25th 2011 by Penguin Books (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780143120872

Author : John Campbell , William David Freeman (Abridged by)

Format : Paperback 564 pages

Genre : Biography, History, Nonfiction, Politics



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From Reader Review The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, from Grocer's Daughter to Prime Minister for online ebook

Matthew says

For all those that might have or plan to see the movie "The Iron Lady" I would highly recommend you read this book, which goes into far more detail on the accomplishments she had in her life which is quite extensive and has had far reaching impacts. In fact I fear the movie glosses over quite a bit of what Ms. Thatcher actually accomplished and the hurdles she had to overcome. For those interested in politics or simply the story of a woman who overcame all obstacles and came to be seen not for her gender but the ideas and strength of character. This book is both inspiring and entertaining at the same time.

Please be aware that John Campbell assumes a certain level of familiarity with British political system and processes and thus might be beneficial to read up slightly on this in advance. There will be several chapters that will seem to dwell on election nuances that for those less interested in politics might wish to skip. However, even for those readers who bypass small sections on local politics and read simply on her country and world impacts will find this to be a very satisfying read.

Read full review at: <http://www.squidoo.com/iron-lady>

Obile says

This is a fine book, logically structured and provides a comprehensive overview of Mrs Thatcher's life as a budding Conservative, Prime Minister, international stateswoman and eventually an outdated, if not cranky, personality. This book is definitely judgemental in its observations, and seeks to derive many things as precipitants of her eventual demise. She is characterised as strong-headed, ideologically focused woman who eventually became more encrusted in her own circle. The book offers a clear narrative of her tenure as PM, detailing in her approach to domestic (socialism, trade unions, privatisation etc.) and foreign (Anglo-American "special relationship", European leaders, EU, nuclear disarmament, NATO etc.) affairs. The prose is extremely readable.

Joanna says

I was torn between giving this 3 stars or 4, as this book's layout and flow made it challenging to read through seamlessly. The back-and-forth between dates and decades and members of the government within each of the chapters made it feel a little choppy. I've read books on Stalin that were more engaging.

However, the amount of content and its quality was impressive as I learned a great deal about Thatcher. My memories of Thatcher (as events around her years in office were considered "current" for me during the 80's) are fairly scattered and I typically associated her with the free market, trickle down philosophy and anti-communist crusades that also characterized Reagan's presidency. Campbell did a very good job painting a full picture of Thatcher's strengths as well as her more negative, single-minded and often hypocritical attributes. Whether you loved her or hated her, you can't deny that her life and accomplishments were fascinating and unprecedented. Her sharply-focused rise to 10 Downing Street was based on her belief that

her divine mission was to rid Britain and the world of socialism as well as cement the alliance with the U.S. to actually make it happen. Some of my favorite sections of the book were those that described her successes in taking the U.K. off the pegged currency model, her battle to control the direction of Britain's participation in the EC, her use of U.S. advertising agency (Saatchi & Saatchi) to boost her public opinion, and finally her audacious and notorious arms dealing which resulted in Britain supplying Iraq w/ arms right up until the first Gulf War. But most enjoyable are the sections that denoted her special relationship with Reagan and she so often had him eating out of her hand (unlike his predecessor George H.W. Bush).

I also felt the ending was a bit rushed. Once the story around internal struggles within the Tory party and her ultimate 'fall from grace' was chronicled, I felt her post-Downing street years were wrapped up too quickly without proper reflection. One last observation was around her fervent belief that Britain should have intervened in the former Yugoslavia. As we know how those horrific events unfolded, it was chilling to read how the government under John Major refused to get involved. All in all, good material, just needed a better editing job.

Jose says

This book is written well so it gets one star. It is also thorough and expounds on the research with accuracy. So another star. Is it biased? Meh. Not too badly. It gives Thatcher a lot of credit but also points out her flaws, both political and, may be, personal. What this book fails at is aiding the reader along with the intricacies of the British political system and assuming he/she knows more than the average person about British culture in general and politics in particular. Sure, one could go get a treatise on British Law and read up on electoral mechanisms, party rules, the meaning of monetarism and the situation of mining in England at the end of the twentieth century. Throw in a roster of every MP, Cabinet member and politician. Why not add a few books on Hayek, Reaganomics, the I.R.A., Rhodesia's colonial past, the European Community, the Cambridge 5 , etc,... In other words, this book is written for people that either lived Thatcherism directly and participated in British political life or know an awful lot already and just want to see where Margaret Thatcher fits in all of it.

It does describe Thatcher's philosophy in big strokes and her deeds in quite some detail but leaves the vast area of "context" practically untouched. I understand this is an abbreviated 500 page version of a 1200 page work. Even if that is so, there must be more readable materials out there. This book doesn't really become interesting until about chapter 10. I wasn't expecting a novel exactly, Thatcher's life and personality were not the matter for flights of imagination, but her influence in politics deserves a more engaging story telling and a wider lens.

Terence says

I thought this was a very well-researched study of the rise and fall of Margaret Thatcher. I found myself changing my mind on a number of issues as a result of the book. What I like about the author's perspective is that he criticizes Thatcher on many of the issues that she herself champions: intellectual consistency, anti-corruption, honesty and the role of the market. As a result of reading this book, I developed a more nuanced sense of why I ultimately dislike Thatcher's political style, particularly in her later years. But I also found that I now accept a number of the key arguments she made about the virtues of privately-run companies.

Josh says

Author John Campbell compiled a larger two volume biographical set on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. However, this book is a much condensed single volume abridgement by a second author, David Freeman, who didn't write the original works. What resulted is a comprehensive account of Margaret Thatcher's work in government that becomes exhausted by an overly negative tone and the feel of a preachy textbook. And yes, there are other ways to write non-fiction which can often be described as fun or exciting – check out Tom Wolfe's "The Right Stuff" or "The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt" by Edmund Morris. It just isn't necessary to painstakingly detail every vague name in each inane cabinet reshuffle throughout her entire life.

Having reached only the half-way point, this is the first review I've written about a book of which I failed to complete. After multiple attempts to read through, I finally threw up my hands in disgust over the authors' nauseatingly tedious style and their obvious disgust for the former prime minister and her policies. By chance, this is also the first time I've ever been actively reading something when the subject matter – Thatcher – happens to pass away. Hopefully, the newly released official biography, by Charles Moore, shows more success at capturing the enormous spirit of this political giant while finding a way to tell an enjoyable and balanced story about her role during the momentous era of the 1980s.

While some criticism is allowable, critical to any decent biography, this book is overloaded with the negative. Why didn't these authors feel the need to explain what Thatcher means to her followers and the movement she led? They never stop attacking her accomplishments and motives. Take for example this shockingly one-sided comment: "...she was not a true liberal at all, but a class warrior who waged and won the class war on behalf of her own kind by using free-market policies tempered with blatant bribes like mortgage-interest tax relief as methods of social reward." And this comment, on page 252, is not followed up by a positive approach, just more attacks.

My unconfirmed guess is that this work may represent an overly hasty attempt to take advantage of the corresponding release of Meryl Streep's strong, but disappointing 2011 film "The Iron Lady." Perhaps it was just too soon; more time may need to pass for history to get a clear view of Thatcher. My suggestion is to file this book away as reference material and seek an alternative. Why doesn't Goodreads produce a 1½ star rating -- appropriate here -- and why is this otherwise excellent website still describing a 2 star rating as "ok?"

Clarina says

I have always been a fan of biographies... I find it fascinating to hear people's life stories - to find out where they have come from, and learn about the journey that brought them to where they ended up.

After watching the film, I decided to read a biography of Margaret Thatcher; also titled "The Iron Lady". John Campbell has written two larger volumes recording Thatcher's life, and this biography is an edited and shortened (!!) version of those two volumes. I'm not normally one for political books but I found this book to be a fairly unbiased (although, come on, clearly everyone writing the biography of a politician has SOME political agenda) portrait of Thatcher - her strengths and weaknesses, her successes and failures. I found Campbell to be VERY readable, and it helped me to understand the background to a lot of politics happening now. I only caught the tail end of the Thatcher era, and I was pretty young, so I found it fascinating to find out about the only female Prime Minister Britain has ever had.

Whatever you make of her, whatever your political convictions and judgements of her time in power, I think its fair to say that Margaret Thatcher was a pretty unique and incredible woman, with her steely conviction, incredible stamina and remarkable self-assurance.

Jim Zubricky says

I originally picked this up shortly after I saw the film, 'The Iron Lady', in the theatre. The film made me want to learn more about the enigmatic Margaret Thatcher. With that being said, this book will not disappoint in that aspect.

To me, I felt like this book was a challenge; partly because I do not have a strong background in modern British history, and how the British government works (I honestly thought I was more knowledgeable than the average person, but still...) so if you're not well versed in parliament and the workings in Parliament, you may be at a disadvantage when you start reading.

Several reviewers have commented about how the author (John Campbell) has or has not been objective with dealing with Margaret Thatcher. I realize (now) that when talking about Margaret Thatcher, you'll love her or you'll hate her. The author's feelings do come out (clearly he points of her failings *cough* European Union), but he does try to champion her at points, too (Falklands, post-PM life, beginning of political life). I think this is the best to be expected.

For me, personally, there were sections that intrigued me and there were sections that really pissed me off. At the very least, this book will provide you with an appreciation to Margaret Thatcher and allows you to make your own decisions as to how to feel about her.

Paul Winter Solstice says

The Thatcher era was my formative years. Incidentally, it was during those years, in 1984, that Hong Kong's future was decided, i.e. to be returned to the sovereignty of China in 1997. Naturally, as a Hong Kong resident, I paid particular attention to the parts of the book where Hong Kong were mentioned. Indeed, I didn't realise that the Iron Lady showed a keen interest in Hong Kong. The book mentions that:

"Between 1992 and 1997 she probably devoted more time to Hong Kong than to any other subject."

"In 1994 she announced that she had already booked rooms in Hong Kong so as to be present in person for the handover; and indeed when the day came, on 1 July 1997, she was there – with Tony Blair and Prince Charles – to witness the interminable ceremony in pouring rain. So far, she acknowledged in 2002, the Chinese had 'generally honoured their commitments'."

It was in February 1982 that I joined the British Forces stationed in Hong Kong, as a locally engaged civilian. Shortly afterwards, in May that year the Iron Lady declared war on Argentina and the Falklands War started. It was an interesting feeling, being a Chinese living in Hong Kong but working for the so-called Ministry of Defence of Britain during that wartime period.

In the latter part of the Thatcher era, I was preparing for the Institute of Linguists examinations in which knowledge of the United Kingdom would be tested. Therefore, I had to keep an eye on various issues in Britain then. Reading this book gives me a sense of deja-vu. One by one, all those once familiar but now

long forgotten issues and names resurface in the book: privatisation, Westland affair, poll tax, IRA, Michael Heseltine, Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson, John Major ...

Lady Thatcher was sort of my idol in these years – for her formidable diligence in her school days, and her toughness and backbone as a Prime Minister.

I would say that though the author obviously has his own views, the book is generally well researched, fair and fascinating.

Carol says

Way too much detail about politics for me, but I suspect there are many who enjoy that part. I loved reading about her background, traits, and her steadfast convictions to keep her values intact. A remarkable woman.

Robert B. B. says

John Campbell's extraordinarily fascinating volume (abridged from the original two-volumes) strikes me as the ideal survey for American readers of the political life and times of the most significant British prime minister between Churchill and Blair. Thatcher's legacy is both consequential and complex, and Campbell manages to give credit where it is due while taking note of her failures. His capacity for spotting the paradoxes of her record -- a free-marketeer who advanced the centralization of government power and a sworn enemy of the Labour Party whose electoral evisceration of its radical leaders made possible the center-left (and politically more viable) "New Labour" of Tony Blair -- makes this an essential study for anyone interested in politics. Campbell's lucid prose adds to its value. Strongly recommended for anyone interested in a balanced and thought-provoking assessment of the Thatcher years.

Britt says

This book was written well, I just find politics incredibly boring. In addition, although Margaret Thatcher was a remarkably strong woman and incredibly accomplished, she didn't seem like a very good mother. She was a lesson of self examination to me. A career is a career. Your children are your legacy.

This was a condensed version of the two volume biography of Margaret Thatcher. I expected this book to talk more about her personal life, but instead it focused more on her politics. I realize that is the scholarly thing to do, but it doesn't make for a very interesting read. I could google her career. I'd like to know who she was.

Clarina says

This has been my serious read of the month, and I'm still only about a quarter of the way through (its a BIG

book) but I'm loving it. I don't remember too much about Thatcher, but I find her absolutely fascinating. Whatever you thought of her policies and hard-line tactics, you've got to admit she was a pretty phenomenal woman. I always enjoy a good biography and this one is triply good because its biography, history and politics all rolled into one. If you've seen the recent film (insteringly titled the same name!) and want to find out a bit more, this is a really good read and after trying out a few samples of Thatcher biographies, this one was definitely the most interesting, readable and balanced that I could find. Highly recommended.

Brian Miracle says

Good account of Prime Minister Thatcher's Life from her childhood to the mid 2000's. Although I'm an admirer of hers from my teenage years, this book wasn't quite as enjoyable as I expected, probably due to my lack of familiarity with the British political system. However, this book does a good job of showing Thatcher as one of the pivotal figures of the eighties (along with Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev), as well as her long-term effect on British politics. The author also fairly judges her strengths and weaknesses, and her accomplishments and failures.

Susan says

This book was not so much a biography as an opinion piece on Lady Thatcher's political career. From the very first chapter, the reader is left with little doubt as to Campbell's personal opinion.

For those interested in such an opinion piece - which is a valid thing to read, just not disguised as a dispassionate biography - keep in mind a couple of things: first, this edition is an abridgement of two longer editions and pretty much everything outside of Mrs. Thatcher's political life is cut. There is no seeing her as a person, just a political leader. Second, this book is geared towards British readers and those familiar with its Parliamentary system - there is no explanation of terms or political processes.

This book is also organized in a mostly chronological fashion, but each period is then divided up by political issue. From an organizational standpoint, this makes sense, but it also means the chronology is a bit vague to follow if a reader were not at least a bit familiar with British politics and history of the 70s and 80s.

Overall, I would not recommend this to anyone looking for a disinterested biography, but it would be a great read for someone looking for a critical view of Mrs. Thatcher's political life.
