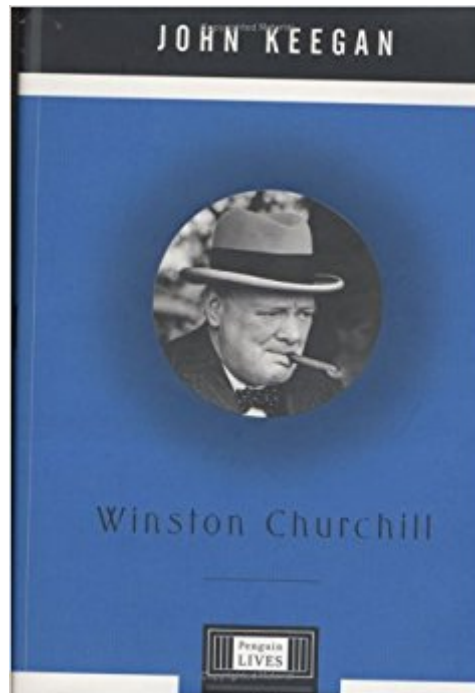




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# Winston Churchill



## Synopsis

When today's world leaders need inspiration and strength in times of crisis, they often turn to Winston Churchill, quoting him and citing his heroic example. The son of a member of Parliament, Churchill, a poor academic student, wanted to be a soldier early in life. But after he escaped from a South African prison camp, his national fame catapulted him into a life of politics. In this Penguin Life, the eminent historian John Keegan charts Churchill's career, following his steadfast leadership during the catastrophic events of World War II while England was dangerously poised on the brink of collapse. With wonderful eloquence, Keegan illuminates Churchill's incredible strength during this crucial moment in history and his unshakable belief that democracy would always prevail. Keegan looks at Churchill's speeches, which are some of the greatest examples of English oratory, and identifies his ability to communicate his own idea of an English past as the source of Churchill's greatness. He also sheds light on the political climate of Churchill's time. The result is an insightful, sensitive portrait of Churchill the war leader and Churchill the man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

He was something of a bully, something of a blowhard, without friends and always in search of a sympathetic audience for his monologues. Yet, writes John Keegan in this slender but thorough portrait, Winston Churchill was unquestionably the right man for the time. Few biographers are better equipped than Keegan, the eminent military historian, to write of Churchill as a wartime leader. Indeed, Keegan suggests, Churchill was never more at ease than when confronting some

fierce enemy, whether across the English Channel or a range of Afghan hills; it was from the saddle that he developed his "vision of how an enlightened empire might transform the future of mankind." The rise of other, less enlightened empires helped put an end to his own, but Churchill steadfastly insisted on a strong role for Great Britain in the postwar world--in which he succeeded, even if voters turned him out of office almost as soon as the war ended. Keegan's respectful portrait assesses Churchill's many accomplishments (and a few noteworthy failures) as he sought, in Churchill's ringing words, to "resist oppression, to protect the weak, to vindicate the profound but unwritten Law of Nations." Admirers of Churchill and students of his time will find much of value in these pages. --Gregory McNamee

The Old Testament and The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire were the most important influences on one of the 20th century's great wartime leaders. These books essentially created the man, argues renowned military historian Keegan (*The First World War*), and Churchill's own words would, in turn, be the key to his greatness: "In the end the personality of Churchill and the prose that inspired his being so interpenetrated each other as to be indistinguishable and mutually inextricable." This is somewhat ironic, Keegan shows in his concise, elegant biography, as Churchill (1874-1965) was a middling student who barely passed the entrance exam for military college. But his one love was history from his voracious, lifelong reading he gained a profound belief in Britain's glorious destiny. Keegan traces the familiar formative events in the future prime minister's life. During the Boer War, he was taken prisoner and his daring escape made him a national hero. After winning election to Parliament (as a Conservative) in 1900, Churchill began his political career championing social reforms that would help the working class. Indeed, his views were so pro-worker that he temporarily switched to the Labour Party. As Hitler rose to power, Churchill began a long, frustrating campaign calling for military preparedness in order to meet the growing fascist threat. Churchill's genius, Keegan stresses, was in his ability to communicate his vision of Britain as a glorious nation with a great civilizing mission, and the book does an excellent job describing his subject's rhetorical power. This is a pithy, highly accessible biography that can be enjoyed over a couple of sittings. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

New Churchill's biography sounds like another episode of the Simpsons - there are thousands of them. And yet this one is unique and worth reading. Why? Three reasons: a] It's short and easy to read b] It covers military issues superbly c] It's not excessively eulogistic I think some American anglophiles and some fervent Churchillians may be disappointed with the book. They might feel that

WSC has received an unfair treatment. But Churchill, a human, has become a myth, particularly in North America. John Keegan writes that he was just a man, a strange man full of contradictions. "A devoted husband and father, he was, by the account of his favorite and deeply loving daughter, Mary, in her 1979 biography of her mother, difficult at home and often impossible (page 186)." Another contradiction of Churchill was one of a strategist. He had repeatedly stressed the importance of air power, more than any other civilian statesmen. Yet when it came to action, he could not resist the call of tradition and romance, and imagined that the Royal Navy could still assert the old supremacy unaided. The mistake of the Norwegian campaign was to be repeated in the Mediterranean, and still more disastrously in Singapore. For me, myself being a Russian, Churchill is a paradox: he was both Russophobe and Russophile. He often referred to the Russians as "crocodiles". Keegan goes positive on Churchill's 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech. I disagree: WSC demanded a unified Anglo-American front against Russia which he described as a triumphalist and expansionist victor state. Russia ostensibly was about to overrun the Western Europe in March 1946. It was manifestly untrue: not only Stalin had no desire to spread communism outside his "sphere of influence", Russia had 20 million dead and was lying in ruins, its many European cities completely flattened, not unlike Hiroshima. In my view it was a sop to Truman and his band of hard-liners who had already decided on the policy of containment of Russia anyway. But it was Churchill who officially started the "Red Peril". Yet when Germany suddenly attacked Russia on June 22, 1941 Churchill was the only statesman in the UK (or the US) who spoke about reaching out and supporting Russia. It contrasted drastically with his anti-communism and russophobia he had displayed only a few weeks before. Churchill said on June 22 1941: "I see the ten thousand villages of Russia, where the means of existence was wrung so hardly from the soil, but where there are still primordial human joys, where maidens laugh and children play. I see advancing upon all this in hideous onslaught the Nazi war machine, with its clanking, heel-clicking, dandified Prussian officers, its crafty expert agents fresh from the cowering and tying-down of a dozen countries. I see also the dull, drilled, docile, brutish masses of the Hun soldiery plodding on like a swarm of crawling locusts. I see the German bombers and fighters in the sky, still smarting from many a British whipping, delighted to find what they believe is an easier and a safer prey." This passage demonstrates amply the most important thing about Churchill - he was a master of his language, a maestro of metaphor, and he used words as weapons of power. This brief but wonderful book gives us a good taste of that.

While I had previously read two books on Churchill, both primarily involved his war experiences. I

wanted to read a bit(emphasise on "a bit") more about the man, without having to read an indepth multi-page biography. This fit the bill for me perfectly. No, in reflection, it wasn't nearly enough information on such a man. Consequently, I've since started a much more thorough investigation of Churchill and his life, personal and political. But as an introduction to the study of Winston Churchill, I do not see how it could possibly be better. As with other Penguin books that I've read, this one was not intended to go into much depth. It is, however, a wonderfully well written introduction of the entire life of Winston Churchill. That's what Penguin does, and it does it well. I do not recommend this book to Churchill scholars, but I highly recommend it to those who want a good and complete introduction of the man, his experiences, accomplishments, failures and his traits, good and bad.

I liked this book very much. When writing of Churchill it must be tempting for writers to go into a lot of detail since he was such a fascinating man, This is all very well but can lead to some tedious reading. In this book the author covers the life of Churchill without getting bogged down but still manages to paint a very complete picture of the life of Churchill. There can be no question that the author knows his subject and knows how to relate information clearly and concisely to others. He inserts passages from some of the better known speeches. The phases of his life are presented smoothly and leaves no dangling questions in the reader's mind. This is a very good book.

A excellent straightforward summary of Churchill's life This book is an excellent, straightforward, summary of Churchill's life and accomplishments. Being less than 200 pages long it does not contain the wealth of detail contained in longer biographies, such as the almost 1000 page biography by Martin Gilbert. Keegan substitutes extensive detail with analysis and an excellent summary of events, and I found this to be an excellent tradeoff. Keegan writes with clarity and gets to the heart of the matter. I read this book just after having finished Martin Gilbert's one volume, 960-page biography and I found Keegan's presentation to be more coherent and had a greater impact on me. I liked Gilbert's book and recommend it, but to some extent I found that its extensive, year-by-year treatment, tended obscure Churchill's contributions with a mind numbing level of detail. Keegan summarized these details and focuses on Churchill's greatness. Gilbert also shows Churchill's greatness, but sometimes I had to read between the lines to get a more rounded picture. There was no need to do this with Keegan's book. I expected that John Keegan, being one of the premier military historians writing today, would have included more of Churchill's involvement in WWI and WWII. These facets of Churchill's life are discussed, but not in as much detail as I expected. However, the level of detail devoted to Churchill's war years was in keeping with that of

the presentation of the rest of his life, and I do not feel that providing only a summary detracted from the overall 5-star rating that I am giving to this book.

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