



In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War

By *David Reynolds*

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In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War By David Reynolds

Winston Churchill fought the World War II twice over—first as Prime Minister during the war, and then later as the war's premier historian. From 1948-54, he published six volumes of memoirs. They secured his reputation and shaped our understanding of the conflict to this day. Drawing on the drafts of Churchill's manuscript as well as his correspondence from the period, David Reynolds masterfully reveals Churchill the author. Reynolds shows how the memoirs were censored by the British government to conceal state secrets, and how Churchill himself censored them to avoid offending current world leaders. This book illuminates an unjustly neglected period of Churchill's life—the Second Wilderness Years of 1945-51, when Churchill wrote himself into history, politicked himself back into the prime-ministership, and delivered some of the most important speeches of his career.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For many, the fact that Churchill won his Nobel for literature comes as a surprise, but he was a prolific—and very well paid—historian and journalist. Awarded Britain's Wolfson History Prize, this highly readable book by Cambridge historian Reynolds supplies the backstory to Churchill's massive postwar publishing project: the epic *The Second World War*. As the author notes, he's writing "a book about personal biography and public memory," beginning with Churchill's crushing defeat in the July 1945 election and offering a unique perspective on WWII, the onset of the Cold War and Churchill's determination to write the history of the 20th century's signal conflict. But Reynolds's real achievement is his grasp of the motives behind that determination: "Churchill's sense of the fickleness of fame... impelled him to be his own historian." He quotes a 1944 letter to Stalin in which Churchill writes, "I agree that we had better leave the past to history, but remember if I live long enough I may be one of the historians." Packed with detail and vivid characterizations (but still clearly a scholarly, thoroughly researched work), it's a different take on one of the few men capable of both making history and writing it. 16 pages of b&w photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Subjecting Winston Churchill's monumental six-volume work *The Second World War* (1948-53) to historical scrutiny, Reynolds delivers a mixture of conclusions that, on the whole, reinforce the work's unique stature. In small and large ways, it has shaped popular and professional historians' perceptions of the global war of 1939--45, from naming it "the Second World War" to theses of its origin in appeasement and its outcome in the cold war. Reynolds seems all the more impressed because the work has survived abundant criticism. Churchill was not comprehensive; he was forced to omit the Ultra secret and was inclined to overlook the war in Russia and the Far East. Sometimes he got his facts wrong; sometimes he altered his text for his own purposes, such as his desire to return to power; and in Reynolds' view, he overindulged in counterfactual speculation. But Churchill was *there* at the center of events, portraying them with unsurpassed eloquence. Important scholarship, Reynolds' inquiry will intrigue the multitude that has read *The Gathering Storm* and its sequels. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

Winner of the Wolfson History Prize

Advance praise for In Command of History

"In Command of History is a fascinating lesson of how he who controls history's pen controls what is accepted as history's reality. And Reynolds tells his tale with Churchillian style, sweep, and wit."

—Joseph E. Persico

"A wonderful book. David Reynolds provides a unique portrait not only of Churchill the statesman who made history but Churchill the author who shaped it. Highest recommendation."

—Jean Edward Smith

Praise from the United Kingdom

“[A] fascinating piece of literary-historical detective work.”

–The Sunday Times (Books of the Year)

“Truly outstanding and original.”

–Evening Standard

“David Reynolds superbly breaks the mould of Churchill scholarship This book leaves you admiring the man more, not less.”

–The Daily Telegraph

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

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