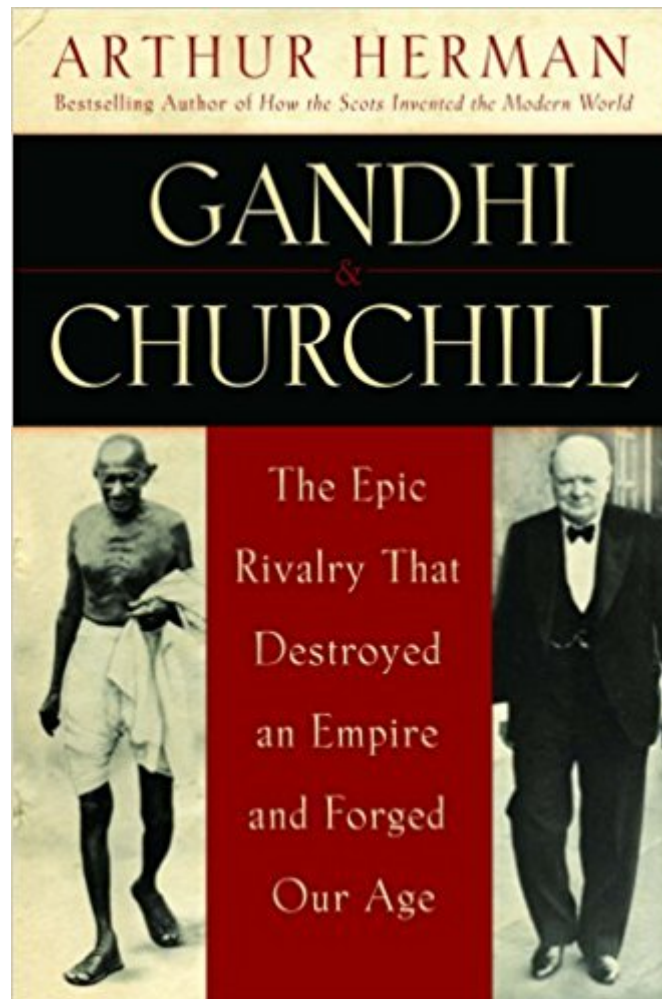


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Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed An Empire And Forged Our Age



Synopsis

In this fascinating and meticulously researched book, bestselling historian Arthur Herman sheds new light on two of the most universally recognizable icons of the twentieth century, and reveals how their forty-year rivalry sealed the fate of India and the British Empire. They were born worlds apart: Winston Churchill to Britain's most glamorous aristocratic family, Mohandas Gandhi to a pious middle-class household in a provincial town in India. Yet Arthur Herman reveals how their lives and careers became intertwined as the twentieth century unfolded. Both men would go on to lead their nations through harrowing trials and two world wars and become locked in a fierce contest of wills that would decide the fate of countries, continents, and ultimately an empire. *Gandhi & Churchill* reveals how both men were more alike than different, and yet became bitter enemies over the future of India, a land of 250 million people with 147 languages and dialects and 15 distinct religions—the jewel in the crown of Britain's overseas empire for 200 years. Over the course of a long career, Churchill would do whatever was necessary to ensure that India remain British—including a fateful redrawing of the entire map of the Middle East and even risking his alliance with the United States during World War Two. Mohandas Gandhi, by contrast, would dedicate his life to India's liberation, defy death and imprisonment, and create an entirely new kind of political movement: satyagraha, or civil disobedience. His campaigns of nonviolence in defiance of Churchill and the British, including his famous Salt March, would become the blueprint not only for the independence of India but for the civil rights movement in the U.S. and struggles for freedom across the world. Now master storyteller Arthur Herman cuts through the legends and myths about these two powerful, charismatic figures and reveals their flaws as well as their strengths. The result is a sweeping epic of empire and insurrection, war and political intrigue, with a fascinating supporting cast, including General Kitchener, Rabindranath Tagore, Franklin Roosevelt, Lord Mountbatten, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. It is also a brilliant narrative parable of two men whose great successes were always haunted by personal failure, and whose final moments of triumph were overshadowed by the loss of what they held most dear.

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Customer Reviews

Most people will read "Gandhi and Churchill" for the author's detailed study of how the two men compared and contrasted with each other. Remember the exam papers that asked you to compare and contrast two historical periods or two--whatever? Arthur Herman uses the compare and contrast framework to anchor his view that under the skin, Gandhi and Churchill were more alike than you would expect if you put the skinny, bare-chested man and his rotund, English-dressed adversary side by side. Both men were products of the Victorian Age. Both highly esteemed the "manly" virtues. Both were ruthless on occasion. And both, more often than we like to think, could be wrong, even disastrously wrong. To add to the mix, both men's lives had a series of successes and failures. For many decades Gandhi and Churchill (but they were not the only players, as the author makes clear in great detail) struggled over what India was and what India would become. In the end, according to Herman, neither man's vision prevailed. This is a very critical dual portrait, not easy on either man, and if both emerge, from time to time, as large sized, it is not because the author intends to spare them. On occasion I found myself wrestling with the author's judgments, not completely satisfied with the interpretations, not sure that there isn't more to be said on one side or the other. Interpretive histories can be more or less persuasive, and I found this one very useful, with lots of new information, but--well, we are allowed to reserve judgment. The author seems to suggest that each man, in his own way, scuttled the possibility of a united India containing Hindus and Moslems together, an India emerging without the birth pangs of massacre and atrocity. He almost seems to be saying that absent these men the bloodbaths would have or could have been avoided. Maybe. However, the book is interesting for another quite unexpected reason: its portrait of what happened in and around India during the Second World War. My guess is most Americans think of WWII in terms of the blitzkrieg in Europe, men and machinery trudging in the snow in endless areas of Russia, naval battles in the Pacific, with some fierce island-hopping fighting going

on as you got closer to Japan. Sure there was something called "over the hump" and of course Singapore fell, and something should be said about Burma, but that part is hazy. For those not aware how deeply and intimately India and Indian soldiers were involved in the war, this book is something of a revelation. For that reason alone some readers might well want to pick up the book quite aside from the book's two-peas-in-a-pod argument.

Writing a dual biography of two political giants is not an easy task. One is reminded about the outstanding joint biography written many years ago by Lord Bullock on Hitler and Stalin. In this book, two themes run concurrently: the British Empire's fin-de-siecle and the rise of India as an independent nation. Although of different backgrounds, both political giants—Churchill and Gandhi—seem to have been much alike. On the one hand, this book gives plenty of evidence about Churchill's effort to keep the Jewel of the British Empire no matter what the cost, while on the other hand, Gandhi—as shown here—has done almost anything to undermine Churchill's aspirations. In a very long but fascinating book, Arthur Herman has depicted the two rivals by showing their strong and weak points. Many other personalities make their appearance on this political stage, such as: General Kitchener, Rabindranath Tagore, Franklin Roosevelt, Jawarhalal Nehru, Clement Attlee and others. As Mr Herman points out, both men enjoyed moments of glory but were also flawed. He tells a wonderful tale about one of the most fascinating yet violent periods of contemporary history. This book shows that there were many dark sides in the course of the British history and the Amritsar act of butchering helpless Indians is just one example. The final result of this showdown between Churchill and Gandhi was the rise of India and the demise of the British Empire with grave consequences for both sides. While at some point Churchill was out of touch with the historical reality, Gandhi has not hesitated to sacrifice millions of his fellowmen in pursuit of his dream and in some ways he was extremely naive when interpreting some political events. This book has been carefully researched and documented, the language is simple yet extremely rich, and the reader—I am confident—will enjoy one of the best-ever written history books that has come along in recent years. Arthur Herman is a master storyteller—a characteristic that many professional historians lack. The result: a very interesting, quick-moving, rich and stimulating narrative.

This is one of those books that takes two familiar lives—those of Mahatma Gandhi and Winston Churchill—and tells them in parallel. The idea is that the two men influenced each other's goals and lives much more than has been acknowledged in the past. The two only met once: in 1906 when Churchill was Colonial Undersecretary, and Gandhi was lobbying on behalf of Indian independence.

Author Herman makes this the center of the book in some ways, which is strange given that it happens very quickly in the book (on about page 130 of what's a 600-page tome) but it works, because the two men seem to have built impressions of one another resting in part on this meeting. Herman has a number of things to say about both men. He spends about equal time with each, discussing the central issues of their lives and how the other person fit into each stage of the history of the 20th Century. For instance, when he's talking about Churchill, Herman recounts his attitude towards Indian independence and towards Gandhi personally. The book also works as a history of the latter part of the British Raj in India, from approximately the turn of the century to independence. There's a lot of interesting stuff in here, including the fact that Churchill's time "in the wilderness" during the run-up to World War II may have been due to his attitude towards India (he opposed independence resolutely) as much as his opposition to Hitler and appeasement. Gandhi comes across as a naïf idealist who thought he could create a country where everyone worked a spinning wheel and there were no factories, who made speeches that set off riots, but always seemed to think he was only encouraging non-violence. I enjoyed this book a great deal. It's long, and there's a lot of material here, but it's very informative and has a different take on things. I would recommend it highly.

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