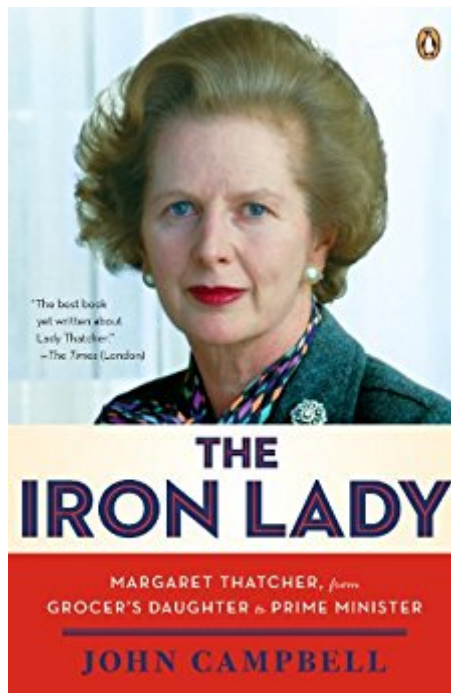


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The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, From Grocer's Daughter To Prime Minister



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

One reviewer said, "Superbly researched...neither a hagiography nor hatchet-job," and with that evaluation I wholeheartedly agree. Having lived through the Thatcher era, I kept up to some extent with what she was doing at the time, but since I'm a liberal, inevitably had a negative reaction to much of what she did. But this book throws much more light on her goals and methods than I'd

previously been aware of. Not that I necessarily approve, but it was fascinating to see how her strong personality and view of life (and of the responsibilities of the individual) allowed her to hold sway in Great Britain for over a decade. I wasn't previously aware of the extent to which the nationalization that occurred after World War II was reversed during the Thatcher era. I don't think of England as being a "socialist" country today (and don't consider that a negative condition in any case), but it's amazing how many trends were reversed during the Thatcher era and how she was able to convince the public that it was in their best interests to get the government out of their lives. Even though unemployment and inflation were high and social perks were being inexorably reduced, Margaret Thatcher prevailed and convinced the majority of voters that what she was doing was in their best interests. Probably the most telling aspect of this book, for me, was to recognize certain similarities between British and American political struggles, particularly in regard to what the U.S. is going through at the moment. The Brits have their knock-down, drag-out, liberal-conservative political fights just as we do. I'm not sure that's encouraging, but at least it doesn't make us look quite as outrageous as it sometimes seems.

Given her enormous impact over eleven years it is fitting that there are so many books about Mrs. Thatcher. Among them books by Mrs. Thatcher. This one is not as well written as hers. It lacks her dry humor and sense of timing. It also glosses over some of the really interesting conflicts in her theories, her life and her personality. What might be interesting would be a parallel biography of her and Disraeli. There are more similarities than just the superficial one of the outsider taking over and being the guiding light of the party of insiders for years. Like Disraeli, she was a radical reformer not just of small parts of the political system, but of the whole society. Mrs Thatcher often stood for iron principles. Yet she at the same time behaved with with startling machiavellian expediency. She stood for a moral order, but as the author points out the amorality of her government in the realm of arms sales was appalling. She talked of hard work and discipline but her rise also showed the triumph of pure dumb luck. She talked of the importance of her father's discipline in her upbringing, and how it molded her, but it is also interesting that in raising her own children she took the exact opposite path, which didn't do either of her kids any favors. There are so many interesting conflicts here that the author should have spent a lot more time on it. Even Mrs Thatcher in her own book dwells on some of the more interesting aspects with candor and at greater depth. The problem with a political biography is that so much of it either goes into too much inter office infighting or too much into psychoanalysis where the narrative suffers. This book near the end goes too much into the inter office wars, which is why she was dethroned.

the Iron Lady this is an abridgement of what originally was author Campbell's 2 volume, 1200 page work on Lady Thatcher. The abridgment (and presumably the editing) was done by David Freeman. While the work is not an out-and-out hatchet job on Thatcher, relatively few of her policies are approved of by the writer, except for whole hearted approval of British crimes in Ireland. Campbell is apparently a British academic who does not appreciate the widely held American view that Margaret Thatcher saved the UK from sure economic self-destruction during her almost 12 year rule. The book traces (quickly) Thatcher's early life, the influence of World War II on her world view and her dedication to free market economics which she grasped at an early age. She began her political career when Churchill was party leader and was a lifelong admirer of him. First elected as a member of Parliament in 1959, by the time Thatcher was making her climb in the party in the 1970's, the Tory party had become a 'socialist lite' party to Labor's outright socialism. Although disagreeing with the party line, she was minister for education and followed Heath's and the party's orders. In a surprise, after Heath lost the party leadership, she became the standard bearer. The book does a relatively good job at cataloging the events during her political career, at times too bogged down in details and at other times unclear as to the subject at hand. For example, the controversy over the poll tax issue late in her prime ministership is related poorly, never truly explaining the British definition of 'poll tax'. It was apparently some sort of head tax but not a poll tax as we on this side of the pond understand it.

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