



The Great Democracies

Winston S. Churchill

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The fourth of Churchill's grandly ambitious four-volume *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* begins with the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars-and ends with the Boer War of 1902. In it, Churchill makes an impassioned argument for the crucial role played by the English-speaking people in exporting not just economic benefits, but political freedom.

Written in Churchill's characteristically compelling style, this volume is the only one in the series to benefit from Churchill's own personal experience as a soldier and a wartime journalist during the Boer War. It provides fascinating reading for those interested in world history and England's impact on it.

The Great Democracies Details

Date : Published December 1958 by Orion Publishing Co (first published 1958)

ISBN : 9780304921195

Author : Winston S. Churchill

Format : 403 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History

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Aria Maher says

The final book in Winston Churchill's 'History of the English Speaking Peoples'. I've read all of these books now, and they are all very detail-oriented, which is not a bad thing, but sometimes he seemed to lose sight of the bigger picture in order to focus on some small detail of motivation or personality, and would follow long historical tangents to the point that I couldn't even remember what I was reading about in the first place. It might be better to read these books along with some other historical resource, so that you can have the bigger picture in front of you and get more context for all the details that Churchill includes.

Candace Griffiths says

Masterful series.

Tony Cavicchi says

Churchill finishes his History of the English Speaking Peoples with a fourth volume focused on the democratic transition in Britain, the growth of the United States, and the growing intensity of conflict in Ireland. The book is a good recounting of the political horse race of the 1800s in the UK and how the two main political parties developed by competing to expand the franchise. The book does suffer as an impartial recounting of events, however, as the passage of time in the narrative brings events closer to the lifetime of Churchill himself. Churchill also devotes more time in the story to his father's "Tory Democracy" than is perhaps warranted from a view from the 21st century. Anyone perplexed by the insanity of debate in the House of Commons on Brexit today could see the politics could be just as complex and dysfunctional in the 1880s discussing Irish home rule. For me, the fourth volume was less intriguing than Churchill's first three, probably because I am much more familiar with the 19th century US history as well as Victorian Britain, than I did of England in the Middle Ages or earlier.

Warren says

In my opinion the driest of the four volumes, it maintains Winston's interest in all things political and military, at the expense of everything else. For example, the American Civil war consumes a good third of the book; the Industrial Revolution is almost entirely overlooked. Allowing for this (would we expect anything more or less from Winston?), I'd award four stars, except that I found the Civil War chapters peculiarly tedious - Winston's enthusiasm for battle details got in the way of his writing a truly interesting account of the War.

Still, you can't go past this series. It's a unique account of history by a man who made an awful lot of it. It is compulsory reading if you are interested in Churchill - it tells you as much about the man as the history he describes.

Jeremy says

An immensely readable and interesting book packed with wisdom and insight by one who really knows what it is like to make history. It is also beautifully written and I enjoy how he takes the long view in politics. It seems that the late 19th century in British politics is very similar to the state of flux found in democracies today. And it will probably take decades to sort itself out just as occurred back then!

Krishna Kumar says

As many have pointed out, Churchill makes a major detour into American politics, in particular the Civil War. I did not feel that this was a major problem as far as the flow of the book was concerned. Remember it is a history of the English-speaking peoples. Not just the history of Britain. What I do have a problem with is how he approaches the Civil War. Churchill falls into the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, hook, line, and sinker. There is a strange attempt to improve the standing of General McClellan whose caution left huge opportunities go begging. There are multiple references to slaves serving their Southern masters loyally, but nothing of slaves joining the Union armies. The history of Reconstruction also follows the same narrative. Reconstruction appears in double quotes and is portrayed as carpetbaggers manipulating freed slaves to exploit the South. The activities of the Klan and other acts of white supremacism are simply stated without any commentary as to their values. And the plight of the freed slaves is simply glossed over or blamed on the North.

David Huff says

I began listening to this 4-Volume masterpiece back in mid-March -- the Audible version, finely narrated by Christian Rodska. Having written a separate review on Volume 1, I can only broadly summarize some highlights here of Volumes 2, 3 and 4:

Volume 2 covered the years 1485-1688, which included, in part, the Renaissance and Reformation, the English Civil War, the beginning of the Tudor line and of the American colonies, and the controversial rise of Oliver Cromwell (of whom Churchill was not a fan).

Volume 3 focused on the 1688-1815 time frame, known particularly for the three great revolutions that occurred: The "Glorious" Revolution in England (1688), the American Revolution (1775), and the French Revolution (1789). The latter portion of this period also saw the rise of Napoleon, up to and including Waterloo.

Volume 4 covers less than a century, from 1815-1901. Here was included the long reign (63 years) of Queen Victoria, and the American Civil War (upon which Churchill expounded at significant length). Also covered was the continued imperial reach of Britain, to India, South Africa, and many other places.

This was a lengthy read, but so very worthwhile. The span of English speaking history is truly amazing, and having the viewpoint of someone like Winston Churchill, who made no small amount of history on his own, was invaluable. True, these volumes emphasize what Churchill in particular thought was important; he also

had a penchant for the military scenarios of each epoch, and the sometimes minute details of different battles. Nevertheless, his wit and his wise insights kept the narrative interesting and illuminating, and I would highly recommend this project to anyone with an interest in history!

Richard Barnes says

Churchill wades through some thrilling stuff (American Civil War, Boer War), some turgid parts (Gladstone was a great PM who introduced huge changes but the narrative doesn't exactly romp through these parts) and some chunks of history that I knew very little of (the Irish Home rule question).

Views upon history have changed much since Churchill wrote these volumes - for example with the American civil war, while Churchill acknowledges the evils of slavery he barely gives black America a role in the story. His portrayals of Generals Lee and Stonewall present men of honour, ability and courage whose loyalty to their states forced them to be on the wrong side. This is a view that would, surely, be unpublishable today.

However, his prose is grandiose; he is telling a story rather than presenting dry academic facts. This is a book that will make me seek out more on the issues he presents (esp the Civil War and Irish history).

James Richardson says

I just finished reading Winston Churchill's The Great Democracies Volumd 4 A History of the English Speaking Peoples. Churchill covers the American Civil War from a British perspective which is interesting forshadowing what the casualties will be like in WWI due to trench warfare which was first used in the Civil War. I especially like his work on Gladstone and Disraeli, though unlike Churchill, I prefer Gladstone over Disraeli. Basically the entire British Empire is touched upon in this volume.

James says

This is a huge subject. In four short volumes, Winston has given the significant events of western civilization, and concisely explained everything up till 1900. Amazing. Much of it is a whirlwind. It is not so great in its detailed analysis of particular events as it is an explanation of how things fit together in the grand scheme of things.

Elle says

This was a really good overview of English and American history. I have now read both the first in the series, A History Of The English Speaking Peoples, Volume I: The Birth of Britain, and this volume. I learned a lot of 19th century British history that I had heard almost nothing about, and also about Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and India. His section on the American Civil War and Reconstruction was superb. I understood some of the battles like I never had before. I like Winston Churchill's writing, and his views on the history as well(you can't read a history book without the author having a bit of a slant). His

view on American history is that of an Englishman, and it was interesting to get a different perspective, especially of the dealings between England and the U.S. I also learned a lot about British politics and politicians, and it was interesting to get historical context after I had read a biography on Queen Victoria--this book basically covers the history at the time of her reign and life.

I have really grown as a reader since starting this book, because I had to read a lot slower to understand at the beginning then at the end. He uses big words and narrates concisely and well. I had to pay attention to get everything--there was a lot of information packed into a paragraph. He mentions the Mormons and treats them well. I loved this description for his word choice: "Within three years a flourishing community of eleven thousand souls, combining religious fervour, philoprogenitiveness, and shrewd economic sense, had been established by careful planning in the Salt Lake country." Isn't philoprogenitiveness a great word to describe Latter Day Saints?

I thought the last paragraph was wonderful, and read in the context of the time he wrote it, profound: "Here is set out a long story of the English-speaking peoples. They are now to become Allies in terrible but victorious wars. And that is not the end. Another phase looms before us, in which alliance will once more be tested and in which its formidable virtues may be to preserve Peace and Freedom. The future is unknowable, but the past should give us hope. Nor should we now seek to define precisely the exact terms of ultimate union."

Cindy Rollins says

It only took this book 20 years to move from my TBR pile to this. This whole series has been wonderful. I can see now that it is probably continued somewhat in Churchill's books about the WWI and WWII. What a man Churchill was. What a way with words and thoughts. Highly readable and continually thought-provoking.

In this volume, there is quite a bit of American history especially Civil War battle history. You can see that Churchill was also in danger of 'loving war too much' as he remarks about Lee and Jackson. His perspective as an outsider makes this all the more thoughtful. I especially enjoyed hearing about the battles surrounding my town, Chattanooga.

Thomas Boltz says

Great read, well worth the time.

Abigail says

More readable than the first volume, although it still didn't particularly hold my interest. Quite racist.

Dan says

At last, I managed to finish Churchill's History. I can tell that he intended to tell this story to unite the English speaking peoples in an alliance against the threat of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism. The history outlines the common heritage of the people inhabiting the British Isles, and all the lands they colonized. It also records all the internecine conflicts between them, from the Anglo-Saxons vs. the Britons, to the American Civil War. He recognizes that despite their common roots, English speaking nations were anything but united, but despite their conflicts, they can always point to a tradition of freedom and the rule of law, brightening their spirit even in the darkest of times.

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