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The Downing Street Years



Synopsis

The first volume of memoirs by Margaret Thatcher frankly recalls the former British prime minister's dealings with U.S. presidents, the Falkland War, and her election victories in 1983 and 1987.

150,000 first printing. \$150,000 ad/promo. Tour.

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Customer Reviews

Fans of Britain's first woman prime minister may have already purchased this fact-filled but ultimately self-serving memoir. Key events of Thatcher's 11-year reign--the alliance with Reagan, the Falklands/Malvinas War, the 1984-1985 miners' strike, conflict within the European Community, and so on--are described in exhaustive detail. There is little attempt to provide a balanced or subtle portrait of a controversial administration. Although, for the most part, the book's prose style is rather pedantic, Thatcher's unique personality nevertheless shines through. The gist of her approach is conveyed in the chapter titles--"The World Turned Right Side Up," "Disarming the Left," "No Time To Go Wobbly." Yet even Thatcher's harshest critics will find this book informative and revealing. The book contains over 50 photographs, some in color. A second volume, devoted to her life prior to the 1979 election that brought her to No. 10 Downing Street, is promised. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 6/15/93.- Kent Worcester, Social Science Research Council, New York Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Iron Lady tells all. Well, not exactly all; her memoirs reveal little of her personal life and,

chronologically, cover only those years during which she was prime minister. Her book has already caused a stir in the U.K. and will be read with great enthusiasm on this side of the Atlantic not only by people involved in government, but also by general readers keen on foreign affairs. The first woman prime minister of Britain was never known for sugarcoating, and her remembrance of her 11-year tenure at No. 10 Downing Street is defined not only by its wealth of details about her activities as head of the government, but also by her unequivocal opinions about world-important events she participated in and history-changing individuals she encountered. Would we expect anything else but outspokenness from Thatcher as she reviews, analyzes, explains, and defends her policies and procedures, domestic and foreign, during her controversial presiding over Britain's disestablishment of socialism and resurgence as a world power? Highlights of her recollections include her comments on the Falklands War ("The significance . . . was enormous, both for Britain's self-confidence and for [its] standing in the world") and the reunification of Germany ("Germany is . . . by its very nature a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing force in Europe"). One has to admire her for her honesty, integrity, and stick-to-her-guns attitude. Brad Hooper

It was fun to read something in Lady Thatcher's own words. I could envision her sitting there, writing page upon page. However, you have to have a rather strong love of politics to read this book as it is heavy on jargon. I would have liked her to have incorporated a little more personalality, but I learned that she was a very private person and didn't like people knowing too much. The one thing I did enjoy is finding what a marvelous mind she has. She wrote with excellent diction and explained things well.

This book is one of the most interesting political autobiographies I have read (and I've read many of them). I must confess that interest was intensified due to the fact that I worked in the House of Commons during her tenure in office, and indeed worked during the 1987 General Election for two Conservative Members of Parliament (David Amess of Basildon and David Evennett of Erith & Crayford--yes, I know, you've never heard of either of them). This is actually the first volume of Margaret Thatcher's books to be published; the prequel is 'The Path to Power' and there is a follow-up, 'The Collected Speeches', but for those interested, 'The Downing Street Years' is the book to have. It begins with the 1979 General Election, and carries forward to her resignation as Prime Minister a decade later. In this volume are her perspectives on all the various Cabinet intrigues, shuffles and reshuffles; her attempts to find civil servants and other helpers who were not of the old guard but of a new mentality, often asking, 'Is he one of us?' by which she meant, not is

he a Conservative, but rather, will he get something accomplished, is he a do-er? Thatcher's perspectives on the various scandals and inter-Cabinet fighting makes for interesting reading -- she is candid in her likes and dislikes among her Cabinet colleagues. Her final row with Geoffrey Howe, who delivered a scathing speech in the HoC that mostly prompted the leadership crisis, is enlightening. (I've not seen his version, if one exists--it would be good to compare the two sides.) She was very disappointed at the end when she thought she had the continued support of the party, but each of her ministers and 'friends' told her in turn that while he supported her, others would not. She saw the writing on the wall, and after having won the first ballot for party leadership but not by a sufficient majority to avoid a second ballot, she resigned in favour of John Major (whose autobiography, recently issued, is also well worth reading, particularly for his comments about how Thatcher tried to maintain a controlling influence over him from behind the office). You might be tempted, if you're not really into politics and not reading this for scholarly purposes, to skim over various minor issues that are gone into great detail. Historians are appreciative, but I seriously ask myself how many non-political scientists and historians will read through all the detail of what are now minor bits of history? In all, a brilliant career, the first woman head of government in a major Western democracy, and well worth reading on the whole.

I learned more about the 1980's from this book than I did living through them. Granted I was young and not paying too much attention at the time, but MT's perspective on some of the pivotal events of that period is fascinating. Particularly enjoyed the discussion on Northern Ireland, the Falklands War and dealings with Russia. Maybe i'm wrong here ... but it also seems like the PM of the UK is forced to work a lot harder than any US congressman or President. She was in the weeds, and seemed to rely on a small team. Does the Parliamentary structure demand that kind of factual grasp, unlike the US system? Smaller support staff budget? Hmm.

This book is about Margaret Thatcher's most remarkable journey from childhood to the highest public office in the land, and it ends most appropriately on that fateful day, following her resignation as Prime Minister, when she departed 10 Downing Street. In her own words, she recounts her amazing life story in politics, and the enormous challenges she faced and overcame. It explains her determination to eradicate extreme unionism and socialism that had become ingrained in Britain and which had resulted in a nation suffering from the "british disease". Her determination, drive and energy to bring immense change to Britain, and to positively change the mindset of a nation that was in a mess when she was first elected Prime Minister in May 1979, shows why she will go down

in history as the greatest post-war leader in Britain, a leader who also influenced the international political landscape like no others had done before her. To the end, Maggie Thatcher remained true to her beliefs. After all her achievements, she rightfully felt betrayed and let down by her own cabinet who, in effect, lost faith and shafted her, despite her having delivered three successive Tory election victories. Margaret Thatcher allows readers to understand that all she ever wanted to do was to improve the lives of, and opportunities for, the British people, and to preserve the democratic way in Britain and around the world. Her story shows why she has truly been the greatest leader of our time.

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