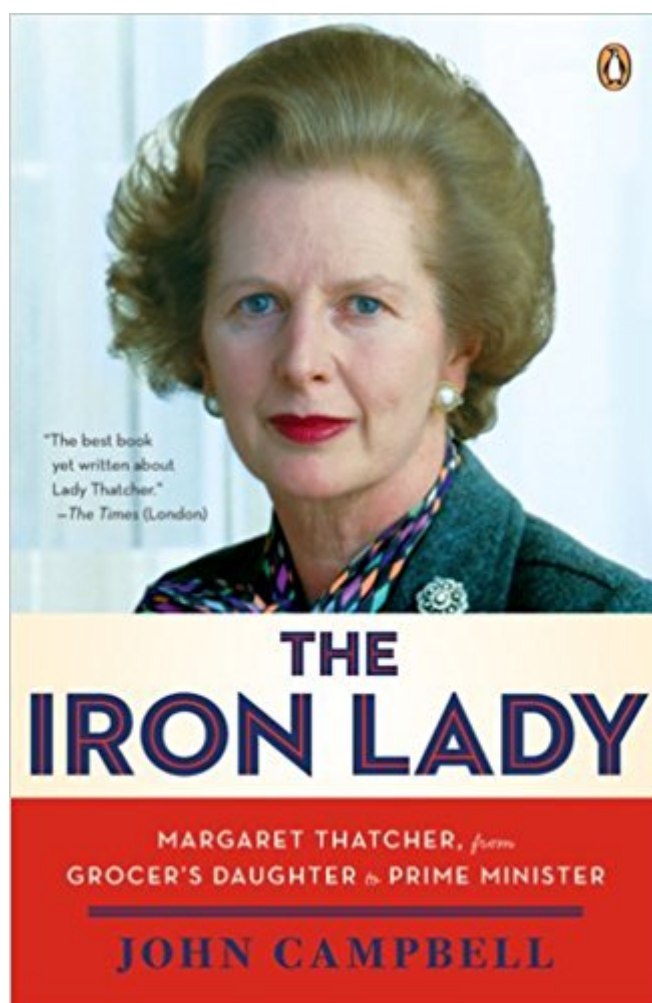


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The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, From Grocer's Daughter To Prime Minister



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

"Anyone who really wants to know what happened between 1979 and 1990 should read this book."

— John Rentoul "Superbly researched...unlike so many others is neither hagiography nor hatchet-job, and probably gets closer to the truth than any...magnificently told."

— Michael Dobbs "The best book yet written about Lady Thatcher."

— Frank Johnson "An enormously useful achievement...every twist and turn of her political life is here."

— Matthew Paris "I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, and indeed arguing with it, because it has reminded me why many of us would never have wanted her to give up."

— William Hague

John Campbell is a leading political biographer. His other books include *Lloyd George, Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Years of Political Rivalry from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown*, and *Edward Heath*, for which he won the NCR Book Award. He lives in England.

This is a comprehensive biography of the Iron Lady. Campbell provides a very detailed chronology of Margaret Thatcher's early life, political career and remarkable legacy. This book touches every aspect of the British Prime Minister and certainly worth a read, however the author's focus on completeness somehow makes this work to a certain extent hard to follow. Background knowledge of British politics and international relations at the time of the Iron Lady is necessary.

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. The book includes many juicy tidbits and vignettes, but perhaps my favorite occurred at a cabinet meeting. Such meetings could never proceed without Margaret being present, but in this case everyone but the Prime Minister was assembled, and one of the ministers said, "Well, her handbag is here, so I think we can proceed." Princess Di was famous for her wardrobe, but that couldn't hold a candle to Margaret Thatcher's symbol of power, the handbag. Although domestic policy takes up a major portion of Campbell's book, another central

theme was the extent to which she vetoed British participation in Europe. She definitely saw Great Britain's place in the world as a partnership with the United States, and of course did everything possible to cement her relationship with President Reagan. Further, her career was saved at one point by the Falklands war, but she had both the luck and the fortitude to survive recurring crises. In the battle between "individual" and "community" rights, I'm much more oriented toward the community than Margaret Thatcher was, but I can admire her courage and stand amazed at how strongly she believed she was right. I read the paperback abridged edition, which came in at 500 pages. No need for the details contained in the original two-volume edition weighing in at 1200 pages.

Campbell does well to the Iron Lady. He is not highly critical but neither is he generous. He covers her beginning and follows her through the prime ministry covering all of her policies. He tries to tinker into her train of thought and how the woman thought and influenced her decisions. He covers the Cold War, economics, domestic policy, the Falkland Islands War and other significant decisions. Unlike many liberal writers he is not critical of Thatcher and makes her decisions apparent per the situation of the times. For example, he takes on many of the accusations today that Thatcher gutted the manufacturing base of Britain and her policies of deregulation led to the Financial Crisis of 2008 and a lack of caring about the poor. He puts you in her shoes at the time. 20%+ inflation, terminal decay in confidence, garbage in the streets and rolling black-outs thanks to unnecessary union strikes and demands, recession, nearly 4,000,000 unemployed and the list goes on. Campbell answers these questions fairly well. He says that the flow of economics would have converted Britain to a service economy and she merely complied with the inevitable. For example she closed down only unproductive coal mines, but kept profitable ones going strong. The Falklands restored prestige and confidence, attacking the unions ended the blackouts and strikes, deregulation allowed more efficient business leading to increased employment and lower inflation. In the end he said, she was right. She banished forever the socialism that strangled Britain. In his reply to those who criticize her for "economic crisis" 18 years later he says "It becomes ever more apparent that history moves in cycles. The solutions of yesterday become the problems of today..."Great book!

Undoubtedly this Penguin biography of Margaret Thatcher is the best in print, at half the length of John Campbell's original superb two-volume work thanks to David Freeman's masterful edit. The scholarship is unquestionably thorough and honest, which Thatcher-haters will, yes, hate. The bottom line conclusion is that the grocer's daughter from Grantham "undoubtedly ... played a part in

the sudden ending of the Cold War in 1989-91 [page 285] ... Her relationship with Reagan and to a lesser extent with Gorbachev enabled her to punch - or at least to appear to punch - above Britain's real weight in the world. For a heady time in the late 1980s she almost seems to have recreated the wartime triumvirate of Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill. ... Meanwhile, her love affair with America pulled Britain away from Europe."

Awesome account of the Thatcher years, clearly written and well cited. Some things I had to look up to understand as I am not familiar with a Parliament government. I had to become accustomed to the bouncing back and forth between years and some repetitive information (more than likely to remind the reader of info stated in an earlier chapter). Anyone who is interested in learning about world politics/socialism/capitalism and needs or wants to explore Britain's part during the latter part of the 20th century should read. I enjoyed it.

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