



Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship

By Jon Meacham



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The most complete portrait ever drawn of the complex emotional connection between two of history's towering leaders

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill were the greatest leaders of “the Greatest Generation.” In *Franklin and Winston*, Jon Meacham explores the fascinating relationship between the two men who piloted the free world to victory in World War II. It was a crucial friendship, and a unique one—a president and a prime minister spending enormous amounts of time together (113 days during the war) and exchanging nearly two thousand messages. Amid cocktails, cigarettes, and cigars, they met, often secretly, in places as far-flung as Washington, Hyde Park, Casablanca, and Teheran, talking to each other of war, politics, the burden of command, their health, their wives, and their children.

Born in the nineteenth century and molders of the twentieth and twenty-first, Roosevelt and Churchill had much in common. Sons of the elite, students of history, politicians of the first rank, they savored power. In their own time both men were underestimated, dismissed as arrogant, and faced skeptics and haters in their own nations—yet both magnificently rose to the central challenges of the twentieth century. Theirs was a kind of love story, with an emotional Churchill courting an elusive Roosevelt. The British prime minister, who rallied his nation in its darkest hour, standing alone against Adolf Hitler, was always somewhat insecure about his place in FDR's affections—which was the way Roosevelt wanted it. A man of secrets, FDR liked to keep people off balance, including his wife, Eleanor, his White House aides—and Winston Churchill.

Confronting tyranny and terror, Roosevelt and Churchill built a victorious alliance amid cataclysmic events and occasionally conflicting interests. *Franklin and Winston* is also the story of their marriages and their families, two clans caught up in the most sweeping global conflict in history.

Meacham's new sources—including unpublished letters of FDR's great secret love, Lucy Mercer Rutherford, the papers of Pamela Churchill Harriman, and interviews with the few surviving people who were in FDR and Churchill's joint company—shed fresh light on the characters of both men as he engagingly chronicles the hours in which they decided the course of the struggle.

Hitler brought them together; later in the war, they drifted apart, but even in the autumn of their alliance, the pull of affection was always there. Charting the personal drama behind the discussions of strategy and statecraft, Meacham has written the definitive account of the most remarkable friendship of the modern age.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Meacham, managing editor of Newsweek (editor, *Voices in Our Blood*), delivers an eloquent, well-researched account of one of the 20th century's most vital friendships: that between FDR and Winston Churchill. Both men were privileged sons of wealth, and both had forebears (in Churchill's case, Leonard Jerome) prominent in New York society during the 19th century. Both enjoyed cocktails and a smoke. And both were committed to the Anglo-American alliance. Indeed, Roosevelt and Churchill each believed firmly that the "English-speaking peoples" represented the civilized world's first, best hope to counter and conquer the barbarism of the Axis. Meacham uses previously untapped archives and has interviewed surviving Roosevelt and Churchill staffers present at the great men's meetings in Washington, Hyde Park, Casablanca and Tehran. Thus he has considerable new ground to break, new anecdotes to offer and prescient observations to make. Throughout, Meacham highlights Roosevelt's and Churchill's shared backgrounds as sons of the ruling elite, their genuine, gregarious friendship, and their common worldview during staggeringly troubled times. To meet with Roosevelt, Churchill recalled years later, "with all his buoyant sparkle, his iridescence," was like "opening a bottle of champagne"-a bottle from which the tippling Churchill desperately needed a good long pull through 1940 and '41, as the Nazis savaged Europe and tortured British civilians with air attacks. One comes away from this account convinced of the "Great Personality" theory of history and gratified that Roosevelt and Churchill possessed the character that they did and came to power at a time when no other partnership would do.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

After their first meeting, in 1918, Roosevelt said that Churchill was "a stinker" Churchill didn't even remember Roosevelt. But by their next exchange, in 1939, Churchill was convinced that Britain's future depended on getting Roosevelt to like him. Meacham's engaging account argues that personal bonds between leaders are crucial to international politics. He draws heavily on diaries and letters to describe a complicated courtship and, at times, seems amazed at what Winston is willing to put up with from Franklin. Churchill paints a landscape for the President, sings for him, and agonizes when his notes go unanswered; Roosevelt teases him in front of Stalin, criticizes him to reporters, and eventually breaks his heart with a diverging vision of the postwar world. But Churchill never gives up, and he later recalled, "No lover ever studied the whims of his mistress as I did those of President Roosevelt."

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From [Booklist](#)

If the personal element in the Roosevelt-Churchill relationship influenced the course of World War II, this author demurs from saying so. The war in Meacham's hands is scaffolding for an edifice of detail about the two leaders' meetings. So Meacham coaxes gossip and trivia from the source material meticulously recorded by each man's voluble and history-conscious entourages. While the way Churchill would barge into Roosevelt's bedroom, or Roosevelt would mix drinks for Churchill, may not seem significant today, to immediate observers this social badinage marked the trajectory of their chiefs' dealings. Churchill was usually transparent, and FDR indirect, traits of the men's leadership that provide coherence to Meacham's immense indulgence in the physical accommodations, the gustatory spreads, and the verbal give-and-take of their friendship. WWII as experienced in personal relationships was the point of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt* (1994); Meacham's work is cut from the same cloth. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

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Katherine Sorenson:

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