

Russia, whose life was full of tragedy and sorrow and whose son was fated to be murdered, along with his family, never to claim the throne. The details in between are what make this text so compelling and rich.

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Paul Addison. *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero.* Lives and Legacies Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. vii; 308. Hardback, \$25.00; ISBN 0-19-927934-9.

It now seems that as much has been written about Winston Churchill as any figure in history. One writer recently observed that the Churchill field was getting so overcrowded that writers needed a very good reason for adding more paper to the total. Not surprisingly, authors have been finding their reasons to write on in specialization or, as the case with David Addison, with a slight twist in focus.

The story line is irresistible: The Great Man of the Twentieth Century, whose life seemed an interesting disaster—at best—until he was 65! For someone both lionized and reviled, whose career hit great heights and great depths, Churchill presents a fine opportunity for what Addison proposes—a brief biography seen “in parallel” with the history of the reputation, or, as the author puts it in his prologue, “the epic struggle between Churchill and his critics.” The book is an outgrowth of Addison’s Churchill entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the author has written elsewhere about the social and political life of Britain in this period. For students and teachers who are particularly interested in that struggle, or would like to get a relatively quick overview of a long, interesting life and a varied, tumultuous career, Addison’s book is smartly condensed and focused.

The book has a number of strengths. Addison provides a convincing knowledge of context and a nuanced sense of judgment, two valuable qualities in assessing a life many love or hate. He aims primarily to explain rather than judge. But he’s not afraid to expose flaws: Addison sees the man even at his greatest moments of triumph as World War II prime and war minister as still often a reckless and impulsive leader. The book is particularly helpful in taking readers through the whole Dardanelles disaster, which dogged Churchill’s reputation more than almost any other event. Addison helps untangle the complex mix of myth and reality, of bad luck and bad decisions (and who actually made which) that led to Churchill getting sacked early in the First World War as head of the Admiralty. The section, too, on Churchill’s mix of reactionary and progressive labor views in the years between the wars is fascinating. Who would have imagined Winston Churchill discovering “triangulation” in 1920! And Addison’s treatment of the iconic statesman of 1940 and beyond deftly balances insider stories and the hardening outside legend.

Of course, the fun part of writing about what others have said and written about Churchill, studying the life along with the changing assessment of his critics, is the chance to quote many juicy tidbits. Churchill is marvelously quotable himself (much of his reputation, after all, stems from oft repeated quotes during Britain's darkest Second World War days), and is a controversial enough subject to draw out heightened rhetoric (the most glowing encomiums or fulminating condemnations) from those observing or assessing him as well. The book includes wonderfully acerbic (and insightful!) comments from supporters and opponents, politicians and journalists, friends and enemies. Addison has seemingly read enormously and quoted judiciously.

The book has interesting information about every phase of Churchill's life, and it is clearly organized into eight sensible chronological chapters. Endnotes do not add much additional information, but the notes, the bibliography, and index are solid. There's much in here that could inform or add spice to a lecture, and students from late secondary school on could profitably use this for their own projects or papers. If I had one problem with the book, it involved the amount of space and detail about the early life. Certainly Churchill's youthful days set the stage and establish certain traits and influences. But there are, at least for readers not interested in immersing themselves in every detail of British history, too many side stories and too many references to obscure events in British history in the first couple of chapters.

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Julian E. Zelizer, ed. *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Pp. 784. Cloth, \$35.00; ISBN 0-618-17906-2.

The book covers a great deal of material. It divides Congress into four eras. As the reader progresses through each era, one can follow the struggle of early Congresses to find a balance in using their powers. The reader then progresses into a discussion about political parties, the role of parties in Congress, and the struggle of Congress to cope with difficult issues such as slavery and westward expansion. The book gives details about the attempts to change Congress in order to meet the needs of a changing nation and world. The reader gains a sense of how Congress continues to change in order to meet the demands of today's complex, ever-changing society.

The discussion of little known pieces of legislation and members of Congress makes this a great book to read. There is a great deal of discussion about these laws that gives the reader a sense that each piece of legislation was important in making our country what it is today. This book also offers detailed information about some of the key players in each session or era of Congress. Some of the members of Congress discussed in this book were leaders who helped shape the institution. Others were part of the larger membership that attempted to shape the nation or tried to diffuse conflicts over issues.