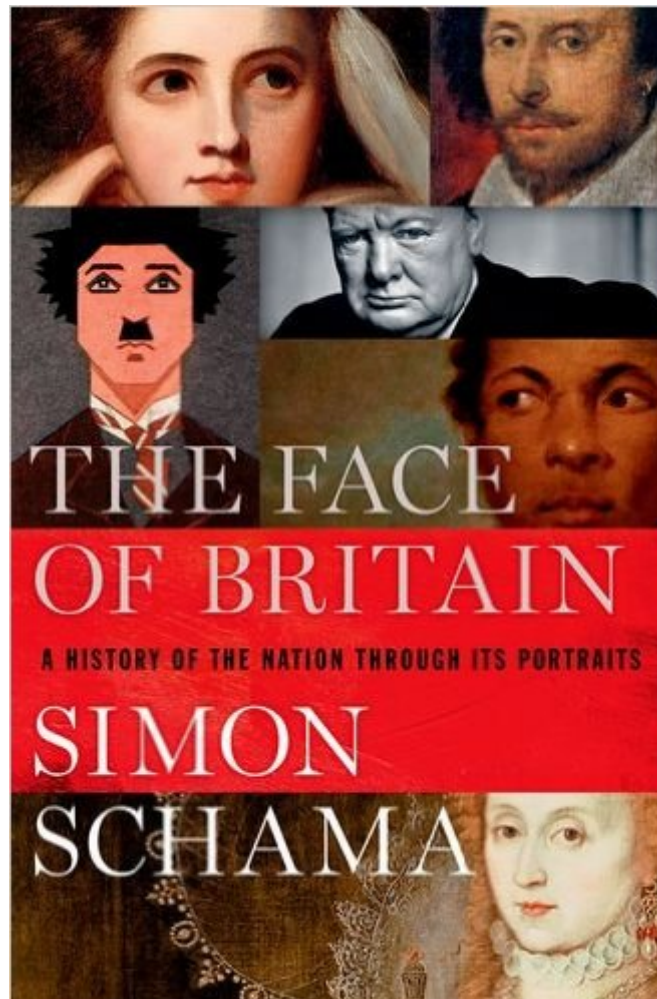


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The Face Of Britain: A History Of The Nation Through Its Portraits



Synopsis

Author of a number of celebrated works, including the bestselling *The Story of the Jews* and *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Simon Schama's latest book fuses history and art to create a tour de force of narrative sweep and illuminating insight. Using images from works-paintings, photographs, lithographs, etchings, sketches-found in London's National Portrait Gallery, *The Face of Britain* weaves together an account of their composition, framed by their particular moment of creation, and in the process unveils a collective portrait of nation and its history. "Portraits," Schama writes, "have always been made with an eye to posterity." Commissioned to paint Winston Churchill in 1954, Graham Sutherland struggled with how to capture the "savior" of Great Britain honestly and humanely. Schama calls the portrait, initially damned, the "most powerful image of a Great Briton ever executed." Annie Leibovitz's photograph of a nude John Lennon kissing Yoko Ono, taken five hours before his murder, bears "a weight of poignancy she could not possibly have anticipated." Hans Holbein's preparatory sketch for a portrait of Henry VIII depicts "an unstoppable engine of dynastic generation." Here are expressions from across the centuries of normalcy and heroism, beauty and disfigurement, aristocracy and deprivation, the familiar and the obscure-the faces of courtesans, warriors, workers, activists, playwrights, the high and mighty as well as pub-crawlers. Linking them is Schama's vibrant exploration of how their connective power emerges from the dynamic between subject and artist, work and viewer, time and place. Schama's compelling analysis and impassioned evocation of these works create an unforgettable verbal mosaic that at once reveals and transforms the images he places before us. Lavishly illustrated and written with the storytelling brio that is Schama's trademark, *The Face of Britain* invites us to look at a nation's visual legacies and find its reflection.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The National Portrait Gallery is a London museum near Trafalgar Square, which is home to thousands of portraits, with only a percentage on display at any one time. It's a wonderful place to visit, and in addition to the permanent displays of works of art, there are frequent special programs on individuals or groups important in British history. Author Simon Schama, in his new book, "The Face of Britain: A History of the Nation Through Its Portraits", is a wonderful look at selected works of art and he tells the stories of the people in the pictures. His are not conventional biographies, but rather short examinations of the influence of society on the subject and the influence by the subject on British society. Oh, and "portraits" can be done by paint, photography, or sculpture. All of the 35 or so sections are strong, but maybe the most interesting are the section on how photographer Yousef Karsh snapped his famous picture of Winston Churchill, glowering at the camera and the poor family of George III. Taken in Ottawa, Canada during a state visit in 1941, Churchill had just addressed the Canadian Parliament and was in no mood to have his picture taken. Karsh was in the ante-room with him and asked Churchill to put the cigar he was smoking in an ashtray. When Churchill wouldn't do it, Karsh marched over to the Prime Minister and snatched the cigar out of his mouth. The resulting picture of a mad Churchill became an iconic image of the man. Schama writes about George III and his son, the Prince of Wales, the future George IV. The prince, one of 15 children of George III and his wife, Charlotte, lived a desalute life with mistresses and illegitimate children.

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