

The Face of Britain: A History of the Nation Through Its Portraits

By Simon Schama

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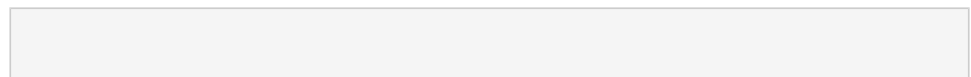
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The Face of Britain: A History of the Nation Through Its Portraits By Simon Schama

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.



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Editorial Review

Review

"...unfailingly amusing and intermittently risqué, delivered with smooth, slightly ironic panache." -*Foreign Affairs*

"This splendid book by historian and art critic Simon Schama could hardly be better timed since it might plausibly be argued that 'the face of Britain' changed on or about June 23, 2016." -Christopher Benfey, *The New York Times Book Review*

"He knows the history, the biography, and the art history... he made me look and learn. He is a great storyteller and we learn something new on every page." -A. S. Byatt, *New Statesman*

"All of these lives rendered with an acuity of detail that could rival the best of portraitists ... describing Lawrence's portrait of Wilberforce, Schama calls the painting a work of 'transforming empathy.' That phrase could be true of his storytelling throughout this book." -Ekow Eshun, *The Independent*

"Simon Schama's richly illustrated history of Britain in portraits is a work of dazzling panache ... a book to devour." -John Carey, *Sunday Times*

"Wonderfully compelling ... what this book, full of unhackneyed paintings and unfamiliar stories, shows is that when Schama is at his best he can see straight through people." -Michael Prodger, *The Times*

"Rich in its variety of subjects ... poignantly memorable" -Martin Gayford, *The Telegraph*

"Some of the best writing on British portraiture I have read." -Bendor Grosvenor, *Financial Times*

"He is both an inspired communicator of detail and context, an excitable and exciting critic and a sleeve-tugging gossip. The idea of portraiture is a perfect vehicle for his detailed imagination...the subjects of the portraits become uncannily alive." -Tim Adams, *The Observer*

"He has animated our portraits superlatively. One of our most in-demand public intellectuals has deftly ventriloquised his talking heads." -iEvening Standardr

"Viewers of his TV shows know what a passionate presenter of his subject - art history - Simon Schama is. He button-holes your eye on his inward voyage of imagination. He does it as compulsively on the page as on screen ... I welcome back in this book history as people - people whose characters can be read in their fascinating faces." -iDaily Mailr

"Schama's greatest gift is a sure eye for an extraordinary story...This isn't what you get from conventional historians or conventional art writers, more's the pity.... Schama has written books which will still be bought and talked about a century from now and he hasn't lost an ounce of zest or intelligence. Damn him." -Andrew Marr, iProspectr

About the Author

Simon Schama is Professor of History and Art History at Columbia University and the author of many books, including *Rough Crossings*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for nonfiction, and *The Embarrassment of Riches*. He is a Contributing Editor to the *Financial Times* for which he writes on politics and culture and has written and presented more than fifty documentaries for the BBC, PBS, and the History Channel, including *The Power of Art*, which won the 2007 International Emmy for Best Arts Programming.

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