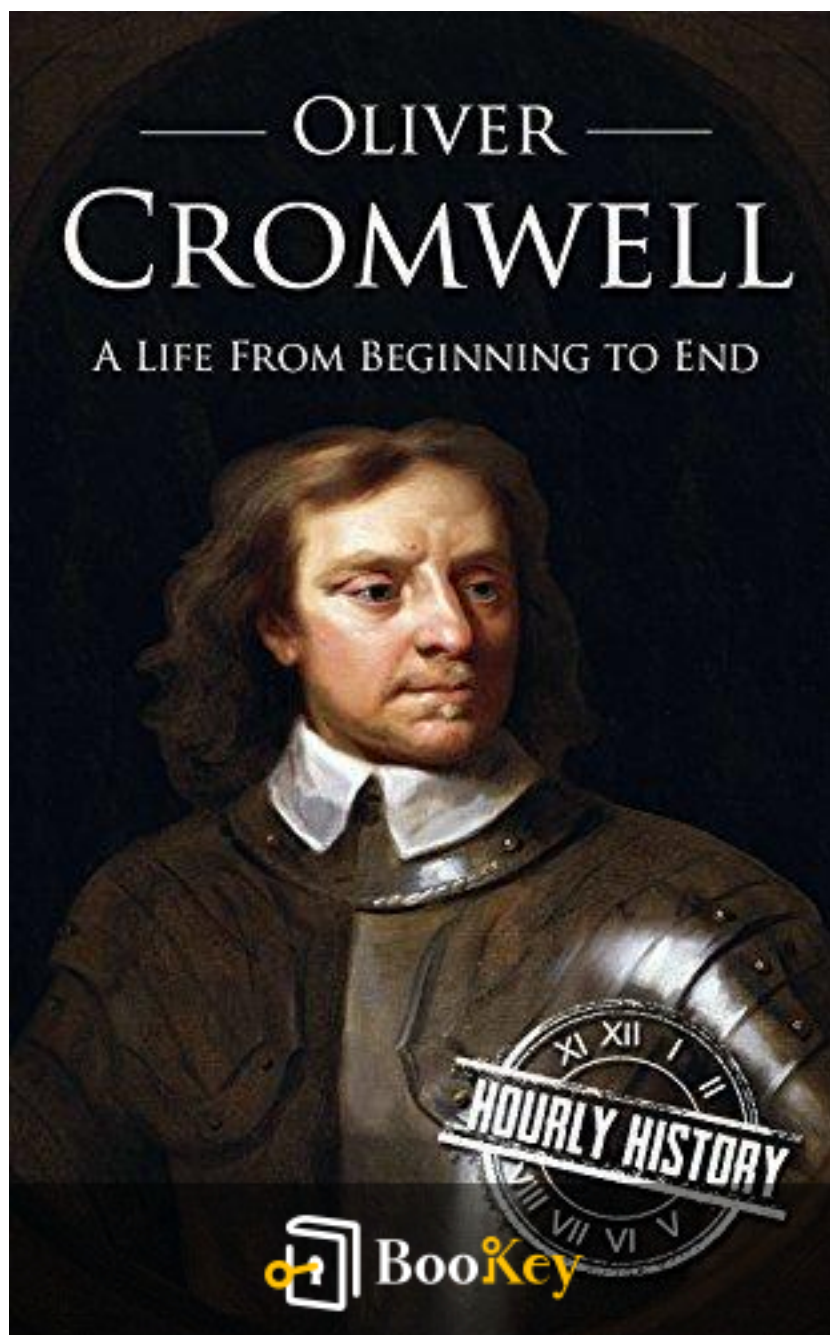


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Oliver Cromwell Summary

A Revolutionary Leader Shaping England's Future

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About the book

In "Oliver Cromwell" by Hourly History, readers are invited to explore the complex life and legacy of one of England's most controversial figures, a man whose rise to power forever altered the course of British history. Cromwell, initially a humble farmer, transformed into a formidable leader during the English Civil War, navigating the treacherous waters of politics, religion, and civil strife to become the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. This engaging narrative delves into the motivations, ideals, and enduring impact of Cromwell's rule, providing an insightful examination of his vision for a new England that sought to balance authority and liberty. As the shadows of tyranny and revolution loom large in our modern world, Cromwell's story prompts us to consider the timeless struggle between power and freedom, making this book a must-read for anyone captivated by history's lessons.

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About the author

Hourly History is a publishing imprint dedicated to producing concise and engaging summaries of historical events, figures, and themes, making complex topics accessible to a broad audience. Their books are crafted with a commitment to clarity and simplicity, allowing readers to quickly grasp the essentials of significant historical narratives. With a focus on providing informative content in a digestible format, Hourly History seeks to ignite curiosity and encourage further exploration of the past, making history both understandable and engaging for readers of all backgrounds.

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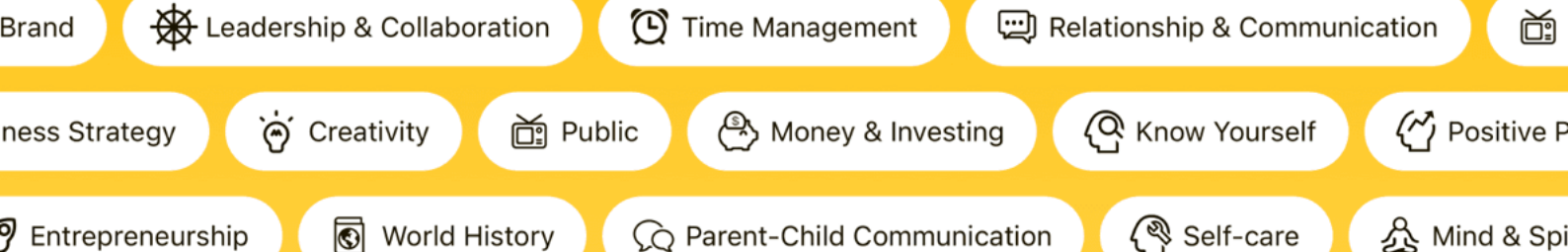
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Chapter 1 Summary: The Early Life of Oliver Cromwell

Oliver Cromwell was born on April 25, 1599, into a family of considerable historical significance. As the fifth child of Robert Cromwell and Elizabeth Steward, he was the only male to survive into adulthood out of ten siblings. His lineage included ties to the Tudor royal family through a distant relative, Thomas Cromwell, who played a pivotal role in the Reformation. By the time of Oliver's birth, the Cromwell family was established as a major landowning force in Huntingdonshire, having accrued wealth from church lands that were sold off after the Reformation. The family's prominence included connections with other powerful families in East Anglia, bolstered by strategic marriages.

However, despite this noble heritage, Oliver's immediate family was not affluent. His father was a younger son with a modest means, and by the early 17th century, the family's fortunes were declining. This decline was exacerbated by his uncle, Sir Oliver Cromwell, who mismanaged family properties, leading to considerable land sales. Baptized shortly after his birth at St John's Church, Oliver grew up with his seven sisters in Huntingdon, attending local education at Huntingdon Grammar School before briefly enrolling at Sidney Sussex College in London, though he never completed his degree.

A significant turning point in Cromwell's life occurred when he married

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Elizabeth Bourchier in August 1620 at St Giles-without-Cripplegate Church. Elizabeth, the daughter of a successful businessman, connected Cromwell with influential circles in London. Their marriage appeared to be a happy and fruitful one, resulting in the birth of seven children between 1621 and 1631. However, the death of their youngest son, James, in 1632 brought emotional turmoil, potentially triggering a “crisis” in Cromwell's life. During this financially difficult period, he became politically active, representing Huntingdon in Parliament in 1628 but struggled to assert influence, culminating in a conflict over local financial disputes.

This conflict ended unfavorably for Cromwell, resulting in a royal charter that barred him from local political power, leading to his brief imprisonment. Faced with personal and financial difficulties, Cromwell sold his remaining properties and relocated to St Ives in Cambridgeshire, where he lived from 1631 to 1636. His time in St Ives was characterized by hardship, leading him to act as a tenant farmer to support his family. Notably, no additional children were born during this period, suggesting the couple may have refrained from having more due to their precarious financial situation. It was during these challenging years that Cromwell contemplated emigration to the New World, seeking a fresh start away from his troubles back in England.

Thus, the early years of Oliver Cromwell's life were marked by a mix of noble heritage, significant personal losses, financial struggles, and a growing



political awareness that would shape his future endeavors.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Resilience in the face of adversity

Critical Interpretation: Reflect on how Oliver Cromwell's journey epitomizes the power of resilience. Despite his noble lineage and the trials he faced, including financial difficulties and personal loss, he emerged with a renewed sense of purpose. Allow his story to inspire you to confront your own challenges with courage; whether it's a job loss, a difficult relationship, or any hardship, remember that adversity can be a catalyst for growth. Embrace this idea: just like Cromwell, you too can navigate stormy seas and emerge stronger. Let his resilience motivate you to turn your struggles into stepping stones towards a more impactful future.

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Chapter 2 Summary: The Road to Influence

In 1636, Oliver Cromwell's life took a significant turn when he inherited a sizeable estate from his deceased uncle, Sir Thomas Stewart of Ely. This inheritance, which included long leases on properties and businesses, allowed Cromwell and his family to enhance their social status, moving into a charming house next to Holy Trinity Church in Ely. This newfound prosperity was accompanied by a growing family, with Cromwell welcoming two more children, Mary and Francis, in the late 1630s, bringing the total to eight surviving offspring.

Despite his improved circumstances, Cromwell remained cautious about venturing into public affairs, especially following a previous setback in Huntingdon. During the 1630s, King Charles I ruled without Parliament, leading to a period known as the King's Personal Rule, during which Cromwell faced the burden of illegal taxes. Although he did not publicly oppose the King's actions, a spiritual awakening began to take shape in his life during this time.

Cromwell's education had adhered to the mainstream religious practices of the Jacobean Church, but around the late 1630s, he felt called by God for a special purpose that was to unfold in time. His pre-awakening life was characterized by a sense of darkness and sin, as expressed in a heartfelt letter to his cousin, Mrs. St John. In this letter, Cromwell articulated a stark vision



of his past, filled with moral failings and a hatred for religious integrity.

This self-reflection led Cromwell to embrace Puritanism, believing that the Reformation of the Church of England had not yet realized its full potential. He sought to distance the church from what he saw as remnants of Roman Catholicism, rallying with others who shared similar views on the need for reform. This group was determined to rid the Church of superstitions and return to a biblical-focused faith, asserting that this change would inspire a more virtuous public.

As Cromwell increasingly engaged with politics, friction with King Charles I emerged. The King's favoritism towards elaborate church ceremonies and Arminianism — practices that Cromwell found blasphemous and indicative of the King's Catholic sympathies — intensified this ideological conflict. Driven by his religious conviction, Cromwell stepped into the political arena in 1640 as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Cambridge.

His initial foray into parliamentary politics coincided with the Short Parliament, which was swiftly dissolved by Charles I after only three weeks, mainly for failing to secure funding for quelling a Scottish rebellion. However, the subsequent Long Parliament offered Cromwell an extended platform, resulting in his rapid rise from an inexperienced politician to a formidable leader by 1642. He aligned himself with like-minded aristocrats and became a vocal critic of royal policies, advocating for the rights of



Parliament and supporting critical legislation.

Cromwell played pivotal roles during this transformative time, championing military appointments without royal consent, safeguarding the Prince of Wales from potential Catholic influences, and proposing strong military responses to the Irish Catholic uprisings. Through a combination of personal resolve, divine faith, and strategic alliances, Cromwell had established himself as a key figure poised for significant influence during the ensuing English Civil War.

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Chapter 3: The First English Civil War

The First English Civil War marked a significant turning point in English history and was characterized by intense political and military conflict driven by differing views on governance and religion. The backdrop of this period began with King Charles I's initial concessions to the Long Parliament, which aimed to curtail his authority over religious and financial matters without public consent. While some factions within Parliament believed these changes did not go far enough, tensions escalated as both the monarchy and parliamentary supporters drew lines in the sand over control of military and political powers.

1. Escalating Tensions: As early as January 1642, a confrontation erupted when Charles I attempted to arrest five MPs on charges of treason, leading to his withdrawal from London. The political climate became divided, with cities pledging allegiance either to the King or to Parliament. This division set the stage for open conflict.

2. Cromwell's Martial Emergence: Oliver Cromwell, initially lacking

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Chapter 4 Summary: Cromwell the Politician

In 1646, the desire for peace was strong among the populace of England and Wales, yet significant political issues loomed unresolved against this backdrop. Oliver Cromwell, who had been contemplating a religious settlement for years, viewed the array of new Protestant factions as integral to God's vision. For Cromwell, it was crucial that Parliament formally recognized religious liberty in the constitutional framework.

His political allies, the Independents, aimed to impose constitutional limits on King Charles I while maintaining him as a figurehead. Initially, there was consensus in Parliament, but divisions soon surfaced as factions with differing visions emerged. As 1646 transitioned into 1647, the Presbyterians, dominant in both Houses, favored restoring the King's pre-war powers in exchange for the re-establishment of the Church of England. This majority group sat at odds with the Independents and the growing discontent of the New Model Army, which Cromwell led.

The New Model Army, which had yet to be officially disbanded, sympathized with the Independents' call for religious liberty and harbored grievances about unpaid wages and the lack of indemnity for actions taken during the war. The Parliament's attempts to disband the army en masse, coupled with the consideration of restoring the monarchy, led to further animosity.



Spring 1647 marked a pivotal moment when discontent among the soldiers culminated in a bold maneuver: a group of New Model Army cavalry, led by Cornet Joyce, seized Charles I. This act of defiance indicated the army's commitment to influencing the political landscape. Although Cromwell attempted to act as a mediator between Parliament and the army, his efforts were in vain as Parliament proceeded with disbandment plans.

In the months that followed, Cromwell aligned himself more closely with the army's interests. The New Model Army drafted a treaty proposing reforms, but radical elements within it, called the Levellers, sought more radical changes, including a restructured power dynamic. Despite sharing some principles with the Levellers, Cromwell remained cautious, prioritizing traditional structures over their more revolutionary ideals.

Amid political turmoil, Charles I was secretly negotiating with the Scots for military support to regain his throne. After his escape from Hampton Court, he aimed to foment rebellion, which initially saw small uprisings effectively managed by Parliament. However, a substantial surge of loyalist sentiment reopened the conflict, leading Cromwell to engage his New Model Army in warfare once more during the Second Civil War.

Faced with a pro-royalist Scottish army, Cromwell executed a strategic campaign that resulted in a decisive victory at Preston, reaffirming his



military command and solidifying the army's resolve against royalist influences. However, even as they fought, tensions simmered between the army and Parliament, with both sides still grappling over the monarch's role.

In December 1648, the rift reached a climax when Colonel Thomas Pride led a coup against Parliament, expelling members advocating for a settlement with the King. This dramatic purge enabled a reformed Parliament, known as the Rump Parliament, to formalize the abolition of the monarchy and herald the establishment of a republic, an outcome Cromwell appeared to support amid shifting loyalties and divine providence beliefs.

Cromwell's motives during this period remain a topic of debate among historians. Though he initially expressed qualms about executing Charles I, by January 1649, his resolution hardened. On January 30, 1649, Charles met his end at Whitehall, his last words reflecting a belief in his divine transition from a corruptible earthly crown to one that was incorruptible—a somber culmination of years of political turbulence and religious fervor. As Cromwell and his contemporaries ushered in a new political era, their actions continued to reverberate through the subsequent conflicts in Ireland and Scotland, shaping the future of England.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The pursuit of religious liberty and political representation

Critical Interpretation: As you navigate your own life, consider Cromwell's determination to secure religious liberty as a poignant reminder of the power of advocating for your beliefs. In a world where differing opinions and cultural backgrounds can create tension, embracing the idea of inclusivity can inspire you to stand firm in your values while respecting those of others. Just as Cromwell and the Independents fought to ensure that their vision of governance included the rights of diverse Protestant factions, you too can strive to create spaces where voices are heard and valued, fostering dialogue that transcends divisions. This awareness not only cultivates a more harmonious environment but also empowers you to contribute to a society that champions freedom and representation for all.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Commonwealth in England, War in Ireland, and Rebellion in Scotland

During the transformative era following King Charles I's execution, England and Wales underwent profound changes that marked the end of established governance. Oliver Cromwell, initially a staunch defender of parliamentary principles, found himself navigating a convoluted political landscape, where his dual roles as military leader and political figure became increasingly intertwined. His steadfast commitment to religion provided him with a moral compass amid shifting allegiances and an evolving political framework.

1. Transition to the Commonwealth: The establishment of the Commonwealth saw Cromwell grapple with conflicting ideals. He sought to reconcile his dedication to conventional political structures with a desire for radical reforms in social, legal, and religious matters. Remaining a member of the rump parliament, he attempted to engage former MPs in a bid to restore legitimacy to the parliamentary body, but many had aligned themselves with the Irish Royalists, forming a united front against him in Ireland.

2. The Irish Campaign: As a military commander, Cromwell embarked on a campaign to quell dissent and reassert English authority in Ireland. Beginning in 1649, he led a significant military expedition, successfully capturing key territories but not without severe repercussions. The sieges of



Drogheda and Wexford resulted in the bloodshed of thousands, atrocities justified by Cromwell as divine vengeance for past persecutions. Ultimately, while the military objectives were achieved, the campaign paved the way for harsh policies against the Irish Catholic population, leading to vast suffering and death.

3. Scottish Rebellion: Concurrently, Cromwell faced challenges in Scotland, where Charles II had been proclaimed king. After returning to England and becoming the Lord General, Cromwell launched a campaign against Scottish forces in 1650. Despite initial setbacks amid illness and logistical issues, he achieved a significant victory at Dunbar, decimating the Scottish army. This triumph, hailed by Cromwell as a divine endorsement, laid the groundwork for further English incursions into Scotland, culminating in a final victory at Worcester, which unfortunately did not capture Charles II.

4. Rump Parliament Dismantled: Upon returning to London, Cromwell's disillusionment with the Rump Parliament grew, particularly as his calls for religious and judicial reforms met resistance. Tensions escalated when Cromwell perceived that parliamentary members were obstructing progress aligned with God's will. Using his military authority, he forcibly dissolved Parliament, driven by a vision of a government that represented godly principles while fearing the return of royalist political elements.



5. The Nominated Assembly: After dismantling Parliament, Cromwell appointed a "Little Parliament" composed of individuals selected for their commitment to reform, envisioning a temporary fix for governance. Despite initial aspirations, this assembly quickly fractured under internal divisions and failed to consolidate power or achieve the reforms Cromwell desired. By December 1653, with this latest political experiment proving disappointing, Cromwell reclaimed control, now with considerably diminished constitutional legitimacy.

Thus, Cromwell’s journey through the upheaval of the Commonwealth illustrates the complexities of leadership in a time of civil strife, where military success did not translate into effective governance. His endeavors reflect not only the tension between desired reforms and political realities but also the moral and ethical dilemmas faced as a leader seeking to impose his vision on a deeply divided nation.

Section	Description
Transition to the Commonwealth	Cromwell attempted to balance traditional political structures with radical reforms while remaining a member of the Rump Parliament amid opposition from Irish Royalists.
The Irish Campaign	Led a military campaign in Ireland starting in 1649, achieving territorial control through brutal sieges, justifying atrocities as divine retribution and resulting in suffering for the Catholic population.
Scottish Rebellion	Faced challenges with Charles II's proclaimed kingship in Scotland; achieved victory at Dunbar but failed to capture Charles II, marking significant English incursions.

Section	Description
Rump Parliament Dismantled	Disillusioned by resistance to reforms, Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament using military power to establish a government aligned with divine principles.
The Nominated Assembly	Created a "Little Parliament" for reform but it quickly disbanded due to internal conflict, leading Cromwell to regain control with diminished legitimacy by December 1653.

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Chapter 6: Cromwell, Lord Protector

Oliver Cromwell's tenure as Lord Protector marked a pivotal moment in the history of England, as it established a system of governance that straddled republican ideals and monarchic practices. Sworn in under the "Instrument of Government," Cromwell assumed significant powers as the chief magistrate of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland for the remainder of his life. However, the transition from power broker to outright leader was complex for Cromwell. While his aspirations for a parliament endowed with strong executive powers were unfulfilled, he found himself adapting seamlessly to his new role. He famously began signing official documents with "Oliver P," akin to monarchs signing with "R" for Regina, and he welcomed titles such as "Your Highness" from his peers.

In April 1654, Cromwell relocated his family to Whitehall Palace, where he embraced the ceremonial aspects of office, hosting lavish state occasions reminiscent of a monarch. This shift was evident from his humble appearance during his initial Protectorate opening in December 1653 to the regal attire he donned during his re-inauguration in 1657, complete with a

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Chapter 7 Summary: Cromwell's Legacy

Oliver Cromwell's legacy is marked by a complex interplay of admiration and vilification, reflecting his multifaceted impact on British history. Following his death, his son Richard briefly assumed the role of Lord Protector, yet his tenure was short-lived, ending in May 1659 due to a lack of military support and a solid political base in Parliament. This absence of leadership created a power vacuum that quickly spiraled into political chaos. Within a year, the changes brought about by Cromwell's leadership and the devastating Civil War, which claimed countless lives from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, were largely undone. George Monck, acting as the governor of Scotland and commander of the New Model Army, marched into London, reinstating the Long Parliament, leading to the return of Charles II from exile.

The public's reaction to Cromwell's actions was severe and swift. On the 12th anniversary of King Charles I's execution in 1661, Cromwell's remains were exhumed and brutally desecrated, a grim testament to the vindictive backlash against his rule. His severed head was displayed publicly, symbolizing the dramatic reclamation of royal authority, although questions linger about the authenticity of the body displayed.

Cromwell's place in history is far from straightforward. To many, he epitomizes the archetypal authoritarian ruler who executed a king only to



elevate himself, while others revere him as a champion of democratic reform and a devout Christian who sought to transform British governance. Public sentiment about Cromwell is sharply divided across the British Isles; while some in England regard him as a great Briton, many in Ireland and Scotland perceive him as a genocidal fanatic responsible for widespread destruction and suffering, ultimately achieving little in terms of positive governance.

Critics during his lifetime likened him to Machiavelli, especially the Levellers, who published a scathing portrayal titled **The Machiavellian Cromwell**. In stark contrast, contemporary literary figures like John Milton extolled his virtues, calling him “our chief of men.” Cromwell’s actions are often viewed through the lens of his deeply held religious convictions—his radical Puritan beliefs shaped his worldview, compelling him to guide others toward what he deemed righteousness. This mission was marked by an ironic call for religious tolerance, juxtaposed with his blatant animosity toward Catholics, which manifested in ruthlessly violent military campaigns.

Cromwell remains a polarizing figure in history, eliciting extreme opinions that range from the view of him as a murderous tyrant to that of a valiant defender of liberty and democratic ideals. His legacy cannot be encapsulated in a singular narrative; rather, it resembles a collage, with each interpretation adding a unique facet to our understanding of his life and deeds. Thus, Cromwell endures as a symbol of the complexities of power, faith, and governance, inviting ongoing contemplation and discourse about his role in



shaping Britain's past.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Complexity of Leadership

Critical Interpretation: Cromwell's legacy teaches us that leadership is not simply about wielding power but understanding the multifaceted nature of its impact on society. As you navigate your own path in life, remember that decisions made in the name of progress can evoke admiration or resentment, reflecting the diverse perspectives of those around you. Embrace this complexity; seek to engage with varying viewpoints, and acknowledge the weight of your choices and how they ripple through the lives of others. By cultivating empathy and open dialogue, you can forge a path that honors both your convictions and the diverse tapestry of experiences that shape your community.

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Chapter 8 Summary: Conclusion

Oliver Cromwell's legacy in British history is one of profound complexity and contradiction. His actions and motivations have led to polarized perspectives: on one hand, he is viewed as a military dictator who executed King Charles I and sought power for himself; on the other, he is celebrated as a champion of democratic reforms and a devout Christian, often regarded as a father of British democracy.

1. Public Opinion: Across Britain and Ireland, views on Cromwell vary significantly. Some English citizens hail him as a “great Briton,” while many in Ireland and Scotland see him as a genocidal fanatic responsible for widespread calamity and minimal positive political change. This contrast underscores the regional and historical divergences in interpreting Cromwell's impact.

2. Historical Comparisons: During his lifetime, his adversaries, particularly the Levellers, compared him to Machiavelli—a critique that reflects concerns about his alleged ruthlessness. In stark contrast, poet John Milton lauded Cromwell, referring to him as “our chief of men,” highlighting the dichotomy in how he was perceived based on political and ideological affiliations.

3. Character and Faith: Cromwell's achievements prompt scrutiny of his



character. He exhibited a fierce religious zeal, a trait that mirrored the ruthlessness often attributed to him. As a radical Puritan, he sought to reform society from what he perceived as sinful behavior. His calls for religious tolerance clashed with a deep-seated animosity toward Catholics, leading to brutal military campaigns where many, particularly Irish Catholics, suffered significant fatalities.

4. Interpretative Extremes: No historical figure evokes stronger opinions than Cromwell. He sits at opposite ends of a spectrum, being viewed alternately as a tyrant and a liberator. This gap in interpretation suggests that his life and legacy cannot be encapsulated in a singular narrative; rather, they are multifaceted, akin to a collage where each perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding.

Ultimately, Cromwell's enduring place in history illustrates the complexities of leadership and morality, reminding us that history is seldom black and white. From his contentious decisions to his fervent beliefs, each layer of Cromwell's actions presents an opportunity to reflect on the nature of power, faith, and the interpretations that shape our understanding of the past.

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