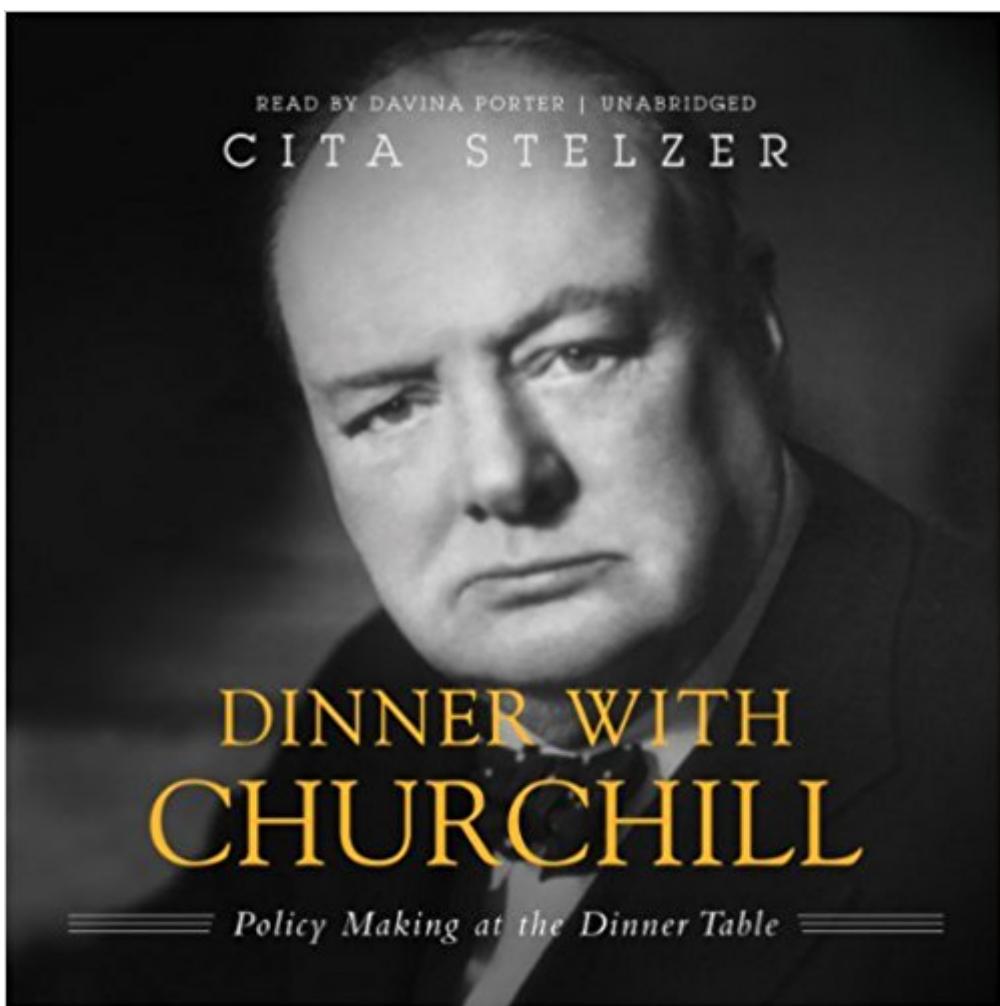


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Dinner With Churchill: Policy-Making At The Dinner Table



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Synopsis

[Read by Davina Porter] In this riveting, informative, and entertaining book, Stelzer draws on previously untapped material, diaries of guests, and a wide variety of other sources to tell of some of the key dinners at which Churchill presided before, during, and after World War II. A friend once said of Churchill: "He is a man of simple tastes; he is quite easily satisfied with the best of everything." But dinners for Churchill were about more than good food, excellent champagnes, and Havana cigars. "Everything" included the opportunity to use the dinner table both as a stage on which to display his brilliant conversational talents, and an intimate setting in which to glean gossip and diplomatic insights and to argue for the many policies he espoused over a long life.

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Customer Reviews

"To Churchill, meals weren't just a matter of getting something to eat. They were social occasions which he used to cement alliances and sway opponents." --(The Wall Street Journal)"These meals, and even white-linen picnics for generals in France after D-Day, are chronicled in *Dinner With Churchill*." --(The New York Times)"A delightful and fascinating book." -- (Andrew Roberts, author of *The Storm of War*)"A delicious tribute to Churchill's heroic appetite for wining, dining, and politicking." --(Ben Macintyre, author of *Operation Mincemeat*)"A feast for foodies and history buffs alike, *Dinner With Churchill* offers a delicious portrait of the culinary tactics that helped Churchill end the global conflict that threatened to destroy everything he held dear." --(The Richmond Times Dispatch)

Cita Stelzer, a freelance journalist and a research associate at the Hudson Institution, previously worked for John Lindsay, mayor of New York, and Governor Hugh Carey. She is currently a reader at Churchill College, Cambridge, and a member of the board of the Churchill Centre and trustee of Wigmore Hall.

Politicians, especially leaders like Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, often seem to live at an Olympian-level, far above day-to-day concerns as they direct great matters of state. But the art of diplomacy on the biggest of issues often depends to a surprising degree on small gestures and quiet, personal connections. Cita Stelzer opens the door to a little-explored aspect of how Churchill used the simple act of dining to achieve political aims. Working to bring the U.S. into the war against Germany, forging an Allied strategy towards the invasion of Europe, and confronting the Soviet Union's post-War ambitions includes, it turns out, careful attention to both maps and menus; to military movements and seating charts. Ms. Stelzer demonstrates that Churchill used all the tools in his arsenal (and all the dinner selections at his disposal) to forge policy and to advance his art of persuasion. We know that Churchill was a great statesman; this portrait demonstrates, as well, that he was a man with whom it would have been delightful to share a meal.

The author's purports to show the importance of Churchill's dinners to his diplomacy, but is somewhat weak in developing this part of the book. On the other hand the book does reveal Churchill's gastronomic taste. Eating, drinking and smoking habits were part of Churchill's persona in his later years. The book covers these areas in great detail. Stelzer keeps pointing out that WSC followed the 19th century manner of formal dining with fancy china and cutlery and multiple courses. All dinners were working dinners, they had a purpose. Stelzer discuss how meticulous WSC was in planning his dinners from menu to sitting placement. He also worked and planned the conversation for the meal almost as much as he did his speeches. The author also emphasizes Churchill's wit and humor along with his impeccable manners. She also states she was surprise to learn that Churchill loved picnics. Stelzer states that WSC liked roast beef, Johnny Walker Red or Black Label whiskey, Pol Rogers champagne, Havana cigars and consommé soups. He liked most foods except he disliked creamed soups. Little new is revealed about Churchill, however, it is well written and lots of entertaining trivia is provided. The book is easy to read and is very enjoyable. Oh, how I would have loved to have been a guest at one of his dinners. I read this as an e-book on my Kindle app for my iPad.

There are hundreds of historical texts that tell us about the meetings at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam with "the big three"...Churchill, FDR and Stalin...but where can one find such juicy (pardon the expression) tidbits on what the leaders dined on and how that may have affected their decisions? The answer is in "Dinner with Churchill", Cita Stelzer's wonderful new book about the gastronomic delights centering around the British leader both before and after the Second World War. Part of my attraction to the book may have been to see if the author really thought Churchill was a sot. It turns out he wasn't so much. Sir Winston drank early, often and regularly but he developed a certain immunity to liquor's effects over the years. After all, he lived to be ninety. But the thrust of the book deals more with what he ate and his likes and dislikes throughout his long tenure in the public eye. Churchill apparently liked "simple fare" but as Ms. Stelzer's points out, what simple fare would be to Churchill would be quite another set of apples to most other people. We learn about his likes....cold meat, new peas, ice cream, for instance, and his dislikes...cream soup, "devilled" chicken and yes, mixed drinks. Most of the book is concerned with Churchill and the war, of course. While meetings and negotiations went on with FDR and Stalin, Churchill found himself playing a variety of roles...with each role diminishing, for the most part, as the war went on. Yet there was the prime minister; dinners, banquets, lunches and all. A nice touch is the author's printing many of the menus that were presented at these affairs. It puts the reader right into the middle of the repasts. And we often discover what these engagements cost. By the way, there's plenty of humor...the "Persian lantern" dessert is a very funny episode. As with any good meal, there must be a fine "dessert" and here, the author includes a terrific chapter on Churchill's cigars and then ends with a list of diners part and parcel to the narrative. "Dinner with Churchill" is an exceptionally fine read. I highly recommend it.

Stelzer had a great idea -- and one that surely marketed well. But the execution of this book was disappointing. The chapters follow a banal formula: brief historical context; arduous travel plans; menu; caveat that Churchill was not a drunk; the Russian send caviar and we are told that Churchill was brilliant (with no examples of his brilliance).

This is an interesting (and important, at least to Churchill) angle on a part of Winston's life. He was the consummate politician, schemer, persuader, and host and he loved to have dinner where he could usually monopolize the conversation and fill the seats with interesting people who might contribute to the conversation and provide an interesting time for all as well as good food and an abundance of drink and cigars or cigarettes. The book is full of menus, which are of great interest, as

well as photographs of the haunts of Churchill in London and many other photographs as he ate his way through three continents and three United States presidents, and, for the most part, enjoyed every bite and sip of it. It is an entertaining book. You don't have to worry about grand strategies, beat off the revisionist historians hostile to WSC or contend with the many who still admire this icon of the 20th century. It is a nice, quick, read.

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