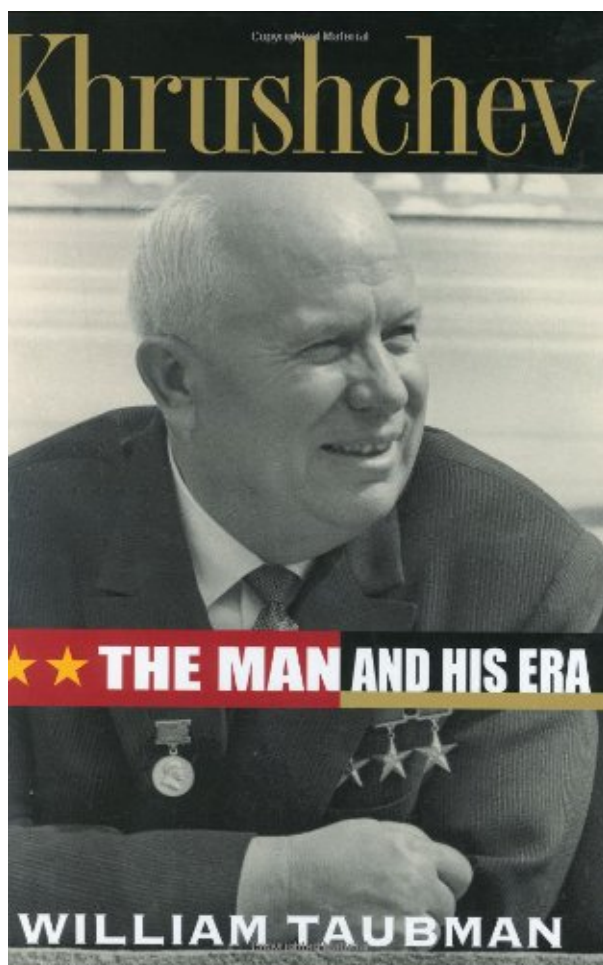
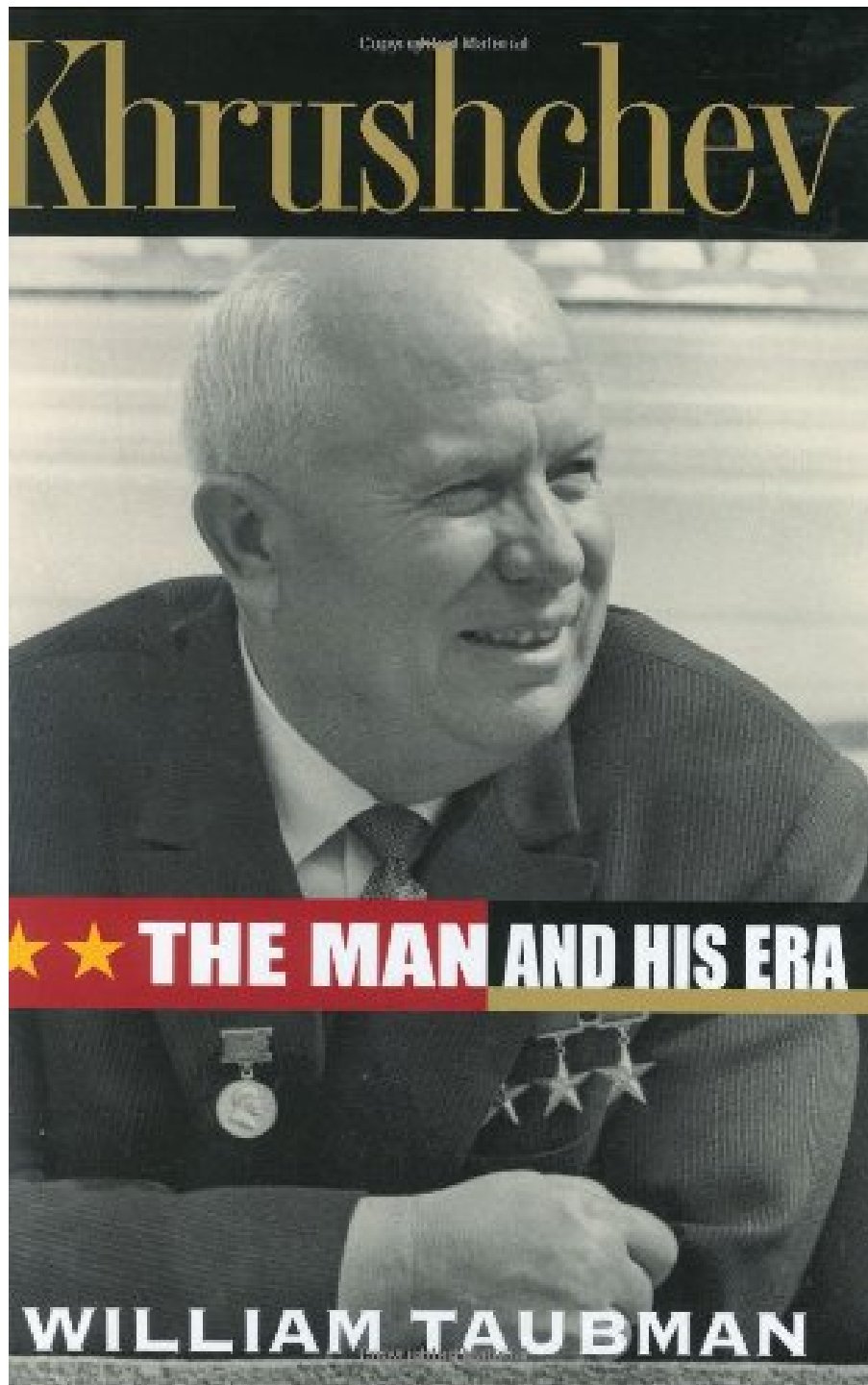


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From Publishers Weekly

Amherst College political science professor Taubman's thorough and nuanced account is the first full-length American biography of Khrushchev-and will likely be the definitive one for a long time. Russians, Taubman explains, are still divided by Khrushchev's legacy, largely because of the great contradiction at the heart of his career: he worked closely with Stalin for nearly 20 years, approved thousands of arrests and executions, and continued to idolize the dictator until the latter's death. Yet it was Khrushchev who publicly revealed the enormity of Stalin's crimes, denounced him, and introduced reforms that, Taubman argues, "allowed a nascent civil society to take shape"-eventually making way for perestroika. Taubman untangles the fascinating layers of deception and self-deception in Khrushchev's own memoir, weighing just how much the leader was likely to have known about the purges and his own culpability in them. He also shows that shadows of Stalinism lingered through Khrushchev's 11 years in power: his fourth-grade education left him both awed and threatened by the Russian intelligentsia, which he persecuted; intending to de-escalate the Cold War, the mercurial, blustering first secretary ended up provoking dangerous standoffs with the U.S. The bumbling, equivocal speeches quoted here make Khrushchev seem a rank amateur in international affairs-or, as Taubman politely puts it, he had trouble "thinking things through." Working closely with Khrushchev's children, and interviewing his surviving top-level Central Committee colleagues and aides, Taubman has pieced together a remarkably detailed chronicle, complete with riveting scenes of Kremlin intrigue and acute psychological analysis that further illuminates some of the nightmarish episodes of Soviet history. 32 pages of photos not seen by PW.

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Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in Biography and the 2004 National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography. The definitive biography of the mercurial Soviet leader who succeeded and denounced Stalin. "The book is a gift, as fascinating as it is important." ?Robert Legvold, Foreign Affairs

Remembered by many as the Soviet leader who banged his shoe at the United Nations, Nikita Khrushchev was in fact one of the most complex and important political figures of the twentieth century. Complicit in terrible Stalinist crimes, he managed to retain his humanity. His daring attempt to reform Communism?by denouncing Stalin and releasing and rehabilitating millions of his victims?prepared the ground for its eventual collapse. His awkward efforts to ease the Cold War triggered its most dangerous crises in Berlin and Cuba. The ruler of the Soviet Union during the first decade after Stalin's death, Khrushchev left his contradictory stamp on his country and the world. More than that, his life and career hold up a mirror to the Soviet age as a whole: revolution, civil war, famine, collectivization, industrialization, terror, world war, cold war, Stalinism, post-Stalinism. The first full and comprehensive biography of Khrushchev, and the first of any Soviet leader to reflect the full range of sources that have become available since the USSR collapsed, this book weaves together Khrushchev's personal triumphs and tragedy with those of his country. It draws on newly opened archives in Russia and Ukraine, the author's visits to places where Khrushchev lived and work, plus extensive interviews with Khrushchev family members, friends, colleagues, subordinates, and diplomats who jostled with him. William Taubman chronicles Khrushchev's life from his humble beginnings in a poor peasant village to his improbable rise into Stalin's inner circle; his stunning, unexpected victory in the deadly duel to succeed Stalin; and the startling reversals of fortune that led to his sudden, ignominious ouster in 1964. Combining a page-turning historical narrative with penetrating political and psychological analysis, this account brims with the life and excitement of a man whose story personifies his era.

"A brilliant, stunning, magnificent book. One of the most important figures of the twentieth century, who had a lot to do with setting the stage for the twenty-first, Khrushchev finally has the biography he deserves?deep and detailed yet fast-paced, scholarly yet not stuffy, historical yet intensely human. Taubman brings Khrushchev alive in all his complexity, capturing both the humanity that somehow survived in him and became the bedrock for his political decency, and the cynicism that made him part of the brutality of the Soviet system. The book has the sweep of a Big Book about a Big Figure, yet its style is no-frills, no-nonsense, straight-from-the-shoulder, with judgments proffered judiciously. Taubman does a superb job of portraying the rogue's gallery of Soviet leaders while providing a colorful canvas of the country and its history. Having spent several years of my own life in Khrushchev's shadow, I couldn't be more admiring of what Taubman has accomplished." ?Strobe Talbott, former U.S. deputy secretary of state, editor and translator of Khrushchev's memoirs "Monumental, definitive, rich in detail. Taubman pulls aside the curtain and shows us both a fascinating man and new facts about Soviet decision making during the most dangerous days of the Cold War. A highly readable, compelling story." ?Anthony Lake, former U.S. national security adviser "The definitive account of Khrushchev's career and personality, this is also a wonderful page-turner about the deadly duel for power in the Kremlin. Altogether it is one of the best books ever written about the Soviet Union." ?Constantine Pleshakov, co-author, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War "Few books in the field of

Cold War history have been as eagerly awaited as William Taubman's biography of Nikita Khrushchev. Reflecting years of research as well as a keen sensitivity to culture, context, and personality, this extraordinary book more than matches the extraordinary character of its subject. It is a superb portrayal of one of the most attractive?but also dangerous?leaders of the twentieth century." ?John Lewis Gaddis, professor of history, Yale University "A portrait unlikely to be surpassed any time soon in either richness or complexity. This volume, with its brisk, enjoyable narrative, succeeds in every sense: sweep, depth, liveliness, color, tempo. Each chapter shines with mastery and authority."?Leon Aron, The New York Times Book Review "Masterful and monumental...one should salute its author for a wonderful achievement....Starting with a juicy subject...Taubman has drawn on a huge body of material, much of it from newly available Soviet sources....He spent nearly twenty years on the book. The result is fun to read, full of insight and more than a little terrifying."?Robert G. Kaiser, Washington Post "Thanks to Taubman, one of the most important figures of the 20th century finally has the biography he deserves....In reconstructing a single paradoxical life, he helps us understand better the complexity of the human condition."?Strobe Talbott, Los Angeles Times Book Review Illustrations, maps, photographs

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#### Features

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

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Excellent Biography

By R. J. Marsella

In Professor Taubman's book Khrushchev emerges as a man rife with contradictions. His rise to power in Stalinist Russia given his humble origins is partly driven by ruthlessness but there is an element of simplicity and almost clownishness that enables him to survive the purges when many of his contemporaries were eliminated.

Post Stalin he displayed a ruthless grasp of power politics with a desire to have the USSR take center stage in World affairs.

The quality of the research and sources required to delve this deeply into his personality is astounding and goes way beyond the historical narrative of events. As an example the account of the Cuban Missile Crisis from the Soviet point of view and Khrushchev's personal involvement is absolutely fascinating.

Overall this is an excellent biography as well as an incredibly detailed view into the inner workings of the Soviet government during the height of the cold war. Highly recommended.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Superb! The Khrushchev that CIA didn't know

By Keith Wheelock

Professor Taubman's magisterial KHRUSHCHEV: THE MAN AND HIS ERA (he waited an additional ten

years to explore newly opened archives and to conduct extensive interviews in Russia that resulted in a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Award) joins John Lewis Gaddis' *THE COLD WAR: A NEW HISTORY* and *WE NOW KNOW: RETHINKING COLD WAR HISTORY* in the "must read" pantheon of Cold War books. Open society Americans were at a major disadvantage in dealing with closed society Soviets. Often the Soviets obtained more 'intelligence' from the New York Times than CIA could glean from its limited covert sources. Taubman illustrates this in his account of the Cuban Missile Crisis:

\* President Kennedy and his Cuban Executive Committee (ExComm) speculated wildly on Khrushchev's strategic thinking behind his 'secret' installation of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Thinking rationally, they presumed that this move was directly linked to Berlin. They also wondered what Khrushchev's fallback plan was, when the U. S. discovered the massive Soviet nuclear and ground troop buildup in Cuba.

They would have been astonished to learn that there was no rational strategic plan. Rather:

\* After Kennedy accepted the Berlin Wall, Khrushchev was convinced "that he could pressure Kennedy again, thus setting the stage for the most explosive Cold War crisis in Cuba;"

\* Khrushchev was convinced that the U. S. was intent on invading Cuba (Defense Minister Malinovsky told him that the United States could destroy Cuba's armed forces in a few days);

\* In April, 1962 Khrushchev said to Malinovsky, in regard to Cuba, "What if we throw a hedgehog down Uncle Sam's pants?;"

\* Khrushchev and Mikoyan were highly sympathetic to the revolutionary spirit of Fidel Castro and, especially, Che Guevara;

\* When his military advisors stated that it was highly probable that the U. S. would discover that 150 ships were carrying 40,000 troops and a bevy of nuclear weapons to Cuba, Khrushchev brushed this aside. "Not thinking through was typical of Khrushchev, especially in his last years of power. But although he lacked a contingency plan, he did have a notion: if the Americans discovered Soviet missiles before they were fully operational, surely he could negotiate himself out of the situation. It was his 'near certainty' that Kennedy would not choose war, according to Adzhubei [his son in law], that made it 'relatively safe' to provoke the U. S. president.

Nuclear war was a near thing as Khrushchev, faced with a resolute President Kennedy, twisted and turned to salvage a modicum of success from his disastrous Hail Mary. This was one of many examples, especially after Khrushchev survived a July, 1957 coup attempt, of his volatility. In a sense, he became almost like Stalin, though without Stalin's strategic patience or bloody terror.

Khrushchev was a survivor of the Stalinist years. Though he may have objected to some of Stalin's actions, he was careful not to anger Stalin. He played a Machiavellian game in which he rose to the top of Stalin's henchmen. After Stalin's death, he managed, within a few years, to eliminate his political enemies and, increasingly, to govern alone.

Westerners could assess him as crude and bizarre. He certainly was embarrassed by his lack of formal education (only four years of school and some technical training). He also demonstrated great bluster and bluff. He often threatened nuclear destruction to Western countries when he had, at most, four deliverable nuclear weapons, and these required hours of pre-launch preparation. His claims of Soviet economic development (surpassing the U. S. economy within a few years) in retrospect appear ludicrous. Likewise, his Virgin Lands agricultural initiative, together with other impulsive Lysenko-inspired agricultural schemes, turned out badly.

Khrushchev was on stage for a critical period of the Cold War. His ego, bluff, and lack of strategic thinking

made him an exasperating opponent for Western Cold War warriors. What was unclear to these warriors was how, cumulatively, Khrushchev's clownish and boorish actions and clear failures (Cuban Missile Crisis, 1960 summit failure, fractured relations with Mao Zedong, food shortages, severe military cuts) led to his ouster in October, 1964.

Professor Taubman's astonishing research and fluid writing style provide extraordinary insight into Khrushchev's life from early years as a steel worker, his survival and success under Stalin, and his roller coaster years in the post-Stalin era. I conclude, after reading this book, that Khrushchev was a severely flawed, but not a 'bad,' man. Amidst his bluster was a sense of humanity. I felt sorry for how he was treated during his final years. I appreciate that Gorbachev spoke approvingly of what Khrushchev accomplished in preparing for a national transition from Stalinist days to what Gorbachev inherited. I find it noteworthy that, in a Russian poll over a decade ago, the only 20th century Russian rulers who were viewed positively were Nicholas II (the last czar) and Khrushchev.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Khrushchev really tried to do good but had to balance against powerful interests constantly scheming ...

By Michael C. Chisick

What a complex and intriguing person. Khrushchev really tried to do good but had to balance against powerful interests constantly scheming against him. Paints a sympathetic portrait of a powerful and significant figure from the 20th century.

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