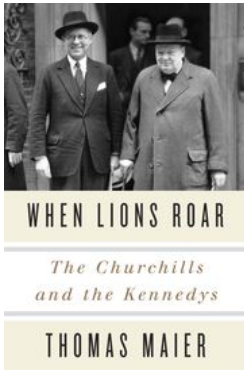


# Joe Kennedy, Churchill star in compelling 'Lions'

Barry Singer , Special for USA TODAY 2:04 p.m. EST November 9, 2014



## When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys

by Thomas Maier  
(Crown)  
in History

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### USA TODAY Rating

It is difficult at this late date to find a new angle on either Winston Churchill or Joseph Kennedy.

Thomas Maier has forged a fresh vantage on these two most-written-about luminaries by literally refracting each man through the other's life. The result is *When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys*, a captivating chronicle of the surprisingly many ways that Winston Churchill and Joseph P. Kennedy (and their progeny) crossed paths (and swords) over the course of the 20th century.

Front and center is the saga of their treacherous diplomatic duel throughout the fateful first year of the Second World War in London. There is Kennedy – the isolationist U.S. ambassador and nominal Nazi appeaser – seeking to keep America out of England's war with Germany by torpedoing Churchill's tenuous standing with Kennedy's boss, Franklin Roosevelt.

And there is Churchill, the newly anointed Prime Minister, decisively outmaneuvering Kennedy, thus guaranteeing England's salvation and the end of Kennedy's political career.

Obviously, this story has been told before. What Maier beautifully factors in is the effect of these struggles on the children. *When Lions Roar* zeroes in on Kennedy's eldest two boys – the doomed, fair-haired Joe, Jr., who echoed all of his father's repugnant views, and the invalid Jack, who ultimately escaped them – pointedly contrasting Kennedy's loving, dutiful, dominated scions with Churchill and his only son, the gifted, yet agonizingly self-destructive Randolph.

Then there is the shadow trail of sex that Maier – the author, after all, of *Masters of Sex: The Life and Times of William Masters and Virginia Johnson* – titillatingly unveils, from the mistresses that Joe Kennedy and Randolph Churchill shared (including Clare Booth Luce), to the infidelities of Randolph's first wife, Pamela, with American envoy Averell Harriman (her future husband) and American newsman Edward R. Murrow, to the affair between Churchill's daughter, Sarah, and Joe Kennedy's replacement as U.S. ambassador, John Winant.

What could be more tangy than a Churchill-Kennedy connection – illicit or otherwise? Maier mines them all. In doing so, he has produced a 700-page tome teeming with Kennedys, Churchills and so many celebrity side-characters.

Standout cameos include plutocrats Bernard Baruch and Max Beaverbrook, who mined their friendships with both Churchill and Kennedy for all that they were worth; novelist Evelyn Waugh, Randolph Churchill's wasp-tongued old school chum; a vividly venal Aristotle Onassis and, of course, Onassis's future wife, Jacqueline.

Laden with significant new research, the book offers up many intriguing tangential revelations about virtually everybody. It also meanders a bit, particularly in a stuttering chronology of the war.

Maier also seems to overreach in sniffing out nefarious financial ties between Churchill and Kennedy during Churchill's "Wilderness Years" of the 1930s. Ultimately, however, he succeeds at what matters most: bringing to life Kennedy and Churchill's fatal differences and fascinating similarities.

*When Lions Roar* is a book of symmetries. Its twin subjects were each self-made successes – Kennedy as the grandson of penniless Irish immigrants, Churchill as the untitled, uninheriting grandson of the Duke of Marlborough. Where Churchill drank scotch, the teetotaling Kennedy made a fortune selling it. Both made enemies as easily as they charmed friends.

Both were dismissed for having poor judgment, but in the end, it was only Kennedy who destroyed himself. World War II rendered Churchill the savior of Western civilization. It left Kennedy with his reputation in ashes.

What separated Joe Kennedy and Winston Churchill in the end? The answer is self-evident: a moral compass. Churchill believed in a greater good – the surpassing value of good versus evil. Kennedy believed only in himself and the expedient power of cash.

### When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys

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3 stars out of four

Barry Singer, author of *Churchill Style: The Art of Being Winston Churchill*, also runs Chartwell Booksellers in New York, which specializes in books by and about Churchill.