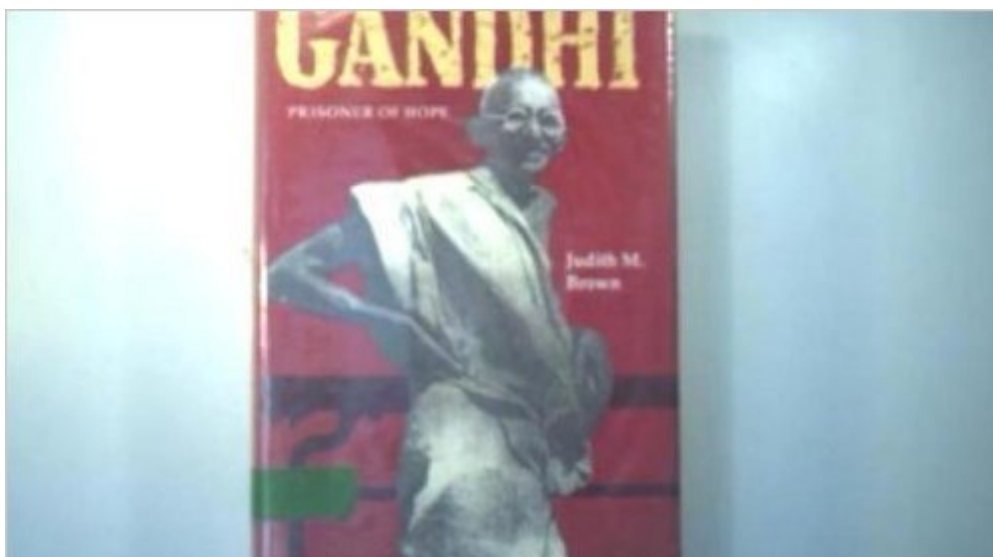


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# Gandhi: Prisoner Of Hope



## Synopsis

The definitive biography of one of this century's most important and controversial figures. Drawing on sources only recently made available, Judith M. Brown sketches a fresh and surprising portrait of Gandhi within the context of his time, in which the Indian leader emerges as neither a plaster saint nor a wily politician, but as a complex man whose actions followed honorably from his convictions. "This is the best biography of Gandhi so far and deserves to be read by everyone interested in him and in modern India." —Bhikhu Parekh, *New Statesman and Society* "Judith Brown has written the most systematic, balanced, and clear biography of Gandhi I have yet seen." —Howard Spodek, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* "In fascinating detail, Brown chronicles the fate of nonviolent tactics in South Africa and, after 1915, in India, where Gandhi now clad in loincloth and sandals quickly became a patriotic hero." —Jim Miller, *Newsweek* "It is a superb book, elegantly written, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to know more about Gandhi as well as the social context which helped to mould him as a man and a politician." —Tariq Ali, *Guardian* "This is as fine an exposition of Gandhi's religious beliefs as we are likely to get. [Brown] has clearly established herself as [Gandhi's] leading interpreter to her generation." —Antony Copley, *History Today* Judith M. Brown is Beit Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth at Oxford University. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gandhi is often remembered simplistically as the champion of non-violent resistance and the

“father of independent India.” There is plenty of truth to this. Like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, he is remembered most for a few signature achievements. But behind these signature achievements there was a highly complex private life, and a career trajectory that was never as simple or smooth as it would seem. Judith Brown’s biography of Gandhi tries to tell this more complex story. It is mainly a story of Gandhi’s public life and the aspects that would later influence his view of Indian affairs: studying law in England as a young man, his early political activism in South Africa, his discovery of higher ideals upon return to India, and finally his influence on the movement for Indian independence. Brown depicts Gandhi as a character of both contradiction and vision, who confronted the most profound questions of the time “in the context of an active public life.” She gives particular emphasis to Gandhi’s personal crisis in the 1920s, which resulted from the failure of non-violence and his diminishing political influence as the leader of Congress. According to Brown, this crisis inspired Gandhi’s transformation from a political activist to a spiritual leader, and ultimately characterized the remainder of his life. His new vision became the transformation of Indian society from the roots upwards in order to create a unified and harmonious India free of British rule. In contrast to the popular memory of Gandhi as the father of independent India, Brown stresses the ways in which he uneasily coexisted with the educated and westernized Indians who led the Indian National Congress. Gandhi’s sympathies lay with the poor, with the masses unable to find representation within the system the British imposed “not with Congress leaders intent on expedient political solutions. Gandhi’s early struggles in convincing Indians of the importance of non-violence, in particular, set him at odds with Congress members, who wished for a more aggressive pursuit of independence. But it also cast him as an all-India public figure capable of commanding mass support, and made him recognizable to all who were politically aware. According to Brown, this charisma became Gandhi’s appeal. His ideals reflected a unique combination of Indian traditionalism and Western idealism. He appealed to both Indians and Western sympathizers, who recognized him as a visionary spiritual leader, aloof from the fray of politics, and this is largely how he is remembered today. The only real weakness of this biography is that it focuses perhaps overmuch on Gandhi’s public life when the reader perhaps wishes for a little more on his controversial personal life (Gandhi did not have such progressive views when it came to the treatment of women, such as his wife, for example). But this is still one of the best biographies of one of the most important figures of modern history.

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