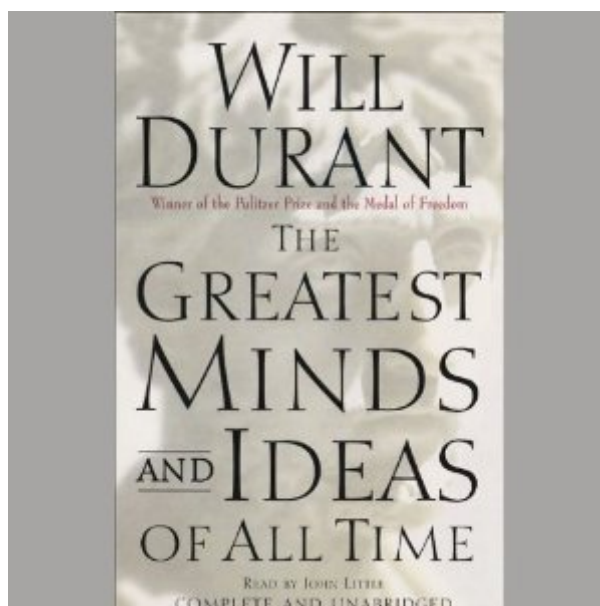


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# The Greatest Minds And Ideas Of All Time



## Synopsis

Over the course of a legendary career, Will Durant was often asked about the most significant events in history, the best books, the best ideas, and so on. *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time* draws on Durant's encyclopedic knowledge to present a world history "best of" that hits humanity's high points. Included are "The Ten Greatest Thinkers," "The Ten Greatest Poets," "The Ten Peaks of Human Progress," "Twelve Vital Dates in World History," as well as engaging profiles of pioneers like Darwin, Keats, and Whitman. This audio edition showcases Durant's eloquence, originality, and his ability to compare and contrast an array of historical figures and achievements.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to more fully develop themselves through self-education. The book is not too heavy-handed with the various subject matter, nor is it written in the stale, esoteric language of an academic. It is a series of papers written by a man of the people for the people, and the passion that Durant has for the material (and the love of knowledge) shines through. This book is a wonderful and concise lesson in history, arts, and sciences, and will help start any one's pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

I just read this book and it is a quick, easy, read. I think this book is an excellent way to develop perspective, either as a high school or college student, or for someone older who wants to more

rigorously develop his or her world-view. The model of this book is a "classical education", along the lines of the recently re-released Harvard 5-foot bookshelf. Most of the people critical of this publication completely missed the point. Many times in the essays Will Durant specifically says that these are merely his opinions, and there are many other educated people out there with different opinions. These essays are intended as a STARTING place to educate yourself and he specifically suggests that you should read further and along your specific lines of interest. (The author also suggests on page 65 that as a college graduate, you might be ready to BEGIN your education with his suggested reading.) Anyone who complains that such-and-such was "rated" ahead of someone else [that they like], or that someone they revere was left off the "top 10" (because most likely they were not left out of the book completely, the author drops a lot of names of people who should be highly considered) just completely didn't understand this book. However, there is one huge problem with this book. I didn't realize it when I started the book (I am not really aware of who Will Durant was) but even though the publication date is 2002, nothing in this book is recent. Actually, Mr. Durant died 25 years ago and I suspect that most or all these essays were written long before then. Unfortunately Mr. Little, the compiler, does not tell us when these essays were written. This becomes painfully obvious when you get to the list of suggested reading. To start off there are a lot of general overview books on history, science (physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, etc.), art, music, psychology and health. I looked most of these books up on and all the ones I saw were close to 75 years old (some had been re-released). I find it completely shocking that a publisher would print such an out-of-date book under the guise of a new publication. I mean, A LOT HAS CHANGED IN 75 YEARS, especially in the sciences. I know that in the last few years specifically there have been some very highly regarded books on the history of Art and on World War I (a glowing but out-of-date suggestion was specifically mentioned on page 80) and Karen Armstrong published several good books on the western religions. One of his suggested readings, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" by Gibbon; might still be relevant even though it is quite old, but I am very suspicious of the rest of the suggested overview readings. There are quite a number of translated works, and for most of them I am sure there are more recent translations. Sometimes he suggests a specific translation, it would be up to you to decide if a more recent translation would be better. That said, presented is an excellent system for "Since we wish to have orderly minds, and avoid the chaos of desultory reading, we shall want to begin at the beginning...we want it in such an order that the knowledge we win may fall into logical sequence in our memories, and give us at last that full perspective which is the source and summit of understanding." Additionally, almost exclusively this book focuses on pre-20th century. I think this is completely understandable and

acceptable, but if you are only interested in the 20th century then this book is not for you. I took two stars off for these out-of-date suggestions, no reference to the actual dates the essays were written and no revised (alternative) suggested reading list. Now it is up to you, the reader, to substitute the suggested readings for modern, up-to-date, versions and start reading.

It's said that good things come in small packages. Sometimes great things do, too. This book may be only 118 pages long, but between these covers you will find reasoned and inspired discussion of some of the people and works who have truly ennobled mankind. Will Durant, in partnership with his wife Ariel, spent his lifetime celebrating our highest and best achievements as a people. His essays on the greatest thinkers, greatest poets, best books, peaks of human progress and vital dates in world history should not only serve as a compact education, it should also fill you with a sense that for all of humanity's folly and waste, we have actually accomplished much that is worthwhile these past few thousand years. It's also very likely this book will spark within you a desire to know and to learn more about our rich heritage. My only wish for this book is that compiler John Little had included the dates these works were originally written. The chapter on the best books for an education, for example, while including many timeless classics, also includes some volumes which have been surpassed by later works--including the Durant's own magisterial lifework, the "Story of Civilization." But this a minor quibble over what is on the whole an exceptional work.--William C. Hall

Heard THE GREATEST MINDS AND IDEAS OF ALL TIME by Will Durant, a best-selling historian and philosopher, who devoted his life to studying human history . . . his efforts earned him a Pulitzer Prize. Although I never read anything by Durant, this work gave me a feel for his writing . . . in addition, it made me realize that though I have spent many years in both undergraduate and graduate education, I should now return to many books that I missed along the way if I want to attain a true liberal arts education. This book is actually a summation of Durant's work . . . it presents a series of somewhat brief essays with titles ranging from "The One Hundred Best Books for an Education" to "The Ten Greatest Thinkers" and including "The Ten Greatest Poets," "The Ten Peaks of Human Progress" and "Twelve Vital Dates in Human History." I particularly liked those dealing with people . . . the ones dealing with dates and events were less interesting. Overall, I'd recommend THE GREATEST MINDS AND IDEAS OF ALL TIME, particularly if you slept in or never took a course in Western Civilization . . . Durant makes the material come alive, particularly when he makes such observations as the following: Confucius was one of the top thinkers. (He then explains why.) You might as well not live until you have heard Bach's work. Balzac is almost as illuminating

as life itself. Miss not a word of Flaubert's MADAM BOVARY. You will marvel at the delicacies of Anatole France. Meander through the 1,700 pages of WAR AND PEACE. Poe is a little bit overrated. Whitman is our only American giant.

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