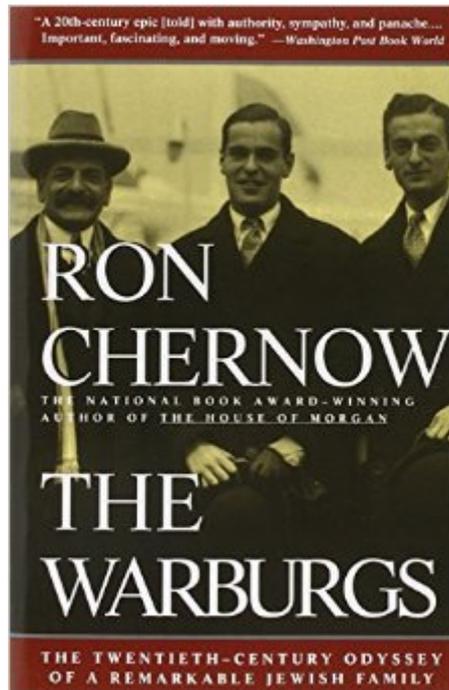


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# The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey Of A Remarkable Jewish Family



## Synopsis

Bankers, philanthropists, scholars, socialites, artists, and politicians, the Warburgs stood at the pinnacle of German (and, later, of German-American) Jewry. They forged economic dynasties, built mansions and estates, assembled libraries, endowed charities, and advised a German kaiser and two American presidents. But their very success made the Warburgs lightning rods for anti-Semitism, and their sense of patriotism became increasingly dangerous in a Germany that had declared Jews the enemy. Ron Chernow's hugely fascinating history is a group portrait of a clan whose members were renowned for their brilliance, culture, and personal energy yet tragically vulnerable to the dark and irrational currents of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ostensibly the study of a remarkable, wealthy dynasty, *The Warburgs* is a monumental history of Europe, the United States, Israel and even Africa. The author manages to faithfully document the lives of these international bankers, nobel prize winning scientists, explorers and philanthropists against some of the most haunting events in human history. That the Warburg family loved their German homeland is indisputable. Even after WWII, some descendents could not resist returning to Hamburg, to see the old estates, to embrace old nannies, employees and to on one occasion, steal back a valuable vase that the Nazi's had appropriated elsewhere. They were passionate German citizens later of course spurned and victimized. From Imperial and then Weimar Germany, the Warburgs were integral to achieving the ends of their leaders; Max Warburg worked tirelessly up until the very end, to secure a peaceful neutralization of Hitler's intention for the Jews. He was

involved in assuring a Dutch purchase of Nyassaland in Northern Mozambique which ultimately played a significant role for Rommel's troops. The family with connections to the Rothschilds, Loeb, Kuhns and others had solid foundations in the U.S. with one Warburg advising Theodore Roosevelt and later, of course, FDR. And logically, from this family where ambivalence toward Judaism was an on-going theme, there were inevitable struggles and betrayals during the seeding and conceptualization of an Israeli sovereign state. The book has many levels of interest- it involves a history of culture and the arts, of Jewish European exodus to the U.S and to Israel, it presents scenes of wealthy Jews celebrating with Christmas trees, of kids attending Anglican schools, and even flirtations with far left and deeply conservative politics.

While less well known than his later biographies of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, this book stands equal to them. Rather than a biography of a single man this is the biography of a most extraordinary family and their impact on banking and the history of the twentieth century. This is a terrific book and one that I recommend without reservation. Chernow tells a very complex story in the tradition of a great novelist, without sacrificing any of the historical details that define the picture of a family whose story mirrors the triumphs and tragedies of the 20th century. The book traces the history of the Warburg family from the 16th century to the 1990's, with the emphasis on the 20th century. The story is told through the biographies of many of its members, focusing on the brothers Aby, Max, Paul, Felix and Fritz, their sons and nephews. Individual chapters cover individuals, interwoven and progressing through the 20th century. There is the scholarly eldest brother, Aby, who exchanged his birthright for the promise of being provided all the books he desired (and created one of the world's greatest private libraries), the next eldest brother Max who autocratically ran the family's Hamburg bank, the next brother Paul who made his mark in the US (providing the banking expertise behind his idea for the US Federal Reserve System), Felix who also made his mark in the US (both as a banker, but even more so as a philanthropist) and on to the youngest Fritz who served in both the Prussian and American Armies, and eventually fought to revive the Warburg position as preeminent Hamburg bankers. The book follows these brothers and their nephew Sigmund who made his mark in the US, in Great Britain (becoming Sir Sigmund) and in Europe after WWII.

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