



Rendezvous With Destiny: How Franklin D. Roosevelt and Five Extraordinary Men Took America Into the War and Into the World

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The remarkable untold story of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the five extraordinary men he used to pull America into World War II

The period between Hitler's invasion of Poland and the attack on Pearl Harbor was the turning point of the twentieth century.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, Americans were eager to isolate themselves from the conflict. Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to help the democracies, but he was hemmed in by congressional and public opposition and frustrated by a lack of information. How could he obtain the intelligence he required when he was trapped in Washington? Distrusting the State Department, he instead sent five men on special diplomatic missions to Europe. Their missions took them into the middle of the war and exposed them to the century's leading figures— and Roosevelt along with them.

First off the mark was Sumner Welles, a chilly patrician who traveled around Europe in the spring of 1940. In summer of that year, after the fall of France, William "Wild Bill" Donovan—war hero and future spymaster—visited an isolated UK at the president's behest to determine whether Britain could hold out against the Nazis. Donovan's report helped convince FDR that the country was worth backing.

After he won an unprecedented third term in November 1940, FDR threw a lifeline to Britain in the form of Lend-Lease and dispatched three men to help secure it. Harry Hopkins, the frail social worker who became the whirling dervish at the center of the New Deal, was sent to explain Lend-Lease to Winston Churchill. Averell Harriman — a handsome, ambitious railroad heir—was charged with delivering the aid to London. Roosevelt even put to work his ruffled, charismatic opponent, Wendell Willkie, whose visit to London was a public relations triumph.

Then, in summer 1941, Hitler ordered the invasion of Russia. Hopkins returned to Britain to confer with Churchill and traveled to Moscow to meet with Joseph Stalin. Hopkins's mission gave Roosevelt the confidence to gamble on aiding the Soviet Union.

Roosevelt's five emissaries are unforgettable characters. Taken together, their missions plot the arc of America's transformation from a reluctant middle power into a global leader. Drawing on vast archival research, historian Michael Fullilove has rescued these men and their missions and given them back to history. At the center of everything, of course, is FDR himself, who moved his envoys around the globe with skill and élan.

Rendezvous with Destiny is narrative history at its most delightful, stirring, and important.

Rendezvous With Destiny: How Franklin D. Roosevelt and Five Extraordinary Men Took America Into the War and Into the World Details

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From Reader Review Rendezvous With Destiny: How Franklin D. Roosevelt and Five Extraordinary Men Took America Into the War and Into the World for online ebook

Brad says

I don't usually read books about the diplomatic endeavours of other countries and found this one by Michael Fullilove to be really good. It took a little while to read and was really all about the beginnings of the Lend Lease program between Britain and the United States. The people involved were varied and different to each other and FDR was an excellent person to play his games. I had thought the book would span most of the war years, but it did not do so. This was something I found to be of interest especially when this in depth research I had not known before between the two nations. Australia was mentioned on several occasions especially through Robert Menzies who was in Britain on occasion and Stanley Bruce as well floated in and out of the pages.

I would recommend the book to anyone. They may like to know more information on Winston Churchill, Sumner Welles, Bill Donovan, Harry Hopkins, Averell Harriman, Wendell Willkie and of course Franklin D Roosevelt or FDR for short.

Bruce says

How nations are brought into war vary from war to war and country to country. This work provides interesting details into how FDR prepared the country for entry into WW II on the side of the Allies. Knowing he faced isolationist and non-interventionists in both parties FDR used special envoys to ascertain the morale and capabilities of the Allies and the assistance they needed. This book covers the five special envoys and their missions. Each had his foibles and special capabilities all of which coalesced to assist FDR in aiding the Allies before US official entry into the war and in preparing the country for war. Anyone with an interest in war and its precursors will find this book a welcome addition to their bookshelves.

Mike Gabor says

An excellently researched and well written book about five men, dispatched by President Roosevelt to Europe from 1939 to 1941, in order to give him a full accounting of the situation there. The men were Sumner Welles, Bill Donovan, Harry Hopkins, Wendel Wilkie and Averill Harriman. The author gives us capsule biographies of all five and a detailed telling of their missions. I was pretty well informed previously of the missions by Donovan, Hopkins and Harriman but still found the retellings quite interesting. As regards to Welles and Wilkie, I found their tales quite informative and educational. I feel this is a very good book for anyone interested in the lead up to WWII.

Grady McCallie says

Michael Fullilove is an Australian foreign policy thinker and writer. In *Rendezvous with Destiny*, Fullilove recounts the missions of five prominent Americans sent abroad by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as his personal envoys between February 1940 and September 1941. During that time, FDR worked to ease a mostly isolationist America into a posture of support for Britain (and, to a much lesser extent, in support of the Soviet Union as well, at least in its opposition to Nazi Germany).

The book will be most useful to three audiences: serious students of US diplomacy who are interested in the lessons to be drawn from FDR's use of personal envoys; graduate students in related fields who need a quick take on US diplomacy in the months of Lend-Lease; and more generally, World War II buffs. The last category is probably the largest in absolute number of readers, and they will enjoy Fullilove's skill at sketching personalities, and his tour of romantic narrative moments: Averrell Harriman and Pamela Churchill beginning an affair during a night of heavy bombing in London; FDR and Winston Churchill celebrating the divine service on board the HMS Prince of Wales during the two leaders' first summit together. Readers in the first two categories can save a good bit of time by merely reading the first and last few pages of each chapter, in which Fullilove offers his assessment of the impacts of FDR's personal diplomacy.

Gregory Bateman says

This is a very well written book which beautifully illuminates the key roles of a handful of individuals from the United States each of whom, in his role as a "personal representative" of President Roosevelt, helped shape the destiny of Western democracies as Nazi Germany took control of Europe and seemed ready to invade the United Kingdom. One of the many strengths of this book is that it provides a very good picture of the character of these five individuals. Their interactions with Churchill enabled Roosevelt to understand whether the UK would survive, and that Churchill was an extraordinary leader of a people who were determined to fight - but they urgently needed weapons and food. In the case of Harry Hopkins, his meetings with Churchill, and later Stalin as Germany advanced towards Moscow, are compelling and valuable to read. A superb book.

Lisa says

Every eye in the room in the small Scottish town filled with tears when Harry Hopkins said: 'Whither thou goest, I shall go...' The charming Harry Hopkins was one of the five envoys who President Roosevelt sent to Europe in the lead-up to the Second World War. This enthralling book by the Australian author, Michael Fullilove tells their stories.

There was the endearing Harry Hopkins, who had to be dressed properly by the valet at the prestigious Savoy Hotel, 'wild' Bill Donovan, patrician Sumner Welles, aristocratic Averill Harimman and generous and big-hearted Republican Wendell Wilkie. They all played their different parts, reporting to the President about the state of British and European defences and advocating for Lend-Lease.

My favourite was Harry Hopkins, with his battered Hamburg hat. He managed to charm both Churchill and the terrifying Stalin, and acted as their go-between with the President. Sickly and frail, Hopkins died in his 50s. His nurse was surprised when his family received messages of sympathy from Churchill, Stalin and the U.S. President! I have a sneaking idea that he is also the author's favourite, and I'd love to read more about

him. Perhaps Fullilove could write a biography of him now?

Rendezvous with Destiny is thoroughly-researched, but it is also full of moving anecdotes and interesting characters, such as Pamela Harriman. I also liked Fullilove's inclusion of anecdotes about Australians. For example, Harriman said that he had an Australian crew when he was flying back to England from the Middle East '...and they're not afraid of anything!'

Posted by Viola at 6:57 PM No comments:

Judy says

A very personal, well written history of how FDR got the information he needed to chart his course re WWII and our entry into the war on the side of Great Britain and Russia. It pulls from diaries, letters and personal accounts of this period, focusing on the men FDR used as his personal envoys since he didn't trust the State Department or some of his own ambassadors. He wanted a personal assessment of both Churchill and Stalin and about the commitment of the people of Great Britain and Russia to fight Hitler. He was already pre-disposed to lend US aid but he needed personal assurances that this would be the right use of American industrial and military power.

The book is too long and repetitive in places. But the focus is at eye level rather than bird's eye. Many historical accounts try to cover great swaths of history while this one focuses very narrowly and as a result feels more intimate. He describes the trips these five men made in quite a bit of detail (almost too much) so the real feel of being in wartime London came through clearly. I liked it.

No, it does not deal with the supposed conspiracy on FDR's part to "allow" the raid on Pearl Harbor and in fact seems, with only one small mention, to dismiss this idea entirely. The focus is almost entirely on the Atlantic.

Joshua Taylor says

Rarely do I give anything full marks, but after careful consideration I've decided the value and insight offered by Fullilove's WWII entry warrant a 5 out of 5. It is rare with a topic as heavily-covered as World War II to find something that provides a great deal of insight into a vital but rather obscure corner of the history. This book does just that by shedding light on the personal envoys that Roosevelt used to build bridges first with Churchill in Britain and then Stalin in the USSR. While the book details missions conducted by five men for Roosevelt, it is clear that Harry Hopkins is the star performer. There is a wealth of new information for even well-informed WWII aficionados in this book - well worth a read.

Ian says

I like how the author carefully distilled the reams of information that must exist on these five extraordinary presidential envoys to create a compact, easy-to-read history of the two years President Roosevelt inched the US into WWII. I became curious about Harry Hopkins and Averell Harriman after reading Churchill's WWII volumes, and this was a perfect supplementary introduction to those two men, along with Sumner Welles, Bill Donovan, and Wendell Wilkie, all of whom Roosevelt sent sniffing out the situation in the early days of

the war when Britain, and eventually the Soviet Union, stood alone while the United States wavered.

The book is tightly focused on the years 1940-41 and the creation and early implementation of Lend-Lease, so readers looking for a more extensive WWII history may be disappointed, but they can find many other suitable volumes to fill out their knowledge on the whole, complex picture.

Courtney Smith Atkins says

Do you play trivia very much? Are you able to retain interesting facts easily? This is the book for you! I don't play trivia and always like to think I can retain these interesting tidbits but never seem to! This book was too long for me and lost my interest. I couldn't wait to be done. I do feel a splash smarter and can see how those that love FDR (did you know he slept on a cot?) would love this book.

charlie says

Astounding and original work of history. This book chronicles the United States ramp up to ww2 by tracing the endeavors of a series of FDR's envoys whom he sent to Europe between the nazi invasion of Poland and Pearl Harbor to gather as much information as possible before leading a very reluctant nation back into war. Much of the stories in here have never been told, culled from personal papers of the envoys locked up in archives and attics.

The biggest hero (and I don't use that word lightly) in this telling of the story is by far Harry Hopkins, a man on borrowed time, dying of stomach cancer, who taxed his body to unfathomable lengths for these two years traveling back and forth from Russia (to evaluate Stalin) to England (to gauge the strength of Churchill) to DC to pour the glue that eventually formed the Union of the Allies. His exploits alone make this book a riveting ... and unique... read.

Peter Bono says

This book is well written and a quick read. Author Michael Fullilove describes the five men Franklin Roosevelt appointed as his personal envoys to England, Soviet Russia and pre-war Nazi Germany before the entry of the U.S. into WW2.

A quick bio is also given about each man. Sumner Welles, Bill Donovan, Harry Hopkins, Wendell Willkie and Averell Harriman. The book goes into each man's mission, their observations and reports to the President.

A plus is the thinking of FDR and why he chose each man for their task. Also some of the correspondence between FDR and Churchill ---and Stalin. Special attention is given to a poem FDR sent to Churchill titled "Ship of State" in 1941 FDR chose it to bolster Churchill during the blitz period. Churchill was so moved he read it in a radio address to the English People. Of all the five envoys most attention is given to Harry Hopkins and rightfully so. I was so impressed with Hopkins that I will research for a good bio just on him. I recommend this book with 4 stars, I wished it didnt end

Jerome says

This book deals almost entirely of the diplomatic exchanges between England and America and the events between 1939 and 1941 which led to America becoming involved in what would become WW2. It goes into quite a bit of detail about the background and politics of the the five men Roosevelt depended on to bring about our involvement, which makes it an interesting read for those interested in the history of that era, as well, of course, W. Churchill.

That being said, I felt it got a bit bogged down from time to time with more details than I really wanted or needed to know. The book also totally neglects the far east and the troubles brewing between Japan and the U.S., hardly mentioning Japan, China etc. That was a bit of a let down for me. As a history book it was a bit too narrow in scope.

Michael says

This book covers the foreign policy of the Roosevelt Administration between the start of WWII in September 1939 and our joining the war in December of 1941. During this time FDR sent various envoys such as Wendell Willkie, Harry Hopkins, and Sumner Wells to Europe to both try to help broker an end to the war and, failing that, to prepare both the Allies and the American people for our joining the war. FDR's men were amazing. The story of Sumner Wells is my favorite. Wells was sent to meet with both Mussolini and Hitler. He came away feeling that peace with the Axis was probably impossible and that the US must be prepared to join in the effort to defeat them. Wells was a man of foresight and vision. Sadly, his career was cut short a few months after his return to America when his homosexuality became known by his political enemies. Like the great British scientist Alan Turing, a great man was lost to the insane bigotry of the era.

On a more light-hearted note, Wells stayed at the Hotel Adlon during his stay in Berlin. Fullilove describes the Adlon as "The grandest hotel in Berlin." My wife and I visited the Adlon when we were in Berlin a few years ago. It was amazing to be in a place so central to the history of the mid 20th century. What was even more amazing was the soup at the hotel restaurant. Seriously. I'm not kidding about that soup.

Donna says

A very concentrated narrative about FDR's personally chosen envoys to monitor and be his spokesman to Churchill and Stalin before the start of the US entry to WW II.

Sumner Welles, William "Wild Bill" Donovan, Harry Hopkins, Averell Harriman, and Wendell Willkie were the non-official people he trusted.

I would say this was the best book for me that explained how FDR got around Congress and public opinion to assist Britain and Russia. He knew the US had to enter the war, but the isolationists (Congress & the public opinion) were against. FDR and his envoy's worked the Lend Lease plan as his way to aid Britain.

I was quite impressed with FDR's initiative as well as everyone's contributions. This was very informative

and had lots of personal details. For some it might be too much, I felt I was right there listening to the conversations.

This takes you up to the Japanese invasion. There is a follow up as to what happens to the chosen 5. Very surprising to me was how the Hopkins & Roosevelt's relationship turned out.
