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Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, And America's Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941



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Synopsis

At the center of the debate over American intervention in World War II stood the two most famous men in America: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who championed the interventionist cause, and aviator Charles Lindbergh, who as unofficial leader and spokesman for America's isolationists emerged as the president's most formidable adversary. Their contest of wills personified the divisions within the country at large, and Lynne Olson makes masterly use of their dramatic personal stories to create a poignant and riveting narrative. While FDR, buffeted by political pressures on all sides, struggled to marshal public support for aid to Winston Churchill's Britain, Lindbergh saw his heroic reputation besmirched-and his marriage thrown into turmoil-by allegations that he was a Nazi sympathizer. Spanning the years 1939 to 1941, Those Angry Days vividly re-creates the rancorous internal squabbles that gripped the United States in the period leading up to Pearl Harbor. After Germany vanquished most of Europe, America found itself torn between its traditional isolationism and the urgent need to come to the aid of Britain, the only country still battling Hitler. The conflict over intervention was, as FDR noted, "a dirty fight," rife with chicanery and intrigue, and Those Angry Days recounts every bruising detail. In Washington, a group of high-ranking military officers, including the Air Force chief of staff, worked to sabotage FDR's pro-British policies. Roosevelt, meanwhile, authorized FBI wiretaps of Lindbergh and other opponents of intervention. At the same time, a covert British operation, approved by the president, spied on antiwar groups, dug up dirt on congressional isolationists, and planted propaganda in U.S. newspapers. The stakes could not have been higher. The combatants were larger than life. With the immediacy of a great novel, Those Angry Days brilliantly recalls a time fraught with danger when the future of democracy and America's role in the world hung in the balance.

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Customer Reviews

This book deals with the full throated debate that involved the nation prior to itsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ entrance into World War II. It deals with a little known group named America First that existed prior to the Second World War. America First, is a term which has only recently become known again in politics as a slogan for the Trump Campaign. However, avid historians, both amateur and professional are familiar with the sloganÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s initial iteration in the 1930Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s as the name of that group, which started out as an isolationist group that initially, was all about keeping America or the U.S. out of World War II. At itsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ center are two towering figures of the 1930Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s, Charles Lindberg, the Lone Eagle Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ the first man who crossed the Atlantic ocean in an airplane, and FDR, president of the United States. Charles Lindberg was on one side, that of the isolationists, which was a strain of politics, beliefs, nativism and inward looking, that has always existed in this country to varying degrees and fervor, and FDR was on the other side which could only be called the internationalist wing of politics, looking, testing the winds of public opinion, and trying to find a way to bring the country to the aid of the embattled anti-Fascist European countries. The arguments over whether to enter the war was surrounded by controversy and the arguments separated families, newspapers, towns, and colleges all throughout America. It even separated the political parties into various factions. They in turn were surrounded by a vivid cast of characters that seems to include everyone who was anyone at the time, and quite a few people who would later in the century go on to become someone.This includes Father Coughlin and the anti-Semitic people who followed him and listened to his radio program. These people would later become big followers of the America First groups through itsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ local chapters, turning it from a simple isolationist group that advocated staying out of WWII into a group which became more known for itsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ anti-Semitic rhetoric and the brawls that occurred outside of isolationist rallies. In addition to Charles Lindberg, his wife Anne Morrow Lindberg, her family who were ardent internationalists also appear. Her father had been ambassador to Mexico and her sister was married to an Englishman whose friends included many people who hoped to bring in the U.S. into WWII, on the side of the British. The author of the childrenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s classic, The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupery, a pilot for the Free French also makes an appearance shortly before his disappearance as does Henry Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“HapÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Arnold, the Air Force Chief of Staff, Harold Stark, Chief of

Naval Operations, George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Truman Smith, an anti-Roosevelt critic, who was also an active duty military officer and the top army analyst in Germany for Marshall, and Alfred Wedemeyer, who would rise to become deputy Army Chief of Staff , and the man who created the Victory program of planning for the amount of arms, men, and materiel such as guns, bullets, blankets and food that would be needed to invade Europe. Wedemeyer had attended the prestigious German Staff College, the Kriegsacademie, but he was also an ardent isolationist. Many people who were also ardent interventionists, such as Grenville Clark make an appearance. Clark, a Manhattan attorney, architect of the draft and was a member of the Century Group, a group that was intended to counter balance the America First Group also make an appearance which was full of many people who were then influential, including many newspaper publishers.Many people who would later become famous also make an appearance, such as Sargent Shriver, who would go on to head the brand new Peace Corps under John F. Kennedy- he later quipped that they thought the Peace Corps would be a failure and didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t want the bad reputation, and Kingman Brewer who would go on to become the president of Yale and later on ambassador to the Court of Saint James, (Ambassador to the United Kingdom). They had been fervent members of the America First Chapters at their respective colleges. Even appearing are some early feminists such as Helen Reid, publisher of the New York Herald Tribune and Time and Life Magazine publisher Henry Luce.Also making an appearance are a class of people who were some of the biggest movers and shakers of the time, and as a result were very famous then, but are now largely ignored- newspaper publishers. In a time, before Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Friendster, Myspace or any other sort of social media, where the media was only radio and newspapers and not social, newspaper publishers had outsized influence on the political life of the country, in a way that would seem strange now. Imagine a time when Kim Kardashian having a column in the daily living pages and people looking to her for advice about whether or not to go to war. Their opinion columns and who they backed for president and what they thought should be done in foreign policy carried far more weight than they do today for reasons which are understandable once you stop and look at them. Today, we have a veritable smorgasbord of cable TV channels, online websites and AM and FM radio.In the late 1930s media was largely limited to newspapers, and a weekly photography magazine, called LIFE. This combined with the then new media of radio were it where media was concerned.. Hence the appearance of newspaper publishers in Chicago(the Chicago Daily Tribune and the Chicago Daily News), Kentucky (The Louisville Courier Journal), New York (Daily News, New Yorker, Evening World, Herald Tribune, New York Post, the New York Times, the New York Tribune, and the New

York World), Michigan (the Dearborn Independent), the Army and Navy Journal, the Atlantic Monthly, Time, the Christian Science Monitor, Foreign Affairs, the Scripps Howard newspaper chain, even the Harvard Crimson, and the appearance of the publisher of LIFE magazine.People who are also familiar with U.S. politics will also spot familiar figures such as Wendell Willkie, the Republican nominee for the 1940 election and long-time Congressman Claude Pepper to name just a few. However also making an appearance because she was a big backer of him and was instrumental in his entering the race is WilkieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s mistress. His wife, also makes an appearance but only because she is not on the campaign trail, but back at home. In fact, WilkieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s mistress campaigned with him, a fact that would make modern day politicians green with envy. The chief thing to note is that no newspaper reporter bothered to point out that the woman who was campaigning with Wilkie was his mistress and not his wife. Newspaper reporters had long known about WilkieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s relationship, but had left it out of their newspapers- another thing which would make modern day politicians green with envy. In short, everyone who was anyone appears in this book.All of this narration is brought together by the skillful use of the newspaper articles from around the entire country and books of the time because so much of the politics was local American politics, and writers at the time were frequently in the forefront of this momentous debate. The end result is a unique slice of life about a time in this countryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s history that has disappeared, a lengthy debate about a momentous decision the country was about to make, shortly before this country stepped onto the international stage. In less skillful hands, this sort of storytelling could and would have become very boring or become overwhelming.

"Those Angry Days" is a very informative and well written history of the debate between interventionists and isolationists in the US from the beginning of WWII through Pearl Harbor. The premise of the book is to examine the debate in large part through the eyes of FDR vs. Charles Lindberg - who became a leading proponent of isolationism. Olson does however also cover the other major players, particularly the isolationists other than Lindberg who have more or less faded away from our collective historical narrative after Pearl Harbor. World events from the mid 30s to the mid 40s are so crammed with events, characters and issues, that it can be difficult to present readable history. Olson succeeds by taking a small bite of the events and thoroughly examining it.I was surprised there was not more about Ambassador Joseph Kennedy - a noted isolationist/appeaser who was limited to an almost cameo role in the book - or about the role of the Moscow directed CPUSA which was isolationist from the time on the German-USSR

non-aggression pact and then quickly changed its stance when Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941.All in all - a good read. Nothing really new to anyone familiar with the history (unlike the characters the reader knows 12-7-41 is coming) , but a lot of well researched, well presented details of the events and people to fill to narrative.

- of a time obscured by mythology, as history tends to be. Lynne Olson breathes life into a period remembered only for its flag-waving unity, reminding us that dissent has raised uncomfortable issues in every war the US has fought. Olson goes behind the victor’s myth of 1930s anti-war dissidents as a collection of fascists, anti-Semites, appeasers and collaborators, showing that public figures and private citizens from across the political spectrum had doubts as to the wisdom and necessity of again girding for combat to refight the last "war to end all wars" that, allegedly, had already made the US - if not the world - safe for democracy. Thus dissent is not the deviance from tradition so often imagined after 1945, when other voices had been effectively drowned and purged from consciousness. Later generations are not the daring innovators they imagine.Olson focuses on the personae of Charles A. Lindbergh and President Roosevelt as protagonists for this ideological civil war; but does not neglect the broader causes and concerns of which these men were reflections. In doing so she reveals the unconscious Eurocentrism - a politer term than racism - that undergird the prowar as well as the "appeaser" schools. When Britain was finally attacked bloody outrage was the order of the day in official US circles. With unceasing assistance from British propaganda efforts the drumbeat for intervention became deafening, finally dragging an initially reluctant public into supporting the Ivy League demand to "do something." If the US man in the street could shrug off Hitler’s Jim Crowing of Jews and crushing Reds, attacking "our friend and ally" - people "just like us" - could not be allowed. Yet parallel and preceding the German war on Britain was Japan’s war in East Asia: Japanese atrocities in China were what one expected of "Asiatic barbarians" and were low on the radar. Let such things happen to Europeans, however, and the line has been crossed. Ironically, it was Japan that proved the immediate threat to US interests. Berlin could only be reached from Pearl Harbor.Ironic, too, is that in finally creating a pro-war consensus the liberal internationalism of FDR was immediately lost. The political opportunism of much of the pro and ant-war rhetoric is revealed as "fascists" were now converted into democratic interventionists eager to continue fighting new enemies at large. Thus did "the good war" blend immediately into cold war, and now into ceaseless wars on "terror." This is the lasting legacy of the "Angry Days." The world is undoubtedly a better place with Hitler’s Reich reduced to memory. But victors have a way of indirectly losing their wars beside the defeated, and such was the case after

1945.But if postwar post mortems leave the triumphalism of 1945 clouded in holocaust, radioactivity, and nuclear proliferation, it is Charles Lindbergh who ironically comes out the better for it. For all of his semi-Nazi ravings of the 1930s, in late life he could write "I have seen the science I worshiped and the aircraft I loved destroying the civilization I expected them to save

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