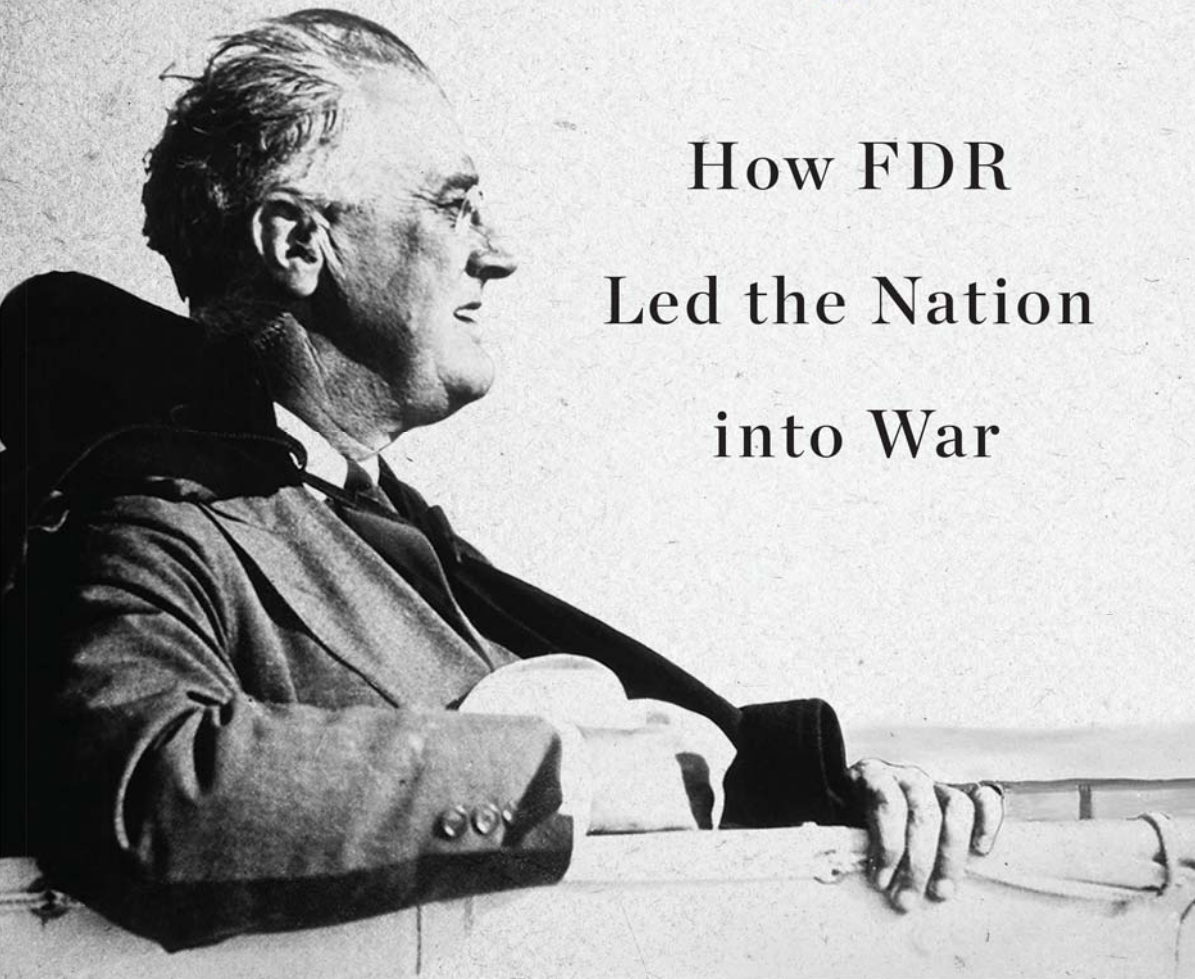


DAVID KAISER

No End Save
Victory

How FDR
Led the Nation
into War



No End Save Victory

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How FDR
LED THE NATION
INTO WAR

DAVID KAISER

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“War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth.”

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

“There were giants in the earth in those days.”

Genesis 6:4

CONTENTS

| | |
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| <i>Introduction: A Generation, a Man, a Moment</i> | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: Civilization Under Threat, May 1940 | 19 |
| CHAPTER 2: Arms and Politics, May–August 1940 | 57 |
| CHAPTER 3: The Growing Threat of World War, June–September 1940 | 97 |
| CHAPTER 4: Reelection and Reassessment, October 1940–January 1941 | 125 |
| CHAPTER 5: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back, January–May 1941 | 163 |
| CHAPTER 6: Enlisting the Nation, January–June 1941 | 205 |
| CHAPTER 7: Toward World War, June–August 1941 | 233 |
| CHAPTER 8: Planning for Victory, August–November 1941 | 267 |
| CHAPTER 9: To Pearl Harbor, October–December 1941 | 307 |
| <i>Epilogue: Generations in Crisis</i> | 335 |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | 343 |
| <i>Notes</i> | 347 |
| <i>Index</i> | 389 |

INTRODUCTION

A Generation, a Man, a Moment

“THIS GENERATION,” FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT TOLD THE DEMOCRATIC convention of 1936, “has a rendezvous with destiny.” By “this generation” he presumably meant his own. But in words much less often quoted, he elaborated on the nature of the challenge that the country faced, involving not only its own future but the future of the whole civilized world. “In this world of ours in other lands,” he said, “there are some people, who, in times past, have lived and fought for freedom, and seem to have grown too weary to carry on the fight. . . . They have yielded their democracy. I believe in my heart that only our success can stir their ancient hope. They begin to know that here in America we are waging a great and successful war. . . . We are fighting to save a great and precious form of government for ourselves and for the world.”¹ Four years later, after German victories in Europe that threatened the invasion and defeat of Great Britain, Roosevelt and the nation had to prepare to defend democracy actively by force. Thanks to FDR, the United States from May 1940 until December 1941 declared and prepared to meet an even greater objective: the total defeat of both Germany and its ally Japan. Although much of the nation and the U.S. Army and Navy would have been content simply to defend the western hemisphere, Roosevelt in the second half of 1941 insisted on planning for total victory, in order to make sure that democracy would not only survive, but prevail. His brilliant leadership crowned that effort with success.

Mankind must often revisit history in light of new experiences and new insights. In the last twenty years, a new perspective has allowed us to

understand the nature of the crisis the United States and the industrialized world faced in the 1930s and 1940s, and to appreciate Franklin Roosevelt's extraordinary insight into the role of his own generation in deciding the fate of the nation and the world for decades to come. The last two centuries of Western history had been marked roughly every eighty years by crises that had destroyed an old order and created a new one. Each crisis had given way to an era of stability, during which a uniquely favored generation of young people had been born. During their childhood they had time to think; in their young adulthood, a secure society allowed them to give vent to their feelings. William Strauss and Neil Howe, the historians who identified the eighty-year cycle, have characterized each of these successive generations as Prophet generations. To them had fallen the task, first, of undermining and destroying the political, social, economic, and international order their grandparents and parents had created, and then of leaving something different behind that would once again endure for decades. Roosevelt, who saw himself above all as the embodiment of broad historical forces, showed both in his acceptance speech and on many later occasions that he understood both the nature of this process and the stakes in his own era. More than once, he explicitly compared his own time to that of the American Revolution and the Civil War, and his 1936 convention acceptance speech was the first of many occasions on which he assumed the mission of preserving democracy for the good of the whole world.²

The first great crisis of American and Western European life had taken place roughly from 1774 through 1803 and had turned above all on the clash between the Enlightenment doctrines of equality and the rights of man, on the one hand, and traditional authority on the other. That crisis had radically different results in different nations. In the United States it gave birth to modern democracy. In Britain, it led to the strengthening of older institutions such as the monarchy and the Church of England and to a severe setback for the lot of the common man. In much of continental Europe, it created authoritarian, bureaucratic governments whose citizens enjoyed equality before the law without any direct influence on their rulers. Slavery in the southern states was, of course, a feature of the new American republic, but one that the Constitution spoke of as little as possible (and never explicitly), and one that many of the Founders had hoped would disappear. When slavery first became a controversial national issue in 1820 on the occasion of the Missouri Compromise, the surviving

Founding Father Thomas Jefferson saw the shape of the future clearly. “I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776, to acquire self-government and happiness to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons,” he wrote. Forty years later his prophecy came true.³

The Transcendental generation, the first American generation born under the Constitution (approximately 1792–1821), saw slavery and the future very differently. Southern Transcendentals lauded slavery as a positive good that needed to be expanded, while many northern Transcendentals identified it as a terrible evil that must be excised from the body politic like a cancer. Each rated the success of their cause, slavery or abolition, far more highly than the preservation of the Constitution or the Union. The issue of slavery grew in importance along with their own rise in power and influence. Even as a young man, Abraham Lincoln, the greatest of all Transcendentals, understood his generation’s historical role to an almost uncanny degree. He posed the problem in an address to the Springfield, Illinois, Lyceum in 1838, at the age of only twenty-eight, after recapitulating the achievements of the Founding Fathers. New men of ambition, he said, would now inevitably arise. “And, when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion, as others have so done before them. The question then, is, can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it cannot. . . . Towering genius . . . thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen.”

Twenty-three years later it fell to Lincoln to lead the Union in its attempt to preserve itself and to restrict and, later, to abolish slavery. From his first inaugural address onward he cast the struggle as an attempt to show that democratic government could survive against armed insurrection—and in so doing, he made the northern cause the cause of democrats across the Atlantic in Europe, where the elite generally favored their fellow aristocrats, the southerners. The Union victory had tremendous consequences in Europe. Only Italy in 1865 elected a legislature through universal male suffrage, but within two more years Germany did so as well, and Britain had broadened its franchise. France became a republic based on universal male suffrage in 1871. Political democracy was one of the main achievements of the nineteenth-century crisis of the Atlantic World.

Yet it was not the only one. In the United States the years following the Civil War unleashed powerful new economic forces, while political authority and civic spirit declined. The triumphant Republican Party stood not only for emancipation, but also for high tariffs, unregulated national banks, and frenzied railroad development. In the South, the white aristocracy spent the first two postwar decades restoring white supremacy through terror. Big city machines stole millions from the taxpayers, and public services were often disgracefully poor. Extremes of wealth and poverty had never been greater. Serious financial crises occurred at least once in every decade. The political climate reached new heights of anti-intellectualism.

Into this world came a new postwar generation, now known as the Missionary generation, born roughly from 1863 to 1884. Like the Transcendentals on the one hand and the post-Second World War Boom generation on the other, the Missionary generation grew up in rebellion against the world around them. In their case, however, that meant seeking to impose order on chaos, to bring a scientific spirit to public affairs, to provide a more decent life for all, and to restore some vitality to democracy. They wanted new institutions to increase human happiness—institutions based, crucially, on a mixture of science and high moral purpose. In their twenties they, like the Boomers of the 1960s, produced an impressive cadre of young revolutionaries and agitating writers such as Emma Goldman, Upton Sinclair, the Wobblies or International Workers of the World, and Lincoln Steffens. “If bad institutions and bad men can be got rid of only by killing them, then the killing must be done,” wrote newspaper editor William Randolph Hearst not long before the assassination of President McKinley. Thousands of educated youth joined the settlement house movement, including such future stalwarts of the Franklin Roosevelt cabinet as Frances Perkins and Harold Ickes. The Missionaries also produced the first generation of black Americans unreservedly committed to racial equality, led by Harvard graduate W. E. B. Du Bois, and the shock troops of the women’s suffrage movement. But as they reached their forties in the first decade of the twentieth century, many found a new home in the reform movements of the Progressive era.

Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson belonged to an earlier generation. Both had childhood memories of the Civil War, and both favored a more conciliatory approach to politics than younger Missionaries. They were, however, the great inspiration to the

progressives of the younger generation, and the first modern Presidents to embrace the idea that the government must work actively to moderate extremes of wealth, improve the lives of average citizens, and curb the excesses of the free market. They also introduced another aspect of the Missionary spirit, activism in foreign affairs. That led Roosevelt to imperialism in the Caribbean—also justified by the need to bring order out of chaos, partly by enforcing the contracts on which some governments had defaulted—and Wilson to his active defense of neutral rights and attempts to promote peace in the early stages of the Great War in Europe. When the German Empire trampled on Wilson's principles by declaring unrestricted submarine warfare early in 1917, the President joined the war. He did so to make the world safe for democracy—and eventually, to try to extend the rule of law to international affairs through the new League of Nations. All of this aroused intense opposition in certain circles. Missionaries like the historian Charles Beard and domestic progressive politicians like Senators George Norris of Nebraska, Hiram Johnson of California, and William Borah of Idaho regarded imperialism as a betrayal of ideals of justice and militarism as a threat to American democracy. And indeed, their opposition to the war, along with bitter Republican partisanship, led in 1920 to the final rejection of the Versailles Treaty and the end of Wilson's dreams. A decade of reaction followed.

This was the world into which Franklin Roosevelt was born in January 1882, the only child of a wealthy Hudson Valley aristocrat, James Roosevelt, and his much younger second wife, Sarah Delano. The apple of his parents' eye, he had a truly idyllic childhood, traveling frequently to Europe, vacationing at Campobello in Canada, and all the while surrounded by devoted relatives from two famous families, horses, ship models, and the Hudson Valley countryside. Roosevelt witnessed the death of a cousin by fire when he was only two years old, watched his parents sit out a violent Atlantic storm that nearly sank their ship a year later, and learned the art of maintaining a sunny disposition in the face of almost any circumstances. His father was a prominent New York Democrat, and in 1887, on a family visit to Washington, Franklin, age five, met President Grover Cleveland in the White House. In the next decade, as a teenager, he watched his distant cousin Theodore Roosevelt ascend through the political ranks, first as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, then Governor of New York, Vice President, and after the assassination of William McKinley, as the youngest President in the history of

the United States. Like another child of a famous American family, Henry Adams, the young Franklin, one might think, would not have been the least surprised had the family gardener remarked to him at an early age, "You'll be thinkin' you'll be President, too!"⁴

Yet the idyllic childhood came to an abrupt end at the age of fourteen in 1896, when his parents put him under the care of the Reverend Endicott Peabody, the famous headmaster of the Groton School west of Boston. Although parental affection had kept him in Hyde Park for two years beyond Groton's normal entrance age of twelve, the Spartan environment, which housed boys in doorless cubicles and kept them busy from morning until night to discourage nasty sexual habits, must have been a rude shock. Young Franklin quickly ingratiated himself with his teachers, and his letters home betrayed no sign of unhappiness. Such an experience was not uncommon among his contemporaries. The late nineteenth century was the dawn of the great age of American education, one that lasted about one hundred years. General, as opposed to classical, education taught the Missionary generation to think for themselves and stand up for their own opinions, but the prevailing ethos also held that young men and women needed hard work and discipline well into their twenties. At Groton another cleric on the faculty tried to inspire the students with ideals of public service. Graduating in 1900, Franklin went on to Harvard, where he took a relaxed attitude toward his studies and poured his energy into the *Harvard Crimson*, of which he became the editor.

Young Franklin also knew that he needed a woman in his life, and he, an only child, dreamed of a large family. As a Harvard undergraduate of twenty he evidently proposed to a beautiful girl from a prominent local family, Alice Sohier, and shared his wish for at least six children. She decided not to marry him, she told a friend many years later, because "I did not wish to be a cow." Not long after, he met his distant cousin Eleanor, then only eighteen, an orphan whose childhood had been as wretched as Franklin's had been idyllic, and who was now the niece of the President of the United States. Although Eleanor was very nervous, not pretty, and lacking in self-confidence, Franklin seems to have been genuinely attracted to her. Two years later they were engaged, and in 1905 they were married in the White House. Like so many young people of their era, they knew how husbands and wives ought to feel and act toward one another, and their voluminous correspondence shows that they tried to do so. Yet their ideas and feelings about life, duty, love, and sex were so different that

trouble was eventually bound to result. Eleanor did in fact bear Franklin the six children that he wanted, one of whom died in infancy, but when the last of them was born, in 1916, she evidently told Franklin that that part of their life was over. Typically, he does not seem to have put up a struggle, but his affair with Eleanor's social secretary, Lucy Mercer—probably the great love of his life—began quite shortly thereafter.⁵

Eleanor's Uncle Theodore, meanwhile, had emerged as the model for the career Franklin had in mind. He was now tall, handsome, and gregarious—a political natural. After law school and a brief and not very engaged career as a New York lawyer, he entered politics for the first time as a state legislator from his native Dutchess County in 1910. After his fellow Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1912, he managed to secure the position that had made his cousin a national figure, Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, a North Carolina newspaper editor, cared little about the Navy, and Roosevelt exercised enormous influence throughout the tumultuous years of the First World War. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Roosevelt wanted to enlist because he did not believe that any man of his age could become President if he had *not* gone to the front, but Daniels and President Wilson persuaded him to stay in Washington. By 1920 he had become sufficiently prominent to secure the Democratic nomination as Vice President at the age of thirty-eight—a full three years earlier than his famous cousin. However, he and his running mate, Governor James Cox of Ohio, suffered a staggering defeat in the backlash against Wilson, the war, and the whole Progressive era.

In 1921, when vacationing at Campobello island just north of Maine, Roosevelt contracted polio and permanently lost the use of his legs. He bore his ordeal cheerfully despite inner despair and resolved not to let it interfere with his plans. His political comeback began in 1924, when he nominated New York Governor Alfred E. Smith for the presidency at the Democratic Convention in Madison Square Garden. Four years later Smith won that nomination, and Roosevelt accepted his invitation to try to succeed him as governor. So strong was the anti-Catholic bigotry against Smith, as well as the feeling that he simply was not presidential timber, that he lost even his own state of New York in the landslide for Republican Herbert Hoover. In a remarkable turn of events, however, FDR won narrowly and became the new governor of the Empire State, and thus one of the leading Democratic politicians in the country.

New and unforeseen circumstances now transformed Roosevelt's career. Those circumstances, too, had generational roots.

Now well into middle age, the businessmen and financiers of the Missionary generation were enjoying almost unprecedented prosperity during the 1920s, and like the Boomers of the first decade of the twenty-first century, they had come to accept it as their due. They now dominated the Republican Party, while the Democrats during the 1920s were fatally split on what would now be called "social issues"—Prohibition and the growing power of the Ku Klux Klan. Wilson had created the Federal Reserve in 1913 to try to make rampant speculation impossible, and despite a severe postwar recession in 1920–1921 there had been no financial panic since. In the 1920s there was also a tremendous boom in real estate, which came to a smashing halt in 1928. Fueled by rules allowing buyers to put down just 10 percent of the value of their stock as margin and by inflows of capital from Europe, the stock market continued rising at extraordinary rates. In October 1929, Wall Street, too, came crashing down, and for more than three years the market refused to revive. Incomes fell, surpluses glutted both agricultural and industrial markets, and by 1932 unemployment was nearing 25 percent of the workforce. These events—the fruits of his own generation's unrestrained greed—made Franklin Roosevelt President in 1933 and gave him a unique opportunity to transform the foundations of American life. During the next four years he made full use of it.

Roosevelt had been no economic revolutionary before 1933. He shared the progressive belief in the use of science and planning to conserve soil, build healthier cities, and design better communities. He believed in lower tariffs—long an orthodox Democratic Party position—and in the public ownership of electric power. He supported some emergency measures to fight the depression as Governor, particularly on behalf of farmers (of which he liked to point out he was one), but he did nothing dramatic to alienate the business interests that were nearly as strong in the Democratic Party as in the Republican. After the 1930 elections returned him to office with a huge majority of 725,000 votes and nearly gave the Democrats control of Congress, he and his lieutenant, Louis Howe, embarked upon a determined campaign for his party's presidential nomination, cultivating party leaders in the agrarian South and West. In 1932 he faced determined opposition from House Speaker John Nance Garner of Texas and from his former patron, Alfred E. Smith. After three inconclusive ballots in which Roosevelt secured a clear majority but lacked the necessary

two-thirds vote for nomination, Garner, prodded by William Randolph Hearst, switched to Roosevelt in return for the vice presidency, a decision Garner regretted for the rest of his life.⁶

Thus began the climax of the most extraordinary political career in American history. Roosevelt in November 1932 defeated Hoover with 57 percent of the popular vote and 472 electoral votes to 59. Hoover carried five of six New England states, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. The Democratic Party and its allies had 318 seats in the House to 117 for the Republicans, and ruled the Senate 59–36.

Faced with an equally serious crisis in 1861, Lincoln in his inaugural address had defined the nation's problems in strictly legal and political terms. Secession, he had argued, would destroy democratic government if allowed to prevail, and the elected federal government must assert its powers. Roosevelt on the other hand discussed the crisis the nation faced in his first inaugural address in blunt moral terms. After famously declaring that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," and summarizing the country's drastic economic state, he identified the moral sources of the nation's crisis. "Our distress comes from no failure of substance," he said. "Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply. Primarily this is because rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence, have admitted their failure, and have abdicated. Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men . . . The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit. . . . Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort. The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits." Roosevelt's emphasis on values as the source of civilization and his view of daily life as an almost sacred enterprise were highly characteristic of his generation. The new President then listed the essence of his own agenda: "to put people to work," to raise the value of farm products, to stop a plague of foreclosures, and to put strict limits on speculation "with other people's money." Within a year, progress on all those fronts was well underway.⁷

As the economy improved over the next four years, the Democratic majorities in Congress increased still further in both 1934 and 1936,

when Roosevelt was famously reelected against Governor Alf Landon of Kansas with more than 60 percent of the popular vote and an electoral vote margin of 523 to 8. The Republican Party in 1936 turned the election into a referendum on American values, arguing that the New Deal was a European-style dictatorship that would destroy traditional American initiative, and Roosevelt met that challenge head on. Although unemployment remained high in 1936 and a number of major New Deal laws had been nullified by a hostile Supreme Court, Roosevelt had successfully defined and implemented a dramatically new philosophy of American government involving a substantially increased federal role in the economy. He had also cast himself bluntly as the defender of the common man and woman against entrenched industrial and financial interests. “They hate me,” he declared famously in a campaign speech in 1936, “and I welcome their hatred.”

In his second inaugural, with unemployment cut in half from just over 20 percent to a still devastating 10 percent, Roosevelt built on the same themes. Four years before, a frightened citizenry “dedicated ourselves to the fulfillment of a vision—to speed the time when there would be for all the people that security and peace essential to the pursuit of happiness.” The American people, he said, had recognized “the need to find through government the instrument of our united purpose to solve for the individual the ever-rising problems of a complex civilization.” Without the aid of government, “we had been unable to create those moral controls over the services of science which are necessary to make science a useful servant instead of a ruthless master of mankind.” In so doing, Americans “were writing a new chapter in our book of self-government.”⁸

Although Roosevelt in these and so many other speeches cast the New Deal as a new stage in the history of American democracy, his work obviously had a critical international dimension as well. Within another four years the task of extending moral controls over science would broaden again, this time to encompass the whole world. During the last twenty years the old order had collapsed all over the civilized world, giving way successively to Communism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, a militaristic authoritarian state in Japan, and National Socialism in Germany, which had taken power under Hitler just five weeks before FDR’s inaugural in 1933. France and Britain, which had undertaken few reforms in response to the Depression, seemed to be declining. New ideas would rule the future, and although Roosevelt was far too radical for most well-to-do Americans and not nearly radical enough for many others, he had

clearly put forth a genuine alternative to the dictatorships of the Left and Right. He built upon this idea when the world ideological struggle became a world war in the two years after 1939, and decided to do everything he could to make his own ideals prevail.

The details of the specific measures embodied in the New Deal and their effects lie outside the scope of this book, but their impact does not. Relief measures, public works, and agricultural programs literally saved millions of Americans from despair or worse. His most lasting legacies were the regulation of financial markets, the most important aspects of which lasted until the late 1990s, and the establishment of a Social Security system. He benefited not only from the progressive philosophy of government but from the depth of the crisis. Although business interests argued almost from the beginning that New Deal measures were inhibiting rather than promoting recovery, very few people could argue, especially in 1933–1936, that the situation did not require drastic measures, and the financial markets themselves had suffered heavily enough to accept restrictions that they have now (as of 2013) overthrown.

Kenneth S. Davis, who wrote a five-volume biography of Roosevelt, concluded that FDR saw himself above all as the instrument of broader historical forces. Roosevelt knew that both the nation and the Western world stood at a turning point, and that he might shape the course of history for many years to come. He surrounded himself with other men, and a few women, of drive, intellect, and ambition, and he allowed them to exercise considerable freedom and initiative in achieving the broader objectives he laid down. Members of all Prophet generations grow up with great confidence in their own opinions, and the New Deal enabled certain of Roosevelt's contemporaries and some of the next-younger Lost generation to put their ideas into practice on an unprecedented scale.⁹

Henry Wallace, the Secretary of Agriculture, implemented the New Deal's farm policy, which raised prices from catastrophically low levels by restricting acreage and slaughtering newly born livestock by the millions. Harold Ickes, the blunt, cantankerous Secretary of the Interior, led the New Deal's fight for public power and built roads and bridges as head of the Public Works Administration. Harry Hopkins, who like Ickes had begun life as a social worker, put unemployed workers ranging from laborers to writers to work for the Works Progress Administration, frequently competing with Ickes for the same projects. Frances Perkins, the first woman in the cabinet, oversaw the extension of collective bargaining rights to

unions under the Wagner Act. Eleanor Roosevelt rapidly emerged as a key political figure in her own right, maintaining cordial relations with extreme left-wing groups and speaking out courageously for the cause of civil rights. Mrs. Roosevelt, wrote W. E. B. Du Bois, the founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), “consorts with Negroes and Communists and says so.” The cast of characters in Washington changed significantly in 1940–1941, but Roosevelt’s leadership techniques did not. Then, too, he gave critical responsibilities to men of experience and very strong views, and allowed them to plan and advocate drastic courses of action both publicly and privately.¹⁰

The Missionary generation combined a strong sense of moral purpose with the knowledge that they were living in one of the most transformative periods in human history. No generation has lived through more profound changes in their adult lives than those born from about 1863 to 1883. The economic and industrial innovations that touched their lives included the telephone, the advent of electricity as the most important source of power, the industrial assembly line, the automobile, the skyscraper, the airplane, motion pictures, the radio, and nuclear fission. Henry L. Stimson, a New Yorker destined to become Hoover’s Secretary of State and FDR’s Secretary of War, was fifteen when the first modern suspension bridge was finished between Brooklyn and Manhattan, and lived to see dozens of others, including the George Washington, San Francisco Bay, and Golden Gate bridges, completed as well. New technologies also built dams and reservoirs of unprecedented size. Every one of these innovations increased human capabilities, knit the country and the world closer together, and allowed for organization and human enterprise on a much larger scale—either for evil or for good.

These innovations also held enormous military implications, from the dreadnought battleship invented in the 1900s to tanks, bomber and fighter aircraft, machine guns and semiautomatic rifles, and effective submarines. Woodrow Wilson, who had been born in 1856 and remembered the Civil War and its aftermath, concluded during the First World War that these changes demanded that warfare be rendered obsolete. The Missionary generation that followed was more concerned to put them to good use, and the Second World War became their supreme test. Having founded history’s largest enterprises and created markets of unprecedented size, they proved more than willing to create a far larger army, navy, and air force than Americans had ever dreamed of, and to build

terrible new weapons. Exactly how Roosevelt and his contemporaries prepared not merely for war, but for victory, in the eighteen months after the fall of France in 1940 is the story of this book. In so doing, they created the world in which we have all spent our lives.

Having dealt with the threatened collapse of the U.S. economy and society in 1933, Roosevelt in 1940–1941 had to face an even more critical situation abroad. The world crisis that became progressively worse during Roosevelt's second term stemmed from political crises and new regimes in other major nations—regimes determined to overturn regional and world order. The First World War had introduced totalitarianism to Europe, first in the Soviet Union and then in Mussolini's Italy. In Germany, the Weimar Republic, hampered from the beginning by the legacy of the First World War, had failed to survive the combination of the Great Depression, the death of its two most effective statesmen, President Friedrich Ebert and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, and the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, who seized power in 1933. Although Japan retained its constitution and the semblance of a parliamentary regime, the Japanese Army and Navy seized effective control of policy after 1931, partly by assassinating politicians who refused to defer to them. Germany and Japan denounced and withdrew from disarmament agreements during the 1930s and proclaimed their need for more territory to solve their economic problems.

The rise of expansionist powers posed particular challenges to the opinions, traditions, and military strength of the United States. Woodrow Wilson's controversial decision to enter the First World War had failed to secure the just peace of which he had dreamed, and the American people also remained bitter over their allies' failure to pay their war debts. In one sense Wilson's ideas remained very much alive during the 1920s and early 1930s: an overwhelming majority of Americans believed that the world should be ruled by law, insisted that their own government respect its obligations, and expected other governments to do the same. But when the Senate rejected the League of Nations in 1920, the United States gave up any idea of imposing these views on the rest of the world by force, or of once again raising huge armies to fight overseas. Its military establishment shrank accordingly.

Although the U.S. Navy still ranked with the British as one of the two largest in the world, the U.S. Army in the interwar period barely

exceeded 100,000 men, the same size to which the German Army was limited by the Versailles Treaty. Little was done to develop air power in either the Army or the Navy. Appropriations for the War and Navy departments remained low, and Roosevelt's cabinet appointments to those departments were among his weakest. In 1935, as the European situation worsened, Congress passed, and Roosevelt signed, a sweeping Neutrality Act banning American ships from travel to war zones or warring nations from borrowing money in the United States—a clear attempt to make sure that the events of 1914–1917 would never be repeated and draw the United States into another foreign war.

Many Americans preferred to regard the serious threats that developed on both sides of the world in the late 1930s as regional rather than global. By the late 1930s Japan was at war in China and Hitler had rapidly rearmed and blackmailed Europe into allowing him to annex Austria and most of Czechoslovakia. More important, both Hitler and the Japanese leadership openly proclaimed a right to vast economic hinterlands from which other powers would largely be excluded—Hitler's in Eastern Europe, and Japan's in China and the Southwest Pacific region. In the western hemisphere, the Roosevelt administration had been pursuing an opposite course, renouncing intervention in the affairs of Latin American states, and the U.S. government also favored the free worldwide movement of trade. But most Americans counted on other powers—particularly the British and French—to hold off new threats to the European order. When the European war broke out in September 1939, polls showed most Americans confident of an Anglo-French victory over Germany in what they expected to be another long war.

The three extraordinary months of April, May, and June 1940 destroyed the political, military, and strategic foundations of the world order upon which the United States had relied. In April, the Germans seized Denmark and Norway, using their air force—the envy of the world—to neutralize British sea power. On May 10 they attacked Belgium, Holland, and France. The new strategy of *Blitzkrieg*—a combination of massed tank formations and tactical air support—broke through the French Army, drove the British from the continent, and in June secured an armistice with a compliant French government that allowed the Germans to occupy the whole French coast. Japan immediately took advantage of the German conquest of Holland and France to put pressure on those nations' colonies in the Far East. The whole world now expected

a German invasion of Britain by the end of the summer, and most observers—including the President of the United States—gave it an excellent chance of success. The consequences for the United States would be almost incalculable.

Simply put, the United States in the spring of 1940 faced the prospect of a nearly overwhelming worldwide coalition that it would have to fight on its own. Its Navy had been designed to fight the Japanese in the Pacific—a task for which it was now barely adequate at best—while the British handled any threats in the Atlantic. Should Britain fall, the German and Italian navies would be able to add British and French warships to their forces, easily take control of the whole Atlantic, and land forces in the western hemisphere. Germany had already neutralized the Soviet Union by concluding the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, and Germany and Japan now had a common interest in the defeat of the European powers.

In addition, the Germans in Norway had shown how they could use air power to expand their zone of control, and if Britain fell the same tactics might easily allow the Germans to reach the western hemisphere. They might move into the Azores and the Canaries in the Atlantic, march through the friendly dictatorships of Spain and Portugal and into French North Africa, and cross the narrow 1,500-mile ocean between Dakar in West Africa and Brazil. Alternatively they might leapfrog across the North Atlantic, first to Iceland, then to Greenland, and then to Newfoundland, from which their planes could reach the United States. The Japanese at any moment might decide to enter the war against the United States by attacking the Philippine Islands. This was the scenario for which Washington had to prepare on an emergency basis in the spring and summer of 1940, and indeed, the possibility of a British defeat continued to preoccupy American planners all through 1941. Initially American military leaders hoped to avoid war in the Pacific, but in September 1940 a world war became a near-certainty when Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, pledging in effect to go to war with the United States should it declare war on any of them. Having avoided an economic collapse in the early 1930s and laid the foundation for a new kind of society, the Roosevelt administration now faced an imminent threat to the security of the United States.

Roosevelt typically responded not only by defining the problem for the American people but also by choosing new men to deal with it. In June 1940 he replaced his secretaries of War and of the Navy with two

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