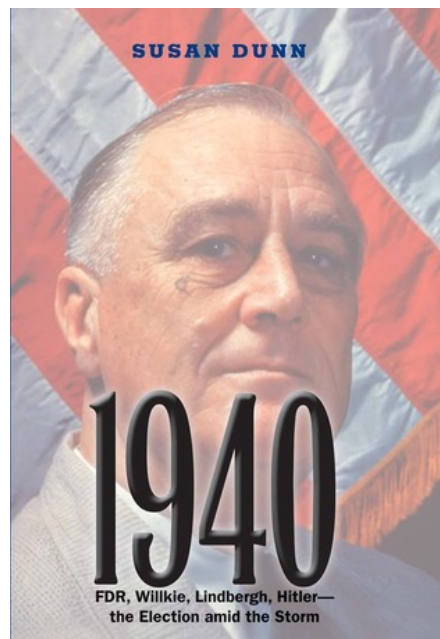




1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler—the Election amid the Storm

Susan Dunn

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In 1940, against the explosive backdrop of the Nazi onslaught in Europe, two farsighted candidates for the U.S. presidency—Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, running for an unprecedented third term, and talented Republican businessman Wendell Willkie—found themselves on the defensive against American isolationists and their charismatic spokesman Charles Lindbergh, who called for surrender to Hitler's demands. In this dramatic account of that turbulent and consequential election, historian Susan Dunn brings to life the debates, the high-powered players, and the dawning awareness of the Nazi threat as the presidential candidates engaged in their own battle for supremacy.

1940 not only explores the contest between FDR and Willkie but also examines the key preparations for war that went forward, even in the midst of that divisive election season. The book tells an inspiring story of the triumph of American democracy in a world reeling from fascist barbarism, and it offers a compelling alternative scenario to today's hyperpartisan political arena, where common ground seems unattainable.

1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler—the Election amid the Storm Details

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Jack Madden says

Interesting debate about FDR's decision to seek a third term at a time of war in Europe and the Far East. The issues were different (isolationists vs. internationalists), but the political arguments show some interesting parallels to our contemporary political landscape.

Howard Spinner says

A very good political read on the events surrounding the 1940 Presidential third term election of FDR. Besides Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie, the Republican nominee, emerges as an heroic figure battling the isolationists within his own party. Charles Lindbergh is accurately depicted as a Nazi loving anti-Semite elitist.

Pamela says

In 1940, Fascism was in the ascendancy everywhere. France had fallen in May. The Battle of Britain was raging and England was fighting for her life. Russia was attacked along the massive length of her border. In the East, Japan was ever more aggressive. Europe was not only under siege but already lost.

In the United States, another fight of a different sort was also taking place. After having cleverly maneuvered his party into nominating him for an unprecedented third term, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was fighting an election battle against Wendell Willkie and a wide range of antagonistic isolationist enemies on the right. Willkie was himself no isolationist and fully realized the intense danger that fascism posed but he was being co-opted by his strange bedfellows in and out of the Republican party. Even at this late date, the American public was severely divided over the question of simply aiding the democracies, let alone any kind of active intervention. They would remain so until the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In her excellent history of this election year, 1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindberg, Hitler-the Election and the Storm, Susan Dunn does a wonderful job of lining up the major players on both sides, presenting all the major arguments leading up to the final decision that can only be made by the American public. What looks like a normal election wrangle, in that momentous year made all the difference in the country's readiness for war a scant year later.

Jason Cecil says

A very satisfying and informative read for the political junkie. Oh that we could return to the days of a 2.5 month presidential campaign!!!

WW2 Reads says

Dunn's book covers not just a pivotal year in the political career of Franklin Delano Roosevelt but also a vital time in the history of the United States. In a time of incredible turmoil Dunn shows how the cool headed FDR prevailed against incredible odds to become the first President to be elected to a third term. Dunn does an excellent job to highlight the tension of the times which might otherwise be lost in the historical mists. Famed aviator Charles Lindbergh openly sympathizes with the Nazis and leads a section of the isolationists opposed to the US's entry into the upcoming war. As isolationists and interventionists battle it out in Congress, Paris is captured by Hitler and the people of the UK face increasingly destructive bombing raids of The Blitz.

FDR manages through political cunning and an uncanny ability to remain calm in the most stressful of situations to steer Congress towards allowing limited aid to the UK while at the same time maneuvering to discredit his potential opponents for the presidency in both the Democratic and Republican Party. And yes he does all of this while paralyzed from the waist down. One can't help coming away from this book recognizing the political genius and courage of Roosevelt in a single year in which the US, and the world, faced tremendous danger.

Joseph says

1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler-the Election amid the Storm by Susan Dunn is an examination of the events surrounding 1940 presidential elections and world events that helped shape the election. Susan Dunn is Professor of Literature and the History of Ideas at Williams College and Senior Scholar and the Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland. She earned her PhD from Harvard in 1973 and is also the author of several books on American history.

The stage is set for the presidential elections of 1940. Franklin D. Roosevelt is finishing his second term as president. He had won both of his previous elections by a landslide but now his court packing plan has overwhelmingly failed and his New Deal programs are stalling. To help keep employment up FDR has begun production of war material in preparation for war. FDR's domestic programs, increased military spending, and aid to the allies created opposition in the United States. Republicans and isolationists wanted to keep America out of the war. Charles Lindbergh was a very vocal isolationist and supported Willkie. His support was not because he believed Willkie was great leader, but more so, because he was not FDR. In June of 1940, Hitler would be dancing a celebratory jig in Paris. The stage was set.

Dunn does an excellent job of explaining the political process of from the Republican selection of Willkie to justifying a third term for FDR. Charges of socialism were leveled at FDR and the Republicans reversed Wilson's claim of "He kept us out of war." to "We kept HIM out of war." FDR's third term run for the presidency is discussed from the contemporary views of the time and the views of the the founding fathers and the *Federalist Papers*.

1940 covers in detail the campaign process including Roosevelt being "drafted" to run a third term. It is interesting reading that campaigns back in the 1940s were not much different from today. There were gaffs, and possible "romantic involvements" of some candidates, accusations of being a socialist, and even Ohio's role as the barometer of the campaign. Claims of ruining the country and gutting the military could easily have been written about the last several presidential elections just as well as it was in 1940. Willkie makes the claim that the Democratic Party was kidnapped by a few people who wanted power (shades of a few hijacking a religion of the 21st century) and to upset the two-term tradition. He then followed it with quotes from Lincoln and Washington.

The election results and the on coming involvement in Europe takes it toll on America and the politicians. Lend-Lease and England become important issues and alliances form and break. The Nazi threat to America becomes real as the *USS Greer* is attacked at sea (after giving a British Bomber the location of the sub). Willkie turns his support to the president. Lindbergh becomes more radical, after being call a “Copperhead”, he resigns his commission in the Reserve Air Corps. Texas passes a resolution informing Lindbergh that he was not welcome in the state. Lindbergh moves to the fringe. Willkie goes on to ally himself with the president to the point of being to progressive for the Republicans.

An enlightening book about a very important time in American history filled with issues and events that changed America and the world. America was on the surface very black and white with the issues, but underneath, most Americans could put away their differences when the country need it. Dunn's book is well written and supported with eighty pages of notes. *1940* presents a clear picture of American national politics in the pre-war years as well as examines the lives of the major players adding a human touch to the history. A very worthwhile read.

Billhotto says

Two issues in the 1940 election. Should the U.S. do everything possible, short of war, to help Great Britain against Nazi Germany and should FDR be elected to a third term? The first issue pitted isolationists against interventionists in a bitter political battle that divided both parties. The European crisis in turn provided justification for FDR to break tradition. The non-partisan nature of aid to Britain was demonstrated when Republicans nominated a political neophyte, Wendell Wilke, who was as staunch an interventionist as FDR. Wilke was a lawyer and former utilities company executive who was backed by publisher Henry Luce. He had some characteristics with a current Republican candidate except that Wilke was an honorable man who believed in international cooperation and social justice. He opposed the New Deal's economic programs but supported Social Security and the Wagner Act. His nomination dismayed conservative Republicans like Robert Taft and isolationists like Charles Lindbergh and the America First organization. On the Democrat's side Joe Kennedy was adamant that we stay out of Britain's fight, but he was successfully finessed by the wily FDR. Dunn points out that both candidates said things they didn't believe, but were expedient, during the election. Especially with FDR there was a lack of transparency as to his real intentions. Kind of like today's Democratic candidate. FDR saw that America's survival depended on Britain's survival, his policies were aimed at stopping Hitler. Wilke also had to pander to his base. What both men agreed on was that democracy was a viable and vital way of life and that the U.S. couldn't rely on its ocean borders to keep us out of war. They went at it, but their real scorn were for people like Lindbergh and his wife, Anne, who were convinced that democracy was useless and Fascism was the wave of the future. Wilke lost the election but, in a huge voter turnout, polled more votes than any prior Republican candidate. After the election he helped pass Lend-Lease and served as FDR's special envoy.

Dunn writes that both FDR and Wendell Wilke were far sighted and, especially Wilke, courageous leaders who, in a time of real crisis, sought to unify and inspire Americans to work and sacrifice for the country and humanity's well being. Would that we had leaders like these today.

Dunn reveals evidence that the German embassy was subsidizing the isolationists and trying to influence the election. Also that, while most isolationists were honest in their desire to stay out of foreign conflicts, a good number were anti-Semitic.

Sarah says

I had to stop reading after the first two chapters because of a brain tumor. After surgery, it took a while to get

my energy and focus back, but this book provided a great motivation. I chose this title because it covers a period I know well, but from a political angle which was foreign territory to me. I learned a lot about labor, foreign relations, personalities, and whistle-stop campaigning, all written in a clear and engaging narrative. Great food for mind and spirit!

Carl says

A book about American politics in 1940: especially the reluctant determination by the United States that it would probably have to take part in the European war. This was a very difficult decision – there was a strong isolationist sentiment in the country, and interventionist leaders in both the Democratic and the Republican parties had to tread carefully. But in 1940 a peace-time draft law was enacted, and war material and destroyers were sent to England.

The two candidates for president in that year: Franklin Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie sincerely respected each other. They had different opinions on domestic economic issues, but agreed on the need to confront Nazi Germany, and worked together to convince the country to prepare for war. The friendly relationship between the two rivals was unusual.

One of the most important isolationists was the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, who admired the virility, efficiency, and racial purity of the Nazis. The book paints a dark picture of him.

Jeff says

I was raised at a time when it was normal in many households to believe that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the greatest President of the 20th Century. I still believe that.

And so, a book that delves into the details of a critical time in our history, during which FDR played such a pivotal role, is a natural choice for my reading list. And what a time — war in Europe and China, isolationists abroad at home, and the ever-present speculation as to whether Roosevelt would have the audacity to break a "sacred" tradition and run for a third term. Ms. Dunn brings all of this vividly to life and far exceeded my hopes and expectations. But she surprised me as well...

You see, I didn't count on Wendell Willkie.

Oh, I knew a little about Willkie. Wasn't he the third Republican candidate to be crushed by FDR? I've seen pictures.

But Willkie was a force to be reckoned with. A corporate lawyer who had never stood for office until nominated by the Republicans as a "dark horse" candidate against FDR in 1940, Willkie hadn't even been a Republican for very long. In a party dominated by isolationists and "America Firsters", Willkie was a firm believer that America had to assist Great Britain in any way possible. And he liked most aspects of the New Deal. And agreed with a peacetime draft. And approved of Lend-Lease. What a strange choice the Republicans made!

Ms. Dunn does a wonderful job of helping us to meet Mr. Willkie. And I walked away at the end of the book with as much respect for Willkie as I have long had for FDR. After losing the election, Willkie went out of

his way to be of service to his country and to help prepare America for what was probably an inevitable war. He assisted Roosevelt in those dark days without rancor and in a way that could only be described as "statesmanlike".

Ms. Dunn is not so kind to other members of this cast of characters. Charles Lindbergh — at the very least an isolationist, but whose words and actions could easily have been (and were) labelled pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic — does not fare well. Nor does Joseph Kennedy. And we spend more than a little time with Congressional isolationists and Nazi fifth columnists as well as with all stripes of congressmen and aides and newspapermen and Cabinet members. There are a lot of people to meet and remember.

But it's all very well worth it, especially because Ms. Dunn gives us reasons to know and remember them all. Her portraits of them — and of their times — are well drawn. And her descriptions of a time and place — in that netherworld between the dark days of the Great Depression and the even darker days of World War — are a welcome addition to my library.

In the end, Ms. Dunn made me glad that, at a time when we had so much to lose, we had statesmen like Franklin Roosevelt. And Wendell Willkie.

TR Peterson says

Dunn's book covers not just a pivotal year in the political career of Franklin Delano Roosevelt but also a vital time in the history of the United States. In a time of incredible turmoil Dunn shows how the cool headed FDR prevailed against incredible odds to become the first President to be elected to a third term. Dunn does an excellent job to highlight the tension of the times which might otherwise be lost in the historical mists. Famed aviator Charles Lindbergh openly sympathizes with the Nazis and leads a section of the isolationists opposed to the US's entry into the upcoming war. As isolationists and interventionists battle it out in Congress, Paris is captured by Hitler and the people of the UK face increasingly destructive bombing raids of The Blitz.

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Peter Mcloughlin says

With the Nazi's steamrolling over Europe taking Poland, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and France and the British facing Hitler alone it was an election year in 1940. Internationalist who wanted to support the allied powers against fascism were in a bitter fight with Isolationist who wanted to stay out. Isolationists existed in both parties and had followers on the left and the right. Some were inspired by noble instincts to avoid war with memories of the slaughter and Jingoism of world war I and some for more sinister motives that in some quarters involved a love of Germany and Nazism as the wave of the future with a disdain of democratic governance as tawdry and decadent. In this election of 1940 the question in many peoples mind

was FDR going to run for an unprecedented third term. a tradition that had made a taboo of seeking a third term for presidential office was about to be broken by FDR. The Republicans had a range of candidates some Isolationist like Taft and Vandenburg and others with an interventionist bent like Wilkie tossed their hat in the ring Wendell Wilkie was the dark horse Candidate and Dewey of Dewey defeats Truman fame eight years later was the frontrunner. Wilkie internationalist position and moderate domestic views gained traction in the primaries and won him the nomination at the Republican convention in Philadelphia. Roosevelt finally (officially though everyone knew he was in) entered his name at the last minute at the convention in Chicago. He won the nomination in the first ballot. The election was decried as a contest between two interventionist candidates as the Wilkevelt twins. After sparring between Wilkie and Roosevelt through the election season Roosevelt running a smart campaign won his third term. This election was decisive in ensuring American support for the beleaguered allies and probably saved the allies from defeat to the Nazi's so it is an important election.

Andy Miller says

A readable history of the 1940 election, this book is best at describing the isolationist sentiment that united many conservatives and liberals, many Democrats and Republicans(though much more prevalent in the Republican party) which at least ostensibly caused FDR to break tradition and run for a third term

An excellent study of Wendell Wilkie, his outsider status being a boon to his going from dark horse candidate to the Republican nominee but then a handicap when running a national campaign against the toughest, smartest political candidate of the 20th century

There are great substories. The nomination of Henry Wallace as Vice President amidst the attacks on the convention floor while Wallace stood by under orders not to respond. Charles Lindberg comes off as a horrible person, not just for being so wrong about the Nazis and the need for preparation but for his antisemitism and personal meanness

Robin Case says

Very readable general audience appropriate recount of the 1940 U.S. Presidential election.

Brad Eastman says

This is a chronicle of the election of 1940. The nation was extremely divided, but more on interventionists/isolationists lines, not strict partisan lines. Ms. Dun does an excellent job of chronicling the events of the campaign and capturing the personalities of the participants, but she does not really develop the underlying trends in American society. She also abandons any sense of neutrality and really favors Roosevelt over Willkie and the interventionists over the isolationists. Of course, in retrospect we understand the Axis menace, but I think Ms. Dunn could have done a better job of exploring the isolationist mindset, not the fringe Nazi sympathizes, but the larger segment of Americans who were still scarred by World War I and distrustful of future European engagements. Instead, she all but denounces the isolationists and implies that they were all on the fringe and roundly denounces them. Similarly, she praises Roosevelt for courageous stands I. Support of Britain, but merely mentions that Willkie shared those views. She finds every inconsistency on Willkie's statements throughout the campaign, but does not provide the same treatment to

Roosevelt. I found her bias to be somewhat distracting. Also, there is an ever present soft antisemitism (and sometimes uglier overt antisemitism), but she never really develops that theme in American history. A few themes other themes are mentioned, but never developed: the role of opposition in a democracy, particularly in our own age of hyper-partisanship; the role of the Senate filibuster and the rules of the filibuster compared to today; and the compressed campaigning season I presidential elections compared to today's constant campaigning.

One additional note: I read this book on Kindle for iPad. I read a lot of nonfiction books in this way, but will now switch to Apple's iBooks. Ms. Dunn makes extensive use of footnotes, both for source information and for supplemental material (do we really need a footnote about Japan attacking China and Hitler attacking Western Europe?). The Kindle app does not handle footnotes well. Frequently, pressing the footnote leads to changing pages, marking text or no reaction. The iBooks app handles them much better. If Kindle wants to be taken seriously for nonfiction, Amazon needs to fix this feature and also find abetted way to handle maps, pictures, graphs and other illustrations.
