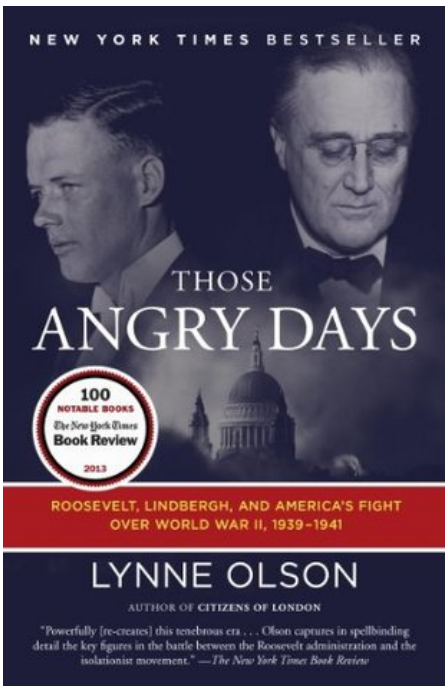

Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941

Lynne Olson

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From the acclaimed author of *Citizens of London* comes the definitive account of the debate over American intervention in World War II—a bitter, sometimes violent clash of personalities and ideas that divided the nation and ultimately determined the fate of the free world.

At the center of this controversy 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. Among the notable figures involved in the struggle were future U.S. presidents John F. Kennedy and Gerald Ford, Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver, and authors Gore Vidal and Kurt Vonnegut.

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.

Praise for Lynne Olson's *Citizens of London*

"Engaging and original, rich in anecdote and analysis, this is a terrific work of history."—Jon Meacham

"*Citizens of London* is a great read about the small band of Americans and their courageous role in helping Britain through the darkest days of early World War II. I thought I knew a lot about this dangerous period, but Lynne Olson has taught me so much more."—Tom Brokaw

Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight Over World War II,

1939-1941 Details

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From Reader Review Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941 for online ebook

Lewis Weinstein says

UPDATED 8/7/13

An absolutely fantastic read. Olson writes history with the pace and intensity of a novel. Characters (real characters) are exposed bit by bit through their actions to have their strengths (Wendell Willkie) and weaknesses (FDR and Lindbergh) picked open to view.

... I have always liked FDR but now like him much less.

... I have never liked Lindbergh and now dislike him much more.

... I never knew about Willkie and now think he was a real political hero, the likes of which we have rarely seen.

Things I learned ...

Always extremely tentative, FDR refused to lead, to try to convince the American people and thus Congress. He did invent Lend-Lease, but then did nothing to assure any substantial flow of material to the Brits. Without Pearl Harbor, he would likely have allowed Hitler to conquer Britain and where would we be now if that had happened? Even after Pearl Harbor, we were lucky Hitler made a mistake and declared war on us.

FDR’s inability to make a decision is portrayed in a way I have never read before. It makes you want to give him a swift kick. In addition to being a ditherer, he is shown as a mean nasty man. Such disillusionment.

Lindbergh never learned from his experiences, which were many and varied. He never grew beyond the super-hero status he achieved early in his life. He comes across as a thoroughly immature and unlikable man who thought during the 1930s that Hitler and the Nazis were “not so bad,” and who, even after the Holocaust, never recanted. He seems to have been completely indifferent to the plight of the Jews in Germany.

He did know how to fly an airplane, but apparently nothing else, including an appreciation of his own limits. If he had emotions, they were never seen. He reminds me of some of our over-paid athletes today, celebrities with nothing to offer when off the field.

Wendell Willkie, FDR's opponent in the 1940 Presidential election, agreed with FDR to not make certain information into a campaign issue, due to national security considerations. Later, after he had lost the election, he urged all Americans to support the President's foreign agenda, and later he travelled abroad for FDR during the war to interact with our allies. And he didn't even like Roosevelt! He died too early, in 1944, at the age of 52.

There are many striking parallels between the political events of 1939-41 and our own recent history. The Republican obstructionism then was as bad as it is now. Had it succeeded, the U.S. would have left Hitler to conquer both Britain (likely) and Russia (possible), and maybe even us.

It is clear from Olson's writing that there was little concern in the U.S. for what Hitler was doing to the Jews, even after Kristallnacht in 1938. Antisemites like Henry Ford, the America First group, and Father Coughlin put out their message of hate virtually unopposed. American Jews were reluctant to push harder than they did, fearing backlash antisemitism here. So Hitler was free to go ahead and murder six million Jews.

In sum, highly recommended. A great pick for our book club opener in December.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"All that noise you hear...is death coming to London. You can hear the bombs falling on the streets and the homes. Don't tune me out---this is a big story and you're part of it…. The lights are all out everywhere, except in America. Keep those lights burning….Hang on to your lights, they're the only lights left in the world."
***Foreign Correspondent* Directed by Alfred Hitchcock**

Joel McCrea and Laraine Day in Foreign Correspondent.

It was serendipitous that last week I happened to watch *Foreign Correspondent* on TCM's salute to Alfred Hitchcock . I've seen the movie before and each time I watch it I like it even more. I didn't realize until I read this book that this movie has importance beyond just a Hitchcockian thriller. This movie was the first American made movie to encourage America to enter the war. The movie was released in 1940 after the events at Dunkirk when an armada of ships and private boats were sent to the coast of France to bring what was left of the British army away before they were annihilated by advancing German troops. This was after the collapse of the French army. This was after the bombs began to fall on London. If you talk to people who were around during this period of time they will tell you it was, even for Americans, one of the most stressful times in their lives.

The war that we wanted to avoid was not going the way we wanted it to go.

Roosevelt dithered.

He had a split country of interventionists and isolationists and both groups were inflamed with reckless rhetoric. The interventionists were mostly East coast anglophiles led by the Century Club of which FDR was a member. They included artists, writers, and even industrial leaders as part of their membership. They thought of themselves as bohemians, but they did not, for instance, invite Walt Whitman to join because they didn't think he was "clubbable".

Poor Walt he was too bohemian for the "bohemians".

The most famous member of the isolationist movement was Charles Lindbergh. He was of course the first person to cross the Atlantic with a plane. He was a hero of the world. He inspired generations of boys to gaze with wonder and with thoughts of daring at the sky. Most of the isolationist movement came from the Midwest and Lindbergh grew up in Minnesota and certainly reflected that geography in his opposition to Roosevelt and any plans the President may have had to bring America into the war. Lindbergh gave several hard hitting speeches that lit a fire in the movement and gave plenty of ammunition to his enemies. His

speeches smacked of anti-semitism and certainly reflected his admiration for Hitler and the German people. He insisted for the rest of his life that was not the case, After the war he had three German mistresses and had **SEVEN** children out of wedlock. He was attempting to build the master race singlehandedly. Including his son Charles, who was tragically kidnapped and killed, he had **SIX children** with Anne Morrow.

Lindbergh giving one of his speeches supporting isolationism.

I like Charles Lindbergh considerably less after reading this book. I like Franklin Delano Roosevelt less after reading this book. I sympathize with Anne Morrow Lindbergh. I found myself liking Wendell Willkie and as sacrilegious as it is, being a lifelong Democrat, I even had to consider the possibility that Willkie might have made a better president in 1940. I found myself loathing a congress that forced Britain to give up ownership of all their remaining assets in the United States to pay their war debt and then sold those assets to bankers who turned around and resold them at huge profits.

Now even though a majority of Republicans may have been isolationists and the majority of Democrats may have been interventionists it was not that simple. Wendell Willkie was an interventionist which it is still amazing that he won the Republican nomination in 1940. Robert Taft (son of William Howard Taft) and Thomas Dewey both commanded larger followings at the convention. So even though he didn't believe in the party platform he won the nomination because the men pulling the strings thought he had the best chance to defeat Roosevelt and anyone even a near turncoat was better than having that bastard Roosevelt in for another term.

If Wendell Willkie had won the nomination and he stayed true to his principles America would have been in the war sooner.

Captain America even beat us into the war. He was created by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon.

"Captain America Comics #1 — cover-dated March 1941 and on sale December 20, 1940, a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, but a full year into World War II — showed the protagonist punching Nazi leader Adolf Hitler in the jaw; it sold nearly one million copies. While most readers responded favorably to the comic, some took objection. Simon noted, "When the first issue came out we got a lot of... threatening letters and hate mail." Wikipedia.

Historically comic books are usually ahead of the general population on social and political issues.

Roosevelt did not take the opportunities that were available to him to help Britain sooner with more than just leaky warships and leftover supplies from WWI. He did not use his political clout and considerable charm to convince a country that we must for the sake of democracy enter the war.

He didn't.
He could have.

And yet I can't refute the results. Germany was on the verge of imposing their will on the world. The Yanks turned them back. Those beautiful damn Yanks. The world owes Churchill gratitude beyond anything that can be expressed for keeping the faith, for not suing for peace after Dunkirk, and for giving those inspirational speeches that turned the tide of support in many households all over America.

Fantastic book about the state of mind of the American public, and how events flipped public opinion back and forth as the pendulum of war gripped the national consciousness.

Jill Hutchinson says

My fascination with this book began with the first chapter and never let up. Lynne Olson has written a masterpiece about a time when the US was floundering, uncertain, making unfulfilled promises, and unprepared to face a World War which could possibly reach the shores of the Americas. FDR seemed almost confused and was more worried about his political future than the build-up of a military presence representative of a world power. France had fallen liked a house of cards and England was standing alone in their small island against the juggernaut of the Nazi war machine. Churchill was begging for assistance of any kind from the US but the isolationist were refusing to get drawn into the battle.

Organizations sprang up all over the country opposing the war but one in particular, America First, had the greatest effect on the foot dragging of the administration. And one of country's heroes, the "Lone Eagle" Charles Lindbergh was leading the charge. Immensely popular, he toured the country speaking out against the Lend Lease program and the naval convoy protection that the US could provide to England. Lindbergh resigned his commission from the armed forces and that was his first mistake. And then a most unusual man stepped forward to sway the opinion of the country.....Wendell Willkie , who lost his bid for the Presidency against FDR in 1940, but was a man to be reckoned with. His support for intervention against Hitler was a strong and convincing factor in the loss of support for the isolationists. Lindbergh became a pariah and Willkie a leading light. Even though, the administration was still waffling when the unthinkable happened.....Pearl Harbor and Hitler's declaration of war against the US two days later. The question was settled but one wonders what would have happened if Pearl Harbor had not been attacked.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough.....it is a well researched, well written history of a less than honorable time in the early years of WWII.

Betsy says

Parts of this book were slow-going, but as it moved toward 1941, it picked up. I learned much about the isolationist leanings of men such as Hap Arnold who was later given 5 stars, and even George C. Marshall who backed some of the isolationist who worked in the military. Best known of the isolationists was Charles Lindbergh who used his name and popularity to speak out against intervention. Fortunately, that backfired when he made some strategic mistakes in his actions and speeches. Seventy years after the end of WWII,we can be grateful for men like Wendell Willie who chose to champion what was right for this country rather than their own personal agendas.

Shawn Thrasher says

Solid, well-researched, and well-written. Charles Lindbergh is always asshole-colored, at least in everything I've read about him, and this book doesn't do anything to change that leopard's spots. His piggish dickheaded-ness is always front and center. The family dynamics between he and his wife's family were quite interesting, and added a personal touch to this story.

It's very easy to romanticize this time period, and Olson succeeds in staying away from a the mythologized caricature of the late 1930s and the Greatest Generation.

Cathy DuPont says

You can always count on America to do the right thing---after they've tried everything else. Winston Churchill

Yes, yes, yes, I'm always proud of myself when I can pull myself away from James Lee Burke, Michael Connelly, Ellroy, Block et al to read an "other" genre. And I'm always happier when I finish.

At 464 pages, I didn't consider this a long book but it certainly seemed long and I've found as I grow older, my attention span isn't what it used to be.

The book made me reminiscent of politics in the recent past when the nation was (is) clearly divided down the middle, 50-50. During the period 1939-1941, the division in America was between the isolationists and interventionists right about at a 50-50 division.

Groups from both factions, the "movers and shakers" of the nation, were created and were active in their attempt to sway the country to their way of thinking.

Charles Lindbergh, America's sweetheart after he was the first person to fly solo non-stop from New York to Paris, was early on an isolationist. He felt it his obligation to "move" the nation toward that end.

Also, I was surprised at the high number of military who were also isolationist although they were not as publicly vocal as Lindbergh.

In the other camp of the interventionists were a multitude of high profile men and women who felt just as strongly that if England fell to Germany, the U. S. was next. Therefore it was in our best interest to support England early on, beginning in the late 1930's when Hitler occupied all of Europe except England.

Surprising to me, in Olson's book, Franklin Roosevelt followed the polls of public opinion rather than lead the nation down the path which he felt they should follow. This was pointed out numerous times during that two-year period of 'flip-flop' governing.

And while FDR was deciding whether to lead the American people to support Britain, London was being blown to bits.

Here's an excellent map showing the bombs dropped by the Nazi's (**EXPLORE THE LONDON BLITZ during 7th October 1940 to 6th June 1941)** London Blitz

When thinking of FDR I've always thought of his leadership through the depression, The New Deal, the CCC, all programs to get the nation from the depths of the depression.

It's been my perception was that he was decisive and firm on making decisions which impacted every man, woman and child in America. According to Olson, this was not so. FDR after presenting all the facts from his advisers, continued to evade on giving a definitive path. And there were times when he did make a

decision, that he reversed that decision the next day or so.

According to Olson, this lapse of decision making on his part was shown in poll after poll. America was ready to follow if the president was ready to lead. This came as a complete surprise to me thinking that FDR was a leader in the free world.

Wendell Willkie, Republican who ran against FDR in 1940 and lost, ended up playing a critical part in moving the nation towards accepting intervention in the war against Germany. In my mind Willkie was only an asterisk in American politics during the 1930-40's. What a pleasant surprise to learn more about him and how he put the nation above the party helping FDR sway the American public toward intervening and providing ships and equipment to Britain.

In the last chapter, Aftermath, Olson points out that Lindbergh had a secret life. He traveled around the world for years after WWII not giving his wife, author Ann Morrow, the benefit of where he was and leaving her for extended periods of time to raise their four children.

It was discovered in 2003 that Lindbergh had three mistresses in Germany and Switzerland. Those three woman (two of which were sisters) had seven children by Charles. Added to his six children from Ann(including his first born Charles Jr. who was kidnapped and killed) another seven children which totaled 13 children he fathered.

Yes, I'm so glad I read this book, and yes, I'm so glad I'm finished with it. Don't let my wa-wa-ing stop you from reading it; please don't deprive yourself of this excellent book.

The education I received from reading the book, far exceeded the complaining I did to myself about how long it took me to read! Sorry about that, folks. Do read it, though.

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I get the dunce hat (or spanked) since I should have pointed to Jeff Keeten's review, the reason I read this book. As we know, Jeff hits them out of the park with his spot-on reviews.

Here's the link to Jeff's take on this great read:

Those Angry Days

♥ Sue says

This is a marvelous historical book which is a also a page turner.

Olson meticulously fills us in about the battle between the isolationists and the interventionists in newsprint pages and in speeches. She shows the inner workings of Roosevelt, his cabinet and followers and also the strange journey of Lindbergh from hero to oddity and beyond.

Dj says

While the book does focus on the relationship between FDR and Lindbergh it doesn't ignore others in the turbulent days of the late thirties leaning up to the US entry into the War. Some of the names that pop up as isolationist are unsurprising and in some cases a no brainier. Others are more interesting. Growing up in the time period I did, it is somewhat of an eye opener to read that individuals like Gerald Ford, Sargent Shriver and John F. Kennedy were isolationists for a time. The author also brings up an interesting point as to why FDR was so hesitant to lead in regards to giving aid to Britain during this crucial phase of the war. When FDR started his Presidency he was strong willed and confident, leading the New Deal, but there was a change between the start of his leading the nation and the time when Britain needed help due to standing alone against Germany. In that time frame FDR had suffered more than one defeat, but perhaps the attempt he made to stack the Supreme Court which cost him so much and hurt his confidence badly. After that the author points out that FDR would follow the people, not lead them. Something that drove a number of his advisers half crazy.

Another interesting comment by the author is just how much the Military was divided on the issue of intervention. Some of the more common complaints are tossed about in many places like the dissatisfaction with giving new weapons to the British instead of keeping them at home to build up defense. One General going so far as to release top secret plans to the public to try and stop the transfer of arms, the fact that Pearl Harbor happened three days later most likely saved his career.

An amazingly good book.

Mike Hankins says

This is a story of Americans deeply divided against one another, about accusations of fake news, about foreign powers interfering in US politics, about fears of an immigration crisis, about leaks of classified military intelligence to the press, college protests, resistance groups, a controversial president in a tumultuous election -- and none of it is about the present day, this is all about the debate of whether the US should get involved in WW2.

This book is fantastic. Americans tend to remember the WW2 years as a time where we were all united in a patriotic sense of duty to fight for freedom and democracy. And that was mostly the case--after Pearl Harbor. But before that, the debate about whether America should ally with England, about whether the Nazis were our enemies or not--that was a fierce debate that Art Schlesinger described as the most intense political debate during his lifetime--including Vietnam.

To tell the story, Lynne Olson focuses on FDR and Charles Lindbergh, although frequently the story is much broader than that, encompassing almost all areas of American life from politics to pop culture, and how the debate between interventionists (who wanted to help Britain against the Nazis) versus isolationists (who ranged from pacifists to ultra-conservatives to outright Nazi supporters) played out in all the various areas of life.

The book is too long at just under 500 pages, although the shocking thing is knowing how much more there is to tell. Olson doesn't spend too much time on the German American Bund, focusing instead on the slightly less extreme America First movement. In story after story, the book does a great job of being balanced,

attempting to honestly show both sides without resorting to character assassinations or accusations about motives. Characters like Lindbergh are shown in their full complexity rather than as caricature. And all of the stories here are written in a fantastic and engaging style that reads like a harrowing novel.

This is a great read for anyone interested in how the US got involved in WW2, anyone who assumes what patriotism means in any context. Most historians will already be familiar with much of this material (although I was often surprised by new, revelatory information) but this book isn't aimed at historians as much as general readers, who will likely find a lot to relate to in this book, that has a lot to say about who we are as Americans, about how diverse of a place America has always been.

Adam says

One of the most frustrating points that is made about our current social and political climate is that it's never been *this bad*. When we talk about our elected officials, regardless of party affiliation, we bemoan the state of our government, their lack of empathy and shared sacrifice, their detachment and utter inability to accomplish anything substantial or beneficial. We demand civility and compromise, we demand clear ideas, and above all else we demand "conversation" over arguments and deadlocks--we want those in positions of power to discuss, share, and come away more informed. And then, to validate this belief, we turn to organizations and institutions that promote just the opposite: cable news channels that feed into our own ideologies so we're imbued with a sense of self-righteousness, a belief that our side is right and the other side is wrong, and it's on these cable-news shows that we see those very same politicians--the men and women we claim to abhor--lecturing The Other Side about proper behavior and the need to personify those very virtues they themselves refuse to embrace. It's a strange, maddening, and almost Orwellian cycle that feeds itself like a creature devouring its own offspring.

But it's not new.

When people say our current situation is worse than any other time in our nation's history, even the not-so-distant past of our fathers and grandfathers, they're presenting themselves as ignorant and foolishly idealistic. Anyone with an understanding of American history that goes beyond their high-school textbooks recognizes how prevalent and enduring these themes are throughout our centuries-long history. There has always been legislative inaction, conflict, arguments, and a lack of leadership when it comes to making our country a better, safer, stronger place; there have always been rotten and corrupt politicians wielding ridiculous amounts of power, talking heads espousing vitriol against those whose ideologies--or ethnicities--differ from their own, and the masses--unsure, angry, afraid--who are bribed and manipulated to pick one side or the other.

Case in point: the lead-up to World War II. Even today, we recognize the complexities and difficulties inherent in how we as a nation approached a war that, for many citizens, was not ours to wage until Pearl Harbor. We understood the evils of Hitler and the Nazis, even before we knew the full extent of his genocide, and in doing so we also understood the commitment it would take--in time, in money, in bodies--to defeat him. He waged his war in part because of the Versailles Treaty's retributive inequities, of which we shared the blame, but we could also step back and claim innocence; after all, we were not his neighbor, and he was not antagonizing us. We understood that much of his power was derived through scapegoating and fear, primarily of those minorities within Germany borders who did not have the numbers or influence to defend themselves, while also knowing many of our citizens--an unhealthy swathe of our own population, we must admit--held some of those very same repugnant views.

It's this division as a nation and a people that lies at the heart of Lynne Olson's *Those Angry Days*, which chronicles the build-up to America's involvement in World War II. Ostensibly an account of the conflict between Franklin Roosevelt and aviator-turned-isolationist Charles Lindbergh, as the subtitle describes, Olson's book is actually the story of our divisions as a nation--a look at how our country was split on what to do about a war we didn't want any part of. And while Olson casts the wildly popular (and deeply communicative) Roosevelt and the wildly popular (but deeply reserved) Lindbergh as representatives of the two sides, both men are little more than supporting players who only meet once, and to no effect. Roosevelt is portrayed as little more than a sabre-rattler whose words do not translate to action, and Lindbergh is far from an isolationist leader, spending much of the story--set in the late 1930s and early 1940s--with his wife and children away from the public eye. When he does engage in politics, which occurs more and more in the book's second half, it's to give anti-war speeches that are increasingly anti-Semitic in nature. But even with his widespread fame, Lindbergh does more to damage the isolationist movement than further its ultimately fruitless agenda.

A more appropriate subject would have been the relationship between Roosevelt and Senator Burton Wheeler, who was Congress' most ardent and vocal isolationists...and a much greater (and more powerful) foe to Roosevelt than Lindbergh was, as he could actually propose--or, in most cases, stall--legislation related to the war. Or perhaps a better focus would have been the relationship between Lindbergh and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, a progressive whose dogged pursuit of the aviator borders on obsession by the book's closing chapter; it was Ickes who led the White House's attacks on Lindbergh, not Roosevelt. Or even between Roosevelt's Republican opponent in 1940, Wendell Willkie, and the Republican Party itself, which threatened to implode over their own divisions--those who supported isolation against those who supported intervention--and ultimately fought this fight in Willkie's candidacy. By the end of the book, Willkie is one of the few public figures, other than Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who comes out of the entire pre-war debacle looking better than he did going in. (Willkie becomes one of those party-bucking, country-before-career politicians people today desperately yearn for, even though he himself gives in to election-year pressures and would not have even survived his own first term had he been elected.)

I'm willing to forgive Olson--or her publisher, or both--for framing the nearly 500 pages of this book as a fight between two men, one a president and the other an aviator, even if the men are more stand-ins than actually page-to-page adversaries; after all, it's the subtitle's promise that actually lured me in in the first place, and I'm far from disappointed in the book. And Olson actually does good by her subjects, including Lindbergh, whose repellent speeches are put into context when related to the man and his inability to process or predict the feelings of those around him; no one leaves this book a boogeyman, and all public figures, including those who are only given a brief mention here or there, are given some depth. (Ickes and Wheeler, undoubtedly the book's two most dichotomous figures, are also its most interesting and, surprisingly, the most fun to read about.) But there's so much to write about here, and so much more to learn, that even if Olson had doubled the size of this book and devoted novel-length portions to all of the divisions and conflicts mentioned within--big and small, national and parochial, enduring and passing--it still would still not have been as satisfying as promised by the subject matter. We know, living as we are now through an era of immense disagreement and change, that conflicts can tell us more about ourselves and our country than anything else, and that great conflicts and great history are often intertwined. And it's that quest--to know more about ourselves and where we came from, who we were then and are now, and how this can make us better people--that is the heart of American history, even when it's the sides of our past we'd rather excuse or forget.

This review was originally published at There Will Be Books Galore.

Steve says

Lynne Olson, in her introduction to *Those Angry Days*, asserts that much of the pre-war history regarding American involvement in foreign wars has been largely forgotten. As a reader of numerous books on World War 2, I would have to agree with her. The internal pre-war debates and battles, in my reading experience, are usually reduced to a few paragraphs or chapters. Olson, in a much needed corrective, has devoted an entire (and fairly long) book to that history.

And it's a very good book. Olson, like all good history writers, does an outstanding job recreating a pivotal time. She successfully brings to life numerous people who lived through those times. The obvious ones, such as FDR, Lindbergh, Marshall, Churchill, Wendell Wilkie (who is arguably the star of the book) have their time on stage. But it's the less obvious ones (and virtually unknown to me) that will really catch your attention. Anne Lindbergh, the wife of Charles Lindbergh, largely through diary entries, comes across as a sensitive, caring, and largely supportive soul, hamstrung by her isolationist husband who seems nearly autistic in his interactions with others; Senator Burton Wheeler, who was evidently the model for Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, would be a major leader of the isolationists as well as a major thorn in FDR's side; and, alarmingly, German sympathetic military officials such as Truman Smith and General Wedemeyer (who would, ironically, create the American war plan), are just a few of the personages that Olson brings to life. Interestingly, in this rich history, it is FDR who perhaps suffers the most. He comes across as tentative, even timid at times, in the face of strong German provocations, such as the 1941 torpedoings of the *Kearney* and *Reuben James*. By this time the American people as a whole (as Olson strongly suggests) were probably ready for war. Americans were not looking for war, but world events, despite the ongoing internal battles between interventionists and isolationists, had by late 1941 made it clear that it would be necessary. FDR continued to think he needed something else, an event, that would make that choice for him. He would get that event on December 7. Highly recommended. (Note that at Olson has written several books on this time period, each with a different focus. I plan on reading them. She's a terrific writer.)

Steven Z. says

Recently I visited the World War II tunnels under the White Cliffs of Dover. As a retired historian this fostered further interest on my part in examining the events surrounding Dunkirk and the German aerial blitz over England in 1940. Coincidentally, Lynne Olson, the author of a number of books dealing with the United Kingdom and the war, published her most recent effort, THOSE ANGRY DAYS: ROOSEVELT, LINDBERGH AND THE FIGHT OVER WORLD WAR II, 1939-1941, a survey of American policy toward events in Europe in the 1930s culminating with its entrance into the war following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Olson as she has done in all her previous books presents a cogent and well written narrative that explores the role of those who sought to prepare for what they perceived to be the coming war with Germany and provide the British with the necessary assistance once war broke out following the German invasion of Poland in September, 1939. Further, Olson examines the role of the isolationist movement during the period, a group that sought to keep the United States out of the war at seemingly all costs. In her narrative Olson incorporates all of the main characters in this, at times, nasty debate ranging from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Charles Lindbergh. Other than a few minute details there is not much that is new here, but the book is an excellent synthesis of available primary and secondary materials and the author has prepared a smooth narrative that captivates the reader.

A number of important subjects and themes are explored. The discussion of the evolution of American public opinion toward the war in Europe is interesting, particularly how the British under the leadership of William Stephenson and his network sought to influence decision making in Washington. The role of Charles Lindbergh as he evolves from a national hero to a political partisan involved with isolationists at home and manipulated by Hitler's government abroad is fascinating. The election of 1940 is accurately described and the fear felt by FDR for the candidacy of Wendell Willkie takes the reader inside both presidential campaigns. Wilkie is treated as a principled man. Despite his feelings about the New Deal, he supported the interventionist movement and he was an essential component politically as the Roosevelt administration sought to gain the passage of important legislation, i.e., the Destroyer Base Deal, Lend-Lease, and conscription in Congress.

Olson correctly points to Roosevelt's attempt to alter the make-up of the Supreme Court in 1937 as his worst domestic political error that heavily impacted his ability to prepare the United States for the approaching conflict and provide assistance to the British after 1939. This defeat lessened FDR's confidence in his own decision-making, reduced his influence on Congress, and saw his own popularity with the American people decline. This hamstrung attempts to alter the Neutrality legislation of the mid to late 1930s and was a boon to the political opposition led by the likes of Senators Burton K. Wheeler and William Borah, Robert Woods, the head of Sears Roebuck, Henry Ford, and Charles Lindbergh.

The passage of HR 1776, better known as Lend Lease is vividly presented in exacting detail. Olson's description of the vituperative politics of the period through the eyes of the main characters is enlightening. The actions taken by Wendell Willkie and Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador to the United States, who died shortly after the bill was passed is detailed and reflects an author in total control of their material. Olson observes correctly that the passage of the bill was FDR's most important prewar political victory and her choice of quotes is wonderful, i.e., Eric Sevareid, the CBS correspondent's description of opponents of Lend Lease as "tobacco-chewing, gravy stained, overstuffed gila monsters, who nestled in their bed of chins, would doze through other speeches, then haul up their torpid bodies and mouth the old, evil shibboleths about King George III, the war debts, Uncle Sap, and decadent France (were) very dangerous men," is also illustrative of the negativity, nastiness, and partisanship of the period.

Over the years some have argued that FDR sought to involve the United States in a war against Germany well before December, 1941. Olson's argument to the contrary is right on as she states that FDR plodded along and took baby steps toward preparing the United States for what he was convinced would be a war to defeat Nazi Germany. FDR read the polls assiduously and was always afraid no matter what the political polls may have reflected that he was too far out in front of what the American people would support. Olson's examination of the politics behind expanding the undeclared naval war in the North Atlantic highlighted by decisions of how much area the United States would defend in convoying merchant shipping is illustrative of FDR's fears, as was his approach to the conversion of the US economy from domestic to military production.

There are numerous other areas that Olson explores ranging from the role of Hollywood in the propaganda war against Germany, the influence of anti-Semitism on American politics, the infighting within the American military establishment, and intimate portraits of the most important historical characters. Olson's examination of events and the attendant research contribute to a well thought out and deeply interesting portrait of the United States and England as both faced the coming war and its final outbreak in 1939 and 1941. As a side note if anyone is interested in reading a counter factual historical novel dealing with this topic they should read THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA by Philip Roth who conjectures of what might have happened if Lindbergh had sought the presidency in 1940 and defeated Roosevelt, just food for thought.

Martin says

This exhaustively researched history is written in a compelling, somewhat novelistic style that made it impossible for me to put down. The novel begins and ends with Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and circles back around to them throughout. The author treats Mrs. Lindbergh very decently (as does Phillip Roth in “The Plot Against America”) and makes me want to know more about the lady. There are other players whom I knew little about. These include radio host Dorothy Thompson, the first American journalist expelled from Germany by the Nazis, Algonquin Round Table founder Robert Sherwood who eventually held posts in FDR’s secretary of war and the Office of War Information, and Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador to the US whose tireless efforts kept communication open (though somewhat filtered) between FDR and Churchill, and who pressed FDR for increased aid to Britain. Two characters who also continually appear in the narrative are Harold L. Ickes, FDR’s Secretary of the Interior, and Democratic Senator Burton Wheeler, who staunchly opposed US entry into the war. I learned more about the America First Committee, especially Lindbergh’s involvement. And that FDR’s protracted dithering on the war greatly stemmed from the bruising he suffered due to his attempt to stack the Supreme Court with the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937. The author also looks at Hollywood’s slowly evolving attitude toward the war, the ambivalent relationship that most Americans had towards Jewish people, and the long term effect that Charles Lindbergh’s anti-semitism had on his wife and children. Now I have to admit, I did rush through the middle of this book when it got too detailed, for my taste, with all the political and diplomatic maneuvering in Washington circa 1940. However, I would say that was not a fault of the book but rather a reflection of my own interests. Once that section was over I was fully attentive again. When I read history books such as this, which shows the US at such a divided time, I take comfort in knowing that our current political polarization is nothing unusual. By the end of this book, I have the sense that America's decision to go to war has been slowly and carefully decided.

Liz Waters says

I love Lynne Olson's work. Well-researched data presented in an engaging narrative style. i learn so many things from every one of her books I read that I cannot possibly count them here. I hate to see them come to an end, and often reread passages over time. For those of us who were brought up with a black and white view of history, it is fascinating to see the little gray shadows brought to light. Lynne Olson makes historical figures come to life as true human beings. She doesn't "expose", but enlightens historic detail. This is a most rewarding read, and particularly relevant in these times when Congress is as obstructionist as it was in the days before World War II. You see the same "tricks of the trade" being played, and know that nothing in politics is really new at all. You can draw parallels between the America-First faction and the modern Tea Party fringe group in their tactics and rhetoric. It is reassuring to see that our current crop of politicians are no more wicked than their predecessors. They are certainly no more enlightened, more is the pity.

I found Olson's portrayal of Anne Morrow Lindbergh particularly compelling. Olson is emerging as a major voice in 20th century history, and I will be watching anxiously for all future books!

Max says

Olson takes us back to a time more uncertain and more contentious than our own. She profiles a strident Charles Lindbergh and a cautious Franklin Roosevelt engaging in the heated debate between the isolationists

and interventionists as WWII unfolds. As the two sides unleash their vitriol on each other, American policy is shaped as much by personal animosities and loyalties as principles. Olson's focused portrayal of this great political divide reveals the character of the participants in ways we might miss in more general histories. We see the American public and their leaders overwhelmed by the rapidity with which ominous events unfolded. The stakes were very high, no one knew what was coming next and everyone showed it. For those interested in how America faced the prospect of war in the two years before Pearl Harbor, this is an invaluable read.

In 1939, the isolationists, led largely by older men who grew up in a world without cars and planes, felt the United States was secure just because of geography. Aiding their effort to ignore Nazi expansion in Europe was a hero well aware of the reach of airpower, Charles Lindbergh. Lindbergh, who lived in England from 1935-38, had visited Germany frequently. In 1936 Goering invited him to review the Luftwaffe. Lindbergh, impressed by German precision and military prowess, wrote glowing reports. In 1938 just weeks after Munich, Goering awarded Lindbergh the Service Cross of the German Eagle. Lindbergh did not expect the award, but it along with his public statements created the image of a Nazi supporter. Lindbergh held that Britain, France and the US's unfair treatment of Germany was the cause of WWII. He expressed the inherent racism of the time saying it was important whites not fight whites, but "defend the white race against foreign invasion." On September 15, 1939, adding his voice to the isolationist cause, he gave a major speech carried by all three national radio networks laying out his positions. He was appealing to the widespread sentiment against war from people who saw the failure of WWI to bring a lasting peace. Many believed Europe was unsalvageable and best left to its fate.

FDR, liberals and internationalists saw the world falling apart and Hitler ready to take over, but they were stymied politically. The Senate was controlled by powerful men born in the years following the Civil War. FDR was still reeling from overwhelming opposition to his plan to expand the Supreme Court. But, a master politician, he bounced back. He enlisted many prominent figures to support replacement of prior Neutrality Acts with a new one that would permit Britain and France to buy arms from the US on a "cash and carry" basis. In November 1939 Congress passed FDR's legislation. To make his case FDR had taken to the national airwaves himself to rebut Lindbergh. FDR wrote Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau that he was "absolutely convinced that Lindbergh is a Nazi." Thus all the stops were pulled out to discredit Lindbergh and the isolationists including empowering J. Edgar Hoover to track them. After the German Blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940, public attitudes began changing. Many Americans became hysterical fearing a German invasion. Many patriotic vigilantes targeted German sympathizers. The country was deeply divided.

With the fall of Paris the war became ever more real to the average American. The interventionists started winning the battle for the people's mind. The major issue became arming the British. Even families were divided. Lindbergh's mother-in law gave a radio speech supporting helping the British and implicitly denouncing the activities of her son-in law. Anne Morrow Lindbergh was torn not only between husband and mother but her sister Constance, to whom she was very close. Constance married an Englishman charged by his government with winning America's support. The British had several groups working for them. Their ambassador Lord Lothian effectively used the American press. Canadian William Stephenson led the British Security Coordination (BSC), a secret New York based organization. The BSC employed mostly Canadians since they blended in better with Americans. The BSC, helped by the FBI and the administration, gathered intelligence and planted propaganda in America. Ian Fleming based James Bond in part on the debonair Stephenson including his "Booth's Gin, high and dry, easy on the vermouth, shaken not stirred" martini recipe.

Also working on Britain's behalf interceding with FDR and others was the New York based Century Group comprised of powerful prominent Americans. The US had surplus WWI destroyers which Britain desperately needed. Century Group members, led by newspaper editor Herbert Agar, went to the White

House to push for giving the British the destroyers. FDR told them that if they could get General Pershing to come out for the deal he would get behind it. They convinced the revered 79 year old Pershing to give a radio address supporting the deal. In return FDR asked for and got US bases on British Caribbean territories. He touted the deal as a hard-nosed bargain with the US coming out on top. Fearing the isolationists in his upcoming bid for an unprecedented third term, FDR did not want his action characterized as a gift to the British. FDR knew there was broad support for this "trade." FDR would follow public opinion rather than lead it.

Century Group members, Wall Street lawyer Grenville Clark and his friend Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, persuaded FDR to name staunch interventionist Henry Stimson as Secretary of War. Along with the 72 year old Stimson who had been President Taft's Secretary of War, they persuaded FDR to appoint interventionist Frank Knox Secretary of the Navy. Grenville Clark also led perhaps the Century Group's most important crusade. Clark was the main architect of draft legislation introduced in Congress in June 1940. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall had almost thrown Clark out of his office a month earlier when Clark brought up the necessity for a draft. But the fall of France and his new boss, Stimson, convinced Marshall to change his mind. With public and even Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie's support for the draft, FDR's interventionist advisors were able to get FDR behind it. FDR had been afraid to bring it up. The draft bill passed in September 1940. The media helped shift public opinion. After France capitulated, the public grew increasingly nervous and anti-German. The Century Group launched a publicity campaign in support of the draft. The New York Times came out for the draft. When the German's began bombing London in September 1940, Edward R. Murrow's radio addresses and Henry Luce's *Life* magazine's pictures of hospitalized children and widespread destruction further galvanized public support of Britain.

On the isolationist side, besides Lindbergh, was the America First Committee led by Sears Roebuck executive, Robert Wood, which became the most prominent isolationist organization. Chicago based where German and Irish communities proliferated, the organization's anti-elitist anti-British attitude represented Midwestern values. But extremists joined the organization including ruffians allegiant to Father Coughlin. Coughlin was the vitriolic friend of fellow anti-Semite Henry Ford who Hitler had praised in *Mein Kampf*. America was polarized. Anne and Charles Lindbergh found themselves ostracized by all their old school friends.

The fall of 1940 brought the bombing of London and the American presidential election. But fortunately for FDR and the interventionists, Republican nominee Wendell Willkie supported Britain. Although in the last days of his losing campaign he would attack FDR for leading America into war, after the election he came out in support of FDR, much to the chagrin of powerful Republican isolationists. In November of 1940 British ambassador Lord Lothian had blurted it out that Britain was broke. They needed American money. Lend Lease was FDR's ingenious way to help, by ostensibly loaning Britain the war material it needed. American public opinion had turned in support of Britain but the bill's passage in February of 1941 was still a pitched battle. Willkie's congressional testimony in support of lend lease was important to its passage. Lindbergh testified for the isolationists.

Unfortunately, FDR did little to implement the new program despite the rousing speech he had given in one of his fireside chats in December 1940. His health was poor and may have been responsible in part for his lethargy. But this pattern of talking tough then waiting to see what everyone thought persisted. Despite a public that largely favored going all out to support Britain he was never sure. He always overestimated the political risk. The press was on his case about his lack of leadership as were interventionist advisors such as Stimson, Knox, Naval Operations Chief Admiral Stark and Henry Morgenthau. On the other side, Marshall did not want to share America's war production with Britain. He embodied the Gibraltar America defense

strategy. He selected intelligence chiefs that thought Britain's failure was imminent, hated Churchill and were Anglophobic. Marshall's intelligence chief Embick was close to Lindbergh and his Germany expert Truman Smith was close to Germany's Washington military attaché General Friedrich von Boetticher. Giving in to the press, public opinion and interventionist advisors, FDR on May 27, 1941 gave another passionate fireside chat declaring a state of emergency and saying he would help Britain in every way possible, but gave no specifics. So tough was the speech, most listeners thought for sure US convoying of supply ships to Britain was imminent and some even thought a declaration of war would follow, but FDR did nothing. Meanwhile, Britain was desperate as Germany sank its merchant ships at rates so high Britain could not even import sufficient food to feed its population.

While FDR's friends failed to bring FDR to action, his political enemies, the isolationists, did. In April 1941 FDR went on a public offensive denouncing the isolationists as unpatriotic singling out Lindbergh for the worst criticism essentially calling him a traitor. Lindbergh answered back just as vehemently accusing FDR of a "government of subterfuge" where "democracy doesn't exist today." Lindbergh denied spreading hate, but he attracted extremists and rallies he led erupted into "Hang Roosevelt." FDR employed J. Edgar Hoover to track his opponents. Lindbergh among others was wire tapped.

In June 1941 a German submarine sank an American freighter leaving the crew to their fate in lifeboats with little food or water. Hitler had ordered his navy not to attack American shipping. He would soon invade Russia and wanted to vanquish the Soviet Union before taking on America. He need not have worried. FDR's tepid response was to position 4000 American soldiers in Iceland relieving the British troops there. There was a silver lining. Admiral Stark organized British ships leaving Canada for England into convoys with American vessels supplying Iceland thus guarding them for half their journey. Next FDR faced the ending of the one year term of conscription for the fledgling American army. The soldiers were disenchanted, ill equipped and ill trained. They didn't know why they were in the army. They were not at war and all around them civilians were enjoying a new prosperity. This came from the added spending to produce war goods which resulted in even more consumer goods being produced. In fact Lend Lease had spent only 2% of its appropriation delivering little more than some basic food items since its inception. There was no sense of urgency and the so called war preparation effort was disorganized. FDR had declared a state of emergency in May 1941 but Americans could see no action consistent with that declaration. By one vote in the House the conscription extension bill passed only due to the skillful leadership of House Speaker Sam Raeburn. If it had failed, the army would have largely been dismantled four months before Pearl Harbor.

In September of 1941 isolationists in Congress opened hearings into the movie industry which had made films that were anti-Nazi and pro-British. Thanks to a well-orchestrated defense by their lawyer, none other than Wendell Willkie, the hearings turned into a disaster for the isolationists and were shortly shut down. The next salvo was from the administration. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes viciously attacked Lindbergh. Lindbergh's next move was a major speech in Des Moines on 9/11/1941 calling out FDR, the British and the Jews for trying to get America into the war. As his wife Anne predicted after failing to dissuade him from giving the speech there was a huge backlash to his characterization of the Jews. It resulted in isolationist organizations such as America First being labeled anti-Semitic and attracted radical anti-Semites to them furthering the image. Lindbergh claimed he was not anti-Semitic but he clearly singled the Jews out as "the other" not really American. Anti-Semitism played a role in the congressional attacks on the movie industry as well. Anti-Semitism was commonplace in the 1930's and 40's. The early years of the century saw a large influx of Eastern European Jews into America and they had become easy scapegoats for the depression.

Also in September 1941 FDR formally announced the US would escort British convoys to Iceland and he instituted a shoot on sight policy for German warships. This was the result of torpedoes fired by a German sub at the destroyer USS *Greer*. FDR presented this incident as unprovoked but likely the sub thought the US

destroyer had dropped depth charges on it when in fact they came from a British plane. The US ship was tracking the sub for the British. On October 16 the US destroyer *Kearney* was torpedoed and eleven US sailors were killed. Outside of pushing for revisions to the Neutrality Act that provided for arming US merchant ships and allowing them to go to Britain, FDR did nothing. Then the destroyer *Reuben James* was sunk and 115 US sailors died. In essence, the US Navy was already at war. FDR after issuing the usual tough sounding statement still was not ready to declare war or even repeal the neutrality act despite widespread public support. He would continue to monitor and follow his interpretation of public opinion which he always thought was against him.

The day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 FDR declared war on Japan but still would not declare war on Germany. If not for Hitler's stupid decision to declare war on the US on December 11, the US might have focused all its efforts on Japan depriving Britain and Russia of the supplies they needed to hold out against the Germans. But fortunately for the country following the subsequent declaration of war with Germany FDR returned to the leadership form he had showed during the hundred days. Japanese bombs had united the country and revitalized its leader.
