

America 1941: A Nation at the Crossroads. By Ross Gregory. (New York: The Free Press, 1989. Pp. x, 339. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$22.95.)

America 1941 is a trip down memory lane for anyone old enough to remember what life was like in the years before Pearl Harbor, but more importantly, it will serve as a marvelous introduction to the social history of pre-World War II America for many years to come.

The author writes that this is "a story of how Americans perceived the world of their time, how they lived their lives and tried to solve their problems" (p. x). Gregory leaves most of the politics, diplomacy, and war to other historians. He discusses almost every facet of American life in this period: working conditions, salaries, city slums, race relations, radio programs, movies, sports heroes, comic strips, and so forth. It is all here, from Joe Dimaggio to Joe Palooka. The author even includes a detailed description of bringing in the hay on an American farm that struck home with a reviewer who has vivid memories of doing in the summer of 1945 exactly what the author describes.

Gregory depicts an innocent, uncertain America stumbling its way into world leadership. Most Americans were very much aware of the war that had been raging around them since 1939, thanks to *Life* magazine, radio commentators such as Edward R. Murrow and Elmer Davis, and a steady flow of Hollywood war movies and newsreels. Still, a majority preferred to believe that somehow America could sit this one out. The author accurately states that Franklin D. Roosevelt, fearful of this powerful isolationist sentiment, refused to present a clear case for intervention on the side of the Allies. His handling of lend-lease is a perfect example of this. FDR euphemistically called it: "A Bill Further to Promote the Defense of the United States and for other Purposes." On the other hand, Gregory's own convincing documentation of the typical American's reluctance to become involved in the war makes one doubt that FDR or anyone else could have rallied the American people behind the Allied cause until American territory was physically attacked. Even the undeclared naval war with Germany failed to create a consensus for war. Only a sneak Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor accomplished this.

America 1941 is a marvelous social history of the American people in the final months before Pearl Harbor. Gregory has made judicious use of a massive array of facts and figures about the lives of ordinary people. This book is not primarily aimed at professional historians but should be of great value to the younger generation who have their only knowledge of the old America from their parents or grandparents.

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