
For many generations, in fact since the euphoria surrounding V-E Day and V-J Day, most Americans have continued to see World War II as "the good war." In their eyes, the United States, under the able leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt pursued enemies as dogged as they were evil, in the process spreading abroad the very reform embodied in the domestic New Deal.

Thomas Fleming will have none of this. A freelance historian and the author of forty books, Fleming is familiar to devotees of PBS television, American Heritage, and the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Fleming begins by recalling how he grew up in Jersey City worshiping FDR. Only now, as he seeks to sift genuine "history" from memory, does he find the halo tarnished. Indeed, he has written an indictment so severe it resembles a lawyer's brief. His narrative is based mostly on published monographs and memoirs, though he does use several doctoral theses, the Columbia University Oral History Collection, and several manuscripts, among them the papers of editor Fulton Oursler, his former employer.

Some aspects of the book, though known to specialists, might be enlightening to the general reader. Particularly helpful is the data on Roosevelt's health: Fleming shows that from early 1944 on the president was far too ill to lead a nation at war. Even before the elections of that year, FDR was limited to a twenty-hour work week. Fleming is also telling on the fiasco of the wartime sedition trials, the domination of wartime production by big business, the surprising Republican victory in the 1942 congressional elections, Roosevelt's attitude towards Harry Truman, and the destructive bureaucratic infighting between Vice President Henry Wallace and Commerce Secretary Jesse Jones. Also cogent is Fleming's account of Roosevelt's handling of the Wallace-Truman dispute as the 1944 Democratic convention approached. There is much to be said for his indictments of saturation bombing, the cover-up of the Soviet massacre of Polish officers, Russia's obstruction of an American air base in the Ukraine, and official and unofficial Allied indifference to the German resistance.

Some claims are highly debatable, to say the least, among them the sweeping assertion that Roosevelt "tricked" his nation into war by using Asia as the "backdoor" (p. 4). Fleming goes so far as to write that FDR "had seduced America into the war with clever tricks, one-step-forward one-step-back double-talk, and the last resort provocation of Japan" (p. 257). Indeed, the president "covertly goaded Japan into attacking the United States" (p. 426).Hardly a contemporary historian accepts this reasoning, and several leading ones, among them Warren F. Kimball and Robert Dallek, find Roosevelt envisioning American participation limited to air and sea conflict against Germany while avoiding hostilities with Japan.
Fleming stresses FDR's "Good Man" cable sent to Neville Chamberlain on the eve of the Munich conference while neglecting Barbara Rearden Farnham's claim that Roosevelt sought to brace the prime minister when the Sudeten crisis first broke out. Also dubious is Fleming's claim that FDR undoubtedly caused the leak of the Victory Program to the hostile Chicago Tribune just four days before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Equally doubtful is Fleming's contention that George C. Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower saw unconditional surrender as "a major blunder" (p. 175), though both generals did want the policy so modified and explained as to precipitate Axis surrender.

One would like a source for Fleming's assertion that because of the Yalta Conference "eleven million Poles became Russians" (p. 489). Were most people east of the Curzon line ethnic Poles to begin with? Furthermore, did not such decisions result from the military victories of the Red Army? Although Fleming is extremely critical of Roosevelt's policies at Teheran and Yalta, he does not examine what leverage Roosevelt possessed by then. Fleming sees Alger Hiss "at the heart" of the Yalta conference (p. 484) but does not explain what difference Hiss's presence really made.

At times Fleming's assertions are downright incorrect. In 1933 Dean Acheson did not resign as secretary of the treasury over "Roosevelt's spendthrift domestic policies" (p. 18). He stepped down as undersecretary because of FDR's gold purchases. During the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Communists were never "passionate supporters of America First" (p. 292); they continually attacked the organization while pushing their own antiwar pressure group, the American Peace Mobilization. Thomas E. Dewey had never been a member of the America First Committee (p. 353). Churchill was not "dumbfounded and dismayed" by FDR's announcement of unconditional surrender at Casablanca (pp. 174, 184), for the policy had been developed jointly by both the U.S. and Britain.

In short, this book is highly polemical. At best it serves as an uneven account. It should not, however, dissuade other scholars from researching a period as significant as it is neglected.

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Inside Organized Racism is a study of white supremacist women who belonged to hate groups in the late twentieth century. During