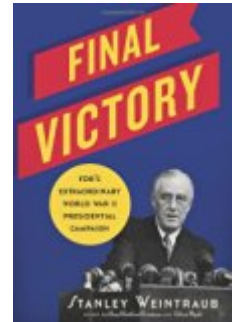


Stanley Weintraub. *Final Victory: FDR's Remarkable World War II Presidential Campaign.* Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2012. 256 pp. \$26.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-306-82113-4.



Reviewed by Cliff Bullock

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Wartime Politics and President Franklin Roosevelt's Fourth Term

Final Victory is a brief study of the last political presidential campaign for Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). Stanley Weintraub weaves a careful, smooth approach to political history by including straightforward official records and original sources with a vast array of articles, memoirs, and even less than reliable secondary sources. Primary sources are the core of *Final Victory*. Weintraub is an accomplished and seasoned author with more than fifty titles to his credit, including *11 Days in December: Christmas at the Bulge, 1944* (2007) and *Disraeli: A Biography* (1993). His style is prescient and richly historical.

Weintraub does not include a cross-referenced index; instead he uses a sources section with written details chapter by chapter. These make for interesting reading as the disparate memoirs, press reports, official documents, personal and official letters, radio broadcasts, and many other original and secondary sources are brought together to speak to the reader. Most in-

teresting is Weintraub's use of conflicting recollections and reports that result in a fluid and provocative historical study.

In chapter 1, Weintraub focuses on FDR's failing health. The author paints a stark picture of a very ill man who seems unlikely to survive another campaign let alone another term. The chapter closes with an introduction of Harry Truman's vice presidential consideration. Although there he does present a clear thesis statement, Weintraub posits that Roosevelt's fourth term would have been crucial to success at the end of WWII and to a more stable postwar world.

In chapter 7, entitled "Facing the Nation," Weintraub chronicles Roosevelt's missteps and mixed signals that may have furthered a Communist-dominated Eastern Europe. He makes references to FDR supporters who had become dismayed by Thomas E. Dewey campaign's support for the "hopeless" Polish London government in exile. The author finishes the chapter by leaving

the reader with little doubt that Roosevelt's vigorous campaigning was deflecting fears about his health. Weintraub does not comment on this obvious subversion of reality but makes it quite clear that Roosevelt was anything but healthy. The brutal truth revealed in *Final Victory* is that Roosevelt was all but a dying man.

Weintraub touches up the dishonesty rampant in American politics in chapter 10 with sure honesty while carefully directing his indignation to protect FDR. It is apparent in the closing chapters and epilogue that Weintraub views FDR as a hero. It is hard to disagree with his treatment of Roosevelt but he does make some uncomfortable generalizations in the epilogue. Weintraub gives no small credit to Roosevelt's leadership through the Great Depression and WWII (as he should) but does not take a critical look at some of Roosevelt's failed policies, such as raising taxes to a confiscatory level on high earners in his first term despite his promises not to do so (which most economists consider a major contributor to the downward economic spiral in 1933). He provides no analysis of some of the more outlandish actions taken by FDR, such as price fixing on gold, and he does not offer much serious critical thought to Roosevelt's acknowledged failure in dealing with Joseph Stalin and allowing Eastern Europe to descend into darkness behind the Iron Curtain.

Final Victory is a short, light read. The author keeps up a lively and informative pace. The book provides supplemental insight and information about the last time a war president has or will be elected to a fourth term. Weintraub touches on but does not question Roosevelt's declaration of "extra rights" that have become part and parcel of modern politics in America. He does not explore the consequences of Roosevelt's launching of increased federal power which stands astride a deeply indebted economy today. Nor does Weintraub address the underlying falseness of Roosevelt's health and fitness to serve a fourth term other than to state simply that he was dead

within eighty-three days of taking office for the last time. Weintraub speaks in the vein of a fan when he credits Roosevelt for leading the country out of a catastrophic depression (which he did) but the author does not examine the effectiveness of his policies. In light of the extreme circumstances of World War II and Roosevelt's direct hand in allowing the creation of a Communist Eastern European empire, it seems sycophantic that the author chose not to examine these aspects of FDR's leadership in detail.

In closing, Weintraub claims that the "Roosevelitian" legacy may well be that no future American president will face such a grave crisis as to require a fourth term. The author does not examine the cult of personality that led to a never before third consecutive term for Roosevelt much less a fourth. It seems fanciful today, with our economy struggling now for over five years, Iran (the world's leader in export terrorism) on the brink of producing nuclear weapons, and the current upheaval in the Middle East, that a current or future president may not face the grave times of Roosevelt's fourth term.

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