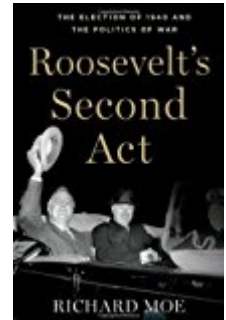


**Richard Moe.** *Roosevelt's Second Act: The Election of 1940 and the Politics of War.* Pivotal Moments in American History Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xvi + 376 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-998191-5.



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Richard Moe, a veteran White House staffer and former president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, presents in *Roosevelt's Second Act: The Election of 1940 and the Politics of War* an intensive and nuanced interpretation of a decisive year in American politics and of the man who presided over it. Moe finds new things to say about a figure already much explored in historical scholarship in examining Franklin D. Roosevelt's journey to a third term in the context of international turmoil. Moe characterizes Roosevelt in terms neither hagiographic nor unsympathetic, recognizing his at times "arrogant and manipulative" politics as well as his strongly felt "moral core" (pp. xv, 327). Ultimately, he argues that the president's conviction that Britain and worldwide democracy needed saving, combined with his growing certainty that he was the best man for the job, guided him in his decision to run again. International events pulled a reluctant nation toward supporting a president whose domestic policies had begun to lose favor in recent

years, and toward a more actively interventionist foreign policy.

*Roosevelt's Second Act* places a microscope on a short period of time, which allows for a richness of detail about the ensemble of characters surrounding FDR, especially the other potential Democratic candidates for president, a wide range of American isolationists, and his eventual electoral opponent, Wendell Willkie. FDR first cultivated New Dealers Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes as possible candidates to replace him, before settling most of his efforts on Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The president deemed Hull the ablest candidate regarding foreign affairs and the most electable, but Hull remained reluctant to run. This fact, along with Roosevelt's distaste for the other alternatives—including Vice President John Nance Garner and Democratic National Committee Chairman James Farley—helped move the president to run for a third term. One of the strongest sections of this book describes Roosevelt's machinations surrounding the 1940 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. A dis-

mal affair that exposed the president's propensity to manipulation and stubbornness, particularly with regard to his insistence upon an unpopular vice presidential candidate (Henry A. Wallace), the event nonetheless placed the assembly firmly in the incumbent's hands.

Among the nation's many isolationists were pacifists, socialists, German sympathizers, communists, and even New Dealers focused on domestic economic problems. Such polarizing figures as Charles Lindbergh, who described the German air power he had witnessed on several visits to that country in periodic radio addresses and speeches before the isolationist group America First, garnered favorable public opinion. Though Americans would not all have supported the appeasement Lindbergh urged, many agreed that their country should stay out of "Europe's War." [1] Moe's attention to the multifaceted isolationism of everyday Americans is important to his argument. FDR's overwhelming belief that democracy's preservation was tied to the United States' willingness to aid those opposing fascism and the election of a president strong enough to do this required overcoming widespread isolationism.

Events in Europe provided the push needed to get past this hurdle. Adolf Hitler made progressively clearer steps toward continental domination and posed a pressing threat to Great Britain, his last major democratic foe in the region after Germany installed a puppet regime in Vichy France. This situation forced Americans to realize the seriousness of the war. Even the more isolationist Republican Party selected a candidate for the general election who supported internationalism. Moe's treatment of Willkie as an individual and politician is thorough and insightful. Though Willkie made a mistake in delaying his campaign after the Republican convention, thereby allowing Roosevelt to make strides with voters by presenting himself as an assertive commander in chief, his presence in the election was crucial. Willkie's internationalism assured that he would pursue

similar tactics to Roosevelt's and depoliticized the foreign policy decisions the president was making as the election drew nearer. Policies to aid the allies, such as "cash-and-carry" and the Lend-Lease Act, became the country's only recourse.

This book deftly mines many previous presidential biographies for material. Among the more interesting documents used were recordings from what FDR called his "Oval Study." The first of their kind, these conversations allow the record to reflect the candid voice of a president who did not leave a diary among his papers. Additionally, Moe cites interesting letters from Felix Frankfurter and Archibald MacLeish, which Roosevelt had commissioned as part of his research into the constitutionality of a third-term run. Each man argued that FDR's running for reelection would not violate the Constitution, and MacLeish added, "Today all private plans, all private lives, have been repealed by a public danger.... In the face of the public danger all those who can be of service to the Republic have no choice but to offer themselves for service in those capacities for which they may be fitted" (p. 193). The letters from Frankfurter and MacLeish are included in the volume's appendix, providing a potentially useful source for historians and teachers.

Moe's volume is a worthy addition to Oxford University Press's Pivotal Moments in American History series. *Roosevelt's Second Act* successfully reaches a general audience, and belongs on the shelf near the works of the author's friends Doris Kearns Goodwin and David McCullough. Moe draws connections between FDR and other leading statesmen that demonstrate the historical significance of presidential decision making in times of international conflict and places Roosevelt's choices in 1940 on a tier with Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase, Abraham Lincoln's preservation of the Union, and Woodrow Wilson's commitment to idealistic internationalism. Many academics could learn from Moe's breezy chapter structure, vivid storytelling, and clear argumenta-

tion. All readers should be moved by how Moe pays homage to the voters of 1940 for their courage in supporting democracy through the unconventional reelection of a third-term president. As Americans approach momentous electoral decisions themselves, they would do well to consider their deepest values once more.

Note

[1]. Lindbergh's popularity as an accomplished airplane pilot lent him a remarkable degree of credibility with the public, a theme Philip Roth examined compellingly in his counterfactual historical novel, *The Plot against America* (New York: Random House, 2004).

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