Charles R. Kesler: Trump's First Year

John Marini
Michael M. Uhlmann
Bradley C.S. Watson: Bureaucracy in America

Brian Allen: The New African American Museum

Allen C. Guelzo: The Gilded Age

Karl Rove: William McKinley

Hadley Arkes
James R. Stoner, Jr.: The End of Free Speech

David P. Goldman: Condi Rice Goes to the Seashore

Matthew Continetti: Senate Pages

Andrew Roberts: VDH on WWIIs

Joseph Epstein: P.G. Wodehouse
Winston Churchill, having forgotten his earlier meeting with the future president in London in 1918 when Franklin Roosevelt was assistant secretary of the navy, later remarked that meeting him as president, “with all his buoyant sparkle, his iridescence,” was like “opening a bottle of champagne”—high praise from Churchill, who drank Pol Roger and was easily satisfied with the best. In 1941, Roosevelt rejoined that “it was fun to be in the same decade with you.”

The friendship between the wartime leaders of Great Britain and what Churchill called “the great republic” began when Roosevelt wrote a letter to Churchill, who had been reappointed first lord of the admiralty in September 1939 upon the outbreak of war in Europe, signing it “Former Naval Person.” It continued after Churchill became prime minister in May 1940 with 11 meetings during the war and an exchange of almost 2,000 communications, meticulously edited by American historian Warren F. Kimball in Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence (1984). Publication of these messages, together with the official multivolume Churchill biography begun by the statesman’s son, Randolph, and completed by the late Sir Martin Gilbert, filled out the picture drawn several decades earlier by Churchill himself in The Second World War (1948-53).

Roosevelt left no comparable memoirs, but notable books on Churchill and Roosevelt include Churchill and Roosevelt at War: The War They Fought and the Peace They Hoped to Make by the late British historian Keith Sainsbury (1994); Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War by Kimball (1997); Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets by British historian David Stafford (1999); and Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship by American journalist Jon Meacham (2003). Subsequent volumes of wartime documents to accompany the biography, now being published by Hillsdale College Press under the editorship of Hillsdale College president Larry Arnn (Gilbert’s former assistant), reveal more about their relations.

In his new book, American banker, businessman, and philanthropist Lewis E. Lehrman, whose previous books include two fine studies of Lincoln, Lincoln “by littles” (2013) and Lincoln at Peoria (2008), draws on these sources and many others listed in his extensive bibliography, broadening the subject to focus not only on his title characters but also on contemporaries around them. In the preface he explains that, although “Churchill, Roosevelt & Company is a book about some of the principal actors and events in the most massive global war of history,” its “purposes are strictly limited to exploring some of the diplomatic, political, war-making, and peace-making efforts of Churchill, Roosevelt, and several of their key civilian and military teammates…. [I]t attempts to cast a singular spotlight on specific people, decisions, and events.”

After explaining that Churchill had learned to leave written records of his decisions while Roosevelt declined to be pinned down by the written word, Lehrman lays out some differences between the two statesmen. He describes Churchill as better prepared than Roosevelt, more focused on the goal of winning the war, and also more honest and tenacious. Churchill was “straightforward,” Roosevelt “practiced at deception.” People thought of Churchill as a bulldog, while Roosevelt compared himself to

Book Review by James W. Muller

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER


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Harriman, managed to woo, bed, and even—FDR often ignored his own government’s de-
Europe as his secret agents, which Kennedy
Kennedy urged a negotiated end to the war
Churchill governed by hammering out consen-
Sumner Welles. In time, both Kennedy and
constitutional traditions of the Parliament and
mal superiors. Churchill could be overbearing
and irritated subordinates, but “respected the
constitutional traditions of the Parliament and
of cabinet government.”

Lehrman’s successive chapters fo-
cus mostly on men closely associated
with Churchill and Roosevelt during the
war. Roosevelt had dispatched Joseph P.
Kennedy, a potential rival for the Democrat-
ic presidential nomination, to be American
ambassador to Britain. At the beginning of
the war, Kennedy sent him a steady stream of
messages claiming that Britain was finished
and would be defeated by Nazi Germany.
Kennedy urged a negotiated end to the war
in Europe, recommending that America stay
out. His defeatism encouraged isolationists
in America, exasperated Churchill and his
government, and led Roosevelt, who fore-
saw an alliance against Germany between the
United States and Britain, to send William
J. Donovan and William Stephenson to Europe
as his secret agents, which Kennedy
resented. FDR also maneuvered around
Secretary of State Cordell Hull, preferring
to work hand in glove with Undersecretary
Sumner Welles. In time, both Kennedy and
Hull resigned in frustration.

Roosevelt’s closest confidant and most im-
portant unofficial agent was Harry Hopkins,
a rumpled, self-made man of the left—nick-
named “Pinky” and “Do-Gooder” by a more
conservative colleague—who had served as
secretary of commerce. FDR sent him to Brit-
in January 1941 to meet Churchill and
gauge the strength of British support for the
war. Hopkins, who lived in the White House,
had a remarkable ability to discern “the root
of the matter” and to match his counsels to
the changing moods of his chief. Recognizing
in him a powerful American friend, Churchill
applied to Hopkins his formidable powers of
persuasion and made him an ally in se-
curing American support for Britain from a
president who remained reluctant. Another
of Roosevelt’s ad hoc agents, William Aveller
Harriman, managed to woo, bed, and even-
tually wed the wife of Churchill’s son, Ran-
dolph, in between sympathetic conversations
over countless card games of Bezique with the
prime minister.

For his part, Churchill relied on his friend
the newspaper magnate Max Aitken, original-
ly a Canadian, who had become Lord Beaver-
brook. Although “known for his eccentric be-
havior,” he applied his energy and decisiveness
to a series of crucial tasks, beginning with the
multiplication of Britain’s air power. Mean-
while, perhaps taking a page from Roosevelt’s
book, Churchill found a way to replace Lord
Halifax, his foreign minister and chief rival
for the prime ministry after Neville Cham-
berlain resigned in 1940, with Anthony Eden,
a much firmer opponent of Nazi Germany, by
dispatching Halifax to be British ambassador
to the United States.

Lehrman’s sketches include impor-
tant military leaders. He explains how
General George C. Marshall earned
Roosevelt’s confidence and the key post as
army chief of staff by resisting the president’s
blandishments and offering advice that was
unvarnished and blunt. Quite different in
character was General Dwight D. Eisenhow-
er, who earned his position as supreme allied
commander by consummate tact in knitting

Churchill’s endeavor to enlist America’s
help in defeating Hitler had borne fruit when
he and the president met in person in Placen-
tia Bay, Newfoundland, in August 1941 to an-
nounce their agreement on an Atlantic Char-
ter—and even more when the United States
declared war on Japan and Germany after the
attack on Pearl Harbor. After describing the
“honeymoon” between Churchill and Roosevelt,
however, Lehrman moves on to the story of how
divergences in the national interest of Ameri-
ca and Britain caused the special relationship
between the two countries—personified in the
friendship between the president and the
prime minister—to founder. Toward the end of
the war, as America assumed a larger role
in fighting Germany on the western front and
Roosevelt aimed to enlist Russia’s help in con-
luding the war against Japan, the president
was friendlier to the Soviet Union than to Brit-
ain, snubbing, ignoring, and even ridiculing
Churchill in Stalin’s presence at Tehran.

Lehrman, whose “studies in character and
statecraft” in this book mostly focus on choices,
incidents, and personalities, reporting approv-
al or disapproval from contemporaries without
explicitly assigning it himself, clearly admires
Churchill’s frank and courageous opposition to
Hitler more than the president’s sinuous resis-
tance to being pinned down in any permanent
friendship or alliance, which Lehrman calls
“Machiavellian.” As his account progresses, he
focuses more on the work of Soviet sympathizers
in the American administration. Drawing
on historical evidence briefly made available by
the opening of Russian archives after the fall of
the Soviet Union, Lehrman shows how Roor-
sevelt’s hope of being able to share leadership
of the postwar world with Stalin, coupled with
his hands-off indifference to the work of sub-
ordinates and inattention caused by his final
illness, allowed the Soviet Union, through its
agents in America and Britain, to profit more
readily from its conquest of eastern Europe by
bending postwar geopolitics and finance to its
own advantage.

Chief among Lehrman’s company
of Soviet agents is Harry Dexter
White, Roosevelt’s assistant secretary
of the treasury, who with like-minded associ-
ates highly placed in federal agencies diverted
American aid from Britain to Russia, passed
on secrets to the Soviet authorities, and fa-
avored the interests of the Soviet Union during
the war and in making arrangements for the
postwar world. White, “the most powerful
man at Treasury except for Secretary [Hen-
ry] Morgenthau,” was chiefly responsible for
conceiving and drawing up the “Morgenthau
Plan,” which called for a pastoralized and de-
industrialized Germany after the war was won.
Hastily vetted and approved—at Roosevelt’s
urging—by Britain and America at the second
Quebec conference in summer 1944, the plan
died a slow death by inanition, as Americans
and Europeans realized over the next year,
while Stalin’s Red Army occupied eastern Eu-

tope, that only resuscitation of a strong, demo-
ocratic nation in the western half of Germany,
including the rebuilding of her industrial
might, could prevent Soviet domination of the
continent. But White’s other machinations—
encouraging Stalin to subvert the freedom of
Poland and the Baltic nations and allowing the
Soviets to deflate the new German currency
after the war—were more successful in tilting
the balance of power in Europe toward Rus-

tia. Lehrman blames Roosevelt and his close
associates for turning a blind eye to actions
by White and other Communist agents in the
American government which weakened our
country at the beginning of the Cold War. In
offering the reader a gimlet-eyed introduction
to the cast of characters surrounding the prime
minister and the president during the Second
World War, Churchill, Roosevelt & Company
does not shrink from calling out members of
the company who should never have been al-
lowed to be part of it.

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Claremont Review of Books • Winter 2018
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—George F. Will

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