



Citizens of London: The Americans Who Stood with Britain in Its Darkest, Finest Hour

By Lynne Olson

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The acclaimed author of *Troublesome Young Men* reveals the behind-the-scenes story of how the United States forged its wartime alliance with Britain, told from the perspective of three key American players in London: Edward R. Murrow, the handsome, chain-smoking head of CBS News in Europe; Averell Harriman, the hard-driving millionaire who ran FDR's Lend-Lease program in London; and John Gilbert Winant, the shy, idealistic U.S. ambassador to Britain. Each man formed close ties with Winston Churchill—so much so that all became romantically involved with members of the prime minister's family. Drawing from a variety of primary sources, Lynne Olson skillfully depicts the dramatic personal journeys of these men who, determined to save Britain from Hitler, helped convince a cautious Franklin Roosevelt and reluctant American public to back the British at a critical time. Deeply human, brilliantly researched, and beautifully written, *Citizens of London* is a new triumph from an author swiftly becoming one of the finest in her field.

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Citizens of London: The Americans Who Stood with Britain in Its Darkest, Finest Hour By Lynne Olson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, February 2010: *Citizens of London* is the story of the American firebrands who broke rank with popular opinion and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with England during the bleak infancy of World War II. Author Lynne Olson more than lives up to the critical acclaim of her last book, *Troublesome Young Men*, by exploring the origins of an Anglo-American alliance that helped turn the tide during the most widespread conflict in history. Although other "Yanks" rallied against the hesitancy of their isolationist government before Pearl Harbor, few matched the impact of U.S. ambassador John Gilbert Winant, businessman Averell Harriman, and broadcaster Edward R. Murrow. Each recognized the insidious dangers of Nazi aggression, and with the help of meticulous research, Olson elucidates the challenges they endured to help bridge political and cultural gaps between the United States and Britain. At a time when the English capital was described as "swimming in the full tide of history," *Citizens of London* echoes Tennyson in its tribute to those who strove, sought, and refused to yield. --Dave Callanan

Exclusive Q&A with Lynne Olson

Amazon.com: Your last three books (*Citizens of London*, *Troublesome Young Men*, and *A Question of Honor*) have focused on England during the late 1930's/early 1940's. As a historian, what draws you to this period?

Olson: I've been fascinated with the place and the period ever since my husband, Stan Cloud, and I wrote our first book, *The Murrow Boys*, about Edward R. Murrow and the correspondents he hired to create CBS News before and during World War II. Several scenes in the book take place in London during the Battle of Britain and the 1940-41 Blitz. In doing research for *The Murrow Boys*, I got caught up in the story of Britain's struggle for survival in those early years of the war – and the extraordinary leadership of Winston Churchill and courage of ordinary Britons in waging that fight. I discovered that there were still a number of stories about the period that remained largely unknown and untold, so I decided to tell them myself.

Amazon.com: Had Pearl Harbor not forced America's hand, how much longer could England have lasted against Germany?

Olson: That's an excellent "what if" question. Churchill, for one, was desperately worried that Britain would be defeated by Germany in 1942 if the United States didn't enter the war. In the days immediately before Pearl Harbor, he knew that the Japanese were also on the move, and he was afraid they were going to strike at British territory in Asia. If that had happened, his country would have been forced into a two-front war, with no lifeline from the United States – which almost assuredly would have meant the end for Britain. So it's no wonder than when he heard the news of Pearl Harbor on the night of Dec. 7, 1941, he was euphoric. It meant, as he later wrote, that no matter how many military setbacks lay ahead, "England would live."

Amazon.com: In contrast to Winant and Murrow, Harriman was a bit of a bourgeois playboy. What made you include him in this book?

Olson: There's no question that Harriman's social life was considerably more hectic in London than that of

Winant and Murrow. At the same time, however, he was a dogged, extremely hard-working administrator of Lend Lease aid for Britain, who did what he could to speed up the flow of American help to the British and who pressed the Roosevelt administration hard for more vigorous action and more direct involvement in the war. He also carved out for himself quite an influential role as conduit and buffer between Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill.

I also wanted to include Harriman for another reason – to point up the contrast between his tough-minded pragmatism and the idealism of Winant and Murrow. These three men, I think, reflected the complexity of America and its attitude to the rest of the world at that time. Winant and Murrow, who championed economic and social reform as well as international cooperation, reflected America's idealistic side. Harriman, who was intent on broadening his own power and influence, as well as that of his country, became an exemplar of U.S. exceptionalism. In the postwar era, it was his world view that, for the most part, dominated American foreign policy.

Amazon.com: You note an almost apathetic Churchill response to American dalliances within his family. Was this a diplomatic necessity or was he simply too focused on the larger picture?

Olson: I'm not sure I would call him "apathetic." I think that "pragmatic" would be a better word. I should also point out that it's not an absolute certainty he knew about the affair that occurred between Averell Harriman and Pamela Churchill, the wife of his son, Randolph, which began in 1941. When Randolph later accused his father of condoning adultery under his own roof, Churchill denied any knowledge of what was going on. That being said, I do believe, as did Pamela, that he was aware of what she and Harriman were up to. Churchill loved Randolph, and while I'm sure he was not thrilled about the Pamela/Harriman affair, he knew how important Harriman and the other Americans were to the survival of Britain, and he had no intention of letting personal matters interfere with the national interest. Besides, Pamela proved to be a useful conduit for him and Harriman, passing on to each man information and insights she had found out from the other.

When Pamela took up with Edward R. Murrow later in the war, she was already separated from Randolph, and I doubt that Churchill cared one way or the other. As for the affair between his daughter, Sarah, and John Gilbert Winant, the couple kept their involvement exceptionally discreet. Sarah believed her father knew about it, but he never said anything, and I don't think he would have minded.

Amazon.com: Talk about the lower-profile "Citizens of London" -- the brave Americans who violated their own country's laws to volunteer for the RAF.

Olson: In the late 1930s, as part of its desperate effort to keep the United States out of war, the American government did, as you note, make it illegal for any U.S. citizen to join the military service of a warring power. But, after Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, thousands of young Americans disregarded that law and traveled to England to join the British or Canadian armed forces. Unlike the hordes of Yanks who descended on Britain just prior to D-Day, the early U.S. volunteers became an integral part of Britain's military and society.

The best-known volunteers were those who joined the Royal Air Force. Seven U.S. citizens were counted among "The Few" – the celebrated band of RAF pilots who, in their Hurricanes and Spitfires, successfully beat back the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain in the summer and fall of 1940. Over the next several months, an additional 300-plus Americans enlisted in the RAF -- so many that they were soon given their own units, called the Eagle Squadrons. Churchill, who instantly saw what a powerful propaganda tool the American squadrons could be, enthusiastically endorsed the idea.

When the U.S. finally entered the conflict, virtually all the Americans serving in the RAF transferred to the U.S Army Air Forces. Of the 244 pilots who flew in the Eagle Squadrons, more than 40 per cent did not survive the war.

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The Anglo-American alliance in WWII was not inevitable, writes former *Baltimore Sun* correspondent Olson (*Troublesome Young Men*). In this ingenious history, he emphasizes the role of three prominent Americans living in London who helped bring it about. Best known was Edward R. Murrow, head of CBS radio's European bureau after 1937. His pioneering live broadcasts during the blitz made him a celebrity, and Olson portrays a man who worked tirelessly to win American support for Britain. Most admirable of the three was John Winant, appointed American ambassador in 1941. A true humanitarian, he skillfully helped craft the British-American alliance. And most amusing was Averell Harriman, beginning a long public service career. In 1941, FDR sent the wealthy, ambitious playboy to London to oversee Lend-Lease aid. He loved the job, but made no personal sacrifices, living a luxurious life as he hobnobbed with world leaders and carried on an affair with Churchill's daughter-in-law. Olson, an insightful historian, contrasts the idealism of Winant and Murrow with the pragmatism of Harriman. But all three men were colorful, larger-than-life figures, and Olson's absorbing narrative does them justice. 16 pages of b&w photos. (Feb.)

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From Booklist

Given our common bonds of language and heritage, many assume that the special relationship between the U.S. and Britain has been both long lasting and inevitable. Olson, former White House correspondent for the *Baltimore Sun*, shows how this relationship was artfully and painfully constructed during World War II, particularly from 1940 to 1941, when Britain stood alone against a triumphant Germany. Many Americans living in Britain, led by Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, viewed Britain as whipped and urged the Roosevelt administration to seek accommodation with Hitler. Fortunately, a relatively small but highly influential group of Americans worked tirelessly to influence government policy. Olson tells their story largely through the prism of the wartime experiences and activities of three men: John Winant, who replaced Kennedy as ambassador and quickly endeared himself to ordinary British citizens with his common touch; Averell Harriman, instrumental in the administration of the U.S. military and to Britain; and Edward R. Murrow, who stirred up sympathy for the British cause in his radio broadcasts to the U.S. during the Blitz. An excellent and revealing chronicle. --Jay Freeman

Users Review

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