1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler—the Election Amid the Storm. Susan Dunn. New Haven: Yale UP., 2013. h/bk 418 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-20574-9. Price $30.00; *Roosevelt's Second Act: The Election of 1940 and the Politics of War.* Richard Moe. New York: Oxford UP., 2013. h/bk 376 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-998191-5. Price $29.95.

A few years ago, I proposed writing a history of the 1940 election to an editor at a university press. The response was negative. Nineteen-forty was not a critical election, I was told, and there was much truth in that statement. The contest between Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Republican challenger, Wendell L. Willkie, brought no major realignment of American political parties, for the election's outcome merely allowed FDR to continue in office. Yet, the 1940 election remains interesting, important, and much overlooked. The title of the standard account, *Never Again:* A *President Runs for a Third Term* (1968) by Herbert S. Parmet and Marie B. Hecht, suggests one reason why the 1940 election merits attention. Nineteen forty also signaled the end of isolationism, since Roosevelt and Willkie both were internationalists dedicated to defending American ideals and interests around the globe. Furthermore, the election inaugurated a requirement, to which all subsequent presidential nominees would become subject, that the nation's chief executive must be able to handle foreign policy competently, if not adeptly. The 1940 election deserves a second look, and Susan Dunn and Richard Moe have obliged by producing two books that are engagingly written and rather insightful.

The books by Dunn and Moe each cover three subtopics, albeit with different emphases: (1) Roosevelt's leadership during the first year of the European war, when he simultaneously faced lingering isolationist sentiments at home and a growing American willingness to assist the allies; (2) FDR's decision to seek a third term; and (3) the meteoric rise and ultimate demise of Willkie's campaign. Dunn is more concerned with exploring the first and third topics. To contextualize FDR's quasi-wartime leadership, she provides chapters on Charles A. Lindbergh's advocacy of isolation, the enactment of America's first peacetime draft, and the contribution of the playwright Robert Sherwood to crafting some of Roosevelt's most stirring campaign addresses. Dunn's forte is extensive research in published sources, especially newspapers, and her deft narration, in the fashion of popular history. Moe's study is similar in that it offers few fresh revelations from

archival sources and is briskly written. But unlike Dunn, Moe manages to sound more searching, and critical, as he probes the mystery of when and why Roosevelt decided to run for a third term — his principal purpose in writing *Roosevelt's Second Act.* Moe thus tries to get into FDR's head, while Dunn seeks to recount the major events and understand the competing forces — and personalities — that made the year 1940 momentous.

Dunn's thesis is simple, straightforward, sensible — and unoriginal. During 1940, both Roosevelt and Willkie "had taken lessons from Machiavelli's playbook" by doing whatever was required to win the election, even if that meant resorting to "overheated rhetoric, unrealistic promises, expressions of fealty to the god of no foreign wars, and unfortunate concessions to the isolationists" (272). From Dunn's account, Willkie emerges as a well-intentioned political amateur who, acting out of deep principle, advocated aid to Great Britain and passage of the Selective Service Act before opportunistically joining the chorus of Roosevelt haters late in the campaign. With his poll numbers sagging, the Republican nominee went "on the warpath" with "griddle-hot talk" accusing the president of planning to take the United States into the European war — a charge that FDR adamantly denied (202). Following the election, however, Willkie reverted to his core beliefs when he braved the ire of isolationists by testifying on behalf of the president's Lend-Lease program. Recalling Willkie's support for Lend-Lease and conscription, Roosevelt dubbed him "a godsend to this country when we needed him most" (290). By stressing Willkie's admixture of statesmanship and political expediency, Dunn has played it safe (to use a homey cliché this author might have employed herself) by providing a persuasive if conventional take on the Republican nominee.

Dunn's assessment of Roosevelt is also familiar: The president was a schemer, albeit a good one — he was good at manipulating people (and events) and good at pursuing noble ends, such as bolstering allied resistance to Hitler's war machine. FDR understood that American security was bound with that of France and Britain but "caution over military aid to the Allies, oscillating public opinion, a refractory Congress unwilling to give up the dream of neutrality, and a potent isolationist movement [...] conspired to complicate Roosevelt's ability to lead" (40). Fortunately, he was "a master politician and maestro of timing" who allowed events overseas, combined with a few bold presidential actions, to convince the American public and Congress that assisting the allies was the correct course (189).

Strangely, FDR's devious side subsides when Dunn considers the matter of the third term. Like many scholars, she places Roosevelt's decision to run again in the spring of 1940, following the Nazi invasion of Western Europe, meaning that a statesman-like need to protect the nation's security, rather than a politician's desire to continue the New Deal, was foremost in the president's mind. Nevertheless, Roosevelt also was concerned about his domestic agenda, for he insisted that the Democratic nominee in 1940 had to be a liberal. In the end, "no politician measured up to his stringent criteria" and that left only one possible standard-bearer: FDR himself (124).

Although terribly conventional, *1940* is hardly a terrible book. Dunn has unearthed nuggets of new or overlooked information, including a quotation from the wife of the Argentine ambassador on Willkie's homespun charisma and appeal to female voters: "He has a mop of unruly curly black hair that to most women is almost irresistible" (113). Contrary to popular perceptions, Republican presidential hopeful Robert A. Taft, Dunn notes, was not a knee-jerk isolationist, since he backed aid to Great Britain on a "cash and carry" basis (75). And, in a twist of irony, the author notes that Lindbergh's mother-in-law, Elizabeth Morrow, joined the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies and spoke on behalf of providing assistance to the allies. Dunn's account of FDR's reticence about running for a third term is compelling, even amusing. The nation's "Sphinx-in-Chief," she writes, at one point drew barbs from the comedienne Gracie Allen, who advised future presidents to "run for the third term first" while she herself weighed running for president in 1940 "on the Surprise Party ticket" (7). Overall, however, *1940* is more appropriate for general readers and undergraduate students, for it offers few stunning revelations and no major reinterpretation of the election.

Moe's book is in some respects the polar opposite of Dunn's. He provides a tightly-drawn examination of Roosevelt's decision to seek a third term that posits the fresh contention that FDR wished to retire in 1941 and delayed his decision to run until July 1940, when the Democrats convened in Chicago. Yet Moe's revisionism is undermined by his own evidence. While the author insists that Roosevelt "was actively planning for retirement," he also asserts that FDR "was at his core a man of action," which supports the idea that the president wished to stay in office (15). As Moe concedes, there was no "obvious successor in sight" and Roosevelt kept it that way, for he declined to rule out a run in 1940 (32). "Was Roosevelt,

as some have claimed, using his refusal to state his intentions as a way of 'freezing' the field and thereby making his own nomination inevitable?" the author asks. "Perhaps" is his answer (41-42). Moe acknowledges that at the end of 1939 Vice President John Nance Garner thought that Roosevelt would run again. And just a few months earlier, the president informed Democratic National Committee Chair James A. Farley that party officials were "trying to make me run," which could be read as a reluctance to seek a third term or an attempt to broach the topic with a powerful Democratic chieftain (92). "Many observers of the political scene in early 1940 concluded that FDR had decided by this point that he would indeed seek a third term," Moe notes, "but there is nothing in the written record to suggest that he had made a decision either way" (97). In fact, there is information in several archival collections to suggest that by the first months of 1940, Roosevelt had decided to run again. But Moe has examined none of these sources. Instead, he relies on standard, published accounts such as *Working with Roosevelt* (1952), a memoir by Samuel I. Rosenman, one of FDR's speechwriters, who believed that the president was determined to retire after completing his second term.

Trying to fathom what Roosevelt was thinking is extremely difficult, and Moe must be applauded for undertaking this task. Roosevelt often professed a desire to return to his home in Hyde Park in 1941. In fact, he probably never admitted to himself that he was running for a third term. Yet he was. During the early months of 1940, FDR continued to keep quiet while his supporters placed his name in state primaries and amassed delegates to the national convention. Was the president, as Moe proposes, merely seeking to maintain his political leverage (or relevance), while he kept his options open? No. Roosevelt must have had eyes fixed on another term because, as this author (and Dunn) admits, "there was no consensus liberal and electable alternative to FDR" (108). And then there was the overriding issue of the war, which Moe rightly insists was "inextricably linked" to the decision to seek a third term (xiv). Roosevelt's occasional professions that he only would run if the United States was either at war or close to going to war posed no obstacle to his seeking a third term. The president had been ahead of the nation in sensing the danger of Nazism. He surely knew that the phony war of 1939-1940 would not last, that Hitler would resume his war of aggression, and that his own tested leadership would be needed in the months and years to come.

In striving to understand Roosevelt's decision-making, Moe makes a number of astute observations. He shows how FDR adopted new political tactics as the country's attention shifted from the Great Depression to the European war. Backed by an approving electorate, the president had championed the New Deal openly and effusively during the mid-1930s. But the late 1930s, when isolationist sentiments were strong, was another matter, one which forced Roosevelt, "a lifelong internationalist," to proceed cautiously, even skittishly, as he moved to aid France and Great Britain in the face of a divided public at home (10). With sensitivity and shrewdness, Moe attributes FDR's "patience and discipline" in politics to "his struggle to resume physical independence after suffering near-total paralysis from polio" (4). Moreover, the author's account of the campaign between Roosevelt and Willkie, while briefer than that of Dunn, is more analytical. Stressing one of the most significant outcomes of the election, Moe avers that "since 1940 presidential candidates have been viewed through a prism of how qualified and competent they are to protect the American people" from foreign threats (329).

Overall, the studies by Dunn and Moe are well worth reading. In addition to focusing attention on a 1940 election, they also illustrate the pitfalls of hyper-partisanship, especially during the final weeks of heated presidential contest, and the promise of bi-partisanship, as Willkie forged a post-election partnership with Roosevelt. Mostly, these two books confirm FDR's reputation as a great politician and even greater president whose leadership changed forever the relationship between America and the wider world. The Roosevelt era in general and the 1940 election in particular proved pivotal for US politics and foreign policy, and Dunn and Moe have reminded us why that was so.

Works Cited

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