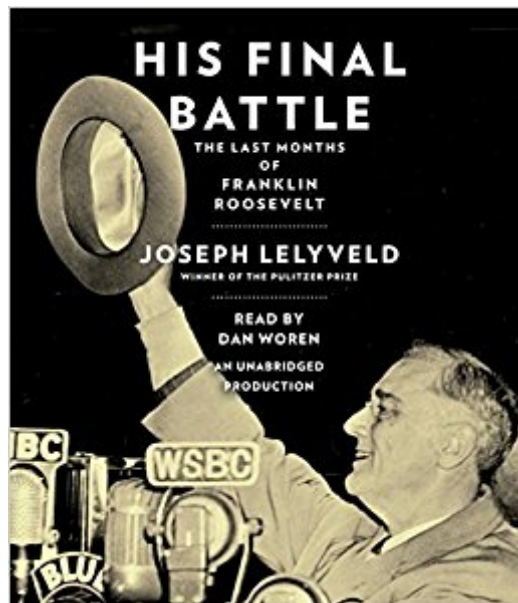




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His Final Battle: The Last Months Of Franklin Roosevelt



Synopsis

A New York Times 2016 Notable Book “By far the most enigmatic leading figure of World War II. That’s how the British military historian John Keegan described Franklin D. Roosevelt, who frequently left his contemporaries guessing, never more so than at the end of his life. Here, in a hugely insightful account, a prizewinning author and journalist untangles the narrative threads of Roosevelt’s final months, showing how he juggled the strategic, political, and personal choices he faced as the war, his presidency, and his life raced in tandem to their climax. The story has been told piecemeal but never like this, with a close focus on Roosevelt himself and his hopes for a stable international order after the war, and how these led him into a prolonged courtship of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator, involving secret, arduous journeys to Tehran and the Crimea. In between, as the war entered its final phase, came the thunderbolt of a dire medical diagnosis, raising urgent questions about the ability of the longest-serving president to stand for a fourth term at a time when he had little choice. Neither his family nor top figures in his administration were informed of his diagnosis, let alone the public or his closest ally, Winston Churchill. With D-Day looming, Roosevelt took a month off on a plantation in the south where he was examined daily by a navy cardiologist, then waited two more months before finally announcing, on the eve of his party’s convention, that he’d be a candidate. A political grand master still, he manipulated the selection of a new running mate, with an eye to a possible succession, displaying some of his old vigor and wit in a winning campaign. With precision and compassion, Joseph Lelyveld examines the choices Roosevelt faced, shining new light on his state of mind, preoccupations, and motives, both as leader of the wartime alliance and in his personal life. Confronting his own mortality, Roosevelt operated in the belief that he had a duty to see the war through to the end, telling himself he could always resign if he found he couldn’t carry on. Lelyveld delivers an incisive portrait of this deliberately inscrutable man, a consummate leader to the very last.”

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A New York Times Notable Book of 2016 "A gripping, deeply human account... Moving, elegiac."

•The New York Times Book Review "Splendid and richly detailed... President Roosevelt won reelection in November, was inaugurated in January, and died in April, three months into his fourth term. After that came the cold war and atomic weapons and a new diplomatic policy called 'mutual assured destruction.' Lelyveld shows with clarity and shrewd judgment how it came about."

•The New York Review of Books "Psychologically intense... Pinning down FDR's innermost thoughts is always an elusive goal for a scholar, but Lelyveld... has the fortitude and skill to properly analyze FDR's decision-making process. What makes His Final Battle so exceptional is Lelyveld's admirable ability to write nonfiction with highly stylized lyrical beauty." •The Washington Post "Gripping Masterfully told Lelyveld brings to this project a complex mind (but approachable language) equal to Roosevelt's complex character (but comforting rhetoric) A heroic and poignant picture."

•The Boston Globe "A compellingly nuanced, almost day-by-day account of the great man's final year of life." •Time "A careful, somber and sometimes harrowing account of FDR's last 16 months [Lelyveld's] full and disciplined investigation of an important theme makes a significant contribution to FDR scholarship."

•The Wall Street Journal "A gripping book that will substantially deepen readers' understanding of a critical time in U.S. history." •Foreign Affairs

"Joseph Lelyveld combines his long-honed reporting experience with a historian's eye firmly fixed on this important story Chock full of illuminating revelations If you are faintly nauseated by the current state of American politics, turn off the cable channel that appeals to your prejudices, and let Mr. Lelyveld take you to a vastly more enlightening time when the main characters had plenty of flaws but also vastly compensating bravery and vision." •The Washington Times "Lelyveld's storytelling skill, his investigative thoroughness and his total dedication to historical fact remain evident throughout... Intense and substantive." •The Buffalo News "Rarely has Franklin Delano Roosevelt

been portrayed with such steely-eyed insight— A deeply revealing look at a famously enigmatic president— A masterful study of a masterful politician, a fresh look at one of the most beloved and complex of presidents. —BookPage — “Meticulous— The author expertly puts together a string of poignant clues to FDR’s last acts— An elegant, affecting work that offers fresh insights on a much-mythologized president. —Kirkus, starred review — “Joseph Lelyveld traces the last, challenging months of FDR’s life with a pitch-perfect blend of meticulous reporting, careful analysis, and deep humanity. For all that has been written about Roosevelt, this deeply-moving book adds significantly to our understanding of that remarkable man. —Gay Talese — “With a seasoned journalist’s built-in skepticism and a gifted historian’s scrupulous respect for evidence, Joseph Lelyveld leads us deeper into Franklin Roosevelt’s thickly forested interior at the end of his life than anyone has ever gone before. His Final Battle is now required reading for anyone who wants to understand the twentieth century’s most consequential—and most mysterious—president. —Geoffrey C. Ward, author, *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History* “A spellbinding example of the biographer’s craft, *His Final Battle* by Joseph Lelyveld paints a portrait of Franklin Roosevelt as president, statesman, and commander in chief, frail and dying, but heroic in his resolve to win the war and preserve the peace that would follow. Deftly interweaving the public and the private, the political and the personal, making use of documents and details others had neglected, Lelyveld offers us an unparalleled historical narrative of the last year of the war and the dramatic story of a singular man and the unthinkable challenges he confronted in the final months of his presidency and his life.” —David Nasaw, author, *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* — “A masterpiece, in dramatic prose, combining deep research, subtle imagination, and ingenious speculation, as well as a vivid analysis of —The Great Tantalizer, — the — devoted utilitarian. — His Final Battle is the work of a seasoned reporter/historian, elegantly written, hard to put down and impossible to forget. — — Fritz Stern, author, *Five Germans I Have Known* — “Powerful, clear-eyed, and briskly-told, Lelyveld’s account of the last months of a 20th century colossus is great history. It’s a wonder Franklin Roosevelt was ever able to get out of bed, let alone guide the Allies through the most perilous period the world had ever known. If you think you knew FDR, think again — Joe Lelyveld brings him to fresh life, in all his human dimensions. — — Timothy Egan, author, *The Immortal Irishman* — “At once human and analytical, *His Final Battle* illuminates the perplexing zone where personal fate and large

historical processes intertwine. The book offers a beautifully-realized, impossible to put down chronicle making fresh connections that deepen understanding of FDR's closing confrontations with crises of health and global leadership. — Ira I. Katznelson, author of *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*

JOSEPH LELYVELD spent nearly four decades as a reporter and editor at The New York Times, and served as executive editor from 1994 to 2001. This is his third book since then, following *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* and *Omaha Blues: A Memory Loop*. An earlier book on apartheid, *Move Your Shadow: South Africa, Black and White*, won the Pulitzer Prize. From the Hardcover edition.

Lelyveld is a journalist rather than a historian. So don't look for new revelations or discoveries, especially in view of the extremely well-plowed nature of this particular field. The strong point of the book is the vivid picture that he paints of Roosevelt's final months, and the analysis of what was going on behind the scenes. This was a particularly critical year in history, and one where America really did have a rendezvous with destiny, and the author gives a highly readable account of what was happening: the Tehran and Yalta summits, the debate over a fourth term, the choice of Truman as running mate, the Polish question, the birth of the UN, and, through it all, the underlying question of FDR's health. Since his medical records mysteriously disappeared after his death, we often have to rely on subjective descriptions by people who were with him, photographs taken at the time, and his writings and speeches. Lelyveld does a very good job of sifting the evidence to decide just how impaired his faculties were in those last months. And his analysis of Roosevelt's character, quite apart from health issues, is incisive: one of the best chapters is his comparison of FDR with Woodrow Wilson, pointing out the many parallels (I was reminded of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* here). The book goes into lots of interesting details about FDR's last year of life, much of which was new to me, including the full context of his Fala quip (perhaps one reason for the presidential pooch making it into the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington!), the "rest cure" at Bernard Baruch's estate, and the maneuverings over his Vice-Presidential choice. Lots of interesting material.

Joseph Lelyveld, who presided over the New York Times at the end of its golden age as a printed newspaper, in this fascinating history describes the end of another golden age--the end of the era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Covering the period from the Tehran conference of November 1943, in which FDR promised Stalin that D-Day would occur by the end of May 1944 (it was only six days

late) to his death in April 1945, the author portrays the weakening president determined to carry on although suffering from, among other things, an enlarged heart. In order to reconstruct the physical condition of the weakening president's last days, the author is forced to rely on diaries and comments made by his doctors, McIntyre and Bruenn, because his medical records mysteriously "vanished" in 1946. Fortunately he does his job well, and the tale is fascinating. Then, too, there are the quick sketches of the historical figures (Truman, Churchill and Stalin, of course, as well as lesser known figures of the time) and the machinations that FDR employed while seeking a fourth term. Perhaps he couldn't face up to his approaching end, but he was astute enough to have replaced Henry Wallace, his third-term vice president, with Harry Truman. One of the figures who played a significant role behind the scenes was FDR's daughter, Anna--this was new to me. It would be Anna who would accompany the president to the infamous Yalta conference, where Churchill, Stalin, and FDR met for the final time. (Mr. Lelyveld, by the way, is not one of those who think FDR gave away the store to Stalin at that conference, although as he tells us certainly his attention span was not what it once was.) Underlying it all was FDR's determination to create a working United Nations, something his first boss, Woodrow Wilson, whom he served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, had been unable to do. And Mr. Lelyveld works wonders with this material. I almost teared up as he describes how the president was making plans to attend the opening session of the UN on April 25, 1945. (A draft of the radio address FDR planned to make on Jefferson Day, April 15, exists, in which he would have said, of the UN, "The work, my friends, is peace.") Truman, of course, would go. The war was won. And, as Mr. Lelyveld notes, when Japan surrendered, Truman "addressed the nation, pronouncing the name Roosevelt only once, in a single-sentence tribute simultaneously reverential and spare, showing that his predecessor was already receding into history." Sic transit.

Jospeh Lelyveld's book, "His Final Battle", encompasses FDR's life from late 1943 until his death. He delivers all facets of the president's presence from his meetings and battles with Churchill and Stalin, to his health, to his relationship with Lucy Rutherford, to his cabinet members, his two vice presidents and so on. It's a wonderful, comprehensive story. That Roosevelt knew or assumed he was going to die is largely in question and the author is careful to point this out when necessary. We know much now (and what the American public didn't know then) about what went on behind the scenes and lifting the curtain, we can peer into FDR's life through Lelyveld's lens. As FDR gets older and weaker, the narrative intensifies and when the president finally dies, I felt a loss of my own. I highly recommend "His Final Battle".

This is a very detailed account of the last months of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his fourth and last election and his death before the end of World War II. Most of these events are well known and have appeared in countless books, films and images, but here we have a more intimate picture of the ailing president as he tried to end the war and prepare for the post-war period and a real peace. His relationships with his wife Eleanor, his daughter Anna and Lucy Mercer, the woman he loved, are also developed. In spite of his obviously deteriorating health he travelled thousands of miles to Teheran and Yalta to meet with Stalin and Churchill. Stalin, with his usual ruthlessness, refused to leave the territory of the Soviet Union, so it was Roosevelt, handicapped by his paralysis and an obviously failing heart, who was obliged to make these journeys by car, ship, plane and rail. Today, of course, a president does not have four terms in office and it would be difficult (I hope) for a president to continue in office in obviously failing health, but we have to admire FDR's courage and tenacity in carrying on to complete his legacy and prepare for the post-war world.

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