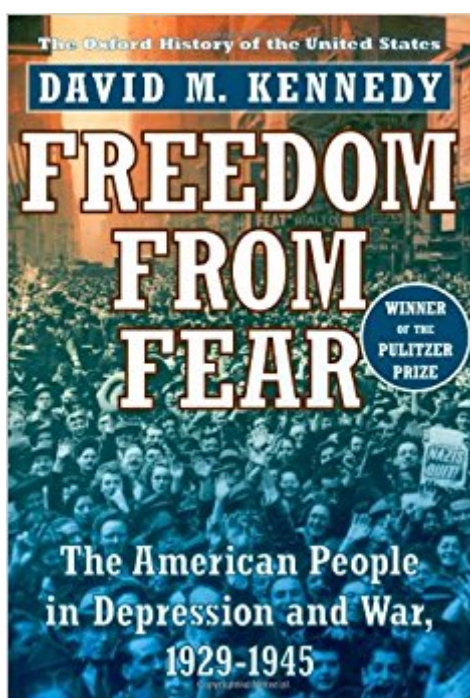


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# Freedom From Fear: The American People In Depression And War, 1929-1945 (Oxford History Of The United States)



## Synopsis

Between 1929 and 1945, two great travails were visited upon the American people: the Great Depression and World War II. This book tells the story of how Americans endured, and eventually prevailed, in the face of those unprecedented calamities. The Depression was both a disaster and an opportunity. As David Kennedy vividly demonstrates, the economic crisis of the 1930s was far more than a simple reaction to the alleged excesses of the 1920s. For more than a century before 1929, America's unbridled industrial revolution had gyrated through repeated boom and bust cycles, wastefully consuming capital and inflicting untold misery on city and countryside alike. *Freedom From Fear* explores how the nation agonized over its role in World War II, how it fought the war, why the United States won, and why the consequences of victory were sometimes sweet, sometimes ironic. In a compelling narrative, Kennedy analyzes the determinants of American strategy, the painful choices faced by commanders and statesmen, and the agonies inflicted on the millions of ordinary Americans who were compelled to swallow their fears and face battle as best they could. Both comprehensive and colorful, this account of the most convulsive period in American history, excepting only the Civil War, reveals a period that formed the crucible in which modern America was formed. The *Oxford History of the United States* The *Atlantic Monthly* has praised The *Oxford History of the United States* as "the most distinguished series in American historical scholarship," a series that "synthesizes a generation's worth of historical inquiry and knowledge into one literally state-of-the-art book. Who touches these books touches a profession." Conceived under the general editorship of one of the leading American historians of our time, C. Vann Woodward, The *Oxford History of the United States* blends social, political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, and military history into coherent and vividly written narrative. Previous volumes are Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution*; James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (which won a Pulitzer Prize and was a *New York Times* Best Seller); and James T. Patterson's *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-1974* (which won a Bancroft Prize).

## Book Information

Series: Oxford History of the United States

Hardcover: 990 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (May 6, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195038347

ISBN-13: 978-0195038347

Product Dimensions: 9.6 x 2.4 x 6.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 183 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #46,656 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in Books > Textbooks >

Humanities > History > Military #368 in Books > History > Military > World War II #411

in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > United States

## Customer Reviews

You can think of *Freedom from Fear* as the academic's version of *The Greatest Generation*: like Tom Brokaw, Stanford history professor David M. Kennedy focuses on the years of the Great Depression and the Second World War and how the American people coped with those events. But there the similarities end--and, in terms of the differences, one might begin by noting that the historian's account is over twice the size of the journalist's. Whereas Brokaw made use of extensive interviews, Kennedy relies on published accounts and primary sources, all meticulously footnoted. This academic rigor, however, does not render the book dull--far from it. Certainly the subject matter is interesting enough in its own right, but Kennedy offers attention-grabbing turns of phrase on nearly every page. He also unleashes some convention-shattering theses, such as his revelation that "the most responsible students of the events of 1929 have been unable to demonstrate an appreciable cause-and-effect linkage between the Crash and the Depression" and his subsequent argument that, although it made order out of chaos, the New Deal did not reverse the Depression--that, he says, was the war's doing. All in all, *Freedom from Fear* compares favorably to its companions in the multivolume *Oxford History of the United States* in both its comprehensive heft and its vivid readability. --Ron Hogan

Rarely does a work of historical synthesis combine such trenchant analysis and elegant writing. Because of its scope, insight, and purring narrative engine, Kennedy's book will stand for years as the definitive history of the critical decades of the American century.

As homeschoolers, we were looking for an American history resource that was reasonably unbiased, honest, and offered enough depth and nuance to be interesting. The Oxford University Press series on American history is highly recommended. Much better than the history books I had when I was in high school!

Extremely well written. Following the events and what lead to the next piece of history during that era (1929-1945) was clearly presented and made exciting to follow and understand. I have thoroughly enjoyed reading all in the series of The Oxford History of the United States, Oxford University Press. Thank you to all the authors who published. My next read is Grand Expectations by James T. Patterson (1945-1974)

This book, covering the years 1930-1945, is a worthy entry in the splendid Oxford History of the United States (of which Mr. Kennedy is the current editor). "Freedom From Fear" is magisterial in scope, and is as balanced as is possible, in a volume covering so many issues that are still highly contentious today. This is not a quick read -- it is an overview of the history of the period, approaching that period from a variety of viewpoints; political, historical, social, and cultural. That adds up to an enormous amount of material and a lot of pages, but Mr. Kennedy's vivid prose style and gift for storytelling makes it far more enjoyable than the phrase "historical survey" usually suggests. As to balance, Mr. Kennedy presents his major characters as rounded individuals with good and bad character traits, who made both good and bad choices. I had not realized, for example, that Herbert Hoover's policies in so many ways foreshadowed FDR's, nor had I realized just how scatter-shot the New Deal really was. For those who want to learn more about this period, during which so many of our current political issues find their roots, this book is very strongly recommended.

I have just finished this book, reading until 2:30 am to cover the last few pages, and am grateful for, and educated, and entertained by this wonderful book. I have always been drawn to histories of the war years, but usually encountered works much more limited in scope. This book is comprehensive, and I cannot even imagine the effort and time that went into writing it.

David Kennedy has put together the players in the Great Depression for us to understand. While he praises Hoover more than the public view of his inability to deal with the depression, Hoover's ideas were put together by FDR. His critical view of FDR's early actions did transform both the Democratic and Republican parties. FDR's ability to cross over to the progressive Republicans and reject the Southern Democrats realigned the two parties. This may have led us to the gridlock of today. In the 1930's the parties both included progressives and conservatives. The focus on the emerging world leaders makes the background of this tragic event and the war to follow understood to those

to young to remember.

My prior knowledge was mainly high school history and articles from newspapers and magazines. I had heard many opinions about why this or that event occurred as it did. Reading the book was fascinating. I highly recommend it. The maps were very helpful. The bibliography for further reading will keep me busy for years.

Excellent reading

A broad scoped and scholarly account of the Great Depression and the period up to and including World War II. Kennedy makes what at first would appear to be a monumental task seem effortless and proves that history on this scale can be told in lucid, well written text. The story of the 1929 Stock Market collapse is clearly and concisely explained in sort of "laymen's" terms (the politically correct way of saying "for the economically dumb"...like me)and he proves that this was not the sole cause of the ensuing "Great Depression" (the excesses of the 1920's were at least as culpable). FDR's New Deal policies and effects make up many chapters and I liked the way that Kennedy was able to take the discussion from a detailed policy forum to how it then affected the common person. We get plenty of "context" in terms of the everyday person/family and how they were affected by all the New Deal programs (some in exhaustive detail...). At the same time, we're kept in touch with events in Europe and how the American "isolationist" foreign policy was a factor in Hitler's and Mussolini's initial reign of terror. Also, the American pre-war relationship with Great Britain discloses (for me) many new surprises as we see the large influence that Churchill had initially over FDR. The war battles and strategy are summarized extremely well and, again, Kennedy is able to effortlessly go from detailed battle discussions to how it's effects were felt on the home-front...in fact one of my favorite chapters is titled "The Homefront Cauldron" where we see the industrial buildup, the effect of the fast growing economy on both the general public (more jobs) and the government and a marvelous discussion on the making of the first Atomic Weapon. The chapter dealing with the end of the war seemed a bit hurried but is made up for in the Epilogue where Kennedy summarizes the whole "post-war" affect on the ensuing generation(s). In the final analysis, this is history on a grand scale and serves the Oxford History Series well as a comprehensive study for this era and deserves the Pulitzer (won in 2000 for history) and to be read widely by all interested in the Depression and WWII. High recommendation.

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