

Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (Oxford History of the United States)

By David M. Kennedy

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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).

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
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*

From Publishers Weekly
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.

From Library Journal
With this history of the Depression, New Deal, and World War II, Stanford University's Kennedy becomes the latest contributor to Oxford's distinguished series on U.S. history. Kennedy has a distinguished record of his own, with two acclaimed books, Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger (LJ 8/70) and Over Here: The First World War and American Society (LJ 10/1/80). Displaying a literary craft uncommon in survey works, he has woven together narrative, sketches of character, and critical judgment to record and analyze the economic, political, social, and military events of these epic years. Readers who feel they live in an era of tumultuous change might well consult Kennedy's book. This account of the crucial struggles and events of the Depression and war years will lend perspective like few others. For all libraries.ARobert F. Nardini, North Chichester, NH
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