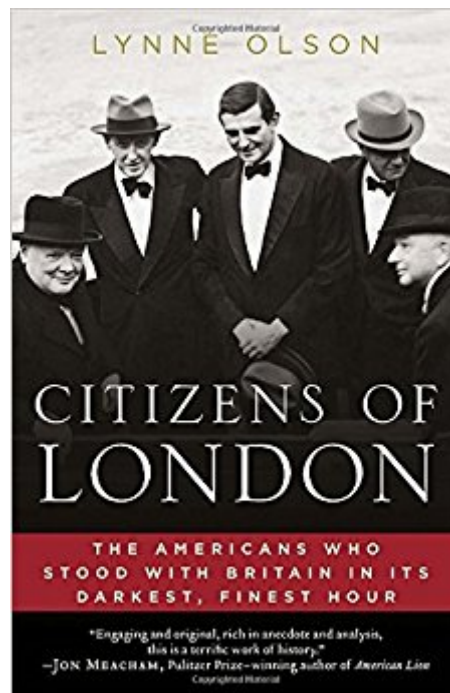




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# Citizens Of London: The Americans Who Stood With Britain In Its Darkest, Finest Hour



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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**

**.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.

**.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 that 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."

**.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.

.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.

.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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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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Lynne Olson, author of *Citizens of London*, is a bestselling writer of historical nonfiction, aimed mainly at Britain's critical role in World War II. Her studies are immaculate in both research and writing skills. Her ability to take a reader through complexity and intense human impact without the aridity usually associated with historical commentary is amazing. In this book three well-to-do Americans wind up in Winston Churchill's coterie as advisors and watchdogs over the activities between the US and Britain as the war escalates. They eventually end up very sympathetic to the plight of the Britishers and less than approving of the opposition from FDR and reluctant US citizens to getting America involved. The hardy and determined British citizens suffered greatly as the United States

refused to come to their assistance in battling the German forces that threatened to obliterate their nation and the misery was exacerbated by this obstinacy. John Winant was the idealistic US ambassador to Britain, Averell Harriman ran FDR's Lend-Lease program in London, and Edward R. Murrow was head of CBS news in Europe. They all developed such close ties with Churchill that they were actually considered part of his official circles. More than that, all three became romantically involved with Churchill's daughters. The author handles this touchy situation with aplomb, sparing the reader any salacious details that would detract from her scholarly approach. Each of the three had serious personality traits that they were able to muffle as they assisted Churchill with his decisions. All three were immensely wealthy and/or influential, they were idealistic, and their interest in the British situation was genuine. Winant was extremely shy and a poor speaker, but his boyish charm and unquestionable loyalty made him a favorite with the British people. Harriman, an industrial scion, was intensely self-centered and tended towards covert attempts to ingratiate himself with Churchill. He was referred to as a "bum-sucker" in the book. Murrow was outspoken and given to critical comments about the US in his broadcasts and writings, something greatly appreciated by Churchill in his never ending attempts to get America involved in the war. When America entered the war after Pearl Harbor, all three, along with Churchill and the rest of the country, were giddy with the decision. The intricate dance of collaboration performed by all the principals throughout the war, and the successful conclusion, is wonderfully chronicled in this intriguing book.

Schuyler T Wallace  
Author of TIN LIZARD TALES

In reading about America's history, and recently reading several other books that deal with this time frame, I find Olson's work to be accurate beyond subjectivism and insightful as it relates to the politics of leadership and conflict. FDR was not my favorite President. America's behavior, but mostly in hindsight, leading up to WWII as she related to other free nations under attack was less than appealing and this book will give the reader some insight which may influence their current outlook. I don't judge the United States behavior "back then" with our current attitudes and perspectives (for instance, the internment of Japanese Americans; which we have tried to repay but in fairness to our past generation may well have seemed the very best solution to the extreme hate directed at those innocents) but do take notice of ideological motivations and self-serving behaviors and wonder how we might be the same today? A good book filled with both historical and personal facts and findings that flesh out a period in the US's and Britain's history that is now lost to our progeny.

Citizens of London tells the story of three Americans who, more than anyone else, helped bring about the U.S. rescue of nothing less than western democracy by telling the story of wartime England. The three were W. Averill Harriman, administrator of the Lend-Lease program, Gilbert Winant, the American ambassador and Edward R. Murrow, the CBS journalist. Gripping, moving, incisive, this book tells how these three men did so much for so many. It offers, too, insightful views of Churchill, Eisenhower and FDR, the giants of the war years. The heroism, idealism and sacrifice of these people contrasts sharply with the mean-spirited, selfish and crude politics of the modern day.

I read a lot of history and am glad I read Citizens of London. Its perspective is more British than American which results in insights about both the British and American war effort which were enlightening. As an American, what you usually get is how we stepped up and saved the world. This book, while not attacking that view, admirably balances it with the incredible commitment, fortitude and sacrifice of the British, while exploring the particular individuals, especially the Americans, who rallied to their cause. I recommend it highly.

A good book, but the writing seemed a bit lopsided. Even though Citizens of London is supposed to be mainly about three Americans, the subject drifted off badly until you kind of forgot about the three men. It also showed the tremendous foot dragging of the United States in becoming involved in the war. They never seemed to realize how close England was to caving in to the Nazi's. I remember once reading of an interview of a captured German soldier who described the state of Connecticut to his American guards. He described many small towns, in particular Naugatuck, the Naugatuck River and the entire Naugatuck Valley. Now how would an ordinary German soldier know about that area? Because, as he told his guards, they were planning on conquering the United States and had gone over much information, state by state. How chilling is that. Thank God the United States finally became involved, although at a very late date. A good read and a valuable glimpse into history.

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