

Volume 12

2015

Book Review: Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War by Frank Costigliola

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Recommended Citation

Lazic, Milorad (2015) "Book Review: Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War by Frank Costigliola," *Madison Historical Review*: Vol. 12 , Article 9.

Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/mhr/vol12/iss1/9>

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Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War. By Frank Costigliola. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. 533pp. \$24.95).

Frank Costigliola is well known for his unorthodox approach to diplomatic history. His early trailblazing scholarship introduced culture and psychology as important methodological devices to the study of American foreign policy. In this sense, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances* follows the path of Costigliola's earlier works. In his newest book, Costigliola claims that the wartime alliance between the United States, the USSR, and Great Britain was a product of the personal relationships between Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, and Winston Churchill. He argues that their psychological traits, emotions, experiences, gender identity and sexuality, class, and education (all things that Costigliola broadly defines as "culture"), downplayed the importance of national interests, geopolitics, and strategy. "Only by including the overlooked private lives of public statesmen, the emotional stakes of their diplomacy, and the cultural context of their ideology can we arrive at a more holistic picture of how the Allies won World War II and then lost the security they had fought for," writes Costigliola (p. 20). He concludes that the Cold War could have been avoided or postponed if only FDR lived longer. When Harry Truman assumed the task of continuing war alliances and postwar planning, the world inevitably descended into the Cold War, since Truman, unlike his predecessor, did not have the charm, wit, emotional intelligence, or intellectual sensibility to nurture a fragile personal relationship with Stalin.

What is novel about Costigliola's book is that he explains the success of this wartime alliance (and its subsequent failure) in terms of personal politics. The book's originality and strengths lie in its scope, as well as its imaginative and bold interpretations. *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances* is peppered with anecdotes that Costigliola skillfully employs to elucidate main characters and their actions in this well-written and exciting narrative about World War II and the initial phase of the Cold War.

The author dedicates a significant amount of space to "The Women and Men Who Sustained the Big Three," who oftentimes significantly shaped policymaking. Costigliola points out that the disintegration of FDR's intimate circle in 1944 presented great emotional and practical difficulties for the President, but also opened space for people who were not committed to the ideas of the Big Three that were outlined in Tehran and Yalta. In chapter seven, "The Diplomacy of Trauma," Costigliola notes that "Soviet experts" George Kennan and Charles Bohlen – "previously kept at arm's length, would shape how a neophyte president and his advisers made sense of the confusing issues arising from the end of war" (p. 260). He claims that their isolation and unhappiness in Moscow "sparked disorientation, depression and desire for revenge" (p. 273). This theme has already been introduced by other historians such as Dennis Dunn. Yet, the strengths of the book, as noted above, contain in themselves inherent weaknesses that leave space open to readers and scholars for critique.

The greatest strength of this work is its description of Franklin Roosevelt and his inner circle, and these descriptions are based on a remarkably comprehensive mastery of American sources. However, this U.S.-centric approach sometimes impairs the strength of the narrative. The abundance of information and the desire to fit them into the main argument sometimes leads to irrelevant facts, digressions, historical gossips, and anecdotes presented for their own sake. For example, Costigliola lengthily describes Pamela Churchill's sexual escapades. Although fun to read, they contribute very little to his overall argument.

In addition, this emphasis on American figures leaves many questions about the two remaining sides of the triangle. Costigliola's narrative about the Soviets relies mostly on secondary sources about Stalin and is one of the weakest parts of the book. In a similar manner, Costigliola did not sufficiently research Winston Churchill although he had the available sources. Costigliola's psycho-social portrait of FDR advances our understanding of how his personal character determined (and limited) his foreign policy, a topic mostly neglected in FDR biographies such as Jean E. Smith's *FDR*, or Nathan Miller's *FDR: An Intimate History*. Unfortunately this could not be said about Costigliola's similar treatment of Stalin and Churchill. With new biographies focused on their formative years, such as Stephen Kotkin's *Stalin* and Michael Shelden's *Young Titan*, Costigliola's psycho-social assessment of these two statesman is greatly outdated and obsolete.

Costigliola's methodological approach puts emphasis on a "holistic picture." Yet, fans of diplomatic and military history will find his "holistic picture," a great exaggeration of cultural and psychological factors at the expense of traditional themes in diplomatic and military history. Such readers may find his concept of culture too elusive, wide, and abstract; thus rejecting some or most of his interpretations and conclusions. With *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances* Costigliola joins unending debate about FDR's foreign policy and Big Three diplomacy. He provides positive assessments of FDR's diplomacy in the framework of the Great Alliance in contrast to Frederick Marks, Dennis Dunn, or Amos Perlmutter who accuse the President of being naïve in dealing with Stalin or incriminate him for courting the tyrant.

This book, the winner of the SHAFR's Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize for 2013, has yet to stand the test of time. Some of its conclusions and interpretations will be, without a doubt, rejected. Some of them are not new or unheard-of. However, this book offers some true gems. FDR's future biographers will benefit greatly from his interpretations and list of sources. It expands the field of diplomatic history by introducing methods from neighboring fields of the discipline. Also, Costigliola produces a masterfully written narrative that is equally interesting to the wider public and to historians, thus raising the standard for future works in the field. To conclude with Costigliola's premise in the form of a question: If FDR lived longer could the Cold War be averted? William A. Williams wrote in his landmark work *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* that "explorations into the forest of conditional history are sometimes fruitful, for they occasionally suggest new insights into what did occur" (Williams, 205). And that is the greatest contribution of Costigliola's book – it offers a very convincing and fresh insight into what did occur.

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