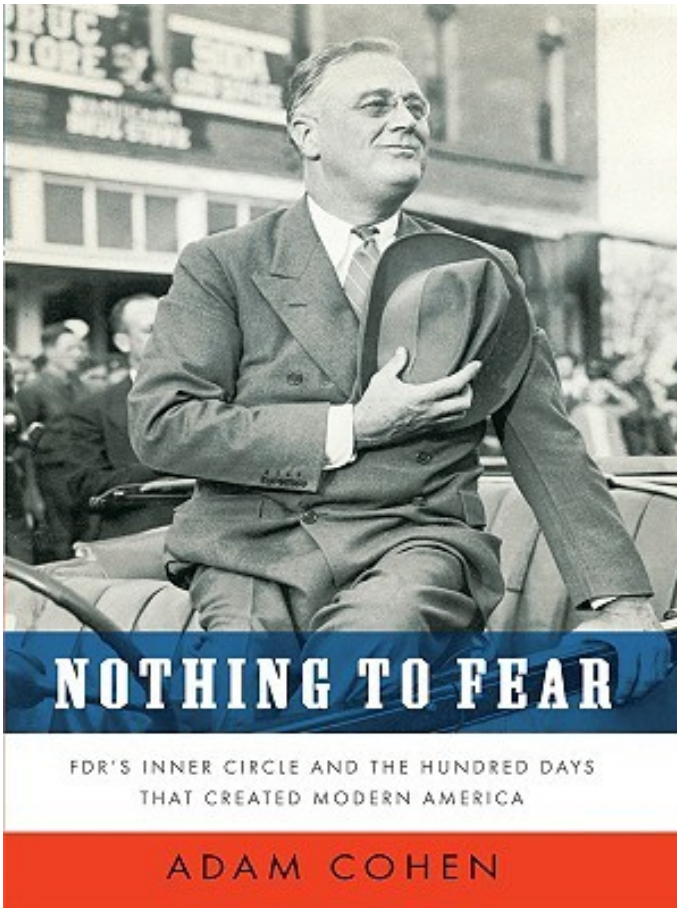

Adam Cohen

Nothing to Fear: FDR's Inner Circle and the Hundred Days That Created Modern America



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Author: Adam Cohen

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Description

A revealing account of the critical first days of FDR's presidency, during the worst moments of the Great Depression, when he and his inner circle launched the New Deal and presided over the birth of modern America

"Nothing to Fear" brings to life a fulcrum moment in American history—the tense, feverish first one hundred days of FDR's presidency, when he and his inner circle swept away the old order and reinvented the role of the federal government. When FDR took his oath of office in March 1933, thousands of banks had gone under following the Crash of 1929, a quarter of American workers were unemployed, farmers were in open rebellion, and hungry people descended on garbage dumps and fought over scraps of food. Before the Hundred Days, the federal government was limited in scope and ambition; by the end, it had assumed an active responsibility for the welfare of all of its citizens.

Adam Cohen offers an illuminating group portrait of the five members of FDR's inner circle who played the greatest roles in this unprecedented transformation, revealing in turn what their personal dynamics suggest about FDR's leadership style. These four men and one woman frequently pushed FDR to embrace more activist programs than he would have otherwise. FDR came to the White House with few firm commitments about how to fight the Great Depression—as a politician he was more pragmatic than ideological, and, perhaps surprising, given his New Deal legacy, by nature a fiscal conservative. To develop his policies, he relied heavily on his advisers, and preferred when they had conflicting views, so that he could choose the best option among them.

For this reason, he kept in close confidence both Frances Perkins—a feminist before her time, and the strongest advocate for social welfare programs—and Lewis Douglas—a entrenched budget cutter who frequently clashed with the other members of FDR's progressive inner circle. A more ideological president would have surrounded himself with advisors who shared a similar vision, but rather than commit to a single solution or philosophy, FDR favored a policy of bold, persistent experimentation. As a result, he presided over the most feverish period of government activity in American history, one that gave birth to modern America.

As Adam Cohen reminds us, the political fault lines of this era—over welfare, government regulation, agriculture policy, and much more—remain with us today. "Nothing to Fear" is both a riveting narrative account of the personal dynamics that shaped the tumultuous early days of FDR's presidency, and a character study of one of America's defining leaders in a moment of crisis.

Insightful reviews

Bob Hoffman: When Franklin Delano Roosevelt came to office in March of 1933, banks, businesses and farms were failing, unemployment stood at 25%, thousands of Americans were going hungry, and an increasing number of citizens were talking of armed rebellion. And FDR was promising "action and action now" but he was a fiscal conservative, and he had only a few untested ideas, "experiments" he called them, on how to pull the nation out of the Depression.

Thankfully, at this very critical time, FDR made some really excellent choices when it came to the selection of advisers. Raymond Moley, who coined the phrase "new deal", helped revive

the banking system and move vital new legislation quickly through congress. Henry Wallace, the new secretary of agriculture, helped save farmers with legislation that propped up commodity prices by paying them to grow less. Frances Perkins, as secretary of labor and the first woman cabinet member, pushed a reluctant president to support federal relief and public works, minimum -wage and maximum-hours laws, a ban on child labor, and other progressive initiatives. Harry Hopkins as administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, focused on rapidly getting money out to the states and the hungry people who needed it and created the country's first federal welfare program. And Lewis Douglas, as the first budget director, was the counterbalance, pushing Congress to pass the Economy Act that actually slashed the federal budget.

Radical action was necessary to pull the US out of the Depression, and thanks to the work of FDR, these advisers, and a surprisingly cooperative congress, a government that had traditionally shunned social programs, suddenly took on a strong, active role in providing relief for a hungry, reeling, out-of-work America.

The New Deal didn't end the Great Depression, but it moved the nation towards a more healthy economy. By 1937, due in part to a series of federal programs-- the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the Public Works Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration--the unemployment rate had dropped to 14%. The gross national product had come back to 1929 levels. And for people who were still unemployed, there was now a safety net.

There are striking parallels between FDR's time and the present. Unemployment is higher than it has been in years. Businesses and banks have been failing at alarming rates. Citizens continue to lose their homes to foreclosure. And ongress has acted controversially, in this case, bailing out banks and businesses and passing a hotly contested health insurance reform bill.

In 1935, Republican presidential candidate, Alfred Landon, made FDR's new Social Security program a campaign issue, telling Americans that to fund the new program, money would be taken out of their paychecks, money that they would never see again. Does it sound at all like the dire predictions we have been hearing from health insurance reform naysayers?

Roosevelt went on to defeat Landon in a landslide in 1936, and social security continues to provide income for retired seniors and persons with disabilities these 75 years later. Those times are not identical to these times, but in 'Nothing to Fear, Cohen serves us up a timely history lesson.

Wendy: FDR got advice from his agriculture secretary Henry Wallace, presidential aide Raymond Moley, budget director Lewis Douglas, labor secretary Frances Perkins and Civil Works Administration director Harry Hopkins.

If you love women's history or are any kind of feminist go right to the part about Perkins. I loved that part. There was a lot of detail, which unfortunately means that there was a lot of detail about the other four characters which engendered less enthusiasm. These characters did not

work together and were often in conflict, so I suppose I actually got to see the whole picture. Not sure how much I really wanted to see the whole picture, but the in depth look at Perkins made the rest worthwhile.

Jessica: I have read a lot of books about FDR, what can I say the man fascinates me?!?! This book spoke of things that both critics and worshipers have forgotten. (Warning Political Soap Box) FDR was a thrifty spender. He cut every department budget by a least a fourth, balanced budget, spending only for public good, created Social Security out of tax (SS would still be solvent had not been for Congress/Presidents borrowing from it) and he believed that every person should have the pleasure of earning the money. He faced high unemployment, but instead of just passing cash around he created the Civilian Cor which brought infrastructure to cities across America. This book follows a few of the revolutionaries in the Cabinet: Francis Perkins, Harry Hopkins, Harry Wallace, Lewis Douglas and Moley (his first name escapes me). This cabinet created some landmarks in public policy: Social Security, minimum wage, maximum hours of work, FDIC, stock regulation, crop supply/demand and ended child labor. For the first time in American history the government and especially the President were personally responsible for the welfare of citizens. As a side note I really admire Francis Perkins, first woman secretary who tackled a corrupt department and went head to head with Labor Unions. This book obviously has a point they are trying to place into the current conversation, if not for that this book would be four stars.

Bookmarks Magazine: Critics agree that via concentrating on 5 aides to the president, not anything to worry presents a brand new and fascinating viewpoint on an epochal interval in American politics. Cohen gears his writing to the lay reader, sparing the heavy coverage research and generating a story either relaxing and compelling. whereas the recent York occasions e-book overview notes that focusing in simple terms on FDR's first a hundred days may perhaps yield a deceptive influence of the hot Deal and that Cohen's framework

Candace Rollins: This e-book used to be much less approximately FDR and extra in regards to the cupboard and advisers that reversed the downward spiral this nation used to be in after the 1929 industry crash and next depression. Perkins, Wallace, Douglas, Hopkins all of them introduced much to the table, yet i discovered their most beneficial resources to be tenacity. They got here they served, they righted the course. I additionally stumbled on FDR to be probably not arms on, yet a huge photo form of chief that analyzed the innovations and acted quickly. FDR's administration type for my part is critical for a president that has so greatly on his plate, in particular in occasions of crisis.

Joe: publication twenty-one of my presidential challenge. Ug, what a disappointment! This booklet was once purported to be a bit present to myself! i would been saving FDR for a wet day. The final actually nice President on my list, yet this ebook was once a failure. Best case scenario: Adam Cohen used to be attempting to make "Team of Rivals: FDR Edition" and failed. Worst case scenario: This was once a covert approach of him promoting and getting me to learn a biography of Frances Perkins. Who? Exactly. i might by no means have picked up a booklet approximately Frances Perkins. now not that she's now not important. Cohen makes the case that she was, it truly is simply there are likely approximately 2 million different biographies i might decide to learn first. I mean, come on, lifestyles is short. Cohen turns out to visualize that

he is giving the reader a hefty dose of FDR in addition to interesting historical past on numerous individuals of his cabinet. The problem? The "healthy dose" of FDR is maybe approximately 15% of the book. "But Joe, he is at the cover! Surely, he is within the ebook greater than that!" Yeah, no, that is approximately it. All of his components have been nice and that i could get up from my literary shut eye simply to succumb moments later whilst he left. The plurality of the e-book is set Frances Perkins. She used to be FDR's Secretary of work in the course of his whole time in office. She helped spearheaded loads of his most vital laws in the course of his first a hundred days in office. So...why used to be her tale so boring? Even her loopy husband sometimes stoning up wasn't adequate to maintain me interested. There have been numerous different cupboard participants thrown in yet all of them finally bought brief shrift in comparison to Perkins. I firmly think that Cohen wrote his e-book approximately Perkins, discovered that nobody of their correct minds would wish to learn it, and additional all of the different stuff on the final second to get the e-book published. Understandable, yet fairly frustrating. FDR is certainly one of my absolute favourite presidents, moment merely to Lincoln so i will certainly be returning repeatedly in my existence but when you learn one booklet on him, would not have it's this.

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