

BASIC BOOKS

Perseus Books • Hachette Book Group

1290 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, NY 10104

t: 212-364-1100

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Publication Date: December 12, 2017

Courtney Nobile

212-364-0666

Courtney.Nobile@hbgusa.com

Kelsey Odorczyk

212-364-0996

Kelsey.Odorczyk@hbgusa.com

“They say the fruit tree produces its greatest harvest in its last season. Perhaps the last few months of FDR’s administration, so overshadowed by the first few months, may be as important. Woolner deftly brings those last moments in power beautifully alive and leaves us with a lasting sense of the man as well as his accomplishments.”

—Ken Burns

“An elucidating, poignant study of an elusive leader.”

—KIRKUS

THE LAST 100 DAYS

FDR at War and at Peace

By David B. Woolner

Franklin Roosevelt ranks among the most important and effective chief executives in American history. Yet while much is known about his famous first “100 Days,” against which all presidents since his time have been judged, we understand less about the significance of his final months in office.

Now, in his forthcoming book, **THE LAST 100 DAYS: *FDR at War and at Peace* (Basic Books; December 12, 2017)** esteemed Roosevelt scholar David B. Woolner paints a detailed portrait of the final 100 days of FDR’s life and presidency. Here we see how FDR—a man of sixty plus years in a precarious state of health—coped with the day-to-day demands of office during one of the most critical periods in American history. His reduced capacity for work meant that he had to set strict personal and public priorities, and the decisions he made illuminate much about what mattered most to him.

Woolner argues that FDR foresaw the globalized world to come and the central place of the US within it. Above all else, this made the establishment of the United Nations and securing the American public’s support for the fledgling organization imperative. But FDR also pursued a number of other less well-known initiatives that he was never able to fulfill, including the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. While balancing these and other urgent matters, FDR tried his best to adhere to the rest-regimen that his two primary physicians insisted was critical to his survival. He understood that he was ill, as did those closest to him, but the standard line from his doctors to the public was that he “was in fine health for a man his age.”

Drawing upon previously untapped sources, including a confidential memo from a physician who examined FDR in 1944, newly declassified records from the Office of Strategic Services, and a recently constructed day-to-day calendar of the president’s activities and contacts, Woolner depicts FDR as a much diminished man, often near the point of physical

exhaustion, yet determined to press on and achieve the goals he set for himself, his nation, and the world. These final 100 days set in motion some of the most important and long-lasting consequences of FDR's transformative presidency, which fundamentally changed the way American citizens view the role of government, as well as America's role in the world.

In an interview, David B. Woolner can discuss:

- **Why FDR rejected the ideology of “America First” and his view that isolationism and economic nationalism hurt American security;**
- **Why FDR decided to carry on regardless of the risks to his health, even though he and Eleanor understood that his decision to remain in office might shorten his life;**
- **The revelation that FDR gave serious thought to resigning his office once the war was over and was encouraged to consider becoming the first Secretary General of the United Nations;**
- **Why his last overseas mission was dedicated to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, even though nearly all of his senior advisors opposed it as risky and impractical;**
- **FDR at Yalta, where Stalin did not outwit and defeat him, as is often assumed;**
- **How the unprecedented levels of violence unleashed between 1939 and 1945 inspired FDR's greatest ambition, and the cause he dedicated himself to above all others: the establishment of the United Nations;**
- **The little-known fact that FDR received a second letter from Einstein in March 1945, urging the President to meet nuclear physicist Niels Bohr out of the latter's concerns about the moral implications of the atomic bomb.**
- **FDR's family life in his final days—his continuing distance from Eleanor, his closeness with his daughter, Anna, and his last moments with Lucy Mercer Rutherford, his “affectionate” companion.**

THE LAST 100 DAYS pulls back the curtain on the private life of FDR, and offers an unprecedented look at how he made his momentous final policy decisions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

David B. Woolner is a senior fellow and resident historian at the Roosevelt Institute and a professor of history at Marist College. He lives in Rhinebeck, New York.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

THE LAST 100 DAYS

FDR at War and at Peace

By **David B. Woolner**

ISBN: 9780465048717

E-Book ISBN: 9780465096510

Release: 11/15/17; On Sale: 12/12/17; Pub: 12/12/17

Price: \$32.00 US / \$42.00 CAN;

A Q&A with David B. Woolner, author of
THE LAST 100 DAYS:
FDR at War and at Peace
On-sale December 12, 2017

FDR is famous for the things he accomplished during the first 100 days of his presidency—launching the New Deal, taking the country off the gold standard, and more. Why are the last 100 days of his life key in understanding FDR as a president?

FDR's last months in office brought to the fore some of the profound issues of the twentieth century: the deliberations of the Yalta conference; the near completion of the atomic bomb; how to prosecute the closing stages of the war against Japan; the transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy; the rising importance of Mideast oil; and most importantly to him, establishing the United Nations and securing the support of the American people for the fledgling organization. By focusing on FDR at a time when his reduced capacity for work meant that he had to set strict personal and public priorities, we get a deeper sense of FDR's true character; a more profound understanding of his hopes for the future and his increasing need to be close to those with whom he felt he could truly be himself.

How did the resources you used – the confidential memo from FDR's doctor, the records from the Office of Strategic Services, the day-to-day calendar of the president's activities – allow you to create a full picture of the last 100 days of FDR's life?

Thanks to the efforts of the FDR Presidential Library to construct a day-to-day calendar of FDR's meeting and contacts, including meetings that FDR wished to keep secret, we now have a much better idea of what the President was up to at any given moment. In addition, the recent discovery of a confidential memo drafted by Dr. Frank Lahey, one of the physicians who examined FDR in the spring of 1944, which predicted he would not survive a fourth term, as well as other records indicating that FDR understood that remaining in office might shorten his life, we get a better sense of just how determined FDR was to carry on despite the risks. This view is directly contrary to the widespread assumption that FDR and his family had no idea just how ill he was.

The addition of other important previously unreleased sources, such as a variety of records from the Soviet Archives and the access I was given to the unpublished version of the diary of Henry Wallace, offer new insights into FDR's policies and state of mind at one of the most critical moments in American—and world—history.

What were the benefits and downsides of FDR's reputation for being secretive and private, even among friends and family?

Throughout his life, FDR earned a reputation as a man of unbounded optimism and good cheer. Yet he also possessed a deep reticence to show emotion or reveal his inner feelings. Emotional impenetrability has its advantages, of course, particularly for an individual charged with the deep responsibilities of a president. But it also has its disadvantages. It can lead to a feeling of isolation and worse still, loneliness, even for a person surrounded by a large family and dozens of aides and assistants. There is no question that by the end of 1944, FDR—whom we must remember was a man confined to a wheelchair—was beginning to feel somewhat isolated and alone. He longed for the day when he could escape the burdens of office and increasingly sought whatever respite he could find in the company of those few individuals with whom he could truly be himself.

In the Lahey memo, it appears that FDR was informed about the severity of his condition, but that remains uncertain. Did FDR or his family ever truly understand how ill he was?

FDR knew that he was suffering from hypertension and the early stages of heart disease, but we do not know if his primary physician, Dr. Ross McIntire, ever informed the president about Dr. Lahey's blunt prediction that the stress of another term would kill him. What is clear is that those closest to the President, especially his daughter Anna, understood that he was in a precarious state of health. As such, Anna and FDR's physicians repeatedly urged the President to cut back

on his workload. At the same time, they did not prevent him from making the arduous fourteen thousand mile trip to Yalta, a journey from which he never recovered. This semi-cavalier—or perhaps reckless—attitude was shared by FDR who, unbeknownst to anyone but Eleanor, had made up his mind in 1940 to carry on as a President for as long as it might take him “to complete his work” even if it might mean he would die in office.

Once elected, was FDR too ill during the end of his life to properly carry out the burdens of the presidency?

FDR was well enough to keep the big picture of what he wanted to accomplish in mind. He was also able to keep up with Churchill and Stalin at Yalta, and had a remarkable capacity, even in these final days, to summon his reserves of strength when he needed them. But on the other hand, there is no question that he was exhausted, and this exhaustion did have an effect—not on his judgment or mental faculties—but on his ability to carry the burdens of office. FDR never took the time, for example, to inform Vice President Truman about the existence of the atomic bomb or fully brief him about the key policies of his administration. And many smaller policy objectives and/or appointments were either delayed or never fulfilled because FDR was too exhausted to carry them out. So the short answer to this question is yes.

Aside from getting the rest needed to survive, what were some of the challenges FDR faced in office during his fourth term?

Thanks to the overwhelming victory the Allies achieved in the Second World War it is all too easy to forget just how daunting a task it was to secure the final defeat of Germany—let alone the final defeat of Japan. The last 100 days witnessed the climax of the Battle of the Bulge; the critical deliberations of the Yalta conference, where the future of the United Nations and great power cooperation hung in the balance; decisions about how best to prosecute the final stages of the war against Japan in the face of the bloody struggle to take Iwo Jima and Okinawa; growing uncertainty among a number of top scientists and officials about the moral implications of the atomic bomb; and how to ensure that the American people—wary of the demands of war—would not revert to the failed “America First” policies of the past, but would embrace the idea that the United States had no choice but to play a leading role in world affairs.

What role – if any – did FDR’s friends and family play in his ability to lead during this period?

Of all of FDR’s closest confidants, the one person who helped him carry out his duties more than any other during these last months was his daughter Anna. She accompanied him to Yalta, where she did her best to screen his meetings and limit the number of people who had access to her father. She also carried out this role in Washington with increasing intensity in the weeks and months after Yalta. FDR also possessed a highly competent and vastly experienced set of military and civilian advisors, such as General George Marshall, Admiral William Leahy, Harry Hopkins, Charles Bohlen and others, who were adept at interpreting his policies and frequently drafted his correspondence with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin.

Why did FDR’s death leave so many Americans with such a profound sense of uncertainty about their future?

FDR was the only American president to be elected to office four times. By the time he died he had been in office twelve years. For many of the young men serving in the military, FDR was in a sense the only president they had ever known, and the ubiquitous reaction among the many millions in uniform was that losing FDR was like losing one’s own father. FDR had also brought the country through the terrible years of the Great Depression. His optimistic temperament, best exemplified in his fireside chats, and determination to use the powers of government to help those in need—an unprecedented step at the time—meant that the vast majority of Americans felt that they had “a friend in the White House.” As such, his loss left a tremendous void in people’s lives, and the outpouring of grief that accompanied his death was perhaps only matched by the death of Abraham Lincoln eighty years before.

How did FDR change the relationship between the American people and their government?

Prior to FDR’s assumption of the office and launch of the New Deal, the only real contact the American people had with the Federal Government was through the Post Office. There was also very little if any regulation of the economy—no social security, unemployment insurance, regulation of the stock market, or federal deposit insurance for our nation’s banks. The New Deal—which in large part was dedicated to making capitalism work for the average American—changed all of this and in the process transformed the relationship between the American people and their government. At the same time, the United States in 1930s was a country that had largely turned its back on the rest of the world, through the series of neutrality laws passed and through the sentiments expressed by such organizations as the America First movement.

FDR rejected these ideas and used the experience of the Second World War to convince the American people that it was in their best interest to support the United States playing a leading role in the world after the war. It was this transformation in attitude that led to the establishment of the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and General Agreement on Tariff and Trade that not only transformed the relationship between the United States and the world community, but also helped foster in the global economy that we live in today.

In what ways was FDR a long-term, forward- thinking president?

FDR had an enormously creative mind. He foresaw that colonialism was a thing of the past and fully expected the proposed United Nations Organization to help foster the orderly de-colonization of the world. He also recognized early on, that despite internal divisions and other problems, China would one day emerge as a great power. He also understood the realities of Soviet power, and recognized the great power cooperation was vital if we were going to prevent the outbreak of another, even more cataclysmic war. It was for this reason that he promoted the idea of the Security Council as a forum where the world's leading powers—the United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, France and China—could air their differences without recourse to war. These ideas were not based on naiveté, but on the geopolitical realities that existed at the time.

How did FDR's untimely death help make the United Nations a reality?

In the emotional tribute Churchill delivered to the House of Commons a few days after FDR died, Churchill observed that in many respects FDR died “an enviable death.” He had brought his country “through the worst of its perils and the heaviest of its toils” and had “died in harness battle harness, like his soldiers, sailors and airmen,” at the very moment when “victory had cast its sure and steady beam upon him.”

In many respects these observations were accurate. FDR had died at an opportune moment, and had not, as he himself feared he might, lingered on to fight the battle over the creation of the United Nations and the establishment of the peace in an incapacitated state, as had Woodrow Wilson decades earlier. Moreover the shock of his passing inspired people the world over to embrace FDR's vision, a sentiment which helped ensure the success of the San Francisco Conference that was tasked with the responsibility of drawing up the final Charter of the United Nations just a few weeks after FDR died. Indeed, in many respects, the UN Charter, and the United Nations, represent FDR's greatest legacy.

Praise for
THE LAST 100 DAYS:
FDR at War and at Peace
By David B. Woolner

“A balanced, readable book based on thorough archival sources that will have considerable appeal to historians and political scientists, as well as general readers interested in the presidency” – *Library Journal*

“An elucidating, poignant study of an elusive leader.” - *KIRKUS*

“We are blessed that David Woolner has turned his gifts as a writer and skills as a scholar to FDR’s last hundred days in office. They were a consequential part of a very consequential life. They were also an important moment in our nation’s history. The Last 100 Days is engaging and enlightening.”

—**E.J. Dionne Jr., author of *Why the Right Went Wrong* and co-author of *One Nation After Trump***

“They say the fruit tree produces its greatest harvest in its last season. Perhaps the last few months of FDR’s administration, so overshadowed by the first few months, may be as important. Woolner deftly brings those last moments in power beautifully alive and leaves us with a lasting sense of the man as well as his accomplishments.”

—**Ken Burns**

“The Last 100 Days is an imaginative, deeply researched page-turner that is a pleasure to read. At a time when many Americans find the White House desolating, David Woolner invites the reader to enjoy some time with a president who, even in his final year, radiated good cheer and hope for our country’s future.”

—**William E. Leuchtenburg, William Rand Kenan, Jr. Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940***

“In this magisterial account, David Woolner makes a compelling case that FDR’s last hundred days deserve to be ranked in importance with the first. Drawing on unequalled knowledge of both Roosevelt and the sources, Woolner refutes the notion of a feeble dying president who had lost his grip and was unwilling to confront difficult issues. He shows that an exhausted FDR conserved his limited energies single-mindedly to concentrate in the two most important issues facing the President—winning the war over the Axis powers and securing post-war international cooperation. A wonderfully lucid and convincing study.”

—**Tony Badger, professor of American history at Northumbria University and author of *FDR: The First Hundred Days***

“Everyone knows about FDR’s First Hundred Days but until now there has been little notice of his last. In this finely-honed and impressively accessible account, David Woolner offers an up-close and insightful look at a dying president wrongly maligned for giving away too much at Yalta and beset by the immediate dangers of the postwar period. Yet, as Woolner illuminates, FDR remained determined to launch the United Nations and develop a ‘New Deal for the World’ before finally succumbing to what Churchill rightly called an ‘enviable death.’”

—**Jonathan Alter, author of *The Defining Moment: FDR’s Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope***

“David Woolner has ‘hung around’ with FDR for over a quarter-century, and we are the beneficiary of that special relationship. Neatly using the last hundred days as a vehicle for a broader assessment, Woolner has given us an honest, solidly researched appreciation of Roosevelt’s dreams and actions—dreams and actions that shaped the remainder of the 20th century.”

—**Warren Kimball, author of *Forged in War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Second World War***

“At a time when a majority of Americans are so disillusioned about politics, and with a sitting president under investigation for possible impeachable offenses, David Woolner’s book offers a compelling look at a great Chief Executive. His portrait of FDR’s last hundred days is a powerful reminder of courageous leadership and provides hope that we can return to presidential effectiveness in the not too distant future.”

—**Robert Dallek, presidential historian and author of *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963***

“We know the story—of course we do. But David Woolner invests it with a sense of Greek tragedy, as we watch a man struggling against time, fate and the furies to complete his life's work. In *The Last Hundred Days*, Woolner uses his unrivalled knowledge of the archives to bring alive with vivid new detail FDR's grand finale and to show how the dying president tried to bring peace to the world—even though his private life remained in turmoil. In an era when the American presidency is under particularly intense scrutiny, here is a sobering yet uplifting account of the demands and costs of power.”

—**David Reynolds, author of *From Munich to Pearl Harbor***

“Franklin Roosevelt’s last 100 days were every bit as fascinating and consequential as his first. If you want to know how much of the modern world came to be, this is the place to begin.”

—**Geoffrey C. Ward, author of *A First Class Temperament: The Emergence of Franklin Roosevelt***

#