

Readers Guide

Citizens of London

Citizens of London is the behind-the-scenes story of World War II's Anglo-American alliance, told from the perspective of three Americans in London who played vital roles in creating the partnership and keeping it alive. While justly acclaimed as the most successful military partnership in history, the wartime relationship between the United States and Britain was anything but the inevitable alliance it appears to be in hindsight. Suspicions, strains, prejudices, and rivalries threatened to derail it before it ever took hold.

The three Americans at the center of the story—John Gilbert Winant, the U.S. ambassador to Britain; CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow; and Averell Harriman, the wealthy, well-connected head of FDR's Lend-Lease program in England—were key participants in America's prewar debate over whether to come to the aid of Britain. When the U.S. finally entered the war, they helped forge and then keep alive what turned out to be a very fragile union.

While *Citizens of London* examines the military, political and diplomatic aspects of the alliance, it is above all a human story, focusing on the individuals who shaped this important piece of history. The extremely close relationship between Winston Churchill and the three Americans is, for example, one of the recurring themes of the book. Aware of how vital the three were to the survival of his nation, Churchill made them de facto members of his own family. So intimate were their ties with the Churchills that all three ended up having wartime love affairs with members of Churchill's family.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Why was the work of these three men so important?
2. Why was Churchill so intent on forging close relationships with them?
3. The Anglo-American alliance has come to be known as “the special relationship” that helped win World War II, preserve democracy and save the world. During the war, however, it experienced many difficulties. What were some of the reasons for those problems?
4. One prominent military historian has described wartime London as “magnificent—the Paris of World War II.” What did he mean by that? What was London like during the war? How did it differ from Washington during that period?
5. How would you compare Britain's experience of the war with that of the United States?
6. Are there any lessons to be drawn from the Anglo-American wartime partnership and the work of Winant, Murrow, and Harriman?

7. Although the book focuses on these three men, there were other Americans in London who played key roles in creating and maintaining the alliance. Who were some of them and why were they important?

8. While Murrow and Harriman were well-known figures during and after the war, Winant disappeared into the shadows of history. Why was that, and why should he be remembered?

9. As you read the book, did your feelings change towards each of these men? Did you change your opinion of Churchill or Roosevelt as a result of reading the book?

10. Of the three main characters, who had the most effect on history? Who had the most influence with Churchill? Who had the most influence with Roosevelt?

About the Author

Lynne Olson is a *New York Times* bestselling author of nine books of history, including *Madame Fourcade's Secret War: The Daring Young Woman Who Led France's Largest Spy Network Against the Nazis* and *Citizens of London: The Americans Who Stood with Britain in Its Darkest, Finest Hour*. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has called her "our era's foremost chronicler of World War II politics and diplomacy."

Lynne lives in Washington, DC with her husband, Stanley Cloud, with whom she co-authored two books.