

# Five Best: Bradley W. Hart on the War Before World War II

**From the author, most recently, of “Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States.”**

By  
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Sabotage! The Secret War Against America

By Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn (1942)

1. “Sabotage!” traces the propaganda and espionage weapons used by Nazi Germany and Japan against the United States prior to World War II. Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn provide facsimiles of Japanese spy maps of the U.S. West Coast, intercepted letters mailed by German spies in America, and correspondence between fascist leaders and anti-Semites on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans were shocked by the book’s revelations that German agent George Sylvester Viereck disseminated propaganda against American intervention in the war, prior to Pearl Harbor, with the use of congressional franking privileges. The authors boldly named the political figures involved in Viereck’s scheme—among them Hamilton Fish III, Rush D. Holt, Gerald P. Nye and Burton K. Wheeler—members of Congress who were “the political heroes of the America First Committee,” the country’s most prominent anti-interventionist organization. Most of the politicians named in this best-selling book saw their careers abruptly ended by voters. The authors also established with devastating clarity the link between a paid Nazi agent and the America First Committee, whose most famous spokesman was Charles Lindbergh.

Under Cover

By John Roy Carlson (1943)

2. In “Under Cover,” published midway through World War II, Armenian-American journalist Arthur Derounian, writing under the pseudonym John Roy Carlson, described his four-year experience as an infiltrator of isolationist and pro-Nazi groups in America—groups engaged, Derounian reported, in a plot to establish a Hitler-friendly fascist regime in Washington. The book emphasized the role anti-Semitism played in these movements. Derounian had no hesitation in naming prominent politicians he encountered in the course of his undercover work, or in heaping scorn on the America First Committee and its followers. The journalist’s revelations outraged those named in

the book and led to a series of failed libel suits. Like “Sabotage!,” “Under Cover” became an instant best seller and remains one of the most compelling accounts of isolationist and pro-fascist activists in America—forces all the more dangerous, Derounian charged, because they came in the guise of patriotism.

### Official German Report

By John Roy Carlson (1961)

3. O. John Rogge initially wrote his “Official German Report” as a Justice Department employee investigating ties between the Third Reich and prominent Americans. So successful was Rogge in uncovering those links that President Truman ordered the report classified and buried. Fired from the Justice Department when he refused to keep silent about his discoveries, Rogge never gave up hope that the report would be made public. In 1961, the government finally allowed its publication; among other startling revelations, the report disclosed details of a German plot to interfere in the 1940 presidential election. The Nazis had funneled millions of dollars to a sympathetic American mogul determined to see FDR replaced by an anti-interventionist president—a plan doomed to failure. But, Rogge writes, “the Nazis had yet other schemes for influencing the outcome of our 1940 Presidential election, as well as the platforms of both major parties.” His spellbinding book, packed with details—the first official account of the propaganda and espionage war that raged before Pearl Harbor—not surprisingly caused a sensation.

Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America’s Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941

By Lynne Olson (2013)

4. “By the summer of 1941,” Lynne Olson writes, “young men drafted the previous year talked of going AWOL . . . soldiers watching a newsreel booed loudly when images of President Roosevelt and General George Marshall flashed on the screen.” Ms. Olson evokes the atmosphere of a time when the isolationist-interventionist conflict had become a “brutal, no-holds-barred battle for the soul of the nation.” Roosevelt’s main adversary in that fight was Charles Lindbergh, the most important anti-Roosevelt and anti-intervention voice of the era. The key moment in this conflict came on Sept. 11, 1941, when Lindbergh delivered a speech in Des Moines, Iowa, that directly blamed the Jews for the outbreak of the war in Europe. Neither the organization’s reputation nor Lindbergh’s would ever fully recover. He was widely denounced in the national press and would be denied the opportunity to serve in the war in any high-profile role. Ms. Olson’s book concludes with an aged Lindbergh visiting his old plane at the Smithsonian, where he gazed up at the Spirit of St. Louis. The plane may have been given a prominent place in one of the country’s most important museums, but there would be no such public idolization for the man who had so famously flown it.

1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler—the Election Amid the Storm

By Susan Dunn (2013)

5. In the 1940 presidential election the incumbent bucked a tradition, dating back to George Washington, that limited the presidency to two terms. Still, the argument for Franklin D. Roosevelt's third term was obvious. The Nazis rolled through France and had begun bombing Britain, while Charles Lindbergh proclaimed that the war was already lost. Susan Dunn's history of this presidential campaign, immensely compelling in its detail, captures the tone of the drama that concluded with FDR's renomination, an outcome received with overwhelming joy by the vast majority of the delegates. After winning the election Roosevelt would have cause to be grateful to Wendell Willkie, his opponent in the race and a strong internationalist at heart. And so he revealed himself to be, after the election, during the bitter battle over aid to Britain via Lend-Lease—a bill vigorously opposed by isolationists. When Willkie issued a public statement of support for Lend-Lease—no small endorsement—a thankful Franklin Roosevelt told an aide that the former Republican candidate was a “godsend” for the country.