

Promoting Britain's Fight: Duff Cooper's 1939-1940 Lecture Tour and American Public Opinion During the 'Phoney War'

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In early October 1939, Conservative member of parliament and former First Lord of the Admiralty Alfred Duff Cooper, together with his glamorous wife Diana, formerly Lady Diana Manners, boarded a ship bound for New York City.¹ Given that Britain had declared war on Germany little more than a month before – and Adolf Hitler had officially annexed western Poland just days earlier – the abrupt departure of one of the country's most prominent Conservative Party voices was, to say the least, controversial. Over the coming months, the Coopers would travel around the United States and make 61 official public appearances at community meetings, university lecture halls and the salons of the rich and powerful in 21 states to discuss the progress of the Second World War.² The American press followed their every move.

Invariably, Duff Cooper's speeches and private remarks revolved around two themes: firstly, that Britain could survive the war and face the inevitable onslaught from Hitler. Secondly – and more controversially – that Britain's best chances of doing so lay with a leader other than Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. This latter point attracted a great deal of attention in Whitehall, to the extent that the Foreign Office once considered trying to order the Coopers to return to the country. Through late 1939-early 1940, therefore, Duff and Diana Cooper became two of Britain's most important unofficial ambassadors to the United States. With no official diplomatic status, nor government post, they were not bound by the niceties and political pressures faced by the actual British ambassador, Lord Lothian. This role suited the Coopers in some senses, and was a poor fit simultaneously. As will be seen, Cooper became an important advocate of Winston Churchill's bid for the premiership in the critical period before it became a reality and, in some senses, provided Americans with their first introduction to their future ally.

¹ A note on the nomenclature of the couple is necessary. The (paternal and legal) family name was 'Cooper,' whilst Alfred Duff Cooper was known as 'Duff Cooper' in the press, and 'Duff' to his friends and colleagues.

² *Old Men Forget* 272.

Simultaneously, however, the Coopers' upper-class bearing and pretensions rankled many Americans who viewed them as snooty propagandists reminiscent of George III's royal governors in the pre-Revolutionary War period. Later British speakers, including the taxi driver and BBC radio star Herbert Hodge (a visitor in 1942), would conversely take much care to emphasise their more humble origins: with Hodge titling his own wartime American travelogue *A Cockney on Main Street*.³ As Hodge remarked, whilst the average American generally did not detect much difference between 'upper' and 'lower' class British accents, 'the public school (or "Oxford" or BBC, whatever you like to call it) sounds to him like an offensive tone.'⁴ Whilst Hodge's 'council school accent was an asset on American radio,' the Coopers more clipped utterances were, perhaps, less tailor made for a mass US audience.⁵

Regardless, the Coopers' lecture tour made an important and demonstrable impact on American public opinion at this critical juncture. In addition, Cooper himself believed the tour opened his eyes to the reality of the American political situation and gave him important insights about how the United States should be treated as an ally, and how American public opinion was not necessarily to be taken for granted. As he recalled in his memoirs *Old Men Forget*, Cooper's American contacts convinced him that Allied propaganda to date had largely failed to connect with American audiences, and that major changes were urgently needed.⁶ In his future role as Churchill's Minister of Information, Cooper would have ample opportunity to turn this conclusion into concrete action. By May 1940, Cooper had pushed through plans to establish a British propaganda bureau in New York, along with plans to expand its operations into Chicago and San Francisco. This led to a protracted battle with Lothian who, as will be seen, had been an opponent of Cooper's own visit to the U.S. as well.⁷

³ Herbert Hodge, *A Cockney on Main Street*, (London, 1945)

⁴ Hodge, 61.

⁵ Hodge, 63.

⁶ *Old Men Forget* 274.

⁷ Nicholas John Cull *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American 'Neutrality' in World War II* p. 78-80.

This article examines the course of the Coopers' tour through the United States at this critical moment to explore its impact on American public opinion, especially among economic and political elites, and the lessons Duff Cooper himself extrapolated from the experience. Its central argument is that Cooper's trip, though also financially lucrative, had two intersecting aims: to take a more direct approach in convincing Americans of the need to aid the British war effort than was official government and embassy policy at the time, and, thereby secondly, to increase the chances that Roosevelt would actually do so. There were no guarantees that the former would lead to the latter, but that, at least, was Cooper's goal. His tour had, in other words, domestic and diplomatic implications – with the fate of his country, and his own frontline political career, both on the line.

To do so, the sources used in this analysis will include Duff Cooper's correspondence with his son, John Julius Cooper, and the unpublished diaries of Joseph P. Kennedy and Robert Bruce Lockhart. This source base will be augmented, however, with a previously-underutilized set of material: Diana Cooper's often-intimate letters to one of her closest confidants, Conrad Russell. Over the course of the trip, Diana wrote to Russell nearly every day, highlighting her recent experiences and providing unvarnished commentary on both the reception of her husband's speeches and her impressions of the United States. This correspondence, only deposited at the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, in the early 2010s, provides a particularly important insight into how the Coopers truly viewed the U.S. and its citizens in this critical period. In many ways this article therefore forms a work of recovery – placing new material into the public record and encouraging others to go further in exploring its meaning. Heavily archivally driven, the narrative of what follows is intended to give future historians an insight into this significant transatlantic moment.

The first section of the article explores the background of the Coopers' visit to argue that their unofficial diplomatic status was a key element of their success engaging with the American public, particularly since it helped dispel the charge that Cooper was a mere propagandist for British interests. The second section explores the early aspects of his trip, including visits with President Franklin Roosevelt and a controversial speech he delivered to a Jewish-American group that particularly rankled the Foreign Office. The third and final section explores the Coopers' trip in the Midwest and West, where public opinion differed greatly from the East

Coast and isolationism ran rampant. As part of this phase of the trip, the Coopers visited Hollywood and attempted to gauge opinion toward Hitler in the entertainment industry. This too would provide Duff Cooper with important insights into how American propaganda was likely to be used after the country entered the war.

Despite the demonstrable importance of the Coopers' American tour, there is surprisingly little mention of it in the existing historiography. Part of this is no doubt that fact that it took place at the same time as a number of significant military and political events in the European Theatre. Duff Cooper's own memoirs discuss the trip in the course of just 16 pages of 384 total, and even then interspersed with the other events of late 1939.⁸ Similarly, John Charmley's 1986 biography of Duff Cooper mentions the trip only in passing – affording 4 pages to the affair.⁹ In a wider study, Stephen Casey does not touch upon the effect of Duff Cooper (or any other British speakers) in his *Cautious Crusade* – which details the path the Roosevelt administration took towards committing American soldiers to the conflict.¹⁰

Meanwhile, historians of British propaganda in the Second World War have hardly done better. Susan A. Brewer's book on British public relations campaigns in the United States fails to mention the Cooper visit at all, despite providing an in-depth analysis of Britain's overall propaganda strategy in the same period.¹¹ Moreover, while authors including Peter Ball, Robert Calder and Nicholas John Cull have examined specific British efforts to shape American opinion they have paid Cooper's own visit only minor attention (despite Cull including an excellent analysis of Cooper's later efforts to expand British propaganda efforts as Minister of Information).¹² More recently, Lynne Olson's *Those Angry Days* uses the mobilisation against Cooper as a brief example of those isolationist voices opposing 'the British serpent...crawling

⁸ *Old Men Forget* 258-274.

⁹ Charmley, 135-138

¹⁰ Stephen Casey, *Cautious Crusade*

¹¹ Susan A. Brewer, *To Win the Peace*.

¹² Peter Bell, 'The Foreign Office and the 1939 Royal Visit to America: Courting the USA in an Era of Isolationism' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), pp. 599-616; Robert Calder, *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States 1939-1945*; Cull.

across the American landscape, spewing forth its unctuous lies,’ but it hardly stands as a key tale in her narrative.¹³ The role of the Coopers’ visit to the United States in both helping shape American opinion, and the couple’s own views of how the U.S. should be treated as both a prospective and, later, actual ally, thus remains a lacuna in the literature.

Fully understanding the significance of the Coopers’ visit to the United States requires background as to the importance such a visit held. By 1939, Duff Cooper was widely seen as a significant player in the Conservative Party and British politics more widely. Having served bravely in the First World War (winning the Distinguished Service Order for his gallantry at the front), he traded working at the Foreign Office for becoming a Conservative member of parliament in the election landslide of 1924. Elected to Oldham in the north west of England, he saw much of the economic difficulties that blighted interwar Britain, and, by consequence, generally sat on the liberal wing of Tory politics together with other younger ex-servicemen such as Harold Macmillan and Anthony Eden. Losing his northern seat in 1929, Duff returned for the much more prosperous Westminster St George’s in 1931, and was appointed Secretary of State for War in 1935. When Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister two years later, he made Cooper First Lord of the Admiralty at the age of 47 – a key post in a government simultaneously trying to make the Anglo-German Naval Agreement stick, and seeking to ready Britain’s navy should a war with Hitler’s Germany prove necessary.

The divergence between Prime Minister and his sometime protégé was fairly swift however. Six months after the Foreign Secretary, Eden, resigned from the Government in protest at its policy towards Mussolini’s Italy, Duff Cooper followed suit. In the wake of Chamberlain’s agreement at Munich to cede the Sudetenland to Germany, Duff Cooper gave a landmark speech in the House of Commons where he declared that whilst ‘the Prime Minister has believed in addressing Herr Hitler through the language of sweet reasonableness, I have believed that he was more open to the language of the mailed fist.’¹⁴ The episode is well known in the narrow terms of British appeasement, but the point is that it was well remarked upon in the United States – and beyond the

¹³ Lynne Olson, *Those Angry Days*, 51.

¹⁴ HC Deb 03 October 1938 vol 339 col 34.

major metropolitan cities. For example, on 3 October 1938 the *Wausau Daily Record* gave part of its frontpage over to the headline that ‘British Foreign Policy is Bitterly Denounced by Alfred Duff Cooper.’ Its Missourian readers were then offered large chunks of Duff Cooper’s resignation speech, including the line that ‘the German government, having got their man [Chamberlain] down, were not to be deprived of kicking him.’¹⁵ The *Associated Press*, whose reporting of the story was carried from the *Tampa Daily Times* in Florida to the *Oakland Tribune* in California, told much of America of the ‘foes’ who had ‘assail[ed the] Munich Deal in [the] House of Commons.’¹⁶ Foremost amongst them, reported as sobbing during his resignation speech, was Duff Cooper. Such newspapers often ran a picture of the dapper now former First Lord, wearing his naval uniform. As diplomatic events seemed to vindicate Duff Cooper’s actions, so too was American interest further piqued. As another British witness to late 1930s America put it, when it came to liberal America, ‘Anti-Munich wise cracks, pungently retailed by [the journalist] Miss Dorothy Thompson, were very popular. Typical was Miss Dorothy Parker’s aphorism: ‘Mr Chamberlain is the first man in the world to crawl at 250 miles per hour.’¹⁷ If they wanted further evidence of Duff’s divergence from his former boss, it was provided by Adolf Hitler in a speech at Saarbrücken on 9 October 1938: ‘it only needs in England that instead of Chamberlain, Mr Duff Cooper, Mr Eden, or Mr Churchill should come to power...it would be the aim of these men to immediately begin a world war.’¹⁸ In such a climate there was a ready made market to hear Duff Cooper. Though whether America was ready to agree was a whole other matter.

But he was not the only draw. His wife Diana was almost equally well known as a socialite and was widely renowned for her beauty and seductive charms. The interest in her from the American press predated the 1939-40 trip by two decades. Indeed, in July 1919 several American sources carried news of a fall which broke Lady Diana’s thighbone – a few weeks after the Cooper’s marriage.¹⁹ In the following years, newspapers which regularly carried the London

¹⁵ *Wausau Daily Herald*, 3 October 1938.

¹⁶ *Tampa Daily Times*, 3 October 1938 and *Oakland Tribune*, 1 October 1938

¹⁷ Robert Bruce Lockhart, ‘Some Reflections on the State of American Opinion,’ Hoover, Lockhart 7/7, April 1939

¹⁸ *Gathering Storm*, 329

¹⁹ E.g. *Times Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), and the *Des Moines Register*, 21 July 1919

Society gossip, such as the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, were kept much more regularly up to date.²⁰ Some of the stories were professional – like the occasion St Louis readers were told that Diana had ‘been forbidden by her father to appear on the stage or in the films’ (a ban which did not hold) – and others dealt with her appearance.²¹ What is certain is that by the time she appeared on the front of *Time* magazine in February 1926, Diana was known to millions of Americans as a woman ‘where brains match beauty.’²² Indeed, in so far as he was mentioned, Duff was usually seen as an interesting appendage to his wife’s glamour, not the traditional role for a rising politician. Referencing the start of Duff’s political career, one report held that Diana had ‘won a victory for her husband,’ and his triumph in securing Oldham in 1924 had been due ‘to the active campaigning of Lady Diana Cooper.’²³ Until Duff’s resignation from the government in 1938, it was his wife, not himself, which was the attraction to the watching American public.

The Coopers’ glamorous reputation was enhanced by the fact that for most of their lives they were taking part in what amounted to an open marriage. Diana Cooper not only tolerated her husband’s numerous and seemingly-incessant affairs but took a string of glamorous and prominent lovers herself. One of her closest confidants was Conrad Russell, the youngest son of Lord Arthur Russell (and therefore a cousin of the philosopher Bertrand Russell), a First World War veteran and later farmer living in Mells Manor, Somerset. Most sources, including the editor of his collected letters, Georgina Blakiston, maintain that the Russell-Cooper relationship was chaste and mere flirtation. Whatever the exact nature of their relationship, Russell and Diana Cooper were extremely intimate and she frequently opened her letters to him with ‘Darling’ and closed at least one with the formulation ‘Diana who loves you’.²⁴ Cooper’s letters to Russell from America – along with those she wrote to her son in the same period -- provide a particularly

²⁰ *PPG*, 11 April 1920

²¹ *St Louis Star and Times*, 23 April 1920; on appearance see *The Tampa Tribune*, 6 September 1926.

²² *Dayton Daily News*, 14 February 1926.

²³ *Dayton Daily News*, 14 February 1926.

²⁴ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, 6 November 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge). See also Georgina Blakiston *The Letters of Conrad Russell*.

personal perspective on the events taking place in the country and the wider international situation.

Given their celebrity, and the recent politics, it was perhaps unsurprising that the Coopers' American tour would be marred by controversy from the start. Its origins are certainly interesting. In early 1938, Winston Churchill had agreed to deliver a 25 date American lecture tour later that year for a fee of \$21,500 (he had asked for \$25,000 but was bargained down), only to withdraw as the diplomatic picture shifted.²⁵ Churchill however passed on Cooper's details to his American contacts to see if his fellow Conservative MP would act as a suitable substitute.²⁶ Eventually, albeit at a lower rate than his friend, this would prove the case. But the pace of events made Cooper's dilemma even more acute than Churchill's. *Old Men Forget* makes clear that the visit had been finalised well before the outbreak of war, and that Cooper was therefore faced with a dilemma over whether he should leave Britain at such a perilous moment or not. As Cooper recounted:

I was faced by a problem. There are obvious objections to a man's leaving his own country when it is at war and expecting bombardment. Those objections are increased when he is travelling to a safe, neutral country where he expects to make money. At the same time I felt that I might be of some use in America and that I was being of little or none in England.²⁷

What this account fails to convey is the precise amount of money Cooper was expecting to make in the United States. According to a surviving copy of the original contract between Cooper and W. Colston Leigh, Inc., dated 5 December 1938, scarcely two months after he had left the government, the 10-week tour would net Cooper no less than \$15,000 (about \$279,000 in 2018), and any additional money would be split equally between the bureau and the lecturer. In addition, the bureau would pay Cooper's train and steamship expenses. In a period when the salary of a British member of parliament was £600, and a Secretary of State could command

²⁵ See draft memorandum between Churchill and Harold Peat, CHAR/1/407A/77-85

²⁶ Hill to Cooper, 20 October 1938, [CHAR 1/324/59](#)

²⁷ *Old Men Forget* 263.

£5000, this was a great deal of money to potentially leave on the table.²⁸ By way of contrast, Herbert Hodge would only receive an allowance of \$10 a day from the British Government during his later tour, and, as he sardonically noted, ‘it might be easy enough for a college professor or a member of parliament to get a few months’ leave to visit the States, but I knew so important a person as a busdriver couldn’t be so easily be spared.’²⁹ There was certainly a greater financial benefit to Cooper waging his campaign against appeasement in the lecture halls of the United States than there had been around the Cabinet table in Downing Street.

Faced with the dilemma presented by the outbreak of war in September 1939, Cooper consulted his friends for advice. Solicitor General and former Conservative MP Terence O'Connor advised strongly against the trip and told Cooper that his abilities would be needed by the government again soon. Contrarily, William ‘Shakes’ Morrison – the Minister of Food and future Postmaster General and Speaker of the House of Commons –told Cooper that taking the trip ‘was the most useful thing I [Cooper] could possibly do’. Similarly, Conservative politician Lord Salisbury expressed support for the trip. The biggest name of all – Winston Churchill – ‘was not very helpful’ and evidently told Cooper merely that ‘if I went I must go not as the emissary of the Government but as an ordinary lecturer on a commercial basis.’ It seemed to Cooper that the First Lord of the Admiralty’s mind was more on the recent sinking of British vessels rather than his friend’s upcoming lecture and travel opportunities.³⁰

Two days later, Churchill encountered Cooper again and more fully expressed his opposition to the trip:

Winston came up to me in the smoking-room [of the House of Commons] and said that he was afraid he had not given his mind sufficiently to the question of my going to America when I had asked him about it the other night. He was still against it, owing to the uncertainty of the future and the impermanence of the Government... I told him that I

²⁸ ‘Agreement by and between W. Colston Leigh, Inc. and The Rt. Hon. Duff Cooper’ (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

²⁹ Hodge, 25, 1.

³⁰ *Old Men Forget* 263.

had no wish to get into the present Government or to serve under Chamberlain again, but that I looked forward to the time when he would become Prime Minister.³¹

As Cooper saw it, the decision facing him was remaining in Britain and hoping something useful to the war effort would come his way, and taking the opportunity to embark on an adventure that might pay political dividends:

So far the main argument that had been put to me against going was that I might do better for myself by staying at home in the hope that something would turn up. This carried little weight with me. In time of war activity appeals to the most lethargic. The rôle of a back-bench supporter of the Government in the House of Commons is not a very active one at the best of times, but when that Government is conducting a war, and when the back-bencher if he indulges in criticism is apt, on account of his past history, to be suspected of spite and malignity, the effect is paralysing. Gradually therefore I came to the decision to go.³²

Reading between the lines, it seems Cooper feared being put into a position in which he would be asked to vote in favor of government policies with which he increasingly disagreed, but which, until May 1940, Chamberlain still commanded a strong parliamentary majority. Rather than be faced with the politically-fraught prospect of rebelling against government whips in a time of war, or having to experience some tense conversations with fellow Conservatives who were at least still nominal colleagues, the easier solution might well be to simply leave the country, and thereby not voting at all. In late September 1939, Cooper obtained final permission for the trip from Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who presciently warned him that ‘in six weeks’ time, ‘when things would be getting pretty hot here,’ a man of my age might be criticised for leaving the country.’ Cooper ignored the warning and, ‘after some humming and hawing he [Chamberlain] said that it would be a good thing for me to go’. It was a decision the Prime Minister would soon regret.³³

For Cooper, then, this was an opportunity to use the international stage to make a key domestic play against the sitting Prime Minister. For those seeking to take on Hitler, the demonstrable isolationist sentiment in the United States was a problem not only because it might

³¹ *Old Men Forget* 263. Brackets in original.

³² *Old Men Forget* 264.

³³ *Old Men Forget* 265.

imperil the British militarily, but also that it incentivised the pro-appeasement voices in Britain to cut a deal. Importantly however, the only way to really engage with American public opinion was to go there. After all, the US Ambassador to London, Joseph P. Kennedy, was hardly likely to talk up the interventionists' prospects to the White House. In October 1938 Kennedy had been in the gallery of the Commons listening to 'Duff Cooper defend his resignation with what I consider a most ordinary defense.'³⁴ A few days later he then visited Neville Chamberlain who told him Cooper was 'just an impossible person.'³⁵ Given Kennedy's famously isolationist views, this likely went down very well. Back channels through the embassy would not work therefore – Cooper had to take his argument to the American people, and shift the public opinion numbers Roosevelt and Congress were then looking at.

Whilst the war changed the tenor of the issue both politically and logistically, Duff Cooper would not be the first British insider to travel to the United States to seek to take the temperature of American public opinion. In January 1939 Robert Bruce Lockhart, former British Consul General in Moscow and sometime intelligence agent, had taken his own lecture tour to the United States where he had 'met numerous politicians, professors, financiers' in a trip that took in the European sympathetic (though still firmly isolationist) east coast to a mid west which mostly wanted out of the war at all costs. As he later recorded, 'I found little enthusiasm, even in New York radical circles, for any active American participation in a European war beyond the giving of munitions and supplies to the Democracies. The further one moves from New York and from the Eastern seaboard, the stronger one finds the isolation sentiment.' Due to a combination of 'Republican Party isolation' with an eye to the 1940 election, the lingering notion that during the First World War America had 'pulled you French and British out of a mess and received little thanks for our efforts,' and the idea – rather paraphrasing Chamberlain's previous view of Czechoslovakia, that Europe was 'a tangle which we do not understand,' Lockhart's view of the America he had encountered a few months before the Coopers was hardly favourable to an

³⁴ Kennedy diaries, JFK Library, 3 October 1938.

³⁵ Kennedy diaries, 6 October 1938.

interventionist argument.³⁶ If Lockhart's experience was anything to go by, the Coopers were about to enter a political bearpit.

The Coopers left London for Southampton on October 12, 1939 to embark on their journey to New York. The night before, they held a typically decadent going-away party at the Savoy, and Diana confessed to her son that she did not 'mind much, except for leaving you.' A crowd of press photographers followed them to the train, but Diana begged them not to publish any photos of their departure in fear that 'the enemy would send us a special torpedo' during the voyage.³⁷

There was a greater potential risk as well, as Diana recounted to her sister, Lady Violet Manners:

All the passengers were horrified when they saw Duff embark... One lady had been in the Lusitania, said 'I felt like cancelling when I heard that.' My real and legitimate fear was that a German ship might ask for Duff himself to be handed over and when I asked the captain what he would do in such an eventuality, he said seriously 'I haven't made up my mind' and that remark brought no comfort.³⁸

As it turned out, the voyage was uneventful but narrowly missed sailing into a hurricane that evidently swept several people overboard on a ship traveling shortly ahead. The couple arrived in New York City on October 22 and took up residence in The Ambassador hotel on plush Park Avenue.³⁹

Their first visit a few days later was to the 1939 World's Fair, where Diana took in several national pavilions. The English pavilion she found 'good but dull', the French 'good + exciting' and the Soviet 'immense... showing with tremendous pride things the U.S.S.R. have made + invented + developed since their new 'regime'. All things we've all had for years, such as an underground railway.' Politically speaking, Diana reported to her son, 'the cry is 'Keep Out the

³⁶ Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Some Reflections on the State of American Opinion,' Hoover, Lockhart 7/7, April 1939

³⁷ Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 12 October 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

³⁸ Letter from Diana Cooper to Violet Manners, [October] 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/3/3, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

³⁹ Letter from Duff Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 23 October 1939 (Duff Cooper Papers 14/36, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

War'.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the American press was already keeping a close eye on the couple's movements. On the day after their arrival, the *Brooklyn Eagle* quoted Duff Cooper as stating that the war in Europe would end 'when the Nazi government is overthrown by the conservative elements in Germany' and suggesting that the monarchy might even be restored with the eventual installation of Otto von Hapsburg – the last crown prince of the Austria-Hungarian Empire -- on a restored German throne.⁴¹ The Coopers' visit to the United States was already off to a high-profile start. It also attracted the interest – and ire – of American isolationists. On 23 October, Senator Gerald P. Nye, a staunch isolationist from North Dakota, pointed to the morning's newspapers revealing 'the continued influx of Duff Coopers and others from England [seeking] to move into the colleges and the universities and the churches of this land, and preach the doctrine of a united front by the English-speaking peoples, a doctrine dictating: 'We must preserve the English Fleet if we want to preserve and make stronger our own national defense.'''⁴² On cash and carry, the senator argued that 'we cannot pretend that these ship provisions do not bring us directly to the question of war against Germany.' The appearance of the Coopers in the U.S. had already become a political football on Capitol Hill.

Just over a week after visiting the World's Fair, the Coopers embarked on the first of their major political engagements in the United States. Traveling to Washington D.C., they met first with the British ambassador, Lord Lothian. Duff Cooper's opinion of Lothian was decidedly mixed. He later recalled that Lothian was 'a man of singular charm, of considerable intelligence and with a wide and intimate knowledge of America.' On the other hand, he believed the ambassador's judgment 'was easily influenced and his opinions underwent great and frequent changes.' Having previously been associated with the so-called Cliveden Set – that set of British and American appeasers surrounding Nancy and Waldorf Astor – Lothian was indeed having to perform something of an about turn as British efforts now sought to coax Americans into the now ongoing conflict. Another important piece of evidence for this tendency, Cooper went on, was

⁴⁰ Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 24 October 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁴¹ 'Duff Cooper sees rebellion ousting Hitler' *Brooklyn Eagle* October 23, 1939, p. 5.

⁴² Congressional Record, Senate, 23 October 1939, 76th Congress, Vol 85/1 741

Lothian's religious conversion from Roman Catholicism to Christian Science, which he described as shaking 'the faith of many in his intellectual discernment.' (Indeed, Lothian's abrupt death just a few months after their 1939 meeting from undiagnosed causes would be attributed by many, including Cooper, to his faith: 'A fine athlete with a splendid constitution, a total abstainer and a non-smoker, he [Lothian] died at the height of his powers and at the moment of his greatest usefulness of a malady which, owing to his refusal to see a doctor, was never diagnosed.)⁴³ The Lothian-Cooper mutual dislike would go on to have major consequences.

The main object of the Coopers' visit to Washington, however, was to meet President Franklin Roosevelt. This meeting in early November 1939 came immediately after the president had managed to convince congress to amend the Neutrality Act to allow shipments of arms to the Allies in return for cash payment (so called 'Cash and Carry'). Diana Cooper reported that the president was 'gleeful over his repeal and didn't pretend to be neutral at all. I was a bit nervous and didn't do very well with him, but he did very well with me and if his legs had not been paralyzed he'd have danced a war dance.'⁴⁴ Meeting the president, however, was not the highlight of the day for Diana. Prior to their meeting with Roosevelt, the Coopers paid a visit to the Hoover Institute of Criminal Investigation, named for the famed director of the FBI, where the couple not only got to see the 'blood stained bits' and death masks of famous gangsters, but also had the chance to try out machine guns in the shooting gallery and riddle 'the target of a life sized man'. Diana reported to her son that she 'did pretty well' at the target shooting.⁴⁵ Her husband, however, was notably less entranced by his meeting with the president. To begin with, Roosevelt offered the couple a selection between coffee and tea at luncheon, which Cooper found appalling, and he 'reflected on how ignorant even the greatest men can be of the customs of other countries [on the basis that alcohol had not been offered].' From this initial awkwardness, the president discussed his 'theory of the four freedoms' and 'also about the problem of unemployment, which he suggested might be solved by the development of central

⁴³ *Old Men Forget* 268-269.

⁴⁴ Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 3 November 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁴⁵ Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 3 November 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

South America.’ Cooper diplomatically concluded in his memoirs that ‘I was much impressed by him [Roosevelt] but I felt that he was disappointed in me. I am not at my best in duologue and even the excellent tea failed to loosen my tongue.’⁴⁶ (No doubt insinuating that booze would have been more useful in this regard.) His wife’s impression of the president was more admiring. ‘No one loves him [Roosevelt] but me,’ she told her sister. ‘Here they say ‘You’ve got Hitler but we’ve got Franklin’... All the rich are just terrified of losing their money.’⁴⁷

Following the meeting with Roosevelt, Duff Cooper’s lecturing work began in earnest with a scheduled speech at Columbia University in New York City. This was a key moment for Cooper, and one that put him at the center of a controversy that would dog him throughout his tour. Before leaving London, Cooper had been explicitly warned not to engage in explicit propaganda activities during his visit to the United States. This admonition was a result of what has been termed the ‘no propaganda’ policy: the idea that the American people would eventually back the fight against Hitler, but that obvious propaganda operations would only serve to alienate any potential support.⁴⁸ The biggest proponent of this theory was Lord Lothian, who simultaneously argued that the best way to sell the American people on cooperation with Britain was to argue that the time-honored principle of the Monroe Doctrine – the idea that European powers should not interfere in the Western Hemisphere – meant that the U.S. should cooperate with Britain’s imperial possessions in Canada and in the Caribbean to make that a reality. In actuality, this would mean cooperating with Britain to keep other European powers, notably Germany, from interfering in the Western Hemisphere. Known as the ‘Lothian Thesis’, this argument gained influence in Whitehall over 1939-40 and reinforced the view that the British government should avoid any form of obvious public relations efforts in the U.S. Under this logic, the American people would simply *realize* that friendship with Britain was the only logical move to make and was consistent with long-standing American foreign policy traditions. There

⁴⁶ *Old Men Forget* 273.

⁴⁷ Letter from Diana Cooper to Violet Manners, [October] 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/3/3, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁴⁸ Brewer 31.

was no need to put this in jeopardy with ham-handed attempts to convince the public of these points prematurely.⁴⁹

Duff Cooper strongly opposed this argument, but it retained a firm hold on the Foreign Office. Before leaving London, Prime Minister Chamberlain sent his Parliamentary Private Secretary to strongly impress the need to, ‘abstain from anything that might be considered British propaganda.’ Cooper found this request both absurd and practically impossible. ‘What will his [a British lecturer’s] audiences expect of him except information about this war, the causes and the prospects of it?’ he asked rhetorically in his memoirs. ‘How can an Englishman give such information without presenting and defending the cause of his country? And what better form of propaganda could there be?’⁵⁰ More insidiously, Cooper believed, giving up on propaganda efforts entirely would be seen by the American public as a sign of weakness and imminent defeat:

The importance of influencing public opinion both in neutral and in enemy countries had been amply demonstrated in the former war. That attempts to exercise such influence should not be crude or tactless was evident, but to abandon all such attempts through fear of falling into crudity and losing tact was plainly foolish. The main reason for its folly in this instance was that not a single American citizen throughout the country was going to give us credit for such abstention. When they saw no sign of our propaganda they naturally assumed that we were doing it very badly, and hence concluded that if we were conducting the war in Europe as inefficiently as we were conducting our propaganda in America, we were likely to lose it.⁵¹

Needless to say, Cooper would soon chafe under the yoke of his supposedly apolitical mission in the United States.

By his own admission, Cooper would give fundamentally, if not literally, the same lecture everywhere he stopped across the United States. ‘‘The Survival of Liberty’ was the title of many of the lectures, but I sometimes felt like Mark Twain who, giving his lecture-agent a list of titles from which his audiences could choose, said ‘They’ll get the same lecture anyway’,’ Cooper

⁴⁹ Brewer 31, 190-1.

⁵⁰ *Old Men Forget* 268.

⁵¹ *Old Men Forget* 269.

recalled.⁵² Given that his lecture was fundamentally the same everywhere, it is fair to say that the documented responses he received to his lecture can be treated as a reasonable cross-section of American public opinion at this critical moment in the trans-Atlantic relationship. On November 6, just days after his meeting with the president, Cooper addressed a crowd of 1,600 at Columbia University in New York. As Stephen Norwood has recently explored, Columbia was in the midst of a vicious campus conflict between pro- and anti-Nazi factions that periodically resulted in violence.⁵³ The university's president himself faced accusations of harboring Nazi sympathies and showed little reluctance overseeing the expulsion of an anti-Nazi student who hosted a book-burning protest in front of his official residence, sparking a debate over academic freedom. Cooper could hardly expect a universally warm welcome and, indeed, his visit was not without controversy.

Two days after his visit, the student-run *Columbia Daily Spectator* – one of the few campus voices to reliably stand up on behalf of anti-Nazi and Jewish students in this period –condemned the speech as counterproductive. ‘Sixteen hundred persons heard Alfred Duff Cooper declare that ‘good propaganda’ is the spreading of truth in his lecture... Would it be ‘impertinent’ to ask Mr. Duff Cooper what he means by ‘truth’?’ the paper editorialized two days later. It continued by evoking the spectre of British First World War propaganda and stating that differentiating ‘‘good and bad propaganda’ would seem to be a difficult task. It is, in fact, a job which gave considerable puzzlement to America in the last war and which seems likely to give America additional trouble in the current one.’⁵⁴ In other words, the *Spectator*'s editors were unsure which side of the fence Cooper himself fell. Regardless, the event itself was a great success from the organizer's perspective. Russell Potter, the director of the Institute of Arts and Sciences of Columbia University responsible for setting up public talks, cabled Cooper's agency shortly after

⁵² *Old Men Forget* 271.

⁵³ Stephen Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*.

⁵⁴ *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Volume LXIII, Number 30, 8 November 1939, p. 2

the event to offer congratulations and assure them that ‘he drew a record audience that exceeded [the] top capacity of Columbia University’s largest lecture auditorium.’⁵⁵

This skepticism toward Cooper’s intentions in the United States would only increase as his tour continued. Following another lecture in New York State, the Coopers headed south for a 10-day tour that included 8 nights sleeping on trains, as Diana bemoaned to their son.⁵⁶ In the course of it, he delivered speeches in Pennsylvania in which he proclaimed that ‘the Germans themselves’ would have to defeat Nazism rather than England and France.⁵⁷ The couple then traveled to Staunton, Virginia, where Cooper addressed a crowd of 600 and called for ‘some form of European federation’ after the war. The southern tour then included visits to the all-women’s Longwood College, Duke University in North Carolina, and Georgia.⁵⁸ Judging from newspaper accounts of appearances, Cooper’s boast that his talk was always fundamentally the same appears to have been the case. His standard speech consisted mainly of the themes that Germany was solely responsible for the war, Britain could certainly win the war, and after the war’s end there should be a more effective peace settlement than the Treaty of Versailles. This was hardly hard-hitting analysis, but, as will be seen, it was enough to seriously rankle some American audiences.

By late November, in fact, the opposition to the Cooper’s tour was hardening and becoming more organized. During an appearance in Boston, two-dozen members of the Father Coughlin-inspired Christian Front – a violently anti-Semitic and arguably pro-Nazi organization – protested outside the Symphony Hall holding the lecture. ‘Our organization objects to English propaganda agents coming to this country to inveigle us into war,’ a protest organizer told reporters. Protesters distributed handbills carrying the slogans ‘Let England fight her own wars’

⁵⁵ Letter from W. Colston Leigh to Duff Cooper, 10 November 1939 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/3, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁵⁶ Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 12 November 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁵⁷ ‘Nazism Doomed, But Not By Allies, Briton Asserts’ *The Pittsburgh Press* 17 November 1939, p. 2.

⁵⁸ ‘Duff Cooper Sees Need for Some Form of European Federation’ *The New Leader* 14 November 1939 p. 3

and ‘Let us learn from past experience to mind our own business’ until asked to cease their activities by the police. There was no violence and the protesters disbanded quietly. Inside the hall, however, there was a brief ruckus when an audience member asked Cooper about Britain’s unpaid First World War debts to the United States and was loudly booed. The former cabinet minister tactfully replied that there was ‘much to be regretted’ about the situation.⁵⁹ Two weeks later, the Coopers faced a more hostile protest in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. As the couple arrived at an event held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, they were greeted by a phalanx of police officers who surrounded their vehicle. Around 150 protesters carrying signs with slogans including ‘Keep America out of this blood business’, ‘British lies will not deceive us again’, and ‘Send Duff home’ protested outside the venue. During his talk, Cooper provocatively referred to the pickets as ‘the stupid forces against liberty, like the children outside carrying signs.’ While there was again no violence reported, police had to escort the couple back to their vehicle following the event.⁶⁰

By December 1939, the Coopers had effectively seen the cross-section of American public opinion Britain was contending to influence. Roosevelt himself may have been willing to toast the passage of Cash and Carry, but at the same time deep scepticism toward aiding Britain remained throughout much of the country. This contrast was undoubtedly heightened for the Coopers in the Brooklyn confrontation. Just a few days before the incident, the couple had returned from a trip to Chicago where Duff addressed a group of 1,500 ‘Scots and Americans of Scottish descent’ celebrating St. Andrew’s Day with a traditional haggis feast. In his ensuing speech, Cooper ‘made a strong plea for American sympathy for the allied empires’ that was evidently well received. The contrast between this crowd and the Cooper’s less welcoming experience back in New York must have been striking.⁶¹ ‘The attitude over here is violently ‘Keep out of it’,’ Diana summarized to Conrad Russell shortly after the couple’s arrival in the

⁵⁹ ‘Briton Called Propagandist’ *Democrat and Chronicle* [Rochester, New York] 29 November 1939, p. 2.

⁶⁰ ‘United States of Europe Seen by Duff Cooper’ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 14 December 1939, p. 4; Letter from Diana Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 17 December 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/6/1/2, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁶¹ ‘Chicago’s Scots Fete Ancient Feast O’Haggis’ *Chicago Tribune* 3 December 1939, p. 22

U.S. In general, they would only find more of this sentiment as they travelled beyond the confines of the East Coast.⁶²

Following a break for the holidays and a brief visit to Canada, the Coopers began the western half of their lecture tour. This schedule would take them as far west as San Francisco and as far south as Texas, giving them a broad overview of American sentiment. By this point, rumours were beginning to spread in the American press that the Coopers would be returning to England early, chagrined at the response they had received from the American public. On January 4, for instance, the *Honolulu Advertiser* ran an editorial headlined ‘Duff Cooper’s Tour a Dud’. According to the editorialist, Cooper’s tour ‘has been moderately curtailed because of lukewarm demand,’ allegedly in part because of the recent release of *Gone With the Wind* ‘and other diversions’. Further, the author blamed Cooper himself for the failure:

New York observers who followed the Cooper speeches for an index on propaganda results now have a lackadaisical summary to offer. Cooper went over big in the Long Island-Newport-Bar Harbor brackets of U.S. society. Remainder of his stay in fact is crowded with social engagements in the homes of prominent citizenry. Before workday audiences he was received with polite interest.... The public was generally favorable to his thesis but hostile to the fact that an Englishman was selling the cause.⁶³

These rumours seem to have had no basis in fact, and the archival record makes clear that the Coopers were not considering an early departure from the country. Regardless, the fact that these stories were circulating indicates the hostility with which their presence was felt by some Americans.

On Sunday, January 7, the Coopers travelled back to Washington D.C. for a scheduled meeting with Secretary of State Cordell Hull. ‘I liked him very much,’ Cooper told his son.⁶⁴ That afternoon, Duff was scheduled to address the National Appeal for Palestine, a Zionist organization that was also addressed that day by Attorney General Frank Murphy. The nation’s

⁶² Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, [October] 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/14, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge)

⁶³ ‘Duff Cooper’s Tour a Dud’ *the Honolulu Advertiser* 4 January 1940, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Letter from Duff Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 8 January 1940 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

top law-enforcement officer used his speech to warn that the ‘same forces which ‘destroyed the peace of Europe’ were at work in this country,’ as the Associated Press put it. In a period in which groups like the German American Bund and the Silver Legion of America still had uniformed followers marching down American streets, this was a timely and appropriate warning that few could dispute.⁶⁵ Rather than echoing Murphy’s most uncontroversial themes or echoing his usual themes, however, Cooper took this speech in a more provocative direction. He proclaimed that the recent German persecution of Jews had created a new moral imperative for the British to support Jews in Palestine more than it ‘ever promised or intended to do before.’⁶⁶ Further, he called for Jews to be given a particular voice in determining the future of Palestine. ‘Every sympathy should be shown to any claim or ambition that the various Arab states may have in any part of the world,’ he told the audience. ‘But a decision should be taken, and should be announced in no uncertain terms, that in this small, historic land from which so much has come, the Jews should be allowed to feel that they have a refuge and a home.’⁶⁷ Predictably, this unequivocal endorsement of increasing aid to Palestine’s Jewish residents met a warm reception at the luncheon. ‘I had to make them a speech after lunch which they liked very much,’ Cooper told his son. ‘They sang to me in Hebrew.’⁶⁸

The reception of Cooper’s remarks was decidedly icier back in London. On January 9, a German long wave radio broadcast made extensive reference to Cooper’s remarks on Palestine. ‘That English apostle of agitation, Duff Cooper, who made himself ridiculous during his propaganda tour to the U.S.A. has just delivered a low agitation speech against the Arabs before a Zionist meeting in Washington,’ the broadcast began. ‘He flattered his audience by telling them that in view of the increasing anti-Semitism in many countries, Britain would have to do even more for the Jews than she had ever promised or intended.’ The broadcast was heard by BBC monitors and included in the Daily Digest of Foreign Broadcasts delivered to the Colonial Office. On 16

⁶⁵ ‘Duff Cooper Urges More Help to Jews’ *The Baltimore Sun* 8 January 1940, p. 9.

⁶⁶ ‘Duff Cooper Urges More Help to Jews’ *The Baltimore Sun* 8 January 1940, p. 9.

⁶⁷ ‘Silver Renamed Head of Palestine Appeal’ *The Dayton Daily News* 8 January 1940, p. 7.

⁶⁸ Letter from Duff Cooper to John Julius Cooper, 8 January 1940 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

January, a copy was passed to the Foreign Secretary, Viscount Halifax, with a note asking, 'Is there anything that the Foreign Office can do to get Duff Cooper to avoid this dangerous and mischievous line? It contained the handwritten addition: 'I expect not, and merely send this for record!'.⁶⁹ This correspondence proved to be only the beginning of the Foreign Office's interest in Cooper's tour.

To a civil servants eager to placate ministers generally regarded as (at best former) appeasers, Cooper's remarks in Detroit that he felt Churchill would succeed Chamberlain, and that the former had 'the confidence of the people,' were far from ideal. On 16 January 1940 one civil servant recorded that 'Mr Duff Cooper, if reported alright, is getting brighter and brighter! His remark about the Prime Minister and Mr Churchill is reminiscent of pre-war days and is not likely to inspire confidence in H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment].' Another noted that 'the sooner he comes home the better for us. But how pleasant to earn so many dollars for so little effort.' A third sardonically scribbled that 'he is doing no good to anybody except his own bank balance.'⁷⁰ Of his earlier trip, Robert Bruce Lockhart had commented that his 'personal view is that the army of British lecturers who annually invade the United States, do almost as much as harm as good. They go, of course, primarily to make money.'⁷¹ By early 1940 it seemed that many of his former diplomatic colleagues agreed.

Duff Cooper also faced a backlash from his own parliamentary constituents, at least some of whom seem to have understandably been displeased that their local representative was cavorting around the U.S. during wartime. Among them was Margaret Greville, a wealthy socialite and a resident of Cooper's constituency. 'He is paid by Taxpayers to sit in Parliament and he is needed at present as there are many questions re. Ministries to which I would like and answer and we, his constituents, are not represented,' she wrote to the local Conservative Party. 'He did not go to the U.S.A. at the request of the Government and from what I hear from reliable sources from

⁶⁹ Letter to Halifax, 16 January 1940 (Foreign Office Papers 800/321, National Archives, Kew)

⁷⁰ FO 800/321, Minutes concerning *Daily Express* article (13 January 1940)

⁷¹ Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Some Reflections on the State of American Opinion,' Hoover Institution, Lockhart 7/7, April 1939

U.S.A. his speeches there have been badly received and in no way strengthened good feeling between our two countries.’⁷² (Cooper retaliated by sending a private letter accusing Greville of having ‘strong sympathies with Germany... and has paid many visits to Berlin’.⁷³) At the same time, there was support forthcoming from London too. On 18 February, the Coopers received a telegram at the Ambassador Hotel in New York. ‘We cannot end our dinner without telling you how much we missed Diana and you. May your work prosper and may we see you soon,’ it read. It had been sent by Winston Churchill, his wife Clementine, ‘Prof’ [Frederick Lindemann], and ‘Brendan’ [Bracken]. Clearly, the Coopers tour also had high-profile admirers in Whitehall as well, albeit ones waiting to seize the keys to Downing Street.⁷⁴

While this controversy played out in the Foreign Office and the Cabinet, the Coopers tour continued seemingly unaffected by the controversy. The day after his speech to the Zionist organization, the couple departed for Virginia and North Carolina, where Duff delivered his stump speech at Duke University. An awkward moment ensued when the Coopers encountered racially-segregated railway cars on the train from Washington to Virginia. As Diana recounted to Conrad Russell, the ‘Coloured’ cars were emptier, so the couple sat in one, only to be ‘turnout our, as soon as we crossed from D.C. to Virginia.’⁷⁵ This rapid lesson in American racial segregation must have been particularly galling and memorable for upper-crust aristocrats from a country in which such racial legislation did not exist. From Virginia, they departed for a lengthy journey across the American Midwest. This would be far less welcoming terrain than they had thus far enjoyed on the East Coast. The Midwest was a hotbed of isolationist, anti-Roosevelt rhetoric, and a year later Chicago would become the headquarters of the anti-intervention America First Committee. The region was also the home to a substantial German-American

⁷² Letter from Margaret Greville to Lord Dartmouth, December 1, 1939 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge). Someone (possibly Cooper, whomever forwarded the letter to him, or possibly even Greville herself, scrawled ‘Bitch’ at the bottom of this letter).

⁷³ Undated handwritten letter from Cooper to unknown recipient, (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁷⁴ Telegram from Winston Churchill to the Coopers, 18 February 1940 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/6, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge)

⁷⁵ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, [Late January] 1939 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge)

population that was generally loyal to the United States but still harbored anti-British sentiment and some sympathy for the Fatherland.

On January 11, the Coopers arrived in Akron, Ohio, where they would remain for only a day before heading to Detroit. Duff's speech that evening, however, was mired in a new controversy unrelated to his remarks a few days earlier. As we have noted, officials in the British foreign office had been worried about Duff's positive noises towards Churchill in his Detroit address, but there were other issues at hand in Akron. That same day, syndicated political columnists Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen used their infamous column 'Washington Merry-Go-Round' to analyze the recent sacking of Minister of War Leslie Hore-Belisha, the most prominent Jewish member of Neville Chamberlain's government and a lightning-rod of anti-Semitic sentiment. Allen and Pearson claimed that his replacement, Oliver Stanley, was 'one of the most pro-German members of the Cabinet' and had been appointed because, 'Chamberlain and the overwhelming majority of the Cabinet want to make an early peace with Germany, then turn against Russia; and Hitler will not talk while a Jew is heading the British Army's drive against Germany.' In addition, they claimed, Cooper and Hore-Belisha had been part of a 'young, hard-headed team of fighters for Empire defense.' Finally, Hore-Belisha had allegedly 'democratized the British military schools, making it possible for a commoner to become a high ranking officer... [and had] shocked the army by putting the cadets on the same status of equality as West Point.' Most damningly, Allen and Pearson argued, 'With a pro-German Minister of War, the chances for peace are better.'⁷⁶

These were explosive claims. If true, a British capitulation to German aggression might be just around the corner and Cooper's claims throughout his lecture tour would have been seen as rank propaganda, as his detractors accused. Further, Allen and Pearson's claims about Hore-Belisha's ouster being linked to his democratization of the British army played precisely into American stereotypes about upper-crust snobbery and cabals of Old Etonians running the British Empire. As Robert Bruce Lockhart had written a few months earlier, 'Americans' dislike of the English upper class is also combined with a mistrust of British conservatism and British imperialism,' a

⁷⁶ Allen and Pearson, 'The Washington Merry-Go-Round' *The Tampa Tribune* 11 January 1940 p. 8.

traditional animosity now giving way to the sharp contrast of a 'wide-spread belief in British decadence' against 'the efficiency of Germany's war industry.'⁷⁷ As such, Duff Cooper had little choice but to directly confront the Hore-Belisha question from the stage in Akron. Before a crowd of 1,200, he stridently claimed that it was 'quite untrue' that Hore-Belisha's ouster meant Chamberlain was looking to make peace with Germany. Further, he claimed, Stanley was 'one of the most anti-German members of the cabinet and has always been anti-German.'⁷⁸ Furthermore, Cooper told local reporters that, 'Commoners and private soldiers promoted from the ranks have always been allowed to go to both military schools in England. Finally, Cooper proclaimed that it was 'lunacy' that Britain would try to invade the Soviet Union. 'Russia has always been impotent outside her own boundaries and nobody has got any good invading Russia, including Napoleon,' he perceptively told the press.⁷⁹

Though short-lived, the Hore-Belisha controversy marked an important turning point in Duff Cooper's rhetoric. Following his appearance in Akron, the former First Lord of the Admiralty added a section to his stump speech praising both Hore-Belisha and his own successor: soon-to-be Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Starting on 12 January – the day the Coopers arrived in Detroit – surviving press accounts overwhelmingly focused on Cooper's praise for his colleagues above that of his usual themes. In Detroit, for instance, Cooper reportedly 'praised the work of Winston Churchill... and Leslie Hore-Belisha whose sudden resignation as minister of war caused an uproar in England last week.'⁸⁰ A week later, *The Minneapolis Star* noted that Cooper would soon be arriving in the city and was expected to discuss both Hore-Belisha and Churchill. The latter, Cooper was expected to say, would soon been afforded greater influence within the war cabinet. 'If a discussion of the two men does not occur in Duff Cooper's regular address... it

⁷⁷ Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Some Reflections on the State of American Opinion,' Hoover, Lockhart 7/7, April 1939

⁷⁸ Kenneth Nichols, "'Lowdown' on Shakeup? Duff Cooper Hasn't Any' *The Akron Beacon Journal* 12 January 1940, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Nichols, "'Lacks 'Lowdown', Duff Cooper Says' *The Akron Beacon Journal* 12 January 1940, p. 2.

⁸⁰ 'Duff-Cooper Forecasts Nazi Drive in Spring' *The Herald-Palladium* 12 January 1940, p. 2.

is likely to occur during the question period after the lecture,' the paper noted.⁸¹ It is telling that the futures of these two men were increasingly on the mind of American audiences.

In reality, the question-and-answer session seems to have been again dominated by a question about unpaid British war debts, to which Cooper impolitically responded that any unpaid debts could be considered 'this country's contribution to a cause in which it had been slow to join.'⁸² This answer earned a sharp riposte from a Minneapolis resident who wrote to the paper days later and highlighting the same themes that would preoccupy the America First Committee in the same geographic area just months later:

Send Duff Cooper back to England instead of allowing him to speak to our high school students giving them propaganda and telling them that the war debt England owes the United States should and will be a gift to pay for our country entering the last World war [sic] three years late? Is that teaching our youth honesty in paying debts and doing justice to our fellow men?⁸³

The Coopers now embarked on a bizarrely circuitous route across the remaining United States. They first travelled south to Birmingham, Alabama, where they drove across the border to speak at Mississippi State College for Women.⁸⁴ They then travelled east to Palm Beach, Florida, where the couple was hosted by Countess Barbara Haugwitz-Reventlow (formerly Barbara Woolworth Hutton, future wife of Cary Grant and one of the richest women in the world) and Duff delivered an address at the Everglades Club. This was quite clearly an aristocratic crowd – the local paper carried a story about the appearance in the society section, and described the crowd as 'as distinguished cross-section of the colony winter life' -- and much more in line with the company the Coopers themselves kept in England. His message was upbeat. 'Democracies can afford to wait better than dictatorships,' he claimed. 'Every day increases the privations in

⁸¹ 'Duff Cooper Can Comment on Colleagues' *The Minneapolis Star* 16 January 1940, p. 18.

⁸² 'Briton Claims Germany not Fit for Arms' *The Minneapolis Star* 18 January 1940, p. 1.

⁸³ Mrs. Carl W. Smith, 'Some Ideas' *The Minneapolis Star* 22 January 1940, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Duff Cooper Appointment Diary, January 15-21, 1940

Germany.’⁸⁵ The Palm Beach lifestyle clearly suited the Coopers, as they remained there for several days afterward.

From there, the Coopers embarked on the remaining stops of their tour. On 25 January they arrived in New Orleans; the following day they arrived in Galveston, Texas; travelled to Fort Worth; and drove to Dallas. This itinerary was followed by a stop in Topeka, Kansas, on 2 February, where Duff predicted that the war would be over in two years and end in an Allied victory. ‘I do not believe America will get into this war,’ he told the Jayhawk audience.⁸⁶ Days later, a regional columnist denounced his appearance again using much of the same rhetoric that would soon enter the America First lexicon:

Alfred Duff Cooper, an Englishman is making speeches in this country. Like all other Englishmen who come over, he is here to deceive and falsify in the interest of Great Britain, now in grave trouble with Germany. The newspapers are beginning to tell what a wonderful man Cooper is; and the people are listening to him with open mouths and swallowing every word he utters as the truth. The other day this gentleman declared with tearful eloquence that England dearly loves the United States; and he spoke of the many sacrifices his country has made for the American people.... When an Englishman visits the United States it is always for the purpose of deceiving us. King George was sent over for that reason; scores of others have followed for the same purpose. Everyone of intelligence should know that Cooper is here to borrow more money for his country and see to it that we finally send another army abroad to win another war for England.... Great Britain has no interest in us except to rob us; the sooner Americans learn this, the better. The truth is a German victory will harm us no more than an English victor. If American democracy perishes, scoundrels within our own ranks will be responsible, not Adolf Hitler.... We have never been able to recognize English sophistry and are applauding the grossest nonsense ever uttered in this country by a foreigner. Our stupidity remains unequalled in the history of gullibility.⁸⁷

This screed was hardly the kind of talk the Coopers would have heard in the genteel salons of Palm Beach, but it did represent the views of many Americans who viewed Cooper’s tour with incredulity. Back in London, the controversy over the tour continued as well. On 1 February, Labour MP Alfred Edwards denounced Cooper and his tour as a threat to British national

⁸⁵ ‘Duff Cooper Hopes Neutrals Will Realize that Blockade, Censorship War Winning Necessities’ *Palm Beach Society News* January 24, 1940 p. 7.

⁸⁶ ‘Duff Cooper sees Post-War Slump’ *The Emporia Gazette* 5 February 1940, p. 5.

⁸⁷ William Ackworth, ‘Horse and Buggy Stuff’ *The Iola Register* 19 February 1940, p. 4.

security. 'There is a member of Parliament going around America, telling Americans what their country ought to do,' Evans told his colleagues. 'The Premier ought to bring him back and put him in a concentration camp.'⁸⁸

By the time these reports appeared in the American press, however, the Coopers themselves were already on the West Coast and it is unlikely they ever saw the piece. On 8 February they arrived in Los Angeles and boarded a train for Palo Alto, California, the home of Stanford University. This would be among Cooper's more heated lectures, in part because the Stanford campus maintained a heavy representation of German exchange students who were continually given a platform throughout this period to spread sympathetic views of Hitler's regime and denounce the British as the true perpetrators of war.⁸⁹ In the days before the talk, the president of the organization that had issued the invitation to Cooper and another anti-Nazi speaker, Eve Currie, was forced to defend the decision, writing that, 'Both Alfred Duff Cooper and Eve Currie were signed to appear at Stanford long before the present European war broke out... Consequently, any discussion of motive in signing these two speakers is pointless. Personally, I want to hear what these speakers have to say.'⁹⁰ Undoubtedly knowing he would be facing a potentially hostile crowd, Cooper retitled his for that night talk to 'How it happened' and focused his rhetorical efforts on pinning the blame for the war on Germany alone. 'The Treaty of Versailles was not in any way responsible. I said, 'In any way', ' Cooper told the audience. 'In one way it may have been. It may have been too generous, but was not too rigorous.' Many negative consequences had come from the First World War, he continued, but 'some good came too: the world came to a new appreciation of what war means.'⁹¹ Diana recalled to Conrad Russell that no Stanford faculty members were to be found at the controversial talk, and as a result the question-and-answer session was a complete failure. The Coopers also missed their train to San

⁸⁸ 'Duff Cooper Should Be Jailed' *The Courier-Journal* 2 February 1940, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Hitler's American Friends*

⁹⁰ Greyson Bryan, 'Neutral Lecture Series' *The Stanford Daily* 26 January 1940 p. 4.

⁹¹ 'Cooper Lays Full Blame on Germany' *The Stanford Daily* 9 February 1940, p. 1

Francisco when the students responsible for their transportation failed to get them there on time and were forced to travel by bus instead.⁹²

The indignities of Stanford behind them, the final leg of the lecture tour took the Coopers on a brief trip to Seattle, where he delivered an address to a ‘capacity audience’, and then back down the West Coast for a brief trip to the golf resort of Pebble Beach and a lecture in Oakland.⁹³ ‘An Allied victory is certain,’ *The Oakland Tribune* proclaimed was the overall theme of his lecture.⁹⁴ The residents of California appear to have been far more receptive to his message than the Americans the Coopers encountered in the Midwest. ‘The critique of Duff Cooper’s lecture is to me thoroughly ridiculous,’ one Bay Area resident wrote to the *Oakland Tribune* days after the lecture. She continued:

I listened to Duff Cooper the other night. His address was a lesson in courage and in restraint. I do not think any single one of his hearers was in any way prompted to vote for American action in support of the Allies. The danger is I think in the opposite direction. I fully expect to read shortly that Congress proposes to move the Navy into Lake Superior and to put the Army in petticoats. If you are interested in a woman’s reaction to Duff Cooper here it is. I felt that it would be a fine thing if we could dig up a few dozen leaders of his type in America. We might then hope some day to be free of corruption in public life.⁹⁵

A local columnist went further and wrote that Cooper ‘is one of the most remarkable of contemporary orators’. In addition, he reported that Cooper had assured him that, ‘the presence of Winston Churchill in the Cabinet [is] a guarantee that no peace will be made short of elimination of the National Socialist regime’. Cooper’s touting of Churchill had clearly continued apace.⁹⁶

⁹² Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, 8/9 February 1940 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁹³ ‘Reception Planned for Duff Coopers’ *Oakland Tribune* 12 February 1940, p. 20.

⁹⁴ ‘Allied Victory is Certain, Says Duff Coopers’ *Oakland Tribune* 14 February 1940 p.8.

⁹⁵ Bertha M. Laycross, ‘Why Worry?’ *The Oakland Tribune* 21 February 1940, p. 22

⁹⁶ Raymond Lawrence, ‘Propaganda and Politics: Duff Cooper’s War for British ‘Ideals’’ *The Oakland Tribune* 15 February 1940, p. 30.

The Coopers could hardly leave California without making one more key visit: Hollywood. This was more than just pleasure after such a long journey around the country; film stars with affinities for Britain were already playing a key role shaping perceptions of the war and would increasingly do so. Several prominent film stars – most notably Charlie Chaplin and *Gone With the Wind* star Vivien Leigh – were themselves British, making them invaluable assets in the war for American public opinion. On 15 February the Coopers arrived in Los Angeles, where they proceeded to the home of studio head Jack Warner. While several lectures were scheduled as part of the visit, the primary aim was clearly to meet with prominent Hollywood stars who might be able and willing to help sell the case for British intervention. To that end, they remained in the Los Angeles area for a week – their single longest stay in any location other than New York – and lunched with the Hollywood glitterati. Duff's appointment diary records dinner parties at the Warner residence nearly every night of their visit, along with a cocktail party that included Vivien Leigh and a visit to MGM Studios.⁹⁷ Diana recalled using the opportunity to phone author Aldous Huxley, and on the night of the 16th the couple dined at the home of *All Quiet on the Western Front* author Erich Maria Remarque and his then-companion Marlene Dietrich.⁹⁸

The following day, the couple attended a dinner populated by a cross section of Hollywood stars. Diana was seated next to the actor Errol Flynn, star of the recently-released *Robin Hood*. 'I took a grave dislike to him,' Diana told Russell. 'Apart from being anti-English and thinking the war foolish, he had more 'side' than any actor I've met, and that's saying a great deal.'⁹⁹ The next day's company proved more pleasant when Diana found herself seated at dinner across from Gladys Coopers and between Basil Rathbone ('a distinguished darling') and Britain's most famous cinematic export, Charlie Chaplin. The latter showed up to dinner with his hair dyed black for his role in the forthcoming *The Great Dictator*. 'He says his film is magnificent but nothing he told me sounded very good,' Diana reported. 'I had an interminable war conversation with him after, when I did not think he made very much sense. Who knows that the boot was not

⁹⁷ Duff Cooper Appointment Diary, February 15-25, 1940

⁹⁸ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, [16 February 1940] (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

⁹⁹ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, 17 February 1940 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

on the other leg.’ Regardless, Diana concluded, ‘this world [Hollywood] seethes with English.’¹⁰⁰ Perhaps so, but Hollywood was clearly far from unanimous in its support for the British war effort.

On February 25, the Coopers departed Hollywood for the East Coast and, ultimately, England. Along the way they stopped to deliver several lectures, and meet various friends. On both 6 and 8 March, they dined at the home of William S. Paley, the powerful head of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) who would be appointed head of the Psychological Warfare division of the Office of War Information and was responsible for assembling a crack team of war reporters that included Edward R. Murrow and the ‘Murrow Boys’.¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly, the future Minister of Information and the one of the United States’ key wartime information directors had much to discuss. Without mentioning the name of his host or the other participants, Cooper recounted the event in his memoirs:

The night before we left America at the beginning of March we found ourselves in company with half a dozen of the most staunch and stalwart American supporters of our cause. They were all men in walks of life that enabled them to gauge the trend of public opinion. They were unanimous in the view that during the first six months of the war the Allies had lost popularity. Whether the Germans had gained what the Allies had lost was another question, and one on which they were divided, but the unanimity on the former point was as impressive as it was depressing. Many reasons were given, but to my mind they all amounted to one, which was that our publicity was being badly organised. I resolved that on my return I would do what I could to set this matter right.¹⁰²

Duff Cooper would soon have the chance to act on this intuition. On 6 March, the Coopers departed for home. Before they embarked, a representative from Cooper’s agency pushed hard from him to sign a contract to repeat the lecture series in October 1940 and continue it into the following year on a similar schedule, ‘But Duff is obstinate, and thinks it is too soon to repeat a tour, and that he ought to be if not in the gov[ernment] at least making speeches in the house.’¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell, 18 February 1940 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

¹⁰¹ Duff Cooper Appointment Diary, March 6, 1940

¹⁰² *Old Men Forget* 274.

¹⁰³ Letter from Diana Cooper to Conrad Russell from the *S.S. Washington*, [4 March] 1940 (Diana Cooper Papers 1/1/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).

It was a prescient decision. Two months later, Duff would be appointed to the office of Minister of Information under the new prime minister, Winston Churchill.

The preceding narrative has laid out their trip in some detail, but there are some connecting ideas we should conclude by drawing out. Certainly, the ultimate impact of Duff and Diana Cooper's tour of the United States was multi-faceted. First, it undeniably shaped Duff Cooper's actions as Minister of Information. As he recalled in *Old Men Forget*, his experiences in the U.S. convinced him that propaganda outreach had to be specifically tailored to American sensibilities:

The United States are perhaps more subject than are other countries to inundation by great waves of conviction. Certain opinions take on temporarily the guise of articles of faith. What elsewhere might be called a craze becomes there a creed. At this fateful moment of history the majority of American citizens were possessed by two firm convictions. One was that they had been enticed into the first World War by the craftiness of British propaganda; and the other was that the second World War was due to the harsh conditions imposed by the French and the British upon the defeated Germans in the Treaty of Versailles. These opinions were due to faulty representations of recent history which had appeared in publications that have mercifully been forgotten.¹⁰⁴

In his new role, Cooper would abandon the 'Lothian Thesis' and begin efforts to directly refute the 'waves of conviction'. Having had so many recent conversations in Hollywood, as Minister of Information Cooper would encourage the production of what became the film *The Invaders* – which played on the fact that German submarines attacking the Canadian navy and coastline already formed a threat to US national security.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, chastened by the criticisms that he was an upper class toff telling ordinary Americans to bail Britain out of its difficulties, he encouraged the use of 'normal' British (and Canadian) accents in the BBC's North American output, and indeed expanded the remit of the British broadcasts – from just an empire only fare (i.e. just targetting Canada and Newfoundland) to reaching the US, too.¹⁰⁶ As he later recalled, 'during my visit to America I had formed strong views on the need for propaganda and on the manner in which it should be done.'¹⁰⁷ Evidently this shift was enacted -

¹⁰⁴ *Old Men Forget* 268

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, 'Celluloid War,' 72.

¹⁰⁶ Cull, 85.

¹⁰⁷ *Old Men Forget*, 280

indirectly leading to the tours, later in the war, of more egalitarian English figures like Herbert Hodge.

While only Pearl Harbor would pull the vast majority of American public opinion over to the Allied cause, Cooper's new approach to American audiences began to have a meaningful effect. Specifically, the strident denunciations of 'British propaganda' that the Coopers saw personally – along with the strident denunciations of their tour that periodically appeared in the American press – gave the new Minister of Information an important preview of the arguments that would be advanced by Charles Lindbergh and the other leaders of the America First Committee throughout the critical months of 1941. In September 1940, Cooper's old foe Joseph Kennedy had recorded in his diary, after a dinner involving himself and Cooper, that 'it's not very encouraging to believe that the American people are being fed with propaganda which the Minister of Information feels is very definitely his propaganda, rather than the facts.'¹⁰⁸ Whatever the truth of later British propaganda, its intention was to blunt the efficacy of figures such as Lindbergh, and keep American entry into the conflict a possibility.

In his own visit, Robert Bruce Lockhart had recorded that 'because we speak more or less the same language, we think we understand Americans. Because of their geographical situation and their heterogeneous composition as a people, they are far harder for us to understand than any European race.'¹⁰⁹ At the very least, for commercial or political reasons (or both), through late 1939 and early 1940 Duff Cooper had at least made the effort. The Coopers' focus on American elite opinion in New York, Washington, Palm Beach and Hollywood may well have been their natural inclination as moneyed aristocrats, but under these circumstances it was also a shrewd way to gauge elite American opinion and perhaps sway it to some degree as well.

While it is hard to quantify exact numbers and we should be careful not to overreach, there is evidence that Duff Cooper's tour itself helped begin to shift some amount of overall American public opinion and helped lay the groundwork for a more active form of intervention in the war. Cooper proved to be a particularly astute and effective messenger in this regard. 'It seems certain to me that there must be actually thousands who have heard you speak who feel, as I do, that you

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy diary, 9 September 1940.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Some Reflections on the State of American Opinion,' Hoover, Lockhart 7/7, April 1939

are not trying to tell the country what to do about the war and that your task is a tremendously effective force in creating a good feeling toward Great Britain,' an Iowa resident wrote to Cooper following his appearance there.¹¹⁰ There are some indications that this view was shared by many of the Iowans' fellow citizens. In September 1940, a Roper/*Fortune* survey found that American public opinion was firmly in line with what Cooper had been arguing in his standard stump speech. A plurality (41%) agreed that the U.S. should 'Declare ourselves allies to the extent of sending supplies and such equipment as planes and warships, but never men'; 31% said the U.S. should 'Go on as we are now, selling them what supplies and equipment they can buy'; 16% stated the country should go further and 'Declare ourselves allies and send supplies and equipment and even men if necessary'; while just 7% said the U.S. should 'Stop sending or selling them anything'.¹¹¹ ****Basically, can we argue that this was an improvement, even marginal on the numbers in late 1939 when Duff first went to the US??****

Of course, no single cause for this shift can be identified, but it is undeniable that Cooper's lectures attracted substantial audiences nearly everywhere and were widely covered in the American press. Duff Cooper's recollection in his memoirs of making more than 60 public appearances, coupled with contemporary accounts of the crowd sizes he was attracting, suggest that he easily addressed tens of thousands of Americans in the course of the tour. This was far from an insubstantial number, particularly given the fact that the attendees were likely to be among the most civically-active Americans and economically well-off given that tickets had to be purchased at a cost to make back his lucrative speaking fee. In this context, Cooper's careful statements about American aid being needed – but not American soldiers – fit well with the moderate approach to intervention that the Roosevelt Administration was itself pushing during this period. If, as John Charmley argues, 'Roosevelt made and unmade sense from day to day; he was a politician who erected ambiguity and ellipsis into an art form,' it was as well to nudge this

¹¹⁰ Letter from Jack L. Edwards to Duff Cooper, 10 February 1940 (Duff Cooper Papers 3/3, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge)

¹¹¹ Survey by *Fortune*. Methodology: Conducted by Roper Organization during September, 1940 and based on 5,215 personal interviews. Sample: National adult. [USROPER.40-021.R02B]

diplomatically dextrous President where one could.¹¹² Duff Cooper played an important role in doing just this.

¹¹² John Charmley, 'Churchill and the American Alliance,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 11 (2001), pp. 353-371, 356.