

The Private Lives of Public Figures: The Wendell Willkie-Irita Van Doren Affair and the Responsibilities of a Biographer



Australian
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University

BIOGRAPHY WORKSHOP
SERIES 2022



Ellsworth Barnard published the first scholarly biography of US politician/statesman/internationalist Wendell L. Willkie. In his book *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom* (1966), Barnard cast doubt on an aspect of Willkie's life that subsequent biographers have accepted as fact: the 1940 Republican presidential nominee's affair with Irita Van Doren, book review editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Barnard portrayed the Willkie-Van Doren relationship as a friendship, which he discussed in less than a page. Yet he also penned an article-length, unpublished essay on the purported romance and his interpretation of it. Barnard's admiration of Willkie was manifest, and he continued to question whether Willkie and Van Doren had been lovers. His book and unpublished essay raise larger issues of biography, specifically, how to balance discussion of a subject's private and personal life and the degree to which a biographer's bias can influence their scholarship. This seminar considers these matters, along with the Willkie-Van Doren Affair itself.

Dean J. Kotlowski is the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the Australian National University and Professor of History at Salisbury University, Maryland. He is the author of *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2001) and *Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR* (Indiana University Press, 2015) and the editor of *The European Union: From Jean Monnet to the Euro* (Ohio University Press, 2000). He has published over forty articles and book chapters, including in such journals as *Diplomatic History*, *Pacific Historical Review*, *Journal of Policy History*, and *Business History Review*. He has been a Fulbright Scholar four times, in the Philippines, Austria, and Australia (twice). He has served as an historical adviser to the U.S. National Archives, Richard Nixon Library, and U.S. Mint. His next book, *Toward Self-Determination: Federal Indian Policy from Truman to Clinton*, is under contract with University of North Carolina Press. He is also researching a comparative study of Indigenous policymaking in the United States and Australia. .

Biography Workshop National
Centre of Biography (ANU)

Time:

Thursday 25 August
2022, 11:00am-12:30 pm

In Person:

Seminar Room 5.72
Level 5 RSSS Building
146 Ellery Crescent

Zoom option:

Meeting ID:
849 0058 9945

Password: 630803

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