



"He Walked Alone: A Biography of John Gilbert Winant. By Bernard Bellush. (New York: Humanities Press. 1969. Pp. viii, 246. \$9.50)"

A more critical view of the Bernard Bellush biography of Winant appeared in the Spring 1970 issue of *Historic New Hampshire*, published by the New Hampshire Historical Society, compared to long-time Concord newspaperman and Winant friend, Leon W. Anderson's analysis (see elsewhere on this site).

Writes reviewer Dr. Charles Lewis Taylor, now emeritus professor of political science at Virginia Tech's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences:

"Persons writing history are of two kinds. One is the antiquarian who rummages around the dusty facts of past events. The other is the scholar, interested in studying the past as a matter of relevance to the present and future. Mr. Bellush is the antiquarian. The report of his searches is interesting for those of us who enjoy old things but not satisfying for those of us who believe that history ought to be analyzed."

Taylor sees Winant revealed as a "complicated and tragic man...likeable...idealistic to a fault...worked hard." And points to Historian Allan Nevins' observation in his foreword of "a great disproportion between his abilities, his hopes, his aspirations, and his achievements." Taylor acknowledges these things are "evident enough in the book," but it's the analysis of these qualities that are missing.

Taylor wonders: "How could Winant fail so miserably at a not-very-exacting Princeton and later greatly enjoy the company of the intellectuals of Britain? If he were a serious Presidential candidate in 1936, where is the evidence? ... Why did Winant gradually lose contact with Washington as ambassador to the Court of St. James? ... Why was he so liberal with time and money for students, soldiers, working people and others, but had no time or interest in his family. What drove him to work so hard?"

"The most important question left unanswered," Taylor writes, "is why Winant took his own life," arguing the subject "is mentioned, obtusely, only in the last paragraph of the book. This is barely descriptive and certainly not explanation."

Adds Taylor: “The book need not have been longer to have been more perceptive...Winant’s desperate financial situation, his generosity, his poor family relationships, his hard work, his frivolous wife, his reticence in meetings, et cetera are all mentioned in passing. The very same items are frequently referred to in many other places but are seldom considered in depth. Assertions alone does not convince even though it interests.”

Bernard Bellush (1917-2011) was a teacher of American history at the City College of New York for some 40 years. He and Nevins were based in London, working with Winant in the embassy during his tenure as Ambassador, both enjoying a warm relationship with their “chief,” as Nevins called him.

Bellush was an “author of books on FDR, NRA and trade union movement in New York City; political activist for liberal causes; contributor to the Jewish Forward,” as recorded in his January 2, 2012 death notice in the *New York Times*.

In a phone conversation on January 16, 1978, Bellush explained he greatly admired Winant as he got to know him during the years in London, and wrote the book because his close friend and “mentor” Alan Nevins “was going to originally, but later found that he could not.” Bellush said he was doing research, and at Nevins’ suggestion, “took up the task.”

Asked if he had come across any sort of scandal or trouble associated with Winant that had not been included in the book, Bellush admitted that there was, but decided not to include any mention out of respect for Winant’s wife and children, of whom he was still close. He refused to comment further, however, implying the issue was of some significance. This of course arose great curiosity over the years, and a loss of respect for the author as historian.

Bellush said only that one of Winant’s sons was a banker, another was treasurer of the United Nations for many years, that his wife had remarried, and his daughter “did not get along with her dad.” Certainly no mention in the book, or nearly 30 years later on a phone call, about Winant’s serious and mostly secret love affair with Winston Churchill’s daughter . The stress of their break-up apparently continued into his retirement in New Hampshire, according to Sarah Churchill he was phoning her repeatedly, becoming public only decades later. — *Dean Dexter*

