

Total Defense

Well, hello everyone and thank you very much for being here this morning. My name is James Fortuna and I'm here representing the New York City Chapter of the Living New Deal. I'm pinch-hitting for Kevin Baker today, so if you were expecting to see our fearless leader at the podium, I'm sorry to say that you're stuck with this early career historian instead.

I'm here to present our 2025 New Deal Book Award. But, since we're fortunate enough to have all three finalists in the room with us today, I want to briefly say a few words about our two honorable mentions before moving on to this year's winner.

First, though, let me commend all three authors together for writing books that are as timely as they are readable. In an age when the role of history or the value of studying the humanities in general is often measured in terms of dollars and cents — the books we're celebrating today each make a case for engaging with the past to make sense of the present. The question of **legacy** ties all three together in their own way. What remains of what other historians have referred to as the New Deal Order? How did we get here? All three authors help answer these questions, and it is my privilege to highlight their work today.

I want to first congratulate Stephanie Gray for her excellent book, *Restoring America: Historic Preservation and the New Deal* (University of Massachusetts Press). This book stakes a claim on the New Deal's legacy by demonstrating how federal bureaucracy, local boosters, and historical mythmaking combined to propel historic preservation as a force for shaping cultural identity during the Great Depression. Broad in geographical scope, this study is sure to inspire future generations of scholars, students,

preservationists, policy makers, and the ever-present American road tripper. Well done!

I also want to congratulate Richard Haw on his excellent *Leon Bibel: Forgotten Artist of the New Deal* (Rutgers University Press). Exhaustively researched, this book reminds us of the New Deal's impact on ordinary Americans, especially those that were artistically inclined. The Federal Art Project has been garnering considerable attention lately, and this case study marks an invaluable contribution to a burgeoning field. Thank you!

Finally, it's time to congratulate our winner. The award committee is pleased to recognize Andrew Preston's *Total Defense: The New Deal and the Invention of National Security* with the 2025 New Deal Book Award. The committee describes this book as "a work of innovative research, capacious vision, and careful argument." I agree wholeheartedly!

For those unaware, Andrew Preston is the W.L. Lyons Brown Jr. Jefferson Scholars Foundation Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy and Statecraft at the University of Virginia. Before joining UVA in 2025, he taught at Cambridge University for nearly 20 years, where he was Professor of American History and a Fellow of Clare College. That is, incidentally, where our paths first crossed. I was in the room when Andrew workshopped this book's introduction at the Cambridge American History Seminar a while back. Seeing the finished product receive such worthy praise and attention here in Hyde Park, some three years later, makes me think I may well be standing in the middle of one of those full-circle moments we always hear about but rarely experience — he's an inspiration! I should also point out that while the New Deal book award is listed first on Andrew's faculty page, *Total Defense* has also received the Society for History in the Federal Government Book Prize, the Society for Military History Distinguished Book Award, and an Honorable Mention for the Society of U.S. Intellectual Historians Annual Book Prize.

This book is democratic in its commitment to accessibility, rigorous in its commitment to historiographic engagement, and timely in its ability to make sense of a world that often seems stuck in a state of permacrisis — to cash in on a term that's gained some purchase lately.

Throughout *Total Defense*, Preston traces what he describes as a “revolutionary turn in American threat perception” across centuries, oceans, and presidential administrations, making a provocative case for understanding national security as the logical extension of the New Deal's commitment to social welfare and stability at home. In his words, the concept of national security we have inherited from the New Deal Order and seen operationalized every decade since the Second World War, is “a doctrine of national self-defense without geographical limits.” Again — how very timely.

In crystalline, accessible prose, we see the continentalism of the founders expand into hemispheric dominance before our very eyes. But Preston never drifts away into an exclusively top-down study of US foreign policy. He keeps the American people — the American experience — center-stage from beginning to end. Preston tells a deathly serious story of American hegemony by marshalling not only an impressive range of archival material and secondary literature, but by giving airtime to other key chroniclers of the American experience along the way. Frank Capra comes to mind!

Preston's “absorbing narrative” reveals the ways in which entire generations have been defined in some way by American foreign policy. The responsibilities of citizenship have been reimagined, and the social, cultural, and economic responses impossible to miss. In Preston's account, state-sponsored social cohesion is more than a by-product, but a key ingredient of the type of expanded military footprint we see maintained today.

As I speak this morning, when the broadcasting of foreign wars into living rooms is already old news, the ink is drying on the latest agreement to bring

'national security'-oriented US military action to a close an ocean away.
Again: How did we get here?

Preston's *Total Defense* helps make it make sense. And for that we thank him. And for that we present him with the 2025 New Deal Book Award.

Congratulations. And thank you!