



America Goes to War

What were the sources of American isolationism during the 1930s?

Isolationism was the attitude that America should be separate from and unaffected by the rest of the world. It gave rise to U.S. policy that avoided involvement in foreign affairs. During the Great Depression, making a living was the most important issue for most Americans. Americans remembered the horrors of World War I and many believed that weapons manufacturers had gotten America into World War I to make big profits. Most Americans saw no reason for the United States to be drawn into the European conflict.

What were the neutrality acts?

In support of isolationism, Congress passed laws known as neutrality acts intended to prevent American involvement in foreign wars. The first act banned the sale of weapons to nations at war. In 1935, when the law was applied to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, the ban hurt the Ethiopians more, since they did not have modern arms. Roosevelt knew that the ban would hurt the weaker Chinese more than the Japanese in their conflict. He never formally recognized war between China and Japan, so that he could continue selling arms to the Chinese.

How did President Roosevelt assist the Allies before the United States was in the war?

Roosevelt recognized the threat to the United States from the totalitarian states, but was limited in how he could help the Allies because of the strong American support for isolationism. While he convinced Americans to prepare for war, he introduced measures to help the Allies.

- **Destroyers to protect bases**—When German submarines attacked British shipping, Britain requested American destroyers to help protect them. The neutrality acts prevented Roosevelt from selling arms, so he traded 50 ships for British military bases in the Caribbean.
- **Lend-Lease Act**—In March 1941, as Great Britain's situation grew desperate, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act which allowed Roosevelt to sell or lend weapons to nations important to American security. The act was opposed by isolationists, but most Americans recognized the need to help Britain fight Nazi Germany. American supplies were also sent to the Soviet Union after the German invasion of June 1941.
- **Troops in Iceland**—Roosevelt sent American troops to Iceland in July 1941, expanding the area of the Atlantic that was under American control.

What were the sources of conflict between the United States and Japan?

The United States protested the 1931 Japanese invasion of China, but did little else to stop Japanese aggression in Asia. In 1940 Roosevelt cut off the sale of aviation fuel to Japan. In 1941 he froze all Japanese funds in the United States, making it impossible for Japan to buy American oil.

What was Pearl Harbor, and why did the Japanese attack it in 1941?

Japanese leaders decided that war was the only way to resolve the conflict between the two nations. They planned a surprise attack against the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Their strategy was to disable U.S. forces in the area long enough so that Japan could take over East Asia. The Japanese attack of December 7, 1941, destroyed nearly 300 airplanes and sank or disabled 18 warships. It did not harm the fleet's aircraft carriers, which were out to sea. The attack on Pearl Harbor was a miscalculation by the Japanese military. It united a divided American public and led to overwhelming support for the war effort.

How did the United States enter the war in Europe?

After the United States declared war against Japan on December 8, 1941, Germany and Italy declared war against the United States on December 11, 1941.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Directions: Mark T for a true statement and F for a false one. If a statement is false, make it true by correcting the underlined word or phrase on the line that follows.

1. In the early 1930s, most Americans were more concerned about the Great Depression than about the totalitarian threat in Europe.
2. Roosevelt applied the neutrality acts to the war between Japan and China.
3. The United States sold Great Britain fifty destroyers to help the British.
4. The Lend-Lease Act allowed the United States to send war supplies to nations such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union.
5. Roosevelt threatened military action against Japan to stop its war against China.

Historian's Notebook - United States Intervention



U.S. Involvement in WWII

After WWI, many people in the United States were isolationists. This meant that they didn't want to become involved in the problems of the world. When Nazi Germany invaded the country of Poland in 1939, Great Britain and France declared War on Germany because of what they did. The United States didn't do enter the war against Germany. Many people, especially those in Great Britain became angry at the United States. When Germany started openly attacking Great Britain and France, both of those countries turned to the United States for help. The United States gave them money and weapons but wouldn't commit any troops. This cartoon was made in the 1940s by Dr. Seuss, before he was an author of Children's books. He was from England and was criticizing the United States for not coming to the aide of its allies. It was only much later after the war that Dr. Seuss became more famous for his children's books, than his political cartoons that he drew during World War II.

Observations: Make a list of what you see in this picture.

Conclusions: Based upon the picture or the reading, answer the following questions:

1. Based upon the reading, how did the United States first act during WWII?

2. What do you think Dr. Seuss felt about the United States?

3. Who does the bird represent in this picture?

4. What is the United States "doing" in this picture?

5. Which two countries came to the immediate aide of Poland?
