

The background of the cover features a repeating pattern of stylized, light green leaf motifs. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves, one slightly larger than the other, pointing upwards and to the right. These motifs are scattered across the entire yellow-green gradient background.

# Waking to Danger

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**ROBERT A. ROSENBAUM**

The logo for Greenwood Publishing Group, featuring a stylized leaf motif to the left of the text.

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# Waking to Danger

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*Americans and Nazi Germany,  
1933–1941*

ROBERT A. ROSENBAUM

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## Preface

“One knows nothing of the history one has experienced,” reflected Victor Klemperer, a German diarist of the Nazi years.<sup>1</sup>

My earliest memory of an historic event is of the inauguration on March 4, 1933, of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which I read about in *My Weekly Reader* in second grade. At the time of Pearl Harbor, I was fifteen and a sophomore in high school. My memories of the years between these two events are like islands in a dark and turbulent river—the history of which I knew nothing.

In this little book, I revisit those islands while plumbing one of many currents in that dark stream: Americans’ diverse responses to Nazi Germany in the prewar years. It is also a journey into my own history—in a sense, a “researched reminiscence” perhaps worth sharing with younger generations.

The 1930s were years when Americans struggled to define their country’s role in a dangerous world. Opinions were deeply divided and passionately held. Before the debate could be resolved, America was attacked. Under President Roosevelt, America entered World War II not only in self-defense but—contrary to the recent desires of many—as a champion of liberty against tyranny, of world order against anarchy.

It was, as has often been observed, the last good war.

R.A.R.

## CHAPTER 1

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# Swastika Rising

From dusk to midnight on January 30, 1933, tens of thousands of jack-booted, brown-shirted storm troopers, flaming torches held high, drums beating, bands playing, paraded through Berlin. The “river of fire,” as one observer described it, passed thunderously through the Brandenburg Gate, then turned down the Wilhelmstrasse, past the Presidential Palace and the Reich Chancellery.

From a window in the Presidential Palace, the aged Reich president, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, watched the seemingly endless procession in bewilderment. Farther along, before the Reich Chancellery, the massed storm troopers raised their right arms and voices in salute to the slight figure in formal dress standing at a Chancellery window—their leader, newly appointed chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler.

Hitler’s appointment that afternoon had surprised most people. He was, indeed, the leader of the largest party—the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP, or “Nazi”)—in the German parliament, the Reichstag, but in two recent elections, in July and November 1932, the number of seats held by the Nazis had fallen from 230 to 196, their proportion of the popular vote from 37 percent to 33.

Disdained by some as a vulgar demagogue. Hitler nevertheless appealed to many others resentful of Germany’s treatment by its victorious enemies in the Treaty of Versailles after World War I and now of its devastation by the worldwide economic depression. His party’s name combined the two most potent ideologies of the day—nationalism and socialism. Nationalism, of course, burned in every German’s breast. By socialism, however, Hitler did not mean the Marxist “socialization of the means of production”—under Hitler, the “means of production” remained profitably in private hands—but a classless society in which

advancement would be based on “personality” and “genius” rather than privilege. He promised a “national community” transcending the narrow interests of social classes, economic groups, and political parties. Repeatedly, in his mesmerizing speeches, Hitler struck chords deeply resonant in the German psyche: blood and soil, betrayal and defeat, enemies within and without, the restoration of Germany as a great power.

January 1933 was a time of crisis for Germany. A third of its workforce was unemployed. Streets and beer halls were battlegrounds for the paramilitary forces of the political parties of the right and the left: the Nazis’ SA (*Sturmabteilung*, Storm Troops) and SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Defense Echelon), the Nationalists’ Steel Helmets, the Social Democrats’ Reich Banner, the Communists’ Red Front. Parliamentary government was paralyzed; government was now conducted by presidential decrees. Masses of Germans were demoralized and despondent, hostile to the postwar Weimar Republic and receptive to an authoritarian alternative.

After a succession of conservative presidential cabinets—cabinets not dependent upon a parliamentary majority—had collapsed in the preceding months, a clique of power brokers persuaded President Hindenburg to grant Hitler’s demand for the chancellorship but in a cabinet dominated by reliable conservatives. Hindenburg distrusted Hitler—a rabble-rouser, a common Austrian who had served in the German army during the war but as a mere corporal. Reluctantly, he accepted the assurances of his advisers that Hitler and two Nazi colleagues would be restrained by eight other cabinet members and “tamed” by responsibility.

Shortly after noon on January 30, Hindenburg met with Hitler and his new cabinet. Hitler promised to uphold the constitution and return eventually to parliamentary government. The president nodded approval and closed the interview. “And now, gentlemen, forward with God,” he said.<sup>1</sup>

In bitter despair, General Erich Ludendorff, who had been Hindenburg’s chief of staff during World War I and a onetime National Socialist member of the Reichstag, wrote to the president: “You have delivered up our holy German Fatherland to one of the greatest demagogues of all time. I solemnly prophesy that this accursed man will cast our Reich into the abyss and bring our nation to inconceivable misery. Future generations will damn you in your grave for what you have done.”<sup>2</sup>

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Hitler was not an impressive figure. *Time* magazine described him as “this pudgy, stoop-shouldered, toothbrush-mustached but magnetic little man.”<sup>3</sup>

American journalist Dorothy Thompson, who had interviewed Hitler in 1932, reported: “When finally I walked into Adolph Hitler’s salon in the Kaiserhof Hotel [in Berlin], I was convinced that I was meeting the future

dictator of Germany. In something less than fifty seconds I was quite sure that I was not.

"It took just about that time to measure the startling insignificance of this man who has set the world agog.

"He is formless, almost faceless, a man whose countenance is a caricature, a man whose framework seems cartilaginous, without bones. He is inconsequential and voluble, ill-poised, insecure. He is the very prototype of the Little Man.

"A lock of lank hair falls over an insignificant and slightly retreating forehead. The back head is shallow. The face is broad in the cheek-bones. The nose is large, but badly shaped and without character. His movements are awkward, almost undignified and most un-martial. There is in his face no trace of any inner conflict or self-discipline.

"And yet he is not without a certain charm. But it is the soft, almost feminine charm of the Austrian! When he talks it is with a broad Austrian dialect.

"The eyes alone are notable. Dark gray and hyperthyroid—they have the peculiar shine which often distinguishes geniuses, alcoholics, and hysterics."<sup>4</sup>

Ordinary Germans viewed Hitler differently. They had been longing for a hero to lead them out of their humiliation and despair. In 1931, Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller had asked, in a radio broadcast, "Where is the leader? When will he come? Our seeking and willing, our calling and striving fail to bring him. When he comes, he will come as a present, as a gift of God."<sup>5</sup>

After an election rally in 1932, a Hamburg school teacher recorded her impressions of the man already universally called "The *Führer* [leader]":

"There stood Hitler in a simple black coat and looked over the crowd, waiting—a forest of swastika pennants swished up, the jubilation of this moment was given vent in a roaring salute. . . .

"His voice was hoarse after all his speaking during the previous days. When the speech was over, there was roaring enthusiasm and applause. Hitler saluted, gave his thanks, the Horst Wessel song sounded out across the course. Hitler was helped into his coat. Then he went.

"How many look up to him with touching faith! As their helper, their saviour, their deliverer from unbearable distress—to him who rescues the Prussian prince, the scholar, the clergyman, the farmer, the worker, the unemployed, who rescues them from the parties back into the nation."<sup>6</sup>

Leni Riefenstahl, who later made classic propaganda films for the Nazis, recalled her first view of Hitler, also in 1932:

"Hitler appeared, very late. The spectators jumped from their seats, shouting wildly for several minutes: 'Heil, Heil, Heil!' I was too far away to see Hitler's face but, after the shouts died down, I heard his voice: 'Fellow Germans!'

"That very same instant I had an almost apocalyptic vision that I was never able to forget. It seemed as if the earth's surface were spreading out in front of me, like a hemisphere that suddenly splits apart in the middle, spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the earth. I felt quite paralyzed."<sup>7</sup>

In 1934, American correspondent William L. Shirer encountered Hitler in Nuremberg. "Like a Roman emperor," he wrote in his diary, "Hitler rode into this medieval town at sundown today past solid phalanxes of wildly cheering Nazis. . . . I got my first glimpse of Hitler as he drove by our hotel. . . . He fumbled his cap with his left hand as he stood in his car acknowledging the delirious welcome with somewhat feeble Nazi salutes from his right arm. He was clad in a rather worn gaberdine trench-coat, his face had no particular expression at all . . . and for the life of me I could not quite comprehend what hidden springs he undoubtedly unloosed in the hysterical mob which was greeting him so wildly."<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

Hitler's appointment as chancellor alarmed other European governments. The reaction in the United States was mixed. Since 1930, the American press—newspapers, magazines, and books—had reported Hitler's rise to prominence. But European affairs were remote for many Americans, who were preoccupied with the hardships of the depression at home.

The *New York Times*, which announced Hitler's appointment in a three-deck, three-column headline on its first page on January 31, found "no warrant for immediate alarm" on its editorial page. "A majority of the Cabinet which [Hitler], as Chancellor, has been forced to accept would be strongly opposed to him if he sought to translate the wild and whirling words of his campaign speeches into political action. On the outside stand the powerful organizations of German labor, ready to resist, by a general strike if need be, any movement to set up a Fascist Dictator in Germany."<sup>9</sup>

Other publications, from the *New Republic* to *Time*, were similarly reassuring. The liberal *Nation* agreed that Hitler was a prisoner of his own cabinet, but saw that cabinet as the triumph of reaction: "The reactionary industrialists and Junkers [aristocratic landowners] want to go back much farther than 1918; they want to go back at least a half century. . . . [Their course] was to capture and tame the leader of the National Socialist movement, and this the reactionary groups seem to have accomplished."<sup>10</sup>

Dorothy Thompson dissented. "[W]here three ministers out of eleven," she wryly observed, "have an active policy with a private armed force to carry it out, and the other eight an inactive one, the three will win."<sup>11</sup>

Marxists interpreted the Hitler government as the last stage of capitalism, when industrialists and finance capitalists would subjugate the working class. Some radicals foresaw an imminent workers' revolution



that would overthrow the Nazi regime. The Communist monthly *New Masses* predicted: “[Hitler] will not be able to reconcile the irreconcilable differences between the big capitalists whom he serves and the masses who follow him. Nor will the violent persecution of the Communist Party prevent it from organizing the masses in a powerful struggle against fascism, against capitalism. On the contrary: the bitter experience of the terror will only steel the masses to greater and more effective combat.”<sup>12</sup>

The anti-Marxist Catholic press tended to view Hitler with cautious optimism. The Jesuit weekly *America* noted that “Chancellor Hitler, speaking to the nation over the radio, announced a reasonable and moderate program, declaring that Christianity would be the basis of moral standards. . . . He concluded by calling upon God for a special blessing.”<sup>13</sup> *Commonweal* pointed out that “the Hitler party . . . was and still is essentially a ‘workers’ party . . . Adolf Hitler is too simple and fearless a man to betray the working population. If he finds that what he believes ought to be done cannot be accomplished, he will resign.”<sup>14</sup>

The Protestant weekly *Christian Century* put its faith in Germany’s venerable (Protestant) president, Hindenburg: “The old president . . . is in a mood to demand a return to the forms of parliamentary government. . . . [T]he terror has gone out of Hitler.”<sup>15</sup>

A number of journalists, however, were deeply apprehensive. Some had already warned in articles and books that Hitlerism meant war. The influential columnist Walter Lippmann, who viewed Hitler as “the most extreme and the most impatient of all the revisionists [of the Treaty of Versailles],”<sup>16</sup> soon concluded: “The spirit of the German Nazis [has] ended all possibility of a pacific revision of frontiers. . . . For not a voice of any consequence will be raised in any democratic country to suggest that the cause of peace can be advanced by placing another human being under the heel of the Nazis. That being the case, there can be no revision of frontiers except by force. . . .”<sup>17</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* observed that Europe had passed from a postwar to a prewar period. “All this latest winter of despair and misery,” it reported, “Europe has waited, hopeless, for the first inevitable guns of the Armageddon that would sweep away forever all possibilities of recovery, happiness, and civilization.”<sup>18</sup>

By November, journalist Stanley High could comment in the *Literary Digest*, “To-day the question of war is no longer whether, but when.”<sup>19</sup>

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None of these commentators comprehended the irrationalism that now possessed Germany, overwhelming the orderliness, traditionalism, and intellectualism for which the country had long been known. Nor did they grasp Hitler’s demonic radicalness. He was not a pragmatic politician

with whom one could “do business.” He was not a revisionist, seeking to recover Germany’s 1914 borders. He was not an imperialist, demanding for Germany access to colonies, markets, and raw materials. His revolution was limitless. Its aim was a Germany dominant in Europe, served by Europe’s subject peoples, and a world reorganized according to his design.

Hitler’s intentions were revealed in his autobiography and political testament, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), which was originally published in two volumes in 1925–26 and appeared in English (in an expurgated version) only in August 1933. In Germany, it became literally a sacred text. Therein, wrote acerbic Dorothy Thompson, “can be read the content of the German mind in a degenerate and plebeianized form.”<sup>20</sup>

Boldly—provocatively—Hitler revealed in *Mein Kampf* his vision of a “Third Reich” (the first was the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the second was the German Empire of 1871–1918) that would embrace all ethnic Germans. The driving force behind this program was a bizarre but widely popular racial theory that he had absorbed as a young man down and out in Vienna before World War I. Race was central to Hitler’s worldview.

“The racial question,” Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*, “gives the key not only to world history but to all human culture.”<sup>21</sup> He believed that the motive force of history was not the class struggle of the Marxists but the eternal, remorseless struggle among human races for survival and dominance.

Historically, the “Aryan” race, of which the Germanic peoples were the chief representatives, was the superior, the most vigorous and creative of the world’s races. “All human culture,” Hitler wrote, “all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan.”<sup>22</sup> On its native soil, the German people had developed its distinctive culture founded on the principle of self-sacrifice, the subordination of the individual to the conservation of the community. From this principle sprang national ideals of authority, honor, and freedom. The German people were “the highest humanity on this earth.”<sup>23</sup>

Due to constant population movements, Hitler explained, to conquests and absorptions, there were no longer any pure races. Mixture with inferior races had enfeebled the German race and culture. “The deepest and ultimate reason for the decline of the old [Second] Reich lay in its failure to recognize the racial problem and its importance for the historical development of peoples.”<sup>24</sup> Defeat in World War I was not the greatest disaster to befall Germany: “men do not perish as a result of lost wars, but by the loss of that force of resistance which is contained only in pure blood.”<sup>25</sup> “All great questions of the day,” he wrote, “are questions of the moment. . . . Only one among all of them, however, possesses causal importance, and that is the question of the racial preservation of the nation. In the blood alone resides the strength as well as the weakness of man.”<sup>26</sup>

Hitler’s first objective, therefore, was to establish a racial state, something unprecedented in human history. For Hitler, the state would not be

the supreme value, as in Fascist Italy, or the agent of a social class, as in the communist Soviet Union. It would be the embodiment of a pure Aryan race. Germany, he asserted, still possessed "great unmixed stocks of Nordic-Germanic people whom we may consider the most precious treasure for our future."<sup>27</sup> The racial state would enlarge that core stock through policies of eugenics (promoting its increase while eliminating inferior stocks), education, and physical training.

In foreign affairs, Hitler wrote, the racial state would not be content to recover Germany's 1914 borders but would aim "to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth."<sup>28</sup> It would unite all European Germans into one Reich, then, through military expansion in the east, provide living space for Germany's growing population and ensure its status as a world power. In the conquered territories of the inferior Slavic race, it would establish colonies of German peasants, thereby forever Germanizing the soil—but not the Slavs themselves, who would be subjugated or exterminated. Before this could be accomplished, however, France would have to be crushed and Britain made an ally. Ultimately, an enlarged, racially homogeneous German state would rule Europe and dominate the world.

The first conspicuous manifestation of Nazi racial policy, official anti-Semitism, was dismissed by many observers as a mere phase or tactic of the revolution. It was neither. The destruction of the Jews was fundamental to Hitler's program.

Jews, who in 1933 constituted less than 1 percent of the population, had lived in Germany for a thousand years. Beginning in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, many German Jews, newly emancipated from medieval constraints, had eagerly sought assimilation. Intermarriages and conversions to Christianity were frequent. Although Jews were at last recognized as citizens in the German Empire founded in 1871, anti-Semitism persisted in a profoundly conservative people that regarded Jews as inherently alien, un-Christian and un-German, representatives now of a cosmopolitan modernity that threatened to dissolve traditional social values and relationships. Despite hostility and discrimination, however, Jews rose to prominence in many areas of the national life. Before 1933, eleven German scientists of Jewish origin had won Nobel Prizes.

Although 100,000 German Jews had served in World War I, 12,000 having been killed in combat and 30,000 decorated for bravery, for Hitler the Jews were not a part of the national community or *Volk* but a distinct and inferior—indeed, vile and subhuman—race. Cunning, implacable, mysteriously powerful, "the Jew" was the "mightiest counterpart of the Aryan"<sup>29</sup> and "the mortal enemy of our people."<sup>30</sup> Without a country, Hitler wrote, Jews had no culture of their own but attached themselves like parasites to other nations and mimicked the host cultures. Like the true parasite, "wherever he appears, the host people dies out after a shorter or longer period."<sup>31</sup>

Instead of self-sacrifice, in Hitler's view, Jews were governed purely by self-interest. Since they rejected the Christian idea of a hereafter (as did Hitler himself), their concerns were entirely worldly and practical. For centuries, the Jewish merchant and moneylender had exploited the honest but naive Aryan, defiled his daughters, and corrupted his princes. In the modern world Jews had become the carriers of the viruses of both capitalism and socialism. These apparently antithetical movements, in Hitler's view, shared common values—internationalism and pacifism—incompatible with German national ideals. The Jew's "ultimate goal in this stage is the victory of 'democracy.' . . . It is most compatible with his requirements; for it excludes the personality—and puts in its place the majority, characterized by stupidity, incompetence, and last but not least, cowardice."<sup>32</sup>

Blocking Germany's fulfillment of its destiny as a world power, Hitler asserted, was the power of international finance, controlled by the "*inexorable Jew who struggles for his domination over the nations*. No nation can remove this hand from its throat except by the sword. Only the assembled and concentrated might of a national passion rearing up in its strength can defy the international enslavement of peoples. Such a process is and remains a bloody one."<sup>33</sup>

It would be ruthlessly pursued as long as the Nazi regime lasted. In his final political testament, dictated in his Berlin bunker the day before his suicide, Hitler charged his heirs "above all" to continue "the merciless resistance to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry."<sup>34</sup>

\* \* \*

The Nazi revolution, the "seizure of power," occurred *after* Hitler's appointment as chancellor. A condition of his demand for the chancellorship was that the Reichstag be dissolved and new elections called. On January 31, 1933, President Hindenburg complied and set new elections for March 5. Hitler proclaimed that the Nazis' enemy was Marxism. Genuinely fearing an imminent Communist revolution, the Nazis persuaded a number of leading industrialists—who as a group had not previously supported the Nazis—to contribute a large war chest to the party. With this money and state control of the radio, the Nazis launched a saturation election campaign.

Nazi propaganda monopolized the state radio and was broadcast through loudspeakers on the streets. Posters and billboards, torchlight parades and mass meetings, spread the alarm of a Communist uprising. Opposition meetings and demonstrations were banned. Newspapers were muzzled. Gangs of SA and SS men—made "auxiliary police" by the Nazi-controlled official police—conducted a reign of terror in the streets, trashing and looting the offices of opposition parties and labor unions, beating and arresting leftists at will. Although the Marxist

parties—the Communist and Social Democrat (socialist)—were the Nazis' principal targets, the (Catholic) Center Party was not spared.

On the night of February 27, the Reichstag building caught fire. Although the Nazis knew that the arsonist was an itinerant Dutch workingman, they insisted that the fire was the signal for a Communist rising (which never occurred). Whipping up national hysteria, they escalated their terror against the Communists. A presidential decree on February 28 suspended (permanently, it turned out) all civil liberties—free speech, press, and assembly—and sanctioned warrantless police searches, mail and telephone surveillance, and indefinite detention. The SA and SS took 100,000 Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, and others into “protective custody” in makeshift jails and camps, where many were beaten, tortured, and murdered.

The ferocity of the Nazi terror—which continued for months and, at a less anarchic level, proved a permanent feature of the regime—shocked and repelled the Western world. “Civilized opinion throughout the world,” the *New York Times* editorialized, “finds itself contemplating with mingled bewilderment and horror the course of events in Germany today.”<sup>35</sup> Still, on March 5, the Nazis received only 44 percent of the popular vote, 288 seats out of 647 in the Reichstag.

When the new Reichstag assembled on March 23 in Berlin's Kroll Opera House, menacing SA and SS troops surrounded the building and lined the meeting hall. The president of the Reichstag, Hermann Goering, Chancellor Adolf Hitler, and the Nazi delegates all wore brown party uniforms. Communist delegates had been arrested or had fled the country. Hitler demanded passage of an Enabling Act by which the Reichstag would surrender its legislative authority—including the power to amend the constitution—to Hitler's cabinet. Voting was held in an atmosphere of brutal intimidation. The Act passed by a vote of 441 to 94 (all Social Democrats). With this cover of legality, Hitler became dictator of Germany.

During the next eighteen months, Hitler consolidated unprecedented powers in his own hands and began the public works and rearmament programs that ultimately lifted Germany out of its economic depression. When on August 2, 1934, President Hindenburg died, Hitler unconstitutionally assumed his powers as head of state and commander of the armed forces although not the title of president; his title now was *Führer* and Reich chancellor. On August 19, 38 million Germans—90 percent of those voting in a national plebiscite—ratified the new dispensation.

Hitler undoubtedly enjoyed wide support in every sector of the population—peasants and workers, shopkeepers and the middle class, industrialists and aristocrats. But he was the agent of none. Ultimately, he led all alike to destruction.

"The whole atmosphere in Germany is electric," an excited correspondent in Berlin wrote in the *Christian Century* in July 1933. "The new doctrines of the mystical Reich now being born are spreading with greatest passion. Everything gives way to Hitler. . . . [A] new will to discipline, a new collective devotion has come which is dissolving all opposition. . . . [T]he revolutionary powers feel justified in rooting out all that is not conducive to the production of a totalitarian state."<sup>36</sup>

(At about the same time, in Dresden, German diarist Victor Klemperer recorded: "[E]veryone, literally everyone, cringes with fear. No letter, no telephone conversation, no word on the street is safe anymore. Everyone fears the next person may be an informer."<sup>37</sup>)

Nazi Germany quickly became a totalitarian state dedicated from the start to war. The word *totalitarian* had been recently coined to describe a new phenomenon: a state that claimed to control every aspect of its citizens' lives—political, economic, social, religious, cultural. Such a state was necessarily authoritarian; dissent was not tolerated. The Nazis crushed or subjugated—*coordinated* was the preferred word—every civil or social structure that had historically served as a buffer between the citizen and the state. Hitler's will was the ultimate authority. "The revolution we have made is a total one," said Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels in November 1933. "It has encompassed every area of public life and fundamentally restructured them all."<sup>38</sup>

The Communist Party was destroyed in March 1933, and the Social Democratic Party was banned in June. All other political parties voluntarily dissolved. On July 14, 1933, the National Socialist Party was declared the only legal political party in Germany.

Even here, Hitler had to make his power unchallengeable. On the night of June 30, 1934, the "Night of the Long Knives," the SS at his command arrested hundreds—and murdered at least eighty-five—of Hitler's personal enemies, party extremists of the left and the right, and SA leaders who had aspired to supplant the army as the nation's principal military force. Alleging to the Reichstag that it had been necessary to suppress a mutiny in the party, Hitler declared: "In that hour, I was responsible for the fate of the German nation and was thus the supreme judge of the German *Volk*."<sup>39</sup> No law constrained the *Führer*.

The Reichstag, thoroughly Nazified, survived as a forum for occasional speeches by Hitler and the rubber-stamping of legislation. The governments of the historic German states (the *Länder*—Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, etc.) were abolished; thereafter the states were administered by Nazi officials who reported to Berlin. Thus Germany became for the first time a centralized unitary state rather than the federal union it had been under the Empire and the Republic.

The army, a formidable pillar of the state, had supported the fledgling Republic in November 1918 but had stood aside during Hitler's ascent to power. Traditionally monarchist in sentiment—its aristocratic generals



were unimpressed by the upstart Austrian corporal—it was won over to the new regime by the removal of the SA as a rival and by Hitler's promises of rearmament and conscription. After Hindenburg died, officers and soldiers took an oath of loyalty and obedience, not to the state or to the constitution, but to Hitler himself. In 1938, Hitler assumed personal command of Germany's armed forces.

Nazis were appointed to strategic positions in the civil service, which was purged racially and politically. Special courts were established to deal quickly and harshly with political offenses, which ranged from jokes to treason. The regular courts, long distinguished for their hostility to the Republic, were nevertheless subjected to intimidation and interference. Judges and lawyers were instructed to uphold the interests of the "national community" rather than the rights of individuals. "Whatever is useful to the nation is right," declared Hans Frank, president of the Academy for German Law, in 1935, "and whatever harms it is wrong."<sup>40</sup> Law became irrelevant. The powers of the political police—the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*) and the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*)—were unlimited.

Labor unions were suppressed and their leaders arrested. The unions were replaced by a German Labor Front, which concerned itself not with the workers' wages and working conditions but with their indoctrination in Nazi ideology. All the workers' gains under the Empire and Republic were lost—the right to organize and bargain collectively, the right to strike, the right to change jobs. Although unemployment was virtually eliminated, workers' living conditions scarcely improved; the regime demanded sacrifice now for a better (postwar) future. In compensation, the Labor Front provided recreational opportunities for the workers' limited leisure—organized sports, discounted concert and theater tickets, and economical group tours and cruises.

State control of the economy grew steadily during the 1930s as the Nazis prepared for war. Businessmen ran their own firms, large or small, but their freedom of action was increasingly constrained by the requirements of the war economy. These always overrode the drive for profits, with the result that some business leaders—who had cheered the Nazis' subjugation of labor, the revival of the economy, and their initial high profits—became disillusioned. Late in the decade the government had to resort increasingly to state-run enterprises to get the war production it demanded.

Nazism and "Jewish" Christianity were fundamentally incompatible. "To the Christian doctrine of the infinite significance of the human soul and of personal responsibility," Hitler—nominally a Catholic—declared, "I oppose with icy clarity the saving doctrine of the nothingness and insignificance of the individual human being, and of his continued existence in the visible immortality of the nation."<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the Protestant churches welcomed the Nazis enthusiastically, the Catholic church warily. The country was two-thirds Protestant,

and the Protestant pastors were notoriously reactionary and nationalist, indelibly stamped by the ferocious anti-Semitism and docile submission to political authority of the sixteenth-century religious reformer Martin Luther. Dominated by a new sect of German Christians, the twenty-eight separate state churches (*Ländeskirchen*) submitted to unification as a national Evangelical church (comprising Lutherans and Calvinists) under a Nazi Reich bishop and a Reich church minister. A group of dissident pastors led by Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller formed a Confessional church to defend the traditional autonomy of the Protestant churches. The Confessional church was crushed, and Niemöller was confined in a concentration camp.

As early as 1930, the Catholic church in Germany had opposed Nazi teachings. The Vatican feared the Nazis, but it feared communism more. On July 20, 1933, the Vatican signed a concordat with the Nazi government. Its recognition of Hitler greatly enhanced his prestige. Moreover, the Vatican consented to the dissolution of the Center Party and Catholic labor unions and withdrew entirely from politics. In return, the church was guaranteed its autonomy, freedom of public worship, and protection of its clergy. Most important, it believed, it preserved its lay organizations—charities, schools, and youth movement—from the grasp of the totalitarian state.

The Nazi guarantees soon proved worthless, and the church was subjected to relentless persecution. In July 1935 the Vatican protested German violations of the concordat and officially declared the Nazi regime hostile to the church. In his 1937 encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Deep Anxiety) addressed to German bishops, Pope Pius XI condemned whoever “exalts race, or the people, or the State . . . and divinizes them to an idolatrous level. . . .”<sup>42</sup>

The “church struggle” remained unresolved when war began in 1939. Hitler then postponed a final “reckoning” with the churches until after the war was won.

Although long internationally respected, German universities, like the churches, were reactionary and antirepublican. Faculties and especially the students fervently embraced the Nazi ideology and rejected Western ideals. On May 10, 1933, students at Berlin University and others throughout the country made bonfires of hundreds of “un-German” books, including those by Freud and Einstein. Signs posted on university walls read: “When the Jew writes in German, he lies.”

Nevertheless, the universities lost their right of self-government. Rectors and deans had formerly been elected by faculties. Now rectors were appointed by the Education Ministry in Berlin and they, in conformity to the leadership principle, appointed deans. Faculties also lost their power to hire and promote. Curricula were loaded with courses in “German science,” “scientific racism,” and the philosophy of National Socialism. A Nazified national student union monitored professors for



political correctness; a hint of professorial heterodoxy would be greeted with insults, riots, or other disturbances.

Curriculum reform continued down to the secondary and elementary schools, which also became vehicles of Nazi indoctrination. "Unreliable" teachers were purged; independent and religious schools were closed. Vehemently anti-intellectual, the Nazis believed that the object of education was "character building." This resulted, at all levels of education, in emphasis on physical and ideological training over academic subjects.

The cultural life of the country was "coordinated" by a Reich Chamber of Culture, whose six divisions—literature, press, radio, theater, music, and film—oversaw all activity in those fields and determined who, for political and racial reasons, could be employed in them. Hitler, a failed artist of conventional taste, banned "degenerate" modern art.

Each profession—doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, teachers—had its own government-directed association. Even purely social groups—sports clubs, hiking clubs, choruses—were impressed into the Nazi juggernaut.

The family did not escape the invasiveness of the state. Equality of the sexes was denied. The supreme function of women, according to Hitler, was to bear and rear children. To increase the population, the state encouraged marriage and fertility. Large, racially desirable families received state allowances and other privileges. Mothers of four or more children were awarded medals. Childlessness was condemned and made grounds for divorce. The Nazis did not stigmatize illegitimacy.

Although family values were celebrated, the family was disrupted by the state's recruitment (eventually conscription) of its children into the Nazi youth movement. "Youth belong to the *Führer*" was the Nazi slogan. Membership in the youth organizations began at age ten for both boys and girls and continued until they entered labor or military service at eighteen. Physical training, competitive sports, military drill, and Nazi indoctrination occupied the children afternoons and weekends, undermining parental control and family cohesiveness. Children were encouraged to denounce their own parents for any signs of nonconformity.

"The majority of the people is content," diarist Victor Klemperer believed in 1936; "a small group accepts Hitler as the lesser evil, no one really wants to be rid of him, all see in him the liberator in foreign affairs, fear Russian conditions, as a child fears the bogeyman, believe, insofar as they are not honestly carried away, that it is inopportune, in terms of Realpolitik, to be outraged at such details as the suppression of civil liberties, the persecution of the Jews, the falsification of all scholarly truths, the systematic destruction of all morality. And all are afraid for their livelihood, their life, all are such terrible cowards."<sup>43</sup>

But the Nazi state was not a monolith. Uninterested in the details of administration but jealous of his power, Hitler refused to delegate clear

authority to his lieutenants, allowing party and government departments to compete among themselves for power and to pursue independent programs as long as they were deemed consistent with the *Führer's* will, explicit or implicit.

By the end of 1938, Hitler's position was unshakable. All the leading elements in German society were subservient to him. The masses of ordinary Germans, dazzled by his achievements in overcoming the depression and making Germany a great power again—all without war—virtually deified him. If living conditions were hard, they blamed overbearing and corrupt party functionaries, not the beloved *Führer*.

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Hitler's confrontation with his mortal enemy, the Jews, began at once. His object was first to drive Jews out of public life and then out of the country; assimilation was never an option. From 1933 to 1938, Nazi policy encouraged the emigration of Jews and other non-Aryans (Christian Germans of partial Jewish ancestry) through social and economic pressure. From 1938 to 1941, coercion and terror were applied to speed emigration. In 1941, when Germany was at war, the Nazis halted emigration and undertook the physical extermination of the Jews in Germany and German-controlled areas of Europe.

Most Germans did not initially share Hitler's paranoid obsession with the Jews. Some were sensitive to the overrepresentation of Jews in certain economic and cultural fields. Many disliked the presence of "primitive" *Ostjuden*, Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia. They were therefore susceptible to the Nazis' incessant anti-Semitic propaganda. If some Germans were repelled by the Nazis' brutality toward the Jews, they were also cowed by it. Few Germans proved willing or able to help the Jews in their ordeal. Many, in fact, profited from the victimizing and despoiling of the Jews.

In the terror that accompanied Hitler's seizure of power, Jews were numerous among the Communists, Socialists, democrats, and labor leaders jailed, tortured, and murdered by SA and SS thugs. Often, they were singled out for especially brutal treatment. During and after the initial terror came anti-Jewish decrees and street violence against individual Jews.

Widespread anti-Jewish violence and boycotts led, on April 1, 1933, to a government-ordered, one-day nationwide boycott of Jewish enterprises. A week later a Law for the Reestablishment of a Professional Civil Service expelled Jews from government employment; the purge was soon extended to "legally recognized public bodies and equivalent institutions and undertakings"<sup>44</sup>—that is, business corporations, newspapers, museums, orchestras, theaters, film studios, whatever, in fact, the Nazis chose. Civil servants, judges, lawyers, professors, teachers, physicians, editors, journalists, musicians, actors, as well as corporation directors, managers,

and employees were dismissed from their jobs; the resulting vacancies were eagerly filled by Aryans. The number of Jewish students admitted to schools and universities was limited to 1.5 percent of the student body. The citizenship of “undesirable” immigrants (chiefly *Ostjuden*) naturalized under the Republic was revoked.

Impatient with the pace of official persecution and mindful of popular discontent with straitened living conditions, party activists incited anti-Semitic demonstrations often accompanied by violence. Local boycotts of Jewish-owned shops and businesses continued. Signs appeared warning Jews away from towns and villages. Similar signs were posted on hotels, restaurants, and other places of accommodation. Jewish property, synagogues, and cemeteries were vandalized. Gangs of SA men bullied and beat Jews on the streets while the police looked on. Every medium of propaganda spread anti-Semitic vilification designed to demonize and dehumanize the Jews. A sardonic joke of the period: “Hitler has broken all his promises except to the Jews.”

Reports of Jewish persecution were suppressed; foreign journalists censored themselves to avoid expulsion. Those reports that reached the outside world—from returned correspondents, travelers, refugees, and diplomats—were simply denied by the German government, which attributed them to enemies of Germany. (The Nazis explained the nationwide April 1 boycott of Jewish businesses as reprisal for “atrocious agitation” abroad.) Even German Jewish organizations, fearful of reprisals, reassured coreligionists abroad and begged them not to interfere. In fact, early reports of persecutions were disbelieved or considered exaggerated in America.

The 1935 Nuremberg Laws enacted Nazi racial doctrine. Jews and other non-Aryans were stripped of their citizenship and became “state subjects.” Marriage as well as sexual relations between Jews and Aryans was forbidden. Mixed marriages could be dissolved by the Aryan partner. It became illegal for Jewish households to employ Aryan women under age forty-five. Supplemental decrees defined a Jew as anyone, whatever his or her religious affiliation, with at least three Jewish grandparents. Two categories of *Mischlinge*, persons with one or two Jewish grandparents, were subject to lesser discriminations.

Ceaseless propaganda and indoctrination having affected ever wider circles, anti-Semitism reached new heights in 1938. With the aim of expelling Jews entirely from the German economy, the Nazis intensified the systematic expropriation of Jewish property that had begun in 1933. Many Jewish businesses were transferred to Aryan owners at fractions of their value; others were expropriated outright. Jewish communal organizations were placed under state control. Individual Jews were required to add the name Israel or Sara to their first names. Jewish men deemed “antisocials” by the Gestapo were arrested and given the choice of immediate emigration or consignment to labor camps.

When Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, the citizens of Vienna—who welcomed Hitler rapturously—fell upon their Jewish neighbors with unprecedented ferocity. The full body of German anti-Semitic regulations was imposed upon Austria at once. Jewish assets were confiscated to finance the forced “legal” emigration of 100,000 Austrian Jews, more than half of the Austrian Jewish population. Other thousands escaped illegally. Hundreds committed suicide.

In October 1938, the German police dumped 17,000 stateless Polish Jews across the German border into a Polish wasteland. The next month, the seventeen-year-old son of one of those Polish families assassinated a German embassy official in Paris. Now sufficiently powerful to be indifferent to world opinion, Hitler ordered a nationwide pogrom in retaliation.

On the night of November 9–10, 1938, gangs of SA and SS men—most in civilian clothes and sometimes abetted by Hitler Youth and civilian mobs—burned synagogues, beat and murdered Jews, and wrecked and plundered Jewish shops and homes throughout Germany and Austria. Hundreds of Jews were killed or committed suicide. Thirty thousand Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps, where they were further brutalized. Most were released after several weeks on condition that they emigrate promptly. On the morning of November 10 the streets of German cities were littered with broken glass, from which the pogrom derived its name *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night).

For its “provocation,” the Jewish community was fined 1 billion marks and required to repair the property damage at its own expense. Insurance payments were confiscated. New restrictions flowed from Berlin. Jews were barred from all economic activity—business, professions, trades—and denied state welfare. They were excluded from theaters, concerts, parks, and libraries and were deprived of their drivers licenses. Jews were barred from universities. The few Jewish children still in public schools—despite daily humiliation and social ostracism—were expelled. By the start of 1939, the Jewish community in Germany was isolated and destitute.

“How deeply Hitler’s attitudes are rooted in the German people,” Victor Klemperer, a “non-Aryan” (Jewish) Protestant, noted sadly in 1938; “how good the preparations were for his Aryan doctrine, how unbelievably I have deceived myself my whole life long when I imagined myself to belong to Germany, and how completely homeless I am.”<sup>45</sup>

During the war, 6 million Jews from all parts of German-controlled Europe were murdered in the Nazis’ “final solution to the Jewish problem.”

In 1933, 37,000 German Jews—often young leftists but also professionals and academics—emigrated, most seeking refuge in neighboring countries. Older Jews were reluctant or unable to uproot themselves. They preferred to believe that the Nazi persecutions—indeed, the regime itself—would prove temporary. Moreover, emigration meant impoverishment: the Nazis confiscated increasingly large proportions of emigrants’ capital. There were few places penniless refugees could go.

Emigration subsided after 1933, then rose after 1935 and peaked in 1939. Between 1933 and the start of World War II in September 1939, 400,000 German Jews—two-thirds of the 1933 German Jewish population—emigrated. Several thousand more left before emigration was stopped in November 1941.

Those refugees who sought haven elsewhere in Europe ultimately fell into the Nazi grip again. About 132,000 reached the United States; 60,000 got to Palestine. Others found refuge in Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Latin America. Some ended up in Shanghai, a free port that did not require immigration documents. The Soviet Union refused entry to Jewish refugees. Most of the Jews who remained in Germany perished in the Holocaust.

Jews were not the only group to suffer Nazi persecution. The small community of Jehovah's Witnesses, who refused to show any sign of submission to the Nazi state, endured brutal tortures in prisons and concentration camps.

Racial and eugenic policies readily fused. Gypsies, homosexuals, and other "socially undesirables"—habitual criminals, vagrants, alcoholics, work evaders—were sent to concentration camps, where many of them died. During the war, Gypsies were gassed along with Jews in death camps.

Beginning as early as 1934, some 400,000 people with hereditary mental and physical handicaps were compulsorily sterilized or subjected to abortions (a practice, sadly, not unique to Nazi Germany at that time). In 1939, under cover of the war, the Nazis secretly launched a long-planned program of euthanasia, rationalized as "social hygiene." Some 200,000 physically and mentally defective children and adults—"lives unworthy of life"—were gassed, starved, poisoned, or shot.

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In *Mein Kampf* Hitler had described the foreign policy of a future National Socialist Germany: rearmament, war, and European domination. Western statesmen had either not read the book or had dismissed it as bombast. But Hitler was in earnest.

The Germany that Hitler ruled in 1933 was militarily impotent. The Treaty of Versailles, which Germany had been compelled to sign after World War I, limited the German army to 100,000 men and denied it aggressive weapons. There was no German air force. In the west, the treaty returned the former French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France. The coal-rich Saar was placed under French administration for fifteen years, when a plebiscite would determine its future. The highly industrialized Rhineland (a wide swath of German territory east of the Rhine running from Switzerland to the Netherlands) was demilitarized—that is, the presence of German armed forces and fortifications was prohibited—enabling

France to invade Germany at will. In the east, the treaty gave Poland a corridor to the Baltic Sea, separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany. The German city of Danzig became a free city and Poland's port. Any political or economic union of Germany and Austria was forbidden.

Of necessity, therefore, the new chancellor spoke persuasively of his peaceful intentions. But at the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva that year, Germany demanded equality of armaments with the great powers, Britain, France, and Italy. Either they should disarm to Germany's level or Germany should be permitted to rearm to theirs. When the powers rebuffed this proposal, Germany quit the conference and the League of Nations as well.

Hitler had already secretly ordered the beginning (actually, the acceleration) of German rearmament, the expansion of the army and navy, the formation of a German air force, and the implementation of economic policies preparing the country for war. The military moves—and the revival of conscription—were publicly announced only in March 1935. But on May 21, 1935, in an address to the Reichstag, Hitler again professed Germany's desire for peace, rejected all thought of aggressive war, guaranteed the present French and Polish borders, and disclaimed any intention of annexing Austria.

Hitler perceived that the Western democracies were paralyzed by fear of another war. World War I had destroyed a generation of young men, and the trauma ran deep, even in Germany. Moreover, Britain and France, in Hitler's opinion, were weak and decadent. France was already mortally wounded by deep social and political divisions, while Britain was enervated by the delusion that Hitler could be appeased by granting his reasonable demands. Hitler was encouraged to take risks.

Beginning in 1935, Hitler achieved a series of stunning foreign policy successes that made him master of Europe. The imperatives of the racial struggle, the constant need for food, raw materials, skilled labor, and other assets, and Germany's temporary military superiority over Britain and France drove Nazi aggression ever forward. "The aim of German policy," Hitler told his generals in 1937, "[is] to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. . . . Germany's problem [can] only be solved by means of force. . . ." <sup>46</sup>

In January 1935 the inhabitants of the Saar voted overwhelmingly for reunion with Germany. In March 1936 German troops entered the demilitarized Rhineland without opposition from France and Britain. When civil war broke out in Spain in July 1936, Germany joined Fascist Italy in sending aid to the Nationalist general Francisco Franco, while Britain and France pursued a policy of nonintervention.

The nerveless vacillation of Britain and France at these events (as well as at the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935) confirmed Hitler's opinion of his enemies' spinelessness. Now supremely confident—and, curiously,

sensing his own mortality—Hitler purged his lieutenants of doubters and accelerated his war plans. In March 1938 German troops entered Austria, which was annexed to Germany. At Munich in September 1938—while Londoners dug trenches in Hyde Park and stacked sandbags in anticipation of air raids—Britain and France surrendered to Hitler the German-inhabited portion of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland.

Thus far, Hitler's foreign-policy triumphs had been achieved without war. Germans rejoiced—and worried.

Hitler's seizure of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 finally convinced Britain and France that war with Germany was inevitable. Belatedly, they guaranteed the security of Poland, now the target of new German threats. On August 24, 1939, Hitler astounded the world when his representative signed a nonaggression pact with his Bolshevik archenemy, the Soviet Union. This freed Hitler to attack Poland, which he did on September 1. It also secured his rear after Britain and France declared war on September 3.

Germany and the Soviet Union quickly divided Poland between them, each imposing a regime of barbaric repression in its conquered territory. The Soviet Union then occupied the Baltic states and attacked Finland. Hitler turned west. In April 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, bringing German arms to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. In May it struck at the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Britain soon withdrew its beaten troops from the continent to safety in their home islands. France capitulated in June. In September, Germany began an air assault on Britain in preparation for an invasion.

Under the leadership of its pugnacious prime minister, Winston Churchill, Britain held on alone, looking to the United States for eventual aid. In June 1941, Hitler, having abandoned plans to invade Britain, turned on the Soviet Union, initiating a titanic and genocidal war unparalleled in Western history. By the beginning of December, German armies had reached the Crimea in the south, were besieging Leningrad in the north, and threatened Moscow in the center. When Japan—a German ally since September 1940—attacked the United States on December 7, 1941, Hitler declared war also on December 11.

Hitler's fortunes seemed to be at their peak.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# The Peace Crusade

In 1933, World War I, which had ended only fifteen years before, still seared Americans' memory. That war had raged two and a half years before the United States entered it in April 1917. By the summer of 1918 the United States had 2 million soldiers on the Western Front. Nearly 50,000 were killed, 230,000 were wounded, 60,000 died of disease.

Mutilated survivors of the carnage still languished in military hospitals. Popular magazines were still full of articles and stories about the war. Some veterans recalled their service in France as a great adventure. But the 20,000 unemployed veterans and their families who "marched" on Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1932 to seek early payment of a promised bonus may have remembered the war differently. In July, the Bonus Marchers were dispersed by the U.S. army.

When war broke out in Europe in August 1914 between the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, and later Italy, Romania and Japan) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and later Turkey and Bulgaria), U.S. President Woodrow Wilson advised Americans to be neutral in thought as well as action. Most Americans willingly complied, believing that the war was a remote and incomprehensible conflict in which they had no stake. Wilson himself was profoundly pro-British, but he struggled to maintain a neutral course.

The British navy established a blockade of the North Sea, and Germany declared a war zone around the British Isles patrolled by submarines. Wilson, consistent with U.S. policy over the previous 150 years, asserted the rights of Americans, as neutrals under international law, to travel and conduct business in the war zones. Both the British and the Germans disregarded those rights. The British detained and seized American ships, but the Germans sank them.

The loss of American lives to German submarines began to move the American public from neutrality to sympathy with the Allies. Declaring the maintenance of America's neutral rights a "sacred duty," Wilson protested vigorously to both Britain and Germany, but his notes to Germany held that government to "strict accountability" if German submarine warfare continued. When the Germans, after a pause of nine months, resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, Wilson saw no alternative to war.

When, on April 2, 1917, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany, he did not present the war as a defense of American commerce. Rather, he presented it as a war against autocracy and militarism, as a war to make the world safe for democracy, as a war to end war. Americans went to war in a state of patriotic and idealistic fervor. The entry of the United States was unilateral and unconditional. The United States did not join Britain and France as an ally but as an associated power. No treaty with the Allies committed them to respect American war aims.

U.S. involvement in the war, although lasting only nineteen months, profoundly—if briefly—transformed American society. The executive branch of the federal government assumed unprecedented responsibilities: it coordinated industry and agriculture for war production, acquired and operated a merchant marine, ran the nation's railroads, conscripted 4 million men, and disseminated war propaganda on an immense scale.

Wartime patriotism had a dark side of zealotry, intolerance, and repression. Schools ceased to teach German; textbooks were examined for political correctness; teachers were required to take loyalty oaths. Universities fired dissident professors.

It became illegal, in time of war, to "utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Radical magazines were banned from the mails, foreign-language newspapers were censored. Socialist leaders were imprisoned for "disloyal" speeches. German-Americans, pacifists, radicals, and "slackers" were attacked by patriotic vigilantes. Self-appointed loyalty enforcers, with government encouragement, spied on their neighbors and denounced them to the authorities.

The war was immediately followed by the infamous Red Scare, when thousands of radicals were harassed and arrested (and more than 500 alien radicals deported) in violation of their constitutionally protected civil liberties. "When the war ended," wrote historian Harry Elmer Barnes, "the United States—the alleged apostle of freedom—was the most reactionary state in Christendom."<sup>2</sup>

In 1919, President Wilson went to the Paris Peace Conference clothed in the moral armor of the war leader who wanted nothing for his country but

a just and liberal peace. Masses of Europeans hailed him as a messiah. But his fellow negotiators in the “Big Four”—the prime ministers of Great Britain, France, and Italy—were unimpressed. They were determined to wreak vengeance on Germany and prevent it from ever again threatening to dominate Europe.

Wilson was forced to surrender some of the most important of his famous “Fourteen Points,” which had become the U.S. war aims and on the basis of which Germany had sought an armistice in 1918. One he managed to salvage was the charter (Wilson called it the covenant) of the League of Nations, which emerged as Article 1 of the Treaty of Versailles. Wilson recognized that the treaty was imperfect, but he believed that the League of Nations would in time be able to modify and revise it.

Members of the U.S. delegation to the Peace Conference and observers at home perceived the treaty as a disaster. In an address to the U.S. Senate on January 22, 1917, Wilson had proposed “a peace without victory,” “a peace among equals.” What he got was a peace of the victors imposed upon the vanquished.

The shock of disillusionment within the American delegation was profound. A dozen young members resigned in protest, one—William C. Bullitt, later U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union and France—declaring, “This isn’t a treaty of peace. I can see at least eleven wars in it.”<sup>3</sup>

Robert Lansing, U.S. secretary of state, felt compelled to resign his office when his criticism of the treaty became known. “The terms of peace,” he had written, “appear immeasurably harsh and humiliating. [The conditions that produced the war] have not been destroyed. They have been supplanted by other conditions equally productive of hatred, jealousy, and suspicion.”<sup>4</sup>

“No peace so wicked, so hypocritical, so contrary to every Allied pretense, can endure,” wrote journalist and publisher Oswald Garrison Villard in the *Nation*.<sup>5</sup> The war to end war, Socialist Norman Thomas later observed, had resulted in “a peace to end peace.”<sup>6</sup>

(Apologists for the treaty pointed to the brutal terms Germany had imposed upon Russia in March 1918 in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which stripped Russia of half its European territory. If the Allies had lost World War I, Germany planned to impose on them a peace no less severe than Versailles.)

Wilson returned to the United States to seek American ratification of the treaty, but the Senate would not accept the League of Nations without reservations. In particular, Article 10 of the covenant obligated each member of the League to come to the defense of another member as the League might direct. To the senators, this meant loss of U.S. sovereignty and endless entanglement in foreign quarrels. When Wilson stubbornly refused their reservations, the treaty was rejected.

In 1920, appealing to the American people over the heads of the Senate, Wilson declared that year’s presidential election “a solemn referendum”

on the League. Again he was rebuffed. The United States did not sign the Treaty of Versailles and did not join the League of Nations.

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By the summer of 1920, most Americans were heartily sick of wartime ideals and duties, of postwar high prices, unemployment, and labor strife. More than anything else they longed to forget the world's troubles and return to the halcyon life of prewar small-town America—fast becoming a golden age in the popular imagination. They considered U.S. involvement in World War I to have been a colossal mistake that had accomplished nothing. Europe was once again a cauldron of nationalism and militarism from which they were eager to distance themselves.

But already the new governments of Russia, Austria, and Germany had begun publishing documents from the archives of their predecessors relating to the origins of the war. Memoirs and autobiographies by statesmen who had participated in the crisis of 1914 also began to appear.

This material was a revelation to historians. Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles had indicted Germany as solely responsible for the war, but "revisionist" historians now argued that Germany, far from having been solely responsible for the war, had not even been principally responsible. Although all the Great Powers shared responsibility for the war, the revisionists now assigned the chief culpability variously to Austria-Hungary, Russia, and France.

The historians soon turned to investigate the causes of U.S. involvement. As early as 1924, revisionist Harry Elmer Barnes asserted: "We did not actually go into the World War to protect ourselves from imminent German invasion, or to make the world safe for democracy, but to protect our investments in Allied bonds, to insure a more extensive development of the manufacture of war materials and to make it possible to deliver our munitions to the Allied governments."<sup>7</sup>

In the next fifteen years, a number of books examined the background of U.S. entry into the war and confirmed Barnes's thesis. The most influential of these was *The Road to War* by Walter Millis, published in 1935 and widely distributed by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Although profoundly ignorant of European affairs and determined not to get involved in the European war, Millis argued, America's leaders had found true neutrality impossible to achieve. Numerous cultural affinities made the American people (with the exception of German and Irish minorities) pro-Ally in sentiment. American elites—in government, finance, business, and the press—were particularly so, due to their ancestry, educations, associations, and interests.

Thus the country was peculiarly susceptible to British propaganda, Millis continued. After the German cables had been cut at the start of the war, all news from Europe flowed through London, where dispatches

were intercepted, edited, and rewritten. American newspapers looked to the British press for interpretation and analysis of events. Celebrated English authors and scholars came to America to explain the Allied cause. American diplomats—all Anglophiles and amateurs—were easily manipulated by the sophisticated British. Their protests over British interference with American commerce were easily turned aside and U.S. peace initiatives frustrated.

No less important, Millis wrote, the British blockade funneled all American commerce with Europe through British ports. The exports of American war materials to the Allies—financed by American bankers—became hugely profitable. True neutrality would have required enforcing impartially America's rights as a neutral against both sides in the conflict or forgoing commerce with the belligerents altogether. Neither alternative was practicable. The United States in fact became a "silent partner" of the Allies, according to Millis. Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917 was the occasion but not the reason for U.S. intervention.

What lessons did Americans draw from Millis's book and those by other revisionist historians? That Americans were ill equipped to navigate the tortuous currents of European politics. That there was no moral difference between the wartime conduct of the Allies and that of Germany. That they had been drawn into the war by British propaganda and the interests of American financiers and munitions makers. That in war international law was too frail to constrain belligerents or protect neutrals. That absolute neutrality and isolation were the only means of avoiding involvement in another European war. The book, wrote Oswald Garrison Villard, "is an absolute justification of the pacifist position."<sup>8</sup>

In 1937, pollster George Gallup reported that, of those Americans who had an opinion on the subject, 70 percent believed that America's entry into World War I had been a mistake.

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World War I created in Americans a profound revulsion to war and a desperate desire for peace. In the postwar period, books about the war with titles like *The Insanity of War* and *The Horror of It* reinforced antiwar sentiment. War novels of the 1920s—notably John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1921), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)—were written in a spare and ugly realism that contrasted starkly with the inflated rhetoric of wartime.

These "were not only books written against the hatefulness and cruelty and filthiness of war," wrote poet Archibald MacLeish in 1940. "They were also books filled with passionate contempt for the statements of conviction, of purpose and of belief on which the war of 1914–18 was fought.

And they left behind them in many minds the conclusion that not only the war and the war issues but *all* issues, all moral issues, were false—were fraudulent—were intended to deceive.”<sup>9</sup>

In the 1930s, war novels, plays, and films became more overtly propagandistic. Their common theme was that all the once-sacred ideals—patriotism, honor, liberty, democracy—were empty abstractions. Only life was real, and nothing was worth dying for.

In 1936 the play *Bury the Dead* by twenty-three-year-old Irwin Shaw was a sensation on Broadway. In this play, set in “the second year of the war that is to begin tomorrow night,” six dead soldiers stand up in their newly dug grave and mutely refuse to be buried. Universal consternation ensues. Shaw presented the war as purposeless, supported only by generals, capitalists, and priests. In the end, the dead soldiers walk away, abandoning the war.

The novel *Johnny Got His Gun*, by Dalton Trumbo (a fellow traveler who joined the Communist Party in 1943), was written in 1938 (before the Nazi-Soviet Pact) although not published until September 1939, by which time World War II had begun. It describes the mental life of young Joe Bonham, a soldier horribly mutilated in World War I and thereafter confined in a military hospital.

Without arms or legs, blind and deaf, the lower half of his face blown away, Bonham breathes through a tube in his throat and is fed through a tube in his stomach. Conscious but unable to communicate, he exists in total darkness and silence with his memories. After a number of years, he conceives the possibility of communicating with his attendants by tapping out Morse code with his head. To his intense excitement, he succeeds, and his attendants reply by tapping on his forehead.

They ask: “What do you want?” He replies that he wants to be publicly exhibited: “I’m the man who made the world safe for democracy.” They refuse. “He was the future,” Joe Bonham reflects, “he was the perfect picture of the future and they were afraid to let anyone see what the future was like.”

American films reflected the nation’s antiwar sentiments. Some, like *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) and *The Lost Patrol* (1934), depicted incidents in World War I with gritty realism, devoid of patriotic sentimentality. Others, like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and the French *Grand Illusion* (1938), emphasized the common humanity of the combatants in that war. A number of films reflected the widespread dread of the next war. The British film *Things to Come* (1936) begins with the start of a war that utterly destroys Western civilization. In *Lost Horizon* (1937), a utopian Shangri-La, hidden in a high Tibetan valley, prepares to preserve the seeds of civilization in the coming apocalypse.

The most fearsome novelty of a new war would be aerial bombardment. The bombing of the small town of Guernica by German planes in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War struck the Western world as a

harbinger of the horrific future. The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso expressed his outrage in a famous painting titled simply *Guernica*. The picture inspired Archibald MacLeish's verse play *Air Raid*, broadcast nationwide by CBS on October 27, 1938. In this drama the vibrant humanity of a small town, whose inhabitants disbelieve the warnings of approaching bombers, is obliterated with mechanical precision.

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In March 1934, *Fortune*, a conservative business magazine published by Time Inc., printed an article titled "Arms and the Men" that examined Europe's highly secretive armaments makers—Krupp in Germany, Vickers-Armstrong in England, Schneider-Creusot in France, Skoda in Czechoslovakia.

"Killing is their business," declared the article in language uncharacteristic of the probusiness magazine. "Armaments are their stock in trade; governments are their customers; the ultimate consumers of their products are, historically, almost as often their compatriots as their enemies. That does not matter. The important point is that every time a burst shell fragment finds its way into the brain, the heart, or the intestines of a man in the front line, a great part of the \$25,000 [the estimated cost of killing one soldier in World War I], much of it profit, finds its way into the pocket of the armament maker."<sup>10</sup>

The *Fortune* article, which was a sensation at the time, was followed by other magazine exposés and several books, of which the most influential was *Merchants of Death* by H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen. A selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and widely read, this book provided a history of the armaments industry and its political influence. "[T]he arms maker," the authors summed up, "has risen and grown powerful, until today he is one of the most dangerous factors in world affairs—a hindrance to peace, a promoter of war."<sup>11</sup>

The "merchant of death" was not unknown in popular folklore. He had a real-life personification in Basil Zaharoff (1850–1936), Turkish-born "mystery man of Europe" who made a fortune representing Swedish and English armament makers. He ultimately became director and chairman of Vickers-Armstrong and was knighted for his contributions to the Allies in World War I.

The central character in George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara*, first performed in 1905, is the paradoxical Andrew Undershaft, partner in Undershaft and Lazarus, munitions makers.

"The government of your country!" Undershaft explodes to his conventionally minded son who is a member of Parliament. "I am the government of your country! I, and Lazarus. . . . You will make war when it suits us, and keep peace when it doesn't. You will find out that trade requires certain measures when we have decided on those measures.



When I want anything to keep my dividends up, you will discover that my want is a national need. When other people want something to keep my dividends down, you will call out the police and military. And in return you shall have the support and applause of my newspapers, and the delight of imagining that you are a great statesman."

In 1936, the Broadway success *Idiot's Delight*, by Robert E. Sherwood, dealt with a group of people trapped in an Italian border hotel as war breaks out. One of them is a mysterious arms dealer, who is rumored to have "promoted" the war. Another character says of him: "He is a master of the *real* League of Nations—the League of Schneider-Creusot, and Krupp, and Skoda, and Vickers, and Dupont. The League of Death!"

The malign influence of merchants of death—and their bankers—was an article of faith among peace advocates determined to prevent U.S. involvement in another foreign war. One of them, Dorothy Detzer, executive secretary of the American branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, persuaded Republican senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota to sponsor a committee to expose the munitions makers' machinations and to propose legislation to curb their influence on national policy. "[N]o Senate committee ever rendered to the American people a more intelligent or important service," Detzer believed.<sup>12</sup>

Based on public hearings between September 1934 and February 1936, the Nye committee's revelations regularly made headlines across the country. From witnesses' testimony and business and government documents, the committee learned that the munitions industry—companies like Du Pont, Electric Boat, Bethlehem Shipbuilding, Curtiss-Wright, Driggs Ordnance, and American Armaments, along with the Morgan bank—had made exorbitant profits during World War I. Since the war, the companies had energetically promoted arms races and armed all sides in Latin American wars and revolutions. Currently they were selling war materials to Japan and Nazi Germany.

In their internal communications, corporate executives celebrated the prospects of war and lamented the approach of peace. In Washington—where they enjoyed close relations with government officials and Army and Navy officers—they lobbied vigorously for military appropriations and against disarmament. They were also guilty of vices probably practiced by other industries—price gouging, bid rigging, influence peddling, and tax evasion.

Although the committee believed that economic interests had brought the United States into World War I, it found no evidence that the munitions makers actually instigated wars. Instead, it discovered the existence of a new phenomenon, a military-industrial complex spawned by the nation's defense requirements that embraced all the country's essential industries and on which millions of factory workers, farmers, miners, and merchants depended for their livelihoods. Nationalization of such a vast complex was impossible, and regulation was difficult. Taxation might take some



of the profits out of war, but the only way to control the military-industrial complex, the committee concluded, was to keep America out of war.

The one result of the munitions investigation was a series of five Neutrality Acts passed between 1935 and 1941, originally intended to end the policies that had permitted the United States to be drawn into World War I. Essentially, in the Neutrality Acts the United States abandoned its historic assertion of neutral rights. At the same time, in the name of neutrality, it refused to differentiate between aggressors and victims, both simply being labeled "belligerents."

Between 1935 and 1937, three Neutrality Acts authorized the president, upon finding that a state of war existed, to declare an embargo on shipments of arms (and later of strategic materials) to belligerents. Loans and credits to belligerents were prohibited; nonembargoed goods had to be sold on a "cash-and-carry" basis. American citizens were first denied U.S. protection if they traveled on belligerents' ships, then prohibited altogether from doing so. The arming of American merchant ships was forbidden.

"The virtue of our Neutrality Act," explained Democratic senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah in 1937, "rests in the fact that we condemn war; that we put restraint upon ourselves by proclaiming to the world that we will stress our duties as neutral, rather than demand our rights. The Neutrality Act is self-imposed to keep us from taking steps which might cause us to become involved [in a war]." <sup>13</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the first three Neutrality Acts grew steadily. The inability to differentiate between aggressors and victims often worked in favor of aggressors—Italy in Ethiopia, Japan in China, the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, with the start of World War II in September 1939, public opinion became increasingly sympathetic to Britain and France.

The Neutrality Act of 1939 repealed the arms embargo, permitting belligerents—as a practical matter, Britain and France—to buy war material in the United States if they paid in cash and transported the material in their own ships. The 1941 act authorized the arming of American merchant vessels and permitted them to sail to belligerents' ports.

It was 1917 again.

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Instrumental in establishing the Senate munitions investigation and passing the Neutrality Acts was the American peace movement. That movement began with the founding of the American Peace Society in 1828. Peace was then only one of many causes—women's rights, temperance, abolition, prison reform, education—embraced by reformers in the first half of the nineteenth century. The peace advocates, many of them women and clergymen, had little influence.

World War I was highly traumatic for the old peace organizations. Their faith in inevitable progress toward a rational and peaceful world was destroyed. During the war, many peace advocates abandoned their pacifist principles and supported the American war effort in the belief that Allied victory over German militarism would ensure permanent peace. Others busied themselves with peace planning and resistance to the wartime curtailment of civil liberties. Relatively few actively opposed the war as peace propagandists and conscientious objectors. Those who did suffered public opprobrium, mob violence, and imprisonment.

After the war, the peace movement revived and flourished. New peace organizations proliferated, engaging variously in lobbying, public education, and peace propaganda, staging public demonstrations and peace rallies, circulating antiwar petitions and publishing antiwar manifestos.

Peace advocates supported the League of Nations and the World Court, the Washington Conference (1921–22) that limited naval armament, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact that outlawed war, and the World Disarmament Conference (1932–34) in Geneva. They advocated removal of trade barriers, disarmament, and international arbitration, and they opposed such manifestations of militarism as defense spending and the establishment of the Reserve Officer Training Corps on college campuses.

During the 1920s the churches played a leading role in the peace movement. In the Protestant churches, peace competed with Prohibition and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy for priority among ministerial concerns. Perhaps to atone for the ministers' complicity in the patriotic hysteria occasioned by World War I, denominational bodies at all levels regularly passed resolutions condemning war and supporting cooperation with the League of Nations, membership in the World Court, and adherence to the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Almost unanimously, they opposed any taint of militarism in schools and colleges, favored disarmament, and opposed military spending.

In 1930, a poll of 19,372 Protestant clergymen found that 62 percent believed that their churches should refuse to sanction or support any future war. (Catholic clergy were not polled, perhaps because their church's teaching on war and civic obligation precluded any variety of opinion among them.)

In the early 1930s, with the onset of worldwide depression, the rise of fascism in Europe, and Japanese aggression in the Far East, the peace movement began to falter and fracture. By the middle of the decade, some peace advocates had despaired of preventing another European war and began to devote their energies to keeping the United States out of it. Among the churches, the internationalism of the 1920s gave way to isolationism. In 1934, with the failure of the Geneva Disarmament Conference apparent, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote: "There is very little that can be done to stop an international war. . . . [T]he main program of peace forces must now be to stiffen the opposition of all classes to *our* participation in the next war."<sup>14</sup>

With civil war in Spain and a presidential election approaching, President Roosevelt in 1936 warmly embraced the peace movement. On August 14, 1936, at Chautauqua, New York, the president declared that the United States could “best serve the cause of a peaceful humanity by setting an example” as the good neighbor, “the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors. . . . We are not isolationists except in so far as we seek to isolate ourselves completely from war.

“I have seen war,” continued the president, who as assistant secretary of the Navy had toured the Western Front in 1918. “I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs. I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed. I have seen two hundred limping, exhausted men come out of the line—the survivors of a regiment of one thousand that went forward forty-eight hours before. I have seen children starving. I have seen the agony of mothers and wives. I hate war. . . .

“If we [again] face the choice of profits or peace, the Nation will answer—must answer—‘We choose peace.’ It is the duty of all of us to encourage such a body of public opinion in this country that the answer will be clear and for all practical purposes unanimous.”<sup>15</sup>

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There were then hundreds of organizations, both secular and religious, devoted wholly or in part to peace advocacy. Each had its particular constituency, vision, mission, and program. Late in the decade, the National Peace Conference, an umbrella group, listed forty mainstream peace organizations on its letterhead.

The peace movement had left and right wings, pacifists and internationalists. American pacifism derived principally from religious roots, including the historic peace churches—Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers—which, in keeping with the Sermon on the Mount, opposed violence, coercion, and even resistance to aggression. Secular pacifists were formed by ethical considerations or by rational calculation of the costs and consequences of war. In the 1930s, secular pacifists were much impressed by the nonviolent campaign waged by Indian nationalist Mohandas K. Gandhi against the British. Internationalists hoped that war could be prevented by international organization and collective action to deter or punish aggressors. Convinced of the efficacy of collective security, they were loath to think—much less talk—about war.

Leading pacifist organizations included the National Council for Prevention of War, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Leading internationalist organizations included the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Foreign Policy Association, the League of Nations Association, the

World Peace Foundation, and the Catholic Association for International Peace.

There were different kinds and degrees of pacifism. Religious pacifists opposed war as inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. "If I can't love Hitler," declared A. J. Muste, executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, "I can't love at all."<sup>16</sup> Secular pacifists opposed war as primitive, irrational, and futile. "[E]vil comes with every war," wrote Oswald Garrison Villard. "Militarism breeds militarism, and mass murder entails more mass murder."<sup>17</sup> Absolute pacifists believed in nonresistance as well as nonviolence. "[I]t is morally preferable for the innocent to die at the hands of the guilty," wrote Kirby Page, editor of the *World Tomorrow*, "than to save their own lives by slaying the offender."<sup>18</sup> Liberal pacifists could accept nonviolent resistance (and even nonviolent coercion) in a just cause. "The best *pacifists*," wrote Socialist Norman Thomas, "are not *passivists*."<sup>19</sup>

Believing that capitalism was the source of war, many pacifists were Socialists. They sought to remove the causes of war by social action, both at home and abroad. For a time, they were thus almost indistinguishable from internationalists. In the 1920s, they supported international treaties and organizations that promised to end war. In the 1930s, some advocated collective security—as long as it employed noncoercive or nonviolent sanctions to achieve its ends. However, as the situations in Europe and Asia deteriorated, pacifists increasingly turned to isolationism.

After Munich, Oswald Garrison Villard rejected collective security in disgust and became an isolationist. He condemned Britain and France for surrendering to Hitler without availing "themselves of far more deadly weapons than guns and airplanes and warships—the boycott and non-intercourse." Bitterly, he declared, "I hope no one will ever speak to me again about collective security, with ourselves lined up with England and France."<sup>20</sup>

The internationalist wing of the peace movement was socially conservative and elitist, often with close connections to government policy makers. Its members thought of themselves as Wilsonians, heirs to Woodrow Wilson's vision of the United States playing a leading role in world affairs. Some of them—notably Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt—had held high positions in the Wilson administration. In the 1930s, the internationalists gained influence when many of them found positions in the Roosevelt administration. For them, the key to peace was collective security.

Pacifist Frederick J. Libby, executive secretary of the National Council for the Prevention of War, and internationalist Clark Eichelberger, national director of the League of Nations Association, were among the leaders of their respective wings of the peace movement. In May 1938, they debated the question "How Can the United States Serve Peace?" in the columns of the *Christian Science Monitor*.

"Collective security is . . . a myth . . .," wrote pacifist Libby. "An enduring peace must have a more substantial foundation than war or the threat of war. Evil cannot be overcome by evil." His prescription for peace involved the removal of trade barriers, voluntary, noncoercive cooperation among nations, and disarmament. "Hate and fear must give way to cooperation and trust. We shall find that the nations we have been fighting are surprisingly like ourselves."<sup>21</sup>

"The division [in the world] is not being forced by those who wish peace," internationalist Eichelberger responded, "but by those who make war. . . . The nations that wish peace control so overwhelmingly the gold, the iron, the oil, and other basic raw materials that these nations, through economic means, could prevent aggression in any part of the world with minimum amount of risk. Even though the risks were great, they would be incomparably less than the risk entailed by a policy of isolation and drift."<sup>22</sup>

Cooperation between the left and right wings of the peace movement proved difficult. After Congress in 1935 rejected the administration's proposal that the United States join the Permanent Court of International Justice (the World Court), the peace organizations formed a united front to conduct an intensive and comprehensive Emergency Peace Campaign to keep America out of war. The campaign, which lasted from 1936 to 1938, massively employed every technique of propaganda. It succeeded in establishing peace committees in 2,000 cities and on 500 college campuses. But the internationalists felt that the Emergency Peace Campaign had only strengthened isolationism in the country. At the campaign's conclusion, the two wings separated irreparably.

In the late 1930s, the division between pacifists and internationalists centered on two legislative initiatives involving presidential power: the Neutrality Acts and the Ludlow Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Believing that Woodrow Wilson had taken the nation into World War I against the wishes of the majority of the people, the pacifists resolved that Franklin Roosevelt should not be able to do the same. Thus they supported mandatory neutrality legislation that would give the president little or no administrative flexibility. They also supported the Ludlow Amendment, which would have transferred the war-making powers from president and Congress to the people through a national referendum. Arguing that both measures would leave the nation impotent in international affairs, the internationalists prevailed. By 1940, the pacifists were collaborating uneasily with the isolationist but nonpacifist America First Committee.

Pacifists and internationalists were small minorities in the U.S. population. The overwhelming majority of Americans were antiwar not on principle but through emotional revulsion. Their attitude toward the rest of the world moved from indifference in the early 1930s to isolationism after 1935.

Of the innumerable youth organizations that could be counted in the peace movement in the 1930s, two in particular reflected the conflict between pacifists and internationalists. Both organizations were leftist and antiwar; both were coalitions of isolationist liberals and internationalist radicals. The liberals provided the numbers; the radicals provided the leadership. In the crisis occasioned by the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, liberals and radicals reversed orientations. In obedience to Moscow, the radicals became isolationists, while the liberals moved toward internationalism. In the process, both organizations were destroyed.

During the 1920s, U.S. college students—typically from affluent middle-class backgrounds—had been notably apolitical, absorbed in campus social life and athletics. The depression awakened them to unpleasant realities. Many young people could no longer afford to go to college; some who had enrolled were forced to drop out or work at menial jobs to finance their educations; graduates faced a high probability of unemployment. Now politically conscious, many undergraduates were drawn to a new and vigorous national student movement.

A small student organization called the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID), founded by Socialists as early as 1905, was devoted to the study of social issues from a progressive point of view. In 1931, leftist working-class students—sons and daughters of immigrants—at New York City's tuition-free municipal colleges organized a National Student League (NSL). From the start, this organization was dominated by Communists and their sympathizers.

Unlike the studious SLID, the activist NSL sought to radicalize and mobilize students to become politically active in a host of campus and societal causes—most notably peace. Male college students in the 1930s feared, with reason, that they would be cannon fodder in a new war. The antiwar sentiments of the Communists, however, were dictated by Moscow, which believed that capitalist countries were plotting an attack on the Soviet Union. In any case, the activity of the NSL revitalized the SLID as both a rival and a partner in the student movement.

Numerous polls in the early 1930s found that large majorities of college students would refuse to fight in any foreign war, while only slim majorities would fight if the United States were invaded. The student peace movement was energized in February 1933 when the Oxford Union, a debating society at Oxford University in England, voted 275 to 153 that "this house will in no circumstances fight for its king and country." The resolution, which became known as the Oxford Pledge, scandalized many Britons, but it was shortly reaffirmed by an even larger vote. In an American version of the Oxford Pledge, antiwar American students vowed "not to support the government of the United States in any war it might conduct."

In 1934, the Communist NSL and Socialist SLID cooperated to organize a National Student Strike Against War, conceived as a "dress rehearsal"



for mass resistance to military conscription in any future war. On April 13, 1934, an estimated 25,000 college students across the country left their classes for an hour to demonstrate for peace and take the Oxford Pledge. "Nation's Students 'Strike' for Hour in Protest on War," the *New York Times* headlined on its front page. The strike's sponsors claimed 15,000 participants in New York City at City, Hunter, and Brooklyn colleges and at Columbia and New York universities. Other strikes were reported at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Vassar, Syracuse, and Chicago. "Disorders occurred at Harvard and Johns Hopkins when right-wing students clashed with the demonstrators," the *Times* reported.<sup>23</sup>

A second student strike, for which the NSL and SLID enlisted a number of nonradical student groups as cosponsors, was held in April 1935. Across the nation, some 175,000 antiwar students participated. Despite—or perhaps because of—the opposition of college and university authorities, who tried to prevent or disrupt the demonstrations and who suspended or expelled their radical leaders (besides giving their names to the Federal Bureau of Investigation), the annual student strikes against war spread and grew. They peaked in 1937, when the sponsors—no longer including the NSL and SLID—claimed as many as a million strikers. In both 1938 and 1939 strikers were estimated to number half a million. The last strikes, in 1940 and 1941, were small and scattered. Nevertheless, such student antiwar demonstrations were unequalled until the demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

In 1935, with the intention of creating a single mass student organization, progressive and antifascist, the NSL and SLID (whose combined membership totaled only 5,000) merged, dissolving their separate organizations to form the American Student Union (ASU). The new organization's founding convention, held in Columbus, Ohio, during the 1935 Christmas holidays, attracted some 400 students, of whom more than a third were affiliated with neither the NSL and SLID. The convention elected a slate of officers consisting entirely of members of the NSL and SLID, passed a number of liberal resolutions, and adopted the Oxford Pledge.

Better organized and more disciplined than their Socialist comrades, the Communists soon dominated the ASU. When Moscow jettisoned its former peace policy and proclaimed a Popular Front of Communists, Socialists, and bourgeois liberals against fascism, the Communists in the ASU performed as instructed. At its 1937 convention, the ASU abandoned the Oxford Pledge and endorsed collective security. At the same time, in deference to its former pacifism, it opposed military spending and mandatory ROTC. The Communist victory was achieved at the cost of alienating Socialist and liberal students, who were increasingly isolationist.

Claiming some 20,000 members among high school, college, and graduate students in 1938, the ASU was struck a mortal blow by the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939. At its December 1939 convention in Madison,

Wisconsin, the ASU endorsed the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet invasion of Finland, and U.S. isolation. Now perceived as a Communist front, the ASU rapidly dissolved.

While the ASU was a membership organization, the American Youth Congress (AYC), founded in 1934, was a federation of youth groups of every sort, including students (the ASU was affiliated with the AYC). From the start, the AYC was distinctly leftist, supporting the New Deal but lobbying for ever larger programs for the young, especially unemployed and underemployed youths. Its peace policy was internationalist and antifascist.

The AYC was fortunate in 1936 to be virtually adopted by Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife. Mrs. Roosevelt was impressed by the energy and idealism of the AYC leaders and believed that they shared the domestic goals of the New Deal. Fond of young people, she took the AYC leaders under her wing, entertaining them at the White House, speaking at their meetings, and getting them access to government officials.

But unknown to Mrs. Roosevelt, Communists had thoroughly infiltrated the AYC's leadership until by 1939 they controlled the organization. Their support for the New Deal had been a tactic of the Popular Front, which ended with the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Overnight, the AYC peace policy switched from collective security to isolationism. It condemned the European war as imperialist and opposed military spending, conscription, and aid to Finland.

In the fall of 1939 the House Un-American Activities Committee subpoenaed the AYC leaders to testify. After eliciting their solemn disavowals of any Communist connections, Mrs. Roosevelt counseled them on their appearance before the committee, attended its sessions in silent support, and invited the AYC leaders to stay at the White House. She also persuaded the president to address AYC members at a meeting held in Washington in February 1940.

The president did not share his wife's fondness for the AYC. He believed that their lobbying for larger youth programs was irresponsible, and he understood their shift from collective security to isolationism. On February 10, 1940—by which time the Soviet Union had shared in the partition of Poland, had occupied the Baltic states, and had attacked Finland—the president addressed the AYC members from the south portico of the White House. Four thousand AYC members stood on the White House lawn in a drenching rain while the president bluntly defended his foreign policy, dismissed the AYC's views on the "imperialist war" as "unadulterated twaddle," and roundly condemned the Soviet Union as "a dictatorship as absolute as any other dictatorship in the world."<sup>24</sup> "The assemblage . . . was almost entirely silent," the *New York Times* reported, "but in the distance a few faint boos were audible."<sup>25</sup>



Mrs. Roosevelt was "indignant at their bad manners and lack of respect for the office of the President,"<sup>26</sup> but she spoke to the AYC members the next day at great length and with much patience. When she defended Finland there were sounds of protest from the audience, at which she asked them "not to hiss or boo until I have finished; then you may do whichever you wish."<sup>27</sup> At her departure, she received an ovation.

At its annual convention in July 1940, the AYC rejected a resolution that specifically named the Soviet Union among other dictatorships (it accepted a resolution opposing "all forms of dictatorship, regardless of whether they be Communist, Fascist, Nazi, or any other type") and condemned conscription and "the un-American regimentation of American youth into labor camps,"<sup>28</sup> a reference to the Civilian Conservation Corps, perhaps the New Deal's most popular program.

Mrs. Roosevelt's patience with the AYC was exhausted. Realizing that she had been deceived by her protégés, she ended her association with them. Like the ASU, the AYC was now recognized as a Communist front, and it quickly disappeared.

When the U.S. Congress passed a conscription act in September 1940, there was little protest on American campuses.

The student peace movement had a light side. In 1936, a group of Princeton students formed the parodistic Veterans of Future Wars and demanded immediate bonuses of \$1,000 for all men aged eighteen to thirty-six so they could enjoy "the full benefit of their country's gratitude" while they were still alive. The prank spread rapidly—and briefly—to hundreds of campuses, spawning variations such as the Future Gold Star Mothers, who wanted government-paid trips to Europe so they could visit the graves of their unborn sons.

Congressmen and veterans organizations were not amused.

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The American peace movement reached its zenith in the interwar years. It did not create the nation's deep antiwar sentiment, but it flourished on it. Yet in the end the peace movement was a failure—not a noble failure but a pathetic one because of the peace advocates' fundamental incomprehension of the world they were trying to save.

The antiwar forces drew "lessons" from World War I that were not applicable to the 1930s. Then the instigator of war was not capitalism—the merchants of death—but aggressive fascism. Naive and doctrinaire, the pacifists could not understand the complex of historical, political, economic, ideological, and even psychological factors that caused governments to pursue aggression. For a while, they exerted significant influence on public opinion and Congress, but only by adding their numbers to the nation's isolationist majority.

At the same time, the internationalists deceived themselves about the possibility of collective action and the effectiveness of sanctions. Sanctions, in fact, were acts of war and had to be backed by a credible threat of force. In the 1930s, neither the will nor the means for vigorous collective action existed in Europe or the United States.

By the start of World War II in Europe, the pacifists had become isolationists, while the internationalists were becoming interventionists.

## CHAPTER 3

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# Friendless in America

In 1937 the Jewish population of the United States was estimated (the Census Bureau does not count people by religious affiliation) at 4.77 million, or 3.7 percent (the historic peak) of the country's total population. The Jews were overwhelmingly urban. Almost half lived in New York City, where they constituted a third of the city's population. There were large Jewish communities also in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. Eighty percent of American Jews were then of eastern European origin. Half were immigrants. Because of their immigrant status, discrimination, and the depression, most were poor.

The first Jews to settle in America, descendants of Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492, arrived at New Amsterdam in 1654. By 1750 there were "Hebrew" congregations in New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Charleston. In 1790, the U.S. Jewish population was about 2,000.

Jews were among the flood of Germans who immigrated in the middle of the nineteenth century. Besides the Northeast, many settled in the South and West, where they often became peddlers before achieving the status of merchants. They rapidly acculturated and entered the middle class. Cincinnati and San Francisco became flourishing Jewish centers. Affluent German Jews, however, were not accepted by Protestant society, which often disdained them as newcomers and non-Christian. By 1880, there were 250,000 Jews in the United States, predominantly of German origin.

Between 1891 and 1920, the "new immigration" largely from southern and eastern Europe—in contrast to the "old immigration" from western and northern Europe—brought 18.2 million newcomers, including many Jews from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Poor and uncouth,

the eastern European Jews were an embarrassment to the highly acculturated German Jews. Their language, Yiddish, grated on gentile ears—historian Henry Adams, grandson and great-grandson of presidents, described “a furtive Yacoob or Yssac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish.”<sup>1</sup> But they were young and often skilled workers. Crowded into the tenements of great cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, they often worked under sweatshop conditions in the clothing and tobacco industries.

With the assistance of affluent German Jews, the newcomers zealously pursued education, economic advancement, and Americanization. Their rapid upward mobility—as small garment manufacturers, storekeepers, school teachers, social workers, civil servants, accountants, lawyers, and doctors—was viewed unfavorably by the Protestant establishment, which considered them aggressive and pushy. It derided newly affluent Jews as vulgar and ostentatious.

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A genteel anti-Semitism pervaded the Protestant middle and upper classes, where ugly stereotypes and derogatory comments about Jews were nearly universal. Gentiles did not have Jewish friends, neighbors, or business associates. Prestigious colleges imposed quotas on Jewish students, and Jewish faculty members were rare. Desirable residential neighborhoods, hotels, resorts, and country clubs were “restricted.” Major corporations, insurance companies, banks, and law firms refused to hire Jews.

In the ethnic stew of city slums, where new arrivals jostled for housing and jobs, anti-Semitism was far from genteel. The new immigrants, largely Catholic, brought with them the ancient religious and ethnic hatreds that had embroiled Europe for centuries. They hated each other, of course, but they hated Jews with a special venom. Jews were Christ-killers, rejected by God and thus deserving of everlasting punishment. The new immigrants preserved Old World superstitions about Jewish religious practices (including ritual murder), accused Jews of dishonesty and sharp practices, and believed that they were conspiring to dominate business, finance, government, the world.

In rural and small-town America—where cities were objects of distrust—Jews, while rarely encountered, were nevertheless often feared and hated. The Ku Klux Klan coupled them with Negroes and Catholics as targets of its hostility. An old populist tradition equated Jews with the Eastern bankers who seemed to control rural lives. Fundamentalist Protestants masked their anti-Semitism behind their religious obligation to convert the Jews for their own good.

Representative of the provincial mind in many respects was automaker Henry Ford. Born in a small Michigan town and poorly educated, Ford

was nevertheless highly opinionated. “[T]he modern City,” he wrote in 1919, “concentrates within its limits the essence of all that is wrong, artificial, wayward and unjust in our social life.”<sup>2</sup> In 1918 he bought a weekly newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, which he proposed to make into an international organ for propagating his populist and often eccentric opinions. In 1926, the *Independent* claimed a circulation of 900,000.

Among Ford’s views was an obsessive anti-Semitism that may have been intensified in the climate of fear and zealotry engendered by World War I. From the start, Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* expressed hostility to “the Jew.” Most notably, between May 1920 and January 1922 the *Independent* published a series of ninety-one articles entitled “The International Jew.” These were based in part on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a recently resurrected fabrication by the czarist secret police that professed to expose the existence of a secret Jewish government plotting to destroy Christian civilization. The *Independent* articles traced every political, economic, social, and cultural phenomenon of the period that the paper deemed subversive to the malevolence of Jews. In 1927, bowing to legal and economic pressure, Ford issued a retraction and apology—while disclaiming personal responsibility—for the anti-Semitic articles and closed the *Dearborn Independent*.

But the “International Jew” articles had by then been separately published in four paperback volumes. These books—together with the *Protocols*—circulated widely in America and (in multiple translations) in Europe. In Germany they were highly valued by the Nazis. Hitler himself in *Mein Kampf* praised Ford as the “single great man” who “still maintains full independence” from Jewish financial power.<sup>3</sup> *The International Jew* and the *Protocols* contributed to the heightened American anti-Semitism of the 1930s, and they continue to circulate in the anti-Semitic subculture to this day.

Ford himself remained (although less publicly) a venomous anti-Semite, and his close associates in the Ford Motor Company continued to support anti-Semitic movements in America.

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The “new immigration” of hordes of unappealing and presumably unassimilable southern and eastern Europeans alarmed the Protestant establishment. In the early decades of the twentieth century, pseudoscientific racial theories—the same theories that infected the young Adolf Hitler in Vienna—provided a veneer of respectability to attitudes that at heart were based on prejudice and privilege. Americans were warned that the newcomers from southern and eastern Europe were racially inferior to the “Nordic” immigrants from western and northern Europe, that their great numbers could not be absorbed, and that they therefore posed a threat to American ideals, institutions, and living standards.

This racism seemed to acquire weighty validation when the embryonic science of mental testing was applied to 1.75 million American draftees during World War I. The results were shocking: the average mental age of white American adults was found to be 13.08 years (a mental age of eight to twelve defined a moron); among European immigrants, Nordics scored higher than Russians (average mental age 11.34), Italians (11.01), and Poles (10.74); Negroes scored at the bottom of the scale (10.41). Most of the Russians and Poles were Jews.

Fear of being overwhelmed by the tide of inferior races resulted in the passage of the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924. These for the first time limited the total number of immigrants that could be admitted in any one year. At the same time, by a complicated formula of "national-origin quotas," they decisively favored immigrants from northern and western Europe over those from southern and eastern Europe.

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In times of crisis such as depression or war, the heterogeneous American social fabric is sorely strained. Fissures among social classes, religious communities, and ethnic groups that pass unnoticed in tranquil times suddenly widen. Such was the case during World War I and again in the 1930s, when the intractable depression and the approach of war agitated the American people. One consequence was the rise of anti-Semitism to unprecedented heights.

The genteel anti-Semitism of the upper classes may have given sanction to the more vociferous expressions of ordinary people. Moreover, the rancorous anti-Semitic propaganda emanating from Germany may have dissolved some lingering taboos in public discourse. In any case, anti-Semitic organizations proliferated. Ugly stereotypes and dark suspicions of Jews were widely voiced in public, in the press, in pamphlets and leaflets, to a degree previously unknown in American history. The prominence of a number of Jews in the "socialistic" Roosevelt administration earned it the name "Jew Deal." Roosevelt himself was alleged to have Jewish ancestry. Some Jewish émigrés from Germany felt that anti-Semitism was far worse in America than it had been in pre-Hitler Germany.

"America has no right to criticize us," Hitler told a group of Berlin correspondents in 1933. "She is just like Germany. In her immigration laws, in her social restrictions and economic discrimination she, too, persecutes the Jews."<sup>4</sup> In a later interview with an American, he added: "What we are doing to the Jews is just what you would like to do in the United States."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most damaging allegation against the Jews was that many of them were Communists—a paradox for a money-minded race. Most Americans were fervently anticommunist, in large part because communism was fundamentally atheistic. This profoundly offended

American Christians, but none more than Catholics, for whom the Soviet Union was literally the Antichrist. Nazi propaganda depicted the Russian Revolution as a Jewish plot, the Soviet Union as ruled by Jews, and Nazi Germany as the West's essential bulwark against the spread of communism. Many Catholics found this view of the world situation persuasive.

The most prominent Catholic spokesman for this view—and its corollary, anti-Semitism—was Charles E. Coughlin. The parish priest of Royal Oak, Michigan, a blue-collar suburb of Detroit, Coughlin began broadcasting pastoral sermons in 1927. With the onset of the depression, he turned to political issues, preaching the “Christian capitalism” advocated by Pope Leo XIII. He blamed the depression on “predatory capitalists” and “international bankers”—universally recognized code words for “Jews.” His Sunday afternoon radio sermons were heard by as many as 30 million people. “Father Coughlin,” *Fortune* magazine observed in 1934, “is just about the biggest thing that ever happened to radio.”<sup>6</sup>

Coughlin's anti-Semitism became more overt after 1936, perhaps most memorably in a radio sermon on November 20, 1938, ten days after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in Germany. Coughlin began by joining in the universal condemnation of the German pogrom. But he quickly asked: “Why is there persecution in Germany today?” With elaborate disingenuousness, he answered his own question: “It is the belief, be it well or ill founded, of the present German government, not mine, that Jews—not as religionists but as nationals only—were responsible for the economic and social ills suffered by the Fatherland since the signing of the Versailles Treaty.”

After 1923, Coughlin went on, communism began to make “substantial advances throughout Germany. . . . Naziism was conceived as a political defense mechanism against Communism. . . . And Communism itself was regarded by the rising generation of Germans as a product not of Russia, but of a group of Jews who dominated the destinies of Russia.”

Indeed, Coughlin declared, twenty-four of the twenty-five leaders of the Russian Revolution in 1917 were Jews. Helpfully, he read their names, which were “published by the Nazis and distributed throughout Germany.” Moreover, in 1935, of the fifty-nine members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, fifty-six were Jews and the remaining three were married to “Jewesses.” And he read these names, also “published by the Nazis.”

Coughlin belittled the suffering of the Jews in Germany compared to the sufferings of Christians in the Soviet Union, Mexico, and Spain about which the press had been suspiciously silent. “Why, then,” he asked, “was there this silence on the radio and in the press? Ask the gentlemen who control the three national radio chains; ask those who dominate the destinies of the financially inspired press—surely these Jewish gentlemen and others must have been ignorant of the facts. . . .”



"By all means," Coughlin concluded, "let us have courage to compound our sympathy not only from the tears of Jews but also from the blood of Christians—600,000 Jews whom no government official in Germany has yet sentenced to death"—a chilling portent!—"and 25 million Christians, at least, whose lives have been snuffed out, whose property has been confiscated in its entirety and whose altars and Christ have been desecrated since 1917 without official protest from America. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

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American Jews were not entirely friendless. At the start of the Nazi persecutions in Germany, the American press was almost unanimous in condemnation. Organizations of every sort—legislative, ecclesiastic, academic, professional, literary, labor, and others—passed resolutions expressing shock and dismay. Across the nation, mass meetings—some convened by interdenominational committees, others of non-Jewish sponsorship—registered outrage. Hitler, the *Christian Century* observed in September 1933, "has produced for [the Jews] . . . a degree of sympathy that they have not enjoyed since the fall of Jerusalem."<sup>8</sup>

Expressions of friendship, however, were often curiously ambivalent. Some articles, particularly in religious journals and diocesan newspapers, pointed out that Jews were at least partly responsible for their troubles. Helpfully, they advised Jews to change their obnoxious behavior and convert to Christianity.

In February 1936, *Fortune* published a sympathetic article titled "Jews in America." It debunked the myth of Jewish power in business and finance, assuaged anxiety about increasing Jewish numbers, and dismissed organized anti-Semitism as a "feeble" German import.

But *Fortune* could not help noting that one of the causes of American anti-Semitism was "the apprehensiveness of the Jews themselves." The well-disposed gentile, the magazine complained, "will . . . be troubled to find his American Jewish neighbor taking offense where no offense is intended. He will be troubled by the uneasy reticence, the circumlocutions, the sense of strain. He will be troubled by the fact that certain Jews carry their race like an Irishman's shillelagh while others resent, as though it were a deliberate insult, any reference to their blood, avoiding friends who speak of it, boycotting publications which publish it in print."<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, the small-circulation, general-interest monthly magazines—*Harper's*, *Atlantic*, *Scribner's*, *Forum*, *American Mercury*—wrestled with the "Jewish problem." More than two dozen articles, written by both Jews and non-Jews—with titles such as "My Friend the Jew," "I Married a Jew," "What the Jews Have Taught Me"—were largely favorable to the Jews, with some caveats. "Jewish racial material when of good quality is one of the most precious ingredients that was ever cast into

humanity," wrote the editor of *Harper's*. "Of the common run of nominal Jews things much less flattering might be said."<sup>10</sup>

There were several exceptions. A contributor to *Forum* in June 1933 undertook to explain, with apparent agreement, "Why Germany Hates the Jews." Jews were an ancient race, he pointed out, and "one of the most prominent characteristics of racial maturity is money-mindedness." By contrast to the Jews, Germans were a relatively young race. "The spirit of the money-lender, of high finance, and of big business is still essentially foreign to them. . . . By 'Jew' [the German] means not so much a race as an idea, the idea of capitalism, materialism, and money-mindedness."<sup>11</sup>

In the *Atlantic* in June and July 1941, literary and social critic Albert Jay Nock, writing on "The Jewish Problem in America"—a problem now of "the utmost gravity," the editor declared in his introduction—professed friendly feelings for the Jews. But dismayed by the amount of latent anti-Semitism he detected in America, he predicted dire consequences for the Jews—comparable to the Nazis' Nuremberg Laws—at the "economic reckoning" that would inevitably follow the New Deal.

For Nock, the Jewish problem was racial: Jews were Orientals living in an Occidental society. The Oriental and Occidental minds were mutually incomprehensible. "[I]n each," he wrote, "there were great areas of consciousness which the other could not possibly enter upon, let alone explore."<sup>12</sup>

The leading mass-circulation, general-interest weekly magazines—the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*—did not concern themselves with the Jewish problem until 1938, after Munich and *Kristallnacht*. Then they, too, were exceedingly friendly to the Jews.

*Collier's* enlisted the eminent anthropologist (and eugenicist) Earnest Albert Hooton to address the problem from a scientific point of view. "[T]he purgative force of natural and social selection," wrote Hooton, "has been exerted continuously and with increasing severity upon the Jewish people, while it has been abated and nullified in large measure among our own non-Jewish stocks. . . .

"[The Jews'] involuntarily eugenic regime has been partly responsible for the astounding frequency with which they produce men of genius. . . . If we could get all of the Jews in this country and Europe to outmarry, it would leaven the lump of Gentile stupidity. There is enough ability concentrated in the few millions of Jews to raise the general average considerably if it were disseminated by intermixture."<sup>13</sup>

The *Christian Century* rejected the liberal embrace of the Jews. Its editor, Charles Clayton Morrison, believed that America was a Christian country in which non-Christians could expect only limited toleration. Tolerance, Morrison wrote in a 1936 editorial, "is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of social solidarity."

"American society," Morrison continued, "is an *organism*, and as such all its vital forces tend toward solidarity, unity, integration.

Any unassimilated element of the population is bound to have trouble, because it is bound to make trouble. . . .

"[T]wo religions can be tolerant of each other only on one of two pre-suppositions: that one will ultimately give way to the other, or that they will interpenetrate each other to their mutual enrichment. . . ." It was an illusion, he argued, "that Judaism can be tolerantly accepted as a permanent insulated culture in the organic body of another civilization. . . .

"Christians," Morrison concluded, "must be brought face to face with their sin against the Jew, a sin which cannot be expiated save by moral insight leading to repentance. And Jews also must be brought to repentance—with all tenderness, in view of their age-long affliction, but with austere realism, in view of their sinful share in their own tragedy."<sup>14</sup>

The *Christian Century* was expressing the view of American society traditionally held by the white Protestant Anglo-Saxon establishment. In the 1930s, that view was already being challenged. In a few decades, multiculturalism would be the dominant view. The popular metaphor would be the mosaic, not the melting pot.

In the 1930s, public opinion research was in its infancy. Nevertheless, its findings on the "Jewish Question" are often cited, although it is likely that many respondents were reluctant to express their true opinions on what, for polite Americans, was a sensitive subject. In August 1937, the Gallup poll found that 38 percent of respondents who had an opinion believed that anti-Jewish feeling was increasing in the United States; by March 1939, the figure had risen to 45 percent. In April 1938, Gallup found that 58 percent of respondents believed that the persecution of the Jews in Europe was entirely or partly their own fault.

In July 1939, a *Fortune* poll found that only 38.9 percent of respondents agreed with the statement: "In the United States the Jews have the same standing as any other peoples and they should be treated in all ways exactly as any other Americans."

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American Jews had watched the rise of Hitler with apprehension, then alarm compounded by feelings of impotence and self-concern. How could American Jews help their German coreligionists? What could they do that would not exacerbate the rising tide of anti-Semitism in America? Did the persecutions in Germany presage similar developments in America?

The dilemma of American Jewish leaders is illustrated by the division between two of the community's most prominent "defense" organizations, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress.

The first was founded in 1906 by rich and influential German Jews to provide relief for victims of czarist pogroms. In 1911 it was influential in securing U.S. abrogation of an 1832 treaty with Russia because the

Russians refused to honor the passports of American Jews. In 1927, the Committee's president, Louis Marshall, wrote the letter for Henry Ford in which the automaker retracted the articles on "The International Jew" that had appeared in his *Dearborn Independent*. In 1933 the Committee helped persuade the League of Nations to appoint a high commissioner for refugees coming from Germany.

These and other achievements were accomplished by "quiet diplomacy," in which members of the Committee voiced their concerns privately to government officials and other influential people. Quiet diplomacy was consistent with the Committee's worldview. Highly acculturated but concerned with the Jews' marginal place in American society, members of the Committee believed in keeping a low profile. They opposed anti-Nazi agitation and demonstrations initiated by Jews as likely to provoke more anti-Semitism in the United States and to expose the Jewish community in Germany to reprisals. Viewing Judaism as a spiritual legacy, they were quick to disclaim any ideology—like Zionism—that suggested that Jews were a distinct nationality. They epitomized the New York term "uptown Jews."

The American Jewish Congress, founded in 1922, was the organization of the "downtown Jews," people largely of eastern European origin. Less acculturated and inhibited than their uptown brothers, ethnocentric and Zionist, they asserted Jewish interests unembarrassed by accusations of dual loyalty. "I have been an American all my life," declared Rabbi Stephen Wise, honorary president of the Congress, "but I've been a Jew for 4,000 years."<sup>15</sup>

During March 1933—the first month of the Roosevelt administration—separate delegations from the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress were received at the U.S. State Department. Both asked for an official "representation" by the U.S. government to Germany protesting its anti-Semitic policies—an exercise of "humanitarian diplomacy" for which there were some old precedents. Both were told that, since no U.S. citizens were involved, the Nazi persecutions had to be considered an internal German affair.

Both organizations then sought a public statement of condemnation of German anti-Semitic excesses by the president. But prominent Jews in or close to the administration were reluctant to obtrude Jewish issues on the larger concerns of the new president. Requests by Jewish leaders for meetings with the president were turned aside. Roosevelt remained silent.

The administration again declined to intervene when, in July 1935, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Berlin. President Roosevelt reportedly expressed his personal concerns to the German ambassador, but in his public speeches he was less forthright, condemning religious intolerance without ever mentioning Germany. Nevertheless, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, repeatedly pressed upon his German contacts the outrage evoked in the United States and other countries by the Nazi persecutions.

After the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in 1938, Roosevelt at last spoke out. "The news of the past few days from Germany," he told a press conference on November 15, "has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. . . . I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in twentieth century civilization."<sup>16</sup> He recalled the U.S. ambassador from Germany, not at the behest of the Jewish organizations but to register his personal revulsion at the German pogrom.

By 1935 it was clear that quiet diplomacy was not working and that developments in Germany had proceeded too far for any representation from the U.S. government to have an effect. Thereafter, the American Jewish Committee devoted itself to research on German developments affecting the Christian churches as well as Jews and on domestic anti-Semitism. It disseminated its data to members of congress, the press, church groups, and organizations of every description in the hope of influencing public opinion without itself appearing as an agitator. "[W]e cannot be constantly thrusting ourselves before the public without danger to ourselves," said Cyrus Adler, the Committee's president. "They will get tired of us."<sup>17</sup> Results of the Committee's educational efforts were disappointing.

Meanwhile, the American Jewish Congress pursued a program of public protest and agitation. "The time for caution and prudence is past," Rabbi Wise declared. "We must speak up like men."<sup>18</sup>

On March 27, 1933, the Congress sponsored a meeting in New York's Madison Square Garden to protest Nazi persecutions. "55,000 Here Stage Protest on Hitler Attacks on Jews," the *New York Times* headlined the next morning on its first page. The Garden was filled to capacity; 35,000 more people outside heard the proceedings through amplifiers; the proceedings were also broadcast to similar meetings in other cities. Speakers included former New York governor and presidential candidate Al Smith, U.S. senator Robert F. Wagner, Mayor John P. O'Brien, William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, two Protestant bishops and other Christian and Jewish clergymen. New York governor Herbert H. Lehman stayed away for fear of the meeting's negative effects.

Governor Smith revealed that he, too, had been pressured not to participate because of conflicting reports about events in Germany and fear of Nazi retaliation on German Jews. A Catholic bishop had, in fact, withdrawn from participation on the assurance of the U.S. State Department that the mistreatment of German Jews had been stopped. Rejecting such "pussyfooting" counsel, Smith was determined to "drag [Nazi persecution] out into the open sunlight and give it the same treatment that we gave the Ku Klux Klan. And it don't make any difference to me whether it was in a brown shirt or a night shirt."<sup>19</sup>

All the speakers professed respect and admiration for the German people but decried their descent into medieval barbarism. Persecution of the Jews in Germany, they agreed, was not an internal German problem but an issue for all mankind.

In May 1933 the American Jewish Congress sponsored a parade in New York protesting Nazi book burnings. A year later, in March 1934, the Congress conducted a "trial" of Adolf Hitler at a mass meeting in New York's Madison Square Garden—provoking an angry diplomatic protest from Germany. Meetings and demonstrations, both Jewish- and Christian-sponsored, continued nationwide throughout the decade.

In the spring of 1933, a movement to boycott German goods and services spread spontaneously among Jewish communities in Great Britain and the Dominions, Europe, South America, North Africa, and the Middle East. In the United States, a boycott was launched in March by the Jewish War Veterans and was quickly joined by the American Jewish Congress. The American Jewish Committee remained aloof. Leadership of the American boycott was later assumed by the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, which embraced non-Jewish as well as Jewish organizations. The boycott persisted throughout the 1930s and caused genuine concern in Nazi Germany.

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The United States has traditionally regarded itself as a place of asylum for refugees fleeing political, religious, or racial oppression in their homelands. Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, welcomes the "homeless, tempest-tost" to America. But the country did not begin to make special provision for refugees until after World War II.

In the 1930s, refugees from Nazi Germany who wanted to come to the United States had to enter like other immigrants, subject to the various restrictions and quotas of the prevailing immigration laws. Total immigration from Eastern Hemisphere countries was then limited to 153,774 persons per year. There were annual quotas for those countries calculated at 2 percent of the foreign-born population of each nationality in the United States in 1890. The annual German quota during the 1930s was 25,957. Certain classes of immigrants were exempted from the quotas—for example, the wives and children of U.S. citizens and ministers and professors and their families. No limits or quotas were imposed on immigrants from Western Hemisphere countries.

Prospective German immigrants to the United States had first to apply for visas from U.S. consular officials in Germany. They were required to prove that they did not belong in any category excluded from the United States for physical, mental, or moral reasons. They then had to prove that they had sufficient money (or provide affidavits of financial support from relatives or others resident in the United States) to ensure that they would not become public charges. This last requirement derived from the so-called LPC ("likely to become a public charge") clause in the Immigration Act of 1917. Once prospective immigrants had been issued a visas,



they might have to wait a year or more if the quota for their country was already filled.

Leniently applied for more than a decade, the LPC clause was ordered strictly enforced by the Hoover administration in 1930 on the grounds that immigrants would be unlikely to find employment in depression-stricken America. The Roosevelt administration twice attempted to liberalize the interpretation of the clause, but consular officials retained wide discretion in applying immigration regulations. Some, who might have been anti-Semitic or personally opposed to immigration, proved excessively strict, multiplying red tape and eventually denying visas to most applicants. Others proved liberal and humane. In 1933, only 7.4 percent of the German quota was filled.

The depression magnified a hundredfold strains of nativism and anti-Semitism endemic in American society. In the past, nativists had charged that immigrants would undermine American institutions and ideals; that was the justification for the restrictive Immigration Acts of the 1920s. In the 1930s, nativists charged that immigrants would take jobs desperately needed by Americans. They described a flood of immigrants—Jews, of course—arriving on every ship from Europe to take jobs and welfare away from needy Americans. “Charity begins at home!” was the cry.

Advocates for the immigrants argued that their numbers were small compared to the total U.S. population, that they would not become public charges, that half (wives and children) were not wage earners, that entrepreneurs among them would create jobs for Americans, and that they would expand the domestic market for American producers.

Between 1933 and 1937, 28,753 immigrants from Germany entered the United States—while 21,645 German aliens departed. Perhaps a quarter of the newcomers were non-Jews—Christian political and cultural refugees (anti-Nazis, academics, pacifists, clergymen, authors) and non-Aryan Christians (Germans of partly Jewish ancestry).

Reason and facts made no impression on opponents of immigration. Demagogues raged. Congressmen considered legislation cutting immigration quotas by 50, 90, and 100 percent. These reductions were never passed, but the strength of restrictionists ensured that quotas would not be enlarged either.

The reaction of American Jews to the refugees was mixed. Some feared that their arrival would exacerbate anti-Semitism in America, already dangerously high. Others, concerned for the welfare of the refugees, found that their efforts to help were complicated by divisions within the Jewish community based on background, ideology, and strategies. Despite these difficulties, American Jewish philanthropy on behalf of refugees proved extraordinary.

In addition to existing service organizations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, many new agencies sprang up to help all or selected groups of refugees and immigrants. In 1934 the National Coordinating Committee for



Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming from Germany was established as an umbrella group to coordinate the work of some two dozen affiliated organizations (half of them Jewish) in both Europe and the United States. The task confronting them was twofold: relief and rescue. Organizations affiliated with the National Coordinating Committee—and others besides—provided emigration aid, economic assistance (including food and clothing), education, vocational retraining, resettlement services, and job placement.

Germany's annexation of Austria—the *Anschluss*—in March 1938 and the violent anti-Semitic disorders that followed marked a turning point in the Western world's perception of the refugee problem. Realizing that the refugee flow would greatly increase, many countries that had cautiously accepted refugees in the past now shut their doors. At the same time, humanitarians demanded a coherent international response to the crisis.

Immediately after the *Anschluss*, President Roosevelt established a non-governmental President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees and called an international conference to create an instrumentality to deal with the refugee problem. His invitations reassured participants that the financing of refugee migration would continue to be borne by private organizations and that "no country would be expected or asked to receive a greater number of immigrants than is permitted by its existing legislation."<sup>20</sup>

The conference met at Évian, France, in July 1938. Of the thirty-two nations represented, only the Dominican Republic offered to accept additional refugees—for agricultural colonization. The U.S. representative announced that the United States, while not enlarging its quotas, would combine its German and Austrian quotas—totaling 27,370—and, for the first time, undertake to fill them. (In 1937, only 42.1 percent of the German and Austrian quotas had been filled; this figure rose to 87.0 percent in 1938 and 108.4 percent in 1939.) This was the most Roosevelt felt he could do under pressure from restrictionists on one side and refugee advocates on the other. The conference also created an ineffectual Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees.

The refugee crisis rapidly worsened. In September 1938, Britain and France surrendered Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland to Germany, uprooting many more Jews. In November, *Kristallnacht* signaled an even more radical campaign of terror against German Jewry. At the end of November, a Gallup poll found that 94 percent of Americans who had an opinion disapproved of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews in Germany. Nevertheless, in December 1938 a Roper poll reported that 83 percent of Americans opposed entry of "a larger number of European refugees than now admitted under our immigration quotas."

In Congress, advocates of immigration liberalization hesitated to push their proposals for fear of providing a forum for antialien demagogues. Any immigration bill, in the view of most congressmen, would be "too hot to handle."

In February 1939, however, congressional committees took up the Wagner-Rogers Bill, which called for the admission, outside of the quota and over a two-year period, of 20,000 German refugee children aged fourteen and under who would be cared for by private individuals and agencies at no cost to the U.S. government. The bill was endorsed by many prominent individuals, establishment organizations, and a virtually unanimous press.

But public opinion, led by patriotic and veterans organizations, was overwhelmingly opposed. In congressional committee hearings, opponents of the bill argued that it would somehow disadvantage needy American children, that it excluded suffering children elsewhere in the world, and that it would undermine the cohesion of German families. Less hypocritical was their argument that the bill would begin a process of liberalizing the existing quota system.

Fatally amended, and overtaken by the outbreak of war in Europe, the Wagner-Rogers Bill died without ever reaching the floor of Congress.

A year later, in August 1940, as England braced for a German invasion, Congress quickly passed legislation admitting an unlimited number of British children into the United States. That migration never took place. Ships were not available, and the Germans refused to guarantee the safe passage of those that were. Two ships carrying children to North America were torpedoed. By the time the British government ended further overseas evacuation in October 1941, only 4,000 British children had reached Canada and the United States.

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An especially poignant event in June 1939 again revealed the attitude of most Americans toward the “homeless, tempest-tost”—sympathetic but rejecting. On May 13, the German liner *St. Louis* left Hamburg bound for Cuba with more than 900 refugees aboard. Many other ships with similarly desperate cargoes were also at sea looking for hospitable ports. Some fifty of the *St. Louis*'s passengers held U.S. visas and intended to wait in Cuba until their numbers came up. All had bought from the Hamburg-American Line “entry permits” that had been issued originally by corrupt Cuban officials. Days before the *St. Louis* sailed, the Cuban government nullified those permits.

The *St. Louis* reached Havana on May 27, but only a few of its passengers were allowed to disembark. For five days, representatives of refugee aid organizations negotiated futilely with the Cuban government. On June 1 the *St. Louis* was ordered out of Havana. It left the next day.

But the ship did not return to Germany. Instead, it cruised in waters off Florida for nearly a week. From its decks, its passengers could see the Miami skyline. The U.S. Coast Guard dispatched a cutter to ensure that no passenger committed suicide—or attempted to swim to shore.

The story of the *St. Louis* was picked up by newspapers around the country. Chartered airplanes flew overhead to photograph the ship and its passengers. The *New York Times* ran stories every day for two weeks, six of them on the paper's front page. Most papers sympathized with the refugees and blamed Germany and Cuba for their plight. Some, of course, blamed the refugees themselves. "Cuba had not invited them," one paper pointed out.<sup>21</sup>

The captain of the *St. Louis*, a humane and sympathetic man, delayed returning to Germany in the hope that new negotiations with Cuba would prove fruitful or that the United States would allow his passengers to land. But the U.S. government adamantly refused to accept them, and when the refugee aid organizations could not post a \$500,000 bond within the forty-eight hours allowed, the Cuban government made its rejection final. On June 8, the *St. Louis* left the U.S. coast and headed back to Europe.

"The saddest ship afloat today," editorialized the *New York Times*, "the Hamburg-American liner *St. Louis*, with 900 Jewish refugees aboard, is steaming back toward Germany after a tragic week of frustration at Havana and off the coast of Florida. . . . No plague ship ever received a sorrier welcome. . . . It is useless now to discuss what might have been done. The case is disposed of. Germany, with all the hospitality of its concentration camps, will welcome these unfortunates home."<sup>22</sup> The *Times*, like most other papers, never suggested that the United States should allow these refugees to land.

The *St. Louis* did not, in fact, return to Germany. It stopped at Antwerp, where all its passengers were given refuge by the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and England. The *St. Louis* then hurried to New York to pick up a shipload of American vacationers for a Caribbean cruise.

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In April 1933, barely two weeks after Hitler assumed dictatorial powers, the Nazi government promulgated the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. This and subsequent edicts aimed to purge political opponents, Jews, and other non-Aryans from German public life. They also set off one of the most remarkable human migrations in history: the movement of thousands of intellectuals—scholars, scientists, physicians, psychologists, psychoanalysts, artists, architects, composers, conductors, novelists, journalists, publishers, and theater and film workers—from Germany and later German-occupied countries to America, with profound consequences for the cultural life of both Europe and America.

"[T]he most extraordinary of the many [migrations] that have served to people this continent," *Fortune* observed in December 1941, the migration of Europe's intellectuals conferred upon the United States "the opportunities and responsibilities of custodianship for a civilization."<sup>23</sup>

University professors were allowed to enter the United States outside the immigration quotas, but they still required substantial personal funds or proof of employment to qualify for U.S. visas. Their entry was facilitated by numerous agencies and institutions, most prominently by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars, founded in 1933 and funded by foundations and philanthropists. The committee gave grants to American colleges, universities, museums, and other institutions to create positions for refugee scholars. Between 1933 and 1943, the committee placed 228 European scholars in American institutions.

Elite universities invited the most celebrated German scholars to join their faculties. The recently founded Institute for Advanced Study was quick to add Albert Einstein and other eminent mathematicians and physicists to its research community in Princeton, New Jersey. In New York City, the New School for Social Research, an unorthodox institution of adult education founded by American Progressives in 1919, created a graduate department that it called the University in Exile. Classes began in October 1933 with a faculty of ten eminent German philosophers and social scientists. Christian and Jewish seminaries created positions for theologians, biblical scholars, and historians.

The refugee scholars were not always happy in their new surroundings, however. In Germany, they had enjoyed high social status and relative affluence. Neither was tendered them in America. The country was deep in the depression, universities were financially distressed, and faculty colleagues resented the newcomers as competitors. Only the most prominent refugee scholars landed in prestigious institutions; most found themselves in minor universities or small colleges scattered across the country. These institutions—informal, democratic, and intellectually barren—were incomprehensible to them. Research scholars who had lectured occasionally to advanced classes in Germany, they now had to teach unsophisticated undergraduates many hours a week. The culture shock was profound on both sides.

No other group of refugees was treated with similar solicitude before 1940. During the German invasion of France that year, thousands of prominent political and intellectual refugees from both German- and Soviet-dominated countries who had sought safety in France fled south into what became unoccupied France. There they were trapped when the collaborationist French government at Vichy closed its frontier with Spain. By treaty, moreover, Vichy was compelled to “surrender on demand” any refugee the Nazis demanded.

In response to concern for these refugees voiced in many quarters, the U.S. government instituted an emergency visa program. The President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees undertook to assemble lists of notable political refugees, trade unionists, and intellectuals drafted by a variety of private groups, screen them, then pass them on for further screening by the Justice and State departments. The approved, select lists

were then sent to U.S. consulates in Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Lisbon with instructions to issue temporary (visitors') visas to the people listed.

But the consular officials moved slowly, finding many "undesirables" on the lists and fearing that German agents disguised as refugees might slip through. Moreover, visas alone were not enough to ensure the refugees' escape. They needed passports, safe conducts for travel in France, exit visas to cross the border into Spain, Spanish and Portuguese transit visas to reach Lisbon, and money to buy ship passage in Lisbon. U.S. consuls did not provide these necessities. Here the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the American Friends Service Committee, the Unitarian Service Committee, and the American Federation of Labor provided assistance.

A private organization, the Emergency Rescue Committee, sent an agent to Marseilles in July 1940 with its own lists of prominent cultural refugees, a supply of visitors' visas, and instructions to find the people named on the lists, furnish them (legally or illegally) with the documents necessary for emigration, and assist their movement to Lisbon.

By the time the emergency visa program ended in July 1941, some 2,000 selected political and cultural refugees had reached the United States.

Starting in 1941, the U.S. State Department severely restricted the number of visas issued for Germany and Central Europe, in part to prevent the infiltration of Nazi propagandists, spies, and saboteurs—the notorious "fifth column" that had allegedly caused the fall of France. Specifically, the State Department barred any refugee who had close relatives still living under Nazi control on the grounds that such relatives could be held hostage while the refugee engaged in espionage for the Nazis.

Between 1933 and 1941, 447,492 immigrants (352,568 from Eastern Hemisphere countries) entered the United States, while 311,676 U.S. residents emigrated. Of the Eastern Hemisphere immigrants, perhaps 225,000—including 150,000 Jews—were refugees from Nazism.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Looking for Hitler

"[T]he only thing we have to fear is fear itself," President Franklin Roosevelt assured a demoralized and frightened nation in his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, "—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." He promised vigorous action to combat the depression, then at its depth.

But, Roosevelt vowed, if Congress did not respond to his recommendations, "I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency as great as the power that would be given me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe."<sup>1</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt noted with concern that this last line drew more applause than any other in the president's speech. That response, she said later, was "a little terrifying. You felt that they would do anything—if only someone would tell them *what* to do."<sup>2</sup>

Americans longed for strong leadership. In a country possessing the world's largest industrial plant and vast mineral and agricultural resources, millions were unemployed, hungry, and homeless. Some of the best minds believed that capitalism had failed and that democracy itself was outmoded. Fear of revolution was in the air, although in fact the nation was not radicalized. Stunned by the economic catastrophe that had befallen them, the American people were sunk in apathy and despair, trusting in traditional values to carry them through the crisis.

Europe, too, was experiencing economic and political turmoil. In eastern and central Europe, fragile democracies had given way to authoritarian regimes. In the Soviet Union, a Communist dictatorship was allegedly creating a socialist utopia. In Italy, Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini had suppressed the chronic disorder of Italian political life



and “made the trains run on time.” Authoritarian governments ruled Poland, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. In the same month that Franklin Roosevelt became president of the United States, Adolf Hitler grasped dictatorial power in Germany. To many of the best minds, the course of history was clearly discernible.

Liberal intellectuals in the United States believed that communism and fascism were responses to the failure of capitalism. (The term *fascism* derived from the Italian Fascist Party and was applied to other authoritarian, extreme-right regimes.) They were unanimous in indicting capitalism as anarchic, wasteful, and dehumanizing, as subject to cycles of boom and bust, as responsible for extremes of wealth and poverty. Their prescriptions ranged from regulated capitalism (the New Deal) through democratic socialism to revolutionary communism. For conservatives, each of these prescriptions represented a progressively larger sacrifice of individual liberty. For radicals, each represented an expansion of individual liberty for the great majority of people who were victimized by laissez-faire capitalism.

A contrary note was sounded by one prominent liberal. In 1931 the famous muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens published a best-selling autobiography, thereby renewing the celebrity he had acquired before World War I by exposing the corruption in American politics and business. Steffens had actually come to admire the “bosses” who exploited the system. While reformers vainly pursued ideals and abstractions, Steffens believed, the bosses were realistic, pragmatic, and effective. In particular, he admired Russian dictator Vladimir Lenin, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, and American industrialist Henry Ford.

Steffens was not alone in his doubts about democracy and his admiration of “great” men. A number of liberals and even radicals succumbed to hero worship, seeing in Lenin a man who—contrary to Marx’s laws of historical development—had changed the course of history by the power of his intellect and will. Reinhold Niebuhr, no admirer of either Lenin or Mussolini, conceded in March 1933: “[T]he inevitability of fascism is a practical certainty in every Western nation.”<sup>3</sup>

Conservatives admired Mussolini far more than liberals did. In September 1931, Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, welcomed the new freshman class with some thoughts about the differences between democracy and dictatorship. “It is rather startling,” he said, “for convinced believers in democracy to observe that [dictatorship] appears to bring into authority and power men of far greater intelligence, far stronger character and far more courage than does [democracy].”<sup>4</sup>

The apparent dynamism of the Italian Fascist regime impressed American businessmen mired in the depression. They found the Fascist values of order, discipline, and work particularly congenial. They believed that Mussolini had prevented a Communist takeover of Italy. His subjugation

of Italian labor was especially exemplary. The business magazine *Fortune* devoted its July 1934 issue to a favorable survey of Italy under Fascism.

In January 1933 Colonel Edward M. House, friend and adviser to President Woodrow Wilson, reported “considerable sentiment favorable to a Mussolini sort of dictatorship in conservative circles in America.” “This is well enough,” he commented, not disapprovingly, “provided the man in control is a beneficent dictator—but how few such men are to be found!”<sup>5</sup>

That year, the Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, in collaboration with publisher William Randolph Hearst, released a motion picture called *Gabriel in the White House* in which an American president, confronted by a devastating depression, discards the Constitution, declares a national emergency, and rules as a dictator. He quickly solves the nation’s problems then conveniently dies—before fascism can become a habit. This was a familiar fantasy in some circles.

The enthusiasm of American businessmen for Mussolini cooled only when they discovered that the Fascist corporative state (like the New Deal, in their opinion) was incompatible with “free enterprise”—by which they meant business unregulated, irresponsible, and predatory. Still, given the choice between fascism and communism—which many businessmen thought was the choice that history then presented—they chose fascism.

American business leaders—organized most significantly in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the American Liberty League—were overwhelmingly hostile to the New Deal, which they condemned alternately as fascistic and communistic. In some, hatred of Roosevelt himself was visceral: a “traitor to his class” who was “soaking the rich,” the “red president,” “that cripple in the White House,” a lover of Jews and Negroes.

Frustrated by the democratic process that had brought Roosevelt to power, some businessmen entertained fascist fantasies of a government by the rich that would restore the gold standard, end government regulation of business, crush labor unions, and limit taxes on the wealthy.

In 1934 the nation was startled by the revelation before a congressional committee of Smedley D. Butler—a retired Marine Corps general, recipient of two Medals of Honor—that he had been approached by Wall Street figures who had offered to finance his organizing half a million veterans to support a coup in Washington that would install a probusiness administration. Everyone named by Butler publicly denied the allegations, and the press treated them lightly.

But the committee, in its final report in February 1935, gave the allegations cautious credence: “Evidence was obtained showing that certain persons had made an attempt to establish a fascist organization in this country. There is no question but that these attempts were discussed, were

planned, and might have been placed in execution when and if the financial backers deemed it expedient."<sup>6</sup>

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That a fascist regime was possible in America was widely conceded on the basis of a number of popular movements that rose—and fell—during Roosevelt's first term. All were mass organizations mobilized by radio, itinerant speakers, and print propaganda and led by single individuals. None had a structure that permitted democratic participation in its governance.

The first consisted of supporters of the Townsend Plan, an old-age-pension scheme propounded in 1933 by Francis E. Townsend, a retired California physician, to fight the depression and preserve the independence and dignity of the elderly. Under the plan, financed by a federal sales tax, all workers would retire at age sixty and thereafter receive a federal pension of \$200 a month on condition that they spend it within that month. By 1935, some 4,500 Townsend clubs claimed as many as 3.5 million members. Townsend himself was an earnest, attractive figure but a poor salesman, totally devoid of charisma.

The second, the Share Our Wealth Society, was led by Democratic senator Huey P. Long of Louisiana. Mobilizing small farmers against the conservative oligarchy that had ruled backward Louisiana since Reconstruction, coarse, flamboyant, and intimidating Long was elected governor of Louisiana in 1928 on the slogan "Every Man a King." Unlike other Southern demagogues, Long kept his campaign promises, building new schools, hospitals, and highways, a new state capitol and governor's mansion, and a new airport for New Orleans, while pouring money into the state university. By patronage, corruption, electoral fraud, and violence, Long created a political machine through which he governed Louisiana as a virtual dictator.

Long was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1930. From Washington, he continued to exercise absolute control over Louisiana. Proposing the redistribution of the nation's wealth as the cure for the depression, Long briefly supported President Roosevelt, but by the end of 1933 he had separated himself from the administration and had alienated most other senators by his contemptuous behavior toward them. It was clear that he had his eye on the presidency in 1936 or 1940. His vehicle would not be one of the conventional political parties but the Share Our Wealth Society, which he founded in February 1934.

The society consisted of autonomous local clubs that promoted Long's Share Our Wealth Plan. This called for a sharply graduated income tax that would effectively limit personal fortunes to a few million dollars and a confiscatory inheritance tax. The revenue from these taxes would be used to provide every American family with a grant of \$5,000 toward a "homestead" (a house, furnishings, and car) and a guaranteed annual income of at least \$2,500.

During 1934–35, the Share Our Wealth Society grew to 27,000 clubs claiming 8 million members. After Long's assassination on September 7, 1935, the movement dissolved. Remnants followed Gerald L. K. Smith, a rabble-rousing Protestant preacher and former aide to Long.

The third movement was the National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ), founded by Charles E. Coughlin, the "radio priest" of Royal Oak, Michigan. In his Sunday afternoon radio sermons, Coughlin had proposed inflationary panaceas to cure the depression and for a time had supported the Roosevelt administration. But when the administration rebuffed his pretensions to be an "insider," Coughlin turned against it.

In November 1934 Coughlin announced over the air the creation of the NUSJ, which listeners could join simply by writing to him. Its great numbers, used at his direction to support selected candidates and issues, would, Coughlin expected, give him the influence in national affairs that he desired. And in fact the fervent response of Coughlin's followers to his denunciation in January 1935 of the administration's proposal to join the World Court may have been decisive in defeating that measure.

To contest the reelection of Franklin Roosevelt in 1936, Coughlin formed the Union Party out of the NUSJ, supporters of the Townsend Plan, and the remnants of Huey Long's Share Our Wealth Society, now led by Gerald L. K. Smith. As the party's presidential candidate, Coughlin selected William Lemke, a nominally Republican representative from North Dakota who, like many adherents of the Union Party, had originally supported Roosevelt only to become disaffected—in Lemke's case, by New Deal farm policy. A month before the election, Coughlin told a group of reporters that the United States was about to see its last presidential election. "We are at the crossroads," he declared. "One road leads of communism, the other to fascism. I take the road to fascism."<sup>7</sup>

Roosevelt, however, had disarmed his critics on the left by his "Second New Deal" in 1935, which saw the establishment of the Works Progress Administration and passage of the National Labor Relations and Social Security acts. Faced with a choice between Roosevelt and Coughlin, Coughlin's followers deserted en masse. The Union Party received only 892,000 votes. Chagrined at this poor showing, Coughlin, who had promised to deliver 9 million votes for Lemke, dissolved his NUSJ and retired (temporarily) from his radio ministry.

Beginning in 1936, Coughlin published a weekly tabloid called *Social Justice*. With a circulation estimated as high as 350,000, it was anticommunist, anticapitalist, anti-New Deal, and anti-Semitic. To regain his influence after the election debacle, he began to move toward the fascist right, printing articles that were not only anti-Semitic but anti-British and pro-German as well.

Back on the air, Coughlin's Sunday afternoon radio sermons—heard by 3.5 million regular listeners in 1938—were also increasingly anti-Semitic. He was a fervent supporter of Nationalist general Francisco Franco in

the Spanish Civil War. By mail, he sought to ingratiate himself with Mussolini. He traveled to England, where he met the British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley. From England, he claimed, he made a secret trip to Germany where he met with Hitler.

In May 1938 Coughlin recommended that his followers form neighborhood "platoons" that together would constitute an anticommunist "Christian Front." Christian Front units quickly appeared in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, and soon spread to Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Detroit.

Christian Front units described themselves as sports clubs, but the "sport" consisted of military drill and weapons training. Members were largely lower-middle-class Irish- and German-American Catholics, intensely anti-Semitic, paranoid about the communist menace, and devoted to Coughlin. The priest himself was ordered by his superiors to take no role in the organization, but its members clearly recognized him as their inspiration and mentor.

When—after Coughlin's controversial *Kristallnacht* broadcast of November 20, 1938—New York radio station WMCA refused to carry further Coughlin sermons, several thousand Christian Fronters on Sunday, December 18, picketed the station, its advertisers, and Jewish-owned stores throughout the city. The pickets returned every Sunday afternoon for many months. In the meantime, gangs of Christian Fronters roamed the streets and subways, peddling copies of *Social Justice*, distributing anti-Semitic leaflets, and orating on street corners, while harassing and assaulting people they took to be Jewish. Sympathetic police, often members of the Christian Front themselves, did little to curb the disorders.

In January 1940, tipped off by an informer, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (led by J. Edgar Hoover himself) seized eighteen members of a Brooklyn Christian Front unit, a cache of weapons and ammunition, and evidence of an elaborate plan to overthrow the federal government. The men were charged with conspiracy and stealing government property. One of the accused committed suicide. Beginning in June, a nine-week trial, constantly hectoring by Christian Fronters, ended in the acquittal of ten defendants and the release of the other seven when the jury could not agree on verdicts in their cases.

Another large organization controlled by one man in which American liberals saw clear intimations of fascism was the publishing empire of William Randolph Hearst. Hearst owned nearly thirty newspapers and a dozen magazines, besides radio stations, a motion picture company, and a newsreel. An inventor of yellow journalism in the 1890s, Hearst in the 1930s preserved his hallmark sensationalism in his newspapers, pandering to the most ignorant and credulous readers—a population that elitist liberals feared. Frustrated in politics, Hearst moved rightward from an early Progressivism until in the 1930s he was universally recognized as a reactionary. He was anti-labor and anti-Roosevelt, an isolationist and a militant nationalist.

Hearst believed that America's principal enemy was the Soviet Union (Japan ranked second). His papers campaigned frenetically against communists, whom they found everywhere, from the nation's schools and colleges to the Roosevelt administration. No friend of Britain or France, whom he blamed for the Versailles Treaty, Hearst considered Nazi Germany a product of that treaty and a necessary bulwark against the Soviet menace. He sympathized with Germany's efforts to revise the treaty unilaterally and muted criticism of Germany in his newspapers. After a meeting with Hitler in 1934, he imagined that he had influence with the German dictator, particularly on the Jewish problem. He was eventually chagrined to realize that he had none.

Hearst's influence on public affairs was decried by liberals, but by the end of the decade it had ceased to be significant as Hearst aged and suffered financial reverses.

The fascist impulse in America manifested itself further in a host of mostly small local or regional "patriotic" organizations that defined patriotism as bitter hatred of some or all of the following: Jews, blacks, Catholics, foreigners, immigrants, Communists, liberals, internationalists, labor unions, and the New Deal. There were perhaps 150 of these radical-right "hate" groups, uniformly pro-German. The Silver Shirts, Christian Mobilizers, Defenders of the Christian Faith, Black Legion, Knights of the White Camellia, Christian Nationalist Crusade, National Gentile League, and many other such groups exhibited high degrees of nativist and religious bigotry, paranoia, sadism, and a proclivity for violence. Some believed that Armageddon was imminent. In all this there was an element of racketeering, since the leaders of these groups generally profited financially from their activities.

Another thing that most hate groups shared was hunger for someone to lead their revolution, a "man on horseback," an American Hitler. One candidate was George Van Horn Moseley, a retired Army general.

In December 1938 Moseley addressed a New York audience on "Our Enemies, Foreign and Domestic"—"potential foreign enemies [Germany and Japan] that I would like to see recast into friends and domestic enemies that I wish to see exterminated completely." "Before we consider ourselves capable of defending the nation internationally," he recommended, "let us try our hand and see if we can lick the Communists, for example. Let us cure up some 12,000,000 syphilitics; let us sterilize the unfit, who we know should not be allowed to breed."<sup>8</sup>

Early in 1939, Moseley may have been interviewed for the leadership of the radical right at a secret meeting of hate-group representatives in Queens, New York, to which he traveled from Atlanta under an assumed name. Shortly thereafter he appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, where he recommended that the Army be used to suppress the Communists, inveighed against Jewish world hegemony, and was concerned that the glass of water before him might have been



poisoned. Ridiculed by the press, Moseley's performance may have cost him the position of American Hitler.

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The despair with democracy and the expectation or fear of fascism that some intellectuals felt during the 1930s was based upon a negative image of the American people. During the depression, journalists, photographers, and filmmakers roamed the country to document the behavior of the people in hard times. Surprisingly, they found little radicalism. Instead, they were impressed by Americans' fortitude, endurance, and faith in a better future.

Poets and novelists celebrated these virtues. Poet Carl Sandburg, in *The People, Yes* (1936), wrote: "In the drive of faiths on the wind the people know: / 'We have come far and we are going farther yet.'" In the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) by John Steinbeck, Ma Joad, the matriarch of a destitute Oklahoma family fleeing their Dust Bowl farm for the deceptive promise of California, reassures her son: "Why, Tom—us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people—we go on."

But to many despairing intellectuals, fortitude, endurance, and faith were not enough in the absence of intelligence. In the 1920s, writers like H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis had derided provincial middle-class Americans. In *Public Opinion* (1922), Walter Lippmann had argued that the average American knew little of the real world, was governed by prejudices, imaginings, and narrowly conceived self-interest, and was therefore susceptible to "manufactured consent."

In the 1930s, architect (of Gothic churches, including the Episcopal cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York) and social critic Ralph Adams Cram spoke for many cultural conservatives when, despairing of democracy and mass culture, he decried the rise to dominance in human affairs of the "barbarian factor." He was seconded by the popular literary critic Albert Jay Nock, who was also elitist and antidemocratic as well as racist. The editor of the *Washington Post* shared the widespread doubts about the future of democracy. "The average voter today," he said in 1936, "is not merely . . . more ignorant than was the case with the electorate in the early years of the republic, but it is now possible to sway his emotions, and his uncritical judgments, as never before."<sup>9</sup>

Among these and similar critics, the consensus seemed to be that the celebrated "common man" was ignorant, credulous, and capable of mindless violence. Too innately conservative to be seduced by communism, he was, in their view, highly vulnerable to the mythology of fascism.

In *Forerunners of American Fascism* (1935), journalist Raymond Gram Swing expressed concern at the credulity of depression-stricken Americans who, by the millions, were seduced by the fallacious economic



panaceas of demagogues like Townsend, Long, and Coughlin. He feared that an alliance of one such demagogue with big business would bring about fascism in America. "Given a land in which the great majority are in want or in fear of it," Swing wrote, "in which democracy has not produced wise leadership or competent organs to conduct public affairs, in which 'big interests' have far more than their share of power, the easiest sacrifice that society seems ready to make, if only its prejudices can be stirred, is of its democratic freedom."<sup>10</sup>

In that same year, Sinclair Lewis published a satiric but pessimistic novel about the possibility of a fascist regime in America. In *It Can't Happen Here*, a U.S. senator, pretending to be a populist and promising a redistribution of wealth that would permit the government to provide every citizen with an annual income of \$5,000, was elected president in 1936. He quickly abrogated the Constitution and established a Nazi-like dictatorship enforced by SS-like "Minute Men." The great majority of Americans supported the regime, were forcibly cowed by it, or were indifferent and apathetic. Despite turmoil at its top—suggestive of the stages of the French Revolution—the regime remained in power at the novel's end.

"[In] America," Lewis explained, "... there had been so very little education ... that most people did not know what they wanted—indeed knew about so few things to want at all."

In the classic films *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Meet John Doe* (1941), powerful men manipulate public opinion to destroy popular heroes. Both heroes possess a sturdy integrity; the public, however—the mass of average men and women—has no resources to enable it to withstand the propaganda to which it is subjected.

Some intellectuals looked forward to fascism as morally superior to capitalism. Seward Collins, the editor of a short-lived (1933–37) monthly, the *American Review*, believed that capitalism—the rule of a greedy and self-serving plutocracy—was responsible for the "modern chaos."

"Capitalism is a disease which must be cured," Collins declared, and remarkably "the cure is shaping itself before our eyes." He alluded to the rise of dictatorships in Europe, notably those in the Soviet Union, Italy, and Germany, which he interpreted as a revival of the "monarchical principle." "What is a monarch?" An individual "in whom all governmental responsibility of a State is vested; he governs in the interest of the whole State. ... The ultimate sovereignty of the people is symbolized in him and is by him realized in action." "After a long interregnum," Collins rejoiced, "Europe is returning to its ancestral form of government."<sup>11</sup>

In America, Collins saw the monarchical principle adumbrated in the unusual powers Congress had accorded President Roosevelt. Moreover, he found a number of American groups and individuals working toward a hierarchical social order, based on "fundamentals and tested principles," to replace the destructive greed that underlay capitalism.

These “conservative revolutionaries”—forerunners of fascism?—“differ sharply from one another, while at the same time having so much in common that they clearly represent one general direction in contemporary thought.”<sup>12</sup> Among them he identified the New Humanists (literary critics Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More), the Southern Agrarians (poets Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom), and the Neoscholastics (educators Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler). And of course the Catholic church provided the model of a tested nonhereditary monarchy.

A scenario for the establishment of fascism in America was provided by economist Lawrence Dennis, the self-styled “intellectual leader of American fascism,” in *The Coming American Fascism* (1936). The liberal state had failed, according to Dennis, because “the masses have not the intelligence or the humanity, nor the [upper classes] the magnanimity, which liberal assumptions have postulated.”<sup>13</sup> With the collapse of socially irresponsible capitalism and the demonstrated incapacity of democratic government to deal with the crisis, he argued, fascism would prove the necessary and rational alternative to social disintegration and chaos.

Fascism, according to Dennis, would be instituted by a disaffected elite organized behind a “great leader.” Free of racial, religious, or ethnic bigotry, American fascism would be the fulfillment of “inevitable and irresistible” social changes long under way in the United States—centralization and rationalization.

Fascism would dictate extreme governmental centralization—the abolition of the federal system, states’ rights, and the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The government would consist of a council of managers and engineers who would administer a “national plan,” a program of social rationalization that would bring the nation’s “social machinery up to date.”<sup>14</sup> It would nationalize monopolies and large corporations but otherwise retain economic freedom.

“Fascism,” wrote Dennis, “regards private property rights, private initiative, and the free market, subject to a proper regime of public interest, as useful institutions—useful means to public ends. The difference between fascism and liberalism, in this respect, is that fascism considers these institutions as means to national ends, whereas liberalism makes the nation and national government a means to the ends of private property and the free market.”<sup>15</sup>

The increasing power of the federal government, business consolidation, and the standardization of American life, Dennis argued, presaged the arrival of fascism. “Big business has been making fascism inevitable; it has been efficiently preparing the people with suitable behavior patterns and developing appropriate mechanisms of centralized national control to hand over to a triumphant fascism. We have perfected techniques in propaganda and press and radio control which should make the

United States the easiest country in the world to indoctrinate with any set of ideas, and to control for any physically possible ends."<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, Dennis's fascist America closely resembled the socialist America desired by many on the left. Both rejected individualism and competition and celebrated cooperation and community. Both relied on national planning by committees of experts. But whereas the socialists based their hopes on an unlikely transformation of human nature, Dennis recognized that all utopias rest ultimately on coercion.

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Nazi propaganda—books, periodicals, pamphlets, phonograph records—poured into the United States from German state and party agencies: the Foreign Organization of the National Socialist Party, the German Foreign Institute, the League of Germans Abroad, the Transocean News Service, the German Railroads Information Office, and many others. Its object was to influence American opinion favorably toward Germany while encouraging isolationist sentiment.

Propaganda material was sent to libraries, colleges, German-American societies, and pro-Nazi organizations and individuals. German diplomats and consular officials in the United States had access to forums provided by academic institutes, educational organizations like the Foreign Policy Association, and radio programs like *Town Meeting of the Air*. The German consulate in New York City maintained a German Library of Information, which distributed propaganda material and published a weekly newsletter, *Facts in Review*, with a mailing list of 70,000 persons.

German agents were frequent visitors to the United States, but much Nazi propaganda originated here. Of 178 German-language newspapers, large and small, in the United States, perhaps a dozen were pro-Nazi, a larger number anti-Nazi, and the majority—many dependent on German tourism advertising—cautiously neutral. The pro-Nazi hate groups published newspapers and pamphlets that made free use of materials received from Germany. Coughlin's *Social Justice* published Nazi propaganda that originated in both Germany and the United States. But some popular, mass-circulation magazines opened their pages to articles by Nazi apologists or propagandists in the interest of "balance."

Coughlin's weekly newspaper, *Social Justice*, made a show of balance. In 1938 the paper serialized excerpts from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, accompanied by helpful commentary underlining their verisimilitude. Coughlin published an article by a Jewish author presenting the historical background of this notorious forgery—then a week later published a rejoinder insisting on its authenticity. In publishing the *Protocols*, Coughlin wrote with his usual disingenuousness: "we are not attributing them to the Jews. We are simply insisting upon their *factuality* be they plagiarized or not plagiarized, be they satires—or not satires."<sup>17</sup>

Contributors to *Social Justice* argued repeatedly that Hitler was the product of the unjust Treaty of Versailles, that he had been empowered democratically, that the Jews were themselves responsible for their persecution, that Nazi foreign policy objectives were reasonable and limited, and that Nazi Germany was the essential bulwark against Soviet communism.

Thus in April 1938 *Social Justice* interpreted Hitler's occupation of Austria as a defeat for the Soviet Union: "[T]he internationalist plotters of Red Russia have been denied a conquest. For, as sure as Hitler took Austria, Stalin and Russia intended to do so, sooner or later. . . ." <sup>18</sup>

It also interpreted Munich favorably. "There is an economic need for a strong power in Central Europe. The Treaty of Versailles denied it; the Treaty of Munich provided it. In the light of history, Versailles stands condemned; Munich vindicated. There can be no separation between the two, for out of vicious Versailles, grew hopeful Munich." <sup>19</sup>

In a review of the perilous year 1938, *Social Justice* observed: "The finger of blame may be pointed at the Allied Powers, but back of them stand the same international bankers today as of yesterday. Behind the turmoil which has beset the world during the past year was the long, lean, bony finger of the international money-changer, who cares nothing if he throws the entire world into war as long as he can save his precious bonds, his precious gold and his precious conquest under the cloak of 'saving democracy.'" <sup>20</sup>

In February 1939 *Social Justice* published excerpts from a speech by Hitler on the sixth anniversary of his appointment as chancellor. "If the rest of the world is inclined to draw the conclusion that Germany," Hitler was quoted as saying, "under military pressure, has menaced others, it is a gross distortion of facts. . . . Germany wishes to live in peace and on friendly terms with all countries. . . ."

"It seems to *Social Justice*," Coughlin commented, "that Chancellor Hitler's own words are a better indication of Germany's attitude towards the rest of the world than many columns of prejudiced editorial comment and 'interpretation.'" <sup>21</sup>

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The most successful—and highest paid—German propagandist in the United States during the 1930s was George Sylvester Viereck. Born in Germany of a German father and an American mother, Viereck was brought to the United States at the age of eleven. Between 1910 and 1930, he achieved a reputation as a poet, novelist, biographer, and journalist.

In August 1914, at the start of World War I, Viereck founded a weekly pro-German paper called *The Fatherland*. This led to his employment as a paid propagandist for Germany. With the coming to power of Hitler—whose rise to prominence he had reported favorably in a 1932 article, "When I Take Charge of Germany"—Viereck returned to propaganda

work to interpret the “New Germany” to America. In 1933–34 he was associated with a New York public relations firm for which he secured the German Railroads Information Office as a client. Ostensibly promoting German tourism, Viereck wrote numerous articles to counteract anti-Nazi sentiment in America that were published in newspapers and magazines across the country.

Between 1932 and 1939, Viereck published a series of articles in *Liberty* magazine advancing pro-German and isolationist views. In November 1936—after Germany had reclaimed the Saar and remilitarized the Rhineland—Viereck asked “Will Hitler Strike First?” “A strong Germany, Hitler insists, is the only safeguard of peace,” Viereck wrote. Germany’s rearmament was defensive, securing Germany against attack by France and Russia. “[U]nlike most statesmen at the helms in other countries,” Viereck pointed out, “[Hitler] himself fought as a private in the World War. Knowing the horrors of modern warfare, he is unwilling to assume responsibility for such a catastrophe.” “War is the last, not the first, resort of the diplomat,” Viereck argued. “And Hitler is a diplomat.”<sup>22</sup>

“[Hitler] desires friendly relations with the United States,” Viereck maintained after the annexation of Austria. “He is puzzled by what he considers the persistent antagonism of the American government and a large part of the American press to a powerful Germany. . . . He can understand that many Americans may disagree with his political philosophy, but he cannot understand why the democracies do not appreciate his fight against Communism.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1939 Viereck became the foreign correspondent for a small Munich newspaper. His salary was paid by the German Foreign Office, where his weekly reports on American press and public opinion were carefully read. At the same time, he was employed by the German Library of Information at the German consulate in New York to edit its weekly newsletter and other publications. His greatest success as a propagandist was providing materials and writing speeches for isolationist members of Congress. The speeches were reprinted from the *Congressional Record* at public expense and widely distributed under congressional franks.

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Germans were a significant component of the “old immigration.” By 1914, 5.5 million immigrants from Germany had entered the United States. They were a conspicuous presence in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Like other immigrant groups, they sought to preserve their language and churches. They founded thousands of social, sports, and cultural organizations. Acculturation proceeded normally until World War I, when American superpatriotism—expressed in hostility to everything German—forced German-Americans to “Americanize” swiftly.

Postwar immigrants from Germany—nearly 430,000 between 1920 and 1932—differed markedly from previous German immigrants. Some were embittered veterans of the lost war and of the Free Corps, paramilitary groups that had fought Communists and other leftists in the social turmoil that had followed the war. Some had been members of the infant Nazi Party. Most were young, single, and unemployed men, industrial workers and artisans displaced in the postwar economic chaos. They found jobs in the factories of New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh—although they became unemployed again when the depression struck.

They had little in common with the assimilated German-Americans. Instead, they gathered in German neighborhoods where German beer halls, restaurants, delicatessens, and small businesses were plentiful—typically, the Yorkville section of Manhattan’s Upper East Side. They founded numerous small organizations, right-wing nationalistic and anti-Semitic, in which they shared their disgust with the liberal German Republic and the pain of exile. Although most had intended to settle permanently in America, once Hitler came to power thousands were drawn back to the “New Germany”—now with wives and children. American soldiers in World War II sometimes encountered English-speaking German soldiers who had spent years in the United States.

These immigrants and the larger German-American community were of great interest to Hitler, who knew little about America. His knowledge was derived from boys’ novels about the American West written by a German who had never visited America, from American films, and from reports of associates who had lived or visited there. He considered America a mongrel nation, ruled by a Jewish plutocracy, too degenerate to fight. Although he admired America’s industrial prowess, he did not believe that America could be of significant assistance to his enemies in a short war. America’s neutrality laws, in fact, seemed to him an invitation to go to war. America hardly figured in the preparation of Hitler’s war plans.

Nevertheless, Hitler and his followers saw the German-American community as a potential asset for Germany. Numerous agencies of the state and party engaged in the study of America, though always through the lens of Nazi racial and political ideology. They believed that Americans of German descent constituted a quarter of the U.S. population and that millions of them still spoke German. Their goal was to energize and enlist German-Americans—“racial comrades”—into a pro-German political force. In Nazi theory, race was more important than citizenship. Wherever he lived, they insisted, a German belonged first to the Fatherland. By propaganda and subsidies to pro-Nazi organizations, they hoped to create a useful arm of German policy in America.

As early as 1922, a group of German immigrants formed a Nazi Party cell in the Bronx, New York. Other right-wing German organizations



sprouted across the country, reflecting the self-imposed isolation of the new immigrants from the established German-American community. The most important of these groups was the National Socialist Teutonia Association, founded in Detroit in 1924. By 1933, it had branches in Chicago, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and New York.

Teutonia was the predecessor of the Friends of the New Germany (1933–36) and the German-American Bund (1936–41). Thoroughly Nazi in orientation, these organizations enlisted mostly recent German immigrants, including German nationals (immigrants who had not yet become citizens) and Nazi Party members.

Until 1936, the Nazi organizations were roiled by rivalries for leadership and for German patronage. Their raucous and menacing activities and their blatant propaganda provoked public hostility and government investigations. Convinced that these groups were not serving German objectives, German officials—desiring a truly indigenous American front—attempted to sever relations with them and vainly ordered German nationals and party members to resign. The situation changed dramatically in 1936 when, out of the Friends of the New Germany, there emerged the German-American Bund led by Fritz Kuhn.

Kuhn, then thirty-nine, was German-born, a veteran of the war and the Free Corps, and an early member of the Nazi Party. In 1923 he emigrated to Mexico and in 1927 to the United States, where he became naturalized in 1934. Flamboyant and histrionic, the “American *Führer*” spoke in a heavy German accent and wore a Nazi-style uniform with black jackboots. He was fanatically anti-Jewish and antiblack, believing that Aryan men were the saviors of civilization. The Bund was “called to assume the political leadership of the German element in the United States,” he proclaimed, and Nazi Germany pointed the way to America’s future.<sup>24</sup>

Kuhn revived the floundering organization, asserting dictatorial authority under the “leadership principle” (*Führerprinzip*). Internal rivalries ceased. Membership grew across the country, although it was heavily concentrated in New York. A select group comprised the SA-like Uniformed Service (*Ordnungs-Dienst*, or OD). The Bund published newspapers in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Its youth division provided summer camps where Bund families could take their vacations while their uniformed children were drilled and indoctrinated. An astute businessman, Kuhn made the Bund financially solvent through membership dues, fees, and contributions; the sale of tickets to Bund events, of uniforms, insignia, regalia, and jewelry, of books, pamphlets, and newspapers (and advertising); the rental of summer cottages in the camps, and numerous other business interests.

Kuhn hungered for publicity, for himself and the Bund. He was frequently photographed in night clubs with attractive women other than his wife. For the Bund, he staged torchlight parades and mass rallies that were reported in newspapers and newsreels.



The most notorious of his rallies was the Bund's celebration of George Washington's Birthday in New York's Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939. That night, a huge floodlit platform stood at one end of the arena. Behind it hung a thirty-foot-high portrait of Washington, flanked by red, white, and blue standards and standards of the Bund. The balcony was hung with slogans: "Wake Up America," "Smash Jewish Communism," "Stop Jewish Domination of Christian America." The *New York Times* headlined "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden." These included, besides the Bundists, Christian Fronters, Italian Black Shirts, Russian Nationalists, other native right-wing extremists, and numbers of curiosity seekers and reporters.

The rally began promptly at eight o'clock. A brown-shirted boys' drum and bugle corps entered and marched to the platform. Their playing accompanied the entrance of the uniformed Bundists, headed by a color guard carrying American, German, Italian, and Bund flags. When they had taken their places, the men of the Uniformed Service (ODs), in gray shirts and black Sam Browne belts and trousers, entered and lined the aisles. The crowd rose and raised their right arms in the Nazi salute.

The crowd then sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" and pledged "undivided" allegiance to the flag. As usual at Bund rallies, speaker followed speaker for three hours. The first, a uniformed Bund official, addressing "My fellow Christian Americans," denounced President Roosevelt for "spreading class hate" and spoke of "the great task of national reconstruction." "Restore America to the Americans!" he cried, and concluded with "Free America!"—presumably from "Jew-rule."<sup>25</sup>

A Lutheran minister regretted American participation in World War I. "Our soldiers went to Europe to prevent a great nation from achieving its liberty," he said. "If Washington were alive today he would be a friend of Adolf Hitler. . . ." <sup>26</sup> He praised former president Herbert Hoover and isolationist senators Gerald Nye, Hiram Johnson, and William Borah. The crowd cheered; Hoover later disclaimed the honor.

Another uniformed speaker denounced "Jewish agitators . . . CIO racketeers . . . these Barney Baruchs and Henry Morgenthau Juniors."<sup>27</sup> When he mentioned Father Coughlin, the crowd roared its approval. He pleaded for a "Jew-free America" and concluded with the shout "Free America!"

While the next speaker discoursed on "the Golden Rule for Aryans," journalist Dorothy Thompson laughed aloud and was ejected from the press box. The following speaker declared that the country was in a deplorable state "[w]hen Henry Morgenthau takes the place of an Alexander Hamilton and Franklin D. Roosevelt the place of a Washington."<sup>28</sup> He pronounced Roosevelt as "Rosenfeld," and the crowd booed. They cheered, however, at the mention of the usual isolationist notables.

The final and principal speaker was *Bundesleiter* Fritz Kuhn, who proclaimed that the aim of his followers was "to protect themselves, their

children and their homes against those who would turn the United States into a bolshevik paradise.”<sup>29</sup> Kuhn was a poor public speaker, but his address was enlivened when a young man from the audience climbed onto the platform but was then tackled and beaten by ODS and carried off by the police. Kuhn was able to continue, denouncing the “campaign of hate” being waged against the Bund in the press, the radio, and the cinema “through the hands of the Jews.” He concluded at 11:15 with three shouts of “Free America!”

Outside the Garden, 1,700 police kept thousands of anti-Nazi protesters several blocks away from the rally. There were thirteen arrests for disorderly conduct and many complaints of police brutality.

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No laws were broken at the Bund’s rally. But local, state, and federal investigators were pursuing possible violations by the Bund of laws regarding taxes, liquor licenses, civil rights, and the wearing of foreign uniforms. Bund camps were closed; California and Florida outlawed the Bund entirely.

President Roosevelt in 1936 had ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation to look into subversive activities in the United States. Beginning with German sympathizers and Communists, the FBI investigation eventually extended to critics of the New Deal.

In 1938 Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act and in 1940 the Alien Registration (or Smith) Act, which made it a crime to teach or advocate the overthrow of the U.S. government or to belong to an organization advocating its overthrow.

Also in 1938, Congress established the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate “subversive and un-American propaganda.” The committee took up the Bund first, but quickly turned to other targets of greater interest to its conservative chairman, Democratic representative Martin Dies of Texas—Communists, labor unions, the New Deal.

Exposure of fascist organizations became popular among journalists and even freelancers: in 1944, a self-appointed investigator taking the name John Roy Carlson published *Under Cover*, a sensationalized and best-selling account of his adventures in the far-right underground since 1939.

In August 1939 the Dies committee returned to the Bund, calling Fritz Kuhn and other Bundists to testify. Kuhn, who had been indicted the previous May on charges of embezzling Bund funds, was obstreperous, but the committee elicited enough information from other witnesses to determine that the Bund was “an absolutely militarized” un-American organization.

Although theatrical and menacing, the Bund had little impact on American society. The House Un-American Activities Committee was

told that membership in the Bund was perhaps 25,000. The vast majority of Americans loathed it. By contrast, the American Communist Party at its peak had perhaps three times as many members, many thousands of sympathizers, and incalculable influence.

Kuhn was convicted of embezzlement in December 1939, sentenced to prison, and later denaturalized together with ten other Bundists. After the war, he was deported to his native Germany. The Bund dissolved in December 1941.

George Sylvester Viereck was convicted in 1944 of violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act and spent three years in prison. Also in 1944 Viereck, Lawrence Dennis, and twenty-eight other alleged subversives, including leaders of hate groups, far-right political organizations, and former Bundists were indicted under the Smith Act for conspiring to support Nazi Germany. A long trial in 1944 ended in a mistrial. In 1947 charges were dismissed.

Charles Coughlin was compelled by church officials in May 1942 to give up his public activities. He remained a parish priest in Royal Oak until his retirement.

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By 1940, fascism had lost its allure for many of the people who had been susceptible to it ten years before. Democracy, however, remained on the defensive, both militarily and philosophically.

Before the 1930s, antidemocratic thinkers in America had never contemplated dictatorship. Their ideal was a republic governed by an elite. Basically, one school of antidemocratic thought favored an elite of wisdom and virtue; another school—consisting largely of the business community—favored an elite of wealth.

The authors of the Constitution had tried to institutionalize an elite of wisdom and virtue in several ways, most notably by taking the selection of the president and vice president out of the hands of the people and vesting it in an Electoral College. They conceived the Electoral College as a body of informed and judicious men who would survey the entire country and identify the most eminent and qualified candidates for the nation's highest offices. This experiment quickly failed when newly arisen political parties usurped the function of the Electoral College. The idea of government by an elite of wisdom and virtue remained the fantasy of romanticists.

With the maturing of the American economy, government by an elite of wealth became increasingly real at both the state and national levels. In the nineteenth century, concentrated wealth manipulated the electorate and corrupted state and national legislatures. During the 1920s America was an unapologetic plutocracy. The administration of Franklin Roosevelt checked the aspirations of the elite of wealth only temporarily.

Early in the twentieth century, a new kind of elite began to be recognized. This elite comprised academic experts, engineers, and “scientific” managers. Presumed to be nonpartisan and devoted to efficiency, members of these groups were employed or consulted by industrial firms and by some city and state governments.

Progressives became fascinated by the idea that a rational and equitable society could be organized by “social engineers.” In the early 1930s a “technocracy” movement enjoyed a brief vogue. Many New Dealers were advocates of “scientific” social planning. Fascist Lawrence Dennis imagined an American dictator governing through a council of technocrats.

In his 1941 book, *The Managerial Revolution*—hailed by the business magazine *Fortune* as “the most debated book published so far this year”<sup>30</sup>—and in articles in *Fortune* and the radical *Partisan Review*, James Burnham, a professor of philosophy at New York University, identified the emerging managerial elite as a new social class, worldwide in extent and homogenous in character.

A disenchanted Marxist, Burnham still adhered to the Marxian historical dialectic—the succession of “ruling classes” as determined by changing economic relations. Just as capitalists had replaced feudal lords as the ruling class in Western society, according to the Marxists, so capitalists were destined to be replaced by the working class. Burnham argued that since World War I history had already demonstrated the falsity of this prediction. Capitalists, he concurred, were certainly finished as the ruling class, but their successors would not be the workers but the managers.

As capitalism had developed, Burnham explained (as had many others before him), the management of business enterprises had become increasingly complex, its diverse functions becoming ever more specialized and professionalized. At the same time, the ownership of the enterprise—once combined with management in the person of the proprietor—had become dispersed among numerous shareholders, whose relationship to the enterprise was largely passive—namely, collecting dividend checks. For all practical purposes, the managers—technically employees of the owners—now effectively “owned” the enterprise, making economic, financial, and production decisions and compensating themselves generously.

Since World War I, Burnham continued, the world had been experiencing “a period of rapid transition from one type or structure of society to another type.”<sup>31</sup> This period of social change—to be completed within fifty years—was the “managerial revolution,” in which the managerial class would establish itself in the leading industrial countries as the ruling class. That process was already far advanced in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Due to local conditions, the United States lagged behind. But “the U.S. can no more escape [the impact of the current world revolution] than that of the waves or the air. . . . The revolution in the U.S. is already well advanced and is daily increasing its speed. Its introductory triumph in this country was the New Deal.”<sup>32</sup>

Twenty years before, economist Thorstein Veblen had observed the emergence of a managerial elite and had considered its potential as a revolutionary force. He had discounted the idea because he believed that the managers were content in their present situation. But Veblen, according to Burnham, did not understand the historical process as discerned by Marxists. The conscious desires or intentions of the managers were irrelevant. History had ordained that they were to become the new ruling class.

How could this happen in America? “[J]ust prior to the first World War,” Burnham wrote, “‘government’ in the U.S. was a comparatively negligible social institution. . . . Today [after the New Deal] the government is by far the mightiest institution of our society. . . . The state’s sphere of operations is indefinitely enlarged. . . . To direct these new state activities under modern historical conditions, there arises within the government . . . a new decisive group of ‘government managers’ and administrators. . . . They do not work within Congress or congressional committees. Their managerial homes are the many boards, bureaus, commissions, authorities, offices. As their functions become more pervasive in the life of the nation, *de facto* sovereignty leaves Congress and the other parliamentary institutions of the vanishing day and comes to rest within these same bureaus, authorities, and offices. . . . The broad managerial class will run society and secure its own rule: not as private owners any more than as feudal lords, but through its control of the unlimited managerial state.”<sup>33</sup>

The managerial society, Burnham acknowledged, would be totalitarian and undemocratic. Opposition parties would not be permitted, although a limited measure of democracy—polling?—might be necessary for the managers’ own purposes: “[I]n planning and co-ordinating the economic process, one of the factors that must be taken into account is the state of mind of the people, including something of their wants and their reactions to the work they are doing. Unless these are known, at least roughly, even reasonable efficiency in production is difficult.”<sup>34</sup>

In any case, Burnham shrugged, “it is not at all clear, from historical experience, how much the masses are devoted to democracy when compared with other values such as jobs or food or reasonable security.”<sup>35</sup>

Burnham’s conflation of communism, fascism, and the New Deal, and his denigration of democracy, were characteristic of much conservative thought in the 1930s. But Burnham went further than most conservatives. He rejected capitalism as well as communism, he expected Germany to win World War II, and he accepted—perhaps without enthusiasm, but certainly without protest—the inevitable totalitarian future.

## CHAPTER 5

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# The Red Decade

Americans' remarkable fear and hatred of Marxism—as distinct from native utopian or reformist socialisms—long antedated the existence of a menacing Soviet Union. It was, to begin with, a foreign ideology brought to America by immigrants, and thus doubly unwelcome. It attacked the institution of private property, and property ownership was widespread in America. It preached class warfare, and Americans were not intensely class conscious. It promised to exalt the proletariat, but few Americans thought of themselves as proletarians. Finally, Marxism was an uncompromising materialistic and atheistic philosophy, perhaps its greatest offense to zealously religious Americans.

Marxism was only one of a variety of immigrant radicalisms—including anarchism and syndicalism (the doctrine of a worker-controlled government achieved by a general strike)—that Americans abhorred and generally associated with labor unrest.

When Russia—after the Bolshevik (Communist) revolution of November 1917—emerged as the aggressive champion of revolutionary communism and withdrew from World War I (freeing many German divisions for service against its former allies on the Western Front), outraged Americans execrated the Russians, supported the Justice Department's persecution and deportation of immigrant radicals in the Red Scare of 1919–20, agreed with the State Department's attempt to contain the communist contagion by refusing to recognize the Soviet Union, and approved of business leaders who effectively subdued the American labor movement during the 1920s.

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Before the war, there had been two Marxist parties in the United States: the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party. In 1919, left-wing Socialists and labor radicals, dissatisfied with the gradualism of the existing Marxist parties and eager to identify with the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Russia, formed two parties claiming the name Communist. These combined in 1921 on orders from Moscow.

The Communist International, or Comintern—the world organization of Communist parties, headquartered in Moscow—asserted control over the American and other national parties. It directed not only the parties' ideology but their internal affairs and tactics as well. In the factional struggles that beset the American Communist Party in the 1920s, only those leaders survived who were absolutely submissive to Moscow's dictates survived. By the 1930s, factionalism had ended and the party had become a monolith, accepting orders from Moscow without discussion or dissent.

Small numbers of communists organized outside the party. Some were followers of Leon Trotsky, one of the original Bolshevik revolutionaries who had been expelled by Stalin from the Soviet Union and eventually found refuge in Mexico. Others were followers of dissidents who had been expelled from the American party. Party members hated the Trotskyists and other "renegades" more furiously than any other enemies.

In 1930 the American Communist Party claimed 7,500 members, mostly working-class immigrants in and around New York City. Jews were conspicuous among them; Communists were particularly influential in the garment workers unions, which were largely Jewish. Jewish defense organizations like the American Jewish Committee were sensitive to the issue and tried to mitigate its effect on public opinion. *Fortune* offered comfort of a sort: "[B]ecause the Jewish intellectual is a formidable member of the Communist Party it does not follow that 'the revolution' in America is Jewish. . . . [F]or every revolutionary Jew there are thousands of Jewish capitalists, shopkeepers, traders, and the like who stand to lose everything in a revolution. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

With the deepening of the depression, the party began to attract new members as well as "fellow travelers" or sympathizers, middle-class professionals and intellectuals who believed that capitalism had failed and that communism offered a rational and desirable alternative.

"We were sure we were living on the edge of catastrophe," recalled newspaper editor James Wechsler, who became a Communist in 1934 while still in college. "Frustration and emptiness were expressed on all sides; the Marxists came breathing certitude and salvation."<sup>2</sup>

Certitude and salvation were what American intellectuals hungered for as the existing order seemed to crumble beneath their feet. Many, like Granville Hicks, literary critic and editor of the Communist weekly, the *New Masses*, found them in the Communist Party. "Marx and Engels," Hicks wrote, "not only explained the crisis of capitalism; they set forth the laws of history. . . . By giving us the key to history, we were convinced,



Marxism enabled us to understand science, literature, all human activity. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Troubled and despairing, Whittaker Chambers—later to become a spy for the Soviets—found that "Communism . . . offered me what nothing else in the dying world had power to offer at the same intensity—faith and a vision, something for which to live and something for which to die. It demanded of me those things which have always stirred what is best in men—courage, poverty, self-sacrifice, discipline, intelligence, my life, and, at need, my death."<sup>4</sup>

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In the 1932 presidential election, held in the darkest days of the depression when both the Republican and the Democratic parties had no better solution to the crisis than a balanced budget, the candidates of the three Marxist parties polled slightly more than 1 million votes out of a total of 40 million cast. The Communist candidate received a record 103,000 votes.

Exaggerated fear of a Communist revolution was then widespread, particularly among business leaders, some of whom flirted with fascism as preferable to communism. Soviet espionage was then little suspected, but conservatives believed they saw Communist influence and subversion everywhere—in the Roosevelt administration, labor unions, civil rights and civil liberties organizations, schools and colleges, youth movements, books, art, and entertainment. And, in fact, Communists often were involved, the party cynically selecting for exploitation those issues and events that served its purposes. Many idealistic and well-intentioned members were unaware of their manipulation by the party.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Comintern, in the interests of doctrinal purity and rigorous discipline, dictated a policy of separatism of national Communist parties from other parties. They would not compromise their claim to be the sole vanguard of the proletarian revolution. Cooperation with their Marxist rivals, the Socialists—now branded "social fascists," since any Marxist who was not a Communist "objectively" aided fascism—was prohibited. In Germany, this policy led to open conflict between Communists and Social Democrats, enabling Hitler to crush them separately with relative ease. In America, it ensured the isolation and insignificance of the American Communist Party.

But the rising threat of Nazi Germany caused the Comintern to reconsider. The security of the Soviet Union had always been the Comintern's paramount concern. In the 1920s, the threat was imagined to come from capitalist countries determined to crush the revolution in its homeland. But in the early 1930s the Comintern recognized in German fascism a growing threat of a more immediate order.

In 1934 the Soviet Union sought safety by joining the long despised League of Nations. The following year the Comintern announced a new

policy—the Popular Front—of cooperation with Socialists and bourgeois liberals in opposition to fascism. Peace advocacy, formerly a Communist strategy, was now subordinated to collective security. National Communist parties everywhere mobilized not in the cause of revolution but to protect the “socialist homeland.”

The American Communist Party accepted this radical change of direction without missing a step. Almost overnight, the party, unchanged at its core, appeared to morph from a conspiratorial revolutionary sect into a typical American service organization—patriotic, liberal, socially active. Communism, its propagandists proclaimed, was twentieth-century Americanism. Suddenly the party proffered friendship to American Socialists and embraced the New Deal, which it had previously denounced. Communist labor unions now affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, with which they had previously competed, and later entered the Congress of Industrial Organizations. New vistas of influence opened before the party.

Communist Party membership grew rapidly during the Popular Front period, reaching 75,000 by 1939. People were drawn to the party for two principal reasons. First, imagining that the Soviet Union was a socialist utopia, they wanted a similar revolutionary transformation of American society. Second, and more immediately, they admired the Communists’ demonstrated enmity toward Nazi Germany and shared the party’s concern to halt the fascist advance. On both these points, no other group on the American political spectrum had comparable credibility.

“I joined the party [in 1935],” Granville Hicks reported, “because, as a convinced Marxist, I was in agreement with what I believed to be its ultimate aim—the socialization of the means of production—and especially because it seemed to be leading the struggle against fascism.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike liberals and socialists, the Communists were serious; “the communists mean it,” said novelist Sherwood Anderson.<sup>6</sup>

Membership in the party, however, was highly unstable. Turnover ran as high as 70 percent per year; more than 200,000 people were estimated to have passed through the party during the 1930s. The duties of party membership were onerous (including almost nightly meetings), the discipline was rigid, and the dogma was suffocating. Some who left continued to serve the cause as fellow travelers; others drifted away altogether with bitter tastes in their mouths.

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The party was not disheartened by its small membership. In fact, it regarded its members as a tough, disciplined cadre trained to extend the party’s influence into far wider circles. Thus Communists who joined a labor union or other independent organization were required to form a “fraction” to influence that organization’s policy and ultimately get Communists into positions of leadership and control.

At the same time, the party organized its own auxiliary organizations, or fronts, to influence ever wider circles of the noncommunist (and unsuspecting) public and to train future party members. There were innumerable such fronts, including the Friends of Soviet Russia, the John Reed Clubs, the International Labor Defense, the Unemployed Councils, the United Farmers League, the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League, the National Lawyers Guild, the American Negro Labor Congress, the American Artists Congress, and the American Writers Congress.

In theory, the fronts were intended to be mass organizations of noncommunists covertly directed by small Communist fractions. During the 1920s the fronts were small, often comprising only Communists and a few fellow travelers. They were more successful in the 1930s, when they enlisted—under the banner of antifascist unity—not only Communists and fellow travelers but also large numbers of “innocents,” people unaware of, or indifferent to, the organizations' real purposes. So many influential people—academics, writers, publishers, clergymen, artists, stage and film workers—were drawn into the front organizations (not to mention the party itself) that the 1930s were dubbed the “red decade.” The Communists ran the fronts with crude effectiveness, appointing and dismissing officers, dictating policy, and making sure that no word remotely critical of the Soviet Union was ever spoken.

The largest and most successful of the fronts was the American League Against War and Fascism, established in 1933 when the Soviet Union, still fearing imperialist encirclement, sought to exploit American antiwar and pacifist sentiment. Invitations to the founding congress in New York in September 1933 were sent to individuals and organizations over the names of prominent noncommunists. Some 2,600 delegates representing several hundred organizations—labor, farm, professional, veterans', pacifist, women's, religious, civil rights and liberties, ethnic, fraternal, youth—attended. Many of these organizations were themselves Communist fronts. The Socialist Party, protesting Communist domination in the congress's preparatory stage, refused to participate although individual Socialists did.

The initial meeting of the congress was chaired by Reinhold Niebuhr and J. B. Matthews, both Socialists and pacifists. The League, however, was not pacifist; it opposed only “imperialist” wars. The manifesto issued at the close of the congress began: “The black cloud of imperialist war hangs over the world”—meaning the war against the Soviet Union supposedly long contemplated by capitalist countries, now led by Nazi Germany and militarist Japan.

War and capitalism (including fascism) were inseparable. “The war danger arises inevitably,” the manifesto continued, “out of the very nature of monopolistic capitalism—the ownership of the means of production by a small capitalist class and the complete domination of government by this class. . . .

"Only in the Soviet Union has this basic cause of war been removed. There are no classes or groups which can benefit from war or war preparation. Therefore the Soviet Union pursues a positive and vigorous peace policy and alone among the governments proposes total disarmament."

The manifesto closed with a ten-point program, of which the fifth read: "To support the peace policies of the Soviet Union . . . ; to oppose all attempts to weaken the Soviet Union, whether these take the form of misrepresentation and false propaganda, diplomatic maneuvering or intervention by imperialist governments."<sup>7</sup>

The American League Against War and Fascism attracted many prominent noncommunist individuals, but its claim to millions of members rested on the combined memberships of its affiliated organizations. As with other umbrella organizations, most members of the affiliated organizations may have been unaware of their membership in the League. In 1942, Roger Baldwin, founder and executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, denied that the League had been controlled by Communists: "[T]he policies made at the top . . . were arrived at by democratic consultation among people, a majority of whom were not Communists, neither party members nor fellow travelers. We were, of course, prevented from taking any position in opposition to Communist policy, for they would have withdrawn and thus wrecked the united front."<sup>8</sup>

At the League's 1937 congress, the Communist Party disaffiliated in deference to the widespread perception that the League was a Communist front. Nevertheless, many Communists and fellow travelers remained, including several on the League's executive board. The League adopted a new name—the American League for Peace and Democracy—better reflecting the nation's pacifist and isolationist sentiment and thus more consistent with the strategy of the Popular Front.

In line with the Communist policy of collective security, the League worked to revise U.S. neutrality laws to distinguish between aggressors and victims, to impose economic sanctions on aggressors, and to cooperate with other countries to quarantine aggressors. Its object was to "keep America out of war by keeping war out of the world."

In August 1939 an open letter addressed "To All Active Supporters of Democracy and Peace" with more than 400 signers was issued to the public. The writers disclaimed connection to "any committee or organization," but from the letter's address, contents, and signers one can fairly infer a connection to the American League for Peace and Democracy. It was issued in response to a manifesto by the Committee for Cultural Freedom that had denounced all forms of dictatorship, including that in the Soviet Union as well as that in Germany.

"With the aim of turning anti-fascist feeling against the Soviet Union," the letter accused, the reactionaries of the Committee for Cultural Freedom "have encouraged the fantastic falsehood that the U.S.S.R. and the

totalitarian states are basically alike." It proceeded to list "ten basic points in which Soviet socialism differs from totalitarian fascism." Point number one: "The Soviet Union continues as always to be a bulwark against war and aggression, and works unceasingly for a peaceful international order."<sup>9</sup>

Signers included such well-known fellow travelers as: authors Waldo Frank, Matthew Josephson, Richard Wright, James Thurber, Louis Untermeyer, and Dashiell Hammett; journalists Max Lerner, George Seldes, I. F. Stone, Robert Morss Lovett, and Vincent Sheean; playwrights George Kaufman and Clifford Odets; composer Marc Blitzstein; poet William Carlos Williams; and painter Rockwell Kent.

The letter was dated August 10, and it was printed in its entirety in the *Nation* (the *New Republic* abridged it) in its issue of August 26—three days after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. That event precipitated the demise of the American League for Peace and Democracy. At its final congress, in October 1939, the Communist-led remnants of the League voted to support the Soviet Union's "peace policy." With the end of the Popular Front, the League was of no further use to the Communists. In February 1940, it dissolved.

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The enmity between Nazis and Communists (before August 1939) was mortal. Communists saw fascism—of which Hitler's national socialism was but one variety—as the final stage of capitalism, the stage in which monopoly capitalists seized the government, abolished the existing constitution, and used the power of the state to reduce the working class to subservience. For Communists, Hitler's accession to power presaged the ultimate class struggle in Germany. Moreover, Nazi Germany—unlike Fascist Italy—posed a major military threat to the Soviet Union. For a decade, Hitler had demonized the Soviet Union on both political and racial grounds. He had made no secret of his intentions to scrap the Treaty of Versailles, rearm, and carve out Germany's needed "living space" in eastern Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union.

As soon as Hitler came to power, American Communists sounded the alarm. Unlike other newspapers, the Communist *Daily Worker* did not hesitate to print reports of Nazi atrocities, particularly against German Communists. It ceaselessly trumpeted the growing threat of war. It advocated a united front among Communists, Socialists, and labor unions to resist the Nazi menace.

The party called an anti-Nazi protest meeting at New York's Madison Square Garden on April 5, just nine days after the Jewish protest meeting at the same site. Claiming an attendance of 22,000 "workers," the *Daily Worker* described "a monster mass-meeting that filled Madison Square Garden to the rafters";<sup>10</sup> the *New York Times* estimated the attendance at 15,000.

A dozen speakers warned against war and against fascism in the United States. "Fascism means war," declared one union representative, "—war upon the workers, war between imperialist powers, war against the Soviet Union."<sup>11</sup>

Unity among all progressive organizations was essential, said a party official, for "the struggle against the program of Roosevelt here in the United States, against the war danger that is developing, and particularly at this moment against fascism in Germany."<sup>12</sup>

Fellow travelers also raised their voices. According to the *Times*, Roger Baldwin "ridiculed the value of political democracy, which he pronounced moribund, and called for a united front of communists and liberals to fight fascism."<sup>13</sup> J. B. Matthews, Socialist and pacifist, declared, "In the struggle against fascism, only a united working class, animated by a revolutionary purpose and led by revolutionary leaders, is adequate. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the only answer to fascism."<sup>14</sup>

Despite Communist leaders' "steely determination to forge a powerful united front in the unyielding struggle against the German fascist dictatorship,"<sup>15</sup> this was still the period when the Comintern regarded anyone to the right of the Communist Party as a social fascist. Thus Communists had little taste for inclusiveness except on their own terms. At Madison Square Garden, speakers belabored the Socialist Party for not participating in the meeting and blamed the German Socialists for Hitler's success. They also attacked the Jewish defense organizations for treating Nazism as a Jewish rather than a class issue.

According to the *Daily Worker*, "The mass meeting adopted a resolution pledging to stand unitedly in the fight for the support of the heroic German people against the bloodthirsty fascist dictatorship, and protesting against the efforts of the American State Department and the bourgeois Jewish leaders to shield the Hitler fascist regime."<sup>16</sup>

Communists were zealous demonstrators—marching, picketing, rallying, disrupting, brawling. They could be counted on to be noisily present at any scene of social conflict—street corners, picket lines, courthouses, demonstrations by their enemies (Socialists, Christian Fronters, fascists of every stripe). On February 16, 1934, 5,000 New York Communists broke up a Socialist rally in Madison Square Garden in honor of Socialists massacred by the Austrian dictator Engelbert Dollfuss—despite their shared hatred of Austrian fascism. The Nazi swastika was a particular provocation to the Communists, and the German-American Bund a favorite target.

Two demonstrations that made the front page of the *New York Times* and were reported around the world involved the German passenger liner *Bremen*. On the night of July 28, 1935, 2,000 New York Communists marched to the *Bremen's* Hudson River pier displaying anti-Nazi placards and shouting slogans. Some managed to get up the gangplank to the floodlit tourist deck where departure festivities were under way. While several

demonstrators cut down the Nazi flag at the prow of the ship and threw it into the river, others fought with the crew and police. The brawl spilled onto the pier and later resumed at a nearby police station where a number of demonstrators had been taken under arrest.

In September five demonstrators charged with unlawful assembly appeared before police magistrate Louis B. Brodsky. Brodsky dismissed the charges against them for lack of evidence, but not before suggesting that the demonstrators might have viewed the swastika flag like “the black flag of piracy” and its display on the *Bremen* as a provocation—“a gratuitously brazen flaunting of an emblem which symbolizes all that is antithetical to American ideals. . . .”<sup>17</sup>

German organizations in New York complained. The German ambassador in Washington delivered a formal protest to the State Department. In Germany, the Nazi press voiced its outrage. Hans Frank, Nazi president of the German Academy of Law, deplored “that this contemptible piece of blackguardism on the part of a Jew could occur under the protection of public office.”<sup>18</sup>

A year later, on August 21, 1936, 150 Communists wearing evening clothes again boarded the *Bremen* shortly before its departure, marched about the decks shouting anti-Nazi slogans and distributing handbills, and fought with the crew and police. On this occasion, as in 1935, the *Bremen* sailed on time at 12:30 a.m.

The demonstrations aboard the *Bremen* inspired a famous short story by Irwin Shaw, the antiwar playwright of *Bury the Dead* in 1936. By 1939, Shaw, like other once-antiwar intellectuals, had become an interventionist, ready to confront the Nazi menace with force. In “Sailor off the *Bremen*,” published in the *New Yorker* in February 1939, a peaceable young man determines to avenge the disfiguring beating suffered by his brother during a Communist demonstration on the *Bremen*. The crew member who administered the beating, a sadistic Nazi, is lured off the ship and savagely beaten on a dark Greenwich Village street. An intellectual’s fantasy, to be sure, but a sign of the times.

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The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) enabled the American Communist Party to exploit its new Popular Front strategy and acquire an unaccustomed respectability through its exertions on behalf of the Spanish Loyalists. Thousands of new members were attracted to what they perceived as the only militantly antifascist organization in America.

In 1931 the exiled Spanish king, Alfonso XIII, had been succeeded by an anticlerical republican government. Neither left nor right was satisfied, and disorder and violence grew. In 1936 a radical Popular Front government was elected that included Socialists, Communists, and anarchists. The country quickly polarized between extreme right and extreme left.



In July 1936, General Francisco Franco led a revolt in the Spanish army. All the conservative elements in Spain—the army, the Catholic church, monarchists, large landowners, industrialists, and the Spanish fascist party, the Falange—joined Franco's Nationalist movement in war against the republican government and its defenders, the Loyalists.

Britain and France adopted a policy of nonintervention. Italy and Germany, however, quickly sent troops, guns, tanks, and planes to the Nationalists. Soon the Soviet Union began to provide war material and advisers to the Loyalists. The fighting was bitter, with atrocities committed by both sides.

The Spanish Communist Party, at Moscow's direction, committed itself to the defense of the Popular Front government and quickly became the largest party in the republic. Communists, led by Soviet advisers and Comintern agents, gained control of the republic's armed forces, in the process brutally suppressing their radical opponents, who were antigovernment as well as anti-Stalinist. The war ended with the fall of Madrid to the Nationalists in March 1939.

Americans knew little about the complexities of the Spanish war. Two-thirds of them, according to a Gallup poll in January 1937, had no opinion about it at all. Most of those who did, however, cared passionately. They saw the civil war in Spain as a decisive confrontation between democracy and fascism. "The Spanish Republicans are fighting our battle as well as their own," declared author Newton Arvin.<sup>19</sup>

Except for the Catholic hierarchy, those Americans—including many Catholic lay people—who were informed about the Spanish war overwhelmingly sympathized with the Loyalists. But their sympathy, however passionate, failed to overcome the dominant American sentiments of isolationism and pacifism. Since the Neutrality Act of 1935 had mandated the embargoing of all belligerents in international (but not civil) wars, Congress in 1937 passed a nearly unanimous joint resolution embargoing both sides in the Spanish Civil War—although the Loyalists were the legitimate, democratically elected government. Thereafter Americans showed their Loyalist sympathies in newspaper editorials, works of literature and art, and humanitarian fund-raising.

The exception was the Communist Party. The party had protested the failure of the Neutrality Acts to distinguish between aggressors and victims. When the war began, New York Communists held mass meetings in support of the Loyalists, demonstrated in front of the Italian and German consulates, and organized numerous committees to raise money for the Loyalists. The party protested the embargoing of the Loyalist government together with the Nationalist regime.

Most important (and illegally), it began clandestinely to recruit volunteers to fight in Spain in the new international brigades originally formed by political refugees from central and eastern Europe and led by Comintern agents. Party offices across the country were instructed to recruit

noncommunists as well as Communists. Candidates were carefully examined for their motivations and political reliability—no Socialists, Trotskyists, or Communist “renegades” were accepted.

“I could not forget those newsreels of the Nazi storm troopers stomping and spitting on those poor, helpless people,” one recruit recalled typically. “I also knew it *could* happen here. My anger was so strong, I knew I had to go. Fascism simply had to be stopped.”<sup>20</sup>

Those selected were usually young men in their twenties—college students, blue-collar workers, seamen, unemployed, adventure-seekers. There were also small numbers of writers, teachers, technicians, and physicians. Few had any military training or experience.

The party paid for their passports and transportation. The recruits traveled to New York, from where they took third-class passage to France. The first contingent of ninety-six men left New York on December 26, 1936, aboard the luxury liner *Normandie*. From Paris, they traveled south, finally reaching Spain by boat from Marseilles or by foot over the Pyrenees.

In Spain the Americans formed battalions named for Abraham Lincoln and, later, George Washington. (The commander of the Lincoln Battalion had four years of college ROTC.) There were also American artillery, transport, and hospital units. The Americans were given minimal training before being thrown into battle.

Not all American volunteers were recruited by the party. Some made their own way to Spain. Altogether, some 3,000 American volunteers fought in Spain; 1,000 died. Only half, it has been estimated, were Communists; perhaps 30 percent were Jews. When the international brigades were dissolved in 1938, the American volunteers returned home. “Premature antifascists,” they endured decades of FBI scrutiny.

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Even as the Spanish Civil War drew to its close, the rosy glow that had suffused the Popular Front began to fade. Some returning veterans revealed the Soviets’ ruthless domination of the Spanish republic. At the same time, the Moscow treason trials (1936–38), in which Stalin purged his real or imagined opponents among the Old Bolsheviks, state and party officials, and army generals, perplexed American Communists and their friends. All the accused in these trials confessed to improbable crimes of espionage and sabotage on behalf of Germany or Japan. Convicted, they were promptly shot. True believers accepted these verdicts as just. Those of weaker faith suspended judgment.

But greater shocks were to come. All during August 1939, black headlines in the *Daily Worker* (and other newspapers) tracked the growing crisis in relations between Germany and Poland. Hitler demanded Danzig and the Polish Corridor; Poland, with guarantees of support from Britain

and France, resisted. Armies massed on the German-Polish border. War seemed imminent.

Suddenly, on August 22, the world's newspapers headlined the news that the German foreign minister was on his way to Moscow to sign a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The world was astonished; the American Communist Party was stunned. Moscow had not bothered to alert the American party to its reversal of policy. The *Daily Worker* made no reference to the sensation for twenty-four hours while party leaders, without Moscow's guidance, wrestled with their dilemma.

On September 11—the eleventh day of the war—the party faithful filled New York's Madison Square Garden to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party in the United States. They heard party leader Earl Browder explain that the nonaggression pact was "consistent with the peace policy" of the Soviet Union. He endorsed President Roosevelt's declaration of neutrality, noting that in this respect the American position on the war was the same as that of the Soviets. The pact, he argued, was a triumph for peace by removing the threat of war against the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately for Browder, the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland on September 17 belied this description. By the end of September the Soviet Union had occupied the three Baltic States. And on November 30 it attacked Finland.

The American press generally had little difficulty recognizing the Soviet actions as cynical, even desperate, power politics, devoid of any pretense of morality. Two totalitarian states, essentially alike, had found a mutually advantageous, if temporary, *modus vivendi*.

The liberal magazines, however—the *New Republic* and the *Nation*, which had long been friendly to the Soviet Union—viewed the pact essentially in moral terms. However one might rationalize Stalin's decision—for good reason he distrusted Britain and France, or he wanted to be free to face the threat from Japan in the Far East—the pact, the magazines believed, injured the prestige of the Soviet Union ("the national embodiment of an international movement which claims to have risen above nationalism and imperialism," as Reinhold Niebuhr noted<sup>22</sup>) among liberals and radicals around the world. Stalin had betrayed his ideology and his commitment to collective security; he had delivered Poland to Hitler and secured Hitler's rear in his conflict with Britain and France.

To have signed the pact at this time, according to a writer in the *Nation*, "was a violation of public morality for which nothing in the record of the Soviet Union had prepared us."<sup>23</sup> "[T]he Russian government has revealed itself as a common despoiler and robber," wrote Oswald Garrison Villard, also in the *Nation*. "It is not only just as bloody as the [other dictatorships], but just as crooked, treacherous, and criminal."<sup>24</sup>

"Stalin is to be criticized," editorialized the less condemnatory *New Republic*, "not for serving the interests of his country as he sees them

rather than observing a nonexistent international morality, but for doing this after a long flirtation with France and England, and for timing his repudiation so as to do them the maximum amount of harm and Germany the maximum amount of good."<sup>25</sup>

When the official line arrived at last from Moscow, it defined the new war as a conflict among imperialist powers in which Britain and France were the actual aggressors. The American Communist Party was instructed to oppose U.S. involvement. From championing collective security, the party now entered the camp of the isolationists—opposing aid to Britain and France, opposing defense measures, opposing conscription. From hailing President Roosevelt as an inspiring leader of the forces of democracy, it now pilloried him as a warmonger.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact and its sequels shook the American Communist Party to its core. Membership shrank by perhaps one half (to be partially recouped after December 1941 when the United States entered the war as a Soviet ally). Many intellectuals, who during the 1930s had given the party respectability and prestige, left it and its front organizations in disillusion and disgust.

Some left in regret. "[T]he great hopes which so recently animated all of us are gone," reflected former fellow traveler George S. Counts, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College. "Gone is the hope that the Russian Revolution would point the way to the economic emancipation of the common man. . . ." <sup>26</sup>

Others left in anger. Although he had severed his Communist ties by 1938, Whittaker Chambers felt betrayed. "Stalin," he wrote, "had unloosed upon mankind, for the second time in two decades, the horror of world war. . . . This was the war that . . . every Communist had foreseen and dedicated himself to struggle against. That a Communist had unloosed it upon mankind was a fact so monstrous that it absolved every man from the bonds of common humanity with that breed and made it a pious act to raise his hand in any way against them." <sup>27</sup>

Granville Hicks suspended judgment about the Soviet Union—a popular tactic when Communists or their sympathizers confronted unpalatable facts—but he quit his job at the *New Masses* and resigned from the party for its "stupid, unconvincing apologetics." <sup>28</sup> Writer and editor Malcolm Cowley resigned—belatedly—from the Communist front League of American Writers, of which he had been a founder, complaining: "Back in the days when the League was fighting fascism, I thought I knew its friends and its enemies; the latter were all those who favored appeasement abroad and reaction at home. Now it has joined company with the appeasers and even the reactionaries." <sup>29</sup>

But many Communists and fellow travelers remained loyal to the party. While many Jews resigned, others remained; secularized and idealistic, they clung to the party with an emotional dependency similar to their parents' adherence to Orthodox Judaism. Some loyalists were disciplined

Communists, steeled to tactical reversals of policy, who had found a home in the party and had nowhere else to go. And there were sentimental types who, despite all evidence to the contrary, remained true believers. They could not bear to abandon the myth of a beneficent Soviet Union leading the way to peace and justice.

On June 22, 1941, Hitler turned upon the Soviet Union. Overnight, the American Communist Party switched from peace-loving isolationism to fervent interventionism. "The armed assault by German fascism and its satellites against the Soviet Union," a party statement declared, "is an unprovoked criminal attack against the greatest champion of peace, freedom and national independence—the Land of Socialism. . . . The Soviet Government is now waging a . . . just struggle for . . . the freedom of all nations and peoples."<sup>30</sup>

"Stalin brought his troubles upon himself," observed the *New Republic*, traditionally uncritical of the Soviet Union but at last sadly disabused. "The Soviet Union under Stalin has sacrificed one by one practically all the principles which made the Russian revolution twenty-four years ago flame like a glorious hope across the heavens for millions of suffering people around the world. His last and greatest concession came when he struck hands with the deadliest enemy of communism . . . and by so doing released upon this planet the horrors of a second world war." Hitler's attack was Stalin's deserved retribution.<sup>31</sup>

The leftist British poet W. H. Auden, who had lived for a time in Nazi Germany and had served as a stretcher-bearer for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, moved to America in 1939. When the war started in September 1939, he wrote a famous poem, "September 1939," in which he described his mood: "Uncertain and afraid/As the clever hopes expire/Of a low dishonest decade."

## CHAPTER 6

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# Sheep among Wolves

In the 1920s, middle-class “mainline” Protestant denominations—Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Disciples of Christ and others—reflected the prevailing business culture. With their boards dominated by businessmen, they were politically conservative, respectable, and materialistic. The fellowship they offered was effectively segregated by race and class. The inspiration was often of the motivational sort, and the morality practical—both conducive to “success.” Protestant ministers, although often narrowly educated and poorly paid, were regarded as community leaders and moral authorities.

In American Protestantism, theology often correlated with politics. The mainline denominations, to which most American Protestants then belonged, were moderate to conservative in both their theology and their politics. They constituted the center on a theological/political spectrum that contained left and right wings.

The right wing comprised fundamentalists, including Southern Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and others. Their theology was based on a belief in the literal truth and infallibility of the Bible. They rejected modernity in all its varied manifestations—biblical criticism, evolution, “indecent” entertainment, liquor. Their politics, therefore, must be categorized as reactionary, although their primary interest was not in social programs but in the salvation of individual souls.

The left wing comprised theologically liberal denominations like the Unitarians, Universalists, and Friends as well as many pastors in the mainline denominations inspired by the Social Gospel movement. These pastors tried to relate Scripture to contemporary social problems. The influence of the Social Gospel was most apparent among Methodists,

Disciples, and Congregationalists. The politics of these pastors—if not of their congregants—was liberal. Many were Socialists and pacifists.

In the 1930s, denominational periodicals were unanimous in their condemnations of Nazi Germany. The fundamentalists saw in Nazism the inevitable fruit of godless modernity, but it was of no concern to their mission of saving souls. The mainline denominations decried the loss of freedom in Germany and feared for international peace, but otherwise were perplexed and prayerful in their responses. Only on the left were the meaning and consequences of the Nazi phenomenon seriously engaged, in liberal journals like the nondenominational *World Tomorrow* and *Christian Century*.

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Depression and approaching war radicalized many Protestant clergymen. The May 10, 1934 issue of the biweekly *World Tomorrow*, “a journal of radical religion”—that is, Protestant, Socialist, and pacifist—announced the results of its poll of Protestant and Jewish clerical opinion under the headline “Clergymen Swinging Leftward.” The magazine had distributed some 100,000 questionnaires and received 20,870 responses (203 from rabbis).

Asked “Which economic system appears to you to be less antagonistic to and more consistent with the ideals and methods of Jesus and the noblest of the Hebrew prophets?” only 5.0 percent of the respondents chose “capitalism (‘rugged individualism’ as in the United States prior to 1929).” Nearly nine out of ten (87.8%) preferred “a cooperative commonwealth (in which the service motive is predominant in individual life and in all social arrangements).” Of those favoring a cooperative commonwealth, 32.1 percent (28.2% of all respondents) chose “socialism—as represented by the Socialist Party of America.”<sup>1</sup>

That 28.2 percent of all respondents favored a socialist solution to the nation’s problems cheered the editors of the *World Tomorrow*. “Among all the trades, occupations, and professions in this country,” they observed with evident satisfaction, “few can produce as high a percentage of socialists as can the ministry.”<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, many Protestant pastors had moved to the left of their congregations.

Catholic laypeople also moved left in the 1930s, but they stopped at the Democratic Party. Whereas the mainline Protestant churches were largely middle class, many Catholics were working class and union members. The New Deal’s labor policies brought Catholic workers to the Democratic Party. Labor’s concentration in northern industrial states made it a powerful component of the “Roosevelt coalition.”

Numerous members of the Catholic clergy moved left as well. Pope Pius XI, in his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, while reaffirming the rights of capital, insisted that capital had a social as well as an individual



character. The capitalist had an obligation to treat his workers justly for "the common good of all society." Labor, the pope wrote, was not a mere commodity; "the worker's human dignity in it must be recognized." In particular, he affirmed the workers' right to organize in their own behalf.<sup>3</sup>

Thus armed, some priests and bishops denounced capitalism in radical terms. The church, of course, condemned Marxism for its atheism, materialism, classism, and collectivism, but many socially conscious Catholic clergy found Roosevelt's reformism congenial. Roosevelt himself was attentive to the Catholic bishops and for the first time appointed Catholic laymen to positions in his administration. No wonder then that, according to one authoritative estimate, 70 percent of the Catholic clergy supported Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election.

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The same 1934 *World Tomorrow* poll that had questioned the Protestant clergy about their political views also examined their attitudes toward war. At that time, the consciences of many Protestant ministers were burdened by guilt occasioned by their conduct in World War I. After lifetimes of peace advocacy, the ministers in 1917 had become superpatriots and bellicose advocates of the fight against the bestial "Hun." In 1933 a book called *Preachers Present Arms* reminded them of their apostasy by printing some of their more extreme wartime sermons. And in 1934, a book called *Religion Renounces War* reminded them of their recommitment to peace by printing many of the peace resolutions and pledges adopted by Protestant groups since the war.

Thus when asked by the *World Tomorrow* in 1934, "Do you believe that the churches of America should now go on record as refusing to sanction or support any future war?" 67.1 percent of the chastened respondents answered yes. Asked "Are you personally prepared to state that it is your present purpose not to sanction any future war or participate as an armed combatant?" 61.8 percent of respondents answered yes. Only 40.9 percent believed they could "conscientiously serve as an official army chaplain on active duty in wartime."<sup>4</sup>

"A revolution in thought is now sweeping through the ranks of religious leaders," rejoiced pacifist editor Kirby Page, disregarding the 80,000 ministers who had not responded to the poll. "'War is sin.' This conviction has been expressed in scores of resolutions passed by religious assemblies and broadcast in various proclamations signed by eminent leaders of religious institutions."<sup>5</sup> Here the respondents accurately reflected the nation's overwhelming antiwar sentiment, although their degree of pacifism exceeded that of the general population.

The history of Christianity is not notably pacific. It records crusades against infidels and heretics, inquisitions against dissenters and doubters, religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. In fact, the *Christian*

*Century* observed in 1934, "Since the rise of the nationalistic state, four centuries ago . . . , the Christian church has done nothing to prevent war, but on the contrary has been the most powerful ally of the war system. By giving assurance of its blessing upon any war which the state might wage, the church actually made war a religious act."<sup>6</sup>

The primitive church had of necessity been pacifist, and pacifist individuals and sects had always been present within Christianity. But the revival of pacifism as a principal tenet of the religion was a relatively modern development, derived from early modern notions of man's innate goodness and perfectibility. Some Protestant theologians found these views and the concomitant pacifism confirmed in the life and teaching of Jesus.

Others theologians disagreed. Reinhold Niebuhr, who during the 1930s remained on the left politically but moved right theologically, believed that most modern forms of Christian pacifism were heretical. "[They] have rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin as an outmoded bit of pessimism, have reinterpreted the Cross so that it is made to stand for the absurd idea that perfect love is guaranteed a simple victory over the world. . . . This form of pacifism is not only heretical when judged by the standards of the total gospel. It is equally heretical when judged by the facts of human existence."<sup>7</sup>

Niebuhr was the most articulate spokesman for a growing movement within the Protestant churches called Christian realism or neoorthodoxy. The realists wanted to reassert Christianity's independence of the national liberal culture, from which it had absorbed a shallow optimism. The realists saw man as egoistic and sinful (fallen, in theological terms), not innately good and perfectible. Christian ethics, they believed, were applicable only in relations between individuals; society—people collectively, with all their conflicting interests—was irrational and demonic. Nevertheless, however corrupt the world was, conscience required of humans pragmatic, effective social and political action, although without millennial expectations. Sinful people must struggle, always in ambiguous conflicts, to approach—never to reach—the moral society that Christianity posed as an ideal.

"Those who believe in the Kingdom of God as realized in a coming period of social justice and intellectual truth," said Niebuhr's colleague Paul Tillich, ". . . are not Protestants in the true meaning of the term."<sup>8</sup>

In the growing international crisis, the Protestant pacifists floundered among high-minded peace proposals. In addition to prayer and penitence, they proffered such nostrums as renunciation of war and unilateral disarmament; strict neutrality, trade embargoes, and isolation; formulation of "basic principles" of international conduct and peace plans; a world economic conference to rectify inequalities among nations; a national referendum before entering a foreign war. Once war began in Europe, they proposed schemes of mediation and a permanent congress

of neutrals to plan for peace. The Christian realists, meanwhile, moved away from their pacifist roots toward advocacy of preparedness and intervention.

Except for the small Catholic Worker movement, pacifism was not significant among Catholics. The church adhered to the doctrine of the just war, according to which a war was just if, among other criteria, it was defensive, the last resort, and conducted by means proportionate to its objective. The church had few illusions about the human propensity for war. "The world is evil and will remain so," wrote John LaFarge, associate editor of the Jesuit weekly *America*. "Until the millennium war will remain endemic in a corrupt world." Nevertheless, "The rejection of pacifism does not release Christians from the positive obligation to labor for peace. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Like Protestants, Catholics were intent upon keeping the United States out of a European war. Despite the just-war doctrine, Catholics could find no justification for America's involvement in a European war before Pearl Harbor—perhaps because belligerency would make the United States an ally of the Soviet Union. "Soviet Russia, alone, would gain by a war in Europe," *America* believed in 1938.<sup>10</sup> Early in 1939, John LaFarge asserted, "At the present moment, the strongest single influence being exerted to keep this country out of war appears to be that of the Catholics of the United States."<sup>11</sup>

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The uncertainty with which the religious press, both Protestant and Catholic, viewed the coming of Hitler did not last through 1933. The reign of terror by which the Nazis solidified their power, the dissolution of all other political parties, the early anti-Jewish edicts, the official hostility toward Protestant and Catholic churches, Germany's withdrawal from the World Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, and the first wave of emigration persuaded the editors of the religious journals that the Nazi regime was both anti-Christian and a threat to peace.

As early as May 10, 1933, the Protestant *Christian Century* editorialized: "The sympathy for Germany which has grown so uninterruptedly in England and the United States for more than a decade has been destroyed overnight. The temper of the new German government, quite as much as the specific measures it has proclaimed and the excesses with which it has been charged, has sent a shiver of apprehension throughout the western world."<sup>12</sup>

The Catholic press, aware that negotiations were under way for a concordat between Germany and the Vatican, was reluctant to speak critically of what *America* called "Germany's reconstruction."<sup>13</sup> Hitler, a writer in *America* opined on April 8, 1933, "is too canny to believe that government can be built up or maintained by violence or disregard of the rights of

others, or of the principles of justice and fair play. The German people with their love of liberty will not suffer themselves to be driven into slavery." In fact, the writer continued, "The signs seem favorable for a complete restoration of a great nation with all the noble ideals and lofty aspirations which for so long have placed Germany in the vanguard of modern progress. . . ."14

The American Catholic hierarchy, which shared the Vatican's conviction that atheistic communism posed a mortal threat to Christian civilization—indeed, to God himself—supported the Vatican's concordat with Hitler in the hope that the Nazis and the church could reach some kind of accommodation. A great part of the Catholic press, always deeply conservative, supported the bishops. Once the concordat had been signed, the Catholic press abstained from criticism of the Nazi regime and concentrated its outrage on the persecution of Catholics by the anticlerical governments of Spain and Mexico.

But Nazi violations of the concordat became too flagrant to be ignored. Priests were being attacked, church services invaded. Moreover, Nazi racial doctrines and the newly decreed sterilization of "defectives" were incompatible with Catholic teaching. In January 1934 *America* conceded: "The Government which began the year [1933] with sustained and systematic attacks upon the Jewish people has proceeded from policies that were un-Christian to standards which, not unfairly, may be described as anti-Christian."<sup>15</sup> Hitlerism, said the Paulist Fathers' *Catholic World* bluntly, "is lunacy plus savagery."<sup>16</sup>

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Of all the rapid and revolutionary changes in German government and society—accompanied by officially inspired violence—that marked the Nazi revolution, it was the assault on the Jews that most shocked and outraged Americans. Americans may have disliked the Jews' "peculiar characteristics" and reluctance to assimilate, but they—or at least their elite, establishment voices—regarded the Nazi persecutions as a reversion to a barbarous past.

Nevertheless, there were widespread suspicions that the atrocity reports were false or exaggerated; Americans remembered the anti-German propaganda of World War I and did not want to be duped again. Until the late 1930s, American newspapers played down reports of Nazi excesses against Jews—although some had accurate information from returned correspondents—out of native skepticism and preoccupation with the "larger picture." The Jewish publisher of the *New York Times* insisted on treating the Jewish persecution in the context of other Nazi persecutions to preserve the *Times's* reputation for impartiality.

Germany, of course, denied the stories of violent anti-Jewish persecution—or promised to stop it. Even the Jewish community in Germany—under

duress—minimized it. German censorship was strict, and American correspondents censored themselves for fear of being expelled. Tourists saw only what the authorities wanted them to see. What to believe?

In March 1934, John Haynes Holmes, pacifist minister of New York's interdenominational Community Church, listed for readers of the *Christian Century* the bases for his outspoken anti-Nazi convictions: "1. The fact, undisputed and indisputable, that refugees, Gentile and Jewish, rich and poor, men, women, and children, have been pouring out of Germany like a flood ever since Hitler came to power. . . . 2. Personal contacts with refugees. . . . 3. Nazi data—documents, books, literature. . . . 4. Books about Germany written by trusted scholars and trained observers. . . . 5. First-hand dispatches of newspaper correspondents, some of whom I know personally, and all of whom I know by reputation. . . . 6. First-hand accounts of impartial visitors and observers—not tourists . . . not Germans, or German-Americans, or pro-Germans . . . not Jews or socialists or communists or intellectuals who have suffered. . . ." Haynes concluded: "We know [what is going on in the Reich] with a certainty and a fulness which make the Hitler regime the most terrifying experience since the world war itself."<sup>17</sup>

No one can doubt the sincerity of the compassion displayed by the religious press for the plight of the German Jews—although the Catholic magazines were ever mindful of the Catholics being persecuted in Mexico, Spain, and the Soviet Union and the Protestant magazines of the non-Aryan Christians in Germany.

In the Protestant *Christian Century*, Reinhold Niebuhr authoritatively confirmed that "the Nazi effort to extirpate the Jews in Germany is proceeding with unexampled and primitive ferocity." "[T]he Christian churches of America," he concluded, ". . . have a clear obligation laid upon them to offer every possible resistance to the inhumanities of the present German regime. They ought to do this both by public pronouncements and meetings in various localities and by pressure upon the Washington government."<sup>18</sup>

As early as April 1933, the editors of *Commonweal*, an independent Catholic journal published by laypeople, wrote: "*Commonweal* firmly associates itself with the great mass action of public opinion which is shocked by and which utterly condemns the anti-Semitism of the Hitler government." "Jews," they continued, "have been subjected to a bigoted discrimination and a persecution wholly unjust and abhorrent to all believers in the human rights of personal liberty, equal justice . . . , cultural and religious freedom and equality of status."<sup>19</sup>

Catholic *America*, notably cool toward Jews, skeptical of news reports, and eager to give Germany the benefit of every doubt, had little to say about the persecution of German Jews but much about the persecution of German Catholics. Not until the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938 did *America*—making, as usual, "every allowance for newspaper

inaccuracies"—forthrightly condemn German anti-Semitism: "We have no words to express our horror and detestation of the barbarous and un-Christian treatment of the Jews by Nazi Germany. It forms one of history's blackest pages."<sup>20</sup>

The Protestant *Christian Century* was no less affected by *Kristallnacht*: "Type will not carry the sense of horror and consternation with which the world reacts to the latest outburst of Nazi violence against the Jews. . . . Hitler and his government have sounded depths of infamy which had not previously been plumbed in modern times."<sup>21</sup>

But to Niebuhr's call for church *action*—public pronouncements, meetings, pressure on the government in Washington—there was no response. The churches were interested in peace, not confrontation. The religious press discussed peace endlessly, and every denominational gathering passed heartfelt resolutions in its favor. Nothing suggestive of intervention, however, was contemplated. Characteristically, after *Kristallnacht*, the Federal Council of Churches issued a call "inviting all Christian people to join in prayer and intercession on Sunday, November 20, for the victims of racial and religious oppression. . . ." <sup>22</sup>

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The Nazi persecutions—political, racial, religious—set in motion a tide of emigration. Besides Jews, there were thousands of Christian refugees—Protestants and Catholics, Aryans and non-Aryans, clergymen, politicians, trade-union leaders, journalists, academics, professionals—subsisting precariously in countries bordering Germany. In April 1933 the *World Tomorrow* listed some of the more eminent refugees, not all of them Jewish, including physicist Albert Einstein, novelist Thomas Mann, and conductor Bruno Walter. "[T]he Hitlerites," the magazine commented, "have swept away nearly everything which has given Germany any real distinction in literature, art and science."<sup>23</sup>

In October 1933 the League of Nations appointed an American, James G. McDonald, high commissioner for refugees (Jewish and others) coming from Germany to help resettle the refugees elsewhere. Through 1935, McDonald's office resettled three-fourths of some 80,000 German refugees, half of them in Palestine. McDonald resigned in December 1935, concerned that the newly instituted Nuremberg Laws, which stripped German citizenship from Jews and other non-Aryans, would precipitate a catastrophic emigration requiring the direct political intercession of the League with the German government. On January 15, 1936, the *Christian Century* printed McDonald's letter in full, together with a long appendix detailing Nazi racist measures since 1933.

The religious press recognized the refugee problem as a challenge to the American churches, especially since a significant proportion of the refugees were Christians. But the churches were apathetic. Jewish communal



organizations were frustrated when they sought the help of sympathetic Christian groups in their refugee-aid work. Individual Protestant leaders and the Federal Council of Churches responded readily, only to discover that the Protestant community as a whole was indifferent to the refugees' plight. In 1933, Harry Emerson Fosdick, minister of New York's interdenominational Riverside Church, complained: "It has been almost impossibly difficult to arouse the conscience of this country, to make Christian people shoulder practical responsibility. . . ." <sup>24</sup>

George N. Shuster, managing editor of *Commonweal*, was outraged that reports of suffering Catholics in Germany had not "sufficed to awaken the conscience of the Church in the United States. . . . [N]ot one clear-cut manifestation of interest or sympathy has been given." <sup>25</sup>

As a result, Jewish communal organizations provided the lion's share of the funding for Protestant refugee-aid organizations. An initial Jewish grant in 1933, for example, encouraged the American Friends Service Committee to begin its notable work on behalf of Christian as well as Jewish refugees. In 1934 Jewish organizations funded the establishment of the American Committee for Christian German Refugees, which then found it difficult to raise needed additional funds. When the YWCA set up a Committee on Refugees in 1938, Jewish money covered half its expenses for two years.

The American Catholic hierarchy was reluctant to credit stories of Nazi persecution of German Catholics, which it believed were spread by Communists, and suspected that any Catholic refugees were probably tainted with communism. "There is no Catholic activity in the matter [of Catholic refugees] anywhere," wrote a reporter for *Commonweal* in 1936, "and it really seems as if fear of what National-Socialist propaganda may say makes German exiles unwelcome guests." <sup>26</sup> Not until November 1936 did the hierarchy establish the American Bishops' Committee on Catholic German Refugees.

With the refugee situation approaching a "social catastrophe" in 1937, John Haynes Holmes implored Protestant readers of the *Christian Century* to help: "I know of nothing in recent years more splendid than the work of the Jews . . . for relief of their stricken German brethren. . . . Christian refugees have also been helped. . . . But now the tide is swelling to an emergency which Jews must no longer be asked or expected to meet alone." <sup>27</sup>

In September 1938 the *Federal Council Bulletin*, soliciting funds for refugee relief, reported hopefully: "The Christians are just beginning to awake to their responsibility." <sup>28</sup>

The overriding problem for concerned governments and the refugee-aid organizations was where the refugees were to go. Few countries would receive the generally penniless and urbanized Jews. Ostensibly because of the depression, most of the American religious magazines accepted U.S. immigration quotas as unalterable. The *Christian Century* regretted the failure of the 1938 Évian conference on refugees to open the



nations' doors to them: "The chief obstacle is that each nation"—including the United States—"wants the others to do it."<sup>29</sup>

Even after *Kristallnacht*, the *Christian Century* believed that, in view of the prevalent anti-Semitism in America, "It would be a tragic disservice to the Jews in America to increase their number by substantial immigration."<sup>30</sup> Eventually, the magazine did support the admission of refugee and British children.

Catholic *America* thought that the refugees were "mainly a Jewish problem"<sup>31</sup>—not a problem "of humanity and of international peace," as High Commissioner McDonald maintained.<sup>32</sup> It repeated as facts the myths spread by opponents of increased immigration: "[R]efugees are pouring into the country on every boat. . . . Quota restrictions from certain countries have been arbitrarily set aside. . . . Incidents of American citizens losing their jobs to find the same filled promptly by refugees are of sufficient frequency to cause alarm." The editor was personally affronted to hear German spoken on Riverside Drive on Manhattan's Upper West Side.<sup>33</sup>

Of the religious magazines, only the Catholic *Commonweal* called for immediate modification of America's immigration laws to permit refugees to enter. It debunked the arguments against such immigration, concluding: "The . . . compelling demands of charity are too obvious to need specifying."<sup>34</sup>

On the whole, while some church leaders became active in refugee work, church members manifested little concern for German refugees, Jewish or Christian. In this they were like most Americans—beset with anxieties about the depression and approaching war, they had little compassion for strangers. On the issue of refugees, the churches reflected rather than influenced public opinion.

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Hitler despised "Jewish Christianity" and intended eventually to extirpate it. For the present, however, he required that the German churches—Protestant and Catholic—be "coordinated" like every other civil and social institution with the Nazi state. Without consultation with the traditionally self-governing Protestant churches, he combined the twenty-eight separate and autonomous state churches (*Ländeskirchen*) into a single national Evangelical church subject—in keeping with the leadership principle—to a Reich bishop. Nazified German Christians dominated church assemblies. Swastika banners decorated church buildings.

Many pastors objected to the state's intrusion upon their autonomy. But this was not an entirely new phenomenon. Traditionally, the German Protestant churches had enjoyed autonomy on condition that they stay out of politics. They had always been financially supported by the states and were now supported by the national government. The pastors were, in fact, civil servants.

Unlike Protestantism in Britain and the United States, Lutheranism—comprising 60 percent of Germans—emphasized personal piety, the “inner life,” and eschewed social action. “The social responsibility of religion has never been even theoretically acknowledged by German Protestants as it has been in western Europe,” observed the *Christian Century*. “[Lutheranism] has never developed the kind of social conscience which would now powerfully resent the demands of Hitler.” The Lutheran churches had always supported the secular authority uncritically, the magazine asserted. Hitler differed from the kaisers and territorial princes in that he demanded absolute and total allegiance, not merely passive submission.<sup>35</sup>

Overwhelmingly, German pastors had welcomed Hitler as a “gift of God” and National Socialism as a “rebirth of the German people.” There was, for example, no protest from the Protestant churches against the Jewish persecutions or the Nazi racial doctrine. But when the German Christians ventured into theology—dismissing non-Aryan pastors (thereby nullifying baptism), eliminating the Old Testament from the Christian scriptures, attempting to merge Christianity with Teutonic paganism, and turning over Protestant youth organizations to the Hitler Youth—resistance appeared.

The resistance was led by Martin Niemöller, a celebrated submarine commander in World War I and now the pastor of a wealthy and aristocratic Berlin congregation. Under Niemöller’s leadership, 3,000 pastors—a third of the total—left the national church and formed a Confessional Church determined to “obey God rather than men.” Many of the dissidents were arrested; some looked for compromises; others fell silent. In 1937 Niemöller himself was arrested. He spent seven and a half years—until the end of World War II—in concentration camps.

In America, Niemöller was compared to Martin Luther and revered as a martyr for his courageous defense of church liberty. In 1938 the press widely reported his secret trial for sedition, and English translations of his autobiography, *From U-Boat to Pulpit*, and of a collection of his sermons, *Here Stand I*, were published. “Contemporary Germany,” wrote a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, “certainly contains no more heroic or gallant figure than Niemöller.”<sup>36</sup>

Niemöller was a curious hero for Americans. An extreme nationalist who had welcomed Hitler in 1933, he never opposed the Nazi regime except as it affected the Protestant churches. From Sachsenhausen concentration camp at the start of World War II, Niemöller—a reserve naval officer with three sons in the army—offered his services to the German navy. His offer was rejected.

In 1939 the *Christian Century* provided a cautionary view of the German Protestant churches. “There is a widespread belief that the churches in Germany are the strongest element in the opposition to the National Socialist regime,” wrote a contributor. He then went on to describe an alien and thoroughly un-American type of Protestantism:

“The religious opposition is directed only against the church policy of the state and against the results of that policy in the educational field, not against the ruling system as such. To consider it antifascist or liberal or democratic is a great mistake. It is absolutely loyal to the present government. Its published documents contain not one protest against dictatorship and its ruthless suppression of all opposition, economic and political, nor one declaration in favor of the restoration of democratic rights.”<sup>37</sup>

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Unlike the German Protestant pastors, the Catholic bishops had since 1930 vigorously criticized the Nazis’ “heretical nationalism.” But in 1933 the Nazi government became the legitimate authority to which Catholics were religiously obligated to give allegiance. In the concordat of July 1933, the Catholic church made a separate peace with the Nazis, hoping to protect its essential institutions from the grasp of the totalitarian state.

Indeed, the German bishops, who had urged the concordat upon the Vatican, hoped for a reconciliation between the Catholic church and the Nazi state. After all, both were conservative and authoritarian, both were hostile to liberalism and communism, both favored organizing economic activity for social ends, and both preached the values of family and religion. Many American bishops shared this hope. As late as 1937, *America* editorialized: “[A] collaboration with Fascism is possible for the Catholic Church; a collaboration with Communism is absolutely impossible. . . .”<sup>38</sup>

The German bishops were quickly disappointed. Not only were Nazi moral doctrines antithetical to Catholic teachings, but, as an international institution, the church was anathema to the intensely nationalistic Nazis. In the 1870s, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck had waged a seven-year *Kulturkampf* to drive the church out of German politics and education—and failed. Hitler was determined to succeed.

Within months of the signing of the concordat, the German Catholic bishops were complaining of Nazi violations. Priests were arrested on charges of sedition and corruption. Catholic charitable organizations were suppressed, the activities of youth organizations restricted. The Catholic press was censored, while the Nazi press vilified the church without restraint. Parents and teachers were intimidated until their children were withdrawn from Catholic schools. Many Catholic schools were closed and teaching nuns dispersed. Catholic children were enticed, then coerced, into the Hitler Youth. The bishops protested, but at no point did they—or the Protestant pastors—break with the Nazi state.

Some American Catholics were more combative. “[N]ow the die is cast,” the *Catholic World* declared in May 1934. “The ultimate issue is clear, the gauntlet is down, the conflict is on. It is Christianity against heathenism;

the brotherhood of man against race prejudice, Christian charity against heathen militarism, the Gospel against Gothic mythology, the Cross against the swastika, the Pope against Hitler."<sup>39</sup>

"Against what [Nazism] teaches," asserted editor George N. Shuster in *Commonweal* in 1934, "Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism must stand allied, cost what it may."<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, the Catholic and Protestant press reported sympathetically the persecutions in Germany of each other's community. "The whole Christian world," editorialized the *Catholic World* in 1934, "continues to watch with anxiety the conflict in German Protestantism. Catholic interest is keen because we feel that the very fundamentals of Christianity are being threatened by some of the policies of the Nazi Christians."<sup>41</sup>

In October 1936 *Commonweal* coupled a recent manifesto of the Confessional Church in Germany and a pastoral letter issued by the German Catholic bishops as "two documents on the present situation in Germany which . . . should open the eyes of many Catholics in this country who sympathize with Hitler's political aims. . . ." "At the risk of their freedom or their lives," the Catholic journal continued, "these Protestant ministers of the Confessional Church, led by men like the intrepid Pastor Niemöller, describe the situation of their church in heartbreaking terms. . . ."<sup>42</sup>

That same month, the Protestant *Christian Century* praised the German bishops' pastoral letter as "probably the most resounding denunciation of Nazi policy toward religion that has yet been issued. . . . [I]t is a magnificent and courageous indictment of a government and an official philosophy of life which, in the words of the pastoral, aim at 'the complete destruction of the Catholic Church' and 'even the uprooting of Christianity in general.'"<sup>43</sup>

Hitler's campaign against the churches was interrupted by the coming of war; he intended to resume it after the war and finish the job. Still, he had reason to feel that he had succeeded where the great Bismarck had failed. He had established a thoroughly "coordinated" national Protestant church, had silenced dissident Protestants, and had subdued the Catholic church. Most important, he had captured German youth. If the Third Reich lasted a single generation, Christianity would be finished in Germany.

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The solidarity of American Catholics and Protestants in the face of German persecutions that some had hoped for did not materialize. Anti-Catholic sentiment was deeply entrenched in the American Protestant churches. This had been recently demonstrated in the 1928 presidential election, in which the candidacy of Democrat Al Smith of New York, a Catholic, had ignited a firestorm of religious bigotry.

In 1936, the outbreak of civil war in Spain reawakened Protestant antipathy. Liberal opinion in America was overwhelmingly pro-Loyalist.

Franco was identified as a fascist, especially since Germany and Italy promptly came to his aid. The American Catholic hierarchy, however, saw the leftist-dominated and anticlerical republic as the implacable foe of the church. For them, the Spanish Civil War was a war between God and anti-God.

The Catholic church's support for Franco seemed to many Protestants consistent with its accommodations with authoritarian regimes in Italy, Germany, Austria, Portugal, and South America. When the Vatican in 1936—mindful of its threatened position in Germany and Spain—proposed a worldwide Christian campaign against atheistic communism, the *Christian Century* spurned the invitation. "The Vatican is a friend of fascism," it editorialized. "The pope, on comfortable terms with fascism in Italy, and willing to make terms with Nazism in Germany, declares a general war on communism and summons the world to fight under his banner. The Protestant world will not follow his flag. It does not like his enemy, but it likes his friends no better."<sup>44</sup>

Writing in the *Nation* in January 1937, Reinhold Niebuhr accused the church of "becoming more and more an unqualified ally of fascism." "Catholic political policy," Niebuhr continued, was largely determined by "the intimate historical connection between Catholicism as a civilization and feudalism. . . . [T]he instincts of Catholicism to preserve itself as a social system overpower any possible moral scruples which may inhere in Catholicism as a religion. . . ."<sup>45</sup>

In September 1937 the Spanish bishops issued a pastoral letter justifying Franco's insurgency. They described the "Spanish Communist Revolution" as anti-Spanish and anti-Christian. Appealing to the just war doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, they argued: "...Spain had no other alternative but this: either to perish in the definite assault of destructive communism . . . or to attempt . . . to save the fundamental principles of her social life and of her national characteristics."<sup>46</sup>

American Protestants were not persuaded. On October 4, 1937, the *New York Times* published an "open letter" signed by 150 prominent Protestant clergy and laymen rebutting the Spanish prelates' justification for war. The Protestants accused the Spanish bishops of "open hostility toward popular government, freedom of worship and separation of church and State—principles that we, as Americans, deeply cherish. . . ."

"Is the Spanish hierarchy speaking for itself or for the Catholic Church as a whole?" they demanded. "... [I]s this to be the policy of the Catholic Church in other democratic countries, where antecedents of the present Spanish struggle were fought to a conclusion centuries ago and church and state permanently separated? . . . [W]e cannot help being disturbed by the fact that no leaders of the Catholic Church in America have raised their voices in repudiation of the position taken by the Spanish hierarchy. Quite the contrary, they too seem to have given their blessing to General Franco and his Fascist allies."<sup>47</sup>

A response to the Protestants' "open letter," signed by 175 Catholic clergy and laymen, appeared in the *Times* on October 14. "The publication of [the Protestants'] letter has not only misrepresented the facts and the issues of Spain," the Catholics asserted, "but it has also tended to create a species of religious war in the United States. . . . Do American Protestants accept and endorse a governmental regime that has carried on a ruthless persecution of the Christian religion since February 1936? Does American Protestantism endorse a regime that is composed predominantly of radical Socialists, Communists, Syndicalists and Anarchists? Does American Protestantism champion a regime that has consistently violated in theory and in practice the fundamental principles of liberty and democracy guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States?"<sup>48</sup>

Only 39 percent of American Catholics, according to a 1937 poll, followed their bishops in supporting Franco; 30 percent supported the Loyalists. A few Catholic magazines seemed actually ambivalent about the Spanish war, mindful of the Spanish church's long identification with a social system in some respects still feudal. The editor of the *Catholic World* in 1937 professed perplexity to see Catholics fighting on both sides in the civil war. *Commonweal*, after a change of editors in 1937, declared itself impartial, "an uncritical partizan of neither [side]."<sup>49</sup> The pacifist *Catholic Worker* also chose neutrality.

The great majority of the Catholic press, however, was fervently pro-Franco. The *Brooklyn Tablet* called Franco "the George Washington of Spain."<sup>50</sup> *America* boasted that it had been "among the very first to come out into the open against the so-called Loyalists and in favor of the Franco uprising."<sup>51</sup>

The Catholic Association for International Peace remained discreetly silent.

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In late 1932 and early 1933, a Christian revivalist campaign—interdenominational and nontheological—progressed across North America from Montreal and Ottawa to New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, then back across Canada to Toronto and Quebec. During the week spent in each city, teams of evangelists preached at local churches; evening meetings filled auditoriums and hotel ballrooms. Large crowds, in which social elites were conspicuous, were addressed, typically, by British aristocrats, generals, and sports figures and by American businessmen, politicians, and prominent clergymen. Testimonies of changed lives were frequent and dramatic. Newspapers gave the revivals front-page coverage.

This campaign was sponsored by an organization known as the Oxford Group. Despite its name, it was initially an American movement, founded by a Pennsylvania Lutheran minister named Frank Buchman. Buchman

had absorbed the conservative pietism of his Lutheran forebears and his theological training. Before World War I, he had experienced a religious awakening and became convinced that a degenerate world was ripe for a religious revival.

Buchman devised a unique method of evangelism: the small, intimate group or "house party," in which seekers would engage in testimony, "sharing" (confession), and education, opening them to divine "guidance" to be received during a daily "quiet hour." He also selected a unique strategy: targeting social elites—aristocrats, political and military leaders, businessmen, celebrities of every sort. He believed that such influential people, if "God-controlled," could transform the world. To attract such people he spurned the tents and ballparks favored by traditional evangelists. His public meetings would be held in the ballrooms of luxury hotels and his house parties in grand country houses.

In the 1920s Buchman began his evangelism in American Ivy League colleges, then in England at Oxford and Cambridge. Soon he was traveling the world with teams of trained and disciplined young disciples, holding mass meetings, organizing house parties, and pursuing prominent individuals for endorsements. His success was enormous. In 1934 Henry P. Van Dusen, a professor (and future president) at New York's Union Theological Seminary, described the Oxford Group movement as "perhaps the most powerful as it is certainly the most striking spiritual phenomenon of our time."<sup>52</sup>

Buchman's concern was the spiritual and moral transformation of individuals. He had no social program other than the naive belief that prominent people could change the world. He was politically obtuse. In January 1934, the *Christian Century* reported his saying, after a trip to Germany (where Oxford groups were established in more than a dozen cities), "We may yet look to Germany for a new reformation."<sup>53</sup>

In 1936, Buchman again visited Germany for the Olympics and used his time there to cultivate leading Nazi officials. He claimed to have met Heinrich Himmler, Nazi police chief, and to have been invited to meet Hitler, although such a meeting never took place. On his return to New York in August, he gave an interview to the *New York World-Telegram* in which he was quoted as saying: "I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defence against the anti-Christ of Communism. . . . Through such a man God could control a nation overnight and solve every last, bewildering problem."<sup>54</sup>

Reaction was intense. "In this interview," responded Reinhold Niebuhr, "the social philosophy of the Oxford group, long implicit in its strategy, is made explicit and revealed in all its childishness and viciousness . . . It explains the particular attention which is paid by Mr. Buchman and his followers to big men, leaders in industry and politics. . . . In other words, a Nazi social philosophy has been a covert presupposition of the whole Oxford group enterprise from the very beginning."<sup>55</sup>



Despite the furor over Buchman's interview, his movement flourished. In a speech in London in 1938, Buchman said: "Hostility piles up between nation and nation, labor and capital, class and class. . . . The remedy may lie in a return to those simple home truths many of us learned at our mothers' knee . . . —honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. . . . The nations must rearm morally."<sup>56</sup> The distinctly pacifist slogan "Moral Rearmament" was picked up by the world press and endorsed by public figures everywhere. It was quickly adopted as the new name of the Oxford Group movement.

As Europe plunged toward war, Buchman viewed world affairs optimistically and credited his movement with significant influence on what he imagined was the improving situation. On May 15, 1939, the *New York Times* reported on its front page a Moral Rearmament rally the night before that had attracted 12,000 people to Madison Square Garden. In addition to the speakers, messages of support were received from the marquess of Salisbury, the countess of Antrim, Governor Herbert H. Lehman, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Mrs. James Roosevelt, mother of the president.

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When war started in Europe in September 1939, American Protestant leaders were uncertain and divided. The Federal Council of Churches may have had a difficult time composing its "Call to Our Fellow Christians" in response to the war. All its American members were committed to peace and neutrality; but one member, the United Church of Canada, was located in a country already at war.

"We call upon the churches to repent," summoned the Council's executive committee, ". . . to keep and strengthen their mission world-wide . . . to defend the liberties of press, platform, and pulpit. . . . to pronounce war an evil thing . . . to seek peace . . . to reaffirm good will . . . [and finally] to make unfailing intercessions. It is our deepest task, our spiritual and creative enterprise, to pray without ceasing. . . ." <sup>57</sup>

Some people did not find this message helpful or inspiring. In January 1940 the editors of *Fortune* indicted the Protestant churches for failing to provide moral leadership in a time of crisis. The clergy had abandoned their commitment to absolute values, said the magazine, in favor of the materialistic values of the laity. How else to account for the bellicosity of the ministers during World War I and their present aversion to war against "a virtual Antichrist whose doctrines strike at the base of the civilization which the Church has done so much to build"? Sadly, the editors concluded: "We are asked to turn to the church for our enlightenment, but when we do so we find that the voice of the church is not inspired. The voice of the church today, we find, is the echo of our own voices."<sup>58</sup>

The voice of *Fortune*, of course, was that of Henry Luce, influential publisher of the weeklies *Time* and *Life*, the monthly *Fortune*, and the radio and film news dramatization *March of Time*. The son of Christian missionaries in China, Luce saw the war, in both Europe and Asia, as the defense of Christian civilization. It was, he believed, necessary and righteous. For Luce, the absolutes pointed toward intervention.

Charles Clayton Morrison, the editor of the *Christian Century*, was struck by the uncertainty and anguish of many Protestant ministers. "Testimonies of the clergy are heard on every hand in which the bravest and most devout confess their inability to reach a decision which they can proclaim with assurance that it reflects the mind of Christ," he reported. "These are indeed times that try men's souls—and none so much as the souls of God's prophets."<sup>59</sup>

Late in 1940—after the fall of France and while Britain was being pounded nightly by the German air force—Morrison invited ten prominent Protestant clergymen to answer the question: "If America is drawn into the war, can you, as a Christian, participate in it or support it?" Some of their responses:

John C. Bennett, professor of theology, Auburn Theological Seminary, New York: "I confess that if the editor had sent the same question to me a year ago, I should have given a different answer. It would have been a 'no' . . . The fall of France and the immediate threat of a German victory opened my eyes to the fact that the alternative to successful resistance to Germany is the extension of the darkest political tyranny imaginable over the whole of Europe with the prospect that if Europe can be organized by Germany the whole world will be threatened by the Axis powers."<sup>60</sup>

John Haynes Holmes, minister, the Community Church, New York: "No!—because . . . I don't believe in this war, which is only the latest of a long series of European conflicts rooted in the age-old struggle for military predominance and imperialistic rule. . . . If America goes into the war, it will be not for idealistic reasons but to serve her own imperialistic interests so closely identified with those of Britain, and to no result other than that of prolonging the duration and extending the range of the struggle in which her ruin will be added to the sum total of the ruin of mankind."<sup>61</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr, professor of Christian ethics, Union Theological Seminary, New York: ". . . I will have no hesitancy in supporting the war effort of the nation. . . . In quality [the imperial ambitions of Germany] represent a peril to every established value of a civilization which all Western nations share and of which we are all the custodians. In extent the German ambitions must immediately reach beyond Europe, because Europe is not economically self-sufficient and a German-dominated slave economy would immediately stand in fateful competition with us and would use all means, fair and foul, to make us the subservient accomplices of its economic and political penetration."<sup>62</sup>

Harry Emerson Fosdick, minister, Riverside Church, New York: "I can never use my Christian ministry in the support and sanction of war. . . . It is not the function of the Christian church to help win a war. A church that becomes an adjunct to a war department has denied its ministry. The function of the church is to keep Christ where he belongs, upon his judgment seat, condemner of our joint guilt, chastener of our impenitent pride, guide of our only hope."<sup>63</sup>

The confusion among Protestant clergymen was communicated to the world through manifestos of the various parties. On March 6, 1939, just six months before the outbreak of war, a hundred Protestant clergymen—including Harry Emerson Fosdick, John Haynes Holmes, A. J. Muste, and Kirby Page—published an "Affirmation of Christian Pacifist Faith," declaring in part: "[W]e declare to a world which is once again madly preparing for war that the Gospel of God as revealed in Jesus Christ . . . leaves us no other choice but to refuse to sanction or participate in war. . . . We affirm our faith that the mission of the church today is to witness with singleness of heart, at whatever cost, to the power of good to overcome evil, of love to conquer hatred, of the cross to shatter the sword."<sup>64</sup>

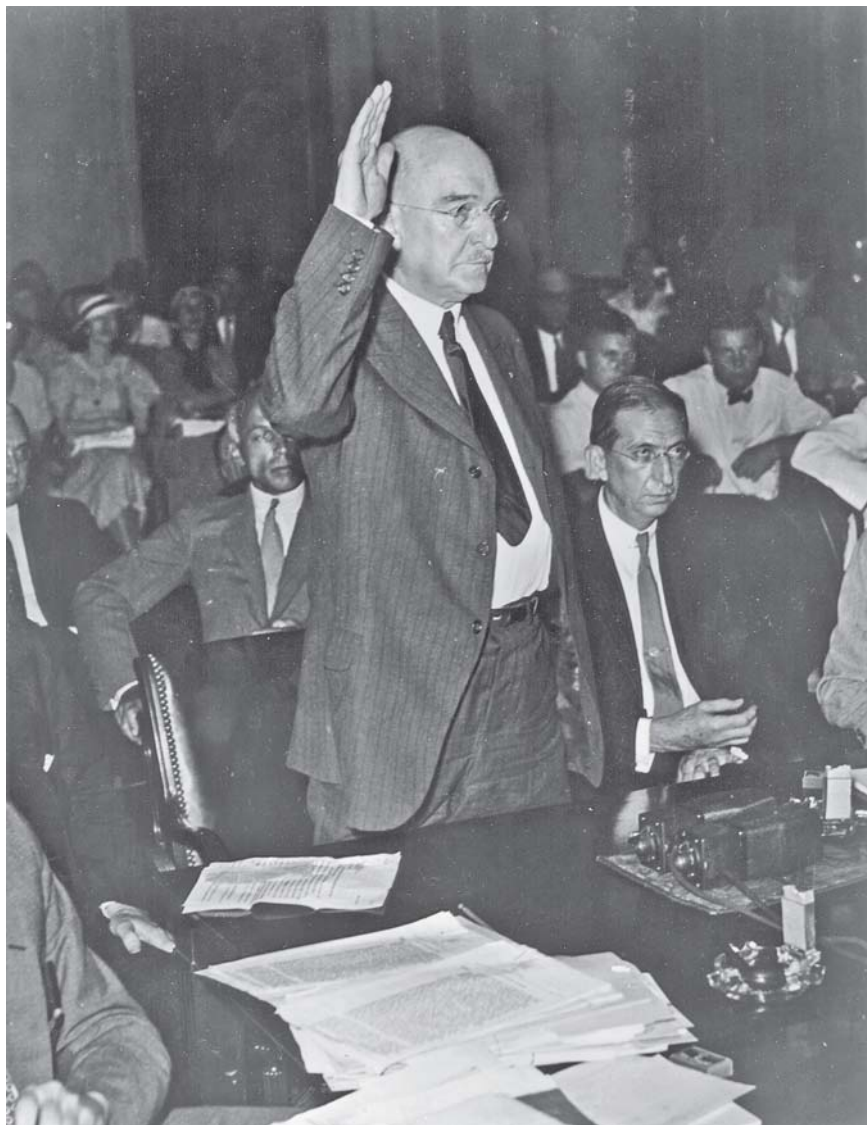
In January 1940 thirty-two prominent Protestant clergymen and laypeople—including Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry P. Van Dusen, and John Foster Dulles—published an interventionist manifesto: "The churches in the United States are under [an] obligation to lead their nation to assume a responsible relationship to the present conflicts. . . . The United States cannot hope to have a part in determining a just and stable peace unless, during the conflicts, she proves herself alive to the deeper issues involved, sympathetic with the warring peoples in their bitter struggles, and prepared to make her contribution to a better future."<sup>65</sup>

Far more numerous than either the pacifists or the interventionists among the Protestant clergy were the "neutralists" (they disliked being called isolationists) who in 1941 organized the Ministers No War Committee. One of their number was Charles Clayton Morrison, whose *Christian Century* had resolutely opposed every defense initiative of the Roosevelt administration on the ground that preparation for defense must lead inevitably to war.

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Morrison, who had a "sure . . . intuition of [Jesus'] meaning for the world,"<sup>66</sup> declared passionately, "For our country to bind itself and its destiny to the destiny of any other nation or any group of nations on the theory that our destiny depends upon their continued existence is . . . to hang our destiny on nails driven into rotten timbers. . . . Every national interest and every moral obligation to civilization dictates that this country shall keep out of the insanity of a war which is in no sense America's war."<sup>67</sup>

On December 7, 1941, the Protestant churches were freed of their dilemma. War was imposed upon America, and patriotism immediately trumped all other principles. The opportunity for moral leadership was lost.

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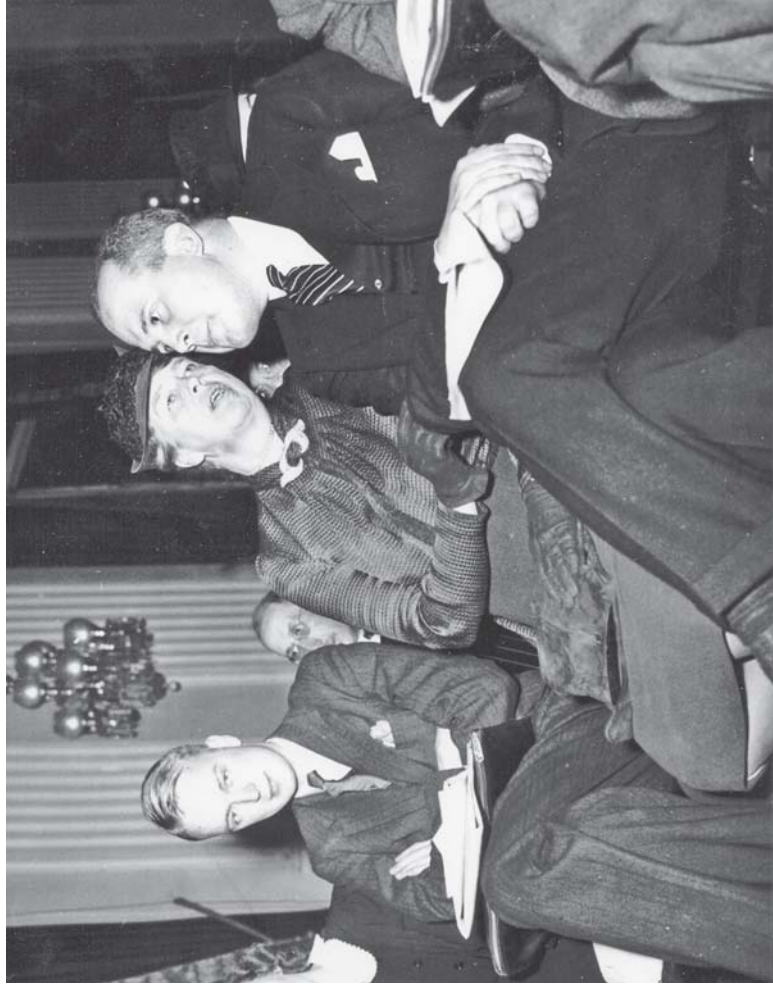


Munitions-maker Pierre S. Du Pont prepares to testify before the Nye committee in 1934. Senator Nye vowed to “take the profit out of war.” (Library of Congress)



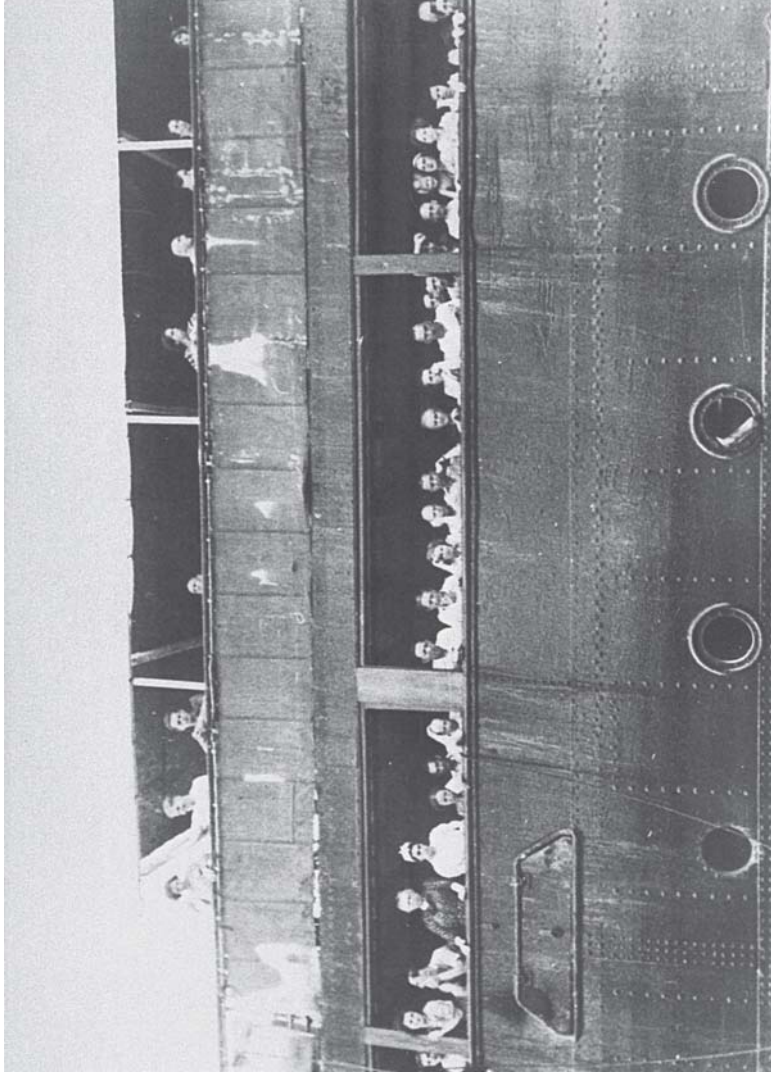
From 1934 to 1939, thousands of American college and high school students deserted their classrooms on a day in April to strike against war. School authorities were not pleased. (The Bancroft Library)





Eleanor Roosevelt was supportive of leaders of the American Youth Congress when they were investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee in November 1939. She later realized that the AYC was in fact dominated by Communists serving the interests of the Soviet Union. (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library)





Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis* in Havana harbor. Barred from Cuba and the United States, they were returned to Europe, where many were caught again in the Nazis' grip. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)



Sen. Huey P. Long's dictatorial control of Louisiana and demagogic leadership of the Share Our Wealth movement seemed to portend the rise of native fascism. (Library of Congress)

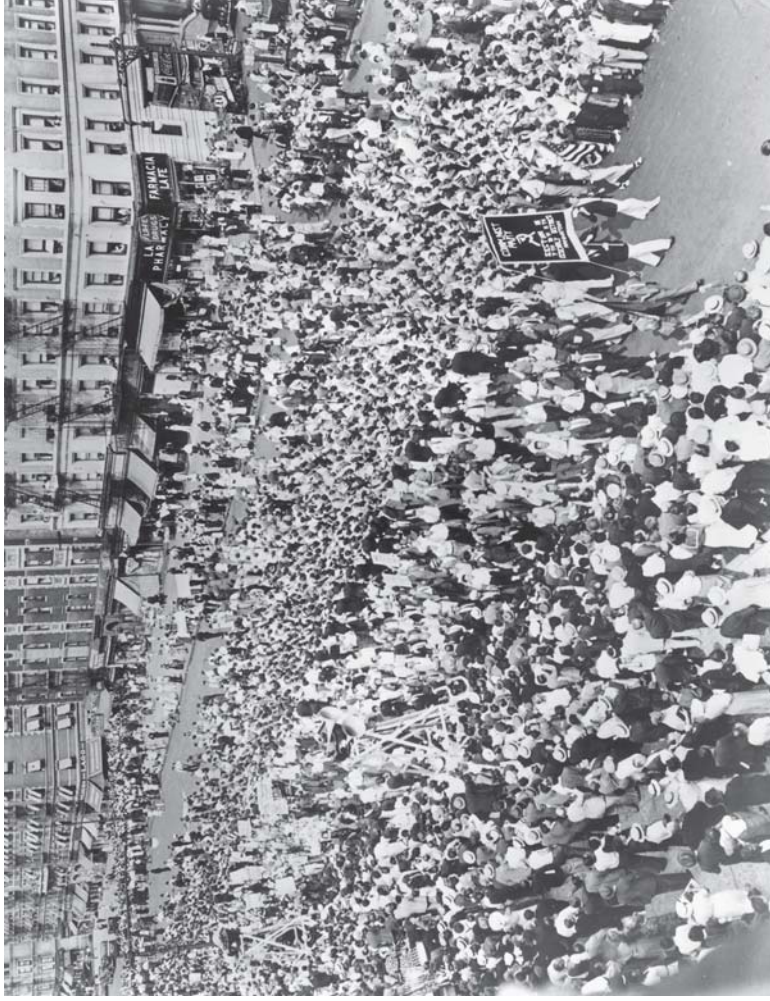


Charles E. Coughlin, the influential "radio priest" of Royal Oak, Michigan, moved during the 1930s from pro-Roosevelt populism to avowed fascism and anti-Semitism. (Library of Congress)



Fritz Kuhn (center) and other leaders of the German-American Bund celebrate Washington's Birthday at a rally in New York's Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939. (Associated Press)





Members of the American League Against War and Fascism demonstrate in New York in 1936 during the Popular Front period. After the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, the League dissolved. (Library of Congress)



Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr renounced pacifism when he concluded that the pursuit of justice always entailed conflict. (Library of Congress)

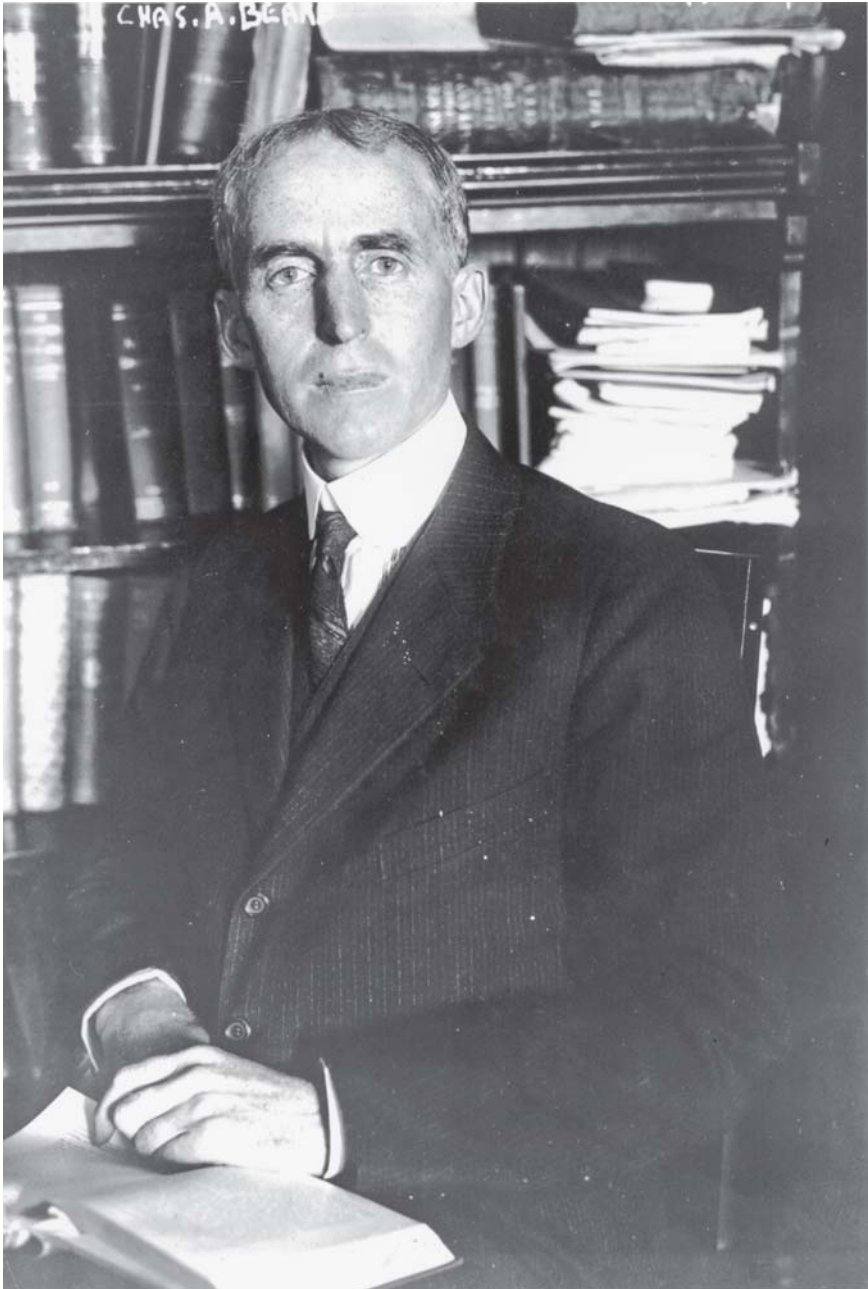


Franklin D. Roosevelt taking the oath as president on March 4, 1933. In his inaugural address, the new president announced: "The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization." (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library)





American businessman Thomas J. Watson (second from left) and other officers of the International Chamber of Commerce confer with Hitler (extreme left) during their organization's 1937 meeting in Berlin. (Associated Press)



Historian Charles A. Beard, who called himself a continentalist rather than an isolationist, believed that President Roosevelt deliberately involved the United States in foreign conflicts to hide the failures of the New Deal. (Library of Congress)



New York City's feisty mayor Fiorella LaGuardia never missed an opportunity to insult Hitler. (New York Historical Society)



Famed aviator Charles A. Lindbergh addresses an America First rally at Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1941. (Associated Press)

## CHAPTER 7

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# The Bottom Line

During the prosperous 1920s the prestige of businessmen was at its height. Marvels of invention and production made national icons of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. The administrations of presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover were unapologetically by and for business—high tariffs, low taxes, minimal regulation. As President Coolidge famously said, “The business of America is business.”

Laissez-faire was the virtual religion of business—although, as is often the case with religion, observance, as distinct from profession, was often a matter of convenience. The business ethos permeated American society and culture. To question the preeminence of business was to be un-American.

The Great Depression dethroned business leaders from their dominance of American society. Stripped, like the Wizard of Oz, of their magical aura, they were exposed as mere mortals—fallible, greedy, and often dishonest. By the time Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated president—on March 4, 1933, at the depth of the depression—they were panicky and paralyzed.

“In words that burned and scourged,” the *New York Times* reported,<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt in his inauguration address excoriated America’s business leaders. “[T]he rulers of the exchange of mankind’s goods,” the president said, “have failed through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence. . . . The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization.”<sup>2</sup>

Leadership in the crisis came not from Wall Street but from Washington. Roosevelt’s decisive resolution of a banking emergency (a task that the elder J. P. Morgan might have accomplished in an earlier age), followed

by a flood of constructive legislation aimed at economic reform and recovery, revived the despairing national morale.

Bewildered, relieved, and (temporarily) grateful, business leaders could not help but celebrate the new regime. *Barron's* financial weekly hailed "the astounding achievements of [the] administration during its first week in office," "the extraordinary transformation of the national psychology."<sup>3</sup> At year's end, the *Nation's Business* took pride in the fact that "there never was a heartier, a more sincere, a more willing answer to a call from Government than was made by American business . . . in an effort to get the nation on the road to recovery."<sup>4</sup> "Prior to the year 1933," *Fortune* reflected, "it had been assumed that only dictatorships of the extreme Right or the extreme Left were capable of action and that democratic governments were hopelessly unqualified to meet the crises of the industrial order. The Administration of Mr. Roosevelt has proved that it is possible for a democratic government retaining at least the democratic forms to act more rapidly and decisively than either Hitler or Lenin was able to act at the moment of assuming power."<sup>5</sup>

But no sooner had recovery begun—the economy turned upward and continued to grow unevenly until a sharp recession in 1937—than businessmen recovered their confidence and began to find fault with the New Deal. Business leaders were notably absent from the new administration, which appeared to them to be staffed entirely by economists, social workers, professors, lawyers, and politicians—bureaucrats who, in the view of businessmen, had never managed a factory or met a payroll. Their seemingly arbitrary and contradictory regulations infuriated men who knew their own businesses intimately and had been used to running them without interference. Before 1933, the federal government had been small, remote, and unobtrusive; in 1933 the era of big government arrived.

As recovery sputtered and massive unemployment persisted, businessmen spoke increasingly of a "lack of confidence" that prevented private capital from investing in new, job-creating enterprises. In 1934 the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (a private organization of businessmen) related "this lack of confidence specifically to heavy federal expenditures, increasing taxes, doubts as to how and when the budget can be balanced, bureaucratic control of business, government competition with private enterprise, increasing labor disturbances, and utterances by Administration spokesmen which 'destroy confidence in the security of property and investment.' . . ."<sup>6</sup>

As the 1936 presidential election approached, *Business Week* editorialized: "Much of the early legislation passed by this Administration for the benefit of the public is sound. By legislation and regulation now operative most of the abuses of the past can be prevented. Business has developed a new concept of social responsibility. . . . But this is not enough.



The victories of industrial decency and economic sanity will go for naught if socialistic experimentation is continued another four years."<sup>7</sup>

"Business is for [Republican candidate Alfred M.] Landon," *Business Week* proclaimed. "He will receive the active support of practically the entire business community in every part of the country except the [Democratic] Solid South, and even there the attitude of business will be sympathetic to him."<sup>8</sup>

Business's opposition to Roosevelt was sometimes expressed in terms of virulent personal hatred. *Fortune* spoke of the "profane and murderous language in the country clubs."<sup>9</sup> This unprecedented sentiment was variously explained: Roosevelt sought dictatorial power; he was driving the country to communism or fascism; he had empowered organized labor; he was taking from the "haves" to give to the "have-nots"; he had betrayed his own social class.

Perhaps the explanation lay in the businessmen's perception that Roosevelt had displaced them from their political and social preeminence in American society. His genial and buoyant personality, his mellow voice and patrician accent, his populist policies explained so intimately and persuasively in his "fireside chats" maddened his opponents. Businessmen longed for the day when they would reclaim their former—and rightful—leadership.

Late in the decade, the personal hostility of the business community to Roosevelt extended to his foreign and defense policies and heightened its fear that the president was maneuvering the country into war in order to consolidate his dictatorship.

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A second blow to the prestige of the business community was delivered by the Senate committee that investigated the munitions industry in 1934–36 under the chairmanship of Gerald P. Nye, a progressive Republican from North Dakota and later a leading isolationist. The committee had been established at the behest of the peace movement to confirm the widespread belief that the munitions manufacturers, along with related industries and banks, had not only profited hugely in World War I but, before and since, had deliberately instigated arms races and wars around the world.

The committee found no evidence that the industry had actually instigated wars, but its public hearings did confirm a view of business long held by radicals and shared by most Americans in the 1930s—that the principal (if not the sole) object of business was profit, that in pursuit of profit businessmen were greedy, dishonest, and amoral, and that among the virtues businessmen willingly sacrificed for profit were humanity and patriotism.



The business community was deeply stung by the revelations of the Nye committee. Its first response was to isolate the munitions makers (but not other industries in the military-industrial complex) and to advocate their strict regulation or even nationalization. "Great manufacturing corporations," the *Wall Street Journal* conceded, "untroubled by any sentimental nonsense of national allegiance, have furthered the sale of their wares among any and all nations which could find the means of payment. . . . Either the manufacture of war munitions must be nationalized or their production in private industry must be subjected by law to a constant and thorough public disclosure."<sup>10</sup>

*Barron's* concurred: "If today public repulsion condemns the munitions manufacturers, they have only themselves to blame; and if that condemnation goes so far as to demand their elimination from private industry, they scarcely can resent it, on the record."<sup>11</sup>

In the religion of *laissez-faire*, of course, regulation and nationalization were abominations. That conservative business writers would consign the munitions manufacturers to such fates is evidence of their determination to protect the rest of the business community from guilt by association. Their religion taught that business was not amoral or unpatriotic but beneficent and (newly) socially conscious.

The business community's second response was to declare, again and again, its ardent desire for world peace. "The American business man has suffered much from wild charges as to his ethics, his practices and his motives," complained the *Nation's Business* in 1934, "but none has been so absurd as the charge that business thrives on war."<sup>12</sup>

"[B]usiness thrives most consistently in times of peace," *Barron's* opined. "[T]his country, as a whole, is perfectly willing to forgo every cent of war profits in return for stable conditions. . . ."<sup>13</sup>

No business corporation participated in the American peace movement of the 1930s, although some business executives sat on the boards of peace societies and foundations. Perhaps the single exception was E. R. Squibb & Sons, a pharmaceutical company, which in 1935 sponsored a weekly radio program for an organization called World Peaceways, an energetic promoter of peace through advertisements in various media. But Squibb may have seen its sponsorship as a shrewd exploitation of a popular cause; listeners were urged to pick up peace pledges at any one of 35,000 participating drugstores.

Despite business's professed abhorrence of war profits, after war began in Europe on September 1, 1939, the *New York Times* average of fifty common stocks climbed 23 percent in two weeks—until a "peace scare" stopped its rise.

In wartime, business spokesmen continued to refute the popular belief that business eagerly sought war profits. "[T]he business men of the United States are slandered when they are represented as willing to drag the country into a foreign war in order to sate their greed for war profits,"

declared the *Wall Street Journal* in September 1939. "Individually and collectively, leading business men have asserted as earnestly as any of their compatriots their belief that there is neither reason nor excuse for making Europe's war ours. . . ."14

"To say that Industry and Business want war or will encourage, directly or indirectly, our participation in the present war, is a vicious and deliberate lie," wrote the publisher of *Business Week* in October. "[T]he destiny of this country can be wrought only in peace."15 The magazine reported an "almost overwhelming response" to this editorial, proving that it "accurately . . . voiced the convictions . . . of American business men."16

In 1939, no American businessman demonstrated his hatred of war as quixotically as Henry Ford had in December 1915, when the automaker chartered a ship to carry a small army of pacifists to Europe "to get the boys out of the trenches before Christmas." Some, however, became active workers for peace.

The most prominent of these was Thomas J. Watson Sr., president of International Business Machines Corporation. Watson was born a Democrat (just as most of his peers were born Republicans), hailed the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt, and became the lone champion of the New Deal in the business community. "The average businessman's opinion of what is right for the country is almost always wrong," he said frequently.17

Business made Watson an internationalist; in 1936 IBM was present in seventy-nine countries. "There is no such thing as either side winning a war," he told an IBM gathering that year; "everybody loses. . . . [A]ll thinking people today realize that another world war would be disastrous to civilization."18

Watson became a trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and, in 1937, president of the International Chamber of Commerce, for which he invented the motto "World Peace Through World Trade." As ICC president he appointed an international Committee for Economic Peace—funded by the Carnegie Endowment—to study a more equitable distribution of the world's natural resources. The key to peace, he thought, was "a fair adjustment of international trade barriers."19

Unlike most of his peers, Watson was no isolationist. "The only way we can hope to be helpful in this world," he said, ". . . is by coming in contact with people and learning to know them, their problems, their aims and ambitions. Then we are in a position to cooperate with them in a helpful way."20 He was impressed by America's need to import vital raw materials and to export its manufactured and agricultural products. "[L]et us never forget how dependent we are upon other nations for certain things that are essential in keeping the wheels of industry turning in the United States. . . . [That] is enough to eliminate from the minds of all thinking people any thought of isolation."21

With the salesman's irrepressible optimism, Watson believed that all interests were reconcilable, all problems resolvable, through the businessman's method of negotiation and compromise. He preached this gospel to political and business leaders around the world, confident that the approaching war would be prevented.

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A highly industrialized country, burdened by debts arising from World War I, Germany in 1933 was heavily dependent on foreign raw materials. For example, it had to import 95 percent of the raw cotton for its textile industry and 60 percent of the ores and nonferrous metals for its manufacturing industries. Its problems were made especially acute by the depression-induced policies of economic nationalism pursued by the United States, Britain, and France, which impeded Germany's ability to sell its goods abroad and pay its debts.

Germany was then the fourth largest importer of American goods, and the United States was the largest supplier of German imports (Germany took 8% of all U.S. exports). The United States sold Germany cotton, copper, lard, fruit, tobacco, oil and gasoline. The goods Germany imported from America were worth twice as much as those it exported to America—chiefly chemicals, manufactured goods (cameras, scientific instruments, and the like), wood and paper products, and textiles. The United States was also Germany's largest creditor.

This was a situation that the new Nazi masters of Germany, bent on preparing for war, found intolerable. To maximize its foreign exchange, the Nazi government stopped payments on loans the United States had made to the German Republic and prohibited the removal of marks (the German currency) from Germany. Interest on German bonds—widely held in America—would be credited in Germany but could not be transferred abroad, and foreign businesses in Germany could not take their profits out of the country.

The Nazis put German foreign trade on a "war basis," banning or tightly restricting imports and requiring that permitted imports be paid for with a combination of a special class of German marks and scrip, both of which could be used only to buy German products. They soon resorted to barter, requiring countries that sold goods to Germany to accept payment in German goods of equal value selected from a list of items abundant in Germany. Meanwhile, they subsidized German exports to undersell foreign competitors.

"This was," recalled former U.S. secretary of state Cordell Hull, "a wholesale and fraudulent policy of the German government to rearm on a gigantic scale by robbing and defrauding all other governments and their citizens of every possible penny."<sup>22</sup>

American businessmen felt no moral constraints about doing business with Nazi Germany. When American Jews in 1933 initiated a

boycott of German goods, a few New York City retailers—notably the Macy's, Gimbel's, and Bloomingdale's department stores—were virtually the only large companies in the country to adhere to the boycott. The decline in U.S.-German trade during the 1930s—by 1939 it had shrunk to half its 1929 volume—did not reflect any desire of American business to distance itself from the Nazis but rather the actions of the American government to punish Germany for its economic and political behavior.

In 1934 Germany abrogated its existing trade agreement with the United States because the agreement's most-favored-nation clause extended to all other countries the tariff concessions the United States made to Germany. Germany wanted a purely bilateral treaty, hoping to obtain enough concessions to balance its trade with the United States.

The United States was then beginning to negotiate reciprocal trade treaties with other countries by which each party lowered its tariff barriers against certain of the other's goods. When Germany sought a reciprocal trade treaty to replace its former agreement with the United States, it was rebuffed. "[T]hat we should refuse to listen to proposals from one of our erstwhile best customers," complained the *Wall Street Journal* in September 1934, "which at least look in the direction of reviving and expanding a mutually advantageous trade is unthinkable."<sup>23</sup>

U.S.-German trade, which had been declining since 1930, fell precipitously during 1934. By February 1935, Germany had achieved a balance of exports and imports in its (much reduced) trade with the United States. The United States, meanwhile, considering German trade policies discriminatory, put Germany on its trade "black list"—that is, Germany got no tariff concessions. Both countries vigorously sought alternative markets, Germany in southeastern Europe and South America and the United States through reciprocal trade treaties.

As the worldwide depression moderated, a number of American businessmen worked to revive world trade, including U.S. trade with Germany. One of these was Thomas J. Watson Sr., who saw trade as the guarantor of peace.

In 1937 Watson led an American delegation of nearly a hundred businessmen to Berlin for the biennial congress of the International Chamber of Commerce. For the congress's opening meeting, the German Opera House was bedecked with the flags of the forty-two nations represented, the Nazi swastika prominent among them. Hitler, Hermann Goering, Joseph Goebbels, and Hjalmar Schacht, head of the Reichsbank and German minister for economic affairs, attended. Goering and Schacht welcomed the delegates.

During the week-long meeting, Schacht and Goebbels hosted lavish parties for the businessmen. Watson was granted a private meeting with Hitler, who, Watson reported, said: "There will be no war. No country wants war, and no country can afford it."<sup>24</sup> Politically naive and

impressed by power, Watson never doubted the *Führer's* sincerity. "Hitler fooled him completely," Watson's son later wrote.<sup>25</sup>

Watson was elected president of the ICC for 1937–39, and Schacht awarded him a medal adorned with swastikas (which he angrily returned in 1940). The congress concluded by passing a resolution hoping that the principal economic powers would "lead the world back to trade, progress, and peace."<sup>26</sup>

After Hitler completed the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the United States virtually ended U.S.-German trade by increasing current duties on German imports by 25 percent—technically to compensate for German export subsidies. Although a free list of chemicals needed in the United States was unaffected, *Business Week* noted: "The Treasury Department's order is practically an embargo on German goods. . . . Its application last Saturday, immediately following the occupation of what remained of Czechoslovakia, made the rebuke all the more pointed."<sup>27</sup>

Business was reluctant to see its trade with Germany disrupted for political reasons. In October 1940, *Fortune* reported that "an impressive portion of American business . . . believes that if a triumphant Hitler beats Britain and dominates Europe, the U.S. should take all the trade with him and from him that it can get."<sup>28</sup>

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During the 1920s and 1930s, a number of American firms—including Standard Oil of New Jersey, Ford, General Motors, International Harvester, General Electric, International Telephone and Telegraph, and American Radiator—built assembly or manufacturing plants in Germany. When the Nazis came to power, they prohibited the transfer to America of the profits generated for American firms by their German subsidiaries. The American owners had little alternative but to reinvest those profits in the German economy. At the time of Pearl Harbor, American investments in Nazi Germany were estimated at \$475 million (\$5 billion in today's dollars). These investments were not forgotten during the war.

The Nazis highly esteemed Henry Ford for his industrial prowess, his contributions to world anti-Semitism, and his well-known hostility to the Roosevelt administration. There may have been yet another reason for their esteem. Anti-Semite Ford may have been an early financial contributor to the Nazi Party in Germany through his personal secretary, Ernest Liebold, who the FBI believed had been a German spy in World War I and pro-Nazi thereafter. In 1938, Hitler sent medals to both Ford and Liebold, which they accepted with pleasure.

The Ford Motor Company opened an office in Berlin in 1925, an auto and truck plant at Cologne in 1931, and a truck and tractor plant in Berlin as late as 1939. In 1941, after a sale of stock in Germany, American Ford

retained 52 percent ownership in German Ford (which it held throughout the war). Germans then constituted a majority of the company's directors. One of these was an executive of the German chemical giant I.G. Farben, which had acquired 15 percent of German Ford stock; at the same time, Edsel Ford—Henry's son, president of American Ford, and one of two American directors of German Ford—joined the board of Farben's American subsidiary, General Aniline & Film.

General Motors, whose plant was at Rüsselsheim, and Ford, at Cologne, competed for the rapidly expanding German automobile market. Ford had difficulty conforming to the Nazis' requirement that foreign materials and parts constitute no more than 5 percent of their cars. Ford paid for German parts by shipping rubber and other scarce raw materials to Germany as late as 1941. General Motors was more successful in meeting Nazi requirements, and by 1936 had won 50 percent of the German market with its small, inexpensive Opel. In recognition of GM's success, Hitler in 1938 personally presented a medal to James D. Mooney, GM's vice president for overseas operations.

In the early 1930s, both companies fired their Jewish employees in compliance with Nazi policy. Later, both began to receive lucrative military contracts, of which their parent companies were kept informed—and which they approved—until Pearl Harbor. After the fall of France, the Germans gave the head of German Ford, an ardent Nazi, responsibility for other Ford plants in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. To a German associate in October 1940, Edsel Ford expressed his satisfaction at learning that Ford plants in western Europe continued to operate—for Nazi Germany. Ford's profits in Germany and the occupied countries, while not then transferable to America, accumulated on the German books and were paid after the war. In fact, after the war Ford claimed—and received, from the U.S. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission—compensation for bomb damage to its Cologne plant, which at the time, of course, had been manufacturing for the Nazi war machine.

Back in the United States after the start of war in Europe, GM vice president James Mooney spoke well of Nazi Germany. In June 1940, he explained "the fundamental causes of this war" to a Cleveland, Ohio, audience. "Germany and Italy," he said, "have felt that the power and control exercised by England and France over the commodities, raw materials and trade of the world subjected their countries to the unendurable condition that food for their people and materials and markets for their industries had been throttled. . . . Germany and Italy are fighting and striving to keep from being starved to death."<sup>29</sup>

Mooney's boss, GM chairman Alfred P. Sloan Sr., also admired Nazi Germany. As late as 1941, by which time Hitler ruled most of Europe, Sloan wrote dispassionately: "[W]hen some other system develops stronger leadership, works hard and long, and intelligently and aggressively—which are good traits—and, superimposed upon that, develops



the instinct of a racketeer, there is nothing for the democracies to do but fold up. And that is about what it looks as if they are going to do."<sup>30</sup>

In 1941, the FBI investigated Sloan, Mooney, and another top GM executive for alleged German sympathies. All were cleared.

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Some American corporations had more intimate connections to Nazi Germany than did Ford and General Motors.

Shortly after the German Empire was established in 1871, Germans decided that industrial competition was costly and wasteful. The imperial government, its successor republican government, and finally the Nazi regime permitted and sometimes even compelled business firms in the same industry to form associations, or cartels. These had the power to pool patents, standardize products, establish production quotas, apportion sales territories, and fix prices, all in the interest of industrial peace and assured profits. German cartels often joined European and world cartels or established special connections with individual foreign companies.

Cartel arrangements and activities were cloaked in secrecy, both to protect business privacy and also to evade possible legal constraints. In the United States, cartel-like organizations—trusts and holding companies—were illegal under the antitrust laws. Moreover, it was illegal for an American firm to enter a cartel that affected that firm's domestic (American) market. Nevertheless, in the expectation of acquiring new technologies and processes, of preventing foreign competition, and of participating in profitable joint ventures, American companies often felt compelled to make secret agreements with German and other cartels, the legality of which might become a matter of dispute.

The largest German cartel was the chemical giant I. G. (for *Interessengemeinschaft*, "community of interest") Farbenindustrie, which in the 1930s embraced more than 380 German firms and over 500 foreign associates. In 1933 Farben became a major financial supporter of the Nazis and later their principal partner in preparing for and waging aggressive war and exploiting German conquests. After the war, American war crimes prosecutors indicted twenty-four Farben executives on charges of preparing and waging wars of aggression, of plunder and spoliation, and of slavery and mass murder.

At their trial in Nuremberg in 1947–48, the Farben defendants argued in part that they were ordinary businessmen no different from those in other countries. In twelve cases the court agreed, acquitting those who were charged with preparing and waging war. It convicted twelve others charged with plunder and spoliation and/or slavery and mass murder. The American Military Government in Germany moved to dissolve the cartel.

Fifty-three American firms had some connection with Farben in the 1930s, including such giants as Standard Oil of New Jersey, the



Aluminum Company of America, E. I. Du Pont de Nemours, and the Dow Chemical Company. Although they were moved entirely by business—not political—considerations, they had every reason to know that the Nazi regime was using Farben and other cartels as weapons of economic warfare. Nevertheless, throughout the 1930s the American companies adhered to their contracts as sacrosanct even when it became apparent that they were impeding America's defense buildup. When the U.S. government in June 1940 published a list of materials critical to national defense, it found that, of the twenty most important, fourteen were produced by companies with ties to German firms.

Standard Oil's 1929 agreement with Farben, for example, provided essentially that Farben would stay out of the world oil business (except in Germany) and that Standard Oil would stay out of the world chemical business (including the United States). Under the terms of this agreement, Farben was able to prevent Standard Oil from developing—or from licensing others to develop—a superior type of synthetic rubber. When the United States entered the war in December 1941, and its sources of natural rubber in southeast Asia were cut off by Japan, it had no capacity for the mass production of synthetic rubber.

The same agreement with Farben required Standard Oil to give up chemical research important in the production of explosives and of synthetic textiles and drugs. While a technicality in its contract prevented Standard Oil from selling aviation gasoline to the U.S. Army, it did sell large quantities to Germany and built refineries there as late as 1939.

Agreements between American companies and German cartels profited the firms involved but—as the Germans intended—crippled American defense preparations. An agreement in 1931 among Farben, the Aluminum Company of America, and Dow Chemical established production quotas for aluminum and magnesium that enabled the American companies to reap substantial profits from low production and high prices. After 1933, Farben disregarded its own quotas with the result that by 1939 Germany had significantly surpassed the United States in the production of those strategic metals.

A similar result followed an agreement between the Krupp Steel cartel in Germany and General Electric. This agreement limited the production of tungsten carbide, essential in the manufacture of hardened steel for machine tools. General Electric made enormous profits from high prices on the small quantity of tungsten carbide it produced while German production soared.

Some agreements between German and American companies were designed almost as espionage pacts. A 1921 agreement between the German manufacturer of precision optical instruments Carl Zeiss and Bausch & Lomb in the United States divided the world market for military optical instruments. Under this agreement, Bausch & Lomb could not sell optical instruments outside the United States without Zeiss's permission,

and it had to provide Zeiss with its business records so Zeiss could monitor its American sales. Thus in the 1930s Bausch & Lomb had to refuse British and French orders, while Zeiss received minute information about U.S. military purchases of optical instruments.

An agreement between the Sperry Gyroscope Company and the German firm Askanis resulted in the transfer of American aviation instrument technology to the Germans.

Apparently, American businessmen, with rare exceptions, were untroubled about the morality or even prudence of their commerce with an aggressive fascist dictatorship. In their own minds, they—like their German “friends”—were honorable and patriotic men devoted to their firms, scrupulous in their contractual obligations, and attentive to the interests of their shareholders. General Motors chairman Alfred P. Sloan probably spoke for many leaders of American business when he wrote in 1939: “[A]n international business operating throughout the world should conduct operations in strictly business terms, without regard to the political beliefs of its management or the political beliefs of the country in which it is operating.”<sup>31</sup>

Merchants of death, it seems, were not entirely figments of pacifists’ imagination.

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The approval of many American businessmen for Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in the 1920s faded in the 1930s—although as late as 1934 *Fortune* sardonically dubbed Italian Fascism a success: “[The Italian] people, once almost ashamed to acknowledge their nationality, now survey the rest of Europe not merely with a fervent but with an arrogant pride. . . . With uplifted hearts and Augustan pride the wops are unwopping themselves.”<sup>32</sup>

No comparable approval, sardonic or otherwise, was overtly expressed for Hitler. From the start, American public opinion was hostile to Hitler and became ever more so as the decade advanced. Anyone impressed by the Hitler regime had to speak guardedly, disclaiming unqualified approval.

Thus a writer in *Barron’s* in 1933 explained the Nazi revolution with considerable acuity and more than a touch of sympathy. It was, he said, the “mobilization of the middle classes, of those who have or think they have a small stake in the existing order—the small business man, the professional man, the small farmer—behind big business and big (in Germany, feudal) agriculture for the defense of the existing order against a threatened attack by those who have no stake in the existing order.” The latter, of course, were the German workers, largely socialist or communist. “This is necessary and even possible only under conditions of extreme social pressure. . . .”<sup>33</sup>

A banker prominent in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported to a business audience in 1936 on his recent trip to Germany: “[I]f one lays

aside [certain prejudices] and dispassionately observes the remarkable transformation in the physical appearance of the country, as well as the spirit of the people, a certain admiration for their accomplishments can hardly be denied. . . . [For example:] the changes which have been brought about in the levelling of class differences, the increased opportunity for the enjoyment of life by the working people, the physical and mental education of the youth of the land, both boys and girls, and last, but not least, the reawakening of the national spirit. . . . And whatever serious objections may be raised to this new order of things by which the all-powerful government enforces its will, it must be admitted that the practical result has been the complete suppression of the communists . . . and the absolute elimination of strikes, wage disputes, and disturbances of that character."<sup>34</sup>

Most American businessmen, absorbed with their own problems in the midst of the depression, were probably less sympathetic to Nazi Germany than simply ignorant or indifferent. The business press, which saw its job as informing and educating its preoccupied readers, took little notice itself of the more dramatic manifestations of the Nazi revolution—the violence and terror, the racial and religious persecutions, the book burnings and cultural purges, the flood of refugees leaving the country. Its outrage seemed to be largely confined to the discovery that the Nazis were not only anticommunist but anticapitalist as well.

Fascism, Nazism, and communism, *Business Week* revealed in 1935, were all varieties of collectivism, of state socialism. "Fascism . . . puts business men under a military control, and uses state socialism to conciliate the people and to pay military expenses. . . . [T]hose business men who financed it in its early stages have learned their mistake. They hoped to use fascism for their own purposes; instead, fascism is using them."<sup>35</sup>

The outrage that business periodicals expressed for the Nazis' affronts to free enterprise never reached the point of suggesting that this was anything to go to war about. Indeed, the business press—which ranged from politically reactionary (*Nation's Business*, published by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce) to politically moderate (*Fortune*, published by Time Inc.)—was uniformly isolationist. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial in March 1938 entitled "Neutrality Is Freedom" was representative of the views of the business press.

"[S]hould general war come in Europe," the *Journal* declared, "it will shake to its ultimate foundations the social order of every belligerent nation. It will leave behind a state of anarchy and chaos, the one sure consequence of which will be the destruction of civil liberties and probably of most of the remaining vestiges of the European civilization that we have known and of which our civilization has been and is today a part. . . .

"[I]f this country is again embroiled in a general war, as it was in 1917, it will mean changes in our social and political order which will gravely imperil the institutions which constitute our system of democratic

government. It is, humanly speaking, most likely that, again suspended for the making of war, as they will have to be, the fundamental liberties now secured to our people by those institutions will never be fully restored to them . . .

"Our territorial frontiers [which are to be defended] enclose continental United States and our national possessions. . . .

"Have we any moral frontiers for which we are duty bound to fight—defense, for instance, of the world's 'democracies' against the world's 'dictatorships'? . . . [W]hatever may be the military result of a conflict between Europe's 'democracies' and Europe's 'dictatorships,' totalitarianism will be the substance beneath the forms, whatever those forms may be, of the governments which survive the conflict. A war 'to save democracy' can result only in democracy's destruction. . . ."36

When war actually began, the *Journal* retreated to the isolationists' Fortress America: "[T]he best service we can render the cause of European civilization . . . is to direct all our efforts to the one task of keeping intact the citadel in the western hemisphere, so that if [civilization] shall fall in Europe it may find here a new birth."<sup>37</sup>

Isolationists expected that World War II would resemble World War I. At its end, *Nation's Business* foresaw, "exhausted nations [would] seek a peace which only America can provide—a peace negotiated through a nation, strong within and without, feared and respected because it truly has the blessings of liberty secured for itself and its posterity."<sup>38</sup>

This expectation had to be abandoned in June 1940, when, with the fall of France and the withdrawal of Britain from the continent of Europe, Nazi Germany appeared as the very probable victor in a short war. Suddenly, the American business community had to confront an issue it had never seriously contemplated before: What would a Hitler victory mean for American business?

That issue was discussed in late 1939 by the *Fortune* Round Table, a group of "representative citizens"—sixteen prominent men (including *Fortune's* publisher, Henry Luce) representing business, labor, consumers, the military, and the academy—assembled by the magazine to sample elite opinion. The old system of international trade, the panel observed, had been carried on by individuals competing with each other. But now totalitarian states conducted foreign trade for political objectives and as a form of economic warfare. Individuals could not compete with state-controlled marketing. In a world controlled by totalitarian states, the panel concluded, "the U.S. would either have to renounce foreign trade . . . or establish severe government controls over foreign trade to cope with totalitarian competition."<sup>39</sup>

The implications for American business were expanded and given dramatic currency by columnist Walter Lippmann in the *New York Herald Tribune* on the very day of France's surrender. Lippmann indicted the Republican Party (then preparing for its presidential nominating

convention) and its business constituency as “sleepwalkers,” unmindful of “the most momentous facts of modern history—that the capitalist system of private property and free enterprise and free labor has come to an end in every industrial nation on the face of the globe, excepting only in the United States.

“Has it dawned upon the [politicians],” he continued, “that the next President of the United States is going to administer our affairs in a world where the whole commercial system we have known has broken down, in a world in which private property and private enterprise have been replaced by a regime of military socialism?

“Do they realize . . . that when an American business man wants to sell or buy in Europe and Asia, he will not be trading with other business men but with monopolies administered by dictatorial governments? That when he competes in the few free markets which may be left, say, in South America, he will be competing not with foreign business men, but with a European government monopoly?

“Do they realize that the American farmer and the American producer of raw materials will be able to sell to that monopoly only if this country will take in payment the manufactured goods of Europe? Have they grasped the fact that these goods are going to be produced by highly skilled labor which is paid the wages of sweated labor and, so far as the conquered peoples are concerned, the wages of slave labor?”<sup>40</sup>

Overnight, *Business Week* reported, the question of America’s position after a Hitler victory dominated American political, economic, and social discourse. Independently, *Business Week* reached conclusions similar to Lippmann’s. *Fortune* followed: “If Hitler destroys freedom everywhere else, it will perish here. Ringed around by a world hostile to our way to life, we should be forced to become a great military power. Our economy would be crushed by a weight of armaments and the indispensable economic controls. We should find ourselves dominated and virtually owned by our own government—a people in slavery to the state. Industry and trade, labor and agriculture would become part of a state system, which, in its own self-defense, would have to take on the character of Hitler’s system.”<sup>41</sup>

Extreme conservatives, however, continued to see the immediate enemy as incipient *domestic* totalitarianism. *Nation’s Business* wrote of a “Trojan Horse, American Model,”<sup>42</sup> and the president of the National Association of Manufacturers spoke of “the juggernaut of creeping collectivism.”<sup>43</sup>

With the fall of France, the high tide of isolationism began to recede. The movement of opinion within the business community can only be suggested by the sparse data.

In November 1939, *Business Week* reported a poll of business executives taken by the Opinion Research Corporation that found that 98 percent of businessmen—approximately the same percentage as in the general

population—wanted the United States to stay out of the war in Europe; 75 percent would oppose America's entry even if Britain and France appeared to be losing. If America were drawn into the war, 22 percent of the executives polled predicted that the United States would emerge a dictatorship.

In May 1941 *Fortune* reported that 84.1 percent of its Round Table members saw "some degree of danger or disaster resulting from a Hitler victory," a "consequence so serious that it should, presumably, be prevented at almost any cost."<sup>44</sup>

Business was beginning to realize that Berlin, not Washington, posed the greater threat.

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1939 was the tenth year of the Great Depression. The nation's industrial capacity had not expanded since the 1920s; industrial production lagged behind the 1929 level. Nine and a half million people—17.2 percent of the labor force—were still unemployed.

Despairing of the New Deal's ability to revive the economy, business looked for help abroad, where war seemed increasingly imminent. "[T]he next war," a writer for *Barron's* suggested cautiously, "... might not be ... wholly without stimulation to American business. ..."<sup>45</sup>

American business had already played a significant part in the world's war preparations. Although the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1937 prohibited the sale of weapons to belligerents, countries that had not been formally designated belligerents by the president—including Germany and Japan—could buy not only weapons but such other war materials as oil, metals, machine tools, and aircraft and parts. Indeed, another writer for *Barron's* calculated that "the total business of American companies arising from foreign rearmament programs may have been as high as half a billion dollars annually in 1937 and 1938."<sup>46</sup>

In September 1939 the otherwise isolationist *Wall Street Journal* probably spoke for the majority of the business community when it expressed satisfaction with the new Neutrality Act. The 1939 act ended the embargo of war materials for belligerents if they paid in cash and carried their purchases away in their own ships. "It has not been seriously proposed that we cut off all commercial relations with belligerents ...," the *Journal* said. "Our isolation from Europe's war does not call for any such sacrifice. ..."<sup>47</sup>

The billion dollars or more that American companies may have earned arming foreign countries—including Germany and Japan—was soon surpassed by revenue arising from American rearmament. In 1939 the nation spent \$1.4 billion on defense; in 1941, defense expenditures were \$6.3 billion (they reached \$80 billion in 1945). This was unprecedented economic stimulation by the government. By the time of Pearl Harbor, the Great Depression was over.



The task of industrial mobilization was huge and complex. An infinite variety of war materials, from shoes to ships, was called for. Military and civilian needs had to be calculated, plans devised and contracts let, strategic materials stockpiled and allocated, factories built or expanded, machine tools produced and factories retooled, workers trained. The existing federal bureaucracy lacked the expertise to manage such a massive production effort. Of necessity, the government turned to industry for the management skills it needed. Thousands of businessmen were hired or drafted to staff new war agencies.

On the morale of the business community, the effect was transforming. The *Wall Street Journal* hailed the "reconciliation between government and business."<sup>48</sup> *Business Week* was relieved that industry would not "have to go about its job of armament-making under the capricious direction of the New Deal's left wing."<sup>49</sup> "For ten years our business system and business men have been under attack," complained the editor and publisher of the *Nation's Business*. But no longer. "Business management," he said, "is in better repute today than it has been in a decade."<sup>50</sup>

"Business now finds itself in the saddle," wrote a contributor to *Current History*. "It is business' big chance. Let it continue to make a fine, unselfish record in rearming the country and the country will be grateful."<sup>51</sup> In the war emergency, business at last reclaimed its "rightful" leadership in American society. Significantly, the Republican Party in 1940 gave its presidential nomination to a successful businessman but political neophyte, Wendell Willkie.

The business press often celebrated the patriotism, sacrifices, achievements, and small profits of American businessmen participating in the defense effort. It was also true that many businessmen were reluctant to accept defense contracts. Antipathy to Roosevelt, isolationist sentiment, and a large measure of self-concern made them skeptical of the emergency. They feared the costs of conversion and expansion, the ending of their profitable civilian production, the difficulty of regaining their civilian markets after the war. "Business as usual" was the intention of many businessmen as national mobilization got slowly and confusedly under way.

Some of the largest firms were least cooperative with the defense program. In June 1940 Henry Ford inexplicably refused to manufacture airplane engines for the British. Some people attributed Ford's refusal to his historic pacifism, but Ford's German subsidiary was already producing war matériel for the Nazis. Perhaps the continuation of his German business necessitated a posture of "neutrality" before Pearl Harbor.

The Aluminum Company of America, before 1941 the nation's only producer of aluminum, refused to invest in power plants necessary to expand production. The steel industry, too, was reluctant to expand for fear of excessive capacity in the "postemergency" civilian economy. Railroad companies refused to order desperately needed freight cars and



locomotives. Airplane manufacturers refused to convert wholly to military production. Standard Oil had to be compelled to license the production of synthetic rubber by other companies. General Motors, while accepting a large number of defense contracts, refused to halt production of its 1941-model automobiles; in 1941 the company produced 4 million cars, using scarce materials in the process. (GM's chairman, Alfred Sloan—a Roosevelt-hater and despiser of politicians generally—advised his executives not to take defense jobs in Washington, and he was angry when they did.)

Government could not compel businesses to join the defense program. It had to meet their concerns, and it did so generously during the "emergency" and the war itself. "Cost-plus" defense contracts reimbursed the manufacturer for all his costs and then added a fixed fee or profit. A privately financed factory could be amortized over five years instead of twenty, with the effect that the factory was paid for by tax savings. In most cases the government itself built new factories, leased them at low rates to private firms, then sold them after the war at low prices. Excess-profit taxes collected during the war could be reclaimed by a manufacturer who suffered losses in postwar readjustment. Wartime profits were kept low, but at the war's end the value of business capital—plants and machinery—had been vastly expanded at government expense.

"If you are going to try to go to war, or to prepare for war, in a capitalist country," Secretary of War Henry Stimson confided to his diary in August 1940, "you have got to let business make money out of the process or business won't work. . . ." <sup>52</sup>

## CHAPTER 8

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# The Search for Safety

As the international scene darkened in the 1930s, apprehensive Americans searched for safety. They seemed to have only two options: isolationism and internationalism.

Overwhelmingly the more popular option was isolationism: no commitments to other nations that might embroil the United States in war; absolute neutrality in the event of a foreign war; and, if attacked, defense of America's impregnable and self-sufficient continental bastion.

Much less popular was internationalism: membership in or cooperation with international organizations that were trying to actualize the rule of law in international affairs; and united action with other peace-loving nations—collective security—to deter or punish aggression through economic and, if ultimately necessary, military sanctions.

Isolationists, it was said, wanted peace for America; internationalists wanted peace for the world.

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With the approach of war in Europe, the merits of isolationism seemed increasingly self-evident to the great majority of Americans, especially to those who lived in the country's enormous interior. Absorbed with the problems of the depression and political upheaval at home, they were ignorant of—and at first indifferent to—foreign affairs. They were confident that the Atlantic and Pacific oceans insulated them from troubles in Europe and Asia. With territory so vast, diverse, and rich, the United States required relatively little from the rest of the world.

But historically America had never been isolated. In six European wars between 1689 and 1815, North America was an active theater in which

European armies and navies operated. After the American war for independence (which was part of a larger Anglo-French war), Britain retained Canada. Spain, then France, claimed Louisiana until 1803. Spain clung to Florida until 1819. Russia occupied Alaska until 1867. During the American Civil War, a French army invaded Mexico.

The ocean “barriers” were highly permeable to cultural influences. American civilization, whose foundations derived entirely from Europe, was continuously enriched from Europe. Second- and third-generation immigrant families preserved their European ethnic identities and retained sentimental attachments to their countries of origin.

Moreover, the United States was inextricably enmeshed in the global economy. From the country’s colonial beginnings, foreign trade had been economically and politically important. As the nation expanded, every sector of the economy—agriculture, mining, manufacturing—looked abroad for markets. In the nineteenth century, foreign investments poured into the United States. During and after World War I, the United States ceased to be a debtor nation and became a creditor nation, making large loans and investments abroad.

Meanwhile, the United States had spanned the North American continent and reached out overseas. As early as the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, it asserted its hegemony over the Western Hemisphere by closing Latin America to further European colonization. In the mid-nineteenth century it seized California and the American southwest from Mexico and divided Oregon with Great Britain. At the end of the century it annexed Hawaii and fought a war with Spain to liberate Cuba, in the process taking possession of the Philippine Islands.

Early in the twentieth century the United States intervened in China, built the Panama Canal, and imposed order on Caribbean nations. American delegations attended Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907, which advanced international law and established the Permanent Court of Arbitration. President Theodore Roosevelt received a Nobel Peace Prize for mediating a peace treaty between Japan and Russia in 1905; he also convened and sent an American delegation to an international conference at Algeciras, Spain, in 1906 which resolved a Franco-German dispute over Morocco.

The United States emerged from World War I a world power whose inaction in world affairs could be as consequential as its action.

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World War I delivered a near-fatal blow to American internationalism. Deeply scarred by the war and disillusioned by its outcome, Americans resolved never to become involved in European affairs again. They were sick of idealism and sacrifice; they wanted only to be left in peace. When European affairs began to intrude on their lives in the 1930s, Americans’

first response was to embrace old and prudent admonitions: Don't get involved. Mind your own business.

The spokesmen for isolationism in Congress and the media—to whom was attached the term *isolationists* (some preferred *insulationists* and others could find no term that accurately reflected their particular views)—were a diverse group. Radicals, liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries; Democrats, Republicans, and Socialists; they came from all parts of the country and different social backgrounds. They shared with the great majority of Americans an abhorrence of war and a determination to keep the United States out of any future war. They believed they had learned important lessons from the experience of World War I—chiefly, that economic interests had dragged the country into war—but they interpreted those lessons variously.

The pacifists among them, rejecting war on principle, opposed any policy—including military preparedness—that might lead to war. Pacifists and nonpacifists alike favored neutrality: some absolute, others discretionary. Some would surrender the neutral rights guaranteed by international law whose assertion had involved the United States in World War I; others would militantly enforce those rights, but (unlike World War I) evenhandedly, against *all* violators.

All nonpacifists would defend the United States if attacked; some would defend the entire Western Hemisphere. Some urged vigorous rearmament; others objected to military expenditures in excess of minimal defense requirements. From 1940, some advocated aid to beleaguered Britain—but short of war; others objected to aid or even commerce. If all else failed, if America's friends abroad were destroyed and America itself was threatened, the isolationists would withdraw confidently into Fortress America.

Despite their diversity, the isolationists adhered to a principle hallowed by age and usage: American independence of action in foreign affairs. "The American nation has never been isolated," declared the *Chicago Tribune* in 1938. "It has been independent and it proposes to remain so."<sup>1</sup>

This principle of independence in foreign affairs had guided U.S. policy since the republic's beginning. In his farewell address in 1796, President George Washington had not advised his countrymen to seek isolation, as is often thought; rather, he had counseled them: "Observe good faith and justice toward all Nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all." But he warned: "Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation. . . 'Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent Alliances, with any portion of the foreign world." His fear was that, in any but a temporary alliance, American interests would become subordinated to those of other nations.<sup>2</sup>

American statesmen had followed that advice religiously, avoiding treaties of alliance and membership in international organizations that limited America's freedom of action. "The men who made America

great," proclaimed Democratic senator Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri in 1940, "were isolationists."<sup>3</sup> In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson had led America into World War I unilaterally, not as an ally of Britain and France. In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt had disrupted the London Economic Conference by putting American interests ahead of those of the international community. Just as Americans had rejected Wilson's internationalism in 1920, so they rejected Roosevelt's after 1937. They would not risk war "to pull some other country's chestnuts out of the fire," as the expression went. If they had to fight, they would fight only for America's interests.

But what were those interests? Defense of America's maritime commerce? Defense of America's far-flung Pacific empire—the Philippines, Hawaii (not then a state), and other small islands? Defense of the Western Hemisphere? There was no doubt that America would fight for the Panama Canal and its continental territory, but was it wise to wait until these were actually attacked? Was it not better to fight overseas than at home, to fight with allies rather than alone? Where, in fact, was America's strategic frontier—the Rhine, the English Channel, or Cape Cod?

Moreover, was the defense of the United States somehow involved in a larger issue—the defense of Western civilization? Were there values—democracy, the rule of law, human rights—worth fighting for? Could the United States be secure in a world dominated by aggressive dictatorships hostile to the values on which America was built?

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Although isolationism was not a systematic philosophy, certain themes recur in the varied expositions of the doctrine.

Isolationists were "first of all realists," Republican senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota declared. "We desire to base our action on an honest estimate of our national physical strength, on an honest weighing of the gains and losses . . . of each practical measure. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Isolationists knew that the United States did not have the power to police the world or to change it. They knew that other countries acted out of national interest alone, with no concern for morality or idealism. They believed that the United States must perforce do the same, which meant minding its own business and looking to its own defenses.

"[I]t is none of our business what form of government exists in any foreign land," declared Hamilton Fish, Republican representative from New York.<sup>5</sup> "[I]t is no business of this country . . . to determine where justice or injustice lies in any corner of the world except in the forty-eight states of the United States," agreed Democratic senator David L. Walsh of Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup>

Isolationists often recalled the American experience in World War I—the cost in dollars and lives, the betrayal of American idealism in the

Treaty of Versailles, the economic regimentation and loss of civil liberties at home, the economic collapse that, delayed a decade, still held the country in its grip.

"When we entered the World War," said Republican senator George W. Norris of Nebraska, "we made the greatest mistake in the history of our nation."<sup>7</sup> "[W]e have not learned a thing as a result of the last war," Senator Nye said, "if we have not learned that European purposes, causes, and wars are not ours, or that it does not lie within our power to inflict our ideals and purposes upon Europe."<sup>8</sup>

Many isolationists trivialized the issues at stake in the European conflict. The phrases *ancient quarrels*, *boundary disputes*, *blood feuds*, *power politics* recur in their speeches and articles. When Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to Hitler at Munich in September 1938, the isolationist *Chicago Tribune* editorialized: "[A]t bottom the conflict is merely another of the many European struggles for power and dominance . . . [in which] America has no place."<sup>9</sup> On the first day of the war, former president Herbert Hoover pronounced it "a senseless war."<sup>10</sup>

Those who discerned profounder issues treated them simplistically. "What is it that is threatening the world with another war?" asked Republican Senator William E. Borah in April 1939. "[I]t is imperialism—that is, territory, colonies, raw material, trade."<sup>11</sup> "Conflicting economic interests . . . is the source of the present international crisis," opined Democratic senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana.<sup>12</sup>

For some, the conflict was between the "have" nations and the "have-nots." The "haves"—Britain and France—had taken the lion's share of colonial booty after World War I, reducing Germany to the status of a "have-not." Italy and Japan, although members of the victorious alliance, had profited less from the war and were accordingly resentful.

For Socialist and pacifist Norman Thomas, the European conflict was between "one set of capitalist powers interested in preserving the status quo [and] another set which wants to change it."<sup>13</sup> One industrialist believed that the war was a worldwide revolution against capitalism.

If it was difficult for the isolationists to agree on what the European conflict was about, it was easier for them to recognize what it was *not* about. It was not, according to some isolationists, an ideological conflict between democracy and dictatorship as internationalists alleged.

Isolationists denigrated Britain and France as "so-called democracies." Both ruled oppressively over empires obtained by violence. Isolationist newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst detested Britain because it was monarchical and France because it was socialistic. (Dorothy Thompson, no isolationist, wrote of prewar Britain: "The ruling class has been a decadent aristocracy fatly nourished by a plutocracy."<sup>14</sup> France, she wrote, was ruled by a decadent middle class that, "regarding itself as the pinnacle of civilization," had lost its sense of purpose and fallen into chaos.<sup>15</sup>)

The conflict was also not about human rights. That subject was never raised when Britain and France allowed Japan to occupy Manchuria, Italy to invade Ethiopia, the fascists to revolt against republican Spain. When they consented to Germany's annexation of Austria and dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, they expressed no concern for the populations being surrendered to the Nazis, "some of whom," Senator Borah noted, "... bore the mortal enmity of their new master."<sup>16</sup>

Nor was the war about the sanctity of treaties. Both Britain and France had defaulted on their war debts to the United States, obligations as sacred as any Hitler had violated. "[A] nation that will not pay its debt is an unsafe nation with which to make a treaty about peace," Senator Borah said.<sup>17</sup> In the isolationists' opinion, the "so-called democracies" could not claim any moral superiority over the dictators.

Few isolationists—among them "radio priest" Charles Coughlin, publicist George Sylvester Viereck, and Republican representatives Hamilton Fish of New York and Jacob Thorkelson of Montana—had anything good to say about Nazi Germany. Most roundly condemned the Nazi regime in Germany as barbaric. They were, however, understanding if not sympathetic toward Nazi Germany's foreign policy.

They considered the remilitarization of the Rhineland and the annexation of Austria as reasonable—if unilateral—rectifications of the Versailles Treaty. In view of that treaty, said Senator Borah, the annexation of Austria "would appear natural, logical, inevitable, and a thing which is not of the slightest moment to the government of the United States."<sup>18</sup> In the Czech crisis of September 1938, Senator Borah announced: "The people of the United States are not interested in European boundaries. . . ."<sup>19</sup>

And yet most isolationists actually sympathized with Britain and France rather than with Germany. "[O]ur sympathies, our hopes, our prayers, are all with the British and French governments in this conflict," said Senator Norris early in the war.<sup>20</sup> These declarations were invariably followed by a *but*. Isolationists struggled to suppress such unneutral sentiments for fear that popular emotion, if unrestrained, might triumph over rational self-interest. The title of an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* expressed their sentiment: "Emotion Must Not Dictate."<sup>21</sup>

The consequences of war for America weighed heavily upon the minds of all isolationists. "[T]he dangers which our entry into war will bring upon us are . . . greater than any conceivable dangers which may come upon us if we stay out of war," said Norman Thomas.<sup>22</sup>

Liberals feared a fascist dictatorship that would dismantle the social gains achieved by the New Deal. Conservatives were sure that the collectivist tendencies of the New Deal, magnified by the centralization and regimentation necessitated by war, would result in a socialist dictatorship. "We have moved far towards totalitarian government already," warned Republican senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio in 1939. "The additional powers sought by the President in case of war . . . would create a socialist



dictatorship which it would be impossible to dissolve when the war ended."<sup>23</sup>

The isolationists' ultimate object was to preserve American civilization from the consequences of war. The Puritan colonists had cast America as an exemplary nation, a godly society to be emulated in time by the degenerate nations of Europe. That ideal remained a permanent theme in American patriotism. The best service America could render humanity now, isolationists argued, was to preserve America in peace and one day redeem a war-devastated world.

"Our great opportunity for service in the cause of civilization," said Progressive senator Robert M. La Follette Jr. of Wisconsin in 1939, "is to stay out of this war and thus preserve in this hemisphere a haven of sanity in a world where madness now prevails. . . . Then when the war is over we will indeed be in a position to give the world succor and leadership."<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the isolationists' arguments ran a plaintive theme of Americans' inability to cope with the devious politics of Europe. Americans would inevitably be deceived, maneuvered, and entangled by wily European diplomatists. Republican senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan confessed that he found Europe's politics "devious with deep intrigue" and "beyond our ken."<sup>25</sup> "Americans . . . aren't smart enough," said historian Charles Beard, "to solve problems of Europe. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

Despite all the reasons for not getting involved in a foreign war, "powerful influences at home and abroad are seeking by all kinds of methods . . . to involve us in all the racial, territorial, and financial problems of Europe, and, ultimately, in war," Senator Borah warned in April 1939.<sup>27</sup> On July 4, Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, sounded a similar alarm: "[W]e are in the middle of a conspiracy to throw this country into [the next] war, and the conspirators are in partnership with a conspiracy far greater and far more dangerous to our national welfare—the conspiracy to scrap the Constitution of the United States and supplant it with the terrorism and communism of Russia."<sup>28</sup>

Who were these "powerful influences"? Bankers and industrialists were the usual suspects. Others identified by isolationists included wealthy Easterners, foreign and domestic propagandists, Jews, Communists (before August 1939), college professors, and editors of liberal journals.

But the chief warmongers, the isolationists believed, were to be found in the Roosevelt administration, which they thought was actively working to bring the United States into the war in order to rescue New Deal programs. Roosevelt himself they saw as devious and opportunistic, secretive and dictatorial. In June 1939, Representative Hamilton Fish believed that President Roosevelt was determined "to take this nation into war if one breaks out in foreign lands."<sup>29</sup> Roosevelt, wrote Senator Taft, was "the greatest menace to peace in this country."<sup>30</sup>

While Europe in 1939 prepared feverishly for war, in America some leading isolationists expressed their disbelief. Democratic senator Robert R. Reynolds of North Carolina asked in January 1939, "Who's going to fight?" Hitler had all he wanted, Reynolds believed, and Britain and France were unable to fight.<sup>31</sup> In March, Senator Nye declared, "There will be no war in Europe this spring, this year, or next year unless the United States encourages, urges, and eggs Europe into it."<sup>32</sup> In April, Senator Taft accused President Roosevelt of "ballyhooing the foreign situation" to divert attention from New Deal failures.<sup>33</sup> Six weeks before war began, Senator Borah, the ranking minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, assured the president that there would be no war; his sources, he claimed, were as reliable as the president's.

"They don't dare have a war and they know it," asserted automaker Henry Ford on August 28. "They're all bluffing."<sup>34</sup>

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During the Roosevelt years, Democrats dominated both houses of Congress by wide margins. Most isolationists were Republicans, most internationalists were Democrats. But both these groups were minorities in their own parties. Most members of Congress might be called neutralists—committed to avoiding war but voting nonideologically as issues of foreign affairs came before them.

Despite the facts that Republican isolationists in Congress were a minority within a minority and were too individualistic to form a stable bloc, they exerted influence disproportionate to their numbers. In the Senate, their influence emanated from the Foreign Relations Committee, where a small number of committed isolationists dominated a divided and poorly led majority. In 1939, Democrats controlled sixteen of the committee's twenty-three seats; the other seven, all isolationists, consisted of four Republicans, two third-party men, and one Democrat. Among these seven were four highly influential men: Republicans William E. Borah of Idaho, Hiram W. Johnson of California, and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan; and Progressive Robert M. La Follette Jr. of Wisconsin. Because Roosevelt depended on some isolationists' votes to sustain his domestic policies, he was always deferential to their views on foreign affairs.

Congressional isolationists enjoyed their greatest influence during Roosevelt's first term. In 1934, they passed the Johnson Act, which prohibited loans to countries that had defaulted on their war debts to the United States. In 1935 Senate isolationists blocked the administration's proposal to join the World Court. Isolationists and their pacifist allies initiated the Nye munitions investigation of 1934–36, which led directly to passage of the Neutrality Act of 1935 and its extension in 1936.

Despite Roosevelt's political difficulties in his second term—the depression still held sway, and the president failed in efforts to enlarge the

Supreme Court, to reform the executive branch, and to purge a handful of conservative Democrats from Congress, with the result that he lost many congressional supporters in the 1938 elections—the congressional isolationists were less successful. To “take the profit out of war,” they repeatedly tried but failed to pass confiscatory taxes on war profits. They failed to prevent a more flexible revision of the Neutrality Act in 1937. They failed to block congressional authorization of a two-ocean navy in 1938. They failed to enact a constitutional amendment—introduced every year from 1935 to 1938—requiring a national referendum before the nation could declare war.

When war began in Europe, the American people discovered that they were not as neutral as they claimed. A basic human empathy for the victims of Nazi and Japanese aggression—and particularly for a people who spoke the same language and professed the same religious and political beliefs—began to challenge the calculus of rational self-interest advocated by the isolationists. While still resolved to keep out of war, the American people were finding the role of onlooker in a world crisis at odds with their image of themselves. Was not America, the land of the free, also the home of the brave?

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Perhaps the most interesting isolationist (although he rejected the term) was Charles A. Beard, the most influential American historian of his time. Although Beard was a man of the left, his case for isolation was in many respects similar to those of other isolationists, including the most conservative.

Son of a wealthy Indiana family, Beard graduated from DePauw University, then studied in Germany and England. In England he was active in worker education and the formation of the nascent Labour Party.

Back in the United States, Beard earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University and became a professor there. As a historian, Beard sought to explain politics and culture by examining the material and economic factors underlying them. His *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) was a milestone in American historiography, although his critics argued that Beard's view of the Founders was one-dimensional.

A staunch civil libertarian, Beard resigned from Columbia in 1917 to protest the university's dismissal of several antiwar faculty members even though he did not agree with them. Thereafter, he lived for the most part on a Connecticut farm. Freed from institutional constraints, he became a vigorous public intellectual, writing and lecturing on political and educational affairs. He became the country's leading proponent of isolationism from the left.

Beard's isolationism grew out of personal experiences at home and abroad. As a student in Germany, he encountered and detested German

militarism. At Columbia, he was an ardent supporter of U.S. entry into World War I. The consequences of that war, however, and revelations of the influence of economic factors on America's decision to intervene, were profoundly disillusioning for him. Working in Europe after the war, he became convinced that the animosities of that continent were hopelessly intractable. Finally, the Great Depression demonstrated for him the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of America's business leadership.

During the 1930s, domestic affairs—recovery and reform—were Beard's greatest concern. For all its faults, he felt that American civilization was still, in Lincoln's words, "the last best hope of earth," and believed that it could be preserved and guided toward a utopian "workers' republic"<sup>35</sup> only if insulated from the embroilments of the Old World.

Beard had no illusions about Nazi Germany. It was the antithesis of everything he valued. He recognized that Hitlerism meant war. But Germany was Europe's problem, not America's, he insisted. He rejected the notion that the United States had any moral responsibility to confront aggression abroad.

"What responsibilities?" he demanded. "To help France, Britain, and Russia police the world? To take part in suppressing all disturbers of world peace, everywhere? To give the world's billions of poverty-stricken people economic goods sufficient to satisfy them? . . .

"Responsibilities to whom? To the peoples of the fifty-odd nations possessing independence? To the peoples of the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese, and Italian dependencies? To the Negroes of British South Africa? To Nationalists in India? To the natives of Zululand as well as the natives of Ethiopia?"<sup>36</sup>

The European nations that, with good reason, felt threatened by Germany and Italy had the means to defend themselves, Beard believed. They "outnumber them in population by at least three to one. . . . These menaced nations far outstrip the two foes in wealth, natural resources, metals, and war materials of every kind. . . . By their side we may also place the British Empire, the French Empire, and the Dutch Empire. . . . These are the helpless pygmies that must be saved from the menacing Leviathans by the blood and treasure of the United States."<sup>37</sup>

The defense of European countries that had the means if not the will to defend themselves, Beard argued, was not America's responsibility and certainly not in its national interest.

What was the national interest? The national interest was conventionally defined in economic and security (rather than social or ideological) terms. One might therefore have assumed that the national interest was the sum or balance of all the country's separate economic interests. But Beard found that in recent decades the national interest had been defined by commercial and manufacturing interests as the expansion—and protection—of America's foreign trade, even though that trade accounted for only 5 percent of the national income.

Due to the maldistribution of wealth under capitalism, Beard explained, America's farms, mines, and factories produced more goods than the domestic market could absorb. America's prosperity depended on the sale of these surpluses overseas. According to Beard, it was the system of foreign trade and the unrealistic assertion of neutral rights—not the machinations of wicked bankers and munitions makers—that had drawn the United States into World War I. No trade, no war, said Beard.

Beard offered his own definition of the national interest: "The supreme interest of the United States is the creation and maintenance of a high standard of life for all its people and ways of industry conducive to the promotion of individual and social virtues *within the frame of national security*."<sup>38</sup> In this formulation, security had the highest priority.

First, security entailed "the utmost emancipation" from dependence upon the economies and rivalries of other nations. A planned economy would achieve that emancipation through a more equitable distribution of wealth so that the domestic market could absorb all that American agriculture and industry produced. Foreign trade would be restricted to the acquisition of necessary imports; America's exports would be regulated to preserve the country's natural resources.

Second, Beard believed, the military defense of the United States, separated as it was from possible enemies by ocean barriers, required only modest naval and air forces. Throughout the 1930s, Beard consistently opposed appropriations for naval expansion as unnecessary for defense.

Beard rejected the name *isolationism* for his position; he preferred Continental Americanism. To him, the word *continentalism* was associated with the conception of a unique American civilization. This civilization, according to Beard, was "republican, secular, and essentially economic in character." It was not racial and "has no mythological traditions rooted in a distant past. . . . It has distinct political and economic ways of life due to its natural environment and the process of settlement and expansion; and these ways of life give it peculiar characteristics, objective and subjective."<sup>39</sup> This civilization was unique, and Beard was intent on preserving it—by isolation and national planning.

Beard occasionally betrayed certain conventional prejudices. Thus, although he favored extension of the "national origins" principle in immigration law to "all areas not yet covered," he proposed that immigrants be *selected* for "social cohesiveness and cooperative capacity."<sup>40</sup> He was suspicious of ethnic loyalties. "[T]he United States," he said, "is treated by resident foreigners as a boardinghouse, not as the permanent home of a people engaged in trying to make a civilization in their own land. These foreigners in letter or spirit are actuated by emotional interests in nationals in other countries and yet look with contempt upon Americans whose primary affections are attached to ties of their own."<sup>41</sup>

A more important animus, shared with conservative isolationists, was hostility and suspicion toward President Roosevelt. Early in the

New Deal, Beard praised Roosevelt for his “nationalism,” his concentration on domestic affairs in pursuit of economic recovery. Even then, however, Beard was disturbed by Roosevelt’s determination to enlarge the navy and by evidence of “outward thrusts” into Latin America and the Pacific.

As economic recovery proved elusive, Beard faulted Roosevelt for not making those structural changes in the capitalist system that alone, he believed, would restart the nation’s economic engine. A suspicion, first voiced in 1934—“a diversion [war] . . . might not be unwelcome, should the domestic recovery program fall far short of its aims”<sup>42</sup>—grew in Beard’s mind. “Confronted by the difficulties of a deepening domestic crisis,” Beard wrote in 1935, “and by the comparative ease of a foreign war, what will President Roosevelt do? Judging by the past history of American politicians, he will choose the latter. . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Roosevelt’s shift in his second term from concentration on domestic affairs to concentration on international affairs Beard considered quixotic and dangerous. Record naval appropriations in 1938 alarmed him: “[T]he super-navy could be used, perhaps was intended by some sponsors to be used, in a new imperialist war in the Orient.”<sup>44</sup>

In an article titled “Giddy Minds and Foreign Quarrels” in 1939, Beard speculated: “The causes of [Roosevelt’s] reversal are obscure. . . .” In any case, “The destiny of Europe and Asia has not been committed, under God, to the keeping of the United States, and only conceit, dreams of grandeur, vain imaginings, lust for power, or a desire to escape from our domestic perils and obligations could possibly make us suppose that Providence had appointed his chosen people for the pacification of the earth.”<sup>45</sup>

(The phrase “giddy minds” was taken from Shakespeare’s play *Henry IV*, in which the dying king advises his son “to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels” to keep his throne secure.)

After World War II, Beard published *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War* (1948), in which he argued that Roosevelt had worked deliberately and secretly to bring the United States into the war. Prominent historians who reviewed the book regarded it as an embarrassment.

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The internationalists comprised two schools of thought: the realist and the idealist.

The realists (not to be confused with the “realist” isolationists) saw the world as an anarchic congeries of sovereign states, each opportunistically pursuing its own interests. For each sovereign state, security required maintenance of costly armed forces, aggrandizement where possible, and alliances with other states to balance the power of potentially hostile

other states or groups of states. The peace achieved by a balance of power was always an armed peace. In this world of *Realpolitik*, law and morality played no roles.

It was this dangerous world into which the United States of America was born. The early republic, which had confirmed its independence in the War of 1812 (part of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe), was confronted by a new danger soon after the conclusion of that war. The victorious continental powers—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—formed a Holy Alliance to support reactionary regimes throughout Europe. Together with France, they contemplated returning to Spain its former South American colonies, which had won their independence during the Napoleonic Wars.

Britain, an ally of the continental powers against Napoleon, abstained from the Holy Alliance and opposed its intervention in the Western Hemisphere. To the United States Britain proposed a joint declaration against European interference in the Americas. Preferring unilateral action, the United States in 1823 issued the Monroe Doctrine. This was certainly an act of presumption for a small and feeble power, but Britain's silent support gave the doctrine teeth. "With [Great Britain] on our side we need not fear the whole world," wrote former president Thomas Jefferson (whose career had been predicated on hostility to Britain) to President James Monroe in October 1823.<sup>46</sup>

The Monroe Doctrine marked the beginning of an informal alliance between the two English-speaking countries against aggressive European reaction. Thereafter the navies of Britain and America policed the Atlantic Ocean, stopping the slave trade, protecting their growing commerce, and preserving the Western Hemisphere from European conflicts.

American strategists recognized that Britain was the cornerstone of America's Atlantic defense. "For over one hundred years," said Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson in 1941, "... a country speaking our language, possessing our traditions of individual and legal freedom, and inhabited by a population from which considerably more than 50 per cent of our own population is descended, has been accepted by us as a dominant factor in the ocean defense upon which our safety and mode of life depend."<sup>47</sup>

The realist internationalists understood that, for its own security, Britain could not allow the Low Countries—the Netherlands and Belgium—to fall into the hands of a major continental power. Thus Britain went to war in 1914 when Germany invaded Belgium. And the United States went to war in 1917 not because of bankers' loans or President Wilson's idealistic rhetoric but because German submarine warfare threatened to starve Britain and put a menacing Germany on the opposite Atlantic shore.

In 1940, according to the realists, the 1917 situation was repeated. Nazi Germany occupied the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France. Britain was vulnerable to invasion or to starvation by submarine blockade.



Realists called for intervention—the majority for intervention “short of war.” They foresaw a world dominated by totalitarian economies inhospitable to a prosperous America and, indeed, to democracy itself. They thought those isolationists wrong who believed that America could trade profitably with such societies or, alternatively, sustain itself in isolation without trade. They thought those isolationists were foolish who refused to defend America until it was attacked or (unlikely) invaded, by which time it would have to fight without allies and with no foothold abroad. For some realists, America’s first line of defense was the same as Britain’s—the Rhine.

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Where realists saw international anarchy, idealists saw a “family of nations.” This family comprised all cooperative, peace-loving nations of whatever form of government that adhered to international law and respected the sanctity of treaties. Aggressor nations were self-excluded. Indeed, “the major issue in the world today,” wrote Raymond Buell, president of the Foreign Policy Association, in 1938, “is not between democracy and dictatorship as such, but between aggressive and non-aggressive means of settling international disputes. The issue is between law and anarchy.”<sup>48</sup>

Law, the foundation of civilization, was based on morality. “For any interpretation of human history,” wrote Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, in 1939, one assumption must be that “there is such a thing as a moral order,” which meant “that moral principle and moral ideals should take precedence of all else. . . .”<sup>49</sup> “There are those,” Butler observed, “who still cherish the illusion that the American people are remote and aloof from the rest of the world and that whatever happens save under the stars and stripes does not concern them. The folly of this illusion is only exceeded by its profound immorality.”<sup>50</sup>

Democracy, the idealists believed, was the political expression of morality, and it was America’s mission to defend and spread democracy throughout the world, preferably by example, if necessary by force. This was the message of idealist internationalists from John Winthrop to Tom Paine, from Abraham Lincoln to Woodrow Wilson and more recent presidents.

In his “quarantine” speech of October 1937, President Roosevelt abandoned official neutrality and embraced the idealists’ moralistic argument for intervention short of war. Disturbed by events in Asia and Europe—Japan’s attack on China, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War—he wanted to alert the American people to the increasing dangers confronting them. He chose Chicago—the home of the isolationist and regionally influential *Chicago Tribune*—as the place to challenge their isolationism.

"The present reign of terror and international lawlessness," Roosevelt told his Chicago audience, seriously threatened "the very foundations of civilization. . . . There can be no stability or peace either within nations or between nations, except under laws and moral standards adhered to by all. International anarchy destroys every foundation for peace. It jeopardizes either the immediate or the future security of every nation, large or small. It is, therefore, a matter of vital interest and concern to the people of the United States that the sanctity of international treaties and the maintenance of international morality be restored." Roosevelt warned Americans that they could not escape the "epidemic of world lawlessness." War was a "contagion," and he proposed that the peace-loving nations of the world cooperate to "quarantine" the aggressors.<sup>51</sup>

Roosevelt's proposal was little more than a suggestion, unspecific and undetailed. For that very reason, his speech was well received in America, where moralism is always popular if it does not exact a price. But it did not make a dent in the nation's profound isolationism. And isolationist leaders now regarded the president not only as an internationalist but also as unneutral.

The *New York Times* at length enlisted under the banner of the idealist internationalists. Noting that the great majority of Americans were sympathetic to the Chinese in their war against Japan and to the victims of Nazi aggression in Europe, it rejected neutrality for both itself and the nation. In an editorial on June 15, 1938, the *Times* called for outright repeal—rather than modification—of the Neutrality Act as a sign of America's moral support for the European democracies.

"No remoteness from the scene of a potential European conflict," said the *Times*, "can isolate the United States from the consequences of a major war. No Neutrality Act can prevent the American people from favoring their natural allies. In any ultimate test of strength between democracy and dictatorship, the good will and the moral support—and in the long run more likely than not the physical power of the United States—will be found on the side of those nations defending a way of life which is our own way of life and the only way of life which Americans believe to be worth living."<sup>52</sup>

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Among the realist internationalists must be counted the officer corps of the Army and Navy. In 1935 there were 12,862 officers (125,098 enlisted men) in the Regular Army and 9,721 officers (82,818 enlisted men) in the Navy. All were career-minded professionals thoroughly assimilated into a hierarchical, authoritarian institution socially and intellectually isolated from civilian society. Indoctrinated with traditional values of duty and honor, they were intensely conservative, both professionally and socially. Many Americans regarded them with suspicion if not outright hostility

as personifications of militarism. Some saw them as potentially willing instruments in a reactionary coup.

For the military, as well as many other Americans, the onset of the depression seemed to be a time of national dissolution. Subversion and unrest were abroad in the land—but the military was on guard. In 1932, the Army chief of staff, General Douglas MacArthur, accused “Pacifism and its bedfellow, Communism” of “organizing the forces of unrest and undermining the morals of the working man.”<sup>53</sup> He shared President Hoover’s view that the Bonus Army that descended upon Washington that summer had been incited by and was infiltrated with Communists. Infantry and cavalry routed the veterans.

MacArthur’s deputy, General George Van Horn Moseley, had earlier proposed to the General Staff that “these aliens [Communists] . . . should be gathered up and either returned to Russia or segregated . . . within the United States.”<sup>54</sup>

In 1934, the *Army and Navy Journal*, a privately published weekly, observed with satisfaction: “The extent to which the National Guard has been employed in strike duty throughout the country reveals the value of this organization in the maintenance of domestic tranquillity.”<sup>55</sup> Six months later it editorialized: “Both the Army and the Navy are in hearty sympathy with the able campaign which William Randolph Hearst is conducting in his newspapers for the eradication of communism from the United States.”<sup>56</sup>

The officers’ scorn and outrage at pacifists probably exceeded their hatred of Communists. In their view, the pacifists’ current shibboleth, “Take the profit out of war,” epitomized their naïveté. The officers believed that war was a permanent fact of life and that its causes were deep and complex. “War is a deadly disease,” General George C. Marshall, Army chief of staff, told the American Historical Association in 1939. “We should do everything in our power . . . to discover the specific which will destroy it.”<sup>57</sup> To fail to appreciate the deep-lying causes of war, and to deny America the military strength necessary for its security, was tantamount to treason.

When in 1935 John Haynes Holmes, pastor of New York’s Community Church, was quoted as saying “[T]he uniform of a soldier is the uniform of a murderer,” the *Army and Navy Journal* called upon Holmes’s auditors “to repudiate the man who so grossly degraded his citizenship and so conclusively demonstrated his unfitness to wear the cloth of his holy profession.”<sup>58</sup> In August 1940, Rear Admiral Clark Howard Woodward attributed America’s lack of preparedness “in large part to the machination of misguided, if not vicious pacifists.”<sup>59</sup>

The officers were not warmongers; their strategic stance was entirely defensive. Still, some officers may have looked forward to war for professional advancement. Some, like George S. Patton, loved war. Stirred by his experience in World War I, Patton chafed at peacetime army life and

anticipated the next war. With that war in sight, in October 1940, Brigadier General Patton wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower: “[W]e will go PLACES. . . . Hoping we are together in a long and BLOODY war.”<sup>60</sup>

Army and Navy officers prided themselves on being nonpolitical, “above politics.” Many did not vote. Yet they had one consuming political concern: military appropriations. The huge war machine of World War I had been quickly dismantled. During the 1920s the Navy was reduced in conformity with a 1922 treaty negotiated at the Washington Conference, and the Army was maintained at skeletal strength. With the coming of the depression, President Hoover annually slashed the War Department’s budget until the conservative officers looked forward hopefully to the Roosevelt administration.

In his inaugural address, President Roosevelt recalled the national resolve in World War I and promised now to “wage war against the emergency.” “If we are to go forward,” he declared, “we must move as a trained and loyal army. . . .”<sup>61</sup>

Among the cheerers was the *Army and Navy Journal*: “The wholehearted support of the Services is being given to the President and the Congress in the existing financial crisis. . . . We who are thoroughly familiar with the feelings of officers and men know that their hearts and hands stand ready to defend the government against all enemies domestic and foreign.”<sup>62</sup> Major Eisenhower also saluted. “*The only chance for success,*” he wrote in October 1933, “is to follow where the Pres. leads. . . . [U]nified support must be given.”<sup>63</sup>

Roosevelt initiated a naval buildup, but he continued to cut the Army’s budget. The Army’s budget for 1934 was the lowest since World War I. Roosevelt proposed even more cuts for 1935, provoking a heated confrontation with the Army chief of staff in the spring of 1934.

“In my emotional exhaustion,” General MacArthur recalled, “I spoke recklessly and said something to the general effect that when we lost the next war, and an American boy, lying in the mud with an enemy bayonet through his belly and an enemy foot on his dying throat, spat out his last curse, I wanted the name not to be MacArthur, but Roosevelt.”<sup>64</sup> The president was furious, and MacArthur left believing that his career was ended. It was not. Roosevelt relented, and the Army’s budget for 1935 was slightly higher than that of the previous year.

The nonpolitical *Army and Navy Journal* regularly praised individual congressmen who supported defense spending.

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In the early years of the depression, the officers’ sense of siege and their high regard for the quality of leadership might have made them susceptible to fascism. In 1933, Eisenhower recorded in his diary: “I have been

called 'Dictator Ike' because I believe that virtual dictatorship must be exercised by our President."<sup>65</sup> Many other conservatives, especially in the business community, held similar views.

General Moseley's extremist proclivities embarrassed the War Department. Yet he was highly regarded by other officers, including Eisenhower, who seemed to view Moseley's anti-Semitic and anticommunist rantings, his defense of the German-American Bund, his obsession with syphilitics and the "unfit," and his later involvement with the subculture of hate groups as mere eccentricities.

Nazi Germany had little appeal to American officers. For several years, many did not take Hitler seriously. General Omar N. Bradley recalled a study group at the Army War College in 1933 that "told us Hitler could be discounted because he was mentally unstable."<sup>66</sup> "I have had some degree of admiration for Mussolini," Eisenhower confessed to 1939, "none, ever, for Hitler." He considered Hitler "criminally insane."<sup>67</sup>

Those who were closer to the German scene took Hitler more seriously. "The government here," Major Truman Smith, U.S. military attaché in Berlin, wrote to Colonel George C. Marshall in January 1936, "is an astounding combination of good sense, nonsense, brutality and ultra-nationalism. No German whom you meet likes it, but it is nevertheless all-powerful. Inasmuch as this government will shortly be backed by one if not the most powerful army in the world, I look for eventual trouble."<sup>68</sup>

Later that year Smith arranged the first visit of aviator Charles Lindbergh to Germany, where he was permitted (indeed, encouraged) to inspect the planes, facilities, and factories of the new Luftwaffe. In October 1937 the two men collaborated on an alarmist report that was received in Washington as the first incontrovertible assessment of the massive German air buildup.

Most officers considered Germany a military, not a political or humanitarian, problem. The *Army and Navy Journal* questioned the propriety of criticizing "the wisdom or justice of other nations' . . . governments."<sup>69</sup> It suggested that American officers had no business formulating or expressing policy opinions. "The Army and the Navy are not in politics and never have been," the *Journal* editorialized in 1936. "They are servants of lawful authority, . . . absolutely obedient to the orders of their Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States."<sup>70</sup>

And indeed the biographies and autobiographies of World War II senior officers, unlike those of their civilian contemporaries, are almost totally devoid of comment on national and international political events in the pre-war years. One officer who may have been unusually sensitive to current events was Polish-born Navy lieutenant Hyman Rickover, a rare Jewish graduate of the Naval Academy and an ardent New Dealer keenly aware of the plight of Jews in Nazi Germany, where his mother-in-law lived.

The *Army and Navy Journal* followed its own advice. Not once before 1938 did it comment editorially on internal German affairs. It did not

mention Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland or its annexation of Austria. Munich, however, "Hitler's rape of Czecho-Slovakia,"<sup>71</sup> proved too much for the *Journal's* disciplined restraint. In October 1938 it foresaw "events of incalculable magnitude. . . . In continental Europe, the Totalitarian Governments have achieved a dominance which cannot be discounted, and are preparing for further expansions which will increase their power. . . . The terrible sufferings and situation of the Czechs, the Jews and the Chinese naturally excite our horror and sympathy."<sup>72</sup>

But intervention was not the answer. The *Journal* agreed with the nation's editorial commentators, who "almost unanimously declare for an isolated America, and protection of that isolation by a formidable preparedness."<sup>73</sup>

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The top military officers were probably better informed about international affairs than were other sectors of society. Military attachés were attached to American embassies around the world. Military personnel were stationed in the West Indies, Panama, the Pacific, and the Philippines. Numbers of officers were sent abroad to study languages and advanced military science. In 1936–38, Army captain Albert C. Wedemeyer was a student at the *Kriegsakademie*, the German General Staff School, in Berlin. "For political and economical reasons," Wedemeyer reported to the War Department in 1938, "Germany must plan for a war of movement which contemplates early decision. . . . I have been impressed with the thoroughness with which the military force as a whole is being trained to seize and maintain the initiative. An aggressive spirit is being inculcated in the leaders of all grade."<sup>74</sup>

In the early 1930s the military viewed the world darkly. "Everywhere we find nationalism more virulent than ever," warned the *Army and Navy Journal* in 1934, "relations between powerful countries in a state of extreme tension, with wars threatening, larger armaments than were possessed before the World War, and a struggle for trade, as well as for territory in the Far East, which contains the growing germs of strife."<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, isolationism was as pervasive in the military as it was in the general population. Many officers had served in World War I and had come home not only disillusioned with the results of that war but also distrustful of the British and French, who had sought to use American troops for purposes of their own. Military strategists believed in isolation and a continental defense. In 1933, for example, Major Eisenhower expressed suspicion of Roosevelt's internationalism. "I still believe," he wrote in his diary, "that the best way to get out of [economic] trouble is to deal within ourselves—adjust our own production to our own consumption and cease worrying about foreign markets except only those necessary to pay for essential imports. . . ."<sup>76</sup> Some strategists

considered the Philippines a strategic liability and would have drawn America's defense perimeter in the Pacific from Alaska to Hawaii and thence to the Panama Canal.

In 1935 the *Army and Navy Journal* celebrated the Senate's rejection of U.S. membership in the World Court. "The strength of the opposition," it commented, "could not have been mustered had it not been for the patriotic and rigorous exposure of the perils in which the country would have become involved made by William Randolph Hearst and the powerful newspapers he controls, supplemented by the appeals of the Radio Priest [Father Coughlin]."<sup>77</sup>

The *Journal* also credited the influence of General John J. Pershing, revered commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, who four years before had endorsed membership in the Court but now reversed himself.

A principal component of the military's pessimism and isolationism was its knowledge of America's unpreparedness for war. When war started in Europe on September 1, 1939, the two new U.S. service chiefs—Admiral Harold R. Stark, sworn in as chief of naval operations on August 1, and General George C. Marshall, sworn in as Army chief of staff on September 1—faced an emergency similar to that which the military had confronted in April 1917. They lacked the men, the machines, and even the organization to fight a modern war. The services were sunk in peacetime routines and mental habits. Moreover, the American people were distrustful of the military, complacent about their safety, and delusional about their invincibility. They were represented in Washington by a Congress that was isolationist and parsimonious. Even the president was so weak politically that he had to deal with Congress with a finesse incomprehensible to the military mind.

Stark had the easier task. Even Congress recognized that a strong navy was desirable to keep the war at a distance. Marshall's job was more difficult. His immediate goal was to build up the army from its current strength of 188,000 men to its authorized (in 1920!) peacetime strength of 280,000 and to equip and train it for modern war. But everything he did had to be minimally incremental. The president consistently pared his budget requests to the bone—and then Congress pared them further.

Stark believed that the United States could stay out of the European war, but he expected war with Japan. Marshall realized that the country had only as much time to prepare as Britain and France could contain Nazi Germany in the west. Germany's blitzkrieg in Poland was a sobering portent.

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The viewpoints of realist and idealist internationalists converged readily in an emergency, most notably in the person of President Roosevelt



himself. When the president addressed the nation in a fireside chat on September 3, 1939, he spoke of the war in idealist terms as the result of international lawlessness. He made clear where his sympathies lay. "This nation," he said, "will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience."<sup>78</sup>

His realism went largely unspoken. He did not reveal his conviction that democratic Britain and France constituted the front line of America's defense in the Atlantic. Nor did he declare his determination to do everything in his power to aid them. The talk was an accurate reflection of American public opinion. Americans were overwhelmingly sympathetic to Britain and France, but they were equally determined to stay out of the war.

In November, Roosevelt secured from Congress a long-resisted revision of the Neutrality Act. The prohibition against selling munitions to belligerents was repealed; belligerents (effectively Britain and France—but not China) could now buy war material as long as they paid for it in cash and carried it away in their own ships. Public opinion permitted the president to do no more.

A *Fortune* poll taken in September 1939, after war had begun in Europe, classified 36.7 percent of the respondents as interventionists. Of these, fewer than half favored entering the war immediately or if Britain and France seemed to be losing; slightly more than half would provide Britain and France with all aid *short of war*. Fifty-four (54.0) percent of all respondents were classified as isolationists, nearly half of whom would have nothing to do—neither aid nor commerce—with either side in the conflict. In other words, three-quarters of *Fortune's* respondents opposed entering the war in any foreseeable circumstance.

Why were Americans so unwilling to share the burden of a war in defense of their own professed values, the internationalists wondered.

In 1940, historian Lewis Mumford saw Americans as "a new race, with healthy physiques, sometimes beautiful bodies, but empty minds—people who have accepted life as an alternation of meaningless routine with insignificant sensation. . . . At best, there is lack of even animal courage among these passive barbarians; their chief motto is 'Don't stick out your neck!' At worst, there is emptiness—a failure to feel their humanity challenged by cruelty, by violence, by despotism, by contempt for the weak and the helpless, by the spiteful renunciation of all the higher goods of morality, art, and science."<sup>79</sup>

Columnist Walter Lippmann blamed the revisionist historians for falsely debunking World War I, with the result that "the teaching . . . of history in American colleges has . . . been emptied of all the elements of greatness—that is to say of the conviction that history is not the meaningless tale of a race of mercenary idiots but the record of great men and great

peoples struggling indomitably to rise out of the sloth and the squalor of their barbaric origins."<sup>80</sup>

Poet Archibald MacLeish indicted the nation's intellectuals, who misunderstood the world crisis as economic and political when in fact it was cultural—"a revolt [in both Germany and the Soviet Union] . . . against the inherited culture of the West." "They have pretended to themselves that the burning of books, the exiling of artists, the invention of mythologies were merely incidents. . . . [But] these things are not incidents. . . . They are the essential nature of the revolution of our age," to which American intellectuals have been indifferent or inactive.<sup>81</sup>

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr also found fault with America's liberal intellectuals—for their "utopian rationalism and universalism." "[Hitler's] victories thus far," he wrote in June 1940, "are partly due to the fact that the culture of the democracies was vapid. Its political instincts had become vitiated by an idealism which sought to extricate morals from politics to the degree of forgetting that all life remains a contest of power. . . . One can only be grateful for the common sense of common folk which has not been corrupted by these illusions and which in the hour of peril expresses itself in sound political instincts."<sup>82</sup>

Isolationist Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, shared the internationalists' concern on this score. "[W]e are morally and intellectually unprepared to execute the moral mission to which the President has called us," he said.<sup>83</sup>

Americans, he believed, had inadequate understanding of and commitment to the principles of democracy. The fault lay with their education. "For forty years and more," Hutchins declared, "our intellectual leaders . . . have been telling us . . . that nothing is true which cannot be subjected to experimental verification. In the whole realm of social thought there can therefore be nothing but opinion. . . . There is no difference between good and bad; there is only the difference between expediency and in expediency. . . . There are no morals; there are only folkways. The test of action is its success. . . . Justice is the interest of the stronger.

"Democracy as a fighting faith," Hutchins concluded, "can be only as strong as the convictions which support it."<sup>84</sup>

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Schemes of international organization to preserve peace—in Christendom, in Europe, in the world—date back to the Renaissance. The establishment in 1919 of the League of Nations, and its abject failure to restrain the descent to war during the 1930s, generated a considerable new literature on the subject.

One scheme that aroused particular interest was presented in a book called *Union Now*, published in February 1939. Its author, Clarence K. Streit, the League of Nations correspondent for the *New York Times*, argued

that the democracies could find safety only in a federal union on the American model. He proposed an initial union of fifteen democratic nations—the United States, Britain and its Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ireland), France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland—whose geographic center of gravity was the North Atlantic. These were the world's oldest, most homogeneous, and most closely linked democracies. United, they would possess a population, wealth, military force, resources, and productive capacity sufficient to deter attack or ensure victory.

As in the American union, the members of Streit's "Great Republic" would enjoy autonomy in domestic affairs. Sovereignty would reside in the union government, which would be supreme in areas like defense, currency, and communications. Citizens of member states would also be citizens of the union. The union government would consist of an executive and a bicameral legislature—a lower house elected directly by the citizens of the union and an upper house appointed by the member states.

The initial union, Streit hoped, would constitute the nucleus of a world government, to which other nations might adhere as they established democratic regimes and guaranteed the human rights of their citizens. The ultimate goal "would be achieved by Union when every individual of our species would be a citizen of it, a citizen of a disarmed world enjoying world free trade, a world money and a world communications system. Then Man's vast future would begin."<sup>85</sup>

If this seemed fantastic and visionary, Streit argued, history had already demonstrated that all the other means by which nations had sought safety—nationalism, alliances, and leagues—had failed.

Streit's publisher expected little from the book, but *Fortune*—attracted by the prospect of world free trade—reviewed it at length and favorably, calling it "a vision of the greatest political and economic opportunity in history."<sup>86</sup> *Life* also publicized it, and the *Reader's Digest* condensed the *Fortune* article. Endorsements by prominent individuals and reviews, pro and con, boosted sales to a respectable 10,000 copies in 1939.

Streit resigned from the *Times* and began a campaign of lectures, debates, radio broadcasts, and magazine articles to promote his scheme. An organization called Inter-Democracy Federal Unionists mobilized local groups around the country. After the fall of France, Streit published *Union Now with Britain* (1941) and vigorously advocated this more limited scheme.

Whatever plausibility Streit's original proposal possessed derived from his limiting his union to established democracies, unlike other schemes for a united Europe or a world government. Inevitably, the enthusiasm for *Union Now* shriveled under the blight of nationalism. No nation was prepared to surrender its sovereignty to a world government. After World War II, the United Nations Organization was established not as a federal union but as another league of sovereign states of innumerable and incompatible political hues.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# News from Germany

In the summer of 1939 a Roper poll found that 63.8 percent of Americans relied on newspapers for most of their news. The percentage was higher for affluent people, lower for poor people.

Before the 1930s, American newspapers carried little foreign news. A few large newspapers maintained correspondents in European capitals, but the others depended for their foreign news on the wire services—the Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service. Almost all newspapers were intensely local in their coverage, giving priority to local, state, regional, and national news above foreign news. The rise of Hitler changed all that.

In Germany, the Nazis quickly suppressed opposition newspapers. Others were required to publish news releases and texts supplied by the Propaganda Ministry. News they generated themselves had to conform to Nazi policy. German citizens knew little about what was happening in Germany and nothing about events abroad except what the government told them. “I have subscribed to a newspaper once again,” German diarist Victor Klemperer noted in 1935. “Every time I read it I feel sick; but . . . one must at least know what lies are being told.”<sup>1</sup>

American newspapers, on the other hand, had plentiful information about Nazi Germany. They, of course, received the news releases put out by the Propaganda Ministry and by other government offices. They had their own or wire service correspondents in Germany, whose reports were sanitized on pain of expulsion. But they also had sources in countries adjacent to Germany and from returned correspondents and diplomats, from travelers and refugees. In 1933, news from Germany jostled for position on front pages with news from Washington.

The problem for American editors was not the quantity of news but the interpretation of it. This was the job of columnists and editorial writers, but few of these had specialized knowledge of German conditions. Newspaper editorials, at least, were more representative of regional public opinion than were nationally syndicated columns.

Editorial writers readily admitted that they were bewildered by the startling events in Germany. All understood that Hitler was the product of the vindictive Versailles Treaty. In February 1933, a few days after Hitler had been appointed chancellor, the *Chicago Tribune* appreciated the "just aspiration for the restoration of Germany's greatness as a world power. . . . With this emotion," the *Tribune* continued, "there must be a good deal of sympathy in disinterested minds. American opinion shares the Fascist hostility to communism and must sympathize with any sane determination of the German people to overcome its menace, morally unify and invigorate the German spirit, and restore and fortify the elements of German character and body politic."<sup>2</sup>

The *Atlanta Constitution* was also hopeful. "Certainly if Hitler can, even though he resorts to ruthless methods, bring the same stability as Mussolini has to Italy, world affairs generally will be benefited."<sup>3</sup>

Some editors thought that the Nazi regime would collapse when "sensible," "educated," "moderate" Germans asserted themselves. After the March 5, 1933, election in which the Nazis and their nationalist allies won a bare 51 percent of the vote, the *New York Times* took comfort from the "irreducible core comprising one-half of the German people still faithful to the democratic ideal."<sup>4</sup>

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was equally sanguine. "The [German] people," it thought, "harassed by economic distress, temporarily willing to follow any expedient, are experimenting. But the spirit of '48 and of Weimar, it may be confidently predicted, will come to the fore again, and democracy will prevail."<sup>5</sup>

Some editorial writers believed that Hitler intended to restore the monarchy, that his execution of party dissidents in June 1934 exposed his weakness, that President Hindenburg might dismiss him at any time.

The Nazis' brutal overthrow of the Weimar Republic under a veneer of legality elicited little protest in the American press. Editorial writers commented in wonder at the Nazis' riotous suppression of their opponents but took little note of the passing of the Republic. In St. Louis, at least, a city with a large German-American population, the *Post-Dispatch* published a sad obituary of the Republic. "The German Republic, as the world has known it for 14 years, lies in ruins," the paper observed. "The Weimar Constitution, that made Germany a democracy, is so much waste paper."<sup>6</sup>

What truly outraged the American press was the Nazis' assault, physical and economic, on German Jews. "For the Nazi regime deliberately to excite the basest passions of the multitude as an instrument of high policy," said the *New York Times*, "is to sink to the level of Czarist policy

and the pogrom. It is a spectacle so repellent that the mind hesitates to accept it as capable of enduring long."<sup>7</sup>

"Herr Hitler, by his insane attack on Jews, has come dangerously close to alienating American sympathy . . ." said the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "Americans of all creeds have joined in protest against the blind anti-Jewish fury of his followers."<sup>8</sup> "The anti-Jewish campaign of Hitler and his Nazis is a demonstration of their madness," said the *Denver Post*. "They have destroyed the last vestige of sympathy people of other nations had for Germany."<sup>9</sup> "Persecution of the Jews, as reported from Germany, belongs to the fanaticism of the Dark Ages," said the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.<sup>10</sup>

The *Atlanta Constitution* counseled the Nazis in language that they would have understood: "Any country with the united Jewry of the world against it is at a decided disadvantage. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

The outrage of the American press at Nazi persecution of the Jews, like their political analyses, was pervaded by illusions. Some editors seemed to think that the anti-Jewish atrocities were perpetrated by uncontrolled Nazi zealots. Others thought that the persecutions were a temporary tactic, that scapegoating the Jews diverted the German people from their economic hardships. No one grasped the centrality of racism in Hitler's worldview, his commitment not merely to the expropriation and expulsion of German Jews but to the ultimate annihilation of all Jews.

The press's concern for German Jews and the Nazi menace waned after 1933. German affairs returned to the headlines periodically—for example, in 1935, when Hitler announced rearmament and conscription, and in 1936, when Germany remilitarized the Rhineland. On the whole, American editors remained uncomprehending and uncertain about the Nazi phenomenon. Some were persuaded that there was a measure of justice in the Nazis' progressive rectification of the Versailles Treaty.

The *Chicago Tribune* was particularly severe in placing the blame for the German problem on Britain and France. "The allies killed the German republic," it said. "They killed democracy. They prevented the settlement of affairs in central Europe in terms which would have been a guaranty of their own security. They killed liberalism, culture, intelligence, good will, and liberty. In the place of a friendly society they raised up dictatorship, brutality, ignorance, serfdom, and military power."<sup>12</sup> The *Tribune's* editors and others had no reason to doubt that the allies, having created the German problem, had the power—if not the will—to resolve it.

Perceptions changed with Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938. This, too, could be rationalized as inevitable and desirable, but Hitler's bullying of the Austrian chancellor, his brutal ultimatums, the German army's invasion of Austria, Vienna's frenzied reception of Hitler, and the orgy of anti-Semitic violence that followed convinced many Americans that this was an act of aggression, that Hitler was an immediate threat to peace.



Hitler quickly precipitated a new crisis over Czechoslovakia. By September 1938, Europe trembled on the brink of war, which was avoided only when, at Munich, Britain and France sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Hitler. The American press was unanimous in its relief. "The Czechs lose part of their country but they save their lives. And on this earth there is nothing so valuable as life," philosophized the *Denver Post*.<sup>13</sup>

The *Kristallnacht* pogrom that followed a month later evoked horror and condemnation from the American press. "Germany Goes Berserk in Orgy of Jew-Baiting," headlined the *San Francisco Chronicle* on its front page.<sup>14</sup>

The last year of peace was a time of clarification for American editors. Isolationists, whose dislike of Nazi Germany was only somewhat greater than their dislike of Britain and France, had no problem. European developments justified their isolationism.

Internationalist editors found themselves in a dilemma. They could express their outrage at Nazi aggression only by increased invective. They could not advocate any policy that might be labeled interventionist. Thus they wavered between resolve and retreat. "[T]he democracies of the world . . . must curb the new barbarism by force," proclaimed the *Atlanta Constitution* on September 20, 1938.<sup>15</sup> But a few days later: "[T]he boiling troubles of Europe, as yet, place no obligation, moral or otherwise, on the United States."<sup>16</sup> "[T]he American people," commented the *New York Times*, "have no right to urge on others the terrible risks and responsibilities we do not share."<sup>17</sup>

When war finally came in September 1939, the *Chicago Tribune* declared at once: "This is not our war."<sup>18</sup>

"Hitler must be destroyed," cried the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "Hitler has made himself an intolerable scourge. There can be no peace in Europe, or in the world, no security, nothing but continuous, humiliating surrender to a madman's insensate ambition, until Nazi Germany is battered into utter helplessness."<sup>19</sup>

But not, of course, by Americans. Two days later, the paper embraced President Roosevelt's declaration of neutrality. "Our first, and last, concern is America," said the *Post-Dispatch*, speaking for a unanimous press.<sup>20</sup>

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The 1939 Roper poll that found that 63.8 percent of respondents relied on newspapers for their news also found that 25.4 percent got most of their news from radio. Of 32 million families in the United States, 27.5 million had radios—more than had telephones, automobiles, or indoor plumbing.

By then, radio dominated most American living rooms. Far from the mere "music box" its creators in the early 1920s had foreseen, radio in

the 1930s provided a complete menu of entertainment. Afternoons were devoted to "soap operas," fifteen-minute chapters in the lives of long-suffering women, typically sponsored by manufacturers of laundry and beauty products. Late afternoons offered children a succession of fifteen-minute episodes of a number of adventure series, usually sponsored by cereal manufacturers. The evening's adult programming began with the phenomenally popular daily fifteen-minute episode of *Amos 'n' Andy*, followed by weekly half-hour or hour comedy, drama, and variety shows. There were, in addition, programs of music, educational lectures, and addresses on subjects of the day. In this "golden age" of radio, all broadcasts were live.

During the early 1930s, news played only a small part in radio broadcasting. Announcers might read news taken from the wire services for five or fifteen minutes daily. In 1930, there was only one network newscast—by Lowell Thomas, a world traveler and raconteur (but no journalist) who spoke for fifteen minutes every weekday evening. The networks, however—the National Broadcasting System and the younger Columbia Broadcasting System—as well as local stations eagerly covered special events, ranging from ship arrivals to disasters.

As the decade advanced, the networks developed news divisions and stables of correspondents and commentators to cope with the growing flood of portentous news from abroad. The birth of modern radio (and later television) news was the Munich crisis of September 1938, during which Europe stood on the brink of war.

On September 12, both networks broadcast Hitler "live" from the Nazis' annual Nuremberg party rally. Through storms of static, the volume rising and falling as if reflecting the ocean's waves, Americans for the first time heard the harsh, ranting voice of the *Führer* (simultaneously translated in New York), punctuated by thunderous roars from the massed party members, as he demanded a solution to the problem of the "persecuted" German minority in Czechoslovakia.

In the days that followed, as the crisis mounted, innumerable news bulletins and special reports broke into regular network programming. The Czechs mobilized, the French called up their reserves, the British navy readied for action. At CBS headquarters in New York, news analyst H. V. Kaltenborn famously lived in his studio for eighteen days, fielding broadcasts from Edward R. Murrow in London and William L. Shirer in Germany and making eighty-five extemporaneous broadcasts of his own, analyzing what are now called the "fast-moving events." On September 30, Czechoslovakia having been sacrificed to Germany, the world heaved a collective sigh of relief in the mistaken belief that peace had been preserved.

Thereafter, radio increasingly brought world events into Americans' living rooms. In the fall of 1940, during the German air assault on London, listeners to Murrow's live broadcasts—always begun with his solemn but

calm “This . . . is London”—sometimes heard the unnerving sounds of bombs and sirens. Murrow’s vignettes of British fortitude during the blitz did much to solidify American opinion in support of Britain.

On December 7, 1941, just before 2:30 Eastern time on a calm Sunday afternoon, the networks again interrupted their regular programs to announce that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

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Germany had been selected in 1931 to host of the 1936 Olympic games. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they determined to use the games to advertise the “New Germany.” Hitler ordered the building of the largest stadium in the world, a huge stone circle, open at opposite ends, ringed by austere rectangular pillars projecting the oppressive monumentality that characterized “fascist” architecture.

The Nazis announced early that only Aryans would participate for Germany, and it was clear that foreign Jewish athletes would not be welcome. Bowing to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), however, they agreed to allow Jews to compete for positions on German Olympic teams (although Jews were denied training facilities and barred from German athletic organizations), to treat all Jewish athletes equally, and to remove anti-Semitic posters from the game sites. Indeed, starting in February at the winter games in Bavaria, anti-Semitic Nazi zealots were curbed, and offensive signs were removed.

In the United States, sports, veterans, labor, church, and many other organizations—including the American Jewish Congress—as well as prominent individuals and some media began as early as 1934 to protest American participation in the games. For many protesters, the issue was not a Jewish one—of 448 members of the U.S. Olympic team in 1932, only five had been Jews—but an act of moral ostracism. In a Gallup poll in March 1935, 43 percent of respondents favored boycotting the Nazi Olympics.

Opinion was sharply divided within the American Olympic Committee (AOC). Avery Brundage, its president, and other members visited Germany in 1935 and reported that Germany was in compliance with the conditions set by the IOC. Back in the United States, Brundage overrode opposition in the AOC. “The politics of a nation is of no concern to the International Olympic Committee,” he said. “Certain Jews must now understand that they cannot use these games as a weapon in their boycott against the Nazis.”<sup>21</sup> The AOC narrowly decided that the United States would participate in the games, although it had difficulty raising the necessary money.

When the summer games opened in Berlin on August 1, 1936, the city was decked with swastika banners. One hundred and ten thousand spectators—including 35–40,000 from abroad—filled the new stadium.

Overhead, the majestic dirigible *Hindenburg* trailed the Olympic flag. Trumpets announced the arrival of Hitler and his entourage at the stadium. (American aviator Charles A. Lindbergh was a guest of Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering.) Composer Richard Strauss conducted a massed chorus in *Deutschland über Alles*, the *Horst-Wessel Lied*, and his own *Olympic Hymn*. When the athletes paraded into the stadium, many national teams greeted Hitler with the Nazi salute; the American and British teams conspicuously did not.

The games continued until August 16, documented by filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl in her *Olympiad*. Hitler attended often and was gratified by the fact that the German team won more medals than any other. On the first day he congratulated Finnish and German medal winners, then left the stadium, appearing to snub two black American athletes who won medals later.

By the next day, Hitler had been informed that the Olympic protocols did not provide for the host head of state to congratulate medal winners. Thus Hitler did not congratulate, among others, the black American track star Jesse Owens, who won four medals. Though he may not have snubbed Owens, Hitler's feelings were recorded by one of his lieutenants: "The Americans should be ashamed of themselves," Hitler said, "letting negroes win their medals for them. I shall not shake hands with this negro. . . . Do you really think that I shall allow myself to be photographed shaking hands with a negro?"<sup>22</sup>

In the evenings during the summer games, top Nazis entertained foreign notables at lavish parties. These and other foreign visitors left Germany deeply impressed. They had seen nothing of Nazi persecutions or military preparations. Germany remained a picturesque country, but now its people were industrious and prosperous. The 1936 Olympics was a triumph of Nazi public relations.

"I find the Olympics so odious," Victor Klemperer recorded, "because they are not about sports—in this country I mean—but are an entirely political enterprise. 'German renaissance through Hitler' I read recently. It's constantly being drummed into the country and into foreigners that here one is witnessing the revival, the flowering, the new spirit, the unity, steadfastness, and magnificence, pacific too, of course, spirit of the Third Reich, which lovingly embraces the whole world. The chanted slogans on the streets have been banned (for the duration of the Olympics), Jew-baiting, bellicose sentiments, everything offensive has disappeared from the papers until August 16, and the swastika flags are hanging everywhere day and night until then too."<sup>23</sup>

As soon as the games were over, the German army captain who had organized and built the Olympic village for the athletes was dismissed from the service as a non-Aryan. He committed suicide. In November, the Olympic village became a training school for German noncommissioned officers.

In New York on October 4, Avery Brundage addressed 20,000 people of German descent at a German Day celebration in Madison Square Garden sponsored by a committee dominated by the pro-Nazi German-American Bund. The crowd stood and cheered when Brundage paid tribute to Nazi Germany. "Germany," he said, "has progressed as a nation out of her discouragement of five years ago into a new spirit of confidence in herself. Everywhere I found Germans friendly, courteous, and obliging."

Brundage continued: "We can learn much from Germany. We, too, if we wish to preserve our institutions, must stamp out communism. We, too, must take steps to arrest the decline of patriotism.

"Thanks to the support of you people of German descent in America," he said, "we were able to get our Olympic team abroad. The question then was whether a vociferous minority, highly organized and highly financed, could impose its will on 120,000,000 people."<sup>24</sup>

At the evening's conclusion, according to the *New York Times*, "the audience, which previously had sung 'The Star-Spangled Banner,' sang 'Deutschland Ueber Alles' and the Horst-Wessel song, the Nazi anthem."<sup>25</sup>

In October 1940, Brundage was dropped from the national committee of the isolationist organization America First for alleged pro-Nazi sympathies.

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On May 6, 1937, the airship *Hindenburg*, a proud symbol of Nazi Germany, caught fire as it was approaching its mooring at the Lakehurst, New Jersey, naval air station and crashed and burned. Of 109 passengers and crew, thirty-five died.

The development of rigid lighter-than-air airships (dirigibles) was pioneered in Germany by Graf (Count) Ferdinand von Zeppelin in the nineteenth century. In World War I Germany used "Zeppelins" for long-range reconnaissance and for raids on London, which caused little damage but considerable panic.

The idea of transatlantic airship passenger service was conceived in 1929. The *Graf Zeppelin*, 400 feet long and capable of carrying twenty passengers, was built as a demonstration craft. The Nazis took control of the Zeppelin Company and financed the building of the *Hindenburg*, 800 feet long, 135 feet in diameter, and originally capable of carrying fifty passengers.

The *Hindenburg* was lifted by hydrogen gas, highly flammable, unlike helium, an inert gas found only in the western United States. Helium was a closely held monopoly of the U.S. government, although available upon request to foreign governments for nonmilitary use. The Germans preferred hydrogen, which was less expensive than helium, lighter, and

had greater lift. They were confident of their ability to handle hydrogen safely.

The *Hindenburg* was propelled by four diesel engines, two on each side of the hull, each capable of developing 4,400 horsepower to drive a four-blade pusher propeller. The control room was contained in a gondola suspended outside the hull at the front of the ship.

Passenger quarters were inside the hull. An upper deck contained twenty-five small, windowless sleeping cabins and the public rooms: a dining room, a writing room, and a lounge (containing a grand piano). Outside the public rooms, a promenade deck enclosed by Plexiglas windows provided views of the earth below. (The *Hindenburg* generally cruised at an altitude of 800 feet.) A lower deck provided toilets and a shower for the passengers as well as a galley (connected by a dumb waiter to the dining room upstairs), a bar, and a smoking room. Quarters for the crew and officers were also inside the hull.

Launched in March 1936, the *Hindenburg* was immediately pressed into service by the Nazi government for propaganda purposes. The great ship, with the Nazi swastika painted on its vertical fins, dropped leaflets and broadcast loud-speaker messages over German cities in advance of the March 29 plebiscite by which Germans ratified Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland.

Between May and July 1936, the *Hindenburg* made ten round trips between Frankfurt and Lakehurst, averaging under sixty-four hours on its westward flight and fifty-one hours on its eastward flight. Eighteen round trips were planned for 1937. (The first regular transatlantic passenger service by airplane—between Long Island and Lisbon, Portugal, via the Azores—began only in June 1939.)

During the winter of 1936–37, the *Hindenburg* and the smaller *Graf Zeppelin* made weekly three-day nonstop flights from Frankfurt to Rio de Janeiro.

For 1937, the *Hindenburg* had been modified to carry seventy passengers. But on its first 1937 flight to New York, it carried only thirty-nine.

The arrival of the *Hindenburg* at Lakehurst was awaited by a crowd of spectators, reporters, photographers, ground crew, and passengers for the return flight to Germany. The fire and crash were recorded in motion pictures and still photographs. A radio reporter describing the arrival was left briefly speechless when the ship exploded. "Oh, the humanity!" he cried.

A week after the crash, a special commission appointed by German air minister Herman Goering and headed by Hugo Eckener, chairman of the Zeppelin Company, arrived at Lakehurst to join an American team investigating the crash. They could find no convincing explanation for the disaster. Rumors of sabotage circulated, but no evidence supported these either. Nor was the disaster an act of God, a New York clergyman assured

his congregation. "God does not reveal Himself in spectacular conflagrations," he said. "God is not a God of caprice."<sup>26</sup>

Eckener declared that hydrogen would no longer be used for passenger dirigibles. In Washington, a Senate Military Affairs subcommittee asked him if helium, provided by the United States, might be used by Germany for military purposes. Eckener replied that dirigibles would never again be used by Germany in war. Modern aircraft had made them impractical.

The crash of the *Hindenburg* put an end to dirigible development. "[T]he Zeppelin has passed into the twilight, perhaps into the night," commented the *New York Times*. The *Hindenburg* "was one of the glories of man's ingenuity and of his will to triumph over all obstacles."<sup>27</sup>

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In 1936, Joe Louis, a twenty-two-year-old African-American, was a rising, unbeaten heavyweight in an all-white boxing establishment. African-Americans idolized him. Many whites were drawn to him not only because of his grace and power in the ring but also because of his public persona—modest, well-mannered, reserved—so different from that of the first black champion, the flamboyant Jack Johnson. Most people believed that Louis would be the next heavyweight champion—a prospect that many whites resented.

German boxer Max Schmeling, eight years older than Louis, had been world champion in 1930–32 and in 1936 was the European champion. Americans considered him a has-been. In Germany, however, he was enormously popular. Handsome and urbane, he had won friends among the artistic and intellectual elite during the Weimar Republic. When the Nazis came to power and his former friends disappeared, Schmeling made new friends among the Nazi elite, including Adolf Hitler, who received Schmeling several times and followed his fights closely. The Nazis looked to Schmeling as an athletic ideal for the New Germany.

But Schmeling never became a Nazi. Although he was photographed with Hitler, attended party rallies, and gave the Nazi salute, he enjoyed a special privilege due to the necessity of his boxing in America, where alone big money could be made. In America, in fact, Schmeling had a Jewish manager, Joe Jacobs, who claimed to have made Schmeling world champion (by protesting a foul by Jack Sharkey). Jacobs devotedly attended Schmeling's German fights but was excluded from his protégé's corner and received no share in the boxer's German winnings.

Louis and Schmeling met on June 19, 1936, at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, New York, in a much-anticipated fight that had taken on symbolic importance in both the United States and Germany. Louis was heavily favored, but Schmeling knocked him out after twelve punishing rounds. African-Americans were cast into deepest gloom; many white Americans



celebrated. Schmeling returned to Germany a Nazi hero; young Joe Louis was devastated.

By June 22, 1938, when the two men met again, the world was closer to war. Hitler had invaded Austria in March and now menaced Czechoslovakia. The symbolism of their rematch—political and racial—was greatly magnified over that of 1936. Louis was now the world heavyweight champion, but he considered his title incomplete until he avenged his only professional defeat. The fight was again held at Yankee Stadium, this time before 70,000 people. An estimated 70 million other Americans followed it on radio; indeed, the nation's life came to a virtual standstill. In Germany, where the fight was broadcast at three a.m., millions more listened.

In two minutes of the first round, Louis, determinedly, brutally, pounded Schmeling to the canvas.

In Harlem, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and countless other cities and towns, black communities erupted in night-long celebration. White Americans took ambivalent satisfaction in Louis's victory: an American had humbled a Nazi; unfortunately, the American was a Negro.

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By the end of October 1938, the Munich crisis was receding, leaving Americans in a highly nervous state. Sunday, October 30, was the day before Halloween. Between eight and nine that evening, CBS broadcast a regular hour drama in its *Mercury Theater on the Air* series, produced, directed, and starring twenty-three-year-old Orson Welles. Welles had already achieved some celebrity on radio playing the title role in *The Shadow* ("Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of man? The Shadow knows!") and as an actor and director—notably in innovative productions of Shakespeare—in the Federal Theater Project and the Mercury Theater, the latter an acting company founded by Welles and John Houseman.

For the *Mercury Theater on the Air*'s Halloween program, Welles had selected a dramatization of the 1898 H. G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds*. This was a story of the invasion of Earth by Martians. Octopus-like creatures armed with death rays and poison gas, the fearsome Martians terrorized southern England for two weeks, when they all suddenly died—felled by earthly bacteria.

Welles modernized the story and moved it to New Jersey. His script told the story through simulated news bulletins and field reports reminiscent of radio's coverage of the Munich crisis just weeks before.

The program opened with an announcement that the *Mercury Theater on the Air* was presenting a dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. Orson Welles then introduced the dramatization, which began with what seemed to be a routine weather forecast followed by dance music from a Manhattan hotel. But this was shortly interrupted by a news bulletin

reporting mysterious explosions on Mars. Music resumed, only to be interrupted again by an interview with a Princeton University astronomer on the significance of the explosions. Then a new bulletin reported the apparent fall of a meteorite at Grovers Mill, New Jersey. More music. A reporter at Grovers Mill came on to describe the meteorite as a huge metallic cylinder. Even as he spoke, the end of the cylinder unscrewed and there emerged loathsome, tentacled creatures wielding death rays. And so it went, the alarm rapidly building with each new report.

Some 6 million people were estimated to have heard all or part of the program. Within thirty minutes, panic engulfed many of them. Listeners tuning in late did not realize that they were hearing a dramatization. Repeated announcements to this effect went unheeded. Princeton University geologists actually went out to look for the meteorite. Switchboards at radio stations, police stations, and newspapers across the country were swamped by callers. People rushed out of their houses and milled in the streets. Many got into their automobiles and drove off seeking safety. Church services were disrupted. There were injuries, heart attacks, and at least one attempted suicide. Emergency workers treated many people for shock and hysteria.

Welles was frightened and embarrassed by the reaction to his prank—but he had acquired invaluable notoriety.

The next day, psychologists and pundits were busy analyzing the event. “Radio ought to act promptly,” admonished the *New York Times*, “to prevent a repetition of the wave of panic in which it inundated the nation Sunday night. . . . The inability of so many tuning in late to comprehend that they were listening to the account of an imaginary catastrophe has its ridiculous, even pathetic, aspects. But the sobering fact remains that thousands, from one end of the country to the other, were frightened out of their senses. . . .”

“Common sense might have warned the projectors of this broadcast that our people are just recovering from a psychosis brought on by fear of war. . . .”<sup>28</sup>

Europe looked on in bemusement. For Hitler, the incident was evidence of Americans’ idiocy.

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The 1939 New York World’s Fair was conceived five years earlier by a group of prominent businessmen seeking a way to attract tourists and businesses to the depression-stricken city. A site was chosen in Flushing Meadows in the borough of Queens. Someone noticed that 1939 was the 150th anniversary of George Washington’s inauguration in New York City as first president of the United States. But the theme of the fair was not to be retrospective but forward looking—to “The World of Tomorrow.” All the world’s nations were invited to exhibit. When the fair opened in

April 1939, only two major countries were absent—China, which was absorbed in war with Japan, and Germany.

Germany's absence probably had as much to do with the Nazis' long-running feud with New York's peppery mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, as with any other cause. The mayor's mother was part Jewish, his father Catholic ("My mother undoubtedly had Jewish blood in her veins," he once remarked, "but I never thought I had enough in mine to justify boasting about it."<sup>29</sup>) He built his political career in the ethnic neighborhoods of New York's Lower East Side, where he was born and where he reputedly spoke on street corners in Yiddish, Italian, Hungarian, and German.

Short, stocky, energetic, volatile, and outspoken, LaGuardia was viscerally anti-Nazi, to the general satisfaction of New York's large Jewish population. He found less to denounce in Italian Fascism, avoiding offense to the city's many Italians. The mayor's "foreign policy" often got him into hot water. To the decorous officials in the U.S. State Department, LaGuardia was a chronic embarrassment.

Even before his election as mayor in November 1933, LaGuardia had participated in rallies protesting the Nazis' anti-Semitic abuses. He had called Hitler a "perverted maniac,"<sup>30</sup> accused the Nazis of planning to annihilate the Jews in Germany, and declared Germany a threat to world peace. One of his first acts as mayor, in January 1934, was to support the anti-German boycott initiated by New York Jews.

On March 7, 1934, more than 20,000 New Yorkers filled Madison Square Garden to hear "The Case of Civilization Against Hitlerism," a mock trial sponsored by the militant American Jewish Congress, the American Federation of Labor, and numerous other organizations. Twenty speakers, including LaGuardia, appeared as "witnesses" against the Nazi regime. There was no defense, the German ambassador, Hans Luther, having ignored an invitation to present the Nazi case.

The "verdict," delivered after midnight, read in part: "We declare that the Hitler government is compelling the German people to turn back from civilization to an antiquated and barbarous despotism which menaces the progress of mankind toward peace and freedom and is a present threat against civilized life throughout the world."<sup>31</sup> It was adopted by acclamation. A single unnamed woman, self-described as "just a woman who firmly believes in Hitler," dissented and received police protection.

Ambassador Luther had protested the mock trial in advance and had been told by State Department officials that the rally was private and constitutionally protected and that no member of the administration would take part. The ambassador was reported to have observed: "Under the Nazi regime, the mayor of Berlin and members of the Reichstag would not be permitted to take part in a manifestation against the head of a State with which Germany maintains friendly relations. . . . The absence of any provision in American law of a similar prohibition was admitted but deplored by German embassy officials."<sup>32</sup>

Three busy years later, on March 3, 1937, in the course of remarks at a luncheon meeting of the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress at New York's Hotel Astor, LaGuardia endorsed the suggestion of a previous speaker for a building at the World's Fair dedicated to religious freedom. The mayor, in fact, would go further and add a "chamber of horrors" that would include "a figure of that brown-shirted fanatic who is now menacing the peace of the world."<sup>33</sup>

The following day the *New York Times* reported this event on page twenty-five; the next day the story moved to page one. The German government had immediately protested the mayor's remarks, and the U.S. secretary of state, Cordell Hull, had apologized on behalf of the U.S. government.

But the German press was not placated. At a signal from the Nazi propaganda minister, German newspapers cried out that the insult to Germany had been beyond all endurance, especially in view of its contemptible source. They heaped abuse on the offending mayor: "dirty Talmud Jew," "Jewish lout," "impudent Jew," "pimp," "white slaver," "gangster master."

The *Angriff*, personal organ of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, editorialized: "The German public has had previous occasion to notice LaGuardia, despite the feeling of nausea that he arouses in our stomachs. His career as New York's mayor is notable by the fact that gangsters, when they had sufficiently bribed him, were able to pillage and kidnap with more impunity than ever before."<sup>34</sup> The *Angriff* described the mayor's luncheon audience as "women of the street fetched in to be entertained by the procurer LaGuardia."<sup>35</sup>

"It is impossible," apologized the *New York Times*, "to translate literally the *Angriff* editorial as, according to American usage, certain expressions employed are unfit to print."<sup>36</sup>

Having disposed of the "impudent Jew" LaGuardia and his audience of streetwalkers, the *Angriff* expressed its contempt for America itself, contrasting the nation of Goethe, Kant, Beethoven, Mozart, "and innumerable other heroes" with the nation of gangsters and kidnappers, lynch law, the third degree, prostitution, corruption, and the "mammoth capitalism, which rides heartlessly by 12,000,000 unemployed, freezing and starving to death in gutters. . . ."<sup>37</sup>

Unfazed by the vituperation directed at him from Germany, LaGuardia stood by his original remarks, noting that although he had not used Hitler's name, the Nazis had recognized who the "brown-shirted fanatic" was. In any case, the mayor was no slouch at vituperation himself. He was not a scheduled speaker at an anti-Nazi rally sponsored by the American Jewish Congress and held at Madison Square Garden on March 15, less than two weeks after his remarks at the Hotel Astor. But his arrival after eleven that night, according to the *Times*, set off "exuberant demonstrations," the crowd "shouting, stamping and clamoring for the mayor" until he responded.

The mayor spoke extemporaneously, as he often did. "My address of a few days ago is no novelty," he said. "I've been saying the same thing for a long time. . . . No matter what Mr. Hitler may say, pay no attention to it because public opinion of the world has decreed that Adolf Hitler is not personally or diplomatically 'satisfaktionsfaehig.'"<sup>38</sup>

The word *satisfaktionsfähig* means "worthy of meeting on the field of honor, that is, dueling." In those elements of the German population where personal honor was still a primary value—the army, the nobility, student fraternities—to be declared unworthy of giving satisfaction was perhaps the most extreme insult. This was a term "unimaginably offensive" in Germany, the outraged German ambassador declared in his prompt protest to the U.S. secretary of state.<sup>39</sup> Hull advised him that taking notice of a politician like LaGuardia would only aid LaGuardia's career.

In April 1938 Germany formally withdrew from participation in the World's Fair "because of financial difficulties."<sup>40</sup>

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The profoundest influence on the popular mind in the 1930s was exerted not by the press or radio but by motion pictures. At least once a week, almost half the U.S. population went to the "movies," where many—it was alleged—absorbed Hollywood's notions of manners and morals.

In the 1920s and early 1930s Protestant and Catholic clergy had inveighed against the movies' "indecentcy," a criticism to which the industry had responded in 1930 by instituting a Production Code Administration to set standards. (In 1939, David O. Selznick, producer of *Gone with the Wind*, had to pay a fine for the use of the word *damn* in Rhett Butler's famous farewell to Scarlett O'Hara: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.") In 1941 the industry became the target of isolationists, who accused it of producing "interventionist" movies that were anti-German, pro-British, and prowar.

Behind the perennial criticism of the movies as an unwholesome influence on American life lay the perception that the motion picture industry was in Jewish hands. In 1936, *Fortune* found that Jews were prominent in the control or management of seven of the eight principal Hollywood studios. A majority of film producers were Jewish, and Jews—including refugees from Europe—were numerous among directors and writers.

This highly unusual circumstance had its roots in the history of the motion picture industry. When the industry was new, chaotic, and barely respectable, it neglected to bar Jews, as other industries and professions had often done. The Jewish "moguls"—Hollywood studio heads—were uneducated immigrants from eastern Europe, aggressive businessmen some of whom had risen from the ranks of exhibitors, which they had been able to enter with little capital. Their consuming desire was to shed their Old World origins and to be accepted as Americans. In fact, their

very success in business depended upon their ability to produce films that reflected and promoted American tastes and values. They were uniformly conservative, Republican, and ardently patriotic. (MGM chief Louis B. Mayer, whose place and date of birth in Russia were unknown, adopted July 4 for his birthday.)

The rise of Hitler in Germany and of anti-Semitism in America—brought especially close to home by the activities of the German-American Bund in Los Angeles—frightened the Jewish filmmakers. Their own perceived vulnerability and the advice of similarly concerned Jewish organizations persuaded them to extreme caution where Jewish issues were concerned. The mere presence of a Jewish theme or character in a motion picture, they feared, might be enough to exacerbate anti-Semitism.

As early as 1933, Jewish groups tried to persuade Darryl Zanuck (a non-Jew) at Twentieth Century Pictures not to produce *The House of Rothschild*, a film recounting the rise of a Jewish banking family from the Frankfurt ghetto to Europe-wide influence. A 1937 Warner Brothers film, *They Won't Forget*, based on the 1915 lynching of a Jewish businessman in Atlanta, changed the identity of the central character from Jew to gentile.

The moguls had a second reason to avoid Jewish and other controversial subjects: their foreign markets. A third of the total revenue of the major studios came from the foreign distribution of their films. When the Nazis in June 1933 imposed restrictions on the content of foreign films shown in Germany, most of the filmmakers acquiesced. As Nazi influence expanded in Europe and Latin America, the pressure on American filmmakers to avoid provocation increased. In 1936, the U.S. Department of State signed on to a resolution adopted by an inter-American conference at Montevideo, Uruguay, that banned the production or exhibition of films that might offend another country or glorify war.

Hollywood's Production Code Administration made sure that no American film would be "objectionable" to either the domestic or foreign market. To this end it dissuaded MGM from filming Sinclair Lewis's anti-fascist novel *It Can't Happen Here*. Out of fear and economic pressure, the moguls embraced the maxim that their business was entertainment, not propaganda.

The willingness of the major studios to do business with Germany persisted until 1940. As late as June 1939, MGM hosted a party of Nazi journalists visiting Los Angeles. After the fall of France in 1940, the Nazis shut down American distribution offices on the continent. Of the once lucrative European market, only Britain remained.

One studio, Warner Brothers, broke ranks with the other majors. Outspokenly anti-Nazi, the Warner brothers ended their business in Germany in 1934 and resolved to alert Americans to the Nazi menace. Because the Picture Code Administration prevented them from making overtly anti-Nazi films, they proceeded by indirection. Warner Brothers films of the 1930s often dealt with topical subjects—gangsters, intolerance, mob



violence—that American audiences might associate with Nazi Germany. The studio was permitted to film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* in 1939 only because it adhered scrupulously to the court record in a recent federal prosecution.

Warner Brothers' costume dramas often carried propaganda messages. *Juarez* (1937) was the story of a Mexican patriot who led a democratic revolution against a puppet emperor installed in Mexico by France during the American Civil War. In *The Sea Hawk* (1940) freedom-loving Englishmen defeat the Spanish Armada. Two notable films portrayed Jews in highly sympathetic light—Alfred Dreyfus, a French army captain falsely convicted of treason, in *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), and Paul Ehrlich, the German bacteriologist who discovered a cure for syphilis, in *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940).

With the start of war in Europe, the constraints on American filmmakers—external and self-imposed—began to relax. In September 1939 President Roosevelt assured the nation that America would remain neutral, “but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well.”<sup>41</sup> After the fall of France in June 1940, public opinion began to shift dramatically toward intervention. At the same time as the Nazis ended the distribution of American films in Europe, the U.S. War Department enlisted the industry to provide recruitment, training, and propaganda films for the armed services.

Beginning in 1940, a stream of what isolationists called “interventionist” or “warmongering” movies (although only a small fraction of total production) flowed from Hollywood. These were certainly anti-German and pro-British; arguably, they were prowar. They included *The Great Dictator* (1940), *The Mortal Storm* (1940), *The Fighting 69th* (1940), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Man Hunt* (1941), *A Yank in the R.A.F.* (1941), and *I Wanted Wings* (1941).

The most influential of the interventionist pictures was Warner Brothers' *Sergeant York* (1941), the story of an Appalachian farmer who received the Medal of Honor for heroism in World War I. When he was drafted in 1917, York, a Christian pacifist, wrestled with a moral dilemma: should he fight or become a conscientious objector. In the end, after reading the Bible and a volume of American history, he decided that the war against Germany was righteous, and he fought. The film was nominated for an Academy Award as best picture and won a best-actor award for its star, Gary Cooper.

The isolationist attack on warmongering movies began with a speech by Senator Gerald P. Nye, Republican of North Dakota famous for his investigation of the merchants of death in 1934–36, before an America First rally in St. Louis on August 1, 1941. His speech was broadcast nationwide.

“Who has brought us to the verge of war?” the senator demanded. This time it was not “the great American and European bankers and the powerful international munitions makers” who had taken the country into World War I. Instead, Nye singled out the motion picture industry.



"[T]hese movie companies," he charged, "have been operating as war propaganda machines almost as if they were being directed from a single central bureau. . . . At least 20 pictures have been produced in the last year—all designed to drug the reason of the American people, set aflame their emotions, turn their hatred into a blaze, . . . rouse them to a war hysteria.

"Who are the men who are doing this?" Nye asked. He read the names of fifteen movie executives—thirteen of them recognizably Jewish—pausing significantly after each name to allow his audience to boo or shout "Jews!" ("[T]hese [are the] men," he reminded his listeners, "who only a few years ago filled their pictures with so much immorality and filth that the great Christian churches had to rise up in protest against it and organize the League of Decency to stop it.")

Moreover, Nye continued, "In each of these companies there are a number of production directors, many of whom have come from Russia, Hungary, Germany, and the Balkan countries. . . . [These men] are interested in foreign causes. . . . [Hollywood] is a raging volcano of war fever."<sup>42</sup>

Earlier that same day, Nye had cosponsored a Senate resolution to investigate the motion picture industry. The Senate rejected the proposal, but isolationist senator Burton K. Wheeler, Democrat of Montana and chairman of the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee, appointed a subcommittee of his Interstate Commerce Committee ostensibly to investigate the concentration of control in the motion picture industry. When hearings began in September, it became clear that isolationists on the subcommittee intended to use it to intimidate the motion picture industry from producing "warmongering" pictures by threatening a national anti-Semitic backlash.

Senator Nye was not a member of the subcommittee, but he was the first witness to testify. He repeated the charges of his August 1 speech to the America First rally, adding a novel argument that motion pictures, as "entertainment," did not have the protection of the free speech clause of the First Amendment.

The hearings were thrown into confusion when it was discovered that the members of the subcommittee had seen few, if any, of the movies they condemned and refused to view them now. Nye himself had seen *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, and his praise of that film at the time was read into the record.

Much of the press treated the investigation with derision. "The American people," said the *Nation*, "are expected to believe, after all that has happened in the past decade, that the Nazi menace is a figment of the Jewish imagination."<sup>43</sup>

The hearings were recessed at the end of September and had not resumed when Pearl Harbor ended the subcommittee's work.

## CHAPTER 10

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# The American Century

On May 10, 1940, the German army smashed into the Netherlands and Belgium. The Dutch surrendered on May 15, the Belgians on May 28. Meanwhile, on May 13, the Germans had launched a second attack through the wooded Ardennes plateau into Belgium and France north of the Maginot Line, the French fortifications facing Germany. This attack reached the Channel coast on May 21, cutting off British and French troops who had hurried north at the first attack. Most of these, having abandoned their weapons and equipment, were evacuated to Britain from the beach near Dunkirk in northern France by British naval vessels, merchant ships, and hundreds of small private boats.

The Germans turned south on June 5, the demoralized French army reeling disorganized before them. German troops entered Paris on June 14. On June 22 France signed an armistice with Germany—at Compiègne in the same railway car in which the Germans had signed the armistice in 1918.

The German blitzkrieg in the west had taken just six weeks.

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The German attack in the west—which followed six months of inactivity popularly called “the phony war” or “sitzkrieg”—stunned and alarmed Americans. The officers of the U.S. Army’s General Staff were “amazed, shocked, dumbfounded.” by the “awesome efficiency” of the German blitzkrieg, General Bradley later recalled.<sup>1</sup> They and the vast majority of Americans had believed that Britain and France would contain the Germans in the west. Suddenly the prospect of German victory in a short war seemed real and immediate.

The perception of danger, said President Roosevelt in a radio address, came “with a rush and shock,” “clearly and overwhelmingly.”<sup>2</sup> Americans, wrote columnist Dorothy Thompson, were threatened with “the complete collapse of the world of which we are an integral part, . . . [of] our institutions, our way of life and the possibility of independent survival.”<sup>3</sup> A writer in the *Nation* compared the German attack to the Muslim invasion of France in the eighth century that was turned back only at the battle of Tours in 732. A writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* compared the fall of Paris to such epoch-making disasters as the fall of Rome in the fifth century and of Byzantium in the fifteenth. “[T]he world has been turned upside down since May 10,” the *New Republic* observed.<sup>4</sup>

Suddenly Americans became aware of the possible consequences for them of a German victory in Europe. Walter Lippmann and other journalists painted a frightening picture of a world reorganized by triumphant totalitarian powers—Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. The entire Eastern Hemisphere would be immediately in their control. If the Western Hemisphere was temporarily safe from invasion, South America, whose cultural and economic ties were with Europe, would be vulnerable to German economic coercion and subversion. Fascism’s success in Europe would be sure to attract imitators in the southern republics, always prone to military dictatorship in any case. Penetration of these countries by Nazi agents was known to be extensive.

Isolated in North America, the journalists predicted, the United States (together with Canada) would become a garrison state, necessarily maintaining a large army, navy, and air force. For its importation of essential raw materials and its export of its agricultural, mining, and industrial surpluses it would be dependent on conditions set by Germany and its allies. American businessmen would be confronted everywhere by state monopolies used as instruments of economic warfare.

“[W]e shall inevitably,” Lippmann wrote, “have to bring all foreign trade under Government control. Inevitably we shall therefore have to bring domestic industry under a control that fixes quotas, allocates raw materials and regulates prices.”<sup>5</sup> German victory, added Freda Kirchwey, editor and publisher of the *Nation*, would mean “that the American standard of living will be leveled to meet the competitive methods of a system built on forced labor. It means the end of democracy.”<sup>6</sup>

The prospect of German victory in Europe and awareness of its possible consequences for the United States produced a seismic shift in American public opinion. Newspapers and magazines—including the *Nation* and *New Republic*—that had formerly been pacifist and isolationist became interventionist—that is, supporting aid to Britain short of war. Polls found that, whereas 82 percent of Americans in May 1940 had been confident of an Allied victory, in July only 43 percent believed that Britain (now fighting alone) would win. The great majority of Americans still opposed going to war, but the proportion of Americans willing to help Britain even

at the risk of getting into the war rose from 12 percent in May to 53 percent in September.

"We of democratic America have been slow to awake to the menace," editorialized the *Atlanta Constitution* on June 6. "But we are, today, awake."<sup>7</sup> "Never in all American history," wrote historian Allan Nevins on June 23, "have our people made up their minds to a grim task more rapidly than in the past month."<sup>8</sup> "[W]ith France smashed, partitioned and prostrate under a puppet Nazi government, . . . the United States for the first time [is now] desperately aware of its peril," said the *New York Herald Tribune*.<sup>9</sup>

The growing spirit of militancy and Anglo-American solidarity was not shared by everyone.

In its May 3 issue, *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, published a petition to President Roosevelt signed by more than 500 scientists, including two Nobel Prize winners (and a number of fellow travelers), urging that the United States remain at peace. As reported in the *New York Times* on May 20, the petition argued: "The futility of war is especially clear to scientists, for war, as a method of solving human problems, is out of harmony with the rational spirit and objective methods of science. Wherever objective analysis is permitted, the great advantages of peaceful procedure in the adjustment of conflict become obvious."<sup>10</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* glimpsed a bit of silver lining in the gathering clouds. "In this dark hour," it editorialized on June 6, "Americans can find some comfort in the knowledge that now there is little prospect of another military adventure in Europe on our part. There is no front in France to be defended by our men and guns."<sup>11</sup>

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The German blitzkrieg coincided with the commencement season at American colleges and universities. At this time, distinguished elders traditionally welcomed graduates to the "real" world with advice and inspiration. In the spring of 1940, however, alarm and uncertainty pervaded commencement orations.

"These are black days for the human race," Secretary of State Cordell Hull told Harvard graduates.<sup>12</sup> "Civilization . . . appears to hang in the balance," the president of Cornell University told his graduates.<sup>13</sup> "The American people seem to be waking up, though slowly, to the tremendous stake which this country has in the outcome of the war in Europe," declared the president of Swarthmore College.<sup>14</sup> "No one can be isolated from this colossal struggle," warned Nicholas Murray Butler at Columbia.<sup>15</sup> "[T]his day [when the German army was at the gates of Paris]," General Marshall told the graduating class at the Virginia Military Institute on June 12, "may . . . be the most fearful in the history of the world. . . .

The world we have known may be revolutionized; the peaceful liberty we have accepted so casually may be a hazard in this ghastly game abroad."<sup>16</sup>

On June 10, President Roosevelt was the commencement speaker at the University of Virginia. "Every generation of young men and women in America," he told the graduates, "has questions to ask the world. Most of the time they are . . . questions of work to do, opportunities to find, ambitions to satisfy. [But today] a different kind of question presents itself—a question that asks, not about the future of an individual or even of a generation, but about the future of the country, the future of the American people. . . . [T]he future of the nation and the future of the American people is at stake. . . . I call for effort, courage, sacrifice, devotion."<sup>17</sup>

Were the president's listeners receptive to his call? Perhaps not.

Judging from the number of magazine and newspaper articles on the subject, the state of mind of college men—who, it was universally understood, would be called upon to fight if America went to war—was of considerable concern. Editors were particularly interested in the students at the all-male elite Eastern colleges. Many college students, of course, were assumed to be "indifferent to all issues except sex and football," according to a recent Harvard graduate.<sup>18</sup> It was the "student leaders"—editors of college newspapers, activists in student movements (some influenced by Communists)—whose editorials, demonstrations, and pranks attracted the attention of their elders. College professors claimed to have insight into their students' minds through classroom discussions and bull sessions. Journalists interviewed students and interpreted their responses through their own college experiences. Thus reports by educators and journalists of the state of mind of the college generation, both favorable and unfavorable, were largely impressionistic.

The *New Republic* professed to find "an intellectual gulf between two generations, the post-war and the pre-war. It can be seen almost everywhere, but is especially obvious in the Eastern colleges, where the majority of each faculty is already fighting Hitler, while a considerable part of the student body is against military intervention and lukewarm about aiding the Allies."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, some faculty members contrasted the enthusiasm of their generation for war in 1917 with the reluctance of the present student generation.

Overwhelmingly, the students wanted the United States to keep out of the war—as did 83 percent of all Americans. They allegedly saw no moral issues in the war. In fact, they tended to admire Nazi Germany for its spirit and success (though they were not pro-Nazi) and had little regard for Britain, which they saw as a craven appeaser. (This was before the Battle of Britain.) Accused of being cynical (or skeptical) beyond their years, they dismissed words like *democracy*, *patriotism*, *morality*, and *responsibility* as propaganda. ("[T]hey cry out against slogans," remarked one educator, but "utter them constantly."<sup>20</sup>)

Putting American interests ahead of Britain's, the students were divided on aid to Britain and were willing to fight only if America itself was attacked. "We take our stand here on this side of the Atlantic, precarious as it is," wrote the editors of the Yale and Harvard student newspapers (one of whom, Kingman Brewster, later became president of Yale) in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "because at least it offers a chance for the maintenance of all the things we care about in America, while war abroad would mean their certain extinction."<sup>21</sup>

Campuses were quiet when the draft act, which had been debated during the summer vacation, was passed in September 1940. If the students were quiet, some of their professors had not been. In August, 240 "educators, writers, religious leaders and professional and business men and women," many of them academics, had issued a "Declaration Against Conscription," in which they claimed that "conscription in peacetime smacks of totalitarianism."<sup>22</sup>

Although college men dutifully accepted conscription, many grumbled that military service would interrupt their educations and delay their pursuit of the "good life." All were gloomy about the prospect of America being dragged into the war. After the 1940 blitzkrieg, some students were quoted to the effect: "From now on we'll have to hope for a quick German victory. It's the only way we'll stay out."<sup>23</sup>

Blame for the presumed disaffection of college youth was widely attributed—antiwar novelists, relativist philosophers, pacifist clergymen, revisionist historians, progressive educators. Of this last category, the *New Republic* singled out those teachers "who tried to abolish war by ignoring it; who told their students that 'war never settled anything' without telling them what would settle anything; and said that 'nobody ever won a war,' as if it followed that nobody ever lost one either. Why should they be surprised today if their students still believe what they were taught?"<sup>24</sup>

Of 21 million Americans between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four in 1940, only 1.4 million were enrolled in four-year colleges while 4 million were out of school and unemployed. Although college presidents and professors often talked about the diversity of their student bodies, it is unlikely that college students, most of them the sons and daughters of affluent middle-class families, were representative of all youth. More likely, they reflected the views and attitudes of their parents.

During the summer of 1940, George Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion polled all American youth nationwide. Gallup found that, while the great majority of his respondents hoped the United States would keep out of the war, 68 percent supported conscription and 76 percent of the young men had no objection to military service. Majorities supported all-out aid to Britain and were prepared to fight if Britain were defeated.

"American youth," Gallup concluded, "is tough-fibered, loyal and hopeful. The young people believe this is a good country, worth working

and fighting for. They have faith in the future. They are not radical—in fact, they are surprisingly conservative in their views.”<sup>25</sup> Television newsman and author Tom Brokaw later called them “the greatest generation.”<sup>26</sup>

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In the crisis of June 1940, Roosevelt decided that the survival of Britain was essential to America’s defense—and, most important, despite the odds, that Britain would survive. Overriding top Army and Navy brass desperate for resources, the president ordered military equipment left over from World War I declared surplus and sent immediately to Britain. He also ordered that Britain receive a large share of America’s still meager war production. To give his administration a bipartisan character, he appointed two Republicans to the cabinet—former secretary of state Henry L. Stimson as secretary of war and Chicago newspaper publisher Frank Knox as secretary of the Navy. Some Republicans demanded their expulsion from the party.

A month later, Roosevelt proposed to exchange fifty overaged U.S. destroyers for leases on British bases in the Western Hemisphere. The destroyers were intended to help defend the British Isles from an imminent German invasion. Isolationist and pacifist opposition was intense.

The administration persuaded General John Pershing—now eighty years old and in poor health and certainly no friend of the New Deal—to endorse the plan. “Only the British are left to defend democracy and liberty in Europe,” Pershing told a national radio audience on August 4, 1940. “If there is anything we can do to save the British fleet . . . we shall be failing in our duty to America if we do not do it.”

Pershing was still not an interventionist. “It is my opinion,” he asserted, “that in this war it would be absolute folly even to consider sending another expeditionary force.”<sup>27</sup>

The exchange was made, although the destroyers proved to be in such a state of disrepair as to be useless in the short run. Nevertheless, the exchange lifted British morale.

With France crushed, the need for a large American army became apparent and pressing. But when the administration proposed conscription, isolationists and pacifists labeled the plan un-American and anti-democratic.

Administration spokesmen argued the case. “In 1917,” Secretary of War Stimson told the House Military Affairs Committee, “we were protected by the unbroken line of the Allies in France and by the unshakable control of the sea by those Allies. Today there is no line in France and . . . in another thirty days Great Britain herself may be conquered.”<sup>28</sup>

General Marshall told a radio audience: “[T]ime is our pressing necessity today. . . . We must train men immediately against the possibilities of



the next few months, which may be the most critical in the history of this country."<sup>29</sup> Despite the administration's urgency, Congress did not pass the conscription bill until September 14.

"For a long time I've been convinced that we will eventually be in this war," Lieutenant Colonel Eisenhower wrote to a friend in November 1940. He thought that the public, wearying of the Nazi threat, would decide "that it will be better, cheaper, and quicker to *remove* the threat."<sup>30</sup>

The military's movement from isolationism to interventionism began only after the fall of France. In December 1940, Secretary of War Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Knox, General Marshall, and Admiral Stark had agreed that the United States would eventually be drawn into the war. At that time, military strategists—including President Roosevelt—believed that South America was vulnerable to German penetration, first by subversion, then by invasion from West Africa. Some strategists found this scenario implausible, and there is no evidence that Hitler ever considered it. But the concept of hemispheric defense replaced the old continentalism and served as justification for proactive defensive moves in the Atlantic during 1941

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1940 was a presidential election year. In choosing their candidates, American political parties generally value electability more highly than ideological orthodoxy. Thus the Republicans, meeting in Philadelphia in June to pick their candidate for president, passed over such party favorites—all conservative isolationists—as senators Robert A. Taft of Ohio and Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan and Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York, men whom Walter Lippmann had called "sleepwalkers" oblivious of the nation's crisis. Bowing to pressure from Eastern internationalists in the party and to an apparent popular demand, the delegates on their sixth ballot nominated Wendell Willkie, a political neophyte (until a few years before, he had been a registered Democrat) but a vigorous and attractive utilities executive.

In July, the Democrats met in Chicago, where in 1932 they had first nominated Franklin Roosevelt. The fall of France had convinced Roosevelt that, despite his plans to retire, he had to run again. He saw no one on the political scene in whom he had confidence as both a war leader and a liberal. Moreover, he was the only Democrat who outpolled all potential Republican nominees. In deference to the third-term taboo, however, he refused to declare his candidacy, wanting instead to be drafted by his party. The confused delegates required prompting, but they obliged by renominating him on the first ballot.

Both candidates supported aid to Britain short of war, and Willkie praised many domestic accomplishments of the New Deal. He argued that a business administration would manage those reforms and the

sluggish defense program better than the Democrats. Increasingly desperate to distinguish himself from the president as the campaign progressed, Willkie identified himself as the peace candidate and accused Roosevelt of warmongering.

Roosevelt did not campaign until late October, but he felt compelled to reassure voters of his commitment to the short-of-war doctrine. In Boston, on October 30, he fatefully promised the mothers and fathers of America: "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign war."<sup>31</sup> His unspoken reservation: if America were attacked, the resultant war would not be a foreign war.

Many Americans had grown weary of Roosevelt, but they were not inclined to exchange an experienced president for a novice as war threatened. On November 5 Roosevelt won 54.7 percent of the popular vote and carried thirty-eight states. Willkie carried only rock-ribbed Republican Maine and Vermont and eight Midwestern isolationist states.

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By the end of 1940, Britain was approaching the point when it would be unable to pay cash for American war material as required by the "cash-and-carry" provision of the 1939 Neutrality Act. To solve this problem, Roosevelt invented a device popularly known as Lend-Lease by which the United States would continue to supply the British and would be repaid not in dollars but "in kind" at some future time.

Lend-Lease, a major step toward belligerency, required congressional funding. Roosevelt prepared the way in a fireside chat on December 29, 1940: "If Great Britain goes down," he said, "the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the high seas—and they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us, in all the Americas, would be living at the point of a gun. . . . The people of Europe who are defending themselves do not ask us to do their fighting. They ask us for the implements of war, the planes, the tanks, the guns, the freighters which will enable them to fight for their liberty and for our security. . . . We must be the great arsenal of democracy."<sup>32</sup>

British prime minister Winston Churchill confirmed the president's view: "Give us the tools," he said in January, "and we will finish the job."<sup>33</sup>

American public opinion, impressed by the steadfastness of Britons under German bombing, was swinging decisively toward aid to Britain even at the risk of war. Congressional isolationists fought and lost their last great battle. The Lend-Lease Bill passed both houses of Congress by substantial majorities; President Roosevelt signed it on March 11.

By this time, President Roosevelt was becoming convinced that the United States must enter the war. Britain's financial straits, its reverses in

Greece and North Africa, and huge losses of shipping in the Atlantic pointed to a crisis. Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June, which might have been expected to take pressure off the British, did not. The Soviets suffered gigantic losses during that year and most of 1942. The survival of the Soviet Union as well as Britain was very much in doubt. Despite his conviction, Roosevelt would not ask for a declaration of war. The country—and especially Congress—was still deeply divided. Roosevelt resolved that the enemy must fire the first shot. He would wait for—perhaps provoke—an incident serious enough to solidify public opinion in support of war.

Still, in early 1941 secret U.S.-British staff talks were being held in Washington. In the War Plans Division of the U.S. General Staff, officers were at work on plans for the coming world conflict. One of these was Major Albert C. Wedemeyer, who, during his two years at the *Kriegsakademie* in Berlin, had come to appreciate the Nazis' historical position and was sympathetic to what he imagined were their limited territorial aspirations. He also credited the Nazis for opening his eyes to the nature of communism. When he left Germany in 1938, Wedemeyer believed that the Soviet Union was the principal menace to Western civilization. Although critical of Roosevelt's anti-German policy, he did his duty. "There was never any doubt in my mind," he wrote in 1958, "that as soon as my country was at war, I would give unstinted and loyal support to the decision of higher authority."<sup>34</sup> Wedemeyer ultimately achieved four-star rank.

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The principal internationalist organization, the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, was formed in New York in May 1940 under the chairmanship of progressive Republican William Allen White of Emporia, Kansas. As editor and publisher of the *Emporia Gazette*, White had become nationally known as a homespun sage and elder statesman in the Republican Party. He had enormous influence in the Middle West, where isolationism ran deepest.

Despite his Midwestern roots, White was no isolationist. He believed strongly that American safety required the defeat of Nazi Germany and was prepared to support the Allies—later Britain—by all means short of war. In the fall of 1939 he had won Roosevelt's thanks for his work as chairman of a nonpartisan committee lobbying for revision of the Neutrality Act. Now again, to the dismay of Republican isolationists, he supported the president's foreign policy by working for aid to Britain.

The White Committee immediately attracted a large number of prominent members. Hundreds of local chapters sprang up across the country. The organization vigorously propagandized and lobbied for the view that the survival of Britain was necessary to the security of the United States.

For this, White was subjected to painful personal abuse from Republican isolationists.

Nevertheless, White remained loyal to his party. He prevented the committee from targeting isolationists in the November 1940 election, fearing that that would end the committee's bipartisan character—besides putting him in opposition to the entire Kansas congressional delegation and the state administration, many of whom were personal friends and political allies. He supported and counseled Willkie during the campaign while remaining on friendly terms with the president, who frequently advised the committee.

The short-of-war doctrine was essential to White. When members of the committee took what he considered a dangerous position in advance of public opinion—advocating American naval escorts for British convoys—White, in January 1941, resigned the chairmanship. Thereafter the committee was dominated by interventionists.

The change was largely dictated by members the committee shared with the small Century Club Group in New York City. This avowedly interventionist organization consisted of some thirty prominent journalists, lawyers, businessmen, and clergy who believed that the short-of-war doctrine was inadequate for stopping Hitler.

Strangely, very few writers noticed a moral problem in the short-of-war doctrine—certainly not the isolationists, many of whom actually hoped for a British victory, but also internationalists who believed that a British victory was necessary for American security. Was it moral to allow Britain to fight alone in defense of shared British and American interests and values? Bruce Bliven, editor of the *New Republic*, saw no problem. “[T]here is little difference,” he wrote, “between a war fought with our machinery and one in which we supply both machinery and men.”<sup>35</sup>

But James B. Conant, president of Harvard University, saw a problem, although he touched upon it only indirectly in a radio address in June 1941: “Nor shall I raise a question that might well disturb our souls—the question whether we in the United States can with a good conscience proclaim this war a fight for freedom and then let another nation do the fighting.”<sup>36</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr and his colleagues were more forthright in addressing the Protestant clergy in the first number of their weekly *Christianity and Crisis*: “Is there a Christian minister who believes that the rights which he daily enjoys and which he takes for granted, like the air he breathes, would be his to enjoy unless these rights had been fought for by Cromwell, by William of Orange and by Washington? Are Protestants in the United States to live off the liberties which others are maintaining for them and then express complete indifference to the fate of those whose sacrifice makes the tranquil and serene life of American Christians possible?

“[W]herever men fight for freedom they fight for us,” the editorial continued. “Those who choose to exist like parasites on the liberties which

others fight to secure for them will end by betraying the Christian ethic and the civilization which has developed out of that ethic."<sup>37</sup>

Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who believed that America must get into the war and was critical of the president's artful but slow progress toward that goal, also felt the moral imperative of commitment. "I am not," he said in a radio address on May 6, "one of those who think that the priceless freedom of our country can be saved without sacrifice. It cannot. . . . The men who suffered at Valley Forge and won at Yorktown gave more than money to the cause of freedom. . . . Unless we . . . are ready to sacrifice and, if need be, to die for the conviction that the freedom of America must be saved, it will not be saved."<sup>38</sup>

A *Fortune* poll taken in December 1941 (just before Pearl Harbor) found that only 15 percent of respondents agreed with the following statement: "It is our war as well as England's, and we should have been in there fighting with her before this."

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The principal isolationist organization was the America First Committee, founded in Chicago in September 1940 and led by retired general Robert E. Wood, chairman of Sears, Roebuck. It advocated military preparedness and defense of the Western Hemisphere. It initially objected to aid to Britain as weakening America's own defenses and risking American involvement in the European war; eventually it accepted such aid as conformed to the "cash-and-carry" provision of the 1939 Neutrality Act. The committee lobbied vigorously against the Lend-Lease Bill. Thereafter it fought every administration move calculated, in the committee's belief, to take the United States into the war.

Like the White Committee, America First quickly recruited a number of prominent individuals and thousands of ordinary citizens in chapters across the country, especially in the isolationist Midwest. It was also joined, supported, or used by a significant number of Roosevelt-haters, anti-Semites, pro-Germans, Coughlinites, Bundists, and domestic fascists of all sorts. Their presence was conspicuous at large America First rallies, and they sometimes assumed leadership positions in local chapters, particularly in California and New York. The organization's national committee was unable to dissociate itself from these undesirables.

The America First Committee was fortunate to enlist as one of its speakers the most famous man in America, Charles A. Lindbergh. Lindbergh had achieved unprecedented celebrity by his solo flight from New York to Paris in 1927. In the next few years, he and his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, daughter of a Morgan partner and ambassador to Mexico, surveyed air routes to the Orient, Europe, Africa, and South America for Pan American Airways. In February 1932 their infant son was kidnapped from their New Jersey home and murdered; a Bronx, New York, carpenter,

Bruno Richard Hauptmann, was eventually convicted of the “crime of the century” and electrocuted in April 1936. Harassment by the press and threats to a second infant son caused the Lindberghs to leave the United States in December 1935 and settle first in England and then in France.

Invited to inspect the air forces of the European powers, Lindbergh was particularly impressed by the German air buildup. The Nazis deceived him as to both the size and the quality of the German air force. The result was Lindbergh’s increased admiration for the Third Reich (he considered making his home in Berlin) and deep pessimism about the fate of the democracies in a future war. In Berlin in October 1938 (after the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia), Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering, “in the name of the *Führer*,” unexpectedly presented him with a medal—for those “who deserve well of the Reich.”

The Lindberghs returned to the United States in April 1939, and Charles immediately undertook work for the Army Air Corps, investigating and consulting on American aeronautical development. When war began in September, he felt impelled to end his work for the Air Corps so he could freely voice his strongly held views opposing American involvement in the war. His celebrity enabled him to command radio time or magazine space almost at will. From April 1941 he traveled and spoke frequently for the America First Committee.

For Lindbergh, the war in Europe was a continuation of the age-old struggle for dominance among European nations. “No outside influence,” he felt, “could solve the problems of European nations or bring them lasting peace; they must work out their destiny, as we must work out ours.”<sup>39</sup> “We must either keep out of European wars entirely,” he argued, “or stay in European affairs permanently.”<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, the present war differed from past wars in that it threatened to destroy the Western scientific civilization that “permits the White race to live at all in a pressing sea of Yellow, Black, and Brown. . . . [W]hile we stand poised for battle,” Lindbergh wrote in the *Reader’s Digest* in November 1939, “Oriental guns are turning westward, Asia presses towards us on the Russian border, all foreign races stir restlessly. It is time to turn from our quarrels and to build our White ramparts again . . . to guard our heritage from Mongol and Persian and Moor, before we become engulfed in a limitless foreign sea.”<sup>41</sup>

Although Lindbergh’s racism echoed Nazi doctrine, he said little that was favorable to Germany. He found Germans “an able and virile nation.”<sup>42</sup> He contrasted German spirit and organization to Britain’s complacency and France’s social disorder. He explained German aggression as a consequence of the Versailles Treaty. In the defense of Western (white) civilization, he felt that a strong Germany was as essential as a strong England and France, “for [Germany] alone can either dam the Asiatic hordes or form the spearhead of their penetration into Europe.” Even now, in March 1940, “Russia is pushing Europe’s frontier slowly

westward again, while Germany, France, and England carry on their suicidal quarrels."<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, he never said anything critical of the Nazi regime—an omission that puzzled and outraged many.

Lindbergh denied that he was pro-German. "I have never taken the stand that it makes no difference to us who wins the war in Europe," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1941. "It does make a difference to us, a great difference."<sup>44</sup> He believed it would "be a tragedy to the entire world if the British Empire collapses."<sup>45</sup> He preferred "a negotiated peace to a complete victory by either side."<sup>46</sup>

"I opposed this war before it was declared," Lindbergh told an America First rally in May 1941, "because I felt that it would be disastrous for Europe. I knew that England and France were not in a position to win, and I did not want them to lose."<sup>47</sup>

"[W]e cannot win this war for England," he declared on another occasion, "regardless of how much assistance we send. . . . Suppose we had a large army in America, trained and equipped. Where would we send it to fight? . . . I do not see how we could invade the Continent of Europe successfully as long as all of that Continent and most of Asia is under Axis domination."<sup>48</sup>

Lindbergh advocated not isolation but independence. "[T]he security of a nation," he said, "lies in the strength and character of its own people." He recommended "the maintenance of armed forces sufficient to defend this hemisphere from attack by any combination of foreign powers."<sup>49</sup> "Our advantage in defending America," he believed, "is as great as our disadvantage would be in attacking Europe."<sup>50</sup>

"We are in danger of war today," Lindbergh said in May 1940, "not because European people have attempted to interfere with the internal affairs of America, but because American people have attempted to interfere with the internal affairs of Europe. . . . [T]here are powerful elements in America who desire us to take part [in the European war]. They represent a small minority of the American people, but they control much of the machinery of influence and propaganda. They seize every opportunity to push us closer to the edge."<sup>51</sup>

By September 1941 Lindbergh was determined to identify those "powerful elements." In a speech at Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11 he said: "The three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt administration."

"It is not difficult to understand why Jewish people desire the overthrow of Nazi Germany," Lindbergh conceded. But, he continued, "Instead of agitating for war, the Jewish groups in this country should be opposing it in every possible way, for they will be among the first to feel its consequences. . . . We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction."<sup>52</sup>



From the start of his career as an advocate of “independence,” Lindbergh had aroused fervent support and vituperative opposition. The storm of criticism that followed the Des Moines speech took him by surprise. His anti-Semitism was so conventional as to be unconscious. Thus he could write in his journal, “A few Jews add strength and character to a country, but too many create chaos.”<sup>53</sup> And he took for granted the popular view of the “Jewish influence in our press, radio, and motion pictures.”<sup>54</sup> His distinguishing Jewish Americans from other Americans in his Des Moines speech was almost a mental habit in Christian America. But his error reflected on the America First Committee, which was now attacked as being anti-Semitic as well as pro-Nazi.

President Roosevelt sincerely believed that Lindbergh was a Nazi. At a press conference in April 1941 he compared Lindbergh’s defeatism to that of the Copperheads, Northerners who supported the Southern cause in the American Civil War. Deeply offended by his commander in chief, Lindbergh resigned his reserve commission as a colonel in the Army Air Corps. When he attempted to reenlist after Pearl Harbor, he was rebuffed. He then worked as a civilian consultant and test pilot for several aircraft manufacturers. In May 1944 the United Aircraft Corporation sent him to the South Pacific to observe the performance of its Corsair fighter-bomber. With the complicity of local commanders, Lindbergh (a civilian) flew fifty combat missions, shooting down at least one Japanese plane.

Lindbergh’s Des Moines speech dealt a severe blow to the America First Committee. The press was almost universally condemnatory. “[I]n the greatest emergency that democracy has faced in modern times,” *Fortune* editorialized, “[pathological isolation] has injected the issue of racial and religious prejudice—the fiery and irrational issue—the totalitarian catalyst.”<sup>55</sup>

Committee members differed sharply among themselves on the truth and/or expediency of Lindbergh’s statements about the Jews. Interventionists were confirmed in their suspicion that the committee was a conduit of Nazi propaganda. Many demanded that the committee denounce Lindbergh. Instead, the committee denied that either Lindbergh or the committee was anti-Semitic and claimed that the committee’s enemies were exploiting the incident to obscure the real issue: “There is but one real issue—the issue of war.”<sup>56</sup>

Lindbergh spoke twice more to large America First rallies before Pearl Harbor, and the committee fought vigorously—and vainly—against repeal of those provisions of the 1939 Neutrality Act that prohibited the arming of American merchant ships and their sailing to belligerent ports.

After Pearl Harbor, the America First Committee and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies quickly dissolved.

In his State of the Union address to Congress on January 6, 1941, President Roosevelt defined the goal of the democracies in the war as the securing of four essential freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—"everywhere in the world."<sup>57</sup>

High-minded and devoid of particulars, a faint evocation of the waning New Deal spirit, the Four Freedoms were quickly adopted as America's rhetorical war aims, somewhat like Woodrow Wilson's "making the world safe for democracy." The artist Norman Rockwell illustrated each freedom in a separate painting, reproductions of which soon appeared in magazines, store windows, and classrooms around the country. These eloquently portrayed the simple pieties of ordinary Americans.

A month after the president's speech, another, more provocative, statement of American war aims appeared. This was written by Henry Luce, chairman of Time Inc., and published in the February 17 issue of his *Life* magazine. It was titled "The American Century."

Luce began by contrasting the British people—calm and resolute—with Americans—unhappy and confused. The British, Luce explained, had put behind them the errors and uncertainties of the past and were now fighting for their lives and country. The cure for Americans' malaise, he prescribed, was to do likewise: to recognize that the United States was already in the war, to reject the sterile counsel of isolationists, and to commit themselves to winning the war. "Britain cannot win complete victory—cannot even, in the common saying, 'stop Hitler'—without American help," Luce declared. "Aid to Britain short of war," he said, "is typical of halfway hopes and halfway measures." He called for immediate, armed intervention.

The war, Luce believed, presented America again with the opportunity for world leadership that it had rejected after World War I "with disastrous consequences." "[T]he complete opportunity of leadership is *ours*," Luce wrote. "Like most great creative opportunities, it is an opportunity enveloped in stupendous difficulties and dangers." Nevertheless, Americans must "accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence . . . exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit."

Luce envisioned America establishing "a system of free economic enterprise—an economic order compatible with freedom and progress." He foresaw America "send[ing] out through the world its technical and artistic skills. Engineers, scientists, doctors, . . . builders of roads, teachers, educators." It was also "the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilization are hungry and destitute." Finally, America must spread its ideals—"a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of co-operation."

Luce did not doubt that America's leadership would be "eagerly welcomed" around the world. America's music, films, and slang, its machinery and technology, were familiar everywhere. Most important was America's prestige, the world's "faith in the good intentions as well as in the ultimate intelligence and ultimate strength of the whole American people."

The twentieth century, Luce prophesied, "America's first century as a dominant power in the world," would be the American century.<sup>58</sup>

Besides appearing in *Life*, where it was read by more than 10 million people, "The American Century" was reprinted in the *Washington Post* and condensed in *Reader's Digest*. Time Inc. sent hundreds of copies to influential people and distributed it in bulk to schools, churches, and other organizations. The essay was also published as a small book.

"The American Century" was received enthusiastically by many internationalists. The idea of world domination seemed to them the fulfillment of America's manifest destiny.

Needless to say, isolationists were not thrilled. But neither were liberal internationalists, who were already thinking about a postwar world of their own design: purer democracy, planned economies, full employment, an international organization of cooperative nations. Luce's notion of America's world hegemony—that is, the hegemony of American capitalists—repelled and outraged them. For them, the war was already being transformed from a conflict between imperialisms into a "peoples' war." Vice President Henry Wallace later spoke of "The Century of the Common Man."

In February 1941 Luce could not foresee the emergence of the Soviet Union as a second superpower that would contest American hegemony through forty years of cold war. Nor could he foresee that, when at last the United States stood alone as the world's only superpower, it would find much of the world resistant to its "good intentions" and "ultimate intelligence."

\* \* \*

With the initiation of Lend-Lease, the passage to war accelerated. In response to heavy losses of British merchant ships to submarine "wolf packs," President Roosevelt established in April 1941 a U.S. "security zone" in the North Atlantic extending as far east as Iceland. U.S. destroyers patrolled the zone in search of submarines and reported their locations to the British.

That same month, U.S. troops established bases in Greenland. In May, the president proclaimed an unlimited national emergency and the next month ordered the closing of German and Italian consulates. In July U.S. troops landed in Iceland. In August President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met at sea off the coast of Newfoundland and, among other understandings, adopted shared war aims in the so-called Atlantic Charter.

That month, too, Congress (by a margin of one vote in the House of Representatives) extended the service of draftees from one year to two and a half years.

A German submarine sank an American merchant ship in the South Atlantic in May; when a submarine attacked a U.S. destroyer off Iceland in September, President Roosevelt ordered the navy to “shoot on sight” at German warships within the U.S. security zone. A few days later, the navy began convoying British ships as far as Iceland. Roosevelt was waging an undeclared naval war with Germany.

After two more U.S. destroyers were attacked (one was sunk) with the loss of American lives, Congress repealed sections of the Neutrality Act that had prohibited the arming of American merchant vessels and their travel into war zones. In November, the president extended Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union, which Germany had invaded in June. Hitler’s involvement in Russia—which he expected to be brief—caused him to respond with restraint to American provocations in the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, tension mounted in the Far East. In August the United States embargoed all trade with Japan, including oil, and during the following months insisted that Japan withdraw from China and Indochina as a condition for resuming trade. Japan resolved upon war. Roosevelt was well aware of Japan’s intentions—although he did not know that they included an attack on Pearl Harbor—and tried to delay hostilities. He insisted to his more militant advisers that Japan must strike the first blow.

The incident that Roosevelt had expected in the Atlantic occurred in the Pacific. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the Philippines and began wide-ranging offensives in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, and the East Indies. The United States responded the next day with a declaration of war against Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy, Japan’s allies, declared war on the United States.

“The long known and the long expected has . . . taken place,” President Roosevelt told Congress on December 11 in asking that it recognize a state of war between the United States and Germany and Italy.<sup>59</sup>

On December 15 he spoke to the American people by radio. “To Hitler the ideal of the people, as we conceive it—the free, self-governing, and responsible people—is incomprehensible. The people, to Hitler, are ‘the masses’ and the highest human idealism is, in his own words, that a man should wish to become ‘a dust particle’ of the order ‘of force’ which is to shape the universe. . . .

“What we face [in this war] is nothing more nor less than an attempt to overthrow and to cancel out the great upsurge of human liberty of which the American Bill of Rights is the fundamental document. . . .

“We covenant with each other before all the world that, having taken up arms in the defense of liberty, we will not lay them down before liberty is once again secure in the world we live in.”<sup>60</sup>

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# Notes

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