

From Isolationism to War

READING FOCUS

- Why did the United States choose neutrality in the 1930s?
- How did American involvement in the European conflict grow from 1939 to 1941?
- Why did Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor lead the United States to declare war?

MAIN IDEA

United States foreign policy changed slowly from neutrality to strong support for the Allies. Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor immediately brought the United States into the war with the full support of the people.

KEY TERMS

Neutrality Acts
cash and carry
America First Committee
Lend-Lease Act

TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete this chart by listing reasons why people supported or opposed the involvement of the United States in the war.

Supported Involvement in the War	Opposed Involvement in the War
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Britain was defending American ideals of freedom and democracy. • The Axis Powers would eventually declare war on the United States. • 	

Setting the Scene During the 1930s, the United States largely turned away from international affairs. Instead, the government focused its energies on solving the domestic problems brought about by the Great Depression. Even as Italy, Germany, and Japan threatened to shatter world peace, the United States clung to its policy of isolationism. The horrors of World War I still haunted many Americans who refused to be dragged into another foreign conflict. President Franklin Roosevelt assured Americans that he felt the same way:

“I have seen war. 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 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.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, address at Chautauqua, New York, August 1936

Few people in the United States agreed with the actions or the ideas of the Fascists, the Nazis, or the Japanese radicals. Most Americans sympathized with the victims of aggression. Still, nothing short of a direct attack on the United States would propel Americans into another war.

The United States Chooses Neutrality

American isolationism increased in the early 1930s, although President Roosevelt, elected in 1932, favored more international involvement. The demands of carrying out the New Deal kept Roosevelt focused on domestic issues, however. He was more concerned with lifting the United States out of the Depression than with addressing foreign concerns.



VIEWING HISTORY Franklin Roosevelt used “fireside chats” to speak directly to Americans during the Depression and later as the United States drew closer to war.



THESE SPRING DAYS IT'S HARD TO
KEEP YOUR MIND ON YOUR WORK!

INTERPRETING POLITICAL CARTOONS Domestic issues kept Congress and the President from focusing on the increasingly tense situation in Europe.

Predicting Consequences What did this cartoonist believe would happen if the United States did not act against Hitler and Mussolini?

China, and Germany had taken Austria and the Sudetenland. The United States watched warily from a distance, protected by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

American Involvement Grows

As the decade wore on, the American economy recovered somewhat. Unemployment and business failures no longer required the nation's full attention. At the same time, Germany and Japan stepped up their aggression against neighboring countries. This combination of events softened Americans' isolationist views.

American opinion shifted even further against the Axis Powers in September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. At that time, almost no one believed that America should enter the war against Germany. But many people felt that the United States shared Britain's interests, and given the constraints of neutrality, President Roosevelt began to look for ways to send more aid to the Allies.

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

Assistance for Britain

After France fell and Britain stood alone against Germany, Americans debated whether to assist Britain and what form that assistance should take.

Analyzing Viewpoints Compare the statements of the two speakers.

Opposed to Aid

"When England asks us to enter this war, she is considering her own future, and that of her Empire. In making our reply, I believe we should consider the future of the United States and that of the Western Hemisphere. . . . I ask you to look at the map of Europe today and see if you can suggest any way in which we could win this war if we entered it. . . . If we concentrate on our own and build the strength that this nation should maintain, no foreign army will ever attempt to land on American shores."

—Charles Lindbergh, Address to the American First Committee, April 23, 1941

In Favor of Aid

"The Nazi masters of Germany have made it clear that they intend . . . to enslave the whole of Europe, and then to use the resources of Europe to dominate the rest of the world. . . . the Axis not merely admits but proclaims that there can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy of government and our philosophy of government. . . . [Britain is] putting up a fight which will live forever in the story of human gallantry."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt,
Arsenal of Democracy speech,
December 29, 1940

Debating the American Role Three weeks after the invasion of Poland, Roosevelt asked Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts to make them more flexible. Congress did so by repealing the arms embargo and providing Britain and France with the weapons they needed. A later amendment allowed American merchant ships to transport these purchases to Britain. The neutrality legislation was effectively dead.

In June 1940, France fell to the Germans, and Hitler prepared to invade Britain. France's rapid collapse shocked Americans, who had expected the Allies to defend themselves effectively against Germany. Now Britain stood alone against Hitler, and many Americans supported "all aid short of war" for Britain. Roosevelt successfully pressed Congress for more aid. On September 3, the United States agreed to send 50 old destroyers to Britain in return for permission to build bases on British territory in the Western Hemisphere. Some Americans saw this exchange as a dangerous step toward direct American military involvement. Two days after the trade, a group of isolationists formed the **America First Committee** to block further aid to Britain. At its height, this group attracted more than 800,000 members, including Charles Lindbergh.

During the presidential campaign of 1940, both Roosevelt and his Republican opponent, Wendell Willkie, supported giving aid to the Allies. They disagreed, however, on how much aid should be given and on what the aid should be. As election day approached, Willkie sharpened his attack, saying that if FDR won, he would plunge the nation into war. To counter this charge, FDR assured all parents: "Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars." In reality, both men knew that war would be hard to avoid.

Lend-Lease In November 1940, Roosevelt won reelection to a third term as President. His easy victory encouraged him to push for greater American involvement in the Allied cause. To continue battling Germany, Britain needed American equipment. Britain, however, faced a financial crisis. Prime Minister Churchill, in a letter to FDR, confessed that his country was nearly bankrupt. "The moment approaches," he wrote in December, "when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies."

In December 1940, Roosevelt introduced a bold new plan to keep supplies flowing to Britain. He proposed providing war supplies to Britain without any payment in return. Roosevelt explained his policy to the American people by

READING CHECK

Why did Roosevelt press Congress for aid to Britain?

VIEWING HISTORY Members of the "Mothers' Crusade" knelt and prayed outside the Capitol to stop Congress from passing the Lend-Lease Act, Bill 1776. **Drawing Inferences** How did these protesters hope to sway votes?



the use of a simple comparison: If your neighbor's house is on fire, you don't sell him a hose. You lend it to him and take it back after the fire is out.

The America First Committee campaigned strongly against this new type of aid. Nevertheless, Congress passed the **Lend-Lease Act** in March 1941, authorizing the President to aid any nation whose defense he believed was vital to American security. FDR immediately began sending aid to Britain. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the United States extended lend-lease aid to the Soviets as well. By the end of the war, the United States had loaned or given away more than \$49 billion worth of aid to some 40 nations.

Japan Attacks Pearl Harbor

Although Roosevelt focused his attention on Europe, he was aware of Japan's aggressive moves in the Pacific. In July 1940, Roosevelt began limiting what

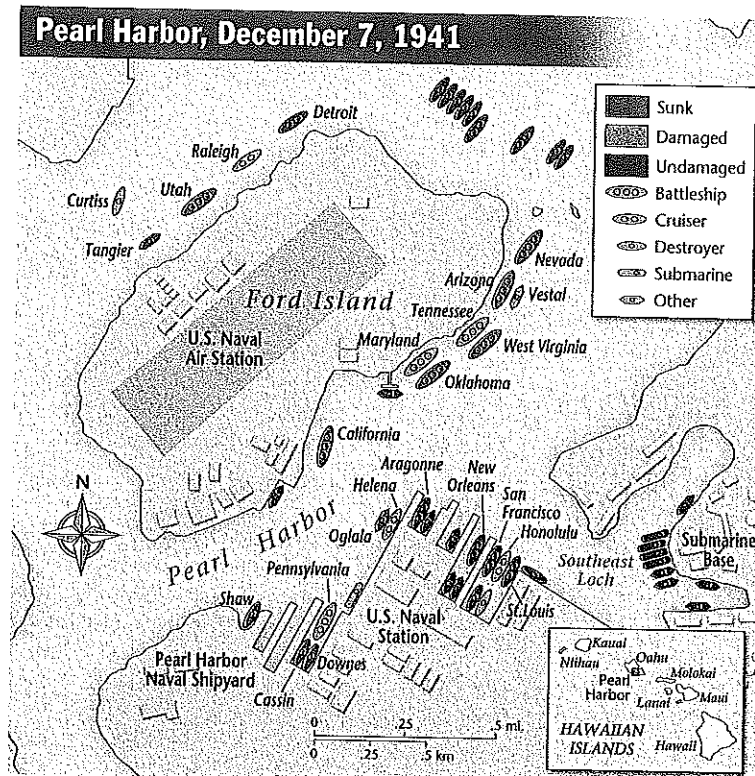
Japan could buy from the United States. In September, he ended sales of scrap iron and steel. He hoped to use the threat of further trade restrictions to stop Japan's expansion. A year later, however, Japanese forces took complete control of French Indochina. In response, Roosevelt froze Japanese financial assets in the United States. Then he cut off all oil shipments. As you have read, Japan desperately needed raw materials, and this embargo encouraged Japan to look to the lightly defended Dutch East Indies for new supplies of oil. For the next few months, leaders in the United States and Japan sought ways to avoid war with each other.

Final Weeks of Peace While Japanese and American diplomats negotiated, a militant army officer took power in Japan. General Tojo Hideki, who supported war against the United States, became prime minister in October 1941. Yet Roosevelt still hoped for peace, and he continued negotiations.

More than a year earlier, American technicians had cracked a top-secret Japanese code. Knowing this code allowed them to read intercepted diplomatic messages. By November 27, based on decoded messages, American military leaders knew that Japanese aircraft carriers were on the move in the Pacific. They expected an attack, but they did not know where.

Indeed, a Japanese fleet of 6 aircraft carriers and more than 20 other ships was already on the move. Its target was Pearl Harbor, the naval base on the Hawaiian island of Oahu that served as the home of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Japan's leaders had gambled that they could cripple the American fleet and then achieve their goals in Asia before the United States could rebuild its navy and challenge Japan.

The Attack Shortly after 7:00 on the morning of December 7, an American army radar operator on Oahu noticed a large blip on his radar screen. He called his headquarters to report that planes were headed toward the island. The only officer on duty that Sunday morning believed that the planes were American. "Don't worry about it," the officer told the radar operator, and he hung up the



MAP SKILLS The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was surprising and swift. **Location** Where did the Japanese inflict the most damage?

phone. Less than an hour later, more than 180 Japanese warplanes streaked overhead. Half of the Pacific Fleet lay at anchor in Pearl Harbor, crowded into an area less than three miles square.

Japanese planes bombed and strafed (attacked with machine-gun fire) the fleet and the airfields nearby. By 9:45, the attack was over. In less than two hours, some 2,400 Americans had been killed and nearly 1,200 wounded. Nearly 200 American warplanes had been damaged or destroyed; 18 warships had been sunk or heavily damaged, including 8 of the fleet's 9 battleships. Japan had lost just 29 planes.



United States Declares War

The attack on Pearl Harbor stunned the American people. Calling December 7, 1941, "a date which will live in infamy," Roosevelt the next day asked Congress to declare war on Japan:

"Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbound determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 8, 1941

Within hours after Roosevelt finished speaking, Congress passed a war resolution. Only one of its members, pacifist Jeannette Rankin of Montana, voted against declaring war. Even the America First Committee called on its members to back the war effort.

On December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. For the second time in the century, Americans had been drawn into a world war. Once more, their contributions would make the difference between victory and defeat for the Allies.

Wearing a black armband to mourn those killed at Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt signed a declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941.



Sounds of an Era

Listen to Roosevelt's speech and other sounds from World War II.

Section

4

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

1. (a) What was required by the **Neutrality Acts**? (b) Did they succeed in keeping the United States neutral? Why or why not?
2. Why did Roosevelt ask Congress to pass the **Lend-Lease Act**?
3. In your own words, describe relations between Japan and the United States before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

4. **Recognizing Cause and Effect**
 - (a) How much did President Roosevelt consider American public opinion when deciding how to respond to the conflict in Europe?
 - (b) Why did he need to consider public opinion at all?
5. **Writing a News Story** Write a short newspaper article on the fall of France from an American point of view. Explain the consequences for the United States.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Writing a Diary Entry
Read eyewitness accounts of the Pearl Harbor bombing online. Next, write a personal diary entry as if you were present for this historic event. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.phschool.com