

“Personally, I believe there is no better argument against our intervention than a study of the causes and developments of the present war. I have often said that if the true facts and issues were placed before the American people, there would be no danger of our involvement.”

**Charles Lindbergh**



# Wretched Entanglements

## The Non-Interventionists of the WWII Era

Ben Lewis

**N**o anti-war movement in American history has been as vilified as those lonely souls who opposed American entry into World War II. Activists like the anti-imperialists at the turn of the twentieth century have simply been forgotten, left to be neither condemned nor lauded by posterity. Others, like the opponents of the Vietnam War, have been positively, if partisanly, celebrated. But the active opposition to World War II enjoys no such luxuries. It was neither insignificant enough to be totally ignored, nor have its members been romanticized or praised. At best, the opponents of American participation in the war are said to have been on the wrong side of history. At worst, they are charged with being a Nazi fifth column undermining America from within.

### THE AMERICAN NON-INTERVENTIONIST TRADITION

No group has been targeted with this latter smear more than the America First Committee, even though evidence in support of the accusation has never been obvious. Founded by a group of Yale University law students, including future President Gerald Ford, the committee boasted the membership or support of many prominent Americans, among them former President Herbert Hoover, later President John F. Kennedy, future Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, publishers Robert McCormick and Joseph Patterson, business magnates General Robert E. Wood and

Sterling Morton, and military officers including Major (later General) Albert Wedemeyer.

The America First Committee was established in September 1940 to provide organized opposition to President Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy, which members of the committee feared was steering the United States towards involvement in World War II. In arguing for staying out of the war, the committee appealed to what it said was the traditional American position on foreign wars.

*"I believe in an impregnable national defense," the AFC's creed began, adding, "I believe we should keep our country out of the Old World's everlasting family quarrels." Reaching its crux, the creed stated, "I believe in the preservation of this Republic. Embroiled again in European affairs, we shall lose it. We shall be destroying the heritage our fathers fought for and sacrificed to leave us. In an effort to destroy totalitarianism, we shall be forced into totalitarianism ourselves. George Washington warned us of this day. His advice is better today than when he gave it."*

This was a reference to George Washington's 1796 Farewell Address in which he struck a markedly similar chord. "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?" Washington had asked. "Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?" He warned against "inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others" and pleaded instead for Americans to "[o]bserve good faith and justice towards all nations [and] cultivate peace and harmony with all."

A quarter century later, President James Monroe restated Washington's policy in a slightly amended form when he warned European nations that the United States would view their interference in the Americas unfavorably, but also promised that America would not take sides in European conflicts. Washington's Farewell Address and the Monroe Doctrine became the unofficial basis for American foreign policy for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

While Americans didn't apply this standard perfectly, neither did they go around the world seeking, in the words of President John Quincy Adams, "monsters to destroy." Adams predicted that once America departed from its non-interventionist path, she "would involve herself,



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beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. The frontlet upon her brows would no longer beam with the ineffable splendor of freedom and independence; but in its stead would soon be substituted an imperial diadem, flashing in false and tarnished lustre the murky radiance of dominion and power. She might become the dictatress of the world: she would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.”

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the United States, influenced by Progressive attitudes towards the use and utility of war, began to move away from its non-interventionist past. Faced with these non-traditional notions, American anti-imperialists vehemently opposed the Spanish-American War and the imperialistic struggles that followed. Less than two decades later a smaller and less vocal group offered similar opposition to American participation in World War I. The opponents of American entry into World War II carried on this defense of the country's traditional foreign policy.

### THE BROAD COALITION

It would be inaccurate to say that all opponents of American entry into World War II were traditionalists, for joining conservatives in the fight against intervention were some liberals and socialists. Even American communists were initially opposed to intervention, since participation in the war would bring the United States into conflict with Joseph Stalin's Russia, which had joined the war on Hitler's side in September 1939. American communists' opposition quickly evaporated, however, when Hitler turned on his co-belligerent and invaded Russia in June of 1941.

The America First Committee reflected this broad coalition. Justus Doenecke wrote that “pacifists and liberals assumed crucial positions in drafting position papers” for the AFC, but “the more vocal members...were staunch conservatives...” As in World War I, the strongest resistance to intervention in World War II came, in the words of Robert Nisbet, “from those closely linked to business, church, local community, family, and traditional morality.” Because conservatives led the opposition, many of the arguments against intervention took on a conservative tone and focused on the preservation of American tradition, liberty and virtue.

### A DEFENSIVE STANDARD FOR WAR

While most non-interventionists were not pacifists, they held a distinctly defensive view of war. Republican Senator Robert Taft enunciated this position when he wrote in 1941 that “War is a vain policy, except a war fought at home to establish or preserve the freedom of a nation.” For many

## “The demands of a new war, they believed, would place this fort of liberty under siege.”

Americans, the experience of World War I verified this belief. Burton and Anita Folsom wrote that when the traumatized American veterans of the Great War came home and began telling their stories, “the public was stunned by the carnage of World War I, by the raw destruction, by the sheer numbers of dead or maimed.”

Two decades later, with war again raging in Europe and Americans again debating participation in it, non-interventionists worried that the hard-learned lessons from World War I would be forgotten. Herbert Hoover, who had personally witnessed the immense suffering of World War I, lamented that “amid the afterglow of glory and legend we forget the filth, the stench, the death, of the trenches. We forget the dumb grief of mothers, wives, and children. We forget the unending blight cast upon the world by the sacrifice of the flower of every race.”

Like Taft, Hoover was not arguing for pacifism, but rather for war as a defensive last resort. “We may need to go to war again,” the former president wrote, “but that war should be on this hemisphere alone and in the defense of our firesides or our honor. For that alone should we pay the price.”

For Hoover, World War I had proven that wars to perfect society and liberate the world were fool's errands. Woodrow Wilson had famously rooted the case for American involvement in World War I in the idea that “[t]he world must be made safe for democracy.” Hoover had joined in this line of thinking, believing that by entering the war America “could impose an enlightened peace; that we could make it a war to end war.”

But the actual experience of World War I changed his mind about war's ability to effect positive social change. “If experience has any value to nations,” he wrote, “there are in the wrecking of these hopes a thousand reasons why we should never attempt it again...” In a radio address in 1939, Hoover stated his new belief that, “[t]his world can never reach peace by threats and force. If this is to be the blind leadership of men, nothing can save the world from a catastrophe to civilization.” Little did he realize the immensity of the catastrophe to come.

### IMPERILED AMERICAN LIBERTY

If anyone was in a position to foresee this catastrophe, it was Hoover. In appreciation for his relief efforts during World War I, which in the words of George Nash had “saved literally tens of millions of people from privation and death,” Hoover was invited to make a return tour of Europe so its people and leaders could thank him. In February and March of 1938, Hoover visited fourteen countries across

Europe and had the chance to speak personally with many political leaders, including Adolf Hitler. What he found on this journey was a continent increasingly driven towards totalitarianism by forces still reverberating from World War I. Upon his return to the United States, Hoover told a radio audience,

*“Let there be no mistake; a new way of life is rising in the world. It directly challenges all our American concepts of free men. And let me tell you that upon my recent journey over and over again men of responsibility breathed to me one prayer. They did not seek military alliances with us. They did not seek loans. What they prayed was that we hold the fort of liberty in America.”*

The demands of a new war, the non-interventionists believed, would place this fort of liberty under siege. Here again World War I, with its attendant economic and social regimentation, served as a cautionary tale. When Roosevelt established the War Resources Board in 1939, conservatives reacted strongly, seeing in it not just another New Deal boondoggle, but an indication that the administration was going to use the war to further its control of the economy. Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg predicted that, before long, prices and wages would be set by the government, goods like food and fuel rationed, and relations between business and labor more heavily regulated. Vandenberg remarked that in this environment, “the Bill of Rights would need a gas mask, and liberty of action would swiftly become a modern memory.”

## THE RISING AMERICAN DICTATORSHIP

In September 1939, soon after the war in Europe began, Roosevelt called a special session of Congress to ask for the repeal of the neutrality laws that banned the sale of weapons to belligerent nations. Doenecke wrote that, “[t]hough FDR was far from explicit, his bill obviously had one aim: to aid the Allies.” For his opponents, this not only revealed Roosevelt’s intention to take sides in the conflict, it seemed to be the first step on the road to war.

Roosevelt’s proposal easily passed, and non-interventionists could only take solace in the fact that warring nations could purchase American weapons solely on a cash and carry basis - that is, they were required to pay for the weapons at the time of the sale and with the understanding that American vessels would not transport them. But whatever comfort this stipulation provided lasted only fifteen months. By December 1940, with France in German hands and Russia still on Hitler’s side, the British Empire faced the Nazis alone. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill informed Roosevelt that Britain would soon be unable to pay cash for American weapons.

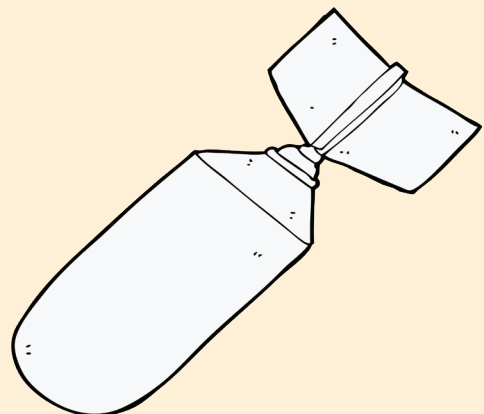
Roosevelt needed a solution, and found it with what became known as Lend-Lease, a program which would give or loan supplies to Britain in exchange for leases on military bases. Roosevelt likened Lend-Lease to loaning a

garden hose to a neighbor whose house is on fire, to which Taft quipped that “[l]ending arms is like lending chewing gum. You don’t want it back.” While claiming to simply allow to America to continue supporting the British, the bill also gave Roosevelt unprecedented power, allowing him to “manufacture...or otherwise procure...any defense article whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States.” Doenecke wrote that “[i]f he so desired, the [bill’s language] could cover virtually everything, military secrets included.” The Folsoms noted that, “if Congress approved Lend-Lease, the president would have enormous power and control and allocate what the United States produced and where supplies went.”

For non-interventionists, Lend-Lease presented the dual problem of risking war and of creating an American dictator. Taft believed the bill authorized Roosevelt to “take us into the midst of the war, and once we are there his powers will be unlimited.” *The Christian Century* called the bill “the most un-American proposal which the American people have ever had seriously to consider.” John Bassett Moore, an expert on international law, said that Lend-Lease raised the ultimate question of “whether we shall have a government of law or a government of men.”

For his opponents, Lend-Lease continued Roosevelt’s troubling tendency to bypass constitutional limits on his authority. Just three months earlier, he had unilaterally agreed to send fifty destroyers to Britain in exchange for leases on military bases on British-owned territory in the Atlantic and Caribbean. This Destroyers for Bases deal was a step too far, even for Wendell Willkie, the interventionist Democrat-turned-Republican who was battling Roosevelt for the presidency. The deal, Willkie said, “was the most arbitrary and dictatorial action ever taken by any President in the history of the United States. It does us no good to solve the problems of democracy if we solve them with the methods of dictators...”

Nor would Lend-Lease be the last time Roosevelt would behave as if he had already received a declaration of war from Congress. In January 1941, wrote Waldo Heinrichs, “British army, navy, and air planners secretly met with their American counterparts in Washington” to develop joint war plans based on the possibility of an American entry into the war. Indeed, the agreement even went so far as to



prioritize the defeat of Germany over the defeat of Japan - *before* the United States was at war with either. A great deal of secrecy and subterfuge surrounded the meeting, with Roosevelt aide Robert Sherwood remarking that the goal was to avoid any publicity which “might provide ammunition for the opponents of Lend-Lease.” Admiral Harold Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, noted that the effect of the secret agreement, withheld from the American people and their representatives, was that “The question as to our entry into the war seems to be *when*, and not *whether*.”

In August 1941, with the United States still nominally at peace, Roosevelt met with Churchill on a warship off the coast of Newfoundland. At the meeting, the two leaders developed the Atlantic Charter which, in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, laid out their vision for the postwar world, enunciating goals like self-determination for all people and the “abandonment of the use of force.” Among the Charter’s eight points was a statement about the two countries’ desires for the peace that would follow “the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny.” The America First Committee voiced concern that, through the Charter’s language, Roosevelt had “committed us to active participation in the present war.” Churchill, reporting to a British radio audience after the meeting, seemed to confirm this, saying, “the President of the United States and the British representative...have jointly pledged their countries to the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny.”

These actions by Roosevelt were taken without a constitutional grant of power or declaration of war and came at a time when over 80 percent of Americans polled said they did not want to go to war. Non-interventionists were critical of both Roosevelt’s penchant for giving himself new powers and his lack of candor regarding his activities and intentions. On this latter charge, even Roosevelt’s defenders have concurred.

### **RESCUING EUROPEAN EMPIRES: AN UNJUST WAR AIM**

The charter’s language about self-determination seemed particularly fatuous since one of its signatories held the largest empire in the world. Considering the extent of the British Empire, North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye called Great Britain “the ace aggressor of all time.” Non-interventionists noted Britain’s long history of oppression in its colonies in Africa, the Middle East and India. Even the beleaguered French were criticized for their imperialism.

The British further alienated non-interventionists by their behavior after the war began. As European countries began to fall in the face of Hitler’s Blitzkrieg, the fate of civilians in conquered countries caused concern in America. Hoover, sensing an opportunity to renew his humanitarian efforts, came up with a plan to, in Nash’s words, “import and distribute food to the civilian populations of German-occupied Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, and

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Belgium, where, he said, there were 18,000,000 persons ‘who are going to die unless food is gotten to them at once.’” But in order for the food to reach the civilian populations under German control, it would first have to pass through the British naval blockade of the continent. Despite German promises that all of the food would reach the civilians that needed it, Nash recorded that Churchill “categorically refused to permit food to pass through the blockade,” reasoning that the “conquered populations were the Germans’ responsibility...and the Germans had food enough to meet it if they desired.”

The civilian populations of Europe were to be left, then, to the generosity of the Nazis. An incensed Hoover would later describe Churchill as “a militarist of the extreme school who held that the incidental starvation of women and children was justified if it contributed to the earlier ending of the war...” *The Christian Century* remarked that “the inhumanity of starving your friends to hurt your enemies reaches depths of moral degradation which cannot possible serve any moral end.”

To non-interventionists, the historical ruthlessness of the European empires, combined with their callous attitudes towards suffering European civilians, made a mockery of the Atlantic Charter’s idealism.

### **THE GATHERING COMMUNIST STORM**

If saving the democratic empires of Europe was a dubious endeavor, an alliance with Stalin’s Russia was downright immoral. But when Hitler launched his invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941, the Communist nation was immediately transformed from Hitler’s co-aggressor into an Allied partner against the Nazis.

Allied leaders had rarely viewed Stalin with the same skepticism they had Hitler. In the months leading up to the outbreak of war in 1939, Stalin had played the Allies and the Germans against each other, with both sides courting Russia as an ally. Stalin’s price for such an alliance was, Hoover reported, “British agreement to the annexation by the Soviet Union of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, East Poland, Bessarabia, and Bukovina.” British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, appalled at the immorality of these demands, refused to assent to them despite objections from inside his own government. Among the dissenters was Chamberlain’s soon-to-be successor, Churchill, who doubted Britain’s ability to fulfill its promise to defend Poland without Russia’s help.

Hitler, unlike Chamberlain, had no scruples about negotiating with other peoples’ freedom. On August 23, 1939, the Germans and Russians signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop

Pact, which they described as a non-aggression treaty. In reality, secret provisions divided Europe into spheres of influence, with Stalin getting nearly everything he had asked the British for in exchange for aiding Hitler in his invasion of Poland and allowing Germany a free hand in Western Europe. The Germans kicked off the European theater of World War II a little over a week later by invading Poland from the west on September 1, 1939. Russia attacked from the east on September 17.

But the Hitler-Stalin alliance was doomed to fail, and fail it did in the summer of 1941. After Hitler's invasion of Russia, the Allies immediately accepted Stalin as a curious partner in the struggle against totalitarianism. In his memoirs, Churchill justified his alliance with Stalin by stating that his life had been "much simplified" by the war with Germany. "I have only one purpose," he told his private secretary, "the destruction of Hitler... If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons." In light of Churchill's willingness to praise Lucifer, his partnership with Stalin was unsurprising.

Roosevelt, too, immediately embraced his new Russian ally, and quickly set in motion the delivery of Lend-Lease aid to Stalin. To soften the blow of supporting a totalitarian regime, Roosevelt chose to whitewash Stalin's pact with Hitler. Raymond H. Dawson wrote that, despite its invasion of Poland and other Eastern European countries, Roosevelt claimed that "Russia is in no sense the aggressor nation." In an attempt to make supporting Communist Russia more palatable, the president even attempted to argue that the Russian constitution protected religious freedom, even though, in the words of Robert Dallek, "Roosevelt knew full well there was no freedom of religion in the Soviet Union."

The non-interventionists were unconvinced. To them the Soviet partnership with Hitler, not to mention Stalin's mass murders via purges, intentional famines, and concentration camps, made any alliance with the communists an albatross on American virtue. In a radio address, Hoover called to memory Soviet aggression, saying, "[t]o align ourselves alongside Stalin will be as great a violation of everything American as to align ourselves with Hitler." If America was committed to helping Stalin conquer new territory for communism, "[w]e should at least cease to tell our sons that they would be giving their lives to restore democracy and freedom to the world."

In August 1941, Hoover issued a joint statement with prominent Americans, stating that, "[r]ecent events raise doubts that this is a clear-cut issue of liberty and democracy. It is not purely a world conflict between tyranny and freedom. The Anglo-Russian alliance has dissipated that illusion." Felix Morley, president of Haverford College and a signatory to the statement, wrote after the war, "I could see no legal or moral reason for our involvement in the derivative hostilities, even with full realization of the Nazi

tyranny. Equal disregard of 'human rights' was apparent in Soviet Russia, and the idea of an alliance with either regime seemed to me anathema."

Stalin's atrocities were not to be simply ignored. The *New York Daily News* claimed that "[t]he Soviets' Christian victims have far outnumbered the Nazi's Jewish victims." While this claim seems odd in retrospect, historian Thomas Fleming reminded readers that 1941 was "a full year before anyone realized Hitler might try to exterminate Europe's Jews." Non-interventionists, Fleming noted, pointed out that anti-Semitism was common in many European countries, including Russia, where the *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow reported that "Josef Stalin had shot more Jews in his late-1930s purges of supposedly disloyal Communists than Adolf Hitler had thus far killed in Germany."

Not only would coming to the aid of Stalin contaminate the morality of an American war effort, it would likely lead to the creation of another, potentially more dangerous enemy. The *Chicago Tribune* wondered, "[w]ould another war begin with British and American troops trying to stem forces they had supported?" In a similar vein, the *Saturday Evening Post* asked "[h]aving saved the world from Nazism, should we not be morally obligated to go on and save it from Bolshevism?" Events during and after the war would validate these concerns.

## NAZI SYMPATHIZERS?

Despite the rich, complex history of the non-interventionists, they have repeatedly been reduced to a caricature which emphasizes a single accusation: that their movement was filled with anti-Semites and Nazi sympathizers. And it is undeniably true that there were anti-Semites and Nazi sympathizers in America, and that they opposed the war. One of the most outspoken critics of intervention was Father Charles Coughlin, who used his national radio program and his publication *Social Justice* to combine antisemitism with criticism of Roosevelt's foreign policies, occasionally going so far as to praise Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini. Similarly, the German-American Bund operated from 1936 to 1941 with the purpose of creating in America a favorable view of the Nazis.

While the America First Committee, wrote Wayne Cole, "had the disadvantage of having Nazis, Communists, and anti-Semites venting similar foreign policy views," this was not, and has never been, proof that they were the driving force behind the mainstream non-interventionist movement. This lack of evidence, however, did not stop Roosevelt's defenders, especially his attack dog and Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, from repeatedly making that claim. Ickes singled out the AFC, reserving his most vicious attacks for its most popular spokesman, Charles Lindbergh.

Ickes's accusations of Nazi sympathies against the AFC

were quite unwarranted. The committee's first press release following its formation announced its intention "[t]o bring together all Americans who see eye-to-eye on these principles [of non-interventionism]," but stated that this did not include "Nazists, Fascists, Communists, or members of other groups that place the interest of any other nation above those of our own." The AFC's executive committee, wrote Cole, rejected contributions from people "expressing pro-Nazi or extreme anti-Roosevelt or anti-Semitic views." Cole wrote that John T. Flynn, head of the committee's New York chapter, told the German-American Bund that "America First not only did not solicit their support but that Bundists were ineligible for membership" because of their fascist views.

Just as Soviet agents would infiltrate interventionist groups - and, indeed, the Roosevelt Administration itself - a handful of America First members were later revealed to have been influenced by the German government. But

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while Roosevelt ignored the Soviet moles within his administration, the AFC proactively worked with federal officials to out any foreign agents in their midst. All told, roughly thirty individuals associated with America First were indicted, out of the eight hundred thousand members of the organization. No member of America First's executive committee, which guided its policies, were ever found to have been influenced by concerns for any nation but the United States. Indeed, one member of the executive committee, Clay Judson, noted that while Great Britain wanted to draw the United States into war and Germany wanted it to stay out, "[o]ur Committee believes that its policy should not be affected one way or the other by what other nations want, but that American interests demand that we stay out."

"Committee leaders," concluded Cole, "earnestly sought to prevent these elements from working through their organization. And their efforts were more successful than most of its critics would concede"

America First's leadership also made a special effort to keep anti-Semites out of the organization, saying that the committee "did not countenance anti-Semitism." While Jewish non-interventionists played key roles in the organization, donations from anti-Semites, like those from fascists, were rejected and explicitly anti-Semitic speakers were declared ineligible to speak at America First rallies. Anti-semitic letters sent to the AFC's headquarters were stamped "CRANK-IGNORE." The committee urged its chapters to make sure that devotees of Father Coughlin did not sell his racist rag *Social Justice* at America First rallies, stating the importance of not permitting "any Coughlin organization leaders to be in a position of leadership or direction in our local chapters" so that "they do not in any way identify the chapter with the Coughlin movement..." In July 1941, General Robert E. Wood, a member of the AFC's executive committee, was reported to have told a group of Coughlin followers that "[w]e don't want you people at America First meeting." Its reward for these efforts, wrote Cole, was that "[m]any extreme anti-Semites denounced America First..."

The charge of anti-Semitism against the committee revolved primarily around a speech Lindbergh gave in Des Moines, Iowa in September 1941 in which the aviator inarticulately said that "[t]he three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish and the Roosevelt Administration." Lindbergh exacerbated his predicament by pointing to what he perceived as Jewish influence "in our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and our government." He took time to explain, "I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire." He stated his belief that "[n]o person with a sense of the dignity of mankind can condone the persecution of the Jewish race in Germany."

Despite this qualification, an avalanche of criticism descended on Lindbergh and the committee. Certainly some critics were sincerely disturbed by Lindbergh's speech, but Cole wrote that "there can be no doubt that interventionists exploited this incident in an attempt to discredit and weaken the campaign against intervention in the European war." Some within the committee became angry with Lindbergh for speaking carelessly and drawing unwanted negative attention. But other non-interventionists were more forgiving, saying that Lindbergh was not a racist, that his speech was not intended to be anti-semitic and that some of Lindbergh's critics actually practiced the antisemitism they accused him of. In fact, the Des Moines speech, while offensive, was considerably less bigoted than various comments attributed to Roosevelt himself. Two weeks after the speech, the committee released a statement that said,

*"Colonel Lindbergh and his fellow members of the America First Committee are not anti-Semitic. We deplore the injection of the race issue into the discussion of war or peace. It is the interventionists who have done this. America First, on the other hand, has invited men and women of every race,*

*religion and national origin to join this committee, provided only that they are patriotic citizens who put the interests of their country ahead of those of any other nation. We repeat that invitation. ... There is but one real issue - the issue of war. From this issue we will not be diverted."*

Lindbergh said in October 1941, that his intentions had been "falsely ascribed" and that he did not "speak out of hate for any individuals or people." In a letter to General Wood, non-interventionist Norman Thomas wrote that "I know that Colonel Lindbergh is not anti-Semitic," but that he needed "advice on public relations."

Whether or not Lindbergh was a racist has been debated ever since. Many of the claims that he was have come as much in the form of speculative character assassination as they have serious historical research. Evidence to rebut the accusations of Lindbergh's antisemitism, however, have come from well-respected historians and those closest to him. Lindbergh's wife, perhaps not an unbiased source, said decades after the war that "in the 45 years I lived with him I never heard him make a remark against Jews, not a crack or a joke, neither did any of my children." This opinion was supported by Harry Guggenheim, Lindbergh's close friend and one-time publisher of *Newsday*, who claimed that Lindbergh "never had the slightest anti-Semitic feeling."

Accusations of Lindbergh's Nazi sympathies seem similarly off the mark. The evidence usually cited for their existence is a medal given to Lindbergh by Hermann Goring in 1938, during Lindbergh's trip to Germany in an official capacity for the American government. The medal, wrote James Duffy, commended Lindbergh "for his services to world aviation and particularly for his 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic." Furthermore, the medal, which Lindbergh had no foreknowledge of, was awarded in the presence of the American ambassador at a diplomatic party at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. Lindbergh could not have rejected it, wrote Duffy, without causing "a well-publicized diplomatic incident."

At least two prominent historians have exonerated Lindbergh of the charge of Nazi sympathies. Historian A. Scott Berg, author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Lindbergh, concluded that "Charles Lindbergh was never associated with any pro-Nazi or anti-Semitic organization..." Cole, long a respected authority on the non-interventionist movement, wrote that "Lindbergh did not like Hitler or Nazism. He did not favor a Nazi dictatorship either for Germany or for the United States. Whatever one may think of his views, Lindbergh formulated them in terms of his own judgment of what was best for the United States and for Western Civilization."

Lindbergh, like most famous figures, was a complicated and not thoroughly defensible character, but the more outlandish claims about his motivations seem to be, at the very least, exaggerations. But, observed Bill Kauffman, "[t]here is a sense in which far too much has been made of Lindbergh. He was one man in the last broad peace movement

in American history, almost a million strong." Lindbergh was not more representative of the movement than a host of other figures. Regardless of whatever anyone thought of Lindbergh, it is ridiculous to smear the entire non-interventionist movement as being fueled by racists and Nazi sympathizers.

The non-interventionists reflected general American sentiment towards the European war. Even into late 1941, 80 percent of Americans did not support intervention to the point of war. If Ickes's accusations of Nazi sympathies were correct, this would have meant that four-fifths of the American population - roughly twice the highest level of electoral success the Nazis achieved in Germany - either actively sympathized with the Nazis, or were duped into supporting them - an obviously absurd conclusion.

### **THE NON-INTERVENTIONISTS' FALL AND VINDICATION**

All of the non-interventionists' objections became moot when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and Hitler declared war on the United States four days later. The non-interventionists, who had made the defense of America their top priority, quickly supported the war that they hoped would not come. But they rarely doubted that they had been right. "Years after Pearl Harbor," wrote Doenecke, "few isolationists regretted the battle, no matter how much their reputations were ruined. For them, the crusade was always one of highest patriotism - and wisdom as well."

History has not been kind to the non-interventionists. As World War II came and went, they were jettisoned to a dark corner of American history. Slandered and denounced, what they said and believed was unfairly reduced to a few baseless accusations. Almost nobody stopped to consider that, on many significant points, they had been right.

While the war had failed to achieve the idealistic goals of the interventionists, it had proven true many of the warnings that non-interventionists had raised. Non-interventionists had said that war would not - and indeed could not - bring peace and freedom, that these worthy goals could only be attained by changing hearts and minds. They had warned that an alliance with Stalin would nullify the alleged righteousness of America's cause and would likely create a new enemy that might be even be more dangerous to American security.

After the war even Churchill admitted that the non-interventionists had been right on these points, writing, "The human tragedy reaches its climax in the fact that after all the exertions and sacrifices of hundreds of millions of people and of the victories of the Righteous Cause, we have still not found Peace or Security, and that we lie in the grip of even worse perils than those we have surmounted."

Wedemeyer agreed, writing "The Allies won the war; but since the Anglo-American leaders did not know and did not even try to determine what they were fighting for, the



crushing military defeat of Germany and Japan raised up new and more dangerous enemies.” Diplomatic historian George Kennan believed that American intervention in two world wars against Germany had accomplished next to nothing, writing, “When you tally up the total score of the two wars...you find that if there has been any gain at all, it is pretty hard to discern.”

Just as World War I led directly to World War II, World War II led directly to the Cold War. And the Cold War itself led not only to the Korean and Vietnam wars, but to interventions around the world over the next four decades. Included in these were interventions in the Middle East, where the United States supported rebels in hopes of undermining the Soviet Union’s attempts to dominate the region. Thus, even today – from Korea to Afghanistan – Americans are still dealing with the fallout from World War II.

The non-interventionists had also predicted that warfare abroad would bring authoritarianism at home, that to fight totalitarianism the United States would have to become totalitarian. The violations of economic and, especially, civil liberties during the war proved this true. The war dramatically increased spending, raised taxes and brought prices and consumption under government control as progressives used the war to dramatically expand the scope of Roosevelt’s peacetime New Deal.

The government intimidated and prosecuted dissenters and, worst of all, locked up over 100,000 of its own civilians simply for being of Japanese ancestry. The war forever altered the relationship between citizens and the government and, wrote historian Richard Pollenberg, “posed questions about the relationship between civilians and the military, between liberty and security . . . which continue to perplex Americans.”

The war further nurtured a national ruthlessness towards foreign civilians. American propaganda dehumanized the enemy in a manner not entirely dissimilar to the Nazi propaganda against Europe’s Jews. This hatred manifested in an increasing willingness to bomb civilians as the war went on. Whereas Americans had early in the war objected to British firebombings of German cities, which Fleming wrote “created temperatures high enough to melt metal and bricks” and incinerated children, the bodies of which “looked like fried eels on the livid pavement,” they were by the end of it using these exact tactics.

The worst and most devastating American attacks on civilians were the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and yet those were far from isolated incidents. American planes firebombed Japanese cities, killing hundreds of thousands of Japanese, and participated in the mass bombings of German cities like Dresden and Hamburg, in which tens of thousands of civilians perished. For many military officers, these new tactics were inconsistent with the traditions of civilized warfare.

Admiral William Leahy, Roosevelt’s Chief of Staff, said “I

was not taught to make war in that fashion...” Lieutenant General Ira Eaker said that that American bombings of enemy civilians proved that “we are the barbarians they say we are.” As many as 400,000 foreign civilians died as a result of American bombings during World War II, their deaths written off as the cost of defeating evil. Thus, in defeating evil, Americans had themselves resorted to evil. Journalist John T. Flynn despaired that “Man’s capacity for cruelty – even the good man’s capacity for cruelty – in the prosecution of a spiritual crusade is a phenomenon to affright the soul.”

The war had further social consequences. American society, wrote Hoover in 1947, had been “dreadfully brutalized by the war.” He asked,

Who would have believed America, without public protest, would drop an atomic bomb [on civilians]...? But of more immediate evidence [of social decay] – crime has increased by 25%, divorces have risen by 20%, one marriage in three ends in divorce, illegitimacy has

**“WWI led directly to WWII, WWII led directly to the Cold War. And the Cold War led not only to the Korean and Vietnam wars, but to interventions around the world over the next four decades. Intervention, as the non-interventionists had predicted, had not perfected humanity.”**

increased by 15%. Our streets teem with the delinquency of teen-age girls. The number of our boys in jail is appalling.

The lasting effect of this social decay is evidenced by how quaint the figures that gave rise to Hoover’s concern seem today. But Hoover was clearly on to something when he rooted these social phenomena in the war. The increase in juvenile delinquency, for instance, had begun during the war, when one social worker observed that, “This war is directly responsible for the boom in badness because children’s fathers go off to war and their mothers go to work, and thus the interest of parents is diverted from the home and the children.” Teen crime became such a problem immediately after the war that radio programs dedicated air time to informing listeners of the wave of youth-perpetrated theft, vandalism and murder that was sweeping the country. Comedy programs built entire plots

around car theft, ending with a plea for concerned citizens to lock their cars, saying that doing so could help troubled teens avoid a life of crime.

Clearly, the actual effects of World War II were considerably more widespread and less beneficent than is commonly acknowledged. Indeed, the war fulfilled the non-interventionists' most dire predictions. It disrupted society, grew government and created new enemies. In 1957, Hoover wrote that the war

...made nearly half the world Communist, armed and bent on the destruction of all free men; made another one-third of the world Socialist, both seeking to infect American life. The cost to the American people has been 400,000 dead sons and nearly 800,000 more wounded; imposed on us the need to support 2,000,000 widows, orphans and disabled veterans; saddled us with more than \$300 billion in Federal obligations; brought such taxation through the front door, as to every cottage, and such inflation through the back door, as to make post-war income of \$5,000 a year no greater in purchasing value than a prewar income of \$2,000; undermined our savings for insurance and old age; and, in the end, brought us ten years of cold war with no peace...

War was no panacea for the world's evils. Intervention, as the non-interventionists had predicted, had not perfected humanity. The idea that World War II was the Good War, one that achieved transcendent goals, was false. Wedemeyer concluded,

Illusory visions of a perfect world to be won by a crusade have served only to prevent America from utilizing her vast material resources, and the energy and dedication of her people to liberty, for the attainment of a realizable objective consonant with our national interest and the ideals we cherish. By pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of an entire world free from the curse of Adam, we forego our opportunity of making parts of it a little more like the Garden of Eden.

World War II vindicated the most important objections the non-interventionists raised between 1939 and 1941. It is not just they who have been mistreated by history, but their arguments. By forgetting why they opposed the war and what the costs of it were, Americans have shredded an important chapter of World War II, one that provides invaluable context to both that conflict and to our modern debates about war. ■

## 4 PEOPLE WHO WANT A GIFT SUB



### Your brother, a college student

One of the ways you know we are really cool here at AL Magazine is we spent our college years in the library trying to figure out how the Federal Reserve was expanding the supply of credit to subsidize the Government's war expenditure binge. Anyway, your brother's probably like that too.



### Your father in law

This one's important! You've tried for years to impress him. One year you even gave him season tickets to his favorite football team. As it turns out, however, the Mets are actually a baseball team and for heaven's sake you all live in Ohio. What's wrong with you? Redeem yourself now.



### Your libertarian buddy

We've all got a libertarian buddy. He's probably not your best friend (remember the time he was screeching about drug laws during Breaking Bad?), but look, we need to stick together. AL Magazine is quickly becoming the glue that is holding this movement together. Time to pass the glue. Wait, what?



### Karen

She seems like a great girl. Instead of introducing yourself and having a conversation like a normal human being, just send her a subscription to AL Magazine and slip a note inside that says, "sup. I think you know who sent this." Good thing for her, she'll never know. But at least she'll be able to explain the nuances of Mises's socialist calculation debate.

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