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AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS TWO WORLD WARS 1914-1957

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Professor Ollinger Crenshaw

The popular historian and onetime eminent journalist, Mark Sullivan, has described in moving passages the impact upon American life of, and the American public's unreadiness for, the coming of the First World War in the late summer of 1914. Since the close of the American Civil War, the energies and talents of most Americans had been devoted to the completion of the national industrial plant, the building of the Continental railroad net, and the rounding out of a vast expanse from the Great Plains to California and Oregon. Immigration patterns shifted in the generation after 1865 to bring millions from Eastern and Southern Europe, people who manned the booming factories and mines, and who brought contributions of their cultures to the American melting pot.

In this busy era of preoccupation with internal affairs, Europe and Asia seemed remote indeed from the United States, in which the metropolitan press reported for the residents of the Atlantic Seaboard the life, the localized wars, the imperialism of that placid age. Historians call the decade of the 1880's "the Nadir of Diplomacy," and some contemporary critics called for the abolition of diplomatic representatives abroad as unnecessary extravagance. During the Nineties, however, there were stirrings of American interest in the role of the nation in the world — a nation which had reached the point of need for foreign markets, and a nation of which the Census Bureau could say in 1890 that the frontier had been closed.

It was during these years that a few voices were heard expounding new doctrines of foreign policy for the United States:

the need for markets, for colonies, for an isthmian canal, for a modern and powerful American Navy. Such ideas were championed by that "Scholar in Politics," Henry Cabot Lodge – Congressman and Senator from Massachusetts; the dynamic New Yorker, Theodore Roosevelt; Whitelaw Reid, publisher of *The New York Tribune;* and by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, United States Navy, a naval officer who became famous by writing books. The preachments of these new prophets, however, received impetus by the brief War with Spain in 1898 — "A Glorious Little War," as one of them, John Hay, described it. For that war brought in its train new problems, including the entry of the United States into world politics through the corridor of so-called "imperialism," and especially with regard to the disposition of the Philippine Islands, occupied by American forces at the close of the war. After a spirited thrashing-out of that problem, in which many of America's finest and most thoughtful citizens espoused the cause of anti-imperialism, the decision apparently was rendered in favor of pursuing the policy of imperialism — at least, for the indefinite future. It is instructive today, in the light of present-day full-fledged retreat of Western (if not Soviet) imperialism, to reread the arguments — pro and con — set forth in the early years of the twentieth century.

Rewards for that hero of the Spanish-American conflict, Theodore Roosevelt, included the Governorship of New York, the Vice Presidency, and, finally (through the assassination of President McKinley in 1901), the Presidency of the United States itself. President Roosevelt (a mere boy of 42 upon his accession), during his nearly eight years in the White House, attempted to educate the American people in the new responsibilities of the nation as a world power. In this work, as in his domestic policies of "trust-busting" and other reforms, he was only partially successful. But, at least a beginning was made through the President's intervention in the Russo-Japanese War as a peacemaker at Portsmouth in 1905 (not without its ensuing difficulties for Japanese-American relations), the Algeciras Conference of 1906,

his well-publicized employment in foreign affairs of "the big stick" in the Caribbean (and, occasionally, elsewhere), his intimate friendship with foreign ambassadors, and his direct correspondence with kings, emperors, and prime ministers.

Despite the course in foreign policy as taught (or, rather, preached) by President Roosevelt, with the White House as his soundingboard, it seems likely that, with the exception of the intellectual classes and the social groups in which the President moved, the American people concentrated more upon their own day-to-day domestic problems, and were beguiled by the rising progressivism rather than upon the fate of Korea or of Morocco. It is true that disturbing rumors were reported of alliance systems which by 1910 had divided Europe into hostile camps, and temblors of international diplomacy occasionally felt in the years before 1914, but in the United States the dramatic presidential campaign of 1912 was fought out by the three major contestants — President Taft (a sincere proponent of world law and peace), ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, and Governor Woodrow Wilson — with scarcely any mention of foreign affairs. The successful candidate, Governor Wilson, confidently expected that his administration should deal largely with domestic problems – and so it did for a brief time, from March 4, 1913 until August, 1914.

Such was something of the background of the American people when World War I brought to a close that comfortable post-Victorian epoch, that time when so many believed firmly in the doctrine of the "idea of progress." Without modern techniques of communication, President Wilson invoked for Americans what he called "neutrality in thought as in action." The public viewed with relief that moat of protection, the Atlantic Ocean, and thanked their stars that their forebears had had the good sense to emigrate to America. The ideas of Washington's Farewell Address of 1796, and the traditional program of neutrality, seemed quite adequate as 1914 turned into 1915.

At the same time, factors were in operation upon the American people, composed, as they were, of an older bloc of descendants from the British Isles or Northern Europe, British in language and culture, and also made up of more newly-arrived immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe — many of them only slowly acquiring the veneer of Anglo-American civilization and retaining the sympathies and ties with their old countries — virtually all involved in "the great war," as it was called. As we know, American cities often were divided into areas and neighborhoods — their Yorkvilles, their Lithuanian or Polish quarters, their Ghettos, or their Little Italys. It is true that in the over-all picture from the outset predominant American opinion favored the Allies — Great Britain (to whom the nation owed its cultural base), France (to whom many felt a sentimental tie going back to the days of Lafayette and Rochambeau, although it must be confessed that the sentiment was even then wearing thin), and little Belgium, whose violation outraged American public opinion. An embarrassment for Allied sympathizers was the presence of Czarist Russia as one of the major powers on that side. Despite certain earlier episodes of marked friendship between Russia and the United States, the notorious tyranny of that absolutist monarchy, the suppression of freedom of opinion, the exiles to Siberia, the anti-Semitic persecutions, all created a profoundly unfavorable impression in the United States. Above everything, nonetheless, American opinion desired victory for the Western Allies of Great Britain and France.

By 1914, a formerly held sympathetic view of Germany was much altered, if not indeed completely reversed. It is well known that throughout the nineteenth century American scholars looked to the German universities for training and, for better or worse (some will think the latter!), the American system of higher learning derived from the German. German scientific research, music, and culture held a high rating among Americans, although during Wilhelm II's years, in the face of his sabre-rattling propensities, Germany became less popular in this coun-

try. Indeed, some, like former President Eliot of Harvard, by 1915 placed a low estimate upon the contributions of Germany in cultural and scientific fields.

Upon such groups, between 1914 and 1917, played other factors, among which may be cited propaganda emanating from both sides and the impact of economic forces upon the American economy. Very soon in 1914, despite initial efforts by Secretary of State William J. Bryan to discourage the flotation of loans by France and Great Britain in this country, the United States Government gave the "green light" to those hard-pressed and well-nigh exhausted nations, so that through J. P. Morgan and Company, American private investors had the opportunity of purchasing Allied securities. During 1914 (a year which saw a recession), American economy responded to the war orders from the Allies, with the consequent launching of a wartime "boom." The Germans also sold some bonds to Americans through the firm of Kuhn, Loeb & Company, but this was small by comparison with Allied funds obtained here, and the latter were expended here in munitions orders and other purchases. This situation, hooking the United States' economic life to the fate of the Allies, has been variously emphasized by subsequent writers, and will be referred to below.

The Germans loudly complained of this situation, which, because of the British fleet and the blockade of the European Continent, in effect made of the United States an Allied arsenal, and was seized upon by the Germans as justification (moral, if not legal) for opening their submarine campaign in 1915. In later years and in retrospect, American writers dwelt heavily upon the factor of British propaganda as tricking American entry into the war in 1917. It is established that definitely there *was* both Allied and German propaganda disseminated through the United States. The British, in particular, was well-timed and effective through understatement — although, through Allied control of the cables and by such documents as the Bryce report

dealing with German atrocities, overstatement was employed as well. In books of the "Now It Can Be Told" type, men like Sir Gilbert Parker and the Englishman, Arthur Ponsonby, in his *Falsehood in Wartime*, laid bare British propaganda techniques, and thus probably rendered Great Britain a disservice in a then unforseen desperate period yet to come. More of this, too, but it is significant that so worldly-wise a journalist as Kent Cooper, former head of the Associated Press, as recently as last year published a book, *The Right to Know*, in which he assigns a prominent role — if not, indeed, the decisive role — to propaganda in the involvement of the United States.

During those deadlocked years of 1914-1917, Americans on the whole desired Allied victory, the participation in wartime trade, American abstention from becoming a belligerent, and perhaps remotely feared a world dominated by the unpopular and militaristic Wilhelm II. They elected President Wilson again in 1916 over the eminent Judge Hughes, whose campaign suffered from ambiguities as to the program he would offer as alternative to that of President Wilson, who had benefited from the billboard campaign advertisements of 1916, which read, "He kept us out of war." People forgot the qualifications which President Wilson made in that regard.

In those tense years the German submarine campaign, unleashed in February of 1915, brought several crises — including that of the *Lusitania* sinking — but they were more or less satisfactorily handled through diplomacy by President Wilson. The Germans justified on moral grounds their submarine activity as a means of breaking the strangulation of the Allied blockade, and as a protest against admitted violations by the British of international law, until the beginning of 1917. In the face of everything else, it appears unlikely that the United States' leadership or opinion was favorable to a declaration of war, and it is hard to see how it could have been brought about without the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917. The Germans

miscalculated badly in 1917 regarding America, as they were to do again from 1939 to 1941.

With the failure of President Wilson's "Peace Without Victory" address of January, 1917 — in which he sketched terms of a durable peace and foreshadowed the League of Nations — and with the announcement of the resumption of submarine warfare, American determination to remain aloof was ended. It became a matter of weeks before the sinkings of belligerent ships with Americans aboard — and even of American vessels in the forbidden zones — would begin. Ambassador von Bernstorff was sent home. The President asked for authority to arm American merchant vessels in February, 1917, and, although filibustered against by the "little group of willful men" who blocked this request in the Senate, actually proceeded to arm the ships anyhow under an antique statute dating from the 1790's.

The special session of April, 1917, was moved up, and the President emerged as a new world leader in his eloquent address asking for war against the Central Powers. Beginning on this occasion, his phrases hurtled throughout the world to friend and foe alike — with the expert assistance of the Committee of Public Information, headed by the late George Creel, a liberal journalist. Not only was the American public treated to a barrage of five-minute speeches on patriotic themes in moving picture houses, but professors (some of whom later recanted and regretted their excessive patriotism), preachers, and professional men gave their services in the cause of better acquainting the apathetic public with the war aims of the United States and our associates, the Allies. Excerpts from President Wilson's addresses, and other materials, were conveniently printed in "red, white, and blue" pamphlets for wide distribution and for promoting the sale of Liberty Bonds to finance the war.

Obviously, it was believed that the people stood in need of such indoctrination. Creel's committee did a very good job, here and abroad; in fact, they did too good a job by over-selling the

peoples of the world on the idea that the postwar world would usher in some kind of millenium of a just and lasting peace, with President Wilson as its prophet. The central theme was embodied by President Wilson in the celebrated "Fourteen Points," effectively employed for propaganda purposes among the peoples of Allied and enemy nations. The European masses ecstatically awaited the unfolding of the new order in which, of course, they also desired the fulfillment of nationalistic aspirations. The Germans, after the turn of the tide of the war in the summer and fall of 1918, sought to salvage something from the generous terms of the "Fourteen Points." President Wilson was hailed by European masses — especially by the French and Italians — in his triumphal European Tour, while waiting for the Paris Peace Conference to begin.

Already danger signs had begun to appear, even before the surrender of the Central Powers, the flight of the Kaiser to Doorn, and the organization of an acceptable German government. President Wilson, just at the moment of supreme triumph, mistakenly (as some thought) breached the bipartisanship in 1918 by calling for the election of a Democratic Congress, whereupon the voters furnished him with a Republican Congress. He decided to go in person to Paris, and he appointed an unimpressive delegation to the Peace Conference. As one malicious critic put it: "He appointed himself four times, and Henry White." Criticism thus developed even before Wilson sailed for France, but, after the Conference began and the divergent peace aspirations of the victors began to emerge, it mounted to crescendo. This, President Wilson sought to allay upon his temporary return to the United States in February and March of 1919. When the text of the Treaty and of the League became known in this country — and their inextricable relationship — opposition stiffened.

Despite Wilson's victory in obtaining his League of Nations, and the fact that there was much good in the Treaty (as professor Birdsall pointed out in his book appearing in 1940), to-

gether with the fact that probably a large majority of Americans wished to ratify some kind of a peace treaty and League, the opposition — led by so-called "Irreconcilables" (or "Bitter-enders"), dwelling upon the weaknesses, the compromises, and the least defensible portions of the treaty, and shrewdly practicing tactics of delay during the summer and fall of 1919 — gradually turned the tide against the Wilson program. Another device was the use of amendments and reservations. The so-called Lodge Reservations were rejected by President Wilson, and a sufficient number of senators refused to accept the Treaty and League without them. Meanwhile, partisanship operated in all these matters, with a view to the defeat of Wilsonism in 1920. The President collapsed while on tour in support of his program, and there was none to replace him. By March, 1920, the Senate rejected the Wilson peace and adjourned *sine die.*

By then the tide had been reversed further in the United States, and the voters overwhelmingly turned to the Apostle of Normalcy, Senator Harding. Wilson's star fell into eclipse during the twenties and thirties, and with it his program. President Harding and Coolidge turned to other approaches to the problem of world peace. However, during the twenties not only the Peace of Versailles and Wilsonism fell into disrepute but the whole matter of American intervention into the First World War followed suit. It became difficult to collect the war debts of more than ten billions, and a segment of the American press and opinion — led by William Randolph Hearst, Senior — became increasingly nationalistic.

Meanwhile, in Europe, — even before the Versailles Conference — the newly dominant Bolshevik government of Lenin and Trotsky published to the world secret diplomatic archives of the Czarist regime. These bared the famous secret treaties between Great Britain, France, and Russia on the one hand and Japan and Italy on the other in dividing the spoils of war. This action, followed by the inclusion in the Treaty of Versailles of the

well-known Section 231 — the "war guilt" clause — embittered the Germans, who, encouraged by criticism of the entire treaty, began in the twenties a movement among scholars and journalists which denied that guilt and looked toward the eventual revision — if not the overthrow — of the terms imposed by the victors. It was natural that the vanquished should desire this to come about, and they were aided by Socialists on the Continent, by Leftists, Radicals, Communists, and by the Laborites of Great Britain. The penetrating analysis and critique of the Treaty from John Maynard Keynes, *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which appeared in 1921, contained so unflattering a portrayal of President Wilson's role at Versailles that it was deleted from the American edition of that book — said by some observers to be one of the most influential books of the twentieth century, and widely read and admired in the United States.

During the twenties, a number of scholars, historians, and publicists reexamined the origins of the First World War on the basis of German and Russian published documents, and, influenced probably by the postwar climate of thought characterized by disillusionment and disappointment, in varying degrees concluded that the guilt for bringing on that conflict was (or should be) apportioned heavily among both sides, with Russia and France coming in for critical treatment. Thus Harry Elmer Barnes, a prolific professor-journalist, brought out his *Genesis of the World War* (1928), which was followed by Professor Sidney B. Fay's more careful and conservative *Origins of the World War* (2 vols., 1929). American intellectuals, having expected so much from the Wilson program, turned from its failures with great bitterness — which inspection of the files of the *New Republic* and of Oswald Garrison Villard's *Nation* will show.

Reaching a wider public in America in the twenties and thirties were writings of novelists, the showing of moving pictures, magazine articles, all of which built up a cynical attitude toward America's first crusade and opened up a field for such satirists

as H. L. Mencken, whose *American Mercury* (a veritable *vade mecum* for the intelligentsia of the twenties) poured unmitigated scorn upon "Dr. Wilson" and all his works. The casual views of Sinclair Lewis' characters expressed in such popular works as *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1923) reflect a suspicion of Europe and of internationalism. Ernest Hemingway's several novels, Lawrence Stallings' plays, and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* depicted to a receptnve public the brutality and senselessness of war.

Many of these interpretations had gained wide currency in the America of the twenties and were in vogue at the time that the Stock Market Crash of 1929 brought sharper problems to the fore. They seemed to underscore the failures of Wilsonism, with the repudiation of the war debts in the early thirties, the rise of Far Eastern aggression in the Manchurian episode of 1931-32, and the emergence of dangerous aggressors in Europe. The inadequacies of the League of Nations were glaringly plain, and, with depression deepening yearly during the early thirties, Americans turned with ferocity on what they believed (or were soon told) had inveigled or tricked them into the war that would "make the world safe for democracy."

With nothing but war debts repudiated, the rise of fierce aggressors in Europe and Asia, and the hatred and ingratitude of Europeans, many Americans were receptive to interpretations that were set forth by a new school of American historians and journalists who came to be called "the Revisionists." They were led off by C. Hartley Grattan in 1929, whose *Why We Fought* laid down the outlines to be rounded out by fuller treatment later in the decade by the more popular book, *Road to War* (1935) by the journalist Walter Millis, which was adopted by the Book of the Month Club and placed on hundreds of American library tables. Millis' account, brilliantly written, emphasizes forces at work to draw a reluctant America into war in 1917, the economic

factors at work to enrich the munition makers, downgrades President Wilson and Colonel House, and makes it plain that Americans really did not want war. Millis' book, read even today, is still persuasive, and was in tune with the public sentiment of its time. H. C. Peterson's *Propaganda for War* (1938) was another Revisionist interpretation, stressing how Americans were tricked by British Propaganda. There were such lurid titles as *Merchants of Death* to lay bare the villainy of international bankers and munitions manufacturers. A few books such as Charles Seymour's studies and Newton D. Baker's little volume defended the Wilson policies, but went unheeded.

In the midst of this state of semipopular books on this theme, much source material was made available in the celebrated investigation of the Nye Committee of the United States Senate, with its vivid headlines from testimony adduced from witnesses to show that the great bankers and munitions-makers had reaped a rich harvest of profits, but that the nation had reaped grim disaster. In passing, it may be noted that the brilliant young legal counsel for the Nye Committee was one Alger Hiss, of whom more was to be heard later. A circus was had by the press at the Nye Hearings, replete with J. P. Morgan himself with a midget placed in his lap.

The picture was completed during the later thirties when Professor Charles C. Tansill brought together in a heavily documented and massive tome *America Goes to War* (1938), the scholarly last word of revisionism.

It was during these same years that there emerged as popular leader in the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt, a one-time ardent Wilsonian internationalist, to grapple with the problems of depression at home, with the mounting foreign problems posed by the rise of Hitler, and the aggressions of the Italian dictator, Mussolini — quiescent since his march on Rome in 1922, but erupting in disturbing fashion in 1935 in Ethiopia. During

this time President Roosevelt's "New Deal" domestic program looked inward rather than outward, and among his supporters he was able to count in the presidential election of 1932 — but in some cases not long afterward — such isolationists as Senator Hiram Johnson of California; Senator Bronson Cutting; Senator Norris; Senator LaFollette, Jr.; the publisher, William Randolph Hearst; Harold L. Ickes, and others.

The lesson drawn from the various writings and investigations by Americans of all walks in life was this: America had been duped, tricked, and well-nigh ruined by its participation in the World War, and, with few dissenting voices concluded, "Never again!" But the question was: How could America be rendered impervious to such duplicity and insulated from future conflagrations, signs of which were on the horizon? The so-called "isolationist group," with comparatively little dissent either in Congress or from the President himself, prepared and put through Congress with large majorities during the period from 1935 to 1939 the so-called "new neutrality" legislation, which in effect (together with the Johnson Act of 1934) would prevent belligerent nations from repeating their villanies of 1914-1917; debtors in default to the United States could not borrow in this country; United States citizens were to be warned to sail on armed or unarmed belligerent vessels in wartime at their own risk (a belated vindication of Secretary Bryan's position in 1915); embargoed arms and munitions to belligerents required the registration and licensing of those engaged in manufacturing. Later versions of neutrality legislation added the "cash and carry" clause, designed to prevent incidents involving American ships and property, and, in general, tended to create an inflexible and permanent protection of U. S. neutrality behind an impenetrable legislative barrier.

Although the Congress reflected American opinion in these laws, certain internationalists complained that instead of keeping the United States out of war, the program would render that more likely through encouraging heavily-armed aggressors such

as Hitler and Mussolini. Such expressions came from *The New York Times* and from the alert observer of world conditions, Henry L. Stimson. President Roosevelt himself — not willing to stand against the tide, although privately critical of the legislation — contented himself with mild criticisms, and did not attempt to rally public opinion against the neutrality laws.

Unfortunately, in the thirties, when we were translating the lessons of 1914 to 1917 into a legislative bulwark, an ominous series of aggressions disturbed Europe and Asia: from the Japanese-Manchurian incident of 1931 through Ethiopia, and Hitler's actions in violation of the Versailles Treaty — all leading to Munich, the outbreak of World War II, and Pearl Harbor. Thus, it appears that because of an entirely different set of conditions from 1933 to 1941, the country had prepared to insulate itself perfectly against the situations of 1914-17. It began to dawn upon some Americans that the lessons learned were inapplicable in the new conditions, and, indeed, that we had learned the wrong set of lessons! This collision of our entire pattern of thinking as expressed in the neutrality legislation with realities necessitated altering policies after 1939, and more especially after the spring of 1940. Soon it was to be a case of pulling down (though not completely until the fall of 1941) the laboriously erected structure. But the collision of world events with the program forced the latter to give way.

Doubtless Americans were more prepared than in 1914 for the outbreak of war in that September of 1939 — when Hitler's mechanized units rolled over Poland, and when President Roosevelt's radio proclamation and statement did not echo Wilson's advice to remain neutral in thought and in action. But the overwhelming majority of our people held to the traditional concept of neutrality, and ardently desired to stay out of the conflict. Yet, Congressional opinion had veered to the extent of revising the neutrality laws to remove the arms embargo feature, after an

eloquent plea by the President and after a heated debate in Congress. The Second World War in its initial months gave evidence of becoming a repeat performance of World War I, what with the French securely behind the Maginot Line and boasting "the finest army in the world." Henry Ford and others spoke of "the phony war," but they did not have long to wait before Hitler demonstrated the incorrectness of that view as, in the spring of 1940, he swooped down upon helpless Norway and overran unoffending Denmark. With the world watching breathlessly, his forces next attacked Belgium and the Netherlands, rendered the Maginot Line ineffective, drove the British to the beaches of Dunkirk, and routed the French army.

Scarcely any event in modern history so thoroughly disturbed Americans. In those frenzied weeks of May and June, 1940, Ambassador William C. Bullitt frantically talked on the trans-Atlantic telephone with President Roosevelt, and Premier Reynaud of France importuned the President for clouds of planes. With France reeling, Mussolini sprang upon his helpless neighbor — despite direct and personal appeals from President Roosevelt to stay this act. Mr. Roosevelt, invited to deliver the commencement address at the University of Virginia that June (where "Junior" was slated to get a degree), used the speech to deliver some biting phrases at Mussolini's expense — the "stab in the back" speech. Back in Washington the news of the war became worse, rather than better, with the unheard of spectre of the probable invasion of Great Britain by Hitler, the possible fall of that great State, and the taking over of the British fleet through some type of "Quisling" government.

Urgent measures were resorted to during the summer and fall of 1940, such as the bases-destroyers deal, huge appropriations for army, navy, and air force, the passage of the Burke-Wadsworth Act providing for the first peacetime conscription in American history, and the replacement of the Secretaries of War and Navy by two eminent Republican leaders whose appointments gave co-

lor to bipartisanship in the crisis of 1940, a year which just happened to be a presidential election year. As the proposed measures emanated from the administration, it was inevitable that partisanship played some role in the opposition as well as that deep feeling of determination to stay out of war — any war — which sentiment has already been described. In each of the issues, however, the President had support either from a majority in Congress or from the Republican Candidate for President, Wendell L. Willkie.

That 1940 was a presidential election year complicated matters for President Roosevelt, a third-term candidate, whose policy of all aid to Great Britain, short of war, and whose boldness was distinctly tempered from July to November, 1940. Some were accusing Roosevelt of plotting war, while others became impatient at his caution. His course during 1940 and 1941, as near as available measurements enable us to judge, was generally supported by a majority of his countrymen, although some of his campaign speeches — as well as those of Mr. Willkie — were aimed at the antiwar vote. The President's Boston address at the end of the campaign was especially pointed, as he intoned "again, and again, and again" to the parents of prospective members of the armed forces. For this, he was sharply assailed by critics in after years.

During 1940, the so-called "Great Debate" raged for public opinion between those groups and individuals who favored all-out aid to Britain, to keep war away from our shores or, if need be, at the risk of war on the one hand, and those groups on the other hand which may be broadly lumped together as the anti- or noninterventionists, frequently called "isolationists" (a term gradually acquiring an invidious meaning), who desired to preserve American neutrality at nearly all costs, and some of whom (such as Colonel Lindbergh and his brilliant wife) were ready to write off Great Britain, who thought we could go it alone with our American Continents and resources, and who believed that Hitler did not have plans to attack the United States —

but that if he did, he could be taken care of. The noninterventionists were usually ready to arm the nation and to protect the bastion of the Americas.

The "Aid to Britain" people felt deeply that American interests demanded that Great Britain be preserved at all hazards, and there were some who believed in positive action to aid her — even American intervention in the war. Outspoken interventionists usually were circumspect, conferring in committees such as the "Century Group" or the "Fight for Freedom Committee." Broader based, and embodying varying shades of opinion, was the "Committee to Defend America by Aid to the Allies," headed by the popular Kansas editor, William Allen White. Mr. White, in common with many of his fellow countrymen, had rather gone far along with the type of thinking prevalent in the country. He had gone along with Walter Millis' thesis about World War I in a review article he wrote in 1935, showing his disillusionment with that first venture. By 1940, however, he was ready to lead the Committee to Aid the Allies, reasoning (with yet a touch of his noninterventionism lingering) that aid to Britain would "keep the war away from America." The White Committee numbered in its many chapters formed during 1940 and 1941 distinguished clergymen, educators, some members of Congress, business men, financiers, journalists, writers, etc. The story of the White Committee's role in the critical years in mobilizing American opinion has been ably told by Professor Walter Johnson of the University of Chicago. Before many weeks passed, it became plain that two distinct factions existed within the White Committee: one group, positive action men, led by the playwright and presidential speech-maker, Robert E. Sherwood and Secretary Stimson of the Roosevelt Cabinet, who increasingly advocated bolder and riskier steps to help Britain and even came close to intervention itself.

The other faction of the committee was headed by Mr. White, who advocated such a policy as Lend-Lease as a measure

to keep America out of, and not get the country into, the war. Eventually, Mr. White resigned from the committee chairmanship in a public letter of December, 1940: "The only reason in God's world that I am in this organization is to keep this country out of war . . . ." After saying he was still in favor of several strong features of the neutrality laws, he stated: "If I were making a motto for the committee it would be: 'The Yanks Are Not Coming,' " an unpalatable slogan to such associates as Clark Eichelberger, Bishop Hobson of Ohio, and Doctor Nicholas Murray Butler. Eventually, the committee came out for intervention — by June of 1941. Professor Johnson has described the work of the committee to win opinion to its views by large newspaper advertisements, radio addresses, and programs sponsored by the chapters.

Championing the "isolationist" viewpoint in "the battle of the committees" was the "America First Committee," which had its inception in a group of Yale law students, headed by R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., of Chicago, but established in the fall of 1940 under the chairmanship of General R. E. Wood — Quartermaster General of the United States Army in the First World War, and then a top executive of Sears, Roebuck & Co. It laid down its creed: abstention from European wars; strong internal defense; making democracy prosperous and effective at home; keeping our nationals and ships out of war zones; humanitarian measures of relief to the suffering of occupied countries; and, finally, a "referendum" to advise Congress when it should face the issue of war and peace. The item was presented in a resolution to Congress by Congressman Ludlow of Indiana, but was blocked by strong administration pressure.

Among prominent American Leaders associated or sympathizing with "America First" were ex-President Herbert Hoover, Senator Robert A. Taft, Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh (America's most recent hero, who lost his laurels in the political arena), and numerous members of the Congress such as Senator Hiram

W. Johnson, Senator LaFollette, Jr., Senator Gerald P. Nye, Senator Bennett C. Clark of Missouri, Senator D. Worth Clark of Idaho, Senator Rush D. Holt of West Virginia, and Representatives George H. Tinkham, Hamilton Fish, Joseph W. Martin, and others. Notable among the noninterventionists was Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan, who, later, during the war, was to execute a famous about-face on the subject of internationalism. A vigorous proponent of the viewpoint of the "America First" people was the historian and political scientist, Doctor Charles A. Beard. Through his numerous writings Professor Beard espoused what he called "Continentalism," and, during the years 1940-41, he personally testified before Congress in opposition to Lend-Lease.

Among other noninterventionists, some of whom either were unwelcome as liabilities to the "America First Committee" or whose motivations varied, may be mentioned Norman Thomas, of strong peace leanings; certain pro-Nazi sympathizers, like the notorious Fritz Kuhn — a brown-shirted strutter; and, for a time up to June 22, 1941, the American Communists, who loudly flayed the "imperialist" war until it became "A Peoples' Crusade" after June 22, 1941. Without doubt, many of the noninterventionists were sincere and patriotic. Their numbers were quite large up to the day of Pearl Harbor, and at times the bloc in Congress rolled up large minority votes against the successive Roosevelt proposals which increasingly moved the United States from the role of "neutral" in the old sense into that of nonbelligerent and cobelligerent — a status unknown to international law. It seems true, also, to say that circumstances placed "America First" and other anti-intervention groups on the same side with Hitler, whose many outrageous policies incensed Americans.

The battle over isolation and intervention might be yet raging but for the fact that Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, silencing the Great Debate and destroying completely "America

First." During the course of World War II, the critics of Roosevelt's foreign policy were silenced, but some of them bided their time when they might obtain a hearing in postwar years. In the war years, most books and articles set forth the administration (or internationalist) point of view, some of them — like Forrest Davis and Ernest K. Lindley's *How War Came* — officially or unofficially inspired. Numerous members of the administration compiled diaries or memoirs for publication shortly after the close of the war. Notable among these are Stimson's *On Active Service in Peace and War,* Hull's Memoirs, Miss Perkin's study of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and many others.

During the war, thought was given to the postwar peace plans and, as military matters and grand strategy receded with the successful course of the war, Americans began to hope that "this time" we should not fail as in 1919. We and our leaders were optimistic about the postwar world in which the Big Three — Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States — would collaborate for a just and lasting peace. Occasionally a warning note was sounded, as when Professor Carl Becker of Cornell published a thoughtful book, *How New Will the Better World Be?* The succession of wartime conferences on the highest level, from Casablanca to Yalta, dwelt with global peace problems, and President Roosevelt himself felt exuberant about postwar prospects in his last public appearance upon his return from Yalta.

But disillusionment has a way of following wars, and the failures of the peace after the fall of Germany and Japan set in motion a new wave of critics, who, beginning in 1947, have presented an interpretation of diplomacy leading up to Pearl Harbor — of wartime diplomacy and high-level strategy, and of postwar diplomacy, with its failures and frustrations, that takes sharp issue with the official, internationalist line of interpretation, and which, for convenience, we may call "the new revisionism." Just

as the spokesman of the Roosevelt administration often or sometimes either were or had been recipients of office from that administration, it is plain that the "new revisionist" writers were without exception (save for some disillusioned former members like ex-Ambassador Bullitt) former opponents of the Roosevelt policy (such as Doctor Beard), who now — from 1947 — could resume the attack.

And resume the attack they did in a most vigorous fashion! Two books by Professor Beard indicted the Roosevelt foreign policy from 1932 through Pearl Harbor; George Morgenstern of the *Chicago Tribune* brought out the first of a number of critiques on the subject, *Pearl Harbor;* and that old veteran of World War I revisionism, Harry Elmer Barnes, fiercely assailed the entire Roosevelt foreign policy in a tome he edited, called *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace,* published in various new editions. Frederic R. Sanborn's *Design for War,* and Professor Charles C. Tansill's *Back Door to War,* present a severe indictment of Roosevelt's allegedly Machiavellian tactics ending at Pearl Harbor. Dr. Tansill's work, heavily documented — though containing valuable material — suffers somewhat from emotionalism and overstatement. It does for World War II what the same author's *America Goes to War* did for President Wilson, although accelerated in emotion.

One of the more rational and persuasive of the "new revisionist" writers is the journalist, William Henry Chamberlain, author of many books, one-time authority on Russia, and whose *America's Second Crusade* (1950) dwells particularly upon the diplomatic history of the Second World War resulting in diplomatic blunders and frustrations. Mr. Chamberlain links up the so-called "second crusade" with the first, but is milder than some in his handling of both wars. It should be observed that a number of the "new revisionist" histories have been published by the Henry Regnery Company of Chicago, and another publishing house to do likewise is the Devin-Adair Company of New York. In any list

of the harshest critics of President Roosevelt's foreign and domestic policies the name of John T. Flynn should be cited. One-time liberal columnist on banking and financial problems for the *New Republic* magazine, Flynn's several books scathingly denounce F. D. R. and all his works.

By far the best known of the "new revisionists" was the late eminent political scientist and historian, Professor Charles A. Beard, who stated his case against Roosevelt foreign policies in two books published after the close of the Second World War. Dr. Beard's fame and reputation were so great with Americans (indeed, he probably was the only historian known to many) that it caused fear lest, unanswered, the public might accept his sweeping indictment of the Roosevelt administration's foreign policies. Professor Basil Rauch of Columbia hastened to answer the Beard arguments in his *From Munich to Pearl Harbor* (1950), while Professor S. E. Morison of Harvard composed one of the most devastating polemics in attacking Beard's views in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* for August, 1948, entitled "History Through a Beard."

Having identified some of the prominent writers of the "new revisionist" school of interpretation, a brief statement of the leading ideas and theses and criticisms becomes pertinent. First of all, the Roosevelt policies from 1939 — and, especially from the spring of 1940 — are charged with leading the unwilling country on to war, step by step, gradually, all the while the President reassured the country as to his peacelike intentions. Part of the deception, so the argument runs, includes such acts as the bases-destroyers deal, the President's promises in the campaign of 1940, Lend-Lease, convoying, shoot-at-sight orders, and virtually everything to Pearl Harbor — including American Far Eastern policy in these years and the breakdown of the Hull-Nomura-Kurusu talks, intended to provoke the Japanese through the alleged "ultimatum" of November 26, 1941, which would lead to war.

In seeking an explanation of the complete success of the Japanese in their Pearl Harbor attack, these writers have evolved the thesis that President Roosevelt "planned it that way." According to this argument, and with the collusion of General Marshall and Admiral Stark, the President deliberately withheld vital information from the Pearl Harbor commanders, and left the fleet exposed as a bait to lure the Japanese into the act of striking there — thus obtaining a "back door" entrance into the war against Hitler. The shocking and successful Japanese attack would also destroy the isolationist opposition, concededly strong, and would solidify public opinion behind the American war effort. Surely these are extreme and even monstrous charges which, in general, American historians have not accepted as established by proof. We know that there were amazing blunders on the part of Washington authorities, and there are suspicious circumstances which have not been explained. Recently, when James Michener, author of "South Pacific" reviewed Walter Lord's *Day of Infamy*, he remarked that Mr. Lord had described well what happened at Pearl Harbor on December 7, but had left untouched what had happened at Washington in the days and weeks preceding, and added that scholars had not begun a searching analysis of that important aspect of the tragedy.

Carrying their criticisms beyond Pearl Harbor into the diplomacy of the war, the "new revisionists" assailed the increasing concessions to the Soviet Union, which culminated in the Yalta Agreements, and, again, severe charges which even included treason subsequently came out. Mistakes there were at Yalta, but that episode must be examined in the context of the time, when American leaders were acting upon the assumption (false, it turned out to be) that the United States and the Soviet Union could and would work together for that just and lasting peace which had eluded the world following the Peace of Paris in 1919. We should be cautious in attributing to that Conference all the disasters consequent to the Yalta meeting, especially in Poland and in the Far

East, for conditions — military and geographic — may have conduced to the identical and unfortunate results.

Further ammunition has been furnished the "new revisionist" viewpoint in the disastrous fate of Nationalist China in the postwar years, while Korea furnishes an even more recent episode. And yet — unlike their predecessors in "revisionism" of the 1920's and 1930's who carried the day, and in the face of bitter postwar disappointments — the American public apparently has not been much interested in the sensational and bitter analysis of the latter-day "revisionists." The fact is that the onset of even more urgent problems since V-J Day has tended to deflect the wider public from paying much attention to the blunders and alleged crimes of years ago. Partisanship, too, was never far absent from the scene — as dislike of the "New Deal" domestic policies colored attitudes of the critics, many of whom were very far to the right in their views.

Nor was the official side of the Roosevelt prewar and wartime diplomacy neglected. The monumental volumes of Professors William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason afford a basis of comparison and contrast in reviewing the period from 1937 to 1941. American liberals, so bitterly disillusioned with the Wilson program and who warmly supported the "revisionists" in the twenties and thirties, had no truck with the "new revisionists" in the post-World War II era.

Unquestionably, "revisionist" history has value in bringing out the mistakes of the past, and it will contribute to a more correct and balanced interpretation than we might otherwise have. Its chief flaw is its emotion-charged ferocity, which the wary reader should recognize and discount. It would be well for the reader of such literature first to identify the general approach of authors to determine which camp they may be in. Finally, readers seeking truth of these unfortunate years should as far as they can divest themselves of passion and prejudice, difficult though that may be.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Professor Ollinger Crenshaw

Professor Crenshaw received his A.B. and A.M. degrees from Washington and Lee University, and his Ph.D. degree from Johns Hopkins University.

He was an instructor in history at Washington and Lee University from 1926 to 1929, Assistant Professor of History from 1930 to 1941, and Associate Professor of History from 1941 to 1947. He was on leave of absence from there from 1945 to 1947, during which time he was engaged in research. Upon his return to Washington and Lee University, he became Professor of History, which position he presently holds.

Professor Crenshaw was an instructor in government at the College of William and Mary during the summers of 1929 and 1930, and a lecturer in history at the University of Wisconsin in the summer of 1948. He also served in the position of Visiting Professor of History at West Virginia University in the summer of 1950 and at Johns Hopkins University during the summer of 1952.

He occupied the Ernest J. King Chair of Maritime History at the Naval War College during Academic Year 1956-1957.

Professor Crenshaw is the author of *The Slave States in the Presidential Election of* 1860, and has contributed articles and reviews to various historical journals.