

**Paper 2: American Isolationism During World War II**

Between 1929 to 1941, America struggled through the Great Depression, foreign affairs took a backseat to economic survival. America imposed high tariffs on imported goods in order to encourage manufacturers to produce more and help the economy. This further reduced Americas relations with other nations.

On September 18, 1931, Japan blew up one of their own railways and framed anti-Japanese Chinese dissidents as a basis for invading China. Japan began a full scale invasion of China on July 7, 1937 and routed the Chinese National Revolutionary Army. Chinese leaders appealed to the League of Nations for assistance against Japan. But, while the United States disapproved of Japanese aggression, they offered no support to China. While some Americans wished to help China, Japan's more technologically advanced and larger military, coupled with America still dealing with an economic crisis prevented any aid from the United States.

Charles A. Lindbergh was the first person to complete a solo, non-stop, trans-Atlantic flight, and used his fame to promote isolationism as a spokesperson for the America First Committee. In Lindbergh's "America First" speech, he uses the policies of Washington and the Monroe Doctrine as past examples of isolationism that have guided the United States to be the best nation in the world, saying "It is a policy that led this nation to success during the most trying years of our history, and it is a policy that will lead us to success again."

Lindbergh believes that the focus of the United States should be inward, to build up the nations defenses and concentrate military power around the United States. The main argument proposed is that the United States is very distant from these nations taking part in the war, this makes it difficult for America to send supplies and troops to aid other countries. Whatever difficulties we face with sending aid, the Nazi's will face if attempting to attack the United States, such as transporting millions of troops,

ammunition and military vehicles and landing on foreign, hostile territory. The ideas presented in this document resonated with many Americans who had suffered through the Great Depression and believed that getting caught in global war would ruin our already fragile economy.

The Atlantic Charter outlined the idealized vision for political and economic order of the postwar world. The document outlined the principles that the United States and the United Kingdom hoped would be the future for the world after the war. Signed by Roosevelt and Churchill on August 14, 1941, this document was a major shift in the ideology of the United States.

The first two points of the Atlantic Charter cement that neither the United States or the United Kingdom are participating with the anticipation of increasing their territories or receiving compensation. The fourth and fifth points argue that no nation should be denied access to the world's raw materials and that every nation should strive to advance its economy. The sixth, seventh and eighth points can be summarized as every nation should feel safe within their own boundaries, be able to travel the seas without hinderance, and abandon the use of force against other nations.

The most important point in the Atlantic Charter in relation to ideas of isolationism is the third point. The third point states that "all people should be able to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them." With the signing of this document Roosevelt has dedicated the United States to seeking out these issues and correcting them, moving America from an isolationist country to a interventionist country.

Comparing these two sources shows Americas conflicting beliefs about entering the war. On one hand, many Americans saw entering the war as a waste of manpower and resources that could be used in the defense of the nation, and on the other hand many believed that we should intervene in the atrocities that were being committed at the hands of the Nazis. The America First Committee believed that the problems of other nations were not our problems and quoted the Monroe Doctrine and George Washington

to appeal to traditionalists. Lindbergh uses the geographical isolation of America in his arguments and says the problems that we face with transportation will be put on the Nazis if we are defending. With the advancements of naval and air transportation, even the geographical isolation would not be an issue for much longer.

The Atlantic Charter advocates for interventionism, showing that it is our duty to ensure that no nation is threatening others, and that everyone has the right to choose the government they live in. Even though there was a lot of pressure from isolationists, Roosevelt continued to assist nations targeted by the Axis in non-military ways. The Atlantic Charter only outlined the ideals that America and Britain hoped to instill in the world after the war, but it had no impact in America joining the war or reducing isolationism in America.

Before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, roughly 80% of Americans did not want to get involved in World War II, after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor Americans wanted retribution and called for war. Any idea of staying out of the war was eradicated after the Japanese surprise attack. The America First Committee disbanded two days after the declaration of war.

Even though America was practically forced into the war, we did not enter because of the Atlantic Charter or any other prevailing sense of belief, but because Japan believed that we would enter the war eventually. The Japanese hoped to cripple the United States naval power for years by striking first.

America bolstered its allies with supplies and the superior production power of the United States eventually won the war. After the victory in Europe, America redirected their attention to the Pacific War.

World War II is the reason that America ended its period of isolationism and transitioned into interventionism. With the end of the War, the Atlantic Charter could begin to come to fruition with the returning of Nazi holdings to their rightful owners and the signing of disarmament treaties.