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In Search of Peace

As the gray light of dawn was breaking over Washington, D.C., windows of government buildings were ablaze with light. Automobiles jammed the streets. At the Capitol, workmen, their breath visible in the frosty morning air, drove wooden stakes into the ground around the House of Representatives' wing. Others followed, stringing wire cable to hold back the crowds expected later in the day. By midmorning, policemen and marines, with fixed bayonets, swarmed Capitol Hill.

Slightly over a mile away, at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, anxious crowds pressed against the iron fence of the mansion, while dozens of police patrolled the grounds. At 11:30 A.M., two open automobiles filled with Secret Service men moved into the driveway of the White House, rolling to a stop under the portico. Riot guns hung menacingly from the sides of the automobiles.

At 12:00 P.M. sharp, the big glass doors of the building swung open. Into the chilly midday air walked President Franklin D. Roosevelt, supported by his son James, who was wearing the uniform of a marine officer. Grim-faced and silent, the president

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slowly descended the steps and entered a limousine bearing the White House insignia. Other automobiles quickly filled with aides, officials, and members of the chief executive's family. A moment later, the cars were moving down the driveway, through the East Gate, turning right on Pennsylvania Avenue. Quiet crowds lined the streets. Skies were leaden, the temperature in the upper forties. A few brown leaves still clung to the city's larger trees.

Minutes later, the presidential caravan entered the Capitol plaza and rolled to a stop near a special entrance. Onlookers broke into a cry. His mouth tightly drawn, the president ignored the cheering, slowly lifted himself from the limousine, and went into the office of House speaker Sam Rayburn (Dem.-TX).

Members took their seats in the House chamber. Meanwhile Senators strode two-by-two down a long corridor and through the rotunda to the House side. A moment later the black-robed justices of the Supreme Court, led by Harlan Fiske Stone, entered the chamber and marched down the center aisle. At 12:24, the vice president rapped his gavel, and everyone stood up. Down the aisle filed the president's cabinet, led by the white-haired secretary of state, Cordell Hull. Then, five minutes later, Rayburn rapped for silence, announcing: "The President of the United States." Automatically, the members of Congress, guests at the rear of the chamber, officials, diplomats, and a handful of servicemen and ordinary citizens rose to their feet. For an instant, there was silence, then applause. The clapping increased but ended abruptly when Rayburn pounded the gavel. Still supported by James Roosevelt, the president appeared, slowly making his way up a ramp to the rostrum. More applause, then cheering, and for the next two or three minutes Roosevelt received the most tumultuous ovation of his presidency. Powerful lights enveloped the president in a blazing glow, movie cameras whirred, a dozen microphones made a jagged pattern across the rostrum.

After the House chaplain offered a brief prayer, the president, dressed in formal morning attire, stood alone. The large clock at his back showed 12:34. At that moment, a hush fell over the Republic.

Figure 1.1 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the declaration of war on Japan, December 1941. Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division LC-USZ62-15185.

Millions of Americans turned toward radios to receive their president's words. Roosevelt opened a black loose-leaf notebook, and in restrained, staccato tones began: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the empire of Japan."

Several of those in the House chamber could remember a similar day just twenty-four years before, when President Woodrow Wilson had made an identical trip to the Capitol. He asked Congress to recognize that a state of war existed between the United States and Germany. The parallel between April 1917 and December 1941 made the drama of FDR's message curiously poignant.

The Roots of Anti-Interventionism

When, in November 1918, peace had finally settled over the Western Front in France, President Wilson made his plans to attend the peace conference in Paris. Over the past year and a half, he had led what he saw as a crusade for democracy; now he would direct the world to a settlement resting on justice and supported by a League of Nations. That December, as the steamer *George Washington* slipped out of New York Harbor, the president jauntily paced the deck, smiling, full of confidence. He believed he had the support of war-weary people the world over. When he landed in France a week later, he was met with unparalleled enthusiasm. A Paris newspaper reported that "never has a king, never has an emperor received such a welcome."

Then something went wrong. The U.S. Senate rejected the peace drafted at Paris. It refused to join the League of Nations, and by 1923 Wilson's successor in the White House, Warren Gamaliel Harding, could announce that the matter was "as dead as slavery." Americans were determined to keep their distance—to insulate themselves from Europe's troubles. Over the next decade and a half, this sentiment increased. By the mid-1930s, Congress was writing this attitude into law.

This is not to say, however, that Americans closed their eyes entirely to the rest of the world. They took considerable interest in events elsewhere, underwriting Europe's postwar recovery while continually expanding their own foreign trade. Thus, although commonly used—and even accepted—the term "isolationist" does not accurately describe U.S. foreign policy between World Wars I and II.

When historians use the term "isolationism," they are really referring to opposition to intervention in wars overseas, particularly in Europe, and to entering into such "entangling alliances" as collective security agreements or international organizations such as the League of Nations. Because "isolationist" connotes a host of vices—indifference, reckless naiveté, appeasement of dictators—one finds "anti-interventionism" a far more accurate term. People harboring this sentiment often referred to themselves as "nationalists" or "neutralists."

Anti-interventionism was an old habit for Americans, one that had several roots. One source was geography. From its birth, the United States had enjoyed security to a degree unparalleled in the history of modern nations. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans served as giant barriers against overseas aggression, while the nation's neighbors in the Western Hemisphere were too weak to threaten any attack.

Another source lay in continental expansion. The North American continent, awaiting ax and plow, offered such splendid rewards that Americans inevitably turned their energy to developing their own empire. Once new markets were secured, they believed, the nation's prosperity would be guaranteed.

Then there was a combination of precedent and patriotism. Americans remembered the counsel of their first president. In his famous Farewell Address of September 1796, George Washington had warned of "the insidious wiles of foreign influence," urged "as little political connection as possible" with foreign countries, and celebrated "our detached and distant situation." Thomas Jefferson, who used the very term "entangling alliances," shared these sentiments. More important, so did most Americans. They contrasted a corrupt, quarrelsome, autocratic Old World—the antithesis of a truly democratic nation—with a New World that they perceived as an Edenic utopia, or in the words of Thomas Paine, "an asylum for mankind." To use the metaphor of Abraham Lincoln, the United States was "the world's last best hope," the final outpost against feudal despotism or revolutionary anarchy. Down to the closing years of the nineteenth century, no responsible politician dared to challenge Washington's position. Isolation became identified with Americanism.

To those fearful of foreign involvement, by the 1920s, the Old World embodied two dangers in particular: British imperialism and Russian Bolshevism. The United States, anti-interventionists maintained, could not afford to be the unwitting agent of either colonial autocracy or revolutionary terror.

From 1776, many Americans had regarded Britain in particular with the greatest of suspicion. Not all were as vocal as the nineteenth-century diplomat Townsend Harris, whose parents

had supposedly raised him to offer prayers, fear God, and hate the British, but most of them saw "Perfidious Albion" as ever seeking to foster its domestic plutocracy and archaic empire. So long as Britain maintained dominion over much of the globe, it would be oppressing billions of subjects and attempting to hoard much of the world's wealth. All too often, many claimed, the United States had served as its unthinking instrument, the primary example being the rescue of Britain during WWI. Just before World War II broke out in Europe, the pundit H. L. Mencken accused the United States of serving as "the client and goon" of its traditional enemy, in fact acting "precisely like an English colony." Even the urbane news analyst Quincy Howe wrote a book in 1938 entitled *England Expects Every American to Do His Duty*.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics embodied a newer threat but one no less pernicious. To more conservative Americans, the Soviet Union stood for the persecution of religion, failure to pay the debts incurred by the Tsarist regime, and the liquidation of the entire Kulak class of relatively affluent farmers. True, for many liberals, not until the middle of the 1930s did Russia become, in the words of a British author and politician, "the God that failed." Even reformers, however, became deeply disillusioned by the actions of the Soviet government: the artificially created famines in the Ukraine, extermination of the top army command, obviously trumped-up accusations of Stalin's purge trials, and establishment and administration of labor camps that later became known as the Gulag.

It is hardly surprising, then, that anti-interventionism was particularly strong among certain ethnic groups, particularly Americans of German, Irish, and Italian origin. In the 1920s, in the wake of WWI, German Americans were embittered over the harshness of the Versailles *Diktat*, Irish Americans furious that their beloved *Eire* had not been granted full independence, and Italian Americans disappointed by the meager gains secured by *Italia* at Paris. Urged on by the Republican party, these ethnic groups reacted against the Democrats—the party of Woodrow Wilson, who appeared committed to a League of Nations and a

decidedly "internationalist" approach to world affairs. When war again threatened in the late 1930s, many among these groups, though seldom sympathizing with the Axis, feared that involvement would make the United States a full-scale partner of Great Britain. As there was never any chance of an American alliance with Germany and Italy, the only alternative was aloofness.

Yet even as early as the end of the nineteenth century, the long tradition of American anti-interventionism seemingly had started to weaken. As a result of the Spanish-American War, the United States began to acquire an overseas empire, one that included the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Within two decades, President Wilson sent American youths to France (in 1917–18) and, when the war ended, sought to take the United States into the League of Nations. The departure from old lines of thought, however, had been more superficial than real. In the next two decades, it was easy for the anti-interventionist habit to reassert itself. In 1935, Representative Maury Maverick (Dem-TX) was undoubtedly expressing a popular sentiment when he announced: "In our Revolution against the British, Lafayette came over here, and Baron von Steuben, also a foreigner, came to train our Revolutionary troops, and we were glad to have them; but we do not like foreigners any more."

The Disillusionment of the 1920s

Americans, disillusioned by the results of the conflict of 1914–18, turned inward. In the 1920s, as historian William E. Leuchtenburg notes, the Great War (as people continued to call it) became "a dirty, unheroic war which few men remembered with any emotion save distaste."

Why had this happened?

America's leaders, historians agree, had oversold the World War. Instead of presenting U.S. participation as a matter of national interest, distasteful but necessary, they had turned it into a crusade for democracy. At the Paris peace conference and after, however, the public saw as much selfish nationalism in the world

as ever, and, if anything, less democracy. Many felt disgusted for having been so foolish as to become party to what they saw fundamentally as a European affair, that is, a war fought over European problems for European ends. No American interest had ever been at stake. Senator Homer T. Bone (Dem.-WA) said in 1935 that "the Great War was utter social insanity, and was a crazy war, and we had no business in it at all." As late as January 1937, 70 percent of those polled responded that entry in the conflict had been a mistake.

Particularly disillusioning was an apparently vindictive settlement that the victors had imposed at Paris in 1919. Many Americans had thrilled to President Wilson's idea of a "peace without victory." They had hailed his Fourteen Points, the last item of which endorsed "a general association of nations" that would afford "mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike." In the highly charged atmosphere at the talks in Paris, however, Wilson had ended up endorsing a League of Nations Covenant that possibly committed the United States to use its armed forces to halt international aggression. Now many Americans felt hoodwinked and support for the League dwindled. Indeed, because of this undertaking, the president returned home to find the Senate insisting on such strong reservations to the Covenant that he refused to accept them. Stalemate would mark the rest of his presidency.

Henceforth, it was commonly held, the United States must avoid collective security. The *New Republic*, a liberal weekly, observed that Americans had hoped that "they would participate in a Europe so chastened by the war that the interests of a lasting peace would take precedence over every other national advantage. The European governments have chosen differently. Well and good. That must be their affair. It certainly should not be America's affair in the sense that American lives and American interests are entangled in it."

A new school of thought that came to be called "revisionism" only strengthened such suspicions. As historians use the term, revisionism means a challenge to a conventional or generally

accepted version of the past. Revisionism was and always was and will be critical of what happened, how it happened, and why it happened. New evidence, overt political ambition, unexpected turns of history, contemporary opposition to public policy all have been, and will continue to be, reasons for "revising" interpretations of past events.

From the summer of 1914, when hostilities broke out, most Americans had accepted the view that the Germans in particular were the aggressors in World War I. They had fired the first shots on the Western Front, raped neutral Belgium, and plunged into France. When, in 1917, the United States entered the war, its leaders stressed that the conflict had been the result of the *Kaiserreich*'s thrust for world domination. As long as Germany remained unbeaten, the former but still influential president Theodore Roosevelt argued that the Western Hemisphere stood "in cowering dread" of an assault.

Once the combat had ended, however, some authors greatly played down German responsibility. In the *American Historical Review* of 1920–21, Sidney Bradshaw Fay denied that Germany was uniquely, or even primarily, culpable. Critic Albert Jay Nock's pamphlet "The Myth of a Guilty Nation" (1922) absolved Germany and deplored American support of the Allies. Sociologist-historian Harry Elmer Barnes, the author of *The Genesis of the World War* (1926), assigned responsibility for the war "in about this order: Austria, Russia, Serbia, France, Germany, and England." Fay's *The Origins of the World War* (1928) claimed that "Germany did not plot a European War, did not want one, and made genuine, though too belated efforts to avert one."

Why then, many such writers asked, had Americans failed to grasp the "truth" about the war and permitted their nation to enter the conflict? In *Why We Fought* (1929), journalist C. Hartley Grattan saw Allied propaganda playing a leading role, a view reinforced when some British officials admitted that the Allies had deliberately lied to the American public. Historian Charles Callan Tansill's *America Goes to War* (1938) focused on British influence, implying that they might well have deliberately sacrificed the *Lusitania* to make Americans more belligerent.

Others stressed the role of unscrupulous Wall Street bankers. In *Shall It Be Again?* (1922), Socialist writer John Kenneth Turner wrote bluntly, "government service to Wall Street's foreign business carried America into the war against Germany." It was common knowledge that American financiers had arranged huge loans to the Allied governments. When it appeared that the Allies might not win, the bankers—so the argument went—feared for their money and hence pressed Washington to enter the war. Although proponents of this "devil theory" offered no proof, the notion of Wall Street responsibility made sense to millions of Americans. It certainly strengthened the view that entry into Europe's bloodbath had been a mistake, heightening the nation's determination to avoid any new European conflict.

Still other explanations were more sophisticated, proponents claiming that the entire American economy, not just the banking community, had become increasingly dependent upon Allied war orders. Walter Millis, staff writer for the *New York Herald Tribune*, claimed in *Road to War—America: 1914–1917* (1935) that "if we now permitted the Central Powers to destroy our trade with the Allies, we should be risking a real and final economic collapse. No political administration could face that prospect." Charles A. Beard, quite possibly the most prominent historian in the United States, felt similarly. In *The Devil Theory of War* (1936), he wrote, "As the days and weeks passed the fate of American bankers, manufacturers, farmers, merchants, workers, and white-collar servants became more deeply entangled in the fate of the Allies on the battlefield—in the war."

The controversy over war debts simply added to postwar disillusion. Late in 1914, when opposing armies struggled less than sixty miles from Paris, the Allies looked across the Atlantic for financial support. Borrowing enormous sums, they worked through such banking houses as J. P. Morgan & Company. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the government opened its checkbook to the Allies. After victory, the Allies managed to pay interest to the private financiers and bondholders, but they appealed for cancellation of debts owed the U.S.

government, that is the American people. Such talk irked the public, who by then had determined that the war had been fundamentally a European venture that had only benefited foreigners. Indeed the Allies, it was felt, should be grateful for U.S. intervention and pay their debts to the last penny. Most Americans agreed with President Calvin Coolidge, who allegedly said: "They hired the money, didn't they?"

Europeans, of course, saw matters differently. So much was Germany's defeat in the American interest, they argued, that until April 1917 they had been fighting America's battles for it. They also saw that the war had crushed their own economies while bringing prosperity to the New World. Little wonder the initials "U.S." now stood for "Uncle Shylock," who was demanding his pound of flesh from people who had shed blood in the common cause. European anger had scant effect upon the Americans; they continued to insist that the Allies honor all obligations. When the Allies defaulted in 1934 because of economic hardship, Americans viewed their going into arrears as additional evidence of Europe's ineradicable corruption.

Disillusion over the war reached its climax during the Great Depression of the 1930s, an event triggered in autumn 1929 by the New York stock market collapse. To many, including some economists, the war had planted the seeds of stagnation. Deflation, they reasoned, must follow inflation and bust inevitably follows boom. During the war, a good number of Americans had enjoyed unprecedented prosperity; in 1929, the reckoning was at hand. The future held a warning: to avoid another bust, avoid another war.

In 1940, a major Protestant weekly, the *Christian Century*, summarized the entire saga in six sentences:

> First, a tremendous factory expansion to produce for a foreign war. Second, a rush of workers for the high pay which such emergency work will offer. Third, big profits for the shareholders in the "lucky" corporations. Fourth, the necessity to keep the expanded plant going if there is not to be an industrial crash. Fifth, peace—and no more use for the expanded plant. Sixth, the crash.

There was also the legacy of the recent war, including the continued demand for veterans' bonuses. Privates risking their lives in France had received $1.25 a day, while civilians in the factories and shipyards at home had earned ten times as much. There was logic in the argument that the country owed veterans some "adjusted compensation," although relatively few Americans favored being taxed to supply such bonuses. And where would this bonus business end? Historians could remind the country that the amount of money paid to Civil War veterans over the years since Appomattox had exceeded the cost of the conflict in 1861–65. There were, of course, the permanent victims of the 1917–18 war. Men who had suffered from the lingering effects of shrapnel wounds and poison gas needed sustained care. That required a great deal of money and these WWI casualties were living reminders of the realities of modern warfare.

The politics of domestic reform provided still another incentive for standing apart, particularly in the late 1930s. During the years 1901–17, the so-called Progressive era, reform in America had moved from triumph to triumph, reaching a climax in President Wilson's domestic program of 1916. As the United States drew closer to war in 1915–17, most liberals urged that the nation stay out of Europe's conflict lest involvement stifle any further progressive legislation. When the country entered the war in 1917, their fears came true: the reform program nearly ended; business leaders were now more entrenched in power than ever.

The worst was yet to come, for in the postwar decade, progressives labored in a political wilderness. Not surprisingly, they felt even greater hostility toward war, having just seen it spawn the "do-nothing" era of President Warren G. Harding and the rise of a crude middle-class business culture, epitomized by the protagonist of Sinclair Lewis's satirical novel *Babbitt*. Even when the New Deal was launched, some reformers feared that war might nullify liberalism's newly secured gains.

Paradoxically, many political conservatives were anti-interventionist, for they feared that overseas entanglement imperiled the capitalist system. Full-scale mobilization, they thought, must lead to inflation, compulsory unionization, and price and wage

controls. Senator Robert A. Taft (Rep-OH) claimed in 1939, "The additional powers sought by the President in case of war, the nationalization of all industry and all capital and all labor, already proposed in bills before Congress, would create a socialist dictatorship," one "impossible to dissolve when the war ended." Internationally famous aviator Charles A. Lindbergh was even more apprehensive, confiding to his diary in 1941, "Who knows what will happen here before we finish it [World War II]—race riots, revolution, destruction."

One thing was certain. Americans of all political persuasions could agree with Kansas editor William Allen White, who found war "the Devil's answer to human progress."

A Rising Peace Sentiment

Certainly war itself had lost its glamor. Reflecting on war, people were no longer inclined to envision cavalry charges with banners flying and sabers flashing. They saw mud, barbed wire, fear, desolation, death. Reinforcing the new image were such books as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), a bitter novel adapted into a popular movie (1930) that showed the disillusionment and death of Paul Bäumer, a German front-line soldier. Bäumer's American counterpart was Lieutenant Frederic Henry, the protagonist of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1926). After the death of his fiancée, Henry commented on war in general:

> You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you.

In the two decades after the armistice, some Americans concluded that most wars in history had been morally wrong. Others wrestled with the morality of killing enemies, even in a "just" war. In 1934, a young man wrote North Dakota's Senator Gerald P. Nye (Rep-ND): " As a potential soldier, I object to the prospect

of becoming cannon fodder in the 'next war'; as a future taxpayer, I object to enriching arms manufacturers by impoverishing fellow Americans; and, most important, as a Christian, I object to preparing to run a bayonet through my brother from another country."

Hence any discussion of the interwar quest for peace must include the peace movement. A variety of organizations strove mightily to sustain the nation's resolve to avoid war. Some were religious groups that saw war as violating scriptural injunction; most had the sole purpose of crusading against what they saw as organized slaughter. The American peace movement had originated in the early years of the nineteenth century, in the wake of Europe's Napoleonic wars. After WWI, however, the cause became a veritable crusade, and in the two decades that followed, it reached its pinnacle of influence.

Between the wars, the peace movement had two wings, which one might label conservative and militant. Believing that peace required international cooperation, the conservative wing—the World Peace Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the League of Nations Association, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace—adhered to collective security. More prominent were such activist groups as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WIL) and the National Council for Prevention of War (NCPW). One small group, the War Resisters League, was an outright pacifist body, pledging itself to "not to support any kind of war."

Like the conservatives, these militant groups at first favored international cooperation. In the 1930s, however, some found the League of Nations incapable of organizing united efforts against aggression. Others saw the League as a new alliance established to enforce the status quo. Still others were fearful of anything smacking of an international police force. Harboring a rampant antimilitarism, they were dedicated to ridding the world of the "war habit." Time, they believed, was short, for at any moment the "militarists" might seize the initiative and plunge the world back into conflict. This sense of urgency gave the radicals a zeal unmatched in conservative circles.

These militant groups, one should add, were in no sense mass organizations; membership was small, funds severely limited. At their peak, they had fewer than a hundred full-time workers each, usually located in Washington and New York. However, because of skillful organization, national disillusion over the Great War, and their own frenetic energy, during the mid-1930s, they profoundly influenced American opinion, reaching out to between 45 and 60 million Americans.

Occasionally a comic note crept into the peace movement. In March 1936, eight Princeton undergraduates organized the Veterans of Future Wars, which soon spread to fifty institutions. Demanding an immediate bonus of $1,000 for every man between the ages of eighteen and thirty-six, they claimed that many in that age group would not survive the next war and therefore deserved their bonuses immediately. The "veterans" paraded with overseas caps worn at right angles to the usual position. Members greeted each other with a fascist-like salute, right arm extended but with palm upturned as though seeking a handout. For college women, the Veterans set up the Future Gold Star Mothers, which demanded that the government award loved-ones pensions for trips to Europe, so that they could visit the grave sites of their future sons and husbands. Future chaplains, propagandists, profiteers, unknown soldiers, munitions makers, and venereal doctors followed. In a parade near Columbia University, a drum major twirled a crutch, leading 150 girls dressed as nurses or war widows who carried "war orphan" dolls. They were followed by 200 young men displaying such signs as "You too can learn to play a machine gun."

Skillful publicity inadvertently led to a genuinely intercollegiate body that, at the height of its strength, encompassed over 500 chapters and up to 60,000 members. What began as a spoof on veterans' demands for an immediate payment ended as biting satire. The Veterans of Future Wars lasted only a few months, crippled by the lack of a general program, the distraction of forthcoming national elections, and congressional adoption of the bonus bill.

Apart from denouncing war and teaching "peace habits," what, then, were the objects of the peace movement between the wars?

Disarmament was one cause dear to all peace groups, conservative and militant, and both wings supported the disarmament conferences of the 1920s and early 1930s. In their view, bulging arsenals were, like tinderboxes, ignited by the slightest spark—such as the assassination of a European archduke. Recalling Europe's arms stockpiles in the years before 1914, peace groups agreed with Sir Edward Grey, Britain's first wartime foreign minister, who had claimed that "the enormous growth of armaments in Europe … made war inevitable."

Peace groups also fostered a movement centering on nothing less than the "outlawry of war." Put forth early in the 1920s, the idea of outlawing war did not catch on until 1927, when Charles A. Lindbergh's solo flight over the Atlantic from New York to Paris brought an outpouring of Franco-American friendship. To capitalize on these sentiments, French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand proposed a pact between the United States and France that would bind the two countries never to fight each other. One of Europe's most clever diplomats, Briand enlisted the help of the American peace movement, which began to press President Coolidge to sign the accord.

The State Department suspected that Briand had hidden motives, that in fact he sought a virtual alliance with the United States, one that would protect France from a possible resurgence of German power. Not surprisingly, American Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg was furious at his nation's professional peace workers ("a set of God-damned fools"), but he came forth with a shrewd counterproposal. If a bilateral treaty was such a good idea, why not craft a multilateral treaty pledging all nations to renounce war? Known as a man of peace—he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926—Briand hardly could refuse the American suggestion. As for the peace movement, it mobilized American opinion behind a multilateral agreement.

In 1928, fifteen nations entered into the Kellogg-Briand Pact, also called the Pact of Paris, renouncing war "as an instrument of national policy." Of the great powers, which included such later

aggressors as Germany, Italy, and Japan, only the Soviet Union failed to sign. Other nations soon clamored to affix their signature. Peace groups hailed the treaty as the greatest step toward peace in human history. More cynical people called it "solemn ballyhoo," "an international kiss."

By the mid-1930s, the peace movement had reached its peak of influence. Its solution for keeping America out of war was total military and political isolation. If war enveloped other parts of the world, the flames must not scorch America. Let the rest of the world destroy itself; America must live. In 1935, historian Beard captured this sentiment: "We tried once to right European wrongs, to make the world safe for democracy. Even in the rosiest view the experiment was not a great success.... [Isolation] may be no better.... But we nearly burnt our house down with one experiment; so it seems not wholly irrational to try another line." Ignoring the troubles of the rest of the world was not enough; the United States should complete its insulation by cutting economic ties with warring nations as well. This idea attracted wide support and, as Chapter 3 will show, resulted in a major inquiry of what would later be called the military-industrial complex and in a series of congressional "neutrality" acts.

So it was, in the decades between the two world wars, that Americans determined to isolate themselves from "foreign" embroilment. The word "peace" took on a transcendent quality, striking a chord whenever it found its way into a sermon, speech, or prayer. When President Harding voiced moving sentiments about concord, he was not indulging in "bloviation," as he was wont to call some of his lesser oratory; Harding and others meant what they said.

By 1938, however, due to a series of crises overseas, pacifist sentiment was waning. In September 1939, after the outbreak of war in Europe, peace groups were facing some gnawing questions. Could the United States remain faithful to its heritage as a beacon of democracy and at the same time stand by while this very system perished in Europe? Was it really true that a general war in Europe or Asia need not touch American interests? The more militant bodies, such as the WIL and the NCPW, still pushed

for American isolation, while more conservative peace groups endorse military aid to Britain. Debate became increasingly sharp, then ended abruptly, due to an event that took place 2,500 miles from the continental United States on the dawn of December 7, 1941. Explaining this change in sentiment and, more important, the events that triggered it, is the focus of this book.