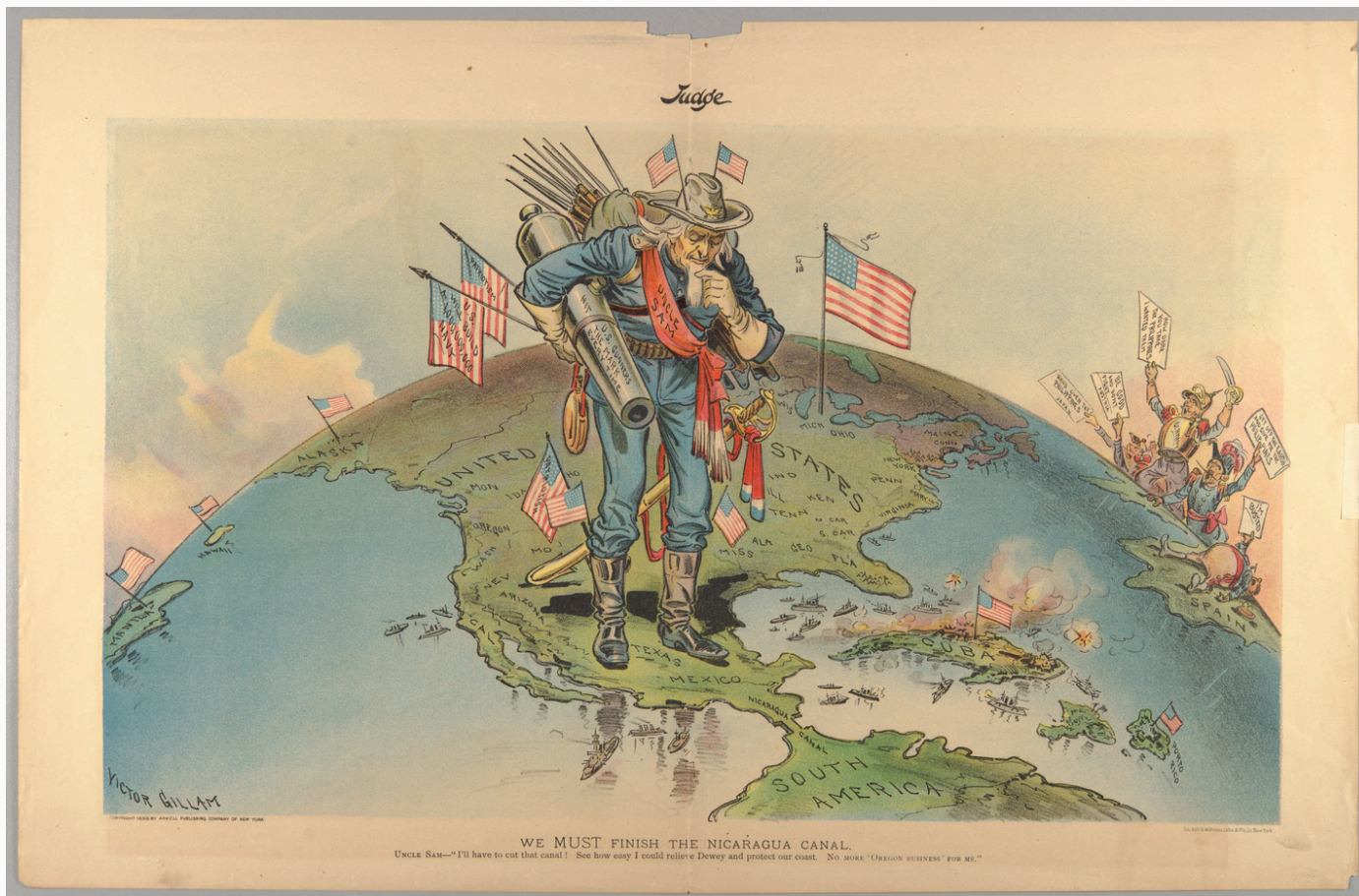


ISOLATIONISM VS INTERNATIONALISM

Did Staying Out or Stepping In Make Americans Safer?



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Did Staying Out or Stepping In Make Americans Safer?

so	<u>Staying Out</u>	<u>Stepping In</u>	si
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Overseas Expansion Overstretched Domestic Capacity and Increased Security Risk

1898 - 1914

By the 1890s, the United States faced no immediate foreign military threat, but it did face serious internal strain. Rapid industrial growth intensified social divisions that demanded sustained attention at home. Expansion after 1898 increasing demands on a state already under pressure domestically. American safety depended on stability at home.



Document 1: Carl Schurz Counters Expansion as a Security Policy (1899). Schurz, a leading Anti-Imperialist League Figure, had served as a Union general, US senator, and cabinet member.

“We are told that we must conquer foreign territory in order to secure new markets for our trade and new outlets for our industries. But conquest does not create markets; it merely imposes government by force. Such a policy will not make us safer, but will compel us to maintain armies and fleets in distant regions, expose us to constant international friction, and involve us in quarrels not our own. Thus we should exchange a position of safety for one of permanent danger, and sacrifice the strength of our Republic at home for precarious advantages abroad.”

ACTIVITY

Click to enlarge

How do Document 1 and Document 2 differ in the main danger they suggest overseas expansion posed to the US?

How could each of these documents be used as evidence to suggest that foreign intervention could overshadow the individual rights of US citizens at home?

Document 2: ‘Civilisation Begins at Home’, taken from Literary Digest.



Click to enlarge

Discuss:

Should the US intervene in regions of the world during periods of instability to keep Americans safer? Refer to historical and contemporary examples.

Distance No Longer Protected the US, Enforcing a Security Perimeter Reduced Rival Encroachment

1898-1914

By the early twentieth century, global competition was intensifying. Distance alone no longer guaranteed American safety. Instability in South America increased vulnerability to European influence, threatening U.S. interests as leaders increasingly interpreted the Monroe Doctrine as requiring enforcement. Controlling the Philippines strengthened U.S. Pacific power and prevented rival powers dominating.



Document 3: Senator Albert J. Beveridge on US Policy in the Philippines (1900). Beveridge framed expansion as both a moral duty and a security necessity, revealing how racial hierarchy and safety arguments were often intertwined.

“The Philippines are ours forever,... And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We do not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. And we will move forward to our work,...with gratitude for a task worthy of our strength, and thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world.”

ACTIVITY

In what ways do Document 3 and Document 4 differ in how they justify overseas expansion?

How can these documents be used together as evidence to corroborate the view that expansion not only made Americans safer by preventing future risks, but would also benefit those areas of the world controlled by the United States?

How could these documents be used to support the claim that US intervention in Latin America and East Asia for economic security made Americans safer?

Document 4: “What the United States has Fought For” John McCutcheon, Chicago Daily Tribune (1914).



Click to enlarge

War Multiplied Immediate and Measurable Dangers to Americans

1914-1918

Opponents of intervention argued that staying out of the war would have kept Americans safer than entering it. Joining the war would greatly increase danger by pulling the U.S. into a massive conflict, forcing millions of men into uniform. A draft was indeed introduced in 1917. Neutrality offered greater safety.



Document 5: George Washington, Farewell Address (1796)

“The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns.

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?”

Document 6: George W. Norris, in Senate debate opposing US entry into World War I on April 4th 1917. Norris was a leading congressional opponent of US entry into World War I, arguing that war was not necessary to preserve American safety and would bring greater danger and suffering.

“Before taking this momentous step, and while standing on the brink of this terrible vortex, we ought to pause and calmly and judiciously consider the terrible consequences of the step we are about to take... No close student of recent history will deny that both Great Britain and Germany have, on numerous occasions since the beginning of the war, flagrantly violated in the most serious manner the rights of neutral nations under existing international law... In carrying out these policies both Great Britain and Germany have sunk American ships and destroyed American lives without notice or provocation... We are about to put the dollar sign upon the American flag. The lives of American boys are to be sacrificed in order that other men may gather wealth... We have not exhausted the possibilities of peace. We have not yet reached the point where war is necessary to preserve the safety of the United States.”

ACTIVITY

In 1898 the Anti-Imperialist League reprinted Washington’s speech under the title “Save the Republic”. Explain why using Washington’s words would strengthen their cause?

How can these two documents be used together as evidence to corroborate that military intervention in other parts of the world did not make the United States safer?

Which of these documents would be the most persuasive in 1917 for Americans who were convinced they were safer with the US maintaining neutrality?

Neutrality Allowed Risks to Escalate by Leaving US Security Unshaped

1914-1918

Supporters of intervention argued that American safety depended on whether the nation could shape the conditions affecting its future rather than simply respond to them after the fact. Allowing foreign governments to ignore U.S. interests was seen as an invitation to further pressure. Entering the war would restore American security.



Document 7: Lansing's private memo reveals a strategic justification for war that differed from the public focus on American lives and shipping. Lansing was US Secretary of State.

"I felt strongly that to go to war solely because American ships had been sunk and Americans killed would cause debate, and that the sounder basis was the duty of this and every other democratic nation to suppress an autocratic government like the German because of its atrocious character and because it was a menace to the national safety of the country and of all other countries with liberal systems of government. Such an arraignment would appeal to every liberty-loving man the world over."

ACTIVITY

How would Lansing's point of view as the former secretary of state influence his memoirs?

What is the value of Zimmermann's telegram for historians studying whether foreign intervention made Americans safer?

How can these two documents be used together as evidence to corroborate that military intervention in other parts of the world made Americans safer?

Document 8: Zimmermann was the German Foreign Minister in 1917

Arthur Zimmermann Telegram to Heinrich von Eckardt

Sent: January 16, 1917

Made public in the U.S. : March 1, 1917.

"On the first of February we intend to begin unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement. You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States is certain, and suggest that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President of Mexico's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace."

International Involvement Transferred Instability to American Society

1918-1929

U.S. deaths in the war had displayed to many Americans the high cost of being involved in world events. At home immigrants and international trade threatened to destabilize society, resulting in immigration restrictions and increased tariffs. American safety came from focusing more on domestic issues and less on international problems.



Document 9: First Annual Message from President Coolidge to the US Congress (1923)

“Our country has one cardinal principle to maintain in its foreign policy. We attend to our own affairs, conserve our own strength, and protect the interests of our own citizens...

The present tariff law has accomplished its two main objects. It has secured an abundant revenue and been productive of an abounding prosperity...

America must be kept American. For this I purpose, it is necessary to continue a policy of restricted immigration...I am convinced that our present economic and social conditions warrant a limitation of those to be admitted... “

Document 10: “Interrupting the Ceremony”, Casey Orr, Chicago Tribune. The image shows the US, represented by Uncle Sam, about to marry “Foreign Entanglements”.

ACTIVITY

Identify two specific actions from the documents that would protect Americans.

Explain how each of these actions made Americans safer.

Identify one other document in this pack that could be used to corroborate either explanation. Explain how that document corroborates the explanation.



Collective Security Aimed to Remove the Causes of Future Wars

1918 - 1929

The First World War could be ‘the war to end all wars’ if the causes of future wars could be removed. President Wilson created the League of Nations where nations could act together to prevent war. Neglecting international events would result in Americans being less safe in the long-term.



Document 11: President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points (1918)

“We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which ... made the life of our own people impossible. What we demand in this war is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which is assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest...The program of the world’s peace, therefore, is our program, and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this:

... XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence.”

Document 12: The Gap in the Bridge,” Punch Magazine (1919). The image shows the US, represented by Uncle Sam, reluctant to complete the bridge



THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

ACTIVITY

What does the bridge represent in the cartoon?

Click to Enlarge

Describe how the historical context of these documents helped influence many to believe that an international association would benefit the U.S., the world, and make Americans safer.

Discuss:

How can International Organizations help prevent wars and decrease tensions between nations? Refer to historical and contemporary examples.

Foreign Entanglement Reduced Democratic Control Over War and Security

1929 - 1941

During the 1930s, conflicts abroad proliferated while the Great Depression weakened European economies and disrupted global trade, creating volatile conditions beyond American control. Becoming embroiled in such crises would reduce U.S. independence and weaken the nation's ability to protect its own security when attacked rather than strengthening it.

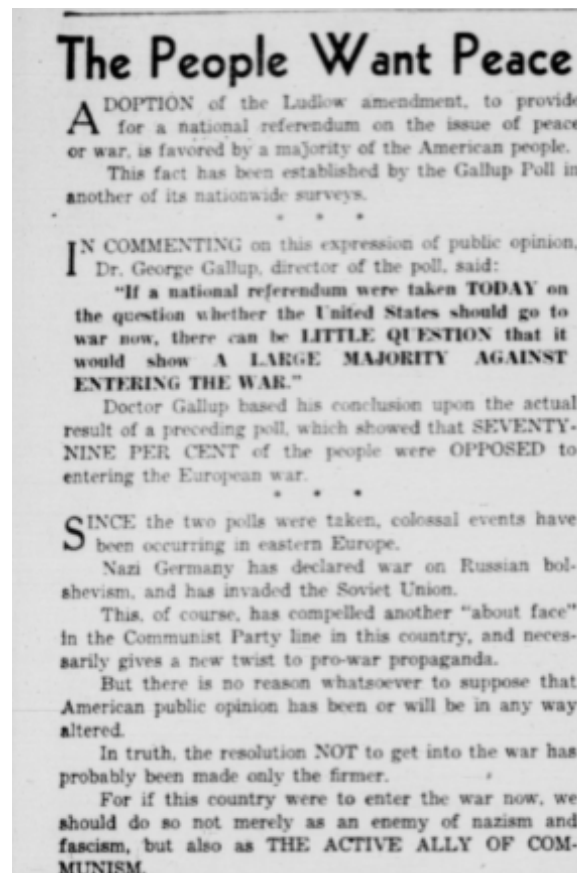


Document 13: Neutrality Act (1935)

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That upon the outbreak or during the progress of war between, or among, two or more foreign states, the President shall proclaim such fact, and it shall thereafter be unlawful to export arms, ammunition, or implements of war from any place in the United States, or possessions of the United States, to any port of such belligerent states, or to any neutral port for transshipment to, or for the use of, a belligerent country."

Document 14: Gallop Poll, Detroit Times, July 3, 1941



ACTIVITY

What is the main similarity in the argument about US safety presented in Document 13 and Document 14?

Which document is most convincing as evidence for the claim that staying out of war made Americans safer?

Opinion polls showing Americans opposed to entering war were often quoted by the "America First Committee". Keeping Americans safe through an "America First" policy has changed in meaning over time since the 1890s – explain those changes.

Click for Transcript

Delay Allowed Threats to Grow Closer to the American Homeland

1929 - 1941

As instability abroad grew through the 1930's the US amended the Neutrality Acts so that Britain could receive arms, helping Britain stay in the war. By U.S. entry, Americans were serving as volunteers and under the new peacetime draft. Intervention, proportionate to public mood was safer than prolonged hesitation.



Document 15: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address at the Annual Dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association (1941)

"...This decision [to pass the Lend-Lease Bill] is the end of ... compromise with tyranny and the forces of oppression. There is no longer the slightest question or doubt that the American people recognize the extreme seriousness of the present situation. That is why they have demanded, and got, a policy of unqualified, immediate, all-out aid for Britain, for Greece, for China, and for all the Governments in exile whose homelands are temporarily occupied by the aggressors.

...And so our country is going to be what our people have proclaimed it must be - the arsenal of democracy."

ACTIVITY

Click to enlarge

What could be inferred about the international situation from these two documents?

How can these documents be used together as evidence to corroborate the view that Americans would be kept safer by being involved in the war?

In what ways has US military aid to nations at war, in order to keep Americans safe, been a common theme in US history?

Document 16: "Man-on-the-Street," Bloomington, Indiana, December 10, 1941, 3 days after the attack on Pearl Harbour

Paul Martin (interviewer)
Paul Martin: "This is Wednesday, December 10 th , 1941. Last Sunday, December 7, the United States of America was attacked by armed forces of the Japanese Empire. The Radio Department of Indiana University, in cooperation with the Library of Congress of the United States has arranged to record some of the opinions of four people concerning the war at this point."

Ms Fargo: "We've been brought up for the past nineteen and twenty years to abhor war and to treat it as something that is not a part of our culture. And then in the past few years, I don't believe we are too surprised at the Japanese action, because we've seen what they've done in the past. And yet, I think if I were there, I'd probably would have done the same thing."

Mr. Russell: "Yes, the other idea, I think, has been instilled into the minds of the youth of this country ever since the World War that war is the greatest of all evils."

Merritt A. Calvert:
"Everyone in this locality and around the university with as many young people as we have, was first depressed and then disgusted and now it seems that we are ready to do anything that is necessary to stop this Japanese invasion."

Donald E. Bowin:
"We are faced with the matter of doing battle with the Axis powers and I believe that we should stick with the American traditional policy of fighting when we are attacked and fighting for American principles."

Click to enlarge

Permanent Mobilisation Weakened Domestic Security and Democracy

1941 - 1949

In World War II 400,000 Americans had been killed and tens of millions died worldwide. The greatest danger was not immediate invasion but the gradual erosion of domestic strength through permanent mobilization, military casualties, and expanded federal power. Preserving American lives by preventing another war was essential to long-term safety.



Document 17: "Today and Tomorrow," Walter Lippmann, Wilmington Morning Star (1947). Secretary of State George Marshall was sent on a diplomatic mission to China at the end of World War Two.

"Nevertheless, if we look at the two main theaters of American diplomatic interest --at China and in Europe--and if we fix our attention on Secretary Marshall's approach we can see a line of policy developing which is altogether different from the line of the Truman Doctrine.

... The Marshall line in China is not an application of the Truman Doctrine, but of an older American doctrine that we must not become entangled all over the world in disputes that we alone cannot settle."

Click to enlarge

Document 18: Speech on the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO), Senator Robert A. Taft, 1949. Taft voted against the establishment of NATO.

"I wanted to vote to let Russia know that if she attacked western Europe, the United States would be in the war. (I believe) that would be a deterrent to war... We issued just this warning in the Monroe Doctrine, and (though we were a much less powerful nation,) it prevented aggression against Central and South America.

But the Atlantic Pact goes much further... the treaty is a part of a much larger program by which we arm all these nations against Russia... It thus becomes an offensive and defensive military alliance against Russia. (I believe) our foreign policy should be aimed primarily at security and peace, and (I believe) such an alliance is more likely to produce war than peace."

Click to enlarge

ACTIVITY

Which document is most convincing as evidence to support the claim that shielding the US from international problems kept Americans safer?

Explain your choice by examining the sources of both documents when making your claim.

How could these documents be used as evidence to support the claim from Washington's Farewell Address that foreign intervention increased risk and did not make Americans safer?

Hostile Governments Abroad Directly Threatened US Security

1941-1949

To many Americans after World War II Soviet expansion meant threats abroad could no longer be separated from security at home. Communism was seen not only as a military danger but as an ideological challenge to the American way of life. Early American involvement abroad was a form of self-defence.



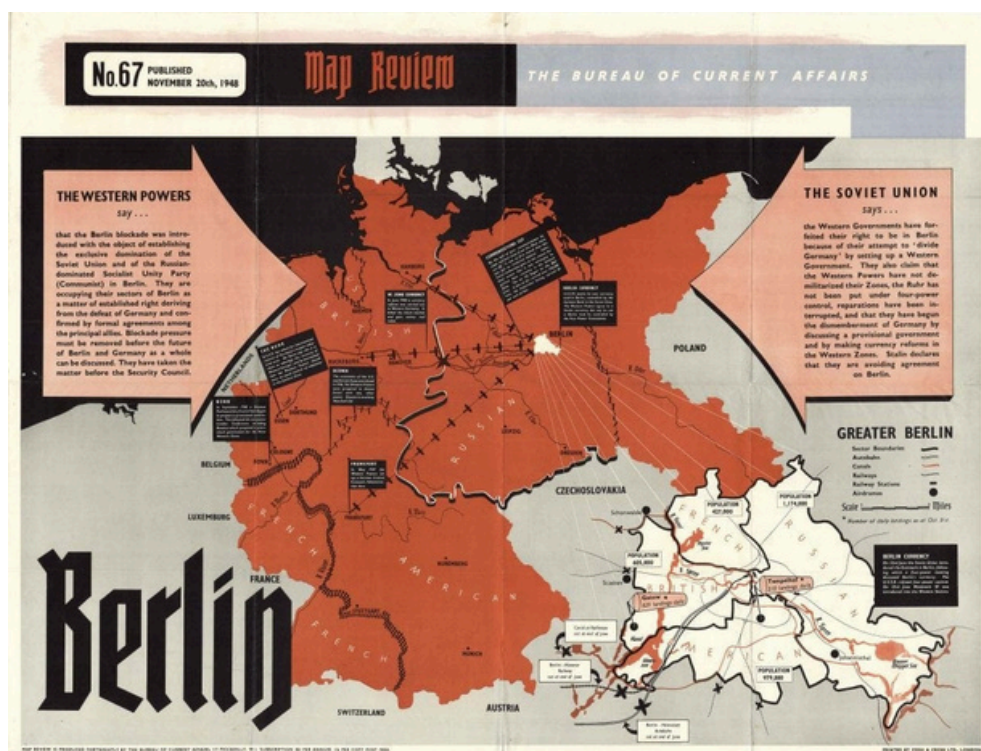
Document 19: Truman's Plea for Greece Gets Mixed Reaction in Congress," The Evening Star (1947).

Speaker of the House Martin, commenting on the speech, said:

"The recommendation of the President calls for a radical departure from our traditional American policy.

...Senator McCarran, Democrat, of Nevada: "This is the crossroads where we decide whether we are to strengthen America's position in a democratic world by refraining from conflicts abroad or whether we are to go the other way. Money alone won't be enough to sustain Greece and Turkey. We will have to go in there with men and materials if we go at all."

Document 20: The image shows the blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Union and the routes of Western supplies airlifted in. A British-produced map intended for public education and current affairs revealing post war instability.



ACTIVITY

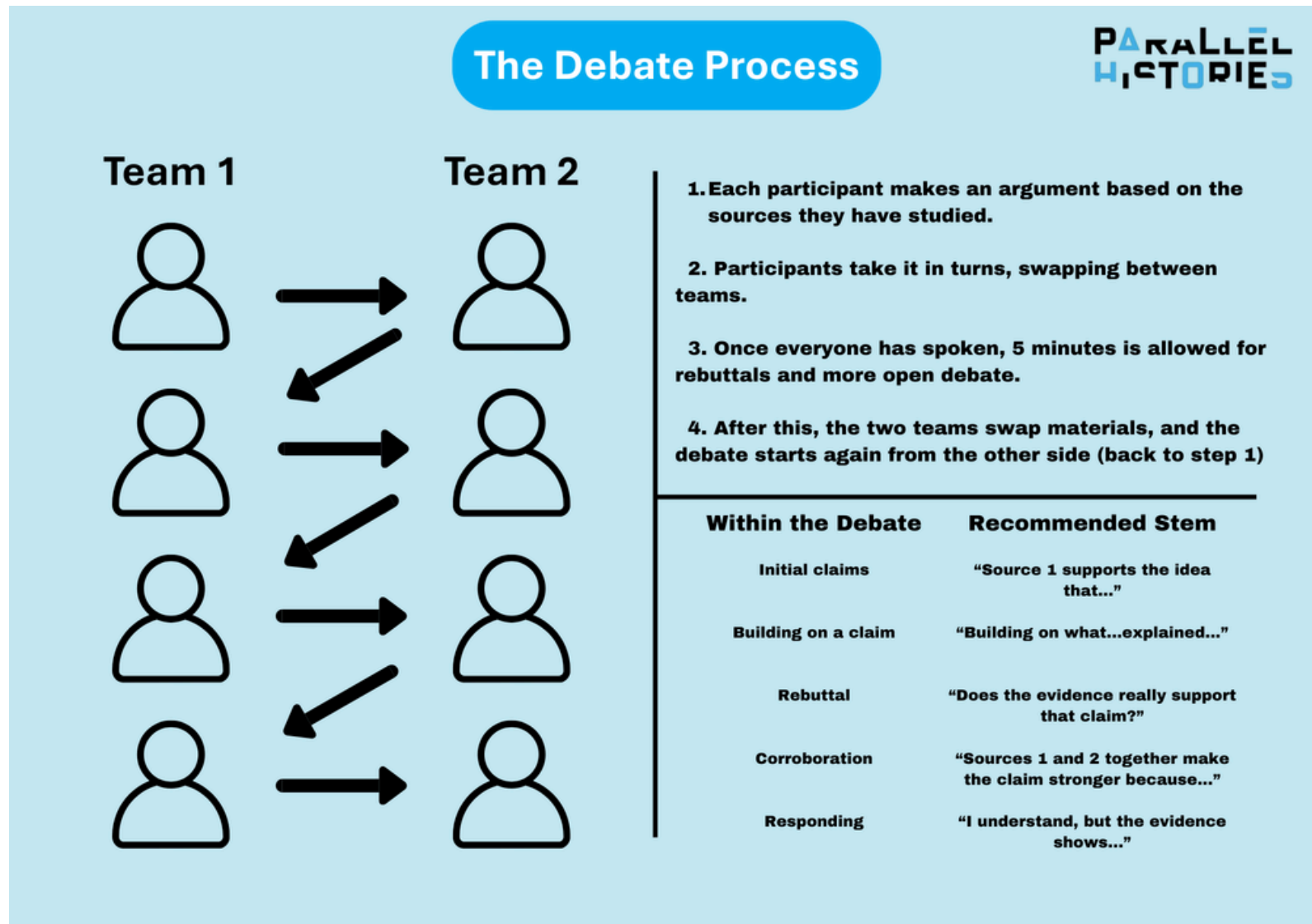
Click to enlarge



Which document is most convincing in supporting the claim that foreign intervention prevented future risks and kept Americans safer? Explain your choice by examining the sources of both documents when making your claim.

To what extent did World War II mark a turning point in US foreign policy, compared with earlier approaches to protecting American security?

Our Debate Process:



End of unit debate: tips on preparing your arguments

Your teacher will give you the title of the debate to discuss, (sometimes that's described as 'a motion to debate') and put you in teams telling you if you are investigating and arguing for '**Continuity**' or '**Change**'. Then it's up to you to make clear arguments supported by strong evidence in order to make your speech persuasive. Your teacher will have tasked a couple of students to act as 'Chairs' – their role is to manage the debate and give feedback to the speakers. The Chairs should tell you what they are looking for in a good speech. Once you have argued from one side, you will be asked to switch positions and argue from the other side.

STEP ONE

Working as a group look through the range of documents your teacher has supplied you, and think about how the documents you select can be used as evidence to support your argument. Each speaker will need to develop a different reason to support the debate motion. Each speaker should focus on different documents to start with.

STEP TWO

Think about how your opponents might challenge your argument. Make sure that your claims are proportionate to the evidence you are drawing from the documents. Think about the provenance of the documents and how this affected the credibility of your claim. Consider how you might challenge your opponent's argument.

STEP THREE

Prepare your speech as bullet points so you can make eye contact with your audience as you speak. If you have printed out any of the documents, think about where you can bring them into the argument. Check your speech is the right length – your teacher will have told you how long each speaker has. Work out the best order for your team to speak, typically the last speaker has the extra job of summarising the whole team's points as well as making their own.

STEP FOUR

Run the debate! It's best if you sit close to and opposite your opponents, and that you sit in the order you'll be speaking. This means you can hear each other more easily. The Chairs will keep everyone to time and give feedback at the end. They will tell each speaker one thing they did well, and one thing to work on. This is more important than deciding a winner.

Acknowledgements

Cover photograph: Image accessible here: <https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:19343508>

Source 1: Originally published in Liberty Tracts Number Four, The Policy of Imperialism by the American Anti-imperialistic League, October 17, 1899. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/08003852/>

Source 2: Originally published in the New York World, November 1898. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1898 - 1938. Image accessible here: <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/baced180-c607-012f-777f-58d385a7bc34>

Source 3: Originally published in the Congressional Record, Senate, January 9, 1900. Accessible here: <https://www.congress.gov/bound-congressional-record/1900/01/09/senate-section>

Source 4: Public Domain. Originally published in the Chicago Tribune, April 26, 1914. Image accessible here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Free_from_Spanish.jpg

Source 5: Originally published in the American Daily Advertiser, September 19, 1796. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw2.024/?sp=248&st=text>

Source 6: Originally published the US Government Publishing Office, 1917. Accessible here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1917-pt1-v55/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1917-pt1-v55-13-1.pdf>

Source 7: Originally published in the Robert Lansing Papers, US Government Print Office, 1939. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/about-this-exhibition/arguing-over-war/for-or-against-war/a-meeting-to-discuss-war/>

Source 8: Public Domain. Originally published by the US Department of State, March 1, 1917. Accessible here: <https://docsteach.org/document/translation-zimmermann-telegram/>

Source 9: Originally published by the Library of Congress, 1923. Accessible here: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-08273_00_00-002-0001-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-08273_00_00-002-0001-0000.pdf

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Source 10: Originally published in the Chicago Tribune, December 27, 1918. Accessible here: <https://hti.osu.edu/opper/lesson-plans/league-of-nations/images/interrupting-the-ceremony>

Source 11: Originally printed in the New York Evening World, January 8, 1918. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030193/1918-01-08/ed-1/?sp=1&r=0.392,0.63,0.484,0.289,0>

Source 12: Public Domain. Originally published in Punch Magazine, December 10, 1919. Accessible here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Gap_in_the_Bridge.png#Licensing

Source 13: Originally published by the US Government Publishing Office, 1935. Accessible here: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/neutrality-act-of-august-31-1935/#:~:text=Introduction,supported%20by%20the%20Soviet%20Union>

Source 14: Originally published in the Detroit Evening Times, July 3, 1941. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88063294/1941-07-03/ed-1/?sp=20>

Source 15: Public Domain. Originally broadcast to the nation, March 15, 1941. Accessible here: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-annual-dinner-white-house-correspondents-association>

Source 16: Originally broadcast by Indiana University radio, December 10, 1941, Accessible here: https://www.loc.gov/item/afc1941004_sr04/ (side b)

Source 17: Originally published in the Wilmington Morning Star, October 1, 1941. Accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn78002169/1947-10-01/ed-1/?sp=4&r=0.1,-0.064,0.975,0.582,0>

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Source 18: Originally broadcast on the Drew Pearson Radio Hours, July 24, 1949.

Accessible here: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/speech-on-the-north-atlantic-treaty/>

Source 19: Originally published in the Washington DC Evening Star, March 12, 1947.

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Source 20: Originally published in the Bureau of Current Affairs, November 20, 1948.

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Further Reading



- 1) Why the US Has Spent 200 Years Flip Flopping Between Isolationism and Engagement
- 2) Council on Foreign Relations: An Anatomy of Isolationism
- 3) Lucid Stars: The American Foreign Policy Tradition Author(s): Walter Russell Mead Source: World Policy Journal, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter, 1994/1995), pp. 1-17
- 4) America First: The Past and Future of an Idea Melvyn P. Leffler and William Hitchcock, eds. Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations
- 5) Library of Congress video interview: The Complicated History of US Isolationism, February 12, 2021 (33 minutes)
- 6) Platform of the American Anti Imperialist League, 1899
- 7) Woodrow Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality, 1914
- 8) Charles Lindbergh America First Speech, April 1941
- 9) Isolationism vs Internationalism: The Debate about US Neutrality within FDR's Administration
10. Berlin Airlift (from the US Secretary of State to the French Embassy regarding the Berlin Blockade)