

America and European Wars  
(Delivered September 15, 1939)

In times of great emergency, men of the same belief must gather together for mutual counsel and action. If they fail to do this, all that they stand for will be lost. I speak tonight to those people in the United States of America who feel that the destiny of this country does not call for our involvement in European wars.

We must band together to prevent the loss of more American lives in these internal struggles of Europe. We must keep foreign propaganda from pushing our country blindly into another war. Modern war with all its consequences is too tragic and too devastating to be approached from anything but a purely American standpoint. We should never enter a war unless it is absolutely essential to the future welfare of our nation.

This country was colonized by men and women from Europe. The hatreds, the persecutions, the intrigues they left behind, gave them courage to cross the Atlantic Ocean to a new land. They preferred the wilderness and the Indians to the problems of Europe. They weighed the cost of freedom from those problems, and they paid the price. In this country, they eventually found a means of living peacefully together - the same nationalities that are fighting abroad today. The quarrels of Europe faded out from American life as generations passed. Instead of wars between the English, French, and Germans, it became a struggle of the new world for freedom from the old - a struggle for the right of America to find her own destiny. The colonization of this country grew from European troubles and our freedom sprang from European war; for we won independence from England while she was fighting France.

No one foresaw the danger ahead of us more clearly than George Washington. He solemnly warned the people of America against becoming entangled in European alliances. For over one hundred years, his advice was followed. We established the Monroe Doctrine for America. We let other nations fight among themselves. Then, in 1917, we entered a European war. This time we were on England's side, and so were France and Russia. Friends and enemies reverse as decades pass - as political doctrines rise and fall.

The Great War ended before our full force had reached the field. We escaped with the loss of relatively few soldiers. We measured our dead in thousands. Europe measured hers in millions. Europe has not yet recovered from the effects of this war and she has already entered another. A generation has passed since the Armistice of 1918, but even in America we are still paying for our part in that victory - and we will continue to pay for another generation. European countries were both unable and unwilling to pay their debts to us.

Now that war has broken out again, we in America have a decision to make on which the destiny of our nation depends.

We must decide whether or not we intend to become forever involved in this age-old struggle between the nations of Europe. Let us not delude ourselves. If we enter the quarrels of Europe during war, we must stay in them in time of peace as well. It is madness to send our soldiers to be killed as we did in the last war if we turn the course of peace over to the greed, the fear, and the intrigue of European nations. We must either keep out of European wars entirely or stay in European affairs permanently.

In making our decision, this point should be clear: these wars in Europe are not wars in which our civilization is defending itself against some Asiatic intruder. There is no Genghis Khan or Zerkzes marching against our Western nations. This is not a question of banding together to defend the White race against foreign invasion. This is simply one more of those age old quarrels within our own family of nations - a quarrel arising from the errors of the last war - from the failure of the victors of that war to follow a consistent policy either of fairness or of force.

Arbitrary boundaries can only be maintained by strength of arms. The Treaty of Versailles either had to be revised as time passed, or England and France, to be successful, had to keep Germany weak by force. Neither policy was followed; Europe wavered back and forth between the two. As a result, another war has begun, a war which is likely to be far more prostrating than the last, a war which will again kill off the best youth of Europe, a war which may even lead to the end of our Western civilization.

We must not permit our sentiment, our pity, or our personal feelings of sympathy, to obscure the issue, to affect our children's lives. We must be as impersonal as a surgeon with his knife. Let us make no mistake about the cost of entering this war. If we take part successfully, we must throw the resources of our entire nation into the conflict. Munitions alone will not be enough. We cannot count on victory merely by shipping abroad several thousand airplanes and cannon. We are likely to lose a million men, possibly several million - the best of American youth. We will be staggering under the burden of recovery during the rest of our lives. And our children will be fortunate if they see the end in their lives, even if, by some unlikely chance, we do not pass on another Polish Corridor to them. Democracy itself may not survive. If we enter the fighting for democracy abroad, we may end by losing it at home.

America has little to gain in another European war. We must not be misguided by this foreign propaganda to the effect that our frontiers lie in Europe. One need only glance at a map to see where our true frontiers lie. What more could we ask than the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Pacific on the west? No, our interests in Europe need not be from the standpoint of defense. Our own natural frontiers are enough for that. If we extend them to the center of Europe, we might as well extend them around the earth. An ocean is a formidable barrier, even for modern aircraft.

Our safety does not lie in fighting European wars. It lies in our own internal strength, in the character of the American people and of American institutions. As long as we maintain an Army, a Navy, and an Air Force worthy of the name, as long as America does not decay within, we need fear no invasion of our country.

Again, I address those among you who agree with this stand. Our future and our children's future depend upon the action we take. It is essential to think clearly and to act quickly in the days which are to come. We will be deluged with propaganda, both foreign and domestic - some obvious, some insidious. Much of our news is already colored. Every incident and every accident will be seized upon to influence us. And in modern war there is bound to be plenty of both. We must learn to look behind every article we read and every speech we hear. We must not only inquire about the writer and the speaker - about his personal

interests and his nationality, but we must ask who owns and who influences the newspaper, the news picture, and the radio station. If our people know the truth, if they are fully and accurately informed, if they are not misled by propaganda, this country is not likely to enter the war now going on in Europe.

And if Europe is prostrated again by war, as she has been so often in the past, then the greatest hope for our Western civilization lies in America. By staying out of war ourselves, we may even bring peace to Europe more quickly. Let us look to our own defenses and to our own character. If we attend to them, we have no need to fear what happens elsewhere. If we do not attend to them, nothing can save us.

If war brings more Dark Ages to Europe, we can better preserve those things which we love and which we mourn the passing of in Europe today by preserving them here, by strengthening them here, rather than by hurling ourselves thoughtlessly to their defense over there and thus destroying all in the conflagration. The German genius for science and organization, the English genius for government and commerce, the French genius for living and the understanding of life - they must not go down here as well as on the other side. Here in America they can be blended to form the greatest genius of all.

The gift of civilized life must still be carried on. It is more important than the sympathies, the friendships, the desires, of any single generation. This is the test before America now. This is the challenge - to carry on Western civilization.

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