

# AMERICANS

## AND THE HOLOCAUST

ISOLATION OR INTERVENTION?

A CASE STUDY ON THE LEND-LEASE ACT

TIMELINE, 1918-1940

# 1918: The Impact of World War I



Source: Imperial War Museum

More than four million Americans served in the war. Afterward, the United States demilitarized and reaffirmed neutrality and isolation.

# 1929: Stock Market Crash



Gangster Al Capone opened this soup kitchen for the hungry and homeless in Chicago during the Great Depression. November 16, 1930. **Source:** National Archives and Records Administration

The stock market crashed and a serious economic depression began worldwide. At the height of the Great Depression, one quarter of the American workforce was unemployed.

# 1933: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler Came to Power



President Roosevelt delivers his first inaugural address in Washington, DC, on March 4, 1933.

Source: Library of Congress



Adolf Hitler greets members of the SA, or Nazi Storm Troopers, in Nuremberg, Germany, after being appointed as chancellor in January 1933.

Source: Yad Vashem



# 1933: At Least 24 African Americans Were Lynched



This flag hung from the offices of the NAACP in New York City from the early 1900s through 1938 every time a lynching was reported. **Source:** Library of Congress

At least 24 African Americans were lynched in the United States in 1933. Throughout the 1930s, African Americans were subjected to government-sanctioned segregation, social ostracism, and racially motivated violence.

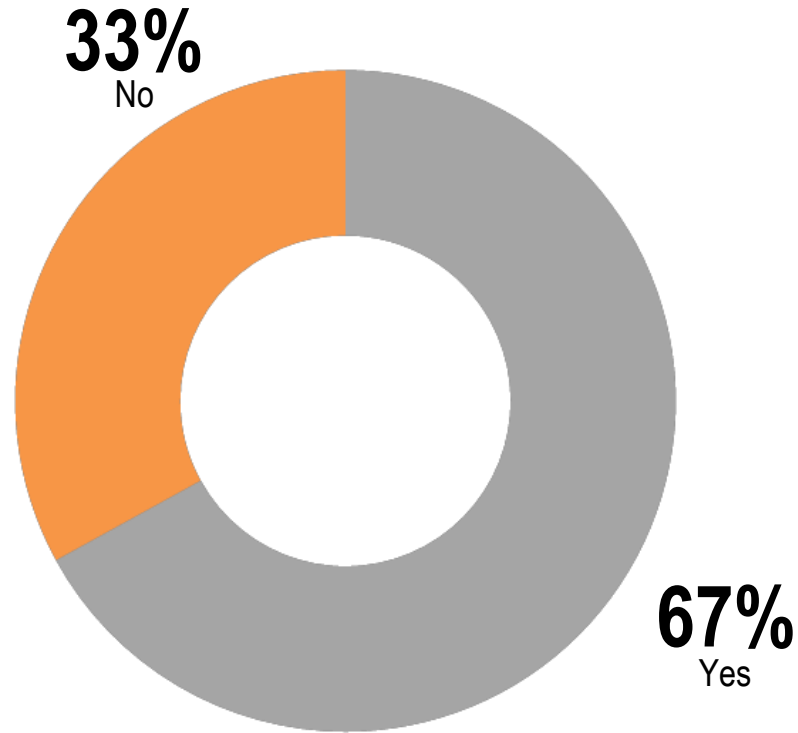
# August 1935: Neutrality Act



Senator Gerald Nye of Nebraska argued that the Neutrality Act of 1935 would help the United States stay out of future wars. **Source:** Library of Congress

On August 31, 1935, Congress passed the first in a series of laws designed to prevent the United States from being embroiled in a foreign war. The 1935 Neutrality Act prohibited the export of “arms, ammunition, and implements of war” from the United States to foreign nations at war and required US arms manufacturers to apply for an export license.

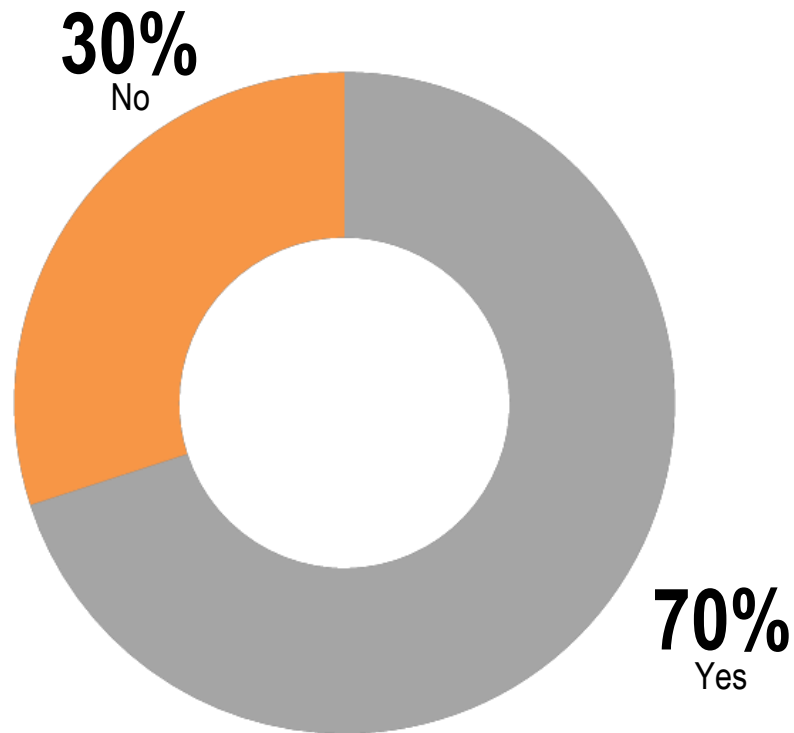
# November 1936 Public Opinion Poll



“Do you think there will be another serious depression?”

Source: AIPO Poll

# January 1937 Public Opinion Poll



“Do you think it was a mistake for the United States to enter World War I?”

Source: Gallup



# 1937–1938 Recession



A migrant family walks down a road, pulling its belongings in carts and wagons, in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, in June 1938. **Source:** Library of Congress

A new recession, which lasted from May 1937 until June 1938, was America's third major economic downturn in 20 years.

Real GDP dropped 10 percent and unemployment hit 20 percent.

## March 11–13, 1938: Anschluss



Austrian Nazis and local residents look on as Jews are forced to get on their hands and knees and scrub the pavement. March 1938–April 1938. **Source:** National Archives and Records Administration

German troops occupied Austria and incorporated it into the German Reich, an event known as the *Anschluss*. Nazi sympathizers attacked Jewish people and destroyed their property throughout the spring, summer, and autumn of 1938.

# November 9–10, 1938: Kristallnacht



Germans pass by the broken shop window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht. November 10, 1938. **Source:** National Archives and Records Administration

Nazi Party members and sympathizers burned synagogues, looted Jewish homes and businesses, killed at least 91 Jews, and arrested approximately 30,000 Jewish men, imprisoning them in concentration camps. Many German and Austrian Jews applied to emigrate out of German-occupied territory.

# September 1, 1939: The Beginning of World War II



German soldiers parade through Warsaw, Poland, on October 5, 1939. **Source:** National Archives and Records Administration

Germany invaded Poland, starting World War II. Honoring an alliance with Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east a few weeks later. After Poland's defeat, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned the country.



# November 1939: Final Neutrality Act Passed

## ROOSEVELT ASKS CONGRESS TO CHANGE NEUTRALITY ACT; OPPONENTS AWAIT REACTION

### AID TO PEACE SEEN

Mandatory Embargo Is  
Called Threat to Our  
Security as Nation

### HULL'S VIEWS IN MESSAGE

Secretary Says Present Law  
Fosters a General State of  
War in Europe and Asia

Roosevelt's neutrality message  
and Hull's statement, Page 2.

Special to The New York Times.  
WASHINGTON, July 14.—President Roosevelt sent to Congress today a special message asking for immediate amendment of the Neutrality Act to eliminate its compulsory arms embargo. This action was necessary, the Chief Executive declared, so that the United States might be on record on the side of preserving world peace, and so that the country would be in the best position to avoid involvement if a general war should break out despite preventive efforts.

Thus for the first time Mr. Roosevelt formally asked for specific changes in the neutrality law, although he has several times previously stated that he thought the statute was not satisfactory. The message took the form of a brief

Presidential introduction indorsing and calling to the attention of Congress a detailed statement on the subject by Secretary Hull. The net effect seemed to be that the President has transferred the issue of revision from Congress to the country. The message was received in the Senate and in the House largely on that basis, and it was believed that Mr. Roosevelt would have much to say about the neutrality situation on his trip around the country, which he has tentatively scheduled to start four days after the adjournment of Congress.

**European Situation Noted**  
The message pointed to the critical situation likely to prevail in Europe for the next several months, and divided, without naming them, the countries of the world into two categories: those bent on forceful change and those desiring to preserve peace.

Secretary Hull found that proponents and opponents of revision are agreed on four cardinal principles of American foreign policy. These he listed as the conviction that the United States must consider first its own peace and security; that the American Government must avoid being drawn into wars between other nations; that this country must steer clear of entangling alliances or involvements; and that this country must maintain strict neutrality to avoid being drawn into war.

The Administration, he said, believes that an arms embargo is a dangerous departure from the practices of international law, while the opponents of change believe the trade in armaments inevitably tends toward involvement and is "immoral."

After more than four years' experience with the various forms of "neutrality" legislation which have been in effect, Mr. Hull reached the conclusion that "the present embargo encourages a general state of war both in Europe and Asia."

**Sees Threat to This Country**  
The result, the Secretary stated, "is directly prejudicial to the highest interests and to the peace and to the security of the United States," since this country can be at its best only in a peaceful world. The aggressors are "more tempted to try the fortunes of war" if they know their less-prepared opponents "would be shut off from those supplies which, under every rule of international law, they should be able to buy in all neutral countries, including the United States."

The message pointed out that "almost all sales of arms and ammunition made in recent years by our nationals have been made to governments whose policies have been dedicated to the maintenance of peace."

Mr. Hull recalled the many years he spent as a member of both houses of Congress in asking for its cooperation on a non-partisan basis, in solving the external problems facing this country.

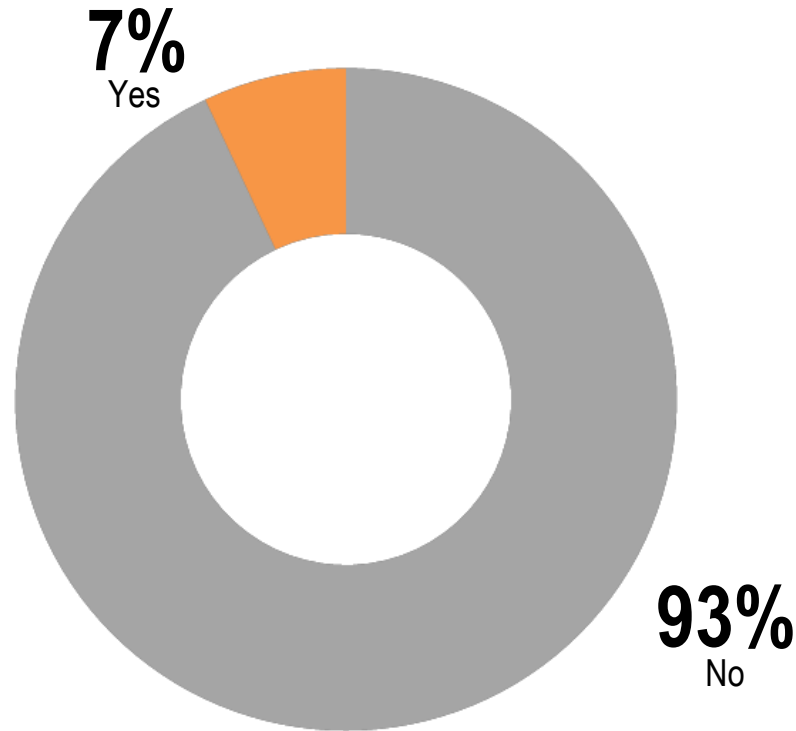
"A peaceful nation like ours cannot complacently close its eyes and ears in formulating a peace and neutrality policy, as though abhor-

Continued on Page Two

The Neutrality Act lifted the arms embargo and put all trade with nations in a state of war (such as Great Britain and France) under the terms of "cash-and-carry." The ban on loans remained in effect and American ships were barred from transporting goods to ports in those nations.

Source: *New York Times*, July 14, 1939

# May 1940 Public Opinion Poll



“Do you think the United States should declare war on Germany and send our army and navy abroad to fight?”

Source: AIPO Poll



# Summer 1940: Committee for America First Created



Charles Lindbergh speaks in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on October 3, 1941. **Source:** Library of Congress

In the summer of 1940, students at Yale University founded the Committee for America First, opposing US intervention in the war. America First, which grew to have 800,000 members, included isolationist, peace, and anti-war activists.

## September 16, 1940: Selective Service and Training Act Signed



Men stand in line to register for the draft in Seattle on October 16, 1940.

**Source:** Museum of History and Industry, Seattle

This bill required all male citizens between the ages of 26 and 36 to register for the country's first peacetime military draft. While the United States was not yet involved in World War II, Congress voted to train American men for military service so the country could defend itself against the growing threat of the Axis powers.

## December 29, 1940: A “Fireside Chat”



Franklin D. Roosevelt delivers “Fireside Chat Number 18” on September 11, 1941.

Source: FDR Presidential Library and Museum

In a radio address, President Roosevelt said: “We must be the great arsenal of democracy. For us this is an emergency as serious as war itself. We must apply ourselves to our task with the same resolution, the same sense of urgency, the same spirit of patriotism and sacrifice as we would show were we at war. We have furnished the British great material support and we will furnish far more in the future.”

**The Museum wishes to acknowledge and thank the following donors  
to the Americans and the Holocaust Initiative:**

Jeannie & Jonathan Lavine

The Bildners—Joan & Allen z"l, Elisa Spungen & Rob, Nancy & Jim

Jane and Daniel Och

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP

Ruth Miriam Bernstein

Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation

In Memory of Simon Konover

Philip and Cheryl Milstein Family

Benjamin and Seema Pulier Charitable Foundation

David and Fela Shapell Family Foundation

Deborah Simon

Laurie and Sy Sternberg