

Unit 4: World War II and the Americas

Lesson 1: USA and the Roads to WWII



Gerald Nye

To what extent was the US isolationist in the interwar period?

A. American 'Isolationism', 1919-33

i. wary of foreigners because:

Nye Committee: created the impression, but did not prove, that US munition supplies influenced US involvement in WWI.

1. Merchants of Death

- a) convinced that WWI was the result of rivalries between corrupt inhabitants of the Old World.
- b) managed to pull the US into the war due to economic ties.

2. USSR

- a) seen as threatening politically, economically, ideologically.
- b) US was the last great power to give full recognition to it (1933)
 - i) due to fears of Japan's expansionism.

3. Fear of Japan

- a) wanted to stop a naval arms race
 - i) US had virtually the strongest navy.
 - ii) prevent Japan from becoming a naval rival.
 - iii) prevent Japan from growing into China and affecting its vast market.



Japan attended the Washington Conference (1921-22) with both hope and concern. Global reduction of naval capacity was welcome for Japan which was facing a fiscal crisis. But Japan also feared that the other big powers might harm Japan's interests.

4. Generally believed:

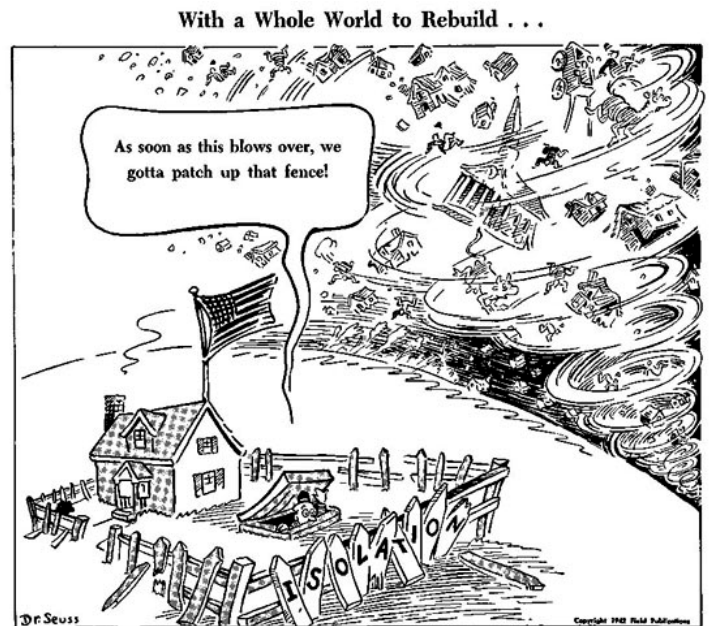
a) depression had been caused by World War I

b) Europe was unworthy of US support

c) Pacifism—people abhorred war

d) Arms manufacturers, bankers had caused World War I

e) World War I had been a tragic mistake for the U.S.



ii. Isolationist Policies

1. Refused Versailles and with that, the League of Nations

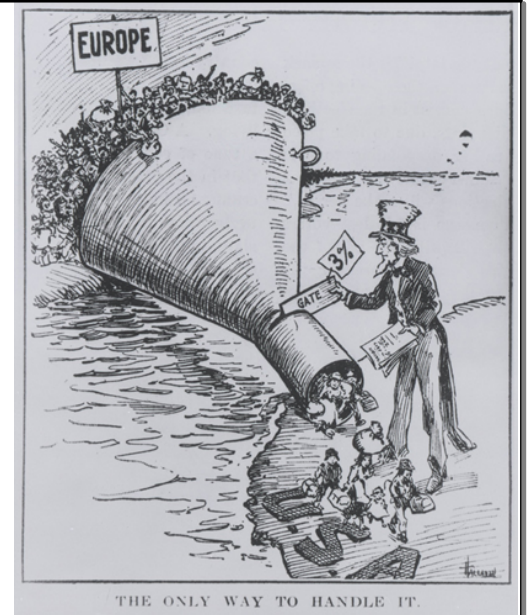
2. Immigration restrictions

a) Quota Act, 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act, 1924

i) reflected Coolidge's view that
"America must be kept American"

ii) interpreted as racist because they cut Asian immigration in particular.

iii) allowed only 60 000 Jewish refugees from 1933-38

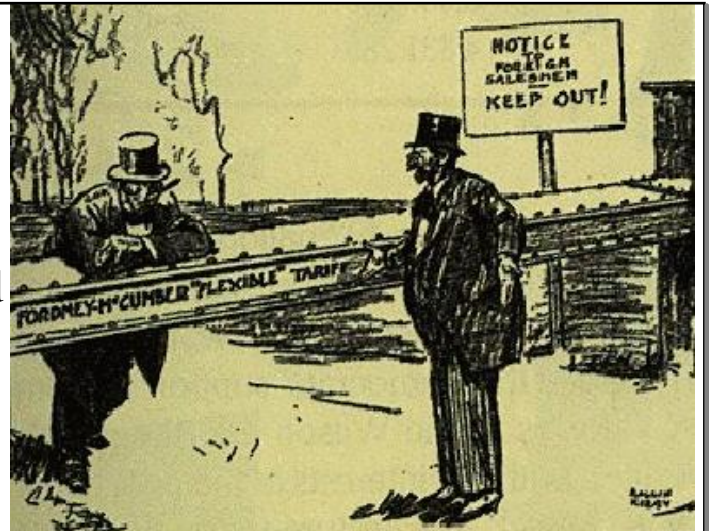


3. Fordney-McCumber Act, 1921

a) introduced the highest import tariffs in US history

b) protectionist measures worsened in the 1930s with the Smoot-Hawley Act.

4. Senate refused full membership to the World Court in 1935



iii. International Actions during the 1920s

1. League of Nations (not a member)

a) attended 40 meetings of the League of Nations

b) supported much of the work done by the League in health

c) member of the LoN agency, International Labour Organization (ILO)

i) monitored and sought to improve labour conditions



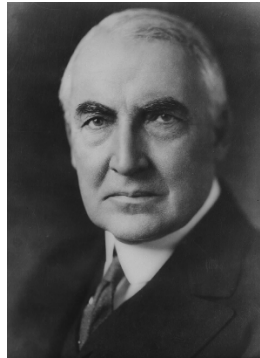
2. Economic considerations

a) Free trade

i) all Republican Presidents of the 1920s believed global free trade was the best guarantee of peace.

1) Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover.

2) however, they implemented protectionist measures



b) European war debts

i) Europeans thought it should be cancelled.

ii) US thought not

- 1) it was a very large amount
- 2) the money would likely be used for weapons.

iii) meant the Allies had to pressure Germany for reparations.

1) led to the Dawes Plan, 1924

a. rescheduling of payments and \$200 million in loans to Germany from the USA.

b. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes campaigned in Euro capitals for support of the plan, which was achieved.

2) led to the Young Plan, 1929 which cut the repatriation bill further and extended the payment period.

iv) significance: US interests still had a stake in Europe

The International Financial System
Under the Dawes Plan and Young Plan
1924-30



3. Disarmament Conferences and Desire for Peace

a) Washington Naval Conference, 1921-22

b) Geneva Conference, 1927

i) failed because it attempted to reduce land armies

ii) French would only accept naval arms reduction

c) Kellogg-Briand Pact – renounced war as a means of solving disputes

d) London Naval Conference, 1930

e) all agreements lacked an enforcement clause.



- 4. Less interference in Latin America
 - a) Columbia was paid \$25 million for US' role in the Panamanian revolution
 - b) 1922-25 US troops withdrew from Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.
 - c) Hoover made a goodwill tour in 1930
 - d) Clark Memorandum repudiated the Roosevelt Corollary from the Monroe Doctrine.
 - e) partly due
 - i) to the Great Depression
 - ii) desire to be "isolationist" in light of WWI horrors
 - iii) US establishing economic dominance there
 - 1. owned 2/3 of Cuban sugar production
 - 2. owned 1/2 of Venezuelan oil production

How and why did Roosevelt get America into the Second World War?

A. Roosevelt's Foreign Policy, 1933-41

i. Latin America and the Good Neighbour Policy

1. Montevideo Conference, 1933
 - a) promised not to interfere in the internal and external affairs of Latin and South American states.
2. 1934 - the Platt Amendment was removed and the US could no longer legally interfere in Cuba.
3. 1934 withdrew US troops from Haiti
4. Big Stick & Cuba
 - a) when political unrest threatened US investment
 - b) US actively supported Batista's government
5. Reciprocity treaties



ii. The Closet Internationalist and the Neutrality Legislation

1. GD preoccupied FDR in 1933

2. favoured a Wilsonian approach which involved active US participation in the international community.

a) aware that voters would not favour international involvement during domestic crisis.

b) Congressman Louis Ludlow introduced a constitutional amendment requiring a referendum before the President could declare war.

i) defeated 209-188 in the House

ii) illustrates the depth of isolationist feeling in America.

3. Congress accepts Merchants of Death interpretation of US involvement in WWI

a) in order to stay out of future wars, US must avoid dealing with belligerents.



4. Neutrality Acts

a) 1935 – First Neutrality Act

i) forced the President to put an impartial arms embargo on all belligerent nations.

ii) Roosevelt didn't like this

1) limited his power to sell arms to victims of aggression

2) allowed aggressors to expand unchallenged until they challenged US security.



b) 1936 – Second Neutrality Act

i) US banned loans to any nation participating in war.

ii) election year meant Roosevelt had to be perceived as supporting the neutrality legislation.

c) 1937 – Third Neutrality Act

i) US citizens could not travel on ships owned by a warring nation

ii) “cash and carry” for warring countries purchasing weapons.

1) Roosevelt liked that it would favour democracies like France and Britain as they had more ships.

iii) historian, Robert Divine described the 1937 Neutrality Act as
“a compromise that reflected the contradictory desire of the American people to remain economically in the world and politically out of it... [a compromise which encouraged Hitler and made the US his] silent accomplice.”



iii. Japanese and German Expansion

1. believed there was a worldwide Fascist conspiracy
2. few others did; press was often isolationist.
 - a) outcry in Chicago when Roosevelt said in Oct. 1937 that aggressors should be “quarantined.”
3. persuaded Congress for gradual rearmament
 - a) start of WWII, US army numbered 185 000.
4. Congress would not act even when Germany took over the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March, 1939.



Quarantine Speech (October 5, 1937) Franklin Delano Roosevelt



6:10 - 18:40

iv. The Second World War: 1939

1. Hitler attacked Poland in September, 1939 and Britain and France declared war on Germany starting WWII.

2. Roosevelt got Congress to repeal the arms embargo and allow 'cash and carry.'

a) FYI: 1937 Neutrality Act allowed for 'cash and carry' but it expired in May, 1939.



3. Roosevelt privately felt Germany was a threat to civilization
4. Winter War: Nov. 1939
 - a) between Finland and USSR
 - b) US sympathized with Finland, but Roosevelt wanted to keep good relations with the USSR
 - i) hoped that eventually Stalin and Hitler would have a falling out.



Simo Häyhä, Finnish Sniper

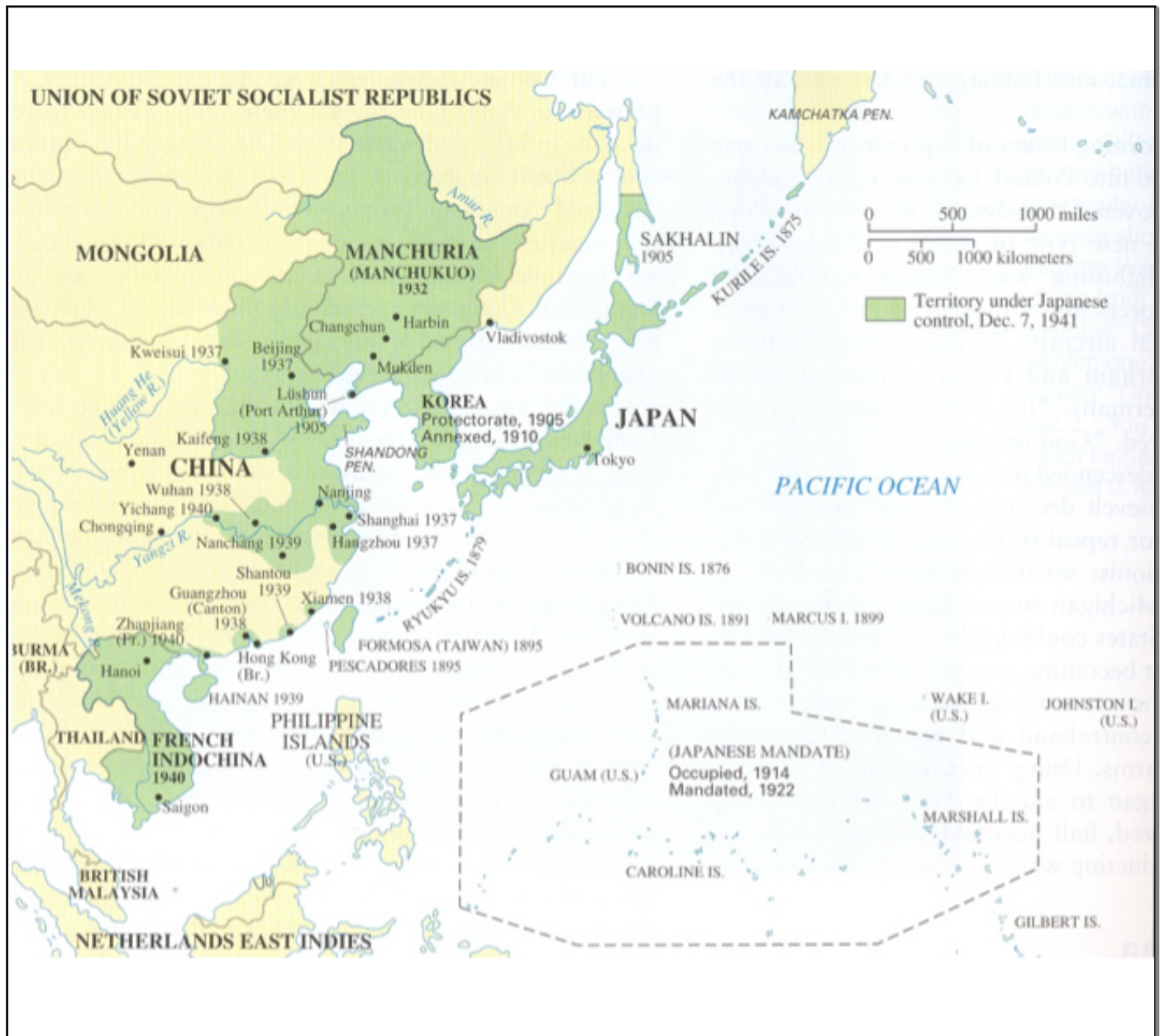
Simo Häyhä was a Finnish sniper during the Soviet–Finnish War, using only a standard iron-sighted, bolt action rifle he recorded more kills than any soldier in any other major war. He was credited with 505 confirmed deaths. The Soviet government tried desperately to get rid of Häyhä and ordered counter snipers and artillery strikes in the area. He lived until he was 97-years-old.

5. Japan and China

a) US threatened to cut Japanese-American trade by mid 1939.

i) significant threat as US oil and steel were fueling the Japanese war effort.





v. The Second World War: 1940

1. spring, 1940: Germany conquered Denmark, Belgium, Holland and France.

2. summer, 1940: only Britain opposed Germany.

3. Germany was sinking many British ships

a) meant Britain was not obtaining the necessary supplies

b) many Americans also came to believe with Roosevelt that Britain was the USA's first line of Atlantic defence.



4. Destroyers for Bases deal, Sept. 1940

a) Churchill begged Roosevelt for 40-50 over-age US destroyers for convoy duty in May, 1940.

b) Roosevelt stalled for months fearing:

- i) US voters wouldn't like it. (election in 1940).
- ii) Britain might lose and thus waste the ships.

c) US agreed when Britain offered to give its bases in the Western Hemisphere.

d) could be argued that this deal ended US neutrality in Europe.



5. Economic Sanctions and Japan, July, 1940

a) certain strategic exports were halted because of Japanese aggression in China.

i) US neutrality in the Pacific ended.

b) Japan demanded bases in Indo-China from the defeated French, August, 1940

c) US increased sanctions

d) Japan retaliated by signing the Tripartite Pact, 1940, a defensive alliance with Germany and Italy.



vi. The Second World War: 1941

1. Lend-Lease Act, March 1941

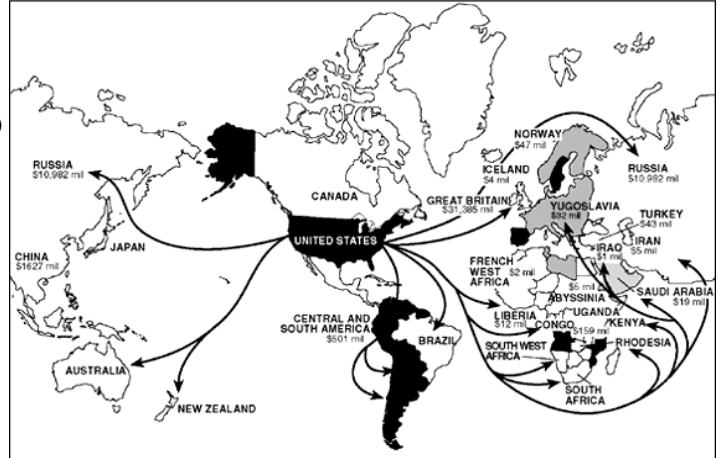
a) Roosevelt coined the term to give impression money and goods would be returned.

b) Roosevelt said that Britain was their first line of defence and needed help. When your neighbour's house is on fire, you did not sell him your hose. You loaned it.

c) got support for \$7 million worth of lend-lease aid to Britain.
i) Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the debate over lend-lease,

"We are buying . . . not lending. We are buying our own security while we prepare. By our delay during the past six years, while Germany was preparing, we find ourselves unprepared and unarmed, facing a thoroughly prepared and armed potential enemy."

Lend-Lease, 1941–1945



2. June, 1941 Germany invaded the USSR

a) Britain gained an ally

b) lend-lease was extended to the USSR



3. Atlantic Charter, August, 1941

a) completed off the coast of Newfoundland, Roosevelt and Churchill met to discuss war aims:

i) condemned aggression

ii) self-determination for liberated nations

iii) uphold the four freedoms: speech, worship, from want, from fear.

iv) freedom of the seas

v) international peacekeeping organization – to be the United Nations



4. Congress repeals most neutrality legislation, September, 1941

a) Sinking of the USS Greer by a German u-boat

- i) Roosevelt claimed the attack unprovoked; however
- ii) it had been trailing the u-boat for three hours
- iii) it had been providing assistance to a British plane that was dropping depth charges.

b) Sinking of the USS Kearney

- i) had been protecting British ships.



5. Economic Sanctions and Japan, Summer, 1941

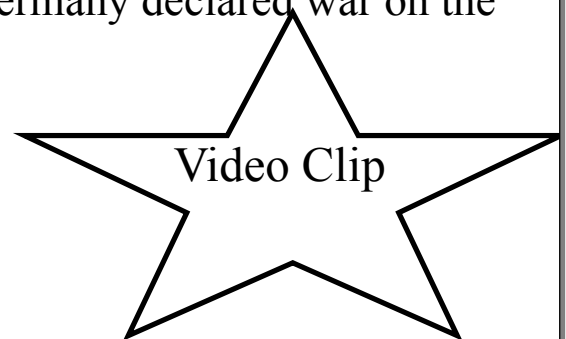
a) US stopped exporting oil to Japan.

b) convinced Japan it needed to expand to acquire natural resources for its war with China.

i) without access to foreign oil, Japan could fight for no more than 18 months.

c) Japan bombed the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 prompting the US to declare war.

i) this brought the USA into WWII as Germany declared war on the USA three days later.





FDR's declaration of war on Japan



vii. SO... Why did the US enter WWII?

1. Roosevelt believed Germany was a threat to US security.
2. US tradition of sympathy for China.
3. Actions Roosevelt took against Germany and Japan.

Also, see page 145 from *Modern America* textbook for more!

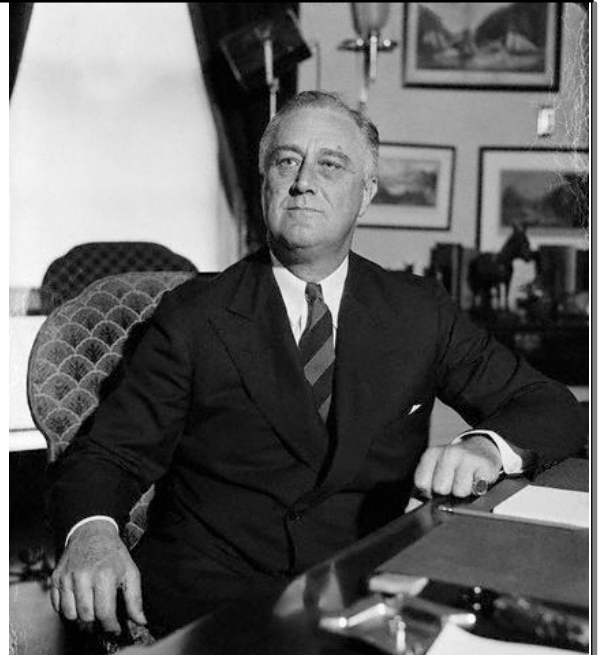
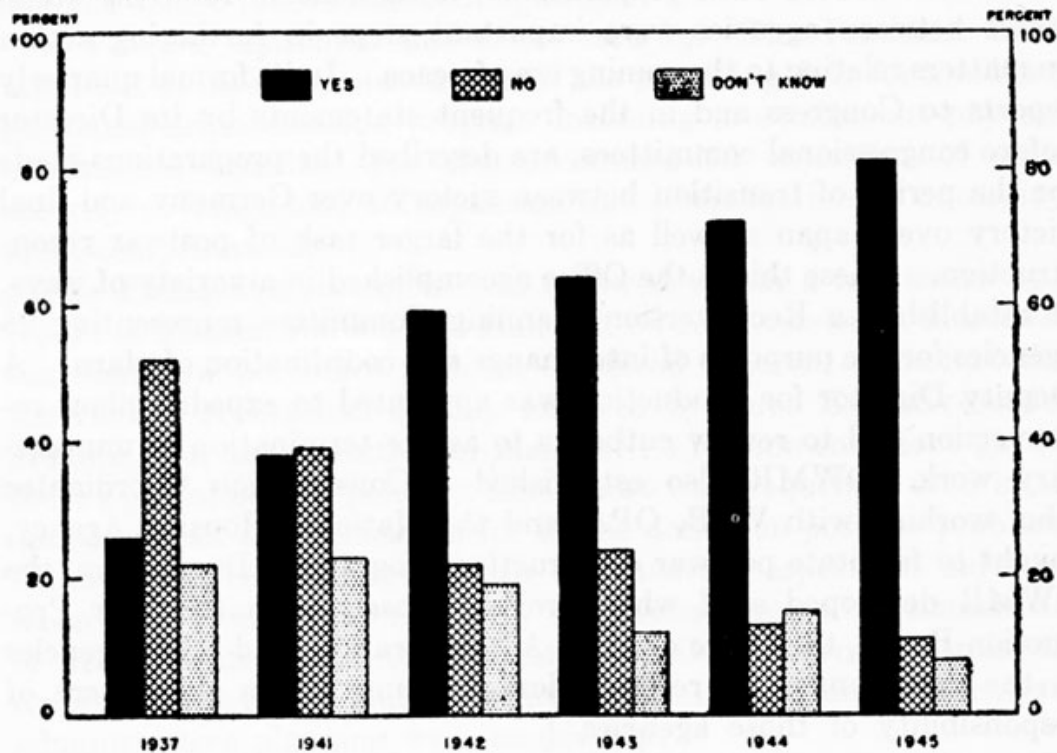


CHART 56. *Public Opinion on Membership in World Peace Organization.*

The question asked was: "Do you think the U. S. should join a world organization with police power to maintain world peace?"



Source: American Institute of Public Opinion.