

LESSON 2

From Neutrality to War

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS • *Could World War II have been prevented?*
• *Why do some people fail to respond to injustice while others try to prevent injustice?*

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Although Americans wanted to avoid fighting in another foreign war, they sent aid when their allies were threatened. The attack on Pearl Harbor convinced the United States to declare war.

American Neutrality

GUIDING QUESTIONS *Why did many Americans support isolationism? Why did President Roosevelt support internationalism?*

The rise of dictatorships and militarism in Europe discouraged many Americans. The sacrifices they had made during World War I seemed pointless. In addition, during the Depression, most European nations announced they would no longer repay their war debts to the United States. In response, many Americans once again began supporting isolationism and trying to avoid involvement in international conflicts.

The Nye Committee

Meanwhile, accusations emerged that arms manufacturers had tricked the United States into entering World War I. In 1934 Senator Gerald P. Nye held hearings to investigate these allegations. The Nye Committee report documented the huge profits that arms factories had made during the war and created the impression that these businesses influenced the decision to go to war. Even more Americans turned toward isolationism.

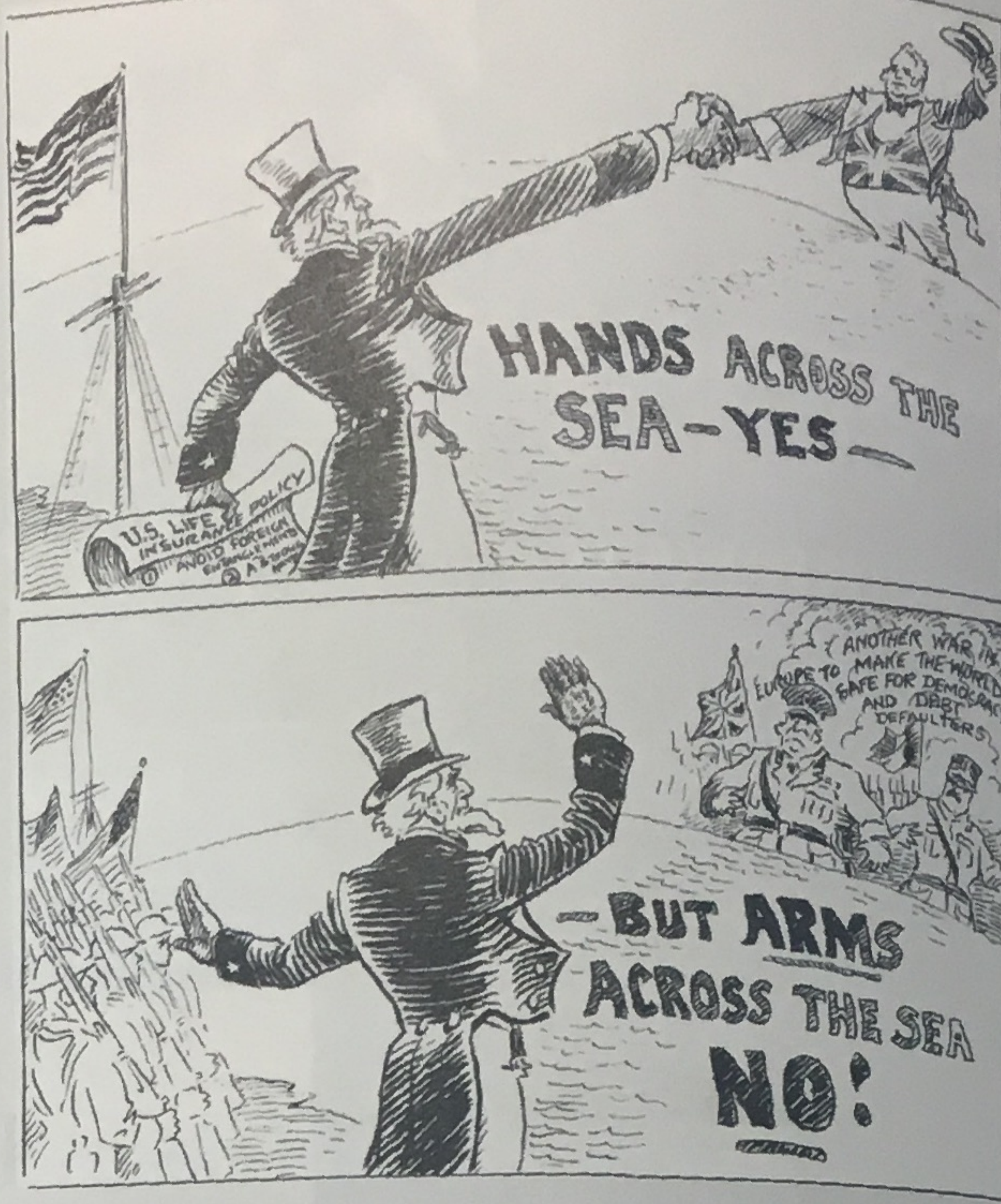
Legislating Neutrality

In response to growing Italian and German aggression in Europe, Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1935. This legislation—reflecting a response to the Nye report—made it illegal for Americans to sell arms to any country at war. Then, in 1936, a rebellion erupted in Spain that soon became a civil war. Congress responded by passing a second neutrality act, banning the sale of arms to either side in a civil war.

POLITICAL CARTOONS

By 1940, many Americans joined Roosevelt in wanting to help Britain and France in their struggle against Hitler. Isolationists, however, still wished to keep the country from directly entering the conflict.

This political cartoon shows Uncle Sam extending a helping hand to Britain but refusing to sell arms to Britain and France.



- 1 **Making Inferences** According to the cartoon, why should the United States refuse to sell arms overseas?
- 2 **Analyzing Primary Sources** What does this cartoon try to persuade the viewer to believe?

Soon after the Spanish Civil War began, Hitler and Mussolini pledged to cooperate on several international issues, and Japan aligned itself with Germany and Italy. Together, the three nations became known as the Axis Powers. As European tensions worsened, Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1937, continuing the ban on selling arms to warring nations and also requiring them to buy all nonmilitary supplies from the United States on a “cash-and-carry” basis. Countries had to send their own ships to pick up goods and had to pay in cash. Loans were not allowed. Isolationists knew that attacks on American ships had helped bring the country into World War I. They wanted to prevent such attacks that could bring the nation into another European war.

Roosevelt’s Internationalism

Despite the government’s stand on neutrality, President Roosevelt supported **internationalism**, the idea that trade between nations creates prosperity and helps prevent war. He warned that the neutrality acts “might drag us into war instead of keeping us out,” but he did not veto the bills. When Japan invaded China in July 1937 without declaring war, Roosevelt claimed the Neutrality Act of 1937 did not apply. He authorized the sale of weapons to China, warning that the nation should not let an “epidemic of lawlessness” infect the world:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“There is no escape through mere isolation or neutrality. . . . When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community . . . joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease. . . . War is a contagion, whether it be declared or undeclared.”

—from *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What steps did the supporters of United States isolationism take to ensure that the country remained neutral in an international conflict?

internationalism
a national policy of actively trading with foreign countries to foster peace and prosperity