

Charles A. Lindbergh: Address to America First Rally (1941)

Charles Lindbergh was the young aviator who electrified the world in 1927 when he flew alone nonstop from New York to Paris in thirty-three hours. After his historic flight, he became an international celebrity. During the late 1930s he emerged as a leading spokesman for isolationism. The largest of the isolationist groups was the America First organization. When war did erupt, however, Lindbergh participated, secretly flying some fifty combat missions in Asia, shooting down one Japanese fighter.

From "The Text of Colonel Lindbergh's Address to the America First Committee Here;" *The New York Times*, 24 April 1941.

... I know I will be severely criticized by the interventionists in America when I say we should not enter a war unless we have a reasonable chance of winning.... But I do not believe that our American ideals, and our way of life, will gain through an unsuccessful war. And I know that the United States is not prepared to wage war in Europe successfully at this time. . . .

I have said before, and I will say again, that I believe it will be a tragedy to the entire world if the British Empire collapses. That is one of the main reasons why I opposed this war before it was declared, and why I have constantly advocated a negotiated peace. I did not feel that England and France had a reasonable chance of winning. France has now been defeated; and, despite the propaganda and confusion of recent months, it is now obvious that England is losing the war. I believe this is realized even by the British government. But they have one last desperate plan remaining. They hope that they may be able to persuade us to send another American Expeditionary Force to Europe, and to share with England militarily, as well as financially, the fiasco of this war....

* * *

... There is a policy open to this nation that will lead to success—a policy that leaves us free to follow our way of life, and to develop our own civilization. It is not a new and untried idea. It was advocated by Washington¹. It was incorporated in the Monroe Doctrine. Under its guidance the United States became the greatest nation in the world.

It is based upon the belief that the security of the nation lies in the strength and character of its own people. It recommends the maintenance of armed forces sufficient to defend this hemisphere from attack by any combination of foreign powers. It demands faith in an independent American destiny. This is the policy of the America First Committee today. It is a policy not of isolation, but of independence; not of defeat, but of courage. It is a policy that led this nation to success during the most trying years of our history, and it is a policy that will lead us to success again....

War is not inevitable for this country. Such a claim is defeatism in the true sense. No one can make us fight abroad unless we are willing ourselves to do so. No one will attempt to fight us here if we are ourselves as a great nation should be armed. Over a hundred million people in this nation are opposed to entering the war. If the principles of democracy mean anything at all, that is reason enough for us to

¹ George Washington (1732-1799).

stay out. If we are forced into a war against the wishes of an overwhelming majority of our people, we will have proved democracy such a failure at home that there will be little use of fighting for it abroad.

The time has when those of us who believe in an independent American destiny must band together and organize for strength. We have been led toward war by a minority of our people. This minority has power. It has influence. It has a loud voice. But it does not represent the American people. During the last several years I have traveled over this country from one end to the other. I have talked to many hundreds of men and women, and I have letters from tens of thousands more, who feel the same way as you and I.

Most of these people have no influence or power. Most of them have no means of expressing their convictions, except by their vote which has always been against this war. They are the citizens who have had to work too hard at their daily jobs to organize political meetings. Hitherto, they have relied upon their vote to express their feelings; but now they find that it is hardly remembered except in the oratory of a political campaign. These people-the majority of hardworking American citizens, are with us. They are the true strength of our country. And they are beginning to realize, as you and I, that there are times when we must sacrifice our normal interests in life in order to insure the safety and the welfare of our nation....

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Contrast Lindbergh's arguments against helping the Allies with Roosevelt's proposals.
2. Assess the viability of Lindbergh's defensive military strategy.
3. Assess Lindbergh's distinction between isolation and independence.
4. To whom was Lindbergh referring when he said that a "minority" had led the United States toward war?