

■ We Must Not Falter Now

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Authors: Henry R. Luce

Genre: speech

Summary Overview

In the spring of 1940, Congress began debate over dramatically increasing, through compulsory service, the size of the American military. *Time* and *Life* editor Henry Luce, in a CBS radio broadcast, argued that it was time for the United States to acknowledge that the war in Europe represented a threat to the United States as well. If Americans valued their way of life, he advised, they should shed the country's declared neutrality and join the war against Nazi Germany, either by supporting Great Britain and other allies with supplies and aid or by getting directly involved. He commended those leaders who had already recognized the threat and spoken out in favor of joining in the war effort, and invited others—regardless of their political ideologies—to unify in the face of the threat posed by Adolf Hitler's belligerence.

Defining Moment

By 1940, Hitler—who once told world leaders that he had no desire to go to war with his neighbors—had violated the Treaty of Versailles by inserting troops into the demilitarized Rhineland and absorbing Austria. In 1939 alone, Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia and invaded Poland, prompting France, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia to declare war in response. In 1940, the German invaders spread into Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. France also fell in 1940, as the Germans established a puppet government capital in Vichy. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Japan became allies with Germany and Italy, and, having already invaded the Chinese region of Manchuria in 1931, continued its advance into China, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.

In 1940, virtually every corner of the world, with the exception of the Western Hemisphere, was living under either the specter of war or actual wartime conditions. Once France fell, the last viable opponent for Germany was Britain (since Russia, to the east, had entered into

a nonaggression pact in 1939 with Germany). German bombers began air attacks on London and other key targets in England. Offshore, German U-boats started sinking merchant ships en route from US to British ports.

Weary from the World War I and separated from Europe and East Asia by thousands of miles of ocean, the United States clung to a state of neutrality. A majority of Americans simply felt that the growing crisis in Europe, while troubling, did not represent an immediate threat to the Western Hemisphere, particularly since no declaration of war had been issued nor had there been any direct attacks on American interests. However, news of the relentless bombing of Britain—the last American ally standing in Europe—led many leaders to call for the United States to prepare for war.

The first step, according to leaders such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Senator James Byrnes (D-South Carolina), was to bolster America's military. The US Army had been significantly reduced after World War I, and the US Navy was largely occupied with the Japan crisis. In the spring of 1940 Congress took up debate on a bill that, through a system of selective compulsory service, worked to raise a military force capable of addressing the wartime threat. The bill, first heard in the Senate, passed unanimously and was put on a course for immediate passage and signature by the president. As that legislation continued through Congress, a growing number of leaders voiced their concerns that the purpose of the bill was not just to bolster the country's security but to prepare its citizens for an unavoidable war. Prominent media mogul, entrepreneur, and philanthropist Henry Luce was among this group, taking to a platform provided by CBS Radio to convince Americans to gird themselves for another major conflict.

Author Biography

Henry Robinson Luce was born on April 3, 1898, in Tengchow (now Penglai), China. His parents were Presbyterian missionaries who inspired in him the desire to play an active role in international development and affairs. He attended the Hotchkiss School from 1913 to 1916 before attending Yale University. He took time off from school to serve as a second lieutenant in the US Army during World War I. After graduating from Yale in 1920, he worked as a journalist before partner-

ing with Hotchkiss and Yale classmate Briton Hadden to found *Time* magazine, first published in 1923. The two would establish two other major publications, *Life* and *Fortune*. In 1941, he penned an editorial, "The American Century," which called for the United States to become a world leader and model for developing countries. An ardent Republican, Luce was active in a number of presidential elections during the decades after World War II. He retired in 1964, and died February 28, 1967, at his home in Phoenix, Arizona.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

I WILL spend only a few of these few minutes talking about the trouble we are in. I want to talk about what we can do to meet the crisis and to overcome it—as a united people.

The gigantic conflict now raging threatens our national existence in any particular you may wish to name. If you are one who loves America, then there is nothing that you like or are interested in which is not already gravely threatened by this struggle. For example: If you like our standard of living,—not as high as it should be, but by far the highest in the world—then that standard of living is gravely threatened. If you are interested in free enterprise—then that is threatened. If you are interested in labor unions—then they are threatened. If you are interested in art and culture—they are threatened. If you are interested in the institutions of self government, in the right to vote, in trial by jury, in the free press,—then all these and more are threatened. And if you are interested in the right to worship God in your own way—then that most definitely is threatened. I do not say the Christian religion can perish. By all the promises we hold most dear, it cannot. But the Christian Church can be driven from the face of the earth back into the catacombs.

Now we, the American people, do not choose to surrender our lives to circumstance. We choose to act. Accordingly we must give to our leaders—of both parties—some rough blueprint of the will and the purpose that is in our hearts. For we have at last a common purpose. For we intend, before many years are passed, we intend to have Peace, real Peace in a world of Peace.

Here, then it seems to me, is what we can tell

the leaders of a united nation—in broad outline but in plain English:

First, we are profoundly willing to strive with all our might and main to make our democracy work better. We know we must go to work—and work harder. It is no longer a question of finding jobs for the unemployed. We urgently need today the full-time services of every able-bodied man and every able-bodied woman in our land. In the next few months, America must and will go back to work.

And, secondly, we know we have to prepare to fight. Yes, well not go on wrapping words in cotton and muffling unpleasant sounds by sticking our fingers in our ears. We won't be fooled by the sound of words like "defense" and "safety." The kind of armament we have ordered, the kind our Senate voted for 74 to 0—that kind of armament isn't anything at all like the pearl-handled pistol our maiden aunt might keep under her pillow. We don't expect to buy a war machine out of a show window and hire a chauffeur to run it. We, all of us,—brothers and sons and fathers—we are ready to get ready to fight. If you are anything like me, you will hate every inch of the way of armament, every inch of the way until at last we can throw the whole wasteful, murderous mess of tanks and guns and bombers into the bottom of the sea. Or most of them anyway. It will be a long, long road. You will hate it to the end—and you will not falter.

But thirdly, the problem which is troubling most of us is how to help the Allies right now in their back-to-the-wall struggle against Nazi conquest.

Before we can answer that question we have to face frankly what may happen. Suppose Hitler wins—this

summer. If Hitler wins, the United States of America will have to make some arrangements for living indefinitely in the same world with Adolf Hitler. Now, it's going to make all the difference how we deal with him. Faced with a triumphant Germany, we are going to hear a lot of plausible talk about how maybe Hitler isn't so bad after all, about how he is going to settle down and paint pictures and be a perfectly sweet benefactor of Mankind. Or the words may be different, but that will be the tune. If we deal with the Third Reich on a basis of appeasement of any kind, it will follow as sure as night follows day that we will pay for it in blood and tears—in the bloody end of all our democracy. We must deal with Hitler as with an enemy—an enemy of Peace, our Peace. If Hitler wins, nothing must stop us for one moment from arming ourselves up to the limit. And as we arm and as we deal intelligently and firmly with Hitler, so will we be able to bring comfort and healing to millions of defeated men and women. These men and women will not be defeated in their spirit and their children will not grow up defeated if we acquit ourselves without fear and without reproach.

Now, secondly, suppose Hitler is not able to bring Great Britain and France to their knees—to his knees—this summer. Then the Allies are likely to win. But how soon they will win and how great their chances are of averting worldwide chaos—that will depend upon how much help we can give and how fast we give it. We would give a good deal today for a chance to stop Hitler without going to war ourselves. If we could buy an Allied victory in one year for \$5,000,000,000 we would be the luckiest people in the world. So, let's make our politicians understand that we don't want to miss the bus, we want to give the Allies unlimited aid as fast as possible.

But what about now,—what about now, this tragic desperate moment? There is something we can do immediately and do it better now than ever again. We can stand up and speak our mind. We can strip off our false cloak of neutrality and announce to the world—to the brown men and the black men and the yellow men and to all the white men of the world—that we stand now and so long as any of us shall live we shall continue to stand for democracy, for international law, for the sanctity of treaties, for freedom, for the individual rights of man, for the faith of our fathers. We can make it plain that therefore we as a nation, one and indissoluble,

deeply wish that Hitler's attack may be beaten off, that we as a nation will continue to refuse to recognize the Nazi domination of free peoples, that we as a nation will continue to oppose, by whatever means seem to us best, the consequences of Nazi victory.

Other proposals have been made. Senator Pepper has proposed that the President be authorized to sell to the Allies some of our army planes to be replaced at any time by planes the Allies have on order here. I favor this proposal. And it might make a difference now. But I am ready and I think the American people are ready to be done with little gestures, little hints of how we stand. I think we are ready to speak out plain to tell the world how we honestly feel.

In my opinion, it is vitally important for us to do this now for our own sakes.

It is apparent that we cannot help others with arms—if we ourselves are not armed. It is even truer that we cannot help others spiritually except as our own spiritual house is in order. The American spirit has recently not been in good order. We can now go a long ways toward regaining our spiritual integrity, as God-fearing democrats, if we stand up and speak our mind now.

How do we do this? We do it by calling upon each of our political leaders to declare himself on behalf of himself and on behalf of us all. Let every political leader high and low speaking for himself and for us, state flatly in his own way (1) that he wishes the defeat of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany (2) that he will never vote to recognize the Nazi domination of once free peoples (3) that he will never in any way give aid and comfort to the Third Reich (4) that he will continue to oppose by every wise and practical means, the consequences of Nazi victory.

Fully realizing his great responsibility, let us nevertheless call upon Franklin Roosevelt to make such a statement. It may not be news how he feels. But it will be news that the American people, whom he serves, now want him to say it plain.

And let us call upon Herbert Hoover of California, first private citizen of the world—let us call upon him to say it too. It may be no news that he feels that way either—but news, great news that his fellow countrymen want him to say it.

And we will call upon Cordell Hull of Tennessee and upon his friend and predecessor as Secretary of State,

Henry L. Stimson of New York, both of whom, against the terrific weight of apathy and ignorance, have fought with all their hearts and minds to stem the oncoming tide of international law breakers. We will call upon Key Pittman of Nevada, far-seeing Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and upon Senate Leaders Alben Barkley of Kentucky and Charles McNary of Oregon, the furthest west of freedom. And we will call upon the most active of our presidential candidates—upon Thomas E. Dewey of New York and Robert A. Taft of Ohio and Burton K. Wheeler of Montana and Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan and Wendell Willkie of Indiana. And you and I, wherever we are, will call upon every candidate for office in the place where we live—we will call upon them to stand up and speak their minds.

Mr. Hoover once said to me there have not been many times in history but there have been a few times, when declarations have changed the course of history. This can be one of the times. (Rising above all partisanship let all our first citizens fashion the words which mean faithful comradeship with all men everywhere who work and fight and pray for peace and freedom.)

Are we or are we not in favor of freedom and democracy? Will we or will we not compromise with the Law

Breakers of the world? Those are the simple questions we need to answer now as a united nation. We can reserve to ourselves freedom of action—to take only such steps in defense of our principles as may seem to us from time to time to be wise and effective. But by standing up and speaking our minds now, we will keep alive hope in the hearts of the defeated and bring new courage to those who press on to battle.

For ours can yet be an epoch of great hope and human progress. The trouble we see about us is not the end of the world. It is only the end—nearly the end—of much folly and miscalculation and stupidity. I know that there are young people listening to me who are quietly resolved to build a better world when their time for leadership comes. And to them I say, you will have your chance and you will succeed if you do not falter now. As for those of us who are older, we are totally unwilling to leave behind us as the record of our generation the world as it now is. And to all of my generation I say we, too, will have our chance our chance to redeem the folly and stupidity of which we all were a part. We, too, will have our chance to leave behind us a world better than we found it. And we will not falter now.

Document Analysis

During his radio address, Henry Luce makes clear that the American way of life is in grave danger from the belligerent German force that grew in Europe. He says that the time for denying this threat existed was over. Americans need to unite, he declares, in a collection of voices. Every American, regardless of his or her political party, needs to profess that he or she intends to work for “Peace, real Peace in a world of Peace.” The United States stands at a crossroads, he suggests: it can choose to stand tall against Germany or continue to hide behind a false sense of neutrality. Only if it chooses the former road, he says, could America’s leadership and strength become manifest for the whole world to see. Luce first appeals to Americans to take stock of what is at risk. The American way of life—a high standard of living, free enterprise, democratic government, organized labor, arts and culture, and religious freedom—were threatened by Nazi Germany. Luce emphasizes the idea that, if Hitler won the war, Christians of all sects would undoubtedly be sent into hiding. Luce calls

upon Americans to take two actions to prevent these losses. The first, he says, is to work hard to improve American democracy and strengthen the economy so that they are more difficult to topple. Second, he says, Americans need to prepare to go to war in defense of these ideals. Toward this end, Luce adds, the US Senate voted unanimously to install the compulsory service system. Still, Americans need to join willingly and zealously, he says. They might hate war (and they should), he says, but Americans should still take part in it without hesitation.

Luce also assesses the situation in Europe. Hitler, he says, has a history of deceiving Germany’s neighbors with diplomatic pleasantries before attacking them. The Nazi leader, Luce adds, should not be appeased, as such a policy would inevitably result in “the bloody end of all our democracy.” Additionally, Luce comments on the plight of the last-standing American ally in Europe: Britain. He says that it is possible that the British might, with no help from the United States or others, repel Hitler’s attack. However, such a victory might take

a great deal of time. The United States, he says, should give as much aid and support to Great Britain to help that nation defeat Hitler in a much quicker fashion. “We don’t want to miss the bus,” he states. Americans should pressure their elected leaders to provide major assistance to its allies.

Luce adds that Americans should take immediate action, the first step of which is simply to speak out against Hitler and the Third Reich. Every leader, he says, whether Democratic or Republican, past or current, must stand tall and reject the Nazis. There is no room for small gestures or acts, he says. The United States should, as one nation, hold fast to its values, and reject petty “folly and miscalculation and stupidity” in the face of the looming Nazi threat.

Essential Themes

Henry Luce grew up believing that the United States should be an international leader. In this radio address, his philosophy was evident. He called upon Americans to finally reject the country’s neutral stance on the war, a concept he saw as akin to “wrapping words in cotton and muffling unpleasant sounds by sticking our fingers in our ears,” and take substantive actions to defend the American way of life. Failing to do so, he said, would likely result in either an immediate win by Germany or a long, costly slog toward an Allied victory.

Luce underscored what was at risk if the United States were to live “indefinitely in the same world as Adolf Hitler.” In such a world, democracy, free enterprise, organized labor, and Christian values would be expunged in the United States as they had been in Germany and other nations conquered by the Nazis. Hitler, Luce said, was consistent in his belligerence. There could be no negotiation or appeasement with the

Third Reich, only direct engagement and war. Americans should not like to enter a war, he said, but they should be prepared nonetheless, for Hitler would continue to move westward if the Nazis were able to defeat Great Britain. Americans should therefore invest in and embrace their democratic values in the face of the Nazi threat.

There did exist an opportunity for the United States to help defeat Germany, in Luce’s opinion. According to Luce, the collective motivation of American citizens and leaders would be central to achieving an American victory, whether by supporting the Allies or joining in the fight. Partisanship, small gestures, and petty actions were to be rejected in the face of strong, unified American voices against Hitler, Nazi domination, and the threat they posed to freedom.

—Michael P. Auerbach, MA

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