

Study Questions for Guinsburg and Reynolds Reading

Thomas N. Guinsburg, “The Triumph of Isolationism”

1. Why does the author believe that none of the various explanations for American isolationism during the 1930s are entirely compelling?
2. Was Roosevelt committed to isolationism? If not, why didn't he push back harder against those who were insisting that Congress enact isolationist policies?
3. What advantages did the isolationists have over the internationalists in making their case to the public?
4. What were some of the unintended consequences of the isolationists' successes during the 1930s? How did the isolationists end up helping to precipitate the very abuses of presidential power they warned against?
5. Given the evidence Guinsburg presents, do you believe Roosevelt was too cautious in his response to the isolationists or was he simply accepting political reality?

Reynolds, Chapter 2

1. How do “Empire, Ideology, and Economics” help explain the origins of World War II?
2. How were fascism, communism, and liberal democracy different from each other?
3. Why was the Spanish Civil War seen as an indication of the weakness of liberal democracy during the 1930s?
4. What is the difference between liberal capitalism and autarky? Why did autarky seem to be winning the battle of economic systems during the 1930s?
5. How did the United States' “Empire of Liberty” differ from the empires of Europe and Asia?
6. What factors kept the US from gravitating toward fascism, communism, or economic autarky?

7. Why does Reynolds describe the US in the 1930s as a “country that had lost its nerve”? How is this “loss of nerve” seen in the foreign policies of this decade?
8. In his approach to foreign policy, in what ways did Franklin D. Roosevelt draw on the ideas of both Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt? In what ways was he different than Wilson?
9. To what extent is it correct to say that throughout 1937-1938, FDR’s policy regarding the situation in Europe was limited to “pin pricks and righteous protests”? If true, *why* was this the case?

Reynolds, Chapter 3

1. What effect did the Nazi-Soviet pact have on the geopolitical situation in both Europe and Asia? What effect did it have on public opinion and policy in the US?
2. Why was FDR concerned about air power after 1938? Why did he fear German air power in particular?
3. Why did FDR fail to rally Congress or the public to a policy of “unneutral rearmament” in late 1938 and early 1939?
4. Why was the US less worried about getting involved in the Sino-Japanese conflict than it was about getting involved in Europe? How did events in Europe shape US policy in Asia?
5. How did the Neutrality Act of 1939 make it less likely the US would be pulled into a European war but also enable the US to provide more help to the British and French?