

Primary Source Reading 11-2 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Roosevelt and the Isolationists

▣ About the Selection

President Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union address has gone down in history as the "Four Freedoms" speech. In it, he set American hopes on a world built on the foundations of freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. He also used the speech to explain the current dangerous situation of the country and to answer the isolationists.

Reader's Dictionary



appeasement: to bring to a state of peace

arsenal: place where weapons are made and stored

assailed: attacked

GUIDED READING

As you read, note Roosevelt's arguments against the isolationists. Then answer the questions that follow.

I address you, the members of the Seventy-seventh Congress, at a moment unprecedented in the history of the Union. I use the word "unprecedented," because at no previous time has American security been as seriously threatened from without as it is today. . . .

Every realist knows that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly assailed in every part of the world—assailed either by arms, or by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord in nations still at peace.

During sixteen months this assault has blotted out the whole pattern of democratic life in an appalling number of independent nations, great and small. The assailants are still on the march, threatening other nations, great and small.

I find it necessary to report that the future and safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.

No realistic American can expect from a dictator's peace international generosity, or return of true independence, or world disarmament, or freedom of expression, or freedom of religion—or even good business.

We must always be wary of those who with sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal preach the "ism" of appeasement.

We must especially beware of that small group of selfish men who would clip the wings of the American eagle in order to feather their own nests. . . .

I have recently pointed out how quickly the tempo of modern warfare could bring into our very midst the physical attack which we must eventually expect if the dictator nations win this war.

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As long as the aggressor nations maintain the offensive, they—not we—will choose the time and the place and the method of their attack.

The need of the moment is that our actions and our policy should be devoted primarily—almost exclusively—to meeting this foreign peril. For all our domestic problems are now a part of the great emergency.

Just as our national policy in internal affairs has been based upon a decent respect for the right and the dignity of all our fellow men within our gates, so our national policy in foreign affairs has been based on a decent respect for the rights and dignity of all nations, large and small. And the justice of morality must and will win in the end.

. . . We know that enduring peace cannot be bought at the cost of other people's freedom.

Our most useful and immediate role is to act as an arsenal for them [nations fighting aggression] as well as ourselves. They do not need man power. They do need billions of dollars' worth of the weapons of defense.

Source: *Living American Documents*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961.

READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. What will win in the end, according to Roosevelt?

2. Where in his speech does Roosevelt anticipate an attack like the one on Pearl Harbor?

3. What role does Roosevelt say America should play in supporting the Europeans fighting tyranny?

4. **Critical Thinking** Roosevelt says, "We know that enduring peace cannot be bought at the cost of other people's freedom." What do you think he means?
