American Reaction to the Japanese Attack on Pear Harbor:
A Public Opinion Study

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Introductory Note

This work is a public opinion study on the American reaction to the Japanese bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base on December 7, 1941. I have attempted here to demonstrate that American opinion concerning this event, while unified in its fundamental opposition to the "treacherous Japanese militarism" that this attack seemingly represented, actually encompassed diverse views and reactions to the Pearl Harbor tragedy. My findings suggest that U.S.-Japanese conflict here stemmed from a series of diplomatic crises which had taken place throughout the 1930's. It is important to note that my use of the term "the American public" refers only to the specific sources I have evaluated in this article, rather than to "grassroots" national sentiment, as research of these publications alone does not enable me to render such a precise assessment of U.S. public opinion.

I have based all conclusions reached here on the following sources: *Time, Newsweek, The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times, Life, The Atlantic*

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Monthly, and *Harper's Magazine*. While each of these publications reflects diverse views, it is possible to form general ideas regarding their views on the origins of the war. *The New York Times* and *TIME* usually supported the Roosevelt administration's simple assessment of U.S.-Japanese discord in 1941. Conversely, *Life, The Nation,* and *The New Republic* were "critical" of American Far Eastern policy since they usually set forth analyses which cited the Roosevelt Administration's diplomatic ineptitude as the cause of the war betwen America and Japan. *Harper's Magazine, Newsweek,* and *The Atlantic Monthly* offer more moderate appraisals of U.S.-Japanese relations than do the aforementioned periodicals, because they normally present a blend of ideas which is best classified as "balanced" rather than "extremist". The careful reader should note, of course, that these interpretations are not necessarily mutually inconsistent; it was quite possible for an author or publication to criticize both Japan and the United States for weakness, incompetence, inflexiblity, or all three.

I believe that this selection of periodicals spans the range of viewed of American-Japaese relations prevailing in the U.S. after the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. Each publication also presents the ideas of those Americans who were best informed about foreign affairs in 1941. Therefore, examination of these sources uncovers information which sheds much light on how Americans viewed U.S. Far Eastern diplomacy as World War II began.

Few events in American history have had such sudden impact on American public opinion as the Japanese bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base on December 7, 1941. Americans accorded the American-Japanese conflict their complete attention and interest. Consequently, speculation concerning the causes of the Pearl Harbor attack pervaded American thought in the weeks following December 7th.

American scrutiny of past U.S.-Japanese diplomatic relations produced diverse conclusions. While an "official view" explaining the causes of war with Japan dominated American thought, many Americans set forth explanations straying from this line. The "official view," or Roosevelt administration line, concerned itself primarily with Japanese treachery and American naval unpreparedness at Pearl Harbor. Dissenters from this stance offered more complex explanations, all of which reflected the history of U.S.-Japanese relations in the Far East. To them, the Pearl Harbor attack represented the culmination of a long-standing and unresolved conflict. They strove to find logical and complete explanations for the failure of U.S.-Japanese diplomacy. In doing so, they promulgated a wide and varied range of views.

Some continued to blame Japan for the diplomatic failure — but for reasons other than treachery and evil. Others blamed America for war's occurrence, and boldly criticized its past Far Eastern diplomatic behavior. This criticism was surprisingly diverse, and reflects a deeper understanding of Far Eastern problems that one might expect to find at this time, given the prevalence of the "official" line in the public sector. Almost all observers hailed Pearl Harbor's most dramatic effect: the unification of American diplomatic aims. While explanation for war's occurrence may have varied, few doubted that Japan, as America's enemy, had to be defeated in war.

Careful examination of the reaction of key commentators to the Pearl Harbor bombing elucidates the U.S.-Japanese conflict during this era. Public opinion in this instance uncovers the roots of the rift between Japan and America and adds greater detail to our knowledge of U.S.-Japanese relations at this time. This in turn, heightens our understanding of the causes of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Sunday, December 7, 1941, was "a black day in American history."[1] Japan's surprise attack shocked most Americans; a slumbering and unprepared America had been forced to sustain a heavy blow. Yet the incident at Pearl Harbor did not crush American morale; few viewed the Japanese blitz attack as an "irretrievable disaster."[2] Instead, an aroused America rallied behind its President and prepared to fight its attacker. Franklin Delano Roosevelt saw events transpiring at Pearl Harbor clearly and simply: in his view, Japan was an evil aggressor nation whose treacherous attack on America typified the unjust course which it had pursued for years in the Far East, and planned to pursue in its future

1. *Newsweek,* 15 December 1941, p. 16.
2. *Life,* 29 December 1941, p. 20.

international relations. In a national radio address on December 10, 1941, he declared:

> The sudden criminal attacks perpetrated by the Japanese in the Pacific provide the climax of a decade of international immorality. Powerful and resourceful gangsters have banded together to make war upon the whole human race. Their challenge has now been flung at the United States of America.[3]

The American public adopted this line eagerly. Its legislative representatives in Congress heartily applauded President Roosevelt's declaration of war on Japan, passing this resolution with but one dissenting vote. *The New York Times* argued that the history of past U.S.-Japanese relations "demonstrates clearly that Japan chose war not because she had no alternative, but because she was determined to carry out her policy of aggression."[4] Affirming its support of President Roosevelt's judgment of Japanese diplomacy, it added, "We have been attacked by Japan in a coup as treacherously planned and as dastardly as any ever delivered by the Germans."[5]

This charge also reflected President Roosevelt's deep conviction that Japanese aggression was part of a worldwide conspiracy through which the evil nations forming the Axis Alliance sought to gain control of the world. In his December 9th radio address, he argued,

> The course that Japan has followed for the past ten years in Asia has paralleled the course of Hitler and Mussilini in Europe and Africa. It is collaboration, actual collaboration so well calculated that all the continents of the world and all the oceans are now considered by the axis strategists as one gigantic battlefield.[6]

This view was soon advanced in the nation's major publications, most notably *The New York Times* and *The New Republic.* The *Times* was firmly convinced that Japan's militarist tendencies matched the aims of the Axis alliance to which it belonged. It agreed with Chinese ambassador Dr. Hu Shih's assessment of the Far Eastern situtation which held that

> Japan became part of the Axis not by accident but by a tradition centuries old of militarism that groomed her for a place beside the European totalitarian and militarist nations . . .[7]

Echoing President Roosevelt's words, *The New Republic* declared, " . . . we may be sure that the action of Japan was part of a strategic unit in which the

3. *The New York Times,* 10 December 1941, p. 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 9 December 1941, p. 30.
5. *Ibid.*, 14 December 1941, Section 4, p. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1941, p. 1.
7. *Ibid.*, 20 December 1941, p. 6.

war in Europe plays an important role . . . [8]''

While Americans espousing the President's view were quick to criticize Japanese diplomatic actions, few found fault in America's position. Indeed, like New York University Law Professor Alexander N. Sack, most believed that Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was ''a violation of international law'' and America's good faith.[9] They fully supported their President's strong indictment of Japan which found expression in his ''White Paper'' on Pearl Harbor. Here, in justifying America's past diplomatic stance towards Japan he argued,

> The story on Japanese and American dealings is an open record written on the books of history. What it shows is that every initiative for peace and better understanding during the whole course of the slowly developing crisis of the last twenty years has come from the United States. . . . Japan replied to these efforts through its long-prepared attack without warning on American bases in the Pacific. There is the record, for all history to read in amazement, in sorrow, in horror, and in disgust.[10]

Newsweek found past American diplomacy essential to projection of its national security interests and argued that any other policy stance towards Japan ''would strengthen Japan without assuring that her renewed strength would not be used against us at a time even more unfavorable to us that the present.''[11]

Thus, supporters of the so-called ''official view'' of Japanese behavior at Pearl Harbor were firmly convinced of the correctness of past American diplomtic moves regarding Japan. They also believed that America's approach to the Far Eastern conflict was morally correct. They agreed with President Roosevelt's declaration that in the Second World War,

> the United States was fighting in self-defense to maintain the right of nations and of mankind to live in peace under conditions of security and justice.[12]

The President's backers reasoned that the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor was a challenge that threatened the status of the free world, and that America as the world's foremost democratic nation, had a duty to repel the forces threatening the maintenance of a free way of life. President Roosevelt's declaration that

> We are now in the midst of a war, not for conquest, not for vengeance, but for [preservation] of a [way of life] and a world which will be safe for our children,

8. *The New Republic,* 105 (15 December 1941): 811. The editors at this time were Bruce Bliven, Malcolm Cowley, George Soule, and Starke Young; it is not clear who wrote the Pearl Harbor editorials.
9. *The New York Times,* 21 December 1941, Section E, p. 6.
10. *Ibid.,* 16 December 1941, pp. 1 and 26.
11. Ernest K. Lindley, ''Behind the Failure of Our Diplomatic Gamble'', *Newsweek,* 15 December 1941, p. 23.
12. *The New York Times,* 16 December 1941, p. 6.

fully embodied their feelings.[13] This view found strong support in the pages of *The New York Times* and *Time*. *The New York Times* viewed advocacy of the American cause as crucial to mankind's future, because with the advent of war, "The great issue of life or death for decent standards of internation conduct now hangs in the balance."[14] *Time* chose President Roosevelt as its "Man of the Year" for 1941, because "the country he leads stands for the hopes of the world."[15] Such pronouncements imputed to America an aura of boundless righteousness. Indeed, the President's supporters experienced little difficulty in determining which nation was "right" in the U.S.-Japanese conflict.

Not all Americans, however, viewed the U.S.-Japanese conflict in strictly moral terms. Many, while blaming Japan for Far Eastern strife, chose to criticize the efficacy of its diplomacy rather than its intrinsic character. Such critics believed that Japan had provoked war with the United States not simply because it was evil, but because its leaders had pursued an improper diplomatic tack over the years which had led it to blunder into conflict with both Western and Asian nations. This view, while certainly not widespread, found expression in diverse publications such as *Harper's Magazine, The New Republic,* and *Life.*

Writing in *Harper's Magazine,* Henry C. Wolfe outlined the major points forming the primary basis of this critical view of Japan.[16] An experienced foreign correspondent and lecturer, Wolfe had used his extensive first-hand knowledge of Central and East European affairs to predict the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 not long before its signing; in the fall of 1941, he had returned from a long tour of Asia, including Japan. He began his criticism of past Japanese diplomacy, by noting that "The root of Japan's troubles rested in her mistaken attitude toward the other peoples of Asia in the past half-century." According to Wolfe, "Japan had the chance to become the sincere leader of Asia, and to reap the benefits of the creation of a greater Asian co-prosperity sphere." Instead, he maintained, Japan did not free the Far East from the injustice it had experienced as a result of Western influence here, "she only took its place as the oppressor and exploiter of her non-white neighbor races." Japan he asserted, had ultimately forfeited its opportunity for Far Eastern leadership, in favor of a policy of imperialism and exploitation, which led to its invasion of Manchuria, only the first of several Japanese diplomatic "blunders" engendered by Japan's mistaken imperialist stance. Indeed, Wolfe argued, "By this time [the Japanese invasion of Manchuria] the island empire had lost sight of the advantages of international good will . . . and short-sighted Japan [by now] had no intention of stopping at Manchuria."

13. *Time,* 22 December 1941, p. 10.
14. *The New York Times,* 10 December 1941, p. 24.
15. *Time,* 5 January 1942, p. 14. The choice of FDR was a remarkable one because publisher and editor Henry R. Luce had been a passionate supporter of Wendell Willkie in 1940.
16. Henry C. Wolfe, "Where Japan Blundered," *Harper's Magazine,* 184 (January 1942): 210-216.

Wolfe noted that Japan's pursuance of an unrestrained Asian policy had threatened its very existence. He declared in *Harper's*,

> The policy of the Japanese militarists and imperialists has brought Japan to a terrible quandary. Drained by four years of war in China, with the danger of greatly expanded hostilities, Japan has been facing a deadly choice. To retreat has meant to abandon her grandoise plans; to stand still, however, has meant to lose face, and furthermore to sink down into the morass of war and economic collapse; to go forward along the path of her immitable imperialistic policies has meant to plunge into a broader war which, with her depleted resources, she can hardly win.[17]

Thus, Wolfe concluded that Japan had made a series of diplomatic blunders which forced it ito isolation and membership in the Axis Alliance. This he reasoned, was perhaps Japan's most serious error, for it placed it in direct conflict with the United States, a rival whom she could never hope to defeat:

> Japan thought that active Axis partnership would give it a free hand to carry out its plans for a co-prosperity sphere in Asia. But it did nothing of the kind. It aroused American hostility and moved the U.S. to take a more positive interest in the affairs of the Far East. American help to Chiang Kai-Shek increased . . . the democracies froze Japanese assets and instituted an oil embargo . . . and for all this Japan had only her imperialists and military extremists to thank.

Wolfe concluded that Japan's imperialistic moves ultimately earned it both Eastern and Western enmity and "forced her into isolation and Axis membership because she had no one else to turn to but Hitler."

Thus, according to Wolfe and other critics of Japanese diplomacy, Japan, as 1941 ended, had driven itself into a position of hopeless desperation by pursuing shortsighted and unrealistic aims. In their view, the Pearl Harbor attack was a clear expression of this desperation. A contributor to *The New Republic* claimed, "The Pearl Harbor attack was brilliant but also desperate . . . The attack was at bottom an expression of fear . . . "[18] To this *Life* added,

> Close observers of Japan have said for years that if that country ever found itself in a hopeless corner it was capable of committing national hara kiri by flinging itself at the throat of its mightiest enemy. Japan has found itself in such a corner. It could not retreat without losing all, and it could not advance without war. It took the desperate plunge [at Pearl Harbor] and told its enemies in effect: "If this be hara-kiri, make the most of it."[19]

This very point received backing from another group in the arena of U.S. public opinion: critics of America's policy towards Japan. This group argued that

17. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
18. William Horton Hale, "After Pearl Harbor," *The New Republic*, 105 (15 December 1941): 816.
19. *Life*, 15 December 1941, p. 27.

American diplomacy, not Japanese imperialism, had led Japan to its desperate plight. America, it asserted, had, in its Far Eastern dealings, been uncompromising, unrealistic, and misleading. It had adopted measures and stances which had led to the polarization of Western and Japanese interests. In support of this charge, these critics cited America's peace proposal to Japan, of November 26, 1941. They argued that this document, which called primarily for Japan's military withdrawal from China and Indochina, and American and Japanese abandonment of their "territorial rights" in China, had been a demand for complete Japanese capitulation to American aims in the Far East, as it failed to recognize Japanese national security interests in this region. In essence, they noted that America here so stubbornly clung to its own interests, and was so determined to forge a settlement based on its own rules of "just" diplomacy, that it backed Japan into a tight corner. Progressive journalist I.F. Stone, in an article in *The Nation* which criticized Japanese intransigence, noted the futility of such diplomatic demands.

> The proposals made by Secretary Hull in his November 26th letter were so obviously unacceptable to a government like Japan's, that one wonders why we negotiated at all.[20]

E.B. White derided America's idealistic expectation that Japanese diplomatic dealings would operate according to the "traditional rules of diplomacy," even if America discounted Japanese interests in the Far East. He noted in his regular "One Man's Meat" column in *Harper's Magazine* that

> In this country [America] we are used to the queer notion that any sort of sporting contest must be governed by a set of rules . . . so it was quite to be expected that America grew purple and pink with rage when the Japanese struck us without warning.[21]

In another *Harper's* article, noted isolationist William Henry Chamberlin observed that America's polarization-inducing approach to Japanese diplomacy drove Japan to war. He asserted,

> Japan was confronted with the choice, made specifically clear in Mr. Hull's memorandum of November 26th, of withdrawing from China, of becoming progressively weaker as the [American] economic sanctions took effect, or of fighting. It is hard to see how anyone familiar with the character of the Japanese people and with the mentality of the military and naval groups that dominated Japanese policy could have escaped the conclusion that the third choice was the most probable.[22]

20. I.F. Stone, "War Come to Washington," *The Nation*, 153 (13 December 1941): 603.
21. *Harper's Magazine*, 184 (February 1942): 329-330.
22. *Ibid.*, March 1942, p. 342.

Critics began to attack the particulars of America's Japanese foreign policy, and did not like what they saw. For instance, many noted that American support of Chinese interests had led to poor diplomatic relations with Japan. With this development, some questioned America's stake in a war where its national security interests did not seem directly threatened. Calling China "the stumbling block in U.S.-Japanese relations" Nathaniel Peffer declared, "The war between Japan and the United States hinged on China — the Pearl Harbor bombs not only began a war, but logically concluded a chapter of American and Far Eastern history."[23] Similarly, *Newsweek's* Washington Bureau Chief, Ernest K. Lindley, noted that in past years "the apparently insurmountable difficulty in U.S.-Japanese relations was the situation in China."[24] Peffer, in *The New Republic*, agreed with the general American conviction that the resolution of the "China problem" was crucial to the maintenance of Far Eastern peace. Yet, he felt that America, in forging such a settlement, should most probably heed Japanese interests here, since China's status was "worth a war to Japan."[25] Indeed, he said, "Why America should be a protagonist for an independent China is not easy to say."[26]

Critics of America's Japanese foreign policy also questioned a problem which they believed lay at the heart of America's diplomatic problems with Japan: America's mistaken attitude towards this Far Eastern power. While this criticism was not widespread, it did find expression in several of America's most influential publications, most notably, *Harper's Magazine*. Its proponents argued that American actions concerning the Far East had rested on the mistaken and unrealistic notion that Japan lacked the resolve, verve, and power to protect its national security interests in this region from American incursion. That is, these critics believed that America had mistakenly grounded its diplomacy on the unfounded assumption that Japanese "weakness" accorded it the option of "carte blanche" action in Asia. They asserted that this notion not only doomed the prospect of tension-free U.S.-Japanese relations, but was also tragically naive.

Veteran foreign correspondent William Henry Chamberlin outlined these sentiments in a lengthy article in *Harper's Magazine* during the spring of 1942. Here he noted regretfully,

> For some inexplicable reason the conviction gained ground throughout the U.S. during the last year that Japan would be a pushover, that its military and naval strength was little, if any, more formidable than that of Costa Rica. Here was another sad and conspicious example of our national weakness for wishful thinking.[27]

23. Nathaniel Peffer, "China's Future and Our Own," *The New Republic*, 105 (22 December 1941): 853-854.
24. Lindley, "Failure," p. 23.
25. "China's Future," p. 854.
26. *Ibid.*
27 William Henry Chamberlin, "America in World War, 1917-1942," *Harper's Magazine*, 184 (March 1942): 338.

Chamberlin concluded that this tendency resulted in America's "gross underestimation of Japan's striking power . . . ."[28] A letter to the editor of *The New York Times* reached the same conclusion: "The U.S. has underestimated Japan's intelligence and unswerving directness of purpose."[29] *Newsweek* noted that even many military men were "disturbed by commentators' glib predictions of a quick U.S. victory over Japan."[30]

Some noted that America's condescending treatment of Japan had become so firmly grounded in U.S. though that efforts to question it were fruitless. While still opposing intervention in the European war, observed Chamberlin in *Harper's*,

> . . . even the most diehard isolationists had nothing to say in criticism of Mr. Roosevelt's action in freezing Japanese assets and practically breaking off trade relations . . . This marked difference in attitude between war with Germany and war with Japan may well be explained largely by the general belief that war with Japan would be a swift and easy process . . . .[31]

When critics of this attitude attempted to challenge its validity,

> Stony silence, accompanied by covert suspicion that here was perhaps an agent of the Mikado, or at best, an "appeaser," was the need of the observer with Far Eastern experience who ventured to suggest that Japan occupied a strong strategic position, that nothing in Japanese history or character would suggest that Japan would be likely to surrender to economic sanctions or to crumple and fold up if a few bombs should fall on Japanese cities."[32]

Chamberlin argued that Americans blindly rejected such dissenting views and made this "curious cult of Japan as a pushover" the prevailing view.[33] He noted that

> Delighted applause was the reward of the speaker who represented the Japanese as a people of futile cretins, who called loudly for talking tough and slapping them down hard, and asserted that the Island Empire could be blotted off the map within two weeks, or at the most moderate estimate, within two month."[34]

Newsweek also acknowledged the widespread popularity of this ill-conceived view and declared, "There were many — in the government as well as outside — who thought the Japanese could be bluffed down."[35]

28. *Ibid.*, p. 339.
29. *The New York Times*, 13 December 1941, Letter from Hyacinthe Hingross, p. 20.
30. *Newsweek*, 15 December 1941, p. 11.
31. Chamberlin, "America in World War," p. 342.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 338.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Lindley, "Failure," p. 23.

Critics of this tough approach argued that it led America to adopt measures such as economic sanctions, which made normal relations with Japan untenable. They asserted that America's establishment of an economic blockade on July 26, 1941, through its freezing of Japanese assets, ultimately fostered the irrevocable tension between the two powers which led to the Japanese bombing of Pear Harbor.[36] These observers profoundly regretted American action in this direction, not only because it led to U.S.-Japanese hostility, but because they sincerely believed that the enactment of such measures would not enable America to achieve its primary aim: to make Japan heed its proposals concerning the Far Eastern order completely. Indeed, most such critics believed that this fact would never lead Japan to succumb to American will. Therefore, *Time* declared, "America's belief that the 'white war' of economic blockade will crush Japan, is unfounded."[37] *Life*, attesting to Japanese strength, exhorted, "Japan cannot be starved to its knees by [economic] blockade . . . . Its people eat very little and produce a great deal."[38] *The Nation* asserted, "Too much weight has been given to Japanese economic weakness . . . . "[39]

Indeed, many observers strove vainly to prove that Japan had the resources to withstand economic pressure and that American actions here would not, and ultimately did not, deter it from defending its vital national security interests. Regarding America's economic blockade *The New York Times* stated,

> . . . Japan has enough strategic raw materials and reserve oil . . . to last at least a year, perhaps even twice that long.[40]

Life added,

> . . . Japan does not have much but what it does have is quite enough to fight the kind of limited war it thinks necessary to drive the allies out of the Far East.[41]

Thus, critics of America's use of economic warfare to influence Japanese foreign policy, were convinced that its employment was fruitless. In fact, they, like Ernest K. Lindley of *Newsweek,* concluded that "the real deterrent to Japan was fear of ultimate defeat," not American imposed economic sanctions.[42]

Such critics argued that measures such as America's economic blockade of Japan, coupled with its underestimation of its Far Eastern rival, severely clouded relations between the two nations. In their view, these policies had stirred an air of desperate tension in U.S.-Japanese relations, and had stirred within Japan,

36. *Ibid.*, at 19.
37. *Time*, 22 December 1941, p. 28.
38. *Life*, 5 January 1942, pp. 44-45.
39. *The Nation*, 153 (20 December 1941): 635.
40. *The New York Times*, 14 December 1941, Section 4, p. 5.
41. *Life*, 5 January 1942, pp. 42-43.
42. Lindley, "Failure," p. 23.

deep resentment of America's stance. These circumstances, such observers commented bitterly, virtually guaranteed future U.S.-Japanese conflict. Lindley, in *Newsweek,* noted that American economic action against Japan formed the root of Japanese aggression at Pearl Harbor. The imposition of such measures it declared, force "the Japs . . . to strike soon or resign themselves to a steady attrition of their strength by economic warfare."[43] *Life* added,

> Had it remained at peace with a capitalistic world, with its gold gone, its export industries ruined, Japan was doomed.[44]

The same observers noted that America's refusal to compromise with Japan, a circumstance engendered by its disrespect for Japan's actual strength and interests, had an equally pejorative effect on U.S.-Japanese relations as had American economic sanctions. *The New York Times* stated that this American tack ultimately convinced Japan that fruitful diplomatic negotiation with America was impossible, and that war represented the only solution to its Far Eastern dispute with the U.S.[45] Indeed, *Time* noted that America's diplomatic inflexibility had led Japan to become deeply resentful of what it considered to be American "trouble-making" policies in the Far East. It observed, "The Japanese have not known an easy life, and they think that this is so because America has kept them from their ease."[46] In discussing Japan's attitude regarding relations with America, as reflected by one of its major leaders, Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto, it asserted, "Yamamoto hates the U.S. attitude toward Japan . . . He has long hated and fought the imputation of inferiority [with which America sought to brand Japan] . . . He has heard for years the U.S. boast that the Japs would be a 'pushover'."[47] Therefore, these critics concluded that America's diplomatic stance regarding Japan forced it to incur deep Japanese hostility. The impropriety of this approach they reasoned, was borne out by the disastrous turn which U.S.-Japanese relations had taken at Pearl Harbor.

Another group criticizing American diplomacy in Asia adopted a different approach. American policy regarding Japan, it maintained, had failed not because it was overbearing in character, but because it had been weak, wavering, and had ignored the true character of the "evil" Japanese empire. *Time* commented:

> The U.S. . . . had no idea of the grandoise and fanatical ambitions of the Japanese militarists. It had not learned the lessons of the Russo-Japanese war.[48]

43. *Ibid.*
44. *Life,* 5 January 1942, pp. 42-43.
45. *The New York Times,* 14 December 1941, p. 6.
46. *Time,* 22 December 1941, p. 25.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 24.
48. *Time.,* 29 December 1941, p. 19.

The New York Times argued that even when America did finally come to understand the nature of Japanese ambition, it blinded itself to the implications of this discovery. After the Pearl Harbor disaster it commented,

> After Japan rejected this government's final proposals for settlement of the Far Eastern situation, Secretary of State Condell Hull issued a warning to all concerned . . . to expect the worst from Japan . . . Was his warning unheeded?[49]

Critics here not surprisingly answered this question with a resounding "yes."

These observers maintained that America had been unable to face pressing Far Eastern realities because weakness and irresolution had bogged down its foreign policy. E.B. White, in *Harper's Magazine,* observed that for American diplomacy

> the years between Munich and Pearl Harbor were like the time you put in a doctor's waiting room, years of fumbling with old magazines and unconfirmed suspicions, the ante years, the time of the moist palm and the irresolution.[50]

Life editor Henry R. Luce, born to missionaries in China, had long been obsessed with defense of Chiang Kai-Shek's government; he combined his concern for China with a vision of an "American Century," dominated by an expansive, aggressive United States. He wrote in *Life:*

> The Pearl Harbor attack was a sign of all the weakness and wrongness of American life in recent years. The thousand odd dead at Pearl Harbor that first day were not merely the victims of Japanese treachery. They were the victims of a weak and faltering America that had lost its way, and failed the world in leadership. . . . The Pearl Harbor attack ended an epoch: 1921-1941, twenty-one pusillanimous years where we [the U.S.] were weak and unprepared.[51]

These critics asserted that the tragedy of Pearl Harbor lay in the realization that this disaster could have been averted if the U.S. had hardened its diplomatic stance in earlier years. Yet, as one has seen, in their view American foreign policy regarding the Far East had been anything but resolute. In fact, some argued that America had appeased Japan in its Far Eastern relations. For this reason, they blamed American policymakers, the supporters of this "fumbling" approach, for the occurrence of the U.S.-Japanese conflict.

Although Luce was a right-winger, left-liberal opinion magazines such as *The New Republic* and *The Nation* also voiced this conviction, which intimated that

49. *The New York Times,* 17 December 1941, p. 4.
50. *Harper's Magazine,* 184 (March 1942): 443.
51. Henry R. Luce, "The Day of Wrath," *Life,* 22 December 1941, p. 11. Though Luce also edited *Time,* and his views dominated *Time, Life,* and *Fortune,* his own signed articles appeared most frequently in *Life.* This article continued the prewar Luce criticism of FDR which was muted in *Time.*

U.S. diplomatic infirmity had made proper resolution of and preparation for eventual U.S.-Japanese conflict virtually impossible. Editors of and contributors to these magazines were concerned less with defense and expansion of American interests than with standing up to what they viewed as an international fascist-militarist conspiracy. *The New Republic,* in assigning blame for the Pearl Harbor tragedy, asserted,

> It is not too early to say that some of the blame for the Pearl Harbor attack must lie with civilian government officials in Washington, who until the last minute, followed a policy of appeasement that made adequate war preparations much more difficult.[52]

The Nation's editor Freda Kirchwey loudly echoed these sentiments in an article that fully represented the views of those who felt that America had "appeased" Japan in past diplomatic relations. She asserted:

> The men in the State Department who engineered the policy of appeasement, which for the past four years has assured both Japan and the U.S. that this country would permit one aggression after another rather than risk trouble, are full partners in the guilt of Pearl Harbor.[53]

Kirchwey, like other proponents of this view, was convinced that U.S.-Japanese conflict could have been avoided had U.S. policymakers acted with conviction and resolve to uphold American interests in the Far East. Thus she declared,

> [The horror of Pearl Harbor] could have been avoided if we had lived up to our proclaimed principles after [Japan's] invasion of China, or even if we had said our final, fatefully delayed "No" at the time Japan signed the Axis pact.[54]

Yet, as Kirchwey argued, America made no move to shift its policy in this direction. Instead, it capitulated to "Japanese blackmail" and pursued an unsteady policy of appeasement whose consequences ultimately proved disastrous. Therefore, in concluding that America could only blame itself for war's advent, Kirchwey declared,

> . . . since we failed at each moment of decision to do more than preach, since Japan was encouraged to believe that its full ambitions could be achieved without fighting, since we began to implement our principles only when those ambitions ran head on into the major strategic and economic interests of Britain and ourselves, the horror came.[55]

52. *The New Republic,* 105 (22 December 1941): 843.
53. Freda Kirchwey, "Partners in Guilt," *The Nation,* 153 (27 December 1941): 656.
54. Freda Kirchway, "The Fruits of Appasement," *The Nation,* 13 December 1941, p. 600.
55. *Ibid.*

The aforementioned evaluations of American foreign policy leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack indicate that this event's occurrence animated popular elements critical of U.S. diplomacy throughout the nation. Yet this effect, while substantial, is by no means a complete representation of Pearl Harbor's primary impact on America. Indeed, the major consequence resulting from the Japanese attack did not promote critical or analytical thought amongst Americans. In fact, this effect, the fomentation of complete national unity, would ultimately suffocate all attempts to criticize American foreign policy. After Pearl Harbor's occurrence, America, a country once deeply divided along Far Eastern policy lines, would never again doubt its resolve during the next five years. War with Japan drew together its most diverse elements (isolationists, interventionists, and administration backers) in one master stroke so that American ended 1941 and began 1942 in a state of complete unity. Therefore, *Life* noted that "the American people, divided and dubious on the morning of December 7, arose the morning of December 8 united by a common enemy and a common hurt."[56] In his "Persective" column in *Newsweek* Raymond Moley declared that "the Pearl Harbor attack crystallized U.S. national purpose in a few terrible hours with it mad illogic."[57] *The New York Times* exclaimed,

> . . . Japan's initial blow, foul as it was, served to unify the nation so quickly and so completely that from now on it is America first, last, and all the time.[58]

Thus, it was clear that the overwhelming majority of Americans were in agreement as to American Far Eastern policy aims as 1941 ended; few doubted that America's primary task was to defeat Japan in World War II. As William Henry Chamberlin observed,

> . . . Formal hostilities began under such circumstances that only absolute pacifists (a negligible minority in any country) could have denied the obligation to take up arms. [59]

To be sure, there remained after Pearl Harbor's occurrence, scattered elements which stubbornly dissented from prevailing American thought: Father Coughlin still preached loudly that America had forced Japan into war and claimed, a week after the Pearl Harbor attack, that there existed within America an eighty percent

56. *Life,* 22 December 1941, p. 15. By an odd coincidence, Luce's missionary father had died the night of 7 December, glad that the U.S. would finally aid China.
57. *Newsweek,* 15 December 1941, p. 84. Moley, an original member of FDR's "Brains Trust," broke with the New Deal but, in this column, praised the President and his negotiations strategy towards Japan.
58. *The New York Times,* 13 December 1941, p. 20.
59. Chamberlin, "America in World War," p. 341.

opposition to war with Japan, while Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin, an extreme pacifist, declared that Pearl Harbor was a Roosevelt-fabricated lie.[60]

Yet the most divisive element in American foreign policy before Pearl Harbor was eliminated by the attack. Isolationism and a call for abstinence from American involvement in the Far East, and indeed, in all global areas including Europe, died a sudden death on the morning of December 7, 1941. The prospect of a direct attack on American territory left this movement, which had stubbornly persisted in America since the end of World War I, bypassed by events and without supporters. Americans, after being attacked by Japan, would no longer tolerate isolationist sentiment; to do so would seem to leave open the possibility of permitting Japan to go unpunished for its act of war, and to skirt the defense of American national security interests which had been directly threatened by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Reporter Gerald W. Johnson, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly,* used a well-known phrase to describe the untimely demise of isolationism as the "murder of a beautiful theory by a brutal gang of facts."[61] William Henry Chamberlain asserted, "The way in which America came into the present war was something of a grim joke on interventionists and isolationists alike."[62] *The Nation* concluded,

> If the Japanese had set out on their great adventure with the express purpose of making our isolationists look ludicrous, they could hardly have chosen a better plan of attack . . . Now, after [the attack] the isolationist rush for the bandwagon is in full swing.[63]

Indeed, after Pearl Harbor, Americans everywhere rushed to declare themselves in agreement with U.S. national purpose as proclaimed by President Roosevelt. His foreign policy proposals, which in past years had stirred widespread opposition, now received general acceptance from most Americans. For the Roosevelt administration, Pearl Harbor began an era in which he and his ideas would become eminently popular; the onset of war ended a period in which many had doubted his resolve in the realm of Far Eastern foreign policy. Therefore, *The New Republic* asserted that

> on December 7, 1941, a new year and a new era began . . . [the old era of opposition to administration ideas] was a page that would never be turned back.[64]

It added that the Pearl Harbor attack "ended overnight disagreements about foreign policy . . . "[65] *The New York Times* declared,

> The Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor . . . blew away with hurricane force the whole structure of myth upon which opposition to the President's policies had

60. *The New Republic,* 106 (5 January 1942): 8.
61. *The Altantic Monthly,* 169 (1 February 1942): 160.
62. Chamberlin, "America in World War," p. 338.
63. *The Nation,* 153 (13 December 1941): 877.
64. *The New Republic,* 105 (29 December 1941): 877.
65. *Ibid.*, 15 December 1941, p. 812.

had been based . . . [66]

Newsweek, in concluding that President Rosevelt's Asian foreign policy had gained the American people's complete support observed,

> The isolationist spirit which had split Congress and divided the country at large into two finger-pointing camps went up in smoke over Pearl Harbor Sunday morning. Before the day was out there was scarely a voice left to bewail the President's foreign policy . . . . [67]

The drift of public opinion here, and the American people's overriding support for the "official" or administration line blaming Japanese treachery for war's advent, suggests that Pearl Harbor gave rise to, for the most part, national cohesion and unity in the U.S. The December 7th attack so effectively quelled American popular disagreement on Far Eastern affairs that the loud clamor of dissent which had plagued the country for years subsided almost immediately after its occurrence. Therefore, as war with Japan began, American foreign policy had the full support of its people.

Yet this development, while eliminating widespread debate over American foreign policy objectives, did not prevent all Americans from offering evaluations of events different from those set forth by the Roosevelt administration. Although such opinion was by no means preeminent, it is interesting to note that not every American saw the U.S.-Japanese conflict in the simple terms marking the explanation which their government had offered. Indeed, as demonstrated here, many Americans argued that U.S.-Japanese conflict was of a more complex character than immediate events might indicate. Their discussion, acknowledging American involvement in Asian affairs, noted that past American diplomacy, whether viewed as anti-Japanese and hostile, or weak and appeasing, had definitely influenced Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor. Even those who continued to blame Japan for the war's onset evinced, in arguing their beliefs, an understanding of the conflict's historical roots. They too admitted that American participation in Far Eastern affairs had shaped the Japanese course of action in 1941.

Thus, study of the American public's reaction to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 reveals that critical evaluation of U.S. diplomacy in Asia did not stagnate completely after December 7, 1941. Analysis of American popular sentiment demonstrates that this event brought from Americans reactions which reflected the fact that diverse factors underlay U.S.-Japanese conflict. Indeed, American public opinion mirrored in many ways the history of recent U.S.-Japanese discord, whose cause, seemingly due to simple and "clear" reasons, actually resulted from a diversity of problems to which neither country ever found a diplomatic answer.

66. *The New York Times,* 8 December 1941, p. 22.
67. *Newsweek,* 15 December 1941, p. 21.