Staying Out, Gearing Up

Trace how isolationism shaped American war preparation in the 1930s.

IS.1.22 "Analyze the causes and effects of American isolationism during the 1930s and the effect this policy had on America's war preparation."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two causes of isolationism, circle two policy choices about helping countries at war, and number two details about U.S. war preparation. Use your marks to trace how causes led to choices and effects.

Neutrality and Readiness

1. In 1935, a voter opening the newspaper might see reports of fighting abroad while still struggling to find steady work at home. Many Americans remembered the losses of World War I and questioned whether entering that war had made the world safer. During the Great Depression, they wanted the government to focus on jobs and relief. Hearings about wartime profits also fueled suspicion that weapons makers had pushed the nation toward war, although that claim was not proved. These pressures strengthened isolationism, a preference for avoiding new foreign wars, not for ending all contact with other countries.

2. Congress translated that mood into the Neutrality Acts. A 1935 law barred sales of American weapons to countries at war, regardless of which side had been attacked. Supporters hoped this rule would keep arms sales from drawing the United States into another conflict. But it also limited how Washington could help nations resisting aggression. After war began in Europe in 1939, Congress allowed countries at war to buy arms if they paid cash and carried the goods on their own ships. Britain could use its navy to collect supplies, while the rule still kept American ships away from combat zones.

3. Isolation did not mean that officials ignored the danger to the United States. After Germany defeated France in 1940, Congress approved a peacetime draft and more spending on ships and aircraft. In 1941, Lend-Lease let the United States supply weapons and other goods to countries fighting the Axis without requiring immediate payment. These changes expanded factories and military training before the United States entered the war after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Even so, years of limited preparation left the armed forces short of trained personnel and ready equipment at first. Avoiding combat had bought time, but it had not produced full readiness.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did memories of World War I and the Great Depression together make isolationism appealing?

2. What unintended effect did the 1935 weapons ban have on the United States' response to aggression?

3. How did the 1939 cash-and-carry rule change the effects of the earlier ban while still limiting American exposure to war?

4. Why could the United States have increased war preparation by 1941 and still have been unready when it entered the war?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise Congress in late 1940. In five sentences, propose one new, noncombat step not named in the passage that could improve war readiness while the United States stays out of the fighting; explain how two causes of isolationism might shape support for your plan, and predict one benefit and one cost.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · IS.1.22

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two causes of isolationism, circle two policy choices about helping countries at war, and number two details about U.S. war preparation. Use your marks to trace how causes led to choices and effects. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did memories of World War I and the Great Depression together make isolationism appealing?	**World War I raised doubts that entering foreign wars made the world safer, while the Depression made jobs and relief seem more urgent than another war.**
2	What unintended effect did the 1935 weapons ban have on the United States' response to aggression?	**Because the ban applied to all countries at war, it limited American weapons sales even to nations resisting aggression.**
3	How did the 1939 cash-and-carry rule change the effects of the earlier ban while still limiting American exposure to war?	**It allowed countries at war to buy American arms, giving Britain a way to obtain supplies. Requiring buyers to transport the goods kept American ships away from combat zones.**
4	Why could the United States have increased war preparation by 1941 and still have been unready when it entered the war?	**The draft, military spending, and expanded factories increased preparation, but earlier limits had left too little time to build up trained personnel and ready equipment.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress should fund training programs for civilian aircraft mechanics in 1940, without sending anyone overseas. Families worried by memories of World War I might support this plan because trainees would remain at home. People focused on the Depression might value the paid jobs, although the program would use money needed for other public projects. More trained mechanics could help the country repair aircraft quickly if war reached the United States. The cost would be less funding for those other projects.

Accept other plausible noncombat steps not named in the passage. The five-sentence response should connect two causes of isolationism to the proposal and identify a likely benefit and cost.