Ambivalent Expansion

• Prelude to WWI
• The Great War
• The Great Depression
• A Second World War
Prelude to WWI

- By 1900, the United States had surpassed any other country in terms of its industrial production
- Bargain between North and West had worked
- U.S. had toyed with territorial empire
  - Found that it preferred conquering markets
  - The closing of the American frontier really occurs in Manila or Havana
- U.S. still active abroad (Monroe doctrine, etc.)
Prelude to WWI, cont.

- What explains US “isolationism”?:
  - ALWAYS U.S. policy to stay away from Europe
  - Europe is where the action & U.S. interests are
  - Other principles of U.S. foreign policy are resolved or are abandoned (i.e. territory).
  - In this sense, isolationism is not a new policy, but a narrowing in of previous objectives.
The U.S., Class, and WWI

- The U.S. is divided by demography
  - Elites/city dwellers:
    - Want U.S. to be more engaged in the world.
    - Flexible money (medium of exchange)
  - Masses (farmers):
    - Want high U.S. tariffs
    - Rigid money (store of value)
    - Fight over the gold standard, Federal reserve (William Jennings Brian)
- Same tensions that existed between North and South economic interests are replaced by urban and rural.
Propaganda

• The United States enters the war late in 1917:
  • Popular view: U.S. “won the war”
  • Reality: U.S. played a marginal role, may have expedited the end of the war.

• Propaganda:
  • War faction in U.S. looks for reasons to join
  • British play an astute game of propaganda
  • Germans do not (Zimmerman telegram)
Versailles

• Coalition that won the war meets to divide Europe
  • Divides itself:
    • U.S. spearheads move not to punish Germany
    • Wilson’s 14 points (free trade/navigation, national self-determination, no secret treaties)
    • Allies want pay-back (reparations, territory)
    • Wilson gets League (not much else)
    • Yugoslavia
“Lessons” from WWI

• U.S. public generally turns against the Great War
  • Popular view: War caused by “arms merchants”
  • U.S. Senate rejects the League of Nations

• Isolation:
  • Majority view is that “European war” a mistake
  • Focus on commerce, U.S. economic interests
  • “Low politics” is really high and vice versa.
Great Depression

• U.S. is the only country that can take leadership
  • England weakened, cannot support sterling
  • U.S. not inclined to, free riding on Great Britain
• Lack of global leadership dooms system
  • More connected than directed
    • Weaknesses spread by “selfish” state actions
      • Beggar-thy-neighbor
      • Liquidity trap
Prelude to WWII

• In so many ways, WWII is a repeat of WWI
  • Germany resentful, wants equal status with UK
  • France/UK downplay risk of war, unprepared
  • Germany/USSR (Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact)
• U.S. double dilemma
  • Population is even more determined to stay out
  • Elites see danger but are wary of repeat of WWI
• Japan saves FDR --> excuse for entry into war.
A Second World War

- Japan attacks US for strategic military reasons
  - Commitment problem:
    - Falling behind, needs access to oil/iron ore
    - Must strike sooner rather than later
  - Europe has opposite problem
    - Germany ascendant
      - UK/France realize they are unprepared
      - Stall for time
  - Both Hitler and FDR recognize commitment problem
    - Autocrat: act without public approval
    - Democrat: get Japanese to force the issue