Virginia Newspaper Editors and the Coming of World War II, 1935-1939

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VIRGINIA NEWSPAPER EDITORS AND THE COMING OF WORLD WAR II
1935 - 1939

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Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Robert Wayne Gray
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to re-create and analyze the mood and sentiments of the editors of twelve representative Virginia newspapers during the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II. This study of editorial opinion on foreign affairs deals with the critical period between the Ethiopian crisis and the neutrality legislation of 1935 and the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. The author's primary aim is not to describe in detail world events as they actually occurred during the period under study; rather it is to depict what the editors thought was happening—real or imagined—and what they felt should be done to improve world conditions.

It is impossible to determine precisely to what extent newspaper editorials influenced and reflected public opinion in the 1930's. Certainly, however, it should be safe to assume that newspapers played a very important role—either directly or indirectly—in shaping and mirroring popular sentiments during the pre-television days of the late 1930's. That the editorial page significantly influenced the masses in any direct way is doubtful. On the other hand, as an observer of Southern attitudes on foreign policy has emphasized, that minority which does read editorials probably influences considerably the thinking of others. Furthermore, the editor of the local newspaper occupies a position that can have a significant impact "both on local opinion and local officials."

Important also is the fact that a close reading of the viewpoints presented by editors enables one to appreciate more fully the trends of thought and the flavor of the debate on critical issues. The reader can again sense the emotions and hear the arguments used to support opinions—arguments that often were revised and elaborated and hence frequently occupied newspaper space for a considerable length of time.

The results of this study appear to demonstrate that rather widely held views about Southern internationalist sentiment during the late 1930's may be in need of revision. If sentiments expressed by Virginia newspaper editors reflect how other Southern editors felt, an investigation of Southern newspapers should prove to be well worthwhile. For a major conclusion of this paper is that the traditional criteria of political partisanship and geography are not completely sufficient gauges for measuring editorial attitudes in Virginia towards international affairs and American foreign policy between 1935 and 1939.


In the spring of 1917 the United States embarked on a crusade to save the world for democracy. Three years later Americans were yearning for a return to normalcy, and with the election of Warren G. Harding many breathed a sigh of relief. An important consequence of the war to end all wars was an atmosphere that left many Americans disillusioned and apathetic about world events well into the 1930's.

By the mid 1930's many in this country feared that the United States might pursue the same dangerous path to war that it had followed during the three years prior to April 1917. A clear reflection of the increasing concern of Americans during the thirties was evident in the mounting popularity of the revisionist school of historians which enjoyed its heyday during the interwar period. Vigorously supported by many journalists and politicians, the revisionist or disillusionist historians attempted to revise the standard or generally accepted interpretations of the origins of World War I and of America's intervention in the war. By the mid-thirties such standard views as Charles Seymour's that the submarine was the crucial issue in American entry in 1917 could not compete in popularity with the revisionist

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1 Among the Virginia editors, Walter Millis was by far the most popular and most quoted of the revisionist historians. The editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress (May 2, 1935, p. 4), for example, wrote that Millis' "research will be of positive value in creating sentiment for strict American neutrality in the next conflict." The editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch (October 5, 1935, p.6) described as an "excellent book" Millis' The Road to War, 1914-1917 (Boston, 1935).
interpretations.  

Although the names of the revisionists were not household words, it was men like Harry Elmer Barnes, C. Hartley Grattan, Charles A. Beard, and Walter Millis who expressed sentiments that most accurately reflected those of an increasing number of Americans during the four or five years preceding the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. Barnes, bitter about the results of the negotiations among the Machiavellian diplomats at Versailles, considered the chances of a second world war to be strengthened by what he labeled "a league of victors rather than a league of nations." Barnes viewed the League as an "Anglo-French organization" designed to perpetuate capitalistic imperialism by such means as the mandate system.

Grattan, a student of Barnes at Clark University, wrote the first significant work on American entry, *Why We Fought*, in 1929. While he minimized the significance of British propaganda, Grattan attributed considerable importance to economic interpretations of the war. But it was not until 1936 when the influence of the Nye Committee's investigations of the war industries was felt that Grattan would go so far as to write: "Economic entanglements with the Allied Powers in the First World War made the participation of the United States in it on the

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side of the Allies possible, logical, and in the end necessary for the health of private capitalism; the wartime policies of the United States Government made participation inevitable.  

In The Idea of National Interest Beard also demonstrated his conviction that commercial and other economic ties with the Allies forced the United States into the war. In another of his books, Beard presented his concept of American "continentalism," the idea that domestic reform and work towards a planned economy should come before international crusades. The author noted that

There are millions of American people . . . who are lacking the security, sanitary conveniences, medical services, educational opportunities, and habits of industry which American statesmen of the industrialist school are eager to supply to the "benighted" in distant and foreign places . . . . Those who are deeply moved in the virtuous sense implied by "the white man's burden" can, in view of the condition of several million Negroes in the United States, probably find extensive outlets for their moral urges at home.

Millis, a writer for the New York Herald Tribune, wrote a highly readable work titled Road to War which became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. To a great extent, particularly in its treatment of Allied propaganda and of financial and commercial entanglements with Great Britain, Road to War is merely a summation and synthesis of previous revisionist works. In at least one respect, however, Millis contributed something new to the revisionist cause. In an examination of the ambivalent reactions of human beings—including "peace-loving


Americans"—to war, Millis emphasized that "war is terrible; it is also glamorous, and because of its appalling terror it exercises a compelling fascination." He then attempted to interpret the "Preparedness" campaign as an imitation of Europe, a Europe Americans supposedly feared but, on the other hand, a Europe experiencing a war that appealed to the psyche of many Americans. In short, preparedness "provided the thrill [of European war] at the moment that it promised to prevent the damage." Such psychological interpretation as this prompted Millis to conclude that the United States had drifted and blundered into the war and that once intervention did come, no American "quite knew how it had happened, nor why, nor what precisely it might mean."10

The revisionists' fear that "deadly parallels" existed between the 1910's and the 1930's was also shared by Congressmen. Their fear was probably reflected best in the neutrality legislation of the thirties. This legislation demonstrates vividly the strong faith many Americans of that period had in law as a means to shield or isolate them and to prevent them from being duped into another foreign war. The degree to which historical analogies permeated the legislation was evident in the New York Herald Tribune's description of the 1937 Neutrality Act as "An Act to Preserve the United States from Intervention in the War of 1917-1918."11

8 Millis, Road to War, p. 93.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 460.
The act of 1937 was designed, at least on paper, to prevent the recurrence of basic developments that revisionists considered instrumental in America's 1917 entry. Should a war break out between two or more powers, the United States would impose a ban on the export of arms and of loans to belligerents and would make it illegal for American citizens to travel on belligerent vessels. By minimizing economic entanglements recently stressed by the Nye Committee and by reducing the chances for emotional reactions such as those created by the sinking of the <i>Lusitania</i>, many Americans felt this country could isolate itself from the problems of Europe.

The susceptibility of many Americans to historical analogies in the thirties was reflected also in an article written by a local columnist for the Richmond <i>Times Dispatch</i>. Writing during the height of the Czechoslovakian controversy in the fall of 1938, the columnist expressed his fear that if emotional reactions did not soon subside, he might "see again photographs made from wax images of handless children, but this time they will be labeled 'Czechoslovakian children' instead of 'Belgian children'."12

The mounting world crises of the late thirties strengthened the revisionists' concern about World War I and its consequences. Believing that they had been tragically misled in the 1910's, the logical reaction of the revisionists was to attempt to prevent a repeat performance in the 1930's. There were undoubtedly enough potential Sarajevos in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II to make Americans shudder with fear. The Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the undeclared Sino-Japanese war, and the events leading up to the Munich Conference

12 Thomas Lomax Hunter, "As It Appears to the Cavalier," Richmond <i>Times Dispatch</i>, September 20, 1938, p. 6.
were certainly among the most critical developments abroad to arouse fears in this country.

This paper focuses its attention upon some of the major world crises between 1935 and the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. The author's concern, however, is not so much with what actually happened abroad as it is with how one small element of the American community reacted to what it thought was occurring overseas. The author concentrates on the opinions of twelve Virginia newspaper editors representing both urban and rural areas in both daily and weekly newspapers. What follows are brief sketches of the newspapers.

The five weeklies include the Bedford Democrat, the Front Royal Warren Sentinel, the Louisa Central Virginian, the South Boston Halifax Gazette, and the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette. Bedford, located in southwestern Virginia about twenty-five miles southwest of Lynchburg, was a town of less than four thousand during the thirties. The Bedford Democrat, established in 1886, was Democratic politically, had a circulation of approximately 2400, and was published and edited during the 1930's by M. T. Harrison, who became editor in 1892.13

Front Royal, which had a population of approximately 2500 during the 1930's, is located in northern Virginia eighty miles west of Washington, D. C. Established in 1869 as an independent newspaper, the Front Royal Warren Sentinel had a circulation of about 1600 and was edited by

F. A. Stoutamyer until 1937 when L. E. Allen took over.  

Louisa, situated in central Virginia about fifty miles northwest of Richmond was a rural community of about three hundred inhabitants during the thirties. The Louisa Central Virginian was founded in 1912 as a Democratic newspaper. Twelve years later George McD. Blake became editor and remained in that position through the 1930's when the Central Virginian had a circulation of almost one thousand.  

South Boston, a town of less than five thousand during the 1930's, is located in southern Virginia thirty-two miles northeast of Danville. Established in 1903 as a Democratic newspaper, the South Boston Halifax Gazette's editor from 1926 through the thirties was J. E. Wood. No circulation figures are available.  

A town of less than four thousand during the 1930's, Williamsburg is in southeastern Virginia twenty-eight miles west of Newport News. Originally founded in 1736, the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette was re-established in 1930 as an independent newspaper by J. A. Osborne who was also managing editor during the thirties. Circulation figures are not available.  

The seven dailies used in this paper include the Alexandria Gazette, the Fredericksburg Free Lance Star, the Roanoke Times, the Danville Register, the Charlottesville Daily Progress, the Norfolk

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Virginian Pilot, and the Richmond Times Dispatch. Situated on the Potomac River six miles south of Washington, D. C., Alexandria had a population of about 24,000 in the late thirties. Established originally in 1784, the Alexandria Gazette prides itself on being America's oldest daily newspaper in continuous publication. With a circulation of over five thousand in the thirties, the editor of the Gazette, a Democratic paper, was Charles C. Carlin, Jr. For all but twenty-four of its 185 years, the Alexandria Gazette has been controlled by two families, the Snowdens and the Carlins. Samuel Snowden, a native of New Jersey, bought the paper in 1808. Three more generations of Snowdens succeeded to the position of publisher before Charles C. Carlin, Sr. acquired the Gazette in 1911. His father was the publisher of a weekly newspaper in Warrenton, Virginia, during the middle of the nineteenth century. Charles C. Carlin, Sr., represented his district, the Eighth, in the United States Congress from 1907 to 1919. His son, Charles C. Carlin, Jr., served as President and Editor of the Gazette from 1924 until his death in 1966 when his wife assumed both of his positions.

Fredericksburg, located in eastern Virginia fifty miles southwest of Washington, D. C., was a town of almost seven thousand in the late thirties. The Fredericksburg Free Lance Star, a Democratic paper, had a circulation then of over five thousand. Its editor, Josiah P. Rowe, Jr., assumed that position in 1926.

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A city of almost seventy thousand in the late thirties, Roanoke is located in southwestern Virginia one hundred and seventy miles west of Richmond. Established in 1886, the Roanoke Times, an Independent Democratic paper, had as its editor during the thirties H. Powell Chapman. Owned then as now by the Times-World Corporation, the Times counted almost 28,000 subscribers.\textsuperscript{21}

Situated in southern central Virginia near the North Carolina border, Danville had a population of 22,000 in the thirties. Rorer A. James, Jr., was the Danville Register’s owner and editor from 1922 until 1937 when Michael Bradshaw became editor. A Democratic paper founded in 1848, the Register had a circulation of more than ten thousand in the thirties.\textsuperscript{22}

Charlottesville, located in central Virginia about seventy miles northwest of Richmond, was a town of 15,000 in the years immediately preceding World War II. Established in 1892 as a weekly by J. H. Lindsay, the Charlottesville Daily Progress was published in the 1930’s by his sons, J. G. and W. E. Lindsay, and was edited by Joseph K. Irving, who became managing editor of the Lynchburg News in the 1940’s. A Democratic paper, the Daily Progress had a circulation of approximately five thousand during the late thirties.\textsuperscript{23}

The city of Norfolk in Hampton Roads had a population of 130,000

\textsuperscript{21} Ayer’s Directory (1939), p. 935; Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{22} Ayer’s Directory (1937), p. 931; Ayer’s Directory (1939), p. 929; Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, pp. 79-80.

\textsuperscript{23} Ayer’s Directory (1939), p. 928; Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, pp. 65-66; Lindsay B. Mount, present executive editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress, to author, June 2, 1969.
in the late thirties. Originally a Democratic paper when established in 1898, the Norfolk Virginian Pilot became Independent Democratic in 1915. By the thirties the paper had a circulation of over 44,000 and an editor named Louis I. Jaffe who acquired the position in 1919 and held it for the next thirty years. Prior to joining the Virginian Pilot staff, Jaffe had been a political reporter and assistant city editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch. A strong opponent of the Virginia poll tax, Jaffe was also hailed in liberal circles for his unyielding anti-lynching convictions. His editorial commentary on the lynching evil won him the 1928 "Pulitzer Prize in journalism for distinguished editorial writing . . .--the first award of any Pulitzer Prize in journalism, and the highest award of any kind that had been made to a Virginia newspaperman."25

Richmond, the state capital, had a population of more than 180,000 during the late thirties. Established in 1903, the Richmond Times Dispatch was a Democratic paper with a circulation of approximately 80,000 just prior to World War II. From 1903 to 1940 the Times Dispatch was owned by "a small group in Richmond and Norfolk, which included Charles P. Hasbrook and Samuel L. Slover." In 1940 the Dispatch merged with its leading rival, the Richmond News Leader when it was purchased by John Stewart Bryan, who was President of the College of

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26 Ayer's Directory (1939), pp. 934-935; Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, p. 188.

27 Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, p. 188; Virginius Dabney, former editor of Richmond Times Dispatch, to author, July 9, 1968.
William and Mary from 1934 to 1942.  

Virginius Dabney, the editor of the *Times Dispatch* from 1936 through 1968, was on the editorial staff of the Richmond paper from 1928 to 1934 and was chief editorial writer for two years thereafter before becoming editor. Having spent six months in Central Europe in 1934, Dabney has stated that "I wrote just about all of the editorials on international affairs between 1935 and 1941." Although he has become considerably more conservative in recent years, Dabney, like Jaffe, was once a hero among Southern progressives and liberals. Dabney has been described by the *New York Times* as "one of the South's best-known early liberals--a white Virginia aristocrat who publicly sought decency, dignity and advancement for Negroes before the movement for civil rights took root..." President of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1957-1958 and "widely known and respected in the publishing industry," Dabney in 1948 won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writings that publicly attacked Richmond's Jim Crow segregation policies on buses and street cars and for editorials supporting abolition of the state poll tax.

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29 Overton Jones, present chief editorial writer of the Richmond *Times Dispatch*, to author, June 4, 1969.

30 Dabney to author, July 9, 1968.


33 Ibid.
One of the greatest problems in analyzing newspaper editorials is that of trying to determine whether an editorial is in any way controlled or censored by the ownership of the paper. Some of the smaller papers such as the South Boston Halifax Gazette, which had the same man as publisher, editor, managing editor, business manager, and owner, do not raise any questions, of course, as to who shapes the editorial page. Likewise, papers with the same person as president and editor, such as the Alexandria Gazette, leave no doubt about whose viewpoints are being expressed. But in cases where there might be some doubt, when confronted with the question of control, the typical and expected response of the paper is usually comparable to that of the present executive editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress who asserted that "very little control was exercised over editorials" by the ownership of the Daily Progress in the thirties. Similarly, Virginius Dabney contends that he was "not pressured" in his molding of the Richmond Times Dispatch editorial page.

Yet in the same interview in which he asserted that he was "not pressured," Dabney confessed that had he been able he would have opposed editorially Virginia's "massive resistance" to the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision. "But not being the owner of the paper, I was unable to do that," Dabney admitted.

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34 Lindsay B. Mount to author, June 2, 1969.

35 Quoted by Franklin, "An Early Backer of Negro Rights," p. 66.

36 Quoted in ibid.
On such sensitive matters in the South as school desegregation, one should probably expect some censorship on the part of newspaper owners. But it is much less likely that there was a great deal of control over views expressed on world affairs prior to World War II. Specifically in regard to the Richmond Times Dispatch, the opinions on international affairs of Dabney frequently clashed with those of another local columnist, Thomas Lomax Hunter. The fact that the ownership permitted these wide differences to appear on the same editorial page would seem to indicate that there was indeed little or perhaps even "no pressure" exercised by the paper's ownership in the thirties regarding affairs overseas.

In sum, to determine which, if any, of the editorials discussed in this paper were not the opinions of the editor himself is virtually impossible. Fortunately, however, the real sources of the editorials analyzed in this study are not of primary importance. Rather the author is concerned primarily with the generally held thesis among many historians that the South was the least isolationist section of the country not only during the Second World War but also during the years immediately preceding September 1939. Do editorials in a selected group of Virginia newspapers seem to demonstrate that the South during the late thirties was "the most international area in outlook?"

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37 See, for instance, the differences of opinion expressed by Dabney and Hunter in the Richmond Times Dispatch on August 31, 1937, p. 6 and September 5, 1937, p. 2. "As an authority on international affairs," stated Dabney, "we regard the 'Cavalier' [Hunter's pen name] as something less than adequate. He knows more about barnyards, coon dogs, woodland lore, and rural life generally." After defending himself, Hunter sarcastically declared that at least his column was "not on the New York Times-Manchester Guardian pipeline."

Did the South, as some have argued, really display a more mature and sophisticated recognition and understanding of world dangers and foreign affairs that did other parts of the nation? Or do the writings of Virginia editors indicate that it would be closer to the truth to say that "isolationism during the thirties . . . was a general American sentiment; not, as sometimes pictured, simply a Midwestern phenomenon born of the insularity of the American interior"? Attempts to answer such questions as these will constitute the bulk of the analytical sections of this paper. The author attempts to determine whether the Virginia editors did or did not share to a considerable degree the revisionist views, predominantly isolationist views, presented at the beginning of this introduction.

As Thomas A. Bailey has written, "the term 'isolation' has . . . come to have a sinister connotation, much as a perfectly good word like 'appeasement' came to have unfortunate implications from having kept bad company." Largely because of the bad connotations, one

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39 Among those who have argued along these lines is Virginius Dabney. For example, see his "The South Looks Abroad," Foreign Affairs, XIX (October 1940), 171-178 and Below the Potomac, A Book about the New South (New York, 1942), pp. 287-289.


is likely to obtain unsatisfactory answers to questions regarding the sentiments of various editors prior to World War II. For example, the present executive editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress has written of the editor of that paper during the thirties: "I doubt . . . that he was an isolationist."\(^{42}\) Similarly, the present associate editor of the Roanoke Times has declared, "I doubt if Mr. Chapman [editor of the Times during the thirties], whom I knew well, entertained any isolationist sentiments."\(^{43}\) Even Virginius Dabney has written that he "was extremely indignant over the sell-out of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, and the tone of the editorials at that time was probably isolationist." But he hastens to add that "later, we veered around, and . . . became strongly pro-ally and interventionist."\(^{44}\)

The only way to discover what the views of the editors were is to study what they themselves had to write. Examined in twelve Virginia papers are the Italo-Ethiopian conflict and the Neutrality Act of 1935; the China Incident, Roosevelt's Quarantine Speech, the Brussels Conference, the Panay Incident, and the proposed Ludlow war referendum debate of 1937; the Czechoslovakian controversy of 1938; and the outbreak of World War II in 1939. By taking into account editorial views on what were to become the major Axis powers in the Second World War, Italy, Japan, and Germany; by examining newspapers,

\(^{42}\) Mount to author, June 2, 1969.

\(^{43}\) Horace Hood III, present associate editor of the Roanoke Times, to author, August 23, 1968.

\(^{44}\) Dabney to author, July 9, 1968.
both dailies and weeklies, from all sections of the state; and by comparing what historians have said about the South as a whole with what the editors of one Southern state wrote, the author attempts in the following chapters to draw some conclusions about editorial opinion in Virginia during the four years immediately preceding Hitler's invasion of Poland in the fall of 1939.
CHAPTER 1: ETHIOPIA AND NEUTRALITY

The year 1935 was a very significant one in the coming of World War II and in American reaction to the coming of the war. Particularly important were the Ethiopian crisis and the passage of the first in a series of neutrality acts designed to prevent the United States from being "dragged" into another "European" or "foreign" war.¹

While United States Congressmen were debating about the details of neutrality legislation during the summer of 1935, Italy's dictator was making plans for a revival of the Roman Empire. The events in Washington and Rome were by no means unrelated. Although Adolf Hitler and the Japanese warlords undoubtedly played a major role in creating the first neutrality act, the international crisis foremost in American thinking during the summer and fall of 1935 was the impending Italo-Ethiopian war. The threat of that war coming in the very year that suspicions of World War I "merchants of death" were

being confirmed by the Nye Committee, aroused too many memories of 1914 for Americans to leave themselves unprotected. It was time for them, as one historian has written, to construct "a storm cellar."

Should Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, become another Sarajevo, Americans in 1935 were determined to remain aloof. Furthermore, in order not to aggravate the already unstable economy, the United States must ignore propaganda from overseas and not become the financier of any belligerent. The failure of the Europeans to pay off their debts from the last war caused one great depression. That was one too many. This time America must remain fortified behind its ocean walls and let the Old World diplomats worry about Italian imperialism—imperialism which was, incidentally, no worse than that the leaders of the British and French Empires had practiced in Africa, India, and other areas of the world in earlier days.

So Congress got busy. The fruit of its labor, the Neutrality Act of 1935, was signed by the President on August 31, less than five weeks before Mussolini's Black Shirts invaded Abyssinia. The Act provided "that upon the outbreak or during the progress of war between, or among, two or more foreign states, the President shall claim such fact, and it shall thereafter be unlawful to export arms, ammunition, or implements of war . . . to any port of such belligerent states. . . ." Also the President was given the discretionary power to

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2 Burns, _Roosevelt_, p. 255.
proclaim that "no citizen of the United States shall travel on any vessel of any belligerent nation except at his own risk." Six months later the 1935 act was extended for a year with the added provision that loans to belligerents would also be forbidden. Hence, the warnings of the Nye Committee were heeded in the form of law.

The rather limited amount of space the editors of the Virginia weeklies devoted to Ethiopia and neutrality in 1935 would seem at first glance to indicate that their concern about world affairs was not so great. One should remember, however, that local and town affairs dominated most of the space in the weeklies even during the critical pre-World War II years.

The Bedford Democrat questioned the effectiveness of a neutrality act which failed to make clear specifically what constitutes an implement of war. In the words of the editor, "wheat is a war supply, no less than bullets or gunpowder." Except for a factual account of the neutrality act in a later editorial, the Democrat gave no further coverage of the act during 1935. Similarly, concern over Ethiopia was limited to a few expressions of hope prior to the invasion by Italy that the United States would "lend all the moral support possible to the efforts which the other great nations are making to avert this silly and senseless war."

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3 Congressional Record, 74 Cong., 1 sess., Aug. 20, 1935, pp. 13795-13796.

4 DeConde, American Foreign Policy, p. 568.

The Front Royal Warren Sentinel echoed the Democrat's concern over the effectiveness of the neutrality act when it quoted "the wise chairman of the War Industries Board, Bernard M. Baruch" as saying that "'righting countries can do without war-gas and machine guns quicker than without wheat and other food and clothing . . . "6 Despite the fears the Warren Sentinel expressed in regard to violations of the neutrality act by "merchants dealing in war goods," the paper asserted that "if we have intestinal fortitude to stick by the present program we will not be drawn into this European mess." Reminding its readers of "the great war," the paper stated that "American shipping interests wanted their profits [then] and got them."7

The Louisa Central-Virginian, an ardent fan of President Roosevelt ("we have almost come to the conclusion that he can do no wrong"8) and frequent critic of Senator Byrd ("that esteemed Senator has never been in a bread line, else he would see things in a different light"9) attacked "the big American newspapers" and the radio announcers for devoting too much space and time to "war talk" and emphasized its opposition "to these United States having anything more to do with Europe, as regards to our taking any part in their affairs."10 Once Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia, the Central-Virginian predicted that "he will meet with disaster." This prediction was based in large part on a belief that the League of Nations would act—a belief that

7 Ibid.
was not realized as the paper itself acknowledged editorially the next year. 11

Editorial comment on the Ethiopian conflict in the South Boston Halifax Gazette was limited to the Armistice Day statement that "it is encouraging to note . . . that the United States seems determined to keep out of another conflict, and this determination is in keeping with the desires of an overwhelming majority of the American people." 12

A quick reading of some of the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette's editorials in 1935 might lead the reader to conclude that it was a strongly isolationist newspaper. For example, in February it expressed its "gratification" that the Senate had voted against United States membership in the World Court thus allowing this country to remain "a free and independent state." In regard to war debts owed the United States, the Gazette contended that this country has "always gotten the short end of the argument" in its dealings with Europe. "The moral would seem to be to keep out of all entanglements and attend strictly to our own business." 13

Furthermore, the editor's disillusionment over world irresponsibility was voiced frequently in criticisms of treaty violations and of the League of Nations. The editor's frustration with world events was probably most evident when he remarked that "we might as well abandon all treaties, build a Chinese wall around ourselves and tell the rest of the world to go hang." 14 After all, it appeared that treaties such

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as the Kellogg Pact were "nothing but a scrap of paper" and that in
their failure to "live up to their solemn obligations" the "Christian
and civilized nations of the world . . . [were] lapsing back to barbarism."\footnote{15}
This failure to uphold treaties combined with the League's inadequate
"back bone" as reflected in its failure to impose sanctions on oil
against Italy seemed to contribute heavily to the Gazette's support
for a strict embargo against Italy and Ethiopia on "everything which is
needed by the nations at war."\footnote{16} This demand for a strict embargo was
intensified by the belief, undoubtedly influenced by the Nye Committee
investigations, that "munitions manufacturers and greedy, unscrupulous
politicians prefer war and its profits, never counting the cost to the
defenseless."\footnote{17}

Despite these statements there is on the part of the Williamsburg
paper an ambivalence that makes it necessary to examine more closely
these apparently isolationist views. Most isolationists in 1935
appeared to favor a type of neutrality such as that embodied in the
neutrality legislation of that year which prohibited the exportation of
munitions to either side engaged in a war. Shortly after Mussolini's
invasion of Ethiopia, however, the Gazette distinguished between
aggressor and victim. Asserting that "if it is necessary that the
might of the United States is required to preserve the safety of all
nations then we should not shirk the responsibility," the editor urged
that this country sell Ethiopia war munitions and food. Although he
foresaw "no occasion to send troops," the editor somewhat vaguely

\footnote{15} Ibid., July 12, 1935, p. 2; Sept. 6, 1935, p. 2.
\footnote{16} Ibid., Oct. 4, 1935, p. 2; Nov. 29, 1935, p. 2; Dec. 27,
1935, p. 2.
\footnote{17} Ibid., July 19, 1935, p. 2.
declared that "an iron ring of steel by the great powers of the world should encircle the weak that their souls may dwell in peace."\(^{18}\) Precisely what this protection of the weak would involve is not made clear, but there can be no mistake that the language is far from isolationist in tone.

The *Virginia Gazette*'s willingness to see the United States play a role in world affairs is stated more clearly perhaps in the following extract from an editorial printed in late 1935:

> While we want and desire peace, ... we must take a stand with the other nations in outlawing war. Our superior civilization should fit America to be the one to lead ... Until we can show the world and by our example prove that we are willing to fight for an ideal we will still be in that backward state which we attribute largely to our forefathers since Adam. If the Anglo-Saxon people would get together as one people and defy aggressive nations with the sword there would be very little attempt made to provoke hostilities. Great Britain and America could control the world destinies if they would, in the cause of peace.\(^{19}\)

In sum, the Williamsburg paper was neither consistently isolationist nor internationalist in 1935.

The viewpoints expressed by the dailies in regard to the problem of neutrality in 1935 were similar to those presented by the weeklies. The question of greatest concern about neutrality legislation seemed to be, as the Alexandria *Gazette* asked, "What ... is an implement of war?"\(^{20}\) Apparently desiring to go farther than the neutrality act, the *Gazette* inquired: "what American wants to see our wheat used to embroil a world?"\(^{21}\) Despite where American sympathies may lie, the Alexandria editor urged his readers to keep these questions in mind

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21 Ibid.
and not to forget that "we were dragged into the last war by our emotions." The editor insisted that "some sort of actual neutrality could be attained" only by embargoing "raw materials which can be made into arms or munitions." The Gazette wanted a neutrality act so clearly defined that there would be no possibility of this country ever again being confronted with the uncertainties of another Lusitania incident. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Alexandria editor asserted later that the "neutrality resolutions ...[went] only a fractional part of the way toward actual neutrality." The Fredericksburg Free Lance Star initially applauded this country's "strong neutrality law" of 1935 and insisted that "we in America must stand as a bulwark against a frenzied Europe ..." Less than three weeks later, however, after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the editor expressed his fear that the neutrality act and the President's assurances of non-entanglement would "fall short of an assurance of real neutrality." Based largely on the likelihood of this country being affected by war propaganda and economic entanglements, the editor's doubts were echoed by several of the other papers. These doubts will be discussed in more detail in connection with the Ethiopian struggle, a struggle which the Free Lance Star declared "is not our fight ... our concern is to mind our own business."

22Ibid.  
28Ibid.
Because the Roanoke Times had nothing specific to point out about the first interwar neutrality act, its feelings about foreign affairs during 1935 should also await discussion of Ethiopia.

The debate over what constitutes an implement of war did not cause as much concern to the editor of the Danville Register as it did to most of the other editors. In the words of the Register, "people do not make war with bread." The editor believed that a broad definition of implements of war that included all exports would create tremendous problems in enforcement of the neutrality act and would make it difficult "to maintain our economic balance if Europe went to war."\(^{29}\)

The most dangerous impediments that might block true American neutrality, according to the Register, were industry and finance. Reminding its readers that "President Wilson, who did not want war, was swept off his feet by the irresistible demand for it that came from our war industries," the Register warned that these industries "have started a chain of events that would lead logically to war."\(^{30}\) Americans simply must not forget the lessons of history; they must remember that it was "the munitions manufacturers and their bankers [who] got us into the World War."\(^{31}\) It was "the sale of munitions and the booming war industries [that] gave us no time for anything except cheers for the minute men who were urging us on into the conflict."\(^{32}\)

Such attacks against munition industries led the Register to

\(^{29}\) Danville Register, Aug. 22, 1935, p. 4.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., Oct. 8, 1935, p. 4.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., Aug. 25, 1935, p. 4.
term the arms embargo section of the 1935 neutrality act "the most humanitarian procedure." But the Danville paper was by no means completely satisfied with the neutrality act. First, the Register emphasized that:

In addition to our economic safeguards against war we need safeguards against propaganda . . . We need also a commission of social psychologists . . . to combat propaganda by explaining its sources and to work out an arrangement to give them an efficient sounding board in Washington. We need it, but we will hardly get it from an Administration that is building the biggest army and navy America ever had.

These remarks on propaganda were made in connection with some comments on Americans' unquestioning acceptance of World War I "Hun atrocities" such as the sinking of the Lusitania.

A second objection to the neutrality act was even more directly aimed at the administration. This objection dealt with presidential implementation of the act. Specifically, it concerned President Roosevelt's statement that supposedly inflexible provisions such as the mandatory arms embargo might in the end contribute to involving the United States in a war. After briefly discussing Woodrow Wilson's "He kept us out of war" campaign of 1916, the Register again reminded its readers of America's gradual entrance into World War I and concluded that "before [Roosevelt] uses his extraordinary power over Congress to make [the neutrality act] flexible he owes it to the country to precisely define a 'flexible neutrality resolution.'"

In brief, it is enough to state that the Register's hopes for this country's non-involvement in brewing world crises were far from bright in 1935.

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33 Ibid.
As world crises mounted during the summer of 1935, the editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress also became more and more uneasy about the susceptibility of the American mind to propaganda. Ever aware of 1917, the editor noted that "for three years, Americans have been deluged with the most concentrated anti-Nazi propaganda." Then using an argument that became a standard one among many interwar isolationists, the paper stated that "we should purge ourselves of the strain of racial [Jewish] oppression before we undertake to mind the business of other people." 36

Once the neutrality act had been passed, the Daily Progress lost no time in declaring that the arms embargo was not enough, that it was "a futile little gesture, accomplishing practically no good, and being in practice merely a discrimination against the manufacturers of armaments." Insisting that "the only way we can keep out [of war] is to boycott all belligerents both as to loans of money and shipments of goods of all kinds," the Charlottesville paper again looked to the past and noted that "in 1917, we were not faced with the issue of going to war or not going to war, but of going to war or facing the most serious financial and industrial crisis of our history." Americans should know by now that "half-way measures will be useless." 37

The Daily Progress added to the Danville Register's condemnations of the administration's role in the initiation and implementation of the neutrality act. Roosevelt, according to the Charlottesville paper,


37 Ibid., Sept. 4, 1935, p. 4.
deserved "censure for not including the [neutrality] resolution on his 'must' list of legislation." Conspiratorial implications as well as a touch of Anglophobia were evident in the paper's expressed fear that the President might not use his power to extend an arms embargo against Britain should she eventually be drawn into a conflict originating between two other powers. The President's discretionary power in regard to extension of the embargo might "have serious consequences" in light of the fact that "Mr. Roosevelt has been playing Great Britain's game privately for some time." The Daily Progress explained the manner in which the United States might be drawn into another foreign war in the following terms:

The chief danger point now . . . is in the Far East. Once England becomes embroiled in any way on the continent, it is generally believed that Japan will make a final drive in China and annex all of the valuable sections of that country . . . If President Roosevelt is still in the White House, indications are that he would step in and police the Pacific for Great Britain, an action that would naturally lead to great danger of our being drawn into a war with Japan.

Of the major state newspapers, the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot was probably the most consistently non-isolationist. Its attitude towards the neutrality legislation of 1935 was one of cautious optimism. On the plus side, the neutrality act was described as "the most extensive effort yet attempted to make neutrality a positive and determining fact." With World War I and the Nye Committee in mind, the Pilot asserted that "a world cataclysm would almost certainly draw us into it if the

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40 Ibid.
nation relied merely on the old formula of making all the money out of it that is possible."\(^{42}\)

On the other hand, the Norfolk editor warned: "No blueprint of neutrality can surely be achieved by resolution."\(^{43}\) Along the same lines, the Pilot continued two days later, "All that has been accomplished is the initiation of a change in policy, limited as to time and scope, which should make it somewhat easier to keep out of the fire if it should not become a general conflagration."\(^{44}\) In short, "it should be recognized [that] the chances of building a bomb-proof policy are extremely slight."\(^{45}\)

The Norfolk editor was in agreement with most of the other state papers (the Danville one being a notable exception) that the broader the definition of "implement of war," the greater the chance of the United States remaining isolated from world conflicts: "Enlarging the definition so as to apply the embargo to a large number of commodities not ordinarily embraced in the 'implements of war' category, would . . . still be the procedure most likely to keep us from being sucked into the maelstrom."\(^{46}\) Significantly, during the period of debate surrounding the first neutrality act, the Pilot never came out openly for or against a broader definition of war implements. Unlike most of the other papers in 1935, the Pilot was unwilling to accept fully the prevalent belief that this country should never become involved in another war.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., Aug. 25, 1935, p. 6.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., Sept. 3, 1935, p. 6.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., Sept. 26, 1935, p. 6.
The Norfolk paper's cautious position is illustrated a bit better perhaps in the following comment on the impartial arms embargo. The first word, if, deserves special notice.

If it be granted that it is of supreme national importance to keep out of the next European war even if it means that imperialism will thereby be aided and the rights of weak peoples be done a disservice, it is better to begin by avoiding the sale of war implements to either side, than to risk the graver involvements that attend the effort to sell arms to both or to embargo the sale of arms to one of the belligerents, thereby directly taking sides in the conflict. Hence, it appears that only after whatever was in this country's national interest could be proven, was the Virginian-Pilot willing to take a definite position on neutrality.

Like the Virginian-Pilot, the Richmond Times Dispatch also acknowledged that "it is by no means certain that . . . any neutrality resolution . . . would keep the United States from being involved in a general European war." The Dispatch appeared to consider the two major blocks to our non-involvement in world crises to be propaganda and the "merchants of death."

Reviving memories of the "10,000,000 young men who soaked Europe with their blood . . . in a wholly futile cause," the Richmond editor declared, "like dumb cattle they were herded into the service in their respective countries, after being so drugged with propaganda that they were completely befuddled as to the issues." Because Americans were fed a steady stream of government-manufactured lies about the Central Powers, as soon as Belgium was invaded in 1914, the Dispatch "firmly resolved not to credit any atrocity stories about either combatant in the Italo-Ethiopian war without . . . absolutely conclusive proof."

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As for the second possible deterrent to our neutrality, the Dispatch believed that existing governmental agencies were capable of handling the munition and armament makers. The Richmond editor "count[ed] on the Munitions Control Board . . . to impose a stringent definition of 'implements of war' under the neutrality act." When several munition industries were prosecuted for selling war materials to the belligerent countries of Bolivia and Paraguay, the Dispatch applauded the Roosevelt administration and remarked that it was "to be commended in the highest terms." The tone of the Richmond editorials on neutrality seems to suggest that that paper was considerably more optimistic about the chances of success for the first neutrality act than were several of the other large state papers such as the Virginian-Pilot.

In regard to Mussolini's Ethiopian campaign, several common themes permeated the editorials of most of the dailies: the Ethiopian conflict could be another Sarajevo; it was indeed a time of testing for the League of Nations; the United States must stand firm and resist any pressures that might drag her into another foreign affair; Britain was guided primarily by selfish motives to save her vanishing empire; perhaps the decisions made at Versailles justified to some extent the actions of Mussolini.

The Alexandria Gazette released some of its Anglophobe and Francophobe frustrations when it declared that Britain and France were unwilling "to give up to Italy some of the African lands they

themselves grabbed in the days when that process was not so frowned upon as now."\textsuperscript{54} Although willing to lend moral support to any efforts employed to block Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, the \textit{Gazette} emphasized that "Britain has done in India, South Africa and various other parts of the world pretty much what Italy is now doing in Ethiopia, and what Japan has been doing lately in China."\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, the Alexandria paper asserted that since "Italy was cheated" at the end of the world war, the League should redistribute the African "mandates," "giving Germany some at least of her colonial property, and giving Italy as fair a share as Britain and France. Otherwise there can be no peace."\textsuperscript{56}

As for the role to be played by the United States, the \textit{Gazette} maintained that "it is a guarantee—always provided the American people continue sane and steadfast—that here, whatever may happen in the Old World, will be a stronghold of peace. In no other way can we serve mankind so well."\textsuperscript{57}

The Fredericksburg \textit{Free Lance Star} lost little time in drawing parallels between the threatening Ethiopian situation and the world war. As early as July the editor discussed briefly the remote, little-known center of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and noted that "back in 1914 there was another place many of us had never heard about—Sarajevo. Something happened there—the murder of an archduke—and you know the rest."\textsuperscript{58} In a reference to the Kellogg Pact, the \textit{Star} asserted that "Il Duce apparently is determined to follow the course

\textsuperscript{54} Alexandria \textit{Gazette}, Sept. 21, 1935, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.}, Nov. 12, 1935, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, Oct. 8, 1935, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}, Oct. 7, 1935, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{58} Fredericksburg \textit{Free Lance Star}, July 20, 1935, p. 4.
previously followed by that prince of imperialism, Kaiser Wilhelm, and reduce all solemn covenants to the status of mere scraps of paper."

Before the actual invasion of Ethiopia, the Star declared that "the American government, which cannot assume responsibility for the maintenance of virtue among nations, must keep its hands off." Once the invasion had begun, the paper instructed its readers that "the point to be kept in mind . . . if war involves a great part of Europe, is that it is not our fight, and that our concern is to mind our own business." 

Yet the Star apparently had little hope that its desires would be realized. Again looking at the past and drawing parallels shortly before the Ethiopian invasion, the Fredericksburg editor contended:

America, today, stands in the same position that it did in 1914. . . . Will it uphold humanitarian principles by refusing to sell the provender upon which war feeds? We fear not. Where there is money to be made the munition makers will coin it, and there will be paid propagandists to support their business views.

The greatest hope the Star appeared to have that this country would remain at peace was that Americans would not forget what they had lost in the recent war: "50,000 young men killed, 200,000 others more or less seriously wounded, a debt of twenty-two billion dollars of our own and loans of eleven billions to our allies."

Although the Roanoke Times considered the prospects of joint action by the League of Nations against Italian aggression to be slim, it predicted that Britain might initiate some action that would deter

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60 Ibid., July 19, 1935, p. 4.
63 Ibid., Sept. 4, 1935, p. 4.
Mussolini's forces. The *Times* was quick to point out, however, that if Britain did act, it would be because of her "interests in Ethiopia and in the adjoining sections of Africa" and that she would be "acting primarily to protect herself rather than because of any altruistic motives." 64

Insofar as the United States was concerned, the Roanoke paper, although in sympathy with Ethiopia, asserted that there were few Americans indeed who would "emulate Great Britain's course in making an anti-Italian demonstration . . . . the American people are unalterably and emphatically opposed to intervention in European quarrels and do not wish their Government to become embroiled in foreign controversies." 65 Furthermore, the *Times* insisted that "sympathy for Ethiopia should not cause Americans to permit themselves to be duped by propaganda intended to deceive and to arouse feeling against the invaders . . . ." 66 Quoting an editorial published the day before by the Richmond *Times Dispatch*, 67 the Roanoke paper agreed that "'We were badly buncoed 21 years ago.'" Therefore, in the words of the Roanoke editor, "Let us think back to 1914 and maintain a skeptical attitude toward vague and unsubstantiated stories of atrocities charged against either the Italians or the Ethiopians. . . . Let's not be taken in so easily this time." 68

In an attempt to explain the "psyche of war," the Danville *Register* observed: "When the bands begin to play man leaps to war

67 Also see pp. 28-29 for another reference to the Richmond *Times Dispatch* editorial of Oct. 5, 1935.
not to make the world safe for democracy or to save his country's honor, but because deep in the human constitution there are primitive passions and perversities written there during the history of the race as it came up from the murk of sub-tropical forests. Such sentiments help to explain the Register's support for the neutrality act and its hopes that the act might be strengthened to include propaganda safeguards.

In regard to Ethiopia, the Danville paper was critical of the League of Nations in general ("it is upholding the White Man's Burden") and of Britain in particular (England's primary interest is always in her possessions beyond the seas.) The Register confessed, however, that "the League of Nations might have been a more vigorous body if America had been a member." In the same editorial the Register concluded, in words difficult to square with the paper's sentiments strongly endorsing American neutrality, that "our splendid isolation . . . has triumphed. But when Africa begins to rumble it will not appear to have been a splendid victory.

Of all the newspapers covered in this study, probably the most adamant in its verbal attacks against European countries, particularly against Great Britain, was the Charlottesville Daily Progress. Described as the "chief exponent" of hypocrisy, Great Britain was condemned by the Daily Progress for her failure to honor a "secret treaty of 1915" which would have given Italy "a protectorate over Abyssinia." Any attempt

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69 Danville Register, July 3, 1935, p. 4.
70 See pp. 23-24 for the Danville Register's comments on neutrality.
71 Danville Register, Aug. 7, 1935, p. 4.
72 Ibid., July 10, 1935, p. 4.
73 Ibid., Aug. 21, 1935, p. 4.
74 Charlottesville Daily Progress, June 29, 1935, p. 4.
by England to settle the Ethiopian problem would be based most likely, according to the Charlottesville paper, on motives that were "entirely self-interested." Why? In the first place, "the prosperity of British-controlled, agricultural Egypt depends upon the Nile, which flows through Abyssinia." Secondly, "Abyssinia is definitely a British sphere of influence, . . . for the British . . . are just beginning important engineering projects there." Thirdly, "an Italian-controlled Abyssinia would drive a wedge between North and South African British Colonies and render union between them forever impossible." To expose even more "the hypocrisy of England's moral pretensions with regard to Ethiopia," the Charlottesville editor declared that "the history of oppression, brutality, and violence that has characterized the treatment of India during the past decade is probably unequalled in all of the history of Western imperialism." Finally, in reference to Britain as well as to other members of the League of Nations, the Daily Progress contended that "certainly the body which unblushingly apportioned large portions of the earth's surface and population among the powers as 'mandates,' would not hesitate to throw Ethiopia to the lions for any moral scruples."

Almost three months before the Italian army invaded Ethiopia, the Daily Progress urged that the United States "prohibit loans to the two countries during their period of preparation for war. . . . the fact that fighting has not been started is in a sense only a

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75 Ibid., July 3, 1935, p. 4.
76 Ibid., Nov. 6, 1935, p. 4.
77 Ibid., July 18, 1935, p. 4.
technicality. . . ." Despite our sympathies for Ethiopia, "it is not our war, and we do not want it to become our war." In an editorial titled "Hot Chestnuts," the Charlottesville paper informed its readers that any British efforts to involve the United States in the Ethiopian crisis would be in reality motivated by the ulterior goal of saving the British Empire. As for American economic interests in Abyssinia, the Daily Progress insisted that "not all the oil in Ethiopia is worth a single American life." In his frequent references to World War I, it is apparent that the Charlottesville editor's concern over Ethiopia was undoubtedly influenced by his conviction that "one Armistice Day a year is enough. . . . The memory of one devastating war, for which we are still paying and for which our children will still be paying many years hence, is sufficient."

"A practical diplomatic rule" was suggested by the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot for determining which countries should go to the aid of Ethiopia: "those powers possessed of the more immediate interests in the threatened area have a more immediate moral obligation to bestir themselves as friendly intercessors than powers whose primary interests lie in other sections of the globe." The whole problem was "brought about by European double-dealing . . . in a very real sense the Italo-Ethiopian involvement is the outcome of a backstairs European bargain. It is the business of those who were in on the bargain in its

78 Ibid., July 9, 1935, p. 4.
79 Ibid., Oct. 9, 1935, p. 4.
81 Ibid., Nov. 11, 1935, p. 4.
82 Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, July 6, 1935, p. 4.
opening stages—France and Great Britain particularly—to pull the irons out of the fire and not the United States which had no hand in it." Any intercession on the part of the United States "must be limited to a tender of its good offices, phrased with careful regard for the delicacy of the situation."

The *Pilot* predicted that "should no way be found to halt the destruction of Ethiopian independence by a great civilized power, a blow will be dealt to the League of Nations which will leave it permanently maimed." Like the Fredericksburg *Free Lance Star*, the *Pilot* feared that Ethiopia might become another Sarajevo. The Norfolk editor believed that "the meladroit diplomacy of 1914 may repeat itself," largely because of the great number of "political irons in the fire. France can go only so far against Italy. Great Britain can go only so far without France." Consequently, League resistance to Italy will be slight and war will erupt in Ethiopia. The Italian invasion had hardly started when the *Pilot* expressed its fear that the conflict might "light fuses leading into the powder magazines of the great powers."

Should the Ethiopian crisis lead to a general conflagration, the *Pilot* considered the prospects of the United States non-involvement

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84 Ibid., July 6, 1935, p. 4.
85 Ibid., July 8, 1935, p. 4.
to be very slim. In the words of the editor, "we shall be relatively safe in our new form of neutrality as long as the East African war is limited to a two-sided conflict on the Ethiopian plateau. If it spills over into Europe, ... only a miracle will keep us from being driven into a state of belligerency ourselves." It was apparent that the cautious optimism the Pilot expressed earlier in regard to the neutrality act had become even more cautious once Mussolini's troops marched into Ethiopia.

Permeating practically all of the editorials of the Richmond Times Dispatch during the weeks preceding and immediately following the Italian invasion in October were numerous parallels between the situation then and as it existed in 1914. The Richmond editor considered "the role of Ethiopia in the present crisis ... not unlike that of Serbia in the crisis of 1914. Mussolini has been bullying ... the Ethiopians, just as Count Berchtold of Austria did the Serbians 21 years ago. ... Austria-Hungary regarded herself as culturally superior to Serbia, and Italy is similarly contemptuous of the Ethiopians today." Like the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, the Dispatch agreed that "it is clearly up to Britain and France to take drastic action, if they wish to preserve the peace and keep the League of Nations afloat." But again with the past vividly in mind, the Richmond editor continued, "Britain alone, as in 1914, apparently has it within her grasp to fend off the approaching catastrophe. If she had announced in early July, 1914, that she would be found at France's side, in the event of a German offensive through Belgium, that offensive might never have been launched."“

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91 Richmond Times Dispatch, Aug. 23, 1935, p. 10.
The Dispatch's references to the past continued when it commented on an attempt by Emperor Haile Selassie to obtain aid from Britain and the United States in exchange for concessions to commercial and industrial interests, particularly oil interests: "This country has not the remotest intention of pulling the chestnuts of the Standard Oil Company out of the fire. It was badly burnt on at least one previous occasion when the commercial and financial involvement of its banks and industries with the Allied cause was one of the major factors which brought it into the World War." At least in this particular case the Dispatch conceded that it was in agreement with Senator William E. Borah, Senator Hiram W. Johnson, and "other members of the ultra-isolationist bloc in Congress."93

The extent to which the United States should cooperate with the League of Nations, according to the Richmond paper, would be to refuse "credits and raw materials" to Italy.94 Although the Dispatch asserted that "the league may not be for us, removed as we are by geography and history from the tangled boundaries and polyglot populations of Europe," it did predict shortly before the Italian invasion that that international body "can be a powerful instrument of peace."95 Within two weeks, however, the Dispatch saw that the lack of cooperation on the part of League members made it highly unlikely that sanctions against Italy would be effective.96 It is not surprising, therefore, that the Richmond

editor was soon urging this country to guard itself against atrocity stories and "the merchants of death" despite what safeguards might be offered by the neutrality legislation.  

In a detailed analysis of American isolationism during the six years prior to Pearl Harbor, Manfred Jonas observed:

the Italo-Ethiopian War fitted neatly into the isolationists' concept of foreign wars and their relation to the United States. The United States had no territorial and only slight economic interests in Africa. Though Mussolini's action was clearly aggressive and unprovoked, it seemed little different from what Great Britain and France had been doing in Africa for nearly a century . . . . Italy's attempt to gain a colony [in Ethiopia] appeared to be an effort to redress legitimate grievances stemming from the First World War and a necessary step toward relieving dangerous internal population pressures. . . .

The isolationists were certain, therefore, that the United States had no reason to become involved in the conflict, either for practical or for moral reasons. They were not prepared to admit that the Neutrality Act was unnecessary to insure American non-involvement in this instance, and showed great concern about the unequal effects of the law on the two belligerents. As a consequence, they intensified their search for means to improve existing legislation in order to provide genuine American neutrality in future conflicts. The most logical step in this direction was a mandatory embargo on strategic materials other than arms ammunition, to take effect immediately upon the outbreak of war anywhere in the world.

With somewhat more stress on the Anglophobia and a few comments on the demands for propaganda safeguards, Jonas's summation of how "the Italo-Ethiopian War fitted neatly into the isolationists' concept of foreign wars" accurately depicts the sentiments, generally speaking, of the Virginia editors. As a whole, the editors advocated a type of neutrality supported by those who have been labeled "timid isolationists": those who "were prepared to surrender some traditional rights in order

98 Jonas, Isolationism in America, pp. 174-175.
to minimize direct contact with foreign nations at war and thus avoid entanglements."99 Unlike the "belligerent isolationists" such as Senators Borah of Idaho and Johnson of California who "were fully prepared to defend American [neutral] rights and [shipping] interests," the timid isolationists such as Senators Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota and Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan were anxious to revive "a concept of neutrality that dated back to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson: that the main objective of foreign policy in wartime should be to stay out of the conflict rather than maintain arbitrary rights."100

The "timidity" of the Virginia editors was most clearly demonstrated in their frequent criticisms of the failure of the 1935 Neutrality Act to go beyond the impartial arms embargo. The editors believe that merely prohibiting "implements of war" trade with belligerent countries was not enough to insure this country's avoidance of war. That the opinions of the Virginia editors were probably indicative of those of Southerners as a whole is supported by one of George Gallup's first public opinion polls. Taken on October 19, 1935, less than two months after the signing of the Neutrality Act and during the early stages of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Gallup's pollsters asked a cross-section of the American people: "What steps . . . should America take to remain neutral--prohibit all trade with nations at war; prohibit trade in war materials only; place no restrictions on trade?" In only two sections of the country did more than fifty per cent of the people polled, fifty-two per cent in each section to be exact, respond that the United States should prohibit all

99 Ibid., p. 35.
100 Ibid., pp. 35-65; Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 239.
trade with belligerents. These two sections, the West Central and the Southern states, were dissatisfied also with prohibiting trade in war materials only; just slightly more than a third of the Americans in those states considered the provisions of the Neutrality Act regarding "implements of war" to be sufficient. 101

Of the twelve Virginia papers, only the Danville Register approved editorially restricting nothing more than war materials to belligerents and only the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette advocated selling war munitions and food to Ethiopia. Memories of Wilson's Great Crusade were simply too close and too powerful to be ignored in 1935. That they would serve as guide posts to carry the United States through the crises of the 1930's was the unmistakable hope of not a few Virginia newspaper editors. True, there was some apprehension that was demonstrated best by the editor of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot. Yet, the views of the editors as a whole appear to be representative of those of most Southerners as expressed in Gallup's polls. If such is the case, Alexander DeConde's observation seems to hold true, at least in regard to 1935, that "before 1938 the South . . . placed a greater value on neutrality than did other sections of the country. 102


The clashes between Japanese and Chinese troops near Peiping in July 1937 paved the way for months of considerable editorial commentary by the dailies reflecting again their bitter memories of the past and deep concern for the future. The undeclared Sino-Japanese war, referred to by the Japanese as the "China Incident," had an impact on the United States that was evident in Roosevelt's Quarantine Speech, the futile Brussels Conference, the Panay incident, and the fate of the proposed Ludlow amendment.¹

Two months before the outbreak of the war between China and Japan, Congress passed a third "permanent" neutrality act which included the main provisions of the 1935 and 1936 temporary acts.

Two new provisions were added: one made it mandatory for the President to declare it illegal for Americans to travel on belligerent ships and the second placed the sale of American goods to belligerents on a "cash and carry" basis, thus lessening the possibility that United States ships on the seas might involve this country in another war.²

Despite the protection offered by this legislative wall, the renewed hostilities in the Far East could not be ignored completely. Because American sentiment was largely pro-Chinese, President Roosevelt refused to invoke the neutrality act on the technical grounds that no war had been declared. Just as invoking the act in the undeclared war between Ethiopia and Italy was intended to help the North African nation, Roosevelt's reversal of that policy two years later was meant to help China which was in much greater need of American shipments of munitions than was Japan.³ Nevertheless, United States policy towards the crisis was designed to make "no direct effort to solidify relations with either China or Japan." Principles were reiterated by the State Department to demonstrate American opposition to specific Japanese violations of United States rights, but nothing else was forthcoming for many months.⁴

Yet by the fall of 1937 at least the President appeared to feel that this country's official position of impartiality was in need of revision. Although the motives behind Roosevelt's famous Quarantine Speech at Chicago on October 5, 1937, are still debated

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³DeConde, American Foreign Policy, p. 570.
⁴Drummond, Passing of Neutrality, p. 53.
by historians, there can be no doubt that the tone of that speech marked a clear departure from the isolationist tones permeating most of his earlier foreign policy speeches. Typical of the President's speeches before October 5 was the one he made on the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia when he declared that "the American people can speak but one sentiment--despite what happens in continents overseas, the United States shall and must remain, as long ago the Father of our Country prayed it might remain, unentangled and free." Almost a year later during the 1936 Presidential campaign, Roosevelt again reassured isolationists by asserting: "We shun political commitments which might entangle us in foreign wars; we avoid connection with the political activities of the League of Nations. . . . We are not isolationists except insofar as we seek to isolate ourselves completely from war."

In light of these remarks, it is understandable why many Americans were opposed to or confused by Roosevelt's statement at Chicago that:

> When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.

> Most important of all, the will for peace on the part of peace-loving nations must express itself to the end that

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5 The usual interpretation, such as that of Langer and Gleason in *Challenge to Isolationism*, is that the President had in mind some extreme form of sanctions to impose against Japan; another scholar, Dorothy Borg suggests that Roosevelt was not thinking of taking a hard line against totalitarian states but rather he was making a "groping attempt" to discover some peaceful means of averting war. See her "Notes on Roosevelt's 'Quarantine' Speech," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXII (September 1957), 405-433.

6 Quoted by Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse*, p. 243.

7 Quoted by Langer and Gleason, *Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 17.
nations that may be tempted to violate their agreements and the rights of others will desist from such a course. There must be positive endeavors to preserve peace. . . Therefore, America actively engages in the search for peace.8

Even Secretary of State Cordell Hull "vehemently protested the implications of the 'quarantine' passage."9

The strong outpouring of isolationist opposition to the Quarantine Speech prompted the President to say later that "it's a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead--and to find no one there."10 Roosevelt apparently believed, as Abraham Lincoln once put it, that "public opinion in this country is everything."11 In response to questions by the press a day after the Chicago speech, Roosevelt definitely backed down when he declared that his speech might be considered an expansion rather than a repudiation of neutrality.12

Despite the efforts Roosevelt made to appease the isolationists, their ire was aroused again a few days later when it was announced that the United States would participate in a meeting to be held at Brussels in November. Although other powers would be represented, it was hoped that the main participants would be the signatories of the 1922 Nine-Power Treaty, a treaty by which the contracting powers, including Japan, agreed "to respect the sovereignty, the independence, and the

10 Quoted by Leuchtenburg, Roosevelt and the New Deal, p. 226.
12 Burns, Roosevelt, p. 319.
territorial and administrative integrity of China." The refusal of Japan to participate combined with the Secretary of State's admission to the Japanese ambassador prior to the conference that the United States contemplated no action virtually foredoomed the Brussels Conference to failure. Nevertheless, with United States participation in the Conference coming on the heels of the Chicago speech and with no knowledge of Hull's statement to the Japanese ambassador, Americans naturally were suspicious.

Following the collapse of the Nine Power Conference in mid-November, less than a month passed before the bombing and sinking in clear daylight of the United States gunboat Panay by the Japanese in the Yangtze River on December 12, 1937. Although two Americans were killed and thirty wounded, a prompt apology and agreement by Japan to pay reparations of more than two million dollars settled the crisis by Christmas, thus demonstrating dramatically this country's determination to avoid war.

Perhaps the most extreme attempt to prevent American entry into another war was that represented in the proposed Ludlow referendum. This proposal was designed to reduce the chances for executive irresponsibility in foreign policy by forbidding the President from leading a divided public into war once again. Briefly, the Ludlow policy sought a constitutional amendment requiring the approval by a majority of the American people in a referendum, except in the case of a direct attack, before there could be a declaration of war. The first such proposed

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14 Drummond, Passing of Neutrality, pp. 54-55.
15 Bailey, A Diplomatic History, p. 705.
constitutional amendment was introduced by Senator Thomas P. Gore of Oklahoma in 1917 just four months after America's entry into World War I. But "the most consistent and energetic advocate of such proposals" was Representative Louis Ludlow of Indiana who introduced his war referendum proposal in 1935. Bogged down in committees for more than two years, Ludlow's proposal was given some impetus by the threat of the Panay, but on January 10, 1938, the House refused by the close vote of 209 to 188 to consider and discuss the proposal. 16

The events in the Far East from July 1937 until the end of the year were discussed in some detail by all but three of the twelve Virginia editors. Three of the weeklies, the Front Royal Warren Sentinel, the Louisa Central Virginian, and the South Boston Halifax Gazette, devoted not one line to editorial comment on the Chinese crisis and American reactions to it. One must wait until 1938 when Hitlerism became more threatening and when Britain and France appeased Germany at Munich to discover the sentiments of these three newspapers on the coming of World War II.

By the fall of 1937, the Bedford Democrat was questioning seriously the value of this country's "rigid neutrality legislation" which seemed only to confirm for the world's dictators that "the United States need not be considered as a factor in world affairs." 17 Continuing in the same vein in what may have been a response to Roosevelt's Quarantine Speech, the Democrat asserted that "words, whether in public speeches or in diplomatic notes, will not stop Japan and it is doubtful if the

16 Jonas, Isolationism in America, pp. 159, 162-163.
nations have any idea of adopting other tactics."\(^18\) Also in reference to the Sino-Japanese war, the Bedford paper early the next year declared that "there was a time when nations went to war over broken treaties. There was a day when strong and self-reliant powers, having given protection to weaker people, were resolute enough to stick to their word. That day, it seems, is not to be found in 1938."\(^19\) Yet the Democrat appeared willing to adhere to the policy of this country setting a good example for the rest of the world: "possibly, if this country, in its contacts, demonstrates its purpose of peaceful development, the lesson may not be lost upon nations that seem inclined to try the sword." Still, however, the United States must permit "no weakness in defense to permit unscrupulous adventurers to take advantage of our good will . . . . we must be abundantly able to enforce proper respect for the rights that belong to this nation."\(^20\)

During the fall and winter of 1937 the editor of the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette at least wrote as if he wanted the United States to play a more active role in world affairs. He stated that "if civilization and the Christian religion are to survive, the English speaking peoples of the world must also unite together and when fully and completely ready, drive the Italians and the Japs into the sea . . . ."\(^21\)

Specifically in regard to the Nine Power Treaty, the Virginia Gazette affirmed that "if we sign treaties we must stand by our

\(^{18}\) Ibid., Oct. 21, 1937, p. 2.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., Feb. 3, 1938, p. 2.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., Mar. 31, 1938, p. 2.

\(^{21}\) Williamsburg Virginia Gazette, Nov. 12, 1937, p. 2.
promise, or forever be despised by civilized nations. There is nothing left for us to do all neutrality laws to the contrary." 22 Shortly after the collapse of the Brussels Conference and the failure of such countries as the United States, Britain, and France to display their "backbone," the Williamsburg paper asked, "Why enter into any treaty if it is not to be kept?" 23 Later, in a reference to the sale of scrap iron to Japan by American business firms, the Virginia Gazette asserted that "a good strict neutrality law is what is required, if not a national boycott against outlaw countries. Nothing else seems to be effective, as treaties are no longer sacred or even worth the paper they are written on. The same applies in a similar degree to the League of Nations, the World Court and Peace Conferences." 24

The Virginia Gazette's reaction to the Panay incident and this country's handling of it was sharp and rather bitter: "If any nation had dared to insult America in this manner in the days when the battleship Maine was sunk by the Spaniards, or even in Woodrow Wilson's time, there would have been stiff reprisals and no excuses would have been replied to or accepted, except with a barrage of shot and shell in the aggressors' own front yard." The Williamsburg paper somewhat belatedly asserted that "all symptoms of wilful aggression should be nipped in the bud . . ." The paper felt the best retaliatory action for the "civilized nations" to take would be an economic boycott against Japan backed by the force of arms. And "if the President is afraid to issue an ultimatum against trade with Japan we have enough red blooded

23Ibid., Nov. 26, 1937, p. 2.
Americans to refuse to handle Japanese goods."^{25}

The *Virginia Gazette* considered the proposed Ludlow war referendum to be both dangerous and ill-timed—dangerous because "it would keep those in authority from preparing to take steps to avert war or to prepare for war until it had the sanction of 20 million American electors" and ill-timed "in its weakening of the President's message to Japan over the Panay 'incident.'"^{26} Within two months, however, the Williamsburg editor demonstrated a dramatic reversal in his attitude towards the United States' acceptance of the Japanese apology for the bombing of the Panay: "this country would suffer other insults and losses without going to war about it. This is a Christian civilization as we know it in a democratic country. It is not a sign of weakness but rather, a sure sign of strength in the nation's character and in the character of the men who run the affairs of the nation."^{27} As in 1935 consistency was not to be found in 1937 on the editorial page of the *Virginia Gazette*.

The immediate reaction of the Alexandria *Gazette* to the China Incident came in an editorial titled "Asia for Asiatics." Insisting that "self-defense today is China's job," the *Gazette* reminded its readers that this country's past efforts to treat China as "a sort of benevolent protectorate" were given little support by Great Britain and others and that "the obvious candidate" for external help was

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^{25} Ibid., Dec. 17, 1937, p. 2.

^{26} Ibid., Jan. 7, 1938, p. 2.

^{27} Ibid., Mar. 4, 1938, p. 2.
Russia. The Alexandria editor advised Americans in China to return home for "here is a great isle of safety in a violent and crazy world." As for Americans who were killed or injured in the danger zone, the Gazette felt that there was "too much tension" for our government "to take offense and demand punishment for any infraction, no matter how small, of the technical rules for protection of citizens. . . . with all due sympathy for the families that have suffered this loss, it may be taken as a lesson to other Americans [to get out]." And as if to leave absolutely no doubt, the Alexandria paper asserted shortly before the Panay incident that "there is nothing in or near Asia that Americans today would fight for." 

In light of these sentiments, the Gazette's endorsement of Representative Ludlow's proposed war referendum amendment as a "sound proposal" comes as no surprise. "A defensive, domestic war," declared the editor, "is probably the only kind of war in which we should ever engage."

Refraining from any discussion of the Quarantine Speech and the Brussels Conference, the Alexandria editor reflected on the mistakes of the past and concluded that "for any lasting peace, these Fascist nations that are making the trouble must have better access to new territory and raw materials. The great land-owning powers must disgorge

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some of their World War loot. There must be a reasonable sharing of natural resources." Because "the world is big and rich enough for all," there must be "a new deal in land and material resources."

The first reaction of the Gazette to the Panay crisis appeared to be a reversal of that newspaper's earlier recommendations that the United States withdraw from the Far East. It was the opinion of the editor that "the people of this country do not want peace at any price. We . . . always will fight in defense of the lives of our countrymen and the honor of our nation." In no uncertain terms the Gazette asserted that "the time has come when we must prove to the world that the stars and stripes still stands for, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. There can be only one answer that Japan will understand and we express the hope that our President will give her a dose of her own medicine." Within two weeks, however, the Alexandria paper was content that the United States had emerged "successfully" from the Panay incident primarily because we "possessed a naval strength compelling Japan's respect."

Even more frequently than the Alexandria Gazette, the Fredericksburg Free Lance Star also encouraged United States non-involvement in the China Incident. Recognizing that attempts to reason with Japan had failed, the Star declared that "our first duty is to remove to safety those Americans who are in the zone of hostilities . . . ."

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34 Ibid., Dec. 20, 1937, p. 4.
A month before the Brussels Conference was to meet, the Star noted prophetically that it "can amount to little more than a pious gesture unless the participating nations, including the United States, are prepared to resort to armed force in the application of their principles." Yet the Fredericksburg editor made clear that he felt:

The danger of a too ready acceptance on the part of Uncle Sam of the role of moral censor is that embarrassing entanglements may thereby be created, just as they were created as a result of the Wilsonian policies between 1914 and 1917.

Under existing world conditions, America's basic aim should be that of avoiding the road to war. The sheer futility of ethical action within international affairs was clearly shown in the events that culminated in the Versailles Treaty. What is happening in the Orient should not be allowed to erase this poignant memory from the mind of official Washington.37

That the Fredericksburg editor became jittery over the Quarantine Speech was evident in his contention that "the United States should guard against a too easy acceptance of the role of moral stooge for other powers. . . . Up to now the Roosevelt administration has merely endorsed action taken by the League of Nations, and . . . this kind of cooperative aid should constitute the limit of our verbal interference in the Far Eastern conflict." To further demonstrate his concern over the Chicago speech, the history-conscious editor stated that "events leading up to American participation in the World War are the stern reminder of the dangers entailed in the repeated enunciation of high-sounding moral principles. The debtor nations of Europe should not be allowed craftily to maneuver us into comparable entanglements.

with respect to Oriental affairs."\(^{38}\) Despite their ethical appeals, the American people should "have no desire to press their own conception of international morals, however noble, at the point of the sword."\(^{39}\)

The influence of the Sino-Japanese war on many Americans' increasing distrust of Europe was reflected in the Fredericksburg editor's comments on the failure of the Brussels Conference. Fearing that the European powers might blame the United States for any lack of future moves against Japan, the Star declared that that would be "the same kind of European technique which was employed after the Versailles treaty. Uncle Sam, having donated the bulk of the money needed for an Allied victory, was blamed for the impotence of the League of Nations and branded as a Shylock for trying to collect the war debts. It all makes one feel that this country might just as well forget the international arena, concentrate on American defense and let Europe stew in its own mess."\(^{40}\)

Not even the Panay affair shook the Star's determination to see this country remain free from world conflicts. After observing that such an incident "was bound to happen sooner or later in the Japanese invasion of China," the Fredericksburg paper expressed its relief that the American people were not regarding the crisis as a "provocation to war."\(^{41}\) The best safeguard for this country, according to the Star in an editorial titled "We are Safe While Strong," was the continuation of

\(^{38}\) Ibid., Oct. 15, 1937, p. 4.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., Oct. 20, 1937, p. 6.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., Dec. 6, 1937, p. 4.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., Dec. 15, 1937, p. 6; Dec. 20, 1937, p. 6.
our preparedness program, for "a strong nation commands respect abroad and is the least likely to become involved in war. We should, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, 'speak softly and carry a big stick.'"\textsuperscript{42}

Although the Roanoke Times sympathized with the Chinese and even acknowledged that "there's something gravely wrong with a world which permits such unspeakable wrongs to go unpunished," it maintained that the Sino-Japanese war "is not our war and we have no business taking sides."\textsuperscript{43}

By December 1937 the Times acknowledged that there was little likelihood of "sterner measures than mere verbal protests" forthcoming against Japan from Washington and London.\textsuperscript{44} Largely because of this, the Roanoke paper believed that "the Chinese would be wise to capitulate without delay. There is nothing to be gained by further resistance."\textsuperscript{45} Even after the conflict in the Far East was brought closer to America with the sinking of the Panay, the Times, although conceding that "there is a limit to patience," refused to back down from its firm belief that "this country is in no mood to engage in a foreign war."\textsuperscript{46}

In its only reference to Roosevelt's Chicago speech, the Roanoke paper a few days before the Panay incident had implied that it supported a quarantine of Japan in the form of an economic boycott.\textsuperscript{47} Two days after

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., Dec. 29, 1937, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{43}Roanoke Times, Nov. 1, 1937, p. 6; Dec. 1, 1937, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., Dec. 5, 1937, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., Dec. 8, 1937, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., Dec. 14, 1937, p. 6; Dec. 15, 1937, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., Dec. 9, 1937, p. 6.
the American gunboat was attacked, the Times extended its undeniable support for "an immediate and effective embargo against any importations from Japan into the United States." To that extent the Roanoke paper felt the United States should go in its opposition to Japan.

Before the end of 1937 the Roanoke editor's rather mild initial reactions to the Panay crisis hardened somewhat. In an editorial titled "Warning to Japan," the editor declared that "Japan must not count too heavily upon the desire of the United States and Great Britain to remain at peace. . . . neither is afraid to fight if need be, and assuredly neither is afraid to fight Japan." Finally, the Times described the proposed Ludlow amendment as "a nonsensical and dangerous measure" largely because "the people cannot possibly know the details about delicate foreign relations." Within two more weeks, however, the Roanoke paper appeared satisfied that this country's acceptance of Japan's apology was a wise act of restraint and not of cowardice.

In the early stages of the war between China and Japan, it seemed "most unlikely" to the Danville Register "that this country could be drawn into the Sino-Japanese conflict . . ." This statement might be attributed in large part to the Register's faith in Americans' learning from the past: "We have had other bitter experiences before in trying to preserve the balance of world sanity and we have

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48 Ibid., Dec. 14, 1937, p. 6
50 Ibid., Dec. 18, 1937, p. 6.
52 Danville Register, Sept. 8, 1937, p. 4.
been left to hold the bag on more than one occasion."\(^{53}\) Probably most
important was the Danville editor's contention that because of the numerous
flagrant and open violations of treaties since the World War, the United
States "can hardly be expected to assume the quixotic role of savior of
the oppressed under the terms of a nine-power treaty."\(^{54}\)

Apparently heartened by the Quarantine Speech, there soon developed
a rather abrupt change of tone on the part of the Danville editor. Without voicing any criticism, the Register reported that Roosevelt's
"stern warning ... indicates that this government has reached the
definite conclusion that something stronger than neutrality legislation ... is needed to halt the carnage, the careless flow of human blood in
China."\(^{55}\) Advocating "a 'quarantine' [in the form of an economic boycott] of Japan by the League of Nations with the United States in full cooperation," the Register, in a specific reference to the Nine Power Treaty, asserted that this country "does not intend that the peace treaties to which it is
a signatory shall become merely 'scraps of paper.'"\(^{56}\)

The slight hopes expressed by the Danville paper in October again changed to gloom in November when the editor predicted that "with the
dismal collapse of the Brussels conference, and with it the hopes of
the peace-loving nations to end the carnage, there seems to be now no
earthly power that can prevent the complete subjugation of China by Japan ... ."

\(^{53}\)Ibid., Sept. 22, 1937, p. 6.
\(^{54}\)Ibid., Sept. 25, 1937, p. 4.
\(^{55}\)Ibid., Oct. 7, 1937, p. 4.
\(^{56}\)Ibid., Oct. 8, 1937, p. 6.
\(^{57}\)Ibid., Nov. 27, 1937, p. 4.
The initial reaction of the Register to the bombing of the Panay was probably more belligerent than that of any of the other Virginia newspapers examined in this study. Recalling past wars, the Danville paper declared, "There was no question concerning responsibility in the marine incidents that led to war in 1812 and 1917. There is no uncertainty about the manner in which the Panay was sent to the bottom of the Yangtze river."\(^{58}\) Asserting that "national honor and prestige require that we see this thing through, come what may," the Register believed that Washington should "deal with Japan as it would with any other murderer."\(^{59}\) In sum, the Danville paper contended that "America will not hesitate if Japan, or any other power, forces war upon her."\(^{60}\)

It was in the midst of the Panay controversy that the Register voiced its opinion that the Ludlow resolution was "unwise" because "America, like other nations that are hated by totalitarian states, needs must be ready for war at all times, to be sure of her defensive might."\(^{61}\)

In the end, though, the Danville paper was content with the "amicable settlement" reached between Japan and the United States: "Only the war-mongers," declared the Register, "... find disappointment in the ... settlement."\(^{62}\)

The first reaction of the Charlottesville Daily Progress to the China Incident was that "while proper protection of our nationals and our commerce in the Far East is of prime importance, there is

\(^{58}\)Ibid., Dec. 14, 1937, p. 4.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., Dec. 19, 1937, p. 6; Dec. 21, 1937, p. 4.

\(^{60}\)Ibid., Dec. 26, 1937, p. 6.

\(^{61}\)Ibid., Dec. 18, 1937, p. 4.

\(^{62}\)Ibid., Dec. 28, 1937, p. 4.
litle the United States could gain even by victory in such an affair . . . "

Such a statement helps to explain the Daily Progress's reaction to the Quarantine Speech in a lengthy editorial titled "Ominous Outlook." Asserting that there were "uncomfortable inferences" to be drawn from the speech, particularly from the section in which the President referred to the need for "a concerted effort" on the part of "peace-loving nations" to oppose treaty violations, the Charlottesville paper feared that "this is manifestly a declaration that America's greatest assurances of continued peace--isolation and neutrality--are in jeopardy." The editor believed that "the 'concerted effort' can mean only that a military alliance is contemplated to enforce by power what the League of Nations has most ineffectually endeavored to enforce by moral suasion." In light of past experience and particularly in light of our recent relations with Britain, a military alliance would be especially dangerous: "By adroit diplomatic maneuvers, financial dealings and propaganda England was a prime factor in inducing American entry into the World War . . . And now England, with tremendous interest in the current situation which endangers her far-flung empire, would seem reluctant to war on her own account; she would invite support of the United States." The simple conclusion of the Daily Progress was that "it is entirely possible that another war is 'just around the corner.'"

What one would expect to be the reaction of the Charlottesville paper to the proposed Ludlow amendment came in a discussion of two similar resolutions introduced in the Senate. To the Daily Progress

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64 Ibid., Oct. 6, 1937, p. 4.
the alternatives were simple: "The Senate is confronted with the question of whether it desires to retain the arbitrary authority to declare foreign wars or trust the public enough to invest it with power." In the editor's words, "if the public has sense enough to elect Congressmen it should be qualified to pass on the matter of declaring war." These comments contrast sharply with the remark made by the editor less than a month later in connection with the Ludlow referendum proposal: "America can be friendly and peaceful with the world without shackling its hands against quick action in emergencies." The editor's change in sentiment can be explained only by the effect that the bombing of the Panay had on him. His immediate reaction to the incident was that "apologies cannot continue indefinitely to be effective." Shortly thereafter, the Daily Progress supported "an enlarged naval program" as our best form of preparedness. After all, "it stands to reason that the richest, most desirable and coveted country in the world cannot afford to neglect its security."

The sentiments of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot concerning the "Chinese tangle" first became clear in its comments on the Quarantine Speech. Recognizing that the President's "pointed" language might encourage some collective action in which the United States would play a role against Japan or Italy, the Norfolk paper believed that the speech "serves a good and timely purpose for the President of the United

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65 Ibid., Nov. 19, 1937, p. 4.
66 Ibid., Dec. 16, 1937, p. 4.
68 Ibid., Dec. 27, 1937, p. 4.
69 Ibid., Jan. 29, 1938, p. 4.
States . . . to reach an arm across the oceans in support of the nations that are seeking to hold in check the forces of war."  

Nevertheless, the Norfolk editor did reserve wholesale approval of the President's implementing some of his vague pronouncements in any manner he might see fit. It should be noted that the Pilot interpreted the Quarantine Speech as a definite departure from our neutrality policy, a policy "inspired by a passionate national desire to avoid embroilment in war under any pretext." Since the Neutrality Act of 1937 represented "the last time the people spoke" through their Congress on this country's foreign policy, the Norfolk editor made it clear that "the President has no moral right to lead the nation into any material commitments under [the Quarantine policy], without consulting Congress." To leave no doubts about its position, however, the Pilot classified itself "among the approvers [of] . . . the tenor and timeliness of the President's Chicago speech."  

A few weeks later on the eve of the breakup of the Brussels Conference, the Norfolk editor expressed his concern that "the President's Chicago speech with its remarks about 'concerted' action to 'quarantine' the treaty-breaking contagion, gave a misleading aspect of potency to the Nine-Power Treaty conference which it helped to bring into being." The Pilot's concern was due to the fact that "by the time the American delegation set sail for Brussels, the idea of concerted quarantine had been reduced to the idea of a 'negotiated' settlement of the particular Far East treaty-breaking that the conference was to consider."  

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70 Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Oct. 6, 1937, p. 6.  
71 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1937, p. 6.  
the Pilot made what appeared to be a rather frustrating attempt to discover something worthwhile in the Brussels Conference. The best the editor could do was to assert that "it serves the cause of realistic diplomacy to find out from experience that a particular instrument of intervention [the Nine-Power Treaty] is not suited to [the] cause in hand . . . . That much--little as it is--is gain."73

"It should be viewed calmly" was the first response of the Norfolk paper to the bombing of the Panay. After all, "whenever foreigners are caught in the zones of war, . . . it is almost impossible to expect that they will escape all its consequences . . . [even] if the combatants are honestly trying to avoid endangering them."74 Although a few days later the Pilot described the settlement of the Panay incident "as welcome a Christmas present as the nation has received," it stressed that the incident "has hardened America's attitude to Japan's machinations in China, . . . has injected new life into this country's armament program, . . . and has left the peace-at-any-price structure definitely weaker."75 It was during the midst of the Panay controversy that the Pilot asserted that the proposed Ludlow amendment would "in effect handcuff the nation." Moreover, in the words of the editor, "it is not easy to name a major American war in the past with reference to which the

73 Ibid., Nov. 26, 1937, p. 6.


75 Ibid., Dec. 27, 1937, p. 6.
people and the Congress differed."

More than three months before the bombing of the Panay, the editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch expressed his initial views on the China Incident in an editorial titled "Let's Pull Out of Asia!" In one long but prophetic sentence the editor declared, "With the Sino-Japanese conflict spreading rapidly, the Times Dispatch favors the evacuation by the United States Government of any Americans now in China who wish to leave, but as soon as those who are willing to go can be gotten out of the danger zone, we see no reason why American warships and marines should continue to patrol an area so dangerous that a single high-explosive shell might strike at any moment and sink one of our ships... Total American investments in China amount to only about $100,000,000," and they simply were not worth the risk of a major war. The Dispatch concluded that "the sooner this country pulls out of the Far East, and lets it stew in its own juice, the better." The editor reiterated these same sentiments three different times during the next few days.

It was with complete justification, therefore, that the Dispatch editor could write in December that "the blowing up of the United States gunboat Panay, with numerous casualties, is just what we said was going to happen, if this country persisted in keeping fighting ships in the Far Eastern danger zone." After remarking that "the admirals are exerting too much influence over this Administration," the Richmond paper once again asserted that "there is no excuse for

76 Ibid., Dec. 16, 1937, p. 6.
keeping American warships in the Far Eastern danger zone." While most of the Virginia editors appeared to support demands on Japan for guarantees against further "unlawful molestation" of Americans and American interests in the Far East, the Dispatch just five days after the attack on the Panay warned: "we certainly do not want a war, and one of the best ways to start one might be for us to continue to insist on terms which the Japanese are unwilling to grant."80

Also unlike many of the other state newspapers, the Dispatch displayed no sympathy for the increasing sentiment in the United States in late 1937 for an accelerated armament program and for an economic boycott against Japan. Specifically in regard to reports from Washington concerning naval expansion, the Richmond paper contended with some suspicion that "unless this country is planning aggressive policies which may draw us into a naval war with Japan off the Asiatic coast, it is difficult to see any justification for adding 10 or 15 cruisers to the fleet, over and above the ships already planned."81 The Dispatch opposed an American boycott of Japanese goods for two reasons. First, the editor was doubtful that it would diminish Japanese aggression in China. Second, "the boycott inevitably tends to create a belligerent state of mind."82 Consistent with these sentiments was the Dispatch's statement that the proposed Ludlow amendment "deserves serious consideration, instead of supercilious hoots."83

80 Ibid., Dec. 17, 1937, p. 16.
83 Ibid., Dec. 17, 1937, p. 16.
In an earlier reference to a similar resolution introduced in the Senate, the Richmond paper, after recalling that "the World War is the historic example of how the desire of the people for peace can be overridden," stated that "the beauty of the [Senator Robert M.] LaFollette amendment is that it gives the people of the United States the right to say when they desire to become citizens of a Fascist state—or its near equivalent—in order to fight a war abroad allegedly for the protection of the democratic principle."84 Hence, from the time of its first reaction to the China Incident through the settlement of the Panay incident, the Dispatch maintained a stance directed towards American non-involvement in the Far East.

Two other matters related directly to the undeclared Sino-Japanese War—the Quarantine Speech and the Brussels Conference—were given rather limited coverage by the Richmond paper. The Dispatch interpreted the Quarantine Speech as marking "an end to splendid isolation," but the questions the speech left unanswered made it impossible for the editor to speculate how it would change what he referred to as our status of "interested bystander."85 Although the Dispatch had "always been dubious concerning the probable efficacy" of the neutrality legislation, the prospect that the President's Chicago speech might reverse a policy supported by the people disturbed the editor. This disturbance was reflected in the concern expressed that "the President not only fails to invoke the neutrality act [against China and Japan despite their war not being

declared), but actually starts off in various respects directly opposite to that chartered by Congress this very year." The President's "erratic conduct" in both domestic affairs (the Court packing scheme) and foreign affairs "would seem to be endangering not only to his own leadership but the influence of the United States as a world power . . ."86

The Dispatch's concern about American prestige in the world was intensified even more by what it termed the "pusillanimous" conduct of the United States and the other fourteen powers represented at the Brussels Conference. As far as the United States was concerned, the Richmond editor considered the "farcical international performance" at Brussels to be unnecessary from the beginning. Why? In responding, the Dispatch held true to its overall coverage of the Far Eastern situation: "President Roosevelt and Congress have so many other problems on their hands at the moment that they can't afford a digression into international affairs until national affairs are given the requisite attention. It is entirely possible that they would not want to exert pressure on Japan, even if other problems closer home were not clamoring for solution, and perhaps they ought not to take such a risk."87

To summarize the sentiments of the nine editors in 1937 by classifying each paper as either strictly isolationist or internationalist is impossible. Only two papers, the Fredericksburg Free Lance Star and the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, fall neatly into either category. The

87 Ibid., Nov. 17, 1937, p. 8.
Fredericksburg paper, in its consistent opposition to United States involvement in the Far East, its criticism of the Quarantine Speech, and its calm acceptance of the bombing of the Panay, can be classified as an isolationist paper. The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, on the other hand, can be labeled an internationalist paper considering its approval of the "tenor" of the Quarantine Speech, its recognition that the "peace-at-any-price structure" was weakened by the Panay incident, and its disapproval of the proposed Ludlow Amendment. The other seven papers are more difficult to classify although the Alexandria and Charlottesville papers were consistently isolationist except for brief "hawkish" flurries following the Panay bombing as was the Richmond paper aside from an initial favorable reaction to the Quarantine Speech.

The only significant pattern that more than half of the nine newspapers falls into has to do with the relation between their reactions to the Panay incident and the proposed Ludlow Amendment. That the critical reactions to the first influenced the negative attitudes toward the second appears to be the case with the Williamsburg, Roanoke, Danville, and Norfolk papers. That such was definitely the case with the Charlottesville paper is demonstrated by the fact that the Daily Progress supported a Senate proposal similar to the Ludlow one until after the Panay sinking when it reacted critically to a war referendum. In short, these five newspapers did not want the Congress to be restricted by a Ludlow amendment in the event that something more serious than the Panay crisis should break out in the future. Although two noted historians probably went a bit too far in asserting that the Panay
crisis "brought the United States to the verge of war," that incident was serious enough to make papers previously strongly isolationist, such as the Charlottesville paper, to break away briefly from their normal stance.

One scholar, however, is definitely amiss when he states in reference to Roosevelt's Chicago speech that "the South, the most international area in outlook, gave solid endorsement" to the Quarantine Speech. In an attempt to demonstrate that the American press on the whole reacted favorably to Roosevelt's remarks of October 5, Travis Beal Jacobs on the basis of four Southern newspapers located in Dallas, New Orleans, Miami, and Raleigh contends that the South "gave solid endorsement." The reactions of several Virginia editors alone refute his thesis. The Fredericksburg and Charlottesville editors were particularly vocal in their opposition to the speech, the latter fearing that Roosevelt's reference to a "concerted effort" meant that a military alliance was being contemplated.

Even Jacobs's assertion that the South was "the most international area" in 1937 is at odds with some impressive Gallup poll results. Americans were asked in June 1937: "If other nations should agree to reduce their spending for armaments, should America agree to reduce its expenditures to the same extent?" Only the West Central states, by two percentage points, ranked ahead of the Southern states in affirmative responses. Eighty-two per cent of those polled in the South replied "yes." Just five days after the Quarantine

89 Jacobs, "Roosevelt's 'Quarantine' Speech," p. 492.
90 Cantril and Strunk, eds., Public Opinion, p. 17.
Speech but two months before the Panay incident, the Gallup pollsters asked: "In order to declare war, should Congress be required to obtain the approval of the people by means of a national vote?" The percentage of Southerners replying positively was equal to that of Americans polled in the West Central states—seventy-five per cent in each section, a higher percentage than in any other section, believed the people should approve war declarations. 91 One area in which Southerners did seem more "internationalist" was in regard to joining the League of Nations. But even in this area, only forty-four per cent of the Southerners polled in October 1937 felt that the United States should join the League. Yet this figure was eleven per cent above the national average. 92 On December 28, 1937, shortly after the sinking of the Panay, the Gallup pollsters asked: "What policy should the government follow with regard to American citizens in China—warn them to leave, and withdraw our soldiers and naval forces, or continue to maintain the present armed forces in China for their protection?" Seventy-four per cent of the Southerners polled stated that the United States should withdraw. Only in the West Central states did a higher percentage—seventy-seven per cent—respond that this country should withdraw. 93 To conclude, the Gallup polls and the views of the Virginia editors in 1937 indicate that, as in 1935, there are legitimate grounds for questioning the assertion by some that the South was "the most international area in outlook."

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91 Ibid., p. 1026.
92 Ibid., p. 403.
93 Ibid., p. 1074.
CHAPTER 3: "PEACE IN OUR TIME"

Although Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the Weimar Republic of Germany in January 1933, several years passed before it dawned on the world just what "Hitlerism" really meant. As late as August 1935, Winston Churchill wrote an article titled "Hitler—Monster or Hero?" in which he concluded, "Both possibilities are open at the present moment.... We must never forget nor cease to hope for the bright alternative."\(^1\)

Churchill's tone, however, changed dramatically during the next few years. Upon hearing Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's announcement in 1938 that he was going to confer with Hitler at Munich,\(^2\) Churchill reportedly hurried out of the Chamber of the House of Commons and declared, "the government had to choose between shame and war."


They chose shame and they will get war." The increasing ferocity of the anti-Jewish persecutions, the Nazi occupation of the Rhineland in early 1936, the take-over of Austria two years later, then the Czechoslovakian crisis—such a record as this explains Churchill's outburst at Chamberlain's announcement.

When Hitler first announced his decision to add to his domain the Sudetenland—the western region of Czechoslovakia containing over three million Germans—the Czechs and the French, with whom the Czechs had signed a defensive alliance, began to mobilize. War appeared imminent. The tenseness that gripped the world during the weeks immediately preceding the Munich Conference was aptly described by Ellen Glasgow when she wrote that the universe seemed like a "vast lunatic asylum."

In the end, however, the premise on which the Fuehrer operated—that "there is no solidarity in Europe," as he put it—held true and war was averted. Before France would aid Czechoslovakia, it insisted on British cooperation. Russia, which also had an alliance with Czechoslovakia, was not committed to act until after the French had done so. The fate of Czechoslovakia, therefore, lay with Great Britain.

Chamberlain's well-known role in the crisis needs little explanation.

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7 Divine, *Reluctant Belligerent*, p. 53.
Although his first two meetings with Hitler at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg resulted in an agreement on the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, it was the conference held at Munich on September 29 and 30 that has gone down in the history books as the "climax of appeasement." With his furled black umbrella in one hand and a piece of paper signed by Hitler and himself in the other, Chamberlain returned from Munich to 10 Downing Street assuring his people that "it is peace in our time."

For the most part, the United States, though greatly concerned, remained quietly in the background as the leaders of Britain, France, Italy, and Germany met at Munich to make the Czechs "the sacrificial victims of the world-wide demand for peace at any price." During the days before Munich, Secretary of State Hull voiced some moral protestations and reminded the European dictators of the Kellogg Peace Pact, but sneers proved to be the only responses. Before a temporary peace was assured, President Roosevelt sent a message to Hitler suggesting that a meeting be held in a neutral European city in order that an "unnecessary" and "unjustifiable" war might be avoided. But Roosevelt hastened to add that "the Government of the United States has no political involvements in Europe, and will assume no obligations in the conduct of the present negotiations." There is little reason to believe that

8 Ibid., p. 54. The final terms of the surrender are outlined by Shirer, The Third Reich, pp. 421-422.

9 Divine, Reluctant Belligerent, p. 54.

10 Burns, Roosevelt, p. 385.

11 Quoted by Langer and Gleason, Challenge to Isolationism, pp. 33-34.
the President had any impact on Hitler's calling the Munich Conference.  

Following the settlement, the worried Administration breathed a sigh of relief. Roosevelt confided to his ambassador in Rome, William Phillips, that he was "not a bit upset over the final result." To the British Prime Minister he sent a telegram declaring that "I fully share your hope and belief that there exists today the greatest opportunity in years for the establishment of a new order based on justice and on law. Now that you have established personal contact with Chancellor Hitler, I know that you will be taking up with him from time to time many of the problems which must be resolved in order to bring about that new and better order." 

The relief expressed as a result of Hitler's statement that the Sudetenland "is the last territorial claim which I have to make in Europe" proved, of course, to be momentary. Just how critical the Czechoslovakian crisis was is reflected to some extent by the greater coverage given to the international scene by the Virginia weeklies during the fall of 1938. The three conferences between Hitler and Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich provided an abundance of material for the Virginia editors to digest and analyze. Their reactions to the abandonment of Czechoslovakia by Great Britain and France were mixed and often confused. Most of them, however, allowed their distrust of England and France to reach a climax and urged their own country to increase its armament program.

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12 Most historians, such as Bailey and Burns, give Mussolini the credit for influencing Hitler's decision to call a conference. Shirer, however, argues that Chamberlain was most influential.

13 Quoted by Leuchtenburg, Roosevelt and the New Deal, p. 285.

14 Quoted by Langer and Gleason, Challenge to Isolationism, p. 35.

15 Quoted by Bailey, A Diplomatic History, p. 708.
The Bedford Democrat's skepticism about Munich was apparent in its observation that "it is probably too much to expect that the agreement . . . will be followed by an easing of the tension in Europe." Looking inward, the Bedford editor stated in late 1938 that "by constructing and maintaining a navy equal to that of any other power, . . . the land of the United States will be safe from invasion and the people of the United States will give up no part of their liberties." In short, "we must pay for our isolation by being strong enough to take care of ourselves without assistance."  

On the eve of the Munich Conference, the Front Royal Warren Sentinel agreed "with the Richmond Times Dispatch when it says Germany must be reckoned with either now or five or ten years hence, when she will be a much more formidable foe." The Sentinel believed that "Hitler is all bluff—but monstrously shrewd at his bluffing—and that either England or Russia, or perhaps France alone, could stand him down without actual armed conflict, simply by making a demand and backing it up with arms." A few weeks after the "supine statesmanship of England and France" at Munich had passed, the Front Royal editor still maintained: "That we will have war in a relatively short time . . . seems almost a certainty."  

Among the weeklies the strongest words of praise for the Munich Conference came from the Louisa Central Virginian. In the words of the editor, "the solution arrived at by the four great leaders,  

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16 Bedford Democrat, Oct. 6, 1938, p. 2.  
17 Ibid., Dec. 15, 1938, p. 2.  
18 Front Royal Warren Sentinel, Sept. 29, 1938, p. 2.  
19 Ibid., Nov. 17, 1938, p. 2.
Chamberlain of England, Daladier of France, Mussolini of Italy, and Hitler of Germany, assures the continent of peace. . . . our pen gives praise to the four men for the sane and humane solution of a very difficult problem." The settlement was indeed "for the best interest of all the people." And six months after the Munich Conference, the Central Virginian still contended that "Mr. Chamberlain knew what he was doing when he undertook and succeeded in giving the foreign countries a plan, whereby peace is assured."  

In a critical review of Britain's role in world affairs during the 1930's, the South Boston Halifax Gazette asserted a week before the Munich Conference: "the British Empire will not have begun its slide in 1938. It began when its influence was not felt in checking the rape of Manchuokuo and the blotting out of [the] existence of Ethiopia, its constant compromising attitude in respect to the functions of the League of Nations and its surrender of credits in America. Britain has been weak, vacillating and an uncertain world power for twenty years." However, should England and France finally stand up to Hitler and a war break out as a result, the Gazette warned its readers: "Don't listen to a lot of war propaganda . . . The United States must keep out of this mess . . . It is best not to fight if it can be avoided honorably. The winner is usually also a loser."  

In his initial reaction to the Munich Conference, the South

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20 Louisa Central Virginian, Oct. 6, 1938, p. 2.
21 Ibid., Oct. 13, 1938, p. 2.
22 Ibid., Mar. 16, 1938, p. 2.
24 Ibid., Sept. 29, 1938, p. 4.
Boston editor asserted that "Czechoslovakians will be a happier people after they have acclimated themselves to their cessation of Sudetenland to the German government. . . . The arrangement is much better than a general war, as can be attested by a visit to some of the veterans' hospitals in the United States, where one can see many ill and maimed veterans, the result of the World War." Yet the Gazette confessed that while "war has been averted for the present . . . , there is no assurance of lasting peace." Furthermore, despite early praise for the Munich agreement, less than a month after the Conference, the South Boston paper warned that "the world may as well . . . be prepared to meet [Hitler's] aggression with the only argument he understands—military force." But it was not until early the next year that the Gazette admitted fully that "the Peace of Munich . . . took away from Czechoslovakia . . . its freedom and forever turned it over to the mercy of Hitler who is now using it as a buffer state and trying to pry into the Ukraine, a further step to his march toward the East." As for the United States, the Gazette appeared to favor an adequate preparedness program although it sympathized with those Americans who "do not want an ill-advised orgy of extravagance and waste, even under the guise of national defense."

Shortly after the Chamberlain-Hitler Conference at Berchtesgaden, the British and French governments agreed to recommend to Czechoslovakia that she accept Hitler's demands for annexation of the German areas of

26 Ibid., Oct. 20, 1938, p. 4.
27 Ibid., Oct. 27, 1938, p. 4.
28 Ibid., Jan. 12, 1939, pp. 4, 8.
Czechoslovakia. Thus it was that the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette condemned Britain a week before the meeting at Munich for her willingness "to sell Czechoslovakia down the river . . . " Largely because of this appeasement, "England . . . will now see her star of Empire slowly setting. . . . As far as this country is concerned we do not want to have any part in the mixup, but stand ready at any time to defend our shores." Yet the same editor a week later asserted that "if we must fight for liberty, better do it now and get it over with." The Gazette described the Munich Conference as simply a "poisonous mixture for democracy." A few weeks later the Williamsburg paper declared that as a result of the abandonment of Czechoslovakia, "war was averted, but only for a season, during which time both England and France have lost face and become third rate powers, a mighty come-down for the haughty British." Indeed "Premier Chamberlain of England has been accused of being pro-Fascist, and from his actions it can very well be believed. It has been stated that he planned the present state of affairs some time ago." Hopefully, however, "the fate of Hitler" will be sealed "sooner or later," for Fascism "will cause a surge of restlessness to break out [in Germany] and with the first signs of depression and its companions of want and misery, trouble will begin."

29 Williamsburg Virginia Gazette, Sept. 23, 1938, p. 2.
32 Ibid., Nov. 25, 1938, p. 2.
33 Ibid., Nov. 18, 1938, p. 2.
34 Ibid., Oct. 21, 1938, p. 2.
The Alexandria Gazette described Chamberlain's second trip to confer personally with Hitler at Godesberg as a "gravely gallant second journey" that would make it clear to the world "that so long as Britain shall endure it may take a great, a humble, a justified pride in the knowledge that everything it could do to avert catastrophe was done." But after Britain and France had agreed on September 18 to try to persuade Czechoslovakia to accept Hitler's terms, the Alexandria paper's tone changed somewhat: "Britain is so slow and so reasonable! It never wants to fight. . . . Britain doesn't care much about face. . . . Trying to reason with Hitler about the peace of the world is--Well, it just doesn't seem reasonable." The feelings of most of the editors about the Munich Conference's offer of "a moment's peace" were reflected in the words of the Gazette: "It seems too much to hope that . . . the nations of the world will discard forever the old method of settling disputes by force of arms. . . . We are wondering if and when and what he [Hitler] will demand next time and what and how the nations of the world will answer then." After an examination of past pledges that Hitler had broken, the Alexandria editor concluded that "the statesmen who made this peace at the muzzle of a gun may be justified, but they cannot stop there. Civilization dare not disarm. There may be a bolder Hitler and a stronger Germany to stop next year or the year after."

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35 Alexandria Gazette, Sept. 17, 1938, p. 4.
36 Ibid., Sept. 23, 1938, p. 4.
37 Ibid., Sept. 30, 1938, p. 4.
38 Ibid., Oct. 5, 1938, p. 4.
As reports mounted that "that bogus framework [the Munich peace] was already cracking," reports based on the numbers of Czechs in the Sudetenland who were being mistreated, the Gazette asked, "If the German government will not be fair to them, should not Britain and France, which sacrificed them for their own purposes, help them?" A final blast was directed at Britain and France when the Alexandria paper discussed the "arbitrary rule" of their leaders. In a reference to Munich, the Gazette noted that "we have seen recently how the prime ministers of Great Britain and France, considered the two greatest democracies in the world after our own, recently made an epochal treaty with the German dictator without troubling to get the sanction of their parliaments, until it was too late to change the terms."

In the fall of 1938 the Fredericksburg Free Lance Star continued to insist that "by staying home and minding his own business, Uncle Sam can provide at least one ray of hope for disinterested advocation of world peace." Even if war should break out in Europe, "there is at least some chance that the lessons learned between 1914 and 1917 would enable the American authorities to maintain the brand of neutrality so widely supported in this country. . . . American efforts to provide moral guidance have been futile ever since the Wilsonian excursion into the visionary realm of honest international cooperation. They would be equally futile now . . . ." "It would be well to remember [that] the

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40 Ibid., Oct. 13, 1938, p. 4.
41 Ibid., Oct. 31, 1938, p. 4.
42 Fredericksburg Free Lance Star, Sept. 12, 1938, p. 4.
last war. . . cost us more than $41,000,000,000 to be the good brother to democracy, and at present the very nations of Europe, who could not find funds sufficient to pay off $13,000,000,000 in war debts, are raising many times that sum to fight another war. . . . All of the red, white and blue bunting in the world . . . cannot hope to compensate us for even the death of one lowly private in the rear rank." Moreover, although "what may happen in Czechoslovakia may be of direct interest to Great Britain, France and Russia, . . . its connection with New World democracy is so remote as to merit meager consideration on the part of official Washington." "This country should simply play the part of alert observor [sic]."  

In reference to British and French acceptance of the partition of Czechoslovakia, the editor asked, "If peace is to rest on such a negative foundation, will it not prove to be . . . no peace at all?" Despite the consequences to be suffered by Czechoslovakia, the Star asserted that that tragedy was "enlightening" to this country in that "We have learned through the puerility of Chamberlain and of Daladier . . . that no dependence can be placed in the statesmen of Europe, that too often they are intellectually dishonest, that their promises, their agreements and their treaties are meaningless, frequently are tricksters and frauds." Quoting from George Washington's famous Farewell Address, the Fredericksburg paper asked, "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe,

43 Ibid., Sept. 19, 1938, p. 4.
44 Ibid., Sept. 12, 1938, p. 4.
46 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1938, p. 6.
entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor or caprice?"[47] The Star expressed considerable relief that "we have 3,000 miles of water on one side and even more secure natural protection on the other, together with a Navy second in strength only to Great Britain."[48]

The nationalistic viewpoints just quoted make it difficult to explain the sentiments of the Star on the eve of the Munich Conference. In an editorial highly critical of the Neutrality Act of 1937, the Fredericksburg paper insisted that that legislation "is too rigid and unworkable and should be discarded at the first possible moment." The editor's reasoning was as follows:

In event of a European war the Neutrality Act ... might become highly embarrassing to America .... Suppose it came to a case in which the democratic powers are dependent on us to save them from extinction under the might of Fascism.

America would find such a condition highly unpleasant as well as uncomfortable when we contemplate that we would be the last great democratic government in the path of Fascist domination.[49]

Apparently the editor, although inconsistent, was not so unreasoning that he would isolate the United States completely from the world—even from the debtor countries—should the need for American aid arise.

The number of editorials in September concerning the Czechoslovakian situation probably explains the Fredericksburg editor's failure to comment extensively on the Munich Conference in October. The lesson was clear: "Throughout the amazing career of Adolf Hitler each objective achieved has served merely as the jumping-off place for another."[50] "He has the

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48 Ibid., Sept. 23, 1938, p. 6.
49 Ibid., Sept. 28, 1938, p. 6.
50 Ibid., Oct. 4, 1938, p. 4.
democracies of Europe helpless under his heel, psychologically beaten, quivering and impotent with terror."^51

The editor of the Roanoke Times spoke too soon when he wrote in early September 1938 that "the democratic nations have learned by this time that Hitler respects force and force alone."^52 Then on the eve of Chamberlain's first visit to the Nazi dictator, the Times declared that "if Hitler doubts that England means what she says, he need go no further back than 1914 to discover that Britain does not take her commitments lightly or seek to get out of them when the die is cast. . . . It is now evident to all Englishmen, including, no doubt, the Prime Minister himself, that Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement has not succeeded."^53

A few days later the Roanoke editor's high hopes were dashed when he found himself writing:

It is a peace-at-any-price doctrine which moves Chamberlain and Daladier to agree to look the other way while Germany annexes the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. . . . Shameful as war is, there are things more shameful than war, and one of them is for a great Nation to go back squarely on its plighted word and repudiate a solemn covenant entered into in good faith.^54

Yet the initial reaction of the Roanoke editor to the Munich Conference, despite his recognition of the injustices, was that a partitioned Czechoslovakia might be better off in the long run than a war in which she and other powers would have to confront a well-prepared Hitler. Furthermore, the editor pointed out "the fact that there is undeniable merit in Germany's claim to the Sudeten, a region inhabited

^51 Ibid., Oct. 22, 1938, p. 4.
^54 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1938, p. 6.
principally by Germans who were deprived of their rightful nationality by the treaty which ended the World War." . . . [Moreover] the preservation of peace . . . will be hailed with great relief by the people of Europe. But for Mr. Chamberlain's patient, persistent and untiring efforts to find a peaceable solution of the problem, this happy outcome would not have been possible."55 Two weeks after Munich, the Times was still sympathetic towards Britain and France: "Americans who are prone to be harshly critical of Chamberlain and Daladier for yielding to Hitler's demands . . . fail to give sufficient consideration to the fact . . . that Germany was ready for war; England and France were not prepared."56 But within a month after the German annexation of the Sudetenland, the Roanoke editor concluded that "Adolf Hitler undoubtedly scored the greatest triumph of his amazing career at Munich."57

The Roanoke paper's position on the role that the United States should play in world affairs in 1938 can be classified as neither isolationist nor interventionist—the Times had reservations about both positions. On the one hand, the editor asserted that President Roosevelt "must know that intervention in Europe's controversies is the last thing the people of the United States desire and in the formulation of American foreign policy, . . . he will be guided accordingly."58 On the other hand, the Times just one day later pointed out that "it would be well

57Ibid., Oct. 29, 1938, p. 6.
58Ibid., Sept. 21, 1938, p. 6.
for all of us to recall the solemn warning of Cordell Hull . . . on March 17 last: "Isolation is not a means to security, but a fruitful source of insecurity. Unless there is concerted effort, there is small hope of preventing the enthronement of the doctrine of force, and, in its wake, inexorably, a relapse into barbarism." 59

In an attempt to predict what England would do in the event of a Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia, the Danville Register, like the Roanoke Times, drew from past history when it recalled that German leaders in 1914 "failed to comprehend that a solemn obligation was more to England than the treaty that bound Germany to respect the sovereignty of Belgium was to the war lords in Berlin." 60 Also like the Times, the Register a few days later faced the grim task of describing the signing by England and France of "the death warrant of the Czechs." The Danville editor's criticism of Britain was to the point: "Again has England bent her knee to Hitler, while a puzzled world ponders . . . whether Britain is, in fact, as Hitler and Mussolini have frequently proclaimed, a decadent nation, no longer able to enforce her authority in world affairs." 61 Continuing the next day, the editor expressed his resentment of "Old World diplomacy" by thanking God that "our country is so situated that it can afford to steer clear of entanglements that would enmesh it in the intricacies of the deceit and hypocrisy that are the hallmarks of those who negotiate treaties for the nations that lie beyond the seas." 62

60 Danville Register, Sept. 13, 1938, p. 4.
61 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1938, p. 4.
62 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1938, p. 6.
The Register condemned Britain and France for conceding at the Munich Conference "all those things for which they made the world believe they were prepared to fight." England should know that "a policy of 'stand and deliver' will not forever best serve [her] interests." Prophetically the Danville editor asserted that "the probability is that historians of another day, looking back on 1938, will, when they review the circumstances under which Czechoslovakia was placed upon the sacrificial altar, chronicle the Munich conferences as the greatest diplomatic outrage, the most notorious sell-out recorded in the annals of time." As for the United States, the Register was gratified to know that at least [our] government ... has not been lulled into a sense of security by what happened at Munich, and that it will ask of the Congress that assembles in January additional funds with which to strengthen our national defenses. The United States must, whatever the cost, be prepared against the day when the war lords of Europe and of the Far East feel they are sufficiently strong to treat us as they have England and France.

The agreement by England and France to support the partition of Czechoslovakia after Chamberlain's first conference with Hitler sparked the following self-righteous remarks by the editor of the Charlottesville Daily Progress: "This surprise was intensified many-fold by the inevitable conclusion that these one-time allies of the United States, to whose rescue we hastened a scant quarter-century ago, had bowed spinelessly to the will of Hitler."
Chamberlain, in the words of the editor, was 'thoroughly cowed and brow-beaten.'\(^{68}\) A week later in its initial response to the Munich Conference, the *Daily Progress* contended that the meeting 'was no victory for the forces of peace . . . The plain truth is that Hitler got what he demanded. . . . A great crime has been committed in the name of Peace.'\(^{69}\) To the Charlottesville editor it appeared that "pacts and promises no longer serve to allay our forebodings. When faith is gone there is little left of security."\(^{70}\)

One of the most concise summaries of the precarious position of England and France in the fall of 1938 came from the pen of the editor of the Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot* on the very day that Hitler and Chamberlain were to meet for the first time at Berchtesgaden. Describing first the sentiments of most Americans, the editor wrote:

Separated by a wide ocean from Europe's turmoil, we are under the temptation in the United States to over-simplify the elements of the conflict—to think of it as a quarrel in which everybody on one side is wrong and everybody on the other side is right. . . . If our sympathies twenty-one years ago were unmistakably with the Allies against the Central Powers, they are today . . . even more definitely with France, Great Britain and Czechoslovakia against Germany—partly because Czechoslovakia is a weak little democracy struggling to preserve its sovereignty against a voracious dictatorship . . . .

Fear of this new German imperialism and what it portends for the safety of the British and French empires—this fear and not an idealistic devotion to Czechoslovakia, its democracy or its right to rule minorities that had rather be ruled by others, determines the opposition of France and Great Britain.

. . . Czechoslovakia was only 50 per cent the result of French-British carpentry directed to the construction of a barrier against a revived German Push to the East. They cannot now grant Hitler's demand for self-determination without opening the door to the imperialism in behalf of which it is invoked. That is the British and French dilemma.\(^{71}\)


\(^{71}\) Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*, Sept. 15, 1938, p. 6.
When Britain and France did open the door to "imperialism" by agreeing to urge Czechoslovakia to accept partition, the Pilot made the point that "today's world powers are just as contemptuous of correct behavior as were the powers who dictated the peace treaties... The world powers were never more callous to this principle [of justice] than they are today, never less burdened by moral scruples and—in respect to certain human values universally respected before the World War—never so barbaric." England and France were even put into the same category as Germany by the Norfolk editor: "The doctrine that no treaty can be allowed to thwart rational necessity, as that necessity is defined by the treaty-violator once advanced by Germany alone has now been embraced also by France and Great Britain." The desertion of Czechoslovakia will see no halt in the armaments race, contended the Pilot, and "that will be its own eloquent commentary on the hollow-ness of the appeasement—its own realistic judgement that Czechoslovakia has been deserted not to avert a decisive struggle but merely to postpone it."

Once the cession—but not the means of cession—of the Sudeten territory had been agreed upon, the Munich Conference was called in an attempt to arrive at some peaceful solution. The Norfolk editor described vividly the viewpoint held by Czechoslovakia: "There the Munich conference can be regarded only as an emergency gathering of friendly and hostile surgeons assembled to explore the possibility of cutting up Czechoslovakia without cutting up the surgeons."

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72 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1938, p. 6.
73 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1938, p. 6.
74 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1938, p. 6.
75 Ibid., Sept. 29, 1938, p. 6.
day the Pilot summed up its feelings about the Munich agreement by terming it "an ill-smelling peace." An even more strongly worded indictment against the "shot-gun solution at Munich" was the Pilot's declaration that "the greatest armament race in peace-time history . . . with all that it implies in cost and sacrifice and international rivalry and international fear, [may be recorded] as another of the fruits of 'peace in our time.'"

The Norfolk editor spoke for several of the other state editors when he asserted, "Not much enthusiasm is to be expected in the United States for a closer participation with a British nation methodically and calculatingly embarked on the business of selling out the weaker nations of Europe . . ." As for America's future policy, the Pilot endorsed a continuation and enlargement of our armaments program in order that we might be able "to protect our own economic and institutional safety. . . Making ourselves militarily powerful on a scale never before attempted in times of peace . . . [is essential because] the Munich deal has profoundly altered the European picture and until we know more about the collateral settlements that will flow from it, we shall on this side beware of enlarging our foreign responsibilities."

The editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch recognized during the midst of the Czechoslovakian crisis that he was living during "one of the critical moments in history, one of those moments which may make 1938 as memorable in the long chronicle of the human race as 1914, 1815, 1861, and 1871."

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76 Ibid., Sept. 30, 1938, p. 6.
77 Ibid., Oct. 17, 1938, p. 6.
78 Ibid., Oct. 18, 1938, p. 6.
On the day that Hitler first conferred with Chamberlain, the Times Dispatch warned: "Chamberlain may as well realize that he cannot depend on any agreements Hitler may make." The next day, the Richmond paper continued its list of warnings: "If Britain and France do not stop Hitler now, they will almost certainly never stop him. . . . Force is the only language Hitler understands. . . . No single concession as to Czechoslovakia, however generous, will satisfy the insatiable Nazis."

On September 20 the Times Dispatch printed an editorial titled "The Sell-Out to Hitler" which demonstrates clearly the influence that one editor can have on another, particularly on one who writes for a much smaller newspaper. The Front Royal Warren Sentinel expressed its agreement with the editorial on September 29, and a week earlier, on September 22, the South Boston Halifax Gazette described the editorial as "a masterpiece of an understanding mind, . . . a classic in modern journalism." The editorial represented the Richmond paper's reaction to the initial agreement by Britain and France to accept the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The editor declared that "the year 1938 will mark the beginning of the end of the British Empire, the decline of France as a world power, and the rise of a German Empire far mightier than that of Charlemagne." As far as actual war goes, "the evil day probably has merely been postponed." In regard to United States reaction, the Times Dispatch believed that "one result of the sell-out of Czechoslovakia to Hitler will be a great strengthening of isolationist

79 Richmond Times Dispatch, Sept. 11, 1938, p. 2.
80 Ibid., Sept. 15, 1938, p. 8.
81 Ibid., Sept. 16, 1938, p. 12.
sentiment in the United States. Many Americans who might have been inclined to come to the aid of Britain and France in a war with Germany and Italy . . . will now feel that Britain and France are not worth it." As a consequence of Chamberlain and Daladier signing another agreement "with the medieval fanatics" in Munich, "they need not count on any help from this side of the water. They have made their bed. Now let them lie in it."  

Alone in the autumn of 1938 among the twelve newspapers examined in this study, the Richmond Times Dispatch asserted

If the United States had joined the League . . . , the world would be in a far less precarious state than it is today. . . No one who approves the course this country has pursued since 1920, has a right to criticize those democracies for the course they have just pursued. The United States has followed policies in the past 18 years which have not only helped to make the rise of the dictators inevitable, but which have made resistance by Britain and France to the dictators much more difficult.  

Because it had supported the League of Nations and had sometimes voiced opposition to America's post-World War I foreign policy, the Richmond paper felt justified in concluding a few days later that "the Munich conference was a famous victory for the dictators." The editor wondered "whether Britain and France are not more greatly imperilled today than they have been since the twentieth century dawned."  

These sentiments help explain the Richmond editor's statement that "time and again, during the recent European crisis, we kept thinking how fortunate America is to be separated by 3,000 miles of

82 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1938, p. 6.  
83 Ibid., Sept. 26, 1938, p. 8.  
water from Europe and 6,000 miles of the same commodity from Asia.\textsuperscript{86} The oceans and the fear of a "destructive economic boomerang" combined to make the \textit{Times Dispatch} leery of an inflated armament program: "It seems conceivable to us that the fear of external Fascism might offer a grave threat to democracy in the United States, if it led us to join the armament race. An adequate Army and Navy we must have, but we should remember that the best defense of our democracy will probably begin, for some time to come, this side of the water's edge of our protective oceans."\textsuperscript{87}

The South Boston and Roanoke papers attempted editorially to convince themselves that a partitioned Czechoslovakia might be better in the long run. Yet both the editors had expressed their confidence prior to the Munich Conference that Britain would not bow to Hitler's demands. In their hopes for world peace, they were merely deceiving themselves. But they were not alone. Many Americans apparently harbored an uneasy optimism immediately following Munich. In early October 1938, a cross section of the American public was asked by the Gallup pollsters: "Do you believe that England and France did the best thing in giving in to Germany instead of going to war?" Approximately sixty per cent responded "yes." Yet when they were asked whether they thought the "settlement will result in peace for a number of years or in a greater possibility of war," only forty per cent believed that Munich would bring peace. Furthermore, although approximately sixty per cent approved the Munich settlement, only twenty-three per cent of those polled considered Germany's demands

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., Oct. 14, 1938, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., Oct. 18, 1938, p. 10.
for the Sudetenland to be justifiable. By November, however, as the anti-Jewish persecutions were stepped up, the Gallup polls revealed that approximately ninety per cent of the American people feared that Hitler was contemplating more seizures of European territory.

The gamut of editorial opinion in Virginia is represented by the Louisa paper which termed the Munich agreement a "sane and humane solution" and by the Norfolk paper which labeled it an "ill-smelling peace." Despite these extreme differences of opinion and despite the confusion apparent in such papers as the South Boston Halifax Gazette and the Roanoke Times, there were two responses to Munich that prevailed among most of the papers. First, the editors' Anglophobia reached a peak. Only the rural weekly in Louisa approved without reservation the British actions. Most of the other editors minced no words in letting their readers know that they considered the British to be "barbaric," "spineless" "frauds" for taking part in such a "shameful" "sell out."

To several, the British Empire appeared to be on the verge of collapse. Frequently expressions of gratitude were voiced for the protective oceans that separated this country from the Old World diplomats. Related to their denunciations of the British were the editors' beliefs that the Munich pact would only postpone war. Again, only the Louisa editor for any length of time and the South Boston and Roanoke editors for brief periods expressed hopes of peace being preserved.

A second sentiment shared by six of the seven editors that

88 Francis Sill Wickware, "What We Think about Foreign Affairs," Harper's Magazine, LCXXIX (September 1939), 406.
89 Divine, Reluctant Belligerent, p. 55.
commented on it had to do with this country's preparedness program. Only the Richmond Times Dispatch, due to its fear of a "destructive economic boomerang" and its faith in "our protective oceans," expressed reservations about proposals to inflate America's armament program. Even the normally isolationist Alexandria Gazette asserted that "civilization dare not disarm." It should by no means be assumed, however, that isolationism and preparedness were incompatible. Although "the anti-preparedness strain in isolationist thinking was [definitely] on the wane" by 1938, there was throughout the thirties what has been called a "militarist trend" in isolationist thought. The increasing number of isolationists who supported military and naval appropriations did so, as one should expect, because they believed that a strong defense would act as a deterrent to any potential aggressor. Never was an offensive war a part of the isolationist "militaristic" thought.

Therefore, it would be unfair to conclude that the advocacy of preparedness by the editors demonstrates a trend towards "internationalism." Rather, Virginius Dabney, the editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch, has written three decades after Munich some lines that seem to summarize best the sentiments shared by the majority of the Virginia editors: "I was extremely indignant over the sell-out of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, and the tone of the editorials at that time was probably isolationist . . . Their purport . . . was that if Great Britain and France were going to betray an ally in that manner, they could jolly well look out for themselves, since they didn't deserve any help from us."

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90 Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 247.
91 Jonas, Isolationism in America, p. 130.
92 Virginius Dabney to author, July 9, 1968.
CHAPTER 4: SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

Less than a year after Munich Neville Chamberlain informed the House of Commons that Britain was going to war with Germany. Two days before, on September 1, 1939, the German invasion of Poland had begun, and this time the British refused to appease Hitler. ¹ In his address before the House of Commons, the Prime Minister declared: "This is a sad day for all of us, and to none is it sadder than to me. Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins."²

Actually Chamberlain's mental preparation for the autumn of 1939 had begun in the early spring of the same year when the Germans went beyond the Sudetenland and extinguished the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Because of Hitler's promises at Munich and because the old excuse of racial affinity was not applicable, Chamberlain asked publicly on March 17, 1939: "Is this the end of an old adventure, or is it the beginning of a new? Is this the last attack upon a small

¹For details on the days immediately preceding September 1, 1939 and on United States reaction to the outbreak of World War II, see Bailey, A Diplomatic History, pp. 708-712; Burns, Roosevelt, pp. 394-400; DeConde, American Foreign Policy, pp. 576-583; Divine, Reluctant Belligerent, pp. 63-73; Drummond, Passing of Neutrality, pp. 83-111; Langer and Gleason, Challenge to Isolationism, passim, esp. 201 ff.; Shirer, The Third Reich, passim.

²Quoted by Shirer, The Third Reich, p. 619.
state, or is it to be followed by others? Is this, in fact, a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?" A few days later, in response to Hitler's reopening a dispute with Poland over Danzig and the Corridor, Chamberlain announced that England and France would go to the aid of Poland should her independence be threatened. This turning point in British and French diplomacy marked the end of the era of appeasement.

When Germany signed a non-aggression pact with Russia on August 24, Hitler's path to Poland was no longer obstructed by fears of opposition from the east. The democracies could only wait for the expected move to be made by the totalitarian states. As one American diplomat noted, it was like "sitting in a house where someone is dying upstairs. There is relatively little to do and yet the suspense continues unabated." The suspense was relieved, of course, in a week's time. World War II had begun.

A few hours after Britain and France declared war on Germany, Franklin Roosevelt declared in a fireside chat that "this nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts." But, the President concluded, "as long as it remains within my power to prevent, there will be no blackout of peace in the United States." Roosevelt wasted little time in letting it be known that he considered the best means of keeping this country neutral was by revising

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3 Quoted by Langer and Gleason, *Challenge to Isolationism*, pp. 69, 74-75.

4 Quoted by Leuchtenburg, *Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 293.

5 Quoted by Langer and Gleason, *Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 204.
the 1937 Neutrality Act. Most importantly, he wanted to see the arms embargo repealed. Earlier attempts to repeal the embargo were met with strong isolationist opposition in Congress. As Vice-President John N. Garner told Roosevelt in July 1939, "Well, Captain, we may as well face the facts. You haven't got the votes, and that's all there is to it." With the outbreak of war, Roosevelt would soon get the votes. In November, Congress passed the Fourth Neutrality Act which repealed the arms embargo but permitted the sale of munitions and other goods to countries at war only on a cash and carry basis. Short-time loans of ninety days were allowed to the belligerents. The old provision forbidding American citizens to sail on belligerent ships was retained and, as a new concession to the isolationists, American ships were barred from sailing in combat zones specified by the President.

The primary concerns of most of the Virginia editors during the weeks immediately following the start of World War II were related: the fate of the Allies and the role to be played by the United States. By mid-September the editor of the Bedford Democrat was pondering what part the United States might play in the war. Although he recognized "the fact that Britain and France are our first line of defense," he did not believe that "the United States will get into any European war unless and until it appears certain that Great Britain and France will be defeated. This is not indicated in the struggle now going on with Germany." To help justify its position, the Democrat urged its

6 Quoted by DeConde, American Foreign Policy, p. 576.
7 Congressional Record, 76 Cong., 2 sess., Oct. 27, 1939, pp. 1024-1027.
readers not to forget the World War and how "it sowed the seeds for the years of social discontent and depression that followed. . . . [In addition] thousands of American lives and untold millions in American wealth and resources were sacrificed. Only history will eventually reveal what good, if any, came from that war." These memories provided the background for the Democrat's insistence that "American neutrality is dependent upon America keeping its head." The Bedford paper even went so far as to assert that "American neutrality is a practical as well as an idealistic necessity." Its reasoning was as follows:

If this nation goes to war, freedom and representative government will automatically end, perhaps permanently. . . . We will have one-man government in this country from the instant war is declared, just as completely as Germany has been subjected to the will of one man. Likewise, in view of the present Federal debt, a war would mean ultimate financial chaos—which alone is sufficient to destroy freedom.

The greatest service that this country can render the world today is through maintenance of representative government, tolerance, and individual liberty within its own borders. Only by doing that can the acts of peace be preserved and a toehold saved for the rebuilding of world civilization after chaos has had its day abroad.9

Significantly, however, the editor still abided by a statement he had written four months earlier in which he declared that the neutrality laws should be amended primarily because the mandatory embargo "inevitably works to the advantage of one contender or the other."10 The Democrat believed that in our remaining aloof, "retention or repeal of the embargo has nothing to do with the possibility of this country getting involved in the war . . ."11

9Ibid., Sept. 28, 1939, p. 2.
10Ibid., May 11, 1939, p. 2.
More than two months before the non-aggression pact was signed between Hitler and Stalin, the Front Royal Warren Sentinel predicted that "when war comes . . ., it will be a contest between so-called Christian nations and pagan nations: a contest between ideologies. . . It will be a bloody day. A war between Russia, Germany, and Italy on one side, and the British Empire, America and France on the other. . ."

Once the pact was drawn up between Germany and Russia, the Sentinel reiterated its firm belief that "the ideologies of those two and the democratic ideologies must conflict on a battlefield." Once the pact was drawn up between Germany and Russia, the Sentinel reiterated its firm belief that "the ideologies of those two and the democratic ideologies must conflict on a battlefield."  

Despite his earlier assertion that America would be found fighting on the side of the democracies, the Front Royal editor declared after the war actually broke out that "whether the United States enters the war will depend upon the people. . . . If Russia enters into a military alliance with Germany, it is likely that America will be drawn in. But now that the die is cast, Americans would be wise to sift the oceans of propaganda and to pray that 'this scourge of war may pass quickly from us.'" As for the merits or necessity of the war, the editor's simplistic feelings were quite evident when he contended that "there is something absurd about staging a world war merely to change a government in one country."  

The Sentinel minced no words in its opposition to those who insisted that this country could remain neutral even if the arms embargo

12 *Front Royal Warren Sentinel*, June 8, 1939, p. 2.
14 Ibid., Sept. 7, 1939, p. 2.
were repealed. Rather than pursue such a "spineless course," the Front Royal paper strongly suggested that if America "believes that the Allies are morally right; that a Red-Nazi victory is burdened with unknown incalculable menaces to her future well-being; . . . that her cream-puffish, pseudo-neutrality will never delude the Germans into thinking that it is a real neutrality; . . . if she believes this, let her forget about neutrality. Let her keep her men here but send munitions, and war supplies of all-description [sic] to England and France forgetting the cost in an effort to get this sorry war over as quickly as possible." In short, the Sentinel concluded, "Americans should realize that a . . . wishy-washy neutrality, neither safeguards us from war, nor aids those whom we want to aid as much as it should."16 The sentiments of the Front Royal paper were expressed a bit more concisely three weeks later when the editor stated, "The Sentinel believes that America can be safely neutral for the present. But it also believes that England and France must win. As long as America is in the world and affected by other nations, neutrality is not a cure-all."17

Up until the last minute the Louisa Central Virginian predicted that there would be no war. With an abiding faith in the Munich agreements, the editor contended in the late spring of 1939 that "there will be no war in Europe in the very near future. The credit is due to Lord Chamberlain, who, like our great President Roosevelt, is against war."18 And just one day before Hitler's troops invaded Poland, the Louisa editor remarked, "we still contend that there will be no

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16 Ibid., Sept. 28, 1939, p. 2.
18 Louisa Central Virginian, May 28, 1939, p. 2.
Finally, when the fact could not be denied, the Central Virginian in an editorial titled "It Looks Like War" expressed the hope that "when [Hitler] sees his tactics defeated . . . , he will commit suicide . . ."²⁰

In regard to this country, the Louisa paper declared, "America will never enter any more foreign wars if our great President, who is backed by 90 per cent of our people, ever has anything to do with it."²¹ Europe's quarrels are Europe's business, and . . . we must keep our hands out of the mess."²² In its unquestioning loyalty to Franklin Roosevelt, the Central Virginian endorsed the President's recommendations for revision of the neutrality legislation: "In his effort at keeping us out of war, . . . we feel quite sure that our President's recommendation and his plea for neutrality will finally be adopted."²³ No doubts were expressed by the Louisa editor that neutrality revision might destroy neutrality.

Like the Central Virginian, the South Boston Halifax Gazette also viewed the Russo-German non-aggression pact as setting the stage for a clear cut battle with one side composed of the "common enemies of Democracy: . . . Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Communist Russia." That such a situation was permitted to develop was attributed largely by the Gazette to "the advice of the jelly fish Chamberlain."²⁴

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²⁰Ibid., Sept. 7, 1939, p. 2.
²¹Ibid., Sept. 28, 1939, p. 2.
²²Ibid., Nov. 9, 1939, p. 2.
²⁴South Boston Halifax Gazette, Aug. 24, 1939, p. 4.
Earlier in an editorial titled "Let It Be Known that America Is Committed to Defense of Democracy," the South Boston paper demonstrated its hearty approval of any efforts this country might make in a future war towards helping the democratic countries. In the words of the editor, "This country has sensed the possibility of the breakdown of European democracy, and in its breakdown she has envisioned the Atlantic and the Pacific being closed against her. It is no longer a fight of European nations; it is a fight for the preservation of human liberty on this earth. America stands guardian of human rights." The next month the Halifax Gazette remarked, "It is an easy matter to talk of peace, letting Europe alone and harking back to the Farewell of George Washington . . . But for us to close our eyes to the issues involved is to follow the fabled ostrich and bury our faces in the sand that we may hide from our own calamity." Six weeks before the outbreak of World War II, the Gazette again asserted that "we believe that the world, to be a safe place in which to live, must be an Anglo-Saxon World [sic] and we further believe that the three democracies [England, France and the United States] will eventually come through with flying colors."27

Yet the first reaction of the South Boston editor to the outbreak of war was: "It is sincerely to be hoped that we hear nothing in this war about making the world safe for Democracy." Even more interesting were the editor's following remarks:

While there is but little doubt that the sympathies of the people of the United States lie absolutely with Poland

27 Ibid., July 20, 1939, p. 1.
and her two Allies, there seems to be no reason for us to be worried over who owns the Free City of Danzig... The Free City of Danzig and the Polish Corridor are something like four thousand miles away from the United States... the simple fact that Danzig has belonged to any of three countries [Poland, Germany, and Russia] has heretofore caused no uneasiness in America and we cannot see for the life of us why it should now.28

With his mind clearly on the First World War, the editor, who had earlier endorsed Roosevelt’s call for neutrality revision,29 warned that "America today, to keep out of this conflict, must watch carefully news from over the seas. It will come to us tainted with propaganda. It is to the interest of some to have us enter the war, it is of interest to a great many more for us to stay out of it."30

The Williamsburg Virginia Gazette, a staunch supporter of the House Un-American Activities Committee, expressed its feelings about the opening blasts of World War II as follows.

We in America can be very thankful that we have even an ocean between us and Europe and which for the present, will at least be a safeguard from without. It is, however, for us to watch with increasing care that all spies, alien disturbers of our government, Communists and Fascists be given short shrift.31

In the next issue of the Gazette, the editor continued: "what this country needs to keep us in peace, is a drastic purge, of all those who foster and preach the isms which hurled Europe into another World War. . . . The evil forces in our own country . . . if not brought to a halt will lead us into a war of our own."32

As far as the war overseas was concerned, the Williamsburg

31 Williamsburg Virginia Gazette, Sept. 8, 1939, p. 2.
32 Ibid., Sept. 15, 1939, p. 2. Editorials of Oct. 13, 1939 and October 20, 1939 also expressed concern over conspiratorial forces at work within this country.
editor felt the United States should revise its neutrality legislation by repealing the embargo and inviting "the English and French to buy all the war material and food necessary to help them save ... democracy." Repeal of the embargo, the editor insisted, "is the only safe, sane and proper course to take. ... We should do all that can be done, to make [our] munitions accessible to the democracies of Europe, by telling them to come and buy for cash, all we can supply and take them away in their own ships and assume all the responsibility of doing so. ... If a war has to be fought, ... we should be in the position of supplying all munitions needed to hasten the war to an early end." Most important, even with repeal of the embargo, the editor maintained that "This is no unneutral act. We ... will not assume any stand, other than to sell and deliver on the terms as enacted by the Neutrality Act, as changed ... [Frankly,] we want the business ... We will not supply any more man power, just the sinews of war that they can buy here." 

The Alexandria Gazette noted a week after the war started that this nation's neutrality legislation, particularly the arms embargo, hampered the "solid line of democracies" because it was "playing into the hands of aggressor countries now well supplied with arms." It was the editor's contention that "a vote to repeal the present [neutrality] law is a vote ... to keep the country out of war."

The Gazette endorsed preparedness as a further safeguard for keeping this country out of the war: "we should put ourselves in

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33 Ibid., Sept. 22, 1939, p. 2.
34 Ibid., Sept. 29, 1939, p. 2.
35 Alexandria Gazette, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 4.
36 Ibid., Oct. 9, 1939, p. 4.
a strong position of self-defense and then sit tight, riding out the war if possible without getting into it. The practical import of this military and naval expansion is that we are less likely to be drawn into the war if we are strong than if we are weak, because aggressors respect strength." In looking to the future, bitter memories of the past seemed to support the Gazette's hopes that the United States might stay out of the second war. In the words of the editor, "We hoped for a better world last time, but we got little more than a continuation of evil forces not yet exhausted. Few of us now have the hardihood to prophesy."38

"Something is wrong with a world which permits such folly," declared the editor of the Fredericksburg Free Lance Star on the day World War II broke out. 39 The editor expressed his hope that Congress would pass "a strong neutrality law which would be fool-proof and serve to discourage Europe from attempting to lure us into its endless and cruel disputes."40 More specifically, "our present neutrality law, which has the effect of being un-neutral, should promptly be revised so that our supplies and materials will be at the disposal of those nations fighting to save the world from the extinction of free government." The editor was "convinced that our immediate interests and our future welfare and that of the world depends on the survival of England and France. [Therefore] we must make our resources available to them so that they can better defend themselves."41 Despite our support for

37 Ibid., Sept. 12, 1939, p. 4.
38 Ibid., Sept. 23, 1939, p. 5.
40 Ibid., Sept. 6, 1939, p. 4.
41 Ibid., Sept. 16, 1939, p. 4.
the democracies, however, Americans must recognize that "several of the European nations have put their 'public relations' machinery to high gear in a prospective attempt to influence American opinion. The American people will do well to be on the alert for any and all evidences of prejudicial comment. Propaganda played a big part between 1914 and 1917 when this country was trying to maintain a neutrality policy."42

Two days after Hitler's troops invaded Poland, the Roanoke Times asserted that "for the moment America's course is clear. It is to stay out of Europe's quarrels and have no part in this suicidal struggle which has been precipitated . . . by one man's brutal lust for power . . . It is not a question where our sympathies lie; it is a question of duty to our own people and to civilization."43 The Roanoke editor continued the next day: "America's sympathies clearly lie with the Allies . . . That is not so much because Americans are pro-British or pro-French or pro-Polish as because they are anti-Hitler . . . Whatever America can do to further the cause of the Allies, short of actually going to war, will be done in the months that lie ahead. For America can conceive of no greater catastrophe that could befall the world than for Hitler to triumph in the war that he has caused, the war that nobody wanted and that everybody, save Hitler, sought to prevent."44 A few days later the Times endorsed Roosevelt's call for repeal of the arms embargo.45

42 Ibid. , Sept. 11, 1939, p. 4.
44 Ibid. , Sept. 4, 1939, p. 6.
The past was definitely on the Roanoke editor's mind when he declared that America, if it is truly neutral, must permit Germany as well as Great Britain to search our vessels for contraband. Furthermore, if the United States adopts a truly neutral attitude on this matter, "it then follows that she has no quarrel for protest if German submarines sink American vessels which fail to stop when ordered to do so. If an American ship is thus sunk, we may expect a widespread cry of indignation all over the country. We should prepare ourselves now for that possibility."\(^46\)

The day after the German blitzkreig began in Poland, the editor of the Danville Register noted that "just under twenty-one years ago we celebrated with rejoicing the victorious close of the war that was to end all wars. . . . [Indeed] we may be grateful for the ocean that separates us from Europe and its endless wars of clashing nationalities. . . ."\(^47\)

Nevertheless, in a long editorial titled "Facing Some Facts," the Register stressed that the United States would join the Allies militarily before it would watch them fall to Hitler. The editor declared: "it may be that we shall see England and France with their backs to the wall, fighting for the right to exist. We . . . cannot spare either of them. . . . We may view them both as defaulting debtors. We have reason to regard them as ingrates, who soon forgot our help, after we had made their victory possible in the last war. But nevertheless, we are bound to them by too many ties for it to be likely that the American will stand idly by and see them destroyed, or even reduced to the role of powers subservient to Adolf Hitler."

\(^{46}\)Ibid., Sept. 14, 1939, p. 6.

\(^{47}\)Danville Register, Sept. 2, 1939, p. 6.
The editor stressed that "no one has any wish for our country to pull British chestnuts out of any fire, nor are we interested in preserving intact the far-flung possessions that go under the noun of the British Empire." But, the editor continued, "this country has a great heritage from England as well as from France in terms of law, government, and ideas. In conclusion, we cherish our democracy, but we have no wish to see the time come when we would be its sole exponent in the world. We want peace, but the time may come when our people may decide that its cost is too high. We have never been willing to purchase it at any price."48 Still, the Register remained a bit leery about possible United States intervention. For example, its reaction to "reports that Adolf Hitler would welcome the mediation of President Roosevelt in efforts to bring peace in Europe" was that "this country has had one experience in an attempt to remake the map of Europe, and the results are not such as to tempt us into another excursion into European affairs. The Treaty of Versailles was a product of Woodrow Wilson's idealism, amended and modified by the realism of the other members of the Big Four . . . . The result has been neither ideal nor realistic."49

One factor that "might well serve to keep us out of war," declared the Register, would be an increase in the army. Looking back, "it is hardly probable that Germany would have given us the provocation that she did in 1917 had she realized that we could have given effective aid to the Allies as soon as we did."50 Like most of the other papers,

48 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1939, p. 4.
49 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1939, p. 6.
50 Ibid., Sept. 15, 1939, p. 4.
however, the Register believed that a revised neutrality law designed to help the Allies would be our best safeguard. The editor endorsed a cash and carry policy that would permit the Allies to purchase munitions from the United States while simultaneously keeping this country's ships out of the war zones. The hopes the editor had for neutrality revision were realized, of course, in the Neutrality Act of 1939.

The Charlottesville Daily Progress advocated neutrality revision a week before the invasion of Poland: "It would seem sensible . . . to eliminate the automatic arms embargo clause, renew the 'cash and carry' provisions, keep American ships out of combat zones, sell goods on our own shores and let the purchasers come here for them. Even that might not guarantee our neutrality but it would be better than the present muddle." Continuing two weeks later, the editor declared, "There is no doubt that such a modification in the [Neutrality] Act would favor the nations we want to see win the war. Great Britain would control the Atlantic. Our supplies would be of inestimable value to the democracies and incidentally, to us." Yet the Daily Progress maintained that "there is no valid reason why the enactment of a 'cash and carry' system and our participation in the war should have any connection."

In response to those who insisted that neutrality revision would increase our chances of being dragged into another war, the Daily Progress argued: "That there will be strong pressure upon this country to side

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51 Ibid., Sept. 22, 1939, p. 4. Similar sentiments on neutrality revision were also included in editorials of Oct. 4, 1939 and Oct. 24, 1939.
52 Charlottesville Daily Progress, Aug. 24, 1939, p. 4.
53 Ibid., Sept. 6, 1939, p. 4.
54 Ibid., Sept. 14, 1939, p. 4.
with the Allies . . . must be realized by all. The pressures will simply have to be resisted! It hinges not upon repeal or retention of the arms embargo but upon a resolute and unshakable will not to send armies abroad."\(^55\) As the prospects of Congressional approval of neutrality revision became brighter, the Charlottesville editor again admitted that "mechanical safeguards of peace are, of course, imperfect . . . . But, in the light of present circumstances, the program about to be enacted by Congress seems about the best neutrality insurance we can take out."\(^56\) The Daily Progress, however, was most frank about the new neutrality law when it asserted: "Considering the mercenary nature of the diplomatic maneuvers that have guided world destiny in the past few years especially, it seems quite beside the point to argue that we have a 'moral obligation' to be impartial as well as neutral. If we follow a course that reacts to our own advantage, as well as to the advantage of our friends, we are following a general precedent."\(^57\)

One change that the editor insisted should not be incorporated in our neutrality revision was extension of credits to the Allies. The editor insisted: "That is exactly the point at which we must stop. We can stay out of war. We must stay out!"\(^58\) In the first weeks following the German blitzkreig in Poland, the Daily Progress remained adamant on the point that the United States must not be drawn into another foreign war. On September 21 the Charlottesville editor declared that:

\(^55\) Ibid., Oct. 3, 1939, p. 4.
\(^56\) Ibid., Oct. 28, 1939, p. 4.
\(^57\) Ibid., Nov. 6, 1939, p. 4.
\(^58\) Ibid.
What is needed in this country today is a "national psychology" irrevocably opposed to participation in the European War. The formation of such a "psychology" depends upon every one of us individuals. . . . Every time we pessimistically repeat the expression, "Oh, we'll be drawn into this," we perform a disservice to our country.

The time has come for us to look at our problems in the same way most European statesmen have looked at their problems since this country began—cold-bloodedly. . . . As much as we like to believe the contrary we are not prepared to fight a combination of powers on European soil. . . . We detest Hitlerism but it is not for the United States to stop it in Europe.

Let's forget our "frontier on the Rhine." Let's draw that frontier up and down the eastern and western shores of this Continent. We do not believe any power or combination of powers will try to invade this Continent—certainly not for some time. If they ever do let's stay over here, meet them at the shore, and be prepared to blast them back into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. 59

The next day, the Daily Progress repeated that "though no safeguards are perfect, the best possible course seems to be to stay over here, sell over here and be prepared to defend this Hemisphere . . . . Our single purpose must be to remain out of war." 60

In order to help justify his position, the Charlottesville editor presented on September 26 some statistics on losses the United States suffered during and as a result of World War I. For example, he noted that "the cost of the World War to the United States is estimated in the current World Almanac at $41,765,000,000." The still lingering depression led the editor to conclude that "the course of reason dictates neutrality." 61 Continuing in October, the Daily Progress declared, "we have nothing to gain from entering the war. We got nothing out of the World War but several billions of dollars in promises which have remained promises. . . . We have never and will never solve the problems of Europe. Perhaps we can solve our own.

59 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1939, p. 4.
60 Ibid., Sept. 22, 1939, p. 4.
61 Ibid., Sept. 26, 1939, p. 4.
That should be our goal." We must 'remember that it takes 10 times as long to pay for a war as it does to fight it." Finally, in an editorial headed "No Repetition," the Charlottesville editor contended, "Our cynicism developed after, not before, the World War and we entered it on a highly idealistic plane; it is only in retrospect that our idealism appears to have been preposterous. Nor is it entirely accurate to hold we were duped into it. All that aside, it should prove a valuable as well as a costly experience. It should keep us over here this time."  

Dominating the editorials of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot during the month of September were continuous calls for revision in our neutrality legislation. Contending that "what we must now do is to take every reasonable precaution to avoid being sucked into the new carnage," the Pilot advocated restoration of the cash and carry policy and "strengthening [of] our army, navy and air corps without interruption." Furthermore, "both categories, arms and munitions on the one hand and everything else on the other hand, ought, in our opinion, to be on the same cash-and-carry basis." Indeed, "short of that remedy there is no good likelihood of our escaping the fury of the rising blockade."  

As for repealing the arms embargo, the Pilot in an editorial critical of Senator William Borah's opposition to repeal, admitted

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63 Ibid., Nov. 2, 1939, p. 4.
64 Ibid., Nov. 15, 1939, p. 4.
65 Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Sept. 5, 1939, p. 6.
67 Ibid., Sept. 15, 1939, p. 6.
that "there is some danger that lifting the arms embargo might give us such a vested interest in the war that we may end by active participation in it. But that danger, we think, is far less substantial than the danger that we may be bludgeoned into war by belligerent acts of violence against American ships and crews." Confessing also that first "the desire to help the Franco-British bloc with the munitions resources of the American market is an important factor in the amendatory movement" and second that "the desire for war profits also has a part in this movement" for repeal of the arms embargo, the Norfolk editor nevertheless insisted that "neither of these considerations or both shall be the controlling reason for amending the neutrality law—... the controlling reason shall be diminution of the danger of our embroilment in the war." In conclusion the Pilot declared that:

the Borah plan of excluding from American-flag ships arms exports destined for the belligerents, but not the hundreds of other necessities of war, is more dangerous than the Roosevelt-Hull-Stimson policy of excluding from American ships all exports to the belligerents whatever their nature, and of allowing the belligerents to buy in this market anything they want, provided they acquire title to it before it is loaded on ship and provided they take it away in their own bottoms. That policy will undoubtedly serve the powers whose navies control the open seas, but it will also serve our own desire to avoid the blockade casualties which constitute the greatest threat to our continued neutrality.  

In an editorial examining the opposing forces developing in Congress over neutrality revision, the Pilot quite objectively stated that:

the real questions before Congress are not legal questions at all. They are questions of judgement and opinion purely. Would the risk of becoming embroiled in Europe's war be greater if we decided to sell arms and ammunitions on a "cash and carry" basis to the belligerents, or if we retained the present freedom to sell the belligerents everything in the non-munitions category?

68Ibid., Sept. 16, 1939, p. 6.
There is no way to prove the lesser danger of either course. It is a question of estimating the probabilities under either course and judging accordingly. . . .69

Just two days after World War II began, the Norfolk editor insisted that this country can remain outside the conflict "only if we make our determination to stay out of war a back-to-the-wall defensive line to be held at heavy cost, to be supported by all the intelligence and understanding and poise and firmness that we can muster." Americans must remember that "twenty-five years ago when another European war broke out . . . there was no expectation that we should be sucked into it."70 A few days later the editor again emphasized that "this war originated elsewhere, against our wishes and in spite of our protests and appeals. Now that it has come, the American government must take every protective step that the existence of the war requires--to preserve our neutrality, to prepare for an uncertain future, and to maintain our position as an independent people in a world of danger."71

The first reaction of the Richmond Times Dispatch to the outbreak of World War II was that "this country should never enter into another European war, unless it is clearly in imminent danger of attack." The editor considered cash and carry legislation to be "a reasonable precaution . . . not only for our own protection, but also in order to give England and France access to our markets." The Dispatch also endorsed repeal of the arms embargo. After all, "there is no more impropriety or danger in selling a fighting plane to a belligerent than in selling him a tanker full of gasoline."72

69 Ibid., Sept. 24, 1939, p. 6.
70 Ibid., Sept. 3, 1939, p. 4.
In advocating cash and carry, the Richmond editor stressed that "we must bear in mind that both Germany and England are fighting for their lives, and that it is only natural that both should do everything they legitimately can, to prevent contraband from reaching the other."73

As for lifting the arms embargo, the editor declared, "How much better it would be for us to sell them [England and France] planes now—admittedly a partisan gesture of the same sort we are making already in the shipments of war materials—rather than to refuse these shipments, and thus to run a grave risk of being drawn into the war later to save them from defeat!"74

In an attempt to explain the causes of World War II, the Richmond editor remarked, "A lone megalomaniac sitting in the Wilhelmstrasse, his abnormal mentality overwrought from excessive work and lack of sleep, has elected to plunge Europe into blood. . . . [The war] is partly the outgrowth of the Treaty of Versailles, partly the result of shortsightedness on the part of various statesmen, especially Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain." Finally the United States must share some of the blame for its failure to join the League of Nations. Except for this last factor, however, the Allies "got themselves into this mess, through no fault of ours." Looking ahead, the editor asserted that "there will be a determined effort of our former allies in 1917-1918 to drag us into the conflict. . . . Let us beware of all their blandishments. . . . Let us be on guard against the flood of atrocity stories . . . We helped the Allies win the last war, and they still owe us nearly $14,500,000,000." Even our failure to join the League of Nations "is not

73 Ibid., Sept. 14, 1939, p. 10.
74 Ibid., Sept. 16, 1939, p. 6.
sufficient to obligate us to ruin the prospects for democracy's survival on this continent." With our huge debt, our entry into the war "would make that [depression] of 1929 seem child's play. So let's stay out ... This nation is in an altogether different position from the one which, in 1917, could afford to lavish billions upon the Allies ... It is only too likely that the war will bring all the participants down in ruin, no matter who the nominal winners are. We, in America, should see to it that one sound democracy remains around which shattered civilization can rally, after the conflict is over."75 "The United States can and must stay out."76 A few days later the Dispatch painted an even more dismal picture of the likely consequences of United States entry into the war:

Destruction of the Federal Government's fiscal soundness, uncontrolled inflation of the currency, the crashing of banks, and insurance companies, nation-wide devastation and ruin, millions of unemployed roaming the streets, with riots, if not revolution, and the strong possibility of either Communist or Fascist dictatorship, will be the probable results for us, if America enters the European war. ... The Times-Dispatch ... is convinced that free institutions will not be preserved on this continent through our involvement in a World War. Suppose we entered the war and helped to "win" for the allies, and after it was all over, we found that all the participants had gone down in Bolshevism, ourselves included. ... This paper has never advocated America's entry into a European war for the purpose of crushing Nazi Germany. ... The United States is not morally, financially or militarily obligated to go to the rescue of England and France, much as it may desire them to win. ...

Is this the doctrine of pacifism or of cowardice? Not at all. This newspaper favors building the armed strength of America up to whatever level is necessary to insure its safety against attack. ... This newspaper is sincerely convinced that the most unselfish thing for this country to do under the circumstances, is to be thoroughly selfish, i.e., to look out for its own interests. That is exactly what Britain and France always do. You may be perfectly sure that they would not come to our assistance, unless they were certain that this was to their own advantage. ... [We ought not to plunge] into a war which was not of our making,

75 Ibid., Sept. 2, 1939, p. 8.
76 Ibid., Sept. 4, 1939, p. 10.
and which is pretty certain to destroy democracy in Europe, no matter who wins. ... We spent a vast amount of blood and treasure in 1917-18, in an effort to save democracy. There is far less democracy in the world today than there was when we embarked on that quixotic quest. Don't let's make the same blunder all over again, and end almost the last hope of preserving liberty on this continent.77

In a discussion of the dehumanizing effects of war, the editor the next day in a reference to the sinking of the Athenia asked, "How many of us are sufficiently objective to think of the millions of charming, cultured and patriotic Germans who would no more condone the sinking of noncombatants on passenger vessels without warning than we ourselves would ... ?"78 Even the President did not escape attack by the Dispatch in regard to the necessity of objectivity. The editor questioned, "Why ... have we no ambassador in Berlin?" Also criticized was Roosevelt's use of the phrase "limited emergency" in a proclamation. The editor contended that that phrase "conveyed to many the impression that this neutral country is faced with some immediate crisis." Finally the Dispatch objected to the President's statement, although admitting it was "perfectly true," that "'I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought. ... Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts.'" The Richmond editor asked, "Why insert this gratuitous appeal to the American people not to be neutral in thought?" The editor naturally concluded that "President Roosevelt is not as neutral as he ought to be--... he is, at times, traveling dangerously close to unneutrality."79

An added objection to the President's actions came a week later when the Dispatch criticized Roosevelt's message to Poland's President for including

77 Ibid., Sept. 10, 1939, p. 2.
78 Ibid., Sept. 11, 1939, p. 10.
a remark that he was "deeply shocked" about the bombings of Poland:
"Mr. Roosevelt's 'deeply shocked' is a little too reminiscent of the notes President Wilson was writing to Germany during a previous American period of neutrality. The Wilsonian notes did not help to keep us out of war, and the less partisan writing and talking to Europe that President Roosevelt now does, the better off we will probably be." 80 The sentiments of the Times Dispatch were probably best expressed when the editor declared, "The best course for us . . . is to remain in our own hemisphere, look after our own democracy, and keep ourselves strong enough to repel any attacker." 81

All of the twelve Virginia editors advocated revision of the 1937 Neutrality Act. In so doing, only the Front Royal Warren Sentinel admitted without reluctance that repeal of the arms embargo constituted a retreat from true neutrality. Indeed, the editors generally insisted that this country's neutrality would be strengthened through revision. Always, however, they stressed that revision would help keep the United States at peace.

Generally historians point to the repeal of the arms embargo as the first significant retreat by the United States from isolationism during the period between the Nazi invasion of Poland and Pearl Harbor. It is worth repeating, however, that the Virginia editors considered their support for the pro-British revision of the neutrality act to be in harmony with their earlier statements opposing United States entry

80 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1939, p. 12.
81 Ibid., Sept. 20, 1939, p. 8.
into another war. As one historian has written, "most anti-interventionists...

favored helping [Great Britain] as much as possible, so long as the risk of involvement in war could be avoided." Indeed, he stated:

...even after 1939, when some aid to Great Britain was deemed advisable, the concept of unilateralism was not abandoned. The conditions under which isolationists were prepared to grant such aid would merely have committed the United States to supplying money and materials which could be readily spared, in the interests of defeating Hitler and thus contributing to America's welfare. 82

Americans— even the most isolationist ones— had very good reasons for refining their views by the fall of 1939. Arguments that all European countries were equally corrupt and morally decadent were being shattered by then, and although it would take Pearl Harbor to completely destroy all Americans' belief that their country was impregnable, this belief was nevertheless being seriously challenged by Hitler's blitzkreig tactics in Poland. It should not be surprising, then, that by October 1939, sixty-two per cent of the Americans approached by the Gallup pollsters favored repeal of the arms embargo. 83

Primarily because of the overwhelming support Southern Congressmen gave President Roosevelt on selective service, Lend-Lease, and other "interventionist" measures, the South has been considered by most observers to have been very anti-isolationist following the outbreak of World War II. Many of Gallup's polls appear to support this observation. For instance, when asked whether the United States should declare war against Germany and send its military forces to Europe to fight if it appeared that Germany

82 Jonas, Isolationism in America, pp. 21, 275-276.
83 Drummond, Passing of Neutrality, p. 99.
was defeating the Allies, forty-seven per cent of the Southerners responded "yes" in October 1939. This figure was considerably higher than the national average of twenty-nine per cent. Yet in an analysis of American opinion on the war between September 1939 and August 1940, Dr. Hadley Cantril concluded that "although New Englanders and Southerners are somewhat more interventionist than people in other parts of the country, attitudes toward the war seem, by and large, to cut across sectional as well as rural-urban lines. The impression gained is that the people in this country... are relatively homogenous in their opinions." Similarly, Ray Allen Billington in a study of Middle Western isolationism demonstrated that while the Congressmen from that section were considerably more isolationist than those from other areas, the differences in public opinion among the sections, although present, were not as pronounced. The conclusions of Cantril and Billington would appear to be accurate insofar as editorial opinion in Virginia is concerned.

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84 Cantril and Strunk, eds., Public Opinion, p. 968.


86 Ray Allen Billington, "The Origins of Middle Western Isolationism," Political Science Quarterly, LX (March 1945), 63-64.
In 1807 Thomas Jefferson wrote: "the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them, inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors."\(^1\) Although "accuracy" and "objectivity" have become almost sacred terms in twentieth century journalism, the editorial page remains a legitimate vehicle for the expression of opinions as opposed to pure facts. And Jefferson's observation, at least in regard to the editorial page, may still be far from untrue. Some of the newspaper editors examined in this study were so susceptible to contradictions and inconsistencies that one might have been well advised during the late thirties to pay heed to Jefferson's views.

Particularly confusing are the editorials in the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette. In the same year that it applauded the Senate's final defeat of American entry into the World Court, the Gazette insisted that this country was compelled to play a leading role in international affairs because of its "superior civilization." Two years later the same paper asserted that such an incident as the sinking of the Panay could not provoke the United States into war; yet the editor strongly opposed the Ludlow proposal and urged the English-speaking peoples to unite to put down aggression and to uphold the principles of the Nine Power Treaty. The Williamsburg editor's initial reaction to

the Czechoslovakian crisis was that the United States should remain aloof. Within a week, however, the editor displayed a willingness to see this country fight, "if necessary." The South Boston *Halifax Gazette*, particularly in 1939, was also vulnerable to criticism for its contradictions. Although other editors frequently voiced mixed and confusing reactions to events abroad, particularly to the Munich Conference, the *Virginia Gazette* was the most consistently confusing of the twelve newspapers.

Any attempt to discover a pattern in views among the twelve editors can also be frustrating. The range of editorial opinion is best represented by the Louisa and Norfolk papers. Always loyal to President Roosevelt, the Louisa *Central-Virginian* appeared convinced that the chief executive would keep the United States out of war. The Louisa editor's isolationist views were illustrated best in his praise for Chamberlain's actions at Munich--praise that continued until the very eve of the invasion of Poland. The Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*, on the other hand, viewed the Munich agreement as an "ill-smelling peace" and was doubtful as early as 1935 that this country could remain free from any "general conflagration." The *Pilot*'s internationalist stance was reflected further in its approval of the Quarantine Speech and its repeated warnings against over-optimism concerning the neutrality legislation.

Yet, a number of the newspapers adhered to positions that were similar enough to make possible the general observations found at the end of each of the chapters in this study. Although recognizing the need to scrutinize propaganda and the actions of the munitions makers,
most of the editors believed that the neutrality legislation provided the best means for this country's avoidance of another war. In regard to specific conflicts such as the Ethiopian invasion and the China Incident, the sentiments of most of the papers were echoed in the Charlottesville Daily Progress's assertion that "not all the oil in Ethiopia is worth a single American life" and the Richmond Times Dispatch's contention that "the sooner this country pulls out of the Far East, and lets it stew in its own juice, the better." When the chances for a European war increased in the fall of 1938, the editors frequently expressed their relief that this country was fortified by oceans. When war actually did break out a year later, changing the neutrality act to help the Allies became the acceptable means for preventing United States entry.

Despite such views as these and despite the results of the Gallup polls noted in this work, historians continue to write with little or no qualification that the South during the late thirties was "the most international area in outlook."\(^2\) Alexander DeConde has declared that the period before the Second World War was "a high point in Southern internationalism,"\(^3\) and C. Vann Woodward has written that the South during the same period "was the least isolationist and the most internationalist and interventionist part of the country."\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Jacobs, "Roosevelt's 'Quarantine Speech,'" p. 492.
\(^3\) DeConde, "The South and Isolationism," p. 333.
The neat dichotomy between an isolationist Republican Midwest and an internationalist Democratic South deserves serious study. Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on geography and politics. Even in the Congressional voting patterns, too often support for increased armaments has been equated simply with anti-isolationism. Clearly, however, the Virginia editors viewed their support for repeal of the arms embargo and for increased armament spending as a kind of "preparedness isolationism" that would help to keep this country out of foreign conflicts, not as a step in the direction of war.

Considering the strong isolationist sentiments reflected in many of Virginius Dabney's editorials through 1939, it seems a bit ironic that the Richmond *Times Dispatch* editor should suggest a year after the Nazi invasion of Poland that the South displayed a more mature and sophisticated recognition and understanding of world dangers and foreign affairs than did other parts of the nation. If a study of Southern newspapers demonstrates that pre-World War II editorial opinion was in accord with that of the *Times Dispatch*, it might be said that the South was not so enlightened as Dabney depicted it to be, at least not before the outbreak of the war. During the period between the invasions of Ethiopia and Poland, memories of Woodrow Wilson's Great Crusade and fears of another Great Depression served to contribute to a definite anti-internationalist strain in Virginia editorial opinion—a strain that could prove to be of significant interest to diplomatic historians if it is demonstrative of how Southern editors as a whole felt.

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5 Dabney, "The South Looks Abroad," pp. 171-178. Also see Dabney's *Below the Potomac*, pp. 287-289.
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