

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## 'Who are the War Agitators?' by Charles Lindbergh

### The Speech

- Watch the speech delivered by Russell Tovey

Duration: 10 minutes

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/the-war-agitators>

### Context

Charles Lindbergh was an American aviator, who won the Orteig Prize for piloting the first nonstop solo flight between New York City and Paris in 1927. This amazing feat of aviation earned him national recognition and international fame.

During World War II, Lindbergh campaigned for American neutrality and isolationism. He supported the America First Committee, and was publicly criticised for his views against America's involvement in the war in Europe. One of the people to criticise him was President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lindbergh responded to this criticism by resigning from the U.S. Air Corps.

Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, America entered the war. Lindbergh was unable to join the war in a military capacity having resigned from the Air Corps and so worked as a technical adviser and test pilot. Until his death he continued to speak out about issues such as conservation of natural resources and worked as a consultant to the US Air Force.

- Discuss with students the main principles of the America First Committee and how these relate to American foreign policy today.

### Content

- Watch the speech again.
- Ask students which of Lindbergh's reasons for America staying out of the war they personally find convincing and which they find unconvincing.
- Ask them to make a note of these using the chart below.

Convincing reasons	Unconvincing reasons

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- Using their notes ask students to consider to what extent Lindbergh's argument is based on emotion?
- Discuss the advantages and limitations of presenting an emotionally detached argument.
- Ask students to identify the points of argument that would be convincing and unconvincing to an American audience in 1941. Ask them to compare these with their own responses.

## Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech and explore the rhetorical devices used. **A transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document.**
- Lindbergh's speech makes considerable use of **logos** as a rhetorical device. Logos is a form of persuasion that appeals to the audience's sense of reason and logic.
- Provide students with the chart below. Ask them to identify examples of each of the following elements of the speech which exemplify logos.

Element of Speech	Examples
Reasoned or logical argument	
Objective points	
A sense of justice	
Knowledge	
Divine or universal laws	

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- Following this exercise ask students to make a note of any features of the language that add force to the argument.
- Discuss the register of the speech. What impact might this have on the audience?
- Discuss the mode of address and whether students find this effective.

## Discussion

- Watch the discussion with the Almeida's Young Leaders

Duration: 5 minutes

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/reaction/the-war-agitators>

- Watch the discussion again and this time ask students to make a note of points made by the reaction group about politicians essentially being human, fallible and capable of developing.
- Ask students to discuss with a partner whether we expect too much of leaders.

## Extension Task

- Ask students to write a speech in which they present a counter argument to Lindbergh's.

## Useful Links

### Websites

[Charles Lindbergh](#) – A biography

[America First Committee](#) – Further information about the committee, its members and its principles

[America First Before Trump](#) – Charles Lindbergh's legacy

[Lend – Lease and Military Aid](#) – America's contribution to the war pre-1941

[American Isolationism in the 1930s](#) – An introduction to isolationism

[The Road to Pearl Harbour](#) – An article exploring the factors that led to America joining the war

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## WHO ARE THE WAR AGITATORS?

Charles Lindbergh | 11 September 1941

*This is an edited version of the speech given by Charles Lindbergh at the Des Moines Coliseum, Iowa.*

Why are we on the verge of war?

When this war started in Europe, it was clear that the American people were solidly opposed to entering it. Why shouldn't we be? We had the best defensive position in the world; we had a tradition of independence from Europe; and the one time we did take part in a European war it left European problems unsolved, and debts to America unpaid.

But three important groups have been pressing this country toward war: the British, the Jewish, the Roosevelt administration. I am speaking here only of war agitators, not of those sincere but misguided men and women who, confused by misinformation and frightened by propaganda, follow the lead of the war agitators.

Let us consider these groups, one at a time.

First, the British: It is obvious and perfectly understandable that Great Britain wants the United States in the war on her side. England is now in a desperate position. Her population is not large enough and her armies are not strong enough to invade the continent of Europe and win the war she declared against Germany.

Her geographical position is such that she cannot win the war by the use of aviation alone, regardless of how many planes we send her. Even if America entered the war, it is improbable that the Allied armies could invade Europe and overwhelm the Axis powers. But one thing is certain. If England can draw this country into the war, she can shift to our shoulders a large portion of the responsibility for waging it and for paying its cost.

If it were not for her hope that she can make us responsible for the war financially, as well as militarily, I believe England would have negotiated a peace in Europe many months ago, and be better off for doing so.

We know that England is spending great sums of money for propaganda in America during the present war. If we were Englishmen, we would do the same. But our interest is first in America; and as Americans, it is essential for us to realize the effort that British interests are making to draw us into their war.

The second major group I mentioned is the Jewish.

It is not difficult to understand why Jewish people desire the overthrow of Nazi Germany. The persecution they suffered in Germany would be sufficient to make bitter enemies of any race.

No person with a sense of the dignity of mankind can condone the persecution of the Jewish race in Germany. But no person of honesty and vision can look on their pro-war policy here today without seeing the dangers involved in such a policy both for us and for them. Instead of agitating for war, the Jewish groups in this country should be opposing it in every possible way for they will be among the first to feel its consequences.

Tolerance is a virtue that depends upon peace and strength. History shows that it cannot survive war and devastation.

I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both the British and the Jewish races, for reasons which are as understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war.

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We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we also must look out for ours. We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction.

The Roosevelt administration is the third powerful group which has been carrying this country toward war. Its members have used the war emergency to obtain a third presidential term for the first time in American history. They have used the war to add unlimited billions to a debt which was already the highest we have ever known.

The power of the Roosevelt administration depends upon the maintenance of a wartime emergency. The prestige of the Roosevelt administration depends upon the success of Great Britain to whom the president attached his political future at a time when most people thought that England and France would easily win the war.

The danger of the Roosevelt administration lies in its subterfuge. While its members have promised us peace, they have led us to war heedless of the platform upon which they were elected.

Our theatres soon became filled with plays portraying the glory of war. Newsreels lost all semblance of objectivity. Newspapers and magazines began to lose advertising if they carried anti-war articles. A smear campaign was instituted against individuals who opposed intervention. The terms "traitor," "Nazi," "anti-Semitic" were thrown ceaselessly at any one who dared to suggest that it was not to the best interests of the United States to enter the war. Men lost their jobs if they were frankly anti-war. Many others dared no longer speak.

Before long, lecture halls that were open to the advocates of war were closed to speakers who opposed it. A fear campaign was inaugurated. We were told that aviation, which has held the British fleet off the continent of Europe, made America more vulnerable than ever before to invasion.

There was no difficulty in obtaining billions of dollars for arms under the guise of defending America. Our people stood united on a program of defence. And then began a refrain that marked every step we took toward war for many months--"the best way to defend America and keep out of war." we were told, was "by aiding the Allies."

First, we agreed to sell arms to Europe; next, we agreed to loan arms to Europe; then we agreed to patrol the ocean for Europe; then we occupied a European island in the war zone. Now, we have reached the verge of war.

Only one thing holds this country from war today. That is the rising opposition of the American people. Our system of democracy and representative government is on test today as it has never been before. We are on the verge of a war in which the only victor would be chaos and prostration.

We are on the verge of a war for which we are still unprepared, and for which no one has offered a feasible plan for victory - a war which cannot be won without sending our soldiers across the ocean to force a landing on a hostile coast against armies stronger than our own.

We are on the verge of war, but it is not yet too late to stay out. It is not too late to show that no amount of money or propaganda can force a free and independent people into war against its will. It is not yet too late to retrieve and to maintain the independent American destiny that our forefathers established in this new world.

The entire future rests upon our shoulders. It depends upon our action, our courage, and our intelligence. If you oppose our intervention in the war, now is the time to make your voice heard.

And if we, the American people, do that, independence and freedom will continue to live among us, and there will be no foreign war.