
Charles Austin Beard: Liberal Foe of American Internationalism

James P. Philbin

George Mason University

You need only reflect that one of the best ways to get yourself a reputation as a dangerous citizen these days is to go about repeating the very phrases which our founding fathers used in the struggle for independence.

Charles Austin Beard¹

It has been a little over a half century since the death of one of the preeminent historians of the twentieth century, Charles Austin Beard (1874-1948). A professor of history at Columbia, the author of numerous articles, essays, books and histories of the United States (a number of the latter co-written with his wife, Mary), and the recipient of prestigious academic awards, he earned the title of “dean of American historians.”²

Lionized in his early career by much of the historical establishment, Beard fell out of favor with his fellow liberal and progressive academics because of his opposition to the nation’s foreign policy in the years prior to World War II. While other scholars were receptive to pressures and allurements from the powers that be to support another American involvement in a foreign war,

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This article is dedicated to my wife, Peggy, her parents, and all those who lived in tyranny behind the Iron Curtain.

¹ Quoted at <<http://www.quoteland.com/quotes/author/34.htm>>.

² Thomas C. Kennedy, *Charles A. Beard and American Foreign Policy* (Gainesville, Florida: The University Presses of Florida, 1975), ix, 97.

Beard remained, for the most part, an unrelenting critic of what he believed was a deliberate and mendacious foreign-policy course, one orchestrated by the Roosevelt Administration to take the country to war. Beard feared tragic consequences for America and the world.

Such a stance had professional and personal costs for the Indiana native, the effects of which have lingered to the present day, and helps explain why there is little mention of his life, career, or influence some fifty years after his passing. This neglect is undoubtedly due to Beard's later scholarship, which undermines what has become the standard historical interpretation and "truth" regarding America and the Second World War. This orthodoxy has been used by many in the postwar era to justify particular policies in the Western democracies. Beard, among others, questioned whether the United States' entry into the war and the resulting Allied victory over the Axis powers was a wholly necessary, beneficial, and heroic course of events. Those who have challenged the accepted interpretation of those times have been ignored, ostracized, or, worse, denounced as fascist sympathizers.³

Foreign-policy stance had personal costs.

This essay will discuss the later phase of Charles Beard's remarkable career when he broke with much of the liberal intellectual and political establishment over the country's entry into World War II. The article will examine his proposals for reconstructing American foreign policy and briefly analyze how his views on developments in the nation's economy during the decades prior to the war affected his outlook on foreign affairs.

The Making of a "Revisionist"

A host of factors led Beard to battle for American neutrality in the years leading up to the Second World War. One motive which has not been emphasized sufficiently was his fervent patriotism. Beard had a great love for America. He believed it to be a unique

³ Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975; reprint ed., New York: Free Life Editions, Inc., 1978), 58-60; Murray N. Rothbard and Jerome Tuccille, advisory editors, *The Right Wing Individualist Tradition in America* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972); Harry Elmer Barnes, *Selected Revisionist Pamphlets*, 11-30. A recent example of a popular figure who has questioned American involvement in the Second World War and has received a torrent of denunciations from mainstream and "respectable" commentators is Patrick J. Buchanan. See Buchanan, *A Republic, Not An Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999).

and divinely inspired nation, forged to be a beacon of light, peace, and hope for the rest of the world. George Leighton comments on this aspect of the historian's personality: ". . . Beard regarded himself first of all, and seriously, as an American citizen. Though to him this meant being a citizen of no mean nation, there was nothing of the bigoted nationalist about him. Citizenship confers upon the holder certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Beard's personal history showed that he was aware of the privileges, that he was never slow in asserting the rights, and that he was not dilatory in assuming the responsibilities."⁴ Leighton continues his description of this neglected feature of Beard's character: "The United States was no geographical expression to him; it was a going concern in which he had a share, a *stake*, and damn the man who, for reasons of frivolity, ignorance, irresponsibility, or simply a desire to throw his weight around, jeopardized the Republic's prospects."⁵

Although a patriot is commonly considered as one who is willing to risk life and limb for the homeland, it can be no less patriotic to jeopardize a career or personal reputation for the sake of one's country. To a large extent Beard did just that. He had come to the conclusion that America had been led off its traditional foreign-policy course, beginning with the unjustified and imperialistic war against Spain in 1898. He was determined to do all that he could to return it to its former non-interventionist course.

While other scholars shrank from political battle,⁶ Beard remained outspoken and steadfast in his opposition to an American Empire right up to his death.⁷ His patriotism undoubtedly sustained him during the virulent attacks and calumnies that he suffered, often at the hands of liberal former colleagues. As the war raged in Europe and the cry for United States involvement intensified, he dejectedly wrote, "I . . . was treated as a mere damned patriot, immoral and criminal, as neglecting my solemn duty to save the world."⁸ Beard also suspected that he was under surveillance by federal authorities.⁹

⁴ George R. Leighton, "Beard and Foreign Policy," in *Charles A. Beard: An Appraisal*, ed. Howard K. Beale (University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 162-63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 161-62.

⁸ Quoted in Ellen Nore, *Charles A. Beard: An Intellectual Biography* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The Second World War was a watershed for American liberalism. Its spokesmen became decidedly more internationalist and left leaning. While Beard, John T. Flynn and others among the Old Guard were increasingly worried about the effects that participation in another world war would have on the country's institutions and its constitutional form of government, a new breed of liberal saw war as an opportunity to transform American society more fundamentally than had been possible under the New Deal. The fears of Beard and others were eventually confirmed. The seeds of what would later become "cultural Marxism" were adroitly sown during this era by a radical and leftist liberal vanguard.¹⁰

While Beard had supported American intervention in the First World War and castigated "Prussian militarism,"¹¹ like the general public and much of academia he became deeply disillusioned, partly because of the war's tragic consequences.¹² He became convinced that Germany was not solely to blame for the war's outbreak, and America's participation did not truly serve its national interest. "Though the cautious will shrink from conclusions too sharp and dogmatic," he wrote, ". . . all must admit that one thing has been established beyond question, namely, that responsibility for the War must be distributed among all the participants, with Russia and France each bearing a Titan's share."¹³ By the mid 1920s, Beard believed that "The Sunday-school theory" of pristine and noble Allied intentions could not be sustained by the mounting postwar evidence: "According to that theory, three pure and innocent boys—Russia, France, and England—without military guile in their hearts, were suddenly assailed while on the way to Sunday school by two deep-dyed villains—Germany and Austria—who had long been plotting cruel deeds in the dark."¹⁴

*Results of
World War I
brought
disillusion.*

During his tenure at Columbia, Beard witnessed first hand the effect that wars have on the lives of non-combatants. When it was revealed that the university forced two faculty members to resign

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Beard and American Foreign Policy*, 30-31

¹² Bernard C. Borning, *The Political and Social Thought of Charles A. Beard* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 106-112.

¹³ Quoted in Borning, *The Political and Social Thought of Charles A. Beard*, 110-111.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

for their anti-war views, Beard said: "I learned what war could do. . . . I saw Columbia use the War to suppress men. . . . I saw the freedom of the press trampled by gangs of spies, public and private."¹⁵ George Leighton contends that this incident, which caused Beard to resign his academic post, was a "devastating experience" which no doubt shaped his future foreign-policy outlook.¹⁶

Although these and other intellectual and personal factors could be cited, it was ultimately the actions of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, often surreptitious, that drove Beard to become a leading proponent of American neutrality. He became convinced that if Roosevelt had honestly followed a non-interventionist foreign policy course, which the President had repeatedly promised publicly, the country could have avoided the conflict altogether. Beard dedicated much of the last portion of his life to showing that Roosevelt had wanted war and that, because of the general lack of enthusiasm for the endeavor by the vast majority of Americans, he had tried to maneuver the United States into war without "firing the first shot."¹⁷

Prior to becoming one of the most vociferous critics of the Administration Beard had hoped to have some influence in the formulation of policy. For a brief time, after his attendance at several White House dinners, it looked as if he might have an advisory role (even if unofficial).¹⁸ It became known that Roosevelt read both *The Idea of the National Interest* and *The Open Door at Home*.¹⁹ Despite some apparent initial interest on Roosevelt's part, the policy recommendations in both works were, to Beard's great dismay, rejected. Roosevelt is reported to have remarked that *The Open Door at Home* was "a bad dish."²⁰

Because his hopes of becoming at least an "unofficial" foreign-policy advisor had been dashed by the middle of Roosevelt's first

¹⁵ Quoted in Leighton, "Beard and Foreign Policy," 168.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Charles A. Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War 1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1948), 517-569.

¹⁸ Kennedy, *Beard and American Foreign Policy*, 73.

¹⁹ Charles A. Beard with the collaboration of G. H. E. Smith, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), edited with new material by Alfred Vagts and William Beard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966); idem, *The Open Door at Home: A Trial Philosophy of National Interest* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934).

²⁰ Kennedy, *Beard and American Foreign Policy*, 74.

term and, more importantly, because of the Administration's mounting international belligerency and its increased arms buildup, especially of naval procurements, Beard began publicly to voice his concerns. As he would continue to point out, until the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt's push for war was in part due to the failure of the New Deal to ameliorate the domestic economic and social crisis.²¹ One effect of military involvement in either the Atlantic or the Pacific theaters would be to divert public attention, at least for a time, from the country's internal woes.²²

As the neutrality debate intensified, the arguments by Beard and others became more finely tuned. One line of reasoning was that the major Allied powers—Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—had far more imperialistic and expansionist histories than either Germany or Japan and that to commit lives, blood, and money to save these bloated and, in some instances, crumbling empires was contrary to America's anti-imperialistic traditions.²³

Beard believed that by staying out of the conflict, Americans could best serve their European kinsmen. The United States would have the resources to aid and then to help reconstruct what was sure to be a "shattered postwar world."²⁴

Some might question whether the opposition of Beard and others to American participation in the war indicated a callous attitude toward the plight of European Jews or others who were persecuted. The historical record indicates that neither the Roosevelt Administration nor the other Allied governments fought the war to rescue these unfortunate victims; they were primarily driven by geopolitical concerns. Also, the scope of the Nazis' inhumanity, which intensified as the fortunes of the conflict turned against them, did not become known until late in the war. Even then, it is widely argued, the Allied governments were slow to aid the survivors of the wartime atrocities.

*Rescuing
persecuted
groups not a
major Allied
objective.*

"Continental Americanism"

Charles Beard was more than merely a critic. He was a theoretician with a blueprint for the reconstruction of an American for-

²¹ Charles A Beard, *American Foreign Policy in the Making 1932-1940: A Study in Responsibilities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 177-78.

²² Nore, *Beard: An Intellectual Biography*, 172.

²³ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

eign policy that he contended had gone dramatically off its traditional course, beginning with the war against Spain and intervention in World War I. He believed that his framework, if adopted, would keep the country out of unnecessary foreign entanglements and prevent the creation of an empire. He titled his foreign-policy prescription “Continental Americanism.” It received its fullest elaboration in the 1940 opus *A Foreign Policy for America*.²⁵

Continental Americanism rested on the country’s non-interventionist track record and its geographical location vis-à-vis neighboring powers, as well as the author’s views concerning economics and international trade. In forthright language Beard called for a foreign policy that reflected and defended solely American interests:

The primary foreign policy for the United States may be called for convenience Continental Americanism. The two words imply a concentration of interest on the continental domain and on building here a civilization in many respects peculiar to American life and the potentials of the American heritage. In concrete terms the words mean non-intervention in the controversies and wars of Europe and Asia and resistance to the intrusion of European or Asiatic powers, systems, and imperial ambitions into the western hemisphere.²⁶

Continental Americanism had a proven track record and was essentially the foreign policy advocated and practiced by the Founding Fathers and followed, more or less, by their heirs. Beard pointed out that, “while Europe was engaged in destroying lives and property,” America’s adherence to non-interventionism allowed it “to concentrate on construction, on building a civilization here.”²⁷

*Advocated
“non-interventionism,” not
“isolationism.”*

Against the allegations that his system was “isolationist,” Beard cited George Washington and Thomas Jefferson’s admonitions on the need for the country to stay out of “entangling alliances.” The Founders were far from isolationists. They encouraged trade, cultural exchange, and interrelationships with other lands and peoples. “At the very outset,” Beard explained, “diplomatic and consular relations were established with the leading countries. Treaties of commerce and amity were sought, signed, and ratified.

²⁵ Charles A. Beard, *A Foreign Policy for America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

Wherever American trading interests extended, the United States gave them customary diplomatic protection.”²⁸ Instead of the pejorative term “isolationism,” Beard used “non-interventionism” as a more accurate description of his system.

Americans were not pacifists, and neither was Beard’s system pacifistic. When obvious wrongs and offenses had been committed against Americans overseas, the United States had justifiably retaliated. Beard also opposed letting European powers extend their footholds in the Western Hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine remained an integral part of Continental Americanism, but it would be only in this hemisphere that America would commit men and arms. Beard wrote: “[T]he United States would refrain from intervention in European politics and would oppose . . . European intervention in the New World. Within this scheme of policy the rules of commercial transactions, diplomatic intercourse, and friendly relations were to be observed.”²⁹

During the period when the nation followed a predominantly non-interventionist foreign-policy course, its leadership had tried to keep an open mind and refrain from making judgments on the ethics and morals of other peoples and cultures. “[T]he creators of continental Americanism made no invidious discriminations on account of forms, ideologies, morals or religions,” Beard said. And while Americans may not have approved of their actions “. . . they carried on business with despots, Tsars, Mohammed Sultans, and oriental tyrants, as well as with parliamentary Britain and republican France.”³⁰

Continentalism was far from a passive or “hermit” policy; it was activist, “positive,” and “clear cut” and required sophisticated statesmanship and guile to be successful.³¹ As practiced by the Founders, Continentalism was, according to Beard, enlightened diplomatic behavior. It ensured peace and tranquillity at home, which contributed to the flourishing of the culture: “And it was maintained with consistency while the Republic was being founded, democracy extended, and an American civilization developed.”³²

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

³² *Ibid.*, 12.

When critics labeled his system “isolationist,” Beard countered that Continentalism was actually its antithesis. Beard pointed out that if America had truly pursued an isolationist foreign-policy course, that course would have greatly hindered the country’s development: “Had the United States inquired too closely into the institutions and morals of European and Asiatic powers and limited its transactions to nations whose code of ethics and types of government conformed to those of America it would have narrowed the range of its commerce and intercourse, stirred up unnecessary enmities, and perhaps arrayed against itself combinations dangerous to its security in this hemisphere.”³³ What he and those who spoke for neutrality wanted to avoid was America’s becoming politically and militarily involved in a world which seemed to be on a nihilistic course of self-destruction.

Founders’ admonitions against “entangling alliances” emphasized.

The spirit of Continental Americanism drew on the country’s anti-militaristic and anti-imperialistic traditions.³⁴ These were a part of the ideological framework for the justification of the American Revolution. The latter was, in part, a movement to secede from empire.³⁵ After Independence, most of the young nation’s leaders admonished their countrymen not to let their country become a junior version of their former colonial ruler. Beard cites George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom warned about the danger to internal liberty from “entangling alliances”:

In his Farewell Address . . . [Washington] referred to the “frequent controversies” of Europe, “the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns,” and alluded to “the combinations and collisons of her friendships and enmities.” It was against entangling “our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice” that Washington warned the American people.³⁶

The importance of Washington’s speech for succeeding generations, says Beard, cannot be understated or ignored. “These were not light words, spoken privately, or angry ejaculations made in

³³ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

³⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Enlarged Ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

³⁵ See the insightful essay by Donald W. Livingston, “The Secession Tradition in America,” in *Secession, State, & Liberty*, edited with an introduction by David Gordon (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 1-33.

³⁶ Beard, *A Foreign Policy for America*, 15.

the heat of controversy. They were, on the contrary, weighed and winged words directed to his contemporaries and coming ages—the expressions of a firm conviction carefully matured out of long and varied experience.”³⁷ As twentieth-century interventionists effectively expunged this advice from the public’s consciousness, the loss of American lives in foreign wars grew dramatically.

Unappreciated Visionary

In the critical years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Beard closely chronicled international events as they unfolded, which enabled him to produce soon after the cessation of hostilities a masterful, if controversial, study entitled *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War 1941*. Since its publication the accumulating evidence has largely confirmed the historian’s central thesis that the Roosevelt Administration, despite its public assurances of seeking peace and neutrality, was actively engaged in a surreptitious campaign to bring about events and circumstances that would lead the nation into the war.³⁸

Beard’s charge that Roosevelt had deliberately sought to take the country into the conflict has been substantially confirmed. Beard’s prognostications and those of other like-minded thinkers regarding the impact that the war would have not only on America but the rest of Western Civilization have come true. One result of the Allied victory has been that a United States Empire has come into full flower, reaching into every corner of the globe and involving America in a series of wars, internecine struggles, ethnic clashes, border disputes, and other skirmishes and conflicts, few of which have had anything to do with the country’s own national security. Beard characterizes such a policy as “perpetual

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ John Toland’s *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982) was one of the first books to charge Roosevelt with complicity in bringing about the Japanese attack that received mainstream press coverage and critical review. Just recently, Robert B. Stinnett, *Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor* (New York: The Free Press, 2000) includes newly discovered documentary evidence that bolsters many of Toland’s assertions. Furthermore, both Houses of the 106th Congress passed resolutions that “absolved” the Hawaiian naval and army commanders Rear Admiral H. E. Kimmel and Major General W. C. Short of any wrongdoing or dereliction of duty in the Pearl Harbor disaster.

“Perpetual
war for
perpetual
peace.”

war for perpetual peace.” A disciple of Beard’s, Harry Elmer Barnes, describes what his mentor meant by the phrase:

With characteristic cogency and incisiveness, Beard held that the foreign policy of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and of their ideological supporters, whether Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, or Communists, could most accurately and precisely be described by the phrase “perpetual war for perpetual peace.” Events since that time (June, 1947) have further reinforced Beard’s sagacity and insight in this respect. George Orwell’s brilliant and profoundly prophetic novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, has since shown how a new political order throughout the world may be erected on the premises and implications of this goal of perpetual war, presented in the guise of a global struggle of free peoples for perpetual peace. There is already alarming evidence that this is just the type of regime into which the world is now moving, consciously or unconsciously, as a result of the foreign policy forged by Roosevelt, Truman, Churchill, and Stalin.³⁹

At home the militarization of society continued after the end of the conflict with the peacetime draft,⁴⁰ which lasted nearly three decades, and with the sometimes non-competitive and incestuous arrangement between the government and certain politically well-connected “defense” industries, the system that President Dwight D. Eisenhower labeled “the military industrial complex.” Beard clearly realized, even before the conclusion of the Second World War, the impact this would have on American society:

In respect of its regimenting and disruptive effects in American society, the Global War was so revolutionary that it made the [First] World War look like an episode. Every branch of economy—agriculture, industry, and labor—all the relations of men, women, and children, every phase of education, every medium of expression and communication, all processes of government, all aspects of civil and military government, were affected by the impacts of the total war and presented far-reaching reactions. Many of the reactions—perhaps all of them—were of incalculable significance for the destiny and opportunity in the United States.⁴¹

American society emerged from the war with its freedoms re-

³⁹ Harry Elmer Barnes, ed., *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: A Critical Examination of the Foreign Policy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and its Aftermath* (Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1953; reprinted., New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1969), viii.

⁴⁰ Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War 1941*, 578.

⁴¹ Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *A Basic History of the United States*, Enlarged and specially illustrated edition (The New Home Library, 1944; reprint ed., New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1950), 472-73.

duced and a burden of global empire to carry, but it had suffered little compared with the vanquished nations. These peoples were not granted humane terms of surrender and a civilized defeat by their “freedom loving” and “democratic” opponents. Only recently have atrocities and horrors come to light which were sometimes deliberately inflicted by the Allies on prostrate and defenseless German civilians during the early postwar period.⁴² Such cruelties came on top of the brutality of the last stages of the war itself, such as the merciless firebombing of Hamburg and Dresden.⁴³

*Postwar
atrocities
by Allies.*

With the hindsight of over half a century and with the opening of the Soviet archives in the 1990s, it has become clear which nation would benefit the most from the United States’ intervention. Allied leadership had one overriding purpose: the complete defeat of Germany. Whether by design or not, the destruction of Germany would create a power vacuum that Stalin’s Bolshevik regime could ruthlessly fill. That the United States assisted in this outcome is difficult to deny. That it was in part the result of deliberate effort is clear from all the revelations regarding Soviet agents and fellow travelers within the highest circles of power in the Roosevelt Administration. A related consideration is that United States intervention would have encountered much stronger opposition in the first place if what some historians have recently argued—that it was Stalin who first mobilized against Germany—had been a matter of public discussion. After becoming aware of the threat of imminent attack, so these scholars contend, Germany proceeded to strike first, catching the Red Army in an offensive mode and thus unprepared to fight a defensive war.⁴⁴

⁴² See the works of James Bacque, *Other Losses: An Investigation into the Mass Deaths of German Prisoners at the Hands of the French and Americans After World War II* (Toronto, Canada: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1989); idem, *Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians Under Allied Occupation 1944-1950* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company (Canada) Limited, 1997); Ralph Franklin Keeling, *Gruesome Harvest: The Allies’ Postwar War Against the German People* (Chicago: Institute of American Economics, 1947).

⁴³ F. J. P. Veale, *Advance to Barbarism: How the Reversion to Barbarism in Warfare and War-Trials Menaces Our Future* (Appleton, Wisconsin: C. C. Nelson Publishing Company, 1953).

⁴⁴ Viktor Suvorov (pseud.), *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?*, trans. Thomas B. Beattie (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1990); Albert L. Weeks, “Sixty Years After the Nazi-Soviet Pact,” *Modern Age: A Quarterly Review* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 220-39.

*Four Freedoms,
Atlantic
Charter
discarded in
war's settle-
ments.*

For much of Eastern and Central Europe, the defeat of “fascism” and the subsequent “liberation” by Soviet forces did not prove the blessing that Allied war propagandists had so glowingly promised. As Beard pointed out:

With regard to consequences in foreign affairs, the noble principles of the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter were, for practical purposes, discarded in the settlements which accompanied the progress, and followed the conclusion of the war. To the validity of this statement the treatment of peoples in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, China, Indo-China, Indonesia, Italy, Germany, and other places of the earth bears witness.⁴⁵

Although “victorious,” America faced a potentially more potent and dangerous foe than the nation it had just defeated: America’s “ally,” the Soviet Union. “[O]ut of the war,” Beard wrote, “came the triumph of another totalitarian regime no less despotic and ruthless than Hitler’s system, namely, Russia, possessing more than twice the population of prewar Germany, endowed with immense natural resources, astride Europe and Asia, employing bands of Quislings as terroristic in methods as any Hitler ever assembled, and insistently effectuating a political and economic ideology equally inimical to the democracy, liberties, and institutions of the United States—Russia, one of the most ruthless Leviathans in the long history of military empires.”⁴⁶

For those trapped behind what would become known as the Iron Curtain,⁴⁷ the ensuing decades would bring terrible hardships and miseries as economic collectivization transformed once-flourishing societies into Third World basket cases. In addition, secret police, trained and nurtured on Bolshevik terrorist and totalitarian methods, became a feature of everyday life.⁴⁸

America’s Pacific foe also met a grizzly fate as Hiroshima and

⁴⁵ Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War 1941*, 576-77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 577.

⁴⁷ The phrase “Iron Curtain” comes, of course, from Sir Winston Churchill, whose policies along with Roosevelt’s ultimately led to Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Yet, despite this, Sir Winston continues to receive favorable treatment among historians and the mainstream media and, in fact, was voted “Man of the Century” by *Time* magazine in 1950. See Ralph Raico’s devastating article, “Rethinking Churchill,” in John V. Denson, ed., *The Costs of War: America’s Pyrrhic Victories* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1997), 255-94.

⁴⁸ Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer, consulting editor Mark Kramer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Nagasaki suffered nuclear devastation. In Asia as in Europe lack of geopolitical acumen and general foresight resulted in huge Communist gains, for which much of the responsibility clearly lay with those in charge of American policy. The destruction of Japan and other actions created conditions favorable for the spread of Communism throughout the Far East, where a Marxist revolution in China and Soviet expansion went largely unopposed.⁴⁹

The one-sidedness of historians and others who to this very day speak and write glowingly of those who, intentionally or unintentionally, created these circumstances and of the war itself as a “noble cause” is extraordinary. Their arguments are in large part highly selective. Indeed, the malevolence sometimes displayed by the “victors” toward their foes, which is mostly overlooked in these treatises, raises the question whether, in practice at least, they had abandoned the faith of their fathers.⁵⁰

Economics and History

Although Beard’s predictions about the postwar world and his analysis of Roosevelt’s foreign policy have proven quite accurate, his understanding of the cause of the nation’s economic crisis and the way to recovery seem more often than not to have missed the mark. These shortcomings help explain why the forces aligned against Roosevelt’s drive for war ultimately failed.

Beard often asserted that Roosevelt’s bellicose foreign policy actions stemmed, in large measure, from the failure of the New Deal to ameliorate the nation’s financial woes and that they were undertaken to divert the public’s attention from the dismal performance of the Administration’s recovery program. Military involvement overseas would necessitate greater government spending, which coincided with the adherence of the Administration’s celebrated “Brain Trust” to then-fashionable Keynesian economic doctrines.⁵¹

Beard’s prescriptions for financial recovery were, in some

⁴⁹ Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, 62-63.

⁵⁰ See the works of Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994; New York: First Touchstone Edition, 1995); Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998); idem., *The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1999).

⁵¹ Kennedy, *Beard and American Foreign Policy*, 77.

Faulty
understand-
ing of
economic
situation
weakened
effectiveness
of antiwar
intellectuals.

ways, more radical and draconian than Roosevelt's. On a number of occasions he suggested that the economic crisis could only be solved by more collectivization and state planning.⁵²

Such views emanated, in part, from what Beard and others believed lay at the heart of the economic maladies. Beard maintained that it was the laissez-faire policies of the preceding years that precipitated the collapse and that, unless there were fundamental change, the economy was essentially doomed.⁵³

Such a position, though still held by many, is highly questionable. The economy in the decades prior to the Great Depression had not been nearly as unfettered by government as in earlier eras; the years leading up to the Depression were a period of increasing state control, regulation and taxation, especially in the critical realm of money and banking. Referred to as the "Progressive Era," it was not "progressive" with respect to economic and individual liberty as understood by liberals of an earlier era. The groundwork for a new, vastly expanded federal government had been laid with the enactment of the Sixteenth Amendment (allowing a federal income tax), the establishment of central banking (the Federal Reserve System), and the creation of a host of state and federal regulatory bodies.

The start of the twentieth century was a time of a grand alignment—or, as the late Professor Murray N. Rothbard said, "cozy alliance"—of government, Big Business, and intellectuals, which aimed at securing for each involved party a privileged and monopolistic status in American political, economic, and social life. Professor Rothbard writes:

I regard progressivism as basically a movement on behalf of Big Government in all walks of the economy and society, in a fusion or coalition between various groups of big businessmen, led by the House of Morgan, and rising groups of technocratic and statist intellectuals. In this fusion, the values and interests of both groups would be pursued through government. Big business would be able to use the government to cartelize the economy, restrict competition, and regulate production and prices. . . . Intellectuals would be able to use the government to restrict entry into their professions and to assume jobs in Big Government to apologize for, and to help plan and staff, government operations.⁵⁴

⁵² See *The Open Door at Home*, 305-20.

⁵³ Beard, *Basic History of the United States*, 452-53.

⁵⁴ Murray N. Rothbard, "World War I as Fulfillment: Power and the Intellectuals," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 81.

What historians such as Rothbard, Gabriel Kolko, and others have argued is that, despite their large size and seeming invincibility, many of the industrial giants at the time, in oil, steel, railroads, etc., were in fact losing market share to newer, lower-cost rivals. To insure their position the established firms turned to government for protection.⁵⁵ Despite the veneer of populist grass-roots pressure to provide “fair competition” and “market stability,” the flood of federal commissions, bureaus, and agencies created in the period (Federal Trade Commission, Food and Drug Administration, Federal Reserve System, Interstate Commerce Commission) actually served Big Business by thwarting its rivals. Far from exhibiting laissez faire, the American economic system of the time was rapidly becoming the “liberal corporate state,” or “monopoly capitalism.”⁵⁶

According to this view, the liberal corporate state was willing to go to war to protect its dominant business interests and “to wield a militaristic and imperialistic foreign policy to force open markets abroad and apply the sword of the State to protect foreign investments.”⁵⁷

In the area of money and finance, the creation of the Federal Reserve accomplished for bankers what the ICC, FTC, and FDA did for industry, but it did so to a far greater degree.⁵⁸ Just as businessmen are vulnerable to innovative, lower-cost rivals, banks have vulnerabilities of their own. Central banking was called for and supported by the major financial houses because it would remove the market checks that prevented them from “overextension” (the creation of fraudulent bank notes and credit) and diminish the fear of retribution.⁵⁹

By the early 1920s, the Federal Reserve had secured complete

⁵⁵ The classic treatment of this subject is Gabriel Kolko’s *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963; reprint ed., Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks/Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1967).

⁵⁶ James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968; reprint ed., Boston: Beacon Paperback, 1969); Burton W. Folsom, Jr., *The Myth of the Robber Barons*, 3rd ed. (Herndon, VA.: Young America’s Foundation, 1996).

⁵⁷ Rothbard, “World War I as Fulfillment,” 81.

⁵⁸ G. Edward Griffin, *The Creature from Jekyll Island: A Second Look at the Federal Reserve*, 3rd ed. (Westlake Village, CA: American Media, 1998).

⁵⁹ Murray N. Rothbard, *The Case Against the Fed* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1994).

*Governmental
intervention
in domestic
economics
conducive to
interventionist
policies abroad.*

control of the nation's money supply. It had begun a course of inflation through bank credit expansion. This policy ignited a "boom" which lasted the rest of the decade.⁶⁰ The inevitable bust followed, with the stock market crash and general financial panic. It can be argued that Roosevelt's *and* Hoover's recovery policies exacerbated the downturn and produced a full-fledged depression.⁶¹

That Beard, America First, and other loosely aligned groups opposing United States entry into the war failed to identify the underlying causes of the nation's economic difficulties and to offer coherent policies to correct them was one of the chief reasons why the New Deal's welfare/warfare policies survived. A non-interventionist and strictly defensive foreign policy is not the antithesis of a market economy but its natural outgrowth. A coalition devoted both to peaceful coexistence with all nations and to a minimal state at home might have headed off the New Deal and prevented the social engineering that followed.

The New Deal was another phase in the rise of the intrusive state and the subordination of religion, family, markets, education, and law to the dominance and, in some instances, total control of government. In America the tradition of hostility to and fear of the state's war-making power and its accompaniments—conscription, standing armies, taxation, empire—would all but evaporate with the country's entry into the Second World War. In retrospect, Beard and those in the neutrality camp can be seen to have represented the last broad-based movement opposed to twentieth century American statism.

Conclusion

By the time of his death, the transformation of liberalism had left Charles Beard in an ideological no-man's land. As postwar liberalism dropped all pretense of pacifism and opposition to empire and became decidedly more interventionist and leftist, antiwar liberals like Beard were unceremoniously shunted aside. By the

⁶⁰ Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, 4th ed. (New York: Richardson & Snyder, 1983).

⁶¹ Rothbard was one of the first to point out that, in his handling of the early stages of the Depression, Hoover was far from the proponent of laissez faire that many have accused him of being. See Part III of *America's Great Depression*.

war's conclusion, Beard had more allies on the "Old Right,"⁶² an amalgamation that consisted of individuals like Frank Chodorov, Albert Jay Nock, Robert Taft, and H. L. Mencken, who opposed the New Deal at home and its adventurism abroad. This coalition would in time fade away with the rise of a globalist anticommunist brand of conservatism, such as that of William F. Buckley, Jr., and, later, of those known as neoconservatives. Much of the Old Right either died out or became aligned with the contemporary libertarian movement.

American foreign policy continues on its often adventurous and violent course, but it is unlikely that a Beardian renaissance will soon occur. Much of the country's current approach to overseas affairs is built on the same assumptions and precepts that involved the United States in the last great war. Those, however, who are troubled by a sometimes insufficient American regard for peoples, institutions, and cultures of other lands and who would like a different, more peaceful approach should consider the historical judgment of Charles Beard in the later phase of his remarkable career.

⁶² This is the name affectionately given by Rothbard to this group of anti-New Dealers; see Llewellyn H. Rockwell, edited with an introduction, *The Irrepressible Rothbard: The Rothbard-Rockwell Report Essays of Murray N. Rothbard* (Burlingame, CA: The Center for Libertarian Studies, Inc., 2000), 3-20.