

**History 282 US Diplomatic  
Discussion Transcript for October 13, 2020  
FDR Diplomacy**

**Main Reading: Chapter 12, Herring**

Herring's discussion of US diplomacy leading up to World War II focused on the often-treacherous balancing act that President Roosevelt attempt to follow as he tried to promote a new kind of American internationalism even though isolationist sentiment was rising. The following selections come from student comments & questions.

**ON FDR'S LEADERSHIP**

STUDENT COMMENT: "I can't decide whether Franklin Roosevelt's leadership technics were hazardous or ingenious. Herring writes that in knowingly appointing conflicting personalities to competitive positions, Roosevelt "created a multiplicity of agencies with overlapping responsibilities, then watched with seeming glee as they engaged in bitter" turf wars (492). As the leader of a world power during one of the biggest economic crises in modern history, this style of competitive appointments seems counterproductive. One would think that without strong leadership, explicit agencies and common procedures, communication between government agencies would be weak, making work inefficient and unsuccessful. Additionally, arguing about who is in charge of doing the job leaves the job itself incomplete or behind schedule. On the other hand, having leaders with differing ideologies does not mean that they can't have a common goal. Having different viewpoints can be advantageous to agency success. Then there is the World Economic Conference in London, where it seems as though FDR counted on the failure of leadership for what he thought was success. His bizarre assemblage of delegates practically ensured the agreements would fall through, according to Herring."

**MULTIPLE CONTEXTS FOR THE GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY**

STUDENT COMMENT: "In September 1933 the Montevideo Conference was held, where the US came to an agreement with Latin states that "no state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another" and Hull boldly claimed that "no government need fear any intervention on the part of the United States under the Roosevelt administration" (499). The conference asserted that the US was there forth opposed to armed intervention in Latin America, and the US followed by eliminating conditions such as the Platt Amendment and a clause from the 10903 treaty with Panama which gave the US rights to intervene in internal affairs. In 1934, much due to the work of Hull, a Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act was pushed through Congress, which the authority lowering tariffs by up to percent. This act "helped to eliminate the customarily fierce congressional battles over tariffs and the log-rolling that went with them ... in the case of the Cuba and the Central American nations, they encouraged exports of US finished goods and the import of agricultural products like coffee, sugar, and tobacco, thus solidifying a quasi-colonial relationship that stunted their economic development and increased their dependence on the United States" (500-01). The new tariff policy strengthened the role of the US as a dominant power in hemispheric commerce and gave it strong economic influence over Latin American nations, but without the intervention methods which often came with Dollar Diplomacy."

STUDENT COMMENT: "President Hoover's hemispheric approach was the precursor of FDR's Good Neighbor policy; it was Hoover's administration that shifted towards a more respectful and less interventionist paradigm, in keeping with the post-WWI Republican approach of "involvement without commitment" (p. 436). It was actually Hoover who first "publicly used the phrase 'good neighbor,'" while visiting Latin America (p. 497). His administration oversaw US troop drawdowns in Nicaragua and Haiti, the latter of which would be completed under FDR (p. 497). Hoover's ultimate hemispheric policy goal, "commercial and financial arrangements to promote stability... and thereby create in the Western Hemisphere a model of world peace," (p. 497) presaged FDR and Secretary Hull's later initiatives designed to tie Latin American economies more closely to the United States (p. 500-501). This shift in policy was sharply contrasted with the beginning of the twentieth century, which saw the promulgation of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and multiple US interventions in the Caribbean and Central America, and one in Venezuela."

STUDENT COMMENT: "The Great Depression is a key to understanding the shift in attitude towards the Latin American population. It brought on a sense of commonality between the economic "superpower" that was the United States and the less prosperous nations of Latin America through the loss of jobs, economic decline, and rise in poverty that plagued America. This caused the US to "lose faith in its exceptionalism" leading to a much more accepting North American population of values, cultures different than their own, as seen with the "easing of deep-seated racial and anti-Catholic prejudices."

STUDENT COMMENT: "Herring also mentions various cultural interchanges that occurred during the time of the Good Neighbor policy including "cross-fertilization of ideas among intellectuals" (498). This "cross-fertilization" included the popularizing of Mexican art as well as Latin American movie stars in the United States. He also mentions an increase in trade due to the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934 which "helped triple U.S. trade with Latin America between 1931 and 1941" (501). This act, led by Hull, "encouraged the export of U.S. finished goods and the import of agricultural products like coffee, sugar, and tobacco" (501). The Good Neighbor policy also led to a "Inter-American conference in Buenos Aires" in 1936, helping to improve perceptions of the United States abroad and promoting a new relationship with Latin American nations. By promoting more stable relations between Latin America and the United States, the policy allowed for more accepting opinions of the U.S. from Latin Americans and vis versa, which allowed for an increase in the exchange of ideas and products.

## **AMERICA FIRST**

STUDENT COMMENT: "In order to overcome general isolationist sentiment to secure aid for Britain, FDR subtly convinced the Americans that they were in a state of

neutrality, while garnering public acceptance of participation in the war. He ensured that his actions were technically neutral, even though he was gathering executive power and assistance for Britain behind-the-scenes. For instance, FDR acquired an agreement to “ninety-nine-year leases for U.S. based on eight British territories... and to pledge publicly that Britain would not surrender its fleet” (522), even though “the deal did not provide immediate intangible assistance either to Britain or the United States” (523). He walked the line of neutrality, preparing for the moment in which the U.S. could jump to help. In the Battle of Britain, Americans watched and listened to the radio as the British withstood German air attacks (523), demonstrating a resistant spirit that resonated with their U.S. ideals. Their growing sympathy for the British cause softened their isolationist resolve, allowing FDR to proclaim that “Axis tyranny endangered the basic freedoms... The Western Hemisphere was threatened... As guardian of the Atlantic, Britain must be defended” (524), and later reveal Lend-Lease Aid for Great Britain. His political maneuverability nudged reluctant Americans out of their isolationist mindset into a rising desire to protect democracy and their ideology.”