

Lying Us into War? The Second Battle of Pearl Harbor

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT gripped the podium and stared with determination at the entire leadership of the U.S. federal government—the House, the Senate, and the Supreme Court—arrayed before him. In the glare of floodlights for newsreel cameras, interrupted by roars from the audience, he spoke of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the previous day, December 7, 1941, a “date which will live in infamy.” To the cheers of the crowd, he asked Congress to declare a state of war between the United States and Japan. The American people, he said, would fight to victory and make certain that “this form of treachery” would never endanger the country again.¹

But even before Roosevelt delivered his speech, some Americans began to suspect treachery of a different kind. In the view of some anti-interventionists, the Japanese assault was the event they had long feared, the “incident” that would allow Roosevelt to drag an unwilling country into war. On the night of the attack, Senator Gerald Nye proclaimed that the president had “maneuvered” the country into war, and the next day Col. Charles Lindbergh Jr. agreed with a friend who muttered that Roosevelt had gotten the United States into the European conflict through the Asian “back door.”² Later, Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce would voice the definitive phrase of the Roosevelt critics. The president, she said, “lied us into a war because he did not have the political courage to lead us into it.”³

These Roosevelt critics made some valid points. The president's foreign policy in Asia had been quite secretive. He had indeed made decisions that he knew might provoke the Japanese into an attack, and he made these decisions in response to events in Europe. After the raid, he pretended that he was as shocked by it as other Americans. Finally, he tried to bury key documents and to force the Pearl Harbor commanders to assume full responsibility for the disaster.

To this brew of governmental secrecy and lies, the anti-interventionists added their long-standing hatred of the president. They fumed at his official conspiracy theories about "enemies within our gates"; they suspected that he was using the newly expanded Federal Bureau of Investigation to spy on and intimidate loyal Americans who opposed his internationalist foreign policy. They believed that he wanted to enter the Second World War to sate his voracious appetite for power and create an American form of dictatorship. As they uncovered more examples of Roosevelt's deceit, their loathing for him grew, until they saw him as a murderer, a proto-fascist, and, at the same time, an unwitting agent for international communism. The Roosevelt critics would later spread the theory that the president provoked the Japanese into attacking Pearl Harbor, deliberately failed to warn the Hawaiian commanders that the raid was coming, and was relieved and even pleased when it occurred.

Roosevelt's disingenuousness, his cover-ups, and his sometimes secret, sometimes public expansion of presidential powers triggered a kind of mania in his enemies. Ultimately, they came to see him as a graver threat to the republic than the Japanese.

THE FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES assembled before Franklin Roosevelt for his Pearl Harbor speech wielded a lot more power—and shouldered many more responsibilities—than had their counterparts in the previous war. During the New Deal, the government's share of GNP roughly doubled, as did the number of government workers. All levels of government increased their expenditures to meet the crisis of the Great Depression, but the federal government grew proportionately faster than state and local governments. Meanwhile, Congress reduced exemptions for the working poor and raised tax rates for everyone, so more Americans paid taxes to support this burgeoning central government. As the federal budget grew from \$4.6 billion in 1932 to \$9 billion in 1940, the number of Americans filing income

Americans received an increasing number of benefits from the government in return for these taxes. Under Roosevelt's New Deal, the federal government took on unprecedented responsibilities for economic and social security. Through the creation of an "alphabet soup" of federal agencies, the government provided jobs to the unemployed, welfare and pensions to the unemployable, and protection for workers who wanted to use their collective power to demand better wages and conditions. The New Deal, as the historian David Kennedy has said, "gave to countless Americans who had never had much of it a sense of security, and with it a sense of having a stake in their country."⁵ Roosevelt's policies and personal style were phenomenally popular, with about 60 percent of voters consistently approving of his performance.⁶

Yet some Americans still despised Roosevelt. Conservatives never forgave him for signing the National Labor Relations Act, which gave government protection to unions. Some leftists, on the other hand, thought that Roosevelt should have made more radical changes, such as nationalizing the banks. Yet although progressives and conservatives disagreed on whether Roosevelt had done too much or too little, they all agreed on one point: the president seemed to have an ominous lust for power.

One-time liberals such as the journalist John T. Flynn, the historian Harry Elmer Barnes, and Senator Burton Wheeler, a Montana Democrat who had been one of the New Deal's most enthusiastic supporters in Congress, were horrified by Roosevelt's 1937 attempt to enlarge the Supreme Court. Flynn called the court-packing plan "the great massacre of the six old men," and Wheeler wrote in his memoirs that FDR's "unsubtle and anti-Constitution grab for power" reminded him of totalitarian dictators.⁷ They saw the president as a menace to the delicate checks and balances written into the supreme law of the land by the nation's founders.

Roosevelt's critics were also outraged by his efforts to retool the executive branch beginning in 1937. Branding his reorganization proposal the "dictator bill," Roosevelt's opponents claimed the bill would, as Representative Hamilton Fish said, "concentrate power in the hands of the President and set up a species of fascism or nazi-ism or an American form of dictatorship, far from the ideals of Jefferson and Lincoln." Another representative fulminated that the bill would pave the way for a "demagogue with personal power madness" to "assassinate the American Republic."⁸ In 1939, a majority of Congress disagreed with these critics and passed the

Reorganization Act, which allowed Roosevelt to create the Executive Office of the President and gave the chief executive more authority and staff.⁹

The opponents of the Reorganization Act worried about any president getting too much power, but they were particularly anxious about this president. Roosevelt's critics quite simply distrusted everything he said. He did seem to have a talent for genial deception; many people would leave an interview with him convinced that he supported them, only to feel betrayed later. Eleanor Roosevelt described this delicately as her husband's ability to take "color from whomever he was with, giving to each one something different of himself." She insisted that he did not intend to mislead anyone, but that he simply "disliked being disagreeable."¹⁰ The president himself admitted that he was a "juggler": "I never let my right hand know what my left hand does."¹¹

Roosevelt's critics, though, believed there was a simpler term for this: lying. He was, John T. Flynn wrote, a "thoroughly unscrupulous" man who would "ditch" allies and principles "with as little conscience as he ditched all his party platforms."¹² Charles Lindbergh Jr. later described him as "a man of great cleverness and little wisdom, personally vindictive, and politically immoral."¹³

In his critics' eyes, there was no lie Roosevelt would not tell, no means he would forswear, if it would help him to achieve his objectives. By the end of his second term, the president's enemies were most concerned about what they saw as his efforts to draw the United States into another war.

IN THE LATE 1930s, as the Japanese rampaged through China, Mussolini conquered Ethiopia, and Hitler took Czechoslovakia, Americans consistently told pollsters that they wanted nothing to do with these conflicts. Like Harry Barnes, Gerald Nye, and the other Great War revisionists, most Americans believed that the previous war had been a terrible mistake that should not be repeated. In the spring of 1941, when Britain stood alone against the Nazis, 81 percent of Americans said they wanted to stay out of war.¹⁴ Most Americans did put some limits on their isolationism: 62 percent said they would be willing to join the war if Britain would fall to the Nazis without U.S. intervention.¹⁵ But as late as November 1941, 31 percent opposed even providing more help to Britain and the Soviet Union by revising the Neutrality Acts. Until the very eve of the Pearl Harbor attack, one-third of the public was determined to do everything possible to avoid joining the war.¹⁶

The president was equally determined to do everything he could to help the British. A dedicated antifascist, Roosevelt had been suspicious of the Nazis from the moment they took power in 1933.¹⁷ He grew more uneasy and angry about Hitler's policies throughout the 1930s, but he was reluctant to challenge American public opinion. In 1938, the British ambassador to the United States explained that Roosevelt "is strongly anti-German and is revolted at what the German Government are doing but... at the same time he fully appreciated limitations which public opinion places on his policies and actions."¹⁸

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Roosevelt responded definitively to a reporter's question about whether the United States could avoid involvement. "I not only sincerely hope so, but I believe we can," he said, "and that every effort will be made by the Administration so to do."¹⁹ Before the 1940 election, he publicly maintained that he would not send American boys to die overseas, even as he grew privately convinced that U.S. security depended on British survival. "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again," he proclaimed. "Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars."²⁰ Roosevelt's enemies recalled this statement frequently, and with great bitterness, after Pearl Harbor. Even historians who sympathize with Roosevelt's internationalist views have characterized his pre-intervention public pronouncements as misleading and "deliberately disingenuous."²¹

The anti-interventionists were not surprised by Roosevelt's deceptions: they saw them as part of his campaign to expand the powers of the presidency. He had no sincere love for Chinese freedom or British democracy, they believed. In their view, he pretended to have these values only as a means to an end: to persuade the American people to support his drive for big government and total personal power. Roosevelt, Flynn wrote to Robert E. Wood, "will break his promises to England as quickly as he breaks them to the American people."²² Both Flynn and Harry Elmer Barnes, leading promoters of Pearl Harbor conspiracy theories in later years, firmly believed that Roosevelt planned to use the war to bring fascism to America.²³ To his critics, Roosevelt was starting a war scare as part of his plan to grab power at home. He wanted, Senator Hiram Johnson said, "to knock down two dictators in Europe, so that one may be firmly implanted in America."²⁴

A massive rearmament program fulfilled many of Roosevelt's nefarious goals, the critics believed: it camouflaged...

of his economic policies; it satisfied his lust for a strong Navy, which was essential for overseas adventures; and it fed his appetite for power. In their view, it was not the "merchants of death" who promoted a dangerous arms race, but a power-mad president who wanted to set the United States "on the road to dictatorship," as Senator Johnson said.²⁵ In his opponents' eyes, the very act of opposing Hitler transformed Roosevelt into an American Hitler.

As the real Hitler advanced in Europe, the anti-interventionists moved from dread to outright panic. Many had been counting the days until the end of Roosevelt's second term, only to be thrown into despondency after the Democratic convention of 1940 in Chicago. There, with the party bosses in control, the chief of the city's sewer system linked the amplifiers at the convention to a microphone in a room below the Chicago Stadium. At the crucial time, he began chanting, "We want Roosevelt!"—a cry that reverberated through the stadium. The "voice from the sewer," as it became known, led the delegates in drafting the president for an unprecedented third term.²⁶ Disgusted by the convention's "sham draft," FDR's critics continued to compare him to European dictators. During the campaign, some Republicans sported buttons that read "Third Reich. Third International Third Term."²⁷

In the eyes of the anti-interventionists, the president showed more evidence of his contempt for democracy in September 1940. That month as Hitler's bombs pounded London, Roosevelt announced that he had unilaterally and secretly reached an agreement with Prime Minister Winston Churchill to trade U.S. destroyers for British bases in the Western hemisphere. The president negotiated the deal on his own authority after his attorney general advised him that he had the constitutional authority to do so. The anti-interventionists disagreed, with Senator Nye calling the deal a "dictatorial step."²⁸ Many historians have viewed the deal as an essential effort to preserve national security at a time of crisis, but his opponents at the time feared that it was part of his plan to destroy the checks-and-balances system.²⁹ As Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. explained, "If the Executive can do these things without action by Congress, can he not also declare war without Congress?"³⁰

The day after Roosevelt announced the bases-destroyers deal, leading opponents of war formed the America First Committee, which would become the most significant group against intervention. Several activists

who would later promote World War II conspiracy theories, including John T. Flynn, joined the organization. The historians Charles Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes offered their support. America First attracted populists and conservatives, pacifists and extreme nationalists, millionaire businessmen and socialists.³¹

Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. was America First's most important spokesman. Dubbed the "Lone Eagle" by the newspapers after becoming the first person to fly alone across the Atlantic, he was one of the most recognized men in the world at the time. While visiting fascist Germany, Lindbergh was impressed by the Nazis' skill in aviation, their energy and efficiency, and their determination to stop communism. He heralded the Germans' technical achievements while ignoring the Nazis' crimes, especially their brutal treatment of the Jews. The German government rewarded him with the Service Cross of the German Eagle, the highest award given to a non-German.

Some America First members shared Lindbergh's admiration for the Nazis, but others despised them. The anti-interventionists were united, though, in their conviction that American intervention abroad would endanger democracy at home. A war with Germany would strengthen the U.S. presidency and weaken the strongest bulwark against Stalin in Europe. When measured against these dangers, Hitler's crimes against human beings thousands of miles from U.S. shores seemed slight to the anti-interventionists. And they were determined to thwart what they saw as Roosevelt's plan to pull them into the war.

After he won his third term, Roosevelt took his biggest step toward aiding Great Britain: he asked Congress to pass the Lend-Lease bill, which gave him the power to "lend, lease, or otherwise dispose of" supplies to any country he deemed essential to the defense of the United States.³² No longer would the British need to pay cash for their goods; the U.S. government would loan them whatever they needed. Despite Roosevelt's insistence that the law would help the country avoid war, the anti-interventionists knew that Lend-Lease signaled a turning point in U.S. foreign policy, and they put up a tremendous fight against it. They repeatedly invoked the "lessons of history" taught by the revisionists and the Nye Committee. Senator Wheeler, the leader of congressional forces against Lend-Lease, used arguments similar to those George Norris had made in 1917.³³ The "interests" were once again foisting "one war measure after another on

you, a peace-loving and unsuspecting people," he told Congress. The people should respond by refusing to play the game of the Morgans and the Rockefellers.³⁴ "Remember," Wheeler told his supporters, "the interventionists control the money bags, but you control the votes."³⁵

The anti-interventionists also stressed the dangers of a leviathan government in wartime, particularly the dangers of an imperial presidency. The peril to the republic, Lindbergh testified to a congressional committee, "lies not in an invasion from abroad. I believe it lies here at home in our own midst."³⁶ In other words, the real enemy was not the Nazis; it was the specter of the mobs that had terrorized his late father and of an American Hitler trying to impose fascism in the name of antifascism. Senator Nye decried Congress's willingness to surrender its constitutional purview to a "power-hungry executive" and reduce itself "to the impotence of another Reichstag."³⁷ If Congress was another Reichstag, then Roosevelt, by extension, must be another Hitler. The America First leaders maintained that the New Deal's centralizing bureaucrats wanted, as Senator Wheeler said, to "establish fascism in the United States."³⁸

The opponents of intervention saw the Second World War as a replay of the First, with both sides motivated by selfishness and greed.³⁹ Once again, British imperialists were tricking the peace-loving United States into sacrificing American lives so that the British could continue to rule "conquered and subject peoples in three continents," as Gen. Hugh Johnson said.⁴⁰ In June 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, the anti-interventionists saw even less reason for their nation to ally itself with Germany's enemies.

When they insisted that neither side in the war had a righteous cause, the anti-interventionists downplayed Hitler's brutal and increasingly genocidal policies against the Jews. Indeed, anti-Semitism was the elephant in the room that the more "responsible" anti-interventionists tried to ignore. Some, like John T. Flynn, tried to keep the most vehement anti-Semites out of America First. They also tried to persuade prominent Jews to join the organization.⁴¹ But Lindbergh laid bare the anti-Semitic core of anti-interventionism when he gave a speech in Des Moines in September 1941 that identified the three forces leading the country to war: the Roosevelt administration, the British, and the Jews. Lindbergh singled out the Jews for special criticism: "Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our Government."⁴²

Most newspapers and public officials condemned Lindbergh's speech—Wendell Willkie, the 1940 Republican nominee for president, called it "the most un-American talk made in my time by any person of national reputation"—and Flynn and some America First leaders were distressed by it.⁴³ But many anti-interventionists believed that Lindbergh had simply told the "truth," that, as the lawyer Amos Pinchot explained, "as a group, the Jews of America are for intervention."⁴⁴ These anti-interventionists shared Lindbergh's conviction that Americans would never willingly join a war against Germany; instead, they were being forced into it by selfish Brits, a lying executive, and Jewish warmongers. Though they insisted that these beliefs were not anti-Semitic, they ignored the long history of American anti-Semitism that lay behind Lindbergh's accusation.⁴⁵

In many ways, the anti-interventionists were, as the historian Manfred Jonas has said, "moving further and further away from reality."⁴⁶ They refused to see the differences between the First World War and the Second, between the British and the Nazis. They did, however, understand that the U.S. government was changing in immense—and, they believed, frightening—ways. Senator Robert Taft, the dean of anti-interventionist conservatives, argued that support for Britain would be the first step down a slippery slope to a national security state. "If we admit at all that we should take an active interest," he said in 1939, "we will be involved in perpetual war."⁴⁷ The United States would become more like European countries, with a powerful, centralized government launching wars around the globe. The increase in the coercive power of the government—to draft men, to commandeer resources, to suppress dissent—would imperil Americans' historic independence and autonomy. It would provoke the hysteria and mob violence that Wheeler and Lindbergh had witnessed firsthand in the previous war, while concentrating frightening powers in the president's hands. It would, as Wheeler said, "slit the throat of the last Democracy still living."⁴⁸

Roosevelt responded with some heated rhetoric of his own. Drawing on Woodrow Wilson's petulant description of the "little group of willful men" who opposed war, he called the America First leaders a "small group of selfish men who would clip the wings of the American eagle in order to feather their own nests."⁴⁹ He compared "Lone Eagle" Lindbergh to the Copperheads, the Confederate sympathizers in the North during the Civil War. In another speech, he proclaimed that "evil forces" were "already

within our own gates."⁵⁰ Like the attorneys general in the previous war, Thomas Gregory and A. Mitchell Palmer, he pledged that the government would wreak vengeance on those who would destroy it. Sometimes, he told the American people on the radio, the president needed to "use the sovereignty of Government to save Government."⁵¹

Radio was a new medium for spreading official theories about conspiracies, and FDR was the master of it. From his first Fireside Chat in 1933, Roosevelt realized that he could use radio to disseminate an unmediated message to Americans in their homes. Through his radio addresses, Roosevelt told Americans that their banks were safe, that the New Deal was working, and that the United States was not going to join the European war. He also used radio to attack the men he sincerely believed were part of a fifth column in America, an "unholy alliance" between the "extreme reactionary and the extreme radical elements of this country."⁵² Roosevelt's opponents also used the radio to spread their conspiracy theories; Father Charles Coughlin, for example, put together a network of stations to amplify his message that Jews were ruining the economy and dragging the country into war. But before he soured on the president and his "Jew Deal," Coughlin praised Roosevelt as a "natural born artist" with the radio.⁵³ The anti-interventionists worried that the charismatic president would exploit radio to convince Americans that his opponents were traitors and that he was justified in sending U.S. troops into the Nazis' line of fire.

By the fall of 1941, the president had unilaterally stationed U.S. troops in Greenland and Iceland and ordered Navy convoys to patrol the oceans near the Lend-Lease ships. As in the previous war, German U-Boats began firing on the U.S. ships that were helping the British. They also attacked the U.S. Navy convoys. On October 17, eleven sailors died when the Nazis torpedoed the *Kearny*, a U.S. destroyer. Two weeks later, the Germans sank the USS *Reuben James*, killing 115 sailors. Although Americans were now dying in the North Atlantic, Roosevelt still did not ask Congress for a declaration of war, for the good reason that he would not get it. A majority of Congress still opposed entering the war.

The president's critics seemed to be living in an alternate universe. Leaping from the undeniable (Roosevelt lied) to the unbelievable (he was a fascist), they were convinced that he and his warmongering supporters had no desire to save democracy. "What hypocrisy! What sham!" Burton Wheeler exclaimed. "Are you going to listen to these political and economic

royalists or will you heed those Americans who stand for peace?"⁵⁴ Nor, in their opinion, was Roosevelt sincere in his hatred of fascism; instead, he wanted to bring a brand of fascism to the United States and install himself as fuhrer.

In Wheeler's view, the president had his knife at the throat of American democracy. Roosevelt was just waiting for an incident that would give him the opportunity to plunge it in.

MOST ANTI-INTERVENTIONISTS assumed that this incident would occur in the Atlantic, where Germans were already shooting at and killing Americans. But there were some opponents of war, including John T. Flynn and former President Herbert Hoover, who worried even at the time that Roosevelt would enter the European war through the back door in Asia.

Tensions between the United States and Japan had been building since the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931. In 1937, when Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, most Americans sympathized with the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. Americans knew the Chinese from the popular Pearl S. Buck novel about noble peasants, *The Good Earth*, from reports by enthusiastic Christian missionaries, and from Henry Luce's *Time*, which celebrated Chiang's brave fighters against the ruthless invaders.⁵⁵ When the Japanese military bombed civilians in Shanghai and butchered an estimated two hundred thousand people in Nanking, Americans saw the images on their local movie screens, as reporters and newsreel cameramen risked their lives to document the Japanese atrocities.⁵⁶

To demonstrate American resolve against Japanese expansionism, Roosevelt moved the headquarters of the Pacific fleet from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in May 1940. Over the next year and a half, the level of hostility between the two countries steadily increased: the Japanese conquered more territory and people, while President Roosevelt embargoed the sale of defense-related items to Japan. In the summer of 1941, the United States stopped selling oil to the Japanese, despite some American policy makers' concerns that such an embargo could provoke Japan to attack the oil-rich East Indies.⁵⁷

These concerns were compelling. The Japanese viewed the U.S. oil embargo as an act of war. If the Americans did not restore the flow of oil soon, the Japanese military planned to grab the Dutch East Indies and achieve independence from American oil. But to take and control the East

Indies, they believed that they needed to knock out British and U.S. bases in the Pacific. As the military secretly prepared for this strike, Japanese diplomats in Washington made one last attempt to persuade the Americans to restore trade.⁵⁸

U.S. military leaders told the president that they needed more time to prepare for a war in the Pacific and urged him to follow a more conciliatory policy. But Roosevelt sided with the hard-liners in his cabinet who contended that the United States could not compromise on China. In part, the president felt morally compelled to help the Chinese; in part, he feared that a Chinese collapse would allow Japan to join Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union. And if the Soviet Union fell to fascism, Britain might follow.⁵⁹

While Germans and Americans moved toward war in the North Atlantic, negotiations with Japan reached an impasse. On November 26, Secretary of State Cordell Hull sent a ten-point note that Pearl Harbor conspiracists would later call the "Hull ultimatum." In it, Hull restated the American demand that the Japanese must get out of China and Southeast Asia if they wanted to restore the flow of imports from America. All of Roosevelt's advisers understood the consequences of this message. After a glum cabinet agreed to the wording, Henry Stimson, the secretary of war, made an entry in his diary that would become notorious. "The question was," he wrote, "how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves."⁶⁰

The Japanese did not need to be maneuvered; they were planning to fire the first shot. For months, Japanese military leaders had been preparing an intricate, multipronged attack. They would strike at Dutch oil fields in the East Indies, British forces in Malaya and Singapore, and U.S. air forces in the Philippines. The centerpiece of the plan was tactically bold and, if it worked, brilliant: a surprise assault on the U.S. fleet in Hawaii. Success depended on overcoming numerous technical problems: crossing thousands of miles of ocean undetected, launching airplanes hundreds of miles from their target, and dropping torpedoes from the air into a relatively shallow bay.

In late November, convinced that they could never reach agreement with the United States, Japanese military leaders ordered the commander of a strike force in the Kurile Islands to begin sailing east. The vessels set out on their 3,500-mile mission in total radio silence. The Japanese Navy took no chances that a panicked sailor might break the silence: officers

removed the radio transmission keys and took out some of the fuses. As the task force sailed for Pearl Harbor, the Imperial Navy started a "radio deception" program so that eavesdroppers from the U.S. Navy would think that the ships were actually in Japanese home waters.⁶¹

American naval officers did not know about the strike force, but they did know that the Japanese were preparing for war. Thanks to a stunning cryptological breakthrough, appropriately code-named "Magic," American code breakers had been reading Japanese diplomatic messages since the fall of 1940. Shortly before Pearl Harbor, Army cryptographers were reading between fifty and seventy-five cables a day from Tokyo. To keep the Japanese from learning that their codes had been broken, the U.S. government closely guarded the secret of Magic. The translators put the messages into locked briefcases and delivered them to a handful of top military and civilian officials.⁶² The Pearl Harbor commanders did not receive copies.

On November 27, because the Magic intercepts showed that Japanese diplomats expected war with America soon, the U.S. Army and Navy sent cautionary telegrams to U.S. military bases all over the world. "Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated to all practical purposes with only the barest possibilities that the Japanese Government might come back and offer to continue," wrote Gen. George Marshall in the Army's message. "Japanese future action unpredictable but hostile action possible at any moment." The Navy's telegram was even more blunt. "This despatch is to be considered a war warning," it announced in its first sentence.⁶³

In Hawaii, the top officers in both services, Gen. Walter Short and Adm. Husband E. Kimmel, received the messages but took little action. The two commanders were not on the Magic distribution list, so they did not understand the context of the message from Washington. Short thought that there was little chance of an attack on Hawaii and presumed that the message was intended primarily for Gen. Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines. Kimmel also thought that the Navy was warning him that Japan was going to "attack some place," but not Hawaii.⁶⁴ Indeed, the top Army and Navy officers anticipated a strike on British possessions or on the Philippines. No one from Washington called Hawaii to follow up on the telegrams.

On the evening of December 6, a Navy lieutenant carried a copy of the most significant Magic telegram to the president, who was working in his study with his aide Harry Hopkins. In the first thirteen parts of it—

fourteen-part message, Japan signaled its intention to reject U.S. demands that it leave China. Roosevelt took about ten minutes to read the sheaf of fifteen typed pages and then turned to Hopkins. This means war, the president said, essentially, and Hopkins agreed.⁶⁵

U.S. cryptographers never decoded a Japanese message saying "We will attack Pearl Harbor." In fact, the United States could not have intercepted such a message because Japanese diplomats never knew about the Imperial Navy's Pearl Harbor plans. If the United States had broken the Japanese naval code, then it might have been able to anticipate the attack (though some historians argue that even the naval messages did not provide enough information). But U.S. military leaders had devoted most of their cryptological resources to decoding the high-level diplomatic cables. As a result, American leaders knew only that war was coming somewhere, sometime soon.⁶⁶

Furthermore, all of the American leaders expected an attack on the Philippines, not Oahu. Several top officials began nonstop meetings on Sunday morning, December 7, as they figured out how to respond to a Japanese assault—an assault that seemed virtually certain once the fourteenth part of the Magic message to the Japanese diplomats in Washington was received and decoded that morning. The last part of this message stated that it was impossible for the United States and Japan to reach an agreement. Subsequent cables told them to deliver this message at 1 p.m. Washington time and to destroy their remaining code machine and ciphers.⁶⁷ If anyone questioned that the Japanese meant war, these last secret messages, snatched from the air by an intercept station in Seattle and swiftly decoded by panicked Americans in Washington, resolved those doubts. But no one tried to alert the Pearl commanders until less than an hour before the ominous 1 p.m. Eastern time deadline, or dawn in Hawaii, when General Marshall shunned the insecure telephone in favor of the radio.⁶⁸ A messenger delivered the crucial warning to General Short's office after the battle was over.

The results of the intelligence failure were catastrophic. The Japanese sank or disabled eighteen U.S. ships and destroyed almost two hundred U.S. airplanes. More than twenty-four hundred Americans were killed.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ATTACK, some public officials demanded to know how such a disaster could have occurred. As the president briefed top congressional leaders in the White House, Democratic Senator Tom

Connally became apoplectic. "Hell's fire, didn't we do anything?" he demanded of the president. He said he was astounded "at what happened to our Navy. They were all asleep."⁶⁹ Other members of Congress shared his anger. "There will have to be an explanation—sooner or later—and it had better be good," Congressman Roy Woodruff, a Republican from Michigan, told Congress the next day.⁷⁰

Caucasian Americans were especially shocked that Asians had successfully planned and executed the raid. British and U.S. military officers believed that the Japanese could never become skilled pilots because they lacked good eyesight and balance. Some U.S. officers initially thought that the Germans had planned the attack. When Japanese planes flew over the Philippines and destroyed U.S. planes still sitting on the tarmac, General MacArthur insisted that Japanese could not have been at the controls. It must have been white mercenaries, he concluded.⁷¹ Years later, when Congress investigated Pearl Harbor, some citizens continued to find it hard to believe that the "dumb Japs" could by themselves win such a stunning military victory.⁷²

But Americans did not have the luxury of dwelling on doubts or questions at the time. On December 8, the president rallied the nation to war with his eloquent speech before Congress. As the historian Emily Rosenberg has shown, he portrayed Pearl Harbor as an outrage against civilization by a barbaric foe, a modern Alamo or Custer's Last Stand.⁷³ By framing the attack as a stab in the back, Roosevelt hoped to unite the nation behind him.

Supporters of the administration acted swiftly to quash any discussion of incompetence or conspiracy. The chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, Senator David I. Walsh of Massachusetts, told his colleagues that they must trust the president. "My God!" he exclaimed. "We have no other course but to throw ourselves and all that we have—heart, soul, body, mind, and all our possessions, into his hands, for him to use as our war President."⁷⁴ Americans agreed that the nation needed to have confidence in the executive. For more than a week, the Navy did not announce how many ships had been sunk at Pearl Harbor, and a vast majority of citizens told pollsters that they believed that this secrecy was necessary.⁷⁵

But even at this early hour, the Roosevelt administration realized that calls to patriotism and unity were not enough. If the president hoped to avoid a congressional investigation of the Pearl Harbor disaster, he would

have to start an inquiry of his own. After a brief Navy probe, the president announced on December 16 that he had appointed a five-man commission to investigate Pearl Harbor. Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts, a Republican, chaired the review. In proposing this inquiry, President Roosevelt set a precedent that would inspire his successors to appoint the Warren Commission, the Rockefeller Commission, the 9/11 Commission, and other, lesser panels of elder statesmen to investigate national disasters—and to avert investigations by Congress. All these commissions were designed to prevent the emergence of conspiracy theories, but their apparent role as official whitewashes often provoked even greater skepticism.⁷⁶

The Roberts Commission had a very narrowly defined mission: to determine if any errors by U.S. military officials contributed to the disaster. The commissioners were not asked to investigate the possible mistakes by civilian leaders in Washington, nor were they told of Magic. This approach was convenient for Washington officials, but it was also essential for the war effort: the Japanese were still sending their diplomatic messages in the same, compromised code, and any revelation of the prewar decryptations could jeopardize wartime intelligence collection. Moreover, the Japanese naval code was beginning to yield its secrets to U.S. cryptographers, whose efforts would prove invaluable to the U.S. Navy in later battles. The concealment of Magic not only saved the Roosevelt administration from embarrassment; it also saved American lives. After five weeks of investigation, the commission issued a report that predictably blamed the two Hawaii commanders for errors of judgment.⁷⁷

Most members of Congress and the media accepted the Roberts report. But there were some Americans who remained skeptical of the official story and were determined to prove it false.

HARRY ELMER BARNES and John T. Flynn were the natural leaders of the World War II conspiracist community. Because they had vociferously opposed U.S. intervention in the war until the day of the attack, they saw Pearl Harbor as a personal humiliation as well as a national tragedy. Moreover, they shared another characteristic of early Pearl conspiracists: a deep, visceral hatred of Franklin Roosevelt and a belief that he would use any means necessary—even murder—to achieve his goals.

The revisionist community of the Second World War rested on the shoulders of Barnes, the “Atlas” of Revisionism,” as he proudly called him-

self in his later years.⁷⁸ Barnes’s strident anti-interventionism had caused the *New York World-Telegram* to drop his column in 1940 in response to what Barnes believed was pressure from “the war-mongers,” British intelligence, and the Morgan bank. He bitterly reflected that if the United States entered the war, “there will be no need of columnists in a few years. The columns will be furnished by the Department of Propaganda.”⁷⁹

In the first year and a half of the war, Barnes had to mute his suspicions about the president and the war as the country rallied round the troops. Even the publishers of his textbooks asked him to rewrite certain sections to make them more patriotic.⁸⁰ But by 1943, as the military tide turned and an eventual U.S. victory seemed likely, some Roosevelt opponents began encouraging Barnes to turn his skeptical eye to the current war. Charles Tansill, a conservative historian and later Pearl Harbor conspiracist, urged Barnes to write a revisionist work, as did William Neumann, a young pacifist historian who had been inspired by Barnes’s earlier books. “I had thought that the work that you and others did in the ‘20s and ‘30s might forestall a reoccurrence,” wrote Neumann, “but the comedy begins anew.”⁸¹

Barnes quickly set to work assembling a community of scholars and journalists who were skeptical about the official version of U.S. entry into the war. He corresponded with several like-minded historians, all of them prewar anti-interventionists, and provided them with encouragement, information, and connections. As he networked with prominent scholars and novices alike, Barnes also trolled for money for his project from Robert E. Wood, the Sears, Roebuck CEO who had led and helped to bankroll the America First movement.⁸² Ultimately, Barnes’s friends and colleagues would write some of the most influential early Pearl Harbor revisionist works.⁸³ His goal was stunningly ambitious: in the midst of total war, he hoped to persuade the American people that their commander-in-chief was a would-be dictator who had ruthlessly allowed twenty-four hundred Americans to be murdered so that he could pursue his imperial ambitions.

One of Barnes’s most significant correspondents was his comrade in the lost cause of isolationism, John T. Flynn.⁸⁴ Like Barnes, Flynn had a personal stake in showing that the war he had so fervently resisted was based on a lie. Also like Barnes, Flynn had paid a professional price for his unyielding isolationism in 1940, when the *New Republic* “liquidated” his column.⁸⁵ Undaunted, he continued to criticize the Roosevelt administration. In 1943, he succeeded in finding a publisher for *As We Go Marching*.

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a book-length polemic on the alleged fascist tendencies of the New Deal. Flynn sent his manuscript to Barnes, who responded with four typewritten, single-spaced pages of suggestions and praise. The book did not mention Pearl Harbor, as Flynn had no evidence yet to confirm his deep suspicions of conspiracy. Barnes had no evidence, either, but he did urge Flynn to stress "FDR's indomitable and boundless will to power, and his utter opportunism."⁸⁶

While Barnes and Flynn nursed their grievances and suspicions in the early years of the war, another man with a strong personal interest in Pearl Harbor began preparing his plans to refute the official story. Up until the early morning hours of December 7, 1941, Adm. Husband E. Kimmel had enjoyed a sterling career. The son of a Confederate officer, he had served with distinction in World War I and worked briefly as an aide to Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin Roosevelt. In February 1941, he assumed command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.⁸⁷ At the time of the Japanese attack, Kimmel seemed destined for even greater glory.

Yet along with General Short, Kimmel found himself sharing the blame for the military's lack of preparedness at Pearl Harbor. At first, Kimmel believed it was his patriotic duty to accept responsibility. Like Short, he reluctantly submitted his resignation after the Roberts report, thinking that his early retirement would bring his period of disgrace to an end.

He was wrong. In an uncharacteristic display of political ineptitude, President Roosevelt startled his war and Navy secretaries in late February 1942 by deciding that the Hawaiian commanders should be court-martialed. The trials would be held after the war.⁸⁸ Roosevelt apparently believed strongly that Kimmel and Short were responsible for the large number of casualties and wanted them punished. But Kimmel's continued willingness to accept blame with silence and grace was dependent on the Navy's willingness to limit his punishment. Now he felt betrayed. "I do not wish to embarrass the government in the conduct of the war," he wrote. "I do feel, however, that my crucifixion before the public has about reached the limit."⁸⁹

Kimmel argued that it was only fair for the Navy to hold his court martial immediately. That way, he could face his accusers and clear his name. But the Roosevelt administration insisted that wartime trials would endanger national secrets. Starting in the fall of 1943, Congress revisited the Pearl Harbor court martial issue every six months, as it debated

whether to keep extending the statute of limitations for prosecution of the two commanders. Each time, the debates provided opportunities for the president's critics to discuss the broader issue of whom to blame for the disaster.⁹⁰ In June 1944, amid the partisan rancor of an election year, Congress agreed to delay the trials once again, but only if the Army and Navy launched new Pearl Harbor investigations. To avoid the appearance of a cover-up, Roosevelt reluctantly agreed to the new inquiries. By this time, Kimmel was so enraged that he refused to accept any responsibility at all for the catastrophe.⁹¹

As the first post-Pearl Harbor presidential election approached in 1944, Kimmel discovered that he might use partisan politics to help his cause. It was a difficult election for the Republicans because any attacks on the president's current war policy seemed unpatriotic, while criticism of domestic policies seemed irrelevant. The solution, some activists urged, was to assail Roosevelt's *prewar* foreign policy and suggest that a different president might have kept the country out of war, or, at the least, been better prepared at its start. In the spring, as the party united behind New York governor Thomas Dewey, Republican leaders began exploring the possibility of using Pearl Harbor as a campaign issue.

Knowing of Kimmel's anger, a Republican Party staffer, George H. E. Smith, approached the admiral's lawyer and began working closely with him to prepare a precise chronology of what key officials knew and when they knew it.⁹² Excited by the partisan possibilities, Smith reported back to his party's bosses that the catastrophe could be portrayed as a lethal example of New Deal incompetence. "It can be shown with telling documentation," he wrote, "that the Roosevelt pre-war approach to foreign policy was so stupid and inept that it constituted a danger to American interests and to world peace which contributed to the ultimate outbreak of war."⁹³

Meanwhile, Flynn and Barnes also contacted the Republicans. Flynn worked as a consultant for the GOP, giving speeches and writing essays that amplified his argument that the New Deal was essentially fascistic. He proclaimed that Roosevelt's reelection would mean the triumph of the "unholy alliance of corrupt politicians interested in jobs and reckless radical zealots interested in revolution."⁹⁴ Yet Flynn's arguments were tame compared to Barnes's polemics. In a letter to Bruce Barton, a party official and advertising executive, Barnes told the Republicans it was time for them to stop acting like a "Quaker deaconess" and start telling the truth

about the president. Roosevelt had, in fact, caused "the murder and maiming of thousands—perhaps millions—of American boys in a deliberately-provoked and futile war."⁹⁵ Barton responded calmly that Dewey could not attack the commander in chief on war policy. With ten million men in the armed services, he said, Americans "do not want to hear anything about the war except that it is being won and that their boys therefore are each day nearer home."⁹⁶

Despite the universal desire to support the troops, the drumbeat of accusations about a possible White House conspiracy continued. With two months left to go in the campaign, Senators Burton Wheeler and Henrik Shipstead proposed a Senate investigation of allegations that Roosevelt had ordered the imprisonment of a U.S. code clerk who could prove that the president was lying about prewar aid to Britain. Tyler Kent, a former employee of the U.S. embassy in London, had been convicted in Britain of spying for the Nazis. But Kent's mother insisted that his real crime was his knowledge of secret messages exchanged between Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.⁹⁷ The Senate declined to investigate Kent's patently self-serving and false defense.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, in the House, Republican congressmen began demanding answers from the White House on Pearl Harbor. In a speech clearly influenced by Smith's research, Representative Hugh Scott posed twenty-four troubling questions about intelligence failures before the war. Scott used awkward, tentative phrasing, but behind his use of the passive voice lurked unmistakably aggressive intentions. There were reports, he said, that the U.S. government had received warnings of the Pearl Harbor attack from the Korean underground, Australian intelligence, and a U.S. naval officer. And yet the government had done nothing.⁹⁹ Implicitly, Scott was raising the big question: Was the president so willfully blind to all signs of a Japanese conspiracy because he was remarkably stupid, or, indeed, was he the most diabolical conspirator of them all?

Flynn also struggled with this question. He and other Roosevelt critics feared that a fourth term for Roosevelt might mean the end of American democracy. Charles Lindbergh even worried that the president might cancel the election and appoint himself dictator. Deeply fearful of the consequences of a Democratic victory, Flynn decided it was time to write what he and other Pearl Harbor critics knew about the background to the attack. With just weeks to go before the election, he convinced the archconserva-

tive, formerly isolationist *Chicago Tribune* to publish the first revisionist account of the origins of World War II.

"The Truth about Pearl Harbor" contained the essential outlines of later Pearl Harbor conspiracy theories. According to Flynn, Roosevelt had goaded the Japanese into attacking—and had indeed known that an attack was imminent—but had done nothing to warn the commanders at Pearl. Afterward, he and his secretary of state proceeded to cover up their ineptitude and impose on "two helpless officers the odium of their guilt."¹⁰⁰ The *Tribune* called it an "overpowering" exposé of "a governing clique seeking to save itself from disgrace by damning innocent men."¹⁰¹ Flynn printed thirty thousand copies of the article and sent one "to every publisher and every editor in [the] country, to every commentator, columnist and news service," along with every congressman and senator and "large numbers of influential private persons." He hoped to force a congressional inquiry.¹⁰²

Although Flynn accused Roosevelt of needlessly provoking war, he did not think that the president knew when and where the attack would come. Indeed, there was no evidence that he did. But as Flynn composed his article, Republican leaders were learning a national secret, a secret that potentially could lead to credible evidence of a deeper conspiracy. Someone privy to the military inquiries told them about Magic.

THE MAGIC CABLES would provide tantalizing evidence to Pearl Harbor conspiracists that the government was covering up the truth. The president's critics were looking for evidence of conspiracy before they ever heard of Magic. Its revelation just confirmed their beliefs.

For much of the war, only a few top officials and intelligence analysts knew about Magic. But bits of information about the program began to leak in the summer of 1944 as the Army and Navy continued their congressionally mandated inquiries.¹⁰³ The Army Board was particularly interested in reading the Magic cables, but the White House refused to give the investigators the most important decrypts. The Army investigators were intrigued, they knew that these potentially explosive documents existed, but they did not know exactly what they said.

With the investigations continuing and the presidential election heating up, a partisan leak was inevitable. In late September, six weeks before the election, Governor Dewey heard about Magic. He later said that a "number of individuals" had leaked him the information and told him it

was his "duty to expose the facts so that the people might make their choice in the election on the basis of full knowledge of the dreadful incompetence or misconduct of the national administration."¹⁰⁴

The leak put Dewey in a bind. He wanted to persuade the voters that Roosevelt had been incompetent or worse before Pearl Harbor. But he did not want to appear to be leaking national secrets in the midst of war. When he launched a slashing but somewhat vague attack on Roosevelt's "desperately bad" prewar foreign policy, the president and his advisers moved swiftly to shut him up.¹⁰⁵

On September 26, an aide to Gen. George Marshall flew from Washington to Oklahoma to deliver a sealed letter to the candidate from the supreme Army commander of America's war. Marshall's letter began by ordering Dewey to stop reading unless he was prepared to keep the secrets about to be revealed to him. A smart man, Dewey sensed a trap: What if the letter "revealed" what he already knew? By consenting to the conditions, he would agree to muzzle himself. Handing the letter back, he told the aide that he would be "happy to talk to General Marshall on any matter if he so desired" but that he was not prepared to make "blind commitments."¹⁰⁶

Two days later, Marshall's aide visited Dewey again, this time at the governor's mansion in Albany. The general had written another letter, this time acknowledging that Dewey had the right to disclose any information he already knew. Despite grave misgivings, Dewey finally agreed to read the letter and learn the administration's arguments against telling the public what he had learned about Pearl Harbor.

In the letter, Marshall revealed the U.S. government's success in breaking the Japanese code. The Magic intercepts had been extremely significant, he said, but had not told the government that an attack would come in Hawaii. The whole Magic story was thus irrelevant to understanding Pearl Harbor. Moreover, it could not be made public. The Japanese, the general explained, had no idea that the United States had broken the code, and *they were still using it*. As a true patriot, Dewey was honor-bound to keep the secret for the good of the country.¹⁰⁷

Dewey found this hard to believe. The Japanese had not changed their codes in three years? Actually, Marshall was telling the truth: Japanese diplomats did continue to send significant messages in the prewar code, and much of the U.S. military's knowledge of Hitler's plans in Europe came from the dispatches of the Japanese ambassador in Berlin.¹⁰⁸ Even more important, US

code breakers worried that the disclosure of the Magic deciphering machine would alert the Japanese that the United States had broken their naval codes after Pearl Harbor. The United States had won the Battle of Midway because of this intelligence coup, which provided a window on Japanese planning.¹⁰⁹ But Dewey did not entirely believe Marshall on this point. Convinced that Roosevelt was a "traitor" who deserved impeachment because of Pearl Harbor, he felt justified in doing all he could to force the man from office.¹¹⁰ He knew, though, that he had no choice but to abandon this line of attack. If he kept quiet, he lost a valuable campaign issue, but if he revealed the information, the administration could justifiably accuse him of treason.

The Pearl Harbor critics were stunned in November 1944 when Roosevelt won another vote of confidence from the American people, defeating Dewey 53 to 46 percent in the popular vote. As the president's party won its seventh straight national election, Roosevelt's critics remained shut out of power. They were marginalized; and people on the margins are most inclined to see conspiracies against them.

THE PRESIDENT'S CONTINUED popularity mystified his critics. Why were the American people so resistant to their message? The obvious answer, of course, was that they were attacking a popular president during a necessary war. But FDR's critics saw their failure differently. It was the result of a plot—a plot against America. In their mind, a cabal of government agents, media provocateurs, and antifascist activists were part of the plot. It was the critics' task to unmask these conspirators. In this way, they—the unfairly maligned opponents—could regain control. But they had to be careful in their quest to expose the true story of the Roosevelt administration. "Any discussion of this enterprise should be highly confidential," Barnes told Robert Wood, "for if there is anything the powers that be fear it is a calm exposition of the facts."¹¹¹ The truth could set them free. It could also prompt the FBI to start a file on them.

The Pearl Harbor skeptics had good reason to believe the government was out to get them, for indeed it was. After the excesses of World War I and the early postwar years, Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone in 1924 had appointed young J. Edgar Hoover to head the Bureau of Investigation and strictly limited it to "investigations of violations of law." But during the New Deal, Hoover's newly expanded Federal Bureau of Investigation moved back into the business of spying on the "ideas and associations" of potential dissenters.¹¹²

Roosevelt first directed the bureau to begin systematically collecting intelligence on "subversive activities in the United States" in 1936. As a U.S. Senate committee later noted, Roosevelt's failure to define "subversive activities" for the bureau laid the groundwork for decades of "excessive intelligence gathering about Americans."¹¹³ The president made this decision unilaterally and secretly, at Hoover's suggestion. Indeed, as Hoover explained in a memo in 1938, it was "imperative" to keep the domestic spying program secret, not to thwart foreign spies, who undoubtedly knew they were being followed, but "to avoid criticism or objections which might be raised to such an expansion by either ill-informed persons or individuals having some ulterior motive."¹¹⁴ These "ill-informed persons" were apparently members of Congress.

Once the war began in Europe in 1939, Roosevelt and Hoover shared an obsession with identifying potential subversives. As the director of the agency charged with stopping subversion, Hoover took responsibility for spreading public fear and offering his bureau as an antidote to that fear "It is known," Hoover told Congress five days after the war began, "that many foreign agents roam at will in a nation which loves peace and hates war. At this moment lecherous enemies of American society are seeking to pollute our atmosphere of freedom and liberty."¹¹⁵ He then asked for, and received, more money from Congress to fight these enemies. In effect, as the civil liberties activist Frank Donner has noted, Hoover was making himself into the U.S. minister of internal security.¹¹⁶

The president saw potential benefits in expanding Hoover's budget and authority. In 1940, as the war raged in Europe and the "Great Debate" over intervention raged at home, Roosevelt broadened the definition of "subversive activities" to include sending hostile telegrams to the president. "As the telegrams all were more or less in opposition to national defense," his press secretary, Steve Early, wrote to Hoover, "the President thought you might like to look them over, noting the names and addresses of the senders."¹¹⁷ Hoover obliged, and Roosevelt thanked him for the "interesting and valuable" reports.¹¹⁸ The president also ordered the FBI to tap the phones of people who might later engage in subversive activities.¹¹⁹ Congress had explicitly prohibited wiretapping, but Roosevelt's attorney general at the time approved the FBI's wiretap program. The law, he said, made it illegal to "intercept and divulge" communication, and the government had no intention of divulging the information—except, of course, to other parts of the government.¹²⁰

Roosevelt ordered Hoover to wiretap, bug, and physically spy on his anti-interventionist opponents during the Lend-Lease debate of early 1941.¹²¹ He contended that they must be getting money from the nation's enemies. Hoover complied with reports on Senator Nye, Senator Wheeler, Colonel Lindbergh, and the America First Committee, among others. In a clear case of harassment, the Internal Revenue Bureau also investigated the finances of America First without giving a reason for the inquiry.¹²²

The FBI's reports on the anti-interventionists were filled with gossip about the president's political opponents but contained no evidence of illegal activity or foreign connections. The surveillance did, however, help the government collect political intelligence. Ironically, considering Hoover's diligence, Roosevelt was not content with the FBI reports alone, and soon hired his own personal spy, the former journalist John Franklin Carter, and attached him to the State Department. Paid with "special emergency" funds, Carter amassed a staff of eleven men charged with spying on the president's enemies. Hoover was furious and began spying on FDR's spy.¹²³

With Hoover's assistance, Roosevelt used taxpayer money and federal bureaucrats to investigate and harass his political enemies. To Flynn, the president's expansion of the FBI was part of his plan to establish a police state and drag the country into war. "You have to terrify the people before they will authorize military expenditures," he wrote to Senator Bennett Clark in 1940. "This is part of that program."¹²⁴ Roosevelt may have sincerely believed—or else convinced himself that he believed—that he needed to monitor and suppress his enemies at a time of national emergency. In his opponents' eyes, though, he was concocting a phony emergency to expand his power.

At the same time the FBI expanded its secret surveillance of dissidents, the Justice Department publicly pursued opponents of war by prosecuting thirty right-wing leaders for wartime conspiracy. In *U.S. v. McWilliams*, the government charged a motley collection of fascist intellectuals and Hitler sympathizers with spreading propaganda to further the international Nazi conspiracy. The indictment was clearly an abuse of prosecutorial authority. Though most of the defendants were anti-Semites, the government could not prove that they had received money or instructions from abroad. Most of the alleged "conspirators" had never even met before the trial. In a brazen act of intimidation, the special prosecutor darkly hinted that he

might add Senator Burton Wheeler to the list of alleged seditionists. The case quickly descended into farce as the defendants made a mockery of the proceedings. After seven months of trying to control the shouted objections, befuddled witnesses, and ad hominem attacks, the trial judge dropped dead of a heart attack. His successor declared a mistrial, and the Justice Department ultimately abandoned the case.¹²⁵

In retrospect, the Roosevelt administration's bumbling attempts to prosecute American fascists seems to prove its ineptitude at conspiring against its most extreme opponents. But former anti-interventionists viewed the case as yet another confirmation of the New Deal's totalitarian tendencies. As Harry Elmer Barnes wrote to Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, this "frame-up makes the Reichstag Fire Trials seem fairly respectable jurisprudence and equitable criminal procedure by comparison."¹²⁶

While the government tried to criminalize their dissent, the Pearl Harbor critics believed, the Jewish-owned media prevented them from publishing their criticism of the president. Ignoring the enormous power of the Hearst and Patterson-McCormick press, the anti-interventionists believed that Jewish-controlled newspapers, magazines, and commentators defined the public debate and managed everything that Americans saw, heard, and read about Roosevelt. This helped to explain why FDR, the enemy of America, had been elected president four times.

In the view of the anti-interventionists, the Jews' most important weapon in the propaganda wars was their control of Hollywood. Before Pearl Harbor, prominent anti-interventionists believed that Jewish movie moguls tried to manipulate the public by making pro-British and anti-Nazi movies. Flynn helped Senators Wheeler and Nye to launch an investigation of alleged Hollywood pro-war propaganda just months before the United States entered the war. The anti-interventionists feared that their opponents would use this tool of mass persuasion to push their own un-American agenda.¹²⁷ Flynn believed that antifascist movie producers were "the most potent and dangerous fifth column in America."¹²⁸

Flynn and other mainstream Pearl Harbor conspiracists had a complicated relationship to anti-Semitism. They repeatedly and publicly disavowed any prejudice against Jews. Flynn in particular repudiated American Nazis, worrying that the public would associate him with them. Yet his declarations of concern for American Jews always had a menacing undertone. If

the Jews knew what was good for them, he often said, they would stop provoking the rest of us. Otherwise, the victimized conservatives would rise up against "minority groups," and Jews would find that their paranoid fantasies had become reality.¹²⁹

Flynn nursed such intense hatred of "Jewish Hollywood" because he believed that his political enemies controlled the modern media, and thus controlled the public's understanding of the war. Flynn and his friends still had access to the print media; even after the *New Republic* cancelled his column, he could publish in the *Chicago Tribune* and with right-wing publishing houses. But his opponents seemed to command the attention of the new media, radio and motion pictures. "The moving picture industry," wrote Flynn in a confidential memo to the America First Executive Committee just months before Pearl Harbor, "went out 100 per cent for war propaganda pictures. The radio gave time to some of our speakers but filled in the space between with a ceaseless flow of propaganda."¹³⁰ In his view, FDR and the Jews of Hollywood had the unchallenged authority to tell the story of the war—and the story of its supposedly un-American opponents.

As if persecution by the Jews and the government were not enough, the old anti-interventionists also felt besieged by antifascist activists. These American opponents of Hitler had organized in pro-intervention groups in the late 1930s as the crisis in Europe escalated. One of the loudest voices for intervention was the Friends of Democracy, whose national committee included such luminaries as the German-born writer Thomas Mann and the philosopher John Dewey. L. M. Birkhead, a former minister who served as national director, accused America First of harboring Nazis and giving "aid and comfort" to Hitler.¹³¹

Once the war started, the antifascists intensified their attacks. Several wrote salacious exposés that accused prewar anti-interventionists of promoting un-American ideas. Although anti-interventionists claimed that they wanted to save the republic, the authors argued, in fact they were engaged in a "plot against America." In *Sabotage! The Secret War against America*, Albert E. Kahn and Michael Sayers alleged that Nazis secretly controlled America First and manipulated anti-interventionist congressmen. Other anti-isolationist books took the classic form of the diary of an undercover agent. Richard Rollins's *I Find Treason*, for example, told the story of his infiltration of the American Nazis. The most popular book-length exposé

was *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America—The Amazing Revelation of How Axis Agents and Our Enemies Within Are Now Plotting to Destroy the United States*, by the antifascist activist Avedis Derounian, writing under the name John Roy Carlson. A gripping tale of the author's secret involvement in America First and other right-wing organizations, *Under Cover* sold more than a million copies and became the best-selling nonfiction book of 1944.¹³²

Under Cover infuriated the former anti-interventionists. They believed that they represented the only citizens who truly put America first, yet now their enemies were calling *them* unpatriotic. The former America First members mobilized to prevent the antifascist activists from maligning the true Americans. "We must say to the bureaucrats and the crackpots and the Communists and all of the disciples of totalitarianism," said Texas Congressman Martin Dies, "Americanism must live, America shall live." Behind the antifascist exposés, Dies saw a "well-organized and highly financed conspiracy."¹³³

Flynn responded with a well-organized and highly financed conspiracy to discredit the antifascists. He secretly raised money from rich industrialists to hire investigators to dig up dirt on *Under Cover's* author, the "alien-born" Derounian.¹³⁴ He hoped to raise \$50,000 to turn the public against the antifascists. Flynn also published numerous articles and two long pamphlets on Derounian and his "smear terror." In a mirror image of Derounian's technique, Flynn portrayed the "smear conspiracy" as an un-American attempt to divide the country.¹³⁵ He encouraged Senator Wheeler to fight for a congressional investigation of the antifascists, "pitched on the theory, which is true, that there is some power, cloaked in secrecy and financed in some secret way, which is carrying on a campaign of slander and traduction against American citizens in positions of leadership."¹³⁶ Congress declined to fund Wheeler's request.

Flynn apparently saw no irony in demanding a congressional investigation of antifascists as America fought a war against fascism. In his Alice-in-Wonderland view of the war, the American fascist sympathizers on trial in *U.S. v. McWilliams* were the victims of a government run amok. The real villains of the war were the Americans who were *excessively anti-Hitler*.

Why were these antifascists such a danger to a country fighting a total war against fascism? Beyond their anger at being called traitors to a country they loved, the conservatives saw a conspiracy of various un-American

forces behind the antifascist crusade. There were three main groups backing the anti-isolationist books, Flynn believed: the Jews, the Roosevelt administration, and the communists.¹³⁷

And here he marked a seemingly small but very important development in twentieth-century conspiracy theories. In his famous Des Moines speech, Lindbergh had railed against the Jews and Roosevelt, but the British had been the third member of his unholy trinity. Flynn's substitution of the Red menace for the British one showed the increasing importance of anticommunism among the Pearl Harbor conspiracists. Indeed, as the war continued, he saw little reason to distinguish between the communists and the New Dealers. They were all pursuing the same goal: subversion, totalitarianism, and the demonization of the few good men who opposed their plot.

Those who saw the hand of Stalin at work in America were voices in the wilderness during the war. They had high hopes, though, for the new world that would be born when the shooting stopped. "No matter in what direction the election goes," wrote Flynn to the conservative publisher DeWitt Wallace in October 1944, "the atmosphere is going to change. I am as sure of that as I have ever been of anything in my life."¹³⁸ Flynn and his friends would be back on top, and the real un-Americans would come to regret it.

THOUGH THEY WERE despondent about its results, the election did provide Roosevelt's critics with one consolation. Once FDR won his fourth term, the administration agreed to release the summaries of the Army and Navy inquiries into Pearl Harbor. The summaries made it clear why the administration wanted to keep the full reports secret. In contrast to the White House-controlled Roberts Commission, the Army and Navy both placed much of the blame on Washington. The Navy virtually exonerated Admiral Kimmel, and the Army Board sharply criticized both General Short and his superiors in Washington.¹³⁹ Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Navy Secretary James Forrestal ordered yet more investigations to counter the embarrassing summaries.¹⁴⁰

Then, on April 12, 1945, the man so hated by the Pearl Harbor revisionists, the president with a "boundless will to power," suddenly passed from the scene. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered the next day to watch the presidential train carry Roosevelt's casket from Warm Springs, Georgia, to Washington. Many of the mourners were openly

Those who believed him guilty of conspiracy greeted Franklin Roosevelt's death with relief and even celebration. Harry Elmer Barnes and his friends, for example, rejoiced in the "liberation" of America.¹⁴² In the short term, the revisionists needed to remain quiet as most Americans mourned the loss of their beloved president. But Roosevelt's death emboldened his critics; at long last, they might be able to get a thorough investigation of what they saw as his greatest crime.

The new president bore no personal responsibility for the disaster at Pearl Harbor and was less concerned with avoiding charges of intelligence failures or conspiracy. Still, Harry Truman was a loyal Democrat who wanted to protect the memory of the man who had chosen him to be vice president. During his first few months as president, Truman focused on ending the war, not investigating its origins. Once the war concluded in August, though, the new president had to balance his loyalty to Roosevelt against the political liability of appearing to endorse a cover-up.

These concerns became urgent just two weeks after the atomic bombs ended the war. A naval officer in the White House learned that military officials had apparently leaked top-secret documents to Flynn, who was using them to write a new exposé on Pearl Harbor for the *Chicago Tribune*. The president and his advisers decided they needed to preempt Flynn by releasing the Army and Navy reports on Pearl Harbor.¹⁴³ Before the release, though, military officers censored the reports and took out all references to Magic, which had revealed the Japanese determination for war in the fall of 1941. The blistering Army Board report said that Washington officials had learned that a Japanese attack was imminent "from informers and other sources." But just who or what were these "other sources"? The censored report was deliberately vague.¹⁴⁴

Truman had tried to keep the truth about Magic from reaching the public, but it was impossible for him to stop all the leaks. As a result of the investigations, many Army and Navy officers knew about Magic, and they were furious with Roosevelt for pursuing Kimmel and Short. One of them apparently leaked the story of the code breaking to Flynn. Within days of the release of the military reports, Flynn published the first public account of Magic.¹⁴⁵

In "The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor," published in the *Tribune* and reprinted as a pamphlet, Flynn charged that British and American officers had broken the Japanese code in 1941 and knew that the Japanese were

poised to attack. Although Flynn did not publicly accuse the president of knowing *where* the attack would come, Roosevelt was clearly the villain of the piece. Flynn charged him with "doing everything except swimming under water with the bombs in his teeth," the *New Republic's* columnist TRB snidely noted.¹⁴⁶ Privately, Flynn and *Tribune* publisher Robert McCormick told each other that they suspected the real truth of Pearl Harbor was still to be revealed. In their view, Pearl Harbor was not the result of incompetence; it was a conspiracy.¹⁴⁷

The revelation of Magic was so explosive that the president and his party could no longer avoid a congressional investigation. To preempt the Republicans, the Democratic leadership of the House and Senate called for an immediate joint congressional inquiry. Senate Majority Leader Alben Barkley appointed himself chairman. The committee included six Democrats and four Republicans, a division reflecting the Democrats' numerical edge in Congress.¹⁴⁸ The Democrats had agreed to an inquiry, but they were determined to hire the staff and control the direction of the probe.

The Republicans were equally determined to be heard. To foil the Democrats' control of the staff, they raised private funds to hire a GOP activist as their own "chief research expert."¹⁴⁹ The stakes were high: Senator Homer Ferguson of Michigan, one of two Republican senators on the panel, proclaimed that nothing less than the survival of American democracy depended on "ascertaining the truth" about Pearl Harbor.¹⁵⁰ The Republicans speculated darkly that the Truman administration was trying to bury this truth. Rumors circulated throughout Washington that some of Roosevelt's most damning papers had suddenly disappeared.¹⁵¹ The journalist John Chamberlain predicted that the investigation would make the rancorous debates over entry into World War I "look like a polite exchange at a garden party."¹⁵²

The congressional hearings opened in November 1945 with all of the media attention one would expect for a major investigation of the possible subversion of American democracy. Four hundred fifty spectators and five newsreel cameras crowded into the Senate Office Building's caucus room to observe the proceedings. Under the intense lights installed for the cameras, the five senators and five congressmen sat sweating at long tables facing their witnesses. The committee members struggled to make their voices heard over the whirring of motion pictures.

popping of flashbulbs. On the walls, brightly colored maps told the story of the battle. Senator Ferguson brought his own prop: a whitewash brush he ostentatiously placed on the desk in front of him.¹⁵³

The first two witnesses, the chief of naval intelligence and a colonel on the general staff, confirmed what Flynn had revealed. As *Newsweek* writers reported in italics for emphasis: "*The Government of the United States was in full possession of advance information that Japan intended to strike within a matter of days, and the knowledge came from a source beyond dispute—Japan itself.*"¹⁵⁴ Washington was reading most of Japan's secret messages for months before the attack, the witnesses testified, and by December 3 top officials knew that the war could begin at any moment.

For the next six months, the committee members tried to tease out the implications of this disclosure. Because they knew that the Japanese were planning to attack, did Washington officials do all that they could to alert the Hawaii commanders? General Marshall insisted that they had.¹⁵⁵ Admiral Kimmel and General Short insisted just as emphatically that "vital information" had been withheld from them. "Had this information been furnished to me," Short testified, "I am sure that I would have arrived at the conclusion that Hawaii would be attacked and would have gone on an all-out alert."¹⁵⁶

The committee spent much time investigating whether the Japanese had sent a message before the assault known as the "winds code." Thanks to an earlier intercepted message, U.S. intelligence knew that the Japanese had told their agents to listen for a secret message in the middle of their propaganda radio broadcasts. If all other means of communication failed, then the weather report would transmit the message that war was imminent. "East wind, rain" would alert Japan's spies that relations with the United States had turned stormy.¹⁵⁷

The winds code greatly appealed to the media: it conjured up B-movie images of Japanese secret agents huddled around their radio receivers, straining to hear the sinister message from their commanders. But did the Japanese government ever send the message? One witness, Capt. Laurance Safford of the Office of Naval Communications, testified that he had seen a version of the "winds message" on December 4, 1941. A naval translator had scribbled the message—"war with U.S.; war with England; peace with Russia"—in colored crayon on yellow teletype paper, Safford said. Yet no one could find this piece of paper. Members of the investigating committee

searched desperately for it, but, John T. Flynn wrote, "always there was a mysterious hand somewhere to frustrate them." Flynn further charged that Navy officials had traveled around the world to destroy all evidence of every single intercept of the winds message. Then they had threatened and browbeaten witnesses and forced them to repudiate Safford's charges.¹⁵⁸

To the committee's chief counsel, a seventy-one-year-old conservative Democratic lawyer named William Mitchell, the fuss over the winds code was emblematic of the blind hatred of the Roosevelt opponents. First, not one other witness ultimately supported Safford's testimony. This meant that Captain Safford himself was either a lone fighter for truth or, as Mitchell and others believed, a bit of a nut. Safford had spent years struggling to prove that the Navy and the administration had "framed" Admiral Kimmel, and he was convinced that his enemies were engaged in a conspiracy to discredit him.¹⁵⁹ Mitchell found such a conspiracy incredible. Even more important, the counsel insisted again and again, it did not matter whether or not the winds code had been transmitted and intercepted. The Roosevelt administration already *knew* that Japan was preparing for war in early December. So why did Pearl Harbor revisionists such as Flynn call the alleged disappearance of the winds message a "bomb-shell"? Mitchell became so angry over what he saw as the Republicans' grandstanding that he and his staff quit in protest just one month into the investigation.¹⁶⁰

Pearl Harbor, once a unifying symbol for the country, had now become a symbol of partisan discord, the *New Republic* noted.¹⁶¹ The Republicans tried to use every witness and document to prove that evil forces were at work in the prewar White House. "It is possible that Hull pulled the trigger," said Senator Owen Brewster at one point, thus neatly shifting blame from the Japanese to America's own secretary of state.¹⁶² Republicans who were not on the committee were even less restrained in their accusations. On the floor of the House, Congressman Dewey Short expressed shock that one witness was still alive to tell his story. "I'm surprised he has not been liquidated," Short said.¹⁶³

Despite their claims, neither side really wanted to discover "the truth" about Pearl Harbor, but to use the Japanese attack to further their own interests.¹⁶⁴ For their part, the Democrats believed that Pearl Harbor showed the folly of isolationism. There was no point in trying to assign individual blame for a tragedy that stemmed from America's self-

to confront the dangers of a changing world. The whole country, President Truman said, had failed to foresee the menace posed by its enemies.¹⁶⁵

The Republicans were furious at the president's attempt to blame the country for Pearl Harbor. For them, the tragedy demonstrated the evils of the man who had overseen the expansion of America's bumbling yet malevolent government. They had no trouble pinning the blame on one person. "Make no doubt of it," the *New Republic* columnist TRB claimed at the height of the congressional investigation, "this is a trial of Roosevelt."¹⁶⁶

In part, the Republicans wanted to blame FDR for opportunistic reasons. "Republicans have long been clamoring for an *issue*," wrote party operative George H. E. Smith to several GOP leaders. "Pearl Harbor is ready-made for them on the highest emotional plane." If the party fumbled this chance, he warned, it should give up hope of ever regaining power. The Democrats, he said, would feel emboldened to change "the entire political and economic system of this country."¹⁶⁷

But Republican leaders were exploiting Pearl Harbor not just for political gain. Many of them genuinely believed that the government was covering up evidence of a conspiracy. This was partly because the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had, indeed, tried to cover up "the truth" about Pearl Harbor. The government had authorized several investigations of the tragedy since 1941, but had always released information piecemeal and out of context. As the operative Smith noted, the government's constant problem was "how to get the Pearl Harbor skeleton out of the closet" without harming the Democratic Party.¹⁶⁸ Its uneasy and unconvincing solution was to reveal the skeleton one bone at a time, "now a femur, now a jawbone," as the journalist John Chamberlain put it.¹⁶⁹ Republicans responded by wondering if a murder had been committed.

The Democrats and Republicans could not even agree on their conclusions. The committee issued two reports that were antithetical in tone and content. The majority report was signed by all six Democrats and, in a move bitterly resented by revisionists, by the two Republican House members. In its most important passage, the majority report proclaimed that the committee had found no evidence that Roosevelt or his cabinet "tricked, provoked, incited, cajoled, or coerced Japan into attacking this Nation in order that a declaration of war might be more easily obtained from the Congress."¹⁷⁰

But the two Republican senators told a much different story, one filled with manipulation, cover-ups, and deceit. Although they stopped short of

contending that he intentionally exposed the fleet to attack, Ferguson and Brewster accused Roosevelt of provoking the Japanese, and then failing to put the Hawaiian commanders on full alert. These dissenters did not believe that the president withheld information because he wanted to protect the nation's code-breaking secrets; instead, they argued that he deliberately deceived the public for his own sinister purposes. "Indeed, the high authorities in Washington seemed to be acting upon some long-range plan which was never disclosed to Congress or the American people."¹⁷¹ Throughout their quest to reveal this long-range plan, the investigators found that "there was a deliberate design to block the search for the truth."¹⁷² In their view, it was their own government, not that of the enemy, that was guilty of infamy on December 7.

IN THE YEARS TO COME, many authors continued to search for the elusive, absolute "truth" about Pearl Harbor. The *Chicago Tribune* reporter George Morgenstern and the historian Charles Beard built on Flynn's work in the late 1940s; Charles Tansill, the conservative historian who had urged Barnes to examine the war's origins back in 1943, published his own revisionist work in 1952.¹⁷³ Flynn persevered with his quest to prove the plot at Pearl until he became too old and ill to work.¹⁷⁴ Harry Barnes also kept up the crusade by inspiring, editing, reviewing, and promoting books that argued for a conspiracy. "If I dropped Revisionism," he wrote in 1958, "it would stop as suddenly all over the world as the bloodstream of Marie Antoinette stopped when the guillotine blade dropped on her neck."¹⁷⁵ Although Barnes found a ready market for his work with right-wing publishers, he grew infuriated by the "mythmongers" and the "court historians" and became obsessed with proving that U.S. entry into World War II was "the most lethal and complicated public crime of modern times." Unhinged by the continued resistance to his arguments, the legendary revisionist of the First World War refused to believe the grisly evidence of Hitler's Final Solution. Once the patron saint of independent thinkers, Harry Barnes became a hero to Holocaust deniers.¹⁷⁶

Admiral Kimmel and his admirers formed a different, intersecting circle of men who spent years trying to prove that the admiral had been the American Dreyfus, scapegoated by selfish politicians. Kimmel's cause was taken up by Adm. Robert Theobald, who worked with Barnes and Flynn to produce a major revisionist work in 1954.¹⁷⁷ These conspiracists created a community: they shared their research, helped each other find evidence, and

and reassured one another that the truth would ultimately prevail. But they could not prove that Roosevelt knew when or where the assault was coming, or that he deliberately provoked the Japanese into attacking.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of faith in the government after Vietnam and Watergate inspired a new generation of Pearl Harbor conspiracy books. Unlike earlier books, these new works did not suggest that the United States should never have entered World War II. To these authors, the broader issue was not isolationism versus interventionism but the consistent pattern of deceit by the federal government. However, none of these books ever proved the central allegation of Pearl Harbor conspiracy theories that Roosevelt had known in advance of the specific location of the Japanese attack.¹⁷⁸

The Pearl Harbor theories of the 1940s pointed both to the past and to the future. In many ways, these theories were the last gasp of isolationism. Opponents of intervention had worried that joining the war would mark the beginning of an American empire. The militarization of society, John T. Flynn worried, could herald the death of the republic. "We will not be able to stop it," he wrote in 1938 to the anti-interventionist senator William Borah, "it will get all mixed up with our thinking; it will thrust forward into the solution of our domestic problems foreign quarrels with which we should have nothing to do."¹⁷⁹ The Pearl Harbor conspiracists looked back with longing to the period before the United States had joined the perpetual war for perpetual peace.

Yet the early Pearl Harbor theories were not merely nostalgic. They also helped to construct a foundational myth of modern conservatism. In the mind of the conspiracists, Pearl Harbor demonstrated everything that was wrong with the New Deal: the "confusion, incompetence, wasteful extravagance, double-dealing and double-talking" of the expansive federal government, the GOP activist George Smith contended.¹⁸⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, the double-dealing and double-talking architect of this oppressive government, had "lied" the nation into war. This is what happened, the conservatives believed, when the government gained too much power at the expense of the people. As Representative Martin Dies told Congress, "When any group of supermen or social planners get control of government and impose their fanatical beliefs, they become avaricious for power and they subjugate the whole body politic."¹⁸¹

But were these planners really supermen, or were they just incompetent bureaucrats? The Pearl Harbor conspiracists could not seem to make up their

minds on this point. The *Chicago Tribune* argued that Pearl Harbor showed Roosevelt's "insouciant stupidity or worse."¹⁸² Yet how could an insouciantly stupid administration pull off such a grand conspiracy? The expanding government, these antistatists argued, could do nothing right—except when it enslaved its citizens. This inconsistency in logic would plague many antigovernment conspiracy theories for the rest of the twentieth century.

The Pearl Harbor critics also expected this conspiratorial organization called a government to leave clues for its enemies to prove its perfidy. Their reliance on the documents of the centralized state to prove their case against the state showed the increasing irrelevance of antistatist ideology. Roosevelt's opponents firmly believed that government investigations would prove the existence of a government conspiracy. Roosevelt, they seemed to think, was capable of provoking a Japanese attack, scapegoating the local commanders, and then wiping out all evidence of a conspiracy—except for a few documents he carelessly left behind for future anti-Roosevelt investigators.

But for all their hatred of the expansive, incompetent, yet malevolent federal government, the Pearl Harbor conspiracists began to see some virtues in one of the official agencies they used to fear. Back in 1940, Flynn had regarded the FBI as a part of President Roosevelt's plan to frighten the American people into granting more power to the presidency. In his view, J. Edgar Hoover, the man responsible for many of Attorney General Palmer's "atrocities after the last war," helped to persuade Americans that they needed to surrender some of their liberties to the government so that the government could protect them.¹⁸³

But Flynn came to discover that Hoover shared some of his concerns and philosophies. Like Flynn, Hoover worried about the men and women they called "antifascists" during the war and "Reds" afterward. Throughout the war, Hoover's FBI leaked derogatory information about the anti-interventionists to Flynn and his friends.¹⁸⁴ Hoover also shared their tendency to demonize their opponents as enemies of the republic.

Now that the war was over, the Roosevelt critics saw the glimmerings of a new dawn. "Their smearing days are over, John," Burton Wheeler had written Flynn in the midst of the war, "and the more they try to smear people now, the more it is going to react against them when this war is over."¹⁸⁵ It was time to expose the real plot against America, and this time the FBI was going to help them do it.