

Guide to
the Microfilm Edition
of the

**FBI File on
The America
First Committee**

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Introduction

The America First Committee was a short-lived group whose entire purpose was to keep the United States out of the European war that began in 1939. The committee was formed in September 1940 following Nazi Germany's successful conquest of France, which gave Adolf Hitler control of almost all of Europe. The committee lasted only until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. When the United States declared war against Japan, Germany quickly declared war on the United States in support of its Japanese ally. During the year between the fall of France and Pearl Harbor a great debate raged in the United States over the extent of American involvement in a European war. America succeeded in mobilizing hundreds of thousands of Americans against the war, but it repeatedly failed to stop Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt from cautiously moving the United States away from neutrality and toward war with Germany. The sneak attack by the Japanese ended what contemporaries called the "Great Debate," plunging the United States into another world war.

A twenty-five-year-old Yale law school student, R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., organized the American First Committee following the fall of France in September 1940. Stuart and his school friends, all of draft age, debated and sharpened their argument for keeping the United States out of war while attending Yale. The core of the argument was the traditional U.S. policy of nonintervention. The Yale students granted that it was necessary to build strong defense in the Western Hemisphere but thought participation in a European war would threaten democracy in the United States. The fear of threats to liberty and the rise of a dictator were, along with staying out of wars in Europe, traditional beliefs that dated to the founding of the nation itself. The Yale group supported the "cash-and-carry" policies that the Neutrality Laws allowed. The college students argued

that the United States should not intervene even if Britain was on the verge of defeat.

In June 1940, Stuart and his fellow students attended the Republican National Convention and received much positive feedback on their views from many attendees. Encouraged, Stuart, the son of the first vice president of the Quaker Oats Company in Chicago, was able to use his family connections to lure General Robert E. Wood, head of Sears and Roebuck Company and Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army during World War I, to head the organization. Many pointed to Stuart's driving collegiate optimism as an asset and the reason for the committee's initial success. The committee touched the isolationist nerve that ran deep in America and quickly received support from across the nation and in Congress. At its peak the committee claimed 800,000 members, including Charles Lindbergh, the aviation hero.

The committee united a number of local groups whose only common denominator was opposition to U.S. participation in another European war. Nationalism, ancient distrust of Europeans, and the lingering disillusionment from the last war combined to make many Americans suspicious of Europeans and their motives. Those who saw a threat to liberty believed that participation in the war would encourage the centralization of power within the federal government and the restriction of basic freedoms, thereby eventually leading to an American dictator. Anglophobia, or a fear of Great Britain, motivated many. This group remembered the days of the Revolution, the War of 1812, and countless other slights that Britain had paid the United States since Independence. There was a widespread perception that Great Britain was willing to fight to the last drop of American blood. While the committee supported creating a strong defensive force to protect the Western Hemisphere, it did not see either Great Britain or the Soviet Union as security assets to the United States, and hence did not feel that U.S. lives or treasury should be expended to defend them. Committee members in general did not see

the security threat that Hitler's Germany posed to the United States, and they had no way to know how evil his regime would become.

The committee brought together a wide variety of Americans: pro-Nazis, pro-Fascists, anti-Semites, pacifists, parents of draft-age sons, and draft-age men. It allied conservatives opposed to President Roosevelt and his New Deal with liberals who feared that a war would derail the New Deal. Communists opposed the war until Hitler attacked the Soviet Union; they then left the committee. The tag of anti-Semitism was most troubling to the committee. The group constantly denied any association with those views yet was never able to disassociate itself, mainly because of its anti-Semite members. In a speech in September 1941, Charles Lindbergh, the group's star speaker, expressed sympathy for Nazi hatred of the Jews. He also warned against Jewish agitation for war, saying that in the intolerance of a war the Jews would be the first to suffer. Lindbergh warned his audience to watch the Jews because of their power in the motion picture industry, the press, and government. With such overtly anti-Semitic sentiments expressed by its most important speaker, it is no wonder that the American First Committee could not shake its anti-Semitic tag. Still, . . . the group attracted thousands to its rallies, filling Madison Square Garden, ran a speakers' bureau, did mass mailings, sponsored polls and radio shows, and published newsletters, autostickers, and pamphlets. The committee counted numerous congressmen, state and local politicians, journalists, and leading businessmen among its members.

Neither the government nor the America First Committee was a clear winner in the Great Debate. During this period, President Roosevelt and Congress took a series of cautious steps, moving the United States in the direction of war with Germany. The American First Committee was unable to stop any of these steps, from the Lend-Lease Act and convoy escorts to the final repeal of the Neutrality Acts. Roosevelt used his great charisma to prepare the country

mentally for war and to expose the evil that he saw in Hitler's Germany. For the most part, the public did not oppose the president's actions, even if it did not support a war any time soon. Pearl Harbor made war immediate, pushing many undecided Americans to the government's side, and made opposition to the war appear traitorous. The America First Committee quickly disbanded.

The FBI files will be of interest to anyone studying America's isolationist traditions. The Bureau investigated Fascist and Communist members of the American First Committee. These reports provided a snapshot of both groups at the end of the 1930s. The Bureau's files contain newspaper clippings that allow the researcher to follow the development of the committee. The collection of pamphlets and speeches, especially by Lindbergh, allows readers to see firsthand the committee's public relations campaign and judge for themselves the extent of anti-Semitism within the group.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation has deleted certain documents or a portion of the documents. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

This file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes section is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

Paul R. Beezley

Roll Notes

FBI File 100-4712

Section 1

Nov 1940-May 1941

Roll 1, 0001-0174

Internal Security re: America First Committee

Post card: Principles of the America First Committee

Allegations of members activities against the selective draft
and ties to the radical pacifist monthly "*Equality*."

News article from:

Los Angeles Herald Express (Feb 1941)

"John Wheeler Flays FDR Lease, Lend Bill"

Objectives of the America First Committee and listing of
its officers

Pamphlets:

A Platform to which every American can Subscribe

Our Foreign Policy by Gen. Robert E. Wood

News article from:

The Herald Statesman (Mar 1941)

"Cites Nazi Support of 'America First'"

The Congressional Record (Nov 1940)

Pamphlet:

Is this Our War? by Clay Judson

Section 2

Apr 1941-Jul 1941

Roll 1, 0176-0410

Article:

News Letter (published Apr 1941)

"No War" Mothers Lured into Anti-Democrats Camp

Investigation of the America First Committee

"A Letter to Americans" by Charles A. Lindbergh

Internal Security re: America First Committee

News articles from:

Pasadena Independent (Jun 1941)

“Mass Meeting Boos President”

Birmingham News (Jun 1941)

“Lindbergh and Others May be Brought Here by
Committee Branch”

Section 3

Aug-Sep 1941

Roll 1, 0412-0654

Internal Security re: America First Committee

Pamphlet:

President Roosevelt said:

“Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign
wars.” (Boston, Oct 1940)

Allegations of pro-Fascist group’s involvement with the
America First Committee

America First Committee, propaganda among soldiers

Jay F. Tiffany letter: Keep America Out of War

America First Committee, disaffection among troops

Involvement of Charles Lindbergh with the America First
Committee and the formation of the “Copperheads”

Pamphlets:

“Can Hitler Cripple America’s Economy?”

“War, what is it?”

“Uncle Sam, a Fellow Traveler?”

America First Committee, Italian Fascist Infiltration

Memo documents the beginning of the America First
Committee

News articles from:

San Francisco Bee (Sep 1941)
 “Group Score Shooting Edict of Roosevelt”
 “Capper Holds U.S. Must Back Roosevelt Act”
Columnist Westbrook Pegler:
 Fair Enough, Labor Day is Mockery (Sep 1941)
Investigation of a membership drive launched by the
 America First Committee

Section 4

Sep-Nov 1941 **Roll 1, 0658-0836**

Internal Security, America First Committee
 Articles of Incorporation, filed Jan 1941
 Stated purpose and Board of Directors
 Meeting held at Olympic Auditorium, Los Angeles,
 Oct 1941

News article from:

 Charleston Gazette (Oct 1941)
 “Lindbergh Fears Loss of Liberties”

Pamphlet: “War in the Mails”

News articles from:

The Washington Post (Oct 1941)
 “Denial of Right to Vote Feared by Lindbergh”
 Norristown Town Herald (Sep 1941)
 “War is England’s, She Asked for It”

Allegations of anti-Semitism against Charles Lindbergh

Section 5

Nov-Dec 1941 **Roll 1, 0838-END**

Internal Security, America First Committee
Fight for Freedom Committee formed in opposition to

America First Committee
Allegations of anti-Semitism are hurting the America First
Committee
Pamphlet: "Neutrality or War"
Copies of America First Committee mailing (Oct 25, 1941)
"The Crisis is Here"
Report No. 1: Subversive Activities in America First
Committee in California

Section 6

Dec 1941-Mar 1942 **Roll 2, 0001-0218**
Internal Security, America First Committee
Report on America First Committee meetings attended by
Charles Lindbergh
Excerpts from a Charles Lindbergh speech (delivered
Dec 19, 1941)
Allegations of anti-Semitism against the America First
Committee
Reports on the formation of an America First underground
organization
Extract from "Merry-Go-Round" (Jan 28, 1942
by Drew Pearson & Robert S. Allen
Pamphlets:
"To the Jewish People of America"
"Dangers Without & Within"
Reports of the America First Committee "shutting down"

Section 7

Apr-May 1942 **Roll 2, 0220-0402**
Internal Security, America First Committee

Reports that the America First Committee has disbanded
News article from:

The Washington Post (Mar 1941)

“Produce Now or be Slaves, Nelson Says”

Investigation at Norfolk reflects the America First Committee unsuccessful in affecting an organization

Investigation into activities of prominent people once members of the America First Committee

Pamphlet:

“America and the War” by Robert M. Hutchins

Reprints of America First Committee literature

“Our Foreign Policy” by Gen. Robert E. Wood

Section 8

May 1942

Roll 2, 0404-0642

Internal Security, America First Committee

Investigation into groups characterized as “Isolationists” and alleged ties to the America First Committee

Reports reveal America First Committee has disbanded since the nation’s involvement in the war

Reprints of America First Committee literature:

“I Hate War” by Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Why America Cannot be Invaded” by
Col. Robert R. McCormick

“The Immediate Relation of the United States to this War” an address by Herbert Hoover

“Our Foreign Policy” by Gen. Robert E. Wood

Allegations of Fascist groups and Nazi sympathizers involved in America First Committee

Investigation into alleged “underground activities” of
former America First Committee members

Section 9

May-Aug 1942

Roll 2, 0644-0892

Internal Security, America First Committee

America First Committee disbanded as an active organization
upon entrance of the United States into the war

Investigations into the “Americans for Peace” group as an
anti-American organization

Investigation into the activities of Dr. Paul Cotton and his
“Peace Group”

Allegations that “Americans for Peace” is an alias for the
America First Committee

Investigation into America First Committee and connections
to other subversive groups

Records of the Indianapolis America First Committee after
they had disbanded

Section 10

Jun 1942-May 1943

Roll 2, 0894-1091

Internal Security, America First Committee

Investigations that America First Committee has totally
disbanded

Excerpt from a speech by Charles Lindbergh (Aug 1941)

NYC Chapter of America First Committee filed petition in
NY Supreme Court for legal dissolution

Reports indicate America First Committee no longer active

Section 11

May 1943-Aug 1944

Roll 2, 1093-1112

Internal Security, America First Committee

No indication subject organization has remained active

Sections 12-14 are not available

Section 15

May 1945-Jul 1956

Roll 2, 1114-END

Informant information, America First Committee

Requests to the bureau for information regarding America
First Committee

Reprint of America First Committee pamphlet:

“Franklin Delano Roosevelt and 80% of the American
People are Against the War”

Advertisement for

“The Golden Archer” a satirical novel of 1975

Enclosure Behind File

c.1941

Roll 3, 0001-0459

Collection of America First Committee literature

includes:

“Is FDR a War-Waging Fanatic or a Shrewd War-Using
Politician?” (Jun 5, 1941)

“Wings Over Nome” (Jul 1941)

“The British Invasion of America” (1941)

“The Truth about England and the New Europe” (1940)

“Must We Fight for our Foreign Trade”

“Mr. President!” a radio address by Archbishop Francis
J. L. Beckman (Jun 1941)

“Our Foreign Policy” by Gen. Robert E. Wood

“Can Hitler Invade America?”

“Can Hitler Cripple America’s Economy?”

News articles include:

Publicity, Wichita, Kansas (Nov 1941):

“Roosevelt Can be Sued for Kearny Dead”

The Nashville Tennessean (Oct 1941):

“Tabernacle Speaker Says New Deal Rule Worse than
Nazis”

“Author Labels Administration Communistic”

The Chicago Leader (Sep 1941)

“Peace Meeting Opens Saturday”

Enclosure Behind File

c.1938

Roll 3, 0461-0469

Communist Party of the U.S.A. Membership Card

Sub-A, Section 1

1940-1941

Roll 3, 0471-0527

Newspaper articles include:

N.Y. Daily (Dec 1940):

“Willard Quits America First”

Washington Times (Feb 1941):

“Mrs. Taft’s Group Flays Lend-Lease”

Chicago Daily Tribune (Feb 1941):

“America First Girds for Final War Bill Fight”

Chicago Daily News (Feb 1941):

“Pro-Nazi Group Rallies to Aid of Isolationists”

N.Y. Herald Tribune (Apr 1941):

“Lindbergh Says Allies Lost War Before It Began”

Washington Post (Apr 1941):

“Nazis Hail Lindbergh as Real American”

Sub-A, Section 2

May 1941

Roll 3, 0529-0640

Newspaper articles include:

Chicago Daily News (May 1941)

“Hits Half-Truth by Wheeler as ‘Smear’ to U.S.”

Washington Times-Herald (May 1941)

“War May End Our Liberties Clark Warns”

The Chicago American (May 1941)

“Can Defend U.S. Here, but Not Abroad: Lindy”

Chicago Daily News (May 1941)

“Bund Rallies Appeasers for America First”

Chicago Daily Tribune (May 1941)

“1,500 A Day Join America First Drive in State”

“Citizens Send Mass Appeal Against War Today to
President”

Sub-A, Section 3

Jun-Aug 1941

Roll 3, 0642-0782

Newspaper articles include:

Chicago Daily Tribune (Jun 1941)

“America First Tells of Gains in Members since
Fireside Chat”

San Francisco Examiner (Jun 1941)

“America First Group Denied Use of School”

Chicago Daily News (Jun 1941)

“A Coincidence? Lindy and Hitler Use Same Idea”

“ ‘Bold Patriot’ Has Big Idea: Lindbergh for President”

The Daily Worker (Jul 1941)

“Negro Papers Lambast Lindbergh as ‘Subversive’ ”

New York Herald-Tribune (Aug 1941)

“Lindbergh Says U.S. Nears War by ‘Subterfuge’ ”

Sub-A, Section 4

Sep-Oct 1941

Roll 3, 0784-0898

Newspaper articles include:

The Chicago American (Sep 1941)

“Wheeler Calls for War on Poverty”

Washington Star (Sep 1941)

“Jewish Groups Denounce Lindbergh Iowa Speech”

Chicago Daily News (Sep 1941)

“America First and Lindbergh Win Bund Praise”

Washington Star (Oct 1941)

“Roosevelt Creating Fear of Conquest Meeting is Told”

Washington Times-Herald (Oct 1941)

“America First Assails Refusal of Radio Time”

Sub-A, Section 5

Nov 1941-Oct 1954

Roll 3, 0900-END

Newspaper articles include:

The Washington-Post

“Quit Iceland, Demand of America First” (Nov 1941)

“Dies Scans America First Roll for Nazis” (Dec 1941)

Times Herald (Dec 1941)

“America First to be Dissolved”

Sunday Worker (Jan 1942)

“Although Dissolved, America First Works Against
War Effort”

The Daily Worker (Feb 1944)

“Pro-Fascists to ‘Invade’ Phila.”