

History : Pathways to Power – USA

After the first World war (1914-1918), the USA adopted a policy of isolationism once again, as it had before 1917. The reasons for this decision can be seen as part political, part economic, as the USA evaluated the impact that the first world war had on its economy and internal policy making.

Before the USA's entry in the first World War in 1917, the reasons for its isolationism, can be traced back to the idea behind the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Indeed, as the USA did not want European intervention of its continent, it would not intervene in European affairs either. This policy was briefly interrupted for a couple of years, when Europe actively sought out its help to win the war, but it was then natural to return to the original policy. From a political point of view, the isolationism was even maintained to a certain extent during the time the USA was helping Europe. Indeed, while Woodrow was keen to see the USA take the lead as "bringer of peace", with his 14 points speech, the Congress did not want the US to be involved too deeply in European politics. As a consequence of this, the USA did not sign the Versailles Treaty at the Paris conference in 1919, nor did it join the League of Nations. The Congress was of the opinion that it was not in the USA's best interests to be weighted down by European problems that should be dealt by the responsables instead.

Added to this, the USA had strong incentives economically to return to isolationism. During the war, it has controlled mainly with material goods, such as weapons, but also by lending out vast amounts of money to the Allied forces. This meant that by the 1930s, millions of dollars were owed to the USA, and states such as the UK and France had no intention of paying them back, considering they had payed enough with the blood of their soldiers. The European states were left economically weak after the war and intended to rely on US help to rebuild their economies. While some americans did help, such as Dawes and Young who in 1928 and 1929 helped restructure German debt, the USA was eager to be refunded. To prevent such an event happening in the future, the Johnson's Debtors Act was passed in 1929 by Congress, thus preventing debtor nation to borrow from the USA in the future. Furthermore, in 1929, with the economic Crash, the USA was bent on recovering its own economy, rather than offering charity to others.

The opposition between Congress and the President continued in the 1930s, when Roosevelt came to power in 1933. He saw it as America's duty to help the rest of the world, which was prevented by the 1937 Neutrality Laws. These stated that America could no longer enter a European conflict without Congress ratifying it first.

To conclude, the USA embraced a period of isolationism once again in the 1920s and 1930s for political and economic reasons, as a response to the consequences of the first World War.

While the USA did lead an isolationist policy in apparence, by 1945 it had a role a global superpower. Many factors led to this, despite Congress's attempt to maintain to USA free from European problems. The factors can be divided into two main groups, in my opinion. On the one hand, the USA's own actions led to its dominating position, but on the other hand, more due to circumstances, was the relative position of other states.

After President Roosevelt came to power in 1933, he made a speech known as the 'four Freedoms Speech', in which he made it clear that he believed it was the USA's duty to spread

democracy around the world. the four freedoms he refers to, are those he believes to be the basis of democracy, and basic human rights: freedom from want, from fear, freedom of speech and religion. While Congress made it clear that the USA would have no part in European conflicts, Roosevelt was preparing his citizens for that event.

By 1941, France was occupied by Nazi forces and the rest of Europe was either annexed to the third Reich or ruled by fascist regimes, which collaborated with the Axis, while Russia suffered heavy losses on the eastern front. It is at this point, that Winston Churchill, the wartime Prime Minister of the UK, travelled to Canada to meet with Roosevelt. It is there that the Atlantic Charter was signed, laying the foundations for the UN, and by which Roosevelt made it his aim to free Europe from fascist domination. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 provided the excuse Roosevelt needed to convince Congress that the USA needed to join the war. When the USA dropped the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1944, thus ending the last stage of World War Two that was being fought by the USA and Japan, the USA's military power was made yet more obvious. So on the 2nd of September 1945, when a ceasefire was signed by the Japanese on the US warship Misery, not only had the USA succeeded in defeating the threat to democracy with the help of the British and Russians, it had also made its military superiority evident.

As well as the direct military help the USA supplied, it also offered financial and material help despite the outward isolationist policies. Thus, for the duration of the war only, Congress ratified the Cash and Carry Act in 1939 as well as the Lend-Lease Act in 1941. These allowed the Allied forces, Britain and Russia mainly, to borrow war-time resources such as weapons, steel but also food that was blocked by German submarine blockades. In the case of the Cash and Carry Act, immediate payment was required, and in gold. As a consequence of this, the USA came out of the war as an economic superpower, possessor of over 50% of the world's gold, which is an important factor in its role as global superpower.

Despite the USA's active policy in helping Europe, its position as superpower is also due to the fact that it had no competitors. Indeed the second world war left Europe devastated, ruined, both financially and materially. Due to its occupied State, France had been severely bombed by allied forces and Germany's most important shipping city Hamburg had few buildings left standing. These examples are representative of Europe as a whole and it is important to say that the USA was badly damaged in terms of material goods, or human lives, while none of the fighting took place on its territory. During the war China had been fighting a civil war as well as fending off Japanese invasion, which weakened it considerably and made it no match for the USA.

Therefore the USA owed its position as global superpower on the one hand because it freed Europe and helped it economically, but also because it emerged from the war rich and militarily superior. While Roosevelt may have seen it as the USA's duty to spread democracy, the war also secured the nation's status as world leader.

Mark awarded = 14–15

Geography = Development issues.

a) Since the 1980s, the African continent has been growing economically, and developing as a whole. Despite this, the continent is not progressing evenly as contrasting levels of development are evident between African states. The documents A and B provide information about these contrasts and their reasons, but do not show the full picture.

Document A is a map of the African continent that shows the nation's GNP as well as their HDI. This the economic and social development is portrayed. First of all, the geographical inequalities of African development can be seen. Indeed, on average the states with the highest GNP and HDI are in North Africa and the western coast, whereas the Sahel nations are the poorest and the least socially developed. This Algeria enjoys a fairly high HDI, between 0,65 and 0,8 (out of 1), and a GNP of about 150 billion US dollars, Niger has an HDI lower than 0,4 and a GNP of 10 billion US dollars.

The contrast can be explained by the advantages associated with the geographical locations = Northern Africa is closest to Europe, separated only by the Mediterranean sea, and the Western coast of Africa has benefitted from trade, since it's discovery.

The document B, an article about Africa's relative economic growth compared to other regions of the world, is also useful in understanding the reasons behind the unequal development of the regions in Africa. In 2012, Africa's average growth was of 5% compared to the global average of 3,3%. The article gives four main reasons for this : firstly, the structural adjustments made to the countries by organisations such as the WTO or the IMF during the 1990s; secondly, Africa's many natural resources that are invaluable to "industrialised and emerging countries"; thirdly, the debt cancellations that many African countries were offered; and lastly, the decline in the number of conflicts in the continent. Paired with document A, it is possible to see a pattern, where countries such as Sudan, Somalia or the Congo that still have ongoing conflicts, are also the states with the lowest HDI and GNP.

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Furthermore, the document B offers an idea of the trends that are affecting Africa, especially interesting as it was written in 2012, one year after the map was made, giving an idea of change. Indeed, while North Africa and South Africa appear to be doing very well in doc A, document B informs the reader that they are actually in risk of decline as they still rely on Europe, "the old Continent" which is in a recession.

While these documents do give an idea of the reasons behind Africa's uneven development, only two factors are given, whereas development can be seen through many different mediums. Indeed, an indicator of the practical situation in these countries could be useful, as would an indicator of what the economy is based on, or figures for the natural increase.

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Moreover the inequalities in development are not only in terms of their location, but also in the countries themselves. Indeed a high GNP does not lead to a high HDI automatically. Nigeria, for example, which has the second biggest GNP, has a low HDI between 0,4 and 0,49. Most African states have low GNP and low HDI, while few have gained good HDI with a low GNP. Neither the document A or B give answers as to why a rich state such as Nigeria, has such low living standards.

b) As seen in the previous question, Africa has many inequalities. when it comes to development. To tackle these problems and allow the countries to progress, different development strategies can be put into place.

First of all, nowadays, with globalisation, the economy has become the most important concern of governments. But as the documents A and B show, economic growth does not always benefit living conditions of the population, indeed while Africa enjoys the second most important economic growth, with 5% in 2012, Sub Saharan Africa has an average HDI of 0.46 compared to the world Average of 0,68. Therefore, the trickle down theory is perhaps not the most advantageous policy to adopt, compared to the trickle up theory, where the aid is given straight to those who need in such a way that they are in control of their lives, and not dependant on foreign aid.

Secondly, as document points out, economic growth relies in part on the country's natural ressources and so its environment. Thus the Sahel countries natural ressources cannot depend on agriculture, while Nigeria grows rich on its oil. Furthermore, it is no use aiding a country, if it is only short term, thus sustainable development is of the essence.

In this way, the states develop while securing the future and allowing for long term benefitts. Document B shows the dangers of relying on one economy. This is the case of South Africa and North Africa that depend on Europe for trade, yet Europe is declining economically and thus damaging the African nation's economy in the process.

As a conclusion, I can say that the best development strategies are those that are founded in sustainable development, economically, politically and environmentally, as well as giving the social aspect of development the attention it needs, and not just focusing on the economy.

Mark awarded = 11–10