

“The New American Century”

People don’t want to go to war But, after all, it’s the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it’s always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it’s a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a parliament or a communist dictatorship Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to great danger. It works the same way in any country.¹

Hermann Göring

Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever *he* shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion ... and you allow him to make war at pleasure [This would place] our President where kings have always stood.²

Abraham Lincoln

The sixty years of U.S. history treated in this book began with Henry Luce’s hopeful reference to the twentieth century as “The American Century.” Writing in 1941, before America’s entry into the Second World War but after Hitler’s conquest of nearly all of continental Europe west of the Soviet Union, Luce made a plea for the United States to take on the leadership role that its industrial and cultural strengths made more or less obligatory. He noted especially the force of America’s prestige and the spread abroad of many of America’s cultural and scientific achievements as evidence of the readiness of much of the world to follow the United States. In a world beset by the expanding power of totalitarian regimes in Europe and Asia, Luce’s call for American leadership contained

¹ Quoted in Jason Epstein, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” *New York Review of Books* (5 Oct. 2004).

² Quoted in David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 126; emphasis in the original.