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Richard Drake's "Charles Austin Beard's Economic Interpretation of the American Century through His Journalistic Writings," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 34:1 (March 2023): 1-29,  
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In 2018, Richard Drake published a deeply researched and well-written analysis of the works of Charles A. Beard.<sup>1</sup> That book was also a passionate defense of Beard's economic interpretation of US foreign policy against the many influential criticisms of the so-called consensus historians.<sup>2</sup> This article expands on Drake's book by examining a seeming contradiction in Beard's last two books written to condemn President Franklin D. Roosevelt's policy of intervention into World War II.<sup>3</sup> In those books, as Drake points out, the influence of "corporations, the bankers, the tycoons—the 'interests'—are conspicuous by their absence." Instead, those books narrate Roosevelt's supposedly malicious maneuvering of the United States into an imperialistic war in defiance of the limits that the Constitution, a constitution which Beard had famously criticized as a malign product of economic elites, properly put on executive power.<sup>4</sup> Drake insists that despite this lack of economics in Beard's books on American entry into World War II, Beard did not abandon his economic interpretation of American foreign policy. Drake backs this up with an extensive survey of Beard's contributions to the leading political journals of the time, which did indeed emphasize the role of economics in America's policies.

Drake uses Beard's 1934 study, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy*, to sum up Beard's economic interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Beard believed that the core of American foreign policy was always aimed at protecting and enhancing elite economic interests. Beard's primary examples were America's use of the Spanish American War and World War I to protect and enhance its stake in the economy of the British and French empires as well that of as its own empire. Contrary to the implication of Drake's introductory assertion noted above that it is surprising to see the absence of "corporations, bankers, and tycoons" in Beard's books about World War II, Drake correctly shows that Beard never did think in quite so conspiratorial way about economic interests as many of his fellow World War I revisionists like Harry Elmer

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Drake, *Charles Austin Beard: The Return of the Master Historian of American Imperialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, and Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). Warren I. Cohen, *The Lessons of Intervention in World War I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). Samuel Eliot Morison, "Did Roosevelt Start the War? History through a Beard" *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1948): 91-97.

<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Beard, *American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940: A Study in Responsibilities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1946). Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (New York: MacMillan, 1913).

<sup>5</sup> Beard, with the collaboration of G. H. E. Smith, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1934).

Barnes and Charles Callan Tansill.<sup>6</sup> Rather than blaming only bankers, tycoons, and munition makers, Beard believed that the entire American economy, including the interests of farmers and laborers, were bound up in world trade, imperialistic though that trade might be. Thus, the United States had to wean itself away from a dependence on foreign trade and build an economy that was self-sufficient as well as egalitarian. He was a true economic as well as a foreign policy isolationist.<sup>7</sup>

Beard also broke with many of his fellow leftists who shifted from isolationism to interventionism when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Although Beard detested the Fascist powers, he saw little to choose between them, the Soviets, and the British and French imperialists. All of them helped create the unjust imperialist world economy from which the United States ought to free itself. Drake makes excellent use of Beard's many articles, reviews, and letters to the editors of the journals of the day to demonstrate Beard's continued emphasis on economics in the run-up to American intervention despite his lack of attention to such factors in his two books about Roosevelt and the war.

*The New Republic* was Beard's journalistic home for twenty years in the 1920s and 30s. When *The New Republic* became enamored of the Communist promise of the Soviet Union in the late 1930s, Beard abandoned it for *Common Sense*, whose editors and contributors had long been his fans. When *Common Sense* converted to interventionism, Beard moved in his last years to *The Progressive*. It is these journals that Drake uses to successfully demonstrate Beard's continuing emphasis on economics as the major impetus for American intervention in World War II.

Drake uses far more than Beard's own contributions to these journals to illustrate his views. He provides lengthy and enthusiastic descriptions of many articles and books by other authors, not only of Beard's time but later, that emphasize the role of economics in World War II and with which Drake presumes Beard would have agreed. Indeed, Beard probably would have agreed with them. But Drake's inclusion of so many other authors seems superfluous to the main point of his article.

Drake convincingly argues that Beard's accounts of Roosevelt's supposedly conspiratorial maneuverings on the eve of World War II did not constitute a surrender of his economic interpretation of US foreign policy. "As [Beard] told [Harry Elmer] Barnes on 2 September 1945, dwindling energy would impose physical limitations on his capacity to recount the full history of the war" (22). Other historians would have to add the economic dimension which Beard no doubt continued to believe.

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<sup>6</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes, *the Genesis of the World war: An Introduction to the Problem of War Guilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926). Charles Callan Tansill, *America Goes to War* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1938).

<sup>7</sup> See not only Beard, *The National Interest* but also Charles A. Beard, with the collaboration of G. H. E. Smith, *The Open Door at Home: A Trial Philosophy of National Interest* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934).