DBQ-Neutrality

The quote above is very valid. It is clear from America's actions regarding political, economic, and social issues that the United States was primarily an isolationist country.

In the beginning of World War II, the United States strived to be separated from the chaos occurring in Europe. In order to stay isolated from these affairs, Congress passed political acts to protect the U.S. from destruction. Propaganda posters were posted everywhere throughout the country to influence people to stay isolated for the sake of protecting democracy. For example, in the political cartoon, "The Only Way We Can Save Her," Orr tried to persuade his viewers not to support America's involvement in the war (Doc A). We can infer that Orr is trying to say that America should not go into war so that Democracy can live on. Without a safe haven from the chaos in Europe, Democracy would cease to exist. Some people wanted to heed the words of George Washington in his Farewell Address to stay away from European affairs. They reasoned that if our first president did not want to be entangled in foreign relations, we should follow his opinions and stay out of the war. This is why the American people were not pleased with the League of Nations and chose not to be a part of it in order to stay isolated. An example of this is the reaction to the Spanish Civil War where fascist leader Francisco Franco attacked the Republican Democracy. Although America would usually intervene to save democracy, they choose to ignore their battle and stay isolated. By doing so, America emphasized its decision to avoid any kind of foreign matters. FDR also took steps to keep the U.S. from entering the war. This idea of neutrality reaches most U.S. Senators, as shown in Vandenberg's speech delivered at St. Paul. This Senator emphasized how important it was for citizens to focus on their own issues and problems (Doc G). He repeatedly stated that the problems in America are more important than our own idealized and moral obligation to spread Democracy. This speech strengthens the hypothesis that America was very self-centered when it came to foreign affairs; only looking out for itself. All of these were factors that exhibited America's want for isolation.

America's desire to stay an isolationist country can also be seen in its economic policies. Soon after America realized the threats from nations such as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, they were quick to create the Neutrality Acts. The Neutrality Acts were created to keep America out of the war. It stated that no American could sell, ship (directly or indirectly), or give any belligerent in the War (Doc. C). This act demonstrated how serious America was about maintaining their neutrality. They would rather stay a safe, neutral country than to try and get out of the Depression by selling weapons; or in other words, isolation was more important to the American than money. Another example of how important isolationism was to the Americans is the Johnson Debt Default Act. This law stated that the United States could no longer lend cash to any country that already owed America money. This also showed that America harbored a selfish need to protect themselves, and themselves only. They had no regard for the wellbeing of foreign nations and just left these countries to "stew in their own juices."  Franklin Delano Roosevelt even pulled out America's participation in the London Conference although the meeting was planned to help solve economic problems for all countries. It was clear that in order to maintain economic security internationally, America should have participated in the conference. This again demonstrated that America valued its own neutrality over the wellbeing of their foreign relationship with other countries.

Evidence of American isolationism can also be seen in social issues. In contrast with the sinking of the American ship *Maine*, when Americans were informed that Japan sank the *Panay*, Americans were satisfied with the apology that Japan gave. They could have very well declared war on Japan, just like they did with the Cuban issues with Maine but Americans felt very strongly about neutrality and wanted to stay out of any foreign affairs. For most of the 1940's more Americans were opposed to going to war than people who were for it (Doc. D). Even as the war progressed, America continued to stay neutral throughout the year of 1940. Reflecting these statistics, many anti-war organizations were created to keep America an isolationist country. One such example is the America First Committee which was a group of people who stressed the isolation of American and avoidance of foreign affairs. Famous aviator, Charles A. Lindbergh, was one of the main supporters of this organization. Another important social figure was Frank Lloyd Wright; he was an architect who was a supporter of isolationism. Since he was well respected in the community, his opinions were highly valued and many supported his support of isolationism in America. The ideas of isolationism did not only spread around men; neutrality was very popular among women. The Women’s Political Club consisted of women who worked together to avoid war and protect their sons (Doc. F). In this photograph, they are protesting Act 1776, also known as the Lend-Lease Bill. The Lend-Lease Bill allowed the government to “lend” weapons to belligerents, an idea that contradicted America’s neutrality acts. Isolationist citizens were quick to react as they criticized the bill for going against their protectionist beliefs. They emphasized how the government should help their own people rather than foreigners. Rather than be over zealous and try to help all countries, America should focus on their own problems. Americans, especially these women, did not want to lose their sons to this war. Over all, through these social actions, it can be concluded that the American populace, both men and women, held strong beliefs in maintaining neutrality during the time between 1933-1941.