Americans watched anxiously through 1940 as developments unfolded in the war in Europe. Sometimes it was hard to tell exactly what was going on—the public placed relatively little faith in the news coming from London, and even less in that emanating from Berlin. Many continued to hope for the best, believing not only that Adolf Hitler might still offer peace, but that the wisest course of action for England and France would be to take it.

However, this hope was increasingly strained as country after country fell to the Germans. Americans recognized, too, that the price being demanded for peace—to let Germany keep Poland, to give up Czechoslovakia, to do nothing as armies swept into Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—was becoming far too high to pay.

As we sit today in a troubled world, waiting in suspense to see to what extent we will be affected by warfare in places far away, what the next fanatical leader of fanatics might do, when the next terrorists will strike, it is not difficult to imagine the apprehensiveness of Americans on the cusp of World War II. Even as most clung to their insistence that their country stay out of the war no matter what, they foretold dire consequences should Germany win it. In 1940, it was still possible to hope for the best.

But the worst was coming.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee

**Darkness and Doubt**

**Question:**

How much do you believe the official news reports...

...from London?

- Believe all: 2%
- Believe most: 14%
- Believe some: 36%
- Believe little: 26%
- Believe none: 15%

...from Berlin?

- Believe all: 1%
- Believe most: 4%
- Believe some: 28%
- Believe little: 35%
- Believe none: 25%

**Source:** Survey by Peile's Research, May 4-9, 1940.

**Not in the Cards**

**Question:**

If Hitler offers to make peace this spring, do you think England and France should meet with the Germans and try to end the war?

- Yes: 75%
- No: 25%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.

**They All Fall Down**

**Question:**

If peace could be reached in the war in Europe between Germany and England and France by letting Germany keep Poland, would you favor this?

- Yes: 30%
- No: 70%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.

**Question:**

If peace could be reached by letting Germany keep Czechoslovakia, would you favor this?

- Yes: 38%
- No: 62%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, April 11-16, 1940.

**Question:**

Should the United States do anything about Germany's marching into Denmark and Norway and Sweden?

- Yes: 74%
- No: 7%
- Undecided: 19%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.
Stay Out of It

Would it be wiser for us to join the war if the allies seem to be losing, or try to stay out in the hope that we can live in peace with the new German empire if Hitler wins?

Stay out: 62%
Join the war: 29%
Don't know: 9%

Source: Survey by People's Research, May 23-27, 1940.

Which of these things do you think the next administration should do and which shouldn't it do?... Keep us out of war unless we are attacked, no matter what happens abroad.

Should keep us out of war: 86%
Shouldn't: 5%
Don't know: 9%

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, March 1940.

Dire Predictions

If Germany should win the war, which of the following statements do you believe would be true, which false?

- True
- False
- Don't know

...A victorious Germany would mean the end of religious freedom in Europe 66%
17%
18%

...She will try to seize territory on our side of the ocean 63%
22%
15%

...Germany will join with Japan in an effort to dominate the world 43%
26%
31%

...A German victory would be followed by world revolution and confusion 57%
19%
23%

...She will try to seize territory on our side of the ocean 52%
28%
20%

...The fear of a German attack would make us give up most of our liberties to some form of dictatorship in this country 55%
24%
21%

...It will bring Europe under a strong and efficient government 31%
15%
54%

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, June 1940.

Still Hoping

At the present time do you find yourself worrying more than usual about your own future?

Yes 39%
No 58%
No opinion 3%

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, November 21-26, 1940.