

2015–2016 Optimist International Essay Contest

Leading by Example: Reality or Fiction

731 words

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There is no greater representation of the reality of leading by example than the international relations between nations. When one thinks of an individual nation, they almost assign it a personality; thinking of it in terms of its leader and what it has done in recent history. Nations like the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, as the most powerful on the planet, each try to set examples for the areas of the world that they lead. Leading by example among countries is not a myth, nor is it fiction. It is reality, and one can see it especially clearly in the events of 1945; the end of the Second World War.

After the end of World War II, the most destructive conflict in all of human history (according to nationalww2museum.org), the nations of the world needed a leader to guide them out of ruin. In the end, the United States assumed that mantle. While the Soviet Union grabbed as much land as it could, installing governments to suit its own purposes, America did the opposite. Rather than take advantage of a Europe in ruins or take control of a defeated Japan, the United States lent the fallen nations aid, granting independence to western Germany and even America's own colony in the Philippines quickly after the end of the war.

In 1941, the Empire of Japan had launched a massive attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. In 1945, the United States had its chance to take retribution on the collapsed empire. Instead, they helped it back to its feet, and within two years the nations were staunch allies. The same game played out in Europe, just with different players. Britain and France had both suffered greatly at the hands of Nazi Germany. Yet, when the war was over and the time

came to settle with the fallen nation, both followed the examples set by America, helping western Germany back to its feet rather than exacting revenge on it. By inspiring the recovering superpowers to move forward down a new path, the United States effectively proved that leading by example is a reality. Britain and France granted independence to their colonies in Africa, democracies were installed throughout Western Europe and Asia, and aid was given to smaller nations when they needed it.

President Harry S. Truman's administration created the Marshall Plan to aid the recovering countries. By donating massive sums of money to Western Europe, the United States ensured that Western economies grew and their nations were rebuilt. Once those nations regained power, they did the same in kind. Britain nearly bankrupted itself aiding Greece in its 1947 civil war and France released all of its imperial colonies against its own interests.

For the several thousand years between their creations and the Second World War, the nations of Europe have almost always acted in their own self-interest. Taking Native American land from the Native Americans in their quest for colonies in the New World, colonizing Africa and India against the wishes of their people, and severely punishing the Central Powers after the First World War are all poignant examples of this. This permeating self-interest in fact led to the tragic conflict that was World War II, which nearly ripped the world to shreds. So when America moved against its own self-interest to provide for the shattered world and the greater good, Europe was quick to follow. The decisions that Britain and France made ended thousands

of years of self-interest governed history and began a new age of interest in the greater good, following the examples set by the world's leader: the United States.

In history, it is apparent, especially at the end of the Second World War, that the theory of leading by example is not just a theory, but in fact a true reality as well. The United States, in its quest for peace in a broken world, moved to establish the United Nations, instilled an interest of the greater good in a world which had previously been defined too often by self-interest. And several other major empires followed its lead, going against everything that they had done over the past several thousand years. It may sound like fiction, but the change in the US's leadership actually resulted in a very real and beneficial change in the development of the world as we know it.