World War I

In the summer of 1914 the great powers of Europe went to war. In a matter of weeks the armies and navies of two great coalitions, the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and later Turkey) and the Entente, or Allies (France, Great Britain, Russia, and later Italy), were locked in murderous combat in Europe and around the world.

For two and a half years the United States remained on the sidelines, the largest and most powerful neutral in a world at war. President Woodrow Wilson initially urged his compatriots to remain "impartial in thought as well as in action," but from the outset this proved impossible. Too many Americans were tied by sentiment or culture to one side or the other. Moreover, the United States, with its great industrial and financial resources, could not easily detach itself economically from Europe's confrontation.

Both sides sought to mold U.S. policy for their own ends. The Allies saw the United States as a source of credit, supplies, and munitions and tried to ensure free access to these resources. Beyond this, some Allied leaders hoped to draw the great American republic into the war as an actual military partner. The Central Powers also could not ignore the United States. Unable themselves to procure U.S. goods through the Allied blockade and with no expectation of U.S. alliance, they limited their goals to keeping the United States neutral and preventing the Allies from taking full advantage of America's financial, industrial, and military might.

Inevitably, America's relations with the belligerents were colored by disagreements over neutral rights in time of war. The Wilson administration defended the right of Americans under international law to trade a wide range of goods with whomever they wished, and to travel wherever and however they wished.

Neither the Allies nor Central Powers accepted America's broad definition of neutral rights, but the British and French benefited more from

free trade with the United States than did the Germans and Austro-Hungarians, and so clashed with America less. Indeed, the Germans soon sought to block U.S. trade with the Allies in the only way they could: by use of the U-boat, a torpedo-armed submarine that could sink without warning any merchant vessel suspected of carrying war material to the enemy. The tactic was often brutal. Crews and passengers could not be saved by the small, vulnerable U-boats and so often perished. To charges of inhumanity, the Germans responded that the Allied blockade of food to German civilians was as barbarous as submarine warfare.

Americans disagreed over which policies to pursue toward the warring powers during 1914–1917. Their views were affected by ethnicity, ideology, patriotism, politics, culture, material interest, and other considerations. These differing attitudes and the motives behind them are suggested in the documents that follow.

Eventually, intervention unleashed internationalist and idealistic feelings, much encouraged by Wilson's leadership. Wilson proposed that the nation assume a much larger role in world affairs, increasing its interest, commitments, and responsibilities. Patriotic sentiment supported the President while U.S. soldiers fought in Europe during the last year of the war, but during the tense peace negotiations that followed, disillusionment and political impasse dashed the hopes of a new world order. Wilson's presidency ended in bitter stalemate over the Treaty of Versailles, which the United States never signed, and the nation once again returned to isolationism in the 1920s.

7.1: The Submarine Dimension (1915)

No belligerent action during World War I set off as explosive a response in the United States as did the German submarine campaign against Allied and neutral shipping. In February 1915 the German government announced that all merchant vessels, whether neutral or enemy, found in a broad zone surrounding the British Isles would be sunk on sight, even if this meant injury or death to crews and passengers. This "unrestricted" U-boat warfare violated the traditional usages of war, and the U.S. government threatened to hold the Imperial German government "to a strict accountability" for any loss of U.S. lives and property under the order. The first selection below is the note sent by Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to the German government conveying the U.S. position. In fact, Bryan correctly stated the normal practices of war, but the Germans felt they had no choice.
The second selection is the response of the German foreign minister, Gottlieb von Jagow, to the U.S. protest against the sinking in May 1915 of the British passenger liner the Lusitania, with the loss of 1,200 civilian lives, including 128 Americans. American opinion was outraged, and the attack had been almost universally condemned. But is it fair to see the Germans as barbarians, indifferent to human life? Does the German foreign minister make a convincing case for his country’s use of the submarine weapon in the instances he describes? Why was the U.S. government, do you suppose, so unsympathetic to German arguments? Was the U.S. government even willing, in later years, to limit the travel of its citizens in dangerous war zones?

Protesting Unrestricted U-Boat Warfare

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

Washington, February 10, 1915

Please address a note immediately to the Imperial German Government to the following effect:

The Government of the United States, having had its attention directed to the proclamation of the German Admiralty issued on the 4th of February, . . . feels it to be its duty to call the attention of the Imperial German Government, with sincere respect and the most friendly sentiments but very candidly and earnestly, to the very serious possibilities of the course of action apparently contemplated under that proclamation.

The Government of the United States views those possibilities with such grave concern that it feels it to be its privilege, and indeed its duty in the circumstances, to request the Imperial German Government to consider before action is taken the critical situation in respect of the relations between this country and Germany which might arise were the German naval forces, in carrying out the policy foreshadowed in the Admiralty’s proclamation, to destroy any merchant vessel of the United States or cause the death of American citizens.

It is of course not necessary to remind the German Government that the sole right of a belligerent in dealing with neutral vessels on the high seas is limited to visit and search, unless a blockade is proclaimed and effectively maintained, which this Government does not understand to be proposed in this case. To declare or exercise a right to attack and destroy any vessel entering a prescribed area of the high seas without first certifying its belligerent nationality and the contraband character of its cargo would be an act so unprecedented in naval warfare that this

[Government is reluctant to believe that the Imperial Government of Germany in this case contemplates it as possible. The suspicion that enemy ships are using neutral flags improperly can create no just presumption that all ships traversing a prescribed area are subject to the same suspicion. It is to determine exactly such questions that this Government understands the right of visit and search to have been recognized.]

This Government has carefully noted the explanatory statement issued by the Imperial German Government at the same time with the proclamation of the German Admiralty, and takes this occasion to remind the Imperial German Government very respectfully that the Government of the United States is open to none of the criticisms for unneutral action to which the German Government believe the governments of certain other neutral nations have laid themselves open; that the Government of the United States has not consented to or acquiesced in any measures which may have been taken by the other belligerent nations in the present war which operate to restrain neutral trade, but has, on the contrary, taken in all such matters a position which warrants it in holding those governments responsible in the proper way for any untoward effects upon American shipping which the accepted principles of international law do not justify; and that it, therefore, regards itself as free in the present instance to take with a clear conscience and upon accepted principles the position indicated in this note.

If the commanders of German vessels of war should act upon the presumption that the flag of the United States was not being used in good faith and should destroy on the high seas an American vessel or the lives of American citizens, it would be difficult for the Government of the United States to view the act in any other light than as an indefensible violation of neutral rights which it would be very hard indeed to reconcile with the friendly relations now so happily subsisting between the two Governments.

If such a deplorable situation should arise, the Imperial German Government can readily appreciate that the Government of the United States would be constrained to hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability for such acts of their naval authorities and to take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property and to secure to American citizens the full enjoyment of their acknowledged rights on the high seas.

The Government of the United States, in view of these considerations, which it urges with the greatest respect and with the sincere purpose of making sure that no misunderstanding may arise and no circumstance occur that might even cloud the intercourse of the two Governments, expresses the confident hope and expectation that the Imperial German Government can and will give assurance that American citizens and their vessels will not be molested by the naval forces of Germany otherwise than by visit and search, though their vessels may be traversing the sea area delimited in the proclamation of the German Admiralty.

It is added for the information of the Imperial Government that representations have been made to His Britannic Majesty’s Government in respect to the unwarranted use of the American flag for the protection of British ships.

[Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan]
The Germans Defend Their Submarine Policy
GOTTLIEB VON JAGOW

Berlin, May 28, 1915

The Imperial Government has subjected the statements of the Government of the United States to a careful examination and has the lively wish on its part also to contribute in a convincing and friendly manner to clear up any misunderstandings which may have entered into the relations of the two Governments through the events mentioned by the American Government.

With regard firstly to the cases of the American steamers Cushing and Gulfflight, the American Embassy has already been informed that it is far from the German Government to have any intention of ordering attacks by submarines or flyers on neutral vessels in the zone which have not been guilty of any hostile act; on the contrary, the most explicit instructions have been repeatedly given the German armed forces to avoid attacking such vessels. If neutral vessels have come to grief through the German submarine war during the past few months, by mistake, it is a question of isolated and exceptional cases which are traceable to the misuse of flags by the British Government in connection with carelessness or suspicious actions on the part of [the] captains of the vessels. In all cases where a neutral vessel through no fault of its own has come to grief through the German submarine or flyers according to the facts as ascertained by the German Government, this Government has expressed its regret at the unfortunate occurrence and promised indemnification where the facts justified it. The German Government will treat the cases of the American steamers Cushing and Gulfflight according to the same principles. An investigation of these cases is in progress. Its results will be communicated to the Embassy shortly. The investigation might, if thought desirable, be supplemented by an international commission of inquiry, pursuant to Title III of the Hague Convention of October 18, 1907, for the pacific settlement of international disputes.

In the case of the sinking of the English steamer Falaba, the commander of the German submarine had the intention of allowing passengers and crew ample opportunity to save themselves. It was not until the captain disregarded the order to lay to and took to flight, sending up rocket signals for help, that the German commander ordered the crew and passengers by signals and megaphone to leave the ship within ten minutes. As a matter of fact he allowed them twenty-three minutes and did not fire the torpedo until suspicious steamer were hurrying to the aid of the Falaba.

With regard to the loss of life when the British passenger steamer Lusitania was sunk, the German Government has already expressed its deep regret to the neutral Governments concerned that nationals of those countries lost their lives on that occasion. The Imperial Government must state for the rest the impression that certain important facts most directly connected with the sinking of the Lusitania may have escaped the attention of the Government of the United States. It therefore considers it necessary in the interest of the clear and full understanding aimed at by either Government primarily to convince itself that the reports of the facts which are before the two Governments are complete and in agreement.

The Government of the United States proceeds on the assumption that the Lusitania is to be considered as an ordinary unarmed merchant vessel. The Imperial Government begs in this connection to point out that the Lusitania was one of the largest and fastest English commerce steamers, constructed with Government funds as auxiliary cruisers, and is expressly included in the navy list published by British Admiralty. It is moreover known to the Imperial Government from reliable information furnished by its officials and neutral passengers that for some time practically all the more valuable English merchant vessels have been provided with guns, ammunition, and other weapons, and reinforced with a crew specially practiced in manning guns. According to reports at hand here, the Lusitania when she left New York undoubtedly had guns on board which were mounted under decks and masked.

The Imperial Government furthermore has the honor to direct the particular attention of the American Government to the fact that the British Admiralty by a secret instruction of February of this year advised the British merchant marine not only to seek protection behind neutral flags and markings, but even when so disguised to attack German submarines by ramming them. High rewards have been offered by the British Government as a special incentive for the destruction of the submarines by merchant vessels, and such rewards have already been paid out. In view of these facts, which are satisfactorily known to it, the Imperial Government is unable to consider English merchant vessels any longer as "undefended territory" in the zone of maritime war designated by the Admiralty Staff of the Imperial German Navy, the German commanders are consequently no longer in a position to observe the rules of capture otherwise usual and with which they invariably complied before this. Lastly, the Imperial Government must specially point out that on her last trip the Lusitania, as on earlier occasions, had Canadian troops and munitions on board, including no less than 5,400 cases of ammunition destined for the destruction of brave German soldiers who are fulfilling with self-sacrifice and devotion their duty in the service of the Fatherland. The German Government believes that it acts in just self-defense when it seeks to protect the lives of its soldiers by destroying ammunition destined for the enemy with the means of war at its command. The English steamship company must have been aware of the dangers to which passengers on board the Lusitania were exposed under the circumstances. In taking them on board in spite of this the company quite deliberately tried to use the lives of American citizens as protection for the ammunition carried, and violated the clear provisions of American laws which expressly prohibit, and provide punishment for, the carrying of passengers on ships which have explosives on board. The company thereby wantonly caused the death of so many passengers. According to the express report of the submarine commander concerned, which is further confirmed by all other reports, there can be no doubt that the rapid sinking of the Lusitania was primarily due to the explosion of the cargo of ammunition caused by the torpedo. Otherwise, in all human probability, the passengers of the Lusitania would have been saved.

The Imperial Government holds the facts recited above to be of sufficient importance to recommend them to a careful examination by the American Government. The Imperial Government begs to reserve a final statement of its position with regard to the demand made in connection with the sinking of the Lusitania until a reply is received from the American Government.

[Foreign Minister Gottlieb] von Jagow

7.2: Voices for Intervention (1915)

There was never any serious support in the United States for entering the war on the side of the Central Powers. But from the beginning some Americans sought to align the United States militarily with Britain and France. There have been many explanations for this tilt to the Allies. Below are three contemporary documents that suggest reasons for U.S. sympathy for the Allied side and for the military support for Britain and France America finally provided.

The first is an excerpt from the Bryce Report of 1915, a British indictment of German behavior toward civilians in the German-occupied regions of France and Belgium. James Bryce, chief author of the report, was the former British ambassador to the United States, a respected figure who had written a famous book about America a generation before.

The Bryce Report was part of a concerted Allied propaganda campaign to influence U.S. public opinion. Do the statements of the report ring true? Is it clear that the brutality against civilians described was deliberate German policy? How do Bryce and his colleagues link the Belgian and French atrocities to German, or “Prussian,” militarism?

The second item is a memo from the private papers of Robert Lansing, the man who succeeded William Jennings Bryan as secretary of state in 1915. Although he represented an officially neutral nation, clearly Lansing himself was not neutral. What were the bases for his pro-Allies feelings? Were they shared by other influential Americans? Were his views of German policies and goals valid?

The third selection is a letter by Lansing to President Wilson on the issue of extending financial credits to the Allies to allow them to continue to buy U.S. munitions and other war supplies. Earlier, in 1914, the U.S. government had sought to discourage U.S. loans to any of the belligerents as an unequal act. Lansing’s proposal represents a retreat from that policy. By April 1917 U.S. investors had bought $2.3 billion of Allied bonds.

Critics of U.S. intervention in World War I have said that the liberal loan policy of the Wilson administration created an economic stake in Allied victory that powerful influenced U.S. policy. What were Lansing’s reasons for wanting to liberalize U.S. loan policies? Are his arguments convincing? Did America have an economic stake in the Allied cause and was this a significant factor in drawing the United States into the war in 1917?

British Report on German Atrocities in Belgium

AMBASSADOR JAMES BRYCE

In the minds of Prussian officers War seems to have become a sort of sacred mission, one of the highest functions of the omnipotent State, which is itself as much an Army as a State. Ordinary morality and the ordinary sentiment of pity vanish in its presence, superseded by a new standard which justifies to the soldier every means that can conduces to success, however shocking to a natural sense of justice and humanity, however revolting to his own feelings. The Spirit of War is defied. Obedience to the State and its War Lord leaves no room for any other duty or feeling. Cruelty becomes legitimate when it promises victory. Proclaimed by the heads of the army, this doctrine would seem to have permeated the officers and affected even the private soldiers, leading them to justify the killing of non-combatants as an act of war, and so accustomed them to slaughter that even women and children become at last the victims. It cannot be supposed to be a national doctrine, for it neither springs from nor reflects the mind and feelings of the German people as they have hitherto been known to other nations. It is a specifically military doctrine, the outcome of a theory held by a ruling caste who have brooded and thought, written and talked and dreamed about War until they have fallen under its obsession and been hypnotised by its spirit.

The doctrine is plainly set forth in the German Official Monograph on the usages of War on land, issued under the direction of the German staff. This book is pervaded throughout by the view that whatever military needs suggest becomes thereby lawful, and upon this principle, as the diaries show, the German officers acted. . . .

(a) Killing of Non-Combatants

The killing of civilians in Belgium has been already described sufficiently. Outrages on the civilian population of the invaded districts, the burning of villages, the shooting of innocent inhabitants and the taking of hostages, pillage and destruction continued as the German armies passed into France . . . .

(b) The Treatment of Women and Children

The evidence shows that the German authorities, when carrying out a policy of systematic arson and plunder in selected districts, usually drew some distinction between the adult male population on the one hand and the women and children on the other. It was a frequent practice to set apart the adult males of the condemned district with a view to the execution of a suitable number—preferably of the younger and more vigorous—and to reserve the women and children. . . .

We find many well-established cases of the slaughter (often accompanied by mutilation) of whole families, including not infrequently that of quite small children. In two cases it seems to be clear that preparations were made to burn a family alive. These crimes were committed over a period of many weeks and simultaneously in many places, and the authorities must have known or ought to have known that cruelties of this character were being perpetrated, nor can anyone doubt that they could have been stopped by swift and decisive action on the part of the heads of the German army. . . .

Whatever excuse may be offered by the Germans for the killing of grown-up women, there can be no possible defence for the murder of children, and if it can be shown that infants and small children were not infrequently bayoneted and shot it is a fair inference that many of the offences against women require no explanation more recondite than the unbridled violence of brutal or drunken criminals. . . .

Conclusions

From the foregoing pages it will be seen that the Committee have come to a definite conclusion upon each of the heads under which the evidence has been classified.

It is proved—

i. That there were in many parts of Belgium deliberate and systematically organised massacres of civil population, accompanied by many isolated murders and other outrages.

ii. That in the conduct of the war generally innocent civilians, both men and women, were murdered in large numbers, women violated, and children murdered.

iii. That looting, house burning, and the wanton destruction of property were ordered and countenanced by the officers of the German Army, that elaborate provision had been made for systematic incendiarism at the very outbreak of the war, and that the burnings and destruction were frequent where no military necessity could be alleged, being indeed part of a system of general terrorism.

iv. That the rules and usages of war were frequently broken, particularly by the using of civilians, including women and children, as a shield for advancing forces exposed to fire, to a less degree by killing the wounded and prisoners, and in the frequent abuse of the Red Cross and the White Flag.

Sensible as they are of the gravity of these conclusions, the Committee conceive that they would be doing less than their duty if they failed to record them as fully established by the evidence. Murder, lust, and pillage prevailed over many parts of Belgium on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilised nations during the last three centuries.

Our function is ended when we have stated what the evidence establishes, but we may be permitted to express our belief that these disclosures will not have been made in vain if they touch and rouse the conscience of mankind, and we venture to hope that as soon as the present war is over, the nations of the world in council will consider what means can be provided and sanctions devised to prevent the recurrence of such horrors as our generation is now witnessing.

Germany Must Not Be Allowed to Win the War

ROBERT LANSING

July 11, 1915

I have come to the conclusion that the German Government is utterly hostile to all nations with democratic institutions because those who compose it see in democracy a menace to absolutism and the defeat of the German ambition for world domination. Everywhere German agents are plotting and intriguing to accomplish the supreme purpose of their Government.

Only recently has the conviction come that democracy throughout the world is threatened. Suspicions of the vaguest sort only a few months ago have been more and more confirmed. From many sources evidence has been coming until it would be folly to close one's eyes to it.

German agents have undoubtedly been at work in Mexico arousing anti-American feeling and holding out false hopes of support. The proof is not conclusive but is sufficient to compel belief. Germans also appear to be operating in Haiti and San Domingo and are probably doing so in other Latin American republics.

I think that this is being done so that this nation will have troubles in America and be unable to take part in the European War if a repetition of such outrages as the LUSITANIA sinking should require us to act. It may even go further and have in mind the possibility of a future war with this Republic in case the Allies should be defeated.

In these circumstances the policies we adopt are vital to the future of the United States and, I firmly believe to the welfare of mankind, for I see in the perpetuation of democracy the one hope of universal peace and progress for the world. Today German absolutism is the great menace to democracy.

I think that we should, therefore, adopt the following for the present and pursue these policies until conditions materially change:

1. The settlement for the time being at least of present submarine controversy because the American people are still much divided on the merits of the war. As it progresses, I believe, that the real objects of the German Government will be disclosed and there will be united opposition. Meanwhile we should get ready to meet the worst.

2. A rigorous and continuing prosecution of all plots in this country and a vigilant watch on Germans and their activities here.
3. Secret investigations of German activities in Latin America, particularly Mexico, and the adoption of means to frustrate them.
4. The cultivation of a Pan American doctrine with the object of alienating the American republics from European influence, especially the German influence.
5. The actual participation of this country in the war in case it becomes evident that Germany will be the victor. A triumph for German imperialism must not be. We ought to look forward to this possibility and make ready to meet it.

There is a future possibility which does not change the foregoing policies but which emphasizes the last one. It is that the war may end in a draw or with the German Empire dominant over their enemies.

The argument could then be made by the German Government that, in spite of the fact that the world was arrayed against it, it succeeded in preventing the defeat of the Empire, and that having thus proved its superior efficiency it should be continued and supported as the agency best fitted to restore the German nation to a state of prosperity.

I believe that this argument would be potent with the German people, who are in the habit of unquestioning obedience to their rulers in thought as well as action. Of course the terrible cost of the war, when the time to consider that arrives, will weaken the argument for the people will ask what is the recompense for the great sacrifices they have made, the great sufferings which they have endured, and the Government will have nothing to show. The nation may then rise and demand a change to a political system in which their voice will be supreme. But, if the argument should prevail and the present military oligarchy should be perpetuated, then what?

My judgment is that the German Government, cherishing the same ambition of world empire which now possesses it, would with its usual vigor and thoroughness prepare to renew its attack on democracy. I think, however, that it would not pursue the course taken in this war which had failed because it would realize that the democratic nations would be more watchful and less trustful and better prepared to resist. It would probably endeavor to sow dissensions [sic] among the nations with liberal institutions and seek an alliance with other governments based on a more or less degree on the principle of absolutism.

The two powers, which would probably be approached by Germany, would be Russia and Japan, which are almost as hostile to democracy as Germany and which have similar ambitions of territorial expansion.

These three great empires would constitute an almost irresistible [sic] coalition against the nations with republican and liberal monarchical institutions. It would be the old struggle of absolutism against democracy, an even greater struggle than the one now in progress. The outcome would be doubtful, with, as it seems to me, the chances in favor of the autocratic allies.

The success of these three empires would mean a division for the time being at least of the world among them. I imagine that Germany would be master of Western Europe, of Africa and probably of the Americas; that Russia would dominate Scandinavia, and Western and Southern Asia; and Japan would control the Far East, the Pacific and possibly the West Coast of North America.

Their success would mean the overthrow of democracy in the world, the suppression of individual liberty, the setting up of evil ambitions, the subordination of the principles of right and justice to physical might directed by arbitrary will, and the turning back of the hands of human progress two centuries.

These, I believe, would be the consequences of the triumph of this triple alliance of autocratic empires, a triumph which even the most optimistic cannot deny to be a reasonable expectation.

The remedy seems to me to be plain. It is that Germany must not be permitted to win this war and to break even, though to prevent it this country is forced to take an active part. This ultimate necessity must be constantly in our minds in all our controversies with the belligerents. American public opinion must be prepared for the time, which may come, when we will have to cast aside our neutrality and become one of the champions of democracy.

We must in fact risk everything rather than leave the way open for a new combination of powers, stronger and more dangerous to liberty than the Central Allies are today.

Lending the Allies Money

ROBERT LANSING

Washington, September 6, 1915

My dear Mr. President:

Doubtless Secretary [William] McAdoo has discussed with you the necessity of floating government loans for the belligerent nations, which are purchasing such great quantities of goods in this country, in order to avoid a serious financial situation which will not only affect them but this country as well.

Briefly, the situation, as I understand it, is this: Since December 1st, 1914, to June 30, 1915, our exports have exceeded our imports by nearly a billion dollars, and it is estimated that the excess will be from July 1st to December 31, 1915, a billion and three quarters. Thus for the year 1915 the excess will be approximately two and [a] half billions of dollars.

It is estimated that the European banks have about three and [a] half billions of dollars in gold in their vaults. To withdraw any considerable amount would disastrously affect the credit of the European nations, and the consequence would be a general state of bankruptcy.

If the European countries cannot find means to pay for the excess of goods sold to them over those purchased from them, they will have to stop buying and our present export trade will shrink proportionately. The result would be restriction of

outputs, industrial depression, idle capital and idle labor, numerous failures, financial demoralization, and general unrest and suffering among the laboring classes.

Probably a billion and three quarters of the excess of European purchases can be taken care of by the sale of American securities held in Europe and by the transfer of trade balances of oriental countries, but that will leave three quarters of a billion to be met in some other way. Furthermore, even if that is arranged, we will have to face a more serious situation in January, 1916, as the American securities held abroad will have been exhausted.

I believe that Secretary McAdoo is convinced and I agree with him that there is only one means of avoiding this situation which would so seriously affect economic conditions in the country, and that is the flotation of large bond issues by the belligerent governments. Our financial institutions have the money to lend and wish to do so. On account of the great balance of trade in our favor the proceeds of these loans would be expended here. The result would be a maintenance of the credit of the borrowing nations based on their gold reserve, a continuance of our commerce at its present volume and industrial activity with the consequent employment of capital and labor and national prosperity.

Manifestly the Government has committed itself to the policy of discouraging general loans to belligerent governments. The practical reasons for the policy at the time we adopted it were sound, but basing it on the ground that loans are "inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality" is now a source of embarrassment. This latter ground is as strong today as it was a year ago, while the practical reasons for discouraging loans have largely disappeared. We have more money than we can use. Popular sympathy has become crystallized in favor of one or another of the belligerents to such an extent that the purchase of bonds would in no way increase the bitterness of partisanship or cause a possibly serious situation.

Now, on the other hand, we are face to face with what appears to be a critical economic situation, which can only be relieved apparently by the investment of American capital in foreign loans to be used in liquidating the enormous balance of trade in favor of the United States.

Can we afford to let a declaration as to our conception of "the true spirit of neutrality" made in the first days of the war stand in the way of our national interests which seem to be seriously threatened?

If we cannot afford to do this, how are we to explain away the declaration and maintain a semblance of consistency?

My opinion is that we ought to allow the loans to be made for our own good, and I have been seeking some means of harmonizing our policy, so unconditionally announced, with the flotation of general loans. As yet I have found no solution to the problem.

Secretary McAdoo considers that the situation is becoming acute and that something should be done at once to avoid the disastrous results which will follow a continuance of the present policy.

Faithfully yours,

Robert Lansing

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7.3: Opponents of Intervention (1917)

From the outset several groups opposed U.S. intervention in the European war. First there were the pacifists, whether members of "peace churches," like the Quakers and Mennonites, or adherents of various secular pacifist groups. Many Socialists also opposed U.S. intervention, although on political, not moral, grounds. Ethnic considerations also played a role in opposing going to war. Many German Americans and Irish Americans either favored the Central Powers or disliked the Allies. Finally, some midwestern Progressives were "isolationists" who denied that the United States had any vital interest in European affairs and urged their fellow citizens to steer clear of overseas entanglements.

The antiwar forces were unable to keep the United States neutral, however. Soon after the German government announced resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare in early 1917, the United States declared war on the Central Powers. The first selection below is a statement issued by the Socialist Party of America in early April, several days after the U.S. war declaration, expressing their opposition to the war. What were the bases of the Socialist position? Were they consistent with Socialist analyses of the nature of contemporary society? From this statement, can you deduce the Socialist attitude toward national loyalty and traditional patriotism?

The second selection is an excerpt from Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette's remarks during the war-declaration debate in Congress. It is representative of the views of many midwestern Progressives. What is La Follette's analysis of the origins of the war? How does it differ from that of the Socialists? How does his analysis influence his view of the war's justice? Do his remarks betray national biases and prejudices? La Follette's own state, Wisconsin, was home to a very large German American population. Could the senator's views have been colored by that fact?

Socialist Party Convention: The Socialists Protest the War

The Socialist Party and the War¹

The Socialist Party of the United States in the present grave crisis, solemnly reaffirms its allegiance to the principle of internationalism and working class solidarity the world over, and proclaims its unalterable opposition to the war just declared by the government of the United States.

¹Majority report adopted at the St. Louis Convention of the Socialist Party, April 7-14, 1917, and ratified by referendum.
Modern wars as a rule have been caused by the commercial and financial rivalry and intrigues of the capitalist interests in the different countries. Whether they have been frankly waged as wars of aggression or have been hypocritically represented as wars of “defense,” they have always been made by the classes and fought by the masses. Wars bring wealth and power to the ruling classes, and suffering, death and demoralization to the workers.

They breed a sinister spirit of passion, unreason, race hatred and false patriotism. They obscure the struggles of the workers for life, liberty and social justice. They tend to sever the vital bonds of solidarity between them and their brothers in other countries, to destroy their organizations and to curtail their civic and political rights and liberties.

The Socialist Party of the United States is unalterably opposed to the system of exploitation and class rule which is upheld and strengthened by military power and sham national patriotism. We, therefore, call upon the workers of all countries to refuse support to their governments in their wars. The wars of the contending national groups of capitalists are not the concern of the workers. The only struggle which would justify the workers in taking up arms is the great struggle of the working class of the world to free itself from economic exploitation and political oppression, and we particularly warn the workers against the snare and delusion of so-called defensive warfare. As against the false doctrine of national patriotism we uphold the ideal of international working-class solidarity. In support of capitalism, we will not willingly give a single life or a single dollar; in support of the struggle of the workers for freedom we pledge our all.

The mad orgy of death and destruction which is now convulsing unfortunate Europe was caused by the conflict of capitalist interests in the European countries.

In each of these countries, the workers were oppressed and exploited. They produced enormous wealth but the bulk of it was withheld from them by the owners of the industries. The workers were thus deprived of the means to repurchase the wealth which they themselves had created.

The capitalist class of each country was forced to look for foreign markets to dispose of the accumulated “surplus” wealth. The huge profits made by the capitalists could no longer be profitably reinvested in their own countries, hence, they were driven to look for foreign fields of investment. The geographical boundaries of each modern capitalist country thus became too narrow for the industrial and commercial operations of its capitalist class.

The efforts of the capitalists of all leading nations were therefore centered upon the domination of the world markets. Imperialism became the dominant note in the politics of Europe. The acquisition of colonial possessions and the extension of spheres of commercial and political influence became the object of diplomatic intrigues and the cause of constant clashes between nations.

The acute competition between the capitalist powers of the earth, their jealousies and distrusts of one another and the fear of the rising power of the working class forced each of them to arm to the teeth. This led to the mad rivalry of armament, which, years before the outbreak of the present war, had turned the leading countries of Europe into armed camps with standing armies of many millions, drilled and equipped for war in times of “peace.”

Capitalism, imperialism and militarism had thus laid the foundation of an inevitable general conflict in Europe. The ghastly war in Europe was not caused by an accidental event, nor by the policy or institutions of any single nation. It was the logical outcome of the competitive capitalist system.

The six million men of all countries and races who have been ruthlessly slain in the first thirty months of this war, the millions of others who have been crippled and maimed, the vast treasures of wealth that have been destroyed, the untold misery and sufferings of Europe, have not been sacrifices exacted in a struggle for principles or ideals, but wanton offerings upon the altar of private profit.

The forces of capitalism which have led to the war in Europe are even more hideously transparent in the war recently provoked by the ruling class of this country.

When Belgium was invaded, the government enjoined upon the people of this country the duty of remaining neutral, thus clearly demonstrating that the “dictates of humanity,” and the fate of small nations and of democratic institutions were matters that did not concern it. But when our enormous war traffic was seriously threatened, our government calls upon us to rally to the “defense of democracy and civilization.”

Our entrance into the European war was instigated by the predatory capitalists in the United States who boast the enormous profit of seven billion dollars from the manufacture and sale of munitions and war supplies and from the exportation of American food stuffs and other necessaries. They are also deeply interested in the continuance of war and the success of the allied arms through their huge loans to the governments of the allied powers and through other commercial ties. It is the same interests which strive for imperialist domination of the Western Hemisphere.

The war of the United States against Germany cannot be justified even on the plea that it is a war in defense of American rights or American “honor.” Ruthless as the unrestricted submarine war policy of the German government was and is, it is not an invasion of the rights of the American people, as such, but only an interference with the opportunity of certain groups of American capitalists to coin cold profits out of the blood and sufferings of our fellow men in the warring countries of Europe.

It is not a war against the militarist regime of the Central Powers. Militarism can never be abolished by militarism.

It is not a war to advance the cause of democracy in Europe. Democracy can never be imposed upon any country by a foreign power by force of arms.

It is cant and hypocrisy to say that the war is not directed against the German people, but against the Imperial Government of Germany. If we send an armed force to the battlefields of Europe, its cannon will mow down the masses of the German people and not the Imperial German Government.

Our entrance into the European conflict at this time will serve only to multiply the horrors of the war, to increase the toll of death and destruction and to prolong the fiendish slaughter. It will bring death, suffering and destitution to the people of the United States and particularly to the working class. It will give the powers of reaction in this country the pretext for an attempt to throttle our rights and to crush our democratic institutions, and to fasten upon this country a permanent militarism.
The working class of the United States has no quarrel with the working class of Germany or of any other country. The people of the United States have no quarrel with the people of Germany or any other country. The American people did not want and do not want this war. They have not been consulted about the war and have had no part in declaring war. They have been plunged into this war by the trickery and treachery of the ruling class of the country through its representatives in the National Administration and National Congress, its demagogic agitators, its subsidized press, and other servile instruments of public expression.

We brand the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world.

In all modern history there has been no war more unjustifiable than the war in which we are about to engage.

No greater dishonor has ever been forced upon a people than that which the capitalist class is forcing upon this nation against its will.

A Progressive Opposes the Declaration of War

ROBERT LA FOLLETTE

Mr. La Follette. Mr. Chairman, when history records the truth about this awful act we are about to commit here, which means the maiming and dismembering of thousands of our noble boys and the deaths of thousands more, it will record that the Congress of the United States made this declaration of war under a misapprehension of the facts inexcusable in itself and that the people at large acquiesced in it on the theory that the Congress should have the facts, and would not make a declaration of war not justified by every rule of equity and fair dealing between nations, impartially applied by this country to all belligerents, and that after our following that course one of these contesting nations, despite our impartial action, had wantonly destroyed our legitimate commerce and destroyed the lives of some of our people.

I say the people acquiesce in our actions here to-day on exactly that false assumption of the facts. We have not treated, as a Government, these belligerents with any degree of impartiality; but, on the contrary, have demanded of one of them absolute obedience to our ideas and interpretations of international law, and have allowed at least one of the other belligerents to override at will the established rules and practice of all the civilized nations of the world for a hundred years with but feeble protest, and, in many cases, with no protest at all.

We surrendered to Great Britain practically all we contested for in the War of 1812. It is true, as far as we know, that she has not impressed our seamen, but she has seized and appropriated to her own use entire cargoes and the ships that carried them. Not carriers in European trade, but carriers to South America.

One of the underlying causes of the awful holocaust in Europe was because Germany had by her systematized reductions in cost of manufacturing, by subsidization of transportation lines and methods of credits made such serious inroads on Great Britain's trade in South America as to seriously disturb her equanimity and threaten her prestige as well as attendant profits.

Mr. Chairman, this war now devastating Europe so ruthlessly is not a war of humanity, but a war of commercialism, and there is not a student of economic conditions within the sound of my voice but knows that to be the fundamental cause of that war, although there are many primary and intermediate questions entering into it.

The President of the United States in his message of the 2d of April [1917] said that the European war was brought on by Germany's rulers without the sanction or will of the people. For God's sake, what are we doing now? Does the President of the United States feel that the will of the American people is being consulted in regard to this declaration of war? The people of Germany surely had as much consideration as he has given the people of the United States. He has heard the cry of the Shylocks calling for their pound of flesh; later on he will hear the cry of Rachel weeping for her children and mourning because they are not, sacrificed to make good the pound of flesh in the name of liberty. The exclamation "O Liberty! Liberty! how many crimes are committed in thy name!" was well made.

Ours is the greatest Nation on the face of the globe. We have had a chance, if we had maintained a strict neutrality, to have bound up the wounds of the oppressed and to have upheld the tenets of the highest civilization throughout the world. But, no; we are asked to go into partnership with the country that has never allowed justice and right to have any weight with her when conquest and gold were placed in the balance. In India, which she held by right of conquest, as a punishment to those natives of that country who desired to be free of England's yoke and rebellion, even as did we in our Revolutionary period, she mercifully tied many of the rebels to the mouths of her cannon and humanely blew them to atoms as a sample of English Christianity. She destroyed the Boer Republic by intrigue and force of arms; she forced, for love of gold, the opium trade on China. Christian England, our would-be partner! In the Napoleonic wars she, by force of arms, confiscated the entire shipping of small but neutral nations to her own use, just as she has in a smaller degree appropriated ships of our citizens to her own use within the past two years. During the Civil War she fell over herself to recognize the Confederacy, and gave it every encouragement possible. Now we are asked to become her faithful ally against a country that, whatever her faults, surely has no blacker record than that of Christian England; to contribute our money and our people in the holy name of liberty to destroy one belligerent, which the President designates as Prussian militarism, a menace of the world; but English navalism, which is surely as great a menace, we enter into partnership with. George Washington said, "Avoid European entanglements," but we are recklessly entering a path to the end of which no man can foresee or comprehend, at the behest of, in many cases, a venal press and of a pacifist President.

God pity our country, gentlemen of the House of Representatives, if you desire that this cup be placed to our country's lips to quaff for crimes committed by a country for unneutral actions and that we enter into an alliance with another country which has been much less neutral. You may do so; I can not so vote at this time.

Mr. Chairman, throughout the country patriotic meetings are being held to encourage enlistments of our young men and boys into the Army to engage in this war in advance of our declaration.

Mr. Chairman, I suggest a resolution, which should be passed and adhered to by the young men of our country and by our soldiers who are asked to enter the trenches of Europe:

"I hereby pledge myself to the service of my country and will guarantee to go and uphold its honor and its flag as soon as the sons of all the newspaper editors who have stood out for our entering the war, and who are of age for enlistment, have enlisted for the cause and the proprietors and editors themselves have patriotically enlisted, on the theory that they should feel it their duty to do so as instigators of the act."

Likewise, Mr. Chairman, the sons of manufacturers of ammunition and war supplies, and all stockholders making profits from such trade. They should freely offer their sons on the altar of their country and, in case of their being under military age, go themselves. Likewise, Mr. Chairman, the J. Pierpont Morgans and their associates, who have floated war loans running into millions which they now want the United States to guarantee by entering the European war; after they and all the holders of such securities have offered their sons and themselves, when of military age, on the altar of their country, and, Mr. Chairman, when the above-mentioned persons have no sons and are too old themselves to accept military service, then they shall, to make good their desire for the upholding of American honor and American rights, donate in lieu of such service of selves or sons one-half of all their worldly goods to make good their patriotic desire for our entering the European war in the name of liberty and patriotism.

Mr. Chairman, it will be fitting for those who have really nothing at stake in this war but death to enter into it and give their lives in the name of liberty and patriotism, after the persons covered by the above resolution have done their part as above suggested and many thousands of our citizens will see it that way ere long.

7.4: Idealism and Disillusionment (1918, 1920)

Once the war ended, Woodrow Wilson quickly became preoccupied with the establishment of a new world order. America’s military role at the end of the war had been small but significant, and it soon became apparent that America’s economic role in the postwar world would be great. Wilson, like most Americans, held the institutions of Europe as largely responsible for the tragedy of World War I—monarchies that rarely extended political power to the masses and economic imperialism that ensured hostility and rivalry among nations. If corrupt diplomatic practices like secret treaties could be replaced by international law that would guarantee such rights as freedom of the seas, peace might have a chance. If the great autocratic and imperial political machines of the world loosened their grip, and individual peoples were each allowed national self-determination, then peace might have a chance. To replace Europe’s sagging imperial structures and their inevitable rivalries, Wilson proposed a new scheme of international law to be called the League of Nations.

Wilson’s philosophy was concisely defined in “The Fourteen Points” and permeated his thinking and diplomatic activity throughout the last three years of his presidency. The Fourteen Points have often been assailed as too idealistic to have been successful and full of basically unresolvable, inherent contradictions. Although the U.S. Senate never ratified the peace treaty that ended World War I, and the United States never joined the League of Nations that Wilson had worked so hard to establish, many of the main principles of “The Fourteen Points” found their way into the mainstream of U.S. thinking on foreign policy years later.

Are “The Fourteen Points” an idealistic proclamation that should have been dismissed as mere rhetoric or propaganda? Did they have an economic component? Did Wilson have a legitimate point in saying that a war would remain inevitable if the institutions of Europe did not change? Most of all, how do “The Fourteen Points” reflect America’s emerging role as a global economic and political force, and how, if implemented, would U.S. interests have been served by them? Finally, although the United States retreated into isolationism in the 1920s and 1930s, how did the principles of Wilsonian idealism prove prophetic?

Finally, in evaluating the Senate’s refusal to ratify the treaty unamended, yet another controversy was created. Did Wilson overstep the bounds of presidential authority by negotiating such a treaty without Congressional approval? Or did Wilson behave irrationally by refusing to sign an amended version that was acceptable to the Senate? Compare the Senate Resolution ratifying the treaty to “The Fourteen Points” and ask if the differences between the two are substantive or cosmetic.

The Fourteen Points
Wilson’s Address to Congress, January 8, 1918

Gentlemen of the Congress:

... It will be our wish and purpose that the processes of peace, when they are begun, shall be absolutely open and that they shall involve and permit henceforth no secret understandings of any kind. The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone.
by; so is also the day of secret covenants entered into in the interest of particular governments and likely at some unlooked-for moment to upset the peace of the world. It is this happy fact, now clear to the view of every public man whose thoughts do not still linger in an age that is dead and gone, which makes it possible for every nation whose purposes are consistent with justice and the peace of the world to avow now or at any other time the objects it has in view.

We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which touched us to the quick and made the life of our own people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secured once and for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the war be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program of the world’s peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this:

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action of the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have established and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safe-guarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unreserved opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

In regard to these essential rectifications of wrong and assertions of right we feel ourselves to be intimate partners of all the governments and peoples associated together against the Imperialists. We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We stand together until the end. For such arrangements and covenants we are willing to fight and to continue to fight until they are achieved; but only because we wish the right to prevail and desire a just and stable peace such as can be secured only by removing the chief provocations to war, which this program does not remove. We have no jealousy of German greatness, and there is nothing in this program that impairs it. We grudge her no achievement or distinction of learning or of pacific enterprise such as she has made her record very bright and very enviable. We do not wish to injure her or to block in any way her legitimate influence or power. We do not wish to fight her either with arms or with hostile arrangements of trade if she is willing to associate herself with us and the other peace-loving nations of the world in covenants of
justice and law and fair dealing. We wish her only to accept a place of equality among the peoples of the world,—the new world in which we now live,—instead of a place of mastery.

Neither do we presume to suggest to her any alteration or modification of her institutions. But it is necessary, we must frankly say, and necessary as a preliminary to any intelligent dealings with her on our part, that we should know whom her spokesmen speak for when they speak to us, whether for the Reichstag majority or for the military party and the men whose creed is imperial domination.

We have spoken now, surely, in terms too concrete to admit of any further doubt or question. An evident principle runs through the whole program I have outlined. It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak. Unless this principle be made its foundation no part of the structure of international justice can stand. The people of the United States could act upon no other principle; and to the vindication of this principle they are ready to devote their lives, their honor, and everything that they possess. The moral climax of this the culminating and final war for human liberty has come, and they are ready to put their own strength, their own highest purpose, their own integrity and devotion to the test.

The Defeat of the League of Nations

Resolution of Ratification of Treaty of Peace with Germany and the League of Nations, March 19, 1920

Resolution of ratification.

Resolved (two-thirds of the Senators present concurring therein). That the Senate advise and consent to the ratification of the treaty of peace with Germany concluded at Versailles on the 28th day of June, 1919, subject to the following reservations and understandings, which are hereby made a part and condition of this resolution of ratification, which ratification is not to take effect or bind the United States until the said reservations and understandings adopted by the Senate have been accepted as a part and a condition of this resolution of ratification by the allied and associated powers and a failure on the part of the allied and associated powers to make objection to said reservations and understandings prior to the deposit of ratification by the United States shall be taken as a full and final acceptance of such reservations and understandings by said powers:

1. The United States so understands and construes article 1 that in case of notice of withdrawal from the League of Nations, as provided in said article, the United States shall be the sole judge as to whether all its international obligations and all its obligations under the said covenant have been fulfilled, and notice of withdrawal by the United States may be given by a concurrent resolution of the Congress of the United States.

2. The United States assumes no obligation to preserve the territorial integrity or political independence of any other country by the employment of its military or naval forces, its resources, or by any form of economic discrimination, or to interfere in any way in controversies between nations, including all controversies relating to territorial integrity or political independence, whether members of the league or not, under the provisions of article 10, or to employ the military or naval forces of the United States, under any article of the treaty for any purpose, unless in any particular case the Congress, which, under the Constitution, has the sole power to declare war or authorize the employment of the military or naval forces of the United States, shall, in the exercise of full liberty of action, by act or joint resolution so provide.

3. No mandate shall be accepted by the United States under article 22, part 1, or any other provision of the treaty of peace with Germany, except by action of the Congress of the United States.

4. The United States reserves to itself exclusively the right to decide what questions are within its domestic jurisdiction and declares that all domestic and political questions relating wholly or in part to its internal affairs, including immigration, labor, coast-wise traffic, the tariff, commerce, the suppression of traffic in women and children and in opium and other dangerous drugs, and all other domestic questions, are solely within the jurisdiction of the United States and are not under this treaty to be submitted in any way either to arbitration or to the consideration of the council or of the assembly of the League of Nations, or any agency thereof, or to the decision or recommendation of any other power.

5. The United States will not submit to arbitration or to inquiry by the assembly or by the council of the League of Nations, provided for in said treaty of peace, any questions which in the judgment of the United States depend upon or relate to its long-established policy, commonly known as the Monroe doctrine; said doctrine is to be interpreted by the United States alone and is hereby declared to be wholly outside the jurisdiction of said League of Nations and entirely unaffected by any provision contained in the said treaty of peace with Germany.

6. The United States withdraws its assent to articles 156, 157, and 158, and reserves full liberty of action with respect to any controversy which may arise under said articles.

7. No person is or shall be authorized to represent the United States, nor shall any citizen of the United States be eligible, as a member of any body or agency established or authorized by said treaty of peace with Germany, except pursuant to an act of the Congress of the United States providing for his appointment and defining his powers and duties.

8. The United States understands that the reparation commission will regulate or interfere with exports from the United States to Germany, or from Germany to the United States, only when the United States by act or joint resolution of Congress approves such regulation or interference.

9. The United States shall not be obligated to contribute to any expenses of the League of Nations, or of the secretariat, or of any commission, or committee, or conference, or other agency, organized under the League of Nations or under the treaty or for the purpose of carrying out the treaty provisions, unless and until an
appropriation of funds available for such expenses shall have been made by the Congress of the United States: Provided. That the foregoing limitation shall not apply to the United States' proportionate share of the expense of the office force and salary of the secretary general.

10. No plan for the limitation of armaments proposed by the council of the League of Nations under the provisions of article 8 shall be held as binding the United States until the same shall have been accepted by Congress, and the United States reserves the right to increase its armament without the consent of the council whenever the United States is threatened with invasion or engaged in war.

11. The United States reserves the right to permit, in its discretion, the nationals of a covenant-breaking State, as defined in article 16 of the covenant of the League of Nations, residing within the United States or in countries other than such covenant-breaking State, to continue their commercial, financial, and personal relations with the nationals of the United States.

12. Nothing in articles 296, 297, or in any of the annexes thereto or in any other article, section, or annex of the treaty of peace with Germany shall, as against citizens of the United States, be taken to mean any confirmation, ratification, or approval of any act otherwise illegal or in contravention of the rights of citizens of the United States.

13. The United States withholds its assent to Part XIII (articles 387 to 427, inclusive) unless Congress by act or joint resolution shall hereafter make provision for representation in the organization established by said Part XIII, and in such event the participation of the United States will be governed and conditioned by the provisions of such act or joint resolution.

14. Until Part I, being the covenant of the League of Nations, shall be so amended as to provide that the United States shall be entitled to cast a number of votes equal to that which any member of the league and its self-governing dominions, colonies, or parts of empire, in the aggregate shall be entitled to cast, the United States assumes no obligation to be bound, except in cases where Congress has previously given its consent, by any election, decision, report, or finding of the council or assembly in which any member of the league and its self-governing dominions, colonies, or parts of empire, in the aggregate have cast more than one vote.

The United States assumes no obligation to be bound by any decision, report, or finding of the council or assembly arising out of any dispute between the United States and any member of the league if such member, or any self-governing dominion, colony, empire, or part of empire united with it politically has voted.

15. In consenting to the ratification of the treaty with Germany the United States adheres to the principle of self-determination and to the resolution of sympathy with the aspirations of the Irish people for a government of their own choice adopted by the Senate June 6, 1919, and declares that when such government is attained by Ireland, a consummation it is hoped is at hand, it should promptly be admitted as a member of the League of Nations.

The 1920s have come down to us as the Jazz Age, a time when Americans, buoyed by prosperity, abandoned social concerns and gave themselves up to moneymaking and personal gratification. The conventional icons of the era include the Charleston, the flapper, the speakeasy, fast cars, the Greenwich Village bohemian, the real estate speculator, and the Wall Street bull market.

But this picture of a carefree, hedonistic society distorts reality. If economic and class conflict in the 1920s were muted by the bright glow of prosperity, cultural conflict was not. Indeed, few eras in our history witnessed such bitter clashes of contending values, creeds, and loyalties. Although the battles were often confused, in general they pitted politically conservative, traditional, white Protestant rural and small-town Americans against various groups defined as outsiders by virtue of their liberal-to-radical politics, their religious or ethnic deviation, their urban cosmopolitanism, or sometimes all three.

The selections below illustrate three of the major cultural battlegrounds of the 1920s: political radicalism, religious and racial tolerance, and prohibition. There were other cultural struggles during the twenties as well as clashes over such issues as Darwinian evolution, sexual behavior, and the deportment of the young. All, however, were really aspects of the same cultural and ideological confrontation.

Keep in mind that the following documents refer to only a few facets of the twenties "cultural war" and do not present the full range of positions even on the controversies they discuss. As you read the selections, consider why the 1920s brought out cultural conflict in so lacerating a way.