

world: "America's duty toward the people living in barbarism is to see that they are freed from their chains and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself," declared Theodore Roosevelt. "Peace cannot be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nations." It is not surprising then that Wilson was willing to intervene in the affairs of even such a major nation as Mexico. "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men," he affirmed.

American intellectuals, after 1890, had been engaged in a dramatic reversal of their attitudes toward Germany. From 1810 to 1890, Germany had been perceived as the most modern European nation, and Americans had gone there to be educated into the most progressive intellectual currents. But the early-twentieth-century image of Germany, firmly established by 1914, was of the most reactionary European nation, stubbornly preserving the medieval and barbaric past. England had replaced Germany as the most admired country. Wilson had shared in this change of attitude. His writings were full of praise for things English, while they described German culture as "essentially selfish and lacking in spirituality."

When war came to Europe in August 1914, Wilson strongly emphasized the necessity of American neutrality. He felt that this world war might create a situation where America would have "the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world." England and France, however, in their conflict with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires were considered too compromised and corrupted by their own empires to be completely worthy of having the United States fight on their side. Wilson's vision of the world that would emerge from this conflict was one in which all empires were dissolved and the major nations imitated the pattern of the United States by pursuing a course of "Open Door" economic expansion which flowed across national boundaries.

If the United States entered the war on the side of England and France only to help them defend their empires, then the United States would have lost its soul in this imperial civil war, and "the spirit of ruthless brutality," Wilson warned, "will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man on the street." If America did not Americanize Europe, then Europe would Europeanize America, and the nation would be locked into a cycle of European civil wars.

By November 1916, however, when he was re-elected on the slogan "He kept us out of war," Wilson feared that he had become trapped in a web of circumstances beyond his control. He and his advisers had refused to take a strong stand against England when its navy violated international law. But Wilson had issued ever stronger warnings to Germany to halt its submarine warfare, also contrary to international law. Finally, in the summer of 1916, an American ultimatum forced the curtailment of German submarine activity. The nightmarish fear that descended upon Wilson was that a German decision to recommence submarine warfare would challenge American national honor and ultimately force the country to enter the European civil war. Desperately, he tried to persuade England and France and Germany to sit down and negotiate a peace settlement. But in January 1917, German leaders decided to take the calculated risk that the restoration of unrestricted submarine activity would defeat the Allies before America could mobilize its military forces.

The great power of the Presidency in foreign affairs had made it possible for Wilson to place the United States on the verge of war without the knowledge of the average voter. These voters had re-elected Wilson because they believed he would preserve peace. The strong peace movement among women had rallied for Wilson. Many German-Americans and Irish-Americans who hated English imperialism also backed Wilson. A number of midwestern WASP "progressives," who feared the power of eastern corporations to influence foreign policy, saw the Republican party in 1916 as pro-English and prowar and supported Wilson.

Wilson shared the view of WASP leaders who had made the foreign-policy revolution in the 1890s that Germany was the chief threat to the American policy of worldwide free trade dominated by the American economy. Both the United States and Germany surpassed England in industrial production and population in the 1890s. But German leaders chose to try to expand overseas through an empire of colonies modeled after that of England. From 1895 to 1917, American naval and military leaders planned for possible war against Germany. And German leaders expected war against the United States during these years.

In February 1917, all of Wilson's advisers urged him to ask for a declaration of war. Bryan, his first secretary of state, had resigned when Wilson's eastern friends had persuaded him to bend neutrality

and allow the New York bankers to make huge loans to England and France. By March 1917, these loans totaled more than \$2 billion, whereas only \$20 million had been loaned to Germany.

Wilson would not retreat from the right of Americans and American ships to sail into the war zone. This was the revolutionary principle of free trade to which the WASP elite was committed. Wilson asked Congress to pass legislation to arm American merchant ships. When his request was blocked by such midwestern progressive Republicans as Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin and George Norris of Nebraska, Wilson armed the ships by executive order. They sailed to England and were fired on by German submarines, and they fired back. By March 1917, Wilson had involved the United States in a shooting war with Germany.

Germany made it easier for Wilson to overcome congressional opposition to the war by urging Mexico to join in a war against the United States and regain the territories it had lost in 1846. These Zimmermann Notes fell into American hands, and Wilson used them to prove the aggressiveness of the German feudal aristocracy. But when Wilson went to Congress with a war message in April, deep doubts still haunted him. "My message today was a message of death for our young men," he lamented to a friend; "how strange it seemed to applaud that."

Once the decision was made, Wilson seemed to be trying to persuade himself that it really was a crusade. "Valor withholds itself from all small implications and entanglements and waits for the great opportunity when the sword will flash as if it carried the light of heaven upon its blade," he cried out. "When men take up arms to set other men free, there is something sacred and holy in the warfare." "I will not cry peace," Wilson affirmed, "as long as there is sin and wrong in the world." Wilson still hoped, at the end of the war, that England and France would divest themselves of their empires and accept the American "Open Door" policy. Then with the end of the German and the Austro-Hungarian empires, American entry into the war would have ushered in a new era in which the entire world would become a rational space for free trade among all nations.

Wilson fiercely repressed all criticism of the war, especially by the Socialists. "This is no time either for divided counsels, or for divided leadership," he warned. "Unity of command is as necessary now in civil action as it is upon the field of battle." But as American armies tipped the balance and forced German surrender in November 1918, Wilson was faced with an overwhelming Republican vic-

tory in the congressional elections. The "many Americans" who opposed the war could, at least, express their unhappiness by voting for Republicans.

Just as he refused to acknowledge that England and France had not divested themselves of their imperial ambitions, he refused to admit that he was not supported by a unified national consensus on the meaning of the war and the shape of the peace. He sailed to Europe, thinking that he had it in his own power to lead the world into a new era. "I am the only person of high authority amongst all the peoples of the world who is at liberty to speak and hold nothing back," he declared. "I am speaking for the silent mass of mankind who have as yet had no place or opportunity to speak."

In Paris, however, he was forced to compromise with the imperial ambitions of England, France, Italy, and Japan. But when he came home to ask for the ratification of the peace treaty and for American membership in a League of Nations, which would guarantee the political patterns established by the treaty, he refused to listen to criticism of the treaty and the structure of the League.

Republicans demanded compromise and revision before they would support the treaty. But Wilson ordered Democratic congressional leaders to reject all compromises. In the hope of persuading the people that they must accept his treaty as the guarantee that American participation in the war had changed world history, he went on a speaking tour of the nation. Addressing the veterans in the crowds, Wilson cried out, "Boys, I told you before you went across the seas that this was a war against war, and I did my best to fulfill the promise, but I am obliged to come to you in mortification and shame and say I have not been able to fulfill the promise. You are betrayed. You fought for something you did not get."

Wilson drove himself hard on this trip; he inflicted such physical punishment on himself as he spoke several times a day, day after day, that it seemed that he was seeking martyrdom. Suddenly, he collapsed, incapacitated by a stroke. He spent the last year of his Presidency in silence and semidarkness. Meanwhile, in 1920 the voters went to the polls and elected Warren Harding, who promised a return to "normalcy."

America had refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles or join the League of Nations. Wilson's dream of world order, of a world liberated from traditional imperialism by the United States, lay silent and impotent within him. Probably the most painful thing for this invalid, however, must have been the knowledge that the self-