



The president and his soon-to-be second wife, Mrs. Edith Galt, attend baseball's 1915 World Series. After Wilson's illness in 1919, she became a powerful figure who greatly influenced White House decision making.

in China and U.S. ambassador Paul Reinsch obtained evidence that Bryan had been lied to. In two tough notes in March and May 1915, Wilson told Japan to back down from the secret demands. Tokyo officials did so, but not because of U.S. pressure. Their own internal politics and British opposition forced them to retreat. Wilson had nevertheless repeated the historic U.S. commitment to Asia. As historian Noel Pugach observes, "In the historically important note of May 11, 1915, the United States declared to China and Japan that it would not recognize any agreement which impaired the right of the United States, the political or territorial integrity of China, or the Open Door."¹⁶

Wilson had hoped to enjoy both the open door and freedom of action in China. Now, with Japan on the loose, his policy was endangered. A century of U.S. policy in the region hung in the balance. Ambassador Reinsch urged the president to work with China against the Japanese. But Colonel House and Secretary of State Lansing (who replaced Bryan in June 1915) wanted Wilson to control Japan through cooperation—to work with, rather than fight, Tokyo. As the United States itself prepared to go to war in early 1917, Wilson believed that he had no choice.

The United States took two steps to cut a deal with Japan. First, in November 1917, the secretary of state negotiated the Lansing-Ishii Agreement. In it, the United States recognized that "territorial propinquity creates special relations between countries." This meant that the United States recognized Japanese dominance in such areas as southern Manchuria. But Japan, in turn, reaffirmed the open door. Lansing and Ambassador Kikujiro Ishii also agreed on a protocol that remained secret until 1938. It stipulated that neither side would use the war to gain privileges in China at the expense of other states. The protocol attempted to short-circuit anything more like the Twenty-one Demands.

Wilson's second step was to control Japan by repudiating his 1913 policy and, instead, creating a second consortium. The United States, Japan, Great Britain, and France would cooperate in investment projects in China. Japanese financiers could thus be more closely watched. Wilson was not coy about government-business relations. He promised "complete support" to U.S. bankers as he asked them to join the new group. That a revolutionary China might soon try to control its own affairs worried few officials in Washington.

WILSON AND REVOLUTIONS: MEXICO (OR, PAINTING THE FENCE POST WHITE)

Until World War I demanded his attention, Wilson was immersed in the problems of revolutions in China, Mexico, and the Caribbean region. He understood that the upheavals arose out of such internal problems as poverty, oppression, and the failure of government to protect its citizens. He also realized that foreign intervention seldom cooled revolutionary fervor; the fervor only became more intense and antiforeign. But along with these views about internal causes, he concluded that revolutions could be caused by foreign corporate and banking interests that exploited smaller nations. By checking such interests and by cleansing a country's internal politics, revolution could be avoided. No better way existed to cleanse those politics and create a legitimate government, he reasoned, than democratic elections.

Determined to help other peoples become democratic and orderly, Wilson himself became the greatest military interventionist in U.S. history. By the time he left office in 1921, he had ordered troops into Russia and half a dozen Latin American upheavals. To preserve order in some countries, Wilson learned, required military intervention. He was not unwilling to use force. Journalist Walter Lippmann recalled



Victoriano Huerta took control of the Mexican Revolution in 1912–1913, only to run into Wilson’s opposition. Their feud not only shaped U.S.-Mexican relations, but led to a historic change in U.S. recognition policy.

“one metaphor [Wilson] used to like to use a great deal illustrating his idea of how a progressive attitude was really conservative. He said ‘If you want to preserve a fence post, you have to keep painting it white. You can’t just paint it once and leave it forever. It will rot away.’”¹⁷

Some people, however, had concluded that their “fence posts” no longer served a useful purpose. They wanted the posts pulled up, not repainted. The Mexicans began reaching this conclusion in 1910–1911, when they rallied to Francisco Madero’s attempt to overthrow the thirty-four-year-old dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Many U.S. interests were not pleased. Under Díaz’s regime, U.S. investment in Mexico had skyrocketed to nearly \$2 billion, much of it in rich oil wells. Americans owned 43 percent of all the property values in Mexico—10 percent more than the Mexicans themselves owned.¹⁸ Madero overthrew Díaz (who was rapidly becoming senile) but found that he had let loose forces he could not control. A number of armed groups tried to claim power. Unable to restore order, Madero was captured by a band led by Victoriano Huerta. The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson, was deeply involved in pushing Madero out of power, but he declared his surprise when Huerta’s men killed Madero.

At this point, Woodrow Wilson entered the White House. Huerta not only had blood on his hands, but rumors circulated that he was supported by British oil interests that had long been in bitter competition with U.S. companies. London and other capitals soon recognized

Huerta’s government. Wilson, however, refused. The president objected to Huerta’s use of force to gain power. He feared that if the Mexican leader remained in power, other Latin American revolutionaries would follow his example. Wilson demanded that Mexico hold democratic elections. The president thus transformed U.S. recognition policy that went back to Jefferson’s time. The United States had usually recognized any government that maintained internal order and agreed to meet foreign obligations (such as debts). Wilson added a third requirement: the new government had to come to power through a process acceptable to the United States. Most governments, of course, did not have America’s democratic tradition. Indeed, he did recognize certain regimes (such as China’s or Peru’s) that made no pretense to being democracies. The belief grew that, in Mexico, the president used his demand for democratic elections only to get rid of the Huerta regime he so disliked.

The president began supporting Huerta’s enemies, especially Venustiano Carranza, who led well-armed forces. Wilson sent a personal agent, John Lind, to tell Huerta that if he held an election in which he was not a candidate, a large loan might be available from U.S. oil, railway, and copper interests in Mexico.¹⁹ Lind, a Minnesota politician who knew little about diplomacy, did not handle his mission well. Huerta turned down the attempt to bribe him and, with British support, conducted an election he handily won. (The election was so open, moreover, that even Lind reported he had cast a ballot.) Deeply angered, Wilson began to turn the screws on Huerta. He was determined, he said, that the Mexican government “be founded on a moral basis.” Sir Edward Grey, the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, privately remarked that “it would require about 200,000 soldiers to put Mexico on a ‘moral basis.’” Grey stepped back, however, after Wilson assured London that British interests in Mexico would be protected.²⁰

Then, on October 27, 1913, Wilson warned, in a speech at Mobile, Alabama, that exploitative foreign “concessions” were no longer to be tolerated in Latin America. Claiming that his own nation’s motives were pure (“the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest”), the president said that Americans only wanted to be “friends” of other nations on terms “of equality and honor.” He would oppose “foreign interests” that tried to “dominate” Latin America and so create “a condition . . . always dangerous and apt to become intolerable.”²¹ As the British and other foreign governments understood, the Mobile Address was Wilson’s declaration that he now would

try to throw out any foreign "concessions" that in his view created "intolerable" conditions. The British also began to realize that Huerta's days were numbered.

The president's opportunity arose suddenly in April 1914, when Huerta's agents arrested seven U.S. sailors who, while on shore leave, had wandered into a forbidden area. Huerta quickly apologized, but Wilson made a series of demands to satisfy American "honor." When Huerta rejected them, Wilson appeared before Congress to ask for the use of U.S. military force against Mexico. As Congress stalled and investigated the charges, the president learned that a German ship planned to unload arms for Huerta at Vera Cruz. Wilson ordered U.S. vessels to occupy the port. Firing broke out that killed 19 Americans and over 300 Mexicans. Latin American nations intervened to help restore peace and meet Wilson's real objective: Huerta's removal. In August 1914, Carranza assumed power. Wilson had apparently won—but only apparently. An ardent nationalist, Carranza refused to bargain with Wilson. The frustrated president now turned to aiding anti-Carranza forces, including Pancho Villa.

Carranza responded with one of the most momentous acts in the revolution. He announced plans for agrarian reform and, most notably, for Mexico's claim to all its subsoil mineral rights. In a stroke, the revolution had turned sharply to the left and threatened U.S. oil companies.²² Wilson intensified his pressure on Carranza, but the Mexican leader succeeded in destroying most of Villa's forces. The president, involved in a continual series of crises arising out of the world war, most reluctantly recognized Carranza's government *de facto* in late 1915.

Villa responded by terrorizing Arizona and New Mexico in the hope that Wilson's military retaliation would undermine Carranza. When Villa murdered seventeen Americans in Columbus, New Mexico, and eighteen U.S. engineers in Mexico itself, Wilson demanded that Carranza allow U.S. troops to track down the killers. Carranza reluctantly agreed, but imposed limits on the movements of U.S. forces. In March 1916, 6,000 men under the command of Major-General John J. ("Black Jack") Pershing rode across the border. Pershing never captured Villa, but his forces did clash with Carranza's army when it tried to restrict Pershing's men. Forty Mexican and two U.S. troops died. Wilson was trapped. He knew the mission was failing. Carranza was firmly in power. But Wilson was determined to remove Carranza, and his determination was strongly reinforced by U.S. Roman Catholics, who feared the growing anticlericalism in the revolution. In early 1917, however, Wilson realized that he would have to enter the European struggle. He

pulled out Pershing's forces and began coming to terms with Carranza.

The president had tried to stabilize and democratize the Mexican Revolution. Eighty percent of the people had never had a "look-in," he declared. "I am for that 80 percent!" He believed he knew what to do: "They say the Mexicans are not fitted for self-government," he had declared in early 1914, "and to this I reply that, when properly directed, there is no people not fitted for self-government." In "properly" directing the Mexican Revolution, however, Wilson twice invaded the country and killed Mexicans. Trying to repaint the old fence post proved expensive.

WILSON AND REVOLUTIONS:

CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Upon entering office, Wilson declared that he wanted "orderly processes" in Latin America as well as stability in "the markets which we must supply."²³ But frequently, maintaining order meant maintaining the *status quo*. In much of Latin America, the *status quo* meant maintaining small elites who (as had Porfirio Díaz in Mexico) worked with foreign interests and exploited their own people. Only revolution or foreign intervention could overthrow such elites. "Democracy" often meant the continued power of those elites because they controlled elections. Wilson wanted elections, real change, order, and no foreign interventions—all at once. He never discovered how to pull off such a miracle. When he then chose order, Wilson and Bryan had to send troops into Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Cuba, as well as Mexico. Latin Americans began to call the U.S. Marines "State Department troops."

In 1913, the marines already were protecting the U.S.-created government in Nicaragua (see p. 262). President Adolfo Díaz's bankrupt regime needed money quickly. Bryan, who had made his political career by attacking bankers, had a novel idea. Why not, he asked Wilson, have the U.S. government lend the money to Nicaragua? The bankers and their exorbitant claims would be bypassed, banks and railways would remain in Central American hands, and it could "prevent revolutions, promote education, and advance stable and just government." Wilson rejected the plan. Substituting government funds for private bank loans would be too "novel and radical."²⁴ Bryan then resorted to the bankers, who already owned 51 percent of Nicaragua's national bank and railways. The bankers loaned Díaz another \$1 million in return for the rest of the railways.