

HE KEPT US OUT OF WAR: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOODROW
WILSON'S DRIVE TO WAR, 1916-1919

by

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ABSTRACT

Woodrow Wilson is a storied figure in the literature of rhetorical scholarship, as he stands as one of the first practitioners of the Rhetorical Presidency. Through his ability to speak directly through the people and circumvent the power of the United States Congress to a large extent, Wilson was able to bring the country to the support of a war that many of them disagreed with. He did this largely through the ideograph of exceptionalism, reminding the United States citizenry that theirs was a history blessed by God to go forth and prosper. His ability to use the rhetoric affectively directly led to his ability to garner support for the war.

Further analysis of Wilson's speeches is required so as to better understand his overall use of the ideograph of exceptionalism throughout his entire presidency. By analyzing a larger body of discourse, it will soon become apparent whether he used the ideograph for other purposes. Future studies can also test parallels between past and future discourse, and look to drawn lines of similarities throughout the decades.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Cliff and Marilyn Lorick, and my brother Jeffrey. Their support has been unfaltering during the completion of this thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members, without whom this project would never have gotten off the ground. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men’s souls.”¹ With these rousing words, in 1914, newly elected President Woodrow Wilson served notice to the world of what stance the United States would entertain toward the rapidly intensifying conflict in Europe. Growing calls for a national Serbian state were increasing, much to Austria-Hungary’s chagrin, France had eyes on the Alsace-Lorraine territory of Germany, and the German Empire was itching to stretch its imperial muscles. As sides across the Atlantic were being chosen, treaties were being honored, armies were being mobilized, and territorial gains were being coveted, Wilson announced that, for now, the sleeping American giant would not be awakened.

Two years later, Wilson won reelection to his second term in office with the slogan, “He Kept Us Out of War,” which seemingly played to the American public’s desire to stay out of what most people regarded as a purely European conflict. But as is the case for many U.S. Presidents, the campaign promise did not match Wilson’s executive decisions. Within months of his election to a second term, Wilson would perform the rhetorical gymnastics of altering his

¹ Woodrow Wilson, “U.S. Declaration of Neutrality, 19 August 1914,” *FirstWorldWar.com*, 22 August 2009, Web. Subsequent references to this speech are made parenthetically, by page and paragraph numbers, to the edited text in the Appendix, Wilson, 1914.

publicly stated foreign policy of neutrality at all costs, to declaring that anything less than full involvement in the war would be an act of treason.

From the point of his reelection onward, the Wilson Administration began a drumbeat that would ultimately lead to a 1917 declaration of war on the German empire and end in the lofty rhetoric of Wilson's 14 Points which called for, among other things, a Slovakian state, a renewed Polish state, and home rule for colonial powers.² According to rhetorical scholar Jason C. Flanagan, the tumult of this three-year period would set the stage for future Presidential war rhetoric and help create a "Rhetorical Presidency," demonstrating how to convince an unwilling public to support foreign involvement (115-48). And while Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt had engaged in wars of imperial aggression previously and had used various forms of public rhetoric in their defense, it is safe to say that Wilson was the first of the modern era to do so. Flanagan defines the "Rhetorical Presidency" as one using direct appeals to the nation for domestic policies and for allowing changes in American foreign policy; Flanagan specifically calls this approach "Wilsonianism" (116). For this reason, a case study of Wilson's discourse seems warranted.

As noted by rhetorical scholar Jason A. Edwards, "in essence, American exceptionalism defines how the United States sees itself in the international order," with the only difference in opinion taking place "amongst politicians as to how the United States should enact these exceptional qualities (269)." It is not so much a matter of if, as it is a matter of how. The United States had been blessed with greatness, so to not use it to the benefit of the world would actually

² Woodrow Wilson, "President Wilson's 14 Points," *World War I Document Archive*, 28 February 2009, Web. Subsequent references to this speech are made parenthetically, by page and paragraph numbers, to the edited text in the Appendix, Wilson, 1918, 14 Points.

be inexcusable. American exceptionalism required that the United States be at the head of the international table.

Justification

This study examines Wilson's discourse to the American people, the U.S. Congress, and the international community before, during, and after the completion of World War I in order to provide insight into what Flanagan and other scholars have called the first Rhetorical Presidency. As communication scholar Jeffrey K. Tulis argues in *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Wilson is the representative of the Rhetorical Presidency of the twentieth century because of his creation of the idea that "popular or mass rhetoric has become a principal tool of presidential governance" (4). Richard J. Ellis explains how 19th century Presidential rhetoric differed from the 20th century in his work, *Speaking to the People*:

Nineteenth-century official presidential rhetoric reflected the original constitutional theory in two major ways: (1) policy speech was to be communicated to Congress and, beginning with Jefferson at least, in writing; and (2) rhetoric directed primarily to the people, such as inaugural addresses and proclamations, was to emphasize general constitutional principles and avoid specific policy proposals. (134)

As such, Wilson represents the bridge between the Presidents of the old school of thought and the so-called Rhetorical Presidencies of contemporary times in terms of addressing the U.S. people.

A key aspect of selling Wilson's foreign policy to the American public was his ability to present effectively the idea of "American exceptionalism." According to historian Seymour Martin Lipset, famed French observer of the American experiment Alexis de Tocqueville deserves much of the credit for singling out America as being "exceptional" among all the nations of the world. In the context in which his *Democracy in America* was written, de

Tocqueville was referring to America's unique mix of being born out of a violent revolution while managing to maintain a large degree of egalitarianism, an analysis that proved to be accurate in almost all aspects. Exceptionalism, defined by the President, held America as the beacon for the rest of the world, a Puritanical idea of a nation inherently destined for greatness based on a mantle handed down from God. How Wilson took the country's view of egalitarianism and used it rhetorically is worth investigating.

According to Ellis, Wilson represented a break from tradition by combining Constitutional requirements of the Office of President with the requirements that hold the President responsible to the people of the United States. From a rhetorical perspective, the break is significant because Wilson spoke directly to the people when he needed to do so, while maintaining the Constitutional legitimacy of his policies (Ellis 1). Ellis claims that the idea that "the president should speak to the people and for the people" was quite modern and progressive for the time, and "Americans would have found such a notion decidedly odd" (1). The normative view during Wilson's era was that the President was subordinate to Congress and was best kept to his own sphere of influence, meeting with heads of state and working within the very narrow powers left to him by the Constitution. Wilson was also the first President to travel the country stumping to get reelected, which public address scholar Michael Hogan claims was extremely forward thinking (19). At the time such action was seen as beneath the station of the President. The mixing of rhetoric aimed at the people, legislative speech making, and campaign discourse formed the beginnings of the modern Presidency.

Historians have suggested that Wilson's contributions to the standard of the modern Presidency do not end with his willingness to speak to the people directly.³ The language Wilson used to bring the nation into WWI, has reappeared in the speeches of Ronald Reagan, William J. Clinton, and George W. Bush.⁴ As Tulis comments, "under the auspices of the Wilson doctrine, all presidents labor under the expectation of great oratory" (177). Furthermore, the twenty-third President was considered a man of high morality and spoke to the public with a professorial lean. Considering that he was indeed a college professor and the President of Princeton University, this makes sense. Eight years after Wilson's death, rhetorical scholar Edwin Paget wrote that the "grandiose and vague images with which he expressed his convictions in order to influence other people" led Wilson to become so wrapped up in his own words that he became incapable of seeing the forest for the trees.⁵

According to Paget, contemporaries of Wilson wrote that he was so "carried away by his persuasive technique" that his critics concluded "he plunged us into the World War for no purpose other than to make himself 'the leader of humanity'" (16). The American people, it appears, did not have problems believing that inserting the nation into other countries' business and acting less admirably in foreign affairs were not completely beyond the pale for the United States.⁶ This rhetorical belief in the moral righteousness of the United States seemed to carry over into the public sphere as well.

³ Scholars Mary Stuckey, Jeffrey Tulis, Jason Edwards, and Lloyd Ambrosius are just a few who have addressed the issue of Wilson's historical contributions.

⁴ Ronald Reagan served as the 40th U.S. President; William (Bill) J. Clinton, 42nd; and George W. Bush, 43rd. For an on-line archive of their speeches, see *American Rhetoric: Online Speech Bank*, at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>.

⁵ Paget 14. Paget's observation seems equally applicable to more recent Presidents who also seemed to feel that, in the country's best interests, the U.S. needed to become embroiled abroad.

⁶ Once the United States did enter the war, the American people supported the war effort with great vigor, volunteering for the army and supporting the President in his endeavors and buying

The rhetorical image of America as the “Shining City on a Hill” had been used for centuries, beginning with Puritan leader John Winthrop’s declaration off the coast of Massachusetts. Even in 1916, the acceptance of the country’s status as “blessed by God” was deeply ingrained in the American body politic (267). Wilson believed whole-heartedly in this idea and held it as the true purpose for the United States on the world stage. The only issue was what to do with this blessing.

When examining any event or series of events over a set period of time, we accept that there is more than one way of looking at a specific situation. As far as the United States was concerned, the war in Europe had been going strong for three years before Wilson decided to commit troops. Historian Thomas Fleming argues in his book *Illusion of Victory* that much of the world saw this lack of speed as the nation’s way to gain the most while risking the least, with President Wilson then more able to convince the world that it was the United States who had won the war (320). In fact, Fleming claims outright that “the president – and the vast majority of those who called for war – thought the United States would not have to send a single soldier to France” (7). Wilson seemed to have had very little idea of what he was getting himself into when it came to his original understanding of the nation’s role in the European conflict.

Wilson delivered speeches before, during, and after the country’s entrance into WWI, and each of these speeches had its own distinct message, depending on whether it was being directed toward the citizenry, the U.S. Congress, or the international community. While such audience modifications are commonplace today, in Wilson’s era, such attention to different audiences, especially domestic ones, simply was unheard of because it was considered pandering and

bonds to keep the war effort afloat. Fleming claims that much of this support was accomplished through the massive machinations of George Creel’s CPI (117-19).

inappropriate for Presidents.⁷ For this study, I examine Wilson's speeches to three different audiences at three different moments during the war, in order to ascertain a better understanding of how his rhetorical choices worked at different stages of the war to support his changed foreign policy.

Overall, then, this case study of Wilson's war rhetoric will add to rhetoric and public address scholarship in three distinct ways: 1) to analyze Wilson's public discourse in order to enhance our understanding of the rhetorical problems common to such war discourse, 2) to examine the rhetorical tools that a president has available when choosing to address the American public, especially language specific to the policy of American exceptionalism, and 3) to provide a foundation for investigating presidential speech making and public policy maneuvering of this era. This study will ultimately provide a fuller blueprint for understanding Wilson's rhetoric during this area and as a framework for analyzing future Presidential discourse.

Review of Scholarship Relevant to Study

One of the most complicated aspects of a case study centering on a particular President and his rhetorical choices involves the number of facets requiring analysis. As Lloyd Bitzer explains about the rhetorical situation, there are so many dimensions to any given situation that to understand the rhetoric focusing on a particular period of time or event effectively requires that we explore each characteristic and consider its background (6). For this study of Wilson, I found that I needed to consider scholarship related to the historical context, as well as that which is related to his discursive responses in this context. Accordingly, the review that follows first summarizes scholarship that has addressed the historical context and then the descriptive

⁷ Mary K. Stuckey discusses in her essay, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," the mistrust that it engendered in the audience through epideictic rhetoric from the President.

framework used to consider that context in this study, before turning to scholarship that has addressed Wilson's rhetorical tactics.

The Historical Context

World War I is one of the most complicated and convoluted wars of the twentieth century, whose genesis is mired in secret treaties and duplicitous ambition. In his book, *The First World War*, historian John Keegan comments:

The First World War was a tragic and unnecessary conflict [. . .] because the train of events that led to its outbreak might have been broken at any point during the five weeks of crisis that preceded the first clash of arms, had prudence or common goodwill found a voice (3).

This sober assessment of what would ultimately devolve into a four-year war, involving countries on six of the seven continents of the world, is quite an indictment when one considers the weight of the charge the author is levying. According to Keegan, had a single rational thought or a desire to see the powder keg that had developed in the Balkan region been employed so that a single match would not set the world on fire, absolute catastrophe could have been avoided (1-23). Alas, it was not to be.

Overview of WWI Events. In his seminal work, *A World Undone*, historian G. J. Meyer wrote that the single match that set the world ablaze was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, in Bosnia, on 28 June 1914 (3). While visiting the outermost reaches of the empire and parading through the streets of downtown Sarajevo, the Archduke was shot by a young member of the "Black Hand," a Serbian nationalist group with plans for a strong and independent Serbia (15). The assassination was merely the final falling domino in what appeared to be an unstoppable progression of events, allowing Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia, a thorn in its military command's side, which had needed removal for some time (58). The rest of the world would soon follow the example of Austria-Hungary.

According to Keegan, many have argued that what took place in 1914 was the result of decades of unresolved territorial disputes and a resurgence of nationalist movements. Keegan comments: “Secret plans determined that any crisis not settled by sensible diplomacy would, in the circumstances prevailing in Europe in 1914, led to general war” (48). Following this logic, the chances of nothing happening at some point during that year were quite slim.

But not all historians of the event accept this narrative. Meyer describes how as “early as October 1916 Germany’s Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg was seeking to get the American president to interject himself as a mediator between the warring sides”(473). Historian Niall Ferguson comments in his book *The Pity of War*, that while the ingredients for a large conflict were certainly there, it was by no means a necessary war that had to be fought for some larger cause. Ferguson blames a great deal of the cause on British imperialism and the refusal of Britain to deal with what was rapidly becoming an unwieldy and uncontrollable empire. And while Britain was by no means the only imperial power of the time, it was certainly the largest of European powers.

The war soon became seen by many of the larger nations as the opportune chance for territorial conquest or the shoring up of old colonial powers. As Ferguson explains, the “contest between the great powers for overseas markets, spurred on by the falling rate of profit in their domestic economies, could only have ended in a suicidal war” (31). The battle raging for foreign markets, in the face of growing nationalism, seemed to have no other logical conclusion.

World War I would have been largely impossible without a massive web of colonial conscripts from nearly every belligerent power. In fact, in her book popular historian *Paris, 1919*, Margaret Macmillan reports, “Soldiers had come from around the world: Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians, Newfoundlanders to fight for the British Empire;

Vietnamese, Moroccans, Algerians, Senegalese for France” (xxv). The war took tremendous tolls in casualties on all sides of the conflict, but absolute decimation of the citizenry was tempered by the use of colonized subjects of the British Empire and the French, Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian territories. These colonial troops were brought in from every corner of the globe to fight and die for a cause that many could not articulate and, if they could, would almost certainly not support. It was a situation that proved untenable on the battlefield and, in the end, would lead to larger demands by the colonial powers to have a seat at the bargaining table in Versailles, including the recently annexed country of Korea (Macmillan 311).

One of the overwhelming themes articulated by almost every writer or scholar offering an explanation for the worldwide entanglement of so many seemingly disparate powers is the commitment made to one another through treaties. Serbia was backed by France, France by Great Britain; Germany threw its weight behind Austria-Hungary, which ultimately brought in Russia, who coveted Poland and the greater Serbian region. The political webs were so thick and convoluted and the published reasons so mired in doublespeak that to untangle the truth for all might not be possible. But it is important to make the attempt so that we may fully understand the reasons behind Wilson’s decision to urge the United States to enter the war.

Many have argued, and this study aims to support this position to a large extent, that the United States had no plan to enter the war until the least amount of damage could be done to its interests and troops. At the least, as historian Martin Gilbert claims in the *First World War*, “It had become clear in the Allied capitals that the United States’ entry into the war would not have any influence on the battlefield for at least a year” (328). Here, Gilbert is referring to May of 1917. By this account, U.S. efforts would have been of minimal aid, until just several months before the war’s end. As Wilson addressed in his 1916 speech to the Democratic National

Convention, the Navy was in horrid shape and the army had fared little better. All they would have been able to contribute would be bodies.

As Macmillan describes him, Wilson was extremely reticent about committing American troops to the fight. Macmillan illustrates how the President went against the wishes of his cabinet and second in command, “Colonel” Edward Mandell House, in waiting so long to commit to the conflict (6-7). Historians argue over whether this reticence derived from a lack of decision-making ability or cold pragmatism,⁸ but Wilson’s decision ultimately launched the United States from one country among many to a favored nation among equals. Much of this progression is thanks to the comparatively small loss of men alongside the other belligerents, the lack of destruction of American infrastructure, and Wilson as the arbiter of peace in Versailles.

As for why the United States entered the war, the reasons are as varied and convincing as there are authors to offer them. Macmillan claims that it was “Germany’s sack of Belgium, its unrestricted submarine warfare and its audacity in attempting to entice Mexico into waging war on the United States” that had “pushed Wilson and American public opinion towards the allies” (4). Famed historian Barbara W. Tuchmann places a fair amount of stock in the last reason in her book, *The Zimmermann Telegram*.⁹ She describes how the invasion of the southwest United States by Mexico was, for many, a very real and horrific possibility (7). It is under these tense conditions that the American government was forced to make the most important foreign policy decision to date, regardless of the validity of the threat.

⁸ Historians such as Niall Ferguson, Margaret Macmillan, Martin Gilbert, and John Milton Cooper, Jr. are just a few who have voiced an opinion on this question.

⁹ The Zimmermann Telegram was a communiqué sent from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German ambassador in America asking for Mexico to consider joining the war on the side of the Germans with the promise of the Southwest U.S. as a prize. It was intercepted by the British and used to entice the U.S. into the war, a move the British desperately needed. See Barbara Tuchman, 1-244.

Almost a century after the conflict began, it is very difficult for contemporary Americans to wrap their heads around the foreign and domestic climate of the time. Not unlike our political climate today, during the initial decades of the twentieth century, the United States had a flare for invasion, and Mexico was one of its favorite targets. The border with Mexico was something of a tenuous idea, having only been “established” several decades earlier and still being, as many Mexicans saw it, available to the strongest power. Sixty years earlier, President James Polk had sent the U.S. army into Mexico under the banner of American exceptionalism and the corollary of Manifest Destiny, the idea that if the United States found lands that it needed, it had a God-given right to take them. Polk, as countless other Presidents beginning with Thomas Jefferson did, argued that God was desirous of expanding the nation’s dominion as far as could be accomplished. Describing the uneasy relationship, Tuchman comments that, “Mexico was both America’s chief foreign investment area and chief trouble spot, where twice in the last three years American troops had gone in shooting and where, at that moment, twelve thousand men under General Pershing were deeply engaged” (7). When the United States finally discovered the existence of the Zimmermann Telegram from the British, who according to Tuchman almost certainly aimed to use the transmission that they had intercepted from the Germans on its way to the German ambassador in the United States to force the U.S. government’s hand, it is not difficult to see why domestic fears would be piqued.

Finally, no analysis of American involvement would be complete without a discussion of the scholarship pertaining to the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. From the beginning of the war, Britain had maintained an effective blockade of German ports in the North Sea. In fact, between the German blockade of the British Isles and the British blockade of the North Sea, the entire area seemed almost impassable. Until 1917, it had been Germany’s

custom when stopping a foreign vessel to rise to the surface, make sure that the vessel was indeed from a belligerent nation, and either allow it to continue on its way or to sink it on the spot. According to Gilbert, this custom was proving to be hazardous to German Unterseeboots, or U-boats, as Allied ships would often fly false flags only to fire on the U-boats once they had surfaced (306), leaving the German submarines in a dangerous and untenable position.

In this context, according to Meyer, “Virtually the entire German nation was clamoring for an end to restrictions on U-boat operations [. . .] all were experiencing the ruinous effects of the blockade, and all had come to see submarine warfare not only as justified morally and legally but as absolutely necessary in practical terms”(482). Even with the sinking of the *Lusitania* two years earlier still in the public consciousness, the devastating effect of the blockade had left in German minds very few options.

On 17 May 1915, the British liner *Lusitania*, while flying under a neutral flag, was sunk by a German U-boat in the North Sea. With many women and children on board, Americans saw it as a most dastardly act that required immediate retribution. And while this retribution would not come for another two years, it remained in the nation’s psyche, much as the memory of the *Maine* did in the Spanish-American War, as a flag to rally around and an example of German barbarity. It worked rhetorically as proof that the only way to assuage the German menace was through force.

The German leadership lifted the restrictions on submarine warfare almost immediately, hoping to bring about a quick end to the war that had dragged on longer than anyone had imagined. Gilbert reports that, “Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral von Holtzendorf [. . .] assured the Kaiser that, with the introduction of unrestricted submarine warfare England would sue for peace in six months” (306). Historian Lloyd E. Ambrosius describes this policy as “a war

against all nations” (21). Soon afterwards, the United States joined the conflict on the side of the Allied nations.

Ultimately, the situation leading up to Wilson’s rhetorical turn toward involving the American people and Congress in the conflict was nothing short of complicated. While historical scholarship argues that WWI was inevitable, the involvement of American troops in that conflict was not. To help provide a clearer understanding of what Wilson and the United States faced, I use the concept of the rhetorical situation developed by Bitzer.

The Rhetorical Situation as Descriptive Framework. Bitzer asserts, “It seems clear that rhetoric is situational” (3). Essentially, nothing in this world happens in a vacuum, especially not history. Everything, every statement, every action, and every reaction has its genesis somewhere in the past. Some wrong, some misdeed, some seemingly inconsequential happenstance can bring nations to war. Bitzer explains, “Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur” (3). Consequently, to understand what is taking place contemporarily, we must analyze and understand what has happened in the past.

Understanding the rhetorical situation is absolutely paramount when attempting to catalog and to expand on the details of historical situations. Bitzer describes the rhetorical situation accordingly:

[A] complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (6)

Accordingly, since situations can be changed or alleviated by powerful rhetoric, the speaker, or *rhetor*, and the discourse introduced into a situation become important variables for study.

Bitzer enumerates what he calls the “three constituents of any rhetorical situation; the first is the *exigence*; the second and third are elements of the complex, namely the *audience* be constrained in decision and action, and the *constraints* which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience” (6). Considered together, these three constituents or variables create the rhetorical situation, a descriptive framework, for analyzing Wilson’s discourse about U.S. involvement in the Great War. In his study on the classification of discourse, rhetorician Richard L. Larson argues that Bitzer’s “comprehensive analysis of the characteristics, structure, and recurrence (or durability) of ‘rhetorical situations’ [. . .] invites new attempts at classification of discourse – on bases different from the usual ones of subject matter, internal organization, techniques of argument, and style”(165). What Bitzer offers is an organizing tool for the critic to analyze situations that invoke rhetorical responses, understanding that events do not just occur but are linked to the past.

How we understand history and the action-reaction nature of past events must be fully understood to understand why we cannot simply cast history aside. As Larson explains, “this definition [. . .] gives philosophic importance to ‘rhetoric’ by demonstrating its continuing concern with forces that shape our world” and allows us to view history not as a series of isolated incidents but as a series of choices made and consequences weighed with the brightest of minds attempting to make the best choices for their nations (165). Analyzing events through the descriptive lens of the “rhetorical situation” allows us to take a look at multiple aspects of a given speech, helping the critic to consider as much as possible while minimizing the potential to overlook something significant. It makes the task unquestionably more difficult, but also much more philosophically rewarding. Let me now turn to a discussion of the scholarship related to

Wilson himself and his rhetorical tactics for responding to the politically complicated situation that emerged during his Presidency.

Wilson's Rhetorical Tactics

Any effective study of the foreign policy of Wilson's Presidencies and the discourse involved with them must include the scholarship that has analyzed the rhetorical style for which he was famous. Born the son of a preacher and formerly employed as the President of Princeton College, Wilson had developed a style that many have described as sanctimonious preaching.¹⁰ In his book *Wilsonianism*, Ambrosius describes Wilson's style as, "exalted rhetoric [. . .] extend[ing] American influence through the world, but never adequately defin[ing] a foreign policy for dealing with pluralism as well as interdependence" (47). Essentially, Wilson had made a promise and committed the United States with words that were difficult for the U.S. government to match with action. Much of the criticism came under the guise of his constant call for the League of Nations.¹¹

Wilson's Rhetorical Style. Historians have commented about the discrepancies between Wilson's rhetoric of peace and understanding and his actions of force and the refusal to forgive grudges. In *Wilsonian Statecraft*, Ambrosius asserts that "Identification of U.S. foreign policy with the progressive fulfillment of God's will on earth limited Wilson's disposition to compromise. Despite his practicality, his appeal to ideals was also an authentic part of his diplomatic style" (3). Wilson was an idealist but not the starry-eyed dreamer that many have characterized him to be. He truly saw America as God's divine will on earth and recognized it as

¹⁰ For example, Scholar Mary G. McEdwards, in her essay "Woodrow Wilson: His Stylistic Progression" in *Western Speech*, touches on the religious influence that Wilson personally held (30).

¹¹ Wilson's advocacy of the League of Nations is discussed later. See Chapter 2.

“the shining city on a hill.”¹² As Ambrosius explains, “Wilson’s philosophy of history, which later would shape foreign policy during his presidency, presupposed the idea of progress”(7). This understanding is crucial to any effective evaluation of Wilsonian policy. Wilson envisioned his place as the leader of the United States on a continuum that began in the Garden of Eden and would end in the ultimate creation of an international body that would end the threat of, or need for, war. He saw himself as the savior of humanity, simply fulfilling his role as handed down to all U.S. Presidents from God in the form of Manifest Destiny.¹³

Rhetorical scholar Mary Stuckey provides an analysis of Wilson’s rhetoric, noting that the “transformation of the American ‘self’ was part of a wider rhetorical restructuring of America’s image of the war and was inextricably connected to the transformation of the German ‘other’ into an enemy of liberty” (116). The ability of Wilson to move from pacifist to neutral to hawk in such a short period of time is simply impossible without the vilification of the German people. It is not enough for simply the Presidential message to change; it is imperative that the structuring of the “us versus them” nature of conflict be brought into focus. Stuckey also describes an early example of nation building: “‘Wilsonianism’ was based upon, among other things, the belief that democracies rarely wage war upon one another, a belief that in turn provided a rationale for promoting ‘democratization’ as a central pillar of American foreign policy” (116). Core to the ideology of “democratization” is the idea of exceptionalism, that the country understands the plight and myriad histories of other disparate countries so well that it

¹² Six decades later, Ronald Reagan would pick up that same theme in his 1989 farewell address. See Ronald Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation,” *Ronald Reagan*, January 11, 1989, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29650#axzz1Pwdo8lwh>.

¹³ For further discussion, see Donald M. Scott, “The Religious Order of Manifest Destiny,” *National Humanities Center*, December, 2008, Web. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/mandestiny.htm>; as well as Chapter 2.

knows exactly what to do to make them the best versions of themselves. It is the height of hubris to believe that because it works for one, it works for all.

Rhetorical scholar Vanessa Beasley correctly attends to the dynamic that Wilson employed, as all “Presidents explain problems to the public in ways that favor their administration’s solutions, and then members of the public in turn pressure their congressional representative, directly or indirectly, to support presidential proposals” (10). By appealing to the people’s elevated sense of importance and the belief that they were a part of a nation destined to provide a direction for others, he was able to use what would become a time-honored method of bringing the public around to a President’s viewpoint.

A considerable part of Wilson’s rhetoric came from the idea of “American exceptionalism,” the idea that the United States was a country distinct from the others. In *The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson*, biographer David Esposito claims Wilson’s use of the concept had political ramifications:

Wilson seized on the idea of American exceptionalism, which had been heretofore a rather static concept, and made it dynamic. He called on his fellow citizens to share their unique heritage with the world. This meant America would have to be consulted in the peace process, because U.S. participation in the new postwar system would be critical. (85)

Essentially, Wilson told the world that U.S. involvement in the war would mean an American negotiated peace with an American dominated international system after the war. At the time, the United States was by no means a world superpower. The beginning of the twentieth century was still a time of empires and dynasties, and America was neither old nor powerful enough to be either.

American Exceptionalism. While many may place the idea of American exceptionalism in a contemporary context, it is most certainly not the invention of the arena of modern political

discourse. Wilson used the concept of American exceptionalism discursively as an *ideograph*, as a symbol for representing the greatness that he saw as the destiny of the United States. An *ideograph* is a word that symbolizes a larger issue and evokes certain feelings about the issue.¹⁴ This *ideograph* functioned rhetorically for Wilson to convince the public that going to war would create a world fit for the United States to lead. Historian Ian Tyrrell comments that while many Americans associate American exceptionalism with the “Golden Age” of the United States, along with the founding of the country and the drafting of its Constitution, the term was originally developed to explain why America had not been forced to weather the rough seas of communism which much of Europe had to battle (1). In truth, the idea of exceptionalism has been employed variously to justify such benevolent concepts as charity or sacrifice, while often simultaneously used to defend military intervention and nation building. This rhetorical turn is no small feat, but it serves to show just how powerful and multidimensional an *ideograph* truly can be.

Rhetoricians Robert Ivie and Oscar Giner discuss the history of American exceptionalism as “an ensemble of traditional myths, typically evok[ing] attitudes of national autonomy and superiority,” including, “Woodrow Wilson calling the nation to make the world safe for democracy” (“American Exceptionalism” 360). Inherent in this description of it lies the firm belief that the United States was preordained for greatest and that Americans have the responsibility to use that greatness and superiority to build the best world possible. Wilson served in an era in which the U.S. historical narrative was not yet fully defined, when the country was still developing its perception of its role in the newly forming global community. Ivie and

¹⁴ The original definition of the term appears in Michael Calvin McGee’s essay, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1-16.

Giner claim that the “nation’s independence of action on the world scene, although perilous, is celebrated as its heroic mission to conquer evil and advance civilization” (“American Exceptionalism” 360-1). While certainly the case today, in Wilson’s era, this idea had been planted a century before in policies such as the Monroe Doctrine and was just beginning to see those seeds sown.

No matter what the presidential leadership of the United States decides, the nation’s motives are articulated as having the best of interests of everyone at heart. Wilson was one of the first Presidents to realize the power of this idea and to rally the country with its rhetorical potency. In the right hands, this design has been able to mobilize the entire nation. The Vietnam conflict is such an example; the public was bombarded with the argument that if South Vietnam was not defended, then all of Southeast Asia would fall to communism. Political scholar Andrew Rojecki takes the traditional view of exceptionalism to its logical conclusion when he states that “Collectively, these values define a political culture that promotes the idea of progress and takes the improvement of the human condition as a given” (69). For Wilson, it was not a matter of whether or not the United States should take the lead on a given issue, it was a matter of timing and location. As discussed earlier, Wilson was simply continuing along a timeline that would have its natural end in American supremacy of a united world. He seemed to truly believe that the United States was the greatest force of good in the world.

Wilson developed his version of American exceptionalism as a mantle handed down to the nation from God. It is truly impossible to separate his rhetoric from that idea. While he did develop reasoning for the war in terms such as safety and economy, his main point to the American people was that not to step up to the challenge of war was cowardly and probably

sacreligious. America was created and had survived fundamentally to change the world. To convey this point to the American public, Wilson used the rhetorical lens of exceptionalism.

Communication scholar Foad Izadi views the concept of American exceptionalism from a more nefarious viewpoint, although by no means inaccurately. Izadi clarifies, “American exceptionalism indicates that the United States’ moral superiority, its unique democratic and revolutionary origins, its political system, social organization, cultural and religious heritage, as well as its values serve to legitimize its policies” (24). If the United States does something, it does it because it knows it is the right thing. And if the United States makes a misstep, it was only out of caring and trying to do good. It is a complete policy cover all. Wilson seemed to have recognized this and employed it fully in his addresses to the nation. For him, exceptionalism and the United States were not separable. To understand President Wilson’s viewpoint fully, it is crucial to remember that in his view, the progress of the United States was a story of an exceptional people destined to do exceptional things.

Method

The way to appreciate Wilson’s rhetorical transition from a decidedly neutral to a pro-war President is to look at his discourse from a series of time periods. There are three instances during which he delivered speeches that directly affected U.S. foreign policy: The September of 1916 Speech to Congress, the April of 1917 War Declaration, and the January of 1918 14 Points Address.¹⁵ In each of these speeches, before, during, and completing the involvement of the United States in the World War I, Wilson used similar discursive techniques to turn the country toward action in the war. Over the course of those two years, he managed to make the 180-

¹⁵ These three speeches have been edited for easy reference in this study and are included in the Appendix.

degree change from refusing to put American boots on the ground in France to demanding it as a moral imperative. Accordingly, I organized my analysis of these three speeches through the descriptive framework of Bitzer's rhetorical situation to understand the exigencies that influenced his policy decisions.

I use the rhetorical construct of American exceptionalism as a critical lens for examining how his discourse responded to those exigencies. Wilson faced the challenge of maintaining his dedication to a system of values and not breaking his promises to the American people, while moving the country to war. A full rhetorical analysis of these artifacts through the critical lens of American exceptionalism helps provide insight into the decisions that Wilson made. I argue that whether or not Wilson knew that he would have to break his 1916 campaign promise, his rhetorical building of American exceptionalism forever changed the destiny of the United States and its future in World War I and beyond by fully applying a design to encourage the American people in one direction or another. I also explore the ideograph of exceptionalism and how it affected America's decision to go to war.

Plan of Study

The present chapter serves as a primer for the difficulty that Wilson faced in the second half of the 1910s. The world was a rapidly developing place, and he clearly saw that the United States could either choose to take its rightful place at the head or be swallowed up by the other belligerent nations. By discussing initial ideas of the rhetorical situation, Wilson's particular rhetorical situation, and his problems therein, and developing a clearer understanding of the ideas of American exceptionalism, it is now possible to delve deeper still into the discursive style of

the twenty-third President. A review of relevant literature gives a base from which to begin the study.

Chapter 2 is an analysis of the specific rhetorical situation Wilson faced from 1916 to 1918. By analyzing the exigencies that required the delivery of these three speeches, it becomes possible to tease out a better understanding of Wilson's texts. Therefore, this chapter provides more background of the Great War and the way in which Wilson's speeches came to be given within that time period.

Chapter 3 discusses the concept of American exceptionalism and the specific way Wilson developed it in his discourse. His understanding of the role of America in world history and the development of the future essentially set the stage for all presidential foreign policy subsequent to his eight years in office. A more developed understanding of the way in which Wilson used American exceptionalism as an *ideograph* provides substantial light on what might otherwise appear to be an inexplicable change of his foreign policy.

Chapter 4 concludes the study by offering implications and discussing the limitations of this study, as well as possible avenues for future research. It considers how, with a view of Wilson in mind, it is possible to understand the development of the American Presidency into the 21st century. Wilson set the pattern for the future presidencies, and an understanding of the development of this will allow us to consider the future of the office.

CHAPTER 2

WILSON'S RHETORICAL SITUATION

Every single event in history, every battle, economic collapse, presidential act or future-saving decision is an amalgamation of processes and factors. What we see as random events occurring organically along a linear timeline actually follow quite a different path. History is a series of actions and reactions, and to the extent that humans and their intellect have the ability to alter the direction of history, it most often occurs through their ability to shape and control a given situation. If, as philosopher Baruch Spinoza tells us, nature truly does abhor a vacuum (1.15), then history has proven itself desirous to follow the path of strength flowing in to situations in which it is required. It is what our leaders do within this moment of change that truly affects change and provides a historical context.

It is one thing to understand that events occur within the tumult of moment-to-moment factors and pressures and another to analyze such factors qualitatively. Bitzer does not give a simple one-line definition, but rather a fully developed descriptive framework for recognizing a rhetorical situation and the necessary variables it entails. Herein, Bitzer's descriptive framework functions as the organizing tool for explaining the overall situation Wilson faced, after his reelection in 1916, with respect to the involvement of the United States in WWI.

Using Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation

Rhetorical scholars have an interest in explaining discursive events as rhetoric, but they recognize that such events are responding to their contexts, not occurring in a vacuum. As Bitzer posits, “rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur” (3). Furthermore, discourse is not rhetorical until it has been brought “into existence for the sake of something beyond itself” (3). For example, if a senator is speaking to a Congressional committee about his or her possible ethics violations, the discourse that occurs is rhetorical in nature because the senator is there in defense of an accusation. Had the accusation not been levied, the senator would most likely never have spoken in the first place. The accusation becomes the *exigence* that evokes a response from the senator.

Bitzer also explains that, “a speech is given *rhetorical* significance by the situation” (5), that is, the reason we care about *what* is being said is because of *why* it is being said. Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech at the Lincoln Memorial, in August of 1963, is certainly remarkable as a rhetorical artifact for his eloquent use of language, but what has given King’s speech its transcendent and timeless quality historically is the chaotic moment out of which it occurred. Today, King’s speech is viewed as a response not only to the audience at the March on Washington, but also to the resistance the Civil Rights Movement had generated from the early 1950s and into the 1960s.¹⁶

¹⁶ For the complete text of this speech, see Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” *American Rhetoric*, ed. Michael E. Eidenmuller, 2001-2011, Web, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihadream.htm>.

King's speech also helps exemplify Bitzer's point that a rhetorical situation necessarily exists prior to the rhetorical discourse, "just as a question must exist as a necessary condition of an answer" (6). Accordingly, if a speaker addresses an audience on the basis of the situational *exigence*, the main idea of the speech must be a fitting response to that *exigence*. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the Congress, in 1941, asking the members to declare war on the Empire of Japan, it was in response to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor Naval Base, in Hawaii.¹⁷ Without the *exigence* created by the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt would have had difficulty urging Congress to declare war.¹⁸ Likewise, if he had used the situation to declare war on Germany instead of Japan, his response would have been deemed, in Bitzer's terms, "unfitting".¹⁹ The discourse arises, according to Bitzer, in an attempt to resolve the situation:

As a result, then, the discourse must respond to the situation, with its various constraints, which the participants have agreed is of concern; otherwise, the discourse simply is not a part of the rhetorical situation. (2)

In this way, then, Bitzer's framework provides a way of examining Wilson's situation as a rhetorical one. His situation was shaped out of and by his discursive responses as President to the growing *exigence* of U.S. policy toward the war in Europe. But, before investigating *what* Wilson said, let us turn to an examination of *why*, from November 1916 to 1918, as U.S. president, Wilson had to respond and what constraints he faced in doing so.

¹⁷ For the complete text of this speech, see Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Pearl Harbor Address to the Nation," *American Rhetoric*, ed. Michael E. Eidenmuller, 2001-2011, Web, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm>.

¹⁸ In fact, some recent historians have suggested that FDR may have had prior knowledge of the planned attack on Pearl Harbor but did nothing, knowing it would provide a political *exigence* for America to enter the war. See Thomas Fleming's book *The New Dealer's War*.

¹⁹ For Bitzer's definition of a "fitting" response, see pg. 10.

He Kept Us Out of the War

In many ways, Wilson's rhetorical situation may be understood to have been created on 7 November 1916, when he won his re-election to the post of U.S. President by less than 5% of the vote against his Republican opponent Charles Evans Hughes.²⁰ While in hindsight Wilson's re-election may seem unremarkable, at the time the narrow margin of victory was seen as a referendum on problems both foreign and domestic. The American people had had to choose between their dislike for Wilson's domestic policies and their fear of Republican saber rattling.²¹ Most historians credit Wilson's re-election with the public's fear of the European war and thus the effectiveness of his campaign slogan "He Kept Us Out of War".²² As a result, Wilson's second term began with the tacit promise that, in contrast to the Republicans, he would continue to keep the nation out of the war.

Certainly, when compared to the Republican Party's position on the war, Wilson's administrative record seemed to have offered the public a genuine choice. During his first term in office, the U.S. government had supported both the Central and the Allied powers financially with munitions through families such as the Rockefellers and Morgans. But, the Democrats were more tight-lipped about the realities of the burgeoning international state of affairs than the

²⁰ For more details on that election, see David Leip, "1916 Presidential Election Results," *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*, 2005, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?f=0&year=1916>.

²¹ This metaphor refers to the Republican Party's eagerness for war. Various historians have noted this political tension in the 1916 election. See, for example, James Milton Cooper's *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*.

²² For discussion of his slogan and its political significance, see "Woodrow Wilson," *Presidents*, Web, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/woodrowwilson>.

Republicans.²³ And, even though Republican Party leaders, such as former President Theodore Roosevelt, were both anxious and vocal about their desire to throw their weight into the European conflict, they could not decide on which side to intervene or what their goals would be. So, the American populace was convinced that the Democrats had no reason to involve the nation in a foreign war.

The American citizenry was not itching for a fight at the time, especially since the nation's stated foreign policy was still founded solidly on the near century old Monroe Doctrine. The country's most recent war effort, the less than popular Spanish-American War, was clearly one of "protecting" interests on the American side of the globe.²⁴ The Great War raging across the ocean was patently outside of American jurisdiction, according to the government's own definition. Nonetheless, those who championed a noninterventionist stance toward the war in Europe should have been somewhat skeptical of Wilson's commitment to that position.

Two months prior to his re-election, Wilson had delivered a speech to the members of the National Democratic Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, accepting the party's nomination. Although the speech seemed to be a typical nomination acceptance speech, it was rhetorically significant for the situational context in which Wilson found himself, in the midst of a war that would end up touching at least half of the continents on the globe. Under those circumstances, the most powerful man in the United States, the incumbent President, would be expected to have something to say on such affairs.

From the beginning of this 1916 speech, accepting the Democratic nomination, Wilson began building a resumé for the Democratic Party, one specifically geared to juxtapose the party

²³ For more discussion of the political division, see Edward L. Ayers, et al., *American Passages: A History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2009), 649-51.

²⁴ Consult "The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War," *Hispanic Division Library of Congress*, 20 July 2010, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/intro.html>.

against the Republicans. He chided the previous Republican administration, during which, “Little intelligent attention was paid to the army, and not enough to the navy,”²⁵ and he repeated that theme frequently throughout the speech. For Wilson and the Democrats, this theme of ill-preparedness served as an example that proved just how unfit to rule the Republican Party was. For a nation that was supposed to serve as the beacon of hope and example for other countries and to “spread the arsenal of democracy,” it was simply unacceptable to have an ill-equipped army and a floundering navy. The United States could not defend itself, much less its allies, in such a state.

One of the most interesting comments Wilson made in the speech was in response to the reissue of the tariff, a matter that critics claimed was far too protectionist. By keeping the taxes on imported goods high, the Republican’s goal was to force U.S. companies to buy local, ostensibly to allow for U.S. economic production to grow. Wilson saw this approach as backwards and antiquated, preferring instead to open U.S. markets to the global system and to allow smaller national companies to sink or swim on their own merit. He had every interest in repealing this tariff and putting in a far more lenient plan. For industrialists such as Morgan, Rockefeller, and Harriman, this position was as it should be. Wilson justified the tariff accordingly:

The tariff has been revised, not on the principle of repelling foreign trade, but upon something like a footing of equality with our own in respect of the terms of competition, and a Tariff Board has been created whose function it will be to keep the relations of American with foreign business and industry under constant observation, for the guidance alike of our business men and of our Congress. *American energies are now directed towards the markets of the world.* (2.7)

²⁵ Woodrow Wilson, “Speech of Acceptance,” *Miller Center of Public Affairs*, 6 December 2010, <<http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3795>>. Subsequent references herein to this speech are made parenthetically, by page and paragraph number, to the copy attended to this study as “1916 Democratic Address.”

At the time, Wilson may have appeared to be commenting on the financial footing of the United States. From today's vantage, though, his comment seems to reveal his true hand in terms of America's financial entanglement with European powers.

At the time, the country had a significant trade surplus; unlike today, it was exporting far more than it was importing. According to historian Samuel McRoberts, the largest purchasers of American goods, specifically through financial institutions and the armaments industry, were the nations of Europe (*WWI Document Archive*). While in the right situation, war can indeed be quite profitable, it was not proving to be the case for the governments in Europe. Eager to take advantage of the European countries' financial situations, J.P. Morgan and Company had been directly involved in talks with the U.S. departments of State and Treasury, pleading with the government to allow them to make loans to the belligerent nations.

In late 1914 and early 1915, the man standing in the way of such financial involvement was Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, who maintained that "There is no reason why loans should not be made to the governments of neutral nations, but in the judgment of this Government, loans by American bankers to any foreign nation which is at war are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality."²⁶ Bryan had found no legal way, either by the letter or the intent of the laws of neutral nations, to permit trading with belligerents, and was not afraid to say so. However, less than a year after this letter was written to Morgan and Co., Bryan was no

²⁶ For a complete text of this judgment, see William Jennings Bryan, "Secretary of State to J.P. Morgan and Company," *WWI Document Archive*, Web, 39 June 2009, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/U.S._Policy_on_War_Loans_to_Belligerents.

longer Secretary of State, and U.S. banks found a more accommodating temperament in the new man holding the position, Robert Lansing.²⁷

In September on 1915, almost a year to the day before Wilson accepted the Democratic nomination for re-election, in St. Louis, Lansing summarized the country's financial problem in a letter to President Wilson:

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 1, 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.

The idea of Europe pulling their money out simply was not an option, as that money was rightfully the United States', and for the Europeans to extract that amount of money would require them to default on their debts to the U.S. Lansing continues his reasoning:

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.²⁸

By Lansing's account, the United States was in the precarious position of being owed a sum of money that, if called in, would ruin the finances of the European continent. Since clearly that

²⁷It can be reasonably argued that Robert Lansing supported Wilson's monetary support of the belligerent nations out of a true desire to see the Allied powers succeed. For more information, see Michael Duffy's essay, "Robert Lansing," at *Firstworldwar.com*.

²⁸For the entire text, refer to Robert Lansing, "Secretary of State Lansing to President Wilson," *WWI Document Archive*, 30 June 2009, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/U.S._Policy_on_War_Loans_to_Belligerents.

was not an option, he reasoned, trade needed to continue on the basis that payment would be made at another time. Until such a time, loans could be floated from the U.S. lending institutions.

The Secretary of the Treasury, William McAdoo, apparently found no reason to disagree with Lansing's forecast, and at the end of his letter to the President, Lansing added the Treasury secretary in his advice:

My opinion is that we ought to allow the loans to be made from 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. (6.29-30)

The unconditional announcement to which Lansing referred was former Secretary Bryan's statement to J.P. Morgan and Company regarding the inability to deal with belligerent nations. In short, European markets needed the United States for loans that were not permissible, due to laws restricting trade with belligerent nations. Furthermore, with its best market unable to pay for goods and services contributing to the war effort, the United States was accumulating a surplus that was largely unprofitable and perhaps financially perilous. Wilson's response to this financial crisis was to open up the doors of American financial institutions, officially declaring that European credit had no limit, as far as the banks were concerned. Rather than risk being stuck with a surplus no one could afford to buy, the U.S. government decided to float the loans, regardless of international law, and went so far as to mobilize a merchant marine and an improved navy to transport goods to the European markets, setting in motion the inevitable gears of foreign intervention.

A year later, to the members of the Democratic Party, in St. Louis, Wilson explained:

Effective measures have been taken for the re-creation of an American merchant marine and the revival of the American carrying trade indispensable to our emancipation from the control which foreigners have so long exercised over the opportunities, the routes, and the methods of our commerce with other countries. (2.10)

With these remarks, Wilson seemed to be taking advantage of the war in Europe to flex burgeoning American muscle, taking advantage of the needs of Europeans to expand American power. With the nations of Europe beating one another into oblivion, the United States had the room and time to continue building and developing the navy that would soon carry its troops to the shores of France. Though Wilson characterized the actions his administration had taken as ones that would emancipate the nation “from the control which foreigners have so long exercised,” it was clear that by declaring the opening of U.S. banks and credit lines to the nations of Europe, he had established the boundaries of the rhetorical situation that would lead the nation into the war. Thus, when Wilson addressed his party, in the fall of 1916, his previous administrative policies posed significant constraints upon his future choices regarding U.S. policies toward the war.

Constraints function in the rhetorical situation by defining what can or can not be said in a piece of discourse. In his discussion about the rhetorical situation, Bitzer explains how constraints function:

[E]very rhetorical situation contains a set of *constraints* made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. (8)

Of course, Wilson’s largest *constraint* was the anti-war sentiment of the American public. The majority of Americans simply did not want to engage in a horrifyingly bloody and territorial European brawl.²⁹ For Wilson, the anti-war sentiment of the public ran counter to the financial

²⁹ In *The Illusion of Victory*, Thomas Fleming discusses that American disapproval for the war largely was not something Wilson cared about, because he had George Creel’s CPI (93).

decisions he had authorized in support of the nations of Europe and to the political tendencies of his party. Yet, his re-election campaign had narrowly succeeded on the platform of non-intervention. As President George W. Bush said decades later, “If this were a dictatorship, it’d be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I’m the dictator.”³⁰ Fortunately, the United States is not such a place, nor was it during the term of the twenty-third President. If Wilson and his anglophile cabinet had had their preference, perhaps the United States would have entered on the side of the Allies sooner than it did. But Wilson was a shrewd politician with the support of a number of even more shrewd politicians and businessmen, all of whom understood that the body politic had to be nudged towards things with which they did not necessarily agree.

In accepting his party’s nomination, Wilson seemed to acknowledge how the will of the people constrained the nation’s actions. Wilson stated:

In foreign affairs we have been guided by principles clearly conceived and consistently lived up to. Perhaps they have not been fully comprehended because they have hitherto governed international affairs only in theory, not in practice. They are simple, obvious, easily stated, and fundamental to American ideals. (3.21)

Wilson was famous for such lofty ideals, declaring that whatever the United States decided to do, it did for the sake of the people and to benefit all humanity. American ideals often depend on the situation, and in this case, Wilson clarified how those ideals were being met:

We have been neutral not only because it was the fixed and traditional policy of the United States to stand aloof from the politics of Europe and because we had had no part either of action or of policy in the influences which brought on the present war, but also because it was manifestly our duty to prevent, if it were possible, the indefinite extension of the fires of hate and desolation kindled by that terrible conflict and seek to serve mankind by reserving cur[sic] strength and our resources for the anxious and difficult days of restoration and healing which must follow, when peace will have to build its house anew. (4.22)

³⁰ For the full text, see George W. Bush, “Transition of Power: President-Elect Bush Meets With Congressional Leaders on Capitol Hill,” *CNN.com transcripts*, 18 December 2000, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0012/18/nd.01.html>.

For those listening carefully, Wilson was moving away from the “neutral in heart as well as action” position he had taken at the outbreak of war a year earlier.³¹ With this explanation, he seemed to be preparing the country for a possible change in foreign policy.

The United States was still verbally neutral at this time, to be sure, but Wilson’s language conveyed a willingness to adapt to change. Wilson declared forebodingly that, “The seas were not broad enough to keep the infection of the conflict out of our own politics” (4.24). Wilson’s word choice is noteworthy because with it he seemed to suggest that the problem had already reached American shores. Characterizing the conflict as an “infection,” with the potential to spread further, Wilson appeared to place himself in the role of a begrudging participant, one who was praying for peace publicly, while privately preparing for a contagious outbreak.

If the private correspondence between Wilson, Secretaries McAdoo, Bryan, and Lansing, and the representatives of the U.S. banking establishment from 1915 had been made public, the politically educated would very likely have argued against such economic entanglements on the ground that they would make some sort of involvement in the Great War almost certain. But such was not the case, and a mere two years later, with the U.S. entrance into the war, many found themselves in the position of shock and dismay. Yet, in 1916, in accepting the nomination, Wilson suggested to his listeners that the war in Europe might soon reach an end:

The future, the immediate future, will bring us squarely face to face with many great and exacting problems which will search us through and through whether we be able and ready to play the part in the world that we mean to play. It will not bring us into their presence slowly, gently, with ceremonious introduction, but suddenly and at once, the moment the war is over. They will be new problems, most of them; many will be old problems in a new setting and with new elements which we have never dealt with or reckoned the force and meaning of before. They will require for their solution new thinking, fresh courage and resourcefulness, and in some matters radical reconsiderations

³¹ For a full text of this speech, see Woodrow Wilson, “Appeal for Neutrality,” *Academic American*, Web, <http://www.academicamerican.com/progressive/docs/WWNeutral1914.htm>. 3 January 2010.

of policy. We must be ready to mobilize our resources alike of brains and of materials.
(5.31)

Knowing that the future Wilson saw for the United States was to have a place at the bargaining table and to serve as the “arbiter of peace,” it is difficult to imagine that he honestly thought these problems could be handled while remaining neutral.

Given the audience to whom Wilson was speaking, it is simply too difficult to come to any conclusion. These were tried and true Progressives, Democratic Senators and Congressmen who re-nominated Wilson unanimously.³² They were political insiders, men who understood the way that Washington and foreign affairs worked. And while they would certainly not have unanimously agreed to involvement in a foreign war that the populous actively opposed, they understood financial affairs. It seems reasonable, therefore, to presume that Wilson’s audience possessed a large amount of insider information such that, when Wilson described continuing the issuance of loans to European belligerents via the transportation on armed merchant ships, most of them would have seen the writing on the wall. After examining the financial and political constraints operating in 1916, when Wilson addressed the Democratic delegation, in St. Louis, Missouri, it is easier to understand just how truly complicated and nuanced the American situation was at the time he won re-election.

Bitzer provides rhetorical scholars with the mandate of exploring this idea further: “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive” (4). Wilson outlined the problems the nation faced, although not explicitly, relying instead on the

³² For more information, see Woodrow Wilson, “Wilson is Renominated for President,” *Xtimeline*, 2009, <http://www.xtimeline.com/evt/view.aspx?id=73064>

inside knowledge of the delegation to catch the true power behind his intimations and political speak.

Toward the end of Wilson's 1916 address to the Democratic convention, his language became decidedly more aggressive and militaristic. Wilson's rhetorical style typically was more moralistic, a preacher style, singing the virtues of a "God Blessed America". But, in this speech, he began to employ words such as war, battle, mobilize, preparation, and resources. And while it is a common technique for politicians to use the metaphor of war and military to convey the gravity of their point, analysis of the discourse suggests that Wilson's use in this speech was more deliberate, less ornamental.³³ His calls for military preparation, warning that the United States would do what was necessary to protect its interests, did not seem intended to renew his past pledges of peace and neutrality. Instead, Wilson appeared to be tentatively gauging the reaction of his audience.

At the conclusion of his acceptance speech, in September 1916, President Wilson spoke in terms that should have chilled pacifists and peace activists to their marrow. He declared:

No nation can any longer remain neutral as against any willful disturbance of the peace of the world. The effects of war can no longer be confined to the areas of battle. No nation stands wholly apart in interest when the life and interests of all nations are thrown into confusion and peril. (6.34)

Far from the traditional U.S. position of isolationism, this statement seemed to be an early call for the League of Nations, or at the very least some sort of agreement, in which if one nation were affected, then they all would band together. He actually identified the role for the United States in bringing about peace:

There must be a just and settled peace, and we here in America must contribute the full force of our enthusiasm and of our authority as a nation to the organization of that peace upon world-wide foundations that cannot easily be shaken. (6.34)

³³ Further analysis of this point provided in Chapter 3.

This statement did not seem to be from a man who was about to win a second term in office on the slogan of “He Kept Us Out of War.” Rather, a year before the United States would enter the war and two years before anyone would know the outcome, Wilson was declaring America’s right to a place at the peace-negotiating table.

Wilson explained this possibility to Democratic Party members, “If hopeful and generous enterprise is to be renewed, if healing and helpful arts of life are indeed to be revived when peace comes again, a new atmosphere of justice and friendship must be generated by means the world has never tried before” (6.34). Specifically, the means Wilson was suggesting was for weaker nations to abandon their autonomy to the will of the stronger ones, in order to establish a whole world order. He stated, “The nations of the world must unite in joint guarantees that whatever is done to disturb the whole world’s life must first be tested in the court of the whole world’s opinion before it is attempted.”³⁴ In a world in which “we can no longer indulge our traditional provincialism,” Wilson told the delegation that the United States “is to play a leading part in the world drama whether we wish it or not. We shall lend, not borrow; act for ourselves, not imitate or follow; organize and initiate, not peep about merely to see where we may get in” (6.39). If rhetorical discourse responds to or arises out of the needs of the situation, then we can read Wilson’s blueprint for resolving the war *exigence*: How did he plan to solve the lack of money coming in from Europe? The United States would lend, not borrow. How would America justify this disregard of international law and neutrality? The United States would act for itself, not imitate or follow. The new world of global finances had brought Europe’s war to the shores of the United States. The country could no longer afford neutrality.

³⁴ Wilson 6.34. Almost thirty years later, such an agreement would be created as a joint resolution by the United Nations Security Council.

Noticeably absent from Wilson's comments was any discussion of the attacks on U.S. shipping vessels, including the famed sinking of the *Lusitania*, in 1915. Though historically the sinking of the *Lusitania* is often cited as the main cause of war, Wilson did not mention it.³⁵ To his party and prior to his re-election, Wilson revealed that his position toward the war was both financial and political – floating credit to his friends in Britain and positioning himself at the head of the peace table. He also repeated the danger that was poised against the United States to their south, and would rear its head during the Zimmermann Telegram episode. Had this speech been given to a less receptive audience, it might have forewarned the American people that the country was on a collision course with war. Instead, the country re-elected Wilson with the promise of staying out of the war, and seven months later, Wilson went before Congress to request a declaration of war.

The Nation Must Go to War

What changed the situation for Wilson in such a short period of time? Militarily, there was no *exigence* prompting the entry of the United States into the war in Europe. In fact, though Germany's Junker leaders had its military far more prepared and excited about the war than either the French or the British and the German were shelling the Allies beyond recognition, the Germans continued to lose major battles. From the stalemate at the First Battle of the Marne, in 1914, to the essential tie at the Somme, in 1916, the Allies were able to hold off the Germans during their massive artillery bombardments and unadulterated attempts to crush what they saw

³⁵ On May 7th of 1915, the British liner *Lusitania* was sunk by a German u-boat in the North Sea. On board were many women and children. As the ship was flying a neutral flag, Americans and all Allied nations saw this act as a direct attack on the U.S. The attack is often cited as one of the main reasons for entering the war. See, for example, Vincent Kan's essay on *Firstworldwar.com*.

as key military positions.³⁶ But, the losses sustained by the Allies during these bombardments were simply overwhelming, and Germany seemed poised to gain an overwhelming foothold in France. In short, the war seemed destined to continue without either side clearly positioned for victory and without any imperative for the United States to get involved.

But German leadership made two decisions that changed the situation for Wilson. One of those decisions was the one to send the Zimmermann Telegram to the government of Mexico. As discussed in Chapter One (11), the Zimmermann Telegram gave American war hawks just what they needed to get the attention of the citizenry, an apparently legitimate threat on the home front. It is one thing to experience war from an ocean away, hearing the occasional news story or reading a piece of propaganda from the Committee on Public Information. It is quite another to see the enemy as at one's doorstep. General John Pershing, the man would lead the American Expeditionary Force in the Great War, had been chasing Mexican bandits all across northern Mexico for the past two years. For many Americans, news of the Zimmermann Telegram, with its promise to award the Southwestern American territory to the Mexican government for its support of Germany, was enough to arouse their anger against Germany and their support of the Allies' war effort.

For others, the telegram was tantamount to adding insult to injury. The other decision German leaders had made was to reignite Germany's previously dormant policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Germany had resumed sinking any ships that came into the militarized zone around the British Isles. Even some German commanders recognized this policy change for the mistake that it was. But Kaiser Wilhelm and his advisers were blinded by hubris. In their opinion, the risk of unrestricted submarine warfare would be worth quickly knocking England

³⁶ For more details, refer to Michael Duffy, "The First Battle of the Marne, 1914."

out of the war and rendering a weak American navy useless. As German Admiral Eduard von Capelle replied, when asked about the threat of American involvement, “They will not even come, because our submarines will sink them. Thus America from a military point of view means nothing, and again nothing and for a third time nothing” (Keegan 372). Suffice it to say, for Capelle and other German advisers, the United States did not appear to be a major threat, and they saw no real consequence in goading the country into a fight.

Regardless of intent, though, these two decisions by Germany created a political *exigence* that Wilson as President could not ignore, even if he had been so inclined. In April of 1917³⁷, in front of an audience of a special session of Congress, the American people, and indeed the entire world, Wilson responded to that *exigence*: “I have called the Congress into extraordinary session because there are serious, very serious, choices of policy to be made” (1.1). Though these choices, he warned, needed to be made “immediately,” he reminded everyone that, “it was neither right nor constitutionally permissible that I should assume the responsibility of making” (1.1). Thus, Wilson seemed to be imploring the nation to understand that it simply was not his place to make such a decision without their blessing.

Nonetheless, Wilson reminded the American people of the exigency that had arisen -- of Germany’s desire to “put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe or any ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean” (1.2). The specter of German submarines just below the surface of the Atlantic was a genuinely

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson, “Wilson’s War Message to Congress,” *World War I Document Archive*, 29 May 2009, Web. Subsequent references to this speech are made parenthetically, by page and paragraph numbers, to the edited text in the Appendix, Wilson, 1917 War Declaration.

terrifying idea to Americans. Though Wilson may have been liberal in his application of the idea, Americans had every reason to fear such a state of affairs.

But it was not just American lives that Wilson was worrying about losing on those transatlantic trips. The financial situation with the Allies had not improved; if anything, it had deteriorated. After banks such as J.P. Morgan and Co. and every other lending house in the country had begged for a piece of the credit that Britain and France had to offer, Wilson had begun using the merchant marine to ferry money and munitions to the Allies in direct violation of neutrality. He admitted as much, when he declared the neutrality of the “free highways of the world” (1.6). These highways must remain unmolested, he implied, so that safe passage of all things could be assured.

Wilson also rhetorically conflated the lives of people with the business of making money. He declared, “Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be [. . .] The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind” (1.8). In this way, Wilson was able to shield his financial efforts with the defense of human life, against the “reckless lack of compassion or of principle,” of the evil German hoards (1.5).

Thus, Wilson found himself asking Congress for a declaration of war out of what he presented as compassionate concern for the welfare of American citizens; he characterized the fight as one that was picked with him and that he fought against with all his being. In fact, he claimed “for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of law” (1.6). What was happening, he suggested, was so low, so barbaric, that not to fight would have been less than cowardly. It would have been an affront to decency and the mantle that America had sworn to carry.

Wilson's rhetorical justification for the war is analyzed more closely in Chapter Three, but it is important to point out here that he had crafted a public persona based on sanctity and high-mindedness, as one who was above the fray of pithy fights in search of a more right and just cause. Furthermore, elected as President promising to keep the country out of the war, Wilson had to explain how this change was not to begin a war of aggression but rather to "make the world safe for democracy" (3.30). Wilson spent much of his political response reiterating the belief that America had no issue with the German people, just with the German government that had submitted its country to war without justification from the people. Of course, Wilson was knowingly doing the same to the people of the United States, under the auspices of Congressional approval. Constitutionally, it was right; but the process is not a democratic one. But, Wilson claimed a higher moral ground:

We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances. We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nation and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states. (3.25)

Was Wilson proposing that any of these times could call for American intervention?

Surely not, but again he couched his reasons in causes unabashedly American and high-minded.

Wilson's final words to Congress were as commander-in-chief:

To such a task, we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other. (4.39)

One would be hard pressed to find a more American ending to a speech than this one. He spoke to Congress but was telling legislators that Americans would go to war for their principles and that they would fight for democracy and the right for self-rule.

But Wilson's rhetorical situation was not just about deciding whether or not to enter the European war. As we have seen, Wilson's intentions toward the war were constrained not only by public opinion, but also by financial agreements and informal political alliances, and he knew that his words would immediately be heard and read by the Entente powers, the Allies, the American people, and the world at large. This speech, then, was not just to Americans, not just to their enemies, nor to their allies. It was a rhetorical response to all who would listen, and in it, Wilson made it clear that the United States would fight for what was theirs, the very definition of imperial and exceptional.³⁸ In this context with this audience and these constraints, one could not have tailored a better speech dealing with the kairotic moment of the declaration of war on Germany and the many intricacies of international affairs.³⁹

The Fourteen Points to End the War

Less than a year later, on 8 January 1918, Wilson was again facing a joint session of Congress. American involvement in the war had been welcomed by the Allies, but the war was still raging at this point. To say that the allies would win without a doubt simply was not a sure thing. There was to be no annihilation, that was certain, but what victory would look like was far from decided. In fact, it would be another ten months and two days before the war was actually ended and the armistice with Germany enacted. Yet, in this context and to this audience, Wilson chose to present his proposal for ending the war, his so called Fourteen Points.⁴⁰

³⁸ In Chapter 3, I focus specifically on Wilson's rhetorical use of exceptionalism in his discourse to justify American intervention in the war.

³⁹ Here, my use of "kairotic moment" comes from the Greek word *kairos*, meaning the critical moment. Rhetorical scholars use it to designate the moment in which the felt need of the audience requires a rhetorical response, as mapped in the rhetorical situation.

⁴⁰ This speech is archived online at

http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Fourteen_Points. Subsequent

Wilson took it upon himself to propose that all French territory be evacuated, the territorial disputes of Alsace-Lorraine be settled, Belgium evacuated, a nation of Poland to be constructed, and colonial claims of sovereignty be examined (3.18-19, 24). None of these terms for peace was a small matter, by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, if anything, collectively they gave everyone on every side even more reason to fight. France, where the majority of fighting was occurring, was in dispute with Germany over the rights to Alsace-Lorraine. The Germans who entered France through Belgium had no desire for a Polish state to be created and certainly did not want to be under the thumb of a “general association of nations” (5.25). And those colonials whose sovereignty would be discussed at the close of the war were the very people fighting much of the war for every country involved. The colonial empires, the main powers in the war, had brought in their imperial forces from every corner of the globe. Not one of them was willing to see its empire taken apart piece by piece without a serious fight. To say the very least, then, the context for Wilson’s peace terms proposal was complicated.

The audience for Wilson’s proposal was even more complicated. On one hand, it included everyone. It was for the American people to show them that victory was not only expected, but also that victory would be a righteous one and its peace terms would assure democratic values and Christian charity. It was for the subjugated peoples of all the Entente nations, a clarion call to those who felt they had no self determination in their lives, assuring them that under an Allied victory, they would have their own say in their lives.⁴¹ It was also directed at the Entente powers themselves, a clear message, that there would be no further

references in this study are made by using the edited version in the Appendix by page and paragraph numbers.

⁴¹ Ultimately this aim proved to be true in only the rarest of occasions, but many of these people took Wilson’s proposal with the utmost sincerity.

tolerance of their militaristic and bullying behavior.⁴² To Germany, the most militaristic nation of the war, were the orders for the “evacuation of all Russian territory” and for “guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety” (3.15). In addition, the victors would decide what domestic safety looked like, and so, a nation who felt safe on its own continent would not be satisfied with such a decision.

On the other hand, one could perhaps argue that Wilson’s proposal had no real audience. Its legitimacy only existed inasmuch as other countries decided to give it any. The United States did not have any particular power to make these decisions, and in the eyes of the Germans, Wilson was quite arrogant in assuming he had the right to make such a proposal. The United States had no power over the Germans beyond what the Germans decided was in their own best interests.

The most important part of the proposal, and the reason why Wilson’s Fourteen Points are remembered to this day, was point number fourteen: “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” (4.25). This clause, the famous League of Nations clause,⁴³ required that if the countries accepted Wilson’s outline for peace, the fourteenth point would have to be a part.⁴⁴

But the real *constraint* facing Wilson in presenting his Fourteen Points was that the United States still did not have the power to insist that other nations accept the proposal. To the

⁴² Wilson did not say these things outright, but through his messages of independence, self determination, and fair play, there can be no mistaking his meaning.

⁴³ This clause required all nations to agree to rule by a global board of representatives based on a global constitution. This clause is what would ultimately morph into the United Nations.

⁴⁴ In Wilson’s mind, it was not only the most important, but also the only thing that would be unacceptable to have absent from any treaty that would consequently result from a cessation of arms.

extent that countries would listen, the constraints were actually quite limited. And in reality, at the end of the war, the nations did follow the Fourteen Points. They ended up being the de-facto rules of negotiations, the points that everyone had in common from which to work. Not least important in the negotiations were the colonials, who felt that they had been promised the right to self-determination and found that their demands were often met with thinly veiled detest.

In defining the terms for ending the war, Wilson was able to impose righteous ideals and sanctimonious values he seemed to think all civilized people should share. But, at the same time, his proposal inserted itself into issues that no one outside of experts understood and that Wilson had taken very little time in learning on his own. The terms created and destroyed nations with the stroke of a pen, united peoples that shared no commonality outside of geography, created countries based on territorial quibbles with other imperial powers, and brought back countries that had disappeared long ago. In a very real way, the Fourteen Points created what we now deem the Middle East with which we are dealing to this very day. The Allies involved themselves in matters that simply were beyond their desire to understand and gave powers to countries that Wilson never wished them to have.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Wilson's Fourteen Points defined the end of the war, and thus, his rhetorical situation ended with the armistice in 1919.

Through the descriptive frame of Bitzer's rhetorical situation, we have provided an explanation of the historical context and of the audiences and constraints Wilson faced during this pivotal time, 1916-1919, as President of the United States. To analyze more fully the impact of his rhetorical choices throughout this situation and to assess his specific rhetorical strategies,

⁴⁵ For example, the ninth point allows for the "readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality" (4.20). Surely, Wilson had something very distinct in mind when he wrote this point. The problem, however, is that no matter how eloquent and righteous it may sound, no one could agree on what "clearly recognizable lines of nationality" for Italy looked like. Different groups had many different designs on Italian borders, but they certainly would not fall under what anyone would call clearly recognizable.

let us shift the focus now from the context to the text. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at exceptionalism, and his ability to employ this ideograph to convince the United States that neutrality was no longer tenable, and that war was the only answer to ensure a seat at the peace table.

CHAPTER THREE

WILSON'S USE OF EXCEPTIONALISM

While President Woodrow Wilson was the first twentieth century President to employ the tenets of the “Rhetorical Presidency,” he was by no means the first to use nationalism’s most powerful rhetorical tool, exceptionalism. Between September of 1916 and January of 1918, Wilson delivered three important speeches: in 1916, his Democratic Address accepting the party’s nomination; in 1917, the Declaration to Congress; and in 1918, his Fourteen Points speech.⁴⁶ In them, he conveyed his message with strong moral tones, suggesting that the United States had to do something because God had given the country a certain inherent greatness. And while the specific task that Wilson called on the citizenry to bear, moving from a strongly neutral to a hawkish position for war, did change, his rationale for his position remained constant.

The notion of the United States as a country destined for greatness and possessed of higher morals was not a new idea. Presidential discourse had always hinted at the belief that the young country was special and blessed, if its institutions would just follow the particular policies of the Executive Office. For instance, Thomas Jefferson believed in American greatness so much that he decided to authorize the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, a venture which very

⁴⁶ Refer to these texts in the APPENDIX.

likely was unconstitutional.⁴⁷ This example of what would be justified by Manifest Destiny, the idea that America had a heavenly right to all the land it needed, was motivated by such exceptionalist beliefs.⁴⁸ To understand the collective knowledge that the country possessed at this time, as well as how Wilson employed it, let us look briefly at the history of the tenets of American exceptionalism. American Studies scholar Amy Kaplan identifies the paradox of American exceptionalism, noting:

It defines America's radical difference from other nations as something that goes beyond the separateness and uniqueness of its own particular heritage and culture. Rather, its exceptional nature lies in its exemplary status as the apotheosis of the nation-form itself and as a model for the rest of the world (16).

This paradox of local norms versus global designs is crucial to the understanding of American exceptionalism because it exposes the key problem of exporting local culture to a larger community. Historian Sidney Lens deals with this problem, in his book *The Forging of the American Empire*, through his description of the American "Myth of Morality:"

On the contrary, its wars were fought only for such high principles as freedom of the seas, the right of self-determination, and to halt aggression. In thought, as in deed, the United States – so the myth goes – has been antiwar, anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist. It has not sought an inch of anyone else's territory, and the few colonies it acquired were treated with kindness and liberated as quickly as circumstances permitted. (1)

This line of reasoning could be taken directly from any of Wilson's speeches about war and more than likely any other President who had dealt with a foreign nation or colony. Lens' comment reinforces the realization that most U.S. policy is based on an inherent narrative of only acting

⁴⁷ Jefferson was a strict constitutionalist, and according to Professor John J. Patrick, from Indiana University, "the president could not buy Louisiana because no part of the supreme law, the Constitution, granted this power to the government" (1).

⁴⁸ Some "moral" justification for Jefferson's decision was needed, as the purchase more than doubled the fledgling nation's size with the stroke of a pen.

out of pure and righteous desires and working to put the country's inherent goodness into action. According to this logic, the United States had never fought a war of aggression.

Present in all three of Wilson's speeches is the ideograph of exceptionalism, which acts as a larger understanding of how the United States is able to succeed again and again, and how Wilson plans to guide U.S. history. In each speech, his understanding of the ideograph does not change. It always is the case that the United States is the best hope for the world, and that what it does is what should be done. The only thing that changes are the situations, the specifics within each exigence that call for a certain explanation from Wilson.

The most complicated aspect of American exceptionalism is its multi-faceted dimensions. On one level, religion plays a crucial role in the understanding of U.S. policy, crafting the rhetoric and policies of the United States and the young colonies out of a mission born of their covenant with God to create a more perfect nation. A second layer of exceptionalism is its belief that some things are simply inherent in the workings of the universe, including the right to live free and to work for a living. Still a third layer calls for action to be taken out of secular necessities, be they territorial, financial, or resource-based reasons. All of these are viable aspects of American exceptionalism, and there is a long history of these various tenets guiding U.S. and North American foreign policy. Each of these strains can be shown historically to have led to Wilson's rhetoric used in 1916-1918.

Religion: God Blesses Anglo-America

The Puritans

In 1630, as his ship *Arbella* sat off the coast off the "New World," John Winthrop delivered what would become one of the most important declarations in the creation of the

American narrative. When he presented his “Modell of Christian Charity” speech to his fellow Puritans aboard the ship, a phrase was forever placed into the American lexicon. He famously declared an idea that would help define American character to this very day, asserting, “for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a hill, the eies of all people are upon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and so cause him to withdrawe his present help from us” (Winthrop 1). In this sentence, Winthrop encapsulated the entire creed of the future United States into a primary thought, specifically the idea that the colony was being judged by all people around it and that to fail would be tantamount to failing their God and the job that was given them. And while this speech was originally intended to characterize a single city, it was quickly adapted to apply to the entire colony.

The “city on a hill” descriptor is a direct representation of the idea of exceptionalism. By declaring that all the colony did was in service to an elevated power and was possessed of a heavenly calling, it required that the colonies strive for a higher level of excellence. In a more modern understanding, the colonies were to act as a shepherd to the rest of the world which had been led astray by the falseness of its beliefs. As time went on, it would be up to the United States, then, to work to be a country led by the most righteous thoughts and purest intentions. And for the later American colonies, that responsibility would require the colonization of and conversion of native peoples across the globe, all in the name of God and capital.

Forty years later, Samuel Danforth, a Puritan preacher from the colony of Massachusetts, delivered a sermon entitled “A Brief Recognition of New-Englands Errand into the Wilderness,” a call to action for all colonists to explore the “wilderness” before them, spreading light into the dark places just as John the Baptist before them (1-2). Danforth made his argument quite succinctly, declaring that true Christians must enter the wilderness “of the free and clear

dispensation of the Gospel and Kingdome of God” (3). The blessing delivered on the Massachusetts colony was not to allow the settlers to sit in comfort and live in ease but to enter the wilderness – both physical and social – to find the true meaning of God, and to bring the word of God with them wherever they found themselves. This idea of entering into the wilderness provides one of the main thrusts for colonial expansion, a corollary of sorts to Winthrop’s “city on a hill.”

Natural Law: Self-Evident Truths

The Founding Fathers

We find the charge of these United States provided at the very beginning of the nation’s *Declaration of Independence*, in the eternal words of Jefferson; “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (1). While today this belief is one Americans hold as perhaps the truest and most invaluable of all aspects of U.S. citizenship, it was not universally applied or widely embraced in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The belief that certain rights were ensured by one’s humanity, which could not be taken away by government, was an exceptionalist idea. Though at the start of the 20th century the idea still did not apply universally to all Americans, it was nonetheless a distinctly American idea. The United States defined itself by the idea that its citizenry had rights of which no ruler could ever deprive them. That idea set the nation apart from the rest of the world. The vast majority of countries around the world was under some form of autocratic rule, be it Middle Eastern despots, aristocratic European kings, or African tribal strongmen. Even Great Britain,

the land from which the Puritans had sought to escape and which had been tempered by Parliament, was ruled by the Crown nonetheless.

America was truly an exceptional nation, a democratically ruled city on a hill. The very idea of democracy, that wonderful Greek concept that the people were wise enough to choose their own leaders and morally strong enough to deal with the repercussions of any decisions, was revolutionary and exceptional. Lens describes how this experiment with democracy led directly to the French Revolution, an event that both Jefferson and Thomas Paine heralded, at first, as proof positive that the American system was the answer (15). To citizens of the United States, it would have certainly appeared that history was on the side of American democracy.

Secular Errand: Empire Demands Territory

The Mexican-American War

Arguably, President James K. Polk did as much for expanding the American right to territory and acquisition as any other President before him. In this era, following the administration of President Andrew Jackson, a man whom Polk would have certainly found to be a kindred spirit, expansion was the name of the game. Lens recalls for us that the “doctrine of imperialism that emerged in the era of Jacksonian democracy followed a simple logic: wherever there was an American pioneer, or likely to be one, it was the ‘manifest destiny’ of the United States to incorporate that territory into its own” (101). This imperialistic doctrine essentially allowed for the United States to annex any territory that its settlers could presumably one day

call home. And for a country with a rapidly growing love for moving westward, this policy was certain to be put to the test.⁴⁹

A key aspect of this justification for growth and expansion was the Monroe Doctrine, the 1823 policy of President James Monroe that the entire western hemisphere was the U.S sphere of influence due to the country's ability to act as a steward for that part of the world.⁵⁰ Any interference in the affairs of the west would be seen as tantamount to an act of war. This doctrine essentially justified expansion and involvement in the affairs of neighboring countries because anything that affected them directly affected the United States. In that way, any impulse the United States had to expand its territory could quite easily be clothed in the exceptionalist rhetoric of the Monroe Doctrine.

Manifest Destiny functioned rhetorically as a slightly more religious aspect of the Monroe Doctrine, although the pretensions of religious necessity often hide more base desires. It is easy to couch secular desires in the language of religion in order to make them more palpable for the public. According to rhetorical critic Lyon Rathbun, in his 2001 essay, "The Debate Over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny," not acquiring territory in the west "betrayed the country's providential future" (464). Not to expand west and take full advantage of the territory that God had provided for the U.S. would be to deny the heroic future that certainly lay in store for the country. Columnist John L. O'Sullivan wrote in his essay, "The Great Nation of Futurity," that the country would be a hemisphere "comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of

⁴⁹ As Americans moved west, they would encounter the local Native American population that did not maintain their same belief in property and would not take kindly to unlawful incursions on the part of the settlers.

⁵⁰ Monroe, James, "The Monroe Doctrine," *The University of Oklahoma College of Law*, 2009, Web, <http://www.law.ou.edu/ushistory/monrodoc.shtml>.

equality, the law of brotherhood – of ‘peace and good will amongst men’” (426-30). If there were a territory that needed to be used by an American settler, then that land was rightfully the divine property of the United States.

In 1845, President James Tyler facilitated Congress’ admission of Texas as the twenty-eighth state to the Union, and a year later, in 1846, Texas declared that the southern border of the state would be the Rio Grande River, 130 miles south of the traditionally accepted border (Lens 119). The resulting territorial dispute with Mexico was supported by President Polk with vigor. Polk placed the U.S. army at the foot of the Rio Grande with guns pointed at Mexico. A highly disputed “skirmish” took place, and for the next two years, the countries remained at war with conflict finally ending with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in February, of 1848. So exceptional was this still very young nation that its borders had expanded to include California, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Nevada. This was Manifest Destiny in practice.

The Spanish-American War

Lens employs a phrase that quite aptly describes the period of 1846-1898, as a time when “Commerce Follows the Flag” (Lens 149). Essentially, wherever U.S territory expanded, business ventures certainly followed. Such was the case on 15 February 1898, when the battleship *Maine* exploded in Cuba’s Havana Harbor. Using a questionable attack to rally Americans around the flag, President William McKinley declared war on Spain, and five months later, Spanish cessions to the United States included Cuba, the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico (Lens 149). For the first time, U.S. greatness included non-contiguous wars and also allowed for the nation to experiment with the idea of colonization. Sugar was the commercial crop to emerge from many of these new territories, as America transitioned into the second part

of Lens' phrase, "The Flag Follows Commerce" (Lens 169). In this paradigm, not the country but rather the suppliers decide from where these goods and services come. Troops were used to clear way for corporations to gain resources, both human and natural, to use to their benefit.⁵¹ Accordingly, if the U.S. needed sugar or a life-long contract at a military base, then invading Cuba made infinite sense. With this political mindset, the U.S. entrance into World War I made complete sense.

Wilson's 1916 Democratic Address

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Wilson is often thought of as the first rhetorical U.S. President, insomuch as he looked beyond the traditional methods of speaking just to his cabinet, powerful members of U.S. finance, or the U.S. Congress, and instead talked directly to the people. A hundred years ago, this characteristic was considered quite novel. His ability to speak to American citizens in a style and language that they understood ultimately led to their willingness to make the necessary sacrifices to insure U.S. leadership globally. This language was that of superiority and necessary dominance. The world was an increasingly dangerous place, and American values were constantly at risk. Wilson tailored his message to the American people to appeal to their sense of superiority and to insist that the U.S. be the one to lead the world into the twentieth century to spread the self-evidently advanced concepts of American democracy and foreign policy.

The United States long considered itself superior to other nations in many respects. From its style of democracy, religion, society, and government, the nation exemplified an experiment in freedom. As Foad Izadi wrote, "American exceptionalism indicates that the United States'

⁵¹ The capital from these territories was not just physical but also cultural. The understanding of this relationship is absolutely key to the concept of colonialism.

moral superiority, its unique democratic and revolutionary origins, its political system, social organization, cultural and religious heritage, as well as its values serve to legitimize its policies” (24). As such, Izadi offers the perfect answer to the question posed earlier, specifically, how does the citizenry of the United States justify the actions that their government takes? In short, Izadi posits, the actions are justified because everything about the country, even its inherent state of being “American,” legitimizes its policies. The nation is simply exceptional.

The concept of American exceptionalism, embedded in its supporting ideology, carries a great moral imperative and responsibility. Izadi explains that America, “as the city on the hill, is thus positioned on the moral high ground with respect to other countries and powers around the world and therefore has a duty to spread American style thought, democratic ideals and values, and political systems to the rest of the world” (24-25). The word “duty” carries quite a cache in the American lexicon, connoting not just right but requirement. As such, witnessing to the world of American greatness, via foreign policy, becomes not just acceptable but also strongly encouraged. Wilson was able to tap into, pick up, and weave into that narrative something unprecedented, a way to get the American people to support a world war that had nothing to do with them. Furthermore, the long-term impact of such a rhetorical effort would carry into future wars, from interventionist dealings in World War II and colonial wrangling with communism throughout the twentieth century.

From the very beginning of his push for war, Wilson employed the narrative that he knew would likely play best on the heart strings and in American souls. In September 1916, he declared to his party: “In foreign affairs we have been guided by principles clearly conceived and consistently lived up to. Perhaps they have not been fully comprehended because they have hitherto governed international affairs only in theory, not in practice. They are simple, obvious,

easily stated, and fundamental to American ideals” (3.21). His message here asserted that other people might not understand what the nation was doing because they did not understand the inherent exceptionalism of the United States, not because the United States was wrong. He suggested that what the world was seeing and would be seeing more in the future was domestic policy writ global. If other countries did not understand what the United States did, it was because they had not seen the United States in the international arena.

The United States was exceptional, Wilson declared, because its decisions were motivated by the desire for peace and the guidance of love and Christian morality. He argued:

We have been neutral not only because it was the fixed and traditional policy of the United States to stand aloof from the politics of Europe and because we had had no part either of action or of policy in the influences which brought on the present war, but also because it was manifestly our duty to prevent, if it were possible, the indefinite extension of the fires of hate and desolation kindled by that terrible conflict and seek to serve mankind by reserving our [sic] strength and our resources for the anxious and difficult days of restoration and healing which must follow, when peace will have to build its house anew. (4.22)

There are several important aspects of this powerful line. For one, Wilson made the point that the U.S. was not dogmatic in its policy thinking and that his administration was willing to change directions and tactics if that were what was called for in a given situation. He seemed to want to impress that these were not random changes, but rather changes based on a well-defined and consistent set of principles based on morality and the improvement of the human condition.

Second, Wilson set up what would soon become his entire *raison d'être*: the peace process after the cessation of fighting. Wilson made it clear that the nation would do what was necessary to make sure that when peace returned, it would be at the head of the negotiating table deciding exactly what that peace would look like. In two years, it would come in the form of his January 1918 Fourteen Points address. Still, his mention of peace suggests that Wilson almost

certainly had decided for war, even before this speech; his 1916 address moved the official American stance towards one that was more comfortable with the idea of war.

Wilson mentioned the sinking of American ships, such as the *Lusitania* a year earlier, but none directly or by name. He declared:

The rights of our own citizens of course became involved: that was inevitable. Where they did this was our guiding principle: that property rights can be vindicated by claims for damages and no modern nation can decline to arbitrate such claims; but the fundamental rights of humanity cannot be. (4.23)

Wilson employed the rationale that although American lives were taken, the losses were not unexpected. His argument was part of his moral neutrality, that despite the loss of life, America had to remain neutral. But Wilson's stance on armed neutrality did not end there:

The loss of life is irreparable. Neither can direct violations of a nation's sovereignty await vindication in suits for damages. The nation that violates these essential rights must expect to be checked and called to account by direct challenge and resistance. It at once makes the quarrel in part our own. These are plain principles and we have never lost sight of them or departed from them, whatever the stress or the perplexity of circumstance or the provocation to hasty resentment. (4.23)

Europe seemed to be put on notice that the war was now on the U.S. radar and the aggressive sinking of ships would be tolerated no more.

In this passage, two points strike as particularly relevant to the conversation. First, this is the only time in the three speeches that Wilson made any mention of sinking of ships and the loss of life involved. Though he referenced the practice of German submarine warfare in his war declaration, he was vague and spoke of the practice more in general terms, not in actual terms. Second, Wilson intimated that the sinking of neutral ships was where some of the legitimacy for war could lie, when he mentioned that it framed the fighting in a way in which U.S. involvement was justified. But he never explored this justification, therefore leaving his listeners to doubt this was his true reason for supporting entry into the war. At the very end of the passage, he

promised that the United States would not quit and would stick to its past record as proof. In this promise, he proved a man of his word. For in just under seven months, the United States was at war, relying quite insistently to its “past record as proof”.

Wilson’s 1917 War Declaration

Wilson’s rigid narrative of the evident exceptionalism of the American people continued in April of 1917, when he stood in front of a special session of Congress to request a declaration of war against the empire of Germany. From the beginning, he relied on the rule of law to show the people that, even in times of great peril and change, the maintenance of rule and procedure was what made the United States great. The bedrock of America is democracy, and the bedrock of that democracy lies within the sacrosanct pages of the *United States Constitution*. Wilson’s argument seemed to assert that if the Constitution supported his policy, then who could be against him? Wilson used the ultimate authority of this founding document.

Wilson’s speech resembled many previous and subsequent war declarations, notably Franklin Roosevelt’s war declaration and Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.” The speech was both impassioned and measured, cognizant of the anger of the American people but equally aware that the President’s maintenance of calm and control was expected and necessary. As the *Declaration of Independence* from Great Britain asserted that the “history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations,” (1) Wilson’s 1917 speech was essentially a list of wrongs done by Germany against both the United States and the world and why the U.S. people, not the U.S. government or any other of its bodies, were required to step in.

Wilson began that process of demonizing Germany with a line he used in his 1916 speech: “Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The

present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind” (1.8).

Wilson would not let the world forget that the moral costs of war were high, and that transgressions such as killing of innocent civilians would not be tolerated. As was established earlier, the two main thrusts of American exceptionalism are the belief in morality and the improvement of the human condition, and this passage from Wilson’s discourse falls directly into that category of morality and progress. By stating that Germany had declared war on mankind, as Izadi explains, Wilson played into the assumption that “American exceptionalism is very much the essence of describing public diplomacy in terms of soft power. American exceptionalism in turn gives rise to an Orientalist view of other cultures, creating a dual world of “us versus them”, “free versus unfree” (25). Wilson’s narrative tapped into the early American feelings of constantly being threatened and that those who are not allies are enemies.

Again, logical reasoning served as the hallmark of Wilson’s narrative, making his case in support of war:

The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness for judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away. Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion. (1.10)

The United States must show the world the meaning of freedom and the benefits of the power of democracy. Wilson even went so far as to state that the world must be made “safe for democracy,” creating the implication that the United States would play the role of farmer with the military as tiller, the continent of Europe the farmland, and the lives of American, British, German, French, Austrian and Russian soldiers and citizens as the seeds of freedom.

Wilson was impassioned with the spirit of war and of the vanquishing of foes. He continued:

There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our Nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life. (2.15)

In other, less extreme cases, America may have found the luxury of dealing diplomatically with Germany and turning the other cheek in the face of such offenses. However, Wilson clearly stated that these were not everyday offenses, not mistakes or lapses in communication. These were deliberate and pre-planned actions that were meant to take human life and destroy American values. According to Wilson, such actions no American should ever tolerate.

In 1916, he spoke of the resolution of American will and how the country's ability to stay the course could be proven by record. He reminded the nation:

My own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months, and I do not believe that the thought of the Nation has been altered or clouded by them. I have exactly the same things in mind now that I had in mind when I addressed the Senate on the twenty-second of January last: the same that I had in mind when I addressed the Congress on the third of February and on the twenty-sixth of February. (3.22)

The United States had not changed the course that it had set out, which apparently was war, and would stick to the things that it had been saying since the beginning of 1917. His narrative did not include the statements made in the previous years, presumably because it would in no way help his argument or add to the creation of American persistence as exceptional.

As usual, the United States' aspirations were pure and selfless, according to Wilson:

Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth insure the observance of those principles. (3.23)

The eternal principles of freedom, choice, and peace were being irreparably threatened by empires that professed no love for such American characteristics. If these principles could not be

shown to be effective through the example of U.S. diplomacy, he implied, then they would be shown effective through the use of U.S. munitions.

Wilson was always dutiful to remind the people why the fight had to be taken on, for they “are now about to accept gauge of battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power” (3.29). The implications behind such rigid and unflinching rhetoric are really quite powerful, with Wilson willing to destroy the nation in order to save the nation. The paradox is quite striking and quite senseless. However, superficially, it is selfless and full of tinges of morality and purity. Wilson asserted that, “I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations” (1.6). Probably, Wilson considered America a cleansing fire that would rein down upon the troglodytes of Old Europe.

Wilson began a narrative that he continued in his Fourteen Points speech in 1918, specifically the desire that he regarded himself to be a friend to the German people and that after the war ended and the U.S. and its allies won, he would welcome them all as friends in the eyes of the government.⁵² Wilson reminded the German people:

[We shall] “happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and actions towards the millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy who live amongst us and share our life, and we shall be proud to prove it towards all who are in fact loyal to their neighbours and to the Government in the hour of the test. (4.35)

⁵² Interestingly, as soon as the United States entered the war, it only allowed the Allied nations to play a supportive role in the conflict; all the other belligerents became either U.S. allies or U.S. enemies.

The American values of forgiveness and redemption played powerfully here and served as a promise that this was not a war of nationality but of ideology.⁵³

Finally, Wilson brought the narrative home by referencing the true power of a nation blessed by exceptionalism. Assumedly, Wilson knew that what he planned was the right thing to do, that as a nation blessed by God there was nothing else that the country could do. He exuded the voice of American passion:

But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest to our hearts – for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. (4.38)

For Wilson, the United States was a country that fought to defend its allies and beliefs. The people of the nation would fight for these principles, “with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other” (4.39). The nation, as the land ordained and protected by God, had to fight under the mantle of freedom and to show that corrupt power did not rule the day.

Wilson’s 1918 Fourteen Points Address

Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech stands alone not so much because of its rhetorical flourishes or transcendent message, but rather, because what it calls for is an extreme and presumptuous overhaul. The President was involving himself in tribal matters that had been raging for centuries, including those of the Polish people and their rightful homeland. The

⁵³ Also, we see the rhetorical separation of the people from a government, as in the American revolutionary discourse of 1777, regarding the relationship between citizens and British government. Cf. McKinley during the Spanish-American war and FDR regarding the German people in WWII.

speech essentially laid out a blueprint for peace in the form of Fourteen Points that Wilson argued, if followed to the letter, would remake the world in the wake of war and ensure peace for all posterity. He fully intended for the United States to head this process, even though he did not bother to research or to understand fully the points he presented.

The trouble in Europe was far more complicated than the average person could have known. In an old world of militarism, dying empires, old monarchies, unwieldy colonies and territorial disputes running back centuries, its complications were simply too much for an American to appreciate. However, Wilson tried. One of the most presumptuous aspects of his speech was that, despite the fact that he had only a cursory understanding of the factional nature of the region, he chose to deliver the speech ten months before an armistice was settled; so almost a year before victory was assured, Wilson was already planning the peace terms. This rests any doubt about whether or not Wilson's main goal was "winning the peace" of the postwar landscape. To Wilson, winning the peace meant being at the head of the table when it came time to discuss terms. The United States was to end the war, as far as Wilson was concerned, as one of the new leaders in the global community. To do this, he would decide the peace terms.

From the very beginning, Wilson employed high-minded and exceptionalist rhetoric to weave his narrative. He said: "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" (2.10). Reaching back to the prose of George Washington's farewell address and his desire for ingenuous affairs and fair treatment of all nations, Wilson called into being a state of existence that many Americans viewed as the golden age of the United States. Though whether the United States has ever actually existed in such a state is not important; rather, the feelings that the image evokes for the American people are those of

patriotism and striving to be their best. To Wilson, as indicated in his speech, what made America great was its ability to continue trying to improve and progress.

Wilson was always quick to couch his reasons in fairness and justice, making sure that the United States remained beyond reproach. He explained: “We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which touched us to the quick and made the life of our people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secured once for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves” (2.11). Here again is Wilson’s continuing exceptionalist virtue of commitment and honesty, fighting for the rights of all peaceful nations and sticking to the promises that have been made. The goal of the United States, he claimed, was a simple one, creating a community “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” (2.11). He intimated that in doing so, the United States would be standing up for freedom, peace, and self determination for every nation across the world who could not do so on their own against oppressive regimes.

Wilson named his Fourteen Points for peace,⁵⁴ the themes of which may be characterized as paternalistic and naïve.⁵⁵ Paternalism is an important aspect, in terms of exceptionalist rhetoric, because it asserts that one nation has a role similar to a father over another people. This becomes especially clear through the lens of the Allies dealing with colonial powers who, according to Wilson, would receive home rule, but in almost all cases did not. Wilson employed paternalism quite often in his address, even if only hinted at through his desire to set an example for other heathen nations.

⁵⁴ For the details of these points, refer to the explanation above (chapter 2).

⁵⁵ Add a specific textual reference here to support your claim.

The 14 Points deal with issues such as self-determination of colonial groups, a problem that would continue plaguing the British Empire until it was an empire no more. He called for the creation of a Polish state, a completely open peace process, and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France from Germany, one of the issues that Hitler cited, in 1938 (?), as his motivation for invading France and Poland. Needless to say, the result was presumptuous and ultimately, for the region, politically destructive.

The speech itself was very short, possibly due to Wilson's confidence that the things that it proposed were essentially self-evident. Continuing the us-versus-them paradigm of American exceptionalism, Wilson declared, "we feel ourselves to be intimate partners of all governments and peoples associated together against the Imperialists. We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We stand together until the end" (4.25). Through this creation of togetherness and camaraderie, Wilson attached all of the allies to his points, including the most controversial point, the League of Nations. To American ears, however, his words might have rung as a clarion call to all freedom-loving nations to follow America's example and support the peace.

Wilson attempted to make sure that his points were unequivocal and beyond question, in terms of motive. For instance, Wilson reminded the world that the United States was committed to the war, and that, "For such arrangements and covenants we are willing to fight and to continue to fight until they are achieved" (4.26). The United States, he suggested, supported its allies, as long as they deferred to its leadership. And in this case, following the war, the allies largely do. He also reminded all German supporters of the American cause and German-Americans that the problem was not with them and that, if they proved to be loyal, they would be welcomed in the post-war world. To Germany, Wilson declared, "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” (4.26). Rhetorically, Wilson had already created his post-war, U.S.-dominated world. It was simply up to the rest of world to choose on which side to be.

Finally, Wilson ended his speech with the themes that permeated all three of his addresses: democracy, freedom, and standing up for supporters of liberty. He declared:

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. (4.29)

In this statement, we see all of Wilson’s themes of American exceptionalism combined into one thought. We see the exceptionalist idea that the United States can stand for no liberties but those very best ones, that whatever it does, it does with the highest moral authority. The final sentence acts as a challenge to the world, that the United States knows and trusts its stance on issues, and it is up to the rest of the world to come to terms with theirs.

In Wilson’s United States, the country could act no other way but in the service of liberty and freedom. It was as if Wilson were God’s defender on earth, protecting the Almighty’s creation from the tyranny of aristocracy and old world empire. Wilson’s post-war view was a world free of empire, except that empire which the United States and its allies saw fit to amass for themselves. But they do so only in service of peace and the greater good. That, in the end, is what made the United States exceptional to Wilson, at least as indicated by his public discourse.

Exceptionalism is an absolutely crucial concept in terms of fully understanding American power and the foreign policy decision that the country makes. More specifically, it allows for a framework to be constructed that shows how Wilson was thinking and on what assumptions he was basing his decisions. These decisions were backed by words couched in the highest and

mightiest tones of morality and individuality. From his Speech of Acceptance in 1916 to his Fourteen Points Speech in 1918, the language Wilson used did not change a great deal. He always asserted the dominance of the United States and its existence as a holy nation with a divine providence laid down through God. What changed were the exigencies, the situations that called the rhetoric into being. For Wilson, nothing particularly changed except for what it was he defending. Ultimately, he used the same rhetoric of American exceptionalism as a defense for all of his decisions made through the years.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

On the 19 of March 1920, President Woodrow Wilson would see the end of his surge towards leader of the peace. On this day, the U.S. Congress voted against the crowned jewel of Wilson's Fourteen Points: the League of Nations. Wilson had stumped for months for the League, travelling by train across the country and delivering pragmatic speeches in support of U.S. ratification of the League from the back of train cars. His health rapidly deteriorating, he would still live to see the League come to fruition and carry on, albeit without the U.S. nation as its creator.

The purpose of this study has been to provide a clear understanding of how Wilson maneuvered through positions of non-interventionism to pro-war hawk and ultimately arbiter of the peace, during the years 1916-1918, and of how he constructed his rationale rhetorically for his audience. I conclude that Wilson benefited greatly from his honest public belief in and rhetorical use of American exceptionalism, an idea that the United States is inherently better than other nations due to a covenant made with God. Based on that ideograph, whatever leaders of America chose to explore within the realm of foreign policy should be accepted because they are led by a higher power.

In Chapter One, I laid the framework for my study with the artifacts I analyzed: Wilson's 1916 Speech of Acceptance, his 1917 Speech to Congress, and his 1918 Fourteen Points address.

These three speeches provided a relatively short period of time in which the President moved from staunchly neutral to pro-war and then to presumptive victory and winner of the peace. I examined the literature on the Rhetorical Presidency, with a focus on what was originally expected and how Wilson differed from the norm. I also looked at Lloyd Bitzer's concept of the rhetorical situation, the descriptive framework I used to understand the context surrounding each speech and its effects on the Wilson's rhetorical choices. Finally, I outlined American exceptionalism, the key aspect of this study and how Wilson's effective use of this concept as an *ideograph* in his discourse allowed him to bring the public with him on his quest for a safe peace.

In Chapter Two, I specifically examined Wilson's rhetorical situation and used Bitzer's rhetorical situation to help explain why Wilson said things the way that he did. This chapter provided a fair amount of background on the subjects of the war in Europe, Americans' relationship to their President, and Wilson's relationship with Europe, in turn. Going through each speech-by-speech, I analyzed them rhetorically to find out the exigencies, constraints and audiences for each speech. By doing this, it is possible to understand the complexities of life in the mid 1910s and to understand what was happening. What I found was that, while Wilson may have promised neutrality to get re-elected, it quickly became apparent that it would not be tenable. Between loans to belligerent nations, Wilson's desire to be at the head of the peace table, and unrestricted submarine warfare in the North Atlantic, it would seem the fates were conspiring to drag the United States into war.

In Chapter three, I analyzed Wilson's war rhetoric through the critical lens of American exceptionalism and consider how this idea bolsters Wilson's message. Since Wilson seemed to have actually believed that the nation was blessed by the creator, it was very easy for him to

move from situation to situation. Though the specific exigencies may have changed, the overall goal and mission did not. For example, in 1916, neutrality was what he thought made the United States exceptional, its ability to stay above the fray and act as a neutral overseer. By 1917, he argued that what made the United States exceptional was its ability and charge to protect the forces of good in the world and to come to their aid against tyrannical power. The situation changed, but the rationale behind the foreign policy decisions did not. Chapter three provides the clearest view into the decisions made by Wilson and how he presented them rhetorically to the people of the United States.

The Rhetorical Situation

In 1916, the United States was in a very tenuous position. War in Europe was threatening to disrupt the entire continent, while south of the border Mexican bandits were proving to be more than the U.S. Army had bargained for. All the while, Americans did not want to see war with Germany, and they had elected a man who promised just such a thing. Unfortunately for those who supported non-interventionism, this would not stand.

As shown in the letters addressing U.S. policy on neutral loans to belligerent nations, the country was already heavily involved in the conflict due to the massive amounts of loans and ammunition that had been sent to both sides of the conflict by major American bankers and industrialists. One reason that the United States had to join the war was that if both sides beat each other beyond their ability to pay their loans, then there would be no money to be made. In my assessment, the United States went to war for money.

But the nation also went to war for principle. After the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 when Germany returned to its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, war with the empire was

fait accompli. Wilson knew that the United States could not stand idly by while blockades were crushing Britain and ships containing support for the country and innocent civilians were being sent to the bottom of the ocean. The United States went to war to protect free people everywhere.

But the country also went to war to win the peace. Wilson could see the writing on the wall that whoever came out of this war on top would have a huge advantage in the coming decades. Wilson had every intention of having the United States as the winner of the peace, and himself at the head of the peace negotiating table. His 1918 Fourteen Points Speech, in which he laid out the United State's terms for a negotiated world peace, is clear proof. His League of Nations would also make it so that this truly would be the war to end all wars. The United States went to war to be at the head of the peace process.

Ultimately, the United States went to war for many reasons, and scholars have posited and defended each one as plausible as the other. What matters more than why the country went to war was how the President sold the idea to the people, the ones who would be doing the fighting and losing their loved ones in battle. It is the rhetorical aspect of the time and the artifacts with which we are most concerned, and the way that Wilson most successfully garnered support for the war was through the use of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

American Exceptionalism

From the city on a hill metaphor of 1630 to Wilson's making the world safe for democracy, in 1918, the common theme that was always present is exceptionalism. It can come in many different packages and with many different faces, but it always carries the same characteristics, specifically the belief that the United States is a country blessed by God, and its people are destined for greatness and inherently possess a superior moral character. In Chapter

three, I divided exceptionalism into three categories: Religion, Natural Law, and the Secular.

Religion is when American exceptionalism is used to defend U.S. foreign policy decisions on the basis of morality and the belief that a higher power is at its back. Natural law portends that the United States is exceptional by fiat, because its people are blessed with inalienable rights that can neither be separated nor taken away. Secular exceptionalism dictates that there are often reasons, such as Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, that require involvement based on safety and prosperity. These are but a few of the many layers of exceptionalism.

Wilson used all three of these tenets of exceptionalism, choosing to focus mostly on religion, but also venturing in to ideas that sound very secular. His rationale for war with Germany was that it was a bully who was not acting in a way that matched the moral integrity of the United States and had to be stopped. Wilson mixed religion with the secular, noting on one hand Germany's refusal to obey any shred of international law, and on the other the United States' providential requirement to stop evil where it saw it. This ability to mix multiple exceptional styles aided Wilson greatly in his ability to gain as much support for his policies as possible.

In many ways, Wilson helped set in motion the wheels of change that would bring the Presidency of the United States to the position it is today. Wilson's view of international relations was global. He understood before many that isolation would not keep a country safe from outside influences and that, even if it could, this was not necessarily a good thing. Wilson sought to open up trade with other nations by lowering the tariff, a very non-protectionist act that outraged many a Republican at the time.

What separates this study is the understanding that Wilson turned Presidential speech making into a two way street, allowing and in many ways requiring participation from the

populace. Inherent in the idea of the Rhetorical Presidency is that the people largely affect the discourse, and a successful president must hear the worries and desires of the people in order to more fully represent them. This idea may seem commonplace today, but it was set in motion through Wilson's struggle to form the League of Nations and garner public support for the war in Europe.

We also witness in Wilson's Presidency the rise of the "people," the American voice that speaks for the populace. Before this, it was a simple case of the have versus the have-nots, with the haves possessing the ear of the President and the have-nots existing within the world that was set up for them. Wilson changes this. Through the struggle of labor unions and peace activists, a voice was given to the unrepresented and the downtrodden, a voice that became the "people." This populist notion came to represent Progressivism, and though it was by no means perfect, we see many Progressive programs and supporters speaking and lobbying for these unrepresented classes during Wilson's era.

Most importantly, however, is the use of exceptionalism that Wilson grabs a hold of and develops to a very large extent. This thesis shows that not only was Wilson stable in his use of the rhetoric of exceptionalism, he was able to turn the meanings of the words to fit the particular situation. If the situation called for peace, then so did exceptionalism; if it called for war, exceptionalism demanded it. This use of American Exceptionalism exists as a corollary to the Rhetorical Presidency, and when we see the ways in which it can be used, it is easy to pick up on how and why current Presidents use it to such a successful extent.

Limitations

This study was limited by choices that I made as to what I wanted to include in the study. It would of course be optimal to look at more artifacts, particularly ones found in the public sphere that both approved and disapproved of Wilson's plans in Europe. However, time did not allow for the scope of this thesis to go further than the three artifacts that were chosen. These three artifacts embody the best representation of three separate time periods in U.S. history and in the development of President Wilson's foreign policy.

The number of speeches delivered by Wilson that were analyzed also limited the study. Wilson gave speeches when the war began, at various points in his reelection and after victory came to allies. However, to truly get into all dimensions of these pieces of discourse simply was not possible. It would not have been feasible within the time period required.

Possibility for Future Study

This thesis has a great deal of potential for further academic study. A single paper could have been written on American Exceptionalism alone, and still there would be more to write about the rhetorical dimensions of Wilson's discourse in terms of involvement in the war. A future direction that I feel would benefit this study is a deeper understanding of how the American understanding of Manifest Destiny and an extension of the Monroe Doctrine led to certain assumptions and beliefs. A deeper analysis of these aspects of Wilson's discourse could provide some interesting new insights.

Also, it would be interesting to study how what Wilson did during 1916 to 1918 can be traced through to the present day in terms of justification for a war that Americans are not particularly excited about entering. There are no shortage of historical examples of presidents

winning support for war through their discourse and use of rhetorical techniques. In each example, it is almost a guarantee that exceptionalism will be found in one form or another.

I intend to continue work in this field and on this subject in my future career and in my doctoral work. There are so many nuances to this study, so many avenues that could be taken, that I am excited to see what else I can find. I envision a much broader and more intensive study of the discourse and presidential use of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

Conclusion

It is arguable whether or not it was inevitable that the United States would enter the war or whether Wilson's desires were pure. Ultimately, this is not what is most important to us as rhetoricians. What is beyond argument is the fact that Wilson's effective use of exceptionalist rhetorical ideas helped him win supporters and sell his dream of involvement and winning the peace. Whether or not this was always his plan is irrelevant, but what is absolutely relevant is how he convinced the American citizenry that war was the only way to go. The United States would always come down on the side of right. "God helping her," said Wilson, "she can do no other" (4.39). Whether or not that happened here is for history to decide. Whatever way the pendulum of the past swings, one thing is for certain: as with all Rhetorical Presidents, Wilson's rhetoric mattered.

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Appendix: Woodrow Wilson's Rhetorical Texts

Speech of Acceptance (September 2, 1916)

Woodrow Wilson

Transcript

Senator James, Gentlemen of the Notification Committee, Fellow-Citizens:

1. I cannot accept the leadership and responsibility which the National Democratic Convention has again, in such generous fashion, asked me to accept without first expressing my profound gratitude to the party for the trust it reposes in me after four years of fiery trial in the midst of affairs of unprecedented difficulty, and the keen sense of added responsibility with which this honor fills (I had almost said burdens) me as I think of the great issues of national life and policy involved in the present and immediate future conduct of our Government. I shall seek, as I have always sought, to justify the extraordinary confidence thus reposed in me by striving to purge my heart and purpose of every personal and of every misleading party motive and devoting every energy I have to the service of the nation as a whole, praying that I may continue to have the counsel and support of all forward-looking men at every turn of the difficult business.
2. For I do not doubt that the people of the United States will wish the Democratic Party to continue in control of the Government. They are not in the habit of rejecting those who have actually served them for those who are making doubtful and conjectural promises of service. Least of all are they likely to substitute those who promised to render them particular services and proved false to that promise for those who have actually rendered those very services.
3. Boasting is always an empty business, which pleases nobody but the boaster, and I have no disposition to boast of what the Democratic Party has accomplished. It has merely done its duty. It has merely fulfilled its explicit promises. But there can be no violation of good taste in calling attention to the manner in which those promises have been carried out or in adverting to the interesting fact that many of the things accomplished were what the opposition party had again and again promised to do but had left undone. Indeed that is manifestly part of the business of this year of reckoning and assessment. There is no means of judging the future except by assessing the past. Constructive action must be weighed

against destructive comment and reaction. The Democrats either have or have not understood the varied interests of the country. The test is contained in the record.

4. What is that record? What were the Democrats called into power to do? What things had long waited to be done, and how did the Democrats do them? It is a record of extraordinary length and variety, rich in elements of many kinds, but consistent in principle throughout and susceptible of brief recital.
5. The Republican Party was put out of power because of failure, practical failure and moral failure; because it had served special interests and not the country at large; because, under the leadership of its preferred and established guides, of those who still make its choices, it had lost touch with the thoughts and the needs of the nation and was living in a past age and under a fixed illusion, the illusion of greatness. It had framed tariff laws based upon a fear of foreign trade, a fundamental doubt as to American skill, enterprise, and capacity, and a very tender regard for the profitable privileges of those who had gained control of domestic markets and domestic credits; and yet had enacted anti-trust laws which hampered the very things they meant to foster, which were stiff and inelastic, and in part unintelligible. It had permitted the country throughout the long period of its control to stagger from one financial crisis to another under the operation of a national banking law of its own framing which made stringency and panic certain and the control of the larger business operations of the country by the bankers of a few reserve centers inevitable; had made as if it meant to reform the law but had faint-heartedly failed in the attempt, because it could not bring itself to do the one thing necessary to make the reform genuine and effectual, namely, break up the control of small groups of bankers. It had been oblivious, or indifferent, to the fact that the farmers, upon whom the country depends for its food and in the last analysis for its prosperity, were without standing in the matter of commercial credit, without the protection of standards in their market transactions, and without systematic knowledge of the markets themselves; that the laborers of the country, the great army of men who man the industries it was professing to foster and promote, carried their labor as a mere commodity to market, were subject to restraint by novel and drastic process in the courts, were without assurance of compensation for industrial accidents, without federal assistance in accommodating labor disputes, and without national aid or advice in finding the places and the industries in which their labor was most needed. The country had no national system of road construction and development. Little intelligent attention was paid to the army, and not enough to the navy. The other republics of America distrusted us, because they found that we thought first of the profits of American investors and only as an afterthought of impartial justice and helpful friendship. Its policy was provincial in all things; its purposes were out of harmony with the temper and purpose of the people and the timely development of the nation's interests.
6. So things stood when the Democratic Party came into power. How do they stand now? Alike in the domestic field and in the wide field of the commerce of the world, American business and life and industry have been set free to move as they never moved before.
7. The tariff has been revised, not on the principle of repelling foreign trade, but upon the principle of encouraging it, upon something like a footing of equality with our own in respect of the terms of competition, and a Tariff Board has been created whose function it will be to

keep the relations of American with foreign business and industry under constant observation, for the guidance alike of our business men and of our Congress. American energies are now directed towards the markets of the world.

8. The laws against trusts have been clarified by definition, with a view to making it plain that they were not directed against big business but only against unfair business and the pretense of competition where there was none; and a Trade Commission has been created with powers of guidance and accommodation which have relieved business men of unfounded fears and set them upon the road of hopeful and confident enterprise.
9. By the Federal Reserve Act the supply of currency at the disposal of active business has been rendered elastic, taking its volume, not from a fixed body of investment securities, but from the liquid assets of daily trade; and these assets are assessed and accepted, not by distant groups of bankers in control of unavailable reserves, but by bankers at the many centers of local exchange who are in touch with local conditions everywhere.
10. Effective measures have been taken for the re-creation of an American merchant marine and the revival of the American carrying trade indispensable to our emancipation from the control which foreigners have so long exercised over the opportunities, the routes, and the methods of our commerce with other countries.
11. The Interstate Commerce Commission is about to be reorganized to enable it to perform its great and important functions more promptly and more efficiently. We have created, extended and improved the service of the parcels post.
12. So much we have done for business. What other party has understood the task so well or executed it so intelligently and energetically? What other party has attempted it at all? The Republican leaders, apparently, know of no means of assisting business but "protection." How to stimulate it and put it upon a new footing of energy and enterprise they have not suggested.
13. For the farmers of the country we have virtually created commercial credit, by means of the Federal Reserve Act and the Rural Credits Act. They now have the standing of other business men in the money market. We have successfully regulated speculation in "futures" and established standards in the marketing of grains. By an intelligent Warehouse Act we have assisted to make the standard crops available as never before both for systematic marketing and as a security for loans from the banks. We have greatly added to the work of neighborhood demonstration on the farm itself of improved methods of cultivation, and, through the intelligent extension of the functions of the Department of Agriculture, have made it possible for the farmer to learn systematically where his best markets are and how to get at them.
14. The workingmen of America have been given a veritable emancipation, by the legal recognition of a man's labor as part of his life, and not a mere marketable commodity; by exempting labor organizations from processes of the courts which treated their members like fractional parts of mobs and not like accessible and responsible individuals; by releasing our

seamen from involuntary servitude; by making adequate provision for compensation for industrial accidents; by providing suitable machinery for mediation and conciliation in industrial disputes; and by putting the Federal Department of Labor at the disposal of the workingman when in search of work.

15. We have effected the emancipation of the children of the country by releasing them from hurtful labor. We have instituted a system of national aid in the building of highroads such as the country has been feeling after for a century. We have sought to equalize taxation by means of an equitable income tax. We have taken the steps that ought to have been taken at the outset to open up the resources of Alaska. We have provided for national defense upon a scale never before seriously proposed upon the responsibility of an entire political party. We have driven the tariff lobby from cover and obliged it to substitute solid argument for private influence.
16. This extraordinary recital must sound like a platform, a list of sanguine promises; but it is not. It is a record of promises made four years ago and now actually redeemed in constructive legislation.
17. These things must profoundly disturb the thoughts and confound the plans of those who have made themselves believe that the Democratic Party neither understood nor was ready to assist the business of the country in the great enterprises which it is its evident and inevitable destiny to undertake and carry through. The breaking up of the lobby must especially disconcert them: for it was through the lobby that they sought and were sure they had found the heart of things. The game of privilege can be played successfully by no other means.
18. This record must equally astonish those who feared that the Democratic Party had not opened its heart to comprehend the demands of social justice. We have in four years come very near to carrying out the platform of the Progressive Party as well as our own; for we also are progressives.
19. There is one circumstance connected with this program which ought to be very plainly stated. It was resisted at every step by the interests which the Republican Party had catered to and fostered at the expense of the country, and these same interests are now earnestly praying for a reaction which will save their privileges, for the restoration of their sworn friends to power before it is too late to recover what they have lost. They fought with particular desperation and infinite resourcefulness the reform of the banking and currency system, knowing that to be the citadel of their control; and most anxiously are they hoping and planning for the amendment of the Federal Reserve Act by the concentration of control in a single bank which the old familiar group of bankers can keep under their eye and direction. But while the "big men" who used to write the tariffs and command the assistance of the Treasury have been hostile, all but a few with vision, the average business man knows that he has been delivered, and that the fear that was once every day in his heart, that the men who controlled credit and directed enterprise from the committee rooms of Congress would crush him, is

there no more, and will not return, unless the party that consulted only the "big men" should return to power, the party of masterly inactivity and cunning resourcefulness in standing pat to resist change.

20. The Republican Party is just the party that cannot meet the new conditions of a new age. It does not know the way and it does not wish new conditions. It tried to break away from the old leaders and could not. They still select its candidates and dictate its policy, still resist change, still hanker after the old conditions, still know no methods of encouraging business but the old methods. When it changes its leaders and its purposes and brings its ideas up to date it will have the right to ask the American people to give it power again; but not until then. A new age, an age of revolutionary change, needs new purposes and new ideas.
21. In foreign affairs we have been guided by principles clearly conceived and consistently lived up to. Perhaps they have not been fully comprehended because they have hitherto governed international affairs only in theory, not in practice. They are simple, obvious, easily stated, and fundamental to American ideals.
22. We have been neutral not only because it was the fixed and traditional policy of the United States to stand aloof from the politics of Europe and because we had had no part either of action or of policy in the influences which brought on the present war, but also because it was manifestly our duty to prevent, if it were possible, the indefinite extension of the fires of hate and desolation kindled by that terrible conflict and seek to serve mankind by reserving our strength and our resources for the anxious and difficult days of restoration and healing which must follow, when peace will have to build its house anew.
23. The rights of our own citizens of course became involved: that was inevitable. Where they did this was our guiding principle: that property rights can be vindicated by claims for damages and no modern nation can decline to arbitrate such claims; but the fundamental rights of humanity cannot be. The loss of life is irreparable. Neither can direct violations of a nation's sovereignty await vindication in suits for damages. The nation that violates these essential rights must expect to be checked and called to account by direct challenge and resistance. It at once makes the quarrel in part our own. These are plain principles and we have never lost sight of them or departed from them, whatever the stress or the perplexity of circumstance or the provocation to hasty resentment. The record is clear and consistent throughout and stands distinct and definite for anyone to judge who wishes to know the truth about it.
24. The seas were not broad enough to keep the infection of the conflict out of our own politics. The passions and intrigues of certain active groups and combinations of men amongst us who were born under foreign flags injected the poison of disloyalty into our own most critical

affairs, laid violent hands upon many of our industries, and subjected us to the shame of divisions of sentiment and purpose in which America was contemned and forgotten. It is part of the business of this year of reckoning and settlement to speak plainly and act with unmistakable purpose in rebuke of these things, in order that they may be forever hereafter impossible. I am the candidate of a party, but I am above all things else an American citizen. I neither seek the favor nor fear the displeasure of that small alien element amongst us which puts loyalty to any foreign power before loyalty to the United States.

25. While Europe was at war our own continent, one of our own neighbors, was shaken by revolution. In that matter, too, principle was plain and it was imperative that we should live up to it if we were to deserve the trust of any real partisan of the right as free men see it. We have professed to believe, and we do believe, that the people of small and weak states have the right to expect to be dealt with exactly as the people of big and powerful states would be. We have acted upon that principle in dealing with the people of Mexico.
26. Our recent pursuit of bandits into Mexican territory was no violation of that principle. We ventured to enter Mexican territory only because there were no military forces in Mexico that could protect our border from hostile attack and our own people from violence, and we have committed there no single act of hostility or interference even with the sovereign authority of the Republic of Mexico herself. It was a plain case of the violation of our own sovereignty which could not wait to be vindicated by damages and for which there was no other remedy. The authorities of Mexico were powerless to prevent it.
27. Many serious wrongs against the property, many irreparable wrongs against the persons of Americans have been committed within the territory of Mexico herself during this confused revolution, wrongs which could not be effectually checked so long as there was no constituted power in Mexico which was in a position to check them. We could not act directly in that matter ourselves without denying Mexicans the right to any revolution at all which disturbed us and making the emancipation of her own people await our own interest and convenience.
28. For it is their emancipation that they are seeking,?blindly, it may be, and as yet ineffectually, but with profound and passionate purpose and within their unquestionable right, apply what true American principle you will,?any principle that an American would publicly avow. The people of Mexico have not been suffered to own their own country or direct their own institutions. Outsiders, men out of other nations and with interests too often alien to their own, have dictated what their privileges and opportunities should be and who should control their land, their lives, and their resources,?some of them Americans, pressing for things they could never have got in their own country. The Mexican people are entitled to attempt their liberty from such influences; and so long as I have anything to do with the action of our great

Government I shall do everything in my power to prevent anyone standing in their way. I know that this is hard for some persons to understand; but it is not hard for the plain people of the United States to understand. It is hard doctrine only for those who wish to get something for themselves out of Mexico. There are men, and noble women, too, not a few, of our own people, thank God! whose fortunes are invested in great properties in Mexico who yet see the case with true vision and assess its issues with true American feeling. The rest can be left for the present out of the reckoning until this enslaved people has had its day of struggle towards the light. I have heard no one who was free from such influences propose interference by the United States with the internal affairs of Mexico. Certainly no friend of the Mexican people has proposed it.

29. The people of the United States are capable of great sympathies and a noble pity in dealing with problems of this kind. As their spokesman and representative, I have tried to act in the spirit they would wish me show. The people of Mexico are striving for the rights that are fundamental to life and happiness, 215,000,000 oppressed men, overburdened women, and pitiful children in virtual bondage in their own home of fertile lands and inexhaustible treasure! Some of the leaders of the revolution may often have been mistaken and violent and selfish, but the revolution itself was inevitable and is right. The unspeakable Huerta betrayed the very comrades he served, traitorously overthrew the government of which he was a trusted part, impudently spoke for the very forces that had driven his people to the rebellion with which he had pretended to sympathize. The men who overcame him and drove him out represent at least the fierce passion of reconstruction which lies at the very heart of liberty; and so long as they represent, however imperfectly, such a struggle for deliverance, I am ready to serve their ends when I can. So long as the power of recognition rests with me the Government of the United States will refuse to extend the hand of welcome to any one who obtains power in a sister republic by treachery and violence. No permanency can be given the affairs of any republic by a title based upon intrigue and assassination. I declared that to be the policy of this Administration within three weeks after I assumed the presidency. I here again vow it. I am more interested in the fortunes of oppressed men and pitiful women and children than in any property rights whatever. Mistakes I have no doubt made in this perplexing business, but not in purpose or object.

30. More is involved than the immediate destinies of Mexico and the relations of the United States with a distressed and distracted people. All America looks on. Test is now being made of us whether we be sincere lovers of popular liberty or not and are indeed to be trusted to respect national sovereignty among our weaker neighbors. We have undertaken these many years to play big brother to the republics of this hemisphere. This is the day of our test whether we mean, or have ever meant, to play that part for our own benefit wholly or also for theirs. Upon the outcome of that test (its outcome in their minds, not in ours) depends every relationship of the United States with Latin America, whether in politics or in commerce and

enterprise. These are great issues and lie at the heart of the gravest tasks of the future, tasks both economic and political and very intimately inwrought with many of the most vital of the new issues of the politics of the world. The republics of America have in the last three years been drawing together in a new spirit of accommodation, mutual understanding, and cordial cooperation. Much of the politics of the world in the years to come will depend upon their relationships with one another. It is a barren and provincial statesmanship that loses sight of such things!

31. The future, the immediate future, will bring us squarely face to face with many great and exacting problems which will search us through and through whether we be able and ready to play the part in the world that we mean to play. It will not bring us into their presence slowly, gently, with ceremonious introduction, but suddenly and at once, the moment the war in Europe is over. They will be new problems, most of them; many will be old problems in a new setting and with new elements which we have never dealt with or reckoned the force and meaning of before. They will require for their solution new thinking, fresh courage and resourcefulness, and in some matters radical reconsiderations of policy. We must be ready to mobilize our resources alike of brains and of materials.
32. It is not a future to be afraid of. It is, rather, a future to stimulate and excite us to the display of the best powers that are in us. We may enter it with confidence when we are sure that we understand it, and we have provided ourselves already with the means of understanding it.
33. Look first at what it will be necessary that the nations of the world should do to make the days to come tolerable and fit to live and work in; and then look at our part in what is to follow and our own duty of preparation. For we must be prepared both in resources and in policy.
34. There must be a just and settled peace, and we here in America must contribute the full force of our enthusiasm and of our authority as a nation to the organization of that peace upon world-wide foundations that cannot easily be shaken. No nation should be forced to take sides in any quarrel in which its own honor and integrity and the fortunes of its own people are not involved; but no nation can any longer remain neutral as against any wilful disturbance of the peace of the world. The effects of war can no longer be confined to the areas of battle. No nation stands wholly apart in interest when the life and interests of all nations are thrown into confusion and peril. If hopeful and generous enterprise is to be renewed, if the healing and helpful arts of life are indeed to be revived when peace comes again, a new atmosphere of justice and friendship must be generated by means the world has never tried before. The nations of the world must unite in joint guarantees that whatever is done to disturb the whole world's life must first be tested in the court of the whole world's opinion before it is attempted.

35. These are the new foundations the world must build for itself, and we must play our part in the reconstruction, generously and without too much thought of our separate interests. We must make ourselves ready to play it intelligently, vigorously, and well.
36. One of the contributions we must make to the world's peace is this: We must see to it that the people in our insular possessions are treated in their own lands as we would treat them here, and make the rule of the United States mean the same thing everywhere, the same justice, the same consideration for the essential rights of men.
37. Besides contributing our ungrudging moral and practical support to the establishment of peace throughout the world we must actively and intelligently prepare ourselves to do our full service in the trade and industry which are to sustain and develop the life of the nations in the days to come.
38. We have already been provident in this great matter and supplied ourselves with the instrumentalities of prompt adjustment. We have created, in the Federal Trade Commission, a means of inquiry and of accommodation in the field of commerce which ought both to coordinate the enterprises of our traders and manufacturers and to remove the barriers of misunderstanding and of a too technical interpretation of the law. In the new Tariff Commission we have added another instrumentality of observation and adjustment which promises to be immediately serviceable. The Trade Commission substitutes counsel and accommodation for the harsher processes of legal restraint, and the Tariff Commission ought to substitute facts for prejudices and theories. Our exporters have for some time had the advantage of working in the new light thrown upon foreign markets and opportunities of trade by the intelligent inquiries and activities of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce which the Democratic Congress so wisely created in 1912. The Tariff Commission completes the machinery by which we shall be enabled to open up our legislative policy to the facts as they develop.
39. We can no longer indulge our traditional provincialism. We are to play a leading part in the world drama whether we wish it or not. We shall lend, not borrow; act for ourselves, not imitate or follow; organize and initiate, not peep about merely to see where we may get in.
40. We have already formulated and agreed upon a policy of law which will explicitly remove the ban now supposed to rest upon cooperation amongst our exporters in seeking and securing their proper place in the markets of the world. The field will be free, the instrumentalities at hand. It will only remain for the masters of enterprise amongst us to act in energetic concert, and for the Government of the United States to insist upon the maintenance throughout the world of those conditions of fairness and of even-handed justice in the commercial dealings of the nations with one another upon which, after all, in the last

analysis, the peace and ordered life of the world must ultimately depend.

41. At home also we must see to it that the men who plan and develop and direct our business enterprises shall enjoy definite and settled conditions of law, a policy accommodated to the freest progress. We have set the just and necessary limits. We have put all kinds of unfair competition under the ban and penalty of the law. We have barred monopoly. These fatal and ugly things being excluded, we must now quicken action and facilitate enterprise by every just means within our choice. There will be peace in the business world, and, with peace, revived confidence and life.
42. We ought both to husband and to develop our natural resources, our mines, our forests, our water power. I wish we could have made more progress than we have made in this vital matter; and I call once more, with the deepest earnestness and solicitude, upon the advocates of a careful and provident conservation, on the one hand, and the advocates of a free and inviting field for private capital, on the other, to get together in a spirit of genuine accommodation and agreement and set this great policy forward at once.
43. We must hearten and quicken the spirit and efficiency of labor throughout our whole industrial system by everywhere and in all occupations doing justice to the laborer, not only by paying a living wage but also by making all the conditions that surround labor what they ought to be. And we must do more than justice. We must safeguard life and promote health and safety in every occupation in which they are threatened or imperilled. That is more than justice, and better, because it is humanity and economy.
44. We must coordinate the railway systems of the country for national use, and must facilitate and promote their development with a view to that coordination and to their better adaptation as a whole to the life and trade and defense of the nation. The life and industry of the country can be free and unhampered only if these arteries are open, efficient, and complete.
45. Thus shall we stand ready to meet the future as circumstance and international policy effect their unfolding, whether the changes come slowly or come fast and without preface.
46. I have not spoken explicitly, Gentlemen, of the platform adopted at St. Louis; but it has been implicit in all that I have said. I have sought to interpret its spirit and meaning. The people of the United States do not need to be assured now that that platform is a definite pledge, a practical program. We have proved to them that our promises are made to be kept.
47. We hold very definite ideals. We believe that the energy and initiative of our people have been too narrowly coached and superintended; that they should be set free, as we have set them free, to disperse themselves throughout the nation; that they should not be concentrated

in the hands of a few powerful guides and guardians, as our opponents have again and again, in effect if not in purpose, sought to concentrate them. We believe, moreover, that who that looks about him now with comprehending eye can fail to believe that the day of Little Americanism, with its narrow horizons, when methods of "protection" and industrial nursing were the chief study of our provincial statesmen, are past and gone and that a day of enterprise has at last dawned for the United States whose field is the wide world.

48. We hope to see the stimulus of that new day draw all America, the republics of both continents, on to a new life and energy and initiative in the great affairs of peace. We are Americans for Big America, and rejoice to look forward to the days in which America shall strive to stir the world without irritating it or drawing it on to new antagonisms, when the nations with which we deal shall at last come to see upon what deep foundations of humanity and justice our passion for peace rests, and when all mankind shall look upon our great people with a new sentiment of admiration, friendly rivalry and real affection, as upon a people who, though keen to succeed, seeks always to be at once generous and just and to whom humanity is dearer than profit or selfish power.

49. Upon this record and in the faith of this purpose we go to the country.

Speech to Congress (April 2, 1917)

Woodrow Wilson

Transcript

1. I have called the Congress into extraordinary session because there are serious, very serious, choices of policy to be made, and made immediately, which it was neither right nor constitutionally permissible that I should assume the responsibility of making.
2. On the third of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the first day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe or any of the ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean.
3. That had seemed to be the object of the German submarine warfare earlier in the war, but since April of last year the Imperial Government had somewhat restrained the commanders of its undersea craft in conformity with its promise then given to us that passenger boats should not be sunk and that due warning would be given to all other vessels which its submarines might seek to destroy, when no resistance was offered or escape attempted, and care taken that their crews were given at least a fair chance to save their lives in their open boats.

The precautions taken were meager and haphazard enough, as was proved in distressing instance after instance in the progress of the cruel and unmanly business, but a certain degree of restraint was observed. The new policy has swept every restriction aside.

- Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents.
- 5.

Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium, though the latter were provided with safe conduct through the proscribed areas by the German Government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle.

I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations. International law had its origin in the attempt to set up some law which would be respected and observed upon the seas, where no nation had right of dominion and where lay the free highways of the world.

This minimum of right the German Government has swept aside under the plea of retaliation and necessity and because it had no weapons which it could use at sea except these which it is impossible to employ as it is employing them without throwing to the winds all scruples of humanity or of respect for the understandings that were supposed to underlie the intercourse of the world.

I am not now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of non-combatants, men, women, and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination.

The challenge is to all mankind. Each nation must decide for itself how it will meet it. The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness for judgement befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away. Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion.

When I addressed the Congress on the twenty-sixth of February last I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence.

But armed neutrality, it now appears, is impracticable. Because submarines are in effect outlaws when used as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping, it is impossible to defend ships against their attacks as the law of nations has assumed that merchantmen would defend themselves against privateers or cruisers, visible craft giving chase upon the open sea. It is common prudence in such circumstances, grim necessity indeed, to endeavour to destroy them before they have

shown their own intention.

- They must be dealt with upon sight, if dealt with at all. The German Government denies the right of neutrals to use arms at all within the areas of the sea which it has proscribed, even in the defence of rights which no modern publicist has ever before questioned their right to defend.
- 15.

- The intimation is conveyed that the armed guards which we have placed on our merchant ships will be treated as beyond the pale of law and subject to be dealt with as pirates would be. Armed neutrality is ineffectual enough at best; in such circumstances and in the face of such pretensions it is worse than ineffectual: it is likely only to produce what it was meant to prevent; it is practically certain to draw us into the war without either the rights or the effectiveness of belligerents.
- 16.

- There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our Nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life.
- 17.

- With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it; and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defence but also to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war.
- 18.
 - 19.

- What this will involve is clear. It will involve the utmost practicable cooperation in counsel and action with the governments now at war with Germany, and, as incident to that, the extension to those governments of the most liberal financial credits, in order that our resources may so far as possible be added to theirs.
- 20.

- It will involve the organization and mobilization of all the material resources of the country to supply the materials of war and serve the incidental needs of the Nation in the most abundant and yet the most economical and efficient way possible. It will involve the immediate full equipment of the navy in all respects but particularly in supplying it with the best means of dealing with the enemy's submarines.
- 21.

- It will involve the immediate addition to the armed forces of the United States already provided for by law in case of war at least five hundred thousand men, who should, in my opinion, be chosen upon the principle of universal liability to service, and also the authorization of subsequent additional increments of equal force so soon as they may be needed and can be handled in training.
- 22.
 - 23.

24. It will involve also, of course, the granting of adequate credits to the Government, sustained, I hope, so far as they can equitably be sustained by the present generation, by well conceived taxation.

25. While we do these things, these deeply momentous things, let us be very clear, and make very clear to all the world what our motives and our objectives are. My own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months, and I do not believe that the thought of the Nation has been altered or clouded by them.

26. I have exactly the same things in mind now that I had in mind when I addressed the Senate on the twenty-second of January last; the same that I had in mind when I addressed the Congress on the third of February and on the twenty-sixth of February.

27. Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth insure the observance of those principles.

29. Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its people, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people.

30. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances. We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling towards them but one of sympathy and friendship. It was not upon their impulse that their government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval.

31. It was a war determined upon as wars used to be determined upon in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellow men as pawns and tools.

32. We are accepting this challenge of hostile purpose because we know that in such a Government, following such methods, we can never have a friend; and that in the presence of its organized power, always lying in wait to accomplish we know not what purpose, there can be no assured security for the democratic Governments of the world.

We are now about to accept gauge of battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power. We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretence about

them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience.

33. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as
34. secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Just because we fight without rancour and without selfish object, seeking nothing for ourselves but what we shall wish to share with all free peoples, we shall, I feel confident, conduct our operations as belligerents without passion and ourselves observe with proud punctilio the principles of right and of fair play we profess to be fighting for.

35. I have said nothing of the Governments allied with the Imperial Government of Germany because they have not made war upon us or challenged us to defend our right and our honour. The Austro-Hungarian Government has, indeed, avowed its unqualified endorsement and acceptance of the reckless and lawless submarine warfare
36. adopted now without disguise by the Imperial German Government, and it has therefore not been possible for this Government to receive Count Tarnowski, the Ambassador recently accredited to this Government by the Imperial and Royal Government of Austria-Hungary; but that Government has not actually engaged in warfare against citizens of the United States on the seas, and I take the liberty, for the present at least, of postponing a discussion of our relations with the authorities at Vienna. We enter this
37. war only where we are clearly forced into it because there are not other means of defending our rights.

- It will be all the easier for us to conduct ourselves as belligerents in a high spirit of right and fairness because we act without animus, not in enmity towards a people or with the desire to bring any injury or disadvantage upon them, but only in armed opposition to
38. an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity and of right and is running amuck.

- We are, let me say again, the sincerer friends of the German people, and shall desire nothing so much as the early reestablishment of intimate relations of mutual advantage between us - however hard it may be for them, for the time being, to believe that this is
39. spoken from our hearts. We have borne with their present Government through all these bitter months because of that friendship - exercising a patience and forbearance which would otherwise have been impossible.

We shall, happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and actions towards the millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy who live amongst us and share our life, and we shall be proud to prove it towards all who are in fact loyal to their neighbours and to the Government in the hour

of test.

They are, most of them, as true and loyal Americans as if they had never known any other fealty or allegiance. They will be prompt to stand with us in rebuking and restraining the few who may be of a different mind and purpose. If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression; but, if it lifts its head at all, it will lift it only here and there and without countenance except from a lawless and malignant few.

It is a distressing and oppressive duty, Gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance.

But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts - for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

Fourteen Points Address (November 8, 1918)

Woodrow Wilson

Transcript

Gentlemen of the Congress:

1. Once more, as repeatedly before, the spokesmen of the Central Empires have indicated their desire to discuss the objects of the war and the possible basis of a general peace. Parleys have been in progress at Brest-Litovsk between Russian representatives and representatives of the Central Powers to which the attention of all the belligerents have been invited for the purpose of ascertaining whether it may be possible to extend these parleys into a general conference with regard to terms of peace and settlement.
2. The Russian representatives presented not only a perfectly definite statement of the principles upon which they would be willing to conclude peace but also an equally definite program of the concrete application of those principles. The representatives of the Central Powers, on their part, presented an outline of settlement which, if much less definite, seemed susceptible of liberal interpretation until their specific program of practical terms was added. That program proposed no concessions at all either to the sovereignty of Russia or to the preferences of the populations with whose fortunes it dealt, but meant, in a word, that the Central Empires were to keep every foot of territory their armed forces had occupied -- every province, every city, every point of vantage -- as a permanent addition to their territories and their power.
- 3.

It is a reasonable conjecture that the general principles of settlement which they at first suggested originated with the more liberal statesmen of Germany and Austria, the men who have begun to feel the force of their own people's thought and purpose, while the concrete terms of actual settlement came from the military leaders who have no thought but to keep what they have got. The negotiations have been broken off. The Russian representatives were sincere and in earnest. They cannot entertain such proposals of conquest and domination.

4.

The whole incident is full of significances. It is also full of perplexity. With whom are the Russian representatives dealing? For whom are the

- representatives of the Central Empires speaking? Are they speaking for the majorities of their respective parliaments or for the minority parties, that military and imperialistic minority which has so far dominated their whole policy and controlled the affairs of Turkey and of the Balkan states which have felt obliged to become their associates in this war?
- 5.

- The Russian representatives have insisted, very justly, very wisely, and in the true spirit of modern democracy, that the conferences they have been holding with the Teutonic and Turkish statesmen should be held within open, not closed, doors, and all the world has been audience, as was desired. To whom have we been listening, then? To those who speak the spirit and intention of the resolutions of the German Reichstag of the 9th of July last, the spirit and intention of the Liberal leaders and parties of Germany, or to those who resist and defy that spirit and intention and insist upon conquest and subjugation? Or are we listening, in fact, to both, unreconciled and in open and hopeless contradiction? These are very serious and pregnant questions. Upon the answer to them depends the peace of the world.
- 6.

- But, whatever the results of the parleys at Brest-Litovsk, whatever the confusions of counsel and of purpose in the utterances of the spokesmen of the Central Empires, they have again attempted to acquaint the world with their objects in the war and have again challenged their adversaries to say what their objects are and what sort of settlement they would deem just and satisfactory. There is no good reason why that challenge should not be responded to, and responded to with the utmost candor. We did not wait for it. Not once, but again and again, we have laid our whole thought and purpose before the world, not in general terms only, but each time with sufficient definition to make it clear what sort of definite terms of settlement must necessarily spring out of them. Within the last week Mr. Lloyd George has spoken with admirable candor and in admirable spirit for the people and Government of Great Britain.
- 7.

- There is no confusion of counsel among the adversaries of the Central Powers, no uncertainty of principle, no vagueness of detail. The only secrecy of counsel, the only lack of fearless frankness, the only failure to make definite statement of the objects of the war, lies with Germany and her allies. The issues of life and death hang upon these definitions. No statesman who has the least conception of his responsibility ought for a moment to permit himself to continue this tragical and appalling outpouring of blood and treasure unless he is sure beyond a peradventure that the objects of the vital sacrifice are part and parcel of the very life of Society and that the people for whom he speaks think them right and imperative as he does.
- 8.

There is, moreover, a voice calling for these definitions of principle and of purpose which is, it seems to me, more thrilling and more compelling than any of the many moving voices with which the troubled air of the world is filled. It is the voice of the Russian people. They are prostrate and all but hopeless, it

9. would seem, before the grim power of Germany, which has hitherto known no relenting and no pity. Their power, apparently, is shattered. And yet their soul is not subservient. They will not yield either in principle or in action. Their conception of what is right, of what is humane and honorable for them to accept, has been stated with a frankness, a largeness of view, a generosity of spirit, and a universal human sympathy which must challenge the admiration of every friend of mankind; and they have refused to compound their ideals or desert others that they themselves may be safe.

10. They call to us to say what it is that we desire, in what, if in anything, our purpose and our spirit differ from theirs; and I believe that the people of the United States would wish me to respond, with utter simplicity and frankness. Whether their present leaders believe it or not, it is our heartfelt desire and hope that some way may be opened whereby we may be privileged to assist the people of Russia to attain their utmost hope of liberty and ordered peace.

11. 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.

12. 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 secure once for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world 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:

15. 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.

16. 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 for the enforcement of international covenants.

17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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 themselves set 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.
20. 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.
21. IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.
22. X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to
- 23.
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autonomous development.

25. 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.

26. XII. The Turkish portion 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 unmolested 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.

27. 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.

28. 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 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 have 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.

29. 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 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.