The Nationalism and Foreign Policy of the United States from 1917 to 1920

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Table of Contents

I - Introduction and Historiography

In 1919, the Paris Peace Conference convened to resolve the crises that instigated the First World War and the turmoil it produced. Nations and their nationalisms defined this era as the supreme political units and as ideological systems. Yet the nationalism of the United States is unappreciated as a factor in the nation's intervention into the First World War followed by its engagement with the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations. These were momentous developments in the history of the foreign affairs of the United States and the twentieth century more broadly. The object of this paper is to contribute to the historical account by examining US nationalism as a causal condition on the consequential actions of the United States during this pivotal period. The central contention of this paper is that US nationalism was integral to its intervention into the First World War and its subsequent involvement with the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations.

This paper uses the term "nationalism" to refer to the substance of the nation,[1] defined as a nation's set of principles, values, and understanding of its history and future, which can also be understood as the nation's beliefs about itself.[2] These are rendered in writing as amorphous abstractions, and become substantial actualities when embraced by the individual and refracted through the individual's identity and action. Therefore, the nationalism that conditions each individual's cognition and sentiment varies among

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[1] For the theory of nationalism see: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Hans Kohn, "The Nature of Nationalism," *The American Political Science Review 33*, no. 6 (1939); W.B. Pillsbury, *The Psychology of Nationality and Internationalism* (New York: Appleton, 1919); David Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa." *The American Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (1962): 924–50.; John Breuilly (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[2] Other common meanings for the term 'nationalism', such as the principle that global politics is and should be founded on the nation-state or the referencing of an individual or a group's zeal for their nation are not the subject of analysis. This distinction enables the paper to examine precisely how US nationalism operated rather than analyzing nationalism as a broader political phenomenon.

nationals. Crucially, the mechanisms of the nation cohere and reproduce its nationalist content to produce remarkably uniform individual nationalisms among its nationals. Politicians reify particularly ardent nationalisms because formal political processes unify the nation's nationalism and demand that it be enacted by the institutions of governance.[3]

This paper's approach to nationalism aligns with scholars who posit that there exists a holistic "American ideology." Historian Emily Rosenberg, for example, defines ideology as "the system of beliefs, values, fears, prejudices, reflexes, and commitments" which are "in sum, the social conscious."[4] Similarly, historian Michael Hunt defines ideology as "integrated and coherent systems of symbols, values, and beliefs."[5] Both definitions expound the concept of nationalism, because they endeavour to represent and explicate the amorphism of socio-cultural essence which operates in conjunction with the concrete aspects of socio-political groups. The ideology approach, however, less effectively grounds ideological substance in the nation-state and only emphasizes explicit ideological themes. By being based in history and by fusing the nation with its nationalism, the paradigm of nationalism tangibly connects abstract ideas to political action and identifies subtle aspects of US nationalism which are not directly espoused by US nationalists but are inextricable from nationalist behaviour.

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[3] While this paper appreciates material and security concerns as foundational factors of national action, it maintains that they are compatible with nationalism as a source of action, and that a completely comprehensive account would require both. This is a well-supported position. See, for example: Mark Hewitson, *History and Causality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Fritz Ringer, "Causal Analysis in Historical Reasoning," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 28, no. 2 (1989): 154–72.; Adam Humphreys and Hidemi Suganami, *Causal Inquiry in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

[4] Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 7.

[5] Michael Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 12.

This paper will examine several fundamental themes in US nationalism which influenced the foreign policy of the United States from 1917-1920.[6] The United States is a civic nation, and therefore nationality is constituted by an individual's devotion to the nation's civic ideals.[7] As articulated by the US Constitution, the civic ideal at the core of US nationalism is to "secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."[8] This foundational civic principle expresses the fundamental nationalist aim of establishing an exceptionally free and virtuous society. This nationalist imperative is the foundation of US foreign policy because it includes the nationalist conceit that the United States is obliged to secure its ideals of liberty on behalf of humanity. When Thomas Paine declared that "we have it in our power to begin the world over again" and that "the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind," he expressed the nationalist conviction that the United States has the unique capability and responsibility to benevolently progress human society.[9]

As this imperative is a civic ideal, its effectuation is an inherently interpretive process. And as republican negotiation is a fundamental principle of US nationalism,

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[6] A: For accounts explicitly framed through "US nationalism" see: Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York: MacMillan, 1957). David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
B: For accounts which this paper has drawn on to develop its presentation of US nationalism but do not use this approach see: Footnote 4-5 & Donald White, *The American Century: The Rise and Decline of the United States as a World Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2009); John Kane, *Between Virtue and Power: The Persistent Moral Dilemma of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Lloyd Gardner, *A Covenant with Power: America and World Order from Wilson to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[7] For discussions of the interpretive nature of the United States ideals see: Footnote 6a & Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 24.

[8] The Constitution of the United States of America. 1789. preamble.

[9] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Philadelphia: W&T Bradford, 1776), 161 & preface.

nationals accept its various interpretative manifestations as natural and legitimate.[10] These constitute the progenitive foundations of the key foreign policy traditions in the history of the United States. The critical question which successive generations of US politicians have diverged upon is whether the United States' nationalist imperative to secure liberty obligates it to only enact the principle continentally, or to directly intervene overseas to secure liberty in foreign regions.

Most politicians in the first century of the nation's existence believed that the nationalist imperative required the nation to enact its exceptionalist vision on the American continent, explicitly emphasizing that overseas engagement jeopardized the continental mission. George Washington, like Paine, cautioned against "interweaving our [the nation's] destiny with that of any part of Europe."[11] As the nineteenth century became the twentieth century, however, politicians radically reinterpreted the nationalist imperative of securing societal liberty as a demand to impose the ideals of liberty on foreign regions. When Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that "the idea of America is to serve humanity," he was advocating for the United States to advance its envisioned form of liberty globally.[12]

The Wilson Administration's prevailing interpretation of the US nationalist imperative was that it required direct intervention into foreign affairs abroad to secure the envisioned form of liberty. Scholars generally reduce this to the "Wilsonian" foreign policy

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[10] For the Republican origins and nature of US political identity see: Joyce Appleby, "Republicanism and Ideology," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1985): 461–73.; Linda Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1985): 474–95.

[11] George Washington's Farewell Address. 1796. The American YAWP. Stanford University Press.

[12] Woodrow Wilson Address to Naval Academy Graduates in Annapolis June 5, 1914. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: The New Democracy*. Ed. R.S. Baker and William Dodd. Vol. 1 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 127. Consider, as well, Madeleine Albright's claim that "America" is the "indispensable nation" in her interview with Matt Lauer on *NBC's The Today Show*. 1998.

ideology.[13] Aside from the issue of excessive personalization, "Wilsonianism" occludes nationalism as a causal source of national action. While it thoroughly engages with the ideal of benevolent intervention, it does not explain why the United States effectuates this ideal nor why it has resonated with generations of US politicians. Furthermore, the "Wilsonian" conceptualization of US action neglects other aspects of US nationalism which are necessary for a holistic understanding of the United States' engagement with the war and the conference. For example, it inadequately explains the United States' affinity towards Britain and its fidelity to the West European intellectual tradition. Scholars using the "Wilsonian" approach often point to the vague idea of anglophilia, and it is important to appreciate that this is based on concrete features of US nationalism.

Principally among these concrete features is the United States' status as a fundamentally post-colonial nation.[14] As the nation consolidated and coalesced into a republic during the revolutionary War of Independence,[15] this desire to escape and transcend the colonial dynamic ingrained an impulse within US nationalism to supersede Europe.[16] Specifically regarding Britain and France, there is embedded within US

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[13] For "Wilsonianism" as a foreign policy ideology see: Norman Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Lloyd Ambrosius, Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2002). Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[14] Two key discussions of the United States as a post-colonial nation are: Kariann Akemi Yokota, Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert Blair St. George (Editor), *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[15] For the process of revolutionary nation formation see: Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Benjamin Park, *American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Carole Berkin, *A Sovereign People: The Crises of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[16] Analogized from Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed, 1986); Brock, William. "The Image of England and American Nationalism." *Journal of American Studies* 5, no. 3 (1971): 225–45.

nationalism an imperative to vindicate the ideals that drove the United States War of Independence.[17] As this paper will demonstrate, the United States intervention into the war and the zealous implementation of its ideals at the conference were motivated in part by the nationalist imperative to vindicate the Western European ideals.

The United States' eurocentric disposition at the conference was amplified by the ethnic component of US nationalism. While the United States is a civic nation, it restricts which individuals can partake in the civic ideals based on ethnicity.[18] When US nationalists determine how to advance their cause of liberty, this same prejudicial ethnic presumption constrains the regions of the world into which it extends its principles to. At the Paris Peace Conference, this feature of US nationalism led it to many regions with ethnic majorities that were excluded from the civic ideals.[19]

As a single foreign policy ideology, "Wilsonianism" inadequately accounts for the deeper and more subtle aspects of US nationalism. Nor does it explain how the different foreign policy ideologies in the United States resolve themselves domestically. The United States' distinct relation to the League as its most ardent proponent during the conference and its subsequent rejection of it cannot be explained by "Wilsonianism" alone. Scholars generally conceptualize the internal debate over the League as a competition between

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[17] For accounts of the European heritage of the United States' ideals see: Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); James Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Steven Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

[18] Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Eric Kaufmann, "Ethnic or Civic Nation? Theorizing the American case," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 27, no. 1 (2000): 133-155.; Philip Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization," in William Petersen et al. *Concepts of Ethnicity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1980.

[19] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

divergent political factions or foreign policy ideologies.[20] Both obscure the true nature of the debate. This paper's argument is that the debate over the League was about the nature of the nation and its nationalism, and that the divergent foreign policy ideologies were differing interpretations of the nationalist imperative to secure liberty.

There were some politicians who maintained a continentalist interpretation of the nationalist imperative, but most accepted foreign engagement and differed on the specific methods. Historians Warren Kuehl and Lynn Dunn have observed that "the only meaningful distinction between themselves ["Internationalists"] and their opponents has to do with the divergence in American views over the means of achieving the shared goal of a stable, peaceful world order."[21] The League debate was framed by contemporaneous politicians as a debate over the constitution, which is because the US constitution is the supreme manifestation of the nation.[22] And the divergent "internationalisms" reflected different interpretive manifestations of the US nationalist imperative to secure humanity's liberty. Therefore, the internal oscillations within the United States' civic nationalism occasioned the abrupt shift from advocating for the League to rejecting it.

Ultimately, US nationalism has been neglected as a causal source of the nation's action.[23] This is especially relevant to the United States' intervention into the First World

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[20] John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Lloyd Ambrosius, W*oodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979); Thomas Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[21] Warren Kuehl and Lynne Dunn, *Keeping the Covenant: American Internationalists and the League of Nations, 1920-1939* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997), xvi.

[22] William Ross, "Constitutional Issues Involving the Controversy Over American Membership in the League of Nations, 1918-1920," *The American Journal of Legal History* 53, no. 1 (2013): 1–88.

[23] An idea explored in depth by: Jasper Trautsch, "The Origins and Nature of American Nationalism," *National Identities 18*, no. 3 (2016): 289-312.

War and engagement with the Paris Peace Conference and League of Nations because these events prompted potent nationalist responses. The history of these events is incomplete without appreciating that nationalism motivated action and the nuances of how it did so.

II - The Declaration of War

The declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917, was a pivotal moment in the history of US foreign policy, for it was the United States' first military intervention into a major European conflict.[24] Yet the United States had been expanding its foreign engagement in the decades leading up to the First World War.[25] After the immense continental conquest of the nineteenth century, the United States fulfilled Frederick Jackson Turner's prescient prediction that "American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise" by expanding across the Pacific Ocean and into Central America and the Caribbean.[26] This rapid process was driven in part by a potent nationalist imperative to realize the nationalist vision of liberty.[27] Regarding the continental expansion, John Quincy Adams pronounced that the "glory [of the United States] is not dominion, but liberty."[28] Several decades later, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that "the young American…is a great friend of humanity; and his desire for land is not selfish, but merely an impulse to extend the area of freedom."[29] Regarding the overseas expansion around the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt

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[24] Daniel Smith, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War 1, 1914-1920* (New York: Wiley, 1965); Michael Hogan, *Paths to Power: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations to 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[25] Howard Jones, *Crucible of Power. A History of American Foreign Relations to 1913* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 53.
[26] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), 37.
[27] On what is conventionally termed "Manifest Destiny" see: Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995).
[28] John Quincy Adams Oration. The American YAWP. Stanford University Press.
[29] Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol 3. Ed. R. Basler et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 357.

proclaimed that "the steady aim of this Nation…is the attainment of the peace of justice" and that throughout the expansion "we have acted in our own interest as well as in the interest of humanity at large."[30]

The Wilson Administration's foreign policy promoted the expansion of US influence and foreign intervention to realize US nationalist ideals abroad. This paper does not focus on materialist or security interests as causal sources of the United States action, but the entry into the First World War provides an opportunity to remark upon how they interact with nationalism as a driver of action. For, these paradigms are wholly compatible, and a comprehensive account would evidently have to consider both. In addition to being a cause of action itself, however, nationalism conditions how nations interpret and respond to materialist and security concerns. Germany's submarine warfare and diplomatic initiatives with Mexico constituted a direct threat to US nationals and a challenge to the United States' military and economic security. This concrete reality necessitated a response, as it would for any nation-state, and the nature of the response was determined by the United States' nationalist ideals.[31]

Within the Wilson Administration, US nationalist ideals manifested as an idealistic commitment to what is usually termed liberal-internationalism. Famously, Wilson outlined his administration's vision of the "programme of the world's peace."[32] Included among his

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[30] Roosevelt Corollary. 1904.

[31] For accounts of the United States entry into the war see: Robert Hannigan, *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914-24* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Justus Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War 1* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2011). Michael Nieberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution*. Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas Boghardt, *The Zimmerman Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry into World War 1* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012).

[32] Woodrow Wilson, Fourteen Points Speech. 1918.

points, was the demand for "absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas."[33] Accordingly, the consensus belief in the Wilson Administration was that Germany's submarine warfare violated the "rules of fairness, reason, justice, and humanity, which the civilized world regards as imperative."[34] Clearly, this view is premised upon the United States' nationalist commitment to securing liberty for humanity.

The United States' dedication to the ideals outlined by Wilson was amplified by the nation's post-colonial urge to vindicate its ideals from their ostensibly debased implementation in Europe. The Wilson Administration "observed" German actions "with growing concern, distress and amazement" because they believed that the "great [German] Government" had abandoned "the humane and enlightened attitude assumed hitherto."[35] Here, the Wilson Administration expresses its alarm that "civilization," and the ideals that were ostensibly supremely constitutive of it could, as the Wilson Administration saw it, fail and discredit itself. Wilson declared that "our motive" for entering and waging war is "the vindication of right," because he believed that it was the United States' nationalist obligation to uphold and enact the ideals at the heart of its nationalism on behalf of "civilization."[36]

The ambivalent post-colonial identification of the nationalist ideals with Britain and France drove the United States to imbibe their propagandistic view of Germany. Wilson spoke openly about the "military masters of Germany" and a general memorandum produced by the administration referred to the "menace of the German army which has

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[33] Woodrow Wilson, Fourteen Points Speech. 1918.
[34] Draft Instruction to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) May 12 1915. In Robert Lansing, *Lansing Papers*, Vol 1. Ed. J.S. Beddie et al. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 662.
[35] Ibid., 662.
[36] Woodrow Wilson, *President Wilson's Foreign Policy Papers*. Ed. J.B. Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), 227.

terrorized Europe and the world."[37] Similarly the United States ambassador to France, William Sharp, blamed Germany for the "savage" nature of the war.[38]

When Wilson spoke of the "supreme test of the nation" he was referring to the nationalist impulse to vindicate the ideals of liberty and thus supersede Europe. Wilson meant that by entering the war out of "universal human sympathy," "America will once more have the opportunity to show the world that she was born to serve mankind" and to attain "her full dignity and the full fruition of her great purpose."[39] This conviction was not restricted to Wilson and his administration either, for it was based in an interpretation of US nationalism that demanded foreign intervention to secure liberty. William Howard Taft, for example, maintained that "we have been blessed beyond any other nation" and "we shall not be worthy of it unless we recognize our responsibility and run our share of risk in securing the world from the scourge visiting it now."[40] Therefore, the nationalist urge to secure the ideals of liberty and transcend Europe by doing so fused into a potent ideological motivation for waging war against Germany.

Wilson's conviction that "the world must be made safe for democracy" specifically meant that the United States was nationalistically obliged to directly commit to the foreign conflict.[41] There were, however, prominent US politicians who were similarly committed to the nationalist mission but diverged regarding its implementation. William Jennings Bryan,

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[37] Flag Day Address Delivered in Washington June 14 1917. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R S. Baker and William Dodd. Vol 1 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 62.
[38] Ambassador in France (Sharp) to Secretary of State. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 300.
[39] Woodrow Wilson. Fourteen Points Speech. 1918.; Memorial Day Address at Arlington National Cemetery May 20 1917, Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R S. Baker and William Dodd. Volumes 1 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 52-53.
[40] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970), 95.
[41] Woodrow Wilson, *President Wilson's Foreign Policy Papers*. Ed. J.B. Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), 284.

for example, resigned as Secretary of State because he believed that "our nation" must "conquer with its ideals rather than with its arms."[42] Bryan decried direct intervention because he believed that intervention would hinder the United States' capacity to secure its envisioned form of enlightened liberty. This conviction was also expressed by House Majority Leader Claude Kitchin, who proclaimed that "half the civilized world is now a slaughterhouse for human beings" and "this nation is the last hope of peace on earth."[43] Bryan articulated the concern that "if we become so Europeanised as to desire to mingle our standards with theirs on foreign battlefields, we will fall an easy victim to the disease of militarism."[44] Bryan meant that foreign entanglement would make demands on the United States that would tarnish the nation's exceptionalist identity of righteous purity and thereby impair its capacity to fulfill nationalist destiny. While the interventionist form of US nationalism prevailed in 1917 and was enacted at the Paris Peace Conference, the more reserved form of US nationalism resurfaced during the debate over the League of Nations.

III - The United States at the Paris Peace Conference

At the Paris Peace Conference, nations from around the world convened to transcend the crises afflicting global politics.[45] At the convocation of the Conference, French President Georges Clemenceau proclaimed that "an immortal glory will attach to the names

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[42] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970), 140.
[43] Quoted in Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 234.
[44] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970), 114.
[45] For accounts of the Paris Peace Conference see: Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking after the First World War, 1919-1923*. 2nd ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003); Ruth Henig, *Versailles and after, 1919-1933* (London: Routledge, 1995); Martin Kitchen, Europe Between the Wars. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013); Patrick Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

of the nations and the men who have desired to co-operate in this grand work."[46] Echoing this sentiment, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that "the history of the world…will now be crowned by the achievements of this Conference," because he believed that "this is the supreme conference in the history of mankind."[47] These leaders of the conference, however, perpetuated many of the problems of the time. Foremost among them was the hubristic conceit that they could reach an impartial and altruistic settlement.

While the hubris of the conference existed independently of the United States' involvement with the conference, US nationalist exceptionalism regarding its ostensibly transcendent ideals elevated it. For US politicians, their idealistic intentions for the conference were extensions of the nationalist impulse to join the war. Senator Key Pittman, for example, wrote to Wilson during the conference, saying that "the adoption and establishment of your program is essential to the liberty, the peace, and the happiness of the world."[48] Wilson certainly believed this as well, for he claimed that the conference was based "on the principle of justice" and that "the people of the United States could act on no other principle."[49] These views extended to the conference as a whole as well. An Inter-Allied Conference prior to the Paris Peace Conference concluded that "the bases of negotiations can only be deemed to be the fourteen points enumerated by President Wilson."[50]

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[46] Georges Clemenceau Paris Peace Conference Protocol 1 Jan 18. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 176.
[47] Ibid., 177.
[48] Senator Key Pittman to Wilson Nov 15 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 281.
[49] Woodrow Wilson. Fourteen Points Speech. 1918.
[50] Inter-Allied Conference at London in December 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 604.

The other nationalist imperative which shaped the United States' engagement with the conference was its intense post-colonial impulse to supersede Europe by realizing its ideals and enforcing them in Europe. At the convocation of the conference, Clemenceau indulged US representatives' nationalist belief in their moral and political exceptionalism by proclaiming that "the intervention of the United States was…a supreme judgment passed at the bar of history."[51] Clemenceau, however, was implying that the United States shared French ideals. William Sharp, US ambassador to France, remarked that by intervening on the Entente's behalf, "America" preserved "a true remembrance of Lafayette and Rochambeau," and that "our common ideal has conquered."[52] US politicians who were not directly associated with France expressed similar sentiments, but emphasized the "spiritual leadership" of the United States. Senator Pittman wrote to Wilson exclaiming that "you are now held in a sacred reverence by all the people of Europe and are looked upon as a superman residing afar off in a citadel of power beyond that of all nations."[53] Pittman's message expresses the essence of US nationalist engagement with Europe, because it conveys the pride US nationalists feel about being separate and superior to Europe but also reveals that European approval was essential for reinforcing. During the conference, Secretary of State Robert Lansing claimed that "America's unselfishness and devotion to justice must be maintained, and we must not be led away" to "impair the reputation which we have won."[54]

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[51] Georges Clemenceau Paris Peace Conference Protocol 1 Jan 18. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 172.
[52] Ambassador in France (Sharp) to Secretary of State. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 300.
[53] Senator Key Pittman to Wilson Nov 15 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 281.
[54] Secretary of State Robert Lansing to General Tasker Bliss December 16 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 521.

Yet this idealism faltered, because it was excessively idealistic, which has been recognized by subsequent scholarship. Interestingly, contemporaries particularly immersed in relevant issues also recognized the United States' inability to fulfill its idealistic objectives. A confidential memorandum produced by the administration in preparation for the conference articulated the concern that "it is impossible in selecting negotiators to represent this Government at the Peace Conference to find men who possess the full knowledge to deal with the numerous and complex questions which will arise."[55] Similarly, the preparatory inquiry understood that "it is clear that the American negotiators will not have time to read extensive treatises" produced to ameliorate their lack of knowledge.[56]

The US representatives' nationalist belief in their capacity to implement their ostensibly transcendent ideals confronted practical limitations and security concerns. Crucially, however, US representatives often operated with the belief that idealistic settlements were possible. This is important because it facilitated brazen resolutions with problematic results. This hubristic condition primarily manifested in two ways: anti-German sentiment and a zealous commitment to the principle of nationalities.

Regarding Germany, scholars have identified that the US representatives advocated for a more conciliatory approach to Germany, and that Britain and especially France demanded otherwise.[57] The US representatives, however, shared the Entente's antipathy to Germany, which facilitated the imposition of the punitive terms.[58] This antipathy was

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[55] Confidential Memorandum Sep 15 1917. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 137.
[56] Report on the Inquiry into the Peace March 20 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 177.
[57] Melvyn Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 15.
[58] Ross Kennedy, "Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and an American Conception of National Security," *Diplomatic History 25*, no. 1 (2001): 8.

heavily influenced by US nationalism because the United States was post-colonially impelled to vindicate the ideals espoused by Britain and France (which were directed at Germany). Clemenceau, indulging US nationalism, remarked during the conference that "America, the daughter of Europe, crossed the ocean to wrest her mother from the humiliation of thraldom and to save civilization."[59] This was the perspective of the US representatives, and during the conference it manifested as a willingness to punish Germany. During a session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Lansing "maintained that Germany should renounce her rights and privileges in favour of the Five Great Powers."[60] Similarly, on the Supreme Council, Wilson "said that he did not wish to grant the Germans any freedom which it was not safe to give them."[61]

Notoriously, the "the High Contracting Parties" of the conference asserted their "moral obligation to redress the wrong done by Germany."[62] Of the many consequences of this conviction, the flagrant contradiction of the exalted principle of nationalities when resolving German territory is particularly salient. In addition to refusing Austrian integration with Germany, the leaders of the conference stipulated that "German nationals" in the newly created Czechoslovak and Polish states would "obtain Czecho-Slovak [substituted with "Polish" in Poland's case] nationality ipso facto and lose their German nationality."[63]

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[59] Georges Clemenceau Paris Peace Conference Protocol 1 Jan 18. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 172.
[60] Robert Lansing at the Council of Foreign Ministers Apr 15. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 4, 638.
[61] Woodrow Wilson at the Meetings of the Supreme Council Feb 8. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 1058.
[62] Treaty of Versailles. 5.0.
[63] Treaty of Versailles. 6.84 & 8.91.

The principle of nationalities was central to the conference, and was particularly emphasized by the US representatives.[64] For, the US nationalist experience conflated self-determination with national self-determination, because of the experience of the War of Independence.[65] Crucially, as many scholars have subsequently observed, Europe's ethnic imbrication precluded ideal territorial resolutions.[66] Even Wilson, upon return to the United States, acknowledged that the settlements required "enlightened expediency," which ensured that the decisions were infused with bias.[67] Regarding the German territorial sentiments, anti-German sentiment informed the resolutions. One need not cite future events to elucidate the consequences of these decisions. For US commissioner A.C. Coolidge wrote the following to the US Commission to Negotiate Peace:

> To tear away some three millions of Germans from their fellows and to unite them against their wills to a Czechish population . . . would not only be a most flagrant violation of the principles which the Allies and especially the United States have proclaimed as their own…but would utterly destroy any hope of a lasting peace.[68]

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[64] Many scholars have observed that it was particularly important to Wilson as well: Allen Lynch, "Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of 'National Self-Determination': A Reconsideration," *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 424.; Michla Pomerance, "The United States and Self-Determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception," *The American Journal of International Law 70*, no. 1 (1976): 17.; Richard Van Alstyne, "Woodrow Wilson and the Idea of the Nation State," *International Affairs 37*, no. 3 (1961): 293.

[65] See previous footnote & Betty Unterberger, "The United States and National Self-Determination: A Wilsonian Perspective," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1996): 933.

[66] Mark Mazower, "Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe," *Daedalus 126*, no. 2 (1997): 48.; Anthony Whelan, "Wilsonian Self-Determination and the Versailles Settlement," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1994): 99.; Throntveit, Trygve. "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination: The Fable of the Fourteen Points." *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 445.

[67] Woodrow Wilson Address Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress Feb 11 1918. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R. S. Baker and William Dodd. Vol 1 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 544.

[68] A.C. Coolidge to the Commission to Negotiate Peace Jan 12 1919. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 2, 494.

US nationalism contributed to destabilizing implementations of the nationalities principle in the Balkans as well where anti-German sentiment was not a factor. Instead, the inherent problems with the doctrine were accentuated by a prejudicial perspective on 'Eastern nationalisms' characteristic of the Western intellectual tradition at that time. Regarding the territorial dispute between Romania and Bulgarian over Dobrudja, for example, the US representatives demonstrated an incapacity to comprehend the situation and hubristically presumed they could resolve it. The United States' Chargé in Bulgaria, Charles Willson, recognized that Dobrudja was a "burning question."[69] Yet he remarked that if Bulgaria was to be awarded Dobrudja Bulgaria would be "satisfied and cease to be a source of trouble in the Balkans" and that if it was given to Romania "Bulgaria will never accept the decision as final, and sooner or later trouble will again begin in the Balkans." He failed to recognize that the inverse was true of Romanian nationalist imperatives.[70]

Another potential factor that may have influenced the United States' approach to Balkan nationalist settlements was the ethnic component of US nationalism. Recall that the United States, like most civic nations, restricts participation in the civic nation based on ethnicity. This paper's argument is that this ethnic restriction manifested through the United States' application of its interventionist ideals. In the same way that, say, US citizens of African descent were excluded from effectuating the civic nationalism, US representatives at the Conference excluded Asian nations from the envisioned benevolent settlement.

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[69] Chargé Charles Wilson to the Acting Secretary of State Dec 12 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 2, 512.
[70] Ibid., 517.

Regarding the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the US representatives simply did not understand the peoples in that region to require the same treatment as European nations. Wilson described the "Turks" as a "docile people" and remarked that it was "necessary to free the subject races of the Turkish Empire from oppression and misrule."[71] Indeed, Wilson explicitly compared the breakup of the Ottoman Empire to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and presumed the legitimacy of divergent treatment, saying that the Ottoman Empire "had fallen apart, as the Austro-Hungarian had" but "never had any real unity. It had been held together only by pitiless, inhuman force. Its peoples cried aloud for release, for succor from unspeakable distress…Peoples hitherto in utter darkness were to be led out into the same light and given at last a helping hand."[72] What the US representatives envisioned was, of course, the mandate system.[73]

Perhaps even more impactful, however, was the United States' neglect of the conflict between China and Japan. As in the case with West Asia, the US representatives knew that there existed salient conflict, but dismissed it as secondary and undeserving of the implementation of the nationalities principle. During a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Lansing remarked that "the question of Shantung was…merely a matter of status."[74] Lansing presumed that it was wholly legitimate for Chinese territory to be colonized, and this sentiment manifested in the Treaty of Versailles, which stipulated that "Germany renounces, in favour of Japan, all her rights, title and privileges…" to its Chinese

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[71] Woodrow Wilson at the Council of Four May 13. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 5, 665; Memorandum of Inquiry into War Aims Dec 22 1917, Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 1, 173.

[72] Woodrow Wilson at the Meetings of the Supreme Council Mar 11. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 4, 368.

[73] For the consequences of the Middle Eastern settlement see: David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (New York: Holt, 1989).

[74] Council of Foreign Ministers Apr 15. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 4, 638.

territory.[75] Clearly, the Conference treated Chinese territory as a colonial possession to be transferred rather than a nation to be integrated into the envisioned settlement.

As with the Sudetenland, contemporaneous observers recognized that the decision was misguided. For example, the United States legal advisor to China, William Cullen Dennis, said that "Eastern questions should be taken up and settled at the same conference which deals with the other questions growing out of the war."[76] Similarly, the US Minister in China, Paul Samuel Reinsch, insisted that:

> A just settlement of the Chinese situation is essential unless the work of the Conference is to fail in protecting the world against a recurrence of the very troubles which brought on the present war. …should Japan be given a freer hand…forces will be set in action which make a huge armed conflict absolutely inevitable within one generation. There is no single problem in Europe which equals in its importance to the future peace of the world, the need of a just settlement of Chinese affairs.[77]

Yet US representatives at the conference did not heed this warning because of their ethnic presumptions about which nattions they were obligated to extend the interventionist nationalist imperative to secure global liberty to. The point is that ethnic presumptions determined which parts of the world and which nations were incorporated into the abstract vision of 'the world' that needed to be intervened upon.

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[75] Treaty of Versailles. 8.56.
[76] The Legal Adviser to the Chinese Government (Dennis) American Minister in China (Reisch) Nov 18 1918. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 2, 887.
[77] The Minister in China Reinsch to Lansing. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 2, 876.

Clearly, the US representatives maintained a prejudicial blindness to the nations with ethnic majorities the United States excluded from its civic sphere. This inconsistent application of the ideals affected Africa as well, which was largely dismissed by US representatives.[78] The US representatives accepted that Europeans' colonies in Africa would fall under the mandate system because of the ethnically prejudiced assumption that they were the least "civilized." Wilson insisted that "the whole theory of mandates is not the theory of permanent subordination. It is the theory of development."[79] Wilson's ignorance to the realities of European colonialism in in Africa is further demonstrated by his response to the Belgian diplomat Ludovic Moncheur, where Wilson assured him that at the conference "Belgium shall be restored to the place she has so richly won among the self-respecting and respected nations of the earth."[80]

The US representatives believed that the League of Nations would resolve the colonial questions in the future, which was a belief that was applied to many of the conference's questions.[81] For, the US representatives' prevailing conviction was that the League of Nations was the centre of the peace, and the core mechanism for establishing their nationalist imperative of human liberty. Wilson described the Covenant of the League of Nations as "nothing less than world settlement" because he believed it to be "a definite guarantee against the things which have just come near bringing the whole structure of

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[78] See footnote #19.
[79] Woodrow Wilson on the Council of Four May 17. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 5, 794.
[80] Woodrow Wilson Reply to Baron Moncheur (Belgian diplomat) June 18 1917. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R S. Baker and William Dodd. Vol 1 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 68.
[81] Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York: Norton, 1986), 40.

civilization to ruin."[82] Yet such grand nationalist ambitions impaired the Conference's capacity to resolve contemporaneous conflict and prevent future conflict.

The US representative's persistent advocacy for the League clashed with most European nations, whose aims primarily concerned their security interests. The United States' nationalist vision neglected practical security concerns because it regarded them as secondary to the exalted ideals of liberty. For European nations, of course, security was of the utmost importance. France's primary objective at the Conference, for example, was not this idealistic vision but rather to secure France and its interests.[83] While Clemenceau's rhetoric included similar notions of liberty, he associated it with the Entente's victory rather than an idealistic peace program. For example, while indulging US nationalism, he proclaimed that "the intervention of the United States was…a supreme judgment passed at the bar of history" intended to "defend an ideal of liberty over which they saw the huge shadow of the Imperial Eagle [of Germany] encroaching further every day."[84] This difference in objectives impaired peacemaking because the United States and France clashed over their objectives and their mutual distrust precluded the impartial altruism professed in the leaders' rhetoric.[85]

IV - The League Decision in the United States

[82] Woodrow Wilson, Address Before the Third Plenary Session of the Peace Conference February 14 1919. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R S. Baker and William Dodd. Volumes 2 (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 537 & 426.
[83] Melvyn Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 15.
[84] Georges Clemenceau Paris Peace Conference Protocol 1 Jan 18. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 172.
[85] Melvyn Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 7-13.

When Wilson returned from Paris, he confronted the difficult task of convincing an ideologically diverse Congress that the interventionist interpretation of US nationalism should be implemented. The League of Nations decision provoked impassioned debate because it required US politicians to determine the nature of the nation. As the intention of the League was to establish peace in the world through collective security mechanisms, the decision demanded an explicit interpretation of how to fulfill the nationalist imperative of securing liberty on behalf of humanity. Whereas in previous generations the consensus interpretation of this imperative was to enact liberty on the continent and thereby avoid jeopardizing it with foreign entanglements, in 1919 many politicians believed that securing liberty necessitated direct and ongoing engagement with foreign states.

In the Senate, the debate was often framed as a constitutional debate, and it has been understood as such by historians. This aligns with the suggestion that the debate was about US nationalism, because the US Constitution is the supreme representation and articulation of the principal civic ideals which constitute US nationalism. In these ways, the League decision was an exemplary instance of the internal negotiations about the nationals which are characteristic of civic nations. At the core of the League debate were divergent interpretations of the United States' nationalist imperative. And while the external political crisis prompted the negotiations, the primary source of contention was the nature of the nationalism.

An early instance of this debate was a publicized debate between William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan hosted by the Press Forum in 1917.[86] They consider whether the United States should join an unofficially proposed 'League to Enforce Peace' and what the nature of such an organization would be and should be. Both men were internationalists in the sense that they were concerned with world affairs, but they fundamentally disagreed on the optimal approach for the United States to fulfill the national imperative to establish and secure its envisioned form of liberty. This discordance manifested primarily through the intense debate over collective security measures. Taft argued that they gave "vitality to the platform" and were therefore necessary.[87] In contrast, Bryan argued that "to put a nation's neck under a foreign yoke and coerce it into taxing [and militarily mobilizing] its citizens to meet a foreign-made assessment would be sure to arouse opposition among any liberty-loving people."[88] Bryan shared "the laudable desire of the members of the league to contribute toward the establishment of an enduring peace," but felt that "to delegate to a foreign council or to alien government's authority to determine its national policy…would be intolerable" because it would sacrifice the "moral prestige of this republic."[89] Bryan's concern was that foreign entanglement would impair the United States' capacity to realize its ideals of liberty continentally, and crucially, that this would also preclude the United States from being an "example" for the world.

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[86] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970).
[87] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970), 22.
[88] Ibid., 50.
[89] Ibid., 25 & 103.

In contrast, Taft's nationalist beliefs entailed intervention in world affairs to secure peace and liberty. He argued that "the position of our country is unique" and that "it is the duty of the United States, in its own interest and in the interest of mankind, to lead the nations into a League to Enforce Peace."[90] Taft uses the word 'duty' many times in the debate, and as he says the duty is to the nation and to the world. It is Taft's nationalist convictions which enable him to deftly fuse the two concepts, because that the United States duty is to the world is a core principle of US nationalism.

While Taft and Bryan were debating The League to Enforce Peace (a theoretical precursor to the League of Nations), its proposed contents were similar to the eventual articles of the League of Nations and all the discussed themes in the Taft-Bryan debates are representative of the congressional debate deciding whether to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson was, of course, the supreme champion of the League, and believed that it would fulfill the nationalist mission of the United States. Speaking to the Senate, Wilson proclaimed that "it was this [the League] that we [the nation] dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way."[91]

Wilson's nationalist passion for the League of Nations clashed with equally ardent nationalist condemnations of the Covenant. In the Senate, interventionists like Wilson faced a coalition of multiple forms of US nationalism. For example, Senator William Borah

[90] William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan. *World Peace: A Written Debate* (New York: Kraus. 1970), 97

[91] Woodrow Wilson Address to the Senate July 10 1919. Woodrow Wilson, *Public Papers: War and Peace*. Ed. R S. Baker and William Dodd. Vol 2. (New York; London: Harper, 1926), 552

delivered the following speech in which he powerfully expressed his continentalist convictions:

> It [joining the League] imperils what I conceive to be the underlying, the very first principles of this Republic. It is in conflict with the right of our people to govern themselves free from all restraint, legal or moral, of foreign powers. It challenges every tenet of my political faith…In opposing the treaty I do nothing more than decline to renounce and tear out of my life the sacred traditions which throughout fifty years have been translated into my whole intellectual and moral being. I will not, I cannot, give up my belief that America must, not alone for the happiness of her own people, but for the moral guidance and greater contentment of the world, be permitted to live her own life.[92]

The last clause is the crux of Borah's position, as it articulates his belief that for the United States to fulfill its nationalist mission to itself and to the world it must not be impaired by foreign entanglement.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge expressed similar reservations, but he did so in a much more ambivalent manner. Lodge proclaimed that "no question has ever confronted the United States' Senate which equals in importance that which is involved in the League of Nations intended to secure the future peace of the world" and denounced "the unfounded

[92] William Borah quoted in: Robert C. Byrd. *Classic Speeches, 1830-1993*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994. 571.

and really evil suggestion that because men may differ as to the best method of assuring the world's peace in the future, anyone is against permanent peace."[93] Here, Lodge identified the existential meaning of the decision for the nation and that the vehement disagreement was generated by the devotion to nationalist principles. Lodge did not express Borah's absolutist perspective, but he fundamentally rejected collective security as a method for the United States to realize its nationalist aim of serving "the cause of peace both at home and abroad."[94] Lodge proclaimed that "I want my country to go forth" and "keep the peace and save the world from all the horrors it has been enduring." but maintained that "I do not wish the Republic to take any detriment" because "that would only cripple us in the good work we seek to do."[95] In Lodge's view, collective security would tarnish the purity of the United States and cripple its capacity to progress the nationalist project of securing liberty for humanity.

Ultimately, the interventionist manifestation of US nationalism was overridden by the Senate and the United States did not join the League. This paper's argument, however, cannot be reduced to the suggestion that the League was diminished without the United States and therefore the nationalist motivation to abstain from the League destabilized global politics. Instead, the argument is that because the US delegation at the Paris Peace Conference ardently enacted an interventionist form of US nationalism, the League was created with more power and responsibility than it otherwise would have. Wilson believed

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[93] Henry Cabot Lodge quoted in: Robert C. Byrd. *Classic Speeches, 1830-1993*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994. 546

[94] Henry Cabot Lodge quoted in: Robert C. Byrd. *Classic Speeches, 1830-1993*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994., 549.

[95] Ibid., 563.

the League to be "necessary" because it would function as a "vital continuity" of peacemaking after the Conference had ended.[96] The US representatives at the Conference had presumed that the United States would join the League and use it to accomplish their interventionist vision for global liberty, but because of the internal nationalist oscillation the result was a disempowered League with excess responsibility, and therefore impaired its capacity to resolve conflicts.

While the League was intrinsically deficient and would have been even if the United States had been involved, scholars maintain that the United States' refusal to join the League did impede global and particularly European conflict resolution.[97] Wilson's conviction that the United States' "spiritual leadership of the world" meant that it was "the only nation which has sufficient moral force with the rest of the world to guarantee the substitution of discussion for war" was a nationalistically infused delusion. Nevertheless, US participation and power may have facilitated the economic reconstruction of Europe and an easing of tensions more broadly.

Instead, the policy of the United States entering the 1920s was to indirectly rehabilitate the European economy through the corporate foreign policy of the Warren Harding Administration (thereby continuing to abstain from the League).[98] Harding's

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[96] Woodrow Wilson Paris Peace Conference Protocol 2 Jan 25 1919. Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference. Vol 3, 194.

[97] Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations* (London: Haus, 2010); Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Northedge, Frederick. *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1946* (London: Leicester University Press, 1986); Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014).

[98] Ellis Hawley, "The Discovery and Study of a 'Corporate Liberalism,'" *Business History Review* 52, no. 3 (1978): 309–20.; Joan Wilson, *American Business & Foreign Policy: 1920-1933* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1971); Carl Parrini, *Heir to Empire: United States Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969); Derek Aldcroft, *From Versailles to Wall Street, 1919-1929* (London: Allen Lane, 1977); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and*

interpretation of the nationalist imperative to progress human liberty was clear. In his famous speech accepting the republican nomination for president in 1920, Harding asserted that:

> Much has been said of late about world ideals, but I prefer to think of the ideal for America. I like to think there is something more than the patriotism and practical wisdom of the founding fathers. It is good to believe that maybe destiny held this New World Republic to be the supreme example of representative democracy and orderly liberty by which humanity is inspired to higher achievement.[99]

Harding embodied a more traditional interpretation of US nationalism, which was that non-entanglement was essential to realizing the nationalist ideals on the continent.[100] Harding emphasized that "we do not mean to shun a single responsibility of this Republic to world civilization," but that "it is better to be the free and disinterested agent of international justice and advancing civilization."[101] Harding believed in corporate expansion as an extension of liberty, but held to Washington's conviction that "the great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations" because "our detached and

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Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Melvyn Leffler, "American Policy Making and European Stability, 1921 - 1933." *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (1977): 207–28.

[99] Warren Harding. Marion Speech. 1920.

[100] The Harding Administration also made arms reduction initiatives, most notably Washington Naval Conference: Thomas Buckley, *The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970).

[101] Ibid.

distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course."[102] Ultimately, Harding believed that "we [must] hold to our own interpretation of the American conscience as the very soul of our nationality."[103]

V - Conclusion

When Frederick Jackson Turner envisioned the United States venturing into the affairs of the world he wrote that "we shall do well also to recount our historic ideals, to take stock of those purposes, and fundamental assumptions that have gone to make the American spirit and the meaning of America in world history." These ideals of liberty were fundamental to the existence of the United States prior to its increasing foreign activity and continued to drive the nation's action as it intervened in world affairs. As such, these ideals have been extensively studied by generations of scholars. Nevertheless, few have identified them to be nationalist ideals.

The object of this paper has been to re-conceptualize the ideological substance of the United States as a nationalism. A foundational premise of this paper is that the United States is a civic nation and the civic principles which constitute the nation and its nationalism are inherently interpretive, which is what produces the potent and divergent manifestations of the nation's ideals. The core imperative of US nationalism is to secure its envisioned form of liberty, and the conceit is that the nation must do so on behalf of humanity. There are two other crucial features of the nationalism which accentuate its

[102] George Washington. Farewell Address. 1796. The American YAWP.
[103] Warren Harding. Marion Speech. 1920.

effectuation, which are the post-colonial impulse to vindicate the nation's ideals and the ethnic restriction on where the nation is obliged to implement its ideals of liberty.

These features of the nationalism are extremely relevant to foreign policy. This is because the nationalist belief in its humanitarian mission creates a global responsibility which even if it is not enacted as intervention directly relates the United States to the world among nationals. Furthermore, the post-colonial dynamic at the core of US nationalism amplified the nation's engagement with Europe and the ethnic impulse within US nationalism excluded the application of the nationalist principles to much of the rest of the world. The dissonance between the rhetoric and action of US politicians is that the language and the ideals are universal but are not enacted universally. Accordingly, US nationalists behave with the conviction that they act on behalf of humanity without doing so, which facilitates negligent foreign policy.

Furthermore, the nature of the United States' civic nationalism entails that it is inconsistently enacted. This is because the imperative to secure liberty must be interpreted and refracted by the nationals who implement it differently. For the first century of the nation's existence, the prevailing form of US nationalism maintained that the ideals of liberty were to be realized continentally, and that foreign entanglement would jeopardize this exalted mission. During the first half of the twentieth century, the conviction that the nationalist imperative obligated the nation to directly intervene in foreign affairs to secure liberty abroad emerged as the dominant form of US nationalism. The United States' intervention into the First World War and its subsequent involvement with the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations occurred as this transformation was being negotiated by the nation.

The entry into the war and the conference was driven by the Wilson Administration's commitment to securing liberty abroad through direct intervention and informed by the urge to vindicate the nationalist ideals of which Europe was the progenitor. These aspects of US nationalism fused to form an intense conviction that by intervening in the war and contributing to a settlement, the United States would advance the cause of global liberty. This provided an overriding ideological motivation for waging war and aligned the United States with Britain and France against Germany. This paper appreciates other causes of the war (and all political action), and maintains that the socio-cultural and ideological motivations for action are entirely compatible with materialist and security related factors.

At the Paris Peace Conference, the United States' representatives continued to enact their interventionist nationalism with great consequence. The conference was a monumental event in world history and its failures existed independently of the United States, but US nationalism exacerbated several key deficiencies of the conference. It accentuated the hubris characteristic of the conference, as well as facilitating the punishment of Germany and an ignorant implementation of the principle of nationalities. Both were key contributors to postwar instability. The League of Nations was the supreme object of the US representatives' policy because it came to embody the nationalist ideals they so ardently espoused. The persistent advocacy for the League impeded peacemaking, however, because it avoided more practical solutions and it incensed France.

Notoriously, the United States did not join the League after being its most dedicated proponent at the conference. The Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles because it enforced a divergent interpretation of US nationalism than had been enacted by the Wilson

Administration. Many of the senators espoused an interpretation of the nationalist imperative to secure liberty that decried collective security measures as a threat or hindrance to the nation's capacity to realize its idealistic objectives. Their idea was that the United States must be completely free to determine its own foreign policy because entanglement would taint the righteous purity of the nation and diminish its exalted capacity. Thus, the abrupt shift in policy regarding the League was caused by internal oscillations in the civic nationalism. The Harding Administration's firm commitment to continuing this less interventionist form of US nationalism cemented the United States separation from the League.

Ultimately, nationalisms condition the actions of nations, especially strong nationalisms like US nationalism. US nationalism is exceptionally relevant regarding the United States' foreign policy from 1917 to 1920 because the momentous events of this period evoked potent nationalist responses from the United States and demanded innovative manifestations of the foundational principles of US nationalism. Thus, an adequate understanding of US nationalism and its relation to the nation's foreign policy is integral to the historical account of the United States' intervention into the First World War and its subsequent engagement with the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations.

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