Chapter 25

The Treaty of Versailles: To Ratify or Reject?

Should the United States have ratified or rejected the Treaty of Versailles?

25.1 Introduction

On December 13, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson's ship, the *George Washington,* slipped into the dock at Brest, France. The war was over. The Allies and the Central powers had put down their guns and signed an armistice. Wilson was going to France to participate in writing the peace treaty that he believed would "make the world safe for democracy."

As the ship made its way to the pier, its passengers could hear the sounds of warships firing their guns in Wilson's honor. On the dock, bands played the "Star Spangled Banner" as French soldiers and civilians cheered. It was a stirring beginning to the president's visit.

Once on shore, Wilson made his way through cheering throngs to the railway station. There he and the other members of the American peace delegation boarded a private train bound for Paris. In the French capital, a crowd of 2 million people greeted the Americans. They clapped and shouted their thanks to the man hailed as "Wilson the Just." One newspaper observed, "Never has a king, never has an emperor received such a welcome."

Many Europeans shared in the excitement of Wilson's arrival. They were grateful for the help Americans had given in the last months of the war. Moreover, they believed Wilson sincerely wanted to help them build a new and better world. Wherever Wilson went, people turned out to welcome him. Everyone wanted to see the man newspapers called the "Savior of Humanity" and the "Moses from across the Atlantic." Throughout Allied Europe, wall posters declared, "We want a Wilson peace."

President Wilson arrived in Europe with high hopes of creating a just and lasting peace. The warm welcome he received could only have raised his hopes still higher. Few watching these events, including Wilson himself, could have anticipated just how hard it would be to get leaders in both Europe and the United States to share his vision.

In 1918, huge crowds greeted President Woodrow Wilson (on the left) as a hero. He offered hope to millions who had been left deeply disillusioned by the war.

◀ Europeans welcoming President Woodrow Wilson to Paris, 1918

This poster urged Latinos to join the war effort and fight for victory. Thousands of Latinos served in the armed forces, despite discrimination against them. Others worked in war industries and on farms that provided much-needed food.

24.5 Enforcing Loyalty Among All Americans

Early on the morning of July 30, 1916, a huge fire destroyed the Black Tom pier on the New Jersey waterfront. Most windows within 25 miles of the pier blew out. Warehouses filled with weapons and explosives awaiting shipment to the Allies in Europe went up in flames. In time, officials figured out that the fire had been set by German agents. Such incidents were few in number, but they fed the fears of a nervous public that German spies threatened the nation.

Immigrants Face Forced "Americanization" Most immigrants, like most Americans, supported the war. They wanted a chance to show their loyalty to their adopted country. They bought war bonds, participated in conservation efforts, and worked in wartime industries.

Nevertheless, rumors of enemy agents sparked anti-immigrant sentiments. Recent immigrants became targets of self-appointed patriot groups like the American Protective League. These groups tried to enforce what they called "100 percent Americanism." Their members sometimes walked around immigrant neighborhoods looking for signs of disloyalty. They also sent the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) names of people they suspected of disloyalty. Many of those people named belonged to political and labor groups.

Intolerance also led to attacks on German Americans. In April 1918, Robert Prager, a German-born citizen, was lynched by a mob near St. Louis, Missouri. His only crime was being born in Germany. Prager had tried to enlist, but officials had turned him down for medical reasons. Immigrants were not the only victims of unwarranted attacks by patriot groups. Anyone who spoke out against the war became a target. For instance, a mob whipped an Ohio minister for giving what was considered to be an antiwar speech.

The Government Cracks Down on Dissent Fear of **espionage,** or spying, motivated Congress to pass the **Espionage Act** in 1917. This law made it a crime to try to interfere with the military draft. It also set severe penalties for spying, sabotage, and vaguely defined "obstruction of the war effort." The Espionage Act also gave the postmaster general broad powers to refuse mail delivery of any materials that might encourage disloyalty.

Americans soon felt the impact of the Espionage Act. Postmaster General Albert Burleson used his new power to ban Socialist newspapers and magazines from the mail. Popular magazines began asking readers to spy on their neighbors and coworkers. The *Literary Digest* invited readers to send in news items they thought "treasonable." The CPI ran magazine ads warning people not to "wait until you catch someone putting a bomb under a factory. Report the man who spreads pessimistic stories . . . cries for peace, or belittles our efforts to win the war."

In 1918, Congress further cracked down on dissent by enacting the **Sedition Act**. This act made it a crime to say anything that was "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive" about the government. Hundreds of people were arrested for offenses such as criticizing the draft or wartime taxes. California Senator Hiram Johnson complained that the law meant "You shall not criticize anything or anybody in the government any longer or you shall go to jail."

Eugene Debs was a colorful and eloquent speaker. During World War I, he publicly condemned both the war and the government's crackdown on dissent. As a result, he was convicted under the Espionage Act and jailed. While in prison, Debs ran for president as the candidate of the Socialist Party, winning nearly 1 million votes.

Socialists and Wobblies Speak Out Against the War When the war began, many members of the Socialist Party spoke out strongly against it. They viewed the war as a fight among capitalists for wealth and power. As Eugene V. Debs, head of the Socialist Party, told his followers,

> Wars throughout history have been waged for conquest and plunder . . . that is war in a nutshell. The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, while the subject class has had nothing to gain and all to lose—especially their lives.
>
> —Eugene Debs, "The Canton, Ohio, Speech," June 16, 1918

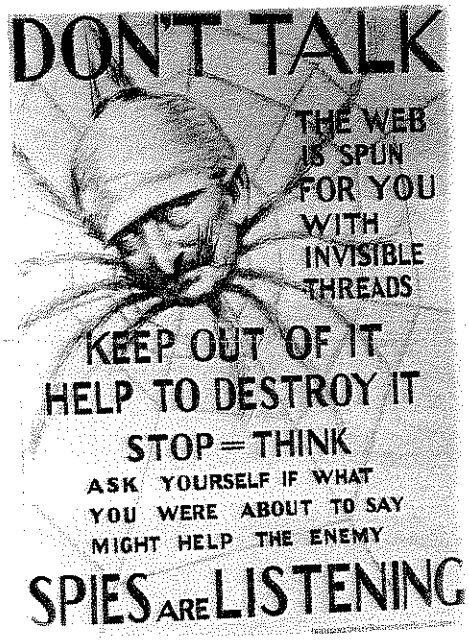
Members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), better known as **Wobblies**, also spoke out against the war. "Capitalists of America, we will fight against you, not for you," declared the *Industrial Worker*, the IWW newspaper, in 1917. "There is not a power in the world that can make the working class fight if they refuse." The Wobblies' antiwar views gave their enemies a chance to attack them as disloyal. In Montana, a mob hanged an IWW organizer. In September 1917, federal agents raided 48 IWW meeting halls, seizing letters and publications. Later that month, 165 IWW leaders were arrested.

In all, the government arrested and tried more than 1,500 people under the Espionage and Sedition acts. Approximately 1,000 were convicted, including Debs, who was sentenced to a 10-year prison term for urging young men to refuse to serve in the military. More than 100 Wobblies were also sent to prison, a blow from which the IWW never recovered.

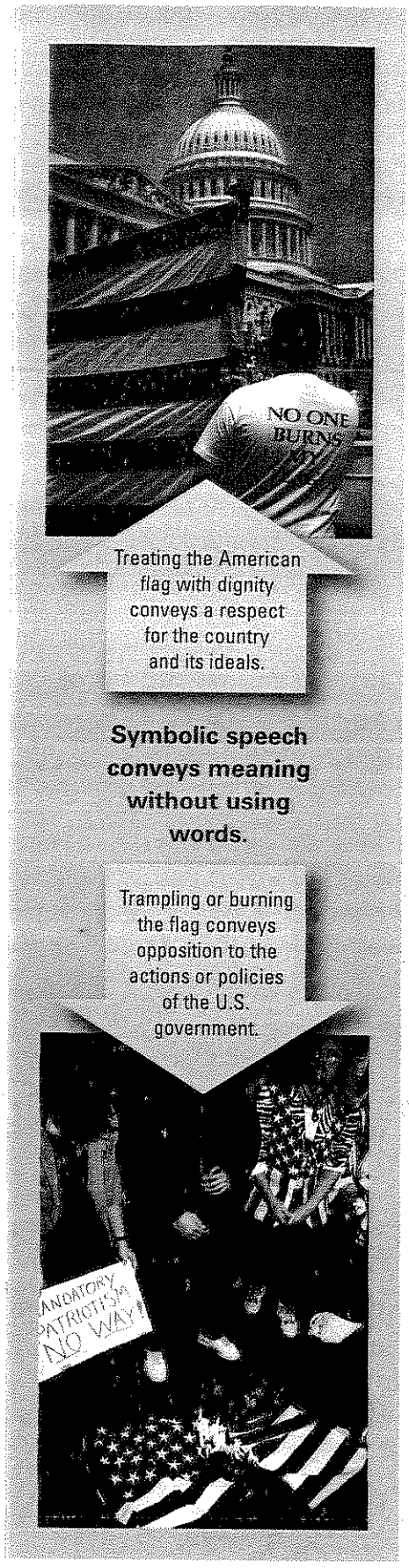
The Espionage and Sedition acts made many Americans uneasy. In 1919, ***Schenck v. United States***, a case involving the Espionage Act, reached the Supreme Court. Charles Schenck, a socialist, was charged with distributing leaflets to recent draftees, urging them to resist the military draft. He was convicted of interfering with recruitment. His lawyer appealed Schenck's conviction on the grounds that his right to free speech had been denied.

In a unanimous opinion, written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., the Court held that Schenck's conviction was constitutional. "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic," Holmes wrote. Schenck's publications created "a clear and present danger" to a nation engaged in war. "When a nation is at war," wrote Holmes, "things that might be said in time of peace . . . will not be endured so long as men fight."

Posters like this one discouraged Americans from speaking out against the war. People who did speak out risked being branded as disloyal.



The Granger Collection, New York



Current Connections

24.6 Defining the Limits of Free Speech

In the years since *Schenck v. United States,* the Supreme Court has expanded its definition of free speech. Today, the Court recognizes three types of protected speech. The first is pure speech, or the spoken word. This is the speech you hear at public meetings or in debates. The second type is known as speech-plus. This is speech combined with action, such as a protest march or picketing during a strike. The speech part of speech-plus is protected by the First Amendment. The action part, however, may be regulated. For example, a protest march may need to secure a permit from the city in which the march is to be held.

The third type of protected speech is **symbolic speech**. Symbolic speech is conduct that conveys a message without spoken words. Just which kinds of conduct should be protected as free speech is less clear. The Court has ruled, "We cannot accept the view that an apparently limitless variety of conduct can be labeled 'speech' whenever the person engaging in that conduct intends thereby to express an idea."

Burning Draft Cards: *United States v. O'Brien* One such test of symbolic speech came in the 1960s, when Americans were deeply divided over the Vietnam War. Some antiwar activists protested the war by publicly burning their draft cards, despite a law that required young men to carry their cards at all times. In response, Congress passed a law that made it a crime to burn draft cards.

On March 31, 1966, David Paul O'Brien was convicted of breaking the new law. In time, *United States v. O'Brien* reached the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that although O'Brien's actions were a form of symbolic speech, a person does not have a First Amendment right to break a law in which the government has a "substantial" interest. The government needed to have young men carry their draft cards to make the Selective Service System work properly. Thus, it could punish protesters like O'Brien who destroyed their cards on purpose.

Flag Burning: *Texas v. Johnson* In the summer of 1984, the Supreme Court took up another free speech issue involving symbolic speech. At the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, Gregory Lee Johnson protested the Reagan administration's policies by setting an American flag on fire. A Texas court convicted him of breaking a state law that made it a crime to intentionally damage a national flag. Johnson appealed his conviction on the grounds that his conduct was protected symbolic speech.

In *Texas v. Johnson,* the Supreme Court ruled that flag burning was protected symbolic speech. The government of Texas, the Court argued, could not prohibit someone from expressing an opinion by burning the flag, even if it found such conduct offensive. The Texas flag law was thus unconstitutional.

Congress reacted to this decision by passing the Flag Protection Act of 1989. This law made it a federal crime to knowingly burn or mutilate an American flag. The new law was soon challenged in the courts. In *United*

States v. Eichman, the Supreme Court ruled that the government can encourage patriotism by persuasion and example, but it cannot do so by making symbolic speech a crime. The Flag Protection Act was declared unconstitutional.

Since 1990, a constitutional amendment making flag burning a crime has been introduced several times in Congress. The proposed amendment reads, "The Congress and the states shall have the power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." Year after year, the amendment has failed to receive the required two-thirds vote in Congress needed to send it to the states for ratification. That such an amendment will be approved in the future seems doubtful.

The flag-burning issue illustrates the difficulty of deciding what speech should be protected. Almost all Americans are offended by the mistreatment of an American flag. Yet many are troubled by the idea of making the expression of opinions by such conduct a crime.

After World War I, Justice Holmes was equally troubled by the idea of punishing people for expressing an opinion. After siding with the government in the *Schenck* decision, Holmes took the opposite view when another Espionage Act case came before the Court. In *Abrams et al. v. United States*, he wrote that only an emergency "warrants making any exception to the sweeping command, 'Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.'"

Summary

During World War I, the federal government worked to mobilize the country for war. At the same time, tensions arose as the need for national unity was weighed against the rights of Americans to express their opposition to the war.

Woman's Peace Party For religious or political reasons, some Americans opposed the war. Among the leading peace activists were members of the Woman's Peace Party.

Committee on Public Information During the war, the government created this propaganda agency to build support for the war. Although CPI propaganda helped Americans rally around the war effort, it also contributed to increased distrust of foreign-born citizens and immigrants.

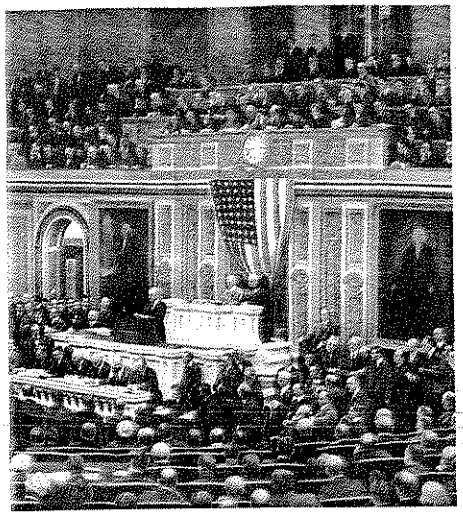
Liberty Bonds The purchase of Liberty Bonds by the American public provided needed funding for the war and gave Americans a way to participate in the war effort.

Great Migration During the war, hundreds of thousands of African Americans migrated out of the South. They were attracted to northern cities by job opportunities and hopes for a better life.

Espionage and Sedition acts The Espionage and Sedition acts allowed the federal government to suppress antiwar sentiment. The laws made it illegal to express opposition to the war.

Socialists and Wobblies Socialists and Wobblies who opposed the war became the targets of both patriot groups and the government for their antiwar positions. Many were jailed under the Espionage and Sedition acts.

Schenck v. United States The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Espionage Act in this 1918 case. It ruled that the government could restrict freedom of speech in times of "clear and present danger."



Woodrow Wilson unveiled his Fourteen Points in a speech to Congress on war aims and peace terms. In his 1918 address, he talked about the causes of the war. Then he laid out his plans for preventing future wars.

25.2 Wilson's Vision for World Peace

On January 8, 1918, Wilson went before Congress to explain his war aims. Although the war was still raging, he boldly stated an ambitious program to make the world "fit and safe to live in." He called his blueprint for peace the Fourteen Points. It was designed to protect "every peace-loving nation" and peoples from "force and selfish aggression."

Fourteen Points to End All Wars The first goal of Wilson's peace plan was to eliminate the causes of wars. He called for an end to secret agreements and the web of alliances that had drawn the nations of Europe into war. Recalling the deadly submarine warfare that brought the United States into the war, he wanted **freedom of the seas**. By this, he meant the right of merchant ships to travel freely in international waters in times of peace and war. He also wanted European countries to reduce their **armaments,** or weapons of war, instead of competing to make their military forces bigger and better.

A second key goal was to ensure the right to self-determination for ethnic groups so they could control their own political future. With the defeat of the Central powers, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires were falling apart. Many different ethnic groups lived within these lands. Wilson hoped to see these groups living in newly formed nations under governments of their choosing.

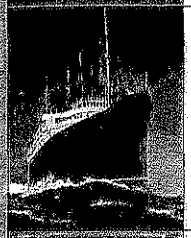
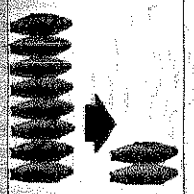
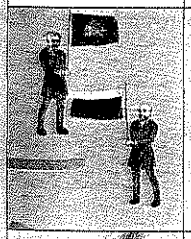
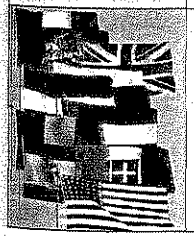
For Wilson, the last of his Fourteen Points was the most important. It called for setting up an international organization called the League of Nations to ensure world peace. Member nations would agree to protect one another's independence and **territorial integrity**. Under the principle of territorial integrity, nations respect one another's borders and do not try to gain another country's territory by force. Working together, League members would resolve conflicts before those conflicts escalated into wars.

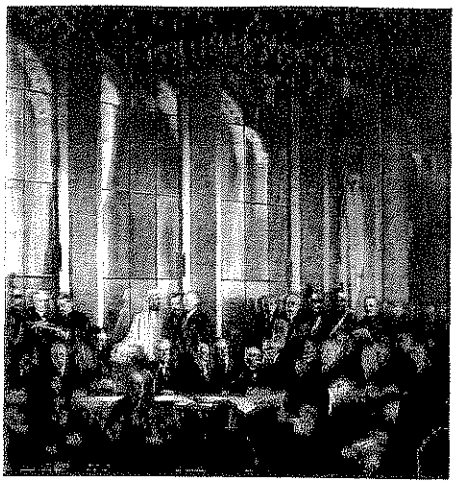
Wilson's Unusual Decisions As the end of the war approached, President Wilson made an unusual decision. Up to that time, no president had traveled outside the United States while in office. Wilson broke with tradition by deciding to lead the American delegation to the peace conference in France. He wanted to make sure his goal of a lasting peace became a reality.

As Wilson prepared for his trip, Democrats and Republicans were getting ready for the 1918 midterm elections. At that time, Democrats controlled both houses of Congress. Wilson called on the American public to show their support for his peace plan by keeping the Democrats in power. But his appeal did not work. The Republicans won a majority in both the Senate and the House. The voters' repudiation of Wilson's appeal weakened his position just as he was about to seek the support of European leaders for his peace plans.

Wilson made matters worse by his choice of other American delegates to the peace conference. Although they were competent diplomats, only one was a Republican. Upon reading the names, former president William Taft griped that Wilson wanted to "hog the whole show." Moreover, not one of the delegates had the confidence of key Republican leaders in the Senate. Because the Senate would have to ratify whatever treaty came out of the negotiations, this oversight would come back to haunt the president.

Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points

	The Points	Support of World Peace
	**Point 1** "Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, . . . [so that] diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view"	Countries would not make secret treaties and alliances. Secret alliances had been a cause of World War I.
	**Point 2** "Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas . . . in war and peace"	Ships would be able to travel freely in times of war. U-boat attacks on shipping had drawn the United States into World War I.
	**Point 3** "The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations"	Free trade among countries would promote economic growth and reduce trade conflicts that could draw nations into war.
	**Point 4** "National armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety."	Countries would reduce their stockpiles of weapons. Militarism had been a cause of World War I.
	**Point 5** "Impartial adjustment of all colonial claims[;] . . . the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the [colonial] government."	The desires of colonial peoples would be taken into consideration in creating a more peaceful world. Imperialism and competition for colonies had been a cause of World War I.
	**Points 6 to 13** These points deal with the restoration of "occupied territory" to Russia, Belgium, France, Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro. They also call for drawing new borders based on "historically established lines of allegiance and nationality."	Restoring land taken from countries by war would restore respect for international law. Redrawing some borders on the basis of self-determination would reduce conflicts among ethnic groups. Frustrated nationalism in the Balkans had triggered World War I.
	**Point 14** "A general association of nations must be formed."	Countries would work together in the League of Nations to resolve conflicts before those conflicts escalated into war.



On June 28, 1919, leaders signed the Treaty of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. The final treaty, with its harsh treatment of Germany, upset many people. "We came to Paris convinced that the new order was about to be established," remarked an unhappy British official. "We left it convinced that the new order had merely fouled the old."

25.3 Ideals Versus Self-Interest at Versailles

The Paris peace conference opened with great ceremony at the Palace of Versailles. The leaders of the four largest victorious nations made almost all the decisions. This group, known as the **Big Four**, included President Wilson and three prime ministers—David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. Representatives of Germany and the other defeated nations took no part in the talks. Russia, which had made a separate peace with Germany after its revolution, did not attend.

Peace Without Victory Gives Way to War Guilt and Reparations Wilson came to the talks eager to share his Fourteen Points with other world leaders. His hopes for easy acceptance of his goals were quickly dashed. Although the other leaders liked Wilson's vision of a peaceful world, they were more interested in protecting the interests of their own countries.

First among Clemenceau's concerns was French security. He hoped to weaken Germany to the point that it could never threaten France again. He insisted that the German army be reduced to 100,000 men. He further insisted that Germany be stripped of its coal-rich Saar Valley.

Lloyd George, who had recently won reelection on the slogan "Hang the Kaiser," insisted that Germany accept responsibility for starting the war. The inclusion of a **war-guilt clause** in the treaty demolished Wilson's earlier hope for "peace without victory." In addition, the treaty required Germany to pay $33 billion in **reparations** to the Allies. Reparations are payments demanded of a defeated nation by the victor in a war to offset the cost of the war. Germans resented both the war-guilt clause and the reparations, rightly fearing that the payments would cripple their economic recovery from the war.

Wilson tried to restrain these efforts at punishing Germany. The other leaders, however, would not back down. Their countries had lost many lives and property, and they expected compensation. They also argued that although the United States was not to receive reparations, it would benefit from them. The Allies had borrowed huge sums from American banks to finance the war. They hoped to repay these debts with reparations from Germany. Wilson reluctantly agreed to the harsh treatment of Germany in order to gain support for what he saw as most important: the League of Nations.

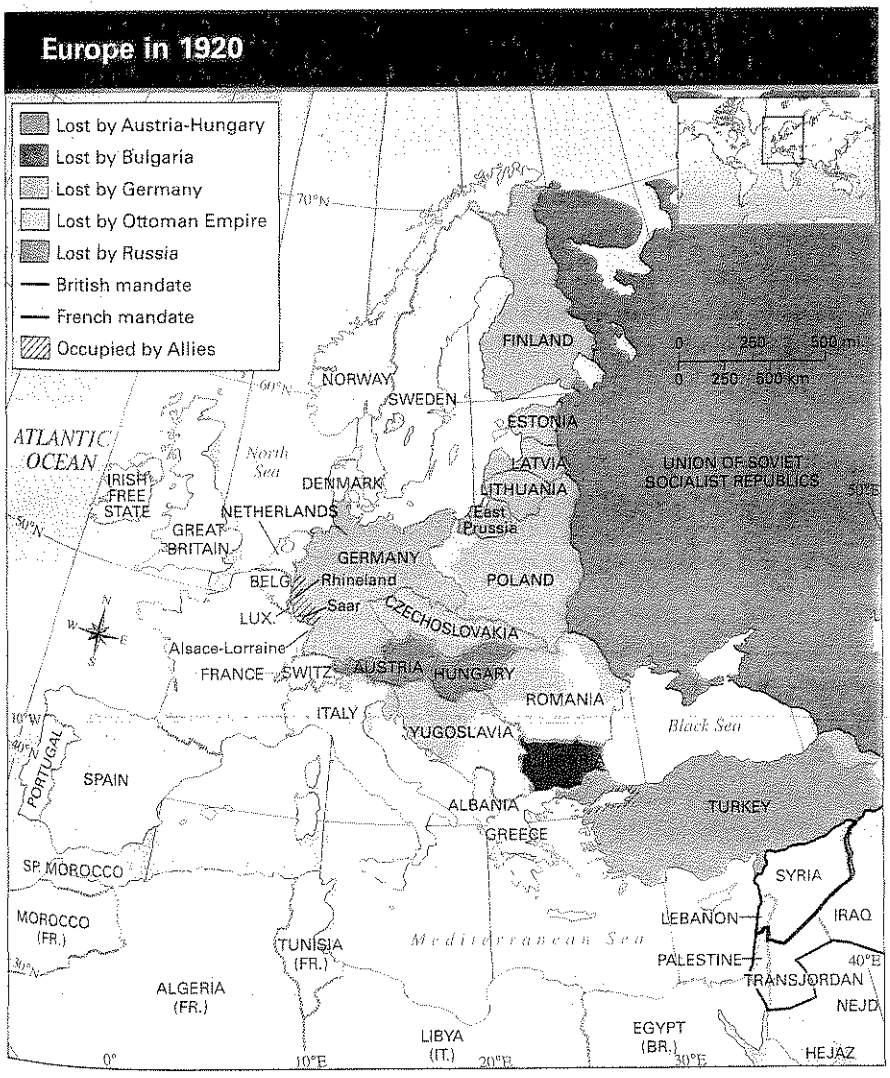
Self-Determination Survives, but Only in Europe Wilson also clashed with the other Allied leaders over territorial claims. In the Fourteen Points, he had called for self-determination for the peoples of Europe. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had left unclear the fate of many ethnic groups. Wilson wanted these peoples to be free to determine their own political futures.

Wilson's commitment to self-determination helped some ethnic groups form their own nations. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the former Russian states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all gained independence. However, other territorial decisions went against Wilson's views. For example, parts of Germany were given to France, Poland, Denmark, and Belgium, with little thought about the desires of the people living there. Italy gained territory that was home to Austrians.

In other areas, the Allies ignored self-determination. Britain, France, Italy, and Japan grabbed German colonies in China, the Pacific, and Africa. Britain and France took over areas in Southwest Asia that had once been controlled by the collapsing Ottoman Empire. They were to govern these areas as **mandates,** or territories controlled by the League of Nations, until each mandate was ready for self-rule. These mandates included Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, as well as some former German colonies in Africa and the Pacific Islands.

Wilson Pins His Peace Hopes on the League of Nations President Wilson had not been able to preserve all of his goals. He did, however, get the other leaders to include a charter for the League of Nations in the final agreement. Wilson hoped that, in time, the League would be able to correct the peace treaty's many flaws. More important, he believed the League would maintain peace by providing **collective security** for its members. Collective security is a commitment by many countries to join together to deal with a nation that threatens peace.

The Big Four formally signed the **Treaty of Versailles** on June 18, 1919. But Wilson's fight for the treaty was just beginning.



World War I and the Treaty of Versailles created new countries and redrew the borders of old ones. Germany and Russia both lost territory. The Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires ceased to exist, and their territories became new countries or mandates of Allied nations.

Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, shown here on the right, led the reservationists, who wanted the Treaty of Versailles changed. Idaho Senator William Borah, on the left, led the irreconcilables, who opposed the treaty in any form. Together, these two groups defeated the treaty in the Senate.

25.4 The Great Debate About Ratification

Two days after President Wilson returned home, he called on the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles with U.S. membership in the League of Nations. Wilson had strong public support. More than 30 state legislatures and governors endorsed League membership. Still, Wilson had yet to win the necessary two-thirds vote of the Senate needed to ratify a treaty. The question was whether he could get enough Republican votes in the Senate to reach that magic number.

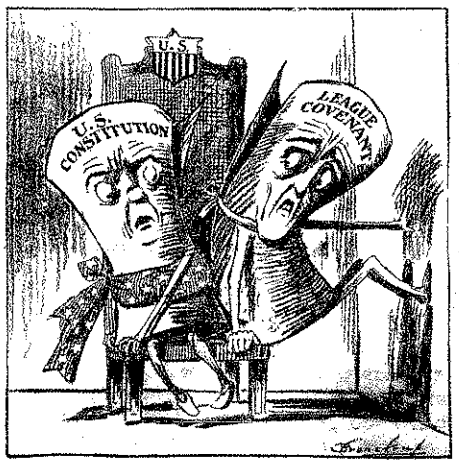
Reservationists Seek Changes Before Approving Treaty Many Republicans in the Senate were reluctant to approve the treaty as it was written. Known as **reservationists**, they said they would vote yes, but only with a number of reservations, or changes, added to it.

The reservationists were mostly concerned with Article 10 of the League's charter. This article focused on collective security. It required member nations to work together—and even supply troops—to keep the peace. Reservationists feared this would draw the United States into wars without approval from Congress. They demanded that Article 10 be changed to read, "The United States assumes no obligation to preserve the territorial integrity or political independence of any other country . . . unless . . . Congress shall . . . so provide."

Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts was the leader of the reservationists. In a speech outlining his views, he warned,

> The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interests and quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence . . . Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind. Beware how you trifle with your marvellous inheritance, this great land of ordered liberty, for if we stumble and fall freedom and civilization everywhere will go down in ruin.
>
> —Henry Cabot Lodge, "On the League of Nations," August 12, 1919

This cartoon illustrates the struggle in the Senate between supporters of the League of Nations and opponents who believed its covenant, or charter, conflicted with the U.S. Constitution. The key issue was whether the League could involve the United States in a conflict without congressional approval.



Lodge had both personal and political reasons for opposing the Treaty of Versailles. He and Wilson had long been bitter foes. "I never expected to hate anyone in politics with the hatred I feel toward Wilson," Lodge once confessed. He was also angry that Wilson had snubbed Republicans when choosing delegates to the peace conference. The ratification debate gave Lodge and his fellow Republicans an opportunity to embarrass the president and weaken the Democratic Party.

As head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Lodge found ways to delay action on the treaty. When the treaty came to his committee for study, he spent two weeks reading aloud every word of the nearly 300 pages. Next, he held six weeks of public hearings, during which opponents of the treaty were given ample time to speak out against it.

Irreconcilables Reject the Treaty in Any Form A group of 16 Senate Republicans firmly opposed the Treaty of Versailles. Known as **irreconcilables**, their "no" vote was certain. They were completely opposed to any treaty that included an international organization that might draw the nation into war.

Republican Senator William Borah of Idaho was one of the more outspoken irreconcilables. The world, he declared, could "get along better without our intervention." He scoffed at the reservationists' position. Recalling George Washington's Farewell Address, he asked, "Where is the reservation . . . which protects us against entangling alliances with Europe?"

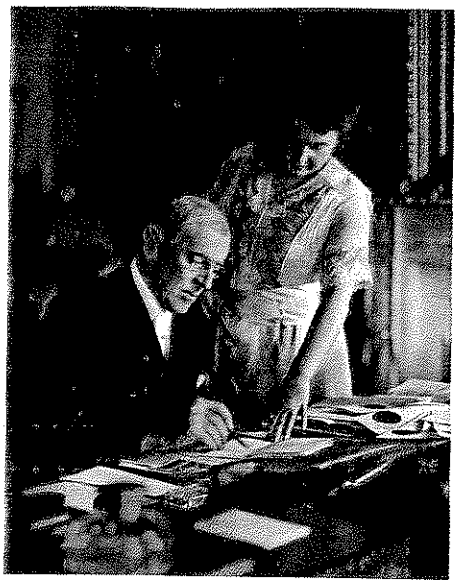
Internationalists Support the Treaty of Versailles Most Senate Democrats strongly supported the treaty. This group, known as **internationalists**, believed that greater cooperation among nations could work for the benefit of all. They argued that the United States had already become a major world power. As such, it should take its rightful place in the world community by becoming a member of the League of Nations. Rather than worry about the United States being dragged into another war by the League, the internationalists focused on the League's role in keeping the peace.

President Wilson Takes His Case to the People As the ratification hearings dragged on, the public began to lose interest. Upset by Lodge's delaying tactics, Wilson decided to go directly to the public for support. On learning the president was planning a speaking tour of the country, his doctor warned that it could damage his already failing health. Wilson is reported to have replied,

> [My] own health is not to be considered when the future peace and security of the world are at stake. If the Treaty is not ratified by the Senate, the War will have been fought in vain, and the world will be thrown into chaos. I promised our soldiers, when I asked them to take up arms, that it was a war to end wars.
>
> —Woodrow Wilson, August 27, 1919

The president embarked on a grueling, 8,000-mile speaking tour of the West. He spoke up to four times a day, giving about 40 speeches in 29 cities. Two irreconcilables, Borah and California Senator Hiram Johnson, followed Wilson on their own tour. Despite their attacks, the campaign for the treaty seemed to be picking up speed when disaster struck. On September 25, 1919, the president collapsed with a severe headache in Pueblo, Colorado. His doctor stopped the tour, and Wilson's train sped back to Washington.

In this cartoon, Woodrow Wilson is shown leaving Congress to seek public support for the League of Nations. The president's speaking tour of the country was cut short when he suffered a collapse.



Edith Wilson managed the president's daily affairs after he collapsed from a stroke while touring the nation in 1919. She later said she made "the very important decision of when to present matters to my husband." But she denied making policy decisions for him.

25.5 A Divided Senate Decides the Treaty's Fate

A few days after returning to the White House, Wilson had a major stroke that left him partly paralyzed. For months, the president remained very ill. Hoping to restore his health, his wife, Edith Galt Wilson, became a gatekeeper. She decided what news he would hear and chose his few visitors.

At first, the public had no idea just how sick Wilson was. When the extent of his illness became clear, Wilson's critics accused Edith of making decisions for the country. Some called her the "assistant president." In her own account of this time, she said she had "never made a single decision regarding . . . public affairs." Still, in her role as caregiver, Edith Wilson became caught up in the nasty political fighting that marked the debate on the Versailles Treaty.

Partisanship Defeats the Treaty From the start, bitter **partisanship,** or rivalry between political parties, marked the treaty ratification process. During the months of debate, senators on both sides put loyalty to their party above all else.

By the time the treaty came to the Senate for a vote late in 1919, the reservationists had added 14 amendments to it. Most of the changes had little impact on the League of Nations. Despite this, Wilson rejected them all. He refused to accept any agreement that did not have the precise language he had agreed to in Paris. When Nebraska Senator Gilbert Hitchcock advised Wilson to work with Republicans, Wilson barked, "Let Lodge compromise!" The president called on his supporters to vote down the amendments and then pass the treaty in its original form.

The plan backfired. On the first vote, Democrats loyal to Wilson joined the irreconcilables to defeat the amended treaty. When the Senate voted on the unamended treaty, Democrats voted yes, but reservationists and irreconcilables joined forces to defeat it.

Under strong public pressure to try again, the Senate reconsidered the treaty four months later. Once again, Wilson opposed any changes. "Either we should enter the League . . . not fearing the role of leadership which we now enjoy," he told his supporters, "or we should retire . . . from the great concert of powers by which the world was saved."

Not all Senate Democrats agreed with this point of view. Fearing that the nation might be left with no treaty at all, 21 Democrats voted to accept the 14 amendments. But even with their support, the final count fell seven votes short of the two thirds needed for treaty ratification.

The 1920 Election Becomes a Referendum on the Treaty As the 1920 presidential election heated up, Wilson struggled to save the treaty. The Democratic candidate for president, Governor James M. Cox of Ohio, declared himself firmly in favor of the League of Nations. His running mate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, supported it as well. "If you want . . . another war against civilization," Roosevelt warned, "then let us go back to the conditions of 1914. If you want the possibility of sending once more our troops and navies to foreign lands, then stay out of the League." The Republican Party straddled the issue, favoring "an international association" to prevent war but opposing the League. Its candidate, Warren G. Harding, lacked conviction either way.

Wilson called for the election to be a "great and solemn referendum" on the League of Nations. By this time, however, Americans were losing interest in the partisan debate over ratification. Issues closer to home, such as inflation and unemployment, appeared more pressing. Most people seemed to think, observed Secretary of State Robert Lansing, that Americans should "attend to our own affairs and let the rest of the nations go to the devil if they want to."

When the votes were in, Cox received just 9.1 million votes, compared with Harding's 16.1 million. "It was not a landslide," said Wilson's private secretary, Joseph Tumulty, of the Democratic defeat. "It was an earthquake." The great referendum on the treaty had gone terribly wrong.

In October 1921, the United States, which had fought separately from the Allies, signed a separate peace treaty with Germany. The League of Nations had begun operations by that time, but the nation whose president had created it was not a member.

Two decades would pass before Americans would rethink the idea of collective security. By then, the nation was engaged in a second global war. Looking back, people could not help but wonder: Could that next war have been avoided if the United States had joined the League of Nations?

Summary

After World War I, President Woodrow Wilson hoped to create a lasting peace. He insisted that the treaty ending the war should include a peacekeeping organization called the League of Nations. Many Americans feared that membership in the League could involve the United States in future wars.

The Fourteen Points Wilson outlined his goals for lasting peace in his Fourteen Points. Key issues included an end to secret agreements, freedom of the seas, reduction of armaments, self-determination for ethnic groups, and collective security through creation of an international peacekeeping organization.

The Big Four When the heads of the four major Allies—France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States—met in Paris for peace talks, they were more focused on self-interest than on Wilson's plan.

Treaty of Versailles The treaty negotiated in Paris redrew the map of Europe, granting self-determination to some groups. Some Allies sought revenge on Germany, insisting on a war-guilt clause and reparations from Germany.

League of Nations Wilson hoped that including the League of Nations in the final treaty would make up for his compromises on other issues. He believed that by providing collective security and a framework for peaceful talks, the League would fix many problems the treaty had created.

The ratification debate The treaty ratification debate divided the Senate into three groups. Reservationists would not accept the treaty unless certain changes were made. Irreconcilables rejected the treaty in any form. Internationalists supported the treaty and the League.

Rejection of the treaty Partisan politics and Wilson's refusal to compromise led to the treaty's rejection and ended Wilson's hopes for U.S. membership in the League of Nations.