

should be integrated into a general narrative. In order to make my work of synthesis complete and to recognize that the study of history involves a never-ending dialogue among its practitioners, I have included the views of leading scholars on controversial matters.

Much of my research over the years has focused upon opponents of American foreign policy during the initial years of World War II and the cold war, and this work continues somewhat in that vein. In examining the debates over Wilsonian foreign policy toward Europe in the years 1914-17, I have sought to scrutinize the events of the period from several vantage points. The published Wilson papers, the *New York Times*, and the *Congressional Record* remain indispensable. Certain vehicles of opinion have proven particularly helpful: the *Nation*, pro-Wilson but harboring pacifist leanings; the *New Republic*, a progressive weekly that articulated its own brand of Realpolitik; the *Outlook*, which combined Protestant moralism with Rooseveltian stridency; the fervently pro-German *Fatherland*; and Hearst's *New York American*, a daily that linked the most aggressive form of militarism with a neutralist posture toward the European war.

In an effort to keep my references in manageable shape, I have usually limited endnotes to direct quotations, diplomatic documents, and the contemporary press. For readers who seek to ascertain my sources for sheer narrative, such as the sinking of merchant ships or the military course of the war in Europe, I have provided an extensive bibliographical essay.

This book could never have been written without the aid of others. Particularly meticulous readings have been given by John Belohlavek, Irwin Gellman, and David Trask. For all three no book dedication is truly adequate. Perceptive comments have also been offered on the entire draft by John Milton Cooper Jr., John A. Thompson, Laszlo Deme, Scott Perry, Thomas Jackson, and June and Elliot Benowitz. Lloyd Ambrosius kindly read introductory material and my conclusion. The entire library staff of the New College of Florida have extended themselves far beyond any reasonable call of duty, and I must single out those to whom I have also dedicated this work: Gail Novak, Caroline Reed, Barbara Dubreuil, Ed Foster, and the late Holly Barone. The college generously awarded me a research grant in the summer of 2005. Ben Proctor expedited my research in the Hearst press. As an editor Steve Wrinn has been all one could ever hope for. No one could extend more friendship nor offer more encouragement. As always, my wife Carol has been my most rigorous critic and closest collaborator.

Setting the Stage

"WE ARE WALKING ON quicksand," wrote Woodrow Wilson to a cousin in September 1915. For over a year the president had sought to steer a neutral course during a conflict first known as the Great War, then as World War I. Costing 30 million casualties and 8 million dead, the event was sufficiently cataclysmic for diplomat and historian George Frost Kennan to designate it "the great seminal conflict of this century."¹ During the past few months, one major power had confiscated huge amounts of American goods being shipped to Imperial Germany. Another leading belligerent had sunk the world's largest ocean liner, in the process killing well over one hundred U.S. citizens.

That autumn the situation showed itself increasingly precarious. On one side of the massive struggle were the Central Powers, in August 1914 an alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary but soon extending to the Ottoman Empire and close to a year later to Bulgaria. On the other side were the Allies, also known as the Entente, a coalition of Britain, France, and Russia. Japan joined the Allies in late August 1914, Italy in May 1915, and Rumania in August 1916. At the time Wilson voiced his apprehension, the French were about to begin a futile offensive between Rheims and the Argonne forest, the Italians were in the midst of a series of inconclusive battles on the Isonzo River, and the Russians had just lost all of Poland, Lithuania, and Courland, a duchy located in western Latvia.

During the entire period of American neutrality, Wilson's term "quicksand" was a most apt one. To the chief executive the conflict appeared as if it would never end. Possibilities of American ensnarement seemed most real, particularly given the crises created by Germany's submarine warfare against merchant and passenger ships.

The United States remained the world's strongest neutral power from August 1914, when the conflict erupted, until April 1917, when it entered the struggle. During this time, Americans fiercely debated every facet of administration policy, ranging from how best to sustain traditional commercial rights to providing the most effective means of maintaining the country's security.

Obviously Wilson was America's foremost policymaker. Before he became chief executive in 1913, he had held various professorships and had served as president of Princeton University and governor of New Jersey. His voluminous writings concentrated on American history and government, not on European diplomacy and global rivalries, though he demonstrated genuine familiarity with Western political institutions. A major work, *The State* (1889), traced the evolution of governmental forms from classical antiquity to contemporary western Europe. At Princeton he had taught courses in international law. After 1902, when he was chosen to lead the university, he occasionally wrote essays on government and politics but henceforth engaged in little serious reading.

Years before he entered the White House, he developed distinctive views of America's role in the world community. Although critical of his nation's actions in the Mexican war ("ruthless aggrandizement") and the Hawaiian revolution of 1893 ("mischievous work"), he perceived the Spanish-American War as rooted in "an impulse of humane indignation and pity." In general, the United States had been founded to serve humanity, bringing "liberty to mankind." By sheer moral example, America could offer such virtues as self-government, "enlightened systems of law," and "a temperate justice" to a backward world. Conversely, if the nation acted irresponsibly abroad, it would compromise its democratic values. In his first Fourth of July address as president, he remarked: "America has lifted high the light which will shine unto all generations and guide the feet of mankind to the goal of justice and liberty and peace."²

In fulfilling the American mission, Wilson's religion played a crucial function. The son, grandson, and nephew of Presbyterian ministers, in 1905 he defined his nation's "mighty task" as making "the United States a mighty Christian Nation," a country that would in turn "Christianize the world."³ Care should be taken, however, in describing Wilson's supposed messianism. Admittedly, much of his self-assurance was grounded in the belief that he could serve as a chosen instrument of an omniscient deity, but he also thought every individual, not he alone, could assume such responsibilities. Both in-

dividuals and nations lay subject to a divine moral law that they could not transgress without peril. He even perceived God's will in his personal defeats.

In 1904 the future president spoke of sharing America's global calling with the British Empire: "The Anglo-Saxon people have undertaken to reconstruct the affairs of the world, and it would be a shame upon them to withdraw their hand." Wilson harbored strong English ties. His mother was born in the British Isles, as were both paternal grandparents. He greatly admired English culture and institutions, esteeming the practices of Parliament and revering such figures as Edmund Burke, William E. Gladstone, and political theorist Walter Bagehot. In 1900 he praised Secretary of State John Hay for confirming "our happy alliance of sentiment and purpose with Great Britain."⁴ Before assuming the presidency, he had visited the British Isles several times, particularly enjoying long walks in the Lake District, but had crossed the Channel only once to visit the Continent.

Like the British, Wilson believed in overseas expansion. He was the first prominent scholar to endorse the thesis of historian Frederick Jackson Turner, a personal friend, who argued that the frontier had forged American nationalism and democracy. The closing of the nation's hinterland, Wilson wrote at the turn of the century, necessitated venturing into new territory: "Our interests must march forward, altruists though we are; other nations must see to it they stand off, and do not seek to stay us." Convinced that the nation must retain its gains of the Spanish-American War, he expressed thanks that America, not Germany or Russia, had acquired the Philippines, even alleging that his country represented "the light of day" and the two rivals "the night of darkness." By 1913, however, during a major crisis with Mexico, he pledged that "the United States will never again seek an additional foot of territory by conquest."⁵

Economic penetration supplemented territorial growth. Wilson championed a form of what later was called "globalization," seeking a world economy based on low tariffs, prohibition of monopolies, extensive financial investments overseas, and an Open Door—equal access to foreign commerce. As the American manufacturer insisted on "having the world as a market," Wilson noted in 1907, "the doors of nations which are closed against him must be battered down."⁶ Nevertheless, he focused far more on his nation's moral responsibility abroad than on lucrative trade. Conversely, Wilson was indifferent to military and naval strategy, hostile to power politics, and impervious to the part force played in international relations.

Just before he assumed the presidency, Wilson told an old friend: "It would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign problems, for all my preparation has been in domestic matters." Though he sought an anti-imperialistic foreign policy and attacked the "dollar diplomacy" of his predecessor, William Howard Taft, his 1913 inaugural address made no reference to overseas matters. Certainly until World War I broke out, the president's priorities lay at home. He concentrated on his domestic program, which was called the "New Freedom" and which consisted of tariff reduction, regulation of business, and reorganization of the banking system. If in December 1915 he hoped that the European war would permit the nation to engage in the "peaceful conquest of the world," he did not find exports crucial to America's prosperity.⁷

In many ways, Wilson was one of the most gifted chief executives in American history, achieving an impressive string of legislative successes. A superb party leader who staunchly believed in a strong presidency, Wilson exercised almost matchless control over Congress. He studied bills carefully, conferred continually with legislators, and was unafraid to use the patronage whip against recalcitrant Democrats. Using his superior intelligence to assimilate material quickly, he soon reached the heart of any problem. He was an excellent public speaker, though at times his eloquence could backfire, as when he spoke of being "too proud to fight" or making the world "safe for democracy."

Just as important, Wilson possessed an uncanny ability to articulate the fears and aspirations of his people. "No other public figure of the time," writes historian Robert W. Tucker, "mirrored the nation's mood; none voiced the nation's hopes and fears as did the president." Yet one must be careful. His brother-in-law Stockton Axson noted that the president lacked "faith in the supreme wisdom of the people." Rather, he believed "in the capacity of the people to be led right by those whom they elect and constitute their leaders."⁸ When the public was uncertain or deeply divided, Wilson could exercise a decisive influence.

On crucial matters of foreign policy, Wilson often made major decisions alone. In his *Constitutional Government in the United States* (1908), he discerned the presidential initiative in foreign affairs as unlimited; the chief executive possessed "virtually the power to control them absolutely." Although acknowledging that the president could not conclude a treaty without senatorial consent, he believed that the chief executive could dominate every step of the diplomatic process. In keeping with this outlook, Wilson

examined diplomatic documents, wrote dispatches on his own typewriter, and frequently acted without the State Department's knowledge. At times he kept his secretaries of state ignorant of important negotiations. The department's staff equaled the size of a second-rate power, the chief executive making meager use of its scant resources and preferring backdoor contacts to formal channels. As historian Patrick Devlin writes, "The President might almost have been running a parish with the help of his wife and a curate and a portable typewriter."⁹

Similarly, Wilson sought to insulate himself from journalists. As early as December 1914, he stopped reading press accounts of the war, seeking "to hold excitement at arm's length." Believing that opponents controlled many of the nation's newspapers and magazines, he read relatively few, relying instead on letters, telegrams, petitions, and meetings with congressional leaders. A month before, the president told his closest adviser, Edward Mandell House, that he had no qualms about lying to the press concerning foreign policy matters.¹⁰ From July 1915, as the *Lusitania* crisis unfolded, until late in 1916, he did not hold a single press conference.

In regard to foreign affairs, Wilson tended to listen to those who either agreed with him or who showed strong admiration. He confided in his two wives and trusted House to an extraordinary degree, although "the colonel" always approached him with deference. Wilson was far from facetious when he told a Princeton critic that he felt sorry for those who differed with him—"Because I know they are wrong."¹¹ From the time he was a university president, Wilson could view opposition as an attack on his very person. Admittedly, he at times exercised caution, consulting Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan and, on the eve of entering the war, his cabinet. He met with prominent peace leaders, including acknowledged Socialists, though he was out of sympathy with their immediate agendas.

For several years, Colonel House remained Wilson's sole intimate adviser. A man of considerable means, he was the son of an Englishman who had made his fortune in the Lone Star State when it still belonged to Mexico. An adviser to several Texas governors, House became an honorary colonel in the Texas militia in 1892, a reward for organizing the successful reelection campaign of James Hogg. During the 1912 presidential race, he became so close to Wilson that by election time he could have chosen any cabinet position he desired. The colonel demurred, in part because of his fragile constitution, but he spoke of seeking "a roving commission," particularly in matters of foreign policy. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Secretary of Agriculture

David F. Houston, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson, and ambassador to Britain Walter Hines Page received their appointments in large part through House's intervention.

Often operating from his apartment in Manhattan, House appeared so self-effacing that he was called "the Texas Sphinx." He exhibited a sense of confidentiality and sympathy to all he encountered, while playing the role of "operator" in a way that left Wilson untainted. Behind this diffident demeanor lay shameless flattery, a burning ambition, an overreaching ego, and a penchant for intrigue. The colonel was so skillful in this regard that Johann von Bernstorff, the German ambassador to the United States, never detected House's strong pro-Allied bias, maintaining in his memoirs that the colonel had always been genuinely neutral.¹²

If one believes House's account of the president's sentiments, the colonel served as the chief executive's "second personality," his "independent self." "His thoughts and mine are one," Wilson supposedly said, adding: "If I were in his place I would do just as he suggested." Historian Robert W. Tucker describes the confidant as a combination of chief of staff, national security adviser, and chief diplomatic agent.¹³ Given House's length of service and the importance of his missions, he may well have been the most important informal executive agent in American history. In the winter of 1915-16, when Wilson sent House to Europe, he bestowed unique diplomatic authority on the colonel.

Yet there is danger of exaggerating House's influence. By spring 1915, the colonel ceased being the president's closest intimate; he was replaced by Edith Bolling Galt, who soon became Wilson's wife. That summer Galt, who harbored misgivings about House, conveyed to Wilson a vague suspicion of the colonel's character. The president responded that House was "capable of utter self-forgetfulness and loyalty and devotion. And he is wise. He can give prudent and far-seeing counsel." Wilson did share her view that intellectually House was "not a great man." His mind was "not of the first class. He is a counselor, not a statesman."¹⁴

From the outset of the war, the president's confidant favored an Allied victory but not one that would allow Russia to gain additional territory. By the summer of 1915, House had decided that American entry into the war was inevitable, though he subsequently questioned this judgment. As time passed, the colonel increasingly played a perilous and destructive role, undermining Wilson at crucial junctures while displaying a false fealty. A son of Wilson's secretary of the navy remarked: "He was an intimate man even

when he was cutting a throat."¹⁵ In negotiating with British and French leaders in February 1916, the colonel ignored Wilson's instructions to avoid discussing concrete peace terms, seeking to transform what Wilson envisioned as a mediation bid into a commitment to enter the war. He naively assumed that European leaders were anxious for American diplomatic intervention, ignoring their explicit denials that negotiation was then possible. Not until the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, however, when House appeared to undercut Wilson's liberal agenda, did the president abruptly sever personal relations.

Upon becoming president, Wilson chose William Jennings Bryan as secretary of state. "The Great Commoner" had served as Democratic standard-bearer in three presidential elections. His influence among the party rank and file, particularly in the South and the West, was second to Wilson's alone; as a man he was even more beloved. Although not responsible for Wilson's nomination in the Baltimore convention of 1912, he played a major supporting role. The president was originally reluctant to make the appointment, having little respect for the Nebraskan's judgment, fearing possible conflict over party matters, and knowing that his choice was ignorant concerning foreign affairs. Wilson ultimately selected Bryan as a reward for party service and as a means of retaining allegiance of a man who, if alienated, could be a troublesome opponent. Besides, the chief executive anticipated few international crises that he could not personally handle.

Almost immediately, Bryan received much criticism, though it often involved matters of style, not substance, and centered on such concerns as his obesity, piety, untidy dress, and sanguine optimism. The secretary's reputation suffered from surreptitious sniping from such influential figures as Colonel House. Wilson could tolerate Bryan's banning of alcohol at diplomatic functions and frequent lectures on the Chautauqua circuit, where he could share the platform with the likes of Tyrolian yodelers. Less acceptable was his replacing lower-ranking personnel at the ministerial level, individuals who had risen through the merit system, with "deserving" but incompetent Democrats.

In some ways, Bryan proved a pleasant surprise. Intensely loyal to Wilson, who thought of him as "my elder son," the secretary shared much of the president's moralistic approach to statecraft. To Bryan international relations centered on the spreading of democracy and of divinely ordained moral principles. If the president once referred to him as "a spoilsman to the core" and "the worst judge of character I ever knew," he gave him a free hand in conducting many Latin American affairs. He permitted Bryan to negotiate some

thirty "cooling-off" treaties that pledged the signers, if confronted with a major dispute, to conduct an impartial investigation for a year before taking up arms. Bryan expressed delight when, late in August 1914, Britain signed such a treaty with the United States, not finding the slightest incongruity in the fact that it had declared war upon Germany just weeks earlier. Though neither Germany nor Austria-Hungary ever entered into such a pact, the secretary convinced himself that Germany backed the arrangement "in principle." Wilson, too, believed in the efficacy of such agreements, declaring in 1919 that had they been in effect in 1914, they might have prevented the world conflagration.¹⁶ Until the United States entered the world war, Bryan treated the agreements as capable of resolving wartime tensions. None of these treaties was ever invoked.

When, in 1914, the European conflict erupted, Bryan refused to allocate blame, much less examine strategic or economic implications of the conflict. Historian John Milton Cooper Jr. conveys his attitude: "America would act like Bryan the fundamentalist by avoiding sin and like Bryan the evangelist by preaching to the unredeemed." In November 1916, though out of office, he offered to visit Europe and personally mediate the conflict. Speaking of the Continent's leaders, he said: "They are all Christians and not pagans, and I could talk to them in a christianlike way and I am sure they would heed."¹⁷ The secretary focused exclusively on maintaining rigid neutrality and stopping the fighting. He never became adept at deciding the timing of peace proposals, developing the substance of possible negotiating terms, or grasping the complexity of diplomatic maneuver.

Within a year, Bryan showed himself temperamentally unsuited and intellectually incompetent to handle European matters. There was hardly a problem that he did not oversimplify. In his public pronouncements and his monthly magazine, the *Commoner*, he reduced tangled legal issues to matters of sheer right-versus-wrong and complicated issues of force and military credibility to simple "truths." The secretary loved to tell fellow diplomats, "Nothing is final between friends," implying that the United States' interest simply lay in preserving its neutrality. Personal sentiment substituted for viable policy.

Wilson recognized his secretary's limitations, keeping crucial matters either in his own hands or, at times, those of Colonel House. When Bryan resigned in June 1915, however, the president lost the sole powerful voice in his administration that warned against intervention. Future restraint would have to come from Wilson himself.

Bryan's successor, too, lacked the president's ear. Robert Lansing, who became counselor of the State Department in 1914, possessed impressive credentials. The son-in-law of Benjamin Harrison's secretary of state, John Watson Foster, Lansing was one of the nation's most respected authorities in international law, representing the United States in more arbitration cases than any other living American. In some ways he was the very opposite of Bryan, projecting the popular image of a diplomat: handsome, urbane, formal, and well educated, a man whom historian Cooper calls "a theater director's idea of a secretary of state." Though his mind was slow and his diplomatic notes sometimes bordered on pedantry, he could master complex legal matters and remained at ease during subtle negotiations. To Lansing any "missionary diplomacy" based on the Golden Rule and evangelical Christianity appeared totally alien. "Force," he once imparted, was the "great underlying actuality in all history."¹⁸

Unlike Wilson and Bryan, the new secretary became so ardently pro-Entente that he sought to enter the conflict long before April 1917. In his own way as simplistic as Bryan, he viewed the European war as centering on freedom versus absolutism, democracy against autocracy, conveniently ignoring the fact that one of the Allies, Russia, remained an archdespotism. Certainly he never considered how damaging total defeat of the Central Powers could be upon Europe's balance of power. Admittedly, he made legalistic demands on both Germany and Britain and did not openly voice interventionist sentiments, believing the United States could act only when its public itself desired war. In his war memoirs he confessed, "There was always in my mind the conviction that we would ultimately become an ally of Great Britain and that it would not do, therefore, to let our controversies reach a point where diplomatic correspondence gave place to action. . . . Everything was submerged in verbosity. It was done with deliberate purpose."¹⁹

Although Lansing raised morale within the department, doing so in the wake of Bryan's irresponsible use of patronage, Wilson treated him like a glorified clerk. Being marginalized made the secretary so resentful that he undermined his commander in chief. At one crucial point he jeopardized House's sensitive negotiations in Europe. Another time he imperiled Wilson's effort to initiate peace talks. On the eve of American entry into the struggle, Wilson complained to House that Lansing was "the most unsatisfactory Secretary in his Cabinet." The man "had no imagination, no constructive ability, and but little real ability of any kind."²⁰ Although the

president did not fire his insubordinate underling, he remained convinced he must be his own secretary of state.

The chief executive was hardly served better by two major ambassadors. Walter Hines Page, Wilson's emissary to Britain, was a leading editor and publisher, affiliated with *Forum*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *World's Work*, and his own firm of Doubleday, Page. He expressed strong enthusiasm for Wilson's presidency, engaging in strategy sessions as early as February 1911. Though finding the English people arrogant and their government undemocratic, Page soon became, in the words of the president, "more British than the British." Perceiving the war as a great struggle against German militarism, he wrote a friend in 1916 that America and Britain must "work together and stand together to keep the predatory nations in order." Germany, he informed a close acquaintance, would eventually attack the United States, the Panama Canal, and South America.²¹

The ambassador met with the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, almost daily and became well acquainted with other British leaders, including Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. Grey reported an incident in which Page, after delivering a communiqué of his government, said to him: "I do not agree with it; let us consider how it should be answered."²² By the end of 1915, Wilson ignored his representative's dispatches, which he deemed hysterical. By March 1917 the president considered removing Page, but he did not act. Like many other presidents, he tolerated unreliable subordinates, possibly fearing the political consequences of any firing.

If anything, James Watson Gerard, Wilson's ambassador to Germany, proved even more unsatisfactory: in the words of historian Arthur S. Link, "an authentic international catastrophe."²³ A wealthy New York attorney affiliated with the Tammany Hall machine, Gerard had chaired the Democratic National Campaign Committee and was serving as an elected justice of his state's supreme court. Totally unprepared for a position demanding the utmost judgment and tact, Gerard possessed a fierce temper, was given to snap judgments, and made no secret of his hostility toward a regime he branded as "Kaiserdom." Both American and German officials soon ignored his advice. Instead they relied upon Joseph C. Grew, the urbane embassy secretary and at times chargé d'affaires, who in July 1916 assumed the newly adopted rank of counselor.

Heading the War Department was Lindley M. Garrison, a leading New Jersey corporation lawyer and former vice chancellor of his state. Wilson had originally considered federal regulator Franklin K. Lane and Pennsylvania

politician A. Mitchell Palmer for the post. He soon believed that Lane was needed at the Interior Department, and Palmer belonged to the Society of Friends, or Quakers, a denomination that officially espoused pacifism. Garrison, whom Wilson aide Joseph Tumulty suggested, at first balked, claiming that he knew little of military matters and lacked a political temperament. Nonetheless, despite his novice status, Garrison was a most able administrator, winning the confidence of the military brass. But his overbearing personality bode ill for long-term relations with a president who never really knew him personally.

Josephus Daniels, Wilson's secretary of the navy, began his tenure as ignorant of ships as Garrison was of armies, though as editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, he had endorsed the robust naval policy of President Taft. During the 1912 presidential campaign, Daniels directed Democratic publicity. He was first considered for postmaster general, but Colonel House, so often responsible for filling major positions, thought that someone with greater influence in Congress was needed for the postal slot. Daniels experienced frequent ridicule for his rustic demeanor, his own assistant secretary, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at best patronizing him. Yet he proved himself a genuine reformer, stressing naval education, requiring sea duty for promotion, and successfully fending off the armor-plate lobby. Aside from Lincoln's secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles, no one served as long in this post. Under his administration the U.S. Navy underwent unprecedented expansion.

A totally different framework for decision making existed in Imperial Germany. At the apex of the Reich stood Wilhelm II, who headed his nation's civil administration and was not limited by parliamentary restrictions. The Kaiser possessed a mercurial and indolent personality, approaching all questions, as one scholar noted, with "an open mouth."²⁴ Upon him lay the responsibility of harmonizing military and political advisers so as to create a united national policy. As long as the power of both sets of counselors remained equal, he could exercise some influence. In wartime the task increasingly exceeded his ability. Until January 1917 Wilhelm possessed sufficient power to back his civilian leaders, who, challenging major elements among the military, opposed the use of U-boats against American shipping.

Under the Kaiser stood the chancellor, who served at the emperor's pleasure. From 1909 to July 1917, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg held the office. Bethmann possessed a melancholy self-doubt akin to Hamlet's; his personal warmth and Stoic ethos failed to compensate for political ineptitude, diplomatic inexperience, and mediocre intelligence. He enjoyed sup-

port from his foreign secretary, Gottlieb von Jagow, who, in November 1916, was replaced by Arthur Zimmermann, a diplomat who manifested more energy but far less judgment. Zimmermann, a hawkish policymaker, supported submarine warfare upon the Atlantic. He suffered from poor health and lacked parliamentary skills.

At first glance, Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff, ambassador to the United States, seemed most suitable for the position; his father had been foreign minister of Prussia and he himself had served in such far-flung posts as Constantinople, Belgrade, St. Petersburg, London, and Cairo. Intelligent, elegant, and charming and married to an American, the suave Bernstorff appeared the quintessential diplomat and, until war erupted in Europe, was quite popular in the United States. Believing in a compromise settlement between the Allies and the Central Powers, at times he exceeded his instructions in the hopes of maintaining peace with America. Yet the count's stiff bearing disturbed Wilson, making personal contact difficult.

Germany possessed a parliament, but its powers were extremely limited. The lower house, the Reichstag, by no means possessed the prerogatives held by the American Congress, the British House of Commons, or the French Chamber of Deputies. It did exercise one crucial function, for it had the sole authority to vote military allocations.

In Germany the military played a far more crucial role than in the United States. The Kaiser bore the title of supreme war lord and legally commanded the armed forces, but once war began, the general staff increasingly wielded decisive power. In mid-1916 Wilhelm complained that he had become a mere shadow, relegated to the sidelines. When Germany entered the war, its first chief of staff was General Helmuth von Moltke ("the younger"), but after his defeat in September 1914 at the battle of the Marne, Wilhelm replaced him with Erich von Falkenhayn. Falkenhayn suffered major failure in Verdun and eastern Europe, thereby giving way late in August 1916 to Paul von Hindenburg. By then the real authority lay in the hands of quartermaster general Erich Ludendorff. Army leaders at first exercised caution, but by the fall of 1916 they endorsed massive use of U-boats, a policy that ultimately drew the United States into the conflict.

Certain admirals exercised strong influence. Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, state secretary of the navy office, began the conflict as his nation's foremost naval leader. By February 1915 he ardently supported U-boat warfare. His faulty analysis of British strategy alienated Wilhelm, who forced his resignation in March 1916. Tirpitz's replacement, Eduard von Capelle,

long remained opposed to unrestricted submarine use but finally bowed to the wishes of his fellow officers. Georg Alexander von Müller, chief of the imperial naval cabinet, possessed great influence; he often voiced caution in confronting the United States. Henning von Holtzendorff, chosen to head the Admiralty staff in the spring of 1915, initially wavered on U-boat use but in December 1916 presented convincing arguments in support of this policy.

If Germany had one bitter foe among the Americans, it was Theodore Roosevelt. Among critics of Wilson's diplomacy, none was as prominent. The former president endorsed an "intimate association" with the British Empire and adhered to the notion that the English-speaking peoples were superior to all others. Recently defeated for the presidency on the Progressive or Bull Moose ticket, TR had almost abandoned domestic reform by the end of 1914 in order to concentrate on foreign policy. In late August, though apprehensive concerning Japan and Russia, he privately voiced the fear that a victorious Germany would soon engage the United States. Within a year Roosevelt condemned Germany's invasion of Belgium, endorsed universal military training, and called for a league of nations that would "put force back of righteousness." Given such views, as well as his desire to recover his party's fortunes, he sharply criticized the Wilson administration. No major American leader expressed himself with such venom. In August 1915 he wrote to his son Kermit that the president was an "abject coward."²⁵ In public he was almost equally abusive. In the 1914 congressional elections, the Roosevelt Progressives were decimated, retaining only one Senate seat, but the volatile ex-president still enjoyed considerable popularity among Americans.

TR's views on Europe lacked coherence. Though he frequently indicted Germany, praised the Allies, and advocated policies that would invariably lead to war, he never publicly endorsed outright intervention. Indeed, he asserted that a show of force would keep America at peace. "The worst policy for the United States," he wrote soon after war began, "is to combine the unbridled tongue with the unsteady hand." A woefully weak America could have perceived wisdom in this view, but, as the *Nation* magazine observed: "he pleads his cause with such heat and so little moderation that his words fail to be impressive." The *New York Times* added: "He warns, he denounces, he glares, he shrieks."²⁶ Nevertheless, he drew such popular support that had he lived in 1920, he might well have been the Republican presidential candidate.

Roosevelt gained strong support from senators Elihu Root (R-N.Y.) and Henry Cabot Lodge (R-Mass.) as well as from Congressman August

tus P. Gardner (R-Mass.). Root had been secretary of war under presidents McKinley and Roosevelt, then became TR's secretary of state. Far more of a standpatter on domestic policy than TR, in 1912 Root supported the reelection of President William Howard Taft, thereby "betraying" his close friend Roosevelt. Nevertheless, when a German U-boat sank the British liner *Lusitania* in May 1915, Root privately maintained that the United States should enter the conflict. In February 1916 he publicly accused Wilson of "threatening words without deeds."²⁷

Lodge, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, was even more strident. Just slightly less conservative than Root on domestic matters, he supported Wilson on certain specific measures, such as permitting arms traffic with the belligerents and defending the right of Americans to travel on their passenger ships. Like Roosevelt, Lodge considered Wilson far too timid, even unpatriotic, and also like TR, he harbored a personal animosity, finding the president downright dishonest. Lodge wrote TR in 1915: "I never expected to hate anyone in politics with the hatred I feel towards Wilson."²⁸ His son-in-law, the highly powerful and visible "Gussie" Gardner, was a Spanish-American War veteran who spearheaded the preparedness movement in the House of Representatives.

Wilson's foreign policy triggered strong opposition from congressional leaders of his own party and from Bryan's followers in particular. Senator William J. Stone of Missouri, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, fought the president on such matters as arming American merchant ships in 1917; he voted against war with Germany. The committee's second-ranking Democratic member, Gilbert M. Hitchcock of Nebraska, shared many of Stone's sentiments, though, in times of crisis, he upheld the president out of loyalty. In the House, Claude Kitchin of North Carolina, majority leader and chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, took the lead in fighting military appropriations. Like Stone, in April 1917 he opposed the president's war message.

Wilson also received sharp criticism from certain midwestern Republicans, who believed him far too pro-British. Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, who stood foremost in their ranks. Using the monthly *La Follette's Magazine* as his forum, the Wisconsin Republican espied Wall Street greed behind most U.S. actions overseas, whether the matter was intervention in Latin America or loans to the Allies. Whereas Bryan stressed "cooling-off" treaties to preserve American neutrality, La Follette emphasized an advisory war refer-

endum by which the American public could directly express its views on entering the conflict.

Debate in the Congress spilled over to the world of journalism. Certain weeklies offered particularly articulate perspectives. Oswald Garrison Villard's *Nation*, an affiliate of the *New York Evening Post*, manifested a Wilsonian perspective. Publisher Villard usually limited his own comments to matters concerning preparedness and the activities of German Americans; Rollo Ogden, a former Presbyterian minister, wrote most of the editorials. *The Outlook*, edited by Congregationalist clergyman Lyman Abbott, espoused Theodore Roosevelt's brand of interventionism, although TR had resigned as its contributing editor in July 1914. The *New Republic* began as a voice for Bull Moose progressivism and a mild version of Rooseveltian foreign policy. Its editors, Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, and Walter Lippmann, supported the Allies, Lippmann being the most intense advocate. By March 1916, finding TR lacking in positive alternatives to Wilsonian diplomacy, it veered toward the president. Early in 1917 Croly and Lippmann became close to Colonel House, a circumstance that confirmed the journal's increasing reputation as the semiofficial Wilsonian organ.

The newspaper chain of William Randolph Hearst, which reached 4 million readers daily, stood in a class by itself. Hearst was unsuccessful in frequent bids to secure public office, including the presidency, but nonetheless exercised greater influence over the public than many members of Congress. His holdings included a movie studio, a newsreel firm, and a company supplying syndicated features. His wire agency, International News Service, served several hundred newspapers. By 1914 the flamboyant publisher owned newspapers in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston, though he took particular pride in his *New York American*, which boasted the highest circulation in the nation and which drew upon eighty correspondents in covering the war. Though denounced as a mouthpiece for Imperial Germany, the *American* gave far more space to pro-Entente articles than to those inclined to the Central Powers; it featured such prominent British contributors as H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and George Bernard Shaw. Hearst was a progressive in domestic politics but trumpeted a strident foreign policy, pressing for major rearmament, warning against a "predatory" Japan, and seeking the annexation of Mexico. Mutual animosity marked the relationship between Hearst and Wilson, reflecting in part the publisher's desire for a far more rigid neutrality in the European war than the president envisioned.

No community backed Hearst's European policy more than the German Americans. In 1914 this group comprised a markedly distinct element in American society, preserving its own identity and asserting itself with vigor whenever its ancestral land came under attack. According to the 1910 census, well over 8 million people of the nation's nearly 92 million either had been born in Germany or had a German parent. In 1916 the National German-American Alliance (the *Nationalbund*), a federation of various societies, boasted 3 million members, though it was largely a paper organization consisting primarily of people who belonged to local societies or clubs. Such cities as New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis possessed German American neighborhoods distinct enough, in some cases, to be nicknamed *Kleines Deutschland*. About five hundred German-language newspapers existed, possessing a total circulation of 1.75 million. One daily, Herman Ridder's *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, which received payments from Berlin, attracted seventy thousand readers.

Such journals were often more extreme than rank-and-file German Americans. Take, for example, the weekly English-language magazine the *Fatherland*, launched within two weeks after war began. Costing a mere nickel, it became the Reich's most outspoken propaganda vehicle in America. Within a month circulation peaked at over one hundred thousand. The poet George Sylvester Viereck, who edited the journal, combined flamboyance and bombast to such a degree that he often hindered his cause more than helped it. In the maiden issue of the journal, he contributed a poem, "Wilhelm II, Prince of Peace." The cover of the 1915 Christmas issue portrayed a tree bedecked with ornaments depicting the locale of German victories; at its base, gifts included a U-boat and a Big Bertha cannon.²⁹ Beginning in June 1915, Viereck received subsidies from the German government.

In addition, certain highly respected scholars, who in many cases had received their graduate training in Germany, backed the Central Powers. Several were of British stock. Some Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities articulated the German case, as did various organizations and legislators representing German American constituencies. On January 30, 1915, the National German-American League was formed in Washington, D.C. It passed a series of resolutions, introduced by Dr. C.J. Hexamer, president of the *Nationalbund*. The group called for the construction of an American transatlantic cable because the British had cut German cables and thereby controlled dispatches from Europe. It also demanded an arms embargo, an American merchant marine, and, taking a slap at the British blockade, "a free

and open sea for the commerce of the United States and unrestricted traffic in non-contraband goods as defined by international law." It supported politicians who placed "American interests above those of any other country."³⁰

Be the matter the conduct of German troops in Belgium or the necessity of unrestricted submarine warfare, German Americans soon became an irritant to the Wilson administration, not to mention the bane of those Americans who were sufficiently pro-British to deem such defenders of the Reich as Viereck abject traitors. Hexamer did little to help matters, declaring: "We have never yet had such a miserable, weak-kneed government as now."³¹ At times crude, at times subtle, pro-German propaganda was nevertheless so extensive that, in the judgment of historians Arthur S. Link and David Wayne Hirst, it could well have preserved peace between the two countries.³²

Various Irish American spokesmen, out to avenge themselves against British rule of the Emerald Isle, allied themselves with their German counterparts. Numbering 4.5 million in 1914, the Irish were concentrated in northeastern and midwestern cities, which could well have given them more political influence than their German confederates, who were often located on midwestern prairies. Pro-Irish elements possessed a spirited English-language press, represented by such newspapers as the *Gaelic American* and the *Irish World*. They espoused the cause of Irish nationalism and thereby attracted broad American sympathy, giving them an audience that narrowly pro-German partisans could not match. Organizations included Clan-na-gael (party of the Irish), headed by Tammany judge Daniel Cohalan, and the anti-British American Truth Society, led by New York lawyer Jeremiah O'Leary. If a mere minority of Irish Americans supported the Central Powers, they expressed their sentiments vehemently. "Liberty for Ireland can only be won through the triumphs of Germany-Austria," wrote James K. McGuire, a former mayor of Syracuse, who served as a liaison between German partisans and the Irish press. At one rally in New York City, the strains of "Die Wacht am Rhein" mingled with "The Wearing of the Green."³³

Both German and Irish Americans confronted an overwhelming fact: many Americans sympathized, in varying degrees to be sure, with Britain and France. Within this body, the greater numbers possessed a subtle outlook, discerning the causes of the war as complex and finding flaws on both sides. A minority perceived the conflict as one of good versus evil, right versus wrong, democracy and liberalism confronting an overwhelming autocracy, though one must distinguish between abstract sympathy and the desire to intervene directly. Realizing that much American sentiment was at least

tacitly pro-Entente, British ambassador Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice counseled his government to avoid overt propagandizing.³⁴ Despite this warning, Sir Gilbert Parker, who directed Britain's American Ministry of Information, blanketed the nation with news releases, pamphlets, and speeches.

When, in early August 1914, war broke out in Europe, Wilson immediately realized that his decisions could vitally affect the international order. He discovered that his advisers served him poorly, either being inadequate to the task or offering counsel that was downright destructive. The Congress and the press presented a cacophony of voices, at times advancing positions that challenged the foundations of his policies. An examination of the president's leadership, how he interacted with all the players, and the judgment of historians is the subject of this book.

The Earliest Debates August 1914—March 1915

ON THE AFTERNOON OF August 6, 1914, a dying woman whispered into the ear of her physician: "Promise me that you will take good care of my husband." As a downstairs clock chimed five times, her spouse asked the doctor, "Is it over?" Receiving a nod, he walked to a window and cried out: "Oh, my God, what am I to do?" Then, composing himself, he vowed: "I must not give way." Nonetheless, the man remained sitting in his chair, maintaining an isolated vigil. President Woodrow Wilson had just lost his wife Ellen to Bright's Disease, a fatal kidney ailment. He soon wrote an intimate friend: "Every night finds me exhausted,—dead in heart and body." He blamed his own ambition for her death. His brother-in-law called him "the loneliest man in the world."¹

It took months for the excruciating grief to pass off. As late as November, the president told his most intimate friend, Colonel House, that he hoped someone would kill him. Wilson confessed that he "was not fit to be President because he did not think straight any longer, and had no heart in what he was doing."² The burden of work sustained him, for the chief executive found himself suddenly facing challenges that no world leader could envy.

At the very time that Wilson's inner world disintegrated, the outer one experienced calamity. Just five days before Ellen died, war in Europe erupted on an unprecedented scale. To most Americans, the outbreak of the conflict appeared as something far off, remote, even unreal. The flurry of diplomatic dispatches, the massing of huge armies, the orders of mobilization—all seemed a kind of gruesome illusion. After the assassination of the Hapsburg heir, the archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary threatened Serbia, a nation having the protection of Russia.