

Meanwhile, in an effort to prevent Allied supplies stockpiled in Russia from falling into German hands and to encourage the counter-revolutionary Russian "Whites" in their civil war against the "Reds," fourteen Allied nations sent troops into eastern Russia. On August 2, 1918, some 8,000 Americans joined the expedition and remained on Russian soil until April 1920. But the Allied intervention in Russia was a colossal failure. The Bolsheviks were able to consolidate their power and defeat the Whites. Lenin and the Soviets never forgave the West for attempting to thwart their revolution.

**THE FOURTEEN POINTS** As the conflict in Europe was ending, neither the Allies nor the Central Powers, despite Wilson's prodding, had stated openly what they hoped to gain from the bloodletting. Wilson insisted that the Americans had no selfish war aims. "We desire no conquest, no dominion," he stressed in his war message. Unfortunately for his idealistic purpose, the Bolsheviks later published copies of secret treaties in which the British and French had promised territorial gains in order to win Italy, Romania, and Greece to their side. When an Interallied Conference in Paris late in 1917 failed to agree on a statement of aims, Wilson formulated his own.

With advice from a panel of experts, Wilson drew up a peace plan that would be labeled the Fourteen Points. These he presented to a joint session of Congress on January 8, 1918, "as the only possible program" for peace. The first five points called for open diplomacy; freedom of the seas; removal of trade barriers, armaments reduction, and an impartial adjustment of colonial claims based upon the interests of the populations involved. Most of the remaining points called upon the Central Powers to evacuate occupied lands and allow political self-determination for various nationalities, a crucial principle for Wilson. Point 14, the capstone in Wilson's thinking, called for the formation of a "league" of nations to protect global peace. When the Fourteen Points were made public, African American leaders asked the president to add a fifteenth point: an end to racial discrimination. Wilson did not respond.

Wilson sincerely believed in the Fourteen Points, but they also served important political purposes. One of their aims was to keep Russia in the war by stating a more progressive purpose—a vain hope, as it turned out. Another was to reassure the citizens of the Allied Powers that they were involved in a noble cause. A third was to drive a wedge between the governments of the Central Powers and their people by offering a reasonable peace. But the chaos into which Central Europe descended in 1918 as Germany and Austria-Hungary verged on starvation and experienced socialist uprisings took matters out of Wilson's hands.

**THE END OF THE WAR** On October 3 a new German chancellor made the overtures for peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points. The Allies accepted the Fourteen Points as a basis of a peace treaty but with two significant reservations: the right to discuss freedom of the seas further and the demand for reparations (financial compensation to the victors) for war damages.

Meanwhile, German morale plummeted, culminating in a naval mutiny. Germany's allies, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary, dropped out of the war during the early fall of 1918. On November 9 the kaiser, head of the German Empire, abdicated, and a German republic was proclaimed. Two days later, on November 11, 1918, an armistice was signed, ceasing the hostilities. Under the armistice the Germans agreed to evacuate occupied territories, pull their troops back behind the Rhine River, and surrender their navy, railroad equipment, and other material. The Germans were assured that Wilson's Fourteen Points would be the basis of the peace conference.

During its nineteen months of participation in the war, the United States saw 126,000 of its servicemen killed. Germany's war dead totaled over 2 million, including civilians; France lost nearly 1.4 million combatants, the United Kingdom lost 703,000 soldiers, and Russia lost 1.7 million. The new Europe emerging from the conflagration would be much different: more violent, more polarized, more cynical, less sure of itself, and less capable of decisive action. The United States, for good or ill, would be sucked into the vacuum of power created by the destructiveness of the Great War.

## THE FIGHT FOR PEACE

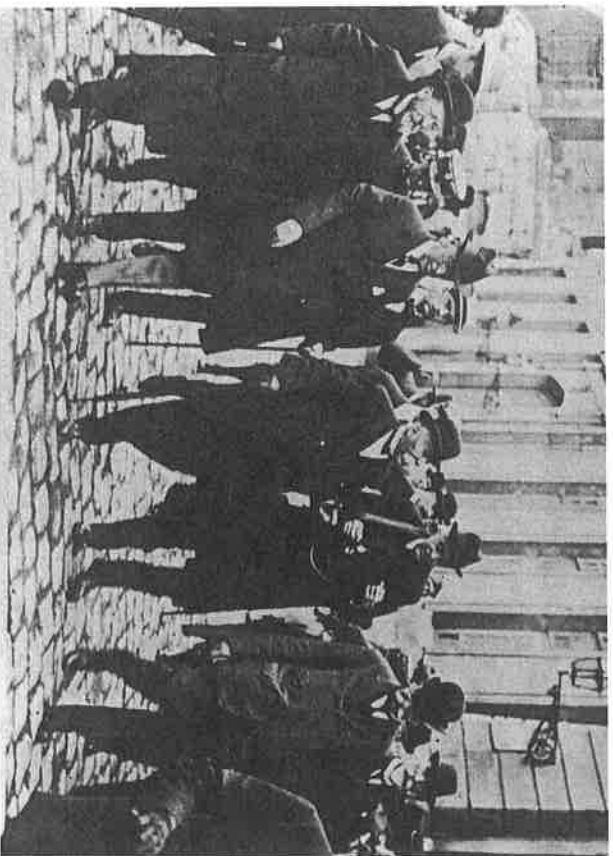
**DOMESTIC UNREST** Woodrow Wilson made a fateful decision to attend the Paris Peace Conference, which convened on January 18, 1919, and would last almost six months. No U.S. president had ever left the country while in office, and doing so dramatized all the more Wilson's messianic vision and his goal of a lasting peace. From one viewpoint it was a shrewd move, for his prestige and determination made a difference at the Paris peace talks. But during his prolonged trip abroad, he lost touch with political developments at home, where his political coalition was already unraveling under the pressures of wartime discontent. Western farmers complained about the government's control of wheat prices while eastern business leaders chafed at federal revenue policies designed, according to the *New York Sun*, "to pay for the war out of taxes raised north of the Mason and Dixon Line." Organized labor, despite real gains during the war, grouched about inflation and the problems of reconversion to a peacetime economy.

In the midterm elections of 1918, Wilson defied his advisers and urged voters to elect a Democratic Congress to support his foreign policies. Republicans, who for the most part had supported Wilson's war measures, took affront. So, too, did many voters. In elections held a week before the armistice, the Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress. With an opposition majority in the new Congress, Wilson further weakened his standing by failing to appoint a prominent Republican to the American delegation headed for Paris and the treaty negotiations. Former President Taft suggested that Wilson's real intention in going to Paris was "to hog the whole show."

When Wilson reached Paris in December 1918, enthusiastic demonstrations greeted him. At the conference table, however, he had to deal with some tough-minded statesmen who did not share his utopian zeal. The Paris Peace Conference lasted from January to June 1919. It included delegates from all countries that had declared war or broken diplomatic relations with Germany. But it was dominated by the Big Four: the prime ministers of Britain, France, and Italy and the president of the United States. The British prime minister David Lloyd George was a gifted politician fresh from electoral

#### The Paris Peace Conference

Woodrow Wilson (second from left) with Georges Clemenceau of France (center) and Arthur Balfour of Great Britain (second from right) during the Paris Peace Conference.



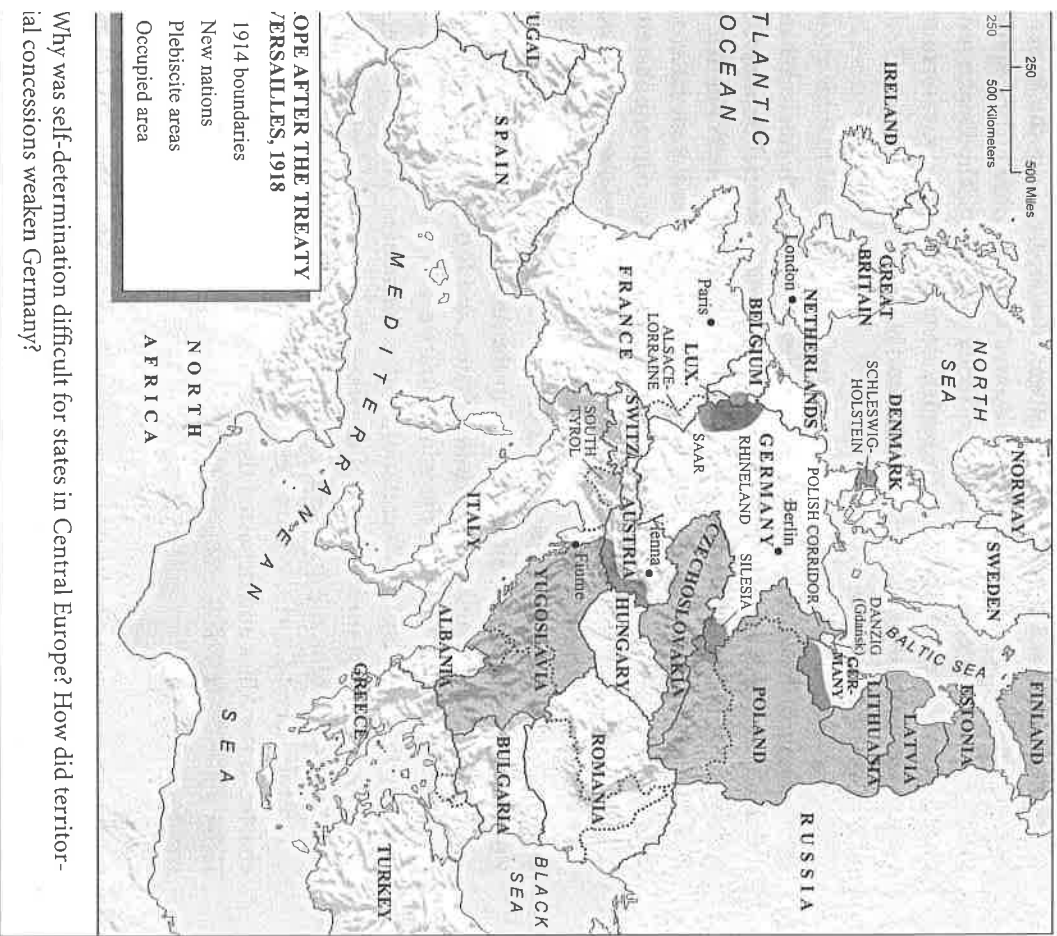
victory following a campaign whose slogan declared, "Hang the kaiser." Italy's prime minister, Vittorio Orlando, was there to pick up the spoils promised his country in the secret 1915 Treaty of London. The French premier Georges Clemenceau, a stern realist, demanded severe measures to weaken Germany and guarantee French security.

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS Woodrow Wilson insisted that his cherished League of Nations come first at the conference and in the treaty. Whatever compromises he might have to make regarding territorial boundaries and financial claims, whatever mistakes might result, Wilson believed that a league of nations committed to collective security would maintain international stability. Wilson presided over the commission to draft a league charter. Article X of the charter, which he called "the heart of the League," pledged member nations to consult on military and economic sanctions against aggressors. The use of armed force would be a last resort. The League structure would allow each member an equal voice in the Assembly; the Big Five (Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States) and four rotating members would make up the Council; the administrative staff, in Geneva, Switzerland, would make up the Secretariat; and a Permanent Court of International Justice (set up in 1921 and usually called the World Court) could "hear and determine any dispute of an international character."

On February 14, 1919, Wilson delivered the finished draft of the League charter to the Allies and departed the next day for a visit home. Already he faced opposition. The Republican Henry Cabot Lodge, the powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, claimed that the League's covenant was unacceptable. His statement of March 4 bore the signatures of thirty-nine Republican senators or senators-elect, more than enough to block ratification.

TERRITORY AND REPARATIONS Back in Paris in the spring of 1919, Wilson grudgingly acceded to French demands for territorial concessions and reparations payments by Germany. The Allied statesmen also agreed that the Allies would occupy a demilitarized German Rhineland for fifteen years and that the League of Nations would administer Germany's coal-rich Saar Basin. France could use the Saar mines for fifteen years, after which the region's voters would determine whether to join Germany or France.

In other territorial matters, Wilson had to compromise his unrealistic principle of national self-determination. As a result of the Great War, four long-standing multinational empires had disintegrated: the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman (Turkish). Hundreds of millions of people



Why was self-determination difficult for states in Central Europe? How did territorial concessions weaken Germany?

had to be reorganized into new nations. There was in fact no way to make Europe's boundaries correspond to its tangled ethnic groupings because mixed populations were scattered throughout Central Europe. In some areas, moreover, national self-determination yielded to other interests, such as trade and defense. The result was a reorganized map of Central Europe in which portions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire became independent, most notably Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and portions were attached to Poland, Romania, and Italy. Ethnic and nationalist tensions continued and would contribute to the crisis that culminated in World War II.

The discussion of reparations was among the longest and most bitter at the conference. Despite a pre-armistice agreement that Germany would be liable only for civilian damages, Clemenceau and Lloyd George proposed that Germany pay reparations for the entire cost of the war. On this point, Wilson made perhaps his most fateful concessions. He agreed to a clause in the treaty in which Germany accepted responsibility for starting the war and thus for its entire financial cost. The "war guilt" clause offended Germans and provided a source of persistent bitterness upon which Adolf Hitler would later capitalize.

On May 7, 1919, the victorious powers presented the treaty to the German delegates, who returned three weeks later with 443 pages of criticism. A few small changes were made, but when the Germans still refused to sign, the French prepared to move their army across the Rhine River. Finally, on June 28, 1919, the Germans gave up and signed the treaty at Versailles.

**WILSON'S LOSS AT HOME** On July 8, 1919, Woodrow Wilson returned home with the Versailles Treaty amid a great clamor of popular support. A third of the state legislatures had endorsed the League of Nations, as had thirty-three of the nation's forty-eight governors. Wilson called upon the Senate to accept the "great duty" of ratifying the treaty. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, however, doubted that the Paris negotiators could make "mankind suddenly virtuous by a statute or a written constitution." Lodge relished a fight. He knew the undercurrents already stirring up opposition to the treaty: the resentment felt by German, Italian, and Irish groups, the disappointment of many progressives with Wilson's compromises on reparations and boundaries, the distractions of demobilization and resulting domestic problems, and the revival of isolationism.

Others agreed. In the Senate a group of "irreconcilables," fourteen Republicans and two Democrats, opposed U.S. participation in the League on any terms. They



"The League of Nations Argument in a Nutshell"  
 Jay N. "Ding" Darling's summation of the League controversy.

were mainly western and midwestern progressives who feared that new foreign commitments would threaten domestic programs and reforms. The irreconcilables would be useful to Lodge's purpose, but he belonged to a larger group, "reservationists," who insisted upon limiting U.S. involvement in the League. Wilson said that he had already amended the covenant to these ends, pointing out that with a veto in the League Council, the United States could not be obligated by the League to do anything against its will.

Lodge, who set more store by the old balance of power than by Wilson's idea of collective security, offered a set of amendments—his reservations. Wilson responded by agreeing to interpretive reservations but to nothing that would reopen the negotiations with Germany and the Allies. He especially opposed the amendments weakening Article X of the League of Nations covenant, which provided for collective action by the signatory governments against aggression.

By September 1919, with momentum for the treaty slackening, Wilson decided to go directly to the people. Against the advice of doctors and friends, he set forth on a grueling railroad tour through the Midwest to the West Coast, pounding out speeches on his typewriter between stops. In all he traveled 8,000 miles in twenty-two days, giving thirty-two major addresses, which included dire warnings of the consequences the nation and the world would face if the treaty were not approved.

For a while, Wilson seemed to be regaining the initiative, but on October 2, 1919, he suffered a severe stroke that left him paralyzed on his left side and an invalid for the rest of his life. For seventeen months his protective wife, Edith, kept him isolated from all but the most essential business. The illness intensified Wilson's stubbornness. He might have done better to have secured the best compromise possible, but he refused to yield and continued to be needlessly confrontational. As he scoffed to an aide, "Let Lodge compromise."

Lodge resolved to amend the treaty before it was ratified. Between November 7 and 19, the Senate adopted fourteen of Lodge's reservations to the Versailles Treaty, most having to do with the League of Nations. Wilson refused to make any compromises or concessions. As a result, his supporters found themselves thrown into an unlikely combination with the irreconcilables, who opposed the treaty under any circumstances. The Senate vote on the treaty with Lodge's reservations was 39 for and 55 against. On the question of taking the original treaty without reservations, irreconcilables and reservationists combined to defeat ratification again, with 38 for and 53 against.

In the face of strong public criticism, however, the Senate voted to reconsider. On March 19, 1920, twenty-one intransigent Democrats deserted Wilson and joined the reservationists, but the treaty once again fell short of

the required two-thirds majority. The real winners were the smallest of the three groups in the Senate, neither the Wilsonians nor the reservationists but the irreconcilables.

When Congress declared the war at an end by a joint congressional resolution on May 20, 1920, Wilson vetoed the action; it was not until after he left office that a joint congressional resolution officially ended the state of war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, on July 2, 1921. Peace treaties with Germany, Austria, and Hungary were ratified on October 18, 1921, but by then Warren Gamaliel Harding was president of the United States.

### LURCHING FROM WAR TO PEACE

The Versailles Treaty, for all the time it spent in the Senate before being defeated, was but one issue clamoring for public attention in the turbulent period after the war. The year 1919 began with ecstatic victory parades that soon gave way to widespread labor unrest, race riots, domestic terror, and government tyranny. Demobilization of the armed forces and the government's war effort proceeded in haphazard fashion. The War Industries Board closed shop on January 1, 1919, and the sudden cancellation of war-related contracts left workers and business leaders to cope with reconversion to a peacetime economy on their own. Wilson's leadership was missing. He had been preoccupied by the war and the League, and once bedridden by his illness, he became grim and peevish. His rudderless administration floundered through rough waters during its last two years.

**THE SPANISH FLU** Amid the initial confusion of postwar life, many Americans confronted a virulent menace that produced far more casualties than the war itself. It became known as the Spanish flu, and its contagion spread around the globe. Erupting in the spring of 1918 and lasting a year, the pandemic killed more than 22 million people worldwide, twice as many as died in World War I. In the United States alone it accounted for over 675,000 deaths, nearly seven times the number of combat deaths in France.

American servicemen returning from France brought the flu with them, and it raced through the congested army camps and naval bases. By September 1918 the epidemic had spread to the civilian population. In that month 10,000 Americans died from the disease. Municipal health officers fined people for spitting on the sidewalks or sneezing without a handkerchief. Millions of people wore surgical masks to work. Still the death toll rose. From September 1918 to June 1919, a quarter of the population contracted the illness.