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WOODROW WILSON'S COLONIAL EMISSARY: EDWARD M. HOUSE AND THE
ORIGINS OF THE MANDATE SYSTEM, 1917-1919

by

Scot David Bruce

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Under the Supervision of Professor Lloyd E. Ambrosius

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2013

WOODROW WILSON'S COLONIAL EMISSARY: EDWARD M. HOUSE AND THE
ORIGINS OF THE MANDATE SYSTEM, 1917-1919

Scot D. Bruce, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Advisor: Lloyd E. Ambrosius

After World War I, reallocating the former German and Turkish colonies proved to be one of the more challenging feats of the peace process. After months of negotiation in 1919, first in Paris, then in London, the various national leaders agreed to create the mandate system, which proved to be a compromise between outright colonial expansion and genuine independence, whereby the former German and Turkish colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were mandated to the conquering nations in trust until the indigenous peoples were deemed ready to administer their own governments and societies. For decades, the mandate system was viewed by scholars as a genuine departure from the traditional forms of European colonialism so prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This study departs from previous interpretations while accounting for the key contributions from past scholars,

providing both new direction and new conclusions. The analysis is largely philosophical in nature, tracing the primary American role in developing the mandates, while examining the developmental ideas behind Wilsonian principles such as national self-determination. Moreover, though Wilson himself is crucial to the study, the historical lens is primarily Edward M. House, who was Wilson's most trusted advisor, with a particular aptitude in the realm of foreign affairs. House was instrumental in forming the mandate system from 1917 through 1919.

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father, David S. Bruce (1939 - 2000)
whose exemplary role modeling as husband, father, and
scholar inspired his youngest son to greater pursuits

Soli deo gloria

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In researching and writing this dissertation, I have incurred many intellectual and personal debts. First, my knowledge of history has been influenced by a number of scholars, past and present. I am grateful for the perceptive critiques offered by Reinhold Niebuhr, George Kennan, and Norman Graebner. Each contributed to my understanding of American foreign relations. I am also thankful for two contemporary scholars, Mark R. Amstutz and Andrew J. Bacevich, both of whom continue to offer insightful analyses on foreign affairs. However, I owe my greatest intellectual debt to Lloyd E. Ambrosius, my advisor and mentor at the University of Nebraska. More than anyone, his articulation of the realist interpretation of history has profoundly shaped my approach to the field.

Second, I am grateful to my faculty colleagues at Corban University for their ongoing dedication in the realm of higher education. Many have offered their prayerful support in recent months and years. I am especially thankful, however, for the following members of the Humanities and Social Sciences division: Bob Mathisen, John Scott, Jim Hills, and John Wilson. I consider it a great blessing to work alongside each of these fine colleagues.

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Fourth, my wife's parents, Tom and Peggy Vlack, have also been a highly-valued support network, offering their unique brand of unconditional love and encouragement along the way. It seems likely that few genuinely respect and enjoy their parents-in-law as much as I do. They are both rare and virtuous examples of the power of affirmation.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Jennifer, and my son, Connor, for their unequivocal support while I was researching and writing this study. Projects of this nature can be equally challenging for those closest to us, who are temporarily deprived of the time and attention they truly deserve. Words cannot adequately express my gratitude for such an extraordinary family.

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INTRODUCTION

President Woodrow Wilson announced his vision of world peace before Congress on January 8, 1918. In his famous Fourteen Points address, Wilson outlined a non-punitive postwar peace settlement devoted to free trade, national self-determination, ending colonialism, and of course a "general association of nations" to promote "political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."¹ At war's end, Wilson embarked on his crusade for a better future, confident that Americans and their European Allies could fashion a meaningful, long-lasting peace. Yet as the Paris Peace Conference began in January 1919, the question of whether or not Wilson's progressive philosophy and optimistic rhetoric could withstand the staunch realities of peacemaking remained unclear. As many in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East surveyed the chaotic postwar landscape, they were not easily convinced by notions of peace, harmony, and progress. Certainly this was true of Europe's victorious political leaders, who were not eager to embrace Wilson's "enlightened" geopolitics. Instead, they sought vengeance and compensation for the

¹ Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* 68 Vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1994), 45: 529. Hereafter cited as *PWW*.

war. Hence, ultimately, securing his vision of progress would prove to be far more complicated than Wilson anticipated.

Reallocating the former colonies of the German and Ottoman empires was one of the more challenging feats of the peace process because the European victors—namely Great Britain, France, and Italy—and Japan sought to openly expand their colonial empires in 1919. Securing a new vision for the colonial world, a progressive American vision, was one of the primary objectives of Wilson's peace initiatives. He was aided in this process by several individuals, Secretary of State Robert Lansing and noted historian George Louis Beer among them. However, no one was more important than the president's close friend and advisor, Colonel Edward M. House, who was instrumental in forming and implementing U.S. colonial policy from 1917 to 1919.

Wilson and House based their postwar colonial vision on the principle of national self-determination, which was, in truth, steeped in ethno-cultural bias as well as geopolitical self-interest. A crucial impulse urged that the newly-articulated League of Nations be responsible for overseeing any new or revised colonial structure. After

months of negotiation in 1919, first in Paris, then in London, the various national leaders agreed to create the mandate system, which proved to be a compromise between outright colonial expansion and genuine independence, whereby the former German and Ottoman territories in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were mandated to the conquering nations in trust until the indigenous peoples were deemed ready to administer their own governments and societies.

Since the mandate system's origins are the subject of this study, it is necessary to place my research within a historiographic context. Contemporaries of Wilson and House, such as Robert Lansing, David Lloyd George, Lord Robert Cecil, and Georges Clemenceau, each published memoirs in the years following the peace conference. These were largely self-serving in nature, and the mandates were minor subjects mentioned in passing, mostly as war trophies in the cases of Lloyd George and Clemenceau.² Even George Louis Beer, a highly valued contributor to American colonial policy, wrote a rather self-important account of

² Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921); David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* 2 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938); Robert Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941); Georges Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930).

the formative work in 1919, titled, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference*, published in 1923. In it, he better demonstrated his acumen for pre-World War I colonial history than a true understanding or critique of Wilsonian progressivism applied to the colonial world.³

In the decades between the world wars, scholarship on the mandates was rather technical in nature, surveying the intricate applications of the mandate system and attempting to gauge the future political horizon of the territories under supervision. A monumental study in this regard was undoubtedly Quincy Wright's treatise, *Mandates Under the League of Nations*, published in 1930. It remains a benchmark study of the legalities and procedural challenges involved with implementing the mandates under League supervision. However, while Wright touched on the historical origins of the mandates, he offered virtually no analysis of the guiding philosophies or the negotiation processes of 1919.⁴ Other pioneering scholars of the mandates, such as Paul Birdsall and Pitman Potter, wrote sound narrative accounts of the 1919 negotiations, yet offered limited analysis of the founding principles or the

³ George Louis Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923).

⁴ Quincy Wright, *Mandates Under the League of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

scheming politicians behind them. The few criticisms offered were directed at the British and French for undermining the full power of Wilson's idealistic principles intended for the colonies.⁵

For decades, the mandate system was viewed by scholars as a genuine departure from the traditional forms of European colonialism so prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not until after World War Two did a growing number of historians seriously evaluate the philosophical roots of the mandate system and then offer critical perspectives of its application in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In his groundbreaking book on the British Empire, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies*, published in 1967, historian William Roger Louis astutely argued that British (and French) imperial interests at the Paris Peace Conference destroyed what might have been a genuine chance for colonial freedom and independence. His scathing account of British imperialism contrasted with a rather benign evaluation of American complicity in perpetuating imperialism through the Mandate System. Here Louis proffered the notion of Wilson the naïve idealist,

⁵ Paul Birdsall, *Versailles Twenty Years After* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941); Pitman Potter, "Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations." *American Political Science Review* 16 (January-March, 1966): 1-38.

whose progressive vision for the colonies was stymied by resolute imperialists such as Clemenceau and Lloyd George.⁶ Contemporaries of William Roger Louis, such as Hessel Duncan Hall and Gaddis Smith, offered similar evaluations in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷

The idea has persisted among many historians that a well-intentioned Woodrow Wilson encountered staunch opposition to his idealistic proposals in Paris, and was therefore forced to compromise his principles in favor of securing a fragmented allotment of his progressive vision.⁸ In the last few decades, the mandates have been tied to this specific discussion, if they are even mentioned at all. Several recent studies bear this out, such as Margaret

⁶ William Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁷ Hessel Duncan Hall, "The British Commonwealth and the Founding of the League Mandate System," *Studies in International History*, ed. K. Bourne and D.C. Watt (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967); Gaddis Smith, "The British Government and the Disposition of the German Colonies in Africa, 1914-1919." In *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, Edited by William Roger Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

⁸ Thomas A. Bailey: *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945) and *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1963). More recent historians have typically been less adamant about Wilson's failed idealism, but continue to offer rather traditional evaluations anyway. The following are good examples: Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

MacMillan's prize-winning 2001 book, *Paris, 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*. In it she includes a brief chapter on the mandates, which correctly defines the mandate system as a form of veiled imperialism. Yet she, too, characterizes Wilson as the frustrated idealist, unable to secure his progressive colonial vision due to opposition from old-guard colonials in his midst. According to MacMillan, then, Wilson's idealism should be taken literally.⁹ In 2007, Erez Manela took this idea a step further in his study, *The Wilsonian Moment*, claiming that various revolutionary movements in Egypt, India, China, and Korea throughout 1919 could trace their inspirational roots to Wilsonian idealism but were disillusioned by "the failure of liberal anti-colonialism."¹⁰ Most recently, in Ross Kennedy's 2011 edited volume, *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, historian Priscilla Roberts' brief assessment of the mandates again offers the interpretation that Wilsonian progressivism failed on the colonial issue, not because Wilson's vision was particularly flawed or unsound, but rather because he and the American delegates simply failed

⁹ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris, 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001).

¹⁰ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

to contend against the rampant imperial desires of their European counterparts.¹¹

This study departs from the intensely technical pieces on the form and function of the mandates as well as these previous interpretations by historians. While accounting for the key contributions from past scholars, the research provides both new direction and new conclusions. Significantly, the analysis is largely philosophical in nature, tracing the primary American role in developing the mandates, while examining the developmental ideas behind Wilsonian principles such as national self-determination. Moreover, though Wilson himself is crucial to the study, the historical lens is primarily on Edward M. House, who was Wilson's most trusted advisor, with a particular aptitude in the realm of foreign affairs.

House was instrumental in forming the mandate system from 1917 through 1919. Yet his role in this process has been misrepresented or ignored completely. For example, in her seminal 1973 book, *Colonel House in Paris: A Study of American Policy at the Paris Peace Conference*, Inga Floto blamed House for undermining American peace initiatives,

¹¹ Priscilla Roberts, "Wilson, Europe's Colonial Empires, and the Issue of Imperialism," in Ross Kennedy, ed., *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

claiming he went around Wilson to secure his own vision for the peace. Moreover, Floto chose to focus solely on House's roles in Paris, though he was vitally important during colonial negotiations in London during the summer of 1919.¹² More recently, in his 2006 biography, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House*, British scholar Godfrey Hodgson adequately covers certain elements of the Paris Peace Conference but neglects to mention a number of crucial roles fulfilled by House, among them his direction of American colonial policy. A worse oversight is Hodgson's claim that House spent July and August of 1919 vacationing, when, in fact, he was leading the U.S. delegation at the Mandates Commission in London.¹³

Most historians writing on the mandate system's origins believe the American delegates were forced into numerous compromises by Britain's David Lloyd George, France's Georges Clemenceau, and leaders from the British Dominions such as South Africa's Jan Smuts. Yet, by framing Edward House and Woodrow Wilson as idealists, naïvely determined to recast the globe and create a new world order, such interpretations inherently abide by their own

¹² Inga Floto, *Colonel House in Paris: A Study of American Policy at the Paris Peace Conference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹³ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

definitions of the Wilsonian approach to colonial progress. Within such interpretive frameworks, President Wilson's stated interests for national self-determination, economic globalization, and collective security are often portrayed as indicators of failure, largely because a varied form of colonial imperialism continued and the supposed Wilsonian vision did not come to fruition. A notable exception to this historiographic consensus is Andrew Zimmermann's *Alabama in Africa*, which focuses on Togo in a transnational framework that features the New South of the United States and the colonialism of the German Empire. In this study, he emphasizes the consensus among American and European leaders and the continuity from German imperialism to the League of Nations.¹⁴

However, grappling with Wilson's and House's own perceptions of the world seems more apropos when attempting to understand the myriad complexities of the negotiations. In truth, despite the concessions made by Wilson and House at the Paris Peace Conference, the creation of the mandate system should be viewed as a significant achievement for Wilsonian progressivism as they understood it. Yet,

¹⁴ Andrew Zimmermann, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

paradoxically, both Wilson and House were unrealistic in their assessment of European colonialism. They projected their own American concepts of liberty, social justice, and morality onto the international stage, hoping to facilitate broad social and political reform.

The Wilsonian legacy remains at the center of world affairs. Accordingly, this study of the mandate system deals with concepts that still shape the international debate over the ongoing global war on terrorism. How the British or the Americans, in 1919 or 2013, should attempt to stabilize the Middle East is but one example of the contemporary relevance of my research.

CHAPTER 1

THE WAR'S END AND EMERGING COLONIAL QUESTIONS, 1917 - 1918

Resolving colonial questions eventually became a crucial topic of consideration in the build-up to the peace after World War I. However, in April 1917, when the United States formally entered the Great War, the future status of colonies around the world garnered relatively little attention from European and American governments. They and their citizens were far more concerned with the immediate strategic realities of the conflict that had been raging for nearly three years, a conflict for which there appeared to be no end in sight.

THE FINAL PHASES OF WAR

In February 1917, after nearly a two-year hiatus, Germany had re-initiated its unrestricted submarine warfare, hoping at long last to strangle the supply lines of Britain and France. As was the case in 1915, Germany's decision to order its U-boats to engage targets without warning was problematic at best. Predictably, several vessels from neutral countries were torpedoed by German U-boats, injuring or killing passengers and crew members. The outraged responses were swift; and American entry in April

was, at least in part, attributed to Germany's resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare.¹

Stalemate still reigned along the three European fronts by the spring of 1917. In the East, the remnants of Russia's once-proud army that had not deserted gamely fought on. They did so despite their likely confusion over the onset in March of a revolution that would ultimately topple the Romanov dynasty and elevate to power Vladimir I. Lenin's Bolsheviks. Then, in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty signed eleven months later, in March 1918, the Bolsheviks agreed to a separate peace with Germany, removing Russia from the war in the midst of Germany's resurgent offensives on the western front.²

In April 1917, however, such eventualities were unknown, still in the future. Instead, all combatants were concentrating on strategic and tactical operations for their late spring offensives. No government of the Allied or Central Powers could have predicted that the armistice

¹ Much has been written about the U-boat campaigns by Germany and the consequences of the "unrestricted warfare" policy. The following studies are especially helpful: Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Diana Preston, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy* (New York: Walker & Company, 2002).

² Morgan Philips Price, *My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1921), 147; John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 3-4; Robert K. Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 458.

would occur in eighteen months, ending the fighting and signaling the demise of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. Instead, during this penultimate spring of combat, the opposing armies still fought in the hopes of achieving the decisive battlefield victories that had eluded them, victories they hoped would end the war.

After arriving in France, American "doughboys" fought well. In 1918, they were instrumental in throwing back the German offensives in places like Cantigny, Chateau-Thierry, and Belleau Wood. In concert with allied units, their combat service then culminated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, which brought fighting to a close.³

Of course, when the armistice finally occurred in November 1918, and the guns fell silent, the belligerent governments and their people began to survey the damage. In truth, much of the world, but especially Europe, was in shock from the trauma of the Great War, numbed by the realities of the experience. For a time, many were simply grateful it was all over. But as reality set in, the consequences began to unfurl, weighing heavily on postwar Europe and America. While some welcomed home long-absent

³ R. H. Lutz, ed., *The Fall of the German Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 478; Robert H. Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), xi.

fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers, others mourned the loved and lost. Compared to Europe, America had barely bloodied its nose in the war, with casualties totaling 323,018 dead and wounded U.S. servicemen. While a shocking figure, European losses were far worse and much of the continent was in shambles. All told, approximately 8.5 million combatants were dead and more than 21 million wounded. Moreover, an additional 18-20 million people would die globally from influenza by 1920.⁴

THE STAKES OF WAR AND PEACE

Understandably, many began to ask for an accounting at war's end. The questions seemed to anticipate the nihilistic responses that would later come. What had it all been for? What had the nations fought to preserve? Was Western Civilization even worth preserving?

In line with their wartime propaganda campaigns, French and British officials responded by publicly claiming that the war had been forced upon them by German militarism and the Huns' feverish pursuit of wanton destruction.⁵ They played the part of innocent, peace-loving nations that had been forced to defend themselves against barbarism.

⁴ See http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html Accessed January 9, 2013.

⁵ J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1986), especially chapters 3 and 4.

Predictably, they alleged that Germany was the nation solely responsible for causing and perpetuating the war.⁶

Given the shared realities of European imperialism and the arms race augmenting regional tensions prior to 1914, such claims were largely self-serving. The rhetoric capitalized upon anti-German sentiments in both Britain and France in 1918. In essence, Allied claims of German war responsibility overlooked the reality of a shared European catastrophe and justified thinly veiled attempts to rationalize punishing Germany while validating British and French wartime policies. Not surprisingly, the demoralized, heartbroken populations of France and Britain largely agreed with the sentiments expressed by their respective government leaders and journalists. Someone had to pay. Why not the Germans?

For its part, Germany was in social and political revolution when the armistice was signed in November 1918. Much like their British, French, and Russian adversaries, most Germans, civilians and soldiers alike, had favored going to war in 1914. At the time, many had believed in the pro-war rhetoric, possessing a keen, though flawed sense of

⁶ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, chapter 4 See also George Creel, *The War, the World, and Wilson* (New York: Harper, 1920), 122.

national unity and purpose, namely a commitment to serve and support Kaiser Wilhelm II and the cause of German nationalism.⁷ Of course, as with new and eager soldiers throughout history, most of Germany's young volunteers possessed strikingly romantic views of war in the summer of 1914. They viewed it as a great adventure, an opportunity to distinguish themselves in battle and then return home in glory as national heroes. Relatively few anticipated the realities of modern warfare that would assault their bodies and minds.

Four years later, Germany's national consciousness had undergone a dramatic transformation. Nearly 2 million Germans were either killed or missing and presumed dead. More than 4 million had been wounded.⁸ These once-proud German soldiers were, of course, considered the "lucky ones." They returned home in defeat, physically and psychologically traumatized by their combat experiences on land and sea and in the air. The scope of the tragedy, the sheer futility of fighting for a failed cause and losing an entire generation in the process gripped many at war's end.

⁷ Ronald Stromberg, *Redemption by War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1970); Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (New York: Knopf, 1975).

⁸ See http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html Accessed January 10, 2013.

However, unlike Britain, France, and the United States, who could at least claim victory, Germany faced coming to terms not only with the tragic war losses they had incurred, but also with the shame of losing the conflict. Not a few Germans spiraled downward into nihilism, seeking answers to important questions: Who was to blame for the defeat? What would become of the German government, its economy, and its people?⁹ The answers would not be immediately forthcoming and they would not be well received by Germans when they did arrive.

Given such a cultural context, it is not overly surprising that the ensuing chaos erupted throughout the country. The Kaiser abdicated the throne on November 9, 1918, departing in shame. The German Empire of nearly fifty years was no more.¹⁰ In its place a German Social Democratic politician named Philipp Scheidemann arbitrarily declared a republic into existence, without any real authority to do so. Several rival political factions were vying for power at the same time. While the new German government

⁹ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 369; Martin Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 146, 306; Rudolph Binding, *A Fatalist at War*, trans. by I. Morrow (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929), 234-7.

¹⁰ Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle*, 146-54; Lutz, ed., *The Fall of the German Empire*, 478-79; Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 33-35.

eventually consolidated its authority by 1919 as the Weimar Republic, establishing an ostensibly democratic system, its leadership remained problematic throughout the 1920s, lacking true consensus and ensuring that the German people remained divided and confused.¹¹

And then there was the United States. By November 1918, President Woodrow Wilson was well known to most Europeans as the intellectual, idealistic American leader. Few understood the deeper, complex forces that motivated a man like Wilson. In keeping with widespread American isolationism during the previous election of 1916, one of Wilson's key campaign slogans simply stated: "He kept us out of war." Such idealistic rhetoric was, of course, misleading. In truth, Wilson's foreign intervention record indicated otherwise, as in the case of America's campaigns against the notorious Francisco "Pancho" Villa in Mexico. Nonetheless, Wilson deftly sidestepped such realities and capitalized politically by claiming to loathe war as a general principle of conflict resolution. However, going before the U.S. Congress on April 2, 1917, and seeking a

¹¹ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 34-35; C. B. Burdick and R. H. Lutz, eds., *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution, 1918-1919* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 70-1; A. J. Ryder, *The German Revolution of 1918: A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 208.

U.S. declaration of war against Germany, the president neatly accounted for the swinging cultural pendulum that increasingly favored war. Ever the politician, his rhetoric was fashioned around a new mission, a deceptively noble sounding mission: America would fight to end the war because, in his words, "the world must be made safe for democracy."¹²

The following January, Wilson articulated his famous vision for the future in his Fourteen Points speech before Congress. In it, Wilson identified a desire for a generous, non-punitive postwar peace settlement. The key points proclaimed the need for an "open" world at war's end, which would include "open covenants" as well as freedom of the seas, equal trade rights, arms reductions, calls for self-determination for nations in Europe, and even the abolition of colonialism. And in case anyone doubted the president's ability to make this utopian scheme a reality, he saved the best for last. Point fourteen advocated the creation of "a general association of nations" to bring about "political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."¹³ Ostensibly, Wilson's League of Nations, as

¹² Woodrow Wilson's address to Congress, April 2, 1917, *PWW*, 41: 519-27.

¹³ Woodrow Wilson's *Fourteen Points* speech before Congress, January 8, 1918, *PWW*, 45:529.

it became known, would help to oversee the establishment of a new, enlightened order in the postwar world.

As the next chapter of this study will demonstrate in more detail, Wilson's rhetorical expression of these idealistic, even romantic sentiments often belied his genuine strains of thought in politics and international affairs. Thus, when applied to broad philosophical concepts, such as national self-determination, the unique strains of Wilsonian progressivism were far more complex (and disturbing) than many contemporaries or future scholars realized. For instance, Wilson's integration of Christian ethics and public policy appeared admirable. Yet his seeming commitment to virtuous, progressive policies was often marred by a deeply-ingrained racism, a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, applications of Social Darwinism, and a sense of American Exceptionalism.

However, these complexities of the Wilsonian mind would not have been evident to the casual observer. Instead, most who heard or read Wilson in 1917 and 1918 viewed the president strictly through the lens of progressive politics. As such, he was widely perceived as an American idealist, and his rhetoric captivated Europeans and Americans alike who were desperately searching for

meaning. Wilson seemed to offer a way of viewing the Great War as a tragic, yet significant means of catharsis, an opportunity to pursue a long-desired cultural renaissance.¹⁴

A number of questions arise. Most importantly, how accurate were such notions? What were the crucial stakes of the long-fought war and the subsequent peace that would be fashioned in its wake? Altruistic speeches and articles about honor, virtue, redemption, and accountability may have been well received by European and American citizens eager for some measure of validation, some profound understanding of sacrifice. However, emotional, manipulative rhetoric aside, the most influential guiding principles were actually based in power politics. Within the corridors of political power in Washington, London, Paris, and Rome the likes of Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, Georges Clémenceau, and Vittorio Orlando (and their subordinate aides) were busy scrutinizing the geopolitical ramifications of the war as it neared its conclusion.

Of primary importance, the balance of power, especially in Europe, was at stake. When the war was still

¹⁴ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, chapters 5 and 6; See also George Creel, *The War, the World, and Wilson*, 131-35; Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, Vol. 4: *The Ending of the War, June 1918-November 1919* (Cambridge, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 329.

winding down in late 1918, much thought had already been given to accruing spoils of war and visiting vengeance upon Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Redrawing the boundaries of Europe certainly appealed to Britain, France, and Italy to be sure. Also at stake, however, was the focus of this study, the colonial possessions of each European power. While colonial issues may have been secondary to the European (or continental) balance of power, the colonies were still profoundly important to all sides. As such, differing perspectives on the future of colonialism—such as outright annexation, trusteeship, or independence—garnered much attention.¹⁵

IMPERIAL RATIONALES AND COLONIAL SYSTEMS

In order to provide context for the key colonial questions that rose to the forefront by 1918, a brief historical retrospective is in order regarding the narcissistic impulses that prompted colonialism as well as a basic overview of the colonial systems themselves. While administration varied among the colonial powers, at least

¹⁵ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*. 2 vols. (London: Odhams Press, 1942), 2: 1467; U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*. Supplement I: *The World War*. 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1933), 2: 29; Laurence W. Martin, *Peace without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1973), 77; Henry R. Winkler, "The Idea of Colonial Trusteeship," in *The League of Nations Movement in Britain, 1914-1919* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1952), 206-08.

in precise methodology, the philosophical rationales were nearly universal for European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Europe's colonial impulses were steeped in the age-old principles of imperialism: wealth, power, and prestige. Ethnocentric ideology and the insular logic of self-interest combined to foster the European desire to possess colonies.

Imperialism dates at least as far back as the ancient realms of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans, to name a few. Since nearly all imperial kingdoms and nation-states throughout history have equated accumulating valuable resources and commodities to the creation and maintenance of empire, twentieth-century Europeans were certainly not inventing the colonial wheel, so to speak. Accumulating power and wealth remained a key principle. Of course in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mercantilism had reigned as the key economic philosophy on which the expanding global empires of Europe were based. Founded on the notion that global resources were finite, mercantilism prompted nations to compete with one another, applying all available means to secure territories and resources for

their own prosperity.¹⁶ Adam Smith's 1776 publication, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, famously contended against mercantilism, favoring the broad acceptance and application of free market economic principles.¹⁷ By 1900, however, Europe's imperial philosophies and methodologies were based upon contemporary geopolitical realities and economic principles. In practice, variants of mercantile philosophy remained alive and well when war erupted in 1914, entrenched at the very heart of Europe's ongoing imperial competitions.

Accumulating resources as the engines of imperial wealth and power may have been crucial, but equally influential were the notions of honor and prestige attached to colonial possessions. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Europeans viewed their colonial empires as synonymous with national greatness, the laws of competition, and even with the idea of cultural fitness. A popular belief held that colonies were positive reflections of the mother country, capable of enhancing a nation's

¹⁶ Writing on the topic of mercantilism is voluminous. The following works are extremely helpful: David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economics in Perspective: A Critical History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

¹⁷ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: A Selected Edition*. Edited by Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

unique character, certainly, but also of promoting the inherent glories of Western Civilization more broadly. Not surprisingly, maps of colonial holdings in Africa and Asia were embraced as powerful symbols of wealth and prestige, even of a nation's future destiny.¹⁸

Economic philosophies and prideful, ethnocentric associations between civilization and colonization furnished rationales to support the subjugation of indigenous peoples around the world. The argument that Western technological advancement equaled inherent cultural progress convinced many, especially when Rudyard Kipling's ideas of "The White Man's Burden" were combined with the Darwinian notion that all of humankind was engaged in an evolutionary struggle in which only the fittest would survive. The Social Darwinist logic of Herbert Spencer and others seemed inescapable. Great cultures should expand and possess vast empires to the "benefit" of "lesser" cultures. The natives had to be "civilized" and the various raw

¹⁸ William Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35-7.

materials then applied in service to the home country.¹⁹

Ultimately, when combined with their inherent belief in both racial and cultural superiority, it was not a huge philosophical leap for Europeans to rationalize colonialism as both economically prudent and culturally progressive. Throughout Africa, Asia, and portions of the Middle East, explorers, adventurers, and missionaries gave way to traders, government administrators, and soldiers. These empires were, in many ways, products of the industrial revolution and of Europe's advantage in technical innovation, especially in weaponry. By the late-nineteenth century, a complex network of ports, trading centers, railroads, plantations and mines covered the African continent as well as parts of the Asian mainland and island territories.²⁰

The consequences were many, and they were tragic for native populations living under colonial rule. European administrators established themselves as the ruling class, overseeing the formation and conduct of colonial policy.

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" (1899), in E. Boehmer, ed., *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 273; Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 35. Perhaps the best intellectual evaluation of Social Darwinism's applications may be found in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

²⁰ Brian Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes: The Repartition of Tropical Africa, 1914-1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), especially chapters 1-3.

They became the social and political elite. Conversely, the native populations were relegated to stratified service castes in most colonial settlements. Those from culturally elite families were, conceivably, allowed to work in useful social or political jobs, but always in service to the Europeans in charge. The remaining members of native populations found themselves in a vast assortment of jobs in service to their respective colonial overseers: mineworkers, ranch hands, laborers on rubber plantations, shipyard workers, and the like.

The technical application of colonial policies varied among the British, French, Germans, Belgians, and others. In other words, while colonialism was universally harmful to the indigenous populations, certain colonial governments pursued measures of peaceful co-existence more effectively than others. By and large those living in places like British Malaya experienced far better conditions than those living under the brutally harsh realities of Belgian rule in King Leopold's so-called "Congo Free State." Nonetheless, the inescapable truth is that indigenous peoples around the world had their kingdoms and countries, their very ways of life stolen from them by Europeans. They subsequently found themselves living in their own native

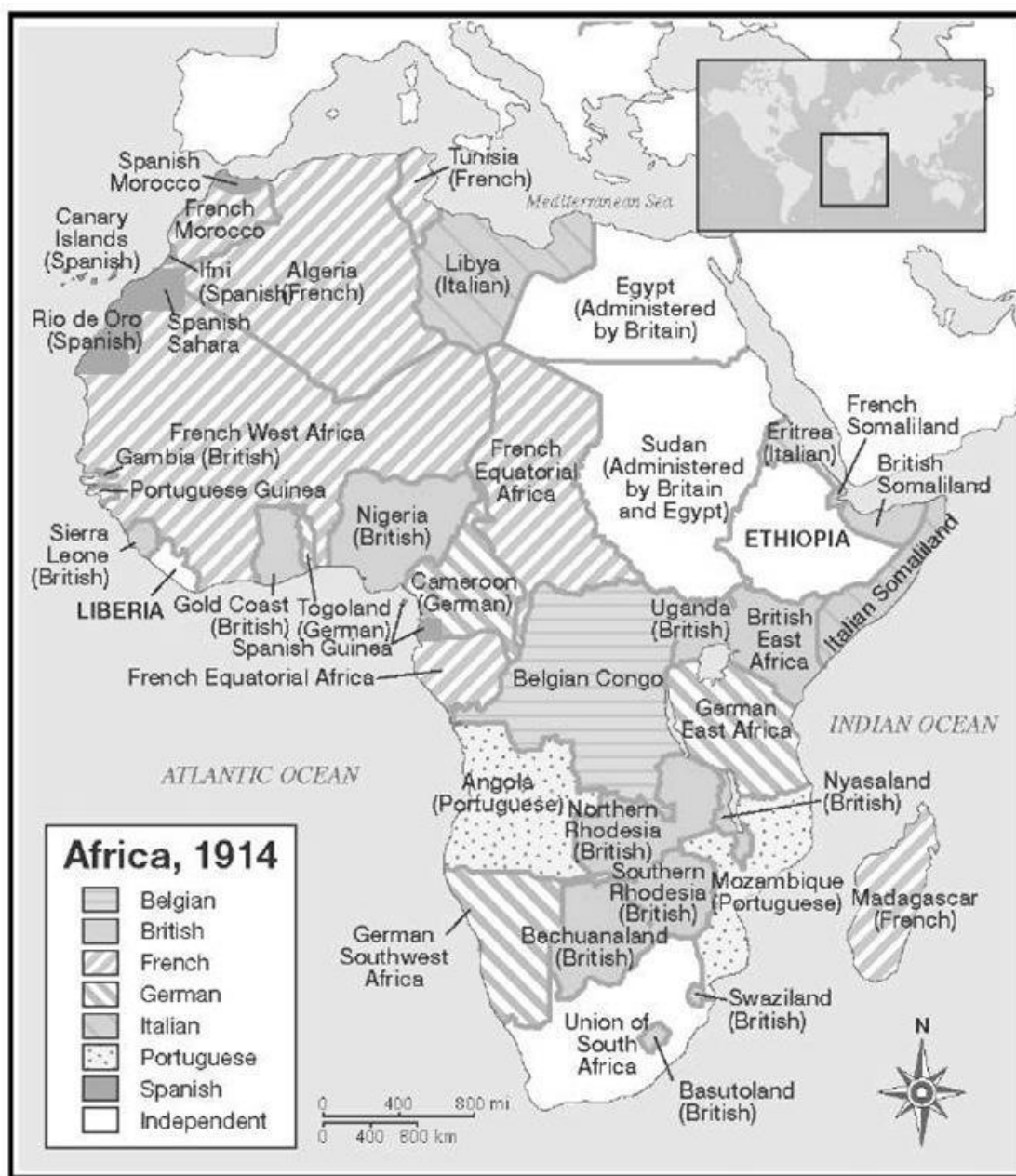
lands in subservient roles. Such were the atrocious realities of colonialism.²¹

EMERGING QUESTIONS AND HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

When war broke out in 1914, Europe and its combined imperial territories consisted of approximately 15,000,000 square miles, nearly 85 percent of the globe's land surfaces. During the war, Germany surrendered its colonies in Cameroon, Togoland, and Southwest Africa after several brutal military campaigns in those territories. At the time of the armistice, Germany still retained its colony in East Africa, though the odds of permanent possession were unlikely at that juncture. Turkish holdings in the Middle East—namely those in Syria, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq—also became vital topics of debate. Hence, at war's end, the victorious powers—namely Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium and to a lesser degree the United States—had to decide the fates of their own colonial holdings as well as those of the former German and Ottoman empires, respectively.²²

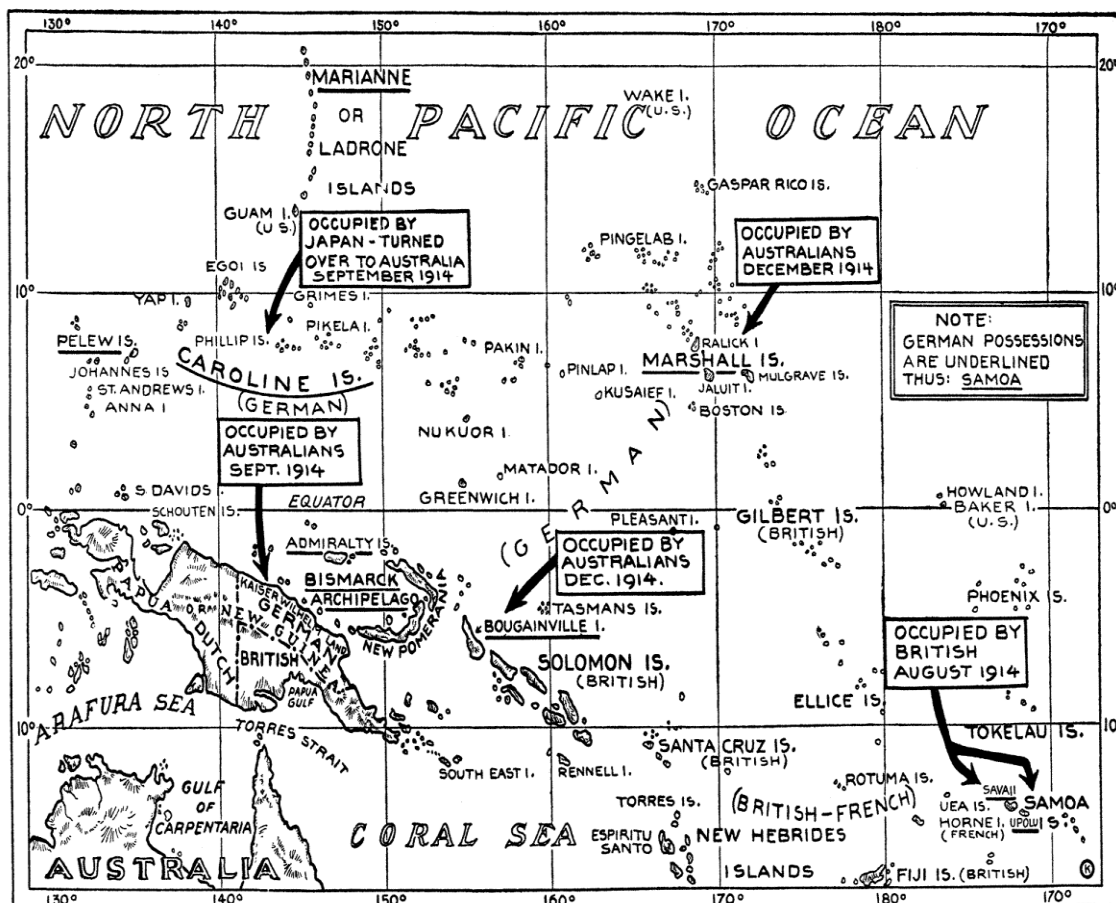
²¹ J. M. Mackenzie, *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1996); Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians. The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), especially chapters 3 and 4.

²² Reference pre-World War I colonial maps on pages 30-32.



Map 1.1

Colonial Africa, 1914



Map 1.2

Pacific Island Colonies, 1914



Map 1.3

Colonial Middle East, 1914

These decisions would be complicated, to be sure. Important questions included the following: should the victorious colonial powers maintain their own colonial possessions? Should they additionally consider dividing the colonial spoils by annexing the former German and Turkish colonies? Conversely, given the idealistic surge of rhetoric emanating from the likes of Woodrow Wilson, members of the Arab revolt, and other indigenous groups, should all colonies be granted independence? Or, lastly, should some gain independence while others remained within the colonial structure?

Given the sharp divisions between pro-colonial voices in Europe and the British dominions versus those advocating the end of colonialism, resolving the colonial questions seemed like a mountain peak too difficult to climb in November 1918. Perhaps predictably, some of the precedents relied upon to inform their decisions moving forward—namely the Berlin Act of 1885, the Brussels Act of 1892, and the Algeciras Convention of 1906—had each been utilized by European powers to ostensibly legalize their ambitious scrambling for colonial gains in the first place.²³ Other

²³ Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 129-47; Sybil E. Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference, 1884-1885*. Rev. Ed. (London: Longmans, 1981), 197-212.

proposals in 1918, including those by Woodrow Wilson and South Africa's Jan Smuts, at first blush appeared to be comparatively enlightened reformations of traditional colonial structures.²⁴ But how may we measure the rhetoric in these proposals? What were the key intellectual foundations informing Wilsonian progressivism in particular? Those questions will be the focal points of the next chapter.

²⁴ Jan C. Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918). The colonial proposals of Smuts and Wilson will garner much attention in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2

The Wilsonian Mind and a Progressive World Order

Over the years, many historical critiques of Wilsonian statecraft have characterized U.S. postwar initiatives in 1918-1919 as overly idealistic, prone to naïve perceptions of geopolitical power structures and vulnerable to the devious machinations of Europe's more realistic and seasoned politicians, such as Britain's David Lloyd George and his French counterpart, Georges Clemenceau. According to such traditional narratives, Woodrow Wilson, Edward M. House, and their American aides succumbed to immense pressure and were forced to abandon their idealistic principles at the Paris Peace Conference in the face of wily, cynical opposition from the British, French, and Italian delegations.¹ Ostensibly, the compromises involved issues ranging from Europe's border restructuring and

¹ As indicated in the Introduction, see especially Thomas A. Bailey: *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945) and *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1963). More recent historians have typically been less adamant about Wilson's failed idealism, but continue to offer rather traditional evaluations anyway. The following are good examples: Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), and *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2002).

economic reparations to the focus of this study, the principle of national self-determination in the colonial world. American history survey texts are actually fairly decent barometers for measuring the consensus views among historians on a variety of topics. Regarding Woodrow Wilson's vision for postwar peace, many popular college survey texts in the United States continue to present students with some variant of the narrative about America's "failure" to secure its idealistic promises in 1919.²

FLAWED INTERPRETIVE ASSUMPTIONS

However, such interpretations are based upon flawed notions of the colonial objectives that Wilson and House ultimately pursued in Paris (and subsequently London) in 1919. Analytical shortcomings are prominent in these studies. Assumptions of failure stem from false premises, which invariably produce unsound conclusions regarding American peace initiatives for the postwar colonial world. The claims of American failure are specifically based upon the fact that the lion's share of former German and Turkish

² The following widely-used texts are good examples: Robert A. Divine et al., *America: Past and Present*, (10th ed.; New York: Pearson, Longman, 2012); James Henretta et al., *America's History* (7th ed.; New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2011); and George B. Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (9th ed.; New York: Norton, 2012).

colonies did not achieve outright independence as a result of the League of Nations Covenant.³

Wilsonian progressive philosophy has often been perceived as being inherently opposed to traditional European imperial philosophy as well as the resulting colonial systems. Equating Wilsonian rhetoric on principles of national self-determination with their own notions of progressive history, Wilson's near-contemporaries as well as future scholars often assumed that the Wilsonian vision was inherently idealistic, entailing the literal, universal pursuit of equality and independence for indigenous peoples under Europe's colonial rule.⁴ Since no such vision of progress came to fruition after the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, frequent conclusions have revolved around the idea that Wilsonian progressivism was flawed, perhaps inherently naïve and unachievable.⁵ The logic seems soothingly inescapable. By ascribing American failure to "compromise" and "acquiescence," traditional interpretations have often

³ See the correspondence between Woodrow Wilson and Edward House on this issue, August 5-12, 1919, *PWW*, 62: 243-47.

⁴ Ernest May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959), 435-37. Also, for a rather unique perspective involving the idea that Wilson conveyed a "higher realism" by combining his views on Christianity with global relations, see Arthur S. Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson and Other Essays* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 127-39.

⁵ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 327-37; Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 185-97.

turned Wilson and House into simplistic caricatures, political idealists whose supposed naiveté proved detrimental when facing savvy political realists, primarily within the British and French delegations.

The truth of the matter is that the eventual colonial settlement was ultimately far more in line with Wilsonian progressivism than many believe. Accurately comprehending the American colonial initiatives engaged by President Woodrow Wilson and Edward M. House requires a sound understanding of the Wilsonian mind, particularly of the philosophical roots and personal experiences that served as the foundations for the Wilsonian brand of progressivism endorsed by these two men.

To begin measuring Wilsonian perspectives on progressive global relations, understanding his intellectual foundations is essential. What are these? As historian Lloyd Ambrosius indicates in *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I*, Wilson's "progressive philosophy of history provided the important intellectual foundations for his liberal internationalism." Ambrosius goes on to characterize Wilson's perspectives in this manner:

The president's understanding of progressive history embraced the Social Gospel in American Christianity. He wanted to redeem the Old World from its outmoded system of alliances that depended upon a discredited balance of power. He sought to establish a new community of nations that would rely instead on collective security. Identification of U.S. foreign policy with the progressive fulfillment of God's will on earth limited Wilson's disposition to compromise.⁶

In essence, Woodrow Wilson was both a traditionalist and a modernist, an old guard Christian moralist who nonetheless believed in modern ideas such as Social Darwinism, which conformed neatly to the germ theory, emphasizing heredity as the prime shaper in human history. And though he generally idealized the Anglo-Saxon heritage, believing Western Civilization was inherently superior, Wilson was also a genuine American exceptionalist. For him, the United States was a uniquely blessed cultural experiment among the enlightened nations of the world.⁷

Some crucial questions arise. What is the genesis of such philosophies? Where did these prevailing concepts of progressivism come from? And more importantly, why did Woodrow Wilson believe them? To provide some answers, a

⁶ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1991), 3.

⁷ See especially Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, vol. 5 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), chapters 2 & 3; Wilson, *Confidential Journal*, December 28, 1889, *PWW*, 6: 462-64; Wilson, "Mere Literature," published in the *Atlantic* in 1893, *PWW*, 8: 346-57. Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

brief overview of Wilson's various philosophical foundations is merited.

COMMON SENSE REALISM CHRISTIANITY

Born in Staunton, Virginia on December 28, 1856, Thomas Woodrow Wilson was a child of the South, spending the majority of his youth in Georgia, before moving to South Carolina in 1870. He was raised by devout, though intellectually-oriented Christian parents of primarily Scottish ancestry. His father, the Rev. Joseph R. Wilson, was a Southern Presbyterian minister whose influence on his son was enormous. In truth, the young Woodrow Wilson benefited immensely from the demanding, yet loving home environment, and he would later give much credit to both his father and mother for modeling the intellectual and spiritual virtues that allowed him to thrive.⁸

A rationalist and scholarly approach, based upon the Scottish Reformed tradition, gave depth and dimension to Wilson's Christianity, and remained central to his worldview throughout his life. But what was entailed in

⁸ H. W. Brands, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt & Co., 2003), especially chapters 1 and 2. While the biographies of Woodrow Wilson are voluminous, the following are some of the best narratives regarding Wilson's formative years: Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House*, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Kendrick Clements, *Woodrow Wilson* (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

this approach? By the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant, evangelical Christianity in America existed within two basic theological streams. The populist evangelical branch, spawned by the First and Second Great Awakenings, gradually became a widely embraced wing of the Christian faith, with a strong revivalist style that downplayed rigid doctrine and appealed broadly to ordinary folk rather than social elites, seminary-trained clergymen, or intellectuals. Most notable in the southern states, the populist orientation originally included mostly Baptists, Methodists, and denominational offshoots such as the Restoration Movement (the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ).⁹

The other theological branch was rationalist and scholarly. Centered primarily in the North, it included those within the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Episcopalian churches. Especially within Presbyterianism, theology and doctrine were steeped in the philosophy of Common Sense Realism, which had been a part of the Scottish Reformed tradition for more than a century. In essence, the Common Sense approach argued that most nineteenth-century

⁹ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eardmans, 1994), 83-108. See also Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 57-9, 132, and D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), chapters 2 and 4.

thinkers included among the self-evident, universal truths many of the basic teachings of Christianity, such as God's existence, His goodness, and His creation of the world. In other words, the Common Sense wing of Scottish Reformed Christianity favored an evidential form of apologetics, emphasizing truths knowable by believer and unbeliever alike, which ultimately allowed individuals to evaluate competing doctrines and worldviews on similar footing.¹⁰

Woodrow Wilson ultimately came to favor a rather interesting combination of evangelicalism's populist and scholarly branches, uniting evangelical fervor with a more traditional emphasis on theology and scholarship. Largely due to his father's Scottish Reformed Presbyterianism, Wilson naturally absorbed much of the Common Sense philosophy as a theological foundation. In this vein, he seems to have viewed his Christianity somewhat more holistically, as a rationalist might. For him, the precepts of the Bible were more than just morality plays that could be embraced or discarded according to the individual conscience, or cast into the realm of private values. Rather, for Wilson, the truths of scripture could be

¹⁰ For a wonderful treatment of the theological variants in North America, including Common Sense Realism, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93-113.

readily understood within the context of real human experience, as logical, universal guidelines regarding how humans were meant to think and act.¹¹

Interestingly, however, Woodrow Wilson appears to have combined this rational, scholarly approach to Christianity with elements of the populist vision. Hence, while he certainly embraced Scottish Reformed theology, the zeal of the populist approach was also ingrained in Wilson. This is not overly surprising considering Wilson's formative years were spent in the South, where populist evangelicalism was most prominent.¹²

Consequences abound. Woodrow Wilson understood Christianity as a definitive, universal worldview that codified the nature of human life. Moreover, its precepts could be logically connected to and measured by the realities of the human experience. Hence, Christianity was demonstrably true. Moreover, the emotional currents of evangelical populism prompted the zealous Wilson to action, lest his Christian faith be relegated solely to church

¹¹ Ibid.; See also "Christ's Army," August 17, 1876, *PWW*, 1: 176-78, 180-81; "A Christian Statesman," September 1, 1876, *PWW*, 1: 188; "The Ideal Statesman," January 30, 1877, *PWW*, 1: 244.

¹² See correspondence between Joseph R. Wilson and his son, discussing and advocating Scottish Reformed Theology, March 12 and March 21, 1887, *PWW*, 5: 467.

activities.¹³ If, indeed, Christian precepts were universally right and good, then might it be possible to use these verities as rationales for meaningful public policy, weaving them into the very fabric of American culture, and perhaps other cultures as well? Wilson aimed to find out.

WOODROW WILSON AND RACE

While Woodrow Wilson's rather eclectic mixture of Christian theology proved central to his advocacy of progressive civilization, his notions of liberalism were also informed by his understanding of liberty and equality, which he measured in part through the lens of race. Hence Wilson's perspectives on racial equality merit a brief overview and analysis.

As a child of the South who came of age after the Civil War, Wilson possessed keenly-felt views on the subject of race. The trauma of the war gave way to dramatic shifts in race relations during the course of Reconstruction. In the wake of the Confederacy's collapse, such changes were, of course, largely unwelcome in the South, producing additional anxiety and tension over the

¹³ "A Christian Statesman," September 1, 1876, *PWW*, 1: 188; "The Ideal Statesman," January 30, 1877, *PWW*, 1: 244; Letter to his future wife Ellen, October 30, 1883, *PWW*, 2: 499-505.

respective roles and responsibilities of white and black Southerners. Not surprisingly, Wilson was extremely critical of Radical Reconstruction, believing Congressional proponents had recklessly disposed of President Abraham Lincoln's moderate vision for reunification. Wilson viewed racial equality as unnatural, and therefore determined that Lincoln's goal must have been to use the Thirteenth Amendment merely to emancipate the slaves, not to provide them with social or political equality among Whites. Wilson thus concluded that Radical Reconstruction was a travesty, an effort on the part of certain Northerners to destabilize and further weaken the South through social and racial revolution.¹⁴

In his book, *A History of the American People* (1902), Wilson wrote the following: "It was a menace to society itself that the negroes should thus of a sudden be set free and left without tutelage or restraint." Then, in conspiratorial fashion, he further suggested that radical Northerners "wished not only to give the negroes political privilege but also to put the white men of the South

¹⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, 5 vols. (New York: Harper, 1902), 5: 18-22, 38, 44-64, 82-97.; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and the *Birth of a Nation*: American Democracy and International Relations." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 18 (December 2007): 689-718.

resolutely under the negroes' heels." ¹⁵ Such statements reveal not only Wilson's belief that Radical Reconstruction was harmful (and unconstitutional), but also his troubling sense of what a properly maintained, mutually beneficial social and racial hierarchy looked like in the South. For Wilson, segregationist protocols such as the Black Codes were positive, stabilizing social forces, allowing limited new freedoms to former slaves, while rightly preserving their subservient status to white southerners, who ostensibly would serve as social mentors to newly freed blacks. Wilson even rationalized the militant activities of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as necessary for the preservation of southern civilization, claiming the KKK was formed as something of a public service organization, forced to "take the law into their own hands." Accordingly, argued Wilson, the KKK utilized intimidation tactics only because they were deprived of normal civil service mechanisms by the Radical Republican agenda.¹⁶ Ultimately, then, Wilson believed Reconstruction endangered the delicate racial balance of power throughout the South. To be sure, he took solace in the fact that Reconstruction was largely

¹⁵ Wilson, *A History of the American People*, 5: 18, 22, 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5: 44-64, 74, 82-97.

unsuccessful by 1877, allowing segregation to remain and expand around the country. Nonetheless, Wilson's memories of these traumatic events directly impacted his policies in later years.

Of course Wilson did not limit his appraisals of race to domestic issues. In the 1880s, as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University, Wilson studied under Professors Herbert Baxter Adams and Richard T. Ely, both of whom had completed their Ph.D. degrees in Germany, at the University of Heidelberg. Steeped in the philosophies of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Adams and Ely dutifully taught their students the intricacies of German historicism, including the so-called "germ theory."¹⁷ According to this line of thought, a nation's development could be likened to biological processes in plant and animal kingdoms. Just as healthy plants germinated and grew from the rich soil, so to the strongest nations developed from the richest cultural roots. According to German historicism, those roots were, of course, Teutonic in nature.¹⁸

From the start, Wilson was taken with this concept, merging Europe's rich cultural heritage with a sense of

¹⁷ Thomas Dixon to Woodrow Wilson, May 4, 1885, *PWW*, 4: 558.

¹⁸ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 21-29.

individual and collective fitness. It was not difficult for Wilson to trace America's social and political lineage. He understood the European foundations better than most. However, he further identified the ideals of American and European culture with another crucial factor: race. He therefore distinguished between white European-based civilizations—perceived as the vanguard of modern liberalism—and those from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, where race and ethnicity supposedly inhibited the pursuit of enlightened social and political virtues.¹⁹

According to Wilson's warped logic, then, it would seem that white people in Europe and North America rightly possessed a monopoly on the enlightened pursuit of democratic principles and liberal progressivism. He said as much in 1885, while writing about the virtues of democracy. For Wilson, the successful American political experiment was best explained by its origins "in our history, in our experience as a Teutonic race set apart to make a special character."²⁰ Clearly, Wilson's perceptions of inherent white superiority informed his approach to geo-politics, including matters of colonial policy, as will be shown.

¹⁹ "The Modern Democratic State," December 1885, *PWW*, 5: 58-92.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

ANGLO-SAXONISM AND SOCIAL DARWINISM

Woodrow Wilson's racist biases consequently affected his understanding and application of other ethno-cultural philosophies. Like many Americans of his generation, Wilson was quite taken with the idea that Western Civilization, dating at least as far back as the Greeks and Romans, was inherently superior to the rest of the world. A rather stark bias toward Anglo-Saxon culture was quite prominent in the United States.²¹ In certain ways, this seems strange, especially given the fact that the Angles and Saxons were historically distinctive to Britain's modern cultural heritage rather than endemic to the rest of Europe and North America. However, the term Anglo-Saxon was (and is) often used to denote an association with Western Civilization more broadly. This certainly seems to have been Wilson's typical application of the phrase.²²

The idea, of course, was that Western thought and culture was intrinsically more enlightened and advanced than cultures elsewhere. When Eurocentric gentlemen like

²¹ Alexander DeConde, *Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 86; Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 59.

²² For a wonderful collection of essays on the realities, contributions, and legacies of Anglo-Saxon culture, see David Clark and Nicholas Perkins, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination* (London: Brewer Publishing, 2010), esp. essays 1-4. Regarding Wilson, see Confidential Journal, December 28, 1889, *PWW*, 6: 459-63.

Wilson surveyed the seminal Western traditions—in history, politics, philosophy, literature, poetry, music, and art, among others—they concluded that the Western cultural heritage was not merely impressive, but innately superior. Of course, they were right in their desire to affirm and preserve the virtues of Western knowledge that had been built up over the many centuries. It is, indeed, difficult to imagine a world without the phenomenally influential ideas of ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, or more modern thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. What might the modern world be without the pivotal engineering skills of the Romans or the exquisite images painted by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and the like? The examples are numerous. Humanity has always been enriched by the best of Western Civilization to be sure.

No, the philosophical flaws lay elsewhere for men, like Wilson, who accepted Anglo-Saxon superiority as truth. Especially insidious was the notion that the rest of the world had much less of value to offer. In identifying Western thought and culture as the most enlightened, the prevailing concept became that Westerners must be the purveyors of genuine knowledge, of truth, and of beauty. As pioneers of “advanced, technologically superior”

civilization, it seemed logical to conclude that the West had the right, even the responsibility, to introduce and foster these ostensibly superior notions to the "backward" peoples in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, among other territories.²³ Still, such ideologies are difficult to rationalize and act upon without something more to go on than philosophical hyperbole based largely on culturally biased sentiments. There had to be something more, a sound logic that could be used to uphold and explain Western, Anglo-Saxon superiority. Wilson and thousands of other Westerners found just such an explanatory gift in the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

The famed British naturalist, Charles Darwin, requires no introduction. His biological theories shook the world in 1859 with the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, then again in 1871 with his more controversial work, *The Descent of Man*. Essentially, Darwin theorized that minor adaptations (sometimes called **microevolution**) within a species could be extrapolated over vast periods of time to

²³ The most famous example, of course, is Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" (1899), in E. Boehmer, ed., *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 273. Theodore Roosevelt and his fellow progressives shared these views, as did Wilson. See Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 140.

explain the major differences dividing taxonomic groups (sometimes called **macroevolution**).²⁴ Darwinism was implacably naturalistic, explaining life's origin and development by strictly natural, random causes. Perhaps the most crucial of these ideas was the theory of "natural selection," whereby nature preserves traits that promote fitness and allow for the survival and advancement of a species.²⁵

As significant as Darwin's theories were for biologists, it was the broad application of his ideas beyond the biological sciences that truly changed the world, often for the worse. A number of Charles Darwin's Victorian contemporaries believed that "natural selection" could be used to explain not only the basic formation of biological organisms, but also every significant aspect of human thought and behavior. Herbert Spencer is perhaps the most famous of these. An English philosopher, politician, and sociologist, Spencer was an avid Darwinist, committed to explaining the entire human experience through a naturalistic lens. According to Spencer, human societies

²⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*, rev. ed., and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

²⁵ Ibid. See also Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 63.

and institutions were just like plants and animals in the sense that they were both formed by the process of natural selection, resulting in what he famously referred to as the "survival of the fittest."²⁶

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Spencer was joined by a growing number of politicians, sociologists, and others, including William Graham Sumner and T. H. Huxley, in advocating for the broad application of Darwinian principles in explaining modern life, including basic social structures. These men assumed society was naturally evolving for the better. For cultural advancement to occur, each individual had to compete in the process of social evolution. Moreover, this freedom of competition was inviolable, and any interference—from the government or elsewhere—would conceivably be disastrous. Social Darwinism thus embraced a laissez-faire approach to government. Even if well-intentioned, by regulating business, taxation, housing, or even sanitation, the government would unwittingly be aiding the "unfit" and hindering societal progression.²⁷

²⁶ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 32.

²⁷ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 32; John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York: Norton, 1990), 15-16.

For Spencer, Sumner, Huxley, and a host of others, successful business magnates and their corporations were presumed to be the "engines" of social progress. If smaller, entrepreneurial businesses were marginalized or destroyed by trusts and monopolies, they had no basis for a grievance. After all, such outcomes were viewed as natural parts of the evolutionary process. Moreover, Spencer and his compatriots believed that Darwinian explanations were not only sound rationales for existing class structures, but also liberating propositions, allowing the different classes to recognize the nominally concrete logic of science as an unbiased, impersonal explanation. In essence the disenfranchised classes should simply accept their natural place in society and live more harmoniously, at least according to the warped logic of Spencer.²⁸

The use of Darwinism to promote such a rugged individualist, "every man for himself" approach to human civilization was challenged by a precious few in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the time of his election to the presidency in 1912, Wilson had long been a philosophical adherent of the disturbing logic; in fact, he was a practitioner. It seemed to be a perfect

²⁸ Ibid.

underpinning for the Anglo-Saxon elitism that many, like Wilson and Edward House, embraced.²⁹

An additional, equally crucial element of Wilson's philosophical/intellectual framework proved enormously important during and after World War I. For while Wilson embraced Anglo-Saxon superiority and rationalized it through elements of Social Darwinist thought, he also believed that the United States existed as a providential experiment, uniquely gifted to carry out its civilizing mission to the world. For Wilson, America was truly exceptional.

THE IMPULSE OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

At present, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, globalization is widely embraced and many parts of the world are coming together despite the considerable cultural and geographic distances. Emerging communication technologies, shared commercial interests, and a greater sense of geo-political interdependence typically elicit much positive feedback from postmodern Americans. Given this cross-cultural milieu, one might naturally assume that an elitist, condescending, and divisive philosophy such as

²⁹ "The Ideals of America," December 26, 1901, *PWW*, 12: 208-27; "Religion and Patriotism," July 4, 1902, *PWW*, 12: 474-78.

American exceptionalism would be increasingly unwelcome. Of course, much of the world is, indeed, wary of the United States. Yet many Americans still gravitate toward the belief that they are part of something special, a singular cultural and political environment that nurtures and insulates, even as it seeks to broaden its impact through the projection of power.³⁰

American exceptionalism is based on two key notions: that America possesses a unique cultural heritage and therefore must act upon a special set of responsibilities, including the projection of inherent virtues such as the concepts of liberty, equality, and republican democracy. The philosophy has deep roots in our culture, stretching all the way back to the early colonial period. In his 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop, a founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, famously outlined his prescription for building a Puritan society that would remain dedicated to the Christian faith despite the many obstacles the Puritans were likely to encounter in the New World.

³⁰ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 18-21, and *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Winthrop took as his inspiration the biblical passage from the book of Matthew known as the "Sermon on the Mount," in which Jesus presents the central tenets of discipleship eventually formalized in Christianity. In Matthew 5:14-16, speaking to the Galilean crowd as well as his own disciples, Jesus says:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.³¹

In his own sermon, Winthrop encouraged his fellow Puritans to unify and conform to their stated doctrines, not only for the sake of their own piety, but also because there was a higher, yet practical calling. He characterized the Puritans' colonial endeavor as part of a unique spiritual covenant with God, whereby the Massachusetts Bay Colony would be as a "city upon a hill," modeling unity and Christian charity to others.³²

John Winthrop's sermons and writings were not widely read during the seventeenth century. Thus his voice was not a clarion call for change during his own lifetime or those

³¹ Matthew 5:14-16 (New King James Version)

³² John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1965), 91.

of succeeding generations.³³ Moreover, in truth, Winthrop should not be shackled with the burdensome chains of a philosophy he neither invented nor advocated. He was not the progenitor of American exceptionalism any more than Friedrich Nietzsche was the founder of Nazism. A close reading of Winthrop's collection of sermons and other pieces indicates the Massachusetts Bay leader did not envision a broad, aggressive pursuit of the "city upon a hill," in which other American colonies (at the time), neighboring territories, or nations were forced to adopt and practice Puritanism as he or his fellow colonists from Massachusetts Bay prescribed. His was a rather more restrained, even elegant, appeal for shared unity and purpose in a community of like-minded people. Winthrop's "city upon a hill" was not intended to alter the world through force of action against others, but rather by consistently modeling its virtues in ways that inspired others to do the same.³⁴

While he likely would have been surprised by the trend, over time John Winthrop became one of the more revered early American colonial leaders. In the wake of the

³³ Noll, *America's God*, 39, 45.

³⁴ Richard Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle, eds. *The Journals of John Winthrop, 1630-1649* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

American Revolution, Winthrop's views gained recognition because of the presumably patriotic quality of his words. By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, his once-obsure sermons and social philosophies were being read and analyzed by scores of politicians and scholars. It is not a coincidence that the key rationales for "Manifest Destiny" in the 1840s drew heavily from the righteous-sounding ideological phrases found in Winthrop.³⁵

As an American born in the mid-nineteenth century, as one who came of age during the decades of unrivaled industrial and economic expansion, Woodrow Wilson adopted American exceptionalism much like his contemporaries.³⁶ He read Winthrop, along with many others of the same ilk. Over time, the exceptional qualities of the American character seemed like foregone conclusions, easily identifiable to Wilson. After all, how else could America's rise to prominence be explained if not by a unique capacity for overcoming immense obstacles in order to secure its republican vision. Not only had Americans achieved independence by defeating a great European power, they had also swept across the continent from east to west, and even

³⁵ Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 30.

³⁶ Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, 5: 115-31, 299-300.

fought and survived a cataclysmic civil war. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, it seemed America and its citizens were poised for greatness.

A number of like-minded colleagues and acquaintances shared Wilson's assessment of the reasons for America's rise to prominence as well as its future destiny. Their mutual support of one another not only inspired confidence through discussion and debate; in Wilson's case, such collaborations often proved to be the genesis of future policy. Perhaps the most important and influential was the famous historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, with whom Wilson struck up a friendship. Turner, of course, went on to fame as one of the leading American historians of the early twentieth century, first at the University of Wisconsin (1890-1910), and then at Harvard (1911-1924). An exceptionalist in his own right, Turner valued the Princeton scholar's opinion highly, and in fact asked Wilson to read and critique early drafts of his famous "frontier thesis," a sprawling critique of the frontier's defining impact on American identity. It was an exceptionalist vision through and through.³⁷

³⁷ Wilson, "The Significance of American History," *PWW*, 12: 184; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American

THE RESULTING WILSONIAN PROGRESSIVISM

Woodrow Wilson believed all of American history was to be interpreted within these essential philosophical frameworks. In conjunction with his applied understanding of Christianity, race, Anglo-Saxonism, and Social Darwinism, Wilson's dedication to the idea of an exceptional American heritage and purpose led him to advocate and pursue a rather unique brand of progressivism, one that often differed from his contemporaries. Typical progressives were, like Wilson, Caucasian, middle-class idealists, though they included both Republican and Democratic advocates. Most were broadly concerned with addressing the abuses of power prominent in local political machines, while instituting practical, efficient, and ethical government protocols. They sought to reform and regulate politics and business in the pursuit of a variety of social justice causes, including ending child labor, implementing safety regulations for the American worker, prohibiting the sale of alcohol, curtailing the corporate

trusts, and endorsing women's suffrage, among other pursuits.³⁸

Wilson the reformer and progressive seemed incongruous with these objectives. Even seemingly like-minded progressives often failed to understand Wilson's approach as president to social and political reform in America. At times, he seemed like a run-of-the-mill progressive. For instance, he was an anti-trust advocate and oversaw the establishment of the Federal Reserve System in the United States. However, while embracing traditional progressivism in many respects, Wilson was atypical in other ways during his two terms. In pursuing his social and political vision, the president drew heavily from his understanding of progressive history, precisely defined by 1) Christianity, 2) race, 3) Anglo-Saxonism, 4) Social Darwinism, and 5) American exceptionalism.³⁹

If contemporaries had fully comprehended the impulses that ruled Wilson, they likely would have been far less

³⁸ John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), especially chapters 1-3; Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 3-30, 190-219.

³⁹ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 3-30, 190-219; "A Christian Statesman," September 1, 1876, *PWW*, 1: 188; "The Ideal Statesman," January 30, 1877, *PWW*, 1: 244; Confidential Journal, December 28, 1889, *PWW*, 6: 459-63; "The Ideals of America," December 26, 1901, *PWW*, 12: 208-27; "Religion and Patriotism," July 4, 1902, *PWW*, 12: 474-78; and "The Significance of American History," *PWW*, 12: 184.

surprised by his domestic philosophies and programs.⁴⁰

Though he targeted the trusts, rightly believing they undermined entrepreneurial competition, his New Freedom program was designed to ensure less federal oversight in business, and therefore less intervention. He also opposed many social justice programs, consistently withholding his support for causes such as child labor reform and women's suffrage.⁴¹

To the twenty-first century mind, these notions seem anything but progressive. Yet once Wilson's underlying philosophical foundations are understood and acknowledged, it is possible to achieve greater objectivity in critiquing the policies, disturbing as they may be. For starters, on issues of race, President Wilson the progressive consistently failed to support black Americans in their fight for equality and upward social mobility in the early twentieth century. Wilson the wily politician may have promised increased measures of equality for African Americans, but such rhetorical posturing belied his true

⁴⁰ Malcolm Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), chapter 5.

⁴¹ Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 206-228, and *Pivotal Decades*, 3-30, 190-219; "The Ideals of America," December 26, 1901, *PWW*, 12: 208-27.

feelings on the matter.⁴² Of course, Wilson did not consider his own views to be contradictory. He believed in inspiring black Americans by promising them a better future, with greater access to social and economic privilege in America. Ironically, however, the upward mobility sought by W.E.B. DuBois and other black leaders required, among other things, broad access for African Americans to the realm of politics, local and national. Yet Wilson was unwilling to seriously consider providing blacks with access to the corridors of political power in the United States.⁴³ In essence, he and his fellow white politicians viewed themselves as the self-appointed guardians of civic virtue. Hence, for the president, the phrase "racial equality" was a misnomer in most respects.

Consider Wilson's responses to several issues of race prior to and during his presidency. As white Americans plowed through the southwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, indigenous as well as Mexican-based cultures were virtually destroyed in favor of white, supposedly "Christian" culture. More accurately viewed as blatant imperialism than a true Christian mission, these

⁴² Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2004).

⁴³ Woodrow Wilson to Thomas Dixon, July 29, 1913, *PWW*, 28: 94.

episodes were largely praised by Wilson as essential to the formation of a "unified nation and people."⁴⁴

Persecution of black Americans was endemic in the South during Wilson's presidency. Yet his administration failed to acknowledge the need for even minimal safeguards against heinous crimes such as lynchings, which were common in many southern states. Wilson was appropriately disturbed by these ongoing murders. Even so, he refused to sanction direct intervention, viewing lynchings as unfortunate byproducts of the magnified racial animosities stirred up during Reconstruction.⁴⁵

Of course, Wilson's views on race were not limited to domestic affairs. During and after the Spanish-American War of 1898, then Professor Wilson was thrilled by the notion of acquiring the Philippines as an American "protectorate." Here was a tailor-made opportunity for the United States. Assuming the Filipinos both desired and needed change, Wilson anticipated providing the "foreigners" with social, political, and spiritual guidance, allowing the Philippines

⁴⁴ Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (Yale University Press, 2003), 194-95.

⁴⁵ Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan Dee Publishers, 2011), especially chapters 5-7.

to eventually leave behind their "regressive" cultural standards and join the ranks of enlightened civilizations.⁴⁶

Wilson's views on race were consistent with his belief in Social Darwinism. In that sense, his domestic reform agenda aligned with the notion that the federal government's responsibilities to the average citizen were actually quite limited, and that federal law should encourage the competitive realities suggested by Darwin's process of "natural selection" and Spencer's "survival of the fittest" mantra. Again, according to this thinking, by interfering with business or supporting the "unfit," the government ran the risk of unwittingly destroying, or at least inhibiting, social progress.

WILSON AND THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

When Wilsonian progressivism was applied to the arena of international relations, the consequences were many. Hence a brief contextual understanding of Wilson's true notions of independence is essential. When referring to the principle of national self-determination, most modern scholars use some variant of the following definition supplied by Alfred Cobban, a pioneering scholar on the

⁴⁶ Woodrow Wilson, "The Ideals of America," *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (December 1902): 721-34; Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 312-13.

subject. Cobban defined national self-determination as "the right of a nation to constitute an independent state and determine its own government for itself."⁴⁷ Implicit in this definition is the idea of sovereignty, the notion that each nation state is inherently capable of formulating civil structures and practicing self-government.

However, the crucial issue for this study is whether Wilson understood national self-determination to be an inherent, universal right. The answer is, unfortunately, no. In reality, Wilson viewed the principle of national self-determination through a very restrictive lens, based largely upon his long-standing commitment to historicism. As previously indicated, Wilson's historicist views were both traditional and progressive in nature, steeped in Common Sense Realism Christianity, racism, Anglo-Saxonism, and Social Darwinism. Moreover, he understood America's exceptional democratic strengths as historically derivative, arising from a shared national consciousness and experience over the course of successive generations. In explaining this idea, Wilson suggested that "no people can be a nation before its time, and its time has not come

⁴⁷ Alfred Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-Determination* (London: Collins, 1969), 104.

until the national thought and feeling have been developed and have become prevalent. Until a people thinks its government national it is not national."⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, according to Woodrow Wilson, the key historical proving ground for Americans had been the Civil War, which, through traumatic circumstances, unified and ultimately strengthened the American commitment to shared civic principles and to national government. Hence, for Wilson, the strength of American democracy by the early twentieth century was based upon a natural historical progression, which he defined as a process of "organic development" that over time produced a truly democratic nation.⁴⁹ In a startling critique coming from a southerner in the 1880s, Wilson affirmed President Abraham Lincoln's handling of the Civil War, namely because Wilson believed Lincoln rightly valued the preservation of national unity. In his dogged pursuit of reunification, Lincoln had therefore saved the nation and its government, affirming

⁴⁸ Woodrow Wilson, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1889), 366-67, 449, 464, 469, 473; See also Wilson's commentary on the State and history in Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd, eds., *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925-27), 1: 159-78.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

and preserving the founding virtues conveyed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence.⁵⁰

As a politician, Wilson understood and applied the principle of national self-determination based largely upon his critique of shared, defining historical events like the Civil War. In essence, he argued that many nations were not genuinely prepared for independence and self-government, especially of a democratic nature. In fact, even if certain groups claimed the right to self-government, any lack of homogeneity would prove detrimental to the effort. Said Wilson, it was imprudent to label "a miscellaneous people, unknit, scattered, diverse of race and speech and habit, a nation, a community." In other words, according to Woodrow Wilson, racial and ethnic uniformity ensured greater success when it came to shared national consciousness and purpose.⁵¹

As a result, Wilson believed that the ideal independent, self-governing nations achieved their status only after long, often trying periods of time, apparently because the unifying bonds required to promote cultural fitness were slow to progress. Initially distinct and self-

⁵⁰ Wilson, *The State*, 449; Baker and Dodd, *Public Papers*, 1: 43-59.

⁵¹ Wilson, *The State*, 464, 469; Baker and Dodd, *Public Papers*, 1: 437-38.

serving demographic groups presumably required generations before they could see beyond their own myopic desires and become part of a larger societal whole. This was even more important for democracies, which required a greater sense of shared vision, at least according to Wilson's questionable logic on the matter. Regardless, these historicist notions were, indeed, crucial in the formation of Wilson's ideas regarding national self-determination.⁵²

As will become apparent in chapters four and five of this study, the Wilsonian approach to the principle of national self-determination became the basis for American colonial policy, ensuring that various indigenous groups desiring independence and self-government were deemed "unfit" and "ill-prepared," lacking the historically progressive, unifying features that Woodrow Wilson favored. His liberal internationalist vision may have been directed toward altering the traditional colonial structures. However, as in the case of his domestic progressivism, when applied to colonial affairs, Wilson's historicism, as well as his religious, ethnocentric, and nationalist prejudices limited his ability to grasp the legitimate claims of non-

⁵² Wilson, *The State*, 2-7, 17-21, 575-76; Baker and Dodd, *Public Papers*, 5: 155-62.

white, non-European peoples concerning their own futures. When viewed within this context, Wilson's notions regarding the Mandate System reveal not only the president's, but the overall U.S. position in a completely different light. The next chapter will introduce the focus of this study, Edward M. House, and characterize his progressive impulses, which were closely aligned with Wilson's. I will then turn to the origins of the Mandate System concept and analyze House's role in overseeing The Inquiry, beginning in 1917.

CHAPTER 3

EDWARD M. HOUSE'S PROGRESSIVISM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MANDATES CONCEPT

The United States government's role in formulating the Mandate System was important, beginning with the Wilson administration's concerted efforts to create a working blueprint for the postwar colonial world in 1917. Many have received credit for conceiving and molding the mandates, including Woodrow Wilson himself, South Africa's Jan Christian Smuts, as well as their European counterparts at the Paris Peace Conference. However, a group of American scholars and statesmen formed in 1917, known as The Inquiry, was also critical in the broad development of postwar initiatives, including those affecting the colonial world. The head of The Inquiry was none other than Wilson's close friend and advisor, Edward M. House.

However, before analyzing The Inquiry's work leading up to the Paris Peace Conference, an overview of House's life and career prior to 1917 will be instructive. In truth, he came to advocate a brand of progressivism remarkably similar to Wilson's. Like his friend, House was a southerner, possessing an ingrained, keenly-felt sense of white, Anglo-Saxon superiority. He was a committed

Darwinist, who believed that Western nations were called to "civilize" the world and promote human evolution. And though he was certainly a proud Texan, House was also a full-fledged American exceptionalist. Hence, to comprehend the genesis of his beliefs, a sound understanding of House's formative years is essential, as is a comprehension of his intellectual foundations and his early political experience as a "kingmaker" in Texas.

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Born in Houston, Texas, on July 26, 1858, Edward Mandell House belonged to one of the wealthiest, most prominent families in the state. His father, Thomas William House, had amassed an enormous fortune through the family's extensive cotton and sugar plantations. By the time of the Civil War, the senior House was also making inroads in the banking industry, expanding the family's wealth in a new arena. Interestingly, from 1861 to 1865, Thomas House prospered further by allowing a small fleet of his ships to serve as blockade runners, which proved a precarious, though highly profitable enterprise. The vessels smashed through Union lines to deliver commodities such as cotton to Europe and returned carrying valuable provisions, including munitions that were, in turn, sold to the

Confederacy. At war's end, the House family emerged as one of the wealthiest in Texas at a time when many aristocratic southern families were either struggling or crippled financially.¹

Edward House came of age after the war ended, during the latter stages of Reconstruction, which proved some of the most tumultuous, challenging years in southern history. Texas in the 1860s and 1870s was exciting to be sure, but it was also a volatile place to live and raise a family. There is little to go on concerning the young House's relationship with his parents. His mother, Mary Hearn House, died when he was in his early teens, and it seems that he and his siblings were largely raised by nannies. What time they spent with their parents appears to have been devoted to rather formal interactions, in which father and mother would inquire about the basic well-being of their children, perhaps to ensure they were reasonably well-adjusted. This is not to say that Mr. and Mrs. House did not love or care for their children, but merely that the intimate, emotional bonds were somewhat less defined and prioritized in the House family. Among other things,

¹ "Reminiscences," 4, in Edward M. House Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. See also Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), 1:39.

instructing their children in matters of personal morality, religion, philosophy, politics, and culture was largely left to other adults or the natural accumulation of personal experience.²

Thus, in sharp contrast to Wilson, whose intellectual foundations were deeply influenced by his parents, House came to rely on his older siblings or himself when it came to the formative virtues. While such parental aloofness may seem rather absurd in the early twenty-first century, it was widely practiced in the late nineteenth, especially among the aristocracy. Moreover, it is important to note that Thomas House was not completely removed from the lives of his children, especially after their mother's untimely death, at least according to Edward House's diary entries during his late teen years. In these, he repeatedly acknowledges his father's pride and encouraging words, and specifically credits House senior with instilling in his sons a vital understanding of international economics and corporate (or estate) finance.³

Edward House was deeply affected by the people he encountered and the events he witnessed prior to 1880,

² "Reminiscences," 1-2, House Papers, Yale. See also Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 18-20.

³ Ibid.

though many of his formative worldviews were shaped less by parents and teachers than by his siblings and boyhood friends. Physically frail throughout his life, House continually struggled with bouts of malaria, among other ailments, but he was especially sickly as a child. And yet he pursued a remarkably active, even robust lifestyle for someone so infirm. Perhaps one reason is that he spent a great deal of time with his brash, adventurous brother, James, whom the younger Edward idolized. In their youth, the two House boys, "Jimmie" and "Ed," wreaked havoc, constantly pitting themselves against one another, as well as their friends, in harrowing feats of recklessness to pass the time and achieve the rites of passage common for boys of the postwar South. Left to their own devices, however, the boys' activities often degenerated into shockingly violent acts of aggression or retribution, such as bullying unfortunate youngsters they did not like. On one occasion, they even hanged a fellow schoolmate from a tree until he turned purple before cutting him free. James tragically died at sixteen from a brain injury due to a fall.⁴

⁴ "Reminiscences," 5-6, House Papers, Yale. See also Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Dover Books, 1946), 76-77.

To be sure, there was a great deal of violence going around. Steeped in war-weary frustration, and resentment toward the North, southern states like Texas were awash in chaos and bloodshed. To a degree, House and his boyhood playmates were simply copying the adults in their spheres of influence. Reconstruction was as controversial in Texas as in other southern states. Often, northern policies and politicians were not well-received. For instance, encouraged by the presence of U.S. Army troops in the South, freed slaves and northern "carpetbaggers" frequently moved in and seized control of local and state government structures, hoping to initiate and enforce widespread political reform. This famously happened in Houston in 1873. However, before the newcomers could consolidate their authority, a disturbing sequence of riots, shootings, and lynchings followed, initiated by Houston's native, white residents, some of whom were aristocrats like the Houses. Such turmoil became all too familiar in the 1860s and 1870s.⁵

Urged on by his siblings and friends, the young Edward House seems to have possessed a rather sadistic streak.

⁵ "Reminiscences," 8-10, House Papers, Yale. See also Seymour, ed., *Intimate Papers*, 1:42.

Even worse, violent interactions were not limited to white acquaintances in Houston and Galveston. House and his companions often harassed recently freed blacks, either verbally or otherwise. He recalled using slingshots, or "nigger shooters," to pelt free black passersby with objects ranging from stones to shards of glass.⁶

House's diary entries throughout his teen years consistently reveal a deeply-felt racism, a sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority and pride, which is not overly surprising given his southern upbringing in the late nineteenth century.⁷ Establishing this psychological and behavioral pattern is vital because it confirms that racist notions, culturally ingrained as they may have been, featured prominently in House's psyche from a young age. There are no indications that House was later involved in formal groups like the Ku Klux Klan in Texas; nor was he particularly vocal about his racism in public by the time of his political partnership with Wilson, though it seems likely that both men learned the political importance of curbing their racist views for public consumption. The

⁶ "Reminiscences," 4-5, House Papers, Yale. See also George and George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*, 77-78.

⁷ "Memories," 9, House Papers, Yale; See also House Diary regarding entrenched racist sentiments as a young man, including entries on June 19 and August 26, 1872, May 3, 1873, and November 23, 1874, House Papers, Yale.

point is that, when measuring House's clear partiality for Anglo-Saxon civilization and his demeaning, manipulative proposals for colonial peoples, such views appear quite consistent with the racist ideologies learned in his youth.

In some respects, the young House thrived in the chaotic environment of Reconstruction-era Texas. His aforementioned social experiences instilled in him a sense of self-reliance and confidence, an ability to measure the harsh realities of the surrounding world and resolve personal disputes with direct force when possible, or by compromising when necessary in pursuit of self-interest. These resolute abilities were later used in quite different ways, as House gradually learned to combine such traits with his passion for the demanding world of politics and diplomacy.

INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Though his social experiences dominated much of his early life, House's education also played an important role in his developing worldview. He was a capable, though unspectacular, student during the years of his formal education. His physical limitations may have played a role, because he was frequently forced to curtail his physical activities and rest while his body recuperated from the

most recent ailment. At such times, he gave himself over to reading, a favorite pastime throughout his life. As an adult, he was a voracious reader in a surprisingly broad range of subjects. Early on, he enjoyed adventure novels like many boys his age, though he embraced some classical literature and history as well.⁸

The tumultuous nature of Texas politics in the 1870s particularly intrigued the young man, and from his early teen years forward he subsequently expanded his interests into the broader subject of American politics. Even as he struggled to retain an interest in other subjects, the realm of politics consistently held his attention. He attended a number of schools over the years, including the Houston Academy, a school in Bath, England, while the House family was living overseas for a year, and lastly two preparatory schools in Virginia. In each case, House frequently conveyed frustration at having to learn mathematical formulas, poetry, or Latin, but wrote quite favorably of his history and civics courses.⁹

In 1875, at age seventeen, Edward House was hoping to enter Yale and prepare for a possible career in either law

⁸ "Reminiscences," 5-6, House Papers, Yale.

⁹ House Diary, September 17 and December 11, 1874, January 18, 1875, House Papers, Yale.

or politics, but was rejected when his performance on the entrance examination proved less than stellar. Apparently, hunting in the woods and bullying in town had occupied an inordinately high percentage of House's energies over the years, at the expense of his academic preparation. Though Yale's president, Dr. Noah Porter, was a friend of Thomas House, he was not willing to allow the younger House admittance, at least not until he addressed his academic shortcomings.¹⁰

Hence, House was referred to the nearby Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven, Connecticut, in the hope that a year or two of additional preparation in Latin, Greek, and the classics would prepare him for the rigors of Yale. At Hopkins, he did study when absolutely necessary, though he also appears to have shirked some of his academic responsibilities in favor of pranks and mildly degenerate behavior whenever possible. More importantly, however, it was at Hopkins that House befriended Oliver Morton, the son of a U.S. Senator from Indiana. They shared a deep, abiding fascination with American politics, and the two became inseparable. On frequent occasions, the two young men

¹⁰ "Reminiscences," 5-6, House Papers, Yale. See also Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 19-20.

visited the Morton residence in Washington, D.C., where House was not only introduced to Senator Morton, but also other senators and representatives, and even President Ulysses S. Grant. During the notorious 1876 election campaign, Senator Morton lost the Republican presidential nomination to Rutherford B. Hayes, who went on to become president after one of the closest elections in history. Regardless, the experiences with Morton's family galvanized House's interest in politics, and he seemed, at last, ready to take the next step toward a prominent future.¹¹

Instead of Yale, both House and Morton chose Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. It was here that House initially became enamored of several crucial concepts that would have a lasting influence on his life and career: Social Darwinism, Anglo-Saxonism, and the roots of his American exceptionalist framework. Applying Charles Darwin's biological theories to culture more broadly was intriguing to House, whose fondness for British and American culture was steeped in notions of white, Anglo-Saxon superiority. He previously lacked a fully-formed philosophy that seemed to logically explain Western

¹¹ "Reminiscences," 5-6, House Papers, Yale. See also Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 20-21.

Civilization's dominance in the world. By the late 1870s, however, there were strong arguments coming from Europeans like Herbert Spencer, as well as others in the United States, proclaiming the virtues of the strong over the weak, virtues that were at least ostensibly based in modern science. In 1877-1878, several of his professors at Cornell were explaining, even advocating these ideas in some detail. Like Wilson and many others, House became convinced that Social Darwinism was a thoroughly sound, even practical rationale for Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, a notion that would deeply influence his later articulations of American colonial objectives.¹²

The broad idea of American exceptionalism came more gradually to House, partially because, as a Texan, he was conditioned to favor the Lone Star Republic over the United States in considerations of loyalty. Still, because of his genuine appreciation for American history and politics, the seeds of the exceptionalist framework had already been sown. While this notion remained largely dormant for House until the early twentieth century, Cornell challenged him to consider the possibility that Americans possessed a

¹² "Memories," 10, and "Reminiscences," 11-12, 35, 38, House Papers, Yale.

uniquely extraordinary heritage, one that virtually demanded a projection of their political and cultural structures associated with national greatness.¹³

Though House did not distinguish himself at Cornell as an elite mind, in truth he appears to have grown immensely, imbibing a far more mature, serious approach to knowledge than ever before. Unfortunately, his time at Cornell proved short-lived. In the fall of 1879, during House's second year at the university, tragedy struck when Thomas House suffered a debilitating stroke. Edward left Cornell, returning to Texas in the hopes of nursing his father back to proper health. Though the senior House initially seemed to make a few strides toward some measure of recovery, it was not long before his health worsened to the point of crisis, and he died in early 1880.¹⁴

Upon reflecting on his possible courses of action, House decided not to return to complete his degree at Cornell, nor did he pursue a law career, though he briefly considered entering the Columbia Law School in New York. Ultimately, he settled in Texas and took over the reins of his father's estate, proving himself a rather capable

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Memories," 10, 32, and "Reminiscences," 38-39, House Papers, Yale.

manager. In addition to overseeing the House family fortune, his primary responsibilities included buying and selling vast tracts of property throughout the state, pitting his business acumen against other real estate developers, many of whom possessed far more knowledge and experience than the young House. To his credit, he was remarkably adept at closing deals and earning the respect of both partners and competitors alike.¹⁵

These were good years for House to be sure. In late 1880, he met the lovely Loulie Hunter, herself the daughter of an aristocratic family, from Hunter, Texas, no less. They married in August 1881, and then embarked on a year-long tour of Europe.¹⁶ Upon their return to Texas, House continued in his business venture as before, until 1882. He longed for something else, something more suited to his personality and interests. In truth, he clearly longed for a role in politics, though he was forced to acknowledge some difficult truths about himself, truths that ultimately defined his life and career from that point on. In particular, House came to realize that he would likely never be able to assume high political office himself, as a

¹⁵ Collection 466, Series I, Box 30, Folder 937, House Papers, Yale.

¹⁶ Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 23.

governor, senator, or certainly as president. His frail health continually plagued him, and he rightly questioned his physical ability to discharge the very public responsibilities of elected officials.¹⁷

Based on his diary entries beginning in 1882, House appears to have been at peace with these realizations.¹⁸ He had always been comfortable in the background, dating back to his childhood when he played second-fiddle to his brother James. House was not charismatic, nor was he overly striking physically. Moreover, he was not a very capable public speaker. All of these traits appear to have come crashing in on House's consciousness as he considered whether he had a future in politics. In the end, the psychological resolution was a rather simple one. House ultimately decided that he actually would be far more effective as a political advisor, as a "hidden hand" that guided the thoughts and actions of the powerful.

MAKING OF A WILSONIAN PROGRESSIVE (1892-1912)

In 1886, House and his wife relocated to the Texas state capital of Austin. On most evenings, they either entertained guests at their palatial new home, or they

¹⁷ George and George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*, 82-83.

¹⁸ House Diary, June 27, 29, July 13, and September 1, 1882, March 14, 20, April 2, May 9, 1883, and January 1, 7, February 12, and May 19, 1884, House Papers, Yale.

hobnobbed elsewhere at parties with the state's elite business leaders and politicians. Because of the honorable reputation and legacy of Thomas House, his son benefited immediately, and it was not long before he succeeded in ingratiating himself to a vast circle of elite, powerful acquaintances.¹⁹

But his family name and connections did not entirely account for his early successes. House was also a quick study, and he poured himself into this self-prescribed internship, devouring the often sordid complexities of the political arena in Texas, especially those of the Democratic Party that he favored. As one account put it, House became deeply interested in learning "all aspects of the art of manipulating men."²⁰ Whether it involved understanding voter trends in the state, measuring nomination tendencies at party conventions, or even learning how to manipulate legislative bodies to pass a desired bill, House vigorously pursued his hands-on political education. And by the early 1890s, he deemed himself ready to test his ideas and skills in the crucible

¹⁹ "Reminiscences," 26, House Papers, Yale. See also House's correspondence with several business leaders and politicians beginning in the fall of 1886, House Papers, Yale, Box 30; Hodgson, 26-30.

²⁰ George and George, 83.

of Texas politics, though his initial foray proved challenging.²¹

In 1892, the incumbent Texas governor, James W. Hogg, faced a staunch challenge for the Democratic nomination from George Clark, a well-funded party rival whose political sponsors included the managing directors of the Southern Pacific Railroad. As it happened, Governor Hogg found himself in the crosshairs of the railroad company because he vigorously opposed monopolistic practices and had devoted much time and energy to regulating the railroad's activities in the state. Hence his political future seemed grim.²²

Enter Edward House, who in this matter aligned himself politically with moderate reformers of the era, many of whom spawned the progressivism of the early twentieth century. Although he had yet to articulate some of these principles, like Wilson in later years, House actually came to favor less government oversight of business, in line with his views on the applications of Social Darwinism to government, specifically in the economic realm. At least in part, House already seemed to be gravitating toward the

²¹ "Reminiscences," 43, House Papers, Yale.

²² Ibid., 18, House Papers, Yale. See also Robert C. Cotner, *James Stephen Hogg* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), 301.

idea that the federal government's oversight should actually be quite limited, preferring instead to encourage the competitive realities suggested by Darwin's process of "natural selection" and Spencer's "survival of the fittest." Again, according to this thinking, by interfering with business or supporting the "unfit," the government ran the risk of unwittingly destroying, or at least inhibiting social progress.²³ Even so, House did believe that overly large, aggressive business monopolies undermined the very entrepreneurial competition required to ensure economic fitness. Hence he opposed the Southern Pacific Railroad in this instance.

After offering to aid Governor Hogg in his time of critical need, House served, by his own choice, behind-the-scenes as the governor's key political advisor. After defeating Clark for the Democratic nomination, Hogg won the 1892 election, and afterward gave much credit to House for his insightful advice on matters of campaign finance and legislative reform, among other issues. Moreover, in partial thanks to House, Hogg also bestowed upon his young

²³ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*, rev. ed., and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Perhaps the best intellectual evaluation of Spencer and Social Darwinism's applications may be found in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 32.

advisor the honorary title of "Colonel," which remained a preferred moniker for the remainder of House's life.²⁴

Over the next sixteen years, Colonel House was an intimate, though unofficial advisor to four consecutive Texas governors, including Hogg, Charles Culberson, Joseph Sayers, and W. H. D. Lanham. In that time, a number of progressive philosophies emerged in House that bore a striking resemblance to those of his future friend and colleague, Woodrow Wilson. House's brand of progressivism was steeped in the racist notions of Anglo-Saxonism and Social Darwinism. Moreover, by the first decade of the twentieth century, House, too, had increasingly accepted American exceptionalism as an explanatory framework.²⁵ Given his own meteoric rise in the realm of power politics in the United States, such philosophies seemed quite rational to the Texas "colonel," whose political career seemed to mirror the inexorable American rise to global prominence.

By late 1910, House was seeking a greater political challenge, preferably as an advisor to a politician of national significance. At this juncture, Wilson remained a somewhat obscure political "dark horse" on the national

²⁴ "Memories," 37, House Papers, Yale. See also Cotner, *James Stephen Hogg*, 393, 399.

²⁵ "Reminiscences," 43, 48, House Papers, Yale.

stage. Though elected as New Jersey's governor in November of that year, Wilson had yet to move beyond the shadow of his academic career to become a visionary politician. Still, House recognized in Wilson the essential qualities of a strong, capable leader. And by late 1911, he was convinced that Wilson's progressive vision was superior to that of other likely presidential candidates, so House decided to arrange a meeting with Governor Wilson.²⁶

The two met for the first time at the Hotel Gotham in New York City, on November 24, 1911. By all accounts, they liked one another immediately, perhaps sensing the possibilities that a political partnership might produce. Even more importantly, after weeks of meeting and discussing a vast array of political ideas, the two men realized they shared a surprising number of philosophical tenets, paving the way for one of American history's most productive political collaborations. During the election year of 1912, House remained in the background as one of Wilson's unofficial campaign advisors. By the time of Wilson's victory in November and the beginning of his first

²⁶ Seymour, *Intimate Papers*, 1: 42; "Reminiscences," 51, House Papers, Yale.

term in March of 1913, the two men were together often; in fact they seemed inseparable.²⁷

THE INQUIRY AND INITIAL COLONIAL QUESTIONS

Colonel House, as he preferred to be addressed, served President Wilson in a variety of capacities from 1913 to 1917. Though he lacked an official role within the administration, House was, nonetheless, part of Wilson's inner circle. Over time, he earned the implicit trust of the president regarding a wide array of political matters, both foreign and domestic. As Wilson's most trusted confidant and advisor, House advised him on a remarkably wide range of topics, from effective modes of political dialogue with challenging personalities in the U.S. Congress to detailed suggestions for Wilson's New Freedom program. Yet he displayed a special talent in the arena of foreign affairs, and he ultimately gained the president's confidence to such a degree that Wilson was willing to send House overseas to negotiate with foreign dignitaries on his behalf. The most famous outcome of House's foreign trips was the House-Grey Memorandum of 1916, inviting the belligerent nations to consider a peace conference and further promising a U.S. declaration of war against Germany

²⁷ Seymour, *Intimate Papers*, 1:44-45. See also Hodgson, 1.

if the Central Powers rejected such an offer by the Allies.²⁸

Ultimately, House was instrumental to the primary subject of this study, guiding the mandates from concept to reality. Serving as the president's principal colonial advisor, House became not only Wilson's eyes and ears during negotiations over mandates in Paris, but also the key American member of the Mandates Commission that met in London in the summer of 1919. Though Wilson was certainly an active contributor to postwar colonial initiatives, he entrusted House with the responsibility of creating and articulating the American position regarding the postwar League of Nations mandates.

Formed in September 1917, the experts of The Inquiry were given the responsibility to prepare for the peace conference by identifying key topics of concern in a variety of fields and then supplying policy positions for Wilson, House, and others to consider prior to the start of negotiations. Although every specified division of The Inquiry fell under his purview, from those considering the geopolitics of Eastern and Western Europe to those

²⁸ Hodgson, 56-62; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Confusions and Crises, 1915-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 134-35.

analyzing the Middle and Far East, House consistently gravitated toward the division assigned to formulate colonial policies and procedures. He conferred almost daily with the colonial experts, whereas he left the other divisions to their own devices for weeks at a time.

Noted historian George Louis Beer served as House's colonial expert, helping him form the American position on postwar decolonization in Africa and the Middle East. A scholar known for his expertise in the field of British colonialism, Beer was an easy choice for House in his effort to mold an extensive report on the social, political, and economic realities present within the African colonies.²⁹ Among his most influential early ideas, Beer proposed to House the inclusion of provisions for indigenous rights and economic free trade, favoring trusteeship in the colonies rather than the traditional colonial oversight proposed by Great Britain and France. In a report for The Inquiry written in December 1917, Beer clarified this approach, first using the term "mandate" to describe The Inquiry's colonial proposals:

In case of any transfer of territory in Central Africa, and possibly even in the existing depend-

²⁹ Lawrence E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 228.

encies, it might, I think be definitely established, that the state exercising sovereignty in Africa is proceeding under an international mandate and must act as trustee primarily for the nations and secondarily for the outside world as a whole.³⁰

In subsequent statements regarding the German colonies in Africa, Beer further acknowledged that political expediency seemed likely to dominate any negotiations regarding the fate of colonial subjects. Though he realized his idea would generate much debate about colonial spoils of war among Britain and France, Beer nonetheless advocated altering the geopolitics in Africa by depriving Germany of its colonies. After all, Germany's autocratic colonial policies prior to 1914 all but ensured the loss of its possessions at war's end. Hence, in German East Africa, Beer advocated several initial resolutions, including one for less stringent colonial immigration laws allowing non-Europeans greater access to the territories. He also criticized the prewar boundaries in West Africa. Here Beer recognized France's political claim to the portion of Cameroon seized by Germany in 1911. Nonetheless, for the rest of Cameroon, he proposed trusteeship, whereby the former colonies would be overseen by a multinational body until they were ready for independence. Perhaps realizing

³⁰ George Louis Beer quoted in Gelfand, 231-32.

this idea might be unwelcome by the British and French, Beer included a reserve option, saying that if his proposal was deemed unfeasible, the only solution might be to "assign part of the Cameroons to British Nigeria and part to French Equatorial Africa."³¹

In researching and writing these various reports for The Inquiry, Beer brought House up to speed on key precedents set by international law. Specifically, he viewed the Berlin Act of 1885 as a major turning point for colonialism in Africa. Ostensibly, the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) was held to regulate African trade and navigation rights, particularly on the Congo and Niger Rivers. In reality, the conferees merely rationalized territorial annexation by signing a collective agreement congruent with codes of international law. Article 34 of the Berlin Act reveals these motives, stating:

Any power which henceforth takes possession of a tract of land on the coasts of the African Continent outside of its present possessions, or which, being hitherto without such possessions, shall acquire them and assume a protectorate.³²

³¹ George Louis Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 57-67.

³² Quoted in Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 197.

Article 35 vaguely elaborated on these imperial designs, suggesting that the conference delegates "ensure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African continent sufficient to protect existing rights." As historian Niall Ferguson rightly asserts, these statements completely ignored the indigenous people and their legitimacy.³³

George Louis Beer and Colonel House both recognized these legalities as positive trends. They appeared to believe that Wilson's League of Nations could serve as a buttress against naked aggression and colonial subjugation, saying "it is not unjustifiable to wage such wars in Africa . . . but it is ignoble to use Africa merely as a pawn to purchase security elsewhere at the expense of the native."³⁴ Yet, while his statements regarding the protection of indigenous peoples seemed altruistic, subsequent documents reveal that House and, to a lesser degree, Beer both shared Wilson's notions for a more progressive strain of imperialism, especially those philosophies reminiscent of the British Empire's administrative network in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁵ As noted Anglophiles,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Beer, *African Questions*, 266.

³⁵ Beer to House, Enclosure II, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 265-69.

Beer and House relished their membership in the British Round Table, which likely affected their colonial opinions.³⁶ In truth, both largely favored accommodation with Britain and France concerning the colonies. Beer and House both sought to dismiss blatantly abusive colonial administration, favoring trusteeships over granting universal freedoms to indigenous people. Fearing the consequences of granting political, economic, and military freedom, even the idealistic Beer lamented that "arming the natives" with such freedoms would seriously "imperil the delicately balanced fabric" of allied relations.³⁷

This is not to say that the idea of self-determination supplied by House (through Beer's work) was deceitful. In fact, House truly sought national self-determination, albeit in a form agreeable to his own progressive "Wilsonian" worldview. Ultimately, the president and his colonial advisors were intent on modifying the traditional formula for outright colonialism, rationalizing their own

³⁶ The British Round Table was an association that met to discuss and promote imperial administration of the supposedly more enlightened variety.

³⁷ Beer, *African Questions*, p. 275.

imperial philosophies by using idealistic rhetoric.³⁸

Wilson's early comments on the topic suggest that he was weighing colonial alternatives without committing to a particularly entrenched stance, a strategy reminiscent of Beer's position. However, in keeping with his statements about the League's moral value, Wilson sought to imbue the colonial settlement with humanitarian overtones that would prevent the looming Allied annexations from appearing blatantly aggressive. The president provided a glimpse of this veiled form of neo-imperialism in an oft-cited interview with Sir William Wiseman on October 16, 1918. In an effort to clarify his progressive vision, as contained in the Fourteen Points, Wilson condemned the atrocities of German colonialism and then decried previous international commissions as both inept and self-serving. He shamelessly declared his League of Nations to be the ideal nonpartisan entity for colonial administration. The president's views are readily apparent in Wiseman's interview notes, in which he writes of Wilson:

He must warn the British, however, of the great jealousy of the other nations—including, he regretted

³⁸ Wilson to House, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 259-60; Memorandum from Beer to House, Enclosure II, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 265-69; Council of Four Minutes, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 275-77; House Diary, June 27, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

to say, a large number of people in America. It would, he thought, create much bad feeling internationally if the German colonies were handed over to us as a sovereign part of the British Empire. He wondered whether there was some way in which they could be administered in trust. "In trust," I asked, for whom?" "Well, for the League of Nations," he said.³⁹

Soon after, Wilson approved the rendition of the Fourteen Points that had been prepared by the secretary of The Inquiry, Walter Lippmann, and his colleague Frank Cobb, the editor of the *New York World*. Colonel House utilized this draft of the key ideas contained in the Fourteen Points throughout negotiations in Paris.⁴⁰ Of particular interest to House were Lippmann's and Cobb's editorial comments on Point 5, which addressed German colonies and other colonial territories that could conceivably be objects of imperial desire when the war ended.⁴¹ Juggling the Franco-British concerns over ongoing colonial stability, Lippmann and Cobb suggested that "exploitation should be conducted on the principle of the open door."⁴² Despite the blatantly imperialistic overtones, this notion

³⁹ William Wiseman Interview, House Papers, Yale, Box 187, Files 2, 53.

⁴⁰ Lippmann and Cobb Memorandum on Fourteen Points, House Papers, Yale, Box 187, File 2, 54. See also Harry R. Rudin, *Armistice 1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944; reprint edition, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), 267.

⁴¹ Lippmann and Cobb Memorandum, House Papers, Box 187, File 2, 54; Digre, 139-40.

⁴² Ibid. Additional evidence on American views may be found in Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany and Peacemaking, 1918-1919: Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 82-83.

influenced Wilson and House in later discussions with the Allies.

Given their shared sentiments regarding Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, it is no surprise that Wilson and House also revealed distinctly racist perspectives in their contact with minority leaders at home and abroad. A prime example is W.E.B. Du Bois, who favored creating a central African state composed of the former German colonies as well as the Belgian Congo. Du Bois believed this proposal aligned with the African desire for independence. It was endorsed by the NAACP Board of Directors in 1919 and then submitted to the Wilson administration.⁴³ However, even though, on the surface, these notions were congruent with Wilson's and House's idealistic rhetoric on national self-determination, not surprisingly, it proved too liberal or progressive to gain Wilson's approval.

Soon after his arrival in Europe for the peace conference, Wilson read *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, by General Jan Smuts of South Africa.⁴⁴ Smuts has often been credited for the progressive mandates concept. In his proposal, Smuts outlined a colonial system

⁴³ Clarence G. Contee, "Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan-African Congress of 1919," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (January 1972): 1:15-16.

⁴⁴ Jan C. Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918).

that could, conceivably function under Wilson's League of Nations. Hence, at least in principle, trusteeship was to be favored over annexation. However, before Smuts' reputation as a genuine progressive is written in stone, the following bears mentioning. Regardless of his stated idealism, Smuts was not genuinely committed to colonial independence. In truth, his imperial designs are not difficult to identify, because he was far more blatant in his rhetorical advocacy of continued spheres of colonial influence. In this vein, Smuts argued that because there were differing levels of colonial development, self-determination could not be administered without thought for inherent geopolitical and cultural realities. Hence, according to Smuts, while certain peoples might be on the brink of readiness for self-government, others were less developed, and therefore "autonomy in any real sense would be out of the question."⁴⁵

At first it seemed Smuts might be willing to advocate shared oversight of mandated territories, meaning Wilson's League would collectively determine whether former colonies had the right to national self-determination. However, Smuts rejected direct international administration as

⁴⁵ Smuts, *The League of Nations*, 12-17.

impractical. Instead, he urged that the League utilize "the administrative organization of individual States for the purpose." This could be accomplished "by nominating a particular State to act for and on behalf" of the League.⁴⁶

Smuts' proposals were significant, though perhaps not to the extent claimed by scholars over the years. George Curry characterized Wilson's response to the Smuts plan by saying, "this document, more than any other of its kind, was to excite the imagination of the American President."⁴⁷ In truth, though Wilson valued the articulate ideas in Smuts' proposal, he certainly did not view the concepts as original. After all, under House's oversight, The Inquiry had made similar proposals beginning in 1917. Wary of Smuts' interest in annexing German Southwest Africa, Wilson nonetheless recognized the value inherent in the South African leader's ideas. His proposals could serve as preliminary blueprints for Wilson, Beer, and House as they prepared for the upcoming Paris Peace Conference and juxtaposed their views on self-determination with those of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19. See also Digre, 142-43.

⁴⁷ George Curry, "Woodrow Wilson, Jan Smuts, and the Versailles Settlement," *American Historical Review* 66 (July 1961): 969.

Smuts to create a controlled vision for a progressive future in colonial areas of the world.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ House and Wilson Correspondence, December 17-18, 1918, *PWW*, 53: 417.

CHAPTER 4

EDWARD HOUSE, WOODROW WILSON, AND COLONIAL NEGOTIATIONS AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE OF 1919

Woodrow Wilson and Edward House arrived in Paris hoping to secure their progressive international vision through intense, reasoned dialogue with their political counterparts, especially the delegates from Britain and France. Wilson and House were at least mildly apprehensive about their impending diplomatic responsibilities; yet they both entered the conference believing their principles would garner a favorable reception, with key elements of the Wilsonian progressive vision serving as something of a philosophical blueprint for the future of humanity. Such lofty expectations proved challenging given the vast array of geopolitical issues facing the delegates, from border reallocation and economic reparation to more tedious, petty rhetorical debates over assigning blame for the travesty of the war itself.

Still, there was reason to hope, especially regarding the postwar colonial settlement, which Wilson and House were eager to define. When the conference began on January 12, 1919, it became evident that colonial issues were prioritized by each of the key delegations. In fact, the

mandate system's basic framework was in place by the end of the month, based partially on several important ideas articulated by Jan Smuts, but more notably on the concepts of trusteeship and League oversight established by House and The Inquiry beginning in 1917.

INITIAL COLONIAL DECISIONS AT PARIS

As indicated previously, the lion's share of scholars have assumed that the Wilsonian vision was inherently idealistic, entailing the literal, universal pursuit of equality and independence for indigenous peoples under colonial rule.¹ However, as this study has shown, the reality was that Wilson and House were both committed to their applied understanding of Anglo-Saxonism, Social Darwinism, and Christianity in Wilson's case, as well as a dedication to the idea of American exceptionalism, all of which informed their philosophical approach to progressive politics. For their part, Wilson and House favored a colonial plan based largely upon the rhetorically laudable Wilsonian principle of national self-determination. But,

¹ See Ernest May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959), 435-37. Also, for a rather unique perspective involving the idea that Wilson conveyed a "higher realism" by combining his views on Christianity with global relations, see Arthur S. Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson and Other Essays* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 127-39. Lastly, see Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, 327-37.

while their liberal internationalist vision may have been directed toward altering the old, traditional colonial structures, their ethnocentric and nationalist prejudices limited their ability to grasp the legitimate claims of non-white, non-European peoples living in colonial regions.²

Even a non-white conference delegation like Japan was faced with a hard fight against the European and American delegates in Paris and London. Japan's hopes of expanding its empire in the Pacific were viewed with suspicion by the Franco-British members. After shocking the world by defeating Russia in 1905, Japan had embarked upon a significant industrial expansion program during the Taishō period (1912-1926). At the very least, Japan sought inclusion in the open trade agreements overseen by the Europeans and Americans. Japan's imperial ambitions were much larger, however. In truth, they hoped to challenge Europe's colonial stranglehold in East Asia and assume that mantle of authority themselves.³

A Japanese diplomat named Kijūrō Shidehara was crucial in paving the way for Japan's imperial vision. Among other Pacific island holdings, he and Viscount Chinda both sought

² See discussion on these elements in chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

³ Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 109-15.

the acquisition of China's Shantung province as part of Japan's expanding Pacific empire. This, of course, would prove extremely controversial given the fact that China had been promised the return of Shantung if Germany lost the war. Moreover, Japan's desire for the inclusion of a racial equality amendment in the League covenant proved challenging, namely because British, French, and American delegates did not view the Japanese as equals. Hence this was a precarious issue during negotiations in Paris and London.⁴

The British, French, and American delegates took the lead on the colonial settlement. Both Wilson and House anticipated that the League of Nations would ultimately be given administrative oversight of colonial territories in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, thereby providing the United States and the European victors with the power to define independence as they saw fit and simultaneously oversee the gradual move toward independence for colonial peoples. The League's oversight would not be cast in such an autocratic light, of course. After all, Wilson and House genuinely believed that a new colonial system could be

⁴ Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention*, 109-15, 119-21; on the Shantung issue, see Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), 293, 311, 363-64.

forged that would reflect the progressive Wilsonian vision for a new, enlightened order in the postwar world. In the eyes of Wilson and House, the blatantly abusive colonial order of the past had to be scrapped in favor of a new system that aligned with Wilsonian progressive standards, inspiring loyalty and trust in the process.⁵

From the start, however, it became clear that the progressive notions held by Wilson and House were not entirely understood or embraced by the British and French delegates. While they were not completely at odds with one another, the British delegation, led by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, sought to fine-tune the existing colonial system. Rather than a system framed largely within Wilsonian progressive philosophy, Lloyd George and his British colleagues favored minor adjustments to the traditional form of colonialism that could be administered within the existing confines of the British Empire.⁶

⁵ This was confirmed a few months later. See Wilson to House, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 259-60; Council of Four Minutes, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 275-77; and House Diary, June 27, 1919, House Papers, Yale. See also Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, 3-30, 190-219; and Malcolm Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), chapters 4-5.

⁶ Council of Ten Minutes, January 24, 1919, *PWW*, 53: 337, 401-02; U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, 13 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942-1947), 3: 718. Hereafter cited as *FRUS:PPC*.

Lloyd George, Robert Cecil, and Arthur Balfour assumed it was necessary to provide a *quid pro quo* for British Dominions as partial payment for their loyal service to Britain from 1914 to 1918. Lloyd George, in particular, wanted to ensure that the Union of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand received the former German territories they each desired: German Southwest Africa, New Guinea, and German Samoa, respectively.⁷ That Britain sought additional colonies was not surprising to House and Wilson. What truly concerned them was the fact that Lloyd George proposed to engage in open colonial annexation, in the process blatantly violating the rhetoric of Wilsonian progressive principles like national self-determination.⁸

It is not that Wilson and House were naively expecting the victorious powers to grant immediate independence to all indigenous peoples under colonial rule. Neither man sought such a dramatic turn of events in the colonial world. However, both House and Wilson did believe the European colonial system was too often marred by corruption and brutality. Moreover, while certain colonial peoples seemed clearly "backward," and incapable of self-rule, it

⁷ See Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes*, 157.

⁸ House Diary, January 7, 1919, House Papers, Yale; See also correspondence between House, Wilson, and Lansing, October 30-December 21, 1918, *FRUS, 1918*, Supplement I, 421-23.

seemed possible that others deserved at least a chance for independence in the not-too-distant future. Of course, as American exceptionalists, House and Wilson arrived full of their own virtue, eager to convince their rival delegates of the merits of Wilsonian progressivism, which should be applied in the colonial world.⁹ The stage was set for much debate.

This became clear during a meeting on January 24, 1919, when the Council of Ten decided that none of the colonies would be returned to Germany. On the surface, this was reasonable to Wilson and House, both of whom believed that punishing Germany by seizing its colonies was a perfectly acceptable course of action. However, when Lloyd George and the British delegates further argued against broad international control over colonial administration, Wilson and House attempted to avert any early bad blood by introducing their ideas for the mandate system to the other delegates. To their great surprise, David Lloyd George embraced the idea of a mandate system from the start, and was (in theory) willing to accept the structure on behalf of Britain. In his opinion, it "did not differ materially

⁹ House and Wilson Correspondence, December 30, 1918 to January 8, 1919, Collection 466, Series I, Box 30, Folders 937-38, House Papers, Yale.

from the method in which the British Empire dealt with its colonies."¹⁰

Such a statement was obviously problematic. It highlighted the British belief that their administration of colonial peoples was broadly acceptable and enlightened, and thus that developing the mandate system would simply serve as a legal and rhetorical mechanism for ongoing British imperialism. Essentially, nothing would be overly affected by political and structural change in the colonies. To be sure, the French thought similarly, as will be revealed. Not surprisingly, then, Lloyd George called for outright annexation in the territories sought by the British Dominions of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, respectively. He then allowed the Dominions to present their claims for pursuing annexation, based primarily upon strategic considerations and geographical location.¹¹

For his part, Jan Smuts, the affable, yet enigmatic leader of the Union of South Africa, was concerned that America's Wilsonian vision might endanger his colonial

¹⁰ Council of Ten Minutes, January 24, 1919, *PWW*, 53: 337, 401-02; *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 718-20.

¹¹ David Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 2 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 1: 542. See also William Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 128-32.

designs in the former German colony of Southwest Africa, writing that Wilson was "entirely opposed to our annexing a little German colony here or there, which pains me deeply."¹² Smuts decided upon a rather shrewd strategy in an effort to turn the tide in his favor. In essence, he went out of his way to persuade the gathered delegates of the uniqueness of German Southwest Africa. "The Cameroons, Togo-land, and East Africa were all tropical and valuable possessions; South-West Africa was a desert country without any product of great value and only suitable for pastoralists." Hence, he argued that his Union of South Africa was the logical choice for developing this former German colony, while simultaneously decrying the need for mandates. According to Smuts, the mandate system might deserve serious consideration in other African regions, but "there was not, in this instance, a strong case."¹³ Hence British Dominions like the Union of South Africa forcefully pushed to annex the territories they respectively desired. Britain proper sought the mandate for East Africa. However, Lloyd George envisioned an extremely limited role for

¹² Smuts Diary, January 24, 1919, W. K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel, eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 4: 41-43, 47-50.

¹³ Council of Ten Minutes, January 24, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 722-23.

Wilson's League, preferring British colonial administration over any multinational body.¹⁴

Four days later, the French began pressing their colonial claims in Cameroon and Togo. Desiring even less international administrative oversight, the French delegation promoted a sweeping plan of annexation in western Africa. Addressing the Council of Ten on January 28, 1919, French Colonial Minister Henri Simon pressed for colonial rewards as well. He specifically argued that France was "entitled to them for the same reasons that had been used by the British Dominions." He further suggested that "the large sea coast of the Cameroons, and the port of Duala were required for the development of French Equatorial Africa."¹⁵ Finally, after acknowledging the British Dominions' concerns regarding international oversight, Simon provided a rather surreal philosophical defense of French colonial history, ending with an erroneous promise that France would secure and protect the indigenous rights in Togo and Cameroon and that free trade practices would be initiated in both colonies. In this,

¹⁴ Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 1: 539-42; Digre, 158-59.

¹⁵ Council of Ten Minutes, January 28, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 760.

Simon sought to appease the American delegation and forge ahead with the proposals for annexation.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, President Wilson and Edward House responded by unequivocally rejecting British and French proposals they viewed as blatantly imperialistic and totally counter to the progressive ideals they espoused, ideals that many Americans and Europeans supposedly favored. Wilson, in particular, observed that "the discussion so far had been, in essence, a negation in detail-one case at a time-of the whole principle of mandatories."¹⁷ In the hope that Wilson and House were not entirely opposed to ongoing colonial enterprises, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and Lloyd George attempted to appease Wilson and House while still achieving their aims. Lloyd George soothingly promised Britain's cooperation in administering German East Africa under League provisions, and further stated that France seemed quite amenable to the mandates concept, despite Simon's rhetoric to the contrary.¹⁸ Clemenceau also responded in a conciliatory manner. This was, however, unsurprising given his desire to subordinate colonial issues within French

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Council of Ten Minutes, January 28, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 763.

¹⁸ Ibid., 767-68.

foreign policy. According to historian Brian Digre, just as Simon's presentation had represented the French colonial ministry's annexationist ambitions, Clemenceau's European focus allowed him to abandon them. Digre further observed that Lloyd George, though he agreed with certain elements of progressivism embraced by Wilson and House, had interpreted Simon's speech better than Wilson.¹⁹

Clemenceau elaborated by expressing a willingness to make concessions as long as viable resolutions existed. In a clear effort to appease both of his allies, the French premier continued:

He did not regret the discussions which had taken place on the subject, since these discussions had impressed him with the justness of the claims of the Dominions. However, since Mr. Lloyd George was prepared to accept the mandate of the League of Nations he would not dissent from the general agreement, merely for the sake of the Cameroons and Togoland.²⁰

Ultimately, the meeting was adjourned without a resolution on the mandate concept. Yet, it was evident that during the meeting of January 28, an Anglo-French alliance was forged, accepting certain principles of the mandate system for the former German and Turkish territories.²¹ From Wilson's and House's perspective, however, much remained to be discussed

¹⁹ Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes*, 160-61.

²⁰ Council of Ten Minutes, January 28, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 768-69.

²¹ Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes*, 160.

before the mandates came to fruition. Specifically, they desired to distance any new system from traditional colonialism, and they were particularly eager to avoid the perception of blatant expansion evident in the Anglo-French proposals.²²

In the following days, European and American leaders devised a carefully crafted compromise, which aimed at appeasing American concerns over the mandates being seen as the League's disguise for annexation. President Wilson was not part of these negotiations, leaving House to forge a reasonable compromise with his British and French counterparts. Late on January 28 and early on the 29th, House met with Robert Cecil, Henri Simon, and several others. After much deliberation, they formed the basis of the three-tiered mandate system, later designated A, B, and C. In essence, the proposal for three classes of mandates favored categorizing the conquered territories on the basis of their geographic locations, simultaneously appointing League member governments as arbiters who would determine the political viability of indigenous leaders in Africa and the Middle East, and ultimately decide whether the

²² House Diary, January 28, 1919, House Papers, Yale. See also MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 103.

respective countries were ready to design and run their own governments.²³

The territories were to be assigned to one of three classes of mandates. A-mandate countries were deemed to be nearly ready for self-government, only requiring a minimal period of political oversight by the League of Nations before independence became a reality. B-mandate nations required more time. These countries would be assigned to a League member in trust, who would be responsible for overseeing the territory's progressive development under League provisions, ensuring the prohibition of illegal trade in slaves, arms, and alcohol, while also curtailing militarization. C-mandate territories would technically function under the same provisions as the B-mandate countries, though they would be under even more extensive—and long-term—control by the League.²⁴

Ostensibly, of course, the three-tiered plan allowed the mandated territories to gradually prepare for outright independence as they moved through the mandate categories. Eventually, the A mandates consisted of the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, whereas most of Germany's

²³ Council of Ten Minutes, January 29, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 770-86.

²⁴ Council of Ten Minutes, January 29, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 770-86. See also Louis, *Great Britain's Lost Colonies*, 132-36, and Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 1: 543-48.

former African colonies formed the B mandates. However, the C mandates, consisting primarily of the countries sought by the British Dominions, were organized as a veiled form of annexation. Hence there would be ongoing debate over how to present the C mandates as benevolently as possible in order to implement the entire system.²⁵

Woodrow Wilson was grateful to House, Cecil, and the others, and was genuinely intrigued by the three-tiered concept, though he was slow in recognizing that much remained to be done, and that further compromise was likely to occur if the mandates were ever to become a reality.²⁶ Still, the president's affirmation of the tiered mandate system is significant because it again confirms the true leanings of Wilson and House regarding the administrative fates of the colonies and their people. Few countries were likely to gain near-immediate independence as class A territories. Most would be identified as either B or C mandates, meaning that Wilson's League would function, for the foreseeable future, much the same as mother countries had for centuries in the colonial world. The League would define and oversee much of the bureaucracy. It would

²⁵ Alan Sharp, "The Mandate System in the Colonial World," in William R. Keylor, ed., *The Legacy of the Great War: Peacemaking, 1919* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 171-74.

²⁶ Wilson to Lansing, January 30, 1919, *PWW*, 54: 262-63.

somehow measure whether indigenous peoples could modernize sufficiently, becoming self-sufficient through industrialization. Most importantly, the League would possess the authority to oversee cultural growth in the postwar colonial world, meaning elements of Wilsonian progressivism could be introduced and perhaps sustained in the far corners of the world. To be sure, Wilson and House both favored such possibilities.

Even the C-mandates, for all their ideological challenges, did not horrify the president. In truth, it seems that Wilson was less concerned with the political practicality of the C mandates than he was with the *perceptions* that would result from their existence. In Wilson's mind, it was one thing to allow the League of Nations to sanction a mandate that technically—and covertly—allowed for something akin to annexation. It was quite another to publicly frame the mandate with blatantly imperialistic rhetoric.²⁷ As we know, neither Wilson nor House was eager for “undeserving” native peoples to receive outright independence, especially if they were not aligned with Wilsonian progressive standards. However, given the fact that the world was watching, it did not seem prudent

²⁷ Council of Ten Minutes, January 29, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 786.

for the victorious powers to flaunt imperialism, whether traditional or new. Clearly, there would have to be more discussion on the three-tiered structure, specifically the C mandates.

The British delegation had created a committee on mandates composed of the prime ministers of the southern Dominions. By the afternoon of January 29, 1919, Lloyd George possessed a preliminary draft of the system that would prove to be remarkably close to the final version of the proposal.²⁸ Smuts then verified Colonel House's acceptance of the draft, assuming that Wilson also approved. It was subsequently approved by the British Empire delegation later that day.²⁹ Then, on January 30, Lloyd George gladly offered the draft to the Council of Ten, though he acknowledged that it represented a rather tenuous compromise. For his part, Wilson considered the draft "very gratifying," further remarking that it succeeded in making a "long stride towards the composition of their differences, bringing them to within an easy stage of final agreement."³⁰

²⁸ Hessel Duncan Hall, "The British Commonwealth and the Founding of the League Mandate System," *Studies in International History*, ed. K. Bourne and D.C. Watt (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), 357.

²⁹ Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers*, 76-77.

³⁰ Council of Ten Minutes, January 30, 1919, FRUS:PPC, 3: 787.

However, shortly afterward, the negotiations again stalled due to a surprisingly intense disagreement between President Wilson and Australia's Prime Minister, William Hughes, after the latter reiterated his nation's desire for direct rather than League-administered oversight of C-mandated territories. In response to Hughes' diplomatic gaffe, Wilson argued that mandate decisions to that point be considered provisional only, infuriating Hughes and other delegates of the British Dominions, who felt they deserved to be instantly granted their desired territories after being so conciliatory earlier regarding the use of annexationist rhetoric. The fiery debate was extinguished only when Lloyd George advised provisional acceptance of the C mandates, to which the other delegates agreed.³¹ In 1922, the provisional British draft was adopted nearly verbatim into Article Twenty-Two of the League Covenant. Paragraph seven of the British draft dealt specifically with Germany's former colonies. It read as follows:

They [the Allied and Associated Powers] further consider that other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, are at such a stage that the mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory subject to conditions which will guarantee the prohibition of abuses such as the slave

³¹ Birdsall, *Versailles Twenty Years After*, 73-75. See also Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 113.

trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic, and the prevention of the military training of the natives for other than police purposes, and the establishment of fortifications or military and naval bases, and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the League of Nations.³²

This proposed clause fostered much further debate regarding the conditions of the mandates for Cameroon and Togo. At a Council of Ten session on January 30, Canada's Prime Minister, Robert Borden, suggested clarifying the language to ensure the prohibition against using C mandates for any military purpose, a change garnering quick support from Wilson and House.³³ Predictably, however, the French sought to protect their right to conscript troops in their mandated territories. In this matter, Clemenceau was joined by Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon in advocating France's needs for security in all French-controlled territories. Seeking to mediate a compromise, Lloyd George argued in favor of the clause, claiming that while it was a protective measure designed to prevent colonial powers from "raising great native armies against each other . . . there was nothing in this document which prevented France from doing what she did before" as a colonial power.³⁴

³² British draft of a clause for inclusion in the colonial article of the League Covenant (later Article Twenty-two), *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 796.

³³ Council of Ten Minutes, January 30, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 804-05.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Clemenceau subsequently acquiesced, remarking that "if he could raise troops, that was all he wanted." The debate continued for another hour or so, but was ultimately settled according to Lloyd George's proposal.³⁵ In truth, however, the language of paragraph seven was sufficiently imprecise so as to generate competing interpretations concerning French conscription of indigenous personnel.³⁶ Thus House would be forced to contend with this issue again while in London as a member of the Mandates Commission.

Final Colonial Developments in Paris

The Council of Ten's formulas in late January 1919 for the mandate system provided a general theoretical framework for a comprehensive colonial settlement. These compromises were significant, however. In fact, the provisional draft of the League Covenant, presented by Woodrow Wilson to the third plenary session on February 14, included each of the major mandate system resolutions passed in January. These were subsequently written into the final Covenant during the fifth plenary session on April 28, 1919. Still, additional negotiations were required before a working

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes*, 165.

colonial settlement could be drafted and presented in full detail.³⁷

One crucial issue involved Japan's colonial petitions, which remained unresolved at this stage. Like their British and French counterparts, Wilson and House feared an increased Japanese presence in the Pacific, primarily viewing Japan's colonial ambitions through the lens of race. In this sense, it was bad enough to consider granting independence to newly formed indigenous governments, but even worse to acquiesce to an "inferior" racial power like Japan. Hence, throughout negotiations in Paris and London, the American delegates resisted compromising their stated commitments to Wilsonian progressivism by granting Japan its colonial desires too quickly, or without qualifications.

Prior to the fifth plenary session held on April 28, matters came to a head. Wilson and House were hoping to dissuade Japan from seeking to acquire the Shantung province in China. Again, the Chinese expected Shantung's return upon the defeat of Germany. In April 1919, Wilson and House still sided with China, recognizing their position as inherently sensible given the geographic and

³⁷ Ibid., 167.

cultural realities. In an effort to persuade the Japanese to relinquish their claim on Shantung, Wilson suggested that Japan would not require (or benefit from) any special interests in Shantung because of the League's impending recognition of the "open door" principle.³⁸ Viscount Chinda and the Japanese delegates remained unmoved, demanding that Germany's claims to the Shantung province be transferred to Japan. Finally, when Chinda threatened to prohibit Japan from signing the peace treaty unless they acquired Shantung, Wilson at last relented. In the end, Wilson and House apparently decided it was less dangerous to alienate the Chinese in order to secure Japan's future membership in the League.³⁹ Whether or not that decision was sound remained to be seen.

Beginning on April 30, 1919, the delegates of the great powers who advanced the mandate system toward a finalized structure were known simply as the Council of Four, composed of Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Italy's Vittorio Orlando. Having quarreled with the others over the Adriatic settlement, Orlando had temporarily returned to Italy, reducing the number to three. Even with

³⁸ Council of Ten Minutes, April 21-26, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 109-11, 123-34, 138-48, 222-23, 227-28, 245-47, 249-50, 316-18, 325-35, 389, 460.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; See also Baker and Dodd, *Public Papers*, 5: 474-75; House to Wilson, April 29, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

Orlando absent, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau, as an informal "council of three," found plenty to argue about. Their respective subordinates—Edward House, Lord Robert Cecil, and Henri Simon—were also present and active in these ongoing discussions over mandates in Paris.⁴⁰

Predictably, several unresolved disputes that had lain dormant since January reappeared during the Council of Four discussions during the first week of May.⁴¹ The foremost of these involved Belgium's claim to part of the former German East Africa. On April 24, 1919, the Commission on German Colonies had composed the following statement: "Germany renounces, in favor of the Five Allied and Associated Powers, all its rights and titles to its overseas possessions."⁴² In addition to the United States, Britain, France, and Italy, the fifth of these powers was Japan, whose colonial ambitions rivaled those of France. Not surprisingly, Belgium reacted negatively to this proclamation, assuming its claims in East Africa were in danger of being nullified. In response, Belgium's premier,

⁴⁰ Council of Four Minutes, April 30-May 7, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 414-508.

⁴¹ Commission on German Claims, Peace Conference, Session of April 24, 1919, File No. 181.22601/1, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Paul Hymans, asked Clemenceau to speak on Belgium's behalf, which he did at a council meeting on May 2, 1919.⁴³

The British and American delegates did not initially favor Belgium in this matter. In fact, Lloyd George adamantly opposed altering the language of the clause to include a "sixth power," believing the Belgian claim was "most impudent," further remarking that millions of British soldiers had fought for the cause of Belgium during the war, whereas "only a few black troops had been sent into German East Africa." Moreover, Wilson and Lloyd George both implied that affirming the Belgian claim in detail was perhaps a premature exercise given the fact that the clause was not intended as a formal draft of specific mandate provisions. Clemenceau agreed, and relayed the council's decision to the Belgian delegates, pledging that the League of Nations, once officially formed, would be responsible for hearing final proposals on the matter of German East Africa.⁴⁴

Lloyd George was eager to complete the colonial settlement in Paris, remarking on May 5 that he was "most anxious to be able to announce the mandates to the Press at

⁴³ Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes*, 169.

⁴⁴ Council of Four Minutes, May 2, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 419-420.

the time when the Peace Treaty was issued." However, Wilson still had certain reservations and responded apprehensively to Lloyd George's proposal for a prompt settlement. Wilson was particularly concerned, saying he hoped to prevent "the appearance of a division of the spoils being simultaneous with the Peace."⁴⁵ Further consideration of the former German colonies was scheduled for the following afternoon.

Perhaps inevitably, given the delegates' levels of physical exhaustion, some final clashes occurred at the sessions on May 6 and May 7. At this late stage, resolving the future status of Cameroon and Togo was one topic that proved difficult, generating debate. Filling in for an absent Lord Milner, the French Colonial Minister, Henri Simon, provided an overview of Anglo-French negotiations on Togo and Cameroon to that point. The future of Cameroon appeared settled, at least in principle. Hence the delegates quickly agreed to assign Cameroon as a French mandate, though a provision was added requiring France to clarify and resolve the ongoing border dispute with Nigeria.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Council of Four Minutes, May 5, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 472-73.

⁴⁶ Council of Four Minutes, May 6, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 493.

Deciding Togo's fate, however, required more elaborate discussion. In this case, both Lloyd George and Clemenceau opposed a formal mandate structure, with Britain's prime minister declaring that "the country was cut into small bits, and it might be found that half of a tribe was under a mandate, and the other was not." Wilson challenged the Anglo-French opposition, not because of the logic, but rather because he was opposed to blatant imperialism outside the framework of mandates. After assurances that Henri Simon would draft a proposal to resolve the issue, Wilson agreed to this provisional resolution on Togo.⁴⁷

On the morning of May 7, two final disputes had to be resolved before the delegates could issue the colonial proposals. First, the French delegation went back on the previous day's agreement regarding Cameroon. Clemenceau and Simon again stipulated French sovereign rights to the part of the Cameroon territory that Germany had acquired from France in 1911, given that the British would directly annex a slice of German Cameroon to Nigeria without a mandate. In essence, Simon demanded a *quid pro quo* given that France's acquired territory in Cameroon was to be assigned as a mandate under League supervision. Lloyd George and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Balfour briefly attempted to rationalize their previous position. Second, the British and French delegations had not yet agreed to the division of German Togoland between them. Avoiding further delay while seeking an agreement in Paris, Lloyd George proposed to postpone a final settlement for Cameroon and Togo until later when the French and British would make a joint recommendation to the League of Nations regarding the future of these former German colonies. Wilson did not object to this compromise, which would give the League a supervisory role in this eventual colonial settlement.⁴⁸

One final debate emerged over whether Italy deserved territorial compensation given the nature of British and French imperial gains in Africa. The Italians feared an exclusionary colonial agreement, denying them a place at the mandate system table. Citing the Treaty of London (1913), they reminded their British and French counterparts that Italy was promised "colonial compensation" if the German Empire faltered and Anglo-French imperial expansion occurred in Africa. Subsequently, in an effort to appease the Italian delegation, both Lloyd George and Clemenceau readily conceded these Italian claims and further promised

⁴⁸ Council of Four Minutes, May 7, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 506-07.

to bring them before the League of Nations at a future point to be determined.⁴⁹

Late on May 7, 1919, the initial mandate system proposal was submitted in Paris. It proved remarkably similar to the notions supplied by Edward House and George Louis Beer more than a year earlier as part of The Inquiry.⁵⁰ House and Beer had designed provisions for indigenous rights and economic free trade, favoring trusteeship in the colonies rather than the colonial oversight proposed by Great Britain and France. Both recognized the new colonial structure as positive. After all, through the mandate system Wilson's League of Nations could pursue ostensibly enlightened progress for colonial peoples, promising them freedom and independence in the future, while ensuring that Western, specifically American, cultural values reigned. While House and Wilson sought national self-determination, they did so in ways that were agreeable to European colonial interests within the rhetorical framework of their own ideas of Wilsonian progressivism. Ultimately, the president and his colonial emissary, House, were intent on modifying the traditional

⁴⁹ Robert L. Hess, "Italy and Africa: Colonial Ambitions in the First World War," *Journal of African History* 4 (1963): 119-126.

⁵⁰ Council of Four Minutes, May 7, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 508.

formula for outright colonialism, rationalizing their own philosophies in the process.⁵¹

Yet, seizing upon Woodrow Wilson's stated commitments to equality and national self-determination, many scholars have assumed that Wilson and the American delegation were forced to abandon their high ideals in favor of appeasing the Allies.⁵² However, despite the various concessions made at the Paris Peace Conference, the creation of the mandate system should be viewed as a significant achievement for the American delegates. While Wilson and House adamantly objected to blatant colonial expansion through annexation, they did so because the former trappings of colonialism did not fit into their own progressive, yet still controlled, notions of trusteeship. Throughout the Paris Peace conference, Wilson and House repeatedly met to discuss the ongoing colonial negotiations. At times, both men were frustrated by certain ideas put forth by the British and French delegations in particular, such as the French argument for using colonial troops to secure French strategic interests. However, as the negotiations in Paris

⁵¹ Beer, *African Questions*, 266; See also memorandum from Beer to House, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 265-69.

⁵² Wright, *Mandates Under the League of Nations*; Birdsall, *Versailles Twenty Years After*; Hall, "The British Commonwealth and the Founding of the League Mandate System"; Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers*.

were winding down, Wilson and House conveyed a sense of satisfaction with the colonial formula, viewing it as an outright success rather than a capitulation to French and British imperial interests.⁵³ Despite occasional confrontations between the delegates, true Wilsonian principles remained intact. Writing in his diary on May 8, House noted that the vast majority of the colonial settlement had "been fostered . . . in accordance with the highest of ideals."⁵⁴ Crucially, the fact that Wilson's League would be granted supervisory control over the mandate system suggested that Wilsonian progressivism could be instilled regardless of French or British imperial designs.

After all, Wilson endorsed the resolution requiring the United States to serve as the League's mandatory power in Armenia. The U.S. Senate failed to pass the eventual treaty, declining American membership in the League of Nations; hence the United States never actually accepted the Armenian mandate. However, the American delegation's mere compliance with the original resolution is perhaps the

⁵³ Several private meetings between House and Wilson during the conference strongly suggest they were quite content with the progress of the colonial structure. See *PWW*, 61: 259-270, 275-77; 62: 370, 374-75; House Papers, Yale, Box 187, File 2, 53.

⁵⁴ House Diary, May 8, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

most obvious indicator of the veiled form of imperialism present in the minds of Wilson and House. Rhetoric aside, they failed to account for the inherent geopolitical realities of a pluralist world, instead sanctioning a mandate system that continued to favor white, European influence over indigenous peoples. Accordingly, the League would decide upon the future form of administration to be adopted in many of the colonial areas. As indicated in the previous chapter, Wilson's League would determine whether former colonies had the right to self-determination.

When measured alongside paternalistic notions of bringing "civilization" to the "savage" races, the true Wilsonian intentions seem more apparent. The primary concern rested not on ensuring colonial peoples' full-fledged freedom from foreign governments, but on finding a new, acceptable way of bestowing American progressive standards on colonial peoples. While perhaps different from traditional forms of European colonialism, these ideas simply represented a new brand of imperialism, wrapped in the League of Nations and multi-national control. The colonial discussions initiated in Paris continued throughout the summer of 1919. After Wilson and many of the other delegates left Paris and returned home, House

prepared for an even more intensive term of service in London as the chief American representative assigned to the Mandates Commission.

CHAPTER 5

EDWARD M. HOUSE AND THE COMMISSION ON COLONIAL MANDATES:

JULY - AUGUST 1919

Perhaps because of a greater historical profile, colonial negotiations during the Paris Peace Conference itself have received far greater attention from historians than they have devoted to the subsequent implementation of the new system of mandates. Yet, the Commission on Colonial Mandates that met in London throughout the summer of 1919 was, at the very least, equally responsible for the colonial settlement eventually adopted as Article Twenty-Two of the League of Nations Covenant in 1922. In fact, though a rudimentary framework for the mandate system was in place when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, much work remained before the mandates could actually be designated and assigned.

FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION ON COLONIAL MANDATES

Formed by the Council of Four on June 27, 1919, the Commission on Colonial Mandates was given the significant, but unenviable, charge of finalizing the structure of the colonial settlement. Specifically, the commission was designed to accomplish four major tasks: to analyze Belgian and Portuguese demands in German East Africa, to conversely

hear the appeals of the indigenous Aborigines Societies regarding German East Africa, to draft a report detailing these divergent interests, and finally to draft the model A, B, and C mandates for eventual consideration by the governing members of the League of Nations once its charter was formally established.¹ The five commissioners selected to head the negotiations were Edward House for the United States, Lord Alfred Milner for the British Empire, Henri Simon for France, Senator Guglielmo Marconi for Italy, and Viscount Chinda Suteomi for Japan. Britain's Lord Robert Cecil and George Louis Beer from the United States also served in advisory roles.² Notably absent from the commission were the four leading statesmen at Paris—Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando—each of whom appeared comfortable delegating the responsibilities for further colonial decisions to these aforementioned advisors.

President Woodrow Wilson returned to the United States immediately after signing the Versailles Treaty, weary from the grueling months of peacemaking in Paris. Already in a weakened state, he had other matters on his mind as he journeyed home. He was preparing for what proved to be the

¹ Council of Four Minutes, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 259-60.

² *Ibid.*, *PWW*, 61: 277-78.

most heated political confrontation of his presidency, a debilitating battle with the U.S. Senate over ratification of the peace treaty and his prized League of Nations.³ Hence, though the president continued to receive detailed reports from Edward House on the progress of the Mandate Commission in London, his focus was elsewhere during the summer and fall of 1919.

Wilson's absence from the commission is noteworthy because it signifies a meaningful transition in the diplomatic command structure after the completion of the German peace treaty at the Paris Peace Conference. The president, who functioned as the chief U.S. delegate during the conference, withdrew from further colonial negotiations at a crucial stage. Beginning on June 28, 1919, intent on other tasks, Wilson assumed a greatly reduced role in finalizing the basic structure of the mandate system. Amazingly, this transitional change in colonial decision-making has been virtually ignored by historians, most of whom were more interested in analyzing either the European colonial demands in Paris or the finalized settlement

³ Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, especially Chapter 3.

accepted by the League of Nations in 1922.⁴

In considering the significance of Wilson's minimal role alongside the primary role of Edward House, two key questions arise. The first involves Wilson's decision to delegate primary responsibility for the colonial settlement to anyone else at this time. After all, it seems clear that the president was deeply interested in devising a new colonial system characterized by his own progressive vision for national self-determination. Why, then, did Wilson allow anyone else to dictate Wilsonian principles on colonialism to the Allies during the mandate system's final stages of development? The second issue centers on the fact that, of all people, House was the individual authorized by Wilson to be the principal U.S. commissioner for the remaining colonial discussions at a time when their once close partnership had supposedly reached a tumultuous and sudden end. Perhaps the best way to address the first issue of the president's withdrawal from colonial negotiations is to make sense of the second, to place the allegedly

⁴ Among the many studies that either downplay or ignore the role of the Mandates Commission, the following are some of the most noteworthy: Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 159-84; MacMillan, *Paris: 1919*, 98-106. Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 215-56, neglects to mention much of anything regarding the Mandates Commission, mistakenly stating that House spent the months of July and August "vacationing."

compromised relationship between Wilson and his longtime friend and adviser in proper context.

THE INFAMOUS BREAK BETWEEN WILSON AND HOUSE

Over the years, scholars have repeatedly attempted to explain why the intimate bond of friendship that existed between Wilson and House did not survive the Paris Peace Conference. Most have concluded that the rift occurred over a period of months, beginning sometime in March of 1919, amidst the highly stressful atmosphere of the peace negotiations, and becoming progressively more apparent by the treaty signing in June.⁵ However, while there can be little doubt that a "break" of sorts occurred in Paris, claims that the rift was so extreme as to permanently destroy their mutual respect and admiration for one another most likely exaggerate the actual nature of the parting.

In fact, the reasons behind the so-called "break" remain unclear, though historical speculation has centered upon a few common themes. Believing that Wilson had developed serious reservations about House's personal and political loyalties by the signing of the treaty, a number

⁵ The literature on the break between Wilson and House is extensive, but the following works are instructive: George and George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*, 240-67; Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 89-90; Edwin A. Weinstein, "Woodrow Wilson's Neuropsychological Impairment at the Paris Peace Conference," in *PWW*, 58: 635-38; Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 215-34.

of historians have argued that Wilson was the one who took action. These analyses specifically allege that the president became increasingly frustrated by Colonel House's habitual predilection for conducting what might be termed as "extracurricular" diplomacy, meeting alone with foreign officials or dignitaries and engaging in supposedly unsanctioned negotiations. Though questions surrounding Wilson's health and state of mind are often factored in to the equation, ultimately these interpretations forcefully argue that Wilson's distrust and frustration with House, irrational or not, grew until reaching a zenith, at which point the president had no choice but to sever ties with House in order to safeguard American policy from his careless, albeit well-intentioned, diplomacy.⁶

Admittedly, there is some truth to the fact that House tended toward pretentious behavior, viewing himself as a superior diplomat, far more suited to personally negotiate foreign policy than others in the administration, including Wilson himself. However, there is a paucity of evidence indicating that House willfully exceeded his diplomatic authority, either in formal negotiations or in more casual conversational settings. To be sure, Wilson and House

⁶ George and George, 240-67; Cooper, 89-90; Hodgson, 215-34.

differed in their negotiating philosophies. Whereas Wilson was often unwilling to compromise, even on the minutiae of treaty phraseology, House tended toward a more conciliatory approach to diplomatic discussions. Still, based on the evidence available, it seems House's policy objectives remained in line with those of Wilson. The colonel simply realized, perhaps better than the president, that measured compromise was necessary, even preferable, in order to secure broader policy goals. Furthermore, while House and Wilson occasionally disagreed in private about the proper formulation and application of foreign policy, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that House ultimately abided the president's decisions, regardless of any personal misgivings he may have had.⁷ This is not surprising, given their shared progressive visions.

Thus, charges that House was somehow undercutting presidential authority and pursuing his own diplomatic agenda in Paris or London are most assuredly false. In

⁷ These observations are based largely upon ongoing dialogues between House and Wilson in 1919, before and after the supposed break, all of which remained quite cordial in nature. Not only do their respective letters and telegrams suggest mutual support, the records found in the Council of Four Minutes in Paris and the Minutes from the Meetings of the Commission on Mandates in London bear out the notion that House respected Wilson's wishes and closely abided by their agreed-upon principles once Wilson was in the United States. Notes of the Commission on Mandates, July-August, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

truth, the arguments for Wilson's vehement disillusionment with House (or visa versa) appear to be anecdotal, based largely upon the rumors and innuendos created first by contemporaries of the two men, and subsequently seized upon by scholars convinced that such a close friendship could be undone solely by personal disloyalty or some unforgivable act of political disloyalty undertaken by House or profound misunderstanding by Wilson.⁸

A more likely theory regarding the so-called "break" involves Wilson's second wife, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, whom the president married in December 1915. If any one person could conceivably be charged with subverting the intimate ties between President Wilson and Colonel House, it would be Edith Wilson, especially because of her fervent desire to be her husband's closest friend, companion, and adviser. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that the second Mrs. Wilson felt extremely threatened by anyone whose relationship with the president rivaled her own, in as much as that was possible. Moreover, she never hid the fact that she was specifically bothered by Wilson's relationship with House, often questioning the president

⁸ See Hodgson, 215-34, and the biased, accusatory comments of Woodrow Wilson's physician, Dr. Cary Grayson, in "The Colonel's Folly and the President's Distress," *American Heritage*, 1964.

about House's true loyalties and commenting on the colonel's seemingly endless list of shortcomings, all the while contrasting these with the prized character traits she so admired in her husband.⁹ Wilson surely appreciated the high praise of his wife, and undoubtedly began to increasingly heed her counsel over time. Whether or not Edith Wilson truly loathed House, and further counseled Wilson to discard their friendship, remains unclear. However, she most certainly did not have a high opinion of the colonel, or Mrs. House for that matter, and her jealousy may very well have been a key factor in driving a wedge between the two men.

In any case, over time, Edith Wilson asserted herself as much more than just the president's loving spouse. Perhaps inevitably, she assumed many expanded roles, acting behind the scenes as the president's trusted counselor, dispensing advice and providing emotional support whenever possible, especially after Wilson's health declined visibly during the peace negotiations, a factor which has also been used to explain the dissolved friendship. This argument centers on the increasingly frequent displays of anger,

⁹ George and George, 156; Edith Wilson, *My Memoir* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), especially chapters 6 and 7.

aggression, and paranoia displayed by President Wilson immediately before, during, and after the peace conference. Innumerable stresses affected Wilson's ability to think and act rationally on occasion. In fact, as recent scholarship has shown, these anomalies were most likely physical signs that Wilson's health was so severely compromised that he may very well have been experiencing a series of smaller strokes in early to mid-1919, prior to the near-fatal stroke he suffered in October of that year. Hence, it is possible that the president was more vulnerable than he typically would have been to suggestions of House's disloyalty made by Edith Wilson, the president's physician, Dr. Cary Grayson, and Secretary of State Robert Lansing, among others.¹⁰

Ultimately, there can be little doubt that a once-warm friendship and political partnership between Colonel House and Woodrow Wilson was permanently compromised, though I believe it dissolved not from a profound change in mutual trust or personal malice, but primarily as a resulting combination of personal and political expediency. After all, even the closest bonds of friendship evolve. A more

¹⁰ See especially Weinstein, *PWW*, 58: 635-38. See also Grayson, "The Colonel's Folly," Cooper, 89-90, and Hodgson, 230-34.

realistic appraisal suggests their enormously beneficial partnership had simply run its course. The two men, whose resolutely independent temperaments were remarkably similar, had simply outgrown one another by mid-1919.

While theories of Edith Wilson's jealous intrigues and her husband's questionably irrational state of mind offer partial explanations, they do not account for a rather stark reality. Despite any personal differences that existed by June of 1919, House retained the president's confidence as his most trusted colonial emissary. Wilson knew and trusted House's personal and political integrity. To suggest otherwise would be counter-intuitive. If, indeed, he had serious reservations about House, Wilson surely would not have allowed him to head the American delegation in London that finalized the crucial mandates issues, especially given the plethora of qualified ambassadors and scholars at the president's disposal, including Beer and David Hunter Miller, among others. The fact of the matter is that House remained the ideal choice for Wilson, especially given the colonel's considerable background in forming colonial policy, specifically U.S. notions of the mandate system.

And so, as he had done prior to the peace conference, Wilson delegated primary responsibility for American colonial policy to House. On June 29, 1919, the morning following the treaty signing, Wilson embarked on the ship heading back to the United States. Sadly, this farewell, in which House encouraged the president to "meet the Senate in a more conciliatory spirit," proved to be the last meeting between the long-time friends. Though they continued to exchange correspondence, both official and personal, they never actually saw one another again. Wilson's response to House's plea revealed the president's uncompromising state of mind by that time. Whereas House was still prepared to engage in measured compromise to achieve larger, vital policy objectives, Wilson had apparently become increasingly rigid, declaring: "House, I have found one can never get anything in this life that is worth while without fighting for it." In a rather melodramatic rejoinder, House, forever the Anglophile, tellingly reminded Wilson that the bedrock of "Anglo-Saxon civilization was built up on compromise."¹¹

¹¹ Final parting between Wilson and House, June 29, 1919, *PWW* 61: 354-55.

PREPARING FOR THE COMMISSION ON COLONIAL MANDATES IN LONDON

Wilson's confidence in his old friend, Edward House, seemed well placed. For his part, House had been instrumental in advocating further, detailed analysis into the form and function of mandates. In a letter to Wilson on June 23, 1919, House adamantly expressed his concern about the mandates, remarking: "I feel with Lord Robert [Cecil] that perhaps one of the chief duties of the Peace Conference will be left undone unless some authoritative statement is made at once concerning the mandatory system."¹² House further detailed to Wilson his support for Lord Cecil's proposed commission, believing it to be a vital initiative for improving the fundamentally vague mandates concept in place at that time. Logically, he argued, after actually drafting the three classes of mandates, the commission would then open their colonial resolutions to public debate, whereby "criticism will be invited just as it was invited with regard to the Covenant of the League."¹³ Yet, for all of his interest and concern, House was somewhat forlorn about being assigned as a member of the Commission on Colonial Mandates, viewing the

¹² House Diary, June 23, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

¹³ Ibid.

appointment as yet another unsought responsibility that forced him to remain overseas. Confiding to his diary on June 21, 1919, House revealed a desire to return home to the United States, saying, "I am eagerly anticipating a triumphant return home in the wake of this exhausting work in Paris."¹⁴

In the end, however, House agreed to serve as the head of the American delegation to London, once again appointing George Louis Beer as his chief advisor in this enterprise. In light of the heated discussions on colonialism during the peace conference, House realized that Beer's expertise would be vital in providing greater legitimacy to any and all American perspectives offered in further colonial negotiations. To be sure, Beer's background as a colonial historian had proven valuable during the peace conference, and House understood he would need further assistance. In many respects, Beer was again an ideal source of information, providing House with a ready interpretation of colonial positions taken by their counterparts from Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. However, House was the final arbiter in London regarding American colonial policy.

¹⁴ House Diary, June 21, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

House seems to have relished his renewed autonomy. He certainly had benefited from the president's confidence as head of The Inquiry in 1917 and 1918, prior to the Paris Peace Conference. At that time, he was given primary authority to form and mold colonial policy with little interference from anyone, even Wilson. Now, as the lead U.S. delegate in London, House once again became responsible for defining and molding the American colonial initiatives according to the progressive political and cultural standards that he and Wilson embraced.¹⁵

In truth, as the head of The Inquiry as well as the chief U.S. delegate on the commission responsible for finalizing and assigning the mandates, House likely deserves more credit than President Wilson for creating the colonial system eventually adopted by the League of Nations in 1922. However, with greater authority comes greater responsibility. As shall be made evident through his service in London in July and August of 1919, House's application of "Wilsonian" national self-determination to the former German and Turkish colonies deserves much scrutiny, especially because of the imperial philosophies, both subtle and overt, contained in the colonial settlement

¹⁵ House Diary, June 30, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

reached by House, Beer, and the other members of the mandates commission.

NEGOTIATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE MANDATES COMMISSION

Technically, the first formal meeting of the Commission on Colonial Mandates was held in Paris, on the morning of June 28th, the day of the treaty signing. Presided over by Britain's Lord Milner, this initial gathering appears to have been held primarily to formulate a tentative meeting schedule in London. In fact, like several other members, House opted not to attend, sending Beer in his stead. The next Mandates Commission meeting was scheduled ten days later in London.¹⁶

The only topic of discussion generating debate at this preliminary meeting involved the specific nature and application of B and C mandates in relation to the Pacific Islands and Southwest Africa, namely whether or not these two territories could both be designated as part of the same class. Viscount Chinda from Japan was rather adamant about branding the islands north of the Equator as B-class mandates only if those south of the Equator—namely the territories in Africa and the South Pacific sought by

¹⁶ From David Hunter Miller's notes on the first meeting of the Mandates Commission (in Paris) on June 28, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 332-34.

Britain, France, and the Dominions—were given the same designation.¹⁷ This is no surprise given Japan's desire to achieve strategic equality, even dominance in the Pacific. While no consensus was reached on this specific issue, the collective desire of Britain, France, the Dominions, and Japan to seek C-class mandates did not sit well with Beer, and he said as much to both Cecil and House later that evening.¹⁸ Again, Beer, House, and Cecil surely opposed the Japanese proposal not only because of any misgivings they had about achieving a status quo on the B and C mandates, but also because of their inherently racist perspectives regarding Japan's capacity to serve as a mandate power.

From the beginning, Beer viewed the three-tiered mandate structure as problematic because it seemed to open the door to rampant manipulation by the mandatory powers. The C mandates were especially troubling because they were structured to allow for complete territorial oversight on the part of the mandatory power, meaning that, for all intents and purposes, traditional colonial administration would continue in the C-class countries. Not only was Beer

¹⁷ Notes of the First Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, June 28, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

¹⁸ George Louis Beer Diary, June 28, 1919, Manuscripts and Archives, Library of Congress, 128.

upset by such blatant attempts to prolong colonialism, he was also anxious over the thought that European countries assigned to oversee the progression of B-class mandates might seek to downgrade their given territory to C-class in order to be granted administrative *carte blanche*.¹⁹

Essentially, Beer anticipated the blatantly imperial designs of the delegates assigned to London. In his brief conversation with House and Cecil on the evening of June 28, he specifically warned them of the impending clash over territorial definitions, claiming Wilson's ideal of national self-determination was in jeopardy unless the other commission members could be swayed.²⁰ Yet, in voicing his initial concerns about the upcoming negotiations, Beer also displayed a distinct lack of comprehension regarding the progressive ambitions for the colonial world that Wilson and House possessed. These differences would surface repeatedly during the weeks of negotiation and compromise in London, forcing Beer to re-evaluate the true nature of Wilsonian progressivism.

For his part, House attempted to assuage Beer's stated concerns by promising to uphold and endorse the Wilsonian

¹⁹ Beer Diary, July 7-13, 1919, Library of Congress, 131.

²⁰ Ibid.

commitment to liberal internationalism in the form of self-determination in colonial territories.²¹ Not surprisingly, Beer was initially quite pleased to hear such affirmation coming from House, though Beer gradually realized that House's notions of progressive philosophy as applied to colonial territories differed from his own far more than he anticipated.²² However, House, as he prepared for the time in London at the end of June, was confident that the final colonial structure formed by the Mandates Commission would measure up to the progressive standards that he and Wilson sought. Confiding to his diary on June 30, 1919, House conveyed his optimism, saying, "I believe the colonial mandates will be one of the chief accomplishments of the United States if the commission in London proceeds according to our expectations."²³ His confidence proved well-placed, at least if we measure the final resolutions against the progressive standards of Wilson's and House's liberal internationalism.

The road to a finalized colonial structure was not without its challenges, however. From the start, it became clear that the old-guard European colonialists favored less

²¹ House Diary, July 4, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

²² Beer Diary, July 7, 1919, Library of Congress, 130.

²³ House Diary, June 30, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

oversight from the League and more administrative autonomy regarding both B and C mandates. The delegates met at Sunderland House twice on July 8, 1919, the first full day of negotiations in London. Since several topics had been broached during the preliminary discussion of June 28, these sessions were designated as the second and third meetings of the commission, respectively.

The first priority was supposedly confined to drafting the B and C mandates and attempting to resolve the dispute between Belgium and Portugal over their competing claims in German East Africa. However, while initiating this discussion at the second meeting, a rather heated exchange broke out over an outlandish French proposal seeking compulsory military service for indigenous peoples in French-administered C-class territories, including the shocking demand that France be allowed to post such forces to France proper for defense purposes. Simon claimed the request had been granted during a Council of Ten meeting in Paris on January 30, though in reality both Wilson and Lloyd George had vehemently opposed the idea at the time.

Clemenceau had backed off and seemingly abandoned the notion.²⁴

House was therefore quite angry that Simon and the French were attempting to push this idea through in London. He and the British commission members rejected Simon's request out of hand. House even claimed, rather melodramatically, that such a provision could jeopardize the American acceptance of the peace treaty. Simon responded by reiterating the French position voiced in Paris—that a colony was "really no different than a mandate."²⁵ Thus, the French sought only to administer their mandated territories as they would any colonial possession. Such open truth shocked the more idealistic members present, including Beer, but in the end, tempers cooled and the matter was pushed to the side. Since House, Cecil, and Beer objected to the proposal, Simon and his French colleagues chose not to press the matter further, though, in the end, it remained conspicuously unresolved. It is important to note, however, that House's objection to France employing indigenous forces for strategic security

²⁴ Notes of the Second and Third Meetings of the Commission on Mandates, July 8, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. Council of Ten Minutes, January 30, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 3: 804.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

grew from his belief that such a blatantly imperialistic colonial practice would jeopardize the progressivism that he and Wilson relied upon to inspire the masses, both in Europe and the colonial world. He stated as much in his diary, saying that regardless of the French right to administer territory as they saw fit, "using native military personnel would undermine the integrity of the mandates through imperial posturing."²⁶ House therefore had no desire to support a proposal that would likely generate a great deal of unnecessary hostility and possibly garner bad press.

Significantly, initial model drafts of the B and C mandates were completed during the commission's third meeting in the afternoon of July 8.²⁷ They strongly resembled the structure outlined in Paris. The B-mandate nations required more time than those under A mandates before becoming fully independent. These countries would be assigned in trust to a League member, who would then be responsible for overseeing the territory's progressive development under League provisions. C-mandate territories would technically function under the same provisions as the

²⁶ House Diary, July 9, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

²⁷ Notes of the Third Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, July 8, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

B-mandate countries, though they would be under even more extensive—and long-term—control by the League.²⁸

Unfortunately, soon the delegates were arguing over other matters. At the fourth and fifth meetings of the commission, the issue of economic equality inside B and C-mandated territories proved contentious. The French delegation favored allowing the mandatory power, rather than native personnel, to administer utilities (such as telegraph lines) and build or expand basic infrastructure (such as railways). According to this notion, the indigenous populations could easily be deprived of economic independence and vitality because the mandatory power could dictate the economic processes, from overseeing basic public works to choosing which bidders received construction contracts.²⁹

Lord Robert Cecil and George Louis Beer strenuously objected to the idea. Cecil asked why it should matter which nationality built something like a railway. Lord Milner voiced his concern as well. But Simon responded by stating, "it would be most unfair that all the benefits of

²⁸ Council of Four Minutes, May 5, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 5: 472-73. See also Louis, *Great Britain's Lost Colonies*, 132-36, and Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 1: 543-48.

²⁹ Notes of the Fourth and Fifth Meetings of the Commission on Mandates, July 9, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

occupation under the Mandate should go to the foreigners (indigenous peoples) and all the cost to the Mandatory Power." Viscount Chinda agreed in principle with the French proposal, hoping to secure Japan's administrative oversight in its own mandated territories.³⁰

Though, strangely, Cecil is often credited with the compromise plan, in actuality House proposed the middle road. In order to resolve the debate over the economic extent of administrative oversight as well as the possible cost-revenue disparity, he proposed that each mandatory power be allowed to create economic infrastructures independently of other countries, stating "the Mandatory Power shall be free to organize essential public works and services on such terms and conditions as it may think just."³¹ Thus a degree of administrative freedom was established, appeasing Simon and Chinda in particular.

However, House followed this statement by suggesting that the natives should have recourse if the mandatory power abused its authority in the economic realm. In a rather clever move, he proposed that, upon its formal establishment, the League of Nations executive council

³⁰ Extended Minutes of Commission Meeting, July 9, 1919, House Papers, Yale. Box 196, Folder 2, 378.

³¹ Ibid.

should be the final arbiter in these matters. Hence, as with most of the peace provisions, Wilson's League would be responsible for determining whether social and economic progressivism was being served in the mandated territories. This was quite a diplomatic coup, and House was no doubt thrilled when his proposals were accepted by the other commission members in a meeting on July 10 at Sunderland House.³² House sent a telegram to Wilson in Washington, D.C., with a full report on the B and C mandates.³³

Beer left London for Paris on July 13, and remained there until August, when he rejoined the commission. House was actually grateful for the autonomy over the last half of July. For his part, House still valued Beer's colonial insights and scholarly mind, but felt that true Wilsonian progressivism might be hindered if Beer's overly idealistic notions were given too much credence.³⁴ Conversely, Beer's diary reveals a growing distaste for House, both personally and professionally.³⁵ The time apart proved valuable for both.

³² Extended Minutes of Commission Meeting, July 9, 1919, House Papers, Yale. Box 196, Folder 2, 378.

³³ House to Wilson, July 11, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 451-455.

³⁴ House Diary, July 15, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

³⁵ Beer Diary, July 7-13, 1919, Library of Congress, 131-34.

In Beer's absence, House, Milner, and Cecil pursued several shared objectives in their negotiations with Simon, Chinda, and Italy's delegate Guglielmo Marconi, the first of which involved whether the indigenous peoples should incur debt for the vast costs of economic and political administration by the mandatory powers. France and Japan favored a rather high debt ceiling, with unforgiving interest rates imposed on the territories, to help offset the costs of trusteeship. At a meeting on July 14, the commission members forged an agreement advocated by House, Cecil, and Milner that ostensibly offered the native peoples a reasonably balanced approach to the debt issue, in which the League would place limitations on overall debt to be repaid. The details would be worked out at a future time, once the League was established. House reported to Wilson that he was pleased that "there was general unanimity of purpose to protect the natives in every way possible."³⁶

Nonetheless, this was one of the key ironies of the entire negotiating process, conveying the philosophical depth of Euro-American cultural imperialism. If the

³⁶ Notes of the Sixth Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, July 14, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace; House to Wilson, July 14, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 477.

mandatory powers had been willing to forego their neo-colonial designs and allow the former German and Turkish colonies to achieve independence, the costs of territorial administration would have been limited and short-lived. Driven by their own ambitions, however, the conquering nations had chosen to pursue the formation of the mandates. Yet here they conveyed a desire to possess the territories and pin the economic burdens on the very people whose future freedom and independence they supposedly sought. If anything highlights the neo-imperialism of the mandate system, this is it. The idea signaled nothing more than a veiled form of traditional colonialism, the likes of which had ravaged indigenous cultures for centuries.

In mid-to-late July, a few outstanding issues were addressed by the commission members, ranging from Liberia's progressively-staged loan payments to the necessity of curtailing arms and liquor traffic in East Africa. The discussions on these topics were relatively straightforward and intuitive, requiring limited negotiation. However, hearing the Belgian and Portuguese claims to parts of German East Africa remained a crucial task for the commission members. In the initial discussion of these claims on July 16, the delegates decided to focus on the

Belgian proposal and delay the Portugal discussion until a later date.³⁷

The debate over the Belgian claim to part of German East Africa centered upon King Leopold's notoriously brutal colonial policies in the Congo during the late nineteenth century. How, asked Lord Robert Cecil, could the commission seriously consider acquiescing in Belgium's request given its colonial atrocities of the past? Though he was in Paris during these meetings, Beer later expressed similar concerns about supplying Belgium with a mandate. However, at the eighth meeting on July 17, the commission made the decision to hold off on a final resolution for a few weeks, allowing the commission members to further consider the stakes of the Belgian claim in the former German East Africa.³⁸ In fact, during the third and fourth weeks of July, the commission members decided to spend some time away from the burdens of foreign relations. House spent the time resting for the most part, though he did socialize in

³⁷ Notes of the Seventh Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, July 16, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

³⁸ Notes of the Eighth Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, July 17, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

the evenings with a number of British friends and acquaintances, including Winston Churchill.³⁹

By the first week of August, the commission members were ready to resume their full-time duties and finalize the remaining resolutions. The delegates met briefly on the morning of August 5 to discuss the Belgian and Portuguese claims, but decided to postpone the discussion until later in the evening.⁴⁰ Finally, during the tenth meeting of the commission, the Portuguese and Belgian claims to parts of German East Africa were resolved. Portugal desired a small triangle of the former German colony, arguing that the territory had been theirs prior to German conquest. Given these historic roots, the Portuguese claim seemed quite reasonable to the commission members. Only Beer expressed any doubts, though he was not overly adamant about these. A brief debate ensued over whether the sliver of territory merited a mandate. Lord Milner thought granting a mandate for such a miniscule portion of land was absurd, and therefore, in a show of arbitrary imperialism, he proposed simply assigning the area as Portuguese colonial territory, free from oversight as a mandate by the League. This

³⁹ See House Diary, July 18-30, 1919, House Papers, Yale.

⁴⁰ Notes of the Ninth Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, August 5, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

proposal was quickly accepted, and the commission moved on to resolve the Belgian claim.⁴¹

In the end, regardless of their misgivings about Belgium's capacity to oversee a part of German East Africa in a manner befitting an enlightened, progressive power, the Belgian claim to Ruanda-Burundi was upheld. Belgium was assigned this territory while the British Empire acquired most of the former German East African colony under the provisions of B-class mandates. Beer and Cecil were deeply concerned about this resolution, but nonetheless went along. Since Belgium was a strategic and cultural ally of France, House and Milner both felt that blocking the Belgian claim would be both counterproductive and destabilizing, especially given the contentious nature of French colonial policy. House even suggested that giving the lands to someone other than Belgium—namely Great Britain—would strengthen the anti-British opposition to the peace treaty. It was that simple. As Beer wrote in his diary, "in such ways are the fates of three-and-a-half million human beings determined."⁴²

⁴¹ Notes of the Tenth Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, August 5, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

⁴² Beer Diary, August 5-12, 1919, Library of Congress, 136-37.

By the second week of August, the only remaining tasks involved drafting the A-class mandates and then providing recommendations for the League of Nations regarding the mandate assignments for the various nations. The only significant change to the A mandates as outlined in Paris involved a clause recommending that the mandatory power be responsible for securing civil order as the A-class nation neared its final goal of independence. The B and C mandates were structured along the lines of the July 8 meeting.⁴³

The commission concluded its resolutions in late August by recommending the assignment of mandates according to the following categories: Class A Mandates were to be quite limited in number, primarily because they were supposedly ready to be "brought along swiftly" toward outright independence, though none achieved that status until the 1940s. Nonetheless, the commission's proposal suggested dual mandates for Great Britain in Palestine and Mesopotamia, though the latter was not enacted. The French were also given Syria as an A mandate.⁴⁴

⁴³ Notes of the Eleventh Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, August 9, 1919, File No. 181.227, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.

⁴⁴ Mandate Commission's recommendations on the assignment of A, B, and C Mandates, July 8 to August 22, 1919, *FRUS:PPC*, 13: 93-101.

Class B mandates were more plentiful. These, of course, required greater levels of political oversight by the mandatory power, but were intended for independence at a "reasonable point in the future." The protectorates of Ruanda and Burundi, formerly of German East Africa, were suggested for Belgium, to be administered as a single mandate. The British were to gain Tanganyika and then split the Cameroons and Togoland with the French, as agreed upon in Paris.⁴⁵

Lastly, Class C mandates were to be assigned along the following lines. The peoples in these territories would ostensibly require long-term oversight by a mandatory power until ready for independence at an indeterminate date in the distant future. Australia was slated to receive mandates for the former territories of German New Guinea, renamed Papua New Guinea, while New Zealand would acquire German Samoa, renamed Western Samoa. As proposed, Japan's South Sea Mandate would involve former German territories in a number of Pacific Islands, including the Marianas and the Marshall Islands. And, of course, Jan Smuts' South Africa would be granted what they coveted most, the freedom to combine their own territory with the former German

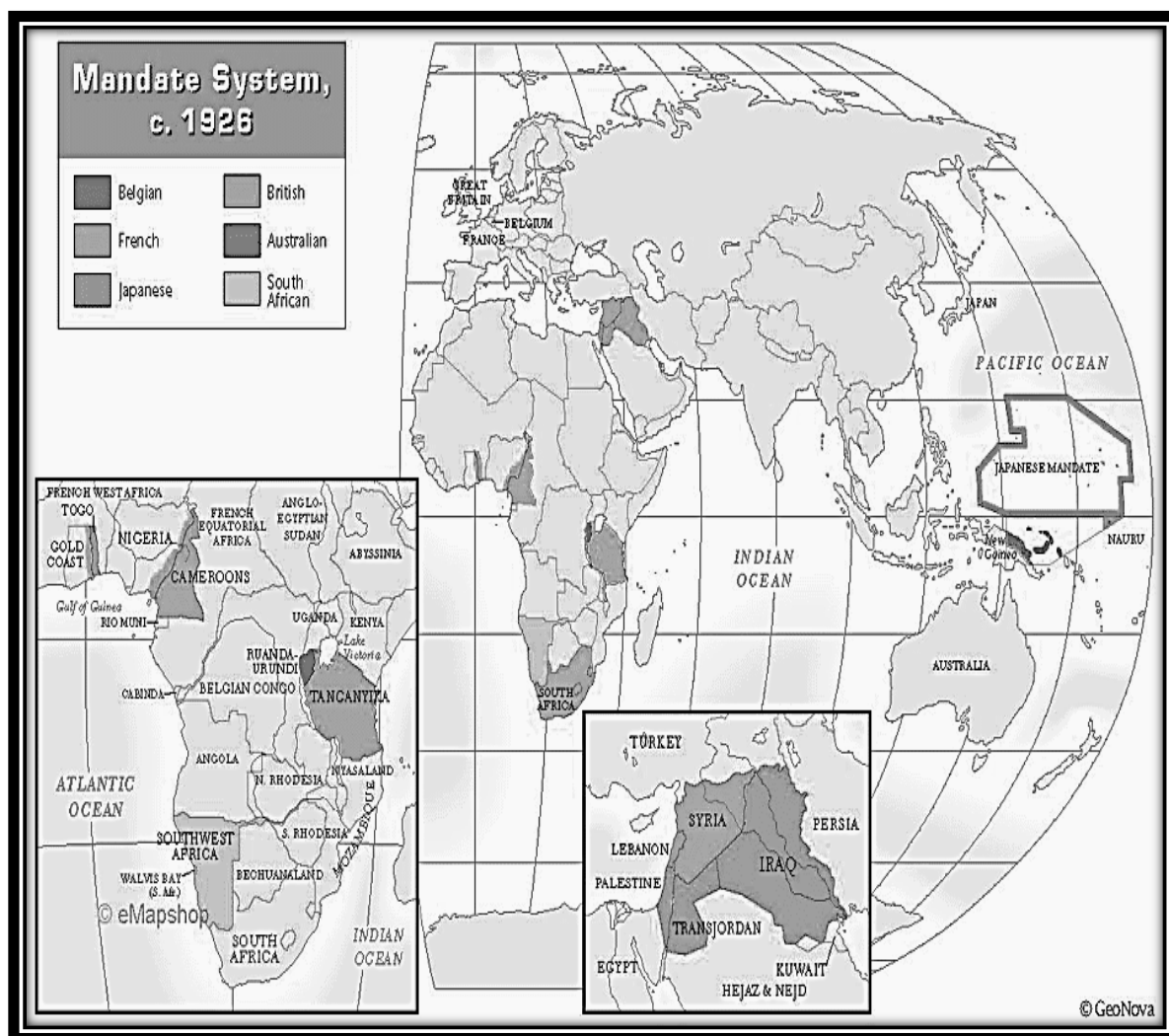
⁴⁵ Ibid.

South-West Africa.⁴⁶ When Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant was formally adopted in 1922, the mandate system assignments conformed to these recommendations, with only a few minor adjustments.⁴⁷

A brief concluding critique of Edward House and the Mandates Commission is in order. What did the commission members generate in July and August of 1919? Obviously, the mandatory powers were given extensive political and economic authority over the former German and Turkish territories, especially in the B- and C-class mandates. In essence, the idea that traditional colonialism would vanish in favor of enlightened trusteeship and progression toward political and territorial independence by colonial peoples was largely false. Instead, the mandate system's imperial legacy became evident, as resolution after resolution favored the mandatory powers' control over indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The question is, how complicit was the United States in forming the system's imperial elements during the London meetings? The traditional view is that House was overly conciliatory without Wilson's guiding presence in London, too willing to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Reference post-World War I map of The Mandate System on the following page.



Map 5.1

The Mandate System

compromise American principles and acquiesce in European imperial claims, especially with his British friends, Lord Robert Cecil and Lord Alfred Milner.⁴⁸ In other words, he sold America (and Wilson) out on the colonial issues. Is this true?

The reality is that Wilson and House were consistently in contact throughout July and August. House sent telegrams every few days to Wilson as well as Secretary of State Robert Lansing, informing them about the proposals and resolutions of the Mandates Commission. Wilson was certainly not kept in the dark. More importantly, however, the president never challenged the positional statements that House included in these telegrams. Rather, Wilson conveyed pleasure and confidence in the work that House, Milner, Cecil, and the others were achieving. On July 18, Wilson sent a telegram to House in which he affirmed, "I find the model mandates B and C quite satisfactory." At his meeting with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on August 19, the president reaffirmed: "The whole system of mandates is intended for the development and protection of the territories to which they apply—that is to say, to

⁴⁸ See especially Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement*, 170-84; MacMillan, *Paris, 1919*, 173-75, 178; George and George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*, 260-67.

protect their inhabitants, to assist their development under the operation of the opinion of the world, and to lead to their ultimate independent existence."⁴⁹

None of this is surprising. The colonial system established in Paris and London was, in reality, well aligned with the progressive standards of Wilson and House, both of whom sought to overhaul traditional colonialism, while ensuring their progressive standards could still be structured and implemented globally according to the Wilsonian standard. House accomplished these goals in London, most importantly through his continued insistence that the League of Nations retain final authority over the colonial administrative processes. We must remember that, from the beginning, the League was intended to function as an extension of Wilsonian philosophy, an instrument of progressive culture on the international stage. By ensuring the League's authority over the colonial world vis-à-vis

⁴⁹ Wilson to House, July 14, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 520; A Conversation with Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, August 19, 1919, *PWW*, 62: 409. Throughout July and August of 1919, a consistent sequence of letters and telegrams between Wilson in Washington, D.C. and House in London bears out the fact that Wilson was fully informed of all of the Mandate Commission's negotiations and that he was pleased with House's diplomacy. In fact, Wilson asked for no revisions and only occasionally asked for additional clarity on specific resolutions. See especially *PWW*, 61: 363-64, 408-09, 451-55, 477-78, 520. *PWW*, 62: 187-89, 235, 243-47, 254-55, 370, 374-75, 409.

the Mandate System, Edward House successfully served Wilson's true principles.

CONCLUSION

The mandate system of 1919 was ostensibly created to ensure cultural progress and eventual independence for colonial peoples. However, as this study has shown, in reality the mandates ultimately served as the foundation for ongoing colonial practices in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Not until the post-World War Two era did many colonial territories finally gain their independence as new nations, often through brutal, hard-fought wars against the very governments assigned, in 1919, as benevolent trustees, charged with overseeing the indigenous nations' prosperity and growth.

In *Alabama in Africa*, Andrew Zimmermann reached a similar conclusion with particular reference to Togo. He observes: "The American 'Negro question' became a foundational feature, blacks themselves a constituent exclusion, of the international order that emerged between the Berlin West African Conference and the Paris Peace Conference. Excluding blacks not only from what was called civilization without outside intervention, helped Europeans and Americans found a League of Nations to enforce what was

supposed to be universal.”¹ Emphasizing continuity from the previous European colonial imperialism to the new system of mandates under the League’s supervision, Zimmermann continues, “The transnational ‘Negro question,’ the attempts by white elites to impose interlinked regimes of political and economic control over African Americans and Africans, became fundamental to the renewed colonial civilizing mission of the League of Nations.”²

What responsibility did the United States have in these affairs? While the evils of the mandate system are generally acknowledged, most historians believe that the American delegates at Paris and London were forced into numerous compromises by Britain, France, the British Dominions, and others. Such interpretations are deeply flawed because they frame Edward House and Woodrow Wilson as overly naïve idealists who misunderstood both the realities of the postwar world and the imperial designs of their European counterparts. By defining President Wilson’s rhetoric on national self-determination in literal terms, which seemed to promise quick progress toward independence

¹ Zimmermann, *Alabama in Africa*, 200.

² *Ibid.*, 202.

for colonial peoples, most scholars have portrayed the mandates as indicators of American diplomatic failure.

The reality, however, was that colonial imperialism did not continue simply because Wilson, House, and other American peace delegates buckled under pressures from less idealistic Europeans. The Wilsonian worldview was far more complex. While Wilson's own liberal internationalist vision sought to alter traditional colonial structures, it did not conform to the idealistic progressivism embraced by many of his contemporaries, nor did it align with the subsequent definitions by many scholars. Wilson and House were not seeking immediate independence for most former German and Turkish territories. Their understanding of progressive civilization was not based on notions of universal liberty and equality. They looked down on native cultures deemed inferior to Anglo-Saxon civilization. Moreover, the United States actually took the lead in forming postwar colonial policy, advocating change that proved far more imperialistic than many scholars acknowledge.

Beginning in 1917 with his supervision of The Inquiry and ending in 1919 with the Mandates Commission in London, Edward House was responsible for molding and assigning the colonial settlement. Guided by Wilson, and imbued with the

president's enlightened notions, House fashioned an eminently suitable structure that neatly aligned with the Wilsonian philosophy of cultural progress. Hence, despite the various concessions made by Wilson and House, the creation of the mandate system should be viewed as a significant achievement for Wilsonian progressivism as understood by both men.

In essence, Wilson and House were intent on modifying the traditional forms of colonialism, using idealistic rhetoric to rationalize and convey their own imperial philosophies. After all, Wilson and House founded their postwar colonial vision on the principle of national self-determination, specifically defined as an extension of Wilsonian progressivism. Moreover, they stipulated that the League of Nations would administer any colonial structure created and assigned by the delegates. Again, Wilson's League would be granted the power to decide whether the indigenous peoples were ready to govern their own fates. It would, paradoxically, determine national self-determination.

By August of 1919, the final resolutions by the Mandates Commission affirmed this crucial aspiration. After months of negotiation, the commission formally recommended

the mandate system for implementation by the new League of Nations. Its provisions ensured League supervision of the colonial settlement. This was significant. Ultimately, the colonial system established in Paris and London was well aligned with the progressive standards of Wilson and House, both of whom sought to overhaul traditional colonialism, while ensuring that cultural progress could still be structured and implemented globally according to their Wilsonian standard. Moreover, the fact that Wilson's League would be granted supervisory control over the mandate system promised that Wilsonian progressivism would be served regardless of French or British intentions.

In the end, the Wilsonian progressive vision was inherent in the veiled imperialism contained in the mandate system. Rhetoric aside, Wilson and House failed to embrace the inherent geopolitical realities of a pluralist world. As a result, they sanctioned a deeply flawed, racist system of mandates favoring white, European political and cultural dominance over indigenous peoples.

In this light, the genuine nature and intent of Wilsonian philosophy is revealed. Wilson and House were not truly concerned with fostering colonial independence in the near future. Rather, they desired to build a new order,

bestowing American cultural progressivism on colonial peoples. While arguably different from traditional forms of colonialism, such notions furnished merely a new framework for imperialism, hidden behind idealistic rhetoric and administered by the League of Nations for a progressive future.

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