President Woodrow Wilson’s Triumph and Tragedy Amidst his fourteen points

Senior Division

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Historical Paper

With the end of the Great War, nations gathered to discuss the next steps to political and economic recovery. The Great War involved a total of 65,038,810 mobilized forces. Fifty seven percent of forces (approximately 29,717,985 soldiers) had been labeled as a casualty by the end of the war.[[1]](#footnote-1) Nearly thirty nations gathered to attend the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. The ‘Big Four’ (United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Italy) dominated the peace conference. The victorious European nations relinquished their opportunity to cease future warfare by their ratification of the Treaty of Versailles within the Paris Peace Conference. President Woodrow Wilson’s proposal of the Fourteen Points to globalize the nations was turned down by the ‘Big Four’ nations. Although Wilson addressed the clear causes of World War One in his Fourteen Points, and the solutions to prevent the same mistakes, the nations tragically struck down all but the League of Nations from Wilson’s Fourteen Points. The League of Nations eventually collapsed due to extreme circumstances, but the United Nations established by Franklin Delano Roosevelt triumphantly took up the same principles with more influence and enforcement than before.

World War One began on July 28th, 1914. America entered the war in April of 1917 after the “German announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare and the subsequent sinking of ships with U.S. citizens on board”[[2]](#footnote-2). President Wilson did not solely enter into the war for the purpose of protecting America, but to spread his vision of peace and justice in the world. As stated by President Woodrow Wilson “only peace between equals can last”[[3]](#footnote-3). All peoples must have equal opportunity to be at peace with one another. At the time, America refrained from the idea of globalization; working cooperatively with other nations to advocate the advancement of nations across the globe, and would reject the President’s ideas on working together with the European nations. This began to cause much unneeded pressure and stress to burden the President as the fear of future wars was put into play. America wanted to remain an isolationist state and believed that entering this war would require the country to interfere in future disputes.

On January 8th, 1918 Wilson proposed his famous Fourteen Points to Congress. President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points promoted his ideals on the perfect world that cooperates and end disputes in a civil manner. The outline of a better world presented by Wilson, promoted the decline in militarism, secret alliances, imperialism, and extreme nationalism. Within Wilson’s Fourteen Points, he believed that all alliances and negotiations must be made public to prevent unwanted disputes. As well as the end of secret diplomatic arrangements, Wilson suggested, “The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations”[[4]](#footnote-4). The President aimed to promote cooperation between nations with the allowance of open trade and negotiations.

The Fourteen Points proposed remedies for the European war-torn countries. Armaments were to only be produced for protection of the country domestically. The countries and colonies that want to be fully controlled by another, must proclaim that desire[[5]](#footnote-5). This self-determination within Europe was addressed by President Wilson. The war left a broken Europe that was littered with scattered foreigners. Belgium, therefore, ordered for all the foreigners post war to be evacuated. Due to the extreme damage caused during the war, both Belgium and France mandated that their countries be restored. This restoration included their sovereignty among other nations, as well as the end of unneeded tensions with the surrounding countries by the redistribution of lands that were conquered, thus, the countries proclaimed their self-determination. Italy, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Poland, and Austria- Hungary were also suggested to be restored. The war came to a triumphant end with the peace conference and the ratified treaty that followed.

The Paris Peace Conference contained delegates from 30 different nations, not including Germany, to discuss the matters of reparation and peace. Of the 30 nations, United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Italy ‘The Big Four’ predominantly decided the fate of Germany. Woodrow Wilson during the peace conference proposed his Fourteen Points and his plan for the League of Nations. Although the other nations argued against his compromise to end foreign warfare, Wilson did not give up with his plan of world unity. The final point declares, “A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike”[[6]](#footnote-6). The League of Nations would strive to maintain this high standard. The diplomats agreed and gave approval to the League of Nations while at the conference. Wilson’s League of Nations was later reestablished as the United Nations which promotes and targets the cooperative peace between foreign nations while finding a compromise to disputes between countries.

During the Paris Peace Conference, the nations drafted the Treaty of Versailles that decided the fate of the Central Powers including Germany. With the Treaty of Versailles “Germany was to admit guilt for the war and pay unlimited reparations. The German military was reduced to a domestic police force and its territory was truncated to benefit the new nations of Eastern Europe. The territories of Alsace and Lorraine were restored to France. German colonies were handed in trusteeship to the victorious Allies”[[7]](#footnote-7). This treaty went against Wilson’s Fourteen Points and became one of the main causes of World War Two.

Wilson’s proposed League of Nations and the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles was rejected by the citizens of America. Although the treaty was ratified by the foreign nations who attended the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson had to propose the idea to the Senate and gain the support of America to become a part of his newly founded League of Nations. At the time of Wilson’s proposal, America was largely populated by those who wished to remain isolationists. On top of that, during Wilson’s return to America, he underwent many health conditions, thus becoming unable to voice his opinions on the subject of globalization. The Treaty of Versailles was sent to the Senate for ratification. The Senate voted against the ratification of the treaty “49 to 35”[[8]](#footnote-8) and brought article ten concerning the U.S. being involved in the League of Nations to vote.

A political Plank was held across America to determine the support for the League of Nations. The Planks showed that 19 of the states did not report their decision or hold a convention, as well as five states that already held a convention on the subject. Ten states with separated votes between two major political parties resulted in a yes for one party and no for the other. Three states voted unanimously yes for support and five states with separated voting resulted against the League of Nations for both parties. The citizens, although split, voiced their opinion against globalization. Within America, the citizens strived for autonomy and believed that the joining of the League of Nations could cause America to gain dependence on foreign nations.

The League of Nations focused on peace and prosperity for all throughout the world. The League was a prototype for the United Nations. According to the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, “Between 1920 and 1925, the organization helped diffuse a border dispute between Sweden and Finland, prevented Austria from economic collapse, prevented the outbreak of a war in the Balkans, and had successfully begun the administration of the German Saar region”[[9]](#footnote-9). With the nations working together, they accomplished many acts of positive recovery for Europe after World War One. The main fault of the League of Nations was their inability to carry out their mission under controversial circumstances. The rise of fascism and lack of support from nations such as the United States, constricted their power and control over the world even more so than before. By the 1930’s the League was powerless against the rising forces of Germany, Italy, and Russia. Wilson’s hope for a league to combat disputes against foreign nations was not in vain.

The end of World War Two and the reign of Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin resulted in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. The rise of opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, and the global depression were the main reasons for the spark of wars to occur in the 1930’s. World War One left the European countries in a state of continuous hardships and turmoil. America was facing its own depression at the same time that the European nations were facing their own recessions, due to the national banks beginning to fail, the damage caused by the Dust Bowl, and the infamous stock market crash.[[10]](#footnote-10) To attempt recovery, President Herbert Hoover instituted the Smoot- Hawley Tariff act. According to the U.S Department of State, “world trade declined by some 66% between 1929 and 1934. More generally, Smoot-Hawley did nothing to foster trust and cooperation among nations in either the political or economic realm during a perilous era in international relations.”[[11]](#footnote-11) European nations followed America’s lead and set up tariffs of their own. These instituted tariffs continued the plummet of the global economy. Along with the global economy facing a major depression, the League of Nations’ credibility and strength was diminishing as more and more nations refused to obey their commands. Hitler was vengeful, and with Benito Mussolini, they swiftly spread their ideal vision of fascism across the surrounding countries. Joseph Stalin rose to power by establishing communism within Russia. These rising powers were too strong for the League of Nations to handle on their own. America continuously refused to enter into the wars which made it harder to combat these forces. “As the failure of disarmament, the peace movement, and the doctrine of appeasement became clear, Congress passed a series of neutrality acts designed to prevent the United States from being drawn into the widespread international conflict that the U.S. Government believed to be inevitable”[[12]](#footnote-12). America began to provide armaments to those fighting against the Axis Powers to show a sign of support. Pearl Harbor was bombed December 7, 1941, and the United States entered into World War Two. When the Axis Powers were defeated, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt fought to establish a group of united nations, including America. Roosevelt succeeded as the United Nations was later established to prevent the mistakes that led up to World War One and Two to be made once again. The United Nations improved upon the faults of Wilson’s League of Nations by focusing more on globalization. President Wilson’s 14th Point is still being carried out today by the United Nations.

Although Wilson played a major role for the victory in the Great War, the people rejected his plans of America being more involved with the dream of globalization. The victorious nations pushed aside Wilson’s Fourteen Points and drafted the Treaty of Versailles. That treaty later resulted in the start of World War Two. The accomplishments of President Woodrow Wilson have been overshadowed by the tragedies that resulted from the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles, which in turn, overlapped Wilson’s desired foreign relations including the desire for the United States to break away from their isolationist state. Many countries violated the treaty as tensions grew. The rising tensions could not be handled by the under supported League of Nations. It was not until the act of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his initiative to reconstruct the League of Nations into the United Nations, that America had gotten involved to promote the cooperation between foreign countries. The United Nations, that was triumphantly established and executed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during a time of great turmoil, is consistently striving to uphold President Woodrow Wilson’s fourteenth point on maintaining a group that can summon peace between all foreign nations across the globe.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Avalon Project. "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points." The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Accessed February 17, 2019. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\_century/wilson14.asp.

Yale Law School provided the entirety of President Woodrow Wilson's 14 points that were announced on the 8th of January 1918. Wilson's Fourteen Points showcase his beliefs on how nations and countries should work together to prevent unnecessary disputes. Eight of the Fourteen Points concerned the nations and their current situation, five other points covered President Wilson’s beliefs on creating and maintaining a peaceful world, while the last point of his Fourteen Points proposed the League of Nations. All of his points concerned how each country should not over exercise its power in militarism, secret alliances, imperialism, and nationalism.

New York Times Company, “Senate Defeats Versailles Peace Treaty with a Vote of 49 to 35,” 1920 March 20, WWPL2185, Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library Photo Collection, *Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, Staunton, Virginia*.

This excerpt from a newspaper is a primary source. This piece of the newspaper provides the headline and result of the Senate's meeting on the proposed Treaty of Versailles. This headline provided me with the result of the Senate being against the ratification and the proposed League of Nations.

Pittman, Key, 1872-1940, “Political Planks,” 1918 November, WWP25471, World War I Letters, *Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, Staunton, Virginia*.

The document "Political Planks" inform the reader as to the opinions of the states on the league of nations. Many states either declared no or did not hold a convention to favor for or against Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations. The states that had held a convention, broke down where their opinions came from. The two major political parties were listed for each state that had done so.

Wilson, Woodrow. "Address of the President of the United States to the Senate."   
      University of Michigan-Dearborn. Accessed April 17, 2019.   
      http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~ppennock/doc-Wilsonpeace.htm.   
      The speech " Address of the President of the United States to the Senate",   
      provides the typed speech that President Woodrow Wilson gave to the Senate   
      on January 22, 1917, before entering into World War One. Within the speech,   
      Wilson emphasizes the importance of justice to maintain peace and prevent   
      the future of such occurrences to cease.

Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum. "Political Planks." Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, Staunton, Virginia. Accessed November 11, 2018. http://presidentwilson.org/items/show/27631.

This website provided a typed copy of the document "Political Planks" as well as the original. President Woodrow Wilson's presidential library also provided information as to where the document originated and when it was published and by whom. This website also provides a brief description of the document.

Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum. "The Peace and President Wilson." Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, Staunton, Virginia. Accessed November 11, 2018. http://presidentwilson.org/items/show/22361.

This website provided a typed copy of the news article "The Peace and President Wilson" as well as the original. President Woodrow Wilson's presidential library also provided information as to where the news article originated and when it was published and by whom. This website also provides a brief description of the article.

Secondary Sources

Department of History. "League of Nations." The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project. Accessed February 17, 2019. https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teachinger/glossary/league-of-nations.cfm.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project provides information on the successes and fails of the League of Nation from when it was signed until it disbanded. The article highlights the main faults of the League of Nations. The main purpose of the article was to promote the successes of the League of Nations throughout its span, including their achievements of preventing war and creating new regions peacefully. The League of Nations had failed because the nations within were no longer abiding by their laws and tensions were escalating.

The Independence Hall Association. "The Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations." U.S. History. Accessed November 11, 2018. http://www.ushistory.org/us/45d.asp.

The article " The Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations" covered a general outline of President Wilson and his stand on the Paris Peace conference. The article also goes into detail on the ‘Big Four’ and their strive to gain retribution and close out Wilson's Fourteen Points but highlights their overall approval of Wilson's proposed league of nations. This article goes into detail as to why the league of nations and the Treaty of Versailles was not ratified by America. This lack of American involvement left one of the superpowers of the world to not be involved in the failing league of nations and help the European countries in a growing call of help.

Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs United States Department of State. "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations." Office of the Historian. Accessed November 11, 2018. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920.

The website " Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations" provided information on the important foreign and domestic, conflicts or achievements. The Office of Historian broke this particular website into sections that concern major historical time periods of America. World War One to Woodrow Wilson striving for the creation of the League of Nations was categorized into the section 1914-1920. That section proved most useful as it contained information on The Treaty of Versailles and President Woodrow Wilson's impact on America, and the foreign nations impacted by World War One.

PBS. "World War One: Casualty and Death Tables." PBS: The Great War. Accessed   
      April 17, 2019. https://www.uwosh.edu/faculty\_staff/henson/188/   
      WWI\_Casualties%20and%20Deaths%20%20PBS.html.   
      The article "World War One: Casualty and Death Tables" by PBS, provides   
      the reader with the statistical information of casualty rates among several   
      nations during the Great War. Sixteen of the most prominent nations are   
     categorized in these tables by their casualty percentage. America had its   
      own section that was more categorized and detailed. The chart broke up the   
      number of casualties from each war. A grand total of 8,528,831 soldiers   
      were killed in the line of duty. A combination of 65,038,810 soldiers   
      partook in the war.

Robert S. Summers. "Woodrow Wilson." POTUS -- Presidents of the United States. Accessed November 11, 2018. https://www.potus.com/woodrow-wilson/.

The website POTUS delivers a general overview of former President Woodrow Wilson's life. Accomplishments and notable events that the president was involved with. The cabinet that was in office at the time of the presidents' term is provided as well. The short video biography provides more information on Woodrow Wilson's beliefs and impacts on America and other foreign nations during his term.

Texas Education Agency. "The Causes of the Great Depression." Texas Gateway.

Accessed April 17, 2019. https://www.texasgateway.org/resource/

causes-great-depression.

The Great Depression within America lasted longer than a decade. It was

ripe with bank closures, horrendous storms, and a stock market crash that

shocked the country. The depression not only occurred in America but also

the many European nations who were recovering from World War One. The

Global Economy was plummeting because of the many tariffs that were

established by the nations in an attempt to raise their revenue. The Great

Depression lead to a downfall of cooperation and peace among the world.

1. PBS, "World War One: Casualty and Death Tables," PBS: The Great War, accessed April 17, 2019, https://www.uwosh.edu/faculty\_staff/henson/188/WWI\_Casualties%20and%20Deaths%20%20PBS.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs United States Department of State, "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations," Office of the Historian, accessed November 11, 2018, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Woodrow Wilson, "Address of the President of the United States to the Senate," University of Michigan-Dearborn, accessed April 17, 2019, http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~ppennock/doc-Wilsonpeace.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Avalon Project, "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points," The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed February 17, 2019, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\_century/wilson14.asp. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Avalon Project, "President Woodrow," The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Avalon Project, "President Woodrow," The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Independence Hall Association, "The Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations," U.S. History, accessed November 11, 2018, http://www.ushistory.org/us/45d.asp. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. New York Times Company, “Senate Defeats Versailles Peace Treaty with a Vote of 49 to 35,” 1920 March 20, WWPL2185, Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library Photo Collection, *Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, Staun* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Department of History, "League of Nations," The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, accessed February 17, 2019, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teachinger/glossary/league-of-nations.cfm. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Texas Education Agency, "The Causes of the Great Depression," Texas Gateway, accessed April 17, 2019, https://www.texasgateway.org/resource/causes-great-depression. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Texas Education Agency, "The Causes," Texas Gateway. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs United States Department of State, "Milestones in the History," Office of the Historian. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)