
Remember the Maine?

Having subdued a continent, America's tremendous energy and expansive drive sought new outlets. Americans had a growing sense of national consciousness and of power. Didn't Darwin say, in effect, that the world belonged to the strongest and fittest? To be a world power, the country needed a navy, and the navy, to be effective, required bases. Washington began to look for targets of opportunity.

American imperialism had a number of previews before the main event. In 1889 the United States joined Britain and Germany in establishing a protectorate over Samoa. Four years later, Americans backed a rebellion against Hawaii's Queen Liliuokalani. Only one day after the uprising the American minister hoisted the Stars and Stripes over Honolulu. The outgoing Republican President Benjamin Harrison hastily sent a treaty of annexation to the Senate. But before the Senate could act, Harrison's successor, Grover Cleveland, who was an archfoe of imperialism, withdrew it.

Cleveland managed to keep the imperialists on a short leash. But by the end of his term in 1897 America was again feeling its muscle and raring to go. The country had recovered from the financial Panic of '93, and prosperity was going to its head. The new generation of Americans, moreover, was unscarred by war. The country had not fought a war since 1865; it had not fought a foreign war since the war with Mexico in 1848.

The United States did not have to look very hard or far to satisfy its expansionist appetite. The Cubans had been restive under Spanish misrule and had mounted a full-scale revolt in 1895. The Filipinos were also unhappy under Spanish rule, and they, too, had rebelled.

She Is Getting Too Feeble to Hold Them



J. S. Pughe. *Puck*, 1896.

Spain dispatched “Butcher” Weyler to Cuba to put down the rebellion. He promptly herded the population, including women and children, into barbed-wire reconcentration camps, where tens of thousands died.

Sensational exposés of Spanish brutality appeared in the yellow journals of Hearst and Pulitzer. The public clamored for war, and drowned out the voices of U. S. business and commercial interests who opposed it.

McKinley hoped to avoid a conflict by applying a bit of quiet diplomacy. His chances of succeeding were all but torpedoed when the U. S. battleship *Maine* blew up and sank in Havana harbor with over 250 officers and men aboard. (The cause of the explosion remains a mystery to this day, although it was widely assumed at the time to have been a Spanish mine.)

Passions in the country ran high. “Remember the *Maine*! To hell with Spain!” was the slogan of the hour. As some congressmen debated war, others gathered in the lobbies of the Capitol, according to historian Bailey, and sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Hang General Weyler to a Sour Apple Tree as We Go Marching On.” Pro-interventionists argued that the United States had a humanitarian duty to save Cubans from their Spanish oppressors. Opponents pointed out that we were in no position to lecture Spain on her treatment of Cubans, considering our own treatment of Indians.

Consistency



Joseph Keppler. *Puck*, 1891.

The Continental European powers were almost unanimous in disapproving the United States' aggressive stance. But they didn't want to offend Britain, or, for that matter, the United States. Outside of a fainthearted remonstrance to Washington and a plea for peace, they did little to help Spain. The Spanish premier, Sagasta, was on his own.

"The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck."



Charles Nelan. *The Herald* (New York), 1898.

Spain did bow to two U. S. demands—a temporary armistice and the lifting of the reconcentration order—but the hour was late. The public and political pressures on McKinley were enormous. Two days *after* receiving word of Spain's capitulation, on April 11, 1898, the President sent a war message to Congress. He underscored the urgent need to abate a nuisance at our door, to protect American trade and property in Cuba, and to eliminate a menace to our peace.

On April 19 Congress passed a joint resolution demanding Spain's withdrawal from Cuba. It recognized the island's freedom and disclaimed any intention to annex.

Make Him Walk Spanish Uncle Sam—Now Git—Durn Ye!



Charles L. Bartholomew (Bart). *Minneapolis Journal*, 1898.

Whatever small hope Spain still harbored of salvaging its empire or at least its prestige was soon extinguished. Less than two weeks after Congress's joint declaration, Admiral Dewey sent the Spanish navy to the bottom of Manila Bay. The first blow for Cuban independence was struck on the other side of the globe.

After Dewey's incredible victory, the name of the game was no longer liberating Cuba but acquiring an empire. Many Americans liked the idea. They considered it America's Duty and Destiny to rescue the Spanish colonies.

The Spanish Brute Adds Mutilation to Murder



Grant Hamilton. *Judge*, 1898.

Other Americans saw no virtues in the United States' acquiring a burdensome family of dependents. McKinley himself had been unenthusiastic about going to war. Now he was undecided about how to handle his victory. He could return the Philippine Islands to Spanish misrule, annex them, or recognize their independence. The President waited for public sentiment to crystallize.

The Cares of a Growing Family



J. Campbell Cory. *The Bee*, 1898.

After prayerful consideration, McKinley concluded "that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them . . ."

The foes of overseas expansion favored independence for the Philippines. They tried to convince themselves that American imperialism was a passing phase.

Our Expansive Uncle, But It's Only Temporary



William H. Walker. *Life*, 1899.

The anti-expansionists were a minority. Most Americans appeared to agree with Senator Lodge that "where the flag once goes up it must never come down." By the end of the century the United States had not only driven Spain out of Cuba; it had swallowed up Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, Wake Island, and a chunk of Samoa. If there had ever been any doubt, by 1900 America was indisputably a Great Power.

From the Big Stick to the “War to End War”

A vast potential market beckoned in the Far East. Now that the United States was a Pacific power, it was in a position to claim a piece of the action. Pago Pago in Samoa provided a way station for U. S. trade with the South Pacific—New Zealand and Australia. Hawaii was a bridge between the West Coast and the Philippines. The Philippines gave America a window on eastern Asia.

The European imperialists had begun carving up the Chinese empire in earnest after China's poor showing in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Britain was alarmed: it had by far the largest foreign-trade stake in the Far East. If nothing were done to stop the Europeans from acquiring long-term leaseholds in China and surrounding them with high tariff walls, Britain's trade would one day be strangled. London reminded Washington of British support during the Spanish-American War, and suggested that Washington could reciprocate by supporting British efforts to keep China's ports open.

The United States twice refused, invoking its traditional policy of nonentanglement. But American merchants and missionaries were just as anxious as the British to have the United States intervene. They kept up the pressure on the State Department until the Secretary of State agreed to reconsider.

In a dramatic reversal of policy, Secretary John Hay in September, 1899, sent Open Door notes to the six powers with interests in China. He urged each one not to interfere with the commercial interests of the others in its particular sphere of influence. In a corollary to the first notes, delivered in 1900, Hay put the United States on record as supporting the territorial integrity of all China and commercial equality in all parts of the Chinese empire. In effect, Washington was trying to protect its own as well as Britain's access to the lucrative China trade. And it was attempting to forestall the dismemberment of China.

The danger of dismemberment was aggravated by the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The Boxers were a group of fanatical Chinese who were out to kill the "foreign devils." The Czar took advantage of the ensuing chaos to dispatch his troops to Manchuria, allegedly to protect Russian lives and a segment of the all-but-completed Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Russia promised to withdraw its troops when the rebellion ended, but they were still there four years later. If Russia succeeded in occupying Manchuria, this would leave Japan dangerously exposed. In February, 1904, Tokyo mounted a damaging sneak attack on the Czarist fleet at Port Arthur, Manchuria. Two days later Japan declared war on Russia. The United States officially took a "wait and see" attitude.

A Story of the China Shop

An Artist's View of the Complications in the Far East



1. Uncle Sam, "Seems ter be a little trouble at the store to-day, boys."



2. Uncle Sam (to France, Germany, and England), "There he goes inside, boys; guess we'd better stay out for a while."



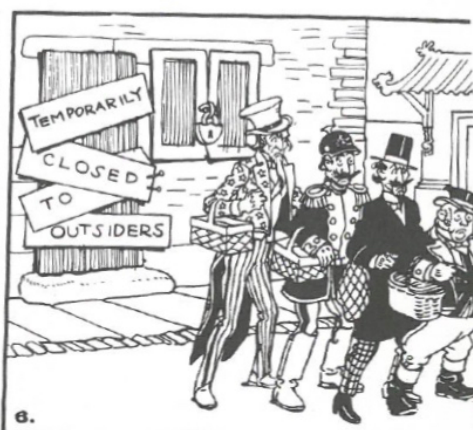
3. Uncle Sam (to China), "Be careful you don't get mixed up in it."



4. China, "Hellup!" Uncle Sam, "Jinkys! they're pulling him inside too. Don't git too near, boys."



5. Uncle Sam, "Never mind, boys. Don't go any nearer. We'll just wait a few days."



6. The Kaiser, et al. "That looks to us like we wait. Uncle Sammy is right, yes?"

Albert Levering. *Harper's Weekly*, 1904.

The United States had traditionally been friendly with both countries. But American sympathies were with the apparent underdogs, the Japanese. Washington suspected that the Russians intended to slam the Open Door in Manchuria, and a Japanese victory would spike that plan. President Roosevelt warned France and Germany to keep hands off. Britain didn't need a warning: it was allied with Japan.

The land war between Russia and Japan was fought on Chinese soil without a second thought to China's neutrality. Within months the Japanese had routed the Russians. But it cost them over 100,000 lives. Japan secretly asked President Roosevelt to mediate. The Russians were also anxious to end the carnage. And in the summer of 1905 Roosevelt met with representatives of the two sides in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

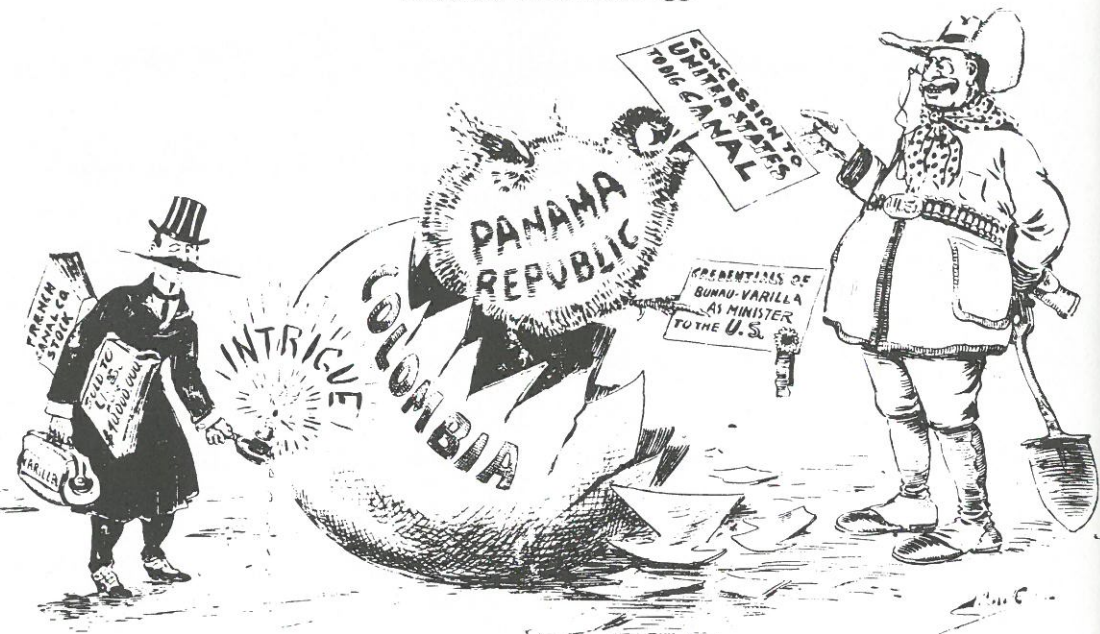
The Peace of Portsmouth was a personal triumph for Roosevelt, although it strained U. S.-Japanese relations and won few friends in Russia.

The fact that both countries had turned to the United States underscored America's new role as a Pacific power. With vast interests to protect, the country's need for a water link between the two oceans was more urgent than ever. If a canal could be cut across the isthmus, it would cut travel time between Puget Sound and the Caribbean by two-thirds.

Britain reluctantly gave the United States the go-ahead to build, control, and fortify a canal. (The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 had barred the two countries from obtaining exclusive control over any canal built across the isthmus.) The next question was, Where should the canal be built? Through Nicaragua or through Panama, which was then part of Colombia? The French-owned "New Panama Canal Co." lobbied in Washington for a canal through Panama. It was well served by one of its major stockholders, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, a Frenchman and a most effective lobbyist. The House approved a canal through Panama and authorized the President to secure a right-of-way from Colombia. If he failed, he was required to negotiate with Nicaragua.

Colombia was dissatisfied with Washington's terms and held out for a better offer. At that point the Panamanians, apparently on signal from Bunau-Varilla, staged a rebellion. An hour after President Roosevelt received the news that the Panamanians had declared their independence, he authorized *de facto* recognition of the infant republic.

"The man behind the egg."



Crane. *The New York Times*, 1903.

With Bunau-Varilla representing Panama, the two countries signed a treaty on terms highly favorable to the United States. Panama became virtually an American military outpost.

Roosevelt not only made good his promise to “make the dirt fly” in the isthmus. He also tried to make sure that no European power in the future would have an excuse to interfere with our ships passing through the Caribbean to the canal. In 1904 the Dominican Republic was wracked by civil war, and there was a strong possibility that the island’s European creditors might come over and try to make good their investments. This prompted Roosevelt to issue his “corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. The United States, he declared, henceforth would exercise an international police power in the Western Hemisphere. Anyone who wanted debts collected should apply to Washington.

The World's Constable



Louis Dalrymple. *Judge*, 1905.

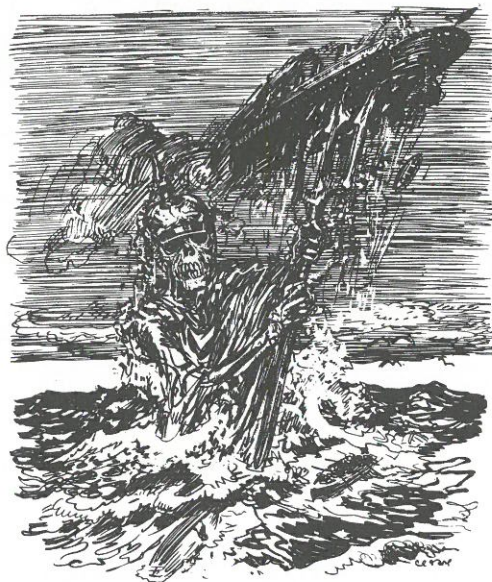
Outsiders who expected the Latin American republics to object to Roosevelt's "big stick diplomacy" were disappointed. It was not until several years later, when the United States cited the corollary to justify wholesale landings of U. S. Marines in the Caribbean and Central America, that our neighbors protested our strong-arm tactics.

Before he left the White House, President Roosevelt exercised his diplomatic skills yet another time, in Morocco. The Germans and the French were at loggerheads and Europe seemed on the brink of war when Roosevelt talked the powers into a conference. For his peace efforts at Algeiras in 1906 and his mediation at Portsmouth the preceding year, Roosevelt was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

Woodrow Wilson, former president of Princeton University and ex-Governor of New Jersey, was the first Democrat in the White House since 1897. He was an archfoe of imperialism and of war. Yet in his first term he authorized more armed interventions in Latin America than any of his predecessors. Between 1914 and 1916, the United States sent troops into Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Virgin Islands, and Mexico. In 1916 Wilson campaigned on the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War." Only a year later he had the unhappy task of formalizing America's entry into World War I.

When the war exploded in Europe in the summer of 1914, America felt strong, snug, and secure. The vast majority of Americans opposed war. And Wilson's policy of strict neutrality had their blessing. The exceptions were the millions of hyphenated Americans. Pro-Ally and pro-German groups fought bitterly and prodded Washington to take sides.

Out of the Depths



Oscar Edward Cesare. *The Sun* (New York), 1915.

Most Americans remained untouched by the war until the heinous attack on the British passenger ship *Lusitania* by a German submarine off the Irish coast. Among the 1,198 passengers and crew who lost their lives were 128 Americans.

Wilson sent one protest, then another to the Kaiser. Ten months passed before Germany offered to assume liability and pay an indemnity. In the meantime anti-German sentiment grew.

As the war spread across the European continent, most cartoonists actively propagandized for American intervention on the side of England and France.

The Python



Jay N. Darling (Ding). *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1917.

Oscar Cesare of the New York *Sun* was a notable exception. So were the cartoonists on the small, radical, Greenwich Village magazine *The Masses*. One of the most talented, Robert Minor, went on to become editor of the *Daily Worker* and acting head of the American Communist Party. (In 1917 the government suppressed *The Masses* for its belligerent antiwar stand.)

Army Medical Examiner: "At last a perfect soldier!"

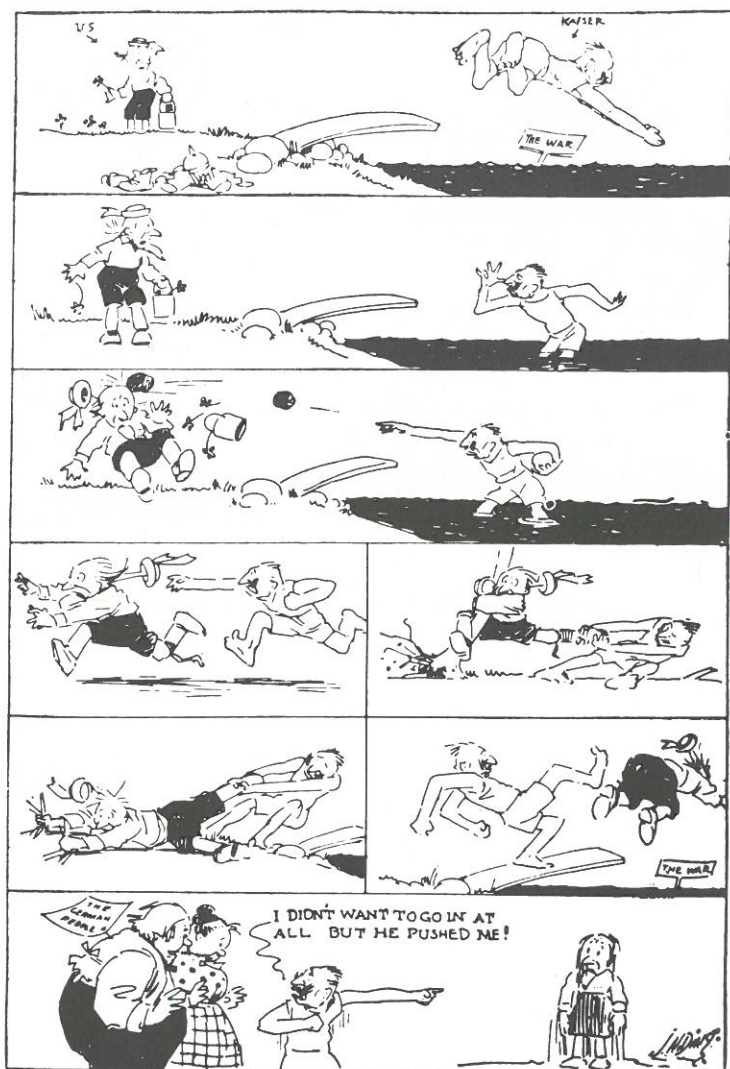


Robert Minor. *The Masses*, 1916.

Wilson remained determined to hold to a neutral course and resisted the mounting pressure to join the Allies and help slay “the Beast of Berlin.” He made more than one attempt to promote a negotiated peace.

In a memorable address to the Senate in January, 1917, Wilson warned that only “peace without victory” could bring permanent settlement, and he called for a League of Nations. Germany’s answer to Wilson’s message came at the end of the month: it launched an unrestricted submarine campaign against *all* ships in the war zone. Germany had helped push the United States into war.

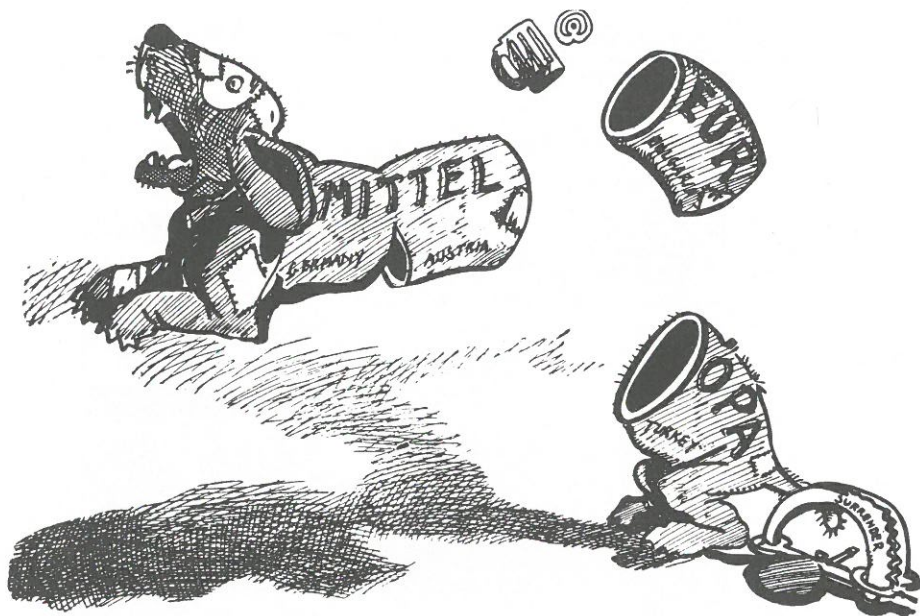
How We Forced Germany Into the War



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1917.

In the interests of preserving our no-alliance tradition, the United States became “associated” with the Allies, rather than allied to them. Allied or associated, the country soon was deeply involved in the war. Over two million Americans saw overseas service. In fact, our fresh manpower helped tip the scales. A year and a half after America’s entry, the war ended. The Kaiser was forced to abdicate. An armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

Nothing Left but the Howl



J. H. Donahey. *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), c. 1919.

6

Return to “Normalcy”

On a blustery, cold morning in December, 1918, President Wilson set sail on the *George Washington* to attend the Paris Peace Conference. It was the first visit by an American President to Europe. Wilson's prestige on the Continent had never been greater, but at home his reputation had suffered. In the recent congressional elections, Republicans had captured both houses. Partisan Republicans disapproved of Wilson. They disapproved of his trip. And they disapproved of his Fourteen Points, particularly the fourteenth, calling for a League of Nations. Wilson had outlined Allied war aims in a fourteen-point statement to Congress in January. The address had been widely acclaimed at home and abroad.

Wilson's chief critics in Congress, Senators Borah, Lodge, Reed, and Knox, were convinced that the less truck the United States had with the squabbling European powers, the better off the country would be.

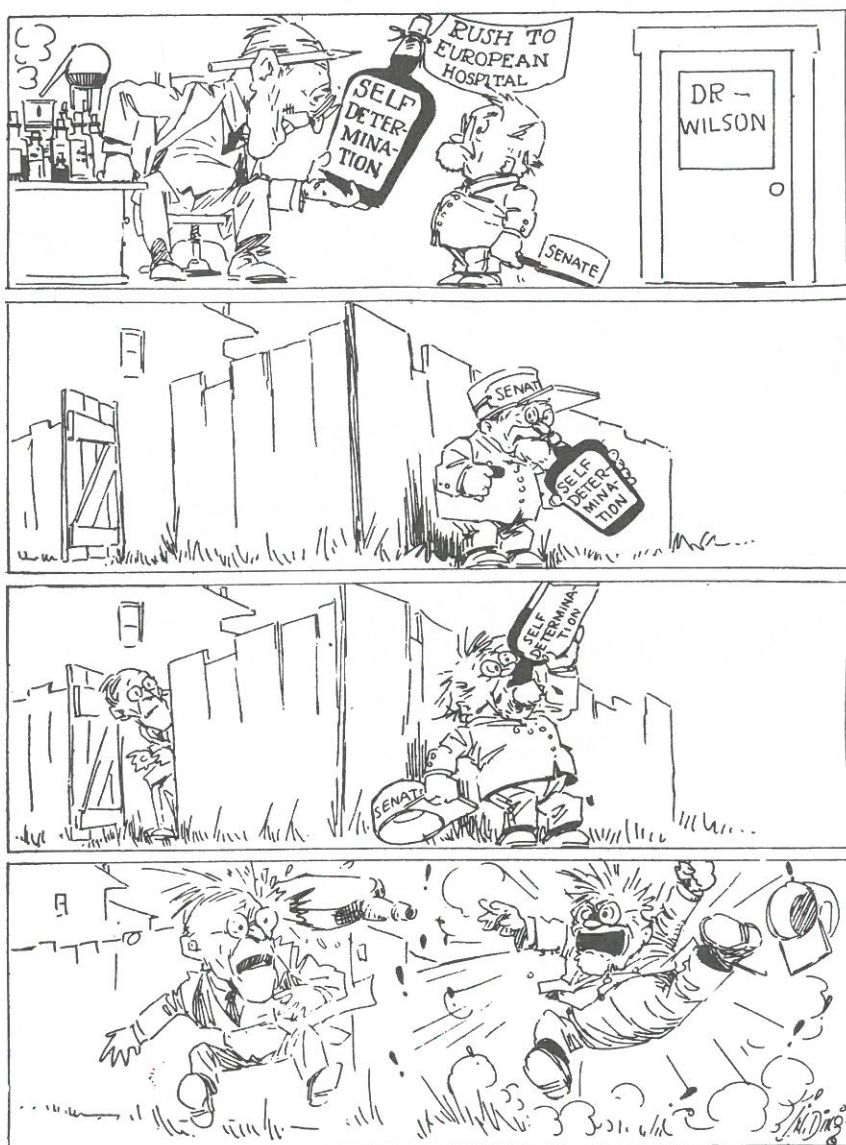
Interrupting the Ceremony



John T. McCutcheon. *The Tribune* (Chicago), 1918.

While Wilson was in Paris, the four senators and their supporters borrowed one of Wilson's principles and exercised their right of "self-determination" as a minority. They served notice on the country and the world that they would approve no peace treaty containing a League Covenant.

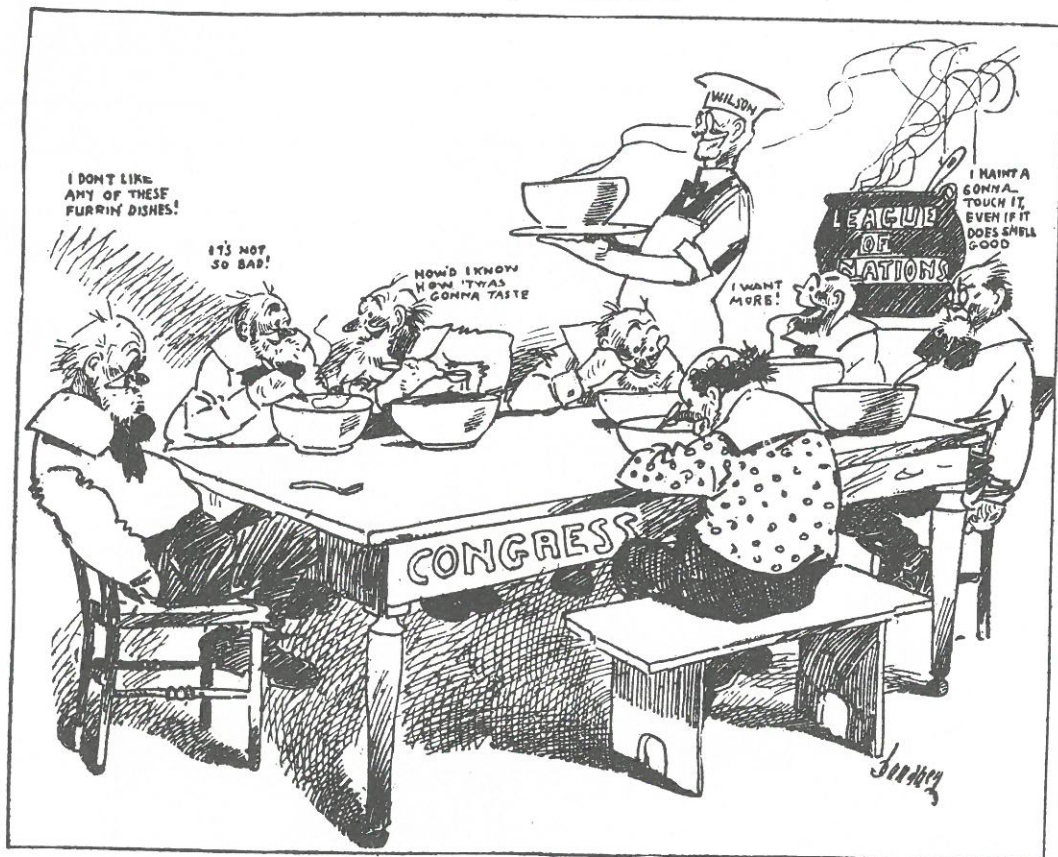
The Prescription That Went Astray



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1919.

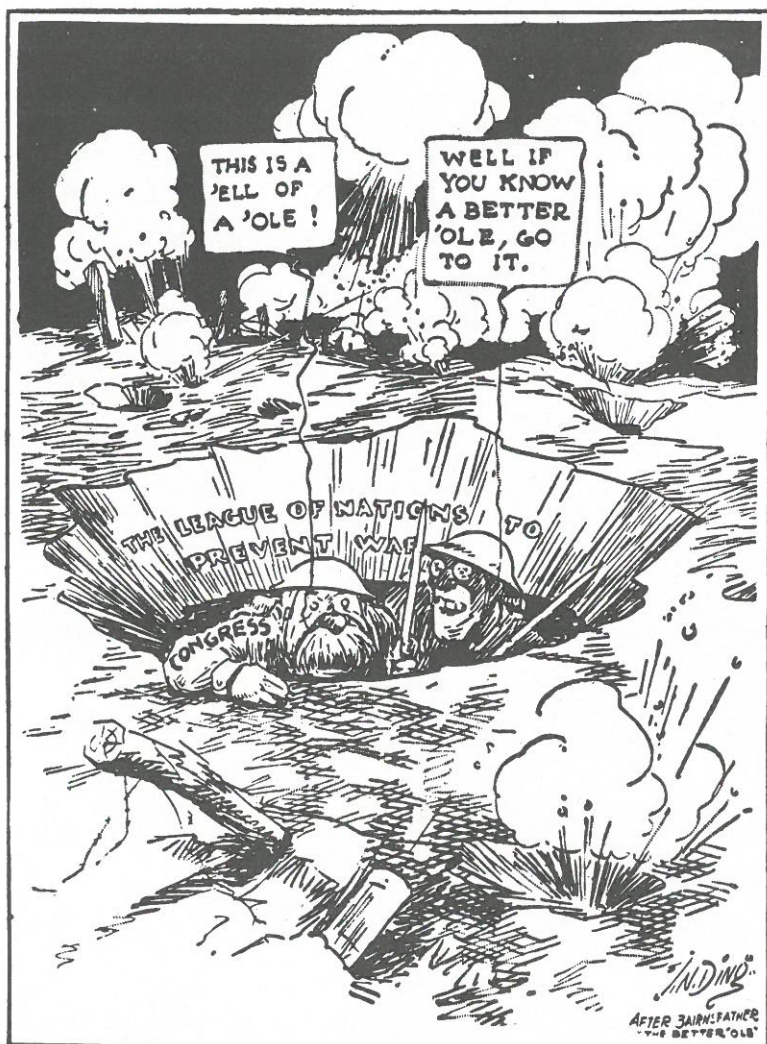
When Wilson returned from Paris in February, 1919, he got a mixed reception.

Getting a Taste of It



J. H. Donahey. *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), c. 1919.

The League of Nations Argument in a Nutshell



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1919.

While the President tried to line up congressional support in Washington, the Allies in Paris were putting the finishing touches on the peace treaty. It was signed with great fanfare in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on June 28, 1919. As Boardman Robinson foresaw in his prophetic cartoon, the treaty was badly flawed.

Signed



Boardman Robinson. June, 1919.

Discouraged by his failure to convert the "irreconcilables" in the Senate, Wilson left Washington in September, 1919, to take his case for the League and the Versailles Treaty to the country.

Before the month was over, the President collapsed in Pueblo, Colorado. His active campaign for the League was ended.

The Senate continued to debate the League Covenant. Lodge insisted on reservations. Wilson objected: no treaty was preferable to a treaty with reservations. Twice in November, 1919, and again in March, 1920, the Senate voted. Three times it refused to consent to ratification.

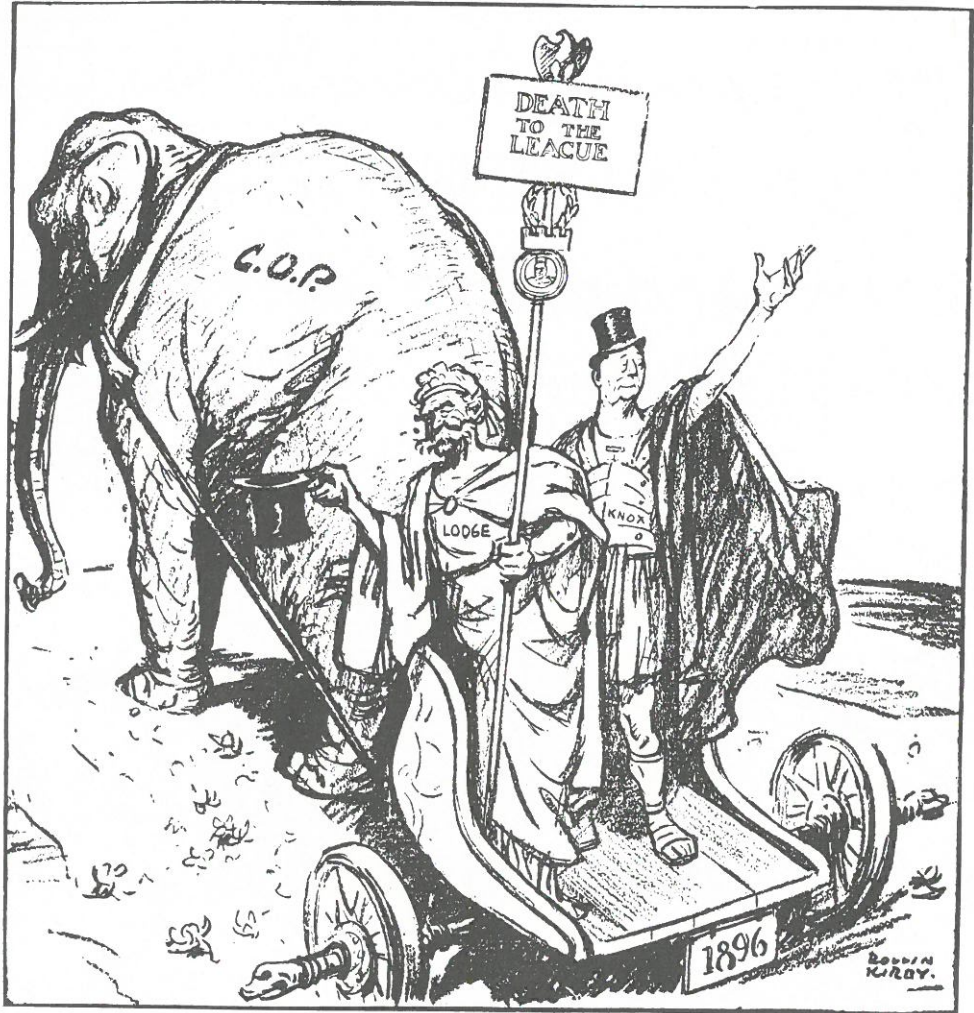
The One Animal That Wouldn't Go Into the Ark



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1920.

The same year that the League was defeated, the country elected Republican Warren Gamaliel Harding President. Harding promised the country a return to “normalcy.”

Triumphal Entry Into Normalcy



Rollin Kirby. *The World* (New York), 1921.

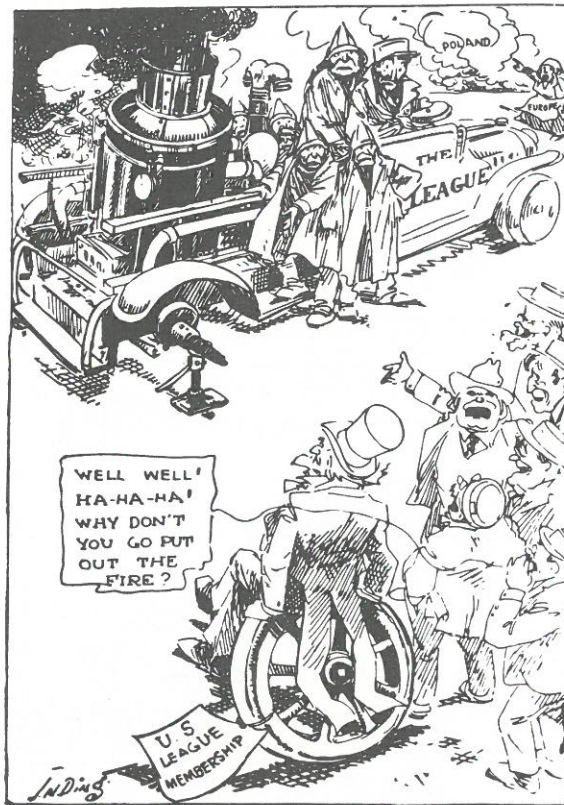
The public had mixed feelings about America's not being a League member. Some people were relieved. They considered it an imperfect institution run by quarrelsome, aggressive "foreign imperialists."



John T. McCutcheon. *The Tribune* (Chicago), 1920.

The pro-League internationalists, on the other hand, were irate. If the League was weak, it was due to our failure to join up and make it work.

"We Told You It Wouldn't Work!"



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, c. 1920.

Wilson failed to sell the League to his countrymen, but his vision of America as a moral force in the world working for peace had a lasting impact. Idaho's Senator Borah, the same isolationist who helped defeat the League, persuaded President Harding in November, 1921, to convene the Washington disarmament conference.

The theory behind the conference was, simply, that by eliminating the weapons of war one could eliminate war itself. That struck a responsive chord. When the conference closed, most of the American press and public hailed it as a monument to peace.

Out of the Washington conference came an agreement to stabilize the world's three most powerful navies, the U. S., British, and Japanese, on a capital-ship ratio of 5:5:3. Japan, by agreeing to accept a lower naval ratio, received America's promise not to fortify further any Pacific island except Hawaii.

Our Greatest Naval Victory



The Roots



Nelson Harding. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1922.

Carey Orr. *The Tribune* (Chicago), c. 1921.

The Hearst papers, representing a vocal minority, deplored the conference results. They claimed that a rapacious Japan was even then formulating secret plans to attack the United States.

Most Americans thought the jingoes were creating a straw dragon to stir up the public over a nonexistent threat.

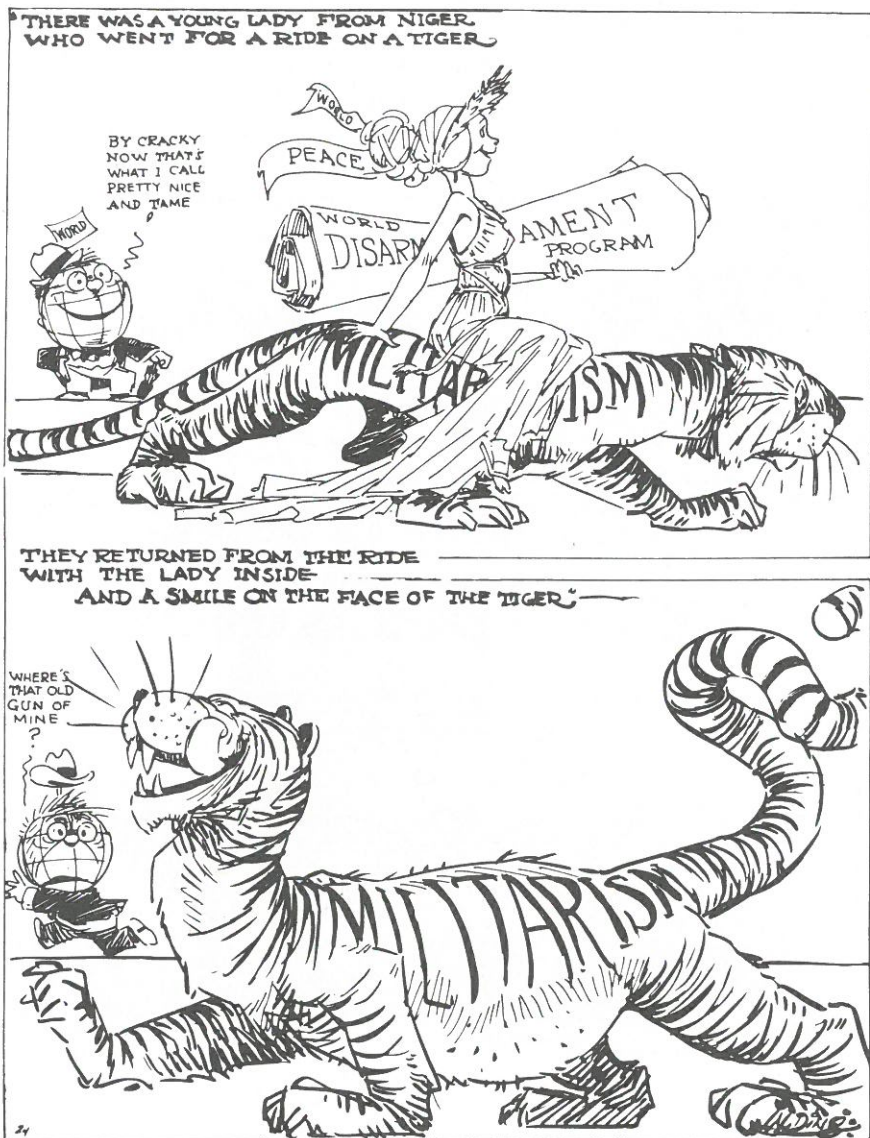
"It looks fine, but I can't make it breathe!"



Homer Stinson. *Dayton Daily News*, c. 1922.

President Coolidge, the thrifty New Englander who succeeded Harding in 1923, hoped to duplicate his predecessor's disarmament coup and hastily set the stage for a new conference. The 1927 Geneva disarmament conference was a complete failure. France and Italy refused to come. Britain and the United States refused to come to terms.

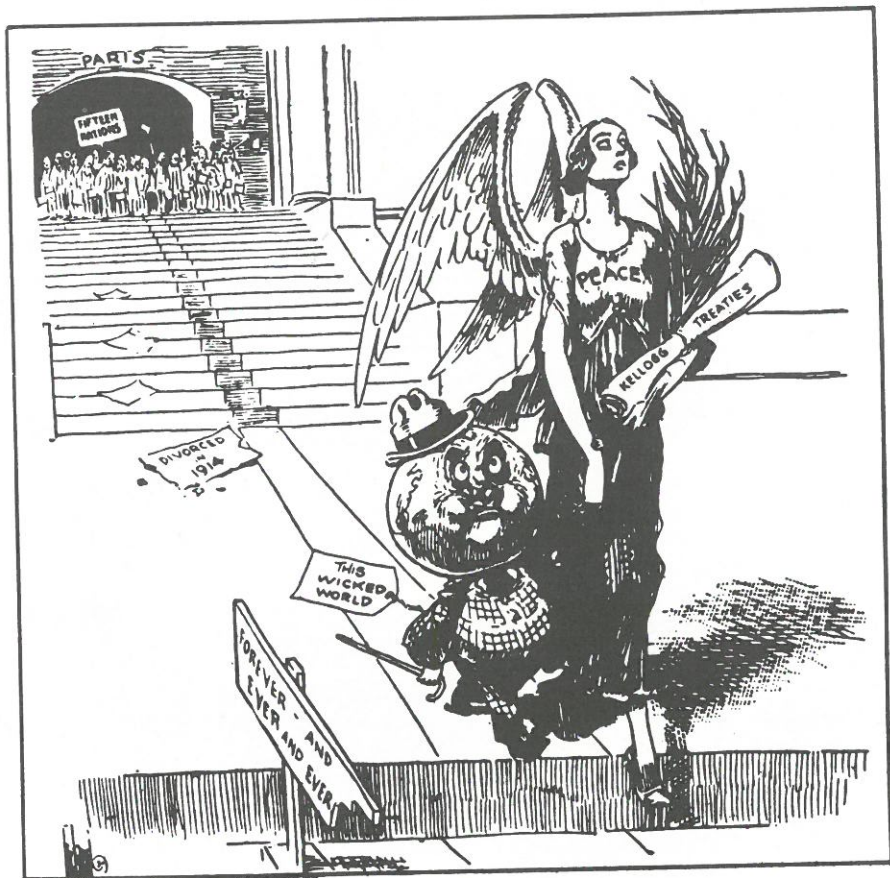
The Round Trip to the Disarmament Conference



Jay N. Darling. *The Des Moines Register*, 1926.

Undaunted by its failure to outlaw weapons or at least limit them, the United States mounted a campaign to outlaw war itself. With strong public backing, the United States joined sixty-two nations in 1928 in signing the Kellogg-Briand Pact of Paris, renouncing war as “an instrument of national policy.” The Senate approved the pact by 85 votes to 1.

Married Again



William A. Ireland. *The Columbus Dispatch*, 1928.

The pact proved to be an illusion. Instead of outlawing war, the treaty merely succeeded in outlawing declarations of war.

Another Blindfold Test



Carey Orr. *The Tribune* (Chicago), 1928.

By 1930 Wilson's hope that World War I would be the "war to end war," a war to make the world "safe for democracy," was looking more and more tenuous.