

So Henry Cabot Lodge Was One of History's Villains?

Maybe it's time to revive one of Massachusetts' most famous men. From a distance of almost a hundred years, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge may have a lot to tell us about how to conduct America's foreign affairs in a chaotic world.

For too long Lodge has been demonized as the prototype of the isolationist, because he led the fight against President Woodrow Wilson's 1919 attempt to make the United States a member of the League of Nations.

In fact, Lodge was a strong advocate of American involvement in world affairs. From his election as senator in 1893, his greatest ambition was to become chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He saw an active foreign policy as crucial to forming America's national character.

Lodge was profoundly influenced by America's Civil War, which he saw as a conflict between good and evil. He thought America's role in the world was to fight similar battles beyond its shores. This meant America had to be strong. He pushed hard for a big navy and an expanded army. He supported the Spanish American War. The struggle for an independent Cuba was "a great broad question" in which "right and wrong are involved."

Lodge saw America's world role as a way to attract young people to a "new ideology of leadership" where they would find "fresh sources of energy" more ennobling than the commercial and material ethos of American big business. He believed American idealism could become a more significant force in world affairs than the often "sordid" imperialism of Britain, France and Russia, who dominated two thirds of the globe.

When Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901, Lodge enthusiastically supported his internationalism. He backed the creation of the Panama Canal and Roosevelt's role as a mediator in the Russian-Japanese War. He was equally enthusiastic about insisting on an "Open Door" policy in China. He exulted when Roosevelt sent America's "great white fleet" around the world.

For Lodge the worst foreign policy sin was inaction and pale neutrality. During the first three years of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson seemed to embody these vices. Lodge was convinced that Great Britain and her allies, France and Russia, were fighting for "the right" and Germany was not only wrong but evil.

Wilson's claim that there was no moral difference between the European antagonists struck Lodge as close to blasphemy. Lodge wanted America to side with the Allies and join the

victorious powers in a "League to Enforce Peace," after the war. He repeatedly condemned Wilson as a weak indecisive leader, an opinion the senator did not change after America finally entered the war on April 6, 1917. After the war, Wilson's concept of a League of Nations that would obligate the United States to fight future wars without the consent of Congress violated Lodge's belief that the use of force should spring from the united will of the American people.

Wilson saw Lodge as a meanspirited narrow man who was ready to "break the heart of the world" for partisan political advantage. He grew to hate Lodge and his supporters as "bungalow minds" and refused to accept their insistence on reservations in the League covenant to preserve American sovereignty.

Lodge won the political battle. Wilson, the League and the Democratic Party were routed in the election of 1920. But Wilson's backers managed to demonize Lodge so thoroughly, he barely won reelection to the Senate in 1922. The demonization grew apace in the decades after Lodge's death in 1924. Forgotten was his vision of an America that could bring a new idealism to international affairs under the inspiration of strong leaders.

Succeeding generations of voters and politicians have backed Henry Cabot Lodge, not Woodrow Wilson, in affirming an international commitment but retaining control of America's sovereignty. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. the senator's grandson, pointed this out after World War II. Writing to one of the senator's biographers, the younger Lodge noted that "the United Nations of today falls squarely within the limits of that [Lodge] proposition. The representatives of nations at the United Nations are ambassadors, and for the very reason that the sovereignty of their country is not compromised." The younger Lodge added that the decision of the American people in 1920 in the light of America's experience in subsequent years "seems remarkably far-sighted."

Lodge's vision of an America that is prepared to work with the international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations but retains the freedom to act independently when necessary seems remarkably close to President George W. Bush's approach to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the future, let's hope that Mr. Bush retains Lodge's conviction that the use of force must always be on behalf of justice and freedom.