

liberals and moderate socialists who were fighting for a new international order based upon peace and justice.

The Paris Peace Conference and the Versailles Treaty

With their armies reeling under the weight of a combined Allied and American assault, the Germans appealed to Wilson in October 1918 for an armistice based on the Fourteen Points and other presidential pronouncements. The Allies agreed to conclude peace on this basis, except that the British entered a reservation about freedom of the seas, and Wilson agreed to an Anglo-French demand that the Germans be required to make reparation for damages to civilian property.

U.S. 27th Infantry Division; end of World War I

The U.S. 27th Infantry Division passing through the Victory Arch in New York City in celebration of the end of World War I, March 25, 1919.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Wilson led the U.S. delegation and a large group of experts to the peace conference, which opened in Paris in January 1919. He fought heroically for his Fourteen Points against the Allied leaders—David Lloyd George of Britain, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy—who, under heavy pressure from their own constituencies, were determined to divide the territories of the vanquished and make Germany pay the full cost of the war. Wilson made a number of compromises that violated the spirit if not the

letter of the Fourteen Points, including the imposition of an indefinitely large reparations bill upon Germany. Moreover, the Allies had intervened in the Russian Civil War against the dominant revolutionary socialist faction, the Bolsheviks, and Wilson had halfheartedly cooperated with the Allies by dispatching small numbers of troops to northern Russia, to protect military supplies against the advancing Germans, and to Siberia, mainly to keep an eye on the Japanese, who had sent a large force there. But Wilson won many more of his Fourteen Points than he lost; his greatest victories were to prevent the dismemberment of Germany in the west and further intervention in Russia and, most important, to obtain the incorporation of the Covenant of the League of Nations into the Versailles Treaty. He was confident that the League, under American leadership, would soon rectify the injustices of the treaty.

“Big Four”

The “Big Four” (left to right): David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States, the principal architects of the Treaty of Versailles.

National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The fight over the treaty and the election of 1920

Public opinion in the United States seemed strongly in favour of quick ratification of the Versailles Treaty when the president presented that document to the Senate in July 1919. Traditional isolationist sentiment was beginning to revive, however, and a small minority of 16 senators, irreconcilably opposed to U.S. membership in the League, vowed to oppose the treaty to the

bitter end. In addition, a crucial controversy developed between the president and a majority of the Republican senators, led by Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. Lodge insisted upon adding 14

reservations to the treaty. The second reservation declared that the United States assumed no obligations under Article X of the Covenant, which guaranteed the integrity and independence of members of the League; moreover it said that the president could not use the armed forces to support the Covenant without the explicit consent of Congress.

Lodge, Henry Cabot

Henry Cabot Lodge, c. 1898.

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Calling this reservation a nullification of the treaty, Wilson in September made a long speaking tour of the West to build up public support for unconditional ratification. He suffered a breakdown at the end of his tour and a serious stroke on October 2. The president's illness, which incapacitated him for several months,

increased his intransigence against the Lodge reservations; with equal stubbornness, the Massachusetts senator refused to consent to any compromise. The result was failure to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority for ratification, with or without reservations, when the Senate voted on November 19, 1919, and again on March 19, 1920.

Wilson had suggested that the ensuing presidential campaign and election should be a "great and solemn referendum" on the League. The Democratic candidate, James M. Cox of Ohio, fought hard to make it the leading issue, but the Republican candidate, Warren G. Harding of Ohio, was evasive on the subject, and a group of 31 leading Republican internationalists assured the country that Harding's election would be the best guarantee of U.S. membership in the League of Nations. Harding swamped Cox (see U.S. presidential election of 1920), and his victory ended all hopes for U.S. membership. In his inaugural Harding announced that the United States would not be entangled in European affairs; he emphasized this determination by concluding a separate peace with Germany in 1921.

Woodrow Wilson

Former U.S. president Woodrow Wilson
leaving his home in 1921, his health
broken.

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Arthur S. Link

The United States from 1920 to 1945

The postwar Republican administrations

Postwar conservatism

After the end of World War I, many Americans were left with a feeling of distrust toward foreigners and radicals, whom they held responsible for the war. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the founding of the communists' Third International in 1919 further fanned American fears of radicalism. Race riots and labour unrest added to the tension. Thus, when a series of strikes and indiscriminate bombings began in 1919, the unrelated incidents were all assumed—incorrectly in most cases—to be communist-inspired. During the ensuing Red Scare, civil liberties were sometimes grossly violated and many innocent aliens were deported. The Red Scare was over within a year, but a general distrust of foreigners, liberal reform movements, and organized labour remained throughout the 1920s. In fact, many viewed Warren G. Harding's landslide victory in 1920 (see U.S. presidential election of 1920) as a repudiation of Woodrow Wilson's internationalism and of the reforms of the Progressive era.