

Woodrow Wilson and American Foreign Policy during World War I

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Wilson's Lack of Sincerity about Neutrality in the War

When World War 1 broke out in 1915, the United States, under President [Woodrow Wilson](#) chose to be neutral by refusing to join either warring factions because Americans preferred peace. An overwhelming 90 percent of Americans did not want the country's engagement in the war because it did not affect the stability of the United States. In fact, Wilson's continued efforts to keep the United States neutral earned him a second term in office as people praised him for keeping the country out of the war. (Office of the Historian, n.d.-a)

Personally, Wilson was convinced that unnecessary, unjustified, and costly wars could be ended and permanent peace could be achieved. However, Wilson's convictions about the war changed within five months of being reelected. Instead of sticking to neutrality, he sought to establish himself as the world's savior by entering the war to restore peace. (Office of the Historian, n.d.-b)

Wilson was convinced that by the power of God, he could become an arbiter of the world by dictating the terms of the war to ensure enduring peace after the war's end. As a result, Wilson forwarded a plan to Colonel House to make a public plea for peace, failure to which the United States would be forced to break ties with Germany because of the submarine standoff. The irony is that Germany itself had been asking Wilson to negotiate peace talks with the Allies because Germany was not interested in prolonging the war. Still, Wilson was reluctant, forcing Germany to blindside Wilson and call for peace talks on its own. However, the fact that Wilson chose to distance himself and the United States from the peace negotiations shows that he was not interested in keeping the country out of the war but was instead interested in preserving his image.

Karp's Negative Perception of Wilson

The decision by Wilson to enter the war is the basis for which Karp perceives him as an egoistic self-serving dreamer who was only concerned about his image as opposed to the good of the American citizens. Wilson was so engrossed in emerging as the most important person in the world after the war that he ignored all public pressure and the advice from Colonel House to resist the urge to join the war. Wilson's egocentrism was, apparently, visible even to outsiders considering that even the Allies worried that the peace note sent by Wilson, after Germany had already asked for peace

negotiations, asking the warring parties to state their terms on how the war could be concluded was meant to further his personal ambitions. (Karp, 1979; Office of the Historian, n.d.-b)

Wilson's self-belief in his oratory skills and ability to convince people to view issues from his perspective led Wilson to give a 'peace without victory' speech in which he urged the European nations to seek the consent of their citizens in the conduct of war. Here, Wilson truly believed that his speech would resonate with the Europeans so much that they would force their governments to be more accountable and choose peace over victory. According to Karp, even though the speech was, at face value, aimed at the Europeans, Wilson's real motive was to show that if and when the United States entered the war, it would be according to the wishes of the Americans. In this case, therefore, Karp deduces that Wilson was neither serving the interests of the Americans nor the Europeans but his own ambition to become the savior of mankind.

Karp Was a Selfish and Egocentric Leader

Based on Karp's extensive analysis of all the options that Wilson had to keep the United States out of the war and possibly even end it, it is clear that Wilson was, indeed, a narcissistic person who believed that only he could offer solutions to the war. As the president of the United States, Wilson was a trustee of the American people, and his sole role was to act in the best interests of the Americans. However, instead of doing all he could to keep the country out of the war as most people wanted, Wilson built a name for himself by entering the war so that he could ensure long-lasting peace as a noble humanitarian. The fact that Wilson had the option of steering clear of postwar European settlements because the results of the war would not affect Americans was enough reason for him to continue exercising neutrality. However, being the egomaniac he was, Wilson could not abandon his quest to become a hero and, as a result, searched for ways in which he could influence the war. (Karp, 1979)

It is appalling to imagine that the United States was led into a war that caused the deaths of thousands of Americans and led to economic hardships because all the resources used in the war were for the benefit of one man's ego. Wilson was, essentially, a hypocrite who purported to act in the best interests of humanity by ensuring that everlasting peace would be realized when the [United States entered the First World War](#) but ironically, 20 years later, the world would be involved in another war. The Second World War was evidence that Wilson was a delusional narcissist who failed in his mission to become a noble humanitarian. (Karp, 1979; Office of the Historian, n.d.-a)

References

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