

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 206

“1919 – The United States IV”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Senate approval of the Treaty of Versailles was hanging by a thread when Woodrow Wilson took up an unprecedented campaign to barnstorm the nation, rally the public to his side, and force the Senate to accept the treaty terms.

But the campaign was cut short when Wilson suffered a stroke. What now? Should he resign? Should he be replaced? What will become of the Treaty?

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 206. 1919: The United States, part four.

When we left off last time, Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, had suffered first, a stroke, and second, a serious prostate infection. The combination of these two illnesses plus his wife Edith's strict limits on who could see him and what he could do left the US virtually without a President for six critical weeks in October and November 1919. Perhaps she was being too strict.

Though the President was all but incommunicado, Wilson, through those who spoke for him, insisted that all was well, that he could continue to perform the duties of his office, and any talk to the contrary was ill informed and motivated by politics.

Though Wilson might be sick, the business of the nation went on. In mid-October, when Wilson's condition was at its most critical, The Senate and the House of Representatives passed the final version of the Volstead Act. Named for Andrew Volstead, a Republican from Minnesota and chair of the House Judiciary Committee, the Volstead Act was the federal law that implemented Prohibition, pursuant to the Nineteenth Amendment, which had been ratified earlier in the year.

No one had any doubt where Wilson stood on Prohibition. He was against it. He believed it was a question best left to state government. Wilson vetoed the bill. But you have to wonder whether he knew he was vetoing it. The bill came to him at the peak of his illness, so if there's any instance where you would ask, is this Woodrow Wilson's doing, or is it Edith Wilson's, this is it. Still, there's no question that, whether Wilson was aware of it or not, the veto was consistent with his previously stated position. Congress overrode the veto, and the Volstead Act became law.

And then there was the ongoing debate over ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. While Wilson remained in seclusion at the White House, over in the Capitol, Henry Cabot Lodge and the Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were hard at work drafting a series of reservations to the Treaty.

I say "Republican members" because the Democratic members of the committee held a caucus on October 24 and voted not to get involved in the reservations debate in the committee until they received direction from the President. Which they never got. Whether a more aggressive response from the Democrats might have moderated what came out of the committee is a question we can only speculate about. Certainly the Treaty lacked crucial support both from the President and from the committee Democrats during a critical moment in the ratification process, and that could not have been good for its prospects. In the event, under Lodge's leadership, the committee approved a series of fourteen Treaty reservations.

Of these fourteen reservations, a few of them were terms Wilson had already agreed to. The biggest stumbling block to a compromise was Article Ten of the League of Nations covenant. This was the article that committed all members of the League to come to the aid of any League member that was attacked. Lodge and the Republicans regarded this provision as inconsistent with the terms of the US Constitution, which give Congress the sole power to declare war. To Wilson and the League supporters, to negate Article Ten, in Wilson's words, "cuts the very heart out of the Treaty." Much of the power of the Treaty derived from this mutual assistance pledge, that to declare war on any one of the League's forty or so members, even a little state like Belgium, would be to declare war on all of them. If that pledge were made, and made credibly, even the mightiest of the Great Powers would have to back down.

On October 30, Woodrow Wilson received his first visitor from outside the small circle he'd been restricted to since his stroke. It was King Albert of Belgium, in the United States for an extended tour of the country. The King was taken to Wilson's bedroom, where the two chatted for about ten minutes.

On November 7, Wilson met briefly with Senator Gilbert Hitchcock, a Democrat from Nebraska. Hitchcock had chaired the Foreign Relations Committee in the previous, Democratic-controlled Senate. Now he was chair of the Democratic Caucus, what we today would call the Minority Leader. He was also a staunch supporter of the Treaty, keen to discuss it with the President. In

their half-hour meeting, Wilson told Hitchcock that he was willing to compromise with the Senate to get the Treaty ratified, but that the Lodge reservations went too far. He asked Hitchcock to estimate how the Senate would vote if the Treaty were brought up without any reservations. Hitchcock told the President that the Treaty would not even carry a majority of the Senate, let alone the required two-thirds. Wilson reacted to this news with astonishment.

A week later, on November 14, Wilson met briefly with the 25-year-old Prince of Wales at the White House. The Prince later wrote that he was relieved to find Wilson looking better than he had been led to believe.

Wilson was clearly on the mend by this time. Senator Hitchcock met with him again three days after that, on November 17, and he also reported Wilson looking much better than he had a week earlier, telling the Senate he wished they could all see the President in his improved condition. In two days, the Senate was going to vote on the Treaty with the Lodge reservations and Hitchcock was at the White House to gauge Wilson's opinion. What he learned was that Wilson was in no mood to compromise. The Lodge reservations were unacceptable, Wilson told Hitchcock, and he called on the Democrats in the Senate to vote against the Treaty so long as the Lodge reservations were attached. They amounted to nullification of the Treaty, he told Hitchcock, adding that if the treaty passed the Senate with the Lodge reservations, then Wilson would pocket the Treaty. That is, he would refuse to ratify it.

I should explain this. In the United States, we often speak informally of the Senate "ratifying" a treaty, but technically, a treaty is ratified by the President, not by the Senate. It's just that Senate approval of the treaty by a two-thirds vote is a necessary precondition to Presidential ratification. So Wilson was within his power to refuse to ratify the Treaty of Versailles as modified by the Senate, if he so chose, even after the Senate gave it that two-thirds vote of approval.

I should also point out Wilson's use of the politically sensitive word "nullification." Before the Civil War, some Southern politicians, mostly Democrats, asserted the doctrine of "nullification," that is, that individual US states had the power to nullify US federal laws they disapproved of. The Republican Party was founded as an anti-slavery party and it had been Republican Presidents and Republican Congresses that had prosecuted the Civil War and oversaw the Reconstruction. This was the foundation upon which the Republican Party was built and upon which it claimed its legitimacy as a political party. A Southern Democratic President accusing a Republican Senate of "nullification" was a slap in the face. It was akin to calling them traitors.

A letter was composed summarizing Wilson's position, which was given to the Senate Democratic Caucus, where it was read aloud on the morning of November 19, the day of the vote. The letter was also released to the press. When the Senate convened at noon, Lodge read the letter aloud in the chamber, and afterward said only, "I think comment is superfluous, and I shall make none." When the Treaty with the Lodge reservations came to a vote, it was 39 for, 55 against, with most Democrats joining the Republican irreconcilables in voting no. Lodge then

called a vote on the clean Treaty, as it had been signed at Versailles. That vote was 38 for, 53 against.

So where to go from here? Senator Lodge made his view plain. It was up to the President to make the next move, not him or the Republicans. Senate Democrats sent Wilson two letters calling on him to offer a compromise. The letters went unanswered. On November 29, an unhappy Senator Hitchcock revealed to the press that he had asked the White House to give him another meeting with the President to further discuss the Treaty standoff—and the White House had refused to grant him one.

On December 2, Wilson submitted his State of the Union message to Congress—in writing, breaking with his own precedent. It was a disappointment. In this tumultuous year of 1919, with its strikes and labor unrest, the Red Summer, the Palmer Raids, which by now were in full swing, with the high cost of living, with high rates of unemployment among returning veterans, the bombing campaigns, the Red Ark, and so many other troubling developments, Wilson's State of the Union message was limited to a few modest legislative proposals, and was all but silent on the Treaty of Versailles, though it did at one point make the claim that many of the US's domestic problems could be blamed on the failure to ratify it.

With the country divided and rudderless, with the President close to incommunicado for over eight weeks now, and with the messages coming out of the White House consisting mostly of empty platitudes, apart from the occasional assurance that the President was doing fine, don't worry about it...people quite naturally were worrying about it. In the absence of hard information about the President's condition, rumors flew. One particularly over-the-top rumor held that Wilson had gone insane, which explained the bars that could be seen over some of the White House windows. Well, it made a better story than the truth, which was that the bars had been installed at the direction of President Roosevelt to protect the White House windows from his son Quentin playing ball on the South Lawn.

Still, the silence coming from the White House was deafening. On October 19, 1919, while Woodrow Wilson was still gravely ill, a prominent American from Tennessee named William O. Jenkins, was kidnapped by Mexican rebels trying to provoke yet another confrontation between the Carranza government and the United States. Jenkins had come to Mexico in 1901 and had opened a textile mill in the city of Puebla. He'd made quite a lot of money during the Porfiriato, that time when the Mexican government welcomed gringo capitalists with open arms. After the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, Jenkins got even richer, taking advantage of the chaos to buy up land, until he owned one of the biggest haciendas in the country, a sugar plantation. His wealth was estimated at \$5 million 1919 dollars, or about US\$75 million in our time, making him one of the richest people in Mexico. He also held the largely honorary title of US consul in Puebla.

During the Great War, neutral Mexico stood accused in the US of harboring pro-German sympathies. Now, with the war over and the Red Scare beginning, the Carranza government in Mexico was accused of harboring Bolsheviks and allowing them to use Mexican territory to spread their revolutionary doctrines in the United States, and there were renewed calls for US military intervention as the Carranza government had still proved unable to tamp down the revolutionary violence in Mexico on its own. The loudest voice in the US government calling for the US military to “clean up” the mess south of the border was a Republican Senator from New Mexico, Albert Fall, also a member of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Fall had represented New Mexico in the Senate since it had first been accepted into the Union as a state, in 1912 and had been elected to a new term in 1918. He had close links to conservative interests in Mexico and to the Mexican oil industry. He was known as “Petroleum Fall.” Woodrow Wilson, on the other hand, continued to hew to the view that it was for Mexicans to decide the fate of their nation on their own. The rebels who kidnapped Jenkins—or bandits, if you like—were holding him for 300,000 pesos in ransom, but were also hoping to precipitate a confrontation between the Carranza government and the US. Jenkins and Senator Fall were personal friends, and so Jenkins’s wife prevailed on Fall to do something, and Fall pressed Secretary of State Lansing.

But then, on October 26, a group of Jenkins’s friends in Puebla paid the ransom and Jenkins was released. He was reportedly in poor health from sleeping in a cave for two weeks, and was admitted to a hospital in Puebla.

Okay, so you might think at this point that the confrontation is over and everyone in Washington can get back to debating the Treaty of Versailles. But less than three weeks later, on November 14, this story took a bizarre turn when the local authorities in Puebla accused Jenkins of orchestrating his own kidnapping to embarrass the Mexican government, and placed him under arrest. Bail was set at 1000 pesos, a modest sum that Jenkins could certainly have afforded, but he refused to pay it, on principle.

The situation was a serious embarrassment for Secretary of State Lansing, who was still taking his victory lap after the bandits released Jenkins when the government took him prisoner once again. Jenkins’ status as a US consul was fodder for jingoistic Republicans in Congress who promoted him to “a high American official,” in the words of one, and portrayed his arrest as a serious insult to the dignity of the United States.

On November 28, Lansing held a testy meeting with the Mexican ambassador, Ignacio Bonillas, in which the two accused each other’s governments of insolence. Lansing told Bonillas that the Jenkins affair was only the latest in a long series of insults the US had endured from Mexico, and that America’s patience was becoming exhausted, and invited Bonillas to reflect on the role the US had played in defeating Germany. Yes, he was threatening war.

With tensions between the two nations elevated, Lansing was called before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on December 4 to brief them on the confrontation with Mexico. In response to questioning from the committee, Lansing admitted frankly that he had not discussed Mexico with President Wilson since August, and that he was dealing with the situation in Mexico on his own because “I did not want Tumulty and Mrs. Wilson to decide the policy.” Tumulty was Wilson’s personal secretary.

That statement gave the Republicans on the committee an opening, and they took it. The Secretary of State was openly admitting that he was bypassing the White House because he didn’t believe that White House policy actually came from the President anymore. The committee moved and passed a motion that Senators Fall and Hitchcock, one Republican and one Democrat, the latter the same Senator who had been unable to get a meeting with the President last week, be appointed to go to the White House and discuss the Mexican crisis with the President themselves.

The committee had no power to force a meeting with the President, of course, but if the White House refused to receive such a high-profile delegation, it would be tantamount to admitting that President Wilson was unable to fulfill his duties as President. So instead, the White House offered Fall and Hitchcock a meeting at 2:30 in the afternoon the following day. They must have realized something like this was going to happen eventually, and they were prepared for it. The room was brightly lit so the Senators could get a good look at Wilson, who was propped up in his bed. His left arm and leg were paralyzed from the stroke; these were tucked away under the covers inconspicuously, while Wilson’s right hand was free. A small table with his Mexico briefing papers was by his bedside, where Wilson could reach them with his good hand.

When Fall and Hitchcock arrived, they were escorted to the bedroom and told that they could stay with the President as long as they wished. Wilson shook Senator Fall’s hand with a pointedly firm grip and asked an equally pointed question. “Well, Senator, how are your Mexican investments getting along?”

Fall told Wilson, “I hope you will consider me sincere. I have been praying for you, Sir.”

“Which way, Senator?” Wilson is said to have shot back.

The meeting lasted forty minutes. As it happened, Jenkins was released from the jail in Puebla the night before. Supposedly, his bail had been paid by an American in Chicago, although it’s more likely all this had been arranged by the Carranza government to defuse the crisis. Jenkins tried to refuse the bail payment and resisted being released, to no avail. The news of Jenkins’s release was telegraphed to Washington the next day, and Dr. Grayson interrupted the bedroom meeting with the news that Jenkins was free.

Afterward, Senator Fall told the press that the President was in good health, as far as he could tell, and was in charge of the Mexican situation. If he had been hoping to prove Wilson unfit to

remain in office, his hopes had been dashed. As for Jenkins, the charges against him were eventually dropped, and Wilson and Carranza declared the misunderstanding between their two nations resolved.

[music: Sousa, "Anchor and Star"]

Over the following weeks, the Christmas season of 1919 and into the early weeks of 1920, Wilson's physical condition improved, and he became more actively involved in government affairs again. But despite this, and despite his winning performance before Senator Fall, there were, and are, good reasons to question his mental state. Strokes can impair a patient's mental and emotional health in a number of ways. The stroke itself can affect the emotions. It can impair attention span and memory.

And then there are the secondary effects. Paralysis in the arm and leg such as Wilson experienced can be frustrating, irritating, or depressing, or all of those things. It can interfere with sleep. It can disrupt relationships with other people.

Wilson's behavior over the rest of his Presidency provides ample evidence that he was experiencing some form of cognitive or emotional impairment. He was always a stubborn character. Now he was rigid and argumentative, to the point of delusional. With regard to the Treaty of Versailles, he became less flexible than ever, insistent that the Treaty be ratified as it stood. He seemed to believe that the American public was broadly in favor of the Treaty, which may have been true, and backed his position wholeheartedly, which almost certainly wasn't. He remembered the reception he had gotten during his whistle-stop campaign and was convinced that public pressure would force the recalcitrant Senators to approve the Treaty, and he wanted something like a national referendum on the subject. Unfortunately for Wilson, there was and is no provision in the US Constitution for any such thing. So he bandied ideas for ways of forcing something like a referendum, including a cockamamie scheme under which he would publicly dare the 55 or so Senators who opposed the Treaty to resign their seats and run for re-election. If they did, and won back their seats, then Wilson would resign himself. The idea here I guess is that if the Senators took the bet, we'd see a sort of referendum on the Treaty, but if they refused it would amount to an admission that their stand on the Treaty was unpopular and they well knew it.

What's interesting about this idea is that you can see in it Wilson's preference for a British-style parliamentary system over the US constitutional system. Recall that back in episode 68, I told you that Wilson's doctoral dissertation in political science expressed precisely that view, and all these years later, Wilson apparently still held to it. Unfortunately for Wilson, this attempt to hack the US Constitution to force a referendum would never have worked. Senators have the luxury of waiting out public opinion, and few are ever likely to waive that luxury. Fortunately for Wilson's reputation, this idea never saw the light of day.

The end of 1919 was a somber time at the White House. There was no Christmas tree that year. Wilson celebrated his 63rd birthday privately three days later. Early in the new year, Wilson wrote a letter to be read out on January 8, 1920, when the Democrats held their annual Jackson Day dinner fundraiser. In the letter, he expressed another version of his referendum idea, declaring that the Republican failure to ratify the treaty was undoing the victory over Germany and that Democrats had no choice but to make the 1920 election into, in his words, “a great and solemn referendum” on the Treaty.

This was politically dicey. The Republicans hoped to do well in 1920, and here was Wilson daring them to put up a fight and make the Treaty a partisan issue. That was a dare the Republicans could easily accept, so long as they held the Senate. And by this time, even some Democrats in the Senate were beginning to waver from the hard line Wilson had laid down. They met with Henry Cabot Lodge to discuss a bipartisan compromise over the Treaty. When the Republican irreconcilables heard about these talks, they threatened to depose Lodge from his leadership position if he continued them. Lodge walked away from the negotiations, and that was the death knell for treaty ratification.

This brings us to friend-of-the-podcast Viscount Grey. Remember him? I am referring to the person once we used to know as Sir Edward Grey, who had served as the British foreign secretary for eleven years, the longest anyone has ever held that post. We ran into him often in the good old days of the Belle Époque, and now it's time to get caught up. Grey was ennobled for his service in 1916. That's when he became Viscount Grey, and traded his seat in the Commons for the House of Lords. When Lloyd George replaced Herbert Asquith as prime minister in December 1916, Grey left the Cabinet and became part of the opposition in the Lords. In 1918, Viscount Grey became President of the League of Nations Union, the British equivalent of the American League to Enforce Peace headed by William Howard Taft. After the Treaty of Versailles ran into ratification difficulties in Washington, Viscount Grey was named His Majesty's Ambassador to the United States, apparently with the hope that he might be able to help smooth the way for Senate approval of the Treaty. But he had arrived in Washington just when Wilson's illness was at its worst, and the White House never did arrange a meeting between Wilson and Grey, which felt a lot like a snub to the British government.

Viscount Grey went home to England in January, but he made one last attempt from there to get a Treaty compromise. It was in the form of a letter published in the *Times* on January 31 and reprinted in many American newspapers the following day. In the letter, Grey acknowledged the right of the US Senate to attach reservations to the Treaty and seemed to suggest that the British government would welcome US involvement in the League even with the Lodge reservations.

This letter was intended to help facilitate a compromise, but it also undermined Wilson's position that the Treaty had to be ratified as it stood or else the Allies would not accept it. Wilson became enraged when he learned of the letter and issued a public statement condemning it.

Wilson went so far as to say in that statement that if Lord Grey were still Ambassador to the US, Wilson would demand he be recalled for interfering in American domestic politics.

Wilson's harsh and intemperate reaction to what was meant as a conciliatory gesture baffled his supporters and hardened his critics. Sadly, this would not prove to be an isolated incident, but merely the first of a series of ill-advised and petulant moves. The second was Wilson's response to his Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, who had welcomed the Grey letter. Wilson sent him an angry letter questioning Lansing's motives for calling cabinet meetings during Wilson's illness. Lansing responded coolly that if Wilson doubted his loyalty, he was prepared to resign. A few days later, he did, at Wilson's request.

Again, Wilson's anger was in reaction to...what? Holding meetings while the President was ill? Isn't that what department heads are supposed to do? Keep the government running until the President gets better? His reaction seemed irrational. So did his choice for Lansing's replacement: the fifty-year-old Bainbridge Colby, a New York attorney who had been a Republican turned Progressive whom Wilson had previously appointed to the United States Shipping Board. Colby had little foreign policy experience and was not close to Wilson personally. His only qualification seemed to be his full-throated support for the League of Nations, and the appointment raised another round of doubts about Wilson's judgment.

Worse still for Wilson's image, just before Lansing's resignation, even as the Secretary and the President were exchanging testy letters, the news leaked to the press for the first time that the mystery ailment that had laid Wilson up for the past four months was in fact a stroke. The White House responded, as usual, with vague statements that Wilson was getting better all the time, but did not deny the report.

The news inspired hundreds of editorials and opinion columns in newspapers across America, questioning whether Wilson was competent to remain in office. Doctors were asked their opinions and there were many willing to speculate that the President may have suffered brain damage. This led many Americans to reconsider the events of the past few months. The strikes and the labor unrest. The Palmer raids. The high cost of living. The rising unemployment. Were these the symptoms of a nation adrift because its leader was no longer fit to lead?

And perhaps most of all, the Treaty debate. Some Americans thought Wilson was being too stubborn; others blamed the Republicans for trying to sabotage a Democratic President's signature foreign policy achievement. But once the news of the stroke came out, it became much easier to believe the problem lay with Wilson and his feckless intransigence.

February 1920 was proving to be a disastrous month for Woodrow Wilson. One more blow fell when that month saw the publication in the United States of a book authored by the English economist John Maynard Keynes. You may remember Keynes; we first encountered him back in 1916, episode 138, when he was a rising star in the British Treasury. In 1917, the King appointed him Companion of the Order of the Bath for his service; this allowed him to put the initials "CB"

after his name. By 1919, his reputation was such that he was part of the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

It was the peace conference that made Keynes famous...because he resigned in protest over the Treaty of Versailles. I'll get into Keynes critique of the Treaty in a future episode. For now, let me just summarize by saying he believed the terms of the Treaty were unfairly harsh and punitive against Germany, and he laid much of the blame for this at the feet of Woodrow Wilson, who, Keynes argued, had promised the Germans fair and equitable treatment at the time of the Armistice, but had allowed Lloyd George and especially Clemenceau to talk him into presenting the Germans with a treaty that in Keynes's words was "abhorrent and detestable."

Keynes's assessment of Wilson, as a leader and a negotiator, was even more scathing. He wrote of Wilson, "[I]f ever the action of a single individual matters, the collapse of The President has been one of the decisive moral events of history. ... He had no plan, no scheme, no constructive ideas whatever for clothing with the flesh of life the commandments which he had thundered from the White House. ... [N]ot only was he ill-informed, but his mind was slow and unadaptable ... There can seldom have been a statesman of the first rank more incompetent than the President in the agilities of the council chamber."

And he did not keep his opinions to himself. He wrote them up in a book, titled *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which was published in Britain in the autumn of 1919. The US edition was released, well, I already told you: in February 1920, when everything was already going wrong for Woodrow Wilson.

Keynes's critique of the Treaty was not the same as that of the Republicans in the Senate. It wasn't even similar. Keynes objected to the Treaty's punitive treatment of Germany, the huge reparations payments in particular. Senate Republican objections centered on the League of Nations and particularly anything that seemed to give the League the power to compel actions by the United States.

What the Senate Republicans and Keynes did have in common was a distaste for Woodrow Wilson, and irreconcilables like Senator William Borah of Idaho gleefully read Keynes's derogations of Wilson into the *Congressional Record*.

By the end of February, it was clear the Treaty was in trouble. Senate Democrats contemplated abandoning the hard line Wilson was asking them to hold to and instead supporting the Treaty with the Lodge reservations, which would have allowed it to pass. Wilson's advisors also urged him to accept the reservations. Half a loaf is better than none.

On March 8, with the Treaty debate ongoing in the Senate, Wilson released a defiant public letter to Democratic Senate leader Gilbert Hitchcock. In it, Wilson focused entirely on the reservation to Article Ten of the Treaty, the one that committed the US to defend the territory of other League members. He declared that a watered-down Article Ten reduced the League of Nations

covenant to “a futile scrap of paper,” and that he would pocket the Treaty if the Senate insisted on that reservation.

The Democrats were dispirited and the Republican reservationists felt insulted. Wilson’s letter played right into the hands of the irreconcilables, one of whom, Senator Frank Brandegee of Connecticut, declared, “The President has strangled his own child.”

The Senate voted to approve the same fourteen Lodge reservations that had been approved last November, plus a new one added by a Democratic Senator that called for self-determination for the people of Ireland. On the vote for the Treaty with reservations, a majority of the Democratic caucus voted in favor, rejecting Wilson’s absolutism. Even so, the vote was 49 in favor and 35 opposed, seven votes short of the required two-thirds margin.

It was over. The United States would never ratify the Treaty of Versailles. The United States would never join the League of Nations. Two months later, on May 14, the Senate passed a resolution sponsored by Ohio Republican Warren Harding deploring the massacres of Armenians and congratulating the people of Armenia on the establishment of an independent Armenian state. Wilson, whose health had recovered further since March, could not resist the opportunity to submit a request for the US to accept a mandate over Armenia as had been agreed at Paris. But as you know from episode 194, the Senate’s sympathies for Armenians only went so far. They rejected the mandate by a vote of 52 to 23. Likewise in May, both houses of Congress passed a resolution declaring an end to the state of war. Wilson vetoed it and the Republicans were unable to override. And so the United States was left in a peculiar limbo, not quite at war, not quite at peace.

During his campaign to build public support for the Treaty of Versailles, Wilson expressly predicted that if the nations of the world did not support the League, there would be another world war within a generation. Those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century know that his prediction will come to pass.

Would US ratification of the Treaty have prevented this second world war? That’s the big question, isn’t it? No one can say with certainty that it would have, or that it wouldn’t have. But as Wilson himself argued, even a 10% chance of avoiding a world war was better than no chance. A United States more engaged in Europe might have prevented the war, or, failing that, might at least have shortened it. Even a modest reduction in the length or scope of that war might have saved millions of lives.

We can only speculate, but here’s a more concrete question to consider. Whose fault is it that the Treaty failed? Henry Cabot Lodge and the Senate Republicans bear a great deal of responsibility. Their reservations were complex, technical, and excruciating, and often phrased in a manner that was downright insulting. So much effort to insure that the US could withdraw from the League whenever it wanted, or that the US would not go to war on the League’s say-so without a Congressional declaration. It was hardly necessary to make these reservations explicit. Of course

the US could leave when it wanted. How would anyone stop it? Of course the US wouldn't go to war if it doubted the wisdom of the war, whatever the League might say. And neither would Britain or France or Belgium or any other League member.

Of course, the flip side of that argument asks, if the reservations were so trivial, were they sufficient reason to hold up ratification? If a 10% chance for peace is better than no chance for peace at all, isn't a Treaty with reservations better than no treaty at all? And here is where the larger share of the blame lies: upon Woodrow Wilson. His "my way or the highway" approach to the Treaty guaranteed its failure. Wilson was always a stubborn man, but this time his stubbornness borders on irrational. It's hard not to think that his stroke affected his mind, making him too rigid or perhaps deluded about how much public support was actually out there.

Wilson should have resigned. If the stroke had impaired his mind so much that he could not see this, then the decision should have been taken out of his hands. But alas, no one did, and Wilson went on, as Senator Brandegee said, to strangle his own child. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say a blood clot in his brain strangled his child.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank John for making a donation, and thank you to Brandon for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like John and Brandon help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so I thank them, and all of you who have contributed for that. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take on our next topic in the frantic year of 1919: the fraught situation in Ireland. If you'll remember, back in episode 173, I told you about the outcome of the 1918 general election in the United Kingdom, in which most of the constituencies in Ireland elected Sinn Féin candidates, who were pledged not to go to Westminster, but to Dublin to organize an Irish parliament for an Irish state. We'll investigate how that played out next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. William O. Jenkins was never convicted of faking his own kidnapping. That charge was obviously bogus. Jenkins lived to the age of 85, passing away in 1963. In 1922, he built his family a Mediterranean-style mansion on South Irving Boulevard in Los Angeles. In the 1920s, that style of house was all the rage, but the Jenkinsees only lived in it for about a year, and eventually sold it to the oil baron J. Paul Getty.

It isn't there anymore. Getty's ex-wife occupied it for many years, until it was demolished in 1957. But there's a good chance you've seen it. In 1950, it was used as the location for the classic film *Sunset Boulevard*, directed by Billy Wilder and starring William Holden and Gloria Swanson. Part of the compensation the production paid for the use of the property was to add a swimming pool. That's the same swimming pool that the dead body of the narrator, Joe Gillis, played by Holden, is floating in at the beginning of the film. Five years later, the mansion was used again as a location for another classic film: *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray and starring James Dean and Natalie Wood.

[music: Closing Theme]