

Grand Valley Journal of History

Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 3

12-1-2014

Competing Visions: Political Constructions of Memory After World War I, 1919-1936

Scott R. St. Louis

Grand Valley State University, stlouiss@mail.gvsu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvjh>

 Part of the [Diplomatic History Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

St. Louis, Scott R. (2014) "Competing Visions: Political Constructions of Memory After World War I, 1919-1936," *Grand Valley Journal of History*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvjh/vol3/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grand Valley Journal of History by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Occurring at the dawn of what would become the most violent and dynamic century in world history, the cataclysmic Great War brought cultural, social, economic, and political devastation to some of the world's most powerful societies. Following the armistice of November 1918, a peace conference convened in Paris. There, borders were redrawn in an attempt to bring stability and peace to the wealthy, self-adulating continent that had torn itself to shreds. However necessary and welcome the peace talks were in 1919, the resultant Treaty of Versailles has been the subject of great scrutiny and vehement criticism for decades since its creation. Historians have portrayed it *ad nauseum* as a vindictive settlement that would sow the seeds for the later ascendancy of fascism in Germany and Italy. Flawed though the postwar arrangements certainly were, an investigation into how European and American leaders sought to legitimate their hopes for the postwar world – namely, by constructing arguments on how the war itself should be remembered – is crucial for understanding the outbreak of an even more violent war two decades later.

Such a fascinating intersection of memory and politics leaves the historian with several burning questions. First, to what extent did political and diplomatic officials of the interwar period justify their proposals for the peacetime international structure by offering their own interpretations of how the First World War should be remembered? Second, in what ways were these suggested remembrances similar or different, and how did these similarities or differences lead the aforementioned figures to the pursuit of different goals for the world after the Great War? Third, did one particular vision or general concept emerge triumphant among competing constructions of memory on the lasting political significance of the war? If so, did this contribute to the weak enforcement of international agreements made at Versailles during the interwar period?

This paper argues that officials at the Paris Peace Conference, in the White House, and in the U.S. Congress strove for the realization of competing visions for the postwar world, and thus were required to construct their own interpretations of how the First World War should be remembered, and what must be learned from it. A pervasive sense of victors' justice dominated the proceedings in Paris, leading to the creation of a settlement which would not find lasting support from European or American decision makers. The dubious postwar arrangements made at Versailles would contribute to the resurgence of a conservative isolationism that dominated U.S. foreign policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s, promoted immediately after World War I by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Indeed, it was Lodge who opposed Woodrow Wilson's call for international cooperation by offering a different – and, at least in the short term, more popular – vision of how the United States should shape its foreign policy in the aftermath of total war.

Although a rich literature on memory and World War I already exists, the focus of this burgeoning field tends to be upon *cultural* constructions of memory¹ rather than *political* ones, likely due in part to plentiful opportunity for conducting original explorations into how the experience and memory of war differed across lines of nationality, class, religion, gender, and race.² The dominance of this cultural perspective in the historiography of First World

¹ An indicative (but by no means exhaustive) survey of relevant monographic literature includes the following: George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Toby Thacker, *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

² For example, see Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Tim Grady, *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

War memory has been augmented by sophisticated, multidisciplinary examinations of material culture and the different media through which memory itself is communicated.³ At least three major monographs move beyond the cultural rule to some extent,⁴ but none of them dedicate extensive analysis to memory *as it was developed* by the subjects upon which this paper focuses: Paris Peace Conference documents and American debates thereon, Warren Harding's inaugural call for a "return to normalcy," and the actions of the Nye Committee. Therefore, this paper provides an important contribution to ongoing studies of memory, its uses, and its abuses following the First World War.

In early 1919, the peacemakers at Paris convened the Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties. The very title of the commission suggests that it was formed with an idea of which belligerent powers were responsible for the escalation of a regional conflict in the Balkans to a war with global consequences. The commission was used as a medium through which official statements on German war guilt were made before the Treaty of Versailles had been completed. Beginning the first chapter of the report presented by this commission on March 29, 1919⁵ was the following declaration:

On the question of the responsibility of the authors of the war, the Commission, after having examined a number of official documents relating to the origin of the World War, and to the violations of neutrality and of frontiers which accompanied its inception, has determined that the responsibility for it lies wholly upon the Powers which declared war in pursuance of a policy of aggression, the conspiracy against the peace of Europe.

This responsibility rests first on Germany and Austria, secondly on Turkey and Bulgaria. The responsibility is made all the graver by reason of the violation by Germany and Austria of the neutrality of Belgium and Luxemburg [*sic*], which they themselves had guaranteed. It is increased, with regard to both France and Serbia, by the violation of their frontiers before the declaration of war.⁶

What follows in the first chapter is a narrative of just over eight pages in length⁷ arguing that Austria-Hungary, conspiring with Germany, plotted to exploit the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand as a pretext to "devour"⁸ Serbia. This collusion led to the outbreak of a war in which the powers of Central Europe would find allies in Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, thus explaining the mitigated culpability of these powers to the east.

Based on the narrative provided in the first chapter of the report and on additional arguments, the aforementioned commission made a series of grave conclusions. The

³ See Nicholas J. Saunders, ed. *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2004) and David Williams, *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

⁴ Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), and Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

⁵ "Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties," *The American Journal of International Law* 14 (No. 1, January-April 1920), 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-107.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

commission claimed that the outbreak of the Great War was “premeditated by the Central Powers together with their Allies, Turkey and Bulgaria, and was the result of acts deliberately committed in order to make it unavoidable.”⁹ Additionally, “Germany, in agreement with Austria-Hungary, deliberately worked to defeat all the many conciliatory proposals made by the Entente Powers and their repeated efforts to avoid war.”¹⁰ The villainous intentions of the Central Powers had been revealed when the “neutrality of Belgium, guaranteed by the treaties of the 19th April, 1839, and that of Luxemburg [*sic*], guaranteed by the treaty of the 11th May, 1867, were deliberately violated by Germany and Austria-Hungary.”¹¹ Once war in Europe was underway, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire fought “by barbarous or illegitimate methods in violation of the established laws and customs of war and the elementary laws of humanity.”¹² With no representation of the Central Powers at the conference, the vengeful sentiments that lurked alongside calls for “never again” in Paris and throughout the world carried the day. This report – perhaps one of the first histories on the advent of World War I written after the armistice of November 1918 – offered at best a lopsided memory of the war’s outbreak in one of the world’s most important political venues, and with great consequence.

Later in the year, the conclusions reached by the commission were enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles, most infamously in the “war guilt clause,” known in official terms as Article 231:

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.¹³

This clause was followed by a subsequent article, which declared that the guilt of Germany and the other Central Powers obligated these countries to pay reparations to the war’s victors:

The Allied and Associated Governments recognise that the resources of Germany are not adequate, after taking into account permanent diminutions of such resources which will resort from other provisions of the present Treaty, to make complete reparation for all such loss and damage.

The Allied and Associated Governments, however, require, and Germany undertakes, that she will make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allied and Associated Powers and to their property during the period of belligerency of each as an Allied or Associated Power against Germany by such aggression by land, by sea and from the air, and in general all damage [.]”¹⁴

Together, Articles 231 and 232 constitute the most widely documented instances of the Allied Powers imposing an egregious form of victors’ justice upon the defeated Central Powers,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹³ Article 231, Peace Treaty of Versailles. Accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/1raiWZR.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 232.

especially Germany.¹⁵ By assigning liability for the war's costs upon Germany and those who fought alongside her, the Allies exonerated themselves of responsibility for any of the devastation caused by the war. In so doing, they conveniently used the example of the war as fallacious proof for preconceived notions about innate German barbarism, developed well before the outbreak of fighting and used in the trenches as motivation for Allied soldiers who could only sustain themselves by believing in the righteousness of their cause.¹⁶ Thus, far from providing the world with a more just and stable model of international relations, the Treaty of Versailles constructed a memory of the Great War replete with irrational hatreds of the past, allowing these sentiments to persist in the interwar period.

Articles 231 and 232, though widely discussed in the scholarly literature, do not by themselves offer a complete portrayal of memory construction in the Treaty of Versailles. Indeed, the placement of war guilt upon the Central Powers (and with an acute vehemence on Germany) is done almost systematically in the treaty. For example, Article 31 provides rationale for many of the punitive measures taken against Germany in subsequent articles:

Germany, recognising that the Treaties of April 19, 1839, which established the status of Belgium before the war, no longer conform to the requirements of the situation, consents to the abrogation of said Treaties and undertakes immediately to recognise and to observe whatever conventions may be entered into by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, or by any of them, in concert with the governments of Belgium and of the Netherlands, to replace the said Treaties of 1839. If her formal adhesions should be required to such conventions or to any of their stipulations, Germany undertakes immediately to give it.¹⁷

In other words, Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality in 1914 provided rationale for the Allied Powers to act *upon* their vanquished enemy in the creation of a postwar settlement. By 1919, the Allied Powers interpreted Germany's violation of the Treaties of 1839 as an action that rendered these treaties null and void, thereby enabling the victorious Allies to justify themselves in creating new arrangements for postwar Europe to which Germany would be bound.

The Allies did not hesitate to exploit this self-conferred power, making arrangements which again relied on interpretations of historical events that bordered on abusing the power of memory. For example, the preface to Section V of the treaty condemns "the wrong done

¹⁵ See, for example, Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 86-87 and Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 193 for scholarly discussion on the origins and intentions of Articles 231 and 232.

¹⁶ See Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 146-147: "Love of France and hatred of the enemy sustained [soldiers] and stimulated them to struggle for a victory they considered as legitimate and therefore good. They fought with all their weapons, cultural hatred of the adversary being among the most important. Augustin Cochin, cousin of Claude, wrote from the trenches just a month before he died there: 'We are for the time being lodged in the ruins of their incredible constructions of forts and underground villages. What a race of slaves and serfs! Never would the fear of heavy shells or punishments make our men do one tenth of this ... Dreadful, dreadful race; the more we see them from close up the more we loathe them. The bands of prisoners are revolting to see, vile, trying too hard to be liked, delighted to be caught ... It is annoying to get killed behind the parapet by such animals. They have a peculiar, powerful odour, which we can't escape from, living as we are on their lines, special lice, too – the famous large, iron-cross lice.' He uttered the crucial word: race. ... The Germans' barbarism was believed to have been substantiated as soon as they declared war and violated Belgium's neutrality; intellectual 'knowledge' of their atavism predated knowledge of the invasion. Germany at war was a national incarnation of barbarism. The atrocities, far from being thought to reveal a specific German crime, were considered merely to confirm pre-established convictions."

¹⁷ Treaty of Versailles, Article 31.

by Germany in 1871 both to the rights of France and to the wishes of the population of Alsace and Lorraine, which were separated from their country in spite of the solemn protest of their representatives at the Assembly of Bordeaux[.]”¹⁸ In Article 51, which immediately follows the preface, Germany was ordered to cede to France the region of Alsace-Lorraine, which it had taken from its western neighbor in 1871 at the end of the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁹ One therefore sees a sort of diplomatic opportunism being employed by the Allied Powers to bolster their power in Europe vis-à-vis Germany through the Treaty of Versailles. By justifying their actions through mention of the “wrong done by Germany” in the past (this time, in 1871 rather than in the First World War), the Allied Powers made apparent their belief that the Treaty of Versailles was less important as a settlement officially ending the First World War, and more important as a statement of their intentions to permanently weaken a supposedly barbaric German nation. Thus, the Allied Powers not only constructed a self-serving memory of World War I, but also *abused* memory of the losses sustained by France in the Franco-Prussian War in order to create a postwar settlement in which Germany was hugely disfavored.

However, it is important to note that the Treaty of Versailles was not entirely bent toward traditional concepts of victors’ justice. To its credit, the treaty also made a serious attempt at bringing the countries of the world together into an organization that would provide arbitration and resolution in situations of international conflict: the League of Nations. Article 10 of the Treaty of Versailles stated that members of the League would “undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council [of the League] shall advise upon the means by which this obligation is fulfilled.”²⁰ Believing that the formation of an effective League was the key to a more stable future, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson sought to win the American people over to his own interpretation of how the First World War ought to be remembered, and what could be learned from it.

Speaking in Pueblo, Colorado on September 25, 1919, Wilson explained why he was in favor of American entry into the League of Nations. He contextualized his feelings within remarks about the sacrifice bravely made by dead soldiers and their mothers:

What of our pledges to the men that lie dead in France? We said they went over there not to prove the prowess of America or her readiness for another war but to see to it that there never was such a war again ... Again and again, my fellow citizens, mothers who lost their sons in France have come to me, and, taking my hand, have shed tears upon it ... Why should they weep upon my hand and call down the blessings of God upon me? Because they believe that their boys died for something that vastly transcends any of the immediate and palpable objects of the war. They believe and they rightly believe, that their sons saved the liberty of the world.²¹

Wilson’s solemn words indicate that he sought to provide Americans with a memory of the First World War imbued with special meaning that transcended contemporary ideas about the nature of international relations. The war had been a struggle to preserve liberty in the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Section V preface.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 10.

²¹ Woodrow Wilson, Address in Favor of the League of Nations, September 25, 1919, accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

undying struggle against tyranny; the victory of liberty could only be sustained in the years to come by taking unprecedented steps toward international unity and cooperation. Wilson therefore sincerely believed in the ability of the League to bring about an eventual “readjustment of those great injustices which underlie the whole structure of European and Asiatic society.”²² Thus, his desire to ensure that United States would make a fair contribution to world security in the aftermath of the most destructive war in history was founded upon a belief that American internationalism would be more beneficial to the world than traditional isolationism.

However, Wilson’s idealism was countered by the adversarial visions of Henry Cabot Lodge, Senate Majority Leader and Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee. In his own address on the League of Nations, delivered around six weeks before the aforementioned Wilson speech, the Republican Lodge offered an interpretation of the war which starkly differed from the one that would soon be given by the Democratic Wilson, his nemesis:

The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves but to the world than any single possession. Look at the United States today. We have made mistakes in the past. We have had shortcomings. We shall make mistakes in the future and fall short of our own best hopes. But none the less is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with this in ordered liberty, in peace, and in the largest freedom?

I feel that I can say this without being accused of undue boastfulness, for it is the simple fact, and in making this treaty and taking on these obligations all that we do is in a spirit of unselfishness and in a desire for the good of mankind. But it is well to remember that we are dealing with nations every one of which has a direct individual interest to serve, and here is grave danger in an unshared idealism.²³

Unlike Wilson, Lodge saw the key to world stability and peace in a continued tradition of American isolationism, with the United States interfering in the conflicts of other countries only when necessary “for the good of mankind.” While Wilson believed that the recent memory of total war should galvanize all nations to strive for greater cooperation through the creation of new institutions, Lodge saw the recently concluded struggle as proof of the “unshared idealism” of the United States, which had intervened supposedly with the sole motive of stopping the violence. In simpler terms, Wilson saw *internationalism* as an ideal to be *achieved*, while Lodge believed American *isolationism* was an ideal to be *protected*.

Diametrically opposed at a time when American entry into the League of Nations depended on the approval of the U.S. Senate, Lodge’s vision defeated Wilson’s in the 1920s and 1930s, as U.S. foreign policy entered an era of conservative isolationism. American policymakers believed that too much was at stake regarding the future of the United States to make promises to an international organization that may or may not undermine traditional aspects of America’s stance toward the world. For example, there was a considerable lack of clarity provided to American legislators regarding the place that the Monroe Doctrine would hold if the United States agreed to join the League of Nations. Article 20 of the Versailles Treaty stated the following:

²² Ibid.

²³ Henry Cabot Lodge, Speech on Objections to the League of Nations, August 12, 1919, accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

The Members of the League severally agree that this Covenant is accepted as abrogating all obligations or understandings inter se which are inconsistent with the terms thereof, and solemnly undertake that they will not hereafter enter into any engagements inconsistent with the terms thereof. In case any Member of the League shall, before becoming a Member of the League, have undertaken any obligations inconsistent with the terms of this Covenant, it shall be the duty of such member to take immediate steps to procure its release from such obligations.²⁴

In response to fears about the status of the Monroe Doctrine, should the U.S. approve a treaty containing such an article, President Wilson agreed to negotiate a reservation for the doctrine in the Treaty of Versailles.²⁵ Article 21 therefore read as follows:

Nothing in this Covenant shall be deemed to affect the validity of international engagements, such as treaties of arbitration or regional understandings like the Monroe doctrine, for securing the maintenance of peace.²⁶

Despite the intent of Article 21 to protect the validity of the Monroe Doctrine, the article as it is phrased contradicts the immediately preceding article. Wilson's efforts to assuage the concerns of the public and the Senate regarding the sanctity of the Monroe Doctrine thus failed, contributing still more to growing support for isolationism that would make Wilson's illness-ridden departure from the White House a bitter one indeed.

Succeeding Woodrow Wilson as President of the United States was Republican Warren G. Harding, who also attempted to legitimate his goals for office through an interpretation of the significance of the Great War. Like Lodge, Harding believed the United States to be a country that would fight for "righteousness and justice," but could make no commitment to do so outside "the exercise of our national sovereignty."²⁷ He viewed the isolationist tradition of the United States as one that warranted continuation for the good of the world, and especially for the good of the United States, where the success of a postwar consumer economy depended upon a return to "normalcy":

Our eyes never will be blind to a developing menace, our ears never deaf to the call of civilization. We recognize the new order in the world, with the closer contacts which progress has wrought. We sense the call of the human heart for fellowship, fraternity, and cooperation. We crave friendship and harbor no hate. But America, our America, the America built on the foundation laid by the inspired fathers, can be a party to no permanent military alliance. It can enter into no political commitments, nor assume any economic obligations which will subject our decisions to any other than our own authority.

...

The normal balances have been impaired, the channels of distribution have been clogged, the relations of labor and management have been strained. We must seek the readjustment with care and courage. Our people must give and

²⁴ Treaty of Versailles, Article 20.

²⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 95-96.

²⁶ Treaty of Versailles, Article 21.

²⁷ Warren G. Harding, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1921, accessed March 15, 1921 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

take. Prices must reflect the receding fever of war activities. Perhaps we never shall know the old levels of wages again, because war invariably readjusts compensations, and the necessities of life will show their inseparable relationship, but we must strive for normalcy to reach stability.²⁸

With these words, Harding clearly demonstrated on the first day of his presidency that his visions for America's place in the postwar world were very different from those of his predecessor. Rather than striving to promote international cooperation as a new mechanism by which to maintain international security, President Harding promised Americans a return to looking inward, especially with regard to business and economic growth. Funeral bells began to chime in mourning for lost hopes that the League of Nations would constitute a viable force to protect international stability.

The return to isolationism which the United States experienced in the aftermath of debates over the League of Nations would persist throughout the 1920s and even the 1930s, as proven by the actions of the Nye Committee from 1934 to 1936.²⁹ This commission, chaired by Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, has acquired a reputation for having been hostile to American business and having sought to demonstrate that the interests of the munitions industry pushed the United States into World War I, thus helping to "steer the United States to an isolationist course."³⁰ The inflammatory remarks of Nye himself,³¹ which enjoyed far more publicity than the actual proceedings of the congressional investigation, were considered by many people to be the official views of the entire committee. Therefore, memory of the Nye Committee is linked to ideas about a congressional assault on American munitions makers in an attempt to prove that they had forced the United States to go to war.³²

However, the aim of the Nye Committee was *not* to prove that private business interests had forced the United States to enter World War I, but instead to determine whether booming conditions in the American munitions industry after August 1914 "had contributed to the double standard of neutrality which most Committee members believed the Wilson administration had applied to the two sets of European belligerents."³³ The committee's findings ought to have conveyed a lesson to the public and to policymakers involving a cautious approach to close economic links in war industries (such as munitions) with belligerent countries in the future.³⁴ However, thanks in large part to Nye's brash comments and utter failure to qualify his words as personal opinion and not the official stance of his commission, historians have found the Nye Committee (and more importantly, Nye himself) to be partially blameworthy for unchecked German, Italian, and Japanese aggression in the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John Edward Wiltz, "The Nye Committee Revisited," *The Historian* 23 (No. 2, Feb. 1961): 211.

³⁰ Ibid., 211-212.

³¹ Ibid., 222-223: "In a national radio address Nye declared, 'The Committee listened daily to men striving to defend acts which found them nothing more than international racketeers, bent upon gaining profit through a game of arming the world to fight itself.' Few Committee members would have supported this reckless statement, and Nye himself, more than twenty years later, said that most of the men who had testified before his Committee were honorable gentlemen. In a speech before the National Education Association at Denver on July 4, 1935, the North Dakota Republican ... declared of the munitions makers: 'These racketeers go out over this world and build up the hates, fears, and suspicions that build wars, that drive people into war, and then getting them there, they keep them there as long as they can.' The Committee's evidence could not even partly prove such a claim."

³² Matthew Ware Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s: Beyond the Merchants of Death* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 127.

³³ Wiltz, "Nye Committee," 227.

³⁴ Wiltz, "Nye Committee," 227.

1930s.³⁵ The findings of the commission – coupled, albeit improperly, with Nye’s incendiary comments – created a (flawed) memory of how the United States became involved in the Great War. This memory bolstered support for isolationism and thus slowed the American response to a growing international crisis that would eventually lead to the outbreak of World War II.³⁶ As public sentiment in Europe – especially in Great Britain³⁷ – turned toward the belief that the Versailles settlement had rendered Germany a victim of serious injustice, the stage was set for Hitler’s ascendancy on the continent, facilitated by American isolationism and a lack of European willpower to enforce the Versailles Treaty.³⁸

From 1919 through the late 1930s, political and diplomatic officials from the Paris Peace Conference, the White House, and the U.S. Congress were compelled to justify their visions for the postwar world by offering their own interpretations of how the First World War should be remembered. In the United States, Woodrow Wilson’s call for international cooperation through the League of Nations failed to defeat Henry Cabot Lodge’s conservative isolationism in the court of public opinion and in congressional debate, culminating in the absence of the United States from the League and the persistence of American isolationism until the Second World War forever changed U.S. foreign policy. The resurgence of American isolationism after the First World War, combined with a lack of determination amongst the democracies of Western Europe to enforce the Versailles settlement against a rearmed and embittered Germany, would facilitate the successes of fascist aggression. Thus, the struggle over memory and World War I led directly to the conditions in which World War II could take place.

³⁵ Coulter, *Senate Munitions Inquiry*, 128.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 479.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 478-483.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

“Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties.” *The American Journal of International Law* 14 (No. 1, January-April 1920), 95-154.

Harding, Warren G. Inaugural Address, March 4, 1921. Accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

Lodge, Henry Cabot. Speech on Objections to the League of Nations, August 12, 1919. Accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

Peace Treaty of Versailles. Accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/1raiWZR.

Wilson, Woodrow. Address in Favor of the League of Nations, 25 September 1919. Accessed March 15, 2014 via the World War I Document Archive, hosted by Brigham Young University. bit.ly/TUIOh5.

Secondary Sources

Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane and Annette Becker. *14-18: Understanding the Great War*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2002.

Budreau, Lisa M. *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Coulter, Matthew Ware. *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s: Beyond the Merchants of Death*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Grady, Tim. *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011.

Gregory, Adrian. *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*. London: Bloomsbury, 1994.

MacMillan, Margaret. *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Mosse, George L. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Saunders, Nicholas J., ed. *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Sharp, Alan. *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Thacker, Toby. *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

- Trout, Steven. *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010.
- Vance, Jonathan. *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997.
- Watson, Janet. *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Williams, David. *Media, Memory, and the First World War* Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.
- Wiltz, John Edward. "The Nye Committee Revisited." *The Historian* 23 (No. 2, February 1961): 211-233.
- Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.