



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 24, 2017

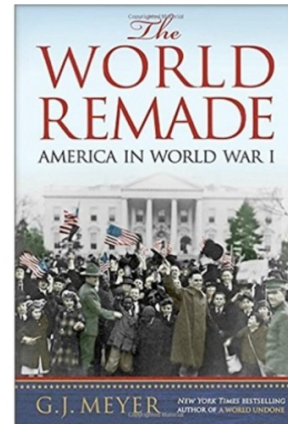
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## World War I — The War on Western Civilization

**The “Great War,” largely a result of England’s intent to squash its new rival, was fostered by American politicians and financiers. The result: millions dead and political chaos.**

***The World Remade: America in World War I***, by G. J. Meyer, New York: Bantam Books, 2016, 576 pages, hardcover.



Some have called it the greatest disaster of the 20th century. The First World War resulted in the fall of the Habsburg, Romanov, and Hohenzollern dynasties in Europe, and was largely responsible for bringing to power fascism in Italy, national socialism in Germany, and communism in Russia. It also unleashed the slumbering forces of aggressive Islam with the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Even the victorious powers experienced fundamental changes in the way their populations looked at government, and became more accepting of government “directing” their personal lives. In the aftermath of the Great War, the move away from American independence and sovereignty and toward a global government — something few Americans would have even considered before American entry — burrowed itself deeply into the upper echelons of both the American government and society.

The drift toward this tragic affair did not begin with the unfortunate assassination of the Archduke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand, by a member of the Black Hand terrorist group, but years earlier, as documented by G. J. Meyer, a popular historian who has taught writing and literature at several colleges in the United States.

While Meyer does not excuse Germany’s role in the war, he makes a convincing case that the principal instigators were to be found westward — in the United Kingdom — and he demonstrates that much of the blame for the war’s continuing as long as it did can be fairly placed on the shoulders of President Woodrow Wilson and his chief confidant, “Colonel” Edward House.

The seeds of the war were planted in the late 1800s, after the creation of the German Empire in 1871



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and its rapid ascension as an economic power to compete with the British. This fear of Germany was fed by a British press that insinuated that there existed “German plots to conquer the United Kingdom.” As Meyer states, “Seventeen years before the start of the war, London’s *Daily Mail* ran a series of articles about Germany with the lurid title ‘Under the Iron Heel.’” Even in America, “Germany’s traditional image as a land of ... philosophers and musicians, began to give way to something harder and darker.”

For a generation, the British public was fed a steady diet of propaganda about the evils of Germany, ramping up to a frenzied level when the war began in August 1914. “Soon the cables were abuzz with reports of the enormities being committed by the Hun as he raped and murdered his way across Belgium. German soldiers cut off the hands of every Belgian boy they could catch.... The same soldiers took particular pleasure in cutting off the breasts of the maidens they had gang-raped in public, and in crucifying nuns and prisoners of war. Buckets overflowed with the eyeballs of blinded Belgians.”

These gross fabrications were intended, of course, to rouse the British public to see the war as a war of good (the British) against evil (the Germans). It also had another intended target — the United States. The French and the British made sure that American minds were not “polluted” with the German point of view by cutting the transatlantic cables found on the floor of the North Sea next to Germany.

Although pictured as a military goliath intent on conquering as much of the Earth’s surface as it could, the Germans and the Austrians actually spent less than the British, the French, and the Russians on armaments. “If Russia had had no allies, her army alone would have outnumbered those of Germany and Austria-Hungary together by hundreds of thousands of troops.”

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Britain’s advantage in the war was their navy, and they used it to place a blockade upon Germany. Food was added to the British list of “contraband” material subject to seizure by that navy. Winston Churchill, Britain’s first lord of the admiralty, was blunt in stating the British goal was to “starve the whole population — men, women and children, old and young, wounded and sound — into submission.” The desire to break that blockade led to the Germans to make use of “unrestricted submarine warfare.”

Wilson was fanatical on the issue that American citizens could “travel in safety wherever they wished, even on the ships of nations at war, even when those ships were transporting war materiel, even in declared war zones.” Meyer argues, “The simplest and most obvious solution to the whole problem would have been to require citizens to traverse the war zone in neutral ships only, but the president brushed it aside as unworthy. Such a remedy, he said, was dishonorable, craven, and an abandonment of American rights and therefore out of the question.”

In stark contrast, Meyer noted, President George Washington declared in 1793 that American merchant ships delivering “contraband of war” to nations at war “will not receive the protection of the United States.”

As the war dragged on, with thousands and finally millions of soldiers perishing along hundreds of miles of a mostly static western front (the Germans made significant advances on the eastern front against the Russians), the Germans repeatedly sent out “peace feelers,” and made several attempts to get the United States to broker an end to the conflict. Instead of doing so, the American government was letting the British government know America’s public “neutrality” meant nothing. As Meyer said, “In London [Colonel] House and [U.S. Ambassador Walter] Page were offering oral assurances that the Wilson administration would do whatever might prove necessary to save the Entente from defeat. The Entente



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powers, therefore, could proceed with confidence — with impunity — to do whatever they thought necessary for victory.”

Colonel House even wrote in his diary that he hoped the war would go on until the Entente forces were strong enough “to make demands of Germany and get those demands met.”

Meyer explores multiple reasons for the bias of the American government for the British. Among the more interesting is his narrative of Wilson’s ties to Wall Street, particularly with American financier J.P. Morgan. The monetary support that Morgan gave to Teddy Roosevelt’s third-party effort for president in 1912, after the incumbent, William Howard Taft, opposed the Morgan-backed creation of the Federal Reserve Bank, is fairly well known. But why would an American banker have such an interest in a fairly obscure American academic, Woodrow Wilson? While exactly how Morgan even became aware of a history professor at Princeton is not clear, in 1902, when Wilson was installed as the university’s president, Morgan was among those attending the ceremony. Later, in 1907, Wilson told the *New York Times* that he would like to see a council of “wise men” to chart the nation’s course, suggesting that the leader of this elite group should be Morgan.

Morgan had helped George Harvey, a Democratic Party leader in the mid-Atlantic states, take over the publishing of *Harper’s Weekly*. It was Harvey who recruited Wilson to leave the halls of academia to run for New Jersey governor in 1910. Then, two years later, Wilson was elected president of the United States when Roosevelt’s third-party effort (largely financed by Morgan) split the Republican vote.

Meyer wrote, “Morgan and Company was appointed U.S. purchasing agent for Britain and would become France’s as well. Over the next four years it would broker fully half of all Entente purchases in the United States, reaping commissions of \$30 million by doing so.”

One man inside the Wilson administration who did not like the lack of neutrality was Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. He opposed allowing Morgan or any other American banker to make loans to nations at war. “We are the one great nation which is not involved and refusal to loan to any belligerent would naturally hasten a conclusion of the war.... Money is the worst of all contrabands because it commands everything else,” Bryan said. “I know of nothing that would do more to prevent war than an international agreement that ... neutral nations would not loan to belligerents.”

Bryan eventually resigned his post rather than continue in an administration he believed was bound and determined to go to war.

Unfortunate for American prospects to keep out of the war in Europe, however, was the fact that most of the leaders of the Republican Party, such as Teddy Roosevelt, were for getting into the war, even going so far as to call Wilson a coward for not jumping in. Voters in 1916 who did not want to get into the war naturally voted for Wilson — the man who supposedly had “kept us out of war.”

Meyer explodes many myths, among them that Britain entered the war because the Germans violated Belgian neutrality. Since at least 1906, Meyer says, the British “had been providing Belgium with funds for the reorganization of her military,” adding, “At the start of the war, British troops were to land in Belgium regardless of whether she was under threat from Germany. The combined British-Belgian forces were then to join France’s armies in an invasion of northern Germany via the Rhineland.”

Meyer’s book continues with the story of the congressional declaration of war and America’s role in the Great War and at the Paris Peace Conference, which produced the Treaty of Versailles.



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Practically every page of this fascinating book offers a new insight into the causes of the Great War, its course, and its consequences. I highly recommend it.



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