

Sample Document-Based Paper

The Battle for Ratification

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The First World War cast Europe into a state of turmoil and disarray. The collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires, along with the revolution in Russia, left territorial boundaries relatively uncertain. In January 1919, representatives from the victorious Allied Nations met in Paris to devise a treaty that might somehow make sense of the chaos and restore some measure of order to the European continent. **1** Each member of the peace conference approached the task at hand with his own agenda, reflective of his country's experience during the war. President Woodrow Wilson of the United States hoped to achieve a number of the idealistic goals laid out in his "Fourteen Points" speech and mold the post-War society into a peaceful utopia, while Georges Clemenceau of France advocated swift and destructive retribution against the Germans. **2** The resulting Versailles Treaty represented something of a compromise between the varying perspectives, with some voice given to idealism and some to punishment. The treaty sought to protect the world from future wars by establishing international measures of accountability, realized in a League of Nations, to afford "mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial independence to great and small states alike."¹ Upon returning to the United States, Woodrow Wilson faced the daunting prospect of convincing the American people that compliance with the treaty, and membership in the League, would provide the best avenue towards a lasting peace. Many in the United States protested the treaty, either on the grounds that it did not reflect their own concerns or from a fear that the international agreement would rob America of its independence, both domestically and upon the world stage. Though Wilson ardently defended the treaty, major opposition in the Senate ultimately led to its failure, establishing firmly, at least for the time being, that the government of the United States was primarily responsible for itself before the rest of the world. **3**

The Versailles Treaty that Wilson returned to the United States with in the summer of 1919 represented an amalgamation of widely varying approaches to peace. **4** His own view revolved around the idea of sustaining peace through the creation of a global oversight committee comprised of the most powerful nations on the planet (primarily England, France, and the United States). This idealistic approach contrasted considerably with the more punitive stances of Georges Clemenceau of France and David Lloyd George of Great Britain. Clemenceau, having seen two German invasions of France during his life, hoped to utterly destroy what remained of Germany, dividing much of its territory and crippling its economy, so that it could never again threaten his country. Similarly, Lloyd George rejected Wilson's goal of "freedom of the seas," on the grounds that it would deprive his country of the formidable weapon of the naval blockade.² Throughout the conference, **5**

¹ Woodrow Wilson, "Fourteen Points," in *Documents to Accompany America's History*, ed. Kevin J. Fernlund, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 204.

² James L Roark, *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 4th ed. vol. 2. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 809. **6**

1: Student sets the paper into its chronological context.

2: Introduces historical characters and their aims.

3: Leads into thesis re: why Wilson failed by setting up the challenge Wilson faced and then indicating how and why the treaty failed.

4: A very good example of an effective transitional and summary sentence.

5: Note the strong transitions between sentences that lead the reader through the argument.

6: Chicago style citations using footnotes and bibliography.

Wilson gradually backed down from his lofty goals in an attempt to curb the European leaders' thirst for vengeance. Grudgingly, he agreed to attribute all of the war guilt to Germany, saddling the country with a tremendous amount of reparation payments, in exchange for a relaxation of Clemenceau's territorial aspirations. Throughout the conference, Wilson's primary focus remained upon the creation of the League of Nations, and, despite Clemenceau's protestations that it could not function effectively in Europe, he finally received a draft of the organization's charter. Though he had to forgo a number of his "Points," Wilson pushed through his ultimate goal, a measure that he was certain would gain widespread acceptance and meet with unprecedented success. ⁷

Upon returning home, Woodrow Wilson found many of his fellow citizens less than approving of his plan. Numerous ethnic groups felt underrepresented or slighted by the conference, citing Wilson's conduct as exclusionary and hypocritical. ⁸ Prior to the end of the war, the President had declared that "national aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase."³ Irish-Americans, supportive of the fight for Home Rule taking place between Great Britain and Ireland, interpreted this statement to mean that Wilson would fight on their behalf for an independent Irish state. ⁹ During the 1919 peace talks, however, the President "declined to introduce the issue, which was certain to bore Georges Clemenceau and antagonize David Lloyd George."⁴ With his sights fixed firmly on the prospect of a League of Nations, Wilson worked carefully to avoid angering or alienating his fellow delegates. ¹⁰ While he had never explicitly voiced support for the Irish cause, Irish-Americans took this inaction to mean that he had abandoned them. Upon his return home, they expressed their discontent and refused to support the treaty. Similarly, many Italian-Americans felt that the treaty failed to address their country's desire for German territory as compensation for the war, while German-Americans railed against the blame forced upon their country. ¹¹

The most vocal opponents of Wilson's treaty, and specifically the League of Nations, could be found within the Republican ranks of the Senate. ¹² Led by Henry Cabot Lodge, the Senate Majority Leader and Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, the Republicans worked tirelessly to forestall and defeat ratification. Many favored either a strictly isolationist stance or voiced their fear that involvement in the League of Nations would lead to a permanent American entrenchment in the affairs of Europe. In a speech before Congress, Senator Lodge argued that ratification of the treaty would go entirely against two foundational tenets of American policy: ¹³ the ideals of George Washington's "Farewell Address" and the "Monroe Doctrine." Should the United States join the League of Nations, Lodge stressed that it would deal a considerable blow to Washington's stance against foreign entanglements and forever remove the separation between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres imposed by the "Monroe Doctrine." "The real essence of [that doctrine]," Lodge argued, "is that American questions shall be settled by Americans alone; that the Americas shall be separated from Europe and from the interference of Europe in purely American questions."⁵ ¹⁴ Looking to the devastating realities of the war and the diplomatic chaos that preceded it, Lodge pointedly questioned his fellow senators on their willingness to abandon the important foundations of American foreign affairs.

Other Republican senators also voiced concern that American involvement in the League of Nations would infringe upon the country's independence of action, that the other members would force the United States into unwanted future conflicts in which it had no real stake. ¹⁵ The major point

³ John B Duff, "The Versailles Treaty and Irish Americans," *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 3 (1968): 583.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 586. ¹⁶

⁵ Henry Cabot Lodge, "Speech Before the Senate," in *Documents to Accompany America's History*, ed. Kevin J. Fernlund, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 208.

7: Paragraph supports thesis by explaining how Wilson's idealism fared in the face of European opposition and by detailing how Wilson had to compromise many of his goals to make the League a reality.

8: Introduces first critique of Treaty of Versailles.

9: Brings in evidence to support critique. Note: author should lead into each quote with an author and context.

10: Shows why Wilson did not address Irish concerns b/c of his larger motives.

11: Shows results of Wilson's choices and priorities.

12: Good transition to lead reader to second critique of Versailles treaty. Could make transition even stronger by pointing out the difference between the claims of ethnic groups and a larger position of isolation (in other words, the ethnics wanted greater US involvement, while the latter wanted the US to disengage from world affairs).

13: Correct use of a colon to underscore relationship between clauses. While a small detail, it is impressive when an often misused mark of punctuation is employed correctly.

14: Good example of the correct way to interrupt a quote.

15: Another fine example of a transitional sentence that brings the reader from one point to the next.

16: Use Ibid. when the same citation appears in the previous note. Add page numbers if different.

of contention within the proposed League Charter was Article X, a clause that essentially committed members of the League to military action against “external aggression” and obligated them to protect the “existing political independence of all members of the League.”⁶ Simply, the article appeared to remove Congress’s sole right to declare war, a loss of freedom that the senators could not abide. Speaking from a platform of American superiority, Senator Sherman of New Jersey warned that the League of Nations would force the United States to “spend [its] substance in men and resources to resurrect and redeem people stunted by racial faults and vices and schooled for generations in chronic revolt and general insubordination against the tranquility of life.”⁷ 17 Many Republican senators refused to sacrifice their own independence and security because of the political instability in Europe. 18

17: Quotations are used as supporting evidence to bolster thesis.

18: Paragraph introduces views of isolationists and sets them into their historical context.

In seeking a compromise between their own views and those of the President, Henry Cabot Lodge and other members of the Committee on Foreign Relations pushed for the addition of a number of amendments, called “Lodge reservations,” to the treaty and League Charter.⁸ Most notably, the Republicans advocated the preservation of Congress’s power over American declarations of war. This reservation required that the President seek approval by both the Senate and House of Representatives before participating in any military action with the League of Nations. This opposition did not represent a firm belief in the severance of all international ties, but a desire to avoid any permanent commitment that could harm America’s interests or independence domestically.⁹ 19

19: Adds nuance to stance on isolation.

In defense of the treaty and his beloved League of Nations, Woodrow Wilson and other Democrats launched a campaign against the dissenting Senate Republicans. Throughout September 1919, Wilson took part in a major speaking tour throughout the country designed to convince the American people of the merits of joining the other European nations in an organization dedicated to the preservation of global peace. Speaking in Indianapolis, the President addressed the supposed threat to American sovereignty and independence that membership in the League represented. From a position of idealism, Wilson argued that any nation that sought only to do good should not bemoan its inability to do ill. “Every man who makes a choice to respect the rights of his neighbors,” he stated, “deprives himself of absolute sovereignty, but he does it by promising never to do wrong.”¹⁰ It was the United States, through righteous action, that would deprive itself of the freedom to do anything, and not the League of Nations. 20

20: Shows Wilson’s responses to Senate opposition. Makes clear both words and deeds.

Wilson’s idealistic rhetoric garnered him a number of likeminded supporters who felt bolstered by the prospect of sustainable peace. A group from California, composed primarily of intellectuals and state politicians, wrote to Senator Hiram Johnson, a vocal Republican critic of the League Charter, urging him to reconsider his isolationist views and accept the treaty. They desired the League of Nations because it promised “peace on a permanent basis of open arbitration, inquiry, and discussion.”¹¹ The acting Democratic leader within the Senate, Gilbert Hitchcock, led the movement for support in Washington while Woodrow Wilson carried out his speaking tour. The senator attempted to allay Republican fears by continually reassuring them that, though it could request the aid of the American military, any offensive or defensive action carried out by the League would require a unanimous vote by its members. If the United States did not wish to participate, then it simply would cast its vote against the motion; it would be “amply protected as to any

6 James E. Hewes, “Henry Cabot Lodge and the League of Nations,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114, no. 4 (1970), 245.

7 “Hitchcock Forces Treaty Reading; Angers Lodge,” *New York Times*, September 1919.

8 Roark, 811

9 Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Wilson, the Republicans, and French Security after World War I,” *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 2 (1972): 342.

10 Woodrow Wilson, “Speech in Indianapolis, Indiana,” in *Documents to Accompany America’s History*, ed. Kevin J. Fernlund, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 209.

11 “Push Reservation Wilson Scouted,” *New York Times*, September 1919.

obligation the league covenant would impose upon it.”¹² 21

Based on this, Woodrow Wilson absolutely refused to accept any of the reservations put forward by Lodge and his supporters, arguing that the Charter did not place the country in a vulnerable position. Specifically, he railed against the proposed change to Article X as a “knife-thrust at the treaty,” stating that it sought to destroy the very ideals he was championing.¹³ Because the Republicans possessed only a small majority in the Senate, they could not effectively voice their reservations through without the support of a number of Democratic senators, something which Wilson vehemently opposed.¹⁴ As a result, the debate over ratification tread on interminably, achieving little along the way. 22

Ultimately, Wilson’s campaigning and the rhetoric of Hitchcock within the Senate helped the Democrats to gain enough support to initiate a vote on the treaty without any of Henry Cabot Lodge’s reservations. Despite this, the pro-ratification side failed to gain a two-thirds majority by only six votes, ending Woodrow Wilson’s hope of American involvement in the League of Nations. Fears of further involvement in a foreign war, of joining an alliance system within a region as unstable as Europe, and of permanent international commitments ultimately led the Senate to reject the treaty. With this action, the Senate firmly established that the federal government’s primary role was to address its own concerns before dealing with those of other countries. While certain overseas agreements could be created, such as those during wartime, perpetual foreign entanglements were to be avoided. 23

Woodrow Wilson’s hopes of securing the League of Nations as a peace-maintaining organization could not withstand the criticism and skepticism of other politicians. Republicans in the Senate did not share Wilson’s idealism, or his belief that ideas could function as well in a practical setting as in theory. In the end, the idea that Wilson had conceived, designed, championed, and brought into existence in Europe, would not be joined by his country. As his presidential term came to a close, Wilson felt as though he had lost, that cynicism, pessimism, and dogged isolationism had dashed his hopes of achieving a global, sustainable peace. 24

General comments about entire paper:

- *Author sets up context well in introduction and continues to set up relevant context throughout the essay.*
- *All historical characters are introduced (first and last name, affiliations, viewpoints, actions).*
- *Most quotes have a clear lead-in.*
- *Clear flow of argument throughout the essay. Solid transitions.*
- *Strong chronology throughout the essay.*
- *Good conclusion (2nd to last paragraph and last paragraph) ties paper together.*

21: Shows response of Wilson’s supporters (again, shows words and deeds). Sets up context of responses and mechanisms.

22: Gives context of Senate debate and outcome.

23: Good analysis of outcome of debate.

24: Conclusion shows Wilson’s analysis of the outcome. It is also effective because it sums up the main points that have been made without either repeating the thesis or going beyond the natural result of essay’s argument.

12 “Hitchcock.”

13 “Push Reservation.”

14 “Predict Failure to Amend Treaty,” *New York Times*, September 1919.

References

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- Duff, John B. "The Versailles Treaty and Irish Americans." *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 3 (1968): 582-598.
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- "Hitchcock Forces Treaty Reading; Angers Lodge." *New York Times*, September 1919, sec. 1.
- Lodge, Henry Cabot. "Speech Before the Senate." In *Documents to Accompany America's History*, edited by Kevin J. Fernlund, 208. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008.
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