Introduction by Louis Galambos


Contents

- Introduction by Louis Galambos, Johns Hopkins University ............................................................ 2
- Review by Rodney P. Carlisle, Rutgers University emeritus .............................................................. 5
- Review by Justus Doenecke, New College of Florida emeritus ....................................................... 8
- Review by Ross A. Kennedy, Illinois State University ........................................................................ 13
- Review by John A. Thompson, University of Cambridge ................................................................. 17
- Author’s Response by Charles E. Neu, Brown University ................................................................. 20

© 2015 The Authors. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/).
Introduction by Louis Galambos, Johns Hopkins University

Between 1880 and 1920, the United States experienced several formidable transitions. A society that had long been largely agricultural and commercial was transformed by the industries of the second industrial revolution. Indeed, America became the largest industrial nation in the world during those decades. The cities were growing rapidly and immigrants from Europe flooded into the United States to take advantage of the opportunities it provided to improve their lot. Rapid growth created problems as well as profits, and governments in the cities, states, and Washington, DC, struggled to find new ways to accommodate an industrial, urban America that the Founding Fathers had not anticipated and many citizens could not understand. In these same years, the United States began to exercise its power abroad, in the Caribbean, in South America, in Asia, and finally in Europe.

These challenging times called for strong effective political leadership. One of the most prominent leaders to attempt to guide the nation through this era of transition was President Woodrow Wilson (in office from 1913 to 1921). Wilson promoted a series of reform measures designed to control the economy, to prevent powerful business interests from exercising their power in damaging ways, and to make the American system more secure and equitable for the majority of its white citizens. As President and Commander-in-Chief, Wilson also was the principle architect of America’s relationships with the rest of the world. He took the nation to the brink of war with Mexico, where a revolution was underway, and he finally took the nation to war in Europe in 1917, ostensibly because of Germany’s unrestricted submarine warfare. By November 1918, American manpower tipped the balance of a stalemate war on the Continent and forced the Central Powers to sign an Armistice. President Wilson attempted unsuccessfully to shape the peace negotiations that followed and to build support for a League of Nations that he hoped would prevent another world war. The European victors were not to be denied a punitive settlement, however, and the Republicans in the U.S. Congress rejected the Treaty of Versailles and the League. Thwarted by his own government and rejected by his former allies in Europe, Wilson ended his presidency in a defeat compounded by his debilitating stroke. For a brief time, his wife Edith was in effect acting president of the United States.

Before his physical collapse, Wilson had built a team of close associates who helped him push through his important domestic policies and guide the nation’s foreign policy. None of those associates were closer to Wilson than Colonel Edward M. House, a Texan who had parlayed his inherited wealth, his skill in handling the personal dimensions of state politics, and his determination to wield power without standing for election into an important role in the Democratic Party. Texas stood on the agrarian/commercial side of the great economic divide in the American economy. Its politics were rooted in the personal relations built up by patronage and maintained by loyalty tested in political infighting. Charles E. Neu’s biography of Colonel House provides us with a revealing portrait of an era before interest-group politics had really taken hold and transformed American democracy. House was astonishingly successful in that context, and it is exciting to watch this master build and maintain his power base in Texas.

Moving to the national scene, House cultivated Woodrow Wilson and became his confidante, close personal friend, and premier political advisor. Leaders who expect to accomplish things – and Wilson had a full agenda – need a good team to do their bidding and House was clearly the leader of Wilson’s team. House was loyal. He did the President’s bidding and was at the same time able to acquire considerable power himself – particularly where appointments were concerned. His power to shape policy did not increase substantially until the United States entered the World War in 1917. Then, House became Wilson’s de facto ambassador and secretary of state. He became deeply involved in negotiations with the belligerents during
1917 and 1918. Following the Armistice of 1918, he continued to serve as the President’s leading representative in Europe until his overweening pride at last disrupted their friendship and their intricate working relationship.

House’s long career and his ties to Woodrow Wilson raise many exciting questions about American state and national politics, the U.S. entry into European affairs, and the Wilson presidency. Neu’s remarkable biography takes us into the heart of that presidency and forces us to judge anew the manner in which it worked, its accomplishments, and its shortcomings. Professional historians will learn much from Neu’s study about the workings of state politics and especially about the continuing role of the interwoven personalities that frequently overshadowed matters of policy. Much of our history of this era has been framed in terms of policies that look toward the future and the distant New Deal. House’s career provides a corrective to that vision of the roots of modern America. Neu’s delineation of House’s links to Wilson will, I believe, settle any doubts that historians have had about the Colonel’s influence on the President. This is particularly the case for the immediate prewar, wartime, and immediate postwar years. Although House held no office for which he was accountable, he nudged Wilson toward favoring the British and French and thus toward entering a war in which the United States had little to gain and the world had much to lose; for a time, House actually spoke for America in the peace conference, an astonishing development that clearly deserves the consideration Neu has given it.

For the most part, the four reviewers appreciate what the author of this biography has accomplished. Rodney P. Carlisle applauds Neu’s meticulous research and his “definitive treatment of the House-Wilson relationship.” John A. Thompson finds that Neu’s account “reminds us of the limited nature of Wilson’s political experience when he entered the White House. Thompson is pleased with Neu’s balance, the breadth of his history, and the rich accounts of the individuals surrounding the President. Justus Doenecke sees Neu’s study as “definitive.” He is fascinated by some of the Colonel’s idiosyncrasies and is pleased that the author included the Texan’s warts – his anti-Semitism, for instance. Even Ross A. Kennedy, who is most critical of the work, says that “one comes away from this book with a strong understanding of the personal dynamic between House and Wilson.”

All of the reviewers have some reservations about Neu’s book, but only Kennedy mounts a serious critique. He concludes that Neu falls short of providing a full and convincing analysis of House’s and Wilson’s ideas about American foreign policy. What, exactly, did they believe the League of Nations would be able to accomplish? How would the small and large nations combine to preserve peace? Would the League be successful if neither Germany nor Russia were allowed to join? On these and other questions, Kennedy charges Neu with errors of omission, with a failure to push deeper into the intellectual dimensions of the policies that emerged from the House-Wilson relationship.

Participants:

Charles E. Neu received his Ph.D. at Harvard University. He is professor of history emeritus at Brown University and adjunct professor of history at the University of Miami. His next book, The Wilson Circle: President Woodrow Wilson and His Advisers, will examine the relationship between Wilson and eight of his closest friends and advisers.

Louis Galambos, is Professor of History, and Co-Director of The Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise, at Johns Hopkins University. He is the editor of The Papers of

Rodney Carlisle holds the A.B. from Harvard College and the Ph.D. in History from the University of California, Berkeley. He is retired as Professor of History from Rutgers University. He is the author, co-author, or general editor of more than 40 works in history. Among his works are *Sovereignty For Sale* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1981); *Supplying the Nuclear Arsenal*, Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); *Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco*, (Denton, University of North Texas Press; 199); *Powder and Propellants* (Denton, University of North Texas Press, 2002); *Eyewitness History: World War One* (New York: Facts on File, 2007); *Sovereignty at Sea* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009,) *Forts of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012). He is currently finishing *Honor and Flight: The American Merchant Flag*, under contract 2015 with Naval Institute Press.

Justus D. Doenecke is Professor Emeritus of History at New College of Florida. Among his books are *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-1941 as Revealed in the Powers of the America First Committee* (1990); *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (with John E. Wilz, 3rd ed.; 2002); *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (2000); *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Foreign Policies* (with Mark A. Stoler, 2005); and *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of American Entry into World War I* (2011). He is currently writing a study on American debates concerning US engagement in World War I, the Paris Peace Conference, the League fight, and the 1920 presidential election.


This massive work has been a ‘lifetime’ project of Professor Charles E. Neu, begun in 1966 and recently brought to completion. The work represents an immense amount of research into both primary sources and secondary works surrounding the relationship of Colonel Edward House and President Woodrow Wilson. It is safe to say that this book will remain unsurpassed as the definitive treatment of the House-Wilson relationship.

Among the strengths of the work are its very close coverage of all, or nearly all, of the discussions between House and Wilson over the period 1911-1919, usually with very complete coverage of the content of the discussion, based on House’s own diary and supplemented wherever possible, with other sources. In addition, Neu closely follows House’s extraordinary role as personal negotiator for Wilson during World War I, and House’s role at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919.

While much of this material has been discussed in other works that focus on specific events or decisions, the extended discussion of House’s role here puts his relationship and importance in a new light. We learn that House was very close to Wilson from 1911 until a break between the two in 1919, and that Wilson placed extraordinary trust in House. We see that House was somewhat infatuated with his role, accounting for his extensive diary, his pride in a close, sometimes cloying, emotional relationship with Wilson, and that he had an exaggerated view of his own abilities to understand the momentous diplomatic issues of the day.

We also gain some insights as to why House gained Wilson’s trust. House was a good listener; he clearly admired Wilson and let him know that; he made a practice of playing to the vanity of his listeners; he was sociable with many political contacts and friends, while Wilson was somewhat personally reserved and ‘un-social.’ House was very good at providing Wilson with accurate assessments of the political views and attitudes of associates and nominees. Furthermore, House, with his wide contacts in the Democratic Party, provided Wilson with important evaluations of how to achieve his goals; he understood the art of compromise and frequently urged Wilson to seek a solution that would preserve his ideals without sacrificing any crucial details. A reader will sense that House was a bit of a sycophant, although Neu is never so blunt or so explicit as to use such a term or to allude to House’s role as anything other than that of ‘counselor.’

The author is careful not to go beyond what his sources explicitly reveal. Thus the reader may be disappointed that House’s early years as a political manipulator or ‘fixer’ in Texas are only vaguely described. We learn that House destroyed his letters and correspondence from that period, and therefore we know that he was a manipulator, but not exactly how the manipulation was conducted. Similarly, the sources give hints at House’s ethnic views—which would appear today to be quite racist—with his judgments of Mexicans, Japanese, African-Americans, and Jews. We also observe, but get no real insight, into the peculiarly intense male bonding between House and Wilson that went into decline after Wilson’s second marriage to Edith Boling Galt in 1916. Both House and Wilson characterized the relationship in rather unusual emotional terms of personal ‘affection.’ In the case of each of these matters, Neu restricts his observations to what can be explicitly documented from House’s own diaries and letters, Wilson’s correspondence, and the files of others close to Wilson. Since contemporaries refrained from discussing such issues in depth, and since House was not introspective about his views on race, on political manipulation, nor on the nature of male bonding, and did not commit to writing any penetrating self-analysis on these issues, we see only their consequences, but no close examination of their psychological roots.
Even so, the close account of the advice of the ‘counselor’ to the President, and the day-to-day documentation of what was said, when it was said, and how it appeared to be received by Wilson, greatly illuminates the major events of Wilson’s presidency. Scholars and students of the Wilson period, both in domestic affairs, and more importantly, in foreign affairs, will find this work a very important resource on all sorts of topics.

A surprising number of Wilson’s cabinet and sub-cabinet appointments were made on the basis of advice from House. House correctly anticipated in 1914 that war was on the horizon; he recognized (as did the President), that U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, Walter Hines Page, did not faithfully represent Wilson’s views. Like Wilson, House held an inflated view of the possible role the United States might play in mediating a peace between the Central Powers and the Allies in 1916, and the author explores the limits to House’s understanding of international affairs quite well.

House’s greatest failure as Wilson’s personal negotiator and representative, as depicted in this work, involved his role sitting in for the President at the Council of Ten during the Paris Peace Conference February 15-March 12, 1919, when Wilson returned to the United States. During that period, House exceeded his instructions in attempting to bring agreement on the terms of the treaty that was to be offered to Germany, making concessions to the French position that Wilson, on his return to Paris, would then immediately disavow.

While the precise cause of the falling out between House and Wilson is left somewhat obscure, it appears to have dated from this time. Again, because Neu relies very closely on House’s own observations and what can be explicitly documented from his diaries and letters and those of others in the Wilson circle of advisers, we remain as uncertain as House himself remained as to exactly what had caused his falling out with the President. However, circumstances and the presentation of the sequence of events point to the period when House acted as the U.S. representative at the Paris Peace Conference during Wilson’s absence as the moment for the breakdown in the relationship. We also learn that Edith Wilson, who initially had reservations about House, grew to like him, but then, after the Paris Conference, expressly prevented House and Wilson from re-starting their close relationship. It is well known that Mrs. Wilson controlled access to Wilson after his stroke in 1919; the effect of that control-access in the case of House is very explicitly documented here.

The very closeness of this work to its sources, while imposing limits on the author to discuss issues from a twenty-first-century viewpoint and causing him to avoid making deep psychological observations, makes it an invaluable resource regarding those issues that it does raise. Future historians will want to consult this volume when writing about or discussing any of these major political and diplomatic topics of the period, as the positions of Edward House and the advice he provided to Wilson played a part in each of them: the elections of 1912 and 1916; how Wilson succeeded in winning support for the New Freedom political reforms of 1913-1914; how American efforts to negotiate a peace between the Central Powers and the Allies were doomed to failure; how American neutrality became untenable in early 1917; how and why the United States was drawn into World War I; and how the American war effort was very clumsily mounted. The work also sheds light on these major issues: the impact of American entry on the war; why the Germans felt cheated by the Versailles Treaty of 1919; and how and why the treaty ended up leaving the Italians dissatisfied; how the reparations clause of the Treaty (that created the economic crisis in Germany in the 1920s) was included; why the treaty and the League of Nations failed to receive approval in the U.S. Senate; and why and how the Wilsonian presidency ended in the peculiar ‘acting presidency’ of Edith Wilson.
Through the 1920s and 1930s, House remained an ‘elder statesman,’ playing practically no role in either domestic or foreign affairs. Nevertheless, his diaries and letters continue to offer observations on the politics of the era. Yet House no longer operated as part of the inner circle of Presidential advisers. Consequently, the coverage of the period from 1919 through his death in 1938 provides details of reactions to people and events, rather than an account of a major role in the events of the era.

However, for the years 1912-1919, this work will be a lasting resource and a mine of information on domestic and foreign affairs.
For years the role of Colonel Edward Mandell House, long the éminence grise of the Woodrow Wilson administration, has been puzzling. One could quip that the Colonel’s self-effacing personality and unassuming appearance in a sense turned him into ‘Colonel Mouse,’ but he may well have been the most influential presidential adviser in American history. “Mr. House is my second personality,” Wilson supposedly said. “He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one. If I were in his place I would do as he suggested.”(1) Certainly, from 1913 to early 1919, House was the second most important person in the United States.

At first, historians were dependent upon Yale historian Charles Seymour’s uncritical Intimate Papers of Colonel House (1926-28), an unabashedly bowdlerized account that subtly contrasts Wilson’s supposed ineptitude and obtuseness to House’s perception and ability.(2) In 1932, George Sylvester Viereck published The Strangest Friendship in History: Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House. Once editor of The Fatherland, the leading German-American weekly during World War I, Viereck had earlier portrayed House as a bungler and hypocrite. By 1929, however, the two men were friends, and three years later Viereck called the colonel “the spiritual generalissimo of the Administration…the pilot who guided the ship in stormy waters at home and abroad.”(3)

A far more scholarly account appeared in 1956, when political scientist Alexander George and his wife Juliette came out with Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study, which used psychological techniques to show that the President’s defects outshone his virtues. Though the Georges gave far less attention to House, they portrayed Wilson’s counselor far more favorably than they did Wilson. (4)

Only in 2006 did a full-scale biography appear. Godfrey Hodgson’s Woodrow Wilson’s Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House is a step towards more thorough scholarship. It suffers, however, from exaggerating House’s influence, neglecting crucial secondary sources, and far too often internalizing House’s views. (5)

The Colonel, however, has never lacked detractors. The journalist Ray Stannard Baker’s multivolume life of Wilson (1927-39) downplays House’s role and questions his skills. (6) A far greater blow came with Arthur S.


Link’s *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War, and Peace* (1979). The tone is set by an index entry that reads “House, Edward M.: Betrays Wilson at Paris Peace Conference.” (7) Occasionally such an indictment reaches the textbooks. Forrest McDonald’s 1968 survey, for example, finds House to have been “Wilson’s darker side, the Mr. Hyde to Wilson’s Dr. Jekyll,” enabling Wilson to act with nobility while House engaged in “the necessary manipulating and wheeling and dealing.”(8) If House was not Niccolò Machiavelli in a Stetson (or what passes for a Machiavelli in Texas), he certainly came close.

Finally, with the appearance of Charles E. Neu’s excellent study, we have a life of House that promises to be definitive. Possessing an engaging style, Neu draws upon a host of manuscript collections, theses, scholarly monographs, and contemporary works. Years of research have produced a commanding account that is balanced, thoughtful, and resplendent with fresh insight. The author ably puts the Colonel’s life in a wider context, providing excellent background material as well on World War I and the postwar global order. Throughout his narrative, Neu reveals a firm grasp of current literature on internal European politics and military campaigns. Certain portraits are deftly drawn, among them those of Baker and the financier Bernard Baruch, who headed Wilson’s War Industries Board.

House’s early years are quite fascinating and Neu covers them well. His father, Thomas William House or “T.W.,” emigrated from England before the Civil War to become one of the wealthiest men in Texas, there establishing the largest wholesale business in the state. Edward Mandell grew up with guns and horses. “Death was my playmate,” House recalled, after noting that he had twice almost killed a friend (6). After spending several years at Cornell and then administering his father’s vast estates, he built up his own formidable political machine soon known as ‘our crowd.’ Always avoiding the limelight, he served as the “indispensable man” to four Texas governors. In the process he showed that he “cared more about personalities than causes, about techniques rather than the substance of politics,” in a sense, more about power than policy (41).

First meeting Wilson in 1911, House soon became his closest adviser. His soothing personality, “gentle, deferential manner,” and “lack of an assertive masculinity” put Wilson at ease, for the President was an “unusually solitary figure for a political leader” (87). Almost immediately Wilson became emotionally dependent on the Colonel. Until Wilson’s second marriage in December 1915, House was practically a member of the Wilson family, repeating his role in Texas as the irreplaceable ‘counselor.’ In some crucial ways, by 1914 House-- not Robert Lansing-- was America’s true secretary of state.

Neu shows just how wide a net House cast, for many figures in the Wilson administration were House protégés. Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson, Agriculture Secretary David S. Houston, and McReynolds’s successor Thomas W. Gregory belonged to ‘our crowd.’ Treasury Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo, Interior Secretary Franklin K. Lane, Attorney General James G. McReynolds, and Wilson’s personal secretary Joseph Tumulty owed their positions, at least in part, to House’s influence. House’s scope extended to ambassadorial and ministerial appointments as well. During World War I, Food Administrator Herbert Hoover and Inquiry (House’s wartime ‘brains trust’) sparkplug Walter Lippmann became House recruits.


8 Forrest McDonald, *The Torch is Passed: The United States in the 20th Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1968), 140.
Some material is quite surprising, even for a specialist. House dabbled in spiritualism, becoming a fellow of the American Society of Psychological Research. In 1911, the Colonel was in no rush to join Wilson’s campaign bandwagon, instead supporting Texas Senator Charles Culberson for the presidency. If read carefully, House’s 1912 cliché-ridden novel *Philip Dru: Administrator* was no blueprint for progressivism but rather portrayed “a dull, static utopia” (71). In some ways, Wilson’s counselor revealed a conservative streak, seeing in the Mexican dictator Victoriano Huerta a force for order. When the Federal Reserve Board was established, House--at best a mild progressive--successfully recommended conservative bankers for major slots. His choice to head the Inquiry, Sidney Mezes (who happened to be the Colonel’s brother-in-law), lacked a genuine knowledge of international relations; he was by training a philosopher of religion who was never able to take hold of the new organization.

Neu offers even more revelations. House possessed a streak of anti-Semitism (his protégé Lippmann being an exception), believing that Wilson and later Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed too many Jews to their administrations. Although in 1934 he hoped that Hitler would modify what he called “his drastic policy against the Jews” (496), the Colonel felt that Jews had exercised excessive power in Germany and were doing so in America. Writing for *Liberty* magazine a year later, House told readers that “more appeasement” of “revisionist powers” (that is, the embryonic Axis) could prevent “chaos and catastrophe.” Indeed, a potent League of Nations could facilitate the necessary adjustments, inducing “those nations having a surplus to share with those who lack it” (500).

Neu captures well House’s incredible sense of self-esteem. House privately boasted in 1918 that his summer home in Magnolia, located on the Massachusetts shore, served as “the first port of call for foreigners coming over, and the last port of call before returning home” (349). While always pouring praise upon the President, the counselor would confide to his diary strong misgivings concerning certain aspects of Wilson’s behavior and policies. The biographer finds the President in part responsible for House’s inflated ego, as Wilson would send the Colonel overseas with only the vaguest of instructions and would fail to monitor subsequent negotiations.

As diplomat, House, as Neu shows, increasingly showed himself to be out of his depth. In all of his diplomatic missions to Europe, the counselor remained unaware of the growing intransigence of London, Paris, and Berlin. While in London in 1914, just before World War I broke out, the Colonel proposed a summit meeting between Kaiser Wilhelm II, British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, and himself. Its aim: to distribute the “waste places of the earth” among the great powers (131). In March 1915 he reported to Wilson from Paris that the French had tentatively accepted the President as mediator. During his entire visit, he over-identified with British leaders, ignored the importance of the submarine issue, and remained ignorant of tensions with Germany’s government and society. When he returned to Europe in 1916, House “saw only what he wanted to see” (234). He was so confident concerning British acceptance of the mediation terms embodied in the House-Grey memorandum that he did not realize that London’s war committee opposed any peace bid. In May 1917, he irresponsibly proposed a secret defensive naval alliance with Britain to contain Japan on the Pacific. By the end of the year, he was convinced that he alone--certainly not President Wilson--possessed the qualifications needed for success both on the battlefield and at the conference table. Hence, in November 1918, he initially opposed Wilson’s heading the peace delegation bound for Paris. Two years later his abortive efforts at the peace conference concerning Italian claims revealed marked ineptitude, increasing Wilson’s newfound suspicions of him.
Such pride would eventually prove House’s undoing. When Wilson issued his peace note in December 1916, House undercut the President by assuring Anglo-Irish statesman Horace Plunkett that the administration’s pro-British policies had not changed. In meeting with French Premier Georges Clemenceau in fall 1918, he ignored Wilson’s instructions by accepting Allied occupation of the east bank of the Rhine. When the President returned to the United States in mid-February 1919, after spending two months in Europe, he learned that the Colonel had defied his explicit instructions by acquiescing in the establishment of a ‘Rhenish Republic,’ which would obviously serve as a French puppet. House also flouted Wilson’s instructions by agreeing to French occupation of the Saar Valley and the separation of the League of Nations’ Covenant from the peace treaty. Though there was no formal break between the two men, the Paris conference marked the last time they saw each other.

House believed that had Wilson remained in Washington as the Peace Conference adjourned, he would have exercised far more power. Neu challenges this claim, noting that it was the President’s skill and persistence that created a more moderate peace and resulted in the inclusion of the League as its centerpiece. On such major issues as Shantung, the Saar, the Rhineland, and Italian claims in the Adriatic, the Colonel’s positions would have led to harsher terms. Neu concludes that “In the supreme moment of his career, House had failed his chief” (422).

Neu does concur with the counselor’s claim that given the circumstances, no better settlement could have been achieved. He approvingly quotes House’s words that “the greater part of civilization had been shattered and history could guide us but little in the making of this peace” (422). The author finds Edith Wilson to have been irresponsible in late 1919 for cutting the Colonel off from her stricken husband. In the midst of a losing battle for the League, argues Neu, Wilson needed House’s conciliatory advice and personal connections.

Flaws in the work are extremely minor. The names of Josephus Daniels (82), Samuel Untermyer (104), and Lincoln Steffens (399) are misspelled. “Ike” Hoover, head usher at the White House, is referred to as Irving (450) and Irwin (496). General James Harbord needs a first name (326). This reviewer is curious concerning the nature of what John Reinertson describes as the ‘House circle,’ individuals whom the Colonel used to advance his peace aims. In his 1971 dissertation Reinertson discusses such people as journalists Lincoln Colcord, Carl Ackerman, and Raymond Swing; diplomats William H. Buckler and Arthur Hugh Frazier; and the editors of the New Republic. (9) One is also curious to learn more about House’s protégé Stephen Bonsal, a journalist who was House’s aide at the Paris Peace Conference. One might muse that George Sylvester Viereck’s relationship to the Colonel, not mentioned by Neu, could qualify as “the strangest friendship in history”! (10)].

---


10 For the House-Viereck relationship, see Niel M. Johnson, George Sylvester Viereck: German-American Propagandist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 153-63.
In all, Neu has produced a foundational work, one essential for future generations of scholars.
Colonel Edward Mandell House has always been a crucial yet enigmatic figure in Wilsonian historiography. Dapper, quiet, and manipulative, the “matchless conciliator” in Ray Stannard Baker’s words, House in particular casts a shadow over any analysis of Wilson’s foreign policy, as does his diary. In his new, comprehensive biography of House, Charles E. Neu surveys all aspects of the Colonel’s career, including, of course, a close analysis of the House-Wilson relationship. House’s political skills appealed to Wilson, the two men shared similar “moral and political values,” and, as Neu emphasizes, House’s personality complemented Wilson’s and fulfilled the President’s emotional needs, especially prior to mid-1915 (x). But House was a flawed diplomat, argues Neu. While the Colonel had insights about America’s place in the world, he also developed an “exaggerated sense of his own importance” the longer he served as Wilson’s chief advisor (510). For his part, Wilson inadequately supervised House, which inflated the Colonel’s ego and set the stage for a dysfunctional relationship between the two men at the Paris Peace Conference. Neu makes this case well—he is a good writer, and one comes away from this book with a strong understanding of the personal dynamic between House and Wilson. Neu’s interpretation of House’s and Wilson’s foreign policy concerning World War I is not as well done, however, as he has surprisingly little to say about the Colonel’s view of international reform and understates the anti-German aspects of Wilson’s diplomacy.

House’s success as a political operative—his favorites served as governors of Texas from 1894 to 1906, he helped run two successful presidential campaigns, and he managed to remain a key adviser to President Wilson for over six years—reflected his organizational and social abilities. As Neu shows, in Texas House excelled at “developing ties of loyalty and affection with his close associates and using patronage to rally party workers behind his candidates” (ix). He also proved adept at maneuvering between the complicated political factions in Texas and at appealing to the patrons who controlled minority block voting in the southern part of the state. Neu outlines how, at the national level, House promoted the fortunes of his allies, including Albert S. Burleson, who became Wilson’s postmaster general. Indeed, argues Neu, “Wilson’s presidency . . . marked the emergence of Texans as a powerful force in the national Democratic Party” (xi). House relentlessly promoted himself as well. He constantly undermined the standing of Wilson’s first secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, for example, and cut Walter Hines Page, U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, out of many of his discussions with British leaders. In Neu’s words, House was “a patient, crafty, and sometimes cynical political infighter” (xi).

Perhaps the only person who could match the Colonel’s talent for intrigue was the second Mrs. Wilson, Edith Bolling Galt. Her sudden appearance in Wilson’s life in March 1915, about seven months after the death of Wilson’s first wife, undercut House’s relationship with the President, although he remained one of Wilson’s most important advisors until spring 1919. House had quickly become close to Wilson beginning in late 1911 in part because his “gentle, deferential manner . . . put the president at ease,” his “apparently fragile health elicited the president’s sympathy and concern;” and “his frequent assurances of affection and esteem helped to satisfy one of Wilson’s deepest needs” (87-88). The death of Wilson’s first wife in August 1914 intensified the President’s emotional dependence on House. Once he became involved with Galt, though, Wilson transferred his affections to her, much to House’s irritation. House worked assiduously to gain Galt’s confidence, but she was “intolerant” of Wilson’s advisers and never seemed fully to trust the Colonel; Wilson’s relationship with House, while remaining “cordial” and still politically important, was much less intimate by the spring of 1916 than it had been earlier (200, 250). By this point, Edith, not House, was Wilson’s “assistant president” (250).
If Neu cogently analyzes the complex web of interaction between Wilson, House, Galt, and the other members of the President’s tight circle of confidants, he is less successful in explaining House’s and Wilson’s foreign policy ideas. Neu most clearly conveys House’s pro-British views. In 1913, on his first trip to Europe for Wilson, House hoped to strengthen U.S.-British relations and began to develop close ties with British leaders such as Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey. The following year he discussed with Page his hopes for “a sympathetic alliance between the two great English speaking countries” (121). After the World War started, House thought it was in “the interest of England, America and civilization to have her [Germany’s] integrity preserved, shorn however of her military and naval power” (141). He believed that “a victorious Germany would threaten American security” and “identified with the Allied cause;” any American mediation of the war should be on Allied terms (160-61). After the German submarine attack on the Lusitania, in fact, House wanted to enter the war on the Allied side. When that failed to happen, House continued to work to align the United States with the Allies as much as he could, an effort that culminated in the pro-Allied mediation scheme outlined in the House-Grey Memorandum of early 1916. Even after the British refused to implement House’s plan and Wilson decided to make a peace bid without them, House opposed the President’s decision out of fear a peace effort would alienate British leaders from the United States.

Throughout 1913-1917 and after, House also voiced support for the idea of reforming international politics. Prior to the war, he tried to promote a European disarmament agreement to ease British-German tensions as well as a great-power understanding for the development of the “waste places of the earth” (131). In his efforts to prod the belligerents into peace talks, House likewise called for disarmament as the basis for a settlement. He also pushed for a Pan-American Pact that included provisions for collective security and, in late 1915, supported a U.S. pledge to join a post-war league of nations. In 1916, House wrote a major portion of Wilson’s speech to the League to Enforce Peace, the President’s first extensive public remarks about U.S. involvement in a peace league; in early 1917 he approved of Wilson’s “peace without victory” speech, which included a discussion of international reform; in July 1918 he and David Hunter Miller, a legal advisor to the American peace delegation, drew up the first U.S. draft of a league’s constitution; and at the Paris Peace Conference House worked closely with Wilson on the League of Nations Commission that wrote the Covenant of the League. In short, House was probably more consistently involved in Wilson’s project to reform international politics than anyone else.

Yet Neu never explains exactly how House conceptualized international reform or its relationship either to British-American relations or to the defeat of Germany. The author’s most detailed discussion of House’s views of a peace league comes when he goes over the House-Miller draft. House, Neu states, wanted “a league of great powers” as he thought equal voting power for small nations was impractical; he also included in his draft collective security guarantees backed up with “diplomatic and economic sanctions against offending nations” (354-55). This brief description of House’s views leaves several key questions unanswered. How did House square his vision of a peace league with his enthusiasm for a British-American alliance? As House worked with Wilson on the league idea from 1916 to 1918, did he assume that Germany would be a member of the new organization? At one point in his narrative, Neu suggests that House and Robert Lansing, Wilson’s second secretary of state, “agreed on most foreign policy issues” (249). Lansing, however, doubted the efficacy of any collective security organization, raising a series of pointed questions about it with Wilson in May 1916. Lansing also opposed allowing non-democratic governments like that of Germany into a league. Did House agree with these arguments? If so, did he go along with Wilson’s international reform plans simply to retain his influence with the President? If not, then why did he tell Wilson in May 1916 that it was not possible to form judicial tribunals to judge international disputes? And why did he add that it was not
possible either to “get the great powers to submit differences among themselves to a council of conciliation”? Did House’s view of international reform change over time? Unfortunately, Neu is silent about these issues.¹

Neu’s lack of engagement with House’s involvement in creating the League continues in his discussion of the Paris Peace Conference. He applauds the League Covenant, claiming that it promised a “radical departure” in international politics, and contrasts it with the French desire for a league that would be “an alliance of the victorious powers” (394, 393). Neu fails to note that neither Russia nor Germany were allowed to join the League, however – for the foreseeable future, it would indeed be a league of the victors. Did House approve of this outcome? Neu does not say. He does briefly discuss House’s work to get the Allies to accept amendments to the Covenant on the right to withdraw from the League, domestic issues, and “the inviolability of the Monroe Doctrine” (407). But he makes no comment about how House perceived these amendments or how they affected the Covenant. Again, exactly how House thought the League would work remains a mystery.

Neu also exaggerates the differences between House’s and Wilson’s approach to the war. In the pre-1917 period, Neu argues, Wilson was basically neutral toward the belligerents, especially after December 1914, as he hoped to mediate an end to the conflict based on a “stand-off” in Europe (215, 162, 219). As Neu himself describes, however, Wilson “tacitly accepted the British maritime system” in late 1914 even though it infringed on American neutral rights; was “unwilling” in early 1915 “to press peace proposals that might threaten Anglo-American understanding;” approved the House-Grey memorandum outlining a plan “to use America’s weight to bring about a pro-Allied peace;” and watered down his late 1916 peace bid after House objected to it (149, 174, 248, 274-75). The President also consistently confronted Germany over submarine warfare more than he pressed Britain over its blockade. Wilson’s actions indicate that he sympathized with the Allies, did not want them to lose the war, and structured his neutrality and mediation policies to support that goal. Neu avoids such a characterization of Wilson’s statecraft, instead suggesting that any pro-Allied tilt in Wilson’s policy was solely due to House’s tendency to mislead the president about the Allies’ willingness to accept U. S. mediation. While it is true that House overstated Britain’s interest in mediation and that he wanted to enter the war on the Allied side, Neu’s own evidence indicates that the president was more anti-German than the author admits.

Once in the war, Wilson, according to Neu, pursued a sensible and forward-looking peace program. The Fourteen Points, he asserts, laid out “bold proposals,” including both progressive peace principles and, “in detail,” America’s position on “territorial claims” (333, 332). In the armistice negotiations, Wilson wanted “moderate and reasonable” terms for Germany, in contrast to the “harsh” conditions pushed by Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France (370). Unfortunately, House, hampered by the timing of the negotiations before America’s power peaked, and by his own ineptness as a negotiator, allowed the Allies to get much of what they wanted, resulting in armistice agreement that was “not . . . in the spirit of the Fourteen Points” (373). At Paris, Wilson continued to battle French efforts, abetted by the feckless, egotistical House, to write a “punitive” settlement against the Germans (393). In the end, the President managed to secure basically fair

and just peace terms for the Germans; they were bitter about the treaty, Neu suggests, not because of anything Wilson did, but because they lost the war.

This is a familiar interpretation of Wilson’s statesmanship and House’s relationship to it. But it is not very persuasive. Far from being “detailed,” the territorial provisions of the Fourteen Points were extremely vague. As Neu notes (without comment), British Prime Minister David Lloyd George observed during the armistice negotiations that the Fourteen Points, aside from the freedom of the seas clause, were “sufficiently elastic to enable us to put our own interpretation upon them” (369). The armistice terms, moreover, were not exactly a surprise to Wilson. As Neu recounts in passing, Wilson “wanted an armistice that would prevent a renewal of hostilities by Germany;” he had in fact included military advisers in the armistice talks in order to achieve that end (370). How such an armistice could simultaneously be “moderate and reasonable” is unclear. Wilson also knew of Foch’s proposed terms no later than 27 October and did little to oppose them, focusing instead on conflicts with the Allies over freedom of the seas and the League of Nations. Essentially, Wilson got the armistice terms he wanted: he rendered it impossible for Germany to resume the war while avoiding full-blown invasion and occupation of the Reich. Likewise, at Paris, Wilson readily agreed to the disarmament of Germany; German war guilt; strategic borders for Poland and Czechoslovakia that weakened Germany; Germany’s loss of colonies; Saarland coal for France; and, finally, Germany’s exclusion from the League of Nations. Certainly Wilson opposed the detachment of the Rhineland from Germany and clashed with the Allies over reparations. But the portrait of him painted by Neu, of a “moderate” struggling to “prevail” at Paris over the grasping, vengeful Allies, is oversimplified.

Still, in many ways Neu’s book is an impressive achievement. The author skillfully illuminates Colonel House’s political operations, which adds to our understanding of progressive-era politics. Neu also provides probably the best analysis yet of the evolving relationship between Wilson and House. If this volume falls short in other ways, it is nevertheless a major work that should be read by anyone interested in the Wilson era.
It is somewhat extraordinary that no full-scale biography of Edward M. House has hitherto been published, even though a century has now elapsed since he played such a prominent role in international as well as American history. This gap in the historiography cannot be attributed to lack of sources. On the contrary, it is more likely that potential biographers have been daunted by the sheer amount of relevant archival material. The collection of House’s own papers at Yale University is evidently voluminous, containing not only his extensive correspondence but also two memoirs of his early life and almost three thousand typewritten pages of the diary he dictated to his secretary between September 1912 and December 1921. But chronicling and interpreting House’s role as President Woodrow Wilson’s closest associate requires going beyond his own version of it (the diary has long been recognized as an unreliable as well as indispensable source). In seeking to present a more detached and comprehensive view of House’s activities and how they were regarded by others, and of his whole life from his origins in Texas to the post-Wilson years (when he kept up his connections with political figures at home and abroad and sought to shape the way history regarded him), Charles E. Neu has consulted a truly formidable range of archival collections and other written sources. He has also made use of oral history, not only exploiting the resources of the Columbia University collection but also himself conducting several interviews, including some with House’s daughters. Neu recalls that when he embarked on the biography he was warned by the doyen of Wilson scholars, Arthur S. Link, that he was taking on “an enormous project … that will involve you in six or eight years of research” (513). Given the thoroughness with which Neu has undertaken the task, it is not surprising that it has taken much longer than that to bring it to a conclusion. But the result was well worth waiting for.

The absence of a biography has not, of course, meant that House has escaped the attention of historians. In person an emollient figure, he has aroused strong and conflicting emotions among those who have written about him. In good part this is because his relationship with Wilson, for several years so close, broke down in 1919, and historians since the 1920s have taken sides in assessing the causes and consequences of this breach. Ray Stannard Baker, who had been Wilson’s press secretary in Paris and became his authorized biographer, attributed House’s loss of influence to his conduct of the peace negotiations while Wilson was in the United States, in particular his yielding to the French demand for a preliminary treaty without the League Covenant.1 Baker’s version was challenged by Charles Seymour, editor of *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, who downplayed the extent to which the relationship between the two men changed. Seymour also suggested that Wilson would have handled the attempt to secure Senate approval of the League of Nations much better if he had not been cut off from House’s advice by those who controlled access to the disabled President after his stroke in October 1919 (an implicit reference to Mrs. Edith Wilson).2 Decades later, the Danish historian, Inga Floto, in a thorough and critical analysis of House’s role throughout the peace conference, concluded that Baker’s interpretation was essentially correct. Originally published by a Danish press in 1973, Floto’s work was re-published as a companion volume to *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* in 1980. In a Foreword to that edition, Link not only praised her account highly but also used it as the basis for a much wider

---


denigration of House’s diplomatic ability and loyalty to Wilson.\(^3\) In a less extreme form, this negative assessment found expression in John Milton Cooper’s recent biography of the president, but House’s cause had meanwhile been championed in a rather sketchy life of him by the British writer Godfrey Hodgson (which is not included in Neu’s bibliography). Hodgson echoes the views of many of the European diplomats who met House in seeing him as “more realistic” than the president and possessed of “greater common sense.”\(^4\)

In several ways, Neu enables us to put such partisanship into a wider and more illuminating perspective. His detailed reconstruction of House’s early years and of his activities before he met Wilson enables us to gain a much fuller appreciation of his qualities and abilities as an independent actor. With inherited wealth augmented by business acumen, House was able to devote his energies to the world of politics that had fascinated him since boyhood. Eschewing office himself, he was very effective in managing the campaigns of those he chose to support – Neu sees all the governors of Texas between 1894 and 1906 as his “protégés” (ix). Neu stresses that it was the processes of politics – the tactics and personalities -that fascinated House. His success derived from his talent for managing personal relationships, not through an engagement with political issues and controversies. Tiring of Texas politics in the 1900s, House sought to establish relations with national Democratic leaders, notably William Jennings Bryan, and he came to spend more of his time in New York. He also began making annual trips to Europe, mingling with the socially prominent; his eldest daughter was presented at the Court of St James (46).

This back history helps us to see that it was not only because of his skill in winning the trust of those he sought to cultivate that House was able so quickly to establish a close and intimate friendship with Wilson after they first met in November 1911. It was also because House’s much longer and wider experience of practical politics and his acquaintance with the European scene were assets that Wilson valued and drew upon. House’s remarkably influential role in helping Wilson choose his cabinet testifies to this. If the impression one gains from Neu’s account is of a much more equal relationship, particularly in the early days, than is portrayed by Wilson’s admirers, this is because it reminds us of the limited nature of Wilson’s political experience when he entered the White House.

In general, however, Neu’s detailed narrative and perceptive analysis of the evolving relationship between the two men does not much change the broad outlines of the picture presented by Link and Cooper. Like them, Neu argues that, on his missions to Europe during the period of American neutrality, House misled Wilson by suggesting in his reports that the belligerent powers were much more favorably disposed to the president’s mediation than they were, and that he also went beyond his instructions by assuring Allied leaders that he and Wilson supported their cause. But, unlike Link in particular, Neu doubts that the Colonel was being consciously disloyal to his friend and patron. There is no doubt that House was strongly pro-allied (even though he did not want the war to leave Russia in a dominant position). Following the Lusitania sinking, he


urged U.S. entry into the war, and, although he later retreated from this position, he continued to view the prospect with much greater equanimity than did Wilson.

The question is whether House was justified in believing that Wilson shared his views regarding America’s own interest in an allied victory. In his recent study, Ross Kennedy argues that the President’s view was really the same as that of his counselor, citing as evidence Wilson’s repeated delegation of discretionary authority to House and his acceptance of the pro-allied terms of the memorandum that House signed with British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey in the spring of 1916. It seems clear, however, that Wilson went along with this secret and conditional agreement only because he saw it as a way to bring the European war to an early end, and by pressing for that goal later in the year in a more public and even-handed way, he provoked House to open disagreement (270-1, 274-5). House feared that Wilson’s peace offensive would align U.S policy with Germany’s, but Wilson, as he made clear, was more concerned to forestall a German submarine campaign that was likely to force the United States into a war which most Americans were very reluctant to enter – as the recent presidential election had shown. As Neu observes, “Wilson was less committed than his adviser to the Allied cause and more aware of the domestic pressures to stay out of the war” (219). Throughout, indeed, the differences of perspective between House and Wilson can be seen as arising from the former’s greater absorption in the European situation and the latter’s greater concern with domestic American opinion.

Neu’s full, perceptive, and remarkably balanced account of the House-Wilson relationship is central to this book, but it contains much more. The story of House’s life and the assessment of his character is set in wider contexts, with the Texas in which he grew up and the onset and evolution of the war in Europe being described with particular vividness. This broader focus enables Neu to paint nice pen portraits of many of the other personalities involved, including the leaders of the belligerent powers. Lightening the detail of the narrative, these features enrich a book that, despite its considerable length, is a pleasure to read. It is also a very handsome volume, with many interesting photographs. Most importantly, though, the perceptiveness and balance of Neu’s judgments and the comprehensiveness of his research make this work required reading for anyone seriously interested in either the Wilson presidency or World War I.

I am very grateful to Professors Rodney Carlisle, Justus Doenecke, Ross Kennedy, and John Thompson for reading what is, after all, a long book, and for their thoughtful comments.

I especially appreciate Professor Thompson’s sensitive reading of *Colonel House* and the skillful way in which he places my interpretation of House in historiographical perspective. Potential biographers of House have been put off, I suspect, not only by the voluminous archival material, but also because a study of his life requires a peculiar combination of interests—late nineteenth-century Texas history, World War I, the Wilson presidency, and biography as a form of historical writing. Specialized studies of House have been invaluable to me and to other historians, but a full biography puts his activities during the Wilson years in a somewhat different perspective and reminds us, as Thompson suggests, that Wilson, especially at the start of his presidency, badly needed an adviser with House’s range of experiences. House quickly pushed his friends and allies into important positions in the administration and also, through his annual trips to Europe—beginning in 1913—established himself as the President’s most important diplomat. If Wilson had been able to place more trusted and experienced diplomats in the key capitals of Europe (especially London), and if his secretaries of state had been more capable than William Jennings Bryan or Robert Lansing, House’s role in wartime diplomacy would have been less significant.

Thompson also notes that this biography deals with far more than the Wilson presidency and World War I. It is also the story of how a wealthy Texan—who became a man of destiny—lived his life. It places the various phases of his life in historical context, and conveys to the reader, I hope, a sense of all the personal relationships that sustained House over the years.

My thanks to Professor Doenecke’s review of what were for him the high points of the book. He offers a summary of the views of House’s detractors, and points out some of the minor mistakes which hopefully will be corrected in a second edition. By going through all of the House collection at Yale—rather than only looking at selected files—I was able to reveal aspects of House’s beliefs—his attraction to spiritualism and his genteel anti-Semitism—that others have missed. But there are some aspects of his career that I was not able to cover as thoroughly as I would have liked, such as House’s relationship with progressive journalists and with the German-American propagandist George Sylvester Viereck. The manuscript that I initially submitted to Oxford University Press was about 280,000 words, 80,000 words longer than the one that was published. In this longer version of *Colonel House* I covered some peripheral topics—such as House’s collaboration with Viereck in the 1930s—and also quoted more extensively from his diary. Timothy Bent, my editor at Oxford University Press, convinced me that the narrative moved too slowly and that a 280,000 book would be too long to appeal to most readers. As I worked through the manuscript and made the cuts (trying to ignore how much time it took to write the pages I was eliminating) I realized that he was right. I wanted the story of House’s remarkable life to be accessible both to scholars and non-specialists.

Professor Carlisle raises an interesting point about the relationship of the author to the primary sources with which he works, and regrets that the narrative does not move deeper into House’s Texas years and the “psychological roots” of the House-Wilson relationship. The main source for House’s early years is his *Reminiscences*, which he dictated in the summer of 1916, and his *Memories*, dictated in the summer of 1929.¹

¹ House Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Yale University Library.
After he sold his Austin mansion in 1914, House and his private secretary Fanny Denton discarded many of the letters he kept there. Even so, it still seems to me that the outlines of his role in Texas politics are quite clear, although I do wish I had had access to letters that would have revealed more about his personal life in the late nineteenth century. In fact, the House collection at Yale, despite its bulk, has little information on his relationship with his wife Loulie and Fanny Denton. Wilson left many extraordinary letters to the two women, Ellen and Edith Wilson, who were most important in his life; House left only a few handwritten notes from his wife and private secretary.

In contrast to House’s Texas years, which I cover in only fifty pages, the sources for the collaboration between House and Wilson are full, consisting of the many letters they exchanged and the lengthy accounts of their conversations recorded in House’s diary. But House was not an introspective man, while the President—who was much more in touch with his deepest feeling than his counselor—lacked the time or energy to probe the reasons for his friendship with House and, with the collapse of his health in the fall of 1919, he never had the opportunity—even if he had been so inclined—to write a memoir. Over the years I read widely in the literature of what was once called psycho-history, and certainly this scholarship raised my sensitivity to various phases of the human life-cycle. But I never found any obvious way in which the insights from this literature could be applied to the House-Wilson relationship. It is always possible, of course, that future scholars will be able to take the material I have gathered and do more with it. It is worth noting, however, that neither of Wilson’s recent biographers—Scott Berg or John Milton Cooper—explains the House-Wilson relationship in a way that would satisfy Professor Carlisle.

Finally, it seems to me that the narrative is quite clear on the reasons for the House-Wilson break. As House traveled to Europe year after year and met virtually all of the leaders of the belligerent governments (especially members of the British ruling elite), he became convinced that his diplomatic skills were superior to those of the President, and that he ought to lead the American delegation to the peace conference. And Wilson’s marriage to Edith Galt changed the emotional dynamics in the inner circle around the president and led Wilson to be more critical of House’s behavior.

Professor Kennedy appreciates the book’s analysis of the House-Wilson relationship, but is dissatisfied with its analysis of House’s ideas about foreign policy. It would no doubt be convenient if House were a systematic thinker about the international system and how it ought to be changed. But he was far more interested in people than in ideas; the various inconsistencies and contradictions of Wilson’s peace program never seemed to bother him. It was Wilson—who was a far more impressive thinker than House—who, as the war progressed, laid out a vision for a new world order, but he had neither the time nor the energy (his health was always fragile) to fill out his ideas about the transformation of the international order. House went along with this vision partly out of conviction, partly out of a desire to maintain his relationship with the president. Occasionally, as in the case of great-power domination of the League of Nations, House disagreed with Wilson, but he never pushed his disagreements all that far. Nor did House ever focus on the weaknesses of the concept of collective security or on the workings of the League. During the Wilson presidency he was extraordinarily busy, conferring with people every day of the week, maintaining a large correspondence, dictating his diary in the evening, responding to Wilson’s often last-minute demands, traveling to Europe, leading an active social life, and keeping in touch with his two daughters. And in his long career as an elder

statesman, he retained a strong faith in the League but never displayed any interest in the theories on which it was based.

Professor Kennedy and I have different approaches to the leaders of this period. In his book, *The Will to Believe*, he notes the “profound ambiguities and contradictions” of Wilson’s peace program, and also describes the “failure of Wilson’s diplomacy.”3 I am inclined to be more charitable in my judgment of House and Wilson, keeping in mind the enormous challenges they faced and their lack of institutional support. They were, after all, politicians who were preoccupied with holding on to power and who were overwhelmed by the rush of events. Rather than hold them to an impossibly high standard of coherence, I tried in *Colonel House* to move beyond our contemporary preoccupations and to try to understand the world these political leaders lived over 100 years ago.

---