

greater ideal could there be? What greater achievement could he have won? . . .

We are disloyal to our ideals if we refuse to let our country enlist in this cause.

INDIVIDUALS AND NATIONS

One word more, Mr. President. I suppose the argument has often been made; but it seems to me that in its simplest form a league of nations bears a close analogy to civil society. Democracy is a league of men, banded together for mutual protection. And they yield certain of their natural rights for the purpose of establishing this democracy as ordered government. In a league of nations the nations must necessarily yield some of the exclusive rights which they now hold for the same purpose—their mutual protection. Is there anything wrong with that? Is the right of the individual more sacred than the right of the nation? But grant for the moment that it is. It is yielded willingly in the interest of organized government, organized democracies, where all have a voice and where all thrive; it is their self-determination, freely given, and all abide by the result of the expression of that voice, and the minorities are given protection. They are not destroyed, as in the old days of the Crusaders. And you may recall in this connection the story of the Crusader, who was told on his deathbed that he had to repent and forgive his enemies, and he naively responded, "Why, I have no enemies; I have killed them all." But a democracy respects the minority which does not quite agree with the majority government, and that is a little sacrifice they must make in order to preserve the peace of society.

Now, the United States, going into a compact of this kind will, let us concede to the objecting Senators, yield apart of what they regard as their exclusive rights about which they are very tender. But is not the prize worth the game? Is not the peace of the world worth the sacrifice? [Applause.] Is there anything more terrible than unleashed human beings destroying each other under circumstances of greatest cruelty? War, we are told, burdens a people with debt to go down from one generation to another, like the curse of original sin. It wipes the people from the earth as though Heaven had repented the making of man. Its evils can not be written, even in human blood. And our campaign is against war. And in that campaign every man is enlisted as a patriot, just as much as every man was enlisted in our recent campaign, where his loyalty was never questioned, to carry the Stars and Stripes, standing for equal rights and justice throughout the benighted countries of Europe and bringing hope

and succor to those who for centuries have been the victims of oppression.

But we are disloyal to our ideals if we refuse to let our country enlist in this cause. We are all, by sacrifice and concession, working for a perfect State at home. The league is working for a more perfect world. And, my friends, just as the organization of society has abolished violence in the settlement of disputes and set up legislatures and courts, so this league of nations, if it carries its purpose through to the finish by creating international tribunals, will abolish war, which is only violence on a broader scale. Let us not dismiss this question by saying it belongs only to the sentimental. Sentiment is the best thing in the world and the difficulty is in living up to it. Human nature is the meanest thing about us, and we are always trying to keep it down. That is the function of society; it is as well the function of the league.

Viewpoint 15B

The United States Should Not Join the League of Nations (1919)

Lawrence Sherman (1858–1939)

INTRODUCTION *The League of Nations was the centerpiece of President Woodrow Wilson's vision for reshaping the world order and America's place in it. Wilson succeeded in incorporating the league's creation within the Treaty of Versailles, negotiated in 1919 by the nations that had fought World War I. But the president faced significant opposition in the U.S. Senate, which had to ratify the treaty. Opponents contended that the League represented a major break from America's traditional isolationist foreign policy of self-protective neutrality and avoidance of foreign entanglements. A faction of senators, dubbed the "irreconcilables," was steadfastly and philosophically opposed to American participation in the League of Nations. One of these senators was Lawrence Sherman, a Republican from Illinois who served in the Senate from 1913 to 1921. In the following viewpoint, excerpted from remarks on the Senate floor on March 13, 1919, Sherman stakes out a position of classic American isolationism and emphasizes the danger of burdening the new nation of America with the conflicts of the old nations of Europe.*

What contrasts does Sherman draw between the United States and Europe? What attitudes about racial and ethnic groups does he reveal? What distinction does he make between the decision to enter World War I and the decision to enter the League of Nations?

Nearly four months ago the belligerent nations signed the armistice that saved Germany from a

From Lawrence Sherman, *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st sess. (March 3, 1919), pp. 4865–57.

destructive atonement for her crimes. In that time the responsible agents of the United States of America have not occupied themselves in ending the war and writing terms of peace upon which Germany shall pay the penalty of acknowledged defeat in her attempts against civilized mankind. They have busied themselves with an effort to create a superstate above the governments and peoples of nations to exercise supersovereignty over both nations and their individual citizens and subjects.

Advantage is taken of a wish for universal and permanent peace to present this device as a certain instrumentality to that desired end. . . .

[But] the constitution of the league of nations must be submitted to that scrutiny which will assay its service as a charter prescribing a rule of conduct among nations and whether obedience can be secured. It must be tested by the peoples grouped under sovereign governments to ascertain how it will affect them and what burdens are likely to be assumed; what measure of relief is practicable. Does this document give it, or if not, what can be written reasonably calculated to accomplish that measure of relief? These are inquiries which merit the highest effort of which this Senate and the American Nation are capable. Such a momentous issue seldom challenges free people for decision. . . .

All nations with organic government sufficient to be dealt with as responsible powers can be assembled by their voluntary act under a code of international law. Twenty-six nations so obligated themselves in 1899 in the first Hague convention. Forty-four nations were signatory in 1907 to the second Hague convention. When the armistice was signed November 11, 1918, all the warring nations were contracting parties agreeing in 1907 to arbitrate differences as a substitute for war. Every outrage perpetrated by Germany she had bound herself not to commit. Her deliberate policy of frightfulness she had solemnly covenanted should never be pursued. The indispensable end to be sought, therefore, is not to multiply international agreements, but to discover means of compelling or persuading nations to keep them when made. . . .

CONFLICTS IN EUROPE

Europe contains many independent sovereign nations. Some submerged nationalities, overwhelmed by wars reaching back some centuries, will undoubtedly rise to reassumed sovereignty. With the latter we may be concerned. They might be converted into warlike forces against us if subject to a dominant government, our enemy. Much European bloodshed has had its origin in commercial rivalry resulting in territorial aggression. It may be repeated. Most wars of modern times have begun in Europe. Kings have fought to gain thrones for their kin and subordinates. Ancient feuds of reigning

families have sent armies into many a disastrous field. Ambitious men have risen to shake continents with their struggles for power.

That is all to end, however, because we now hear that kings are no more and the people will administer all future governments. We fervently pray it may be so. Yet some of the people we are asked by this league to invest with sovereign power over us may well engage our concern.

Russia is the fountainhead of bloody chaos and the attempted dissolution of every civil and domestic tie dear to the Anglo-Saxon race. Germany may be passing from despotic rule to class government founded on Marxian socialism.

The constitution of the league of nations is a Pandora's box of evil to empty up on the American people the aggregated calamities of the world.

The restless elements of Europe, inured to violence and disliking the monotony of private industry, are always explosive material. Erecting them into states does not insure tranquillity. To all such people, if they have not wisdom and virtue, self-restraint and justice to the minority, liberty is the greatest of all possible evils, not only to them but to the world.

If we ratify this league in its present form, we invest such people with equal power over us. Their vices and misfortunes react upon us. Their follies and crimes become in turn a menace, because we have given them an equal vote in the league with our own country. It may become not a means of removing a menace but of creating one beyond our power either to abate or to remove.

The constitution of the league of nations is a Pandora's box of evil to empty upon the American people the aggregated calamities of the world, and only time is the infallible test even of our own institutions.

WORLD WAR I

When the United States by joint resolution of Congress entered the war April 6, 1917, we signed no pact with the Governments arrayed against the central powers. The American felt in his heart Germany was a menace to the free governments of the world. There was an instinctive horror at Germany's methods of making war and her avowed policy of frightfulness. It was known she aimed at world dominion. Those in authority at this Capitol knew we must fight the danger alone or jointly with the allies.

We chose to make common cause against a common danger. To do so we abdicated no sovereign power. We bound ourselves in no perpetual alliance to draw the sword whenever and so long as a majority of European governments voted it upon us. Our practical expression in this crisis was to reserve for ourselves the power to decide when and how long a controversy between two or more nations in some quarter of the globe was of such magnitude as to warrant our interference even to the extremity of war.

A working status was in fact established between our Government and the allies. Under it the war was fought successfully to the armistice of November 11, 1918. No nation surrendered its sovereignty. They voluntarily combined their strength against the common peril. It was a union of equals, and each was in an equally common self-defense bound to give all it had if the struggle demanded it. This is the key to any league of nations that will survive the ephemeral theories and impossible yearnings of the alleged friends of humanity who are more fertile in phrase making than successful in the practical affairs of men. . . .

The actual working alliance between our Government and Germany's European enemies . . . implies no loss of sovereignty and no violence to national sentiment. It is a cooperative expression of the law of self-defense, an American doctrine on which every patriot can join his fellow man. It impairs no constitutional power of Congress. It invades no executive domain, and it leaves our Government the responsible instrumentality to direct the will of our people. We escape the perils of surrendering our country to the mandates of a majority of the Governments of the Old World by this course.

The same public opinion in a free government that would unite our people under the proposed league would lead to concerted action under a treaty whose obligation rests in good faith. If public opinion does not support the league, it can not send armies into the field. America will not sacrifice her lives and her treasure unless her heart is in the war. No mere language written on parchment can in practice make any compact between sovereign nations more binding than a treaty unless some supersovereign force be contemplated as a coercive agent upon the American Government and its people. Force converts such a league into a tyranny and international oppressor. Such a compact becomes the source of universal war, not the means of permanent peace. . . .

ARTICLE 10

In article 10 [of the Covenant (constitution) of the league of nations] the members of the league bind themselves to preserve each other, and the executive council is required to advise upon the means by which all the league members shall be protected against external aggression which will impair their territorial integrity and political independence. If this article avails anything it binds our Government, its Army, its Navy, its people, and its Treasury to defend Great Britain's colonial dependencies any place in the world. A like obligation attends us for France, Italy, and every other league member. England's territorial possessions are in every part of the globe. Russia is a vast area with 180,000,000 people, and Germany with 70,000,000. The United Kingdom of Great Britain has in Europe fewer than 50,000,000 population. More than 300,000,000 souls acknowledge the supremacy of England's flag in Asia. Great Britain feels, as seldom before, the need of help to maintain her territorial integrity. . . .

I decline to vote to bind the American people to maintain the boundary lines and political independence of every nation that may be a league member. It ought to be done only when the question menaces our peace and safety. It must be a treaty uniting our associated nations in the mutual and common bonds of self-defense. It becomes, then a league of sovereigns acting with the common purpose of self-preservation. The law of nations is like the law of individuals. Self-defense is the first law and is justified before every tribunal known to civilized man. . . .

This league, Mr. President, sends the angel of death to every American home. In every voice to ratify it we can hear the beating of his wing. There will be none to help; no decrees from omniscience will direct us to sprinkle with blood the lintel of every American home. If this supersovereignty be created, conscription will take from all, and we will bear the white man's burden in every quarter of the world.

FOR FURTHER READING

- Robert E. Hennings, *James D. Phelan and the Wilson Progressives of California*. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Herbert F. Margulies, *The Mild Reservationists and the League of Nations Controversy in the Senate*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.
- Ralph A. Stone, *The Irreconcilables*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970.
- Ralph A. Stone, ed., *Wilson and the League of Nations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.