



H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews

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Robert W. Tucker. *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914-1917.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007. 272 pp. \$39.50. ISBN: 978-0-8139-2629-2 (cloth).

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Contents

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by Christopher L. Ball, H-Diplo	7
Review by John Milton Cooper, Jr., University of Wisconsin-Madison	13
Review by Ross Kennedy, Illinois State University.....	16
Review by Elizabeth McKillen, University of Maine.....	20
Review by Klaus Schwabe, Emeritus, Aachen University of Technology.....	24
Author's Response by Robert W. Tucker	27

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Aspiring Ph.D. candidates in U.S. diplomacy in the 1960s received a full introduction to the literature on Woodrow Wilson's leadership of the United States into WWI and his ensuing quest with the Versailles Peace settlement and the League of Nations. From skimming Charles Tansill and the post-WWI revisionists to Thomas Bailey's classic studies, we moved on to the post-WWII assessments of Edward H. Buehrig, Ernest May's *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (1959), and Arthur Link's multi-volume study that followed Wilson almost letter by letter through the perils of neutrality into war.¹ These studies brought up reminders about earlier studies on Thomas Jefferson and James Madison grappling with issues of neutrality leading up to the War of 1812 and recollections about orders-in-council, blockades, and contraband. And then we moved on to the "Good War" of WWII, cheered FDR's un-Wilson like maneuverings on the neutrality legislation of the 1930s, and watched the Cold War transformation of neutrality into a policy of neutralism advanced by third world leaders against the wishes of U.S. leaders.

Robert W. Tucker is well-situated to provide us with an interpretive meditation on Wilson and the difficulties and dilemmas that he faced in advancing a traditional American policy of neutrality and isolation. As Professor Emeritus of American Diplomacy at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Professor Tucker has influenced students of diplomacy and the attentive public with books and articles ranging from Thomas Jefferson to George W. Bush and the Iraq War. Tucker points out that half a century ago he published *The Law of War and Neutrality at Sea* (1957) which focused on the consequences of WWI on the institution of neutrality, and that his more recent study of the statecraft of Thomas Jefferson and Jefferson's efforts to deal with neutrality revived his interest in Wilson.²

The reviewers have significant books on aspects of Wilson's diplomacy or forthcoming studies and they appreciate Tucker's study of neutrality and his close reading of Wilson's failed efforts to keep the U.S. out of the maelstrom of WWI. They also welcome the critical perspective that he applies to Wilson's leadership and his effort to suggest that the President had some alternatives in dealing with the Allies of Great Britain and France and the Central Powers led by Germany even if they question the feasibility of some of the author's suggestions. The reviewers also raise a number of questions concerning Tucker's close focus on Wilson and his thoughts at the expense of more analysis of the context in which Wilson made his decisions and different historical approaches.

¹ See Tucker's Chapter III "Interpretations" for a historiographical discussion on the literature dealing with neutrality and U.S. entry into WWI.

² I might add that when Bradford Perkins reached Wilson and the 1914-1917 period in his lecture course on U.S. diplomacy at the University of Michigan, the attentive graduate students in the class of over 100 undergraduates noted that Wilson reminded Perkins of Jefferson and the latter received some final critical remarks from the podium.

1.) Tucker's depiction of Wilson does not attract extensive disagreement. Christopher Ball, for example, notes that Tucker's Wilson is neither psychologically flawed nor "incompetent or inherently indecisive," nor an "inspired visionary." (1) In contrast with his chief advisers, Secretary of State Robert Lansing and Colonel Edward House who definitely wanted the Allies to win and the U.S. to at least avoid a confrontation with Great Britain over its actions against neutral trade with Germany, if not join the war on London's side, Tucker's depiction of Wilson attempts to keep the U.S. out of the war and defend neutral rights receives a sympathetic assessment from the reviewers. Klaus Schwabe, however, does question whether Wilson, as a "practical idealist," readily adjusted his principles to changing circumstances. Ross Kennedy questions whether Tucker has given sufficient weight to Wilson's concerns about Germany in his willingness to accept British policies infringing on neutral rights and in his endorsement of Colonel House's negotiations with the British in 1915.

2.) Tucker's central thesis on Wilson's handling of the difficulties raised by WWI before 1917 challenges both Ernest May's perspective that war was coming with Germany, irregardless of Wilson's policies on neutrality, when Germany had enough submarines to isolate Great Britain, and Arthur Link's view that Wilson did as well as he could to be neutral within the context of international law, British control of the seas, and U.S. interests and public opinion. Tucker suggests that Wilson was slow to articulate a policy on the war and recognize the consequences of implementing policies that favored the Allies. Admittedly faced with traditions and pressures to take an isolationist stance towards another European war and a desire to defend neutral rights at odds with isolationism, Wilson tried to maintain both and stay out of the war. As Tucker critically notes, Wilson found himself failing to maintain a neutral stance with respect to acceptance of British policies on contraband, such as shutting off American food shipments to Germany, and the British blockade and mining of the North Sea as well as other actions. On the other hand, Wilson insisted on the right of Americans to travel into Germany's war zone on neutral and belligerent passenger liners and merchant vessels. Ross Kennedy and Ball note, with some doubts on its possible effectiveness, Tucker's suggestion that Wilson had the alternative of defending neutral rights vis-à-vis both sides if he backed it up with an effective policy of military preparedness from the start to impress both sides before he turned to mediation, most significantly in the House-Greg memorandum negotiations with Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign secretary, which went against a traditional isolationist stance.

3.) Tucker does note how Wilson's firm stance in principle on the submarine does lead him to back off by accepting the submarine as a legitimate instrument of naval warfare and pursuing negotiations with Germany to try and avoid a crisis that would lead to war. (127) What Wilson insists on in negotiations over the sinking of the *Lusitania*, *Arabic*, and *Sussex*, is that Germany followed pre-1914 international law practice of cruiser warfare in which the attacking vessel had to provide for the safety of the passengers and crew and neither sink ships without warning nor just put people in life-boats at sea and abandon them. A question that this issue raises is who were the Americans insistent on entering the waters of German's war zone and risking their lives on passenger lines and merchant vessels? In *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*, the subject of a forthcoming H-Diplo roundtable, Kristin Hoganson explores the significant

expansion of American interest in and participation, both in person and in fictive travel clubs, in overseas travel, with England and Europe as key destinations, as well as the acquisition of foreign products from domestic furniture and display items to foreign cuisine. If the Americans traveling into the war zone and the Americans at home who supported Wilson's stance on the right of Americans to travel, represented members of Hoganson's consumer constituency, it would add significant context on this issue.

4.) Several of the reviewers suggest that more context is needed for understanding Wilson and the American response to the war. John Milton Cooper, for example, notes a "sense of the context in which the actors operated," with emphasis on three major points starting with the beginnings of the war and the British blockade. Cooper stresses a "sense of removal from the war on the part of the American public and most of its leaders" which influenced Wilson, House, Lansing and Bryan's "desire to avoid unnecessary and perhaps costly trouble, with no offsetting benefits." (2) A second point is the American reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania* which Cooper describes as "that era's 9/11" but producing an overwhelming anti-war response that reinforced Wilson's own conflicting desires to defend America's neutral rights and avoid war. (2-3) Cooper's third point refers to the year after the *Lusitania* crisis and increasing public criticism of Great Britain over the blacklist of American firms and Ireland.

5.) Elizabeth McKillen suggests that Tucker "seriously underestimates the importance of broader economic, social, cultural, and political factors in shaping Wilson's foreign policies." (2-3) McKillen recommends that Tucker give more weight to William Appleman Williams' perspective linking economic and security considerations, although Tucker does note at several points that Wilson and his few advisers recognized that "economic interests had tied the United States to the Allied cause. It was not the only tie, nor even the most important, but after seven months of war its ever-increasing significance was apparent." (105, 54) If Tucker does not find Wilson and his advisers discussing economic concerns in their deliberations, letters and memos, should he, nevertheless, give more weight to this factor in Wilson's policies?

6.) McKillen also would welcome more attention to the "new literature on World War I in the fields of social and cultural history" and gender issues. (3-4) In noting extensive criticism of Wilson's pro-allied policies from groups on the left, McKillen suggests that this may have contributed to why Wilson persisted in his efforts to negotiate with Germany and became more neutral and critical towards London. As McKillen points out, "gendered posturing and language" was widespread in the political culture of the late 19th-early 20th century. "Given Wilson's own frequent use of gendered language," McKillen suggests, "it seems plausible to assume that concerns about appearing manly in the public eye played at least some role in his obsession with defending the nation's honor and with his unwillingness to compromise on the principle of the rights of neutrals." (4) Does gender, for example, help explain why Wilson as opposed to Bryan insists on the right of Americans to travel on belligerent passenger and merchant vessels?

Participants:

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Elizabeth McKillen is a professor of History at the University of Maine. She is the author of *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy: 1914-1924* (1995) and many articles on U.S. labor internationalism. Currently, she is at work on two book projects: one on the subject of U.S. Labor and American Empire, 1898-1920 and another on U.S. Labor and the International Labour Organization. McKillen received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1987.

H-Diplo Roundtable

Klaus Schwabe is Emeritus, Aachen University of Technology. He completed his Ph.D. at Freiburg in 1958 under the direction of Gerhard Ritter, and his Habilitation in 1969. His teaching career included positions at Freiburg, Chair at Frankfurt University, and Chair at Aachen University of Technology until his retirement in 1997. He has written numerous monographs including *Woodrow Wilson* (1972); *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking 1918-1919* (1985); and *World Power and World Order, from 1898 to the Present. A History of the Twentieth Century* (in German) (2005) which was featured as an H-Diplo roundtable in May, 2007.

During World War I, the relationship among two long-standing U.S. policies — isolation from European political-military commitments and protection of neutral trading rights — and President Woodrow Wilson’s emergent post-war peace policy clashed irreconcilably. Wilson abandoned both isolation and neutrality, which were in conflict due to British and German naval practices, and chose war in order to shape the post-conflict peace. The result was failure on all three fronts: the United States resumed isolation and rejected the League of Nations system and, by the 1930s, denied itself the traditional rights of neutrals that before it had championed. The United States had isolation without benefits. Tucker presents Wilson as a frustrated statesman-tailor who, presented with repeated rips in the traditional fabric of United States policy, rends its apart after his muddled mending fails.

Christopher Ball is completing his Ph.D. at Columbia University entitled “Ideologies of Security: Visions of Democracy and International Order in the Making of United States Grand Strategy Policy.” Ball has been a lecturer at the University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins, and Iowa State University. He is an editor at H-Diplo and currently supervises book reviews and the general list.

This book focuses attention on an oft-neglected subject of U.S. foreign policy: the *reasons* for entering World War I. Historians have covered the period well, but the underlying policy conflicts are treated as almost obvious.¹ The political science wing of the international relations (IR) field has examined the European decisionmaking in 1914 intensively, but has largely ignored the U.S. side. Tucker embarks across this terrain, focusing on the strategic and diplomatic dilemmas with which Wilson wrestled and his advisors anguished, with Wilson often as much a source of the latter’s troubles as their foreign counterparts. For different reasons, this book will have appeal for the current wave of IR scholars interested in norms as either causal or constitutive factors. Tucker traces Wilson’s efforts to uphold and strengthen existing norms covering neutral rights and non-combatant immunity against British and German efforts to exploit ambiguities and omissions in formal treaty law. Tucker also restores attention to neutrality as an American tradition and as an international legal concept, one that is usually misunderstood in terms either of Cold War-era non-alignment or abstention from involvement with belligerence

Tucker does not present Wilson as incompetent or inherently indecisive; this is not the common-place account that Wilson’s psychological flaws harm his policy-making. But neither does Tucker endorse the view that Wilson was an inspired visionary. Rather, Wilson is confronted by bad choices: asserting neutral rights would put the United States on a path to war with Germany and at least economic conflict with the United Kingdom and France. Defending neutral rights would mean, in effect, abandoning isolation. The alternative to economic and military confrontation was mediating a peace settlement, which again would breach the isolationist tradition, even if the belligerents had been

¹ For example, Thomas J. Knock writes “the vicissitudes of neutrality have been thoroughly treated elsewhere” in his *To End All Wars* (Princeton, 1992), 33.

willing to do so (55, 85). It is important to stress, as Tucker does (79), that Wilson's choices were not inevitable ones. Sticking by a policy of unwavering defense of neutral rights along with increased but ill-defined arms program, Tucker argues that Wilson *might* have preserved neutrality while sacrificing isolation to a degree by stepping in to mediate a peace that entailed some return to the pre-war status quo (82). Wilson forsook mediation because he wanted to preserve isolation, not because the prospects for successful mediation were low. By acquiescing in deed to British interference with neutral rights, Wilson set the United States on a course that would at some point entail war with Germany (86).

This is the first point at which I part with Tucker. A strategy of deterrence by armament to preserve neutral rights was unlikely to work for five reasons. First, the naval requirements for a strategy would have required years, not months, of construction. In August 1914, Britain had 45 capital ships built or being built while the United States had 14.² The United States would have to build ships both to contend with British surface vessels as well as German submarines. Second, it was unclear what the military purpose of such arming would have been. Would the United States have convoyed its merchant ships and fired on British warships if they had attempted to divert U.S. vessels to British ports unlawfully? It is unclear what Britain should have feared from such a build-up. Third, the only alternative would have been to embargo the United Kingdom and France, but such defenses of neutral right had failed in the past, and would entail a massive economic harm. Prior to the war, 65% of U.S. exports by value went to Europe, with the United Kingdom accounting for 45% and Germany for almost 25% of that trade. Under the British restrictions, U.S. exports to Germany dropped precipitously but 53% of the loss was made-up by drastically increased trade to neutral states initially, and the rest was *exceeded* by increased exports to the allies.³ Embargoing the allied powers would have eliminated exports equal to roughly 2% of GNP during a recession.⁴ Fourth, as Tucker points out (79-80), Wilson and his advisors did not want a German victory, and embargoing the allied powers would have run that risk that Germany and its allies would have made a decisive breakthrough. Finally, given the domestic opposition to the armament program and military reorganization that Wilson proposed in Dec. 1915, it is implausible that stronger plans would have been accepted in late 1914.

The heart of Tucker's account, however, is Wilson's struggles in 1915 and 1916 with the consequences of Germany's adoption of unrestricted anti-submarine warfare around the British Isles in Feb. 1915, the British ban on all trade with Germany in March, and the three notes to Germany after the sinking the *Lusitania*. Since Wilson was unwilling to seriously press Britain on its blockades, Germany resorted to further predations on merchant

² Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914* (Routledge, 2001), 222.

³ Avar Longley Bishop, "The War and the World's Trade," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 47:9 (1915), 641-650. Based on ten months ending in April 1914.

⁴ Based on figures from Bishop, "The War and the World's Trade" and *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to Present, Bicentennial Edition* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975), 224 (Series F 1-5).

vessels. But Wilson was unwilling to openly push the United States into war with Germany over submarine warfare. Tucker concludes that Wilson was unable to decide what he valued more: maintaining isolation or championing of neutrality (115).

In this equation, saving isolation and neutrality as policies meant staying out of war with Germany or Britain. This is the second point on which I part with Tucker. Having outlined the meaning of maritime neutrality in international law and statecraft with clarity and precision that few if any Wilson scholars have done (56-71),⁵ he treats *American* neutrality oddly as the opposite of *any* belligerency. While the United States had not openly fought a European state over neutral rights in 100 years, there is no reason to equate war in 1917 with the abandonment of isolation or neutrality as a preferred policy. The United States had waged war in defense of isolation and neutrality; the United States did not ally with France or Britain in the Quasi-War or the War of 1812, respectively.⁶ In 1917, America again defended neutrality by refusing *aligned* belligerency. Indeed, when Wilson did ask Congress to recognize U.S. belligerency against Germany he never formally aligned the United States with the allied powers. He termed the United States an “associated” power despite cooperating as a de facto ally. Isolation was gone in deed and neutrality replaced by belligerency but Wilson sustained a simulacrum of both.

The key to understanding Wilson’s position was his fear of war in and of itself, not as an abandonment of isolation or neutrality. Tucker notes that Wilson wrote and spoke in 1915 (23) and in 1917 (202) of his dread of war, especially its likely effects on civil liberties and domestic reform. He also acknowledges Wilson’s policy of war avoidance in other discussions (171, 207, 214). Wilson must have been aware of the probable, qualitative difference between his use of force in Mexico and the Caribbean and combat with European powers. And indeed, the greater purpose of longstanding U.S. isolation and neutrality was to avoid major war with great powers because of the horrendous consequences such wars would have had on American political institutions and social order. Wilson sacrifices a defense of neutrality to avoid war; his neutrality policy is subordinated to his war-avoidance policy.

Wilson’s desire to avoid war was reflected in his 1916 efforts to bring about some mediated end to the war via a peace conference. But the Feb. House-Grey memorandum produced no action after Wilson qualified the over-reaching of his unofficial, anachronistic national security advisor, Edward House (170-171).⁷ Wilson adopts the more radical

⁵ Tucker’s first work was *The Law of War and Neutrality at Sea* (U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1957) as part of the Naval War College’s International Law Studies series. It was reissued by Lawbook Exchange, Ltd. in 2006.

⁶ The purpose of the Non-Intercourse Act was to use economic leverage to force Britain and France to respect U.S. neutral rights.

⁷ The historians of U.S. policy during WWI tend to adopt contemporaneous terms too readily. House was an honorary “colonel” by the Texas governor’s appointment, and House reported disliked the title (see “The Real Col. House,” *New York Times Magazine* 16 Dec. 1917). I doubt few people born after 1960 could explain what an “order-in-council” is, let alone its legal basis. “Preparedness” is a similar term that remains obscure to the uninitiated.

prospect of a postwar league by May 1916 (on the heels of the German capitulation in its reply to the United States' *Sussex* note), a bolder mediation offer in Dec., and the follow-up "peace-without-victory" speech in Jan. 1917, which Tucker recounts. He aimed to transform international politics and end the war *without war*. But neither isolation nor neutrality would really be abandoned in Wilson's plan because the postwar order was to create a "community of power" rather than entangle the United States in formal alliances to balance power among rival states and was to guarantee freedom of navigation rather than sacrifice neutral trading rights. Wilson hoped to transcend the dilemmas he confronted.

What ended those hopes of peace without U.S. belligerency was the German decision to resume and widen unrestricted submarine warfare. War was then the only path to transform the world order. But Wilson only grudgingly accepted that path, trying first to retain isolation and neutrality by pursuing armed neutrality. The March 1917 Senate filibuster that Wilson condemned provided a pause for reflection, though Wilson proceeded to arm some ships. It is unclear how arming merchantmen alone would have protected U.S. ships against submarines effectively or brought about any change in postwar world politics. Wilson quickly abandoned armed neutrality and instead called for a declaration of war. Tucker correctly cites Sen. Gilbert Hitchcock's comment that if arming ships was wrong in late March, after the filibuster, it was wrong in early March, before the filibuster (200). Why Wilson did it remains as puzzling as his policy shifts in the *Lusitania* notes (127).

One potential explanation for the policy reversals in the second *Lusitania* note and the brief ship arming is the absence of a strong U.S. foreign policy apparatus. As Tucker points out, Wilson never had more than four advisors on foreign policy during the war at any time: House, the secretary of state (William J. Byran, then Robert Lansing), the secretary's counselor (Lansing, then Frank L. Polk), and Walter H. Page, the ambassador to London (25). No equivalent of the National Security Council staff existed; the State Department had only three assistant secretaries to cover administration and consular affairs; Wilson's White House staff consisted of private secretary Joseph P. Tumulty, his two assistants, and some clerks. The State Department's recently created geographic "divisions" (they were not bureaus) put Germany and the other central powers in the Near Eastern Affairs division, not the West European one, as of 1911.⁸ None of the policy vetting of multiple bureaus, let alone a formal inter-agency process existed under Wilson. Given the stress and surprise, Wilson and his advisors must have experienced in Feb. 1917, the confused attempt to avoid outright belligerency is understandable.

There is a third point with which I disagree with Tucker — that the U.S. acquiescence to the British blockade but continued and escalating protests against German attacks on U.S. merchant and non-combatant belligerent vessels meant that the United States "abandoned the impartiality required of a neutral" (86, 133). This is the crux of his argument that Wilson's neutrality policy made war with Germany inevitable. First, it is hard to see how

⁸ Gaillard Hunt, "The History of the Department of State," *American Journal of International Law* 6:4 (Oct. 1912), 922.

this conclusion can be derived from Tucker's prior discussion of neutrality and its requirements (56-71). The law of maritime neutrality required belligerents to allow private merchant ships to trade with belligerents provided that neutral governments were not aiding the belligerent governments directly, except in contraband, which was ill-defined, and or unless a legitimate blockade was in place. The problem was Britain's unprecedented expansion of what counted as contraband, and Germany's reprisals, which were directed at neutral and belligerent vessels. Britain also violated the well-established customary rules of blockades by failing to establish a blockade that was limited to Germany's coast and instead blockading access to the Baltic Sea. However, only the belligerents that violated neutral rights claimed that their reprisals were justified; no neutrals recognized the legal or normative validity of these actions. Short of abandoning trade with or fighting against the infringing belligerents in defense of merchant vessels, there was little any neutral could have done. The latter action would have meant convoying U.S. merchant with U.S. warships and forcibly resisting any British attempt to search or divert the ships or any German attempts to sink them. Such a course would have meant war with one or both belligerents. Geography and British policy meant that neutral trade would benefit the allied powers and harm the central powers. This did not make neutrals partial to one belligerent anymore than if bad weather had sunk most German-bound ship and spared most British-bound ones. Second, the ultimate Germany reaction — submarine attacks without warning against all vessels in its declared war zones — was not inevitable. As Tucker notes (210), Wilson's advisors feared that if Germany had responded favorably to Wilson's Dec. 1916 peace proposal *and* if the allies rejected it, the U.S. public might have viewed German retaliation via unrestricted sea attacks as justified. Under the same conditions, if Germany did not retaliate, House feared the United States "would inevitably drift into a sympathetic alliance with her" (210). Germany's twin choices to reject the U.S. peace proposal and to attack vessels indiscriminately pushed the United States to war. As Tucker notes, this was *Germany's* great mistake (211-212).

These disagreements should not distract, however, from my support for Tucker's overall arguments. U.S. protests against Britain were less severe than those against Germany, and this certainly affected German views of the United States as a potential mediator (211). I agree with Tucker that we should see this as a consequence of Wilson's commitment to the norm on non-combatant immunity (134) rather than sympathy for the allies' cause over the central powers (98) or simply that life mattered more than property. The problem that Wilson created for U.S. policy was he sought to champion a norm rather than the law. The great source of tension between the United States and Germany was that the United States insisted that its citizens be able to travel *safely* on non-combatant *belligerent* vessels (132). This is the substance of U.S. protests over the *Lusitania*, *Arabic*, and *Sussex* sinkings since these were British or French vessels upon which Americans were killed. The United States was right, however, to demand that non-combatant enemy vessels be given warning to stop before being fired upon. Under existing custom, the *sinking* of private, belligerent cargo or passenger vessels was not permitted unless the safety of the captor's ship or its operational success demanded it, and even then it had to ensure the safety of the passengers and crew, which excluded abandoning them in life-boats at sea (92-93). For submarines, the extraordinary was commonplace since the submarines lacked spare crew to bring the ship

to port or the ability to safely escort it. The issue is whether Wilson should have accepted this as a new reality.

Likewise, Tucker is correct that the United Kingdom cast aside prior understandings of what trade items could be restricted and how they could be restricted, and thereby also violated the principle of non-combatant immunity by barring food as contraband (134). Prior to 1914, the only conditions under which food or provisions were considered contraband were if they were directed to a belligerent's armed forces, government departments, or their contractors.⁹ The United States protested these policies, but never threatened to break diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom, as it did against Germany in April 1916.

Wilson refused to countenance the violation of non-combatant immunity, but the crucial difference between German and British violations of norms of non-combatant immunity was that Germany was killing U.S. citizens when it did so and Britain was not. So here I part with Tucker again. I agree with Tucker that it was not that innocent life mattered more than property (98), for innocent German lives were imperiled by British actions, but that innocent *American* lives were imperiled by German submarine warfare. Wilson was not a starry-eyed one-worlder but was committed to transformed global order because it was the best pathway to secure his vision of U.S. interests. His internationalism was a consequence of his nationalism, not a substitute for it.

Tucker is correct in his overall strategic assessment. Wilson waited too long to bring U.S. strategic resources in line with his goals. Even if he hoped not to intervene militarily in the European war, the United States lacked the military resources and the popular support to credibly threaten such an option against any of the belligerents. For the central powers, the United States was already effectively supplying most of what the allies needed, and for the allies, the United States was already doing most what it could to aid them. Wilson's failure was as much rooted in his inability to rally Congressional and public support for a more cohesive strategy early on as it was in any diplomatic ineptness.

⁹ John M. Gover, "Comparative Views of Contraband," *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* 2:1 (1900), 126. See also the 26 Feb. 1909 London "Declaration concerning the Laws of Naval War." Available at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/255?OpenDocument>. The declaration never entered into force, but it is the only signed multilateral statement defining contraband.

This is a work of traditional diplomatic history, and I mean that as a compliment. In this book, Tucker amply displays the virtues of the careful historian of diplomacy. He has done copious research, relying especially and correctly on Arthur Link's edition of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, together with other important sources, particularly the papers of Robert Lansing in the Library of Congress and the diary and letters of Edward M. House at Yale. What is more, he has mastered those sources, not just delved into them to support points that he wishes to make. Best of all, Tucker draws on his several decades of teaching about diplomatic practice at Johns Hopkins's SAIS. He takes complicated issues surrounding the concepts and practices of neutrality seriously and clarifies them nicely. In those ways, this volume covers much of the same ground as Ernest May's *World War and American Isolation* (1958) and the three volumes about World War I in Link's massive biography of Wilson, but Tucker also brings a fresh eye to exploring that ground and looks at major issues with new insight.

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In his interpretation of the two and a half years between the outbreak of the "Great War" (the British name that has never really caught on here), Tucker draws a welcome and useful distinction between "neutrality" and "isolation." This is critical to understanding these years because it is usually not recognized how those were fundamentally in conflict. Neutrality called for assertion and defense of national rights to conduct trade and engage in travel with belligerent countries and not to submit unduly to restrictions imposed by belligerents. Isolation called for separation from overseas power politics and, in this instance, avoidance of involvement in the war. William Jennings Bryan at the time and the authors of the Neutrality Acts in the 1930s were willing to sacrifice neutral rights in order to avoid intervention in the war or entanglements that might lead to such intervention. Bryan stood alone among Wilson's advisors in this choice, and he resigned rather than risk war. Lansing and House made the opposite choice and worked, sometimes overtly, more often covertly, to push neutral rights to the point where isolation gave way to war. Wilson himself, as is well known, tried to have things both ways, and as a result he often engaged in what Tucker calls "a diplomacy that even now seems baffling." (127) This strikes me as an accurate portrayal of Wilson, in line with the point that Link made in one of his volumes, that Wilson had not one neutrality policy but several shifting ones.

This is a fine book and one to be recommended to anyone interested in this subject of overweening significance. What this book lacks is what has dissatisfied many people with

traditional diplomatic history -- namely, much of a sense of the context in which the actors operated. This is particularly striking at three points that Tucker dwells upon at length. The first point covers the early months of the war, when Britain began imposing a blockade in which the Wilson administration acquiesced. Tucker agrees up to a point with 1930s "revisionists" that there was pro-Allied bias in that response, but he reaches that judgment thoughtfully and dispassionately, with some attention to other influences. What he misses is the sense of removal from the war on the part of the American public and most of its leaders. For them, this was a terrible calamity that was happening to other people, far away. The notion that America might be drawn in just did not register in many minds. British dominance on the seas meant that America was largely cut off from Germany and the other Central Powers, so that dealing with the blockade seemed to be a strictly bilateral problem between Britain and the United States. As well as I have been able to read the acquiescence in the blockade, it seems to have arisen from a desire to avoid unnecessary and perhaps costly trouble, with no offsetting benefits. Moreover, Bryan was a full and willing participant in these decisions, not just Wilson and his pro-Allied advisors.

That acquiescence did have wider consequences, and Tucker notes that submarine warfare was Germany's way of trying to counteract the Allied blockade. That is true, but it does not mean that retaliation was the main reason for unleashing the u-boats (all thirty or so of them in 1915, of which only a dozen or so were operational at any one time). As Tucker acknowledges, the blockade was not causing much immediate harm to Germany, and it seems likely that the submarines would have gone hunting even if the blockade had done even less harm. The submarine was an offensive, not a defensive weapon. Moreover, in using those weapons, they were doing the only thing that might cause meaningful trouble with the United States---the only thing that carried with it the risk of war. Tucker is correct, as was May, in noting that the frictions with Britain never carried this risk. But he appears to agree (it is not completely clear whether he does or not) with John Coogan's dismissal of the distinction between the blockade affecting property and the submarines taking lives. That distinction did lend an emotional edge to the disputes with Germany that was lacking in the ones with the Allies.

The second point where Tucker misses the context, or at least an important part of it, is the reaction to the sinking of the Lusitania. From this account, the reader would not grasp that this was the great turning point in America's stance toward the war. This was that era's 9/11---the "shock of recognition," when people suddenly, painfully found themselves facing the war as something that touched them. In one of the few matters that he gets dead wrong in this book, Tucker asserts that Wilson could easily have taken the country into war over the Lusitania. A cursory reading of Link and other works could have shown him how strongly anti-war the public reaction was and was supported by most leaders apart from Theodore Roosevelt and his cabal of thinly disguised interventionists. Out of one thousand newspaper editors who telegraphed their views to New York papers---the closest thing to a modern public opinion poll at the time---the number calling for war was six. Wilson captured the public mood and his policy dilemma best when he told Bryan, "I wish with all my heart I saw a way to carry out the double wish of our people, to maintain a firm front in respect of what we demand of Germany and yet do nothing that might by any possibility involve us in the war." (Wilson to Bryan, June 7, 1919, Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of*

H-Diplo Roundtable

Woodrow Wilson, 33:359) Wilson's diplomacy seemed baffling not only because he was trying to square circles of conflicting ideas, as Tucker emphasizes, but also because he now had an aroused public that wanted contradictory things and overwhelmingly recoiled from intervention.

The third point where Tucker misses the context is in the year following the *Lusitania*. He dwells on how much tougher Wilson was toward the Germans than he was toward the Allies, although he also shows how flexible that toughness could sometimes be. True enough, but what is missing here is a sense of scale in the context. The submarine controversy with Germany, with its recurring crises, threatened war. It was the front-burner issue. The British gladly availed themselves of this cover in order to continue to tighten the screws of the blockade. A few people, such as their ambassador in Washington, Spring Rice, warned that if the submarine menace should ever be lifted the Americans have a bevy of diplomatic bones to pick with the Allies. Tucker emphasizes Wilson's disappointment over the failure of mediation after the House-Grey Memorandum as the reason for deteriorating Anglo-American relations during the second half of 1916. What about Ireland, which he relegates to a footnote? Equally, what about the greater attention that such things as the British blacklist of American firms now got, thanks to the relaxation of tensions with Germany following the Sussex affair?

I do not intend these comments to be overly negative. I have always disliked critics who berate authors for not writing different books from the ones they do write. Tucker has written a fine, thoughtful, most enlightening book about the diplomacy of neutrality from 1914 to 1917. It is an important book that anyone interested in this time should read. I only wish that he had occasionally tipped his hat in the direction of the political context in which his actors performed. His diplomatists, especially Wilson, also had other things on their minds when they dealt with these issues and events.

Robert Tucker's book on Woodrow Wilson's neutrality policy during World War I presents a thoughtful analysis of an important topic in twentieth-century American foreign relations. Without admitting it to himself, Tucker argues, and without thinking too much about the consequences of what he was doing, Wilson early on adopted policies clearly favorable to the Allies in the war. Once set on this course, Wilson found it hard to change direction and, indeed, the president became ever more committed to it as he equated American prestige and the laws of humanity with confronting Germany's submarine campaign in the Atlantic. Tucker is critical of the president's unneutral posture, arguing it was bound to undermine Wilson's own goals of staying out of the war, mediating a "peace without victory," and building a new international order based on the League of Nations. In the end, Tucker suggests, Wilson defeated himself.

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There are several significant points for Wilsonian historiography in Tucker's argument. First, his book is a refreshing break with the dominant interpretation of Wilson's pre-1917 diplomacy put forward by Arthur S. Link and recently echoed to some degree by John Milton Cooper, Jr., and Thomas J. Knock. According to this view, Wilson was as neutral in thought and in practice as he could be given the character of international law in 1914, Britain's control of the sea, American interests, and American public opinion. Drawing on the work of John W. Coogan, Tucker rightly replies that Wilson did in fact have a viable alternative to a pro-British policy: he could have "combined strict neutrality with measures of preparedness" (p. 79). Unlike the policy praised by Link and other scholars, this approach, Tucker argues, might have gained the respect of the belligerents and contributed to a deadlock in the war – two developments conducive to Wilson's objective of mediating an end to the war on the basis of the status quo ante bellum.

Tucker makes another point all too often missing from recent scholarly works on Wilson. Like Lloyd Ambrosius, he sees that however much Link and others have tried to associate the president with internationalism, Wilson's commitment to American participation in a league of nations was actually highly qualified. Wilson would only join a peace league on American terms; the league, Tucker notes, had to be based on "American principles" or the United States would continue its traditional refusal to make any political-military commitments overseas (pp. 206–07). In this sense – in the sense of refusing to engage politically in a world still dominated by traditional diplomacy – Wilson was an isolationist.

Tucker also provides an illuminating examination of the concept of "neutrality" in the pre-1914 international system. Neutrality law assumed that war was a legitimate instrument of national policy and that wars were likely to be "limited in terms of the parties involved, the

fraction of the populations actively engaged, and the nature of the belligerent war aims” (p. 67). In such a world, the point of neutrality law was to keep warfare contained and allow those at peace to continue their normal lives as much as possible. Although the customs and rules associated with neutrality were somewhat vague, Tucker argues they had held up easily enough in conflicts that had broken out in the twenty or so years prior to 1914. What swept away the traditional code of neutrality was the unprecedented scale and stakes involved with World War I and, equally important, the growing belief as the twentieth century went on that warfare for any purpose other than self-defense was unjust and illegal.

For all of the positive qualities of Tucker’s book, however, significant parts of his interpretation are open to question. His analysis of Wilson’s view of Germany, for one thing, is problematic. According to Tucker, “Wilson appears to have entertained little real fear over the consequences a German victory held out for American security” (p. 4). Such fears chiefly animated the president during the initial weeks of the war, when Germany rapidly advanced into France, and Tucker suggests they were deep enough to cause Wilson to make his initial decision to accept Britain’s maritime system (pp. 89-90). But once the Allies halted the Germans at the Marne, these fears “markedly receded” (p. 89). Wilson not only became convinced that Germany would lose the war, but also more determined than ever to remain a “nonparticipant” in the conflict, even in the unlikely event the Allies looked headed to defeat (p. 204).

Yet abundant evidence indicates that Wilson was always anxious to make sure that Germany did not expand its power as a result of the war. He set in motion his pro-British neutrality policy in late September 1914, *after* the German armies began retreating in France. He did so, in fact, after being advised by Colonel House that Germany’s “purpose had already largely failed.”¹ From late 1914 onward, Wilson also wanted to end the war with terms based on the status quo ante bellum. Given Germany’s occupation of Allied territory, such terms required a roll back of German power. They represented not so much a “peace without victory” as a minimum win for the Allies – a “peace without conquest” as Walter Hines Page aptly called it.² Far from being unconcerned about the prospect of Germany winning anything from the war, as Tucker argues, Wilson consistently sought to insure its defeat and limit its expansion.

Tucker’s shaky interpretation of Wilson’s attitude toward Germany is perhaps most evident in his discussion of the House-Grey memorandum, a pro-Allied intervention plan devised by Colonel House. He downplays Wilson’s apparent agreement with House’s late 1915 assertion of a deep American security stake in the Allied cause and suggests the president had backed away from House’s intervention scheme by December (pp. 151-55). He also emphasizes that although Wilson approved the House-Grey memorandum in early

¹ House Diary, 28 September 1914, in Arthur S. Link, et. al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton: 1966-1994), 31:94. Hereafter cited as *PWW*.

² Page to Wilson, 20 January 1917, *PWW* 40:532.

March 1915, the president refused to commit himself both to enter the war if a peace conference failed and to support peace terms “not unfavorable to the Allies” (p. 170). In Tucker’s view, Wilson did not genuinely endorse the memorandum’s ideas; the president went along with House’s effort because he did not want to suffer the diplomatic damage of disavowing his advisor’s work (pp. 47—49).

The evidence, though, appears to run counter to Tucker’s argument here. Prior to House’s departure for Europe, Wilson admitted the colonel’s point that the United States could not afford to find itself ever facing Germany alone, without the Allies.³ It is true, as Tucker suggests, that when Wilson sent House to Europe in December 1915, he was intrigued by the possibility of peace talks with Germany as well with Britain. But the president also shared House’s suspicions of Berlin’s motives, endorsed the colonel’s determination not to be put “in a disagreeable position with the Allies,” and agreed House should visit London first, before going to Germany.⁴ As Tucker himself concedes, Wilson approved of House’s negotiations with the British over the intervention plan once House was in London and praised the memorandum when he saw it (pp. 169-70). Contrary to Tucker’s assertions, moreover, Wilson did *not* modify the memorandum’s statements suggesting American support for peace terms favorable to the Allies. Both House’s diary and the cable Wilson typed up for Grey regarding the memorandum refer to only one change made by Wilson to the agreement, namely the watering down of America’s pledge to enter the war on the side of the Allies if Germany was “unreasonable” in peace talks.⁵ The president left unchanged the memorandum’s language on peace terms, which included a section specifying House’s support for the transfer of Alsace-Lorraine to France and Russia’s acquisition of an outlet to the sea. Wilson did not share House’s eagerness to get in the war, in short, but he did want to co-ordinate mediation efforts with London and he did want peace based on the Entente’s minimum terms, not Germany’s.

In addition to understating Wilson’s fears of German power, Tucker also devotes far too little attention to Wilson’s preparedness policy. He barely mentions it at all, even though one of his key claims is that Wilson’s own goals would have been better served had the president embarked upon a defense build up soon after the war started rather than waiting until late 1915. Readers are left wondering why Wilson delayed in proposing a preparedness program, why he embraced preparedness when he did, and how his defense

³ House Diary, 15 December 1915, *PWW* 35:356.

⁴ House to Wilson, 22 December 1915, *PWW* 35:381 and Wilson to House, 24 December 1915, *PWW* 35:387-88.

⁵ House to Wilson, 15 February 1916, n. 2, *PWW* 36:180. See also House Diary, 6 March 1916, *PWW* 36:262; House to Grey, 7 March 1916, *PWW* 36:266. Tucker seems to base his interpretation of Wilson’s modifications to the House-Grey memorandum on Charles Seymour’s discussion of the document in *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*. But Seymour only refers to one correction, not two. Wilson inserted the word “probably,” he says, in connection with entering the war in order to have the sentence in question correspond with another “probably” *already in the original document*, in its second sentence. Tucker appears to misunderstand this passage and to think Seymour is talking about the insertion of two “probablys” into the memorandum, instead of just one. See Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston and New York: 1926), 2:201.

program related to his diplomacy toward to the belligerents. These issues obviously have relevance for an analysis of Wilson's neutrality policy, yet Tucker does not address them.

Finally, one wishes that the author had analyzed Wilson's view of international reform more carefully. Tucker asserts near the end of the book that Wilson's fear of a second world war "lay at the center of his thought," but he does not explain how this fear shaped the president's neutrality policies in 1914 or 1915 (p. 206). In fact, he seems to contradict his assertion about the centrality of this fear in Wilson's thinking by suggesting that Wilson only became interested in mediation and a peace league in later 1915, as the president came to realize his neutrality policies were leading to war with Germany (pp. 145, 174). In addition, however much Tucker criticizes Wilson's stance on neutrality issues as counterproductive, he is curiously credulous regarding Wilson's goal of creating a new international order. The author seems to assume this was a rational, workable objective; had Wilson only pursued the "right" policies, he implies, a "peace without victory" and a viable league of nations might have been achieved. How, though, would a peace league actually work? How did Wilson think it would work? And why would Germany embrace it when Wilson clearly wanted it based on the frustration of any German gains in the war? Tucker has little to say on any of these crucial questions.

Still, this is an interesting and significant book. The meaning of "Wilsonianism" is elusive, and historians will doubtlessly always disagree over the rationale, purposes, and quality of Wilson's statesmanship. I found Tucker's arguments stimulating, even when I wasn't persuaded by them or thought they were incomplete. I enjoyed reading this book and highly recommend it to anyone interested in Wilson's statecraft or in U.S. foreign relations in general.

Those interested in applying the methodologies of the new diplomatic or international history to the World War I era will be disappointed by this book. Relying primarily upon traditional types of U.S. diplomatic records, Tucker's purpose is to restore the debate over neutral rights to a central place in the narrative of WWI. In this limited goal, he largely succeeds. However, by exploring the question of neutral rights in a vacuum, Tucker seriously underestimates the importance of broader economic, social, cultural, and political factors in shaping Wilson's foreign policies during the years from 1914-1917.

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Recent historical accounts like those of Thomas Knock have focused on the ways in which Wilson built a left-of-center coalition during the early war years that was committed to both progressive reform at home and to pursuing a progressive internationalist agenda abroad that included American membership in a future League of Nations.¹ But Tucker portrays Wilson as a leader dependent on a few pro-British advisors such as Robert Lansing and Edward House and as obsessed with enforcing a legalistic and moralistic vision of nineteenth century neutral rights law rather than on planning for the future.

Under nineteenth century law, "the practices establishing the rights and duties of belligerents and neutrals were dependent, not upon logical deductions drawn from general principles, but rather upon the concrete circumstances attending war's conduct in a particular historical period." (61) Yet Wilson insisted upon viewing nineteenth century practice governing the right of neutral passengers to travel through war zones either on neutral or belligerent ships as absolute. This thinking made Wilson uncompromising in his attitude toward submarine warfare. Yet, under international law, belligerents were entitled to reprisals in the event of unlawful conduct by their enemies. The British blockade could reasonably be construed by the Germans as a violation of international law that earned them the right to reprisal. But Wilson, suggests Tucker, abandoned impartiality by accepting with only mild protest the British blockade while insisting--particularly in the wake of the Lusitania affair--that Germany abandon submarine warfare against merchant ships unless it could adhere to traditional rules governing the protection of civilians during attacks.

¹ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: 1992); John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge, 2001); Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: 2003); Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge: 1987).

Robert Lansing and Edward House, according to Tucker, understood that the U.S. risked war with Germany by adopting a hard-line position on submarine warfare. But because they believed that the war was a struggle between freedom and tyranny they were willing to accept this risk in order to aid the Allies. By contrast, Wilson remained “adrift,” in his attitudes regarding U.S. belligerency even after the Lusitania affair, “suspended between a past he could no longer recover and a prospective future he could not bring himself to accept.” (130)

In the two years following the sinking of the Lusitania, Wilson continued to pursue negotiations with the Germans but refused to compromise on the issue of the rights of neutral passengers and ships. Such a course made war inevitable, Wilson’s desire for peace notwithstanding. Particularly vexing was Wilson’s insistence on the principle that American citizens had the right to travel on Allied merchant vessels. Tucker argues that on “almost any traditional calculus of national interest the principle seemed altogether insufficient” as a reason for declaring war.(143) But the president equated the principle with the “nation’s dignity and honor” and felt he could not “yield his position” without “jeopardizing prestige and credibility abroad and leadership at home.” (143,140)

In reemphasizing the debate over neutrality, Tucker offers a welcome corrective to those who credit Wilson with an almost superhuman clairvoyance in pursuing his vision of progressive internationalism and of a League of Nations before being felled by his stroke in 1919.² The picture that emerges in Tucker’s rendering of Wilson is instead of a president who was at the war’s beginning more tied to the nineteenth than the twentieth century and who failed to anticipate the way in which modern war would render older principles of international law obsolete. In detailing Wilson’s stubborn insistence on the rights of neutral passengers to travel through war zones throughout the period from 1914-1917, Tucker demonstrates effectively that Wilson’s rigidity and moral absolutism predated his stroke and limited his intellectual flexibility in ways that sometimes prevented him from rationally calculating either the national interest or the best path toward international cooperation after the armistice. Tucker’s account will in turn force historians to ask anew whether Wilson’s uncompromising behavior toward his political opponents during the debate over the League of Nations was really so aberrational after all.

But in other ways, Tucker’s account falls short and would benefit from a consideration of some of the analyses of both the William Appleman Williams school and of the newer cultural and social history approaches. In a short chapter on “Interpretations,” Tucker traces the debate over neutral rights from the first wave of revisionism in the 1920s and 1930s through the post World War II era but then stops, suggesting that--with a few notable exceptions--historians since the 1960s have been more preoccupied with the League of Nations debate or with Wilson’s policies in Latin America and the Caribbean than with the debate over neutrality. But while this is doubtless true, the broader questions raised by the Williams school about the linkages between economic and security interests need more attention.

² See, for example, Cooper, 422.

According to Tucker, neutrality was the corollary of isolationism but could sometimes come into conflict with it during European wars. But, as the Williams school so effectively detailed and as Tucker himself acknowledges, the United States was never really economically isolationist. Its interest in the rights of neutrals derived not from a desire to remain isolated from the world but from a desire to expand economically in a world that by the late nineteenth century was dominated by empires. In this sense, Wilson's ardent defense of neutrality might be viewed more as a corollary to the Open Door Notes so touted by the Williams school than to a mythical 19th century isolationism. Similarly, Wilson's plans for a League of Nations designed in part to enforce neutral rights law might be interpreted as a logical outgrowth of a fairly consistent vision of American international economic interests in a world that was dominated in 1914 by balance of power politics but that was moving toward hegemonic dominance by the United States. Even if Tucker disagrees with Williams-school revisionists, he needs to better explore the repercussions of this rich body of work for his own understanding of Wilson and the rights of neutrals under international law.³

Equally important, Tucker needs to come to terms with the new literature on World War I in the fields of social and cultural history. Tucker, like so many diplomatic historians, assumes without demonstrating that on the major issues of war and peace "Wilson's views were close to the public's views." (24) Tucker therefore neglects the role of public opinion in influencing Wilson's wartime policies between 1914 and 1917. But an abundant literature that has emerged at the intersection of social and international history over the past two decades has demonstrated just how unpopular many of Wilson's pro-allied policies were. Critics of Wilson's pro-allied policies included not only the "pro-German groups" to which Tucker briefly alludes, but also many groups on the left—including Socialists, feminists, trade unionists, a diverse array of working-class immigrants, and Southern populists of both races--whose support Wilson badly needed to court if he were to triumph in the 1916 election.⁴ Just how unpopular Wilson's handling of the Lusitania incident was in these circles was aptly demonstrated by a widely circulated Socialist cartoon which portrayed a dandified Wilson doing the bidding of a fat and smirking munitions shipper by lecturing a muscular American worker on the need to "Be Prepared

³ See especially, William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: 1959); Lloyd Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution: 1913-1923* (New York: 1984) and Thomas McCormick, *America's Half Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* (Baltimore:,1995): 17-42.

⁴ For example, see Dawley, *Changing the World*, Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: 2004); Elizabeth McKillen, *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy: 1914-1924* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); idem, "Ethnicity, Class and Wilsonian Internationalism Reconsidered: The Mexican- and Irish-American Immigrant Left and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1914-1922," *Diplomatic History* 25(Fall 2001) 553-587.

to Go to War to Defend Your Right to Travel In Europe This Summer.”⁵ Such widespread sentiments must at least have given the president pause in 1915 and may help to explain why he continued to pursue negotiations with Germany even while persisting in an interpretation of neutral rights that—as Tucker convincingly argues—made U.S. intervention in the war all but inevitable.

Finally, Tucker’s treatment suffers from an inattention to gender issues. In a dismissive footnote, Tucker suggests that “[f]or Wilson ‘honor’ meant more than chivalrous sentiments or ideals.” (215) But whether Wilson himself was personally motivated by chivalry begs the question: gendered posturing and language, as numerous historians have made clear, formed a critical component of the political culture of the era. In pursuing a policy viewed as weak toward Germany, Wilson risked being labeled a “mollycoddle” by politicians like Theodore Roosevelt. By contrast, if he pursued policies viewed as too servile toward business interests he was condemned by socialist and labor groups as a “silk-stocking militarist.”⁶ Given this context, Wilson’s own gendered language during the years leading up to war deserves more attention by historians—not primarily as an indication of Wilson’s own gender views but rather as a gauge of the gendered political image he was trying to promote of himself. Wilson apparently wanted himself viewed as a “man too proud to fight” without sufficient justification but also as one who was willing to fight if no other way were found to end the “unmanly business” of submarine warfare.(111)⁷ Given Wilson’s own frequent use of gendered language, it seems plausible to assume that concerns about appearing manly in the public eye played at least some role in his obsession with defending the nation’s honor and with his unwillingness to compromise on the principle of the rights of neutrals. At minimum, gender deserves to be included on Tucker’s scholarly checklist as he tries to explain Wilson’s “baffling” policies from the time of the Lusitania affair to the declaration of war. (127)

In sum, by neglecting much of the literature on Wilson since the 1960s, Tucker has helped to demonstrate its utility and its richness. Despite its many omissions, Tucker’s book will be an important primer for those seeking to understand the details of the debate over neutrality from 1914-1917.

⁵ *New York Call*, 25 July, 1915, 1

⁶ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States: 1880-1917* (Chicago: 1995); John Whiteclay Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: 1987); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: 1996); Frances Early, *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (Syracuse: 1997); Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens* (Indiana, 1999); *Appeal to Reason*, 17 March, 1917, 4.

⁷ “President Wilson Asks Congress to Declare War Against Germany, 1917” in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, v 2: Since 1914, sixth ed. (Boston, 2005): 36.

Until the post-World War Two period Woodrow Wilson was the second most-hated American president by the German public (FDR came first). It was post-surrender German historical revisionism combined with the growing accessibility of confidential source material that led to a more dispassionate assessment of the 28th American president in German historiography. More recently, however, the claim of the administration of George W. Bush to be an heir of Wilson's legacy has cast a new shadow on Wilson's image, as the following quotation illustrates: "Few people are any longer likely to share the ... assertion that American diplomacy in the 20th was characterized by the attempt to create a peaceful world order".

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Inspired by present concerns, as they are, such recent views nonetheless confront the historian with a challenge. With his most recent book, rather an interpretative essay than a chronological account, Robert W. Tucker, one of the grand old men in the historiography of American foreign relations, has risen to this challenge in taking another close look at Wilson's much debated policy as a neutral in World War One. Essentially, this is the account of a failure. According to Tucker, Wilson was determined to keep America out of the war, and yet in attempting to defend America's rights as a neutral power he ended up declaring war on Germany. It was an irony, one may add, that this failure inaugurated America's career as a promoter of a liberal internationalism.

To Tucker America's entry into World War One was anything but a foregone conclusion. As he shows, Wilson, notwithstanding his dispute with Imperial Germany about the latter's submarine warfare, remained largely unimpressed by the various belligerents' claims at moral superiority. Instead, he increasingly abhorred the senseless massacre into which the "Great War" was degenerating. He wanted the United States to stay out of it also for fear lest a belligerent America would suffer domestically and would jeopardize its standing as a morally independent and disinterested mediator between the two warring parties.

Tucker's major point is that America's ultimate entrance into the war in part resulted from a discrepancy that existed between Wilson's sincere purposes and his political actions attempting to implement them. Tucker agrees that this discrepancy was partly due to a common interest the Wilson administration and the Western allies shared – the US government as the most important exporter of war supplies to the allies and, as a consequence, the beneficiary of a finally booming economy at home, - the allies as the

recipients of much needed commodities that sustained their war effort. Inevitably, America at large thus became a more and more benevolent neutral with a clear pro-Allies bias. Significantly, Wilson more than once demanded a regime change in Germany and by implication total victory, whenever war with the Central Powers seemed imminent. It certainly never occurred to him and his advisers to advocate something similar for the United Kingdom. To be sure, there was the continued dispute with Germany about the forms and the legal meaning of its submarine warfare, and in the end, not to forget, there was Germany's fateful decision of January 31, 1917, to proclaim the resumption of its unrestricted U-boat campaign.

Still, Tucker makes Wilson at least partly responsible for America's unwanted involvement in the war by stressing the rigid legalistic line Washington adopted from early on in response to the German submarine challenge. As early as February 1915 the Wilson administration publicly stressed Germany's – and only Germany's, not Great Britain's – "strict accountability" for losses America suffered due to the indiscriminate use of the submarine by Germany. Thus Wilson increasingly committed himself and America's prestige to an ultimately military response to German violations of America's rights as a neutral. It did not help, Tucker adds, that Wilson, personally and rhetorically, raised the stakes the defense of America's neutrality involved. To Wilson defending America's neutrality meant not only preserving international law, but even more so opening up the way for a peaceful world order under the auspices of a League of Nations. To Wilson the instrument to arrive at that goal was American mediation between the belligerents. Tucker scrutinizes the Anglo-American soundings that ended up in Wilson's public commitment of May 27, 1916, for an international organization globally guaranteeing peace. This, Tucker emphasizes, was Wilson's decisive new departure, as the president promised that America would join such a League as a leading member thereby parting with its isolationist tradition.

Naturally, war with Germany would have paralyzed Wilson's efforts. The German-American dispute about Germany's U-boat warfare, therefore, assumed a more and more principled character, and only Germany's so-called Sussex pledge of May 4, 1916, i.e. the promise to conduct the U-Boat campaign strictly in accordance with the rules of a cruiser blockade, laid this controversy to rest for the time being. This German concession made it possible for Wilson at long last to adopt what Tucker accepts as a truly neutral stance. In this, he remarks, the president fundamentally differed from his closest advisers like Col. House or the legally trained Robert Lansing, the Secretary of State, whom Tucker regards as more influential than previous historiography did.

Whether Imperial Germany would uphold the Sussex pledge or would revert to unrestricted submarine warfare thus was absolutely crucial for maintaining the American government's neutrality. From Wilson's standpoint, the final German decision to resume the unrestricted U-boat campaign not only violated sacred neutral rights and international law, it also thwarted his prestigious grand design for mediation. As Tucker concludes in a final chapter devoted to America's declaration of war, America's intervention in World War One fundamentally changed Wilson's perception of the war's nature: What before to him had been a mere power struggle now became a contest for values. What remained

unchanged, however, was Wilson's commitment to a universal "dominion of right" (p.203). To him this meant a world that accepted American principles assuring a lasting peace. His break with American isolationism was to be definite.

By and large, I find Tucker's interpretation convincing. It is not altogether novel, but it has the merit of presenting in a succinct and penetrating way what one can derive from having waded through the countless pages of Arthur Link's monumental biography of Woodrow Wilson. In particular, Tucker's text reaffirmed my own conviction of the supreme importance of the part the personality of Woodrow Wilson played in the evolution and the ultimate failure of America's neutrality in World War One. Tucker enhanced the effect of this personal approach by skillfully selecting quotations from public and confidential sources like Wilson's speeches and letters or from the House diary.

It is to be regretted that Tucker fails to include Wilson's final peace move of December 1916 into his analysis. No doubt, such an extension of his text would not have basically changed his argument, but it would have helped to further illustrate his interpretation and would have made it better understandable to the non-expert reader.

In the end, the profile of Woodrow Wilson as a foreign policy decision maker that can be distilled from Tucker's interpretation reminds one of Max Weber's distinction between a policy of principle ("Gesinnungspolitik") and a policy of responsibility ("Verantwortungspolitik"). Wilson, as Tucker understands him, tended to the first – principled – category of policy, as preserving international law was more important to him than keeping his "great nation" out of the war. In this respect he undoubtedly mirrored the attitude of the majority of his people, especially the intellectual circles.

This said I am still tempted to ask up to what degree Wilson really always was bent on sticking to his principles regardless of the consequences. Regarding the basic values to which he was committed the answer should be a clear yes. Still, one may ask to what extent Wilson was tempted to adjust his understanding and the application of his principles to circumstances. Tucker himself points out how swiftly Wilson changed and forgot judgments he had previously expressed regarding World War One and its "higher" objectives, and he demonstrates that Wilson's shifting was pretty much in line with the treatment one or the other belligerent chose vis-à-vis America as a neutral. So he may have been somewhat less principled and more flexible, at times even more opportunist, more of a "practical idealist" (p. 27) than Tucker seems to be prepared to admit. This reservation should not detract from the historic responsibility the then Berlin government shouldered in embroiling America in World War One – thereby, ultimately and ironically, enhancing, if not establishing America's position as a preeminent world power.

Author's Response by Robert W. Tucker

I can only hope that my remarks do not convey the impression of ingratitude toward the reviewers. On the contrary, I am much indebted to them for their criticisms and the careful reading they gave the book.

On Professor Ball's first point, the unlikelihood of a strategy of deterrence by arms working in the case of the allies. He is of course right about relative naval strength. But the real point of an armament program, in the beginning at any rate, was to show a clear determination to insist upon a strict neutrality. This had to be shown at the outset of war, or soon thereafter. Yet Wilson did just the opposite. On almost every count, he gave way to Great Britain while refusing to consider an arms program. Had Wilson followed a strict neutrality, the British course would surely have been quite different. On this we have the testimony of the British foreign minister. It may be argued that at the time the president did not know of the British position on differences with the United States over neutral rights and could not have been sure how the British would react. A simple test, however, would have revealed how far the British government was determined to push. The president was quite unwilling to run the test. Had he done so, and established clear limitations to British pretensions, Germany would have had less reason to employ the submarine as she did. Less reason since she would have access to those goods allowed at the time by the law of contraband. But Great Britain would still have remained dominant at sea; strict neutrality by the United States would still not have cancelled out the advantages the British enjoyed by virtue of their naval supremacy and geographical position. The prospect that this would possibly lead to a decisive breakthrough by Germany could be safely dismissed.

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Ball's second point is that I treat "American neutrality oddly as the opposite of any belligerency." This I do, but why only American neutrality? Any state's neutrality was the opposite of its belligerency. In traditional international law, during war a state had to be either a neutral or a belligerent. At the same time, it was possible for a neutral to use force, as an exceptional measure, in order to protect its neutral status. There were limits, though undefined, to the measures a state might take to defend its neutrality, since such measures

unavoidably bordered on belligerency. In 1917, America did *not* defend neutrality by refusing “aligned belligerency.” Although choosing not to formally align itself with others, the United States abandoned neutrality and embraced belligerency. The view that one defends neutrality by accepting a belligerent status was rightly rejected by the noninterventionists. On the other hand, belligerency may be the only way to defend a state and its policy of isolation. The obvious, though not the only, case is the isolationist state that defends itself against armed aggression. For all practical purposes, however, an isolationist state was a state that remained neutral in the wars of others.

On the third point that Ball makes: he disagrees with the argument that by acquiescing to the British blockade but by continued and escalating protests against German submarines the United States abandoned the impartiality required of a neutral. I do not see what other conclusion may be drawn. The duty of impartiality was not exhausted by neutrals refusing to recognize the legal validity of a belligerent's actions; it also required the neutral to take such action as would make the offending belligerent desist. Ball writes that such action in the instant case “would have meant war with one or both belligerents.” I dispute this in the case of Great Britain and cast some doubt on it in the case of Germany (provided, of course, that the United States had initially made the British conform to the law governing contraband and blockade). But that argument apart, the consequences Ball draws to show the absurdity of my argument (“it would have meant war with one or both belligerents”) is instead the simple truth of the matter. These considerations apart, Ball is narrowly right in his criticism that one cannot say that the ultimate German reaction was inevitable and at the same time insist that the Germans made a great mistake in not accepting Wilson's Dec. 1916 peace proposal. I overshot the mark; but given the prior course of German-American relations, I did so by not too much.

I quite agree with Ball's conclusion that Wilson's internationalism “was a consequence of his nationalism, not a substitute for it,” and that what primarily motivated him was not innocent lives imperiled by German submarine warfare but innocent American lives. At the same time, he did emphasize as well the German disregard of the “inviolable principal of humanity” which defined the essential difference between war and murder, between the permitted and the forbidden taking of human life. Germany's conduct of submarine warfare, he insisted, overrode this distinction. But so did the British blockade, though it did so in a manner quite different from the submarine. Wilson chose to ignore the effects of the blockade on the German civilian population, though they were in time no less deadly than those of the submarine.

Wilson nevertheless acquiesced in the blockade. Professor Cooper writes that this acquiescence “seems to have arisen from a desire to avoid unnecessary and perhaps costly trouble, with no affecting benefits.” This was certainly true, but only so long as Germany did not respond. The only response open to her, apart from diplomatic protest addressed to the neutral states, was the submarine. The effectiveness of the submarine having been demonstrated in the early stages of the war, an otherwise unemployed German navy began pressing for its use as a commerce destroyer. Even if we were to grant Cooper's contention that this “does not mean that retaliation was the main reason for unleashing the u-boats,” the Allied blockade certainly afforded Germany a weighty reason – or excuse – for

H-Diplo Roundtable

launching the submarine against enemy commerce. I do think that John Coogan went too far in Wilson's case, though not in Lansing's or House's, in dismissing Grey's distinction between the blockade affecting property and the submarine taking lives, and I so stated in the text. That distinction, however spurious in the end, did indeed lend an "emotional edge" to the disputes with Germany.

Cooper writes that I miss the broader significance of the reaction to the sinking of the Lusitania. I do not see what I could have added to my account to emphasize the significance of the event. I thought I had stressed that it was, in Cooper's words, "the great turning point in America's stance toward the war." Quite different is Cooper's contention that I am "dead wrong" in my assertion that Wilson could have taken the country into war over the Lusitania. He could have done so, however, had he only followed the path marked out in his first note to Germany following the sinking. At the very least, that path would have led to the breaking of diplomatic relations, a step that at the time foreshadowed war. Wilson did not follow this course. Instead, his second and third notes either abandoned or softened the terms he had initially set out.

It is the case that in the period following the Sussex affair there was a relaxation of tensions with Germany and deterioration in relations with Great Britain. Between May 1916 and January 1917, Wilson bends his efforts to regain a neutrality lost in the early months of the war. In this, he is certainly helped by German forbearance with the submarine and English measures in the ever tightening of the blockade. His efforts fall short though; he can neither undo his actions of the preceding two years nor can he induce the belligerents to follow him into the uncharted territory of his peace proposal.

Professor Kennedy is critical of my analyses of Wilson's view of Germany. In fact, Wilson's view of Germany in relation to the United States is never altogether clear. In the sentence of mine that Kennedy quotes ("Wilson appears to have entertained little real fear over the consequences a German victory held out for American security.") I added parenthetically "an outcome that, in any event, he did not expect, and particularly in the earlier period of the war." At the same time, I wrote (a few pages later) that: "Wilson was not blind to the prospective threat of a triumphant Germany to the nation's security interests. He appreciated that a German victory, even if it were not immediately to give rise to a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, might eventually impose a burden of military preparedness, which the country had been able to escape in the past." These considerations, however, were not compelling enough to overturn long-held views about the nature and basis of American security. To the limited extent he did see a connection between American security and events in Europe, what was decisive for him was not the threat to the nation's security that *might* arise in a distant future when a victorious Germany had recovered from the devastating effects of war, but the threat to America's institutions and well-being that *would* arise if America were to become a party to the war.

Kennedy sees a consistency in Wilson's attitude toward Germany that I am unable to find. He writes that Wilson "consistently sought to insure its defeat and limit its expansion." To so characterize Wilson's outlook and policy during the entire period of neutrality seems to me to be, if not simply wrong, than at the very least a marked exaggeration. Kennedy thinks

the House-Grey negotiations and the famous memorandum that resulted prove his view. I think that all they bear out is Wilson's determination to avoid war and that Walter Lippmann was right in once arguing that Wilson "would have been willing to have almost any peace in Europe if he could keep America out of war." Lippmann went on to observe: "I think he saw that if once he could induce the belligerents to begin talking that they never could resume fighting. He was willing to try any device including the House negotiations that might bring on a conference, *provided* it did not commit him to entering the war."

The period from late May 1916 to the end of January 1917 appears to support this position. At no time during this period does Wilson appear to favor the Allies over Germany. In late August, he voices the belief "that a psychological moment will come. I am praying that it will come very soon, when some suggestion made out loud by somebody that they (the belligerents) will have to listen to will be irresistible, that they will begin to parley. And once they stop fighting and begin the parley, they will never begin fighting again." There is no favoritism or bias here. Nor is there any in Wilson's prolegomenon to his peace note. The prolegomenon addresses the meaning of the war and is pure Wilson. The thought sequence is this: wars have always been without deeper meaning and significance, but at least they had glory. In this war the glory is gone. All we see is untold human suffering. To obtain enduring peace, it must be shown that suffering has been without real purpose. No "victory" can be allowed to obscure this lesson, lest we set the stage for yet another conflict. The prolegomenon expressed a view that necessarily had to be disguised when Wilson drafted his December 1916 peace note addressed to the belligerents. Yet it is there. Finally, throughout the fall of 1916, Wilson's determination to pursue an even handed course, bolstered by his emphasis on the belligerents' moral equivalence, were a constant worry to House and Lansing, so much so that in November House openly raised the flag of near rebellion.

On Kennedy's last two criticisms – I plead guilty to the first. Too little attention was paid to Wilson's preparedness policy. With respect to the second, however, Kennedy's criticism – that I should have analyzed Wilson's view of international reform more carefully – must be rejected. Wilson's fear of a second world war, which "lay at the center of his thought," was formed only in the later stages of the war, which should have been apparent given the context of my discussion in the final chapter. This fear did not shape his policies in 1914 or even in 1915 until the late summer or early fall, when the president came to appreciate his policies were leading to war with Germany. As for my being "curiously credulous regarding Wilson's goal of creating a new international order," I am at a loss to understand how Kennedy reached this conclusion. Nowhere do I assume that this was "a rational workable objective" and that a "viable league of nations might have been achieved." On the contrary, I express my skepticism on all of this. If I did not take up the "crucial questions" raised by Kennedy, it is because the book deals with Wilson's neutrality policies and why we went to war, not with a critique of how and why a peace league could have been expected to work.

Professor McKillen's general criticism is that I pursue the issue of Wilson's neutrality policies in a vacuum, neglecting or underestimating the importance of economic, social, cultural, and political factors in shaping these policies. A particular grievance is that I overlook the Williams school and the questions raised by this school about linkages

between economics and security interests. In my defense, I must say that my interest was to examine Wilson's policies as such rather than to analyze the many factors influencing Wilson's decisions, and especially the economic. Certainly, his neutrality was from the start shaped by economic concerns. In turn, those concerns were derived, as McKillen notes, from a longstanding desire to expand economically throughout the world (economically though not politically: political isolation from Europe was no myth but a reality).

I doubt whether paying more attention to gender issues would have helped in understanding Wilson's neutrality. It may be true, as McKillen points out, that gender posturing and language formed a critical component of the political culture of the era. It does not follow that concern about appearing “manly” in the public eye played a role in Wilson's obsession with defending the nation's honor and prestige and his unwillingness to compromise with Germany on the disputed issues of neutral rights. Honor and prestige are qualities that we – men and women – identify with the nation; they are deemed important not only in their own right but because they are seen as indispensable for defending other interests of the nation. Honor and prestige remain as significant today as they did in the age of Wilson, though their meaning has altered in the intervening period. Female heads of state have given them the same deference as have male heads of state and they have been quite as determined to uphold them. And if it is argued that women have done so because they yet live in a male dominated world, the reply can only be that the argument remains at best unproven.

Professor Schwabe asks “up to what degree Wilson really was bent on sticking to his principles regardless of the consequences.” He thinks Wilson was perhaps more of a “practical idealist” than I was prepared to admit. Wilson certainly thought of himself as a practical idealist; it was, he thought, what separated him from Bryan. His first secretary of state's readiness to sacrifice neutral rights to stay out of the war was “a singular sort of moral blindness,” Wilson declared to Edith Galt during the crisis brought on by the sinking of the Lusitania. Bryan's failing was not as an idealist but as a practical man who had to come to terms with the world as it was, not as it ought to have been. Wilson was persuaded he was a practical man and his legion of admirers have shared this appreciation.

We need not accept the view of Wilson's critics at the time and after to be skeptical of this self-portrait. If Wilson was neither a shameless opportunist nor a hypocrite, as Roosevelt and his friends charged, he scarcely fits the mold of the practical idealist. One need not point only to the position Wilson took in the fight over the League of Nations to so argue. For the position taken in 1919 - above all the refusal to compromise - was, after all, not a unique one. That position was characteristic of almost all earlier stances taken by Wilson in the great battles marking his career, whether in academia or in politics.

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