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Coolidge against the world: Peace, prosperity, and foreign policy in the 1920s

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Coolidge Against the World: Peace, Prosperity, and Foreign Policy in the 1920s

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Abstract

The common narrative of the 1920s is either to largely ignore the nation during this time and the men who presided over it or to simply dismiss the decade as a time of isolationism and Republican failure and the three presidents as corrupt, lazy, silent, or incompetent. The problems of the more typical narratives are most starkly shown in the realm of foreign policy. A more thorough examination of the role of President Calvin Coolidge and the American nation in that area reveals something very different. Because, if we approach those years as a “historical way station on the road to the New Deal” and Coolidge’s Presidency as years of inaction then we will miss much of the reality of not only Coolidge’s thoughts and actions while President, but also this nation’s deep and complex level of global interaction that occurred during those interwar years.

The best way to challenge the normal narrative is granting even greater voice to President Calvin Coolidge himself. He wrote and delivered hundreds of speeches during his political career, presidential or otherwise. Through his presidential speeches we see not inaction and inactivity, but thoughtful and prudent action and an expectation of other men in his administration to do their jobs. Instead of a United States cut off from the world, hoarding her wealth, ignoring pleas for help, and sitting alone in isolation, we are provided glimpses of global and regional cooperation, the expansion of international trade, and the desire to create peace separately from political entanglements like the League of Nations. These visions of President Coolidge and American foreign policy in the 1920s should change the way we think about and teach the period.

Introduction

Calvin Coolidge was not supposed be president in August of 1923. The sudden death of the elected president, Warren G. Harding, on August 2, 1923 thrust Coolidge into the spotlight. This type of transition is not uncommon in American history, but a sudden change of leaders like this is vastly different from a normal transfer of power at election time. Such successions are different; allow no time for preparation as they are “unscheduled, usually unpredicted, and sudden.”¹ Stepping into his new role, Coolidge would first have to “assure the government and the country of continuity and to promise his loyal pursuit of his predecessor’s policies.”² Approaching Coolidge’s presidency with this understanding changes the way we view his actions prior to the election of 1924, and those that followed during his own term in office. Thinking about this transition and specifically how it applies to the realm of foreign policy we can see those responses made by Coolidge and the direction of the nation’s policy in a new light.

What do we mean by foreign policy? This term is many times misapplied or used to mean something analogous to terms like diplomacy and foreign relations. Historian Richard Leopold created an outstanding definition and differentiation for these terms: “By foreign policy I mean those objectives and aims set by the government for promoting the nation’s interest and welfare in the world at large. Diplomacy I take to be the art or profession of transacting business among governments. Foreign relations I define as the

¹ Frederick C. Mosher, W. David Clinton, and Daniel G. Lang, *Presidential Transitions and Foreign Affairs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 38.

² Mosher, Clinton, and Lang, *Presidential Transitions and Foreign Affairs*, 40.

sum total of all connections – official, private, commercial, and cultural – among different countries and different peoples.”³

As for Calvin Coolidge’s foreign policy he believed strongly in non-intervention and possessed a very nationalistic outlook that would greatly affect his attitudes towards world politics. While he differed greatly from Wilson, they both viewed America and her people as exceptional. Their difference of opinion surrounded how that exceptional spirit could best be used to the world’s benefit. Coolidge wanted to wield our booming economic sector to profit from and improve the world. Wilson, on the other hand, wanted to spread democracy and in a sense expand the ideals of the Monroe Doctrine world-wide. Americans were not isolationists, despite what is commonly portrayed, then and Coolidge was forced to deal with the effects of revolutions in places like China, Mexico, and Russia, naval disarmament debates, the World Court, war reparations and war debts, and the international and national calls for peace. The foreign policy of his administration shows Coolidge’s belief in and his ability to delegate tasks to people who he feels can handle any problems that may arise.

The bookends of World War I and World War II greatly overshadow the peace and prosperity that was afforded Americans in the 1920s. This was not a time of isolation or of inaction on the part of the American people either. There was trading to be done, peace to be fought for, though both rarely required a shot to be fired by Americans. Revolutions from years earlier were continuing to reverberate or boil over again all around the world. Mexico, Nicaragua, China and Russia were all experiencing shouts for

³ Richard W. Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), viii.

freedom, change, and death. The United States was not yet the global power we all imagine striding out of the Second World War victorious, but it was not far from it. It was one of the few nations of sufficient industrial power that had escaped the First World War relatively unscathed and stood to gain from a wide range of credits extended during and shortly after. There was power in that. Wilson had grand plans to sit at the head of the League of Nations. Congress, the American people, and the next two presidents had very different ideas. The political discontent of those nations, either neighbors or far abroad, would need to be addressed by diplomatic poise or the end of a rifle.

The political climate of the post-war 1920s lent itself to the former and the actions of both presidents' administrations reflect this precious knowledge of public opinion. The starkness of the policy shifts during this period are best seen through a reexamination of the nation's foreign policy under Wilson, Harding, and Coolidge particularly. Through Coolidge's speeches, we are offered a glimpse of both what Americans wanted to hear and what their president wanted to tell them. Coolidge and his speeches will be the lens through which we can best see how our nation really responded to a changing role in the world.

Thinking about these questions, concerns about foreign policy and how they might apply to the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, is my goal. The main avenue of understanding the concerns he had about foreign policy can be garnered through the many speeches he gave during his years in office. By deeply analyzing the speeches that Coolidge personally wrote and delivered during his time as president we are able to see both the ideology driving him and the rhetoric that was appealing to so many Americans during the 1920s. The starkness of these ideas is most vividly displayed in the realm of

foreign policy – a realm where both he and the nation deserve much more attention from scholars.

My argument owes much to the work of other historians and writers even though this approach, drawing so heavily from Coolidge's speeches, has never been done before. There are, however, books that have attempted to understand the mind and rhetorical origins of Coolidge's ideas and actions as president. Chief among these are L. John Van Til's *Thinking Cal Coolidge: An Inquiry into the Roots of His Intellectual Life* and Charles C. Johnson's *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America's Most Underrated President*. These have made use of the plethora of early writings (the published ones) as well as materials from his college years at Amherst. Yet neither has made the final leap into looking at the finished product of his presidential speeches and addresses. Johnson's work is one of the two most recent biographies on Coolidge and, surprisingly, he fails to make use of the speeches available through the Library of Congress and other non-published sources. Their efforts were not wasted as they offer us both context and understanding of the origins and depth of President Coolidge's ideals and knowledge that radiate throughout these speeches.

As to any writings on Calvin Coolidge's foreign policy, there is nothing written in any book length format about his foreign policy generally. There are a few theses and published books worthy of note that address specific aspects of his international policies and ideas. The best of the former is Steven R. Hall's "Glimpses of Wilsonianism: United States involvement in Nicaragua during the Coolidge era" and Aykut Kilinc's "Oil, honor and religion: United States foreign policy towards Turkey, 1923—1927." Hall's argument is fascinating for its attempt to show that Coolidge's administration was in

Nicaragua not just to keep the peace and allow for free elections, but to actually change the world's behavior by spreading democracy and civilization to nations like Nicaragua. While there are many positives about this work, it still falls into the trap of assuming too much isolationism for this period and may be confusing a complicated situation where Coolidge exhibits more of a Monroe Doctrine type of thought instead of echoing Wilsonian ideology. Coolidge appears more concerned with American security and regional stability, than with necessarily saving the world. The issues involved with Coolidge and Nicaragua will be explored further in Chapter Three.

Kilinc's work is likewise fascinating, but for different reasons. Discussions of foreign policy during this period are rare; discussions about non-European or non-Central America are even rarer.⁴ This argument focuses on the discussions and policies swirling around the Lausanne Treaty that was originally negotiated between the United States and Turkey in 1923, but after meeting strong, unexpected resistance from the American public it would not be until 1927 that Coolidge would ignore the vote of Senate and sign it into law anyway. Kilinc blames this reaction and the years of foot-dragging on "the Armenian situation and the preconceived prejudices against Muslims and Turks."⁵ Both theses discuss the impact of ideology and the importance of public opinion upon foreign policy during the 1920s. These are themes that will also impact the conclusions being made here as Coolidge seems keenly aware of the calls for peace in the wake of World

⁴ The only two works that directly address US policy towards Turkey during this period are Leland James Gordon's *American Relations with Turkey, 1830-1930: An Economic Interpretation* (1932) and Roger Trask's *The United States Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, 1914-1939* (1971). As you can see by the publication dates, there is certainly much lacking from recent scholarship on this topic.

⁵ Aykut Kilinc, "Oil, honor and religion: United States foreign policy towards Turkey, 1923—1927" (master's thesis, University of New Hampshire, 2007), 84.

War I and is driven by an ideology that is dominated by an understanding of history and a deep appreciation for pragmatism.

Most of the published literature that addresses foreign policy during the 1920s is either about the decade as a whole, treating the presidencies of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover almost as single entity, or is only about specific international problems and places. The best of the books addressing the decade as a whole, is Warren Cohen's *Empire Without Tears: America's Foreign Relations 1921-1933*. Here Cohen offers us a concise and well-written account of the time that was "too important to be dismissed as an isolationist interlude separating the internationalism of Woodrow Wilson from that of Franklin Roosevelt."⁶ He goes further by boldly asserting that the "reader will find no reference to isolationism in this book" which may shake many who have been told that repeatedly about the 1920s.⁷ The greatest mistake that authors treating this time period and Coolidge make is not granting him his own voice.

When Coolidge actually is discussed there have been many claims over the years that he did nothing on the world stage as president. This myth has gone even further at times to claim that not just the president, but that the United States of America "also withdrew from world politics after 1920."⁸ While it is true that this was a calmer period, both at home and abroad, than that experienced by many other American presidents, it is false to claim that either this nation or the Republican presidents of the 1920s were withdrawing from global politics or implementing isolationist policies.

⁶ Warren I. Cohen, *Empire Without Tears: America's Foreign Relations 1921-1933* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), v.

⁷ Cohen, *Empire Without Tears*, v.

⁸ William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass), 2000, 3.

So, the aim of my thesis is to better understand the foreign policy of the United States during the 1920s by making use of the largely untapped voice of Calvin Coolidge through the many speeches he wrote while president. Towards that end, this thesis is divided into four chapters: the return to normalcy, the molding of the mind, Coolidge addressing the world stage, and my conclusion. Chapter One, "Returning to Normalcy," begins with the presidential race and election of 1920 when we see a public rejecting Wilsonian ideas and wanting a different approach to the post-war peace. What is "Return to Normalcy" and why was it appealing to the American public? How do Harding's approaches to foreign policy differ from those of his predecessor? What kinds of policies and issues does Coolidge inherit upon Harding's untimely death? To discuss these previous presidents and the transitions surrounding them, this chapter leans heavily upon secondary works about both Wilson and Harding and their foreign policies. Chief among these are: Lloyd Ambrosius' *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations*, Wesley Bagby's *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920*, Mark Gilderhus' *Pan American Visions: Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere 1913-1921*, Kenneth Grieb's *The Latin American Policy of Warren G. Harding*, Robert Murray's *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration*, and Harley Notter's *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson*.

The attempted goals of this chapter create a difficult situation for both myself, the author, and you, the reader. This is a broad and sweeping narrative that is less about arguing something new in regards to Wilson and/or Harding and more about trying to provide a deeper understanding of both the domestic and foreign situations their

administrations created and what that meant for the problems Coolidge might face during his time in office. This lengthy discussion is far more necessary for our discussion of Coolidge than other presidential transitions might warrant for at least two reasons. First, unlike other instances of presidents dying in office it does not appear that Coolidge held the same ambitions to ascend to the highest office as other vice presidents, like Teddy Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, certainly had. This alone would have left him far less prepared to not only hold the office, but also to take responsibly and initiative on the stage of foreign policy. Our understanding the shift from Wilson to Harding, and then to Coolidge continuing many policies and actions of the latter, is paramount to our appreciation of foreign (and arguably domestic) policy for this time.

Chapter Two, “Molding of the Mind,” will discuss the origins of the mindset and beliefs that will greatly impact the words and actions of Coolidge once he became president. Special attention will be paid to his time at Amherst College under the tutelage of both Anson D. Morse in United States history and Charles Edward Garman in philosophy. In looking at the educational impact of these men we are able to see Coolidge’s deep appreciation for the Founding Fathers, especially our first president, George Washington, and his understanding of America’s past and purpose. This chapter will rely on multiple books that address the teaching of Garman and Morse and how their education might have affected Coolidge’s beliefs. Some examples of these include: *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*, Hendrik Booraem’s *The Provincial: Calvin Coolidge and His World, 1885-1895*, Thomas Le Duc’s *Piety and Intellect at Amherst College, 1865-1912*, John Almon Waterhouse’s *Calvin Coolidge Meets Charles Edward Garman*, and the *Letters, Lectures and Addresses of Charles Edward Garman: A Memorial*

Volume. These works speak to the nature of Garman, the man that Coolidge spends a total of six pages of his 247-page autobiography discussing. As with the final chapter, this discussion will rely heavily upon the writings and speeches of Coolidge himself.

Finally, Chapter Three, “Coolidge Addresses the World Stage” will present and dissect the many presidential speeches written and delivered by the president himself on issues and stances related to foreign policy. What did he say about war and peace? What was his reaction to specific events or problems? To put together the argument of this chapter more thoroughly it will be relying most heavily upon the speeches made by Coolidge while he was in office from 1923-1929. Most of these are housed in the Everett Sanders Papers in the form of machine-readable transcription made available online through the *Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy, 1921-1929* -- Library of Congress. There are also three books that reproduce many of his speeches and addresses, though many of them predate his presidential years. Those titles include Coolidge’s *Foundations of the Republic* and *The Price of Freedom*, as well as *Calvin Coolidge on The Founders: Reflections on The American Revolution & The Founding Fathers*, ed. David Pietrusza.

This examination of Coolidge’s foreign policy through his own words fits into the broader narratives and historiography surrounding him by pushing back against most of what others have written about him. It does so not by directly attacking the works of others, but by showing a side of Coolidge that others have chosen not to and by giving him a voice when others would prefer to keep him as “Silent Cal.” While a full discussion of this historiography is beyond the scope of our question or concern, it is worth our time to briefly discuss the problems inherent in much of the academic and

popular scholarship surrounding Coolidge as it is this same group that has largely ignored many of these speeches he made while president. That issue is very much our concern.

One of the few writers to challenge the standard narrative of Coolidge was scholar Thomas B. Silver. In his book *Coolidge and the Historians*, he questioned the way that our 30th President was presented, especially by the famous and award winning historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who penned the oft-cited history of the 1920s, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order*. Silver argues that well-known historians have not done their due diligence on Coolidge and that the “historian is to the politician much as the judge is to the lawyer. They both take sides, but the lawyer takes one side from the outset and strives with all his might to make it prevail, while the judge takes sides only after giving a fair and full hearing to all parties involved.” The conclusion he reaches is that Coolidge has never been granted this from those “leading historians” like Schlesinger.⁹

However, the problems with the Coolidge historiography seem to go even further back than Schlesinger. While he is guilty of relying so heavily on only sources that appear overly critical of Coolidge, the problems go deeper than that. Schlesinger, and others, have put too much emphasis on the words of three men connected to Coolidge: Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg, famous newspaper editor and author William Allen White, and long-time White House usher Irwin “Ike” Hoover.¹⁰ The comment most used from Vandenberg is that Coolidge was an unimpressive vice-president who would

⁹ Thomas B. Silver, *Coolidge and the Historians* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1982), 8.

¹⁰ All three men published books that are heavily referenced by historians of Coolidge and the 1920s. White had *Calvin Coolidge, The Man Who is President* (1925) and *A Puritan in Babylon: The Story of Calvin Coolidge* (1938); Hoover had *Forty-Two Years in the White House* (1934); and Vandenberg had *The Trial of a Tradition* (1926).

have probably been denied re-nomination.¹¹ The reader, when presented this would likely not be surprised to be told that Coolidge would have been equally so as president.¹²

However, the actual passage from Vandenberg, that is rarely quoted or presented in its entirety seems to speak differently of Coolidge.

Death put its tragic hand upon President Harding before his work was done. Succeeding him came a quiet, modest, unperturbable New Englander who – while so unimpressive as Vice-President that he probably would have been denied re-nomination even for second place, had his chief survived – has captured the well-nigh universal imagination of the people in his unruffled, common sense dependabilities in the higher station which he now occupies in his own right. The character of President Calvin Coolidge partakes the atmosphere of those granite hills that gave him birth. He never shirks a rendezvous with duty. He came to maturity in a sector of the nation which not only is rich in intimate tradition, but also believes in keeping green the laurel of those patriotic memories. It is inevitable that all worth tradition in his keeping shall be safe. It is certain that the trail will not wander while his compass points the onward press.¹³

Vandenberg's words now seem to carry a much different tune about Coolidge. Instead of a man speaking of the terrible political career and outlook of a president we are given a passage that appears largely filled with hope and positivity. This presentation of Vandenberg's views is rarely given.

White presents himself, and is then often misrepresented by historians, as a reliable source on Coolidge's nature and character because he supposedly knew him well. However, he only met the man about three times and all after Coolidge had entered the White House.¹⁴ Certainly White knew of Coolidge but using him as a source of something akin to a character witness is perhaps questionable at best. There are parts of

¹¹ Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur M., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1957), 57.

¹² Silver, *Coolidge and the Historians*, 11.

¹³ Arthur H. Vandenberg, *The Trail of a Tradition* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1926), 396.

¹⁴ Silver, *Coolidge and the Historians*, 15.

his works that do carry more weight, such as comments that pertain to observable traits or qualities that only contemporaries could bear witness to. Such as how “the impact of his Presidential responsibilities had weighted him down” and aged him considerably.¹⁵ White is also not the only one of Coolidge’s contemporaries to voice concern over his physical health. As with the breadth and depth of Vandenberg’s comments, these more useful portions of White’s are underrepresented.

The treatment of Ike Hoover’s comments is usually applied in a similar fashion. Schlesinger used them to jump to rather extreme conclusions about the actual amount or quality of Coolidge’s work while in office.

As President, he dedicated himself to inactivity. “No other President in my time,” said the White House usher, “ever slept so much.” In his dozen or so waking hours, he did as little as possible.¹⁶

Now, commenting about the sleep habits of a president in a positive or negative fashion is one thing, but for Schlesinger to take that and conclude that that Coolidge dedicated himself to inactivity and did as little as possible while awake is really grasping at straws. Reaching those conclusions based on the words of Ike Hoover are disingenuous to both reality and the words of Hoover.

None of this is to say that these sources do not deserve our attention or are inherently unreliable. Instead, it is to call for a more complete picture to be offered and fairer treatment by historians. Not all of the historians and writers on Coolidge have belittled his role generally or in the realm of foreign policy. More recent books like Robert Sobel’s *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (1998), Amity Shlaes’ *Coolidge* (2013),

¹⁵ William Allen White, *A Puritan in Babylon* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 428.

¹⁶ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, 57.

and Charles Johnson's *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from American's Most Underrated President* (2013) have at least attempted to provide discussion of issues relating to foreign issues. Both Johnson and Sobel offer complete chapters to address these concerns and Shlaes attempts to discuss them throughout. While this is an improvement over other writings on Coolidge, there is still work to be done, particularly in emphasizing and granting the former president a voice in the matter through a greater focus on his speeches and writings.

What does this all mean for our bigger questions about Coolidge's and America's foreign policy during the 1920s? If we approach those years as a "historical way station on the road to the New Deal" and Coolidge's Presidency as years of inaction then we will miss much of the reality of not only Coolidge's thoughts and actions while President, but also this nation's deep and complex level of global interaction that occurred during those interwar years.¹⁷ Largely ignoring these foreign interactions and events and trying to belittle the character of former presidents by misrepresenting or ignoring sources does not change facts. Giving greater voice to Coolidge is one way to start to change this mindset.

Chapter One: Returning to Normalcy

The returns for the 1920 election were deafening in their rejection of the Wilsonian direction of the country in the post-war years. The Republican candidate, Warren G. Harding, took a resounding 16,143,407 votes and 404 electoral votes to Democrat James Cox's 9,141,750 and 127 electoral votes. Even though Harding would capture a Southern state for the first time since Reconstruction, the South still went

¹⁷ Silver, *Coolidge and the Historians*, 82.

overwhelming Democratic with Cox capturing all of the remaining region plus Kentucky. That, however, was not enough to stave off Harding winning by a staggering popular majority of 60 percent.¹⁸ These numbers and results are impressive, but perhaps the most visible rejection of Wilson and the Democrats came in the form of states which had shifted their support from Wilson in 1912 and 1916 to the Republicans.¹⁹

President Woodrow Wilson's stance that the 1920 campaign should be a "great and solemn referendum" on the League of Nations, as well as the Democratic convention's support for the League left their eventual nominee with little room to deviate on the issue.²⁰ The result of this stance, and the "partisan controversy" surrounding the League since 1919 forced Cox to defend and Harding to attack it.²¹ In many ways this statement from Wilson typified his obsession in the years after World War I. His pursuit of both the creation of a League of Nations and America's participation in it seems to have left him ignoring many of the other problems of the world. This debate, for or against the League, gave the appearance of an argument for or against globalism or nationalism. Few things are this simple and the votes, in Congress or the 1920 election, against the League were not, however, calls for isolationism.

This chapter is unique in that its focus is not on Coolidge exactly. Instead the point is to explain the world as it was when Warren Harding's death forced Coolidge into a role he neither expected nor was particularly qualified for, especially in regards to

¹⁸ Wesley M. Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 159.

¹⁹ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 159-160.

²⁰ Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 43-44.

²¹ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 134.

foreign policy. By looking at the foreign policy decisions of both President Woodrow Wilson and President Harding we are able to see their impact on the world and America's role in it, that would affect the choices Coolidge would have to make when he became president. It is not the intent or the purpose of this chapter to provide a complete account of Wilson's presidency, the Paris Peace Conference, the 1920 campaign, or Harding's presidency. Instead the focus will always be: what does this mean for Coolidge and the world he would encounter? With that focus in mind there are many questions pertaining to the years 1919-1923 that can be raised. What is "Return to Normalcy" and why was it appealing to the American public? What was the foreign policy of Wilson and Harding? What role did the League of Nations debates play in the 1920 election? How does Harding's approach to foreign policy differ from that of his predecessor? What kinds of policies and issues does Coolidge inherit upon Harding's untimely death? These questions are pertinent to the 30th President because decisions made in the realm of foreign policy usually take time to truly manifest themselves as problems or solutions. Choices made by both Wilson and Harding will impact the world Coolidge will face. The public's positive response to the idea of a return to normalcy and other ideas of frugality and prosperity under Harding made it easier for Coolidge to step in and continue most of those directions, particularly on the home front where changes can and do occur more quickly.

To try and answer these questions we will first discuss what isolationism was and how it differs from the non-interventionism that Harding and Coolidge would actually emphasize. Then we will briefly look at the foreign policy directions for both Wilson and Harding. For Wilson, the focus will be the post-war years and the important debates

about the League of Nations. For Harding, we will look at his election and the policy decisions that followed. Both men made decisions, good and bad, that would greatly impact the world that Coolidge would gaze upon on the morning of August 3, 1923.

Isolationism and non-interventionism are far too often confused and misapplied by historians and political scientists. Isolationism is a policy that actively resists entering alliances, engaging in economic trade with foreign powers, or joining in international agreements. The end result is usually a focus upon being economically self-reliant and in a constant state of peace as alliances and disputes are aggressively avoided. Many scholars believe that the United States was isolationist up through the interwar years, including the 1920s.²² America has never actively pursued a true isolationist policy, and certainly not during the presidencies of the Republican leaders Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. Under their leadership, attempts were made to not only cooperate with other nations, but to better the world through conferences and trade deals. These attempts included the creation of pacts to outlaw war, conferences to limit naval armaments, and trade deals like the Pan-American agreements. The United States also intervened, militarily or otherwise, around the world in an attempt to create or keep political stability in foreign nations. Those are not actions of a nation cutting itself off from the world. If at any time in this nation's history it would seem that isolationist tendencies did show themselves, it was during the Great Depression, but that was a necessity based on limited

²² Richard Leopold who wrote extensively on American foreign policy has an interesting idea of what isolationism was and meant to the United States. While he described it in similar terms, he felt that it was used and applied alongside other major concepts like neutrality and the Monroe Doctrine, and lesser concepts like nonintervention, recognition of de facto government, and equality of trade opportunity, which originally afforded the young nation a positive and realistic course. For Leopold, the abandonment of isolationism would not occur till the eve of World War II where there "seemed no alternative to abandoning their historic isolationism and neutrality." See Richard Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy: A History*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1962, 17-18 and 545.

funds, a floundering global market, and a focus on trying to fix national problems in the wake of the Stock Market Crash.

Instead, America traditionally pursued a non-interventionist foreign policy prior to 1945. The famous Farewell Address of America's first President, George Washington, is typically pointed to as the starting point for thinking about how to conceptualize our nation's foreign policy. Historian Richard Leopold thinks that Washington's Farewell Address "constituted a foreign policy of independence, not isolationism" that spoke to having as limited a political, not economic, relationship with Europe as possible.²³ Independence is the key to non-interventionist ideas as it allows the nation to trade freely, resist joining alliances or signing treaties that limit national sovereignty of thought and action, and hopefully enjoy years of peace. The freedom of economic trade is a component that is missing from isolationist foreign policies, but was actively encouraged and pursued by the Republicans of the 1920s.

While discussions of isolationism in regards to the League of Nations debates and the election of 1920 are important, it is imperative to remember that the sides were far from strictly Democratic internationalists versus Republican nationalists.²⁴ Historian Lloyd E. Ambrosius raises concern over many other historian's attempts to emphasize what they saw as a "negative, partisan, and isolationist role" of the Republicans despite that party's support of what they saw as a positive alternative to the League.²⁵ Perhaps historians fail, just as Wilson did, to "appreciate the distinction that [Elihu] Root and

²³ Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy*, 19-20.

²⁴ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 92.

²⁵ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 91.

other Republicans made between a global system of collective security and an alliance limited to Western Europe.”²⁶ This alternative was a proposal made by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George that required a pledge by American and British leaders to defend France against a future German attack if the French would rescind their demand for the ceding of the Rhineland from Germany to France. Wilson agreed to this plan and submitted the French security treaty to the Senate on July 29, 1919 but only with the view of its existence in conjunction with the League of Nations. His refusal to view the alliance as a possible alternative to the League all but destroyed support for this treaty from Republicans.²⁷ In the end no agreement could be reached as Republicans refused to consider the French security treaty if it was attached to the League, and on the other side Democrats refused to support it separately.²⁸

While the rejection of the League of Nations and general direction of Wilson’s foreign policy is important to our understanding of the attitudes and desires of Americans, the apparent rejection of Progressivism inherent in Harding’s electoral victory is equally as valuable. Historian Wesley Bagby described the absence of progressivism in the campaign of 1920 as its “most striking feature” as it had characterized both the elections of 1912 and 1916.²⁹ That is to say that the campaign was lacking concern over education, regulations, and labor laws. Instead, the focus was on jump-starting the economy and trying to avoid the possibility of being dragged into Europe’s problems again. Bagby further claims that to many contemporaries, like

²⁶ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 93.

²⁷ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 93.

²⁸ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 97.

²⁹ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 161.

Republican William Borah, the “campaign and the election signified the exhaustion of the progressive impulse and a consequent movement into reaction” and they would see their opinions justified by the “adoption of governmental policies during the next decade which seemed designed to facilitate, instead of preventing the exploitation of the common man.”³⁰ In the end though, he does not see the election actually halting the Progressive Movement. Instead the election simply “demonstrated that progressivism had been temporarily submerged during the war in the new social climate that neither produced nor supported progressive leaders.”³¹ While that may be true in regards to the election of 1920, historian Robert Murray thinks the absence of progressivism is only bolstered by the policies of Harding and then Coolidge, particularly in regards to the economics where “the outward signs of prosperity, robbed progressivism of much of its relevancy” for the middle and upper-middle classes.³² While the election may not have completely halted the movement, the rejection of elements of Democratic domestic and foreign policies would allow for Harding’s dominant victory and set the stage for a world where the ideas of the Progressive movement would still appear necessary as exploitation and suffering would not disappear despite the increased prosperity.

For Bagby, the World War altered the mindset of the society and “required the inculcation of principles contradictory to such philosophic underpinnings of progressivism as humanitarianism, the social gospel, faith in the generality of man, respect for the individual, and democracy itself.”³³ The total impact of the rejection of

³⁰ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 161-162.

³¹ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 167.

³² Murray, *The Harding Era*, 505.

³³ Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 167.

progressivism is beyond the scope of my argument as its influence affects domestic policy to a much larger degree, but the ideals, morals, and customs of the American people would shape the direction of the election which would alter foreign policy for the next decade. The fact that society was turning away from many of the progressive ideas is important because it helps explain part of the support Harding received and in some ways how three, distinct Republican leaders were able to win consecutive elections during the 1920s.

Woodrow Wilson's attempts for creating, in his mind, a more perfect and peaceful world in the wake of the First World War offers us a window into many problems that plagued foreign policy during his last years in office and in many cases would carry over to the next president and beyond. Historian N. Gordon Levin, Jr. describes this effort of Wilson, from 1917 forward, to be an attempt to "construct a stable world order of liberal-capitalist internationalism, at the Center of the global ideological spectrum, safe from both the threat of imperialism on the Right and danger of revolution on the Left."³⁴ While this is certainly true, his ideas of peace and a new world order were far from perfect. The League of Nations debate was at the forefront of everyone's mind as a peace treaty was attempted in the wreckage of Europe. While it is probably far too simple to say that the results of Wilson's attempts to form the League, and have America lead the way into a new future of peace, shaped the election of 1920 and paved the way for Republican domination of that decade. It is not unreasonable to point to Wilson's single-

³⁴ N. Gordon Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1.

minded, obsessive, and internationalist focus as being detrimental in his final years and it did certainly put the Democratic party in a tough position for the coming election.

While a complete breakdown and analysis of Woodrow Wilson's ideas on peace, foreign policy, and a more perfect world order are beyond the scope of this work, we must address the basic beliefs that drove his actions in foreign policy during those years between 1917 and 1920. Political scientist and writer Harley Notter breaks Wilson's policy down into three defining elements. The first was morality "which derived from his historical studies, his conception of progress, and his social-religious philosophy." The "belief in the capacity and the right of people to rule themselves was another basic element." This second one stemmed from his studies in English and American history, the famous writings of statesmen from 18th and 19th centuries, and from his political-social-religious philosophy. Finally, was the way he conceived of America and her mission. In Wilson's mind, the nation had been founded "upon ideal foundations with a singular devotion to the principles of democracy and Christianity and to the well-being of mankind."³⁵ Notter's intense and detailed research shows that each of these elements of thought that defined Wilson's foreign policy had actually "been determined – and in several instances the specific policies built upon them had been formulated – before he entered the White House as President."³⁶ Wilson's concepts and ideas were clearly well developed and deeply affected by his years as a scholar and historian. Like Coolidge, his religious faith would also shape his ideas and policies. His years spent as a historian also gave him a different perspective on the reception of his ideas and choices. Certainly,

³⁵ Harley Notter, *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 651-652.

³⁶ Notter, *The Origins*, 654.

while he wanted public approval, in the present, he also very much sought with every action to be on the right side of history.

Months before the Allied powers were victorious, Woodrow Wilson made a speech on January 8, 1918 that highlighted his Fourteen Points for European and world peace and why victory in the war was necessary. This speech was made from a mindset of a man who felt that he alone held the answer to re-building the globe (especially Europe) out of the ashes of a world war. The principles put forth called for many ideas like free trade, democracy, and even a certain level of national self-determination to be applied to, protected by, and used by the global community.³⁷ For Americans the “most important impact that the Fourteen Points had was to engender a fresh environment for progressive internationalism and the League.”³⁸

The importance of this famous speech goes beyond Wilson’s utterance of these words and branches out into both the issues surrounding the pursuit of peace at the war’s conclusion and the upcoming American presidential campaign. It is also clear that Wilson had already taken steps towards pushing the ideas of the League and a new world order by himself as “he did not consult the State Department” and only “read the text to Lansing the day before he spoke to Congress.” On top of that his private secretary, Joseph Tumulty, “knew nothing of the speech until two hours before its delivery” and

³⁷ For the best summary of these ideas and their repercussions, see Robert H. Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 125-126.

³⁸ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 146.

“three cabinet members learned of it several hours afterward.”³⁹ Wilson saw his path to historic immortality and the pursuit had begun.

The initial steps of Woodrow Wilson at the Peace Conference in 1919 were bungled with a series of four tactical errors. All of these miscalculations point to a president vastly differing in leadership style and conceptualization of the president’s role in comparison to the men who would follow him, including Coolidge. Wilson appears fearful to delegate very much responsibility to the State Department and his Secretary of State. His actions here also raise questions as to the boundaries of the American president – do they have the authority to negotiate peace? Individually, these decisions likely were not fatal to the world’s future or Wilson’s legacy. However, as we have seen, the failure of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations to create peace and re-build after the world war would have dire consequences. Here in the United States, it would directly affect the election of 1920 and put Coolidge in a position to ascend to the highest office upon Harding’s untimely death. Around the world, tensions would remain high and debt would remain a problem even before depression swept the globe.

Wilson’s first, and likely biggest mistake, was his decision to go to Paris at the head of the United States delegation. This was an “unprecedented action” by an American president as few men holding that office up to this time had left the country, let alone travelled to Europe, for either business or pleasure. Originally Wilson had planned on staying in Washington, D.C. as it was “not customary” for the “titular head of state to negotiate.”⁴⁰ Clearly he changed his mind and attended anyway; breaking both custom

³⁹ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 125.

⁴⁰ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 136.

and historic precedent. However, while this action on Wilson's part may have been unprecedented, but so was the bloody war that he felt warranted it.

The second mistake was the selection of Paris as the site of the peace conference. Ferrell claims that it was chosen to "please the French who had suffered most in the war." Regardless, it was a poor choice though it actually was not the original choice. The plan had been to hold it in a neutral state and Switzerland seemed ideal. However, "at the last minute Wilson and Lansing threw over the plan" because of rumors about Bolshevik propaganda in the country.⁴¹

Third, was the group chosen to represent the United States. This delegation consisted of: Colonel Edward M. House, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, General Tasker H. Bliss, and the lone Republican, Henry White a retired diplomat. Each man carried problems with him to the peace talks. Ferrell called this a "weak" group and elaborated on the concerns with each. For House, the problem was his appointment made him prominent and he required the ability to work behind the scenes. Lansing had been put in the State Department because Wilson desired a figurehead. To make matters worse the President was said to have "talked to House for months about how stupid Lansing was" and their need to have him replaced. The selection of Bliss appears to have "made no sense other than the general's attendance at the Supreme War Council." With White, Ferrell terms his appointment "absurd" because he "had spent years outside of the United states, possessed no importance in the Republican party, and was old and tired."⁴² This does not sound like a group that would have inspired much confidence and in fact, it

⁴¹ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 137.

⁴² Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 137.

comes across as a group that would simply let Wilson get his way and not steal any of the limelight he was sure to garner with his visit to Europe. Finally, the fourth problem stemmed from the actual convening of the conference. Though not entirely Wilson's fault the bringing together of delegations was haphazard at best, both with the American contingent and the other nations involved.⁴³

All of these errors compounded the concerns surrounding both the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. Worst of all for Wilson, the League and the Articles of the Covenant were now directly tied to him and his efforts in Paris throughout 1919. Understanding the outcome of the peace conference and the American rejection of the League of Nations offers us another glimpse of the world that Wilson helped shape; a world that Coolidge would have to face shortly.

Two of the non-League issues that arose during the peace talks that would impact foreign policy over the next decade were penalties levied against the Central Powers: the issue of reparations and the doling out of Germany's (and the former Ottoman Empire's) colonies. The issue of reparations against Germany would plague international relations throughout the next decade and President Wilson had much to do with the bill.⁴⁴ For it was Wilson who pushed the idea of including the cost of Allied military pensions and separation allowances into demands for reparations. The United States would also submit a claim for additional reparations to cover the costs of the small American army that stayed in Germany until 1923. In the end, the conference passed a reparations bill that in 1921 forced Germany to pay a total of \$33 billion, a figure that is staggering considering

⁴³ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 139-140.

⁴⁴ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 142.

the financial situation they were in at the time. More than half of that sum was the result of pensions. To make matters worse the conference also wrote direct blame for the war onto the German's shoulders. This assertion would deeply affect European politics for at least a generation.⁴⁵

The breaking up of the former Central Power's colonial holdings is a bit more complicated. Much of it started with the British and French dividing up the Middle East provinces of the former Ottoman Empire – Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq – with the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. The British received the majority of the territory. Following that there was a secret treaty between the British and Japanese in 1917 that essentially split German Pacific holdings by a line drawn down the equator. This gave Japan the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas island groups.⁴⁶ The effect of these two decisions would impact foreign policy and international conflict for decades to come.

In the end, Wilson with his desire for a particular kind of peace was the focus of criticism from American liberals and socialists on the Left and by the Lodge-led Republicans on the Right. Those on the Left “argued that the severe terms of the Treaty had laid the foundations for another world war” and as radicals they disliked America's involvement in the League of Nations, an organization they saw as being an “imperialistic and anti-revolutionary postwar extension of the Entente alliance.” Wilson's critics on the Right approved of the Treaty's “severity” but sought to keep the United States' “freedom of decision in foreign affairs inviolate” and they opposed the League

⁴⁵ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 142-143.

⁴⁶ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 143-144.

which they saw as a “device for absorbing American power far too directly into the defense of the pro-Allied European settlement.”⁴⁷

While debate about the League and the peace treaty dominated much of political discussion and policy formation, both at home and abroad, it was not the only concern of Wilson in the post-war years. The Russian Revolution posed quite a problem for Wilson and his ideology. As the czar was replaced in 1917 he welcomed the initial government that took over, but refused to recognize the Bolsheviks who eventually overturned that short-lived democratic rule. Then, in 1918 Wilson ordered a contingent of U.S. troops into the regions of northern Russia and Siberia which resulted in fighting between them and the Bolsheviks. His refusal of diplomatic recognition of the Soviet state was done because he believed “that the Russian people would never accept communist rule.” It would appear that Wilson’s stance of non-recognition and his reluctant intervention violated the principle of national self-determination regardless of how much he pushed anti-Bolshevik policies as essential to ending the war with Germany and creating world peace.⁴⁸ This policy of non-recognition would be upheld by both Presidents Harding and Coolidge, though slowly trade between the two will increase despite the governmental attitudes.

The peace conference also failed to reach an agreement on the Russian problem and instead chose to basically the avoid the issue.⁴⁹ Murray asserts that as historians have looked back on these events, it is in this failure, among the many perpetrated by the

⁴⁷ Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics*, 253.

⁴⁸ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 129.

⁴⁹ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 147.

delegates, that resides “the fundamental reason the conference failed.”⁵⁰ Perhaps this statement is less bold if we actually consider the impact that Soviet Russia would hold for the world over the rest of the century. Maybe Wilson and other national leaders had a right to fear the Bolsheviks. However, their fears would never materialize into real action – military or otherwise.

The decision to recognize (or not) Turkey, the most powerful player to emerge from the crumbling Ottoman Empire in the wake of defeat, was another issue that would not be resolved until Coolidge took executive action in 1927 and re-established relations.⁵¹ While the ideologies were obviously different between the Bolsheviks and the Turks, this difference of belief would again form the basis for the United States’ policies of non-recognition. Much like Russia, problems arose prior to the end of the war. In 1915 a new effort by the Ottomans to suppress the Armenians emerged and anti-Turkish feelings in the United States grew.⁵² Diplomatic relations were severed April 20, 1917 shortly after America declared war against Germany. Despite their severing of ties the two powers never declared war against each other. There were tactical and practical reasons against such a move as it could have offered a military advantage to Germany, caused American troops to fight over a larger area, halted American relief efforts in the Middle East, and likely damage to American property in the region.⁵³ Any discussion of American and Turkish relations during this period must always return to the questions surrounding the Armenian genocide. Historian Simon Payaslian blames Wilson for not

⁵⁰ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 147.

⁵¹ Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 230.

⁵² Roger R. Trask, *The United States Response to Turkish Nationalism and Reform, 1914-1939* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 20.

⁵³ Trask, *The United States Response to Turkish Nationalism*, 21-22.

being as “strongly committed” to the issues relating to Armenia as he was to the League, saying that he “was not prepared to expend much political capital on the Armenian question.” Payaslian thinks that Wilson could have provided economic and military aid to the Republic of Armenia and her people with little resistance from Congress.⁵⁴ Oddly enough, Wilson’s administration, with its rhetoric of moralism and humanitarianism, failed to stop the genocide and instead focused on trying to maintain friendly relations with the Turkish government during and after the war. A true peace and diplomatic relations with this nation would not return to their pre-war state until late in Coolidge’s presidency.

While Europe and the Old World were the focus of much of Wilson’s foreign policy, the concerns of issues closer to home were also important. Revolution and political upheaval in Mexico would cause problems for American presidents for over a decade. The beginning was the “ouster of the aging dictator” Porfirio Diaz which led to the election of Francisco I. Madero whose presidency would not last long. By 1913 he had been assassinated as part of a military takeover that saw General Victoriano Huerta grab power. The cycle would continue as a rebellion began amongst northern dissidents under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza. This revolt lasted eighteen months and “repeatedly confounded” Wilson.⁵⁵ Just as he wished to avoid military intervention in Soviet Russia, Wilson sought other alternatives to a peaceful correction of revolutions in Mexico. His attempts surrounded withholding diplomatic recognition and indirectly

⁵⁴ Simon Payaslian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 172-173.

⁵⁵ Mark T. Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions: Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere, 1913-1921* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 12.

supporting the removal of Huerta from power.⁵⁶ The events in Mexico were one of many that raised questions about the meaning and application of the Monroe Doctrine in the current and future world.⁵⁷ Relations with Mexico would continue to be a problem for the next decade. To ease tensions and try and establish peaceful and beneficial cooperation, Coolidge would send multiple ambassadors until one was able to make hopes into realities.

Attempts were made by Wilson's administration to institute a Pan American Pact that would foster "what contemporary social scientists would call 'regional integration'" where "the cultivation of more intimate ties would demonstrate self-evident virtues and necessarily would serve mutual interests in peace, prosperity, and security." Those who believed in such ideas of Pan Americanism "presumed the existence of natural harmonies in the western hemisphere and reasoned that the creation of a functioning, regional system would benefit all participants by facilitating, among other things, the settlement of disputes, the expansion of trade, and the diminution of European influences."⁵⁸ The Great War changed things. Wilson's focus drifted from Latin America to Europe and the rest of the world. There were questions as to whether the Monroe Doctrine could "coexist logically" with the Fourteen Points.⁵⁹ As to this question, there is a belief that they need not coexist, instead "his vision of a future League of Nations represented the worldwide expansion of the Monroe Doctrine."⁶⁰ Towards the end of his presidency there was a

⁵⁶ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, 13.

⁵⁷ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, 15.

⁵⁸ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, ix.

⁵⁹ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, 129.

⁶⁰ Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 41.

clear “tendency to relegate Latin American concerns to a lesser plane” which “produced dismay and disquietude over prospects for the future.”⁶¹

One final point bears mention here and it is the issue of the eventual American occupation of Nicaragua. Violence and instability in this country highlighted a growing concern surrounding the Panama Canal as it neared completion and “American investments grew larger in this region.” With this increased presence and the importance of the Canal to trade and naval power the stability of the states in Central America and the Caribbean became ever more important.⁶² “Recurrent violence,” like that in Mexico, now “endangered national interests.”⁶³ Nicaragua “was close to anarchy” and the United States “moved to save it from collapse.”⁶⁴ Marines would be sent in to prevent “the chaos that would result if the factions were left to fight it out for control.”⁶⁵ They would occupy the country for twelve years, from 1912 to 1924 and account for little change. Kamman believes it was “still a country unprepared for democracy, with a penchant for revolution.”⁶⁶ Thus would the issue of what to do with Nicaragua carry over to Coolidge and he would wrestle with problems of trying to stabilize the country in his own right. As we can see, questions surrounding Mexico, Latin America, and Pan Americanism, would not die with the League of Nation debates and the thought of expanding the Monroe Doctrine. Issues surrounding this region would carry over through the next few

⁶¹ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, 129.

⁶² Notter, *The Origins*, 247.

⁶³ Notter, *The Origins*, 247.

⁶⁴ William Kamman, *A Search for Stability: United States Diplomacy Towards Nicaragua, 1925-1933* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 12.

⁶⁵ Notter, *The Origins*, 308.

⁶⁶ Kamman, *A Search for Stability*, 17.

presidencies as his actions there “had perhaps caused more controversy there than anywhere else in the world.”⁶⁷

With this brief summary and analysis of the world Woodrow Wilson envisioned and tried to create, we can see how both his successes and failures shaped the world that both Presidents Harding and Coolidge would encounter. How did Harding face the challenge of stepping into the White House and addressing these and other problems?

During the campaign of 1920 Warren G. Harding attacked the idea of the League of Nations but he was also aggressively targeting the mindset of Wilson and the Democratic party in both the domestic and foreign spheres. When thinking about Harding and his political ideology it is almost impossible to separate him from the famous idea of a ‘Return to Normalcy.’ The speech that brought forth that famous line contains many points that speak to his measure of both the nation and the world.

America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality.⁶⁸

Here we see the phrase surrounded by calls to reject many of the perceived goals of Wilson, the Democratic nominee Cox, and even Progressivism. A later statement would remove all doubt that Harding rejected notions that legislation or laws would save the world from human nature. “The world needs to be reminded that all human ills are not curable by legislation, and that quantity of statutory enactment and excess of government

⁶⁷ Eugene P. Trani and David L. Wilson, *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 132.

⁶⁸ Warren G. Harding, “Return to Normalcy,” *TeachingAmericanHistory.org*, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/return-to-normalcy/>

offer no substitute for quality of citizenship.”⁶⁹ Harding cleverly worded his statement to go after internationalism *and* progressivism in one fell swoop. Both held beliefs that if problems like war or child labor were allowed to exist unimpeded they were dangerous and the only way to fix them and to protect society from itself was to erect barriers in the form of laws. Instead of thinking of the world in that fashion, Harding, Coolidge, and many Republicans at the time saw more merit in fixing ourselves first, hence the reference to there being no substitute for good citizens. Harding would eventually turn his ‘normalcy’ into an antonym for Wilsonianism through skillful politics and luck, and with that “he became invincible.”⁷⁰

Harding never made the attacks personal though as he spoke respectfully of both Cox and Roosevelt and called Wilson “one of the most intellectual figures of a century and a half” during the campaign. Just as he had secured the nomination it was suggested in their strategy meeting that the primary target should be Wilson and not Cox, and Harding is said to have responded, “I guess you have nominated the wrong candidate, if this is the plan, for I will never go to the White House over the broken body of Woodrow Wilson.”⁷¹ Pair this potential statement with the way he spoke of internationalism and progressivism and you see a man who is willing to attack ideas and beliefs he disagrees with, but not the person who holds those beliefs. Harding’s approach fit both the campaign and his personality well.

⁶⁹ Warren G. Harding, “Return to Normalcy,” *TeachingAmericanHistory.org*, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/return-to-normalcy/>

⁷⁰ Murray, *The Harding Era*, 70.

⁷¹ E. Mont Reily, “Years of Confusion,” unpublished manuscript, Ohio Historical Society Library, Columbus, Ohio, 111-120, quoted in Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 52.

Unlike Wilson, who had tried to take foreign policy directly into his own hands, Harding was prepared to let members of his administration perform their assigned tasks. President-elect Harding announced Charles Evans Hughes as his secretary of state on February 21, 1921 and told reporters that in his administration that questions for the state department would go to the secretary of state.⁷² This was not done because Harding lacked anything in regards to foreign policy experience; it could be argued he was one of the most experienced presidents in that regard up to this time. He was quite the world traveler having first visited Europe in 1907, again in 1909, and yet again in 1911. During the 1909 trip he also stopped off in Egypt. In 1911 he traveled to the Caribbean and in 1915 to Hawaii. Finally, between the election and his inauguration he visited Panama. Beyond his travels, he had served as chairman for the Senate's Committee on the Philippine Islands, and been on the Committees on Naval Affairs, Pacific Islands, and Territories, and was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee.⁷³ Harding possessed a first-hand knowledge of the world and foreign relations that few people were capable of at that time.

The decision to empower his secretary of state in spite of his personal knowledge was because he was aware of the complexities of foreign affairs and policy; he was "not comfortable in dealing with diplomatic problems."⁷⁴ This was a change from Wilson's approach that had resulted in using "[William Jennings] Bryan, [Robert] Lansing, and even Bainbridge Colby largely as clerks and kept control of foreign policy in the White

⁷² Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 109.

⁷³ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 109-110.

⁷⁴ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 110.

House.”⁷⁵ A deviation from Wilson here further highlights Harding’s sense of an attempt to ‘Return to Normalcy’ and trying to re-establish a sense of his belief of what the president’s role and power really were.

Of the many problems left unresolved by Wilson, the most problematic at the time and in the long-run probably the most significant was America’s relationship with the Soviet Union in the wake of the Bolsheviks’ revolution and rise to power.⁷⁶ Harding had his opportunity to reverse the course set by his predecessor and he chose against it. In March of 1921 the Soviets called for a reversal of the non-recognition policy and showed a desire for improved relations with the new presidential administration. Not a single member of the cabinet supported the move and Hughes spoke out against it. He was not the only vocal member as Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, also spoke out against any deal with the Soviets. Despite the changes in theory and action from Wilson, they still stuck with the approach of the previous administration and refused recognition of the Bolshevik government. Why was there support for staying the course? Because the “Republicans agreed with their Democratic predecessors about the ideological reasons for non-recognition.” Indeed, the vocal Hoover “was convinced of the need to proclaim an American ideology, because bolshevism, more than any ideology, threatened American individualism, mobility, private property, equality of opportunity, democracy, and economic expansion.”⁷⁷ The issue of Soviet recognition would remain unchanged for many more years and continue to be a concern for Coolidge.

⁷⁵ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 110.

⁷⁶ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 116.

⁷⁷ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 120-121.

The Harding administration was more effective in its handling of the Mexican situation, another problem inherited from Wilson's presidency.⁷⁸ With Mexico there was also the issue of recognition stemming from their own series of revolutions. Unlike concerns over ideology, the fear was for the safety of Americans and their interests in and around Mexico. Before any sort of recognition could be granted they "must sign a pact furnishing safeguards" that would offer "assurances against confiscation and expropriation, except for public purposes and then only with prompt payment of just compensation" and further guarantees protecting private property. They also wanted "restoration, where possible, of all that Americans had lost since 1910" and "reciprocal guarantees for nationals of either country of freedom to worship."⁷⁹ This was presented in the form of a treaty that the Mexican government said they would never sign to gain their recognition.⁸⁰ This was the government's stance from the outset as spokespeople consistently said their country "would never buy recognition at the cost of dignity."⁸¹ In the end the Americans folded and officially granted recognition on August 31, 1923 which offered a temporary solution to the tensions with Mexico.⁸²

There were still other problems in Latin America, many of them hold overs from Wilson's presidency and policies of "overcommitment, stemming from an aggressive altruism and a prolonged crusading mentality."⁸³ The result of this previous mindset left Harding's administration from day one with American troops stationed in the Dominican

⁷⁸ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 127.

⁷⁹ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 129.

⁸⁰ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 130.

⁸¹ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 132.

⁸² Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 132.

⁸³ Kenneth J. Grieb, *The Latin American Policy of Warren G. Harding* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 1.

Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua.⁸⁴ The ideas of the Monroe Doctrine and Pan Americanism which had shaped foreign policy in the region for years still played a large role in Harding's administration as Hughes "was convinced that the Monroe Doctrine was essential as part of the foreign policy of the United States and was a cardinal rule of self-protection."⁸⁵ His belief did not stop there as "the republics of the Western Hemisphere must be kept free from encroachment upon their independence and from partition by non-continental powers."⁸⁶ While Hughes supported the theory he also thought it had been abused in the years since 1823 and sought to rectify some of that aggressiveness, particularly our interventions and occupations of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua.⁸⁷ His plan for pulling our troops out was put in motion with the support of Harding and before he left office in 1925 American soldiers were out of the Dominican Republic, ready to leave Nicaragua, and plans were in place for Haiti.⁸⁸ Harding and his administration at least attempted to improve relations with Latin and Central American countries despite differences and the carryover of issues from his predecessor's actions.

The League of Nations debate took a front-seat in the 1920 election and it was clear by Harding's victory that the option of America joining was dead. The proposed alternative of Harding never really materialized either. However, there was pressure from Hughes for the country to join the Permanent Court of International Justice, which is more commonly known as the World Court. Harding had also expressed interest for such

⁸⁴ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 133.

⁸⁵ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 134.

⁸⁶ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 134.

⁸⁷ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 134-135.

⁸⁸ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 135.

a move in his inaugural address.⁸⁹ Hughes would not press Congress to join the World Court until February 1923, where it met stiff resistance in the Senate despite the support of the President. There were many concerns over the Court's relationship with the League.⁹⁰ Progress would be made when the House voted in favor in 1925, but the Senate held out until 1926. While they voted in favor they did so with a handful of formal reservations. Coolidge would later abandon the proposal in light of these reservations and the issue hung around until 1935 "when the Senate again failed to agree to American participation."⁹¹

Wilson, despite his many successes ultimately failed to achieve American participation in the League of Nations.

Of course he failed most unfortunately at the Conference because (1) he does not know how to deal with men, (2) he has no idea of team-work, i.e., of how to devolve work on others and get them to work with him and each other, and (3) because he is a one-idea man, and thought the League of nations would be the sovereign panacea for the world's tragedy which he could not prevent, but a repetition of which he hoped might be thereby prevented; *and he staked everything on its establishment.*⁹²

The failure to delegate responsibility and allow people to do their job was detrimental to Wilson's foreign policy and his singlemindedness towards the League after 1918 (and perhaps earlier) was destructive towards not just foreign polices as it neglected other global issues, but clearly damaged domestic policies and sentiments which paved the way for a Harding victory in the 1920 election.

⁸⁹ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 146.

⁹⁰ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 147.

⁹¹ Trani and Wilson, *Presidency of Warren G. Harding*, 148-149.

⁹² Allan Nevins, *Henry White: Thirty Years of American Diplomacy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 487. Emphasis mine.

The period of 1921-1923, under Harding, “was one of crisis and readjustment” consisting of “years of tremendous economic and social change.” Much of this had carried over as Wilson had tried to create and manage the peace. Harding was able to steady the ship and create a smooth transition for the nation into a more stable and “prosperous peacetime existence.”⁹³ If Harding was good for the country, he was also outstanding for the Republican party. They had been out of the White House for eight years and seemingly had no policy or program; Harding’s administration would give them both. Whatever thoughts of the ‘normalcy’ program are today, it was successfully retained with minor changes by two succeeding presidents, particularly Coolidge who won in 1924 with massive public support, where it continued to show its effectiveness.⁹⁴

Clearly the choices, actions, and ideas of Wilson and Harding shaped the world that Coolidge would face in 1923. Specifically tensions still existed between the United States and the Soviet Union, Mexico, and Turkey over recognition and formal relations. Troops were still deployed in a few Latin American and Caribbean nations. Issues still stemmed from the peace with Germany and the issue of war reparation and debt from our allies and debate over the World Court still raged. The approach taken by Harding in rectifying many of the ills of the world would be continued under Coolidge, especially in the first year. Much of this grew out of their similar beliefs about the nation, the role of the president, and problems with Congress. This would be the world that Coolidge would inherit and he would approach its problems with the calm rationality and a sense morality

⁹³ Murray, *The Harding Era*, 533.

⁹⁴ Murray, *The Harding Era*, 534.

he had gained in his earlier years and under the tutelage of Charles Edward Garman at Amherst College.

Chapter Two: Molding of the Mind

In the 1960s, a Master's student named Guy Goodfellow asserted in his thesis that "during the Coolidge Presidential years there prevailed a bewildering pace of change. But Coolidge's ideas remained wedded inflexibly to his past."⁹⁵ Coolidge's ideas were not stuck in his past, that is in his earlier life; they were firmly attached to the shoulders of the Founding Fathers and the great philosophers that came before him. This attachment is vividly shown during his years of public service and then in his speeches and actions while president. This attachment was also very much thanks to the training of two particular professors.

Most authors and historians who have written about Calvin Coolidge have tried to help us understand where he picked up his idealism, beliefs, and tools of rhetoric. Usually, emphasis is placed on his time at Amherst College, and for good reason. His time there prepared him for his future challenges thanks to the specific teachings of two men: Anson Morse and Charles E. Garman. From these men he received an eclectic training in the classics, history, politics, philosophy, and rhetoric, all with a non-denominational religious focus.⁹⁶ The ideals and way of thinking that Garman and Morse encouraged clearly shaped the mindset of the future president.

⁹⁵ Goodfellow, Guy Fair. "Calvin Coolidge: A Study of Presidential Inaction." (Master's thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 1969), 7.

⁹⁶ L. John Van Til, *Thinking Cal Coolidge: An Inquiry into the Roots of His Intellectual Life* (San Bernardino, CA: Pine Grove Publishing, 2015), 69-70. Van Til believes that Garman may have been America's best philosophy teacher at the time.

Calvin Coolidge was not an outstanding student and during his first two years at Amherst he felt that despite studying hard he had accomplished marks that “were only fair.”⁹⁷ By his junior year everything changed. His “studies became more interesting” as he stepped into the classrooms of Garman and Morse.⁹⁸

The influence of Garman’s teaching upon Coolidge can best be summed up in the words of the 30th President himself. He considered Garman to be “one of the most remarkable men” with whom he had encountered and thought it “difficult to imagine his superior as an educator.”⁹⁹ However, his praise did not stop there:

We looked upon Garman as a man who walked with God. His course was a demonstration of the existence of a personal God, of our power to know Him, of the Divine immanence, and of the complete dependence of all the universe on Him as the Creator and Father “in whom we live and move and our being.” Every reaction in the universe is a manifestation of His presence...The conclusions which followed from this position were logical and inescapable. It sets man off in a separate kingdom from all the other creatures in the universe, and makes him a true son of God and a partaker of the Divine nature. This is the warrant for his freedom and the demonstration of his equality. It does not assume all are equal in degree but all are equal in kind. On that precept rests a foundation for democracy that cannot be shaken. It justifies faith in the people.¹⁰⁰

In all, Coolidge spent almost seven pages of his 247-page autobiography speaking to the impact of Garman’s instruction upon his life and career.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Calvin Coolidge, *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*, 1929, Reprint, (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 60.

⁹⁸ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 60.

⁹⁹ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 63, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 65-66.

¹⁰¹ For more information on Calvin Coolidge’s education at Amherst College see Chapters 2 and 3 of L. John Van Til’s *Thinking Cal Coolidge: An Inquiry into the Roots of His Intellectual Life*, Chapter 3 of Charles C. Johnson’s *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America’s Most Underrated President*, Hendrik Booraem’s *The Provincial: Calvin Coolidge and his World, 1885-1895*, and Coolidge’s own *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*.

Contemporaries were aware of Garman's importance to Coolidge as well. His wife, Grace, spoke of the importance that books played in her husband's life and mentioned the posthumously compiled collection of Garman's letters and lectures as being of considerable value:

For many years Mr. Coolidge had little time for reading outside that which was required in preparing an address, but he was in the habit of reading after he had retired for the night. Books mounted in piles upon his bedside table, for he did not like to have them disturbed. Among them could always be found his Bible, the *Life and Letters of Charles E. Garman*, the Amherst professor whose influence upon his students was so marked, and *Paradise Lost* in two paper-covered volumes. These two small books he frequently carried with him when traveling.¹⁰²

This unique tome is of equal importance to us as it was one of the few ways to gain any real sense of what Garman was actually like a professor and an intellectual. Unlike Anson Morse, Garman did not publish multiple books and aside from this published collection compiled by his wife after his death, we know only glimpses and incomplete details of how he was able to be so influential to so many.

Garman employed an educational style that would appear normal to us today, but would have been revolutionary at the end of the nineteenth century. In a letter to Amherst President Hall, Garman wrote a letter discussing his aims and methods as a professor. He described a pamphlet system that he printed at his own expense. These were part of his solution to attacking the "unavoidable resistance to new ideas on the part of students at this age."¹⁰³ These pamphlets were "very fragmentary" and took up a single topic or part of a topic and treated it as one would in a lecture. These copies were not given to

¹⁰² Grace Coolidge, "A Wife Remembers," in *Meet Calvin Coolidge: The Man Behind the Myth*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (Brattleboro, VT: Stephen Greene Press, 1960), 66.

¹⁰³ Charles Edward Garman, *Letters, Lectures and Addresses of Charles Edward Garman: A Memorial Volume*, 1909, Reprint (Miami, FL: Hardpress Publishing, 2013), 57.

students; they were loaned with the expectation that they would be returned for the use of the next class.¹⁰⁴ Garman spoke of the benefits:

In this way I can state a question without answering it by having them turn over to the next chapter of the book and find the answer given there. If I find the question is really appreciated, the effort is a success; if not, I must approach it from some other direction, by some other pamphlet which shall have enough new material to hold their thought and stimulate their inquiry, and yet at the same time focus their attention on the problem they have failed to appreciate.¹⁰⁵

This created a different dynamic for the students in the class. Garman felt that if lectures were used to any extent they made the students into merely spectators and that by instead focusing on pamphlets “they get the lecture before coming into the class room and our time is spent in discussion.”¹⁰⁶ This methodology was clearly ahead of its time and certainly created a memorable experience for Garman’s students as he was exposing them to what we think of today as seminar classes or flipped classrooms. While it is unlikely that Garman was the only professor at the time to challenge the status quo of lecture based courses, it is clear that the experience of this ground-breaking style was effective and found useful by his students.

It is easy to draw straight lines between many of the ideas professed by Garman in these types of discussions and those uttered later by Coolidge. This influence was very real and there is no better example than the event that propelled him onto the national scene and helped him gain the vice presidency. While Governor of Massachusetts,

¹⁰⁴ Garman, *Letters, Lectures and Addresses*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Garman, *Letters, Lectures and Addresses*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Garman, *Letters, Lectures and Addresses*, 58.

Coolidge faced a crisis that had the potential for nationwide chaos: The Boston Police Strike of 1919.¹⁰⁷ Garman opposed such labor strikes:

When the laborers seek by merely increasing their wages to remove their difficulties they are increasing the evils of the times. When the laborers seek not to get, but to give, better service, and demand the same of their masters, and ask the same of their masters, and ask that manhood shall depend not on wealth, but on merit, then a new star, which is the star of Bethlehem, has begun to shine in their sky.¹⁰⁸

This passage is important for a few reasons. The first point is that Garman is clearly teaching that labor strikes, no matter who is doing them, are wrong. Not only wrong, but this act is evil and actually harmful to society. Another key point is the idea of service and especially how that act can be applied to better society, even if done in small actions like doing one's job.

Calvin Coolidge's Governor's Proclamation in response to the 1919 Boston Police Strike was a heavy-handed piece of front page news:

There appears to be a misapprehension as to the position of the police of Boston. In the deliberate intention to intimidate and coerce the government of this Commonwealth a large body of policemen, urging all others to join them, deserted their posts of duty, letting in the enemy. This act of theirs was voluntary, against the advice of their well wishers, long discussed and premeditated, and with the purpose of obstructing the power of the government to protect its citizens or even to maintain its own existence. Its success meant anarchy. By this act through the operation of the law they dispossessed themselves. They went out of office. They stand as though they had never been appointed.

Other police remained on duty. They are the real heroes of this crisis. The State Guard responded most efficiently. Thousands have volunteered for the Guard and the Militia. Money has been contributed from every walk of life by the hundreds of thousands for the encouragement and relief of these loyal men. These acts have been spontaneous, significant and decisive. I propose to support all those who are supporting their own government with every power which the people have entrusted to me.

¹⁰⁷ For more information on the Boston Police Strike of 1919 see *A City of Terror: 1919, The Boston Police Strike* by Francis Russell generally.

¹⁰⁸ Garman, *Letters, Lectures and Addresses*, 371.

There is an obligation, inescapable, no less solemn, to resist all those who do not support the government. The authority of the Commonwealth cannot be intimidated or coerced. It cannot be compromised. To place the maintenance of the public security in the hands of a body of men who have attempted to destroy it would be to flout the sovereignty of the laws the people have made. It is my duty to resist any such proposal. Those who would counsel it join hands with those whose acts have threatened to destroy the government. There is no middle ground. Every attempt to prevent the formation of a new police force is a blow at the government. That way treason lies. *No man has a right to place his own ease or convenience or the opportunity of making money above his duty to the State.*

This is the cause of all the people. I call on every citizen to stand by me in executing the oath of my office by supporting the authority of the government and resisting all assaults upon it.¹⁰⁹

There are echoes of Garman reverberating throughout that bold proclamation. Coolidge highlights concern over those in positions of power, entrusted to them by the people, taking actions that likely change nothing and are actually putting innocents in danger. This came just a few days after the famous telegram Coolidge sent to Samuel Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), in New York City. This earlier message contained much the same beliefs while also highlighted the issue of striking and that the dangers of this act for society outweighed anything that the police would gain in their selfish attempt. “There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time,” is the famous line that would adorn newspapers around the nation.¹¹⁰

Nothing was guaranteed, but Coolidge’s stance and statements in the face of this potential disaster gained him the national spotlight and likely earned him the vice presidency. His words and actions echo those concerns and beliefs of Garman and many others, to be fair, as he showed a willingness to stand up for what he believed was right

¹⁰⁹ Calvin Coolidge, *Have Faith in Massachusetts: A Collection of Speeches and Messages* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 133-134. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁰ Coolidge, *Have Faith in Massachusetts*, 131.

despite the potential fallout for his career. Coolidge subscribed directly to ideas professed by Garman, but also to a certain mentality and the ability to approach issues both big and small. He remembered how, “Garman told his class in philosophy that if they would go along with events and have the courage and industry to hold to the main stream, without being washed ashore by the immaterial cross currents, they would some day be men of power.”¹¹¹ This ability to stand firm in the face of problems would serve Coolidge well as both Governor of Massachusetts and President of the United States. The fallout of this strike happening during his reelection year for governor could have destroyed him if he had allowed it to. Instead, he took Garman’s teachings to heart and held to that “main stream” thanks to his sense of courage and industry.

Garman has always received the most attention from historians in terms of Coolidge’s intellectual influences, but Morse also had a great impact. Through Morse’s class Coolidge gained a deeper understanding and respect for history. The teachings of Morse were described as “absorbing” and the lectures on “medieval and modern Europe were inspiring, seeking to give his students not only the facts of past human experience but also their meaning.”¹¹² There was great emphasis placed on the “political side of history” as they discussed Charlemagne to Napoleon.¹¹³ Before long their study shifted to the United States and Morse “became most impressive.”¹¹⁴

He placed particular emphasis on the era when our institutions had their beginning. Washington was treated with the greatest reverence, and a high estimate was placed on the statesmanlike qualities and financial capacity of Hamilton, but Jefferson was not neglected. In spite of his many vagaries it was shown that in saving the nation from the danger of falling under the domination of

¹¹¹ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 100.

¹¹² Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 60.

¹¹³ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 60.

¹¹⁴ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 60.

an oligarchy, and in establishing a firm rule of the people which was forever to remain, he vindicated the soundness of our political institutions. The whole course was a thesis on good citizenship and good government. Those who took it came to a clearer comprehension not only of their rights and liberties but of their duties and responsibilities.¹¹⁵

The admiration for George Washington would carry over and keep coming up in his later speeches. Morse ascribed to the “traditional Whig interpretation of history as a steady march of progress and expansion of liberty, from barbarism to civilization.”¹¹⁶ This influence could help explain the reason for some of Coolidge’s ideas that tended to be considered more progressive and liberal for the time, especially early in his career where he voted for the direct election of U.S. Senators and was in favor of the Women’s Suffrage Amendment.¹¹⁷ While Morse and Garman were teaching different subjects it is easy to see the overlap in the ideas of service and duties to one’s society coming at Coolidge from both directions.

Just as with Garman we can see Morse’s ideas clearly shine through Coolidge’s 150th American Revolution Anniversary speeches made while he was president. These appearances afforded Coolidge the opportunity to emphasize the importance of those moments from 150 years prior and why they still mattered to his contemporaries. In the first of these anniversary speeches, Coolidge boldly proclaimed: “Wherever men love liberty, wherever they believe in patriotism, wherever they exalt high character, by universal consent they turn to the name of George Washington.”¹¹⁸ Now, this speech was

¹¹⁵ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 61-62.

¹¹⁶ Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishings, 1998), 35.

¹¹⁷ Sobel, *Coolidge*, 62.

¹¹⁸ Calvin Coolidge, “Address at the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of George Washington Taking Command of the Continental Army”, Cambridge, Mass., July 3, 1925. Speech, 1. All of the speeches, unless otherwise noted are used from Hand Copies: Speeches of President Calvin Coolidge, Preserved by Everett Sanders. In the Everett Sanders Papers: a machine-readable transcription, *Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy, 1921-1929* -- Library of Congress. Web. 15 January 2016.

made to commemorate the day that Washington took command of the Continental Army so it would be easy to discount these statements as simply exalting the man of the hour. However, Coolidge does not stop there with his high praise as he brings up the idea of posterity and how we might remember great men. He states that we must rank them “according to their accomplishment while living” and “the permanent worth of the monuments representing their achievements which remain after they are gone.”¹¹⁹ Leaving Coolidge to conclude that “by this standard I think we may regard George Washington as the first lay citizen of the world of all time.”¹²⁰ Based on those ideas of posterity and ranking great men, it is hard to argue against Coolidge’s conclusion. Do we not speak boldly of his achievements while living? Do we not memorialize him now that he’s gone? Certainly we do with the likes of Washington. Monuments, bridges, towns, and roads are named after him, and of course his face etched into the side of a mountain with other men we hold in high esteem.

This was not empty praise heaped upon our first president because the occasion called for it. Instead, this manner of speaking about George Washington had occurred earlier in Coolidge’s career. Prior to the election of 1920, Coolidge wrote a letter to Republican Congressman C. Bascom Slemph of Virginia.

It was your same great Washington who warned his fellow-countrymen always to place America first. He was the first great American who had the vision to see that America had the ability to be independent and self-sustaining and who believed supremely in the greatness of his own countrymen. This did not cut him off from becoming a part of the world or cause him to withdraw the support of American from those who might be in need in other lands.

¹¹⁹ Coolidge. *Washington Taking Command*, 2-3.

¹²⁰ Coolidge. *Washington Taking Command*, 3.

For the exemplification of these principles in the present crisis of our country and of the world, people are turning toward the Republican party...¹²¹

These earlier words echo similar feelings and ideas about our first president. Coolidge does not see the beliefs of Washington necessitating an isolationist feeling or direction for the country. However, the important part of this is to see that his statements from these anniversary speeches are not empty rhetoric prepared for the occasion. These are the views that he has held for many years.

In what ways did Coolidge see this greatness in Washington expressed? What attributes and ideas did he believe deserve our attention and applause? One of the biggest points Coolidge draws attention to is that of Washington being one of the first to speak of or envision the colonies as an American nation. That realization made the conflict a bigger and more complicated storm than the singular colonies of Massachusetts or Virginia could hope to weather alone.¹²² Coolidge considers Washington to be great as a soldier, a statesman, and a patriot beyond those attributes that may be “accorded to any mortal.” Saying that “others may have excelled him in some of these qualities, but no one ever excelled him in this threefold greatness.”¹²³

Washington was more than just a statesman. He was also a soldier and that impacted his legacy. Coolidge spoke of Washington’s visit to the Continental Congress before they selected a commander in chief. He wore his “Virginia uniform of buff and blue” which left some to “ridicule the display of military predilection.” Coolidge saw it

¹²¹ C. Bascom Slemp Papers, 1866-1944, Accession #9507, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

¹²² Coolidge. *Washington Taking Command*, 23.

¹²³ Calvin Coolidge, “Washington’s Birthday Radio Address”, The White House, Washington, D.C., February 22, 1925, *Calvin Coolidge on The Founders: Reflections on The American Revolution & The Founding Fathers*, ed. David Pietrusza (Church & Reid Books, 2012), 87.

differently. In his eyes, Washington's actions and choice of dress "could hardly have been construed as meaning anything other than that its wearer realized what was ahead and was willing to force some part of that realization on others."¹²⁴ This conclusion of Coolidge's seems to be fair if we assume, like he does, that Washington was making calculated moves with both his words, his choice of dress, and his actions. For that is exactly what Coolidge sees in this story. That is the fact that Washington "understood, and he never underestimated, the political bearings of every move."¹²⁵ These speeches seem to come from a man who understands and respects the complexity of a past figure whose place in the historical conscience seems too often to hang in the balance between myth and reality which leaves many people uncertain of where that line is. A statement from Coolidge's radio address on the birthday of Washington sums up this idea best: "It is not possible to compress a great life into a single sentence."¹²⁶

The importance of George Washington to Calvin Coolidge is for at least two reasons. Historically, our first president bears our respect and admiration as leading our young nation in both a lengthy war and the peace that followed. Personally, for Coolidge, the approach that Washington took is the precedent set for his role. The steps taken by Washington over a 150 years ago should be studied, understood, and applied to today's problems. These anniversary speeches afforded Coolidge the perfect opportunity to remind himself and the people of this nation about those steps.

Washington was many things and yet his abilities as a soldier do stand out. To illustrate this point further, Coolidge brings up a pronouncement that he attributes to

¹²⁴ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 25-26.

¹²⁵ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 43.

¹²⁶ Coolidge, *Birthday Radio Address*, 88.

Frederick the Great that declared the Trenton-Princeton campaign was “the most brilliant military performance of the century.” He follows this up with his own words of praise: “For myself, without pretense of military wisdom, the lightninglike stroke of Trenton and Princeton in its supreme audacity and ideal execution has always seemed the most perfectly timed combination of military genius and political wisdom that we find in the records of warfare.”¹²⁷ Yet, in another speech, Coolidge claims that “it can not be said that this ranks as a great battle.”¹²⁸ While his tune has changed slightly, he does not discount the events at Trenton entirely as he continues with saying that it “was the turning point in the Revolutionary War at which defense and defeat became offense and victory.”¹²⁹ I think both of these statements hold great truth and it is fascinating to see him attack the question of Trenton from two different angles. The first is taking place in an attempt to argue in favor of the selection of George Washington to lead the Continental Army. The second is uttered in celebration of the success of Trenton and Princeton. With those thoughts in mind those two quotes describing the same event appear not to be disagreeing but instead to be different sides of the same coin, one being used to praise a great man and the other to celebrate the event Coolidge sees as the turning point of the American Revolution.

Towards the end of one of those celebratory speeches Coolidge highlights the principles of conduct that Washington offered in his Farewell Address. The points he draws out are that of valuing honesty, believing in our fellow man, cherishing no

¹²⁷ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 40.

¹²⁸ Calvin Coolidge, “Address at the 150th Anniversary of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton,” Trenton, N.J., December 29, 1926, *Speech*, 9.

¹²⁹ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 9.

resentments, harboring no hatreds and forgiving our enemies. In Coolidge's eyes Washington also made it clear by his argument that cooperation is the key to both progress and peace.¹³⁰ Why do these principles of conduct matter so much to Coolidge?

Because for him:

The world has not outgrown, it can never outgrow, the absolute necessity for conformity to these eternal principles. I want to see America assume a leadership among the nations in the reliance upon the good faith of mankind. I do not see how civilization can expect permanent progress on any other theory. If what is saved in the productive peace of to-day is to be lost in the destructive war of to-morrow, the people of this earth can look forward to nothing but everlasting servitude. There is no justification for hope. This was not the conception which Washington had of life.¹³¹

Washington was more than just our first president for Coolidge. He saw him as the first American, a great soldier, a strong statesman, and the one that offered the secret to a better future. Despite the ever changing world, Coolidge is stating that living by ideals and principles laid down over a hundred years ago, we can have the good that we seek in the world. Through this pursuit we can have peace, hope, and prosperity. Coolidge appears to see it as his duty to bring these principles out of the past and into the present to guide the American people, and the world, into a more peaceful and prosperous future.

John Adams, of Massachusetts, is praised by Coolidge for being the one to present Washington's name to the Continental Congress for consideration as commander-in-chief. He says that we can thank Adams for Washington and for John Marshall being Chief Justice and that "destiny could have done no more."¹³² This is one of the few moments that Coolidge mentions another Founding Father by name. While Adams could

¹³⁰ Coolidge, Washington Taking Command, 53-54.

¹³¹ Coolidge, Washington Taking Command, 54-55.

¹³² Coolidge, Washington Taking Command, 30.

not have been the only one rooting for Washington and Marshall, his ability to see what others could not and support both of those men seems important to Coolidge.

Not all of Coolidge's focus on Washington can be brushed off as mere hero-worship for he does mention the human qualities of failure and set-backs that he had to overcome during the course of his life, particularly during the American Revolution. For example, he correctly stated that, even with Washington in command "the struggle [the American Revolution] was well-nigh lost at several periods."¹³³ That is to say, even with George Washington in command, even with the victorious crossing of the Delaware, the war and independence were far from guaranteed.

In his discussions of the American Revolution it is sometimes easy to get lost in his heaps of adoration for Washington and lose sight of his "so-what" in regards to why we as his contemporary countrymen should still care about the events of the late 1700s – namely the war for independence. There is always a political message within these speeches, as one would expect from a presidential address, but there is certainly an applicable and tangible "so-what" in regards to the present and future being employed. At the end of his speech commemorating George Washington taking command of the Continental Army, Coolidge draws parallels between that distant past, the recent horrors of World War I, and the future he hopes to see:

The world has tried war with force and has utterly failed. The only hope of success lies in peace with justice. No other principle conforms to the teaching of Washington; no other standard is worthy of the spirit of America; no other course makes so much promise for the regeneration of the world.¹³⁴

¹³³ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 32.

¹³⁴ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 57.

Coolidge follows this up by calling out the “Old World” – i.e., Europe – and asking the crowd listening to his words to reject a desire to get caught up in the problems of those nations across the ocean like they had done recently in the chaos of a world war.

Coolidge sees Washington and the other Founding Fathers as having forged ideals and principles out of the fire of the American Revolution. Those ideals and principles come in many forms. They were written in famous documents like our Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Coolidge sees great merit in another form of sharing ideals and principles: action. The greatest case of this was the Revolution itself. For “Washington and the patriots of his day wanted peace,” and yet “they found it was necessary to make great sacrifices in order to secure it.”¹³⁵ There is a lot going on in that statement from Coolidge. We are hearing strong rhetoric that, placed in the context around it, is defending a “just” conflict. Yet, as we have seen from other speeches he is very much in favor of peace. A moment like this, celebrating a battle that was a turning point of a great conflict, is a perfect moment to both defend engaging in battle and decrying the bloodshed.

The idea of the American work ethic is a common talking point for many politicians, motivators, and educators when discussing the success of the American colonists and those in the early Republic. This is a virtue that the hard-working masses are supposed to be able to get behind in support. Mere brawn and muscle are not the only way for that work ethic to shine through, however. Instead, it is only thanks to the “development of our natural resources, our inventive genius, and mechanical skill this

¹³⁵ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 35.

Nation has become possessed of very large wealth.” The knowledge of how to exploit natural resources, invent wonderful machines, and make them work for us is a key to our success in Coolidge’s mind. This work ethic is not fool proof either. It can be dangerous as in “past history it has usually led first to luxury and ease and later to decline and decay.”¹³⁶ Coolidge did not believe they had yet reached that point of complacency or idleness but speaks of being ever vigilant.

The fascinating points he makes about the value of work do not stop there. He proclaims that: “Prosperity is not a cause; it is a result.”¹³⁷ It is a result of all of those virtues, principles, and ideals that trace all the way back to the “First American” – George Washington – and the Founding Fathers. Coolidge refuses to see the bad that can also exist in prosperity. For him it is not “based on indolence and ease, on avarice and greed, or on selfishness and self-indulgence.” Instead, “it is the result of industry, fair dealing, self-denial, and generosity.”¹³⁸ Those positive aspects are summed up for him in the word “character.” He also believes that if we place trust in the process and put these virtues into practice every day our prosperity will only grow greater. He concludes that thought with a profound statement: “A more efficient service, one to another, will be the foundation of a greater prosperity and of a stronger national character.”¹³⁹ This is not important simply because it is telling us we will become richer and better people for treating our neighbors properly. Instead it is profound because it echoes the deliberations of a Founding Father not named Washington, namely Alexander Hamilton. Simply put,

¹³⁶ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 20.

¹³⁷ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 28.

¹³⁸ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 28.

¹³⁹ Coolidge, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, 29.

Hamilton as our nation's first Secretary of the Treasury argued that the key to successfully creating both a powerful economy and a strong central government must be achieved by linking the wealthy's interests to the fate of the national government.¹⁴⁰ So we see in Coolidge's speeches a certain harkening back to the ideals, principles, and beliefs of many of the American Founding Fathers. Even more than that, we see Coolidge taking and applying those key points towards motivating and inspiring his contemporary Americans for their present and their future.

As a highly religious man, Coolidge is also fairly quick to bring aspects of faith into the discussion of the American Revolution. While we know he attended the religiously grounded Amherst College, his exposure to religion started much earlier. For Coolidge's family, particularly his grandparents, both the Bible and church played a role in their daily lives. In his autobiography he specifically points to two moments this exposure manifested itself. The first was during his grandfather's illness where he would have young Coolidge "read to him the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which he had read to his grandfather."¹⁴¹ The second being his family's role in the local church.

For most of the time during my boyhood regular Sunday school classes were held in the church which my grandmother Coolidge superintended until in her advanced years she was superseded by my father. She was a constant reader of the Bible and a devoted member of the church, who daily sought for divine guidance in prayer.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ This argument is the basic summation of "Report on the Public Credit, Jan. 9, 1790" (page 531), "Report on a National Bank", Dec. 13, 1790 (page 575), and most importantly "Report on the Subject of Manufactures", Dec. 5, 1791 (page 647) which can be found in Alexander Hamilton, *Alexander Hamilton: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2001).

¹⁴¹ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 16.

¹⁴² Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 17-18.

This grandmother was important for the young Calvin as he “stayed with her at the farm much of the time and she had much to do with shaping the thought of my early years.”¹⁴³

This religious upbringing showed itself in the speeches by where his focus and choice of words would often go. In one key passage he actually compares Philadelphia (Independence Hall particularly) to the Holy Land:

It is little wonder that people at home and abroad consider Independence Hall as hallowed ground and revere the Liberty Bell as a sacred relic. That pile of bricks and mortar, that mass of metal, might appear to the uninstructed as only the outgrown meeting place and the shattered bell of a former time, useless now because of more modern conveniences, but to those who know they have become consecrated by the use which men have made of them. They have long been identified with a great cause. They are the framework of a spiritual event. The world looks upon them, because of their associations of one hundred and fifty years ago, as it looks upon the Holy Land because of what took place there nineteen hundred years ago. Through use for a righteous purpose they have become sanctified.¹⁴⁴

There are many fascinating threads of mythological and rhetorical construction running through this series of statements. First off he’s asserting that people do see Independence Hall as hallowed ground, that people, both Americans and foreigners, see a divine purpose in what happened there 150 years ago. It is also worth noting that this statement is made during a speech in celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Why is that noteworthy? Because this passage is clearly going beyond that singular moment and referencing every moment of Independence Hall’s role in our nation’s founding. That is why he thinks people see each of those bricks and that shattered bell as being sanctified relics of the holy purpose of controlling one’s destiny. Coolidge sees the Declaration as an inspiration that transcended our own borders as it should be “regarded

¹⁴³ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Calvin Coolidge, “Address at the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence,” Philadelphia, Pa., July 5, 1926, 4-5.

as one of the great charters that not only was to liberate America but was everywhere to ennoble humanity.”¹⁴⁵ Now it is easy to see Coolidge’s earlier connection completed: Philadelphia’s Independence Hall is hallowed ground because like Christ, the American Founding Fathers sacrificed and suffered to show humanity the way to a free, virtuous, and prosperous life with their words and actions.

The religious connections to the Declaration of Independence do not stop there for Coolidge. However, he does briefly shift his discourse away from those religious connotations to address the more temporal influences upon that document. He spends a few pages going into a discussion about the important ideas put forth by this Declaration and then comes to some startling conclusions that it is not the ideas themselves which are amazing, but it was that “a new nation was born which was to be founded upon those principles and which from that time forth in its development has actually maintained those principles, that makes this pronouncement an incomparable event in the history of government.”¹⁴⁶ There would appear to be something to this conclusion as this belief is far from new. Coolidge downplays the importance of French thought to the ideas contained in our Declaration saying:

It is generally assumed that French thought had some effect upon our public mind during Revolutionary days. This may have been true. But the principles of our Declaration had been under discussion in the Colonies for nearly two generations before the advent of the French political philosophy that characterized the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷

It is quite interesting that Coolidge only mentions French philosophers here. Is he simply ignoring the likes of other European philosophers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes,

¹⁴⁵ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 19-20.

Adam Ferguson, and David Hume or is he simply discounting their influence? Either choice would appear odd. Simply discounting the importance of European thought to our end result would have likely sufficed and yet he specifically called out the French, our ally in independence. The reason that this line of thought would make sense is that it would play into his bigger point that these ideas had a home in many colonial pulpits since as early as 1638 when Rev. Thomas Hooker, of Connecticut, asserted two big points in a sermon to the General Court. First that “the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people,” and second, that “the choice of public magistrates belongs to the people by God's own allowance.”¹⁴⁸ While these ideas are not necessarily religiously-oriented, they do find themselves emanating from a religious person and place. For much of New England, especially in the time Coolidge is discussing, ideas of religious faith permeated every corner of society. There are certainly some echoes of the future Declaration in the words of Hooker. Namely that government gains its power and legitimacy from the people, morally upstanding people. Coolidge's dismissal of the impact of European philosophy upon our ideas of freedom, justice, and equality is a seemingly odd stance to make even if one wants to believe the Declaration of Independence is a reflection of exceptional thoughts and ideals with a decidedly American origin.

Deviating from the questions of origins of the ideas, Coolidge reasserts the religious importance of this document:

In its main features the Declaration of Independence is a great spiritual document. It is a declaration not of material but of spiritual conceptions. Equality, liberty, popular sovereignty, the rights of man--these are not

¹⁴⁸ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 20.

elements which we can see and touch. They are ideals. They have their source and their roots in the religious convictions. They belong to the unseen world. Unless the faith of the American people in these religious convictions is to endure, the principles of our Declaration will perish.¹⁴⁹

There is great clarity surrounding Coolidge's belief in the spiritual and physical necessity of adhering to these ideals. This is getting so much attention because his faith and his trust in that belief shines through so clearly in these last few pages of this speech. He believes that all things go back to that faith in God – our freedom, our Constitution, our prosperity, and even ourselves. This mindset will manifest itself advocating and actively supporting democratic ideals and freedom throughout the world, albeit less aggressively and one-sided as Woodrow Wilson had tried.

Coolidge exclaims in concluding fashion that our Declaration is the “product of the spiritual insight of the people.” He warned those listening that they lived in an age of great scientific knowledge and wealth which did not create the Declaration. Instead those things are the product of that document. That if we fail to cling to things of the spirit that “all our material prosperity, overwhelming though it may appear, will turn to a barren scepter in our grasp.”¹⁵⁰ This in a way harkens back to his belief that prosperity is a result. Specifically, a result of our belief in the values, morals, and principles left behind by our Founding Fathers.

There were many moments in which Coolidge would masterfully summarize the role or briefly state the importance of the American Revolution in rhetorically rich statements. An example of this is when recklessly stating that it “represented the informed and mature convictions of a great mass of independent, liberty loving, God-

¹⁴⁹ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 29-30.

¹⁵⁰ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 39.

fearing people who knew their rights, and possessed the courage to dare to maintain them.”¹⁵¹ As with many of his rhetorically striking statements this one overgeneralizes and makes a lot of historically questionable assumptions, like education levels, economic freedom, and even literacy rates of that great mass.

Coolidge believes that Washington and the Americans were successful in winning their fight for independence because they believed in their cause and their cause was just. Here is one of the many times that he quotes a historical figure in a speech, as he uses a line from a letter that Washington wrote to his brother speaking of “the full persuasion of the justice” of their cause. On the other side of that conflict, it was also the final realization for the British, “that their cause was not just that led them to abandon their attempt to subdue the Colonies.”¹⁵² Here we see his almost otherworldly admiration for Washington combining with his belief that this American Revolution was actually a spiritual crusade to create the illusion of this conflict having been the proper course of action, not because men thought of it as such, but because it was right in the eyes of God. This like other parts of his speeches is trying to justify the actions of the past while also elevating our Founding Fathers to another level of thought, belief, and action.

These ideas are carried over into Coolidge’s speech made in celebration of 150 years since the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. His speech deviates from simply discussing that first meeting, but instead takes off from there and shifts to the importance of that moment being the beginning of a long and arduous

¹⁵¹ Coolidge, Declaration of Independence, 8.

¹⁵² Coolidge, Washington Taking Command, 37.

process that results in our Constitution.¹⁵³ That document and our success as a nation has led to its adoption “as the fundamental law for republics in every quarter of the world.” With its influence able to be “traced in every constitution on earth, from China to Peru, from the Australian Commonwealth to the German Republic.”¹⁵⁴ This is placing the importance, the “so-what”, of that first meeting into the context of how it affects them in 1924. Not just his contemporary Americans either. The result of the process that started in that first gathering in Independence Hall has changed the world. For him, it altered the Founder’s present and future, it altered the future that Coolidge himself resided in, and he argues it altered the very course of human history.

This idea behind the words “power of the people” is constantly brought up by every freedom loving American and Coolidge is no exception. One of the final points he makes there in regards to the Constitution is that it deserves more praise for showing the power of the people. For this document was the result initially of a voluntary effort on the part of the people to “redress their own grievances and remedy their own wrongs.”¹⁵⁵ There are many levels to this thought. The first being that all or many people in the former colonies came together to make that happen. Perhaps there is truth to that at a later point, but the American colonists were far from united at this juncture. The second is slightly more profound as Coolidge is forwarding the idea that people, collectively and as individuals, hold great power. Alone, that statement is only so powerful. If you combine it within the context of many other statements we have examined, it can be seen as a

¹⁵³ Calvin Coolidge, “On the 150th Anniversary of the First Continental Congress,” Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 25, 1924, in *Calvin Coolidge on The Founders: Reflections on The American Revolution & The Founding Fathers*, ed. David Pietrusza (Church & Reid Books, 2012), 67-70.

¹⁵⁴ Coolidge, First Continental Congress, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Coolidge, First Continental Congress, 72.

warning against deviating from the principles and ideals that have led to America's prosperity. Deviating as an individual could be damaging, but deviating as group of individuals, as the Founders did, changes the course of human history.

As we have seen there are many levels of rhetoric, history, and truth to the speeches Calvin Coolidge made to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the American Revolution. These speeches showed an awareness, historical and otherwise, to the complexity of greatness and patriotism. Washington is presented as an outstanding example of what all American should and can strive to be. Sometimes we can learn just as much from someone by looking at what is not said by them. In the case of Coolidge, we do not hear him praise any other Founding Father to the extent he does with Washington. His assertion that it was due to John Adams that we even had Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army (and eventually as our first president) and John Marshall as Chief Justice is about the most we get beyond comments made in passing about others. There is something to that. Coolidge's plan for these speeches is fairly clear: there would be a focus on Washington, the Declaration and Constitution, and why those still mattered in the mid- to late-1920s. This is a sound strategy and we cannot help but assume that those were also the important pieces of those arguments. That is not to say that those lines of thought were not politically motivated, but that perhaps those principles he spoke so highly of were actually part of what motivated him.

The mind of Coolidge was clearly shaped and directed by the teachings of those two great educators from his time at Amherst College. From Garman we can see his sense of rationality and unwillingness to overreact to a potential crisis. This influence was not just in a general sense either, as we can clearly pick up specific points carrying over

from Garman's views on strikes and labor problems in the handling and response of Coolidge in Boston during 1919. While Garman gets the attention from historians and writers, Morse deserves a certain level of praise too. The political views of Morse offered a framework for the application of ideas learned previously and Coolidge's love of history seems to have only grown from this educational experience. Garman helped Coolidge understand how to think and how to apply that to all walks of life and Morse helped him understand the complexity of politics and how to frame think about history and its importance in the past, present, and future. Now it time to see Coolidge apply these traits, ideals, and beliefs to the problems of the world. The problems that we saw in Chapter One that were created, avoided, and exacerbated by the presidents that came before him.

Chapter Three: Coolidge Addresses the World Stage

It was early in the summer of 1927 and two men sat down for lunch. One of them was President Calvin Coolidge and the other was Colonel Raymond Robins. The mealtime conversation quickly turned to the question of outlawing war.

"Mr. President," said Robins, "you have immortality lying all around you in this proposal to outlaw war and you are doing nothing about it."

"Well," replied Coolidge, "the people are not interested in that proposition; they probably think it is impractical."

"They ought to be interested," countered Robins, "and it is practical, and I understood you were for it when I was campaigning for you in 1924." The issue was pressed until the President would discuss the possibility of trying to outlaw war with

Secretary of State Kellogg.¹⁵⁶ The chance to outlaw war, if such a goal is possible, showed itself in what would become the Kellogg-Briand Pact. We will discuss this pact and Coolidge's responses to it later. For now, let us understand why this exchange embodies much of our 30th president's ideas on foreign policy.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the man that would become president was prudent, thoughtful, and strong in his convictions. These traits shine through in that exchange with Robins where he is seemingly unconcerned with the personal glory that could be gained by being the president to outlaw war. Public opinion is not necessarily the only factor in his stance, but it is clear that he is concerned with the will of the people.

The most obvious, though unspoken, point is that he saw this as not being his battle or role. That is, he believed in his Secretary of State to do his job and that job was to deal with foreign policy and issues like this one. Delegating duties and expecting those placed in or voted into positions of power to do their job were key points to the way that a Coolidge-led government would function. If you were unable to do your job you would be replaced, as he did by sending Dwight Morrow to replace James R. Sheffield as the United States Ambassador to Mexico starting in 1927. There were actually three different ambassadors appointed to Mexico by Coolidge between March 1924 and October 1927. Finding the right fit for the job was important as relations between our two countries were tense. Luckily, this appointment of Morrow was a successful attempt to shift the countries away from potential conflict, military or otherwise.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Claudius O. Johnson, *Borah of Idaho*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1936, 399.

¹⁵⁷ James R. Sheffield was actually the second of the three Ambassadors to be appointed to Mexico under Coolidge. The first, Charles B. Warren, served from March 31, 1924 to July 22, 1924, Sheffield served from October 15, 1924 to June 5, 1927, and Morrow would serve from October 29, 1927 to September 17, 1930.

This understanding of roles is important to our discussion of Coolidge. His ideas of federalism and the role of the president affects everything his administration did – from domestic to foreign policy. While “Governor of Massachusetts, Coolidge supported wages and hours legislation, opposed child labor, imposed economic controls during World War I, favored safety measures in factories, and even worker representation on corporate boards.” Yet, as president he did not support these same issues because “in the 1920s, such matters were considered the responsibilities of state and local governments.”¹⁵⁸ His ideas had not changed, only his role and position had.

Calvin Coolidge made dozens of speeches while president from 1923-1929. These speeches represent a vast untapped resource for historians to shatter the long held preconceptions about Coolidge’s person and presidency. What did he have to say about foreign policy? What did he have to say about the issues of war, of peace, and of interactions with other nations? In the portrayal of Coolidge as a silent man most historians and writers have largely ignored these speeches. As with his thoughts on George Washington, the American Revolution, and the importance of history to his contemporaries, these addresses contain nuanced arguments and points that show a man who was deeply invested and concerned with the world around him. By examining these speeches, we can explore their common themes and see how he responded to the world’s problems – those that carried over from the Wilson and Harding presidencies and those new concerns.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Sobel, “Coolidge and American Business,” *Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation*, Accessed 11/19/16, <https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/essays-papers-addresses-35/>.

During the last formal address that Coolidge would make during the 1924 campaign he outlined the direction and mindset that his administration's foreign policy would take.

We have a well-defined foreign policy known of all men who will give it candid consideration. It has as its foundation peace with independence. We have abstained from joining the League of Nations mainly for the purpose of avoiding political entanglements and committing ourselves to the assumption of the obligations of others, which have been created without our authority and in which we have no direct interest. Under our Constitution we cannot, by treaty pledge or limit the future action of the Congress. But we have not refused to help, we have not refused to cooperate, we have not refused to act, whenever circumstances have arisen under which we could render assistance.¹⁵⁹

Coolidge speaks to an approach that leaves American autonomy intact while not refusing to participate in conferences or offer aid and assistance when the situation requires it.

War is a common theme among Coolidge's speeches. Despite his focus on the warrior and the militaristic attitudes required when discussing such events, he spoke just as much about the idea of peace. At the end of his speech commemorating George Washington taking command of the Continental Army, Coolidge draws parallels between that distant past, the recent horrors of World War I, and the future he hopes to see:

The world has tried war with force and has utterly failed. The only hope of success lies in peace with justice. No other principle conforms to the teaching of Washington; no other standard is worthy of the spirit of America; no other course makes so much promise for the regeneration of the world.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Calvin Coolidge, "Address at meeting of Chamber of Commerce of United States, October 23, 1924," quoted in *The Mind of the President: As revealed by himself in his own words. President Coolidge's views on public questions selected and arranged by subjects*, ed. C. Bascom Slep (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 20.

¹⁶⁰ Calvin Coolidge, "Address at the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of George Washington Taking Command of the Continental Army", Cambridge, Mass., July 3, 1925, Speech, 57. All of the speeches, unless otherwise noted are hand copies used from: Speeches of President Calvin Coolidge, Preserved by Everett Sanders. In the Everett Sanders Papers: a machine-readable transcription, *Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy, 1921-1929* -- Library of Congress, Web, 15 January 2016.

This harkening back to the Founding Fathers, and George Washington specifically, is also a common theme in his speeches. Towards the end of that same celebratory speech Coolidge highlights the principles of conduct that Washington offered in his Farewell Address. The points he draws out are that of valuing honesty, believing in our fellow man, cherishing no resentments, harboring no hatreds and forgiving our enemies.¹⁶¹

In Coolidge's eyes Washington also made it clear by his argument that cooperation is the key to both progress and peace.¹⁶² Why do these principles on conduct matter so much to Coolidge? Because for him:

The world has not outgrown, it can never outgrow, the absolute necessity for conformity to these eternal principles. I want to see America assume a leadership among the nations in the reliance upon the good faith of mankind. I do not see how civilization can expect permanent progress on any other theory. If what is saved in the productive peace of to-day is to be lost in the destructive war of to-morrow, the people of this earth can look forward to nothing but everlasting servitude. There is no justification for hope. This was not the conception which Washington had of life.¹⁶³

In another speech he again asserts this relationship between Washington and peace by saying, "Washington and the patriots of his day wanted peace."¹⁶⁴ It should be no surprise then that Coolidge would adopt, at least on paper, such a non-interventionist attitude toward foreign policy as the idea of leaving Europe to her own devices and focusing on home was a major point of Washington's Farewell Address. The cries for peace were loud in the shadow of a devastating world war that still hung over the world and despite the distance that United States held from the worst of it. Certainly this public hope for peace contributed to Coolidge's actions, but he showed no grand ambitions for

¹⁶¹ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 53-54.

¹⁶² Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 53-54.

¹⁶³ Coolidge, *Washington Taking Command*, 54-55.

¹⁶⁴ Calvin Coolidge, "Address at the 150th Anniversary of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton", Trenton, N.J., December 29, 1926, Speech, 35.

world domination or national expansion. Intervention, of any kind, under Coolidge was relatively sparse and seems to have only occurred in countries, like Nicaragua, where an American military presence had previously been exercised. This small flexing of the military's muscles was supposedly used to protect American nationals and their interests, like business ventures in Latin/Central America and elsewhere, and the vital Panama Canal for trade.

Not all of his discussions of war are focused on Washington and the Founding Fathers though. More often than not, his focus returns to the idea of peace. When dedicating the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri, on November 11th, 1926, he said of the monument that it “has not been raised to commemorate war and victory, but rather the results of war and victory, which are embodied in peace and liberty.”¹⁶⁵ It should be obvious by this point that Coolidge's mention and use of war is perhaps a superficial vehicle of opportunity for him to reach his important points on peace. Every one of the speeches he makes at monument dedications or in celebration of some past victory branches into Coolidge trying to sell peace to the American people. The public was a willing buyer of these ideas as a large contingent of Americans had been calling for peace since 1915.¹⁶⁶

The religious side of Coolidge's world view also shines through in most of his speeches. Discussions of war and foreign policy concerns were not exempt from such language either. “It is not only because of these enormous losses suffered alike by

¹⁶⁵ Calvin Coolidge, “Address at the Dedication of the Liberty Memorial at Kansas City, Missouri, November 11, 1926, Speech, 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ See Charles Debenedetti, *Origins of the Modern American Peace Movement: 1915-1929* (Millwood N.Y: KTO Press, 1978) for more on this topic.

ourselves and the rest of the world that we desire peace, but because we look to the arts of peace rather than war as the means by which mankind will finally develop its greatest spiritual power.”¹⁶⁷ This followed him addressing the concern over losses that this nation suffered in the Great War – both in terms of money and human life.¹⁶⁸ However, his broader point is that mankind must fundamentally improve and that they must seek peace or perish.

This concern over loss speaks to a bigger issue of how much it actually costs nations to go to war and deserves more of our attention. Wasting money was always a concern of Coolidge, even when it was not his own. This concern takes two forms in his speeches. The first is that militaries cost money to operate in both war and peace. Saying that “like everything that has any value, the Army and Navy cost something. In the last half dozen years we have appropriated for their support about \$4,000,000,000.”¹⁶⁹ Remember that the last half dozen years, as of this speech in 1926, were the first six years of the peaceful, prosperous “Roaring Twenties” when things appeared to be great for many Americans. This is without taking into account the second form of the financial costs that wars place upon a nation: pensions and death gratuities. These are the long-term costs that a country must bear many years after a war has concluded. The first of these pays for the retirement of living soldiers after their service and the other provides funds to the soldier’s surviving family to lighten the financial burden immediately

¹⁶⁷ Coolidge, Dedication of the Liberty Memorial, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Coolidge, Dedication of the Liberty Memorial, 24-27.

¹⁶⁹ Coolidge, Dedication of the Liberty Memorial, 18.

following the death, but prior to any potential survivor benefits starting.¹⁷⁰ Coolidge addressed this problem when speaking at Gettysburg Battlefield:

The respect in which the United States holds its service men is indicated by something more substantial than lip service. Between \$6,000,000,000 and \$7,000,000,000 have gone out of the United States Treasury in pensions and gratuities to those who fought in that war which reached its crest upon this hard-fought field. These payments are still going on at the rate of about \$200,000,000 each year. To the account of those who took part in the World War, for benefits and compensations in the short period of 10 years since its close already there has been set aside almost \$5,000,000,000, and payments are going on at the rate of about \$560,000,000 each year. Our people do something more for their service men and their dependents besides giving them a kind word while they live and placing a wreath on their last resting place when they are gone.¹⁷¹

Now, he is certainly not blaming the individual soldier for the cost that they force the nation to bear. Coolidge's purpose is instead multifaceted in that he is trying to make that point that Americans have and always will respect those men who place themselves in harm's way when the Nation asks that of them. The other side of that is the cost in capital – human and otherwise. The specificity with which he makes his argument shows the importance that money holds.

Coolidge is not blind to the fact that many great attributes of human character shine in times of war either.

We know that discipline comes only from effort and sacrifice. We know that character can result only from toil and suffering. We recognize the courage, the loyalty, and the devotion that are displayed in war, and we realize that we must hold many things more precious than life itself. But it can not be that the final development of all these fine qualities is dependent upon slaughter and carnage and death. There must be a better, purer process within the realm of peace where humanity can discipline itself, develop its courage, replenish its faith, and perfect its character.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ "Death Gratuity," *United States Military Compensation, Department of Defense*, accessed 1/3/2017, <http://militarypay.defense.gov/Benefits/Death-Gratuity/>.

¹⁷¹ Calvin Coolidge, "Address at Gettysburg Battle Field," May 30, 1928, Speech, 3-4.

¹⁷² Coolidge, *Dedication of the Liberty Memorial*, 27-28.

This is one grand statement about his ideas on character building within which we can see the culmination of his religious upbringing, his years at Amherst, and the evolution of his ideas on peace coming together. Here he is telling the crowd gathered in Kansas City, Missouri that the bravery, the courage, and all of the other attributes we praise in times of war have to be found through other avenues if we are ever to have any sort of lasting peace. Coolidge is pushing a fascinating conclusion here: for the world to know peace, we must find a way to grab onto those ideas and characteristics in times of peace in an attempt to ward off our desire to find them only in the toil and suffering of war. This is the kind of deep thought and humanity that finds itself excluded from most histories of Coolidge.

How do the general ideas on war and peace from Coolidge's speeches further play into the realm of his foreign policy? According to historian L. John Van Til the "principle issues for Coolidge included peace initiatives, collection of war-time debt, arms limitation, stimulation of trade, and an active effort to create good will among nations."¹⁷³ Clearly the ideas of peace shine through in that list as does Coolidge's domestic and foreign policy of trying to increase prosperity. War and more unpaid debts would hinder both of those aims.

From another point of view, independent journalist Charles Johnson believed that "Coolidge's foreign policy was simple but elegant."¹⁷⁴ What was this simple and elegant plan? In his State of the Union Address from December 6, 1923, Coolidge asserted: "We attend to our own affairs, conserve our own strength, and protect the interests of our own

¹⁷³ Van Til, *Thinking Cal Coolidge*, 135.

¹⁷⁴ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 224.

citizens...we recognize thoroughly our own obligation to help others, reserving to the decision of our judgement the time, the place, and the method.”¹⁷⁵ This differs little from other speeches made during his presidency:

Our country has never sought to be a military power. It cherishes no imperialistic designs, it is not infatuated with any vision of empire. It is content within its own territory, to prosper through the development of its own resources. But we realize thoroughly that no one will protect us unless we protect ourselves. Domestic peace and international security are among the first objects to be sought by any government.¹⁷⁶

The themes of peace continue to resonate. Coolidge’s foreign policy directions are clearly focused through those ideas of peace and maybe more importantly, the progress and prosperity of America domestically. Regardless of his points or ideas on peace, his intentions are always what he thinks is best for his homeland, just as George Washington would have wanted it.

Coolidge greatly relied on the knowledge and abilities of men other than himself in regards to his foreign policy decisions and actions. Part of this was due to it being a weakness of his coming into the presidency. Michael J. Gerhardt, Constitutional Law Professor at the University of North Carolina, believes that “Coolidge had no interest in foreign affairs” when he became president. This caused him to leave many of the initial decisions in those areas to his secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes.¹⁷⁷ This stance by Gerhardt is a simplification of reality at best. As we shall see, Coolidge was not only involved and aware of foreign policy concerns, but he would also assume a bigger role

¹⁷⁵ Calvin Coolidge, State of the Union Address, December 6, 1923, Speech, quoted in Charles C. Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America’s Most Underrated President* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013), 224.

¹⁷⁶ Coolidge, Dedication of the Liberty Memorial, 16-17.

¹⁷⁷ Michael J. Gerhardt, *The Forgotten Presidents: Their Untold Constitutional Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212.

over time. That inexperience was not the only reason he put trust in Hughes (and later Kellogg) in regards to foreign policy:

It is not sufficient to entrust details to some one else. They must be entrusted to some one who is competent. The Presidency is primarily an executive office. It is placed at the apex of our system of government. It is a place of last resort to which all questions are brought that others have not been able to answer. The ideal way for it to function is to assign to the various positions men of sufficient ability under their jurisdiction. If there is a troublesome situation in Nicaragua, a General McCoy can manage it. If we have differences with Mexico, a Morrow can compose them. If there is unrest in the Philippines, a Stimson can quiet them.¹⁷⁸

This idea of expecting others to do their job should not be confused with Coolidge being lazy, not being up to the task, or being unwilling to take a stand. Instead this ability to delegate, put people in positions of power, and expect them to do their job competently or be replaced should be understood for what it is and not dismissed as simply him possessing no interest in foreign policy. A President's job is not to try and do everything on his own. He is a single part, albeit the most important part, of one of the three branches that constitute our government.

The gravity of his role as president is not lost on Coolidge, nor is he wanting to delegate away his responsibilities. Later in that same reminiscence he continues, "While it is wise for the President to get all the competent advice possible, final judgements are necessarily his own." No one is able to make those decisions but him and his "decisions are final and usually irreparable."¹⁷⁹ This stance highlights how seriously he takes the job of President.

¹⁷⁸ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 196-197.

¹⁷⁹ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 197.

Another key aspect of Coolidge's foreign policy is carried over from his approach to domestic policy. That is avoiding idle talk or repeating discussion of events and situations where nothing new can be said. He spoke to this in a press conference in 1925: "It isn't helpful for me to keep talking about certain foreign relations unless there is some development that warrants some statement on my part. I didn't really want to keep rehashing practically the same thing, because it irritates foreign countries oftentimes and they wonder why the White House keeps making statements that don't appear to them to be very helpful."¹⁸⁰ This is a fascinating hint at the mindset of Coolidge and allows us insight into knowing that if he actually discusses something in his speeches in relation to foreign policy (or anything else for that matter) we should sit up and pay real attention.

Before looking at specifics from Coolidge's foreign policy we need to look at an otherwise largely ignored concern from author Charles Johnson that has some impact on the president's ability to conduct business on the world stage. Johnson claims that the adoption of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, which required the direct election of senators by the people, "hobbled" Coolidge's presidency.¹⁸¹ Now these claims are the furthering of an argument made by his former professor and adviser on his book. Ralph Rossum of Claremont McKenna College studied the dangerous damage that direct election of the Senate may have had on our nation. The direction of his study is much more focused on the late 20th century than Johnson's application.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Howard H. Quint and Robert H. Ferrell, eds. *The Talkative President: The Off-the-Record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964), 25-26.

¹⁸¹ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 216.

¹⁸² See Ralph Rossum, *Federalism, the Supreme Court, and the Seventh Amendment: The Irony of Constitutional Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001).

Why is this a problem? Should the people not have a say in electing the members of the Senate? For Johnson, the problem is that leaving this to the vote of the people led to “a partisan demagoguing of defense issues.”¹⁸³ He takes this concern even further saying that this was against the Founding Father’s plans as this left the Senate “far from being inoculated against popular prejudices as the framers of the Constitution intended.”¹⁸⁴ Specifically he claims that this affected Coolidge’s presidency at least twice: “during the anti-Japanese hysteria” of the 1924 Immigration Act and the debates over the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the international attempt to outlaw war.¹⁸⁵ Johnson’s concerns do not stop there, however. In the first he blames the Senate for stoking racial fear and the in the second for playing on the naïve hopes that world had for peace following World War I. He then calls out specifically Senators Henry Cabot Lodge and William Borah, who were chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1920-24 and 1924-33 respectively, for wielding the delusions of “unreasonable fear and unrealistic hope.”¹⁸⁶ This line of thought is important for us to consider when looking at Coolidge’s foreign policy. No president is judge, jury, and executioner when it comes to foreign affairs. Congress will have their say and Secretaries of State also play their role.

Coolidge was not oblivious to this problem that the Senate presented as he remembered years later in his autobiography that “The Senate had but one fixed rule, subject to exceptions of course...that the Senate would do anything it wanted to do whenever it wanted to do it. When I had learned that, I did not waste much time with the

¹⁸³ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 216-217.

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 217.

¹⁸⁵ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 217.

¹⁸⁶ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 217.

other rules, because they were so seldom applied.”¹⁸⁷ This is not where Coolidge’s complaints about the Senate ended. In another passage he wrote, “If the Senate has any weakness it is because the people have sent to that body men lacking the necessary ability and character to perform the proper functions.”¹⁸⁸ Note that in neither of these statements is the former president complaining about the Seventeenth Amendment directly, but the results of that change clearly affected him and his ability to work with that legislative body. By complaining about people sending the unfit and those resulting choices of individuals not abiding by any real rules, Coolidge offers quite a bit of ammunition in support of the arguments of both Rossum and Johnson.

The biggest point to take away from Johnson’s concern and our earlier examination of Coolidge’s speeches is that his administration is a player on the world stage. While the 17th Amendment has bearing on domestic policy too, its effect would seem more severe for a president attempting to engage in foreign policy. Coolidge did not establish America’s global presence, but he certainly had a role in expanding and continuing that tradition. Immigration changes, naval limitations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Pan American Conference, uprisings and revolutions in Nicaragua and China, and even questions about a potential World Court dominated Coolidge’s time in the White House.

Immigration straddles the line between domestic and foreign policy. On one hand the laws and decisions are very much domestically focused and applied. Yet, on the other, decisions to limit or exclude certain nations or people can have international

¹⁸⁷ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 162.

¹⁸⁸ Coolidge, *Autobiography*, 163.

repercussions. In one speech Coolidge drew a connection between our immigration policy and the, as he saw it, anti-imperialistic intentions of the nation, saying, “We are against aggression and imperialism not only because we believe in local self-government, but because we do not want more territory inhabited by foreign people. Our exclusion of immigration should make that plain,” and that “our outlying possessions, with the exception of the Panama Canal Zone, are not a help to us, but a hindrance. We hold them, not as a profit, but as a duty.”¹⁸⁹ Regardless of what sphere of presidential politics we believe the policies of immigration inhabit, the choices made in signing the 1924 Immigration Act do have ramifications beyond our borders.¹⁹⁰

Another early initiative that faced Coolidge was that of naval limitations or disarmament. In many ways these talks over naval limitations, limiting both the number and size of certain ships, were inherited like the immigration changes when he unexpectedly found himself president. However, unlike the latter, Coolidge did not find himself having to sign off on any of this as agreements had been reached under President Harding’s watch in the 1921 Washington Conference. This gathering of nations was one of about a half of dozen similar conferences that called for a limit on armaments and/or the sizes of navies.¹⁹¹ All of these conferences that took place in the years after World War I “found the United States, which had repudiated the League [of Nations], heavily

¹⁸⁹ Calvin Coolidge, “Address at the Observance of the Tenth Anniversary of the Armistice under the Auspices of the American Legion,” Washington, D.C., November 11, 1928, Speech, 30-31.

¹⁹⁰ As much of immigration policy does fall under the auspices of domestic policy, please consult Robert A. Divine’s *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952* for a more thorough analysis of the Immigration Act of 1924 and the domestic repercussions.

¹⁹¹ These conferences included the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, the Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armaments, the London Naval Conference, the League of Nations Preparatory Commission on the Disarmament Conference, and the Disarmament Conference itself.

involved in the alternative approach to security.”¹⁹² The result of the 1921 conference was that America would scuttle thirty major ships if the Japanese would do so with seventeen of theirs and the British with nineteen.¹⁹³ Unfortunately those talks were only the beginning and they would continue to differing degrees throughout Coolidge’s own years in office. He specifically discussed that original conference stating that, “For the purpose of naval limitation we called the Washington Conference and secured an agreement as to capital ships and airplane carriers, and also as to the maximum unit tonnage and maximum caliber of guns of cruisers.”¹⁹⁴ This was done without limiting the numbers of cruisers, lesser craft, and submarines. He then accuses the foreign governments of trying to limit the number of permissible craft in categories which the United States dominated. In light of that, he saw our nations’ willingness to agree to such terms as something to be commended; a “demonstration to others of our good faith in advocating the principle of limitations.”¹⁹⁵ Coolidge still had reservations.

For, despite his calls for peace, Coolidge was quite keen on the ideas of a strong national defense. To accomplish that goal required a well-trained, but small standing army, as many of the Founding Fathers would have agreed if they wanted one at all, and a strong navy. Comparing our naval needs and limiting accordingly could be detrimental to our navy’s ability to defend us because it “is obvious that, eliminating all competition, world standards of defense require us to have more cruisers.”¹⁹⁶ Concern over this may go beyond harkening all the way back to the likes of George Washington. In 1890,

¹⁹² L. Ethan Ellis, *Republican Foreign Policy, 1921-1933* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968), 80.

¹⁹³ Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 223.

¹⁹⁴ Coolidge, *Tenth Anniversary of the Armistice*, 15-16.

¹⁹⁵ Coolidge, *Tenth Anniversary of the Armistice*, 16-17.

¹⁹⁶ Coolidge, *Tenth Anniversary of the Armistice*, 17.

Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, a lecturer in naval history and the president of the United States Naval War College, published *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*. This groundbreaking work highlighted the importance and necessity of a strong navy. Mahan’s argument would have certainly resonated with a president who believed in trade, economic frugality, and protecting one’s interests all along the sea routes on “great highway.”¹⁹⁷ There is no clear evidence that Coolidge read Mahan’s work, but it not out of the realm of possibility. Even if he did not, it is highly likely that some of his advisors and many within the ranks of the military hierarchy at this time did.¹⁹⁸

It should certainly be clear by now that despite all of Coolidge’s talk of peace that he was not a pacifist. While he was opposed to fighting except in the form of self-defense or where our aid was required by request, he was not totally opposed to such actions and proudly spoke of heroic deeds done by men in war. Van Til thinks differently on this issue as he believes that Coolidge’s opposition to war “rested on several factors, including a strong distaste for the destruction of human life in wars.” The other reasons offered – expense, waste, disruption to social progress – actually seem to be more problematic for Coolidge.¹⁹⁹ However, he does not appear entirely opposed to war, but finds great solace in the idea of some type of “just war.” The idea of his support for a certain type of justified war or military intervention is ever clearer as his presidency

¹⁹⁷ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660-1783*, 12th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1942), 25.

¹⁹⁸ This is certainly an assumption of mine as no direct link was yet found connecting Captain Mahan’s work the ideas of President Coolidge.

¹⁹⁹ Van Til, *Thinking Cal Coolidge*, 135. Van Til’s belief is more specifically that Coolidge’s stance on war/peace is “so intense that he might properly be termed an ‘anti-war president.’” Which is followed up by his stating that a “consideration of him as a kind of pacifist might be a fruitful avenue of study for an interested scholar.”

continues and his involvement deepens; particularly his support for the outlawing of war and his decision to send troops into Nicaragua in 1927.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact is certainly the most famous piece of foreign policy that crossed Coolidge's desk. The context within which this idea of outlawing war was raised is in the period of relative global peace in the decade following the First World War: "If one word was repeated more often than any other during the years after poignantly memorable Armistice, that word was 'peace.' Peace echoed through so many sermons, speeches, and state papers that it drove itself into the consciousness of everyone."²⁰⁰ Coolidge was one of those people echoing peace throughout his speeches. He discussed this pact at length on two occasions. The first was made while negotiations were still ongoing.

As is well known, we are also engaged in conversations with different powers for putting peace on a new basis and making it still more permanent. In June, 1927, M. Briand, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, made an historic proposal to this Government. He suggested that France and the United States sign a treaty condemning recourse to war and renouncing it as an instrument of national policy in their mutual relations. During the 11 months that have since elapsed, this suggestion has been developed into one of the most impressive peace movements that the world has ever seen. The United States has accepted the principle underlying M. Briand's suggestion and has advocated its extension so as to include within the scope of the proposed treaty not only France and the United States, but also Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Japan, and any other nations of the world that might care to join with these six powers in a common renunciation of war.

In order to facilitate discussion and to demonstrate that a treaty such as that desired by the United States could be short, simple, and straightforward, Mr. Kellogg, Secretary of State, submitted on April 13, 1928, for the consideration of the other interested powers, a preliminary draft of a treaty representing in a general way the form of treaty which he suggested we were prepared to conclude. This draft treaty has met with

²⁰⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, *Peace in Their Time: The Origins of the Kellogg-Briand Pact* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 13-14.

very favorable reception. Not only has the idea of a multilateral treaty for the renunciation of war been indorsed by public opinion here and abroad but the governments themselves have approached the matter with an interest and a sympathy which is most encouraging.²⁰¹

This lengthy discussion of the Kellogg-Briand Pact is important for many reasons. One is that Coolidge felt confident enough in the talks to bring this up while making a speech at the end of May 1928. The second, is that Coolidge made it a habit to not talk about situations unless something new or worthwhile was worthy of discussion. The length at which he spoke on this occasion and the details he offers should tell us that this pact is quite a big deal for the administration and the country. It is quite odd that the president did not mention any of the real American origins of this idea.

While it is true that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand, proposed the ideas of this pact to the United States, that is not the true starting point. In fact, it was James Shotwell, a Columbia University professor, who called Briand to action. Yet the American origins and influence did not stop there as Shotwell teamed up with Salmon Levinson, an attorney, and Senator William Borah of Idaho in advancing this plan. This involvement from Borah in the drafting and furthering of this pact highlights the concerns voiced by Johnson earlier in regards to the Seventeenth Amendment as it “indicates the problem of senatorial involvement in foreign policy that Hamilton most feared.”²⁰² So why did Coolidge not mention any of this? Perhaps he felt constrained by time. More likely, he was already having feelings of ill will towards the expanding senatorial powers that he discussed in his autobiography.

²⁰¹ Coolidge, “Address at Gettysburg,” 24-27.

²⁰² Johnson, *Why Coolidge Matters*, 227.

Another major role of Coolidge during his tenure was continuing and contributing to the existing policy of occupying and deploying troops to areas in Central America and the Caribbean. Historian Max Boot believes there have been two ways that the United States has waged war throughout our history. The first is that most celebrated and studied: the large wars – like the American Civil War and World War II. The second is the far less celebrated tradition of fighting small wars. Many of these occurred prior to the Great Depression with the U.S. Marines making 180 landings around the world between 1800 and 1934.²⁰³ This second form of conflict is quite commonplace to us now, just as it would have been to President Coolidge as he felt compelled to send thousands of Marines to Nicaragua during 1926-7.

Nicaragua was not the only place that required military action from his administration, but it is the most interesting. Coolidge did not see the action taken there as a war. Instead he described the situation this way:

Though we have at this time some of our forces in Haiti, Nicaragua, and China, they are in none of these places for the purpose of making war, but for the purpose of insuring peaceful conditions under which the rights of our nationals and their property may receive that protection to which they are entitled under the terms of international law. Our further purpose in Haiti and Nicaragua is to assist the peoples and governments of those two countries in establishing stability, in maintaining orderly and peaceful institutions in harmony with civilized society. We are there at their express invitation and in accordance with explicit agreements.²⁰⁴

This is how he is describing the American role in its own backyard. Our reason for being in countries like Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and even China has little to do with war in his

²⁰³ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xiv.

²⁰⁴ Coolidge, "Address at Gettysburg," 6-7.

mind.²⁰⁵ This is not exactly the time to get into definitions of war and occupation of other nations, but Coolidge believes that Marines fought and died in this mission to establish stability, maintain order, and allow for harmony in their peaceful institutions. At its height, there were more than 5,000 servicemen in Nicaragua in an attempt by the United States government to ensure that the election of 1928 would occur peacefully and fairly. That was the most soldiers ever stationed there.²⁰⁶ Taking into account all causes – disease, accident, suicide, homicide – there were 136 Marines lost in Nicaragua from 1926-1933.²⁰⁷ While Coolidge chose to not consider this response a war, it resulted in the death of Americans and the spending of money that could have potentially served better causes. However, we should also remember that Coolidge was not the reason we were there originally. His decision to return our military to the region was likely rooted in a feeling of an obligation to fulfill our initial purpose and concern over the potential of more instability or conflict in an area so close to home and America's interests (especially the Panama Canal).

Part of Coolidge's fascination with Central America and the Caribbean stemmed from the desire for stability in and around the Panama Canal. As with many aspects of his foreign policy, this did not begin with him. Concerns with stability and peace in the region were the basis for the different Pan-American Conferences. President Coolidge made three lengthy speeches surrounding these conferences. Not all were the same type

²⁰⁵ For more on this aspect of military involvement in China, see Dorothy Borg's *American Policy and the Chinese Revolution, 1925-1928* (1947, Reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1968).

²⁰⁶ Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace*, 242-243.

²⁰⁷ Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace*, 252.

of conference, but they all addressed those concerns by bringing together leadership from different American nations to have them engage in meaningful dialogue.

The first of these conferences that Coolidge addressed was the 1927 Third Pan American Commercial Conference in Washington, D.C. His opening line speaks directly to the conference's purpose: "The Pan American movement rests on the principle of mutual helpfulness."²⁰⁸ These Pan American conferences were a commercial venture that represented private industry and trade among the American nations which left it in a semiofficial place where the government was only there to "promote and encourage" as "governments do not have commercial relations."²⁰⁹ Coolidge appears to believe that creating a stable environment for trade and giving economies and industries room grow will reduce potential needs for wars. As he stated, this type of agreement relies heavily upon the principle of mutual helpfulness, as well as cooperation from dozens of nations.

The second of the conferences actually saw Coolidge paying a visit to Cuba in January of 1928. Until President Barrack Obama's visit in 2016, he had been the last American president to set foot upon that island. Coolidge's visit was almost as big a deal. His speech was far less dedicated to ideas of economics as the one a year earlier had been. Instead, this speech focused upon the idea of political stability and maintaining peace in the Caribbean and throughout the Americas. He discussed the almost 100-year history of this gathering and highlights their continued principles "of international

²⁰⁸ Calvin Coolidge, "Address before the Third Pan American Commercial Conference at Washington, D.C.," May 3, 1927, Speech, 1.

²⁰⁹ Coolidge, Third Pan American Commercial Conference, 3.

relations, and in the practical ability of putting them into effect.”²¹⁰ This conference had an important place in the world:

The Pan American Conferences meet for the purpose of maintaining and extending these important principles. It is impossible to conceive of a more inspiring motive which men could entertain in dealing with the affairs of this world. You have convened to take counsel together for increasing the domestic welfare of the free people of our independent republics and promoting international peace. No other part of the world could provide constituencies which all have such a unity of purpose. The whole atmosphere of the Conference is animated with the spirit of democracy and good will. This is the fundamental concept of your organization. All nations here represented stand on an exact footing of equality. The smallest and the weakest speaks here with the same authority as the largest and the most powerful.²¹¹

With this passage, Coolidge speaks to the intentions of the conference as well as his own motives. He sees great merit in spreading the ideals of democracy through the Western Hemisphere. As we have seen with Nicaragua he is willing to do so by force if necessary.

The last of these conferences that Coolidge addressed was the Pan American Conference on Arbitration and Conciliation, 1928. Like the others, this meeting brought together almost two dozen nations “who have a common purpose to advance the cause of civilization by substituting the obligation of reason for the coercion of force.”²¹² His focus on the ideas of peace change little over the course of his speeches and with this speech he is certainly utilizing the rhetoric that the nation and the world wanted to hear after the horrors of World War I. These conferences highlight the importance that the American government and Coolidge’s foreign policy placed upon the areas of Central

²¹⁰ Calvin Coolidge, “Address before the Pan American Conference,” at Havana, Cuba, January 16, 1928, Speech, 13.

²¹¹ Coolidge, “Address before the Pan American Conference,” 13-15.

²¹² Calvin Coolidge, “Address before the Pan American Conference on Arbitration and Conciliation”, Washington, D.C., December 10, 1928, Speech, 1.

and South America and the Caribbean. Protecting our coastal waters and the Panama Canal were paramount.

The final piece of Coolidge's foreign policy that bears mention here is his support of the World Court. The attempt to form this international organization is a complicated tale that covers many years prior to his presidency. The idea of a World Court was not new and had been discussed in America multiple times in the 1800s.²¹³ Historian Denna Frank Fleming blames the United States Senate for the problems surrounding its creation or adoption. Fleming is "critical of the Senate's long-established ways of killing peace treaties." For him, this is a tradition that deserves the blame for their blocking the League of Nations as well.²¹⁴ Coolidge put the fate of America's involvement in such a court in the Senate's hands:

I have advocated adherence to such a court by this Nation on condition that the statute or treaty creating it be amended to meet our views. The Senate has adopted a resolution for that purpose.

While the nations involved can not yet be said to have made a final determination, and from most of them no answer has been received, many of them have indicated that they are unwilling to concur in the conditions adopted by the resolution of the Senate. While no final decision can be made by our Government until final answers are received, the situation has been sufficiently developed so that I feel warranted in saying that I do not intend to ask the Senate to modify its position. I do not believe the Senate would take favorable action on any such proposal, and unless the requirements of the Senate resolution are met by the other interested nations I can see no prospect of this country adhering to the court.²¹⁵

So, if the Senate should bear the blame, as Fleming believes, then Coolidge is equally as guilty. Despite his desire for American participation he is unwilling to force the hand of

²¹³ Denna Frank Fleming, *The United States and the World Court, 1920-1966*, 1945, Revised (Garden City, NY: Russell & Russell, 1968), 15-23.

²¹⁴ Fleming, *United States and the World Court*, 3.

²¹⁵ Coolidge, *Dedication of the Liberty Memorial*, 37-38.

the Senate. He is playing by the rules and might be the only one involved who is doing so. That is not to say that Coolidge was deviating from his values and ideals. His statement following that lengthy passage was that, “while we recognize the obligations arising from the war and the common dictates of humanity which ever bind us to a friendly consideration for other people, our main responsibility is for America.”²¹⁶ Indeed, Coolidge is sticking to his values and ideals by not wanting to overstep his role as he sees it. He is putting America first and always, just as he believes Washington would have wanted it.

Instead of a lazy, “silent” man, through these speeches and their level of involvement of Coolidge upon the global stage we are granted glimpses of a man who exhibit far greater knowledge, initiative, rationality, and a sense of his role as president than most historians grant him. Perhaps, if he is guilty of anything it is being somewhat naïve in his attempt to look for the best in humankind. From his own words we see a president that is driven by deep-seated ideals and is not afraid to walk upon the world stage and speak or act upon those beliefs. His confidence with such endeavors does grow as he embraces his unexpected role as commander-in-chief. He was deeply invested in our nation’s concerns and trying to better the world for his contemporaries and future generations. Coolidge has been misrepresented and misunderstood. Let this study of his speeches give us pause as we look back at his presidency and let us reconsider the way we think about this man’s role in American history, politics, and foreign policy.

²¹⁶ Coolidge, Dedication of the Liberty Memorial, 38.

Conclusion

C. Bascom Slemph, who served briefly as Coolidge's secretary, described a "characteristic" passage from the President as "no surplus verbiage, short, epigrammatic sentences, an elevated tone growing in spirit until it constitutes a moving appeal."²¹⁷ Surely this approach of style and delivery, along with his reluctance to address issues that contained no new developments, and his reliance on others to do the tasks assigned, contributed to our willingness to discount Coolidge's knowledge of and impact upon America's foreign policy during the 1920s. While Coolidge's time in office certainly contains no famous speeches or actions relating to foreign policy, as we get from Wilson's attempts to create a new world order for peace or Roosevelt's speech after the surprise attack upon Pearl Harbor plunged American into war again, their absence, however, does not imply that his presidency was dedicated to inactivity or inaction as many writers and historians would have us believe.

The presidential transitions that took place between 1920 and 1925 greatly impacted the direction of the nation, both at home and abroad. The degree to which the rejection of the Democrats and Wilsonian ideas swept the nation in favor of Harding is proof of people's desire for a change. Change on the global stage takes time. As we have discussed, the number of actors, intentions, and plans involved drag out both good and bad results. While change is often slow to happen domestically, the problem is vastly amplified with more nations, politics, and egos involved. With this in mind, if we take a minute to really appreciate the changes that do and do not occur under the shift from

²¹⁷ Calvin Coolidge, *The Mind of the President: As revealed by himself in his own words. President Coolidge's views on public questions selected and arranged by subjects*, ed. C. Bascom Slemph (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 25.

Wilson to Harding, we need to understand why. The problem for us is that to answer that is far beyond the scope of our discussion here. That shift was presented to help show, ever so briefly, the repercussions of the actions of the administrations that preceded Coolidge's.

Another required piece of my argument was to try and understand how and why Coolidge may have thought the way he did. The influences of both Anson Morse and Charles Garman during Coolidge's time at Amherst College cannot be overstated. While work has been done on this influence, here and in other writings, there are still connections to be pursued. One area worthy of more consideration is the depth of potential influences of Morse's teachings as he was published more widely and we have access to much more of his ideas.

Despite the literature surrounding Coolidge and despite my efforts here, there is still more to be gained from an even more detailed analysis and evaluation of the speeches of our 30th president. Adding his words and ideas to our presentation of him will only create more depth and knowing to our understanding of the 1920s. By largely ignoring these sources and only repeating the words of historians like Schlesinger we are doing a disservice to reality and truth. Perhaps Coolidge really did sleep longer and more often than any other president. However, that is only a piece of the life that Coolidge led. The speeches examined in Chapter Three show us that he was aware of the world and her problems. They show that he was concerned about peace, war, freedom, and prosperity, both here and abroad. Coolidge and his administration took steps to improve the relationship with Mexico, they tried to protect the American people and her interests by maintaining peace in places like Nicaragua. They also made huge strides to promote

peace globally by supporting attempts to outlaw war through the Kellogg-Briand Pact and establish a World Court. In the realm of economics and a drive to promote even greater prosperity they worked to foster trade and respect between all of the nations that make up North and South America. These are not the visions of Coolidge that many historic accounts offer.

By trying to better recreate the world as it would have been for both Coolidge and America at this time we can come to see all of these pieces and their interactions differently. Instead of inaction and inactivity, we see from Coolidge thoughtful and prudent action and an expectation of other men in his administration to do their jobs. Instead of a United States cut off from the world, hoarding her wealth, ignoring the cries and pleas of others, and sitting alone in isolation, we might see global and regional cooperation, the expansion of international trade, and the desire to create peace separately from political entanglements like the League of Nations. These visions of President Coolidge and American foreign policy in the 1920s should change the way we think about and teach the period. This is not a time of nothing and isolation between World War I and the Great Depression and New Deal. This is instead a time of hopeful peace talks, international trade, and military inventions that require more discussion.

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