



University  
of Glasgow

O'Brien, P. (2013) The American press, public, and the reaction to the outbreak of the First World War. *Diplomatic History* . ISSN 0145-2096

Copyright © 2013 The Author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/64323/>

Deposited on: 29 April 2013

# The American Press, Public, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War

Phillips Payson O'Brien

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 was greeted in many of the world's cities with large crowds. Some were celebratory, others tense. The largest gathering held anywhere in the world occurred on 4 August and involved up to 400,000 people. This was a boisterous celebration, revolving about news flashes about the outbreak of war. Reports were posted in large red letters on the sides of buildings and news that the crowd liked was greeted with cheers, the largest of which erupted when it was announced that Great Britain had declared war against Germany.

This meeting was held in Times Square in New York City.<sup>1</sup> It was not an exception. The day afterwards large crowds celebrating the outbreak of war marched up and down Broadway. There were gatherings in Herald Square, Greenwich Village, and the upper and lower East sides.<sup>2</sup> The *New York Tribune* printed a picture of the crowds which gathered outside its offices on Nassau Street.<sup>3</sup> The police seemed so worried by the exuberance of some that they broke up one pro-Allied mass meeting. By 6 August the Mayor of New York, John Mitchel, was so frustrated that he issued a proclamation against further gatherings.<sup>4</sup>

These meetings were far larger than the ones held in Europe at the same time. In fact recent research has stressed the muted nature of European war enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup> The 'mass' demonstrations in front of Buckingham Palace on 3 August involved between 6,000 and 10,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The demonstration held in Berlin at the same time, which received great coverage in the German rightwing press, involved 30,000.<sup>7</sup> Other German demonstrations did not exceed 50,000.<sup>8</sup> Throughout Europe it seems impossible to find a meeting that would have exceeded 100,000.

It is a bit jarring to think that large crowds came out in America to cheer the outbreak of war, that there were many Americans who believed that war needed to be celebrated. Yet, war had been a constant facet of American life since the outbreak the American Civil War. The United States had been involved in a series of protracted and well-covered wars against the American Indians in the 1870s and 1880s. Between 1898 and 1904 the country had also engaged in a wide-scale and very popular war with Spain and a subsequent guerrilla conflict against Filipino insurgents. From 1895 onwards the United States had been involved in periodic war scares with other major powers including Great Britain, Japan, and Germany. Just before the outbreak of war in Europe, Woodrow Wilson deployed American military forces into Mexico.

The study of the American reaction to war is one in which political scientists continue to engage in a fascinating conversation. Important scholarship has been recently published by (among others) Ole Holsti, Adam Berinsky, Matthew Baum, Tim Groeling, Eric Larson, Bogdan Savych, John Mueller, Richard Gelpi, and Peter Feaver. They have created a number of different models of American public opinion and war which, even though they are based overwhelmingly on evidence gathered since 1945, have relevance for the United States in 1914. One of the main questions is to what degree public opinion on war (and foreign policy in general) is determined by elite policy makers and institutions such as the media.

For Baum and Groeling, the elite debate is important, but not in and of itself. It is the portrayal of the elite debate by the media, how it is framed, that really helps explain how Americans react to war and foreign affairs. They argue the famous broadcast by Walter Cronkite in 1968, made just after the Tet Offensive, was vital in shaping American opinion.<sup>9</sup> The Johnson Administration's policies and arguments, meanwhile, were less important. Holsti portrays the public as a more active agent in its own decision-making process. Whilst he believes that the American public is generally more sceptical about overseas conflicts

than elites, he also does not believe that the public needs to be frightened into supporting action.<sup>10</sup> Instead it can be convinced by more rational arguments about national interest.

Larson and Savych describe a process that is more variable. To them the public chooses to support different conflicts for different reasons. For instance the Clinton Administration's bombing of Kosovo received support from those who were motivated by moral more than strategic considerations. When it came to the present war in Afghanistan, however, the situation was reversed.<sup>11</sup> Berinsky rejects the notion that the American public reacts to foreign policy or wars in a way materially different to its reaction to domestic questions.<sup>12</sup> He argues that much of American reaction is shaped by domestic partisan identity or allegiance. Democrats instinctively opposed the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq while Republicans supported it.

Of all these different visions, the most controversial might be Feaver and Gelpi's. Their argument is that the crucial issue that governs the American response to war is the perception of victory.<sup>13</sup> They claim that there is a significant part of American public opinion that naturally gravitates towards warfare, which they term the 'hawks', and that the next crucial group is the one that will support involvement in a war if it is seen as winnable. In this model those Americans who are swayed by casualty numbers are less influential. If any administration can hold together a coalition of the Americans who instinctively support wars with those focussed on victory, it will have a comfortable majority with which to work even with relatively high casualty levels.

This relative downgrading of the importance of casualties in swaying public opinion has sparked debate.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is the kind of analysis that has mostly escaped much of the historical study of the American public's reaction to war. In some cases, such as Niall Ferguson's *Colossus* the research and thesis are of such poor quality that they are irrelevant.<sup>15</sup> When it comes to the American reaction to the outbreak of war in Europe in

1914, the historical literature is much, much better, but it does tend to assume a great deal. The majority of work has been done on individual reaction, particularly that within the Wilson Administration and high political figures. Because of this, the picture we have is surprisingly uniform. Arthur Link, the dean of Woodrow Wilson scholars, claimed that describing the American reaction to the outbreak of war as a 'shock' would be an 'understatement' and added: 'When war came and the international structure fell crashing in ruins, thoughtful men in the United States, indeed, in all the world, were stunned and perplexed.'<sup>16</sup> In both 1969 and 1990 John Milton Cooper used similar language.<sup>17</sup> 'For Americans the war was, in the phrase they coined later "over there." It was a horrible calamity that was happening to someone else, far away.'<sup>18</sup>

Before 1990 similar sentiments were expressed by Ernest May, Daniel Smith, Patrick Devlin, Sean Dennis Cashman, and Neil A. Wynn.<sup>19</sup> In the last two decades there has been a flourish of excellent writing about America between 1914 and 1917 that has continued to portray the American people as stunned and shocked at the outbreak of war, as embracing neutrality, and as viewing European war as a terrible thing. Robert Zieger uses language that is almost identical to Link and Cooper. 'Americans were fascinated and appalled by these terrible events. Expressions of gratitude for the existence of the Atlantic Ocean and of self-congratulation for America's traditional stance of non-involvement in European affairs were almost universal.'<sup>20</sup> David Traxel speaks of Americans 'great and terrible shock.'<sup>21</sup> Mark Allen Eisner speaks of American popular pressure against war leading Wilson into a neutrality position.<sup>22</sup> Robert Tucker emphasizes the American people and government's deep reluctance to get involved in the war.<sup>23</sup> Alan Dawley has the American people staring on in 'horrified disbelief' as the European war began.<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Keene has the American people 'shocked', Meirion and Susan Harries discuss claims that Americans had renounced the greed of Europeans.<sup>25</sup> John A Thompson focuses on progressive political elements that were instinctively anti-war.<sup>26</sup> Ross Kennedy gives a wider picture. He classifies those politicians who favoured preparation for war such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore

Roosevelt as 'Atlanticists' and compares them to a very strong pacifistic group. In the end Kennedy believes that an instinctively pro-Allied Wilson administration had to hide its preferences from a strongly neutralist American public.<sup>27</sup>

This notion that the American people were instinctively shocked or horrified at the outbreak of war is one of the formative assumptions behind one of the more studied aspects of the American experience between 1914 and 1917; the impact of propaganda. Thomas Fleming, Byron Farwell, Edward Robb Ellis and Alan Axelrod all believe that propaganda was crucial in conditioning an anti-war United States public to accept entering the conflict in 1917.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the idea that the American public might have a large segment that was attracted to conflict, which is such a fascinating part of the ongoing political science discussion, is very rare in the present historiography. Yet this runs counter to the first book on the subject, Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, published in 1922.<sup>29</sup> Lippmann presents the American public at this time as emotional, partly fascinated by war, and one eventually entered the First World War with great assurance. His view of human nature and war was not positive. '...if a war breaks out, the chances are that everybody you admire will begin to feel the justification of killing and hating.'<sup>30</sup>

In Lippmann's world the public's tendency to react emotionally and aggressively had to be tempered by foreign policy elites.<sup>31</sup> It was the American people who were instinctively drawn to war and warfare, and the better educated elites who needed to calm them. The most important, and problematic, institution within this model was the press. Lippmann saw the press as a crucial agent in setting the national mood over foreign crises, and dangerously influential when it acted out of partisan or sensationalist impulses.<sup>32</sup>

When looking back at other sources written at Lippmann's time, it is clear that many wanted to portray themselves as being shocked when war erupted in 1914. In 1926 Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of Agriculture, David Houston, claimed to remember his

emotional reaction. 'Politically, economically and socially, Continental Europe, with the exception of a few small countries, is still medieval...'<sup>33</sup> The journalist Mark Sullivan, whose best selling contemporary history of the United States *Our Times*, was published in 1933, spoke similarly.

'Thus—first by brief despatches, flashes of startling news, later by vivid narratives and descriptions in periodicals and newspapers, accompanied by photographs of soldiers marching, cities ruined, men in trenches, tragedy at sea—thus did America learn of the war. It gave rise among us to many moods, expressed in Isaiah-like sermons with Europe's "insanity" as text, pontifical editorials which combed the dictionary for synonyms of "senseless", "barbaric"; man in the street debate, cigar store oraculation.'<sup>34</sup>

Yet, Sullivan was operating with a memory that at best can be termed 'selective'. In 1914 he was the editor of *Colliers*, a literary and commentary journal with one of the largest circulations in the United States, 561,770.<sup>35</sup> *Colliers* was a moderate, Republican publication which avoided overtly jingoistic language. Yet Sullivan, in the first editorial he published after the outbreak of war, was gleeful at the benefits that the United States would accrue.

'A great war in Europe will enable the United States to sell its crops in places which will give much greater income than if there was no war. Almost every industry will derive more or less advantage....Should the American people take advantage of the golden opportunity afforded them by the outbreak of the war, it will mean not diminished but increased prosperity for the United States.'<sup>36</sup>

A week later Sullivan wrote that as long as the war lasted the United States would make a great deal of money.<sup>37</sup> By the first week in September he went further. 'In the past and the immediate present, the war, of course, has caused us as a nation some confusion. This is being effectively remedied and will soon be in the past. For the future it is possible to say, in the words of one of the most thoughtful leaders of American finance and industry,

that if he have wise leadership, *the permanent result upon American industry and commerce of the present European war will be of a beneficence such as to stagger the imagination.*<sup>38</sup>

[italics mine]

In describing the war as a 'golden opportunity', Sullivan was far more honest about his countrymen's emotions in 1914 than he would later be in 1933.

### **A Golden Opportunity**

When Woodrow Wilson released his famous neutrality proclamation on 19 August, he singled out two institutions as particularly influential in shaping American opinion—God and the press. 'The spirit of the Nation will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits...'<sup>39</sup> As such he acknowledged the important, if problematic, role that the media plays in affecting or reflecting public opinion. For a sceptical Walter Lippmann, the press (or what today we might call the media) was a central if not benign institution in determining public opinion.<sup>40</sup> Lippmann saw the press having great power, he just doubted that the press could accurately portray an international situation to a domestically concerned readership. As such Lippmann believed the press rarely used its power to lead public opinion down a proper path.

Of course just speaking about public opinion in this era before opinion polling presents its own challenges.<sup>41</sup> Lee Benson, who claimed that it was possible if difficult to study public opinion before polling, put particular stress on identifying the proper contemporary sources and in avoiding recollections.<sup>42</sup> Charles Tilly discussed strike and protest action, which he believes was becoming increasingly sophisticated by 1914.<sup>43</sup> J. Michael Hogan also believes that at the time of the war there was a growing belief that public



opinion was discernible.<sup>44</sup> Research has also been done specifically on the role of newspapers and public opinion in this period and much of it supports the Lippmann view. Michael Schudson argues that the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the growth of an objectivity agenda amongst American newspaper publishers, as they attempted to supply news that was more fact driven and accurate to the public.<sup>45</sup> James Hamilton also argues that newspapers became more Independent in these years and believes that they often mirrored public opinion as a means of appealing to consumers.<sup>46</sup> James Carey believes that the growth of a more mass oriented newspaper industry after 1890 helped create a stronger national 'audience'.<sup>47</sup> Recently Maxwell McCombs argues in his excellent book on public opinion that empirical evidence now 'confirms and elaborates Lippmann's broad brush assertions' about the agenda setting power of the press.<sup>48</sup>

Research on the power of the media today has shown that it is particularly influential because of its ability to 'frame' the discussion of an issue. Thomas Nelson, Donald Kinder, Richard Brody, Robert Entman and McCombs put particular stress on this ability—showing how the media uses its power to frame an issue either in line with or in opposition to the wishes of presidential administrations.<sup>49</sup> This power is particularly strong when there is a general media consensus.<sup>50</sup> Matthew Baum and Tim Groeling believe that 'elite' sources of information, including the media, play a crucial role in determining public opinion if these sources present a united picture.<sup>51</sup> Page, Shapiro and Dempsey maintain that the repetition of the stance by the media is crucial in shaping public thought.<sup>52</sup> Stuart Soroka believes this power is particularly strong in the case of foreign relations, which is outside of most American's personal experiences.<sup>53</sup> A problem can occur, however, when this consensus breaks down. In that case, public opinion also seems to fracture, with partisan identification or sympathy often becoming the lead indicator of how individuals will perceive certain war or national security questions. Overall this power of consensus has resonance in other arguments such as those of Feaver and Gelpi. If an assumption of victory is important in

maintaining public support for conflict, then a media consensus in favour of a war being winnable is vital.

This research has combined an understanding of the present research on framing and consensus with a Lippmannite understanding of the role of the media in reflecting/shaping public opinion.. Twenty-five daily and Sunday papers were examined in detail for this article, as well as 5 major national journals. The newspapers were: <sup>54</sup>

<u>City</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Daily Circ</u>	<u>Sunday C</u>
<i>New York</i>			
American	Dem	277,465	739,844
Evening Journal	Dem	725,000	
Times	Dem	240,000	175,000
Tribune	Rep	50,000	50,000
<i>Chicago</i>			
Herald/Examiner	Ind	240,000	580,000
Tribune	Rep	258,000	867,000
<i>Philadelphia</i>			
Evening Bulletin	Rep	290,325	
Inquirer	Rep	184,958	264,956
Record	Dem	172,066	130,002

*St Louis*

Globe-Democrat	Rep	116,976	159,553
Post-Dispatch	Dem	171,101	304,523
Republic	Dem	161,531	106,330

*Boston*

Globe	Dem	160,000	300,000
Herald	Rep	160,000	90,000
Post	Dem	369,553	286,831

*Cleveland*

Press	Dem	171,094	
-------	-----	---------	--

*Baltimore*

American	Rep	76,261	101,903
Sun	Dem	88,458	67,276

*San Francisco*

Examiner	Ind	107,120	205,109
----------	-----	---------	---------

*Cincinnati*

Enquirer	Dem	75,000	215,000
----------	-----	--------	---------

*New Orleans*

Times-Picayune	Dem	19,000	82,500
----------------	-----	--------	--------

*Washington DC*

Post	Ind	30,000	45,000
------	-----	--------	--------

Star	Ind	65,954	49,570
------	-----	--------	--------

*Los Angeles*

Herald	Dem	90,410	
--------	-----	--------	--

Times	Rep	58,019	86,148
-------	-----	--------	--------

<b><u>Total Circulation</u></b>		<b><u>4,358,291</u></b>	<b><u>4,906,545</u></b>
---------------------------------	--	-------------------------	-------------------------

These papers were chosen to test whether there was a national consensus on the outbreak of war and to see how the issue was framed to the American reader. Therefore the list starts with at least two papers of different political orientation taken from the seven largest cities in the United States (with the exception of Cleveland). These partisan identifications were Democratic, Republican or Independent—using the party the paper supported in the elections of 1914 and 1916 as a determinant. That means that some papers

that called themselves 'Independent' in 1914, have been classified here as partisan (such as the *New York American* or the *Cleveland Press*). In this case the self-styled claim to independence was more a vehicle to increase circulation, as these papers strongly supported one party. The four papers indentified here as independent were wary of being associated with one party. The *Chicago Herald*, for instance, in the run up to the 1914 Congressional elections ended up endorsing 11 Republicans, 10 Democrats and 9 Progressives for the House of Representatives.<sup>55</sup> This independence could be very important. The *San Francisco Examiner*, a Republican-Progressive paper, refused to support Charles Evans Hughes in 1916, a move that ended up being emblematic of the Republicans' inability to win that state. There was also an attempt to select a range of papers with different social targets. The *New York American* and *New York Evening Journal*, for instance, were owned by William Randolph Hearst and combined had the largest circulation in the country. They were openly patriotic and popular in orientation. On the other hand, the *New York Tribune*, with a much smaller readership, was aimed at the Republican party 'elite'.

Beyond the seven largest cities in the country, particular attention was paid to California and Ohio because of their crucial role in the 1914 congressional elections and the 1916 presidential election. Both were states that usually leaned Republican, but which Woodrow Wilson won very narrowly in 1916. If either had voted for Charles Evans Hughes, he would have become president. Finally two other cities were chosen, New Orleans as a representative of the Deep South and Washington DC, to see if there was a different governmental voice on affairs. The journals chosen, *Colliers*, *Harpers Monthly*, *The North American Review*, *Scribners* and *The Nation*, were mainstream journals, though with some political identification ranging from the clearly Republican *Colliers* to the more traditionally liberal *Nation*. Their circulations were:<sup>56</sup>

**Journal Name**

**Circulation**

Colliers	561,770
Harpers	100,000
Nation	11,000
North American Review	15,000
Scribners	150,000
<b><u>Total Circulation</u></b>	<b><u>837,770</u></b>

The combined circulation figure for these newspapers and journals was over 10 million. In 1910 the U.S. census had the overall national population at more than 92 million, so that this figure represents a sizeable percentage of the country's reading population. Within the papers and journals particular attention was paid to three areas. First were the publisher's editorials. Every paper contained an editorial section every day, where the paper's official position was laid out. This editorial usually stressed themes that were developed in different news stories on the front page of the paper, working symbiotically with them to frame the news. Beyond the editorials, front page and special section news articles were examined. Again, these almost always reflected the editorial stance of the paper, but sometimes went into greater details about the war situation. Finally, illustrations were examined. Many papers ran an illustration, which reflected the editorial stance of the paper, on the editorial page or the front page.

When war broke out in Europe it quickly became the dominant news event, driving murder trials and scandals from the front pages. By Monday 3 August most had decided that the war was the major story. By Friday 7 August all the papers had run at least one major editorial which discussed the conflicts expected impact on the United States. Whilst many described the war as a calamity for Europe the overwhelming belief was that the war would be hugely beneficial for the United States.

Of 24 papers, 16 were soon describing the war as a great opportunity for America.<sup>57</sup> These were the *New York American*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Herald*, the *Philadelphia Record*, the *Philadelphia Evening News*, the *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, the *St Louis Republic*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>58</sup> Four papers were more neutral in tone both seeing possibilities but also urging restraint. They were the *New York Times*, *Boston Post*, *New Orleans Times Picayune* and *Washington Star*. Only 4 generally presented the war as a real tragedy, some on moral but others on economic grounds. They were the *New York Evening Journal*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Baltimore American* and *Los Angeles Herald*.<sup>59</sup>

Those papers which saw the war as a great opportunity were obsessed with taking advantage of the conflict to increase American trade, both to Europe and around the world. In its most delicate phrasing, such as in this *Washington Post* editorial, it could be said more in sorrow than in anger. 'Europe is a volcano of racial antagonisms, religious hates, social debacles, national jealousies, political plunderings and financial warfares. There can be no peace in Europe for many, many years and our intelligent farmers, our shrewd businessmen, our enterprising manufacturers have before them the advantages possessed by a land of peace in its dealings with a continent divided into warring and quarrelsome races and nations. Warring Europe needs our products. Warring Europe weakens our commercial competitors in every other continent of the globe.'<sup>60</sup> However such restraint was not the rule—many papers discussed the profit and trade possibilities with remarkable gusto. The *New York American*, the most read paper in the United States, after days of hammering away at the theme, was ecstatic in its calls for government to take advantage of the trade opportunities posed by the war.

'Action! Action! Should be the watchword and the duty of the American Congress and the American People in this great commercial emergency....

**TWO THOUSANDS MILLIONS** in trade is the prize which world conditions have put before the American people. Europe's tragic extremity becomes, without any working of our own, America's golden opportunity—the opportunity not of a lifetime but of a century of national life.<sup>61</sup>

Even the *American's* more staid competitors in New York voiced similar sentiments. On 2 August, the *New York Tribune* ran a leading editorial entitled 'Our Opportunity in South America.'<sup>62</sup> Two days later, in an editorial entitled 'A Time for Coolness and Confidence' it prophesized that the war in Europe would make the United States' position in the world 'still more secure and enviable.'<sup>63</sup>

In Philadelphia and Boston, two other northeastern cities with large trading interests, similar sentiments were expressed by the majority of papers. On 3 and 4 August the *Philadelphia Record* published editorials discussing the profits to be made by foreign trade, particularly from a rise in commodity prices.<sup>64</sup> The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* was even more confident when it editorialized on 4 August that the United States could use the war to improve what had always been a statistical weakness in the American economy, its negative foreign trade balance.

'...the United States is well prepared, and is in a position to be master of the situation, to check the outflow of gold, and to secure the return of that which has gone in payment for its wheat and other supplies which Europe must have.'<sup>65</sup>

In Boston the language was even more evocative. On 3 August the *Boston Globe* published a major article headlined 'United States due for Boom: Federal Officials Happy at Prospect' and two days later they trumped this by publishing a major piece headlined 'Wall Street still Hopeful: Europe Must get our Exports or Starve.'<sup>66</sup> Later, the *Globe* wrote an editorial that demonstrated the emotional conflict that existed between those who wanted to condemn war, but on the other hand looked forward eagerly to the economic windfall that this war promised.



'No American citizen worthy of the name would prolong the terrible international conflict a single moment for the sake of profits, but there is much legitimate business crying to be done and it is up to us to do a large share of it.'<sup>67</sup>

The newspapers of the Midwest were just as enthusiastic about improving trade but usually didn't feel it necessary to provide any moral disclaimer before profit. This was partly because the war offered particular help to Midwestern farmers, who due to the beautiful weather of the summer of 1914, were on course for a bumper year of food production.<sup>68</sup> The *Chicago Herald* editorialized on 3 August that the war would increase demand for Midwestern grain.<sup>69</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* was even more vociferous. On 10 August 10 the *Tribune* published an article by the respected head of its Washington DC Bureau, Arthur Sears Henning, with the headline 'War May Bring Big Boom to the US: Exporters, Shippers, Farmers and Clothes Makers Face Windfall.'<sup>70</sup> Henning, claimed that all the moralizing of Congressmen against war quickly gave way to a rush to gain trade advantage. He described how senatorial speeches focussed on improving market conditions, that the senate immediately passed a trade commission bill, and that other such measures 'will be passed with equal dispatch if the war excitement keeps up.'<sup>71</sup> On 9, 10, and 11 August the *Tribune's* editorial page hit its stride as it published a sequence of stories and editorials about the trade opportunities war presented, particularly for agriculture.<sup>72</sup> To see the breadth of the pro-trade stories, an entire page of the *Tribune*, both stories and an illustration, was devoted to the subject on 11 August (see picture A).

The lead given by the *Tribune*, perhaps the Midwest's most important newspaper and one of the top Republican papers in the country, was aped by papers of both parties in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St Louis. The very pro-Democrat *Cleveland Press* editorialized; '...the great central community in the United States, which has its nerve center in Chicago, has decided to lose no more time in hooking up to Opportunity' and praised the scouting parties that were supposedly on their way to South America to capture markets previously dominated by Europeans.<sup>73</sup> The *Cincinnati Enquirer* stands out for the sheer number of

articles extolling the trade advantages of war. It published editorials urging Americans forward on 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 31 of August!<sup>74</sup> The Enquirer's tone was celebratory. The war was America's 'Opportunity' and the country was urged to go 'Full Speed Ahead.'<sup>75</sup>

St Louis presented an equally united picture, which is important as it portrayed itself as a place with both Midwestern and Southern roots. The *St Louis Globe Democrat*, a moderate Republican paper, has the distinction of running on 3 August the first major cartoon about the economic benefits of the war for the United States—entitled 'The Certain Rich Man.'<sup>76</sup> On the same day the pro-Democrat *St Louis Republican* ran two major editorials, one on the need to boost foreign trade and the other entitled America's 'Opportunity.'<sup>77</sup> Why this is interesting is that the Deep South, as represented by New Orleans, seemed worried. Relying on cotton exports instead of food, the picture from New Orleans was initially far less optimistic. Whilst it was assumed that Europeans would have to buy lots of grain to kill themselves, their need for raw cotton was less certain. On 3 August, 4, and 5 the Times-Picayune published editorials and major news stories about the economic threat posed by the war.<sup>78</sup> However on August 6<sup>th</sup> they changed tack dramatically and ran a front page cartoon with a smug Uncle Sam, entitled 'Good News from the Front.' (See Picture B). From that point on the Times-Picayune's reporting both mentioned the general trade advantages posed by the war, but also the particular problems of the cotton industry.

Baltimore was an example of another southern city whose press hedged its bets at first. The *Baltimore Sun* was mostly upbeat. Between 5 and 12 August they published five editorials on the possible economic advantage of the war.<sup>79</sup> Their editorial on 12 August was entitled 'A Great National Opportunity.'

'Until a few days ago we realized mainly the inconveniences and indirect dangers which the European War involved for this country. But we are now beginning to perceive that

it offers us the greatest business and commercial opportunity that has been presented to us for several generations—an opportunity not simply for makeshifts and expediences of a temporary character, but opening the way for permanent results and new and lasting trade conditions.’<sup>80</sup>

The *Baltimore American*, a Republican paper, was initially very pessimistic in its reporting on the war, on both moral and trade grounds.<sup>81</sup> It even published some striking anti-war cartoons. However, this tone began to break down quickly. Looking at the main editorial cartoons published by the *Baltimore American* on 5 August, 10 August, and 15 August, this evolution is clear.<sup>82</sup> The first (Picture C) was an anti-war piece dwelling on the sadness of death. The second (Picture D) was published to reassure Americans about their strength and security. The last (Picture E) was openly enthusiastic about the war, using a sporting metaphor to urge Americans to take up the trade opportunity.

California also presents a split picture. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Examiner* quickly adopted the ‘war-as-opportunity’ position. On 3 August the Republican-supporting Times, opined; ‘The United States must feed and clothe Europe: Now is the time to get busy and raise things. Our Industries will hum and big money will be made.’<sup>83</sup> By late August the paper was publishing special reports in its large Sunday edition outlining the huge benefits that the war was soon to bestow.<sup>84</sup> The Examiner, generally Republican, though strongly progressive, was equally effusive.<sup>85</sup> On 8 August its lead editorial was titled ‘The Mighty Prize War Brings to Us.’ ‘...the United States will be the department store of the world, with its shelves loaded with goods and other nations clamouring to buy at its counters.’<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand, one of the most pessimistic papers was also in California, the *Los Angeles Herald*. The strongly progressive Herald continued to describe the war in bleak terms until 23 August. Before that date, with growing frustration, it attacked those that believed the war would be an ‘unmitigated blessing’ (it is fascinating that it felt the need to do

so as early as 7 August).<sup>87</sup> They also published a series of the bleak anti-war cartoons. However, by 23 August even they felt the need to portray the impact of the war in positive ways in an editorial entitled 'Made in the United States, The Familiar Label.'<sup>88</sup>

The Herald's story of conversion was mirrored closely in the other papers that did not rush to hail the fighting in early August such as the *New York Times*, *New York Evening Journal* and *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Like the Herald these papers were flummoxed at the amount of celebratory rhetoric they encountered at the outbreak of fighting. On 11 August the *New York Times* felt it necessary print a lead editorial scolding those voicing satisfaction at the European conflict.

'We note some disposition...to look upon the war in which nearly all Europe is engaged, and which may extend to the Orient before it is ended, as an opportunity for the United States to reap large advantages that would not in other conditions have been available.'<sup>89</sup>

The position of the *New York Evening Journal* is particularly interesting. The sister paper of the *New York American*, the Journal had the largest daily circulation in the country. For the first few weeks of August 1914, it refused to dwell on the great opportunities war presented. It was not until 19 August that it changed tone, publishing a lead editorial entitled 'The Big Chance for the United States' one it followed three days later with a larger piece titled 'War, Sad as It Is, Means Marvellous Business Opportunity for the United States.'<sup>90</sup>

At exactly the same time the *New York Times* started lustily expressing the sentiments it had warned against earlier. On 18, 19, and 22 August it published three editorials calling for measures to support American overseas trade.<sup>91</sup> On 31 August the lead editorial was entitled 'The War and Our Prosperity'.

'The country is so fortunate that it is thinking chiefly about how the war will affect its material interests, while our unhappy foreign friends are thinking about problems of national existence and individual sorrows beyond any money considerations. Relatively the United

States is the most fortunate country in the world.<sup>92</sup> This unanimity of view from New York by the end of August is interesting because the New York Stock Exchange still closed. On 31 July, just as the war began, trading was halted to stop what was expected to be an outflow of European money from the United States back to the home countries to finance the war effort.<sup>93</sup>

By the end of August 1914 there was practical consensus amongst the American newspapers examined here that the war was first and foremost a great economic opportunity for the United States. A majority came to that conclusion within the first few days of fighting, whilst it took the rest a few weeks longer. The reaction by weekly and monthly journals mirrored this consensus, though because of their print schedules it often took them longer to engage with the question. The sentiments expressed in *Colliers* quoted earlier, were echoed widely. In November, *Scribners* published a major piece by A. Barton Hepburn, Vice President of the Chase National Bank entitled 'The Trade Opportunities Facing the United States'.<sup>94</sup> The *North American Review* in its September edition (the first published since the outbreak of the war) printed back to back a lead editorial and a main article about the trade benefits the conflict offered the United States.<sup>95</sup> Another article later in the edition even complained that Americans, instead of being shocked or horrified by the war, were not taking the conflict seriously enough.<sup>96</sup> By the end of 1914 the supposed economic benefits that the war offered the United States were considered so important that different lobbying groups started paying for advertisements calling for coordinated action. *Harpers Monthly*, in its November edition, published an advertisement from the Quoin Club and the National Periodical Association, claiming to speak for a veritable who's who of American mainstream magazines including: *The American Magazine*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century*, *Colliers*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harpers*, *The Literary Digest*, *National Geographic*, and *Scribners*.<sup>97</sup> The advertisement had three main points; the dollar needed to be made more elastic so that it would be easier for the USA to trade, a way had to be found to get American crops to the

warring nations, and with the Panama Canal just opened the USA should act quickly to replace European trade in South America.

### **The War and American Intervention**

What seemed to be lacking in America was a widespread anti-militarist perspective. The general American news reporting of the war in its early stages was rather breathless and dramatic, often portraying the war as a gigantic sporting event. Most of the papers hired military 'experts' who would digest the cables coming from Europe and determine who had won or lost the previous days contests. They even published stories deliberately to point out the humorous side of the war. On the first day of the war the *Boston Herald* reported that the city might experience a severe waiter shortage. A headwaiter at one of Boston's leading restaurants complained; 'The war is a great trouble. The men won't attend to business. They talk and talk....Two of them, a German and a Frenchman, got to fighting. They would have broken all the china in the place, only they were separated by a Swiss.'<sup>98</sup> A few days later the *Boston Globe* reported that with the notable exception of the head chef of the Harvard Club, a Frenchman named Arthur Haltcoeur, very few members of the city's kitchen staffs felt drawn to lay down their utensils and join in the combat.<sup>99</sup> In New York there was a great deal of concern over toy imports. Germany toymaking, centred in the town of Nuremberg, was a world leader and dominated the American toy trade.<sup>100</sup>

Of course American war reporting was not regularly frivolous—but nor was it regularly one of sober condemnation. This also brings up the question about different positive pictures that were put forward about the impact of the war. One of the most powerful of these was the refrain from the more progressive elements in the American press that the war could lead to a positive transformation in European governance. Journals such as the *Nation* and *Harpers*, which spent the most effort condemning the futility of war, admitted that

the First World War offered the possibility of a great progressive leap forward.<sup>101</sup> In the first edition assembled after the war began, *Harpers'* lead editorial optimistically prophesized that that the 'release of this awful tension may prepare the way for a natural solution, through the breaking of very hollow shell of national pride and the elimination of all restrictions to the free play of constructive national activities, and especially of all restrictive patriotisms.'<sup>102</sup> The *New York Times* also frequently argued that the war could bring positive change. On 5 and 6 August it published editorials arguing that war now could bring benefits later—the first entitled 'Peace Through War' and the second 'Through Evil Good May Come.'<sup>103</sup> The war was the dying gasp of a backward, aristocratic Europe; one that was destined to be replaced by a more modern, democratic continent—more like America.

One element in this critique was that the war was mostly the fault of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When fighting commenced, most major American papers tried to affix blame. This was a delicate task in an ethnically diverse country, even for northeast papers that were openly supportive of Great Britain and France. Though Germany was often seen as the pivotal power in the war, most American papers were reluctant to blame the Germans, therefore Austria became the culprit. The *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* all laid the blame squarely at the feet of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>104</sup>

Papers in the Midwest, where the largest numbers of German-Americans lived, were also critical of Austria-Hungary, but tried even harder not to portray Germany in a negative light. On 1 August the *Cleveland Press* claimed that it was Austria's desperate, irrational, desire to control Serbia that was the underlying reason for the crisis.<sup>105</sup> Yet, the *Press* went out of its way to present Germany's efforts in a completely different light. On 8 August they published a feature article on German Kaiser Wilhelm 'As He Is.' The German Emperor was portrayed as both physically and morally 'brave' and the correspondent predicted that under his wise military leadership Germany would make a splendid effort.<sup>106</sup> On 27 August, the *Press's* lead editorial was a bitter attack on those who were spreading stories about German atrocities.<sup>107</sup>

'...we advise our readers to be slow to believe a tenth part of the charges and counter-charges that have been or will be made of atrocities in the war's wake....A little while ago, for example, we were reading daily reports of how brutally German officials and soldiers were treating American tourists caught in the war tide. But it turns out that not only were these tales false, but the reverse was true—practically every American returning from Germany tells of the exceptional courtesy and kindness with which Americans were treated there....So now, when we read tales of alleged German brutality in the wake of the army's march, we accept them—NOT.'<sup>108</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* was also careful to differentiate between the behavior of Germany and Austria. On 1 August it blamed a backward, 'dynastic' Austria for the war's outbreak.<sup>109</sup> Yet Germany was seen in a very different light, one of deep respect. The Tribune quickly came to the conclusion that Germany, surrounded on all sides by hostile enemies stood very little chance of emerging victoriously from the war. In that case, German efforts would have to be almost superhuman.

'Merely as a piece of military confidence, Germany's challenge of Europe is wonderful...Germany has not yet her back to the wall, but she has enemies on all sides. German efficiency may be the equivalent of legend. If so, that efficiency is more than human. Such odds have never been accepted before.'<sup>110</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune's* position was also important not only because it was one of the most important paper's in the country, it was one of the most interventionist and was keen to stress the moral benefits of war in general. On Sunday 9 August they praised the national spirit that war can bring in a lead editorial entitled 'War Virtues in Peace.'

'In the mighty crisis of war a nation will rise to heights of sacrifice, to achievements of united action, to triumphs of heroic energy which, if they were matched in time of peace for the ends of civilization would work miracles of progress. This must be an insistent thought for us in America who are able to watch the tremendous phenomenon of war as bystanders



merely. We deplore the waste, the agony of this monster combat. We marvel at what seems to us its insane want of justification. But we cannot, we ought not, to close our eyes to its revelations of desperate strength, of devotion stronger than death, of loyalty to ideas of sentiments which cannot shatter, of a brotherhood which the sword cannot cleave.'<sup>111</sup>

This sentiment was indicative of the belief of others that the United States might have to join in the war. Theodore Roosevelt, who shared the Tribune's belief that war could be a force for moral improvement, was just one of many who started calling for preparedness in case the United States had to fight.<sup>112</sup> The issue of American intervention took a serious turn very early in the process when Japan joined the Allies in late August. Anti-Japanese prejudices were widespread in the United States, particularly on the West Coast. In 1906 San Francisco even passed a regulation calling for the separate education of 'Oriental' children to protect white children from having to be educated beside those of the 'Mongolian' race.<sup>113</sup> Acts such as these were particularly offensive to the Japanese government and periodically in the years before 1914 their reactions would lead to talk about war between America and Japan.

When, therefore, the Japanese entered into the fighting and began conquering much of the German Empire in the Pacific, this was seen as a decidedly threatening development. The *Los Angeles Times* was, not surprisingly, one of the first to point out the problems for the entente powers that could result from Japan's entry. On 21 August, in a lead editorial entitled 'Embarrassing Friendship', the Times described the acute dilemma that now confronted Britain because of Japanese actions.<sup>114</sup>

Such sentiments were not limited to the west. The *Boston Post* believed that the United States had a legitimate national interest in stopping the Japanese from using the declaration to seize more territory and mocked the Japanese statement that they were there to keep the peace.<sup>115</sup> Other papers, like the *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, felt worried enough by the rise in anti-Japanese sentiment, that they warned their readers against agitating for

the United States to join the fighting.<sup>116</sup> They certainly had reason to be concerned as other papers argued that Japanese intervention might lead to American entry. Not surprisingly the most bellicose was the *Chicago Tribune* which openly wondered if Japan's belligerence should lead to America joining the war.

'We were never so devoted to peace. We never saw the glories of militarism flattened into a sodden mass; but with every consideration urging us to peace we must recognize the obligations of one generation to another. No Coward exists whose state is so contemptible as the one who involves a dependent in dangers in order that he may be so secure....We may hope that nothing will be done or left undone by this generation of Americans which, because it was done or not done, bequeathed a burden to the next.'<sup>117</sup> It seems interesting that this intervention-scare occurred at precisely the same time that Woodrow Wilson issued his neutrality proclamation. It was released the day after the *Boston Post* and *St Louis Globe-Democrat* editorials and just a few days before the *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* editorials.

The other moment when American newspapers pondered intervention happened in October, when it seemed that Germany might win the war. At that point pro-Allied papers, particularly in the Northeast openly contemplated whether the United States should soon join in the combat. The particular issue that first caused discussion was Germany's threat to the Monroe Doctrine. The German Ambassador to the United States, Count Bernstorff, who was not prone to diplomatic restraint, foolishly (and honestly) answered a question about Germany's rights to attack Canada. Seeing as there was a Canadian force on European soil fighting against the German Army, Bernstorff refused to dismiss the notion entirely that Germany had the right to attack the dominion. To the papers in Boston this was an extraordinary affront to American diplomatic prestige. On 27 October the *Boston Herald* wrote an editorial calling attention to Germany's possible threat to the Monroe Doctrine, while on 28 October the *Boston Globe* threatened military force.<sup>118</sup>

While this storm over the Monroe Doctrine ended up occurring in a regional teacup, it is another indication that some in the press were not shy in calling for the use of American force from the moment that the war erupted. Far from simply embracing neutrality and urging that the nation take every step to avoid hostilities, many realistically discussed the use of American force.

### **The 1914 Election**

The final way to examine the American reaction to the First World War is to look at the reporting of one of the most interesting Congressional elections in American history. Congressional elections are often treated like the embarrassing relations of American politics. The 1914 election, however, was one of the most exciting in American history. In 1912 America's two-party system had fractured for the first time in 60 years and a new political party, the Progressives, has entered into the fray. Because of the tripartite split, the Democrats had rolled up huge majorities in the House of Representatives, with 292 members compared to 132 Republicans and 9 Progressives. The 1914 elections were therefore to test whether the Progressives could survive and whether the Democrats could maintain their strength. In that sense it was a true three party contest (the last in American history to this day). Both of the older parties had particular concerns. Many of the progressive voters had been disaffected Republicans who had followed the charismatic Theodore Roosevelt and the GOP was desperate to get them back. The Democrats, however, wanted to gain the mantle of the most 'progressive' party and were determined to steal away as many 'Progressive' voters as possible. They pointed to the raft of legislation they had passed on different economic issues since 1912. It was also a fascinating election because of the growth of popular voting for the senate. Until 1914 many senate seats remained the preserve of state legislatures and they were now in the hands of the popular voter. The *Chicago Tribune's* chief Washington correspondent, Arthur Sears Henning, summarized the importance of the election admirably.

'The election today is distinguished by many unusual features, and brings to a close one of the most remarkable political campaigns in American history. Never before have the people beheld candidates for the United States senate, long the bulwark of corporation rule, going up and down the country intent upon winning the confidence of the voters....Never before—in the memory of this generation at least—has a foreign war produced a profound influence upon a political contest.'<sup>119</sup>

He was not alone in wondering what the impact of the war would be on voting. Wilson and the Democrats had, for more than a month, tried to nationalize the election and turn it into a referendum on the President's policies, including that on the war. Wilson took the rather precipitous decision to issue the annual presidential Thanksgiving proclamation a full month before the holiday, though only a few days before the election. He crowed openly about the war's economic benefits for America and commended his neutrality and 'peace with honor' stance. 'Our crops will feed all those who need food; the self possession of our people amidst the serious anxieties and difficulties and the steadiness and resourcefulness of our businessmen will serve other Nations as well as our own.'<sup>120</sup>

On the campaign trail, Democrats were equally unsubtle. The *New York Times* reported favorably on Secretary of War Lindsey Garrison's stump speech centring on the claim that the President's policy was saving the country from bloodshed and carnage and that to vote against the President's party at this moment of crisis would seriously weaken the nation's prestige and international standing.<sup>121</sup> It was a theme that was echoed by Democrats around the country. Roger Sullivan, the Democratic Candidate for U.S. Senate used his attachment to Wilson's peace policy as a major plank of his campaign.<sup>122</sup> It was also one of the most important issues used by the Democrat-supporting press in their election endorsement editorials. The *Cleveland Press*, one of the most partisan Democratic papers in the Midwest, constantly played up the benefits of Wilson's war policy.<sup>123</sup> They were joined in this by the *Boston Post*, *Philadelphia Record*, *Boston Globe*, *Baltimore Sun*,

and the *St Louis Republic*.<sup>124</sup> The latter devoted a large section of its endorsement editorial to the virtues of Wilson's war policy.

'Beneath all the discussion of the tariff, the currency conservation, trust control, one central current of feeling runs through the hearts of the American people today—thankfulness to the God of nations that we are at peace with all the world....in Washington, by a desolate fireside, sits a man, burdened with the care of one hundred millions, whose wisdom, balance, and self-possession, whose sense of the priceless value of peace and the strength of national self-control has made the difference for us, between the fair and smiling land which is ours and an inferno of war, with carnage at the battle front and want and weeping at home.'<sup>125</sup>

There were also a number of stories in both Democratic and Republican papers which discussed the beneficial impact of the war. The *Los Angeles Times* on 11 October reported how the western mining states were benefitting from the steep rise in the price of gold and other ores.<sup>126</sup> The *New York Times* published a front page piece on 10 October about how Europe's need for American loans had led to a governmental shift so that gold would now be treated as tradable commodity.<sup>127</sup> The *Boston Herald* stressed the positive impact of the war in its pre-election editorial 'Big Trade in War Goods.'<sup>128</sup> Even those Democratic papers which had originally not embraced the fighting in August were now comfortable discussing the issue. The New Orleans Times Picayune ran a very confident cartoon on the subject the day before the vote. (Picture F). The Republican press was more than aware of this Democratic tactic and tried to de-nationalize the election. Many of the Republican paper endorsement editorials never even mentioned the war, benefits or otherwise.<sup>129</sup> Instead they talked about the vote as an opportunity for re-establishing Republican party unity after the disastrous split of 1912. Republican papers also talked about limiting the Democrats almost unchecked powers in domestic life.<sup>130</sup>

Before the vote, most of the Democratic press seemed confident that Wilson's record, including that on the war, would help minimize losses in the House of Representatives. The *Philadelphia Record* on 1 November urged Pennsylvanians to support the President. 'The finest piece of work that can be done Tuesday is to put the Keystone State in the Democratic column. It would cheer President Wilson and strengthen his position in his own country and in the world as nothing else would.'<sup>131</sup> The *Baltimore Sun* ran a cartoon entitled 'Stand by Woodrow'.<sup>132</sup> The *Boston Post* made it perfectly clear that it believed voters should support the Democrats because of Wilson's position on the war. 'It (Democratic party) ought to be supported because support will be an indorsement of President Wilson.'<sup>133</sup>

When the dust had settled, this plea seems to have fallen (mostly) on deaf ears. In 1914 the Republicans gained 64 seats, slashing the Democrat majority to 230 to 196. A large number, but not all, of the progressives who had deserted the Republican party in 1912 returned to the fold. Many of the Republican gains came from the return of progressive voters in the vital swing states, as they gained 12 seats in Illinois, 12 in New York, 11 in Pennsylvania, and 9 in Ohio.<sup>134</sup> To much of the press it was clear, Wilson and the Democrat's attempts to make the war an issue had failed. The *Washington Post*, along with the *Chicago Herald* one of the least partisan papers in 1914, remarked that, contrary to many expectations, the war was not the main issue in the campaign.<sup>135</sup> Once the voting had been completed they criticized the Democrats for 'foolishly' trying to make the election an endorsement of Wilson's war policy.<sup>136</sup>

Other papers, if not willing to go this far, ended up seeing the war as mostly irrelevant in determining who Americans voted. The *New York Times*, worked hard to put a positive spin on the results.

'Mr Wilson has not altogether escaped the penalty of success which the country so often visits upon a President in the second year of his term. Even though he has shown and

maintained master over a fractious Congress and has shaped its action to his will, even though he has in less than two years carried through a programme of legislation unequalled in variety, scope and importance in the record of any other President's complete term...the verdict is not favourable to him or his party.'<sup>137</sup>

The war in Europe hardly figured in the *New York Times* analysis—and this was the rule in the country. Election summary editorials in Democratic and Independent newspapers in Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco saw the war playing little or no role in how Americans voted.<sup>138</sup> When it was included, the war was portrayed as damaging the Democrats.<sup>139</sup> Republican papers in the northeast and Midwest, meanwhile, were invigorated. They described Democrat attempts to make the vote a referendum on Wilson and his war policy as a disaster that backfired. Some even said that the Democratic losses were because the President had been too slow to help American businesses take advantage of the war.<sup>140</sup>

The President personally did not need a newspaper to provide him with the analysis that this election was not an endorsement of his policies (either foreign or domestic). Reading the election results with his closest friend, Colonel Edward House, Wilson was despondent.

'He (Wilson) spoke of the result of the recent elections, and was distressed because it seemed hardly worth while to work as hard as he had worked during the past two years and have it so scantily [scantly] appreciated. I tried to console him by stating that he was not running and they were voting for others and not for him. He replied 'People are not so stupid not to know that to vote against a democratic ticket is to vote indirectly against me....He seemed thoroughly weary and heartsick...'<sup>141</sup>

In all honesty, Wilson was being melodramatic. The election results were not a repudiation of his policy, at least as regards the war in Europe. The American voter did what he had almost always done before that time, voted on local and economic issues. However,

if it did not represent a repudiation of the president's policy, it also demonstrated that very few Americans believed that they needed to endorse a neutralist war policy.

### **Conclusion**

In the end an examination of the press does provide a new perspective on the American reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914. The most important points are:

- 1) There was a strong consensus from the end of August through the congressional elections in November, that the war was primarily an economic opportunity for the United States. The outbreak of war was framed in this way for readers of Democratic, Republican and Independent newspapers and magazines from all the cities studied. 16 of the 24 newspapers studied adopted this position by the end of the first week, with the rest coming around by the end of the month. This was seen in their editorials news articles and even illustrations and the notion of the war being a great opportunity grew in intensity over time.
- 2) The idea that Americans were mostly shocked or appalled by the outbreak of war misrepresents the complexity of their reaction. While there were regular expressions about the horror and tragedy of war, these declined as time progressed. On the other hand, many Americans were much more excited than shocked and followed the course of the war eagerly.
- 3) Politically, appealing to the American people to support Wilson's war policy was ineffective in 1914. During the Congressional campaign the Democrats tried to turn the vote into a national referendum in support of Wilson's policies, including that on the war. This policy seems to have failed.

Looking at 1914 from this perspective is important and it leads to further questions about the United States in the neutral period. It is time, for instance, for a re-examination of the 1916 election. Almost every book on America and the First World War discusses the



presidential campaign with reference to the Democratic slogan that Wilson 'kept us out of war' in a way that implies that Wilson's policy of neutrality was crucial in his re-election.<sup>142</sup> Yet, the American people enthusiastically embraced entering the war just a few months later and this contradiction has not been satisfactorily addressed. One might argue after looking at the reaction in 1914 that what is surprising about 1916 is how *poorly* Wilson performed. He was a sitting president at a time of international crisis who had presided over two years of economic boom. No American president had ever lost under these conditions, indeed such economic conditions normally lead to a landslide victory. Yet Wilson only just squeaked by his Republican challenger, Charles Evans Hughes. A little less focus on foreign policy and a little more Clintonian 'It's the Economy Stupid', and 1916 makes better sense.

By the end of 1914 the American reaction to the outbreak of the First World War, at least as put forward by the nation's press, had been set. The country would not join in the fighting unless it was in the national interest (which it might eventually very well be) and meanwhile the country was to do everything possible to benefit economically from the ongoing crisis. This view of the American people and press is one that is actually closer to the one given by political scientists today than the more general assumptions by historians.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, 5 Aug 1914, p. 5. From here on all newspapers and journals quoted will be from 1914 unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, 6 Aug, p. 8

<sup>3</sup> *New York Tribune*, 6 Aug, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, 7 Aug, p. 6

<sup>5</sup> Also see: Jean Jacque Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, (New York, 1986); Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 2008) and Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: British and Irish Popular Responses to the Outbreak of War, 1914*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin); Hew Strachan, *The First World War: Volume 1, A Call to Arms*, (Oxford, 2001) pp 101-62.

---

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'British War Enthusiasm in 1914: A Reassessment', in Gail Braybon (ed), *Evidence, History and the Great War*, (New York, 2005), p 75.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany*, (Cambridge, 2004) p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, pp. 60-5

<sup>9</sup> Matthew A Baum and Tim J. Groeling, *War Stories: The Causes and Consequences of Public Views of War*, (Princeton, 2010) pp 9, 284-5.

<sup>10</sup> Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, (Ann Arbor, 2004) p. 316.

<sup>11</sup> Eric V Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Santa Monica CA, 2005) pp 23, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*, (Chicago 2009), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Feaver and Richard Gelpi, *Choosing your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force*, (Princeton, 2004); and (with Jason Reifler) *Paying the Human Costs of War, American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts*, (Princeton, 2009) .

<sup>14</sup> John Mueller and Ricard Gelpi exchanged articles about casualties and public opinion in *Foreign Affairs*. John Mueller, 'The Iraq Syndrome', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. /December 2005, Volume 84, Number 6; Richard Gelpi, 'The Cost of War', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2006, Volume 85, Number 1.

<sup>15</sup> See: Phillips O'Brien, 'Warfare and the Rise and Fall of National Power', *War in History*, Vol 14, #2, 2007, pp 268-74.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era*, (New York, 1954), pp. 145, 148.

<sup>17</sup> John Milton Cooper, *The Vanity of Power: American Isolationism and the First World War*, (Westport CT, 1969) pp 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades; The United States 1900-1929*, (New York, 1990) pp 221-2.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Smith, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War I: 1914-20*, (New York, 1965), pp 1-2; Ernest May, *The World War and American Isolation: 1914-17*, (Chicago, 1959) p. 3; Patrick Devlin, *Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson's Neutrality*, (New York, 1975), p. 141; Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Age of Titans: The Progressive Era and World War One*, (New York, 1988), p. 460, 466. Neil A. Wynn, *From Progressivism to Prosperity: World War One and American Society*, (New York, 1986) p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Zieger, *America's Great War, World War I and the American Experience* (New York, 2000) p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> David Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War 1898-1920*, (New York, 2006), p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Allen Eisner, *From Warfare State to Welfare State: World War I, Compensatory State Building and the Limits of the Modern Order*, (University Park, Penn, 2000), p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality 1914-1917*, (Charlottesville, 2007), p. 18

---

<sup>24</sup> Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution*, (Princeton NJ, 2003), pp 107-8.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Keene, *The United States and the First World War*, (London, 2000), p. 9; Meirion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence America at War 1917-1918*, (New York, 1997), p. 26. Also see: D. Clayton James & Anne Sharp Wells, *America and the Great War 1914-20*, (Wheeling Illinois, 1998) pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> John A. Thompson, *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Ross Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I and America's Strategy for Peace and Security*, (Kent, Ohio, 2009), p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I*, (New York, 2003); Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War 1917-1918*, (New York, 1999), p 22.; Edward Robb Ellis, *Echoes of Distant Thunder: Life in the United States 1914-1918*, (New York, 1996), pp. 167-71, 234; Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*, (New York, 2009), pp 56-9.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, (London, 1991, originally published 1922).

<sup>30</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp 134-5.

<sup>31</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 400.

<sup>32</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp. 321, 338-57.

<sup>33</sup> David F Houston, *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet: 1913-20*, (New York, 1926), p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States 1900-1925*, Vol V, (New York 1933), pp 30-2. For another examples from this time see Preston Sloggin, *The Great Crusade and After: 1914-29*, (New York, 1930), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> See: *N.W. Ayer and Sons, American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, (Philadelphia, 1914), pp 639-665.

<sup>36</sup> *Colliers*, 15 Aug, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Colliers*, 22 Aug, p. 14,

<sup>38</sup> *Colliers*, 5 Sept, p. 14

<sup>39</sup> There is an online copy of Wilson's Proclamation accessible at *The American Presidency Project*. See: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=65382#axzz1KxY1Hi3>.

<sup>40</sup> Ole Holsti, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippman Consensus Mershon Series: Research Programs and Debates, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 36, No 4, Dec 1992, pp 440-1.

<sup>41</sup>. See: Daniel Hucker, 'Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, Policymaking, Representations, Perceptions, *The International History Review* (forthcoming article).

<sup>42</sup> Lee Benson, 'An Approach to the Scientific Study of Past Public Opinion', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 31, #4, (1967-1968) pp 531-2.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Tilly, 'Speaking Your Mind Without Elections: Surveys and Social Movements', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 47, #4, (1983), pp 474-5.

- 
- <sup>44</sup> J. Michael Hogan, *Woodrow Wilson's Western Tour: Rhetoric, Public Opinion and the League of Nations*, (College Park TX, 2006) pp 44-45.
- <sup>45</sup> Michael Schudson, 'The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism', *Journalism*, 2001, 2:149, pp 166-7.
- <sup>46</sup> James T Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell, How the Market Transforms Information Into News*, (Princeton, 2004), pp 7-8 and 37-38.
- <sup>47</sup> James Carey, 'The Press, Public Opinion and Public Discourse', in Theodore Glasser (ed) *Public Opinion and the Communication of Dissent*, (New York, 1995) p. 384.
- <sup>48</sup> Maxwell E McCombs, *Setting the Agenda, The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, (Cambridge, 2004), p.3.
- <sup>49</sup> Thomas E Nelson and Donald R Kinder, 'Issue Frames and Group-Centrism in American Public Opinion', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol 58, Number 4, November 1996, pp 1057-8; Richard A. Brody, *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion and Public Support*, (Stanford CA, 1991) p. 9; Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power, Framing News, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Chicago, 2004).
- <sup>50</sup> Slavko Splichal, *Public Opinion: Development and Controversies in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Oxford, 1999) pp 35-6.
- <sup>51</sup> Baum and Groeling, *War Stories*, pp 3-5. Also see: Baum and Groeling, 'Shot by the Messenger: Partisan Cues and Public Opinion Regarding National Security and War', *Political Behavior*, (2009) 31: pp 157-186.
- <sup>52</sup> Benjamin I Page, Robert Y Shapiro, Glenn R Dempsey, 'Who Moves Public Opinion', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol 81, 1 (1987) pp 35-8.
- <sup>53</sup> Stuart Soroka, 'Media, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8 (1), Winter 2003, pp 42-3.
- <sup>54</sup> The seven largest cities in the USA at the time were New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, St Louis, Boston, Cleveland, Baltimore, plus San Francisco (11), Cincinnati (13), New Orleans (15), Washington DC (16) and Los Angeles (17). The 1914 circulation figures come from: *N.W. Ayer and Sons, American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, (Philadelphia, 1914). Rounded figures are estimated circulations, exact figures were checked by audit. The figures are given by city: New York City, pp 639-665; Chicago, pp 174-189; Philadelphia, pp 840-848; St Louis, pp 526-8; Boston, pp 387-93; Cleveland, pp 731-4; Baltimore, pp 378-9; San Francisco, pp 83-6; New Orleans, pp 365-6; Washington DC pp 125-7; Los Angeles, pp 71-3. The Library of Congress maintains an online version of the directory:  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vols/loc.gdc.sr.sn91012092.0014350220A/pageturner.html>
- <sup>55</sup> *Chicago Herald*, 4 Nov, p. 8.
- <sup>56</sup> See: *N.W. Ayer and Sons*, pp 639-665.
- <sup>57</sup> I was not able to find the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* for Aug. 1914.
- <sup>58</sup> See: *New York American*, 3 Aug, p. 16, 4 Aug, p. 16; 6 Aug, p. 16; *New York Tribune*, 2 Aug, p.9; 4 Aug, p. 9; *Chicago Tribune*, 4 Aug, p. 6; *Chicago Herald*, 3 Aug. p. 6; 6 Aug, p. 8; *Philadelphia Record* 4 Aug, p. 8; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 Aug, p. 6; *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, 3 Aug p. 7; 7 Aug, p. 8; *St Louis Republic*, 3 Aug, p. 10; *Boston Globe*, 3 Aug, p. 3; *Boston Herald*, 4 Aug, p. 8; *Baltimore Sun*, 3 Aug, p. 8; 5 Aug, p. 6; 6 Aug, p. 6; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 3 Aug, p. 6; 5 Aug, p. 4; 6 Aug, p.4; *Washington Post*, 1 Aug, p. 6; *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Aug., p. 12.

---

<sup>59</sup> See *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 Aug, p. 9; 4 Aug, p. 9; *Baltimore American*, 3 Aug, p. 8; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 3 Aug, p. 1; *Los Angeles Herald*, 7 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> *New York American*, 8 Aug, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Tribune*, 2 Aug, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> *New York Tribune*, 4 Aug, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Record*, 3 Aug p. 8; 4 Aug, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Boston Globe*, 3 Aug, p. 3 and 5 Aug, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Boston Globe*, 19 Aug. 1914, p. 6'

<sup>68</sup> See *Cleveland Press*, 8 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Chicago Herald*, 3 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 10 Aug, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 10 Aug, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 16, Aug, p. 6. See editorials entitled 'Meeting Opportunity' and 'The Road to Farming.'

<sup>73</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 2 Sept, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> The Aug. 3, 6, 9, 10, 14, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 31 editorials were on p.6. The rest appeared on p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 17 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, 3 Aug, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> *St Louis Republic*, 3 Aug, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 3 Aug, p.1; 4 Aug, p.1; 5 Aug, p.1

<sup>79</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 12 Aug, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Baltimore American*, 3 Aug, pp 2 & 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Baltimore American*, 5 Aug, p. 16, 10 Aug, p. 14, 15 Aug, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Aug. p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Aug. Section II, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> The Examiner was for the public ownership of railways and favored progressives in both party.

<sup>86</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 Aug. p. 16. Also see 25 Aug. p. 16.

- 
- <sup>87</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, 7 Aug, p. 6.
- <sup>88</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, 23 Aug, p. 23.
- <sup>89</sup> *New York Times*, 11 Aug, p. 8.
- <sup>90</sup> *New York Evening Journal*, 19, 22 Aug. It published its editorials on an un-numbered sheet. William Randolph Hearst affixed his name to the editorial on Aug. 22.
- <sup>91</sup> *New York Times*, 18, 19, 22 Aug, p.8.
- <sup>92</sup> *New York Times*, 31 Aug, p. 8.
- <sup>93</sup> William L. Silber, 'What Happened to Liquidity when World War I Shut the NYSE?', *Journal of Financial Economics*, Vol 78, # 3, December 2005, pp 685-701. The Stock market stayed closed until December 12, 1914. When it reopened the prices went down sharply on the first day as money was removed. However the market soon made up these losses and in 1915 went on to the highest levels it had ever reached to that time.
- <sup>94</sup> *Scribners*, Nov. p. 96
- <sup>95</sup> *North American Review*, Sept. p 321, 322.
- <sup>96</sup> *North American Review*, p. 732.
- <sup>97</sup> *Harpers Monthly*, Nov. issue, advertisement of Quoin Club. *Harpers* did not print numbers on the pages of the advertisement section.
- <sup>98</sup> *Boston Herald*, 1 Aug, p. 4
- <sup>99</sup> *Boston Globe*, 6 Aug, p. 6.
- <sup>100</sup> *New York Times*, 20 Aug, p. 4. Other goods that the article mentioned might be in short supply because of the war were leather gloves, dress furs and lace.
- <sup>101</sup> *The Nation*, 27 Aug, pp. 241-2.
- <sup>102</sup> *Harpers Monthly*, Nov. 1914, p. 963.
- <sup>103</sup> *New York Times*, 5, 6 Aug, p. 12.
- <sup>104</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 Aug, p. 6; *New York Times*, 3 Aug, p. 8; *Boston Globe*, 4 Aug, p. 6.
- <sup>105</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 1 Aug, p. 8
- <sup>106</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 1 Aug, p. 2.
- <sup>107</sup> Recent historical scholarship has shown that many of the stories about German atrocities in 1914 were correct. See: John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, (London, 2001).
- <sup>108</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 27 Aug, p. 8.
- <sup>109</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 1 Aug, p. 6
- <sup>110</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 6 Aug, p. 6. Also see the lead editorial on 24 August p. 6.

- 
- <sup>111</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 9 Aug, p. 4/II
- <sup>112</sup> John Milton Cooper Jr, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt*, (London, 1983) pp 276-7.
- <sup>113</sup> William Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific 1897-1909*, (Austin TX, 1958), p. 191.
- <sup>114</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Aug, p. 4.
- <sup>115</sup> *Boston Post*, 18 Aug, p. 10.
- <sup>116</sup> *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, 18 Aug, p. 8.
- <sup>117</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 Aug, p. 6.
- <sup>118</sup> *Boston Herald*, 27 Oct, p. 12; *Boston Globe*, 28 Oct, p.6.
- <sup>119</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 3 Nov, p. 1.
- <sup>120</sup> *Boston Globe*, 28 Oct, p. 1.
- <sup>121</sup> *New York Times*, 29 Oct, pp 5, 10.
- <sup>122</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 28 Oct, p. 1, 2 Nov, editorial section p. 1.
- <sup>123</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 23 Oct, p. 10.
- <sup>124</sup> *Boston Globe*, 30 Oct, p. 10, *Boston Post*, 2 Nov, p. 12; *Philadelphia Record*, 1 Nov, p. 8; *Baltimore Sun*, 2 Nov, p. 5;
- <sup>125</sup> *St Louis Republic*, 3 Nov, p. 6.
- <sup>126</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Oct, p.14.
- <sup>127</sup> *New York Times*, 10 Oct, p. 1.
- <sup>128</sup> *Boston Herald*, 28 Oct, p. 16.
- <sup>129</sup> See: *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 Nov, p. 6; *St Louis Globe Democrat*, 2 Nov, p. 8.
- <sup>130</sup> *Baltimore American*, 5 Nov, p. 8.
- <sup>131</sup> *Philadelphia Record*, 1 Nov, p. 8.
- <sup>132</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, 2 Nov, p. 6.
- <sup>133</sup> *Boston Post*, 2 Nov, p. 12.
- <sup>134</sup> *Boston Globe*, 4 Nov, p.1.
- <sup>135</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 Nov, p. 6.
- <sup>136</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 Nov, p. 6
- <sup>137</sup> *New York Times*, 4 Nov, p. 6

---

<sup>138</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 5 Nov, p. 6.; *Cleveland Press*, 6 Nov, p. 10.; *Boston Herald*, 4 Nov, p. 12.

<sup>139</sup> *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4 Nov, p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5 Nov, p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> Arthur Link (ed), *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton NJ), vol 31, p. 265.

<sup>142</sup> Zieger, pp 41-3; Traxel, p. 247; Johnson pp 120-5; Keith, p.32;