The First World War: American Ideals and Wilsonian Idealism in Foreign Policy

Karis Durant
Mentor: Dr. Randolph “Mike” Campbell
University of North Texas, Department of History
April 3, 2008
it was called "the war to end all wars"
World War II

Korea

Vietnam

Gulf War

War on Terror (Afghanistan and Iraq)
“He Kept Us Out of the War”

Wilson’s 1916 campaign slogan
“The President’s [McKinley] desire is for peace. He can not look upon the suffering and starvation in Cuba save with horror. The concentration of men, women, and children in the fortified towns and permitting them to starve is unbearable to a Christian nation geographically so close as ours to Cuba”

-William Day, Secretary of State

Spanish American War - 1898
“The world must be made safe for democracy. “

President Wilson addressing Congress, April 2, 1917

http://content.answers.com/main/content/wp/en/thumb/f/fd/300px-Wilson_announcing_the_break_in_the_official_relations_with_Germany.jpg
“...we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy... for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring and safety to all nations and the world itself at last free. a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.”

~ President Wilson, April 2, 1917 ~
“The American people, to the entire disbelief of contemporary foreign observers and to the disbelief of their own children of the next generation, were willing to take a stand in the world for principle” (Ferrell).
Speeches given by Wilson

– Feb. 26, 1916 - “Valor strikes only when it is right to strike”
– April 13, 1916 – “These are days that search men’s hearts”
– September 2, 1916 – acceptance speech for Presidency
– October 26, 1916 – “The business of neutrality is over”
– November 1916 – “The day of isolation is gone”
– January 22, 1917 – “Essential terms of peace in Europe”
– April 2, 1917 – Declaration of War
“What Mr. Wilson is sworn to do is prescribed by the Constitution. He is sworn to execute faithfully the office of President of the United States... He is not sworn to execute the offices of the president of humanity....”
“The task he cuts out for the American people is a great one, worthy of our country and its grand ideals.”

Senator Benjamin Tillman, South Carolina

“It constitutes a shining ideal, seemingly unattainable while passions rule the world, but embodying nevertheless the hopes of the nations both large and small.”

“President Wilson’s address was inspired by lofty idealism and voiced the aspirations of the whole world for a lasting peace founded on justice and liberty.”

The Atlanta Constitution, January 23, 1917
“But you don't hear many conservatives echoing the grand Wilsonianism of Bush's Second Inaugural, in which he claimed that ‘America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.’ The fastest-growing species on the foreign-policy right is what National Review editor Rich Lowry calls ‘to hell with them’ hawks: conservatives who don't care how non-Americans run their societies as long as they don't threaten us in the process. Among Democrats, hawkishness is out of fashion, but humanitarianism remains strong.”

“Moralism and military force are both necessary to U.S. foreign policy, but the former shouldn't ride the latter into battle.”
Americans have not, will not, and should not eliminate their idealism, but perhaps by studying the past, Americans will be able to create a better blend of idealism and realism for the future.
Acknowledgments

- Dr. Randolph “Mike” Campbell
- Dr. Samuel Matteson
- The Honors College
- Dr. Alfred Hurley
- Casey, Christine, Elizabeth, Jenny, Josh, Rafael
Sources