The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era **16** (2017), 2–23
doi:10.1017/S1537781416000438

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"HE KEPT US OUT OF WAR!" A COUNTERFACTUAL LOOK AT AMERICAN HISTORY WITHOUT THE FIRST WORLD WAR

One hundred years after President Woodrow Wilson led Americans into the Great War, this essay ponders various counterfactual scenarios based on the assumption that the United States had not become a belligerent power in 1917. The methodological introduction makes a case for counterfactual analysis as a useful and indeed indispensable tool of historians. The second part demonstrates that contemporaries, including Wilson himself, did not consider American entry into the war a foregone conclusion. The third section looks at the possible consequences of continued American neutrality on the international position of the United States, while the fourth part focuses on the question which major domestic developments would have been unlikely had America remained neutral. Had the United States stayed out of the Great War, America's international role in the postwar world would not been very different from what it actually was in the 1920s, but the nation would have been spared the spasms of war hysteria that altered domestic politics.

On June 16, 1916, the delegates to the Democratic National Convention in St. Louis adopted a plank to the party's electoral platform commending "the splendid diplomatic victories of our great President, who has preserved the vital interests of our Government and its citizens, and kept us out of war." The day before, the resolutions committee had inserted the phrase into the platform without consulting the president. According to the recollections of several of his advisers, Woodrow Wilson was "furious" because the slogan could be read as a promise he might not be able to keep. Referring to the repeated confrontations with Imperial Germany over the latter's conduct of unrestricted submarine warfare, he told Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, "Any little German lieutenant can put us into the war at any time by some calculated outrage." Still, the president did not repudiate the plank, which Democratic strategists believed resonated widely among voters. During the campaign, the Democrats attacked the Republicans as warmongers, insinuating that a vote for GOP candidate Charles E. Hughes would be a vote for war.[1]

Only two months after Wilson's narrow reelection, his misgivings about the "He kept us out of war" campaign slogan proved justified when Germany, ignoring the president's calls for "peace without victory," resumed unrestricted submarine warfare effective February 1, 1917.[2] After the German announcement to attack all Allied and neutral sea traffic within blockade zones around Great Britain, France, and Italy without prior warning, it was only a matter of time until German U-boats would sink American merchantmen

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heading for Allied ports. Wilson severed diplomatic relations with Berlin, but continued to hope that war could be avoided. However, after German U-boats had sunk three American merchant ships in mid-March, the president became convinced that war was inevitable.

Historians have criticized Wilson's course of neutrality between August 1914 and February 1917 for many reasons, including lack of clarity and resolve, hypocrisy and pro-Allied bias, self-righteousness, and lofty ideas about neutral rights. Yet even many of his critics acknowledge that the president was sincerely committed to keeping America out of the European war and that he did not decide to go to war before he had convinced himself that all other options had been exhausted. Journalist Frank Cobb, editor of the *New York World*, remembered that shortly before Wilson made his decision for war, the two men had a private conversation in which the president exclaimed, "If there is any alternative, for God's sake, let's take it." Eventually, Woodrow Wilson concluded that there was no alternative but his protracted struggle with his "distressing and oppressive duty," as he called the decision for war in his message to Congress of April 2, 1917, begs the question of whether he could have succeeded in keeping the United States out of war and, if so, what the likely consequences might have been.[3]

The following essay heeds a recent call by leading U.S. historians of World War I for counterfactual reflection on questions pertaining to American involvement.[4] One hundred years after Woodrow Wilson led Americans into the Great War, I propose to take a look at American history without the country becoming a belligerent in the spring of 1917. First, I will argue that counterfactual analysis is a useful and indeed indispensable methodological tool of historians. Second, I will demonstrate that continued American neutrality is a plausible scenario. Third, I will ponder the possible consequences of American non-belligerency for the international position and, finally, for the domestic development of the United States in the aftermath of the First World War. The purpose of this essay is not to write a history that never happened, but to chart the terrain of historical alternatives and possibilities in dialogue with the sources and historiography. The major conclusions I draw from my counterfactual scenarios are that if the United States had stayed out of the Great War, America's international role in the postwar world would not been very different from what it actually was in the 1920s. In combination with the proposition that a neutral America would not have gone through the spasms of war hysteria, my counterfactuals highlight the failure of Woodrow Wilson's quest for a new liberal world order.

I.

Counterfactual analysis evokes strong feelings among historians. There is a long tradition of dismissing "what if" questions as vain speculation unbecoming to serious historians. "And he [the historian] is never called upon to consider what might have happened had circumstances been different," wrote philosopher Michael Oakeshott in his critique of causal analysis in history. History, Oakeshott insisted, was a continuous process in which all preceding events were equally necessary to bring about a specific outcome. Historians should not insert "false and misleading interruptions" into the historical process by weighing causes and considering alternatives, but should instead focus on

reconstructing the facts as fully as possible. There was no need to worry about the causes of change, because "change in history carries with it its own explanation."[5] Obviously, few historians subscribe to the idea that facts and change are self-explanatory. Much of our intellectual effort is concerned with theories, models, and methods claiming to explain historical change ranging from large processes, such as industrialization, to individual events, such as the outbreak of World War I. Still, constructing counterfactual scenarios has remained controversial. Most recently, the eminent British historian Sir Richard Evans published a critical assessment of the use of counterfactuals in history, in which he exposes popular counterfactual scenarios such as "What if Hitler had been killed in the Great War?" and "What if the Nazis had won the Second World War?" as wishful thinking and fantasy tales aimed at entertaining gullible readers and promoting political agendas. Evans's critique focuses mostly on the practice of constructing "altered pasts," encompassing long periods of time.[6] Indeed, if we understand history as a complex interplay of nonlinear processes influenced by multiple interacting variables, imagining large-scale counterfactuals appears as futile and fanciful as attempts to predict long-time future developments.[7]

But Evans also has little use for short-term counterfactuals based on altering only one factor in order to assess its relative causal weight. Such thought experiments are unnecessary, he suggests, because we already know from the evidence why things happened. In the same vein, the author contests the need for counterfactual reasoning to highlight the contingency of events. Commenting on the peculiar circumstances of Hitler's ascent to power in January 1933, Evans states, "It does not require a counterfactual to establish the role of contingency in these events, simply an examination of the evidence." But he also claims that by 1932/33, Weimar democracy was already doomed. The only conceivable alternative would have been a *coup d'etat* by the German military and the establishment of an authoritarian regime, although Evans doubts that the *Reichswehr* would have mustered the strength and resolve to put down the Nazi storm troopers.[8] Obviously, these propositions cannot be based on any direct evidence, because the German military never attempted a coup. Instead, they are predicated on the author's (perfectly plausible) assessment of what was "objectively possible" by probing the ramifications of potential alternatives.

My use of the concept of "objective possibility" goes back to Max Weber's essay on *Objektive Möglichkeit und adäquate Verursachung in der historischen Kausalbetrachtung* ("Objective Probability/Possibility and Adequate Causation in Causal Reasoning by Historians"), in which he demonstrated that all causal judgments by historians are logically based on counterfactual assumptions, whether historians are aware of it or not.[9] The underlying assumption is indeed quite basic. As political scientist Richard N. Lebow puts it, "If we say x caused y, we assume, *ceteris paribus*, that 'y' would not have occurred in the absence of 'x'."[10] For Weber, causal judgment does not simply derive from studying the evidence, but requires independent logical operations based on what he called "rules of experience." In other words, we need some kind of general theoretical assumption why "x" causes "y" and, hence, why "y" would not have occurred in the absence of "x."[11] Such general background knowledge, which we derive from other historical contexts by virtue of making comparisons, allows us to assess the objective probability of alternative scenarios. For example, Richard Evans dismisses the proposition that an armed uprising of a united front of Socialists

and Communists could have prevented the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 by citing the abortive insurrection of the Austrian Socialists against the Dollfuss dictatorship a year later. Logically speaking, Evans refutes the imaginary scenario of a successful uprising of the German Left against the Nazis by invoking the comparative experience of the factual Austrian case.[12] This argument is predicated on the assumption that conditions in Germany and Austria were sufficiently similar to warrant the counterfactual supposition that a Socialist uprising in Germany was unlikely to succeed.

Because Weber believed that such probabilistic reasoning is an integral part of historical judgment, he emphatically pleaded for controlled thought experiments, calling upon historians to eliminate specific conditions from the chain of historical events and then ask, based on explicit rules of experience, what would have been the likely consequences. Constructing *unreal* alternative historical sequences, he argued, helps us to comprehend the *actual* causal factors that determined the course of history.[13] Controlled thought experiments in the Weberian tradition, I argue, have nothing in common with the "fantasy worlds" at which Evans directs his criticism. On the contrary, they can educate us about the limits of what could have possibly happened had things been different and thus strengthen our sense of historical realism. Unlike Evans, who concludes that even "under strictly limited conditions," counterfactuals are of "little real use in the serious study of the past,"[14] I see considerable heuristic value in carefully bounded counterfactuals.

Weber argued that counterfactual assumptions are a mirror image of causal judgment and he insisted that, because historians employ counterfactual scenarios anyway, they should do so explicitly. Because many historical narratives and controversies are concerned with constructing chains of causation—the historiography on wars being a major case in point—the works of historians are necessarily suffused with counterfactual scenarios, as this essay will demonstrate with regard to America's entry into World War I. Making the logical and empirical implications of counterfactuals explicit is not only a wholesome intellectual exercise, but sheds light on the complexities of causation, including gauging the relative causal weight of decisions, events, and structural forces.[15] Counterfactuals also help us to gauge the broader historical significance and impact of events and decisions. For example, right after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, commentators universally agreed that this day would change the course of history. But has it really? Assuming that 9/11 never happened is easy; indeed, we need only imagine that security at the airports of Boston, Washington, D.C., and Newark had done a better job. We may then ask which of the subsequent events, such as the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the passage of the PATRIOT Act, would still be conceivable. Obviously, determining the long-term impact of 9/11 will be a task for future generations of historians.[16]

Counterfactual thought experiments remind us that history is a contingent process. This is no trivial benefit. Hindsight bias is notoriously conducive to constructing outcomes as overdetermined, even though contemporaries experienced the course of events as unpredictable. We may argue today that Germany had but a scant chance of winning the First World War, but, in the spring of 1918, the Allies were not so sure, and many Germans believed that victory was imminent.[17] Moreover, contingency is not merely a residual category for accidental circumstances not covered by structural analysis, but contingent factors may be of crucial importance. A comparison between

the July Crisis of 1914 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 illustrates my point.[18] Many historians have argued that the international crisis following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife led to war because it exacerbated the systemic causes that made a general war highly likely in the first place. But the same would probably be said today about the Cuban Missile Crisis, had that confrontation sparked a nuclear war between the superpowers (provided there would still be historians around). Surely, the power struggle between American capitalism and Soviet communism, the frantic nuclear arms race and the fragile balance of terror were all bound to lead to a clash sooner or later! Unlike the decision makers in 1914, however, those of October 1962 were able to avert war. Although the ensuing decades of the Cold War brought more dangerous confrontations, humanity was spared the nuclear apocalypse that many contemporaries, for good reason, believed to be a real menace. Is it, therefore, unreasonable to consider the possibility that war might also have been averted in July 1914, and that the experience of a close call with general war might have served as a wholesome lesson to European leaders after 1914? This comparative thought experiment highlights the importance of leadership and decisions as contingent, yet crucial, factors that can make the difference of life and death for millions of people. President John F. Kennedy and Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and their respective advisers were not "sleepwalkers … blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world," as Christopher Clark characterizes the protagonists of 1914. They knew they were operating on the brink of a nuclear showdown that might destroy human life itself. Then again, the happy ending of the Cuban Missile Crisis may have had as much to do with sheer luck as with superior crisis management.[19]

Because counterfactual propositions cannot be directly tested against the historical record, their claim to validity necessarily rests on the plausibility of the underlying background knowledge and on circumstantial evidence; they are, in Weber's words, "judgments about possibilities." This raises the question if such possibilities must have been considered plausible by contemporaries. From a theoretical perspective, this is no compelling requirement. Weber himself conceived of counterfactuals as "abstractions." Economic historians, in particular, have long since used such theoretical abstractions to test the plausibility of their models. Robert Fogel's famous scenario of American economic development without railroads does not depend on evidence that nineteenth-century Americans actually considered alternatives to building railroads, but aims at assessing the actual impact of railroads on American economic growth.[20] In contrast, Niall Ferguson wants to enhance the credibility of counterfactuals by considering "*only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered*."[21] In the realm of assessing the circumstances and consequences of human decisions and action, Ferguson's argument strikes me as persuasive. If historians can demonstrate that contemporary decision makers pondered alternatives, they have occasion to ask what might have happened had those alternative decisions been taken. Moreover, probing allegations of "missed opportunities"—a favorite tenet of historians' blame games—requires combining contemporary evidence with counterfactual reasoning. In particular, historians need to show that relevant actors perceived an opportunity for taking a different path of action, and that seizing the purported opportunity would have altered the course of subsequent events. For example, Richard Evans's skepticism

about the prospects of a working-class uprising against the Nazis, mentioned above, implies that no opportunity was lost because no opportunity existed in the first place.

Of course, we need to remain aware that counterfactual history has its pitfalls. First of all, constructing "altered pasts" over long timespans becomes less convincing and more speculative with every new link in the imaginary chain of events.[22] Trying to tell how the United States and the world would look today if Wilson had kept the country out of war is a topic for fiction writers, but not for historians. Also, we must avoid the temptation of constructing counterfactuals that suit our normative preferences of what should have happened, rather than what could have happened. I can only assure readers that my interest in the scenario of American nonparticipation in World War I is not to demonstrate that Germany could or should have won the war. I also do not support revisionist accounts according to which Woodrow Wilson should be held responsible for all the real and imagined pernicious consequences of the Versailles Treaty: if Wilson had not led America into the Great War, it would have ended in a tie; there would have been no Versailles Treaty, no humiliation of Germany, no Hitler, and no Holocaust![23] Such deterministic and apologetic propositions ignore, among other things, that the Versailles Treaty was neither the most important factor in the rise of Nazism nor incompatible with Germany's status as a great power.[24]

II.

Because counterfactual scenarios gain plausibility by evidence that contemporaries considered pertinent alternatives, I will now ponder such evidence. As mentioned above, most historians agree that Wilson was truly committed to keeping America out of war until he saw no other option. To be sure, critics have suggested that, in reality, he had been convinced of the need to enter the war against Germany early on in the war, but hesitated because the public did not seem to be ready.[25] In my view, Wilson's mediation efforts after his reelection demonstrate that the American president was actively pursuing alternatives to war. In late November 1916, Wilson put the screws to the Allies by inducing the Federal Reserve Board to issue a warning to investors not to buy any more foreign loans. On December 18, he called upon all belligerents to state their war aims in preparation of a general peace conference, but neither the Germans nor the Allies responded favorably to his proposal. Undaunted, Wilson appealed to world opinion in his "Peace without Victory" speech of January 22, 1917, when he spelled out his ideas for a just peace and a liberal world order that would prevent future wars.[26]

Wilson was shocked when he learned about Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare but, according to his intimate adviser Edward M. House, the president "was insistent that he would not allow it to lead to war if it could possibly be avoided." Although he severed diplomatic ties with Berlin, Wilson hesitated until late February 1917 before ordering U.S. commercial ships to be armed.[27] At that moment, he learned of the notorious "Zimmermann telegram"—a secret German offer to Mexico for an alliance against the United States in case the latter should declare war on Germany, which British intelligence had intercepted and forwarded to the president. Wilson decided to publish the telegram, but still wavered. When German submarines sank three American vessels in mid-March, Wilson's entire cabinet declared themselves in favor of war, but the chief executive "gave no sign what course he would adopt,"

according to Secretary of State Robert Lansing. Instead, the president withdrew for nearly two weeks from both the public and his advisers before he finally delivered his war message to Congress on April 2, 1917, proclaiming it to be "a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars."[28] Unless Wilson succeeded in a masterful deceit of the whole world, it is reasonable to infer that he was serious about his peace initiative in the fall and winter of 1916/17 and that he was desperately looking for alternatives to war, even after his hopes for a peace conference had collapsed.

Wilson's contemporary critics agreed that war was not a foregone conclusion. Former President Theodore Roosevelt, who had favored American entry into the war since a German submarine had sunk the British luxury liner *Lusitania* in May 1915, killing 128 Americans among a total of roughly 1200 dead, feared as late as March 13, 1917, that the president would again dodge the necessary choice. "If he does not go to war with Germany, I shall skin him alive," the Roughrider, who despised Wilson as a coward, wrote to Henry Cabot Lodge. Ironically, war critics also felt that Wilson could have decided differently. For example, House majority leader Claude Kitchin (D-NC) responded to the presidential war message: "I shall always believe we could and ought to have kept out of this war."[29]

As expounded above, establishing evidence that contemporaries considered alternatives adds plausibility to a counterfactual scenario, but does not prove that these would have been objectively possible. Wilson's search for alternatives may have soothed his moral conscience, but otherwise may have been wishful thinking. Historians of a realist persuasion have claimed for a long time that American economic and strategic interests tied the United States to the Allies and, sooner or later, made U.S. entry into the European war inevitable, regardless of Wilson's struggle for neutrality. "American diplomacy in final analysis," wrote Ross Gregory, "was less a case of the man guiding affairs of the nation than the nation, and belligerent nations, guiding the affairs of the man."[30]

Then again, Wilson's contemporary critics believed that he had a choice, and that it was not national interest per se, but the president's interpretation of American neutrality that was bound to lead to war against Germany. After the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned because Wilson refused to condemn British violations of U.S. neutral rights and to prohibit Americans from traveling on the ships of belligerent nations. Wilson insisted that he was only trying "to carry out the double wish of our people, to maintain a firm front in respect of what we demand from Germany and yet do nothing that might by any possibility involve us in the war."[31] According to historian Robert Tucker, however, this course "was almost perfectly fashioned for America's intervention in the war." Instead, Tucker suggests, Wilson should have made it clear to both the Allies and the Germans in the early phase of the war that he was determined to defend neutral rights against all infractions. Had he insisted on keeping American trade with Germany open, the Germans would have had no excuse for waging unrestricted submarine warfare and might have been more receptive to American mediation.[32]

Perhaps a more balanced pursuit of neutrality might have avoided the repeated confrontations with the Germans in 1915 and 1916, but the fact remains that Wilson did not seriously consider it. Instead, he held on to dogmatic views about neutral rights that clearly favored the Allies. Barring Americans from traveling on the ships of

belligerents, he maintained, involved the "honour and self-respect of the nation. … Once accept a single abatement of right and many other humiliations would certainly follow." Moreover, although Wilson would have denied that economic considerations could influence his decisions on war and peace, after 1914 the American economy had become heavily dependent on exports to the Allies. Lobbying groups ranging from farmers and cotton planters to arms manufacturers and Wall Street banks urged the president to defend America's commercial interests as a neutral power.[33]

Wilson also saw little reason for reconsidering his stand on neutrality because the Germans yielded to his demands for almost two years.[34] Between 1914 and 1917, America's political and economic power had rapidly increased and reinforced Wilson's conviction that he could both uphold U.S. neutral rights and broker a negotiated peace. After his reelection, he reckoned that the moment had arrived to use America's financial leverage with the Entente and put himself in the position of an arbiter. The president's diplomatic efforts in late 1916 and early 1917 sent a message to the Allies that they should not count on the United States entering the war.[35] But Wilson also knew that time for diplomacy was running out. German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg had told U.S. Ambassador to Berlin James Gerard that without a determined peace move by the American president the pressures for resuming unrestricted submarine warfare would become irresistible. While Wilson was launching his initiative in late 1916, the German High Command managed to isolate the chancellor, who had been the main opponent of a break with the United States, and persuade the kaiser that the U-boats were Germany's only remaining hope for winning the war. The submarines, they promised, would cut off England from all supplies and force the British to ask for terms within five months. Even if America should declare war on Germany, the U-boats would prevent U.S. troops from crossing the Atlantic. General Erich von Ludendorff, Germany's most powerful military leader, reportedly snapped, "I don't give a damn about America!"[36]

Although the German leadership had already decided on January 9, 1917, to unleash the U-boats, Berlin informed Wilson only the day before the campaign began.[37] There is no question that the German decision was a game changer. It dashed all hopes for a negotiated peace Wilson may still have entertained and dramatically diminished his options to keep the United States out of war. Once German submarines began destroying American merchant ships, war became inevitable. Wilson, who had condemned German submarine warfare as an assault on civilization and threatened to hold the German government accountable for the loss of American property and lives, could not back down without discrediting himself as the leader of a great power. The German submarine challenge, Robert Tucker concludes, forced the president to abandon neutrality. It was also the crucial factor that persuaded the majority of the American people of the necessity to fight: "In the absence of that challenge, the country would in all likelihood have remained a nonparticipant in the war."[38]

III.

If German U-boat warfare against American commercial shipping deprived Wilson of any realistic alternative to war, this raises the question whether the Germans could have avoided war with the United States. After all, influential voices, including

Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, German ambassador to Washington Count Bernstorff, and sociologist Max Weber, had warned against the incalculable military, political, and economic risks of breaking with America. Historian Adam Tooze calls the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare "a turning point in world history," implying that a different German decision in January 1917 would have led to a different end of the war.[39] Probing this proposition would require an independent line of counterfactual reasoning, which is beyond the purview of this essay. Suffice it to say that it entails an assessment if and how Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, who had successfully curbed the proponents of U-boat warfare for one and a half years, could have once more withstood the pressure from both the military and public opinion clamoring for revenge against the British "hunger blockade." Three conditions, in particular, appear crucial. First, German military and naval leaders would have needed to take a sober risk assessment of their U-boat gamble. Second, German political leaders would have needed to trust in Wilson's good faith as a peace mediator.[40] Third, and most important, trusting in Wilson's mediation efforts would have required the Germans to repudiate the goal of a victorious peace.[41]

For the purposes of this essay we need not consider these issues in any detail. If the argument is plausible that the United States had not entered the Great War save for the German U-boat campaign, the logic of counterfactual analysis merely requires that we assume that Germany did not resume unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917. We change one causal factor and ask, based on the *ceteris paribus* rule, what the possible consequences of continued American neutrality might have been. I will first consider the implications for America's international position. Relevant counterfactual scenarios in this realm depend on assessments how the war would have ended without American military participation. Logically, we may infer three possibilities: a German victory, an Allied victory, or a negotiated peace.

The view that American intervention decided the outcome of the First World War has a long tradition. Supposedly, U.S. entry into the war reinforced Allied morale at a critical moment and gave the Entente unlimited access to America's material and financial resources. Between June and October 1918, U.S. troops helped beat back the German offensive on the Western Front and irreversibly turn the tide in favor of the Allies.[42] Does this mean, however, that the Germans would have won if Wilson had kept his country out of war? Historians who have argued along these lines emphasize that in early 1917, the Allies were on the brink of financial bankruptcy and could no longer have paid for vital American deliveries. According to John Milton Cooper, submarine warfare was unnecessary "to cut off the Allied lifeline of overseas supplies [because] finances were about to accomplish the same result." The Entente, Cooper asserts, could no longer have obtained American supplies and money without "the active, full-scale assistance of the United States government … The Allies required nothing less than American intervention to save them from collapse. Not their own efforts, but Germany's stupendous blunder provided them with the sole means of averting defeat."[43]

In Cooper's scenario, American neutrality inexorably leads to a military situation that forces the Western Allies to sue for peace sometime in 1917. Because we know that Russia collapsed in 1917 in spite of America's entry into the war and that the Italians barely escaped total defeat after the rout of Caporetto in November 1917, it is plausible to suppose that the Central Powers would have emerged victorious by the end of that

year. German expansionists would have been in a position to dictate a peace that would have established Germany's military, political, and economic hegemony over much of Europe from the Atlantic Coast to the Ukraine. The Peace of Brest-Litowsk of March 1918, which established German predominance over Eastern Europe, would have received its Western counterpart. Belgium, the victim of German aggression in 1914, would have become a protectorate and France would have been made economically dependent on the German Empire. Possibly the Reich could also have enlarged its colonial possessions. Needless to say, the Germans expected their vanquished enemies to pay huge indemnities.[44]

A peace dictated by Germany would have looked like an unmitigated disaster from the American point of view. Surely, the Germans would not have allowed the U.S. president, whom many Germans saw as a "bitter enemy" as early as February 1915,[45] to play any part in the peacemaking. Wilson would have had to bury his hopes for a new liberal world order based on collective security, the equality of all nations, free trade, and disarmament, which he had espoused in his "Peace without Victory" speech. For the time being, a German triumph would have thwarted his vision of the United States as a key player in the international system. Moreover, Britain and France would almost certainly have defaulted on their American debts, amounting to at least $2.5 billion before April 1917, with catastrophic repercussions for Wall Street and the U.S. economy at large.[46] Finally, a European economy dominated by Germany would have seriously impaired American trade opportunities. Arguably, the demobilization crisis the American economy experienced after the war pales in comparison with such a scenario.

The putative consequences of a German victory for American national interests have prompted many historians to argue that, sooner or later, U.S. entry into the Great War was imperative. Certainly Woodrow Wilson himself did not wish to see the Germans prevail. Shortly after the European war had begun, he confided to Colonel House "that if Germany won it would change the course of civilization and make the United States a military nation." A victorious Germany might even threaten American security in the Western hemisphere.[47] Wilson's dislike of Germany and his pro-British bias did not mean, however, that he wished to see the Entente triumph. An Allied victory would not "greatly hurt the interests of the United States," he told a journalist in late 1914, but it would also not be an "ideal solution." The best outcome of the war would be "a deadlock that will show them [the belligerents] the futility of employing force in resolving their differences."[48] Basically, Wilson held on to this goal until early 1917. Under his leadership, the United States was going to play the role of a powerful arbiter once the warring nations could no longer carry on the slaughter. When the president threatened the Allies with cutting off American loans in late 1916, he was following through with this strategy.

But what if the denial of money and supplies had pushed the Entente to the verge of defeat? Would Wilson have changed course to restore the balance of power? In the view of historian Hew Strachan, the president had no other choice. Strachan makes an explicit counterfactual argument that even "if the United States had not been propelled into the war by Germany's decision to adopt unrestricted U-boat warfare," Wilson could not have gone through with his threats to cut off American loans because Allied bankruptcy would have triggered economic crisis in America. "The financial commitment to the Entente," Strachan surmises, "would have bound the United States to its

survival and even victory, whatever America's formal position in relation to hostilities." In fact, the eminent military historian goes on to claim that American entry into the war may have delayed Allied victory because mobilizing the American Expeditionary Force gobbled up scarce supplies that otherwise would have gone to the Allied armies. The military benefit of undivided Allied access to the production capacities of U.S. industries would have been greater than the distant prospect of a large U.S. army on the Western Front.[49] Far from spelling doom for the Entente, American neutrality would have speeded up Allied victory.

If the British and the French could have prevailed without the support of the AEF remains debatable. In November 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George pleaded desperately with the Americans "that you send to Europe next year, and as early next year as possible, as many men as you can spare, to enable us to withstand any possible German attack."[50] But perhaps the Allies could have beaten back the German offensives of 1918 on their own and, all other things being equal, the Central Powers would also have collapsed in the fall of 1918. Without an American military contribution to victory, the Entente would not have had any reason to invite Wilson to the peace table and could have dictated a peace undiluted by the need to compromise with the man whom French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau ridiculed as "talking like Jesus Christ" and whose Fourteen Point-Peace Program the Allies only accepted reluctantly and with reservations.[51]

It is not necessary to reconsider the details of the Paris Peace Conference to conclude that without Wilson's participation, the Allies would have imposed a punitive peace on Germany much harsher than the actual Versailles Treaty. Even worse from Wilson's point of view, it would have been an old-style peace based on secret diplomacy and great power politics. Without the U.S. president at the peace table, there would have been no League of Nations, no freedom of the seas, and no colonial mandate system. Without Wilson's staunch resistance, the French would have had a much better prospect to realize their territorial war aims, including the annexation of the coal-rich Saar area and the permanent occupation of the Rhineland "until the region will be ready to join France," as Clemenceau promised as late as February 1919. In Paris, Wilson thwarted the French plans by threatening to leave the conference and letting the public know that he had ordered the *U.S.S. George Washington* to be ready for departure. In the same vein, the president opposed Italian demands for the Fiume region and the Dalmatian coast until the Italian delegates temporarily left the conference.[52] But since Italy annexed Fiume in 1924 anyway, Wilson's resistance merely delayed what otherwise would have happened five years earlier. All things considered, it appears evident that without Wilson's defense of the principles of democracy and national self-determination the Allies would have faced few restrictions in their territorial reordering of Europe and the Middle East. Although most Germans did not realize this at the time, if it had not been for Wilson, "things could have turned out much worse."[53]

Surely, Wilson believed that that the Versailles Treaty was infinitely better than an unfettered Allied victory. In his domestic struggle for ratification, he steadfastly denied the Treaty's compromise character as well as any inconsistencies with his Fourteen Points, and celebrated the League Covenant as the crucial breakthrough that would pave the way for a just and democratic world order. In contrast, American critics of the Versailles Treaty opposed the League as a dangerous infringement of U.S. sovereignty,

but had no objections against imposing a punitive peace on the Germans. The "Atlanticists," to borrow Ross Kennedy's term for the pro-Allied wing of the Republicans led by Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root, and Henry C. Lodge, wanted to see Germany "beat[en] to her knees" and, had America stayed neutral, would have welcomed a decisive Allied victory as serving U.S. national interest.[54] From an economic viewpoint, they were probably right, especially when compared to the alternative scenario of a German victory. Given their dependency on imports from the United States, the Allies would have been forced to keep their borders open for American trade. If a more forcible approach would have enabled them to collect larger amounts of reparations from Germany, and thus pay their debts to American creditors, seems questionable, however. Between 1921 and 1923 the French tried that approach, including the occupation of the Ruhr area, Germany's industrial powerhouse, but to no avail. Eventually, American money was needed to stabilize the economic and financial situation of victors and vanquished alike.[55]

My third scenario of continued U.S. neutrality assumes a negotiated peace. Historians of the Great War have endlessly probed the questions if, when, and how a compromise peace might have been possible. In hindsight, it appears unbelievable that the unprecedented slaughter and ongoing stalemate did not by themselves force European leaders to seek an end by negotiations. In reality, the dynamics of destruction and violence was the main obstacle to a compromise peace. As historian Holger Afflerbach puts it aptly, "The enormous human, economic and financial losses only made things worse by the day. Statesmen and political leaders found their room for manoeuvre limited. … they all felt obliged to devise war aims that would provide justification for the sacrifices they were demanding from their citizens; … they felt … that to settle for a compromise would mean condemning themselves—or the next generation—to fighting the same war over again."[56] Needless to add that the idea of a compromise peace evokes counterfactual speculations about a less catastrophic past. Because a negotiated settlement would have saved Germany from the humiliations of the Treaty of Versailles, John A. Thompson thinks that "it is almost certain that Europe would have been spared at least some of the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s."[57]

In his neutrality message of August 18, 1914, Woodrow Wilson had indicated his willingness to serve as an honest broker for peace negotiations. As mentioned earlier, the president believed that, sooner or later, stalemate and exhaustion would force the belligerent to the negotiating table. Wilson's "Peace without Victory" speech of January 22, 1917, marks the climax of his effort to bring about a compromise peace. By promising "that the people and the government of the United States will join the other civilized nations of the world in guaranteeing the permanence of the peace," the U.S. president claimed, in Adam Tooze's words, "the role to which he truly aspired, the arbiter of a global peace."[58]

But even if exhaustion had brought the belligerents to their senses sometime in 1917, it is doubtful whether they would have allowed Wilson to play that role. The Germans certainly did not consider the U.S. president an honest broker, but a partisan of the Entente. In the fall of 1915, the kaiser had told Ambassador Gerard that "when the time comes I and my cousins, George and Nicky [the King of England and the Russian Tsar], will make peace to suit ourselves without the interference of anyone else."[59] In its response to Wilson's peace note of December 18, 1916, the Imperial government informed Wilson

that a discussion of war aims would be the business of "delegates of the warring states." The Allied answer was no less brusque, protesting against Wilson's putting the two groups of belligerents on the same moral level and insisting that a just peace required a complete "reorganization of Europe."[60] Although the Allies faced a dire financial crisis, they showed no signs of yielding to Wilson's calls for negotiations, but let him know that he was welcome as a co-belligerent, but not as a mediator.

In retrospect, the obstacles to a negotiated peace appear almost insurmountable. How could France and Germany have found a solution to the Alsace-Lorraine question? Even the most moderate French politicians considered the recovery of the provinces that Germany had annexed in 1871 as absolutely indispensable. In July 1917, the center-left parties in the German Reichstag called for a peace of understanding and reconciliation, but vowed to fight on for Germany's territorial integrity. Germany may have evacuated Belgium and Northern France, but giving up Alsace-Lorraine would have been seen as tantamount to defeat by most Germans.[61] How could the separatist nationalities of Austria-Hungary have been satisfied short of dissolving the Hapsburg Empire? How could the Balkans have been pacified? Would Britain and France have given up their plans to carve up the Ottoman Empire on which they had agreed in the Sykes Picot Agreement of May 1916? Would Italy have forfeited its claim to the territorial gains the Entente had promised Rome in the secret treaty of 1915? Could Russia under the provisional government have been stabilized and held its own at the peace table? Would the Poles have achieved the independent state they sought?[62] A peace conference between the Entente and the Central Powers in 1917 without American participation would have faced the same convoluted problems as the Paris Conference in 1919; however, neither side would have been able to impose its demands on the enemy.

Whatever settlement the Europeans might have hammered out among themselves, Wilson would have hated it. It would have been a deal of callous quid pro quos and territorial "compensations" with little regard for the interests of the affected populations and the sovereignty of small nations. It would have been a settlement aimed at restoring a rough balance of power, that is to say, of the very system of international relations Woodrow Wilson had condemned as the root cause of the Great War and which he firmly believed had to be replaced by a system of collective security enshrined in a League of Nations.[63] Moreover, the financial consequences of a European compromise would have been bleak for American creditors because the Allies could not have hoped for reparations to repay their debts in America. A prostrate Europe would have needed to import American goods and capital, but political instability would have deterred private investors. In short, the situation would have very much looked like the actual situation of 1919 to 1924.

All three of my scenarios—German victory, Allied victory, a European compromise peace—assume that if Wilson had kept the United States out of war, the American president would have had no say in shaping the peace and that none of these alternative developments would have led to a "Wilsonian Peace" based on collective security and a liberal world order. America's absence from the peace table would also have precluded any U.S. commitment to guarantee the peace. If these are plausible propositions, they suggest a sobering conclusion: Had the United States stayed out of the Great War, America's international role in the postwar world would not have been very different from what it actually was in the 1920s. The United States would have been the world's economic

powerhouse and banker—a position it had already obtained before the country entered the war. Americans would have had a vital interest in Europe's economic and political stabilization, but stayed away from any formal security arrangements. Perhaps, as a former neutral power, the United States could have pursued its stabilization policies with more international credibility and fewer domestic constraints because U.S. foreign policy in the 1920s would not have been saddled with the legacy of the acrimonious Treaty Fight.

The only conceivable alternative scenario to this outcome is a success of Wilson's appeal for a peace without victory in early 1917. If the belligerents had accepted the American president as "the arbiter of a global peace" and heeded his plans for a new world order, and if the American people and the Senate had backed his promise to guarantee such a peace, world history might have been set onto a different and happier path. However, as the actual reactions to Wilson's appeal demonstrated, in 1917 the Europeans were not ready to accept an American veto position.[64]

IV.

Devising counterfactual scenarios of America's international position in the postwar world, if Wilson had kept the country out of war, leads to relatively plausible results, I believe, because we have good information on the structure and the principal actors of the international system, including the strategies and war aims of individual decision makers. In contrast, it is more difficult to envision alternative paths of domestic developments in the absence of U.S. participation in the First World War. Social processes and economic cycles, for that matter, encompass longer time spans than military and political events and are influenced by multiple variables. Moreover, in the case of gauging the impact of wars, we need to avoid the fallacy of ascribing social change to wars simply because change occurred during or after wars. The case of American involvement in World War I calls for special caution, since the United States was a belligerent nation for only nineteen months. The country experienced no fighting and devastations on its own soil, and military casualties amounted to 110,000 men, a low figure when compared to the losses of the major European nations. For Americans, historian Jay Winter notes, "the Great War was too short and too limited … to be inscribed indelibly in collective memory."[65]

Nevertheless, historians keep pondering the impact of the First World War on American society, including its role as a catalyst for social and political change and its long-time legacies. When we engage in counterfactual reasoning about these issues, we need to distinguish between two sets of causal questions: Did the war merely accelerate existing social and political trends, or did it mark a significant caesura? Which developments would have occurred anyway, albeit somewhat later, and which developments are unlikely without the war? For example, it is obvious that the power of the federal government grew enormously after the United States had entered the war, but does this constitute a "political transformation" in the sense that the federal government would have remained smaller and less intrusive if Wilson had kept the country neutral?[66] Answers to such questions are often suffused with normative assumptions, as in the case of the long-standing debate on whether the First World War ended the Progressive Era. Did the wave of political and social coercion that came with belligerency interrupt the

promise of democratic reform, later to be revived by the New Deal, or did "the mobilization of 1917 and 1918 [merely] illuminate the degree to which an emerging bureaucratic system had actually ordered American society," as Robert Wiebe concluded in his classic critique of progressivism?[67]

In a recent essay, economic historian Elliot Brownlee has defended Woodrow Wilson's record of economic reform by employing an explicitly counterfactual proposition. Brownlee concedes that the war provided Wilson with an opportunity to use the Federal Reserve Board and the federal income tax as instruments for strengthening the federal government and for "soaking the rich," but also reckons that the president's free trade and antitrust agendas became casualties of war mobilization. In the absence of World War I, indeed of the two world wars, Brownlee reasons, "an even stronger strain of Wilsonian progressivism might have infused the genome of government in the twentieth century … [B]y the beginning of the twenty-first century, the international search for trade liberalization and equity, governmental efficiency, financial stability, and the effective regulation of multinational corporations might have been advanced by a full generation." Obviously such a scenario also supposes that, without American involvement in the First World War, conservative Republicans would not have dominated American politics in the 1920s and "gutted the economic accomplishments of the Progressive Era."[68]

According to Brownlee, if the United States had not waged global war in 1917 and 1918, American capitalism may have entered a path toward a "smaller-scale, leaner, suppler and more efficient corporate economy." Imagining an alternative history of capitalism in the twentieth century, however, leads us into the gray zone between controlled thought experiments and speculation that has given the method a bad name. Instead, I will focus on areas where the war had a direct impact and, hence, counterfactuals are more plausible. Today, most historians see the groundswell of repression, vigilantism, and racial violence as the most deplorable consequence of U.S. participation in the First World War, even though the repression also triggered resistance from civil libertarians and African American civil rights groups.[69] Again, such views imply that, although anxieties were already running high before 1917, American society would have been spared full-blown war hysteria had the country remained neutral.

For German Americans this would have made a big difference. By the early twentieth century, they were widely regarded as a hard-working and law-abiding model minority. Although suspicion of disloyalty had grown between 1914 and 1917, the onslaught against German American ethnic identity after the U.S. declaration of war against their ancestral homeland was massive and violent. Patriotic zealots tried to purge German language and culture from American life; German American organizations were forced to disband; German Americans had to demonstrate their loyalty at every occasion and some suffered physical abuse, including the lynching of a German immigrant for allegedly making "disloyal" remarks. Although Wilson, in his war message, had expressed his faith in the loyalty of German Americans and later dismissed the agitation against the German language as "ridiculous and childish," he refused to speak out in public. Perhaps the war hysteria only accelerated the assimilation of German Americans, but without war between the United States and Germany they would not have gone through a traumatic experience of humiliation.[70]

In the same vein, it is unlikely that Congress would have agreed to the 1917 Espionage Act, which for all practical purposes criminalized dissent and criticism of the U.S. government. Presumably, Postmaster General Albert Burleson and Attorney General Thomas Gregory would not have enjoyed a free rein in enforcing censorship and suppressing the Left. In Thomas Knock's grand narrative of Wilson's progressive internationalism, the President's failure to rein in repression and hysteria figures as the crucial and tragic mistake that destroyed Wilson's center-left coalition and the domestic base of his peace program at large. "He puts his enemies in office and his friends in jail," the progressive Wilson supporter Amos Pinchot lamented. For many of his pacifist followers, going to war was the root cause of Wilson's failure and tragedy. "He was unable to see that whenever and wherever liberalism links itself with war and war-madness," publisher Oswald Garrison Villard wrote in his 1924 obituary, "it is liberalism that perishes."[71] While liberalism did not exactly perish, it is plausible to argue that liberals and the progressive Left could have played a stronger role in American politics in the 1920s if Wilson had kept the United States out of war.

This is not to suggest that continued neutrality would have made American society a peaceful and progressive paradise. Racist violence, including lynching and pogrom-like assaults against black communities, had been part and parcel of Jim Crow America long before the United States entered the war. With the onset of the Great Migration of African Americans to the expanding industrial centers of the North and the Midwest at the beginning of World War I, racial tensions intensified. After April 1917, war hysteria further exacerbated racist violence. The East St. Louis race riot of July 1917 claimed dozens of victims; lynchings of African Americans, which had been declining since the 1890s, more than doubled from 36 to 76 cases between 1917 and 1919.[72] Still, the Great Migration had begun before the United States entered the war and would have continued even if America had remained neutral. Hence, racial violence, triggered by competition for jobs and housing and by blacks asserting their rights, appears almost inevitable. In recent years, many historians have emphasized that the war to make the world safe for democracy boosted black protest and militancy, especially among African American veterans who "returned fighting," as W. E B. Du Bois famously proclaimed in 1919.[73] Alas, neither black patriotism nor black protest wrought any major legal changes or cracks in the walls of segregation and racism in the wake of the Great War. Thus, it stands to reason that the status of African Americans would not have been significantly different in the 1920s if the United States had not gone to war.

While Woodrow Wilson was notoriously indifferent toward black rights, the war clearly affected his stance toward woman suffrage, which he had long viewed with great skepticism. After America's entry into the war, militant suffragists picketed the White House and rebuked "Kaiser Wilson" for promising democracy to the world, but doing nothing against the disfranchisement of American women. In contrast, Carrie Chapman Catt and her moderate National American Women Suffrage Association successfully impressed the president by extolling the contribution women made to the war effort. In late September 1918, Wilson implored the U.S. Senate that amending the Constitution to give women the vote was "vital to the winning of the war." Arguably, without the ideological dynamics of the war, Wilson may not have become a supporter of woman suffrage, as historian Barbara Steinson suggests.[74] But Wilson's appeal did not immediately sway opponents in the Senate, who rejected the Nineteenth Amendment twice

before it finally passed in May 1919. Ratification by the states took more than another year. While the war for democracy probably effected favorable changes in public opinion and speeded up the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the proposition that continued American neutrality would have delayed the vote for women for an extended period of time appears unlikely.

While presidential support may have helped the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Wilson unsuccessfully vetoed both the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, which paved the way for a near-total ban on alcohol effective January 16, 1920. Recent studies of Prohibition emphasize the crucial importance of World War I, which must have looked like a "godsend" to the advocates of Prohibition. To be sure, statewide Prohibition had made strident progress long before the war, but a congressional vote on a constitutional amendment, held in December 1914, did not even come close to a two-thirds majority. After the United States entered the war, the "Drys" skillfully exploited the anti-German hysteria to crush the resistance of German American brewing interests and made a forceful argument that banning alcohol would save precious cereals and keep doughboys sober. In her new history of the *War on Alcohol*, Lisa McGirr argues that the Eighteenth Amendment was not a "foregone conclusion," but owed its success to the war. After 1914, the anti-alcohol crusade gained momentum, but succeeded only because the war hysteria pushed the amendment over the top. According to McGirr, the impact of Prohibition on the future course of American history was much more profound than it is usually assumed. It tremendously boosted the growth of coercive federal power, laid the foundations of the penal state, and left an ambiguous legacy for later "wars on drugs." Prohibition furthered the rise of the Second Ku Klux Klan while oppositional "Wets" formed the nucleus of the New Deal coalition.[75] In short, we may deduce from McGirr's narrative that if America had not entered the Great War, then Prohibition would not have succeeded as a national policy and twentieth-century American history would have taken a different and perhaps happier turn.

Historians have made a similar argument about the causal impact of the war hysteria on the success of immigration restrictions. Nativists had introduced restrictive legislation, such as a literacy test for adult immigrants, for many years before World War I, but all presidents had vetoed pertinent bills. In 1917, however, Congress easily overrode Wilson's veto of the literacy requirement because agitation against "hyphenated Americans" carried the day. According to Alan Dawley, the subsequent introduction of quotas in 1921 and 1924 was the result of "messianic Americanism," which had thrived during American belligerency and its aftermath.[76] Still, the rapid urbanization of American society and fears of mass immigration by impoverished and possibly radical Europeans would have fueled demands for immigration restrictions even if the war hysteria had not created a political opportunity for nativism.

In sum: the advocates of woman suffrage, immigration restriction, and Prohibition seized the opportunity American participation in the First World War offered for their respective causes. Yet only in the case of Prohibition does the counterfactual scenario of American neutrality suggest a plausible argument that the Eighteenth Amendment might not have succeeded and a national ban on alcohol might have never entered American history books.[77] In contrast, the proposition that the worst extremes of repression and vigilantism and perhaps the conservative backlash of the 1920s could have been

avoided appears to be a reasonable, albeit not exactly a bold conclusion. Then again, fear of war hysteria was a main reason why many contemporary Americans opposed going to war and why Woodrow Wilson himself was so reluctant to enter the fray. "Once lead this people into war, and they'll forget there ever was such thing as tolerance," he told journalist Frank Cobb shortly before he made his final decision for war. "Conformity would be the only virtue … and every man who refused to conform would have to pay the penalty."[78]

CONCLUSION

Eventually, Woodrow Wilson, despite his prescient misgivings, did not keep his country out of war because he no longer saw any alternative. He was willing to pay the price of "illiberalism at home"[79] in order to advance a new liberal world order that in the future would spare Americans and all nations the horrors of war and ensure their peaceful democratic development. "I am now playing for 100 years hence," the president self-confidently defended his vision against domestic critics.[80] But Wilson's gamble failed. The United States did not enter the League of Nations and retreated to an international position that was not very different from the counterfactual scenarios based on the assumption that it had remained neutral. Adding the proposition that a neutral America would not have gone through the spasms of war hysteria highlights the magnitude of Wilson's failure. Until January 1917, he had hoped that he could broker and shape peace as an impartial arbiter. That would have been his personal best-case scenario. Instead, the German decision to discard American neutrality forced Wilson onto a path that ultimately led to his worst-case scenario, namely, Americans turning their backs on his peace program, which, he implored his audiences during his great speaking tour in September 1919, would lead to the recurrence of war on an even larger scale.[81]

Counterfactual analysis is a mirror image of causal explanation. Pondering unreal, yet plausible scenarios helps us to better understand the causal impact of events and decisions, individuals, and structural forces. It opens up horizons of possible developments and thereby allows us to assess the alternatives that contemporaries contemplated. Only if we are willing to take a serious and systematic look at the "what ifs" will we be able to fully comprehend the course and contingencies of history. As one of the key watersheds of twentieth-century history, American entry into the Great War is a challenging and instructive object of counterfactual analysis, as this essay has tried to demonstrate.

NOTES

[1]Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1937), 257–58; Newton D. Baker to Ray S. Baker, Aug. 6, 1928, reel 71, Ray S. Baker Papers (RSB), Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (LC MD); Memorandum of Conversation with George Creel, May 23, 1932, reel 73, RSB; Arthur Stanley Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace 1916–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 108–12.

[2]An Address to the Senate, Jan. 22, 1917, Arthur Stanley Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (PWW), vol. 40 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966–1994), 533–39; Count Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff to Robert Lansing, Jan. 31, 1917, PWW, vol. 41, 74–79.

[3]For the historiography on Wilson's neutrality policy, see Justus D. Doenecke, "Neutrality Policy and the Decision for War" in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Ross A. Kennedy (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2013), 243–69; Cobb quoted in Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace*, 398–99; An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Apr. 2, 1917, PWW, vol. 41, 519–27, 526.

[4]Christopher Capozolla et al., "Interchange: World War I," *Journal of American History* 102:2 (2015): 463–99, 488–91. However, none of the participants raises the scenario of continued U.S. neutrality.

[5]Michael Oakeshott, "Historical Continuity and Causal Analysis" in *Philosophical Analysis and History*, ed. William H. Dray (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 193–212, esp. 206–7 (quotes).

[6]Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), see esp. chs. 1 and 2. Evans's book is mostly a response to the introduction and case studies in Niall Ferguson, ed., *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Picador, 1997).

[7]See Richard Ned Lebow, "Counterfactuals, History and Fiction" in *Historical Social Research—Historische Sozialforschung* 34:2 (2009), special issue: *Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method—Kontrafaktisches Denken als wissenschaftliche Methode*, ed. Roland Wenzlhuemer (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2009), 57–73, 62.

[8]Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 113–17, 40–41, 110–12. I admit that counterfactual scenarios pertaining to the end of the Weimar Republic have continued to fascinate me ever since I wrote my master thesis on the topic in 1984.

[9]Max Weber, "Objektive Möglichkeit und adäquate Verursachung in der historischen Kausalbetrachtung" in *Max Weber: Gesammelte Aufsätze Zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 266–90; see also Fritz Ringer, "Max Weber on Causal Analysis, Interpretation and Comparison," *History and Theory* 41 (May 2002): 163–78. Weber's essay was originally published in 1906. He built on the work of Johannes von Kries, a physiologist and psychologist interested in probability theory.

[10]Lebow, "Counterfactuals," 57.

[11]Weber, "Objektive Möglichkeit," 276. It may be added that Weber's model laid the groundwork for the proposition that all historical explanations entail general laws, at least implicitly. This concept, developed by Karl Popper and Carl-Gustav Hempel, became known as the "covering law model"; see William H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1.

[12]Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 112.

[13]Weber, "Objektive Möglichkeit," 287.

[14]Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 124. Surprisingly, Evans bolsters his conclusion with a quote from Weber's essay on objective probability, without acknowledging that Weber actually made a case for counterfactual analysis.

[15]Roland Wenzlhuemer, "Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method" in *Historical Social Research—Historische Sozialforschung* 34:2 (2009), special issue: *Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method—Kontrafaktisches Denken als wissenschaftliche Methode*, ed. Roland Wenzlhuemer (Köln: Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung, 2009), 27–54, 30–33, 39.

[16]See my essay, Manfred Berg, "Der 11. September—Eine Historische Zäsur?," *Zeithistorische Studien* 8:3 (2011): 463–74.

[17]See, e.g., Winston Churchill's account of the German spring offensive of 1918, Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis: 1916–1918. Part Two* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927; Collector's Edition: Norwalk, CT: The Eastern Press, 1991), 404–28.

[18]Lebow, "Counterfactuals," 60, briefly hints at the contrast but does not fully ponder its implications.

[19]Christopher M. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 562. For a concise account of the crisis and the leadership of Kennedy and Kruschev, see James G. Hershberg, "The Cuban Missile Crisis" in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65–87.

[20]Weber, "Objektive Möglichkeit," 287–89; Robert Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).

[21]Ferguson, *Virtual History*, Introduction, 86; see also Wenzlhuemer, "Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method," 40–41. Italics in original.

[22]See, e.g., Gary J. Kornblith, "Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise," *Journal of American History* 90:1 (2003): 76–105. Kornblith assumes that Henry Clay had been elected president in 1844, instead of James Polk. He then asserts that Clay would not have annexed Texas and waged no war against Mexico. Fair enough, but the next steps already appear less persuasive: no overturning of the second party system, no Civil War, and slavery persisting into the twentieth century.

[23]Interestingly, this revisionism has recently made a comeback among popular American writers; see, e.g., Burton Y. Pines, *America's Greatest Blunder: The Fateful Decision to Enter World War One* (New York: RSD Press, 2013); Jim Powell, *Wilson's War: How Woodrow Wilson's Great Blunder Led to Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, and World War II* (New York: Crown Forum, 2005).

[24]In my doctoral dissertation I have demonstrated the considerable success of Weimar foreign policy in revising the Versailles Treaty in lockstep with U.S. desires for peaceful change. See Manfred Berg, *Gustav Stresemann und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika: Weltwirtschaftliche Verflechtung und Revisionspolitik, 1907–1929* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990).

[25]See Robert H. Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917–1921* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 8–12.

[26]See Wilson's letter to William Harding, Nov. 26, 1916, PWW vol. 40, 77–80; on the background, see John M. Cooper, "'The Command of Gold' Reversed: American Loans to Britain, 1915–1917," *Pacific Historical Review* 45:2 (1976): 209–30, 222–27; An Appeal for a Statement of War Aims, Dec. 18, 1916, PWW vol. 40, 273–76; German answer, Dec. 26, 1916, ibid., 331; Allied answer, Jan. 10, 1917, ibid., 439–42; An Address to the Senate, Jan. 22, 1917, ibid., 533–39.

[27]From the Diary of Colonel House, Feb. 1, 1917, PWW vol. 41, 86–89; An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, ibid., 283–87.

[28]A Memorandum by Robert Lansing, Mar. 20, 1917, PWW vol. 41, 436–44, 444; An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Apr. 2, 1917, ibid., 519–27, 526; Thomas Boghardt, *The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry into World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012); Rodney P. Carlisle, *Sovereignty at Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 382–85.

[29]Roosevelt quoted in Wilson Link, *Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace*, 392; on Roosevelt's attitude toward the war and Wilson, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "The Great War, Americanism Revisited, and the Anti-Wilson Crusade" in *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Serge Ricard (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 468–84; Kitchin quoted in Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13–14.

[30]Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 130–39, 136.

[31]Bryan's letter of resignation, June 9, 1915, PWW vol. 33, 375–76; Wilson's letter to Bryan, June 7, 1915, ibid., 349.

[32]Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914–1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 84–87.

[33]Wilson's letter to William Joel Stone, Feb. 24, 1916, PWW vol. 36, 213–14. Wall Street Banker Thomas W. Lamont later conceded that all Americans had benefited from the war boom, but denied that lobby groups had any influence on Wilson. Lamont to Ray Stannard Baker, Mar. 20, 1916, RSB reel 78.

[34]For a comprehensive account of the German American tug-of-war over Germany's submarine warfare, see Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 99–140.

[35]See Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (London: Penguin, 2014), 52–55.

[36]Letter from James Gerard to Edith Wilson, Apr. 26, 1927, RSB reel 75; on the debates within the German leadership, see Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 295–302.

[37]German Ambassador Count Bernstorff to Robert Lansing, Jan. 31, 1917, PWW vol. 41, 74–79.

[38]Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War*, 204; for similar assessments, see Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 307; Cooper, "The Command of Gold" Reversed, 228.

[39]Tooze, *The Deluge*, 56–58.

[40]See Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War*, 221.

[41]For an account of the political debates on unrestricted submarine warfare in Germany, see Berg, *Gustav Stresemann und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, 46–69.

[42]See Christopher Capozolla et al., "Interchange: World War I," 490–91, with a critical perspective on overemphasizing the impact of American belligerency.

[43]Cooper, "The Command of Gold" Reversed, 228, 230.

[44]The standard account of German war aims is Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims in the First World War* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967). See also Berg, *Gustav Stresemann und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, 38–46, for the war aims of a German nationalist.

[45]See the reports of Ambassador Gerard on German public opinion, Feb. 10, 11, 14, 1915 Department of State, ed., Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1915, Supplement, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928, 101–4.

[46]On the extent of Allied purchases and loans in the United States before 1917, see the Statement by J.P. Morgan & Co., Jan. 7, 1936, RSB reel 78.

[47]Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, vol. 1 (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1926–1928), 298–99; Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 9.

[48]A Memorandum by Herbert Bruce Brougham, Dec. 14, 1914, PWW 31, 458–60.

[49]Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 991–92.

[50]"Secret Document Reveals Britain's Darkest Hour," *Current History XXII*, July 1925, 513–530, 519, copy in RSB box 134.

[51]Clemenceau quoted in: From the Diary of Colonel House, Apr. 28, 1919, PWW vol. 58, 185–87; An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Jan. 8, 1918, PWW vol. 45, 534–39; on Allied reservations about the Fourteen Points, see Colonel House to Wilson, Oct. 31, 1918, FRUS 1918 supplement 1, vol. 1, 425–27.

[52]Clemenceau quoted in: Georges-Henri Soutou, "French War Aims and Strategy" in *The Purpose of the First World War*, ed. Holger Afflerbach (Berlin—München: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2015), 29–44, 42; on Wilson's resistance against the French plans to annex the Saar valley and the Rhineland, see Paul Mantoux and Arthur Link, eds., *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24–June 28, 1919)*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 55–64; on Wilson's threats to leave the conference, see From the Diary of Dr. Grayson, PWW vol. 57, 50–52; Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, 488, 492–93.

[53]Eberhard Kolb, *Der Frieden von Versailles* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011), 103–4; for a comprehensive account of German hopes for a "Wilsonian Peace" and subsequent accusations of betrayal against the President, see Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, 1918–1919: Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[54]See, e.g., An Address to the Senate, July 10, 1919, PWW vol. 61, 426–36; An Address to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Sept. 4, 1919, PWW vol. 63, 7–18; for a defense of League critics, see Henry C. Lodge, *The Senate and the League of Nations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925); Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009), XIII, 6–7, 179.

[55]See Berg, *Gustav Stresemann und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, 103–41; see also Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[56]Holger Afflerbach, "… eine Internationale der Kriegsverschärfung und der Kriegsverlängerung … War Aims and the Chances for a Compromise Peace During the First World War" in *The Purpose of the First World War*, ed. Holger Afflerbach (Berlin—München: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2015), 237–54, 238–39.

[57]John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London: Longman, 2002), 141.

[58]An Appeal to the American People, Aug. 18, 1914, PWW vol. 30, 393–94; An Address to the Senate, Jan. 22, 1917, ibid., vol. 40, 538; Tooze, *The Deluge*, 58.

[59]James Gerard to Ray S. Baker, Nov. 4, 1935, RSB reel 75.

[60]James Gerard to Robert Lansing, Dec. 26, 1916, PWW vol. 40, 331; William Graves Sharp to Robert Lansing, Jan. 10, 1917, ibid., 439–42.

[61]Soutou, "French War Aims and Strategy," 36–39; Peace Resolution of the German Reichstag, July 19, 1917, Herbert Michaelis and Ernst Schraepler, eds., *Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart. Eine Urkunden- und Dokumentensammlung*, vol. 2 (Berlin O. J., 1958ff), 37–38. The Resolution, however, only opposed "forcible annexations," thus leaving open the possibility of a referendum by the population of Alsace-Lorraine.

[62]On the war aims and strategies of all belligerent powers, see the various contributions in Afflerbach, *The Purposes of the First World War*; obviously my list of problems echoes the territorial issues that Wilson later addressed in his Fourteen Points of Jan. 1918, see An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Jan. 8, 1918, PWW vol. 45, 534–39.

[63]An Address in Washington to the League to Enforce Peace, May 27, 1916, PWW vol. 37, 113–16; An Address to the Senate, Jan. 22, 1917, ibid., vol. 40, 536.

[64]Tooze's characterization of the United States as a "novel kind of super state, exercising a veto power over the financial and security concerns of the other major states of the world," strikes me as exaggerated for the World War One era. Cf. *The Deluge*, 8.

[65]See Jay Winter's reflections in Christopher Capozolla et al., "Interchange: World War I," 490–91.

[66]"Political transformation," see Capozolla, ibid., 495.

[67]Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 293; for a view of progressivism that emphasizes its democratic potential and its survival in social movements from below, see Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 297–330.

[68]Elliot W. Brownlee, "The New Freedom and Its Evolution" in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Ross A. Kennedy Wiley-Blackwell Companions to American History, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 106–32, esp. 123–27 (quotes); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 315.

[69]See Jennifer Keene in Christopher Capozolla et al., "Interchange: World War I," 492, 498–99; for an excellent analysis of the roots of coercion in the spirit of voluntarism, see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You. World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[70]An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Apr. 2, 1917, PWW vol. 41, 526; Two letters to Joseph Tumulty, Apr. 10, 1918, ibid., vol. 47, 311; on the extent and impact of the anti-German hysteria, see Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 245–304; Don H. Tolzmann, ed., *The Anti-German Hysteria of World War One* (München: Saur, 1995).

[71]Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 85–104, 133–37, 157–60 (Pinchot), 184–89; Oswald G. Villard, "Woodrow Wilson: A Supreme Tragedy," *Nation*, Feb. 24, 1924, 156–58, copy in RSB box 137.

[72]Elliott Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis July 2, 1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Jessie Carney Smith and Carrell Peterson Horton, eds., *Historical Statistics of Black America*, vol. 1 (New York: Gale Research Inc., 1995), 493–94.

[73]Manfred Berg, *"The Ticket to Freedom": The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2005), 23–25; see Adriane Danette Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in the Time of Trial: The African American Experience in World War I* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011); Chad Louis Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[74]An Address to the Senate, Sept. 30, 1918, PWW vol. 51, 158–61; Barbara J. Steinson, "Wilson and Woman Suffrage" in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Ross A. Kennedy (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2013), 343–63, 359–60.

[75]Thomas Welskopp, *Amerikas große Ernüchterung: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Prohibition* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 26–29, 28; Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), esp. XVI–XXII, 31–37, passim.

[76]Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Perennial, 2008), 276–84; Dawley, *Changing the World*, 290–91.

[77]I acknowledge that such a conclusion may betray the normative bias of someone who likes a drink every now and then.

[78]Link, *Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace*, 399.

[79]Ibid.

[80]From the Diary of Henry Fountain Ashurst, Oct. 14, 1918, PWW vol. 51, 338–40, 339.

[81]See, e.g., An Address to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Sept. 4, 1919, PWW vol. 63, 7–18.