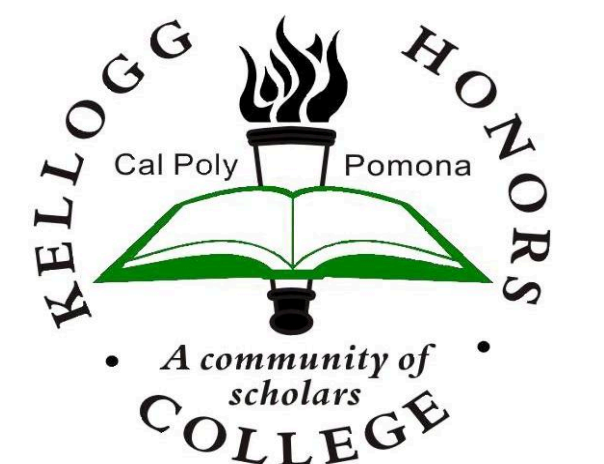


A CAPTAIN DOWN WITH THE SHIP: The Impetus Behind William Jennings Bryan's Resignation



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SECRET SECRETARY OF STATE

Wilson had developed personal respect for Bryan like that of opposing chieftains. However, he disagreed with Bryan's policies and thought them extreme and naïve. Yet, as the first Democratic president in sixteen years, he understood that not to include the popular leader of the party – a man who largely contributed to his nomination – as a member of Cabinet would be political suicide. He appointed Bryan as Secretary of State "in order to have him in Washington and in harmony with the administration rather than outside and possibly in a critical attitude."

When World War I broke out, the President and Secretary of State agreed that America should remain neutral. But as the conflict continued in Europe, it was evident that their definition of neutrality differed. Bryan sought to do everything in America's power to arbitrate peace. At one point, he suggested ending trade with Europe – America's saving grace from a recession – to choke the war financially. Wilson distrusted Bryan's judgment in foreign matters and delegated state responsibilities to Colonel House. House went to Europe in the spring 1915 to mediate peace; he spoke with foreign dignitaries, reprimanded impartial ambassadors and correspond with Wilson about international affairs. House even was the main diplomat working with Britain in the weeks after the sinking of the Lusitania to negotiate terms with Germany.

ONE-SIDED IDEALIST

William Jennings Bryan was a powerful and persuasive orator. An advocate for the working man and champion of the Progressives, Bryan was nominated as Democratic Presidential candidate three times in 1896, 1900, and 1908. Bryan believed it was his mission to fight for and improve the lives of others, to advance the welfare of humanity. One of his most deeply held convictions was that man should not pick up the sword but to "beat their swords into plowshares." Bryan used every opportunity to advocate for world peace and Pacifism. He sought to establish international "cooling off treaties" in which nations would agree to not engage in hostilities for a twelve month period.

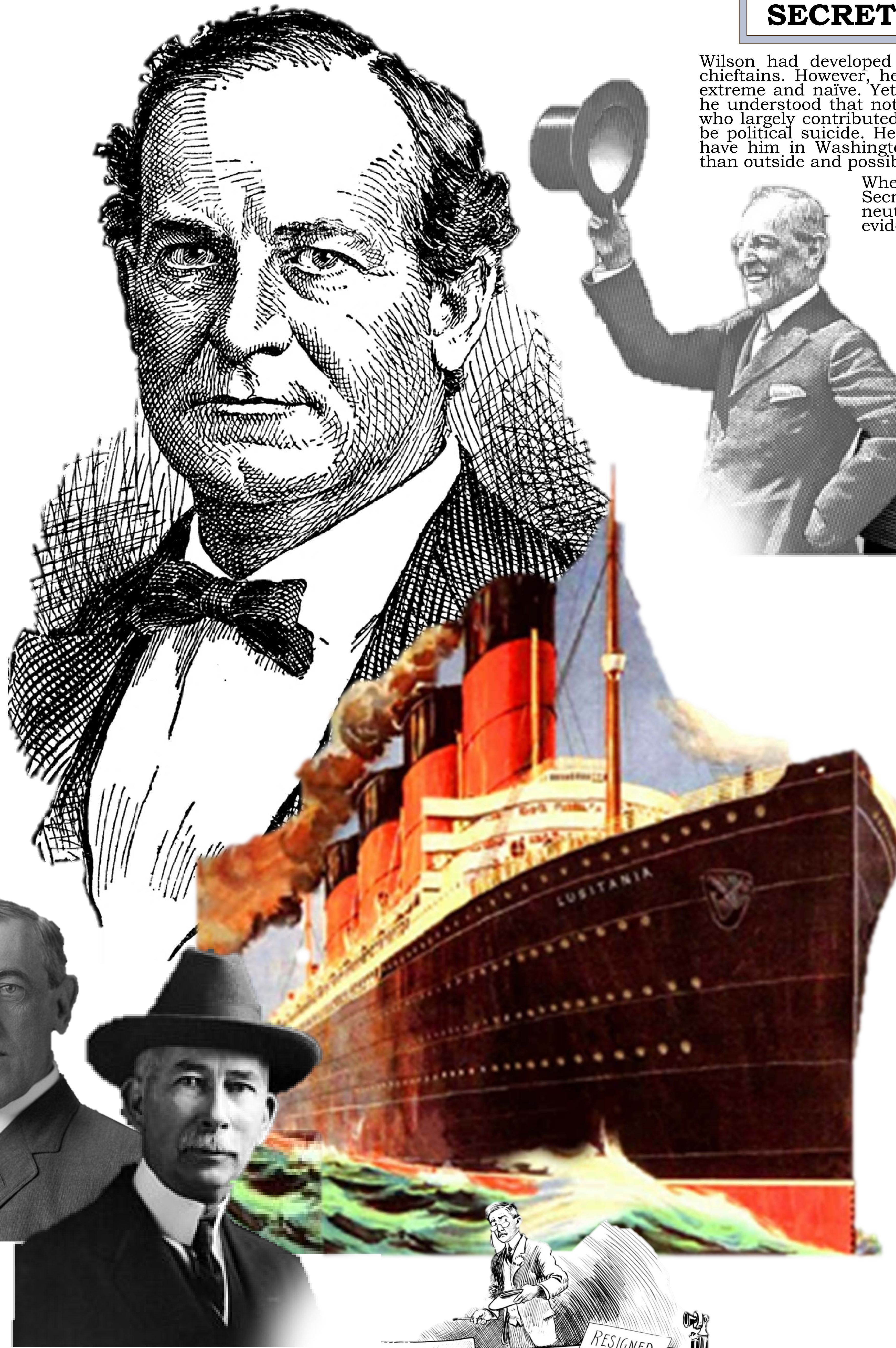
Bryan envisioned America as an international model. "Behold a republic gradually but surely becoming the supreme moral factor in the world's progress and the accepted arbiter of the world's disputes..."

DIGNIFIED AND DUPED

Woodrow Wilson was a thinking man, caring and thoughtful toward others. His childhood dream was to hold a powerful position as a world leader. Upon completing college, Wilson pursued law in expectation that it would catapult him into politics. Unsuccessful as an attorney, he became a distinguished academic and the President of Princeton. His tenure propelled his election as Governor of New Jersey and subsequently, his Presidential candidacy. Reserved, Wilson had a tendency to seem cold and distant, but his ability to detach emotionally and aim for the moral solution appealed to the public. Governor Wilson met Colonel House for campaign counsel and found in him a dear friend. Having a critical father, Wilson was insecure and relied on others for comfort and encouragement. In Colonel House, Wilson found a kindred soul, one who would be his confidante, to reassure and support him. House was eager to become his closest adviser.

MASTER MANIPULATOR

Colonel Edward M. House aspired "to influence men in positions of power, to be a silent, unobtrusive, behind-the-scenes adviser" with the ultimate goal of sharing presidential power. Skilled in the art of manipulation from his mischievous boyhood, he sought to apply his experience to influence world leaders and make backroom political decisions. Indispensable in Texas politics, the governor bestowed upon him the title Colonel. Well known to those aware of the internal workings in the Democratic Party, he was tapped on the shoulder to work with William Jennings Bryan in his Presidential runs. Colonel House declined because he saw Bryan as unresponsive to suggestion. House waited in the wings until 1912 when he met Woodrow Wilson, Governor of New Jersey. "It is just such a chance as I have always wanted for never before have I found both the man and the opportunity."



LUSITANIA LOST, PACIFISM AT WAR

On May 7, 1915, the British passenger liner, *Lusitania*, sank by a German U-Boat killing 128 Americans. It enraged public sentiment. Former President Teddy Roosevelt called for war. Cabinet members and the British Ambassador supported decisive action against Germany. Colonel House telegraphed Wilson that the sinking of the *Lusitania* dictated a change in America's foreign policy and believed it would only be a matter of time before the United States entered into war. However, the *Lusitania* carried a secret cargo of ammunitions and flew the American flag as a precursor to attack. Therefore, Bryan wished not only to send a response to Germany for the unwarranted loss of American lives but to Britain as well for violating American sovereignty. At the advice of other counselors, Wilson declined. The first *Lusitania* note was sent on May 11, urging Germany to abide by traditional warfare and spare noncombatants. Germany responded at the end of May claiming that the *Lusitania* was armed and therefore fired in self-defense. In drafting a second note to Germany, Wilson and Cabinet members agreed to hold Germany to strict accountability. Bryan believed that to respond to Germany aggressively and not object to Britain's smuggling was jeopardizing pacifism and neutrality. Moreover, he feared that it would lead the nation to war as it allowed Germany to dictate if and when America entered the European conflict. Bryan alleged that the administration wanted war and was out of touch with public sentiment of avoiding war.

THE RESIGNATION

"You must not do that! Stay and help keep us out of war." Wilson pleaded on June 4, 1915, at the end of a Cabinet meeting, when Bryan pulled him aside and expressed his intent to resign. For the past month, Bryan had had sleepless nights, dreading the nation would go to war. Bryan had come to realize that his role and authority was undermined. Nonetheless he tried to persuade the President against war and to arbitrate peace. As it became apparent that the nation would soon enter the European conflict, he wanted no part. The following Monday, June 7, Wilson asked Bryan to visit the White House to ascertain if they might resolve their differences. For an hour, they argued. Amidst the discussion, Bryan, trembling, quipped "Colonel House has been your Secretary of State, not I, and I have never had your full confidence."

Bryan resigned on June 8, 1915. His resignation ran across headlines. The former Secretary of State hoped he could work from the public sphere to relentlessly advocate for peace and prevent entry into world war. However, Bryan's resignation sank his career and his credibility. The public supported Wilson's note to Germany and believed Bryan's response was unwarranted and extreme. To them, he became a laughing stock.

