

Woodrow Wilson & Mexico

U.S. Foreign Relations, 1909-1920

The intensification of disputes at the southern border determined by moralism,
idealism, and democracy

Research Project by WWH Summer Scholar 2022
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Woodrow Wilson & Mexico

“Our sincere wish is to serve Mexico. We stand ready to assist in any way we can in a speedy and promising settlement which will bring peace and the restoration of order.”

-Woodrow Wilson

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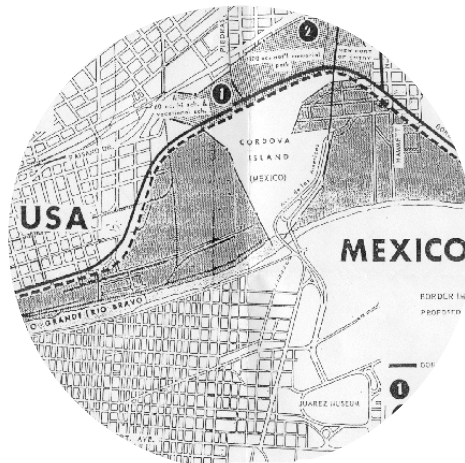
Wilson's Legacy in Mexico

INTRODUCTION

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declared the Western Hemisphere would no longer be available for colonization. This policy established the United States not only as a global hegemon, but as the sole protecting power of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. The protection of these developing countries, more specifically Mexico, meant more than barring world powers from invading. It meant the United States would be involved in every aspect of Latin American business and politics. In American foreign policy, international involvement was seen as a moral obligation to preserve democracy and capitalism, but in developing countries like Mexico, it would be perceived as an invasion. This became a dynamic theme of Woodrow Wilson's presidency. More troops were sent abroad during his administration than in any other in American history. Armed intervention in the Western Hemisphere during Wilson's time in office is often overlooked due to the immense scale of World War I, but it created some of the most complex situations in foreign policy he would face as the leader of the free world. While his actions in Mexico may have been criticized by leaders of the U.S. government, Woodrow Wilson kept the principle of morality at the forefront of his decision-making. This infographic will provide a brief synopsis of U.S. involvement in Mexico and a better understanding of the rise in tension at the southern border.



Before Wilson's Presidency



1 October 17, 1909

U.S. President William Howard Taft met with Mexican President Porfirio Díaz. This was the first-ever meeting between U.S. and Mexican heads of state. The meeting was celebrated on both sides of the border - Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas - with parades, receptions, and ornate gifts. The Chamizal region (pictured above) was considered neutral for this occasion.

2 December 21, 1909

Henry Lane Wilson was appointed ambassador to Mexico. More information on Henry Lane Wilson is provided on page 3.

3 June 24, 1910

The Convention for the Arbitration of the Chamizal Case concluded on this date. The land being disputed covered 600 acres between Juárez and El Paso, and the Treaty of 1884 had drawn the boundary line in the middle of the Rio Grande's deepest channel. During flooding seasons, the U.S. - Mexico boundary was often disputed due to the fluctuations of the river, acting as a thorn in the relations between the two countries.



PALESTINE DAILY HERALD

PALESTINE, TEXAS, TUESDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 22, 1910.

Friday Advertising Can Be Made Effective Through Herald Advertis

Mexican Revolution
Official Start Date:
November 20, 1910

REVOLUTION IS NOW ON IN MEXICO

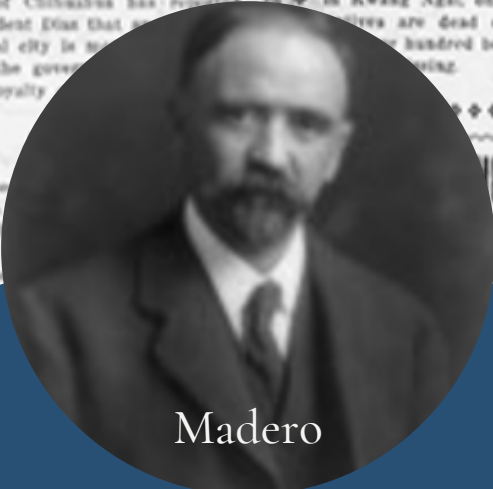
The Real Thing is Reported Under Way in State of Chihuahua, Mexico--Twenty Seven Killed in Acamburo.

(Herald Special)
El Paso, Texas, Nov. 22.—A real revolution is in progress in the state of Chihuahua, and bloody fighting between loyal troops and insurgents is reported from many places in the state. A train load of infantry was carried into the territory where the trouble is worst today. The governor of Chihuahua has reported to President Díaz that the army of the capital city is now loyal to the government and the loyalty of the people is being maintained.

CLOTHES THAT

Are the kind you want
WE HAVE THEM
They are satisfactory in quality, style and fit.
Above all They Satisfy

Madero elected:
November 6, 1911



Madero

N'T
Music Hungry

FRATERNAL MILITARY INSURANCE OF

COMPANIES WILL COME UNDER CONTROL OF VARIOUS STATES IF PLAN OF CHICAGO MEETING CARRIED OUT.

After losing the 1910 elections, Francisco Madero created the Plan of San Luis Potosí calling for the Mexican people to take arms against the wealthy, land-owning, and oppressive oligarchy protected by dictator Porfirio Díaz. Madero's message of elective suffrage and no re-election resonated with many lower-class Mexican communities, who thought political change would finally bring them proper land reform and an end to the 30-year military regime. The plan sparked one of the bloodiest revolutions in Latin American history, lasting from 1910 to 1920. This headline from the Palestine Daily Herald, two days after the start of the revolution, demonstrates the role the U.S. media played in first-hand coverage of the violence.



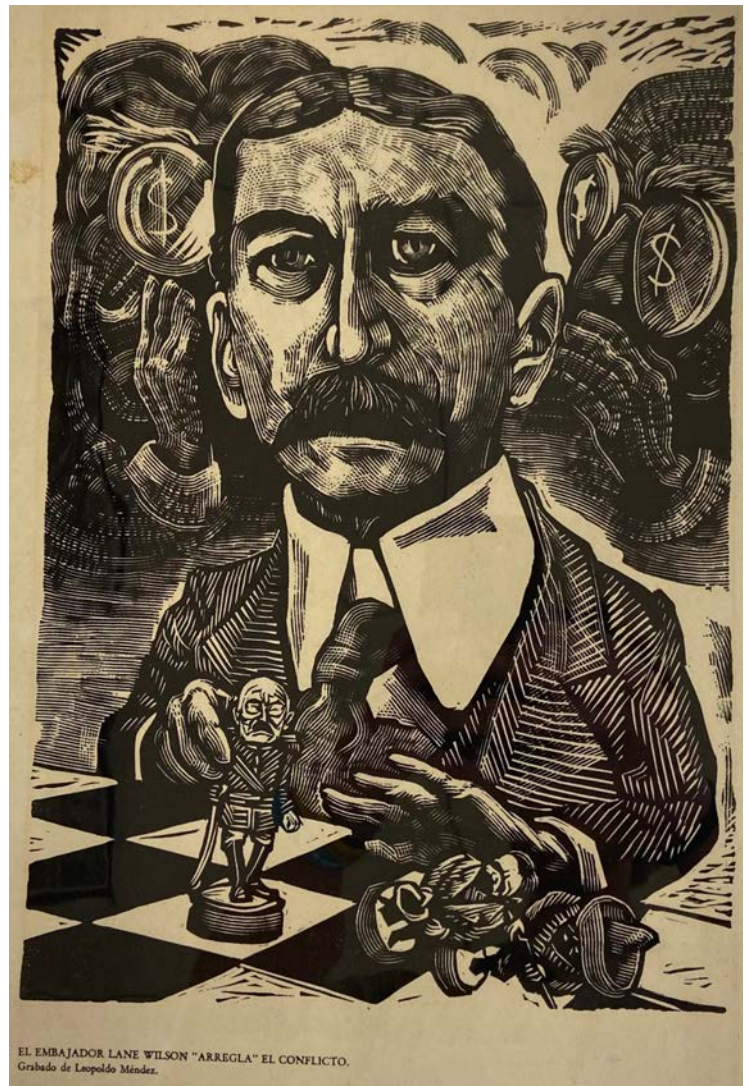
Henry Lane Wilson

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico

1910-1913

President Taft appointed Henry Lane Wilson to be the U.S. ambassador to Mexico in 1910, influenced by Richard Ballinger, Taft's secretary of the interior. Wilson was closely associated with the Guggenheim family, whose business, the Guggenheim Brothers, had large holdings in the Mexican mining and copper industries. At times, those interests justified Wilson's personal agenda, creating tension between himself, Mexican leadership, and correspondents in Washington, D.C.

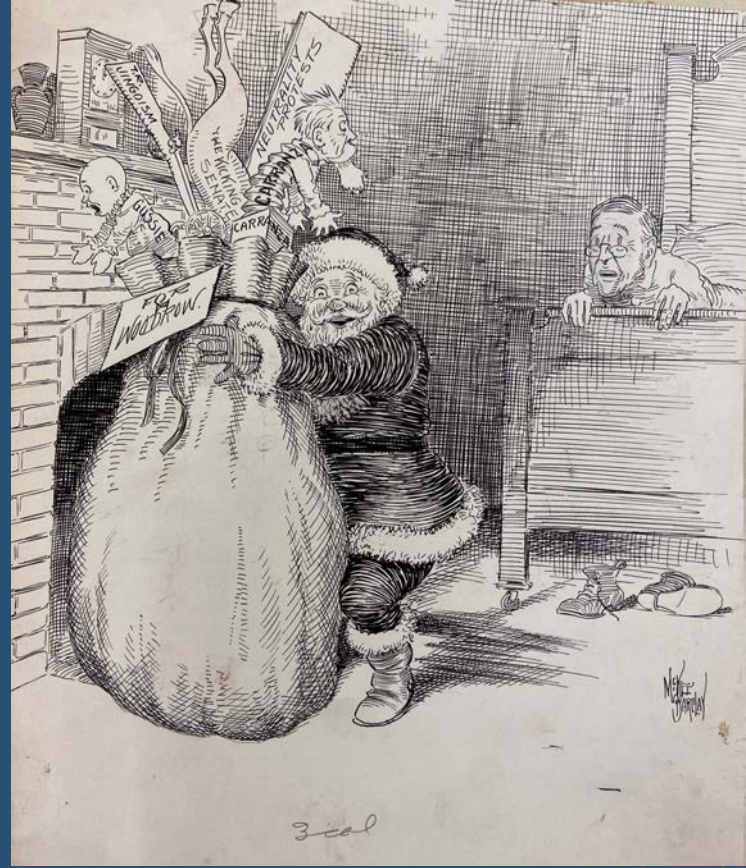
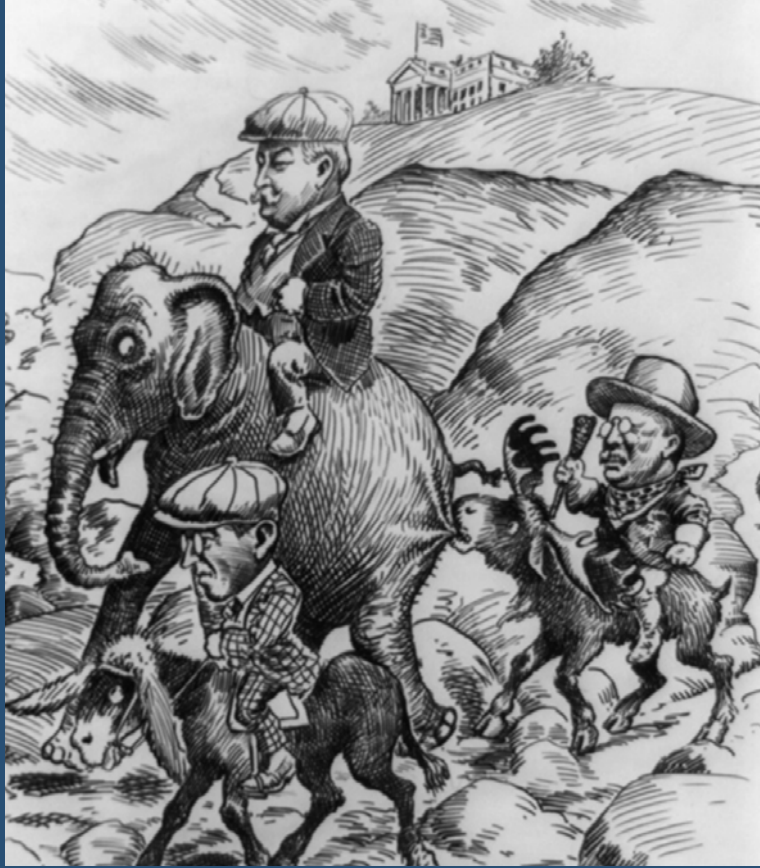
During his tour in Mexico, Wilson was a proponent of establishing the proper respect for American power and privilege in Latin America. He believed President Francisco Madero's emphasis on Mexican citizens' rights to be a sign of his incapacity to uphold U.S. interests. Due to his distrust in the country's leadership, Wilson used his diplomatic position to influence Madero's overthrow in 1913 by a military coup. He worked in alliance with successful army general Victoriano Huerta and the son of the infamous dictator Porfirio Díaz, Felix Díaz. The three came together in an agreement called the Pact of the Embassy, making Huerta the interim president before the next election. Through the study of Huerta's telegrams to Washington, Wilson was very supportive of the rebellion and served essentially as the state department's policy maker in Mexico. When Huerta took full control of the presidency and had Francisco Madero assassinated on February 22, 1913, Wilson lost his reputation as an ambassador among the American public. He not only pushed for the international recognition of Huerta's regime, but his actions would also be the source of Woodrow Wilson's largest diplomatic problem before World War I.



Note: There is no familial connection between Woodrow Wilson and Henry Lane Wilson.

Woodrow Wilson's Inauguration

March 4, 1913

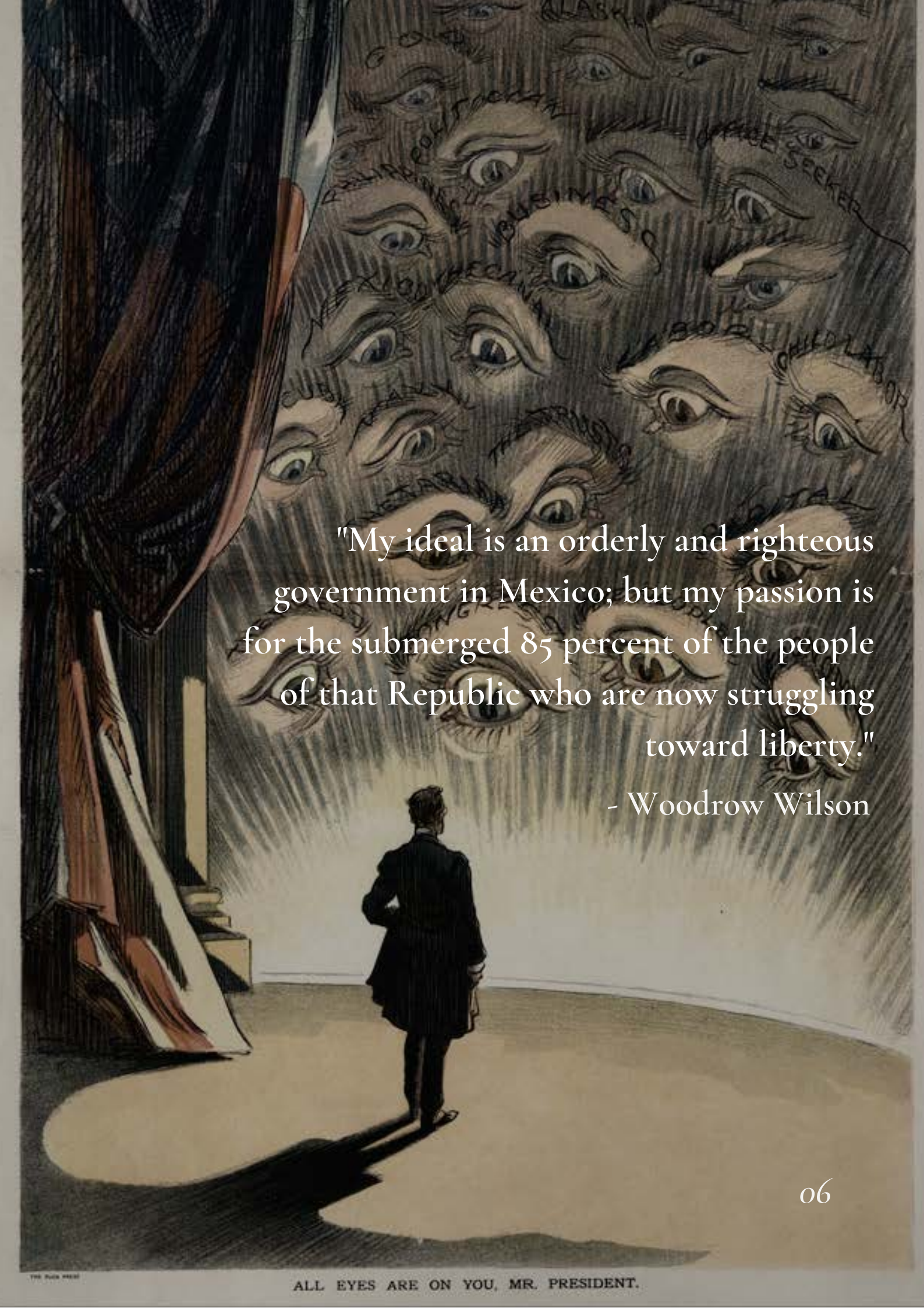


Just two weeks before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, Mexico erupted in rebellion due to Francisco Madero's assassination. Had Taft been re-elected, his neglect of the situation in Mexico would have most likely led to the international recognition of the new military dictator, Victoriano Huerta, given the influence of Henry Lane Wilson. Taft left his "bag of problems" (pictured above) for the new administration to handle. Woodrow Wilson was highly critical of the Huerta regime and the Mexican Revolution. He denounced the use of violence in place of legal evolution, and he desired to promote the idea of true constitutional liberty. He even called the crisis in Mexico "an inexcusable aggression" because of his deeply rooted opposition to un-democratic processes. In responding to Huerta's letter of congratulations following his inauguration, President Wilson addressed him as "General" rather than "President." Wilson's Presbyterian upbringing influenced his foreign policy toward the protection of human rights over material interests. He viewed democracy as the most humane and Christian form of government. The actions of Henry Lane Wilson, Victoriano Huerta, and the rebels in Mexico would challenge every fiber of Wilson's moral being. The controversy surrounding U.S. involvement in Mexico would lead Wilson to make some of his most difficult diplomatic decisions, but simultaneously the most memorable political decisions of his presidency.

Woodrow Wilson's Moral Dilemma



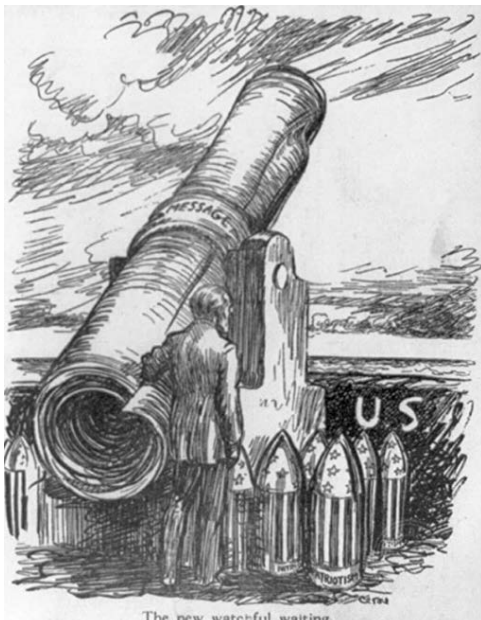
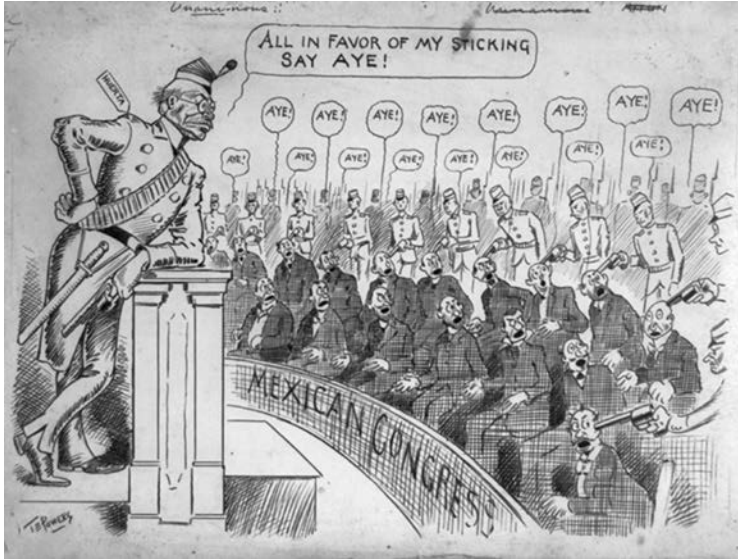
President Wilson was well-read in European political history and aware of the current developments affecting U.S. foreign policy. He was an incredible politician, but an amateur diplomat. There were a handful of situations in which he acted more on instinct than knowledge, and he had little understanding of the complexities of the Mexican Revolution. He believed intervention would not only change the course of Mexican politics in the name of democracy, but would also break the foreign capitalist hold on the country. Because of his distrust of Henry Lane Wilson and his extra-legal acts as U.S. ambassador, the president sent two special executive agents, William Bayard Hale and John Lind, to report on the situation in Mexico. He wanted what was best for Mexico, which meant taking a stand against U.S. business interests; other European powers such as Germany, which had already recognized Huerta internationally; and even the suggestions for recognition by the state department. While Hale was a student, Lind was chosen because he was a loyal Democratic party member. Like Wilson, Hale and Lind had no prior diplomatic knowledge, especially concerning Mexico. Lind was a proponent of interventionism, and after his analysis of the Mexican Revolution, he decided that the only way to end the conflict was to give definitive support to the Constitutionalists fighting Huerta's regime. The three points Lind tried to push on Mexican officials were (1) cessation of fighting, (2) Huerta's resignation, and (3) an early and free election in which Huerta could not participate. His lack of success led him to conclude that a more direct approach was necessary.



"My ideal is an orderly and righteous government in Mexico; but my passion is for the submerged 85 percent of the people of that Republic who are now struggling toward liberty."

- Woodrow Wilson

Timeline



March 11, 1913

Woodrow Wilson made his initial statement on relations with Latin America, addressing how the United States could not stand idly by while Victoriano Huerta's military regime took over Mexico. He declared, "We can have no sympathy with those who seize the government to advance their own personal interests or ambition."

August 27, 1913

In his address to a joint session of Congress on Mexican affairs, Woodrow Wilson stated, "...we are not the only friends of Mexico. The whole world desires her peace and progress...if only she choose and attain the paths of honest constitutional government." He implied a policy of "watchful waiting" after John Lind's proposals for a cessation of fighting are rejected.

October 31, 1913

President Wilson drafted a message to Congress including a preliminary joint resolution for military intervention in Mexico. His plan was to oust Huerta and return political power to the Mexican Congress. The situation seemed so dire that the appeal almost outweighed the risks to Wilson.

File

March 11/13

For morning papers
March 12

~~In view of questions which which are naturally uppermost~~
~~in the public mind just now, the President issued the following~~
~~statement.~~ One of the chief objects of my administration will

be to cultivate the friendship and deserve the confidence of
our sister republics of Central and South America, and to pro-
mote in every proper and honorable way the interests, ~~both~~
~~material and political~~, which are common to the peoples of
the two continents. I earnestly desire the most cordial under-
standing and cooperation between the peoples and leaders of
America and, therefore, deem it my duty, ~~as it is also my~~
~~pleasure~~, to make this brief statement ~~and address to the~~
~~several governments of our neighbor republics by first formal~~
~~official communication~~

Cooperation is possible only when supported at every
turn by the orderly processes of just government based upon
~~arbitrary or irregular~~
law, not upon ^Aforce. We hold, as I am sure all thoughtful
leaders of republican government everywhere hold, that just
government rests ^{always} upon the consent of the governed, and that
there can be no freedom without order based upon law and upon
the public conscience and approval. We shall look to make
these principles the basis of ^(subsequent) mutual respect, and helpfulness
between our sister republics and ourselves. We shall lend our
influence ^A every kind to the realization of these principles
in fact and practice, knowing that disorder, personal ^{ambition,}
and defiance of constitutional right weaken and discredit

First page of President Wilson's original draft of his statement
of March 11, 1913, regarding Latin-American relationships

The statement above from March 11, 1913, suggests that President Wilson's intentions in Mexico were purely to promote cooperation and understanding. John Lind's reports contradicted Wilson's initial statement, and because he was a trusted party member, Wilson was more receptive to methods of intervention. On January 31, 1914, he overturned the U.S. arms embargo to Mexico and changed his policy from mediation of the Mexican factions to full support of the revolution.

INVASION OF VERACRUZ

APRIL 21, 1914

President Wilson learned of a German ship arriving with arms for Huerta's regime and ordered the U.S. Navy, along with 3,000 soldiers, to block the port at Veracruz and seize the city. Wilson thought this action would be supported by the revolutionaries fighting against the Huertista government, but instead, it was denounced by all Mexican parties. Nineteen American soldiers died at the hands of the Mexican Naval Academy garrison.

SAILORS ARRESTED

APRIL 9, 1914

Nine U.S. sailors were taken into custody after they entered a restricted space in the small oil town of Tampico, Mexico. The sailors were released unharmed, but Admiral Henry T. Mayo demanded a formal apology with a 21-gun salute to the American flag.



AUTHORIZATION OF THE USE OF FORCE

APRIL 19, 1914

Woodrow Wilson stood behind Admiral Mayo's statement and went to Congress to request authority to send armed forces to Veracruz. The purpose behind this request was to uphold the honor and dignity of the United States. President Wilson was tired of Huerta's consistent disregard for American foreign policy and citizens.



U.S. Withdrawal from Veracruz

November 23, 1914

In unofficial statements, President Woodrow Wilson declared that the seizure of Veracruz would be "the end of Huerta" and there would be little to no military opposition. Wilson was warned on three separate occasions, however, that his call for intervention would be met with force. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan warned Wilson that direct action would give all Mexican factions a reason to unify against the United States; William Bayard Hale reinforced Bryan's assumptions in his 1913 reports; and Venustiano Carranza himself, the leader of the revolutionary Constitutionalists fighting against Huerta, implied that Mexican nationalism would annul any support given by the U.S. through interventionism. Even facing that immense opposition, Wilson still felt a moral obligation to continue his political battle for the elimination of Huerta. He was convinced that foreign imperialism in Mexico was the reason for the country's inability to create a government based on self-determination and that the Veracruz action would help shock the nation into promoting democratic values. Wilson was incorrect in that assumption, and he ordered the withdrawal of the U.S. soldiers from Mexico. Following the diplomatic crisis, he invited the three main powers of Central and South America, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, along with Uruguay, Bolivia, and Guatemala for a conference in Niagara Falls to determine how to restore international order between the United States and Mexico. The agreement led to the establishment of a Constitutionalist provisional government in which all parties to the civil war would be present, and Huerta resigned soon thereafter on July 15, 1914. Four days after the A.B.C. Conference, Wilson spoke to the people of Philadelphia, stating, "My dream is that as the years go on and the world knows more and more of America it...will turn to America for those moral inspirations which lie at the basis of all freedom." Despite his controversial decisions in Veracruz, Wilson never lost touch with his initial goal to prioritize human rights above all other interests. He felt that his actions were justified by the final outcome and that Mexico was on a better path in terms of political stability.



UNITED STATES RECOGNITION OF CARRANZA

OCTOBER 9, 1915

Following the conference at Niagara Falls, the countries present recognized Venustiano Carranza as the leader of Mexico. What these countries did not realize, however, was the divide taking place within the Constitutionalist party. General Pancho Villa did not accept the terms agreed upon by the international powers and took matters into his own hands. President Wilson ordered an arms embargo against all opposition to Carranza.

JOHN J. PERSHING INVADES MEXICO

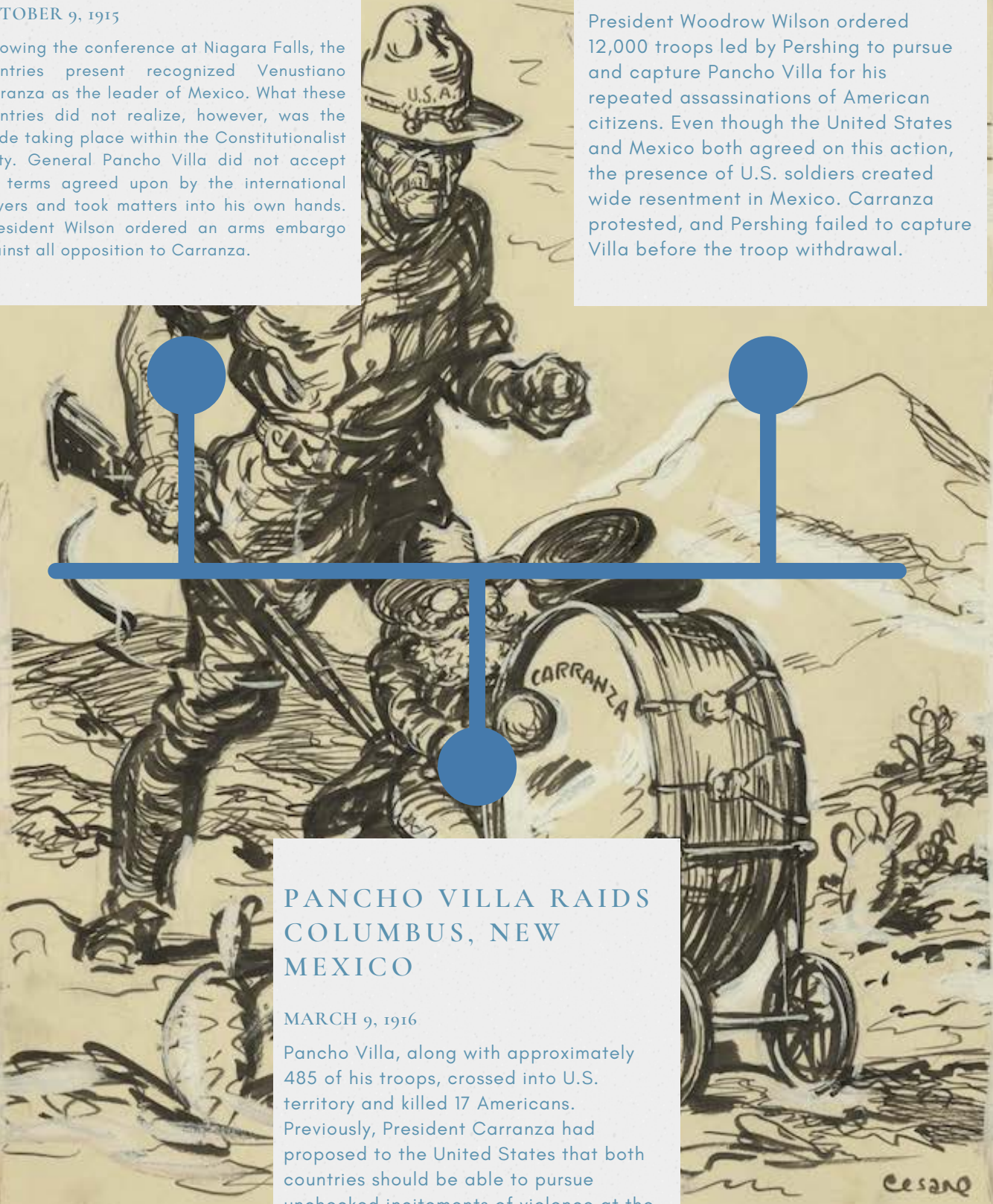
MARCH 15, 1916

President Woodrow Wilson ordered 12,000 troops led by Pershing to pursue and capture Pancho Villa for his repeated assassinations of American citizens. Even though the United States and Mexico both agreed on this action, the presence of U.S. soldiers created wide resentment in Mexico. Carranza protested, and Pershing failed to capture Villa before the troop withdrawal.

PANCHO VILLA RAIDS COLUMBUS, NEW MEXICO

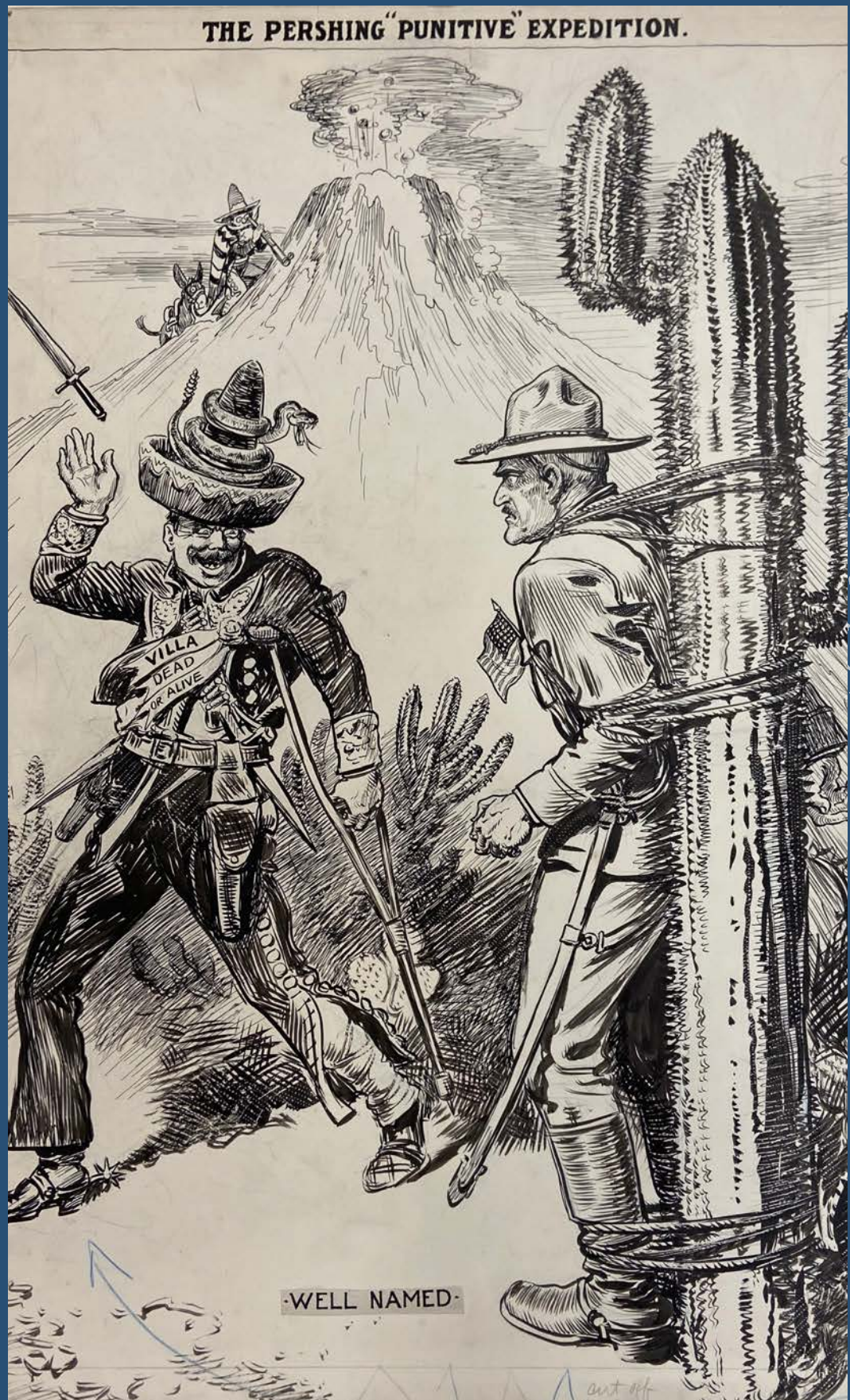
MARCH 9, 1916

Pancho Villa, along with approximately 485 of his troops, crossed into U.S. territory and killed 17 Americans. Previously, President Carranza had proposed to the United States that both countries should be able to pursue unchecked incitements of violence at the shared border. His proposal was accepted by the Department of State on March 10.



January 28, 1917 - U.S. Withdrawal

While the "Punitive" Expedition led by Pershing failed to capture the infamous Pancho Villa, it represented a big step toward the stabilization of the Carranza administration in Mexico. Villa's forces were severely weakened by the expedition, and his arms supply was cut off due to the embargo put in place by President Wilson. Wilson was sympathetic to Carranza and was adamant about making an example of Villa to put an end to banditry at the southern border. The Punitive Expedition was the closest the United States and Mexico had come to an all-out war since the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). The expedition was relatively small-scale in terms of U.S. foreign involvement, especially during World War I, but it illustrates the rising tensions with Mexico taking place during the Wilson administration. Mexican citizens looked down upon Carranza for his phlegmatic stance on this intrusion by the U.S. and even members of the Constitutionalist Party saw it as a sign of his weakness as president.



Zimmermann Telegram

March 1, 1917



The American public first found out about the Zimmermann telegram in March, but it was originally leaked by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman to the German envoy in Mexico, Heinrich Von Eckhardt, on January 16, 1917. The telegram consisted of a contingency plan in case the United States entered World War I on the side of the Allied powers. Germany's plan was to conquer the United States, gift Mexico its previously stolen land in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, and take the rest for its own empire. Mexico took no decisive measures in response to Germany's offer due to President Carranza's fear of the return of U.S. troops following Pershing's expedition the previous year. When the telegram was published in May, Carranza declared Mexico's full neutrality. It can be deduced from this information that President Woodrow Wilson's decisions in terms of armed intervention in Mexico were the reason for its neutrality. If Victoriano Huerta were still president in place of Carranza, the potential for war at the southern border would have been much greater, and United States history could have looked much different following World War I. Nevertheless, anti-German sentiment surrounding the Zimmermann telegram after its release gave President Wilson and Congress no choice but to enter the war and fight against Germany and its allies.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NEW YORK CARLTON, PRESIDENT

via Galveston JAN 29 1917

GERMAN LEGATION MEXICO CITY

130	13042	13401	8501	115	3528	416	17214	0491	11310
18147	18222	21500	10247	11518	23677	13905	3494	14938	
98092	5905	11311	10392	10371	0302	21290	5101	39095	
23571	17504	11209	18278	18101	0317	0228	17094	4473	
23284	22200	19452	21589	07893	5509	13918	8958	12137	
1333	4725	4458	5905	17108	13851	4458	17149	14471	0706
13850	12224	0929	14991	7382	15857	07893	14218	30477	
5870	17553	07893	5870	6454	16102	15217	22801	17138	
21001	17388	7146	23638	18222	0719	14331	15021	22845	
3150	23552	22096	21604	4797	9497	22401	20855	4377	
23610	18140	22200	5905	13347	20420	39089	13732	20607	
0929	5275	18507	52282	1340	22049	13339	11205	22295	
10439	14814	4178	6992	8784	7032	7357	6926	52262	11207
21100	21272	9340	9559	22404	15874	18502	18500	15857	
2188	5378	7381	98092	10127	13486	9350	9220	70036	14219
5144	2831	17920	11347	17142	11504	7807	7762	15099	9110
10482	97556	3509	3070						

BEHNSTOFFF.

Charge German Embassy.

Wilson's Legacy in Mexico



As presented in the previous pages, Woodrow Wilson was highly involved in the United States' foreign relations with Mexico during his administration. Wilson was determined to influence policy so that Mexico would be free of external capitalist or imperial interference and act out of self-determination. He believed, "When properly directed, there is no people not fitted for self-government." His ideals were of peace and cooperation in place of narrow-minded nationalism and materialism. The historic interests of the United States were linked to physical and monetary expansion, but Woodrow Wilson's desire was to create a new world order based on trust. He may have contradicted his stance on interference in Mexico during the two major armed interventions, but his end goal was for its government to finally recognize its people's interests and to see the United States as a protective "big brother" power. In his Western Preparedness Tour in Topeka, Kansas, in 1916, Wilson stated, "We have made ourselves the guarantors of the rights of national sovereignty and of popular sovereignty on this side of the water in both the continents of the Western Hemisphere." He was willing to make his views known to the international powers of the world like Great Britain or Germany by any means possible, and he was confident enough to stand up to those in his administration who opposed this ideal. In his "Friendly Talk with Mexico" in 1918, he even states, "We had no right to interfere with or dictate to Mexico in any particular with regard to her own affairs." He recognized that the United States had a significant impact on the Mexican Revolution by ousting Victoriano Huerta, but that the only purpose was to replace a dictatorship with a democracy. Wilson's vision was to make Mexico a prosperous power in the world, and he did as much as he could to establish it as such. I hope that after reading this brief synopsis you have found President Wilson's history with Mexico fascinating and complex. His actions there are not often talked about in conversations surrounding his legacy, but they are some of the best examples we have of his perspective of moralism and idealism in U.S. foreign relations.