

# **A STRANGE FATE: QUINCY WRIGHT AND THE TRANS-WAR TRAJECTORY OF WILSONIAN INTERNATIONALISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Quincy Wright (1890-1970) was a founder of the field of international relations, author of hundreds of articles and books, and consultant to the State Department's postwar planning efforts during World War II. He was also a Wilsonian of a kind Wilson would have appreciated: Over five decades spanning two world wars, he promoted international integration under adaptive institutions of global governance that demanded significant relinquishments of national sovereignty. Yet little is written about this remarkable figure. The following article undertakes three tasks: First, it demonstrates Wright's Wilsonian approach to international relations, which emphasized the cooperative formulation and pursuit of common interests among nations. Second, it details his campaigns for world government, including his collaboration with the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace (CSOP), perhaps the most important of the private organizations that helped shape the State Department's postwar plans. Third, it investigates the ultimately fruitless efforts of Wright and the CSOP to shape, in Wilsonian fashion, the paradigm of U.S. foreign policy and the structures of international organization established under Roosevelt. I conclude that Wright's Wilsonianism, which envisioned the integration of a multipolar world under international government, was rejected by policymakers jealous of national sovereignty, even as they built prominent aspects of Wright's vision into the postwar architecture.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historians, theorists, and practitioners of international politics squabble over many things, both within and across their respective realms. There is surprising agreement, however, on the basic narrative of the years spanning the two world wars, and the lessons to be gleaned from it. The First World War is remembered for Woodrow Wilson's failed quest to establish a system of international law and institutions that could fundamentally reform the behavior of states and transform the interactions among them. This folly, it is held, was epitomized by Wilson's scheme for a League of Nations, a powerful world parliament that would curb the pursuit of narrowly construed national interests and encourage states to recognize their convergent interest in each others' well being. The failure of Wilson's own government to join the League, the crises of the interwar years, and the Second World War

are remembered for their disillusioning and then horrifying demonstrations of Wilson's naivety.

Finally, the story goes, the United States' role in the victory over fascism and its second stab at postwar planning under Franklin Roosevelt were triumphs of a hard-headed idealism, distinct from and superior to Wilson's woolly-headed version; and these triumphs in turn demonstrate the trans-war era's ultimate lesson: Power is the major determinant of international relations, and always will be. In this view, the primary purpose of international law is to codify existing behaviors and hierarchies to make world politics more predictable, while that of international organization is to facilitate peaceful adjustments to the status quo rather than significant alterations. It follows that Roosevelt's success in institutionalizing this vision at a moment of American geopolitical preeminence ensured the best of all plausible world orders: one reflecting the values of a liberal-capitalist superpower with an entrenched interest in the spread of democracy, prosperity, and human rights.

Of course, the degree to which those latter interests have superseded others over the past six decades has been debated by scholars, and even some of Roosevelt's successors in office. Still, most agree with FDR's conclusion that the post-1945 framework—a framework facilitating America's pursuit of the world's best interests as America defined them—was at the very least more practical and beneficial than Wilson's scheme for a faction-raven world parliament whose most important constituency, the American people, was never likely to recognize its capricious authority.

Ironically, these conventional lessons of the trans-war years are antithetical to the thought of a largely forgotten scholar who not only lived through the period, but dominated the era's academic discourse over world politics and international organization: Quincy Wright of the University of Chicago, a theorist of international law, founder of the discipline of international relations, adviser to the Roosevelt administration, and unreconstructed Wilsonian. Recovering Wright's story and the strange, trans-war trajectory of his Wilsonian vision is vital to understanding, evaluating, and transcending a six-decade dialogue about international affairs, and America's role in them, that has grown sterile.

## IDEALIST OR REALIST?

Wright grew up in Medford, Massachusetts, near Boston. After graduating from Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois in 1912, he received his PhD in political science from the University of Illinois in 1915. After a brief stint as an instructor at Harvard he moved to the University of Minnesota and then to Chicago, where in 1923—at age 32—he was hired as a full professor and inaugural director of the nation's first graduate program in international relations. In 1926 he launched the project for which he is best known to scholars, a massive and long-running interdisciplinary think-tank on the causes of war.

He moved from Chicago to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1956, and then to the University of Virginia in 1958, retiring in 1961. During his academic career Wright was President of the American Association of University Professors, 1944-46; of the American Political Science Association, 1949-50; of the International Political Science Association, 1950-51; and of the American Society of International Law, 1955-56 [1].

A longstanding member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Wright also supported numerous internationalist organizations including the World Citizens Association, which he co-directed. When war broke out in Europe in 1939 Wright helped co-found the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace, an influential think tank in state department circles. When the U.S. entered the war Wright became an official consultant to both the state department and the Foreign Economic Administration. After the war he was a technical adviser to the Nuremberg Tribunal and a consultant to UNESCO. In 1953 he was awarded a Norwegian science prize for his empirical inquiries into “the causes of war and the conditions of peace,” as he titled one of his most important books [2].

These achievements were not all that set Wright apart. One thing distinguishing him from his post-1945 counterparts, especially, was his clear understanding of Woodrow Wilson’s vision for the world, which recent scholarship is finally reconstructing. A fresh look at the sources of Wilson’s ideas, the context of their formulation, and their popular reception reveals that his program for the comprehensive reform of international relations was no fool’s errand. Instead, as many contemporary observers recognized, the radicalism of Wilson’s vision complemented its realism. The balance-of-power system of selfish, competitive nationalism had failed catastrophically, with consequences literally unimaginable in the prewar years. Wilson’s quest for what he called a “community of power,” embodied in an egalitarian, deliberative world polity exercising genuine sovereignty over members, was hardly an illogical response to that catastrophe [3]. As Wright remarked in 1921, the events of 1914-18 had demonstrated the inescapable interdependence of international society, in which “violations react disastrously upon the violator.” The lesson was to embrace and regulate that interdependence rather than resist it, which was exactly what Wilson’s League was designed to do. The League, Wright explained, “unquestionably tends to decrease the rights and powers of its members and to increase their obligations and responsibilities,” but did so “with the purpose...of better securing those rights and of enlarging the capacity of each to exercise its powers” [4]. In his magnum opus, *A Study of War*, published just after the United States had found itself drawn into a second world conflagration, Wright quoted Wilson in identifying “the organized opinion of mankind” as the only just and practical authority that could be invoked to resolve conflicts in a rapidly shrinking and changing world. Citing Wilson’s wartime addresses among his sources, Wright concluded that “such invocation is possible only through the procedures functioning within an international organization which has superseded the balance of power as the basic guaranty of state security” [5].

Unlike Wilson, Wright would live to spend the next five decades at the vanguard of American internationalism, tirelessly promoting means to achieve the basic purpose of the League Wilson had envisioned. Like Wilson, however, most scholars who have paid Wright sustained attention since his death in 1970 have largely misunderstood him [6]. Christopher Mark Davis, for instance, has classed Wright among the “legalists” and “idealists” who, in Davis’s view, dominated the nascent but burgeoning field of international relations in the interwar years. That field was supposedly characterized by a naïve faith in the power of international law to alter international relations, and a dangerous neglect of the power struggles that shaped them. In short, Wright and his cohort were clones of Woodrow Wilson who somehow failed to learn from his mistakes [7].

Emily Griggs, one of the few political scientists to view Wright through a historical lens, has voiced a strong dissent from this view. Griggs examined Wright in the context of philosophical pragmatism, which pervaded the social sciences at Chicago in the interwar

years. She concluded that, contrary to the stereotypes of his interwar cohort, Wright's empirical, "ethically neutral" pragmatism led him to view power as the main driver of politics, and likely to remain so. Indeed, Griggs's Wright was highly skeptical of one-worlders and supra-nationalists. He viewed international legal, political, and economic arrangements as means to stabilize rather than rationalize international relations, and promoted the study of domestic and international dynamics in order to predict the course of world politics, reduce its frictions, and minimize its costs—not as a step toward challenging its basic structure. In short, as Griggs announced in her article's title, Wright was "a realist before realism" [8]. Finally, Steven J. Bucklin has also emphasized Wright's realism, while arguing that it was tempered by a Wilsonian openness to change—both changes of institutional arrangements and changes of theoretical perspective. Bucklin's Wright evolved from a dreamer conjuring vague schemes of world government into a proponent of gradual change, whose prescriptions for a more ordered, peaceful world were, despite their idealistic cast, "quintessentially conservative" [9].

These efforts to redeem Wright from the political-science purgatory of idealism and to challenge the realist-idealist dichotomy that constrains the IR field are important. Nevertheless, the picture of Wright that emerges from Griggs's and Bucklin's analyses is as misleading as Davis's. The portrait suffers from two major flaws: a distortion of Wright's pragmatism, and a consequent misrepresentation of his Wilsonianism. For like Wilson himself, Wright was committed to finding the most practicable, and thus direct, route toward a radically reorganized international society—a society oriented toward ambitious but concrete goals of global peace, security, and wellbeing, rather than proceeding from abstract and outmoded first principles of national sovereignty, rights, and interest-as-power.

## **PRAGMATISM AND THE POWER OF IDEAS**

Wright's pragmatism can be traced to his reading of William James and to the pervasive influence of John Dewey, whose mark on the social sciences at Chicago remained long after his departure in 1903 (and Wright's arrival twenty years later). As sophisticated scholarship since the 1980s has shown, the pragmatism of James and Dewey was anything but ethically neutral. Indeed, the fundamental assumption behind their embrace of empiricism was that human endeavors are inherently normative [10].

James and Dewey held that as thinking beings, we develop hypotheses about the world based on our partial experience of it. Because our experience is limited, our hypotheses reflect to a large extent our ideas about the way things should be; and because our thinking is goal-driven, such hypotheses are used (directly or indirectly) to realize those normative ideas, or better, ideals. Moreover, this behavior is entirely justified, for the world is always changing, and our actions can affect that change. This is not to say James or Dewey believed we could wish into being whatever we imagined. Rather, they believed that, in some cases, the actions motivated by our ideals created conditions more hospitable to their realization; and that, in all cases, acting on our hypotheses and pursuing our ideals was the best means of testing them against experience, and refining our knowledge of what was possible in a given set of circumstances. Finally, because circumstances constantly changed across time and space, the most accurate knowledge required that individual experience be supplemented by social

experience—whether communicated through history, the cooperative inquiry of the sciences, or the deliberative discourse of democratic communities [11].

It is unclear when, exactly, Wright first encountered the writings of James and Dewey, but he frequently cited their work, especially James's. Discussing "War and Public Opinion" in 1935, Wright adopted James's psychological arguments about humans' various and often competing desires for strenuous action, personal recognition, and sacrifice for the community, concluding that pacifists' emphasis on "the horrors of war" might backfire and "stimulate an interest" in it. Consequently, he argued, "diversion of interest from the war-like possibilities to other positive interests which would be frustrated by the war may be a more hopeful course for the peace propagandists; a method, in fact, suggested by William James's suggestion of a moral equivalent for war" [12]. Wright considered the building of a world community with a shared awareness of interdependence to be the key to maintaining peace, and he returned to James's 1910 essay on "A Moral Equivalent for War" in his own *Study of War*, completed in 1941 as his involvement in postwar peace planning was intensifying. He cited James's essay when suggesting that social integration, though typically spurred by identification of an "out-group" of human beings, might also be encouraged by identification of "out-groups of impersonal ideas or conditions such as war, disease, unemployment, and poverty" [13]. Wright went on to argue that "the boundaries of membership and even the existence of human groups" were just as contingent upon "persuasion and faith" as upon objective factors; in effect, the existence and character of human out-groups was no more nor less rooted in "fact and reason" than that of "impersonal out-groups" would be. Social identities were malleable and rarely attributable to objective conditions, as attested by the variety of ways in which human groups had organized and reorganized themselves "internally" throughout history. In the nineteenth century, for instance, "Types of organization as different as socialism, communism, fascism, and liberalism" had developed during a matter of decades in one continent, Europe, "all parts of which had experienced similar technological and economic conditions." Which type prevailed in any given society was "a matter of opinion" within that society, depending "in large degree on the relative intensity of the faith, belief, and loyalty" of the system's "adherents" [14].

Over hundreds of pages Wright made his point clear: Both sociological and historical analyses of group integration and conflict supported a "voluntaristic view" of human affairs, accepting the constraints placed on actors by material conditions and historical precedents, yet refusing to ignore the role of "the initiating entity" in shaping change. In other words, the voluntaristic view "assumes a pluralistic universe with many free agents." Wright's use of the Jamesian vocabulary of voluntarism and metaphysical pluralism was no coincidence; he cited James's essays on *A Pluralistic Universe* as authority for his assertions [15]. Unsurprisingly, Wright's voluntarism reflected James's complex understanding of human action as both individually willed and socially influenced in its origins, and as simultaneously powerful and uncertain in its effects. Applying it to his own cherished ideal, Wright admitted that "a world society" could never exist "merely because some persons have conceived of such a society," yet insisted that "no such society can exist unless some persons have conceived of it." Nevertheless, even if that conception were enshrined in a reformed League with formal "legislative authority" over the world's governments, its practical significance would depend in the long term on the very conditions such a League was meant to foster: "A widespread sense of world-citizenship," he concluded, "appears to be an essential element of effective international organization" [16].

In sum, Wright never argued that “community formation” on a supra-national level was merely a matter of changing minds [17]. But nor did he view competition among self-interested nations as the inevitable determinant of world politics. Instead, Wright’s pragmatist internationalism rested on his Jamesian perspective on the power of ideas to shape the constraints under which they were applied, a perspective he explicitly articulated in discussing “The Application of Scientific Method to Social Problems” in an appendix to the second volume of *A Study of War*. Buttressing his assertion that “social acceptance” of a viewpoint on a social problem “often becomes a factor in the problem itself,” Wright invoked James’s broader formulation of the same argument in a quotation from *A Pluralistic Universe*: “A philosophy may indeed be a most momentous reaction of the universe upon itself. It [the universe] may...possess and handle itself differently in consequence of us philosophers, with our theories, being here” [18].

### A WILSONIAN AFTER WILSON

The foregoing is not meant to suggest that Wright ignored the degree to which circumstances limit the pursuit of ideals, including the ideal of an organized world community. As Griggs pointed out, Wright was too aware of the complexity of “human society” to claim that all its globe-spanning, culturally variegated elements should be organized at every level along a single model, or that the whole of it could be stabilized once for all by any single method. He was equally aware of the barriers to approximating the ideal of world order in his own day, on even the most basic level of mitigating war. Neither international law nor collective security agreements nor a nominal “world union, federation, or league” could guarantee peace among states unwilling “to sacrifice a considerable part of their sovereignty” [19]. For Griggs, such sobering insights reveal Wright’s inclusion of war-prevention proposals at the end of *A Study of War*—in a section comprising a mere fifty-odd pages out of more than two thousand—as merely a pro forma exercise [20].

This appearance is dispelled by a closer reading of Wright’s massive text. Page after page reveals his passionate belief that global interdependence, as he wrote in one passage, “made it ever more pressing for lovers of freedom that the world be made safe for democracy” [21]. Wright felt no need to attribute that last famous phrase directly to Wilson, or to apologize for its normative character. Readers familiar with his work over the previous two decades would have been well aware of his longstanding commitment to international organization along the lines Wilson envisioned, a commitment which emerged during World War I and persisted beyond the publication of *A Study of War* into the post-World War II period. In November 1919, the very month in which the Senate first rejected U.S. membership in the League of Nations, Wright ended a long, dispassionate, and somewhat tedious analysis of the League Covenant with a clear endorsement of its ratification. Certainly, the United States would have “less opportunity for complacent reliance upon a fortunate geographic position, [and] more responsibility for the general maintenance of law.” But far from threatening American interests, this arrangement served interests and ideals simultaneously, by ensuring “adhesion” to the “basic policy” George Washington first prescribed: “Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all” [22].

More than fifteen years later, in 1935, international tensions and the rise of fascism were feeding serious public doubt about the League's value, with or without U.S. participation. Yet Wright again insisted that "a world organization of the character of the League of Nations" was more than ever "a necessity" [23]. Even so, it needed to be improved, and wider membership—including the United States—was the best means of doing so. Once again Wright appealed to American political traditions in making his case: "The organization of the United States was doubtless improved when the Articles of Confederation were superseded by the Constitution," he wrote, "and it may be that a change of equally drastic character is necessary in the League of Nations." Yet before it could become a "super state" reflecting the world's interdependence, it had to cultivate global public opinion by demonstrating the political will to enforce democratic norms among states—an order more easily filled by a League with the United States as a member [24].

Of course, the League failed to exercise such political will, and a second global conflict exploded in 1939. But these events only deepened Wright's conviction that, due largely to America's "loss of faith" in the League, world organization had never been fairly tested, while the alternative had failed repeatedly with increasingly devastating consequences. By seeking the freedom to remain aloof from world affairs, the United States had left the League in the control of powers committed to maintaining the status quo, so that the Covenant's provisions for peaceful change in the world's political arrangements were ignored. America's jealousy of its sovereignty thus contributed to the reestablishment of a balance-of-power politics that bred dissatisfaction and aggression among unsatisfied states, leading to war [25]. In a letter to the *Forum and Century* published in April, 1940, he responded to a previous article weighing the options of "isolation and intervention" in the war by exploding the dichotomy, which assumed in either case that the nation could somehow enter and exit international society at will. Rather than debating such abstract impossibilities, Wright asserted, "We should... assume our share of responsibility for ordering the world of which we are inescapably a part. Will we sacrifice some measure of our economic and political sovereignty provided others do likewise...?" If not, he concluded, "we may expect the catastrophic decline of civilization to continue..." [26].

This undeniably normative bent should not be surprising in the work of a pragmatist. James and Dewey did not draw a sharp line between the expository and normative. Rather, efforts at detached inquiry and analysis were necessary to determine the best means of achieving goals, while constantly reflecting on the goals themselves [27]. As a Wilsonian, moreover, Wright would naturally have adopted this brand of pragmatism, whatever version his colleagues in the Chicago political science department might have practiced. The most characteristic and radical feature of the League Wilson had envisioned was its promotion among nations of the pragmatist principle of deliberative discourse, or what Wilson called "common counsel." The League Assembly would register a range of political needs, desires, and experiences far wider than any benevolent directorate of Great Powers could access. Moreover, the Assembly's own deliberations over that experience could prompt alterations, both minor and major, to the status quo [28]. Wright recognized this feature in his gloss on Article 11 of the Covenant, which Wilson frequently claimed was his "favorite." The article authorized the Assembly, or any of its members, to "advise the reconsideration... of treaties which have become inapplicable," and to appraise the League of "international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world." As Wright wrote, the article's purpose was to "assure necessary adaptation to new conditions and to avoid a perpetuation of

the status quo”—in short, to achieve a peaceful, just, and democratic world through peaceful, just, democratic inquiry [29].

Indeed, Wright recognized that Wilson had sought to give effect to this pragmatist principle of reflection and adaptation at multiple points in the Covenant, by means both radical yet eminently practical: the granting of legislative power to the League. As a student of constitutional government, Wilson understood that legislative processes facilitating peaceful change were as crucial to order and security as the interpretation and enforcement of law. “This balance,” Wright wrote in 1934, “was recognized in President Wilson’s original draft of the Covenant which linked in a single article a guarantee of the territorial status quo against violence with a legislative procedure for territorial change.” The article’s division at Paris into Articles 10 and 19, however, combined with a “strengthening” of the former’s text and a “weakening” of the latter’s, “disturbed this balance.” The opportunity to redress the “distortion” through interpretation, practice, or formal amendment was foreclosed by America’s absence and the consequent predominance of the status quo powers in the League [30]. By the late 1930s the results should have been clear to everyone: As Wright wrote in regard to the Munich Settlement, the failure of governments and peoples to subordinate selfish prerogatives of national sovereignty to just procedures of international adjustment assured a world with “little respite from wars and rumors of wars” [31].

Though Wright’s pragmatist internationalism was, like Wilson’s, quite radical, it was not detached from the realities of American politics. The monochrome still-frame of American isolationism in the interwar years must be abandoned in favor of a kaleidoscopic moving picture of the nation’s political culture. As historians of Wright’s generation recognized, there was substantial elite support for international engagement in the 1920s, and this persisted, though strained and constricted, in the 1930s [32]. Moreover, popular support for international organization was far more prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s than often assumed. The American Red Cross, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, and the American Federation of Labor are only a few of the mass organizations that endorsed U.S. League membership in the 1920s and continued to endorse either membership in the League or formal cooperation in its activities and directives over the next two decades [33].

In short, Wright embraced the internationalist cause at a time when its future success seemed more achievable, and its recent failure more contingent, than most scholars recognize today. He was no realist before realism. Wright was a Wilsonian after Wilson.

## CONSTRUCTING AND CRITIQUING THE POSTWAR ORDER

There is little doubt that the internationalism that had thrived during the 1920s was severely undermined by the Great Depression of the 1930s. As Akira Iriye has argued, the economic and cultural internationalism of the earlier period was far more significant than the U.S. government’s smattering of important, but infrequent, disarmament initiatives and security agreements. The Depression caused many to challenge the assumption that economic interdependence could be a source of stability, and even to doubt the liberal ideals so closely associated with competitive capitalism and free trade. Thus, writes Iriye, “the reaction against

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economic internationalism contained within it the rejection of the principles and values that had envisaged the emergence of a world community... of mutual cooperation" [34].

At the same time, this very backlash against internationalism prompted renewed efforts from the internationalists. As noted, Quincy Wright persisted in his advocacy of American League membership. He and others claimed that a more comprehensive political internationalism, in the form of a world organization encouraging and facilitating the coordination of economic policies among nations, might have arrested the Depression before it became so acute, and that a more politically powerful League might have moderated the reactions of its members. As economic turmoil metamorphosed into geopolitical tension, and tension metastasized into conflict, an increasing share of the foreign policy elite began listening to the internationalists. What might have sounded like utopian rhetoric in the 1920s began to assume the quality of a Jeremiad to increasing numbers of policymakers in the 1930s.

By the time war broke out again in Europe those policymakers included Secretary of State Cordell Hull and his boss, President Roosevelt—both of whom had pro-League backgrounds and, like Wright, had long anticipated the eruption of economic crisis into military conflict. As a result, in a strange twist, the period of Wright's most direct influence on foreign policy began at the height of the isolationist America-Firsters' influence on public opinion.

In 1939 Wright co-founded the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace (CSOP) with three other prominent internationalists: James T. Shotwell and Clyde Eagleton, professors of international law at Columbia and NYU, respectively, as well as officers of the League of Nations Association (LNA); and Clark Eichelberger, a former student of Wright's who directed the LNA and also helped form the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. The CSOP was less official than its Great-War predecessor, the Inquiry, yet seems to have enjoyed a similar degree of access to the executive branch. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles was a member of the commission, which facilitated its leaders' access to power and eventually their inclusion in the state department's postwar planning process. Shotwell and Wright met and corresponded frequently with Cordell Hull, and Eichelberger met with Roosevelt several times, twice delivering CSOP reports personally to the president [35].

The main tenets underlying the CSOP's recommendations for postwar planning were those underlying Woodrow Wilson's internationalism in the First World War, and Wright's in the decades since. Once again, war had starkly revealed the increasing global interdependence of all human endeavors and interests, even in a decade of autarky and ideological division. Any settlement of the current conflict must prevent, or at least respond swiftly, to future incarnations of the virulent, aggressive nationalism that had twice thrown civilization into chaos. The options, as Wright saw them, were "empire à la Hitler or world federation" [36]. Prerequisite to the latter was a comprehensive political organization that could facilitate economic and cultural cooperation on a global scale, along with performing the international administrative, legislative, and judicial functions long contemplated by radical internationalists [37]. In its final form this organization, whose general features the commission charged Wright with delineating, clearly resembled the suite of deliberative and electoral institutions promoted by pragmatist internationalists like Walter Lippmann during the First World War—institutions incorporated into Wilson's conception of the League, at least as he foresaw it evolving from the Covenant's initial arrangements [38]. Like Lippmann

and Wilson before him, Wright considered genuine sovereignty over member nations the *sine qua non* for such an organization; a sovereignty at first restricted, but extending indefinitely as the organization's operations became smoother and more familiar, and its benefits clear [39]. As explained in the CSOP's third report, which Wright largely drafted, those benefits would include not just collective security, but collaborative action to reduce poverty, disease, and hunger while increasing opportunities for education, social growth, and cultural exchange among all the world's peoples. Finally, and unprecedentedly, the new organization would be charged with "enlarging the protection offered by the world community to the individual"—that is, with holding states accountable for respecting the "human rights" of their own citizens and, indeed, all human beings [40].

Before the evolution of a superstate could begin, however, the world would have to solve the "pressing problems" that would confront it immediately after the fighting stopped. The "problems of relief, of the restoration of law and order, and of economic reconstruction" were immediate practical and humanitarian concerns that could not wait on the world order the CSOP envisioned. Indeed, they might prevent its establishment. Thus the commission devoted several months of work to the "transitional period" between war and world organization [41]. There were two major features of the transitional period. First, it must set the expectation of a future international system that was both structured and flexible—one designed to maintain order through intelligent adaptation to change. This required that governments and international institutions be restored or rebuilt with integration in the new organization in mind. Like Wilson a generation before, the CSOP declined to dictate the specific form of government any nation should have. But it did set criteria: States-member of the new world body must adhere to international law, recognize the world body's legislation as part of international law, and relinquish sovereign control of communications, trade, credit, raw materials, and armaments, according to the logic that phenomena of this sort were inherently transnational [42]. These highly structured aspects of the transitional period were simultaneously markers of its flexibility, for all were designed to place ultimate control in a democratic world community that could consistently shape its government according to changing circumstances, needs, and goals. Indeed, the commission would not even hazard a guess at the length of the transition, instead emphasizing the importance of "time for careful thought, for experimenting and testing," and for "discovery of what peoples want, after their sufferings, in the way of a permanent settlement." Such "study and deliberation" were "essential in the democratic process." The most important immediate task was not to set a timetable, but "to establish the community means of control for the period" [43].

The second feature of the transitional period was that it would, out of necessity, be orchestrated largely by the four most important powers of the anti-fascist alliance: the U.S., Great Britain, Russia, and China. "At the end of hostilities, the responsibility for the reconstruction of the world will rest upon the victors, whether they like it or not, and whether anyone else likes it or not." That responsibility, however, carried with it the temptation to undermine the process of reconstruction they were charged with overseeing. The "danger" was that the Big Four would "not be willing to relinquish their position in favor of a world organization," or would "fail to establish the national, regional, and world institutions to which their authority should be transferred." Thus it was crucial that the victors bind themselves, "through pledges taken in advance," to transferring control over postwar activities and institutions when the time was right. Such "self-denial" was a matter of long-term self-interest: Selfish "postwar methods" on the victors' part would encourage the same

aggrieved and aggressive nationalism that had caused the last two wars. The victors must use their power and influence to bring a temporary order to the world, but it must be an order designed to pass away, along with the victors' exclusive dominance of world affairs. "The permanent institutions of the world order should evolve from consultation with and consent of the peoples who are subject to them," the Commission wrote. "Only in this way can they be expected to command the loyalty and support of all" [44].

"How much of this process is possible, no one knows," the commission admitted in its report on the features of that more ambitious system. "...The only way to find out what is both possible and necessary," the report continued in a pragmatist vein, "...is for the governments as well as the peoples to come to grips now with the basic problems from which there can be no escape if the ideals of freedom and justice are to survive" [45].

As it turned out, much of the CSOP's transition-period agenda was not only possible but achieved in the postwar architecture formulated at Dumbarton Oaks and accepted by the United Nations Conference on International Organization at San Francisco—notably, the creation of an umbrella economic and social administration to parallel the new international political administration, and the explicit affirmation of international responsibility for the protection of human rights. There were, however, several failures at San Francisco, and one that was particularly glaring in the sight of the CSOP: the transition itself was abandoned. The temporary great-power directorate became, with a few alterations, a permanent feature of the United Nations Organization in the form of the Security Council—which by common agreement among its creators-cum-permanent members gave each of the Great Powers a veto over the rest of the world's decisions. Whereas the CSOP and many members of the U.S. delegation at San Francisco joined other nations in calling for majoritarian policy making processes, the U.N. Charter made Great-Power unanimity a prerequisite for executive action, while denying non-permanent members the veto privileges enjoyed by their predecessors on the League of Nations Council. The government of the United States, the U.S.S.R., or any other of the victor nations could frustrate the will of the world, but no nation or group of nations could legally frustrate the will of any one of them. When evaluated against the criteria for world organization established by the CSOP, this outcome left the most important feature of the proposed new order, the capacity for democratic, peaceful change, and unattained [46].

Could such a radical transition possibly have occurred? The chances would have been better had Roosevelt been a Wilsonian of the Wilson-Wright variety rather than the imperial variety that set the pattern for most of the post-1945 period. For all his keen awareness of the world's interdependence, FDR had his cousin Teddy's blood in his veins, and by 1945 the events of the past half decade seemed to have proven America's fitness to lead the world in a very direct way. The transitional phase of the CSOP plan was bound to appeal to him most, especially since the anticipated development of the atom bomb seemed to ensure his nation's supremacy vis-à-vis the other great powers. Yet lodging power in a Security Council that featured America's only credible competition, the Soviet Union, as a member with an equal veto set the stage for the transformation of all global business into an ideological and geopolitical struggle.

Roosevelt's death further reduced the chances of salvaging the CSOP's original vision of democratic cooperation among nations—chances that had been raised slightly by FDR's conviction that he could work with the Soviets, and thus prevent the division of the UN into bipolar spheres of influence. With little time for Harry Truman to develop his foreign policy, the Soviets entered the war against Japan, increasing U.S. anxiety over their intentions in

Asia, while Japanese resistance convinced Truman to drop the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, increasing Soviet anxiety over American power and potential ruthlessness. Meanwhile, Truman's eventual secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, may have been a wolf in sheep's clothing (from the CSOP perspective): A CSOP member, Dulles turned increasingly hawkish in the last years of the war, and had grown skeptical of the commission's faith in an orderly but genuine revolution in world politics by the time he was named senior delegate to the United Nations Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in 1945. Dulles helped complete the institutionalization of the Great-Power directorate that FDR began by advocating the addition of the so-called "domestic jurisdiction clause" to Chapter II of the Charter, which exempted all "internal" matters from investigation or action by the United Nations—clearly an advantage for strong states with the power to stonewall their weaker concerned neighbors [47].

Dulles, then, spoke from experience in more ways than one when he remarked in 1949 "that the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace made an indispensable contribution to the creation of the United Nations" [48]. The political structure of the UN, however, fell far short of what most of Dulles's CSOP colleagues had envisioned. From early in the life of the new organization Wright became one of its most consistent critics, even as he attempted to direct attention to its latent potential as a basis for fundamental reform of world politics. "The United Nations is a transitional organization," Wright stated—half descriptively, half prescriptively—in 1946. "It includes in its structure aspects of several types of world organization," he continued, but the "privileged position of the great powers suggests that it is a world empire governed by these powers." The UN's failure to restrict the sovereignty of member nations, however, cost it the unity of an empire, and already it was clear that its "unsanctioned declarations of moral purpose" were "likely to be violated." In effect the UN's structure had encouraged yet another lapse into a balance-of-power system, one made increasingly unstable by the decreased number of great powers, expanding range of contacts and points of friction among states, and growing asymmetry of defensive versus offensive force in the atomic age. In Wright's assessment, "world empire and world federation" were the only means to restore equilibrium, and establishing the former would—in addition to threatening individual and group liberties—likely require "atomic war." As for the latter, Wright conceded that the UN was promoting the formulation and acceptance of universal norms upon which a federal world order depended. The rapidly deteriorating relations between the United States and Soviet Union, however, suggested "a race between deteriorating conditions of the power equilibrium and developing conditions favorable to world law" [49]. The UN Charter, despite representing a lost opportunity to leave the anarchy of balance-of-power politics behind, was still the best vehicle for the promotion of multilateral and international political, economic, and cultural initiatives and networks that were necessary to outrun the next world war. Its educational and social functions could turn its limited capacities for political internationalism into the means of its own transformation, and eventual transcendence. "The United Nations represents the limit to which present world opinion will go in the direction of world federation," Wright wrote in 1946, as the internationalist enthusiasm of the war years was already giving way to fear, cynicism, and reaction among the peoples and leaders of the former Allies. "It must not be sacrificed because it is not perfect. Rather it must be the foundation on which to build as evolving opinion permits" [50].

Thus in the wake of the Second World War Wright found himself in a familiar position: defending the value and trumpeting the potential of an organization, and even a world-cultural movement, whose failings he knew better than anyone and whose ultimate success he considered uncertain. He still believed that the only “realistic” policy was an “idealistic” policy, recognizing “that in the long run man will persist but nations and institutions will rise and fall,” that the “dominant values are human,” and that “long-run policy should be guided by them and seek to adjust national policy and develop international institutions to serve them in a changing world” [51]. He still believed, too, that Woodrow Wilson had championed some of the noblest of those values in 1918, when he committed the United States to fight for the “reign of law, based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind”; and finally, he still believed those were the values that the authors of the Atlantic Charter and signatories to the Declaration of the United Nations had asked their peoples to uphold two decades later. And yet, he lamented, those values were “by no means realized in the United Nations Charter.” In an often frighteningly interdependent world, he continued, most people “do not want to submit their national sovereignties either to world empire or to world federation. The dilemma is one which is difficult to solve by abstract logic and will have to await the logic of history” [52].

Of course, according to the logic of history one could argue that the UN has been a remarkable success. If nothing else, there has been no world-swallowing war for sixty-five years. But then perhaps that is just another argument for aiming beyond the conventionally realistic in international relations, if only in hopes that the outer limits of realistic reform are reached—and pushed.

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- [2] Wright obituary in *New York Times*, cited above note 1.
- [3] See especially Woodrow Wilson, address to the Senate, January 22, 1917, in Arthur S. Link, et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-94), 40: 533-39.
- [4] Quincy Wright, “The Effect of the War on International Law,” *Minnesota Law Review* 5 (1920-21), 436- 58, esp. 444, 451.
- [5] Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), vol. 2, 772-73. Wilson’s addresses of February 11 and July 4, 1918, are cited on 772 n. 19 and 773 n. 24.
- [6] Two exceptions are Robert Hillman and Glenn Tatsuya Mitoma, who has carefully studied important aspects of Wright’s thought. However, both scholars limit their studies to Wright’s work during World War II, as a member of the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace (CSOP), and attend more to the structure and

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- [13] Wright, *Study of War*, vol. 2, 1037, n. 80.
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- [15] *Ibid.*, 1236, n. 36.
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