

## Who Is To Blame?

### Historian #1

“Republicans who controlled the Senate after the 1918 elections had no intention to hand Wilson a victory on the treaty, no matter what compromises he might make: they were driven primarily by the partisan goal of undermining him and his party and thereby ensuring the success of their candidate for president in the 1920 presidential election. ...”

“The mutual antipathy between Wilson and Lodge did not help matters at all when control of the Senate reverted to the Republicans in 1919; and Republicans had no enthusiasm for Wilson’s League of Nations proposal to begin with. While the treaty would probably not have been ratified so long as the League was a part of it, both sides only exacerbated matters by poking partisan sticks in each other’s eyes. Wilson could have made some prominent Republicans part of his negotiating team, but passed up that opportunity for greater bipartisan cooperation. Moreover, he could have accepted some reservations to make clear what he had already conceded, and that was that Congress’ constitutional role in declaring war could not be bypassed by a League of Nations recommendation to use military force. ...”

“Nevertheless, Republicans vilified the League as taking away America’s sovereignty and its independent determination over whether to go to war, while Wilson vilified Republican opponents of the League for putting the nation on a course for another great, and final war that would end the world as we know it. ...”

“What ultimately spelled the difference in the League debate was the mood of a war weary electorate, once again turning inward in a neo-isolationist posture. Republicans exploited and capitalized on that mood; Wilson seemed oblivious to it given his self-righteous confidence in the correctness of his vision for world peace. ...”

### Historian #2

“The blame must rest primarily with Wilson's arrogant obstinacy, and then with his sick state of mind, which together bred his insistence that the treaty he had negotiated at Versailles, including the League of Nations provisions, be ratified unamended. The American people were not opposed to U.S. participation in the league. Polls taken at the time showed that Americans wanted to join a permanent peacekeeping body by ratios of four or five to one. The Republican majority in the Senate also favored a league of some kind - the true isolationists among the Republicans were not more than a dozen, to which I would add that even some of those might have been won over by well-drafted concessions.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the Republican leader, however he figures in the U.S. mythology, was no isolationist either. His "Fourteen Reservations" to Wilson's Fourteen Points were designed to meet valid objections and so ensure overwhelming Senate ratification - all kinds of people associated with the peacemaking under Wilson, such as Colonel House, Herbert Hoover, and Democratic leaders like William Jennings Bryan, favored the reservations. The only opponent of any significance was Wilson himself. In March 1920, Lodge controlled 49 senators' votes in favor of the league with reservations. The 23 votes Wilson controlled, added to this 49, were more than enough to secure U.S. membership in the league. But Wilson's 23 supporters voted against the league rather than accept the Lodge reservations. So America rejected membership. An overwhelmingly internationalist country was turned in an isolationist direction as a result of a personal failure of leadership by a dying man.”

### **Answer the following questions in complete sentences:**

1. According to Historian #1 who or what is to blame for the failure of the U.S. Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and thus the failure of the U.S. to join the League of Nations? Why?

2. According to Historian #2 who or what is to blame for the failure of the U.S. Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and thus the failure of the U.S. to join the League of Nations? Why?
3. With whom do you agree? Why? If you agree with neither then who or what is to blame? Why?
4. What do the two sources reveal about the nature of the job of the historian?
5. Based on your knowledge of world history and the events that transpired after WWI, would the history of the world have been significantly different if the U.S. had accepted the Treaty of Versailles and joined the League of Nations?