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Thomas Nelson Page, Diplomat

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THOMAS NELSON PAGE, DIPLOMAT

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Richard Paul Dauer
1972
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Richard P. Dauer

Approved, January 1972

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to discuss and analyze the public career of Thomas Nelson Page, noted Southern writer and American Ambassador to Italy during World War I. This essay concentrates on Page's ambassadorial career. It discusses Page's qualifications for a diplomatic position and why he received the post in 1913. During Page's tenure as Ambassador to Italy from 1913 to 1919, he had to deal with the complex problems of Italian and American neutrality, Italian and American participation in World War I, and the Paris Peace Conference. Page's goals, his attempts to realize them, and why he was unable to accomplish them are considered in this analysis.

Page's ambassadorial career was marked by futility. His major objective, that of closer Italo-American relations, failed to materialize, primarily because of the clash between the two countries at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Page resigned his post because he was discouraged both by his government's position at the peace negotiations and by its ignoring his suggestions for promoting better relations with Italy.

The failure of Italian-American relations during this period was due to several factors. The state of American politics allowed Page to become an ambassador although he lacked the experience and the ability to surmount the problems caused by war and peace. Because he became increasingly pro-Italian in his sentiments, the State Department, the American peace negotiators, and the President ignored his reports, some of which might have helped to avoid the clash at Paris. Moreover, Page's government did not provide him with sufficient information or personnel to help him coordinate his actions with his government's policies. Finally, the Italian government's lack of realistic, decisive leadership contributed to the Italo-American misunderstanding at Paris and, ultimately, to its downfall at the hands of Benito Mussolini.
THOMAS NELSON PAGE, DIPLOMAT
INTRODUCTION

Serious students of American foreign policy during World War I are very aware that the history of this period is far from complete. Much has been written on this important period; however, many of these works have dealt with general topics. Such studies, moreover, have focused mainly on the United States without giving adequate attention to European developments. Much remains to be learned about World War I diplomacy, particularly the activities of individual diplomats.

The career of Thomas Nelson Page, United States Ambassador to Italy from 1913 to 1919, is worthy of study for several reasons. Basically, it offers the opportunity to consider a very neglected area of World War I diplomacy: the relationship between the United States and Italy. Although much has been written about the conflict between these two countries at the Paris Peace Conference, very little has been concerned with Italo-American relations from 1914 to 1918. Yet this era is of crucial importance to an understanding of both the problems at the Paris Peace Conference and Benito Mussolini's subsequent rise to power. Since Page's ambassadorship was at the center of Italo-American relations, this study should contribute to a more effective understanding of this problem.
Page's career also offers an interesting comment on the conduct of Wilsonian diplomacy. Wilson had to face many critical, complex foreign problems during his two administrations. In dealing with them, Wilson had to bear the consequences of his own inexperience, inadequate knowledge, and planning. Thus, decisions made during his first two presidential years sometimes hindered his subsequent actions. His selection of Page as Ambassador to Italy is one indication of this lack of serious thought about foreign policy at the onset of his administration.

Wilson's dealings with Page during the latter's ambassadorship provide additional commentary on Wilsonian diplomacy. Several historians have noted Wilson's tendency to neglect or at least partially ignore foreign policy officials. Reliance on unofficial sources of information, such as Colonel House, tend to corroborate this interpretation. Page was the victim of this tendency. Although his advice and information initially found an audience in Washington, he increasingly fell out of favor with Wilson and his policymakers. By the time of the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson relied on the advice of his commission of experts, the Inquiry, and more informal counsel, such as that offered by British journalist Wickham Steed. Page found difficulty in merely presenting his opinions, especially after the Conference ground to a halt over the Fiume question.

This study discusses four main aspects of Page's diplomatic career. Chapter I deals with Page's qualifications for the Italian ambassadorship
and Wilson's reasons for selecting him for that post. Chapter II is concerned with the period of American neutrality during World War I. Page's aims, methods and achievements are analyzed in the context of American and Italian policies. Chapter III describes Page's attempts to deal with the growing tension between Italy and the United States during the time when both fought Germany and Austria-Hungary. The study concludes with an analysis of the rupture of Italo-American relations, Page's differences of opinion with President Wilson, and the ambassador's resignation from the diplomatic service.
CHAPTER I

PRELUDE: THE PREAMBASSADORIAL CAREER
OF THOMAS NELSON PAGE

On June 17, 1913, the United States Senate received President Woodrow Wilson's nomination of Thomas Nelson Page, "one of the most popular of living American writers,"\(^1\) to be "ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the United States to Italy."\(^2\) Four days later the Senate confirmed this nomination. Page succeeded Thomas J. O'Brien, who had served as Ambassador to Italy since 1911. The announcement of this appointment was received enthusiastically by a generation which did not, for the most part, consider professional training or experience an important qualification for an influential diplomatic position.\(^3\) Newspapers and personal and professional friends praised Page's appointment. At least by the standards of his time his general qualifications could

\(^1\)New York Times, June 18, 1913, p. 1.


\(^3\)The New York Times decried political appointees but envisaged no end to the system and concluded pessimistically that "the best we can hope for is the appointment of generally competent men who will spend some part of their time in trying to learn the requirements of their posts, other than purely social requirements, and will not fail in an emergency." New York Times, March 22, 1913, p. 12.
hardly have failed to impress most people as impeccable. By more objective standards, however, his life style, experience and personal outlook suggested that he would have problems in his new career.

1. EARLY LIFE: EDUCATION AND LAW

Thomas Nelson Page was born on April 23, 1853, at "Oakland", a plantation near Beaver Dam in Hanover County, Virginia. His childhood experiences provided him with the major sources of his literary works and the basis of his Southern conservatism. His family ancestry, distinguished on both sides, led him to stress genealogical tradition as a source of Southern greatness. Too young to remember or understand the course of events leading up to the Civil War, he nevertheless retained vivid and romantic memories of the war itself. But as his memories included nothing of the hardships of the conflict, his writing was characterized by an unrealistic view of the Civil War. Also, his lack of physical suffering during the war probably made it psychologically easier for him to stress sectional reconciliation in his stories and poems. The declining fortunes of the Page family was an additional influence on him. Oakland was not a flourishing plantation during Page's childhood. He could never reconcile himself to the fact that while his aristocratic family's wealth

was shrinking, industrialists were becoming extremely wealthy. For Page honor, duty, and family tradition were much more important than wealth, and a distrust of industrialism and urbanization, sources and results of this new wealth, pervaded his writing.

Page's education was typical for one of his class and environment. As a child, he studied at a nearby school run by his aunt. His father also taught him Latin and Greek. In the fall of 1869 Page enrolled at Washington and Lee College, where he was inevitably impressed by its president, General Robert E. Lee. Although he edited the college newspaper, academically he "scraped through in damnable mediocrity." In June 1872, he withdrew without receiving a degree. Returning home, he studied law under his father's tutelage, and in 1873 he enrolled at the University of Virginia to study law. Applying himself with unusual diligence, Page finished the two-year course in one year. But in working so hard he suffered a nervous breakdown on the eve of his comprehensives and had to wait until the autumn of 1874 to pass these tests and receive his law degree.

Page practiced law with his father for a year. Then he was offered a position as a lawyer for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway and moved to Richmond in 1876. Twenty-three years old at the time, much of the pattern of his future life was already discernible:

He was a sensitive young man..., marked by restlessness and charm, a conservative by inclination and training, yet burning with ambition to achieve the reputation and wealth which he regarded as the right of an educated man of good family. Remembrance of the past glories of his family must have been as powerful a spur to him as the impoverished farm he had just escaped.

At Richmond Page quickly made a place for himself in the city's social and political life. His family connections assured him of contact with the "better people," and he took an active interest in the public affairs of the city, serving on its Board of Alderman and being elected a lieutenant of the Richmond Light Infantry Board. Trying to build up his wealth, Page spent more time with personal business and investments than with his law practice. Nonetheless, he retained many clients because of his reputation of honesty.

At this time Page began the literary career that led him to strongly desired wealth and fame. One of his friends, Armistead Gordon, had published a poem in Negro dialect. Page was impressed and convinced he could do as well. Thus motivated, he wrote "Uncle Gabe's White Folks," which he sold to the publishing form of Scribner's for fifteen dollars. It was an inauspicious debut for what proved to be a gratifying and distinguished literary career.

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6 Holman, pp. 18-19.


8 Holman, pp. 21-22.

9 "Recollections and Reflections," p. 65.
His real start in literature did not come until several years later, however. In 1880 he saw a semi-literate letter taken from a dead Confederate soldier. The letter told the soldier of his sweetheart's love for him and of her promise to marry him on his next furlough. But she warned the soldier that she would marry him only if he came home "honorably." Impressed by the letter's emphasis on duty, love, and honor, qualities he considered essential to the Southern experience, Page wrote a story based on it and submitted the tale to Scribner's. The editors did not publish "Marse Chan" until 1884, but when it was reprinted in an anthology, Short Stories by American Authors, Page's literary reputation began to grow.

2. PAGE THE WRITER: LITERATURE AS POLEMIC

From 1884 to 1898 Page became increasingly well known and popular as a writer. He spent correspondingly less time with his law practice as he entered the busy life of story writer, novelist, essayist, and public lecturer. In 1893, after his second marriage, to Florence Lathrop Field, he gave up his law practice and moved to Washington, D.C. During this period his most popular books were: In Ole Virginia, a series of Negro dialect tales; The Burial of the Guns, a collection of stories; Two Little Confederates and Among the Camps, two books for children; The Old South, a series of essays; and Red Rock, a novel about Reconstruction in the South.

Page thought that the editors had withheld publication for some time because they feared the North would not accept a war story from the Southern viewpoint. Ibid., p. 24.
Because Page was essentially a raconteur, his most successful efforts were his local color short stories. His literary formula was simple: he took the Virginia plantation and described its romantic and idyllic qualities. His main points of interest were the devotion of the slave to a kindly master, the loyalty of the master to his state and code of honor, and the glorification of women and antebellum Southern society. The major sources of his stories were the experiences of his family and friends. Concentrating his attention on great planters and faithful house servants, he neglected the freedmen, the field hands, the yeoman farmers, and the poor whites. His picture of the South was at best a limited one.

In his milieu, however, Page was surprisingly effective. His fiction of the 1890's recalled a golden age, a time of stability when the South was agrarian and self-contained. By concentrating on generalized, idealized aspects of Southern society, Page was one of the major creators of the myth of Southern "heroism." His influence on Southern writers of the era was great, and he was in many ways the leading literary spokesman of the South during the 1880's and 1890's.

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11 Holman, p. 63.

12 Ibid., pp. 139-140.

13 Lawrence J. Friedman maintains that Page may have been the most popular novelist in the country at the turn of the century. The White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Postbellum South (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 62.
The myth he projected was pervasive. It persuaded a generation of contemporary readers of the author's accuracy and still lingers on in the popular mind even though Page's fiction is rarely read today. Even the spokesmen of the New South and old-time abolitionists were effected by this "mythic image."

Northerners, who eagerly bought Page's books, were quite susceptible to his approach. His stories described a society markedly different from the developing urban society and its resultant tensions. Also, many Northerners subconsciously wanted to make up for the destruction of the South during the Civil War. Illogically, they wanted to be told that slavery was not so bad, that Negroes were lovable but simple. Finally, Page's theme of sectional reconciliation, thinly symbolized by his stories' frequent intersectional marriages, was one that everyone wanted to hear.

Of course, Page's natural audience was in the South. To many Southerners Page's nostalgic stories by their emphasis on the greatness of antebellum Southern civilization provided vindication for the bitter defeat of the Civil War. To the advocates of the New Southern industrialism this emphasis on a nostalgic, agrarian past was not contradictory.


Instead, this interpretation of the South was congenial to the mentality of the New South, because it emphasized Southern nationalism and it did valuable service in the cause of sectional reconciliation. 16

Page's influence on the actual course of sectional reconciliation was probably minimal. Indeed, it could be argued that his popularity was a reflection rather than a cause of national unity. Certainly there were many other factors contributing to this during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many Northerners and Southerners sought political, economic, and social reconciliation by various means, including celebrations like Memorial Day, articles in journals and newspapers, educational funds to help Southern education, and fraternal contacts. Southerners like L. Q. C. Lamar, Walter Hines Page, Henry W. Grady, Robert E. Lee, and Joel Chandler Harris, among others, contributed to this trend. Still, one of Page's major literary contributions was the expression of this ideal of national reunion. 17

After the publication of Red Rock in 1898, the quality and quantity of Page's work declined. Much of his writing was hastily done and inadequately revised. Also, he suffered from insomnia, dyspepsia, frequent colds, and a persistent rash. At the same time he became more involved


with Washington's social life and frequent trips to Europe, where Italy especially appealed to him. Politics also became a more active interest. As a result, Page's interest in literature was gradually shunted to the background.

But from 1900 to 1910 Page continued to write. He experimented un unsuccessfully with short stories, factual essays, poems, plays, and problem novels. All of these attempts lacked his former intense enthusiasm and sure knowledge of subject matter. Moreover, Page was out of touch with the literary currents of the United States. He had been bypassed by the naturalists and the social critics of the era. Although he tried to adapt to these new styles of writing, he lacked the necessary ability and flexibility. Dreiser, Norris, London, Howells, and others replaced him as literary spokesmen at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In one respect, however, Page continued to be a literary representative of the Old South. From 1900 to 1910 he wrote a series of articles on race relations that vividly defined the Southern conservative position. One of his essays, *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem*, remains today as one of the classic definitions of a Southern view of Negroes. Page easily assumed the paternalistic attitude of noblesse oblige so common to members of the planter aristocracy. He wrote and believed that backward blacks had accepted slavery cheerfully and had emerged from a state of barbarism with the twin benefits of civilization and Christianity. Southern

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18Gross, p. 105.
whites were the natural protectors of "good blacks" and would protect them from "bad blacks" and evil Northerners teaching social equality. Because Southern whites knew Negroes and what was best for them, it was unnecessary for blacks to vote. Whites, responding to their duty, would always protect them.  

Page was no Negrophobe; in fact, he had a genuine affection for certain types of blacks, the abject or servile ones. His distrust was reserved for those blacks who demanded equality and those whites who believed blacks were entitled to this equality. He strongly believed that freedom for blacks had resulted in a reversion to barbarism exhibited in blacks' sexuality. Thus, he defended lynching as a defensive reaction by whites to black sexual assaults on white Southern women. To combat

19 Thomas Nelson Page, "The Great American Question," *McClure's Magazine*, XXVIII (March, 1907), pp. 565-572 demonstrates what Page meant by "good" and "bad" blacks. "Good" Negroes were those who remained under white subjection and were "docile, amiable, tractable, and pleasant to deal with." "Bad" Negroes were those who had some power and were mostly "swaggering, arrogant, dangerous, and intolerable." p. 565.


22 Ibid.

this retrogression he offered two solutions. First, he believed that "re­sponsible" Negro leaders like Booker T. Washington should exert more positive leadership over their people. He approved of the "moderate approach" of these men. Second, he wrote that blacks could be elevated considerably by industrial education. But this would be a segregated education; blacks did not need the book learning that whites did. Instead, they had to learn craftsmen's skills. 24 Page's opinions on race relations where those of the friendly paternalist who wanted the best for blacks and knew that equality and participation in much of Southern life was not in the best interest of blacks or whites. 25

Page also represented a common line of Southern thought in political affairs. A lifelong democrat in the tradition of Jeffersonian agrarianism, he resented the growth of Northern corporations and their political influence. His hostility to big business was due to his family's loss of status and his realization that this new order had supplanted his ideal, an agrarian, aristocratic society. He thought that the Republican Party was the party of big business and frequently characterized it as the defender of the "privileged class." In particular, he criticized the Republicans' defense of the protective tariff at the expense of the consumer. 26 Even his personal


25Ibid., passim.

regard for Theodore Roosevelt did not prevent him from criticizing Roosevelt's failure to reform the tariff, the "nursing mother of the trusts."27

Considered together Page's literary efforts indicate a reactionary man, one who looked to the past not only for solutions but also for escape. This may explain his reason for writing. To be sure, Page believed that he wrote to satisfy a desire to see himself in print.28 His writing also earned money and soothed his status anxieties, but his family was venerated in Virginia, and his marriage to Mrs. Field freed him from money worries. His literature provided him with a vehicle to satisfy his "semi-messianic compulsion to justify the South to the nation...and to explain the nation to techy Southerners."29 This compulsion was probably not only to inform others but also to provide psychological therapy for himself. Writing about the past and its glories may have helped him to direct his thoughts away from adverse racial relations and the reality of industrial and urban America. He could always direct his thoughts to the good old days through his escapist literature.30

Page's life and literary career did little to prepare him for a diplomatic post. His formal education had been fragmentary, and his performance had been mediocre. His interest in law had never been deep, and his legal


28"Recollections and Reflections," p. 25.

29Holman, p. 56.

30Friedman, pp. 69-71.
career was undistinguished. The subject of his writings had been confined
to a definite locale and era in the past. Moreover, in none of these activ­
ities had he shown any real ability to analyze, to dig below the surface for
underlying realities. Although he had traveled extensively in Europe, he
had never systematically studied European culture or history. Nor was he
fluent in any foreign language. In short, Thomas Nelson Page was a suc­
cessful local colorist, Southern apologist, conservative essayist, and Wash­
ington socialite with powerful political friends. And it was precisely these
qualities that enabled him to become an ambassador.

3. AMBASSADORIAL APPOINTMENT: THE WRITER AS DIPLOMAT

By 1910 Page's interest in writing had almost disappeared. He was
very active in Washington's social life, local and national organizations,
and political affairs. Although he was not a close personal friend of Theodore
Roosevelt, he had a cordial relationship with the President during his two
terms, and Roosevelt often consulted Page on Virginia's federal patronage. 31
People seeking government jobs for themselves or for others frequently
asked Page to use his influence on their behalf. Roosevelt usually followed
Page's suggestions. Page also had a strong position in Virginia state
politics through his ties with the administration of the University of Virginia.32

31 Several letters from Roosevelt to various people substantiate that
Page was consulted. See Roosevelt to Silas McBee, February 3,
1903 and Roosevelt to Clark Howell, February 24, 1903, for verifi­
cation of Page's role. Elting E. Moorison (ed. ), The Letters of
Theodore Roosevelt (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951-

32 Dumas Malone, Edwin A. Alderman: A Biography (New York: Double­
day, Doran and Company, Inc., 1940), pp. 152, 172, 202-203.
and Senator Thomas S. Martin's "Virginia Machine." All of these involvements made him a busy man and led to his 1910 renunciation of literature for what he hoped would be a full life as committeeman, commission-member, and statesman. 33

Having given up his literary career without much regret, Page became even more involved with Washington's political and social activities. He served on many committees and spoke for various causes, including pacifism, better public roads, anti-vivisection, alumni contributions to the University of Virginia, technical education for blacks, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Despite, or perhaps because of, these activities, he did not seek active political office, although others urged him to do so. 34

In 1912 Page became more actively involved in politics. He participated in the 1912 Democratic Convention in Baltimore as an unofficial observer. The power struggle in Virginia between the entrenched, Martin-led regular Democrats and the progressive insurgents, both represented on the Virginia delegation, was one reason for his interest. The regular Democrats favored Oscar Underwood for the Democratic presidential nominations while the progressive insurgents supported Woodrow Wilson. 35

33 Holman, p. 133.

34 A November 6, 1910 letter from E. D. Gallion to Page, for example, urged him to run for the Senate. Page Collection.

Page later claimed that he had worked for unity within the party and had supported Wilson's nomination, but there is strong circumstantial evidence indicating otherwise. A conservative Southerner, he had a close relationship with several members of the dominant Democratic "Machine," especially Senator Martin. Martin's aversion to Wilson was well-known. Moreover, Underwood's candidacy had several appeals to Page. He was the first Southerner living in the South to be an active candidate for the presidential nomination. The oft-heard cry of "The South for a Southerner." reflected Page's sentiments. Also, Underwood had studied law at the University of Virginia, Page's alma mater. Most importantly, however, Underwood, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, was the outstanding Democratic authority on the tariff and a conservative in the Jeffersonian tradition. Certainly his belief in a tariff for revenue only, his opposition to the concentration of government authority, and his advocacy of

36 Letter to the Editor, Richmond News Leader, September 14, 1912. Page was possibly "trimming" in this letter. The fact that it was written over two months after the Baltimore Convention indicated that he was now supporting Wilson for various reasons, including the desire to be considered for a political office.

37 The Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 24, 1912, p. 1, for example, noted Martin's influence in pushing the Virginia delegation for Underwood first and anyone but Wilson after that.


39 Ibid., p. 231. Wilson's ideas, although generally the same as Underwood's, were less well-known than Underwood's at this time. Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 128.
state sovereignty coincided with Page's political opinions. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Page originally supported Underwood at Baltimore. ⁴⁰

If Page actually hoped for Underwood's candidacy at Baltimore, he was disappointed. Wilson, aided by some of the political bosses whom he strongly opposed, secured the Democratic nomination. ⁴¹ But this nomination was not at all displeasing to Page. Page desired a Southern President, and Wilson, though his ties were primarily with New Jersey and Princeton University, was a native Southerner. The two men were well acquainted with each other through mutual friends, work for the Alumni Association of the University of Virginia, and membership in the Southern History Association. These ties, Page's lifelong loyalty to the Democratic Party, and the hope that Wilson might appoint him to some high office, ⁴² influenced him to openly support Wilson's campaign. Of special interest was his open letter to the editor of the New York Times. Page wrote,

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⁴⁰This opinion is at least partially bolstered by a March 14, 1913 letter from Mississippi Senator John Sharp Williams to President Wilson. In the letter Williams said that Page had probably supported Underwood at the convention. Page Collection.

⁴¹For a fuller discussion of this, see Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House, pp. 440-444. Ironically, Martin, who had great fears of Wilson destroying his organization had much to do with the Virginia delegation's swing to Wilson. Ibid., p. 460, Moger, p. 279.

⁴²A letter to Page immediately after the Baltimore Convention urged him to let his friends speak to Wilson about the ambassadorship to Great Britain. J. G. Hiden to Thomas Nelson Page, July 6, 1912, Page Collection.
"Mr. Wilson is the only candidate who represents true democracy—the government by the people—for the benefit of all the people, as opposed to a system which, for the lasting years has been for the benefit mainly of a privileged class."\(^\text{43}\) After the 1912 election, Page maintained close contacts with Wilson. He served as chairman of the Reception Committee at the inauguration. The night before the inauguration Wilson stayed at Page's home in Washington.

After the election, Page was frequently mentioned in the newspapers as an ambassadorial candidate. Some of his friends wrote that they would be very happy to write letters on his behalf. At first his reaction was coy. "Naturally one reared in Virginia is not likely to turn his back and run from a high political honor, but I have never sought political preferment and I am too set in my ways to begin it now.... I am not and could not be a candidate for office."\(^\text{44}\) Later, as indicated in a letter to Virginia Governor William Hodges Mann, his reaction was more positive:

I am in no sense a candidate for the position. It appears to me so exalted that one who should seek it himself would thereby indicate his unfitness for it, and from the beginning I have told all the friends... that, however highly I should esteem such an honor, I could not take any steps whatever to promote my chances of obtaining it. These I must leave wholly in the hands of friends. I should think that Virginia might well claim by virtue of her position to be entitled any honor. If she thinks me worthy to represent her, no one would be prouder than I, or would more zealously devote whatever abilities he possessed to her service.\(^\text{45}\)


\(^\text{44}\)Thomas Nelson Page to John S. Wise, December 23, 1912, Page Collection.

\(^\text{45}\)Thomas Nelson Page to Governor William Hodges Mann, March 13, 1913, Page Collection.
Page originally desired to be Ambassador to Great Britain. Although the newspapers frequently mentioned him in this connection, he was not seriously considered for this position which instead was offered to Walter Hines Page, a close personal friend of Wilson. Disappointed, Page resolved to settle only for an appointment to Italy or France, but he still refused to openly push his cause with his friends or the President. Undoubtedly, however, the frequent rumors, the flattering comments, and the efforts of various politicians on his behalf pleased him greatly.

In fact, it was the efforts of politicians that secured an ambassadorship for Page. President Wilson had desired to break the custom of rewarding rich contributors to party funds and worn-out politicians with diplomatic posts. Certain conditions, however, greatly modified this desire to put only qualified men in high positions. One of his basic problems was that he had to offer these positions to people who could afford to accept the resultant financial sacrifices. Poor men could not afford to be ambassadors. The annual salary of $17,500 was not nearly sufficient to cover the expense of maintaining a pretentious home and entertaining in a manner befitting a great and wealthy power. Wilson was also forced to consider influential legislators in his appointments. A practical politician, more concerned with the passage of domestic legislation than with foreign affairs, he could not afford to endanger critical programs by alienating members of

46 Thomas Nelson Page to Minna Burnaby, May 3, 1913, Thomas Nelson Page Collection, College of William and Mary.


48 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
Congress. Page benefited from these realities; he was wealthy, and he had influential Congressmen backing his appointment.

One of Wilson's problems during the first few months of 1913 was Virginia's federal patronage. A large group of Democratic insurgents led by Henry St. George, Andrew Montague, Carter Glass, Richard E. Byrd, and Allan D. Jones had fought to break the control over the party by Thomas S. Martin, Claude Swanson, Henry D. Flood, and others. Wilson's victory had appeared to indicate a victory for the insurgents, the original Wilson backers in Virginia. Martin's regular Democrats were fearful. They had vigorously opposed Wilson's nomination, primarily because he was a threat to machine politics, although they endorsed his candidacy after the Democratic convention. Nevertheless, Wilson strongly attacked the Martin machine in a speech delivered in Staunton, Virginia in late 1912.\textsuperscript{49} Those who had sought to break the machine stranglehold on local and state government awaited an overt demonstration of Wilson's gratefulness for their support. His nomination of Joseph E. Willard, a wealthy politician,\textsuperscript{50} for an ambassadorial post would be the first sign.

Although Wilson was very much in sympathy with the insurgents, he had to deal realistically with the situation. His first consideration was the

\textsuperscript{49}Moger, pp. 282-287. See also Kaufmann, pp. 12-16 and \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, March 13, 1913, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{50}Joseph E. Willard was a rich resident of Fairfax, Virginia. He had been a member of the House of Delegates, Virginia's Lieutenant governor from 1902-1906, and an unsuccessful candidate for Senator. Moger, pp. 178,212
slim Democratic majority in the Senate (51 Democrats to 44 Republicans). The machine backed Page for an appointment, and the President could not afford to offend these politicians. Martin was one of the most influential Democrats in the Senate. He had been Senate majority leader in the 62nd Congress and had expected to become the majority leader in the 63rd Congress. But Secretary of State Bryan and Wilson backed Senator John W. Kern of Indiana instead. It would have been dangerous for Wilson to antagonize Martin and the regular Virginia Democrats any further. As chairman of the critical Senate Appropriations Committee, Martin retained considerable influence. The junior Senator from Virginia, Claude Swanson, held an important position on the Naval Affairs Committee. Other machine supporters held powerful positions in the House of Representatives. Representative Harry Flood, for example, was the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Equally important, however, Wilson could not risk alienating the insurgents. They also held crucial positions on key committees. Especially critical was Representative Carter Glass, Chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee. If Wilson's plans for reforming the


52Ibid.


54Grantham, p. 304.
currency system were to be realized, he could not risk a break with Glass. Rather than choose one man and risk alienating the opposing faction, Wilson named Joseph E. Willard Ambassador to Belgium and Thomas Nelson Page Ambassador to Italy.

The public reaction to Page's appointment was quite favorable. Hundreds of congratulatory telegrams, letters, and notes came to his Washington home. The New York Times, the New York Sun, and the Richmond Times-Dispatch praised his appointment because he was a man of letters and culture. To these newspapers and others the appointment was a suitable reward for a man of Page's reputation. They all expressed the opinion that Page would make an excellent ambassador.

Page reacted with understandable pride and uncharacteristic humility. In a letter to his brother, Rosewell Page, he wrote:

As the time draws nearer to cut loose from the old moorings and launch out in such new seas, I find myself considerably sobered by the prospect, but I trust and pray that everything will come out all right. Certainly I mean


56Later, when his political position was stronger, Wilson moved away from compromises and increasingly favored the machine Democrats. Link, Wilson: The New Freedom, p. 162.

57New York Times, June 16, 1913, p. 8; New York Evening Sun, June 18, 1913, Page Collection; and Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 18, 1913, p. 7.
to do my utmost to justify the confidence which my friends have imposed in me. 58

Because Page had almost no real qualifications for his new position, his six years in Italy was an extremely trying experience. He was sixty years old and had several physical ailments that plagued him until he died. A career as a lawyer, writer, Washington socialite, and political dilet-tante had done little to prepare him for the administrative aspects of his position, although they enabled him to deal very effectively with the social requirements. Although he worked very diligently to master Italian, his lack of fluency and intimate knowledge of Italian politics often caused him to depend on unreliable or informal sources of information. All of these liabilities hampered his effectiveness as Ambassador to Italy.

CHAPTER II

TRIAL UNDER FIRE: PAGE AS AMBASSADOR, 1913-1917

On September 3, 1913, Thomas Nelson Page and his wife left the United States on the Lusitania. Heeding diplomatic protocol he purposely planned to travel to England and then to Italy. This would avoid his arrival in Italy long before he could present his credentials to King Victor Emmanuel III, who was not expected to return to Rome from his summer villa until the Italian Parliament reconvened in November. Consequently, the Pages arrived in Rome in late September. Because the King was not yet in Rome, there was nothing much for Page to do.

1. A NEW JOB: PEACEFUL INTERLUDE, 1913-1914

Although Page did not worry very much about the exact nature of his job, he did have some general goals. Of utmost importance was his desire for a stronger, friendlier relationship between the United States and Italy. He believed that an important first step was to make Italy and the United States better known to each other. Mutual ignorance was a fundamental problem in Italian-American relations. The American attitude toward Italy had been shaped by two major factors: art and immigrants. From the

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Italian immigrants the American people created a durable, tenacious stereotype; Italy for them was truly a terra incognita. Likewise, the Italians had very little knowledge of the United States. The sources of their conceptions were Italian emigrants and American tourists. The result was an extremely distorted picture of the United States. Surprised and shocked at the extent of Italian ignorance of America, Page spent much of his time in an attempt to make his country better understood.

One of Page's major tasks was to learn Italian. The ability to speak and write Italian fluently would obviously draw him closer to the people by showing them that he cared about and respected their culture. This impression was reinforced by his observation of popular reaction to his Italian-speaking wife. Page spent four years learning the language and was able to talk to government officials and make public speeches in Italian by the end of this period. This undoubtedly helped him to become a very popular person in Rome.

Although his goals were rather vague and general, Page was determined to be a successful ambassador. An efficient embassy staff was a necessary first step. Unfortunately, he faced several handicaps. For one


thing, he was the third American Ambassador in four years. Moreover, the United States did not even own a permanent Embassy in Rome. Page soon found that there was considerable friction among the embassy staff. To make matters worse, the First Secretary of the embassy, Post Wheeler, was accused of abusing his diplomatic privileges in the importation of dutiable articles, especially gas.

Page reacted quickly to alleviate these problems. After searching Rome for suitable quarters, he leased the Palazzo del Drago, which had been occupied by two previous American ambassadors. He was glad to obtain a residence that would compare favorably with the other embassies in Rome. He also asked the State Department to investigate the problems of the embassy staff. As a result, the two secretaries of the embassy were recalled, and Arthur Frazier, Second Secretary of the Austrian Embassy, was temporarily transferred to Rome. By the end of December 1913, the embassy had two permanent secretaries, Norval Richardson and Peter Jay. Page was pleased with all these men, especially Frazier.

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6 The two previous ambassadors were John G.A. Leishman, who served from April 1, 1909, to August 12, 1911, and Thomas J. O'Brien, who served from August 12, 1911 to June 21, 1913.

7 Gould, p. 66.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
Except for the unpleasant affair of the embassy staff, Page liked Italy and his new job, and was pleased by the public reaction to him. "The newspapers," he noted, "all had the most flattering reports, much too flattering." He was also impressed with his ceremonial reception by King Victor Emmanuel III at his summer estate, Via Rossore, and found the King and Queen to be delightful people. Page's extreme desire for formal recognition was satisfied, and he was elated. "I wish you could have been there," he wrote to his daughter, "we reached the highest point of social eminence."12

But six months later much of the glamor had faded away as Page faced the routine nature of his job. He became disappointed and bored with much of his work, and found little time to spend on writing. He was unhappy because most of what he did seemed unimportant. Thus, he complained that most of his days were spent seeing people who wanted to use him for their own purposes.13 Obviously, these activities did not correspond to his expectations of recognition and importance.

When not concerned with these routine daily tasks, Page worked zealously to convince Italian officials to ratify Secretary of State Bryan's

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12 Thomas Nelson Page to Minna Burnaby, November 30, 1913, Thomas Nelson Page Collection, College of William and Mary.

13 Thomas Nelson Page to Rosewell and Ruth Page, April 12; 1914, Page Collection.
arbitration treaty. Page was interested in it because it was closer to his ideal of an ambassador's duties and because of an association with the cause of international arbitration. He was enthusiastic about convincing Italy of the treaty's importance:

For such a long time, all the great powers have been shy of such treaties--I mean treaties to investigate all questions of differences and if I can get Italy to consent to do it as I believe she is going to do, it will be the first case in which one of the great powers has consented to do it.  

The treaty called for a "cooling-off" period in the event of an international dispute, and provided for the establishment of a five-member commission to investigate and report on the problem. For once his efforts were rewarded. The arbitration treaty's ratification was approved by the United States Senate on August 13, 1914, and President Wilson signed it on March 17, 1915. The Italian government ratified it on November 29, 1914. These ratifications were exchanged on March 19, 1915, and the treaty was proclaimed March 24, 1915.

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14 In 1910 for instance, Page had addressed the American Society for Judicial Settlement of International Disputes. Page Collection.

15 Thomas Nelson Page to Roosevelt and Ruth Nelson Page, April 12, 1914, Page Collection.


Any exhilaration that Page might have felt about this achievement, however, was lost in the course of events that began in July 1914. World War I began while the Pages were in England on a summer vacation. They immediately cancelled their plans and hastened back to Italy. "I am here in England trying to get off to Rome amid chaotic and indescribable conditions," wrote Page. "The whole world seems going to war. Thank God we had a wise strong President with sense and character enough to save us this."18 A week later he was in Rome to begin a long, frustrating five-year attempt to deal with the complex problems of war and peace.

2. WORLD WAR I: THE PERIOD OF ITALIAN NEUTRALITY

Page's initial reactions to the "Great War" were mixed. Shocked by its magnitude and brutality, he believed it constituted the gravest danger to mankind in history.19 Simultaneously, he was exulted by the tremendous change. Now his job became more important and relevant;20 he had been released from the drudgery of his former existence. He cabled the government more frequently, because he believed he had important news to tell. He was instrumental in forming a Relief Committee to deal with the problems of American citizens in war-threatened Italy. The Relief Committee was effective in getting Americans back to the United States, and President

18Thomas Nelson Page to Rosewell Page, August 3, 1914, Page Collection.

19Thomas Nelson Page to Rosewell Page, August 27, 1914, Page Collection.

20Ibid.
Wilson congratulated Page for his activities during this period.  

Page's analysis of the war was unsophisticated and oversimplified. He thought that its roots were increased armaments and universal military service, which had caused the rise of European militarism. He blamed an international conspiracy of munitions manufacturers for encouraging this militarism. The war itself was a threat to civilization, and the biggest threat of all was Germany, Page's villain. German militarism, and its insane desire for territory, had caused the war, and a German victory would bring a return to "medievalism." The Entente, especially Great Britain, opposed this German madness and fought to save civilization. Reverting to his former racist ideas, he predicted that the Anglo-Saxon qualities of bravery and fortitude would bring an Entente victory.

In August 1914, the Italian government found itself in a precarious diplomatic position. Technically it was bound to the Triple Alliance, originally ratified in 1882 and most recently renewed in 1912. But in 1914 Italy was not prepared for, and did not want, war. Her Foreign Minister, Marquis Antonio Di San Giuliano recognized the traditional Italian hatred for Austria and the popular belief that Austria had caused World War I. He also knew that fighting on either side would be disastrous.

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21 Woodrow Wilson to Thomas Nelson Page, December 8, 1914, Page Collection.

22 Thomas Nelson Page, "Has Civilization Failed?", undated ms, Page Collection, p. 3.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 6.
for Italy. The Italian Army was woefully unprepared and had 50,000 men fighting in Libya. For him neutrality was the only feasible alternative. Article Seven of the Triple Alliance offered him an escape. It provided specifically for consultation prior to any military action, but the Austrian government had not notified Italy about its ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, 1914. Consequently, Di San Giuliano was on sound legal ground when he refused to honor the alliance and declared Italian neutrality on August 3, 1914.

The precariousness of Italy's diplomatic position was not appreciably diminished by the neutrality declaration. If her former allies won a decisive victory, Italy could not expect much generosity at the peace table. More likely, Italian neutrality would be regarded by Austria as a pretext to insure her dominance in the areas to which Italy also aspired. Entering the war as a cobelligerent with her former allies also seemed dubious. Austria-Hungary had broken the alliance by ignoring Article Seven; it seemed reasonable to assume that she would continue to try to cheat Italy of her territorial ambitions if the Central Powers were victorious. Even


more decisive to Italian foreign policymakers was the Battle of the Marne, which shattered the myth of German military invincibility. Now it appeared that Italy had everything to lose and nothing to gain by cobelligerency with the Central Powers.  

By October 1914, Di San Giuliano was sure that the Entente would win. If Italy remained neutral, she would gain nothing. If, however, she entered the war on the side of the Entente, she would have the opportunity to achieve her goals of national unity and expanded Italian boundaries. Di San Giuliano died later that month, but his successor, Baron Sidney Sonnino, and Premier Antonio Salandra shared his views. Although they consulted with Germany and Austria-Hungary, they concentrated on the Entente. Their success came with the secret Treaty of London, which was signed April 26, 1915. In this treaty Italy modified her initial territorial demands, partially because of Russian objections but primarily because of her fear that the war might end before she could enter it. Nonetheless, the Treaty promised substantial amounts of territory to Italy's north and east. If the Entente won and honored the Treaty of London, Italy would have defensible frontiers and dominance in the Adriatic Sea.

When Salandra signed the Treaty of London, he agreed to declare war

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27Renzi, p. 1423.

28Seton-Watson, pp. 431-432.

the government had to face the problem of creating an atmosphere of war enthusiasm. It carefully planned its campaign with organized public demonstrations. Gabrielle D'Annunzio, the flamboyant Italian poet-adventurer, came to Rome and created popular war fever with his inflammatory speeches.

After the King's desire for war became known, the neutralists seemed to melt away. As a result, when war was declared on May 23, 1915, the Italian public and the Parliament overwhelmingly supported belligerency. 31

Throughout this period of Italian neutrality Page tried to keep the State Department and President Wilson informed. Although he had no knowledge of the terms and circumstances of the Treaty of London, 32 his letters, telegrams, and dispatches provided the administration with a reasonably accurate account of Italian diplomacy and politics. He realized that the declaration of neutrality was temporary, that Italy was quite unprepared for hostilities in August. Thus, he wrote of the quiet war preparations of the Italian government during the winter of 1914. Troops were sent to the northeastern Italian border, and factories ran night and day. The government bought war supplies and coal from the United States.

30 The Roman Catholic Church, organized labor, Parliament and the general population were decidedly neutralist at this time. Seton-Watson, p. 1438.

31 Ibid.

32 Page did not learn the exact terms of the Treaty of London until the Russian government printed them in 1917. He did have a general idea of the territorial provisions of the agreement, however.

33 Thomas Nelson Page to Secretary of State Bryan, August 22, 1914, Foreign Relations of the United States, Supplement 1914, p. 69.
indications of Italian war preparations were demonstrated by the appointment of General Vittorio Zupelli as Minister of War, increased governmental funds for military purposes, money borrowed for testing new siege guns, and a troop build-up to a fighting capacity of 1,200,000 men by December, 1914.

Page also kept the government informed about the course of diplomatic negotiations between Italy and the Entente. His reports reflected the belief that Italy was craftily bargaining with both sides to obtain maximum territorial concessions. As early as August 1914, he predicted that Italy would declare war on Austria to gain territory. Although he occasionally wrote that the Central Powers might be able to lure Italy to its side, his dispatches usually indicated that Italy would join the Entente. Of utmost

34Page to Bryan, November 19, 1914, ibid., p. 143.
35Ibid.
36Page to President Wilson, January 1, 1915, Wilson Papers, Series 2.
37Ibid.
38This interpretation, which has colored so many subsequent histories of the period is disputed by William Renzi, who convincingly argues that Italy could realistically enter the war only on the side of the Entente. He writes that the negotiations with Vienna were a ruse to deceive the Central Powers about Italy's true intentions and to alarm the Entente, thereby maximizing its ultimate receptivity to Italian demands., p. 1427.
importance were his letters to the chief policymakers, President Wilson, Secretary Bryan, and Colonel House. These letters emphasized Italy's sole motivation as sacre egoismo. Thus, Italy's policy of "watchful waiting" was designed to maximize what she could gain from the war. At Nice, in April 1915, Page met with Colonel House and told him, "Italy is acting in a wholly selfish way and... it matters little with her whether she supports the Allies or the Dual Alliance, provided she is on the winning side." The image was clear: Italy's motives were solely territorial. It was a picture that Washington never forgot, and helped determine American policy towards Italy from 1917 to 1919.

3. AMERICAN NEUTRALITY: PAGE'S PROBLEMS AND EFFORTS

From the outbreak of war in 1914 until American intervention in April 1917, American foreign policy centered on the two most powerful adversaries, Great Britain and Germany. Relations with these two countries were of primary importance because each pursued policies that directly

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43 Gould, p. 73.
influenced American interests.\textsuperscript{44} Italy, however, remained \textit{terra incognita}. Italian belligerency did not change the indifferent relations between her and the United States. Americans were ignorant of the Italian war effort. To be sure there was some reaction to her declaration of war on Austria-Hungary. Some people condemned Italy for deserting the Triple Alliance, while others praised her for joining the Entente. But press and cinema coverage of the Italian military effort against Austria-Hungary was minimal; concentration again focused on the Western Front's deadlock. Also, the Italian war effort had little effect on the American economy. Italy purchased coal, wheat, iron ore, and cotton and woolen goods from the United States, but these orders did not come close to the size of British and French orders. Thus, at the popular level, Italy's war was a \textit{guerra incognita}.\textsuperscript{45}

The American policymakers also remained relatively indifferent to Italy during this period. Lansing, House, and Wilson were more concerned with the Allied blockade and the German submarine. Their indifference was reinforced by the Entente's attitude towards Italy. Their war was with Germany; Italy's was with Austria-Hungary.\textsuperscript{46} Believing that their troops had to remain in Western Europe, Great Britain and France forced Italy to fight in isolation. Great Britain negotiated with the United States for the Entente.


\textsuperscript{45}Gould, pp. 61-64.

\textsuperscript{46}Italy did not declare war on Germany until August 28, 1916.
Italy was not even consulted during either of the House peace missions to Europe.47

Conversely, Italy remained aloof and indifferent to the United States during this period. The poor people, who knew the most about America from their relatives in the United States and American tourists, thought of her in terms of material possessions and wealth.48 The upper class had almost no knowledge of the country.49 Many Italians disliked or distrusted the United States and believed that America was motivated by unclear territorial aspirations. According to Page, some even believed that the United States eyed areas coveted by Italy.50 This fixation on tangible territorial motives made it difficult to understand Wilson's purposes. In addition, Italy was extremely apprehensive about the possibility of American intervention on the side of the Entente. Many Italians believed that this might divert war supplies away from Italy. Also, there was the possibility that American military efforts might overshadow Italian exertions and diminish her influence at the peace conference, thus endangering her territorial hopes.51 Italy, to say the least, was not overly enthusiastic about the United States.


48Page to Senator John Sharp Williams, March 14, 1915, Page Collection.

49Gould, p. 61.

50Page to House, February 1, 1916, Page Collection.

51Page to Wilson, February 3, 1917, Wilson Papers, Series. 2.
The Italian government was responsible for much of this distrust. The officials did not understand American policy. Two people in particular were responsible for this. In Washington, the Italian Ambassador to the United States, Marquis Di Cellere, failed to transmit accurate information about Wilson's policies. Because he had few contacts with American officials, he constantly misinterpreted Washington's plans to Italy. The only thing he clearly understood was American ignorance of Italy. At this level, however, he was frustrated by the dominant person of Italian foreign policy, Foreign Minister Baron Sidney Sonnino. Dedicated to the point of fanaticism to a dream of Italian security as defined in the Treaty of London, Sonnino adhered to a policy of secrecy. He refused to approve the necessary funds to spread Italian propaganda. According to Page, Sonnino recognized the United States as a power and feared her. Nevertheless, he refused to take any active steps to deal with the situation and remained relatively indifferent.

It was within these confines of mutual ignorance and different emphases that Page had to work. Obviously, this condition complicated an already difficult task. Still, Page made some definite contributions to improving Italian popular opinion of the United States. Such successes were not equalled on the governmental level, however, because Page's influence on official policies was minimal.

52 Gould, p. 87.

53 Page to House, November 27, 1914, as cited in Gould, p. 87.
One of the few specific issues involving both countries at this time was the problem of naturalized citizens. In 1907 the United States government had begun the process of negotiations for a naturalization convention. In particular, the State Department was concerned with a conflict of Italian laws. Article XI, clause 2 of the Italian Civil Code provided that Italian citizenship was lost by any person acquiring citizenship of a foreign country. But under Italian law the naturalization of any Italian in a foreign country without the consent of the Italian government was considered no bar to military service. Consequently, the United States government asked for a treaty of mutual recognition of naturalizations and immunity for a naturalized citizen from punishment in his native land for offenses committed after his emigration.

The Italian government, however, declined to negotiate in 1907, and the problem still existed in 1914. Thus, when war broke out and Italy began its rapid buildup of military forces, many Italian-Americans found themselves in an unpleasant situation. The Italian government contended that all naturalized American citizens of Italian birth, all persons born in the United States of Italian parents before the parents' naturalization, and even some people born after the parents naturalization were liable

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54 Foreign Relations, 1914, p. 391.
55 Ibid., p. 392.
56 The Italian government told Ambassador Griscom that the subject was too complex to regulate by international agreement and that an Italian commission would investigate changing Italian laws regarding citizenship. Ambassador Griscom to the Secretary of State (Elihu Root), June 19, 1908, Ibid., p. 395.
to military service. In accordance with this policy, Italian-American males traveling or studying in Italy were detained, and many were forced into Italian military units. To compound the problem the Italian authorities objected that American passports were the same for native and naturalized citizens. Their insistence on birth certificates and other proofs of identity resulted in the detention of many innocent people. And as the need for manpower increased, the Italian government resorted to holding wives and children of naturalized Italian citizens in the United States to compel their husbands and fathers to return to Italy for military service.

Page was kept busy with negotiations for the release of these dual citizens. From 1914 to 1917 the Embassy received a steady stream of inquiries from parents, spouses, relatives, congressmen, and State Department officials. In each case Page and his aides had to try to get all the information from Italian and American sources. He made repeated visits to the Italian Foreign Office and wrote many letters. Often he received only vague verbal promises to investigate. Some of the requests for release from Italian military service were legitimate, but others were not. Although

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57 Consul Shank to the Secretary of State, September 2, 1914, ibid., pp. 404-405.


59 One example of this was the request for exemption from Italian military service of Carmine Mazza. Upon investigation it was found that both young Mazza and his father were Italian citizens. Furthermore, Mazza had been an Italian resident for thirteen years prior to his military induction. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ambassador Page, February 2, 1916, ibid., p. 401.
some were honored by the Italian government, many others were denied. The complexity of the laws involved, the time-consuming investigations, and the futility of so many cases tired the Ambassador and his overworked staff.

Realizing that the easiest way to resolve the problem was a naturalization treaty, in September 1914, Page requested the State Department for permission to talk to Italian officials.60 Counselor Robert Lansing wrote back that the time was not favorable for such negotiations.61 Page was not satisfied with this answer and repeated his request.62 This met with a more favorable response from the State Department. Lansing answered Page's telegram: "The Department's views coincide with your own as to the great desirability of concluding a naturalization treaty with Italy. It is believed that such a treaty will be the only means of solving the vexed question of disputed nationality."63

Encouraged by this message, Page talked with Italian officials about the proposed treaty. In December, conversations with Sonnino convinced him that an early settlement was a distinct possibility. He believed that the Italian desire for closer commercial relations and increasing American tourism would convince the officials of the desirability of such an agreement.64

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61Counselor Lansing to Page, October 7, 1914, ibid., p. 409.

62Page to Bryan, October 14, 1914, ibid., pp. 410-411.

63Lansing to Page, November 20, 1914, ibid., p. 412.

64Page to Bryan, December 14, 1914, ibid., p. 412-413.
But his initial optimism dwindled with endless conferences bringing no tangible results. Sonnino continually expressed a desire to reach a settlement, but he always said that the present time was not convenient for negotiations.  

As Page's hopes for a treaty disappeared, the State Department became more irritated with the Italian government. What especially irked American officials was the Italian practice of holding wives and children of naturalized American citizens to induce the latter to return for military service. After several years of complaints the Italian government was persuaded to permit the unrestricted departure of these people. But the impressment of naturalized citizens and sons of naturalized citizens continued to be a source of disagreements. Although a relatively minor affair in comparison with the German submarine or the British blockade, the failure to resolve this difficulty was an ominous indication of subsequent

66 See for example, Lansing to Charge' Jay, May 1, 1916, _ibid.,_ pp 409-410. Also, Lansing to Jay, May 12, 1916, _ibid.,_ p. 414.  
68 In 1918, Italy and the United States solved part of the problem with a treaty on conscription. This treaty allowed male citizens of one country to choose service either in their resident country or their country of residence. It set a time limit of sixty days for choosing service under either flag after the proclamation of the treaty and allowed for preservation of nationality regardless of which flag the citizen served under. U.S. Department of State, Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements between the U.S. and Other Powers, 1910-1923 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), III, pp. 2708-2711.
Unsuccessful in his attempts to bring the two countries together on naturalization, Page was more fortunate in some of his unofficial acts. On January 13, 1915, central Italy was devastated by an earthquake whose tremors lasted for a week.\textsuperscript{69} The death toll was over 30,000 and damages were estimated at $60,000,000.\textsuperscript{70} Page reacted quickly and inquired about any aid that the United States might offer. The Italian government replied that it would not accept aid from any foreign country.\textsuperscript{71} After visiting the earthquake-damaged area, Page and his wife established a private fund to which many people contributed. Administered by Mrs. Page, the fund furnished money for the construction of shelters and the making of clothes.\textsuperscript{72} This act was greatly appreciated by the Italian public and Page later received a medal for his generosity during this time.

Other acts to befriend Italy during her period of belligerency were restricted by American neutrality and Italian apathy to aid. Though dis-

\textsuperscript{69}The hardest hit town was Avezzano, located forty miles west of Rome. Of 11,279 people in the town, only 800 survived the disaster. \textit{New York Times}, January 15, 1915, p. 1. Rome and Naples also felt tremors, but damage there was minimal. The American Embassy was cracked by the quake and plaster fell from its ceiling. \textit{New York Times}, January 14, 1915, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{72}\textit{New York Times}, June 12, 1921, Section II, p. 6.
couraged by this indifference, the Pages worked to help war-ravaged Italy. Page sought money for the American Red Cross's activities, while his wife led volunteer work of American ladies in Rome. The women made shirts for Italian soldiers and supplies for hospitals. Mrs. Page also organized the American Relief Clearing House, which received private American funds to buy badly needed medical supplies. She spent much time and effort on these projects. Efficiently operated, the programs were popular with Italians because they showed the sympathy of the Pages for Italy.

4. THE WANING OF PAGE'S INFLUENCE

More than any other time, the period of May 1915 to April 1917, crystallized Page's opinions. Like Walter Hines Page, United States Ambassador to Great Britain, he became an advocate of the country to which he was accredited. He sympathized with Italy's hardships and war sacrifices, which he compared to the suffering of the Confederacy during the

73 Thomas Nelson Page to Rosewell and Ruth Nelson Page, October 22, 1915, Page Collection. Page believed that the Italians had some justification for this feeling: "The 'helpers' have probably bragged too much about this." Ibid.

74 See New York Times, February 8, 1917, p. 11 for a description of these activities. The efforts of the American women were quite impressive. By 1917 they had produced more than 100,000 shirts, bandages, and other supplies. Ibid.

75 Even after Page's death these acts were recalled by the Italian people. New York Times, November 3, 1922, p. 16.
Civil War. 76 His views were reinforced by the sight of wounded soldiers in Roman hospitals and even in the Embassy itself. 77 In August 1916, the Italian government permitted him to visit the Italian front. Page came away deeply impressed by the difficulty of the Italian soldiers' task and their obvious bravery. "No one who knows the region will ever say the Italians are not doing wonders," he wrote. "It is really incredible." 78

This sympathy caused Page to seek means to promote a more complete understanding by the American people. He believed that this was necessary because both countries were isolated, the United States by neutrality, Italy by her war with Austria-Hungary. 79 Aware that the American public did not get much information about Italy's war, 80 he sought to explain her reasons for fighting as well as her military bravery. When he visited the Italian front he wrote a dispatch for the Associated Press that was carried in many major newspapers. Even more important was his journey to the United States in 1916. Although the visit was primarily personal, Page

76 Page to House, October 29, 1918, Page Collection. See also Page to Minna Burnaby, August 28, 1916, Thomas Nelson Page Collection, College of William and Mary.

77 Gould, pp. 71-72.


79 Page to House, February 1, 1916, Page Collection.

80 This was as much a result of Italian censorship as it was a lack of interest by American newspapers.
used two interviews with the New York Times to defend Italy's war motives and her failure to declare war on Germany. He also praised the courage of the Italian soldiers.

As his sympathy for Italy grew stronger, his ability to objectively assess the Italian situation dwindled. In his earlier dispatches of 1914-1915 Page had demonstrated a good grasp of Realpolitik and a remarkable adjustment to Old World politics. A man accustomed to write of "Liberty" and "Democracy," he noted almost wistfully that "None of these countries seem to consider the sentimental side as our people do. They look the facts coldly in the face." Despite his inexperience, his reports during the period of Italian neutrality had been reasonably accurate; however, even though he now had more experience, they became less precise in 1916 and early 1917.

Part of Page's problem was a lack of objectivity, which clouded his perception of events. Many of his reports and letters contained explanations of why Italy was fighting. These dispatches differed in tone from his earlier messages. His sympathy caused him to emphasize the war idealism of the Italian people rather than the machinations of the government.


Page also defended Wilson's neutrality policy in the latter interview.


See, for example, Page to Lansing, March 20, 1917, The Lansing Papers, I, pp. 757-758.
In 1916 Page became concerned by the forthcoming presidential election. Consequently, many of his telegrams and letters concentrated on praising Wilson's domestic and foreign policies, and denouncing the Republicans, especially Theodore Roosevelt, as war-mongerers. Instead of analysis, many of his messages contained justification of past events. His information during this time was limited.

Page's loss of objectivity was not the only reason for his lack of perception. The condition of American and Italian diplomacy at this time played a big part. Because diplomatic appointments were considered as part of the spoils system, to be freely distributed after presidential elections to political appointees, Page was an inexperienced and untrained official. He bravely faced the prospect of performing his functions, but Orlando's policy of secrecy and a lack of knowledge and reliable sources of information hampered him. It took time to interpret the mood of another country and to develop contacts among other diplomats, government officials, and the press. Page simply could not approach the professional level of reporting of ambassadors like Claude Barrière of France and Sir Rennell Rodd of Great Britain. Between them these men had had twenty-five years of service in Italy by 1914. Forced to rely on information from the Italian press and tidbits gathered from other ambassadors and their staffs and handicapped by his own ability to


86Gould, p. 66.
analyze, Page just had to overcome too many obstacles. He did his best by cultivating people like Salvatore Cortesi, the Italian representative for the Associated Press, and creating his own intelligence department under the military attache' at the Embassy. Nonetheless, his reports became less reliable about Italian governmental policy. Sonnino's policy of withholding information about war aims, coupled with Page's lack of access to many people with intimate knowledge of Italian politics, made it impossible for the Ambassador to forward clear views of what Italy planned. Moreover, Sonnino's evasiveness in personal interviews made it difficult for Page to adequately analyze the aims of the enigmatic Foreign Minister. Finally, his preoccupation with justifying Italy and defending Wilsonian policies kept Page from devoting all his energies to reports of present and future policy rather than past actions.

There is evidence that Page fell out of favor with the major foreign policymakers in Washington during the period of American neutrality. Although President Wilson wrote several letters of commendation, he privately confided to Secretary Lansing that he found some of Page's dispatches vague and somewhat inaccurate. He also made some comments


about an interview with Page that had caused some controversy. "Evidently," he wrote, "the Ambassador has as much trouble in Italy as we have on this side of the water in regulating interviews and determining their content."90 House also lost some faith in Page during this period, primarily because of Page's inability to master a diplomatic code.91

These opinions made it unlikely that Page's reports received much serious consideration by the President or the State Department in 1916 and 1917. Page had become another of Wilson's superfluous ambassadors.92 Even his earnest efforts to support Wilson's re-election in 1916 came to no avail. Believing that his writing talent could help the President, he prepared a spirited essay on Wilson, "President Wilson's Critics: A Challenge--Not a Defence," which he hoped to publish in American newspapers. The State Department was not enthusiastic about this and advised him not to publish it.93


91 House Diary, April 4, 11, 1915, as cited in Gould, p. 72.


93 In April, 1916, Colonel House, having heard of Page's plans, wrote to Secretary Lansing, "I have a feeling that it may not be in the best of taste for an Ambassador to write complimentary articles concerning the Administration under which he is serving and is a part." House to Lansing, April 20, 1916, The Lansing Papers, I, p. 736.
An administration that was wary of its ambassador would not pay much heed to him in formulating its policy. Wilson might have considered removing Page, but there was a dearth of qualified replacements at this time. He decided against replacing Walter Hines Page, American Ambassador to Great Britain, for the same reason. Also, the United States was not deeply involved with Italian affairs at this time. Why replace a man in a relatively unimportant country at a time when other matters were so much more pressing? In any case, the United States had no clearly defined Italian policy. Diplomatic attention focused on Great Britain and Germany. Although matters concerning Italy came up during this period, no coherent plan was developed. An example of this lack of direction was the case of the Attualità.

On September 9, 1916, the owner of a Greek steamer, the Mina, filed suit in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia against the Italian steamship Attualità to recover $800,000 in losses resulting from a collision between the two ships in the Mediterranean Sea. The Attualità had been attached in Norfolk pending the court's decision. On September 28, 1916, the District Court ordered the release of the vessel, but the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit overruled this decree. The Italian government protested the decision and claimed exemption from attachment as a requisitioned vessel of a friendly

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Secretary Lansing, in a closely reasoned and legalistic letter, rejected the Italian argument and said the Attualità was not an armed public vessel entitled to immunity under international law. Italy continued to disagree, especially when a United States judge ordered the sale of the ship to pay the damages awarded to the Greek claimants.

Although the case was closed by the sale of the ship on August 7, 1917, to an Italian company, it indicated several salient features of Italian-American policy. Like the problem of naturalization, the Attualità case was never satisfactorily resolved. As a result, mutual irritations between the two countries began to develop, irritations that grew when they became cobelligerents. The policy of the United States was a response, a reaction rather than a part of an overall plan. The diplomatic preoccupation with Great Britain and Germany precluded the framing of such a policy. Even more indicative of Italian-American relations was a telegram sent by Page to Lansing in December 1916:

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) earnestly requests my aid in obtaining release and prompt departure for Italy of steamer Attualità requisitioned by Italian Government, now under seizure Norfolk on complaint of Greek shipowner. Grain cargo Attualità greatly needed here. Baron Sonnino reminds me agreement had previously been reached with

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97 Lansing to DiCellere, October 26, 1916, ibid., pp. 680-685.
99 Ibid., p. 687.
Department that no ships requisitioned by Italy would be subjected to seizure. 100

To say that there was a failure to communicate is an understatement. Baron Sonnino was either unaware of Lansing's letter to Ambassador Di Cellere or he chose to ignore the American position. This bland indifference on Sonnino's part continued to plague Italian-American rapprochement, especially at the Paris Peace Conference. No less strange is Page's unawareness of his government's position. Despite the stress of these months, the State Department's failure to inform Page of its policies was inexcusable. As far as the State Department was concerned, Italy and its American ambassador were not worthy of serious consideration. Mutual ignorance and indifference were policies that would have disastrous results two years later.

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100 Page to Lansing, December 11, 1916, ibid., p. 685.
CHAPTER III

ITALY AND THE UNITED STATES AT WAR, 1917-1918

The German government announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare on January 31, 1917. Until April 6, 1917, the United States remained a state between peace and war. Each of President Wilson's major decisions during this period was reached only after much mental anguish and deliberation. By March 21, Wilson believed that he had no alternative but war. He had lost faith in his ability to bring Germany to the peace table because of her assault on American shipping and her Zimmermann telegram proposing to involve the United States in a war with Mexico and Japan. Wilson was convinced that American belligerency would bring an early peace, an increased influence with the Entente and Germany, and a greater chance to promote an effective and just peace settlement.¹ Thus he appeared before Congress on April 2 and asked for a declaration of war. On April 6, 1917, Good Friday, Congress declared war on Germany. Although Italy and her enemy Austria-Hungary had played no significant part in Wilson's decision, the United States and Italy were now co-belligerents. Two short years later, the two countries were abysmally divided.

1. INITIAL REACTIONS TO AMERICAN BELLIGERENCY

Page had followed Wilson's diplomacy with much interest. For several years he had written friends, relatives, and public officials that American security was inextricably tied to the outcome of the European war. He expressed this feeling to President Wilson as early as November 1914, three short months after the conflict's beginning. Although he originally did not believe Germany to be a practical menace, he gradually changed his mind. By mid-1915, he was convinced that German militarism and desire to intervene in Latin American affairs constituted a grave danger. He wrote that a victorious Germany would take the first possible opportunity to interfere in the affairs of Mexico and South America. The sinking of the Lusitania and the Sussex confirmed his distrust of Germany.

Page, who believed in power as a force in world diplomacy, thought a strong United States could exert much influence on the European powers. For much of the period of American neutrality Page hoped that its power could be used to peacefully intervene to save the world from self-destruction. When Italy entered the war, he abandoned his original idea of a concert of

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2 Thomas Nelson Page to President Wilson, November 11, 1914, Thomas Nelson Page Collection, Duke University. Hereinafter referred to as Page Collection.

neutral powers to end the war and hoped for mediation by the United States alone. From May, 1915, to November, 1916, his hopes dwindled, but Wilson's reelection in 1916 once again increased his expectations. Now European governments would more readily recognize Wilson's power and aid the United States to effect a just and durable peace. But the failure of the Wilson peace movement in the winter of 1916-1917 quickly ended these hopes.

Besides supporting mediation, he also advocated military readiness. During American neutrality, Page frequently wrote letters arguing for preparedness. He was concerned about the rise of German militarism and feared a postwar revolutionary spirit in Europe. Apprehensive of American security in general, he believed that America would have to show its "teeth." He strongly backed Wilson's preparedness program of 1916, although its emphasis on naval building neglected the swift anti-submarine craft necessary to deter the German navy. Even in 1916, however, he did not really believe that direct American military involvement was necessary or wise. Nonetheless, he never ruled out the possibility of United States belligerency. If the honor and welfare of the United States were challenged, the country

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4 For the change in Page's position, See Page to Wilson, August 26, 1914, January 1, 1915, March 23, 1915, Wilson Papers, Series 2. For his later opinion, see Page to Lansing, November 25, 1916, ibid.

5 Page to Mrs. Burnaby, November 10, 1916, Thomas Nelson Page Collection, College of William and Mary.

6 Page to Wilson, April 19, 1915, Wilson Papers, Series 2

7 Page to Colonel House, April 2, 1916, Page Collection.
would have to fight. Considerations of future national security, ending the war quickly, and creating a situation to make future wars impossible were the only reasons for going to war.  

Confident that these conditions existed in April 1917, Page vigorously defended Wilson's war declaration. America fought, he declared, to make the world safe for "Democracy" by thoroughly defeating the militaristic Germans. War would also insure the nation's security. Finally, by defeating Germany quickly and decisively, the United States would be able to establish a just, enduring peace and world-wide democracy, even in Russia. All of this would be through the efforts of President Wilson, who was universally recognized as the world's greatest man. 

Page believed that a shared state of belligerency could foster more Italo-American friendship. Italy's feeling of isolation from her allies Great Britain and France, would cause her to be "liberal" in her relationship to America, wrote Page to Lansing. "She would do much to be emancipated from this subjection (to Great Britain and France)." Several of his dispatches to Lansing emphasized Italian hopes of securing big loans

9 Page to Ambassador William Sharp, May 19, 1917, Page Collection.
10 Page to John S. Harrison, April 6, 1917, Page Collection.
11 Page to Judge Anderson, June 22, 1917, Page Collection.
from the United States. A more liberal loan policy, he intimated, would be very helpful in promoting better Italo-American relations.  

Page's hopes for a rapprochement soared with the Italian government's establishment of a commission to go to America. He wrote enthusiastic letters to American officials and at least one member of the Italian group. These letters stressed two major desires. First, he hoped for a closer understanding between the two governments. "Your task will be to try to explain and interpret to my people your own... In fundamentals we are and stand for the same things..." he wrote to Marquis Borsarelli di Rifreddo, a member of the Italian delegation. These "same things" were, he believed, the devotion to democracy and liberty. He hoped that the commission would clarify to Americans that Italy was fighting not solely for territorial expansion but rather for the freedom of Italians living in Austrian land and for a defensible frontier secure from the Dual Monarchy.

Page also hoped that the commission would be helpful in more tangible ways. More direct financial relations between the two countries was most desirable. Even more critical was the resolution of the major specific


15 Page to Wilson, April 25, 1917, Wilson Papers, Series 5A.

16 Page to Borsarelli, May 5, 1917, Page Collection.

17 Page to Wilson, April 25, 1917, Wilson Papers, Series 5A.
source of Italo-American friction during the period of American neutrality. Page expressed his strong opinions on this subject to Secretary Lansing:

"I do not think it remiss to suggest to them (the Italians) the deep interest which our Government takes in the negotiation of the naturalization treaty as a means of doing away with what may be a possible point of friction between us in the future."18

Italy's reaction to United States belligerency was mixed. On the surface, Italian politicians and people alike were enthusiastic about their new war partner. The New York Times reported that Rome "throbbed with enthusiasm." A crowd of Italians gathered in the center of Rome and proceeded to the American Embassy to show its appreciation of America. Receiving a deputation from the crowd, Page appeared with its members and made a short speech. The people responded with tremendous cheering for Page and the United States as an ally.19 This enthusiasm at the popular level was apparently duplicated by the officials of the Italian government, who honored Page at a luncheon. Premier Paolo Boselli attended the luncheon, and Page spoke briefly, emphasizing that both countries were fighting for liberty.20

This initial reaction, however, did not reflect deeper feelings. As Page had noticed before, Italian opinion about the possibility of future American belligerency was not noticeably enthusiastic. This reflected Italy's un-

18 Page to Lansing, May 2, 1917, Page Collection.

19 New York Times, April 9, 1917, p. 3.

certainty about the part the United States would play in the war and the subsequent peace settlement. Other observers remarked cynically that the April 8 demonstration of public spirit was typical of such activities in Italy. Gino Speranza, then in Italy as a reporter of the war for the *New York Evening Post*, wrote in his diary, "A member of the Ambassador's staff asked naively whether I knew that a demonstration like this is always carefully worked up. I assured him this was no exception." Page himself noted that the announcement of American intervention caused only moderate public reaction in Italy.

The hopes for a war-inspired Italo-American rapport were misfounded. The mutual ignorance of the neutrality period carried over into the war effort. American newspapers still concentrated on the Allied war effort on the Western front and almost completely neglected Italy. Similarly, Italian newspapers gave their attention to the Alpine front and invariably ignored American mobilization and subsequent fighting. Page complained of Italian journalistic inattention in a letter to Colonel House. This indifference was a result of Italy's isolated fight in the Alps, a struggle which was not

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21 Ibid.


aided by Great Britain. Because Italy did not send soldiers to other fronts and received very few troops in turn from her allies, she turned her attention inward. If her allies were not going to help her, she would have little to do with them.

The attitude of Foreign Minister Baron Sonnino was very important in determining Italo-American relations. He was preoccupied with his "blessed dream" of obtaining a secure Italy through determined adherence to the provisions of the Treaty of London. Sonnino showed little interest in the United States and made few efforts to understand President Wilson or his diplomacy. An adequate picture of the United States was an impossibility because of the incomplete, scornful dispatches from his ambassador in Washington, Di Cellere. Sonnino's policy of secrecy, his inadequate financial aid to Italian propaganda interests in the United States, and his half-hearted support of the Italian mission in the United States insured a lack of knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic. Actually, Sonnino did not desire too frank an understanding of Italian war aims. He realized that the United States posed the biggest threat to Italy's Adriatic claims because America had not signed the Treaty of London. His policy of silence on Italian war aims was unrealistic, but he refused to depart from it. Page warned him about the dangers of such an approach, but Sonnino did not take any corrective measures.

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25 Ibid., p. 86.

26 Sonnino's policy was unrealistic because it prevented any real discussion of Italy's claims. Thus, Italy was never sure of the American position on the Adriatic.

27 Page to Lansing, September 21, 1917, Page Collection.
Page's desire for close economic ties between the two countries was not fully realized because of certain developments. Italy became more dependent on American financial aid during the war. The United States made credits available to Italy under the Liberty Loan Acts. A $100,000,000 loan was floated in May 1917, a $60,000,000 loan in July, and a $40,000,000 loan in August. The American government also extended $230,000,000 credit to the Italians. The military disaster at Caporetto in the fall of 1917, when Italy's army frantically retreated in the face of an Austrian offensive, greatly weakened the Italian financial situation. Facing military disaster, tremendous shortages in grain and coal, and imminent starvation, Italy needed her allies to survive. She was in desperate straits. Only America, with her vast financial reserves, could help her much. Thus, by the end of 1917, Italy was almost wholly dependent on American loans.  

Even before Caporetto, Sonnino became interested in vigorous action on the question of financial relations. Although he completely neglected the larger, more critical issue of war aims, he pushed hard for a better economic situation with the United States. Exactly why he emphasized this is unclear, but he expressed his desire to Page several times. Caporetto temporarily modified even Sonnino's Adriatic policy; foreign affairs had to be concerned with survival, not territory. Vittorio Orlando,  


the new Italian Prime Minister, and Francesco Nitti, his Minister of Finance, called for increasing cooperation with the Allies, especially the United States. Nitti in particular was very desirous of establishing long-range commercial ties with America and tried to establish sound economic relations. 30

Events seemed to favor closer ties between the two countries. Italy needed friendlier relations with the United States because of her economic situation. As for America, there was a possibility that better relations might bring post-war business opportunities. Mindful of this, Page advised the sending of an American commission to study business and financial possibilities in Italy. 31 Nevertheless, these mutual economic advantages did not materialize. Sonnino's preoccupation with the Adriatic question caused him to generally ignore Italy's growing reliance on American loans. Moreover, the United States became irritated with Italian methods. The Italian mission in the United States had the responsibility of making financial arrangements with the American government. Its disorganization, inefficiency, corruption, and complete disregard for proper purchasing procedures displeased American officials. 32 Finally, Italian military victories at the end of the war led to delusions of grandeur


32Gould, pp. 107-110. Page also became irritated with the attitude of the government of Italy. He complained about its attempt to raise the amount of the loans and its unwillingness to cooperate, Speranza Diary, Vol. II, p. 26.
and a return to Sonnino's territorial policy. Nitti and Orlando's willingness to conciliate the United States disappeared in the furor caused by these unexpected events.  

2. PAGE'S EFFORTS

Plagued by the two countries' ignorance of each other's policies, their suspicions, and their irritations with each other, Page doggedly tried to cope with his diplomatic duties. He still believed that Italy and the United States had to learn more about each other. "Ships go back and forth between Italy and America, but there is no bridge over the waters upon which the two people may walk and meet," he said to Gino Speranza. One of the chief difficulties was that the American Embassy had few ways to gauge Italian public opinion or to learn what was happening in the country except through inadequate consular reports and random bits of information.

Despairing of help from the State Department, Page decided to organize a volunteer Intelligence Office to encourage the flow of news between the two countries. To head this organization he asked Speranza, an Italian-American lawyer living in Rome as a correspondent for the New York Evening Post and The Outlook. The bilingual Speranza, who had previously

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33Seton-Watson, pp. 505-506.


35Ibid., pp. 4-5.

36Page, for instance, complained about the State Department's sending a military attache who spoke neither French or Italian. Ibid., p. 26.
volunteered to help Page, eagerly accepted the position. At first, Speranza's job was unofficial, but before long he was given a regular diplomatic appointment by Secretary Lansing. He became the Attache' of Political Intelligence, and his function was to keep the State Department informed on Italian events and policies, especially trends in Italian public opinion. Speranza collected newspaper opinions and did much of the embassy's political and military reporting. Page admired Speranza's work, and his own reports were strongly influenced by his aide's opinions.

Several months after American intervention, Page began to urge the United States government to declare war on Austria-Hungary. At first, he indicated that this would be greatly appreciated by Italian leaders like Sonnino. He argued that failure to declare war would also alienate the Italian people. By the end of October 1917, his messages became more insistent. Faced with an impending German-Austrian offensive and low morale, the Italian government was desperate for signs of Allied concern.

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38 Gould, p. 68.


40 Page to Wilson, September 26, 1917, Wilson Papers, Series 2.

41 Ibid.
"I would earnestly suggest... we give every... support possible," Page wired Lansing. The Italian collapse at Caporetto proved to Page that Italian morale needed a tremendous psychological lift. This could come from an American war declaration. Page emphasized the necessity of such an action: "I believe Italian Government would rather have our declaration of war against Austria than our troops."43

Until Caporetto, Washington showed little concern over Austria-Hungary. When the decision to declare war on Germany was made, Wilson had decided not to seek war with Austria. First, he believed he had no justification. Unlike Germany, the Hapsburg Empire had not committed any "overt acts." Even more central to Wilson's policy was his belief that a "soft policy" might induce Austria to seek a separate peace.44 Thus, Germany became America's sole enemy in 1917. As far as the United States was concerned, Austria represented the most feasible way to end the war through a negotiated peace.

Toward the end of 1917, however, Wilson concluded that a declaration of war would help the war effort. The Caporetto debacle had revealed


the despair of the Italian people and the possibility that the divided Italian government might sue for peace. Allied morale received another shock in November 1917, with the news of the Russian Revolution and Russia's subsequent withdrawal from the war. Would Italy be the next to defect? Page's anguished appeals were only a part of what Wilson had to listen to. Senior policymakers in Washington, national groups in America, various congressmen, and sections of the American press supported the argument that a declaration of war would bolster Italy and counteract Allied defeatism. More importantly, it was argued that such an action would enable the Allied and Associated countries to more effectively coordinate military and diplomatic strategy. Convinced by these arguments, Wilson called for war on Austria-Hungary on December 4, 1917.

Wilson's message and the subsequent vote of Congress to declare war on Austria inspired Italy. Premier Orlando joyfully hailed the new Allied unity and welcomed the United States in its fight against a common enemy. The Italian people were no less enthusiastic. Italian clubs and organizations sent messages of gratitude to President Wilson. Page also was gratified; he believed that Wilson's action had aroused the Italian people. Before, Italy's war effort and sacrifices had not been adequately appreciated. Wilson


47*New York Times*, December 5, 1917, p. 3.

had demonstrated that the United States was aware of Italy's suffering and was willing to aid her at this crucial time. 49

As everyone concerned realized, the American declaration of war was a symbolic act, a morale-builder for Italy. If Wilson planned to maintain Italian enthusiasm for the United States, more concrete forms of aid would have to follow. Even before December 4, Page had requested Wilson and Lansing to send American troops to Italy. 50 During 1918, his apprehension increased, and he became more adamant about the question of troop disposal. From June 1918, to October 1918, he sent numerous letters and telegrams to civilian and military leaders. Furthermore, he visited Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and General John Pershing to advance his views. 51 He even suggested to an incredulous General Tasker H. Bliss that the Allies should send 500,000 soldiers to the Italian front. 52

Page's messages furnished two reasons for his suggestions of troops. He believed there was an imperative military need for more men and equipment on the Italian front. Italy had always lacked the necessary heavy artillery, guns, and planes. 53 An amateur strategist, Page also


believed that American troops were needed to bolster the weak Italian defenses in the Alps. He wrote that if the Italian lines broke, Northern Italy would fall, endangering Southern France and strengthening the Central Powers' desire to continue fighting. All of this would prolong the war, perhaps for years, a displeasing prospect.

To his military arguments Page added political and psychological reasons for aiding Italy. He stressed the symbolic value of sending troops to Italy. It would be "an emblem of future and possibly not distant victory," he wrote to Wilson. By encouraging a war-weary, defensive people, such an action would sustain their willingness to fight. Finally, he believed this was a necessary step to alleviate Italy's anxiety about her relations with her war partners. Italy was sure that England and France had neglected her throughout the entire war. As a result, she felt tremendously isolated from the other Allies. Perhaps if the United States sent aid, the Allies would follow suit. If the United States did not send reinforcements, however, Page did not want to guarantee how long her present enthusiasm for the United States would last.

Military leaders did not react positively to Page's requests. When he visited Paris in July 1917, to ask Pershing for American soldiers, he was told that Pershing strongly opposed the deployment of troops anywhere

54Page to Martin, February 19, 1918, Page Collection, Page to Frank L. Polk (Assistant Secretary of State), September 4, 1918, Page Collection.


except on the Western Front. When Page persisted, Pershing wrote him the United States had neither the troops nor the necessary ships for transportation. Moreover, the United States could not make a unilateral decision; only the Supreme War Council had the power to deal with matters concerning the coordination of the Italian and French fronts. General Bliss, a member of the Supreme War Council was no more sympathetic to Page's 1918 request for 500,000 troops for Italy. After telling the Ambassador that he did not have the authority to make the decision, he added that Page would get very little encouragement from either Pershing or General Foch.

This unenthusiastic military response was matched by America's civilian leaders. Sending troops to Italy did not correspond with Wilson's hopes to induce Austria-Hungary to conclude a separate peace. Even after the United States declared war on the Hapsburg Monarchy, Wilson adhered to his "soft policy" and tried to avoid offending Austria. He was encouraged in January 1918, when Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister, said that Wilson's Fourteen Points might serve as the basis of a compromise peace. Also, foreign policy advisors believed that Austria was war-weary.

58 Pershing to Page, March 19, 1918, Page Collection.
59 Bliss to General Peyton C. March as quoted in Palmer, Bliss, Peacemaker, p. 313.
and ready for peace. But hopes for a negotiated peace were destroyed by French Premier Georges Clemenceau. In April 1918, newspapers published Clemenceau's statements that Austria-Hungary was double-crossing Germany. As a result of this action, Czernin resigned and the Austrians were frightened back to Germany. Wilson then dropped the idea of a separate peace with Austria-Hungary.

Another series of events moved the United States towards a more positive Italian policy. In the spring of 1918, the United States became more involved with the problem of oppressed minorities in Austria-Hungary. Various nationalities of the Hapsburg Empire clamored for American support to break up Austria-Hungary into separate nation-states. At first, Wilson did not support this policy. Point X of his Fourteen Points advocated the federalization of Austria-Hungary. Several factors led him away from this policy. As noted above, Wilson became discouraged with a "soft policy" towards Austria-Hungary. Also, Lansing supported the policy of completely breaking up the Austrian Empire along national lines because he feared a power vacuum in Eastern Europe. With Russia out of the war, he believed it necessary to create a new balance of power. Independent Central

60Arthur J. May, pp. 584-588.

European states would counterbalance German military power. Militarily, support for the oppressed nationalities might prove advantageous. The Inquiry, Wilson's group of scholars planning for the future peace negotiations, and the State Department's Putney Report both stated that helping these people would knock Austria out of the war rapidly. Then the Allies would be free to concentrate on Germany alone.

Wilson was impressed with these arguments, but was dubious about Italy's reaction. After all, the Yugoslavs, one of these oppressed nationalities, occupied land that Italy claimed by the Treaty of London. But the Italian government unofficially supported the Pact of Rome, which intimated that it supported Yugoslav territorial aspirations. This apparent Italo-Yugoslav cooperation, Wilson's disillusionment with Austria-Hungary, and pressure from various congressmen led to a cautious May 29, 1918


64 The Pact of Rome was a result of the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in April, 1918. The Pact included a section in which the Yugoslavs and Italians expressed mutual interest in the unification of both nations and undertook to settle frontier disputes in a friendly spirit, according to the principles of nationality and self-determination. Orlando welcomed the pact in the name of the government, thus giving it unofficial recognition. Seton-Watson, pp. 494-495.
The Wilson administration, however, made no specific commitments to the Yugoslavs to avoid arousing any Italo-Yugoslav rivalry. At the same time, there was much concern for Italy's material welfare. Various sources indicated that Italian morale was very low because of a lack of American recognition of her war effort. The United States was also concerned about a peace offer made by Austria-Hungary to Italy. There was no desire for another war dropout like Russia. Lansing realized that German propaganda, the limited amount of physical aid to Italy, and lack of sympathy given by the State Department to Italian requests for coal, war materials, and ships might create a similar situation.

To help bolster sagging Italian morale and counter any aid given the Yugoslavs, the government sent thirty ambulance sections with thirty officers and 1,350 men to the Italian front. Lansing also wired Walter Hines Page, Ambassador to Great Britain, to tell the American experts to be more sympathetic to Italian requisitions at the regular meetings of the

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68 Lansing to Page, April 5, 1918, *ibid.*, p. 199.
Inter-Allied organizations. In June 1918, the United States took two more steps to aid Italy. First, the State Department supported Italy's efforts to stabilize her exchange rate. One historian has called this one of the United States' greatest services to Italy during World War I. Second, in response to Page's telegrams, the government sent one infantry regiment to Italy. This decision was formally announced on June 28, 1918, the same day that Lansing made a relatively strong statement endorsing the Hapsburg subject nationalities. Thus, the Yugoslavs and the Italians were encouraged at the same time.

All of these actions indicated an Italo-American rapprochement, but discouraging signs remained. As Page recognized, most Americans aid was symbolic. Surely one infantry regiment would not help the Italians very much. Moreover, neither side had begun any serious discussions about war aims. For the United States silence on this matter was deliberate. Under the influence of Caporetto and the Pact of Rome, the government tried to keep Italy in the war and ignored her war aims as much as Italian morale would allow. Washington realized that any specific discussion

69 Lansing to Walter Hines Page, May 16, 1918, ibid., pp. 230-231. See also Lansing to Page, June 11, 1918, ibid., pp. 238-239, for this policy.

70 Gould, pp. 159-160.


72 Gould, p. 162.

73 Ibid., p. 163.
would reveal the incompatibility of Point IX of Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Treaty of London. They did not want a disillusioned Italy leaving the war at this time.

Ominously, however, there were indications that Italy was moving away from the Pact of Rome's conciliation of the Yugoslavs. Sonnino, the major force in Italian foreign policy, had never changed his mind. Fearing that Yugoslav territorial designs would endanger Italian domination of the Adriatic, he refused to abandon the treaty and endorse the Pact of Rome. Page's reports to Washington made his position clear. 74

After Italy's troops managed to hold the line against Austrian forces in June 1918, the Italian Cabinet began a lengthy, well-publicized discussion of war aims. Sonnino's views were opposed by Leonida Bissolati, a pro-Yugoslav member of the Italian Cabinet. Orlando, though sympathetic to Bissolati's opinions, did not dare contradict Sonnino. 75 Because this debate was fully reported in the Italian newspapers, a concerned Lansing asked Page in September 1918, to ascertain the Italian position on Yugoslav claims. 76 This was especially important as the war was coming to a close, but there was no clarification of Italy's position. The Italian Cabinet issued a contradictory statement recognizing Yugoslav aspirations but not

75 Gould, pp. 163-167.
retreating from the Treaty of London. The United States was further misled by a Page letter to Colonel House stating that Sonnino had given in to Bissolati's conciliatory policy. 77

Thus, on the eve of the war's end, the United States and Italy were still woefully ignorant of each other. The Italian government had no definite comprehension of Wilsonian diplomacy and the American position towards their claims. But they did have some clues from the Fourteen Points that the United States would not be entirely sympathetic. For its part, the United States government had no adequate understanding of Italy's war aims. This was partially so because the Italian government was still divided on this issue. Only the Paris Peace Conference revealed the divergence between the two countries' attitudes and policies. Page's unsuccessful attempts to bridge the gap led to the complete collapse of his ambassadorial career. His failure was partially his own, but both the Italian government and the United States were also to blame.

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77 Page to Lansing, September 26, 1918, ibid., p. 826.
CHAPTER IV

SHATTERED DREAMS, 1918-1919

World War I ended in the fall of 1918, when both Austria-Hungary and Germany sued for peace. Austria's first proposal, an appeal for a conference of all belligerents, was rejected by President Wilson, who desired a peace with a military victory.¹ But when the Allies broke through the German lines in northern France, General Ludendorff told the German government to sue for peace. Ludendorff apparently hoped that this would allow him to regroup the German army. The Austrians followed Germany, filing for peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points on October 7, 1918. The Allies feared that Wilson would be trapped by the Central Powers, but Wilson adroitly handled the situation, leaving the two countries little opportunity to resume hostilities.² As a result of these negotiations, Wilson persuaded the Germans to depose their emperor and democratize their government. At the same time, he secured what he believed to be almost complete Allied acceptance of the Fourteen Points as the basis of peace. The Germans and the Allies signed an armistice on November 11, 1918.

1918. The war was now over and peacemaking could begin. All the victorious nations had plans for this peace. The divergent viewpoints, however, were never satisfactorily resolved at the Paris Peace Conference. Therein lay the tragedy of the Treaty of Versailles.

I. GLORIOUS EXPECTATIONS

The basis of American peace plans was Wilson's Fourteen Points. Six of these guidelines were general; they looked to the prevention of future wars by various means. The cornerstone of Wilson's peace program was Point XIV, which called for an association of nations to provide collective security. As for the conflicting Adriatic claims of Italy and Yugoslavia, Wilson's program was unclear. Point IX of the Fourteen Points referred to Italy's hopes: "A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of Nationality." 3 Point X dealt with Yugoslavia: "The peoples of Austria-Hungary... should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development." 4 Both statements were vague; consequently, they would cause difficulties at the peace talks unless they were clarified.

Between the time of the statement of the Fourteen Points and the signing of the armistice, attempts were made to define the Adriatic

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question more precisely. "The Inquiry," as Wilson's fact-finding com-
misson was known assigned four members to analyze the problems of
Austria-Hungary. William E. Lunt of Harvard worked on Italy's claims,
although he had no intimate knowledge of modern Italy. The Inquiry
received information about Italy's position from Ambassador Di Cellere.
Even before the Fourteen Points Address the group had treated Italy's
problems in some detail. Its memorandum at the time had balanced
Italy's strategic needs for defensive positions against the ethnic compo-
sition of the population involved. As a result of its study, the Inquiry had
favored ceding Italy a northern border consistent with her defensive needs
while continuing Austrian dominion over the predominantly Austrian popu-
lation. In the east the Inquiry had dealt negatively with Italy's claims. It
asserted that there was no justification for extending Italian rule over the
Yugoslav majority of the Dalmation coast and expressed a fear of Italian
expansion in the Balkans. But Wilson overlooked this study and circumvented
the controversial, complicated nature of Italy's program in his speech.

Frank I. Cobb, editor of the New York World, and Walter Lippmann,
Secretary of the Inquiry, who was later attached to the American Commis-
sion to Negotiate Peace, prepared a semi-official resume of the American
position on Italy on October 1918. Their memorandum urged a strategic
northern border for Italy, essentially the one Italy claimed by the Treaty

5Lawrence E. Gelfand, The Inquiry: American Preparation for

6Ibid., pp. 142-143.
of London. 7 The report was less clear on Italy's eastern border. Although they advocated making both Trieste and Fiume free ports, they outlined the precise boundaries. It also made a straightforward United States commitment to the principle of Yugoslav nationality and independence. 8 Thus, there still remained an ambiguity on the Adriatic question at the end of the war.

Italy's situation was no more clear. After the April 1918. Pact of Rome, the Italian government appeared to favor a policy of supporting the Yugoslavs' territorial demands. This was the policy favored by Bissolati, Nitti, and, to a certain extent, Orlando. As a result, the United States believed Italy would modify its Adriatic demands of the Treaty of London. In September 1918, the Italian Cabinet's statement recognizing the Yugoslav movement for independence strengthened this conviction. Although this policy was not supposed to be made public, the ensuing newspaper reports forced the Italian government to publicly pledge support for the Yugoslavs. 9

Despite this apparent backing of the Yugoslavs, the Italian government and public were divided. Italy's military situation favored a conciliatory policy towards the Yugoslavs before October 1918. Events during that month changed the situation. During the summer of 1918, the Allies

7Colonel House to the Secretary of State (Lansing), October 29, 1918, Foreign Relations Supplement 1, 1918, p. 410.
8Ibid., pp. 410-411.
9Mamatey, The United States and East Central Europe, pp. 313-315.
had continually prodded Italy to launch a military offensive. Fearing overextension and another Caporetto, the Italian government requested more military aid before initiating such a move. In late October, however, the Italian army unexpectedly broke through the demoralized Austrian lines at Vittorio Veneto. It was Caporetto in reverse; the Italian army pushed through into Austria and occupied Fiume. These "glorious" military victories were seized upon by the victory-starved Italians. The press called for the annexation of Fiume and the territory promised in the Treaty of London. ¹⁰ When the Austrian Yugoslavs declared their independence and claimed land pledged to Italy by the London Pact, the Italian press reacted violently. The newspaper stressed that the Yugoslavs had fought for the Hapsburg Monarchy against Italy and now claimed to be Allies. They further emphasized the ungratefulness of the Yugoslavs to Italy, the conqueror of Austria. ¹¹

The military events of October 1918, relieved the Italian Cabinet's anxiety. The government had realized that Italy's claims would be endangered if foreign troops were still on her soil when the war ended. Vittorio Veneto removed the possibility of Italy playing the 'beggar at the


peace table and caused a lengthy, well-publicized debate in the Cabinet. On one side was the inflexible Sonnino, who remained steadfastly loyal to his dream of Italian security as defined by the Treaty of London. Sonnino had no desire to weaken his treaty by aiding the Yugoslavs. The leader of the opposition was Bissolati, who favored a Wilsonian peace, conciliation of the Yugoslavs, and annexation of Fiume. In the middle was Orlando, sympathetic to Bissolati but afraid of openly defying Sonnino. The debate lasted until January 1919, and revealed the division of the Italian policy-makers, a split that was never effectively reconciled.\(^\text{12}\)

Page symbolized the two irreconcilable elements of Italo-American relations. His beliefs reflected the difference between Wilsonian internationalism and Italian nationalism. To his personal frustration he was never able to unite these two disparate strands of thought. Because of these divisions his dream of a closer postwar rapport between Italy and the United States was shattered.

Like Wilson, Page wished to see the end of wars fought for territorial gain. He was confident that the United States could accomplish this. Wilson's moral leadership and the prestige and power of the United States would bring a just peace to prevent future wars. This could be achieved by disarming Germany, making her pay war reparations, and creating a League of Nations to create an international dialogue and

\(^{12}\)Albrecht-Carrie, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, pp. 70-73.
maintain world peace. 13

Page also accepted the contradictory position of supporting much of Italy's nationalistic claims. He believed that the United States, especially President Wilson, did not understand the nature and strength of Italian demands. In his letters to Wilson, House, and Lansing, he sought to explain Italy. He believed that her northern claims were based on strategic necessity. 14 On the other hand, her desire for Adriatic territory showed her nationalism, her hopes for future national greatness. 15 To Italy the peace represented a means of expressing her national power and completing her territorial ambitions. The French regarded Alsace and Lorraine as symbols of French security; similarly, the Italians considered Trent and Trieste as essential to Italy's future success. 16

Page did not recognize the incongruity of his two opinions. Although he wanted an association of nations to prevent war, he did not realize he supported claims that might very well create another war. If Italy were to receive all that she had asked for in the Treaty of London plus Fiume, a future war was very probable. The Yugoslavs could not support any treaty denying their interests. Tension already existed between Italy and the Yugoslavs, who were outraged by the well-publicized reports of Italy's


14Page to House, October 29, 1918, Page Collection.

15Ibid.

16Page to House, October 25, 1918, Page Collection.
intentions to seize the lands promised to her by the London Pact. 17

On the eve of the pre-armistice negotiation, Italo-American relations were uncertain. Wilson's program was unclear, but the Fourteen Points did not indicate much sympathy for the Italian position. 18 Italy's program was even less apparent. Her cabinet was divided over such fundamental issues as the Treaty of London and the annexation of Fiume. But a growing spirit of Italian nationalism promised a time when not even the Treaty of London would suffice to satisfy the people. Taken together, these programs seemed to be on a collision course in late October. That they did not produce sparks at this time was the result of a blurring of differences in two distinct episodes: the pre-Armistice meetings of October 1918, and Wilson's visit to Italy in December 1918.

2. LOST OPPORTUNITIES: THE PRE-ARMISTICE AGREEMENT AND WILSON'S ITALIAN VISIT

There were two chances for the two governments to recognize and frankly discuss their differences in the months before the actual opening of the Paris Peace Conference. The first of these occurred in late October

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17Mamatey, The United States and East Central Europe, p. 360.

18Wilson seemed to be out of sympathy with much of Italy's claims at this time. In an October 16, 1918 interview with Sir William Wiseman, a British journalist, he said that he favored a settlement on the basis of self-determination. This indicated that he would work against much of what Italy wanted, for most of this land was populated either with Yugoslavs or Austrian Germans. John L. Snell (ed.), "Wilson on Germany and the Fourteen Points," Journal of Modern History, XXVI (December, 1954), p. 367.
1918, when President Wilson sent Colonel House to Paris to represent the United States on the Supreme War Council. House's mission was to get Allied acceptance of the Fourteen Points as a basis for peace. At the meetings of the Supreme War Council House was perhaps too eager to secure Allied pledges supporting the Fourteen Points. He tried to avoid specific issues likely to produce conflict. He believed these could be discussed more advantageously at the Peace Conference. House tried to gloss over differences with Italy. He had little knowledge of, and interest in, the Adriatic question. He and Wilson considered Germany the enemy; consequently, Italian objections to the Fourteen Points, sometimes vehemently expressed by Sonnino and Orlando, were brushed aside as irrelevant. After all, Italy's enemy was Austria. On November 5, 1918, a formal Allied note was sent to Wilson. As it contained only British reservations to the Fourteen Points, Wilson assumed that Italy had no major objections. House's cables to Wilson failed to convey the substance, intensity, and formal nature of Italy's disagreement. Thus Wilson did not know of Sonnino's position until he arrived in Paris in December of 1918.

House also agreed to a proposal by British Prime Minister Lloyd George that the military terms of Austria-Hungary's armistice be prepared and presented without consulting Wilson. He agreed to terms that were not

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19 Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe*, p. 360.

merely military. Article III of the armistice provided for the military occupation of the territory assigned to Italy by the Treaty of London. House approved this term because it did not mention the Treaty of London by name, but by allowing Italy to occupy this land he was granting the treaty's intent. Furthermore, he did not tell Wilson about this. General Tasker H. Bliss of the Supreme War Council also saw the terms and did not raise any objections. The State Department, aware of the armistice's contents, did not protest its provisions or inform Wilson of them. And yet Wilson had no intention of honoring the treaty.

The results of House's diplomacy were unfortunate. House had not secured Italian assent to Point IX, and he had created a great deal of confusion. Because he did not hear to the contrary, Wilson believed that Italy had agreed to the Fourteen Points, including Point IX, explicitly in the German armistice and implicitly in the Austro-Hungarian armistice. This was one of the guiding assumptions of the American experts during the Paris Peace Conference. On the other hand, Italy assumed the opposite, that she had accepted the Fourteen Points with specific


22 In December, 1918, David Hunter Miller, one of the Inquiry's leading experts, wrote to General Tasker H. Bliss that although there had been no formal modification of the Treaty of London, Italian acceptance of the Fourteen Points indicated a modification of the treaty where it was inconsistent with the Fourteen Points. Miller to Bliss, December 13, 1918, Paris Peace Conference, Vol. I, p. 413.
reservations about Point IX. Furthermore, her politicians believed that Article III was an implicit recognition of the Treaty of London.23

Between November 1918 and December 1918, the tension grew worse. The Adriatic question exploded over the question of the disposal of the Austrian fleet. On October 30, 1918, the Austrians turned over their navy to the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslavs, in turn, sent a note to Wilson implying that the ships would be given to the United States, Great Britain, or France, but not to Italy.24 The Italians were extremely angry over this. If any of the Allied fleets met the Yugoslavs as equals, it would indicate similar treatment at the peace table. The Italian government protested any such action, arguing that Italy considered the Yugoslavs as enemies who could not be thought of as friends merely because they dropped their allegiance to Austria.25

At the same time, Italian troops occupied the territory assigned in the Treaty of London and treated it as their own. Italy tried to use its American regiment to give an Inter-Allied character to the occupation. The regiment was divided into battalions and accompanied Italian troops into Fiume and Cattaro. Although the American soldiers were actually under Italian control, they were brought along to give the impression of United States approval of the occupation. When Secretary of War Baker heard about this, he ordered American troops out of the area and back to

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23Gould, pp. 89-91.


France under General Pershing's company. 26

But House again managed to confuse the issue. Prior to Baker's order, he had conferred with Father Korosek, a leader of the Yugoslav National Council. Korosek had urgently asked for American troops in the troubled Adriatic area. Because Orlando had also asked for American forces, House thought it safe to agree to Korosek's requests. He received Wilson's consent and asked General Pershing for troops. Pershing replied that American soldiers were already stationed in the Adriatic and waived his claim to them. Thus, the American regiment remained in the Adriatic, serving Italy's purposes. This blatant misuse of American forces ceased only when General Bliss received Wilson's approval to withdraw them from the Italian command. 27

During these months, Page had one major purpose in mind: to convince the President to visit Italy before the beginning of the Peace Conference. 28 He wrote several letters to House and Lansing about the desirability of such a journey. Wilson's trip would be beneficial in several ways. First, it would immeasurably improve Italo-American relations. Second, Page believed that Italy would feel slighted if Wilson came to Paris.

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26 Mamatey, The United States and East Central Europe, pp. 366-367.


Early replies to Page's requests failed to give any positive plans for a visit to Italy. Lansing wrote that the President had made no plans to come to Rome, although he believed that he might possibly do so before his return to the United States. Page replied, "Please say to the President for me: 'For heavens sake don't come to Europe without visiting Italy before returning home.'" He believed that the Yugoslav question was getting out of hand and wanted Wilson to get some first-hand information about the situation. Because he did not hear anything more from the State Department, he believed it necessary to go to Paris to see the President. "All Italy looks to the Ambassador to make certain that Wilson will visit Italy," wrote Gino Speranza, Page's political analyst. When Wilson arrived in Paris on December 14, 1918, Page, Sonnino, and Orlando were waiting for him. The talks between Wilson and the two

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29Page to Lansing, November 19, 1918, _Paris Peace Conference_, Vol. I, p. 137. Page to House, November 19, 1918, Page Collection. At this time Franco-Italian relations were bad. Italy blamed the French for stirring up the Yugoslavs. Many Italians believed that France was taking steps to deprive Italy of land promised her in the Treaty of London. Page believed that Italy would resent Wilson's meeting with the Allies in Paris, France's capital, unless he visited Rome, Italy's capital. _Ibid._


31Page to Lansing, November 27, 1918, _Ibid._, p. 142.

Italians were very vague. Because only Sonnino knew how to speak English, Wilson received a distorted view of what Italy wanted. The Foreign Minister had been warned in advance by Page not to mention the Treaty of London and to emphasize Italian security instead. Sonnino followed this advice, leading Wilson to believe that Fiume was not a necessary part of Italy's demands. 33 Deeply interested in the Adriatic question, Wilson decided to pay official visits to London and Rome when the Conference was delayed until January. 34 Page was pleased to hear this and returned to Rome on December 22 to prepare for the President's visit.

Unfortunately, Wilson's trip accomplished very little. Accompanied by Page, who met him at the Italian border, he arrived in Rome on the morning of January 3, 1919. He was met at the railroad station by King Victor Emmanuel III. That afternoon he went to a luncheon, addressed the Italian Parliament, visited with a deputation from the Quirinal, and received the citizenship of Rome. The following day he toured Rome, visited the Pope, attended an official luncheon at the American Embassy, talked with the King, and left Rome. 35 Because of this hectic schedule, there was little time to clarify problems by any heart-to-heart talks with Sonnino or Orlando.

34 Albrecht-Carrie, Italy at the Paris Peace Conference, p. 81.
By this time, however, the President probably had a good idea of what Italy wanted. His purpose for making the trip was to sound out the strength of his sympathizers. He knew that Bissolati was his major defender in the Italian Cabinet, and he needed to measure the Italian minister's support. Page's messages had indicated that Bissolati's following was small, and Ray Stannard Baker, who had visited Italy early the prior month, had been discouraged by the strength of the anti-Wilson forces in Italy. But only a personal visit could clarify this, thought Wilson.

On the other hand, the Italian government was determined to block Wilson from encouraging and mixing with the Bissolati movement. Bissolati's resignation on December 28, 1918, had publicly dramatized the conflict within the Cabinet. The government did not want any more trouble on the eve of the Conference. The methods it used to prevent Wilson from meeting with the Italian people were outrageous and deceitful. When the President was on his way to the Chamber of Deputies, he was told that his motorcade would stop at the Piazza Venezia so he could address the people. Instead, he was whisked away to the Parliament, leaving thousands

36 Actually, Bissolati had resigned by this time, but this was done after Wilson had made his plans. And Bissolati still had a significant following.


of people, including Page, waiting in the Piazza for him. On the evening of his departure, he was supposed to speak to the people from the balcony of the Quirinal. When he started to go out, he was informed that there was no audience. Actually, this was true, but only because Italian soldiers had prevented anyone from coming near. After he left Rome, the Italian government circulated false reports that Wilson had a phobia for crowds and that it had feared that someone might throw a bomb. But Wilson was convinced that the people supported him. His tremendous reception in Italy led to his belief that the Italians favored a Wilsonian peace. He should have remembered that both Page and Baker had earlier stressed the rise of a spirit of imperialism in Italy. Since he did not assess the problem realistically and because the government had limited his contact with the Italian people, he returned to Paris with the idea that he had won an unofficial contest with Orlando and Sonnino. This mistaken impression inspired him to make a costly blunder in April 1919, when he appealed to the Italian public on the question of Fiume.

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3. BASIC POSITIONS AND AMBASSADORIAL FAILURE

If Sonnino and Orlando appeared to observers as a smoothly functioning diplomatic team, it was only a surface illusion that hid the hopeless division of the two men. They did not agree on what they were fighting for. Sonnino did not realize that Austria's total defeat had changed Italy's position by destroying the old balance of power. Unprepared to accept Wilsonian diplomacy, he refused to acknowledge the principles of the Fourteen Points. But his policy was quite unrealistic in several ways. He did not do anything about Italy's financial dependence on the United States, although this position might endanger Italy's claims. He also did not realize that his "realistic" policy of 1915 had become outmoded by 1919. Austria-Hungary no longer existed, and internally divided Yugoslavia was no threat to Italy's security. But Sonnino refused to reconsider his ideas and remained devoted to his Treaty of London. 42

The only realistic man in the Italian government was Bissolati. He accepted American power in European diplomacy and believed Wilson's program was beneficial to Italian interests. He favored a League of Nations to protect the weaker countries like Italy and wanted to abandon the Treaty of London to facilitate an Italo-American alignment. He also thought that rigid adherence to the London Pact would create a Slav irredentism that would drag Italy into future wars. Willing to modify these demands, he wished to concentrate on Fiume. But the powerful, unrealistic

42 Gould, pp. 270-279.
Italian desire for security in the Adriatic and Sonnino's stubbornness caused Bissolati to resign on December 29, 1918. His subsequent attempts to explain publicly his policy were shouted down. The Italian people were too land-hungry to listen to his sane, realistic program. 43

Orlando meanwhile created the Italian interest in Fiume by sending in Italian troops on November 2, 1918, and ordering a full-scale occupation of the city two weeks later. He had logical reasons for desiring Fiume, 44 and was willing to modify the Treaty of London to obtain it. But he was unwilling to risk a break with his Foreign Minister, whose political support was necessary for the survival of his coalition government. Instead, he tried to whip up public enthusiasm for Fiume to coerce Sonnino to abandon some of his Adriatic demands. His policy backfired, however, when Sonnino refused to back down. Because of the newly created fervor for Fiume, the Italian peace delegation went to Paris badly divided. Most of its members were willing to barter Dalmatia for Fiume; Sonnino wished to drop Fiume but rigidly stuck to his oft-expressed position on the Treaty of London. Meanwhile, newspapers and the Italian public clamored for both Fiume and the Treaty of London. Sonnino refused to budge, but Orlando did not dare to confront his uncompromising Foreign Minister. As a result, the Italian delegation ended in a deadlock and, swayed by the reports of fervent


44 Sonnino's reasons were: (1) to redeem Italians living there; (2) to annex an area he felt economically necessary to Italy; (3) to allow Italy to penetrate the Central European vacuum caused by the decline of Austria-Hungary. Gould, pp. 301-302.
Meanwhile, the American position was gradually defined. After his trip to London and Rome, Wilson worked on the Italian problem. Three major pre-Conference reports influenced the American program. The first was the Cobb-Lippmann memorandum prepared for Colonel House before the Pre-Armistice negotiations. The second was an Inquiry study of the strategic nature of the Austro-Italian frontier written by the famed geographer Ellen Churchill Semple. Third was a December 12, 1918 proposal prepared by the Inquiry's Italy "expert," William Lunt, at the President's request. The Inquiry's tentative report of January 21, 1919, incorporated almost all of their recommendations.

The Inquiry's memorandum dealt with two major problems. The first was Italy's northern border. Both Semple's report and the Cobb-Lippman program urged concessions to Italy. Military advisors agreed that Italy's strategic needs warranted consideration. The final advice was to "give Italy all that part of the Tyrol to which she has any just claim on linguistic, cultural, or historical grounds." It was believed that this adjustment would make the League of Nations' job easier and its success more probable by discouraging future German aggression.

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46 Gelfand, pp. 221-224.

47 Outline of Tentative Recommendation, January 21, 1919, as quoted in Gelfand, p. 224.

48 Ibid.
Adriatic claims, the second problem, were modified. The experts rejected the Treaty of London line because it violated Yugoslav nationality and because Italy had no close economic ties with the areas she claimed. The final report conceded Italy a few ports for national security but denied any claim over Fiume on the grounds the city was vital to Yugoslavia's economy and future growth. The report concluded that if Italy were given all her Adriatic demands, she would dominate the entire area, a situation detrimental to Yugoslav security. 49

Acting on this report, Wilson came up with his own plan. Far from being uncompromising on the Italian question, he retained a great deal of flexibility. He knew that he had to deal with Italian nationalism, personalities of the Conference, desires of new nations, and plans of other statesmen. Thus, he was willing to yield more to Italy than what the Inquiry recommended. And in making up his mind, he sought other advice. He had talked with Orlando and Sonnino before visiting Rome. At the Italian capital he had conferred with Bissolati and had tested public opinion. He had also listened intently to the counsel of H. Wickham Steed, a British journalist with intimate knowledge of Italy and Yugoslavia. 50

He neglected only one source, his Ambassador to Italy. Why did he ignore Page, who had so much knowledge of the Italian situation?

Page's opinions were regarded with suspicion from the very beginning by the American Commission. Before it came to Paris, Page had cabled


50 Ibid., p. 378.
the State Department for permission to meet with Wilson on the latter's arrival. The State Department reacted with little enthusiasm to this request. Only after he appealed to Colonel House did he receive the necessary approval. When he talked to Wilson about Italy, there were indications that the two men disagreed.

Many of the Commission members believed that Page was too pro-Italian to be objective. General Tasker M. Bliss, the leading military advisor of the American Commission, observed, "It seems to me that Mr. Page like nearly all Americans in Italy, simply make themselves (sic) mouthpieces of Italian wishes." Ray Stannard Baker wrote House that Page had succumbed to Italy's official views and had lost touch with real Italian popular opinion. As the Conference continued, his daily reports, heavily dependent on the work of Gino Speranza, made little impression. The Commissioners and American intelligence officers had long considered Speranza to be an uncritical Italophile and believed that Page was under his aide's influence. In February 1919, two of Page's telegrams on Franco-Italian relations came before a meeting of the Commissioners with this

51Ibid., p. 375.
54Gould, p. 375.
55Ibid., p. 68.
reaction: "The Commissioners were amused by the apparent discrepancy and the conclusions were not too flattering to Ambassador Page."  

Part of the Commission's opinion of Page was justified. In late 1918 Page expressed opinions consistently backing Italian claims, especially to Fiume. In the Yugoslav-Italian dispute of November, he continually blamed the Yugoslavs for causing the problem. Undoubtedly he was strongly influenced by Gino Speranza. As Speranza noted in his diary, "He trusts my judgment largely, if not wisely, because he trusts my affection and loyalty." Speranza favored maximum concessions to Italy and Page concurred.

If anything, Page became even more of an advocate of Italian interests in the months between Wilson's visit to Rome and the April explosion over Fiume. In his letters he distinguished between the Italian people and their government, making it clear that he wanted justice only for the former. He believed that they had entered the war to liberate Italians living under Austrian rule and had continued fighting despite tremendous hardships. They quite justly resented being put on the same plane as the Yugoslavs, who "were but yesterday Austrians engaged in the act of destroying with

56 Christian Herter to Joseph Grew, February 12, 1919, as quoted in Gould, p. 376.


joy Italians and Italian villages...." Although he said he favored a Yugoslav state, he did not believe in putting them on the same level as the Italians. He would render justice by allowing Italy to redeem her land, including Fiume, and to provide for her security.  

He was extremely apprehensive about what would happen if Italy did not receive essentially what she asked for. In the first place, he believed Italians would blame the United States for blocking her demands and siding with her enemy, the Yugoslavs. All hopes for any Italo-American rapport would then be lost. Second, he also feared that if Orlando and Sonnino did not succeed in appeasing Italian public opinion, their government would fall, paving the way for internal revolution and, possibly, Bolshevism. The results, he believed, would be disastrous, for the future of Europe, and the League of Nations. Thus, his sympathy for the Italians, his reliance on Speranza, his incomplete conception of collective security, and his desire to avoid a serious Italo-American argument led him to advocate a program favorable to Italy.

But even if he was an Italophile, his reports should have received

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60 Page to Arthur Hugh Frazier, March 4, 1919, Page Collection.


62 Page to House, April 17, 1919, Page Collection.

63 Page to House, March 15, 1919, March 28, 1919, April 19, 1919, April 22, 1919, Page Collection.
more careful scrutiny by the Commission and Wilson. Speranza was an able commentator on Italian press and public opinion. During these months, his reports, as transmitted by Page to Paris, clearly noted the rising tide of Italian annexationism. They were important not for what they advocated but rather for what they described. If Wilson had been accurately informed of their contents, he would have realized that one of his fundamental premises was wrong. The Italian public would not support his program if it did not include Fiume. It would not support any public declaration to give up Fiume, no matter how rationally such a request might be presented. Thus forewarned, he could have avoided one of his biggest political blunders, the April Appeal to the Italian people.

4. THE QUESTION OF FIUME: EXPLOSION AND REACTION

The question of Italy's claims was of secondary importance to the Paris Peace Conference and was not considered at any length until April 1919. Before that the concern was with the League of Nations and with the difficult questions of the disposition of Germany's colonies, the French demand for security, the disarmament of Germany, and reparations. All of these involved long discussions, constant bickering, and frequent compromises. By the time Italy's problems were discussed, nerves were frayed and tempers short. In particular, the overburdened Wilson was tired and ill. In early April he suffered what was then diagnosed as an attack of influenza. At least one medical expert believes that Wilson had actually suffered a minor stroke with some resultant vascular damage
and behavioral changes, an omen of his later major stroke in October 1919. 64

It was in such a setting that the question of Fiume was considered. With its continuing fixation on the Adriatic problem, the Italian delegation remained deadlocked. Sonnino was not interested in the League of Nations or the changing structure of world power except when Italy's interests were directly involved. His own concentration on territorial issues led him to ignore the economic and financial aspects of the peace, features vital to Italy's future. Unlike Sonnino, Orlando's political support was tenuous and dependent on his ability to get Fiume. Popular demand for Fiume, which Orlando had helped create, was out of control; if Orlando could not procure Fiume, his government would fall. His only realistic chance was to abandon the Treaty of London, but he could not afford to break with Sonnino, whose political backing was necessary for his government. In brief, he was trapped. The result was diplomatic paralysis, not Italian wiliness. The indecisive Italians found it impossible to accept any terms, so they rejected them all. 65

In April, Wilson had a firm program. The American delegation had begun to split in March. Most of the territorial experts supported their earlier proposals, but Colonel House and Dr. Sidney Mezes, Director of the Technical Experts, favored a more conciliatory policy towards the

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Italians. Again, Wilson carefully considered all his maps and reports and decided against the House group. He had already promised most of Italy's northern border to Sonnino, but said that otherwise he would accept the experts' proposals. He made one further exception to this program; he was willing to allow Fiume status as an international port rather than ceding it to Yugoslavia. His position was relatively flexible. He could compromise on Fiume, and he had several possible boundary lines to divide the Adriatic territory. Furthermore, he had the final resort of threatening to reduce economic aid to Italy. But he failed to reckon with Italian stubbornness and division. Even the potential financial threat was not sufficient to deter Sonnino.

The Italian question was considered secretly by the Conference's Council of Four from April 19 to April 23. Great Britain and France stayed on the diplomatic sidelines. Although both countries favored paring Italy's demands, they were bound as signatories of the Treaty of London to honor all of Italy's claims except Fiume. Several people, mainly Lloyd George and Colonel House, unsuccessfully tried to advance compromise schemes. On April 22, hopes for a solution soared. With Lloyd George acting as an intermediary, Wilson and Orlando discussed

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69Gould, p. 413.
various concessions, but negotiations stalled on the question of Fiume. 70

With the positions deadlocked, Wilson decided to change his tactics from secret to public diplomacy. On April 24, European newspapers headlined his appeal to the Italian people. The statement was carefully prepared and clearly explained his views. He said that the Treaty of London was of no use because of Austria-Hungary's disintegration. His proposals would allow Italy to increase her borders and her security. He closed with a strong appeal to Italian-American friendship, hoping that this message would somehow result in a modification of Italy's program. 71

Wilson's frontal attack had been carefully prepared. His trip to Rome had given him the impression that the Italian people backed him rather than Orlando. Some of Page's reports tended to give the impression that public opinion was different from the newspaper accounts. 72 Wilson believed that the papers were controlled by the Italian delegation. 73 He had conferred with the territorial experts and the American peace commissioners before making his final decision. Many of the experts and Commissioners Lansing, Bliss, and Henry White favored a strong stand and decisive action. They pushed him to assert his leadership. 74 Also, the President

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70 Albrecht-Carrie, Italy at the Paris Peace Conference, pp. 132-140


72 For instance, Page wrote to House, "I feel....that he, Wilson, may have to appeal to the people, and then leave it to time to let them recognize anew who has at heart their true interests." Page to House, April 14, 1919, Page Collection.

73 Albrecht-Carrie, Italy at the Paris Peace Conference, p. 143.

74 Mayer, pp. 695-700.
had been falsely led to believe that Lloyd George and Premier Clemenceau would issue similar ultimata. A joint declaration would put pressure on Italian moderates to get Orlando to break with Sonnino. Finally, he hoped the appeal would rally not only the Wilsonians of Italy, but also of Britain, France, and America to his program. None of these expectations were realized.

The Italian delegation reacted quickly to Wilson's challenge; Orlando left the same evening to get a vote of confidence from the Italian Parliament. Page was surprised and shocked by the news. Unwarned by any prior notice from Paris, he heard of Wilson's statement in the Embassy several hours after the official news had been broadcast over Rome. He knew that Italian reaction would be virulently anti-Wilson, but refused a government offer to furnish soldiers to protect the American Embassy. Although he believed in the Italian cause, he tried not to give any public sign of his sympathy. He had to obey the President, but he decided to go to Paris to confer with Wilson.

Page realized that public opinion in Italy had risen to a fever pitch. He had witnessed internal disorders in March and April. Militant socialists had called strikes in Rome and other cities. Counterdemonstrations led by militant right-wing Fasci caused violent confrontations.

\footnote{Baker, Vol. II, p. 166.}
\footnote{Mayer, pp. 694-695.}
the right-wing press attacked all socialists as Bolsheviks, and there was much speculation about a communist revolution. Page believed that a peace on Wilson's Italian terms would create a chaotic political situation, with the possibility of a Bolshevik revolution or a return to absolutism. In either case, Italy would reject Wilsonian diplomacy for the old system of alliances. Italo-American friendships would be destroyed, and Italy would eventually turn to Germany for friendship. Such a combination would be disastrous for world peace.

Page also believed that the whole incident could have been avoided with more American sympathy for Italy. After all, he reasoned, Italy had fought for "Liberty" and self-determination, two Wilsonian principles. All Italians asked for now was to be treated with reasonable consideration and have their sacrifices recognized. He believed that the territorial experts had neglected to consider the people in their proposals. Although he supported Wilson's program in general, he could not support his decision on Fiume. Despite his belief in a viable Yugoslav state, Italy should have a prior claim.

Because they were alarmed at the situation in Italy, Page and Claude Barrere, French Ambassador to Italy, left Rome by train for Paris on

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78Mayer, pp. 681-687.
79Page to House, March 15, 1919; Page to Henry White (American Commissioner), June 2, 1919, Page Collection.
80Page to Frazier, April 8, 1918, Page Collection.
81Ibid.
May 8. Page arrived in Paris alone because Barrere received a telegram from the French government telling him to return to Rome. When Page arrived in Paris on May 9, he went directly to the Hotel Crillon to explain that "nothing can save Italy but giving her Fiume." He assumed that Wilson would want to see him as soon as possible and wrote a note to the President of his availability.

On May 11, House phoned Wilson to warn him that Page might resign immediately if Wilson did not see him. Wilson replied that it made little difference whether Page resigned then or later. When no answer to his first note came, Page sent a longer letter that urgently explained his beliefs in detail. Although Wilson finally agreed to meet with Page, the conference achieved little. The President did not want to hear what Italy

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82 Tree, p. 1139. The United States peace commissioners were not enthusiastic about any Page visit to Rome during the Fiume crisis. Both Lansing and Henry White concurred that it would be "unfortunate for Page to be absent from Rome" and requested a telegram expressing this feeling be sent to Rome. Minutes of the Daily Meetings of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary, Thursday, April 24, 1919, Paris Peace Conference, Vol. XI, p. 163.


85 House Diary, May 13, 1919, as cited in Birdsall, p. 283.

86 Page to Wilson, May 12, 1919, Wilson Papers, Series 5b. At the end of the letter he added, "The present situation is so crucial that I feel you will pardon my seeming urgency in requesting a chance to place all the information in my possession at your disposal."
was saying; he believed she was greedy, and he did not care about her sacrifices. Though Page publicly stated optimism when he left Paris, he was bitterly disappointed with the President's attitude.87

Newspapers combined reports of the Wilson-Page disagreement with rumors that Page had tendered his resignation. As early as February, the New York Times had reported that Page had decided to retire.88 In April these rumors increased, but the Ambassador and the State Department denied that any such action had occurred. It was not until July 14, 1919 that Page confirmed his intention to resign:

While the war was being fought it was necessary for all of us to do our bit, as it was given us to do. I felt it was my duty to remain in Italy and do my bit, but with the signing of the Peace Treaty I felt that I had finished my war duty and could come home.89

Actually, Page had considered resignation since 1915, when he expressed a desire to get away from his tiring duties.90 The problems of war and peace restrained him from taking any positive action until January 1919. Convinced by Wilson's visit to Rome that everything would be worked out to Italy's satisfaction, he expressed his desire to return to the United States later that spring. He requested, however, that the State Department not publish the news of his decision until his return home.91

87Tree, p. 1140.
91Page to Wilson, January 21, 1919, Wilson Papers, Series 5b.
There were several reasons for his resignation. Now that the emergency situation of war had ended, he no longer felt bound to his post. Also, living abroad had tired the elderly Pages mentally and physically. The Ambassador was worried about his wife's health and desired a rest for himself. Back home he could resume his literary career by using his experiences as topics for new books. But the major cause of his decision was frustration. He complained that the State Department never listened to his advice or informed him of its policy. Although he had made the Embassy more efficient and had created friendlier relations with Italy, the Department never expressed its gratitude or granted his requests. He believed that his sacrifices, justified perhaps by war, were no longer necessary. He was more than ready to retire.

Wilson's tremendous work load at Paris caused him to defer Page's resignation. He may have believed that such an action would weaken his position in the negotiations. In May, however, he was ready to accept this request. Newspaper accounts quoting Page as saying that Wilson completely misunderstood the psychology of the Italian people must have upset the President. Accepting Page's resignation would enable Wilson to present a more unified front to Italy by avoiding the embarrassment of having a prominent American official publicly criticize his government. Wilson's decision

92 Page to William A. White, January 14, 1919, Page Collection.
93 Page to Frazier, March 5, 1919, Page Collection.
was facilitated by indiscreet remarks made by Mrs. Page during her husband's May visit to Paris. When Page offered to stay at his post until the settlement of the Italian problem, Wilson promptly answered that he had offered the post to Brand Whitlock, who had immediately accepted.

All that remained were the formalities. Page announced his resignation in mid-July and submitted his formal letter to Wilson shortly thereafter. On August 22, the State Department announced his resignation, but withheld any news of his successor. Wilson completed the formalities with a letter to Page expressing his regrets and his gratitude for Page's work. Thus, the process initiated eight months prior was completed. The Pages left Europe that summer and arrived home in autumn. The diplomatic phase of Page's life was now over.


95 Wilson to Page, June 14, 1919, Page Collection. Whitlock, who talked with the President in June, said the President smilingly told him, "I was very glad...to be able to write him that the post had already been tendered to you and accepted. Still,...I wish to let him down easily, and so I have told him that he could announce his own retirement when he goes home, and then I shall make the appointment." Whitlock diary as quoted in Nevins, p. 571. Whitlock subsequently reconsidered leaving his post at Belgium and turned down the Rome position.

96 Page to Wilson, July 19, 1919, Wilson Papers, Series 5b.


98 Wilson to Page, August 29, 1919, Wilson Papers, Series 5b.
Upon Orlando's return to Rome after Wilson's April Appeal, Italian public opinion erupted in nationalistic fervor. Orlando waited in Rome for some conciliatory gesture because it seemed impossible that Wilson would maintain his opposition in the face of such an uproar. Although he had received a vote of confidence from the Italian Parliament, no hint of compromise came from Paris. Realizing that Italy might be ignored completely in the peace, Orlando returned to Rome on May 5. Negotiations on Fiume and Dalmatia began again, with House and André Tardieu, Clemenceau's confidante, trying to effect a compromise. Although both sides made some concessions, the gap was still too wide, and in June the negotiations completely failed. That same month, Orlando's government fell.  

Popular sentiment in Italy, frustrated by the outcome of the peace, was swayed by extremists. Gabriele d'Annunzio, the nationalist poet and novelist, led a band of volunteers who seized Fiume in September 1919. He ran his own government there until the end of 1920. In November 1920, the Italian government signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Yugoslavia. Under the terms of the treaty Fiume became a free city, an ironic development

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because Wilson had been willing to accept this some twenty months before.²

Meanwhile, an opportunistic Benito Mussolini took advantage of Italy's political strikes, governmental bankruptcy, rampant unemployment, and war hysteria. Invoking the specter of "Bolshevism," he used the fears that socialist strikes had aroused in the middle class to argue that he was the only safeguard against internal revolution. Although the actual danger of revolution was small, industrialists, landowners, policemen, professional people, and veterans accepted his myth of an impending communist coup. By October 1922, his supporters numbered more than 300,000. At the end of that month, the Fascists marched on Rome. Knowing that his army would not fight the Fascists, King Victor Emmanuel III telegraphed Mussolini, who had prudently stayed in Milan, to come to Rome to form a cabinet. Mussolini then gradually turned his constitutional government into a fascist dictatorship.³

In the United States, Page's resignation left a vacancy that was not filled for eight months. Although the post had been offered to Brand Whitlock, he turned it down, preferring to remain in Belgium as her American Ambassador.⁴ Wilson's illness prevented any further action for several months. On February 12, 1920, the newspapers announced that Robert Underwood Johnson would be nominated as American Ambassador to Italy.

²Ibid., pp. 543-547, 577-582.
³Ibid., pp. 570-629.
A distinguished author and one-time editor of Century Magazine, Johnson had been associated with Italy for over thirty years. In 1895, he had been decorated as a Cavaliere of the Crown of Italy. As it had done with Page, the New York Times hailed Johnson's appointment. Johnson's tenure only lasted a year, for he was replaced when Warren G. Harding became President in 1921.

When he returned home, Page was given a large reception in Richmond by the Virginia House of Delegates. The Pages then traveled to southern California, where the ex-Ambassador worked on his new book, Italy and the World War. Page hoped that this work would correct American opinion that Italy had fought selfishly and disastrously. His lack of objectivity led him to write a book that stressed the sacrifices of the Italian people in their quest for "Liberty." It was more a testimony to his sympathies than it was a work of historical scholarship. It was at best a superficial history of modern Italy and at worst an emotional diatribe.

After this book's publication, the Pages traveled to South Carolina, Colorado, and England, among other places. Although the trips were beneficial to her husband, they proved to be too much for Mrs. Page, who died during a short visit to Massachusetts. The heartbroken husband

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7 New York Times, June 7, 1921, p. 17.
returned to his birthplace, "Oakland." On November 1, 1922, he died of a heart attack while working in his garden. Both deaths were sadly noted by the Italian people, who had a great deal of respect for the Pages. And Page, so sorely disappointed by his government's failure to recognize him, would have been very pleased by an editorial in the New York Times:

And at Rome Thomas Nelson Page...proved to be a diplomat of parts and a sound interpreter of the Italian war spirit. During the Fiume complication, when America (was) none too popular in Italy, he saved an awkward situation by restraint and his happy faculty of conciliation. He had already endeared himself to the Italian people by his love of the arts and a personality that was agreeable and tactful and engaging. A Virginian gentleman who was a man of letters and understood the Italian character, and who besides was what may be called a practical idealist, had qualifications for the post that a political appointee would certainly have lacked. No one has brought the valor and fortitude of the Italian army more vividly to the mind than Thomas Nelson Page in his description of visits to the front. His pictures of the achievements of the troops in the rugged passes of the Alps are unforgettable.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Judged by his own goals, Page as an ambassador was a failure. His primary purpose, to help bring about closer Italo-American relations, was totally ruined by the conflict at Paris in 1919. The lack of knowledge that had existed when he arrived in Rome in 1913 continued to exist after his departure. Neither country knew or cared much about the motives and policies of the other. The discord caused by the Paris Peace Conference played a direct role in bringing Mussolini to power; the result of his

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fascist dictatorship was a war with Italy's former allies, France, Great Britain, and the United States. Page's prediction of a German-Italian alliance was realized with the Rome-Berlin Axis of 1936.

Why was Page's dream unfulfilled? The most obvious reason was Italy's failure to develop a realistic foreign policy. Here the primary blame must be placed on Sonnino. The Foreign Minister dominated the formulation of Italian plans through a succession of Italian war ministries. His views were incorporated in the Treaty of London when Italy entered World War I. Sonnino insisted on his "blessed Treaty" in the face of revolutionary change in the old balance of power. Preoccupied with his desire to insure Italy's security, he neglected cultivating any friendship with the new nationalities arising from the ashes of the destroyed Austro-Hungarian Empire. Even more critical was his failure to develop any strong friendship with the United States, on whom Italy was financially dependent. His fear that the United States would chip away at his Treaty of London kept him from initiating any frank discussion of Italy's post-war needs. With Page he was evasive and nonspecific. The result of such policies was an incomplete understanding of what Italy wanted and needed. Because he always concentrated on Italy's territorial needs, he overlooked her economic situations. Shortages of coal, grain, and money did not faze him. What he did not realize was that the United States did not need Italy, but Italy required the friendship of a creditor country like the United States. In the long run, his policy won out over the more realistic programs advocated by Bissolati and Nitti.
Finally, Sonnino's intransigence kept Italy's peace delegation divided at Paris. The wavering Orlando was more willing to compromise with Wilson, but Sonnino refused to budge. As a result, most Wilsonians mistakenly believed that Italy wanted both the Treaty of London and Fiume. The impression of a greedy Italy that had craftily bargained its way into the war gained strength and led many Americans on the Peace Commission to oppose any concessions to Italy. Fiume became a symbol of this determination. The deadlock thus created severely damaged Italy. Orlando's prestige suffered, and he quickly lost power. Italy failed to get any financial aid from her Allies; her resultant economic distress caused political and social unrest, a situation exploited by the opportunist Mussolini. In this way Sonnino helped pave the way for the rise of Italian fascism.

Even by more objective standards, Page's career illustrates a failure of ambassadorial diplomacy. He became increasingly isolated from the decision-making process in Washington. At first, during the period of American neutrality, there was no coherent Italian policy, a result of purposeful neglect. American attention quite realistically focused on Germany and Great Britain. Italy was only of minor concern to Wilson, Lansing, and House. The United States could afford to be vague; Italy needed her aid, but was not necessary either to American diplomacy or to her later conduct of the war. When decisions were made about Italy's postwar claims, Wilson listened primarily to his experts. Page's views held little sway. Only his early 1914-1915
telegrams, stressing Italy's reasons for entering the war, influenced American policy.

Page had little effect on the administration because he was considered an Italophile. There is little evidence to counter this view; Page did become convinced of the rightness of the Italian cause and used his position to advance his opinions. His major advisor, Gino Speranza, helped to reinforce his bias with his pro-Italian analyses. Speranza's opinions were suspect in certain intelligence circles, and it was correctly assumed that Page's reports reflected the opinions of his aide. As a result, the valuable parts of his messages, those dealing with Italian public opinion, were overlooked by Inquiry experts and other members of the American delegation. This helped to pave the way for Wilson's unfortunate April Appeal to the Italian people.

The failure of ambassadorial diplomacy was not caused solely by Page's inadequacies or lack of objectivity. Wilson and the State Department put Page in several tight spots because they failed to keep him informed of developments. The Attualità case showed a lack of communication between the State Department and its representative in Rome. Another example was the failure of the State Department to tell Page anything about the important meeting between Wilson, House, and British Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour. At this meeting in April 1918, the three men discussed the Treaty of London, but nobody transmitted the terms to Page. Instead, he read of it in the press after the Bolsheviks printed it months later. Most unfortunate was Page's
unawareness of the decision to issue an appeal to the Italian people in April, 1919. Caught completely by surprise, Page had no opportunity to take any measures to counteract the inevitable public reaction to this maneuver. Because he was badly informed, Page could not coordinate his actions with Wilson's policies. It is also possible that by denying Page complete information the government prevented him from better communication with Sonnino. Though the possibility was remote, this might have changed the Foreign Minister's mind. Nevertheless, Page would have been a much more capable diplomat if he had received a more complete outline of what Wilson planned and wished him to do.

In some respects, Page's tenure was not completely a failure. He was remembered and loved by the Italian people. Much of this admiration undoubtedly stemmed from his well-known support of Italy's territorial program, but most of it came from popular appreciation of his other activities. His attempts to aid the earthquake-stricken people of Avezzano, his visit to the Italian front, his mastery of the Italian language, his obvious respect for Italian culture, and his wife's efforts to help war-ravaged Italy were evidence of his deeply-felt sympathy for Italy. The public respected him for this.

Page's failures were symptomatic of the contemporary American diplomatic system. The diplomatic corps was made up of many people like Page, people who were inexperienced and unqualified for sensitive foreign positions. Also, the State Department lacked an adequate bureaucracy to aid its ambassadors. Many of Page's subordinates in the Embassy
had little training in Italian affairs. Page also suffered from the lack of any real support and direction from the State Department. When he sought professional aid, the State Department sent him amateurs. When he messaged for more information, he received almost nothing substantial. Ironically, the Peace Commissioners decided to send him information after the Fiume question had exploded. ⁹ It was a question of much too little much too late. At least Page realized that embassies needed more than just a few secretaries to meaningfully analyze complex situations and countries. His plans to correct this situation were halting, inadequate, and sometimes mistaken, but they indicated a direction for future diplomatic reform. Above all, each of his activities demonstrated his realization that a successful ambassador had to know and respect the country to which he was accredited.

In conclusion, Thomas Nelson Page's diplomatic career demonstrated certain characteristics of Wilsonian diplomacy. Wilson's Italian policy was, for the most part, a realistic one in terms of methods and goals. At Paris he retained a good deal of flexibility. He had an ultimate weapon, economic coercion, but he never got the chance to utilize it because of Sonnino. On the other hand, his failure to utilize Page showed his tendency to rely on people outside of formal diplomatic circles for plans and action. His trust in academic scholars was evident in his reliance on the Inquiry, rather than his fellow commissioners, to furnish him with information.

Any comments by Page were filtered through the experts, who did not trust his judgments. As a result, Page, who should have been at the center of Italo-American relations, remained on the periphery.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

An examination of Thomas Nelson Page's life, especially his diplomatic career, necessarily touches upon several large historical topics. Page was a writer whose fiction must be evaluated in terms of somewhat contradictory developments in the post-Reconstruction South: the creation of the plantation life myth and the simultaneous growth of the New South creed. Page also has historical interest to those concerned with race relations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, he was a diplomat during the World War I era. This career encompassed the period of American neutrality, the war, and the Paris Peace Conference. To understand Page, one must know a great deal about American history. I do not pretend to understand this period fully. The following essay will describe the works that I found most useful in writing this paper.

There is no definitive Page biography. His brother, Rosewell Page, has written a life story, but the result is an affectionate, anecdotal, uncritical book, more a tribute to his brother than a useful work of scholarship. Harriet Holman's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, written twenty-four years ago at Duke University, contains the most detailed information on Pagé. Her interest, however, stops at the end of Page's literary career. His involvement in diplomatic affairs, the focus of this essay, is dismissed in a few short pages.
Page's literary career is most completely discussed by Holman and by Theodore Gross's *Thomas Nelson Page*. The latter work seems to owe a great deal to Miss Holman's conclusions. Because he was an essayist, Page's theories on racial relations are best understood by reading some of his articles. "The Negro: The Southerner's Problem" and "The Old-Time Negro" (contained his *The Old South*) are two of his more revealing essays. Guion Griffis Johnson's "The Ideology of White Supremacy" and "Southern Paternalism toward Negroes after Emancipation" were most helpful in providing a conceptual framework for a discussion of Page's ideas. Also useful was Thomas Gossett's *Race: The History of an Idea in America*.

The two most important sources of Page's career as an ambassador are his papers at Duke University and *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*. The Page Collection at Duke provides copies of most of his letters to President Wilson, Secretary of State Lansing, and Colonel House. It also contains other letters useful in determining Page's personal opinions about his diplomatic tasks. *Foreign Relations* gives information on the important aspects of Italo-American policies. Taken together, these two sources yield an accurate picture of the problems that existed between the two countries and Page's attempts to deal with them.

Page's diplomatic career must be considered in light of events in the United States. Arthur S. Link's *Wilson the Diplomatist* is a good starting point for any attempt to deal with this period. His monumental
biography of Wilson provides the most detailed information on Wilsonian foreign policy. They also show the relative lack of concern for Italy in Washington during the period of American neutrality. Ernest R. May's *The World War and American Isolation* is a multiarchival study that emphasizes decision-making in London, Berlin, and Washington. It is particularly enlightening about Chancellor Bethmann's desperate but unsuccessful attempt to keep the United States out of war. Daniel M. Smith's *The Great Departure* is a convenient summary of Wilsonian foreign policy through the time of the Paris Peace Conference. Five works shaped my opinions about the Peace Conference. Paul Birdsall's *Versailles Twenty Years After* and Thomas Bailey's *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* chronicle American involvement at Paris, albeit with somewhat differing conclusions about Wilson's effectiveness. Arno J. Mayer's *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking* focuses on Wilsonian diplomacy in relation to public opinion in America and Europe. It was especially helpful in determining why Wilson went to Rome before the Paris Conference began. Another informative study about the relative lack of concern about Italy before the Paris Peace Conference and the influences on Wilson's Italian policy is Lawrence Gelfand's *The Inquiry*. Finally, Ray Stannard Baker's *Wilson and World Settlement* was important both for its first-hand information about the problems with Italy and for a very useful scheme of organizing this rather complex topic.

As for Italy herself, two general works that proved enlightening were Christopher Seton-Watson's *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism* and
Denis Mack Smith's *Italy: A Modern History*. These books and William A. Renzi's "Italy's Neutrality and Entrance into the Great War" formed the basis of my comments about Italy's decision to join the Entente. Italian and American problems with Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia are ably discussed by Victor S. Mamatey's *The United States and East Central Europe* and Arthur J. May's *The Passing of the Hapsburg Monarchy*. Italy's problems and failure at the Paris Peace Conference is discussed in detail by Renè Albrecht-Carriè's *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*.

There is no complete published study of Italo-American relations during this period. John Wells Gould's Ph.D. dissertation, "Italy and the United States, 1914-1918," however, was quite important to this study. Gould originally set out to write about Page's ambassadorial career, but he gave up this project when he determined that Page had little influence on Italo-American relations. Still, his discussion considers Page's role in some detail. Also, his study, based on a careful investigation of American and Italian sources, has several opinions that influenced my discussion. His dissertation emphasizes the realism of American policy towards Italy, the stubborn influence of Sonnino, and the resultant clash of two fundamentally irreconcilable policies at Paris in 1919. Gould blames Sonnino for a lack of realism and believes that Wilson, contrary to the opinion of other historians, came to Paris prepared with a flexible program for Italy.
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