

The Making of an Atlantic Federalist, 1914–1939

In May 1956, in response to yet another request for support from Clarence Streit, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the longtime editor of the *New York Times*, confided to a staff member that Streit “has been a problem for me ever since he left The Times on which he was a good correspondent but he’s awfully noble.”¹ In addition to Sulzberger’s obvious exasperation, the comment directs attention to Streit’s initial – and successful – career as a foreign correspondent. This chapter, accordingly, considers Streit’s activities before the publication of *Union Now* in 1939. The first section examines his path from an ambitious high school and university student in Montana to Europe: as soldier in World War I, as a low-level member of the US delegation to the Paris peace conference in 1919, as a Rhodes scholar, and finally as a budding journalist. Curious, ambitious, and notably progressive in his politics, Streit profited from the international upheavals of the time to escape what he perceived as the straitened confines of life in the United States.

The next section is devoted to Streit’s emergence as a well-regarded foreign correspondent during the 1920s, a period often presented as the profession’s golden age. Although Streit lacked the glamor of better-known celebrity colleagues, such as Vincent Sheean and Dorothy Thompson, his experiences offer another perspective on the work of interwar foreign correspondents. More precisely, they highlight the significant gap between professional ideals and practical realities. The resulting frustrations prompted foreign correspondents to redefine their

¹ NYPL, NYTCR, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 171, file 9, Sulzberger to O. E. Dryfoos, May 3, 1956.

profession during the 1930s in the context of mounting international tensions, a response Streit would pursue to the limits and beyond of journalism. The final section focuses on Streit's tenure as the *New York Time's* correspondent in Geneva for much of the 1930s covering the League of Nations. This extended posting, which proved crucial to his embrace of Atlantic federal union, provides an intriguing vantage point for reconsidering the League's place in US foreign relations at the time. Perhaps no group contributed more to fostering the view of the League as a failure than did foreign correspondents. Although initially a League enthusiast, Streit soon came to share this assessment, inspiring him to plunge into the developing debate in the 1930s about the nature of the international order and the United States' role in it.

FROM MONTANA TO EUROPE

Clarence Streit was born in January 1896 on a farm in California, Missouri, one of five children of Louis Streit, a salesman of farm machinery, and Emma Kirschman. At age fifteen, Streit moved with his family to Missoula, Montana. Entering high school, he threw himself into extra-curricular activities, founding and editing the school newspaper, winning a local championship with the debate team, and earning third-place honors in a state-wide speaking contest. Following graduation, Streit, in 1914, entered the State University of Montana to study journalism. Established the same year, the university's journalism school was part of a nation-wide development that saw journalism emerge as a field of professional study. In addition to playing intercollegiate football, Streit edited the university newspaper (*Montana Kamin*) and participated on the debate team.²

At the state university, Streit also distinguished himself as a critic of the Wilson administration. In 1917, he stood alone among students in refusing to sign a supportive telegram to Wilson, who had just taken the United States into the raging war in Europe. In a further act of protest against the administration's clampdown on political dissent, he rejected the first-place medal won at the annual state intercollegiate oratorical contest for a speech entitled "The Hope of Democracy." Going further, Streit publicly requested the prize money be given to the defense fund of Thomas J. Mooney, a socialist and trade union activist tried and

² The Rhodes Trust, Clarence Streit file, untitled biographical notes; and LOC, CKS, Box I: 40, file: Biographical articles, "Achievers."

convicted for his alleged part in detonating a bomb at a pro-war parade in San Francisco in July 1916.³ His gesture attracted some attention outside of Montana. “Such a spirit in the new generation that is coming upon the stage of the world’s affairs is indeed hopeful,” a Kansas newspaper admiringly editorialized. “Would that there were more young men with this honest devotion to justice!”⁴

To be sure, Streit was far from alone in his support of Mooney. The case received wide publicity in the United States and abroad, with numerous observers denouncing what they judged a miscarriage of justice.⁵ Streit’s criticism of the Wilson administration, though, extended well beyond the Mooney case. In a letter/article written for a local Missoula newspaper in April 1917, he defended Senator Robert La Follette’s vote against US entry into the war, deploring the “war hysteria” overtaking the country while also questioning the patriotism of “war-bloated industries.” Pointing to US policies at home and abroad, he dismissed as hypocrisy Wilson’s claim to be waging a “war for democracy”:

when the liberal thinker, the believer of democracy at home in times of peace, looks at the men in this country who are most anxious to go to war to “protect democracy” he is entitled to his doubts of their sincerity. He finds that the men who would defend the rights of the little nations in Europe are men who in the past have paid no attention to the rights of the little nations of the Caribbean. The men who are feverish to overthrow autocracy in Germany are the most reactionary Tories when the question involves democracy in this country. The newspapers which are loud in praise of revolution in Russia are most bitter in their denunciation of any symptoms of revolt in our own industrial feudalism.

At the same time, Streit expressed faith in Wilson’s declared goal of forging a new and better postwar international order. While regretting the president’s failure to make US entry into the war “conditional upon the promise of the Allies to form a league to prevent the world from becoming involved in such a catastrophe as this again,” he remained confident that “the influence of America may still do some good when the slaughtering part of the war is over.”⁶

³ “Medal Is Declined by Clarence Streit,” *The Daily Missoulian*, May 13, 1917, 2.

⁴ Untitled, *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kansas), May 26, 1917, 4.

⁵ For a detailed study of the case, see Richard H. Frost, *The Mooney Case* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968). For wartime repression and violence, see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ LOC, CKS, Box I: 130, file: CKS – Articles – General, Untitled text, April 1917.

Streit's doubts about the war's purpose did not prevent him from volunteering for military service. In June 1917, he left Missoula to begin training with an army engineer regiment, an assignment likely influenced by his earlier summer employment as a government surveyor in Alaska. By November 1917, Streit was in France, happy to have escaped the stifling political climate at home. "I cannot understand the wave of intolerance, with its determination to suppress the least expression of nonconformity, which seems to have spread over the country which has always acclaimed its freedom of speech and press," he wrote in December. Americans, he added hopefully, would soon "realize that in a country fighting to make the world safe for democracy, intolerance, hate and forced conformity are among the enemies of the cause."⁷ As an engineer, Streit worked behind the lines, well away from the murderous trench warfare on the Western front. Most days were spent overseeing an assorted collection of construction workers, which included black Americans, Scandinavians, German and Austrian POWs, and Chinese. Reflecting the casual prejudices of the time, Streit appeared mildly surprised that "the negroes" counted among the best workers.⁸

When not on military duty, Streit penned articles on life in France for a Missoula newspaper. One hallmark of his observations were clichéd contrasts between French and Americans. Thus, while discomfited by the sight of French men kissing each other in greeting instead of using the more American (and manly) handshake, Streit admired the open-minded moral "code" he observed among the French, opposing it to the "Puritan mentality ... entrenched in Americans." Similarly, he marveled at the can-do energy and efficiency of Americans yet also suspected that the "French know how to live better than we do." "It rarely if ever dawns on them [Americans] that there may be a better way of living than the mechanical, commercial existence we follow." However conventional his views, Streit clearly nourished a Francophilia that set him apart from the widespread anti-French sentiments scholars have detected among US soldiers at the time.⁹

⁷ "Talk of the Town," *The Missoulian*, December 6, 1917, 6.

⁸ "Writes of Life with Engineers," *The Daily Missoulian*, February 21, 1918, 3; and LOC, CKS, Box III: 3, file 5, diary, December 1917.

⁹ "Talk of the Town" and "American Speed Amazes French," *The Missoulian*, March 19, 1918, 4, and April 1, 1918, 3. For anti-French sentiment among American soldiers, see Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 118–25.

Streit's experiences in France also fed a swelling interest in European and international politics, which he observed through his left-leaning politics. Writing home in early 1918, Streit declared himself "a Socialist, a believer in the common man." And as a socialist he itched to be sent to Russia, where he "could have seen and could be seeing the revolution there at first hand . . . I have been deeply interested and sympathetic with the Russian revolution since it broke. But it is impossible to get any true idea of conditions in Russia from the outside – of that I am positive."¹⁰ That Streit could contemplate being posted to Russia also reflected his new duties: Sometime in 1918, he transferred from the engineers to military intelligence. Following the armistice in November, he was one of ten army intelligence members assigned to the US delegation to the peace conference. Years later, Streit joked that he served on Woodrow Wilson's security detail, smelling flowers to make sure they were not poisonous. In reality, his job was more prosaic but also more interesting: to oversee the delegation's burgeoning library of material on subjects of potential pertinence to the peace negotiations. Streit relished his duties for the privileged access to information it offered as well as for the vistas on international politics it opened. "It is enough to give one an idea of the immensity of the problems confronting the coming conference," he commented on the size and variety of the documentation.¹¹

Even as a junior member of the US delegation, Streit found himself in early 1919 at the center of European and international politics. The peace conference that opened in Paris in January acted as a magnet, drawing to the French capital monarchs, statesmen, diplomats, politicians, advisors, revolutionaries, activists, artists, and even gawkers from across the globe. With much of Europe and beyond roiling from the seismic effects of four years of warfare, the stakes in Paris appeared to be of world-deciding importance. The sense of expectation and possibility was palpable. "I feel that it is an opportunity of a life-time," he wrote his mother, "especially at this particular time when all the world is gathering in Paris for the Peace conference."¹²

¹⁰ LOC, CKS, Box III: 6, file 7, Streit to Mother and Folks, June 8, 1918; and "Sergeant Streit Gets Letter from Secretary," *The Missoulian*, October 20, 1918, 1–2.

¹¹ LOC, CKS, Box I: 1, file: Notebooks and Notes, 1917–1918, entries for December 22 and 23, 1918.

¹² LOC, CKS, Box III: 7, file 3, Streit to Mother, December 22, 1918. For Paris in 1919, see Tyler Stovall, *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

His security duties left Streit plenty of time to immerse himself in this heady atmosphere – to read up on current issues, to write about them, to take courses at the Sorbonne, and to socialize with the small army of foreign correspondents gathered in Paris. All of this further stoked his interest in politics. As might be expected, Streit sympathized with French trade unionists who called a general strike in May 1919, arguing the “French working class” had been driven to despair by “the stupidity, the brutality of the Clemenceau government and of the ruling class in general.”¹³ Streit’s leftist politics are even more evident in his first book, published in 1920. The book stemmed from his interest in the Briey Basin, an iron-rich region on the Franco-German frontier. In the early months of 1919, a controversy erupted in French newspapers and parliament over allegations, made by an odd coalition of leftists and nationalists, that the region had escaped wartime damage due to a tacit alliance between French and German heavy industry. In endorsing unconditionally the allegations, Streit mimicked notable features of prewar progressive journalism in the United States: its exposé-style, its anti-corruption and anti-business thrust, and its moral fervor. Accusing the *Comité des forges*, the French industry organization, of privileging its business interests over the nation’s, he castigated the “Yellow International of the financial and mineral interests” for which “[t]he wholesale slaughter of men, it cannot be denied, means good business to those who furnish the instruments of death.”¹⁴

Journalists in the Progressive mold sought to mobilize journalism in the service of reform. The aim was not simply to report on events but also to use reporting to galvanize change. His duties in Paris, though, offered

¹³ LOC, CKS, Box I: 130, file: CKS – Articles – General, Streit, “May Day in Paris. By an American,” *The Liberator*, August 1919, 41–46. Also see Jean-Louis Robert, *Les Ouvriers, la patrie et la révolution. Paris 1914–1919* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1995), 291–403.

¹⁴ Clarence K. Streit, “Where Iron Is, There Is the Fatherland!” *A Note on the Relation of Privilege and Monopoly to War* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1920), 50–51. For more on the controversy, see Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *François de Wendel en République: L’argent et le pouvoir, 1914–1940* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 67–107, 121–22. The classic study of Progressive journalism is Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage, 1956), 185–96. Also see J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22–52; and Joseph R. Hayden, *Negotiating in the Press: American Journalism and Diplomacy, 1918–1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 58.

Streit a first opportunity to dabble more directly in policy. In January 1919, he drafted a memorandum for the US delegation on “Bolshevism,” an issue lurking menacingly over the peace conference despite (or because of) the absence of the Bolsheviks.¹⁵ Consistent with his sympathy for the revolutionary events in Russia, Streit argued against Allied military intervention on the grounds that it would be counter-productive even if successful as the defeat of the Bolshevik regime would saddle the Allies with the thankless task of imposing order on chaos. Nor did Streit favor a policy of isolating the regime through economic blockade, as this would alienate the Russian people and reinforce their reliance on the Bolsheviks. Instead, he recommended the Allies formally recognize the Bolsheviks and allow normal economic relations to develop with Russia on the principle that “a government tends always to become conservative.” In what in retrospect might serve as an epitaph for his own political evolution, Streit declared it “axiomatic that the radicals of today are the conservatives of tomorrow.”¹⁶

There is no evidence the memorandum was read by anyone on the US delegation, let alone that it influenced US or Allied policy. But this hardly mattered, as Streit quickly grew disillusioned with the proceedings in Paris, commenting in March 1919 “that this isn’t a Peace Congress but an Inter-Allied Victory meeting, with indignation as the guiding general force and Individual Economic Interest as the chief counselor of each nation.”¹⁷ To judge from his activities in Paris, which included writing for *Stars and Stripes*, the US army’s newspaper, Streit was becoming far more interested in journalism than in policy. In any case, the signing of the peace treaties in the summer of 1919 put an abrupt end to his twenty-two-month adventure in Europe. Now demobilized, Streit returned to Missoula to complete his journalism degree and to take up a staff position with the *Daily Missoulian*. But not for long. Soon afterward, Streit learned he had been awarded a Rhodes scholarship. In January 1920, he was back in Europe, this time at the University of Oxford to study international relations, modern history, and economics.¹⁸

¹⁵ Arno Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

¹⁶ LOC, CKS, Box I: 36, file: Biographical material 1939–86 & undated, “Bolshevism,” January 21, 1919.

¹⁷ LOC, CKS, Box III: 7, file 4, Streit to Mother and Folks, March 2, 1919.

¹⁸ The Rhodes Trust, Clarence Streit file, untitled biographical notes.

BECOMING A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

Streit's commitment to his studies as a Rhodes scholar is open to question. In 1920, he took a summer job as an assistant in the Paris bureau of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger's* newly established international news service. Although Cyrus Curtis, the *Ledger's* owner, preferred to focus on domestic news, he decided his newspaper had to respond to the growing demand for foreign news, partly a by-product of the recent world war. The *Ledger* might have subscribed to an international press service, the three principal American ones being the Associated Press, United Press, and Hearst services. But Curtis sniffed a business opportunity. "What I want," he explained in July 1920, "is a superior news service" that could be sold "to every [sic] worth while newspaper in the United States."¹⁹ Accordingly, he set out to build his own service, tapping Carl Ackerman, a former *Saturday Evening Post*, and then United Press correspondent, to direct the European service.

Ackerman was an interesting choice. A veteran correspondent with considerable experience in Europe, Ackerman had supplemented his wartime journalism with covert reporting for the State Department and for Colonel House, President Wilson's closest confidant. Ackermann's principal task was to keep both informed of the complex and evolving political situation in Russia in 1917–18. It is tempting to imagine Ackerman came across Streit's memorandum on Bolshevism, effectively talent-spotting the fledgling journalist, but Ackermann's virulent anti-communism suggests otherwise. Ackerman, in fact, acted less as a reporter than as a propagandist, writing anti-Bolshevik reports as well as a doctored version of the infamous anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (itself a forgery by the prewar Tsarist secret police) in which Bolsheviks replaced Jews as the malevolent actors in a conspiracy for world domination. With the war and his clandestine activities behind him, Ackerman established a central office in London for the *Ledger's* international news service with branch offices in Paris and Berlin.²⁰

¹⁹ LOC, Carl A. Ackerman Papers, Box 130, Curtis to Ackerman, July 12, 1920.

²⁰ Meghan Mernard McCune and John Maxwell Hamilton, "My Object Is to Be of Service to You': Carl Ackerman and the Wilson Administration during World War I," *Intelligence and National Security* 32 (2017), 744–49; Morrell Heald, *Transatlantic Vistas: American Journalists in Europe, 1900–1940* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 45, 105–6; and Wythe Williams, *Dusk of Empire: The Decline of Europe and the Rise of the United States, as Observed by a Foreign Correspondent in a Quarter-Century of Service* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 208.

Having worked during the summer for Ackerman's European service in Paris, Streit returned to Oxford for the autumn term of 1920. Soon afterward, he received permission to interrupt his Rhodes scholarship during the first half of 1921 in order to serve as Ackerman's special correspondent in the "Near East" based in Constantinople. The highlight of his five-month posting was a roundabout voyage to Ankara to interview Turkey's reclusive leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Streit kept a travelogue that he sought unsuccessfully to publish, pitching it as an antidote to "the prejudice which has so long distorted our [Western] views of the Turk . . ."²¹ At the end of his posting, Streit resumed the Rhodes scholarship in the summer of 1921 only to abandon it in September. That month, he married Jeanne Defrance, a Parisian whom he had met in the summer of 1920. Although information on her is scarce, Defrance appears to have come from an educated, middle-class milieu – her excellent English being one indication. Prior to the marriage, Streit had requested an exemption to the rule that only bachelors could be Rhodes scholars but was refused.

Unable to stay at Oxford, Streit took up an offer from the *Ledger*. Backed by Curtis's "open purse," its international service, in the words of its Paris bureau chief, Wythe Williams, was engaged in a buying spree, "purchasing news features, sending men on far distant assignments, and hiring writers with big names to give their impressions on the international situation." Among the big names recruited was Colonel House. Less ostentatiously, the service also hired a stable of young talent in what Williams described as a "gold rush from America" – talent that included Dorothy Thompson and Clarence Streit. Toward the end of 1921, Streit accepted a regular position with the *Ledger*, becoming its correspondent in Rome at a starting salary of \$5,000 (about \$75,000 today).²²

In Rome, Streit witnessed the death of the liberal political regime and its replacement by Mussolini and his fascist movement. As the historian Mauro Canali notes, unlike most foreign correspondents, who tended to report admiringly on *Il Duce*, Streit maintained a critical attitude toward the new regime, emphasizing the minority and even seditious nature of the

²¹ It would eventually be published as Heath W. Lowry, ed., *Clarence K. Streit's The Unknown Turks: Mustafa Kemal Paşa, Nationalist Anakara & Daily Life in Anatolia, January–March 1921* (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir University Press, 2011). See p. xv for the citation. Also see The Rhodes Trust, Clarence Streit file, Streit to Mr. Wylie, December 18, 1920.

²² Williams, *Dusk of Empire*, 207–8; and Joseph C. Goulden, *The Curtis Caper* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 37.

march on Rome while working to puncture the myth of Fascist popularity. Passivity not enthusiasm struck Streit as the dominant response of Italians to fascism.²³ In early 1923, the *Ledger* made Streit its Balkan correspondent based in Constantinople and Athens. The newspaper, he boasted, has “doubled my salary, making me the highest paid man in the foreign service” apart from the bureau chiefs. The *Ledger*, he added, “spends a good deal of money advertising its foreign correspondents.” The salary increase notwithstanding, Streit found the new posting difficult, admitting at the end of the year “I am getting tired of jumping about from one crisis to another in the Balkans.” The birth of his first child in January no doubt added to the burden of frequent travel.²⁴

Streit would remain in the Balkans for almost two years, during which time his frustrations mounted. One problem came from John Spurgeon, the newspaper’s editor, who pressed Ackerman to report less political news and more human-interest stories. “*Please*, for the love of Mike,” he scolded Ackerman, “try to think of news in the human sense. Give us something with people. We are fed up on Russia, Bolshevism, Czechoslovakia, Poland and what the various Prime Ministers are doing or saying to one another.” Streit became a point of contention, with Spurgeon judging his Turkish assignment an unnecessary luxury and Ackerman defending his protégé as a “live wire” with immense promise.²⁵ Mounting tensions between the two men soon prompted Ackerman to resign, leaving Streit alone to face Spurgeon’s pressure exercised through Williams, his immediate superior. From Paris, Williams unleashed a steady barrage of criticism, beseeching Streit to reduce his expenses, to shorten his reports, to write more “human-interest stuff” and, perhaps most of all, to set aside any illusions about his task as a journalist. “Please remember,” he admonished, “that the newspaper business is a daily affair. We have no time to do things as they should be done. It is often a case of snap judgment and speeding up, and no one knows

²³ Mauro Canali, *La scoperta dell’Italia: Il fascismo raccontato dai corrispondenti americani* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2017), 10, 106–7, 168–70. Streit soon nuanced his position, describing Mussolini in private as a “moderate” who “has much more brains than his followers.” See LOC, CKS, Box III: 8, file 4, Streit to Dad, November 4, 1922.

²⁴ The Rhodes Trust, Clarence Streit file, Streit to Mr. Wiley, March 14 and December 29, 1923.

²⁵ For Spurgeon, see Gerald L. Feltner, “Modern Foreign Correspondents after World War I: The *New York Evening Post*’s David Lawrence and Simeon Stunsky,” *American Journalism* 34 (2017), 328–31. Also see LOC, Carl W. Ackerman Papers, Box 131, Spurgeon to Ackerman, May 25, 1920; and Ackerman to Spurgeon, December 12, 1930.

better than I do how wrong often it all is. So I decline to take it too seriously.” As early as 1921, Streit privately complained that “its [sic] sometimes a bit difficult to know what to send.”²⁶

In early 1924, Williams resigned from the Paris bureau. By then the *Ledger’s* international service was in fatal decline, its revenues and Curtis’s interest both shrinking. Recognizing the obvious, Streit began moonlighting for other US newspapers before accepting a position in 1925 with the *New York Times*. With a daily circulation of well over 400,000 copies (and almost double on Sunday) in 1930, the *Times* not only enjoyed a wide readership but also was the newspaper of choice for much of the US political elite. The *Times*, one knowledgeable observer noted in 1935, “will remain America’s greatest newspaper because it is rich enough to employ men who write well, rich enough to operate the largest foreign news service, to print documents in full, to give the public a far greater quantity of news than any other paper.”²⁷ Its foreign news service was unrivaled in its geographic scope and content. A position with the *Times* thus promised Streit secure employment, greater prestige, and a wider readership. It also entailed considerable travel: Posted initially to Vienna, he moved around a great deal over the next several years, working not only in Europe but also in North Africa and the Caribbean.

Among Streit’s assignments was a stint in Haiti in 1928 to study the “ways of the American intervention,” which had begun in 1915 and was scheduled to end (as it did) in 1934.²⁸ In addition to reports for the *Times*, Streit penned an article for *Foreign Affairs*, a journal published by the Council on Foreign Relations, the elitist club of US internationalists. The article criticized the military occupation regime for its counter-productive results. Despite their declared aim of building an independent Haiti, the occupation authorities were doing almost nothing to train Haitians to run their own affairs while pursuing development policies privileging US-owned plantations at the expense of a growing “landless proletariat,” effectively reproducing dependence. Writing to his wife, Streit castigated occupation officials for their ignorance of Haiti, of its history and

²⁶ LOC, CKS, Box III: 13, file 3, Williams to Streit, July 23 and August 7, 1923; and Box III: 8, file 3, Streit to Dad, October 27, 1921.

²⁷ George Seldes, *Freedom of the Press* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1935), 214. On the newspaper more generally, see Yves-Mair Péréon, *L’Image de la France dans la presse américaine, 1937–1947* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2011), 33–43; and Laura Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9–19.

²⁸ The Rhodes Trust, Clarence Streit file, Streit to Mr. Wylie, March 26, 1929.

languages, as well as for their “enormous self-complacency” and lack “of the spirit of sympathetic understanding.” In the article, though, he identified the principal problem as the “system,” defined obscurely as “circumstance and drift,” rather than the occupation itself or its US personnel, whose good intentions he never questioned. The solution, accordingly, was not to change the system but to reinforce it through greater political oversight by Washington.²⁹

If Streit’s somewhat critical position points to the continued relevance of his left-leaning politics, it also suggests a blind spot when it came to issues of empire and race in US policies. Like many well-meaning people, Streit, while recognizing “race prejudice” as a factor on US occupation policies, could be serenely unaware of his own racism. For instance, he recounted to his wife a party at the presidential palace, describing as “amusing and pathetic” the attempts of Haitians to imitate their more civilized betters. But arguably even more telling was the assumption that Haiti desperately needed to be developed (civilized) and that only the United States could do so, notwithstanding the occupation’s patent problems, among them its exploitative nature. Rather than structural elements of US occupation, Streit viewed its shortcomings as an inherent function of “backward and weak” countries. The result was a convenient alibi not only for the regrettable aspects of US policies but also for what Streit discerned as the predictable failure of the occupation to match US ideals.³⁰

Shortly after the article’s publication in *Foreign Affairs*, the *Times* posted Streit to Geneva, where he would remain as its foreign correspondent until 1938. Never again would he venture beyond the north Atlantic world.

THE FRUSTRATIONS OF A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

Streit’s thriving career as a foreign correspondent paralleled the development of the profession in general. Indeed, the interwar years have been

²⁹ Streit, “Haiti: Intervention in Operation,” *Foreign Affairs* 6 (July 1928), 615–32, 619, 627–29; and LOC, CKS, Box III: 4, file 7, Streit to Wife, January 25, 1928.

³⁰ LOC, CKS, Box III: 4, file 7, Streit to Wife, January 20, 1928. For the occupation, see Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Even after the end of the military occupation, the United States continued to control Haitian finances until 1947. See Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 250.

called the “golden age” for US foreign correspondents.³¹ The boom in newspaper readership, which began in the mid-nineteenth century and was fueled by the expansion of education, falling prices, and various marketing techniques, carried over after 1918. At the start of the 1920s, the United States could boast of some 2,500 daily newspapers published in 11,000 towns for a combined circulation of 32 million. By one estimate, 95 percent of adult Americans read at least one newspaper on a regular basis.³² Over the next decade, circulation figures continued to grow, though at a reduced rate even if some newspapers showed remarkable gains. The *New York Times*, for example, increased its circulation by 60 percent between 1920 and 1930.³³

Accompanying the overall growth of newspaper readership was an expanding market for foreign news, a development that can also be traced back to the nineteenth century. If the Spanish-American War and, more generally, the United States’ emergence as an imperial power, stimulated this expansion, US involvement in World War I and in the peacemaking in Paris 1918–19 added a potent spur. “The war has developed a new sort of Washington correspondent,” one journalist commented in 1920. “Five years ago it helped a Washington correspondent very little to be familiar with European politics. To-day such knowledge enhances his value beyond measure.”³⁴ Newspaper content reflected the change. In the case of the *New York Times*, by one estimate 19 percent of front-page articles dealt with foreign news between 1900 and 1905; the corresponding figure for 1920 to 1925 was 32 percent.³⁵

More foreign news required more foreign correspondents, and the early postwar years witnessed a notable increase in their numbers. As recently as the end of the nineteenth century, most newspapers had relied

³¹ John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 2; and Nancy C. Cott, “Revisiting the Transatlantic 1920s: Vincent Sheean vs. Malcolm Cowly,” *American Historical Review* 118 (2013), 46–75, 68.

³² Nancy F. Cott, *Fighting Worlds: The Bold American Journalists Who Brought the World Home between the Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 11; and Thomas C. Leonard, *New for All: America’s Coming-of-Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 69, 91, 179.

³³ Robert W. Desmond, *Crisis and Conflict: World News Reporting Between Two World Wars, 1920–1940* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1982), 291–303.

³⁴ Cited in Feltner, “Modern Foreign Correspondents after World War I,” 327.

³⁵ Christine Ogan, Ida Plymale, D. Lynn Smith, William H. Turpin, and Donald Lewis Shaw, “The Changing Front Page of the New York Times, 1900–1970,” *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (1975), 343.

for foreign content on local reporters who were paid by the story (stringers). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Chicago Daily News* was the first newspaper to develop an extensive news service with its own full-time US correspondents, but before the Great War it remained modest in size and reach. In the wake of the war, several major newspapers scrambled either to follow the *Chicago Daily News*' example in creating a service or, as in the case of the *New York Times*, in enlarging their existing structures. In the early 1920s, Adolph Ochs, the *Times*' owner, resolved to build "the widest and most comprehensive newspaper coverage in the world," notwithstanding the estimated annual costs of \$500,000.³⁶ Unlike Curtis and the *Ledger*, Ochs and the *Times* would enjoy sustained success in the endeavor.

Newspapers appeared ideally placed to meet the demand for foreign news. After all, they faced few competitors in the field. Television had yet to be invented while radio remained in its infancy; only toward the end of the 1930s would it seriously challenge the predominance of newspapers. As for other printed media, such as magazines and reviews (most of which were published on a weekly or monthly basis), they complemented more than rivaled newspapers' often quotidian reporting. This prominence has led one historian to declare "[p]rint journalists created the public sphere during the interwar years." While this assessment is perhaps exaggerated, it is nevertheless true that newspapers and the correspondents who worked for them functioned as a leading source of information about the outside world – about its people, places, and events – for much of the US public. Foreign correspondents at the time, another historian remarks, served "as antennae, as interpreters and expositors" for Americans back home.³⁷

For all these reasons, the job of foreign correspondent appealed to ambitious, curious, and intrepid Americans in the early postwar years. The urge to escape the geographical limits as well as the social and moral

³⁶ Meyer Berger, *The History of the New York Times: The First 100 Years, 1851–1951* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 249. Also see Jaci Cole and John Maxwell Hamilton, "A Natural History of Foreign Correspondence: A Study of the *Chicago Daily News*, 1900–1921," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84 (2007), 151–65.

³⁷ Cott, *Fighting Worlds*, 324; and Heald, *Transatlantic Vistas*, xiii. Giovanna Dell'Orto argues that "it is through the ecology of discourses created, circulated and maintained through the press that foreign realities are understood and acted on." See her *American Journalism and International Relations: Foreign Correspondence from the Early Republic to the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

constraints of living in the United States clearly activated Streit, but, as Nancy Cott and Deborah Cohen show, the quest for personal freedom and novel experiences spurred others whose careers began in the 1920s.³⁸ Admittedly, not all these early-career correspondents found their way to Europe: The number of US journalists working in China rose steadily after 1918, one sign of the globalizing scope of public interest in the world beyond the United States.³⁹ Still, Europe continued to draw a disproportionate share of US journalists. If the strong dollar offered important advantages, a far more important reason was the strength of overlapping transatlantic bonds – political, economic, cultural, and ethnic – that had made Europe the seemingly obvious destination for students, tourists, and other travelers from the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ The recent world war, which for the US public was fought preponderantly on the Western front, strengthened this focus on Europe. Reflecting this bias, Europe and especially Western Europe accounted for upwards of 80 percent of foreign coverage in US newspapers during the interwar years.⁴¹

The 1920s, then, were an auspicious time to become a foreign correspondent in Europe – a time when personal and professional opportunities seemingly abounded. This is certainly the impression foreign correspondents themselves cultivated in their first-hand accounts of perilous journeys, intrigue-laced politics, and encounters with the good and the great. Streit's travelogue of his 1921 expedition to interview Atatürk offers an early example, even if it was published long afterward. But the paragon is Vincent Sheean's 1935 best-selling memoir, *Personal History*, which became the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 thriller, *Foreign Correspondent*.⁴² Although few correspondents possessed Sheean's literary skills, growing numbers, responding to a burgeoning market, penned memoirs, which grafted personal histories onto dramatic narratives of international politics. Summing up his career in 1936, Webb Miller, a United Press (UP) correspondent, recounted:

³⁸ Cott, *Fighting Words*; and Deborah Cohen, *Last Call at the Hotel Imperial: Reporters Who Took on a World at War* (New York: Random House, 2022).

³⁹ Yong Volz and Lei Guo, "Making China Their 'Beat': A Collective Biography of U.S. Correspondents in China, 1900–1949," *American Journalism* 36 (2019), 473–96.

⁴⁰ See Whitney Walton, *Internationalism, National Identities, and Study Abroad: France and the United States, 1890–1970* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Cleo Joffrion Allen, "Foreign News Coverage in Selected U.S. Newspaper 1927–1997: A Content Analysis." PhD, Louisiana State University, 2005, 71; and W. James Potter, "News from Three Worlds in Prestige U.S. Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (1987), 77.

⁴² For Sheean, see Cott, "Revisiting the Transatlantic 1920s," 46–75.

During twenty-four years I have had a grandstand seat at the momentous show in history. From there I have witnessed the decline and fall of empires, the birth of new nations, the rise of new philosophies of government and the disappearance of old ones. I have seen the map of the world redrawn and come to know men and women of fifty-one nationalities and a dozen creeds and religions. I have made friends with presidents, premiers, dictators, generals, soldiers, common workers, murderers, thieves, pimps, panders, and prostitutes.⁴³

In placing themselves at the center of events, foreign correspondents imbued their profession – and themselves – with a sense of importance and purpose. “We made it a point to be casual and nonchalant about kings and dictators and premiers,” Eugene Lyon, a UP correspondent, remarked. But “[u]nderneath it [nonchalance] we were thoroughly impressed with the importance of our calling and our privileged vantage point on History in the Making.”⁴⁴

All told, descriptions of the interwar years as the golden age of the foreign correspondent are readily understandable: In this formative period for the profession, talented and determined individuals enjoyed considerable freedom to forge careers whose rewards included not only travel and adventure but also attractive salaries, prestige, and relevance. Yet this description, now something of a cliché, neglects an important element: the professionalization of journalism. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, journalism became a well-defined profession with its own educational requirements, skills-set, norms, rules, and expectations. And one unintended consequence of this process was the emergence of a palpable gap between professional ideals and realities.

Historians of journalism have identified an emerging norm and even ideology of “objectivity” centered on an ideal of factual, disinterested, apolitical, and in-depth reporting.⁴⁵ The initial impulse dated to the late

⁴³ Webb Miller, *I Found No Peace: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1936), 317.

⁴⁴ Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1937), 394.

⁴⁵ Michael Schudson, “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism,” *Journalism* 2 (2001), 149–70. Also see Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics of the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and Hazel Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Schudson’s claim that the “objectivity norm” distinguished American from European journalism is questionable. See Michael Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitaine Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017); and Christian Delporte, “Les journalistes dans l’entre-deux-guerres. Une identité en crise,” *Vingtième siècle* 47 (1995), 158–75.

nineteenth century and was the product of several factors, including a reaction to the sensationalism, luridness, and distortions if not outright fabrications of the “yellow press.” The World War I experience of government control and censorship, together with patriotic self-censorship on the part of newspapers and journalists, generated a reaction, reinforcing the appeal of objectivity as an ideal. Journalists should be independent seekers, not simply of the facts but also of a deeper and truer understanding of events, a type of reporting requiring them to dig beneath and beyond the propaganda and censorship of various kinds.⁴⁶

The most prominent contemporary proponent of objectivity in journalism was Walter Lippmann, the prolific journalist and political commentator. In a series of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1919, subsequently issued as a short book, he warned of the dangers of government efforts to influence, if not control, the news. But Lippmann reserved his sharpest criticism for the self-censorship practiced by newspapers, warning “the most destructive form of untruth is sophistry and propaganda by those whose profession is to report the news.” The following year, the *New Republic* published a much-commented-upon study by Lippmann, cowritten with Charles Merz, of the *New York Times*’ coverage of events in Russia in 1917, pointedly demonstrating the newspaper’s invasive anti-Bolshevism, a bias in which the editorial staff and journalists were equally complicit. Incidentally, Streit, back in 1918, had privately railed at the Press’ “bourgeois prejudice” against Russia. Lippmann and Merz were no less scathing, judging the *Times*’ coverage as “nothing short of a disaster. On the essential questions the net effect was almost always misleading, and misleading news is worse than none at all.”⁴⁷

For Lippmann and Merz, one solution was to raise the “professional standards of journalism” as “the discipline by which standards are maintained are not strong enough.” To do so, they recommended codes of ethics, greater accountability, and transparency in the operations of

⁴⁶ David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America’s Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007); and Hayden, *Negotiating in the Press*. Journalism was not alone in undergoing a process of professionalization associated with the ideal of objectivity. For another case, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴⁷ Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 10; and Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, “A Test of the News,” supplement to *The New Republic*, August 4, 1920, 3. For Streit, see LOC, CKS, Box III: 7, file 3, Streit to Mother, October 30, 1918.

newspapers, and better training of staff and of journalists in particular. Invoking public concern about the shortage of objective reporting, an alarmed Lippmann cautioned that if the profession did not take measures to regulate itself then “some day Congress, in a fit of temper, egged on by an outraged public opinion, will operate on the press with an ax.”⁴⁸

If Lippmann’s alarmism expressed a general malaise at the time, it was also overblown, for journalism was undergoing an accelerating process of professionalization – one centered on the ideal of objectivity. One element of this process, illustrated by Streit’s own educational path, was the rapid multiplication of journalism schools and programs in the United States. The University of Missouri created the country’s first journalism school in 1908; 20 years later there were some 430 instructors teaching 5,500 students in over 50 institutions. In 1913, Columbia University’s school opened its doors, signaling that journalism now belonged among the professions taught at elite universities. Ackermann, Streit’s first boss, would graduate from Columbia’s school in 1913 and later become its dean. Although curricula varied from school to school, typical programs lasted from two to four years and emphasized professional ethics as well as practical skills. Journalists, these schools taught, served not a particular country, interest, or political cause but the greater or public good.⁴⁹ Other elements of professionalization included the creation of prizes, most notably the Pulitzer first awarded in 1917, and the elaboration of codes of conduct – as Lippmann himself had recommended. In 1914, the National Press Club adopted the “Journalist’s Creed” written by Walter Williams, the founder of the University of Missouri’s journalism school. Identifying the profession as a “public trust,” it insisted “clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.”⁵⁰

Thus, Streit became a journalist at the very moment the profession was assuming a corporate identity, which esteemed the ideal of objectivity, defined as a responsibility to strive for accurate, value-free, and thorough reporting. More than a mere inspiration, the idea of objectivity was intended to be a practical guide for journalists in their day-to-day

⁴⁸ Lippmann and Merz, “A Test of the News,” 41; and Lippmann, *Liberty and the News*, 76, 74–103.

⁴⁹ Jean Folkerts, “History of Journalism Education,” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 16 (2014), 231–40.

⁵⁰ Ronald T. Farrar, *A Creed to My Profession: Walter Williams, Journalist to the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 192–206.

activities. One result, as Streit's experience suggests, was a frustrating gap between the ideal and reality.

Foreign correspondents faced practical difficulties that all the talk of a golden age easily elides. As Lippmann recognized, there was government censorship, which became an especially visible problem during the 1930s when several European regimes, and most notably Nazi Germany, placed tight controls on information. Webb Miller thus lamented in 1937 that "[f]ollowing the rise of dictatorial governments . . . censorship became a fundamental rule . . ." But even in the 1920s government censorship appeared ominous. A conference of press experts, convened in 1927 under the auspices of the League Nations, called on governments to end various measures of censorship, including the banning of foreign correspondents.⁵¹ The year before, Streit, working as the *New York Times*' correspondent in Rumania, had been expelled from the country for articles judged hostile to the monarchical regime.⁵²

Journalists in the 1930s were even more troubled by what the League's conference of press experts labeled "tendentious news" – that is, news provided by governments. The 1920s saw the proliferation of national news agencies across Europe, which increasingly exercised a guiding hand on (and sometimes a monopoly of) national news, a significant source for foreign correspondents and an absolutely vital source for US news services. By 1934, the Associated Press received the majority of its European news from state-controlled national agencies. John Gunther recognized the obvious problem with such news, remarking "handouts" by their very nature constituted propaganda; he nevertheless expressed confidence that the knowing correspondent would be able to filter out biases. Gunther's confidence, though, was questionable at a time when national services increasingly served, in the words of one historian, as "gatekeepers" not only for the larger US news services such as AP and UP but also for correspondents working directly for newspapers.⁵³

Less direct, but not necessarily less irksome, forms of censorship occurred on the US side. If individual correspondents had their preferences and prejudices, so too did the newspapers they worked for. The editorial biases of some, such as the isolationist and arch anti-Democrat

⁵¹ Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 318; and Christopher A. Casey, "Deglobalization and the Disintegration of the European News System, 1918–34," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2017), 281.

⁵² "Rumania Expels Times Reporter," *New York Times*, May 25, 1926, 3.

⁵³ Casey, "Deglobalization and the Disintegration," 278–79. On the role of the larger American news services, see Desmond, *Crisis and Conflict*, 225–34.

Chicago Tribune, were self-evident. Those of others, such as the *New York Times*, were more or less explicit – and also a matter of political perspective. In the 1930s, George Seldes, a former foreign correspondent in Europe turned fierce critic of the Press, accused the *New York Times* of being “the organ of the men of the *status quo*, the friend of those in power, the conservative spokesmen of a system which dreads change and which fears every reform or radical plan . . .”⁵⁴ In terms of international politics, though, the newspaper was not so much pro-*status quo* as it was staunchly internationalist in a broadly Wilsonian sense, which translated into general support for greater US engagement in the world as well as sympathy for the League of Nations, while also shying away from specific commitments. If this orientation left room for manoeuvre, the possibilities were not unlimited as Streit himself would discover when his editors, deeming he had strayed too far from the *Times*’ line, questioned his “reputation for objective reporting.”⁵⁵

Commercial imperatives, broadly construed, probably had a more practical impact on journalists than political censorship. In principle, a division of labor existed between the larger US news services and foreign correspondents working directly for newspapers: While the former concentrated on “facts” (deaths, elections, disasters, etc.), the latter provided the context – or what Gunther termed “the significance behind the facts.” In reality, correspondents were less free than Gunther maintained to “explore, elucidate, and editorialize.”⁵⁶ One reason, mentioned earlier, is that newspaper owners and editors perceived the growing demand for foreign news through the lens of an imagined everyday American. Correspondents came under pressure to Americanize foreign news, and, as Seldes explained, this entailed approaching foreign news as one would domestic news. And the dominant approach to the latter was that of the local beat reporter, whose copy combined basic information with an emphasis on immediacy and personalities. Tellingly, Seldes deemed this reporting and not journalism.⁵⁷

Financial considerations reinforced the constraints on journalism. Maintaining an adequate foreign news service proved expensive, spurring

⁵⁴ Seldes, *Freedom of the Press*, 214. For Seldes in general, see Helen Fordham, *George Seldes’ War for the Public Good: Weaponising a Free Press* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

⁵⁵ LOC, CKS, Box I: 13, file: Press: General, 1932, Streit to Carl Ackermann, October 31, 1934.

⁵⁶ John Gunther, “Funneling the European News,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 1, 1930, 638.

⁵⁷ George Seldes, *Lords of the Press* (New York, 1938), 283–91. Also see Fordham, *George Seldes’ War for the Public Good*, 27–28.

an ever-greater reliance on the larger news services such as AP and UP, whose limits were increasingly evident. Even the handful of newspapers, the *New York Times* among them, willing and able to incur the costs involved, sought to curb spending. Streit's editors, indeed, repeatedly pressed him to keep costs down. One way to do so, given the high costs of telegraph communication at the time, was to reduce the length (word count) of stories sent by wire. As with social media today, the incentives to be succinct produced a distinct and even abstruse vocabulary among correspondents. But they also pushed correspondents to sacrifice context in favor of "facts." Clearly chafing under such constraints, Streit during the 1920s toyed with several ideas: to create an expatriate daily to provide the in-depth reporting for the "thinking intelligent man," or even to establish a syndicated service offering higher quality international news.⁵⁸

Additional constraints involved newsgathering. Contrary to a popular portrait of journalists dashing from one adventure to another in pursuit of their stories, the reality was far more routine – and frustrating. For most correspondents, the principal sources of information consisted of national news agencies, newspapers, government handouts, and the larger news services, all of which were problematic. The ambitious correspondent who endeavored to expand this source base quickly encountered obstacles. Most US correspondents possessed limited language skills at a time when English was less omnipresent than now. Streit spoke French, which proved handy in Romania but less so in Vienna, his first regular job with the *Times*.⁵⁹ And, like many correspondents, Streit moved from one posting to another in rapid order (four times between 1922 and 1927). In addition to the disrupting effects on family life, this frequent movement hindered the ability to develop in-country expertise and contacts. To be sure, foreign correspondents formed a relatively tight-knit fraternity in interwar Europe, often sharing information with one another. But however useful, this cooperation offered no real solution to the limits of inadequate sources. Foreign correspondents could do little more than scratch the surface.

The overriding result was a frustrating gap – indeed gulf – between what foreign correspondents were enjoined to do (and many sought to do) and what they did. Journalism's ongoing professionalization,

⁵⁸ LOC, CKS, Box I: 12, file: Daily Why Project, untitled note, August 1, 1924; and Box III: 8, file 6, Streit to Dad, September 23, 1924.

⁵⁹ For one correspondent's emphasis on the importance of linguistic capabilities, see J. C. Oestreicher, *The World Is Their Beat* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1945), 72.

epitomized in the ideal of objectivity, held out a tantalizing promise: Correspondents could produce the factual, sourced-based, and in-depth reporting needed for the public to grasp the stakes of international politics. Yet multiple practical factors – editorial politics, commercial imperatives, inadequate sources – rendered this promise all-too elusive. If the resulting gulf between the promise and the realities of the job has probably become a permanent feature of the profession, it was particularly palpable during the interwar period because the process of professionalization was so recent.

The frustration generated by this gap is evident in a lengthy report Streit wrote in 1932 in his function as president of the association of journalists accredited to the League of Nations. The occasion was a League inquiry into the relationship between the Press and the promotion of peace, which included the subject of “false news,” defined as information that was deliberately distorting. Streit sought to expand the scope of the inquiry to encompass the practical difficulties facing foreign correspondents. “Always,” he opened, “we journalists have had to fight for accuracy against heavy odds.” A key problem lay in the gulf between professional ideals and reality. While the demand for, and need of, “accurate news” was ever more apparent, the ability of correspondents to respond fell woefully short. One handicap was the need to simplify complex issues requiring 25,000 words into “500 words.” Another was the shortage of time, support, and sources. Rather than “do work of the standard he would like to do,” a correspondent is forced “to dash off two or three reports ... for newspapers in different places, and then write reports on several other different things, and they have to grind away like this every day.” Streit understood that “accurate news” – reporting approaching more closely the ideal of objectivity – could be prohibitively expensive as the “*newspaper cannot live on what people will pay directly for the news.*” Accordingly, he recommended international subsidies to defray the costs involved in the production and dissemination of news. The recommendation proved controversial, earning Streit a reprimand from his editor who viewed it as veiled criticism of the *Times*.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ LONA, Association internationale des journalistes accrédités auprès de la S.D.N., Box P 14, file: Correspondance, etc 1932, “The Problem of False News. Reply to the Council of the League of Nations by the Committee of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the League of Nations,” Streit, July 26, 1932. Emphasis in original. For the enquiry, see Carolyn N. Biltoft, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 105–10. For the reprimand, see

Streit was far from alone in his frustration. As is well-known, several of the most prominent US correspondents at the time – John Gunther, Vincent Sheean, H. R. Knickerbocker – voiced dissatisfaction at the constraints operating on them. Having observed first-hand the aggressive nature of the fascist states, they urgently sought to warn Americans back home of the looming threat.⁶¹ Finding foreign reporting too constraining, too limited in its influence, these correspondents responded by re-defining journalism. Most often they donned the mantle of opinion-maker as reporting gave way to commentary. Here, Lippmann had blazed a path with his column in the *New York Herald Tribune*, which others would follow, for example, Dorothy Thompson.

The frustration felt by Thompson and others, however, did not date from the 1930s. Its roots can be traced back to the postwar years and to the ongoing professionalization of journalism, encapsulated in the ideal of objectivity, which created a gulf between ideal and reality. It was not that this ideal excluded the role of Cassandra; if anything, it encouraged it. And the ideal of objectivity did so by inculcating a strong sense of purpose and self-importance among foreign correspondents. “We felt that what we wrote was important, that it could not only interest people, but influence them – and through them events” recollected Geoffrey Cox of his American (and British) colleagues.⁶² In the context of mounting international tensions during the 1930s, correspondents believed they had a duty, indeed a responsibility, to influence policies. If journalism and its objectivity ideal could not accommodate this imperative, then it would need to be reformed – or abandoned.

Streit, too, was tempted by the idea of the journalist as commentator/opinion-maker – hence his interest in founding his own expatriate newspaper in the mid-1920s. Ultimately, though, he went further. Rather than issuing general calls for opposition to the dictator states, Streit began to devise proposals for specific international issues. At the end of 1920s, he concocted a plan to reduce the dangers of international conflict by having nations pledge themselves to hold plebiscites before declaring war. Thanks largely to his status as a *New York Times*’ correspondent, Streit received numerous comments on his plan, including one from Franklin

NYPL, NYTCR, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Box 72, file 72.17, E. L. J. to Sulzberger, October 12, 1932.

⁶¹ Cohen, *Last Call at the Hotel Imperial*, 136–66; and Cott, *Fighting Worlds*, 4–5, 321.

⁶² Geoffrey Cox, *Eyewitness: A Memoir of Europe in the 1930s* (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press, 1999), 249.

D. Roosevelt, soon to become governor of New York, who remarked that the US Congress would certainly reject the idea, and from Lippmann, who pointed out that, if all countries were sincerely willing to adopt the plan, the problem (war) would no longer exist.⁶³ A few years later, Streit returned to the charge, this time with a plan to solve the war debts/reparations issue that had so bedeviled international politics in the 1920s. Although managing to get a lengthy article published in the *Times* on the plan, few seemed interested. As Lippmann gently counseled Streit, the issue had lost much of its pertinence by the early 1930s.⁶⁴

In the face of discouraging responses, Streit dropped both plans. The urge to find solutions to pressing international problems, however, remained.

IN GENEVA COVERING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

In early 1929, *the New York Times* assigned Streit to Geneva to cover the League of Nations, where he would remain until the end of 1938. The lengthy stay in one place testifies to the value the *Times* placed in him, for Streit successfully resisted pressure to be reassigned, including to the newspaper's head office in New York, presumably to be groomed for its editorial staff. To be sure, Streit confronted familiar pressures, not least that of adapting his reporting to the demands of objectivity. Unhappy with "Streit's discursive articles," the *Times*' managing editor reminded its European editor in 1932 that "[w]hat we want from Geneva, as you know, is news." While "[t]here is room for a certain amount of interpretation," too many of Streit's despatches "have been edited or omitted."⁶⁵

But for all the constraints, Geneva was an exciting place to work for a foreign correspondent during the 1930s. During the sessions of the League's General Assembly or during periods of crisis, the city became the focal point of international politics, bringing together national

⁶³ See LOC, CKS, Box I: 12, file: Peace Plan, "Checking War by Reciprocal Pledge," Streit, May 23, 1929; for Roosevelt, see CKS, Box I: 4, file: Chronological correspondence, Roosevelt to Streit, July 27, 1928; and for Lippmann, see SMLPU, Hamilton Fish Armstrong Papers, Box 60, file: Streit, Clarence, Fish to Streit, January 23, 1929.

⁶⁴ YUL, Walter Lippmann Papers, Box 104, file 2021, Lippmann to Streit, November 10, 1933; and Streit, "A Plan for World Recovery Based on Use of War Debts," *New York Times*, September 24, 1933, 4.

⁶⁵ NYPL, NYTCR, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 72, file 72.17, Sulzberger to E. L. J., December 13, 1933; and LOC, CKS, Box III: 8, file 7, E. L. James to Birchall, October 31, 1932.

leaders, foreign ministers, and diplomats from several continents. Upward of 100 foreign correspondents were accredited to the League, with another 200 or so passing through on a regular basis, making Geneva a hub of international journalism. The League, an English correspondent commented in 1938, “possesses a curious fascination for the world’s newspapers and their correspondents. Geneva is the first laboratory to be created for the manufacture of world opinion.”⁶⁶ It was also a congenial place to work, thanks to the League, whose information section, headed by a former US journalist, Arthur Sweetser, cultivated foreign correspondents, providing them with ample documentation and comfortable facilities.⁶⁷

Streit thrived in Geneva. Colleagues referred to him as “the able and popular Clarence Streit” and as the “most distinguished among the residents.” In addition to such praise, Streit, in 1932, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the world economic conference.⁶⁸ In the process, he became a recognized expert on the League of Nations, writing articles for magazines as well as giving lectures and radio addresses in Europe and the United States on the organization.

In his public appearances, Streit addressed the fraught subject of the United States’ relations with the League – a subject on which scholarly views diverge. An older view emphasizes the United States’ absence from the League following the Senate’s rejection of the peace treaty in 1919 and again in 1920, an absence supposedly emblematic of the country’s isolationist orientation during the interwar years. Organized groups such as the League of Nations Association (LNA), founded in 1923, labored to persuade the public and Congress of the League’s merits, though ultimately with little success. After the Senate’s 1935 rejection of membership in the World Court, a tribunal attached to the League, support for US participation in the latter rapidly faded.⁶⁹ A newer view, by contrast,

⁶⁶ George Slocombe, *A Mirror to Geneva: Its Growth, Grandeur and Decay* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 315.

⁶⁷ For Sweetser, see Isabella Löhr and Madeleine Herren, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik: Arthur Sweetser und die Mediendiplomatie des Völkerbunds,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62 (2014), 411–24; and Heidi J. S. Tworek, “Peace Through Truth?: The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations,” *Medien & Zeit* 4 (2010), 22–28.

⁶⁸ Slocombe, *A Mirror to Geneva*, 317; and John T. Whitaker, *And Fear Came* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 88.

⁶⁹ Warren F. Kuehl and Lynne K. Dunn, *Keeping the Covenant: American Internationalists and the League of Nations, 1920–1939* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997); Robert D. Accinelli, “Militant Internationalists: The League of Nations Association, the

underscores the country's involvement in the League, particularly in its diverse "technical" activities (health, education, finance and economics, labor). If the principal actors were nongovernmental organizations such as private banks and foundations, many enjoyed the State Department's blessing and sometimes active if discreet backing. This second view, moreover, belongs to a larger effort to rehabilitate the League's historical reputation: Rather than a failed security institution, it now appears as a dynamic and innovative participant in efforts to devise new forms of international governance – forms that would mark international relations after 1945.⁷⁰

Foreign correspondents in Geneva during the 1930s would have been surprised by subsequent efforts to rehabilitate the League's record. By the second half of the decade, their collective assessment of the institution was markedly negative. "It was, unfortunately, impossible to follow the proceedings of the League at Geneva without becoming cynical about it," Robert Dell, a well-known journalist, remarked in an account tellingly entitled *The Geneva Racket* and published in 1940. Dell was British but well before then US correspondents in Geneva had issued harsh assessments of the League. It had "failed lamentably," Webb Miller bemoaned in 1936, making another European war unavoidable, a prediction echoed by John Whitaker, a *New York Herald Tribune* journalist, who deemed the League to have "failed, and failed miserably."⁷¹ Wythe Williams, who had been Streit's immediate boss at the *Ledger* before also joining the *New York Times*, denounced the League as a "colossal failure – of which it furnished almost daily proof." Looking back from 1940, Frederick Birchall, another *Times*' correspondent, dismissed the institution as the "Futile League."⁷²

Peace Movement, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1934–28," *Diplomatic History* 4 (1980), 19–38; and Gary B. Ostrower, *Collective Insecurity: The United States and the League of Nations during the Early Thirties* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979).

⁷⁰ For the United States' involvement, see Ludovic Tournès, *Les États-Unis et la Société des Nations (1914–1946): Le système international face à l'émergence d'une superpuissance* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016). For the more general rehabilitation of the League, see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 1091–1117.

⁷¹ Robert Dell, *The Geneva Racket 1930–1939* (London: Robert Hale, 1940), 7; Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 322; and Whitaker, *And Fear Came*, 98.

⁷² Williams, *Dusk of Empire*, 227; and Frederick T. Birchall, *The Storm Breaks: A Panorama of Europe and the Forces that Have Wrecked Its Peace* (New York: Viking, 1940), 89–101.

As prominent purveyors of foreign news, correspondents were well placed to influence opinion at home. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the image of the League as a failure became common currency among US commentators by the second half of the 1930s. Speaking at a conference on foreign policy in the autumn of 1938, Samuel Flagg Bemis, a distinguished Yale historian, recognized the events of the last few years had demonstrated “that no world peace is possible through the League of Nations.” Shortly afterward, John Foster Dulles, a Republican foreign policy heavyweight and future secretary of state who would soon collaborate with Streit, concluded the League had “failed to become an instrument qualified to preserve the peace.”⁷³ This generalized sense of failure is worth underscoring, for it prompted an extended debate on the reasons for the League’s failure as well as on what could and should be done. Streit would become a prominent participant in this debate with the publication of *Union Now* in 1939. But even before then Streit’s evolving views of the League from his perch in Geneva provide an interesting perspective on this developing debate.

Reflecting his confidence in Wilson’s vision of internationalism, Streit initially exhibited considerable enthusiasm for the League as an instrument for building peaceful relations between states. One fellow correspondent remembered him as “the self-appointed voice of the League’s Wilsonian conscience,” while an Italian observer described him less charitably as an “infatuated fanatic of the LoN.”⁷⁴ Streit’s Wilsonian internationalism can be seen in his tenure as president of the professional association of foreign correspondents in Geneva in the early 1930s, during which he aggressively lobbied League officials to open all deliberations to the public. The “rule of secrecy,” he insisted to one of them, undermined the open diplomacy essential “to peace and good understanding among peoples.”⁷⁵

Streit’s early reporting also evinced a strong faith in the League. During the first half of the 1930s, he strove to counter the “anti-League dogma at

⁷³ Samuel Flagg Bemis, “Main Trends of American Foreign Policy” in Frank P. Davidson and George S. Viereck, Jr., eds., *Before America Decides: Foresight in Foreign Affairs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 99; and John Foster Dulles, *War, Peace and Change* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 84.

⁷⁴ Edmond Taylor, *Awakening from History* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), 164; and Canali, *La scoperta dell’Italia*, 342.

⁷⁵ LONA, Association internationale des journalistes accrédités auprès de la S.D.N., Box P 13, file: sujets divers, 1928–1938, Streit to Paul Hymans, March 9, 1932; and the file in LONA, League of Nations, R2442/7B/29034/3071.

home,” urging US membership in radio addresses to American listeners while highlighting the institution’s positive contributions to international politics in his articles.⁷⁶ More fundamentally, Streit portrayed the League less as an institution than as a method whose effect was to foster peaceful relations between states. Although delegates were sent to Geneva to defend their countries’ narrow and selfish policies, once there they found themselves enmeshed in extended exchanges with one another from which emerged a shared understanding of collective interests:

Nowhere else are men subjected constantly to this . . . pressure to see the world as a whole and their own country in perspective as a part of it. Nowhere else is the suicidal character of the war relationship brought home so repeatedly to them in its various phrases. Nowhere else is the imagination so stimulated to see what peace would really mean and to understand the advantages it would bring to everyone. And nowhere else does practice so monotonously remind one that the way to peace is discouragingly long and hard.

The League, as Streit endeavored to explain to a US public, offered a microcosm of a cooperative and therefore peaceful practice of international relations. It “is a fact,” he proclaimed, “that few men can come to know the League at first hand without becoming converted to Wilson’s basic idea.”⁷⁷

Streit by no means presented the League as an unqualified success in his articles. In reporting on the world disarmament conference, which ran from 1932 to 1934, he pointed to the difficulties of convincing sovereign nations to cooperate with one another – a difficulty that would increasingly preoccupy him. Nevertheless, during the first half of the 1930s Streit’s confidence in the League appeared resilient. He framed the League as a bold and even revolutionary experiment in international relations as well as a work in progress. The main task, accordingly, was to strengthen the League’s “new peace machinery” by persuading the United States to join but also by developing its provisions for collective action. Critics of the League must be patient, he counseled readers, as its development would take time, reminding them “that no better alternative has been proposed.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ For example, see in the *New York Times*, “Streit, on Radio, Urges League Aid,” February 6, 1932, 9; and “Big Advance Made by League in Year,” January 4, 1931, 79.

⁷⁷ “The Coldest Audience in all the World,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1933, 119, 130.

⁷⁸ “The World’s Efforts to Attain Peace,” August 12, 1934, 114, 125; and “League Prestige Falls and Rises,” February 23, 1936, 74, both in *New York Times*. Also see Streit, “The League’s Defenders Make Answer,” *International Conciliation* 16 (1934), 83–90.

In calling for a strengthened League, Streit implicitly took sides in a debate among internationalists in the United States at the time. Almost all internationalists judged the League's present state as inadequate, and almost all of them supported US membership. They disagreed, however, on what needed to be done. One group advocated reform of the League to make it more acceptable to the US public, which effectively meant weakening the institution. Writing in 1936, A. Lawrence Lowell, a former president of Harvard and longtime pro-League Republican, thus suggested transforming it into a "purely consultative body, shorn of teeth and claws." Such a League, Lowell conjectured, might persuade Congress that membership posed no threat to the country's freedom-of-action.⁷⁹

Another group of internationalists expressed interest in reinvigorating rather than weakening the League. Many of them gravitated to the LNA, the principal pro-League organization in the United States. During the second half of the 1930s, the LNA suffered from deepening divisions between pacifists, who advocated American neutrality in a future war, and the advocates of a League-centered collective security. Prominent among the latter was James Shotwell, a Columbia University professor and LNA president from 1935, best known today for his part in the 1928 Kellogg-Briand pact, an international agreement seeking to outlaw recourse to war as a tool of state policy.⁸⁰ Like all internationalists, Shotwell lobbied for US membership in the League, deeming it an essential condition for an effective international organization. But he did not support participation at any price, and certainly not that of further weakening the League. Instead, in a book published in 1937, Shotwell discussed how to strengthen the League's "machinery of peace enforcement," floating the idea of reorganizing collective security on a regional basis. Rather than defining collective security in terms of a "uniform, world-wide obligation to take military action in the case of aggression anywhere in the world," a definition imposing unrealistic burdens on members, Shotwell proposed a system of "concentric circles of graded responsibility" in which the states most immediately concerned would cooperate under the League's aegis to preserve and enforce peace, if necessary by military means. Elsewhere, Shotwell even spoke of reviving

⁷⁹ A. Lawrence Lowell, "Alternatives before the League," *Foreign Affairs* 15 (January 1936), 102–11.

⁸⁰ For Shotwell, see Harold Josephson, *James T. Shotwell and the Rise of Internationalism in America* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975); and Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

the “old diplomacy” with its “secret dealings” in order to facilitate such cooperation. The key point, though, is that Shotwell and his allies were searching for the means to revitalize both the League and collective security.⁸¹

By the time Shotwell’s book appeared, Streit’s thinking on the League had considerably evolved, kindled by several overlapping considerations. One was his deepening belief that the foundational divide in international politics was between democracies and authoritarian or dictator states. Although this belief might be ascribed to Wilson’s enduring legacy, for Streit it had become a preoccupation by the 1930s. What he called the “militant autocracies” – a bloc comprising Germany, Italy, and Japan but not necessarily the Soviet Union – posed an existential challenge, not only to the League but also to democracy itself, which he associated with the principle of “freedom.” “It is democracy that brings not only freedom to man but wealth and power,” he asserted as early as November 1934; “it is the peoples who have longest endured autocracy that have been blighted most.” If freedom initially encompassed both the collective and the individual, Streit soon defined democracy exclusively in terms of the latter. Unlike the authoritarian states, he lectured in 1936, “Democracy puts its faith in the individual.”⁸²

Several aspects of this binary vision of international politics deserve mention. First, a focus on democracy, defined in terms of individual freedom as opposed to the collectivism of the autocracies, facilitated Streit’s estrangement from the Progressive-reformist political sympathies so evident in his early journalism. A focus on the chasm between democracies and non-democracies (“militant autocracies”) obviated a critique of the internal functioning of democratic regimes. Whatever its shortcomings, democracy as a regime type appeared decidedly preferable to its nondemocratic counterparts. Although Streit was certainly not alone in shifting the political reference point from inside to outside democracy, it is striking the extent to which his earlier critical stance toward the United

⁸¹ James T. Shotwell, *On the Rim of the Abyss* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 18, 28, 333–36; and James T. Shotwell, “Mechanism for Peace in Europe,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 17 (May 1937), 292–93.

⁸² “Democracy versus Absolutism: A Measuring Rod Is Applied to the Two Groups of Nations,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1934, 154; and Streit, “World Organization through Democracy,” in R. B. Mowat, W. Arnold-Forster, H. Lauterpacht et al., eds., *Problems of Peace. Tenth Series. Anarchy or World Order* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), 236.

States became blunted. During a brief visit home in the midst of the Depression, Streit wrote not of the suffering and misery of millions of people but of the population's general wealth and contentment. The "sum total of individual anguish does not necessarily reflect that condition of the community, viewed as a community, as society," he lectured. If Streit suspended his typical emphasis of the individual, it was to defend the reigning economic system. "Foreclosures of mortgages have never killed the country," he insisted, adding that the solution to the economic crisis "will be not toward discarding private enterprise but toward freeing it from its enemies ..."⁸³ Absent entirely was the critical fervor of his earlier journalism.

Another notable aspect of Streit's binary vision of international politics is that it placed him at odds with other US correspondents in Geneva. Significantly, many of the latter perceived the principle international divide during the 1930s in terms not so much of regime type but of wealth in what amounted to the internationalization of the Progressive critique of inequalities within the United States. In this schema, there existed the have and have-not powers. The latter category, which included but was not limited to Germany, Italy, and Japan, consisted of states dissatisfied with the status quo and especially with the privileged access to resources which Britain, France, and the United States enjoyed. Probably the best-known exponent of this view was Frank Simonds, whom Hamilton Armstrong Fish, the longtime editor of *Foreign Affairs*, considered one of the "two best Americans" in Geneva (the other being Streit). In a popular study cowritten in 1935, Simonds claimed international politics were determined by the dynamics between two groups of states: "those who possess [the 'static' powers] and those who seek to possess [the 'dynamic' powers]." Continuing, he blasted the League as nothing more than a tool of the static powers to preserve the status quo at the expense of the dynamic powers. Given the unwillingness of the static powers to alter the distribution of resources, "a dynamic power has no other choice but to appeal to force." Similarly, John Whitaker bristled at the League's hypocrisy, denouncing the institution "as an alliance of the 'have got's' against the 'have not's.'" Talk of keeping the world safe for democracy, he

⁸³ Streit, "America Revisited and Revealed Anew," *New York Times*, November 25, 1934, 25, 124; and "An Inquiry into the Nation's Thoughts," *New York Times*, December 2, 1934, 151, 159.

growled, entailed “keeping the world safe for perpetual dividend-clipping in the United States, Great Britain, and France.”⁸⁴

But if Streit appeared at odds with his fellow correspondents in Geneva, his more political-ideological as opposed to class-oriented understanding of international politics resonated at home. To be sure, several prominent US internationalists, among them Clark Eichelberger, the LNA’s national director, warned against simply dismissing all of Germany, Italy, and Japan’s professed grievances, asserting collective security must be accompanied by “peaceful procedures for securing justice.”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, as scholars have shown, by the second half of the 1930s the drawing of sharp distinctions between democracies and non-democracies (variously labeled totalitarian, authoritarian, dictator, fascist, militarist) had become a notable trait of US political culture.⁸⁶ Illustrative, here, is a short book written by Streit’s friend, Armstrong Fish, entitled “*We or They*.” The “gulf” between democracies and dictators was not only “deep and wide,” Fish contended, but also unbridgeable because of their opposing “conceptions of life.” Whereas democracies championed “great and precious freedom – freedom to think, to believe, to disbelieve, to speak, to will, to choose,” dictatorships offered “nothing but obeisance, body, mind and soul, before the iron will and upstretched arms of a restless, infallible master.” War between the two might be averted, Fish added, but only if the democracies cooperated. Their leaders must strive “to minimize minor conflicts between themselves, remembering how much it is in the interests of every democracy that every other democracy be strong and prosperous enough to maintain its existing form of government.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *Peace and Counterpeace: From Wilson to Hitler* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 488; Frank H. Simonds and Brooks Emeny, *The Great Powers in World Politics: International Relations and Economic Nationalism* (New York: American Book, 1939), 128–29; and Whitaker, *And Fear Came*, 264–69.

⁸⁵ William T. Stone and Clark M. Eichelberger, *Peaceful Change: The Alternative to War* (New York: FPA, 1937); and Eichelberger, “Forth to Peace,” *The American Scholar* 8 (1938–39), 122.

⁸⁶ Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

⁸⁷ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, “*We or They*”: *Two Worlds in Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 3, 46–47.

Looking back, it is tempting to see this distinction between democracies and non-democracies as prefiguring the Cold War, though doing so risks overstating the role of the Soviet Union and of anti-communism in domestic political debates while understating that of the fascist states and Nazi Germany in particular.⁸⁸ But the more pertinent point for the time concerns Armstrong Fish's belief in the need for a common front of the democracies against the dictator states – a call that also resonated at home, even if it left the question of the United States' precise role unanswered. Equally important, a flipside of this belief consisted of growing doubts about the strength of the democracies and about their ability to compete successfully with the dictator states. “[S]kepticism,” Ira Katznelson writes in his study of the New Deal United States, “was prevalent about whether representative parliamentary democracies could cope within their liberal institutional bounds with capitalism's utter collapse, the manifest military ambitions by the dictatorships, or international politics characterized by ultranationalist territorial demands.”⁸⁹ Among the skeptics was Leslie Raymond Buell, the president of the Foreign Policy Association and prominent commentator on international affairs. In a lecture series in which Streit participated, Buell wondered “why is it that the democracies of the world, including our own, seem to be going down to defeat, while the dictators are going ahead.”⁹⁰

Buell feared the democracies, lacking sufficient internal unity and “concept of purpose,” would be tempted to imitate the dictator states in order to compete with them. Streit, though, sought to counter what he believed was the mistaken impression of democratic weakness. Marshaling a bevy of quantitative indices, he insisted that, taken together, the democracies enjoyed an impressive preponderance of power in multiple areas: economic, financial, raw materials, and military. Although these figures might buttress arguments about the unfair global

⁸⁸ Michaela Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2014), 114.

⁹⁰ Buell, “Where Are the Democracies Going?,” in Raymond Leslie Buell, George Gallup, Robert J. Watt, and Clarence K. Streit, eds., *Howard Crawley Memorial Lectures 1939* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), 1–17. In lectures in Chicago in 1938, William Rappard, a US-born Swiss diplomat and academic, remarked that “the cyclone of the authoritarian reaction that has passed over the world has even shaken the institutions of democracy where they were older.” See his *The Crisis of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 6.

distribution of resources, Streit's point was the opposite: that the democracies suffered from an unjustified "inferiority complex." As a bloc, they "have such overwhelming power that they have no need to bother whether the autocracies come or go." Rather than seek to appease the autocracies, the democracies were in a position to dictate to them the terms of prolonged peace. Significantly, while in accord with Fish on the need for cooperation among the three leading democracies (Britain, France, and the United States), Streit's vision was more expansive, encompassing in his calculations of resources the fifteen democracies ringing the Atlantic Ocean – a group he called the "Free Fifteen."⁹¹

For Streit, then, the principal threat to peace – as well as the biggest challenge to overcome – was disunity among the democracies. The solution, though, demanded more than mere cooperation among democracies, regardless of the number involved. It required some form of common political structure – or "world government." "Every year has more convinced me that in all this pother of war, peace, neutrality, depression, recovery, nationalism, internationalism," Streit intimated to Lippmann in early 1936, "the central issue and the only basic problem is the problem of organizing effective world government."⁹² Initially, Streit hoped the League, as he explained in a *New York Times* article, might furnish the democracies "with a mechanism for coordinating the action of great and small nations . . ." But he soon concluded the League was incapable of doing so, principally because an institution of sovereign nation-states was fatally flawed in conception. "The League method cannot possibly work," he confided to Ackerman in 1935, though adding that he could not say so in his reporting, "for in my cables I give the League view, not my own."⁹³

Streit would soon become less cautious. Rather than expending time and effort on "League reform," he lectured a Geneva audience in 1937, "we must start afresh our thinking on our problem of world government." No less importantly, Streit offered the US federal system as a promising source of inspiration for such thinking:

I think the most stimulating field for anyone interested in this great problem [of world government] to study is the history of the Constitution of the United States.

⁹¹ "Democracy versus Absolutism," 154; and Streit, "World Organization through Democracy," 220–51.

⁹² YUL, Walter Lippmann Papers, Box 104, file 2012, Streit to Lippmann, January 6, 1936.

⁹³ Streit, "League Still Gives Democracies Hope," *New York Times*, November 8, 1936, 124; and LOC, Carl W. Ackerman Papers, Box 79, Streit to Ackerman, May 24, 1935.

The United States is the outstanding success in the domain of the rationally constructed, large-scale democratic inter-state government. Since that is precisely the field we are in, the common-sense thing is to study the American experience for guidance.⁹⁴

Or as he told a US audience: “It is high time we Americans returned to our great tradition of constructive pioneering. If we are to win this race [between dictatorship and democracy] we must take the lead ourselves and lead the world the American way.”⁹⁵

By the end of 1938, Streit had traveled a long way from Missoula, Montana. Beginning in the aftermath of World War I, he forged a successful career in journalism, becoming the *New York Times*'s correspondent in Geneva, a posting which placed him at the center of international politics. At the same time, the constraints of journalism – constraints rooted in the process of professionalization and encapsulated in the ideal of objectivity – proved frustrating to Streit as it did to other correspondents. Rather than simply observe and report events, Streit wanted to shape policy, to find solutions to pressing issues. Early on, Streit's progressive sympathies directed his activist inclinations more toward domestic policies – hence his protest of the Wilson administration's clampdown on internal dissent. But by the 1930s, Streit's binary understanding of international politics as a contest between democracies and non-democracies had effectively dissolved his critique of US democracy. No less importantly, his experience in Geneva convinced him of the need for unity among the democracies. The pressing question now became how to unify the latter – a question Streit was eager to answer.

⁹⁴ Streit, “Reform of the Covenant Is Not Enough,” in Herbert S. Morrison, Gaston Riou, Stephan Osusky et al., eds., *The League and the Future of the Collective System* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), 230–31.

⁹⁵ Streit, “Can We Avert War,” in Raymond Leslie Buell, George Gallup, Robert J. Watt, and Clarence K. Streit, eds., *Howard Crawley Memorial Lectures 1939* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), 50.