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Charles A. Beard in Midpassage

THOMAS C. KENNEDY *

MANY of the obituary notices, book reviews, and essays about Charles A. Beard following his death in August, 1948 contain pointed allusions to what friends and critics alike regarded as a decline of Beard's former prestige as "the dean of American historians."¹ This judgment was based, in large part, on the unfavorable reception among American historians of Beard's two postwar revisionist volumes on Franklin D. Roosevelt, which were highly critical of the President's conduct of American diplomacy prior to the Second World War.²

Yet for some historians, Beard's waning prestige coincided with the decade of the 1930s, during which the bulk of his writings on foreign affairs reflected an intense commitment to an isolationist point of view; or, as the Beards described it in their *America in Midpassage*, the "continental" or "American civilization" school of foreign policy.³ In any case, most of the commentaries suggest or imply that Beard's criticism of extensive diplomatic involvement on the part

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¹ See, for example, Douglas S. Freeman, "Charles A. Beard and the Writing of History," *Christian Century*, LXV (September 22, 1948), 964; Perry Miller, "Charles A. Beard," *Nation*, CLXVII (September 25, 1948), 344-46; Peter R. Levin, "Charles A. Beard: Wayward Liberal," *Tomorrow*, VIII (March, 1949), 36-40; Samuel E. Morison, "Faith of a Historian," *American Historical Review*, LVI (January, 1951), 261-75; Review of Howard K. Beale, ed., *Charles A. Beard: An Appraisal*, by Robert E. Burke, in *American Historical Review*, LX (October, 1954), 116-17.

² Charles A. Beard, *American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940: A Study in Responsibilities* (New Haven, 1946); *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (New Haven, 1948).

³ Charles and Mary Beard, *America in Midpassage* (New York, 1939), I, 453.

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of the United States was a significant aspect of his thought only in the 1930s and after.

It is possible, however, to trace Beard's adoption of certain isolationist attitudes and policies during the decade after the First World War.⁴ From Versailles to the Great Depression, Beard's thought on world affairs was marked by alternating moods of optimism and pessimism that coincided, respectively, with many features of liberal internationalist and liberal isolationist thought in America during the twenties.⁵

Beard not only had supported American participation in the First World War on the grounds that "the German military machine threatens all mankind," but had regarded intervention on the side of the Allies as inevitable in 1916 and, in January and February, 1917 was critical of President Wilson's hesitance in not taking more drastic action against Germany.⁶ Consistent with this conviction that it was necessary and desirable for the United States to adopt a

⁴ A few scholars have alluded to the pre-1930s roots of Beard's isolationism, but have not probed this theme in depth. See Max Lerner, "Charles A. Beard: Civilization and the Devils," *New Republic*, CXIX (November 1, 1948), 23; Selig Adler, "The War-Guilt Question and American Disillusionment, 1919-1928," *The Journal of Modern History*, XXIII (March, 1951), 14n; Bernard C. Borning, *The Political and Social Thought of Charles A. Beard* (Seattle, 1962), 106n.

⁵ The terms "liberal internationalist" and "liberal isolationist" are derived from Eric F. Goldman's delineation of progressive-liberal opinion in regard to American foreign policy during and after World War I. The liberal internationalist was basically wedded to the notion of collective security in the promotion of world peace, which meant support of American intervention in the First World War and extensive participation in world affairs, including membership in the League of Nations following the end of hostilities. The liberal isolationist, on the other hand, was distinguished by his attachment to an economic interpretation of war, a fear that war meant the end of domestic reform and compromised civil liberties, a skeptical attitude towards the League, and, by the 1930s, a "deep-seated disillusionment with Wilsonianism." Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform* (New York, 1952), 223-61, 374-76.

⁶ Charles A. Beard, "A Call Upon Every Citizen," *Harper's Magazine*, CXXXVII (October, 1918), 655; Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament* (New York, 1936), 107; *New York Times*, January 23, 1917, 2:5; February 27, 1917, 2:6.

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belligerent status in 1917-1918, during the 1920s Charles Beard frequently emphasized the responsible and active role which America would have to assume in foreign affairs. Immediately after the war and toward the end of the period under review, moreover, he was generally sanguine in his appraisal of the prospects for international peace and stability.

At times, however, Beard despaired of the possibility of establishing a world that would be "safe for democracy" even if the United States embraced significant international commitments. Indeed, on occasion he feared that these commitments, particularly in foreign commercial ventures, might jeopardize the nation's security. His deliberations on the origins of the First World War and the "war guilt" question also gave rise to doubts about the validity and wisdom of his vigorous support of the war effort. When his thinking ran in these channels, Beard expressed views which clearly foreshadowed a number of the isolationist and revisionist themes found in his writings during the 1930s and after.

On the eve of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Beard, in *National Governments and the World War*, summarized the reasons for American intervention and reviewed the war aims of the United States. The war, Beard wrote, was patently one of national self-defense, a case of "taking up arms to repel acts of violence and wrong already being committed against the United States" by the Imperial German Government. But in responding to this challenge, he added, President Wilson had made it clear that "the United States sought no new material gains from the war — no new territories, no forcibly won markets for American trade, no compensations in money for wrong done — but rather to overthrow militarism and imperialism, making

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way for peace and democratic governments throughout the earth.”⁷

In a sympathetic fashion that implied acceptance of Wilson’s program for a non-vindictive treaty, Beard then outlined the major principles that were to guide American diplomacy in the forthcoming peace settlement. But optimism was tempered by words of caution. The worthy aims of Woodrow Wilson, he observed, probably would not be “universally accepted or lived up to by all nations in spirit as well as letter.” Beard nevertheless concluded that “those who have faith will believe that a real change has come in the long course of history and that the years 1917-1918 . . . will mark the opening of a new epoch in the rise of government by the people and in the growth of a concert among the nations.”⁸

America’s membership in a League of Nations was strongly endorsed in the final chapter of this study. Despite the “complete abandonment of her traditional policy of isolation” implicit in such a course of action, the United States had already set aside this policy by participating in the First World War. “The conditions obtaining in the modern world” would have made such a policy obsolete in any event.⁹

Before the formal signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, however, many liberals who had enthusiastically embraced Wilson’s war aims were disturbed by the

⁷ Charles A. Beard and Frederick A. Ogg, *National Governments and the World War* (New York, 1919), 556, 558. In the preface to this work (dated December 12, 1918), it is noted that Beard was responsible for writing the chapter from which these ideas were taken.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 570.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 590. The political scientist, Frederick A. Ogg, assumed the responsibility for this passage. But the sentiments expressed in regard to the non-viability of isolationism and the membership of the United States in an international peace-keeping organization were consistent with Beard’s own views before and during the war. See Charles A. Beard, *American Government and Politics* (1st ed.; New York, 1910), 330-33; Ruhl J. Bartlett, *The League to Enforce Peace* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944), 111; Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York, 1957), 51.

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prospect that the President would not be able to redeem his pledges. During the spring of 1919, editorials and articles in the *New Republic* chronicled the uncertain progress of the peace talks at Paris. Increasingly, many liberals came to doubt the fulfillment of the Fourteen Points, to question the integrity of America's recent comrades-in-arms, and to wonder whether Woodrow Wilson himself had not lost sight of the noble aims for which the country had gone to war. By December, 1919, when the *New Republic* began to serialize John Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a polemic against Wilson and the reparations clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, a considerable number of liberals were in virtual alliance with conservatives in opposition to the pact.¹⁰

Selig Adler has suggested that in 1919 Beard joined with Oswald Garrison Villard, Herbert Croly, and other liberals in the United States "who turned against the League because of the 'imperialistic' parts of the Treaty of Versailles."¹¹ If so, Beard did not develop an implacable anti-League attitude, for he often praised the concept and certain activities of the League in the decade after Versailles. It is clear, however, that by mid-1919 Beard was becoming impatient with what he regarded as distorted accounts of the origins and conduct of the war which gave the impression that members of the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, and Russia) were impelled only by idealistic motives in waging war against the Central Powers. But he just as vigorously asserted: "America's part in the great war was just and needed no specious apology."¹²

Indeed, throughout the 1920s Beard usually adhered to the belief that American intervention was warranted, regardless of any personal re-evaluations of the "war guilt"

¹⁰ Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny*, 263-70.

¹¹ Adler, "The War-Guilt Question."

¹² Charles A. Beard, "Propaganda in the Schools," *The Dial*, XLVI (June 14, 1919), 598.

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thesis and the Versailles treaty. Accordingly, he did not accept the views of those who argued, as did Harry Elmer Barnes in *The Genesis of the World War* (1926), that American participation was both unnecessary and unwise.

In his review-article of Barnes' work, Beard sustained the author's debunking of the victors' version of "war guilt," which Beard characterized as the "Sunday-school theory" of responsibility for the war. Barnes' analysis of the prime causes of the war, with "the bitter rivalry of the industrial powers for markets" at the head of the list, also met with Beard's approval. But he emphatically warned that "there is equal danger in the attempt to white-wash the German Kaiser, the Crown Prince, the war party and the super-patriots of the Fatherland."¹³

Beard pointedly refuted Barnes' contention that President Wilson had never been neutral and had deliberately promoted a war spirit throughout the country, observing that, as late as February, 1917, the President "looked rather coldly upon the pretensions of both parties to the European war." In view of Beard's extensive writings on the economic interpretation of war, it is perhaps significant that this idea was not broached in the essay when he discussed the reasons for American involvement. Instead, the motive of national security appeared to be uppermost in his mind. Challenging the hypothesis that a German victory would have been of no consequence to the United States, Beard remarked: "Certainly Mr. Barnes could hardly say that the United States would be in a more favorable position with a triumphant German military party astride Europe than with the Entente Allies victorious and at one another's throats." "It is decidedly to the interest of the United States," he added, "to help prevent the rise of any single European power to a dominant position." But in a conclusion that would find

¹³ Charles A. Beard, "Heroes and Villains of the World War," *Current History*, XXIV (August, 1926), 733.

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wide application in Beard's isolationist writings in the next decade, he stated that the American people "should not be bamboozled" by European statesmen and "should regard with cold blood all the quarrels of Europe."¹⁴

This interpretation of Wilson's restrained behavior and the national security motive with regard to America's involvement in the First World War were substantially embodied in *The Rise of American Civilization* published the following year. But Beard now considered briefly the hypothesis that Wilson had contemplated American entrance into the war in 1916. Moreover, the economic interpretation was introduced in a passage which implied that the pressures of interest groups (investors, munitions makers, merchants, and manufacturers) were among the many forces "that helped to form the President's crucial decision" for war.¹⁵

By 1930 Beard's interpretation of presidential responsibility for American belligerency had become more critical. In a study written with his son, William, Woodrow Wilson's conduct of diplomacy after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May, 1915 was described as "a program destined to end in an open break." The impression conveyed, however, is that the President's diplomacy might have been inept, but was without guile.¹⁶ Such views stand in rather sharp contrast, of course, to Beard's position by the mid-1930s when he joined the ranks of the revisionists who attacked Wilson's idealism and alleged guilt in dragging the nation into an unnecessary war at the instigation of economic interest groups.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 734-45.

¹⁵ Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1927), II, 626-33.

¹⁶ Charles and William Beard, *The American Leviathan: The Republic in the Machine Age* (New York, 1930), 275.

¹⁷ Charles A. Beard and James Harvey Robinson, *The Emergence of Modern Europe* (rev. ed.; Boston, 1930), II, 376.

¹⁸ The most provocative account of this revised interpretation of the role of Woodrow Wilson and economic forces in America's intervention in the

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If Beard was convinced during the 1920s of the power-political and ideological justification for American intervention in World War I, he was consistently critical of attempts to gloss over the complexities of the war's origins. An important impetus to Beard's revised estimate of the responsibilities for the war and pessimism over its consequences was a trip he made to Europe in 1919-1920. While on the Continent he observed the general breakdown of national economies combined with political unrest, including a riot in Italy associated with Mussolini's subsequent rise to power.¹⁹ It was also at this time that Beard took the opportunity to examine some of the official documents then available in European archives. Insights gained from these papers and published accounts into the operations of the alliance system before and after 1914 caused Beard to view his earlier appraisals of "war guilt" with increasing skepticism.²⁰

However disappointed Charles Beard might have been with the new diplomatic revelations and with some of the results of the war, neither he nor his wife, Mary, believed in 1921 that the imperfections of the Treaty of Versailles and the Senate's rejection of American membership in the League of Nations absolved the United States of international responsibilities. In the Beards' first joint effort in American history, the high school text *History of the United States* (1921), they clearly rejected isolationism, since

By no conceivable process could America be disentangled from the web of world affairs. Isolationism, if

First World War probably is to be found in Beard's *The Devil Theory of War: An Inquiry Into the Nature of History and the Possibility of Keeping Out of War* (New York, 1936).

¹⁹ William Beard (comp.), *The Economic Basis of Politics and Related Writings by Charles A. Beard* (Vintage ed.; New York, 1958), xiii.

²⁰ Mary R. Beard, *The Making of Charles A. Beard: An Interpretation* (New York, 1955), 30-31; Cushing Strout, *The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl Becker and Charles Beard* (New Haven, 1958), 138; Borning, *Political and Social Thought of Beard*, 107.

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desirable, had become impossible. . . . America, by virtue of its institutions, its population, its wealth, and its commerce, had become first among the nations of the earth. By moral obligations and by practical interests its fate was thus linked with the destiny of all mankind.²¹

Within a year, however, Beard was recommending that the United States allow Europe “to set its own house in order under the stress of its own necessities and experiences. Its statesmen know little enough, perhaps, but they know Europe better than any agents sent out from Washington.”²²

This ambivalence would appear to have stemmed, in large part, from Beard’s troubled reflections — demonstrated in several book reviews — on the origins of the war, the gap between the idealistic aims and chaotic aftermath of World War I, economic imperialism, and war propaganda.²³ But the most complete expression at this juncture in Beard’s life of his shifting attitudes toward the causes and results of the First World War and the future course of American foreign policy in the light of this episode is contained in *Cross Currents in Europe Today*, based on eight lectures delivered at Dartmouth College in 1922.

The first three lectures dealt with the “war guilt” question, in which Beard claimed he would “pass no judgments upon the motives and policies of the actors in the great drama that opened on August 1, 1914.” Yet he soon commented bitterly on the diplomats who secretly “exchanged pledges and created situations which drove Europe relentlessly into the abyss. Out of the millions that went forth to die, out of the millions that stayed home to suffer and bear the burdens, only a handful — a score or more —

²¹ Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *History of the United States* (New York, 1921), 620.

²² Charles A. Beard, *Cross Currents in Europe Today* (Boston, 1922), 265.

²³ See Charles A. Beard, “The Recent War,” *New Republic*, XXV (December 22, 1920), 114-15; “Transition in Politics,” *Nation*, CXII (February 23, 1921), 297-98; “La Guerre Absolue,” *New Republic*, XXVIII (September 21, 1921), 109-10.

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knew by what process the terrible *dénouement* had been brought to pass.”²⁴

In Beard’s analysis of primary responsibility for bringing on the war, Russia and France were accorded special blame in view of an alleged Franco-Russian scheme, formulated as early as 1908, to destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire in a general European war.²⁵ Beard’s revisionist account received slight critical notice at the time. But one reviewer thought the presentation lacked balance, and charged that Beard’s entire “war guilt” thesis rested on the questionable assumption that the whole course of European events after 1908 turned on a vague promise by the Russian government to support Serbia in the future.²⁶

It may be that Beard overstated his case at Dartmouth in his attempt to redress the balance of truth. Yet his views had not altered when he wrote three years later: “All must admit that one thing has been established beyond question, namely, that responsibility for the war must be distributed among all the participants with Russia and France bearing a Titan’s share.”²⁷ In 1930, however, Beard and James Harvey Robinson singled out for sympathetic discussion the revisionist work of Sidney B. Fay [*The Origins of the World*

²⁴ Charles A. Beard, *Cross Currents in Europe Today*, 2, 6. A few years later, Beard confided in a letter to Harry Elmer Barnes: “I hesitate in measuring out the exact amount of damnation due to the liars and incompetents who got the world into the mess of 1914 – but none of them can get too much.” C. A. Beard to H. E. Barnes, July 14, 1926[?], Harry Elmer Barnes Papers, Western History Research Center, University of Wyoming Library, Laramie, Wyoming. From the context of the letter, it would seem that Beard wrote it just before his review of Barnes’ book appeared in *Current History*, August, 1926.

²⁵ Beard, *Cross Currents*, 9-10, 26-27.

²⁶ Review of C. A. Beard, *Cross Currents in Europe Today* by Joseph Fuller, in *American Political Science Review*, XVII (May, 1923), 332. Since Beard concluded elsewhere in his lectures (p. 81) that “circumstances rather than the form and language of the understandings” determined the extent to which commitments were fulfilled in 1914, the reviewer’s fundamental criticism had considerable merit.

²⁷ Charles A. Beard, “Viscount Grey on War Guilt,” *New Republic*, XLIV (October 7, 1925), 172.

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War (1928)], which rejected the notion that one could affix ultimate or preponderant responsibility on any one of the powers and denied that the war resulted principally from a Franco-Russian conspiracy.²⁸

The lecture-essay, "America and the Balance of Power," in *Cross Currents in Europe Today*, reflected Beard's anxiety over the proper role which the United States should play in world affairs. His conclusions anticipated in remarkable detail some of his isolationist arguments in the 1930s, particularly the thesis of "continental Americanism." It is perhaps no exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that this is the most revealing document written by Beard in the 1920s.

In the first of his Dartmouth lectures, Beard stressed the impact of world events and forces on the past, present, and future history of the United States, particularly in trade and finance, where there was "now a web of international relations . . . so fine in mesh and so tough in fibre that no sword can cut it. The East and West have met," he continued, "and they are one. The world is an economic unit and the United States is being woven into the very fabric of that unity."²⁹ In the final lecture on "America and the Balance of Power," however, Beard shifted his perspective to consider how American foreign policies affected world events and, ultimately, American domestic policies. The upshot of his analysis was that the United States should adopt a basic approach to diplomacy that would lead to trying to sever itself from the aforementioned "web of international relations."

Beard observed in his introductory remarks to the last lecture that America's status as an industrial and trading nation was "the key to our domestic history and to our future foreign policies," with present signs indicating a continuing dependence upon foreign trade for national

²⁸ Charles A. Beard and James Harvey Robinson, *The Development of Modern Europe* (rev. and enlarged ed.; Boston, 1930), II, 319-20.

²⁹ Charles A. Beard, *Cross Currents in Europe Today*, 1-2.

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prosperity. Emerging from the First World War as “first among the investing, industrial, commercial, maritime, and naval powers of the earth,” the United States was in a favored position and thus appeared to be on the threshold of penetrating “the most inaccessible markets of the most distant lands.”³⁰

Since Beard had long believed that the historic competition for overseas markets had led inexorably to imperialism, armaments, and warfare, he regarded these new economic opportunities as being fraught with dangerous pitfalls, particularly in the Far East. He noted that the cornerstone of American diplomacy in that area of the world — the Open Door policy — appeared to have the dual advantage of satisfying pecuniary interests and ethical principles. But the fact that the recently concluded Washington Conference (1921-1922) had been so involved with Pacific problems aroused his interest and concern. He was especially attracted to a remark in Warren G. Harding’s address to the Senate, asking for approval of the major treaties concluded at the Conference, in which the President had said: “. . . the Pacific had its menaces and they deeply concerned us.”³¹

To Beard, these “menaces” meant Japanese threats to American commercial interests in the Orient. Moreover, he concluded that American diplomacy at the Washington Conference was designed to isolate and check Japan by abrogating her twenty-year alliance with Great Britain, by keeping Japan in a position of naval inferiority, and by imposing a self-denying pledge on any possible expansionist ambitions in East Asia. Though the fulfillment of these objectives presumably would carry out the principles of the Open Door policy, he wondered whether such a policy was in the national interest in view of the “intense and active rivalry” it would lead to with England and France, as well

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 240, 242, 251.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 253-54, 258-59.

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as Japan. "Shall the government," he asked, "follow trade and investments?"³²

The answer to this question, he believed, would be determined by weighing the consequences of three policies open to the government and people of the United States. The first was "the policy of positive imperialism naked and unashamed." This policy, employing all the diplomatic and military instruments of the government, was dismissed by Beard because it entailed too many risks to national security and prosperity in behalf of special economic interests. The social consequences in the possible development of a "vaster aristocracy of wealth and a huger proletariat" also made it unacceptable.³³

A second possible policy proposed by Beard could be "that of no policy at all, save the policy of drift and muddle." In pursuit of overseas markets and investments "it would follow in the paths of Alexander and Caesar but would be content with the philosophy of Buncombe County." Such a policy might achieve a number of things, Beard admitted, but he sarcastically stipulated only one possible accomplishment: "It might land the nation at the gates of destruction."³⁴

The third policy received Beard's most sympathetic consideration, and, although set forth in 1922, embodied many features of his "continental Americanism" thesis of the 1930s. The devotees of imperialism, he remarked, referred to this policy disparagingly as "Little Americanism." As Beard described this policy, it would mean that the government of the United States would not use diplomatic or military means to encourage or protect the foreign trade or investments of American citizens; territorial annexations would cease and spheres of influence would be discontinued;

³² *Ibid.*, 259-62, 266.

³³ *Ibid.*, 267-69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

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the Philippines would be granted independence and Hawaii would become the farthest outpost of American interests and security in the Pacific; an army and navy would be established "by universal military service if necessary, and perhaps preferably"; and the American government might consider membership in the League of Nations if other countries "were prepared to adopt a similar domestic policy." This diplomatic agenda, he declared, "would bend all national genius upon the creation of a civilization which, in power and glory and noble living, would rise above all the achievements of the past."³⁵

During the two years which followed the Dartmouth lectures (1922-1923), Charles and Mary Beard made two extensive trips to the Far East.³⁶ These journeys, buttressed by his earlier speculations on American-Japanese rivalry and the furor created by the discriminatory Immigration Act of 1924, led him, in 1925, to write an article analyzing the prospects of war between the United States and Japan. Once again, he set forth a number of opinions that were to be revived during the thirties.

Beard did not discount the possibility of an armed clash between the United States and Japan arising out of economic competition for trade and investment opportunities in China. But he ridiculed the suggestion that the Japanese could "cross the Pacific Ocean, assail our Western coast and . . . seize all the territory as far east as Denver." Japan simply was not powerful or wealthy enough to contemplate such a scheme. At best, the Japanese might seize the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 269-70.

³⁶ The first, in the winter and spring of 1922-23, was undertaken at the personal invitation of the Mayor of Tokyo, for the purpose of advising the municipal authorities on administrative reforms. The results were recorded in Beard's *The Administration and Politics of Tokyo* (New York, 1923). The second trip was made after the Tokyo earthquake of September, 1923, when Beard volunteered his services to help plan the rebuilding of the city. *New York Times*, September 5, 1923, 4:2; September 13, 1923, 3:5; September 17, 1923, 14:6; November 29, 1923, 35:4.

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Philippines. In that event, he observed with undisguised irony, considerable effort would be required “to restore them to the position of liberty which they now so happily enjoy under American sovereignty.”³⁷

The America that would emerge victorious from this hypothetical war, he conjectured, probably would occupy Japanese-held territories in the Far East (Formosa and Korea), as well as creating a few thousand millionaires. But he feared that the consequences to life in the United States, notably in the violation of civil liberties, would more than offset the material gains of a war caused by economic rivalry. This possible unpleasantness could be avoided, Beard suggested, if Americans would pay more attention to the statistics of trade and finance which demonstrated that our business dealings with Japan were far more profitable than with China. In short, a proper understanding of where our economic interests in the Far East really lay would enhance the prospects of peace between the United States and Japan.³⁸

The diplomatic record of the Harding and Coolidge administrations also influenced Beard’s growing concern over the direction in which American foreign policy was moving in the mid-1920s. In their monumental study, *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927), the Beards made it clear that they found little cause for optimism in contemporary foreign affairs. Specifically, the husband and wife team detected what they regarded as a disturbing inconsistency. That is, international political entanglements such as the League of Nations, they noted, may well have been anathema to both presidents. But the vigorous pursuit of foreign commercial ventures saw the Harding administration take “all necessary

³⁷ Charles A. Beard, “War with Japan: What Shall We Get Out of It?” *Nation*, CXX (March 25, 1925), 311.

³⁸ *Ibid.* This idea of commercial rivalry in East Asia as the fundamental reason for Japanese-American antagonisms was reiterated the following year in an article Beard wrote with Mary Beard, “America and the Far East: The Issues of Pacific Policy,” *Survey*, LVI (May 1, 1926), 189.

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and appropriate steps to protect and advance the claims of business enterprise to goods of a ponderable character.”³⁹

This policy, moreover, reached its apogee under Calvin Coolidge, with Secretary of the Navy, Curtis Wilbur, as one of its foremost official spokesmen.⁴⁰ In the summer of 1927, Beard publicly attacked Secretary Wilbur for his espousal of the notion that the government should protect private foreign investment anywhere in the world. Anticipating a prominent liberal isolationist theme in his *The Open Door at Home* (1934), Beard maintained that every dollar in the “surplus of plutocracy” which was diverted from foreign investment to domestic use benefitted the nation as a whole. Put into effect on a large scale, he said, this program “would reduce our chances of becoming mixed-up in the next European adventure in Christian ballistics.”⁴¹

In 1927 Beard also traveled to Yugoslavia, collaborating with George Radin in writing *The Balkan Pivot, Yugoslavia*. Though this study dealt primarily with administrative reforms in Yugoslavia, the authors pointed to the continuing political instability in the Balkans that could lead to a new flare-up. Were this to happen, Beard and Radin wondered, “do the peoples of Germany, France, England, and the United States wish to shed their blood and pour out their treasure in an effort to substitute new ways for old?”⁴²

Beard had a shocking personal experience during his brief stay in Yugoslavia. The day after he had spoken to Stephen Raditch, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Raditch was assassinated in the Yugoslav parliament by his

³⁹ Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, II, 680-81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 704-5.

⁴¹ Quoted in *New York Times*, August 3, 1927, 9:1.

⁴² Charles A. Beard and George Radin, *The Balkan Pivot, Yugoslavia: A Study in Government and Administration* (New York, 1929), vi, 304, 321. The trip was made at the request of the American-Yugoslav Society of New York and sponsored by the National Institute of Municipal Administration.

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Slovakian political rival.⁴³ Beard, according to a close friend, returned from that country in 1928 in a disillusioned frame of mind, and often spoke of the whole of Europe as just a “big Balkans” and a “madhouse.”⁴⁴ Conceivably, it was about the time that Beard arrived back in the United States that he wrote a letter to Harry Elmer Barnes in which he complained about being “sick of the sniffing gang that runs Europe.” The reluctance of European nations to pay “honest debts” also disturbed him, and led him to conclude: “But I am not going to have any more wool pulled over my eyes, if I can help it.”⁴⁵

In spite of Beard’s experience in Yugoslavia, and in spite of the over-all mood of discouragement which marked much of his writing from 1921 to 1928, toward the latter half of 1928 his publications displayed a more hopeful view of world affairs. The reasons for this altered outlook are not readily discernible in his writings nor in any of the biographical sketches about Beard. Perhaps one may assume that Beard’s inherent optimism was given a significant boost in the midst of a general feeling of high expectations for world peace attending the negotiation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact (August 27, 1928), even though he soon had reservations about its practical application.⁴⁶

Whatever the reasons, it was in August, 1928, that Beard sounded an affirmative note in the preface to *Whither Mankind*, when he wrote that “for visions of despair,” the contributors to the volume substituted “a more cheerful

⁴³ Mary R. Beard, *The Making of Charles A. Beard*, 289.

⁴⁴ George S. Counts, “Charles Beard, the Public Man,” in *Charles A. Beard: An Appraisal*, edited by Howard K. Beale (Lexington, Ky., 1954), 235. In later years, the memory of the time spent in Yugoslavia prompted Beard to say to Eric F. Goldman: “Let Dorothy Thompson settle the problems of Europe, I can’t.” *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 235.

⁴⁵ C. A. Beard to H. E. Barnes, June 24, 1928[?], Harry Elmer Barnes Papers, Western History Collection, University of Wyoming Library, Laramie, Wyoming. Barnes has placed the notation, “late 1920s,” on this letter.

⁴⁶ Charles A. and William Beard, *The American Leviathan*, 741-42.

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outlook upon the future of modern civilization, without at the same time resorting to the optimism of the real-estate agent." In the epilogue he contended that "nations must associate themselves in understandings and guarantees," in order to avoid the devastation of war. "The magnitude and difficulties of this undertaking are immense," he readily conceded, "but the League of Nations and treaties of renunciation already indicate what the strategy of peace may be."⁴⁷

Further evidence that Beard had returned to a liberal internationalist stance may be seen in an article published in February, 1929, in which he went so far as to depict the United States as a makeweight against any threat to the European balance of power. "The almost dead certainty that the United States will throw her sword into the scale if hostilities open again," he predicted, "gives pause to the boldest of warmakers." There were also words of praise for the League of Nations for, despite some shortcomings, its very existence lessened the probabilities of "such subterfuges, evasions, and double-dealing as those which eventuated in the World War." And regardless of America's "myth of isolation," he added, in view of the nation's economic power and stake in world peace, "the United States is in the League and it matters little whether or not its adhesion is indicated by parchment and seals."⁴⁸

In the same *Harper's* essay, and in words that are in dramatic contrast to his later observations on the disclosures of the Nye Committee in 1935 and 1936, Beard assigned to international bankers an almost benevolent role as promoters of peace in the world community — a thesis which

⁴⁷ Charles A. Beard (ed.), *Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization* (New York, 1928), v, 407-8.

⁴⁸ Charles A. Beard, "Prospects for Peace," *Harper's Magazine*, CLVIII (February, 1929), 327, 330.

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echoed a conviction held more than twenty years before.⁴⁹ The establishment of the Bank for International Settlement, a provision of the Young Plan adopted in August, 1929, gave him and James Harvey Robinson additional reason to believe in 1930 that agencies of international finance could make positive contributions to peace.⁵⁰

Also in that year Beard, with his son, William, forcefully underscored the possible danger to the United States of blindly accepting isolationism. This doctrine, they commented, was one of the "popular shibboleths approved by millions of citizens who could not give a ten-word account" of its inner significance. It was, moreover, a "dogma" formulated before technological developments had made the security of formidable ocean barriers obsolete. "Hence the creed of isolationism which once seemed convincing," Charles and William Beard concluded, "may be employed to defeat its own purpose, namely, the maintenance of national security."⁵¹

Beard's ambivalent and shifting views of foreign affairs in the decade after Versailles thus suggest the possible appropriateness of a phrase like "Charles A. Beard in Midpassage" to describe this period in his life. One can almost sense, particularly in his writings that were affected by his personal experiences in Europe and Asia, a struggle going on in his mind as he weighed the merits of internationalism versus isolationism. In short, Beard seemed torn between supporting what he often perceived to be the perilous necessity of extensive American participation in world affairs, or embracing a limited foreign policy in which Americans would not, in the future, have to feel guilt or

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 327-28. For the expression of comparable sentiments before the First World War, see Charles A. Beard, *The Industrial Revolution* (rev. ed.; London, 1902), 51-52; *Politics* (New York, 1908), 30.

⁵⁰ Charles A. Beard and James Harvey Robinson, *The Development of Modern Europe*, II, 546.

⁵¹ Charles A. and William Beard, *American Leviathan*, 732-33, 736.

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responsibility for such devastating consequences of war as Beard had witnessed in Europe.

Beard nevertheless appeared to face the decade of the 1930s with a relatively optimistic and decidedly internationalist outlook. But shortly after 1930, the deepening of the Great Depression in the United States, accompanied by world-wide economic, political, and military instability, found him turning away from this outlook, eventually “to become the chief oracle of the incorrigible isolationists.”⁵² However, Beard would continue, as he had in the twenties, to shape his isolationist arguments within the general framework of the goals of national security and the extension of domestic liberal reform. And since the seeds of his intense reaction to an enlarged American involvement in world affairs — especially of a commercial nature — had been sown and nurtured in the 1920s, Beard’s advocacy of a policy of “continental Americanism,” or isolationism, throughout the 1930s represented the fruition of previous convictions rather than a sharp departure from them or an entirely new thesis.

⁵² Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse*, 225.