
Book Review

Profile of a British Agent-of-Influence

by Stu Rosenblatt

Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House

by Godfrey Hodgson

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006

335 pages, hardback, \$35.00

Godfrey Hodgson makes a compelling case—albeit unintentionally—for permanently burying any positive reputation of British agent-of-influence Col. Edward House (1853-1938). This British biographer attempts to draw a parallel between the tumultuous events of 1910-20 and the current crises of the (British-instigated) War on Terror. As in World War I, when House manipulated a willing President Woodrow Wilson to enter the conflict on the British side, Hodgson argues that a strong alliance between the United States and Europe (i.e., Britain), is the only way to “victory” in the current endless wars. Presumably he means the consolidation of a new British-directed empire.

Hodgson resurrects House as the more “pragmatic” half of the Wilson-House collaboration that allowed the Allies to triumph in the war that failed to end all wars, and his purpose is to laud the efforts of House in dragging the United States into World War I, and cementing the newly created Anglo-American “special relationship.”

Hodgson sums up the case for House's role as a British agent-of-influence: “In America's wartime relations with Britain, House was the key figure. He worked closely with the British intelligence chief agent Sir William Wiseman and dealt as an intimate equal with the British war leaders, Herbert Asquith, Arthur James Balfour, and David Lloyd George. He went everywhere in Britain: he stayed at Cliveden with the Astors, dined with the prime minister at Downing Street, and got on famously with the king. He was shown the Admiralty's secret war room by Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and had an arrangement with the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, that he could drop around for a chat before dinner every Sunday.”

The period surrounding World War I did mark a turning point in the consolidation of the Anglo-American alliance. It paved the way for two world wars and an endless stream of

conflicts, from Korea to Iraq. To bring this crisis of civilization to a close, one useful element would be to leave the memory of House to rot in his grave.

The real identity of the United States lies in the legacy of the American Revolution, which created a great republic to rally the world against Anglo-Dutch imperialism. Failing to reconquer the United States militarily in the 19th Century, the British turned to other means, including internal subversion. House was a key operative in this effort during the 20th Century.

As Hodgson demonstrates, House was an anglophile operative from the outset. His father, T.W. House, was born in Somerset, England; he later emigrated to the United States, and made a fortune in cotton, land, and running the Union blockade of the Confederacy. By the end of the Civil War, he had stashed \$300,000 in gold in Barings Bank in London, and an equally large sum in an account with Liverpool cotton brokers.

Colonel House's rise to power in Texas politics followed a similar course, where he steered the campaigns of old Confederate generals and sympathizers to governorships. He catapulted to the national stage with his management of the rise of fawning anglophile and Confederate dreamer Woodrow Wilson to the Presidency in 1912.

In the Summer of that year, House penned a book-length manuscript, “Philip Dru, Administrator,” lauding the policies of dictatorship and economic empire. Wilson “swallowed” the book while on the campaign trail. House's “hero” seizes power by a violent coup, overthrows the U.S. Constitution, initiates a policy of global free trade, and negotiates a successful alliance between the United States and Great Britain to rule the world—and all in the name of Progressivism! The proposal for joint rule with the British came at a time when the vast majority of Americans were staunchly opposed to any alliance with our historical bitter enemy.

Everything sketched in “Philip Dru” would become policy under Wilson, and Hodgson even says that “Philip Dru is a profoundly authoritarian vision, not of a democratic leader but of an “administrator. . . . House's hero is a dictator in the original Roman sense, a strong man who knocks heads together when the constitutional government is incapable of responding to deep-seated social problems.”

Following the election, House hand-picks the notoriously racist Wilson Cabinet, from Albert Burleson to William McAdoo, and instigates much of the treacherous domestic agenda. A flunkey of the Warburg family, he engineers the creation of the Wall Street-controlled Federal Reserve system, lowering of tariffs, and the invasion of Mexico in 1914.

The main focus of the book is House's role in steering the United States into a foreign policy alliance with Britain that led directly into U.S. military participation in World War I. Hodgson establishes House as a direct agent for the Milner Group of Liberal-Imperialist warmongers who plunged the world into cataclysm. In 1915, House ran shuttle diplomacy on behalf of his close friend, Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Edward Grey,

giving Germany the choice of acceding to British war aims, or facing American entry into the conflict on Britain's side.

Prior to America's entry into the war, it was House's job to prod the reticent Wilson into battle. To his credit, Wilson resisted, and Hodgson documents many incidents in which Wilson opposed House's armtwisting. Finally, to guarantee that Wilson didn't "go wobbly" (as Margaret Thatcher said of George H.W. Bush on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War), the Foreign office deployed Sir William Wiseman to the United States in late 1916, to direct Colonel House.

Wiseman was the director of British Intelligence in the United States. He was sent to spy on U.S. negotiations with Germany (though House was reporting all to the Foreign Office), and to work with House. He rented an apartment in the same building as House in New York; he was on the secure phone line from House's dwelling to President Wilson; and he participated in the ultra-secret Inquiry set up by House to work out U.S. post-war aims. So much for Wilsonian democracy.

The Inquiry

During World War I, Wilson requested that House create a top-secret institution, known as the Inquiry, to prepare U.S. plans for a post-war peace conference. Prior to U.S. entry into the conflict, the Allies signed a series of secret treaties whose purpose was to carve up the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires at the cessation of hostilities, and divide the spoils. House formed his Inquiry group to set out the U.S. position. While Hodgson acknowledges the importance of the Inquiry, he covers up its deeper operations.

The Inquiry set up shop in New York, outside the purview of the State Department or any official branch of government. It became a haven for British-tainted policymakers and spies, and formulated a U.S. strategy in perfect harmony with British war aims.

For example, House plucked Walter Lippmann from the board of the *New Republic*, a Fabian Society publication which had been used to generate the geopolitical arguments that guided American entry into the war. It was Lippmann, under House's supervision, who drafted Wilson's Fourteen Points, the American version of British geopolitical machinations to redraw the map of Europe. House dangled the Fourteen Points before the Germans to secure the Armistice, and then abandoned most of them at the peace conference.

Perhaps the most intriguing member of the Inquiry was George Beer, who is identified in Carroll Quigley's authoritative book *The Anglo-American Establishment*, as the only participant on the Inquiry who was simultaneously a member of the Milner Round Table, the central policymaking body of the British Empire. A germanophobe and anglophile, Beer had authored studies on the British Empire during the latter part of the 19th Century, as Quigley writes, "to counteract the falsehoods about British Colonial policy to be found in the manuals used in American primary schools." Beer also had done studies on the roots of the American Revolution, from a

British standpoint, and was a direct Milner agent on the Inquiry.

Beer was an expert on "colonial questions," and was the major conduit for Gen. Jan Smuts and Alfred Milner's innovation of the Mandate System. That system dovetailed well with the newly formed British Commonwealth, the decentralized version of the empire.

The Inquiry was also directly influenced by British Intelligence director Wiseman, who inserted British war aims into its plans, and consulted freely with House. The Inquiry steered clear of the key economic planks of the Versailles Peace Conference, concentrating only on geopolitical boundaries and British war aims. So much for Wilsonian Democracy.

League of Nations

Hodgson points to House's role in initiating the ill-fated League of Nations, and correctly identifies House's motivation as bringing an end to the Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states. While House and Wilson are certainly early sponsors of this attempt at global government, the real source of the gambit was the British. One gains real insight into classic British manipulations by examining the genesis of the League of Nations.

Hodgson identifies Sir Edward Grey, House's confidant, as the likely originator of a League of Nations organization. House endorsed the League of Nations idea early on, but at Versailles, the two key authors of the final League plan were insiders of the British establishment and allies of Milner: Gen. Jan Smuts and Lord Robert Cecil.

The British controlled all sides of the debate, and had their own agenda, which ultimately won out. House supported a League that could command military units to impose the League's ultimata. The British had no intention of allowing this kind of option, for several reasons: 1) At this time, the British Empire was still a potent force and was being transformed by the Milner crowd into a Commonwealth arrangement, more palatable to the colonies; 2) the British wanted no interference in their own ability to militarily control the world through sea power; and 3) they were worried that an armed League would be able to woo the Commonwealth members toward a League that might even be dominated by the United States.

The British were not opposed to world government, simply not this variety. When the U.S. Senate voted against American participation in the League, thus dashing the dreams of Wilson and House, the British quietly applauded "American national sovereignty," and kept the League firmly under their control.

Thus, House played the part of a useful fool in the larger British equation. As for the legacy of the Versailles Peace Conference, at which House and Wilson were prominent players, it was an unmitigated disaster, typified by the looting of Germany through reparations, and it paved the way for economic chaos in Europe, while sowing the seeds of Nazism and Fascism more generally. This was the real result of House's work in Europe.