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Road to War

How and why did the United States enter the First World War? Last week, with these questions made more pointed than ever by the similarity of America's position in the present European conflict, new light was shed on the problem. In two bulky, 800-page volumes, the U. S. State Department published the hitherto secret papers of Robert Lansing, wartime Secretary of State from 1915 to 1920.

Among the subjects discussed were these:

Entry into War: Though it has long been known that Lansing was strongly pro-Ally, the papers reveal for the first time that he had seriously recommended war on Germany as early as August, 1915, almost two years before America took that step. His aim, as expressed in a letter to President Woodrow Wilson, was to prevent whichever side won from imposing peace with a "free hand." If America continued to alienate both sides by demanding neutral rights, he warned, she would certainly lose all post-war influence.

War Aims, Lansing thought, should be to "crush Prussianism," "end autocracy," and supplant them with "democracy." "Compromising with the ruffians who brought on this horror," Lansing wrote, would only leave it to "some future generation to complete the work which we left unfinished."

War Conduct: After America had entered the war, Gen. John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the AEF, opposed ending it with the 1918 Armistice. In a report, he wrote: "I believe that complete victory can only be obtained by continuing the war until we force unconditional surrender from Germany." In transmitting this document to President Wilson, Col. Edward M. House spoke critically of Pershing's attitude and reported that it was likewise condemned by British Prime Minister Lloyd George and by French Premier Clemenceau.

Cavell: Most dramatic passage in the *Lansing Papers* was the detailed story of U. S. Minister to Belgium Brand Whitlock's futile efforts to save Edith Cavell, British nurse executed in 1915 by the Germans for assisting Allied soldiers to escape from German territory. Revealed for the first time was the fact that Whitlock acted without consulting Washington.