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On the League of Nations

Henry Cabot Lodge



OVERVIEW

Henry Cabot Lodge served as a Republican United States senator from 1893 until his death in 1924. He led the Republican senators in a successful fight to prevent the United States from joining the League of Nations after World War I. As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Lodge felt the League would involve the United States too deeply in European affairs. Lodge gave the following speech to support his case against President Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations in 1920.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What arguments does Lodge use to oppose the League?
 - According to Lodge, how can the United States best contribute to “world service”?
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I am as anxious as any human being can be to have the United States render every possible service to the civilization and the peace of mankind. But I am certain that we can do it best by not putting ourselves in leading strings, or subjecting our policies and our sovereignty to other nations. The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves, but to the world, than any single possession.

Look at the United States today. We have made mistakes in the past; we have had shortcomings. We shall make mistakes in the future and fall short of our own best hopes. But nonetheless, is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with this in ordered liberty, in peace, and in the largest freedom? I feel that I can say this without being accused of undue boastfulness, for it is a simple fact. And in taking on these obligations, all that we do is in the spirit of unselfishness, and it is a desire for the good of mankind. But it is well to remember that we are dealing with nations, every one of which has a direct individual interest to serve, and there is grave danger in an unshared idealism. Contrast the United States with any country on the face of the earth today and ask yourself whether the situation of the United States is not the best to be found.

I will go as far as anyone in world service that the first step to world service is the maintenance of the United States. You may call me selfish if you will, conservative or reactionary, or use any other harsh adjective you see fit to apply. But an American I was born, an American I've remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the United States first. And when I think of the United States first in an argument like this, I am thinking of what is best for the world. For if the United States fails,

the best hope of mankind fails with it. I have never had but one allegiance; I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag and I cannot share that devotion and give affection to the mongrel banner invented for a league. Internationalism, illustrated by the Bolshevik and by the men to whom all countries are alike, provided they can make money out of them, is to me repulsive. National I must remain and in that way I, like all Americans, can render the amplest service to the world.

The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interest through quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her powerful good, and endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come, as in the years that have gone. Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind. Beware how you trifle with your marvelous inheritance—this great land of ordered liberty. For if we stumble and fall, freedom and civilization everywhere will go down in ruin.

Source: Library of Congress, American Memory. "American Leaders Speak: Recordings from World War I and the 1920 Election, 1918-1920" [Document posted on the World Wide Web]. Retrieved May 5, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://memory.loc.gov/>