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# Reporting for the State Department: Carl W. Ackerman's Cooperation with Government during WWI

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REPORTING FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT: CARL W. ACKERMAN'S COOPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT  
DURING WWI

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The press was outraged when reports in 1973 exposed the CIA's use of American journalists as undercover informants during the Cold War. The CIA-journalists link represented for the press a shocking break in the traditional line between journalists and government. A study of journalist Carl W. Ackerman's experiences in the First World War suggests, however, that the CIA-journalists link has historical precedents in the practices of twentieth-century reporters. Ackerman, who later became the first dean of Columbia Journalism School, sent confidential reports to the State Department while reporting overseas for magazines and newspapers. He forged close relationships with a number of American and foreign government officials, offering them his cooperation and service. This thesis details Ackerman's cooperation with government during the Great War and is the first step to an understanding of the systematic, close relationship between numerous progressive journalists and the Wilson Administration.

## INTRODUCTION

When journalist Carl W. Ackerman traveled to Europe during WWI, he carried credentials from the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *New York Times*, but he not only filed reports for the newspaper and magazine while overseas. Ackerman, on a confidential assignment for the government, sent secret reports to the State Department and President Woodrow Wilson's advisor Colonel Edward M. House. While historians have described Ackerman's role as a British informant during the Anglo-Irish War, labeling him a "British spy," no scholar has detailed Ackerman's cooperation with the U.S. government during the First World War. Ackerman, who later became the first dean of Columbia Journalism School, forged close relationships with government officials during the war, offering them his cooperation and service. He not only sent reports to the State Department, but also kept a number of other officials informed of his findings while overseas. He sent drafts of his articles to government officials for their approval before publication. He met often with the President's advisor, who advised and guided his work. Ackerman also cooperated with officials of Allied governments during the war.

Journalists, like many other progressives, gladly went to work for the government during the war. Some of the work of these journalists is well known. Walter Lippmann and George Creel had close and highly visible relationships with the President or members of his staff and filled public roles within government. Yet, although widespread, the cooperation between journalists and the government during WWI never gained the attention of contemporaries and has never received in-depth analysis from historians. For today's journalists, working for the government is seen as a severe break in journalistic principles – one that undermines the journalist's role as objective observer. But men like Ackerman never received any negative comments about close, friendly interactions with government during WWI. The press' silence would contrast sharply with the loud, negative reaction to journalists' cooperation with government during the Cold War.

Over thirty years after Ackerman's European mission, an American journalist accepted an assignment from the U.S. government's Central Intelligence Agency. In the early years of the Cold War, columnist Joseph Alsop was sent by the CIA to the Philippines to cover an election. Alsop was not the only journalist working for the CIA. Reports show that perhaps as many as 400 American journalists offered their services to the agency during the first two decades of the Cold War. The journalists operated overseas as "undercover informants," providing information to CIA agents about what they had seen and heard at diplomatic receptions, military bases, Eastern European factories, and other places and events where the journalists enjoyed special access. The CIA saw in the journalist a

link to foreign military, academic and government sources, and took advantage of any information the journalist could provide through “debriefings” after the journalist-informant returned from overseas trips. Other journalists fulfilled more agent-like roles, recruiting foreign nationals to spy for the CIA, hosting faux events to discreetly place American and foreign agents in the same place, and delivering information to foreign agents.<sup>1</sup> Some journalists even fed misinformation to foreign politicians and presented “black” propaganda to foreign journalists. The CIA ran an extensive propaganda machine overseas, operating foreign news services, handing false information to foreign reporters, and planting fake news stories all in the name of fighting Communism.<sup>2</sup>

While some of the journalists who worked for the CIA were on the CIA’s payroll, others volunteered their services. The CIA also had relationships with many of the journalists’ employers. The top executives of news organizations lent the CIA their resources and cooperation. Twenty-five news organizations provided “cover” for CIA-agents abroad, with over a dozen CIA operatives using a journalistic-cover overseas in the first few decades of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

Reports of the CIA-media relationship surfaced in 1973, and coverage continued over the next four years.<sup>4</sup> Members of the press expressed their outrage that journalists had abandoned the all-important journalistic principle of press independence. In 1977, the Associated Press Managing Editors Association (APME) wrote a resolution criticizing the CIA’s involvement with the media and condemning the journalists who chose to participate, saying the press’ credibility necessitated “absolute freedom from government interference.” The National News Council agreed, writing in its 1980 report that journalists working for the government brought a “destruction of public confidence in the integrity of the press as an independent instrument of public information free from government manipulation.”<sup>5</sup> A 1977 editorial in the *New York Times* expressed a slightly more sympathetic viewpoint, but ultimately condemned journalists and the CIA for their interaction. The *Times* editorial board argued that although the CIA-journalists relationship may have been “understandable” during the Cold War it was nonetheless wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media.” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, October 20, 1977, 55-67.

<sup>2</sup> John Crewdson and Joseph Treaster, “C.I.A.: Secret Shaper of Public Opinion,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1977, 1, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” 55-67.

<sup>4</sup> Oswald, Johnston, “Journalists doubling as C.I.A. contacts,” *Washington Star News*, November 30, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> “Statement on CIA use of Journalists,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 19 (May 1980): 102.

The American public, the *Times* argued, had “a right to assurance that the journalists they trust for information are not in any sense accountable to unseen paymasters.”<sup>6</sup>

In the years of coverage and comment on the CIA-journalists relationship, the press never mentioned journalists like Carl Ackerman. Instead, the events of the Cold War symbolized for the press a shocking break in the traditional line between press and government. But an analysis of Ackerman’s experiences in the war suggests that the CIA-journalists relationship has historical precedents in the practices of twentieth-century progressive reporters, who were intent on helping the government “make the world safe for democracy.”

The literature on government-press relations of the WWI era focuses on President Woodrow Wilson’s strained relationship with the press, including the failure of Wilson’s press conferences, and the effect of Wilson’s poor press relations on support for the League of Nations. Historians credit Wilson’s confidant and advisor, Colonel Edward House, and Wilson’s secretary, Joseph Tumulty, with easing the press’ distrust of Wilson.<sup>7</sup> Scholars have noted House’s close relationship with progressive journalists and his efforts to keep American correspondents in Paris informed, despite the media-blackout around peace negotiations.<sup>8</sup> The literature also covers the centralization of government publicity and war propaganda in the Committee on Public Information, headed by former muckraking editor George Creel, and Wilson’s push for censorship laws after the US entered the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Only rarely have historians suggested that a systematic, close relationship existed between numerous progressive journalists and the government. In his 2010 article, historian James D. Startt describes how Colonel House forged close relationships with journalists, but he makes no mention of the number of other government officials who were involved in the cooperation between the Administration and journalists or the variety of ways journalists assisted the government during the war.<sup>10</sup> Historian John A. Thompson’s book on progressive publicists also fails to illustrate the full extent of the government-press relationships during the Great War. Thompson

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<sup>6</sup> “The Reporter and the Spy,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1977, 34.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Hilderbrand, *Power and the People: Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921*. (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981); George Juergens, *News from the White House: The Presidential-Press Relationship in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); John Tebbel and Sarah Miles Watts, *The Press and The Presidency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

<sup>8</sup> John D. Startt, “Colonel Edward M. House and the Journalists,” *American Journalism*, 27 (2010): 27-58.

<sup>9</sup> James Robert Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee of Public Information 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939).

<sup>10</sup> Startt, “Colonel Edward M. House and the Journalists,” 27-58.

mentions particular ways in which progressive journalists supported the war effort, but his attention to journalists and their relationship with the Administration last only a few pages.<sup>11</sup>

Historians of the progressive period have occasionally illustrated how a specific reporter developed close ties with the Wilson Administration. No scholar, however, has adequately described Carl Ackerman's cooperation with government during the war. In his article on Colonel House, James D. Startt notes that Ackerman acted as one of House's intelligence gatherers and that the two grew close after their first meeting in 1917. But Startt makes no attempt to describe the full extent of Ackerman's cooperation with government during the war and fails to mention Ackerman's close relationships with a number of other government officials.

This thesis is a first step in the study of the close, systematic relationship that existed between numerous progressive journalists and the government during the First World War. An analysis of Carl Ackerman's cooperation with government during the war offers a new understanding of the government-press relationships of WWI and lays a framework for future research on the topic. The thesis will also provide a more complete picture of the man who became the first dean of Columbia Journalism School. By detailing his early years as a Washington correspondent and his experiences during the war, the thesis offers a wealth of new information about the famous dean.

In order to conduct an analysis of Ackerman's cooperation with government, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to research Ackerman's papers at the Library of Congress. I studied Ackerman's correspondence with family, friends, and numerous government officials. I analyzed his speeches, his diary and his published reports. I made two separate trips in the summer of 2015 to research at the Library of Congress. I have also studied the papers of Colonel Edward House. To complete this project I have read extensively in the literature covering the Progressive Era, government-press relationships, President Wilson and Colonel House.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will describe the mood of the early twentieth century, when the ideals of progressivism encouraged a variety of social and economic reform. I will illustrate some of the factors that propelled Ackerman to offer his services to the government at the outbreak of war. In the second chapter I describe Ackerman's family life, his collegiate career, his early assignments as a journalist, and his views on public opinion and President Wilson. In the third chapter I explain Ackerman's close relationship with government officials, focusing especially on his relationship with Colonel House. I also explain how Ackerman began cooperating with

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<sup>11</sup> John A. Thompson, *Reformers and War: American progressive publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the State Department and describe his eagerness to offer the government his service. In the fourth chapter I describe Ackerman's work overseas in Switzerland, Siberia and the Far East. I describe the reports he sent in code to the State Department, his interactions with the government officials he met on overseas assignments, his request for an official government position, and the effects of his close proximity to government. In the last chapter I illustrate Ackerman's life after the war. Although he became a strong advocate of press independence, Ackerman still continued his cooperation with government. In the conclusion of this thesis I summarize the ways in which Ackerman cooperated with government, suggest factors that influenced his willingness to cooperate with officials, and argue that the study of the Wilson-press relationship is not complete without an analysis of journalists' public and secret work for government during the war. This thesis opens the door to future research on the topic.

## 1. THE PROGRESSIVE PRESS

“In the world today the most important influence  
in the development of opinion is the daily press...”  
-Carl W. Ackerman, 1914<sup>1</sup>

It's 10:00 a.m. on a Monday morning and a group of 200 journalists stand outside the executive offices of the White House. They wait for a signal from the doorman that the president is in and ready for them.<sup>2</sup> It's the second time that the president has invited the Washington correspondents to meet with him. The first meeting took place eleven days after the president's inauguration, when 125 journalists showed up for a meeting in the Oval Office.<sup>3</sup>

When the journalists enter the East Room, they find President Woodrow Wilson standing at his desk. The President smiles, says a few comments, and then motions for the journalists to begin. “The questions come in rapid succession,” wrote journalist L. Ames Brown of the meeting. “First there is: ‘Mr. President, will you tell us something about the Mexican situation?’ or ‘Mr. President, is a reply soon to be made to Ambassador China's last note on the Japanese land controversy?’ Then somebody wants to know if there are any Illinois appointments pending.”<sup>4</sup>

This scene is familiar today - a modern day presidential press conference. But for the journalists of 1913, these regularly scheduled question-and-answer sessions - which were open to all White House correspondents - were new, inaugurated by Wilson at the behest of his secretary, Joseph Tumulty.<sup>5</sup> The conferences were also a symbol of the growing power of the press. From the latter part of the nineteenth century to Wilson's presidency, the press had developed into an independent and influential entity in American politics. During the 1830s transformation in American journalism, the press had unburdened itself from its dependence on politicians, who had financed the prominent party papers. The editors of party papers only had the option of echoing the partisan opinion of their “political masters” in editorials and relied on government printing contracts to maintain their operations.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Carl W. Ackerman, “The War and Our Next Election,” typescript, circa 1914, 4, box 192, CWA.

<sup>2</sup> L. Ames Brown, “President Wilson and Publicity,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 1, 1913, 58.

<sup>3</sup> John Tebbel and Sarah Miles Watts, *The press and The Presidency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 371.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, “President Wilson and Publicity,” 58.

<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Power and the People: Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 95.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: a Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 14-16

reporters grilling Wilson in the press conferences, however, were searching for nonpartisan and unbiased news that would grab the attention of the growing urban middle class.<sup>7</sup> Information about city life, engrossing stories of city crime, and news of political and social events all helped increase the penny papers' circulations. While the party papers sold expensive subscriptions to elites, the penny papers sold advertisement space, enabling the low price and wide circulation.<sup>8</sup>

By informing citizens of the nation's problems, like child labor, industrial strife, and political corruption, the penny papers also proved a crucial part of the progressive movement, which had gained momentum after the turn of the century. The reports of progressive journalists were reaching millions of people nationwide. From 1870 to 1909, the number of newspaper dailies jumped from 574 to 2,600. Total circulation reached 24,200,000 by 1909.<sup>9</sup> With five hundred dollars, James Gordon Bennett founded the *New York Herald* in 1835, but by the first decade of the twentieth century, newspapers had become million dollar investments.<sup>10</sup>

Nearly every leading newspaper in all major U.S. cities had claimed its political independence by 1890.<sup>11</sup> But the press had not yet drawn the strict line between government and journalists that exist today. Instead, the early press codes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries underlined the press' patriotism. In 1876, nine years after its founding, the Missouri Press Association listed four principles of good journalism – journalists should avoid articles of “demoralizing character,” focus on the substance of the article and omit details, resist “bitter words and partisan excesses,” and engage in “much reading and study.” The association concluded that although journalists “are sometimes partisans, we are always patriots.”<sup>12</sup> The 1914 *Journalist's Creed*, published by the first dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, Walter Williams, also highlighted the “profoundly patriotic” nature of journalists. Most importantly, however, the progressive values that many of these journalists and editors championed encouraged an active involvement in reform and politics. Support for Wilson's progressive platform led journalists Robert Woolley and Josephus Daniels to take positions in Wilson's publicity department in the 1912 campaign. Other journalists contributed through organizations committed to reform. Journalists Charles Edward Russell,

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<sup>7</sup> Schudson. *Discovering the News*, 22-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-22.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 188.

<sup>10</sup> David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University, 1998), 23; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 189.

<sup>11</sup> Mindich, *Just the Facts*, 118.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Stephen Banning, “Press Clubs Champion Journalism Education,” in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession*, ed. Betty Houchin Winfield (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008) 95.

Lincoln Steffens, and William English Walling helped establish the NAACP. Walling also contributed to the founding of the National Women's Trade Union League. Franklin Howe, a writer and lawyer, held positions in the National Voter's League, the Committee on Industrial Relations, and the Association for an Equitable Income Tax, among others. Muckrakers, like Ida Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker, supported reform through their exposés of corruption.<sup>13</sup>

The progressive movement, in which journalists played such an essential role, was a reaction to the problems created by unchecked industrialization, the economic depression of the 1890s, and a rapid urbanization that brought farmers and villagers into crowded cities. In the nineteenth century, giant corporations, like the Standard Oil Company and the Carnegie Steel Company, had formed monopolies, and as numerous other businesses consolidated into trusts, Americans feared the end to their "equality of economic opportunity."<sup>14</sup> Individuals felt they no longer had control over their own experiences. In the cities, owners of factories, mines, and plants set prices for wages and outlined the structure of the workday. The competition for jobs forced workers to accept dangerous working conditions. In rural areas, railroads and a volatile international market regulated the prices for farmers' crops. Low prices led many to tenant farming. The progressives blamed laissez faire policies for the social and economic hardships, and although they hesitated to centralize authority, they also realized that the nationwide problems were out of reach for state government. Federal government regulation, progressives believed, would control the chaos of the natural order.<sup>15</sup>

Government was simply the machinery that exercised the public's will, however. Progressives believed overall in self-government and wanted to restore political authority to the people.<sup>16</sup> Reformers promoted direct primaries and the initiative, referendum and recall as legislation that, in Woodrow Wilson's words, "takes power from the boss and places it in the hands of the people."<sup>17</sup> Another way to amplify the voice of the people was to empower public opinion. "There can be no constitutional government where the organs of government are not

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<sup>13</sup> John A. Thompson, *Reformers and War: American progressive publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 11-25.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Woodrow Wilson quoted in Burton Hendrick, "The Initiative and Referendum and How Oregon Got Them," *McClure's Magazine*, July 1911, 235.

constantly under the controls of public opinion,” Wilson wrote in 1908.<sup>18</sup> Progressives had tremendous faith in a democracy moved by an informed citizenry. “Public opinion has made war and peace, has made laws and institutions,” wrote psychologists Hugo Munsterberg. “It is, therefore, the chief endeavor of the nation to bring everybody into contact with the sources of information in order that public opinion may be well instructed.”<sup>19</sup>

Progressive theorists described the management of public opinion as a type of “social control for improving national life.”<sup>20</sup> Social control had become a keystone of progressivism since 1901, when economist Edward A. Ross published his landmark study of the same name. Ross emphasized the need to inform and arouse public opinion so that it could “become the respectable agent for the righteous protection of the social welfare.”<sup>21</sup> A variety of middle-class professionals, including educators, lawyers, church members, and politicians, joined the reform movement. Some of these professionals sought to educate and inform public opinion through writings in progressive newspapers and magazines. Franklin Howe, a lawyer and city councilman in Cleveland, wrote volumes on municipal reform. Louis Brandeis, nicknamed the “People’s Lawyer,” championed small business and unions and wrote articles for the progressive magazine *Harper’s Weekly*. Wilson appointed Brandeis to the Supreme Court in 1916.<sup>22</sup> Educating public opinion also required transparency in government and business. In his 1910 gubernatorial campaign, Wilson said he would use “pitiless publicity” to rid the Democratic Party of the Old Guard system.<sup>23</sup> The phrase soon gained widespread popularity, appearing in advertisements, editorials, and the daily congressional record. “Nothing checks all the bad practices of politics like public exposure,” Wilson wrote in *The New Freedom*. “You can’t be crooked in the light.”<sup>24</sup> Wilson’s inauguration of the press conferences symbolized his desire to operate his government under the glare of pitiless publicity.



The progressive journalists of the early twentieth century had gained considerable esteem and influence. Since the penny papers emphasized news, interviews, and human-interest stories, publishers “set a premium on the

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<sup>18</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 83.

<sup>19</sup> Hugo Munsterberg, “The Case of the Reporter.” *McClure’s Magazine*, February 1911, 435.

<sup>20</sup> Hilderbrand, *Power and the People*, 200.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 18, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Tumulty. *Woodrow Wilson As I Know Him* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 41.

<sup>24</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), 116.

good reporter.”<sup>25</sup> The journalist of the early twentieth century had job security, name recognition, and the opportunity to study his craft at the newly opened journalism schools at Columbia University and the University of Missouri. During Roosevelt’s Administration, reporters became an important part of the Washington scene. The White House press corps had an official pressroom in the White House (thanks to Roosevelt) and enjoyed unprecedented access to the workings of the federal government.<sup>26</sup>

In an effort to professionalize the field, editors and publishers in a variety of press associations voiced the need for formal education for journalists.<sup>27</sup> With his multimillion-dollar endowment toward a journalism school at Columbia University in 1903, Joseph Pulitzer wanted to “begin a movement that will raise journalism to the rank of a learned profession” and “...make a class distinction between the fit and the unfit.”<sup>28</sup> The new journalism courses and schools motivated journalists to develop national standards of practice. The first journalism textbook, *Steps into Journalism* by Edwin Shuman, appeared in 1894.<sup>29</sup> The ethical codes of press groups like the Missouri Press Association also helped push journalism towards professionalization. Walter Williams’ *The Journalist’s Creed* instructed reporters to seek accuracy, fairness, and truth, and described good journalism as fulfilling a public service.<sup>30</sup> Progressive journalists held their work in high regard, believing “the vitality of the democracy itself rests today upon the popular knowledge of complex questions.”<sup>31</sup>

The “characteristic contribution” of the progressive movement, argued historian Richard Hofstadter, was the “socially responsible reporter-reformer.”<sup>32</sup> By writing investigative pieces that exposed corruption and mismanagement, muckraking journalists provided the public with the information and fuel they needed to push for progressive reform. “To an extraordinary degree, the work of the progressive movement rested upon its journalism,” Hofstadter wrote.<sup>33</sup> The abundance of national magazines brought muckraking journalists a platform to expose

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<sup>25</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 190.

<sup>26</sup> George Juergens, *News from the White House* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Banning, “Press Clubs Champion Journalism Education,” 80-95.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Mindich, *Just the Facts*, 120-121.

<sup>29</sup> Mindich, *Just the Facts*, 121.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Ibold and Lee Wilkins, “Philosophy at Work: Ideas Make a Difference,” in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession*, ed. Betty Houchin Winfield (Columbia: University of Missouri Press) 101-107.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 29-30; “Editorial Announcement: The Railroads on Trial.” *McClure’s Magazine*, October, 1905, 672.

<sup>32</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

ineffective medicines, unsafe foods, unsanitary procedures in plants and other widespread social problems.<sup>34</sup> By 1917, circulations of over half a million were not unusual for muckraking magazines like *Collier's*, *Hearst's*, *McClure's* and *Everybody's*.<sup>35</sup>

Writing in 1914 for *The New Republic*, muckraker Ray Stannard Baker described the previous sixteen years as a time when “the corruption of cities, the abuses of public service corporations, the tyranny of riches” were “spread boldly before the people.” He concluded, “it is probable that no other nation ever before submitted itself to such a searching self-examination.”<sup>36</sup> The “era of the muckrake” was inaugurated in January of 1903 when *McClure's* coincidentally published three muckraking articles in one issue.<sup>37</sup> The famous muckraker Ida Tarbell published her second installment of an exposé on the Standard Oil Company, Lincoln Steffens wrote an article on municipal corruption in Minneapolis, and Ray Stannard Baker wrote about the conditions of coalmines.<sup>38</sup> The editorial that appeared in the same issue explained that the underlying theme of all three articles was “American contempt of law.” Those in power had taken advantage of their position, ignoring the law and making the public pay their debts. The *McClure's* model was to “shock readers into demanding reform.”<sup>39</sup>

The journalists, and especially the muckrakers, had a unique position to educate the masses on the complex questions facing society. In an editorial announcement of Ray Stannard Baker's exposé on the railroad industry, the magazine explained that Baker had only done what all citizens would do given the time and resources – “go to the bottom of the railroad problem and form a real decision for themselves.”<sup>40</sup> Muckrakers believed the problems of their society would resolve once they educated the public on the issues.<sup>41</sup> “When the masses of the people anywhere understand any cause they never fail to do justice,” muckraker Charles Edward Russell wrote in 1907.<sup>42</sup> *McClure's* editors believed that Baker's article would put the railroad barons on trial before “the higher court of public opinion” which was “greater than Congress, or the legislature, or the desires of any class or party in the nation.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Progressive Era* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 2.

<sup>35</sup> David W. Levy, *Herbert Croly of The New Republic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) 255.

<sup>36</sup> Ray Stannard Baker, “The One Idea,” *The New Republic*, December 4, 1914.

<sup>37</sup> Harold Faulkner, *The Quest for Social Justice* (1932. Reprint, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1959) 112.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Reynolds and Gary H. Hicks, *Prophets of the Fourth Estate* (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012), 22-23.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds and Hicks, *Prophets of the Fourth Estate*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> “Editorial Announcement: The Railroads on Trial.” *McClure's Magazine*, 672.

<sup>41</sup> Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> “Editorial Announcement: The Railroads on Trial.” *McClure's Magazine*.



Although President Wilson often touted his commitment to “pitiless publicity,” his strained relationship with the press limited his ability to conduct an open government. Wilson’s reserved and rigid personality alienated reporters, and Wilson, in turn, had little respect for the press. He treated journalists more like students, who annoyed him with trivial and uneducated questions.<sup>44</sup> Wilson’s 1912 presidential campaign had also exacerbated his distrust of reporters. At the family home in New Jersey, journalists gathered, obsessing with the personal lives of the family and making, what Wilson considered, ill-mannered remarks.<sup>45</sup> Historian George Juergens argues that Wilson and the press “were thoroughly disillusioned with each other” by the time Wilson entered the White House.<sup>46</sup> At the outbreak of war in 1915, Wilson ended the weekly press conferences and distanced himself from the press.

Ironically, a president who wished to limit his interaction with the press hired numerous journalists to work for his Administration. In 1912, journalists Josephus Daniels and Robert Woolley both took positions in the campaign’s publicity department. Wilson would later appoint Daniels as Secretary of the Navy and Woolley as Director of the U.S. Mint. The many progressive journalists who had joined in the fight for Wilson’s second term also enjoyed privileged positions or received special assignments from the Administration. For example, Walter Lippmann, a journalist for *The New Republic*, endorsed Wilson’s campaign in 1916 and later worked as assistant to Secretary of War Newton Baker. Journalist George Creel, who worked for the publicity department of the Democratic Party during the 1916 campaign and wrote a book titled *Wilson and the Issues*, became head of the Committee on Public Information.<sup>47</sup>

In 1916, Wilson’s campaign ran under the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War.” In progressive magazines and newspapers, journalists warned about the horrors of modern warfare and argued that the U.S. should guide Europe to a lasting and liberal peace while remaining neutral. But Germany’s return to its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare forced Wilson’s hand, and by 1917, Wilson chose war. Progressive journalists were quick to accept the President’s decision and seek ways to contribute to the nation’s effort.<sup>48</sup> Historian John Thompson argued that the

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<sup>44</sup> Tebbel and Watts, *The Press and the Presidency*, 373, 379.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>46</sup> Juergens, *News from the White House*, 138.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 169-171.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 151

journalists' confidence in Wilson's leadership "led naturally to an active commitment."<sup>49</sup> While publicly the President retreated from the press, closing the door on his "open door" policy, privately, the President and members of his Administration asked progressive, pro-Wilson journalists for their service, and a number of journalists gladly obliged.

Carl W. Ackerman was one of the many journalists who cooperated with the Wilson Administration during the war. When Ackerman returned to the United States from Berlin in early 1917, he was eager to serve and, by the end of the year, he had accepted an assignment from the State Department. Ackerman adopted many of the beliefs of early twentieth century progressivism and was staunchly pro-Wilson. In his first book, published in June 1917, Ackerman praised the President's progressive platform. Unlike previous presidents, Ackerman argued, Wilson recognized public opinion as "the greatest force in the world."<sup>50</sup> He believed that through a policy of open diplomacy, Wilson had "done more to accomplish the destruction of militarism and to encourage freedom of thought in Germany than the Allies did during nearly three years of fighting."<sup>51</sup> Germany had dragged the United States into the conflict, Ackerman argued, and now the United States was "at war to aid the movement for democracy in Germany."<sup>52</sup> He was happy to join the Wilson Administration in its righteous cause.

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<sup>49</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 169.

<sup>50</sup> Carl W. Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2 “HE WAS CRAZY ABOUT WRITING”

“I was in a sense an agent of public opinion who called each day to report the opinions of the belligerents to the readers of American newspapers.”  
- Carl Ackerman, 1917<sup>1</sup>

In October of 1962, 72-year-old Carl Ackerman wrote to A.N. Marquis Company, publisher of *Who's Who in America*. The former journalist's biographical sketch was absent from recent editions of the book. “Now that I am being honored on a few 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, I am asked why I am not listed currently,” Ackerman wrote to the publisher. He had just celebrated the half-century mark since his debut with the United Press Association and his graduation from Columbia Journalism School. He was a member of the school's first graduating class in 1913.<sup>2</sup> Ackerman received a response from the Executive Vice President of Marquis Kenneth Anglemire a month later. The editors had decided not to include Ackerman's sketch in the next edition since he had retired from his position as Dean of Columbia Journalism School in 1956. Anglemire explained that the Board of Editors only selected individuals who were “most exposed at the moment to national reference inquiry.”<sup>3</sup>

Ackerman replied to Anglemire with a revised sketch listing his current activities. He was a member of the Advertising Review Panel of the Brewing Industry, a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, and was editing his private collection of papers for the Library of Congress. “As long as the Pulitzer Prizes are awarded my connection with the Board during the years of controversy will be subject to reference inquiry,” Ackerman wrote.<sup>4</sup> The editors reviewed Ackerman's revised sketch, but concluded, “that the extremely rigorous standards for inclusion in *Who's Who*...do not quite seem to be satisfied.”<sup>5</sup> Two years later, Anglemire received another letter from Ackerman. “When a man, over 75 years of age, is elected president of a Sportsman's Club isn't it possible the fact may be of ‘national reference interest?’ Ackerman asked.<sup>6</sup> “In answer to your question,” Anglemire responded. “A man at 75 these days is just in the prime of his life, but the presidency of a Sportsman's Club is somewhat short of exciting national attention.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ackerman to A.N. Marquis Company, October 6, 1962, Box 120, CWA.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Anglemire to Ackerman, November 7, 1962, Box 120, CWA.

<sup>4</sup> Ackerman to Anglemire, December 15, 1962, Box 120, CWA.

<sup>5</sup> Anglemire to Ackerman, January 3, 1963, Box 120, CWA.

<sup>6</sup> Ackerman to Anglemire, June 3, 1965, Box 120, CWA.

<sup>7</sup> Anglemire to Ackerman, June 11, 1965, Box 120, CWA.

Historian James Boylan describes Ackerman as a man “obsessed with personal status and real or imaged slights.”<sup>8</sup> Ackerman worked diligently throughout his life to make a name for himself and was eager for recognition of his achievements. He desired connections with powerful men and a spot among the leaders of the country. His determination and self-confidence earned him positions at top magazines and newspapers and ultimately led him to Columbia Journalism School, where he served as the first dean. His journey began, however, at Earlham College where he first studied journalism.



In 1908, eighteen-year-old Carl Ackerman decided against joining the family business, a dry goods store in his hometown of Richmond, Indiana, and instead chose Earlham College. Ackerman’s time at Earlham, according to a school publication, was one of an “unassuming aggressiveness, for he did his work thoroughly without ostentation.”<sup>9</sup> Ackerman was a decent student, making mostly A’s and B’s in his courses. He was also involved on campus as a member of the debate team and a participant in the school’s Tennis Association. He was elected senior class president.<sup>10</sup> Early on during his time at Earlham, Ackerman decided to pursue a journalism career, taking classes in English, history, and political science. He was a staff member of the *Earlhamite*, the college’s student magazine, and a member of the Earlham Press Club.<sup>11</sup> In his time away from campus, he wrote for two local dailies - *The Indianapolis News* and *The Indianapolis Star*. He was to act as the official Earlham correspondent for the local papers, but Raymond Swing, a writer for *The Indianapolis Star* who later became a close friend of Ackerman’s, had to remind the young journalist not to cover state and national news. “Stick to Earlham,” Swing wrote to Ackerman in 1909. “We will cover the world ourselves!”<sup>12</sup> After his graduation, Ackerman joined the advertising firm Sidener and van Riper. He had met Guernsey van Riper, one of the firm’s owners, when the firm organized the school’s fundraising campaign during Ackerman’s senior year. The firm set up their offices on Earlham’s campus. “Carl Ackerman spent every spare minute in my office, picking up what information he could,” van Riper wrote in a book about the firm’s history. “He was crazy about writing.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Boylan, “Carl W. Ackerman: The Journalism School’s Other Founder,” *Columbia Magazine*, Spring 2005.

<sup>9</sup> “After Earlham, What?,” Student papers, Box 100, CWA.

<sup>10</sup> Student papers, Box 100, CWA.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Swing to Ackerman, 1909, Box 110, CWA.

<sup>13</sup> Guernsey van Riper, *It Happened Like This: the Life Story of Sidener and Van Riper, Inc.* (Indianapolis: Caldwell, Larkin and Sidener-Van Riper, 1959), 7.

In the summer of 1912, Ackerman attended a convention hosted by the Earlham Press Club. The guest speaker was Dr. Talcott Williams, the newly appointed director of Columbia Journalism School. The new journalism school was set to open for the first time in September, and Williams was on a speaking tour to raise interest in the program. Williams' speech in Richmond inspired Ackerman to attend the school, which offered a one-year program for students who held bachelor's degrees.<sup>14</sup> On September 30, seventy-nine students arrived at Columbia for the opening day of the program.

The new journalism students spent their first day in downtown New York City gathering interviews and materials for news articles.<sup>15</sup> Williams described the school as the first "to use a great city as its laboratory for technical training."<sup>16</sup> The school also prized itself on hiring practitioner-instructors, with both former and working journalists teaching the school's courses. One of the school's full-time teachers was Robert MacAlarney, city editor of the *Evening Mail* who assigned Ackerman to cover Woodrow Wilson's 1912 campaign. During this assignment, Ackerman met many of the key members of the Wilson Administration, including the President's advisor, Colonel Edward M. House.<sup>17</sup> On June 4, 1913, Ackerman and nine other journalism students graduated from Columbia with B.Lit. degrees.<sup>18</sup>

After graduation, Ackerman joined the United Press Association's New York bureau. Although he felt he was underpaid, he stayed in hopes of a Washington assignment. "I was willing to sacrifice to get there," he told Roy Howard, president of the UP. After an unpleasant four months in New York, when he endured "unbearable" insults from his supervisor and "petty" criticism from others, Ackerman saw an opportunity in a new assignment as bureau manager in Philadelphia.<sup>19</sup> But less than a month into the assignment, Ackerman sent in his resignation. He had grown impatient with the low pay. "A \$2 'raise' seemed but little 'recognition' in light of what had been paid others in New York," Ackerman wrote to Howard.<sup>20</sup> For reasons that are unclear, however, the resignation did not stick. Ackerman was in Albany in January of 1914 with the United Press and had convinced General Manager William

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<sup>14</sup> James Boylan, *Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903-2003* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Boylan, *Pulitzer's School*, 27-31.

<sup>16</sup> Talcott Williams, "The School of Journalism," *Columbia University Quarterly* 14 (1912): 235.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Ackerman, address Columbia University's School of Journalism 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, April 10, 1963, Box 165, CWA.

<sup>18</sup> Boylan, *Pulitzer's School*, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ackerman to Howard, circa December, 1913, Box 145, CWA.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Hawkins to send him to Washington for his next assignment. “For five and half hours last night Mr. Hawkins and I thrashed out my objectives with the UP,” Ackerman wrote to his father. “He finally asked that I go to Washington and let him show me that I was mistaken.”<sup>21</sup> By the spring of 1914, Ackerman was a Washington correspondent.

“Here I am in Washington – at last!” Ackerman wrote to his parents in May. “And according to Mr. Hawkins, I’m here to stay.”<sup>22</sup> Ackerman had taken a midnight train from New York after a last minute call from Hawkins the night before. He was thrilled with his new assignment but regretted the distance between him and his fiancée, Mabel “Vandy” VanderHoof, who worked in New York as an illustrator for children and women’s magazines.<sup>23</sup> “If Vandy were here I’d be living the perfect life!” Ackerman wrote to his parents. Ackerman and Mabel moved their fall wedding date and married in Washington on May 24.<sup>24</sup>

The 24-year-old correspondent spent his days in Washington roaming the halls of the White House and the State, War, and Navy building. As he passed the offices of Josephus Daniels, Theodore Roosevelt, Lindley M. Garrison, and others, he occasionally peered into the rooms. If an official was alone, he walked in. “Covering the White House and many governmental offices was informal,” Ackerman recalled years later. Outside of the President’s office, sitting at a desk, Ackerman would find Chief of the Secret Police, Colonel Edmund W. Starling, who was “always discretely friendly.” Joseph Tumulty, the President’s secretary, was also available to speak with the journalists. Even President Wilson made time for the press corps, meeting journalists in the Oval Office for regular press conferences.<sup>25</sup> The conferences, however, would only last until the outbreak of war in August.



Ackerman was in the White House when news came of the assassination of Austria’s Archduke and Archduchess. At the outbreak of the war in Europe, the United Press assigned Ackerman to cover the belligerent embassies. During the first three months of the conflict, he called on each embassy at least once, sometimes three times a day. Calls ran late into the evening. He considered the ambassadors and counselors with whom he spoke the “highest diplomats of the warring governments in Washington,” and in his frank discussions with them he felt he

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<sup>21</sup> Ackerman to father, 1914, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>22</sup> Ackerman to parents, 1914, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>23</sup> Ackerman to mother, 1914, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>24</sup> Ackerman to parents, 1914, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>25</sup> Ackerman, Speech at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, April, 10, 1963, Box 165, CWA.

learned the opinions of each nation.<sup>26</sup> “I was in a sense an agent of public opinion who called each day to report the opinions of the belligerents to the readers of American newspapers,” Ackerman wrote of the assignment.<sup>27</sup>

For Ackerman, 1914 marked a significant shift in international affairs. World governments had recognized, for the first time, the importance of mobilizing public opinion in neutral nations.<sup>28</sup> At the start of the war, Germany published a report that outlined the reasons for war and blamed the conflict on the Allies. The report became known by the color of its cover – white. Britain, Russia, and France each published books of their own that blamed the other side and explained their country’s efforts to prevent war. Each book was known by its color – Blue for Britain, Orange for Russia, and Yellow for France.<sup>29</sup> Hundreds of thousands of copies of each book arrived in the United States. “This was the first time any foreign power ever attempted to fight for the good will - the public opinion – of this nation,” Ackerman wrote.<sup>30</sup> By winning public opinion, belligerent nations would gain the sympathy of neutral nations. The world governments had realized, Ackerman argued, that “public opinion was the biggest factor in the world.”<sup>31</sup>

Ackerman believed the daily press played a crucial role in the mobilization of public opinion. The press was the battlefield, where ambassadors led armies “of the most influential men in the country in discussion.”<sup>32</sup> In the past, embassies of warring nations kept silent in neutral countries, but now “the ambassadors who formerly never saw newspapermen greeted them at all hour [sic] and without ceremony.”<sup>33</sup> Like other progressives, Ackerman believed that an informed citizenry would lead the country in the right direction. If only citizens of all nations had a frank understanding of their country’s intentions in international affairs, public opinion could become the “deciding force” in international disagreements. Ackerman believed public opinion would become a “stronger international force than large individual armies and navies.” With public opinion as the controlling factor, statesmen would find secret diplomacy useless. “Publicity will be the new punch in diplomacy to give opinion a world force,” he wrote.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Carl Ackerman, “Uncle Sam and the War,” typescript, 1915, chapter IV, Box 192, CWA.

<sup>27</sup> Carl Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917) 20.

<sup>28</sup> Carl W. Ackerman, “The War and Our Next Election,” typescript, circa 1914, 4, box 192, CWA.

<sup>29</sup> Bernadotte E. Schmitt, “France and the Outbreak of the World War,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1937, 516.

<sup>30</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>32</sup> Ackerman, “The War and Our Next Election,” 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Carl Ackerman, “Uncle Sam and the War,” 8.

Ackerman had faith in the progressive principle of opinion management, believing the President would guide opinion formation with a “judicious interpretation of affairs.”<sup>35</sup> President Woodrow Wilson, Ackerman argued, had taken on the role of spokesman for the American people and his policy was to “permit public opinion to rule America.”<sup>36</sup> In a speech to the American Bar Association in 1914, President Wilson had said, “The opinion of the world is the mistress of the world.” Ackerman repeated the phrase often. He believed that future diplomacy would follow Wilson’s lead, with government’s publicizing their actions and citizens engaging in “full discussions of all international issues.”<sup>37</sup> Ackerman saw Wilson’s publicity of international affairs as a symbol of the new power of public opinion in diplomacy. Unlike his predecessors, Ackerman argued, Wilson recognized that public opinion was “the greatest force in the world,” even greater than the presidency.<sup>38</sup>



In November of 1914, Ackerman wrote to Roy Howard to ask for a position as a war correspondent.<sup>39</sup> A few months later, Ackerman and Mabel, who was three months pregnant, arrived in London. The couple soon realized their German surname triggered more than suspicious glances from locals. Ackerman believed English censors were delaying or holding his mail.<sup>40</sup> When he applied for permission to travel to Holland and Germany, the officials at the Home Office noticed Ackerman’s German name on his passport. The officials retreated to discuss the matter, keeping Ackerman waiting for twenty minutes. When they returned they submitted Ackerman to a series of questions. Was he born in America? What about his parents? His grandparents? Where were his letters of introduction and his credentials for the United Press Association? Did he have any documents showing he had lived in America five years ago? Where was he living in England? When he finally passed the officials’ test and received a stamp on his passport, the officials warned that his wife would have to answer the same questions. “Scotland Yard was after me immediately after I landed,” Ackerman explained to his parents in a letter. “All of this will, of course, indicate to you that I am going to Germany. As soon as we are able to travel over there comfortably.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ackerman, “The War and Our Next Election,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, The Next Republic?*, 288.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Ackerman, Address Columbia Journalism School 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, April 10, 1963, 3, Box 165, CWA.

<sup>40</sup> Ackerman to father, March 13, 1915, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>41</sup> Ackerman to parents, March 9, 1915, Box 14, CWA.

Almost as soon as Ackerman had arrived in London, Howard appointed the German-speaking reporter manager of the Berlin bureau. "This is probably the biggest newspaper assignment one could get," Ackerman wrote to his parents in March.<sup>42</sup> Ackerman was to replace Karl Henry von Wiegand, an American journalist of German descent who had scored an exclusive interview with Germany's Crown Prince in the early months of the war. He had decided to leave the UP for a spot with the prominent *New York World*.<sup>43</sup> "Von Wiegand is the most famous correspondent in the war zone and it overwhelms me to think that I am to take – or try to take his place," Ackerman wrote to his parents.<sup>44</sup> If Ackerman at first seemed anxious over this new responsibility, he quickly found his confidence. Howard believed Ackerman's sense of humor was "his best defense against a fatal conceit," and wrote to Ackerman's father with a suggestion. "I honestly believe you will further his best interests by not letting him know just how proud you are of him," Howard wrote in December of 1915. "Carl will never fail because of a lack of confidence in himself."<sup>45</sup>

When Ackerman and Mabel arrived in Berlin they found a lively city. Military cars, taxis, carriages, and thousands of soldiers crowded Berlin's streets. The stores were open and busy. The locals were confident of the country's impending victory. "Flags are flying everywhere to-day," Ackerman wrote in an early dispatch. "Bands are playing as regiment after regiment passes through the city to entrain for the front. Through Wilhelmstrasse the soldiers move, their hats and guns decorated with fragrant flowers and with mothers, sisters and sweethearts clinging to and encouraging them."<sup>46</sup> Unlike British officials, the Germans offered foreign war correspondents access to the front lines. During his two-year stay in Germany, Ackerman traveled to the front in Belgium, France, Poland, Russia and Romania, seeing "almost as well as a soldier."<sup>47</sup> "The authorities are showing the American newspaper men every opportunity," Ackerman wrote to his parents in March.<sup>48</sup> With British control of over sixty percent of international cables, however, British censors could delay or suppress any news dispatches Ackerman sent from Berlin.<sup>49</sup> Thus in addition to his wireless messages, Ackerman sent news to the US through the mail. "The more mail stuff we get the

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<sup>42</sup> Ackerman to parents, March 19, 1915 Box 14, CWA.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Nagorski, *Hitlerland: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> Ackerman to parents, March 19, 1915 Box 14, CWA.

<sup>45</sup> Howard to Ackerman, December, 7, 1915, Box 145, CWA.

<sup>46</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?*, 40-41.

<sup>47</sup> Ackerman, *Germany the Next Republic?*, vi.

<sup>48</sup> Ackerman to parents, March 25, 1915, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>49</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, "Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870-1914," *English Historical Review*, 86, (1971): 740.

better,” a UP news manager wrote to Ackerman in April of 1915. “We are getting a splendid play on everything that comes from you. German news is at a premium here.”<sup>50</sup>

Germany announced its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in the areas around the British Isles in February 1915. Three months later, a German torpedo hit the *Lusitania*, a British passenger carrier. The ship sank in under eighteen minutes and 1,201 people lost their lives, including 128 Americans. President Wilson sent a note to Germany demanding a “strict accounting” of the country’s attack on Americans and a cessation of the country’s unrestricted submarine warfare.<sup>51</sup> During the critical period in German and U.S. relations, Ackerman saw American Ambassador to Germany James W. Gerard daily. He had first met Gerard while covering Wilson’s 1912 campaign.<sup>52</sup> Ackerman believed Gerard had handled diplomatic relations with “bluntness, frankness and a kind of ‘news instinct,’ which caused him to regard his position as that of a reporter for the United States government.” Gerard had sent daily reports to the government about Germany.<sup>53</sup> In his book *Germany, the Next Republic?*, Ackerman chronicled Gerard’s every effort in Germany to prevent war. He blamed the failure of his efforts on Germany’s desperation for victory through submarine warfare.<sup>54</sup> Gerard, in turn, commended Ackerman for his “splendid patriotism” in Berlin. While pro-German correspondents had misled Germans as to the true American sentiment toward war, Gerard argued, Ackerman and Associated Press correspondent Seymour B. Conger had “preserved their Americanism unimpaired.”<sup>55</sup>

Ackerman’s initial sympathetic outlook toward Germany had turned to disgust. “I watched developments in Berlin change the German people from world citizens to narrow-minded, deceitful tools of a ruthless government,” he wrote in 1917. “I saw Germany outlaw herself. I saw the anti-American propaganda begin...I saw the birth of lawless Germany.”<sup>56</sup> The anti-American propaganda, Ackerman argued, impressed upon Germans that America was not neutral and that the United States was shipping supplies to Germany’s enemies. The propaganda encouraged Germans to believe that anyone speaking English was an enemy. Ackerman recalled in his 1917 book that Germans

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<sup>50</sup> Perry Arnold to Ackerman, April 27, 1915, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>51</sup> “Leading Points in President’s Note to Germany,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1915, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ackerman, Address Columbia Journalism School 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, April 10, 1963, 5, Box 165, CWA.

<sup>53</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?*, 281-282.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>55</sup> James W. Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, (New York: Grossert & Dunlap, 1917), 306.

<sup>56</sup> Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic*, vii.

had physically attacked Americans who spoke English in public.<sup>57</sup> Germany's Foreign Office also supported the League of Truth, an organization that worked to win the support of German Americans and attacked President Wilson and the United States through its propaganda publication, *Light and Truth*.<sup>58</sup> "The year and a half between the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the severance of diplomatic relations was a period of terror for most Americans in Germany," Ackerman explained.<sup>59</sup>

By early 1917, Germany had resumed unrestricted submarine warfare and the U.S.'s commitment to neutrality waived. "Berlin is gradually losing its attractiveness and we are very anxious to leave," Ackerman wrote to his father. "People are insulting, unkind, selfish and they hate America and Americans."<sup>60</sup> By February, the United States broke diplomatic ties with Germany and by the spring, Ackerman, his wife, and their two-year-old son, Bobby, arrived in the United States. Ackerman and his family returned to a country enveloped by a "patriotic hysteria." Churches, labor groups, universities, and German-American organizations pledged their loyalty to the nation's cause. Mob violence and heckling made pacifism "more uncomfortable."<sup>61</sup> In April, the U.S. declared war on Germany.



Back in New York in March 1917, Ackerman was busy giving lectures on German public opinion and writing about his experiences in the Central Powers.<sup>62</sup> He had left the United Press for a position with the *New York Tribune*. In advertisements for Ackerman's series of articles on Germany, the paper described the young journalist as having "a greater personal knowledge of conditions in Germany and Austria than any other American except Gerard."<sup>63</sup> Ackerman would provide *Tribune* readers with information that had failed to pass the censors in Germany. "It is costing us big money to get Ackerman, but we're willing to stand it for the prestige of the *Tribune*," read one advertisement.<sup>64</sup> The *Tribune* had paid Ackerman \$950 for the series.<sup>65</sup> In June, George H. Doran Company

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>60</sup> Ackerman to father, January 10, 1917, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>61</sup> James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information 1917-1919*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939) 24.

<sup>62</sup> "This Week's Free Lectures," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1917, 17; "In the Current Week," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1917, 24.

<sup>63</sup> "The Next Revolt?" *The New York Tribune*, March 27, 1917, 1.

<sup>64</sup> "Tribune Syndicate Features vs. Newsprint Situation," *The New York Tribune*, March 3, 1917, 18. Box 122, CWA.

published Ackerman's book, *Germany, the Next Republic?*, which also appeared serially in the *Evening Public Ledger*.

A few weeks after his return to the United States, Ackerman began a correspondence with the President's advisor, Colonel Edward M. House. "Now that I have returned to New York with Ambassador Gerard," Ackerman wrote to House. "I would be very glad if I might have an opportunity of talking with you."<sup>66</sup> The next day, Ackerman received a reply from House. "I shall be very glad to make an appointment. I have read with great pleasure many of your recent articles and I shall be pleased to talk with you."<sup>67</sup> Over the next few months, Ackerman and House met often. Ackerman sent House a copy of his book, clippings of his *Saturday Evening Post* articles, and a short memo describing the "present conditions in Germany."<sup>68</sup> "I am interested in everything you write," House wrote to Ackerman in June. "You seem to me to be doing about the best work that is being done."<sup>69</sup> Ackerman's observations of the liberal movements gaining momentum in Germany, which he detailed in his book and several articles, were of great value to House. An understanding of public opinion in enemy countries was crucial to U.S. diplomacy and to any future peace plan.<sup>70</sup> House likely saw in Ackerman a way to stay informed of liberal sentiment overseas. Ackerman, in turn, looked to House as an advisor of his work, helping him to properly instruct domestic public opinion on Wilsonian policy. In spring 1917, House and Ackerman quickly forged a close friendship that lasted long after the war ended.

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<sup>65</sup> Garet Garrett to Ackerman, May 26, 1917, Box 122, CWA.

<sup>66</sup> Ackerman to House, March 21, 1917, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>67</sup> Ackerman to House, March 22, 1917, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>68</sup> House to Ackerman June 24, 1917, June 27, 1917, and June 30, 1917, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>69</sup> House to Ackerman, June 24, 1917, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>70</sup> John D. Startt, "Colonel Edward M. House and the Journalists," *American Journalism*, 27 (2010): 41.

### 3. “SO CLOSE TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS”

“Every correspondent who has had foreign experience seeks to discover ‘key men’ in ‘key positions’ – men who know what is being privately discussed by cabinet officers, men who know what governmental policies are and when they are apt to be modified or changed.”

-Carl Ackerman<sup>1</sup>

Across the street from the White House, Carl Ackerman roamed the halls of the State, War, and Navy building, interviewing anyone he could find. First, he spoke to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, then the former Governor of Minnesota John Lind, and then Secretary of War Lindley Garrison. It was Ackerman’s first day as a Washington correspondent for the United Press and he was overjoyed. “Here I am in Washington – at last!” Ackerman wrote his parents that night. “I’m glad, tickled, happy, enthused – and everything else...I’ve been so close to...government officials that I’m almost too tickled to write.”<sup>2</sup>

At the outbreak of WWI in 1914, Ackerman, like many other progressive journalists, forged close, cooperative relationships with members of the Administration. On overseas assignments for the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, Ackerman befriended American military and diplomatic officials. The American consuls he met were “guides, interpreters, counselors and friends combined...”<sup>3</sup> In Siberia, Ackerman worked closely with Colonel O.P. Robinson and Major General William S. Graves. Ackerman accompanied Graves and his staff on a military mission to the Siberian interior. His account of this mission is detailed in his book, *Trailing the Bolsheviki*. In Switzerland, Ackerman met Allen Dulles, an American intelligence officer who was appointed director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1953. The two exchanged friendly notes once Ackerman left Switzerland for the U.S.<sup>4</sup> But Ackerman’s relationship with other government officials went beyond a friendly correspondence. Ackerman offered men like Colonel Edward M. House, the President’s most trusted friend and advisor, and Frank Polk, counselor of the State Department, his cooperation and service. He submitted drafts of two different articles to Josephus Daniels of the Navy Department and Joseph Grew of the State Department for their approval before publication.<sup>5</sup> He sent at least one confidential report describing the political situation in Russia to Ambassador

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Maurice Walsh, *The News from Ireland, Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution*, (London, I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2008), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ackerman to parents, May 1914, Box 14, CWA

<sup>3</sup> Carl Ackerman, “The Last Days of the Czar,” *American Consular Bulletin* IV, July 1922, 194.

<sup>4</sup> See correspondence between Ackerman and Dulles, 1918-1921, Box 104, CWA.

<sup>5</sup> Ackerman to Daniels, June 24, 1918, Box 169, CWA; Grew to Ackerman, June 27, 1917, Box 28, CWA.

Roland Morris and another to Third Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long.<sup>6</sup> Upon his return to the U.S. after his trip to Siberia, Ackerman scheduled an appointment with Long.<sup>7</sup> He was eager to discuss with him his experiences overseas. Throughout the war Ackerman had “close but unofficial relations” with the State Department, where he sent confidential reports during his newspaper assignments in Switzerland, Siberia, and the Far East.<sup>8</sup> Ackerman also cooperated with the British War Mission, a group charged with distributing British propaganda in the United States. “He is a very good fellow,” said Lord Northcliffe, director of the mission. “and is now working in a friendly fashion with W. and myself.”<sup>9</sup> “W” was British journalist Arthur Willert, who was aware of Ackerman’s behind-the-scenes work for the Wilson Administration. In his 1953 book, *The Road to Safety*, Willert wrote that Ackerman was “sent out to spy the land” in fall 1918.<sup>10</sup> More than anyone else, however, Ackerman cooperated with Colonel House, who he consistently looked to for advice and guidance.

In the early years of their friendship, when House was a dominant player in international politics, Ackerman and House met often. In early 1917, after he had returned from his stay in Berlin, Ackerman traveled to New York to visit with House four times within two months.<sup>11</sup> Ackerman believed that as the President’s most trusted friend, House was “invaluable in the formation, the development, and the carrying out of our governmental policies both nationally and internationally.”<sup>12</sup> Like other progressive journalists who formed close relationships with House, Ackerman was eager to cooperate. He sent drafts of his articles to House, asking for his suggestions and approval before their publication. During his assignments for the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, Ackerman acted as House’s “unofficial reporter,” sending confidential letters to House through the State Department. Desiring to choose posts where he could “be of service” to the Administration, Ackerman consulted with House before accepting foreign correspondent assignments.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ackerman to Morris, no date, Box 141, CWA; Ackerman to House and Long; December 28, 1918, CWA.

<sup>7</sup> Ackerman to Long, April 2 1919, Box 30, CWA

<sup>8</sup> Ackerman to William Benton, September 13, 1945, Box 151, CWA.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Butler to John Buchan, July 9, 1917, FO 395/75.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Willert, *The Road to Safety*, (New York: Frederick A. Preager, 1953), 151.

<sup>11</sup> March 26, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH; April 18, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH; May 26, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH; May 29, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH.

<sup>12</sup> Ackerman to Charles Seymour, April 25, 1927, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>13</sup> Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.



Colonel House, a 59-year-old political advisor from Texas, had counseled four governors in his home state in the 1890s. But by 1910 he had moved to New York and was looking toward the national stage.<sup>14</sup> He sent a letter to Woodrow Wilson – then Governor of New Jersey - in October of 1911 and arranged a meeting with Wilson in November of the same year.<sup>15</sup> “We found ourselves in such a complete sympathy in so many ways,” House remembered of the visit. “We soon learned to know what each was thinking without either having expressed himself.”<sup>16</sup> Wilson also believed the two shared a deep understanding. “Mr. House is my second personality,” Wilson explained. “He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one.”<sup>17</sup>

After Wilson’s election in 1912, House’s “extraordinary influence” on the President was made clear.<sup>18</sup> Wilson largely followed House’s recommendations for Cabinet appointments, and he sent House on three separate peace missions to Europe after the outbreak of war.<sup>19</sup> House even had his own bedroom in the White House for overnight stays.<sup>20</sup> In 1917, once the United States entered the war, Wilson asked House to gather a group of academics and intellectuals to study possible post-war settlements. The Inquiry – as the group became known – drafted a memorandum that informed Wilson’s Fourteen Point speech on U.S. peace aims.<sup>21</sup> In fall 1917, House was appointed to the Supreme War Council, which worked to coordinate the military strategy of Allied nations. He also represented the United States at the Paris Peace Conference. Wilson and House both shared the dream of a lasting liberal peace through a League of Nations. At Wilson’s request, House drafted a constitution for the League.<sup>22</sup> For all of his influence, however, House never had an official position in Wilson’s Administration. The President offered him the “platter” of Cabinet positions, but House declined them all. The Colonel told Ackerman years later that he wanted to remain Wilson’s equal and not become an employee.<sup>23</sup> He also liked to work behind the scenes. But

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<sup>14</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson’s Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 5

<sup>15</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson’s Right Hand*, 1, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Hodgson, *Wilson’s Right Hand*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson’s Right Hand*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson’s Right Hand*, 8; Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House into the World War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), v.

<sup>20</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson’s Right Hand*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> John Thompson, *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 202.

<sup>22</sup> Seymour, *Papers of Colonel House*, v.

<sup>23</sup> London Notes, June 24, 1921, Box 1, CWA.

House's special position in the Administration was well known. In reference to House's summer home in Magnolia, Massachusetts, Lord Northcliffe, Director of Propaganda in Britain, once stated, "All the roads lead ultimately to Magnolia."<sup>24</sup>

In his Magnolia home and in his apartment in New York, Colonel House met with a variety of experts and intellectuals to gather information useful to the Administration. He arranged meetings with journalists, ambassadors, British and American major generals, and members of the Wilson Administration. "With all of them House talked so as to have an insight into each situation from as many angles as seemed necessary," historian Charles Seymour wrote in 1928.<sup>25</sup> Once House gathered a "true picture" of a situation he would relay the information to the President. On a private telephone that connected his study with the State Department, House had daily conversations with the Administration.<sup>26</sup> After the United States entered the war, House was inundated with callers. "The days are in continual turmoil now," he wrote three days after Congress declared war. "Telephone calls, telegrams, letters and personal interviews occupy every waking hour."<sup>27</sup>

Many of those who visited House were pro-Wilson journalists and editors. Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly, editors of the liberal *New Republic*, met House for weekly talks.<sup>28</sup> The *New Republic* had become a semi-official voice of the Administration and in meetings House "outlined to all of them the things I thought they should do to help best."<sup>29</sup> Before the U.S. joined the Allies, the editor of the *Washington Post*, Theo Logan, offered to keep House informed of the Washington scene.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the war, House orchestrated government assignments for a number of cooperative journalists. Lincoln Steffens of *American Magazine* traveled to Russia and kept the government informed of the revolution there. Ray Stannard Baker of the *New Republic* went undercover for the Administration. Posing as a foreign correspondent, Baker traveled to England where he assessed liberal thought in the country and reported back to the government. The government paid Baker for his reports.<sup>31</sup> Lincoln Colcord of

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<sup>24</sup> Seymour, *Papers of Colonel House*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> April 5, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 171.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 171; April 17, 1917, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH.

<sup>30</sup> December 15, 1916, Diaries, Volume 5, EMH

<sup>31</sup> John Maxwell Hamilton and Robert Mann, ed., *A Journalist's Diplomatic Mission* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), xiii.

the *Public Ledger* was also sent to Europe to report on the liberal sentiment in belligerent countries.<sup>32</sup> Colcord had an especially close relationship with House, visiting him nearly three times each week.<sup>33</sup>

In spring 1917, at the height of the war, Ackerman made his first visit to Colonel House's New York apartment. The two soon began a friendship that would last long after the war ended. In 1931, Ackerman wrote to House to congratulate him and his wife on their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.<sup>34</sup> The next day, House wrote Ackerman: "There is no one whose good wishes we appreciate more than yours."<sup>35</sup> House began his letters to Ackerman "my dear friend" and ended with "your friend always."<sup>36</sup> When Ackerman was appointed director of the *Public Ledger's* foreign news service in 1919, he recruited House as an advisor of the paper, and in 1925, the Houses and Ackermans shared Christmas dinner together. "We had planned to have our Christmas in the country," Ackerman had written to House. "But I told Mrs. Ackerman the only invitation I would not decline was the one from you and Mrs. House."<sup>37</sup>



In a meeting in early 1917, Ackerman explained his current project to House – a book about the United States' diplomatic relations with Germany – and House "promised to advise with him as his work progresses."<sup>38</sup> Three weeks later, Ackerman delivered a draft of the book to House for his review.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the war, Ackerman looked to House for guidance in his work. In summer 1918, for example, Ackerman and House met to discuss the League of Nations, which President Wilson had introduced in his Fourteen Points speech in January. Ackerman wanted to write a series of articles on the League, and House had invited Ackerman to Magnolia to "talk it out together."<sup>40</sup> In August, Ackerman sent House a draft of the first article in the series.<sup>41</sup> "I don't know that I have included all of the points which were suggested, but I shall be very grateful to you for any suggestions, criticisms and changes which you may make." He encouraged House to mark the changes on the manuscript.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson's Right Hand*, 171.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965), 236.

<sup>34</sup> Ackerman to House, August 7, 1931, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>35</sup> House to Ackerman, August 8, 1931, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>36</sup> House to Ackerman, August 8, 1931, Box 29, CWA; House to Ackerman, September 14, 1920, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>37</sup> Ackerman to House, December 1925, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>38</sup> March 26, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Vol. 5, EMH.

<sup>39</sup> April 18 1917, Series II, Diaries, Vol. 5, EMH.

<sup>40</sup> House to Ackerman, June 16, 1918, Box 28, CWA.

<sup>41</sup> Ackerman to House, August 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

In May 1917, Ackerman consulted with House about an article he was writing on Germany's peace aims. In the published article, Ackerman accused the German government of "sham liberalism."<sup>43</sup> Through an "inhuman censorship," the government had led German citizens to believe they were fighting a defensive war. But the government's true objective was the security of territories in France and Belgium, which it had unlawfully seized. It was fighting for conquest. For this reason, the German government had not - and would not - state its peace terms. If German citizens knew of the intentions of their government they would become "restive" and the government needed, above all else, the support of public opinion. The calls for peace, Ackerman argued, were rouses to appease the liberal forces in the country and the "peace snag" was the system of government in Germany, which "gives the Kaiser complete authority in war and peace."<sup>44</sup> "Carl Ackerman was my most interesting caller," House wrote in his diary that night after a long day of meetings. "I am arranging with him to get his article entitled "The Peace Snag" widely syndicated in this country, South America, and Europe. It seems necessary for the world to know what the German military clique have in mind, and how impossible peace is at the moment."<sup>45</sup> House was also eager to have the President's cooperation. In a letter to the President the next day, House reiterated the premise of Ackerman's article. The "military masters" in Germany were only interested in a peace based on conquest. He urged the President to bring light to the issue. "Unless you lead and direct liberal thought," House wrote to the President. "It will not be done."<sup>46</sup> Wilson agreed and delivered a speech on the "German Plot" on Flag Day in 1917. In the speech, Wilson repeated the points made in House's letter. Germany had not stated their peace terms, although they had often discussed their desire for peace. The German government's purpose was the "deceit of nations" and the territories in France and Belgium were "pawns."<sup>47</sup> Ten days later, Ackerman's article appeared in the papers.

Ackerman also consulted with House before accepting foreign correspondent assignments. "My only object is to go where I can be of service," he wrote to House.<sup>48</sup> In September 1917, Ackerman was debating between newspaper assignments in Argentina or Europe. After a trip to Washington where he met with Secretary of State Robert Lansing, the President's secretary Joseph Tumulty, and former classmates, Ackerman wrote to his mother,

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<sup>43</sup> Carl Ackerman, "Two Maps of Germany and the Peace Snag," *Evening Star*, June 24, 1917, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> May 29, 1917, Series II, Diaries, Vol. 5, EMH.

<sup>46</sup> Letter printed in Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House: Into the World War*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 132-133.

<sup>47</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "The German Plot," (speech in Washington Monument Grounds, June 14, 1917).

<sup>48</sup> Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

“All of my friends here in Washington are urging me to go to Europe, but I will not decide until I see Colonel House in New York.”<sup>49</sup> After this meeting with House, Ackerman made plans with the *Saturday Evening Post* to travel to Europe. But he would not only file reports for the magazine. He would also act as an “unofficial reporter” for Colonel House and send confidential reports in code through the State Department.<sup>50</sup> Ackerman sent reports from Spain, France, and Switzerland. When his assignment was nearing its end in spring 1918, Ackerman wrote to House: “May I not, also, express my appreciation of the confidence which you and the Department placed in me, and add that I shall be glad to be of service again!”<sup>51</sup>

Upon his return to the United States, Ackerman pitched the idea of a series of articles on the League of Nations to the editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*. He also asked House to recommend the series to the magazine’s publisher, Cyrus Curtis. “I am anxious to do this for the Post, if I can, because I shall then be in a position to be of more assistance to you and the Department...,” Ackerman explained to House.<sup>52</sup> But the *Saturday Evening Post* declined Ackerman’s offer and he then turned to the *New York Times*, which had proposed an assignment in Siberia and the Far East. “I did not want to decide upon the *Times* proposal without taking the liberty of consulting you,” Ackerman wrote to House. “My object is to be of service to you and the Department first.”<sup>53</sup> House replied that Ackerman could “serve better in Europe rather than Asia.” The League of Nations would be an important topic by year’s end, House explained.<sup>54</sup> “The Colonel writes that he wants me to go to Europe and not to Russia. For me that settles it,” Ackerman wrote to his father.<sup>55</sup> Like the *Saturday Evening Post*, however, the *New York Times* was uninterested in a series on the League. The war had not yet ended. The League would have to wait for peace. Ackerman had no choice but to accept the *New York Times* assignment. But he could still help the government. On a trip to Washington, Ackerman explained to Frank Polk, counselor of the State Department, that he would soon travel to the Far East. Polk arranged for Ackerman to send confidential dispatches to Colonel House and the State Department just as he had done in Switzerland.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ackerman to mother, 1917, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>50</sup> Ackerman, memo to Library of Congress, June 21, 1962, Box 158, CWA.

<sup>51</sup> Ackerman to House, June 18, 1918, Series I, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>52</sup> Ackerman to House, June 15, 1918, Series I, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>53</sup> Ackerman to House, July 9, 1918, Series I, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>54</sup> House to Ackerman, July 12, 1918, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>55</sup> Ackerman to Father, no date, Box 14, CWA.

<sup>56</sup> Ackerman to House, August 28, 1919, Series I, Box I, EMH.



In the fall of 1952, Ackerman – then dean of Columbia Journalism School – gave an address to the incoming class of journalism students. He spoke of the friendships the students would make with men and women in business, politics, education, and science as they reported on city events. “You will make friendships which will follow you throughout your life,” Ackerman told the students. “...When you meet people, no matter how unimportant or how insignificant they may be at the time, remember they are part of this great opportunity of improving your human relationships.”<sup>57</sup> Ackerman told the students of a “lucky” school assignment that landed him in party headquarters of the Wilson campaign in 1912. It was then that Ackerman first met Josephus Daniels, Secretary of Navy; John Davis, Counselor of the State Department; James W. Gerard, Ambassador to Germany, and Colonel House. These men “became the great figures of the Woodrow Wilson Administration,” Ackerman told the students, and he had been fortunate to call himself “one of House’s fair-haired boys.” He believed that House and others in the Administration had aided his career in “many, many ways.”<sup>58</sup>

Ackerman certainly understood that a relationship with House, who was a “key man” in a “key position,” could benefit his career. But as his letters to House show, he was, above all, eager to serve the Administration. Ackerman leaves this fact out of his speech to students thirty-five years later. “In the war for Democracy, the press must lead,” he had written to House in 1917. “So far the newspapers have not been mobilized to the best advantage of the United States or Our Allies.” By accepting House’s guidance, Ackerman published articles in line with the Administration’s policies and brought publicity to issues House and Wilson deemed important. Ackerman had an abiding faith in the power of public opinion and he believed that the United States should “fight with news as well as with an army.”<sup>59</sup> In his papers, there is no evidence that suggest Ackerman was hesitant about accepting advice or assignments from government officials. In fact, he often illustrated his willingness to serve the government. Ackerman remained strongly pro-Wilson throughout the war. He had accepted the Wilsonian view of the war as one for democracy, and in the name of democracy and public opinion, he was willing to cooperate with government officials.

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<sup>57</sup> Ackerman to Class of 1953, September 25, 1952, Box 164, CWA, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ackerman to Class of 1953, September 25, 1952, Box 164, CWA, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ackerman to House, December 20, 1917, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

#### 4. REPORTING FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT

“During my stay I had an opportunity of meeting a number of French, British and American officials, not generals, cabinet officers and ambassadors, but officials entrusted with the execution of important matters.”

-Carl Ackerman<sup>1</sup>

After traveling through Spain and France, Ackerman settled in Switzerland in December 1917. He would spend the next five months in the town of Berne, observing the political movements in Germany and Austria-Hungary and sending confidential reports of his findings to the State Department and Colonel House. Ackerman kept the Department informed of the democratic movements gaining momentum in enemy countries, the reaction to President Wilson’s peace aims, and the influence of U.S. propaganda. He continued reporting for the State Department when he traveled to Siberia and the Far East in late 1918, sending reports on the Russian civil war and U.S. and Allied intervention in the country. In his reports, Ackerman followed House’s instructions to “send criticisms.”<sup>2</sup> He analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. strategy and filled his reports with lists of suggestions for U.S. and Allied policy. House forwarded reports of “important bearing” to President Wilson.<sup>3</sup> While overseas, Ackerman was also reporting for the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He often shared information with the government that he left out of his published reports.

Ackerman worked with an extraordinarily wide array of American and foreign officials. In Switzerland, the Minister of the American Legation Pleasant A. Stovall, and the Legation’s charge d’affaires, Hugh Wilson, were both aware of Ackerman’s work for the government.<sup>4</sup> Before Ackerman traveled to the Far East, Colonel House wrote letters to Ambassador to Japan Roland Morris and Minister to China Paul Reinsch introducing the journalist and his work.<sup>5</sup> Ackerman met with men like George McFadden, director of the War Trade Board in Paris; Pomeroy Burton, a representative of Lord Northcliffe; and Colonel Dennis Nolan, chief intelligence officer of the American

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<sup>1</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>2</sup> Ackerman to House, February 17, 1918, Series 1, Box 2, EMH.

<sup>3</sup> House to Wilson, February 2 and March 6, 1918, WWP; Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>4</sup> Ackerman to House, March 7, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH; Ackerman to House, January 30, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>5</sup> Ackerman to House, August 21, 1918, Series I, Box 1, EMH; House to Ackerman, August 22, 1918, Box 29, CWA.

army.<sup>6</sup> He formed a close friendship with Dr. Louis Schulthess, a former attaché to the Swiss Legation in Washington. In his reports to the State Department, Ackerman often relayed information he obtained from these government officials. He not only sent reports to the State Department and Colonel House, but also kept officials overseas informed of his observations. Ackerman came to rely on government information and published at least two false news articles based on forged reports from government officials. Ackerman even asked for an official position with the government's Committee on Public Information while in Switzerland.<sup>7</sup>



When Ackerman arrived in Switzerland in December 1917, the Allies and the Central Powers were both facing economic and military collapse after three and a half years of war.<sup>8</sup> While the Central Powers struggled under heavy food shortages caused by the U.S. and Allied blockade, Germany's submarine warfare was nearly starving Britain.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. entered the conflict in April 1917 and sent financial and naval aid to the Allies, but its small army of 108,000 soldiers offered little military assistance in 1917.<sup>10</sup> "Today is the most critical period of the world war," Ackerman wrote in December. "It is more critical than the early days of 1914, because the war is nearer a conclusion and Germany has not been defeated."<sup>11</sup> In fact, Germany had won a decisive advantage in December. The Bolsheviks had seized power in war-weary Russia in November by promising an immediate peace with the Central Powers. A month later the Bolsheviks signed an armistice and began peace negotiations with Germany in Brest-Litovsk.<sup>12</sup> In an effort to keep Russia fighting with the Allies and to encourage the liberal peace movements within Germany, President Wilson outlined the U.S.'s peace aims in his Fourteen Points speech in early January.<sup>13</sup> The war would end, Wilson stated, if only Germany was "willing to associate herself with us and the other peace-loving nations of the world in covenants of justice and law and fair dealing."<sup>14</sup> At the end of his speech, Wilson

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<sup>6</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>7</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>8</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 141.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Richard, *When the United States Invaded Russia*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 10; Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> Richard, *Invaded Russia*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Ackerman, "United We Win," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 1, 1917, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Richard, *US Invaded Russia*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Hodgson, *Wilson's Right Hand*, 161-163.

<sup>14</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Fourteen Points," (address to Congress, January 8, 1918).

called for a League of Nations “for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.”<sup>15</sup>

One of Ackerman’s chief objectives while in Europe was to study official Swiss opinion toward the proposal of a League of Nations.<sup>16</sup> In May 1918, Ackerman met with President of the Swiss Republic Felix Calonder to discuss the League. Calonder was aware of Ackerman’s role as a reporter for the U.S. government and agreed to speak with Ackerman for the specific purpose of providing information to Colonel House and President Wilson.<sup>17</sup> “I had the honor of being received by the President of the Swiss Republic, who made the following statements with the understanding that it would be submitted to you but not published,” Ackerman wrote to House.<sup>18</sup> “...Mr. Calonder stated that he was happy to make this statement regarding a League of Nations for your information and for the information of President Wilson.” In February, Ackerman reported to House that Calonder had approved of Wilson’s Fourteen Point speech and had assigned Dr. Louis Schulthess to study Switzerland’s role in the formation of a league. Ackerman learned this information from Schulthess, who had close ties to the Swiss president.<sup>19</sup>

Ackerman also obtained information from influential Swiss professors, like Max Huber and William E. Rappard. Huber, who Ackerman described as the “advisor of the Swiss republic for all questions of international law,” would not speak for publication, but Ackerman reported his statements to House.<sup>20</sup> Both of the men were generally favorable to the idea of a league of nations. Ackerman suggested that the U.S. maintain unofficial relations with Swiss professors, who could provide “valuable information” in the future. “In Switzerland the University professors play a greater part in the public life and thought of the country than the so-called intellectual leaders do in the United States,” Ackerman wrote to House in May.<sup>21</sup>

Rappard was already well known in the U.S. He had taught economics at Harvard and, as head of a Swiss diplomatic mission to America in 1917, had won the favor of President Wilson.<sup>22</sup> In April 1918, Rappard also

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ackerman to House, June 18, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>20</sup> Ackerman to House, February 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>21</sup> Ackerman to House, June 18, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>22</sup> Vira B. Whitehouse, *A Year as a Government Agent*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), 42.

exchanged letters with Colonel House.<sup>23</sup> After a meeting with Rappard, Ackerman wrote to House: “He was very happy to know that you had appreciated a letter which he had written. He said he had just received an acknowledgment from you which made him feel that his report was worthwhile.”<sup>24</sup>

Ackerman reported to House in March that Germany’s “fundamental policy” was to prevent unity among the Allies.<sup>25</sup> Germany was hoping to convince at least one of the Allied nations to sign a separate peace treaty. Ackerman told House that Germany’s current campaign was to “win the friendship of the French.”<sup>26</sup> He learned from a German correspondent that the Foreign Office in Berlin had instructed newspaper editors to adopt a sympathetic view toward the French, and after a trip to France in December, Ackerman worried that the campaign was influencing French officials. He heard rumors of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs commenting that France would make peace with Germany if the troops failed to hold the Western Front.<sup>27</sup> Pomeroy Burton, an assistant to Lord Northcliffe, told Ackerman that the British were so worried over France signing a separate peace treaty that the British War Cabinet sent a confidential representative to Paris to observe the situation.

In one report, Ackerman told House that the Allies were far from unified. During a trip to Paris in April, Ackerman heard stories from government officials of the bitter disputes between the French and British. “Mr. [Pomeroy] Burton complained that the French contractors withheld supplies from the British army,” Ackerman reported to House. “A contract for five thousand aeroplanes was ruthlessly broken.” Colonel Frank McCoy, an assistant to General John Pershing, told Ackerman that the British flag kept disappearing from the dining hall in French headquarters, and during a walk from Chaumont to Paris, a group of American officers told Ackerman of disagreements between British and French troops at the front. Ackerman reported all of this information to House and urged the U.S. to intervene. “Whatever may be the cause of this feeling between the French and English I think it is distinctly our duty as Americans to try to heal these wounds,” Ackerman wrote. In his reports for the *Saturday Evening Post*, however, Ackerman makes no mention of the discord between the Allies.

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<sup>23</sup> Ackerman to House, April 25, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>24</sup> Ackerman to House, April 25, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>25</sup> Ackerman to House, March 8, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>26</sup> Ackerman to House, December 20, 1917, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>27</sup> Ackerman to House, December 20, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.



Ackerman not only sent reports to House and the State Department, but also kept officials in Switzerland, France, and the Far East informed of his observations. In April, Ackerman spent two weeks in Paris visiting “a number of French, British and American officials, not generals, cabinet officers and ambassadors, but officials entrusted with the execution of important matters.”<sup>28</sup> On multiple occasions during his stay, Ackerman met with George McFadden of the War Trade Board to discuss economic conditions in Switzerland.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. and Allied blockade against the Central Powers had severely limited the supply of food and goods imported into the country.<sup>30</sup> Ackerman relayed information to McFadden that he had received from Edmund Schulthess, former President of the Swiss Confederation and current chief of economic affairs, and Professor William Rappard.<sup>31</sup> The men told Ackerman that the Swiss government wanted to transport food into Switzerland with German ships, which were interned in Spain and Holland. They explained that Germany had already agreed to sell or lease the ships to Switzerland, but British officials had refused the idea.<sup>32</sup> In his meetings with McFadden, Ackerman urged the acceptance of Switzerland’s proposal and gave McFadden a long report on the issue. Food was the best propaganda, Ackerman argued. He also sent a copy of his report to Pomeroy Burton who forwarded it to Lord Northcliffe.<sup>33</sup> After his meeting with Ackerman, McFadden sent a report to the Inter-Allied Shipping Board and the next month Switzerland agreed to send a representative to London for negotiations.<sup>34</sup>

Ackerman also sent reports to Ambassador to Japan Roland Morris. In September 1918, Ackerman had sailed to Siberia for a six-month assignment with the *New York Times*.<sup>35</sup> One month after his departure, the war ended when Germany signed an armistice on November 11. The situation in Siberia, however, was anything but peaceful. Anti-Bolshevik forces were locked in a civil war against the powerful Red Army. The Allies intervened in Siberia on behalf of Czech and Russian anti-Bolsheviks, but American policy in the region was unclear. In August

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<sup>28</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Pleasant A. Stovall, “The Neutrality of Switzerland,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 6 (September, 1922): 3, 202

<sup>31</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>32</sup> Ackerman to House, February 22, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>33</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH; Ackerman sent Burton a second report a month later: Ackerman to Burton, May 18, 1918, Box 143, CWA.

<sup>34</sup> Ackerman to Burton, May 18, 1918, Box 143, CWA. (Ackerman reported that these negotiations soon failed because of London opposition.)

<sup>35</sup> Ackerman to van Anda, August 30, 1918, Box 122, CWA.

1918, President Wilson sent Major General William S. Graves and his division to Siberia but gave orders not to intervene in Russian politics.<sup>36</sup> The presence of American troops but the lack of American involvement confused even the War and State Departments, who both formed conflicting interpretations of the government's strategy.<sup>37</sup> In his reports to the State Department, Ackerman stressed the need for a clearly stated policy in the region. "Peace in Russia cannot be made at a peace Conference in Europe," he wrote. "It can only follow the application and execution of a definite and separate Allied or American policy in Russia itself. Whether Russia is to emerge from this civil war a democratic nation or a theatre of anarchy depends upon what the United States and the Allies do now."<sup>38</sup> State Department Counselor Frank Polk, who feared the "growing menace of Bolshevism," forwarded one of Ackerman's reports to Secretary of State Robert Lansing.<sup>39</sup>

On November 17, Russian Captain Ivan Krasilnikov and his forces overthrew the Social Revolutionary government in Omsk, a territory controlled by White Russians, and established Admiral Alexander V. Kolchak as military dictator.<sup>40</sup> In Siberia, Ackerman had conversations with officials in Omsk and Ekaterinburg, including the chairman of the Czech National Council, and was convinced that British and Russian forces orchestrated the coup with the help of the Czech General Rudolf Gajda. He sent a report to Ambassador to Japan Roland Morris. "I have the honor of transmitting the following information," Ackerman wrote. "Overthrow of the All-Russian government planned by certain English, Russian and Czech generals as a final effort to force American intervention in Siberia."<sup>41</sup> The chairman of the Czech National Council told Ackerman that the Czechs were in a desperate situation, with a depletion of supplies and a much smaller military than the Bolsheviks. The Czechs had long awaited American aid and believed that the U.S. would view the coup as a danger to the Czechs' position in Siberia and eventually send troops. Ackerman told Morris that Kolchak, Gajda, and the British General Alfred Knox had planned the coup. "A coup d'état in Omsk would serve their purpose," Ackerman explained. "...It would reestablish the military party in power in Omsk and carry out Knox's ideas that no government in Russia which is not a military government will

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<sup>36</sup> Carl J. Richard, *When the United States Invaded Russia*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013) 55-57.

<sup>37</sup> Carol Wilcox Melton, *Between War and Peace: Woodrow Wilson and the American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918-1921* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 106.

<sup>38</sup> Ackerman to House, telegram, undated, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>39</sup> Melton, *Between War and Peace: Woodrow Wilson and the American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918-1921*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Richard, *U.S. Invaded Russia*, 62-63.

<sup>41</sup> Ackerman to Morris, telegram, no date, Box 141, CWA.

succeed.”<sup>42</sup> Ackerman only shared this information with Morris and the State Department. In his report for the *New York Times*, Ackerman made no mention of these generals or the idea that the coup was a scheme to win American intervention in Siberia. He only writes: “The complete story of this coup d’état cannot be told at this time because of the part played in it by certain important powers.”<sup>43</sup>



Ackerman asked for an official position in the government’s propaganda bureau soon after he arrived in Switzerland. In December 1917, Ackerman reported to House that he had met with officials of the Norwegian and Swiss Legations in France and was “astonished to find so much pessimism and criticism of the United States.”<sup>44</sup> He believed that the U.S. was “suffering from a lack of intelligence and constant publicity,” and that “something must be done immediately to fight with news.” He wrote that he would suggest a plan in the next few days and soon delivered a proposal to Hugh Wilson, the Legation’s charge d’affaires.<sup>45</sup> Before Wilson could send Ackerman’s report to the State Department, however, news came that Norman Whitehouse, a New York stockbroker, would travel to Switzerland to open a new office for the Committee on Public Information.<sup>46</sup> This report was not entirely true. The CPI was indeed establishing an office in Switzerland, but Vira Whitehouse, Norman’s wife, would lead the efforts. The State Department had concealed this fact by reporting that Mrs. Whitehouse, a leader of the women’s suffrage movement in New York, was in Switzerland to “study conditions relating to women and children.”<sup>47</sup>

Upon hearing of the CPI’s plans, Ackerman wrote to House with a suggestion. “While I think we should have some kind of a bureau here,” he explained. “I beg to urge that only an experienced and well-known journalist be entrusted to this work.”<sup>48</sup> Ackerman assured House, however, that if Whitehouse possessed a “good understanding” of German politics and propaganda, he would find “all of us willing and anxious to help him.”<sup>49</sup> But when Vira Whitehouse arrived in Berne, she immediately encountered difficulties with the American Legation. Whitehouse insisted upon conducting her work “openly and with the knowledge of the Swiss government,” but

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Ackerman, “Civilization a Mockery in the Russia of Today,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1919.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ackerman to House, January 7, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>47</sup> James Robert Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: the story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939) 275.

<sup>48</sup> Ackerman to House, January 7, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Legation officials stressed the importance of secrecy.<sup>50</sup> Ackerman, who had met Whitehouse in late March, also believed that the CPI should work behind-the-scenes. He reported to House in early January that the public announcement of CPI's new Swiss office was "very unfortunate," and in February he sent House an article from a Swiss newspaper to "show what can be done without official and public assistance."<sup>51</sup> The author of the article was Dr. Louis Schulthess, a former attaché of the Swiss Legation in Washington and a close friend of Ackerman's.<sup>52</sup> The article, according to Ackerman, explained that the U.S. entered the war because it "believed democracy throughout the world was threatened by the German government."<sup>53</sup> Without citing his source, Schulthess had also included a line from a CPI bulletin, which stated that, "America's gigantic armaments, her army of millions, her ship-wharves, and Liberty motors have become a reality and will decide the war."<sup>54</sup> Ackerman told House that Schulthess would publish three additional articles.<sup>55</sup> In her book, *A Year as a Government Agent*, Whitehouse refers to Ackerman by name as one of the many individuals in Switzerland who believed that openness in CPI work "was at the very least impracticable."<sup>56</sup>

Ackerman wrote to House in April that cooperation between Whitehouse and the Legation was impossible. "I tried to adjust the differences between her and our Legation here but without result," he reported to House.<sup>57</sup> Ackerman discussed the matter with Minister of the Legation Pleasant Stovall, who suggested that Ackerman ask the State Department if he could take over Whitehouse's responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> "Should I undertake the publicity work here I shall be in a better position to serve the Department," Ackerman wrote to House a few weeks later.<sup>59</sup> He explained to House that, without an official position with the government, he was forced to use his salary from the *Saturday Evening Post* to meet the expense of his Department work. "I find that I cannot do the work for the Department which I had intended and desired to do under this arrangement," he wrote.<sup>60</sup> Ackerman was never given a position with the CPI, but he continued to offer suggestions for U.S. propaganda in his reports to the State

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<sup>50</sup> Whitehouse, *A Year as a Government Agent*, 36, 104.

<sup>51</sup> Ackerman to House, January 7, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH; Ackerman to House, February 28, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>52</sup> Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH; Ackerman to House, February 28,

<sup>53</sup> Ackerman to House, February 28, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>54</sup> Whitehouse, *A Year as a Government Agent*, 142

<sup>55</sup> Ackerman to House, February 28, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>56</sup> Whitehouse, *A year as a Government Agent*, 104-105.

<sup>57</sup> Ackerman to House, April 12 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ackerman to House, April 29, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Department. “Our propaganda in neutral and Allied countries is proving a miserable failure,” he wrote to House in February.<sup>61</sup> He believed that U.S. propaganda should encourage the liberal movements in Germany and stress America’s commitment “to fight to the end for her principles.”<sup>62</sup> “War today is fought by statesmen to gain enemy peoples,” he wrote to House in late January.<sup>63</sup>



Ackerman’s close proximity to government often placed him in a position to receive confidential or leaked reports from government officials. Twice during the war, Ackerman published false news stories, which were based on forged reports he received from secret service agents. For his article on Germany’s torpedoing of the *Lusitania*, a British passenger liner, Ackerman relied on what he said were two authentic reports leaked from Germany. American and Allied secret service agents gave the reports to Ackerman, suggesting that the material would make “a splendid article for publication in the United States and Europe at this time.”<sup>64</sup> Before he sent his article to the *Saturday Evening Post*, Ackerman wrote to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to ask for approval of the article’s publication. “The information in this article was given to me in Switzerland, where I was doing confidential work for the Department of State, by American and Allied naval secret service agents,” Ackerman wrote. “Because the material about the *Lusitania* has never been published I desire to ask whether the U.S. Navy Department has any objection to the publication of the article...”<sup>65</sup> In the *Lusitania Aftermath*, published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in September 1918, Ackerman wrote that a German spy had placed bombs in the *Lusitania* before it sailed, causing a second explosion after the initial hit by the German torpedo.<sup>66</sup> The second explosion, which resulted in the ship sinking unusually quickly, was an international mystery. British and American leaders denied Germany’s accusation that the ship was carrying ammunition on its way to Liverpool. Historian Erik Larson argues, however, that the *Lusitania* was in fact carrying artillery shells and 170 tons of rifle ammunition bound for Britain, but that this was unlikely to cause an explosion.<sup>67</sup> Although German spies did gather near the New York harbors, there was no

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<sup>61</sup> Ackerman to House, February 22, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>62</sup> Ackerman to House, February 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH; Ackerman to House May 4, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>63</sup> Ackerman to House, January 30, 1918, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>64</sup> Ackerman to Daniels, June 24, 1918, Box 169, CWA.

<sup>65</sup> Ackerman to Daniels, June 24, 1918, Box 169, CWA.

<sup>66</sup> Carl Ackerman, “The *Lusitania* Aftermath,” *Saturday Evening Post*, September 14, 1918, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Erik Larson, *Dead Awake: the Last Crossing of the Lusitania*, (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2015), 195.

evidence that spies had placed bombs in the *Lusitania*. A ruptured steam line, not a cargo of bombs, likely caused the explosion.<sup>68</sup> Ackerman's report was based on fabricated documents.

Ackerman published another false report a year later. The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought the Bolsheviks into power and produced a new conspiracy theory. Judeo-Bolshevism was the idea that Jews had orchestrated the Russian Revolution and this myth resurrected an obscure forged document, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first written in late 1890s. The *Protocols* described a Jewish plan for world domination and purported to show the minutes of a secret meeting of the "Elders of Zion," a group of Jews who "stage-manage world events." In 1919, in the midst of the First Red Scare, White Russian émigrés passed the forged *Protocols* to American diplomats and intelligence officials.<sup>69</sup> In October, Ackerman published the first English excerpts of the *Protocols* in a series of articles in the *Public Ledger*. In Ackerman's version of the transcript, however, references to Jews were substituted with references to Bolsheviks. In his articles, Ackerman wrote that an American official had given him the Russian document, a booklet of twenty-four protocols, which had "every evidence of being the guidebook of the world revolutionists." He called it the "Red Bible" and claimed it showed the "diabolical methods" of the Bolsheviks "in planning the destruction of all government."<sup>70</sup> Many believe that Ackerman received a copy of the original *Protocols* and altered the document before publication, turning it into anti-Bolshevik propaganda. But in a letter to his editor, Ackerman explained that he believed the copy was from a reliable source and insinuated that he published it without alterations. "The information I was given showed that they were 'Russian,' that they were brought to this country by an American intelligence official and that they were the result of or intimately related to the inner council of the Bolshevik government," Ackerman explained. "I have seen photographs of the original Russian edition, dated Moscow, 1917."<sup>71</sup> Whether or not Ackerman altered the transcript himself, he nevertheless published the false documents and perpetuated the hoax. One result of his close relationship with government was that officials gave him "leaked" reports whose authenticity he took on the word of someone else.

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<sup>68</sup> Erik Larson, *Dead Awake*, 88, 334.

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin W. Segal, *A Lie and A Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1995) xi-xii; 3, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Carl Ackerman, "Red 'Bible' Counsels Appeal to Violence," *The Public Ledger*, October 27, 1919, 1, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ackerman to John Spurgeon, November 25, 1919, Box 131, CWA.



Ackerman was home in Pennsylvania in the summer of 1918 when he received a letter from Hugh Wilson at the Legation in Berne. “I wish you were back on this job here,” Wilson wrote. “It is getting more interesting day by day and I miss you like the deuce in our work. So after you have had a few months at home...come back again to this part of the world and help out.”<sup>72</sup> In Switzerland, Siberia and the Far East, Ackerman was in close contact with numerous government officials who often provided information for his reports to the State Department. It was not out of place for foreign correspondents to work closely with officials, occasionally trading information with them, but Ackerman’s closeness and proximity to government was considerable. His interactions went far beyond officials giving information to a friendly journalist involved in events. Ackerman offered his cooperation and service to the government and his close relationship with the State Department was no secret to officials overseas. Ackerman and the American officials were working together to achieve an American victory. There was certainly an air of patriotic service among Americans so close to the war zone. When Ackerman wrote to House praising the Minister of the Legation Pleasant A. Stovall, he described Stovall as a “real American... a man who reflected the real democratic spirit of the United States – the Spirit of Unselfish service which we are trying in so many ways to bring to Europe.”<sup>73</sup> House forwarded Ackerman’s letter to President Wilson.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hugh Wilson to Ackerman, August 15, 1918, Box 33, CWA.

<sup>73</sup> Ackerman to House, June 11, 1918, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>74</sup> House to Ackerman, June 15, 1918, Box 29, CWA.

## 5. LIFE AFTER THE WAR

“The primary obligation of the press in peace and in war is to serve as an instrumentality of the public, not as an agency of government.”  
-Carl Ackerman, 1941<sup>1</sup>

In the cold early days of 1919, delegates from more than thirty countries arrived in Paris for a peace conference. Over four years after the assassination of Austria’s Archduke and Archduchess, the world would finally negotiate peace. When Colonel House left for Paris as one of the five U.S. peace delegates, Ackerman was in Russia sending reports to the State Department on the Russian civil war. “I shall always regret that you were not in Paris,” House wrote to Ackerman that summer. “You would have been helpful in many directions and I certainly missed your not being there.”<sup>2</sup> Ackerman and House would remain close friends in the years after the war, and although Ackerman eventually became a strong advocate for press independence, he also continued his cooperation with government.



In January 1920, Ackerman traveled to Europe. Five years had passed since his first trip overseas as a young war correspondent with the United Press. Now, the thirty-year-old journalist made his way to London, where he would organize and direct the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*’s first foreign news service. By August, Ackerman had set up offices and hired twenty-one correspondents for the service in cities from Dublin to Athens.<sup>3</sup> “Many handicaps and difficulties have been overcome,” Ackerman wrote to the *Ledger*’s general manager. “Much remains still to be done.”<sup>4</sup> When Ackerman first proposed the idea of a foreign service to the newspaper’s owner Cyrus Curtis, he suggested that the paper hire Colonel House as a contributor on foreign politics.<sup>5</sup> House was initially hesitant to the idea. “If Col. House writes at all he wants to write when what he has to say will be first page news and not editorial page comment,” Ackerman explained to the paper’s general manager. “But, he insisted, . . . that until we could convince him that by writing such articles he would not weaken his influence and his prestige he would not consider

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Ackerman, “How Free is the American Press: Keeping the News Lines Open,” (speech at Annual Meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April, 18, 1941), Box 162, CWA.

<sup>2</sup> House to Ackerman, July 16, 1919, Box 29, CWA.

<sup>3</sup> Ackerman to John Martin, August 16, 1920, Box 130, CWA.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ackerman to John Spurgeon, January 1, 1920, Box 132, CWA.

any kind of agreement.”<sup>6</sup> Four months later, House agreed to join the paper as a political advisor, and in June he traveled to Europe. “The *Public Ledger* takes this occasion to announce to its readers the addition to its staff of Colonel Edward M. House, who sailed for Europe last Saturday,” the *Public Ledger* advertised. “A keen observer he will while abroad keep this newspaper in touch with the current of events. Few Americans have a wider and more intimate acquaintance with the statesmen of Europe than Colonel House and none more fully than he enjoys their confidence and respect.”<sup>7</sup>

Once he arrived in London, House met with Ackerman almost daily. In the summer months of 1920, Ackerman and House discussed the League of Nations, the war, the *Pubic Ledger*, and the slew of government officials House visited while overseas. On a stroll in Hyde Park in late June, House told Ackerman of his dinner the night before with a group of British officials. He had dined with Sir Edward Grey, former foreign secretary, and his assistants, Lord Robert Cecil and Sir William Tyrrell. House believed he could convince Grey to write an editorial for the *Ledger*. “From a silent man he has now become a publicist,” Ackerman wrote of House a month later. “He is enjoying this work more than any cub reporter could. His face is again filled with smiles.”<sup>8</sup> House was so enthused with this new role that he told Ackerman he would no longer advise presidents. “I intend on advising the newspapers for they make public opinion and influence presidents,” House told Ackerman.<sup>9</sup> House outlined daily articles to Ackerman and also wrote weekly statements, which appeared in the paper under the tagline, “Colonel House today made the following statement to the Public Ledger Foreign Service.”<sup>10</sup>

When Ackerman traveled to Ireland for the *Public Ledger* in spring 1920, the Anglo-Irish war was in its second year. Guerilla warfare between British forces and the Irish Republican Army - a wing of the Sinn Fein party - began in January 1919 with the assassination of two British policemen. Sinn Fein had won a landslide victory in the general election one month before the assassinations, and on January 21, the new Dáil Éireann parliament declared the independence of the Irish Republic. Great Britain outlawed the Dáil less than a year later.<sup>11</sup> Upon his return to London, Ackerman received two letters from Sir Basil Thompson, director of intelligence for Scotland Yard, asking

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<sup>6</sup> Ackerman to John Watkins, January 1920, Box 133, CWA.

<sup>7</sup> Ackerman to House, June 19, 1920, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> London Notes, Note July 24, 1920, Box 1, CWA.

<sup>10</sup> London Notes, July 27, 1920, Box 1, CWA; Ackerman to John Watkins, July 10, 1920, Box 133, CWA.

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Costigan, “The Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1919-1922: A War for Independence or Systematized Murder?” *University Review* 5 (Spring 1968): 81.

for a meeting. “From the day [the letters] were received, until Sir Basil Thompson retired recently, it was my good fortune to stand with him behind the scenes and to witness the dramatic events which culminated in the creation of the Irish Free State,” Ackerman wrote in the first article of a three-part series on the Anglo-Irish conflict.<sup>12</sup> In a meeting in early May, Thompson explained to Ackerman that he was interested in peace talks and wanted to recruit representatives from each side as mediators. He then handed Ackerman confidential reports that Scotland Yard had seized from Irish Republicans. The reports identified a man by the name of Michael Collins as the leader of the Irish Republican Army. Thompson told Ackerman that it was Collins, not Sinn Fein founder Arthur Griffith, who was the true leader of the rebellion. Thompson agreed to the publication of the reports.<sup>13</sup> “Being intensely interested in the possibilities of helping to lay the foundation for a better understanding of the Irish problem through the press,” Ackerman wrote. “the D.I. handed me photostat copies of a number of confidential documents.”<sup>14</sup>

Ackerman soon became an intermediary between British and Irish officials. At the direction of Sir Thompson, Ackerman traveled to Ireland in late June to “explore the possibilities of peace.”<sup>15</sup> Colonel House, who had just arrived in London for his position with the *Public Ledger*, had agreed to act as a mediator between Britain and Ireland after receiving a request from Irish statesman Sir Horace Plunkett. British Prime Minister Lloyd George had also agreed to the idea.<sup>16</sup> Ackerman was sent to Ireland to discern Irish and British sentiment toward mediation through House. Ackerman met with Plunkett, General Sir Nevil Macready of the British forces, Desmond Fitzgerald, member of the Sinn Fein parliament, and Arthur Griffin. “I went to Dublin to urge mediation,” Ackerman wrote in his diary. “B [Sir Basil Thompson] said he told Lloyd George what I had been doing without mentioning my name and that he was exceedingly anxious to have me keep in touch with Sinn Fein.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time that Ackerman was meeting with officials in Ireland, American journalist John Steel was mediating between Chief Secretary for Ireland Sir Hamar Greenwood and Sinn Fein members. “Unknown to the outside world two American newspaper men were acting as the sole connecting links between Sinn Fein and Downing Street,” Ackerman wrote two years later.<sup>18</sup> When Ackerman returned to London he reported to House and Thompson that

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Ackerman, “Ireland from a Scotland Yard Notebook,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1922, 433.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 434-435.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> London Notes, July 25, 1920, Box 1, CWA.

<sup>18</sup> Ackerman, “Ireland from a Scotland Yard,” 436.

Sinn Fein member Desmond Fitzgerald had agreed to travel to London to meet with Thompson. A few days later Fitzgerald arrived in London and presented a list of conditions for peace negotiations. The plan failed, however, when the Sinn Fein Parliament announced that they would only negotiate peace with a member of the British government.<sup>19</sup>

Less than a month later, Ackerman helped British officials establish a line of communication with Michael Collins, the leader of the Irish Republican Army. With help from Fitzgerald, Ackerman set up a series of interviews with Collins, who British military officials had spent months trying to locate and capture. Sir Thompson assured Ackerman, however, that officials would not follow him on the interviews. In exchange, Ackerman would provide the government with information about Collins.<sup>20</sup> “Sir Basil was extremely anxious to know what kind of man he was,” Ackerman wrote.<sup>21</sup> In their first meeting, Ackerman and Collins spoke for two hours, and a few days later, Ackerman published the Irish leader’s first public statements. When Ackerman returned to London he prepared a confidential report on Collins for Sir Thompson. He also sent a copy of the interview to Sir Hamar Greenwood. In the spring 1921, Ackerman submitted to Collins a list of questions about mediation and peace, which Collins answered in writing. Ackerman then sent the questions and answers to General Macreedy, who forwarded the information to the Prime Minister.<sup>22</sup> “For the first time in over a year of confidential conversation, a real leader of the Republic had answered, in writing, questions upon which the British Government could formulate a peace policy,” Ackerman wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>23</sup>

In May 1921, Ackerman wrote a long report to Lloyd George, Britain’s prime minister, urging him to meet with Martin Glynn, an Irish-American and former Governor of New York, who was visiting London. George and Glynn met the next day and spent three hours discussing an Irish settlement.<sup>24</sup> Glynn explained to the Prime Minister that prolonging the conflict would negatively affect Great Britain’s relationship with the United States. The hope for an Irish Republic was strong among Irish-Americans.<sup>25</sup> At the end of the visit, Lloyd George agreed to meet with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>20</sup> Ackerman, “Ireland from a Scotland Yard,” 440.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Ackerman, “The Irish Education of Mr. Lloyd George,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1922, 611.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Ackerman, “Janus-Headed Ireland,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1922, 809-810.

<sup>25</sup> J.B.E. Hittle, *Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish War: Britain’s Counterinsurgency Failure* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), 111

Eamon de Valera, president of the Dáil Éireann.<sup>26</sup> When peace talks began in Ireland in the summer, Glynn believed the meetings played a role in ending the conflict. “It looks...as if a settlement of the Irish question looms near at hand, and I rather feel that we had something to do in starting the matter,” Glynn wrote to Ackerman.



In summer 1921, Ackerman resigned from the *Public Ledger* after disputes with the paper’s editor in Philadelphia and returned to the United States.<sup>27</sup> Ackerman decided to leave journalism for a career in corporate public relations, and in 1922, he established his own firm, Carl Ackerman, Inc.<sup>28</sup> Ackerman worked with major corporations like Remington Rand, Inc. and Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Company.<sup>29</sup> In 1928, Ackerman closed his firm and took a position in the public relations department at Eastman Kodak Company, where he stayed for three years. As early as 1925, however, Ackerman expressed to Colonel House his desire to return to journalism. “May I take this opportunity to tell you that while 1925 has been the biggest business year I have had it has been at the expense of sacrificing everything that I have really longed to do,” Ackerman wrote. “My former frequent calls upon you were the most inspiring calls I have ever made but when one becomes an organ grinder for Big Business one loses the finer things in life.”<sup>30</sup> In 1931, Ackerman left the Kodak Company and accepted a job as assistant to the president of General Motors.<sup>31</sup>

Ackerman did not stay at General Motors for long. In March of 1931, the President of Columbia University appointed Ackerman as the director of Columbia’s journalism school. The 41-year-old alumnus would replace director John W. Cunliffe, who had led the school since 1919.<sup>32</sup> Ackerman soon became the school’s first dean and later transitioned the school from a two-year undergraduate program into a one-year graduate program.<sup>33</sup> At an event honoring the school’s founder, Joseph Pulitzer, Ackerman made his first address to the students. “Pulitzer had this vision. Out of the fullness of his experience he endowed a school of journalism because he believed that ‘our Republic and its press will rise and fall together’ and that ‘the power to mould the future of the Republic will be in

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<sup>26</sup> Ackerman, “Janus-Headed Ireland,” 810.

<sup>27</sup> Ackerman to John Spurgeon, July 8, 1921, Box 132, CWA.

<sup>28</sup> Carl W. Ackerman Papers Finding Aid, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C., 2011, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Clipping, 1940, Box 16, CWA.

<sup>30</sup> Ackerman to House, December 1925, Series 1, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>31</sup> James Boylan, *Pulitzer’s School: Columbia University’s School of Journalism, 1903-2003* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 64.

<sup>32</sup> Boylan, *Pulitzer’s School*, 64-66.

<sup>33</sup> James Boylan, “Carl W. Ackerman: The Journalism School’s Other Founder,” *Columbia Magazine*, spring 2005, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/alumni/Magazine/Spring2005/contents.html>.

the hands of the journalists of future generations.' To Pulitzer journalism was primarily a public service."<sup>34</sup> While Columbia's advisory board and the alumni association welcomed the new dean, others criticized Ackerman's background in public relations. "Now a director comes straight from a corporation publicity job!" read an editorial in the campus paper, the *Spectator*. "We can think of a score of distinguished editorial men, who have never compromised ethics, and were available for the post."<sup>35</sup> Ackerman's response to the critics was that his experience let him "see both sides" of the relationship between journalism and business. "I feel quite certain that after our program is developed here in the school that the press will have no reason to regret my past experience," Ackerman said.<sup>36</sup>

As dean, Ackerman spent much of his time publicly defending the press and its role in society. He called for an end to government interference in journalism. In 1933, Ackerman led the campaign against President Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration, which required industries to produce codes of fair practices that would set prices and boost employment. The NRA was part of Roosevelt's New Deal, which sought to stabilize the economy after years of depression. In a speech before the Commercial Club of Chicago, Ackerman warned that the NRA gave President Roosevelt "practically supreme authority" in the licensing of industry. He supported the decision of the American Newspaper Publishers Association to add a provision to the newspaper code that guaranteed the freedom of the press.<sup>37</sup> "Under subtle government direction, the trend is definitely toward control, coercion, compulsion and regimentation," Ackerman told the Commercial Club. "The issue which has been raised of the freedom of the press under NRA is the first danger signal... the people must make a choice between liberty and control."<sup>38</sup>

In spring 1941, eight months before the U.S. entered WWII, Ackerman expressed his concern over wartime restrictions of the press. In a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Ackerman warned that President Roosevelt could enact a government censorship "whenever he deems it to be necessary."<sup>39</sup> He called for an amendment to the Lend-Lease Act of March that would specifically prohibit government censorship of the press. As

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<sup>34</sup> "Columbia Observers Pulitzer Birthday," *New York Times*, April 11, 1931, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Boylan, *Pulitzer's School*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> "Ackerman Foresees New Journalism Era," *New York Times*, September 20, 1931, N2.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Ackerman, "The Last Proving Ground for Democracy," (speech given at meeting of the Commercial Club of Chicago, November 24, 1933), Box 159, CWA.

<sup>38</sup> Ackerman, "The Last Proving Ground," 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Ackerman, "How Free is the American Press: Keeping the News Lines Open," (speech at Annual Meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April, 18, 1941) 542, Box 162, CWA

a cautionary tale, he spoke of the British press, where “editors and publishers became propagandists overnight” once war began.<sup>40</sup> The American press must take action, Ackerman argued, to ensure the freedom of news in times of international emergency. “The primary obligation of the press in peace and in war is to serve as an instrumentality of the public, not as an agency of government,” Ackerman stated. “The fulfillment of that obligation is the greatest of all the domestic ways and means...of keeping news lines open.”<sup>41</sup>

Ackerman also argued against journalists working with government. When President of the American Society of Newspaper Editors Roy A. Roberts took a position on a government wartime advisory board in 1943, Ackerman called for his resignation. “The propaganda interests of any government in war or peace are incompatible with the complete freedom of news and opinion which editors should maintain,” Ackerman wrote in a letter to Roberts. “The time will come when you will have to make a choice between government propaganda and the freedom of news.”<sup>42</sup> Three years later, Assistant Secretary of State William Benton called for a new international program that would place American journalists in the Foreign Service. The journalists would disseminate “accurate data about the United States to those who want to know” and would provide foreign news media with the information they needed to correctly interpret American politics.<sup>43</sup> Publishers from fifty American newspapers would each choose a journalist from his staff to serve the State Department for a two-year overseas assignment. As paid employees of the Department, the journalists would also collect information for the government about foreign nations. Journalists were the best candidates for this position, Benton argued, because they were “already trained to observe and report the American scene.”<sup>44</sup> After the two-year assignment, the “information specialists” would return home and other journalists would take their place. “I believe such a program is essential to our national security,” Benton wrote in *This Week*. “People who know us, who trust us, are not apt to make war against us.”<sup>45</sup>

Ackerman, however, believed the program was “an unsound and dangerous proposal.”<sup>46</sup> He warned the editor of *This Week* that Benton’s program ignored the “realistic fundamentals which are involved from the viewpoint of objective journalism.” Ackerman believed that the United States should take itself “out of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ackerman, “How Free is the American Press,” 543.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Alfred Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine: a History of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1923-1993* (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 47-48

<sup>43</sup> William Benton, “A New Kind of Diplomat,” *This Week*, March 3, 1946, 8, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ackerman to William Nichols, March 8, 1946, Box 151, CWA.

international propaganda business,” and in a letter to President Truman, he urged an end to the government’s international information programs created during the war.<sup>47</sup> “The education of the peoples of foreign countries in respect to American policies, activities and ideals should be primarily on the same basis as the education of our people at home,” he argued. “That is by means of daily news, collected, interpreted and distributed by privately operated press associations, newspapers, periodicals, books and radio.”<sup>48</sup>

Although publicly Dean Ackerman argued for a strict separation of press and government, he worked closely with government officials on two university projects. In 1942, Ackerman accepted secret funding from the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the C.I.A., for the establishment of a journalism school in China.<sup>49</sup> Hollington K. Tong, a former Columbia classmate of Ackerman’s, approached the Dean in late 1942 with the idea of establishing a school in China that would teach American journalism. He suggested that Columbia back the program. Tong, who worked for the Chinese Nationalist Government as Vice Minister of Information, had already persuaded Madam Chiang Kai-Shek, the wife of China’s leader Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, to approve the deal.<sup>50</sup> Ackerman agreed to Tong’s proposal and set out to raise funds for the program. He first looked to the State Department’s Division of Culture Relations, but when the Department declined, he turned to the Office of Strategic Services. The OSS, which Ackerman identified as an “anonymous friend” on the proposal, agreed to give \$30,000 each year for the school. The initial deposit, however, was \$50,000.<sup>51</sup>

In September 1943, four Columbia teachers arrived in Chungking, the wartime capital of China, and in October, the Chinese Post-Graduate School of Journalism opened its doors to 35 English-speaking students.<sup>52</sup> The Americans soon realized, however, that Tong was not working for a government bureau but for a propaganda agency tied to the Kuomintang, a political party in China that supported Madame Kai-Shek and her husband. The teachers worried they were training “bigger and better propagandists for the Kuomintang,” and argued against Tong’s censorship of the school’s newspaper, the *Chungking Reporter*.<sup>53</sup> Tong would not pass any information critical of China’s leader. Before the school’s second year, Harold L. Cross resigned as dean. Ackerman found his

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<sup>47</sup> Ackerman to President Harry Truman, January 18, 1946, Box 151, CWA.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Boylan, “Carl W. Ackerman.”

<sup>50</sup> Boylan, *Pulitzer’s School*, 94-96.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-100.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

replacement in the *Herald Tribune*'s Rodney Gilbert, who showed little interest in the school and left after a year for an assignment with the OSS. One of the two new teachers who had arrived with Gilbert was Ackerman's son Robert Ackerman, a 1941 graduate of Columbia. Ackerman secured \$50,000 from the OSS for the school's third year, but with the end of the war, the school closed its doors.<sup>54</sup> In total, the OSS secretly sent Ackerman \$235,000 for the journalism school.<sup>55</sup> In a letter to Columbia's president after the closing of the school, Ackerman explained his anonymous source. "I am now permitted to disclose to you, with the understanding that you treat this information in the strictest confidence, that the source of these funds is the United States Government," Ackerman wrote. He did not name the OSS as the department involved.<sup>56</sup>

Ackerman also accepted State Department guidance on the awarding of Columbia's Maria Moors Cabot prizes in journalism. In 1936, Ackerman met State Department official John Moors Cabot, who wanted to establish awards for journalism excellence in Latin America. The prizes would honor Cabot's mother who passed away in 1934.<sup>57</sup> Ackerman and Cabot signed a deal two years later. Although Cabot had made clear his intentions to choose journalists solely on their contributions to journalism and not on their political affiliations, Ackerman used State Department files to collect information on potential medalists.<sup>58</sup> Cabot also did not want State Department officials nominating journalists for the award, but in 1941, U.S. ambassador to Cuba nominated a pro-American journalist and Ackerman chose the journalist as one of the awardees.<sup>59</sup> After the country entered WWII, Ackerman promised to consult with the State Department before choosing awardees "so as not to interfere with United States foreign policy."<sup>60</sup>



In his public addresses as Dean of Columbia Journalism School, Ackerman seemed far removed from the young journalist who advocated for press censorship in 1917 and willingly cooperated with government during WWI and the Anglo-Irish war. Ackerman's shift from a cooperative journalist eager to help the government to a dean publicly professing the sanctity of press independence is explained, in part, by the post-war evolution of the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 102-108.

<sup>55</sup> Ackerman to President of Columbia University, 1945, Box 63, CWA.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Boylan, *Pulitzer's School*, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 85.

press. Two years after Ackerman left the *Public Ledger*, the American Society of Newspapers Editors produced the first national code of journalism ethics. The code stressed independence, freedom of the press, impartiality, decency, truthfulness, and responsibility. “Freedom from all obligations except that of fidelity to the public interest is vital,” the code stated. “Partisanship in editorial comment, which knowingly departs from the truth, does violence to the best spirit of American journalism; in the news columns it is subversive of a fundamental principle of the profession.”<sup>61</sup> Earlier codes had also stressed factual reporting and impartiality, but after WWI, the ASNE code and the 1926 code of the Sigma Delta Chi - the predecessor to the Society of Professional Journalists- “enshrined objectivity as a canon of journalism.”<sup>62</sup> During the war, journalists witnessed the power of government propaganda to sway public opinion and began to question the public’s ability to form rational opinions. Journalists also feared the rise of the press agent, who acted as a wall between journalists and information and demonstrated that individuals could manipulate the “facts.”<sup>63</sup> In a searing article on the failures of the press, journalists Roscoe C.E. Brown argued in 1921 that journalism had devolved into a type of propaganda promoted by press agents. “Its result is an organ of public opinion more or less completely, according to the extent of the process, transformed from an unbiased, or at least autonomous, expression to a suggested and not disinterested utterance.”<sup>64</sup> Journalists saw a strict objectivity as a way to overcome subjectivity and propaganda, which polluted public opinion. By the 1930s, the ideal of objectivity was widespread.<sup>65</sup>

Ackerman’s willingness to accept secret funding from the OSS and his cooperation with the State Department in the administration of the Cabot prizes, however, are not easily explained. Ackerman was often motivated by a desire for personal status and he knew the post-graduate school in China and the Cabot prizes would both increase the prestige of the journalism school. Perhaps Ackerman’s ambitions got the best of him.

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<sup>61</sup> Paul A. Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine: A History of the American Society of Newspapers Editors, 1932-1993*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 206.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen J. A. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004) 214-216.

<sup>63</sup> Ward, *The Invention of Ethics*, 226-230.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Amy Reynolds and Gary Hicks, *Prophets of the Fourth Estate* (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012), 182.

<sup>65</sup> Ward, *Invention of Ethics*, 215.

## CONCLUSION

Ackerman, like many other progressive journalists, forged close relationships with government officials during the Great War. In his papers are friendly letters with members of the State Department, military and intelligence officials, and the President's friend and advisor Colonel House. Ackerman believed that correspondents should gather information from "key men in key positions" and early twentieth-century journalism textbooks encouraged journalists to "cultivate the friendship of influential citizens."<sup>1</sup> Ackerman certainly understood that such close relationships with officials could benefit his career. Colonel House, who Ackerman met with often, was the man "in the know" in Washington and his exceptionally close friendship with the President was well known. Ackerman's interactions with these officials, however, went far beyond a friendly journalist hoping for a "scoop." Ackerman offered his cooperation and service to many members of the Wilson Administration. He was "sent out to spy the land," gathering information for the government while on overseas correspondent assignments.<sup>2</sup> He sent confidential reports to the State Department and a number of government officials, explaining the strategy of enemy countries and offering suggestions on policy. He submitted drafts of his articles to officials, seeking their comments and approval before publication. He reported details to the State Department that he left out of his published reports in the *New York Times* and *Saturday Evening Post*. Ackerman also cooperated with the British War Mission in the U.S. and worked closely with British officials in the Anglo-Irish war just two years after Great War's end.

There was no other official that Ackerman was closer to during the war than Colonel House. In the spring 1917, after the U.S. had entered the war, Ackerman had his first meeting with the President's advisor and the two soon began a friendship that would last long after the war ended. Ackerman looked to House for advice and guidance in his work. In meetings and letters, Ackerman and House discussed topics for articles and House outlined suggestions and criticisms. Ackerman sent drafts of his articles to House for his approval before publication and House advised Ackerman on his first book, which praised Wilson for his open diplomacy. Ackerman also consulted with House before accepting foreign correspondent assignments. "My only object is to go where I can be of service," he wrote to House. Before Ackerman left for Switzerland in late 1917, he had agreed to act as an

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Maurice Walsh, *The News from Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Willert, *The Road to Safety*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953), 151.

“unofficial reporter” for Colonel House and the State Department. In his letters to House throughout the war, Ackerman expressed his commitment to assisting the government and even asked for an official government position with the government’s propaganda bureau. Although Ackerman was reporting for the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post* while he was cooperating with the State Department, he wrote to House that, “my object is to be of service to you and the Department first.” Journalists today would consider Ackerman’s interactions with House a severe violation of press independence, but in his letters to House and other officials, Ackerman expressed no hesitations or misgivings about taking advice and guidance from government agents.

Ackerman’s willingness to cooperate with government was influenced, in part, by the progressivism of the early twentieth century. By the time of President Roosevelt’s election in 1904, the progressive reform movement pervaded all areas of social and economic life.<sup>3</sup> Progressives encouraged an active involvement in reform and politics, blurring any lines between journalists and government. Journalists, lawyers, educators, and a variety of other professionals joined reform organizations like the NAACP, the National Voter’s League, the National Women’s Trade Union League, and many others.<sup>4</sup> Support for President Wilson’s progressive platform led a number of journalists to take official positions in Wilson’s 1912 and 1916 campaigns.<sup>5</sup> Progressives believed that the government should also take an active role in reform. The laissez fair policies of the nineteenth century, progressives argued, had caused the problems of unchecked industrialization and urbanization. Progressives sought to control the chaos of “natural forces” by intervening in affairs and often looked to government regulation as a way to solve the country’s economic and social issues.<sup>6</sup>

Progressives stressed the power of public opinion to influence politics and recognized the need to instruct and guide public opinion into a positive and reconstructive force.<sup>7</sup> Like many other progressives, Ackerman believed that leaders of states could manage public opinion with a “judicious interpretation of affairs.”<sup>8</sup> He praised President

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Reynolds and Gary H. Hicks, *Prophets of the Fourth Estate* (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983), 22; John A. Thompson, *Reformers and War: American progressive publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30-31.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 169-171.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Power and the People: Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 200.

<sup>8</sup> Ackerman, “The War and Our Next Election,” typescript, circa 1914, 4, box 192, CWA

Wilson for acting as a spokesman for the American people.<sup>9</sup> By accepting the guidance of House and other members of the Administration, Ackerman published articles in line with the Administration's policies and brought publicity to issues House and Wilson deemed important. "Suppose soldiers at the front talked about their leaders as some papers talk about the government," Ackerman wrote three months after his first meetings with House. "Do you suppose a dissatisfied army could win?...It is just as necessary for the press, as for the army, to be united."<sup>10</sup>

The "patriotic hysteria" enveloping the country during the war years also played a role in Ackerman's eagerness to cooperate with government.<sup>11</sup> Before the U.S. entered the conflict in early 1917, progressives warned of the horrors of modern warfare and stressed the importance of the U.S. staying neutral in the European conflict. Wilson ran for reelection on the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War." But when the President declared war after Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, many progressive journalists were quick to accept the President's decision and even more sought ways to contribute to the nation's effort.<sup>12</sup> Soon after his return to the United States from Berlin, Ackerman scheduled a meeting with House and a few months later he had accepted an assignment from the State Department. Throughout the war, Ackerman wrote often to House of his eagerness to "serve." He sought assignments with newspapers and magazines that would place him in a position to assist the government. He used his salary from the *Saturday Evening Post* to pay the expenses of his work for the Department so he could continue volunteering his service. When his assignment in Switzerland was nearing its end, Ackerman wrote to House thanking him for the "confidence which you and the Department placed in me" and offering his continued service to the Administration.<sup>13</sup> He was eager for another government assignment.

By the time that Ackerman was studying journalism at Columbia, journalism textbooks were teaching reporters to "keep yourself out of the story."<sup>14</sup> The press codes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stressed the press' patriotism, independence from partisanship, and factual reporting. Only after the Great War,

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<sup>9</sup> Carl Ackerman, *Germany, the Next Republic?* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917) 26.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Ackerman, "What Wartime Germany Does with Printer's Ink," *PEP*, June 1917, 6.

<sup>11</sup> James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information 1917-1919*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, *Reformers and War*, 151

<sup>13</sup> Ackerman to House, June 18, 1918, Series I, Box 1, EMH.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen J. A. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004) 208-215; Stephen Banning, "Press Clubs Champion Journalism Education," in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession*, ed. Betty Houchin Winfield (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 95.

however, did the press formally acknowledge objectivity as a fundamental principle of good journalism.<sup>15</sup>

Journalists had grown disillusioned during the war when government propaganda and public relations illustrated the potential to manipulate facts. The press reacted to what historian Michael Schudson calls the “subjectivization of facts” by upholding objectivity as an established professional value.<sup>16</sup> The post-war press believed that affiliation with government officials or partisan organizations compromised a journalist’s ability to report objectively. The first national press code, written in 1923, stated that “freedom from all obligations except that of fidelity to the public interest is vital.”<sup>17</sup> By the 1930s, the ideal of objectivity in journalism was widespread.<sup>18</sup>



The assignments journalists completed for the CIA during the Cold War mirrored Ackerman’s assignments with the State Department. Like Ackerman, the journalists of the 1950s acted as “undercover informants,” providing information to government officials gathered during international trips. The journalists of the Cold War met with CIA officials for “debriefings” once they returned from foreign nations. Ackerman visited House and other State Department officials after trips to Switzerland and the Far East, eager to give an account of his travels. Many of the journalists of the 1950s volunteered their services to the government. Ackerman did the same. But Ackerman’s close proximity to government officials never negatively affected his career as a journalist. Throughout the war he earned assignments with reputable newspapers and magazines and was a published author. He was later awarded the high honor of an appointment as the first dean of Columba Journalism School. When the allegations surfaced in the 1970s of the CIA-journalists link, on the other hand, the press was outraged, arguing that journalists working with government brought a “destruction of public confidence in the integrity of the press as an independent instrument of public information free from government manipulation.”<sup>19</sup> The press of the 1970s saw the events of the Cold War as a break in the traditional line between government and the press. But an analysis of Ackerman’s records suggests that the CIA-journalists relationship has historical precedents in the practices of twentieth-century progressive reporters.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: a Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 125.

<sup>16</sup> Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Ward, *The Inventions of Journalism Ethics*, 215.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “Statement on CIA use of Journalists,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 19 (May 1980): 102.

This thesis was the first step to an understanding of the close, systematic relationship between journalists and the Wilson Administration developed during the war. Future research should analyze the relationships between other progressive reporters and government officials to better illustrate the trend toward government cooperation. Ackerman's willingness to accept confidential assignments from the State Department was not unusual at the time. In fact, in the years leading up to the war and after the war's outbreak, many more journalists fulfilled active roles in government, oftentimes behind the scenes. Like Ackerman, journalists Edward Price Bell and Stanley Washburn quietly assisted the government while they continued reporting for newspapers and magazines. These men were not on the government's payroll. Men like George Creel and Walter Lippmann left careers as journalists to take public positions in government. Future research should study men like Lincoln Steffens and Stephen Bonsal who worked openly for the government but continued reporting for newspapers. In a final category are men like Ray Stannard Baker, William Hale and Frederick Wile, who worked for the government behind the scenes and received payment for their work. This thesis shows that the study of the Wilson-press relationship is not complete without an analysis of journalists' public and secret work for government during WWI.

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