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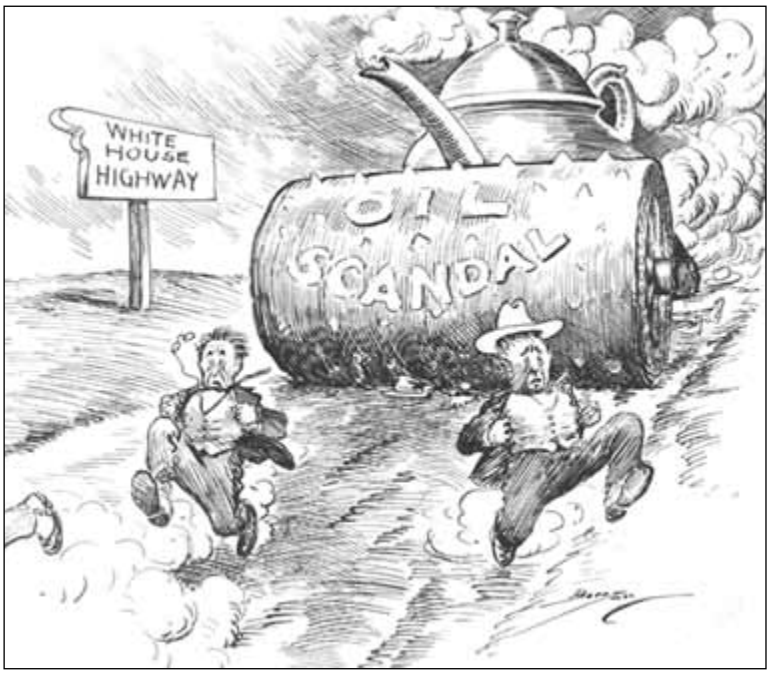
The Teapot Dome Scandal

The Teapot Dome scandal unfolded in the 1920s during the presidency of Warren Harding. It remains one of the most shocking stories of government corruption. President Harding died in office before most of the scandal became public. As the Senate investigated the scandal, the press and the public demanded to know how two of the richest oil barons in the country had bribed government officials to obtain leases to oil fields on government land. It took six years, two civil trials, and six criminal trials to track down what one senator called "the slimiest of slimy trails beaten by privilege."

By the end of World War I, the demand for oil was growing. During the war, the U.S. and British navies converted their ships from coal to oil. Cars were rolling off the assembly lines in huge numbers. By 1920, oil production had soared to 450 million barrels in the U.S., and the oil industry was booming.



The Teapot Dome scandal seemed to lead directly to the White House. The only person ultimately convicted of criminal charges was Harding's secretary of the interior, Albert Fall. (Library of Congress)

One man who made huge profits from the oil boom was Edward Doheny. Doheny struck oil in April 1893 near the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles, and within a year had 81 wells pumping in Los Angeles. By 1916, he had expanded his oil empire into Mexico. But President Carranza of Mexico wanted to take back the country's oil fields. Doheny needed help from the U.S. government to get rid of Carranza, and he began to court people in high places in Washington.

U S HISTORY

Another man who had accumulated a huge fortune from oil was Harry Sinclair. Sinclair leased oil fields in Kansas and Oklahoma and by 1920 had amassed one of the largest fortunes in the United States. Like Doheny, Sinclair was expanding overseas with oil fields in Venezuela and Columbia. He also needed friends in high places to help build his foreign empire and also to help him lease the Teapot Dome oil field in Wyoming.

Doheny, Sinclair, and many other oil barons decided that the best way to get access to more oil was to elect a president who would help them. Prior to Harding's election the conservation movement had been going strong. In 1909, President Taft had signed an executive order designating land known to have rich oil underground into "reserves" for the exclusive use of the navy. Three Naval Petroleum Reserves were created in 1912. Two were in Kern County, California, and one was at Salt Creek, Wyoming, known as Teapot Dome because of the shape of the land. The oil industry wanted to get leases to the navy reserves. But during the Wilson administration, the navy had refused all their requests for a lease.

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Reform and Change

This edition of *Bill of Rights in Action* looks at issues related to reform and change. The first article examines the Teapot Dome scandal, which rocked the Harding administration. The second article explores President Wilson's attempt to reform international diplomacy. The last article looks at the philosopher John Stuart Mill and his views on liberty, women, and changing society.

U.S. History: The Teapot Dome Scandal

U.S. History: Woodrow Wilson's Quest to Change the World

Government: John Stuart Mill and Individual Liberty

Guest writer Lucy Eisenberg, Esq., contributed the article on the Teapot Dome scandal. The other articles were written by our longtime contributor Carlton Martz.

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Friends in High Places

The oil barons were happy when Wilson left office and Harding—a Republican—was elected in 1920. Many had donated large amounts of money to Harding's campaign in hope of overturning the conservationist policies of previous administrations. Sinclair himself donated $1 million to Harding's campaign and became a good friend of the new president. When Sinclair came to Washington, he joined in the White House poker parties and was often invited to stay over night as Harding's guest. Doheny had not made a huge donation to Harding's campaign (he had contributed $25,000), but after the election, he sent congratulatory letters to the president and offered Harding the use of his 375-foot yacht for a post-election vacation cruise.

The oil barons' wishes came true when Harding announced that he had appointed Albert Fall, a former senator from New Mexico, as secretary of the interior. Fall was a rancher, mine owner, and former prospector.

He was an "old pal" of Doheny. Fall had hopes that when he left the Cabinet (he planned to stay for only one year) that Doheny would hire him. Fall knew that Doheny had hired the previous secretary of the interior.

Fall was also a good friend of Harding, whom he played poker with two or three times a week. When he served in the Senate, Fall had strongly opposed the conservation policies put in place under Presidents Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson. He believed that the government's land should be placed in the hands of private interests and exploited as soon as possible.

Fall wasted no time in helping the oil barons get leases to public lands. One of the first things he did as secretary of the interior was to persuade Harding to transfer authority over the naval reserves from the secretary of the navy to the Department of the Interior. Two months after being inaugurated, Harding signed an executive order putting the reserves in the hands of Secretary Fall.

That same month, Fall went to the Kentucky Derby as Sinclair's guest. He also wrote a letter to his friend Doheny, stating that he had everything worked out with the Department of the Navy. He assured Doheny that he will "conduct the matter of the naval leases under direction of the President" without having to consult with the navy.

Many officers in the Navy opposed Harding's executive order. One admiral complained that if the reserves were turned over to the Interior Department, "we might as well say good-bye to our oil."

Fall Delivers Oil

The naval reserves were a big prize. The two oil-rich California reserves were about 70,000 acres of land. The Teapot Dome reserve in Wyoming was much smaller but was thought to have more oil. It was estimated to hold about 150 million barrels of oil. Many—indeed most—of the oil companies in the country would have jumped at the opportunity to lease oil from those reserves. But the leases were never put up for public bidding. Instead, Secretary Fall negotiated leases for the naval reserves in secret, on terms that brought him a lot of personal gain.

The first lease, for the California reserves, was negotiated with Doheny in November 1921. Under the terms of the proposed lease, Doheny's company, Pan-American Petroleum and Transport Company, would build storage tanks in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, store oil for the navy, put crude oil in the tanks, and pay royalties on the oil drilled from the reserves at a low price. It was a great deal for Doheny. He estimated it would give him a profit of $1 million. In return, Doheny made a "loan" of $100,000 to Fall. On November 28, 1921, three days after Doheny made his offer, his son, Ned Doheny, carried a black satchel containing the $100,000 in cash to Fall's hotel apartment and watched him count the money.

Negotiations on the Teapot Dome lease took place a month later. Fall was at his New Mexico ranch when he received a telegram saying that Sinclair and his lawyer wanted to see him "on a very urgent and important matter." Sinclair and his party arrived at the ranch on December 31, 1921, and stayed for three days. During the day, they went hunting for deer, quail, and wild turkeys. At night, they negotiated a deal for the Teapot Dome reserves. The final lease, which was signed on April 7, 1922, gave Sinclair's Company, Mammoth Oil, the exclusive right to extract oil and gas from the Teapot Dome reserve for 20 years.

A month after the lease was signed, Fall sent his son-in-law and business partner, M.T. Everhart, to see Sinclair in his private railroad car in the Washington railroad yard. Sinclair gave Everhart $198,000 in Liberty Bonds to be delivered to Secretary Fall. Soon afterward, Everhart received from Sinclair another $35,000 in bonds and a "loan" of $36,000 in cash. The bonds went to Fall's bank accounts in New Mexico and Texas. After receiving them, Fall began to pay back taxes on his land, which he had owed since 1912.

The Scandal Unfolds

Fall intended to keep the leases secret. But an inside source leaked information to the *Wall Street Journal*, which ran a front-page story about the Teapot Dome lease on April 14, 1922. The news caused an immediate uproar in the oil industry. Complaints poured in demanding to know why there hadn't been competitive bidding. Anger also came from Congress, but the president stood by his friend Fall and sent a letter to the Senate endorsing Fall's plan to lease the naval reserves. He said that he had seen a report from

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Fall, and the plan had his "entire approval." And when Fall told the president that he was going to resign early in 1923, Harding offered him a seat on the Supreme Court.

Warren G. Harding (1865–1923), 29th U.S. president, died in office before Teapot Dome became a major scandal. (Library of Congress)

The Senate decided to investigate the leases, including whether the president had the authority to transfer the leases to the Department of the Interior. Hearings began in October 1923, after Fall had resigned. When called as the first witness, Fall claimed that he had legal authority to lease the navy reserves and had negotiated the leases at good prices to protect national security. In December, both Doheny and Sinclair appeared before the committee. They also testified that the leases were in the best interest of the nation and denied that Fall had received any benefit or profit from the deals. (Sinclair failed to state that only six months earlier, he had paid Fall $25,000 to accompany him on a trip to Russia to explore the possibility of an oil deal with the Russian government.) Fall was asked about whether he had received any compensation from Sinclair for the trip to Russia and responded with the first of many lies: "I have never even suggested any compensation and have received none."

Gradually evidence began to emerge about Fall's business dealings with the oil barons. Witnesses from New Mexico testified that during 1922 (after Ned Doheny delivered the black satchel), Fall had bought property next to his ranch (for $91,500) and spent more money on other improvements and purchases. In January 1924, Doheny reappeared before the committee and testified that he had indeed paid $100,000 to Fall as a "loan." In December, Fall said he was too ill to testify. But he wrote a letter to senators on the committee stating that he had never approached either Doheny or Sinclair, "nor have I received from either of said parties one cent on account of any oil lease or upon any account whatsoever." When the committee recalled Fall, he declined to testify "on the ground that it may tend to incriminate."

By now the members of the committee believed that crimes had taken place. After Fall refused to testify, the head of the Senate investigating committee, Senator Walsh, introduced a resolution. It stated that it appeared that the leases were made "under circumstances indicating fraud and corruption." It called on President Coolidge (President Harding had died in August 1923) to bring legal action to cancel the leases and "to prosecute such other proceedings, civil and criminal, as may be warranted by the facts." While Congress was debating the resolution, President Coolidge announced that he was appointing a special counsel to take whatever action was necessary to make sure that justice was served.

Meanwhile, things got nasty in the Senate. The committee called Sinclair. He refused to testify on the grounds that after the special counsel was appointed, the committee had no authority to question him. (Sinclair was indicted and sentenced to three months in jail for contempt of Congress.) The committee also recalled Doheny, who was asked if he had ever employed Cabinet officers after they retired. Doheny testified—with some pride—to having employed five former members of President Wilson's Cabinet, including the former Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo, who was still in his employ. (At that time, McAdoo was the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination in the upcoming presidential election.) The impression was growing in the press and among the public that both political parties were smeared with corruption.

Six Years in Court

The special prosecutors appointed by President Coolidge spent six years working on the Teapot Dome scandal. Their first goal was to bring civil lawsuits in federal court to cancel the leases and recover the naval reserves. They filed one case in California and one in Wyoming, and both were successful. In California, the trial judge ruled that Doheny's payment of $100,000 to Fall was tainted with fraud. He ordered that the leases be cancelled. "The injury that has been done to the nation," the judge wrote, "as well as the distrust of public officers that it caused, cannot be overestimated." The trial court in Wyoming dismissed the suit, but the government appealed. The Eighth Circuit Court reversed and held that the leases had been made fraudulently and should be set aside. "The entire transaction," the court stated, "is tainted with favoritism, collusion, and corruption, defeating the proper and lawful functions of the government."

The special prosecutors also filed four criminal cases. One charged Fall and Doheny with conspiracy to defraud the United States. Another similar case was against Sinclair and Fall. A third case charged Fall with bribery. And a fourth case charged Doheny and his son Ned with bribery. These cases, which were tried over a period of six years, were less

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successful. In the conspiracy cases, defense lawyers managed to convince the juries that Doheny and Sinclair had no intent to defraud the United States. The juries accepted the argument that the leases were made to help the navy prepare for war and to protect the country. They found the defendants not guilty. Doheny and his son were also found not guilty of bribery. Only Fall was convicted, for having accepted a bribe while acting in his official capacity. The prosecutors made a strong argument that the evidence showed "the criminal intent of Fall to make money out of his position of trust and honor," and the jury agreed. Fall was sentenced to a year in jail and to pay a fine of $100,000. His appeal was denied on June 6, 1931, and he was sent to the New Mexico State Penitentiary.

* * * * *

As a result of the diligent investigation of the Senate committee and the persistence of the special prosecutors, the rich oil fields at Teapot Dome and in California were recovered and returned to the U.S. Navy. The government collected millions of dollars from Doheny and Sinclair as well as almost $50 million for the oil drilled in its reserves. The Harding administration has remained a symbol of corruption. The Teapot Dome scandal illustrates the dangers that money and corporate power can pose to democratic government. Even the appearance of corrupt influences can erode people's faith in democracy.

For Discussion

1. What was the Teapot Dome scandal about? Who were the main parties in the scandal?
2. How was the scandal uncovered? What happened to the parties to the scandal? Do you think justice was done? Why?
3. The last sentence says: "Even the appearance of corrupt influences can erode people's faith in democracy." What does this mean? Do you agree? Explain.

A C T I V I T Y

Potential Corruption

Government officials regularly deal with private citizens and corporations. These dealings are part of what government does. They also can give rise to problems of corruption, as in the Teapot Dome scandal. The danger of money corrupting politics will always exist. Below are four areas where people today voice concern of potential corruption, or the appearance of corruption, in government.

1. **Regulatory agencies being run by members of the regulated industry.** Government agencies, such as the Energy Department and Food and Drug Administration (FDA), oversee sectors of the nation's economy. Is it proper for former oil executives to head the Energy Department or former pharmaceutical executives to lead the FDA? Would these be cases of "foxes guarding the hen house"? Or, would they add needed expertise to the agency?
2. **Government officials leaving government to lobby.** Many times when both appointed and elected officials leave government, they become high-paid lobbyists who lobby the same officials they once worked with. Two complaints are heard about this practice. (1) Government officials may work to garner high-paid lobbying positions while on the government payroll. (2) Former government officials may have too much influence with current officials. Are these complaints valid? Or, would it be unfair to stop companies from hiring people they think will do the best jobs as lobbyists?
3. **Individuals or organizations making large campaign contributions.** The average cost to a person campaigning for a seat in the House of Representatives is $1 million. It costs more to campaign for the Senate or for president. Candidates must raise huge sums of money. They rely on donors for contributions. Do people or groups making large contributions gain too much influence over politicians? Or, are even large campaign contributions fundamental to democracy?
4. **Companies getting awarded government contracts without competitive bidding.** In 2008, the federal government bought more than $500 billion in goods and services. Most of these goods and services require government contracts. Sometimes contracts are made without competitive bidding. Would requiring competitive bidding for all contracts make corruption less likely? Or, would it simply make government contracting less efficient?

Form pairs.

Each pair of students should rank the four practices in terms which students think pose the greatest threat of corruption today (1 being the greatest and 4 being the least). Then for the practice they believe poses the greatest threat of corruption, they should create a rule or policy to guard against this threat.

Join pairs to form a group of four. In these groups, students should discuss their rules or policies and select the best one to present to the class.

Each group should report its decision and reasons for it.

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Woodrow Wilson's Quest to Change the World

Even before the United States entered the "Great War" in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson wanted to change the world. He sought a way for nations to join together to guarantee a permanent peace.

In 1796, President George Washington set the course for American foreign policy by cautioning the new nation "to steer clear of permanent alliances." This isolationist policy reflected Washington's desire to keep the United States out of Europe's frequent wars.

In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine warned the Europeans against establishing any new colonies or interfering in the affairs of independent nations in the Western Hemisphere. It also reaffirmed that the U.S. would stay out of Europe's alliances and wars except when American rights were threatened.

In the 19th century, the United States expanded. Through the Louisiana Purchase, the acquisition of Florida, negotiations for Oregon, the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, the Gadsden Purchase, and the Indian Wars, the nation grew. By the turn of the 20th century, many thought it should play a role as a world power.

Following the Spanish-American War in 1898, Republican presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft pushed an aggressive nationalist foreign policy. They argued for an American empire and for the U.S. to act abroad for its own national interests.

Many Americans agreed. But many other Americans remained isolationists, both Republicans and Democrats. They preferred that Americans tend to business at home. They believed two vast oceans could protect the U.S. from foreign threats.

U S HISTORY

When Democrat Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913, he remarked to a friend, "It would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs." Wilson, a former professor of American government, expected to spend most of his time working for domestic progressive reforms such as a new income tax aimed at the rich.

'Moral Diplomacy'

When Wilson entered office, European imperial powers dominated much of the world. They attempted to maintain a "balance of power" through opposing military alliances.

Progressives like Wilson had another vision for the world. They wanted to disarm nations and end war to create a world where democracy would thrive. The progressives believed that Americans had a God-given mission to spread their democratic ideals to the rest of the world.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), 28th U.S. president, led the nation through World War I and hoped to build an international framework for peace. (Library of Congress)

In office only a few days, Wilson faced a foreign policy crisis involving Mexico. That country was in the middle of a revolution. General Victoriano Huerta had seized power, imprisoned the Mexican president, and probably issued the order to have him killed. Wilson considered Huerta's regime illegitimate and demanded that he resign. Wilson announced he would not recognize any Mexican president whom the people had not freely elected.

Those Mexicans opposing Huerta, calling themselves Constitutionalists, raised an army. They defeated Huerta's troops in several battles but could not take Mexico City. In April 1914, Wilson ordered U.S. forces to occupy the Mexican port of Veracruz to cut off Huerta's supply lines. Within three months, Huerta resigned, and Wilson withdrew U.S. troops.

After this intervention in Mexico, Wilson began to express his ideas for a new American "Moral Diplomacy." At its core was the principle of "self-determination," the moral right of people to choose their form of government and leaders by democratic elections.

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Wilson the Peacemaker

On August 19, 1914, shortly after the "Great War" in Europe began, President Wilson declared American neutrality. Wilson tried to mediate peace between the two warring European alliances.

In May 1915, a German U-boat, a submarine, sank the British passenger ship *Lusitania*, killing more than 1,200 men, women, and children (including 128 Americans). This shocked Americans and prompted Wilson to demand that Germany end its U-boat warfare against civilian ships. Germany agreed to reduce its submarine operations when Wilson promised to try to persuade Britain to lift its blockade of German ports.

President Wilson addressed Congress in April 1917 asking for a declaration of war. (Library of Congress)

In 1916, Wilson was re-elected president by a slim margin on the strength of his slogan, "He kept us out of war." Soon after his re-election, Wilson delivered a revolutionary foreign policy speech to Congress. He argued that the fighting in Europe should end with a "peace without victory." Wilson explained that "victory" meant a peace forced on the losers who would surely harbor resentments leading to yet another war.

WORLD HISTORY

Wilson stated the moral principles he believed necessary for world peace. Governments, he said, must exist by the "consent of the governed" and enjoy the right to self-determination. Nations must reduce their armies and navies. All must enjoy "freedom of the seas" to engage in trade. But most important, Wilson declared that nations large and small should join together in a "concert of power," an international organization.

Despite Wilson's attempts to mediate a just peace, the war continued as did Britain's blockade of Germany. In February 1917, Germany announced it would resume sinking without warning any ships approaching British or other Allied ports. The U.S. also intercepted a German telegram, seeking to enlist Mexico as an ally if America declared war. These German actions persuaded Wilson to ask Congress for a declaration of war.

In his war speech to Congress on April 2, 1917, Wilson condemned German U-boat killing of civilians as "warfare against mankind." He went on to famously state, "The world must be made safe for democracy."

Congress declared war by a large margin, but not before isolationists like Republican Senator George Norris of Nebraska blamed a rush to war on Wall Street bankers and munitions makers. "We are going into a war upon the command of gold," he said.

The Fourteen Points

Most Americans quickly mobilized behind the slogan, "A war to end all wars." The first military draft since the Civil War produced the largest American army ever created up to that time. Nevertheless, pacifists, political radicals, certain churches, and some immigrant groups actively protested America's participation in the war.

In January 1918, as American troops fought on European soil for the first time, Wilson again appealed for peace. In an address before Congress, he spelled out his "Fourteen Points" program for peace, expanding on his previous principles for peace:

1. Open covenants of peace must be arrived at, after which there will surely be no private international action or rulings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
2. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.
3. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

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4. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest points consistent with domestic safety.

5. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the population concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

Except for the 14th point, Wilson's remaining points dealt with territorial matters, including returning and adjusting borders of the combatants in the war and providing for eventual self-rule for peoples in the Balkans, Poland, and the Turkish Ottoman Empire (an ally of Germany).

In the last of his Fourteen Points, Wilson returned to his dream for an international organization for world peace:

14. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

In 1917, the Russian Revolution had broken out. Russia was one of the Allied nations fighting Germany. When Communists took control of the Russian government, they negotiated a separate peace. This freed thousands of German troops to join a final offensive against the U.S. and the other Allies on the Western Front in France.

When their offensive failed in the spring of 1918, Germany negotiated to end the fighting, hoping to reach a peace agreement based on the Fourteen Points. A temporary agreement, an armistice, was made on November 11, 1918. (For years, November 11 was celebrated as Armistice Day. Today it is called Veterans' Day.) By the end of the war, more than 53,000 Americans and millions of Europeans had died in battle.

The League of Nations Covenant

In December 1918, President Wilson arrived in Europe to help negotiate the treaty formally ending World War I. This was the first time an American president in office had ever visited Europe.

Huge cheering crowds greeted Wilson as a hero. One banner proclaimed him the "Savior of Humanity." The other Allied leaders, however, were focused on redrawing the map of Europe and punishing Germany.

The conference to write a peace treaty began in Paris in January 1919. The victors excluded the Germans from treaty negotiations. Wilson persuaded the other major Allied leaders from Britain, France, and Italy to first work on a covenant, a written agreement, to create an international organization: the League of Nations.

The League Covenant covered many issues, including fair working conditions and a mandate system to guide colonial peoples toward independence. But to Wilson, the most important purpose of the League was stated in the opening words of the Covenant:

> The High Contracting Parties, In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war . . . Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.

The covenant created new mechanisms to maintain permanent world peace, including:

- An Executive Council, consisting of five big powers and four smaller ones, to decide questions of war and peace by a unanimous vote.
- The authority for the Executive Council to order economic penalties and to recommend necessary military means against a war-making nation.
- A pledge by member nations to reduce armaments to a level necessary only to preserve order within their borders.
- A Permanent Court of International Justice to settle disputes between nations.
- Article X of the covenant committing members to guarantee "the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League" against any "external aggression." This meant an attack on any League member obligated all other members to come to its defense.

The Covenant of the League of Nations represented a revolutionary change in international relations and a radical departure from traditional American isolationism. Wilson had seemingly achieved his dream. But he had made a fatal mistake: He had not included any Republicans in his delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. In the congressional elections of 1918, the Republicans regained majority control of the Senate, which had to approve any international treaty by a two-thirds vote.

Wilson learned that nationalists and isolationists in the Senate had serious concerns about Article X. They feared it would force American troops to act as policemen of the world. Even progressives had doubts, arguing that the peacemaking authority of the League was too weak.

Wilson agreed to some changes in the covenant, particularly a new article to safeguard the Monroe Doctrine. But he refused to compromise on Article X, which he viewed as essential for enforcing world peace. After concluding

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The League of Nations held its first sessions in 1920. The United States rejected the Treaty of Versailles and never joined the League. (United Nations Office at Geneva)

that the League would correct any flaws in the rest of the treaty with Germany, Wilson signed the treaty at Versailles, the palace of the old French kings, on June 28, 1919.

Wilson's Fight for the League

At first, the American public showed widespread support for the Treaty of Versailles, including having the U.S. join the League of Nations. But the League troubled Republican senators. Nationalists such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, developed a series of "reservations." These were conditions for American membership in the League, mainly preserving the right of the U.S. to act in its own national interest.

One of the reservations required Congress, not just the president, to approve any U.S. military action under Article X. A few isolationists in the Senate objected to the U.S. joining the League at all, with or without reservations.

This left progressives in both parties to carry Wilson's cause for the League. But many objected to the requirement for unanimous action by the Executive Council. They thought it weakened the League's authority to guarantee peace. They also expressed anger that Wilson had done little to restore free speech and other civil liberties that had been severely restricted in the U.S. during the war.

By September 1919, the treaty faced certain defeat in the Senate, mainly because of opposition to U.S. membership in the League. Wilson decided to go on a speaking tour of the country to gather public support for America's participation in the League.

Wilson opposed making any changes in Article X, arguing that this would undermine the idea of nations acting together to stop wars. He predicted that failure of the U.S. to the join the League would surely lead to "another struggle in which not a few hundred thousand fine men from America would have to die, but . . . many millions . . . ."

Wilson spoke to large enthusiastic crowds but finally collapsed from exhaustion. Back in Washington, he suffered a massive stroke, which prevented him from continuing his campaign for Senate ratification of the Versailles Treaty with its League Covenant.

The Senate finally voted against ratification. Heartbroken, Wilson abandoned plans to run for president a third time. The big victory of Republican Warren G. Harding in 1920 was widely viewed as a vote against American membership in the League of Nations.

'Wilsonianism'

Woodrow Wilson attempted to change the world by promoting such principles as self-determination, disarmament, and the cooperation of nations to preserve the peace. This new approach to American foreign policy, sometimes called "Wilsonianism," was an idealistic alternative to the balance of power between opposing military alliances. The League of Nations operated for two decades but ultimately failed to stop World War II.

Although Wilson received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1920, most Americans turned back to the isolationist attitude that the U.S. should have as little to do with the rest of the world as possible. This sentiment prevailed until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Although Wilson died in 1924, his reputation revived during the Second World War. Many believed that if the U.S. had become a member, the League of Nations could have prevented that war. President Franklin D. Roosevelt seemed to vindicate Wilson's idealism by identifying "Four Freedoms" worth fighting for: freedom of speech

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and worship; freedom from want and fear. After the war, the U.S. helped found the United Nations.

The Cold War undercut Wilsonian idealism by producing a "balance of terror" among distrusting nuclear powers. Yet even during this period, elements of Wilsonianism survived. One example was the 1975 Helsinki Accords, signed by 35 nations, including the U.S. and USSR. In this document, countries promised to respect the borders created at the end of World War II. But they also promised to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief." Another example was President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy, which emphasized human rights.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wilsonianism surfaced again. People in almost every part of the world wanted democracy, free trade, a ban on the spread of nuclear weapons, and an effective United Nations. All these things are rooted in Wilson's vision for peace in 1919.

President George W. Bush promoted a foreign policy to make America safe by extending democracy to those who do not yet enjoy it. Some have called Bush's foreign policy a form of Wilsonianism.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why did Wilson argue for "peace without victory"? Do you agree or disagree with his view? Why?
2. Why do you think Wilson failed in his fight for the U.S. to join the League of Nations?
3. Do you think President George W. Bush was a "Wilsonian"? Use evidence from the article to support your answer.
4. Do you think U.S. officials should be concerned with human rights abuses in other countries? Explain.

For Further Reading

Dawley, Alan. *Changing the World, American Progressives in War and Revolution*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

"Woodrow Wilson." *American Experience*. PBS Online, 2001. URL: www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/filmmore/ps.html This web site includes Wilson's key speeches and other primary sources.

A C T I V I T Y

The Fourteen Points

In this activity, students evaluate six of the Fourteen Points.

1. Divide the class into small groups.
2. Each group should read and discuss Points 1–5 and Point 14. For each point, the group should discuss and answer these questions:
   a. What does it mean?
   b. Is it relevant today? Why or why not?
   c. Should it be part of international law today? Why or why not?
3. Call on groups to report and discuss their answers.

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John Stuart Mill and Individual Liberty

British philosopher John Stuart Mill's radical childhood education prepared him to write major works on philosophy and social reform. Writing in the mid-1800s, Mill's views on freedom of expression and equal rights for women were far ahead of his time.

John Stuart Mill's father, James, trained to be a Presbyterian minister but became disillusioned and soon rejected all organized religion. James went to work as a journalist in London, and he joined philosopher Jeremy Bentham to lead a group of social reformers known as the Philosophic Radicals. They followed Bentham's philosophy called Utilitarianism.

Bentham attempted to devise a standard for human conduct and for deciding what public policies and laws society should adopt. He concluded that actions were right if they promoted the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. He argued that it was human nature to seek happiness, defined as pleasure, and to avoid unhappiness, defined as pain.

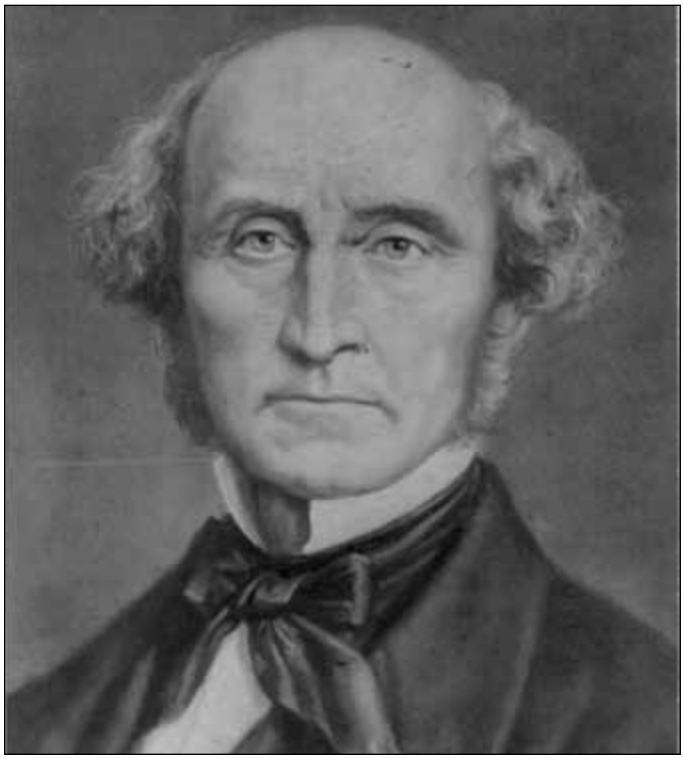
The Philosophic Radicals used Bentham's principle of happiness to mount a social reform movement in Britain. They sought to address social problems brought on by the Industrial Revolution. The radicals attacked the conservative landowning aristocracy that still dominated British society and resisted social change. They also called for such reforms as the right to vote for all adult men, a public education system, and population control to prevent too many workers, which depressed wages.

GOVERNMENT

James Mill married Harriet Burrow in 1805. The first of their nine children, John Stuart Mill, was born in London on May 20, 1806. With the encouragement and help of Jeremy Bentham, James designed a radical education program to home school his son. James set out to make John Stuart Mill a philosopher who would carry on the work of the Philosophic Radicals.

John learned Greek at age 3 and started studying Latin at 8. By 10, he had read the Greek and Roman classic writers such as Plato and Cicero, English and Roman history, works on algebra and geometry, and Shakespeare.

John read Newton's *Principia Mathematica* at 11 and Aristotle's work on logic at 12. As a young teenager, he studied philosophy and political economy (now called economics), including the works of John Locke, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bentham.



John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), champion of liberty and the rights of women, is considered the greatest British philosopher of the 19th century.

Every day, John took walks with his father, giving an account of what he had read and learned. His father was a demanding, impatient, and severe teacher, who constantly criticized John's shortcomings.

Later in life, John wrote in his *Autobiography* that he was "in awe" of his father who provided him with "an education for precise thinking" that made him "find out everything for myself." He also remarked, "I was not at all aware that my attainments [accomplishments] were anything unusual at my age."

By age 15, John had read hundreds of works in Greek, Latin, and English equal to a classic university education. But he never attended any school or college. Nor did he have any friends his age because his father believed they would interfere with his education. Nor was he allowed any holidays or vacations from his studies. When the other Mill children came along, John's father assigned him to teach them. In reality, John Stuart Mill never had a childhood.

Mental Crisis and Renewal

After 1819, James Mill worked as an administrator at India House, the London headquarters for the East India Company. This old trading firm had acquired the authority to govern Britain's India colony. In 1823, he secured a job at India House for his 17-year-old son.

John Stuart Mill's duties at India House were light, which gave him time to write for literary journals. He also

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participated in debates, defending the Utilitarian views of his father and the other Philosophic Radicals.

In 1826, however, at age 20, Mill suffered a mental crisis that apparently arose from a conflict between loyalty to his father and growing disagreement with some of his Utilitarian ideas. Mill also began to question the adequacy of his unique education. He later wrote, "The whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down."

Mill began to see himself as a "mere reasoning machine." He sensed "all feeling was dead within me." He realized that his education had lacked such things as music, appreciation of natural beauty, and especially poetry. Utilitarians like his father thought these things distracted people from the reasoning necessary to arrive at universal truths in life.

Mill began to read and meet Romantic writers and poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Goethe. They all emphasized the importance of human feelings as a source for truth. Mill also explored history as another source of getting at the truth about how people should live and organize their societies.

Mill began to doubt Bentham's basic assumption of human nature: that people always seek pleasure and avoid pain to achieve happiness. Mill decided that "free will," an individual's freedom to choose his own form of happiness, could override the Utilitarian pleasure-pain principle.

All this caused Mill to re-evaluate Utilitarianism. What was happiness? Mill thought that it was more than simply pleasure, as Bentham and his father had stated. Mill asserted that happiness was becoming whatever the individual wanted to be. This required individuals to develop their own minds, feelings, and imagination to become independent, thinking persons. Mill called this "individuality."

By individuality, Mill did not mean selfish individualism. He argued that to achieve true happiness, individuals should strive not only to develop themselves but also to help others do the same.

Mill concluded that the role of society, the economy, and government was to enable individuals to achieve their individuality. Mill believed that individuality could not prosper without a "liberal culture," consisting of individual liberties, equality of women, toleration of different lifestyles, a free-market economy, and limited government.

Mill and Harriet Taylor

Harriet Taylor, a wife of a pharmacist and mother of three, strongly supported equal rights for women and other social reforms. These issues, however, did not interest her husband, who provided little intellectual stimulation for her.

In 1830, Harriet first met John Stuart Mill at a dinner party in her home. Both in their mid-20s, they quickly recognized their mutual interests and "affection" for each other. From this point on, she worked constantly with Mill, helping him write and edit his articles and books.

Harriet's husband demanded that she end her close relationship with Mill, but she refused. Instead, she devised an odd compromise to share herself with both men. She divided her time between living with her family at home and staying with Mill at a country cottage. This arrangement went on for more than 20 years.

After he met Harriet, Mill began to make an impact on Britain's intellectual world. In 1831, he wrote "The Spirit of the Age," an essay that used history to show how Britain was going through a transition from feudalism to a new age. He hoped to foster an alliance of the middle and working classes to get rid of Britain's old feudal aristocracy.

When his father died in 1836, Mill experienced a personal liberation from the man who had dominated his life. Now 30, he took over his father's job at India House.

With Harriet's steady support, Mill published books on logic and economics that made him a more important philosopher than his father. In his economics book, Mill criticized the selfish pursuit of money. Mill argued that wealth should only be a means to achieve the higher goal of individual self-development, what he called individuality.

Mill wanted as many as possible to participate as business owners in a free-market economy. This was possible, he wrote, if workers pooled their money to buy out private businesses and operate them as cooperative enterprises. Workers would elect their managers and collect their wages from the profits of the enterprise, which would have to compete with other privately owned businesses.

Mill opposed government central planning, which most European socialists advocated. His vision was every man and woman a business owner. He saw this as a way to help them achieve their self-development and happiness. Today, historians often classify Mill as a Utopian Socialist.

Mill finally married Harriet Taylor in 1851 after the death of her husband. Both of them, however, soon suffered from tuberculosis. Believing he would die before long, Mill spent more time writing his *Autobiography.* But Harriet's case was more severe, and she died in 1858 while they were on a trip in France. Mill buried her there and erected a monument with a long inscription, praising her.

'On Liberty'

Mill and Harriet spent much time writing and rewriting "On Liberty." They were almost ready to publish it when she died. He published this pamphlet-length work without further revision the following year, dedicating it to her.

(Continued on next page)

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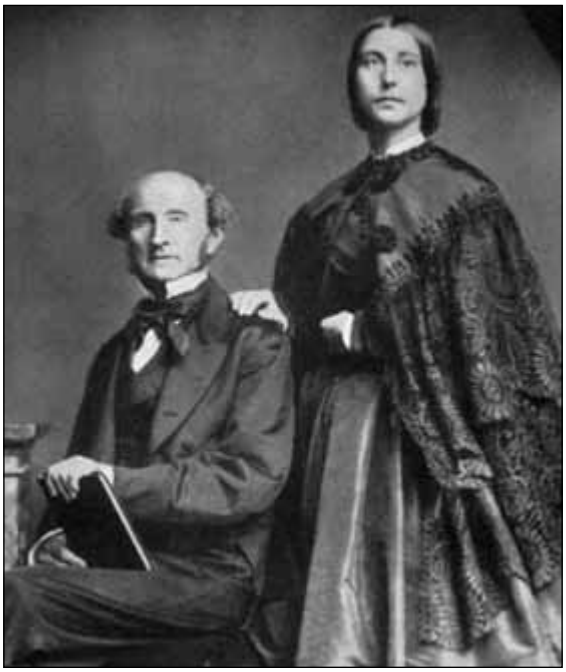
At the beginning of "On Liberty," Mill stated that democracies like the United States were going to replace the absolute monarchies and tyrannies of the past. With the people in control of their governments, however, a new problem arose.

Based on his careful reading of *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville, Mill feared that the "will of the people" would more often be the "will of the majority." This could threaten liberty and individual self-development if the majority acted to oppress minority viewpoints and lifestyles. A democracy, Mill argued, could easily become a "tyranny of the majority."



Helen Taylor, the daughter of Mills' wife Harriet, took care of Mill in his later years and published his Autobiography after his death.(Library of Congess)

To overcome this threat, Mill proposed what philosophers today call his "harm principle." Mill wrote that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." Mills' "harm principle" would block democratic majorities from interfering with the liberty of any adult unless that person threatened harm to others. Mill then identified the specific liberties he had in mind:

- "liberty of conscience"
- "liberty of thought and feeling"
- "absolute freedom of opinion"
- "liberty of expressing and publishing opinions" (freedom of speech and press)
- "freedom to unite, for any purpose" (freedom of assembly)
- "liberty . . . of forming the plan of our life to suit our own character, of doing what we like" even if this appeared to be "foolish, perverse, or wrong"

Any society without these liberties, Mill declared, was not free. "The only freedom which deserves the name," he wrote, "is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede [obstruct] their efforts to obtain it."

Mill further argued that truth is found through the "collision of adverse opinions." He wrote, "He who knows only his side of the case, knows little of that." When people listen only to one viewpoint, he explained, "errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood."

Mill recognized that individual liberty needed limits or else harm to others may result. He gave the example of an "excited mob" outside the house of a grain dealer, shouting that he was starving the poor. In such circumstances, Mill agreed, the police were justified in arresting those whose angry words might easily inflame violence. He also said that the government had no business censoring those same words published in a newspaper article.

Mill argued that "an atmosphere of freedom" was necessary to assure all people the opportunity to develop their individuality. He condemned British society of his day for its suffocating conformity. He applauded original thinkers, oddballs, geniuses, and nonconformists who experimented with different lifestyles, thus preventing human life from becoming a "stagnant pool."

Mill stated that government should be limited to providing the conditions necessary for people to achieve their individuality. He cited examples of when government was wrong in trying to stamp out certain human behavior and lifestyles. One example was prohibiting gambling. Another was persecuting the Mormon religion.

On the other hand, he argued that government was right to prohibit people from getting married if they could not support their children. To have a child, he wrote, "without a fair prospect of being able, not only to provide food for its body, but instruction for its mind, is a moral crime, both against the unfortunate offspring and against society."

Mill's "On Liberty" drew criticism. Some accused him of encouraging anarchy, immorality, and godlessness. Other critics doubted that he had adequately defined "harm" and questioned his assumption that people actually wanted to pursue self-development. Mill himself remarked that "On Liberty" was "likely to survive longer than anything else that I have written." He was right. It is his most famous work and has never gone out of print.

'The Subjection of Women'

After publishing "On Liberty" in 1859, Mill turned to political reform. He advocated expanding the right to vote to all adults, including women. He devised, however, a controver-

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sial voting system, which gave more voting power to those with an education (rather than owners of property).

Mill supported government subsidies to parents who could not afford schooling for their children. But he opposed a public school system because he believed it would enforce social conformity.

An opponent of slavery (which Britain had abolished in 1833), Mill supported the North during the American Civil War. He wrote that if the South won this "would be a victory of the powers of evil, which would give courage to the enemies of progress."

In 1865, Mill won a Liberal Party seat in Parliament. He ran on the condition that he would only vote his conscience, even if this went against the wishes of the voters he represented.

Mill saw his seat in Parliament as a platform to voice his views on political and social reforms, especially the right of women to vote. In 1867, he helped organize Britain's first women's suffrage (right to vote) society. His speeches and votes in Parliament were often far ahead of his time. Consequently, he was defeated for re-election in 1868 after serving only one term.

The year after he left Parliament, Mill published "The Subjection of Women." This pamphlet summarized his longstanding arguments for the equality of women in Britain's male-dominated society. He stressed that women should have the same rights as men to develop their individuality. This included the right to own property, earn a college education, choose any occupation, and participate fully in politics.

Mill disagreed sharply with his father on women's suffrage. James Mill always held that a husband represented his wife when he voted, so she had no reason to exercise this right. John, however, argued that a wife's interests were often different from those of her husband, and thus she should have an equal right to vote for them. Despite Mill's efforts, British women did not secure even a limited right to vote until 1918, long after he died.

* * * * *

In his last years, Mill finally wrote on religion, a topic that he had avoided all his life. His critics often called him an atheist. He wrote, however, that he accepted the existence of God as probable and Jesus as a great prophet. Even so, he believed that organized religions opposed social change and restricted individual self-development.

Mill died in France in 1873, a few days short of his 67th birthday and was buried next to Harriet. Helen Taylor, Harriet's daughter who cared for Mill after she died, published his now-famous *Autobiography* soon after his death.

Today, most consider John Stuart Mill Britain's greatest philosopher of the 19th century. He was also one of the last major world thinkers to write on nearly every philosophical topic, ranging from logic to religion. His farsighted views on democracy, individual liberty, and equality for women make him as relevant today as in his own day.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Mill redefined the Utilitarian concept of happiness as achieving "individuality." What did he mean by this? Do you agree with him? Explain.
2. What did Mill mean by the "tyranny of the majority"? Do you think this is a problem for democracy? Why?
3. Do you think Mill would object to laws stopping individuals from doing harm to themselves such as taking addictive drugs? Why?

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A C T I V I T Y

The Harm Principle

In "On Liberty," John Stuart Mill defined harm to others in this way:

> Whenever, in short, there is a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public, the case is taken out of the province of liberty, and placed in that of morality or law.

Form six small groups to each discuss one of the situations listed below. In each case, group members should decide if it meets Mills' definition of harm. According to Mill, if something is harmful, then government is justified in passing a law to prevent the harm.

1. A business person opens a pornographic bookstore.
2. Two people of the same sex get married to each other.
3. A private college newspaper prints articles that promote hatred of certain races.
4. An individual neglects and cruelly abuses his dogs.
5. Protesters burn an American flag.
6. An atheist organization pays for a highway billboard that says, "God Does Not Exist. Enjoy Life Now."

Each group should report its decision and explain why harm to others does or does not exist.

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National High School World History Standard 22: Understands how the United States changed between the post-World War I years and the eve of the Great Depression. (5) Understands how political issues in the 1920s influenced American society (e.g., . . . the Harding and Coolidge administrations . . .)

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California History-Social Science Standard 12.2: Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured. (5) Describe the reciprocity between rights and obligations; that is, why enjoyment of one's rights entails respect for the rights of others.

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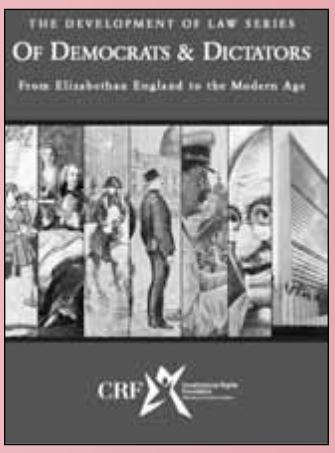

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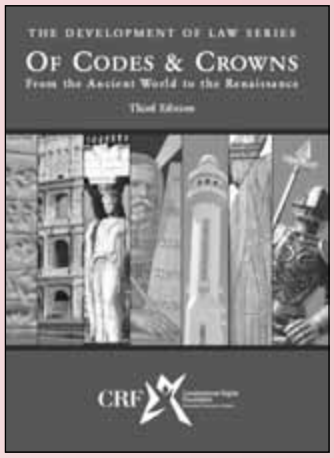

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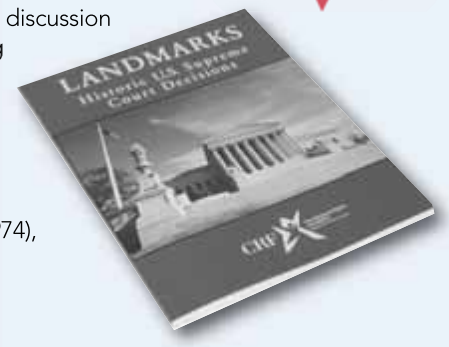

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