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The Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration (1895–1916): Evoking and Mobilizing an “International Mind”

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Between 1895 and 1916, a Conference on International Arbitration met annually at Lake Mohonk, New York, seeking to implement arbitration as a substitute for war. This article considers the aims, effects, and limitations of these conferences, including the problematic assumptions underpinning their apparent progressivism. The belief that an enlightened public opinion would play a decisive role in advancing arbitration will be interrogated, as will the conviction that the Mohonk group provided a mouthpiece for an emergent “international mind.” The article shows how these conferences evoked a “global” public opinion that was simultaneously (and paradoxically) expansive, exclusionary, forcible, and manipulable. It reveals too how American conceptions of internationalism took shape, anticipating aspects of Wilsonianism.

This article considers a series of annual conferences hosted at Lake Mohonk, a mountain resort in upstate New York, commencing in 1895. These gatherings brought together “businessmen, politicians, clergymen, journalists, reformers, lawyers, educators, and other persons of prominence” with a shared interest in advancing the status of international arbitration in the public mind.¹ Participants were chiefly (though not exclusively) from the United States and Canada, many of them also involved in other contemporary social movements. Delegates often shared an interest in women’s rights, vegetarianism and animal welfare, children’s rights, industrial arbitration, abolition of the death

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¹ Warren F. Kuehl, *Seeking World Order: The United States and International Organization to 1920* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 40.

penalty, temperance, and prison reform, to name but a few.² Sharing an ethos of progressivism, the men and women who gathered at Mohonk reflected a conviction that the new world could shape a public sentiment, first nationally and then globally, that would substitute methods of arbitration for war. The well-to-do participants epitomized the common Progressive Era conviction that society could be improved.³

The conferences also exhibited a degree of American exceptionalism, the delegates convinced that the United States was uniquely placed amongst the nations to advocate international arbitration.⁴ As an advanced democracy, governed by popular will and located geographically far from the shores of warlike Europe, the United States was obliged to lead the world into a brighter and better American century. As Stephen Wertheim notes, the United States was born of both “exceptionalist nationalism” and internationalism, the latter envisioning “a world governed by reason and rules, not force and whim.” Similarly, Heather Cox Richardson remarks how, from 1898 to 1920, “progressive Americans sought to use government to reform America and to launch it on an international crusade to spread American values.”⁵ With regard to arbitration, the United States, alongside Great Britain, led the way, both through the 1872 settlement of the *Alabama* claims and, after a brief deterioration in Anglo-American relations during the 1895 Venezuela crisis, the Olney–Pauncefoot Treaty, intended to be the first of many arbitration agreements between great powers before being scuppered by the Senate in 1897. At Mohonk, this disappointment simply reinforced the determination to secure more public and political support for arbitration and did little to dampen the conviction that the Anglo-Saxon powers remained at the vanguard of the movement.

Educating and enlightening public opinion was deemed essential, reflecting a progressive reformist impulse that championed the public. As Benjamin Allen Coates remarks, conferences exhibited the familiar tendencies of Progressive Era social activism and attracted “the standard variety of reformist

² David S. Patterson, “Citizen Peace Initiatives and American Political Culture, 1865–1920,” in Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen, eds., *Peace Movements and Political Cultures* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 187–203, 189–90.

³ This belief has been noted by Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1998), 50. See also Rodgers’s influential essay “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History*, 10, 4 (1982), 113–32.

⁴ Larry E. Burgess, *Mohonk, Its People and Spirit: A History of One Hundred Years of Growth and Service* (New York: Purple Mountain Press, 1980), 47.

⁵ Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 18; Heather Cox Richardson, “Reconstructing the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” in Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy C. Unger, eds., *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 7–20, 17.

elites.”⁶ Broadly speaking, notes Leon Fink, such activists adopted an “optimistic view of their relation to the larger public,” considering themselves to be the principal “agents of social change.” By simply fusing “applied reason and active citizenship,” progressive activists believed that all of society’s ills could be remedied, including war. Active citizenship would result from the strategic employment of the most formidable tool in the activists’ armoury – education.⁷ It was often unclear how far this “active citizenship” should stretch, whether it should comprise the masses or simply an informed elite capable of effecting political and social change. For many progressives, asserts Robert H. Wiebe, quality mattered more than quantity, requiring only a core of “better informed, more alert, less gullible citizens.”⁸ The Mohonk group’s early aims reflected this, championing international arbitration domestically, particularly within those constituencies of American opinion that wielded influence and power. In this way, the Mohonk conferences speak to broader debates about public opinion’s place within American democracy.⁹

The conferences became more ambitious in later years, seeking actively to cultivate an *international* public opinion in support of arbitration. To be sure, the assemblies merit a position within a broader lineage of conceptions of “world opinion.”¹⁰ Christopher Hill noted back in 1996 that this lineage stretched back at least to Kantian ideas of a “world federation” and Benthamite notions of “civilized public opinion,” later incorporating the free-trade schemes of Richard Cobden and John Bright, through to President Woodrow Wilson’s belief in 1919 that world opinion could sustain a new world order.¹¹ Hill’s understanding of “world opinion”

⁶ Benjamin Allen Coates, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 66. See also Jonathan Auerbach, *Weapons of Democracy: Propaganda, Progressivism, and American Public Opinion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 3.

⁷ Leon Fink, *Progressive Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Democratic Commitment* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13, 25.

⁸ Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1995), 164.

⁹ For more on these latter debates see Tom Arnold Forster, “Democracy and Expertise in the Lippmann–Terman Controversy,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 16, 2 (2019), 561–92; and Forster, “Walter Lippmann and Public Opinion,” *American Journalism*, 40, 1 (2023), 51–79. These issues are also discussed throughout Auerbach, *Weapons of Democracy*.

¹⁰ Mohonk features in Steve Witt’s recent discussion of “global public opinion” in “Creating the International Mind: The Language of Internationalism and the Battle for Global Public Opinion (1912–38),” in Julian Walker and Christophe Declerc, eds., *Multilingual Environments in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 226–38, but he focusses on Nicholas Murray Butler rather than the conferences in their totality.

¹¹ Christopher Hill, “World Opinion and the Empire of Circumstance,” *International Affairs*, 72, 1 (1996), 109–31. The ideas discussed by Hill and other scholars interested in the concept of a “world opinion,” notably Frank Rusciano, have recently been revisited in

comprised both a community of states (consolidated by more robust international law and institutions) and a cosmopolitanism emanating from non-governmental transnational dialogue and exchange. He further identified five key actors within this nongovernmental cosmopolitanism: the church, secular moral leaders, business interests, the mass media, and cross-national pressure groups.¹² These five categories featured prominently at Mohonk, making it still more essential to centre Mohonk's righteous place in the development of Western notions of "world opinion." The following analysis undertakes this centering, emphasizing the importance of the Mohonk gatherings whilst acknowledging their limitations, not least how the "global" public evoked was often exclusionary and couched in racist tropes.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE MOHONK CONFERENCES

The Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration have received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Dig deep and one may locate the occasional doctoral thesis or master's dissertation, but published accounts are scarce. Few works on the "Gilded Age" or the "Progressive Era" mention Mohonk, and what mentions exist are fleeting.¹³ More substantive allusions can be found within peace history literature. Charles Howlett discusses how women used the conferences to enunciate a "feminized" conception of peace work that foregrounded their roles as teachers and nurturers.¹⁴ Warren F. Kuehl discusses the "extensive campaign of education" undertaken by the conferences with a view to advancing the cause of arbitration with the public and statesmen alike, while Charles Chatfield notes how the Mohonk participants were "practical people [who] trimmed the terms of arbitration to what they thought might be politically acceptable."¹⁵ Mohonk also features

David Monger's "Speaking to or for the World? Britain, Presumed Authority and World Opinion at the Start of the First World War," *Historical Research*, 96, 21 (2022), 82–102.

¹² Hill, 122–23.

¹³ Ian Tyrrell mentions the arbitration conferences in passing in both *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 19, and "Connections, Networks, and the Beginnings of a Global America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," in McKnight Nichols and Unger, 381–98, 384 (being the only reference to Mohonk in this entire compendium). The conferences are afforded more attention, albeit at scattered intervals, throughout Richard M. Gamble's *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

¹⁴ C. F. Howlett, "Women Pacifists of America: Women's Views at the Lake Mohonk Conferences for International Arbitration, 1895–1916," *Peace Research*, 21, 1 (1989), 27–32.

¹⁵ Kuehl, *Seeking World Order*, 40–41; Charles Chatfield, *The American Peace Movement: Ideas and Activism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 192), 14.

in works by David S. Patterson and C. Roland Marchand, the latter accentuating the organizers' efforts to include "men of greater prominence, position, and expertise in foreign affairs."¹⁶ For Cecile Reid, Mohonk reflected a growing conviction that peace and law could not be uncoupled, a position echoed by Anne Chao, who contends that these gatherings, along with the two Hague Peace Conferences, established arbitration as the "hot" topic in peace activism.¹⁷ A useful overview of the Mohonk conferences appears in a recent encyclopedia, Howlett concluding that their more practical orientation distanced them from "the old peace societies" and laid foundations for subsequent developments in international law and organization.¹⁸

The relative scarcity of scholarly attention is still more surprising given the vast archival materials available at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC). Few scholars have made use of these papers, and some of the most illuminating information on the conferences can be gleaned from the detailed inventory of the archives compiled by SCPC staff.¹⁹ Among the voluminous papers stored at SCPC are some contemporary accounts of the Mohonk conferences, one of which will be used as a point of departure for the subsequent analysis. This is a 1910 pamphlet entitled *Answers to Ten Questions about the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration*.²⁰ Five of the questions can be answered as concisely now as they were back in 1910. Question Three was simply "where is it?" The conferences met ninety miles north of

¹⁶ David S. Patterson, *Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); C. Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898–1918* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 40–41.

¹⁷ Cecile Reid, "Peace and Law: Peace Activism and International Arbitration," *Peace & Change*, 29, 3–4 (2004), 527–48, 530; Anne Chao, "Transmissions and Transformations: Global Peace Movements between the Hague Conferences and World War I," *History Compass*, 5, 5 (2007), 1677–93, 1680.

¹⁸ Charles F. Howlett, "Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration (1895–1916)," in Mitchell K. Hall, ed., *Opposition to War: An Encyclopedia of U.S. Peace and Antiwar Movements*, Volume I (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 373–75. See also Charles F. Howlett and Christian Philip Peterson, "Peace in an Age of Modernity, 1865–1914," in Christian Philip Peterson, William M. Knoblauch, and Michael Loadenthal, eds., *The Routledge History of World Peace since 1750* (London: Routledge, 2019), 42–58.

¹⁹ This can be consulted online (at <https://archives.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/resources/scpc-dg-054>, accessed 7 May 2023). Howlett's article is an exception, and the current author has used some of these papers in "'Allowed to Serve, Not to Speak?' The Role of Women in international Peace Activism, 1880–1920," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31, 4 (2020), 609–29.

²⁰ *Answers to Ten Questions about the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration* (Mohonk Lake, NY, 1910), Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC), Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration Records (hereafter Lake Mohonk Papers), Series II, Box 1.

New York City, at a picturesque 1,200-acre resort in the Hudson valley, dominated by a Victorian castle, the Mohonk Mountain House. The resort is still owned by the Smiley family, whose involvement dated back to 1869, when Albert K. Smiley and his twin brother Alfred, two schoolteachers from Maine, purchased the original 300 acres.²¹ Greatly extended in subsequent decades, the hotel was soon large enough to host sizeable conferences, gaining attention as the venue for the Conference of Friends of the Indians and Other Dependent Peoples, which met for the first time in autumn 1883. Meeting annually until 1916, this conference welcomed members of the Indian Rights Association and other reformers who sought to enlighten public opinion and policymakers on issues affecting native Americans. The attendees were chiefly middle-aged, white, Protestant members of the urban middle class, with sufficient prestige and influence to shape federal policy, albeit pursuing an assimilationist agenda that accentuated rather than dismantled racial categorizations.²²

In 1890, Mohonk hosted the first Conference to Consider the Education and Christianization of the Negro. Reprised only once, in 1891, the two events were “the first meetings of any consequence where Northerners and Southerners sat down together for a serious discussion of Black–white issues.” Somewhat controversially, no African Americans were invited, Albert Smiley fearing that their presence would deter southern whites from attending.²³ Beyond its blanket whiteness, the attendees at these conferences were, like those who attended the conferences of the Friends of the Indians, mostly middle-aged, Protestant, and middle-class, with a strong representation of preachers and educators. Approximately one-third of attendees were women, and there was, as Smiley had hoped, a strong representation from the southern states. Despite the benign intentions of the delegates, the two meetings reflected the prevailing attitudes of those present. In Lasana D. Kazembe’s opinion, this amounted to a cabal of “White social engineers” exhibiting a “toxic White paternalism” that betrayed their “loathing of Blacks/

²¹ Albert Smiley recalled spending “every dollar I had” to purchase the property, incurring a significant debt in the process. Alfred initially kept drawing a schoolteachers’ salary from a nearby Friends School at Poughkeepsie to meet the ongoing expenses of upkeep and enlargement. See Frederick E. Partington, *The Story of Mohonk*, 4th edn (Annandale, VA: Turnpike Press, 1962; first published 1911), 26; and Burgess, *Mohonk, Its People and Spirit*, 17.

²² For more on this see Alexandra Harmon, “When Is an Indian Not an Indian? The ‘Friends of the Indian’ and the Problems of Indian Identity,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 18, 2 (1990), 95–123; and Wilbert H. Ahern, “Assimilationist Racism: The Case of the ‘Friends of the Indian,’” *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 4, 2 (1976), 23–32.

²³ Leslie H. Fishel Jr., “The ‘Negro Question’ at Mohonk: Microcosm, Mirage, and Message,” *New York History*, July 1993, 277, 285.

Blackness.”²⁴ Aspects of this paternalism would permeate the arbitration conferences too.

The last of the ten questions queried whether the arbitration gatherings were related to the Friends of the Indians conferences, to which the answer was an emphatic “no,” other than sharing a venue and host. Another easily answered question was, “How are the meetings conducted?” The conferences themselves, much like their Mohonk antecedents, were friendly if rather austere affairs. The Smiley brothers were Quakers, hence the meetings were dry, smoking was discouraged, and travel to and from the venue was prohibited on a Sunday.²⁵ A broadly similar programme was undertaken every year, with six sessions – two each day – spread across three days. From the start, social opportunities beyond the formal sessions were considered crucial to crafting a cooperative spirit of friendliness and camaraderie, exploiting the venue’s spectacular landscapes and vistas. As Albert Smiley noted, “it is our custom at all our Conferences held here to try to mingle pleasure with business.” Formal morning and evening sessions bookended afternoons “devoted to social intercourse and chiefly to riding.”²⁶ Delegates were also encouraged to make “free use of ... the boats, bowling alley, tennis courts, croquet grounds and golf links.” “We want all of you to enjoy yourself,” insisted Smiley.²⁷

Question Eight asked about membership and dues, to which the reply was that there was no standing membership, with attendance at the conference contingent on the personal invitation of Albert Smiley (or his younger half-brother Daniel following Albert’s death in December 1912). “The absence of a repeat invitation,” it was noted, “should not be taken personally.”²⁸ Within the first decade, attendance had risen from an initial figure of around fifty to more than 300, and, as this article will show, efforts were made in subsequent years to expand participation further, especially internationally. There were no dues, although voluntary contributions from attendees were welcomed and used to cover the cost of publications. The nature of these publications was the essence of Question Nine, the answer being that these were chiefly current and past annual reports (available at the cost of

²⁴ Lasana D. Kazembe, “‘The Steep Edge of a Dark Abyss’: Mohonk, White Social Engineers, and Black Education,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 52, 2 (2021), 123–43, 124–25.

²⁵ Fishel, 278.

²⁶ Address of Albert Smiley, 28 May 1902, *Report of the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1902* (Mohonk Lake, NY: 1900), 23. All annual reports will hereafter be cited as *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, [Year]*.

²⁷ *Ibid.* See also the general program for the sixteenth annual meeting in 1910 (amongst others), SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series II, Box 2.

²⁸ *Concerning the Origin and Objects of the Lake Mohonk Conferences* (Fulton, NY: The Morrill Press, 1906), SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series II, Box 1.

postage), the circulation of “Frequent circulars on special subjects,” and a handful of other pamphlets and information that could be provided on request.²⁹

MOHONK: PUBLICITY, THE PRESS, AND PUBLIC OPINION

If five questions are answered easily, the remaining five merit further consideration: What is it? What is its purpose? Who compose it? What does it do? What subjects are discussed? Question One was the most fundamental – “What is it?” The given answer in 1910 was concise and straightforward: “A series of annual conferences (1895 to date),” as well as a “permanent office, in charge of a secretary, through which the annual meetings are arranged and a propaganda conducted.”³⁰ The “permanent office” was opened in 1901 to deal with an increase in correspondence that proved beyond Albert Smiley’s capacity to deal with. The bulk of the work undertaken by this permanent office fell to the secretary, a man called H. C. Phillips (although W. C. Dennis appears to have been the principal corresponding secretary until Phillips’s arrival in autumn 1902). Besides organizing the annual conferences, the secretary’s chief function was to respond to letters and inquiries, liaise with the press, and circulate occasional bulletins “relating to the progress of arbitration.”³¹ The overriding aim was to publicize their activities and increase the visibility and salience of the arbitration cause. The Mohonk group thus utilized a tactic common to Progressive Era activists, prioritizing publicity and the “cultivation of a unified, issue-conscious ‘public opinion’.”³²

The permanent office added impetus to Mohonk’s press engagement efforts, and the growing influence of the press, for good or ill, was recognized clearly. The topic featured regularly and at length in the arbitration conferences, predicated on an early belief that the press was sympathetic. The American Peace Society’s Benjamin Trueblood, a regular Mohonk attendee, noted in 1897 how “the great magazines and their ablest writers, and the great weeklies and dailies, have shown such unanimity in the line of our work [that] it is perfectly safe to say, this unanimity in the press having come, we are not in danger of losing it again.”³³ The press had apparently

²⁹ *Answers to Ten Questions about the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *A Decade’s Review of the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1895–1905* (Mohonk Lake, NY: Dec. 1904), SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series II, Box 1.

³² Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 182.

³³ Address of Benjamin Trueblood, 2 June 1897, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1897*, 15.

overcome the nationalist impulses that stoked warlike fervour in the United States during the 1895 Venezuela crisis. However, newspapers' role in fuelling anti-Spanish sentiment in 1898, coupled with the flagrant patriotism of the British press at the outbreak of the Second Boer War in 1899, suggested that little had changed. As one English delegate at the 1900 conference lamented, his country had been overcome by "a wave of militarism and jingoism."³⁴ Whether the press echoed or shaped popular opinion was a point of debate. The New York academic Felix Adler insisted that the more popular newspapers only "respond to and exaggerate the public sentiment ... echoing the cry of the hour, the passions of the hour."³⁵ Either way, it was agreed that more concerted efforts were needed to harness and control the press, ensuring that it act more responsibly in times of crisis.

It was not outlandish to think that the press *could* be mobilized in more benign ways. After all, the British journalist W. T. Stead had demonstrated before and during the 1899 Hague Peace Conference how effectively it could be used to support initiatives in the direction of peace and arbitration.³⁶ It was clear to Mohonk's organizers that there was profit in getting the press onside. Phillips was particularly keen to better publicize their cause and set to work enhancing links with American newspapers. Writing to Daniel Smiley in February 1903, he prophesied that "the plan to secure greater publicity in the press will be quite successful," above all because he had secured the services of Mr. L. A. Maynard of the Maynard Press Agency to prepare advance articles on the Mohonk conference and to use his syndicate to circulate them. In April that year, Phillips told Trueblood that Maynard had penned "an excellent article descriptive of the Conference" which would shortly be sent to "25 of the leading papers of the country." Hoping for publication in mid-May, Phillips requested a photograph from Trueblood, conveying Maynard's opinion that the article's "chances of success will be greatly increased if photographs of a few leading members can be supplied to the papers."³⁷

³⁴ Address of Mr. William S. Clark, 6 June 1900, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1900*, 25.

³⁵ Address of Dr. Felix Adler, 7 June 1900, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1900*, 75.

³⁶ Two discussions of Stead's influence in 1899, offering somewhat divergent interpretations, are Annalise R. Higgins, "Writing for Peace: Reconsidering the British Public Peace Petitioning Movement's Historical Legacies after 1898," in Maartje Abbenhuis, Christopher Ernest Barber, and Annalise R. Higgins, eds., *War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907* (London: Routledge, 2017), 138–54; and Daniel Hucker, "British Peace Activism and 'New' Diplomacy: Revisiting the 1899 Hague Peace Conference," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 26, 3 (2015), 405–23.

³⁷ H. C. Phillips to Daniel Smiley, 8 Feb. 1903; Phillips to Benjamin Trueblood, 14 April 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

By late April, Phillips claimed that the “newspaper work is progressing finely,” Maynard proving to be “the most valuable man in the Conference from a standpoint of publicity.” His article was accepted by the *Boston Evening Transcript*, the *New York Times*, the *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), the *Washington Times*, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Buffalo Express*, the *Providence Journal*, the *Utica Daily Press*, and the *Louisiana Times*. It was anticipated that several other papers would follow.³⁸ Scheduled for publication on 17 May, the article appears to have been published on different dates and in different forms. A full version was published that day by the *Providence Journal*, a striking article accompanied by three photographs showcasing the panoramic vistas of the Mohonk scenery. Maynard provided a brief overview of the conference’s history, identified some prominent attendees, and outlined its principal objectives, namely the promotion of international arbitration. The article claimed that the conference’s impact was already being felt, the “remarkable upgrowth of public sentiment in favor of arbitration” attributable in no small part “to the inspiration going out from Lake Mohonk.” An example of a slightly abridged version appeared in the *New York Times* a week later without any accompanying photographs.³⁹ Phillips later expressed satisfaction at the press attention received. “[F]rom the standpoint of publicity,” he told Trueblood, “last week’s Conference was a pronounced success,” garnering more coverage than “all the previous conferences together.” Phillips was particularly pleased that southern and western publications had given the Conference “decidedly more space than before.”⁴⁰

Efforts continued thereafter to sustain press interest. Although the newspapers rarely sought information from Mohonk in advance of the conferences, requests for cuts and photographs to accompany articles after the event were frequent. Ahead of the conferences, the direction of travel was one-way, the permanent office sending numerous letters to various journals across the United States offering prepared articles and photographs for publication. These requests emphasized how the object of the Mohonk conferences chimed with the public interest. Phillips hoped that “the large place which international arbitration now occupies in the public mind” would convince the editor of the *Globe* (Boston) to run a piece ahead of the 1906 conference.⁴¹ The response to these efforts was mixed. Phillips had little luck with *Comfort* magazine (Maine) after offering them, free of charge, an article of any length

³⁸ Phillips to Albert Smiley, 29 April 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

³⁹ “International Conference at Mohonk,” *Providence Journal*, 17 May 1903, 19; “Mohonk Arbitration Conference This Week,” *New York Times*, 24 May 1903, 33.

⁴⁰ Phillips to Trueblood, 6 June 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

⁴¹ Phillips to the *Globe* (Boston), 27 April 1906, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 26.

outlining “the present status of international arbitration.” The editor’s response cited a “lack of space,” making it unlikely that they could run anything more than a couple of five-hundred-word pieces with no guarantee of a timely publication date. By contrast, the *Fort Smith Times* (Arkansas) was more forthcoming, agreeing to use an article and some “scenic” photographs of the Mohonk venue as a full “Sunday feature.”⁴² The Mohonk office also contacted publications further afield, including *The Sphere* (London), with the assurance that if they ran a piece on Mohonk, no information or photographs would be provided to other European publications. This appeared to be unsuccessful, as there is no record of the Mohonk conferences featuring in the pages of *The Sphere* in 1907 or any other year. More success was had in Canada, where *The Citizen* (Ottawa) ran an abridged version of the article rendered more “suitable for Canadian consumption.”⁴³

Links with the press were cultivated further by the frequent participation at the conferences of newspapermen. In 1912 William C. Deming, editor of the *Wyoming Tribune*, discussed at length how the popular press could shape public sentiment. “We have only to hark back to the spring of 1898 to recall the masterful influence of the press in arousing a peaceful nation to war against Spain,” he observed, suggesting that if the press could provoke an unnecessary war, it must surely be “potent enough to prevent one.” Deming spoke of the “world-wide instrumentality” of the press, a topic echoed in another editor’s speech. John Lewis of *The Star* (Toronto) advocated the creation of an international publication that would help construct a “new machinery for world-wide organization.”⁴⁴ Felix Adler also advocated an international press in 1913, suggesting that a global “publicity bureau” could supplement the Hague tribunal and provide a corrective to the prevailing tendency in the press to sensationalize. “Passion must be forestalled,” he warned: “once roused, it is as idle to try to prevent bloodshed as it would be to try to restrain Niagara at the brink of the cataract.”⁴⁵

Harnessing the press more effectively was essential in pursuit of one of Mohonk’s principal aims, namely the mobilization of public support. As Adler concluded his 1913 address, “The sole force that can avail is the

⁴² Phillips to the editor of *Comfort* (Augusta, ME), 26 Oct. 1906; and reply, 30 Oct. 1906; letter from *Fort Smith Times* (Arkansas) to Phillips, 29 April 1907, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 26

⁴³ Phillips to *The Sphere* (London), 27 April 1906; *The Citizen* (Ottawa) to Phillips, 2 May 1907, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 26.

⁴⁴ Addresses of William C. Deming, “The Opportunity and Duty of the Press in Relation to World Peace,” 17 May 1912; and John Lewis, “International Forces,” 15 May 1912, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1912*, 167, 57–8 respectively.

⁴⁵ Address of Felix Adler, “Justice the Basis of International Peace,” *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1913*, 131–34, 131–32.

moral force of an enlightened and world-wide public opinion.”⁴⁶ This speaks clearly to the second of the ten questions set out in the 1910 pamphlet: “What it is its purpose?” The brief answer given then was that the conferences sought to “create and direct public sentiment in favor of international arbitration and an international court; generally, to encourage the substitution of pacific methods for war in settling disputes between nations.”⁴⁷ The centrality of this objective was articulated from the start. Benjamin Trueblood told the very first conference that the “sentiment of the civilized world is already practically opposed to war and in favor of peace, and one of the purposes of conferences like this is to assist in concentrating this public sentiment.”⁴⁸ The task of enlightening the public was set out plainly in the invitations sent out ahead of each conference; in 1896, Smiley’s invites outlined how the conference’s object was “to influence public sentiment in favor of the settlement of international disputes by arbitration.”⁴⁹

Initially, Mohonk focussed on domestic American opinion rather than the more ambitious appeal to a “worldwide” opinion that Adler evoked in 1913. So important was the need to educate American opinion that entire sections of the conferences discussed how to do it. In December 1902 Albert Smiley forwarded a “rough outline” of the schedule for the following year’s meeting, the second session being on “The Need of Influencing Public Opinion.” Smiley noted how this subject “has come in at each Conference for some years, and will afford a good opportunity for college presidents and educators as well as clergymen.”⁵⁰ A focus on public opinion was equally explicit in correspondence with prominent figures in wider peace circles. Phillips wrote to the Russian sociologist Iakov Novikov in January 1903, explaining that the Mohonk conferences took place “with a view to influencing public opinion” and thus creating a public sentiment more amenable to the ideas that had recently gained such ground at the 1899 Hague conference. Later that month, Phillips wrote to the prominent industrialist, philanthropist, and friend of peace Andrew Carnegie, conveying Albert Smiley’s regret that Carnegie had thus far been unable to attend a Mohonk meeting. He also drew attention to the conference’s efforts to reach out to men like Carnegie “with a view to educating public opinion among our business classes.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁷ *Answers to Ten Questions about the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration.*

⁴⁸ Address of Benjamin Trueblood, 3 June 1895, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1895*, 8.

⁴⁹ Invitation to the Second Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 12 March 1896, signed by Albert Smiley, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A1.

⁵⁰ Albert Smiley to Trueblood, 15 Dec. 1902, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

⁵¹ Phillips to Novikov (he used the name Jacque Novicow), 8 Jan. 1903; Phillips to Carnegie, 24 Jan. 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

This emphasis on business was just one way in which the Mohonk organizers believed that public opinion could be reached, albeit one that featured as a specific topic of discussion at every conference. Representatives of business appear prominently in the lists of attendees, as recognized in the answer given to Question Five in the 1910 pamphlet, “Who compose it?” It was noted then that the conference could boast nearly two hundred “Co-operating and Corresponding Business Organizations, including leading chambers of commerce and like bodies in almost every large city of the United States and Canada.” Of course, the attendees came from a much broader cross-section of society than this. “Each meeting is attended by about three hundred personal guests of the founder, Mr. Albert K. Smiley,” it was observed, with the business committee for the 1910 gathering comprising judges, lawyers, army and navy men, businessmen, members of the State Department, experts in pan-American affairs, clergymen, and members of other peace and arbitration societies.⁵² Beyond this, various academics, teachers, and college presidents also attended regularly, and in the second half of its lifespan there was much greater representation of politicians and diplomats.⁵³

Mohonk also benefited from the stimulus provided American peace work by the meeting of the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) in St. Louis in 1904, and the parallel success of activists in encouraging President Roosevelt to revive calls for a second Hague Peace Conference.⁵⁴ Thereafter the conferences secured the adhesion of more prominent statesmen like Elihu Root, academics like Nicholas Murray Butler, and more eminent figures in the field of international law such as Oscar Straus and James Brown Scott.⁵⁵ Notably, all participants identified thus far are male, and there is little doubt that men *did*

⁵² *Answers to Ten Questions about the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration*.

⁵³ As C. Roland Marchand has remarked, prominent statesmen had always been invited but, at least in the conference’s early years, rarely attended. Marchand, *The American Peace Movement*, 21.

⁵⁴ Kuehl, *Seeking World Order*, 76; See also Daniel Hucker, “‘Our Expectations Were Perhaps Too High’: Disarmament, Citizen Activism, and the 1907 Hague Peace Conference,” *Peace & Change*, 44, 1 (2019), 5–32, 8–9; and Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Hague Conferences and International Politics, 1898–1915* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 142.

⁵⁵ Murray Butler is discussed by Witt, “Creating the International Mind,” 227–29; and in Charles F. Howlett’s “Introduction” to Nicholas Murray Butler’s *The International Mind: An Argument for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013), ix–xxx. Elihu Root has recently been the subject of Christopher R. Rossi’s *Whiggish International Law: Elihu Root, the Monroe Doctrine, and International Law in the Americas* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). For more on the growing purchase of international law in the United States during this period see Coates, *Legalist Empire*, 59–135. See also John Hemp, “James Brown Scott and the Rise of Public International Law,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 7, 2 (2008), 151–79.

dominate the proceedings. This is not to say that women were entirely absent; after all, Smiley was clear from the start that it was always “my custom to include in the invitation the wives of men.”⁵⁶ Still, relatively few women gave formal addresses, and those who did usually spoke on topics that accentuated women’s roles in the family and in the classroom. Some women purposely exploited stereotypical gender roles to stress their unique contribution to the cause. Hannah J. Bailey of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union told the 1897 meeting that women could “influence the public sentiment of the future by promulgating peace principles among the children,” a task that they would perform with energy given how war “widows her and makes her children fatherless.”⁵⁷

A more regular contributor to the Mohonk scene was Lucia Ames Mead, who was both the wife of a male delegate (the prominent Boston pacifist Edwin Mead) and a significant participant in her own right. She provided a link between the arbitration movement and other areas of activism via her membership of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Council of Women. Mead was also, as Mitchell K. Hall notes, “among the first peace advocates to emphasize the importance of public opinion,” reflecting her connection to mass movements beyond pacifism.⁵⁸ Mead claimed that women, as mothers, nurturers, and educators, could play a pivotal role in cultivating a better public opinion. Women must be better informed if they were “to do the work for peace that our peculiar privileges of leisure and influence in home and school provide us opportunities for.” Mead berated that “great new class of privileged women who are relieved from household drudgery,” who devote their abundant leisure time to “an excess of whist and golf and French conversation lessons” rather than working in pursuit of peace.⁵⁹ Her exasperation notwithstanding, the parallel development of women’s organizations offered an opportunity for advocates of arbitration, and efforts were made to channel their influence. May Wright Sewell, president of the International Council of Women (ICW), attended the 1903 Mohonk conference, afterwards thanking Smiley for “the opportunity of meeting so many advocates of Arbitration, and promoters of Peace, and opponents of War.” Sewell explained that she could help advance peace sentiment through regular “contact with representative

⁵⁶ Albert Smiley to George H. Emmott (Baltimore), 16 Nov. 1895, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A1.

⁵⁷ Remarks of Mrs. Hannah J. Bailey, 3 June 1897, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1897*, 88.

⁵⁸ Mitchell K. Hall, “Lucia Ames Mead (1856–1936),” in Hall, *Opposition to War*, Volume I, 429.

⁵⁹ Remarks of Lucia Ames Mead, “The Evils and Obstacles to be Overcome,” 29 May 1902, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1902*, 64.

women of many nationalities ... first engaging and then uniting their interests in this movement.”⁶⁰

An internationalist aspect was thus another contribution that women could bring, especially as teachers. Fannie Fern Andrews of the American School Peace League made this point forcibly in 1912, providing the Mohonk group with a report of her organization's activities that stressed the need to work on a global scale. “The public opinion of one country,” she remarked, “no matter how favorably inclined, can never establish international peace.”⁶¹ As teachers, women could do much to cultivate a more pacific international sentiment. As Sewell insisted, it is “women who have the first touch upon the child's brain [and] teachers who have perhaps the second.”⁶² Although the Mohonk conferences remained overwhelmingly male, there was a clear recognition that women's allyship was advantageous. The inauguration in 1911 of the Black Prize, an essay-writing competition for female undergraduates to mirror the Pugsley Prize established in 1908 for male students, illustrated a growing acknowledgment of women's voices. The recipient of the 1914 Black Prize was Mary Olive Beldon, a senior at Indiana University. Accepting the award, Beldon noted that she had “come to believe that women can serve their country infinitely better by furthering the cause of peace.” Women, she averred, who knew “the value of human life,” represented an “active and vigorous force in national life, [and if] women of the world should unite their efforts, war could be abolished.”⁶³

The student essays submitted for both the Black and Pugsley prizes often spoke to a growing conviction that public opinion was malleable, and that education was integral to the creation of a more enlightened international sentiment. One entry to the Pugsley contest in 1910 insisted that public opinion has usurped armies and navies as the ultimate force, still more powerful for being “universal, world-wide.” Another suggested that “within the universities of each nation” it was possible to create “a public opinion that will dominate the world.”⁶⁴ Though infused with a degree of youthful idealism, perhaps even

⁶⁰ May Wright Sewell to Albert Smiley, 20 July 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 20.

⁶¹ Fannie Fern Andrews (American School Peace League) to Phillips, 18 July 1912, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 116.

⁶² Address of May Wright Sewell, “The Universal Demonstration of Women in Behalf of Arbitration and Peace,” 28 May 1903, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1903*, 80–81.

⁶³ Miss Mary Olive Beldon to Phillips, 10 March 1914, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 117.

⁶⁴ “Social Progress and International Arbitration” (anonymous), “Public Opinion the Ultimate Factor in International Arbitration,” by Hyman N. Levy, both being entries to the 1910 Pugsley Prize Essay Contest, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 57a.

naivety, the student essays mirrored a more widespread confidence that public opinion was both a growing force and one that could be moulded on a global scale. As Judge George Gray of Delaware, chair of the 1904 gathering contended, “Public opinion is no longer fenced in by national boundaries. It has overleaped them all, and now an international public opinion is making itself felt from one corner of Christendom to the other.”⁶⁵

TOWARD AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC?

Gray’s “international” public opinion is clearly problematic if he understood it to comprise only those territories considered Christian. At the very least, it evokes a Christian missionary zeal shared by many who attended all iterations of the Mohonk conferences. Echoes of the white “social engineer” are abundant in the proclamations of Gray and others. Furthermore, attendees who frequently proclaimed themselves representatives of an “international” public were far from international themselves. Delegates were overwhelmingly from the United States and Canada, unsurprising given the location and the logistical hurdles involved for those wanting to attend from further afield. Recognizing this problem, the organizers sought to increase international participation, although efforts focussed almost exclusively on securing the attendance of prominent Europeans. Their understanding of what constituted the “international” was both limited and revealing. One area in which more expansive representation *was* consistently sought was Latin America, most conferences devoting entire sessions to pan-American affairs. Speakers from Central and South American republics were regular contributors, as were American statesmen with expertise in the region, especially those involved in the Pan-American Union. Debates at Mohonk about the Monroe Doctrine reflected what was happening in the diplomatic sphere, the 1902 Drago Doctrine seeking to reconfigure it in anticolonial terms (without necessarily questioning US leadership in the Americas), whilst the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary was a more explicit reaffirmation of America’s role as protector and civilizer.⁶⁶

It proved difficult to relinquish notions of US supremacy and the concomitant need to “educate” and “civilize” their southern neighbours. From 1906, however, with Elihu Root as Secretary of State, Washington appeared to accept a reformulation of the Monroe Doctrine based more on principles of

⁶⁵ Opening address of George Gray (president), 1 June 1904, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1904, 8.

⁶⁶ For more on the contemporary debates about the Monroe Doctrine see Alex Bryne, *The Monroe Doctrine and United States National Security in the Early Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 60–70.

international law than on power politics and coercion.⁶⁷ Speakers at Mohonk reflected a similar trend, encouraging the reframing of the doctrine along pan-American lines even before such arguments became more mainstream in America with the 1913 publication of Hiram Bingham's *Obsolete Shibboleth*.⁶⁸ In 1912, an Argentinian delegate stated emphatically that the Monroe Doctrine "involved a measure of supremacy" whereby the US "appeared inclined to act as our guardian in home questions, unnecessarily provoking a possible resentment."⁶⁹ It was held that popular support for arbitration made it difficult for America to refuse to submit to such mechanisms any issue arising in the western hemisphere. The Bolivian minister to the US told the 1911 conference that "no nation, no matter how strong, would dare to defy public opinion – the public opinion of the world – and go to war before submitting their claims to arbitration."⁷⁰

South American disgruntlement did not go unnoticed in the north. The American diplomat John Hicks (previously a US representative in both Chile and Peru) noted how "our Latin American friends are too polite and too circumspect publicly or frequently to make known their fears or to say too much that will shock the prejudices of their North American neighbors," but still feared "the great republic of the north." Hicks considered it imperative that the US convince others "that we have exactly as much respect for the laws of nations as for our own laws."⁷¹ But it was not only issues pertaining to the western hemisphere that compelled the Mohonk gatherings to consider how to speak for an allegedly global public in a world where extant sovereign states were few. In fairness to the organizers, they *did* invite representatives from across the globe. One example was Mirza Ali Kuli Khan, chargé d'affaires at the Persian legation in Washington, DC, who told the 1911 conference, "The term 'civilized world' should be broadened to embrace all mankind." While the conferences were veiled in pleas "for the spread of civilization" that conceal the true motive of rendering substantial parts of the

⁶⁷ Juan Pablo Scarfi, "In the Name of the Americas: The Pan-American Redefinition of the Monroe Doctrine and the Emerging Language of American International Law in the Western Hemisphere, 1898–1933," *Diplomatic History*, 40, 2 (2016), 199–205.

⁶⁸ Hiram Bingham, *The Monroe Doctrine: An Obsolete Shibboleth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1913). For a far-reaching discussion of this book's impact in the United States see Bryne, 93–129.

⁶⁹ Address of J. P. Santamarina, "Pan-American Arbitration," 15 May 1912, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1912*, 50.

⁷⁰ Address of His Excellency Señor Don Ignacio Calderon, "The Influence of the United States on the Peace Policy of the World," 24 May 1911, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1911*, 66.

⁷¹ Address of Hon. John Hicks, "The Great Northern Peril," 24 May 1911, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1911*, 89, 93.

globe “subservient” to others, “our hope for the peace of the world will fall short of realization.” “The day has passed,” he insisted, “when one man or a body of men could deem himself or themselves a self-appointed guardian of another.”⁷²

The Mohonk conferences did not shy away from tackling difficult questions and contentious topics, as the full and frank discussions of how to interpret the Monroe Doctrine show. But it was equally apparent that the conferences could never quite jettison a paternalistic “Western outlook” with religious and racialistic undertones. This was expressed both by the organizers’ efforts to broaden international representation at their gatherings (by seeking primarily the participation of prominent Europeans), and by the frequent deployment of a problematic distinction between the “civilized” and “uncivilized” peoples to reconcile notions of an enlightened global public with European imperialism and the Monroe Doctrine. As Lucian Ashworth has put it, pacifists were not immune “from racist and racialized arguments,” resulting in the exclusion of “certain peoples from the possibilities of progression to a perceived higher level of civilization.” In this sense, the Mohonk gatherings confirm Ashworth’s suggestion that pacifists of this era exhibited racist tendencies in three ways: enthusiasm for colonialism, positioning the United States and the British Empire as progressive drivers of the pacifist agenda, and advancing a “pacifist version of the civilizing mission.”⁷³

This affected the expansiveness and inclusivity of an emergent global public. Put bluntly, a belief prevailed that this progressive and influential sentiment emanated exclusively from the public sphere of the “civilized” world. Claims to speak for global opinion echoed a “Western outlook” that Ashworth has identified in the likes of Norman Angell (and others) that championed Anglo-Saxon norms and favoured whiteness.⁷⁴ It thus confirms Cecilie Reid’s contention that the Mohonk meetings were preoccupied with “the Anglo-Saxons’ mission of raising the stature of others to a peaceful, productive co-existence.”⁷⁵ This was also apparent in Lyman Abbott’s 1913 evocation of an emergent “international conscience.” This, he argued, had developed more rapidly over the previous fourteen years than in “all the years which preceded,” owing largely to intensified “public agitation” and “the increasing

⁷² Address of Mirza Ali Kula Khan, “The Conditions of Universal Peace,” 24 May 1911, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1911, 82.

⁷³ Lucian M. Ashworth, “Warriors, Pacifists and Empires: Race and Racism in International Thought before 1914,” *International Affairs*, 98, 1 (2022), 281–301, 291. ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Reid, “Peace and Law,” 530. Similarly, Bederman notes how evocations of “civilization” described something that was “itself a racial trait, inherited by all Anglo-Saxons and other ‘advanced’ white races.” Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25.

intermingling of different civilized nations.”⁷⁶ In short, an enlightened international conscience, essential to first establish and subsequently underpin an effective system of international arbitration, must spring from the “civilized” peoples. Such a narrow understanding offered little scope for the peoples of colonized territories to assert meaningful agency within any global public, despite the pleas of Kula Khan and others to embrace a more inclusive definition.

Still, a more benign explanation of the civilized/uncivilized distinction is possible, as the citizens of self-governing states (particularly states with functioning democracies and a free press) exercised a more decisive influence on policymakers and were thus more likely to effect meaningful change. Mohonk’s organizers had always invited “prominent and representative citizens” to the gatherings, those most likely to influence both popular and elite opinion. Attendance at Mohonk was “marked by the high character of its personnel and by its cosmopolitanism,” the intention being to coalesce “a body of representative citizens.” Smiley was particularly anxious that his initiative was sufficiently distinct from a “peace” congress, urging repeatedly that “radical ‘peace’ men ... should not be at all to the front.”⁷⁷ Idealistic pacifists could play a part at Mohonk, but real progress could only be made by converting to the cause those men and women who could affect policymaking. By 1909, Philips felt that this strategy was paying off, noting with satisfaction “the gradual disappearance of the scepticism and distrust which formerly seemed to be written between the lines of the polite letter received from many men of prominence.”⁷⁸

The focus on reaching those with current or future influence informed efforts to increase European participation. A sprinkling of overseas delegates had always attended, but European guests were rare and mostly British. Moreover, many foreign delegates were those based in (or at least passing through) the United States. By 1903, it was clear to the Mohonk organizers that greater industry was needed to solicit interest overseas. Daniel Smiley wrote to the English pacifist Hodgson Pratt in June 1903, noting positively that the arbitration movement was gaining ground in both Britain and France but expressing regret that Pratt had been unable to attend that

⁷⁶ Address of Dr. Lyman Abbott, “Arbitration as a Means for the Promotion of International Justice,” 14 May 1913, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1913*, 15.

⁷⁷ *A Decade’s Review of the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1895–1905* (Mohonk Lake, NY: Dec. 1904), SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series II, Box 1; Albert Smiley to Phillips, 3 Feb. 1904, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 21.

⁷⁸ Secretary’s report for the year ending 31 Oct. 1909, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series II, Box 2.

year's assembly.⁷⁹ The Berne-based International Peace Bureau (IPB) offered further opportunities for the Mohonk group to extend its reach into Europe. The IPB's Albert Gobat wrote to Albert Smiley in October 1903 requesting more information about the Mohonk conferences. In reply, Phillips sent the first eight annual reports of the Mohonk conference and promised to add Gobat to the mailing list.⁸⁰ In early 1905, Phillips hoped that the forthcoming gathering would "have a strong foreign delegation," asking Gobat to "put me in communication with any of your friends or countrymen who might consider invitations." That same year he asked Pratt for information as to which "of your countrymen ... might be in this country" at the time of that year's conference.⁸¹

More concrete efforts to secure European speakers soon followed. Nicholas Murray Butler wrote to Phillips in September 1909 urging that more be done to secure the participation of "some very high class European," recommending the IPU's Lord Weardale. "I wish we could get him," Murray Butler continued, "and a high class Frenchman, say d'Estournelles de Constant, and a high class German." Within days, Phillips had penned invitations to both Weardale and de Constant, and though neither attended in 1910 d'Estournelles did go the following year.⁸² Murray Butler wrote to Phillips again in 1911 maintaining that "still larger representation from abroad" was possible. He suggested inviting the IPU's Christian Lange, the editor of the London *Economist* Francis Wrigley Hirst, and Dr. Wilhelm Paszkowski of the University of Berlin.⁸³ Lange was the only one of the three to attend in 1912, and Phillips later approached him directly to request "a list of some men from Europe who ought to be at the next conference." Lange provided several names, notably Norman Angell but also some German academics (Professor Schücking and Dr. Wehberg), one academic each from Austria and Switzerland (Professor Lammasch and Max Huber respectively), as well as echoing Murray Butler's earlier suggestion of Hirst. He also suggested several "peace workers proper," chiefly the English pacifists Carl Heath (secretary of the National Peace Council), Fred Maddisson (the International Arbitration League), and the Peace Society's William Evans Darby. From mainland Europe, Lange suggested the prominent Austrian pacifist Alfred

⁷⁹ Daniel Smiley to Hodgson Pratt, 2 June 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

⁸⁰ Phillips to Gobat, 11 Nov. 1903, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A2.

⁸¹ Phillips to Pratt, and Phillips to Gobat, both 20 Jan. 1905. See also Phillips's letter to Pratt on 16 Feb. 1905, all SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A3.

⁸² Nicholas Murray Butler to Phillips, 20 Sept. 1909, and Phillips's reply, 24 Sept. 1909, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 117.

⁸³ Nicholas Murray Butler to Phillips, 13 Oct. 1911, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 117.

Fried and the Frenchman Gaston Moch, with the caveat that Fried “does not speak English even tolerably,” whilst he knew nothing of Moch’s proficiency in the language. Elsewhere, Lange recommended the well-known Belgian pacifist Henri La Fontaine, who was “a great traveller, speaks English tolerably well and is an effective orator.”⁸⁴

By the time war came in 1914, the extent of overseas representation at Mohonk had grown significantly from the early gatherings of the 1890s. In this sense, the conference could better claim to represent the emergent global public that it so readily evoked. There was additional progress in including representatives of the burgeoning labour movement, something that Phillips (more so than the Smileys) was keen to harness. In February 1906 Phillips acknowledged to Edwin Mead the Mohonk group’s “shortcomings” in reaching out to workingmen, writing to another correspondent that he was “personally ... especially anxious to see them represented,” considering Albert Smiley’s reservations – that working-class representatives would use the Mohonk platform to advance industrial rather than international arbitration – rather “narrow.”⁸⁵ Indeed, he insisted to Smiley that working-class representation was essential “if we are to pretend it is a representative conference.” Excluding them, warned Phillips, “will antagonise them when [we] really need their help.”⁸⁶ To be sure, the conferences thereafter did include more representatives of organized labour, which, alongside more foreign speakers and a sprinkling of women, *did* increase the inclusivity and diversity of the gatherings. How far the Mohonk conferences could legitimately claim to be “internationalist” is, however, more questionable. At best,

⁸⁴ Phillips to Lange, 9 Jan. 1913, and Lange’s reply, 25 Jan. 1913, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series V, Box 121. Murray Butler and d’Estournelles de Constant became prolific correspondents, and their wartime exchanges have been published as Nadine Akhund and Stéphane Tison, eds., *En guerre pour la paix: Correspondence Paul d’Estournelles de Constant et Nicholas Murray Butler, 1914–1919* (Paris: Alma éditeur, 2018). Norman Angell had become well known following the publication of *The Great Illusion* (1910), and his contribution to peace activism is the subject of Martin Ceadel’s *Living the Great Illusion: Sir Norman Angell, 1872–1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a broader discussion of the IPU, albeit with a greater focus on the 1920s, see Martin Albers, “Between the Crisis of Democracy and World Parliament: The Development of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the 1920s,” *Journal of Global History*, 7, 2 (2012), 189–209. For more on La Fontaine, as well as his fellow Belgian internationalist, Paul Otlet, see Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880–1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 26–30. Laqua has also written about Austrian pacifism, including prominent figures like Fried and his notable collaborator, Bertha von Suttner, in “Pacifism in Fin-de-Siècle Austria: The Politics and Limits of Peace Activism,” *Historical Journal*, 57, 1 (2014), 199–224.

⁸⁵ Phillips to Edwin Mead, 8 Feb. 1906; Phillips to Maynard, 9 Feb. 1906, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A6.

⁸⁶ Phillips to Albert Smiley, 9 Feb. 1906, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series I, Box A6.

this internationalism was redolent of the cosmopolitanism described by Kristin Hoganson as neither universalist or egalitarian, instead one that “celebrated empire, on the part of both the United States and the European powers.”⁸⁷

For most Mohonk contributors, the democratization of global politics, with public opinion an ever more powerful force, extended only to countries considered sufficiently civilized. When articulating his influential conception of an “international mind” at Mohonk in 1912, Nicholas Murray Butler defined it as “nothing else than that habit of thinking of foreign relations and business, and that habit of dealing with them, which regard the several nations of the civilized world as friendly and co-operating equals in aiding the progress of civilization.”⁸⁸ By this reckoning, only “civilized” states could be considered equals within any emergent mechanisms of international society. By extension, the demand to refer disputes to arbitration need not apply to those considered the “internal” affairs of any imperial power. Given time, the “uncivilized” portions of the globe could, under the stewardship and tutelage of the Christian West, join the ranks of “civilized” nations. As one speaker noted in 1907, “there are, unfortunately, some quarters of the earth ... which contain few highly civilized communities,” meaning that, in such places, “there is no such thing as ‘public opinion.’” It was incumbent on the West, therefore, to impress upon “these people the force of public sentiment, by devising some means to cultivate, to arouse, to organize an educated public opinion in those countries.”⁸⁹ The Reverend Sidney Gulick, who was living and working in Kyoto, noted in 1914 that Western influence in East Asia was bearing fruit. “The impact of Christendom on Asia has at last started into new activity those long torpid peoples comprising more than one-half of the human race,” he remarked, and Asia was benefiting from “acquiring our modes of thought and life and organization.”⁹⁰

But Gulick also issued a warning, suggesting that the West must treat other races as equals or risk alienating them. As Asia acquired “the white man’s machinery of civilization,” it was essential that equal treatment within the community of nations must follow. Still, Gulick was guilty of flagrantly “othering” those for whom he was preaching equality of treatment, the suggested uplift to Western standards of civilization cloaked persistently in racist

⁸⁷ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

⁸⁸ Opening address of President Nicholas Murray Butler, “The International Mind,” 15 May 1912, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1912*, 15–16.

⁸⁹ Address of Francis B. Loomis, 24 May 1907, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1911*, 164.

⁹⁰ Remarks by Rev. Sidney L. Gulick, “The Church as a Factor in Racial Relations,” 29 May 1914, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1914*, 200–5, 200.

rhetoric. “We are discovering that Asiatics are as brainy as we are,” continued Gulick, “and that they produce men of splendid character.” Much now depended on the West’s willingness “to accept the fact that men of other races and colors and even with almond eyes, are our equals.”⁹¹ Equals, of course, only insofar as Asia mimicked the trappings of Western civilization and where a country was independent of Western colonial control. What applied to Japan, therefore, would not axiomatically apply to others. Despite a growing recognition that the label “civilized” could be applied to non-white and non-Christian peoples, the programme of the Western-centric Mohonk elites retained an instinctive missionary zeal. An “international mind” required careful cultivation, starting in the United States, then taking hold in other “advanced” or “civilized” countries, before spreading further afield. Always, however, the fear of a backslide into barbarism was prevalent, and this could even happen in apparently “civilized” countries. After all, if public opinion could be moulded in support of international arbitration and peace, it was also susceptible to the more pernicious forces promoting armaments and war. This had already been acknowledged during both the Spanish–American War and the Second Boer War and was later deployed to explain why armaments in Europe were increasing rather than decreasing. One English participant at the 1909 conference blamed the “yellow press” for prompting the current “naval scare” that so soured Anglo-German relations.⁹²

In seeking to “create and direct public sentiment in favor of international arbitration,” the Mohonk group reflected simultaneously an optimistic view of public opinion and a melancholy recognition of its susceptibility to manipulation. They also embodied an American belief in the progressive and beneficent influence of an empowered public. Wertheim contends that the enthronement of “public opinion as the underwriter of world order and world peace” was an integral facet of a distinctly American internationalism.⁹³ That the United States would emphasize public opinion so strongly was unsurprising. James Bryce, the liberal politician who later became Britain’s ambassador to Washington, had famously described America’s unique attachment to public opinion in the opening line of *The American Commonwealth* (1888): “In no country is public opinion so powerful as in the United States; in no country can it be so well studied.”⁹⁴ This is not to say that Bryce always considered public opinion a force for good. He warned

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 203–5.

⁹² Address of William S. Clark, 6 June 1900, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1900*, 25; Address of J. Allen Baker, MP, “The True Feeling of the English and the German People,” 20 May 1909, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1909*, 83.

⁹³ Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World*, 22.

⁹⁴ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), 3.

the 1909 Mohonk conference that whilst the press was frequently blamed for jingoistic outbursts, the papers were simply giving the reading public what the public wanted. “In every country the newspapers try to meet and gratify the wishes of the people,” he remarked, “their faults quite as much as their virtues.” In this sense, continued Bryce, it remains “the ordinary citizens who are the ultimate masters both of the government and of the press.”⁹⁵

Bryce believed that further education and enlightenment could create a global public opinion able to transcend petty national rivalries and prejudices. His compatriot, Norman Angell, struck a similar tone at the 1913 conference, noting that progress would be possible once “public opinion is able to pierce the illusions” that underpin nationalist sentiment.⁹⁶ Angell and Bryce were echoing a view already articulated by Elihu Root in 1908, when he told the American Society of International Law that public opinion provided the ultimate sanction for international law. For Root, the “injury which inevitably follows nonconformity to public opinion” would compel nations to adhere.⁹⁷ The ideas emanating from Mohonk thus anticipated President Woodrow Wilson’s comments to the third plenary session of the Paris Peace Conference on 14 February 1919 that the future League of Nations relied “chiefly upon one great force, and that is the moral force of the public opinion of the world.”⁹⁸ In this sense, the twenty-two Mohonk conferences *did* have an enduring legacy, influencing the subsequent development of ideas and mechanisms in the direction of international law and organization.⁹⁹ This despite the prospects for their programme looking bleak once war erupted in Europe in 1914, and bleaker still once America’s entry into that war rendered the 1916 Mohonk conference the final chapter.

⁹⁵ Address of James Bryce, “Allegiance to Humanity,” 21 May 1909, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1909, 162.

⁹⁶ Address of Norman Angell, “Some False Theories Supporting the War System,” 14 May 1913, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1913, 78.

⁹⁷ Elihu Root, “The Sanction of International Law,” presidential address before the second annual meeting of the American Society of International Law, 1908, *International Conciliation*, 8 (July 1908), 11–12. The American Society of International Law originated at the Mohonk conferences, first being considered in 1905 and formally coming into existence in early 1906.

⁹⁸ President Woodrow Wilson’s address to the third plenary session of the Preliminary Peace Conference, 14 Feb. 1919, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Reel 448. For more on how Wilson’s stance was anticipated by earlier peace advocates see Daniel Hucker, *Public Opinion and Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Global Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 23–31.

⁹⁹ Howlett notes Mohonk’s importance in the establishment of the American Society of International Law, as well as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the World Peace Foundation, both in 1910. Howlett, “Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration”, 374.

MOHONK AND THE ONSET OF WORLD WAR I

Like most other American societies associated with peace and international arbitration, the Mohonk group was rocked by the outbreak of a European war and initially uncertain how to respond. Phillips expressed the hope – widely shared amongst peace activists – that “one good result of this European war will be the awakening of the nations to see a better way to settle difficulties.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, allow the war to run its course and it might just prove to be the most effective peace propaganda imaginable. This was reflected in the platform adopted by the 1915 conference: “The present war daily furnishes convincing proof of the superiority of those measures [arbitration] over the resort to violence.” That same conference saw Daniel Smiley stress that participants *could* discuss matters freely but must avoid “direct criticism of specific policies or acts of any belligerent or groups of belligerents.”¹⁰¹ The Mohonk group thus continued to extol the virtues of arbitration in the hope that something better might emerge from the ashes of conflict. As Smiley remarked in 1916, “in time of war we should prepare for peace.”¹⁰² Unlike more doctrinal pacifist organizations, the Mohonk group did not need to consider whether they should advocate using America’s neutrality to seek a mediated settlement and thus end the conflict.

This owed partly to their long-standing efforts to distinguish their conferences from those of more “radical” peace groups, but also to the fact that many Mohonk participants felt keenly from the start that Germany and its allies must be defeated. Pressure from French correspondents surely contributed to this sentiment. Léon Bollack wrote to Phillips on 10 September 1914 that he was delighted to see “that American feeling is in favor of our cause,” but still urged that “America ought to come to our side.” In reply, Phillips expressed sympathy “with those unjustly suffering,” but averred that the Mohonk group could “take no action that might embarrass the American government in its earnest efforts to limit the scope and duration of the gigantic struggle.” He suggested also that American entry into the war “would only add to the carnage.”¹⁰³ Although the 1915 and 1916 conferences mostly adhered to the directive to avoid criticizing either side, the

¹⁰⁰ Phillips to Judge David Davis, 25 Sept. 1914, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series V, Box 118.

¹⁰¹ Platform of 1915 Mohonk conference, remarks by Daniel Smiley, 19 May 1915, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1915*, 9.

¹⁰² Remarks by Daniel Smiley, first session, Wednesday morning, 17 May 1916, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report, 1916*, 9.

¹⁰³ Léon Bollack to Phillips, 10 Sept. 1914, and Phillips’s reply, 29 Sept. 1914, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series III, Box 117.

overwhelming (if often implicit) tone was that the Allied cause was righteous. One speaker in 1915 told his audience that disarmament would be impossible if Germany emerged victorious as “a philosophy bound up in militarism will have triumphed also.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, Germany and its allies were branded as “uncivilized,” contributing to the conviction post-Armistice that any postwar “league” should, at least initially, comprise the victors and omit the vanquished. Charles Eliot, president of Harvard, recommended in 1915 a postwar league of “likeminded nations” with sufficient levels of “public liberty” to prevent their governments embarking upon similar paths of aggression to that taken by Berlin and Vienna in 1914.¹⁰⁵

Even as war raged in Europe, those gathered at Mohonk refused to abandon the fundamental convictions that had underpinned their efforts for more than two decades. They still believed that arbitration could be substituted for war and that more robust international mechanisms could reduce, if not eliminate, future conflicts. They believed too that an enlightened public opinion would be the principal sanction underpinning such mechanisms. To be sure, some acknowledged that additional sanctions might be necessary. William I. Hull accepted that “a genuine international police power” might be required but was reluctant to dismiss the power wielded by “the great forces of international diplomacy,” including both “a national and international public opinion.”¹⁰⁶ President Wilson echoed this view in February 1919, insisting that “armed force is in the background” of the new League of Nations, but its ultimate sanction lay in the “public opinion of the world.”¹⁰⁷ Though shaken by the 1914–18 war, it was clear that many of those associated with Mohonk continued to believe stridently in their cause. The Vermont academic Frank C. Partridge claimed in November 1917 that “one of the most obvious results of the war will be the increased influence and authority of the peoples in international relations,” public opinion wielding ever greater control over diplomacy. Elihu Root expressed similar hopes in 1921, repeating his conviction that “the public opinion of mankind” was so mighty that it could, if sufficiently “intelligent, informed and disciplined,” control the conduct of nations as it already controls the conduct of individuals.¹⁰⁸ That

¹⁰⁴ Address by Theodore S. Woolsey, “War and Disarmament,” 20 May 1915, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 68–69.

¹⁰⁵ Address of Charles W. Eliot, “Hopes for the Future,” 21 May 1915, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1915, 160.

¹⁰⁶ Remarks of Professor William I. Hull (Swarthmore), 17 May 1916, *Lake Mohonk Conference Report*, 1916, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson’s address, 14 Feb. 1919, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Reel 448.

¹⁰⁸ “The Future of International Law,” address delivered by Frank C. Partridge at Middlebury College, Charter Day, 1 Nov. 1917, SCPC, Lake Mohonk Papers, Series X, Box 176; Elihu

these hopes would be dashed within a generation needs no further elaboration here.

The stories of individuals and organizations committed to peace rarely have happy endings. The story of the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration is no exception. The 1916 conference was the final act. Once the United States joined the Allied cause in April 1917, “it became no longer possible to gather together the representative men and women necessary to carry on the work.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the entire 1895–1916 period was also, at least superficially, one of repeated disappointments. Arbitration treaties were frequently scuppered by the Senate, America went to war with Spain, Great Britain waged war in South Africa, the Russians and Japanese came to blows, and regional conflicts in the Balkans anticipated the 1914–18 war. Advances *were* made in perfecting the arbitration apparatus, owing chiefly to the 1899 and 1907 Hague conferences, but aspirations for disarmament were crushed by the rampant armaments race that foreshadowed 1914. Despite this, and despite the unmistakable echoes of racial supremacy and imperial hubris, the Mohonk story is one that merits greater attention. The arbitration conferences represented a significant effort on the part of the citizenry – first in North America but then more globally – to influence and ultimately change diplomatic norms. For this alone, Mohonk deserves a more prominent place within the literature on peace history, internationalism, and Progressive Era activism in the United States. Certainly, they added impetus to the global movement in support of the Hague conferences, and to the establishment in the United States of both the Carnegie Endowment and the World Peace Foundation in 1910.¹¹⁰

The Mohonk story also reveals much about the degree of faith placed in public opinion, both nationally and internationally, and concomitant efforts to cultivate a global public sentiment capable of reining in the dogs of war. That these efforts failed does not render the story superfluous, but rather provides a salutary and instructive lesson to anyone seeking today to harness the support of that most fickle of beasts – public opinion. Appeals to public opinion are easily made, and it is easy to become convinced that public opinion must instinctively endorse what appears incontrovertible, such as favouring peace over war. But such appeals and assumptions are fraught with peril, especially when accompanied by paternalistic (even patronizing)

Root’s presidential address at the fifteenth annual meeting of the American Society of International Law, 7 April 1921, SCPC, Elihu Root Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Partington, *The Story of Mohonk*, 82–85.

¹¹⁰ Laurence M. Hauptmann, Introduction to *Index of the Proceedings of the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration, 1895–1916* (1976), cited in Burgess, *Mohonk, Its People and Spirit*, 47.

arguments about the need to elevate an ignorant and ill-educated public. These challenges are amplified when purporting to speak for a “global” public with myriad linguistic, historic, and cultural complexities, in so doing privileging an undeniably problematic, if not overtly racist, Western outlook. Nevertheless, the individuals who frequented Mohonk *were* convinced that their cause resonated with an increasingly powerful and cohesive international public. This despite the 1895–1916 period brimming with frequent and brutal outbursts of jingoism, burgeoning levels of global armaments, and the most catastrophic conflagration experienced to date. Worse still, the very same public that was supposedly bemoaning armaments and war appeared to be pushing their nations into conflict. The Mohonk participants discovered that public opinion was no panacea. Instead, it was fickle, susceptible to manipulation, and operating chiefly at a national rather than international level. But their efforts were not without impact, as the focus and discussion at Mohonk clearly influenced subsequent conceptions of both “world opinion” and international organization that took shape both during and after the 1914–18 war. The Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration merit more attention than this article provides, but it is hoped that this contribution goes some way to showcasing their significance and impact.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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