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HIST 343 Research Seminar: War, Military and the American Nation

**How Axis Expansionism and the Second World War Affected Oberlin College President**  
**Ernest Hatch Wilkins’ Beliefs on Peace and How to Achieve It**

President Ernest Hatch Wilkins was a president tasked with guiding a college through one of the darkest periods of human history. This contemplative and intensely passionate man was at the helm of Oberlin College from the start of the Great Depression to the end of the Second World War, and during the global ideological and geopolitical turmoil in between. Wilkins had a strong devotion to peace, to duty, to anti-authoritarianism, and to his faith; these devotions, previously in harmony with one another, were driven into conflict as the world began to be consumed by war. Wilkins would spend his tenure at Oberlin negotiating what place his beliefs had in a world devolving into violence and totalitarianism, and attempting to determine what world could be built from the chaos that would be protected from seeing such horrors again.

Ernest Hatch Wilkins was born in Newton Center, Massachusetts on September 14, 1880 to Samuel F. Wilkins and Laura Hatch Wilkins. Wilkins graduated from Newton High School at age 15 as valedictorian. In 1896 Wilkins went to Amherst College where, in 1897, he would take the opportunity to travel to Italy and discover his love for the Italian language. This experience would lead him to adopting a focus on Romance languages in his studies. Wilkins would obtain his bachelor’s and master’s degree at Amherst in 1901 and 1903, respectively. From the time of

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1 “E.H. Wilkins Takes Oberlin Helm in Fall”, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 26, 1927.
earning his bachelor’s until 1904 he held an instructorship in Romance languages at Amherst, and then held a new instructorship of the same kind at Harvard starting in 1906. Also in 1906 Wilkins was married to Oriana Phillips Hall, with whom he had two children. Harvard was the place he earned his doctorate at in 1910. He would continue his instructorship until 1912, when he was recruited by the University of Chicago to be an associate professor of Romance languages, being promoted to a full professorship in 1916. During the Great War Dr. Wilkins would join the YMCA administration, first as a recruiter of YMCA educational secretaries for France and Italy, and eventually as director of all YMCA educational work in US-based army camps and naval stations. He would also write multiple books for US Army use, including “Army French”. For his efforts he would be awarded the Italian title of Knight of the Order of the Crown.\(^2\) In 1923 Wilkins would acquire the additional role of Dean of the College of Arts, Literature, and Science, where he would work until 1926. By this time Wilkins was already accruing much clout via his work on Italian literature, on which he was a leading academic in the field, and via his development of collegiate education theories, where he was already nationally recognized for his creation of orientation courses at the University of Chicago.\(^3\)

By 1926 Oberlin College was looking for a new president, and Dr. Wilkins’ name was repeatedly mentioned by Oberlin faculty and alumni, as well as numerous educators across the nation whom the College consulted during the search. After examining over 100 candidates Oberlin College decided Wilkins met the criteria they were looking for: he was relatively young, an accomplished scholar, a capable administrator, and would be the first Oberlin College President to not be a clergyman. Dr. Wilkins also found much appealing about Oberlin College: he knew many alumni, some of whom were his friends; Oberlin was one of the top schools in the

\(^2\) ibid
\(^3\) ibid
nation in terms of faculty and finances; he admired the College’s “distinguished breadth of view” and its “deep spirit of service”; he supported its co-educational nature; he approved of its lack of fraternities; he was happy with its midwest location; and he believed his services were best-used in the role of a college administrator.\(^5\) It was the case that Oberlin College and the now-President Wilkins were well-suited for one another.

While President Wilkins brought an impressive resume with him, he also brought with him characteristics as central to his identity as they were to his administrative style: his firm belief in an individual’s civic duties and his religious faith. In many talks, speeches, and interviews President Wilkins would often discuss the necessity of civic duty amongst the citizenry, and especially amongst college students. His view was that, in the complex and dangerous modern times, the survival of the nation and of democracy would require more numerous, more devoted, and more intelligent citizens than ever before.\(^6\) It was especially important to create “good citizens” out of college students, as the majority of those in public leadership positions were college graduates.\(^7\)

This emphasis on civic duty likely came from his religious beliefs. President Wilkins was a devout Congregationalist and saw the presence of religion and religious behavior in many aspects of life. Throughout his presidency at Oberlin he would regularly deliver sermons in Finney Chapel, often make connections between a topic and religion during an assembly talk, and would commend the religious character of late faculty members in eulogies he gave. Crucially, Wilkins believed that religion was likely the strongest impetus for peace in the world. In a November 12, 1933 address titled “The Religious Approach to Peace” Wilkins

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\(^4\) “President Wilkins States why He Came to Oberlin”, *The Oberlin Review*, June 30, 1927
\(^5\) ibid
\(^6\) “Civic Duties are Discussed by Dr. Wilkins”, *The Oberlin Review*, March 31, 1936
\(^7\) ibid
acknowledged Christianity’s historical connection to war, but said that the more warlike Christianity had become the further it had moved from Christ. He believed that the multitude of Christian peace societies, across denominations, that had sprung up starting in the 18th century were one of the strongest forces for peace in modern times and throughout history. In the same address Wilkins stated “certainly the central spirit of religion craves and seeks unity, craves and seeks an inner peace for the full attainment of which there must be peace in community, in nation, and in the international order”. These beliefs help to shape Wilkins into a lifelong, ardent peace activist.

This want for peace did not manifest itself in a pure and idealistic rejection of war in all of its forms. Wilkins was very much a pragmatist, but it was not on a purely pragmatic basis for which Wilkins acknowledged the place of some forms of war; his idealism also left room for certain situations to permit war to occur, and he regarded conscientious objection as foolhardy. Wilkins understood war in terms of its violence, and as such it could be understood at the level of everyday violence, such as self-defense and police action. In Wilkins’ mind war was one of the most evil forces in the world, but there were evils worse than war, chief among them being enslavement. To subject a person to the short but violent phenomenon of war was both evil and tragic in all aspects, but the tragedy of war was at least temporary; enslavement was at least as tragic and evil, and it was indefinite. It was thus a duty to protect oneself from a state of enslavement. To protect oneself, one had to live in a community and a nation that allowed them to be free, and in turn to protect that community and that nation from any force of tyranny. From these ideals Wilkins envisioned three circumstances in which war was acceptable: the first was in self-defense against a foreign invader; the second was if an international body, such as the

8 The Religious Approach to Peace*, November 12, 1933 in Unpublished Talks, 1927-36, Box 107, Oberlin College Archives (OCA)
League of Nations, required the United States to assist in military sanctions against an “international felon”; the third was, under certain circumstances, the defense of one’s international neighbors. It was in this third category that Wilkins found complication, and would be the source of his greatest conflict during the course of the 1930s.

At the turn of the decade into the 1930s Wilkins was generally optimistic about the capacity of humanity to find lasting world peace. In his first 1930-31-school-year address to the student body Wilkins outlined his dream of an international, seven-year collegiate study of the problems of war and peace. In this effort basic studies would be conducted normally, but advanced studies in nearly every field would focus around these central themes. He espoused that such a program may not exist in his or his listeners’ lifetimes, and that the problem of war would likely not be solved by the current generation, but that this was a workable and perhaps inevitable method of ending war. At the same time, Wilkins envisioned a serious threat to humanity: war could eventually reach a level of terribleness that could “exterminate civilization”. For Wilkins, there was a race between the cause for peace and the destructiveness of war; eventually, one would forever win out against the other. In 1930, Wilkins believed humanity would soon take its greatest step forward in favor of peace so far.

Wilkins would continue to argue for a research-oriented approach to world peace, but by 1935 the international situation had complicated things. The rise of a red Russia decades ago and a black Germany, Italy, and Japan recently had created a series of international felons Wilkins viewed with growing concern. To Wilkins, dictatorship, regardless of its ideological foundations, was fundamentally incompatible with peace; conversely, democracy was fundamentally

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9 “Students Against War I: Pledge Resistance”, November 6, 1935 in Addresses on the subject of War (WWII), approx. 1939-45, Box 107, OCA
11 ibid
incompatible with war. Additionally, Wilkins was primarily concerned with a European war. While the war between Japan and China was ever-present in his mind, and although he detested said war intensely, his primary goal was to keep the United States out of war. To Wilkins, the main threat to the achievement of that goal, aside, perhaps, from domestic jingoism, was a war between the European great powers. Wilkins kept these in mind when considering what ought to be done to keep the United States from being drawn into or forced into war. By the end of 1935 one was already being attempted by the United States, while another was being contemplated by academics. Neutrality and isolationism found manifestation in the Neutrality Act of 1935, and the concept of an international federation was being discussed.

Over the course of the mid-to-late 1930s Wilkins would develop a complicated relationship with both isolationism and neutrality, but at least at first he was willing to try it. Two years after the Neutrality Act was first passed Wilkins had his criticisms of the policy, and was cautious about believing in its potential success, but thought that the idea of neutrality needed to be tested for its validity. If the model succeeded, the United States would prove a new technique for peace; if it failed, the concept of isolationism in the modern world could be decidedly and permanently discarded.

At the same time, Wilkins was considering the idea of an international federation. A particular type of international federation appealed to him: one where membership was exclusively for democracies. Following from his belief that dictatorship was an inherently belligerent government structure, any totalitarian nation had no place in a federation designed to maintain a lasting peace; an international federation of democracies, given that the world’s democracies held awesome military and resource might, could instead pose an insurmountable

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12 “What Can America Do to Preserve Peace?”, January 29, 1937 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
13 ibid
challenge to any would-be warmongers, thus serving as a deterrent and keeping the international peace.\textsuperscript{14} It was, further, not sufficient to maintain only a confederation or league such as the League of Nations. By 1939 Wilkins likened the reasons why the League of Nations failed to the reasons why the Articles of Confederation failed amongst the Thirteen Colonies, and, just as the Colonies moved from a confederate system to a federal one, so too must the world move to a system of federation.\textsuperscript{15} Once the idea had found its way into Wilkins’ mind, he became one of its apostles. To him, the belief on which international body would be required to maintain a lasting peace would not greatly change, but rather only what exact form it ought to take and when it could or should be implemented.

Wilkins did not share the same stalwart belief in neutrality as he did in international democratic federation. By spring of 1939 Wilkins had already turned from a tentative supporter of neutrality to a critic of the policy, considering it a “green light for aggressors”.\textsuperscript{16} Wilkins had two main issues with neutrality: first, that it had no deterring effect for international aggressors, and second that there was no practical policy that would create “true” neutrality. When the United States signed the Neutrality Act it removed the ambiguity over whether it would join with a victim nation in the event of invasion. This in effect took the United States out of the calculations of aggressor nations in contemplating their own expansion, and thus made attempts at expansion much more likely.

At the same time, there was no way for the United States to maintain a “true” neutrality without making the unacceptable moral compromise of supplying the aggressor and defender nations equally, a circumstance Wilkins believed would inevitably give the aggressor nation an

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}
\textsuperscript{15} “Keeping Out of War”, Radio Talk by President Ernest H. Wilkins of Oberlin College, Station WGAR, Cleveland, May 8, 1939 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
\textsuperscript{16} “A Presidential Message to Congress”, April 20, 1939 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
advantage. In the case of a European war specifically, this could cause a grave issue if the aggressor nation or nations (specifically Germany and Russia, either alone or together) capitulated the “bulwark” Western European democratic nations, leaving the United States alone in any subsequent conflict.\textsuperscript{17} Since the United States could not accept this outcome it would inevitably trade more with the defender nation than with the aggressor, putting the United States \textit{de facto} on the side of the defenders and increasing the likelihood that the aggressor nation would retaliate against the United States militarily, drawing the nation into war.\textsuperscript{18} Wilkins was also frustrated with how President Roosevelt did not apply the Neutrality Act to the war in the Far East, meaning that the United States was supplying Japan at the same time Japan was invading China.\textsuperscript{19} This meant, in effect, that the way the Neutrality Act was being enforced created the very kind of morally unacceptable outcome Wilkins was concerned with.

Even as he outlined his many issues with neutrality and isolationism, it can not be said that Wilkins fully rejected the concepts. In the winter of 1938-1939 Wilkins still believed that neutrality, and specifically the Neutrality Act, had a purpose to play in keeping the United States out of any future, relatively short war and thus should not be repealed. Despite his acknowledgement of the dangers of dictatorial aggression and the threat it posed to the United States, Wilkins was still determined to ensure the United States stayed out of any European or Far East war. What he did want were revisions to the Act to ensure the President had to apply the Act universally, to make totally illegal the selling of military weapons and equipment in general, and to make illegal the selling of “secondary war material” such as foodstuff and steel to either side of any military conflict. Even then, Wilkins accepted that the United States was stuck in a

\textsuperscript{17} “The Way to Peace”, May 18, 1939 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
\textsuperscript{18} ibid
\textsuperscript{19} “The Dilemma of Neutrality”, 1938 in Addresses on the subject of War (WWII), approx. 1939-45, Box 107, OCA
dilemma of either attempting a “true” neutrality or of adopting what Wilkins called a “discriminatory” neutrality.\textsuperscript{20} For a time Wilkins believed that “true” neutrality was the proper solution to this dilemma. Only a few months later, however, in the spring of 1939 Wilkins had changed his position: in consideration of the potential deterrent value of arms and weapons sales to the British and French he supported an amendment to the Act that would allow for such sales. He believed that, as Europe was still at peace, it was not technically unneutral to sell arms to Britain and France, and thus arms could be sold as a method of deterrence without violating the neutrality of the United States.\textsuperscript{21}

With the invasion of Poland and the commencement of the Second World War in Europe Wilkins made a decisive pivot towards absolute neutrality. First, as arms sales would no longer be preventing a European war, and such arms sales risked pulling the United States into the war, Wilkins revoked his support for the policy. This was not a decision made without acknowledgement that it was morally and pragmatically essential that the Allies won the war, but to Wilkins it was more important to keep the United States out of war. Wilkins justified this both by stating that he did not want Americans to experience the awful suffering of a war that the Allies may be able to win without United States involvement, and by saying that the role of the United States in the world at that moment was to continue “the safe maintenance and the constant perfecting of the haven and stronghold of democracy”.\textsuperscript{22} Wilkins acknowledged that there may come a time where the United States was forced into the war, but that, even though the danger of such an event was real, it was neither immediate nor inevitable.

Over the next few months Wilkins grew in his belief that the United States would stay out of the war. By May of 1940 Wilkins was so convinced that the political unpopularity of a war

\textsuperscript{\(\text{20}\text{ ibid}\)}

\textsuperscript{\(\text{21}\text{ “Democracy at Bay”, September 20, 1939 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA}\)}

\textsuperscript{\(\text{22}\text{ ibid}\)}
declaration and the general unpreparedness of the United States military would keep the nation out of war that he did not see citizen activism as necessary to ensure the maintenance of peace. At the same time, Wilkins accepted and encouraged the build-up of national defense resources, seeing such action as the next attempt at deterrence of foreign aggression. When the Selective Training and Service Bill was proposed Wilkins gave it his support, although again he had his criticisms of the Bill. Amongst other things he believed that certain provisions were required for professions that he believed were important for the civilian side of national defense, including a recognition of the importance of collegiate education in such an endeavor. Wilkins’ support for this and other national defense policies was also rooted in the belief that, should the United States wind up at war, it was better to send trained, prepared, and properly equipped men into the fray. It was thus that the financial and temporal costs of national defense expansion was ultimately worth it.

Wilkins’ confidence in the capacity of the United States to stay out of the Second World War would gradually degrade after the passing of the Selective Training and Service Act. In an address titled “Coming of Age”, given on April 30, 1941, Wilkins acknowledged that the threat of German expansionism drawing the nation into the war had gradually increased to grave proportions, so much so that “it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the issue of peace or war will be so narrow as to be decided by letters from Oberlin - even, conceivably, by the writing or the non-writing of some one letter from Oberlin”. At the same time, this still meant that war was not inevitable, and thus the program of national defense was more important than ever.

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23 “That Which Rises in the East”, May 28, 1940 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
24 Ibid
25 July 9, 1940 Memo, OCA in World War II Subject Folder, OCA; August 14, 1940 Memo, OCA in World War II Subject Folder, OCA; “Education and the National Defense”, April 6, 1940 on Oberlin on the Air: Radio Talk over Mutual Network.
26 “Coming of Age”, April 30, 1941 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
before. It was also now essential that citizens partook in civic engagement, especially in writing to their Congressmen. Wilkins still held out hope that a combination of defensive deterrence and domestic political pressure would suffice to keep the nation from war.

By November of 1941, such hope in Wilkins was all but extinguished. In a letter written on November 9th titled “National Problems: November, 1941, A Personal View” Wilkins outlined both a bleak international situation and a fairly drastic departure from his previous neutrality-focused policies. In the letter, Wilkins first outlined the fundamental principles he was considering when reshaping his thoughts and policies. As always, Wilkins maintained that enslavement was a fate worse than total war, but he now added his belief that the cost of maintaining a strong national defense, if forced to do so indefinitely in the face of an existential menace, would eventually be “worse than war in its total affect [sic] upon the nation”. He also outlined his belief that it was no longer feasible to consider war and peace as binary; rather, it must be considered as a “scale that runs from total peace to total war”. This scale could be broken down into six stages, from A to F. Each stage towards war along this scale increased the violence and suffering, and thus was progressively more evil; however, the differences between the evil of each stage were great. Always keeping to his belief in the minimization of suffering, maintaining the nation’s position at the lowest possible stage still adequate for the situation was the most morally desirable policy. From this base Wilkins considered the geopolitical situation.

He began with the fundamental premise that Germany was on a quest to achieve world domination. Given this, should Germany defeat the Allies, and especially if it should defeat

27 “National Problems: November, 1941: A Personal View”, page 1 paragraph 4, November 9, 1941 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
28 ibid, page 1 paragraph 2
29 ibid, page 1 paragraph 11
30 ibid, page 4 paragraph 20
31 ibid, page 2 paragraph 7
Russia, Germany will pose an existential threat to the United States. In this situation Germany would ramp up the propaganda and sabotage operations Wilkins believed were already occurring, would begin submarine warfare against the United States, and would begin a massive build-up operation with the intent to invade the Western Hemisphere. This situation could also end in a war with Japan, depending on the circumstances. Should all of this occur it would be required to maintain a strong national defense as either a deterrent or, if necessary, a means of repelling invasion for an indefinite length of time, a situation already accepted as worse than total war. It was also important to consider the currently falling morale of the Allies and the Russians, as well as the dispositions of the neutral countries.

With all of this in mind Wilkins proposed a multitude of policies. The most significant of these policies pertained to his scale of war and peace. Stage A, the first stage, was the supplying of one side with material aid, but without any military commitments. Wilkins believed the United States had already moved to Stage B, what he called “limited convoy warfare”. In this stage convoys charged with supplying material aid were protected by the military resources required to defend the transport of such material, but only up to national boundaries. Now, Wilkins believed, it was time to move forward to Stage C: unlimited convoy warfare. In this stage convoys were provided a military escort in the strength and numbers “necessary to insure the delivery of the highest possible proportion of material aid to its destination”. Aid would thus be given in the highest quantities possible without sacrificing the United States’ ability to

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32 ibid, page 1 paragraph 6; page 2 paragraph 7
33 ibid, page 2 paragraph 9
34 ibid, page 1 paragraph 5; page 2 paragraph 10
35 ibid, page 1 paragraph 6; page 3-4 paragraph 16
36 ibid, page 2 paragraph 1A
37 ibid, page 2 paragraph 11B; page 3 paragraph 13
38 ibid, page 2 paragraph 11C; page 4 paragraph 18
grow the national defense. Wilkins believed that this shift should be accompanied by the repeal of the Neutrality Act, stating that the Act had proven to be a failed policy except in the fact that it had prevented the United States from entering the war when it was totally unprepared to do so. The repeal of the Act, Wilkins believed, combined with unlimited convoy warfare would send a strong message to the Allies, to the neutral nations, and to potentially rebellious citizens in the occupied territories. Finally, it was important to enter into negotiations with Japan and convince them that Germany posed as much a threat to them as it did to the United States. His final thoughts of the letter encapsulate his ultimate view of these policy positions:

“Our position is then that we are primarily concerned with our own defense - but in the process of that self-defense we are entitled to the satisfaction of realizing that we are striving to prevent the disappearance of democracy and of freedom from the earth.

Our defense effort should be constantly accompanied by two other and related efforts: first, the effort to maintain and to perfect our own democracy; and, second, the effort to establish an international order which may serve to prevent the recurrence of the tragic compulsions which are now upon us”.

Of particular note, and perhaps surprisingly, is the degree of strength, or lack thereof, behind Wilkins’ wish to stop at unlimited convoy warfare. When discussing the best stage of war for the United States to be at, Wilkins admitted that he had no “significant opposing argument” to moving to Stage D, unlimited convoy warfare combined with preventative military action against enemy military forces which are “sources of interference with the delivery of material or as

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39 ibid, pages 3-4 paragraphs 15-18
40 ibid, page 3 paragraphs 13-14; page 4 paragraphs 18-19
41 ibid, page 5 paragraph 24
42 ibid, pages 5-6 paragraphs 25-26
sources of attack upon our outposts”, or even Stage E, which was Stage D without any target restrictions for the air and naval forces. He even went as far to say that he could “imagine a combination of military circumstances and conditions within this country which might lead me to favor extension even to Stage E”. The only proviso he could attach was the belief that Stage F, total war, would require a declaration of war. It is difficult to argue that Stage E, or even Stage D, is anything less than a state of war, and so in effect Wilkins had at this point accepted that the United States engaging in some level of warfare was not only necessary but potentially desirable.

On November 18, 1941, after the gutting of the Neutrality Act by Congress, Wilkins gave his final thoughts on the policy of neutrality in an assembly talk titled “Death of Neutrality”. In the talk he reiterated both that neutrality was worth attempting as well as the grievances he had always had with the policy and the Act itself, commenting that these issues had likely “foredoomed” the project. He also mentioned that by the summer of 1940 he believed that the Act ought to be repealed. Towards the end of his talk he admitted that he was wrong to oppose the 1939 revisions that allowed for arms trades with the Allies, that at the time at least some of his opposition was likely due to wishful thinking that neutrality would ultimately prove a successful policy, and that he was now glad that the United States had starting supplying Britain with arms when it did. He ended his talk with an acceptance of the total and irrevocable death of the concept of neutrality in the modern world, and a call for a focus on national defense and to the building of an international federation of democracies.

The attack on Pearl Harbor came as a shock to Wilkins as it did to the rest of the United States, perhaps in part due to his belief that war would come from Europe rather than Asia.

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43 ibid, page 3 paragraphs 11D-E; page 4 paragraph 21
44 ibid, page 5 paragraph 23
45 “Death of Neutrality”, November 18, 1941 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
Almost immediately Wilkins set himself to assisting in the war effort in whatever capacity that he could. By January of 1942 Wilkins had already set in motion a series of changes to put Oberlin College on a war footing. Amongst them included: a comprehensive list of courses relevant to military service, including new courses such as Military Acoustics, Navigation, and Zoology; the waiving of any additional fees incurred by changing schedules to incorporate the new courses; and a mandatory physical examination for all seniors, with additional advice regarding physical condition provided to those who required it. Wilkins also instituted his most famous wartime policy: personally responding to every letter sent by Oberlinians in military service. This correspondence was accompanied by a variety of services provided by Wilkins, such as passing along any letters sent from one serviceman to another, alerting servicemen to the presence of any other Oberlinians on the same base, and providing free subscriptions to the Oberlin Review and the Alumni Magazine. As the war went on Wilkins would expand Oberlin College’s capacity to assist in the war effort, including accepting a V-12 Navy Officer Training Program unit onto the campus, and distributing a pamphlet outlining ways that women could contribute to the war effort and the resources Oberlin College could provide when working towards such contributions. Throughout the war Wilkins was fully devoted not only to a service of his nation, but also to the fostering within his students the necessary skills and character traits required for them to survive the war and return home as citizens ready to do their utmost in preserving the peace they won.

When the war was over, Wilkins found the establishment of the United Nations a moment that could prove to be “as far-reaching in their implications for the progress of mankind

46 “The College on a War Basis”, January 12, 1942 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA
47 “Biographical Material: Ernest Hatch Wilkins, President of Oberlin College, 1927-1946”, OCA
48 “Uniforms Under the Elm: Oberlin’s V-12 Unit” by Patricia Y. Ikeda, 1979, OCA
49 “Opportunities for Oberlin Women in War Time”, February 6, 1943 in World War II Subject Folder, OCA
as any contribution of science or any political achievement”.\footnote{“From War to Peace” November 1945 in Unpublished Talks, 1937-46, Box 107, OCA} Despite its flaws Wilkins believed that the United Nations was perhaps the greatest step towards lasting peace in history, so much so that he provided a copy of the United Nations Charter to every student.\footnote{ibid} Still, Wilkins did not believe the United Nations was perfect, and it was not the international federation of democracies he had long advocated for. Wilkins was convinced that a worldwide unifying force must be found to finally bind humanity together before humanity tore itself apart.\footnote{“Ties That Bind”, November 21, 1945 in Non-Scholarly Publications on War, 1929-45, Box 108A, OCA} He was also convinced that isolation, in any form and at any level of being, was fundamentally ruinous.\footnote{“Isolation is Desolation” March 5, 1946 in Addresses on the subject of War (WWII), approx. 1939-45, Box 107, OCA} These beliefs were certainly proven true by the events of the Second World War.

Throughout the 1930s, although his policy positions changed, President Wilkins’ principles regarding peace remained largely the same. He always maintained a belief in the ideas that one must strive to ensure the least amount of suffering possible, that one must value oneself, one’s neighbor, and one’s community, and that a person had a duty to the nation that had raised him. Although at times overly-committed to certain policies due to his intense desire to avoid war, he always attempted to make sure the policies he advocated for were the ones most adherent to his principles in the given circumstance. When war finally came Wilkins thought it his civic duty to assist his country in the war effort to the fullest extent of his abilities, as well as his moral duty to prepare his students for the trials and challenges to come to the fullest extent of his abilities. Throughout the war, Wilkins never lost sight of the peace that would come afterwards, and he hoped to do what he could to ensure that peace would be a lasting one.
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I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment - Jeremiah Slack-Welles