An American Way of Life

*Old-world realism and cynicism should discourage America from any further attempt to impose her idealism, her romanticism into the affairs of people whose concepts are utterly different from our own and will always be.*

*American civilization belongs to the people who accept it,*

*can afford to have it and can sustain it and keep it.*

Fred Chaney, May 10, 1940

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Fred Chaney wrote “An American Way of Life,” on May 10, 1940. It was after the War to end all Wars. It was after the Germans bombarded Poland on September 1, 1939. After Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, marking the beginning of World War II. Before the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the United States declaring war on Japan on December 8, 1941.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated on his September 1, 1941, radio address “[w]e are not a warlike people. We have never sought glory as a nation of warriors. We are not interested in aggression. We are not interested – as the dictators are – in looting. We do not covet one square inch of the territory of any other nation. Our vast effort, and the unity of purpose which inspires that effort are due solely to our recognition of the fact that our fundamental rights are threatened by Hitler’s violent attempt to rule the world.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

On the day Chaney wrote “An American Way of Life,” his family heard on the radio that Germany invaded Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and Winston Churchill would become the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.[[2]](#endnote-2) Chaney said that the United States had not lost any ships and suffered no national wrongs to provoke an attack from Germany. Why should we allow ourselves to be carried into it? Was Fred Chaney a pacifist even though he had joined the Marines when he was younger. Could he not see what was coming next?

Andy Taggart reviewed Chaney’s manuscript and stated “[s]o amazing to hear the thoughts of a man – troubled, perhaps, but no less brilliant – from May of 1940, when we have the benefit of knowing what happened in the ensuing months and years…[O]ur perspective is crafted by what we know (horrors of WWI, distance of continental Europe from USA, thesis that Hitler can’t possibly attack forever,) when, literally on the same day the world is changing in immeasurable ways.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

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Fred Chaney’s mother, Ms. Rife P. Chaney sent this manuscript to Dr. Jaquith on July 26, 1965. She said “this is a copy of an article written by Fred sometime ago and we have just found it again. He wants you to have a copy which is enclosed.” The manuscript was placed in Chaney’s medical record by Dr. Jaquith.

The manuscript is included in its entirety and has not been edited. Some endnotes are included for clarification and to provide additional information.

*May [10], 1940*

*In this land where life is still held worth-while and death an enemy in spite of the New Deal’s inspiration to suicide upon the part of some we can’t take it! – big business leaders and our erst-while oligarchy of extremely successful money grabbers nursed in the tradition that the fat of the land is their exclusive mess of pottage and the Government hadn’t oughta poke its selfish fingers into it – we have running beneath the crass materialism which has the dollar mark for its God and no true culture to speak about – a considerable collection of citizenry whose names are seldom seen in head-lines and never mentioned as very much of a success; who neverthe less, have a capacity for idealism-for romanticism-which may be the best characteristic included in the talk of so many impassioned orators upon patriotism as they speak resoundingly of ‘AN AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE’.*

*May their tribe increase for they do indeed form the selected legion upon which the hope of America’s national civilization rests – into whose keeping the development of the epic and the saga of this brave new world must pass, when the excitement has died away, when the flaring and gaudy head-lines of sensationalism and tumult has sunk to the level of their rightful place, and when the outward advertisements and blandishments of power, position and possessions no longer are represented as the basis and back-bone of a nation seeking a true knowledge of itself and its destiny.*

*These deep quiet minds and souls will afterwhile, I am sure make us stable and serene and great. After they have done so – ‘The American Way of Life’ will cease then to mean to the world a mad scramble after headlines and wealth upon the part of leaders and individuals who are so greedy but instead it will mean the sublime effort of the world’s greatest people to maintain in their standards of thought and life that quality of dignity which only comes from the improvement of the powers of imagination, the perceptive senses of beauty and sentiment which makes of life a rich experience indeed and infuses into the soul and the heart of the individual or state that consciousness of being and worth which out-lasting all material losses or defeats, victories and delusion, take on added meaning with the passing years.*

*And these glittering generalties have been prompted to what I sometime humorously refer to, as mind (and others, as my misfortune) by a Thanksgiving proclamation which I read today and which I copy for you here.*

*It was issued several seasons ago by the then Governor Wilbur Cross of Connecticut. Uncle Wilbur for many years was a professor at Yale and he reached the high elevation of the Governor’s office (or slipped down to it) because a great concourse-a whole slough of them, in fact, (scads, droves, coveys) of his ex-students wanted another scholar in politics and shoved him there without even by-your-leave or much of a campaign. Quite a quaint proceedings sometimes politics in Connecticut. But anyway there Uncle Wilbur was hustled away from the campus at Yale and what must he do about it. One thang that he did about it was writing a Proclamation like you soon shall read as I did. And when you catch Paul Johnson speaking with such literary excellence, or defining what a year of life of the people of Mississippi mean with this same ring of truth and beauty call my attention to it will you and I’ll save a place for it in my best scrapbook to chew over thoughtfully from time to time. I read this in Alexander Woolcott’s ‘Second Reader’ which I borrowed from George Gill.[[4]](#endnote-4) Most of the stuff that the critic has put there would bear a second reading as the title implies. The volume (over 1,000 pages) consists of Essays, mystery and ghost stories, a biography, short stories, some letters and several complete novels of which Somerset Maughan’s ‘Cakes and Ale’ I believe, with Woollcott, to be the most consummately skilful and memorable tale that that great artist ever threw together, and you would enjoy it if you got Sis to loan you the book.*

*The Proclamation reads- “Time out of mind at this turn of the seasons when the hardy oak leaves rustle in the wind and the frost gives a tang to the air and the dusk falls early and the friendly evenings lengthen under the heel of Orion, it has seemed good to our people to join together in praising the Creator and Preserver who has brought us by a way that we did not know to the end of another year. In observance of this custom I appoint Thursday the twenty-sixth of November, as a day of Public Thanksgiving—*

*FOR,*

*“The blessings that have been our common lot and have placed our beloved state with the favored regions of Earth—for all the creature comforts, the yield of the soil that has fed us and the richer yield from labor of every kind that has sustained our lives—and for all those things as dear as breath to the body that quicken man’s faith in his manhood, that nourish and strengthen his spirit to do the great work still before him, for the brotherly word and act; for the honor held above price, for steadfast courage and zeal in the long long search after truth, for liberty and for justice freely granted by each to his fellow man and so freely enjoyed; and the crowning glory and mercy of Peace upon our land- -*

 *THAT- -*

 *We may humbly take heart*

*And thought of these blessings as we gather once more with joyous and happy rites to keep our Harvest Home,[[5]](#endnote-5)*

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*If Uncle Wilbur doesn’t win my argument in those two paragraphs I know that no weak or futile conceits of my own can possibly go on from here to win. Seldom do you catch a political leader blowing the trumpet for so many spiritual, intangible, mystic and yes -- romantic human qualities as those definitions and interpretations set before God as the important gifts to thank Him for. A romantic inventory of a year’s life. It will help me to evaluate the effort that I make now. It is an effort at progress-- a discovery of something which has been here for some time perhaps, but whose truth I have only lately come upon. There is always a new word to be said about the past as the future proceeds. The search for a whole truth about life includes all things old and new and goes on apace, -- thus has truth ever fascinated our minds and eluded Time’s definitions. But the passion for it remains in our hearts -- we want to be understood, each and every one of us, we want to be seen for what we are in our souls and as we would like to see others. But they, like we, change as does the truth about them. In some such way we see that through life truth will never be fixed and determined –but constantly challenging our interest with changes, and we shall, I suppose, forever seek it as the thought of better minds than ours have done – as a story never finished, as a sequel dimly guessed but whose meaning may never entirely be written out.*

*But all of that opens up a tremendous field of speculation and yours I know, is not a mind to delight in abstractions. Your life has been filled with sentiment and feeling and that is more than definitions. For you the truth is disclosed instinctively and by intuition through the channel of your feeling. Let others do the explaining if they must – you will know whether what they say has the genuine color, the warmth or the breath of experience. If it may be shown to exist by act, deed, performance then you accept it into your thought as having value that abstractions can never hold. What I want to lay before your judgement is a thing that has been worked along that track, not so much an experience of thought in the ultimate as an experience of feeling, quivering in the soul, in the heart- in the blood.*

*During the past year my thought like everyone else has been drawn with sharp interest to the madness that has been spreading through the world. Many people think that it is a foregone conclusion that it will engulf us—that the thing we will have to do is to go out and meet it and prevent it, that way. They still think that our first line of defense is in France if we are to save our civilization in the world. Military history teaches that for each fighting man that an aggressor sends out for an invasion against the enemy it takes three to stand behind to support him in the efforts of his attack –that spreading and dispersing any army of invasion is to handicap and weaken the consolidation and concentration of materials, supplies and men that would be at hand for defense. So by sending an army to France once more we would have dissipated the strength of the first line of defense that this country’s civilization has. Why gamble our resources and the lives and health of possibly millions of our youth by sending them to Europe to fight this struggle of a foreign Armagaddon once more. Common sense is against it. And more than that appears to me to be against it. The true ‘American way of Life’ divorced of its excitement, its cheap bravado, its love of sensation and stirring the surface of the National waters into a turmoil—its real civilization is against gambling its precious best against an uncertainty such as another foreign military expedition would be.*

*The spread of crusades has always petered out in the past as it did with Caesar, Alexander and Napoleon. The new world didn’t exist when the first two were marching and Napoleon’s schemes, for all their magnitude, never embraced the whole globe. The entire show was over when it got too large for itself – the resistance of ideas, of cultures as much as anything else that were different from those in the minds of crusaders, and which could not be changed even under military losses and defeats – these factors always toppled the dreams of world conquest into the ashes and it always will. The forces of destruction can march only a certain distance and then crumble to disintegration and a black memory upon the page of History. Even holy crusades fail when they attempt to smother insurmountable differences and impose their ideas and character into too many lives. The world itself shall never be conquered by any given set of ideas, ideologies, or any given set of men.*

*At least History says not—so personally I’m for defense and not invasion in order to preserve the most in our civilization. I do not look for it to come this time in spite of a sort of growing hysteria which would seem to make it inevitable I have thought about you so much during the past year and naturally I don’t want see those who are near and dear to you gambling their lives and all that they mean in this madness when all that their efforts would be spent for would be foreign, turmoil confusion and uncertainty. This time I do not believe that the youth of this country will be called onto do it.*

*The only excuse that can arouse our people to the necessity for another crusade is that of enlightened self-interest. No false idealism dedicated to the mission of saving the world for the democratic ideal will turn the trick again. We saved the world once for that and there is less democracy in the world today than there has been since the dark ages. There is as quality of Romanticism that has naturally taken growth in our people to which the thought of missions and crusades appeal. With the history of a conquering race behind us it is in our blood—We would still stake our life for a principle. Conditions of pioneering life, civil strife, the hard slow battle through depression have been met and over-come and our national colors have never trailed in defeat in any clash with foreign foes. We have won our right to have and to hold our brave new world and the democratic consciousness that has evolved to maturity because of what we are and what we have done. But this conception of life—this way of live, belongs peculiarly to America. It does not need to be preserved in Europe because it is not there. Age-old national hatreds and traditions of distrust, revolutions, and wars have worked toward the establishment of something else there than this idealism, this romanticism that we know. Not even in France or Great Britain does it live, because they cannot sustain it, cannot afford as Hitler himself says ‘the luxury of Democracy’. The thought of our best leadership this time is dedicated to keeping Democracy alive HERE—protecting it HERE. The over-whelming sentiment of our people who have learned their limitations in bitter experience knows this and will protect it HERE. They will defend to the death those mystic, intangible standards that were defined and explained as well as I have seen them in Governor Cross’s proclamation—but they realize this time that this culture, this representation of what we are, (what our people and country are) does not belong at the head of a crusade to save the world again—or indeed Europe.*

*Our leadership has learned caution now with the maturity of this true quality of romantic thought, the visionary qualities that stirs in the soul of America. Because of the past and its teaching it has come at last to a capacity for considered judgement that shall see us through this menace without becoming involved.*

*Perhaps I am wrong. In romantic individuals and in nations there is always the danger of setting up false and impossible Gods, that may lead to ruin and undoing instead of to realization. The classic example of what I am trying to say appears I think in the tragedy of failure seen in the life of the man who led us to Armageddon before.*

*The things that he preached, the ideals of Democracy that he stated in his momentous addresses and clarion speech were noble and fine, but their application was lacking in judgment and when they lost their sense of direction they became false, they became will- ‘o-the -wisps and instead of priceless they ultimately showed themselves to be without any genuine significance or value, UNLESS they teach us something today.*

*In his speech to the American Congress he called our conscious to action and to magnificent sacrifice (for to thousands the words meant death) the laying upon the altar of their meaning the very life-blood and gold of their youth—their opportunity, their chance in life—with the following statement, definition and interpretation of what we were to fight for—*

*“We shall fight”, said our President, “for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts—for Democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.*

*“To that task” the voice of this leadership spoke on – “We can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth, happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her she can do no other.” Beautiful, - beautiful indeed. No words were ever more effective in inflaming our qualities of romanticism into doing the wrong thing—into throwing away life without judgement—Reading back through them they almost make one feel like dying for such beauty even though that beauty was a delusion.*

*But judgement still remains as the highest faculty of the human mind since it includes all the sifted senses of imagination, memory, emotion and being, that translates the individuals consciousness into action and determines his course.*

*The words lacked judgment though they had a marvelous sentiment and beauty.*

*But today we have in place of this, sentiment, this beauty, a kind of matured leadership that has arrived at judgment. Perhaps it includes sentiment and beauty too. I think it does but of a less spectacular and sensational kind.*

*In the crisis again facing us today it may be seen in the statements of leaders like Wilbur Cross, who pronounces and interpret American life to mean beautiful and idealistic conceptions too. But not shot through with impossibilities such as any world vision, any definition of purpose or destiny which is more than national must of necessity be.*

*What we need to see us through is the ability to maintain the dignity and the calm of cool judgement that is free from a false idealism and impossible romanticism as well as free of hate and hysteria—that when confronted with inflammatory statements and definitions can distinguish between heroics and mock-heroics, sentiment and sentimentality, romance and untrue romanticism, and in the end come through the counterfeits of truth to the real coin and have it for our possession.*

*In spite of a superficial growing hysteria therefore I do not believe that we will again allow ourselves to be swept into the cauldron of Europe which instead of melting away the dross in the gold of the democratic way of life destroys it entirely when it is poured into that pot.*

*Hitler is leading the German nation to regret—for this crusade too will over-leap itself and fail finally in spite of military victories. To wage war is always a worthless enterprise. The hopes that have inspired it turn to futility and emptiness at the last.*

*I do not believe this war will ever be brought to us, if we prepare ourselves against its invasion. The nature of the courage and the thought that fits into the pattern of our matured ideals, our culture, has grown to be not of the brand that easily loses its head through hatred and hysteria although those symptoms still are on the surface. The German people are not offering a reward of a million dollars for the kidnaping, capture and removal of our leader although we sent an expedition of aggression against them in the past. It is being done here. But I do not think a gesture of this kind is clearly indicative of our state of mind. Most Americans recognize the ridiculousness of such wild proposals and their conscience no longer demands that they demonstrate a mass move of such a nature to express themselves. Wilful aggression against Germany would be that**. We have lost no ships, suffered no national wrongs to provoke such an attack. Why should we allow ourselves be carried into it. Nations are not annihilated in war—only civilization perishes by conflict, as the finest and best that was in the aristocracy of the old South passed. We can afford to keep our civilization here in the new world that we have made for it and the growing conviction of that should be our best safe-guard as incidents to inspire hysteria occur and reoccur through the progress of humanity’s sorrow and shame, now by way of taking place beyond the seas.*

*Not long ago I saw a picture which should add its mite toward keeping America out of the senseless struggle this time. It was called “The Eagle and the Hawk” and featured Frederick March and Cary Grant – an aviation story built up against the glamourous back-ground of warfare in the skies.*

*In the war picture Frederick March, as Jerry Young, an English ace was having a great success in his dashing career blasting German war-planes from the sky.*

*No one except Cary Grant, as “Crocker”, his gunner, and observer, suspected that Lieutenant Young thought upon any of this in any wise other than as a glamorous and thrilling thing to be doing.*

*Yet before Crocker asked for an assignment on Lt. Young’s plane he knew that the name opposite Pilot Young’s on the squadron’s line-up roster at head-quarters had changed five times—that Young had lost five gunners, and that he had night-mares because of it and called their names in his tortured sleep.*

*But together these two became a crack combat crew and only quarreled and parted when Crocker started blasting away at helpless parachute jumpers from a balloon they had shot down—*

*“No man who rides in my ship can do that” Young tells Crocker.*

*“But this is war you fool” the gunner spits back, “Those mugs would have hit the ground with information that might be dropping a bomb down on you or me right now.”*

*“Just the same there are some things that avaitors don’t do—even in war”. States Jerry Young, “And pot-shooting parachutes is one of them.”*

*So they split up, Crocker explaining to the Colonel that Young was beginning to get ‘soft’ and requesting a transfer to another pilot’s machine.*

*But Jerry’s success as a warrior continued.*

*To a bunch of new officers a little later who moved to active service in their sector and who wanted to meet the great ace because they had previously heard so much about him the Colonel says— “Be like Jerry Young—be daring and fine fighters. Lt. Young is a shining example up here of what England wishes her war-birds to be”—and he asks Jerry to say a few words to the young officers, to help them get off to a right start.*

*“I am glad to know you fellows” Lt. Young tells them complying with the Colonel’s request, “I guess we’ll be seeing quite a bit of each other now. I don’t know what to say to you that might be of any help exactly. You are pretty much your own judge up-stairs there when the lead gets to flying. Only I might say that when you shoot down your first man—DON’T LET IT GET YOU. Remember that—remember that they are your enemies, that you are fighting for the things that are RIGHT—the important things, for human liberty and—and, well—the preservation of civilization. I guess that’s the important thing to remember—that’s all.”*

*But even as he speaks you can see that Jerry Young has begun to doubt the truth of these words—that he is starting to realize that the way he and his comrades go about it is not the way to set the human spirit free or to preserve its civilization.*

*Yet the ‘Eagle’ soars on, counting new triumphs though the tension within grows greater and greater as his acts clash with the convictions he now carries in his soul.*

*It reaches the breaking point when finally behind his own line he succeeds in shooting down the ship of Voss, a great German pilot. He lands only to discover that the man he has killed (for all his war-won reputation) is just a slender under-developed boy—less than twenty years old.*

*Around his neck hangs a locket with his mother’s picture and the request that it be sent to her should he be killed.*

*When word reaches head-quarters that Jerry Young has shot Voss to his death his fellow aviators prepare a banquet in his honor. A French general comes with additional medals as testimony of his widely recognized heroism.*

*It is during this testimonial scene that Jerry Young cracks completely— “I am no hero” he shouts in the General’s face “I don’t want your medals. Do you want me to tell you what they represent? I’ll tell you. BRAINS—B-L-O-O-D, HUMAN BLOOD LIKE MY OWN---LIKE YOURS---THAT I’VE HAD MY PART IN HELPING TO DESTROY. Yes, that’s what your iron and tin little medals mean. That’s the truth about them. I’ve found out. Keep them and wear them yourself if you do not understand but I---I, I’m through-----------”*

*He stumbles from the banquet into his own sleeping quarters, pulls his pistol and kills himself.*

*Crocker, his erstwhile gunner (now his enemy) comes in and finds his body.*

*Crocker realizes that Jerry’s suicide will off-set all his brilliant exploits of heroism in the air and discredit him in the eyes of his air comrades who are still making merry at the banquet given in his honor.*

*The gunner starts to leave the scene to announce his discovery. But something draws him back. He stares down again at the crumpled body and as he stares scenes drift across the vista of memory of all the tight places that he and Jerry Young have been through together.*

*Suddenly he reaches down and lifts Jerry to his bed, slips the self-murder pistol in his pocket and puts a cloth over the dead ace’s head to hide the bullet wound.*

*At this point the Colonel come in - -*

*“What is the matter with Lieutenant Young” he demands.*

*“Drunk” Crocker responds, “That is why he spoke as he did at the banquet, sir---drunk.”*

*“yes—I realized that. Well I hope he is O.K. in the morning.”*

*“He will be, sir—and, and—Oh yes Colonel, Lieutenant Young asked that I fly with him tomorrow---as his gunner.”*

*“fine, Crocker, I am glad that you two boys have gotten together again. Best fighting teem I’ve got.”*

*He goes out. Dawn comes. It find Crocker placing the body of Jerry Young in the pilot seat of a combat plane.*

*By aid of the ship’s double set of controls he flies it slowly rising into the rising sun.*

*Out of sight of those behind he pumps bullets in to the wings of the plane—ripping seams up either side near the forward fuselage, finally swinging his gun point blank upon the dead officer’s head.*

*This gruesome work accomplished—he turns back.*

*This picture ends upon the scene of an honored soldier’s grave whose epitaph reads –*

*“To the sacred memory of Lieutenant Gerald Young who died gloriously in the skies while fighting for human liberty and the Preservation of civilization.”*

*Thinking of the picture I realized that Crocker had done a fine thing of course in forgetting his personal feeling about Young and rescuing his memory from disgrace. This savagery game of war has its paradox as a picture of ruin and devastation to the finest in civilization. But the flaming courage that it brings to light in men’s souls was bred by the uses of civil life and only made dramatic because seen against the carnage with which war surrounds it. The glory of the fight makes a false challenge to our romanticism and the blood and brains that are scattered in pitiful destruction are not, as Jerry Young found, the source of any heroism of which to be proud.*

*Even in its scenes of raw courage it is a masquerade—the beauty of the thing belongs to the soul of a mock-heroism that mocks at human liberty always and makes a mockery too of what courage accomplishes. Let our young men think of that when their imaginations consider the prizes of heroic action that belong with the desperate game and they will see as Young saw after it was too late that there is no truth there.*

*Pictures like that help to explain the meaning of the crisis that faces American manhood today more than impassioned oratory upon patriotism—more than heating our minds with words depicting high-sounding principles and calling that the youth of America lay down its life in their service. Looking upon the scene we may see for ourselves that they are not there. So in building the sentiment that free of hate and hysteria comes to the base of well-balanced judgement on all that is preached, written, and dramatized—in sifting our way through all the camaflouge and confusion—spectacles such as this with their comprehension and clarity for spiritual values pointing like a finger of light beyond the realism of surface things are the means by which war wil stand indicated in our minds and our hearts past the ring of the words of false idealism, visionary romanticism and meaningless dedication of all that life and existence means to us—the people of America. It must not happen again. The true heroism of Jerry Young’s derived its meaning in suicide. He could no longer live in the presence of the memory of what war had made of him.*

 *Theodore Roosevelt has said that “only those are fit to live who are not afraid to die”[[6]](#endnote-6). Courage is the highest claim that we have to divinity. Only by over-coming fear may we live up to the great challenge of life. It is pretty well settled in the United States that Hitler is a heel and an international gangster—and the thought seems to be widely prevalent that our courage as a nation demands that we do something about it. But Hitler has made no overt act against our people and the wise thing to do is to arm ourselves sufficiently to discourage the war being brought to our shores, not to rush in to remove the world’s suspicion of cowardice upon our part. The world knows that as a nation we are brave. But that bravery meets its acid test not in the capacity of reckless enterprise such as casting away our materials and our lives in another expedition to enter Europe’s slaughter hours of fools but in the development of an attitude of soreneness and calm that can keep us clear-brained and safe-guard the civilization that we possess in this part of the world against the consequences of wild action.*

*The times cry aloud for a leadership of balanced judgement to see us safely through. I think that we have it. In all of the president’ public utterances since the outbreak of the European furies that begin once more to threaten American civilization and peace, it has made itself plain. Facing the danger with open acknowledgement of its very real menace he pleads for level-headedness and the detachment of emotional control. His foreign policy up until now is clearly directed toward the objective which aims to build up a popular sentiment in favor of the erection of as strong a bulwark for defense of his part of the world as may be obtained. Because of the Neutrality Act none of the more than 200 neutral ships lost thus far have been American ones and his administration has been singularly free of international incidents with their attendant official warnings which have served to stir the troubled waters in the past and increased the apprehension and danger of the times. Plainly our leadership during the present state of anxiety and emergency does not contemplate another expedition of American troops at Armagedden. The mistake that was evident in the course followed the last time when Wilson (unconsciously perhaps) was shaping our destiny toward that and from the very first with his notes of warning, his high-sounding definitions of the insisted upon rights of neutrals, not alone on this side of the world but in every part of the globe; in his magnificently worded protests against the acts of belligerants affecting what he called the “rights of civilization” that were being disregarded in the case of non-participating nations beyond the limits and scope of the Monroe Doctrine. In his powerful pleas for recognition of the dignity of the weaker states of Europe to have the ruling voice in their own affairs, or as he termed it, “the self-determination of their own destiny”.*

*This was splendid as a course in cock-eyed idealism but in the high placed position of responsibility from which it eminated it lacked that mystic balance of judgment that should have known that such glittering generalities of speech constituted the American people as the watch-dog of the rights of mankind and that Wilson was inflaming the imagination of our people with the war-like state of mind that set us on a road to taking part in a foreign business not of our making and which represented a hopeless chaos in which American standards could never mean much. Wilson’s international idealism might have just as well been hollored down a rain barrel. But it goaded our emotions into a state of upset, dither, panic and bother that left the logic of all historic sense and perspective behind. It lead us also to sensational, bloody and terrible sacrifices as we have witnessed in the battle of Belleau Wood. And out of it came victory.[[7]](#endnote-7) We won the war, but we lost the peace. So as far as the noble dedication was concerned that exists today only as a memory. Europe remains just as badly in need of a holy crusade of goodness and virtue as ever. Voices are heard proclaiming it. How badly off the track of historical judgement and sound sense Wilson’s colossal dream of world states-man-ship actually was became evident to the historian when he joined his colleagues in victory around the peace table. For it was they and not his German enemies who made a mockery of our participation in the mess which according to state purpose we had entered (‘and just at the crucial time to supply the coupe ‘de grace) to ‘Save the world for Democracy’—to win the ‘War to end all Wars’”.*

*Wilson stood up in this assemblage recognizing what he interpreted at an hour of such a victory, (against the hard-won and untold cost of the dreamed of and long awaited triumph)—as the opportune moment to bring about the “concert of nations” which at last was to make the world free” (as he had envisioned in his request from the American Congress for a declaration of war against the German people). Here was the great moment—the golden opportunity in the drama of humankind that was to translate the grand vision into permanent fact and truth. This was the chance to remake the Earth—to abolish wars forever and guarantee to nations that henceforward the world would become a civilized home in which all might dwell in peace.*

*He stood and told of his dream—he read to the assemblage the famous fourteen-points by which the realization was to be brought into happy fulfillment— (Freedom of the Seas, Self-determination of nations, Respect for International boundaries for treaties, etc.) These fourteen principles to be guarded and enforced by a World Court, or, as he named it specifically, “The League of Nations”.*

*It all made up as beautiful a set of ideas as the angels ever had and how eloquently his masterful oratory etched the picture there in this gathering of the rulers of Earth come to write a whole chapter now in its destiny. To close the days of one epoch in the long hard struggle for human rights, liberty, civilization, peace and happiness—to open a new.*

*But the impression that this program made upon the other actors who occupied the stage along with Wilson to play leading roles in the tremendous and moving drama of world events can best be understood by considering two causal remarks uttered by two of the European cast. For in them, may be seen the quality of old-world realism and cynicism that should ever discourage America from any further attempt to impose her idealism, her romanticism into the affairs of people whose concepts are utterly different from our own and will always be.*

*Lloyd George listens with impatience at first to the American crusader mouthing his false and impossible romanticism about “The Rights of Man” (disregarding in his wonder of those lofty conceits the history of those upon whom he now seeks to fire with zeal for their adoption his formula for the world’s future guidance and protection). But George’s interest is not keen enough for the nervousness of impatience to last long. Toward the end he is just tired. He turns wearily to Clemenceau and remarks vaguely as though he were bored and wished the long-winded American would get through and sit down— “Is he still talking about his League of NOTIONS”? he asks.*

*And the Frenchman is more voluable with his own cynicism “Fourteen points to guarantee the peace of the World” he sneers. “This fellow’s egotism is boundless. Why don’t he read somewhere that God Himself has never been able to get them to accept even ten?”.*

*YES. Romanticism versus realism. The philosophy of the old world versus the new, But there is among us and in our blood (as a heritage of the pioneer spirit of our past) a capacity for romantic feeling and thought that is no different from its counterfeit, its cock-eyed idealistic impostor as Realism itself. True romantic thinking never does derive its value or do the world or the individual good by way of impossible dreaming, or wishful thinking. The power of a true romantic imagination is boundless but it keeps the curb bit on those powers and never lets them outrun the limitations of experience of wisdom or emotional control. Thus its judgement and decisions are pitched upon the broad base that accepts the world and people as they are and spends not so much time contriving to change them as in searching through them for whatever intrinsic truth and beauty they have to offer. Some such search for instance as is brought to light in Governor Cross’s thank yous to God. For balancing both realism and romanticism together such minds as his seem to go beyond the faults of both to pick the motherlode of truth out of life’s progress and experience, holding the course ever dignified and secure—garnering from the years a culture of sympathy, understanding, vision and hope, among his fellows. And that is the romance and glory that, in the ‘long long search’ makes life worthwhile.*

*Reading his thought I like to picture him as being like Stark Young said of his character Edward McGehee in his “So Red the Rose” – “One of those people who follow something inner—some compulsion like a cloud—something in him was like the balancings of the clouds”, and as possessing the kind of judgement that Edward discerned in his father (who, when Edward left for college at the eve of the struggle between the states made him promise to come home first if Mississippi seceded and rush off to war ‘because some fool was beating a drum’).*

*The thought of war was glamorous and romantic to the young man, of course, But he promised because – “His father was, in his feeling, the back-ground of all true things. There were men who were not carried away—could never be carried away by wild rumours and reports, men like Judge Winchester and his father—who heard all the arguments and remained alone and felt something about life and about the future, comprehended it, as it were, under God and Edward saw how this was different from most men’s chatter.”*

*So to-day we need the leadership of men who discern not the visions of Messiahs that we may be called to spread abroad with flame, sword and oratory any great truth of human-kind.*

*We want national and local figures only, who comprehending the meaning and the limits of American experience and culture, preach for the security, protection and defense of our way of life, our ideals, our materials, and our possessions—ALL THAT WE ARE, in the part of the world in which they have found birth and grown to greatness. American civilization belongs to the people who accept it, can afford to have it, can sustain it and keep it. It belongs to America alone. God Bless America and preserve her. Let us defend her to the death if need arise but let her never again spend her blood and her might in another foreign invasion.*

*Even as I write these words to you the ultimate test is focusing itself upon our consciousness. History is vividly in the making. Today the Tenth of May 1940 newspapers carry Adolph Hitler’s order of the day to his soldiers—It reads as follows,*

*“Soldiers of the West Front. The hour for the deciding fight for the future of the German nation has come.*

*“For three hundred years it was the aim of the English and French rulers to prevent every real consolidation of Europe and above all, to hold Germany in weakness and impotency.*

*For this purpose alone France has declared war on Germany 21 times in 200 years.*

*For decades it has been the aim of British rulers to keep Germany from unity, to deny the Reich every earthly possession which is necessary to the preservation of a nation of 80,000,000 people.*

*England and France have carried through this policy of theirs without worrying about the regime which happened to rule in Germany at the time.*

*What they wanted to strike was always the German people.*

*Their responsible men admit this goal quite openly.*

*Germany shall be dashed to pieces and reduced to small states. With that the Reich shall lose its political power and with it the possibility of securing for the German people their living rights on this Earth. For this reason, all my peace overtures have been rejected and war was declared on us September 3, of last year.*

*The German people has no hatred, no inimical feeling toward the English or French people.*

*It stands, however, before the question whether it will live or perish.*

*In a few weeks the brave troops of our armies have crushed the Polish opponents pushed forward by England and France, thereby eliminating danger from the East.*

*Thereupon England and France decided to attack Germany from the North.*

*From April 9 the German armed forces have nipped this attempt in the bud.*

*Now what we have seen for many months as a threatening danger for us has happened. England and France are attempting by employment of a gigantic maneuver of distraction in Southeast Europe to thrust forward into the Ruhr district over Holland and Belgium.*

*Soldiers of the West front the hour for you has now come.*

*The fight beginning today decides the fate of the German nation for the next 1000 years.*

*Do your duty now.*

*The German people with its best wishes are with you.” The voice of hatred and the voice off destruction casts its echoes throughout the world.[[8]](#endnote-8)*

*At 3:30 Luxemburg was invaded, Holland an hour later, then Belgium. In these thrusts it is the intention apparently of Hitler to capture air bases and submarine bases along the North sea and close to England and then center his attack against England and France especially concentrating upon the bombing of the British navy and loosening the strangle-hold it has over incoming German supplies.*

*Radio reports boomed through the low-ceilinged living room of our home here—beat against Spring air flowing in across the green lawn and from out the busy street. – “Rotterdam blasted---parachute troops take bridge—blitzkreig tears at heart of the low countries. All of those here in my home group, Donnis, Rife, Mama, Padaddy, even Little Sugar for once rests her three-year old body containing that dynamo of perpetual energy and is hushed—although she, of course, does not know what these things mean.*

*“Brussels bombed, Switzerland under black-tipped wings of Nazi raiders”.*

*The radio simmered with the cracking voices of eye-witnesses in Europe as the hideous and fantastic pattern of events spread from the old world out into the atmosphere of the new—into this very room itself— “Planes zooming over the Hague—Dutch guns blast Hitler’s columns of invaders—”*

*Outside a lawnmower droned softly and birds were singing in the shrubbery. Outside was the beautiful little town of which another voice has said, “The river town that water-oaks and myrtles hide and bless has broken every law except the law of kindliness.”*

*A click of the radio dial and Peace was once more restored to the town, to the atmosphere of the room—to this world, our world, America.*

*We can keep it if we arm ourselves with weapons to enforce our wishes. Our wishes are for Peace.*

 *Real Americanism*

 *One country – the best on the face of the earth;*

 *One people – and true, by adoption or birth;*

 *One language – unspoken by tyrant or slave;*

 *One banner – The Flag of the free and the brave,*

 *From ocean to ocean, from valley to crag;*

 *One country – one people – one language – One Flag.[[9]](#endnote-9)*

1. Francis Trevelyan Miller, Litt.D., LLD., *History of World War II*, Armed Services Memorial Edition, 1945, University Book and Bible House, Philadelphia, PA. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Wikipedia.org, Timeline of World War II (1939), Accessed May 6, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Andy Taggart email to Bo Bowen, May 10, 2021, and May 11, 2021. Andy Taggart co-authored *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2008* and *Mississippi Fried Politics: Tall Tales from the Back Rooms.* [www.trwlayers.com](http://www.trwlayers.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. George Gill was married to Margaret Gill who was a cousin to Fred Chaney. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Proclamation actually states: “We may humbly take heart of these blessings as we gather once again with solemn and festive rites to keep our Harvest Home.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Theodore Roosevelt, “Only those are fit to live who do not fear to die; and none are fit to die who have shrunk from the joy of life and the duty of life. Both life and death are parts of the same Great Adventure.” https://goodreads.com [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. General Pershing commander of the AEF stated, “the Battle of Belleau Wood was for the U.S. the biggest battle since Appomattox and the most considerable engagement American troops had ever had with a foreign enemy.” Wikipedia.org, “Devil Dog.” [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Chaney took great liberty revising and rewording the newspaper article. The *Delta Democrat-Times* article published May 10, 1940 was from London through the *Exchange Telegraph*, a British news agency with the headline “Hitler Speaks.” The article was not as harsh as Chaney had written with his version. “Hitler Speaks,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, May 10, 1940, p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Fred Chaney, “An American Way of Life,” May 1940, Fred Chaney Medical Record, MSH. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)