

THE SECOND LINE

Written by

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Based on *How We Advertised America*

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

A TICKER TAPE PARADE in full, patriotic force. President WOODROW WILSON (60) is all smiles as he drives through.

The cheering crowd holds SIGNS reading: RE-ELECT WOODROW WILSON, HE KEPT US OUT OF WAR, and AMERICA FIRST!

REPORTERS jockey for space amid disorienting CAMERA FLASHES. A lone NEWSPAPERMAN (30s) simply takes in the fanfare: his NOTE PAD conspicuously empty.

He strains to catch a glimpse of Wilson. They make brief eye contact... a Reporter bumps the Newspaperman out of the way.

The Newspaperman tips his hat in apology. With a small smile, he turns his back on the parade and slips away, unnoticed.

CHYRON: Washington, DC - January 1915.

CUT TO:

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

CHYRON: May 1915

Sudden, somber silence. A wearied Wilson pores over a creased TELEGRAM. He stares at the approaching HEADLIGHTS through the rain-streaked window.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A black MODEL T pulls in front of the WHITE HOUSE. STAFFERS rush forward with UMBRELLAS as the two GENTLEMEN emerge.

Other CARS are not far behind.

INT. WAR ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Wilson's CABINET (40s-60s) rises upon his arrival. Wilson waves them off.

WILSON

This is no time to be standing on ceremony. Are we all here?

(beat)

Good.

He motions to the STAFFER manning the SLIDE PROJECTOR.

On cue, the images appear in rapid succession: TRENCH WARFARE, FRONTLINE COMBAT, and other scenes of DEVASTATION.

The Cabinet members shake their heads and mutter under their breath as they watch.

WILSON (CONT'D)
Terrible, isn't it?

BRYAN
It's tragic.

BAKER
Despicable.

WILSON
And yet I am no less appalled by these images as what I now see before me.

His Cabinet turns to look at him.

MCADOO
Mr. President?

WILSON
Look around. There's no anger. No outrage. No shock. We have become inured to the horrors that surround us.

BRYAN
Surround? But, sir--

WILSON
This is all worlds away from us, I know, Mr. Secretary. The casualties of someone else's war.

BRYAN
That's not what I was--

WILSON
Is it not what we were all thinking?

The Cabinet avoids Wilson's eye.

WILSON (CONT'D)
Whether we are willing to admit it or not, this conflict extends far beyond imperial politics in Europe.

Wilson again motions to the Staffer. A new slide appears: a beautiful CRUISE LINER.

BAKER
A British ship?

WILSON
Cruise liner. By the name of
Lusitania.

He nods to the Staffer: SMOKE now plumes around the near-vertical ship.

WILSON (CONT'D)
She was torpedoed earlier today.

BRYAN
How many, sir?

WILSON
One, maybe two blasts to her
starboard side.

BRYAN
How many *dead*?

WILSON
At least a thousand.

A heavy silence falls on the room.

MCADOO
Were any of them American?

BRYAN
That's what you care about? Forget
Americans, these were *people*.
Innocent people.
(beat)
Shouldn't matter what flag they
flew.

Secretary Bryan is on his feet: visibly agitated. Wilson rises as well and pats Bryan on the shoulder.

WILSON
To return to my original point,
gentlemen, *this* is what the war is
all about. Something much greater
than petty politics.
(beat)
We are fighting for the fate of all
humanity.

MCADOO

Surely you're not suggesting--

WILSON

Today, tomorrow, maybe even months from now. But that day is approaching.

BRYAN

No.

Bryan shrugs off the President's hand.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

This is not our fight. I would expect you of all people to understand that.

WILSON

But haven't you seen--

BRYAN

I've seen *plenty*, Mr. President. But I see our country's future if you do not stay your course.

Wilson pulls a LETTER from his pocket.

WILSON

This is my final warning to the Germans. They will do with it as they will, but be assured: when neutrality becomes the same as complicity, we can no longer remain idle.

(beat)

Your signatures, if you please.

All but Secretary Bryan step forward to sign. They turn to look at him.

BRYAN

You have no more need of a pacifist on your Cabinet than you have intent on keeping your campaign promises.

Wilson freezes, pen still in hand.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

You're running on a platform of false hopes. "*He Kept Us Out of War*", they're shouting.

WILSON

You know I never approved of that slogan--

BRYAN

"He'll put America first." And yet, and yet, Mr. President, you call for preparedness and neutrality in the same breath.

He starts to gather up his belongings.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Let me give you one last word of advice: if you go through with this, the Germans will be as *nothing* compared to the wrath of your own people.

Bryan storms off, pausing in the doorway.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

(shouts)

"War in Europe, Peace in America,
God Bless Woodrow Wilson!"

The door SLAMS. Secretary McAdoo starts to rise, but Wilson shakes his head.

WILSON

There's no need to murder a man as he's committing suicide.

(beat)

I fear we'll be looking for more than a new Secretary of State in these coming months.

He hands the signed letter to the Staffer.

WILSON (CONT'D)

When the news breaks tomorrow about the *Lusitania*, the country will be in uproar.

(beat)

I need you to find the voice that cuts through all the noise.

The Cabinet exchanges mystified looks.

INT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS - OFFICE - MORNING

CHYRON: Denver, Colorado - Six Months Later

The Newspaperman from earlier dozes at a cluttered DESK. The nameplate reads GEORGE CREEL, EDITORIALS.

George doesn't open his eyes as FREDERICK BOWN (40s) enters.

GEORGE
I already finished it, Fred.

FREDERICK
And slept through all the excitement.
(beat)
It's not like you to be missing in action.

He tosses a NEWSPAPER onto the desk. George stifles a yawn as he reads the headline.

GEORGE
"Denver's Uprising Against Misrule:
35,000 Citizens Denounce Municipal
Corruption."

He rubs his bleary eyes.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
What's happened?

FREDERICK
Seems your last article had more legs than even you could have hoped for.
(beat)
70,000 of them, in fact.

George bolts upright.

GEORGE
Who were they after?

FREDERICK
The Assessor.

GEORGE
He's been removed from office.

FREDERICK
In more ways than one.

He points to a line in the paper.

GEORGE

(reads)

"After his makeshift barricade
fell, the assessor was bodily
marched to City Hall in full view
of the waiting people."

George tries to hide a smile.

FREDERICK

Smirk all you want. I know your
fingerprints all over this.

GEORGE

I was here all night.

FREDERICK

Think about what you just did,
George, and *think* about what that
means for you.

GEORGE

I already know--

FREDERICK

I don't think you do. You just
about incited a *riot* last night.

(beat)

The people are following you. That
leaves the Powers That Be with two
options. They can either punish you
or they can recruit you.

He reaches into his pocket.

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

Lucky for you, the Mayor wants you
on his side.

He passes George a TELEGRAM.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

A large CROWD gathers at the front of CITY HALL. George
stands on a RAISED PLATFORM alongside the MAYOR.

A BADGE is pinned to George's chest. The Mayor shakes his
hand and speaks into the MICROPHONE.

MAYOR

To George Creel, our new Police
Commissioner.

(MORE)

MAYOR (CONT'D)

May his tenure bring the change
this city so desperately needs.

The crowd erupts in applause.

EXT. THEATRE - EVENING

CHYRON: November 1916 - One Year Later

The MARQUEE reads: BLANCHE BATES STARS IN *UNDER TWO FLAGS*!

George passes small groups of THEATRE PATRONS. Many nod in acknowledgement when they see him. A couple shake his hand as he walks by.

PATRON

Good evening, Mr. Creel.

GEORGE

Evening.

A well-dressed MAN (40s) starts when he hears George's name and stares after him. After a beat, he follows him inside.

INT. THEATRE - LATER

BLANCHE BATES (30s) commands the stage as CIGARETTE, a French spitfire. She sits on top of a TABLE, faces BERTIE CECIL, played by a handsome, young German American.

CIGARETTE

We are soldiers, not traders, you say? Yet you would rather be called out, court-martialed, and shot than have your toys inspected by the Black Hawk, is that it?

BERTIE

Well, why not? I grant his right in field and barracks, but--

CIGARETTE

Oh, *but* is a blank cartridge and never did anything but misfire yet. Shoot dead or don't aim at all.

She leans forward.

CIGARETTE (CONT'D)

Listen to me. One example set on your part and these soldiers will mutiny. What will happen then?

BERTIE

You call yourself a soldier. You
tell me.

Cigarette jumps down from the table and goes toe-to-toe with Bertie.

CIGARETTE

Yes, I am a soldier and I have seen
war. I have seen soldiers mutiny,
seen them walled in and shot down
by the thousands.

(beat)

Would you have me see this again?

The room goes deathly quiet as the audience takes this in.

INT. THEATRE - LATER

Blanche takes a bow to THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. Her German co-star receives a much more tepid response.

"Bertie" puts on a smile anyway and joins the cast for a final bow. Blanche pats his shoulder, sympathetic, as the CURTAIN falls.

EXT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Blanche graciously greets a small crowd of fans.

She catches George's eye and hurries over. George kisses her cheek and hands her a BOUQUET.

GEORGE

You were a revelation tonight.

HOUSE (O.S.)

Mr. Creel!

George and Blanche turn to see the Man from earlier. This is COLONEL HOUSE (50s).

HOUSE (CONT'D)

Are you George Creel?

GEORGE

Yes, sir.

HOUSE

(extends hand)

Edward House.

GEORGE
Colonel House? As in--

HOUSE
The President's advisor.

He greets Blanche before George can react.

HOUSE (CONT'D)
Good evening, Miss Bates.

BLANCHE
Mrs. Creel, please. What brings you from Washington, Colonel? I don't think you came all this way for my little show.

HOUSE
I came to have a word with your husband.
(beat)
But it was my deepest honor to see the famous Blanche Bates perform.

She shakes his hand before excusing herself.

HOUSE (CONT'D)
Much like your wife, your reputation precedes you.

GEORGE
A double-edged sword, I'm sure.

HOUSE
Are you aware that your writing carries much further than Denver?
(off his look)
There's one article, in particular, that comes to mind.

He reaches into his coat pocket, pulls out a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. He reads aloud.

HOUSE (CONT'D)
"Expression, not suppression." Has a nice ring to it. You wrote this?

GEORGE
(guarded)
And stand by every word.

George stiffens as House sizes him up.

HOUSE

You have a very unorthodox opinion
on censorship, Mr. Creel.

GEORGE

I believe the public can and *should*
be trusted with the facts.

HOUSE

All of them?

GEORGE

Save for the most sensitive of
military intelligence.

(beat)

Is this some sort of test?

HOUSE

Your articles, along with word of
your reform efforts, have caught
the President's attention. He sent
me personally to see you.

GEORGE

President Wilson? But why?

Colonel House ignores the question. He pockets the article,
pulls out an ENVELOPE.

HOUSE

There is a dinner in one week's
time to celebrate his re-election.
He wishes to extend an invitation.

GEORGE

But I'm just a newspaperman.

He fiddles with the envelope, troubled.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Sir, why would he choose to send
you for someone like *me* -- much
less, choose to send someone at
all?

HOUSE

My duty is to serve the President
whenever and wherever he needs me.

(beat)

One week, Mr. Creel.

With a bow, he leaves a thunderstruck George behind.

EXT. CREEL RESIDENCE - MORNING

A modest, but well-kept two-story home.

INT. CREEL RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Blanche has turned the bedroom inside out. The CLOSET and every DRAWER are wide open, their contents scattered.

George steps over SHOES and HAT BOXES as he enters. He pores over House's invitation.

GEORGE

President Wilson wants me to have
dinner with him. No, scratch that,
President Wilson wants to have
dinner with *me*.

BLANCHE

Sounds like a gas.
(re: suitcase)
Grab that for me, won't you?

GEORGE

To think that a muckraker half the
country away could break bread with
him, the greatest man to ever live.
(beat)
I'll be an inspiration to newspaper
writers everywhere.

His reverie is cut short when Blanche tosses the suitcase to him. George fumbles, but catches it.

Blanche takes the invitation from his hands and, with a kiss on the cheek, leaves her husband to fend for himself.

EXT. CREEL RESIDENCE - THE NEXT DAY - DAY

A MODEL T idles in front. THOMAS "TOMMY" TYDEN (40), Irish-American, leans against it. He waves as the Creels approach.

TOMMY

(to Blanche)
I never much believed in miracles.
Least 'til today.

He winks as he takes her suitcase.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

A whole week without the words "the
greatest man to ever live".

Blanche laughs.

BLANCHE

Well, George has always styled himself a Wilson man.

(beat)

Matter of fact, *he* encouraged him to run for president in the first place!

George starts to scuff his shoe.

TOMMY

(to George)

Did you really? Now how come you two don't have dinner together more often?

GEORGE

I'd say he has more important matters to attend to, wouldn't you?

Tommy backs off. He's struck a nerve.

TOMMY

I'm just joshing you, Georgie.

(beat)

You know we're both real proud to see you getting the credit you deserve.

George nods. He puts on a brave face as he says goodbye to Blanche, but looks troubled as the car drives off.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Tommy's car pulls away from the TRAIN STATION, leaving George and his luggage. He makes his way to the TICKET BOOTH.

George passes a LARGE POSTER advertising: SOLD OUT! WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S CHAUTAUQUA SERIES!

INT. TRAIN - DAY

George settles into a SLEEPER COMPARTMENT.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

George, now dressed to the nines, stands awestruck in front of the White House. A STAFFER ushers him inside.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - STATE DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

All the trappings of an elegant soiree. To his amazement, George is seated at the PRESIDENT'S TABLE.

He shakes hands with the CABINET MEMBERS. Everyone stands when Wilson enters, sitting only when he does.

WILSON
You must be Creel.

GEORGE
Yes, sir!

A dazed George walks over to Wilson to shake his hand.

WILSON
I look forward to making your acquaintance.

GEORGE
Thank you, Mr. President.

Wilson smiles, turns to the MAN sitting next to him. George fidgets, but doesn't leave.

Wilson turns back to George and scrutinizes him.

WILSON
Don't trust that you belong here,
is that it?

George nods.

WILSON (CONT'D)
I've heard enough stories about you
to fill one of your newspapers. I
plan to discern for myself the type
of man you truly are.

He drapes his NAPKIN in his lap. The other dinner guests follow suit.

WILSON (CONT'D)
It would also be remiss of me to
not thank you for all of your
endorsements.

Wilson signals to the SERVERS. George, morale boosted, takes his seat as the FIRST COURSE arrives.

All eyes are on the President as he raises a GLASS.

WILSON (CONT'D)

It is my sincerest hope that these
United States will continue to
uphold the ideals and democratic
virtues for which she stands.

(beat)

Lord knows the rest of the world
can learn a lesson or two from us.

Polite, if uneasy laughter.

WILSON (CONT'D)

I pray that the belligerent nations
will soon choose an end to the
conflict in Europe over an end to
humanity.

George leaps to his feet, GLASS raised. There are GASPS and
MURMURS at this breach in protocol.

GEORGE

To peace without victory.

WILSON

(beat)

To peace without victory.

The tension breaks as conversation resumes. Wilson holds eye
contact with George for a moment.

INT. STATE DINING ROOM - LATER

The dinner is winding down. A slightly drunk George
entertains the guests with his impersonations.

Wilson roars with laughter. His Cabinet remains unmoved.

WILSON

Do William Bryan next!

The room quiets... the guests and Cabinet are unsure about
this request. George and Wilson are oblivious.

GEORGE

Ah, the Secretary of State. Pardon
me, the *former* Secretary of State.

George makes a big show of preening himself as he speaks. He
moves to the head of the table.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 A great choice, Mr. President, what
 with the man dominating the
 Chautauqua circuit these days.
 (to the guests)
 I'm sure you're all aware by now of
 Mr. Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech.
 You know the one.

George speaks in a deep, Southern drawl, over-articulating every word.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 You shall *not* press down upon the
 brow of labor this crown of thorns.

He stands on top of his CHAIR, shaking his fist at the audience in fervor.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 (yells)
 You *shall not* crucify mankind upon
 a cross of gold!

Wilson is doubled over in laughter. George steps down and bows to APPLAUSE. The Cabinet glares at him.

DINNER GUEST
 What about the President?

GEORGE
 I couldn't possibly--

WILSON
 Go on, George. Don't be modest.

George hesitates, looks around the table. He approaches a BESPECTACLED GUEST.

GEORGE
 (re: glasses)
 May I?

He puts on the spectacles, winces. He looks back at Wilson.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 You're much more near-sighted than
 I imagined, sir.

The guests laugh. George turns his chair around to create a makeshift PULPIT.

He gives a much more reserved and respectful performance: voice strong and clear, understated conviction.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

When I consider the state of the world today and this wretched, righteous conflict abroad, I am plagued by a single question.

The room goes silent. George doesn't notice when a STAFFER approaches Wilson. The President tries to wave him off.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Are these combatants warring to secure peace or are they vying to establish a new balance of power?

Wilson reluctantly follows the Staffer.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The President grimaces as he listens on the phone.

INT. STATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A troubled Wilson puts on a smile. He re-enters, but no one notices. The crowd is mesmerized by George.

GEORGE

We seek not an end to unchecked power, but a beginning to sustainable peace.

(beat)

Thank you.

George shyly steps away from the "podium", the spell broken.

DINNER GUEST

What speech was that from?

WILSON

My next one. With Mr. Creel's permission, of course.

The guests are startled to see Wilson. They hastily stand. Wilson leans against a chair.

WILSON (CONT'D)

It's getting rather late, my friends. I wish you all a safe journey home.

The room buzzes with indistinct conversation as the crowds gather their belongings and leave.

I/E. WHITE HOUSE - FRONT ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Staffers scurry to return COATS and HATS and guide guests to their CARS. One stops George as he passes.

STAFFER

The President requests that you stay a while longer, Mr. Creel.

He escorts George against the rush of people.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Wilson finishes pouring a second TUMBLER of scotch. He gestures for George to take a seat.

WILSON

I was under the impression that your wife was the performer. But it seems you are equally comfortable in the spotlight.

(beat)

Did House mention we were keeping tabs on you?

George nods as Wilson flips through a FILE.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Quite the resume you've got.

(beat)

I can't tell if you're a police commissioner moonlighting as a newspaperman or a newspaperman moonlighting as a police commissioner. What do you say you are?

GEORGE

I'm just a man trying to make a difference. Doesn't matter what form that takes.

Wilson tosses the file aside.

WILSON

Do you believe in war?

GEORGE

I believe in our country. That's what you're really asking, isn't it?

WILSON

You see right through me.

He takes a sip of scotch.

WILSON (CONT'D)

These are treacherous waters that we're treading, George.

(beat)

Half the country won't so much as *breathe* lest they rock the boat.

GEORGE

And the other, sir?

WILSON

They're circling like sharks.

Wilson downs his drink, slams the tumbler down.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Either way, we're dead in the water.

GEORGE

Maybe not, sir.

(off his look)

What if rocking the boat is *exactly* what we need right now?

George grabs a NOTE PAD and PEN from his coat.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Like you've said, the people are divided. They need a cause.

WILSON

I think they've made it clear enough they don't want this one.

GEORGE

So convince them.

WILSON

How?

GEORGE

Give them the facts. All of them. And then *trust* that they will do the right thing.

He does a rough SKETCH of a BOAT.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Tell them this: the boat is this many feet long and this many feet wide and weighs just so much. If you think rocking the boat will help the cause, then *rock*.

Wilson chuckles.

WILSON

I like you, George.

(beat)

And the time might come when I may even *need* you. Were you to receive that call, can I rely on you to help me?

GEORGE

Without a doubt, sir.

WILSON

You can start by writing an article for me.

George flips the page of his note pad.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS - NIGHT

The building bustles with activity as George arrives.

INT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS - STAFF ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The other WRITERS crowd around George. Frederick leans against the wall, unimpressed.

FREDERICK

You expect us to believe you know the President's next move.

GEORGE

I have it on excellent authority.

FREDERICK

You have it on *anonymous* authority. Until you give up your source, I'm not running this article.

GEORGE

We'll be the first to break the story. This is national -- no, *international* news.

A beat as Frederick contemplates it.

FREDERICK
I find out you're giving me the run
around--

GEORGE
I'm not.

Frederick calls over another Writer.

FREDERICK
Call Edwards. Tell him we'll have
the final proof in an hour.

George smiles and grabs his coat.

INT. CREEL RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sunlight streams through the window. Blanche drinks coffee as she reads the *The Rocky Mountain News*.

The headline blares: WOODROW WILSON TO MODERATE PEACE TALKS.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

George WHISTLES a tune as he ascends the steps.

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

George looks up in surprise as Frederick barges in.

FREDERICK
Every major paper is calling us for
the story.
(beat)
Are you still in contact with your
source?

GEORGE
Let me see what I can do.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

A) George leads the editors in a staff meeting. He points vigorously at the chalk board which details the PEACE TERMS of each country. Chief among them are GERMAN DISARMAMENT.

B) Newspapers print with the headline: PEACE NEGOTIATIONS FAIL! PRESIDENT WILSON TO GIVE ADDRESS.

C) The Staff Room is more crowded than ever. TELEPHONES ring incessantly.

D) George sits at a TYPEWRITER. The words "GERMANY RESUMES UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE" appears. He looks at the stack of WAR PHOTOS beside him.

E) Bundles of newspapers are dropped off at a STORE with the headline: PRESIDENT WILSON SEVERES DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH GERMANY.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

George glances over a copy of the NEWSPAPER as he waits for his GROCERIES to be bagged.

Behind him, a WOMAN holds a BOUQUET. She taps George on the shoulder.

WOMAN

You're the man who's been writing those awful war stories, aren't you?

George folds down the paper, surprised.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

The *Rocky Mountain News* of late has become *exceedingly* combative.

GEORGE

I'm sorry you feel that way, but--

WOMAN

It's disgraceful.

(beat)

I won't stand for some... tawdry warmongering from a *once* reputable publication.

GEORGE

If you have an issue with the paper's content, madam, I suggest you take it up with the Kaiser.

The Woman stares at him, slack-jawed. George puts some COINS on the COUNTER.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
The flowers are on me.
(beat)
Enjoy the rest of your day, ma'am.

He tips his hat and gathers up his groceries.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS - DAY

George still looks upset as he walks towards the entrance. He freezes when he sees Colonel House waiting for him.

George keeps his tone light.

GEORGE
Another dinner, Colonel?

HOUSE
Something a bit more permanent.
(beat)
There's an airplane waiting for us.

He gestures to his car.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - EVENING

CHYRON: April 1917

Staffers hurry to assist George and House. One starts to guide George away.

STAFFER
Right this way, sir. He's expecting you.

George turns, confused, to House.

GEORGE
Aren't you--

HOUSE
Wherever and whenever he needs me.
(beat)
Good evening, Mr. Creel.

And with that, House leaves. George hesitates before following the Staffer.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Wilson sits at his desk. He's distraught.

WILSON

I have prayed like Jesus in
Gethsemane that I may be spared
these horrors. Yet I have always
known this would be my cross.

GEORGE

What do you need me to do, sir?

WILSON

Convince me.

Wilson staggers to his feet.

WILSON (CONT'D)

I need you to convince me and
convince this country that we can
win this.

He hands George a TELEGRAM. George reads it, stunned.

WILSON (CONT'D)

The British decoded it last week.

GEORGE

Why would Germany want an alliance
with Mexico? They have no
grievances with the British.

WILSON

They do against us.

A beat as George absorbs this.

GEORGE

(quiet)
We're entering?

WILSON

Seems we already have.

George starts to reach for his NOTE PAD.

WILSON (CONT'D)

I'm not asking you to write an
article for me.

GEORGE

Then what--

WILSON

I'm asking for the performance of a
lifetime.

He punctuates his words with a jab of his finger.

WILSON (CONT'D)

I need you to *sell this war*.

(beat)

You'll have your own committee.

Anything you need is yours.

GEORGE

And what about you, sir?

WILSON

I'll convene Congress in the morning. By evening, we should all be of the same mind.

Wilson limps to the door. He holds it open for George.

EXT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

A large crowd assembles in front of the Capitol Building. Several clutch newspapers that read: WILSON ASKS WAR!

The crowd presses closer to the building's entrance. They are getting palpably more agitated.

INT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING - HOUSE WING - CONTINUOUS

CONGRESS convenes in a joint session. President Wilson stands at a PODIUM in the front.

WILSON

I have called the Congress into extraordinary session because these are extraordinary times -- a turning point in our storied history.

(beat)

The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs. They cut to the very roots of human life.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - DAY

The street is packed. A PEACE PROTEST marches down Pennsylvania Avenue and approaches the White House.

INT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING - HOUSE WING - DAY

Wilson continues his speech.

WILSON

Property can be paid for. The lives
of peaceful and innocent people
cannot.

(beat)

The atrocities perpetuated by the
German government are
indiscriminate in their purview and
relentless in their pursuit of
selfish ends.

He slams his hand down on the Podium.

WILSON (CONT'D)

We *cannot* suffer any further
violation of human rights.

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - DAY

George sits at his desk, stacks of NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES
beside him. He starts to circle the names of EDITORS,
WRITERS, and ARTISTS as he talks on the TELEPHONE.

WILSON (V.O.)

We have exhausted every means of
diplomacy available to us and are
now left with no alternative.

George checks his WATCH. He starts to loosen his tie.

WILSON (V.O.)

I advise that the Congress declare
the recent course of the Imperial
German Government to be *nothing*
less than war against the United
States.

George sets down the telephone and scribbles the name HARVEY
J. O'HIGGINS to the list. The title of the page reads: THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - DAY

A COUNTER-PROTEST slows the momentum of the Peace Protesters.
A brawl breaks out.

INT. UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING - HOUSE WING - DAY

Wilson musters up the last of his strength.

WILSON

To such a task, 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 and
the happiness and peace which she
has treasured.

The color drains from his face, but his voice remains firm.

WILSON (CONT'D)

God helping her, she can do no
other.

Wilson steps back from the podium. The Congress immediately
begins to confer in small groups -- oblivious to the
President's heavy limp.