

1. The Making of a Wilsonian Internationalist: Early Life and Career, 1892-1937

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During Sumner Welles's long career, he saw the State Department grow from a small operation, with its cramped offices adjoining the White House, into a large bureaucracy with thousands of employees and a spacious headquarters in Foggy Bottom. The department's growth during his lifetime mirrored America's growing power in the world, as U.S. foreign policy evolved from the more localized preoccupations of his early career—where the U.S. sought to project its power regionally—to visions of an American-guided world order in the 1940s, where America's reach began to extend to the entire globe.

Welles saw these changes sharply reflected throughout his lifetime. Born in New York City on October 14, 1892 to a wealthy and established family, Benjamin Sumner Welles entered an America that was vastly different from the one he would come to know as an adult. In the year of his birth, the major European countries elevated their legations in Washington to the status of embassies, a move confirming America's growing status and power in the world. The most recent census had declared the American frontier closed. The quest for new overseas markets and colonies accelerated, and the United States was on the verge of becoming a great industrialized world power.

Sumner could trace his lineage to the initial settlement of the American colonies. The Welles family was prominent in New York City society, and throughout his later career Sumner would benefit from his close relationship with other established New York families, such as the Oyster Bay branch of the Roosevelts. The association with them went back many years. Sumner's mother and Eleanor Roosevelt's mother were good friends, and he and Eleanor shared a godmother. In 1905, the twelve-year-old Sumner attended Franklin and Eleanor's wedding, where he carried the bride's train as she walked down the aisle on the arm of her uncle Theodore. The Roosevelt connection was also important symbolically, for many of Welles's contemporaries would be challenged by the example of Teddy's commitment to public service. Whereas many members of the American privileged class thought public life beneath them, Theodore Roosevelt sought to make it seem respectable, even noble. [1](#)

Welles was a sickly child, dominated by his mother throughout his early years. Contemporaries would later joke that the fastidious Sumner wore white gloves as a child at play. Nonetheless, his upbringing within the cloistered and privileged world of the New York elite shaped him by reinforcing his feelings of superiority over others and contributing to his inability to relate well with those from different backgrounds. The Welles family made regular trips to Europe, where young Sumner formed early opinions and impressions about many of the countries he would be involved with during his diplomatic career. [2](#)

Following in the footsteps of Franklin Roosevelt, Welles attended Groton School in Massachusetts at a time when the student body included Averell Harriman, Dean Acheson, and Eleanor Roosevelt's brother, Hall, who became Welles's roommate. Groton served the American establishment as Eton or Harrow did the English. The school was conspicuously inbred; eventually, more than half the student body would be the sons of alumni, with both Welles and Franklin Roosevelt sending their sons there. Like Roosevelt before him, Welles fell under the spell of headmaster Endicott Peabody, a stern New Englander educated in England at Cheltenham and Trinity College, Cambridge. Peabody modeled Groton after Cheltenham, arranging the students in British-style "forms" rather than American "grades" and favoring British spellings over American.



Students enforced their hierarchies by strict hazing rituals and various other torments of which the headmaster approved, believing they contributed to the development of "manly Christian character." Welles, inept at sports and unpopular with his classmates due to his sarcasm and cold personality, fell short of Peabody's ideal. Yet Groton nonetheless seems to have left a mark. Peabody told successive generations of Grotonians that public service was a high and noble calling, and many graduates would later acknowledge the school's profound influence on their careers. Franklin Roosevelt called Peabody the "biggest influence on my life," and Welles once told Peabody, "If I ever achieve anything in this world, even amount to anything, and I mean to, it will be due very greatly to you." ³



Upon Peabody's advice, Welles went off to Harvard in 1910, again following in the path of Franklin Roosevelt, who had graduated in 1904. By his own admission, his years at Harvard were not happy. He spent much of his time drinking heavily, frequenting brothels, and developing a reputation for questionable behavior. He was unpopular: no clubs desired his company, he played no sports, and was rejected by the Harvard Crimson. He left little impression, and his classmates remembered him, if at all, for his Brooks Brothers suits, stickpin, stiff collar, and aloof demeanor. ⁴ In 1913, contemplating dropping out of Harvard, he took a year off from his studies and traveled the world. He considered studying art in Paris, but instead returned to the United States and graduated from Harvard with his class in 1914. ⁵

After a year of drifting he decided to join the foreign service and in 1915 requested the help of a fellow Harvard graduate, William Phillips, who had married Welles's cousin and occupied a senior position in the State Department. Welles also asked Franklin Roosevelt, now the assistant secretary of the navy, to personally recommend him to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. "I am delighted to learn that you are going to take the diplomatic examinations this Spring," Roosevelt wrote to Welles, "and am gladly sending you a line to go with your application." To Bryan, Roosevelt

wrote: "I have known [Welles] since he was a small boy and have seen him go through school and college and I should be most glad to see him successful in entering the Diplomatic Corps." [6](#)

Welles received the highest score on the diplomatic examinations held that spring and soon embarked upon his foreign service career. The timing of his entry into the diplomatic corps was significant, for, with the Great War raging abroad, and a neutral America edging toward intervention, a diplomatic career seemed to offer rewards of social status and adventure. Like many young men of his station and generation, he came to admire the wartime leadership of Woodrow Wilson. "We had been thrilled to the depths of our emotional and intellectual being," he wrote years later, "by the vision that Woodrow Wilson had held out to us of a world order founded on justice and on democracy. As my generation looks back to the years between the wars I think our one outstanding thought must always be 'it might have been.'" [7](#)

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Also in 1915, Welles married Esther Slater, the sister of a Harvard classmate, whose family possessed a massive textile empire based in Massachusetts. They would have two sons: Benjamin born in 1916, and Arnold, two years later. Welles soon distinguished himself during diplomatic postings in Tokyo, where he oversaw Japanese treatment of German internees, and in Buenos Aires, where he spent much of his time seeking to outmaneuver British officials for trade advantages in the Argentine market. He rose rapidly through the ranks of the State Department bureaucracy, returning to Washington in 1920 to become assistant chief of the Latin American Affairs Division. [8](#) Within a few months he became "Acting Chief" of the division, helping to prepare and implement the "Wilson Plan" for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Dominican Republic. [9](#)



By August 1921, just a few months shy of his twenty-ninth birthday, he became head of the Latin American Affairs Division, the youngest division chief in the history of the department. He aimed to promote Washington's interests and sought to foster a new sense of order in the region by improving the image of the United States through the reduction of the American military presence and by the avoidance of further intervention. He believed Latin America and the Caribbean deserved more attention from Washington (mostly through more intimate trade ties), and he began to develop many of the ideas that would one day evolve into the Good Neighbor Policy. [10](#)

Welles admired President Harding's secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes, and shared his desire to reduce armaments and increase international economic integration. He considered the urbane and austere New Yorker one of America's greatest statesmen and a suitable model for emulation. This admiration was mutual, and Hughes later made him his personal envoy for Latin America. Yet despite his feelings for Hughes, Welles



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subsequently resigned the post due to marital difficulties. During the years since his marriage to Esther Slater, he had been involved with several other women (and perhaps, according to the account by his son, a few men), and had surreptitiously used \$100,000 of his wife's fortune to purchase jewelry for a mistress. Under the circumstances, Welles felt a desperate need to earn a larger income to enable him to make a complete break with his wife and support his increasingly complicated personal life. [12](#)

He left the department in March 1922 in search of a more lucrative career, only to change his mind and accede to Hughes's urgings that he become U.S. commissioner to the Dominican Republic. [13](#) While still serving as commissioner, he accepted a number of other short-term diplomatic missions, including a temporary appointment as President Coolidge's personal mediator in the Honduran civil war. Welles labored to restore order and equilibrium to the region, and his efforts in Honduras brought him national attention as the drama of his mediation efforts reached millions through the U.S. press. [14](#)

Soon thereafter, in July 1925, he again resigned. He may have been discouraged by the fact that his meteoric rise meant that, due to his age and tenure, he could for the moment rise no further. [15](#) After his second resignation, he maintained an active interest in Latin American and Caribbean affairs. He briefly considered joining a Wall Street investment bank, but longed for another diplomatic posting.

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In late 1925, the new secretary of state, Frank Kellogg, considered appointing Welles assistant secretary for Latin American Affairs, or even ambassador to one of the Central American republics, but the idea encountered the opposition of President Coolidge, who disapproved of Welles's chaotic personal life. "So long as I am President, that young man will never even be a minister," Coolidge is alleged to have said. Washington newsmen later speculated that Coolidge's dislike for Welles may have been a result of Welles's divorce from Esther and his relationship with the prominent heiress Mathilde Townsend Gerry, whose husband, Senator Peter Gerry of Rhode Island, was a close friend of Coolidge. Welles had not helped his cause when he attended the 1924 Democratic convention (which nominated Coolidge's opponent) in the company of Mrs. Gerry. Following the convention, Welles and Mathilde departed separately for Paris, to begin Mrs. Gerry's divorce proceedings. [16](#)

In 1925, Welles and Mathilde married in a "quiet ceremony" in upstate New York, which was, as a matter of course, announced to the world the following day on the front page of the *New York Times*. [17](#) As the former wife of a senator, Mathilde was already a formidable Washington presence. Her grandfather had made his millions developing the Pennsylvania Railroad, and

her mother had been one of the social arbiters of Washington society at the turn of the century. Welles moved with Mathilde and a staff of fifteen servants into the colossal Townsend Mansion on Massachusetts Avenue, a replica of Marie Antoinette's *Petit Trianon*. ¹⁸ But, for the most part, Welles spent the bulk of his time a few miles outside of Washington in the Maryland countryside at the hulking 49-room "country cottage" known as Oxon Hill Manor. He would make great use of Oxon Hill during his career, fêting foreign dignitaries and diplomats, entertaining the president, and hosting informal meetings of senior officials. Roosevelt, too, liked the location, and would steal away to Oxon Hill, only a twenty-minute drive from the White House, to sip mint juleps on the veranda overlooking the Potomac. ¹⁹

Without an official position in the state department, Welles spent the next three years working on his book, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844-1924*, which was completed in 1928. ²⁰ It concluded with an appeal for stronger trade ties and a more considerate and cooperative policy toward Latin America, and can be seen as a prelude to similar views that were later encapsulated in the Good Neighbor Policy. In Welles's view, before the United States could begin to play a greater role in the world, it had to first establish its leadership in the Western Hemisphere. To that end, the United States should attempt to mitigate many of the grounds for past distrust by pursuing a policy of more benign relations. "No nation can live unto itself alone," he wrote. "If the United States, therefore, is to maintain itself as one of the greatest forces in the world of the future ... the time is at hand when it must reach the conviction that in the Western Hemisphere lies its strength and its support." ²¹

With the severing of his official ties to the Republican administrations of the 1920s, Welles began working closely with Franklin Roosevelt, exchanging views on foreign affairs and drafting Democratic policy papers. Welles drew closer to Eleanor Roosevelt as well, corresponding with her frequently and visiting her at Hyde Park on a number of occasions. His friendship with Eleanor would prove to be a valuable alliance in the years ahead. ²²



He also became active in the unofficial foreign policy establishment of the 1920s, joining the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the Council on Foreign Relations, and he began dabbling in party politics, using his friendship with Eleanor and Franklin to gain influence with senior Democratic figures. Welles even toyed with the idea of seeking the Maryland Democratic Party's nomination for the U.S. Senate. As Roosevelt plotted his next political moves, Welles sent him regular briefings on Latin American affairs and offered his assistance to Democratic candidates such as the 1928 presidential nominee, Al Smith, for whom Welles made a number of foreign policy speeches. ²³

Roosevelt, who was chairing Smith's effort, broached the possibility of Welles receiving a senior appointment in a future Democratic administration, and the two men worked together throughout 1928, drafting a foreign policy paper under Roosevelt's name that appeared in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. He suggested that U.S. intervention in Latin America should take place only in a multilateral context. With Welles's assistance, Roosevelt now advocated international limitations on naval forces and attacked Coolidge's dispatch of Marines to Nicaragua, thus unconsciously implying that Roosevelt's previous opinions on Central America and the Caribbean were somehow misguided. The article also promoted several objectives that would later feature prominently in his future presidential administrations, such as expanded regional economic integration and a desire to work in concert within the inter-American system to pursue U.S. interests in the region through subtler means. [24](#)

After Roosevelt became governor of New York in 1928, Welles served as part of an informal shadow cabinet, responding to Republican foreign policy initiatives and briefing Governor Roosevelt on world affairs. Welles's contribution in the area of foreign affairs would prove similar to the service the Brain Trust provided Roosevelt in the realm of domestic economic policy. He made frequent calls at Hyde Park and the governor's mansion in Albany, and he prepared attacks on the foreign policy of President Hoover and Secretary of State Stimson. [25](#)

In support of Roosevelt's efforts, Welles attended the 1932 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and helped draft the party's platform plank on Latin America, working closely with the journalist Drew Pearson, whom he subsequently introduced to Roosevelt. [26](#) Welles advised Roosevelt throughout the fall contest, giving a number of speeches on foreign affairs and strengthening his influence through a generous financial contribution to Roosevelt's campaign. He was elated by Roosevelt's landslide victory in November. [27](#)

The press assumed he would receive an important post in the new administration. Some even speculated that Welles, although only 40, might be named secretary of state. [28](#) Yet Roosevelt required someone with more stature and instead appointed Welles to the post of assistant secretary for Latin America, making him part of a small group of senior advisers to the new secretary of state, Cordell Hull. [29](#) Ominously, Roosevelt also made many of the other appointments beneath Hull, and the emerging working environment at State did not bode well for the future. [30](#) Dean Acheson later recalled that the department was a "house divided against itself," with both Hull and Welles surrounding themselves with loyalists. "Suspicious by nature," Acheson recalled of Hull, "he brooded over what he thought were slights and grievances, which more forthright handling might have set straight. His brooding led, in accordance with Tennessee-mountain tradition, to feuds. His hatreds were implacable—not hot hatreds, but long cold ones.

In no hurry to 'get' his enemy, 'get' him he usually did." [31](#)

Matters were further complicated because, during most of his tenure at the State Department, Hull suffered from the debilitating effects of tuberculosis and diabetes. He kept his condition secret, but his frequent absences from Washington raised speculation in the capital and later, after 1937, forced on him the humiliation of turning the department over to Welles for long periods of time. Nor was Hull's cause helped by his prominent lisp and an almost inaudible public speaking voice, both of which limited his public role. [32](#) His usefulness was also undermined by his lack of personal compatibility with the president. From the early months of the administration it became clear that Roosevelt would seek to bypass and ignore him. [33](#)

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Roosevelt paid deference to Hull, but sometimes the secretary's plodding style exasperated him. Roosevelt would cheerily open cabinet meetings by turning to him and asking, "Cordell, what's the news from abroad," to which Hull's deflating answer would usually be: "Not very encouraging." John Gunther, the peripatetic chronicler of events during the 1930s and 1940s, would later recall that if Welles were present in place of Hull, "the reply would be swift, precise, and comprehensive. FDR must have wished at least ten thousand times that Welles, not Hull, was the actual Secretary." [34](#) But Roosevelt dare not rid himself of Hull because of his influence on Capitol Hill and his prestige with the public. This fact was not lost on the foreign diplomatic representatives in Washington. A British diplomat in Washington described Hull as "a man of the utmost integrity, dignity and charm. He behaves with great courtesy to the heads of missions, and replies at great length to any question they may put to him; but when they return to their houses they usually have difficulty remembering anything he has said that deserves to be repeated." [35](#)

Uncertain about his own stature, Hull was suspicious of Welles's presence in the department. Welles maintained his own base of power apart from Hull, and his friendship with journalists such as Drew Pearson aroused Hull's suspicions. By the mid-1930s Pearson had become the most influential and highest-paid newspaperman in the country; his syndicated column, "Washington Merry-Go-Round," appeared in more than 600 newspapers. [36](#) He and Welles became intimate friends, and Welles served as one of his more valued sources. Pearson wrote glowingly of Welles's accomplishments, while Welles reciprocated by feeding Pearson gossip and information not easily obtainable outside the administration. [37](#)

Welles had an immediate impact on policy. Prior to Roosevelt's inauguration, the president-elect received from Welles a memorandum that gathered together his thoughts on inter-American affairs. "The creation and maintenance of the most cordial and intimate friendship between the United States and other republics of the American Continent must be regarded as a keystone of our foreign policy," Welles wrote. [38](#) A few months later, he

spelled out in greater detail the key components of his views on U.S.-Latin American relations. He suggested a policy whose features would include non-interference in the affairs of other nations, non-intervention, increased trade, and lower tariffs. ³⁹ He persuaded Roosevelt to use his Pan American Day speech on April 12 to enunciate these new policies toward Latin America. "The Continent," Welles wrote to the president, "is awaiting very eagerly some official announcement by you of the policy which you intend to pursue with regard to inter-American affairs, and it seems to me that the opportunity afforded on April 12 would be a very suitable occasion upon which you might make such a declaration of policy." ⁴⁰ In a letter to Hull, Welles added, "It seems to me essential, if the President is to speak at all upon this occasion, that he should seize the opportunity to announce a constructive, remedial policy, and not limit himself solely to the expressions of friendship and good will which convey nothing concrete and which will not satisfy Latin American public opinion." ⁴¹

Welles understood that Great Britain and France, small as they were geographically, added considerable weight to their standing as world powers due to their claims to speak for millions around the world in their colonial empires. Perhaps the United States, too, needed to speak for millions more beyond its own population. The United States should seek to speak on behalf of a unified hemisphere.

His disillusionment with Washington's approach to Latin America during the 1920s led him to believe that the United States stood to gain far more through a policy of cooperation with its hemispheric neighbors than through intervention and intimidation. Yet the Good Neighbor Policy got off to a rocky start. Welles served only a few weeks as assistant secretary before accepting an ill-fated assignment as the president's personal envoy to the strife-torn Cuban republic. ⁴² In Cuba, the rhetorical idealism of the Good Neighbor Policy came up against the pragmatic realities of maintaining U.S. hegemony in the region. ⁴³

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Roosevelt and Hull may have felt that, with Welles's past experience mediating disputes in Central America, the new assistant secretary might be on familiar ground in Havana. "The situation [in Cuba] frankly is rather more precarious than even I had anticipated," Welles wrote to Drew Pearson. "There is a tension in the atmosphere and a bitterness of feeling generally which I have not previously experienced except during the brief weeks I was in Honduras at the time of the revolution of 1924." ⁴⁴

After a decade of repressive rule, Cuban strongman Gerardo Machado violently confronted an effective political opposition. Welles initially assumed he could compel Machado to resign and thus pave the way toward a restoration of stability in Cuba through patient mediation. "Bearing in mind the fact that I think at this time we have the best opportunity in my lifetime to lay down the foundation for a beneficial and sane Latin American policy,

both commercial and political, I cannot admit the possibility of intervention," he wrote after his arrival in Havana. "Intervention would at once create suspicion and distrust, notwithstanding our treaty rights here, throughout Latin America, with very great prejudice, of course, to our improving relations in Latin America during the next years." [45](#)

Although Welles initially succeeded by forcing the departure of Machado, he soon became deeply immersed in Cuban political intrigues. [46](#) He wanted to restore order to Cuba but also sought to induce the Cubans to select "good men" to lead them. In the wake of Machado's departure, he moved to secure the presidency for his longtime friend, Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, who he assumed would form a government more amenable to U.S. interests. [47](#) But the diminutive and professorial Cespedes never captured the imagination of the Cuban masses, and Welles did not help the new president's cause when the two men were photographed for the Cuban newspapers in a warm *abrazo*, a careless blunder in a nation sensitive to the appearance of U.S. domination. At times during Cespedes's tenure Welles virtually ran Cuba himself. "Owing to my intimate personal friendship with President Cespedes," he wrote to Hull, "and the very close relationship which I have formed during these past months with all the members of his Cabinet, I am now daily being requested for decisions on all matters affecting the Government of Cuba. These decisions range from questions of domestic policy and matters affecting the discipline of the Army to questions involving appointments in all branches of Government." [48](#)

Cespedes's accession, and his close association with the new U.S. envoy, led to unrest in the streets of Havana. [49](#) When a coalition of workers, students, and young military officers led by Ramon Grau San Martin ousted Cespedes, Welles reacted angrily and recommended a U.S. military intervention to restore "stability." As mobs in Havana shouted "Down with Welles" and the Cuban press accused him of acting as a "proconsul of Yankee imperialism," Welles pressed for the introduction of U.S. troops under the provision of the 1901 Platt Amendment, which allowed for Washington's continued intervention into Cuban affairs. [50](#)

Roosevelt and Hull flatly rejected his request. The call for a military intervention may indeed seem somewhat incongruous, coming as it did from an official such as Welles who was, after all, instrumental in implementing the Good Neighbor Policy. But Welles thought it wholly consistent with the Wilsonian policy of non-recognition and intervention that the former president had employed against successive Mexican regimes, as well as against the Bolshevik government in Russia. Wilson, the father of the Fourteen Points and the League of Nations, frequently relied upon military power to gain his idealistic ends in world politics, ordering unilateral armed interventions in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, and contributing troops to the allied attempts to overthrow the Bolsheviks in Russia. Many presidents have used force to achieve their aims, but few so frequently as Wilson.

Welles later explained that he merely aimed to restore order to the streets of Havana. While the United States did not land troops in Cuba, U.S. naval forces maintained a threatening offshore presence throughout the crisis. The question of intervention became moot when a revolt led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista overthrew Grau with the seeming approval of Welles. In any event, Welles, having become so deeply involved in Cuban politics, had clearly outlived his usefulness. After being burned in effigy by angry crowds in Havana, he returned to Washington and his old post as assistant secretary. His controversial seven-month tour in Cuba further strained his relations with Hull, temporarily undermined him in the eyes of some colleagues, and might have ended his career had it not been for his personal friendship with the president and his wife. Welles spent the next three years trying to live down the interventionist reputation he had acquired in Cuba. [51](#)

Yet the Cuban imbroglio illustrated larger truths about Welles and the Good Neighbor Policy. He believed in hemispheric comity, but only so long as other nations did not interfere with U.S. interests or the drive for greater economic integration. The United States might tolerate a degree of autonomy in the Caribbean, but only so long as it did not disturb the order and the economic and political equilibrium of the region. This was amply demonstrated in Cuba, and would be again during Welles's years as assistant secretary. While he sought to promote a "new era" in U.S. relations with its hemispheric neighbors, he continued to work from the assumption of Washington's economic and political primacy in the region. He understood that Washington, through its extensive economic ties and the implied threat of military intervention, exercised ultimate influence in the region, and that mere disapproval from a State Department official still had the power to destabilize a regime. [52](#) Despite numerous pronouncements by U.S. officials about a new approach, there was little change in Washington's stance toward Latin America. [53](#) The only tangible difference between Welles's approach and the interventionism of the past was one of method. Control of the hemisphere would now be pursued by subtler means: cozier relations, the strategic use of inter-American trade, a stronger cultural policy, increased respect for Latin American customs and protocol, the strategically planned distribution of economic aid, a greater reluctance on the part of Washington to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of the other American republics, and full support for repressive military regimes friendly to U.S. interests. [54](#)



As for intervention, the Good Neighbor Policy sought to work hand-in-hand with favored Latin American regimes to head off the potential for upheaval, thus making U.S. intervention less necessary. Washington would work with the Latin Americans to suppress leanings toward either fascism or communism and to make the regional investment climate more hospitable to U.S. economic interests. Welles further resolved to ameliorate tensions by recognizing all governments in the region, no matter how repressive,

demonstrating that he had no difficulty supporting non-democratic regimes so long as they remained amenable to Washington's strategic and economic interests. Whatever else the Good Neighbor Policy stood for, it was never a model for regional democracy or individual rights. [55](#)

There were, however, several areas where Welles made lasting improvements in the relations between the United States and the rest of the hemisphere. He sought the genuine friendship of Latin American diplomats, showing them a warmth and consideration that often surprised his colleagues. Furthermore, after returning to Washington at the end of 1933, Welles labored to make amends with Cuba and at the same time push the Good Neighbor Policy forward by negotiating the repeal of the despised Platt Amendment. [56](#) He also began negotiations with Panama over revisions to the 1903 Canal Treaty, which had been unpopular throughout Latin America. He aimed to modify the treaty, allowing for limited Panamanian involvement in the canal's control. His efforts to end the 1935 Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia led him to persuade Roosevelt to call an inter-American peace conference at Buenos Aires in 1936, where Welles played a major role in rallying support for a declaration that established the principle of collective consultation and nonintervention. Similar success followed inter-American conferences at Lima in 1938 and Panama in 1939, as well as the administration's tempered response to Mexico's nationalization of American commercial property in 1938. [57](#)

While the U.S. remained more or less aloof from European political matters during the interwar years, Washington's involvement in Latin America was comparatively far-reaching. The U.S. aimed to shape the hemisphere's economic, diplomatic, political, and social policies along lines favorable to its own interests. Welles's approach to Latin American affairs during these years anticipated his unique brand of nationalistic internationalism during his later tenure as under secretary, by which he sought to achieve national aims through international means. Furthermore, his later enthusiasm for collective security and world organization stemmed partially from his experiences organizing this "American system" in the 1930s, where he called for pan-American unity and a permanent regional body to resolve hemispheric disputes. [58](#)

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As part of Welles's effort to redefine the Monroe Doctrine in more multilateral terms, the Good Neighbor Policy also had success, at least superficially, in convincing the Latin American republics to adhere to a hodgepodge of quasi-Wilsonian aims. At numerous hemispheric conferences between 1936 and 1942, U.S. delegations met with some success in reaffirming Wilsonian principles such as self-determination, the denial of territorial expansion, the avoidance of arbitrary border changes, the restoration of independence and sovereignty, equal access to raw materials, and support for some form of collective security or world organization. Thus, when it came time to construct the coming world order during the war years, Welles would argue that this "American system" could be exported outside the Western

Hemisphere, providing a model for the other Great Powers in their relations with each other, but also for those nations within their own spheres of responsibility. [59](#)

Notes:

Note 1: "Welles Family Genealogy," box 7, folders 6–7, Welles papers, FDRL; Fred Rodell, "Sumner Welles: Diplomat de luxe," by Fred Rodell, *American Mercury*, November 1945; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), 11. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Welles to Bailey, March 8, 1948, box 129, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist*, 11; Frank Ashburn, *Peabody of Groton: A Portrait*, (New York: Coward, 1944), 112–114. [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Harvard Annual*, 1914; Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist*, 19; Rodell, "Sumner Welles. [Back.](#)

Note 5: *Harvard Annual*, 1914; *Harvard Class of 1914 Report*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1920); Sumner Welles, "Civic and National Personality," c.1916, box 205, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist*, 11. [Back.](#)

Note 6: Welles to Roosevelt, March 1, 1915; Roosevelt to Welles, March 15, 1915; Roosevelt to William Jennings Bryan, March 15, 1915, all in FDR Papers as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1913-21, FDRL Rodell, "Sumner Welles.". [Back.](#)

Note 7: Lawrence E. Gelfand, "The Mystique of Wilsonian Statecraft," *Diplomatic History* 7:2 (Spring 1983): 87-101; Welles to Roosevelt, March 15, 1915, FDR Papers as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, FDRL; Sumner Welles, *The Time For Decision* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 3. [Back.](#)

Note 8: *Boston Morning Journal*, April 15, 1915; "Overall History of D.O.S." (Sumner Welles) 4E3, 6/29/D, Box 1, RG 59, War History Branch Studies, National Archives; Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist*, 41-62. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the U.S. Occupation of 1916-24* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 204-205; Welles to Josephus Daniels, May 7, 1927, box 23, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL; Bainbridge Colby to Welles, May 25, 1920,

box 23, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Norman Davis, August 19, 1921, box 63, Davis papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Colby frequently praised Welles's work to President Wilson, and Welles occasionally met with the president to discuss questions related to the administration's Latin American policies during these years. For more on the view that it was the Wilson administration that took the first practical steps toward repairing relations with Latin America, see Daniel M. Smith, "Bainbridge Colby and the Good Neighbor Policy, 1920-1921," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50:1 (June 1963): 56-78. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Sumner Welles, "Is America Imperialistic?" *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1924. For an excellent examination of Welles's views of U.S. policy toward the Caribbean, see Gail Hanson, "Ordered Liberty: Sumner Welles and the Crowder-Welles Connection in the Caribbean," *Diplomatic History* 18:3 (1994): 311-332. Hanson concludes that Welles's efforts to check disorder and instability in the Caribbean established a useful pattern for Washington's post-World War II relations with the Third World. [Back.](#)

Note 11: "In my opinion," Welles, who was not prone to flattery, wrote to Hughes in 1922, "there has never been a period in the history of the country when the foreign relations of the United States were so ably directed as they are by you today." Welles to Charles Evans Hughes, March 15, 1922, box 23, folder 3, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 12: In 1942 Esther eventually retained the services of Henry Stimson, Roosevelt's secretary of war, to recoup some of the money owed to her by Welles. See Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist*, 95, 389. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Bainbridge Colby to Welles, March 20, 1922, box 23, folder 3, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Charles Evans Hughes, March 6, 1925, box 23, folder 5, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Welles to Norman Davis, April 29, 1926, Davis papers, Library of Congress; "Overall History of D.O.S." (Sumner Welles) 4E3, 6/29/D, Box 1, RG 59, War History Branch Studies, National Archives; *The Nation*, August 1, 1942; Welles to Hughes, October 23, 1922, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter referred to as FRUS], 1924, vol. II (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939) 75-76. [Back.](#)

Note 15: When Joseph Grew replaced William Phillips as under secretary in early 1924, Welles's mistress, the heiress Mathilde Townsend Gerry, wrote to Welles in Santo Domingo, "How stupid of old Charles Evans to give that drunken Joe Grew Phillips's place and not you." Mathilde Townsend to Welles, March 10, 1924, box 19, folder 4, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Norman Davis to Welles, September 2, 1925; Welles to Davis, April 23, 1926, Welles to Davis, April 29, 1926, box 63, Norman Davis papers, Library of Congress; Welles, *The Time For Decision*, 188; "Welles/Slater divorce papers," box 19, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 17: "Mathilde Welles: Autobiography: My Girlhood Days," box 19, folder 8, Welles papers, FDRL; "Mathilde Welles: Autobiography: Today," box 20, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 18: "Mathilde Welles: Autobiography: 1910-1925," box 19, folder 6, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 19: "Oxon Hill: Architecture and Survey," box 9, folder 6, Welles papers, FDRL; interview with Mary White of the Oxon Hill Manor Foundation, April 4, 1996, Oxon Hill, Maryland; "Mathilde Welles: Autobiography: Oxon Hill Manor," box 19, folder 10, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 20: The book took its name from the Biblical story (found in I Kings, chapter 21), in which Naboth is murdered at the instigation of Jezebel so she can obtain a vineyard. In Welles's telling, the vineyard represented the Dominican Republic and the United States, Jezebel. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Sumner Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844-1924* (New York: Dayson and Clark, 1928), 936-937. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Welles memorandum to Roosevelt, January 20, 1928, FDR Papers: Family, Business and Personal Correspondence, FDRL; Roosevelt to Welles, February 24, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, September 27, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Eleanor Roosevelt to Welles, September 13, 1928, Welles to Eleanor Roosevelt, September 27, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 9, 1928, box 148, folder 8, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 23: "Washington Democratic Meeting Address," 1928, box 194, folder 1, speech files, Welles papers, FDRL; "Campaign Speech, 1928," box 194, folder 2, speech files, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Roosevelt to Welles, March 7, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Roosevelt telegram to Welles, June 1, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Roosevelt to Welles, July 7, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; "Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View," by Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Foreign Affairs*, July 28, 1928, FDR papers: Articles by FDR, FDRL; Roosevelt to Welles, September 8, 1928, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Norman Davis, February 17, 1931, box 63, Davis papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Welles to Roosevelt, February 17, 1931, box 148, folder 10, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Welles draft of Democratic Party statement, 1932, box 148, folder 12, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Marguerite LeHand, October 27, 1932, box 148, folder 11, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Welles to Norman Davis, November 19, 1932, box 63, Davis papers, Library of Congress. [Back.](#)

Note 28: *Baltimore Post*, September 28, 1932. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Roosevelt to Welles, March 9, 1932, President's Personal File [PPF] 2961, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, December 19, 1932, PPF 2961, FDRL; Roosevelt to Welles, February 1, 1933, PPF 2961, FDRL; Eleanor Roosevelt to Sumner Welles, December 7, 1932, box 148, Welles papers, FDRL; Eleanor Roosevelt to Mathilde Welles, February 17, 1933, box 149, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 30: For an account of Hull's inability to control U.S. foreign policy see, for example, Julius Pratt, "The Ordeal of Cordell Hull," *Review of Politics* 28 (January 1966): 76-98. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 9-11. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Irwin F. Gellman, *Secret Affairs: Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 161, 25-26. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Louis B. Wehle, *Hidden Threads of History: Wilson Through Roosevelt* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 115; Julius W. Pratt, *Cordell Hull* (New York: Cooper Square, 1964), 16-19; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 8-9. [Back.](#)

Note 34: John Gunther, *Roosevelt in Retrospect: A Profile in History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 131-132. [Back.](#)

Note 35: FO 371/21541 "Records of Leading Personalities in the U.S.," January 12, 1937, British Public Record Office [hereafter cited as PRO]. [Back.](#)

Note 36: *Time*, February 13, 1939; *Collier's*, April 22, 1939. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Welles to Pearson, June 12, 1933, box 146, folder 8, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Pearson, June 8, 1933, box 146, folder 8, Welles papers, FDRL; Pearson to Welles, August 11, 1933, box 146, folder 8, Welles papers, FDRL; Drew Pearson to Welles, July 23, 1937, box 146, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Welles to FDR: "A Memorandum on Inter-American Relations," January 10, 1933, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. For a more detailed examination of this document see Charles C. Griffin, ed., "Document Section: Welles to Roosevelt: A Memorandum on Inter-American Relations, 1933," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 34:2 (May 1954): 190-192. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Welles to Hull, April 4, 1933, with annex: "Memorandum for the President," by Welles, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Welles to Roosevelt, April 6, 1933, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Welles to Hull, April 7, 1933, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Press statement by Welles, April 24, 1933, FRUS, 1933, vol. V, 278; Welles memorandum of conversation with Roosevelt and Charles Taussig, April 24, 1933, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 43: For Welles's mission to Cuba see Irwin F. Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Cuba, 1933-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 3568; as well as Louis A. Perez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 193-201; E. David Cronon, "Interpreting the New Good Neighbor Policy: The Cuban Crisis of 1933," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 39 (November 1959): 538-567; Louis A. Perez, Jr. "Army Politics, Diplomacy and the Collapse of the Cuban Officer Corps: the 'Sergeant's Revolt' of 1933," *Latin American Studies* 6:1 (1974): 59-76; William S. Stokes, "The Welles Mission to Cuba," *Central America and Mexico* 1 (December 1953): 3-21; Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). [Back.](#)

Note 44: Welles to Pearson, May 17, 1933, box 146, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Welles to Pearson, May 17, 1933, box 146, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 46: This feat brought Welles to the attention of the nation, as he was profiled in numerous magazines and newspapers. A *New York Times* headline called him "Our Man of the Hour in Cuba." *New York Times Magazine*, August 20, 1933. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Welles to Hull, August 12, 1933, *FRUS*, 1933, vol. V, 358-359. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Welles to Hull, August 19, 1933, *FRUS*, 1933, vol. V, 367-368. [Back.](#)

Note 49: According to Louis Perez, "the new regime was overshadowed by the omnipresence of the American Minister." See Perez, "Army Politics, Diplomacy and the Collapse of the Cuban Officer Corps," 60. [Back.](#)

Note 50: Telephone conversation between Hull and Welles, September 5, 1933, *FRUS*, 1933, vol. V, 386; "Mathilde Welles Autobiography: Cuba," box 19, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL; *Americana*, October 1933. More detailed accounts of these events can be found in Perez, *Cuba and the United States*, 193-201; and Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista*, 35-68. Welles even employed the specter of communism in Cuba in an attempt to obtain Hull's backing for intervention. See Robert E. Bowers, "Hull, Russian Subversion in Cuba, and Recognition of the USSR," *Journal of American History* 53:3 (December 1966), 549. [Back.](#)

Note 51: "Mathilde Welles Autobiography: Cuba," box 19, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, May 18, 1933, Official File 470, FDRL; Roosevelt to Welles, June 24, 1933, Official File 470, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, July 7, 1933, Official File 470, FDRL; memorandum of conversation between Hull and Welles, September 5, 1933, *FRUS*, 1933, vol. V, 386-87; Phillips to Roosevelt, November 23, 1933, *FRUS*, 1933, vol. V, 525-26; Time, February 19, 1940, 15; Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 315-317. [Back.](#)

Note 52: See, for example, the essay by Gerald K. Haines, "Has Anything Changed? The United States and Its Relations with Latin America," *Diplomatic History* 17:4 (Fall 1993): 627-631. [Back.](#)

Note 53: For example, when the Dominican Republic's strongman Rafael Trujillo subsequently demanded that Washington replace its U.S.-appointed collector of customs, Welles suggested that "the Dominican Government will have to be told just where it gets off." Welles to Pulliman, August 24, 1933, box 147, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 54: See David Schmitz, *Thank God They're On Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Throughout the era of the Good Neighbor Policy, regional leaders became highly skilled at discerning Washington's desires. "When Welles and Hull spoke of a government capable of guaranteeing order," writes Lester Langley, "Batista provided one." See, for example, Langley, *The United States and the Caribbean in the Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 134. [Back.](#)

Note 55: For an argument that the Good Neighbor Policy pursued traditional U.S. goals in Latin America merely through new rhetorical approaches, see David Green, *The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971). For a more orthodox account, see Irwin Gellman, *Good Neighbor Policy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). Still, Gellman explains that the Good Neighbor Policy sought to concede only those U.S. advantages that had already become obsolete while retaining those it still considered necessary to its national interests. Gerald K. Haines has argued that Roosevelt and Welles justified their policy of supporting repressive dictatorships by claiming that they were technically "republics." See Gerald K. Haines, "Under the Eagle's Wing: The Franklin Roosevelt Administration Forges An American Hemisphere," *Diplomatic History* 1:4 (Fall 1977): 374. Paul Varg has explained that the Good Neighbor Policy aimed merely to maintain the economic dominance of the United States in the region. See Varg, "The Economic Side of the Good Neighbor Policy: The Reciprocal Trade Program and South America," *Pacific Historical Review* 45:1 (February 1976): 70-71. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Memoranda of conversations between Welles and Roosevelt regarding Cuba, January 26 and 30, 1934, box 149, folder 2, Welles papers,

FDRL; memorandum of conversations between Welles and Roosevelt regarding Cuba, March 3, 1934, box 149, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; memorandum of conversation between Welles and Roosevelt, August 14, 1934, box 149, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Sumner Welles, "On the Margin of War," delivered at the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, Panama, September 25, 1939, speech files, box 194, folder 13, Welles papers, FDRL; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-45* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 122-24, 175-76. Welles received much of the credit for the Good Neighbor Policy at the time. In a revealing "tell-all" article in the *New York Herald Tribune* in the autumn of 1936, William Castle, former under secretary of state (1931-1933) wrote that it "would probably be fair to say that Mr. Hull generally becomes aware of American policy in Latin America only after the fact," and that Welles "is perfectly willing to assume responsibility and to act independently even when such action may possibly be contrary to the policy of the Secretary." *New York Herald Tribune*, October 18, 1936. Such stories did little to improve the Welles-Hull relationship. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Sumner Welles, "On the Margin of War," delivered at the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, Panama, September 25, 1939, speech files, box 194, folder 13, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 59: For Welles's belief in the exportability of the "American system," see his speeches "On the Margin of War," op. cit.; and "The Victory of Peace," delivered February 26, 1943, speech files, box 196, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL; as well as Welles, *The Time For Decision*, 240-241. For an account of how Roosevelt and Welles sought to use the Western Hemisphere as a model for regionalism during the Second World War, see Warren Kimball's essay "'Baffled Virtue ... Injured Innocence': The Western Hemisphere as Regional Role Model," in Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin D. Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 107-125. [Back.](#)

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