The reputation of Brand Whitlock as a diplomat far surpasses his time spent as an attorney, author, and mayor. His work towards obtaining personal liberty in America followed him on his journey to Brussels, Belgium as he sought to provide aid for people oppressed. However, Brand Whitlock can be considered a reluctant hero because of his hesitancy towards becoming a councilman and later had an immense amount of influence during the Progressive Reform Era as mayor of Toledo, Ohio and as the first minister of Belgium. By analyzing his written narrative of Belgium, published after WWI, and his personal letters from the war, the motivation of minister Brand Whitlock, on behalf of the Belgium government, will be determined to show his personal investment to the people of Belgium.

Brand Whitlock a big time hero started as the mayor of Toledo, Ohio, where he served four consecutive terms from 1906 to 1913. Prior to his time in office, Whitlock had focused on his love for writing. Having no college education, he leaped into work as a news reporter for the Toledo Blade from 1887 to 1890 before moving to Chicago.¹ The windy city in 1891 was where he began his work in journalism as he wrote for the Herald, the top Democratic newspaper at the time. Gradually his goals led to bigger literary works and deeper into politics as he successfully completed the bar in 1894 but he also felt conflicted.² He was very unsettled, even uncertain of his own future. He wrote to Octavia Roberts, a close friend, in the summer of 1897 and revealed his inner turmoil³

During the past four months I have been in a state of such uncertainty, of such indecision, regarding my future career, that I border upon a state of nervous prostration—almost dementia. The question of selecting a location for the practice of law is the most difficult

as far as ever from a settled determination or I find myself apparently as far as ever from a settled determination or conviction. The turmoil of warring interest, duty, and desire rages on within me until I am almost exhausted, and no longer capable of forming mental judgment.  

Whitlock discussed a sort of apprehension towards his future career as a lawyer and explained the exhaustion that he felt because he was no longer capable of proper judgment. I have continued daily to study law—daily and nightly, and altogether it has been a weary and a dreary time. Such days as have not been gray, have been blue, and the star of literary ambition, while always there, winks mockingly at times. I am conscious more and more of my limitations, and filled with a grave self-distrust, a strong self-dissatisfaction. I feel a conviction growing of the futility of literary effort on my part. There is one consolation, if one can’t write, one can read, and I presume writers would urge us all to belong to this latter class.  

His continuous study of law began to take a toll on his emotions and interfered with his literary aspirations.  

The drive to compose several fictional stories was of focus for Brand Whitlock and the main subject of several of his personal letters in the months leading up to World War I. Whitlock’s motives were not those of a politician; his focus was to become an established writer. His conflict over law also expressed his hesitancy towards entering the life of politics. However, he soon became an extremely popular trial lawyer and gradually gained an extensive clientele.  

As a lawyer he was encouraged to defend the public in petty cases of loitering or vagrancy by

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Mayor Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones of Toledo. Whitlock’s political views were influenced by Mayor Jones, who served as mayor of Toledo before Whitlock. He was a strong supporter of Jones and even continued the reforms that Jones had implemented. Mayor Jones developed a strong passion for welfare and equal rights for the people, all of which were religiously motivated. Whitlock also took stock from his literary idols as well, including Tolstoy and Whitman as a basis for his social policies.8

The political reforms of both Samuel Jones and Brand Whitlock were true to the progressive movement of the time period. The Progressive Era took place in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century at the height of Whitlock’s career. The Progressive Party campaign of 1912, the year Woodrow Wilson was elected president, was at the foundation of fundamental changes that took place in American politics. Progressivism set out to restructure American politics by allying democracy and centralizing administrative powers. However, the progressive’s party platform was not a radical rejection of the American constitutional tradition but merely an effort to restore it. Progressives advocated for a government of the People directly by the People and sought to dissolve the concentration of wealth. “Supporters sought to sustain a sense of national identity in the face of the profound changes brought by the rise of the corporation and the expansion of immigration.”9 Like Whitlock and Jones, progressives who dedicated themselves to the welfare state, stood for the idea that programs of social control, social insurance or standardization of industry could not be adopted unless supported by public opinion.10 “For Progressives, public opinion would reach fulfillment with the formation of an

10 Milkis and Mileur. Progressivism and the New Democracy. 23.
independent executive power, freed from the provincial, special, and corrupt influence of political parties and commercial interests.” The progressive reforms challenged the very foundation of republican democracy and Whitlock was a strong supporter of the socialist movement.

In addition to sharing many of Samuel Jones’ political ideas, Whitlock served as the older man’s legal adviser. Mayor Jones even considered Whitlock to be a close friend and disciple. In spite of their close relationship, Whitlock remained an artist by trade and although a successful lawyer himself, he despised those with legalistic mindsets. His creative nature prevented him from being close-minded and he was always willing to assist all those in need, especially the poor. It was his success in the elected office that drew attention towards Whitlock becoming a national figure. He campaigned for mayor of Toledo without having any experience on how to run for political office or serve as mayor of a city. Newton D. Baker, mayor to Cleveland, described Whitlock as having more respect for Jones than himself as Whitlock continued the “experiment” in democracy. Whitlock soon developed a notorious reputation, not just because of his lack of experience, but also because of his demand for fairness. He was a man who focused on human interaction. He managed the city’s police, prison, crime, and labor problems through direct involvement, which allowed for a more efficient city. His hands-on involvement in humanitarian issues were another motivation for his literary works and eventually provided him with the proper necessities to serve as the foreign ambassador to Belgium.

Brand Whitlock continued a dual career before his efforts at writing were overshadowed by World War I. Yet, his artistic nature never allowed him to forget his determination to continue

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writing even if it was muddled within war and poverty across the globe. He brought forth a sensitivity to diplomacy that other diplomats lacked; while he lacked the arrogant nature, which most politicians inherently possessed. He strove to facilitate the progressive ideals, which he implemented during his time as mayor, and later during his diplomacy in Belgium. However, prior to becoming minister to Belgium, Whitlock visited Europe during the fall of 1912, in order to study several European cities. The state of Ohio had just recently amended its constitution to give Ohio cities greater independence. The idea for the trip was to learn from European cities as the United States had just hit the turning point for the progressive movement by electing Woodrow Wilson as president. Like, Mayor Newton Baker, of Cleveland Ohio, Whitlock felt it necessary to research successful cities in order to extend the social movement. Expression was what Whitlock wished to achieve. He wished to see Ohio with a more sentimental outlook and expression and believed the progressive movement could achieve that idea.

Despite Whitlock being motivated to broaden the progressive movement, his cause for going to Europe were clouded by his literary purpose. The opportunity to travel Europe reopened the doors for Whitlock’s creative side and, without fewer political duties at hand, his desire to write was the main objective. Even after hearing of his nomination to become the first U.S. ambassador to Belgium, his dream of writing continued. In December of 1913, while abroad, Whitlock learned of his nomination to the post of Minister of Belgium by Woodrow Wilson. He wrote a cordial letter to President Wilson to express his gratitude and eagerness to take the position, although his excitement most definitely was due to the fact he believed it would allow

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him more time for writing freedoms.\textsuperscript{17} However, his dream of vacationing in Europe and writing at leisure quickly came to a halt, as WWI took over most of Europe.

Once again, his diplomatic intentions were obscured by his thirst for writing. Although he accepted his new position as minister to Belgium and was honored to be able to represent the United States in Brussels, he entered the position halfheartedly. He was more encouraged by the thought that opportunities for writing would no longer be interrupted by his work, which is not the reflection of a true diplomat. Whitlock slowly developed a feeling of despondency towards democracy, even before becoming minister. In October of 1913, he wrote to Peter Witt, close friend and former colleague, and expressed his weariness and hesitancy toward diplomatic services.\textsuperscript{18}

I suppose you know that the Independent movement has been split in two, and that while each faction stands on the same platform and contains many good men, the movement has thus broken by personal ambitions so that it will probably be of little force hereafter, at least for a little while. The situation makes me sick at heart, and I have come pretty nearly to despair of democracy. Perhaps this is a mood that will pass with the weariness and nervousness that all this fighting has created in me.\textsuperscript{19}

The true diplomat acquires arrogance and upholds themselves to higher standards than those they work on behalf of. Politicians crave rewards and their work is a reflection of selfishness. As noted above, this was why Whitlock was so hesitant towards ever becoming a councilman. Yet, his literary idols and Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones provided him with the proper personal qualities needed for life in politics.

\textsuperscript{17} Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 172.
\textsuperscript{18} Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 170.
\textsuperscript{19} Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 170.
It was through the guidance of others that Brand Whitlock was able to create for himself such a reputation. His belief in the work of others, including President Wilson’s ideals and leadership, motivated him as a politician. His writing turned to record keeping as his personal history and presence in Belgium is known because of personal letters. His time in Belgium was not as a diplomat but as a free agent, as the United States was not actively involved in the war. He served as a correspondent between the Belgian government and the United States but he saw himself as a guest to witness the administration of European government. When Belgium was invaded he was able to give testimony to the true events that occurred leading up to WWI.

Upon arrival in Belgium in 1914, Whitlock encountered a hopeful and prosperous nation remaining intact despite the surrounding issues. He served as minister to Belgium for six months before World War I began. His personal letters recorded the reality of war but because of Germany’s invasion of Belgium he was distracted and unable to be as tedious as before. After the invasions Whitlock was unable to write every day as he had done before and his letters slowly began to become infrequent and an afterthought. Between the invasion and American’s entry into the war, he turned to recording all the events that took place in the spare time he had. His thorough documentation of Belgium’s involvement in the WWI was later published in 1919, following the war. In *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Whitlock provided an eyewitness account of the events of WWI and what truly occurred in Belgium. The narration of his experience shed a new light on warfare and its effect on civilians. Moreover, Whitlock wrote of his interactions with King Albert of Belgium, the other foreign ambassadors, and his own take on the war.

In August of 1914, Germany invaded Belgium despite the latter’s claim of neutrality. Prior to the invasion, the Germans delivered an ultimatum to the Belgian government, demanding passage through their land. The foreign ambassadors at the time were greatly
concerned with the outcome of Germany’s threat and waited for any news as to what would come of Belgium. The devastating news of the ultimatum arrived Friday July 31, 1914 and resulted in chaos. The Belgian government refused to break their neutrality and promised the German government resistance to any aggression.\textsuperscript{20} The Germans response was an onslaught, as they would take land by force. Belgium turned to France and England who guaranteed alliance if Belgian soil was invaded. Despite the invasion being inevitable, the temperament of ambassadors began to change. Whitlock noticed that women were calmer, braver, and more reasonable during hardship.\textsuperscript{21}

Many of them were in fear, many in a panic, a few almost in a frenzy. There were those who wished to go home, and there were those who, still loath to relinquish their European tour—did not wish to go home. Many of them were without money, their travellers’ checks suddenly worthless; they were at their wit’s ends. I find a note in my journal to the effect that the women were often calmer, braver, more reasonable than the men. It was a strain listening to the repeated tales of hardship. What they most needed was some one to think and, above all to decide for them, for they were too perturbed to think or to decide for themselves…\textsuperscript{22}

Even the foreign delegators were far more concerned for themselves than for the country of Belgium. Many of the delegates wished to return to America and end their tour of Europe, although, like Whitlock, there were a few who wished to stay and not give up their dream of European travels.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 52
\textsuperscript{22} Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 51-52.
\textsuperscript{23} Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 52
Germany was not alone in sending ultimatums during WWI. Six days prior to the Germans ultimatum, the Austrians had sent their own demands to the Serbian government. The Balkan diplomacy was very familiar with ultimatums and their own was brutal and undoubtedly urgent, as they demanded a reply within 48 hours.²⁴ Whitlock believed no nation could ignore such a summons and knew a fight would be the inevitable outcome. The question Whitlock had was, would the war be confined to the Balkans or would it spread to all of Europe?²⁵ He involved himself in the several correspondences between Austria and Serbia as he read the different dispatches from the capitals. Whitlock believed that through the work of diplomacy, the Serbian and Austro-Hungarian government could find a solution. Most importantly, he believed a settlement would occur without involving neutral Belgium and the preoccupied America.²⁶

Despite these hopes, he was prepared and almost expectant of the outbreak of war. In the early morning of August 1914, Whitlock was notified of what he already knew. His servant, Omer, was there dressed in uniform informing Whitlock of what everyone in Belgium feared.²⁷ Europe was rapidly mobilizing, Luxemburg had already been invaded and the declarations of war were simply formalities. Despite this news, not once was Whitlock in a state of panic at the idea of being in Belgium during the invasion. His calm demeanor was due to his focus on helping with the American legation. He was even too busy to notice the affect the soon to be war had on his family.²⁸

… I went upstairs and told my wife that we’re in for it, that war was certain, but I was too busy all that morning to notice how the family was affected—until at noon my wife told

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²⁷ Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 47
²⁸ Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 55
me that Aunt Sarah had decided to go home; she was sadly shaken. Great bustling about then, rushing up and downstairs, servants flying everywhere and clamouring Americans in the corridors below!²⁹

He became preoccupied with assisting his fellow ambassadors and helping the civilians who remained in Belgium.

His interests in Belgian relief came as rapidly as the suffering did. Belgium quickly fell to the German invasion and the devastation was widespread and extreme. Towns and small villages were being burned, civilians were killed in the crossfire, and property was seized. Whitlock, along with several other ambassadors grew overwhelmed with the need to do something to protect the lives of the innocent. He quickly came to realize that the destruction of towns was limiting the native Belgians access to supplies and food. Hunger no longer involved social classes but the nation and eventually Europe as a whole. The Belgian government worked to correspond with the Germans to acknowledge their struggles. In time, the German authorities recognized the need for resources, as poverty and hunger levels rose, and agreed that any food brought in would not be seized or used by German forces.³⁰ Quickly the efforts of Brand Whitlock as minister to Belgium changed drastically with the times of war.

As minister to Belgium his work became more about activism in order to provide for the people. He focused solely on the well-being of the Belgians who did not desert their homeland. He was extremely concerned with the conditions of Belgium, mainly the dwindling food supply. In a letter to President Wilson, he addressed the threat of starvation to the people of Belgium:

The President, Washington: In two weeks the civil population of Belgium, already in misery, will face starvation. In view of this fact, and at the request of the Relief

³⁰ Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative.* 343-344
Committee, I venture to call your attention to my telegram to the Department dated October 16 in the conviction that your great heart will find some way by which America may help provide food for those hungry ones in the dark days of the terrible winter that is going on.  

He strongly encouraged President Wilson and the American government to help provide aid, not just for the Belgians but also the remaining Americans. Whitlock’s top priority was no longer writing but had become providing necessities to the citizens during the war. The interests of both Belgians and outside civilians became his main concern. He had no prior knowledge of what to do in situations of war and so he was put to the ultimate test. He immersed himself in obtaining proper resources for the civilian population. He continued to send requests for support to the American ambassador stationed in London. Eventually, assistance came in the form of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Herbert Hoover, later the 31st president of the United States, who at the time was in London assisting in sending Americans home as the war became overwhelming, organized the CRB in order to raise funds necessary to purchase food for the Belgian civil population. The organization was composed entirely of Americans and would ship the food exclusively to Brand Whitlock, as the American Minister in Brussels.

However, the CRB, which was working to provide help for innocent civilians had their own issues, which Brand Whitlock addressed. The relationship between the CRB and the Comité National, a French relief program, became distressed as the war continued. At first, the CRB were quickly able to produce several thousands of distributing programs in Belgium and Northern France. Not only were the committees providing food but also medicine, help for

32 Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 358
33 Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 359
orphanges and even an agricultural committee was set in place.\textsuperscript{34} The CRB slowly began to grow in size, establishing offices in London, New York, and Rotterdam. The organization worked quickly to establish an office in Brussels in order to coordinate with the Comité National.\textsuperscript{35} Yet, when the committees began facing difficulties with the CN, Whitlock worked quickly to resolve the problems.\textsuperscript{36}

The direction of the CRB was that all food was to be delivered straight to the American minister of Belgium and then distributed under his supervision.\textsuperscript{37} This responsibility quickly became Whitlock’s greatest role as the foreign ambassador to Belgium. He supervised food distribution and when unable he sent representatives. His support during the war was not superficial and from an office but at the war front. He was neither standoffish nor afraid of involving himself in the war and although he was an American abroad he showed the same support to the foreign socialist parties as he showed loyalty to King Albert of Belgium. His growing job as an ambassador and relationship to the king was what motivated him to support the Belgian government.

Throughout the war, Brand Whitlock exchanged several letters from King Albert in regards to each other’s health, their wives, and their concerns for the nation. The most important letter he received was concerning his memoir, \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}, and his dedication to King Albert:

\begin{center}

Dear Ambassador,

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\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. V.2. 90
\item Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 361
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\item Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 362
\end{thebibliography}
You have given me a very real pleasure in sending me, with a cordial dedication, your handsome and interesting volume upon life in Belgium during the German occupation. I thank you for it most sincerely.

All that you have observed, with so much penetration and balance, will serve to furnish a precious documentation to history.

No man could throw a more heroic light upon this story than he who, for three years, represented the great American republic at Brussels with such elevated authority, and whose firmness and dignity of deportment made him the unescapable judge of those who placed might above right.

The Queen and I shall always cherish the memory of you and Mrs. Brand Whitlock as true and steadfast friends. We hope that we shall often have an opportunity to resume our pleasant and interesting talks.

We offer you again the assurance of our unvarying friendship, and I beg you, dear Ambassador, to believe in my devoted regard.

ALBERT

His decision to dedicate his memoir to King Albert served as another reminder of Whitlock’s support for Belgium during WWI. He witnessed the King’s speech in parliament and was greatly moved, as were the other ministers. The parliament chamber was filled with intense emotion and a captivating show of patriotism. He felt a sense of pride for King Albert just as the Belgians did for their own ruler. Despite being a foreigner to the land, he showed an appreciation for the king just as he did for President Wilson.

38 Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 61
A relationship between foreign delegate and ruler involves communication from government to government, and Whitlock was no exception to this as he served as intermediary between President Wilson and King Albert. Whitlock oversaw the delivery of personal messages from King Albert to Wilson and vice versa. He also worked to create a pleasurable atmosphere by expressing the appreciation that both leaders held for one another. His own appreciation for both leaders was not lost in translation either. In a letter to President Wilson, after receiving news of his nomination to become ambassador to Belgium he stated:

For it is an honor to represent our country at Brussels, and all the more an honor to receive this distinction from an Administration that means so much to American and to Americans everywhere, as does this Administration under your brilliant leadership. And when I speak of American, I am thinking not only of that physical America of which we are all so proud, but, with you at its head, of that America of the mind, whose beautiful ideals your great work is realizing.  

Whitlock idolized both men and believed in their ideals. He wanted so greatly to please them with his own work as minister to Belgium, his ideals became that of someone else’s.

His efforts at the war front were not selfish acts because he sought to provide help to those in need. His motivation on behalf of the Belgian government was for the civil population. His own ideals may have been formed on the basis of others but he represented the Belgian people in a time of urgency. He provided a nation with justice and a deep compassion to survive war. He was able to smooth the creases of war in the most unlikely places. His relief for aid was extended to court where he negotiated on behalf of the Belgian people. He attended trials and hearings of city officials, citizens, even manufacturers to offer protest for those convicted

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40 Brand Whitlock. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. 1viii
under false pretenses by the Germans.\footnote{Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 1ix} His work as a foreign ambassador in Belgium gave him the reputation as a big time hero who gave relief to a nation.

Despite his American citizenship, Whitlock never returned to America with the intention of permanent residency. He stayed in Belgium as minister until 1922 before he began his concentration of literature and surrounded himself in an environment of cultivated aristocracy. His literary works depended on his residency outside of America, as he firmly believed his work would have more potential. He continued to visit Brussels and several European cities and traveled home to the United States on occasion. However, he was particular to Cannes, France and resided there until his death in 1934. He noted of the change within himself. He was able to admit that his old liberalism was gone and the disintegration of European civilization turned him into a conservative.

One changes as one grows older, one becomes a little more patient, perhaps a little wiser. And then, most of the reforms I used to advocate in my strenuous young days have been adopted. I don’t know whether they have done any good or not, but they don’t seem to have very much harm, at any rate. As to the new ones proposed, I am afraid that I am not quite advanced enough for them…. Of course, as one grows older, one loses a good many illusions, but the main thing is to keep one’s ideals. To lose both illusions and ideals is the worst of all tragedies.\footnote{Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 1xv.}

He lost faith in the social reforms and no longer had any sympathy for socialism.\footnote{Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 1xiv.} His own consciousness of his personal failure also pushed him towards disillusionment. He was eager to become a renowned novelist and he believed the eighteen novels he published fell far short of

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\footnote{Brand Whitlock. \textit{Belgium: A Personal Narrative}. 1ix}
\footnote{Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 1xiv.}
\footnote{Whitlock and Nevins, \textit{The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock}. 1xv.}
this goal. Yet, he forgot that he lived a noble, devoted and at times heroic life that did not go unnoticed.

Brand Whitlock provided an eyewitness account of WWI. He was able to take the events of a ghastly war and humanize them. He gave the country of Belgium a beating heart and pulse to represent its people. His work as minister to Belgium was immersed in protecting the lives of civilians. His letters, though written to maintain his own sanity, shed a new light on the harsh reality of war. He was not frightened or threatened by Germany’s invasion nor was he willing to leave. The war on Belgium provided Whitlock with enough motivation to go above and beyond his title. His creativity as a writer was transformed and used to have powerful effect during a delicate situation. He provided thousands with food, medicine, and shelter during war, not for the sake of his name but for the sake of Belgium and its people. He was desperate to see Belgium survive the war and in the end she did. It was through his personal investment in Belgium that he was able to take detailed documentation and turn it into a narrative no one should soon forget.
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