

# Robert Lansing Biography

## Robert Lansing

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# Contents

<a href="#">Robert Lansing Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>

# Biography

Robert Lansing (1864-1928), American lawyer and statesman and an expert in international law, was secretary of state in Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet.

Robert Lansing was born in Watertown, N.Y., on Oct. 17, 1864. He graduated from Amherst College in 1886 and 3 years later joined his father's law firm. His marriage to Eleanor Foster, daughter of John W. Foster, President Grover Cleveland's secretary of state, made possible a career in international law. He served as legal counsel in many important international negotiations, including the Bering Sea Arbitration (1892-1893), the Bering Sea Claims Commission (1896-1897), the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal (1903), the North Atlantic Fisheries Arbitration (1909-1910), and the American and British Claims Arbitration (1912-1914). He also helped found the American Society of International Law and its *Journal*.

President Woodrow Wilson appointed Lansing counselor of the State Department in 1914. He influenced policy in several important crises, including the *Lusitania* affair after the outbreak of World War I. Following the unexpected resignation of Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, Lansing assumed his place in June 1915.

Lansing played a useful but subordinate role in the Wilson administration. He was a supporter of the Allied forces in the war, despite his condemnation of their violations of neutral rights, and he strongly favored American intervention against the Central Powers in April 1917. During World War I Lansing negotiated the Lansing-Ishii Agreement with Japan (1917), which helped curb Japanese expansionism in East Asia. He also applied the doctrine of nonrecognition to the Bolshevik regime in Russia. He took little part in formulating American war aims. Despite his differences with the President, Lansing retained Wilson's confidence until 1919, when, at the Paris Peace Conference, he expressed criticism of Wilson's plan for a league of nations. However, after signing the Versailles Treaty, the secretary returned to Washington and sought unsuccessfully to obtain senatorial acceptance for the League Covenant.

Lansing's attempt to assume leadership of the Cabinet during Wilson's illness in 1919 incurred the President's wrath. Wilson forced him to resign in February 1920. Lansing practiced law in Washington, D.C., until his death on Oct. 30, 1928.

Lansing published several books concerning the Paris Peace Conference and the war years. His more general publications include *Government: Its Origin, Growth, and Form in the United States* (1902), with Gary M. Jones, and *Notes on Sovereignty* (1921).