

6.27 Hồ Chí Minh at the Paris Peace Conference (1919)

Source: <http://vietnamwar.lib.umb.edu/origins/docs/Lansing.html>

Background: Hồ Chí Minh, who led Vietnam to independence in wars against Japan, France, and the United States, first appeared on the international stage at the Peace Conference in France after World War I. At the time he used the name Nguyen Ai Quoc. Vietnamese nationalists took Woodrow Wilson's promise of national self-determination seriously and unsuccessfully lobbied for an end to French and British colonialism in South East Asia. In this letter, Nguyen Ai Quoc tried to enlist the support of American Secretary of State Robert Lansing for an independent Vietnam for the Annamite people.

Questions

1. Who was Nguyen Ai Quoc?
2. Why did he address this letter to American Secretary of State Robert Lansing?
3. In your opinion, how would history have been different if the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles after World War I had accepted the demand of Third World people for national self-determination?

Letter of Nguyen Ai Quoc (Hồ Chí Minh) to the American Secretary of State, Paris, June 18, 1919

To his Excellency, the Secretary of State of the Republic of the United States, Delegate to the Peace Conference, Excellency,

We take the liberty of submitting to you the accompanying memorandum setting forth the claims of the Annamite [Vietnamese] people on the occasion of the Allied victory. We count on your great kindness to honor our appeal by your support whenever the opportunity arises. We beg your Excellency graciously to accept the expression of our profound respect.

Nguyen Ai Quoc

Claims of the Annamite [Vietnamese] People

Since the victory of the Allies, all the subject peoples are frantic with hope at prospect of an era of right and justice which should begin for them by virtue of the formal and solemn engagements, made before the whole world by the various powers of the entente in the struggle of civilization against barbarism.

While waiting for the principle of national self-determination to pass from ideal to reality through the effective recognition of the sacred right of all peoples to decide their own destiny, the inhabitants of the ancient Empire of Annam, at the present time French Indochina, present to the noble Governments of the entente in general and in particular to the honorable French Government the following humble claims:

- (1) General amnesty for all the native people who have been condemned for political activity.
- (2) Reform of Indochinese justice by granting to the native population the same judicial guarantees as the Europeans have, and the total suppression of the special courts which are the instruments of terrorization and oppression against the most responsible elements of the Annamite people.
- (3) Freedom of press and speech.
- (4) Freedom of association and assembly
- (5) Freedom to emigrate and to travel abroad.
- (6) Freedom of education, and creation in every province of technical and professional schools for the native population.
- (7) Replacement of the regime of arbitrary decrees by a regime of law.
- (8) A permanent delegation of native people elected to attend the French parliament in order to keep the latter informed of their needs.

The Annamite people, in presenting these claims, count on the worldwide justice of all the Powers, and rely in particular on the goodwill of the noble French people who hold our destiny in their hands and who, as France is a republic, have taken us under their protection. In requesting the protection of the French people, the people of Annam, far from feeling humiliated, on the contrary consider themselves honored, because they know that the French people stand for liberty and justice and will never renounce their sublime ideal of universal brotherhood. Consequently, in giving heed to the voice of the oppressed, the French people will be doing their duty to France and to humanity.