remains some of the most moving writing in American journalism.

In the final chapter of the book McKee writes: “William Allen White was never as liberal as he thought himself; certainly he was never the radical he called himself” (p. 198). And in the same chapter McKee comments that all his life White stood in the broad middle way of midwestern liberalism, throwing brickbats at the extremists on either side of the highway. “Because democratic liberalism has so many shades and because William Allen White felt free to move over the whole spectrum of that liberalism, he confused his friends and enraged his enemies” (p. 202).

McKee, professor of English at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, has written a fine work. There is no trace of literary sterility. White comes through as a flesh and blood human, deeply involved in the passions and controversies of his time, a newspaperman and politician who made a significant contribution to his nation in both fields.

*Indianapolis News*  
Edward H. Ziegner


In early 1917 a small coalition of United States senators filibustered to death the so called Armed Ship Bill which would have given President Woodrow Wilson authority to place weapons on American merchant ships. The successful Senate effort provoked Wilson into firing his famous arrow of wrath at the “little group of willful men” who, “representing no opinion but their own, have rendered the great government of the United States helpless and contemptible” (p. 3).

Although this dispute has been obscured in history by Wilson’s later battle with Congress over United States membership in the League of Nations, the struggle was no small matter. It involved some of the great names in Senate history (George W. Norris, Robert M. La Follette, Henry Cabot Lodge) and dealt with a major foreign policy issue. The outcome not only exercised an impact on the operating procedures of the Senate (the first cloture rule ever was adopted
following the filibuster) but also affected domestic and world politics.

Thomas W. Ryley's slim volume provides a dispassionate discussion of the events and players in the debate over the Armed Ship Bill. Ryley carefully reviews source material, giving a balanced assessment of the motivations and tactics of the opponents of the legislation as well as an analysis of whether a filibuster actually took place or whether there was merely "extended debate." The book is useful beyond its immediate topic for, as Ryley himself points out, he treats a subject over which there has been similar controversy in the last decade and a half, the appropriate role of Congress in American foreign policy.

Ryley provides carefully documented illustrations of tactics in the dispute, tactics used even today by the executive branch to get its way with Congress on foreign policy matters: a major presidential address, an invocation of the urgency of action (Wilson's speech was delivered less than six days before Congress adjourned), a carefully timed release of significant information (the Zimmerman note), and an unwillingness to accept amendments.

Perhaps the most instructive result of the armed ship debate was Wilson's action immediately following the death of the bill. Ryley recounts how, four days after Congress adjourned without passing the measure, Wilson, lacking congressional authority, began to explore ways to arm merchant ships by using his power as commander in chief. His decision to arm them was announced the following day.

The consequence of the debate and filibuster on the Armed Ship Bill then was startling, although, viewed in 1976 against the events of the last decade, not unfamiliar. The action did not change Wilson's course: sans congressional sanction he nonetheless armed the ships. It was, of course, similar executive disregard for Congress which during the 1960s and 1970s prompted Congress to enact over President Richard M. Nixon's veto the War Powers Act, preventing presidents from exercising war making or quasi-war making powers without the express consent of Congress.

Ryley's book leaves the impression that the senators who opposed the bill were not at all a "little group of willful men" but rather a coalition of dedicated persons who, for a variety of reasons, felt it necessary to oppose Wilson's steamroller
methods. Their efforts gave rise to the same question often faced today when people in the executive branch of government—some in very high places—despite their rhetoric about the joys of executive-legislative “partnership” in foreign affairs, do not really believe that Congress should be significantly involved in the shaping of foreign policy. Although the Constitution assigns to the president chief responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy, there are, in this reviewer’s opinion, three major roles appropriate to Congress in this field. First, Congress can establish—through law or in other ways—or give sanction to, certain principles that govern the nation’s foreign affairs. Second, Congress can oversee the implementation of these principles by the executive branch. Clearly, Congress cannot—nor should it—run foreign policy on a day to day basis. But, equally clearly, Congress has the right, indeed the obligation, to monitor the executive branch in its direction of international affairs. Third, under the Constitution, it is Congress that has power to appropriate the money essential to the carrying out of policy abroad as well as at home.

Recent events have demonstrated the importance to the national interest of an active Congress vigorously exercising its responsibilities in foreign policymaking. Professor Ryley’s book is a case study which illumines this crucial though still unresolved issue.

Member of Congress, John Brademas
Third District, Indiana


One of the finest historical series currently being published by a major university press is Ohio State’s Modern America. Begun in 1964 and edited by John Braeman (University of Nebraska), Robert Bremner (Ohio State), and David Brody (University of California—Davis), the books deal with important themes in twentieth century American history and represent significant monographic contributions