THE MILLENNIUM AND THE MADHOUSE:
INSTITUTION AND INTERVENTION IN
WOODROW WILSON’S PROGRESSIVE STATECRAFT

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by

Matthew Todd Phillips

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I had officially become a history major at Thiel College only about two weeks before the September 11th attacks. The subsequent war, regime change and nation-building in Afghanistan continued through my graduation in 2003. I began my graduate school career at Kent State University about three months after American tanks rolled through Baghdad, Iraq, a successful offensive leading to more regime change and the concurrent construction and destruction of nation-building. Those wars surged, wound down, and surged again as I began work on my dissertation. Along the way, smaller operations also brought American force to bear in Pakistan, the Philippines, Yemen, and elsewhere. In the final months of research and writing, American bombs began to rain down on Libya. And, now, as I finalize things, a unilateral operation in Pakistan has put Osama bin Laden in the sea.

Even before 2001 I had found something compelling and unsettling in the interplay between benevolence and self-interest, best intentions and the use of force. It was the Vietnam War, in fact, that had first pulled me into history. In all of these cases, I rarely found people’s explanations of hypocrisy or inconsistency on the part of policymakers to be satisfying; the rhetoric throughout the nation always seemed far too sincere for greed, bloodlust, or anything simple to be the only explanation. Ultimately, my questions led me to the World War I era, a time when determined and visionary rhetoric of human progress coursed through a mankind bent on some of worst carnage witnessed in history, as industrial warfare and poison gas claimed millions of lives. In the
end, that pointed me toward trying to grasp the thinking of a man who directly embodied these fundamental tensions between principles and force—Woodrow Wilson. From Wilson’s interventions to the current Libya campaign, it has been clear that hypocrisy and inconsistency are inadequate explanations—that there is something deeper at work in the fabric of U.S. society that has led to recurring patterns in the use of force. The research I present here represents an attempt to understand.

I can never hope to thank in any way that is adequate all the people who have helped me along the way, but here’s a stab at doing them some justice. My committee, of course, gets top billing—above all my advisor of more than seven years, Ann Heiss. Her eagle-eyed editing elevated this dissertation from what otherwise would have been caveman gibberish. She was instrumental at all stages of the research and writing process, and before that point her courses were truly eye-opening. She’s been almost disturbingly helpful; at one point she even drove me to and from a medical procedure. I can’t thank her enough. Clarence Wunderlin has been a source of deep questions regarding ideology and rhetoric. His in-depth comments written all over my papers—in two colors of ink—have given me the benefit of great insight and provided me with direction. His buffalo burgers and wide selection of random beers, further, contributed some of the calories that went into this dissertation. Elizabeth Smith-Pryor helped me to understand the nature of race in the Progressive Era, always knew the right book or article to recommend, and offered discerning and good-spirited commentary. Richard Feinberg broadened my thinking with an anthropological perspective; the knowledge he imparted helped me not
only with the history of social theory but also with the cultural theory that buttresses my research. At the University of Akron, studying with Walter Hixson was like being hit over the head repeatedly with a post-modern approach to U.S. foreign relations—and this was a good thing! I thank them all.

Other folk at Kent and Akron have been very willing to hear my ideas, to bounce ideas back to me, and to ask questions that have forced me to think more deeply about aspects of my research. Though this list is no doubt incomplete, it certainly includes Kevin Kern, Assad Pino, Alison Fletcher, Lenette Taylor, Steve Haynes, Patti Kameya, Melissa Steinmetz, Tom Weyant, Lisa Lazear, Mathew Brundage, Monika Flaschka, Bailey Trenchard, Denise Jenison, and, especially, Sarah Žabić (who actually seemed to enjoy listening about my topic for minutes on end). Bowman 205 and Ray’s Place—the two homes of Kent State’s colony of History graduate students—have witnessed the greatest discussions and the greatest levity, and everyone who has been part of this experience deserves a collective thank you here and an individual thanks in person. You have all made my Kent State experience more than memorable.

Various professional organizations have proven to be amazing communities, as well. Through meetings of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations I have had the pleasure of meeting Mark Gilderhus, John Milton Cooper, Jr., John A. Thompson, and Lloyd Ambrosius, all of whom have been exceedingly affable as they listened to and read my work and provided their thoughts and advice. Any challenge I make to any of their arguments regarding Wilson comes solely out of the complete and utter respect I have for them and their work. The same holds true for Mark Benbow and
Bob Kane, who have been great fellow panelists and conference-goers. Closer to home, other organizations such as the Ohio Academy of History have afforded me the opportunity to meet and chat with Gary Hess, John McNay, John White, Joseph Watras, Clayton Koppes, Una Cadegan, and others, all of whom seriously mulled over aspects of my research and provided me with constructive thoughts.

Immeasurable thanks is also in store for people whose impact goes deeper than my dissertation, such as my social studies and history teachers over the years. At Port Allegany, Matt Wilson and Harry Stevenson above all sparked my historical thinking. Taking Stevenson’s classes were truly inspiring and life-altering. At Thiel College, James Koshan, Robert Olson, and James Bloomfield were the perfect trio to learn from. Bloomfield drilled into everyone’s head the need to “read, study, and learn.” Olson taught with a soft-spoken intensity and a seriousness coupled with the perfect dry sense of humor. My attention to Native Americans in this dissertation owes much to his lessons. Koshan took and continues to receive a good-natured beating from students who adore him. With an infectious drive to probe and ask questions, a passion for history and society, and simply a great humor, there is no better teacher. His repeated questioning, “What is an American? What is an American?” and “How do you kill an idea?” still resonates with me; in many ways, these questions course through my work here. It was fitting that, shortly after filing the paperwork to major in History, I was sitting in a discussion class with Koshan when two planes hit the World Trade Center towers, another hit the Pentagon, and a fourth plane flew overhead before turning around in Ohio and ultimately crashing south of Pittsburgh. “This changes everything,” he said.
By the way, archivists, public historians, and librarians pretty much rock. John Powell, curator of the Woodrow Wilson House, emailed me a number of sources related to the first Abyssinia mission to the United States, and I subsequently used them to bookend my dissertation. Clark Evans of the Library of Congress and Linda McCurdy of Duke University were very helpful as I mapped out some of my preliminary research. The staff at the Archives of the History of American Psychology in Akron was impeccable; research there was truly enjoyable. Likewise, the people who helped me at the Harvey S. Firestone Library and the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University were consummate professionals, as they wheeled out and whisked away pile after pile of microfilm for me.

I’m certain that there are many more names that should be here. Family and friends go without saying. Many of them asked not to be named here. This includes my wife, Sara, so I suppose I shouldn’t write about how wonderful she is, how she kept me sane through the stressful parts of the dissertation process, and other nice things like that. There’s also someone who I can’t thank by name—the mystery person, perhaps long since passed, who left a 1920s newspaper clipping in an old book I looked at in the course of my research; the clipping, which was of an article detailing Bolshevik marriage laws, provided me with a “eureka” moment that worked its way into this dissertation.

Lastly, Arthur Link, who I never met but who dedicated over thirty years to editing the 69-volume *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, deserves the utmost gratitude. The importance of the work he did is immeasurable.
One final remark is that any factual mistakes found in the following pages are solely my own responsibility. Don’t even think about blaming any of the fine people mentioned here.
Introduction

*I have great confidence in progress; I feel the movement that is in affairs and am conscious of a persistent push behind the present order.*

– Woodrow Wilson (1889)

“Out of a land wreathed in the mists of antiquity, a plateau encompassed with mountain barriers,” wrote the *New York Times* in August 1919, came four emissaries from Ethiopia bearing gifts and congratulations for the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. At the head of the mission was Adafersaw Yenadu, the Dejazmach (or Commander in Chief) and son of the late emperor, Menelik II. The *Times* described Menelik, who had died in 1913 during Wilson’s first year in office, as a figure “seemingly from the pages of Arabian legends”; he had achieved international acclaim in the 1890s when his kingdom’s dramatic repelling of an Italian invasion secured Ethiopia’s sovereignty amidst the Scramble for Africa. The delegation in 1919—Ethiopia’s first mission to the United States—also included Kantiba Gabrou, a diplomat conversant in English; Ate Hirouy, the mayor of Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa; and Ato Snikae, Yenadu’s assistant. The acting secretary of state, William Phillips, greeted them upon their arrival in Washington, D.C. After presenting gifts to President and Mrs. Wilson, their plan was to tour the United States in order to learn, above all, about the

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economic opportunities and technology of—as the Times phrased it—“this bustling Yankee business race.” Connected to the mission were letters from the Empress, Zewditu, and her cousin and regent, Ras (or Prince) Tafari Makonnen. Zewditu wrote, “We feel in our hearts that America has risen with firmness to proclaim the equality and independence of all the nations of the world. May God grant to your country blessings and prosperity.” Tafari, who would later gain international renown and become America’s close Cold War ally as Emperor Haile Selassie I, expressed his joy with the Allies’ victory, noting that when he heard that “the purpose of America [was] to give independence to the entire globe, my heart was comforted with hope.”

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2 John Powell of the Woodrow Wilson House was exceedingly helpful with the material for this section and furnished me with photographs of the gifts mentioned below; “First Call for Abyssinia!” New York Times, August 10, 1919, X3; New York Times hereafter abbreviated NYT; “Abyssinians Here to Greet America,” The Washington Post, July 8, 1919, 1; Breckinridge Long to Joseph Patrick Tumulty, with enclosures, Washington, July 12, 1919, PWW 61:470-74; Zaouditou, Empress of Ethiopia, to Woodrow Wilson (hereafter WW), Meizia 15, 1911 (April 22, 1919), ibid., 472; Ras Tafari to WW, Meizia 15, 1911 (April 22, 1919), ibid. 472-73; Ethiopia and the United States had been working on treaty of commerce since around April 1914, but uncertainty over the royal succession coupled with divisions of sympathy related to World War I contributed to difficulties; a treaty was concluded between executive parties in both states in June 1914—and President Wilson and Lij Iyasu even exchanged direct correspondence—but the American draft, awaiting Congressional ratification, became buried and forgotten in paperwork until Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby brought it to Wilson’s attention in August 1920. The impetus for new action was the beginning of operations of Anglo-American Oil Company—connected to Standard Oil—in Ethiopia’s Harrar province, which pressed the need for a permanent American diplomatic posting in Ethiopia. See United States. Dept. of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920 (Washington, U.S. Govt. Printing Office), 229-52; Foreign Relations of the United States hereafter abbreviated FRUS.
The Ethiopians almost certainly captured Wilson’s imagination as they explained their kingdom’s ancient connections to David and Solomon through Queen Macada of Sheba, their nation’s conversion to Christianity in “the time of Constantine,” their holy crusades since then, and their familiarity with and love for America’s war for independence. Enhancing the almost mystical aura of the proceedings was the presentation of gifts, which included royal clothing studded with silver and jewels for Mr. and Mrs. Wilson; jewelry and a gown for the first lady; delicately embroidered cloth; two elephant tusks apparently weighing over one hundred pounds each; a shield of gold and hippopotamus hide trimmed with purple velvet and jewels; a solid gold crown; a cape made from a lion’s mane and trimmed in velvet and silver ornaments; javelins; and a beautiful curved sword with a rhinoceros horn hilt and a scabbard of purple velvet and gold. The last was perhaps most meaningful, as the late Menelik once wore the sword, whose initials it bore.³

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Nearing the end of their trip, Gabrou remarked, “During our entire stay here we have been impressed with your kind hospitality. You have made us feel very welcome. We felt all the time as if we were among friends.” Yet, the news accounts tell another story, one of ambassadors from afar deeply troubled by the biases of a United States in the thrall of Jim Crow. On the night of Sunday, August 3, the emissaries were to be the distinguished guests at the National Democratic Club in New York City. Earlier in the day they had been traveling to Central Park with their sponsor, the American Consul General to Persia, H. H. Topaykan, who stopped at the club along the way for a cigar. Some of the club’s members chafed at the sight of the Ethiopians, and at least one man stridently voiced his objection to their planned dinner that evening. Later, the entourage learned that the dinner was canceled. A replacement venue, the Ritz Carlton, was not secured until well into the evening. The Club ardently denied that the “color line” was a factor, claiming that Sunday evenings were reserved for ladies’ nights. Topaykan and the New York Times remained wholly
unconvinced, and those involved said that Yenadu was “deeply hurt” by what had transpired.  

Not long before this point President Wilson had returned to the United States after playing such an instrumental role in the post World War I peace proceedings, which included the drafting of the Covenant of the League of Nations, that he later received the Nobel Peace Prize. He had articulated such an appealing vision of justice and democracy that his words had even captivated the nobility in Ethiopia, a distant, uncolonized kingdom that had not even fought in the war. Yet in 1919, as the emissaries came to the United States with their congratulations and their desire to forge a close friendship with the world’s apparent moral leader, they became the victims of American prejudice. The incident speaks to the tensions built into Wilson’s progressive vision. William Monroe Trotter, a strongly anti-accommodationist African American who Wilson barred from the White House, once asked the president to show African Americans the same respect he had given other people “of color” in the world (specifically, the people of the Philippines); later, hoping to make his case at Versailles during the peace conference, Trotter had to find work as a waiter on an ocean liner, since Wilson’s administration had made acquiring passports difficult for African Americans. As this dissertation will make clear, though, the reverence that Wilson held for ancient Abyssinia and the hope that he had in the Filipinos was not at all at odds with his concurrent support for Jim Crow laws.

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5 The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Wilson the 1919 prize one year later, in 1920.
6 Trotter was specifically referring to Wilson’s promise of independence to the people of the Philippines; William Monroe Trotter, address to WW, November 6, 1913, *PWW* 28:494.
or their global equivalent, the colonial mandates in Africa and elsewhere that came out of Versailles.

An elaboration of this dissertation’s argument follows later in this introduction, but in short it deals in large measure with the disentangling of Woodrow Wilson’s world view and the way in which he applied it to situations he encountered while in office, and one of the major undercurrents throughout is the realization that many of Wilson’s seeming paradoxes are internally consistent and conform to his own philosophy. To some of his contemporaries, he appeared a moral crusader, while others found his secularism to be repugnant; he believed that leaders should be “animated” and yet conservative and that liberty required regulation; his universalism was relativistic; his religious principles were, in his own estimation, orthodox and unorthodox at once; racial and gender hierarchies were embedded within his liberal internationalism; he sought order and anarchy and the concurrent growth and erosion of state power; he showed both a sympathy and an intense hatred for socialism; he preached that moral ends could be attained through amoral means; he fought to end power politics while using power politics; he pushed for global interdependence while empowering American exceptionalism; and he held that human agency was essential in the playing out of Providential destiny. Reverence for Ethiopia juxtaposed with generally low regard for the “black” community within the United States is just another example of a Wilsonian view that may jar assumptions. Wilson presents a
riddle, then, one that has afforded scholars many an opportunity to find apparent paradox or hypocrisy.⁷

Unraveling Wilson’s “riddle” speaks to larger questions dealing with the nature of the United States, its principles, and its power. Oftentimes at first blush commonly stated American principles seem at odds with the use of American power—political, military, cultural, or economic. Like the Cold War and the present post-9/11 period, the 1910s can seem a wholly contradictory time, particularly when contemplating the exceedingly hopeful rhetoric of “progressivism” alongside the grim savagery of the era’s defining event, World War I. When confronted with such seeming incongruity, people commonly fall back on the apparent hypocrisy or compartmentalization of those deemed responsible—or sometimes the only response is a shrug. That Wilson, as we will see, spoke with such consistent conviction, though, points to a cleavage of perception between the American statesman and those who have sought to understand him. Wilson, as the dissertation will show, endeavored to place himself as the steersman at the center of American currents, and so his career in many ways came to embody the tensions that have fueled discussion of American foreign policy before, during, and after his time. Analyzing Wilson’s world view at a fundamental level, then, serves to illustrate something of the way in which the interplay of principles sustains recurring patterns in the use of American power.

No brief commentary here can do justice to the rich and varied historiography on Woodrow Wilson, but a fair general assessment is that most of the debates over the years directly or indirectly center on deeming Wilson’s policies realistic or idealistic, for good or for ill. By and large, the tone of the work concerning his foreign policy has shifted with the major foreign situations since his presidency—negative works in the 1930s\(^8\) reflecting the breakdown of the 1919 peace; positive works around World War II inspired in part by the era’s renewed calls for international institutions and collective security; the early Cold War stoking Realist critiques of a starry eyed Wilson; 1960s criticisms focusing on his ethnocentrism, racism, opposition to revolution; etc. To be sure, at all points, a four-sided debate over Wilson’s practicality/idealism (for good or for bad) has marked the historiography. Realists such as George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, Robert Osgood, and Hans Morgenthau condemned Wilson for rejecting the mechanisms of power politics, such as balance of power and spheres of influence, concluding that the president was ignorant of the realities of foreign relations, power, and the nation’s interests.\(^9\) Arthur Link replied that Wilson had a “higher idealism,” contending that the institution of Wilson’s ideals was the United States’ only chance for a lasting peace in the world situation—making his “idealistic” goals a valid national concern; he further argued that Wilson tailored his policies according to clear end goals and a levelheaded


By no means has debate ended, but with changing historical factors, the accumulation of research and interpretations, and, perhaps most importantly, the increasing availability of primary sources related to Wilson (including Link’s completion of the 69-volume *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* in 1993), analyses have generally become more objective and nuanced. While the realist, Robert Tucker, has continued to argue that Wilson’s multilateralism was a failure and out of touch with global dynamics—asserting that any apparent Wilsonian victories in the twentieth century came through very un-Wilsonian power politics—the venerable Lloyd Ambrosius has updated the realist critique, putting forth a nuanced argument that Wilson’s universalism ill fit the incredible complexity, or pluralism, of the world. Ross Kennedy, who has echoed shades of Link’s higher realism argument, has also pointed out that many of Wilson’s failings or chief difficulties stemmed from what he considers contradictory assumptions built into the statesman’s world view, such as the propensity to use power politics to end power politics.\(^{13}\)

This dissertation is premised on the postmodern realization that arguments concerning Wilson’s realism or idealism are inherently arbitrary, defined in large measure by the views of the historians themselves; as Frank Ninkovich has pointed out,

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for example, Kennan’s criticism of Wilson being out of touch with the “national interest” reflected the realist’s own political philosophy more than making any historical argument. Rather than deeming Wilson’s policies rational or irrational, good or bad, or fit or unfit for the world situation, and rather than engage in debate over labeling Wilson, the task of this dissertation is to reach more deeply, more fundamentally, and to ask how Wilson understood the world and how his world view provided the framework through which he shaped his policies. This is a meaningful step that has often been neglected or treated lightly when discussing Wilson’s foreign policies. Providing such an analysis allows us to judge Wilson by his own criteria, to gauge his perception of and reaction to the external, and to better understand some of the tensions embedded within a particular ideology of power and principle. In short, this dissertation simply asks, “Why?”

As it seeks to understand root impulses for decision making, the methodology that the dissertation employs is perhaps best termed perception analysis. Combining some traits of standard intellectual history with the approach and insights of the “cultural turn” in the historiography of U.S. foreign relations, it intentionally avoids psychohistory—a highly problematic approach with similar goals of seeking fundamental causes for the formulation of policies. Psychohistory, such as Edwin A. Weinstein’s *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography* or Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt’s *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: Twenty-eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study*, tends too much toward simplistic reductionism and is inherently ahistorical as it

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looks to a subject’s character for root explanations (though such works do provide worthwhile individual insights). The dissertation also avoids biography, preferring thematic analysis in a loosely chronological framework instead. (See the appendix for a timeline.)

Rather, perception analysis approach looks to the interplay of its subject’s ideology and perceptions of the external, which together create both the filter for understanding phenomena and the framework for making subsequent decisions. The first step in perceptional analysis is to map out the subject’s world view and ideology; this is perhaps possible only with certain subjects, such as Woodrow Wilson, who consciously crafted a model for understanding human society. In Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy, Michael Hunt defines ideology as “an interrelated set of convictions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality.” The three main components of Hunt’s definition are of central import to perception analysis: Discovering the way the subject simplified the world into distinct components, the way in which he or she understood connections between these parts, and the impulses for action that emerged from this reckoning. While ideology involves the call to action part of Hunt’s definition, world

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16 I would modify the “ideology” definition to read “more easily comprehensible,” since an ideology by no means has to be “easy”—and easiness is subjective—but it does still simplify the world in some way and in some degree; Hunt identifies three foreign policy traditions deeply rooted in U.S. culture—the formation of racial hierarchies, disdain toward “revolutions” (as opposed to wars for independence), and connecting a feeling of American exceptionalism to fostering liberty in the world in one way or another; Michael Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).
view simply consists of the first two parts—the mental map that one creates over an “abject reality” in order to impose order and sense on complexity by breaking it into component pieces, however conceived. In terms of human society, these have tended to be culturally relative categories such as race, nation, gender, class, and sanity, as well as geopolitical demarcations such as countries and continents. While such categorization occurs in order to simplify complexity, the imposition of clear borders where there is no such certainty is a primary source of social tension.

The second step in perception analysis, then, is to chart the way in which knowledge of external phenomena—sources of incoming information—process through the subject’s ideology. This is of fundamental utility in a study of policy construction as it is ideology combined with perception that fuels the basis of individual decision making. Perception as understood here, then, is simply the way in which one processes the


external. Further, since ideology does not emerge in a vacuum but is crafted, perception and world view exist in flux with one another, each shaping the other.¹⁹

 Beyond perception analysis, the other theoretical basis for this dissertation is in the historiography of empire, which provides a way to connect ideology to power. Empire is a power relationship generated and sustained by a dynamic interplay between metropole and periphery, as understood in cultural/intellectual, economic, and political/military terms. (Walter Hixson, for example, has shown the power of myth in the nourishing of empire.) Understood in a postmodern sense, empire is a force separate from the formal flag-planting of imperialism; though the two can exist together, empire can take on “a life of its own” unattached to the world of formal borders. Sometimes alternative wording such as ascendancy, expansion, or hegemony get at this sort of power, but such word choice deflects from empire’s profound similarities to the

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dynamics of imperialism. Empire is inherently a site of tension, generated by an often fluid sense of “otherness.” Ideology, as it imposes order on complexity by reducing the world to component parts, is, then, the primary generator of empire. With difference between metropole and periphery maintained, empire perpetuates in changing forms. For Wilson, as we will see, an abstract, impermanent, and changing conception of otherness was built into the fabric of his ideology as he rearticulated the very nature of American Empire.

This dissertation’s essential argument, then, is that during his “academic years” Woodrow Wilson crafted a particular ideology that provided him with the framework through which he perceived, responded to, and attempted to shape domestic and foreign situations while in office. The title itself provides the key to understanding the argument: The millennium, as we will see, was Wilson’s end goal for historical change, and the “madhouse” speaks to the othering inherent in the process he envisioned; a statesman’s primary tool to bring progress, further, was not imposition of will, but, rather, an intervention that reshaped the social institutions through which individuals and communities developed.

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Reflecting the methodology of perception analysis, then, this dissertation is divided into two parts. The first lays out and analyzes the holistic and progressive ideology that Wilson formed through his “academic” years from the 1870s to 1910, which included a synthesis of major currents of thought from both secular social and political theorists and American Presbyterianism (and its Calvinist roots). The section will illustrate the way in which Wilson’s ideology took the shape of a progressive social dynamic premised on the interplay of social institutions, statesmanship, and the public’s thoughts and habits. No previous work has shown that Wilson’s ideology worked as a single, integrated idea. Rather, they point out various ideas that Wilson adopted, developed, and used in hodgepodge fashion. Yet, the connections are as important and instructive as the individual components, if not more so. A diagram that encapsulates his ideology appears in the part one introduction (see fig. 4), and, because of its immeasurable utility, is used in every chapter that follows, as well. Finding this “key” into Wilson’s thought has immense explanatory power. In a direct sense, it addresses some of the standing debates in the intellectual history of Wilson’s thought. For one, it recognizes continuities between the different stages of his career and shows that Wilson made no sudden, substantive ideological breaks. Secondly, it integrates the understanding of Wilson’s foreign and domestic policies by making linkages between policies related to such seemingly disparate issues as woman’s suffrage, sterilization of the “feebleminded,” Pan-Americanism, and the war with Germany.\footnote{Many historians who focus on Wilson’s role in forming the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, for instance, barely mention his Pan-American efforts, Latin American occupations, or Philippines policy, if at all, despite, as Mark Gilderhus notes, their central and formative place within Wilson’s global visions. See, for example, Ross Kennedy, \textit{The Will to Believe}, an admirable and very well-}
interconnectedness of Wilson’s secular and religious thought. Recently, Mark Benbow and Malcolm Magee have profitably articulated the connections between Wilson’s religious background and his policymaking, and this dissertation treats their work, in many ways, as a launching point; this examination differs from theirs at the onset, though, in holding that theology and secular thought were equal partners in Wilson’s ideology.

More profoundly than resolving debates regarding Wilson’s thought, though, this dissertation’s unique breakdown of the former president’s ideology has incredible analytical utility when applied to questions regarding the motivations behind his decision making. In step with perception analysis, then, the second part of the dissertation scrutinizes the expanding ways in which Wilson’s progressive ideology served as filter and framework during his “political years,” as he divided the United States, the Americas, and the globe along lines of nation, race, gender, class, sanity, etc.; judged communities’ levels of spirit and intelligence; and attempted to shape their interconnected progress through exclusionary, assimilationist, and pluralist approaches. Perception analysis allows linkages to be made that are rarely, if ever, considered in the previous Wilson historiography, illustrating the shared impulses behind the statesman’s thought and policies regarding the “feeble-minded,” African and Asian Americans,


immigrants, trusts, women, Native Americans, the Philippines, the American nation-states, Germany, Russia, and the Versailles mandates. Further, connecting perception analysis to empire historiography, the section concludes that Wilson’s desire to make the world “safe for democracy” entailed a loaded notion of making it “safe from madness.”

There are certain things that perception analysis does not do. For one, it must be clear at all points that this dissertation does not argue that Wilson had a clear plan in place—a blueprint—that he attempted to project on the world. Rather, he had a framework that provided a consistent way to interpret and respond to circumstances as he perceived them. Second, it does not “get into Wilson’s mind” with one hundred percent certainty, as doing so is beyond the historical process—and, really, is simply impossible. Rather, it “gets into” Wilson’s ideology and policies utilizing the historical record, and, when the record falls short of elaborating what he was thinking during particular moments, draws inferences based on how his particular knowledge of a situation would have filtered through his ideology, or epistemological framework. Third, perception analysis is not intellectual history as traditionally understood. Within the paradigm of a perception analysis, tracing the people and writings that the subject learned from is simply tangential, as the focus is on how decisions emanated from ideology. Illustrating how ideas transfer and are refashioned is an incredibly useful enterprise, and this has

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25 Consistency on Wilson’s part, coupled with his conscientious intention to apply what he called his “philosophy of politics” to his decision making, suggests that the likelihoods we are dealing with here approach as much certainty as is possible with any historical figure.
been done well repeatedly. Perception analysis is simply a different venture, one that answers certain questions that traditional intellectual history cannot. Lastly, though perception analysis requires close attention to language and meaning, it is not discursive analysis. Influenced by Michel Foucault, discursive analysts look to the way in which common ways of thinking exist as limiting institutions in society, shaping the speech and subsequent action of human actors. This dissertation’s focus on just one historical actor is at odds with the very nature of discursive analysis. Still, the importance of discourse is implied throughout, particularly as Wilson was a player in an era that people referred to as “progressive.”

The root analysis provided by a study of perception repositions the Wilson historiography while also resolving some of the standing debates. For example, Lloyd Gardner and other revisionists argue quite effectively that one of Wilson’s greatest desires was to subdue revolutions and that he feared communist or socialist subversion, while Thomas J. Knock shows quite clearly that Wilson closely communed with those on the left—including self-defined socialists—and in fact was further “left” on some issues

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27 Much of the work of the “cultural turn” has quite productively focused on the power of discourse in human society. An influential example of this approach’s utility to foreign relations history is Kristin Hoganson’s Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, which argues that a discourse of manliness in a time of perceived masculine crisis in the United States pointed President William McKinley and others toward war in 1898—primarily by rendering unviable alternative options that would have been “unmanly.” Discourse analysis shows the powerful role that language has in historical change; language, indeed, is a crucial source of power.

28 In the early 1980s Daniel Rodgers identified three “clusters” of thought that defined the Progressive Era, each of which could be considered to constitute a discourse—antimonopolism, social bonds, and social efficiency. While these clusters no doubt contributed to the development of Wilson’s ideology, as discourses they also forced him to tailor his subsequent policy goals to the currents of the social and political arenas. Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” Reviews in American History 10:4 (Dec., 1982), pp. 113-132.
than many contemporary socialists and pacifists, the approach used here solves this historiographical quandary by illustrating that Wilson was an adamant centrist who disdained overly fast change, shared the same endpoint goals as people associated with the far left, and had a relative conception of what moderate, radical, and reactionary meant. Likewise, many historians have seen Wilson’s inability to compromise regarding the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations as inconsistent with his political ideology, leading some to conclude that his failing cerebrovascular health accounted for a change in personality, rather, though, perception analysis shows quite clearly that Wilson’s ideology was irresolvably torn by its concurrent application in multiple contexts—the American nation, European politics, and the global situation as a whole—a point that, unlike the health argument, can be analyzed historically. These examples and many others will be addressed throughout the dissertation as certain parts of the argument are fleshed out. Erez Manela’s *The Wilsonian Moment*, meanwhile, shows one extremely fruitful direction in which the Wilson historiography is moving, as he analyzes the impact that perceptions of Woodrow Wilson had elsewhere in the globe in the months following World War I (specifically Egypt, India, China, and Korea). This dissertation does the inverse, as it investigates the perceptions that Wilson had of elsewhere. In general, the historiography has rested between our two focuses.

The point for this dissertation is that although American power did not come solely from Woodrow Wilson’s mind, his ideology was instrumental in the definition and

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redefinition of American power in an era when the notion of power was dramatically rearticulated, and so it should be understood *at a root level*. This requires an attentiveness to the way in which Wilson’s ideology and perceptions of the external fed into one another, forming his epistemological filter and framework for decision making. As such, the analysis presented is—by design—a neutral one, as it provides no immediate way to judge Wilson except in relation to his own ideology. By showing the way in which seeming contradiction emerged from one statesman’s coherent ideology, though—such as liberalism and segregation, altruism and violence—this dissertation can speak to the recurring patterns in the use of force that have characterized not only Wilson’s tenure in power but also the history of American politics in general.

In introducing *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*, Thomas J. Knock wrote, “In the course of my research it seemed to me that many of the most interesting and decisive developments in the evolution of the League of Nations idea took place well before Wilson went to the peace conference, and that greater light might be shed on the struggle by going back to its inception—some four or five years before those months of superheated debate upon which the historiography tends to dwell.”32 This dissertation has a similar motivation, but, true to the demands of the methodology employed here, it takes the analysis back nearly fifty years before Wilson’s work at Versailles and his subsequent meeting with four emissaries from far-off Ethiopia.

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32 To be fair, Knock does address earlier sources of Wilson’s thought, though mostly as framing background for the main thrust of his argument, which deals with President Wilson’s close association with left internationalists. Knock, *To End All Wars*, vii.
PART ONE

The Millennium through Secular Means: The Progressive Social Dynamic

Introduction

[There is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men.]

– John Calvin

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was a Christian anarchist. More specifically, he believed that Christian anarchy would be the “end of history”—the culmination of centuries of human progress. Yet he was no religious zealot. Rather, he was a social philosopher who bridged two worlds in turn of the century thought—that of secular, evolutionary social theory as well as that of evangelical, Protestant (particularly Presbyterian) theology. A self-proclaimed translator of great thoughts, Wilson wove the two strands into a comprehensive, holistic theory of historical progress comparable to the social philosophies of Hegel and Marx. This first set of chapters, “The Millennium through Secular Means: The Progressive Social Dynamic,” presents the core of Wilson’s


3 The following chapter discusses, in part, the influence of Hegelian philosophy on WW.
ideology. Together, the chapters illustrate that through his academic and religious studies, Wilson formulated an understanding of society and its progress based on a three-part dynamic involving social institutions, statesmanship, and people’s thoughts, habits, character, and spirit—or what he sometimes called the “public mind.” When the three parts of the social dynamic influenced one another efficiently and positively, Wilson held, a society progressed and thus brought humanity closer to the millennium.

The son of a Presbyterian minister and, later, an elder in the Presbyterian Church himself, Wilson also became a career social scientist in the age of Herbert Spencer and other social interpreters of biological evolution. For nearly forty years, he was a student, professor, writer, and public speaker of politics, history, and law, mostly at Princeton University. By the time he became U.S. president in 1913, then, the intellectual revolution launched by Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* had informed his understanding of the world just as fundamentally as the theological revolution initiated centuries earlier by John Calvin, the patriarch of the Presbyterian Church. Rather than choosing either social science or his faith as his sole prism, Wilson squared the two with one another, finding a level of overlap between the former’s millennialism and the latter’s evolutionism that, to him, proved the veracity of both.

The relationship between Wilson’s faith and his secularism has been a contentious subject. Historians (along with the general public) have tended to assume that there is a natural division between the secular and the spiritual, and between the realistic and the idealistic. Some historians, such as Niels Thorsen, argue that Wilson, first and foremost a

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skilled politician, only used religion for rhetorical purposes. David Steigerwald, in contrast, contends that Wilson’s values, particularly those derived from religion, formed the basis of his world view; according to Steigerwald, Wilson’s study of politics and social theory did not impart to him any new outlook on the world as much as it gave him a “modern” vocabulary to buttress his pre-existing values. Preeminent Wilson scholar Lloyd Ambrosius, meanwhile, cites both religion and social theory as influences upon Wilson but tends to treat them as separate discourses. In a similar vein, John Milton Cooper maintains that Wilson handily compartmentalized his thoughts, separating his religious principles from his secular career. And in recent scholarship, Mark Benbow and Malcolm Magee, in striving to shift the historiography toward recognizing the fundamental importance of religious thought to Wilson’s political practice, focus their interpretations explicitly on religion, though they acknowledge that Wilson’s thought had multiple sources.\textsuperscript{5}

Contrary to the popular dichotomous assumptions regarding the secular and the spiritual and the realistic and the idealistic, Wilson once remarked that life must be seen “not as a thing of parts and patches, but as a thing entire, undivided, woven of spirit and of matter.”\textsuperscript{6} In Wilson’s understanding, in other words, a proper world view was comprehensive and holistic, one in which worldly and spiritual blurred together. As we


\textsuperscript{6} WW, Baccalaureate Address, Princeton University, June 11, 1905, \textit{PWW} 16:128.
will see in the next few chapters, in fact, Wilson believed that Western thought and political institutions, irreligious as they may seem, carried with them the spirit and values of Christianity, meaning that the essence of Christianity spread through the world via otherwise secular means as Western politics expanded their reach and sway. It is such nuance that has led historians, at least in part, to dance around the fundamental nature of Wilson’s world view and present arguments—all with merit—of his predominantly secular or religious bent or his principally realistic or idealistic disposition. He was all of these at once; with Wilson, secular and religious, realistic and idealistic, were not so clearly distinguished.

The idea of seeking the millennium through ostensibly secular means was particularly important to Wilson. In his conception, the only hope for true, lasting progress was through the three parts of the social dynamic nudging one another in a positive direction. Borrowing from evolutionary theory, he saw institutions (such as states, schools, churches, and families) as social environments that could foster positive or negative traits among the populace (preferably altruism and reason) and provide statesmen (political leaders, pedagogues, clergy, and patriarchs) the means and atmosphere, hopefully, to lead effectively. The dynamic also required wise, far-seeing statesmen to commune with and inspire the public and to translate the spirit of the day into appropriate institutional reform. And it needed educated, rational, and well-spirited public opinion to check the authority of the statesman and to elevate institutions to their

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7 Clarence P. Cowles (Class of 1898), “Home, Church, State – The Three Primary and Fundamental Institutions of Civilization,” Burlington, VT, November 23, 1947, Series 1 Box 4 Folder 12, Woodrow Wilson Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University; this collection hereafter abbreviated WWC (Princeton).
full potential. Thus, political processes were at the core of humanity’s movement toward the future golden age.8

Fig. 4: The “Progressive Social Dynamic” as Woodrow Wilson conceived it. Notice that each pillar is variable and contingent upon the other two pillars.

In both religious and secular writings and speeches, Wilson was not shy about referring to a coming millennium. In an 1885 essay, “The Modern Democratic State,” he wrote, “The reality after which modern political movements are reaching out is the universal emancipation and brotherhood of man.” In his time in office, Wilson was a thoroughgoing institutionalist and he long spoke of the need for government to provide order before anything else. Yet he believed that progress would continue to a day when no government would be needed, because, as he described in 1910, “each man will live

8 The differing progressive ideologies of Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt share similarities in their general contours. As Clarence Wunderlin explains, Roosevelt saw “nations” and “commonwealths”—“representative or republican forms of government led by the best representative men acting in the ‘public interest’”—as the keys to civilization advance. Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr., “‘Nation’ and ‘Commonwealth’: Two Conceptions of Political Community in Theodore Roosevelt’s The Winning of the West, 1889-1896,” (working paper, Department of History, Kent State University, 2010).
within the law of an enlightened and purified conscience.” He elaborated further, saying, “I understand all descriptions of the millennium to be descriptions of that Christian anarchism in which every man will be a law unto himself, but every man’s will will be purified and rectified by being centred not upon himself, but upon Christ; anarchism not meaning disorder, but that broadest of all order which is based on self-sacrifice, charity and friendship.”

In this future, then, reason and altruism, rather than institutional government, would provide society’s order.

As radical or idealistic as this may sound, though, Wilson’s political mantra was Burkean conservatism and he believed that society, meaning its institutions and the public mind, needed to evolve slowly. In this sense, Wilson’s thinking reflected the shifting Christian paradigm that Matthew Frye Jacobson discusses in *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917:* Whereas Christianity’s former ethnological paradigm, premised on Genesis, focused on the essential unity and stasis of humanity, Jacobson explains, evolutionism shifted the paradigm to development. Jacobson writes that “by its very popularity, including its misapplications, evolutionism became a secular counterpart to an earlier religious discourse of the Christian civilizing mission among the ‘heathen.’”

For Wilson, while his Presbyterian upbringing taught him that human society was marching inevitably forward, with the guiding hand of Providence, through progressive stages, toward a day of universal brotherhood, piety, and peace, he found a near-convergence of belief in the

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9 WW, address on the Clergyman and the State at the General Theological Seminary in New York, April 6, 1910, *PWW* 20:333.

social theory of his time, a body of thought that understood evolution as directional progress. At an interchurch conference in New York City in 1905, in fact, Wilson spoke on Christian progress, defining it as “modification under the pressure of circumstance, purpose, and desire.”\(^{11}\) The secular, academic language in a religious setting speaks volumes about Wilson’s holistic, non-dichotomous world view. “Pressure,” further, reflects the evolutionary idea of selection and “circumstance” corresponds to environmental factors, while “purpose” and “desire” inject human will (of the statesmen and the public) into the developmental dynamic. To Wilson, then, “development” in slow, evolutionary time was inherently Christian.

The following three chapters lay out the intricacies and the rational functionality of Wilson’s progressive social dynamic. Though it might seem logical to devote a chapter to each of the dynamic’s pillars (institutions, the public mind, and statesmanship), the system’s inherent circularity makes this approach impossible in a linear text; one pillar cannot be explained without the others. As such, this introduction has outlined the dynamic’s general framework, while the following chapters unweave Wilson’s thought along lines responsive to the current historiography: The first two chapters delve into the academic and theological strands in Wilson’s thought, respectively, showing the contributions of both bodies of knowledge to the facets of his dynamic world view. The third illustrates how Wilson’s understanding of statesmanship and of covenant both capped the progressive social dynamic with interknit secular and theological undertones

\(^{11}\) WW, notes for an address to the Inter-Church Conference on Federation, “Mediation of Youth in Christian Progress,” Carnegie Hall, New York, November 19, 1905, \textit{PWW} 16:227.
and rendered his world view a true ideology as defined by Michael Hunt and others—in that it involved a call to action\(^\text{12}\)—in this case, the active agency of intervening leaders in society.

One last note is necessary before moving on, and that is on the scope of the section and its sources. This section restricts itself to Wilson’s pre-political life, particularly his academic years, from his undergraduate days in the 1870s, through his time as a college professor and university president, and ending with his New Jersey gubernatorial campaign in 1910.\(^\text{13}\) These were the years in which Wilson constructed his progressive social philosophy. Upon entering politics, he did not abandon deep philosophical thinking, but circumstances dictated that he deal on a daily basis with the exigencies of decision making. According to his own definitions, he was no longer dealing with political science but with politics.\(^\text{14}\) In many ways, this shift began upon Wilson’s elevation to the Princeton presidency in 1902. Through the decade, rough and tumble university politics took their toll on Woodrow Wilson the scholar. “My days,” he lamented to a close friend in 1909, “are full of business, my head goes round with the confused whirl of university politics; I read no books, nor anything else that might renew my mind or quicken my imagination; I disperse my powers upon a thousand things

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\(^{13}\) Being a university president is certainly political; “pre-political” here simply refers to the time before Wilson dove fully into state and national politics as a career.

\(^{14}\) George L. Denny (Class of 1900), notes from “Politics vol. I,” Princeton University, February 27, 1900, *Notes of George L. Denny on Woodrow Wilson Lectures*, Box C0416 AM 80-8, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Hereafter abbreviated as *Denny Notes*. 
scattered and unrelated.”15 His progressive ideology, thus crystallized by that point, became without great alteration the backbone of his policymaking as New Jersey’s governor and as the United States’ president—the subject of part two.

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15 WW to Mary Allen Hulbert Peck, Princeton, NJ, June 19, 1909, *PWW* 19: 261. See also WW to Peck, Princeton, NJ, July 11, 1909, ibid., 309. In the later letter, he wrote that his mind was so weary that he could “read nothing but detective stories with zest and comprehension.”
**ONE**

Social Studies: The Life of Institutions

[L]ike every other man of intelligence and education . . . I do believe in organic evolution. It surprises me that at this late date such questions should be raised.

– Woodrow Wilson (1922)

[T]he social organism, like the physical, has its order and law of evolution.

– Woodrow Wilson (1885)

Woodrow Wilson stood before his students at Bryn Mawr College in September 1885. “Almost all recorded history, which is not the history of savages,” he began, “is the history of nations.” Before that lay the foggy “Preliminary Age,” he continued, an unimaginably long era that dwarfed modern history and served as a “period of preparation” for the rise of the world’s various nations. During this nascent era humanity divided into numerous bands, principally for reasons of self-defense. Largely isolated from one another, notable cultural differences developed between the small communities,

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and war marked the only significant intergroup relations. Thus, Wilson declared, by the time that “society emerged into the light of history,” those with the best customs and institutions (law, religion, family organization) had prevailed. “These war-surviving groups,” he explained, “were the stocks from which nations sprang,” each stock and nation imbued by its unique history and social development with a distinct character.

Yet, while these nations had progressed successfully out of the era of isolation, Professor Wilson remarked, many soon found themselves “petrified,” their progress “arrested” by an overzealous attachment to customary law. Established customs often became “strait-jackets,” as group members had to conform or else face dire penalties, severely limiting the variation—and thus the dynamism—of their nations. To progress, nations had to abandon customary law in favor of “government by discussion,” where law was based no longer on status and strict observation of custom, but rather on “reason, consent, and contract.” “This,” Wilson stressed, “is the whole difference between stagnation and progress.” Such discussion, especially of principles, replaced government by force with that by reason. Perhaps most importantly, because it rewarded intelligence, discussion-based government fostered reason as a dominant trait among the nation’s members. The successful nation thus transferred its energies from “eager, restless, oftentimes rash action” to “clear creative thought.” Instead of abandoning all action to mere thinking, those nations that continued to progress found “the perfect flower of social
growth” in “animated moderation,” which Wilson described as “calmness without sluggishness” and “deliberation without weakness.”

This chapter argues that, during his “academic years,” Woodrow Wilson constructed a uniquely synthesized philosophy of dynamic social progress that was premised, fundamentally, on an analogy between social and biological evolution. To Wilson, the interaction between social institutions and people’s thoughts and habits—one of the three connections in the progressive social dynamic—was a driving force in human progress. (Statesmanship, the third pillar of the dynamic, is the subject of chapter 3.) He conceived the social world as evolving in a manner generally similar to the biological world, with social institutions comparable to physical environments and people’s character, or “thoughts and habits,” to physical traits. In Wilson’s evolutionary conception of history and civilization, societies could progress, stagnate, or degenerate. To be progressive, a society needed to be dynamic (able and willing to make measured change when necessary), in the same way that the most successful species were those most adaptable. A society also needed to be organic, in that its institutions and culture evolved naturally with one another rather than in revolutionary leaps. A truly organic, or “evolvable,” state actively involved its citizens in sober discussion of politics and principles and was flexible toward changing circumstances. Because each nation evolved in its own particular context, further, there was no universally perfect state structure that all nations should adopt. Wilson believed that in his time democracy in one form or

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another was the most organic, and thus most progressive, government form for certain mature nations on a particular evolutionary path—but that it was not necessarily the only way forward. No matter what, though, human society would, in steps, approach a millennial end of history as institutions and character continually perfected each other in a positive feedback loop.

**Wilson’s Academic Synthesis**

In this study, what matters is what Wilson thought, not where his thoughts came from; his world view (and its application) can be analyzed at face value without allusion to its genealogy. Still, delving into some of the major sources of his social thought puts his world view in context and provides points of reference and comparison. Most importantly, it illustrates how Wilson strove to fuse the various social ideas prominent in the academic discourse of the time, true to his belief that his skill was in taking a wide view of things and translating the major ideas and sentiments of his era into a general synthesis.\(^3\) Through his years as an undergraduate at Davidson College and Princeton\(^4\) (graduating in 1879), law student at the University of Virginia (1879-1880), lawyer in Atlanta, Georgia (1882-1883), graduate student in history and political science at Johns Hopkins University (1883-1886), professor at Bryn Mawr College (1885-1888), Wesleyan University (1888–1890), and Princeton (beginning in 1890), and Princeton’s president (1902–1910), Wilson integrated into his understanding of dynamic social

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\(^3\) WW, confidential journal entry, Middletown, CT, December 28, 1889, *PWW* 6:462-63.  
\(^4\) Princeton University was formally known as the College of New Jersey, taking on its present name in 1896.
growth a diverse range of ideas from political, legal, and historical theorists and observers. His synthesis adapted some of the major intellectual strains of the time, from the Historical School of Edmund Burke, Herbert Spencer, and others to the Historicism of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, and together with Frederick Jackson Turner he formulated the historiographical view that social environment and experience shapes a people’s character, or spirit.

Central to Wilson’s scholarly synthesis was the organic analogy, a comparison between biological evolution and social development first articulated by British theorist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Human societies, Spencer claimed, were akin to biological organisms, with the pieces of society serving the whole in much the same way that components of an organism contribute a vital function to its life force. Wilson trained this organic analogy especially on political growth, arguing that governments needed to have “life.” In his last major work, 1908’s *Constitutional Government in the United States*, he posited that the American government, created before Charles Darwin’s time, was premised on the mechanistic “Whig theory of political dynamics,” which itself had sprung, unconsciously, from the Newtonian world view. In the Newtonian cosmology, there were universal laws and forces, and everything in the cosmos had its place in a balanced symmetry. Likewise, according to Wilson, the elements of an English-style government, with its checks and balances, were to work in a similar way, making governance less arbitrary and thus more ordered, more “calculable.” These checks and balances functioned to offset one another, bringing dynamic order to government in much the same way that gravitational and explosive forces do for the universe. But, Wilson
interjected, “The trouble with the theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing.” A better lesson from science, he proclaimed, came from Darwin rather than Isaac Newton. Borrowing heavily the language of biological evolution, Wilson declared that government “is modified by its environment, necessitated by its tasks, shaped to its functions by the sheer pressure of life.” Whereas a machine-like government was bound to face friction and break down because its unbendable, universal laws would not perfectly fit all situations, a living government would continue to grow through slow but unceasing adjustment to circumstances.

In *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism*, Ronald J. Pestritto argues convincingly that Wilson’s evolutionary political philosophy drew from both the Historical School and Historicism. The former, with its roots in England and Germany, was centered on Edmund Burke’s assertion that “political principles ought to be grounded in the concrete historical reality of one’s own time and place.” Burke countered his view

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5 Luckily, Wilson added, the American government, though Newtonian in origin, was created with enough adaptability to transition, through reform, to a Darwinist framework. WW, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York: Columbia UP, 1908), 54-56; from his reading of “armchair anthropologists,” Wilson also picked up on Sir E. B. Tylor’s (1832-1917) idea of “survivals,” the cultural equivalent of vestigial organs—cultural “leftovers” that could be analyzed as a window into the past of a culture. In *The State*, Wilson wrote in the mode of Tylor that it is possible to ascertain the origins of government just as scientists can trace ancient evolution; just as traces of primitive creatures have survived as fossils, “fragments of primitive institutions have been preserved, embedded in the rocks of surviving law or custom, mixed up with the rubbish of accumulated tradition, crystallized in the organization of still savage tribes, or kept curiously in the museum of fact and rumor swept together by some ancient historian.” Looking at survivals, Wilson argued that political systems have progressed more rapidly than ideas have: He notes a number of survivals in otherwise modern institutions, such as the kinship language used in guilds, unions, and orders (“brotherhoods”) and the retention of the Crown at the center of English politics despite the political progress made there. Men continue to carry their brides off, even though it is no longer necessary to steal them. And society still cares for “good blood,” despite the realization that the “only real patent of nobility in the modern world” is achievement. WW, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics*, rev. ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1911, orig. 1889), 1, 17-18; Wilson also borrowed from Sir Henry James Sumner Maine’s *Ancient Law* when talking about the origins of human society, including the claim that there was a progression from status to contract as the basis of society. Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection With the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (London: John Murray, 1861).
with what he considered the French conception of abstract, timeless liberty, which he
deemed ahistorical absurdity; quite simply, history, or past experience, mattered.\(^6\) Major
proponents of this school in Wilson’s time were Herbert Spencer, Walter Bagehot
(pronounced Baj-it), and Georg Jellinek. The arguments of these men (among others)
bolstered Wilson’s belief that law had an intrinsic relationship with society, and that,
consequently, politics had to grow, or adapt, with society as a whole.

Bagehot was certainly the most influential scholar upon the young Wilson’s
mind—especially his 1875 work, *Physics and Politics, or, Thoughts on the Application of
the Principles of “Natural Selection” and “Inheritance” to Political Society*. In Wilson’s
own words, Bagehot “sought to apply the principles of heredity and natural selection to
the development of society, showing how political organization was first hardened by
custom; then altered and even revolutionized by changes of environment and by the
struggle for existence between banded groups of men; and finally given its nice
adaptations to a growing civilization by the subtle, transmuting process of an age of
discussion.”\(^7\) Wilson was so enamored with *Physics and Politics* that he “venture[d] to
say that there is more stimulation in this book than in any other modern writing on the
history of political development.” He considered it a seminal work in political history, as
it not only was enjoyable to read, but, most importantly, gave “a sense of structure for
students to follow when moving on to other political studies.” Indeed, it served as
Wilson’s overarching framework for his own political investigations.

\(^7\) WW, “Walter Bagehot.—A Lecture,” address delivered at Johns Hopkins University, February
24, 1898, *PWW* 10:436-37. This was the second of three lectures in a series, “Three Prominent [Literary] Statesmen.” The first was on Edmund Burke (creatively titled “Edmund Burke: A Lecture”) and the third on Sir Henry Maine (“A Lawyer with a Style”).
As Pestritto points out, though, Wilson’s major criticism of the Historical School (especially of Bagehot’s work, which we will analyze more closely throughout the chapter) was that it did not look into the future of progress—content, merely, to investigate the history of institutional evolution. Historicism, with its roots in German idealism, filled this void in the scholar. Pestritto explains, “Wilson, and the historicism to which he subscribed, understood history not only as organic and evolutionary but as rational and powerful. Consequently, history was leading to a specific end.” Hegel, the philosopher most identified with Historicism, famously conceived of history as progressing through a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, with each historical era shaped by a *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age. Overlapping with the Historical School, Hegel also argued that government must evolve—that it cannot be given or instantly created.\(^8\) Marx, another notable Historicist, borrowed from Hegel to develop a similar framework for historical progress, the two fundamental differences with Hegelian philosophy being the contention that material factors, rather than the *Zeitgeist*, drove social change and that society advanced through a succession of revolutions rather than constant evolution—the latter a point with which Wilson adamantly disagreed. Finding some credence in both Hegel’s and Marx’s views, though, Wilson contended that life was “woven of spirit and of matter, governed by laws of thought as well as of material force.”\(^9\) In his Darwinist

\(^8\) Two of Wilson’s most influential professors in graduate school at Johns Hopkins were Herbert Baxter Adams and Richard T. Ely, both of whom had studied at Heidelberg University under Johan K. Bluntschli, a “prominent Hegelian state theorist,” ibid., 8-19.

\(^9\) WW, baccalaureate address, June 11, 1905, *PWW* 16: 122; Walter Bagehot, whose work shaped Wilson’s thinking significantly, argued against the theory that “material forces” were the “main-springs of progress,” with moral causes secondary. He says that moral causes are first, for it is the “action of the will that causes the unconscious habit.” Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics, or, Thoughts on the Application*
framework, both thoughts and material factors were parts of the environment in which human society evolved. And, as chapter 2 will illustrate, Wilson’s understanding of the Christian millennium fundamentally molded his vision of history’s endpoint, or progress’s culmination.

Wilson’s evolutionary understanding of social growth, further, was premised on the notion that races and nations evolved on various paths and that some, in turn, were more advanced than others. This concept took two subtly different forms in Wilson’s career—the germ theory and the frontier thesis. First, from his graduate advisor, Herbert Baxter Adams, Wilson encountered the germ theory of politics. An extension of the organic analogy, the germ theory sought to explain the apparent progress of some nations and races over others, particularly in explaining American and Western exceptionalism as the product of centuries of organic growth from the Greeks through the Latins, Teutons, Celts, and English. Lloyd Ambrosius understands the theory as one that stressed “heredity over environment in the shaping of human history,” noting that Adams and Wilson conceived of the Teutonic racial lineage as one marked by a “fierce democratic temper.” As we will investigate more fully in later chapters, though, the “germs” that Adams and Wilson referenced likely were not hereditary genes as understood by modern science, but, rather, more akin to what present-day thinkers would call cultural memes.

Wilson learned from Bagehot and Thomas Huxley (famously known as “Darwin’s Bulldog” for his forceful support of his colleague’s controversial theory) that natural selection does not mold nations in any direct sense—but that education works to make certain thoughts “more or less unconscious” in a population. In *Physics and Politics*, Bagehot wrote that “there is a tendency . . . that the descendants of cultivated parents will have, by born nervous organisation, a greater aptitude for cultivation than the descendants of such as are not cultivated. . . . There is, by this doctrine, a physical cause of improvement from generation to generation.”\(^{13}\) In turn, Wilson often spoke of habits and historical experience as getting into the “blood” of a race or nation.\(^{14}\) If he understood such transfer of traits to be truly biological as Bagehot and Huxley did, he meant so in a Lamarckian,\(^ {15}\) not Darwinian, sense; as Gail Bederman points out, Lamarck still held the day for most evolutionists, not Gregor Mendel (considered the father of genetics)—especially among the educated general public.\(^ {16}\) Whether or not intelligence and character “got into the blood of the population” in a literal or figurative sense, the important implication is that change was possible—and in just a matter of generations; superiority,

\(^{13}\) Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, 4-8.


\(^{15}\) Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a French evolutionist who preceded Darwin by a century, postulated that an individual could pass on to its progeny traits that it acquired during its lifetime. One popular example learned in Wilson’s day—and the present—deals with giraffes that stretch their necks to reach higher and higher leaves, leading their offspring to be born with slightly longer necks than their parents’ generation. Another common example is a man who develops strong muscles in his line of work, leading his sons to develop stronger muscles as they grow.

inferiority, strength, weakness, etc., were not, according to Wilson’s understanding of the germ theory, fixed in any sort of strict biological sense.

In any case, by the end of the 1890s Wilson was squarely a believer in the social, rather than biological (be it Darwinist or Lamarckian), development of nations, becoming a major proponent of the frontier thesis that Frederick Jackson Turner made famous. Turner was a Johns Hopkins history graduate student in the later 1880s, and Wilson encouraged the young scholar’s interest in seeing the Western frontier as a process (not a mere place) that breathed life into American society. Later, in January 1889, Wilson and Turner crossed paths at a boarding house and quickly formed a friendship, spending hours discussing a range of topics, especially the organic growth of nations, while emptying the house of cider and cake. Later that year, in Baltimore, they met up again and, in Wilson’s words, talked about “the growth of the national idea, and of nationality, in our history.” They were most interested in the social impact that the West’s development had on the Union—a Western counterpart to the talk at the time of “the South’s place in the race and mission of the nation.” While Wilson spent the next couple of years working on Division and Reunion, a history of the United States from 1829 to 1889, Turner fleshed out the influential frontier thesis, presenting it July 12, 1893, at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Wilson’s turn in thinking had been in step

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17 Turner later recalled Bagehot’s influence on Wilson on this point. Also, Turner’s initial focus was specifically on Wisconsin rather than the West as a whole. See Wendell H. Stephenson, “The Influence of Woodrow Wilson on Frederick Jackson Turner,” Agricultural History 19, no. 4 (October 1945), 249-253.

18 Wilson, then Princeton’s president, attended the exposition as well, describing it to his wife, Ellen, as “the most artistic and beautiful the world has ever seen.” On July 26, 1893, during the opening session of the Congress of Higher Education, he presented the address, “Should an Antecedent Liberal Education Be Required of Students in Law, Medicine, and Theology?” Melvil Dewey, the famous librarian,
with Turner’s. Around the time he re-met Turner, in fact, he had been searching for a new historical paradigm, one to update the organic analogy without altogether replacing it. Wilson continued to appreciate the analogy but believed it was dangerous if taken too literally. He and Bagehot were aware, he wrote, that politics “proceeded not by laws of nature but [by] laws of character and mind.”

Still an evolutionary view of history, Turner’s frontier thesis placed the focus squarely on historical experience in shaping a nation’s thoughts and habits—precisely the shift in focus Wilson had been seeking.

Through his academic career, as Wilson studied societies as akin to organisms that evolved, or progressed, in conservative steps toward an eventual endpoint, his primary focus was on the way in which political institutions served as social environments. Of the connections in his progressive social dynamic, the relationship between institutional environments and character traits was the one that drew most directly from the organic analogy. (Chapter 3 will show how Wilson’s political philosophy regarding active statesmanship deviated from the laissez-faire conclusions that the organic analogy implied.) As Wilson wrote in 1899, “Institutions are subsequent to character. They do not create character, but are created and sustained by it. After being successfully established, however, they both confirm and modify national character,

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was one of the official commentators on Wilson’s paper. WW to Ellen Axson Wilson (hereafter EAW), *PWW* 8:284-85; Link’s footnote to “Should an Antecedent . . .”, ibid., 285; WW, *Division and Reunion, 1829-1889* (New York: Longmans, Green, and co., 1893).


20 In fact, Wilson had considered it his life’s duty to study the “history and interpretation of institutions.” WW, confidential journal entry, Middletown, CT, Dec. 28, 1889, *PWW* 6:462-63.
forming in no small degree both national thought and national purpose—certainly national ideals.” In other words, institutions and the “public mind” were connected with one another in a continuous feedback loop, shaping one another in an ongoing sort of evolutionary relationship. Wilson identified law as perhaps the key social environment, as it gave life to the state; from law, Wilson elaborated, came ties of habit, affection, interest, and morals. Subscription to the frontier thesis showed that Wilson also considered geo-cultural processes to hold character-shaping power; the American frontier, for instance, was an institution as important to American development as was the Constitution. And statements over his academic career reveal that he conceived of many other kinds of social environments, including schools, churches, and families.  

Through Wilson’s various subjects of social study, then, he constructed a synthesized conception of human social evolution. No single component of the framework was uniquely Wilson’s contribution to social theory, but the synthesis as a whole (including theological elements discussed in the following chapter) was distinctly his creation. The rest of this chapter will move past Wilson’s intellectual background, then, to illustrate how he envisioned social progress toward the millennium emerging through the interplay of political institutions and character traits.

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**Animated Moderation**

“Stagnation has been the rule, progress the exception,” Woodrow Wilson wrote in *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics: A Sketch of Institutional History and Administration* (1889) and again in *Constitutional Government in the United States* (1908). He borrowed the phrase from Walter Bagehot, who wrote that progress was an alien idea to ancient, Eastern, and savage societies. “Only a few nations, and those of European origin, [have] advanced,” Bagehot contended. Although every nation *had* advanced in the past, most had stopped at some point along the way.\(^{22}\) Employing the biological analogy, Wilson and Bagehot held that the key to continuing progress was to have a measured dynamism—an animated moderation—balancing the energy of the savage with the Eastern penchant for order, a course that abandoned the recklessness of the former and the dull fixity of the latter. It was not simple personal preference that led Wilson to favor such a middle path; rather, the contours of his progressive dynamic left animated moderation as the only workable way toward progress. In form and operation, a society premised on animated moderation was one where an educated body of public opinion existed, intimately connecting citizens to the dynamic through free and active political discussions. Such “government by discussion” promoted flexibility toward institutions, thus allowing social change to occur, while at the same time also producing a soberness of rational thinking that tempered impulse. A state founded on such evolutionary principles thus steered its society between stagnant motionlessness and degenerative chaos, pointing it, instead, toward progress.

In biology, adaptability, or “evolvability,” requires variation, and Wilson held the same to be true for society. In his understanding of social evolution, most peoples had become dominated by custom or military rule and so had “known no political progress,” as an overemphasis on order snuffed out any possibility for social change. Just as a species with a dearth of physical traits could not evolve healthily under changing environments, a society whose members were overly conformed would be practically static and thus unable to adapt to new circumstances and progress. “Many races,” Wilson lamented, “have never come out of this tutelage of inexorable custom.” The Persians and the Chinese, he explained, were clear examples of civilizations, along with a number of now-dead ancient ones, that had become “arrested,” their advancement held back by adherence to “antique custom.” To them and to others, the Western drive for constant change and improvement was perplexing. Bagehot colorfully described Western difficulties in “uplifting” the East as “attempting to put new wine into old bottles—to pour what we can of a civilisation whose spirit is progress into the form of a civilisation whose spirit is fixity.” In Wilson’s words, the civilization of the East was marked by a fixed “dullness.” “[C]ustomary discipline,” he asserted, killed out of ancient and Eastern civilizations “the propensities to variation which are the principles of progress.”

The implication in this thought is that there had once been an inherent spirit for change in these civilizations, that there was something to be said for the spirit of savagery—the penchant for action. In line with the discourse of the era, Wilson believed

23 WW, Constitutional Government, 29; WW, The State, 1911 ed., 17; Bagehot, Physics and Politics, 156; WW, “Walter Bagehot.—A Lecture,” address delivered at Johns Hopkins University, February 24, 1898, PWW 10:436-37
that when a nation progressed, it needed to retain the positive values of the previous era; many nations, unfortunately, progressed out of savagery by giving up their savage manliness, especially their will toward conflict, and by doing so they fated themselves to be locked in their present level, certain to be destroyed when other parts of the world inevitably progressed past them. To be sure, Wilson did not want “civilized man” to regress to savagery; he and similar thinkers, such as Bagehot and Spencer, saw savages as childlike, marked by an overwhelming passion and a desire for immediate gratification. Yet, while savages were uneducated, they were not stupid, and in fact had “acute senses” and “quick perceptions,” were rather inventive, and, according to Bagehot, could quickly see the importance of industrial civilization and learn how to use it as well as, if not better than, “civilised man.” As childlike, savages learned much more readily than those in old civilizations, especially the fixed ones of the East. Their passion of thought could also be a virtue, especially when it came to creativity; Wilson believed, for example, that “civilization tend[ed] toward the deterioration of poetry,” making man less compassionate, more coldly rational.

The healthiest, and most progressive, civilizations, then, cultivated the positives of the savage spirit while avoiding the smothering extreme of fixed civilization. The weak reason and impulsiveness of savages stood in contrast with the more civilized penchant for “deliberate thought,” or patient intelligence. In barbaric times, Bagehot wrote, quick and strong action meant survival, prosperity, and rising over competitors;

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traditional wisdom taught ancient peoples never to pause. Yet much of modern progress, he continued, could be attributed to men who have known how to “sit still”—scientists making for a clear example—with an eye toward the future; savages, quite simply, could not see past the present. Further, though savages were geared toward action, their societies acted as herds, with individuals motivated by conformity rather than any sort of entrepreneurship, blindly copying the habits of their leaders just as children do. “When you have seen one Fuegian,” Bagehot sardonically quipped, “you have seen all Fuegians.” In other words, despite their positive virtues, savage societies lacked variation of thought and thus failed to progress, or socially evolve. For Wilson, the American nation, in contrast, was the quintessential example of the progress that could come from the variation, or dynamism, injected into society through animated moderation. Just as their English forefathers had done in previous centuries, Americans had “combine[d] the rude strength and bold initiative that can subdue a wilderness with those self-controlling habits of ordered government.” The vibrant American spirit that developed out of the nation-building frontier experience was “in a sense unrefined, because full of rude force, but prompted by large and generous motives.” A civilized nation injected with a healthy dose of savage energy, America was the quintessential progressive nation.\textsuperscript{26}

A nation mindful of its advancement, wary of stagnation, and feeling an energy for change, though, must not abandon order for revolution, Wilson repeatedly stressed, as attempts to accelerate progress violated the organic foundations of the progressive social

The primary object of law, Wilson taught, was order; only with order could governments hope to foster progress, the second, though far less common, object of law. For Wilson, the phrase “orderly progress” was redundant; progress, by its very nature, could only be orderly. Just as there were laws of nature that shaped orderly change in the natural world—slow, biological evolution through natural selection—there were also laws of society that did the same for the social world. While the state, as a primary social environment, had power to mold thoughts and habits, the body of people’s thoughts and habits, conversely, molded the state as a sort of environment, as well. Because of this intimate connection, evolutionary change was the only kind of social progress possible; revolutionary shortcuts were simply impossible. “Human choice,” Wilson wrote in The State, “has in all stages of the great world-processes of politics had its part in the shaping of institutions; but it has never been within its power to proceed by leaps and bounds, [for] it has been confined to adaptation, altogether shut out from raw invention. Institutions, like morals, like all other forms of life and conduct, have had to wait upon the slow, the almost imperceptible formations of habit. . . . Political growth refuses to be forced; and institutions have grown with the slow growth of social relationships; have changed in response, not to new theories, but to new circumstances.”

Put more simply, Wilson argued that institutions could be changed much more quickly than people’s thoughts and habits could follow, and to create too much of a separation between the two was to invite social degeneration. In Wilson’s conception, then, revolution undermined the order necessary as the basis of progress and thus could

bring only social regression no matter how lofty its sentiments. The French Revolution, for instance, ushered in not liberty, but unhealthy anarchy, as the French populace had not yet been prepared, in thought and habit, to live within the new institutional frameworks that revolutionaries had sought to establish. “A particular form of government,” Wilson wrote, “may no more be adopted than a particular type of character may be adopted: both institutions and character must be developed by conscious effort and through transmitted aptitudes.” In his view, the American War for Independence stood in stark contrast to the French Revolution. There was no American Revolution, he argued, because colonists merely “Americanize[d] the English government,” updating—but not revolutionizing—their political institutions to better fit the American social environment. Drawing again from organic analogy, Wilson saw American independence as a speciation event, similar to a population of a species moving to a new environment and, after a number of generations, becoming different from its parent population. The French, in comparison, did not “speciate,” but, rather, tried to create something wholly new, which utterly jarred their social dynamic. Such social disruption was degenerate, as the chaos that ensued undid some of the offending nation’s previous progress and created uncertain ground for future progress.28

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The truly organic state, then, functioned through “regulated liberty,” the balanced fit between the population’s spirit, or thoughts and habits, and level of social control. Liberty, Wilson wrote, “is to be found only where this is the best order. The machine that runs with perfect adjustment; the skein free that is without the tangle; the man free whose powers are without impediment to their best development.” A more savage, or rude, people required a stricter institutional environment in order to keep their impulses in check; in time, “a steady schooling in affairs” would temper their “hot youth” and disabuse them of “irrational hopes.” A more civilized, or sophisticated, population, in turn, required greater social freedoms in order to foster a dynamism, and thus a progressivism, within their nation; a more controlling government would be stifling. For revolutionary France, without the particular type of law and order necessary to restrain that generation’s impulses, the scales of the otherwise civilized nation were tipped toward savagery, as the people flocked from one idea to another while leaving the streets of Paris soaked with blood. Their “liberty” was unregulated and thus degenerate.29 Regulated liberty, then, was a form of animated moderation—enough freedom to give life to a society with enough control to prevent it from accidental self-immolation.

To Wilson, a “government by discussion” ensured the tempered energy necessary for progress, the balance between the dullness of fixed law and the regressive instability of revolution. Wilson (and his mentor, Bagehot, from whom he borrowed the term “government by discussion”) defined such a government loosely, including any where

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citizens were able to engage in regular public deliberations over the day’s politics and the deeper principles behind them. The most progressive nations before modern printing were small states such as those of classical Greece and medieval Italy, where discussions were heard in assemblies. In modern society, technology made indirect government by discussion possible even for very large nations.30

The public opinion that formed through discussion was of supreme importance to Wilson’s progressive social dynamic for three reasons. First, it connected the populace to the dynamic much more intimately than pre-discussion forms of government. With the public tied closely to the evolutionary dynamic, thoughts and habits would prove to be much more responsive to the shaping powers of institutions. Crucially, then, government by discussion accelerated the possibility for social progress toward the millennium.

![Diagram](image.png)

Fig. 5: Institution-Public Mind Connection: Government by discussion, in Wilson’s conception, strengthened the evolutionary relationship between institutions and the public mind.

Second, a government system that included political debates of some sort implied that institutions and political ideas were changeable. While the earliest societies had

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scorned original thought and reverenced law as something fixed and timeless, inherent in a government by discussion was the notion that certain subjects were unsettled and open to debate. In turn, Wilson held, law should be a flexible thing, always translated into the spirit and realities of the day. He advocated viewing the U.S. Constitution as “elastic,” for example, arguing that “constitutional evolution” would take place through interpretation, bringing life and progress to the nation. He considered a rigid application of law, in contrast, to be stifling, repeatedly referring to it as a strait-jacket upon society.\(^{31}\) Only adaptive governments could evolve; those that were not were doomed to eventual extinction.

The third contribution of discussion to the dynamic was that it rewarded and developed intelligence in society, making the nation levelheaded in regard to change while also fostering one of the key traits necessary for practicable anarchy—sober reason. By its very nature, Wilson believed, a society based on discussion would grow in intelligence, and intelligence would create a conservative, deliberative streak in people. People of sober intelligence realized the value of study, information gathering, and a period of “mere passiveness” before embarking on a project or adventure of any sort. Although they could identify obvious deficiencies in “old systems of thought,” they had the sense to see that it was no wiser a path simply to rush into new ones. Free government, then, entered doubt into people’s minds, counteracting, as Bagehot phrased it, “the excessive inherited impulses of humanity.” And so, while discussion opened the

door to reform, it also negated any impulse toward the upheaval of rapid, unhealthy change. At the same time, it was an “opening of the mind,” increasingly habituating citizens to an order based on reason rather than force, making people more tolerant of other ideas, and promoting healthy, creative thought over both dullness and rashness—all key components of Wilson’s vision of the millennium. The deliberativeness produced through discussion, then, coupled with the flexibility that also came from it, meant that a state organized in such a way was organic, progressing toward ever greater reason and away from impulse and force.

The organic state, premised on discussion, thus escaped from the stagnation of fixed law and conformity that marked Eastern civilization and from the ignorant brashness of the savage world—and consequently embarked its society on the path of progress. A government by discussion promoted the animated moderation necessary for social evolution through the development of public opinion. It introduced variation of thought into society and thus an openness and ability to change—necessary prerequisites for evolution—while also cultivating a deliberative intelligence in society that tempered the passion for chaotic, degenerative revolutionary change. Ultimately, it moved mankind closer to the millennium by promoting reason over force as an organizing principle and by intimately connecting a society’s population to the progressive dynamic, making a society’s “spirit” more sensitive to the pressures of the social environment.

Notes for Four Lectures on the Study of History, ca. Sept. 24, 25, 28, and 29, 1885, PWW 5: 18-23; Bagehot, Physics and Politics, 186-95. Even among savages, Bagehot pointed out, those nations with more variation, such as the Maori of New Zealand, showed greater mental faculty than baser ones with less variation, and the correlation was no coincidence. Ibid., 97-100; WW, “Walter Bagehot.—A Lecture,” address delivered at Johns Hopkins University, February 24, 1898, PWW 10:436-37.
Relative Universalism

Wilson’s understanding of society as something evolving also led him to a sort of political relativism as he looked at various societies from around the world and throughout human history. Each society operated most efficiently (and thus progressively) according to whatever principles meshed organically with its particular history, level of maturity, and general “spirit” at that point in time. The calculus of the world was indeed toward a shared set of universal values including, especially, reason and altruism (see chapter 2), and progress toward that day was assured; in the wide view of things, Wilson ardently maintained, “the lines of advance are seen to be singularly straight.” Yet, the proper application of those ideals in daily politics meant that, in any given moment before the millennium, different political principles best served different peoples. What was conservative for one nation could be radical or reactionary for another. Wilson hailed democracy as the best form of government in his day for certain nations and likely the best for other nations to aspire toward, but he recognized fundamental deficiencies in democratic governments as well. Further, his social vision led him to conclude that democracy could be replaced in a later age of progress by some other sort of state structure, and he was open to the possibility that states could find a way to move forward while bypassing democracy altogether. Seemingly paradoxically, then, Wilson can be described as a relative universalist; while universal values would reign at the “end of history,” there was no single, abstract political principle that was appropriate for all times and places.

Wilson’s political relativism stemmed from two interrelated beliefs—one, that history proceeded forward in general stages, each marked by a defining spirit, and, two, that a society’s political structures needed to mesh organically with its “public mind”—the general spirit that developed from the collective force of the citizens’ thoughts and habits. As Wilson wrote in *The State*, “The Order discoverable in Institutional Development is not, indeed, the order of perfect uniformity: institutions, like the races which have developed them, have varied infinitely according to their environment. . . . But the great stages of development have remained throughout clear and almost free from considerable irregularities.” Each stage was marked by a certain spirit and political climate permeating the whole of advanced civilization, and the politics of the age needed to correspond to that era’s spirit. An age of despotism, for instance, would be driven by fear, an age of monarchy by the quest for honor, rank, and privilege, and an age of republics by virtue and the elevation of community interests over individual desires. Though there were no clear borders between eras and all three types of government structures existed in the present, each stage was dominated by one particular form that was more advanced than the previously dominant mode of rule.

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34 Ibid.

35 Though Wilson was never entirely clear who was included in the estimation of historical stages, the implication was that it was, until, perhaps around his lifetime, confined to some conception of “Western” civilization.

The organic analogy had at least an indirect influence on Wilson’s notion of stage-to-stage progress: Especially among the non-scientific public, the general understanding of biological evolution in Wilson’s time was that evolution was directional, with some species more advanced than others. Along such a teleological line, such as that from “lesser forms” to humans, the more advanced type would replace its more primitive forebears while the anachronistic parent species continued to exist for some generations before its inevitable extinction.  

Likewise in the social realm, anachronistic government forms could continue to exist, for a while, alongside more advanced forms. These inferior forms would die out eventually as their connected populations moved past their old ways (through choice or force) and forged ahead on the path to progress. This is how Wilson conceived the “lines of

37 This is analogous to the birth of a new generation: The creation of a child does not cause its parents to cease to exist. Likewise, the development of a new, “more evolved” species would not cause its parent species to disappear immediately.


Fig. 6. “Evolution of a Pitcher.” This lighthearted 1889 print highlights the pervasiveness of the conception of evolution as linear progress from one form to another.
advance” as “singularly straight”; he did not mean that there was only one path to social evolution, but, rather, that human society, taken as a whole, continuously moved forward without much deviation. The stages were universal; societies’ routes and pacing were not.

A closer look at social evolution, then, revealed relatively great variation in appropriate state structures. As Wilson explained to the students in his politics class at Princeton, “Each nation has its own appropriate form of political life, its own functional characteristics, produced by the circumstances of its own development, expressions of its own character, and experience in affairs.”

For this reason, he found himself “tolerant of all institutions, past and present, by reason of a keen appreciation of their reason for being.”

Wilson, then, identified three related areas that determined the type of politics most suitable for a nation: its unique history, its current “spirit,” and its maturity. First, history imparted to a society a unique batch of experiences, from wars to the introduction of foreign races, that affected its social and legal fabric, just as did natural factors such as climate and geographical location. Second, law also needed to reflect a society’s “character,” or its thoughts and habits—the “public mind.” Wilson wrote in The State that a nation’s law “bears evident marks of having been developed along with the national character, which mirrors the special life of the particular people whose political and social judgments it embodies.” After all, within the framework of the progressive social dynamic, a workable law had to have the support of a general part of the population; even

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39 This quote, from a student’s notes, has been altered in order to read more naturally. In its original form: “Each nation has its own appropriate form of pol. Life, its own functional characteristics, produced by the circumstances of its [own dev.?], expressions of its own character & experience in affairs”, George L. Denny, Denny Notes, “Politics,” February 26, 1900.

40 WW, confidential journal entry, Middletown, CT, Dec. 28, 1889, PWW 6:463.
in a despotism, a law ultimately rested on the population’s obedience to it, not on the lawmaker’s will. Indeed, Wilson remarked to his politics class, “Men have been happy under very different organs from ours.” Third, then, was Wilson’s belief in “regulated liberty,” discussed earlier—the idea that law not only needed to be amenable to the public’s taste but that it also needed to conform to its society’s level of maturity. “[F]or different stages of development in civilization there are different stages of liberty,” Wilson once declared in relation to American colonial ventures in the Caribbean and Philippines. “In developing liberty we have to learn how to hold certain persons in check without choking them to death.” For a nation ruled by chaotic impulses, a more repressive government was necessary; for a nation mellowed by “education in affairs,” where individuals had developed reasonable characters, a freer sort of government was not only possible, but necessary.41

Wilson’s observations on Japan’s political transformation as it sought to adapt to Western modernity are illustrative of his thoughts on the relative suitability of political structures. Wilson read the new Constitution of the Empire of Japan of 1889 (the “Meiji Constitution”), and concluded that Japan had generally created a fitting and workable political environment, but not without some faults. He believed that Japan had wisely modeled its constitution on the Prussian constitution, which vested great power in the monarch. Article III of the Meiji Constitution, for instance, placed sovereignty in the

41 WW, The State, 1911 ed., 598; WW, an Address in Atlantic City to the New Jersey State Teachers’ Association, December 28, 1909, PWW 19:637; original quote, “Men have been happy under very diff’t. organs from ours.” George L. Denny, Denny Notes, “Politics,” February 26, 1900; report of a Founder’s Day Address at Vassar College, delivered May 2, 1902, reported May 3, 1902, Poughkeepsie, NY, Daily Eagle, PWW 12:362; WW, confidential journal entry, Middletown, CT, Dec. 29, 1889, PWW 6:463-64.
person of the emperor and declared him “sacred and inviolable.” There was a bicameral legislature, conferring some representation in Japan, but amending the constitution hinged on the emperor. And “the crowning point of resemblance” between the constitutions, Wilson believed, was “the position of ministers of state in the system”: They were made responsible to the emperor, not the legislature, and were given “the right to sit and speak in either House.” Creating a strong centralized, ministerial government with a modicum of representation was, Wilson asserted, a good move for a nation transitioning away from a tradition of feudal rule. “[C]onsidering the stage of development which Japan now finds herself,” he concluded, “the Prussian constitution was an excellent instrument to copy. Her choice of it as a model is but another proof of the singular sagacity, the singular power to see and learn, which is Japan’s best constitution and promise of success.”42 In other words, it was an adaptation, not a revolution, and fit the nation’s spirit and readiness.

In comparison, the faults of Japan’s new constitution were minor, though still noteworthy in highlighting Wilson’s views toward the relative applicability of laws. Implicitly conjuring biological speciation, Wilson noted that all modern constitutions appear similar in many ways because they are “all of the same family,” mostly derived, ultimately, from English precedent; Japan’s constitution was the latest addition to the tree of constitutional governments, branching off of Prussia’s. Tracing constitutional development back to England, Wilson observed that the borrowing had at times been “blind” and pointless. European constitution-makers, he wrote, had often made the

42 WW to Daniel Coit Gilman, Middletown, CT, April 13, 1889, PWW 6:169-72.
mistake of viewing English principles as universally rational, when, in reality, they only made sense in the context of England’s unique political evolution. As one example Wilson mentioned “the practice of having all money bills originate with the popular House of the legislature, [even though] the historical situation which made that practice indispensable [had] passed away.” Many European constitutions, and now Japan’s, had unnecessarily adopted this practice. It was an inorganic adoption everywhere but in England. No specific state structure, then, was universally appropriate; in fact, no specific state structure was even appropriate for more than one nation. Politics were relative; law needed to develop in step with society.

In Wilson’s sort of political relativism, premised on a notion of social advance, further, even “radical,” “conservative,” and “reactionary” were terms that took on relative meanings. He considered reaction to be opposition to progress already made—to retreat from the lines of advance. Radicalism, in contrast, was a rash attempt at progress. It was just as degenerative as reaction for reasons discussed earlier—it upset the order necessary for social evolution leading to a chaos that could only be contained through reactionary force. But, Wilson explained, what was radical for one society could be conservative, or even reactionary, for another.43 While the Meiji Constitution, for instance, was a progressive step for Japan, adopting a similarly imperial constitution would have been a regression for the United States—and utterly radical for Fuegians and other “savages.”

In Wilson’s view, democracy seemed to be the most progressive government form in his era—for those nations prepared for it through historical experience, character, and

43 WW, “False and True Conservatism,” address delivered November 12, 1907, in Nashville, to the Watauga Club, PWW 17:491-95.
maturity. Wilson defined “democracy” as government “by universal popular discussion,” where the entirety of the adult population (or at least all men) had “the largest liberty of opinion, of discussion, and of political choice.”\textsuperscript{44} According to Wilson, a democracy could be “based on individual initiative” (as in the United States) or on “communal initiative” (à la socialism).\textsuperscript{45} In either form, democracy was an exceptional form of government by discussion, as it connected a society’s entire adult population to the progressive social dynamic. Doing so gave increased weight to public opinion as a force in the dynamic and intimately connected the whole of a population to the shaping pressures of the social environment. Democracy’s greatest advantage, Wilson declared, was in providing the state, through universal participation, with immense variety, or “richness of material.”\textsuperscript{46}

Yet, there were serious concerns regarding democracy and its application around the world. In “The Modern Democratic State,” Wilson asked why democracy seemed to be natural for some nations but practically unattainable for others:

Why has it been cordial and a tonic to little Switzerland and to big America, while it has been as yet only a quick intoxicant or a slow poison to France or Spain, a mere maddening draught to the South American States? Why has England approached democratic institutions by slow and steady stages of peaceful development, while so many other states have panted toward democracy by constant revolution? Why has democracy existed in America and Australia virtually from the first, while other states have utterly failed in every effort to establish it? Answers to such questions as these would serve to show the most truly significant thing now to be discovered concerning democracy: its place and office, namely, in the process of political development.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Writing this in 1885, Wilson specified “adult males.” For his views on women as citizens, see part two; WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” December 1885, \textit{PWW} 5:62-63;
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} WW, “Democracy,” a lecture, December 5, 1891, \textit{PWW} 7:357.
\textsuperscript{47} WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” 63.
Democracy, in other words, could be an ill for a society rather than a framework for progress. For one, Wilson admitted, it was “the clumsiest form of government in the world.” It utterly lacked in efficiency, acting with notably poor “speed” and “force” in comparison to monarchies and aristocracies. And it did not magically cure all social problems—and sometimes even contributed to them. “Even when the proper conditions for its application have been supplied,” Wilson lamented, “it has not proved a remedy suitable to be applied without great caution. Disappointing as the fact may be, it has proved only a relative, not an absolute, good.” People needed to realize that democracy was fallible, just like any other product of human endeavor. It was clear, he said, that “its inspiration was of man, not of God.”

For democracy to attain its promise, a society had to cultivate it slowly, over generations developing democratic thoughts and habits while expanding democratic structures. After all, Wilson cautioned, democracy was not a “body of doctrine” that could simply be enacted; rather, it was a “stage of development . . . built upon by slow habit.” It needed to be grown into with a steady patience that was difficult for a society to maintain. As such, there were a number of prerequisites that a society needed to meet before it could manage democracy:

It is a form of state life which is possible for a nation only in the adult age of its political development. A people must have gone through a period of political tutelage which shall have prepared them by gradual steps of acquired privileges of self-direction for assuming the entire control of their affairs. . . . They must have acquired adult self-reliance, self-knowledge, and self-control, adult soberness and deliberateness of judgment and

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sagacity in self-government, adult vigilance of thought and quickness of insight.

Freedom of discussion, ever-increasing involvement in the political process, and widely available institutional education were absolutely necessary preconditions for such traits to develop. True democratic change would not come from revolutionary doctrine or angry discontent, Wilson noted, but through such real world and in-school education.\textsuperscript{49}

Democracy was especially complex—and consequently difficult—at the national level, as citizens had to enter a social relationship with people from far beyond their everyday communities. For one, a number of linkages in the social structure needed to be established throughout the geographical expanse of the nation. Printing was one, as it carried the seeds of educated discourse throughout the land, giving knowledge a universal rather than parochial flavor. Travel and commerce were among other activities that created the social links upon which democracy could flower beyond the parameters of a mere community. Furthermore, only a people “of the highest and steadiest political habit” could manage democracy without national injury. The path between savagery and fixity—animated moderation—was essential. Workable democracy, Wilson explained, “is the heritage of races purged alike of hasty, barbaric passions and of patient servility to rulers, and schooled in temperate common counsel.” Any nation could aspire toward democracy, but achieving true, mature democracy would take generations. “It can never be made to sit easily or safely on first generations, but strengthens through long heredity.” As of 1891, even France was not quite there; it needed more discipline, Wilson

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 63, 71.
declared, “a few more hard lessons in self-control.” Soon, though, it would indeed be able to attain and manage democracy.\(^{50}\)

Where democracy had developed properly (only in the United States, England, and Switzerland by 1891), it was proving to be indeed the consummate state structure for fostering progress in the current age, as it finely cultivated the thoughts, habits, character, and spirit of democratic citizens. By its very nature, it provided citizens with a healthy “political education” that promoted such virtues as self-control, self-knowledge, and self-reliance. With the whole of the adult population (or, at least, all men) entered into the world of the public sphere, a sort of Social Darwinism kicked in, conditioning citizens to prepare themselves through “struggle and sacrifice.”\(^{51}\) Where and when possible, then, democracy was establishing its usefulness in fostering the elements of character necessary for the functional anarchy of what Wilson considered the millennium.

Despite the possible downfalls of democracy, then, Wilson believed it certainly a part of humanity’s future because of what it could offer, though he considered that another, as yet unimagined, form of government could also confer the same set of social advantages. Here, Wilson showed some indecision. In the essay, “The Modern Democratic State,” he wrote that “it is certain that Democracy is the proper next stage to be achieved in the political march forward.” Yet in his notes for his never-finished magnum opus “Philosophy of Politics,” upon which “The Modern Democratic State” was based, he mused, “[I]f there be a development of political order beyond democracy, it is

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 71-74; WW, “Democracy” lecture, 358.

It was the most dynamic, empowering, progressive government form the world had yet seen.

Nevertheless, Wilson believed that democracy—or another form of government that fostered the same spirit—was not necessarily “the final stage in political evolution.” He was not concerned, though, with speculating on what the politics of a future age might
look like, except to say that the institutional structure of societies would need to ensure “varied and vigorous . . . life” and a “closely knit, vitally coordinated, [and] sensitively whole . . . polity.” Such a government, no matter its form, would ensure the continued “evolvability” of society. Above all, though, Wilson was passionate about divining the spirit of his particular age, as we will see more fully in chapter 3. And he seized assuredly on democracy as the government form that best promoted and responded to that spirit.

“Relative universalism,” then, is a fitting description of Wilson’s conception of social progress. The world was moving, in successive stages, toward an age of universally beneficial and motivating values, and each stage more closely approached the self-governing spirit that such an era would require. Yet, though the unfolding of history as a whole pointed assuredly in a linear, positive direction, the proper way ahead could vary considerably from one society to another. Because of differences in historical experience, levels of maturity, and national spirits, societies around the globe required relatively diverse political systems and guiding political principles as they evolved socially. Pause history at any point before the universal millennium, Wilson held, and one simply could not find a single, abstract political structure or principle that was appropriate for all nations. He believed that, in his era, democracy was emerging as the most progressive government form, but that nations had to grow into it slowly. Those who rushed into it brought harm to their societies. But those societies that evolved democracy cultivated among the entire polity the positive virtues necessary for the millennium: “adult self-reliance, self-knowledge,” “adult soberness and deliberateness of

judgment and sagacity in self-government,” and “adult vigilance of thought and quickness of insight.” Wilson would consider any government form that promoted such qualities to be progressive, worthwhile, and equal to democracy, but it seemed to him that democracy based on individual initiative was, in his era, the best known institutional environment for the progressive social dynamic.

From the influences of social theorists such as Walter Bagehot, Herbert Spencer, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Frederick Jackson Turner, Wilson developed his own, synthesized theory of human progress, premised on the notion that a people’s institutions and their character traits evolved in step with one another. Societies could stagnate or regress, but they could avoid both by operating with “animated moderation”: A society needed to have enough life to be dynamic and adaptable—and thus evolvable—but enough self-restraint to keep the energy for change from being unleashed as destabilizing, counterproductive chaos. A “government by discussion”—one that in some way included citizens in political debates, with democracy the ultimate known form—was the most organic state environment, as it promoted the spirit of animated moderation through the development of public opinion. Political debate opened a society to the possibility of change, while the deliberative intelligence that inevitably grew among citizens involved in the political process mitigated any zeal for debilitatingly premature change. A discussant—especially democratic—population was enmeshed thoroughly in the progressive social dynamic, and thus its spirit was acutely responsive to

the shaping powers of the institutional environment; consequently, healthy, viable progress could accelerate in such a society. Further, because of the evolutionary nature of social change, nations could develop in vastly different ways and thus required vastly different political frameworks at any point in time, though there was a general “order and law of evolution”\(^55\) that pointed human society, as a whole, positively toward the millennium.

In its most ostensible form, then, Wilson’s progressivism was secular in nature, grounded in and part of the social theory of his day. Yet his lifelong study of Christianity, the subject of the following chapter, would permeate his understanding of institutions and of spirit. And it would inform, at a fundamental level, his faith in a millennial end of history.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 62-63.
Theology: Unceasing Progress in the Way of the Lord

I think one would go crazy if he did not believe in Providence. It would be a maze without a clue. Unless there were some supreme guidance we would despair of the results of human counsel.

– Woodrow Wilson (1918)

The only trouble with Woodrow Wilson is that he was a confirmed and confounded Calvinist.

– Wilson’s lifelong friend and supporter, David Bryant (ca. 1924)

“What asses Presbyterians are capable of becoming…!” The year was 1890 and the man writing this to Woodrow Wilson was his father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson—ironically a well-respected Presbyterian minister. The elder Wilson had become enraged upon learning that the southern Presbyterian Church had once again maligned his brother-in-law—Woodrow Wilson’s uncle—James Woodrow. This time, the Charleston Presbytery had rejected Woodrow’s application for membership on the grounds that he was too secular and brought disgrace to the Church. Through the previous decade, after

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1 “Unceasing progress in the way of the Lord” borrowed from Calvin, *Institutes* III XI:5, in *A Calvin Treasury*, ed. Keesecker, 103; first quotation from WW, “Remarks in London to Free Church Leaders,” December 28, 1918, *PWW* 53:530; Bryant, as quoted by William Allen White in White’s *Woodrow Wilson, the Man, His Times and His Task* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 63. White, who interviewed many of Wilson’s acquaintances following the former president’s death in 1924, was a noted journalist of the early 20th century who, early in his career, penned the famous editorial, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” printed in his *Emporia Gazette*, August 16, 1896.
all, he was at the center of a scandal that rocked southern Presbyterian society and culminated with the trustees of the seminary where he taught firing him amid accusations that he was a heretic. Throughout these tribulations and other ordeals, Woodrow Wilson’s support for his uncle was resolute. His backing of Woodrow’s world view sheds telling light on the theological dimensions of his own.

By any standard, Woodrow’s resume was impressive, reflecting the Presbyterian emphasis on acquiring a broad, advanced education. He was a trained geologist, chemist, and minister, as well as a successful banker and businessman, and he often held multiple posts at once. One, though, loomed far above the others: His quarter-century stint as Perkins Professor of Natural Science in Connection with Revelation at the Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia defined his life and established his place in history. His ultimate fate was nearly inevitable, as the job’s title and description immediately and intimately placed him in the middle of the science-religion debate that had been mounting in the nineteenth century. He would enter the position, in 1861, by declaring that the new

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2 Joseph Ruggles Wilson (JRW) to WW, Clarksville, TN, October 25, 1890, PWW 7:53-54; Link’s notes to previous, ibid., 54.
3 Early in his career, Woodrow headed an academy in Alabama, followed later by a stint as a professor at Oglethorpe University in Georgia. As the Civil War tore the nation apart, Woodrow put his scientific training to use in the service of the Confederacy as the laboratory chief in the breakaway nation’s medical department; the lab produced medicine to treat the Confederate wounded. He took on these duties while also settling into his new position at the Columbia Theological Seminary. Following the war, he opened a printing office. Active in the Church, he served as the executive officer of the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly’s Foreign Missions Board, as eight-term Commissioner to the Southern General Assembly, and once as moderator, for one term each, of the Synod of Georgia and of South Carolina. After his “heretical” scandal, he became president of South Carolina College (later the University of South Carolina) and, for fourteen years, president of a bank. He continued on as an active scholar, doing work with the Victoria Institute in London, Isis at Dresden, Saxony, the Scientific Association of Germany, the Scientific Association of Switzerland, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the International Congress of Geologists. Cooper, The Warrior and the Priest, 16; White, Woodrow Wilson, the Man, His Times and His Task, 20-24.
4 In 1859, the Columbia Seminary established the Perkins Professorship of Natural Science, and the Southern Presbyterian Review published the works of many men aspiring for the position. Upon
science of geology, which seemed to contradict the Genesis chronology, was not truly at odds with the deeper truths that the Bible was intended to convey.\(^5\) His undoing would come about twenty-five years later as he made essentially the same argument regarding Darwinian evolution, in what Arthur Link describes as “one of the most notorious battles in the nineteenth-century war between science and religion.”\(^6\)

In 1884, the Alumni Association and Board of Directors of the seminary invited Woodrow to respond to the contention that skeptics were “using alleged discoveries in science to impugn the word of God.”\(^7\) They specifically wanted him to address evolution, regarding which rumors had been spreading that he held “unsound” views. Woodrow began by asserting that “no intelligent child of God [could] be indifferent to a knowledge of his Father’s handiwork, or of the methods by which he controls the course of his universe.” He repeatedly stressed that the Bible and science were two wholly different bodies of knowledge. As such, he declared, it was a logical fallacy to seek a science lesson from the Bible, just as it was to seek a moral lesson from science. One needed to read the Bible, Woodrow cautioned, with a bit of a relativistic, interpretative perspective—with the eyes of an artist rather those of a scientist. For instance, he noted, while the Bible describes the sun as rising and setting, science scoffs at such apparent ignorance, pointing out that the perception of rising and setting is merely an illusion.

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\(^7\) Address given May 7, 1884. Published as Woodrow, “Evolution,” *Southern Presbyterian Review*, XXV (July 1884), 341-68.
caused by the earth’s rotation on its axis; yet, Woodrow insisted, what matters to the viewer is that, from his position, the sun does rise and set.\footnote{Likewise, Woodrow continued, the rationalist could scoff at the person who says that, by traveling from Europe to the United States, he was traveling westward; after all, the person was “really” only trivially slowing down his rapid eastward motion on the planet’s rotation. For the traveler, the perspective of traveling eastward is what matters, and factoring in the earth’s rotation is ludicrous. Scientific versus Biblical classification provides another example. Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Woodrow noted, class bats with birds. Scientifically, this is a grave error of classification, but the meaning of the Biblical passages, Woodrow explains, was to describe creatures that fly—by which accounts it was indeed accurate. South Carolina, likewise, used such Biblical classification to outlaw the killing of birds whose diet primarily consists of insects. They included bats, which, scientifically speaking, are not birds. Their intent, though, was not “to teach zoology,” but to outlaw the killing of flying things that eat insects. They were certainly accurate, Woodrow concludes, when they included bats in the legislation.} The relation between biblical and scientific “truths,” he continued, is similarly relative; there is a meaning behind biblical passages that cannot be understood correctly in scientific terms, just as biblical terms cannot properly explain scientific matters. The Bible, after all, deals with religious and moral truth; the age of the earth, its shape, its position in the universe, etc., all have absolutely no bearing, Woodrow averred, on man’s relation to “ourselves and God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” To Woodrow, then, evolution was neither theistic nor atheistic. He concluded his address with brief remarks affirming his belief that the development of life in all its complexities on Earth through the mechanisms of nature could only confirm—rather than deny—the progressive unfolding of Creation via the shaping powers of “laws which God has ordained and executes.”

Woodrow’s address, though mildly worded, unleashed a firestorm that tore through the southern Presbyterian Church. In the majority, apparently, were those who feared that the association between “man and ape” invited society to devolve further into “materialism, godlessness, and sensuality.” These detractors generally conceded that Woodrow was capable, eloquent, and a man of earnest faith, but believed that “something...
[had to] be done” about his alleged teaching of evolution under the banner of the Church. In response, in 1884 he faced a trial in front of the Synod of South Carolina, which ultimately asked him to resign. Refusing to do so, he instead faced four years of trials in front of various church bodies. In 1886 he was fired and in May of 1888 the Presbyterian General Assembly voted 139 to 31 to uphold his dismissal.⁹ Throughout this ordeal, there was another side within the Presbyterian ranks that supported Woodrow, some even hailing him as an intellectual saint whose teachings bolstered their faith rather than lessened it.¹⁰ Woodrow Wilson, for his part, had no doubt which side he fell on, considering his beleaguered uncle’s opponents to be utterly “ignorant,” failing to “listen to reason” and bringing “spite and bigotry . . . [to] God’s church.” He even contemplated withdrawing from the church. In 1885, he met a former professor of chemistry who had to resign from the South-Western Presbyterian University in Clarksville, Tennessee, for his teaching of theistic evolution. Considering him an “exile of conscience” much like his uncle, Wilson arranged for the man to lodge at a boarding house in Baltimore as he studied at Johns Hopkins while searching for new employment.¹¹

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¹⁰ One of his students later remarked, “He was a universal genius, one of the greatest scholars the South ever produced. He taught me more than all the other professors combined, and so grounded me in the truth of the Bible that no power on earth can successfully assail my faith.” Louis C. LaMotte, Colored Light: The Story of the Influence of Columbia Theological Seminary, 1828-1936 (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee, 1937), 212.

¹¹ Those around him were equally supportive of his uncle James. His fiancée, Ellen Louise Axson, another “convert” to evolutionism (through another pastor’s preaching), agreed wholeheartedly with her beau. And his minister father, Rev. Joseph Ruggles Wilson, whose preaching was generally “conventional,” nevertheless supported Woodrow with a true passion. Ellen Louise Axson (ELA) to WW,
Wilson ardently supported his uncle because he cared for Woodrow not only as a loyal relative but also as a true admirer whose thinking, in many ways, took on the same shape regarding the secular, the theological, and the nature of truth, revelation, and progress. After Woodrow died in 1907, Wilson wrote that he “was one of the noblest men” that he had ever known, a “great thinker” and “man of science” who had a significant influence on his own understanding of the world. Three years later, as Woodrow’s daughter, Marian Woodville Woodrow, heard her cousin campaigning for the New Jersey governorship, she could not help but hear her late father’s thoughts and sentiments coming from the mouth of the future American president.12

The story of James Woodrow provides a fitting introduction to the place of theology in Wilson’s own world view and the role it played in shaping his conception of the progressive social dynamic. This chapter argues that a particular interpretation of Presbyterian theology fundamentally shaped Woodrow Wilson’s world view; just as he synthesized various social science concepts into his progressive philosophy, he did the same with religious ones, in a way that blurred the distinctions between the two and provided the substance of his vision of the millennial march. The chapter will illustrate, first, that Wilson grew up and lived his life enmeshed in Presbyterian society and as a

man of abiding faith, and that, accordingly, notions from the Calvinistic tradition shaped his world outlook integrally—though in anything but a dogmatic fashion. Second, it will show that the world view that he forged through his life of learning was a holistic one, fusing the religious and secular into one, and that, as such, he understood religion to be a fundamental component of societies—as an institution and as a discourse that shaped individuals’ thoughts, habits, and spirit. Third, it will demonstrate that Wilson believed that human society was slowly growing, through the subtle, shaping hand of Providence, toward the reign of an earthly “Kingdom of God,” as human agents increasingly acted upon the law of conscience, or pure love, rather than upon the law of force.

The underlying thrust of this chapter, then, challenges John Milton Cooper’s argument that Wilson was nearly a “political agnostic.” Citing Wilson’s argument in *The State* that law “plays the role neither of conscience nor of Providence . . . [and] follows standards of policy only, not absolute standards of right and wrong,” Cooper concludes that Wilson for the most part severed his religious and political thought, making analysis of his religious beliefs tangential at best when investigating his politics. Cooper implies that theology can only involve universal values, but Wilson’s religious principles were premised *at an elemental level* on relativistic concepts, as discussed previously and as will be explored further in this chapter. Far from compartmentalizing the religious and the secular, Wilson, like his uncle James Woodrow, understood a finely nuanced relationship to exist between the two realms of knowledge and experience. Wilson certainly argued that law comes from man, not from God, as the above quotation and a

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score of others attest, but with a deft touch he added that it nonetheless nudged mankind in the right direction when properly aligned with the spirit and revelation of the era. Considering Wilson’s integrated understanding of the social progressive dynamic, upon which this chapter will further elaborate, then, it is apparent that his political thought could not but be theological, in a sense, just as his religious thought could not but be worldly, in a manner of speaking, as well. As the chapter will show, Wilson believed that at each stage of progress, religion took on a different hue as revelation unfolded, and that, in the modern era, action that advanced society’s spirit was often secular in form. In fact, he felt that in modern society political reform was a more viable form of spiritual progress than was old-fashioned missionary conversion.

**Unorthodox Orthodoxy**

In 1889 Wilson wrote in a journal that he kept sporadically, “Unorthodox in my reading of the standards of faith, I am nevertheless orthodox in my faith.” The apparent conundrum in Wilson’s own self-reflection provides a useful way of understanding his Christian, specifically Presbyterian, heritage and the manner in which he wove together the components of his overarching world view. He was indeed a man of deep, penetrating faith in the major, basic tenets of his Presbyterian upbringing: the role of Providence in shaping history, the existence of sacred covenants between God and men, the chosenness of human agents, and the power of love-based service in human progress. Yet, Wilson was on the “liberal” side of southern Presbyterianism; he was no biblical literalist and he

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abhored over-rationalized, specific dogma in the same way that he loathed what he regarded as non-evolutionary political ideology, such as revolutionary socialism. He considered his religious views, in contrast, to be worldly and practical. With his academic training, he diverged from his minister father’s concentration on strict obedience to the laws of a fearsome God and belief in a world of clear-cut good and evil, and he embraced a rather nuanced understanding of progressive morality. While his faith was indeed firm and “orthodox,” his “standards of faith” were, like his political values, inherently relative, and thus “unorthodox.”

The progressive journalist and politician William Allen White once wrote, “If ever a man was called and elected, foreordained and predestined to Presbyterianism, he was Woodrow Wilson.” After all, Wilson was born into a Presbyterian lineage that stretched back, on both his maternal and paternal lines, to the Reformation. Nearly all of his male antecedents were ministers, including his father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson, Jr., several of his grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and even his father-in-law. His father, the Reverend Wilson, cofounded the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America, which was later rechristened the Presbyterian Church in the United States and more colloquially known as the southern Presbyterian Church. Rev. Wilson’s congregation in Augusta, Georgia, was one of the largest in the South. A few years after leaving that post, he became a professor at the Columbia Theological Seminary, in Columbia, South Carolina, alongside his brother-in-law, James Woodrow. And from 1861 to 1898, he held rank in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Woodrow Wilson, after leaving his father’s manse, spent twenty-four of the next thirty-
seven years at the College of New Jersey/Princeton University, a de facto Presbyterian institution until 1906. As Malcolm D. Magee states in his excellent *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy*, “[T]he future president was immersed in a particular Princeton and Southern Presbyterian tradition that he absorbed, quite literally at the knees of his father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson, his devout mother, Janet Woodrow Wilson, and the religiously active clergy, family, and friends he was surrounded by from his youth onward. This tradition and these influences shaped the way Woodrow Wilson perceived the world.”

Looking back at his early life, Wilson once commented that he had “the unspeakable joy of having been born and bred in a minister’s family,” and he held on tenaciously to the major tenets of his faith throughout his years with an unflinching conviction. As his daughter, Nellie, later recalled, “Throughout their entire lives father and mother remained true to their religious heritage, although mother went through periods of doubt and anxious searching for answers to ultimate questions. She read deeply into Kant and Hegel, and the English and Scotch philosophers, and seemed to arrive at conclusions that satisfied her. Father had a deep and unquestioning faith in God which was based, I think, on an inborn, intuitive sense of His nearness and reality. He never felt the need of proving God’s existence. His faith was a dominant, living factor in his life and never failed him to the very end.” He devoted great energy to church participation, serving as a church elder for twenty years in Princeton, a communicant at a

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church in Washington, a delegate at various inter-church councils, a lay minister on a number of occasions, and, by default, a member of the congregation who always had, as one minister told him, a “reverent, worshipful bearing.” As a young professor, he once wrote in a private journal that even if he never found intellectual contentment, he always would be fulfilled spiritually. As we will see later in the chapter, he would only approach intellectual satisfaction as the two sides of his world view melded together.

Throughout the chapter, the hold of the major tenets of Wilson’s Presbyterian heritage on his thought will be readily apparent—Providence as history’s guiding hand, human chosenness and agency within God’s order, the power of love and the ethic of service, and covenant theology. The latter warrants special mention here, as we discuss Wilson’s religious background, since it is the one aspect of Wilson’s faith that historians most often look to in investigating the role of theology in his domestic and foreign policies as president. Mark Elliot Benbow contends in his thought-provoking study of the covenanter basis of President Wilson’s Mexican policy that covenant theology provided the link between the religious and the secular in Wilson’s world view. John Mulder, whose landmark study of Wilson’s religious thinking, *The Years of Preparation*, inspired Benbow’s investigation, elaborates: “According to [the] theological point of view [of covenant, or federal, theology], God had established a covenant of grace with people, offering them forgiveness from their sins in exchange for obedience to the divine will. A further covenant, one of nature, had also been established by God, in which the affairs of

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this world—its laws and its government—were conducted according to God’s moral law. The essential thrust of the covenant theology was to provide a comprehensive theological view of the individual, the church, and society, each with its own function and place within the divine scheme of government of the world.” In turn, the Calvinist tradition stressed the creation of constitutions and favored the erection of federal structures to bind society’s components. In other words, covenant theology—especially the covenant of nature—was a centering spiritual idea that made a place for ostensibly secular elements in a holistic world view. One perhaps amusing example of Wilson’s covenantal outlook comes from a journal entry from 1876. Wilson, then a young man, wrote that he had been praying to God, confessing that he had been a “cold Christian” despite “the health and strength” and other numerous blessings that God had provided him his entire life. He felt that he had received from God without giving in return, and promised, in business contract language, to “endeavor to make Him some slightly better return for His many mercies.” In other words, he would honor his side of his covenant with God.18

Despite his adherence to the standards of his Presbyterian faith (such as covenant theology), Wilson came to temper the harsher, more rigid, universally specific elements of Presbyterianism in his own emerging world view. As a young man Wilson expressed belief in the need for strict moral discipline, in line with his father’s reading of the covenant of grace, and he saw the world as a battleground between good and evil, where every individual had to choose one side or the other. Historians such as Ross Gregory and

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18 WW, diary entry, September 23, 1876, PWW 1:198.
John Mulder suppose that this disciplinarian, universally moralizing viewpoint continued to influence Wilson through his presidency. But this assumption bears closer scrutiny. Mulder, for instance, based most of his description of Wilson’s early religious thought on his father’s sermons.\(^\text{19}\) While it is true that some of Wilson’s earliest writings, especially the 1876 essay “Christ’s Army,” echo his father’s thinking fairly well, it is clear that by his entry into politics—and, really, well before then—he had developed his views, relativistic toward both the application of discipline and the nature of good and evil. Much of the content of the rest of this chapter illustrates this point.

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the southern Presbyterian Church faced an identity crisis of sorts, and the theological splintering that occurred provided Wilson some individual ability to craft his own “standards of faith” while remaining true to the Presbyterian faith in general. The collapse of the Confederacy had put the Church in disarray, and many congregants and ministers alike began to conceive of the world as “fragmented and degenerating” rather than “coherent and progressing.” With this loss of faith in progress, many southern Presbyterians even questioned millennialism altogether. Factions emerged among members of the church, with a progressive, millennialist movement gaining renewed strength in the 1880s. This “liberal” side tended to confront the problems of the era with an eye toward worldly progress, and as such overlapped with the secular “New South” movement, which saw the South’s salvation in political,

economic, educational, and scientific improvement. The more “conservative” half, in contrast, tended to find relief from the period’s turmoil in a literal study of the Bible and in the defense of orthodox doctrine and dogma; in fact, it was conservative Presbyterian ministers at Princeton Theological Seminary and elsewhere who spearheaded the birth of the Christian fundamentalist movement. To be sure, the lines of division were not always so clear, but, increasingly, debates within the church did take on such a dichotomous hue, and Wilson’s uncle, James Woodrow, was perhaps its most dramatic victim.

The Presbyterianism that Wilson adopted and crafted was markedly antidogmatic toward anything but the major contours of the faith and was effused with a practical worldliness that some contemporaries confused with secularism. His daughter Nellie recalled that once, upon hearing that the Presbyterian Synod had overturned the doctrine of “infant damnation,” her father broke into laughter, and then quipped, “Think of all those dear little babies that have been burning in hell so long; now they will all be released.” Hell, Nellie explained, was something that her parents considered to be “only a state of mind.” Wilson, in fact, held that John Calvin’s greatest contribution to humanity was in his political experiment (described later), not in his formulation of “doctrines”—though those were still significant. As John Milton Cooper notes, even Wilson’s minister father freely imbibed in pleasures of the material world—“vacationing at fashionable resorts, smoking, playing billiards, and even occasionally drinking whisky”—a

remarkable personal liberty that many of his fellow clergymen did not allow themselves. A reading of the covenant theology of the church could certainly allow—and even promote—the worldliness that the Wilsons espoused. As we will see later in the chapter, Woodrow Wilson’s rejection of dogma came with a preference, instead, to accept and be humbled by the continuation of a great deal of mystery in the universe as revelation unfolded ever so slowly; he understood dogma as overly specific, a mistake made by men who rushed to authoritative conclusions they were not equipped to make.

Because of his partially free-thinking view toward elements of his faith, furthermore, Woodrow Wilson came to be rather tolerant of other denominations, even non-Christian ones. He admired the Jewish contribution to the Western political and philosophical heritage and praised what he saw as the medieval Catholic role in the nurturing of a democratic ethos. Perhaps more surprisingly, he considered Hindu theology to be a refreshingly intriguing “system of philosophy.” As president of Princeton, in 1906, he oversaw the university becoming officially nonsectarian. Earlier he had vouched, ardently though fruitlessly, for Frederick Jackson Turner, a Unitarian, to become a member of the faculty. He would find success later with other non-Presbyterian nominations, including a Jewish professor in 1904 and a Roman Catholic one in 1909. One should not in the least dismiss the importance of Presbyterianism to Wilson, though. As Mark Benbow stresses, it is vital to investigate Wilson’s Presbyterian, Covenanter

\[\text{21} \text{ McAdoo, } \text{The Woodrow Wilsons, } 41-42; \text{ WW, ”Renaissance, XX, Calvin—Geneva, France,” a classroom lecture, c. April 14, 1887, } \text{PWW } 5:488-90; \text{ Cooper, } \text{The Warrior and the Priest, } 17-18.\]
background, and not merely his nineteenth-century Protestantism. To be sure, Wilson was not a partisan Presbyterian, as his thoughts were shaped by a general evangelism and an appreciation of religious philosophy in general, a point that attests to the relativity inherent in his world view. But Presbyterianism fundamentally influenced him by simple virtue of being the faith in which he lived, breathed, and prayed.

It is apparent, then, that Wilson’s self-reflection of himself as an unorthodox orthodox Presbyterian was apt. He was certainly a thoroughgoing southern Presbyterian, and he held an unshakeable conviction in the keystones of Calvinism. In covenant theology, specifically, he found a bridge between the spiritual and the secular, through which he viewed outwardly worldly matters, such as political progress, as inherently sacred. Diverging from the understanding of Presbyterianism dominant at the time of his birth as rigidly disciplinary and dichotomously and universally moralizing, he developed much more nuanced, relativistic views toward ethical questions. Divisions within the southern Presbyterian Church provided Wilson the room for such personal crafting of his faith while still remaining true to the Calvinist tradition’s guiding tenets. As such, he rejected outright specific declarations of dogma and effused a worldliness in his everyday practice of his faith. And, moreover, though he was a loyal and believing Presbyterian through and through, he gladly accepted the diversity of religious thought.

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Holistic World View

For years, a major current in debates regarding the nature of Wilson’s thinking and statecraft was an argument over his inherent “realism” or “idealism,” and of central concern was the everyday impact of religion on his governing style. Realist interpreters, such as George F. Kennan and Hans J. Morgenthau, complained that Wilson was out of touch with reality, or least with the matters most vital to America’s national security—as they conceived it themselves, in strictly geostrategic terms. Standing in contrast to them have been historians, such as John Milton Cooper, Jr. and Frederick J. Calhoun, who argue that Wilson’s policymaking was generally practical and adaptable and that religious principles simply provided him with some guiding impulses. Likewise, in trying to steer a middle course, Arthur S. Link argued that Wilson practiced a “higher realism,” in that his outlook was “more perceptive, more in accord with ultimate reality, more likely to win the long-run moral approval of societies professing allegiance to the common western, humane, Judeo-Christian traditions.”

More often than not, in cases such as these, such arguments illustrated more about the author’s world view than they did about Wilson’s. For his part, Wilson did not conceive of the world in such dichotomous terms, and he believed that the tendency of people in his own time to do so was one of the great negatives of modern society.

Woodrow Wilson’s world view was, rather, intrinsically holistic. He sought a sort of “grand ideological synthesis” for modern society, a perspective that blurred all

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23 See, for example, Kennan, American Diplomacy; Morgenthau, In Defense of the National Interest; Cooper, The Warrior and the Priest; Calhoun, Power and Principle; Calhoun, Uses of Force in Wilsonian Foreign Policy; Link, “The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson.”
realms of inquiry and knowledge in a quest to divine a deeper underlying order behind it all. Consistent with the Calvinist tradition, Wilson understood faith and reason to be intertwined, interconnected gifts that separated man from beast and made him able to uncover bits of the truths concerning humanity’s spiritual-material existence. Coupling faith and reason, Wilson believed his own outlook regarding religion to be practical, and he eschewed dogma and simplistic moralizing. Conceiving mankind as developing through a holistic progressive social dynamic, he held that Judeo-Christian ideals had permeated Western political institutions, imparting to them an underlying spirit that allowed them to spread secularly. He held this to be especially true in his own era, as he touted the spiritual credentials of outwardly secular progress. Understanding Wilson’s world view to be holistic, then, renders the realist/idealist debate tangential at best when analyzing the predispositions that motivated his policymaking.

In 1908, Woodrow Wilson encouraged Lucius Hopkins Miller, professor of religion at Princeton, to seek publication for an article he had recently penned, “Modern Views of the Bible and Religion.” Expressing ideas with which Wilson strongly agreed, Miller wrote that a modern world view

consists in a new conception of man’s powers and ways of acquiring knowledge, due to the advance in philosophy and psychology; in a new conception of the universe, due to science; and in enhanced recognition of man’s social nature and obligations, due to a variety of causes, of which intercommunication and education are perhaps chief. According to the modern view, no cause is merely a cause. It is also an effect. This is true preeminently of the social organism. Instead of clearly defined causes having clearly defined effects we have a network of interactive influences,
well nigh impossible to separate, the sum total of which makes up our modern life.\textsuperscript{25}

Miller’s vision was an updated spin on the Calvinistic tradition of seeking a “grand ideological synthesis,”\textsuperscript{26} an extension of the covenant of nature, or covenant of works. He presented it as a sort of “grand unified theory,” or “theory of everything,” based on the intimate interconnection of the subjects of all fields of inquiry—scientific, philosophical, religious, etc. Wilson’s thoughts ran parallel to Miller’s. In a May 1909 address at the Hartford Theological Seminary, he declared that scientists were no longer content to conceive of the universe in strictly materialistic terms. Apparently projecting his own thoughts onto “scientists,” he maintained that “[t]hey know that there is a spiritual segment in the complete circle of knowledge which they cannot supply and which must be supplied if the whole circle is not to show its imperfection and incompleteness.” In all fields, he continued, lines of division had become fuzzy—between mathematics and physics, between physics and chemistry, between chemistry and biology, and so on. He explained, “[T]he domain of knowledge, like the globe itself, is round and there is no stopping place.” To complete the “map of knowledge,” he proclaimed, mankind needed “to press onward into the field where lie the unknown things both of physical knowledge and of spiritual knowledge.” As such, Wilson asserted, the Christian Church needed to take a leading role in society—in education, science, philosophy, and politics—and become the fundamental force behind “sentient and thinking life,” acting upon its duty “to show the spiritual relations of men to the great


\textsuperscript{26} Maddex, “Southern Presbyterian Review,” 303.
world processes, whether they be physical or spiritual." Specific, subject-based inquiry could be fruitful, but, in the wide view, the whole of existence was greater than the simple layering of its component parts. It was synergistic.

A central facet of Wilson’s belief in an attainable grand ideological synthesis was the overlapping of faith and reason, a critical feature of the Calvinist tradition. As Neils Aage Thorsen explains, whereas Martin Luther had made a firm distinction between the sacred and the secular, Calvin had endeavored to do the opposite. In turn, “Wilson embraced a world view that presupposed that religious meaning was inherent in the secular order.”

His thoughts in this regard were based, for one, on his view of the relationship between brain and spirit, and, two, on the theological notion of antinomy. Wilson conceived the human mind in holistic terms, composed of both matter and spirit. Calvin believed that just as “feeling” distinguished all animals from “inanimate things,” it was reason that separated “us from brute.” Humankind’s mental faculty, in other words, was an inherently sacred thing. Likewise, Wilson believed, God had intervened in the natural processes of evolution in order to infuse mankind with a soul. As his uncle, James Woodrow, wrote, the soul “separates the mere animal from the exalted being which is made after the image of God.” Reason and spirit, then, were two manifestations of the divinity that God bestowed upon his chosen beings. In a 1905

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28 Cooper, The Warrior and the Priest, 19; Thorsen, The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 6; Magee, What the World Should Be, 9, 12-14. Magee writes, “His religion was inseparable from the other aspects of his philosophy.”
baccalaureate address at Princeton, Wilson explained the synergistic and symbiotic implications behind this holistic perspective:

Knowledge is the mere food and tonic of the mind, learning merely its exercise. Its health is established, its strength increased, by right action upon these things. . . . Though the psychologists dissect and anatomicize the mind for our instruction, they do not and cannot take it apart. It is immersed in matter, but it is itself spirit. Our hearts and our intellects are not in fact distinct. Our emotions sweeten our thinking, our hearts give character to our minds. As the spirit is turned so will the mind direct. Our spiritual health, our very rectitude of thinking, is determined by purity of motive, elevation of ideal, the visions of hope and the plannings of purpose.\textsuperscript{30}

One’s way in the world, consequently, was found in the realization that spirit and intellect were one; great mental faculty coupled with degenerate spirit was a mind wasted, or misused, a rejection of God’s gift to man. Such a covenantal break from God’s grace came with consequences. As Wilson read in Romans 8:6, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” A man was not complete, and in fact lost his way, if he failed to see and live the connection between faith and reason, between spirit and intellect. Contrary to Mark Benbow’s argument, then, Wilson did not rely on theological ideas only from time to time (especially during crises when a quick decision was necessary),\textsuperscript{31} as he simply did not separate the components of his thought that way.

Wilson’s rejection of a brain/spirit dualism was deeply connected to his belief, emerging from his faith in the grand interconnection of all facets of existence, that there


\textsuperscript{31} WW, notes for a religious talk, April 26, 1906, \textit{PWW} 16:377; Benbow, “Leading Them to the Promised Land,” 2.
was a deeper substance running through all of creation, just beyond man’s grasp, but glimpsed in moments of inspiration. He was fond of referencing a section of William Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” “I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean and the living air, / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.” By no coincidence, Wilson usually included this passage while discussing Romans 8:6 (quoted above) and the holistic nature of the mind.\(^{32}\) Coursing through the totality of the universe—man’s mind included—was a nebulous, ultimate truth.

For Wilson, faith in this fundamental, but mysterious, universal truth led him to embrace the theological concept of antinomy.\(^{33}\) An epistemological perspective, antinomy as Wilson understood it was the notion that two ideas, principles, or outlooks that appeared to be eminently rational individually, but yet incompatible when considered together, could still both be right. For instance, in articles discussing the relationship between science and religion, Wilson’s uncle, Rev. James Woodrow, held on to the idea of the general infallibility of both Scripture and the scientific enterprise. Woodrow wrote that the Bible contains truths so profound “and so fully authenticated by the strongest evidence of every kind, that it is impossible for a reasonable mind to doubt them.” But, he cautioned, one must not fall into the trap of biblical literalism and come doggedly to

\(^{32}\) WW often referenced this section of Wordsworth’s poem, including in addresses in 1894, 1903, and 1906. He altered the excerpt to first person plural, beginning “We feel ‘a presence that disturbs’ us...” See WW, notes for a religious talk, April 26, 1906, and Link’s editorial notes that follow, \textit{PWW} 16:377-78.

\(^{33}\) Antinomy is the key idea behind Malcolm Magee’s analysis of the centrality of faith in Wilson’s foreign policy, \textit{What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy}. 
resist materialistic insights that might seem to contradict Scripture. Religion and science needed to be understood through distinct spirits, or perspectives, as they were different prisms through which to view the universe. Deeper truths, in fact, could be discerned in the process of trying to untangle points of logical tension between science and the Bible; simply rejecting science, indeed, revealed not a strong faith, but, Woodrow alleged, a truly lacking one. Woodrow’s point was not to draw a strong line between religion and science, but, rather, to show how, in his belief, they could work together—each in its own unique way—to advance human understanding of the universe. Wilson shared his uncle’s thoughts on this matter, holding that there was no inherent “antagonism between science and religion.” Rather, he declared in his 1909 address to the Hartford Theological Seminary, they were the essential components of the “circle of knowledge,” and the challenge of the modern era was to work toward fitting them together without rejecting either.  

Underpinning Wilson’s conviction regarding antinomy was a comfort with mystery in the universe and faith in the slow, but progressive, resolution of such mystery. Holding human knowledge and abilities to be limited, Wilson believed it likely that apparently irresolvable logical conflicts would unravel over time as mankind’s holistic grasp of the universe matured (an idea discussed in more depth later in the chapter, in relation to revelation). John A. Thompson argues that, in light of the era’s tension between “biblical criticism and Darwinism,” on one hand, and “traditional theological

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axioms” on the other, Wilson’s response “was to fence his religion off from the ordinary workings of intelligence.” In making this claim, Thompson looks to Wilson’s December 1889 journal entry, in which the young scholar wrote that he had never had “deep reaching spiritual difficulties,” despite the “intellectual difficulties” that the age presented. Though he “saw” them, they never “troubled” him. “[T]hey seemed,” he continued, “to have no connection with my faith in the essentials of the religion I had been taught.” In other words, Wilson did not see modern advances in material knowledge challenging in any significant way the fundamentals of his spirituality. Far from “fencing off” his faith from the more secular trappings of his thought, then, Wilson, moved by the logic of antinomy, was adamant about the lack of any substantive, irresolvable tension existing between science and religion and the acceptability of some apparent uncertainty and incongruity in the present. As Malcolm Magee writes, “Academic inquiry was not an obstacle to Wilson’s faith. On the contrary, he held contradiction explainable in mystery.” Wilson conceived of this “mystery,” as the “presence that disturbs us” in Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”—that “something” that is “deeply interfused” in the universe, from the sun, to the ocean, air, and sky, to man’s mind. Material or spirit, everything made sense together, even if man could not quite grasp it all yet.

Because Wilson embraced material knowledge, though, he rejected what he considered to be overt dogma and practiced a faith that he deemed practical, sensible, and grounded in reality. He agreed with his colleague, Lucius Hopkins Miller, when he wrote

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that any conflict between faith and reason was “between science and dogmatic theology, not between science and religion” and that mankind only learns through experience. In language reminiscent of Wilson’s condemnations of revolutionary political ideology, Miller elaborated, “The ancient philosophers took a short cut, and reached reality by ‘jumping out of their skin,’ as the Germans say, but the modern philosopher is shut up to the slow, painful method of acquiring an even larger experience of the facts of life.” The most potent faith, in other words, was grounded in experience, not in cloistered theology of the type that anti-Darwinist ministers used in prosecuting James Woodrow or that missionaries tended to spout off to Wilson’s annoyance. Wilson’s brother-in-law, Stockton Axson, noted that Wilson had “plain practical religious views” and quipped to Mrs. Wilson that her husband would have thus made a “more beneficial” Sunday school teacher than “half the ministers in the Southern General Assembly.”36 His opposition to dogma, and thus to simplistic moralizing, meshed with the overarching relativity of his world view.

Conceiving the universe, including the social world, in holistic terms not only gave a seemingly secular cast to Wilson’s faith but also imparted a subtle, but fundamental, spirituality to his political views. Namely, since the spiritual and the secular intimately influenced one another in the social world, practitioners of Western politics throughout history had imparted something of their spirit to developing political institutions and philosophies—a spirit that was inherently Judeo-Christian. Progress had

continued to such a point that, by Wilson’s time, Western politics carried the torch of Christianity while appearing to be wholly divorced from religion. In a 1909 address, “The Minister and the Individual,” he declared, “No doubt Christianity came into the world to save the world. We are privileged to live in the midst of many manifestations of the great service that Christianity does to society, to the world that now is. All of the finest things that have made history illustrious seem to have proceeded from the spirit of Christ. All those things which distinguish modern civilization are things which it has derived from the spirit of the church.” Directly or indirectly, he professed, Christ’s spirit had inspired most of the great movements of the day.\(^\text{37}\)

![Fig. 7: Christianity in the Dynamic. Over centuries of Western political history, the thoughts, habits, and spirit of Christians had infused the evolving political institutions of their societies. Concurrently, that same spirit then cycled back to the populace through the influence of the institutional environment. By Wilson’s time, institutions that seemed wholly secular nevertheless carried Christ’s spirit.}

As Lloyd Ambrosius notes, Wilson’s views on racial and religious development overlapped. The primary stocks at the head of Western civilization, in Wilson’s estimation, were the Aryans and the Semites, who, by no matter of coincidence, were closely associated with the Judeo-Christian religious heritage. For one, the foundations of the Western legal tradition, premised in the concepts of “justice and injustice, [and] of civil and religious liberty,” emanated from the “laws of the old and new Testaments.” To Wilson, this legal lineage was, in fact, the key to civilization; any nation not founded in any form on such principles was not “prosperous,” and, truly, not civilized—and vice versa. Wilson’s remarkable openness to Judaism in a time of widespread intolerance, in fact, came from his particular notion of racial-religious progress. In *The State* he wrote that the “Teutonic” race carried the torch of Western political development after the fall of the Roman Empire and argued that it

would be a mistake . . . to ascribe to Roman legal conceptions an undivided sway over the development of law and institutions during the Middle Ages. The Teuton came under the influence, not of Rome only, but also of Christianity; and through the Church there entered into Europe a potent leaven of Judaic thought. The laws of Moses as well as the laws of Rome contributed suggestion and impulse to the men and institutions which were to prepare the modern world; and if we could but have the eyes to see the subtle elements of thought which constitute the gross substance of our present habit, both as regards the sphere of private life, and as regards the action of the state, we should easily discover how very much besides religion we owe to the Jew.\(^{38}\)

Jewish thought, in other words, had pervaded Western life and politics—and so had become central to Western identity. Boosted even more by the advanced “spirit of morality” provided by “the coming of Christ into the world,” Judeo-Christian thinking

separated the civilized from the “heathen.” Heathen races and nations did, indeed, have an “innate sense of right and wrong,” according to Wilson’s relativistic views, but those races and nations that were infused in one way or another by the Judeo-Christian spirit—particularly that of Christianity—existed on a higher plane of virtue, further along the path toward the millennium.39

In Wilson’s conception of historical progress, further, the infusion of Western politics with Judeo-Christian ideals did not waver with the Renaissance and Reformation—and, in fact, amplified. Through his holistic understanding of political progress, he saw no reason to separate the Renaissance and the Reformation from one another. He credited Martin Luther with stressing the individuality of conscience and of judgment—key principles behind the development of liberalism. In Luther’s era, Wilson argued, thought was freed from “exclusion in cloisters and universities,” and so the masses of people had begun to use their minds and move away from childish ignorance—to discuss sincerely both public affairs and matters of faith without deferring to the dogma of either. Calvin, further, was instrumental in fostering the democratic spirit, counter-intuitively through his quasi-theocratic sixteenth-century political experiment, as he forged a community and government in Geneva, Switzerland, “founded upon the authority of the congregation,” and only the guidance and representation of the minister-leader.40

By Wilson’s time, holistic political advancements such as those that Luther and Calvin initiated in the Renaissance-Reformation meant that Christianity coursed through modern political life—despite the era’s secular outward appearance. Addressing Princeton’s 1904 graduating class, for example, Wilson argued that Christianity had pervaded their university, *whether or not they realized it*; the “precepts of honour, of faithfulness, and of happiness” that underscored university life at Princeton had been illuminated in “the Old Testament and the New.” Such permeation was not something experienced by Princeton only, though, but by all of civilization. In an earlier speech, Wilson maintained that humanity, justice, and love emanated from the Bible, to the benefit even of non-believing imitators. Progress, he concluded, was thus Christian, and the advancement of civilization subsequently came through the expansion of Christianity. Unraveling this reasoning process, it is clear that Wilson considered the spread of Christianity to mean the extension of the values of humanity, justice, and love, not the simple proliferation of churches and converts. In fact, Wilson held that in the modern era progress could be achieved more effectively through secular political reform than through an anachronistic missionary approach. Christianity’s fundamental power in political progress could not be overstated. It had, as he wrote in 1901, “liberated the world.”

To Wilson, then, the “Progressive Era” was inherently Christian. Society’s goal was political reform, but its driving force and its need was spiritual. “Men’s consciences are awake,” Wilson declared in 1904, “and crave conquests which are attempted in the

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spirit of religion if not in its name and under its elder organization.” More than a mere enthusiasm for scientific and material advancement drove the age; a genuinely charitable spirit had also spurred earnest efforts in bettering the art of healing and in improving social conditions. Furthermore, Wilson believed, while there was a great need in America for “rationalizing religion” (consider his views regarding dogma), more important was the need for “spiritualizing life.” “The everyday, business rationalization of life,” he held, “produces a hunger for the mystery.” While the spiritual cause could be furthered in the public arena, Wilson cautioned, one must not conclude erringly that all conceptions of secular progress were inherently good. “Nothing is more injurious,” he claimed, “than the efforts of some men to prove that the service of Mammon is perfectly consistent with the service of God.” Consequently, in order that progress be truly spiritual and not merely materialistic, citizens needed to nurture the values of helpfulness, unselfishness, love, and loyalty, as doing so would be “moralizing” and “liberating” and feed both the vitality and the integration of society. Further, he quoted Romans 7:6, “That we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter,” in arguing that people needed to have a liberal attitude toward law, being open to reform rather than captive to legal dogma. To take on the issues of the day, then, society needed both an “intellectual awakening” and a “spiritual” one. As John Mulder explains, Wilson’s views regarding the Progressive Era can be understood under the banner of “civil religion”:

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42 WW, Baccalaureate address, Princeton University, June 12, 1904, PWW 15:370; WW, notes for a religious address, “The Church and Society,” December 11, 1903 (delivered December 13, 1903 at the Second Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia), ibid., 78; WW, “The Positive in Religion,” October 15, 1876, PWW 1:211-12, originally printed in the Wilmington North Carolina Presbyterian, Oct. 25, 1876; WW, notes for a chapel talk at Marquand Chapel, Princeton University, November 8, 1896, PWW 10:42; Denny, Denny Notes, “Politics,” February 27, 1900.
American political ideology has been significantly influenced by religious ideas, particularly those arising out of the Protestant and Calvinist traditions. In recent years, this fusion of religion and politics in American has been described as a “civil religion,” and it is clear that Woodrow Wilson’s political thought and career demonstrate a significant example of the way in which religion interacted with politics in defining the goals of an individual and national policy.\(^ {43}\)

As such, while at Princeton Wilson participated in the Sociological Institute, an organization sponsored by the Princeton Theological Seminary and devoted to discussing how to apply Christian principles to contemporary society.\(^ {44}\)

Wilson’s ideas regarding “civil religion” ultimately drew from his holistic perspective regarding the universe and man’s place in it and his belief that there was a grand ideological synthesis that fundamentally blurred the ostensibly sacred and profane. To Wilson, there was a deeper meaning and order suffusing existence, and man, of all creatures, was uniquely equipped to gain glimpses of the greater mystery through his overlapping gifts of reason and soul. Such a world view imparted a particularly worldly tinge to Wilson’s faith, and he consistently promoted what he considered the practical and sensible over the dogmatic. Wilson’s understanding of the progressive social dynamic, which intimately interconnected institutions with thoughts and habits, furthermore, led him to conclude that the Judeo-Christian spirit had permeated Western politics throughout history—to such an extent that Judeo-Christian values spread through the extension and development of Western political institutions without any outward appearance of missionary proselytizing. In his own era, in particular, the Christian spirit

\(43\) Mulder, *The Years of Preparation*, xi.

\(44\) Link, ed., *PWW* 9:100n1.
was the driving force behind the push for secular political and social reforms, as mankind inched closer to the Kingdom of God.

**An Earthly Kingdom of God**

Historian Niels Thorsen surmises that early eighteenth century theologian Jonathan Edwards’ description of the millennium influenced Wilson’s. As Thorsen explains, “[T]raditional Calvinism assumed that the millennium would come about as the result of the actual reappearance of Christ.” But Edwards, a key figure from the “First Great Awakening,” and himself a former president of the College of New Jersey (later rechristened Princeton University),

45 “taught that the millennium would be established before Christ’s return and the end of history. The result was that the millennium seemed more continuous with secular history.”

46 Whether or not Wilson had actually studied Edwards’ theology, the similarity of their millennial views is undeniable. As the remainder of this chapter will illustrate, Wilson believed that mankind lay on a spectrum between animal and divine, and that humans, as individuals and as whole societies, would grow closer to God and the millennium as they developed both the spiritual and intellectual facets of their character. In a fundamental sense, Providence guided progress toward the millennium, assuring humankind’s ultimate attainment of the Kingdom of God. Despite Providence’s guiding hand, though, advance also required the conscientious

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45 Edwards is perhaps best remembered for his influential sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”
effort of human agents. Failing to perform this service slowed the movement toward the millennium and was the ultimate sin, breaking what was, perhaps, man’s most sacred covenant with God. Consistent with his political beliefs as explained in the previous chapter, Wilson held that the properness of certain reforms depended on the society in question, in this case measured in terms of the particular society’s “state of human nature.” In Wilson’s reckoning, as society increasingly approached the divine through slow development, the essential substance of the universe became more clearly revealed, allowing each generation to act in a freer manner more closely approximating the spirit required of the Kingdom of God. Reform, then, needed to match the level of revelation guiding the society’s life, and so radical change was impossible. Though law could have some impact on transforming people’s spirit, change ultimately rested upon individuals’ will. In time, as people’s consciences approached the divine, no more institutional law would be needed, as individuals would be guided by a spirit of love, reason, and justice. Accomplished through increasingly “secular” means, that future age would nonetheless be the realization of the Kingdom of God.

In his foundational *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin writes, “We see among all mankind that reason is proper to our nature; it distinguishes us from brute beasts, just as they by possessing feeling differ from inanimate things.” Mankind, in other words, was in a unique position in relation to the rest of Creation, an animal for sure, but the only one with the gift of reason. Though not a groundbreaking idea in and of itself, coupled with the idea of human progress as discussed in the previous chapter, it had a rather deep implication: If mankind were growing more reasonable over time, then the
division between man and “brute beast” was widening. Man was becoming more divine.

At the turn of the century, Wilson wrote that the man of the modern age “has been made
more human by schooling,

by growing more self-possessed—less violent, less tumultuous; holding
himself in hand, and moving always with a certain poise of spirit; not
forever clasping his hand to the hilt of his sword, but preferring, rather, to
play with a subtler skill upon the springs of action. This is our conception
of the truly human man: a man in whom there is a just balance of faculties,
a catholic sympathy—no brawler, no fanatic, no Pharisee, not too
credulous in hope, not too desperate in purpose; warm, but not hasty;
ardent, and full of definite power, but not running about to be pleased and
deceived by every new thing.

The title of the work in which Wilson voiced these thoughts was On Being Human. The
contention was that the power of reason and the ability to control one’s temperament
were the marks of refined humanity. The implication, conversely, was that one who
abandoned reason or did not moderate his character failed to be fully human. The social
thinker whom Wilson so admired, Walter Bagehot, for instance, wrote that among
“savages” morals were baser, cruder, less refined—that morality was an “acquired” thing
that needed to be cultivated through long experience. By implication, then, savages were
closer to animals in a social (though not biological) sense. Wilson often spoke of the
traits of the “complete Christian,” those pieces of character necessary for a millennial rule
of spirit. Whereas, as Bagehot noted, savages had “strong passions,” “weak reason,” and
a herd mentality and lived only in the present, a person of mature reason and spirit had a
driven, purposeful individuality that was tempered by calm reflection and “sane and
broadened judgment.” He kept his emotion in check, not by abandoning it but by
remaining kind yet firm, righteous yet “joyful, diligent, [and] fervent.” More than just a list of character traits that Wilson preferred, he understood them to be necessary prerequisites for the Kingdom of God, an anarchy of sorts where spirit rather than institutional law would guide people’s lives, possible only when human nature was divine, having expunged all vestiges of brute impulses.

In the broad view of history, Wilson held, Providence was steering mankind, inevitably, toward this era of divine human nature. According to Calvin, Providence perpetuated the “order of nature,” as we have seen earlier in the chapter, and history “was adapted to a definite and proper end.” Wilson’s secular hero, Walter Bagehot, agreed: Commenting on natural selection, Bagehot wrote in Physics and Politics that it was clear that “human history is guided by certain laws.” No doubt, though, Calvin and Bagehot conceived of Providence in notably different ways. Calvinist theology was originally effused with the concept of strong predestinarianism: Before Creation, God had already meticulously designed his plan for the history of the universe, including the election of certain human agents, who alone would be saved. As Mark Elliott Benbow notes, though, the Presbyterian Church of Wilson’s day had deviated from this unconditional view to one that allowed for free will to determine one’s ultimate fate. Just as in a democracy, all people could participate—in this case in God’s plan. In a broader universal sense, then,

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48 Calvin, Institutes I XVI:4-7, in A Calvin Treasury, ed. Keesecker, 104-05; Bagehot, Physics and Politics, 44; Benbow, Leading Them to the Promised Land (Kent, OH: Kent UP, 2010), 54-55; see also
the guiding force of Providence and humans’ free will engaged in an ongoing dynamic
that made for a universe that evolved in a general direction toward a specific endpoint
rather than through a precise, practically mechanical, unfolding. God painted the universe
in broad brushstrokes, not locking in to a predetermined fate any particular moment,
individual, or society. Despite the variable specifics, though, human nature was, indeed,
steadily progressing toward the divine.⁴⁹

In Wilson’s conception of the march of progress, then, human agency was
imperative, and so people had a duty to do their best to further God’s plan. Once, when
Wilson was still in Baltimore attending Johns Hopkins, his fiancée, Ellen Louise Axson,
wrote to him from Savannah, Georgia, where she was visiting her father, whose health
was in serious decline. The situation looked dire, she wrote to Wilson, but added that
however things turned out would be “right.” Wilson strongly objected to her sentiment,
saying that her utterance was “almost too near to saying that ‘whatever is is right,’
[which] is very far from being true.” Though he had the strongest of faith in the “right
ordering of Providence,” he continued, he maintained that people still needed to do their

⁴⁹ Recall the quotation included, in part, in chapter 1, “Tested by history’s long measurements, the
lines of advance are seen to be singularly straight.” WW, The State, 1911 ed., 555; Wilson seemed to
contradict his thoughts on changing human nature in a 1902 address, when he said, “We have the same sort
of human nature that Adam had.” Yet, this comment followed shortly after he had argued, “We are learning
from present experience that for different stages of development in civilization there are different stages of
liberty.” His general point in the passage was of arguing for regulated liberty; “we have to learn how to
hold certain persons in check,” he declared, “without choking them to death.” It seems, then, that the
meaning of his comments regarding Adam’s nature—if they are not to be considered a simple
contradiction—hinges on his statement, “[W]e haven’t succeeded in exterminating the tendency to
misbehave.” In other words, people still, in a general sense, have a certain predisposition to do wrong.
Wilson implies, then, that, despite this universally shared sinfulness, people do indeed act differently at
different stages of development. Otherwise, there would be no need for different levels of liberty. WW,
Founder’s Day Address, Vassar College, May 2, 1902, reported in Poughkeepsie, NY, Daily Eagle, May 3,
duty, and “in the wisest way” they could. People should not casually accept a “false step” on the fallacious belief that “it belonged to the general fore-ordained order of events.” He held the topic so dear that he elaborated in a second letter sent twelve days later. In this letter to his weary fiancée, he cautioned that he was not saying that not all things “work together for good.” After all, he held such an unprogressive view to be atheistic. Rather, he was stating that one cannot justify “letting things drift, in the assurance that they would drift to a happy result.” In a broad view of the universe, things moved in a positive direction, but it was immoral simply to sit back in faith; one had to actively do their part in working for it to come. It was their duty. As Henry Wilkinson Bragdon cleverly put it, Wilson believed both in predestination and in the need to give “destiny a helping hand.”

Humans performed this duty, in Wilson’s estimation, through selflessly serving fellow humans, which improved the world in the here and now through the spreading of love. To Wilson, the “right motive” of service stood in contrast to the wrong motive of “self-aggrandizement.” “The true spirit of Christianity,” he declared in a religious talk, was “not love for salvation’s sake, but service for love’s sake.” One should not try to cultivate love for his or her own benefit in the afterlife, but, rather, one should serve humanity so that love would spread. A passage from I John IV, discussing God as love, inspired his thoughts on this point. Since God was love, he lived within those who loved. As more people served humanity out of love, then, Wilson reasoned, humanity would grow more divine, edging mankind closer to the Kingdom of God. In a 1902 address at a student conference in Massachusetts, he connected this thought to secular progress,

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forcefully arguing that while individuals could and should hope for mercy in the afterlife, they had a greater duty to the community around them in this life. “[A] nation must save itself on this side of the grave,” Wilson declared, for “there is no other side for it. Its character must be made now and finished now. . . . And so there is a responsibility laid upon us here which is greater than the responsibility of individual salvation.” More important than striving for individual salvation, people should work to “lift other men . . . in that great process of elevation; and that is the patriotic duty just as much as it is the religious duty.”

If acting out of selfish interests was averse to true service, so was failure to act altogether. The Bible “does not teach any doctrine of peace,” Wilson once said, “so long as there is sin to be combated and overcome in one’s heart and in the great moving force of human society.” In fact, failure to act on one’s duty was sin. If original sin had come with “The Fall of Man” in the Garden of Eden, then progress was mankind seeking redemption. One who had the ability to better some aspect of the world, however miniscule, and failed to do so, had shirked his or her duty, breaking a sacred covenant with God; in other words, stagnation was sin. Worse yet was action that brought regression—a temporary step back on the millennial march. Wilson’s occasional comments on the battle between “good” and “evil” in the world have led some historians to conclude that he interpreted the world in black and white terms, simplistically labeling

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people and nations as good or evil depending on whether or not they followed a certain rigid set of universally applicable, explicit principles. But things were never so one-dimensional with Wilson. Rather, bearing in mind his equation of stagnation and regression with sin and his relative views regarding progress, discussed in the previous chapter, it is apparent that his assessment of a person’s or society’s goodness or evilness was qualified in the same way that he judged the appropriate nature of a nation’s political institutions: Was the person or society acting in a way appropriate for bringing progress in relation to his/its particular set of circumstances and current level of development? If not, therein lay an immorality far graver, in the big picture, than any simple transgression of God’s commandments. A savage might follow a coarser, more brutish, set of social mores than a person in advanced society, but if he performed service that in some way brought his society closer to the next stage of development in means available to him, and the advanced person did not, he was the better, more moral person. Likewise, as we will see later, Wilson believed that if a nation of people somewhere in the world were truly stagnated, seemingly unable to break out of its “rut,” and a more civilized nation had the opportunity to help with little to no risk to its own stability and advancement, and it failed to do so, that developed nation had sinned. Providence had provided an opening for

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52 Often cited is Wilson’s 1876 essay, “Christ’s Army,” signed “Twiwood,” *Wilmington North Carolina Presbyterian*, August 23, 1876, reprinted in *PWW* 1:180. In this essay, he portrays a regimented world in long-standing battle, with the army of saints, under “divine generalship,” fighting the army of evil. His description seems to be an attempt at literary flair, though, as he describes the evils to be battled as “evil thoughts, evil desires, [and] evil associations”; Ross Gregory is one such historian who describes Wilson as inheriting a rigid form of Presbyterianism that made inflexible distinctions between good and evil. See Gregory, “To Do Good in the World,” 56; as Mark Benbow explains, Wilson’s “grounding in covenant theology . . . led him to believe that Christians had a duty to fulfill God’s will on earth,” Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land*, 2.
mankind to advance an inch toward the millennium, but to no avail—a truly serious covenantal rupture.

The desire to serve, though, needed to be tempered by a practical moderation, as progress toward the millennium could only develop slowly. In his 1901 musing on manliness, *When a Man Comes to Himself*, Wilson wrote that although young men may burn to change the world they needed to become wise to the limits of change—not to give up on their dreams for a better society, but to think about it soberly. The millennium, he assured his readers, would indeed come—and required the active service of such passionate men—but it simply could not be brought in one fell swoop. The machinations of the world, he reiterated, were simply too subtle and complex for any kind of radical change to be practicable or advisable.\(^53\) In the previous chapter, we saw the social theory behind his admonitions on slow change; there was also a parallel theological concept that pointed his thought in the same direction: The progressive revelation of God. In slow, evolutionary time, humans were increasingly gaining knowledge of the essential nature of the universe. By definition, religion entails the derivation of ethics from metaphysics,\(^54\) and so progressing revelation implied, to Wilson and others of similar mind, that ethics evolved, as well. Ethical change—transformation of the principles guiding social life—could not come at once, society-wide. Rather, ethics, in Wilson’s view, resided first and foremost in *individuals*. Institutional law, if well fitted to a society, could nudge individuals in the right direction, in the same indirect sense that Providence shaped the

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\(^{53}\) See WW, *When a Man Comes to Himself*, especially ca. 30.

\(^{54}\) The word “religion” derives from the Latin *religare*, which means “to bind together.”
course of the universe, but, ultimately, change could only proceed at the slow speed of individual development.

For Wilson, the idea of revelation was intimately connected to the concepts of mystery and antinomy. Wilson fit Lucius Hopkins Miller’s description of a man who was not agnostic, but, rather, “believes that he knows, but admits that he does not know all. He believes that God is being progressively revealed in the life of the world, and has been progressively revealed in the past.” As Wilson’s father, the Rev. Joseph Ruggles Wilson, preached, revelation was simply “truth made known.” Each age gained an increasingly clarified knowledge of the ultimate truth. Changes in philosophy, science, and social organization, Miller explained, “will continue to come as the world grows older. As they come, the new light they shed upon the problems of life and of destiny will modify men’s views of God, of man, of Jesus Christ and of the Bible.” Rather than such unraveling of the greater mystery leading mankind away from God, Miller continued, the “Christian faith [would] be increasingly clarified and increasingly justified.”55 Wilson concurred.

In Wilson’s estimation the greatest truth, or revelation, came from Jesus Christ’s message of love. “The spirit of morality was changed and established once and for all,” Wilson declared, “by the coming of Christ into the world.” Miller granted “to all religions their share of truth,” and Wilson’s comments regarding non-Christian religions such as Judaism and Hinduism show that he thought the same. Nevertheless, in Miller’s words,

55 Miller, “Modern Views of the Bible and Religion,” 309-10, 319; JRW, “The Gospel a Mirror” (sermon on James 1:25), Wilmington, NC, November 10, 1878, 5, in “Sermons of Joseph R. Wilson,” Reel 523 Series 11 (Woodrow, Axson, and Wilson Family Material, 1856 – 1894), WWP; Rev. James Woodrow used the equation of God with truth to support his argument regarding evolution. For instance, he wrote that the only other explanation for the clear evidence that creatures had different forms in ages past is that God put fossils in the earth to mislead humanity. But, he declared, that “must be rejected, because it is inconsistent with a belief in God as a God of truth.” Woodrow, “Evolution,” 354.
Jesus had laid the path to “the perfect knowledge of God.” Wilson elaborated on this point, “Christianity has liberated the world, not as a system of ethics . . . but by its revelation of the power of pure and unselfish love.”56 In other words, the Christian revelation was not a delineated list of principles, or “system of ethics,” to be learned and followed, but, rather, a particular spirit to carry and to cultivate. By acting out of “pure and unselfish love,” one served humanity and, in turn, the millennial march. Further, since the essence of Christianity lay in selfless love and not in any more elaborate, expressly Christian doctrine, Christians did not, in a sense, hold a monopoly on the Christian spirit. This is how, in Wilson’s view, Christianity had “liberated the world”; as explained earlier in the chapter, Wilson believed that Christian values spread in a non-missionary, non-dogmatic sense through the expansion throughout the world of Western-derived political and social structures.57

Wilson held that since Jesus’ revelation of the “power of pure and unselfish love” was an abstract idea, however straightforward sounding it might be, humanity was still

56 Miller, “Modern Views of the Bible and Religion,” 309; in his comments about Christianity liberating the world, Wilson also includes the phrase, “not as a system of altruism.” His thoughts seem to be unclear here, though, as altruism is oftentimes associated with acting out of “pure and unselfish love.” Perhaps Wilson associated altruism with serving others selflessly, but not necessarily out of a “pure” feeling of love. In this case, Wilson would have been laying more importance with the motivation that precedes a seemingly selfless act than with the act itself. WW, When a Man Comes to Himself, 36-37;

57 WW, baccalaureate address, June 12, 1904, PWW 15:368; though valuing other religions as revelatory to a degree, Wilson believed that Christian study in particular was preferable, as the Bible “awaken[ed] the spirit,” providing “more mental and imaginative stimulus than any other body of writings.” Statement about the Bible, printed in the Daily Princetonian, October 8, 1909, reprinted in ibid. 19:406; Arthur Link suggests that Wilson’s focus on the power of love probably grew as he cultivated a close relationship with the Rev. Azel W. Hazen in Middletown, CT, during his years teaching at Wesleyan University, 1888 to 1890. Link, ed., ibid. 6:646n; he and Hazen kept a correspondence for years after he had left Wesleyan. For an example of their esteem for each other, see Hazen to WW, Middletown, CT, March 26, 1891, ibid. 7:181 and WW to Hazen, Princeton, NJ, June 30, 1891, ibid. 7:229.
discovering and clarifying the message’s full meaning and application to life;\(^{58}\) the implication of this belief was that societies could only evolve, rather than jump, toward higher levels of living. Revelation needed to be learned and *felt*. Wilson’s father, for instance, preached that a person needed to study the Gospel continually throughout his life, no matter how old its lessons might seem, if the written words were to inspire true personal revelations. The knowledge and wisdom of the Gospel could not simply be given to the reader, but, rather, had to be attained over time. Likewise, more divine levels of human nature could only develop throughout a society through the slow evolution of habit and spirit. Wilson repeatedly condemned socialist theories, despite praising their underlying spirit, deeming impossible their implementation in reality. The problem, as he saw it, was that human nature was not yet equipped for a socialist society to operate without becoming inefficient and corrupt. It is telling, though, that he used such qualified phrases as “*present* state of human nature” and “*present* operations of human nature.” In his view of the social progressive dynamic, human nature was not fixed; it was the cultivation of people’s thoughts, habits, and spirit, after all, that made mankind more divine and brought it closer to the millennium. He felt that many people in his age were simply not “actively following” the virtues necessary for socialism—or, in his preference, Christian anarchism—despite such virtues being known. And trying to force a change of habits on such a society, Wilson reckoned, was not “spiritual,” in that instead of fostering higher motivations and ideals among the populace, people only acted through

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\(^{58}\) Consider Miller’s comments, above, about the impact of philosophical, scientific, and social changes on religion.
compulsion. The compelling power in such a scenario would never be able to erode away, because the people would not develop the elevated virtues necessary to guide their lives without its coercion.

This is not to say that Wilson saw no role to play for institutions in shaping more divine habits among individuals. After all, until human society attained the Kingdom of God, there would be a fundamental need for institutional law and obedience to it. The principle of love would eventually supersede the letter of law, and people would come to obey the right order of things essentially by instinct, but, until that day, institutional law was necessary if people were to live in true liberty. Liberty, in this sense, was having the freedom to do what was right, to live in a way that molded character. The problem with radical change was that it required a demoralizing degree of discipline if it were to be effected. And, if enforcement was lacking rather than overwhelming, the social chaos that would result would be equally ruinous for individuals’ character. As the previous chapter showed, Wilson believed in the need for “regulated liberty.” In the secular sense, as we saw, regulated liberty referred to the degree of institutional force that best fit a society’s level of social development. Likewise, theologically, it concerned the healthiest amount of freedom for a particular individual based on his or her level of spiritual development—the most efficient calibration between freedom that could lead one astray and discipline.

59 JRW, “The Gospel a Mirror,” 4-5; WW, “Political Liberty, Political Expediency, Political Morality, in a Democratic State,” a public lecture, December 19, 1894, as recapped by the Boston Herald, Dec. 20, 1894, reprinted in PWW 9:108-09; WW, “The Banker and the Nation,” address to the American Bankers’ Association, Denver, September 30, 1908, ibid. 18:426-27; WW, address on the clergyman and the state, General Theological Seminary, New York, April 6, 1910, ibid. 20:333; Lucius Hopkins Miller was again on the same wavelength as Wilson regarding socialism. It would only work, he argued, if all men were true Christians, for then socialism and individualism would be one and the same. Miller, “Modern Views of the Bible and Religion,” 317-18.
that could stifle. Law, correctly used, worked like the guiding hand of Providence: It nudged people in the right direction not by a direct push but, rather, by clearing the progressive path and obstructing deviant ones. It created an environment in which the best decisions could be made while the worst ones were less likely. It provided room in which an individual could grow. This, to Wilson, was moral freedom—the right to make a “choice of that which is good”; he contrasted this with jural freedom—the simple “right to make a choice,” be it good or bad.⁶⁰

Ultimately, social progress hinged on individual agency, even if Providence and law pointed people in the right direction by forging the best conditions for personal development. In Wilson’s conception of the social progressive dynamic, after all, individuals and institutions could only evolve in relation to one another. There was an inherent tension, then, between individualism and the institutionalism that Wilson and others, such as Lucius Hopkins Miller, identified with socialism. In “socialism,” as understood thus, social institutions were held supreme, gearing people to work toward the community’s good—to the betterment of the social organism as a whole. Individualism, in contrast, held the individual to be supreme, advocating that each person worked toward his own best interests. Wilson was adamant in his support of individualism, declaring in a 1903 speech, “the supremacy of the individual will to its surroundings is the very basis of society.” He was gravely concerned that people were coming to believe that individuals were wholly reflective of their surroundings and thus excused environmentally from their

offenses and shortcomings.” Without the individual will, he asserted, society crumbled.

“There can be no responsibility,” he continued, “without this independence of the will, no law, no coercive power.” Theologically speaking, Wilson argued as early as 1876, it was the individual who strove to approximate “the divine character”; society only created conditions. On the same wavelength in 1909, he identified the very process of progress with this individualistic striving: “Progress began when . . . men began to conceive religious obligation in terms of individual, other-worldly responsibility.” To be sure, happiness was to be found in the path of Christian progress, but it was work, as well. “Soul-progress,” as Wilson termed it, could only come through traversing a path “attended with and obstructed by many difficulties,” and a believer needed to “strain every muscle.” The overall focus of the dynamic, then, was on individual development toward the divine; social progress simply came in the aggregate of individual improvement. “The energy and salvation of the modern world,” Wilson wrote, “is the individual conscience.”

Yet, Wilson realized major shortcomings with pure, unregulated individualism, and he concluded that there needed to be a balance between “socialism” and individualism. True, “socialism,” done wrong, choked individual development and inhibited an individual’s striving for salvation by seeking to eliminate causes for

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62 Likewise, in Physics and Politics Bagehot argued against the theory that “material forces” were the “main-springs of progress,” with moral causes secondary. Rather, he said, moral causes come first, for it is the “action of the will that causes the unconscious habit.” Bagehot, Physics and Politics, 10-11.
individual struggle with moral and ethical issues. But, the selfishness of unfettered individualism worked to the detriment of the social organism, as well, which in turn ended up impairing the individual just as much. Lucius Hopkins Miller wrote that the strong individualism “of the middle ages and of early protestantism” had grown “outworn,” as there were pressing “social needs” in the modern era that “individualistic gospel” simply could not meet. Like Wilson he argued that the idea of the Kingdom of God required the “perfect balance between individualism and socialism.” If all men were true Christians, Miller claimed, “socialism and individualism would work equally well.” Wilson clarified Miller’s thought in a November 1909 address, remarking that truly “Christian Socialism” would be anarchical, not institutional, premised on motive rather than on organization. Individual agency, after all, was necessary if people’s values truly were to evolve. Wilson, in fact, declared that “individual salvation” was “national salvation.” “[R]eligion unites itself with the patriotic purpose,” he argued, “because there is no motive which elevates like the religious motive.” Yet, he also argued that an individual’s salvation—or movement toward the divine—largely depended on the “salvation of society,” as well. In the social progressive dynamic, the individual and society needed one another. As we will see in the next chapter, the solution, for Wilson, was a social regulation that did not eliminate individual agency but, rather, sought to create the right social conditions for individual progress toward the divine.

In Wilson’s thinking, then, the Kingdom of God would be achieved on earth when all people were governed by their own spirit of right action rather than by any institutional laws. As individuals and societies developed character, they would become less animal, less savage, and, in turn, grow to approximate God more closely. God had calibrated the calculus of the universe to point human development in the right direction, but only in an indirect sense. Human agents were central to mankind’s march toward the millennium. Charged with the duty of advancing mankind from the wilderness of the Fall to the radiance of the Kingdom of God, any failure to do one’s part was a serious sin, a breach of man’s covenant with God. At the same time, humans could not rush millennial progress. For one, advancement hinged on the progressive revelation of God’s plan and nature’s order. Further, the move toward the Kingdom of God involved the gradual lessening of institutional laws as people’s spirits became more divine, and human nature could only improve incrementally. Wilson recognized Jesus’ message of truly selfless love as the superior revelation—even if not yet fully grasped—and considered the cultivation of this spirit of selfless love to be the spread of godliness. Society, then, could only evolve toward the millennium through the slow interplay of revelation and developing virtue. Law, like Providence, could create conditions for individuals’ advance, if properly tuned, but the pace of progress ultimately lay with individuals improving their spirits by serving others through a spirit of selfless love.

Woodrow Wilson’s progressive social philosophy, as this chapter has made apparent, was far from being either politically agnostic or theocratic. Theological notions,
particularly from Presbyterianism, infused Wilson’s thought from an early age, though he retained a certain open-mindedness and an aversion to dogma that led him to interpret his faith as orthodox and his interpretation of religious principles as unorthodox, or non-dogmatic. Wilson conceived the world in holistic terms, considering ostensibly religious and secular processes to be, at an essential level, fundamentally the same. Ultimately, he believed that the workings of the progressive social dynamic operated upon the indirect influence of Providence, slowly cultivating the spirit of individuals. Eventually, in this view, mankind would attain a universally divine spirit, reaching the day when human society could function on the law of conscience, or pure, selfless love, rather than on the compulsion of institutional law.

Throughout the millennial progression, the conscientious effort of human agents needed to be coupled with the omnipresent influence of Providence. In Wilson’s view, though all humans could provide service to mankind, certain individuals were particularly well equipped to steer society toward the Kingdom of God based on their inspired glimpses of God’s plan and their positions of influence in society—the statesmen of the following chapter.
THREE

The Statesman in the Dynamic: Captain of Mind & Spirit

Society is an organism which does not develop by any cunning leadership of a single member, but with slow maturity and all-round adjustment, being led at last into self-consciousness and self-command by those who best divine the laws of its growth.

– Woodrow Wilson (1885)

Duties are weighed not by deeds but by ends.

- John Calvin

At the end of June 1903 Woodrow Wilson returned to Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut, where he had been the chair of History Department for two years in the late 1880s, to take part in a week of festivities honoring the bicentennial of the birth of John Wesley. An eighteenth century Anglican cleric and theologian, Wesley believed that England’s Church had come to overemphasize dogma and ritual, and so he instructed Anglican worshipers in a Gospel-based revivalism intended to cleanse and bolster their souls through the power of the Holy Spirit. Slated for Wesleyan’s commemoration were baseball games, a concert by the university’s glee club, and addresses by prominent New England educators, journalists, and religious figures. On the

2 This movement came to be known as Methodism.
night prior to Wednesday, July 1st’s commencement ceremony, Wilson spoke on “John Wesley’s Place in History,” after which attendees walked on campus to view a “fairyland” scene created by one thousand Japanese lanterns and other lights hung from trees and placed in front of halls, the presidential home, and the university chapel.³

Wilson’s comments regarding Wesley show that he not only admired the seminal Protestant thinker for his evangelical efforts but also held him as a commanding figure of his place and time, a man whose life work had served human progress immeasurably. “John Wesley’s place in history is the place of the evangelist who is also master of affairs,” Wilson asserted.

The evangelization of the world will always be the road to fame and power, but only to those who take it seeking, not these things, but the kingdom of God; and if the evangelist be what John Wesley was, a man poised in spirit, deeply conversant with the natures of his fellow-men, studious of the truth, sober to think, prompt and yet not rash to act, apt to speak without excitement and yet with a keen power of conviction, he can do for another age what John Wesley did for the eighteenth century. His age was singular in its need, as he was singular in his gifts and power. The eighteenth century cried out for deliverance and light, and God had prepared this man to show again the might and the blessing of his salvation.⁴

Wilson’s appraisal of John Wesley, as this chapter will bear out, illustrates his holistic view of the role of the statesman, or “master of affairs,” in his progressive social dynamic: Certain eras required certain instrumental figures, commanding both powerful souls and sharp minds capable of divining the “winds of change,” to lead communities

⁴ WW, John Wesley’s Place in History, address delivered at Wesleyan University, Wesley Bicentennial, (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), 47.
toward millennial progress by energizing them in moderate strokes. In Wilson’s estimation, eighteenth-century England “cried out for deliverance and light,” and Wesley, “prompt and yet not rash to act,” speaking “without excitement and yet with a keen power of conviction,” was one such man whose vision of Providence broke through the social mire to renew the human spirit, rekindling progress. This chapter, then, will first explain why Wilson believed that statesmanship was a necessary branch in the progressive social dynamic, along with institutional environments and communities of individuals. It will then elaborate on the role Wilson believed political statesmen needed to play in society, along with the limits that the dynamic placed upon them. Lastly, it will delve into Wilson’s desire to see a stronger covenantal relationship, or more efficient communion, form between statesman and community—in the political context meaning the concurrent growth in the power of both the executive and the public at the expense of other sources of state power, such as congresses and parliaments. Thus, a Machiavellianism of sorts was a part of Wilson’s philosophy of statesmanship, but one with moral hues: A statesman was to make whatever decisions were sensible and practicable in the moment, in the conviction that millennial ends would come of purely political means.

A Covenantal Role

Critiquing an American system of checks and balances that he believed had gone off-kilter and thus deadlocked, Woodrow Wilson wrote in 1879, “[W]e perceive that our institutions, when once thrown out of gear, seem to possess no power of self-adjustment.”
Institutions could come to work in ways other than designed and become inefficient and thus a detriment to society. It would take the agency of individuals, Wilson implied, to correct such problems through institutional reform. As he conceived it, human society comprised various covenantal relationships between leaders, or federal heads, and communities. While it was a community’s goal to advance toward millennial betterment as a whole, through the evolutionary aid of a suitable institutional environment, the leader’s role was to ensure that a healthy relationship continued to exist between community and its institutions. Put simply, Wilson saw the covenant between leader and community as completing the three-part social dynamic. Subsequently, he held that failure in statesmanship could result in the breakdown of the dynamic—and thus of progress.

Wilson’s conception of statesmanship drew as much from political study as from his Calvinist background; indeed, as the previous chapter illustrated, Wilson made no firm distinction between sacred and secular. As Malcolm Magee explains, “To Wilson . . . the word ‘covenant’ was the starting place for the integration of the sacred and the secular,” as it established the basis of social linkages at all levels—“the individual, church, society, government, and God.” Covenant, or federal, theology originated in Scotland, and a particularly influential strain had developed in the American South prior to Wilson’s birth. At its heart, covenant theology deals with constructing the

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social order on a series of sacred contractual relationships. The primary covenant in human society, for example, was the “covenant of works,” made in the Garden of Eden between God and the representative of mankind, Adam, which promised life in exchange for obedience to God’s will; likewise, the covenant of grace, established later, offered forgiveness of sins, and thus eternal life, for acceptance of Jesus Christ. Covenants were not strictly limited to deals made between God and men; in fact, society’s very functioning relied on covenants between men. Covenant theology was thus inherently political, making for what John Mulder terms a “theology of politics.” As Mark Benbow explains, the word “federal” derives from foedus, the Latin word for “covenant”; the very idea of a constitution, or political contract, then, was inherently sacred in Calvinist thinking. Also embedded in covenant theology, as Wilson learned it, was the Christian belief in progress. With the Fall of Man, God’s order in the world had collapsed, and structure could be brought out of the chaos only through the forging of covenantal relationships—constitutions, social contracts, etc. For Wilson and like-minded persons, Magee notes, redeeming mankind in such a fashion was in fact the “purpose that directed all of human history.” Wilson’s penchant to create constitutions, from boys’ baseball organizations in his youth, to efforts as president of Princeton and an elder in the Northern Presbyterian Church, and most dramatically at Versailles following the Great

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7 As Mark Benbow elaborates, though a covenant is similar to the idea of a compact, it is premised on an “oath before higher moral authority,” whereas a compact is solely a secular concept. For Wilson, the idea of a covenant carried with it a higher duty to God. Benbow, “Leading Them to the Promised Land,” 40-42.
War, show that he inherited this covenanter impulse and constantly applied it to his life’s work.\(^8\)

With the federal approach, then, society comprised numerous covenantal relationships, between executive and nation, for instance, or between representative and state, minister and congregation, pedagogue and pupils, patriarch and family, etc. All of these leading figures were statesmen of one form or another, responsible for keeping the institutional environment with which they were affiliated adjusted to the nature of the particular community they represented in a way that most efficiently brought progress. Wilson considered John Calvin, for example, “the great reforming Christian statesman,” and not a mere cleric, for he forged a true political-religious community, with him as its federal head; not only did he reform abstract Christian theology (addressing thought directly), but he also modified the very practice of Christianity (providing substantive

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institutional reform). Like Calvin, presidents, prime ministers, monarchs, bishops, pastors, popes, fathers, teachers, etc., were all types of statesmen, tasked, in Wilson’s thinking, with the covenantal duty to steer the progress of the particular communities they represented. Since part two of this dissertation will analyze Wilson’s political decision making, the rest of this chapter will specifically expand on his particular views regarding statesmanship of political states—i.e., national leaders.

**Navigating the Winds of Change**

Wilson conceived the statesman as wholly a part of the progressive social dynamic, meaning that he could only operate according to its logic and only act in response to—and as a part of—its workings. His millennial duty was to moderate change—in the national statesman’s case, meaning to steer political change between radicalism and inertia and economic change between selfish individualism and oligarchy, as each presented a social path away from progress because of its detrimental effects on the public mind; a statesman was, in other words, a manager, at once a conservative and a reformist. Such a person had to have a special combination of mind and spirit that allowed him to understand society, read its present condition and the currents moving it, chart the proper path ahead, and have the willingness and fortitude to make the adventure necessary in trying to bring it closer to its destination. His ultimate purpose was to stimulate the community toward millennial progress—toward, in other words, more self-discipline and habitual goodness and altruism. While a statesman could commune directly with the public through inspirational leadership and see some positive effect on
the public mind, the most effective way to ensure lasting social evolution was to spearhead the reforms necessary to bring institutions in line with the current public character. Still beholden to the other pillars of the dynamic, though, the statesman—no matter his vision of what was necessary—could only work within the flexible but very real limits imposed by the public mind and the present institutional framework. A true statesman was one who had the strength of character to balance these checks and act on his providential vision.

As David Steigerwald explains in “The Synthetic Politics of Woodrow Wilson,” the goal of Wilson’s ideal statesman was not to create new values for a populace to adopt, but, rather, to preserve ones, such as altruism, whose superiority had long been known (see previous chapters); such a statesman was to ensure the preservation and spread of time-tested principles, Wilson explained, by “translat[ing them] into the language and measures of the day.” In this sense, Wilson was neither reactionary nor radical, but always seeking the tense middle ground in between. Such centrism did not come out of apathy, indecision, or nostalgia, Wilson believed, but, rather, from the statesman’s duty to perform a political balancing act that would ensure continued progress.

Politically speaking, what this meant was that a statesman needed to steer change in a moderate course—to reform certain social structures occasionally in order to maintain and promote positive social values. Over time, Wilson recognized, social conditions change, and so aspects of society needed to be recalibrated in concord with

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such changes lest society grow out of step and become either tumultuous or deadened, either of which would, after all, threaten the principles dearest to social well-being. As he declared in a public lecture in 1894, “The law of progress is the law of modification. . . . Modification in the modern democratic state means the adjustment and accommodation of the general opinion and purpose to changing social or political conditions.” He consistently stressed the measured word “modification” and cautioned that none of the three pillars of the dynamic should control any of other two: Leery, for example, of the “tyranny of the majority” as unmediated and thus degenerate, Wilson condemned Andrew Jackson above all American presidents before him for observing the “dogma . . . that anything the people willed was right.” By setting “the people” loose and allowing their cruder side free play, Wilson held, Jackson violated his role in the covenant; not only did he fail to be a statesman to the people, but he also trampled on laws, bedrock social institutions that they were. Wilson concluded that, without two of its pillars operating properly, America’s progressive social dynamic during Jackson’s presidency stumbled and nearly collapsed. As with Jackson’s era, Wilson saw the world at the turn of the century as “full of hope and energy,” utterly brimming with countless commendable idealistic visions. But, he felt, the hope had no moderation and thus the energy was wasted; such energy could be corralled, rather than wasted, and utilized in a positive direction only through true, viable statesmanship—the kind that knew how to wield it without stifling it.10

Similarly, Wilson also came to believe that just as a statesman needed to steer the political currents between oppressive conservatism and unstable revolutionism, both of which presented evolutionary dead ends, he also needed to balance economic forces between the analogous economic dead ends that would come of either complete state socialism or unfettered individualistic competition. Pure state control of the economy, Wilson believed, would result in a stifling lack of individualism, which, in turn, would quash the character and initiative necessary for practicable millennial anarchism. At the same time, though, unbridled, unregulated capitalism, as Wilson saw it, seemed to be leading toward an oligarchic neo-feudalism that likewise would suffocate self-development of individuals as economic power came to be held by a slim minority in society, making it increasingly difficult for the millennial character to grow in individuals.\footnote{One of Wilson’s professors at Johns Hopkins, the economist Richard Ely, influenced him on this point; the 1885 “Statement of Principles of the American Economic Association,” which Ely co-authored, began by declaring “We regard the state as an agency whose positive assistance is one of the indispensable conditions of progress.” He saw over-competition bringing disastrous results and sought some degree of cooperative reform. Bragdon, \textit{Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years}, 115.} Wilson’s thinking turned Spencer’s laissez-faire argument on its head, declaring that proper regulation would, indeed, \textit{promote} competition rather than quash it.\footnote{See Herbert Spencer, \textit{The Man Versus the State} (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1884).} The relativist that he was, Wilson did not seek an unchanging, timeless principle regarding the limit to the state’s regulatory power, but he believed that in his day some degree of monopoly regulation, social legislation, and government oversight of business was necessary in order to steer American society away from a character-killing, anti-millennial neo-feudalism.\footnote{Bragdon, \textit{Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years}, 177-78; Mulder, \textit{The Years of Preparation}, 105-06.}
Not just anyone, Wilson held, was fit to balance society between economic and political extremes; rather it took somebody of a particularly strong mind and spirit to be a true statesman, someone whose strength of character commanded a force capable of counterbalancing the weight of the public as a whole, on one hand, and of social institutions on the other. Anyone in a position of leadership who lacked the necessary character traits would, like Andrew Jackson, invite the downfall of the progressive dynamic he was to represent. First and foremost, the “spirit of service” needed to guide a true statesman, Wilson declared, for it “has made every leader that this race has ever known.” By this sentiment, Wilson, in his own words, united religion with “the patriotic purpose,” for, as we saw in the previous chapter, he held that religion provides the ideals that prod forward all facets of progress. A statesman, in this instance, needed to serve selflessly and for a cause. Yet, Wilson cautioned, simple moral enthusiasm was not nearly prerequisite enough for viable statesmanship; “uninstructed and of itself,” he averred, it is most certainly not “a suitable guide to practicable and lasting reformation.” The key word here is “uninstructed”; the true progressive spirit required pure intelligence, as well, coupled with an altruistic spirit. Modern society, as Wilson saw it, was of “almost infinite complexity and unlimited scope,” and thus required “captains of the mind.” “The action of the world, if you will but watch it in the long measure,” he elaborated, “is always based on right thinking, and the thinker must always walk at the front and show the way.” With proper intelligence, a statesman would know the proper, most efficient way to focus his spirit, and would have the flexibility of mind to handle

politics pragmatically, on a moment-to-moment basis, rather than acting dogmatically, or, as he termed it, with “immutability of belief.” With a balance of commendable intellectual and moral faculties, a person possessed the animated moderation required of statesmanship.

With the holistic union of mind and spirit, or brains and soul, a leader could comprehend, or “translate,” the spirit of the age and have the power to act on that vision. Ronald J. Pestritto refers to such “translators,” in Wilson’s vision, as “world-historical individuals.” These figures, in Wilson’s analysis, lead the unfolding of history through their divining of Providence, or what Hegel termed the “world spirit.” Though, as Wilson stated in “The Modern Democratic State,” a leader does not create a community’s personality; rather, it is only through the direction of “those who best divine the laws of its growth” that a society reaches “self-consciousness and self-command.” The ability to discern the genuine movement of affairs was especially pertinent in the political arena: Whereas a minister could tend to each individual congregant’s personal progress toward salvation, Wilson maintained that national statesmen “must study mankind in the mass where men are undoubtedly different from the individual”; such statesmen, he reiterated, had to “study combinations of men.”

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the “world spirit” (or, rather, national spirit), and act on and respond to this “public mind.” Pestritto elaborates on Wilson’s point:

The implicit will of a modern society is not equivalent to majority opinion, which exists merely at a surface level and is often beset by contending passions. A true, modern democracy is governed not necessarily by popular majority but by a leadership that can best discern the implicit, historically conditioned will that lies beneath ordinary political competition. This is why . . . Wilson’s model of political leadership requires, above all, that the leader hold visionary qualities that enable him to read the historical spirit and discern what the true, objective will of the people really is.\(^{18}\)

More than being a well-intended thinker, then, Wilson’s statesman needed to have the strength of character to carry out his purpose: Compromise, Wilson believed, was a tool to be used only in moving toward fulfillment of a cause; a providential vision itself should never be abandoned. Wilson viewed John Wesley, for example, as someone who risked taking an “adventure of mind [and] conscience” at a time in England when no one else would.\(^{19}\)

An adventurer’s agency in the progressive dynamic, though, was only found within limits imposed by the logic of the social system. (See fig. 8.) For one, “administrative machinery,” or the government structure itself, was a partial check on the statesman’s powers. Likewise, the mind and “moods” of the public provided another constraint, one of deep interest to Wilson. Though a statesman was indeed to be an initiating force, and not led by public opinion (as Jackson had been) or simply “agreeable,” Wilson contemplated, he also could not “dare . . . to be so individual in


social activity as in art, e.g. dare not outrun or shock the common habit; dare not innovate.”

Dealing with the public meant taking into consideration all of the people’s complexities, including their irrationalities. In an 1889 address titled “Leaders of Men,” Wilson declared that the proper statesman reasons that, although “[o]ne and one make two . . . [i]f the people think that one and one make more than two . . . until they see otherwise we shall have to legislate on that supposition.” Rather than being a nonsensical way to lead, it was the only way to do so without quashing the dynamism of the social structure. Paraphrasing Burke, Wilson taught his politics class that politics needed to do “justice . . . not to human reason, but to human nature, of which the reason is but a part.”

To move too far ahead of the populace was to invite revolution, which in turn would be “followed by reaction.” Quite simply, a statesman in any society—even the Russian tsar—needed to be attuned to the moods, traditions, and prejudices of his citizens or subjects. A leader could never successfully act independently of the public. Only by

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20 Through this logic, Wilson initially opposed the citizens’ initiative, though he later came to believe that an educated citizenry could direct creative, and not just limiting, power into the dynamic, as long as it did not enslave the executive to the will of the majority and, in turn, cripple the progressive structure; WW, address to the Civil League of St. Louis, “Civic Problems,” March 9, 1909, PWW 19:86; news report of a WW address in Pittsfield, MA, “President Wilson Says We Can’t Tell Political Parties Apart without Looking at the Label—Candidates Reticent as to ‘Principles’,” PWW 18:443; memoranda for “The Modern Democratic State,” c. December, 1885, PWW 5:59.


22 The Russian tsar, Wilson wrote, faces “limitations of social habit, of official prejudice, of race jealousies, of religious predilections, of administrative machinery even, and the inconvenience of being himself only one man. . . . He can only do what can be done with the Russian people. He cannot change them at will.” WW, When a Man Comes to Himself, 26; in the same vein, he also posited, “The most absolute monarchs have had to learn the moods, observe the traditions, and respect the prejudices of their subjects; the most ardent reformers have had to learn that too far to outrun the more sluggish masses was to render themselves powerless.” WW, The State, 1911 ed., 555-96.
maintaining this progressive covenant between leader and led could a leader continue to push toward his fundamental goal of fostering greater self-reliance among the citizenry.\textsuperscript{23}

A statesman’s ability to effect change toward the millennial goal, then—his agency within the dynamic, in other words—was found in \textit{moderate} action upon the other two pillars of society. Most fundamentally, he could work to adjust the institutions of the community in order to maintain a healthful evolutionary environment;\textsuperscript{24} he could also try to enliven the public directly through direct communion and good example. The easier but less enduring way to affect the populace was the latter—simply speaking to them, through words and action, in an inspiring manner. As Bagehot wrote in \textit{Physics and Politics}, a national leader has an effect, mostly unconscious, on the community.\textsuperscript{25} In turn, Wilson held that good leadership—or the image thereof—would energize society. Such an effect was useful in waking the sentiments of society, perhaps in providing motivation for a short-term goal, but rarely did it have long-lasting effects in the social dynamic. The more lasting route to social progress, rather, was through modifying the evolutionary environment itself.

There was no absolute science to divining the necessary institutional adjustments in a given moment, but when a world-historical individual charted a proper path forward, his task would then become one of preparing the public for reform, steering—but not

\textsuperscript{23} Kesler notes that though Wilson and Lenin were similarly utopian in their end goals for society, Wilson did not believe that the leader \textit{could}—let alone should—innovate and force the public to follow. Kesler, “Woodrow Wilson and the Statesmanship of Progress,” 122; “Paternal morals, morals enforced by the judgment and choices of the central authority,” Wilson asserted, “do not and cannot create vital habits or methods of life unless sustained by local opinion and purpose, local prejudice and convenience . . . and only communities capable of taking care of themselves will, taken together, constitute a nation capable of vital action and control.” WW, \textit{Constitutional Government}, 195.

\textsuperscript{24} According to Wilson, “[t]he evolution of its institutions must take place by slow modification and nice all-around adjustment.” WW, “Leaders of Men,” \textit{PWW} 6:659.

\textsuperscript{25} Bagehot, \textit{Physics and Politics}, 90-93.
forcing—majority thought in the proper direction. The ground, in other words, needed to be made fallow for change. With some transformation of “common thought,” institutional reform would become practicable, and with sufficient institutional reform, “common thought,” in turn, would have room to grow even more fundamentally improved; only through such a process could law be a vehicle of progress. The more “imaginative” or “novel” the proposed social reform, the more “converting” would be necessary, meaning that the statesman would have to see the majority “calm” down and realize the advantages of reform; after all, Wilson held, though a reform initiative was a product of the statesman’s reason, practical politics dealt more with emotion. And, because political values shifted as society moved toward the millennium, rendering conservative and radical relative terms (see chapter 1), the best way to pitch reform was in conservative language. Sometimes, doing so could come across as devious. According to Richard T. Ely, one of Wilson’s graduate school professors, Wilson once described socialists as “long-haired and wild-eyed” during a debate. Ely challenged his student, saying he had never seen such a socialist. Wilson replied, “If you say such things you make people believe you are a conservative and then you can go ahead and do progressive things.” In Wilson’s view, he was not trying to trick people, but, rather, utilize discourse to deal practically with the emotional, irrational element in politics: Though the people might perceive a particular proposed action as radical and become

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26 As Kesler explains, “The distinctive character of the ‘statesmanship of progress,’ as [Wilson] called it, was the ability to see whither history is tending and to prepare the nation to move in that direction, to move with the current rather than to struggle against it or be caught in its eddies—or be dashed by it against the rocks.” This is in stark contrast to the long-standing Western paradigm of statesmanship, the “statesmanship of natural right.” Kesler, “Woodrow Wilson and the Statesmanship of Progress,” 105; WW, “Leaders of Men,” PWW 6:659.
agitated, and though that action may have previously been a radical one, it could now in a
new context be practical, necessary, and reasonable. Interestingly, Wilson wrote
somewhat testily in When a Man Comes to Himself that such nuanced interplay between
the dynamic’s pillars was the reason “why we approach the millennium so slowly,” not,
as “cynics” alleged, because leaders and legislators were “incapable of high purpose or
indifferent to the betterment of the communities which they represent.” Change was
slow, and, in the political arena, it could be a dirty affair, one in which interests chafed,
but true statesmen forged ahead, charting, as best as they could tell, an efficient, practical
way across the rugged landscape.

In neither case (direct communion with the public or institutional reform) would a
statesman’s influence be revolutionary, but yet his vigilant management was absolutely
vital. Though oftentimes a leader’s role revolved around talk, Wilson cautioned that he
could not simply utter “vague phrases.” Rather, he needed to deliver “the substance of the
law and the substance of liberty.” Wilson wielded these specific comments in support of
a revolution in Portugal that had removed King Manuel II and created a new republic.
Manuel II was, to him, an example of a leader who failed his end of Portugal’s political
covenant; though he had long promised better conditions in Portugal, those changes never
materialized and a fairly quick and peaceful insurrection had, in Wilson’s estimation,
rightfully removed him from power. Notice that Wilson did not deem this action a socially degenerating revolution since it only
targeted top-level political change in the name of moderate reform rather than deep social transformation.

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27 WW, “Nature of the State and Its Relation to Progress,” one of three lectures delivered at the
third annual session of the School of Applied Ethics, sponsored by the Ethical Culture Society. Plymouth,
MA. July 13, 16, and 17, July 2-10, 1894, PWW 8:597-601; WW, When a Man Comes to Himself, 23-25;
Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years, 110; Magee, What the World Should Be, 36.
28 Notice that Wilson did not deem this action a socially degenerating revolution since it only
targeted top-level political change in the name of moderate reform rather than deep social transformation.
statesmanship in general: A covenantal leader needed to use his gifts of mind and spirit to discern a way to keep his society calibrated toward animated moderation, rather than chaos or stagnation, and to act on that vision by using his agency within the social progressive dynamic to bring moderate yet real change. “The object of all political thought should be action,” he once wrote. “It should never counsel a timid standing still for fear of possible mistakes; it should always point out the way of progress.”

A More Efficient Communion

Wilson’s conceptualization of the progressive social dynamic, and the role of energetic, covenantal leaders within it, presented him with two seemingly paradoxical conundrums regarding statesmanship. The first was the belief that broadening of democracy and centralization of strong executive authority could go hand in hand. The second, “moral Machiavellianism,” was that a statesman could make a decision, practicable in the moment, that contradicted ethically with millennial end values—for example, using war to establish a more peaceful environment or enacting segregation in the interests of eventual assimilation. Such goals that at first blush might seem incongruous were, in fact, consistent within the framework of Wilson’s world view.

Through the internal logic of Wilson’s millennial scheme, for starters, extending public empowerment and increasing centralized power were not mutually contradictory; millennial goals could be attained more efficiently and thus more quickly and assuredly,

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29 WW, notes for “The Modern Democratic State,” Reel 487 Series 7D Folder 1, WWP Reel 487 7D, pp. 15-16.

30 Each of these examples will be addressed later in part two of the dissertation.
Wilson believed, through a smoothly functioning relationship between statesman and public. He realized that checks on executive authority were necessary when people’s altruism could not be trusted to guide them completely, but he also felt that such checks introduced friction into the dynamic, curbing the efficacy of the statesman. In the modern day, he argued in 1908’s *Constitutional Government*, cooperation among the various parts of government was “necessary, as anything else is a death sentence.” Modern government required not only strong leadership but also an “intimate, almost instinctive, coördination of the organs of life and action”—between the statesman and the nearly automatic operations of a progressive public’s habits of thought. America, in fact, could learn from the authoritarian bureaucratic methods of Germany and France, Wilson admitted, adapting them to America’s democratic society. The ideal evolutionary framework was one in which the executive was unencumbered—and could be trusted to be so—thus reconciling efficiency with liberty. In such a scenario, a truly “intimate organic connection between the Administration and the community as a whole” would be formed, and the executive would be a genuine “organ” of the public and not an “outside power.” A statesman, in fact, would come to be the very “embodiment of the national idea” for which his people collectively stood.

In other words, a key part of the evolutionary process was the gradual elimination of the “middle man” in the dynamic, along with the concurrent, gradual elimination of institutional machinery. Wilson targeted Congress, above all, as the source of America’s

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political woes, singling it out as particularly responsible for the nation’s factionalism, a heated charge from Wilson since he connected factionalism to inefficiency and inefficiency to the curbing of millennial development. His qualms with Congress dated as far back as his 1879 article “Cabinet Government in the United States” and his 1883 doctoral dissertation, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*, in which he declared that Congress as it functioned at the time was despotic, threatening the nation with genuine stagnation. One solution he suggested early on was for the United States to copy the British model of “ministerial government” in which members of the president’s cabinet would also serve in Congress, emboldening the executive branch with a bit of legislative potency. A presidential administration could then have some hope of acting on its public-given mandate, while the representative process would continue to ensure the discipline of the reform agenda. Furthermore, though he rose to political power in New Jersey with the aid of machine bosses and Democratic Party hacks, he quickly cast them off after securing the nomination for the New Jersey governor race’s in 1910. In line with his critique of Congress, he pledged in 1910 to move New Jersey past lowly, divisive, even possibly corrupt politics and work instead on measures “conceived in the large spirit” by true statesmen working to serve the people and not simply themselves and their cohorts. Bosses and most congressmen stood in the way of an efficient covenant.

Wilson’s articulation and promotion of public administration emerged as a central facet of his desire to reduce political middlemen and institutional machinery. One of the

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leading figures in the emerging field of public administration in the 1880s and 90s, Wilson wrote in *Congressional Government* (1885) and “The Study of Administration” (1887) of the moral efficiency that could be brought to governance through the professionalization and expansion of the bureaucratic corps. Such experts—and their duties—would be apolitical, an extension of the statesman. Free from the meddling of political institutions, these professionals could focus on their specific duties. In real world terms, this meant the expansion of executive power. Checks on the administrators’ power would be provided by their job descriptions and the managers above them rather than—in a direct sense—Congress or the Constitution: Ultimately, the chief executive was the president, who was himself still held accountable by the voting public and other traditional checks. Wilson’s thinking here drew primarily from European influences—particularly German and French thinkers, something he noted directly. As Pestritto explains, Historicist and Hegelian thought told Wilson that “the educated experts in the bureaucracy, insulated from the pressures of narrow self-interest, were to see more clearly than the people themselves the objective will, and were to know best the administrative means to achieve it.”34 With an empowered executive branch—driven by finely tuned bureaucratic machinations—statesmanship could be more efficient and thus, in Wilson’s envisioning, more progressive.

With the slow maturation of the public’s thoughts and habits—including those of the statesman, who was, after all, a product of the public—obstacles between an

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increasingly potent statesman and the public could be removed, which would allow the
public, in turn, to grow even more empowered; total maturity and self-rule was, after all,
the ultimate goal of the progressive social dynamic. The question became, then, how to
interpret the maturity of the people in a given era. By Wilson’s 1910 gubernatorial
campaign, he was still uncertain about direct democracy, and through his academic years
he mostly opposed ideas such as direct primaries and the referendum, arguing that the
people could not so directly initiate change in the system. Yet direct democracy was
consistent with his millennial vision and his shifting on the issue suggests that he
believed American society had, by the 1910s, grown ready for such responsibility.

In 1910, in fact, he wrote that not only was centralized organization necessary for
efficiency but also that having a “definite authority” provided “someone in particular
whom we can observe and control.” In other words, the streamlining of government
power would create a new sort of checks and balances: A more direct covenantal bond
between statesman and public—one in which there were fewer institutional obstacles and
less intersection of sources of authority—meant that those two pillars of the social
dynamic could more strongly affect one another, making society more dynamic at the
same time that power continued to be checked. Considering the size and
interconnectedness of a modern nation-state such as the United States, Wilson felt that a
return to truly localized, intimate democracy was not feasible, but an interesting solution
he advocated was to simplify the election process for the electorate in a reform known as
the short ballot. The voting process had become so large and cumbersome, he held, that

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citizens simply could not make informed assessments about most of the candidates, especially when they had other aspects of life to worry about, as well. This reality was another source of inefficiency in American society and another barrier in the covenant between government and citizenry, just as Congress could be, and was one reason Wilson was hesitant to embrace measures of direct democracy such as the referendum and recall. He felt so strongly about the need for the electorate’s burden to be lessened that he presided over the nationwide Short Ballot Organization, which demanded that only the “most important” offices should be subject to “public examination” and that there should be many elections in cities, counties, and states, filling only a handful of offices at once, rather than a few elections filling many offices. Voters, the organization insisted, were indeed intelligent and clearly not apathetic, but the system did not allow the full use of their intelligence, forcing them to “vote blindly” in many instances. In turn, governance suffered, as oftentimes pure “politicians” were elected, allowing party machines to force factional agendas. “I believe,” Wilson declared in 1909, “that the Short Ballot is the key to the whole idea of the restoration of government by the people.”

In such reform, centralized authority and public power would be concurrently strengthened, bolstering the bond of the social covenant and thus generating the stable dynamism required for millennial growth.

Just as Wilson reconciled centralization of authority and broadening of democracy in fashioning his philosophy of statesmanship, he also held that, because of the relativity

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of the progressive dynamic, a leader’s work was to be at once both “moral” and “Machiavellian”: The millennial end goal was a peaceful, united society where individuals were guided by self-control and altruism, but there were steps necessary to get to that point that would not belong in a later time: war, segregation, limits on individualism, etc. In short, a statesman was to make whatever decisions were sensible and practicable in the moment, in the conviction that millennial ends would come of purely political means—measures that regulated society between stagnation and chaos.

In contemplating the limits of state power, Wilson concluded that the political state should not intervene directly in the matter of “private morals”—of personal thought, conscience, and opinion; in other words, it should not tell people how they should think. In the “civilized” world, Wilson argued, law no longer “attempt[ed] to regulate conscience or opinion,” except when it came to “tangible acts of injury to others” and when “common action [and] uniform law [were] indispensable.” A “positive state” for Wilson, then, was not one that legislated thought and action, but rather one that forged a healthy, efficient, social dynamic, yielding a more moral society as byproduct.37

In his writings and lessons, Wilson was careful to distinguish between individual and social ethics. The former, he taught, were “based upon some absolute standard of right and wrong” and deal with man’s relationship to God. Social ethics, in contrast, were

37 WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” PWW 5:78; WW, The State, 1911 ed., 603; the idea of the “positive state” was an area of major scholarly debate during Wilson’s academic career, with figures such as Herbert Spencer arguing that one conception or another of laissez-faire, “negative” government would ensure social progress and others, such as Frederick Harrison (whose 1875 work, Order and Progress, Wilson studied), arguing that the state had the responsibility to intervene in society in order to advance its morality. Wilson, true to his centrist style, forged a political theory between the two compelling arguments; Harrison, Order and Progress: Thoughts and Government [and] Studies of Political Crises (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1875).
determined by different criteria: What was best for the community as a whole. In social
ethics, each “individual must give up some point in his own view,” Wilson argued. “In
better society, all of society, including the great majority of ignorance, must be advanced.
The *impracticable* man who will not compromise may be right according to individual
ethics, yet he is of no use whatever to society.” Crucially, he stated that individual ethics
were “not based upon expediency,” but on absolutes, whereas “[p]racticality is the law of
social amelioration.” Such talk of expediency and calculating ends to means connects
Wilson—who as we have seen was, in some areas of his belief, a social anarchist—to
Edmund Burke and Niccolò Machiavelli, two figures who, in the American political
context, have long been associated with conservatism. Wilson openly admired both
thinkers, in fact, and considered them to be among a handful of “Leaders of Political
Thought.” Though they may not have preached the individual morality necessary for an
individual’s soul, their ideas were like a preacher’s in the matter of social ethics.

Firstly, in the language of Machiavelli, Wilson considered the field of politics to
be the study of “the means to the ends of desires,” and he defended the realist thinker,
averring that he was “not so bad a man as he had been painted.” In *The Prince*, Wilson
argued, Machiavelli proposed a statecraft based on rule, or force, and not to any degree
on moral considerations, with the end in mind “an orderly state, ruled for its own good, in

39 In a thought-provoking argument, Trygve Throntveit compares Wilson’s thought to William
James’ philosophy of pragmatism and radical empiricism. Throntveit, “Common counsel’: Woodrow
40 See, for example, WW’s 1895 lecture series in Philadelphia, “Leaders of Political Thought,”
including “Machiavelli, the Politician of the Renaissance,” et al., December 5, 1895, *PWW* 5:356; the other
men Wilson included among the six were Aristotle, Montesquieu, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Walter
Bagehot; see also Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years*, 263.
which justice should be efficiently administered, in which beneficent peace should reign.” Material prosperity would come even if liberty did not. Wilson admired the philosophy as a product of its time—in line with his views that different values fit different historical eras—and held that Machiavelli’s vision was praiseworthy even if it was to his detriment that it was amoral. Machiavelli’s thinking can indeed mesh with Wilson’s progressive social dynamic, in which order precedes liberty. That Jean Calvin also argued, “Duties are weighed not by deeds but by ends,” no doubt gave Machiavellianism even more credibility to Wilson, who likely interpreted both men, of such different backgrounds, holding the same idea as a sign of it being a fundamental truth.41

Secondly, Wilson borrowed from Burke to argue that a statesman’s key guiding principle should be “expediency,” simply meaning doing “the things that are best to do under the circumstances.” Even more than Machiavellianism, then, Burke’s philosophy was the bridge between Wilson’s higher ideals and his practical political decision making. As Charles R. Kesler points out, to “many historians there is not one Woodrow Wilson but two—the conservative southern Democrat and dyed-in-the-wool Burkean and, after about 1910, the more familiar progressive reformer and idealistic moral crusader.” Some historians, he continues, explain the change by saying he “saw the light,” and others say, cynically, that “what he saw was how to get elected.” Kesler, though, rightly argues for a “fundamental continuity between the ‘two’ Wilsons.”

41 Denny, Denny Notes, “Politics,” February 27, 1900; Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years, 263; WW, lecture on Machiavelli, February 8, 1887, PWW 5:459-61; WW, “Machiavelli, the Politician of the Renaissance,” et al., December 5, 1895, PWW 5:356.
Burkeanism was inherently progressive for Wilson; it was a political philosophy premised on the idea of growth, after all—that of slow, orderly progress, which was the only kind of progress Wilson believed possible. Expedience was the way to have an interventionist, positive state that advanced morality without meddling in the realm of individual morals. As Bragdon explains, expediency “was a technique of progress, the means whereby the state adapted to social and political change. It involved due regard for accidents of time, place, and circumstance, and culture. It meant dealing with practical solutions without stubborn adherence to principle.” Wilson himself, in fact, declared, “Politics must follow the actual windings of the channel of the river: if it steers by the stars it will run aground.” For example, he praised Thomas Jefferson’s decision to purchase Louisiana from France even though the Constitution contained no provision empowering him to do so. The Constitution was just an institutional framework, not a timeless principle, and adding to America’s territory was a greater good—served a truer millennial end—than strict adherence to written law. Wilson believed that the truest statesman was one who knew what he could not do: He could not simply re-create parts of society as if he had a “clean sheet of paper to write upon,” but if he could do something to achieve a greater end, then it was expedient to do so. Despite the Constitution, Jefferson had an opportunity of circumstance to enlarge the United States, and he wisely acted upon it.42

In closing this section, it would prove interesting to comment on one more figure Wilson admired, the “Iron Chancellor” of Germany, Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898). Wilson’s regard for Bismarck has confused various scholars who have viewed Wilson as a champion of high ideals and have seen in the German Chancellor a leader who practiced Realpolitik and oftentimes quashed opposition, targeting socialists, Catholics, and others. Yet, in Bismarck Wilson saw a true statesman for the German national experiment and saw in his amoral policies the groundwork for progress—and, thus, indirectly moral ends. Wilson recognized the German leader’s moral transgressions and excused them in light of what he considered to be otherwise noble work; after all, as we saw earlier in the chapter, Wilson believed that the spirit required of a leader steering a nation’s progress was different than that of an individual seeking personal salvation. “The most despotic of governments under the control of wise statesmen,” he declared, “is preferable to the freest ruled by demagogues.” Bismarck, Wilson maintained, was a great leader because he acted strongly and swiftly on grand purposes with resolve and energy, in other words seeking a specific path to progress through expedient means. He did recognize that Bismarck’s career was open to scrutiny, commenting that the chancellor’s “occasional bad faith” included “the wilful disregard of justice and the wilful breaking of faith.” “But,” Wilson qualified,

in a man who is conscious of great powers, whose mind is teeming and overflowing with great political plans and dreaming of great national

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43 Richard W. Van Alstyne, for instance, considered this to be one of Wilson’s many inconsistencies, alongside his support of American imperialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. As this dissertation shows, though, all of these examples were strongly consistent with Wilson’s conception of the social progressive dynamic. See Van Alstyne, “Woodrow Wilson and the Idea of the Nation State,” *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944), 37, no. 3 (July 1961), 293-308.

triumphs, and who, whithal, is hampered on every side by almost every circumstance of his surroundings, we can at least understand an occasional breach of honor, and, in the presence of so many grand and peerless qualities and so many noble purposes, can perhaps forgive a want of integrity which so seldom exhibits itself. And even when uprightness is wanting in his purposes or in his choice of means, its place is filled by uncommon wisdom in action.\(^{45}\)

In contrast, Andrew Jackson ruled a relatively free political system as a demagogue, unleashing a firestorm of prejudices and emotions that served no larger purpose than satiating the majority’s immediate desires, which threatened to sap the American dynamic of its efficacy. In short, Bismarck’s statesmanship was progressive, despite its problems, whereas Jackson’s was decidedly not progressive, despite its idealistic overtones.\(^{46}\)

Rather than being inconsistent, then, in supporting men as different in character as Wesley and Bismarck, Wilson was simply following the contours and nuances of his conception of the progressive social dynamic. The need for energetic statesmanship within covenantal relationships implied, firstly, that democracy should be widened and centralized authority should be strengthened. Such statesmanship also called for “moral Machiavellianism,” an application of expediency in daily decision making that paid less mind to the social values ultimately being sought than to the practicability of measures intended to improve or maintain the community’s dynamism.

Statesmanship, then, was to Wilson a necessary pillar in the progressive social dynamic as an intervening figure was necessary to maintain efficient harmony between


\(^{46}\) WW, Division and Reunion, 102.
institutions and the public. Wilson’s ideal statesman was a figure who encompassed the holistic ideals of mind and spirit, qualities necessary to divine the winds of change and steer his community through moderate but firm action. He could be an agent of progress only within the boundaries of the dynamic itself, neither outrunning the public nor utterly abandoning law, but, rather, working to nudge both in healthier directions. Doing so was a matter of expedience rather than rigid adherence to a timeless code of values. Yet, despite the amorality of such politics, the process of empowering the public in slow, incremental steps—while keeping their passions in check—brought social maturity and the realization of millennial values.
Part One Epilogue

In 1915, President Wilson’s speech on “John Wesley’s Place in History,” described in the previous chapter’s opening, was published and sold throughout the United States. By that point, as we will see in the following section of the dissertation, Wilson had come to envision himself in the words he had spoken about Wesley twelve years earlier. His age was one of wars and revolutions and so, as with Wesley’s, was “crying out for deliverance and light”—perhaps even more so. After all, as Wilson had written at the onset of his academic career, just as organic evolution makes leaps in times of cataclysm, so, too, does social progress: Whereas the greatest minds in society oftentimes shy away from public service, seeing it as tedious and base, “many countries find their greatest statesmen in times of extraordinary crisis or rapid transition.”\(^1\) Wilson, then, would shift from academic to politician during an era he interpreted in precisely those terms, seeing not only his country, but the world as a whole, in desperate need of statesmanship.\(^2\)

As a political statesman, his long-developed world view provided the framework for his daily decision making. Enmeshed in both social theory and Presbyterianism, Wilson had, by 1910, created a uniquely synthesized understanding of social evolution that was at once both spiritual and worldly. He conceived of a three-part progressive

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\(^2\) Wilson was the 34th governor of New Jersey, serving the state from January 17, 1911 to March 1, 1913. On March 4, 1913, he became the 28th president of the United States, and he finished his second eight years later, on March 4, 1921.
social dynamic, built upon the interactive pillars of institutional environments, people’s “thoughts and habits,” and statesmanship. From social theory, especially, he came to see institutions and character evolving through the influence of one another, and he believed that progress occurred most assuredly wherever a particular society possessed the most freedom that it was fit to handle. Imbalance between the two pillars could lead to chaos or stagnation, and so it was the statesman’s duties to constantly regulate the relationship. Any society that was dynamic would see progress, relative to itself, as the process was one of maturation toward increasing self-rule. Above all, the process of social maturation, which could be articulated solely in material terms, was, to Wilson, the road to the millennium. Eventually, through the mechanisms of social evolution, the human community would attain such cultivated qualities of mind and spirit that it could function with institutional anarchy; guidance would come not from the imposition of law, but, rather, from purity of individual motive. At all steps along the way Providence and statesmen would create conditions that would nudge society, inevitably but indirectly, toward this “end of history.” Though aspects of Wilson’s world view, then, appeared to lie on an idealistic plane, his conception of the social dynamic also provided a rather grounded basis for daily decision making: Proceed with whatever steps were necessary, in the moment, to keep society regulated and managed, and leave the long-term manifestations of social dynamism to Providence and the law and order of evolution.

Crucially to the rest of the dissertation, Wilson’s progressive social-dynamic provided a prism through which he interpreted the figures, events, and developments of his age. In both individuals and societies he sought balance: Intelligence and emotion
serving one another, purposefulness without brashness, individualism without selfishness, etc. A political statesman’s duty, specifically, was to intervene whenever society went off-kilter; in such cases he was to instigate reforms that would create new social conditions, ones that would, above all, contain the threat of stagnating or regressive social disruption and also foster greater reason, altruism, and other dynamic qualities necessary for progress and the eventual attainment of the Kingdom of God.

Just as the progressive social dynamic provided Wilson an internally rational framework for regulatory statesmanship, its antinomic nature also confronted him with the substantial tensions that would mark his years as a politician and color his legacy. His world view was rife with antinomies, or couplings of ideas that he held to be true individually yet could seem logically contradictory when viewed together. Within the dynamic, such things seemed coherent, but, viewed from another perspective as Wilson translated them into policy, they could seem inconsistent, paradoxical, or even hypocritical. The notion of secular millennialism, for one, has been a longstanding source of confusion and misunderstanding. Animated moderation, relative universalism, regulated liberty, functional anarchy, unorthodox orthodoxy, the concurrent expansion of both executive and public power, moral Machiavellianism, Providence with human agency, and a laissez-faire positive state were among other important extensions of Wilson’s progressive social dynamic, ones that had tension embedded in them.
On January 17, 1911, Wilson provided his inaugural address as governor of New Jersey to the state legislature. After proposing an agenda of corporation regulation, ballot reform, and revamping the public utilities commission, he concluded by saying,

Our reward will be greater than that to be obtained in other service: the satisfaction of furthering large ends, large purposes, of being an intimate part of that slow but constant and ever hopeful force of liberty and of enlightenment that is lifting mankind from age to age. . . . It is not the foolish ardor of too sanguine or too radical reform that I urge upon you, but merely the tasks that are evident and pressing, the things we have knowledge and guidance enough to do; and to do with confidence and energy. I merely point out the present business of progressive and serviceable government, the next stage on the journey of duty. The path is as inviting as it is plain. Shall we hesitate to tread it? I look forward with genuine pleasure to the prospect of being your comrade upon it.\(^3\)

Though his ending remarks were certainly a flourish of rhetoric, over thirty years of developing thought as student, lawyer, professor, public speaker, and church figure show that he truly saw his emerging duty in such a light. A genuine analysis of the policymaking that followed this address, then, can only come after placing it in the context of his secular-millennial world view and the progressive social dynamic.

\(^3\) WW, inaugural address to the New Jersey state legislature, Trenton, NJ, January 17, 1911, *PWW* 22:353-54.
PART TWO

Channeling the World’s Energy: The Statesmanship of Progress

Introduction

_We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else._ – Woodrow Wilson addressing the U.S. Senate after returning from Versailles (July 1919)

Woodrow Wilson was a bit of a psychologist when it came to national and global politics. In fact, the field of psychology—in his lifetime a world of madness, degradation, and hysteria—once beckoned to him. In June 1884, while he was pursuing graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University, professor of psychology and pedagogics G. Stanley Hall wrote to him, asking the determined political scientist to be his assistant in his logic and psychology courses. Wilson never seriously contemplated abandoning his studies in favor of peering into the depths of the mind, but he was most certainly flattered. He admired Hall’s research and considered him a better scholar than his own professors. Surprised by the offer, Wilson at first believed that Hall wanted him to be a subject of a

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1 WW, speech to the Senate, July 10, 1919, _PWW_ 61:426-436.
psychological study. Hall, it turns out, had read the first few chapters of the fellowship applicant’s *Congressional Government* and pursued Wilson over the rest of the summer, writing that he would be “most happy [to have] the stimulus” Wilson would provide as a “co-worker.” Wilson was not swayed, but he did take the professor’s pedagogy course the following year. Wilson felt the class worth taking—even though it began at the horrifying hour of 9:00 a.m.—because Hall was “one of the most interesting and suggestive men [at] the ‘Varsity.” Remaining an admirer long after his graduate school days, he would later autograph his copy of Hall’s book, *Methods of Teaching History*; it is now held in the Wilson Library at the Library of Congress.²

Wilson, focused as heavily as he was on political evolution, had felt entirely unqualified to work in psychology and had laughed at Hall’s offer, but Hall was correct in seeing a connection between his work and Wilson’s research interests. As Gail Bederman explains in a chapter devoted to Hall in her influential book, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Hall’s primary academic questions dealt with the vitality of

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² WW to ELA, Wilmington, NC, June 3, 1884, *PWW* 3:205; ELA to WW, East Rome, GA, June 5, 1884, ibid. 207; G.S. Hall to WW, West Somerville, MA, August 29, 1884, ibid. 311; Link, ibid. 335, n1; WW to ELA, Nov. 13, 1884, Biological Room JHU, ibid. 430; Link, ibid. 313, n1.
civiliization. Fearful of an overcivilization that sapped the masculine energy of white men by making them focus too much on self-restraint, he came to champion a “savage” education for boys.\(^3\) Not a fringe psychologist by any means, Hall in many ways steered the mainstream of American psychology during the Progressive Era. In 1887, not long after his exchange with Wilson, he founded the *American Journal of Psychology*, and in 1892 he became the first president of the American Psychological Association.\(^4\) Both Hall and Wilson were driven to understand the nature and mechanisms of what they believed to be social evolution; Hall’s chosen lens just happened to be psychology while Wilson’s was political history—and they both shared an interest in education. (“I am to be a pedagogue,” Wilson wrote to the future Ellen Axson Wilson, in explaining one reason why he would be taking Hall’s pedagogy class. And he was right; he spent the majority of his career working in education.)

Hall’s world view was based on recapitulation theory, which held that the stages of individual development (such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) corresponded literally with the stages of social development. A child’s mind was a savage mind (not simply like one), and so on, through adulthood/civilization. To teach a child to act upon adult virtues of self-restraint was as futile as teaching such ideas to a savage—perhaps even degenerative in both cases. A Lamarckian sort of racism, then, buttressed Hall’s thinking: There were inferior and superior people, and only the superior ones could handle civilization—but every society (and every individual) had the ability to develop

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\(^3\) WW to ELA, June 3, 1884, ibid. 205; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 3, “‘Teaching Our Sons to Do What We Have Been Teaching the Savages to Avoid’: G. Stanley Hall, Racial Recapitulation, and the Neurasthenic Paradox,” 77-120.

\(^4\) In 1889 he also became the first president of Clark University, staying in that post until 1920.
adult maturity through a properly timed and an appropriately tailored education. Wilson’s theories of political evolution, as discussed in part one, shared this reasoning, and Hall glimpsed this in his reading of Wilson’s work.⁵

Considering the psychological nature of Wilson’s political philosophy is necessary in analyzing and contextualizing his policies as political statesman. The following set of chapters argues three connected points: one, that Wilson’s conception of the progressive social dynamic forced him to view the nation and world as communities of communities defined primarily along crisscrossing lines of race, nation, gender, and, most fundamentally, ability (or mental constitution);⁶ two, to advocate policies fitted to his perceptions of these communities, their respective levels of maturity and citizenship, and their institutional relationship to the dynamic around them; and, three, to ultimately manage, or channel, the escalating energy for change in both the United States and the world as a whole in a way that held back the potential for chaos and insanity and redirected it toward new outlets (rather than being a suffocating, reactionary strait-jacket). To Wilson, such management was progressive statecraft, with the progressive statesman’s role, as we saw in the previous chapter, akin to that of a pedagogue, priest, doctor, or—as G. Stanley Hall would stress—parent.

Part two, then, is grounded in the historiography of disability. As Catherine J. Kudlick explains, disability is a “social category on par with race, class, and gender,”

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⁵ WW to ELA, Nov. 13, 1884, PWW 3:430; Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 77-120.
⁶ Other categories that Wilson sometimes contemplated, alluded to, or hinted at include class, religion, criminality, and sexuality.
absolutely “crucial for understanding how Western cultures determine hierarchies and maintain social order as well as how they define progress.” From notions of the “monstrous” to talk of “degeneracy, defect, and decline,” it is quite possible that disability is the modern West’s ultimate Other, with it and related terms wielding immense discursive power beyond mere rhetoric. “For political and policy historians,” she continues, “disability is a significant factor in the development of the modern state, by raising questions of who deserves the government’s assistance and protection, what constitutes a capable citizen, and who merits the rights of full citizenship.” And “disability” itself continues to elude easy definition—proof of its discursive flexibility. Usefully for this study, the notion of disability is inherently subjective, a “political or moral judgment” that says less about the “disabled” person in question than about the viewer’s own assumptions and values regarding society.\(^7\)

Wilson, for his part, lived in an era of paradigm shift regarding “the disabled,” as Americans between 1890 and 1920 increasingly focused on rehabilitation instead of seclusion. The tension that emerged was between healing the troubled individual through

\(^7\) Kudlick also writes, “Not since Joan Wallach Scott heralded a new age with her ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’ have historians faced such an exciting time to rethink what we do. Over the past two decades, our cousins in anthropology and literature have produced essays and monographs dealing with disability as a historical subject. The fields that blazed the trail for studying race, gender, and sexuality while introducing postmodernism and the linguistic turn have provided valuable analytic and theoretical tools for exploring this new Other”—the disabled.”; Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability Studies; Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” The American Historical Review 108, Issue 3 (June 2003), 763-767; Brad Byrom, “A Pupil and a Patient: Hospital-Schools in Progressive America,” in The New Disability History: American Perspectives, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York UP, 2001), 133-135; the various essays in The New Disability History are all instructive, and they are all premised on the same point that Kudlick makes about the disabled being the ultimate “other” in Western society. As Longmore and Umansky note in their introductory essay, many Americans were unable to access public spaces until the enactment of the American with Disabilities Act; what existed beforehand was nothing less than a type of de facto segregation, and that the law tackled this exclusion decades after addressing civil rights suggests that disability-based othering was more deep-seated in American society than racial, gendered, and other forms of discrimination. Longmore and Umansky, introductory essay, in ibid., 1.
medical or moral intervention, on one hand, and, on the other, fixing the troubled aspects of society that corrupted the individual in the first place. Wilson’s policymaking closely echoed the contours of this tension. While he targeted specific communities nationally and internationally for particular interventions, he also endeavored to reform the national and international systems so that they would breed less chaos and promote increasing efficiency and dialogue. (In fact, as we will see, tweaking the social environment is what Wilson had in mind when he referred to making the world “safe for democracy”; it is a much subtler approach than simply exporting democracy abroad.)

The social world that surrounded Wilson in the 1910s—the decade that encompassed most of his political career—was one undergoing dramatic upheaval. Industrialization continued to force new needs and questions upon society. Within the United States, African Americans, Native Americans, women, immigrants, and others agitated for rights, while others stood firmly in opposition. Internationally, the colonial world was starting to crack, while militarism grew in fervor in some quarters of Europe and elsewhere. As the Ottoman Empire continued to draw its last, labored breaths, the Balkans erupted into warfare. An act of political terror there escalated into a worldwide war centered in Europe—the bloodiest war the world had seen at that time. Russia underwent a series of revolutions, culminating with the ascension of a socialist experiment to power, the assassination of the royal family, and five years of civil war. Massacres in British India perpetrated by British troops fomented rather than suppressed rebellion there, while similar developments played out in Egypt as well. In China, over two millennia of imperial rule ended in rebellion and the birth of a volatile republican
state. South of the American border, ten years of multifaction revolution and civil war tore through Mexico. Throughout the world, upstart empires Germany, Italy, and Japan pressed for their own “places in the sun,” and the empire where “the sun never set”—the British Empire—violently quelled revolution in its nearest and oldest overseas colony, Ireland. Upheaval touched all aspects of society: The sinking of the RMS Titanic in 1912 challenged the era’s hubris, while Albert Einstein’s theory of general relativity, published in 1915 (ten years after special relativity), brought the very shape and foundation of the universe into question. And the decade closed with the Spanish Flu, the greatest pandemic since the Black Death, claiming millions of lives throughout the world. The list could continue, but the general point would remain: The world of the 1910s was one that, for many people, bordered on insanity.

Wilson partly embraced this turmoil as he sought to contain and remold it. Many classic studies of Wilson’s diplomacy have rightfully placed his policies in this context of global tumult, including the aptly titled Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution (N. Gordon Levin, Jr.) and Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913-1921 (Arthur S. Link). The question at the core of the historiography centers on just how actively Wilson pursued an agenda versus how much he simply reacted to outside events; other studies, after all, emphasize Wilson’s “mission” and his interventionism. Reality, as is almost always the case, falls between the two extremes: Wilson, as with any other individual, was inextricably connected to the machine of human society and was both “influencer and influencee,” to varying degrees, of everything that happened in the interconnected world. His notion of the progressive
social dynamic—despite downfalls that will become apparent through the following chapters—served him well in this case, as it reinforced in his mind that no person lives in a vacuum and no action takes place in one.

What will become clear through this set of chapters is that the turbulent era presented both need and opportunity: a need for order lest society degenerate, but also a moment of opportunity—presented by the chaos itself—for society to be steered on a new, transcendent course. Energy abounded, destructive if given no shape, no direction, and no outlet, but just short of revolutionary if properly channeled. Wilson felt such energy mounting in the years leading up to the 1910s. In an 1894 speech, he defined progress in relation to civilization, which he said was composed of two elements, one material, one immaterial: The material element, he said, dealt with man’s mastery over nature, while—most crucially to our point here—the immaterial one dealt with a social and political order properly responsive to the “needs and conditions” of the time. While the industrialization that began in the Jackson era dramatically increased the “aggregate material power of the country,” he also wrote, society grew ever more complex, “fruitful of new problems of life, full of new capacities for disorder and disease.” In psychological jargon, he articulated the fear that accompanied the hope of the Progressive Era: There seemed to be two starkly contrasting possible paths for society—either utter social collapse (“disorder and disease”) or true progress toward a better world. And by the 1910s these extremes seemed even more amplified.

Wilson came to his conclusions regarding need and opportunity based on three ideas that he connected together—one, that democracy was the best known political form
for the progress of the civilized world (as we saw in part one) but that it was fragile and required a safe environment to live and proliferate; two, that the world had become interconnected in one globalized but off-kilter dynamic; and, three, that the United States had emerged onto the world scene from a particularly progressive, distinctive history at just the time that the world needed to enter a new era under a new kind of statesmanship. Because of the vulnerability of democracy and the interconnection of global society, Wilson believed that the United States would need to take on a position of leadership if it were to continue to prosper and if civilization as a whole were to continue to progress.

Democracy, though the superior known government form, required specific conditions to thrive. Wilson characterized the “democratic state” as “a moral person with a very peculiar, delicate constitution.” While democracy had indeed produced a strenuous society in most places it had developed, it was increasingly proving to be “slow, cautious, uncertain, [and] anxious,” as it moved from youth to middle age. Linking political theory to medical lingo, Wilson said that no political doctrine provides “perfect nutritiousness” and that democracy had revealed itself to be “only relatively true, and nutritious only under certain conditions and for certain persons.” The “Sovereignty of the People,” he continued, was not a “panacea, equally curative of all ills; and even when the proper conditions for its application have been supplied, it has not proved a remedy suitable to be applied without great caution.” Above all, democracy was particularly “susceptible to
sentiments.” Ultimately, there were “defects in the system” and the “proper means of eradicating them” were yet to be discovered.\(^8\)

At once both complicating and facilitating progress, further, the world was becoming truly linked globally. A true American nation was forming out of many parts, and a genuine global community was emerging out of the anarchy of the nation-state system. Domestically, North, South, and West were melting into one another, and, internationally, what happened on one side of the planet could now quickly and deeply affect the other. Wilson, as part one showed, believed that nations had once evolved individually, in relative seclusion. What was to happen now that they were becoming intensively linked? Some scholars of the era expressed fears of impending race wars, but Wilson and his mentor, Walter Bagehot, had more hope, holding that while exploding tensions were no doubt a manifesting byproduct of globalization, isolation had also bred a variety of unique ideas, morals, and experiences that could now come together, broaden the mind, and lead civilization in fruitful new directions.\(^9\) Pluralism both at home and abroad, then, created the potential for insanity or healthy diversity—for disorder or for growth.

The obvious conclusion for Wilson was that management of the crisis/opportunity was crucial, and, buying into the myth of American exceptionalism, he held that social evolution and the guiding hand of Providence had placed the United States in a special position to carry the torch of civilization. There is no clearer proof of this point than the


\(^9\) Bagehot, Physics and Politics, 40.
words Wilson uttered to the Senate in July 1919 upon returning to the United States after
the world-reshaping post-World War I negotiations in Versailles:

Our isolation was ended twenty years ago, and . . . our counsel and
association [is now] sought after and desired. There can be no question of
our ceasing to be a world power. The only question is whether we can
refuse the moral leadership that is offered us, whether we shall accept or
reject the confidence of the world. The stage is set, the destiny disclosed.
It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God
who led us into this way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward,
with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this
that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The
light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else.\footnote{WW, speech to the Senate, July 10, 1919, \textit{PWW} 61:426-436; as Malcolm Magee explains, “Providential timing” was a phrase that Wilson often invoked when referring to a measure appropriate for the time—whether or not it was radical or conservative in the past or might be in the future. Magee, \textit{What the World Should Be}, 36.}

As Walter Hixson, Anders Stephanson, Emily Rosenberg, Joan Hoff, Frank
Ninkovich, Thomas J. Knock, and others argue, the Progressive Era was a transformative
time in the evolution of the “myth of American diplomacy.” While belief in American
exceptionalism had, until that point, largely translated into policymakers wishing to
distance the United States from the corrupt, fallen, wider world, the reverse came to be
true, as “manifest destiny” came to mean “spreading the American dream” beyond
America’s shores.\footnote{See especially, Hixson, \textit{The Myth of American Diplomacy}; Stephanson, \textit{Manifest Destiny}; Rosenberg, \textit{Spreading the American Dream}; Joan Hoff, \textit{A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008); Ninkovich, \textit{The Wilsonian Century}; Knock, \textit{To End All Wars}.} For Wilson, the nation-building enterprise in the Philippines was the
pivotal cause and manifestation of this transition, as the “American frontier” expanded
beyond the Americas themselves. With the acquisition of the Philippines, Wilson
declared, “we have awakened to our real relationship to the rest of mankind.” Taking a distant colony was no doubt important for Americans, but the United States was by no means the only colony grabber in the Progressive Era. (Indeed, it was late to the game of the “new imperialism.”) Yet, Wilson felt that the United States was set to be the world leader—and not a more experienced power holder, such as Great Britain—because its democracy had evolved in a wilderness through true pioneers forging something from practically nothing, whereas Britain and other European countries still carried baggage from their heavily classist pasts. Further, the American nation’s colonial history provided the United States with a broadening experience that mother countries across the Atlantic lacked. (Australia shared the United States’ position in this regard, but it had not attained anything approaching the power of its North American counterpart.)

Despite America experiencing colonial subjugation in its history, U.S. leadership under Wilson and his example contained a markedly patriarchal and martial interventionist streak. Mark Elliot Benbow asserts that, in the light of covenant theology, to “deny the United States an active role in the world was [to Wilson] an attempt to deny God’s will.” Still, this does not, of itself, translate to military intervention. America’s influence could be one of a venerable “city upon a hill” or as a source of cultural and economic enlightenment, with businessmen, missionaries, athletes, musicians, and other non-soldiers as the nation’s agents of suasion. But, in Wilson’s world view, world action in the young twentieth century needed to be militant, considering the particularly

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12 WW, news report of an address on patriotism, Syracuse, NY, February 17, 1904, PWW 15:172.
13 WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” December 1885, ibid. 5:63, 75-76; quote from Knock, To End All Wars, 10.
tumultuous conditions that abounded.\textsuperscript{14} In a May 1911 address, Wilson averred that the Bible “does not teach any doctrine of peace so long as there is sin to be combated and overcome in one’s heart or in the great moving force of human society.” More than superfluous rhetoric, these words provide a revealing window into Wilson’s foreign policy thinking. Connecting religious thought to social theory, Wilson saw sin as the opposite of progress, with the “original sin” of Adam and Eve in the Eden myth bringing the absolute regression of the “fall of mankind.” Any movement away from original sin or primitive savagery, for the individual or for society, was millennial progress, but anything back toward it, Wilson implied in his address, required combative intervention.\textsuperscript{15} Since the 1910s, in Wilson’s estimation, provided so many openings for social degeneration, the decade’s issues required forceful management. “If I cannot retain my moral influence over a man except by occasionally knocking him down,” he remarked, as president, in 1916, “then for the sake of his soul I have got to occasionally knock him down.”\textsuperscript{16}

As the next few chapters will illustrate, as Wilson sought to craft his domestic and foreign policies, his tool of analysis was the progressive social dynamic that he had conceived over the course of his academic career. One fundamental extension of his ideology was the loose categorization of society into crisscrossing communities based on race, nation, gender, and ability/disability and the relativistic belief that environment and

\textsuperscript{15} WW, “An Address in Denver on the Bible,” May 7, 1911, \textit{PWW} 23:15.
historical experience had conditioned these communities differently: Some were more mature than others, and some had developed a special institutional relationship to wider society. In turn, notions of civilization, maturity, and citizenship were deeply connected to Wilson’s conception of progress. Another extension of the dynamic was the belief that energy for change could be either progressive or destructive depending on the efficacy of its management. From these two ideas, Wilson sought to turn the needs of the era into opportunities to take the nation and world to the next stage of millennial progress.

Psychological thinking and discourse were crucial to Wilson’s thinking at all steps, particularly in regard to disability and intervention. Ultimately, making the world “safe for democracy” meant ensuring and propagating the conditions in which old democracies could continue to live without corruption and new ones could take root—in which positive virtues and habits grew slowly through the subtle but certain shaping hand of well-balanced institutions. At the same time, it meant making the world safe from madness.

The following three chapters lay out the major contours and areas of Wilson’s policymaking in a semi-chronological, ever broadening fashion. Chapter four focuses on domestic policy as it investigates the ramifications of the idea of “community” in Wilson’s progressive social dynamic; it illustrates one of the antinomies of Wilsonian thought: The governor and president touted plural nationalism while entrenching or instituting various forms of segregation. Chapter five moves to the fuzzy area between domestic and foreign—empire—as it considers Wilson’s deliberation between direct imperialism and liberal internationalism and shows why he came to embrace the latter,
first regionally and then globally. Chapter six then delves into the implications of Wilson’s liberal internationalism as it overlapped with his perceptions of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Germany as the most influential source of madness—and threat to progress—in the world. Each chapter will relate pure thought from both Wilson’s academic and political careers to specific and representative examples of concrete policies, including (but not limited to) eugenics programs, federal segregation, continued female disenfranchisement, the adoption of Mother’s Day, immigration reform, expansion of Native American reservations, Filipino independence, Pan-Americanism, numerous Latin American interventions, war with Germany, campaigns against Bolshevik forces in Russia, the Fourteen Points, and espousal of the League of Nations.
FOUR

Communities of the American Nation-State

I wish I could say we have principles without bigotry, but I believe we are a most bigoted people. We get this from the race from which most of us are descended.

– Woodrow Wilson (1902)

When you think of it, we are engaged in the somewhat questionable practice of making all the world uniform. . . . There is an amount of aggregate vanity in the process which it is impossible to estimate. Moreover, you will notice that there are very whimsical standards in this world. We speak of some persons as being normal, and of others as being abnormal. By normal we mean like ourselves; by abnormal we mean unlike ourselves. The abnormal persons are in the minority, and therefore most of them are in the asylum. If they got to be in the majority, we would go to the asylum. . . . The only thing that saves us is that the abnormal people are not all alike. If they were, they might be shrewd enough to get the better of us, and put us where we put them.

– Woodrow Wilson (1904)¹

In the autumn of 1883, Woodrow Wilson received word from his fiancée, Ellen Louise Axson, that her father, Rev. Samuel Edward Axson, would be retiring and moving the family from East Rome, Georgia, to Savannah on account of his degrading health. Her father was restless during the day and sleepless at night, sometimes going four nights without sleep. Ellen described his insomnia as “desperate” and “mysterious”—a

condition that left him in a “sort of ‘frenzy of nervousness.’” At times he would be “absent in the body” while “present in the spirit,” and other times the condition would suddenly release him to temporary normalcy. While Wilson hoped that the “change of scene” would alleviate Rev. Axson’s “distressing disease,” by January his condition had only deteriorated, and the man once “gentle, mild and quiet in manner” had grown violent. Around January 10, he was committed to Georgia’s state mental institution, the Central State Hospital in Milledgeville. Wilson visited for most of the month. Ellen remained and grew anxious herself. She had faith that God had a reason for what her father was going through, yet she could not see any possible future for a man who, “at best, has been the inmate of an insane asylum.” Wilson held out hope for a full recovery and told Ellen that she was being too pessimistic; he had heard of people with similar conditions who had been returned to “permanent . . . usefulness.” Family and staff needed to remain vigilant in caring for the patient, Wilson asserted, and Providence would take care of the rest. Rev. Axson’s health did indeed improve at times, sometimes to the point that he was “lucid, affectionate, and almost cheerful.” Every upswing was followed by a relapse, though, and by mid-May his health had so degenerated that the doctors had given up hope of his recovery. On May 28, he died, possibly by his own hand. Wilson wrote to his grieving fiancée that he was happy that this “tragedy of insanity” was over and that Rev. Axson was now at peace and with “the Lord.”

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2 ELA to WW, East Rome, GA, October 15, November 12, November 17, and November 20, 1883, PWW 2:476-77, 525, 533; WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, November 22, 1883, ibid. 545; Link, footnote to Charles Howard Shinn to WW, January 27, 1884, ibid. 662n3; Annie Wilson Howe (WW’s sister) to WW, Columbia, January 29, 1884, ibid. 666; ELA to WW, Savannah, GA, February 4, 1884, ibid. 3:7; WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, February 10, 1884, ibid. 13-14; ELA to WW, Savannah, GA, February 18 and March 10, 1884, ibid. 30, 75; Samuel Edward Axson to ELA, Asylum near Milledgeville, March 6,
More than just an anecdote from Wilson’s life, this story reflects something of the nature of late nineteenth century American culture and hints at Wilson’s budding progressive ideology. As Michel Foucault argued in his groundbreaking *Madness and Civilization*, the “mentally disturbed” had, with the Enlightenment, become the ultimate Other in Western society, replacing the monstrous, as the mind came to be considered key to humanity’s advance. Those deemed mentally unsound were to be excluded from society, as with the lepers of earlier years, to protect wider society from their degrading presence. The “Progressive Era” added the touch of a moral and medical concern for the disturbed individual’s rehabilitation and possible assimilation back into society.³

Wary of civilization’s penchant to exhaust an individual’s mind and spirit, Wilson actively gauged his own mental health and provided personal asylum when necessary, even writing once, “I mean to keep out of the asylum.” He had recently worked himself to sickness, he told an old friend, reiterating, “Certainly I must do something to keep me out of the asylum.” Exclusion from society, from civilization, in other words, could be a tonic; a new institutional environment could bring progress, as institutions had the power to reform.⁴ In this vein, Wilson took regular vacations in Bermuda, and his explicit goal each time was to regain slipping health and sanity. “Nations and all big affairs of whatever kind seem here remote and theoretical,” he once happily reported to Mrs. Wilson. “The rest has been splendid, invaluable,” he exclaimed after returning from

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⁴ WW to John Franklin Jameson, Princeton, NJ, January 1, 1892, *PWW 7:371-72*
another trip; “it has been enough to render me normal at home once more.” As president, his trips to the island abated, but he continued to find getaways, sometimes heading out to sea for a few days to get “relief from the madness of Washington.”

Above all, as the asylum and vacation stories illustrate, Wilson considered an intimate relationship to exist between an individual and the institutions (including the community) around him, one inherently tied to progress. Just as the psychologist was to guide his patient’s growth by finding him the best environment for reform, the statesman’s task was to do the same for each community under his guidance. This chapter argues that Wilson’s estimations of communities’ mental vitality—spirit and intelligence—led him to advocate exclusionary, assimilationist, or pluralist approaches to national issues. The chapter first discusses this in a general sense before tackling specific policies regarding the communities under his watch—defined in terms of gender, race, nation, class, and mental health. Along the way, it shows that what can seem like inconsistencies on his part resolve when viewed in terms of the progressive social dynamic—though with sticky questions left unsettled that would plague his administration and its legacy.

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5 So invested was Wilson in the therapeutic benefits of a genteel land away from the corrupting influence of modern civilization that he—an early automobile enthusiast—spearheaded a petition in 1908 to keep automobiles banned from the island. Autos, he wrote, “would alter the whole character of the place. . . . [Bermuda] derives its principal charm from its utter detachment from the world of strenuous business and feverish pleasure in which most of us are obliged to spend the greater part of our time.”; WW to EAW, Bermuda, January 14, 1907, PWW17:4; WW to Oswald Garrison Villard, Bermuda, January 26, 1908, ibid. 609; WW, a petition, c. February 1, 1908, ibid. 609-11; WW to EAW, Bermuda, February 28, 1910, ibid. 20:184; WW to E. M. House, U.S.S. *Mayflower*, July 21, 1917, ibid. 43:238.
Central to Wilson’s world view—and its most troublesome extensions—was the concept of “community.” While people reached for perfection individually, an individual could not exist apart from his or her community, and the overarching spirit of the community operated as a sort of sort of social institution, on par with governmental structures, that shaped his or her development. In a way, then, communities themselves progressed, through a constant feedback loop with their members. Community is a nebulous idea and communities have ambiguous borders, culturally defined⁶ via fuzzy notions of belonging and perceptions of gender, race, nation, class, and sanity. Wilson asserted that a community was a group that had a conscious awareness of social ties, a common outlook and set of cultural practices, and a history of working as a whole upon

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group matters. By this definition, he believed that as late as the turn of the century the United States was not a true nation, but rather a “meta-community” of sorts, and perhaps the biggest questions facing the nation’s statesman dealt with how the different subnational communities were to be pieced together and how they were to interrelate. Would the institutional vehicle of shared law assimilate all citizens in a slow evolutionary process? Should some groups simply be barred from citizenship altogether, primarily for wider society’s benefit? Or, more delicately, should groups remain separate from one another, both culturally and institutionally, in order to ensure that the march of progress was not harmed through intergroup tension or the degrading influence of one group on another? After all, Wilson maintained that a person’s thoughts and habits were largely a product of the community in which he or she lived. But the statesman’s power to shape individuals was only indirect; his influence was over communities and other institutions, making it his task to manage the communities under his watch—and their interrelation—in a way that kept them all pointed toward the millennium.

As late as 1908, Wilson insisted that “the several sections of our own country are disparate and at different stages of development,” rendering the United States without a

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7 WW, *Constitutional Government*, 26; George L. Denny, *Denny Notes*, “Politics,” April 10, 1900 and Charles Besoré, “Politics” lecture notes, April 9, 1900, WWC Box 4, Folder 8, Series 1 (shortened references later to “Besoré notes”).

8 After all, Wilson maintained that a person’s thoughts were a product of his or her community. In some cases, he held, a “man may choose his thoughts by choosing his company. “In the midst of labour,” he wrote, “he may rest himself, in the midst of excitement calm himself, in the midst of sorrow soothe himself, by a change of mental scene.” A man “may cultivate high company,” he added, with books, with nature, and with other men. A younger Wilson had even wished to depart “ignorant Georgia” so that he could find somewhere that offered more “intellectual companionship” and thus greater prospects for personal and professional development. WW, Notes for a Vesper Service, September 21, 1902, *PWW* 14:133; *Daily Princetonian*, news report of a religious talk, May 5, 1905; WW to Richard Heath Dabney, Atlanta, GA, May 11, 1883, *PWW* 2:350-51; see also WW, A Welcome to the Daughters of the American Revolution, April 14, 1914, *PWW* 27:306.
“full community of feeling”; in such a scenario, the national statesman was a federal head over an at least temporarily plural nation. By the dictates of the progressive social dynamic, it would be his duty to commune with each community’s spirit while also tending to and cultivating an overarching, emerging national feeling. The key global problem of Wilson’s era, perhaps, revolved around this concept of the nation-state. Combining the idea of nation (understood as a broadly conceived cultural community) and the notion of state (defined as the network of official, primarily political and economic, institutions structuring a society), a country positioning itself as a nation-state invited grave social tension regarding matters of citizenship. For Wilson and others in the Progressive Era, concerns over society’s efficiency and development, coupled with the notion that some communities were more socially advanced than others but that all could evolve, fostered a debate over how best to handle diversity while also nurturing national cohesiveness and progress; the discussion had to do with rather more than simply liking or disliking certain groups. The logic of the philosophical predicament allowed for three general types of answers: assimilation, exclusion, or pluralism. Assimilationists felt that a single state worked for and represented a single nation, and that any cultural outliers needed to come into the mainstream before they could be full members of the state (full citizens); the process could be voluntary or coercive. Exclusionists likewise equated a single nation with a single state but held that those not belonging culturally were simply to be kept out of the state; this could mean simple denial of citizenship, physical removal,

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or outright murder. Pluralists held a looser connection between nationhood and statehood, maintaining that an overarching state could have multiple officially recognized nations that it represented; though there would be some set of overarching laws, different kinds of citizenship would also be recognized.

Wilson’s progressive social dynamic would point toward policies across the spectrum of assimilation, exclusion, and pluralism, as he dealt with matters of race, gender, class, and mental well-being. Considering Wilson’s faith in mankind’s millennial march to universally followed values, he was ultimately an assimilationist. A nation with no cultural center was no true nation, he held, and cultural anarchy was adverse to progress. And, a nation separated into subcomponents—what Wilson called a “caste nation”—was more likely than any other to stagnate. Yet Wilson was by no means a straightforward assimilationist. For one, he abhorred social “conformity,” maintaining that complete unity of thought quelled the exchange and battle of ideas, which killed progress. Conformity was a tyrant, he said at times; other times he called it a “strait-jacket.” Dissent was healthy, even patriotic, as it ensured that a nation would not stagnate. Secondly, he maintained that two communities separated by outlook, historical experience, maturity, and other social factors could not be thrust together hastily. Practically speaking, Wilson asserted, people at different levels of advance

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10 In the nearer term, he even considered a community stronger, and thus more able to progress, if it shared binding cultural characteristics such as language. “Rejecting the idea of pluralism,” Lloyd Ambrosius argues, “he emphasized instead the crucial importance of assimilation and Americanization.” Ambrosius, Wilsonian Statecraft, 10; WW, Constitutional Government, 29.

required different types of administration; premature merging would muddle the efficacy of government and hinder the progress of both groups. Culturally speaking, people once divided would likely become inflamed if suddenly placed together as social counterparts; in Progressive Era jargon, Wilson referred to this latter idea as “friction.” A segregationist sort of pluralism, in Wilson’s thinking, would be necessary at least temporarily before eventual assimilation, lest friction degenerate the vitality of both communities. In the meantime, the interplay between the varying communities could be fruitful if managed by the statesman and organized by the state structure in a positive manner. Variability could make or break a society; it was necessary for positive movement, but, if mismanaged, it could instead unleash negative energy.

A democratic nation could eventually fuse “races of diverse habits and instincts or unequal acquirement in thought and action” only once it reached “maturity,” long trained in self-government. In centuries past, races such as Norman and Saxon fused through conquest, and more recently, Austria and Hungary fused via the force and symbol of a throne. But for a true, democratic fusion the primary instrument could only be a broad, shared education, the only cure for the social madness that came from the lack of “clearly conceived standards of common thought.” The proper democratic education generated spirit as much as it imparted knowledge, and it would “steady the nerves” of a

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12 As Gary Gerstle phrases it, “Wilson developed a dynamic notion of American nationality that celebrated America both for the varieties of its peoples and for its ability to fuse the best traits of each people into one culture.” Gerstle, “Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson,” 96; WW, When a Man Comes to Himself, 26; WW, an after-dinner speech to the New England Society, New York, December 22, 1900, PWW 12:53.
“disjointed” and at times “fanatical” society. Eventually, the thoughts and habits of separated communities would grow close enough, Wilson implied, for assimilation to occur naturally.

Holding, then, that a person was at least partly the product of his or her community environment and that the United States was not fully cohesive, Wilson felt that the American nation-state’s populace was at best a plural community and at worst hardly a community at all. It would be his task, once in office as the nation-state’s statesman, to find a workable adjustment among the country’s cultural communities.

Ranking and valuing developing communities, in turn, was integral to Wilson’s conception of meta-community management. Communities, being culturally defined, have no obvious borders; rather they constantly undergo processes of uncertain redefinition as structures of culture and power are continuously renegotiated and reformulated. Wilson drew his lines in standard turn of the century fashion—by gender or familial demarcations, by race or nation, by class, and by mental fitness. And, just as the progressive social dynamic demanded that he place borders where none clearly existed, it also required that he assess the unquantifiable—the intellect and spirit of communities. Wilson believed, after all, that both individuals and communities had rights and duties attuned in relation to the intelligence, character, and energy of their greater community’s level of progress. Further, he felt that individuals and communities injected something of their mind and disposition into their greater community. Ultimately, these two

considerations informed a particularly progressive and algorithmic notion of citizenship and formed the basis of his domestic policies.

Progressive Era talk of ability and disability factored discursively into debates that touched on matters not only of mental health but also on gender, race, nation, and class—all of which overlapped with one another and ultimately informed considerations of assimilative, exclusionary, or plural citizenship. In Wilson’s thinking, the only natural component of humanity that could bring regression was heritable disability; otherwise the human community was socially perfectible.\footnote{Compare Wilson’s “soft racism,” to that of Madison Grant, on one hand, and the cultural relativism of Franz Boas, on the other. Whereas Grant asserted in 1916’s influential \textit{The Passing of the Great Race}, “There exists to-day a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics,” Boas came to proclaim, as Edward H. Beardsley notes, that “the alleged weakness of the savage mind was merely a mirage which owed its existence to anthropologists’ insistence on viewing native mores and actions from the vantage of white cultural values.” Madison Grant, \textit{The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History}, new ed., rev. and amplified, with a new preface, by Henry Fairfield Osborn (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1918, orig. 1916), 16; Edward H. Beardsley, “The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder, and the Cause of Racial Justice, 1900-1915,” in \textit{Science, Race, and Ethnicity: Readings from Isis and Osiris}, edited by John P. Jackson, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 159, originally printed in \textit{Isis}, 1973, 64 (50-66); see also Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Barbarian Virtues}, 160-64, 179-80.}

The fundamental social dichotomy, then, was, as Wilson quipped in the chapter’s epigraph, between “normal” and “defective.”\footnote{While in earlier Western thought, defectives were those who had deviated from the static nature of God’s plan, they were now those who “pulled humanity back toward its past, toward its animal origins,” as Douglas Baynton notes. “In Darwinian terms,” Elaine Showalter explains, “insanity thus represented an evolutionary reversal, a regression to a lower nature.” A Christian millennialist could see things this way, too—as a move back toward the Fall. Douglas Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” pp. 33-57, in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., \textit{The New Disability History: American Perspectives} (New York: New York UP, 2001), 35-36; Elaine Showalter, \textit{The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980} (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 106.} In a constitutional system, he maintained, citizenship required straightness of thought, strength of character, energy, drive, and the ability to improve.\footnote{WW, \textit{Constitutional Government}, 23; Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” 36-37; Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Barbarian Virtues}, 180; see also WW,} Anything less in a single
individual introduced weakness and fragility into the community and the constitutional system, endangering the march of progress. Wilson’s first concern with meta-community management, then, dealt with each group’s ability to participate in a democracy without harming wider society or itself.

More than concern over what a group could not do or withstand, though, the discourse of ability was also largely a matter of what unique energy or traits the group in question could contribute to the whole. While opponents of the “New Woman,” for example, often employed a discourse of disability to deny women suffrage (i.e., exclusion)—that women were irrational, excessively emotional, and constitutionally weak—people on all sides of the argument considered them “angels in the machinery” injecting feminine virtues into society: Though there was little question that women imparted a unique spirit to civilization, the debate centered on whether or not they should be included directly in the political process.\(^{17}\) Perhaps, some people worried, women would weaken with the new burden of political responsibility, or maybe women would stand up to their new task by adopting more masculine characteristics: Either possibility deprived society of its needed femininity, which heretofore had been guarded in and promoted through the domestic sphere.\(^{18}\) Likewise, perceptions of race\(^{19}\) and class fed

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into considerations of citizenship. If, as unadulterated Social Darwinists argued, certain groups were biologically inferior, they should be excluded from progressive society and allowed to peter away, but if social imbalance only grew out of differing social conditions, then people could simply be “rehabilitated” or “uplifted” in healthier social environments. Furthermore, a steady stream of immigrants attempting to better themselves offered society a possibility similar to that of the “angels in the machinery”—people whose rugged drive to raise themselves and melt into the bourgeois mainstream provided an otherwise “overcivilizing” nation with progressive vigor.  

As Wilson shifted from social theorist to practical politician, his world view left him with a rather nuanced, complex approach to managing subnational groups, wherein at one point or another assimilationist, exclusionary, and pluralist policies appeared to be appropriate. Believing that a statesman should not be too far removed from the populace, he tended to address those issues that were already “in the air,” and in relation to the

Malady, 3-4, 121; Gail Bederman explains gender as a “historical, ideological process [through which] individuals are positioned and position themselves as men or as women.” There is nothing intrinsic about gender, and manhood and womanhood are more than mere list of traits. Like Joan Scott, she notes that gender “is a continual, dynamic process” constructed via connections made between anatomy, identity, and authority—three things that have no intrinsic connection until linked, socially, through gender. Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 5-8; see also David D. Gilmore, Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1990).

In the words of Matthew Frye Jacobson, racism “is a theory of who is who, of who belongs and who does not, of who deserves what and who is capable of what. By looking at racial categories and their fluidity over time, we glimpse the competing theories of histories [that] inform the society and define its internal struggles.” Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 6.

structure of the American nation that meant “feeblemindedness,” racial segregation, immigration reform, class division, and woman’s suffrage. Understanding his approach to these issues requires an analysis as nuanced and complex as the thinking that went into it, lest one resort to simplistic accounts (such as “racist,” “sexist,” “hypocritical”) that fall short of satisfactory explanation. To be sure, aspects of Wilson’s policymaking may certainly appear problematic to scholars in the present. He supported eugenics measures that included sterilization of “defectives” while also championing the rights of all people around the world. He promised racial justice and condemned the Ku Klux Klan while overseeing the segregation of the federal government and sympathizing with the Jim Crow spirit and policies of the “New South.” He was leery of “foreign stock” invading American shores and yet welcomed immigrants as a source of vitally needed energy for the nation. He resisted women’s emancipation, only to become a strong advocate of woman’s suffrage. Throughout his time in office, though, his solutions to nagging social issues were by and large consistent with his social philosophy—the three-part progressive social dynamic.

Sanity & Ability

Perhaps above all, Wilson’s support for the sterilization of individuals is the most challenging part of his record to understand. A widespread sentiment in the “Progressive Era” was that society could be directed in a rational, efficient manner by those of knowledge and understanding; such effective management would point society in a positive direction. This thinking combined with the growing biological understanding of
inheritance to create eugenics. The reasoning was rather straightforward: If some traits are inferior and some are superior, and if traits pass on to future generations, then human progress can be addressed through the social management of inheritance. “Positive” eugenicists hoped to encourage breeding among the “better elements” of society (perhaps through tax breaks or anti-miscegenation laws), while “negative” eugenicists sought to eliminate “lesser” traits by removing “defectives” from the breeding population (through sterilization or even outright physical elimination).  

Fig. 11. A pedigree involving “Normal” (N) and “Feebleminded” (F) individuals. From Henry H. Goddard, The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness (New York: The Macmillan company, 1912).

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21 Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 152-63; Edwin Black, War against the Weak, 75-76, 99, and throughout; in The Man Versus the State, which Wilson read, British thinker Herbert Spencer related the study of the Jukes Family, which had become a “race” of the descendants of Margaret Jukes, a “gutter-child.” Her progeny included “great numbers of idiots, imbeciles, drunkards, lunatics, paupers, and prostitutes” and over two hundred criminals. Spencer argued that it was a great social evil, not a kindness, to allow such people to procreate—especially so prolifically. Spencer, The Man Versus the State, 110-11.
Wilson entered politics in a time when many states were considering and even passing eugenics sterilization laws that targeted habitual criminals such as “drug fiends” and “moral and sexual perverts,” “defectives” such as epileptics, and people deemed “imbeciles,” “feebleminded,” and “idiots.” In 1911, Governor Woodrow Wilson’s pen brought New Jersey into the fold. As Edwin Black explains,

Chapter 190 of [New Jersey’s] statutory code created a three-man “Board of Examiners of Feebleminded, Epileptics and Other Defectives.” The Board would systematically identify when “procreation is advisable” for prisoners and children residing in poor houses and other charitable institutions. That law included not only the “feebleminded, epileptic [and] certain criminals” but also a class ambiguously referred to as “other defectives.” New Jersey’s measure added a veneer of due process by requiring a hearing where evidence could be taken, and a formal notice served upon a so-called “patient attorney.” No provision permitted a family-hired or personally selected attorney, but only one appointed by the court. The administrative hearing was held within the institution itself, not in a courtroom under a judge’s gavel. Moreover, the court-designated counsel for the patient was given only five days before the sterilization decision was sealed. Thus the process would be swift, and certainly beyond the grasp of the confused children dwelling within state shelters.23

Black is especially critical of Wilson’s connection to eugenics, calling him a hypocrite for “[s]tressing individual freedoms” in his campaigns, helping to craft the League of Nations, and crusading “for human rights for all.”24

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22 Nevada sterilized habitual criminals. Iowa targeted “criminals, idiots, [the] feebleminded, imbeciles, drunks, drug fiends, and epileptics,” as well as “moral or sexual perverts.” Virginia House Bill 96 would have targeted “criminals, imbeciles, and idiots,” though it failed to pass. In 1912 New York established a board comprised of a neurologist, surgeon, and general physician that could rule for a vasectomy, tubal ligation, or full castration for “feebleminded, epileptics, and other defectives. Black, War against the Weak, 68-69.

23 Black, War against the Weak, 68-69; Through his sponsorship of eugenics in New Jersey, Wilson became identified as a eugenicist, and in 1914 the Second Eugenics International Congress invited Wilson, then President of the United States, to be one of their meeting’s vice presidents. The conference, originally scheduled for September 1915, was not held until 1921; Wilson did not attend; Henry Fairfield Osborn to WW, May 29, 1914, WWP, 4 – 1432 – 4 announcement R317.

24 As is the course in his book, The War against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race, Black makes valid yet tenuous links between early twentieth century American
Where Black implies hypocrisy on Wilson’s part, Wilson would have seen none. Wilson’s implied conception of citizenship was based upon a universal progressive vision of order that could not include allegedly degenerate elements. Societies have long defined certain actions as “criminal” if they undermine their society’s order—for example, theft in a culture premised on private ownership—and have instituted exclusionary and reformist policies to keep “proper” society ordered and running. Such criminals lose, at least temporarily, the rights of the full citizen; citizen becomes convict. Rather than seeing imprisonment and related measures as undemocratic, citizens of representative nations tend to see the hand of law as a protector of democracy. Likewise, in a “progressive” society as many Americans, including Wilson, understood it around 1910, each alleged degenerate threatened the fullest possible expression of civilization, particularly by sapping its energy and making it less efficient. In this case, “degenerates”

eugenics and the Holocaust, tracing some of the members of New Jersey’s board to the concentration camps of a generation later. For example, he points out that Wilson’s chief eugenicist in New Jersey was Dr. Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen, who had founded the Eugenics Research Association. Katzen-Ellenbogen, who had become an American citizen in 1907, lectured on abnormal psychology at Harvard and developed a specialization in epilepsy as it related to mental deficiency. In 1912, he was an expert witness in the trial of a murderer who claimed an epileptic attack had diminished his mental capacity; the man was electrocuted that same year. Under Wilson, Katzen-Ellenbogen became the scientific director of the State Village for Epileptics in Skillman, New Jersey. As Black notes, it “was there that he would develop his eugenics interests” as he studied the hereditary roots of epilepsy, and it was he who drafted New Jersey’s sterilization law at Wilson’s request. In 1915, he left for Europe and never returned to the United States, his psyche degrading (ironically enough) after the death of his son. The next time he appears in the historical record, he was a prison doctor at the Buchenwald concentration camp, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of French captives, particularly communists. To patients he found worthy, he was a superior and a compassionate doctor, but to those he deemed undesirable he was a cold, callous murderer. He considered the Frenchmen he killed to be mongrels, weakened by African and Mediterranean blood. Black, War against the Weak, 68-69; 320-22.

25 Speaking in Indianapolis in 1902, he remarked that men should have sentiment but not be sentimental. He provided the example of otherwise sensible people who oppose the death penalty out of an unhealthy sappiness. In the case of people subject to capital punishment, he argued, society trumps the individual: murderers injure society and so should be hanged. The parallel to his eugenics thinking is clear: In the case of “defectives,” as with “murderers,” the existence and well-being of society was at stake, negating the individual rights of the guilty. Exclusion would be the answer for “defectives” just as for criminals—the difference being permanent exclusion for “defectives” versus temporary exclusion and rehabilitation for most criminals. Wilson, a talk in Indianapolis, April 25, 1902, ibid., 12:353.
referred not only to habitual criminals in the more traditional sense but also to a loaded notion of “the weak.” Non-citizenship thus expanded to include “idiots, feebleminded, imbeciles,” and any number of others thought to have a degrading effect on progressive society’s intellectual and moral order.

Defining something as subjective as “defective” is problematical; for Wilson, it simply meant holding unfixable qualities counter to the intelligence and spirit requisite for citizenship in a discussant society. In 1891, he had noted, “The whole of law, indeed, is based upon the presupposition that the deeds of men proceed from their natures, and are connected with these natures by the law of cause and effect.” Eugenicists saw their targets as people without free will, ruled by irrational impulses to such an extent that they could not be viable citizens and in fact threatened the vitality of civilization through the menace of their heritable traits.26 Sanity was thus a matter not only of brainpower but also of spiritual fitness—broadly conceived as character and the ability to follow moral precepts. Wilson had taught that equality in suffrage only extended to the point where all are “equal in capacity to judge . . . public affairs.”27 He even rejected laughing gas as an option during painful dental work, because, he said, he would rather experience the pain

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26 Pioneering psychologist and eugenicist Henry H. Goddard, who Wilson appointed to his New Jersey eugenics team, defined a “feeble-minded” person as “one who is so mentally defective from birth of from an early age that he is unable to compete in the struggle for existence, or unable to manage his affairs with ordinary prudence,” because he “cannot regulate his conduct or control his impulses.” Henry H. Goddard, “Levels of Intelligence and the Prediction of Delinquency,” October 18, 1920, Henry H. Goddard Papers, Archives of the History of American Psychology (hereafter AHAP), Box M32, Folder MSS #1; for Goddard’s letter of appointment, signed by Wilson, see Henry Goddard Papers, AHAP, Box M33, File AA-1; WW, A Translation and Digest, with Commentary, Notes on Jurisprudence. Commentary on Adolf Merkel, “Elemente der allgemeinen Rechtslehre,” in Franz von Holtzendorff (ed.), Encyclopädie der Rechtswissenschaft (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 5-44. August 21, 1891, PWW 7:269; WW, “Democracy” (a lecture), December 5, 1891, PWW 7:347.
27 Denny, Denny Notes, “Politics,” April 3, 1900 and Besoré, Besoré Notes, “Politics,” April 3, 1900.
than “condescend” to the gas and not be “free to think.” Referring to biblical passages, he sometimes remarked that the mature man possesses a “fine balance and consistency of judgment,—an unsentimental tolerance and a capacity to feel without being unbalanced by the feeling.” Such “[s]ane and broadened judgment” prevented a man from becoming a “fanatic” or a “crank.” In short, a person on the proper path in life was more than a mere thinking machine, but also felt the world—without becoming unhinged.

Furthermore, eugenics was consistent with Wilson’s social philosophy because “defectives” did not comprise a community forged through historical experience and social ties: They were, ultimately, outside the dynamic, not subject to progress or the influence of others. As Wilson quipped, society was safe from the rebellion of the abnormal because “abnormal people are not all alike.”

Whereas social evolution

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28 WW to Mary Allen Hulbert Peck, Princeton, November 2, 1908, PWW 18:479.
29 WW, (remarks on Psalms I: 1-3) “Notes for a Talk to the Philadelphian Society, April 4, 1895” and “Prof’ Wilson’s Address,” from the Daily Princetonian, April 5, 1895, ibid. 9:243-44; WW, religious address premised on Proverbs IV: 18, ibid. 11:376; report in the Daily Princetonian, March 1, 1900, ibid., 453.
30 WW, “The Young People and the Church,” October 13, 1904, ibid., 15:510-11; Wilson joked other times about abnormality, as well. Speaking to the Commercial Club of Chicago in 1902, he commented on a businessman’s need to understand politics and society, segueing into a joke-ridden rant against sociology. Though men should understand “social conditions,” they have no need, he quipped, to understand “sociological conditions, because I don’t know what sociology is” and did not know anyone who does. Sociology seemed to be the study of whatever is queer, Wilson said, while he was content with the “normal.” He noted that there are certain sociologists who spend great lengths of time in penitentiaries, studying “the point of view of the convict.” Wilson spent one evening with one such sociologist and was “hypnotized” by the end. He joked that afterwards he felt the urge to “go out and commit a crime” himself. “I felt a hunger for irregularity, and I examined my state of mind with the curiosity of a surgeon using the scalpel.” “Now these fellows,” he laughed, “are sociologists, and I am afraid of them; they get me in an abnormal condition.” While political economists and “students of politics” study “definite” and “particular” subjects, sociologists seem to jump to whatever is “irregular.” Such research is useless in a “commercial community,” Wilson concluded. Businessmen sell to the “regular person,” not the abnormal one. While his remarks were catered to his crowd, his commentary on sociology is broadly important: In short, defectives were an afterthought to him, tangential to society, its workings, and its progress. WW, An Address to the Commercial Club of Chicago, “The Relation of University Education to Commerce,” November 29, 1902, ibid. 14:240-41.
occurred through the progress of communities, defectives were individual anomalies, and since defectives’ problems were biological in origin, they could not be improved through the social mechanisms of the dynamic. Yet, while society could not impact them, the reverse did not appear to be true to Wilson: their very existence did indeed degrade society. For Wilson, the answer, then, was biological exclusion through sterilization.

Race, Nation, and Class

While Wilson opted for outright exclusion in the case of defectives, he deemed other groups responsive to social forces and able to contribute to the public mind. This did not mean instant and full citizenship for all healthy adults, though. In the case of African Americans, Wilson accepted their presence as a practical fact of American society but felt that enslavement and Reconstruction had tarnished their community. He approached this progressive dilemma through a combination of “rehabilitation” and multigenerational, segregationist pluralism.

It is true that Wilson was a child of the South, yet simply calling Wilson “racist” or a Southerner is rather uninstructive. After all, while he was fond of telling “Darky” stories and peppering his speech with racist idioms, he counted at least one African

31 As Henry H. Goddard, who worked on Wilson’s eugenics team, explained, a person of “weak mentality” could not “appreciate his relation to the group.” Henry H. Goddard, “Levels of Intelligence and the Prediction of Delinquency,” October 18, 1920, Henry H. Goddard Papers, AHAP, Box M32, Folder MSS #1.

32 One such phrase was “nigger in every woodpile.” In one story, Wilson said that he used to have to “wind up” a “colored cook” on occasion to get her motivated to work, once prompting her to mutter “slavedriver” under her breath. While running for governor in New Jersey, he gave a speech in St. Peter’s Hall in Jersey City on September 28, 1910, in which he compared himself to a “colored man” who fell asleep on a train, his head back and tongue sticking out; a man poured quinine, Wilson narrated, “on the darky’s tongue” while he continued to sleep. Later, he closed his mouth and jumped awake, yelling to the doctor, “Is there a doctor in this train, boss? I done busted my gall.” Wilson repeated this story at least one
American among his friends and lifelong supporters\textsuperscript{33} and he regularly donated to “negro” education programs. By no means being dismissive of Wilson’s racism, these points rather provide a moment of reflection and a call for nuance. Dealing with Wilson’s seemingly convoluted racial ideology has been troublesome for historians, and interpretations have ranged from simplistic generalizations of Southern racism to relatively useless distinctions between harsh and mild racism to correctly made connections between Wilson’s historicist progressivism and his racial thinking.\textsuperscript{34} Some historians correctly point out that Wilson’s racism was much milder than that of some of his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{35} Still, knowing that Wilson had a relatively genteel approach to race

\textsuperscript{33} That would be David Bryant, an African American man who had been Rev. Wilson’s butler, general handyman, and assistant and young Tommy Wilson’s childhood pal. It seems the goodwill between the two men was sincere, though the friendship was clearly imbalanced. On Inauguration Day on March 4, 1913, Wilson invited Bryant to the White House, though he left his friend in the kitchen while entertaining white friends and family elsewhere in the house. Wilson also provided Bryant with lifelong support, sending regular installments of money (just as Rev. Wilson had done) and an occasional overcoat or suit. In both instances, Wilson’s actions were at once good-natured, on one hand, and paternalistic, demeaning, and unquestioning of racial “place” on the other. David Bryant to WW, Wilmington, NC, November 8, 1910, ibid. 21:583; White, \textit{Woodrow Wilson, the Man, His Times and His Task}, 58, 220, 277, 465-66.

\textsuperscript{34} Erez Manela, for instance, simply says, “Woodrow Wilson was a son of the American South. . . . He was raised with racial assumptions typical of that time and place” and never “seriously challenged” his racist views. Likewise, Ross Gregory casts Wilson as a creature of a Southern childhood, remarking, “Although he never acquired the sectional hatred that plagued many of his fellow southerners, he easily accepted other attitudes characteristic of the South. . . . [W]hite supremacy so pervaded the local—and national—psyche that he scarcely questioned the principle, and as president he found nothing improper in placing nonwhite people beneath the level of other Americans.” Similar descriptions often illustrate the staunch racism of Wilson’s father, Rev. Wilson, who had vocally supported slavery as consistent with Biblical history and teaching. Manela, \textit{The Wilsonian Moment}, 26; Gregory, “To Do Good in the World,” 55-56; Mulder, \textit{The Years of Preparation}, 9

\textsuperscript{35} Michael Dennis writes that in a time when crowds would gather from all around “to watch Henry Smith lynched, his feet seared with a red-hot iron, the word ‘Justice’ emblazoned on the scaffold, his grisly demise captured in souvenir photographs, whites who promoted segregation seemed comparatively mild”; Dennis rightfully worries that some people, in turn, consider Wilson’s espousal of segregation harmless or even enlightened. Michael Dennis, “Race and the Southern Imagination: Woodrow Wilson
does not fully explain the shape of his specific policies. More than a simple difference of degree, Wilson’s racism differed from that of some his peers in its motive: Wilson was a “progressive racist.” Historicism informed his racism, grounding him in the belief, as we have seen, that a government needs to match its respective community’s spirit, or maturity. Though Ronald J. Pestritto correctly makes this connection, he also claims that Wilson felt slavery to have been a healthy experience for African Americans, as it brought them into close contact with a superior race. As we will see, however, Wilson quite directly drew the conclusion from his progressive social dynamic that slavery was demoralizing. Clearly, though, his brand of racism was bound in his philosophy of nationalism, and the two cannot be disentangled.

As a historicist, Wilson rejected biological interpretations of racial disparities. Rather, he held that historical experience shaped the spirit and abilities of a community. In the case of African Americans, he believed that the experience with slavery had sapped their energy in a way that extended past emancipation and that Reconstruction corrupted them with its premature granting of political power. This historical legacy left the New South and the emerging nation with a dilemma in Wilson’s eyes. African

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36 It seems that some of the hesitation regarding adding nuance to the historical understanding of Wilson’s racism has to do with a mistaken fear that doing so requires being dismissive of Wilson’s racial ideology, or “explaining it away.” As Gary Gerstle explains, a true analysis actually confronts Wilson’s racism head-on. See Gerstle, “Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson.”

Americans were truly part of the American nation, they did indeed have the power to improve through the mechanisms of the progressive social dynamic, and national assimilation was necessary for national salvation. Yet the logic of the dynamic also said that two groups of people previously separated could not simply be thrown together since their different historical experiences and resulting levels of maturity meant that they required different styles of government and since intimate coexistence would breed corrosive friction. Wilson felt that he never quite solved this conundrum of the “melting pot,” but the general thrust of what he did followed the contours of the progressive social dynamic: one, treating African Americans as a separate community, on a separate path of progress, and working on their uplift, and, two, separating the races, for now, in the interests of national harmony, while managing a federal government that represented the entire nation in a pluralistic fashion.

Despite his flaws, Wilson certainly did not discriminate on the basis of color or continental origin, at least not in an international sense. He believed that the greatest civilizations traced back, ultimately, to Egypt, after all, concluding that natural factors within Africa could not explain any present-day backwardness throughout Africa and the African Diaspora. The cordial relations that he fostered with Abyssinia, or Ethiopia, in 1919 further illustrate this stance: While he believed that most of Africa had become horribly downtrodden through years of excessive colonial exploitation, Ethiopia had remained free and proud through battlefield success, adept international statesmanship,
and a deep Judeo-Christian tradition. Unique social evolution produced unique results. In the community of nations, in his eyes, Ethiopia rose above other African nations because of its esteemed past; within the United States, African Americans remained second class citizens because of what he deemed their degenerate past.

Especially early in his career, as a participant in the New South movement, Wilson frequently discussed the problems that the legacy of slavery and Reconstruction conferred upon the modern South. Wilson held a romanticized view of the antebellum South, to be sure, and he insisted that slavery was not a regularly cruel institution. Yet, he concluded that servitude was a social disease, incompatible with modern democracy and progress. For the South in general, it retarded the region’s industrial development, locking it into an inefficient, anachronistic, manorial mode of production. Slaves, furthermore, had adapted to potential overwork by growing lazy, “slothful and negligent.” Even more troubling, the “most demoralizing feature” of the slave system, Wilson lamented, had to do with “the marriage relation among the negroes”: Generation after generation saw families torn apart as members were sold individually. This aspect of slavery was particularly horrifying to Wilson, for, as we will see in the following section, he believed that family was at the root of society’s order and progress. The history of broken families, laziness, and negligence had, in Wilson’s thinking, become part of the

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38 Egypt comments quoted in the Diary of Mary Yates, July 31, 1908, *PWW* 18:386; WW to EAW, Grasmere, August 23, 1908, ibid. 411; for elaboration on respect for Ethiopia, see the dissertation’s conclusion.

39 “Even in the ruder communities,” Wilson wrote, “public opinion demanded that when negroes were sold, families should be kept together, particularly mothers and their children.” Slave dealers continued to split families apart, though, earning the visceral hatred of their fellows, but people tended to look the other way out of recognition of the practice’s apparent economic necessity. WW, *Division and Reunion*, 105-08, 123-28; WW, *A History of the American People*, IV:269-70; WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” 80.
African American nation. These thoughts and habits were not permanently fixed in the population, but they would be hard to overcome and the process would take time and sensitive statesmanship.\textsuperscript{40}

In regard to Reconstruction, Wilson maintained that citizenship and leadership required an education and demeanor that Southern blacks had not yet attained, that Southern blacks and their Northern allies were not in harmony with the Southern whites they were ruling over (and thus not fit statesmen), that premature access to power was corrupting for African Americans rather than uplifting, and that the experience was degrading for Southern whites as it stirred up counterproductive passions in society. Since slavery was retrogressive for African Americans, Reconstruction was, according to Wilson, akin to giving responsibility and power to juveniles.\textsuperscript{41} Slavery created a “class” (not a race) simply unready for self-rule; the peculiar institution had fostered sloth, instability, and aggressiveness rather than vigor, prudence, and leadership. Furthermore, “black rule” created a conflict of overlapping dynamics as it thrust populations with unique historical experiences (Southern Blacks and Northern whites) over a separately evolved Southern white culture. Statesmen could rarely, if ever, be “[i]nvaders” or “usurpers,” Wilson wrote in The State, as statesmanship required a historically developed connection to the people. Reconstruction, in this light, was an alliance between “ignorant” blacks and immorally opportunistic carpet-baggers, neither interested in true

\textsuperscript{40} In his essay in Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson, Gary Gerstle argues that Wilson did not care for slaves’ psychological problems or the inherent immorality of slavery and that he only opposed the institution for what it did to white southern society. I disagree. Though Wilson certainly did not rail against the wrongs of slavery, he did believe that it had negative effects upon the enslaved community. See Gerstle, Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson,” 103.

citizenship or statesmanship. In the face of such circumstances, Wilson believed that the Southern reaction, which included the Ku Klux Klan and lynching, was understandable but counterproductive. Looking back in 1923, he wrote of the Klan that “no more obnoxious or harmful organization has ever shown itself in our affairs.” And in 1916, he had said that lynching was “a serious menace to the whole structure and spirit of our civilization.” The Klan and lynching fostered disorder and a bad spirit, thus disrupting the South’s and the nation’s progress. Reconstruction, then, degraded Southern whites, too, by stirring up their passions; violence was a loss for perpetrators and victims, their respective communities, and the progress of their shared nation.

In the short term, then, Wilson advocated the Black Codes as a way to maintain order in the New South; no matter how much change the South needed, after all, progress still demanded order. In Wilson’s estimation this meant a temporary exclusion, at least to some degree, of the African American population from the political components of the social dynamic: Voting rights had to be limited until ignorance and immaturity were remedied. Southern whites opposed the “ignorant suffrage” of blacks, he insisted: “We

42 These concerns square with Wilson’s takes on other episodes in history, such as the French Revolution, which he saw as a volatile time of fanatical power transfers from which France was still recovering a century later. Responsibility required a certain constitution lest one suffer debilitating physical and mental consequences. For Wilson, it was no surprise that there was a disproportionate number of African Americans in mental institutions (and subject to eugenics); though the reason for this was because of the racism behind diagnoses, people such as Wilson found in such statistics confirmation of their racial theories. Michael Dennis, “Looking Backward: Woodrow Wilson, the New South, and the Question of Race,” American Nineteenth Century History 1, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 77, 80, 82; WW, A History of the American People, V:4-22, 300; WW, The State, 1911 ed., 598-99; Gilman, Difference and Pathology, 137; on French volatility see WW, marginal notes to J. R. Green, History of the English People, Vol. III, c. Sept. 4, 1879, PWW 1:542; WW, “Self-Government in France,” c. Sept. 4, 1879, ibid. 515-536; Atticus (WW), “Mr. Gladstone, A Character Sketch,” April 1880, pp. 624-642, printed in the Virginia University Magazine, XIX (April 1880), 401-26, ibid. 633; WW, “The Modern Democratic State,” 67.

43 WW to George McLean Harper, Princeton, January 8, 1903, ibid. 43:540; WW to Senator Morris Sheppard, Washington, March 22, 1923, ibid. 68:298; WW to Tumulty, the White House, August 11, 1916, ibid. 38:24
object to their votes because their minds are dark, . . . because they are ignorant, uneducated, and incompetent to form an enlightened opinion on any of the public questions which they may be called on to decide at the polls.” “Readjustment” of suffrage would work in part to “undo the mischief of reconstruction.” Blacks could vote when they gained literacy and education in general, and in the meantime they certainly should not hold any political authority.\textsuperscript{44} Not only were blacks as unequipped as children for full citizenship, but Southern whites were also not yet prepared for social affiliation with their former chattel. This reality meant a continuation of race-based social distinctions, but in a new, slightly progressed form, one that demanded “restraint and compulsion” of a community moving into adolescence and responsible management from those with experience.\textsuperscript{45}

Wilson was clear, though, that he saw such social separation as a temporary necessity geared toward the progress and eventual unification of both communities.


\textsuperscript{45} Comparable to parents requiring their teenage children to hold jobs, Wilson supported vagrancy laws that targeted unemployed African Americans. In this transitional social setup, Blacks needed to remember their place; Wilson once recounted, for instance, how his sister had had an “‘uppish’ negro” cook who had grown “mutinous . . . and was summarily bounced.” Dennis, “Looking Backward,” 80, 83; WW, \textit{A History of the American People} V:4-5, 58; WW, \textit{Division and Reunion}, 261; WW to ELA, Little Rock, August 17, 1886, \textit{PWW} 5:322.
Instead of there being a sharp break from subjugation to full citizenship, as Congress had attempted to force upon the South, freedom needed be a process, Wilson emphasized, earned and honed in steps. Society, in the meantime, would be composed of two racially and historically demarcated races, the “lesser” one moving from exclusion to pluralist recognition through uplift. Wilson saw no easy path for the progressive unification of the two racialized Southern classes, despite having “long devoted deep thought to the subject.” The general shape of his approach, though, was two-fold: Aiding the educational and vocational uplift of African Americans and promoting relatively separate spheres of existence for the races so that each could tend to its own progress without the friction of racial discord.

Despite his worries regarding eventual intergroup assimilation, Wilson was certain that education would be the primary pillar of uplift. Universal suffrage could only be a “safe, rather than a damming and revolutionary method of rule,” he wrote, if white Southerners “resolutely resolve[d] to raise these new men from ignorance and rescue

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46 He favored Lincoln’s original plan, which he considered a moderate path toward emancipation and national reconciliation. According to Wilson, a central component of Lincoln’s approach was for the federal government to deal with African Americans “as a laboring, landless, homeless class” for a little while under tutelage, provided only their substantial freedom should be recognized and their ultimate elevation by education provided for.” WW, *Division and Reunion*, 261.


48 By his own admission, Wilson never found any satisfactory way for the communities to merge. While convicts could be rehabilitated and reintroduced to society on an individual basis, without so much as a ripple of an effect on society, a similar process involving thousands of people would be much more disruptive. Wilson’s thinking regarding convicts is illustrative of the direction of his thinking here. In 1883 he denounced Georgia’s penitentiary policies, arguing that their practice of convict labor was degrading. “Indeed,” he proclaimed, “it is evident that the system is quite incompatible with modern ideas of the duty which society owes to the criminal classes. No effort ought to be spared to educate and elevate the inmates of our prisons. No outlay, however great, is wasted which is devoted to the training of convicts in the handicrafts or to their moral and intellectual elevation.” While work could bring self betterment, Wilson maintained, the convict labor system, like slavery, required convicts to toil solely for others, which only fed rot of spirit. WW, “Convict Labor in Georgia,” New York *Evening Post*, March 7, 1883, reprinted in *PWW* 2:310.
them from prejudice by . . . education.” Whereas Reconstruction was “mal-adjustment,” liberty was premised on “adjustment,” which education brought—education of both true “enlightenment” and vocational “training” in agricultural and industrial work. Within a few years of Reconstruction’s end, Wilson wrote, the “more energetic among the negroes” were “slowly acquiring habits of thrifty self-support.” They were “intelligent citizens” who voted independently rather than being influenced by fear or prejudice. The process was an inexorably slow one for Wilson, and “splendid,” educated negroes remained the exception. Above all, he hailed the accommodationist, Booker T. Washington, who, like Wilson, advocated black vocational uplift coupled with a grin-and-bear-it demeanor that accepted discrimination and segregation as impermanent realities.49 Fearing that government aid would turn recipients into nonprogressing wards of the state, Wilson instead encouraged individuals of means to help aid African Americans’ own “self-elevation.” With a little help, African Americans could make headway in manufacturing and trade, which would sharpen their intellects and, by implication, make them better citizens.50 Wilson took up his own call when he donated to “negro” schools. For years, he donated regularly to the Colored Orphan Industrial Home in Lexington, Kentucky, which focused on literacy and trade (and also provided a home


50 WW, notes for an address for the Hampton Institute, Philadelphia, February 26, 1909, ibid. 69; WW, “Stray Thoughts from the South,” ibid. 2:29.
for elderly women). And, in 1909 he aided to some degree in the founding of the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua for the Colored Race in Durham, North Carolina (which would later become North Carolina Central University).  

As this educational process unfolded, blacks and whites would need to maintain, in general, their historical separation in what Wilson deemed a “sound and sensible” process that began with elements of exclusion (through disenfranchisement) and pluralism (“separate but equal”) and pointed the way toward eventual assimilation by promoting education and industry. In time, such cultural and economic advance would lead to a union between intelligent whites and blacks in the South. As he came to realize, though, that electoral anger fueled by discriminatory tactics was just as disruptive an infusion of emotion into the Southern dynamic as had been electoral ignorance, his conception of the progressive social dynamic offered him little real answer to the riddle of what was best to do. But, the general shape of his approach remained: A call for paternalistic white oversight in society at large (in the statesmanship and institutional components of the dynamic) while the black community matured (in the public mind aspect of the dynamic).

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In the meantime, the communities were to remain largely separate—in schools, in business, and in marriage.\(^{52}\) This was the mentality he brought with him to the presidency.

As a presidential candidate in 1911, Wilson wrote to Bishop Alexander Walters, an influential African American within the Democratic Party, and assured him that he “wished to assist in advancing the interests of their race in the United States,” and to “see justice done them in every matter, and not mere grudging justice.” He continued, “The colored people of the United States have made extraordinary progress towards self-support and usefulness, and ought to be encouraged in every possible and proper way.” Prominent African Americans such as W. E. B. Du Bois were enthusiastic. Hope quickly turned to disillusionment, though, when Wilson oversaw the segregation of various federal departments and failed to make more than a couple of “Negro” appointments.\(^{53}\)

Accusations that Wilson was either duplicitous or constrained by the sympathies of his white Southern appointees were common then—and have been in the historiography since then—yet, political calculations alone fail to consider the fundamental aspects of federal segregation under Wilson. As Kenneth O’Reilly explains, “Wilson and his Cabinet saw segregation as a rational, scientific policy.”\(^{54}\)

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\(^{52}\) Though apparently not fearful of biological contamination, Wilson felt that mixed families would chaotically blur the lines between communities at different levels of progress. Dennis, “Looking Backward,” 77-78, 96-97; WW, *Division and Reunion*, 275; WW to William Alexandar MacCorkle, Princeton, NJ, January 31, 1901, *PWW* 16:565-66; Diary of Mary Yates, July 31, 1908, ibid., 18:386.


\(^{54}\) In commentary printed posthumously, Du Bois wrote that Wilson established a Southern regime in the District of Columbia, composed of Southern office-seeking supporters. “Far from being able to take
was responding to political considerations, he was also quite clearly acting in a way consistent with his preconceived notions of racial progress. Above all, Wilson held that as president he was statesman of the entire American nation and of the Democrats, and that as such he had to consider matters “as the leader of a great national party.”

Consistent with his New South views, then, this meant rejecting full exclusion, segregating the races (or subnations), reducing the emotion that could enter the dynamic through racial tension, and tending to the elevation of each community separately. The nation-state would be constructed pluralistically, featuring the federal government as a shared federal head, or statesman. Each community would have its own institutional-cultural dynamic to which the government would need to be attuned.

any step forward in the matter of race relations,” Du Bois wrote, “we found ourselves fighting a host of bills in Congress and in the state legislatures introduced by preconceived movement and designed to strengthen the caste restrictions on civil rights. They touched marriage between the races, housing, education, jim-crow street cars in the District of Columbia and the Federal Civil service.” Likewise, Eric Steven Yellin, in an otherwise superb explanation of federal segregation under Wilson, focuses on political machinations in explaining Wilson’s segregationist policies. Yellin correctly argues that Wilson felt that segregating the federal offices would be a pragmatic way to steer between his black and anti-racist allies on one hand and his white supremacist ones on the other. After all, Yellin notes, “Woodrow Wilson viewed the hysterical racism of white southern politicians as unseemly. While he could speak passionately about white southern heritage and loved his ‘darcy’ jokes, he did not fill his speeches with racist diatribes like many southern Democrats”; Du Bois, “My Impressions of Woodrow Wilson,” 455; Yellin, “In the Nation’s Service,” iii, 103, 121; Kenneth O’Reilly, “The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 17 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 117-118.

55 WW to Thomas Dixon, Jr., the White House, July 29, 1913, *PWW* 28:94.

56 Journalist John Palmer Gavit wrote to Wilson’s friend, ardent civil rights activist Oswald Garrison Villard, as federal segregation was unfolding in October 1913: “It is perfectly clear to me that for the first time since the Civil War, we are at the point of conflict between two utterly incompatible ideas in this matter; that the issue cannot be avoided very long; but that the forcing of the issue will be fraught with momentous consequences. These two ideas, certainly clear in your own mind, are (1) that the negro is ‘a white man with a black skin,’ entitled to be treated in every way upon his individual merits, exactly as if he were white; (2) that he is of a different and presumably inferior race, to be treated with ‘justice’ and all possible consideration, but kept apart racially, and compelled to make progress on different, even though parallel lines. I see no middle ground.” John Palmer Gavit to Oswald Garrison Villard, Washington, October 1, 1913, ibid. 348-50; Gavit would include such thoughts in “The Negro at Washington,” New York *Evening Post*, Oct. 21, 1913.
Pluralism was a headache for Wilson, one that he could avoid when president of Princeton. There, he was simply statesman of the university’s community, and Princeton did not carry the historical baggage of racial division and tension for the simple reason that it had always been whites-only. Wilson could instead follow the much less complicated process of exclusion. Within the university’s society, he had sought to break down social barriers between different classes of students by, for example, seeking to eliminate members-only eating houses and integrating the graduate and undergraduate communities. But these measures only touched those who were already university citizens. When it came to admittance, he maintained the university’s traditional racial exclusion. Wilson formulated no official policy barring African American admission to the university, but he held that “the whole temper and tradition of the place are such that no negro has ever applied for admission.” He was, above all, concerned with Princeton’s temperament. When G. McArthur Sullivan, a self-described “poor Southern colored man” wrote to him asking if he had a chance at attending the university, Wilson replied that it was “altogether unadvisable for a colored man to enter Princeton.” Rather, he should earn his degree at a “Southern institution” and then take a course at the Princeton Theological Seminary, as it was “under entirely separate control” from the university (and had had black students). Blacks could progress, Wilson was saying, but not at Princeton; the university’s official response, in fact, suggested Harvard, Dartmouth, or Brown as potential universities for Sullivan. Princeton’s history meant that black students would disrupt pockets of social sentiment, ultimately distracting it from its mission and overall progress, while also making a class of outsiders who would be uncomfortable and
thus distracted from their own mission and progress. Wilson opposed Chinese admissions for the same reasons.\footnote{A number of black students had attended Princeton’s Theological Seminary before Wilson’s tenure, but Princeton would not confer a degree upon a black undergraduate until 1948. The only place for blacks at Princeton, Wilson implied, was waiting tables; in fact, white students could not have such “menial” jobs. Bragdon, \textit{Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years}, 335; WW to John Rogers Williams, Judd Haven, Ontario, Canada, September 2, 1904, \textit{PWW} 15:462; Link’s footnote to ibid.; WW to Morgan Poitiaux Robinson, Princeton, NJ, October 30, 1903, ibid., 32; G. McArthur Sullivan to WW, Lynchburg, VA, November 20, 1909, ibid. 19:529; WW to Sullivan, draft, c. December 3, 1909, ibid. 550, Charles Williston McAlpin to Sullivan, Princeton, NJ, December 6, 1909, ibid. 557-58. WW to Andrew Clark Imbrie, Princeton, NJ, March 26, 1909, ibid. 120; see also Charles N. Grandison to WW, Atlantic City, NJ, September 26, 1910, ibid. 21:171-72. Grandison was a former college president, minister, and lecturer. Though he planned to vote for Wilson in the New Jersey elections, he was surprised to learn that Princeton would not accept African American students while Wilson was president of the institution, and that Wilson, “being a Southern man, was in sympathy with the policy of excluding Negroes.” “I can not,” Grandison wrote, “bring myself to believe that a man of your breadth of vision and of your high moral ideas would be willing to close the door of opportunity in the face of any aspiring human being, whatever his race or nationality.” He sought a clear statement from Wilson on his racial views.}

Wilson broke barriers when he found it possible to do so, though. For one, he helped make originally Presbyterian Princeton officially non-sectarian, bringing a Jewish man and a Roman Catholic man to the faculty and attempting to hire Frederick Jackson Turner, a Unitarian. And more to our point here, he accepted Japanese and Korean graduate students, including Syngman Rhee, who in 1948 became Korea’s first president. Japan had proven itself the most “Western” of the non-white nations, after all, and had established itself on the world stage (and Japanese universities had even translated some of Wilson’s writings). Korea was firmly in Japan’s sphere, becoming a protectorate in 1905 and an official colony in 1910. Whereas Southern Blacks, in Wilson’s thinking, needed to mature further before assimilating with Southern whites, Japan \textit{had} elevated itself and its citizens could not only survive at Princeton but also contribute to the
university’s graduate community—in line with his view that assimilation between communities occurred first between the intellectual elites of each.\textsuperscript{58}

As national statesman and “leader of a great national party” upon taking the presidency, though, Wilson’s options were limited. Quite simply, his conception of the progressive social dynamic did not allow any socially connected part of the whole to be excluded. Blacks were part of the American nation and the Democratic Party, as was the history of slavery, Reconstruction, and racial tension; Wilson’s political philosophy forced him to try to be attuned to these realities.\textsuperscript{59} His political philosophy told him that government cannot force any social change that is out of step with the public mind and that social friction should be avoided lest progress get derailed by emotional flare-ups.\textsuperscript{60}

His approach was to recognize African American improvement, on one hand, and to create spheres of African American federal employment, on the other. By doing so, he believed that he could foster the slow elevation of the African American community, focus on national progress, allow different races an opportunity to take part in their shared nation-state’s business, and keep racial tensions to a minimum.

While Wilson did not support direct governmental assistance to African Americans, as we have seen, he did believe that government could acknowledge and showcase African American progress, as doing so cultivated no risk of stagnating dependence and could, in fact, create and perpetuate energy for growth. This was the

\textsuperscript{58} Mulder, \textit{Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation}, 177; Syngman Rhee to WW, Princeton, NJ, 1910, \textit{PWW} 20:556; see also Link’s footnotes to ibid.; Motokichi Takahashi, Rock Springs, WY, January 10, 1907 to WW, ibid., 16:557-58

\textsuperscript{59} To be sure, race was never a priority for Wilson—to the point where he seemed to want to ignore the nation’s racial problems. Conversation with John Milton Cooper, Jr., ca. June 2009.

\textsuperscript{60} And, in 1913, the Democrats were poised to make sweeping reforms, including trust regulation and the creation of the Federal Reserve.
logic behind the National Negro Exposition, held July 5 to 25, 1915, in Richmond, Virginia, which Congress helped to fund.\footnote{Congress provided $55,000, and Virginia contributed, as well. The Negro Historical and Industrial Association hosted the event. WW, National Negro Exposition Proclamation, \textit{New York Times}, July 3, 1915, printed in \textit{PWW} 33:464.} According to the Library of Virginia, “The exposition was held at the Virginia State Fairgrounds, and featured works from African American schools, clubs, and organizations from more than twelve states. The exhibits included artwork, needlework, furniture, machines, and other products of African American craftsmanship. In addition to the exhibition halls, a midway was open with a variety of vaudeville acts, sideshows, and daily horse races.”\footnote{Library of Virginia, \textit{Virginia Memory}, “This Day in History: July 01, 1915,” http://www.virginiamemory.com/reading_room/this_day_in_virginia_history/july/01, accessed November 23, 2010.} In announcing the event, Wilson wrote that it would “encourage the negro in his efforts to solve his industrial problem,” “demonstrate his progress in the last fifty years,” and “emphasize his opportunities.”\footnote{Wilson did not attend, writing in a private letter that he was too busy to speak or make any sort of formal appearance at the event; he felt that simply being present would be a slight to the organizers of “so interesting an occasion and all that it signifies.” Wilson’s “statesmanship” here well illustrates his desire both to see black uplift and to ignore race as much as possible; WW, National Negro Exposition Proclamation, \textit{New York Times}, July 3, 1915, printed in \textit{PWW} 33:464; WW to Giles D. Jackson, the White House, July 23, 1915, ibid., 34:16.}

The most incendiary race-related issues for Wilson’s administration, though, dealt with federal appointments and the segregation of federal departments, and Wilson’s handling of these matters clearly illustrated both his political philosophy in action and the political constraints upon his leadership. The Democrats actively courted the African American vote during the 1912 elections, with some success, leaving the winning party with a predicament: Both anti-accommodationist blacks such as W. E. B. Du Bois and virulent white supremacists such as Thomas A. Dixon, Jr., author of \textit{The Clansman}...
(which was the inspiration for *The Birth of a Nation*), found hope for their respective causes in Wilson’s victory. Federal segregation and “negro appointments,” in turn, quickly became an intertwined issue and headache for Wilson as he adjusted to his new job. First, in April or May 1913 two of Wilson’s Southern Cabinet members—Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels and Postmaster General Albert Burleson—began, with Wilson’s blessing, the segregation of their workforces in the name of reducing racial friction. Second, a few months later, Wilson made a move that invited great friction from all corners, as he nominated Adam E. Patterson, an African American, to be Register of the Treasury; Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo, another Southerner, had recommended him to Wilson upon the urging of numerous prominent Democrats. The way Wilson handled both cases set the racial tone for the remainder of his time in office.

Above all, the “race question” stoked the very sorts of conflicting emotions that Wilson feared would distract society and kill progress. Oswald Garrison Villard—a Democrat, friend, and civil rights crusader—wrote letter after letter on behalf of the NAACP, informing the president that black Democrats were forming protests and considering political defections in response to their leper-like treatment in segregated departments. Thomas Dixon, Jr.—a Democrat, friend, and KKK-sympathizer—wrote, meanwhile, that the South could never forgive Wilson if he allowed a “negro” (Patterson) to boss “white girls.” In the interests of the “spirit of [rational] harmony and goodwill,”

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64 Daniels was a North Carolina newspaperman who regretted his earlier support for white supremacy. Burleson was a Texan and son of a Confederate officer. Both men held their positions for the entirety of Wilson’s presidency, from 1913 to 1921. See the diary of Josephus Daniels, April 11, 1913, *ibid.*, 27:290-93; William Gibbs McAdoo to WW, July 18, 1913, *ibid.*, 28:40-41.
Patterson withdrew his nomination, but the heat continued through the year. Villard wrote in September saying that people were calling for the names of the black men Wilson claimed supported segregation. Meanwhile, Senator James K. Vardaman, a Democrat from Mississippi, gave a number of inflammatory white supremacist speeches in the nation’s capital. In November 1913 Wilson met with William Monroe Trotter and other representatives of the National Equal Rights League, a group that refused to close ranks with what they considered an overly accommodationist NAACP. In a meeting in which Trotter railed against federal segregation, Wilson grew angry and both parties left simmering, with Wilson reiterating his support of the policy on the grounds that it

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65 Villard wrote that segregation policies made African Americans feel like “there is something degrading and demoralizing in associating with these American citizens, as if they were lepers to be set apart.” Villard to WW, New York, July 21, 1913, ibid., 60-61; Dixon, Jr., to WW, New York, July 27, 1913, ibid., 88-89; Villard to WW, with enclosure [Booker T. Washington to Villard, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, August 10, 1913], New York, August 18, 1913, ibid., 185-88; Villard to WW, New York, August 27, 1913, ibid., 239-40; Howard Allen Bridgman to WW, Boston, September 4, 1913, ibid. 256; Bridgman to WW, Boston, September 16, 1913, ibid., 277-78; Bridgman, “Turning the Negro Back,” The Congregationalist and Christian World, XCVIII (September 18, 1913), 357-59

66 Moorfield Storey, president of the NAACP, wrote a widely published letter to Wilson that was firm but polite, and subtly scathing, remarking: “Never before has the Federal Government discriminated against its civilian employees on the ground of color. Every such act heretofore has been that of an individual State. The very presence of the Capitol and of the Federal flag has drawn colored people to the District of Columbia in the belief that living there under the shadow of the National Government itself they were safe from the persecution and discrimination which follow them elsewhere because of their dark skins. Today they learn that, though their ancestors have fought in every war in behalf of the United States, in the fiftieth year after Gettysburg and Emancipation, this Government, founded on the theory of completely equality and freedom of all citizens, has established two classes among its civilian employees. It has set the colored people apart as if mere contact with them were contamination. . . . To them is held out only the prospect of mere subordinate routine service without the stimulus of advancement to high office by merit, a right deemed inviolable for all white natives as for children of the foreign born, of Italians, French and Russians, Jews and Christians who are now entering the Government service. . . . For the lowly of all classes you have lifted up your voice and not in vain. Shall ten millions of our citizens say that their civil liberties and rights are not safe in your hands? To ask the question is to answer it. They desire a ‘New Freedom,’ too, Mr. President, yet they include in that term nothing else than the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution under which they believe they should be protected from persecution based upon a physical quality with which Divine Providence has endowed them. Moorfield Storey to WW, New York, August 15, 1913, ibid., 163-65.
prevented friction—apparently missing entirely the irony of what he said.\textsuperscript{67} In this and other situations, Wilson’s response to enraged parties was to declare that they needed to understand the volatile situation “from the ground” and to appreciate the “delicacy and difficulty” of the race question. He lectured to Trotter, “Things do not happen rapidly in the world, and prejudices are slow to be uprooted. We have to accept them as facts, no matter how much we may deplore them in the moral and social consequences.” He urged Villard to help keep the African American community in a “just and cool equipoise” until he could find a sane path forward.\textsuperscript{68}

Wishing to quell racially charged emotions while still being a statesman of a truly national party, Wilson worked out a plan consistent with his views on federal headship


\textsuperscript{68} To Thomas Dixon, Jr., Wilson said, “I do not think you know what is going on down here,” and reassured him that he had not forgotten Southern sympathies. To Howard Allen Bridgman, editor-in-chief of \textit{The Congregationalist and Christian World}, he cautioned that one must try to see the situation “from the ground.” To Villard, he wrote, “It would be hard to make any one understand the delicacy and difficulty of the situation,” particularly in dealing with an ornery Senate whose support he could not risk losing; “I want to handle the matter with the greatest possible patience and tact,” he added.” Wilson even rejected Villard’s idea of having a commission investigate race conditions in the federal government “because the situation is extremely delicate and because I know the feeling of irritation that comes with every effort at systematic inquiry into conditions. . . . I never realized before the complexity and difficulty of this matter in respect of every step taken here. I not only hope but I pray that a better aspect may come upon it before many months.”\textsuperscript{68} Later, he wrote again to Villard, “I hope that you will try to see the real situation down here with regard to the treatment of the colored people. What I would do if I could act alone you already know, but what I am trying to do must be done, if done at all, through the cooperation of those with whom I am associated here in the Government. I hope and, I may say, I believe that by the slow pressure of argument and persuasion the situation may be changed and a great many things done eventually which now seem impossible. But they can not be done, either now or any future time, if a bitter agitation is inaugurated and carried to its natural ends. I appeal to you most earnestly to aid in holding things at a just and cool equipoise until I can discover whether it is possible to work out anything or not.” O’Reilly, “The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson,” 118; WW to Villard, The White House, July 23, 1913, \textit{PWW} 28:65; WW to Thomas Dixon, Jr., The White House, July 29, 1913, ibid., 94; WW to Bridgman, The White House, September 8, 1913, ibid., 265-266; WW to Villard, The White House, August 21, 1913, ibid., 202; Wilson’s Reply [to William Monroe Trotter, in person] and a Dialogue, November 6, 1913, ibid., 496; WW to Villard, The White House, August 21, 1913, ibid., 202; WW to Villard, The White House, September 22, 1913, ibid., 316.
and his belief that African America comprised a subnation as yet separate from the rest of America: It was what he termed a “plan of concentration”\(^{69}\) that would provide proportionate room for both whites and blacks in the federal service, place them in separate “whites only” and “blacks only” bureaus in order to prevent racial friction from interfering with the nation’s business, and offer blacks an avenue through which they could prove their merits to the nation while fueling their own progressive energy.

African Americans, first of all, were part of the Union and part of the Democratic Party; to Wilson, their subnation had to be represented in the federal government. Yet, he did not wish the federal government to become disproportionately black: If America were primarily white, he reasoned, government posts should be as well.\(^{70}\) Wilson tried only twice during his first term to appoint an African American, and he succeeded just once, despite a member of the Democratic National Committee providing Wilson in May 1913 with a twelve-page list of African Americans who should receive presidential appointments.\(^{71}\) In principle, Wilson was not against African Americans he deemed intelligent and experienced working for the state. He had opposed some of Theodore Roosevelt’s federal appointments when the black men in question were to work in the South; Roosevelt showed poor statesmanship, in Wilson’s view, when he endeavored to force change and ignore local sentiments.\(^{72}\) The firestorm that followed the Patterson

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\(^{69}\) WW to Thomas Dixon, Jr., the White House, July 29, 1913, \textit{PWW} 28:94.

\(^{70}\) Diary of Josephus Daniels, April 11, 1913, ibid., 27:290-9; Yellin, “In the Nation’s Service,” 124.


\(^{72}\) The federal government had, in the past few presidential administrations, become a source of support for civil rights as it had carried the torch of integrated employment. Theodore Roosevelt had been particularly fond of this approach to racial issues and had even made some appointments of African
nomination confirmed in Wilson’s mind his belief that statesmanship required sensitivity to people’s sympathies, and it also showed him that it would be nearly impossible to gain Senate confirmation of any African American appointments when white Democrats controlled the Senate. Proof that he did indeed wish to be a national statesman, though, comes with his one successful appointment of a black man. In 1914, he secured the nomination of Robert Terrell to a municipal judgeship in Washington, D.C. Terrell was a Republican, which meant that Wilson did not need the votes of racist Democrats to gain confirmation. But Wilson’s thinking here transcended mere politics. For one, Terrell was one of the “thoughtful negroes” of whom Wilson approved; his resume included a one-year stint as principal of the Tuskegee Institute under Booker T. Washington, after all. Color aside, Wilson considered him the “best judge of his rank in the district.”

Secondly, the population of Washington, D.C., was around one-third African American and a disproportionate number of the court’s litigants were black. In Wilson’s conception of statesmanship, it only made sense for at least one of the city’s five municipal judges to be African American.

Wilson envisioned his appointments of African Americans aligning with a process that would reduce interracial tensions and represent subnational communities by creating Americans to political positions in the South. After one such appointment in early February 1903, Wilson asked a group of Princeton alumni if they had heard why the groundhog went back in his hole that year; the groundhog was afraid, Wilson snickered, that Roosevelt would put a “coon” in. Speech to Princeton alumni in Baltimore, February 6, 1903, reported in the the Princeton Alumni Weekly, III (Feb. 14, 1903), pp. 311-312, reprinted in PWW 14:358; Diary of Mary Yates, July 31, 1908, ibid., 18:386.

The previous president, William Howard Taft had appointed him to the post. He had first entered the nation’s service under Theodore Roosevelt, who had made him a justice of the peace. Wilson’s appointment was not an attempt at bipartisan goodwill; four of the five municipal judges—all of them Republicans—had their terms expire in 1914, and Terrell was the only one Wilson renominated. Osborn, “Woodrow Wilson Appoints a Negro Judge,” 481, 482, 486, 488.

Ibid.
uniquely black and white federal departments. More than simply reducing tension through separation, furthermore, Wilson believed that concentrated departments would be one way the federal government could aid in “negro” uplift. According to McAdoo, he and Wilson had planned to make the Registry Division “a distinctly colored division” under Adam Patterson. They believed it would give “the negroes” a chance to prove themselves on the national stage, and that the work and mission would “have a stimulating and beneficial effect upon the negro race.” McAdoo maintained that this sort of plan had already been working in the Army, where, he wrote, there were four “negro regiments,” complete with black privates and non-commissioned officers. Where Wilson’s administration found black employment to be most reasonable was in the diplomatic service to Haiti and Liberia, two predominantly black nations closely connected to American history and foreign policy. After discussing the idea throughout 1915 with Secretaries of State William Jennings Bryan and Robert Lansing, Wilson ultimately nominated Bishop Alexander Walters to be Minister to Liberia, a man he counted among the “prominent” and “thoughtful negroes” who supported his plan of concentration. (Walters declined.) The nation’s business in Liberia, a nation forged by freed American slaves, would be, Wilson believed, most secure in the hands of a black

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75 In April 1913, Secretaries Daniels and Burleson discussed the difficulties they had with overseeing integrated workforces; according to Daniels in his diary, Burleson found it nearly impossible for blacks and whites to work together in one train car, “where it is almost impossible to have different drinking vessels and different towels, or places to wash.” After talking to many “prominent negroes” who apparently shared his concerns, Burleson concluded that segregation “would be a great thing to do,” claiming that he “had the highest regard for the negro and wished to help him in every way possible.” Daniels saw things the same way, and, with Wilson’s blessing, both men began to segregate their workforces; see the diary of Josephus Daniels, April 11, 1913, *PWW* 27:290-93.

76 McAdoo to Villard, Washington, October 27, 1913, ibid., 453-455.
A statesman being in tune with local sympathies was a foundation of his progressive social dynamic, after all. All in all, while direct assistance would, Wilson feared, breed wards of the state, proportionate employment opportunities would, like the vocational training of the Tuskegee Institute, create means through which blacks could improve themselves by dealing with responsibility and competition.

In the end, the historical record proved that Wilson’s approach to reducing racial tension and promoting assimilative goodwill between the two subnations only had the opposite effect. Wilson tried to convince himself and others that any related emotional flare-ups only stemmed from poor implementation of his policies. Villard wished the Cabinet members behind federal segregation could be “blacked up” so that they could experience the humiliating and infuriating consequences of segregation. When Wilson met with William Monroe Trotter again, in November 1914, the meeting turned into a forty-five minute shouting match. As he grew more irate, Wilson reiterated his belief that practical politics demanded a slow, unsentimental approach to racial tension; militance would destabilize the nation with unproductive passions. He denounced Trotter’s un-“Christian spirit” and tone of “passion,” insinuating that he was a poor statesman, and banned him from the White House. As racial tensions continued to fester, Wilson began to wonder if segregation hurt progress because it fueled emotions rather than containing them. At the NAACP’s urging, he issued a condemnation of lynching—by far the most

77 Alexander Walters (1858-1917), civil rights leader, born a slave, bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; Wilson was less certain when it came to Haiti, since most ministers to the nation were white, and the Haitian president seemed to be more receptive to whites; WW to Villard, The White House, August 29, 1913, PWW 28:245-46; William Jennings Bryan to WW, Washington, April 3, 1915, ibid., 32:471-72; William Phillips to WW, Washington, September 22, 1915, ibid., 34:504; WW to William Phillips, The White House, September 24, 1915, ibid., 511; Robert F. Lansing to WW, Washington, October 15, 1915, ibid., 35:68.
potent manifestation of racial emotion, and a radical, vigilante enforcement of segregation. Still, he never moved to end federal segregation, and it continued to the end of his second term in 1921. Its spell was never truly ruptured until more than a generation later. By that point, Villard’s prediction that segregation would harden and amplify racial tensions rather than soften them had come true; Wilson had helped to cement caste in the United States rather than break it.

Aware of the historical baggage wrought by the experience of slavery, Wilson was determined not to allow any similar sort of division to grow in the United States as he looked at what he treated as the combined issues of immigration and class. As we have seen, Wilson looked at African America as a subnation constructed through historical affiliation, experience, and common cause rather than as a race defined at least partly in terms of biological inheritance. As he understood the nation’s social progress, he held that both the nation’s distribution of wealth and its immigration situation required balanced regulation that at once prevented the creation of separate American

78 “We are all practical men,” Wilson said, “We know that there is a point at which there is apt to be friction, and that is in the intercourse between the two races. Because, gentlemen, we must strip this thing of sentiment and look at the facts. . . . It is going to take generations to work this thing out. And . . . it will come quickest if these questions aren’t raised. . . . We can’t blink the fact.” On segregation, Villard averred, “the precedent thus established will be of the utmost danger to the colored people long after [the administration’s] motive has been forgotten and [its members have] disappeared from public life.” Villard to WW, New York, September 18, 1913, PWW 28:289-290; Villard to WW, New York, September 29, 1913, ibid., 342-44; O'Reilly, “The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson,” 118-19; see also Michele Faith Wallace, “The Good Lynching and ‘The Birth of a Nation’: Discourses and Aesthetics of Jim Crow,” Cinema Journal, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 85-104; Edward North Savath, “Race and Nationalism in American Historiography: The Late Nineteenth Century,” Political Science Quarterly, 54:421-441 (September 1939); George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
communities and embraced the energy that those bent on self-advancement brought to the United States.

At the turn of the century, Wilson considered the greatest danger the United States faced to be a growing “alienation” “between labor and capital”; yet, he added that “industry and accumulation, the result of thrifty habits,” should not be discouraged. The business morality behind trusts did not square with the morality required for the millennium, as monopolies quashed possibilities for individual initiative. Organized labor fanned flames of class sentiment that hindered popular government’s ability to act in the best interests of the populace. Both trusts and labor, then, imperiled civilizational advance as they stagnated or misdirected society’s energies and threatened to divide society into irreconcilable camps—moving society back toward medieval oligarchy.\(^79\) Wilson formulated two responses to this threat, both consistent with the progressive social dynamic. One was to regulate competition by breaking all substantial monopolies; he believed that such trust-busting kept the energy of competition in society by allowing the free market to operate except in paradoxical situations where it came to threaten itself. The second was to create a Federal Reserve System in 1913 to institutionalize the nation’s financial situation, following his comments nine years earlier that the American banker had “in his hand the very nerves of the social organism,” with the power to make the nation “tremble and wince.” The system created was a confederation of regional banks whose purpose was to steady the nation’s chartered banks through federal

statesmanship. Through this sort of limited industrial and financial regulation, Wilson believed, America could be classless yet spirited: Even with wealthy and poor, an individual’s wealth would be able to rise or fall, retaining in society an incentive for people to engage in self-improving endeavors. As Wilson explained the benefits of the Reserve system to business, “American businessmen, big and little, are [now] free to succeed, and that if they do not succeed, it is because they lack the brains or the environment; they have not been born in the right place, they have not found the right place, or they are lacking the material which is necessary in gray matter.”

With a dynamic and individually competitive class environment in place, a statesman could, in turn, manage immigration in a balanced way that would prove a boon to society. Wilson held no romanticized views of the new immigrants of the turn of the century, referring to them as “pauperized,” “discontented,” unskilled men of the “lowest class” and “of the meaner sort.” He did not believe they brought “bad blood,” though, and deemed mismanagement rather than ethnicity to be the cause of metropolitan woes. Allowing the inflow of such people was worth the risk, Wilson held, because America faced a graver risk of overcivilization. Success and comfort often brought leisure, and too much leisure meant purposelessness. With such emptiness, society would become stagnant; Wilson even said that too much boredom would lead him to “try to see how near [he] could come to getting into jail.” For the now “fully adult” United States,

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immigration was an “infant” factor, bringing with it juvenile risks but also a spirit for change and growth that came primarily with the drive for self-betterment. What made America special, Wilson declared, was its unique “combination of [the] higher culture of books and learning with the experience and struggle of conquering nature”; some of the most promising American minds, he remarked, were five-year old street urchins. Rather than becoming locked into America’s lowest rung, though, the very process of struggle that would provide America with its energy for progress would also raise the immigrants and their families toward the American dream; furthermore, as Wilson saw it, it would assimilate them. As these people settled into the mainstream, found more leisure time, and became more cultivated, new immigrants would still be arriving on America’s shores. In 1915, Wilson hailed this perpetual process, saying, “This is the only country in the world which experiences this constant and repeated rebirth. . . . This country is constantly drawing strength out of new sources. . . . [I]t is constantly being renewed from generation to generation by the same process by which it was originally created.”

When it came to policy, then, Wilson welcomed a particular kind of regulated immigration consistent in general with his views of the progressive social dynamic: People who could integrate as individuals were to be welcomed without qualification,
while groups most at risk of forming subnations in America were to be excluded.\footnote{As early as 1881, even as he expressed fears of “lesser stock” invading American shores, he expressed his desire to see more immigrants come to the South. See WW, “Stray Thoughts from the South,” c. February 22, 1881, ibid. 2:123.} Wilson vetoed two immigration bills during his tenure as president, primarily because they contained clauses that would have required literacy tests for newcomers to gain admission to the United States. Commenting on his veto in January 1917, Wilson declared that the literacy test “is not a test of character, of quality, or of personal fitness but would operate in most cases merely as a penalty for lack of opportunity in the country from which the alien seeking admission came.”\footnote{While David Roediger and James Barrett suggest that politics motivated an immigrant-hating Wilson to try to woo the immigrant vote and Mathew Frye Jacobson argues that Wilson was simply kowtowing to business interests who wanted access to cheap labor, Wilson’s vetoes drew from his fundamental views as much as they helped him politically. The 1917 bill, meanwhile, was passed over his veto; David Roediger with James Barrett, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the ‘New-Immigrant’ Working Class,” in Roediger, \textit{Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past} (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2002), 148; Frye Jacobson, \textit{Barbarian Virtues}, 200; WW, remarks to the House of Representatives, January 29, 1917, \textit{PWW} 41:52-53.} Still, Wilson was not laissez-faire when it came to immigration. The nation could benefit or be thrown askew by an influx of immigrants, and it was up to the statesman to keep things pointed in a positive direction. Since 1882, there had been legislation excluding people with documented mental illnesses,\footnote{Lunatics and idiots (1882); epileptics and the insane (1903); imbeciles and the feeble-minded (1907), and “persons of constitutional psychopathic inferiority” (1907), Frye Jacobson, \textit{Whiteness of a Different Color}, 165.} and Wilson was generally okay with these provisions as they barred people he considered detrimental to society and not respondent to social influences. Furthermore, “In the matter of Chinese and Japanese coolie immigration,” Wilson flatly declared, “I stand for the national policy of exclusion.” He had welcomed Japanese and Korean graduate students in Princeton because of his belief that the intelligent classes would merge first when two communities came together, but average Asian workers, he feared,
would simply become entrenched as a new subnation in America, producing lasting tensions similar to those regarding relations between blacks and whites. (He praised their work ethic and thrift as better than the new European immigrants’, though.) Part of the 1917 immigration law that Wilson favored created a “Barred Zone,” in fact: People from east of the Caucasus and Ural region were to be excluded from American immigration. 1921’s Emergency Quota Act (passed under new president Warren G. Harding), which placed immigration quotas on various regions and excepted educated professionals from any limits, drew from the spirit of Wilson’s policies and general approach to immigration. 86

Gender and Family

Wilson’s thought and policies regarding the family, and particularly woman’s suffrage, lastly, provide another angle on his views regarding assimilation, pluralism, and exclusion. He believed that what he termed the patriarchal family was the primary institution in civilization and that it conferred specific roles upon men and women as they molded future generations of citizens. The Progressive Era’s ever-growing blurring between masculine and feminine spheres gave Wilson much to ponder and mull over as he sought to preserve the good of tradition while facilitating the spirit of change and progress. As with race and immigration, Wilson’s thoughts on the keystone family-related issues of his era—especially those regarding the “New Woman”—may at first

seem puzzling and contradictory. But, as he mulled over and dealt with social matters of
gender and family, he charted an evolving path consistent with his ideology of millennial
progress: The institutions of manhood and womanhood were to be protected and
promoted in the abstract, allowing their connected virtues to continue to affect the spirit
of the nation, while women, as with men, would be able to enter the public sphere and
vote.

“No belief is more deeply fixed in the traditions of the great peoples who have
made modern history,” Wilson wrote in The State, “than the belief of direct common
descent, through males, from a common male ancestor, human or divine.” Influenced by
Henry Sumner Maine and other late nineteenth century anthropologists, Wilson
considered the patriarchal family to be the fundamental government form, at least in
societies that evolved.\footnote{Wilson oftentimes used “patriarchy” as a blanket term when
discussing systems of kinship and governance as they related to male headship. This includes
what is more correctly term patrilineality, a system that traces descent through fathers. Such
conflation may have been intentional on Wilson’s part as he considered the family to be the
basic political institution. WW, The State (1911 ed.), 2-4, see also 2-14; WW, “Notes for Four
list, ibid. 6:578; Cowles, “Home, Church, State,” WWC.} As a vital institution, the patriarchal family molded the
individual from birth, teaching moral virtues essential to social functioning; in adulthood,
the individual could then contribute “to the sum of national activity.”\footnote{WW, “The
Modern Democratic State,” PWW 5:77-79.} Any system of
kinship other than patriarchy corrupted the familial institution and thus endangered
society at a basic level, and Wilson referred to polyandry as an “ugly institution of
promiscuity.” Patriarchy meant growth from discipline; promiscuity meant degradation, a
cause of “confusion” and a product of “confused” times.\textsuperscript{89} As such, one of the constituent functions of government “necessary to the civic organization of society” was, Wilson maintained, legally defining family relations (between husband and wife, parents and children).\textsuperscript{90}

As the foundational social institution, the patriarchal family drew upon the particular strengths of men and women; it was also premised on an elemental, complementary bonding between husband and wife. When Wilson’s fiancée, Ellen Axson, wrote to him in 1885 expressing her disagreement with the idea that a woman has the “right to live her own life,” Wilson seconded her feeling:

If it means the right of woman to live apart from men, it is as untrue to the teachings of history, to the manifestations of Providence, and to the deepest instincts of the heart as would be the other proposition that men have a right to live outside the family relation. The family relation is at the foundation of society, is the life and soul of society, and the women who think that marriage destroys identity and is not the essential condition of the performance of their proper duties—if they think so naturally and not through disappointment—are the only women God has intended for old maids. Their sex is a mere accident. In my opinion, a woman proves her womanliness, a man his manliness, by longing for the companionship of marriage, and for all the duties and responsibilities that marriage brings. I have no words in which to express my contempt for the view which would have it that marriage belittles a woman! It no more belittles her than it belittles a man.

Wilson continued that while women were not to be “the mere drudges of the household,”

\textsuperscript{89} Confronted with evidence that early “Aryans” may have been polyandrous (since female names had crept into genealogies), he wrote, “We can be sure that this confusion is explicable in many ways which enable us to preserve our respect and admiration for our forefathers, as at least fine savages.” WW, “Some Words upon An Essay on the Early History of the Family, by A. Lang,” c. Nov. 19, 1884, ibid. 12:48-85; WW, \textit{The State} (1911 ed.), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{90} The others: Providing order and safety; regulating trade and overseeing property and contract rights and obligations; defining crime and doling out punishments; defining citizenship; and handling foreign affairs. WW, “The Functions of Government,” lecture at Johns Hopkins University, February 17, 1888, \textit{PWW} 5:670-71.
there were roles to fill within the family, and husband and wife were to work “in communion with” one another, neither in a subordinate position, offering their gender’s particular “mental and moral gifts” to the home’s functioning.  

Through the turn of the century, Wilson maintained that men were uniquely equipped for the public sphere, a potentially corrupting place that included business and direct involvement in politics, whereas women’s gifts lent themselves to the domestic sphere, an area that not only included the “motherly” side of the home but also civic activity in the community. In one of his few essays not directly addressing politics or history, *When a Man Comes to Himself* (1901), Wilson laid out the qualities of true manhood: A man who has come into his own has control of his spirit (“no longer reckless,” “infatuated,” or “self-centered”) and has a sober view of the world. A man must have a solid constitution and be “thoroughly sane and healthy” lest disillusionment overcome him. This was not to be emotionless, for quelling emotion was to be no longer human. Rather, a man needed to maintain a healthy spirit that was both a bulwark against society’s corrupting influence

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91 WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, March 1, 1885, ibid. 4:316-18.
and a boon to society itself.\textsuperscript{92} Male responsibility within the institution of the patriarchal family—fatherhood and even ownership of slaves—could bring out the best in men, producing “a noble and gracious type of manhood.”\textsuperscript{93} As Robyn Muncy explains, Wilson opposed trusts at least partly because he saw them as undermining American manhood.\textsuperscript{94} Without true economic independence, men did not have the full array of social mechanisms necessary to grow and come into their own (or “come to themselves”). Echoing his views on slavery, he believed that even if business owners were gentlemanly, their workers would still languish. The purpose of government regulation, in fact, was to keep competition “manly,” not ridding society of competition but merely making sure that it was fair, with, as he phrased it, no “hitting below the belt.”\textsuperscript{95} With sobriety, sanguinity, and a solid constitution, a man could develop as an individual and prosper in the ruggedness of the public sphere.

The domestic sphere, in contrast, was women’s domain. As Wilson wrote to Ellen, women were endowed with unique faculties that separated them from men. He was clear, though, that the difference was not in intellectual capabilities. Ellen, in fact, possibly outshined Wilson intellectually, a point he readily admitted. As late as the

\textsuperscript{92} It was reasonable for a man to go “half-crazy” when in love and become “subject to the domination of [his] nerves,” but at all other times he should avoid such a condition and maintain “mastery over” himself”; WW, \textit{When a Man Comes to Himself}, 1-4; WW to ELA, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, January 4, 1884, \textit{PWW} 2:645-47; WW to ELA, Baltimore, January 8, 1884, ibid. 653; WW to ELA, Wilmington, NC, July 20, 1884, ibid. 3:253-54.


\textsuperscript{94} Robyn Muncy, “Trustbusting and White Manhood in America, 1898-1914,” American Studies 38:3 (Fall 1997), 21-42, see especially 26-27.

\textsuperscript{95} WW, address on Thomas Jefferson, April 16, 1906, at the Jefferson Day Dinner of the National Democratic Club of New York in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, \textit{PWW} 16:367-68.
1890s, he believed that women were not fit for the public sphere because they were too logical: Lacking personal familiarity with the public arena, they drew their conclusions about politics and business from pure thought rather than from real world experience. Furthermore, Wilson held that women had a certain sympathy, sentiment, or spirit that made for possible fragility in the sometimes brutal public world but that flourished in the home, to the benefit of the men whose own constitutions were tested daily. The institutions of marriage and family provided sanity for the man who had to wade out into the world. Not only was public life wearying, it could also distort one’s moral compass, but the protected domestic sphere provided daily asylum.

As with his views on society in general, Wilson believed that the nature of the gender spheres was dynamic; this meant that women’s and men’s places and roles were not entirely set in stone, as his views on female college education illustrate. Early in his career Wilson taught at Bryn Mawr, a women’s college, and he believed that his students there displayed a “painful absenteeism of mind” regarding political history and theory. Perhaps the cause was immaturity rather than “femininity,” he pondered, but in any case, he felt that since female students lacked experience with and involvement in politics,

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96 WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, March 1 and March 6, 1885, ibid. 4:316-17, 338-39; WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, April 24, 1884, ibid. 3:146; WW to Frederic Yates, S.S. Caledonia, Greenock, Scotland, September 5, 1908, ibid. 18:417.

97 Wilson’s father had preached about the social need for such a gender division, and Ellen enthusiastically endorsed his sermon; WW to ELA, Baltimore, MD, March 31, 1885, ibid. 4:437; J. R. Wilson, “Female Training,” May 23, 18158, Greensboro Female College, Greensboro, GA, as explained in Mulder, Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation: 7-9.

98 He once wrote to Ellen, “My one antidote against all ills and discouragements is my love for you. I should feel so absolutely naught without you,—so without weight or significance! I caught all the little moral force I have by a sort of contagion from you,—and all the atmosphere that makes my writing seem literary and gives it a momentary charm.” For her part, Ellen sometimes wished that she had been a man because she felt that she had an intellectual calling, but she never questioned the gender roles themselves; WW to EAW, March 15 and May 2, 1892, PWW 7:487, 605-06; WW to EAW, February 4, 1897, ibid. 10:144; EAW to WW, March 5, 1890, ibid. 6:542.
political lessons ill-fit their lives’ needs. In a clear indication that he did not believe women to be doomed biologically to such ignorance, though, Wilson qualified that he was referring to female students “of the present generation.” Women’s education had to occur in stages, and in his perspective the original “pioneers” were increasingly giving way to “normal” students.\(^9^9\)

The danger that had to be managed as the New Woman pressed further into society came with the increased blurring between the public and domestic spheres; as with African Americans, Wilson believed that any significant social empowerment was best managed through a period of education and segregation. Social work was immediately acceptable and perfect work for women, according to Wilson’s standards, as it was already in the domestic sphere and required the cultivation of “tastes” that mothers already engaged in at home. Uplift of the rugged and downtrodden required a dash of paternalism, to be sure, but a heavy dose of the civilizing feminine touch all the more surely.\(^1^0^0\) The work brought men and women together, certainly, but with their fatherly and motherly roles, respectively, intact. In places where masculine and feminine identities would not contrast as starkly, though, such as in the college classroom or the workplace, Wilson was adamant about maintaining separate spheres. Co-education, he asserted, would be “demoralizing,” meaning not that it would lead to vice, but that it would “vulgarize” the relationship between men and women. Women could and already did have colleges of their own, he pointed out (foreshadowing indirectly his “policy of

\(^9^9\) From Wilson’s Confidential Journal, October 20, 1887, Bryn Mawr, ibid. 5:619; WW to John Franklin Jameson, Baltimore, MD, February 21, 1892, ibid. 7:444.

\(^1^0^0\) WW, notes for an address delivered at Village Improvement Society, May 10, 1904, ibid. 15:316-17; new report of this address, *Princeton Press*, May 14, 1904, ibid. 330-32;
concentration” regarding African Americans in federal employment). The rise of certain white collar work as “women’s jobs,” further, was also consistent with Wilson’s ideology, as it maintained general gender separation and conformed to his beliefs in men’s and women’s complementary abilities. Having male bosses was acceptable (and for departments of young women, preferable) as that workplace environment mimicked the patriarchal family. Trouble came, though, in racially integrated workplaces: One of the greatest concerns of the federal segregation debacle was that African American men boss white women. For Wilson it was a matter of confusing the social dynamic: White women and African American men were products of different subnational historical experiences. If black and white men were not quite ready to integrate (aside from intellectuals), and if white women and white men were not also not yet at that point, then black men and white women had even further to go.

The trick for Wilson as he moved into politics and had to deal with the New Woman was to find a way to maintain the “angel in the machinery” without putting a strait jacket upon women and their progress. To both Wilsons it seemed that the suffragists’ fight for gender equality had less to do with wanting men to take on the positive virtues of femininity and more to do with women wanting to gain the right to be “just as bad as” men. As we have seen, Wilson believed that sometimes old virtue

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101 WW to Charles William Kent, Princeton, NY, May 29, 1894, ibid. 8:583-84; WW to EAW, Princeton, May 4, 1892, ibid. 616
103 In 1904, Ellen and daughters toured Europe. In cities such as Rome she encounter “impossible crowd” after crowd of women—by her estimation at a ratio of nine women to one man, of “all nationalities.” “This is certainly the women’s century!” she exclaimed. “They have taken possession of the earth!” To a certain degree she was horrified by the young, unchaperoned, unmannered young ladies,
needed to be preserved in new ways. If women were to move into the public sphere, then their domestic virtues would need to be preserved some other way lest society fall off kilter. But until his time in office confronted him with the full force of the suffrage movement, Wilson found no solution save “absolutely alter[ing]” “the present constitution of the family and the present division of duties as between husband and wife.” And, considering Wilson’s regard for the patriarchal family as the basis of civilization, that was a nearly unthinkable proposition.

The day before Wilson arrived in Washington, D.C., for his inauguration in March 1913, 5,000 suffragists marched outside the Capitol. Over the next few years suffrage groups organized petition drives, D.C. pickets, speeches, pressure blocs that targeted Democrats, congressional and White House lobbies, and other forms of protest geared toward gaining a federal female suffrage amendment. They most hoped to influence President Woodrow Wilson, a man who had taught students of politics that democracy was a system of government in which a nation’s “adult males” together took part in the public discussion and decision making of the state. By philosophy a slow, deliberate thinker of firm conviction, as late as 1912 Wilson said that the issue was a big one that he was still “only half way through.”104 For reasons we will see shortly, Wilson became ideologically content with women voting and began to champion it by 1915. Sensitive to regional differences, he first held that it was a matter for the states to decide,

and on October 6 of that year he cheerfully voted for female suffrage in New Jersey as a private citizen. By 1916, he was recommending that the various states extend democratic rights to women “upon the same terms as” men. Yet through to the point of the amendment’s final passage between 1919 and 1920, Wilson continued to hold typically “clumsy” meetings with female activists, and in 1917 a number of picketers who were arrested for obstructing traffic went on hunger strike only to experience the damage and discomfort of feeding tubes forced down their throats. Still, he did come to endorse the federal amendment, imploring a joint session of Congress in September 1918.

A convergence of factors had moved Wilson in the direction of supporting a federal amendment. Political calculations played a role, to be

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sure, but Wilson was not simply “being a politician.” Rather, true to his understanding of society’s workings, his political maneuverings drew from principle. Contrary to the false dichotomy often presented, he was both sincere and political, a point that Thomas Knock, Christine A. Lunardini, and Victoria Bissell Brown make clear. As Brown points out, “[T]he suggestion that Wilson endorsed woman suffrage but did not actually believe women should be voters constitutes quite a serious charge . . . [that] Wilson was willing to jeopardize womanhood, the American family, and the state by supporting woman suffrage and thereby gaining a few votes for the Democratic Party.” Rather, his move coincided with a number of things: For one, as Erez Manela astutely observes, Wilson’s positioning of the United States as the bastion of liberal democracy during World War I compelled him to compare his international rhetoric to America’s realities; the people of the world, Wilson noted, believed that “democracy means that women shall play their part in affairs alongside men.” Secondly, the 1910s saw a blossoming of female participation in the public sphere, including state-level voting and wartime work, and Wilson realized that “women were still women,” the American family had not collapsed, and the state still functioned. Seeing that the state and the home were protected (and

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107 As voters, he said in 1912, women will be “as indispensable as they are delightful.” Quoted in ibid., 140-41.
108 Kendrick A. Clements and Erica A. Cheezum wrongly contend that Wilson’s change was “reluctant” and largely political in motive. John Milton Cooper is closer to the mark when he states that Wilson gained “newfound conviction” (and also sought to gain votes), though a more accurate phrasing would be that he acquired a newer, more refined interpretation of his long-held convictions. See Kendrick A. Clements and Eric A. Cheezum, *Woodrow Wilson* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2003), 120, and John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades*, 218.
even, possibly, improved), he endorsed in 1918 what he had considered “radical reform” only ten years earlier.¹¹⁰

Any major social change—as woman suffrage would be—would have to come in a way that did not threaten the operations of the state, lest the nation’s social progress stagnate. In this vein, in August 1916, Wilson wrote to Vice President Thomas Riley Marshall, saying that he had great “confidence in the good sense and public spirit of the women of the country.” As the president elaborated in a letter to a women’s organization four days later, “One of the strongest forces behind the equal suffrage sentiment of the country is the now demonstrated fact that in the suffrage states women interest themselves in public questions, study them thoroughly, form their opinions and divide as men do concerning them. . . . Men do this naturally, and so do women, though it has required your practical demonstration of it to convince those who doubted this.” For Wilson to have talked to suffragists, even in 1908 when he considered their agenda to be radical, and to have preferred one organization to another, shows that he accepted women as political actors despite any hesitation he may have had. Furthermore, he also observed proof of women’s public abilities with the wartime “women of Europe,” who, he declared, had been demonstrating that nations depend on women as much as men in their times of greatest stress¹¹¹—a lesson reiterated once the United States entered the war.

More than proof of competency, though, Wilson also came to believe that the “woman’s touch”—domestic virtue—was a positive for politics. As late as 1908, he was

¹¹¹ WW to Thomas Riley Marshall, the White House, August 3, 1916, ibid. 37:517; WW to the Jane Jefferson Club of Colorado, the White House, August 7, 1916, ibid., 536-37; Brown, “Did Woodrow Wilson’s Gender Politics Matter?” 134, 151;
not so sure of this, thinking that women’s sentiment could prove a good, but also possibly a bad if their “goodness,” or political naivety, made them dupes for “charming and lovable” but inept figures such as William Jennings Bryan. By 1916, though, his fears had been quelled. While men brought the spirit of business and the battlefield to politics, virtues nurtured by Social Darwinism, women carried “the power of sympathy as contrasted with the spirit of contest.” Their power “of interpretive understanding, of sympathetic comprehension,” a type of greater intelligence nurtured through years of domestic pursuits, was, he declared, “precisely what society needs.” While anyone could use “brute force,” women were uniquely equipped to provide the kind of higher intelligence needed to help (rather than hit). In other words, mankind needed a new spirit, one guided by the Golden Rule, and the way for this to happen was through women entering the public sphere.¹¹²

Still, as Wilson moved toward this thinking, he remained troubled by the question of what would happen to the home if women took on a more public role; as he had said, he feared that women’s political empowerment could only come with a fundamental change in the patriarchal family. Judging by his policies in office, his answer was to separate gendered institutions from bodies—or, in other words, to find ways to protect and promote femininity, masculinity, motherhood, and fatherhood while allowing women to become public citizens. Following a joint resolution of Congress, on May 8, 1914, he proclaimed that Mother’s Day would be observed on the second Sunday of May that year and thereafter. Connecting motherhood to the health and pride of the nation, he asked that

homes and government offices display the flag in observing the special day, a “public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country.” Anna Jarvis, who headed the Mother’s Day International Association, had energetically lobbied Wilson to see Mother’s Day become a national holiday. Like Wilson, she saw the day not only as a patriotic observance but also as a solemn one, to be celebrated in churches throughout the nation. The association declared, “No nation is greater than its homes,” and asked that people wear white carnations to represent the cherished virtues of motherhood: their white color for purity, fragrance for love, “wide growth” for charity, and “endurance” for fidelity. The day would infuse the nation with an appreciation for these long-hailed qualities in an age of change. Motherhood was a necessary and vital component of the nation’s health, sustenance, and well-being—as important as soldiers for the defense of the nation. The goal of Mother’s Day, then, was to give Americans pause and help them to remember this. For Wilson, Mother’s Day created a new institutional practice that kept domestic values—purity, love, charity, fidelity, care, safety, etc.—coursing through society while women moved increasingly into the public sphere. Similar organizations that existed to promote Father’s Day (or Dad’s Half Day or Father’s Evening) lobbied Wilson as well. Though Wilson and Congress did not move to make it a national holiday, Wilson did send his greetings and best wishes to these groups, and his family celebrated privately in the White House. As with motherhood, fatherhood was to be preserved and

113 People would, furthermore, be reminded of their responsibility toward each other, the Association said, a duty that begins in the Home. Far too many Americans, the program explained, die in a given year “from preventable diseases and accidents—due to ignorance, carelessness, and insanitary homes and communities”—300,000 children and even more men and women. The threat was as grave as an invasion coming to America from across the sea or from Mexico. WW, Mother’s Day Proclamation, May 8, 1914, WWP S. 4, no. 374, P. 1 Reel 259; Anna Jarvis, Mother’s Day International Association, to WW, April 22, 1915, ibid.
cherished. Wilson further sought to redeem childhood in this potentially corrupting era by confronting child labor and working to curb working hours for women. In his handling of Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and children’s labor issues, Wilson was acting as he envisioned a statesman should, managing change in a way that preserved the values of old while nudging mankind ever closer to the type of assimilation necessary for the millennium.

The last question to answer is why Wilson treated some suffragists so poorly if he cherished femininity, respected the suffrage movement, and came to endorse women’s voting rights himself. The answer parallels the division Wilson made between militant and accommodationist African Americans: For Wilson, there were “good ladies” and “bad girls.” Wilson never cared for confrontational criticism and styles of protest, as they brought disruptive emotion rather than a constructive spirit to public discourse. Suffragists who were overly vocal or aggressive made Wilson uneasy; Ellen even joked

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114 Newspaper clipping, “Dad’s Half Day Comes July 18,” ibid. S. 4; no. 1592; P. 1 Reel 318; Herbert A. Schoenfeld, President, Seattle Dads Association to WW, telegram, Seattle, WA, July 15, 1914, ibid.; WW to Schoenfeld, July 17, 1914, WWP S. 4; no. 1592; P. 1 Reel 318; see also Ralph LaRossa, The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1997).

115 Edwards, Angels in the Machinery, 165; Note that Edwards’ claim that the Children’s Bureau was created under Wilson is incorrect; it was founded in April 1912, under President Taft; Frederic H. Robinson, President, Medical Review of Reviews, to WW, April 28, 1915, WWP S.4, no. 1098, P. 4, Reel 306.

116 According to the diary of Nancy Saunders Toy, Wilson remarked in 1915 that woman suffrage would not hurt politics but would be “disastrous” for the home. “Somebody has to make the home and who is going to do it if the women don’t?,” Toy recalled Wilson asking. This remark is out of place for Wilson in 1915, though he may have had such worries a decade earlier. Victoria Bissell Brown casts doubt on Toy’s recollection, suggesting that perhaps she misunderstood Wilson’s view and placed some of her own thoughts on him. As Brown points out, these alleged comments came on the same day that he said precisely the other thing to suffragists, reaffirming his view at the time that suffrage was a matter for states to decide and noting that he personally respected the movement. Considering the weight of the evidence against Toy’s comment, Brown’s assessment seems to be correct. Wilson did have concerns about the home, indeed, but Toy’s account seems to be simplified and exaggerated. See Nancy Saunders Toy, diary entry, Wednesday, January 6, 1915, in PWW 32:21; Brown, “Did Woodrow Wilson’s Gender Politics Matter?” 141.
about “escaping” from a group of suffragists. Most troublesome for Wilson was the National Woman’s Party (NWP) which, under Alice Paul, picketed the White House, sometimes numbering in the thousands and remaining there daily, even through sleet and snow. He preferred the “mother” organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, comprised of more tempered ladies, including their president Carrie Chapman Catt. At first Wilson handled the NWP picketers with tolerance and even some humor, once offering tea to the women as he passed by. Things changed in the heated atmosphere of World War I, though, as the women carried banners that called the president “Kaiser Wilson” and asked how the United States could be fighting for democracy abroad while resisting it at home. Scuffles broke out in the streets between “patriotic” passersby and the protesters. In June 1917, around two hundred women were arrested for blocking traffic and ninety-seven chose prison over fines. They mostly went to Occoquan workhouse, a dilapidated facility in Virginia, where many of them, including Alice Paul, went on a hunger strike. In response, prison employees used tubes to force feed them, causing gastric distress and vomiting. Wilson later pardoned some of the prisoners—and in fact, he never directly ordered their arrests—but he never approved of their actions, especially in such troubled times, and he ordered the press to limit its coverage of the arrests and imprisonments. When the Senate failed to ratify the suffrage amendment bill in September 1918, the protesters returned to the White House with a vengeance, building controlled fires, climbing on statues, and even setting ablaze Wilson’s idealistic war and peace proclamations.\footnote{117}{EAW to WW, Cornish, New Hampshire, July 23, 1913, \textit{PWW} 28:67; Cott, \textit{The Grounding of}}
and commentary on women, the family, and gender issues in general, it is clear that the mistreatment of the NWP protesters had little to nothing to do with disrespect for women or hatred toward the suffrage movement, and much more to do with his disdain for criticism, especially in wartime, and his deeply rooted political belief that overwhelming displays of emotion, or ill-civility, in society required paternalistic force—in the name of order, discipline, and growth. “Civilized” women such as Carrie Chapman Catt were worthy of moving into the political sphere whereas “wild colts,” or “bad girls,” such as Alice Paul, needed stern treatment.

Once, in his days on the lecture circuit, Wilson remarked that the United States would finally come to full democratic maturity the day citizens elected an African American woman to be president. Was the comment something he said merely to amuse his audience, or did he truly mean it? It was uncharacteristic, to be sure, but the

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EAW to WW, Rome, April 24, 1904, PWW 15:275-76.

118 Henry Wilkinson Bragdon considers Wilson’s comment to be “wholly uncharacteristic” and simply a ploy to work his audience. See Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years, 231; Gary Gerstle similarly argues that Wilson geared his progressivism to ensure that America would remain a
comment did square with his beliefs, as this chapter has established: The truest democracy required a certain level of assimilation, and some day that would include parts of the nation not yet full partners in the democratic process. Issues such as race and gender were puzzles, difficult to find answers to, and excruciatingly slow in their providential unraveling.

As Wilson saw it, women were entering the public sphere as motherhood, femininity, fatherhood, masculinity, and childhood were revered, protected, and promoted through progressive legislation. African Americans were making subnational progress as the federal government made efforts to include them, in a segregated way, in the workings of the State. “White” immigrants were entering the United States mostly as lower class families with the progressive drive to achieve the American dream, while Asian immigrants were barred from arriving in droves to America’s shores, lest they create new subnations that would present integration issues as troubling as those facing the post-Reconstruction South. Eventually national assimilation would occur, but first separation would be necessary, in order to provide each community with a uniquely tailored institutional framework and style of statesmanship and to keep friction between subnational communities to a minimum. The first intercommunity merging would occur—and had been occurring—among the intellectual elites, while the only individuals to be forever excluded from full citizenship were “defectives”—those with heritable weaknesses that would threaten democracy and progress if allowed to proliferate. All other people, though, were subject to the social mechanisms of the progressive dynamic,

"white republic." Though that was indeed the way his policies worked, it does not seem to have been his intention. See Gerstle, “Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson,” 115.
rendering civil discourse and community uplift possible, however slowly. With enlightened statesmanship, exclusion and pluralism could be used as tools in the management of society, pointing society away from degradation, distraction, division, and corruption, and toward growth, focus, cohesion, and virtue. Mankind would be closer to the millennium.

The road that Wilson’s “moral Machiavellianism” forged toward that joyous day, though, included female protesters shackled and force fed, African American workers segregated and certain black leaders barred from the White House, Asians excluded from pursuing new lives in America, and people with perceived physical and mental abnormalities forcibly constrained and sterilized. To be sure, Wilson was not “a Hitler,” but neither was he “a Gandhi”; rather, true to his centrist sort of progressivism, his political thoughts and policies were rather grey. And, as his role as president of the United States increasingly confronted him with the conflagrations of the 1910s, he would take his style of meta-community management, or progressive statecraft, to the world stage.
Wilsonian Empire: International Liberalism & Calibrated Colonialism

I am by instinct a teacher, and I would like to teach them something.
– Woodrow Wilson, referring to his Republican opponents (1916)

Lord! Lord! the fun I’ve had, the holy joy I am having . . . in delivering elementary courses of instruction in democracy to the British Government. Deep down at the bottom, they don’t know what Democracy means. Their empire is in the way. Their centuries of land-stealing are in the way. Their unsleeping watchfulness of British commerce is in the way. “You say you’ll shoot men into self-government.” said Sir Edward. “Doesn’t that strike you as comical?” And I answered, “It is comical only to the Briton and to others who have associated shooting with subjugation. We associate shooting with freedom.”
– Walter Hines Page, Wilson’s ambassador to the United Kingdom (1913)

On the afternoon of January 25, 1915, Alexander Graham Bell, in New York City, and Thomas August Watson, in San Francisco, engaged in the first transcontinental telephone conversation, their call spanning a distance of 3,400 miles. Later that evening, a 4,750 mile loop connected participants in New York, San Francisco, Jekyll Island (Georgia), and Washington (D.C.), including Theodore N. Vail, president of AT&T, Charles Cadwell Moore, president of the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco,

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and President Woodrow Wilson. Addressing Mr. Moore, Wilson said, “It appeals to the imagination to speak across the continent” and wished the upcoming San Francisco exposition success. To Mr. Watson, he stated, “I consider it an honour to be able to express my admiration for the inventive genius and scientific knowledge that have made this possible and my pride that this vital cord should have been stretched across America as a new symbol of our national unity and our enterprise.”

The world had become smaller; the nation had become stronger.

Earlier in his presidency, Wilson had used another innovative technology to conquer the American frontier. In May 1913, he recorded “A Message to the American Indians,” and Edison phonographs carried his words to the various indigenous states within the United States. The act exemplified Wilson’s tendency to merge the novel and the cutting edge with something of the previous century’s mindset. Addressing his “Brothers,” Wilson declared that Thomas Jefferson’s dream of a day when the “Red Men” would become “truly one with us” was drawing ever nearer. Exclusion had given way to pluralism and now true assimilation. In an intended compliment, Wilson said, “Education, agriculture, the trades are the red man’s road to the white man’s civilization today . . . and happily you have gone a long way on that road.” American statesmanship, though not always just or selfless, had ultimately brought Native Americans to a point of

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2 WW, telephonic messages, to Charles Cadwell Moore, Thomas A. Watson, and Alexander Graham Bell, January 25, 1916; ibid. 32:118-19; “Phone to Pacific From the Atlantic,” New York Times, January 26, 1915. According to the New York Times article, “The telephone line used across the continent yesterday will be opened for commercial purposes on March 1. It was announced that the charge for a telephone conversation between New York and San Francisco would be $20.70 for the first three minutes, and $6.75 for each minute thereafter. When one man in New York talks to a man in San Francisco $2,000,000 worth of apparatus will be tied up and cannot be used for the duration of the conversation for any other purpose. It is expected that, in normal conditions, it will require about ten minutes to put a call ‘through’ across the continent.”
brotherly union. He continued, “There are some dark pages in the history of the white man’s dealings with the Indian and many parts of the record are stained with the greed and avarice of those who have thought only of their profit, but it is also true that the purposes and motives of this great Government and of our nation as a whole toward the red man have been wise, just, and beneficent. The remarkable progress of our Indian brothers towards civilization is proof of it, open to all to see.” Over the past couple of generations, military rule had given way to civil administration and schools had replaced military posts. “The education and industrial training the Government has given you has enabled thousands of Indian men and women to take their places in civilization alongside their white neighbors,” Wilson rejoiced. Thousands had adapted to manly capitalism, abandoning tribal economics for private property and homesteading; many Native Americans had even gained esteem in the professions and in the federal government. “The great White Father,” President Wilson concluded, “now calls you his ‘brothers,’ not his ‘children.’” As a sign of respect, he declared, the United States would construct in New York Harbor a monument in honor of Native American achievement. The image of a looming Native American man offering the sign of peace would greet newcomers to the burgeoning nation.\(^3\)

These two events helped to mark the transitional nature of the decade of Wilson’s political career—the 1910s. The American “frontier” now stretched from the Caribbean

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to the Philippines. Technology and other aspects of globalization were shrinking the world, bringing people into closer regular contact with one another. Old ideas and power relationships remained, readjusted to the new circumstances. Wilson stood as the man, in his own envisioning, to oversee and shape the changes to come in what was clearly, to him, the next stage in mankind’s millennial march. And, it is perhaps telling that the National American Indian Memorial was never constructed. 4

This chapter argues that Wilson’s political philosophy led him to try to seize the transformative nature of his decade in power to construct a more integrated and formalized progressive social dynamic over the Americas and, ultimately, the globe. In this sense, international liberalism and “calibrated colonialism” were two sides of the same coin, and together they provided the essential thrust of “Wilsonianism,” or “progressive internationalism.” After elaborating on such terminology, this chapter will delve into specific areas of Wilsonian foreign policy. It will begin with Wilson’s reconfiguring of the American frontier, a process that set the Philippines on a path toward sovereignty, recognized Cuba as an independent but not yet fully sovereign state, and provided for the citizenship of Puerto Ricans and Native Americans. It then analyzes Wilson’s desire to create some sort of formal framework for the Americas—Pan-Americanism—by working closely with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in South America while oftentimes turning to forceful “intervention” in Northern Latin America and the Caribbean. Lastly, it illustrates the connections between Pan-Americanism and the

4 Ibid.
international framework coming out of Versailles in 1919, including the League of Nations and the mandate system. Along the way, it will become evident that the dynamic’s connections to certain forms of pluralism, exclusion, and assimilation, as established in the previous chapter, translated directly to the international scene, as did the call to judge statesmen, institutions, and nations based on perceptions of their spirit and intelligence. Ultimately, an undercurrent of notions regarding race, nation, family, gender, religion, sanity, and other cultural characteristics informed Wilson’s foreign policies from Port-au-Prince and Manila to Paris.

**On Internationalism, Imperialism, Sovereignty, and Force**

The progressive social dynamic was geared toward the nurturing of cultural, economic, and political values that Wilson believed were requisite for an era of ethical anarchy, yet the philosophy of statesmanship built into the dynamic made clear that statesmen could adjust only institutions directly; values could only be changed indirectly through the evolutionary nurturing of properly managed institutions. The only other way to change a society was to change the statesman. As Wilson looked to readjust peoples around the world using the moral and practical power of American statesmanship, then, he, one, sought a leading role in constructing worldwide and regional cultural, economic, and political structures for the new order and, two, forcefully looked after the uplift of “little brothers” whose statesmen or institutions were allegedly curbing their stability and progress. American force could not directly change cultural values, but American moral influence coupled with stability and new institutional environments would, in Wilson’s
envisioning, effect eventual millennial results. To this end, Wilson advocated international liberalism and calibrated colonialism—both defined below—on the basis of a calculated conception of sovereignty. Ultimately, the force of Wilsonianism extended what some scholars deem American Empire while congruently undermining territorial imperialism.

Thomas Knock astutely refers to Wilson’s internationalism as “progressive internationalism” rather than the more common “liberal internationalism” or “liberal-capitalist internationalism.” While notions of liberalism and capitalism did indeed strongly inform Wilson’s vision for world order, they were reformulated by his philosophy of progress; as the previous chapters have illustrated, Wilsonian liberalism was based on a relative universalism that said that people’s rights, duties, and appropriate types of governance had to be in line with their community’s maturity, or development. The pluralism that came out of relative universalism created liberalism only in a graduated and progressive sense. It is true, as Lloyd Ambrosius notes, that Wilsonianism called for “peacemaking on the basis of collective security, national self-determination, and ‘open door’ globalization,” but it was in a way that favored the so-called most civilized states of the world, acknowledged the realities of power politics, and utilized temporary pluralism and exclusion for ultimately assimilating goals.5 (For clarity’s sake, here, then, the desire to create a sense of citizenship between nation-states under some sort of constitutional structure [with the political, economic, and other affiliations that

that entails] will be referred to as international liberalism, as Wilsonianism—or progressive internationalism—in a larger sense rested on both international liberalism and calibrated colonialism.)

Wilson first wrote about global federation in 1887 and joined the American Peace Society in 1908. He was certainly not the only person pondering such global possibilities: As the international order broke down in the opening decade of the twentieth century, various coalitions formed with slightly different visions regarding the feasibility of collective security, the types of institutions that would best connect the nations and states of the world, and the notion of sovereignty for great-, small-, and non-powers. Frank Ninkovich notes a tradition of “normal internationalism” in the United States, established by the turn of the century, that advocated transnational economic and cultural activity in the private sector; this contrasts with “crisis internationalism,” which he identifies with times of global calamity that have caused policymakers, with Wilson being the first, to see international engagement in the name of global betterment as a matter of national

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6 Interestingly, despite the understandable attention that Wilson’s internationalism draws, he was not the only major figure to articulate a vision of a new, “liberal” world order. The idea of a league of nations was common in educated circles in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere in the generation leading up to the Great War. Kennedy's analysis finds three internationalist coalitions in Progressive America: Pacifists, who were generally isolationist and sought antiwar pacts and arbitration treaties, such as William Jennings Bryan, Jane Addams, Robert La Follette, and Oswald Garrison Villard; Liberal Internationalists, who wanted the nation-states of the world to become citizens under a global federal framework, such as Wilson, Samuel Gompers, and the League to Enforce Peace, which included William Howard Taft; and the Atlanticists, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Elihu Root, who were more comfortable with power politics—though they wanted the status quo to change—and decried collective security as unfeasible. Ideologies within coalitions varied—for instance, Taft’s nationalism was certainly more conservative than Wilson’s, Taft orchestrated arbitration treaties, and Wilson supported this endeavor—but in general those in Kennedy’s Pacifist and Liberal Internationalist camps collectively elbowed out the Atlanticists by 1917. David H. Burton, Taft, Wilson, and World Order (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP), 2003, 80; Warren F. Kuehl, Seeking World Order: The United States and International Organization to 1920 (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1969); Kennedy, The Will to Believe, xii-1; Knock, To End All Wars, viii.
security.\textsuperscript{7} It is the combination of the circulating league idea, the crises of the 1910s, and Wilson’s dynamic social philosophy that birthed Wilsonian progressive internationalism, of which international liberalism was a primary component.

By the nature of the progressive social dynamic, though, Wilson’s international liberalism could not exist without its imperial counterpart, calibrated colonialism, a term that Paul Kramer has usefully introduced into the lexicon. Writing specifically on the Philippines, Kramer explains, “Calibrated colonialism involved the setting of criteria by which Filipinos would be recognized as having the capacity to responsibly exercise power in the colonial state” by proving their abilities at certain steps along the way to self-governance. While Wilson certainly did come to champion an end to imperialism as the world knew it by the 1910s, he was never wholly opposed to it in general. When he proposed world federation in 1887, in fact, he imagined not only a federation of “the great states” but also that each empire should be a federation itself; empire, in other words, could be built into the fabric of an otherwise liberal world order. While he would increasingly react against what he perceived as the negatives of imperialism—particularly the stagnating selfishness that mother countries often displayed—he believed that a direct, formal, and temporary relationship between a powerful state and an “undeveloped” one could be beneficial for both. Around the time of the Spanish American War, he chastised his critics’ arguments as “weepings.” Colonization, he taught his politics class, was one of the few processes that could create a community—and, considering the importance of community to his progressive vision, this was no small

\textsuperscript{7} Frank Ninkovich, \textit{The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 12.
point. Even as he later confronted imperialism, he never sought to tear it down completely, partly because, fearing revolutionary change and always seeking to keep the positives of old while adjusting institutions to new times, he wanted to moderate the way in which great power worked internationally, promoting the positive aspects of imperial traditions while eliminating the debilitating ones. Thus, he championed calibrated colonialism alongside international liberalism: establishing order in a territory, then training and expanding education of “intellect and spirit” in a graduated march toward self-governance. As we will see, he applied this mentality not only to the Philippines but also to Native America, the Caribbean and Central America, and the League mandates.8

Combined with international liberalism and its belief in the eventual fraternalization of all the world’s nation-states, calibrated colonialism was a case of “older brotherism” more than it was paternalistic (though just as condescending in the immediate sense). Wilson even referred to his foreign policy in Latin America as “playing Big Brother.” Kramer believes that calibrated colonialism’s intention was to create the “illusion of impermanence” in a way that perpetuated American control. Considering Wilson’s sincerely held progressive philosophy, such cunning was not his design, but the end result was the same. In this vein, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt make a useful distinction between Empire and imperialism, arguing that “in contrast to imperialism Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that

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progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.” Its roots are in the universal application of U.S. constitutional values and structures. Springboarding from this point, Amy Kaplan explains that Wilson “foreshadow[ed] the emergence of today’s postmodern regime, in which the sovereignty of the nation dissolves in the borderless world of empire.” Along these lines, Mary Ann Heiss notes that Americans have long used words and phrases such as “expansion,” “Manifest Destiny,” and “benevolent assimilation” in place of empire or imperialism in ways that oftentimes worked to perpetuate what Hardt and Negri term Empire. Wilsonian older brotherism, then, played into what Kaplan calls a paradox of American exceptionalism: Figures such as Wilson held the United States as the “apotheosis of the nation-form itself and . . . a model for the rest of the world . . . [but if] the fantasy of American imperialism aspires to a borderless world where it finds its own reflection everywhere, then the fruition of this dream shatters the coherence of national identity, as the boundaries that distinguish it from the outside world promise to collapse.” For Wilson, though, this was no paradox: National identity and imperial control were only instruments toward a millennial future that, he implied, would ultimately melt away national and imperial distinctions.9

The pluralism that stemmed from Wilsonianism—or international liberalism teamed with calibrated colonialism—rested upon a hierarchal and legalistic view of sovereignty that often pointed Wilson toward forceful intervention. As Mary Renda explains, gender and racial hierarchies that were “deeply embedded” in his ideology oftentimes led Wilson to promote political and economic policies that were just as dominating as the imperial schemes he criticized. Particularly telling is a story that Ray Stannard Baker—a journalist and strong Wilson supporter—recorded. In May 1916 the two men met in the White House and talked, in part, about the devolving situation in Mexico, which had been torn by civil war, revolution, and a revolving door of self-proclaimed leaders. Wilson was adamant that, “a people had the right ‘to do what they damned pleased with their own affairs,’” and he “wanted to give the Mexicans a chance to try.” He believed there had long been shamefully “predatory” American interests in Mexico, and he doubted that “the blessing of free government had [ever] been bestowed upon a people from above [and had] not come with struggle [and] trials from below.” Nevertheless, Wilson concluded, the United States may have to “go in finally [and] make peace.”

He truly believed his intentions toward Mexico were more benevolent than other examples from American history, yet his progressive ideology, in his mind, made force seem nearly warranted.

The first step toward forceful intervention was judging a people’s “proper governance”; if their institutions and statesmen were off-kilter, then their state, in Wilson’s thinking, did not hold sovereignty. In 1891, he referred to the United States as

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“an adult, disciplined, self-possessed nation” and averred that these qualities had taken
time to cultivate. When a nation learns to value law, order, and governing institutions, he
proclaimed, it has attained self-respect and self-control and thus “sovereignty over itself.”
Later, in *The State*, he defined democracy as “self-controlled conduct.” Viewing nation-
states as moral persons, then, Wilson utilized recapitulation theory to position them on a
scale of maturity. This, in turn, opened up his foreign policy to the same sorts of cultural
perceptions analyzed in relation to domestic policy in the previous chapter. For instance,
reflecting his beliefs regarding mental soundness, he once noted that only nations that are
“capable of sufficient self-restraint to do nothing but that which is expedient” are capable
of self-government. When this is the case, he added, such nations exhibit “political
wisdom, political balance, [and] political self-direction.” Such measurement is wholly
subjective, and Wilson rated nation-states through the prism of his own progressive social
dynamic; though there was a certain relativity with this philosophy, it still precluded any
thought of supporting economic and political types outside the mold of capitalism and
constitutional republicanism. Mary Renda points, for example, to “the locally oriented
subsistence agriculture cherished by Haitian peasants,” which, she says, “registered with
American progressives as little more than a sign of backwardness.” It did not help that
Wilson was often not conversant with the intricacies of what in later years Wilsonian
social scientists would dub the “Third World.” Bias, stereotype, and aphorism often filled
in gaps in knowledge.\(^{11}\) A low opinion of a people alone, though, did not lead to

\(^{11}\) WW, “Democracy,” December 5, 1891, ibid., 7:358-359 (a lecture, variations of which he
presented throughout his career); Alstine, “Woodrow Wilson and the Idea of the Nation State,” 298;
intervention. It was Wilson’s belief, after all, that communities could progress if managed correctly. Rather, full sovereignty was only lost when the state apparatus was no longer geared toward progress, due to statesmanship and/or crucial institutions becoming absent or diseased. Ultimately, then, Wilson’s most important judgments rested on leaders and political and economic institutions rather than on cultures.

A people’s state lacking sovereignty did not mean simply that there were no barriers preventing any foreign meddling; rather, according to Wilson, such a situation warranted a responsible party intervening to establish a better statesman and, to some degree, system of institutions so that the people could regain their sovereignty. In Wilson’s view, his interventions targeted individuals, such as Pancho Villa in Mexico or Kaiser Wilhelm in Germany, and, on occasion, systems of governance, as well. Following the Columbus Raid by Villa’s forces in March 1916, for example, Wilson referred to Villa as a “bandit” and asserted that the expedition to be launched into Mexican territory was not “an invasion of the republic [of Mexico] or . . . an infringement of its sovereignty,” but rather “a necessary punitive measure, aimed solely at the elimination of the marauders, who raided Columbus and who infest an unprotected district near the border.” War would not come between the
two countries, he assured, “so long as sane and honourable men” remained in power. The expedition was not an act of war hysteria, in other words, but rather a medical approach to a festering infection. As Mary Renda notes, legalism, with its end goals of peace and order, has often led to violence; its eventual manifestation would be “police actions” for the globe—jargon not too far from Wilson’s thinking. Walter Hixson explains, “Despite their advocacy of peaceful internationalism, the vast majority of [Progressives] . . . prove[d] highly amenable to foreign intervention. Just as they sought to regulate capitalism through modest government trust busting and various social reforms, Progressives advocated rational management of the new empire.”

In turn, Wilson initiated more foreign interventions than most other presidents in America’s history. During his two terms in office, his administration launched several interventions intended to have some sort of transformative effect on the foreign place targeted, in some places multiple times; depending on interpretation, this list could include the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Haiti, Germany, Cuba, Panama, the USSR, Honduras, Guatemala, and perhaps more. To be clear, though, establishing order was not enough, on its own, for Wilson. He often condemned Theodore Roosevelt for focusing to

12 Furthermore, while Wilson did actively work to reform the federal state, his presidency was still part of American institutional structure; as such, the notions of class, race, gender, democracy, etc., that had become embedded in federal institutions over the years colored the tools at his disposal for foreign policy; the military, often used for nation-building and not just fighting, brought with it the weight of paternalism, and private capital, often used to spread American influence, carried with it a predatory nature. See Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 94-95; To further bolster his position regarding the Mexican Expedition, Wilson purported that the United States would be cooperating with Mexico’s General Venustiano Carranza, as Villa was a “cause of irritation to both” countries. Wilson viewed Carranza as a much more legitimate statesman for the people of Mexico (and had recognized his presidency in 1915). WW, A Statement and a Warning, March 25, 1916, *PWW* 36:364-66; Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land*, 68; Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 114-15; Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 116. Hixson continues, “No one seemed better suited to carry out progressive reform than Wilson—and no one would better symbolize the progressive penchant for foreign intervention. . . . [He] seemed the perfect embodiment of religious redemption and secular modernity,” ibid.;
such an extent on establishing order that he contented himself to see conservative regimes or dictatorships in power. For Wilson, as Mark Benbow explains, intent mattered. Force had to be calibrated toward eventual progress through the mechanisms of the progressive social dynamic.13

Ultimately, the progressive social dynamic bred the key tensions of Wilsonian foreign policy. As Malcolm Magee notes, Wilson “spoke of his policies with language appropriate to a coming peaceful millennial age while using the common tools of the present age: power and military force.” Such personal and righteous rhetoric fostered deep-seated hatred of his policies’ shortcomings. Further, as Mary Renda explains, while Wilson’s many interventions appear at first glance to be failures of his liberalism, deeper inspection shows them to be the legalistic extensions of its “hidden implications.” In this vein, Ross Kennedy asserts that Wilson’s national security strategy faltered when it sought to use power politics to end power politics. And Mark Benbow illustrates, using Mexico as an example, that other people often understood sovereignty differently than Wilson; rather than gauging sovereign rights based on the vitality of statesmen and institutions, his opponents often regarded any American meddling within their country’s borders as a national affront.14 In Wilson’s progressive world view, though, force could

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13 Wilson’s favorite poem, after all, was William Wordsworth’s “The Character of the Happy Warrior,” which beatifies a man’s moral duty to sacrifice, fight, and work with a “generous spirit” through the troubles of the world. See Memorandum by Ray Stannard Baker of a Conversation at the White House, May 12, 1916 (conversation May 11), PWW 37:37; Frederick S. Calhoun, Uses of Force and Wilsonian Foreign Policy (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1992), ix, 1-2, 9; Calhoun, Power and Principle, 250-67; Benbow, Leading Them to the Promised Land, 128.

14 Magee, What the World Should Be, 55; Renda, Taking Haiti, 114-15; Kennedy, The Will to Believe, xiii-xiv; Benbow, Leading Them to the Promised Land, 68.
bring eventual peace, power politics could end power politics, and American older brotherism was an extension rather than a quashing of the sovereignty of nations.

Wilson would carry this paradigm—that of the progressive social dynamic and its inherent antinomies—to international politics. Above all, the Great War that broke out in Europe in August 1914, revolutions in Latin America and elsewhere, and globe-shrinking technological innovations such as the telephone, confirmed for him that the era was a time of great flux that offered the world either immense promise or utter collapse—and that the United States was in the unique position to rise to moral, economic, and physical leadership. The moment was one of great, global “readjustments” that historians would be analyzing a century later, he mused, and this tumult coincided with America’s emergence as a mature power, “thorough[ly] prepar[ed] . . . to care for its own security and . . . to play the impartial rôle in this hemisphere and in the world which we all believe to have been providentially assigned to it.” With recently passed legislation, American bankers were set to “do the world’s banking,” and American capital was poised “to finance some of the chief undertakings of the world for ourselves and for others.” More than pushing mere material interests, though, America’s mission was one of elevating the global “spirit.” The United States, Wilson explained, was a “member of the family of nations” and, as such, “she” wanted nations to interact in the same way that she hoped her citizens would treat one another. She would lend her “moral influence” and contribute, with others, to collective “physical force” to erase power politics and national greed from global affairs. The obsession with seeking material advantages, Wilson pointed out, had after all led directly to the world’s current conflagration. Of prime consequence, wars had
now achieved such a scale that it would no longer be possible for a nation-state to remain neutral, just as the people of a community would not stand for a system where each citizen “had to assert his own rights by force.” Looking at the world in 1916, Wilson observed, “[W]e have not a society of nations. . . . We must have a society of nations.” Above all other nation-states the United States was in a position to act on behalf of global consciousness and community infrastructure. As Wilson wrote in the summer of 1916, America had benefited from the Great War while other states languished. “No one can doubt that the immediate future of the world will be crowded with quick changes,” he wrote:

> Every true lover of America must wish the United States to play a part in those changes. . . . Almost alone among the great nations of the world, she will be unhampered in meeting a great opportunity. . . . The opportunity is at hand, therefore, for which she has waited. Her principles are suited to the freedom of mankind and the peace of the world. She can now exemplify those principles in action with a new leadership, a new opportunity to exhibit them upon a great scale.

In October, he tied his thoughts together, averring, “America must hereafter be ready as a member of the family of nations to exert her whole force, moral and physical, to the assertion of [community members’] rights throughout the round globe.”  

15 A formalized progressive social dynamic would replace global anarchy, and America would be the older brother with the responsibility and experience to guide and shape this process. And antinomy would abound.

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The Frontier Empire

When Wilson became president in 1913, he inherited a formal territorial empire that included numerous indigenous reservations, Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Cuba (to a certain extent), and the Philippines, among other places; Arizona and New Mexico had just become states in 1912, twelve years after the conclusion of the Apache Wars. As he sought to recalibrate global politics, his first step was to forge deeper ties among those in close regional contact with the United States. For those bound by history, law, and sentiment to the United States, such as Native America and Puerto Rico, this meant a path to American citizenship. For others, such as Cuba and the Philippines, the course would be a calibrated one toward sovereign independence. Both parts would ultimately serve Wilson’s grander hope of facilitating a plural world of nation-states evolving socially toward the community consciousness of the millennium. Along the way distinctions between foreign and domestic would become hazy.

Understanding Wilson’s foreign policy must begin with the way he viewed American Indians and their tribal affiliations, assimilation, and paths to citizenship. In many ways the historical U.S. approach to its indigenous inhabitants was the starting point for the calibrated colonialism side of Wilsonianism as it entailed ranking groups on a civilizational axis, carefully offering “protection” and “reform,” teaching “self-mastery” rather than enabling dependence, and mapping out nuanced federal relationships that blurred lines of sovereignty. Wilson held romanticized notions of Native Americans, to be sure, but embedded within these beliefs was a conviction that
they could progress toward his understanding of civilization—and had been doing so, in many cases, for quite some time.

As Wilson’s phonographic speech revealed, he believed the path to Native American brotherhood lay with the severing of tribal affiliations and the adoption of an individualist ethos that would come with private (or, rather, patriarchal) ownership and liberal politics; though native cultures did not need to conform precisely to “American” ways, tribalism, in Wilson’s view, was anathema to progress as it inhibited the nurturing of self-sufficiency needed for the millennium’s universal self-rule. With the nineteenth century’s disruptions to native polities, Wilson believed, Native Americans had required “protection”; individual states had failed as their statesmen, though, as the predatory exclusion of Indian Removal evinced. Americans, being the agents of the “invasion,” had a duty, rather, to bring the “forces of the modern time”—the “saw-mill,” “the road and the mine,” “the railway,” etc.—to native peoples. “But,” Wilson cautioned, “we should go amongst them not to master them and to take what they have so long possessed, but to teach them self-mastery and the use of what they have, so that it shall indeed be their own.” This call echoed precisely his sentiments regarding African American uplift: It had to point individuals toward their own abilities, so that people put in the position of the government’s children could mature into civilizational adulthood. Wilson declared that Native Americas were, after all, “worthy as a race of the very best government could give them.”

Wilson also believed that it was interesting to study “Indian” institutions, such as Powhatan’s confederacy, even though they did not, in his understanding, influence American constitutional developments; WW, Division and Reunion, 1829-1889, 9; WW, An Address on the Cause of Berea College
Throughout his academic career, Wilson had shown a romanticized sort of respect for Native Americans that fit into his philosophy of civilization advance. He praised the “Civilized Tribes” of the South and the Iroquois Confederacy above all. By the 1830s, Wilson wrote, the Cherokee, numbering over 13,000, “had acquired a degree of civilization and of ordered self-government which rendered it impossible to deal with them as savages.” They very nearly became “a permanent independent community” within the Gulf States and so in the time of Andrew Jackson were “driven” away. His use of the word “driven” suggests that he saw moral wrong in the policies of removal; to Wilson, removal was a shame, particularly, as his wording implies, because the people affected were “civilized” and on the verge of true community sovereignty. The Cherokee, Creek, and other “civilized tribes,” Wilson later wrote, “had settled to the occupations and learned the arts of peace” and had “boasted a system of self-government and of orderly obedience to their own laws which seemed to promise, not extinction or decay or any decline of their power, but a great development and an assured permanency.” Earlier, in colonial times, the Quakers of Pennsylvania provided more appropriate statesmanship between the races, primarily because they treated the “red men” as an “equal race” and so dealt with them honestly and justly while seeing to their “speedy civilization.” Further, the natives of Pennsylvania were trained to be submissive through years of subordination to the Five Nations, or the Iroquois. The Iroquois were, in Wilson’s estimation, “the most capable and formidable anywhere to be found upon the eastern stretches of the continent.” They had an advanced, confederate style of government; in contrast to groups

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that Wilson othered simply as “redmen,” the Iroquois sat in “calm counsels” and engaged with the English in “diplomacy of the forest.” Further south, the Seminoles of Florida were among these “redmen” (despite often being considered one of the “Five Civilized Tribes”); Wilson described them as “restless” and “marauding,” conjuring associations with the so-called barbarians from Roman history that he had long studied. But, just as the Germanic tribes had advanced to great heights after association with Roman civilization, Wilson implied, so could the “restless” and “marauding” tribes of North America. Material interests had far too often trumped what in Wilson’s mind should have been the benevolent older brotherism of white Americans, and the propensity to warfare, such as with the esteemed Sitting Bull, was “tragic.”

Better policies, in Wilson’s eyes, came with the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887, or GAA. In what Theodore Roosevelt described as “a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the mass,” the GAA provided for a process of assimilation toward individual (non-tribal) land ownership coupled with the opening of reservation lands to white settlement. Crucially for Wilson in relation to his progressive philosophy, a Native American could earn American citizenship by receiving an individual allotment, or homestead, or by abandoning his/her tribe, living independently, and adopting an Americentric lifestyle. With allotment, citizenship would come at the end of a twenty-five year trustee period. By 1905 over half of the Native American population had become citizens—at least on paper. In 1906, the Burke Act amended the GAA, rendering

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citizenship automatic upon the issuance of a fee patent, providing that the Bureau of Indian Affairs judged an applicant to have the capacity to manage “his or her affairs” and had severed tribal ties. Though these policies preceded Wilson’s time in office, they were consistent with his ideology as they provided for a calibrated path toward citizenship that involved the adoption of what he termed “manly” individualism and the abandonment of other forms of association and production.

While in office, Wilson worked to continue the “normalization” of relations between Native Americans and the federal government, cementing the relationship as a civilian rather than a military one. Though he continued the policy whereby non-allotted reservation lands would be opened up to white settlement and mineral and agricultural exploitation, he also endeavored, through heavy use of executive order and the occasional signing of legislation, to expand the size of various reservations (such as the Paiute, Blackfeet, and Goshute) and to create new ones altogether (including the Kalispel, Laguna Pueblo, and Cocopah Indian Reservations and the Battle Mountain Indian Colony), particularly by recognizing the misdeeding of previous borders. It was

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19 Woodrow Wilson: Executive Order 1772, Withdrawing From the Public Domain Certain Lands in the State of California, May 6, 1913; Executive Order 1782, Adding Lands to the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona, June 2, 1913; Proclamation 1249, Fort Peck Indian Reservation, July 25, 1913; Proclamation 1252, Opening of Undisposed Lands in Lower Brule Indian Reservation, South Dakota, September 24, 1913; Proclamation 1257, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, November 12, 1913; Executive Order, Navajo Reservation, New Mexico, December 1, 1913; Proclamation 1261, Modifying the Boundaries of the Carson National Forest, New Mexico, January 4, 1914; Executive Order, Gila River Reservation, August 27, 1914; Proclamation 1282, Disposal of Lands in the Crow Indian Reservation, Montana, September 28, 1914; Proclamation 1290, Opening Lands in the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, North and South Dakota, March 18, 1915; Proclamation 1301, Opening to Settlement Lands Within the Crow Indian Reservation, July 19, 1915; Executive Order 2223, Siletz Indian Reservation, July 19, 1915; Proclamation 1311, Opening to Settlement Lands Within the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, September 17, 1915; Executive Order, Colorado River Indian Reservation, November 22, 1915; Executive Order, Former Siletz Indian Reservation, February 29, 1916; Proclamation 1330, Modifying the Boundaries
Wilson’s goal to be “wise, just, and beneficent,” after all—but through the prism of a progressive world view that imparted a certain meaning to those words that included the calibrated use of exclusion, pluralism, and assimilation. With a direct level of control over the dynamic that he certainly wished he had elsewhere, he continued the tradition of appointing tribes’ “chiefs,” or statesmen, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Furthermore, as he said in his phonographic address, some Native Americans were moving beyond tribal politics and attaining positions within the federal government. When the nomination of the “Negro,” Adam Patterson, for Register of the Treasury fell through, in fact, Wilson successfully appointed Gabe Parker, a man of Choctaw ancestry, in his place. With personal success stories such as Parker’s and with the Native American birth rate finally exceeding its death rate, Native Americans, in the words of BIA Commissioner Cato Sells, were “no longer a dying race.”

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The Great War, above all, shaped the Wilson administration’s “Indian” policies regarding assimilation and citizenship. Not long after his war message, Wilson called on the nation to feed itself and others, and many Americans, in turn, looked to what they perceived as wasted land in Indian reservations. BIA Commissioner Cato Sells seized the situation as an opportunity to effect what he described as the “final solution to the Indian problem” by ending “guardianship over all competent Indians . . . giving even closer attention to the incompetent that they may more speedily achieve competency.” Through an expanded push to homestead, Sells argued, Native Americans would learn self-sufficiency and rise above the stagnation that was wrought by being wards of the state. Meanwhile, the war left the United States with over 10,000 Native American veterans; in 1919, Wilson signed legislation that provided for those who had been discharged honorably to become citizens automatically upon application. (Only in 1924, though, under Warren G. Harding and contrary to Wilsonian calibration, did all Native Americans receive nominal citizenship.)

In comparison to Native American policy, Wilson’s dealings with Cuba and Puerto Rico present a seeming riddle at first: He never wavered in his support for Cuban independence while he strongly pushed for Puerto Rican citizenship. Although

Democratic Party politics certainly had something to do with the difference, Wilson’s progressive world view was the deciding factor in the way he separated the places. The Platt Amendment of 1901 had provided for future Cuban independence but with the right for the United States to intervene politically, economically, and/or militarily; it also provided a calibrated framework for the withdrawal of American troops. For a time Cuba was to be essentially a self-governing colony. Wilson’s language regarding Cuba shows that he considered it to be an independent nation, worthy of the kind of sovereignty that he projected onto every nation-state: A functioning progressive social dynamic, including a viable statesman and institutions, meant sovereignty; anything less required the dutiful intervention of a power in the position to fill the gap and right the ship. Cuba, to Wilson, was a foreign country with which the United States held treaties—and it was those treaties that created the legal basis for intervention. Content with the constitutional system established in Cuba, in 1917 the United States would intervene in order to quell revolutionary activity and oversee elections; in Wilson’s mind, the progressive dynamic in Cuba simply needed to take hold as Cubans became habituated to democratic rather than revolutionary transfers of power.22

Wilson referred to Puerto Rico, meanwhile, in the same way that he spoke of Hawaii and Alaska—as a U.S. territory. In a way, Puerto Rico was, in fact, already its own “reservation.” In June 1916 the impetus grew in Congress to push through a bill that would grant citizenship to Puerto Ricans; Wilson avidly pushed for its success and

ultimately signed the Jones-Shafroth Act into law in March 1917. The following month he wrote to Puerto Rico’s federally appointed governor (and his former Johns Hopkins classmate), Arthur Yager, that he took “great pleasure” in removing “the last legal barrier between Americans and Porto Ricans. . . . The United States has complied with an obligation of justice. The people of Porto Rico have now the name, privileges and responsibilities of all other citizens of the United States. We welcome the new citizen, not as a stranger, but as one entering his father’s house.” Considering the paternalism apparent in his comment, it is perhaps surprising that Wilson moved for citizenship for all Puerto Ricans while keeping with the allotment system’s calibrated approach for Native Americans, who he referred to as brothers. For one, though, Puerto Rican society did not have, as far as Wilson knew, any sort of stagnating tribal ties to break up. Further, as Secretary of War Newton Baker informed Wilson, José de Diego, a prominent Puerto Rican independence leader, lawyer, poet, and politician, had been visiting the various Caribbean states touting a “union of the Antilles” that would orient those countries around Spain. Doing so would have muddled Wilson’s grander views for regional integration, discussed in the following section, which called for benevolent U.S.-American statesmanship and opposition to European ties. As Baker explained, granting the Puerto Ricans citizenship would deflate de Diego’s cause.\(^\text{23}\) Thus, because of the lack of legal obstacles, the absence of tribal ties, close association with the United States, and

\(^{23}\) It also did not hurt that citizenship paved the way for the drafting of Puerto Ricans for the United States’ World I War I cause, through the Selective Service Act which Congress passed two months later. 20,000 Puerto Ricans would serve their new nation-state in the war; WW to Sen. John Franklin Shafroth, the White House, July 6, 1916, ibid. 37:369; Newton Diehl Baker to WW, Washington, July 21, 1916, ibid. 455-56; WW to Baker, the White House, July 24, 1916, ibid. 469; WW to Thomas Davies Jones, the White House, November 15, 1916, ibid., 38:649; WW to Arthur Yager, the White House, April 1, 1917, ibid., 41:515-16.
the protection of Pan-American goals, Wilson would advocate and win Puerto Rican citizenship; in contrast, Cuba would face the blurring of its sovereignty and a pattern of American intervention geared, at least in Wilson’s eyes, to fine tune its social dynamic so that it could ultimately progress on its own.

Situated on the other side of the globe from the Caribbean and Native North America, meanwhile, the Philippines presented a unique extension of the American frontier. Interestingly, as technology made the world smaller and Wilson sought greater hemispheric integration, he worked to loosen direct U.S. control in far-flung places. In 1913, he uttered, “[T]he Philippines are our frontier now. We don’t know what is going on out there, and I presently hope to deprive ourselves of that frontier.” Wilson felt so out of touch with goings-on in the Philippines that before he took office he dispatched to the islands a confidante, Henry Jones Ford, to “study the people politically, socially, [and] ethnologically.” Ford landed in Manila in March and sent his formal report later that year, in September. Ultimately, Wilson decided on a calibrated path toward guaranteed independence for the distant edge of America’s frontier. Along with a general lack of knowledge in America about the Philippines, the Philippine War for Independence had become unpopular with the American public. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt had declared, “We shall have to be prepared for giving the islands independence of a more or less complete type much sooner than I think advisable.” Wilson would follow a similar path. Content that the islands had achieved a practicable level of order, he also convinced himself that the Filipino political elite had grown ready to govern, that a loose, pluralistic sort of community consciousness now bound the peoples of the Philippines, and that
Filipino social institutions allowed for millennial progress; further, with ever-strengthening internationalist designs, he realized that Filipino independence was a matter of public image and responsibility for the United States. Ultimately, the Jones Bill formally promised eventual independence for the Philippines while readjusting its federal connections to the United States and providing a calibrated path toward sovereignty. By the time Wilson left office, though, the Philippines still remained under the United States and would continue in that position until after World War II.²⁴

According to the dimensions of Wilson’s progressive philosophy, as part one of the dissertation explained, different kinds of power and order—statesmanship and institutions—had to be properly adjusted to the maturity of the people in question, particularly in their ability to engage in fruitful and enlightened public discussion; such was the key to progress. When Wilson first observed the Philippines during the initial American conquest and early stages of the occupation, he perceived peoples who needed discipline before they could develop democracy. In a 1901 lecture, he declared, “They can have liberty no cheaper than we got it. They must first take the discipline of law, must first love order and instinctively yield to it.” Discipline would nurture peaceable, stable habits that could then be utilized for a later, democratic readjustment. Echoing Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden*, Wilson added, “We are old in this learning and must be their tutors,” explaining that the United States needed to ensure that “the law which teaches them obedience is just law and even-handed.” Such well-adjusted colonial

statesmanship would “infinitely shorten” the Filipinos’ “painful tutelage.” Both parties had a duty toward one another, and both had potential for greatness or failure: “We must govern as those who learn; and they must obey as those who are in tutelage. They are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice. . . . But though children must be foolish, impulsive, headstrong, [and] unreasonable, men may be arbitrary, self-opinionated, impervious, [and] impossible.” Crucially, learning and progress was possible in this formulation.\(^\text{25}\)

By the time Wilson took office, Filipino-American affairs had mostly passed from the military to the civil. A graduated paternalism was clear in the nature of the federal relationship: In the colony’s bicameral system, the upper house consisted of the Philippine Commission, a nine-member body including the governor-general, all of whom were appointed by the U.S. president; in 1913, only one secretary was Filipino. The lower house, or Philippine Assembly, was popularly elected by those literate in English or Spanish. The Commission had legislative and some executive power, and it alone represented the non-Christian populations, such as the Muslim Moros. Wilson and his confidante, Henry Jones Ford, believed that a calculated path toward Filipino self-rule and the ending or reconfiguration of the Philippine Commission were appropriate; establishing a precise timetable would be a mistake, though, for the United States, as statesman, needed to actively assess the development of the public mind in the Philippines and adjust the adolescent nation-state’s power relationship with the United

States accordingly. It was as if the Philippines had moved from childhood into adolescence. When Wilson’s new governor-general, Francis Burton Harrison, arrived in Manila, he carried a message from the president that sought to reassure the population that the United States was working as “trustees” and would grant independence in steps through a process of “preparation.” Above all, the people would need to prove their expanding democratic abilities and their broadening community feeling.

Wilson’s administration would tout a process of Filipinization for the islands—of incrementally granting self-control of various institutions. Part of the reason Wilson felt the Filipinos were ready for advanced Filipinization by 1913 was that they had by that point experienced over ten years of American education, training, and political programs. At the time of Wilson’s election, the Philippines boasted 3,660 schools with American teachers and thousands of Filipino teachers trained by Americans. Their elites were ready to be statesmen, especially revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo, who maintained a correspondence with Wilson and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. Furthermore, Ford had expressed to Wilson that the people of the Philippines were “very different from any people of color with whom the people of the United States are acquainted,” more Asian than African and more Western than Asian. Spanish colonialism had long acquainted the Filipinos with the stabilizing, ethical, and progressive force of Christianity. Much to Wilson’s delight, Ford also reported that Filipino culture strongly valued the family institution. A major pillar of Filipinization, in turn, would be to allow

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the Filipinos increasing means to prove themselves. The first step of Wilson’s “trusteeship” would be to give Filipinos a majority in the commission. As Wilson explained, this upper house power would create “immediate proof” of “the political capacity of those native citizens” leading their people. Still, full elections would be, in War Secretary Lindley Garrison’s words, “radical” for a population not yet habituated to democratic order and processes and cumbersome for a state still without a modern infrastructure. Though this policy revealed a fairly paternalistic attitude, its advocates stood in stark contrast to other, more pessimistic Americans who believed, as Paul Kramer notes, that “Filipinos without U.S. supervision would prove corrupt, incompetent, exploitative, and even savage as a ‘self-governing’ people.” It likely did not hurt that educated Filipinos largely celebrated Wilson’s electoral victory in 1912 and showered him with messages of hope and praise, nor that Aguinaldo assured Wilson that Filipinos post-independence would continue to seek the guidance of Americans and would keep English in the curriculum; this was evidence of sound, sober thinking in Wilson’s view. Wilson wrote to Governor-General Harrison in March 1915, “The people of the Islands have already proved their quality and in nothing more than in the patience and self control they have manifested in waiting for the fulfillment of our promises.” In the same month, he wrote to Manuel Quezón, the Philippines Resident Commissioner to the U.S. House of Representatives, that the Filipinos would shortly prove that they were “a people capable of self-possession and self-government” if they merely continued their “moderate and constitutional course.”

Along with ruling and institutional ability, another grave concern with Filipinization was the strength of community feeling in the Philippines; before the Philippines could be a modern state, in Wilson’s philosophy, it had to be a nation—otherwise its social dynamic could not effectively operate. In 1901, Wilson had said in reference to the Philippines, “You cannot call a miscellaneous people, unknit, scattered, diverse of race and speech and habit, a nation, a community.” America had gained its community consciousness organically, and, likewise, the Philippines could not simply will themselves a community. “They are of many races,” he continued, “of many stages of development, economically, socially, politically disintegrate, without community of feeling because without community of life, contrasted alike in experience and in habit, having nothing in common except that they have lived for hundreds of years under” Spanish colonial rule that “arrested their development.” Secretary Garrison echoed these thoughts in 1913, writing to Wilson that “there are at least forty islands large enough to consider separate consideration; perhaps thirty different languages spoken; and something like thirty different strains of blood among the people. An approximation to homogeneity of purpose will be necessary before a cohesive federal government, independent of all other governments, could have hope of success.” Ford worked to allay many of these fears in his 98-page report to Wilson, having learned that Spanish made a
better federal, or intergroup, language than English; that the literacy rate was actually 80 to 90 percent if it took into account proficiency in any language; that language differences were no greater than some European nation-states’ regional dialects; that the United States had created a currency system and a network of roads; that the Filipino struggle against Spain had already created a strong basis for unifying sentiment; that intertribal rivalries had been grossly overstated; and that the only group to worry about, the militaristic, Muslim Moros, could be easily handled with modern weaponry. Ford, Aguinaldo, and others pointed out to Wilson that Switzerland’s pluralistic federal model would work well in the Philippines—a decentralized federation without language conformity. Ford stressed that Filipino self-government did not have to conform perfectly to America’s “theoretical views” and that the people were certainly prepared for something along the Swiss lines. His call for the United States to be mindful to develop institutions in line with Filipino customs squared comfortably with the philosophy of institutional evolution that Wilson had long espoused.\(^\text{28}\)

One other concern with the Philippines, in addition to democratic ability and community consciousness, was the continuance of a pre-colonial social arrangement the Spanish had dubbed caciquism. In essence, this was a patron-client structure for village life that to progressive Americans resembled bossism or tribalism—two social structures they believed stagnated progress through the quashing of personal initiative. As he

assumed the presidency, Wilson had already tackled city bosses in New Jersey and he was working to break tribalism in the United States. Ford reported, though, that caciquism in the Philippines was more a sort of feudal-manorialism and that societies with similar institutions elsewhere in the world had still been able to adopt constitutional forms of government and make social progress.\textsuperscript{29} In Wilson’s mind, this meant that the Philippines were closer to self-sovereignty than was tribal America.

Outside of concerns about the Philippines’ own evolution toward self-government, Wilson’s Philippines policy also drew from his progressive philosophy in another way—in assessing how the American relationship with the Philippines would affect the image of American statesmanship as he strove for liberal progressive integration in the Americas and globally. If the United States were to represent democratic progress for all peoples, after all, it would need to be “wise and beneficent” toward its largest colony. Promising the Philippines ultimate self-governance was of crucial importance, Wilson wrote, because it “touch[es] the world situation.” As bills guaranteeing the Philippines’ eventual independence and granting Puerto Ricans citizenship sat in Congress in late 1915, Wilson declared to Congress, “Our treatment of them and their attitude toward us are manifestly of the first consequence in the development of our duties in the world and in getting a free hand to perform those duties. We must be free from every unnecessary burden or embarrassment; and there is no better way to be clear of embarrassment than to fulfil our promises and promote the interests of

those dependent on us to the utmost.” Lowering the flag in Cuba, Wilson said the following year, had made Americans proud and had only given more power to the flag and what it symbolized, showing that that it stood for “the rights of mankind.”

With concerns about Filipino development assuaged and with the desire to cast a favorable sheen on America’s image, Wilson put his weight behind the Jones Bill. This bill, which promised eventual independence for the Philippines while setting a series of benchmarks, worked its way through Congress in 1914 and 1915 and finally met Wilson’s approving pen in August 1916. Such action had long been part of the Democrats’ agenda and had been the cause for celebrations throughout the Philippines upon the party’s victories in 1912. As Kramer explains, under the original 1914 drafting, which Manuel Quezón, penned,

[T]he president would continue to appoint a governor-general and Philippine Supreme Court justices, but all other legislative authority would reside in a bicameral elected legislature, subject to the vetoes of the governor-general and the president. A census would be held in 1925 and every decade following; when 60 percent of adult Filipino males were literate in English, or 75 percent literate in any language, and peace, order, and financial responsibility were recognized by U.S. authorities, a referendum on independence would be conducted and a constitutional convention held in the case of its passage.

Republicans, for their part, staunchly opposed the bill because of its preamble, which made the promise of independence, arguing that Filipinization had degraded governmental efficiency in the islands; their most recent president, William Howard Taft, even spoke out strongly against the bill by using Wilson’s own academic writings (in

which he cast the Filipinos as unfit to rule) against him. For his part, Wilson believed amendments to the bill that called for greater self-rule to be “too much too soon,” but being that the moment was there to act—with both houses of Congress and the Democratic Party as a whole pushing for the bill—he chose to forge ahead. The situation in the Philippines was close enough to his liking that, he said, he could “get behind it with a great deal of genuine conviction.” If he had been unable to square the legislation with his progressive philosophy, political considerations alone would not have been enough for him to support the bill.31

Wilson’s Philippines policy left his administration with a conflicted legacy. The nation-state did not achieve independence until 1946, thirty years after the passage of the Jones Act. Kramer believes that calibrated colonialism in the Philippines was part of a hegemonic design to retain power over the islands. The “imperial benchmarks” that Wilson helped to establish facilitated a pattern of “deferred independence” that certainly maintained U.S. power over its colony. When Wilson made one last call for the

Philippines’ sovereignty, in his outgoing presidential address in 1920, he still spoke of calibration rather than national self-determination. And, as Republican administrations took power, they found ways to manipulate the benchmarks in order to maintain America’s control of the islands. Yet, while Wilson certainly would have approved of a slightly longer “education” for the Filipinos, he clearly did not want to retain the Philippines ad infinitum. Rather, as with the entrenchment of racism and racial hegemony that came with Jim Crow segregation despite Wilson’s hopes, calibrated colonialism prolonged U.S. imperial control despite his millennial intentions. More important globally, the work involving Filipinization was transformative for Wilson, as it bolstered his faith in the power of “progressive” intervention, proved to him that it was now “America’s era,” and bolstered him with a personal pride and the adulation of grateful Filipinos that would spirit him to Versailles.  

Pan-American Progressive Regionalism

As Wilson worked on depriving the United States of its frontier of old, he endeavored to facilitate the birth of a new North and South American order that would very loosely federalize relations between the otherwise independent and sovereign constitutional nation-states of the Americas, creating mechanisms, in his thinking, though which interstate millennial consciousness could take root; the process of doing so,

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though, would lead to as much violence—or intervention—as the frontier conquests of earlier years. The fundamental thrust of Wilson’s Pan-American vision was concomitantly to curb violence and promote constitutional democracy, capitalism, and other forms of “progress” both between and within member nation-states. Those states with stable democracies, largely self-controlled and burgeoning economies, and a dash of military power were to center the process—the United States, above all, followed by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and some other South American republics; at the other end of the spectrum would sit states subject to the intervention of “older brothers”—principally Mexico and the Caribbean nations. While Mark Gilderhus separates Wilson’s Pan-American initiatives into two categories—“coercion in the form of military intervention and cajolery based on notions of Pan Americanism”—both approaches reflect the same overall goal: progressive internationalism for the Americas. This section will illustrate that Americans including Wilson perceived parts of the Americas as having distinct levels of social maturity; that, despite any such differences, Wilson believed that the Americas constituted a neighborhood or family; that he held that growing connections, if managed correctly, could uplift the politics, morals, economies, science, etc., of all involved; and that Pan-American “citizenship” brought with it the rights and duties of citizens and statesmen, which meant, as in the previous chapter, discipline and uplift, exclusion and assimilation. As Gilderhus points out, Pan-Americanism “actually anticipated broader U.S. involvement in Latin American affairs.”  

33 Gilderhus, “ Revolution, War, and Expansion,” 165, 171; Alonso Aguilar, Pan-Americanism
During the “Progressive Era,” American interventions in Latin America occurred in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean only. Although geographical proximity certainly played a role in increasing U.S. sensitivity to its close neighbors, many Americans also perceived greater progress and potential self-progress in South America; Wilson’s secretary of state, Robert Lansing, for instance, said that the Caribbean states required “more intimate direction” than did the republics of South America. Through the later 1800s and early 1900s, Americans especially found parallels between the Temperate South (Chile, Argentina, etc.) and the “settling” of the West; though the pace of “development”—such as in railroad expansion—did not usually meet Americans’ expectations, there were clear signs of Americentric progress. The completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 and the Pan-American push in the 1910s, above all, brought a heightened U.S.-American awareness of Latin America, with an explosion of economic, diplomatic, military, scientific, religious, literary, and philosophical texts flooding the United States. Three former arguments about South America—“economic backwardness, cultural simplicity, and political immaturity”—began to give way; in 1913, Theodore Roosevelt even announced to the Argentineans that they had achieved maturity, South America had advanced to “sisterhood,” and some individual states (particularly those with some military power) were men. No longer did racial miscegenation or the Catholic Church, apparently, doom South America to backwardness.34

For Wilson, then, the moment was possible for a push for Pan-American integration. Early in his presidency he told House that (in House’s words) “the time had come when this nation should cease to assume a guardianship over its sister republics and to ask them to come into partnership.” The Wilson administration attended and organized many conferences and expositions promoting Pan-American connections—commercial, scientific, etc.—but the centerpiece of Wilsonian Pan-Americanism was the proposed Pan-American Pact. With Wilson and William Jennings Bryan’s State Department spearheading the initiative, the pact in its original form called for four things: the constitutional republics of the Americas to guarantee each other’s “territorial integrity” and “independence”; arbitration for any ongoing territorial disputes; control of munitions sales between members; and the implementation of a “permanent international commission” to arbitrate, before resort to warfare, any future tensions that traditional diplomacy would fail to solve. By design, the administration would work primarily with the ABC powers—Argentina, Brazil, and Chile—to try to implement this progressive dynamic over the Americas. (Wilson had little to say about Canada—still squarely under the British Crown—or its possible role in the pact.) Through the Pact and other forms of association, Wilson hoped, a great new spirit would emerge from the Americas, one to separate it from—and redeem—the Old World. Close association in the Americas, marked most symbolically with the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, signified, in

Wilson’s words, a new “chapter” in world history.\textsuperscript{35} In its conception, then, Wilson’s Pan-Americanism was just as important an update to the Monroe Doctrine as was the Roosevelt Corollary; only in retrospect does it seem not as consequential, largely because the pact failed and the foreign policy as it played out on the ground did not look too very different from Roosevelt’s.

On the ninth day of his presidency, March 12, 1913, Wilson issued a statement on Latin American relations in which he said that one of the goals of his administration would be friendly relations with “our sister republics of Central and South America.” In speeches and proclamations to follow over the next several years, he repeated the same message: The Americas now, more than ever, constituted a neighborhood, or a family of nations, and so needed to exist as a true community—to the benefit of all involved. This was possible, after all, among states now sibling to one another. Wilson repeatedly reiterated that the ties that were forming transcended mere commerce—though ties of capitalist competition were indeed healthy. While the Panama Canal physically split the two continents, Wilson mused, it drew them closer together “spiritually,” and it was such “spiritual union,” he averred, that should be sought above all. The states of Latin America had faced immense burdens over the years, including the granting of foreign concessions, but yet they still progressed, Wilson noted in October 1913. Using terminology connoting citizenship and sovereignty, he declared, “The dignity, the courage, the self-possession,

\textsuperscript{35} He repeated these thoughts to Ray Stannard Baker in a 1916 interview, see A Memorandum by Ray Stannard Baker of a Conversation at the White House with WW, May 12, 1916 (Conversation May 11), \textit{PWW} 37:37; House to Lansing, New York, October 12, 1915, ibid., 35:54; WW to Edith Bolling Galt, August 12, 1915, ibid., 34:179; WW to Bryan, the White House, January 29, 1915, ibid., 32:159; WW, An Address on Latin American Policy, 5th Annual Convention of the Southern Commercial Congress, Mobile, Alabama, October 27, 1913, ibid., 28:449.
the self-respect of the Latin-American states, their achievements in the face of all these adverse circumstances, deserve nothing but the admiration and applause of the world.” The United States should extend true amity to these emerging nation-states, proving to be their “friends and champions, upon terms of equality and honor.” Speaking two years later, after Europe had devolved into mass murder, Wilson stated that the conflagration across the Atlantic proved more strongly than ever the need for the states of the Americas to recognize truly “what it means to be neighbors.”

36 In the interests of forging a community of spirit, Wilson was adamant that relationships between the United States and other American states not be defined by material interests; doing so was “unfair” to the other nations and degrading to one’s own nation, he explained. If he truly sought his conception of the millennium—and his academic and political careers clearly illustrate that he did—then his commentary here was sincere (though possibly misguided, as we will see below). He pledged that the United States would never take “one additional foot of territory by conquest” (and by his reckoning held to this promise) and worked to discourage American investors from acting predatorily in other countries. Simply spreading the values of individualism—democracy and capitalism—would benefit everyone, economically as well as spiritually: “[W]e shall not be poor if we love liberty, because that nation that loves liberty truly sets every man free to do his best and be his best, and that means the release of all the splendid energies of a great people who think for themselves.” In private correspondence, he remarked that

he found that diplomats left over from the Taft administration’s “Dollar Diplomacy” far too focused on promoting “the material interests of individuals of the United States” rather than “moral and public considerations” and were scarcely able to understand what he and Bryan intended to do with foreign policy. He wanted, for instance, to offer Columbia $20 million to make amends for mistakes in the way the United States wrested control of the Panama Canal region; he believed that doing so would provide the United States moral legitimacy at a mere material cost. (Congress blocked the plan.) Historians have noted clear contradictions between Wilson’s proclamations and the way his foreign policy extended American business interests, with Gilderhus even saying that Wilson declared “economic war” on Latin America, but Wilson, it seems, truly believed that his plan for Pan-American association would bring benefit to all involved while reigning in the selfishness of both American businesses and foreign leaders.37

More deeply, Wilson believed that a healthy, balanced interconnection would elevate the Zeitgeist—stoking the “public mind” of the emerging Pan-American social dynamic. In March 1915, aboard an Argentine warship built by the New York Shipbuilding Co., he said, “The great advantage of intermixture, not only of actual intermixture of blood, but of constant intercourse between nations, is that there grows up a common understanding. . . . I believe that the modern world is preparing us for this understanding and comradeship by its extraordinarily increased means of intercommunication.” Even science would benefit and, more importantly, be a vehicle for

37 WW, An Address on Latin American Policy, 5th Annual Convention of the Southern Commercial Congress, Mobile, Alabama, October 27, 1913, ibid., 28:450-52; WW To Charles William Eliot, the White House, September 17, 1913, ibid., 280; Gilderhus, “Revolution, War, and Expansion,” 171; Gildherus, Pan American Visions, 2; Knock, To End All Wars, 43.
interconnection, helping to instigate a mutual spirit. Directly conjuring the millennial future and the transformative nature of the era as it connected to Pan-American solidarity, he uttered,

It seems to me that this is a day of infinite hope, of confidence in a future greater than the past has been; for I am faint to believe that, in spite of all the things that we wish to correct, the nineteenth century that now lies behind us has brought us a long stage toward the time when, slowly ascending the tedious climb that leads to the final uplands, we shall get our ultimate view of the duties of the mankind. We have breasted a considerable part of that climb and shall, presently—it may be in a generation or two—come out upon those great heights where there shines, unobstructed, the light of the justice of God.38

If the Americas were to organize the community that was already naturally forming, Wilson reasoned, then the involvement of non-regional states in the affairs of the Americas needed to abate; this meant giving increased weight and an updated form to the Monroe Doctrine. As Lloyd Ambrosius explains, one of Pan-Americanism’s purposes was “to insulate the Western Hemisphere from the Old World’s problems.” America would stand to lose if a foreign power made military or economic gains in what had traditionally been its sphere. Fearful of German

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intrigues in Mexico Wilson said in 1916, “Nobody seriously supposes . . . that the United States needs to fear an invasion of its own territory. What America has to fear, if she has anything to fear, are indirect, roundabout, flank movements upon her regnant position in the western hemisphere.” In the Caribbean, Wilson’s administration made Haiti guarantee that it would not turn over the useful port, Môle-Saint-Nicolas, to any foreign power. In Mexico, Wilson said, General Huerta’s receiving of overseas assistance to help his grab for power amounted to a foreign invasion and a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Even American citizens, Wilson declared, could invest in foreign enterprise only “with the understanding that our nation’s interest in the advancement of these countries and in their working out of a great destiny, is greater than in any possible profits that may come from such investments.” Even the growth of Japanese power required a “vigilant eye.”

Crucially, though, U.S.-American protectionism through the Monroe Doctrine transcended, for Wilson, mere power politics, as he equated the greater national interest with millennial advance.

More fundamentally, European and Japanese penetration of the Americas would have confused what Wilson saw as the emerging Pan-American social dynamic; there would have been competing sources of statesmanship, some from outside the Americas, throwing the dynamic off-kilter and thus inefficient and stagnant—or even regressive. In the same vein, Wilson opposed José de Diego’s Union of the Antilles in the Caribbean, which would have expanded the role in the Americas of what he perceived as a degraded

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and anachronistic Spanish Crown. He also balked at a Pan-Hispanic alternative, led by
Mexico and Argentina, that would have separated the Pan-American community into,
essentially, exclusionary castes and deflated American hegemony—or its role as premier
statesman. Traditional U.S. hegemony in the Americas could be transformed into healthy
statesmanship; competing associations, in turn, would have to be cast aside lest the
neighborhood devolve into cliques.  

When Wilson called for a new relationship between the United States and its
“sister republics,” he also said, “Cooperation is possible only when supported at every
turn by the orderly processes of just government based upon law, not upon arbitrary or
irregular force.” Association, or Pan-American citizenship, in other words, could only be
premised on a certain type of order existing not only between the member states but also
within each of them; thus, built into the fabric of regionalism was interventionism. In the
emerging dynamic, states or institutions that did not fit the mold would be rendered
criminal and subject to corrective measures: “We shall lend our influence of every kind,”
Wilson declared, “to the realization of these principles in fact and practice, knowing that
disorder, personal intrigue and defiance of constitutional rights weaken and discredit
government and injure none so much as the people who are unfortunate enough to have
their common life and their common affairs so tainted and disturbed.” While the United
States would be sincerely devoted to peace, criminals disturbed the peace and would have
to be rehabilitated: In 1885, he had written that democracy had to that point proven to be

40 Newton Diehl Baker to WW, Washington, July 21, 1916, ibid., 37:455-56; Gilderhus, Pan
American Visions, 179.
a “mere maddening draught to the South American states,” and later he remarked, “I am going to teach the South American Republics to elect good men.”

Wilson’s Mexico policy quickly established the pattern that he had announced. When he received word that Huerta had moved to dissolve Mexico’s Congress and otherwise endeavored to establish dictatorial power, he wrote to the powers of the world that Huerta had overturned constitutional order in Mexico and was working “to convert that nation into a limited despotism in which force shall dominate regardless of either the wishes or the interests of the people.” As such, Wilson implied, Huerta was statesman of neither Mexico’s institutions nor, more importantly, its people. American intervention was necessary, then, and such intervention would, in Wilson’s thinking, restore Mexican sovereignty, not destroy it: “The government which, by reason of its position, is and must continue to be of paramount influence in the Western Hemisphere, cannot, without a sacrifice of its grave responsibilities, permit the ambitions of one man or a group of men to check the upward progress of a sister republic or the development of its civilization. The people of Mexico have a right to determine their own destiny and they have intimated no desire to turn from the path of civilization back to the instruments and methods of barbarism.” Huerta spurned American offers of mediation, “prov[ing] to the world how utterly impossible it is for him to conceive or construct a government in keeping with modern times.” Wilson’s administration then sponsored a counterrevolution in Mexico, subsequently getting drawn into naval and marine engagements in 1914.

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before Huerta fled the country; the pattern for American involvement would be set, and America would fall ever more deeply into Mexican affairs as their civil war continued. As Thomas Knock explains, Wilson was very aware that his interventions seemed to go against his pronouncements but saw the interventions as unavoidable in the current way of doing things; the Pact, though, would remove “the cause of those problems that, in his thinking, compelled him to do violence to his own words.”

For Wilson, the initial question in trying to establish the Pact involved with whom to work. From the first, the idea was to deal with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, to negotiate terms with them and gain their compliance, and then to present the plan, jointly, to the rest of the eligible American states. The ABC states, after all, were those that had conformed most closely to Americentric expectations of development. Brazil topped the list and was, for a while, the only Latin American state to receive an ambassador—the others receiving only ministers; by the summer of 1914 the ABCs and the United States

42 For a much fuller analysis of Wilson’s Mexico policies as they related to covenant theology, see Benbow, Leading Them to the Promised Land, particularly Chapter 6, “Carranza or Villa? The Question of Recognition, July-December 1914,” pp. 78-98, which discusses image and perception; WW, A Draft of a Circular Note to the Powers, Washington, October 24, 1913, PWW 28:431; WW, A Draft of an Address to Congress, c. October 31, 1913, ibid., 479-81; WW, A Draft of a Circular Note to the Powers, November 7, 8, 10, 1913, ibid., 502-04; WW to EAW, the White House, September 28, 1913, ibid., 334; Knock, To End All Wars, 84.
all shared ambassadors with one another. House, Wilson’s trusted backroom diplomat, met ABC representatives the same way he did with European statesmen. Relations were similar to those with Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Norway, Belgium, and Great Britain—from one mature citizen to another.43

Having identified an ABC-oriented strategy, Wilson then moved on to questions of how to deal with the Mexican situation and Chilean territorial concerns—topics that became interwoven primarily because of their import to sovereignty in the face of internationalism. From the opening of negotiations, Argentina and Brazil mostly backed the Pact’s provisions, with some minor requests for fine-tuning, the most significant being Brazilian worries about arbitration terms. Chile, more protective of its sovereignty, raised reservations over arbitration procedures, the stipulation that member states maintain republican forms of government, and the call to respect members’ territorial integrity. It had an ongoing border dispute with Peru and wished to see the Pact more as a mutualized Monroe Doctrine that kept out hemispheric outsiders but did not police between member states. As negotiations dragged on, Wilson believed that a good way to prove the efficacy of collaboration, illustrate American sincerity, and solve some thorny national interests was to refer the U.S.-Mexican dispute to ABC arbitration, an option he first considered in 1913 and moved ahead with in 1915 following an altercation involving

43 Pan-Americanism had a long and varied history before Wilson, stretching back to the days of Simón Bolívar and nineteenth century decolonization; formal “Conferences of American States” began in Washington, D.C., in 1889 and were primarily trade-oriented. The Pan-American Pact as Wilson’s administration proposed it, though, marked a turning moment in Pan-Americanism, and the idea grew out of his own progressive philosophy, precedent, and the lobbying of similarly-minded individuals such as Representative James Slayden (D- Texas) and Andrew Carnegie; Knock, To End All Wars, 39; Gilderhus, “Revolution, War, and Expansion,” 172; From the Diary of Colonel House, January 13, 1915, PW 32:64; WJB to Page, Washington, November 9, 1913, ibid., 28:516.
American sailors in Tampico and the subsequent American occupation of Veracruz. As House explained to Wilson, using Americans with interests in Mexico to support national policy on the ground (as had been a standard approach) would prove folly and anathema to Wilsonian goals; the two options that remained were unilateral American action and ABC involvement. An ABC-oriented conference held in Niagara Falls, Ontario, presented Wilson with the ability to deflate the situation in Mexico without a further occupation or invasion. Wilson wrote to his girlfriend, Edith Bolling Galt (Ellen had died in August 1914), that the United States could now be seen as neither being selfish nor aggressive—nor “even playing Big Brother to the hemisphere too arrogantly.” Though the conference proved a minor success, the Pact still failed to come to fruition, partly because of continued Chilean foot-dragging. House pointed out to Wilson that there were other “larger South American Republics” of use; Wilson later described some of these as “B.U.G.”—Bolivia, Uruguay, and Guatemala (despite Guatemala, in fact, being in Central America). By 1916, though, Wilson and House had deemed Chile too important to abandon, particularly as it had a long and formal friendship with Brazil and because, as House wrote in his diary, Wilson “prefer[red] the Pact to fail rather than do an injustice to one of the smaller nations; since the whole pact was based upon mutual good will and justice he did not wish to start it with a palpable injustice.” As the United States grew increasingly involved in European wartime diplomacy and Wilson looked to the transformative peace to come, his administration placed renewed emphasis on the Pact, with House saying it would be “epoch making” and Wilson declaring that there was a “psychological moment” to set a precedent for the world. In a sign of foreboding, one of
the main causes of the Pan-American Pact’s failure was the same thing that doomed Versailles: the relationship between territorial disputes, sovereignty, and international law. Another inherent issue—the problem of American image as legalism led to the use of force—would hurt Wilson’s cause, especially as he sent the Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916 to pursue Pancho Villa’s forces.44

Where the hemisphere saw the most paternalistic and interventionist extensions of Pan-American Wilsonianism was on the island of Hispaniola—the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Wilson saw his administration’s policy in the Dominican Republic (a country that saw American fighting in 1914 and an eight-year Marine occupation beginning in 1916) as exemplary and its role in Haiti (which saw a nineteen-year Marine occupation begin in 1914) as a more complicated application of the Dominican approach. In both “small republics,” as House termed them, Wilson saw a propensity to rebellion that threatened all stability—not only jeopardizing American interests, but, more deeply, quashing all possibility for progress and creating an opening for Old World intrusions. In both places, Wilson’s solution was a strong presence where he expressed a desire not to be too heavy-handed but to use the pathways of calibrated colonialism to provide the countries with his conception of sovereignty. It is in these countries, above all, that the

pluralism inherent in Wilsonian Pan-Americanism would be illustrated: Lacking sovereignty, Haiti and the Dominican Republic had a different kind of Pan-American citizenship, one that came with temporary exclusion and lower status and the promise of eventual assimilation. (And, interestingly defying standard descriptions, Wilson constantly had to restrain his secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, when it came to using force in the Caribbean.)

In many ways, the situation in the Dominican Republic was a straightforward one: There was a pattern of rebellion, rather than election, that needed to be quelled. Just as Wilson had utilized the perspective of Henry Jones Ford in the Philippines early in his presidency, he sought the wisdom of Jacob Harry Hollander regarding the Dominican Republic. Hollander, a professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins, had done similar work for the Roosevelt administration. He painted a picture of a small country in dire need of “wise statesmanship.” Roosevelt, he said, had instituted programs to stabilize the country’s political and economic situations, but Taft had undermined this work when he recognized rebel leaders who had seized power in 1911 and 1912. According to Ford, this established a horrible precedent in which the Dominicans saw political violence as a legitimate response to dissatisfaction. He cautioned against continuing Taft’s approach but also warned of the dangers of “gunboat-and-marine opportunism.”

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45 House diary, June 24, 1915, ibid., 33:452.
46 As the administration embarked on working with the republic, it encountered what Bryan described as a deep problem with “fraud and conspiracy.” Bryan recommended that the United States have a minister to the Dominican Republic to help with oversight, and he also promoted the idea of offering a non-cumbersome line of credit that would ease their “embarrass[ing]” debts, allow them to build infrastructure, “promote education,” and, most importantly, breaking the cycle of rebellion while improving America’s image. He advocated this plan for Nicaragua and Haiti, as well; Jacob Harry Hollander to WW, Baltimore, March 22, 1913, ibid., 27:215; WW to Hollander, the White House, March 24, 1913, ibid., 219;
of the saving graces about the Dominican situation was that the state was ruled by a
president rather than a council or cabinet (as was the case in Haiti), making it easy to
influence policy. In 1914, Wilson told the Dominicans to choose a new president
democratically or have the United States impose one. After successfully establishing a
provisional president, the Dominicans then had elections later that year where around
80,000 people (in Bryan’s estimation) voted—under American terms, planning and
supervision. The administration considered the elections a wild success, and Bryan told
Wilson that the new president, Juan Isidro Jimenes Pereyra (who had been president
twice before), was certainly the “man of the people,” as the electoral results indicated. To
Wilson, this meant the Dominicans were establishing a legitimate, sovereign dynamic. As
a conciliatory gesture, Jimenes put opposition figures in his Cabinet—of most import,
Secretary of War Desiderio Arias—and they proved to be his undoing. Bryan and Wilson
hoped to get Jimenes to “can” his disloyal secretaries and promised to threaten rebel
elements with force if they continued to imperil Dominican democracy. On May 7, 1916,
Jimenes caved in to Arias and stepped down. Nine days later U.S. Marines landed and
quickly moved to establish military rule in a way that mimicked American policy in the
Philippines: Calibrated colonialism that involved a government with posts filled by
Americans and Dominicans, censorship, infrastructure and economic programs, and the
training and equipping of Dominican forces—coupled with a heavy response to armed
opposition. (Arias fled Santo Domingo.) Four years later, Wilson wrote that he was

Hollander to WW, Baltimore, April 7, 1913, ibid., 265; WW to Hollander, the White House, April 8, 1913,
ibid., 272; WW to WJB, the White House, April 8, 1913, and Link’s footnote, ibid., 272-73; WJB to WW,
Washington, June 4, 1913, ibid., 495; WJB to WW, with Enclosure, Washington, c. July 20, 1913, ibid.,
47-48
“looking towards a gradual withdrawal of our interference with the self-government of Santo Domingo.”

Wilson provided little commentary on his thoughts on the Dominicans, though his paternalistic response is very suggestive that he viewed them as backward when it came to democratic progress. One particular episode in the Dominican business shines some more direct light on the matter: In March 1915, a letter that the American minister to the republic, James M. Sullivan, wrote became public. He had described the Dominicans as “unmoral” and of “gross and crass ignorance,” declared that the Roman Catholic Church was too weak “to cope with the savage and brutal tendencies of semi-civilization” existing there, and called the nation-state’s leaders “hopeless.” In response, Wilson pressured Sullivan into resigning. Wilson told Bryan that the situation was serious particularly because it had become public, leaving a “horrible impression” among the Dominicans. Most damning, Bryan wrote to Wilson, Sullivan had “used disparaging language against the whole people, including their leaders.” He had weakened the relationship between the republic and its temporary American statesman by dampening the peoples’ spirit and their faith in the United States. Not once did Wilson condemn Sullivan’s actual accusations. Rather, to Wilson, the situation was akin to a parent

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pointing out a child’s shortcomings: While the child was certainly not mature yet—and thus flawed in adult standards—embarrassing the child could only have negative consequences.

On the other side of Hispaniola, meanwhile, Haiti seemed to present Wilson with problems and conditions similar to those in the Dominican Republic, but matters quickly escalated beyond his liking. Both were nations of people Wilson disparaged (in Haiti’s case directly) but still hoped to see progress. Both faced a cycle of rebellions he hoped to break. Both, with their threat to American interests, compelled Wilson to support American business interests while seeking to elevate Haiti’s economy for the people’s own betterment. Both affected Wilson’s Pan-American initiatives. And both devolved into full-fledged, long-term American occupation following rebel targeting of the state’s Wilson-approved statesman. With Haiti, though, the Cacos uprising—explained below—would turn the American intervention into something much more heavy-handed than Wilson would have liked, and he even admitted some sympathy for America’s opponents there. The affair in Haiti, then, provides a perfect illustration of the antinomies of the Wilsonian progressive social dynamic, as Wilson came to disapprove of his own policy while also embracing it.

To begin with, Wilson’s views regarding Haiti were clearly paternalistic; the Haitians, in his estimation, were not yet brothers, but, rather, children. Using an adjective he usually reserved for his “darky” stories set in the American South, he referred to Haiti as a “dusky little republic.” Describing Haitian political instability with a racial double-entendre, he also called the country “that benighted place.” Mary Renda points out the
irony in Wilson seeing Haiti as much less mature than any other nation-state in the Americas: Haiti was founded only twenty-nine years after the United States, making it the second independent nation of the New World. For Wilson, though, that fact coupled with the recurrence of rebellions in Haiti and the depravity of its subsistence economy only reinforced his belief in Haitian backwardness: It had had a head-start on Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, after all. That the Haitians were mostly descendants of slaves and had suddenly found themselves in political control (in 1804 after battling the French) drew obvious parallels to Southern blacks, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.49

The American occupation of Haiti did not begin until July 28, 1915; before that point, the Wilson administration had kept close tabs on the republic, trying to help manage its political volatility, economic shakiness, and territorial risk by extending American hegemony in a way that protected overall Pan-American designs. Between 1908 and 1915, the Haitian presidency changed hands seven times, most of the men meeting grisly ends (dismemberment, bombing, likely poisoning, etc.). Wilson was adamant that the situation there was not comparable to Mexico: Whereas the Mexican revolutionary bands followed one political philosophy or another, he said, the rebel factions in Haiti were simply out for their own “plunder”—implying that none of them were viable potential statesmen but only brigands. The fighting there constituted “insurrection” rather than revolution. Following the Dominican Republic’s U.S.-sponsored elections in 1914, the Wilson administration moved to use the same model in Haiti. The idea was to establish a commission involving American representatives and

49 WW to Galt, the White House, August 15, 1915, ibid., 34:208; WW to Galt, Cornish, NH, August 10, 1915, ibid., 163; Renda, Taking Haiti, 30, 91-93, 114, 118.
the various rebel leaders, have them agree on a provisional president, and then hold a U.S.-supervised election. Wilson advised Bryan to be firm in presenting this plan in Haiti, telling the rebels that the United States would simply not stand for perpetual “revolutionary conditions.” The trick in Haiti, though, was that their political institutions involved an indirect election of the president; the Chamber of Deputies elected the senators and the senators elected the president. As Bryan told Wilson, the system left no good way of gauging how much a candidate represented the people, especially in a tense revolutionary situation when the assemblymen were “under duress” and subject to the intimidation or corruption of one rebel leader or another. To Wilson, this meant that there was a fundamental disconnect in the Haitian social dynamic, with the statesmen separated from the people; it also meant that it would be harder for the United States to influence policy. Still, the administration did not seek to change Haiti’s government structure. Rather, the plan would be, as Bryan explained, to “support a president if he seems to be generally acceptable and gives promise of capacity and efficiency” and otherwise “trust . . . to the future.” In February 1915, a pro-U.S. rebel leader, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, came to power, and the Wilson administration hoped it could work with him. Because of the indirect nature of the Haitian political system, Bryan noted that the United States would have to use “other means of ascertaining whether Vilbrun Guillaume Sam has the support of the people to such an extent as to give reasonable assurance of permanency to his government.” At the same time, Wilson insisted that Sam’s government accept an
American advisor who would not only look after American interests but also work “to prevent the constant recurrence of revolution.”

Haiti’s political instability, meanwhile, had created a number of economic problems of concern to Wilson; of greatest consequence was the control of its custom houses and the Banque National d’Haïti. Rebel factions often seized the custom houses in order to finance their endeavors, threatening American businesses that had, by 1915, established a very strong presence in Haiti. The bank, further, was primarily controlled by American investors; it had originally been French-owned, but when it faltered in 1911, American investors led by National City Bank of New York stepped in. Most worrisome, the bank was also the Haitian government’s treasury. Wilson, Bryan, and Lansing all expressed a deep wariness regarding the bank’s role in Haiti. While Bryan proposed intervention to Wilson, he added, “but I do not like the idea of forcible interference [sic] on purely business grounds.” Lansing pointed out the bank’s representative to the Haitians was a condescending man who made the United States look bad. While the custom houses presented an avenue of wealth for rebel desires, the weakness of the bank threatened the Monroe Doctrine and Pan-Americanism as it opened up Haiti to foreign economic invasion. For Wilson, the bank was too susceptible to the influence of its French and German investors; as Bryan reported to him, “[T]here is no doubt that the foreign financiers have been a controlling interest in the politics of Haiti.” Such a German and French presence in Haiti complicated the Pan-American dynamic as Wilson

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50 WW to Galt, the White House, August 15, 1915, *PWW* 34:209; Bryan to WW, Washington, January 7, 1915, ibid., 32:27-28; WW to Bryan, the White House, January 13, 1915, ibid., 62; Bryan to WW, January 15, 1915, ibid., 75-76; Bryan to WW, February 25, 1915, ibid., 288-89; Bryan to John Franklin Fort, February 27, 1915, ibid., 295-96; WW to Bryan, the White House, April 5, 1915, ibid., 479.
saw it, wherein the United States was to be the hegemonic statesman looking to the uplift of its hemispheric younger siblings; other potential statesmen would complicate the dynamic, subjecting it to cross-purposes and friction—and stagnation. The Wilson administration’s solution for both the bank and custom house issues was increased supervision: Keep a closer legal eye on the bank (Bryan suspected it was violating terms of its contract) and install an American agent to oversee Haitian customs by agreement with Sam’s government. Bryan was more concerned with Haiti’s financial issues while Wilson focused more on political turmoil, but the situations overlapped greatly, and the Wilson administration hoped that the Commission, Sam’s provisional government, American oversight, and coming elections would fix both problems and create the proper conditions for social growth—political, economic, etc.—without trying to change Haiti’s culture directly or advance the interests of particular American companies.51

Despite the administration’s intentions not to exert too much hegemonic power, though, it grew increasingly involved in Haiti, with broader foreign policy concerns playing a role in the calculus alongside the issues discussed above. The wider Pan-American context was crucial, for one: Haitian rebellions threatened American efforts in the Dominican Republic, especially considering the movement of arms between the two neighbors and the shared sense of discontent in the border region. Furthermore, the administration was deeply worried that the port of Môle-Saint-Nicolas could fall under the control of a foreign power. In turn, it would consider acquiring the port and harbor in

the interest of protecting its Pan-American statesmanship, and, ironically, Haiti’s own sovereign integrity. While Wilson pledged that the United States would not take “one additional foot of territory by conquest,” purchase was not off the table. Early in Wilson’s first term, Bryan broached the idea of acquiring the port on the country’s northwest shore and making the people there citizens if they desired. After the start of the Great War, Bryan grew increasingly worried that it would fall under the control of a foreign government or “foreign capitalists.” As the United States developed an intimate but firm relationship with Sam’s government in 1915, Wilson demanded that Haiti either provide the United States with control of the port or ensure that no other foreign government control it. After the occupation set in later that year, the Haitian government offered the unqualified cession of Môle-Saint-Nicolas, but the Navy said it did not need it and Lansing—Bryan’s replacement as secretary of state—said taking it would harm America’s image. Wilson told Lansing to defer the matter until later.\footnote{Bryan to WW, Washington, April 3, 1915, \textit{PWW} 32:473; Bryan to Paul Fuller, Jr., Washington, May 6, 1915, ibid., 33:116; WW, An Address on Latin American Policy, \textit{5\textsuperscript{th} Annual Convention of the Southern Commercial Congress}, Mobile, Alabama, October 27, 1913, ibid., 28:451; Bryan to WW, Washington, June 14, 1913, ibid., 27:519; Bryan to WW, Washington, April 3, 1915, ibid., 32:472; WW to Bryan, the White House, April 5, 1915, ibid., 479; Lansing to WW, Washington, August 9, 1915, ibid., 34:142-44; WW to Lansing, Windsor, VT, August 9, 1915, ibid., 144; Lansing to WW with enclosure, Washington, August 10, 1915, ibid., 157-58.} The United States never would purchase the port, though for similar reasons it would acquire the Danish West Indies in 1916, rechristening the territory the U.S. Virgin Islands. More importantly here, though, is that Wilson saw Haiti’s political and economic turmoil as threatening its own territorial sovereignty as well as the United States’ Pan-American hegemonic statesmanship and so considered buying Haitian territory to protect both.
Despite what Wilson hoped was a measured approach to Haiti, matters grew out of hand by the summer of 1915. The administration had placed its faith in the provisional presidency of Sam while working to implement the Commission, economic oversight, and eventual elections. In May, Paul Fuller, Jr., arrived in the republic as the United States’ special representative and quickly achieved a U.S.-Haiti treaty drawn to the administration’s desires. Wilson and Bryan were also working on selecting a black American to be the official diplomat to Haiti, as the previous chapter discussed. Yet, insurrection continued as did the shady maneuverings of the National City Bank, leading Wilson to write to Bryan that everything regarding Haiti seemed “sinister,” “unpleasant,” and “unpropitious.” Wilson’s ill-feeling was prescient. As rebels advanced on Port-au-Prince in opposition to Haiti being rendered an economic protectorate, the city erupted in violence. Sam responded by having 167 political prisoners, including a former president, executed on July 27, 1915. His enraged opposition only grew more incensed; as he sought refuge in the French Embassy, a crowd found him on July 28, beat him to death, and threw his body to the crowd outside. The mob proceeded to rip his body to pieces and paraded his head throughout the city. American naval forces stationed in Port-au-Prince’s harbor (330 sailors and marines), under Admiral William B. Caperton, quickly moved into the city, initially to protect the diplomatic corps in the city; shortly thereafter the White House formally recognized the action and a nineteen year experiment with calibrated colonialism began.53

53 Bryan to WW, Washington, May 6, 1915, ibid., 33:115; Bryan to WW, Washington, May 28, 1915, ibid. 275; Fuller to Bryan, State Department telegram, Port au Prince, May 27, 1915, ibid., 277; WW to Bryan, the White House, May 28, 1915, ibid., 278; Bryan to WW, Washington, April 3, 1915, ibid., 32:472; WW to Bryan, the White House, April 5, 1915, ibid., 479; WW to Bryan, the White House, March
While wanting to keep out foreign, especially German, intrigue in a time of Haitian vulnerability, Wilson’s other major motivation for the occupation was a paternalistic humanitarianism—to provide first order and food and then create the conditions for sovereign progress. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, one of the architects of federal segregation, wrote Wilson that the Navy was directing food relief efforts by organizing a local, Haitian committee to run things and by charging “Navy prices” for provisions. One had to be careful of dependency, Daniels cautioned: “It is very dangerous to begin to supply provisions because many Haitiens [sic] are like the negroes in the South after the war and would quit work entirely, deserting plantations if our Government undertakes to feed them.”

More than providing food, though, the immediate focus of the administration was on establishing order, and it is in this quest that some of the deepest implications of Wilson’s progressive philosophy become apparent. As Wilson and his advisors saw things, discontented peasant fighters, called Cacos, had been throwing their might behind the plundering designs of various rebel leaders—or men Daniels termed “lawless chiefs.” The man with the largest following was Dr. Rosalvo Bobo, an outspoken critic of the American presence in Haiti; it was his forces that had been responsible for driving Sam from power. Critically, as Lansing described to Wilson, “Dr. Bobo, who appears to be the head or the figurehead of the present revolution, is, I am informed, mentally unbalanced


54 Lansing to WW, Washington, August 3, 1915, PWW 34:69; Lansing to WW and enclosure, Washington 7, 1915, ibid., 121-22; Daniels to WW, Washington, August 2, 1915, ibid., 34:61.
and brutally savage.” The weight of this statement in relation to Wilson’s progressive social dynamic cannot be overstated, especially as it came from Lansing who tended to be one of the more measured of Wilson’s advisers. Bobo was perhaps the leading man of the people, but—if Lansing’s mental assessment was accurate—he would have proven to be a diseased statesman, infecting the populace, or public mind, of the Haitian dynamic he was to manage. The brutal treatment of Sam seemed proof of the mania of Bobo’s “mob.” The potential for such insanity to continue was immense in Haiti, as Lansing explained, because most Haitians were illiterate, rendering them “clay in the hands of politicians” who seek to “loot” them. Haitian representatives were at risk, too, according to Daniels, as they lived in terror of the Cacos and were about to make Bobo president out of sheer fear. The Wilson administration believed that “intelligent Haitians” saw the benefit in American assistance but were too terrified to vocalize their support and that most Haitians simply wanted an end to anarchy. With more Marines arriving and patrols increasing, Bobo stepped down from presidential contention and surrendered his arms. Daniels told Wilson that the Cacos alone were to blame for the Haitian chaos and that most of the people were “submissive and well disposed” and would cooperate in ending their role in Haitian politics. Despite the administration’s desire to see the opposition as a union of a deranged leader and bands of practically lawless, armed men—and, in turn, to approach Haiti as a police action—the violent American presence swelled the ranks of the Cacos. As Mary Renda explains, what the Wilson administration saw as a district-by-district policing of criminals most Haitians came to see as a war “between nations.”

[55 Daniels to WW, Washington, D.C., August 3, 1915, ibid., 70-71; Renda, Taking Haiti, 80-84,]
By August 1915, Wilson considered Haiti one of the administration’s greatest
difficulties and felt drawn further and further into a situation beyond his grasp. Lansing
called the Haiti imbroglio “distressing and very perplexing.” Wilson confided to Edith
that while he considered it to be the “critical matter” at the time, his administration had
“not yet mastered . . . the complications” of the situation. “It’s a pretty mess!” he
despaired. Lansing suggested that one way to deprive the Haitian freedom fighters of
their means to continue their armed opposition was for the United States to take control
of “the public revenues” of the republic. Between such financial control and “our marines
policing the Haytien Capital” in what amounted to “more or less an exercise of force and
an invasion of Haytien independence,” Lansing admitted the policy was “high handed,”
“open to criticism,” “far in advance of our Dominican policy,” and counter to his notions
of sovereignty. Still, he told Wilson in the jargon of medical intervention, what the
administration was doing was the only practical option if the goal was to “cure the
anarchy and disorder which prevails in that Republic.” As long as the United States did
not try to change Haitian culture (by, for example, promoting English over French), he
said, the American presence would be acceptable, justified, and humanitarian. Still,
Wilson felt that he was responsible for actions in Haiti none too different from heavy-
headed Roosevelt policies that he had chastised. By September, he admitted to Edith that
he felt a “sneaking sympathy” for Haitian Cabinet members who resigned in protest of
Haiti being required to have an American financial adviser, but he believed that what the
United States was doing was “necessary for Haiti’s salvation.” Conjuring his moral

139; Lansing to WW, Washington, August 3, 1915, PWW 34:69-70; Lansing to WW with enclosure,
Washington, August 7, 1915, ibid., 121-22; Lansing to WW, Washington, August 9, 1915, ibid., 142-44;
Machiavellianism, he told Edith, “I do not like the argument that the end justifies the means,” but Haiti presented “extraordinary circumstances” and he saw no other possible course for Haiti and the United States; the United States simply needed to “help” the Haitians rather than “subordinate them.”\(^{56}\) The seeming contradictions embedded in his progressive philosophy—in this case the relationship between sovereignty and intervention—had torn him, and he felt in a way simply a subject to Providence working through his administration.

Beyond Haiti’s own sovereignty, furthermore, Wilson worried about the impact of the Haitian occupation on his Pan-American goals. He wondered if American policies such as control of Haitian custom houses hurt the U.S. image in Latin America and convinced himself that since Haitians were “negroes” Latin Americans did not consider them “as of the fraternity” and so would not be offended.\(^{57}\) Though a seemingly simple self-reassuring justification, the implication of this statement is that Wilson accepted Pan-American subdivisions even as he opposed the Antillean Confederation and the Pan-Hispanic movement. What mattered most was that the United States was the overarching statesman calibrating the Americas’ progress.

\(^{56}\) WW to House, Cornish, NH, August 4, 1915, ibid., 79-80; Lansing to WW, Washington, August 3, 1915, ibid., 69; WW to Galt, Cornish, NH, August 4, 1915, ibid., 89; WW to Galt, Cornish, NH, August 9, 1915, ibid., 139; Lansing to WW, August 13, 1915, ibid., 183-84; WW to Galt, with enclosure, the White House, August 30, 1915, ibid., 367; WW to Galt, the White House, September 9, 1915, ibid., 437; WW to Galt, the White House, August 15, 1915, ibid., 208-09.

\(^{57}\) As Mark Gilderhus explains, “Wilson’s policies in the Western Hemisphere never really achieved much coherence. Instead, they abounded with inconsistency and contradictions as his subsequent interventions in the Caribbean confirmed. In a phrase, Wilson had difficulty reconciling his commitment to self-determination with other U.S. interests in promoting trade, security, and stability.” Gilderhus, “Revolution, War, and Expansion,” 165; WW to Lansing, the White House, c. August 13, 1915, ibid., 183; WW to Galt, the White House, August 15, 1915, ibid., 209.
Pan-Americanism, as we have seen, then, exemplified the multipronged nature of Wilsonian progressive internationalism: international liberalism—particularly in relation to the proposed Pact’s focus on ABC (and to some extent) BUG negotiation and arbitration—coupled with calibrated colonialism, as seen in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The Americas now constituted a neighborhood, or family, and so demanded a framework to stabilize its social dynamic and point it toward progress for all involved—politically, ethically, economically, scientifically, etc. Internationalism meant citizenship for individual nation-states, leading Wilson to Pan-American policies that featured the same sorts of judgments and subsequent exclusionary, pluralist, and assimilationist policies as his domestic policies involving African Americans, women, the mentally ill, etc.

**Global Wilsonianism**

Chatting about Mexico, Germany, and the frenetic world situation with Ray Stannard Baker in the White House in May 1916, Woodrow Wilson expressed his belief that the United States would likely, in Baker’s words, “be called upon to do [something] toward helping to bring about world peace.” Baker continued, “He talked at length and with great enthusiasm of the new Pan-American treaties which are to make us partners with South and Central America, rather than guardians. He thought it a great step in advance. . . . He thinks some idea as this must be applied to the world situation.” Wilson’s ideas reminded Baker of those of the League to Enforce Peace, and later that month at a League to Enforce Peace convention, Wilson proclaimed his idea for a new
world order based on liberal values and collective security. Wilson’s plans culminated in the Fourteen Points, which he proclaimed in January 1918 with the nation at war; the points called for a more open and diplomatic—and less armed—world, territorial readjustments, and a new “league of nations” to provide a semblance of order to the globe. As Gilderhus points out, “The Fourteenth Point had descended directly from the earlier Pan American Pact.” In turn the peace of Versailles and its centerpiece, the League of Nations, would see the same flaws as the Pan-American Pact and Wilson’s hemispheric policy in general—deep-rooted civilizational hierarchies fueling an inherent pluralism, tensions between national sovereignty and international power, and a debilitating lack of commitment.  

Just as with Pan-Americanism, the Versailles peace, which Wilson played a fundamental role in shaping, drew deeply from the former professor’s progressive social philosophy—its law was to be of an evolving, nurturing sort; it required a personage in a managing, providential position; and it featured exclusion and pluralism as tools for ultimate assimilative integration. As Wilson told House in March 1918, “My own conviction, as you know, is that the administrative constitution of the League must grow and not be made; that we must begin with solemn covenants, covering mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity . . . but that the method of carrying those mutual pledges out should be left to develop of itself, case by case.” The world could not

58 In December 1915 Wilson had uttered similar thoughts regarding the postwar order to House in private conversation; A Memorandum by Ray Stannard Baker of a Conversation at the White House, May 12, 1916 (Conversation May 11), original text edited to flesh out abbreviations, ibid., 37:36-37; Ambrosius, Wilsonian Statecraft, 71; WW to House, the White House, May 16, 1916, ibid., 57; Gilderhus, Pan American Visions, 136; Ambrosius, “Democracy, Peace, and World Order,” Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson, 228-234; Gilderhus, “Revolution, War, and Expansion,” 170; Ambrosius, Wilsonian Statecraft, 38, 70-71; David H. Burton, Taft, Wilson, and World Order, 80.
be changed in one fell swoop, despite the tumult of the era; law and people had to evolve together. Wilson, rather, sought something less formal than a constitution, for which he believed the nation-states of the world were not yet prepared; instead, he desired something more elemental that would orient members around basic values, making a later, more formal framework possible. The end goal, Wilson wrote in private correspondence, was to make “the world safe from irrational radicalism and revolution.” Incremental global elevation would ultimately bring an enlightened future. As of 1922, Wilson said, the world had “been made safe for democracy,” but that accomplishment was only one step in a long course.59

The process, Wilson wrote, would require “remov[ing] by rational and enlightened reform the soil in which such weeds grow.” “God send,” he added, “that we may have the intelligence and steadfastness to do it.” As such, civilizational hierarchies informed by perceptions of maturity (with all the racial, gendered, and other constructs that that went with this, as we have seen in this and the previous chapter) led Wilson to call for postwar U.S. statesmanship bolstered by the other Great Powers and, concurrently, to advocate the exclusion or calibrated colonialism of some of the nation-state citizens of the new world. He believed that the United States had risen above all other nation-states with the civilizational force to manage the transition to the new world order. “If the United States does not serve the world in this matter,” he averred, “I know of no other democracy that can.” Much to Wilson’s dismay, though, the Senate in 1920

59 WW to House, the White House, March 22, 1918, ibid., 47:105; WW to John St. Loe Strachey, the White House, April 5, 1918, ibid., 258; WW to Frank Irving Cobb, Washington, November 15, 1922, ibid., 68:192.
had rejected his call, leaving the League without the statesmanship he believed it needed.\textsuperscript{60}

Meanwhile, Wilson’s views on national maturity informed him on the other end of the spectrum as well: If, as he envisioned, the world’s nation-states were to have a liberal framework spearheaded by those with the most mature democracies, then the least mature would have to go through a calibrated period of readjustment before attaining full global citizenship. For Wilson, this meant a progression past the predatory imperialism of old. In an address at a peace conference session in February 1919, he said,

> Then there is the feature about this Covenant which to my mind is one of the greatest and most satisfactory advances that have been made. We are done with annexations of helpless people, meant in some instances by some powers to be used merely for exploitation. We recognize in the most solemn manner that the helpless and undeveloped peoples of the world, being in that condition, put an obligation upon us to look after their interests primarily before we use them for our interest.\textsuperscript{61}

Wilson was speaking of the mandate system, in which the League would oversee nations put in charge of mandates—burgeoning states forged out of the wreckage of old empires. It would be calibrated colonialism with League oversight—not too far from his old idea of empires within a world federation. The League would ensure that steward nations would bear an attitude of “development” rather than “extermination.” While the powerful had a duty to civilize, old empires far too often did not colonize so that “mankind might be lifted in those places to the next higher level.” Thus, Wilson called for regulated imperialism with reasoning not too far from his views on capitalism, the Federal Reserve,

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.; see also WW, \textit{The Road Away from Revolution} (draft), c. April 8, 1923, ibid., 68:323 and final version, c. July 27, 1923, ibid., 394.

\textsuperscript{61} WW, Address to the Third Plenary Session of the Peace Conference, February 14, 1919, ibid., 55:176-77.
and trust-busting: Both imperialism and capitalism had the power to uplift, but they required statesmanship to keep them adjusted away from their negative possibilities. It had long been Wilson’s conviction, after all, that social progress required finding ways to preserve the good of old ways. While Wilson challenged imperialism, he also embraced aspects of it. Thus, while the Fourteen Points seemed to call for decolonization, Wilson held that it could only occur through adjustment, not a quick tearing down. In turn, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 established three levels of mandates (partly through Wilson’s orchestrating and partly by compromise): Class A, territories of the former Ottoman Empire, considered mostly mature and close to self-rule (Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Syria); Class B, territories from parts of the previous German colonies in Africa, considered in need of a bit more control by the mandatory power (Ruanda-Urundi, Tanganyika, Kamerun, and Togoland); and Class C, which required territorial absorption by the mandatory power (some Pacific islands as well as Namibia). While France, Britain, and, to a lesser extent, Japan, became the official mandatory powers, the mindset carried close to home for Wilson: Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic were to be excluded from League membership, with the qualification that they could join later. They were, essentially, U.S. mandates (especially Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Viewed in the light of Wilsonian progressive internationalism, then, there was no inconsistency between Wilson’s Pan-American and global endeavors or between his calls for an open, liberalized world and his hegemonial drives: International liberalism and calibrated colonialism worked hand in hand.62

The League of Nations and the Versailles postwar system, then, drew from Wilson’s Pan-Americanism, and they both faced the same kinds of impulses, pluralism, antinomies, tensions, and failures. Both were intended to begin formalizing international dynamics in a way that pointed members toward millennial uplift. Both called for enlightened American statesmanship coupled with the assisting statesmanship of other major powers (Britain, France, and Japan; Argentina, Brazil, and Chile). Both involved calibrated colonialism as a means of elevating the “less mature” members to truly sovereign citizenship. Wilson was proud of his work. Even as he saw the frictions of the postwar order in the couple of years before his death in 1924, he remained optimistic in his millennial vision, writing, “The League has indeed become a vital and commanding force and will more and more dominate international relationships. I am thankful that I had something to do with its institution.”

In 1919, Zitkala Ša, or Red Bird, wrote in American Indian Magazine, “The Red man asks for a very simple thing—citizenship in the land that was once his own,—America. Who shall represent his cause at the World’s Peace Conference? The American Indian, too, made the supreme sacrifice for liberty’s sake. He loves democratic ideals. What shall world democracy mean to his race?” Her comments were emblematic of the “Wilsonian Moment” that Erez Manela so powerfully described. While only morphing, rather than annihilating, the world’s imperial structure, Wilson had still painted a...
situation where there were, in his words, “two choices for the world: democracy or imperialism.” While a new day had indeed dawned, Wilson said, he warned that the forces of imperialism still lived on and they hoped to warp the League to selfish ends. Even America’s allies in the war were far from selfless: The British policy regarding the Irish independence movement troubled him deeply, and he was very wary of British, French, and Italian attitudes in general. Subalterns around the world, such as Zitkala Ša, found hope in this moment—including W. E. B. Du Bois and Ho Chi Minh, both of whom who traveled to Versailles in 1919 to represent African America and French Indochina, respectively. Wilson’s “moment” tore him in two irreconcilable directions: His proposed postwar plans, on one hand, went against his own political philosophy as they outpaced the American public’s ability to support him, while, on the other hand, they did not go far enough for a disenchanted world population hanging in the balance. In that moment, he had the power to harness the energy of discontent, and had he truly wanted to destroy imperialism, he could have been incendiary. But, doing so

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65 For more on this point, see Ninkovich, The Wilsonian Century, 77.

would have gone beyond the pale of his progressive social dynamic; such explosive change was simply contrary to his most deeply held principles. Just as Pan-Americanism utilized calibrated interventionism, the League, with its flirtation with old imperial dynamics and its structure designed to mold those impulses to new, more elevated uses, was squarely in line with Wilson’s evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, approach to achieving the millennium.

Ultimately, this chapter has shown that Wilson tried to wield the tumult of the 1910s to implement fuller, more substantial, progressive social dynamics—first over the Americas and then over the globe. Progressive internationalism, or Wilsonianism, entailed both international liberalism and calibrated colonialism and, as such, brought him to the Pan-American Pact and the League of Nations, citizenship for Native Americans (in steps) and Puerto Ricans, limited sovereignty for Cubans and Filipinos, and interventions in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and elsewhere—all the reflection of a consistent ideology brimming with tense ramifications and deeply informed by cultural perceptions such as race, nation, family, gender, religion, and sanity. It would take involvement in a world war to bring Wilsonianism in full force to the world stage, and doing so would require Wilson to perceive the Germans as restless “marauders” like the “redmen” of old or Villa’s bandits and to group their leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, with Dr. Bobo of Haiti—as “mentally unbalanced and brutally savage.”

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A Crazed Kaiser and Wilson’s Goat: The Transformation of Wilhelm’s Germany

If [the Germans] are all crazy, lock them up. If [they are] so stupid they have no right to live, as ignorance is no excuse. . . . So we must overcome stupidity by force and bring the people to realize their mistake. When this is done we may be able to make a civilized race out of them. If they can be made to realize their mistake we may place them amongst the white races. If not, keep them in Germany as no one else wants to go there.

– Bert Hall, Lafayette Escadrille pilot (1918)

This war is really the greatest lunacy ever committed by the white races.

– Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany (October 1914)

During cozy evenings at the White House in the first winter of the Great War (1914 into 1915), Wilson oftentimes read sketches that the British journalist, A. G. Gardiner, wrote of major figures on both sides of the Atlantic. In *Prophets, Priests and Kings*, first printed in 1908 and reprinted in 1914, Wilson and company found sometimes witty, sometimes compelling portrayals of men such as Sir Edward Grey, Rudyard Kipling, Tsar Nicholas II, and William Jennings Bryan. Wilson so enjoyed Gardiner’s work that he often read portions of his vignettes aloud to intimates such as Edward House

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1 Lieut. Bert Hall, *En l’Air! (In the Air): Three Years on and above Three Fronts* (New York: The New Library, 1918), 198; Wilhelm continued, “We are beating one another to death on the continent for the greater good of England, and at the same time England has managed to make the whole world believe that we are the guilty party. You could lose all faith in goodness. Of course we are not without guilt,” quoted in Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 371.
and family members. One of the depictions that the group found particularly interesting was that of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. Gardiner’s nine-page description opened with Wilhelm atop a white horse, leading a military parade—“master of a million men, the most powerful figure in Europe.” Perhaps someday, Gardiner predicted, such parades would become war rallies bearing “the ancient ring of doom.” Wilhelm, after all, was an autocrat whose power derived both from “physical force” and, anachronistically, his claim of divine right. He was indeed a brilliant man—energetic, astute, and knowledgeable in music, art, cuisine, theology, philosophy, and trade. But his brilliance was that of a nervous genius, and he could switch from careless laughter to “lighting” anger in a moment; in this sense, Gardiner mused, Wilhelm had the mind of an artist, ruled by “moods and impulses,” to the discomfiture of all whom he affected. He was arrogant, with a greater “god-like vision” of himself than any other man in history. The German people did not love him, and in dealing with them he varied between confrontational and “aloof and remote.” “He dwells on Olympus,” Gardiner wrote, “and sends his thunderbolts hurtling over the astonished people.” Still, the Germans respected him, proud, above all, of his strenuous and filial virtues. Beyond Germany, Wilhelm had maintained European peace for twenty years; hawks in Germany believed him timid, but, Gardiner claimed, Wilhelm preserved amity in Germany’s interest. The peace he believed in, in any case, was “peace armed to the teeth,” and though he was not a “warrior,” Gardiner explained, he was certainly a “militarist.” Ultimately, Wilhelm was “more fascinating” than anyone else on the globe—and he was vitally important. Considering his power within Germany and Germany’s role in the world’s balance, it was dangerous
that Wilhelm was “impulsive, imperious, and dramatic.” “Germany will not cease to be a disturbing element in world politics,” Gardiner concluded, “until the Kaiser has stepped down from his mediæval throne and derives his power from a free and self-governing people.”

A few years later, Wilhelm was exiled in the Netherlands, where he lived the remaining twenty years of his life and became something of a renaissance country gentleman. He learned to speak Dutch; drawing on memory alone he wrote his memoirs, published in 1922; he nurtured a passion for archaeology and took part in research on the island of Corfu; and he dabbled in architecture and ship design. He also grew a beard, developed a love for chopping wood, and continued his avid hunting, bagging hundreds of animals. He kept abreast of world affairs, as well. Although he initially viewed the rise of the Nazis in Germany with positive interest, he quickly became disillusioned with Hitler and his platform, condemning the Night of the Long Knives and Kristallnacht and disowning a son who supported the anti-Semitic violence gripping his old homeland. Wilhelm died on June 4, 1941, shortly before the German invasion of the USSR. Against his wishes, Nazi regalia adorned his funeral.

Questions of image and perception abound in the contrast between these two portrayals of Wilhelm II. For one, they describe the man at different points in his life—the first when Wilhelm was in the thick of the world’s machinations and the second when he had had what Wilson would call a “change of scenery.” Further, Gardiner was a

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British journalist, a contemporary of Wilhelm’s, and an opponent; the second picture comes from an even-handed modern biography by a historian, Giles MacDonogh. Interestingly, the account of Wilhelm’s last days provides another contrast—that with a man of even more piercing image, Adolph Hitler, who has since become much more surely the world’s symbol of madness and violence. Still, for a time, Wilhelm II was, in American discourse, the cause of the world’s insanity—a brilliant man with the mind of an artist, ruled by moods, in charge of the most powerful army on the planet and holding the balance of war and peace—and the vitality of human civilization—in his frenetic grip.

This chapter argues that perceptions of the “madness” of Wilhelm and the state and nation around him played a crucial role in Woodrow Wilson’s decision, in April 1917, to ask Congress for war with Germany. Sanity is a culturally relative concept that deals with an individual’s ability to function in a particular society; it is not a clinical term, and one’s sanity may or may not be linked to physically derived mental illness. On the one hand, it can refer to a society’s perceptions of a person’s capacity to handle life in the social order without suffering apparently debilitating setbacks to his or her mental health. On the other, it deals with the apparent rationality of an individual’s behavior or ideas—rationality defined relative to cultural values and the social order. On both accounts it seemed to Woodrow Wilson by April 1917 that Kaiser Wilhelm’s personality

Along the former lines, the Progressive Era witnessed widespread fears, for example, of a nervous degeneration dubbed neurasthenia. Now thought to be a catch-all term for a number of mostly physiological and neurophysiological problems, such as depression and fatigue, neurasthenia was thought at the time to be an ill-adaptation by some people to the modern lifestyle. See, for example, F.G. Gosling, Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
and ideas were an irrational and destabilizing force for progressive world civilization. As Wilson saw it, the German political system—“militarism”—allowed the spread of madness throughout Germany and, in turn, Europe, particularly due to the “diseased statesmanship” of Wilhelm II. This madness, as evidenced by the Great War, brought degeneration rather than progress to world affairs, threatening mankind’s millennial march. Germany, in Wilson’s view, held the key to the European balance of power, and the European balance of power, in turn, fundamentally shaped the health of the globe—making Wilhelm the key statesman of the world’s informal dynamic. Prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, many Americans—Wilson included—had great faith in German civilization. Before Wilson could conceive of war with Germany, then, his perception would have to shift in a way that othered the German state and allowed for an intervention consistent with his ideology. As Robert Lansing once wrote to Wilson, Ottoman “ethnic cleansing” of the Armenians was not surprising since the Ottoman government was “by nature cruel and barbarous,” but German outrages in Belgium were much more “criticizable” since Germany had previously evinced a “high standard of humanity.”

Wilson’s social philosophy and his emerging progressive internationalist efforts (as discussed in the previous chapter), combined with the information he received regarding Wilhelm to create an ideological and discursive force that over a two and a half year period ultimately pointed him toward war with a “decivilized” Germany.

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The chapter will first show that, prior to August 1914, Wilson and Americans in general held a fairly positive view of German civilization and the German state’s position in maintaining the balance of power while ascribing to Wilhelm a split personality that oftentimes exhibited brilliance and peacefulness but also showed glimmers of mania coupled with autocratic power. Second, the chapter will show that after the war’s start, Britain had a clear influence within the United States, including upon Wilson, and played a role in shaping perceptions of the German leader. Lastly and most substantively, the chapter will trace the shifting of Wilhelm’s American image between August 1914 and April 1917, analyzing the process through which Wilson and those around him came to see the German leader in the same light as Rosalvo Bobo—as a diseased statesman bringing degenerative illness to his own nation and, in turn, to international affairs.

Fig. 23: Diseased Statesmanship: Wilson’s increasing perception, culminating in March 1917, was that Wilhelm II was a diseased statesman in the German, European, and global dynamics.
Germany & the Friedenkaiser before 1914

Tracing back to his academic career, Wilson held positive but wary views of German society and of Wilhelm, as did the United States in general. German scholarship was one of the major forces of late nineteenth century academia and Bismarck’s Germany was one of the dominant powers on the world scene. For a young student of politics, such as Wilson, Germany was a place of obvious interest. Through the 1880s, Wilson’s reading list was dominated by German works, especially ones involving political science and law; in order to delve into German scholarship so thoroughly he even taught himself German. When he considered a European trip in 1886 with the purpose of observing the “men and things” of the modern world, he planned on living in Berlin with his wife and young daughter—not London or Paris. (With Ellen expecting their second child, the trip never occurred.) Many of his professors and colleagues had spent time studying in Germany, including G. Stanley Hall, whose 1881 Aspects of German Culture discussed German religion and spirituality, science, psychology, and philosophy.6

As Wilson looked to Germany’s recently forged political system, he found much to admire, both despite and because of its difference with America’s style of governance. It was a powerfully centralized government that still had popular representation and was the world’s most socialist modern state—a mostly good thing. The German emperor, or kaiser, held immense power, but, Wilson noted, “The most despotic of governments

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6 WW, A Working Bibliography, c. October 1, 1883 to March 27, 1890, PWW 6:563-611; Link, comments in ibid., 5:vii; WW to Richard Heath Dabney, Bryn Mawr, PA, Nov. 7, 1886, ibid., 385; WW to H. B. Adams, Bryn Mawr, Pa, Dec. 5, 1886, ibid., 416-17; Link, comments in ibid., 492; G. Stanley Hall, Aspects of German Culture (Boston: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1881).
under the control of wise statesmen is preferable to the freest ruled by demagogues.” Wilhelm I, the first German emperor, had mostly deferred to the chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, a man Wilson certainly considered a “wise statesman.” Compared to America’s congressional quagmire in the 1880s, it seemed to Wilson that Germany was tackling one issue after another as it emerged as a modern nation-state. In 1889’s *The State*, he wrote that the German emperor was truly a president—not a monarch like Austria’s leader—as he ruled over a “federal state . . . united in a great ‘corporation of public law’.” The kaiser, Wilson added, held a “hereditary office” rather than a “hereditary throne,” and so German sovereignty did “not reside in him.” Crucially, this meant to Wilson that the emperor (or the chancellor through him) was truly attached to the German state’s social dynamic, connected to the sovereign German people and thus the nation’s progress. The kaiser held real constitutional powers, such as presiding over the legislature, appointing and removing the chancellor and other government officers “by his whim,” conducting foreign policy, and acting as commander in chief of Germany’s “vast military forces.” Though he was “not responsible” in the sense that he could not be removed from power, there were checks on his authority; Germany was ruled by law and not one man’s “prerogative.” The Bundesrath was a very powerful legislative body, the organ of Germany’s sovereignty, with some judicial and administrative powers as well. Germany’s other representative house, the Reichstag, had the power to approve legislation (the Bundesrath proposed it); the emperor could dissolve it, but only with the Bundesrath’s approval. Political parties within this system ranged from those who “desire[d] democratic privilege” to those who came from “long-
established” upper class backgrounds and gave a conservative, monarchist dimension to German politics and administration. Though Wilson disdained monarchy, he approved of the German system, at least at this point, as a positive step for a people emerging out of a medieval past. Crucially to his time in office, he would enter the presidency believing, one, that the German leader was perhaps the “most powerful ruler of our time,” and, two, that German politics was split between forces of liberal progress and those of imperial anachronism; as the guns of August 1914 began to sound, as we will see, he then began to wonder if the German system had become corrupted in a way that bred militaristic madness.7

The first suspicion that Wilson had that something was amiss with Germany’s “spirit” came not with its political system but with the nature of its scholarship. While he admired Georg Jellinek, a German legal philosopher who argued that law must be understood in its intrinsic relationship with society, he came to believe that most other German writers dealt far too much in the abstract rather than in concrete. Years later, responding to his Versailles critics who said that he was too pro-German, he said that one reason he never visited Germany was because he disliked Germans, and he singled out their ideas regarding education and political science to make his point: There was too much pure theory and, as he had said throughout his career in education, too much specialization. While Wilson, from his seat as Princeton’s president, touted a broad universal education that would uplift the spirit and build character, he believed that German scientism quashed the bigger picture, which to him was a frightful threat in a

world that required holistic integration and understanding. No “thoughtful man,” Wilson declared, should devote all of his energy to one task; doing so was simply undemocratic, counter to the values of a society premised on public discussion.\footnote{WW to Gilman, Middletown, CT, April 13, 1889, \textit{PWW} 6:169-70; Edward Graham Elliott’s Memorandum of a Conversation with Wilson, Princeton, NJ, January 5, 1903, ibid., 14:320-25; Stockton Axson, \textit{Brother Woodrow: A Memoir of Woodrow Wilson}, edited by Arthur S. Link, with the assistance of John E. Little, L. Kathleen Amon, and Nancy Plum (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 55; White, \textit{Woodrow Wilson, the Man, His Times and His Task}, 139-40; report of a Wilson speech on labor and education to alumni in Harrisburg, PA, \textit{Patriot}, February 20, 1903, reprinted in \textit{PWW} 14:363.} Between 1914 and 1917, the feeling that the German spirit was off-kilter became exaggerated as it festered in Wilson’s mind, just as would happen with fears of the kaiser’s autocracy and the power of degenerative forces within German politics.

After Wilhelm II ascended to the throne in 1888, he became the focus of American thoughts regarding Germany, as he pushed aside Bismarck and took on a much more active role in affairs than his grandfather had. As Wolfgang J. Mommsen notes, an era of German history “has been identified, perhaps justifiably, with the personality of Wilhelm II.”\footnote{Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 25 (May-Jun 1990), p. 289.} Herbert Perris’ \textit{Germany and the German Emperor}—a 512-page overview of German history published in 1912—illustrates one way in which Americans had come to perceive Wilhelm in the years preceding the outbreak of war in Europe—as a man of glaring contradictions. Perris noted that when Wilhelm first came to power in 1888, he seemed brash and outspoken and faced accusations of insanity, yet over the ensuing years he had proven himself to be eloquent, charming, and bright. Happily, after thirty years of Bismarck’s cold realism, Wilhelm was an idealist with a sincere religious faith. The only deep-seated “quirk” that Perris found was Wilhelm’s belief in the divine right of the
Hohenzollern dynasty. But, overall, Perris was glad that the world had had the time to come to appreciate Wilhelm as a complex man and had cast off the rumors of brashness and insanity that had cast a shadow on his early years. While Perris attempted to impart a balanced assessment of Wilhelm, a *New York Times* Sunday magazine feature from June 8, 1913, was much more lopsided as it showered the German leader with effusive praise. The occasion was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Wilhelm’s coronation, and the article, “Kaiser, 25 Years a Ruler, Hailed as Chief Peacemaker,” spanned over five pages. The editors noted that in 1888 people feared that Wilhelm would be a brash, autocratic, and war-minded ruler, especially after he fired Bismarck, but now “he is acclaimed everywhere as the greatest factor for peace that our time can show.” Andrew Carnegie was among the luminaries who honored him, noting that the kaiser was “a remarkable man indeed, alert, earnest, affable, a man with a mission which he labors earnestly to fulfill, a born ruler of men.” Praise also came from Theodore Roosevelt (who supported his militaristic side and his love of all things naval), William Howard Taft, and major British and German figures.¹⁰ Wilson, then, would become president at a time of general good-feeling toward Wilhelm, but even Perris’ book and the *New York Times* article revealed the discursive potential for Wilhelmine othering: Wilhelm held the keys to the balance of power, he was deeply religious, he was brilliant but of uncertain mental health, and he held potentially autocratic power.

The *New York Times* article had referred to Wilhelm as “Chief Peacemaker,” a man “acclaimed everywhere as the greatest factor for peace that our time can show.” Whenever “war clouds are gathered in Europe,” the article declared, Wilhelm endeavors to maintain the balance of power. Indeed, he styled himself the *Friedenkaiser*, or emperor of peace, and drew comparisons to Theodore Roosevelt who entertained a “big stick” philosophy while also garnering a Nobel Peace Prize. In *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*, A. G. Gardiner declared that Wilhelm was “easily the foremost man in Europe.” Further, he had a reputation as an ardent and sincere Christian; religion, in fact, was the major component of Perris’ portrayal in *Germany and the German Emperor*. Throughout his career, he was known to write respectable theology, and he even devoted a section of his memoirs to theological issues. He had been tutored by a Calvinist and, in turn, had taken on moralistic progressive era causes such as campaigning against gambling and for temperance.11

Tempering his image as a devout emperor of peace were questions regarding his mental health and his autocratic power. The nature of Wilhelm II’s alleged mental illness remains unclear, though bipolar disorder was apparently a common problem on the Prussian side of Wilhelm’s family. Importantly, though, as Giles MacDonogh explains, “while Wilhelm was known to have bursts of anger, the episodes were not considered

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significant by those who saw [him] daily.” In general, Wilhelm simply often spoke before thinking, but would oftentimes reverse something he said after taking the time to mull it over. Mommsen notes that a historiographical tradition dating back to 1908 and experiencing a resurgence in the 1980s focused on “Wilhelm’s boastful ponderings, his theatrical speeches, often completely out of touch with reality, his childish jokes and amusement, usually in all-male company, his inclination to take everything personally, his inability to distinguish between personal and private affairs, his tendency to confuse rhetoric and reality,” painting a picture of a “personality bordering on the insane.” Yet the high esteem in which European circles held him alone suggests that he could not have been devoid of all reason; rather he was perhaps not as sober a statesman as others believed leaders should be. For his part, Wilson simply observed of the new emperor in 1889 that he did not exhibit much of the “divine” spark, but there was, he held, no need for concern; German politics would continue to be progressive. Meanwhile, observers sometimes wondered if the German state invested too much power in its emperor. While Wilson’s studies of German politics suggested to him that the German nation was sovereign and its citizens enjoyed representation, he recognized the immense strength of Wilhelm’s position; Gardiner, more directly, described Wilhelm simply as an “autocrat.” Bismarck, Wilson believed, had had the strength of mind and character to be the Iron Chancellor, but if Wilhelm II—who fired him—did not have a “divine” spark and was manic, there could be profound implications. To what extent, observers wondered, could Wilhelm’s impulses become policies? Here was a man, after all, who styled himself the peace emperor but loved all things martial—dressing in military garb, adorning himself
with feathers, bangles, a cape and tweeds, unearned medals, stylized mustache, and sword on hilt, avidly hunting, and holding energetic rallies for his soldiers in which he gave impassioned, belligerent speeches. In this context, Wilson believed that German patriotism under Wilhelm had become too worshipful.

As far as the State Department was concerned, at this time Germany seemed to be a civilized partner in world affairs. It was among many signees, along with the United States, of an agreement to curb international opium traffic; it accepted American mediation with Cuba over claims resulting from the Cuban war against Spain; and it signed onto a number of other international conventions in the emerging international system. The United States even protected and looked after German interests (as well as other nations’) in Constantinople during the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913 and in revolutionary Mexico during 1914. The only real moment of stress between the two nations occurred in early 1913, during the Taft administration, when a German war vessel came under fire in Liberia. When Liberia failed to comply with all of Germany’s resulting demands, Germany threatened force. The United States, which saw itself as a protector of Liberia, asked Germany to modify its demands and to await investigation of what happened; Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox said that he expected “a patient and liberal attitude” from Germany. German compromise came after some intransigence and forceful language, but the point remains that Germany did rely on what Wilson

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12 MacDonogh explains that although the emperor “could utter terrible threats . . . Germany was not a tyranny. He threatened to wind up the constitution on countless occasions; but it is significant that nothing ever happened. He often called for someone to be shot too, but no one ever was; MacDonogh, The Last Kaiser, 1-2; 460-61; Mommsen, “Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics,” 290-91; WW, 659-660. “Leaders of Men,” address at University of Tennessee Commencement, June 17, 1889, PWW 6:659-60; Gardiner, Prophets, Priests, and Kings, 64; WW, “Patriotism,” Worcester, MA, Women’s Club, January 29, 1902, PWW 12:260;
dubbed “public discussion” rather than war to settle its international disputes. It was a member of “high civilization,” after all.\(^\text{13}\)

As European diplomacy started to wither in the spring of 1914, Wilson sent Edward House on a number of informal political trips to Europe, the first beginning in late May 1914, to work as his personal representative; their approach shows that they considered Germany—and Wilhelm, in particular—to be the situation’s fulcrum, that they had both hope and fear in Wilhelm’s faculties, and that they viewed jingoism as a disease that could corrupt Germany and civilization as a whole through the personage of Wilhelm. While House’s first trip would also take him to France and Britain, he chose to visit first with “Germany and the Kaiser” to, as he said, “make the ground fallow” for securing European stability; his approach clearly suggests that he saw Wilhelm’s Germany as the keystone of the situation. While there, House formed opinions of the German statesmen he met, viewing some favorably and labeling others as “forceful and aggressive.” The whole of Germany, he claimed, had devolved into “jingoism run[ning] stark mad.” In early meetings, Wilhelm fulfilled his reputation as the *Friedenkaiser*, agreeing that the United States could help the tense situation and asking House to keep him apprised of his trip’s progress. House came to form positive views of Wilhelm and contrasted the German emperor’s bearing with the apparent bellicosity of Britain’s King George V—all the more noteworthy because House was an Anglophile. A month prior to the eruption of hostilities in Europe, he wrote to Wilhelm that he hoped the German

\(^{13}\) For the Opium Conference, see *FRUS*, 1912, 183-209; *Foreign Relations of the United States* hereafter abbreviated *FRUS*; for Cuban mediation, see ibid. and *FRUS*, 1913, various pages throughout; for German interests in Constantinople, see American Embassy, Berlin, November 10, 1912, *FRUS*, 1912, 1349; for German interests in Mexico, see *FRUS*, 1914, 884-888; *FRUS*, 1913, 664-675; Knox quoted in Secretary of State Knox to American Ambassador in Berlin, Dept. of State, January 10, 1913, 664-5.
leader would use his “commanding position” in European diplomacy to “bring about a sane and reasonable understanding among the statesmen of the Western Peoples, to the end that our civilization may be continued uninterrupted.” His wording suggests not only faith in the peace emperor but also fear that Wilhelm could allow insanity to spread, as he had already been doing within his own country; it is also subtly evocative of the split personality that would come out much more acutely in American discourse as the conflict progressed. Following logically from his call for reason, House soon blamed Wilhelm for the breakdown in international order, concluding that his sanity had failed.14

With a focus on Wilhelm’s peacemaking, religious devotion, mental questions, and martial rule, American discourse had given Wilhelm a complex—and, to some eyes—split, personality in the years leading up to the Great War: peaceful and militant, brilliant and unbalanced, spiritual and nationalistic, reformist and autocratic. That there was no major war in 1912 and 1913 put the focus on the positives in this image of Wilhelm. With war, as we will see, the discourse reversed Wilhelm’s intellectuality to insanity, bastardized his religiosity from devout to maniacal, transformed his martiality from manly to barbaric, and changed his moniker from *Friedenkaiser* to War Lord. “Not since the days of Napoleon has one man so captured the public imagination; never in the past century has a nation been so personified in one being; not since the time of the ‘Corsican Ogre’ have the woes of Europe been so frankly attributed to one ruler; never has a man been so universally vilified and lampooned, both in word and drawing,” wrote

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the editor of *The Kaiser: A Book about the Most Interesting Man in Europe* in 1914. Cartoons, illustrations, and written accounts, the book’s preface claimed, had been demonizing the kaiser as a crazed man in a spiked helmet, while, at the same time, Germans claimed that they had been forced into taking up “the sword” and that the supposed “War Lord” himself had met the call to war with tears. The editor told his American readers that their country was the “umpire” of the world and that they were responsible for rendering an impartial verdict upon the states of Europe and, specifically, upon Wilhelm, who had rightly or wrongly become the focus of the war. “He has done good. He has done evil. So much will probably be granted by all. But does the good or ill predominate?”

Wilson, as we will see, took up the call to be the world’s umpire as he endeavored to translate his progressive internationalist goals to the global situation; in turn, he grappled with casting judgment upon Wilhelm II.

**The British Caricature**

As Wilson and the rest of the United States sought to understand Wilhelm and the apparent insanity of the war in general, partial British figures, including a fairly sophisticated propaganda network, worked to influence the “umpire.” As one British propagandist in America wrote to his editor at the *Times* of London, the “Kaiser, in particular, has ‘got their goat.’” While Wilson was undoubtedly an Anglophile to a certain degree, he did have a clear respect for Germany, as we saw earlier, and he was wary of British imperialism and selfish policies, as the last chapter described.

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Nevertheless, British propagandists, lobbyists, and contacts were able to play upon Wilson’s sympathies in a way that suggested familiarity with his social philosophy, and, partially with their assistance, the kaiser would “get Wilson’s goat.” By no means did propagandists lead Wilson and the United States to war, but they played a role in shaping the discourse of a mad emperor, and this discourse was crucial in nudging Wilson toward his decision to intervene.16 Such British influence came primarily through three vehicles: formal propaganda, a basic cultural connection, and diplomatic contacts.17

Wellington House was Britain’s propaganda department at home and abroad during the Great War. The head of its American branch was Gilbert Parker, one of the men who had showered praise upon Wilhelm in the New York Times’ 1913 feature. At first, Wellington House worked only to prevent the United States from forging close ties with Germany, but as Britain became increasingly dependent on American trade and finance, its propaganda came to push for alliance. British propagandists endeavored to

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16 Quoted in Ross, Propaganda for War, 76.
17 Throughout the years of the American war debate, the belligerent nations made varied attempts to influence American public opinion in their favor or against their enemy’s. Of the warring nations, Britain, France, and Germany were most active in such propagandistic endeavors, with Britain substantially ahead of the others as the most successful of the belligerent nations in this regard. German propaganda was rather crude and lacked subtlety, with bombastic, dramatic language and a general clumsiness that made their efforts rather transparent. If anything, it lost German support. French propaganda quickly matured in the war’s early months as the French government created the Maison de la Presse in 1915 for war-related information, devoting one department to overseas propaganda. At first, as Robert J. Young explains, “Rape, pillage, mutilation, and murder . . . were all attributed to the kaiser’s uniformed marauders.” Eventually the increasing outrageousness of French accounts bred cynicism in France and overseas; in turn, French propagandists shifted to a subtler, information-driven form of propaganda. The French came to focus on their historic ties to America and to present their cause as one of continued liberty versus German militarism. They garnered the support of America’s own “cultural elite,” especially the press, including Ralph Pulitzer of the New York World, Adolph Ochs of the New York Times, and James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald; James Duane Squires, British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1935), 45; Robert J. Young, Marketing Marianne: French Propaganda in America, 1900-1940 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004), 46-50; Michael L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18 (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982); Ross, Propaganda for War.
work through subtle means, preferring to utilize sympathetic Americans for their cause. Parker’s American mailing list possibly surpassed 170,000 in 1917, including at least 555 newspapers. One tactic used by Parker’s crew was to flood the American press with psychological assessments of Wilhelm. With Wellington House’s involvement, an American psychologist, Dr. Morton Prince, wrote about “The Psychology of the Kaiser” in the New York Times and a published book of the same name in 1915. Prince put the stamp of psychology on his writings, but his argument was primarily political and ideological: He sympathized with Germany’s Social Democrats in contrast to the kaiser’s “feudalism” and lampooned Wilhelm’s divine right claim as a symptom of a psychological disorder. Britain and its American sympathizers, such as Prince, gained the ear of Americans especially because they played upon America’s values of academic sobriety; they appeared to be presenting just the “bare facts” in their news releases and put the stamp of modern science on their indictments of the kaiser.\(^\text{18}\)

Beyond formal propaganda, the fact that the United States and Britain shared a language and had common cultural and institutional roots and that Britain controlled the

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only operational transatlantic cable to the United States meant that American understanding of European goings-on would likely be skewed through British perspectives. Wilson, as we have seen, was a fan of the British journalist A. G. Gardiner. He was so delighted with Gardiner’s vignettes that he often read them aloud, including a flattering description of himself that had been printed in the *London News*. Visiting European statesmen in early 1915, House made a point to dine with Gardiner, whom he referred to as “our friend” in a letter to Wilson. Meanwhile, readers of major American newspapers no doubt noticed that many war-related articles arrived via “special cable from London.” These stories—some of which likely had Wellington House connections—flirted with the lines of journalistic integrity, often using alleged quotes from German dissenters to paint Wilhelm as a crazed “devil” and “tyrant” who was bent on utterly destroying the British people. Supposedly “thoroughly trustworthy sources” claimed that Wilhelm ordered his army to “exterminate . . . the treacherous English” and promised to confer medals upon the first aviators to strike British towns. The historical record shows, though, that while Wilhelm certainly grew angry at his wartime enemies, he was a known Anglophile and German war planners had only continental and colonial designs.

British books sold in the United States (some printed in London, others in America) also became a common source of information on the war and its key

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20 “German Socialists Assail the ‘Tyrant,’” *NYT* (Sept 2, 1914), 3; “Says Kaiser’s Order Was: Crush British,” *ibid.* (Oct 1, 1914), 1; “Kaiser’s Prize for First Bomb on London,” (Oct 5, 1914), 1; on German designs, see Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).
personalities. Often pitched to an audience that valued sober reflection, they described Wilhelm as a complex character whose negative qualities were to blame for the ongoing war. One such book described Wilhelm as both a “builder” and a “blunderer”—known for great accomplishments as well as colossal failures. The book’s writer, George Saunders, asserted that in 1914 “war fever took possession of the Kaiser and . . . he cast aside the restraints of political sanity with the mask of peacemaker.” He further averred that the kaiser was never a peacemaker and that his policies had destined Europe to the current war.21 Other British publications rejected subtlety for outright lampoonery. Swollen-Headed William: Painful Stories and Funny Pictures After the German!, for example, used English wit to poke fun at Wilhelm. Poems such as “Swollen-Headed William” described Wilhelm as an egotistical autocrat who would not find a place in heaven—a direct challenge to his religious reputation in America. “The Story of Cultured William” ridiculed German Kultur and Wilhelm’s persona as the peace emperor, saying that he “killed the doves” and plunged Europe into barbaric destruction. Other titles included “The Story of Little Bite-His-Thumb,” “The Story of William Who Would Not Have Any Peace-Soup,” and “The

Story of Fidgety Will.”  

While providing a laugh for Anglophiles, such works also helped to further caricature Wilhelm, transforming a man formerly considered complex into a black-and-white character representing manic belligerency.  

While the British influenced the American public at large with their descriptions of Kaiser Wilhelm, the British foreign service and government officials also had an opportunity to affect the U.S. State Department and Colonel House because of the nations’ close diplomatic ties with each other; this relationship opened up an avenue through which the British foreign policy establishment could pass their perceptions of Wilhelm on to American foreign policymakers including, ultimately, Wilson—either by design or simply indirectly. Since Wilhelm’s coronation in 1888, the British foreign policy elite had formed a skewed view of the German leader that fixated upon his apparent idiosyncrasies, including, especially,

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23 As we will see, charged descriptions of the Kaiser ebbed in the press, as in 1915 and 1916, except at times of tension, such as in May 1915, following the Lusitania’s sinking. One explanation for this development highlights the role of British propaganda in America. During these two years, Britain irritated the United States by interfering with American ships on the Atlantic and blacklisting American firms that it suspected were engaged in trade with the Central Powers; it also angered pockets of the American population with its suppression of the Easter Rebellion in Ireland. British propagandists used the sinking of the Lusitania to remedy this anti-British surge by publicizing German celebrations over their “naval victory,” but even the anger that the sinking generated ebbed in a nation that truly seemed to wish to remain out of the war. Sanders and Taylor, 173.
rumors of his mental instability. In one instance in 1895, after Prime Minister Lord Salisbury left Wilhelm waiting for hours for a meeting concerning Turkey, the German leader trembled, burst with volcanic anger, and stormed out without settling the Turkish questions; reports of Wilhelm’s instability subsequently raged through British diplomatic circles and the press. One official warned Salisbury that Europe would be doomed “if the Sovereign who possesses a dominant voice in the foreign policy of the Empire is subject to hallucinations and influences which must in the long term warp his judgment, and render Him liable at any moment to sudden changes of opinion which no one can anticipate or provide against.” While Wilhelm’s anger subsided and his subsequent outbursts were largely inconsequential, British policymakers based all of their subsequent German policy on the premise that Wilhelm was volatile and unbalanced.24 Wilson came to this view much later, and he did so partly because of British perceptions trickling down to him from his primary eyes on European politics such as Edward House and Ambassador Walter Hines Page.

**Becoming a Hun**

Addressing troops as they embarked for China during the Boxer Rebellion, Wilhelm declared, “Show yourselves Christians, happily enduring in the face of the heathens! . . . Just as the Huns under King Etzel created for themselves a thousand years ago a name which men still respect, you should give the name of Germany such cause to be remembered in China for a thousand years that no Chinaman . . . will dare look a

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Christian in the face.”

Years later, Wilhelm’s own enemies would resurrect his use of the word “Hun” in othering the Germans and their emperor. Within the United States, this transformation between the Great War’s beginning in August 1914 and Germany’s resumption of submarine attacks on the Atlantic was a crucial element in Wilson’s decision for intervention in April 1917 and occurred concurrently and interconnectedly with the president’s growing progressive internationalist visions. This section traces Wilhelm’s American transformation chronologically by identifying three primary shifts: In the opening months of the war, through its first winter, Americans in general, the Wilson administration, and Wilson himself were torn between two very different images of Wilhelm and Germany as they tried to make sense of the conflagration in Europe and respond to it. The years 1915 and 1916 featured the image of Wilhelm with a split personality, torn between war and peace factions, plagued by mental frailty but retaining Americans’ faith (Wilson’s included) that he could fix things, especially in the aftermath of crises such as the sinking of the RMS. *Lusitania.* With Germany resuming submarine warfare between January 1917 and March 1917, Wilson concluded that Wilhelm truly was a disturbed statesman engaged in a diseased social dynamic with his counselors and nation and that this “Hun” madness was bringing degeneration to the world as a whole.

As war broke out in Europe in August 1914, most Americans were neutral, largely out of sheer ignorance of the situation’s complexity; a poll in the war’s early weeks showed 105 newspaper heads supporting the Allies and 20 in favor of the Central Powers, with the remaining 242 respondents—about $\frac{2}{3}$—claiming no preference. As

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25 Quoted in MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser*, 244.
Americans sought to assign blame for the war, eyes that turned toward Germany oftentimes split the German nation into progressive and reactionary sides and used armchair psychology to conclude that Germany had gone mad. In the public sphere, George Santayana wrote in *The New Republic* that many “earnest” people had revered such Germans as Goethe, Kant, and Hegel and their “humanitarian, cosmopolitan, [and] romantic” philosophies, but that German actions on the Atlantic and reports of their wrongdoing in Belgium made Germany seem, instead, like it was “machine-loving, nationalistic, and aggressive.” In the same vein, Wilson’s friend Oswald Garrison Villard wrote in various outlets that there was a Germany of spiritual and intellectual idealism and commercial and scientific leadership that he supported and a Germany of the kaiser and the “autocracy of militarism” that he opposed, and he hoped that the good Germany would trump the bad one and a truly democratic Germany would form in the aftermath of the conflict. David Starr Jordan, a popular Stanford professor and naturalist who often corresponded with Wilson, remarked: “The German people do not burn universities [in reference to Louvain]. Neither do they make war for war’s sake. They are helpless in the hands of a monster of their own creation. . . . The Germany of today is an anachronism. Her scientific ideals are of the twentieth century. Her political ideals hark back to the sixteenth.”

Beyond splitting Germany, American discourse also split Wilhelm’s personality. In the opening months of the war, many Americans held on tenaciously to

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Wilhelm’s positive reputation as the “Peace Emperor” and as a sincerely religious man, but questions about autocracy and the kaiser’s mental state also garnered significant press coverage. While some people clearly favored one interpretation over the other, many envisioned Wilhelm sitting on his throne, an angel above one shoulder arguing on behalf of liberalism, peace, and religion and a demon above the other advocating autocracy, aggression, and mania.

When diplomacy broke down in August 1914, Wilhelm apparently fell into a depression and became increasingly susceptible to illness. Throughout December of the first year of war, and recurring thereafter, American newspapers followed the kaiser’s illnesses in front page coverage. At some point prior to December 9, 1914, Wilhelm came down with a feverish, bronchial sickness, and his ill health lasted through the New Year. Speculation as to what specifically was afflicting him included such theories as “nervous depression,” “overexertion,” and vague “psychological reasons.” (Such news received even more extensive coverage in England, where, at one point, a rumor even circulated that Wilhelm had died.) In a time of charged emotions, immature psychology, and awareness that war could break individuals, Wilhelm’s condition fueled new rumors that he had gone mad. As early as September 1914, newspapers featured articles by

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27 On a national day of prayer for peace in October 1914, ministers expressed hope in Wilhelm’s religiousness; one minister even noted that a ten-volume collection of the Kaiser’s speeches included a few volumes devoted to religion—theology so sophisticated that the volumes “could be read with profit by any minister.” Wilhelm received praise from Americans—and from Pope Benedict XV—for ordering that French priests who became German prisoners-of-war while fighting for France as common soldiers be treated as officers. His name even entered a debate over Prohibition in the U.S. House of Representatives; one representative who was advocating Prohibition cited the Kaiser’s temperance sentiments in supporting his case; “Services in Brooklyn,” NYT (Oct 5, 1914), 6; Ibid. (Oct 16, 1914), 1; “The Pope Praises Act of the Kaiser,” ibid. (Oct 24, 1914), 1; Ibid. (Dec 23, 1914), 7.

psychologists offering their thoughts on the soundness of the kaiser’s mind. One psychologist discussed the “hereditary mental defects” of the Hohenzollerns, which in some cases had bred outright cruel and insane figures and in others, such as Wilhelm II, had fostered a more subtle “mental degeneration.” Oftentimes he was innocently eccentric, the psychologist explained, but sometimes his quirks could be dangerous—especially when his belief in his divine nature became intertwined with his love for the military. Another article claimed that Wilhelm was suffering from a “form of insanity known as mania grandiosa.” Whatever the actual nature of his health, the seed had been sown in American thought that the war was further degenerating an autocrat’s mind.

Like the American public in general, Wilson’s top foreign policy minds were also torn by Wilhelm’s complexity and importance. In September 1914, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan initiated American mediation efforts with a plan to work through Wilhelm first, and then, with his consent, to address the other belligerents. Early indications suggested that Wilhelm would agree. The State Department, then, operated at this point under the assumption that Wilhelm was amenable to peace and that the fate of Europe hinged on Wilhelm. In another letter, Bryan added that he did not know what Wilhelm’s response would be, but declared that war “is so horrible from every aspect that


29 In one of his war speeches, translated and printed in American papers, he thundered, “Remember that the German people are the chosen of God. On me as German Emperor the spirit of God has descended. I am His weapon, His sword, and His viceregent. Woe to the disobedient! Death to cowards and unbelievers!”; P. Theo. Leyendecker, “Kaiser’s Mind Unsound? Dr. Hamilton Thinks It Exhibits a Distinct Insane Trace,” NYT (Sept 8, 1914), 10; “God Will ‘Help Destroy,’” ibid. (Apr 11, 1915), 2:4; “Kaiser as God’s Sword,” ibid. (Sept 9, 1914), 2.
no one can afford to take the responsibility for continuing it a single hour.” This meant, Bryan continued, that if mediation efforts broke down and one nation could be blamed for the failure, that nation would be seen as unreasonable and wreckful. In the same vein, House had pitched his backroom efforts in the name of “reason” and “sanity,” and when war broke out his changed tone toward Wilhelm suggests that he blamed the emperor himself for Germany’s militarism—perhaps as an originator of it but more so as a weak mind that allowed it to proliferate. On the one hand, House described an overly materialistic Wilhelm to Wilson, a man—he had heard—who had designs on South America and who only associated with the world’s rich, such as America’s Morgan family; the German leader, House wrote, seemed “possessed with the power of wealth, and his whole economic scheme seemed to me wrong and wholly material.” Yet, on the other hand, House agreed with an Atlantic Monthly article that blamed Germany’s “military caste” for the war and referred to Wilhelm as the “only . . . pacifist in Germany.” The contradiction in his sentiments indicates that House was torn between his previous faith in Wilhelm and his newfound frustration over diplomacy’s failure. Meanwhile, Ambassador Page, whose Anglophile sentiments grew less discreet as the war raged on, reported from London that the “cult of valor”—that might is right—was “driving these [German] militarists mad.” He felt that Wilhelm and the German

30 Although neither side at this point was truly interested in mediation, France and Britain did conclude and approve arbitration treaties with the United States in September. Since early in 1914 Bryan had been spearheading arbitration treaties with numerous world nations; these treaties stated, in essence, that the signatory nations would agree to arbitration before launching into future wars. Germany never signed such a treaty, making it appear more intransigent than the other major powers; Bryan to Gerard, Washington, September 7, 1914, FRUS, 1914 supplement, 98; WJB to Page (Britain) and Herrick (France), Washington, Sept. 8, 1914, ibid., 99
government were like Napoleon but worse—as the German militarists had a “dream of universal conquest.”31

Within the early months of the war, Wilson also began to ponder whether there was something off about Wilhelm’s “divine” spark, influenced in part by direct correspondence with the German leader and by Gardiner’s vignette in Prophets, Priests, and Kings. On September 8, 1914, Wilson received a letter from Wilhelm in which the emperor claimed that German troops had caught British and French soldiers with thousands of dumdum cartridges. Wilhelm noted the suffering that such exploding bullets caused, as well as the fact that their “barbarous” use violated international law. But then he went on to assert that Belgian guerrillas had compelled German commanders to make the heartrending decision “to take the most drastic measures to punish the guilty and to frighten the bloodthirsty population from continuing their work of vile murder and horror” by destroying villages in “self-defense.” Such decisions, Wilhelm added, made his “heart bleed” but were militarily necessary. In relation to Wilson’s notions of statesmanship and order, Wilhelm’s logic seemed to be astray, as his stances regarding the illegality and savagery of dumdum bullets, on one hand, and German violence in Belgium—a country that they had attacked in violation of international agreement—seemed contradictory. Tellingly, Wilson replied according to the precepts of his progressive philosophy, informing Wilhelm that the issues regarding dumdums and Belgium were too emotional for the time being and that mediation would have to wait for

the war’s end, when cooler heads would prevail. This response contrasted, to Wilson, his virtue of sober reason against the heightened passions of warfare that Wilhelm seemed to exhibit. Still, the correspondence was an opening for mediation, as Bryan told the president, and Wilson felt “honored” that the kaiser had turned to him: He had shown enough sense to seek out Wilson’s statesmanship. (Page, meanwhile, thought that the alleged atrocities in Belgium proved that Germany was showing a “glorious enjoyment of war.”)32

Just a few months later, Wilson was delightedly reading portions of Gardiner’s portrayal of Wilhelm aloud to friends in the White House. In his description, Gardiner provided Wilson with a way to reconcile the German leader’s seeming positives and negatives: *He had the mind of an artist*. This was an era that found art as the one productive institution for the mad outside of the asylum. Freud, Wilson’s contemporary and a popular figure in the United States, explained that all civilized people found reality to be “quite unsatisfactory” and struggled with impulses, but, while the energetic and able worked to shape a better reality and those with “that artistic talent which is still a riddle” could fight impulse with impulse and regain reality by escaping though their work, the less fortunate fell into neurosis. The era’s iconic mad artist, Vincent Van Gogh, was also Wilson’s contemporary; two years before he died in 1890, he had written, “I have sometimes worked excessively fast; is that a fault? I can't help it. . . . Isn't it rather intensity of thought than calmness of touch that we're looking for—and in the given

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circumstances of impulsive work on the spot and from life, is a calm and controlled touch always possible? Well—it seems to me—no more than fencing moves during an attack.”

All reports seemed to indicate to Wilson that Wilhelm flirted with that line between artistic and neurotic. In either case, Wilhelm certainly did not fit his mold of proper statesman, intelligent or not. In 1885 Wilson had written, “One dare not be so individual in social activity as in art, e.g., dare not outrun or shock the common habit; dare not innovate. Such is not the task of leadership.” Consistent with his disdain for pure theory and his preference for practical politics, Wilson’s favorite artwork was that which, he explained, exhibited “realism and perfection of detail”; he found Whistler’s etchings, in contrast, to be “unsatisfactory dashes of helter-skelter lines and irresponsible patches of shade.”

An artist was not fit to lead any state, but especially not Germany, where, as emperor, he was fully connected to the German nation, played a decisive role in the European balance of power, and, in turn, was of prime influence globally.

It is from this perspective that Wilson received a letter on January 25, 1915, in which America’s ambassador to Germany, James Gerard, reported that Germany’s under secretary of foreign affairs, Arthur Zimmerman, had exclaimed that if Germany found itself in trouble with the United States it had five hundred thousand “trained Germans in America who would join the Irish and start a revolution.” Gerard noted to Wilson,

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“Zimmerman’s talk was largely ridiculous and impossible as it seems to us it would not surprise me to see this maddened Nation in arms to go lengths however extreme.” Wilson filled the letter’s margins with remarks and particularly emphasized Gerard’s description of Germany as a “maddened Nation.” Commenting on the letter to Bryan, Wilson called the dispatch “nothing less than amazing” and said that “[s]uch distempers of the mind make the discussion of peace seem painfully difficult.”

Elements of Germany had gone beyond the pale of reason; Wilhelm may have had good qualities but his mind was not attuned to statesmanship; and no democratic processes existed in Germany to change the power structure: Thus, Wilson concluded by January 1915 that Germany’s social dynamic was broken and fueling German degeneration, leaving only glimmers of hope in otherwise “painfully difficult” peace overtures.

As the war progressed through 1915 and 1916, the American public questioned Wilhelm’s control in Germany, but Wilson and those closest to him remained convinced that the kaiser remained powerful though torn between competing factions and that he retained at least a shred of reason despite the sinking of the Lusitania and general German recalcitrance and scheming. As Wilhelm fell into occasional sickness and depression, his mood apparently vacillated; he could be on the verge of nervous collapse one day, and, with the arrival of better news, cheerful and confident the next. Wilhelm’s top advisors, including the chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, took over most operational duties, likely with his consent; Wilhelm mostly took to reviewing troops, giving speeches, conferring medals, visiting the front, etc., on most days but would retake

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the reins in moments of crisis. Chatter in the American public marked this change, with
the number of articles dealing with Wilhelm’s “goodness” or “evilness” decreasing and
editorials now discussing the possibility of a “walled Kaiser” who had no real say in his
government. In times of great tension or hope, though, the “split personality” accounts of
Wilhelm that had featured so prominently in the war’s early months would return; with
times of anxiety prevailing, Wilhelm’s image in America would move ever closer to the
evil caricature that it would become.35

Through 1916, Wilson and his top advisors remained convinced that Wilhelm
held control and that speculation of his being “walled off” had more to do with the
latitude he was granting to his most trusted advisors. In February 1915, Senator Albert J.
Beveridge visited Germany and reported back that Wilhelm’s health was robust. In
April, House wrote from Paris that Wilhelm was “still in absolute authority” and was
influenced most by his chief of the General Staff and grand admiral, Erich von
Falkenhayn and Alfred von Tirpitz, respectively. Gerard had earlier written the same to
House, adding that Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg was certainly neither “boss” nor of
much influence whatsoever as Wilhelm found him boring and only tolerated him. Later
that year, after the Lusitania incident, Gerard reported that Germany’s government had
collapsed, with the department heads fighting each other, Bethman Hollweg doing
nothing, and Wilhelm in the field “surrounded by military influences.” In July, he wrote
that Wilhelm “seems to have disappeared as a factor. It seems extraordinary. He is
entirely in [the] power of [the] military.” Gerard’s message carried little power, though;

35 MacDonogh, The Last Kaiser, 22, 367-71, 460-61; see, for example, “Condemns the Talk of a
‘Walled Kaiser,’” NYT (Jun 6, 1916), 4; “German School Girls Write of Kaiser,” ibid., July 25, 1915, 7:3;
through 1915 the ambassador could not gain an audience with Wilhelm and other high officials and so oftentimes resorted to reporting gossip. Wilson ascertained as much and referred to him as an “ass” in private correspondence with Edith. Occasionally Gerard’s reports received the voucher of trusted men such as House or Lansing, but in other cases Wilson paid them no more respect than he did the hearsay printed in the papers. Thus, through 1915 and 1916, Wilson saw a kaiser who held real power in Germany, delegated his authority, increasingly invested trust in military advisors such as Falkenhayn and von Tirpitz, maintained a routine that preserved his fragile health, and rose to the forefront in times of crisis—such as when dealing with the blowback from the Lusitania sinking.

On May 7, 1915, about 750 miles west of Ireland, the German U-boat SM U-20 fired on the British passenger ship, RMS Lusitania; within twenty minutes the ship had sunk and nearly 1,200 people had died, including over one hundred mostly prominent Americans. The ship carried war materials, such as rifles, and its journey followed an April 22nd warning by the German government printed in American newspapers, but its sinking nonetheless provoked outrage within the United States. Contradicting earlier reports of a “walled kaiser,” news accounts blamed Wilhelm for the fiasco, calling him a pirate and an outlaw, among a number of other decivilizing denigrations. Political cartoons followed suit, foreshadowing the caricaturization of Wilhelm that carried through the intervention years. In general, the Germans became “Mohammedans” like the Barbary pirates of a century earlier who had similarly rejected international norms. To

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36 House to WW, Paris, April 11, 1915, PWW 32:349; Gerard to House, Berlin, March 6, 1915, ibid., 352; Gerard to WW, Berlin, June 1, 1915, ibid., 33:299; Gerard to House, July 6, 1915, ibid., 34:1; WW to Galt, August 30, 1915, ibid., 34:376; WW to Galt, September 2, 1915, ibid., 405; WW to Galt, September 10, 1915, ibid., 441.
House and the British statesmen he was visiting, it seemed that Germany had abandoned masculine precepts with its underwater attacks on women and children (and use of poison gas in the trenches) and was striking “below the belt.” Page said that Germany was fighting “war under the black flag.”

Still, it was tough for Wilson to wholly decivilize Germany, and he felt that war was unnecessary if reason were still possible; such thinking was wholly consistent with his progressive social philosophy, which saw war between two civilized communities, or nations, as anathema to millennial progress. In turn, his first “Lusitania note” followed a legalistic approach and blamed “German authorities” specifically for criminal acts on the seas, which also included the torpedoing and aerial bombing of other British and American ships prior to the Lusitania incident. Wilson and staff wrote that Germany had “hitherto” exhibited a “humane and enlightened attitude” and had “always engaged upon the side of justice and humanity” in international affairs,

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leaving them scarcely able to believe that such attacks constituted an official German policy rather than aberrations. Despite Germany’s intentions to disrupt British naval superiority with submarine warfare, Wilson wrote, U-boat tactics simply could not maintain the “rules of fairness, reason, justice, and humanity” that “all modern opinion” (or, “the civilized world,” as originally penned) demanded. Accompanying the note, which was officially signed by the State Department, was a “tip” signed by the Executive Office stating that the Wilson administration held great confidence that Germany would “respond to this note in a spirit of accommodation” and meet the American view “in good temper . . . despite the passions of the hour,—passions in which the United States does not share.”

Such diplomatic wording evinced not only hope that Germany might yet act sensibly but also fear that it might devolve further—and needed to be reminded of its civilized standing. And it seemed that Germany’s two possible paths hinged on Wilhelm himself. Gerard reported from Berlin that the Wilson administration’s response to the Lusitania sinking had triggered a debate

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Fig. 28: “What is the answer?” Cleveland Plain Dealer, (May 15, 1915), 1. This cartoon appeared next to a Cleveland Plain Dealer article that stated the nation’s war or peace depended on Wilhelm’s reply to the first Lusitania note. Ben F. Allen, “Calmly Awaits Reply of Kaiser,” CPD, May 15, 1915, 1.

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38 WW to Bryan, the White House, May 12, 1915, PW 33:174; WW, Bryan, and Lansing, final edit of note to German government via Gerard, May 12, 1915, ibid., 174-78; “stampeded” commentary from the shorthand diary of Charles Lee Swem, May 10, 1915, ibid., 138; WW to Bryan with enclosure, the White House, May 13, 1915, ibid., 181-82;
between war and peace factions in Germany but that Wilhelm was surrounded only by the hawks. The ambassador held that while the emperor was “rabid” over American munitions sales, the jolt of America’s resolute stance had forced him to make “a nice recovery”; this followed his remark earlier in the year that it seemed that Wilhelm truly never wanted war. As hope, then, remained in Wilhelm, Wilson conjured the vision of an angel and a demon hovering above either of the emperor’s shoulders, writing to Edith at the end of August 1915, “Business seems to have come to a standstill while we wait to see which set of his counselors the Kaiser will heed.”

Some German actions in the months following the _Lusitania_’s sinking gave the administration hope that the forces of good within Wilhelm were winning out. The incident, for one, provided an opening for Wilson to push for binding global institutions in the spirit of Pan-Americanism. Talk of a postwar world court regained traction and the chairman of the World Court Congress, John Hays Hammond, claimed that the “unofficial spokesman of Emperor William,” Dr. Bernhard Bernburg, had assured him that Germany was interested in the plan. Then, after a German U-boat, the SM _U-24_, sunk a British ocean liner, the SS _Arabic_, on August 19, 1915, Germany officially tempered its submarine policy. Wilhelm, to the dismay of Admiral von Tirpitz, followed “peaceful” advisors such as Bethmann Hollweg and announced that attacks on passenger ships could come only after clear warning and that sincere efforts would be made to save lives. Germany had already made these orders in secret at the beginning of June, and so Wilhelm declared that the commander of the _U-24_ had broken orders when he had the

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39 Gerard to Lansing, forwarded to WW, Berlin, June 24, 1915, ibid., 454; Gerard to House, Berlin, February 15, 1915, ibid., 32:255-56; WW to Galt, the White House, August 30, 1915, ibid., 34:376
Arabic torpedoed; Wilhelm offered to pay an indemnity, to submit both the Lusitania and the Arabic cases to international arbitration, and to respect U.S. views on naval rules. In October, furthermore, the German emperor displayed humanity toward two French women who had been sentenced to death for helping their countrymen escape; responding to an international outcry that included an official statement from Wilson, he commuted their sentences to life imprisonment. And, responding to crisis conditions in Poland, which German and Austro-Hungarian forces had recently wrested from Russian troops, Wilhelm assured Wilson that the new German administration there was taking measures to distribute “cereals and potatoes” and to combat “the epidemic diseases raging in the occupied parts, [such] as cholera, dysentery, spotted fever, [and] smallpox . . . [saving] thousands and thousands of human lives.” These efforts, Wilhelm explained, came on top of continued attempts to support the Rockefeller War Relief Commission. Herbert Hoover, a man who symbolized the civilian relief efforts of World War I through his tireless chairing of the Committee for Relief in Belgium, wrote to Lansing on January 2, 1917, that Wilhelm was “intrinsically a humane man [who was] generally desirous of promoting peace”; Wilson received the forwarded letter a few days later.40

Still, Wilhelm often seemed recalcitrant, arrogant, and wholly unreasonable in Wilson’s eyes. After the first Lusitania note failed to achieve much of a reaction, the

administration issued a handful of others in the ensuing months, each slightly firmer in tone. (The strong language of the second note is what led Bryan to tender his resignation as secretary of state in June.) The third note, sent on July 21, declared that the administration would view any subsequent attacks as “deliberately unfriendly,” signifying a growing lack of confidence in German civilization, enlightened ideals, and friendship. By June, Ambassador Gerard had gone eight months without being able to gain an audience with Wilhelm. Furthermore, while Wilhelm’s communications with Wilson spoke of humanitarian principles and gave a “hint of peace,” they also exhibited what one journalist described as an “irritating and almost arrogant tone.” When Wilhelm spoke of German efforts in Poland, for example, he lashed out at Britain, France, and Russia; the commentary that other world statesmen provided on the Polish crisis, in contrast, was far less defensive and accusing. He also held to his argument that the British blockade had forced Germany into its attack upon merchant ships (and passenger ships carrying munitions), to which Wilson replied in the third note, “Illegal and inhuman acts, however justifiable they may be thought to be against an enemy who is believed to have acted in contravention of law and humanity, are manifestly indefensible when they deprive neutrals of their acknowledged rights, particularly when they violate the right to life itself.” Consistent with a progressive philosophy that demanded that society adjust in ways that maintained ageless values through changing situations, Wilson added, “The rights of neutrals in time of war are based upon principle, not upon expediency, and the principles are immutable. It is the duty and obligation of belligerants [sic] to find a way
Furthermore, as Wilson endeavored, in his thinking, to rationalize international affairs by pushing for Pan-Americanism and international liberalism in general, Wilhelm’s Germany oftentimes seemed to stand in his way. Gerard had heard of a conversation in which Wilhelm called the United States hypocritical when it banned arms sales to Mexico and yelled, “There is no international law!” Later in 1915 Gerard was finally able to meet with Wilhelm; in the meeting, Wilhelm apparently said that he would “attend to America” when the war was over, that he could not accept Wilson as a fair mediator, and that he would make his own, separate peace with his cousins, George V of England and Nicholas II of Russia. House commented, “We had to laugh at

Fig. 29: “The German Government believes that it was acting in justified self-defense,” (Kirby in the New York World).

This cartoon lampoons Germany’s justification for sinking the Lusitania and portrays the Kaiser as a comically malevolent character.

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this characteristic, egotistic, picture which the Kaiser had drawn of himself.” Closer to home, the Wilson administration consistently received reports of German intrigues in the Caribbean, as the previous chapter discussed. Page allegedly learned through French channels that in 1909 Wilhelm had attempted to bring European powers together to “smash” the Monroe Doctrine. In general, Wilson concluded that German officials were “crude blunderers” who had little understanding of Americans.42

For Wilson and his inner circle, Gerard’s meeting with Wilhelm in May 1916 cemented for the time the image of a German emperor with a touch of madness and arrogance who nonetheless prolonged hope in reason and cooperation. When Gerard arrived at the chateau, Wilhelm smiled and asked, “Do you come like a Roman Pro-Consul bringing peace in one hand and war” in the other? When the

Fig. 30: “Patching Things Up; ‘Be careful, Wilhelm, my stock of patches is running low.’”NYT, May 9, 1915, 5:13.

Germany had managed to satisfy American demands and requests just enough to placate Wilson. This cartoon, which situates Wilhelm at the helm of German U-boat policy in the wake of the Lusitania crisis, shows a patched up ship bearing a flag that reads “German American Relations.”

ambassador replied that the United States sought friendly relations, Wilhelm launched into a diatribe in which he asserted that American notes of late had been discourteous; that German-American friendship dated back over a century; that, while the Americans charged Germany with being barbarous in the war, he, as emperor and as a Christian, sought to conduct the war “in a knightly manner”; that the French had been ignoble; that the British blockade sought to starve Germans and keep milk and Red Cross supplies out of Germany; that this was a breach of international law; that this justified submarine warfare; and that he would destroy England and its royal family before he would let his wife and grandchildren starve to death. He also noted that America had been developing submarines, as well, averring that the technology had rendered international law outdated. An obviously irritated Wilhelm also said, in the guise of small talk, that the German troops were “splendid” and that it took great “courage to remain under vexing fire from American ammunition.” Still, the two men did manage to have what Gerard described as “pleasant general conversation,” touching on such diverse topics as Henry Ford and woman’s suffrage. Before concluding the conversation, Wilhelm expressed his hope that Wilson would continue to work for peace and said that Germany would consider American mediation now since his country was in a stronger negotiating position than it had been earlier. He pledged his desire to see the horrific loss of life end, and he hoped that House would return to Berlin and visit him on Wilson’s behalf. Forwarding Gerard’s account on to Wilson, Lansing noted that Gerard did well and represented the administration’s views.43 While Wilhelm’s “peace armed to the teeth” attitude, then,

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43 Gerard, report to State Department, Berlin, May 3, 1916, ibid., 36:613-16; Lansing to WW,
demanded wariness and kept questions of his possible mania on the minds of Wilson and his inner circle, his apparent “other side” maintained, for a while, hope in German civilization and reason, allowing dire situations to be “patched up.”

With Germany’s war effort bogging down by late 1916 and the British blockade wreaking havoc within Germany, Wilhelm’s military staff urged him to reverse his submarine policy and to target all Britain-bound shipping with a fury—the hope being that the Allies would be driven out of the war before the United States could adequately respond. On January 31, 1917, Wilhelm signed the orders; on February 1 they went into action; and on February 3 Wilson severed all diplomatic ties with the once “enlightened” nation-state. Between that point and March 1917, President Wilson became convinced that the kaiser’s Germany was a nation with which he could not work. Previously, German authorities had cooperated with American desires just enough to retain Wilson’s hope that Germany and the kaiser, so esteemed a few years earlier, would, in his estimation, come to their senses. But the return to the “barbarous” submarine warfare convinced Wilson that Germany could not come to its senses because it had totally lost them. From the start, it had seemed to him and his inner circle that the German nation was “maddened,” and, with Germany’s pivotal position in European affairs, was threatening Europe as a whole with degeneration; an apparently unstable Wilhelm in a position of immense power only exacerbated and escalated the mania. With German intrigues in the Americas and mounting U-boat attacks on the Atlantic, it increasingly

appeared to Wilson that the madness was spreading to the Americas. And, crucially, Wilson found even his own well-being imperiled.

Germany’s reversal concerning submarine warfare ruptured the foundations of President Wilson’s world. According to House’s diary entry from February 1, 1917, Wilson became very distressed over the “sudden and unwarranted” change in policy. He had expected peace talks to come within a month, and German authorities had indicated interest in such proceedings. Movingly, House wrote, “The President said he felt as if the world had suddenly reversed itself; that after going from east to west, it had begun to go from west to east and that he could not get his balance.” While waiting for Secretary of State Lansing to arrive that morning, Wilson was “listless,” House noted, and he “nervously arranged his books and walked up and down the floor.” Trying to calm his nerves, he played some pool. That the world had become so unbalanced to Wilson that it impaired his own mental health was a pivotal moment for him; progress, to him, required balance, which meant discipline, order, and a healthy institutional environment. War could be a degenerative condition—and a contagious one, as well. After the Lusitania incident in May 1915, Wilson had held that some Americans were getting carried away with war fever. While he could not trust any of the belligerents to be “reasonable” in peace talks, the United States needed to exhibit “perfect self-possession.” More deeply, war’s destabilizing power hit Wilson on a very personal level, as well: The Lusitania attack had come just a few days before the birthday of his wife, Ellen, who had died the previous August. Grasping for a foundation in such tremulous times, Wilson had sought refuge in what he long considered the most fundamental of institutions—marriage and
family—and had engaged in a number of serious conversations with his new love, Edith Bolling Galt, about the nature of their relationship. Writing to her on the day after the U-boat attack, he had implored, “I know that no one can help me as you can. I know that you may be my haven and . . . sanctuary.” Her love, he declared, would “re-inforce” in him “everything that fits a man for achievement and the exercise of serene strength”—and he wrote such things, he admitted, “through a veil of sweet tears.” They wed in December of that year, and family, coupled with apparent diplomatic progress with Germany, restored Wilson’s faith and health. But then, at the tail end of January 1917, the kaiser’s Germany made the world go from west to east.44

In relation to millennial duties, Wilhelm’s instability and Germany’s militarism were, in Wilson’s view, criminal and sinful in nature, as their contagion unrooted mankind, including the American statesman himself; still, as House recorded, Wilson retained some hope in the “possibility of bringing the Germans to their senses” by expelling the German ambassador, Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff. The president remained adamant that he did not want the United States to enter the war, but he also held that Germany was “a madman that should be curbed.” When House suggested that continued American non-involvement was unfair to the Allies, Wilson visibly “winced” and held that he wanted to stay out if it were “humanly possible.” Giving diplomacy one

last chance, Wilson, House, and Lansing agreed to retain the Austrian ambassador and work with Germany through him.45

Two of the images Wilson received of Wilhelm and of the German political situation in the couple of weeks before the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare shaped the way he received word of the unsettling policy. One, a message from Gerard to Lansing from earlier in the month that met Wilson’s desk three weeks later, once again questioned Wilhelm’s power—this time asserting that the new chief of staff, Paul von Hindenburg, was “the real ruler of Germany” and that Wilhelm “was losing his mind and spent all his time praying and learning Hebrew.” The second was word he received from House that there were active, liberal elements in the German government who were threatening the future of the Hohenzollern’s dynastic rule. The general impression from Gerard’s report—which House corroborated—fortified Wilson’s growing suspicion that Wilhelm’s statesmanship was failing as he bent to military figures and pursued the impulses of his “artistic” mind. Through the end of 1916, the American media had been suspecting that Germans who wished to respect the United States had gained the upper hand in relation to Wilhelm, and the resumption of submarine tactics had, in turn, sparked a general sense of surprise. An American diplomat in Berlin, Joseph Grew, had reported the previous November that Wilhelm had been blocking the desire of German naval commanders to resume submarine warfare. A secret memo from January 3, 1917, noted that the U-boat commanders had denounced the restrictions on submarine activity and were planning on petitioning Wilhelm for a change in policy. “The matter of a general U-

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45 House diary, the White House, February 1, 1917, ibid., 41:87-89
boat warfare,” the report concluded, “is now before the Kaiser and he is giving it his
earnest attention. Great pressure is being brought upon him from all sides.” The
announcement of the new policy on January 31, in turn, confirmed to Wilson and his
advisers that the metaphorical demon over Wilhelm’s shoulder had prevailed. As House
wrote, while the German people were certainly carried away by war fever, “devilish
machinations in governmental or military circles” were ultimately to blame for
Germany’s apparent “inhuman and selfish” record of late.46

In this context, the news of liberal opposition in Germany confirmed to Wilson
that German civilization still existed and that true sovereignty could be restored there if a
change of statesmanship and political structures were to be effected. Even before the
break in relations, editorialists had begun to call for Wilhelm’s ouster; Dr. Morton Prince,
who had earlier written about the kaiser’s psychological well-being, now declared that it
would be folly to have any militarist, such as Wilhelm, at a peace table. Church
congregations that had long retained hope in the “peace emperor” now joined in the
clamor; one church speaker quipped, in reference to Wilhelm’s constant assertions that
God was on Germany’s side, that the god involved was Thor.47 Such remarks indicate
that by 1917 many religious Americans had come to see the kaiser as an obstacle to—
rather than a champion of—peace. In this light, it is not surprising that President Wilson


echoed the calls for Wilhelm’s ouster after the United States entered the war. In the meantime, a war of intervention grew ever more possible in Wilson’s mind, and though he still expressed a wish to avoid force “if humanly possible,” his evolving perceptions of the situation made a slip toward hostilities ever more possible—just as had happened on a smaller scale in Haiti.

A convergence of several developments in February and March at last led Wilson to fully other Wilhelm and the German state. First, on February 24, Ambassador Page received the infamous Zimmerman Telegram, which British authorities had intercepted and passed on to him; the German foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmerman, had intended, with the telegram, to propose alliance with Mexico in the event of war between the United States and Germany. Second, the Germans were wreaking an ever greater toll on the Atlantic as their submarines sank over half a million tons of shipping in February and March, even as American merchant ships armed themselves; March 16 alone saw three American ships succumb to torpedo attack. Third, Tsar Nicholas II’s autocratic regime in Russia fell on March 15 when he abdicated the throne and handed power over to a provisional government. Fourth, the last week of March saw front page reports that Wilhelm was suffering from a “severe nervous breakdown” and that he required stimulants to maintain daily activity. The Zimmerman Telegram, which the administration released to the public on March 1, constituted a serious strike against Wilson’s Pan-Americanism and was the ultimate affirmation, to him, that the German disease was spreading beyond Europe, across the Atlantic, and now quite certainly on to the Americas—this on top of earlier schemes in places such as Haiti. The increasing U-
boat attacks confirmed that Wilhelm and his advisers were fully committed to what Wilson considered an inhumane path that blatantly disregarded the most fundamental of all principles—the right to life. The first Russian revolution of 1917, which promised possible democracy in a once autocratic empire, provided the ability to understand the war as a battle between militarism and despotism, on one side, and constitutional liberty on the other. Wilhelm’s apparent mental breakdown seemed to bear out the pitfalls of a German system that Wilson once praised but now believed lacked adequate democratic safeguards, enabling mania and warmongering to grow and run amok. In turn, Americans began to hiss at images of Wilhelm, newspapers reported that there was no longer any hope whatsoever for diplomacy, and Wilson, on April 2, asked Congress for war.\footnote{John Howard Morrow, \textit{The Great War: An Imperial History} (London: Routledge, 2004), 202; Wilson’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, \textit{PWW} 41:519-27; “Hear Kaiser Has Broken Down; May Take Cure at Homburg,” \textit{NYT} (March 24, 1917), 1; “Kaiser Suffers from Nervous Breakdown; Told to Take Cure,” \textit{CPD} (March 24, 1917), 1; Kaiser Picture Hissed,” \textit{NYT} (March 7, 1917), 5; “Pupils Tear Down Kaiser’s Picture,” \textit{NYT} (March 20, 1917), 11; “U.S. to Spurn Any Offers of Mediation,” \textit{CPD}, (March 23, 1917), 1; see also Binoy Kampmark, “No Peace with the Hohenzollerns: American Attitudes on Political Legitimacy towards Hohenzollern Germany, 1917-1918,” \textit{Diplomatic History} 34:3 (November 2010), pp. 769-791.}

Wilson’s war address to Congress on April 2, 1917, embodied the transformation of Kaiser Wilhelm’s image as it contrasted with Wilson’s progressive social philosophy and subsequent global goals. He opened by noting how German submarine attacks chafed against his former faith in Germany, stating, “I was for a little while unable to believe that such things would in fact be done by any government that had hitherto subscribed to the humane practices of civilized nations.” Submarine warfare reversed mankind’s march toward millennial altruism, Wilson declared, by killing freedom of the seas: “By painful stage after stage has that law been built up,” he remarked, “with meager enough results,
indeed, after all was accomplished that could be accomplished, but always with a clear view, at least, of what the heart and conscience of mankind demanded.” By attacking civilization progress, Wilson averred, Germany was waging “a war against all nations.” Still, America ought not meet Germany’s apparent mania with mania of its own, but rather with sober self-possession; Wilson asserted, “The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperateness of judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away.” In line with his views on manly adulthood, he demanded that the United States “not choose the path of submission” as it tempered its emotion, but, rather, that it forge a firm, resolute, and “solemn” response that was neither savage nor timid, “conduct[ing] our operations without passion.” He even made a point to state, “My own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months.” The binary he established placed the United States in “a concert of purpose and action” with the free nations of the world and painted the adversary—which included Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire—as “autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people.” In other words, he no longer saw Germany as representing a heavily centralized form of democracy but rather as a mad state connected to its nation only in a degenerative, and thus illegitimate, form; just as in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere, then, intervention would restore, rather than usurp, the German nation’s sovereignty. On this note, Wilson defended the German people, who had only grown maddened because of the failure of their statesmen and institutions. “It was not upon their impulse,” he maintained, “that their government
acted in entering this war.” Rather, in Wilson’s perception, Wilhelm with his artist’s mind was impulsive and manic and prone to the “devilish machinations” of the hawks around him—and impulse was not a trait befitting the more orderly world he wished would arise. Tying international liberalism to the millennium, he said, “We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.” By implication, a state run by a crazed kaiser and devilish advisors had to be excluded from such a vision; whereas such dynasties and “little groups of ambitious men” corrupted international politics with selfish intrigue, truly “self-governed nations” he insisted, were responsible global citizens. Civilization hung “in the balance,” Wilson concluded, as Wilhelmine militarism imperiled millennial progress by threatening democracy’s ability to survive where it already existed and to grow where it had not yet blossomed.49 On April 4 and 6, the Senate and the House, respectively, accepted Wilson’s call for war with Germany.50

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49 Wilson’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, PWW 41:519-27.
50 By war’s end, Wilson was convinced that the mania of the German was lasting and required a stronger remedy than simply the removal of their emperor and the institution of a more representative government. Early in the Versailles proceedings, in January 1919, Wilson said that the Germans would require at least “a generation” of improvement before they could be trusted as global citizens. This remark echoed Wilson’s calibrated colonialism philosophy. In turn, Wilson advocated paternalistic punishment for Germany and temporary exclusion from global citizenship in the League of Nations. See the chapter “Wilson and the Versailles Treaty” in Ross Kennedy, The Will to Believe, 182-202.
Between April 1917 and the aftermath of the war’s end in November 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II became a caricature in the United States, the symbol of both manic folly and sinister evil, as the U.S. Food Administration poster on the left illustrates. This image markedly differs from the 1933 photograph of Wilhelm in exile, on the right.

Defeat the Kaiser and his U-boats—Victory depends on which fails first, food or frightfulness—Waste nothing.” Steele, United States Food Administration, 1917. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division”; Oscar Tellgmann, “Kaiser Wilhelm II. im Exil,” September 1933, German Federal Archive (Deutsches Bundesarchiv), Bild 136-C0804, http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/.

Figs. 31 and 32: Between April 1917 and the aftermath of the war’s end in November 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II became a caricature in the United States, the symbol of both manic folly and sinister evil, as the U.S. Food Administration poster on the left illustrates. This image markedly differs from the 1933 photograph of Wilhelm in exile, on the right.

Writing from his exiled home in the Netherlands in 1922, Wilhelm claimed, probably correctly, that President Wilson was the first belligerent leader to call for his abdication and the end of the Hohenzollern dynasty. The following year Wilson declared triumphantly in his final essay, “The world has been made safe for democracy. There need now be no fear that any such mad design as that entertained by the insolent and ignorant Hohenzollerns and their counselors may prevail against it.”

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51 According to Wilhelm, he agreed to the exile plan when Wilson said that doing so would lead to better peace conditions for Germany. Wilhelm II, The Kaiser’s Memoirs, 320.
52 Announcing the armistice to Congress five years earlier, on November 11, 1918, Wilson had declared, “The arbitrary power of the military caste of Germany which once could secretly and of its own single choice disturb the peace of the world is discredited and destroyed.” More importantly, he added, the war had brought the great nations of the world together in “common purpose” and had infused them with a desire to move human civilization to the next stage of progress by forging a more coherent and just world.
As Wilhelm “became a Hun” and Wilson’s progressive internationalism evolved, the two played off of one another in a way that seemed to leave intervention as the only option for Wilson. Germany had been a member of the community of civilized nations and it played a central role in European and global dynamics. Wilhelm had had—in American discourse—a split personality that in the years just before the outbreak of war focused more on his brilliance and peacefulness than on his apparent mania and autocracy. Between 1914 and 1917 the image moved, in contrast, toward a negative caricature, spurred on in part by British influence, including the sophisticated propaganda network run by Wellington House. American neutrality at the onset of the war was compatible with a complex Wilhelm who exhibited both good and bad characteristics, and administration initiatives were initially premised on the belief that the peace hinged on Germany, and specifically Wilhelm, whose negatives demanded wariness and whose positives needed to be nurtured. Wilson held that the German emperor had the mind of an artist, guided by impulses, while he was surrounded by one set of advisors who appealed to his better half and another to his worse—as if he had an angel over one shoulder and a demon over the other. The Lusitania incident stoked fears that the bad kaiser was winning out, but it also provided an opportunity for diplomacy. In the months that followed, Wilhelm displayed truly humane characteristics at the same time that he and his state were recalcitrant and challenged Pan-Americanism. When Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in the opening months of 1917, Wilson felt as if the world

changed course—that Wilhelm and his government had undermined all of human civilization. As Wilson learned that Wilhelm was studying Hebrew as he intentionally handed most power over to his military advisors, it now seemed certain to him that the negative—manic, autocratic—Wilhelm had prevailed. A convergence of developments in February and March 1917—including the Zimmerman Telegram, increasing submarine attacks, the abdication of the Russian royal family, and reports that Wilhelm suffered a nervous breakdown—then made for the full othering of Wilhelm and his state: A maddened emperor and his devilish staff had corrupted Germany’s social dynamic, which in turn stoked mania in a German nation that could still be saved and imperiled the truly self-ruling nations of the world and the incremental advance toward a more rational, altruistic world. Thus, on April 2, 1917, Wilson successfully urged Congress and the American nation to fight to make the world “safe for democracy” by making it safe from madness.
Part Two Epilogue

In 1923 an ailing Woodrow Wilson penned his final essay, “The Road Away from Revolution.” While he had faith that world civilization had been redeemed in the Great War and at Versailles, a dark pessimism coursed through the essay’s paragraphs. The days were marked by doubt and anxiety, the world was full of “unrest,” and, he wrote, “the road ahead seems darkened by shadows which portend dangers of many kinds.” That such turbulence spanned the entire globe told Wilson that there “must be some real ground for the universal unrest and perturbation.” The root of the discord lay deeper than in mere political or economic reasons and spoke to a spiritual crisis. The greatest manifestation of this problem was revolution, with the Bolshevik’s being the most “outstanding” example. Russia’s revolution was generations in the making, Wilson wrote, the product of years of fundamental social problems inadequately addressed. The bulk of Russia’s populace had long seen their democratic aspirations quashed, but the greatest target of the people’s ire was economic rather than political: capitalism. Wilson asserted that the revolutionary perspective on capitalism—in Russia and elsewhere—was so charged with feeling that it was worth investigating. Was capitalism progressive? Did it serve the “conscience” and nurture “generosity and humane feeling?” Surely the “blame for the present discontent and turbulence” around the globe was not “wholly on the side of those who are in revolt” against civilization, Wilson declared. The unease spoke to a failure of statesmanship, national and global. It was humanity’s duty to “seek a
way to remove such offenses and make life itself clean for those who will share honorably and cleanly in it.” Otherwise, legitimate grievances would continue to breed “irrational revolution.” Just as civilization had saved democratic potential (and thus millennial progress) by defeating militarism, it now faced the grave responsibility of dealing with global revolutions that stemmed from the inequalities and injustices that remained. Neither negative conditions nor revolutions that sought to ameliorate such ills were healthy: The persistence of economic and political inequality hindered individuals’ ability to improve and injected hateful emotion into the public mind, while revolutionists abandoned the precepts of the progressive social dynamic and tried to institute radical changes that simply further disrupted society. American newspapers, for example, had been reporting various stories—most of them unsubstantiated rumors—detailing Bolshevik efforts to retool or even undo the institution of marriage, and the Soviets quite directly worked to erase religion from society, most darkly manifested in the murder of the Metropolitan of Kiev and other religious figures. Marriage and religion, in Wilson’s philosophy, were two of the most vital institutions for social order and millennial progress; revolution that targeted either was sheer madness.¹

The solution to the global revolutionary epidemic as Wilson saw it was two-fold: The United States needed to take the reins of moral leadership and work to create the “clean” conditions necessary for progress, and it needed to promote worldwide

cooperation based on the values of “Christian civilization”—not a “narrow or technical conception of justice,” but, rather, “sympathy and helpfulness and a willingness to forego self-interest in order to promote the welfare, happiness, and contentment of others and of the community as a whole.” Capitalism had been selfish as it spread around the globe. Human civilization, in turn, could “be saved only by becoming permeated with the spirit of Christ.” Wilson pitched his call not only to “our churches” and “our capitalists” but also to “our political organizations,” and as part one of the dissertation showed, spreading Christianity politically meant developing discussant, community-binding institutions, such as the League of Nations, premised on values of altruism, reason, and justice.

“The Road Away from Revolution” serves as a useful final thought for part two, as Wilson touched on the themes of assimilation, exclusion, pluralism, and the community of nations as human civilization transitioned into the post-Versailles era. Humanity, Wilson insisted, needed to move toward a light assimilation centered around shared values while accepting an expedient pluralism (such as with the mandate system) and completely rejecting, or excluding, “irrational” entities, such as the Bolsheviks. The United States was clearly, in his view, in a providential position to claim the responsibilities of global leadership. The end goal was not the mere promotion of capitalism or the accumulation of wealth but rather the forging of a transcendent global spirit. As with the Great War, the rash of revolutions presented an opportunity as much as

\[ \text{WW, “The Road Away from Revolution.”} \]
As Wilson’s anti-Bolshevik stance set the stage for the rest of the twentieth century, it represented a clear continuity with his world view, forged long ago, and its political application from 1910 through 1921. As Wilson gauged particular communities’ spirit, intelligence, and contribution to the social dynamic, he advocated various exclusionary, assimilationist, and pluralist policies—regarding “defectives”; African- and Asian-Americans; immigrants; trusts; women; Native Americans; Filipinos; Cubans; Puerto Ricans; Dominicans; Haitians; American nation-states including the A.B.C. powers; the territories lost by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire; German militarists; and Bolsheviks. Though Wilson’s policies and stances were consistent with his progressive philosophy, they were oftentimes at odds with his millennial end goals: national and global segregation in the service of eventual
assimilation, paternal violence in the service of peaceful order, etc. And, from governing New Jersey to ascending to international statesmanship at Versailles in 1919, Wilson cast this vision in an ever broader circle—New Jersey, the United States, the Americas, the globe.
Conclusion

You cannot, in human experience, rush into the light. You have to go through the twilight into the broadening day before the noon comes and the full sun is upon the landscape.

– Woodrow Wilson (1919)

The sight must have been a peculiar one for Woodrow Wilson as he met the four emissaries from Ethiopia. Here were men who had the same complexion of the “swarthy,” “dusky” men of his Southern heritage, formally and reverentially received in the same White House that William Monroe Trotter could no longer enter (as long as Wilson was in office). They were clad in robes, likely conjuring images of a long-ago epoch. They were the nobility of a feudalistic empire. Yet, as the image of Abyssinia processed through Wilson’s ideology, everything suggested that here stood four representatives of a nation that was not in the least stagnant and certainly not doomed to fail in the millennial march. The Old and the New Testament permeated the kingdom’s 5,000 year history, and, as one of the emissaries—Adafersaw Yenadu—explained, Ethiopia stood proudly as a pillar of “the living god,” resolutely empowered by “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The gift of Menelik’s sword, a product of beautiful craftsmanship, was a reminder of Ethiopia’s battlefield success. No savage

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1 WW, after dinner remarks in Paris, May 9, 1919, PWW 58:598-600.
nation, Wilson’s world view said, could have sent a modern European army fleeing—even Italy’s; as Walter Bagehot had written in *Physics and Politics* over forty years earlier, “[T]he best institutions have a natural military advantage over bad institutions.” Ethiopia’s sovereignty was earned for a reason: Its triumph in battle was a testament to its firm character. The government had been shaken by anachronistic royal infighting following Menelik’s death, certainly a sign, as Wilson saw it, of political backwardness, but the faction that won out had favored the Allies in the Great War and took heart in the American president’s pledged mission in the name of “liberty and independence”; even America’s War for Independence was an inspiration. Surely, Wilson’s ideology suggested, this was a sign that the Ethiopian state was not locked in medieval anachronism. Though Ethiopia was, as Kantiba Gabrou explained, an agricultural nation, the ambassadors were was most interested in learning from Yankee hustle and bustle and considered the roads, bridges, lights, and architecture they saw in the United States to be America’s gift of art to the world. Ethiopia was no democracy to be sure, but its liberty seemed to be regulated, the emissaries described a populace that was content, and, besides, there was little infrastructure as of yet that could support a society of public discussion in a country so large. Perhaps Ethiopia was about to transition in the way of Japan, which had within the past couple of generations established representative institutions, industrialized, and achieved battlefield success. Bolshevism did not seem to be an issue, either; Gabrou even laughed, in a later interview, when asked if Bolshevism could make any inroads in his nation. The people were simple and their bellies were full, he replied, conjuring Wilson’s 1912 statement that “no man can rationally live, worship,
or love his neighbor on an empty stomach.” In conversation, the emissaries mentioned that Ethiopia had slaves, but Wilson—who was born in a United States that still had slavery—found the institution to give paternalistic training to slaveholders even if it did have its very real downside. In short, as Wilson’s ideology processed things, Ethiopia was materially content and spiritually fulfilled—and thus poised to make certain millennial progress.²

Through the prism of Wilson’s ideology, then, the treatment that the Abyssinian emissaries received was not all at odds with William Monroe Trotter’s. To Wilson, Trotter was an emotional man who brought anger to public discussion and represented a counterproductive way to lead a nation out of its supposed degeneracy. These men from Abyssinia, in contrast, were stately, cordial, charming, and self-possessed. Tellingly, the same administration that sought a “plan of concentration” and embarked on segregating the federal government took pains to pronounce the names of Ethiopia’s empress and regent correctly—the empress’s name, Zewditu, was pronounced as though spelled “Zowdeetoo,” an inter-administration letter coached, and Taffari was pronounced “Taffaree (the ‘a’ . . . pronounced as in ‘car’ and the accent . . . on the ‘ee’).”³ In


September 1923, then, it was likely no surprise to Wilson when Ras Tafari secured Ethiopia’s membership in the League of Nations while most other African states continued to languish under colonial rule or the newly imposed calibrated tutelage of the mandate system.\footnote{Ethiopia—or Abyssinia—was the third African member; Liberia (an unofficial American project) and South Africa (under white settler rule) had joined in 1919. Egypt would become the League’s fourth African member in 1937; Wilson’s last national address was on November 10, 1923; he died the following February.}

In this story and throughout the dissertation, a methodology of perception analysis has illustrated the interplay of Wilson’s ideology and his perceptions of the external, elaborating on the way in which this interplay created both his filter for understanding the world and his framework for making decisions. Part one laid out Wilson’s progressive social dynamic, which he forged over the course of his academic years through a holistic union of secular and theological threads. Societies progressed toward a millennium in which people were ruled solely by reason and an altruistic spirit, he believed, and the path toward that point required a healthy, animated, and balanced relationship between social institutions, statesmanship, and people’s thoughts and habits. Part two then used this dynamic as a basis through which to analyze the way in which Wilson interpreted and attempted to shape the matters that confronted him while in office. In domestic and foreign situations alike, the dynamic suggested to him certain exclusionary, assimilationist, and pluralistic policies as he endeavored to reform institutions in ways calibrated toward social progress. He understood the 1910s to be a dramatically transformative time, and he hoped, as statesman, to seize the energy for good rather than
allow it to remain destructively unleashed. His solution was to establish an evolving but formalized social dynamic over the Americas and the world. Ultimately, his ideology and hopes culminated in the absolute denigration of—in his perception—the “once-civilized” Germany and its mad statesman, Wilhelm II. As hope for democratic progress was, in Wilson’s mind, made safe from the madness of militarism, “irrational revolution” emerged as the new Wilsonian Other. In time, this tension would serve to nourish the further expansion of American Empire.
Appendix

TIMELINE

1536: First publication of John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

1798: William Wordsworth pens “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey.”

**December 28, 1856:** Thomas Woodrow Wilson born in Staunton, Virginia. The family would later live in Augusta, Georgia.

1859: First publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*.

**May 1861:** Rev. Joseph Ruggles Wilson cofounds the Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States.

1865: Wilson witnesses Jefferson Davis taken through town as a prisoner of war.

1870: Wilson’s family moves to Columbia, South Carolina, where Rev. Wilson takes a professorial post at the Columbia Theological Seminary.

1873: Wilson attends Davidson College in North Carolina but suffers from ill health.

1874: The Wilson family moves to Wilmington, North Carolina.

1875: Wilson begins undergraduate study at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). Walter Bagehot’s *Physics and Politics* and Henry Sumner Maine’s *Early History of Institutions* published.

1877: The last Reconstruction troops leave the South.

1879: Wilson graduates from the College of New Jersey.

1879-1880: Wilson studies law at the University of Virginia.

1882-83: Wilson works in a law partnership in Atlanta, Georgia, then enters graduate study at Johns Hopkins University.
1883: Rev. Samuel Edward Axson admitted to the Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia.

May 7, 1884: James Woodrow presents his address, “Evolution,” at the Columbia Theological Seminary. The Southern Presbyterian upheaval it generated continues through the decade.

June 1884: G. Stanley Hall asks Wilson to be his assistant.


1886: Wilson receives his Ph.D. in politics and history from Johns Hopkins University. He begins teaching at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania later that year.

1887: Wilson first writes about world federation. Dawes General Allotment Act signed into law.

1888: The Wilson family, now with two young daughters (Margaret and Jessie) move to Middletown, Connecticut, where Wilson begins teaching at Wesleyan University. In the same year, Wilson’s mother, Jessie Janet Woodrow, dies. (His third daughter, Eleanor, is born the following year.) Wilhelm II becomes Kaiser of Germany.


1890: Wilson becomes a full professor at the College of New Jersey. On July 27, Vincent Van Gogh shoots himself in the chest, dying two days later.

July 12, 1893: Frederick Jackson Turner presents the Frontier Thesis at the World Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, while Wilson presents a paper on education.

1893: *Division and Reunion* published.

September 18, 1895: Speaking in Atlanta, Booker T. Washington recommends a stiff upper lip and economic self-improvement for African Americans.

1898: War with Spain culminates in U.S. colonial acquisition of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines.


1901: Wilson writes *When a Man Comes to Himself*. 

June 1903: Wilson celebrates John Wesley’s bicentennial at Wesleyan University

1903: Rev. Wilson dies.

1906: Significant health event leads to blurred vision and impaired arm motion. Princeton becomes officially nonsectarian.

1907: James Woodrow dies.


1909: Wilson begins his run as the Democratic candidate for the governor of New Jersey.

1910: Mexican Revolution begins.

January 7, 1911: Wilson takes office as governor of New Jersey.

April 21, 1911: Wilson signs New Jersey’s Act to Provide for the Sterilization of Feeble-minded (including Idiots, Imbeciles, and Morons), Epileptics, Rapists, Certain Criminals and Other Defectives.

1911: Looking toward the presidential election, Wilson promises justice to African Americans.

1911-12: Imperial rule in China ends in revolution.

April 1912: Sinking of the R.M.S. *Titanic*.

November 1912: Wilson elected U.S. President.

March 1, 1913: Wilson officially steps down as New Jersey governor.

March 3, 1913: Large suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., organized by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns.


March 12, 1913: Wilson issues statement on Latin American relations.

May 1913: Wilson records “A Message to the American Indians.”
Spring 1913: Federal segregation measures initiated.

June 1913: 25th anniversary of Wilhelm’s coronation celebrated with general praise in the United States.

July 1913: Controversy over Adam E. Patterson nomination for Register of the Treasury.

October 1, 1913: Gabe Parker becomes Register of the Treasury.

November 6, 1913: First meeting with William Monroe Trotter.

December 23, 1913: Federal Reserve Act passed.

May 8, 1914: Wilson proclaims the first Mothers’ Day.

May 1914: Edward House begins European mission, meeting first with Wilhelm II.

Summer 1914: U.S. establishes full ambassadorial relations with Argentina and Chile, cementing its special relationship with the A.B.C. powers.

June 28, 1914: Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia, Austria-Hungary.

August 1, 1914: The Serbian-Austrian War pulls in the alliance system, becoming the Great War.


August 15, 1914: Panama Canal goes into operation.

September 8, 1914: Wilson receives first letter from Wilhelm II.

November 12, 1914: Second meeting with Trotter ends with Trotter banned from the White House.


January 25, 1915: First transcontinental phone line goes into operation.

May 7, 1915: R.M.S. Lusitania torpedoed by German U-boat SM U-20.

June 9, 1915: William Jennings Bryan resigns as Secretary of State.


March 14, 1916: Punitive Expedition launched in Mexico to hunt Pancho Villa; U.S. forces pull out on February 7 the following year.


April 1916: Easter Uprising in Ireland.

August 1916: Wilson condemns lynching.

August 29, 1916: Wilson signs the Jones Act, promising calibrated independence to the Philippines.

November 1916: Wilson re-elected.

February 3, 1917: United States severs relations with Germany after the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.


February 24, 1917: Ambassador Walter Hines Page receives the intercepted Zimmerman Telegram.

March 2, 1917: Wilson signs the Jones-Shafroth Act, collectively conferring citizenship upon Puerto Ricans.

March 15, 1917: Tsar Nicholas II abdicates, marking victory of February Revolution in Russia.

March 16, 1917: Three American ships succumb to torpedo attack.


April 6, 1917: Congress declares war on Germany.
**Summer 1917:** Suffragists imprisoned at Occoquan workhouse in Virginia force fed while on a hunger strike.

**November 1917:** Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

**1917-1933:** American occupation of Cuba.

**January 8, 1918:** Fourteen Points speech.

**August 1918 to April 1920:** American forces fight Bolsheviks in Vladivostok and Arkhangelsk (Sept. 1918 – July 1919) regions of Russia.

**November 11, 1918:** German armistice with the Allies. Kaiser Wilhelm II steps down one week later.

**January 18, 1919:** Peace Conference opens in Versailles.

**June 28, 1919:** Treaty of Versailles signed.

**July-August 1919:** Ethiopian mission to the United States, including White House meeting with Wilson in July.

**September 25, 1919:** Wilson incapacitated by major stroke in Pueblo, Colorado.

**November 6, 1919:** American Indian Citizenship Act passed, providing citizenship option for Native American veterans of the Great War.

**March 19, 1920:** Last U.S. vote on the Treaty of Versailles fails in the Senate.

**August 18, 1920:** 19th Amendment ratified, guaranteeing women the right to vote.

**January 16, 1920:** First League of Nations meeting, in Geneva, Switzerland.

**December 10, 1920:** Wilson receives 1919 Nobel Peace Prize.

**March 4, 1921:** Wilson leaves office.

**August 1923:** “The Road away from Revolution” printed.

**February 3, 1924:** Wilson dies at his home in Washington, D.C.
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