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Lloyd E. Ambrosius. *Woodrow Wilson and American Internationalism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 278 S. $29.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-316-61506-5.

Reviewed by Branden Little

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Commissioned by Caryn E. Neumann (Miami University of Ohio Regionals)

In *Woodrow Wilson and American Internationalism*, Lloyd Ambrosius fires a volley of criticisms against a former American president that could be just as easily aimed at President Donald Trump. Many of Ambrosius's accusations of Woodrow Wilson, a president whose term of service concluded nearly a century ago, ring a familiar tune today. Statements that Wilson "was exceedingly disingenuous" (p. 182), "racist" (p. 63), and did "not champion civil liberties for all Americans" (p. 47) echo those made by political pundits and scholars about Trump. Wilson's "vision of American democracy and capitalism focused on the rights of white men," Ambrosius asserts (p. 234). Pessimistic (p. 178) and virtually incapable of empathy "with foreigners" (p. 3), Wilson failed "to work with European allies" (p. 154). Invariably, he "promised more than he could deliver" (p. 205).

One could read any number of presidential biographies of Wilson and never encounter such sharp statements. In this important study drawing upon a lifelong scholarly investigation of Wilson, Ambrosius traces the contours of the enigmatic president's enduring prominence. Ambrosius addresses the reasons why Wilson's reputation as an architect of American international ascendancy largely remains intact. And he forcefully contends that the mostly benign characterizations of Wilsonianism warrant wholesale detonation.

Historians who have followed Wilson closely will undoubtedly be familiar with many of Ambrosius 's essays, nine of which are conveniently reprinted in this single volume. This compilation of Ambrosius's most recent writings on Wilson, which date from 2003 to the present, will aid scholars and students of all levels who are engaged in the study of American foreign relations, war, the Progressive era, civil rights, and the presidency. In this collection the complexities of Wilson's public life and his imprint on the modern world are clearly drawn. Ambrosius's trenchant assessments of Wilson's historical record are critical, judicious, and penetrating.

Ambrosius begins *Woodrow Wilson* with an original historiographical essay. He traces the emergence of an increasingly globalized world in which Wilson played a pivotal role as both the inheritor and agent par excellence of a messianic American crusade to remake the world. Unsatisfied with popular treatments of a near-mythic statesman extraordinaire, Ambrosius documents the ways in which Wilson's racialist biases and ingrained Protestantism infused his political decisions at home and abroad. The president's world-

view and the policies he promoted, Ambrosius explains, were spawned in his formative childhood experiences in the smoking ruins of the defeated Confederacy. Wilson's unflinching conviction in white supremacy never waned. Racial Anglo-Saxonism informed his paternalistic belief that minorities at home and the rest of the world alike needed white American guardianship. His missional sensibilities to transform the world into a community of liberal democracies drew great strength from his understanding of racial hierarchies and the conviction to "uplift" peoples he considered inferior.

Chapters that establish the historical context of the Progressive milieu and Wilson's scholarly development as a professor of political science and government showcase the ways in which Wilson formed his understanding of civic nationalism, democracy, and the special role of the United States in the history of the world. Wilson's third historical monograph, ***Division and Reunion: 1829-1889*** (1893), advanced a thesis of democratic consolidation analogous to Fredrick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis."[1] As graduate students at Johns Hopkins University, Wilson and Turner shared ideas. Wilson's exposition on the frontier appeared in print before Turner delivered what became a seminal speech, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," at the American Historical Association annual meeting in 1893. Historians often overlook Wilson's and Turner's relationship, Ambrosius notes. Turner's ideas undeniably shaped elite thinking about the inevitable advancement of American civilization. Wilson's ideas did, too. Wilson conceptualized the "frontier" globally and envisioned fantastic opportunities for the spread of American ideals. His thoughts on the subject had long been forming prior to winning the White House. His eventual ascendancy to the presidency of the United States provided the venue from which he would champion democratization beyond US borders.

Ambrosius deftly explains many of Wilson's apparent contradictions that have given rise to charges of hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness, and racism. Wilson "valued liberty more than equality," Ambrosius repeatedly argues (p. 45). The Virginia-born child of Reconstruction was an academician turned politician, who never seriously considered racial equality a genuine proposition. He unabashedly promoted racial division by accepting increasingly popular norms of Jim Crow racial segregation as the employment policy for the federal government. As president, Wilson intensified the concentration of power in the hands of white males in the United States.

Another chapter on the implications of Wilson's racism examines the global resonance of Wilson's prejudices by establishing his collusion with a longtime friend and writer of ***The Birth of Nation*** (1915). This blockbuster film celebrated the Ku Klux Klan's reactionary defense of American values from a fictitious threat to white society by emancipated slaves. Other historians have minimized Wilson's association with this film. Ambrosius, however, indicts Wilson for supporting the film's distribution. He also connects Wilson's war message of April 1917 to the themes expounded by that film: just war against barbarians would create perpetual peace. Demonstrating that Wilson was remarkably consistent in his views about the danger of revolutionary upheavals at home and abroad, Ambrosius provocatively casts Wilson "as a proponent of global white supremacy" (p. 90). By the end of the First World War, the paternalistic Wilson believed that a reformed concert of white European imperial powers led by the United States would benefit everyone else who submitted to their beneficent authority. He championed the League of Nations and the neocolonial mandate system that rank-ordered prospective mandates by his understanding of their racial sophistication.

Wilson repeatedly characterized his concept of

great-power leadership as a "moral force" (quoted, pp. 56-57). "We are fighting for the liberty, the self-government, and the undictated development of all peoples," he proclaimed in May 1917 (quoted, p. 54). Wilson considered other political ideologies and systems to be predicated on coercive power, but unquestionably believed American democracy was based on the consent of the governed. His abstract and often theoretical understanding of democracy did not hear the plaintive cries of racial minorities in the United States who intimately understood the true limits of their civil and human rights. Racial violence, discrimination, and xenophobia intensified in America during Wilson's presidency. Wilson was indifferent to the victims' lament. He fiercely opposed quests for racial equality and political independence voiced throughout the United States and colonized world. Wilson simply believed that once American ideals were introduced to foreign lands, other societies would gladly embrace them. He overlooked the fact that the leadership of most European colonies already shared his notions of preserving their privileged position. The challenge was to convince the masses they should remain in a subservient condition.

One of the chief defects of Wilson's statesmanship was his inability to perceive the frustrations his universalist rhetoric of liberation engendered. He alienated Japanese statesmen, Chinese nationalists, and African Americans alike. Ambrosius explains that "he expected African Americans to accommodate themselves to a subordinate position in" a racially segregated United States (p. 71). Wilson overestimated their willingness to comply. And as Erez Manela and Daniel Gorman have shown, Wilson unwittingly inspired nationalist movements in Kenya, Korea, Indochina-Vietnam, and other lands that contested white colonial rule. [2] Wilson had nonetheless provided a spark of inspiration to people he considered his inferiors. He legitimized their quests for political autonomy. Tragically, Wilson's rigidity and racism prevented him from reconciling his beliefs with their expectations.

A chapter on Wilson's relationship to the beleaguered Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire starkly demonstrates one of his foremost political miscalculations. Ambrosius reveals that in the one instance Wilson was most likely to succeed in his postwar agenda—to create an American-led League of Nations mandate for Armenia—he fumbled. Wilson insisted on tethering a US-led mandate for Armenia to the US Senate's ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. The Senate was willing to accept the mandate but not the League, and Wilson's maneuver to achieve both objectives utterly failed. Ambrosius documents how Wilson's partisanship blinded him to the strength of congressional support for the mandate. Forging a mandate to protect the brutalized Armenians was nevertheless possible because of Allied, Armenian, and congressional backing. But Wilson parleyed badly with the Allies, the Armenian diaspora, and Congress, and got nothing he wanted. He blamed everyone save himself. He left behind a wake of wrecked relationships that tarnished his and the United States' reputation. Ambrosius convincingly argues that Wilson unconscionably abandoned Armenia.

Extensive and illuminating historiographical discussions appear in several chapters. Ambrosius skillfully navigates a variety of interpretive and evidentiary oversights by Wilson's biographers, political scientists, and foreign policy elites. The popular image of Wilson, he insists, is the byproduct of scholarly oversimplifications and distortions. Not everyone will agree with his assessments, but future scholars and biographers will certainly need to contend with his claims.

Many Americans reflexively believe in triumphalism, that the United States has always championed freedom and served humanity's interests. America is truly "a global force for good," to bor-

row from the US Navy's recent recruiting slogan. But as many critics of American power observe, the United States often has misused and abused its dominant position in international affairs. Its actions in numerous instances have been imperialistic, racist, and downright harmful. Woodrow Wilson's own jaundiced beliefs and crass political maneuvering provide ammunition to this critique.

Ambrosius's biography of Wilson and his synthesis of Wilsonianism helps to illuminate very recent American history. The modern "imperial" presidency derives some of its inspiration from Wilson—promises and pitfalls alike. Ambrosius insists that the notion of preventive war against Iraq in 2003 and George W. Bush's grand ambition to remake the Middle East derived great strength from alleged connections to Wilsonian traditions. Today, the debate about renaming the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in light of criticisms about Wilson's racism indicates that the twenty-eighth US president's legacy remains hotly contested.[3] Historians, Ambrosius reminds us, have a duty to reject facile treatments of complex personalities and events. The perils of partisan history are too great to ignore.

Notes

[1]. Woodrow Wilson, ***Division and Reunion, 1829-1889*** (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893).

[2]. Daniel Gorman, ***The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and ***International Cooperation in the Early Twentieth Century*** (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Erez Manela, ***The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[3]. Merrit Kennedy, "Princeton will keep Woodrow Wilson's name on school buildings," NPR online, April 4, 2016; David Greenberg, "Woodrow Wilson and the Klan," ***New York Times***, April 6, 2016.

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