

American Democratic Interventionism: Romancing the Iconic Woodrow Wilson

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There is an American foreign policy tradition in respect to military interventions in the Third World, which validates the importance of democratic ideals as central to the success of the policy. Woodrow Wilson is the founding father of this tradition. While the normative commitments of Wilson made sense in Victorian America and can probably be considered innovative for his day, the manifest lack of success in transferring democracy through military intervention leads us to question the character of Wilson's interventions and the ideals that motivated them. This essay will consider the content of Wilson's democratic theory and its integration into ideals of national mission and destiny; how this became the philosophical basis for policies of military intervention; the assessments offered by historians of the success of this policy; and the role of racial paternalism in legitimating the policy at the time. In a contemporary respect, we are left with the question of whether we want such a philosophy of democratic interventionism to be the basis for transferring democratic values and practices to Third World countries today.

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Post–Cold War American foreign policy has been accompanied by a resurgence of idealism concerning military intervention, and the idealist most often cited is Woodrow Wilson. Woodrow Wilson intervened more than any other American president did. He used military force just as many others have, to remove, maintain, and reorder the governments of less powerful countries. However, in comparison with others, Wilson presented a well-developed philosophical link between his interventions and the fortunes of democracy. The language of democratic reformism, which he developed, is linked to many post–Cold War military interventions. When it is well done, we celebrate the vision with the compliment that it is “Wilsonian.” In a recent *Newsweek*, Bush was given a “thumbs down” on his policy in Iraq, which the magazine termed a “Wilsonian” nightmare. Despite the neo-conservatives’ capture of democratic reformism, this Wilsonian turn in American military intervention defies liberal or conservative categorization. For example, Stanley Hoffman finds Wilson’s understanding of American exceptionalism to be at the center of virtue in American foreign policy. If our Wilsonian legacy of idealism were carefully nurtured in Iraq, the Bush administration would undertake a genuinely multilateral, collective security effort (Hoffman 2004:20–21). Walter Russell Mead, in contrast, finds US policy in Iraq to be a direct reflection of the best of Wilson’s legacy. Revival Wilsonians, otherwise known as neo-cons, “put the linkage between idealism and security... on

steroids'' and understand well the importance of democratic values to an American policy of intervention (Mead 2004:88–89). Robert McNamara and James Blight argue that the United States can reclaim Wilson's democratic interventionist agenda, if it avoids his moral righteousness and unqualified endorsement of national self-determination (McNamara and Blight 2001). Tony Smith thinks that the only problem with Wilson's legacy was his unwillingness to confront the need for extensive social and economic change following the use of force (Smith 1994:80). Many others join these analysts in a post-Cold war reassessment of the importance of Wilson (Kissinger 1994; Ruggie 1996; Fromkin 1999; Ambrosius 2002, 2006).

That such a politically and theoretically diverse group of international relations thinkers and policy analysts can all celebrate Wilson as a visionary for the twenty first century has reestablished his significance. However, what does it mean about the Wilsonian vision that both contemporary conservatives and liberals claim him? Is it that his interventions were so impressively successful in transferring democracy? Were his ideals so well developed that many policy makers and analysts continue to be associated with them? In the following investigation I will explore (1) the way in which Wilson reshaped the policy dialogue of his day on national mission and intervention to include democracy as the centerpiece; (2) the ordinary, undemocratic character of his interventions; (3) how historians differ in their understanding of the success of Wilson's democratic interventionism; (4) the character of Wilson's democratic theory, which is more paternalistic and less inclusive than contemporary American democratic practice; and (5) how the social and political context of his day on race, an important factor in Victorian understanding of national mission, might explain Wilson's confident interventionism.

While it is an important road to traverse, this analysis is not going down a realist road. If Wilson's ideals are not expressed in his policy of interventionism, it might long ago have been critiqued as essentially a problem of a realist wolf in idealist sheep clothing. A few historians have done so, but most historians do not make such a critique and even the few that do agree that the ideals Wilson espoused were sincerely held (Healy 1988). Perhaps, this is the case as well, because realist actors of the day that we in the early twenty-first century identify as prominent realists also embraced the idealism of the age that was so much a part of Wilson's approach to foreign policy. Theodore Roosevelt, a classic realist for some contemporary political scientists, incorporated an explicitly anti-material, moral, Victorian dimension to his approach to balance of power politics (Cooper 1983). What is primarily under consideration here is whether the ideals that Wilson made a part of American foreign policy should not be reconsidered given the nature of their founding and the historical evaluation of the Wilsonian record. Perhaps the idealization of military intervention as a shining sword of liberty and democratic change made sense in an era that also believed in a broader understanding of Western leadership and a narrower understanding of democratic franchise. On what grounds do we continue to write about this as though it actually represents a genuine democratic experiment?

In order to consider the historical record on Wilson, the secondary sources reviewed have been considered both from the standpoint of the information they provide and the theoretical perspective they represent. Ian Lustik argues persuasively that political scientists who study history must remember that secondary sources are always engaged in important intellectual debates about major questions in the field and that to rely on one major historian or one school is to present theory as evidence (Lustik 1996). The following discussion is based upon diverse sources, some of which disagree with the argument made here. While there is considerable consensus on many aspects of Wilson's foreign policy

making, the outlanders in the conversation, theorists who saw Wilson as a realist or an imperialist primarily concerned with national interest, are included and assessed.

Humanitarian Paternalism and National Mission Democratized

A commitment to military intervention as a way to promote American values abroad began with the Spanish American War in 1898. Wilson was not initially an important part of this debate, but he was a participant. There was an important sea change in the ideological underpinnings of foreign policy in the late 1890s, which he successfully redirected away from national mission to democracy. When President McKinley opened the new era of interventionism with the simple claim that such a policy was humanitarian in intent and progressive in character, the floodgates of American national mission opened. John Lewis Gaddis finds that American foreign policy switched from a cautious realism to a missionary reformism, which arose from an expanded sense of national pride in the accomplishments of American society (Gaddis 1987:3–19). Richard Hofstadter, quite puzzled by a national mood which embraced a demand for humanitarian reform “strangely coupled with a taste for battle,” finds that an “acceptance of annexation was also coupled with and softened by much talk of duty and responsibility” (Hofstadter 1996:146).

A new interest in humanitarianism abroad embraced American western expansion as a model for international expansion. If the United States accepted the responsibility for the governance of Native Americans, then why should it question its right to govern the Philippines (Williams 1980)? Critics argued that the Philippines was noncontiguous territory and was very far from the continental United States. They also pointed out that internal territories had never been formal colonies of the US government. Pro-imperialists argued in reply that Alaska was not contiguous to the United States; California was a territory at the time that was perceived to be very far away; and there was an imperial feature to the role of the federal government in the western territories. Theodore Roosevelt, a pro-imperialist and Lamarckian who thought all races could improve and progress, was optimistic about the ability of the United States to act as a paternal guide for the peoples of Asia and Latin America (Coletta, 1981:92–93; Dyer 1980:16).

Wilson, while not involved in vigorously justifying the annexation of the Philippines, made national destiny arguments very similar to pro-imperialists. Wilson maintained that it was not surprising that the United States crossed a large ocean to bring democracy to the people of the Philippines, when it had, in fact, crossed a large continent to do the same (Wrobel 1993:71). He openly supported the new imperial role of the United States and drew on Social Darwinism and the Social Gospel to do so (Ambrosius 1987:3). However, his distinctiveness early on was the way in which he put the concept of democracy at the center of the policy of military intervention. Significantly, all historical analysts, even when they are primarily interested in other important factors of analysis, find it necessary to address the role of Wilson’s democratic commitments in the study of intervention. Because of his own considerable study of law, history, and comparative government, Wilson was able “to take the long historical view” on his own policies of intervention and act in the interests of democracy (Link 1971:29). Wilson believed America to be “a nation spared by history the struggles and corruptions that had debased older societies,” and thus a nation especially well prepared to lead others to democracy (Heckscher 1991:294). An idealist whose intellectual hero was Edmund Burke, Wilson saw democratic development in organic not revolutionary terms (Nordholt 1994:563). Wilson saw many colonial or former colonial territories as “backward,” not ready for democracy. If there was any hope for democracy, the people in Asia and Latin

America must embrace the American model, and if they did not do so willingly, “the United States must make them” (Healy 1979:4). Wilson was sympathetic to revolution as a legitimate route to democracy. He believed, as many in the progressive movement did, that if US interventions were detached from economic and other interests, they could accomplish democratic reform abroad (Knock 1992). Wilson was an impatient democratic reformist and a “benevolent interventionist” who gradually learned that his interventions were not appreciated by those in nonindustrialized societies (Clements 1992).

Wilson became the first representative for early twentieth century intervention to meld democratic reformist commitments to the new humanitarianism so explicitly and clearly. Democracy was the Holy Grail around which other concerns, such as national destiny, revolved. Wilson’s language is explicitly civic rather than racial in respect to national destiny. In this way, he echoed an earlier and foundational political debate. The American Revolution integrated early millennialism about national destiny and republican optimism about the accomplishment of freedom as a world historical event. Tom Paine was one of the first to interject the idealism of this perspective into foreign affairs. He argued that foreign policy should extend beyond mere national interest to serve the international common good. However, Paine also argued that military intervention—whatever the values at stake—was immoral. Ideas would be a far more powerful instrument of democratic change than external arms. They “will penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot... where diplomatic management will fail” (Fitzsimons 1995:579). Thomas Jefferson like Paine struggled with the question of how force should relate to the establishment of democracy. Ultimately, Jefferson rejected the idea that the United States should be an active military crusader for the democratic reform of other countries, though he continued to worry about the ability of a lone democracy to survive in a world of empire and monarchy (Tucker and Hendrickson 1990). For both Paine and Jefferson, it was obvious that the success of the American democratic experiment could be the basis for democratic revolutions in other countries. What was not obvious was how these revolutions should be encouraged.

Wilson stood at the intersection of the republicanism of the founders and the humanitarian paternalism of the new interventionists and adopted the focus on the democracy of the former and the hopes for military intervention of the latter. Wilson rearticulated the earlier post-revolutionary concern with the world-historical nature of democratic change, but made the case for intervention as a tool of global democratization. He was more ambitious than both Paine and Jefferson and much more optimistic than the national destiny humanitarians like Roosevelt.

Wilsonian Democratic Intervention in Mexico and Haiti

Mexico presented the first opportunity for Wilson to act on his idea that American foreign policy could serve as a midwife to democratic advancement abroad. While the post-revolutionary Mexican government was initially stable, there were internal challengers to its legitimacy. When Huerta, who commanded Mexico’s federal forces, had the president, his primary rival for power, murdered, Wilson refused to recognize the new government. Wilson ignored the cautionary warnings of his advisors, insisting, “I will not recognize a government of butchers” (Clements 1992:97). Not opposed to the idea of revolution but concerned about an undemocratic leadership, Wilson saw himself and American capability as representing the democratic interest of the Mexican people. Wilson hoped that Mexican leaders would cooperate to form a government that would earn international recognition. His positive diplomatic offensive included asking Huerta to step down and offering Mexico a new loan as

an incentive. These offers were not accepted, and he moved to imposing an arms embargo on the country and supporting Huerta's opposition. If Mexico's leaders would not act in the interest of the society, Wilson would "help Mexico save herself and her people" (Gilderhus 1977:22). After offering support to both Carranza and Villa, Wilson worked with Villa's guerrilla army, which agreed to accept American military and economic assistance to oppose Huerta (Gardner 1984:45; Langley 1985:85; Heckscher 1991:299). This was an intervention by proxy, but it indicated how serious Wilson was about shaping the character of Mexican democracy.

In the midst of this attempt to remove Huerta, Wilson initiated an actual military intervention. Mexican authorities in Vera Cruz arrested and detained several American sailors, their commanding officer, and an official diplomatic mail courier, after the United States had sent several navy warships into Mexican coastal waters to intimidate Huerta's government. With miscommunication and misunderstood intent on all sides, Wilson insisted on an apology and a public, military demonstration of Mexico's respect for American national honor. Huerta insisted on a reciprocal show of respect. Wilson then ordered a military intervention. Three thousand Marines subdued the city with "efficient ruthlessness," destroying considerable property and killing two hundred Mexicans, mostly civilians (Quirk 1967:100–101). Because local authorities did not cooperate, the American military took over every aspect of local, state, and federal government including taxation, the courts, sanitation, public roads, and power. During the occupation the United States repaired bridges, paved old and built new roads, cleaned up the port, imposed sanitary regulations, and built a new municipal building (Quirk 1967:121–136, 146; Langley 1985:103–108). To pay for this, a new, American administered taxation system was established.

The Vera Cruz intervention, as would be the case in other Wilsonian interventions, resulted in the creation of a coalition of internal political forces, normally at war with each other, which resisted the presence of the American military (Clements 1992:99). Even after Wilson confronted the fact that there were no Mexican allies in favor of US intervention, the United States continued to insist on a new plan for Mexican agrarian and social reform before agreeing to withdraw from Vera Cruz. Huerta had left the country, but his successor, Carranza, refused to consider any externally determined policy goals. When Carranza's forces entered Vera Cruz, they rejected individuals who cooperated with American power (Quirk 1967: 156–177; Heckscher 1991: 329–330; Grieb 1994:563). When Wilson no longer insisted on free elections, and when Carranza agreed to a constitutional form of government, an adjudicated land reform, and respect for private property rights, the United States terminated its support for Villa and withdrew from Vera Cruz (Gardner 1984:61; Clements 1992:100).

However, this was not really an exit strategy, because at this point, the United States was deeply involved in internal Mexican political affairs. Villa's disappointment with America's fickle collaborations almost immediately resulted in a dramatic group execution of seventeen Americans on a Mexican train. Villa's forces invaded the United States, killing nineteen and destroying considerable property in Columbia, New Mexico. Wilson launched another military intervention into Mexican territory with four thousand American troops in January of 1916. In hot pursuit of Villa, Wilson did not consult Carranza. Nevertheless, Wilson was disappointed when the new Mexican regime determined that the intervention was a hostile violation of territory. Instead of the United States and Mexico cooperating on a common endeavor, they nearly went to war. A year later, American troops withdrew but only after a deep penetration of Mexican territory and actual engagement with Carranza's army. At one point, General Pershing, who led an army in Mexico of 10,000, proposed to occupy the entire country (Heckscher 1991:398).

Wilson also intervened in Haiti for democratic reformist reasons that were very similar to those in Mexico. Wilson was concerned that the rapid changes in Haiti's government were detrimental to the kind of political order in which democracy and prosperity might thrive (Healy 1979:128–129; Calhoun 1993:18, 22, 25). The political instability and poverty “drew Wilson and Bryan's concern like a magnet” (Clements 1992:104). Hoping that greater control over Haiti's economic instability would calm the political situation, Wilson offered a new custom's control arrangement and was surprised when Haiti did not accept (Schmidt 1995:25). When an especially violent and brutal change in government occurred, Wilson ordered a military intervention. The initial goal to provide stability quickly expanded to include the identification of new, more democratic, leadership. The Haitian congress, under US pressure, selected a president favorable to US interests. When the custom house was taken over by American administrators and marshal law was declared, several government ministers resigned. After a year of attempting to shape the interests and views of the Haitian legislature, the government became a “military autocracy” (Healy 1979:6). The legislature was suspended and was not reconstituted until 1929. Wilson's cabinet knew that pressure had been placed on local representatives before it agreed to elect the candidate who would implement a US plan. The military officer in charge at the time of the initial intervention explained the US aims in the following manner: “the United States must expect to remain in Haiti until the natives had been educated to respect a self-sustaining government” (Calhoun 1993:54).

Historians who have examined the Haitian intervention found little evidence that democratic policies followed democratic intent. The use of force was, according to one analyst “unrelenting” and the attention to the foundations of democracy unfocussed (Calhoun 1993:66; Schmidt 1995:12). There were two armed rebellions and the second rebellion in 1918 was very costly in Haitian life and thus did little to support the legitimacy of the American presence. As in the case of Vera Cruz, the positive impact of the intervention was largely material in nature. Military occupation resulted in improved sanitation and roads, the construction of hospitals and public buildings, the training of a new police force, and the establishment of fiscal order (Clements 1992:104–105). Given the continuing challenge to US presence, the Wilson administration implemented the idea that a strong police force was the major contributor to political stability. The primary institutional legacy of the occupation was the creation of a national gendarmerie or constabulary. During Wilson's administration, there was an open conflict between military officers at different levels of responsibility about how extensive the powers of the new gendarmerie would be (Healy 1979:208–209).

In examining these two cases, it would appear that there was a major gap between Wilson's democratic intentions and the kinds of policies he actually implemented in Mexico and Haiti. Were his ideals a ruse? The intensity and persistence with which he maintained an interest in the progress of democratic change probably rules this out. Was he an idealist-realist and/or an idealist-nationalist like those who accepted a quasi-empire for America? As mentioned earlier, this bipolarity does not work conceptually in the same way at the turn of the previous century as it does today. Mark Gilderhus maintains, “Wilson's position on occasion had the effect of justifying the extension of American ideals and institutions into foreign areas on grounds that foreign peoples actually willed it” (Gilderhus, 1977:xi). This leaves us wondering whether his commitment to democratic ideals and to US leadership were in conflict with each other in a philosophic or practical respect? Alternatively, was the character of his understanding of democracy from a contemporary standpoint simply undemocratic? To answer these last two questions, I will consider whether Wilson's

interventions in a practical respect were distinctive in his day; the key components of his understanding of democracy and how they relate to his interventions; and in what ways the social and political context of the day shaped the character of his democratic ideals.

Turn-of-the-Century Expansion and Intervention: Were Wilson's Interventions Distinctive?

In the decade prior to the Spanish-American War, the Census Bureau reported that the line of frontier settlement was no longer identifiable; the value of industrial production began to exceed that of agriculture; and hundreds of thousands of immigrants, from parts of Europe under-represented in the United States, literally poured into America. These changes and others gave rise to the progressive movement, and a new agenda of reform, much of which Wilson supported. These changes also opened the door to international expansion and new interventionism. Following the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States subsequently intervened in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. US troops left Cuba in 1901, and Cuba was given independence in 1902. However, the Platt Amendment gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuba for reasons of regional security, which it did so with frequency. Popular government was established in Puerto Rico in 1900, but in the process, it was made a permanent protectorate of the United States. Save the period during World War II when the Japanese invaded, the Philippines was essentially governed as an American colony until 1946. The United States intervened in Panama in 1903, which formalized its separation from Colombia and introduced decades of US presence in the management of the Canal Zone. US troops were in Nicaragua in 1909, were reintroduced in 1912 for just over a decade, and again in 1926 for 6 years. The United States intervened in Mexico in 1914 and 1916, in Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and in the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924.

The way in which the United States expanded—its political or institutional method of expansion—is not easily categorized. On the one hand, its interventions were not quick, strategic efforts to remove or maintain regimes. On the other hand, they were not colonization in the classic European sense. They were long-term involvements in the political and economic relations of these countries, which began with intense diplomatic and economic relations, accelerated with military intervention, and often concluded with a period of external governance and internal war. The threat of the use of force was often initially used to encourage local political authority to acquiesce to American political and economic demands. Actual military intervention triggered a change in government, and the United States then shaped the character of a new regime, which was democratic in philosophy but authoritarian in character. The change in government and the arrival of US troops usually led to internal resistance, which was purposefully and deliberately addressed by American military force.

In light of this, it would appear that Wilson's interventions were not especially distinctive. Under Wilson US troops were only temporarily in Mexico, but they remained in the Dominican Republic until 1924 and Haiti until 1934. In the case of the Dominican Republic, the United States attempted to oversee official Dominican financial policy and diplomatically to shape the decisions made by domestic authorities several times five years prior to actual military intervention (Calder 1984:1–31). A similar diplomatic conversation, as we have seen, took place between the United States and Haiti prior to military intervention. The guerrilla wars in Haiti and the Dominican Republic like Cuba were consistently characterized, by historians holding many different views on inter-

vention in general, as brutal, unrelenting, and costly in life and national resources (Calder 1984; Calhoun 1993; Healy 1979; Langley 1985). Even if we expand our understanding of democratization to include some aspects of authoritarian rule, it is difficult to find a process of political liberalization in Wilson's interventions.

The question for most historians in their examinations of Wilson's military interventions was whether Wilson changed his views, redesigned his policies, or in any way learned from his experiences. This question arises because there is so clearly a conflict between philosophy of intervention and actual policy. How did he reflect on the lack of congruence between his commitment to democracy and his interventions? August Heckscher's assessment is that Wilson eventually saw his Vera Cruz intervention as a mistake (Heckscher 1991:329). Arthur Link argues that Wilson's Mexican interventions taught him to be more of a realist and that the way in which he imposed authoritarian rule on Haiti and the Dominican Republic are evidence of that new realism. (Link 1971:81). Kendrick A. Clements finds that Wilson was surprised or shocked when Mexican political actors saw things in terms of their own national determination or were reluctant to welcome US military presence. For example, Wilson was surprised when his Vera Cruz intervention united the supporters of Huerta and Carranza and shocked when Carranza was angry about a US intervention to pursue Villa (Clements 1992: xiii, 97). More broadly, he thinks that Wilson learned at the end of his presidency that democracy cannot be forced and that concluding a military intervention is always more complicated than beginning one.

However, other analysts are not so sure Wilson learned from his experiences of attempting to impose democracy through military intervention. Robert E. Quirk thinks Wilson went into his Vera Cruz intervention as a "zealot," completely committed to pushing Huerta out of office for reasons of principle (Quirk 1967:3). He does not find that Wilson changed his views on Mexico in the course of the intervention itself. Lawrence E. Gelfand in assessing Clements's work thinks that even in the case of Wilson's last intervention in Russia he was still convinced that the creation of democracy could be forced (Gelfand 1994). Rather than having learned anything about the use of force in Mexico, Frederick S. Calhoun determines that Wilson made a terrible error in Haiti and the Dominican Republic with the use of force to create democracy because the cost in human life was so high (Calhoun 1993). David Healy and Robert Hannigan, cautious about Wilson's idealism, think he struggled throughout his presidency with a principled foreign policy and the need to impose control on unstable regimes (Healy 1988:180–199; Hannigan 2002:46–47).

The distinction between those historians who find Wilson learned and those that do not appears to be about the quality of his leadership and his own insight into his motives and demons. No one makes a compelling case that he went forward with a new foreign policy. There is no evidence of an intervention forgone or of later presidential reflections on the costly nature or frustrations of previous interventions. So why did Wilson not learn the lessons for which empirical circumstance might have been such a good teacher? Alternatively, perhaps this question is asked in the wrong way. If Wilson remains a democratic reformist despite the way in which his interventions were carried out, what was it that kept Wilson from understanding that there was a huge gap between the American model of democracy he so admired and the implementation of his ideals in the form of authoritarian governance? Perhaps, if we fully acknowledge the paternalistic nature of his approach to democracy in Latin America and Asia, the lack of congruence is not quite so pronounced. The key to this conundrum lies in Wilson's own complexity on the issue of democracy.

Democratic Vision and the Character of Leadership

Perhaps the most striking thing for the contemporary analyst about Wilson's interest in introducing democracy in Latin America and Asia is his confidence about the virtuous nature of America as a model for the democratization of other countries. Wilson understood American national-state building to be uniquely virtuous. The story of American political development is for Wilson a story of keeping "ideals clear, unmarred, commanding" (Gardner 1984:27). America in comparison to Europe is, according to Wilson, "a virgin continent" (Ambrosius 1987:10). European wars and aristocratic excess easily trumped the American Civil War or western settlement as examples of undemocratic or corrupt political traditions. America possessed the historical integrity and self-abnegating national destiny that Europe lacked. The superior nature of its ideals was reflected in a federal system of government that had successfully brought together different nationalities and races. Because of this special history, America might best represent the universalistic nature of democracy (Link 1971:78). Better the United States than a European presence in the Philippines "in as much as hers was the light of day" (Heckscher 1991:129).

In keeping with the ideas of the age, this confident, romantic understanding of American history was complemented by a theory of American leadership that was paternalistic in nature. Democracy was an important political universal; any society was capable of it. But because it was the result of an evolutionary process, for many countries a mentor or teacher was needed. In 1885, while still an academic, Wilson found that democracy was "not created by aspirations... it is built up by slow habit," and "immature peoples cannot have it, and the maturity to which it is vouchsafed is the maturity of freedom and self-control" (Link 1971:77). Some historical accounts maintain that Wilson admired and identified with those peoples, who undertook genuine revolutions in the name of self-determination and democracy (Heckscher 1991:296-297; Knock 1992:33). In the case of Mexico, Wilson wanted to guide the positive development of a genuine revolution in the right direction diplomatically and saw the United States as a virtuous instructor for how self-government should be created and maintained. Wilson found American diplomatic intrusions, military interventions, and colonial occupations to be a good way for "backward" countries to learn how to progress politically and socially, even if that meant that the United States must force them to be democratic. Therefore, in the Philippines, Wilson maintained that it must be ruled "with a strong hand that will brook no resistance and according to principles of right gathered from our own experience, not from theirs," because "they are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice" (Thorsen 1988:175). In addition, "they must first love order and instinctively yield to it. We are old in this learning and must be their tutors" (Ambrosius 1987:11). Wilson understood that the United States would be experimenting with its knowledge of democratic self-government in its territories, but he was convinced this would have a positive moral and spiritual impact on both the United States and the countries it now governed. Some have termed the latter an "imperialism of the spirit" (Williams 1962:57).

Finally, Wilson thought the leadership of his particular administration was an especially good vehicle for the introduction of democracy to other countries, because it did so with a pure moral purpose, unsullied by interest. As was the case for other Progressives, Wilson saw the key characteristic of goodness in a government or a revolution as the lack of economic or personal self-interest in the agenda of the government or party at issue. It was special interests, very frequently economic or financial special interests, which could block the genuine democratic character of the political self-determination of new states. In

order to establish the virtuousness nature of US efforts to introduce democracy in Latin America, Wilson promised that the United States would not “seek one additional foot of territory by conquest” (Clements 1992:95). Wilson wanted Latin American countries to know that he not only identified with their plight, but also indeed found that the United States shared in it. Foreign imperialism was driven by a kind of capitalism that did not respect democratic rights and processes anywhere. Progressives at home would need to address those financial and economic special interests, just as the revolutionaries he admired did so in China, Mexico, and Russia (Heckscher 1991:297–299; Knock 1992:43). Europeans, in contrast, were imperialists. Wilson was openly critical of European imperialism “with no evident sense of hypocrisy” (Steigerwald 1994:31).

Wilson saw the introduction of democracy in the Asia and Latin America as an important effort despite the difficulties because from his perspective the policy was well considered and necessary. Wilson was an advocate for democracy in a classical and heroic, rather than modern and representative respect. *Demos* does not fail because the virtue of the leader goes unrecognized, though it may suggest a problem with those to whom it has been offered. Wilson saw former colonial territories struggling with political instability and without any hesitancy found US leadership to be a good solution to the difficult problem of creating democratic governance. A liberal at the turn of the last century, his ideas do not reflect many contemporary understandings of democratic practice.

Democratic Ideals in an Age of Race Hierarchy

As in the case of democracy, the way in which humanity was defined in Wilson’s day was distinctly different from contemporary understandings of human rights or humankind. The most striking distinction is that between early and late twentieth century understandings of race. Wilson became president at a time of harsh reassertion of racial exclusivity. For his own era, Wilson was left of center on economic and class issues, but like most other members of his party, he embraced the national consensus on race (Smith 1997:413, 419; Milkis and Mileur 1999:158). This consensus did not challenge Jim Crow or states’ rights in the South. Whatever their political affiliations, even Northerners did not campaign against the use of the literacy test to exclude African-American voters or object to proposals to limit immigration of Asian peoples. Northern views on race were not dissimilar from those held in the South (Smith 1997:371–385). Wilson did not challenge state or federal segregation and included radical racists in his administration like Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo and Post Master General Burleson who intensified racial discrimination in their own departments (Clements 1992:45, 160).

This resulted in the reversal of “decades of progress” in the area of racial integration in the federal civil service (Milkis and Mileur 1999:157). While public lynching of African-American males in the South rose steadily during Wilson’s presidency, the primary concern of his administration was that it might disrupt the war effort. In respect to other racial groups, he oversaw the now controversial allotment of native lands from tribal governing bodies to individual holders, which ultimately resulted in the massive loss of land and income for Native Americans. After receiving a formal protest from Japan, Wilson risked war with Japan rather than insist that California reconsider legislation that would prevent Japanese-Americans from owning land. Japanese-Americans had already been denied the right to citizenship (Heckscher 1991:300–302).

Historians disagree about whether Wilson pursued the racial policies he did, because he was haunted by his Southern past, a prisoner of his times, or someone who fully believed in the necessity of states’ rights and racial segregation.

Niels Thorsen in his assessment of Wilson's political thought finds that the direction of his work and life comes from his attempt to address the rift between the north and south, which was not yet bridged. Indeed, he was seeking a theory of politics, which would heal the nation (Thorsen 1988:222). Thorsen tells us that for Wilson the Civil War was "internalized fratricide" and thus he saw the national mood to be "a wandering and restless spirit" (Thorsen 1988:229-230). August Heckscher sees Wilson as a victim of political circumstance who could not really lead the country in a new direction on race, while attempting to balance the support of the progressives and a Senate dominated by southern Democrats. According to Heckscher, Wilson "was a reasonable and enlightened man who had largely transcended his southern upbringing." Nevertheless, he "acted according to...the lights of his time" (Heckscher 1991:291, 293). In contrast, Kendrick Clements thinks Wilson had "insensitivity" toward African-Americans, trading "Negro stories" with a companion on the way to Versailles and refusing to make even small gestures towards change recommended by the NAACP. At the same time, he was not a crude racist, and his family's approach to race had been "condescending and paternalistic" (Clements 1992:160, 46).

Wilson's interventions were no less or no more racist than those of other turn-of-the-century foreign policy makers. In the case of Haiti, one historian states bluntly, "the racism of occupying forces poisoned their good works" (Clements 1992:105). Another explains, "Instead of modeling after the Americans, many Haitians were alienated by American arrogance and condescension" (Schmidt 1995:16-17). The assumption by American personnel of race hierarchy was explicit in Haiti. Colonel Waller, who led the suppression of the first rebellion, referred to the Haitian leadership in private as "real niggers" and "coons" (Healy 1979:210). Of the 2,000 Haitians who were killed during the second rebellion, some were killed for sheer sport (Calhoun 1993:67; Schmidt 1995:119). A Senate investigation in late 1921 explicitly critiqued the Wilson administration for its forced labor policies, which triggered the second rebellion, and its local personnel for being insensitive to Haitian circumstances (Schmidt 1995:122-123). At home, a judge reviewing the loss of life associated with the second rebellion exonerated the Marines held responsible, calling the Haitians "savage" and a people "who operated free from all restraints of civilized warfare" (Calhoun 1993:67). The judge found that the Marines exercised restraint by not killing all members of the resistance.

Very few foreign policy analysts consider the importance of race in the making of American foreign policy. Horne maintains that race was a central concept in the foreign policy debates of Wilson's day and one that was openly debated and assessed (Horne 1999). Vitalis argues that most colonial powers saw the establishment of their governance abroad as a benefit to their own national interests but also as a humanitarian policy based in assumptions about racial hierarchy (Vitalis 2000:335, 340). If like Horne and Vitalis we factor in the assumptions of the day about race, Wilson's paternalism towards Mexico and his insistence on order in Haiti take on a different character in respect to his democratic vision. In comparison with the contemporary era, a president had less to worry about at home when aggressively insisting on his own views in respect to the US military implementation of democratic reform as in Mexico or when overseeing a forced labor policy as in Haiti. It should not surprise us that it is a complex project to call for democracy in Mexico or Haiti in an era when the members of similar racial groups or descendants of earlier immigrants were facing the repression of their own democratic rights in the United States itself. Wilson could assume a certain privileged position based on his understanding of American civic identity and leadership, but this was also heavily informed by assumptions of the racial superiority of European civilization. Wilson provides a language of racial remove and abstraction for later generations with his embrace of democratic reformism and

civic nationalism. In his own era, he need not explicitly reference the ideas of the age on race as he outlined his own policies on democracy and military intervention, but remembering that today is an important policy project.

Wilsonian Interventions Reconsidered: A New North-South Nexus

In an era when military intervention is used to bridge north-south interests and stabilize global politics, getting clear on what we mean by intervening in order to champion democratic principles is of increasing importance. The north-south dimension of this democratic interventionism was not important in an era of formal and informal imperialism. Today, however, when American foreign policy makers and analysts call upon the Wilsonian spirit to get past the cynical interventions of the Cold War or to address the demands of the war on terror, we need to understand what Wilson meant by democratic intervention in a very clear respect (Betts 1994; Jervis 1991/92; Stedman 1993). With this clarity, we can formulate a foreign policy, which is part of a new, twenty-first century North-South Relations, and not the informal imperialism of the past. Perhaps Wilson's ghost does haunt policy making, as McNamara and Blight maintain, but it is in a way we are not yet aware (McNamara and Blight 2001).

In this writings and speeches, Wilson integrated democratization and military intervention and thus charted new ground in the connections established between ideals and intervention. Eric Foner has argued that the concept of freedom in American history is not a "fixed category or predetermined concept" but rather "a terrain of struggle" (Foner 2002:22). Abraham Lincoln in calling upon democratic universalism in the midst of the Civil War expanded the founding fathers' concept of democracy to include the value of equality. To do this, he offered a new understanding of the Declaration of Independence. Some politicians and commentators of his day rejected this interpretation and chided Lincoln for misunderstanding the Declaration, but his innovation is with us still (Wills 1992; Maier 1998:201–208). Wilson did something similar in respect to foreign policy when he justified the idea of military intervention with democratic ideals rather than referencing the more nationalistic or humanitarian claims of the day. In so doing, he ennobled the new interventionism. Wilson was also critiqued at the time for the way he handled the concept of democracy, but like Lincoln, his leadership has been celebrated ever since.

There is today a very important distinction in respect to scholarship and intellectual debate of the two. Lincoln's ideals have been worked and reworked, challenged and reconsidered, engaged and contested, and while foundational are no longer considered to be immediately relevant to civil liberties or race relations in twenty-first century America. Wilson's understanding of American democratic national identity as relevant to military intervention has scarcely been addressed by contemporary international relations, and consequently his legacy for foreign policy in this area remains on the level of policy polemic. Despite considerable recent, historical scholarship, which makes clear that democratic values and practice at home have been reinterpreted in the course of American history, foreign policy analysts and international relations scholars, who make very acute analytic distinctions in other areas, continue to talk about democracy and debates about democratic values as though they have a universalistic, a historical meaning.

American foreign policy exceptionalism includes a much-celebrated philosophical war over the role of ideals and interest in the making of foreign policy. Wilson's commitment to democracy as a central tenant of America's role in the world is legendary, but his legacy of democracy in American foreign policy has a Janus-faced quality. He is rightly credited with setting the democratic foundations of the modern concepts of multilateral cooperation, world order, and

collective security, but he is also the philosophical father of principled military intervention. A romantic understanding of American history, a paternalistic approach to Third World governments, and a positive attitude towards imperialism, which reflect important social and ideological assumptions of his day, were the important philosophical foundations for his actual policies. Wilson's intent was clearly in the domain of civic nationalism, but it is not a civic identity that many would choose to embrace today.

Examining the historical roots of ideas and ideals that seem out of step with the policies, which they shape, puts us in touch with the ways in which political traditions can outlast their usefulness. The surprise for those historians who have examined Wilson's efforts is that it may be just as problematic to make external power work in the interests of democracy, when a president makes his clear commitment to ideals, as when interest is the guide to interventionist policy. In terms of military intervention and democracy there is no golden age from which we have fallen. Intervention as a form of democratization is a vexed project and one that this generation has inherited. Neo-conservative holdouts like Walter Russell Mead believe that the values associated with the intervention in Iraq were noble ones, but that the policy implementation was very badly done (Mead 2004:153). Certainly, the suffering of populations in countries confronting repressive authoritarian governments urges many contemporary liberals and conservatives in that direction. If there is a lesson in Wilson's policy of intervention, it is that we must carefully evaluate our own paternalistic traditions of racial exclusion attached to the claim of democratic reformism, when we intervene in Third World societies. Wilson used the language of civic nationalism, which allowed him to dialogue with the Founding Fathers on the highest ideals of the American democratic experiment, but it also allowed him to be vague about the political assumptions of his day concerning membership and representation. The twenty-first century north-south divide might develop in quite a different direction without military intervention depicted in the North as a policy of virtue and progress, especially since it is seen in the South as the dishonest and cynical domination of economically and militarily weaker states.

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