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A Non-Pilgrim's Progress

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Many years ago, when I was giving a talk in Austin, Robert Divine introduced me by commenting that I had stayed with World War I while other diplomatic historians were moving forward in the twentieth century to work on World War II and the Cold War. “I guess I’m just stuck in the same rut,” was my reply. I should have gone on to explain why that was so. One reason is that I have never considered myself to be primarily a diplomatic historian. I have enjoyed studying the interaction of nations, during World War I, for example, the duel over submarine warfare, Anglo-American relations, the House-Grey Memorandum, loans to the Allies, the Armistice, and the peace negotiations. Yet I have always been more interested in the domestic roots and influences behind foreign policy. This was part of a broader interest in political history that spanned domestic and foreign affairs.

That interest began early. I dedicated one of my books to my father “who introduced me to the greatest sport in the world—American politics.” I grew up following politics the way other boys followed baseball or football, reveling in the events, players, and lore. With that bent, it might seem odd that I did not pursue political science in college, but for me history had more color and zest and complexity.

From the outset, I wanted to work in the twentieth century, but I took a temporary detour into Reconstruction. The college I attended was Princeton, and David Donald had just joined the faculty. There was the required senior thesis, and Donald came highly recommended as an advisor. That was good advice, because he was a taskmaster who put me through my paces in research and writing. For graduate study, I chose Columbia because I wanted to work with Richard Hofstadter. The way he had blended political and intellectual history particularly excited me. This was at the beginning of the 1960s, and the atmosphere was redolent with notions about international leadership. Being a bit of a contrarian and knowing Hofstadter’s interests in right-wing movements, I chose to work on isolationism, and originally intended to study the period leading up to Pearl Harbor.

Though not himself a quantifier, Hofstadter suggested that I study congressional roll call votes, which I did. In those pre-computer days that meant copying votes from the *Congressional Record* and making maps of congressional districts. It was tedious work, but it revealed that the biggest factor driving isolationism was Republican partisanship. That may not sound surprising, but it did not jibe with prevailing views. Isolationism, often preceded by the modifier ‘midwestern,’ was explained as the outgrowth of provincialism and insularity (an earlier version of ‘flyover states’) with a hefty admixture of ethnicity in the form of German-Americans’ distaste for conflict with the Fatherland and Irish-Americans’ ancient Anglophobia. I had no particular brief for the isolationists, but it did strike me that this amounted to a pathological interpretation.

I also started looking at what these isolationists were saying in those pre-Pearl Harbor days. I found that many of them presented thoughtful, sophisticated arguments against entanglements that might lead to war overseas. I also quickly learned that those arguments were not new to the 1930s, and some of the most important figures making those arguments were not new to the debate. Such leading isolationists as Senators William E. Borah and Hiram Johnson had cut their foreign policy

teeth two decades earlier, during World War I. I realized that I was watching the second act of this play, and I wanted to go back and see the first act. When I started examining material from that earlier period, I decided to look at not only the public and private papers of the isolationists but also at those of their main adversaries. The other side included Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft, and their materials often proved richer sources than those of the isolationists themselves.

For isolationism as a foreign policy doctrine, the time leading up to intervention in 1917 proved pivotal. A distinction needs to be made between isolation and isolationism. Before this time, isolation had been what Henry Cabot Lodge had disparaged in the 1890s as a ‘habit’ that needed to be broken. To his and Roosevelt’s chagrin, their excursion into imperialism had not done the job. Only with the world war, especially with the sinking of the *Lusitania*, was awareness of international involvement seared into the center of public consciousness. This awareness and the threat of war spawned an active, well-articulated defense of what had previously seemed unchallenged. They reacted to the threat they perceived to America’s separation from, and superiority to, the war-like, monarch-ridden, imperialistic ‘Old World.’ A fitting analogy is religious fundamentalism: as long as the ‘old-time religion’ faced no serious attack, there seemed no need to define its tenets and trumpet its cause.

Fundamentalism is also a fitting analogy because the first full-blown statement of isolationism came in 1915 from William Jennings Bryan in his rebuttal to the ‘League of Nations’ idea propounded by the League to Enforce Peace, which was headed by Taft and presented as a response to the new foreign policy situation. The Great Commoner’s championship of isolationism was likewise significant because of where he stood on the political spectrum. Like him and unlike the isolationists of a later time, most members of this first wave were progressives. The six senators who voted against the war were all from that side of the spectrum, and they included Robert M. La Follette and George W. Norris. (Borah and Johnson reluctantly voted for the declaration of war and later regretted it). The vote in the House was less-clear cut, but a progressive tilt was still discernible and included the first vote cast by the first woman elected to Congress, Jeanette Rankin of Montana.

A common theme among these progressive isolationists was, curiously, a situational conservatism: they feared that war would undo and forestall reform, and they detected the nefarious influences of Wall Street and big business behind the call to arms. These arguments would resurface twenty years later with the Neutrality Acts and the investigations of the Nye Committee. By then, however, the twists of partisan politics and ideological realignment were beginning largely to eclipse the nexus between progressivism and isolationism. Situational conservatism was shifting to the right. That side now harbored greater fears of the domestic consequences of international involvement, which they saw as a ruse to extend New-Deal style agencies. These attitudes persisted even after World War II with frequent gibes at overseas economic aid as ‘world-wide Works Progress Administration (WPA)’ and the effort to trim presidential executive power in foreign policy with the Bricker amendment. Despite Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party foray in 1948, opposition on the left to involvements and interventions abroad would not become respectable again until the 1960s with Vietnam.

My first book, *The Vanity of Power*, came out of that study of the isolationists.¹ By the time it did, I was ready for a change of subject, but not a change of period, because this era had grown on me. In part, it was sheer fascination with the people and events. Moreover, I recognized that this period witnessed the opening acts of more than isolationism. This was the true beginning of American engagement in world politics. The imperialist venture of 1898 may have broken the ‘habit’ of isolation in fact, but it did not do that for public consciousness, even among opinion-molding elites. Domestically, the period around World War I attracted me because of progressivism, with the intellectual depth and vigor of the debates surrounding it; economic and social change, which continued the transformation of a dispersed, mainly agrarian, bi-racial country into a polyglot industrial nation, with many received ideas under siege.

My next subject, the diplomat Walter Hines Page, attracted me through a mix of my family background and practical proximity. Page, like my parents, was a North Carolinian who had gone North to seek his fortune but retained ties with his

¹ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Vanity of Power* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1969).

native region. I had encountered him several times in my reading, but what really pulled me toward him was seeing his letters to Wilson from his ambassadorial post in London. Amid the typewritten, terse, business-like letters and memoranda, Page's lengthy weekly or bi-weekly effusions in exquisite handwriting stood out. Even more, their content, which grew ever more passionate in their advocacy of the British cause in the war, was striking and puzzling—who was this man and how did he get off haranguing the president like this? His papers were at Harvard, and since I was teaching at Wellesley this collection was only a short ride away on what was then still called the 'MTA.' I also traveled to other archives and had two lengthy sojourns in London to work on the British side of his time as ambassador.

In one way, Page provided a case study of an ambassador who 'went native' and over-identified with his hosts at the expense of his own country's interests and perspectives. In another way, he provided an example of someone who transferred earlier domestic concerns to the international scene. Sectional reconciliation had been his fondest cause. He wanted the South to get over the Lost Cause and reintegrate into the nation's life by becoming more like the North in education and the economy. Almost as soon as he got to London, he espoused comparable reconciliation between the two countries, and he hatched a scheme for bilateral cooperation in developing the world's 'waste spaces' in the tropics. In 1898-99, he had been a vociferous imperialist along the lines of Theodore Roosevelt and Lodge, and these ambassadorial ideas came as a logical extension of his earlier views. As a literary man, he shared his generation's cultural Anglophilia, and his first months in London pushed him toward Anglomania, which the war only intensified.

Page also led me to some things I had not expected. Before he went to London in 1913, he had been a journalist, magazine editor (including the *Atlantic Monthly*), and book publisher, so I immersed myself in the history of those fields. His literary bent and business dealings led me to look at the leading writers with whom he dealt. They included a varied lot of literary figures from the South, including the Virginia novelist Ellen Glasgow, the African-American short story writer Charles W. Chesnutt, the Tuskegee principal Booker T. Washington, and the scurrilously racist writer Thomas Dixon, who adapted his novels for D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. Page was a man of many parts—too many, I sometimes thought—but working on him showed me how biography can offer a corrective to overspecialization. Politicians and diplomats lead lives outside those spheres, and it behooves us historians to view them as broadly as we can. This recognition would help me when I later turned to Roosevelt and Wilson.

The most surprising revelation to me from Page involved gender roles. He grew up encouraged in his bookish, imaginative bent by a gentle, cultivated mother, to the displeasure of his hard bitten businessman father. This domestic drama would play itself out many times in life and literature in the modern urban world. Yet here it was happening in semi-rural North Carolina just before, during, and immediately after the Civil War. Page's way of dealing with this family conflict was not to choose sides, but to try to combine both literary and commercial pursuits and also to wield political and social influence. This encounter with gender-tinged callings later proved useful in studying TR in particular, with his flamboyant masculinity, but also with Wilson.

Working on Page drew me toward taking a closer look at those two men. Page and Wilson had a lot in common. They had met in their early twenties, and they had followed each other and abetted each other's careers as southern expatriates. Yet profound, unacknowledged differences of temperament and aims separated them. In his often blustery, enthusiastic ways, Page resembled Roosevelt more than Wilson. His ideas about sectional reconciliation on largely conservative northern terms did not jibe with Wilson's progressive approach. His passionate espousal of the Allied cause and thinly disguised interventionism sprang much more from moral than strategic considerations, and that mirrored TR's stance. In short, circumstances conspired to give Page a case of mistaken political identity in his association with Wilson.

The antinomy between Roosevelt and Wilson led me to my next subject. In graduate school, I had become interested in the epic clash between them. That passage in Robert Osgood's *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* where he compares their conflict with Nietzsche's Warrior and Priest had stuck with me.² So I decided to try a comparative approach

² Robert Osgood's *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953).

to the two men. My method of attack was different from the way in which we historians usually work. I divided their lives into comparable periods, and I tried to read as much primary material about them in each period as I could before looking at secondary work. Clearly, it was impossible to rid my mind of other scholars' views, but this approach did help me to look at these subjects with fresh eyes.

The uncanny parallelism of Roosevelt's and Wilson's lives and the abundance of printed editions of their letters, speeches, and published writing made it fairly easy to encounter them first-hand. That was enormously stimulating, and it served to disabuse me fairly quickly of some fancy constructs I had conjured up. I had envisioned them as intellectuals in power, especially in the Nietzschean categories, which I airily translated into dionysiac and apollonian identities. Confronting them as they were showed me that they were far more interesting and complicated than those categories could encompass. TR may have come closer than any other American leader to being a Nietzschean Warrior, but Wilson was not his polar opposite, certainly no Nietzschean Priest.³

One happy offshoot of this work was that it brought me together with Arthur Link. Of the three notable historians of their generation with whom I had an association, after Donald and Hofstadter, this was the closest. I was never Link's student in the strict sense, but, like everyone else who worked in this era, I certainly was his student—no one knew more about the topic than he did. I had made contact with him while working on the isolationists, and he gave me valuable leads about sources, especially the Claude Kitchin papers. While working on Page, I sought his advice again and stopped by Princeton several times to see him. He made generous comments on both of the books that resulted.

Link must have been taking my measure as a Wilson scholar, because he invited me to join the Editorial Advisory Committee to *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. I represented a newer generation; the other members included contemporaries of his, a former student, William Harbaugh, and a former colleague, Richard Leopold. We would read the volumes in manuscript, usually two per year, and we would come to Princeton for an annual meeting, which was more of a social occasion than a working session. Harbaugh once said to me, "You know, John, Arthur really doesn't want our advice." That was true, although he welcomed suggestions about possibly unconsulted sources (not many), but he did want our company. Despite the many hours that he put in by himself, he was the least solitary great scholar I have known. He liked having people around him, and he would often call me on the telephone.

This association may also have helped in the way I treated Wilson in the comparative biography. With Roosevelt, I found myself trying to go further down the interpretative trail so well blazed by George Mowry, John Morton Blum, and Elting Morison.⁴ I found their views insightful and compelling, and I hoped I was adding to their work. It was different with Wilson. I soon found myself girding up as an iconoclast. The icon I wanted to smash had originated with Roosevelt. In their battle of 1912—still the best intellectual contest in any presidential election—he had labored mightily to besmirch Wilson as a phony progressive, i.e., a conservative state-rights southern Democrat who deceived the public with sweet-sounding but toothless gestures toward reform. Four years later, that argument got powerful reinforcement when Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann justified their and the *New Republic's* support for Wilson by claiming that he, not they, had changed—that he had abandoned his anemic New Freedom of 1912 for something essentially like TR's red blooded New Nationalism of that year.

³ At my editor's prodding, I did keep Nietzsche's words in the title of the book, Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), but we reversed the expected order of the subjects in an effort to introduce ambiguity. My editor was Aida Donald, wife of David Donald.

⁴ See George Mowry, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1945), John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), Elting Morison, introduction to *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

Given such provenance, it was not surprising that this view of Wilson as a half-hearted, belated progressive found a prominent place in the historiography. Link was one of the first to enshrine it there. He did that in his earlier work, particularly his *New American Nation* series book and the first two in the magisterial five-volume treatment of Wilson and his career up to 1917.⁵ Those volumes stand alongside the works of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Henry Adams among the best accounts of presidential administrations.⁶

When I challenged this interpretation, Link raised no objections. This should not have come as a surprise to me. In spite of his seemingly imperious manner and way of delivering pronouncements, Link never imposed a party line on his students or other scholars he worked with. A list of the men and women who did their degrees with him reveals a wide range of subjects and views. Thomas Knock, one of Link's students who became a good friend, and I have often talked about Link's catholicity—a good word to use with this man who, like his subject, was a staunch but never narrow Presbyterian. But I think the strongest reason that I got no grief was that Link had quietly changed his mind about Wilson and progressivism. Close reading of the final three volumes of his Wilson history shows that the New Nationalism conversion story disappears altogether in favor of a portrait of Wilson as an advanced progressive. Link never disavowed his earlier arguments, but he did not think he needed to.

My next work was a detour into the world of books aimed at the classroom market. I was recruited to write a volume on the first two decades of the twentieth century in a series that divided it up into comparable segments, edited by John Morton Blum. The publishers assured me that this was something I could write out of my teaching, really just adapt my lecture notes. That proved easier said than done. Maybe John Blum could have done that, but I learned that a lot of material which I could conveniently glide past in class required much more reading, if not original research. Someone once compared doing a sweeping narrative to skating fast over thin ice. I was only covering twenty years, but that was often how it felt. This was the closest I ever came to the textbook enterprise, and it immunized me against any further infection.⁷

The nicest aspect of this project was getting to know John Blum, who was a fine critic and coach and became another good friend. I have often used him as an example of how being an historian doesn't have to be like playing Leo Durocher's baseball—'guys don't win ball games.' John was one of the nicest persons I've ever known. Another fine historian of the same ilk whom I also got to know well was Robert Ferrell.

My next work was on the League fight. For a long time, I had harbored a sense of unfinished business from the World War I isolationists. I remembered that Bryan had presented the isolationist argument against the league idea in 1915 and that he was soon joined by Borah and others. Those years witnessed a dress rehearsal for the League fight of 1919 and 1920. I wanted to study this episode in the arenas of the Senate, parties, and public opinion.

One thing that struck me immediately was how broad an agreement prevailed about some need to remain active in world affairs, even though it might be severely hedged with reservations like the ones Lodge attached to consent to the League Covenant under the Treaty of Versailles. At least one Irreconcilable senator also favored a security pledge to Britain and France, though not a formal treaty: Philander Knox proposed it in what he called the 'Knox Doctrine.' That evaporated in the deadlock that ended the League fight, as did Republican talk in 1920 about an 'association of nations' to replace the League. Still, it was striking how small a following isolationism attracted during the League fight; its heyday would not come for another decade and a half, with the Neutrality Acts, the Nye Committee, and the Ludlow amendment. Another thing

⁵ Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era* (New York: Harper's, 1954), *Wilson*, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947-1965).

⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt* 3 vols. (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1957-60); Henry Adams, *The History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*, 2 vols (New York, Library of America, 1986—original edition, 9 vols. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1889-91).

⁷ See Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

that struck me in the League fight was the pervasiveness of idealistic talk and notions of what is now called American 'exceptionalism.' European-style *realpolitik* was almost nowhere to be found.

Finally, I could not help being impressed with the overall seriousness of the debate on all sides. This was really the last great debate over foreign policy. Advertising and evangelism were already eating into the kind of oratory that extended back to classical times with Demosthenes and Cicero. This was also the last time when political leaders reached people primarily through the printed word, not the sound of their voices. Bryan, Wilson, Borah, Johnson, La Follette, and others might give great speeches in the Capitol and on tours, but most people would read their words in the extensive newspaper coverage that was the norm. Radio was just around the corner, and television would make its debut in another generation. These media extended the reach of leaders, as Franklin D. Roosevelt showed with his Fireside Chats, but it came at the expense of shortening their audiences' attention span. The pre-Pearl Harbor debate, by contrast, would be long on emotional appeals and short on intellectual discourse.

Working on the League fight, I could not avoid giving Wilson a prominent role. No matter what might have happened under another president, there would not have been anything remotely resembling this fight without him. I had learned from studying him in comparison with TR how bold a leader Wilson was—far bolder than his rival, public images to the contrary notwithstanding. From his Princeton presidency onward, Wilson had mounted audacious initiatives. Intervention in the war, the Fourteen Points, and hammering together the League were his boldest ones in foreign policy or any sphere. Likewise, the League fight would have turned out differently without him. The spiteful deadlock between him and the senators led by Lodge owed more to Wilson than anyone else. Good will was lacking on the other side, too, but Wilson's refusal to compromise did doom League membership. Cruel as it is to say, he was guilty of this 'supreme infanticide.'

This inescapably brings up the subject of Wilson's physical and psychological state, particularly the part played by the massive stroke he suffered in the middle of the League fight. Although I had touched on this subject earlier, I had to delve deeper now. Like Link, I had earlier latched onto the provocative and insightful contributions of the neurologist Edwin Weinstein, who had written articles and a book on Wilson's medical condition.⁸ His interpretations and Link's championship of them stirred up a teapot-tempest feud. Opposing them were Alexander and Juliet George, authors of a study that had emphasized Wilson's supposed psychological deformations.⁹ This feud had many of the less attractive features of courtroom strife, with each side bringing in its expert witnesses. It even took on aspects of an institutional war, pitting Princeton against Stanford. I confess that I sided with Link, not only out of loyalty but also because it seemed ridiculous to minimize the impact of a medical disaster like Wilson's stroke.

Now, however, in studying the League fight I decided to draw back and reconsider the matter. I consulted a friend at Wisconsin who was chair of neurology in the medical school. I showed him both what I was writing and the relevant volumes of the *Wilson Papers*, which included contemporary notes by Wilson's attending physicians and essays by neurologists whom Link had enlisted to write analytical contributions. My friend's advice was to introduce 'uncertainty.' Besides giving me the expected physician's disclaimer about diagnoses not based on personal examination, he pointed out to me that people who suffer strokes like Wilson's can operate at near their full mental and physical capacity right up to the time it happens. This made me refrain from trying to explain too much about Wilson's pre-stroke behavior as symptoms of what was to come.

As for the significance of the stroke, my friend pointed out that its emotional and psychological effects probably owed a lot to Wilson's isolation afterward. The medical wisdom of the time dictated sparing the patient anything that might upset her or him, whereas today the practice is to get the patient into social interaction as soon as possible. Wilson almost certainly

⁸ See Edwin Weinstein, "Woodrow Wilson's Neurological Illness," *Journal of American History* 57 (September 1970): 324-351, and Weinstein, *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

⁹ Alexander and Juliet George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Dover, 1956)

would have dealt better with the stroke—which resulted from clotting, not hemorrhage, and was not life-threatening—if he had not immediately afterward suffered a urinary infection—which was more debilitating and was life-threatening. Here was a perfect storm of ill-effects. Combined with his isolation, it left him emotionally unbalanced and incapable of sound political judgment—hence the awful outcome to the League fight, mainly of his making.¹⁰

Wilson should not have stayed on as president, but there then existed no mechanism for removing him, short of his voluntary resignation. Lest we grow smug about what might happen today, read the Twenty-Fifth Amendment and ponder how well it addresses presidential disability. It is an unwieldy instrument that really calls for a *coup d'état* to remove a president who is unwilling to go. The kind of cover-up like the one Mrs. Wilson ordered and his physicians abetted would not be possible now, nor would the 'splendid deception' about FDR's paraplegia, much less his long seclusion in early 1944. This is not because of the amendment but because of the ubiquitous intrusiveness of the electronic media—there is something to thank television for. The greatest danger in presidential disability lies not in cases of physical impairment but in mental and emotional derangement, and this amendment offers scant safeguard against that.

My final work was a straight-out biography of Wilson.¹¹ Several people had prodded me to do one, and I received encouragement from publishers. Since this was a second time around on much of his life, I thought it might go quickly, but I was wrong. Again, as in the classroom book, I found that there were aspects that I had passed by before. I particularly took a fresh look at his early life, and I was struck once more by how much richer the sources were for TR's early life than for Wilson's. Anyone who studies him owes a great debt of gratitude to Ray Stannard Baker, just as those who study Page owe a similar debt to Burton J. Hendrick.¹² Those authorized first biographers were journalists who did what came naturally to them: they interviewed people and sought out recollections. This was a full generation before academics tumbled to the value of such memories and coined the term 'oral history.' Much about Wilson's and Page's early lives would be lost without their journalistic digging.

I delved more into the role of religion and other aspects of his youth. His father was a liberal clergyman, in both personal morality and theological views, and once he relocated to the faculty of the Columbia (South Carolina) Seminary, his son 'Tommy' grew up in one of the most sophisticated religious environments on either side of the Atlantic. The boy was slow to learn to read and may indeed have suffered from a mild form of dyslexia, but it was extraordinary how he compensated for any difficulties by learning shorthand and acquiring what was then the newfangled device of the typewriter. He showed remarkable intellectual independence from early on, reading and writing on his own more than for classes and quietly sloughing off the prevailing state rights views of his southern environment. His academic career, first as a scholar and then as a college president, was stellar; over a century later he ranks near the top among political scientists and academic leaders. Likewise, those who rate state governors place him among the all-time greats. In short, this is a person who would rate scholarly attention and biographies even if he had never become president.

Another area that I devoted more attention to than I had done so in earlier works was race. This came before the recent outbursts at Princeton and elsewhere about Wilson's attitudes and actions toward African-Americans. I have never tried to apologize for or excuse his condoning the attempts to segregate the federal workplace or the demotion of African-American employees, but I do think it is necessary to understand what led him to permit those actions. My late friend, the superb African-American historian Manning Marable, once told me that he could understand Wilson's need as a Democrat of that era to appease his southern white base, especially because the Great Migration had barely begun to spawn much of a black electorate in the North. In fact, Wilson nearly missed out on the presidential nomination in 1912 because of his political

¹⁰ See Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2009).

¹² Notes and transcripts of Baker's interviews and solicited memories of Wilson are in the Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress. Copies of Hendrick's notes and other materials I collected are in the library of Randolph Macon College, Ashland, Virginia.

weakness in the South. The two ends of the white political spectrum—the Bourbon bosses and the agrarian radicals—each suspected that he had gotten ‘yankeefied’ by his residence in the North and was, therefore, no longer a true southerner. After he took office, Wilson bristled at press accounts about how ‘Dixified’ his administration was. Wilson was an expatriate southerner who lived his entire adult life in the North, and his views on race and some other matters came closer to what prevailed there than in his native region.

Tom Knock once said to me that he thought two things kept Wilson from achieving what he called ‘transcendent greatness’: race and civil liberties. I agree. Even before the recent controversies about race, his war-time record on civil liberties stood in the way of his being properly honored on his side of the political spectrum—on the left, among liberals and progressives. His domestic achievements such as the Federal Reserve, the Federal Trade Commission, the income and inheritance taxes, the eight-hour law for railway workers, and the child labor law, among others, blazed the trail toward the New Deal and the Great Society. Wilson’s feats rank him along with Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson among the three great liberal legislative presidents of the twentieth century, and he did not enjoy FDR’s national emergency blank check from Congress or LBJ’s years of experience and mastery on Capitol Hill. Perhaps the surest sign of the significance of his legacy as well as that of his successors is how they remain under attack from the right.

Then came intervention in the world war and, with it, a rampage against an ethnic minority and socialists and other radicals who were critical of the war. Wilson predicted most of this repression and intolerance, and yet he let it happen. Why? Struggle as I did and still do with that question, I have never come up with an answer that satisfies me. Perhaps if I were a novelist or some other kind of imaginative writer, I might presume to plumb deeper into what Winston Churchill called “the workings of this man’s mind and spirit.”¹³ I have speculated that giving belligerent passions some latitude was necessary for Wilson to wage war. He did believe that if young men who accepted military service risked their lives, then people who opposed the war might have to suffer some consequences. He worried about the situation, and in the fall of 1918 he told the attorney general that the more militant prosecutors might need to be reined in. But that was late, and the Armistice came before they did anything. Those speculations do not satisfy me, but as a responsible historian I am not willing to go further than the evidence permits me to go.

Let me conclude by offering another reason for why I have stuck with this era. This answer also has a Texas tilt. The great western and environmental historian Walter Prescott Webb was a quintessential Texan who received all but an unhappy smidgen of his higher education at the University of Texas, where he spent his entire academic career. In one of his presidential addresses, Webb divided historians into two camps—pilgrims and hoboes. Pilgrims, he said, were the committed disciplinarians who located themselves in the mainstream of their fields and marched purposefully forward to expand well-marked areas of research and interpretation. Hoboes, by contrast, followed their interests in whichever directions their fancies took them. Webb conceded that pilgrims probably produced more work, but he thought hoboes had more fun.¹⁴ I heartily agree with that assessment, except that I have seen quite a few self-professed pilgrims use their claims to rationalize their own low output and scoff at other people’s work.

On the occasion of my retirement, I mentioned Webb’s categories, and I told the graduate students present that our job had been to make pilgrims of them. I often thought we did that job too well, and I had groused that we were turning out historiographers rather than historians. My own experience at Columbia had been similar. There was a manual called *The Graduate Student’s Guide*—anonymously published, although it was an open secret that the author was Jacques Barzun. A friend of mine quipped that it was designed to turn us into ‘self-propelled academic projectiles.’ I told the students that this pilgrim-in-training business was all well and good, but I hoped they would never lose touch with their inner hoboes. I urged them to do at least some of their work, not to serve a cause or advance a career, but out of sheer, cussed interest in a subject.

¹³ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis* (New York: Scribner, 1927) vol. 3, 229.

¹⁴ See Walter Prescott Webb, *An Honest Preface and other Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

That is mostly what I have done. I have been a hobo. Not completely, of course: our discipline's judgments about historical significance have guided me, and I have sought to locate my work alongside what others have done. But what I have enjoyed most has been pursuing things that have simply fascinated me. My list of biographical subjects speaks to that fascination, as do the events I have studied. Some historians may make their way mainly out of a sense of obligation or duty, but I think being attracted to a subject for its own sake brings vigor and insight. That is my *apologia*. I leave it to others to judge the results of what I have done.

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