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Introduction

Focusing on President Woodrow Wilson and the United States in international relations, this collection of essays addresses enduring questions about American political culture and statecraft. His liberal internationalist vision of a new world order, which he articulated during World War I and which expressed his version of Americanism, would shape U.S. foreign policy for the next century. The following chapters thus assess not only his role during his presidency but also his legacy in defining the United States' place in world history. They explore the nexus between American culture and international relations, between ideas and diplomacy, between ideology and power, and between humanitarian promises and self-interests. My critique of Wilson's leadership in international relations highlights the limits of his definition of a new world order, notably with respect to religion and race. His belief in God's providential mission for the United States in world history and his racial/ethnic identity profoundly limited the president's international vision and statecraft, which expressed a Eurocentric, particularly Anglo-American, bias and drew a global color line. This book thus examines the exclusive as well as the universal dimensions of Wilsonianism.

Modern Anglo-American liberalism furnished the ideological foundation for Wilson's new foreign policy in the early twentieth-century Progressive Era, an era in world history of imperialism and both nationalism and internationalism. When he called for making the world safe for democracy through American intervention in the European war, he envisaged a new world order that projected his understanding of U.S. national identity. He affirmed the tenets of collective security through a new League of Nations, national self-determination as the rationale for drawing new

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borders, and an "open door" for international commerce and finance as well as travel and cultural exchange. This vision required the freedom of the seas and the removal of barriers to trade and investment across borders. Hoping the Great War would culminate in the creation of a global community of liberal democracies with capitalist economies, he saw nation-states as the building blocks of this new world order.

Paradoxically, Wilson's American vision of a new world order followed an old European intellectual tradition with biblical and classical roots. As Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt observed in *The Myth of the West* (1995), the idea of America came from the old world, not from the frontier in the American West as Wilson as well as Frederick Jackson Turner affirmed. This worldview depicted the United States as the culmination of world history, and gave Americans confidence in their future. Their new land represented a "city on a hill" or "last frontier" or "end of history."[1] Their incomparable empire was not really like those of other great powers that had risen and fallen. The myth promised the United States a happier destiny with unending progress. Wilson embraced this mythic American exceptionalism in his understanding of world history.

Wilson applied this nationalist perspective to international relations during and after World War I. Within the framework of American exceptionalism, the president claimed to offer the postwar world its best hope for lasting peace. The League, which he saw as the centerpiece of the Versailles Treaty with Weimar Germany, promised a new era of international relations. It would protect modern civilization against barbarism. It would replace old rivalries with "the united power of free nations" to keep the peace. He sought to establish the United States as the world's preeminent leader in pursuit of "international social control" or, actually, of U.S. hegemony. The League, he believed, would enable Americans to provide worldwide leadership largely through their moral influence over public opinion, and thus fulfill their God-given destiny. "America shall in truth show the way," he affirmed as he presented the peace treaty to the Senate.[2] At stake was nothing less than the defense of civilization against the barbarism of another world war.

[1] Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995).

[2] Address to Senate, July 10, 1919, Woodrow Wilson, *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson: War and Peace*, eds. Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd (New York, 1927), 1: 537–54; Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton, NJ, 1989), 61: 426–36.

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Wilson's belief in America's God-given destiny and its progressive history blinded him from seeing what Wolfgang Schivelbusch called "the culture of defeat" in other countries. Born and raised in the American South, the president had experienced the trauma of defeat after the Civil War. This experience profoundly influenced him. Yet he found it difficult to empathize with foreigners who also suffered from military defeat. In *The Culture of Defeat* (2004), Schivelbusch compared the American South after the Civil War, France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, and Germany after World War I. The losers in all three wars claimed moral superiority over their conquerors. They regarded themselves as true defenders of civilization against barbaric victors.[3] Wilson's claim to have created a new world order of "civilized men" at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 did not appear that way to most Germans in the Weimar Republic. Nor did it look that way to French premier Georges Clemenceau, who had experienced military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Wilson shared the white South's trauma after the American Civil War, but he did not understand either Clemenceau's fixation on French security or Weimar Germany's almost universal rejection of the Versailles Treaty. Wilson's new world order fell short of French and German expectations, and those of other nations that had anticipated more from the peacemakers in 1919. Widespread disillusionment fed belligerent nationalism, which manifested the culture of defeat and contributed to the failure of democracy and peace after World War I. Wilson's concept of a global community of nations offered no solution to the postwar conflicts in Europe. Nor did it fulfill the hopes of anticolonial nationalists on the other side of the color line elsewhere in the world.

Wilson's biographers and historians of his role in international relations have typically applauded the positive qualities of Wilsonianism. So too have political scientists. Emphasizing supposedly universal principles of his liberal internationalism, they have tended to downplay his religious and racial prejudices. In contrast, Joyce Carol Oates, in her novel *The Accursed* (2013), depicted his as well as Princeton's provincialism in 1905–06, although, as the university's president, he was one of the most cosmopolitan residents in this predominantly white Protestant community. He embraced its "Anglo-Saxon Christianity." In the novel Wilson asserted, "the United States is charged by God with spreading Christian democracy throughout the world, and opening the markets of the East as

[3] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York, 2004).

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well – by diplomacy if possible, by power otherwise." His Calvinist faith required both local and global engagement on "a battleground between the forces of Good and the forces of Evil."[4] Oates portrayed the demonic consequences in Princeton of this racial and religious mission, and by implication, potentially elsewhere in the world whenever provincial Americans encountered foreign peoples and ideas. Essays in this book explore such encounters in Wilson's diplomacy and statecraft during and after World War I and in his legacy of Wilsonianism.

This book provides my historical perspective on fundamental issues in the ongoing debates over the role of the United States in the world. Other historians such as David Reynolds[5] and political scientists such as G. John Ikenberry[6] have recognized the importance of the Wilsonian legacy. As they observed, the history of World War I and of Wilson's role in it has continued to influence international relations throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. My book on Wilson and his definition of America's place in world history will offer insights not only on his diplomacy and statecraft and on American political culture during the World War I era but also on his legacy in current international relations.

Since the end of the Cold War, two major trends in historiography have provided new perspectives on America's place in the world. In this new era of globalization after the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, historians have sought to escape the limits of Cold War scholarship that emphasized the global division among the First, Second, and Third Worlds. In that framework, the United States and its allies had defended their freedom, democracy, and capitalism against the threat of dictatorial communism from the Soviet Union and other communist countries in a rivalry that had often played out in the Third World. With the apparent triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism over communism and the new era of globalization, historians looked for better ways to understand not only the present but also the past. One major historiographical trend was the emergence of the field of world history. No longer restricted by Cold War categories, scholars in this field sought to understand the history of various peoples and regions of the world by comparing them and identifying their transnational and international connections. Their focus was global, typically not adopting

[4] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Accursed: A Novel* (New York, 2013), 57, 212, 351.
[5] David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2014).
[6] G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

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an America-centric or Eurocentric viewpoint like the one that privileged the First World during the Cold War. The second new historiographical trend was the internationalizing of American history. Scholars in this field also looked for transnational connections between developments in the United States and comparable ones elsewhere in the world. Historians of U.S. foreign relations, including myself, have contributed to and benefited from these two trends in contemporary historiography.

CONCEPTUALIZING WORLD HISTORY

In *Navigating World History* (2003), Patrick Manning described how historians have created a global past by developing the field of world history and making it a significant part of historical studies. It has become an important subject for courses at colleges and universities and for research. He found the modern roots of Western ideas about world history in early modern Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. Nineteenth-century Europeans further developed a philosophy of history that placed Western civilization at its core. "In the emerging hierarchy of empires, nations, and colonies," Manning explained, "the term *civilization* became part of the vocabulary of every philosophical camp. The term served as a double-edged weapon for confirming the primacy of European (and later, North American) nations in the world order. For premodern times, *civilization* referred to the succession of leading empires and societies, in contrast to each other and to the timeless barbarians beyond their limits. For modern times, *civilization* meant *the civilized world*, including the leading nations and imperial homelands but not the colonies."[7] World War I, he noted, expanded global awareness. Thus, Manning observed, "Woodrow Wilson, who as a historian participated actively in the nationalistic style of writing about American history, became a theorist for a new world order once he became president and a leader of the Allied war effort.... Wilson's vision of the League of Nations contributed, in the minds of some, to the notion of world government."[8] He proceeded from nationalism to internationalism.

Manning recognized that scholars in the new field of world history studied primarily the subjects that had characterized diplomatic history. "World historians have worked in most detail on the social sphere,

[7] Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, 2003), 31.

[8] Manning, *Navigating World History*, 43–44. See also Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2012), 116–88.

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focusing especially on politics, warfare, commerce, and the rise and fall of states." But they no longer interpreted these subjects within the nineteenth-century framework that continued to shape the thinking of twentieth-century leaders such as Wilson. Instead, they recognized greater diversity and relativity among the historical actors and their viewpoints. Manning emphasized that

> the logic of world history, while reliant on the facts as they are known, leads inevitably instead to a multiplicity of interpretations. Thus, writers a century ago chose to focus on "civilization" as the basic concept in world history, and attempted to write master narratives focused on this concept.... By the opening of the twenty-first century, civilization had ceased to be an absolute standard. It maintained its significance, but, like everything else in world history, civilization had to be relativized.[9]

Recent historical scholarship on World War I has increasingly embraced the perspective of world history. Rather than adopting a single national viewpoint, historians have placed the war in the broader framework of international and transnational history. Although the assassinations of Austria's archduke and his wife by a Serbian terrorist in Sarajevo precipitated the July 1914 crisis in Europe, the resulting war quickly became global. It involved not only European empires around the world but also independent nations in Asia and the Western Hemisphere. It soon led to conflict between Japan and China and eventually to intervention by the United States and other nations in the Western Hemisphere. Not only did the war become global; it also became total, affecting all aspects of the state and civil society. In *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (2014), edited by Jay Winter, the authors interpreted it as both global and total.[10] Other historians also framed their studies of the war and postwar peacemaking as world history. This perspective characterized Hew Strachan's *The First World War* (2001), Margaret MacMillan's *Paris 1919* (2001), Niall Ferguson's *The War of the World* (2006), Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment* (2007), and Adam Tooze's *The Deluge* (2014).[11]

Emily S. Rosenberg and her coauthors in *A World Connecting* (2012) examined the period from 1870 to 1945 as an era of major transition

[9] Manning, *Navigating World History*, 117–18.

[10] Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. I: *Global War*, Vol. II: *The State*, and Vol. III: *Civil Society* (Cambridge, 2014).

[11] Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, Vol. I: *To Arms* (Oxford, 2001); Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York, 2001); Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York, 2006); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007); Adam Tooze,

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in world history. They analyzed the invention of modern statehood, examined the global reach of empires, studied the migrations of peoples around the world, traced commodity chains in the global economy, and focused on transnational and international currents in the shrinking world. The contributions of this book demonstrated the paradoxical experience of the world becoming more interdependent and yet apparently more diverse as different peoples increasingly interacted with each other. "Over the period from 1870 to 1945," Rosenberg observed in the introduction, "the world became both a more familiar and a stranger place. Fast ships, railroads, telegraph lines, inexpensive publications, and film all reached into hinterlands and erased distances. The exchange of people and products accelerated, while the fascination with traveling around and describing foreign areas–long evident in human history–reached new heights." This interaction created not only a greater sense of familiarity but also of strange differences. "New connections highlighted all kinds of regional differences," Rosenberg noted, "and the awareness of difference could promote suspicion and repulsion perhaps even more easily than it facilitated understanding and communication." In this modern era of interdependence and fragmentation, the world was increasingly characterized by both "the intensifying global interconnectedness" and "the multiple processes of disintegration and reintegration."[12] For better or worse, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what happened in one place vitally impacted people in other countries or regions of the world, increasingly connecting the local and the global.

INTERNATIONALIZING AMERICAN HISTORY

As the field of world history was emerging, the Organization of American Historians launched its Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History. Directed by Thomas Bender, its *La Pietra Report* (2000) called for "new understandings of the American nation's relation to a world that is at once self-consciously global and highly pluralized."[13] In *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (2002), which Bender

The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931 (New York, 2014).

[12] Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 3–4. See also C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Malden, MA, 2004), 1–3.

[13] Thomas Bender, *La Pietra Report* (Organization of American Historians and New York University, 2000), 5.

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edited, he explained the purpose of this new direction in historiography. "My argument and that of this book," he wrote, "is not for increasing the study of American foreign relations, although that is important. The point is that we must understand every dimension of American life as entangled in other histories. Other histories are implicated in American history, and the United States is implicated in other histories. This is not only true of this present age of globalization; it has been since the fifteenth century, when the world for the first time became self-consciously singular."[14] Bender offered his own understanding of "America's place in world history" in *A Nation Among Nations* (2006).[15]

As historians of the United States increasingly transcended national borders in their scholarship, they also crossed the artificial boundaries between subfields of American history. Historians of U.S. foreign relations often pioneered in this new direction but they were soon joined by others, especially as they too sought to internationalize the study of their particular specialties. Outstanding examples of this recent scholarship combined American diplomacy, culture, and economics,[16] gender and international history,[17] race and U.S. foreign relations,[18] U.S. diplomatic and American western history,[19] labor and U.S. foreign relations,[20] American intellectual and diplomatic history,[21] immigration and U.S. foreign relations,[22] and religion in American war and

[14] Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 6.
[15] Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York, 2006).
[16] Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York, 1982); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics of Culture and Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).
[17] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT, 1998).
[18] Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).
[19] Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York, 2008).
[20] Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York, 2009); Elizabeth McKillen, *Making the World Safe for Workers: Labor, the Left, and Wilsonian Internationalism* (Urbana, IL, 2013).
[21] Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).
[22] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 2012).

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diplomacy.[23] These historical studies provided new perspectives on America's place in the world by transcending national borders and disciplinary boundaries that divided scholarship into fields and subfields.

Placing the United States in the global context of world history involved comparisons between American values and institutions and those of others. It required scholars to study the popular and scholarly claims of American exceptionalism, which affirmed that the United States was a providential nation with a unique history and mission. President Ronald Reagan expressed his belief in American exceptionalism in his farewell address on January 11, 1989. He saw the United States as still a "shining city upon a hill," misquoting Puritan leader John Winthrop's sermon to English settlers upon their arrival in the new world in 1630, to describe the "God-blessed" America he imagined as a land of "freedom."[24] In the new era of globalization after Reagan's presidency, his widely shared belief in American exceptionalism continued to shape how the United States defined its place in the world. This nationalist mythology still influenced American historiography as well. Among others, Australian historian Ian Tyrrell challenged this perspective that had characterized the way Americans had typically interpreted their history for the past century. He heralded a new framework to escape this exceptionalist perspective. "The internationalization of scholarship itself," he noted, "is steadily eroding the boundaries that at the turn of the [twentieth] century created strong national historiographical traditions, including American exceptionalism."[25]

Within this new framework, which the OAH Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History promoted, historians placed the United States in a global context but without regarding it as an exceptional nation. Yet they understood that Americans, such as Wilson and Reagan, affirmed American exceptionalism. For example, Daniel T. Rodgers examined the transatlantic connections of social politics in the "progressive age" of the early twentieth century in *Atlantic Crossings* (1998). He noted that American progressives initially derived many of their ideas from European reformers, but this changed when the United States intervened in World War I. "Into the heart of guidebook Europe the American expeditionary army

[23] Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012).

[24] Ronald Reagan, Farewell Address to the Nation, January 11, 1989, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>.

[25] Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1031–55.

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had rushed in the summer of 1918, not as a junior partner in an entangling foreign alliance but, as the American progressives preferred to see it, in a crusade to rescue civilization itself." Leadership shifted to the United States.

"America had the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world," Woodrow Wilson put the war's moral in a nutshell in late 1919, in the messianic rhetoric that American war propaganda agencies had disseminated wholesale on both sides of the Atlantic. With Wilson mapping out the future of democracy in liberated Europe, with cheering crowds lining his procession through Dover, Paris, and Rome, it was not hard to imagine that the torch of world progress had indeed passed, once more, to the United States.[26]

For Wilson, but not Rodgers, the emergence of the United States as the top progressive global leader during World War I seemed to vindicate America's exceptionalist role in world history.

Ian Tyrrell also offered a transnational interpretation of American history that eschewed the framework of American exceptionalism that Wilson, both as historian and president, had embraced. In *Reforming the World* (2010), he examined "the creation of America's moral empire" during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

The new internationalism that moral reformers supported turned on the exchange of ideas, norms, and values among like-minded individuals in voluntary organizations across national boundaries. Ordinary people would work together in non-state relationships to enhance international understanding, to foster ethical conduct, and to promote moral reform. Peace between nations would flow from the activities of clubs and reform organizations.

This transnational culture of moral reform, he noted, usually exerted only an indirect influence on U.S. foreign policy. "While moral reform networks and missionaries did contribute at times to specific policy outcomes," Tyrrell observed, "these were usually determined by realpolitik. Rather than determine statecraft, the Christian coalition contributed to a missionary and reformist *Weltanschauung* within the higher echelons of American politics."[27] Within that cultural milieu, Wilson defined his vision of a new world order during World War I.

[26] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 368. See also James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, 1986) and Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920* (Stuttgart, 2000).

[27] Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 192, 232–33. See also Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (New York, 2007), 134–69.

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