



Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism

Ronald J. Pestritto

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Woodrow Wilson is best known for his service as the twenty-eighth president of the United States and his influence on American foreign policy in the twentieth century and beyond. Yet Wilson is equally important for his influence on how Americans think about their Constitution and principles of government. *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism* highlights Wilson's sharp departure from the traditional principles of American government, most notably the Constitution. Ronald J. Pestritto persuasively argues that Wilson's unflinching criticism places him clearly in line with the Progressives' assault on the original principles of American constitutionalism. Drawing primarily from early writings and speeches that Wilson made during his years as a scholar, Pestritto examines the future president's clear and consistent ideologies that laid the foundation for later actions taken as a public leader. Engaging and thought-provoking, *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism* gets to the heart of Wilson's political ideologies and brings a fresh perspective to the study of American political development.

Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism Details

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From Reader Review Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism for online ebook

Mike Flores says

Did you ever notice how modern progressives constantly want to change or do away with the Constitution and Bill Of Rights? From the electoral college to gun rights, they have zero respect for the Constitution. Why?

To understand the roots of the problem you have to understand that the beliefs of Hegel had swept our intellectuals from the mid 1800's on and by the time Wilson went to University, it was the dominant belief in colleges and universities here as it also is in Europe and Asia. To this day.

This book shines a light on the very dark intellectual side to liberalism. Hegel I can describe this way: you take a tree. You cut it down and make it into a chair. Through conflict they believe a new thing, like a chair, will emerge. This is how they can sleep at night as Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq dragged on. They honestly believed something new would emerge, like the chair example, so all the deaths and maiming and killing was worth it. But what has happened around the world with Trump, Brexit, France, Italy, Germany, etc is that there is no illusion of a chair anymore. All you have is a chopped up tree. The "progress" isn't happening, because Hegel was wrong.

To understand liberalism, this is the book to start with.

ELB says

Woodrow Wilson the Educated Fool

A President that tried to destroy the Constitution and gave us, The Federal Reserve Act, Federal Trade Commission Act, Child Labor Tax Act, Federal Water Power Act, Smith-Hughes Act, Underwood Tariff Act-a bill that enacted the first national income tax.

In the book, WOODROW WILSON, by Ronald J. Pestritto, explains how Wilson came to believe in Progressive Ideas. He wasn't a socialist but there wasn't much difference between socialism thought and Wilson. From his education at John Hopkins University where all of Wilson's teachers were educated in Germany and in the tradition of German state theory and philosophy of history.

Chapter 1 and 2, Wilson's understanding of the state is addressed. The author contends there that Wilson has an organic concept of the state, grounded in historicism---especially in historicism's rejection of natural-rights theory. Wilson's organic view of the state leads him to advocate increased national power, conceiving of a more powerful, more centralized state as the natural consequence of America's historical development. Chapter 3, Lays out the criticism of the Constitution essential to moving beyond the notion of limited government to one more compatible with efficient state power. Wilson calls for the flexibility to interpret the Constitution in accord with new conditions, and criticizes the narrow and mechanical separation-of- powers constitutionalism. In its place, he wants to institute a separation of political and administrative questions in government.

Chapter 4, Wilson's earliest institutional plan for effecting his political ideas, is for the adoption of something approaching a parliamentary system of government.

Chapter 5., Wilson later decided that the parliamentary system of government would not work so he decided, there must be presidential supremacy over a reconstituted party system, and an activist judiciary as a partner

in keeping the system responsive to the spirit of the times.

Chapter 6. examines Wilson's leadership doctrine in more detail, suggesting that his visionary concept of leadership is grounded in historicism and is central to transforming the institutional expectations for the American presidency.

Chapter 7. Wilson wants to free administration from the pressures—and accountability—of politics, and to grant to a nonpartisan civil service greater discretion to manage the complex machinery of the modern American state.

In a nutshell- Wilson was a progressive and believed that the U.S. Constitution must mean what the times require it to mean, (Since the government cannot be understood to come from anyplace other than the concrete reality of what history has provided, there can be no principled or universal notion of liberty or rights. Liberty, and any doctrine of rights based upon liberty, must always be contingent upon the historical environment. Rights cannot be, therefore, "natural" or "unalienable," as the American founders believed, but must come from the conventional situation itself—from the current state.

Sharon Wilbur says

Pestritto does an amazing job making the evil of Woodrow Wilson come to life. History determined the form of government per Wilson, and his opinion was that we'd grown beyond that moldy Constitution & needed a man of principle to rule based on what it was we wanted & needed. Of course orators would convince us what we wanted. What happened to our government while we were busy raising families and learning to use the new gadgets.

Tom Schulte says

I think this is actually a good and timely book that may have a lot to compare and perhaps reveal about the current trend toward liberalism and into a perilous future, but the dry, textbook-like delivery and Anglocentric view makes it hard to recommend this to a reader today.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Much of the factual information here I was already aware of. For example I knew (from earlier reading) that Wilson was a part of the progressive movement rather than being a Jeffersonian as he's often presented (or thought of). The extent however of his disagreement with that branch of political thinking (having not been written on much since) was a slight surprise to me.

For example (from Wilson's writing, the book has extensive end notes for each chapter) Wilson totally dismissed the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. :

"when in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

These words he ignored and dismissed regarding them as rhetorical while accepting only the listed grievances. Wilson (again from his own writing) rejected the Jeffersonian and Democratic/Republican view of government, subscribing to Hegel's ideas.

I can't synthesize the book adequately here, suffice it to say I intend to run it down and purchase a copy (I looked at it before getting it from inter-library loan, it's always fairly expensive). It will stand detailed study.

I was slightly torn on the rating for this book. It can be slow going at times as it's fairly "fact packed" and not written as a novel or for "readability". But I have decided on 5 stars. I would suggest reading this book. I'd suggest that even if you "feel" you'll hate it, try reading it before dismissing it. Then see what you...."think".

Shawne Seignious says

I finished the book and found it to be interesting, if not easy reading. it was well sourced and the addition of Wilson's letters were interesting. I would recommend it to a history buff or someone just wanting to understand our former presidents.

Naomi says

This is my second book by this author. I liked this book and the author, but would only use it as a primer/base to study the ineffectual and dangerous administration of this president. To truly understand all the "accomplishments" of Woodrow Wilson, one would have to go more indepth.

Martin Whatwouldthefoundersthink says

This is a great book. It is not necessarily a light read, but for a scholarly work, it is very readable. I disliked

Wilson even more after reading it. His research is meticulous. I did a review earlier this year at whatwouldthefoundersthink.com here.

Ken says

This is another one of those books that you love because you learn the real story but hate because of the ideals and character of the individual. Woodrow Wilson and those who follow him have ruined the United States and unfortunately, the People have let them do it.

Wilson believed that the most efficient means of governing was to have a lifetime appointed executive who oversaw lifetime positions for Subject Matter Experts (SME) who would be able to produce the right policies in all aspects of society. In his world, there would be elected officials, but their primary job would be to debate policies implemented by the SMEs and convince the masses of the validity of these policies. He was enamored with British Parliament and thought that is the direction the United States should be gravitating to.

Obviously not a rule by The People.

Jordan says

Well researched and well argued.
