Book Reviews


This slight but perceptive volume records the contributions of five distinguished scholars to the gigantic exercise in historical hindsight characterizing Woodrow Wilson's centennial year. Maintaining a high individual level, the essays as a whole display an analytical rather than a sharply revisionist tone; all recognize Wilsonian shortcomings; none denies his contributions both to his own and to a later day. Each reader will find one or another most rewarding; this one learned most from the first and second.

Charles Seymour, reviewing "The Role of Colonel House in Wilson's Diplomacy," concludes that a fuller exploration of more completely available evidence will show the Texan's interest and influence shifting from the domestic to the foreign scene and exerting a selective rather than an all-pervasive impact, which counted for most in connection with Western Europe, neutrality, war aims, inter-Allied relations, and peace plans. He sees House as no deus ex machina, but as an expert in operations, a catalyst whose function was less in originating policy than in harmonizing the diverse elements necessary to its effectuation.

The editor's essay on "Woodrow Wilson and Collective Security" describes a president entering the White House relatively innocent of knowledge or concern for international politics and turned toward collective security through a League of Nations largely by the exigencies of Anglo-American relations during a maritime war. He finds much of Wilson's speech of May 27, 1916, before the League to Enforce Peace originating in ideas which Sir Edward Grey had conveyed to House during several preceding months. Paralleling this was the concept of a Pan-American Pact guaranteeing inter-American security by mutualizing the Monroe Doctrine as a defense against external aggression. This, generalized into Article X of the League Covenant, became at once a chief focus of Wilson's league and a principal target of its opponents.

Harold M. Vinacke, in dealing with "Woodrow Wilson's Far Eastern Policy," describes his substitution of independent action for the Taft-Knox scheme of pushing American capital into China through the agency of only half-willing bankers, and his ultimate reversion to the consortium idea. He concludes that the non-intervention doctrine, developed in response to Japan's strictures on China in the Twenty-One Demands, was all that could be done under existing circumstances. Noting the diametrically opposed objectives of Robert Lansing and Viscount Kikujiro Ishii, he gives Ishii credit for outsmarting Lansing in the use of terms, creating a situation contributing to later Sino-American suspicion and Japanese-American antagonism.

Samuel Flagg Bemis, in "Woodrow Wilson and Latin America," emphasizes the inelastically Calvinistic character of presidential devotion to principles of democratic self-government. Inevitable tensions
resulted from ranging this rigid yardstick alongside a Latin America still fumbling for democracy through recurring cycles of dictatorship and revolution. Wilson's vision, via the proposed Pan-American Pact, of a day when inter-American organization would guarantee inter-American security, made slight impression on contemporaries; circumstances forcing him to become “the greatest interventionist in the history of the United States” bulked larger in his own day and fanned the fires of Yankeephobia; only in a later generation did his ideal of inter-American comity bear fruit.

In a final essay Sir Llewellyn Woodward presents “A British View of Mr. Wilson’s Foreign Policy.” Noting the paucity of British studies of Wilson himself, he outlines J. M. Keynes' “harsh, cocksure, and arrogant” analysis of Wilson as a slow and rather witless Presbyterian contending with his intellectual superiors, Sir Harold Nicolson's more reasoned conclusion that Wilson failed because of his over-confidence in the capacity of democracy to make right judgments in the short run, and R. B. McCallum's redressing of the Keynesian imbalance. Attempting to reflect the current consensus, he suggests that whereas Wilson saw the war born of a system of “secret alliances” rooted in a dark and devious past, today's British historians would find it springing rather from lack of a system which might have staved off disaster; he comments on Wilson's assumption of an American level of political virtue superior to that of Europeans, his sense of mission, and his consciousness of power, too often expressed in language grating upon European ears, but concludes by accepting present-day efforts at international organization as a revival and vindication of Wilsonian ideas.

How soon, one wonders, will some director of doctoral essays set an aspiring candidate to an analysis of the Wilsonian analyses of 1956?

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The author's purpose in this book is to find the major plot in Jacksonian political appeals, with the hope that details will thereby gain further meaning and order. In identifying the Jacksonian movement and distinguishing it from its opponents, he recognizes that notions of economic and social class constituency and alignment, interests and programs, are inadequate or groundless in fact. He rejects also the views that political democracy was a significant issue, and that consequential political change was any part of the movement: such change, he writes, raised no substantial public issues between the Jacksonians and their rivals.

Meyers uses another approach: he seeks to understand the Jacksonians on the basis of what some of their spokesmen said they were. He concludes that Jacksonian Democracy was an “effort to recall agrarian republican innocence to a society drawn fatally to the main