
It is all but impossible to study the early life of a prominent political figure without attempting to discern the development of those character traits and ideological convictions associated with him in his public years. In the case of Woodrow Wilson, as Osborn correctly observes in his preface, this tendency has been carried to an outrageous extreme by the recently published Freud-Bullitt exercise in secondhand psychoanalysis. Consequently, Osborn has written of Wilson’s early years with the avowed purpose of refraining from drawing any inferences for the future and of allowing Wilson’s personality to emerge solely from a presentation of the facts. That he does not entirely succeed in his design is somewhat disconcerting to the reader but does not by any means obviate the value of the work.

Despite the author’s attempt to write history wie es eigentlich gewesen, certain threads of interpretation inevitably develop. One can hardly read Osborn’s discussions of Wilson’s tendencies to rationalize defeats and to despise rivals without applying these traits to the League of Nations struggle. Nor can the reader follow the author’s development of such themes in Wilson’s scholarly writings as the need for a strong executive and the dangers of congressional supremacy without thinking of his later tendency to regard himself as the tribune of the people and the legislative branch as the habitat of men with “bungalow minds.” Wilson’s penchant for drafting the charters of debating societies and mock parliaments, to which Osborn makes frequent reference, naturally conjures up images of his role in formulating the covenant of the League of Nations, while the denunciations of strident nationalism articulated in his writings seem to prefigure the internationalist stance of his administration. The reader will also discern the development of such other Wilsonian traits as a Calvinist sense of morality, a distaste for lawyers and legalism, and a fierce, stubborn pride. The difficulty with all of this is that one is never entirely certain if these are conclusions which he himself has drawn from the facts presented, or whether they are really Osborn’s judgments which the reader has been persuaded to accept by the author’s method of selecting and presenting information. Since Osborn has seemingly amassed sufficient evidence to justify stating the conclusions which the reader will almost inevitably draw, it would have been more forthright to have asserted them explicitly.

Nevertheless, Osborn’s Wilson is a remarkable feat of scholarship, based upon a seemingly exhaustive study of the available manuscript material and free from the obvious partisanship which has infected most other studies of Wilson’s early life. Of particular importance to scholars are the detailed discussions of Wilson’s numerous writings and speeches on educational philosophy, political science, and American history, each of which receives at least a full chapter. Nor does Osborn fail to consider his subject’s personal life, describing not only his relationships with his family and close friends but also his en-
counters with some of the leading scholars of the day, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, John Franklin Jameson, Herbert Baxter Adams, Albert B. Hart, and Richard Ely.

Method aside, Osborn has produced an important work which will doubtless stand as the classic reference on Wilson's early life for many years to come.

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Wood bills this work, focusing upon the campaign for a federal child labor law, as a case study of "the deeply political processes by which constitutional law is formed." He further writes, "an understanding of constitutional development involves more than insight . . . into the operation of federal judicial power. It necessitates exploration of every phase of democratic policy formation—from the coalescence of politically relevant opinion and the enactment of public policies by the popular branches of government through judicial construction of the limits of the powers and the legitimacy of the purposes embodied in legislation . . ." (pp. ix-x).

Unfortunately, his study fails to fulfill this promise. He does not adequately explore the forces making for congressional passage first of the Keating-Owen bill and then of the Pomerene amendment. His explanation boils down to little more than an appeal to the spirit of the times. He does not, for example, discuss the role of the nation's women's clubs in agitating the question; he does not explain the shift by the AFL from opposition to support of federal legislation; he does not show in sufficient detail the activities of the National Child Labor Committee in promoting favorable sentiment and lobbying in Washington. Moreover, the author stops in the middle of the story. He does not even try to explain the failure to ratify the child labor amendment. And the reversal of Hammer v. Dagenhart (1918) in the Darby Lumber Company case (1941) is summarily dealt with in two pages with the explanation that the depression brought about "a transformation of popular sentiment" (p. 300).

The heart of the book—and its chief contribution—is its summary of the constitutional arguments, pro and con, in the debate on child labor in Congress, its detailed account of the steps taken in the litigation testing the constitutionality of the Keating-Owen bill and the Pomerene amendment, and its analysis of the resulting Supreme Court decisions.

Yet even within these limits the work suffers from weaknesses. Although Wood's assessment of the motives impelling the justices is on the whole judicious, it could have been strengthened by more research into their private papers. Except for a few scattered references to the Taft Papers, he has not