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Woodrow Wilson's Place in Political Time:

A Critique of Stephen Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make*

INTRODUCTION: SKOWRONEK, PREEMPTION, AND WOODROW WILSON

In Stephen Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make*, Skowronek divides all past U.S. presidents into one of four categories in his typology. He spends his entire discussion on three of these categories: the reconstructives, who attempt to repudiate the past to establish a new party regime, the articulators, who act as the faithful sons and continue the commitments of the reconstructives, and the disjunctives, who struggle with the impossible leadership situation to revive the dying regime. The preemptives, those who come into power opposed to a resilient regime, are hardly discussed in his entire analysis. Skowronek defines these presidents as "the wild cards of presidential history," given that they do not fit in his recurrent pattern of foundation, consolidation, fragmentation, and decay.¹ He claims that the preemptives do not "establish, uphold, or salvage" like the other three groups, but instead, offer a third way, or an alternative.² This classification, as well as his lack of discussion on the preemptives, makes it seem as though there is no place for the preemptive presidents in his typology. Skowronek not only seems to disregard their significance, but also does not consider long-term effects of opposition presidents. He effectively isolates and removes the "wild card" preemptives of his own creation completely from political time.

¹ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 444.

² *Ibid.*, 449.

Woodrow Wilson is one president who Skowronek defines as making the politics of preemption. Wilson does not fit comfortably into Skowronek's typology, as no other president before or after Wilson had to face the same challenge as he did upon taking office in 1912. While Skowronek labeled him as a preemptive president in Lincoln's Republican regime, Wilson's role is much more complicated than that, and his contributions were much more significant than Skowronek's analysis suggests. Wilson was not a "wild card," and was not irrelevant in the course of presidential history. On the contrary, his presidency dramatically changed the emergent pattern of presidential power, the place of the Republican Party in the recurrent pattern of Lincoln's regime, and laid the foundations for the future of the Democratic Party. An examination of Woodrow Wilson proves not only that Skowronek's treatment of the preemptives is lacking, but also reveals weaknesses in Skowronek's method of analysis and framework overall.

A part of the reason that Wilson does not fit into his framework is that Skowronek is limited by his definition of party regimes as he fails to consider the significance of smaller movements within the larger context of a period of party dominance. Skowronek places Wilson in the middle of Abraham Lincoln's Republican regime established in 1860, which constrains Skowronek's ability to understand Wilson in the context of his own time. Not only was Wilson opposed to the still resilient regime of his predecessors William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, but he also needed to approach his presidency within the context of the Progressive Era. Considering these factors is something Skowronek fails to do, as he emphasizes the larger sweeping party regimes while discounting the smaller political movements within said regimes. His division of presidential history into large party regimes misses the significance of smaller

movements such as the Progressive Era, and the ways in which these different time periods influenced the emergent patterns of presidential politics.

Lastly, Skowronek does not divide his analysis of presidents between foreign and domestic policies. In fact, he spends very little time talking about foreign affairs at all. In Wilson's case, it is necessary to divide analysis of his presidency between his domestic and foreign politics, as he faced different challenges in each area. Wilson had to justify his domestic reform program, New Freedom, in the context of the expansion of presidential power in the Progressive Era while simultaneously attempting a reconstruction of foreign affairs in the time of a World War against stark Republican opposition. Here is another area in which Skowronek does not take his analysis far enough. Had he divided up his discussion of individual presidents between their domestic and foreign politics, he would have realized that presidents make different politics in both situations. Herein lies the possibility that one president can occupy more than one space in political time, and fit in more than one section of Skowronek's typology.

Analyzing the presidency of Woodrow Wilson through Skowronek's framework illustrates that Skowronek's typology is insufficient for fully explaining and understanding Wilson's place in political time. Woodrow Wilson should not be viewed as a preemptive president in the context of Lincoln's Republican regime, but as a Democrat in the Progressive Era. Doing so reveals that Wilson was articulating the domestic policy platform of his Republican Progressive predecessors. However, by separating analysis of domestic and foreign policy, it becomes clear that Wilson was breaking from the past and attempting a reconstruction of U.S. foreign policy. Furthermore, it is Wilson's legacy and long-term significance which outlasted any immediate failures from being an opposition president, allowing him to transcend

Skowronek's classification of a president making the politics of preemption to a more complex role in presidential history.

THE GILDED AGE AND THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

In order to understand Wilson's place in political time, the context of his rise to power must be examined, beginning with the era preceding the Progressives. The era before Wilson's has been colloquially called the Gilded Age, and was marked by *laissez-faire* presidential leadership with corrupt monopolies ruling the business world unchecked. The presidents who served during this time, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, Chester A. Arthur, Benjamin Harrison, and Grover Cleveland are often remembered through history as the "forgotten presidents," since they rarely exercised their powers in office. Instead, they let monopolies form as businesses gained political power. This era was a time of corruption, patronage, societal divisions, high wealth inequality, and weak leadership following the post-Civil War reconstruction era.

Furthermore, this was an era of Republican dominance. Four of the five presidents during this period were Republican, and both houses of Congress had a Republican majority almost the whole era. The only Democratic president during this period, Grover Cleveland, could not overcome the systemic factors of his time. Cleveland failed to obtain mastery over his party necessary for a reconstruction, and even divided his party over the repeal of the Silver Purchase Act.³ In addition, Cleveland's administration was blamed for the Panic of 1893, when shaky railroad financing led to bank failures and intensified the debate over the gold standard. Yet Cleveland could not effectively respond to these crises, as historian Vincent De Santis notes, since "most Americans regarded government regulation as unnecessary, unjust, and even

³ Henry Loomis Nelson and Daniel S. Lamont, "Grover Cleveland," *Politico* Vol. 188, No. 633 (August 1908): 182.

immoral.”⁴ This idea suggests that leaders could not overcome the limits of their own era. The instability, corruption, patronage, and divisions following the post-war period placed constraints on the public’s expectations for the presidency and their capacity to act in the Gilded Age. The result was complete governmental inactivity, leading the Democratic Party and Presidency into a dire state.

The election of 1896 resulted in a victory for Republican William McKinley who by Skowronek’s conception of a party regime was still a part of Lincoln’s Republican Party system. However, the Republican Party McKinley was striving for was much different than the party of Lincoln. This election was a close victory for McKinley, who only defeated William Jennings Bryan by less than one million votes.⁵ This victory was not realigning in the conventional sense as the previous era was already dominated by Republicans. Instead, 1896 was realigning in the sense that it established a new set of commitments and direction that reshaped the Republican Party and whole political system. McKinley’s election ushered in the Progressive Era which was very much a response to this era of inaction and *laissez-faire*. The reconstruction he was attempting was not an effort to repudiate an opposing party, but an internal repudiation of past Republican leaders and politics. What McKinley accomplished was too radical to be considered mere articulation.

McKinley’s inaugural address reeks of repudiation. It not only condemns Cleveland and the situation in America, but it also sets forth a new program for the U.S. domestically, in foreign policy, and sets a precedent of party leadership. As far as domestic policy, McKinley mentioned the need for banking reform, addressing business conditions, reforming the tariff, and

⁴ Vincent De Santis, “American Politics in the Gilded Age,” *The Review of Politics* Vol.25, No. 4 (October 1963): 554.

⁵ “1896,” U.S. Presidential Election Data, The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php

agricultural reform.⁶ As far as foreign affairs, McKinley began to pave the way for new activism abroad. He remarked, “In this age of frequent interchange and mutual dependence, we cannot shirk our international responsibilities.”⁷ While remaining within the realm of the Western hemisphere, McKinley was advocating a more active role on the world stage. Finally, he also established the precedent of Progressives as Party leaders. McKinley “saw party organization as a dual instrument to enact the people’s will and educate them to meet new ideas. He often warned fellow politicians against avoiding new challenges.”⁸ McKinley recognized the need for strong partisan politics.⁹ He became the master of his party, embraced change, and sought to tackle the poor state of America. All three of these areas, domestic policy, foreign activism, and party leadership, set the tone for the rest of the Progressive Era and determined the direction of his successors.

McKinley was reelected in 1900, but was assassinated in 1901, only six months into his second term. With his death, Theodore Roosevelt, McKinley’s second term vice president, assumed the role of president. T. Roosevelt continued the work of his predecessor, and presented the country with a Square Deal. This platform consisted of consumer protection, conservation of natural resources, and reining in corporations. As far as foreign policy, T. Roosevelt promoted interventionism on the basis of nationalism and asserting the U.S. as a world power. In casting T. Roosevelt as an articulator, it is important to consider who he was articulating. It was not so much Lincoln from 1860, but McKinley, his immediate predecessor who launched the Progressive Era. While his commitments were the same as McKinley’s, it was T. Roosevelt who had the charisma and eloquence to truly turn Progressivism into an established movement.

⁶ William McKinley, “First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1897,” http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/mckin1.asp.

⁷ H. Wayne Morgan, “William McKinley as a Political Leader,” *Review of Politics* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct. 1966): 427.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁹ *Ibid.*

After T. Roosevelt left office in 1908, his Secretary of War William Howard Taft was elected. Seeing as he was directly from T. Roosevelt's administration, Taft can be considered as T. Roosevelt's "hand-picked successor" who followed his path in both domestic and foreign affairs. Taft, as the "faithful son" making the politics of articulation, fulfilled his role perfectly. Not only did he continue T. Roosevelt's domestic and international traditions, but he updated them to fit the presidency in his own right as the orthodox-innovator. Domestically, in his inaugural address Taft discussed all of the same areas that his predecessors, McKinley and T. Roosevelt, had dedicated the Republican Progressive coalition. He mentioned business, antitrust legislation, agricultural reform, the tariff, conservation efforts, protection of labor, and the Panama Canal.¹⁰ Taft directly tied himself to T. Roosevelt's regime when he said, "I should be untrue to myself, to my promises, and to the declarations of the party platform upon which I was elected to office, if I did not make the maintenance and enforcement of those reforms a most important feature of my administration."¹¹ Considering that he played an active role in T. Roosevelt's administration and the fact that T. Roosevelt's policies were still in favor, Taft understood that it was his duty to honor those commitments.

As far as foreign policy, Taft continued the policies of his predecessors by promoting the maintenance of a strong army and avoidance of war at all costs. What is of importance is that he used the phrase "this hemisphere," which still affirmed the path of isolationism towards European affairs.¹² Throughout his administration, Taft promoted a policy of Dollar Diplomacy, the idea of promoting U.S. economic interests abroad through intervention.¹³ However, as his administration went on, Taft became more conservative and was not fulfilling his role as the heir

¹⁰ William Howard Taft, "Inaugural Address, March 4, 1909," avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/taft.asp.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Thomas Bruscino, "The Rooseveltian Tradition; Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and George W. Bush," *White House Studies* Vol. 10, N. 4 (2011): 311, 313.

to Progressivism. This shift led to the ultimate fragmentation of the Republican Party as T. Roosevelt felt betrayed and broke with his unfaithful son. The fracturing of the Republican Party and disagreement between Republican leaders provided a perfect opening for a Progressive Democrat to take the stage.

These were the political circumstances upon which Wilson ran for President in 1912. The emergent pattern of the Progressive Era consisted of changing expectations of the President and more intervention in the economy than ever before. Historian Arthur S. Link defines Progressivism as “the popular effort . . . to ensure the survival of democracy in the United States by the enlargement of governmental power to control and offset the power of private economic groups over the nation’s institutions and life.”¹⁴ Furthermore, this era saw the expansion of a more aggressive nationalistic foreign policy. But this era was more than expanded government regulation. This increase in presidential authority demanded the President to be active, not passive, and to exercise more power in office. Progressivism was the redefinition of the institution of the presidency grounded upon the repudiation of the *laissez-faire* tradition of the Gilded Age. To understand Wilson’s place in political time, he must be understood as a Progressive Democrat. Not a Democrat opposed to a resilient regime of Republicans established by Lincoln, but as the first Democratic President coming into power as a part of emerging Progressivism. The Progressive Era represented a complete break from the past and an attempt to establish a new role for the presidency which transcended party ties. This was the political environment in which Woodrow Wilson must be situated.

¹⁴ Arthur S. Link, “What happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 64, No. 4 (July 1959): 836.

PATH TO PREEMPTION: ELECTION OF 1912

Wilson had to face a unique challenge going into the election of 1912. In order to win the nomination, Wilson had to appeal to two different constituencies within the Democratic base. He had to appeal to those who favored progressivism or radicalism as well as those who were more conservative and still dedicated to the Jeffersonian tradition of weak central government and states' rights.¹⁵ However, due to the record of Democratic defeats and continuous Republican government, Wilson had the authority to repudiate his own party position. While he still had to order-affirm the legacy of Jefferson, he was also able to promote progressive ideals in an effort to reshape the commitments of his party.

Wilson ended up winning the Democratic nomination for his ability to reconcile both of these positions. As far as his competition in 1912, T. Roosevelt decided to run against the incumbent Taft for the Republican nomination. Taft ended up winning the nomination, so in response T. Roosevelt formed his own Progressive "Bull Moose Party." This action fractured the Republican Party even further, dividing the Republicans into two camps behind the two prominent leaders of the era, moving the Republican regime to a state of fragmentation. This decision is often viewed as the main factor that contributed to Wilson's ultimate victory. The contest of 1912 saw Wilson faced against both Taft and T. Roosevelt, his fellow Progressives.

During the campaign, Wilson was often criticized by his opponents for having backward-looking conservative commitments. Yet at the same time, Wilson was propounding a progressive platform. Some wrote this off as inconsistency, and other historians, such as Arthur S. Link, have claimed that Wilson was pressured into a more Progressive stance than he desired.¹⁶ It is not so much as that Wilson changed his mind to embrace Progressivism as it was the nature of the

¹⁵ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

¹⁶ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

election. Because the election of 1912 pitted T. Roosevelt and Wilson against each other, the two men with Progressive ideals both polarized their positions. To distinguish himself from the opposition, Wilson had to promote a more conservative platform. But once in office, Wilson catered to the more Progressive Democratic constituency. All along he embraced the tide of Progressivism and used it as a platform to launch his Democratic reconstruction.

Despite the apparent inconsistencies in Wilson's platform and in light of the Republican fragmentation, Wilson won the election with only 41.8% of the popular vote but a crushing 81.9% of the electoral vote.¹⁷ The Congressional results showed promise for a Democratic reconstruction as well, as for the first time in decades, both houses of Congress held a Democratic majority. The House had already turned Democratic in the previous midterm election, but it gained 89 new seats to strengthen its hold on the chamber.¹⁸ The Senate followed suit by switching to Democratic control.¹⁹ This election was evidence of Wilson's unique position in political time. The record of Democratic defeats gave him authority to repudiate the position of his party. However, he also had to provide a different option than T. Roosevelt and Taft, forcing him to polarize his position during the election to oppose the Republican Progressivism. His victory demanded that Wilson attempt to redefine Progressivism in Democratic terms while simultaneously continuing the Progressive movement.

The fractured state of the Republican Party in 1912 speaks to Wilson's place in the recurrent pattern of both Lincoln's Republican regime and the Progressive Era. Wilson came into power during a relatively weak Republican period, between the fragmentation of T. Roosevelt and the decay in the 1920's seen from Warren G. Harding to Herbert Hoover. Furthermore, his

¹⁷ "1912," U.S. Presidential Election Data, The American Presidency Project.

¹⁸ "Congress Profiles: History, Art, & Archives," United States House of Representatives, [History.house.gov/Congressional_Overview/Profiles/](https://history.house.gov/Congressional_Overview/Profiles/).

¹⁹ Party Divisions in the Senate," United States Senate, www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers_partydiv.htm.

Democratic predecessor Cleveland had left the Democratic Party divided and weak. It was necessary that Wilson rejuvenate and reorganize the commitments of his party in light of the presidency's newfound Progressivism. Considering his place in the recurrent pattern and the Democratic majorities elected to both the House and the Senate in 1912, it seems as though Wilson was in the prime position to launch a reconstruction of his own.

FIRST TERM: DOMESTIC ARTICULATION

Wilson spent the majority of his first term articulating the domestic Progressive Era platform by tackling the same areas as his Progressive predecessors. During the campaign, Wilson had set forth his domestic reform program of New Freedom, which consisted of three components: tariff reform, banking and finance reform, and antitrust legislation. All of these issues were the very issues the three Progressive presidents before Wilson addressed during their administrations. Wilson was continuing their domestic reforms while redefining them in his own right to the purposes of the Democratic Party. While he was articulating the Progressive position he was also attempting to redefine the Progressive movement in his own terms as a Democrat. As a result, he ended up betraying the commitments of his predecessors, and confusing the definition and aims of the Progressive movement as a whole.

Wilson interpreted his victory and the Democratic victories in Congress as the public's response to the previous administrations. In his inaugural address, he stated, "No one can mistake the purpose for which the nation now seeks to use the Democratic Party. It seeks to use it to interpret a change in its own plan and point of view."²⁰ Wilson saw this change as the basis of his authority and justification to repudiate the Republican Party and to redefine the government in Democratic terms. His address also contains order-shattering impulses, as he said

²⁰ Woodrow Wilson, "First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1913," http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson1.asp.

of the past regimes, “Some old things with which we had grown familiar . . . have dropped their disguises and showed themselves alien and sinister.”²¹ Here Wilson was order-shattering and attempting to break with the past. He was declaring that it was time to acknowledge the poor state of the government and to change it. Wilson believed the Democratic Party was the vehicle needed to launch that reconstruction.

Wilson’s inaugural address is also full of order-creating reconstructive language. He proclaimed, “Our duty is to cleanse, to reconsider, to restore, to correct the evil without impairing the good, to purify and humanize every process of our common life without weakening or sentimentalizing it . . . our work is a work of restoration . . . we shall restore, not destroy.”²² Here Wilson was embracing reconstructive and order-affirmation language as he proclaimed a desire to stay connected to traditions and the parts of government that work while searching for new ways to solve problems. Coming into his first term, Wilson appeared as though he was prepared to launch a reconstruction of the government. However, he ended up mostly articulating the Republican Progressive platform.

He then proceeded in his address to lay out the specific order-creating elements of his domestic program, New Freedom. The tariff had been an issue struggled with for years, as many other presidents tried and failed to lower it. As far as banking reform, there was a consensus that change was needed but debate over whether control should be private or public, and centralized or decentralized. And lastly, T. Roosevelt and Taft had reputations as “trust-busters,” yet they disagreed on how to handle them. T. Roosevelt distinguished between good and bad trusts, and sought to reform the conduct of monopolies. But Taft saw that the issue was the legality of the trusts, and sought to prevent them from happening.

²¹ Woodrow Wilson, “First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1913.”

²² Ibid.

Wilson's New Freedom dealt with all three of these areas. For the tariff, Wilson's Underwood Tariff successfully destroyed special privileges to increase competition and provided relief for consumers, and had a provision for the income tax. Secondly, the Federal Reserve Act established one central and twelve regional district banks to create a reserve system. This act appeased almost all of the differing groups as it was in part decentralized and centralized, with mostly public control. Lastly, the Clayton Antitrust Act aimed to restore competition and came down harder on the monopolies without destroying big business. This platform was mostly rearticulating the already established commitments of the Progressive Era and the presidents before him.²³

The difference between mere articulation and Wilson's New Freedom was that Wilson used the Democratic Party to achieve his reforms. This technique worked and Wilson was able to execute his entire reform program. A part of Wilson's unprecedented legislative success was that he obtained complete mastery of the Democratic Party. One way in which he did this was by decreasing the separation between himself and the Congress. He appeared in person to speak before Congress, something that had not been done since before Jefferson's presidency.²⁴ This practice allowed Wilson to act as the personal spokesman for his New Freedom program, and to present it directly to the members of Congress. Wilson, following the example of British Parliament, was attempting to achieve leadership by party.²⁵ Wilson said, "I look upon the party as an instrument, not an end."²⁶ Unfortunately, Wilson negotiated all of his New Freedom legislations solely with members of his own party. He made his program a partisan issue and conducted his reforms as the leader of the Democratic Party. The result was that Republicans felt

²³ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom*.

²⁴ John Milton Cooper, Jr. *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*, 214.

²⁵ Daniel D. Stid, "Woodrow Wilson & the Problem of Party Government," *Polity* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer 1994)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 568.

left out of the proceedings and were frustrated by Wilson's exclusion.²⁷ Following McKinley's precedent, Wilson believed employing partisan leadership was the path to success.

Another way Wilson led his party was by making use of patronage, an anti-Progressive practice, for his appointments. Wilson personally handled his appointments in order to fill his government with supporters dedicated to pursuing a Progressive government.²⁸ He made it clear early on in his presidency that he wanted his administration to be a Progressive one and he saw to it that he was supported by other dedicated Progressives. Wilson was using patronage to attempt to redefine party government. Historian Daniel D. Stid claims, "far from seeking to destroy the traditional American Party system, Wilson was attempting to transform and thereby legitimize it."²⁹ Wilson attempted to build a party of "individuals [who] would invariably band together to pursue ends they had in common."³⁰ By using patronage, Wilson was taking it upon himself to build a party that would pursue Progressive interests. His use of patronage, as well as personal relations with Congress, were ways in which Wilson attempted to change the nature of party governance and ensure the success of his reconstruction.

After surviving the perils of a divided party during the election of 1912, Wilson ultimately obtained complete mastery over his party. Through the use of patronage and direct interaction with the Democratic members of Congress, Wilson was able to unite his party under his cause to pursue his legislative platform. This allowed him to push his agenda through entirely in his first term and to achieve the most unprecedented legislative success in history. This success allowed Wilson to set himself and the Democratic Party on a solid foundation of Progressive reform. Wilson was strengthening his party and solidifying his position of

²⁷ John Milton Cooper, Jr. *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*.

²⁸ Arthur S. Link, "Woodrow Wilson and the Democratic Party," *The Review of Politics* Vol. 18, No. 2 (April 1956): 147.

²⁹ Daniel D. Stid, "Woodrow Wilson & the Problem of Party Government," 555.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 557.

leadership. While he may have only been articulating the Progressive position of his Republican predecessors, he was prepping himself up for future success, simultaneously weakening the Republican Party even further, and establishing himself as the leader of the Democratic Party.

REELECTION AND SECOND TERM: FOREIGN RECONSTRUCTION

Wilson ran for reelection in 1916 against Republican Charles Evan Hughes on the campaign slogan “he kept us out of war,” citing his ability to maintain neutrality towards the budding European conflict throughout his first term. He also was able to herald his major legislative success through the New Freedom as the rightful leader of the Progressive Democrats. The Republicans were still divided, but without the third-party factor dividing the vote, the election was much closer. Wilson narrowly won reelection in 1916 with only 49.2% of the popular vote and 52.2% of the electoral vote to Hughes’ 46.1% and 47.8% respectively.³¹ He also retained a Democratic majority in both houses of Congress, although the majority decreased slightly. Wilson began his term affirming the success of his previous term, as he highlighted in his inaugural address, “Perhaps no equal period in our history has been so fruitful of important reforms in our economic and industrial life or so full of significant changes in the spirit and purpose of our political action.”³² Wilson began his term strong, relying on the legitimacy of his past success to propel him forward and hopefully be enough to sustain him through the years to come.

However, he also acknowledged the growing possibility of impending foreign intervention. Wilson declared, “There can be no turning back. Our own fortunes as a nation are involved whether we would have it so or not . . . We shall be the more American if we but

³¹ “1916,” U.S. Presidential Election Data, The American Presidency Project.

³² Woodrow Wilson, “Second Inaugural Address, March 5, 1917,” http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson2.asp.

remain true to the principles in which we have been bred.”³³ Even if the U.S. had maintained neutrality in his first term, Wilson knew that the war was becoming a growing threat to the U.S. and their allies. While his campaign slogan was “he kept us out of war,” Wilson never did promise that he would be able to maintain neutrality. His second inaugural address was an early attempt to begin preparing the U.S. for the war to come. Wilson ended up being correct, as not long into his second term, he could no longer maintain neutrality and decided to enter the foreign conflict. It was in this term and under these circumstances that he was able to launch his reconstruction of U.S. foreign policy.

Wilson’s reconstruction was based not in domination by his party, but by an effort to break with the U.S. tradition of non-interventionism. Wilson was suggesting an unprecedented involvement in European affairs with the aim of redirecting America’s role in the world. In his “War Message” to Congress, Wilson proclaimed,

We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.³⁴

Wilson linked an unprecedented intervention in a European war to older American traditional ideals and values dating back to the American Revolution. Furthermore, he began to set the stage for his later crusade for an international organization when he referenced the notion of a “league of honour,” and “partnership of democratic nations.” Wilson was attempting to prepare the Americans for the possibility of one’s creation in the context of fighting for traditional American values.³⁵ This is the ultimate order-affirmation.

³³ Woodrow Wilson, “Second Inaugural Address, March 5, 1917,”

³⁴ Woodrow Wilson, “War Message, April 7, 1917,”

Wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson’s_War_Message_to_Congress.

³⁵ Ibid.

Wilson's order-affirming impulses were nontraditional. Considering he had no precedent to fall back on to justify his repudiation of the past, Wilson called upon the United States' standing in the world as evidence of the part they should play in the post-war world. This strategy was effectively order-shattering historical tradition and isolationism towards European affairs. What he was attempting to do with his order-creating forces was to establish the U.S. as a world power and the leader of an international organization aimed at promoting world peace and cooperation between nations. This ideal was central to Wilson's reconstruction.

At the conclusion of the war, Wilson took advantage of the opening he had been looking for to promote his new vision for U.S. foreign policy. Wilson traveled to France to take part of the peace negotiations armed with his Fourteen Points, clear visions for the terms of the peace settlement, as well as the provisions for an international peace-keeping league. He met the rest of the Big Four, consisting of David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Georges Clemenceau of France at Versailles. Before the negotiations, he expressed his confidence to Herbert Hoover, then a member of his war time cabinet:

[Wilson] made some expression of his satisfaction that the Allied leaders so strongly supported his ideals. I commented that he must not ignore the shapes of evil inherent in the Old World system. He brushed this aside with a remark that Europe had a changed spirit as the result of the blood bath through which it had passed. But one day, three months later, Mr. Wilson remarked wearily that I had been right.³⁶

While Hoover was worried that Wilson's ideals about foreign policy were too revolutionary for the European leaders to embrace, Wilson seemed to believe the time was exactly right for such a proposal. Unfortunately for Wilson, Hoover was indeed right and Wilson had to concede on almost all of his points in Versailles in order to secure the one component he wanted most: the League of Nations. All that was left now was to take the Treaty of Versailles back to the United States, and go to the Senate for ratification.

³⁶ Herbert Hoover, *The Order of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1958), 68-69.

This task proved more difficult than anticipated, as Wilson faced much opposition from the Senate. In the 1918 Congressional elections, Wilson suffered a blow to his post-war aims. Before the elections, he desperately pleaded to the public, “If you have approved of my leadership and wish me to continue to be your unembarrassed spokesman in affairs at home and abroad, I earnestly beg that you will express yourself unmistakably to that effect by returning a Democratic majority to both Senate and House of Representatives.”³⁷ Instead the Senate, which previously had a Democratic majority, flipped to Republican control by one vote.³⁸ In turn, the House, controlled by Republicans since 1916, increased its hold of the chamber.³⁹ This Republican majority was not receptive to Wilson’s plans, and he had a tough fight ahead of him.

Following his tradition from the first term, Wilson was not very open to negotiating with the Republican Party. The Senate opposition, headed by Henry Cabot Lodge, proposed a set of reservations to the treaty which Wilson saw as stripping the League of Nations of its core principles and purpose and did not accept. After going on a nationwide speaking tour attempting to sway public opinion to put pressure back on the Senate, Wilson suffered a stroke which left him paralyzed on his left side. With its main crusader weakened, and public opinion unable to sway the Senate, the Treaty of Versailles failed to pass, and the U.S. did not join the League of Nations. At the time, it appeared as though Wilson’s foreign reconstruction had failed.

One counterargument to the notion of Wilson as the leading reconstruction president of U.S. foreign policy is the fact that the concept of a peace-keeping international organization was not an entirely new idea. For one, there was a part of the Republican constituency supporting a league even before Wilson began promoting one. For example, former President Taft was

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson in Harold U. Faulkner, *From Versailles to the New Deal: A Chronicle of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover Era* (Yale University Press, 1950), 9.

³⁸ “Party Divisions in the Senate,” United States Senate.

³⁹ “Congress Profiles: History, Art, & Archives,” United States House of Representatives.

elected the president of an organization dedicated to promoting an international organization, the League to Enforce Peace. Formed in January 1915, this group based in New York worked to advocate their own plans for a peace-keeping league, and later supported the League of Nations.⁴⁰ However, Wilson did not accept their plan. This could be for a couple reasons. For one, Wilson may not have wanted to involve himself with the Republican Party, as seen in his tradition of Democratic Party leadership. But considering the divided state of the Republican Party, and Taft's association with the LEP, Wilson may have had a better chance had he worked with them. More likely, however, is that Wilson wanted to be the one to define the terms. Just as Wilson would not accept any reservations, he would not accept a draft for an international organization from anyone other than himself. He had to be in control, and he had to design it to his specifications or it would not work.

In addition to Taft, some of the most prominent Republican leaders now in opposition to the League of Nations were discussing such a possibility years before Wilson's crusade. Both T. Roosevelt and Senator Lodge had gone on the record supporting a peace-keeping organization. Roosevelt claimed in 1910, "It would be a master stroke if those great Powers honestly bent on peace would form a League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among themselves, but to prevent, by force if necessary, its being broken by others."⁴¹ Similarly, Lodge said as late as 1916, "I do not believe that when Washington warned us against entangling alliances he meant for one moment that we should not join with the other civilized nations of the world if a method could be found to diminish war and encourage peace."⁴² So why, then, did these leaders and their party work so fervently to stop Wilson and his League?

⁴⁰ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12-13.

⁴¹ Theodore Roosevelt in James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 247.

⁴² Henry Cabot Lodge in James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years*, 248.

James M. Cox, the future Democratic candidate for President in 1920, posed his own theory. He wrote of T. Roosevelt and Lodge's apparent switch:

They knew that from Jefferson to Lincoln, with but brief interruptions, the Democratic Party had held full sway . . . Such leadership could not but impress and direct the mood of the nation for years to come. Roosevelt and Lodge well knew this. If now there were added to these achievements the establishment of world peace, the supreme event in the history of nations, the name of Wilson and the prestige of his party might be invincible as after Jackson and Jefferson.⁴³

Cox was claiming that Lodge and Roosevelt were acting out of the interests of the future prospects of their party. They wanted a Republican victory in 1920, and destroying Wilson's chances at achieving his peace settlement was a path to obtain just that. In addition, as seen in Wilson's presidency thus far, Wilson was establishing a strong Democratic Party government. If the Republican's hoped to compete, they would have to come together and act as a unified body ready to oppose Wilson's party government. This tactic was the emergence of solidified party warfare, and an example of placing the party's interest above the good of the country, and in this case, possibly over the whole world, as the League of Nations crumbled without the United States' leadership.

Despite the failure of the U.S. to join the League of Nations after WWI and that the concept of the U.S. joining an international organization did not originate with Wilson, his ideology was still new. While the means he may have promoted may have been the same as Taft's or T. Roosevelt's, he was striving for different ends. In terms of foreign affairs, Wilson was a "missionary of democracy."⁴⁴ He broke with his predecessors who only promoted activism in the Western Hemisphere for reasons based in nationalism and economic materialism. This position was a move away from T. Roosevelt's "realism," Taft's "Dollar Diplomacy," and

⁴³ James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years*, 251-253.

⁴⁴ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 276.

American tradition.⁴⁵ Instead, Wilson's view was more idealistic and based in his belief that the United States should promote peace and democratic ideals abroad. He was not attempting to merely advance U.S. interests with the League of Nations. Wilson was attempting to completely redefine the role of the U.S. in the world, based on self-determination, democracy, and the need for U.S. leadership. These ideals are what ultimately drove Wilson's attempted reconstruction and outlasted any immediate failures he may have had.

REPUDIATION AND "NORMALCY": ELECTION OF 1920

The election of 1920 cast Warren G. Harding as the repudiator and James M. Cox as the faithful son. Cox fulfilled his role as the faithful son and experienced the pitfalls of making the politics of articulation. While Cox struggled to campaign on a platform favoring the League of Nations when government opposition was high, he ended up betraying Wilson. On the other hand, Harding ran on the promise of a "return to normalcy," centering his entire campaign on repudiating not only Wilson, but the entire Progressive Era. Just as the Progressive Era was a break from the Gilded Age of "forgotten Presidents," the Post-War period was a rejection of the era before it. For Harding, this election was a final effort to attempt to rejuvenate his decaying party by reaffirming the policies of the old Republican regime. This makes Harding in part a disjunction president, as he was trying to revive a dying regime, but still partly a weak effort at a reconstruction as he directly repudiated Wilson's regime. For Cox, it was an attempt to continue the commitments of his coalition in light of the decay of progressivism and failure of the Treaty of Versailles.

The Democratic candidate, James M. Cox, was a known reformer and was a supporter of Wilson's internationalism and Progressive reform as the Governor of Ohio. His nomination represents an effort to choose a successor open to continuing Wilson's policies, as opposed to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

challenging them. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who served as Secretary of the Navy under Wilson, was chosen as the Democratic candidate for Vice President in 1920 because of his affiliation with Wilson. By selecting someone from the “Wilson wing of the party,” the Democrats hoped to appease his constituency, considering Cox was not directly from Wilson’s administration.⁴⁶ Reflecting on his campaign later, Cox wrote, “I came to realize that the banner of Woodrow Wilson had really been put in my hands. I resolved to carry on with such strength of mind and body as I possessed.”⁴⁷ As the Democratic candidate, Cox felt obligated to base his campaign upon continuing Wilson’s legacy. Wilson had succeeded in reorganizing his party and setting his successors on the path of Progressivism and continuing his fight for the League of Nations.

With the conclusion of WWI and the failure of the Treaty of Versailles still fresh in the minds of the American public, the election of 1920 inevitably centered on foreign affairs. During the campaign, Cox and FDR paid Wilson a visit at the White House on July 18, 1920. Cox said to Wilson, “Mr. President, we are going to be a million percent with you, and your Administration, and that means the League of Nations.” Cox was assuring Wilson that he was aware of his obligations as the faithful son. FDR, in his vice presidential nomination acceptance speech, echoed this sentiment and highlighted the fact that there was unfinished business to attend to. He remarked, “Even if a nation entered the war for an ideal, so it has emerged from the war with the determination that this ideal shall not die . . . The other half is not won yet.”⁴⁸ FDR was channeling Wilson with his rhetoric about the U.S., the world, and the League of Nations. Just as Cox had at his meeting with Wilson, FDR was acknowledging that it was their obligation

⁴⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *F.D.R. His Personal Letters. 1905-1928*, ed. Elliott Roosevelt (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1948.), 488.

⁴⁷ James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years*, 234.

⁴⁸ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Americanism,” <http://pastdaily.com/2012/09/05/fdr-1920-vice-presidential-acceptance-speech-past-daily-reference-room/>.

to settle unfinished business concerning the League of Nations. It was their responsibility to continue the commitments of Wilson, the Democratic Party, and ultimately, Americans.

Unfortunately, true to the politics of articulation, as the faithful son attempts to continue the legacy of his predecessor while simultaneously adapting to changing circumstances, someone ended up betrayed. In his nomination acceptance, Cox said this about the Democratic position on the League of Nations:

As the Democratic candidate, I favor going in . . . ‘We advocate immediate ratification of the Treaty without reservations which would impair its central integrity, but do not oppose the acceptance of any reservation making clearer or more specific the obligations of the United States to the League associates.’⁴⁹

Cox was linking the issue of joining the League of Nations to the established commitments of his party coalition as set forth by Wilson. However, as in the politics of articulation, Cox the orthodox-innovator was attempting to update his party’s position to reflect new political circumstances. In this case, Wilson was the one being betrayed when the Democratic Party platform acknowledged a willingness to accept reservations on the Treaty. While this may have been a better political strategy, it betrayed Wilson’s commitment to the Treaty and League as he envisioned them. Nonetheless, Cox and FDR had to continue to promote the League of Nations in light of growing opposition.

The Republican ticket was Warren G. Harding, Senator of Ohio, and Calvin Coolidge, the Governor of Massachusetts. They were nominated by the Republican faction desiring to reverse the tide of Progressivism. Harding based his campaign on a “return to normalcy,” directly repudiating Wilson’s entire administration and characterizing him as abnormal. His platform rested heavily on the re-affirmation of old traditional conservative values, as he declared in his inaugural address, “Our supreme task is the resumption of our onward, normal

⁴⁹ James M. Cox, “Accepting the Democratic Nomination for President, Delivered at Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1920,” <http://www.daytonhistorybooks.com/page/page/4453351.htm>

way. Reconstruction, readjustment, restoration, all these must follow . . . A regret for the mistakes of yesterday must not, however, blind us to the tasks of today.”⁵⁰ Here Harding was suggesting that Wilson was an interruption in the natural cycle of the presidency. Harding was resuming this cycle of Republican leadership, beginning with his reconstruction. He clearly saw himself as a part of the larger Republican objective, yet primarily within the context of repudiating the entire Progressive Era. Wilson was simply an anomaly, a distraction, and a pause from business as usual.

In addition to order-affirmation, Harding emphasized shattering the notions of Progressivism seen in the past few presidencies. Harding viewed Progressivism as a deviation from the true purposes of government that should never be utilized again. Instead of creating something new, Harding wanted to return to the policies of the past. Harding aimed to decrease government intervention in the economy and limit the use of presidential power. He remarked, “There is no instant step from disorder to order . . . No altered system will work a miracle . . . Any wild experiment will only add to the confusion. Our best assurance lies in efficient administration of our proven system.”⁵¹ Harding did not want to continue expanding the role of government, an experiment he saw as a failure. That is why the U.S. should return to a system that had been tried, and in Harding’s point of view, provided the best solution for the country. This platform was a direct repudiation of the Progressive politicians, who believed that their policies were the fix for America’s poor state after the Gilded Age.

More specifically, just as Cox affirmed America’s participation in the League of Nations, Harding directed his order-shattering impulses towards reversing the new strain of interventionism. Instead, he affirmed the traditional stance on foreign policy in order to justify

⁵⁰ Warren G. Harding, “Inaugural Address, March 4, 1921,” <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/harding1921inauguration.htm>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

his repudiation. He observed, “Today our foundations of political and social belief stand unshaken . . . The recorded progress of our Republic . . . proves the wisdom of the inherited policy of non-involvement in Old-World affairs.”⁵² Harding wanted to return to a less aggressive foreign policy with less involvement and no involvement in European affairs. Adhering to this policy was the way to ensure that Wilson’s reconstruction was a failure and that the U.S. resumed isolationism.

However, the Republican Party was still heavily divided on this issue, and not every Republican was prepared to abandon Progressive foreign policy. Harding had the task of appealing to a pro-league constituency, including former President Taft. Herbert Hoover was another example of such a Republican. He wrote, “I had all my adult life been a registered Republican and taken part in Republican organizations. [From 1914 to 1920] I engaged in no political party activities. After that time I resumed my party affiliations and directed them to support the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.”⁵³ This dedication to Wilson’s foreign policy was evidence that Wilson’s crusade did not fall upon deaf ears. With the fractured state of the Republican Party, Harding had to appear like a better Pro-League candidate than Cox to ensure his victory.⁵⁴

Cox attempted to distance himself from Harding and the Republicans by emphasizing the backward-looking nature of their platform. He said, “The leaders opposed to Democracy promise to put the country ‘back to normal.’ This can only mean the so-called normal of former reactionary administrations. . . Our view is toward the sunrise of tomorrow with its progress and

⁵² Warren G. Harding, “Inaugural Address, March 4, 1921.”

⁵³ Herbert Hoover, *The Order of Woodrow Wilson*, Footnote 1, 15.

⁵⁴ Harold U. Faulkner, *From Versailles to the New Deal: A Chronicle of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover Era*, 55.

its eternal promise of better things.”⁵⁵ Cox was reminding the public that the politics of the Gilded Age were not as successful as Harding was claiming. Harding wanted to return to the very policies that created the America the Progressive Era was attempting to repudiate and fix. Cox’s strategy proved futile, as the end of Wilson’s presidency left the direction of the Progressive movement unclear. The commitments of the Progressive movement moving forward into the 1920’s were unclear, and Harding benefitted from this fragmentation and lack of vision.⁵⁶

Harding ended up crushing Cox with 76.1% of the electoral vote and 60.3% of the popular vote.⁵⁷ As far as Congress, the House increased its Republican majority by 123 seats, and the Senate by 10.⁵⁸⁵⁹ On his quest for normalcy, Harding was attempting to reconstruct the Republican Party to reflect the age of *laissez-faire*, non-interventionism, and reactionary government. Unfortunately for Harding, the era he was attempting to return to no longer existed. As historian Leonard Schulp argues, “Harding’s promise of ‘normalcy’ reflected a yearning for a simpler time in America and a return to less adventurous attitudes . . . Americans voted for nostalgia.”⁶⁰ Wilson and the rest of the Progressive presidents had forever redefined what the Presidency was. The emergent pattern of expanding presidential authority, new responsibilities abroad, and more power to the President could not be reversed. The political situation changed, and being at the end of his recurrent cycle of his party regime, Harding in part faced the perils of the impossible leadership situation of disjunction and his reconstruction did not have a chance.

⁵⁵ James M. Cox, “Accepting the Democratic Nomination for President, Delivered at Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1920,”

⁵⁶ Arthur S. Link, “What happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?” 849.

⁵⁷ “1920,” U.S. Presidential Election Data, The American Presidency Project.

⁵⁸ “Congress Profiles: History, Art, & Archives,” United States House of Representatives,

⁵⁹ “Party Divisions in the Senate,” United States Senate.

⁶⁰ Leonard Schulp, “The Vanguard of Politics; the Presidential Election of 1920,” *Manuscripts* Vol. 48, Issue 4 (New York: Fall 1996): 309.

Cox and FDR's commitment to standing by Wilson demonstrates that Wilson succeeded in a reconstruction of his party around Progressive and internationalist ideals. He succeeded in establishing a coalition, even if it was weak in 1920, which desired to continue on his work and honor his legacy. After the loss in 1920, the Democratic Party was considerably weakened. However, the Republican Party of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover was nowhere near as strong as the Republican Party of McKinley, T. Roosevelt, and Taft. Wilson's presidency successfully weakened the Republican Party by presenting a powerful Democratic leadership to counter previous Republican dominance. Wilson may have not succeeded in a liberal reconstruction between 1913 and 1921, but he did succeed in weakening the Republican Party further and indoctrinating his Democratic successors with his ideology.

WILSON'S LEGACY AND LONG-TERM SIGNIFICANCE

Wilson left the Presidency in 1921 a broken man both physically and emotionally. With the failure of his vision for the League of Nations, Wilson was unable to execute what would have been his crowning achievement. Furthermore, he was losing the White House to a man who had won on repudiating his policies and promising to reverse everything Wilson's presidency had accomplished. Despite this, Wilson's reconstruction was not a failure. While he may have not established the Democratic Party as the dominant regime, it is his long term effects that deserve the attention. By discussing two future presidents, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the significance of Wilson's legacy becomes clear.

Evidence of Wilson's long term effects appears in the form of Herbert Hoover. From his time in Wilson's war cabinet as the head of the U.S. Food Administration, Hoover became a dedicated pupil of Wilson, despite his Republican affiliation. The impression Hoover leaves in his book *The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson* is that he seemed to really admire Wilson, not only as

an idealist, but as a leader. He often wrote of Wilson as a crusader who fought for his ideals and refused to back down due to the importance of what he was fighting for. Despite any immediate failures, Hoover still believed Wilson's legacy was the combinations of the ideals he promoted, his revolutionary vision, and his undying devotion to the cause of peace. He also saw the United Nations as a revival of the Wilsonian spirit, which in Hoover's opinion, was the most revolutionary aspect of Wilson of them all. Hoover wrote:

In spite of failure and tragedy which was to come, it should be recorded here that Woodrow Wilson made great gains for mankind, and the influence of his ideals has extended over these many years.

Through his leadership and his sacrifices, he established for the first time in history a systemic and powerful organization of nations to maintain peace . . .

Under Mr. Wilson's banner of freedom, twenty-one races of men threw off their oppression by revolution. . . . There can be no doubt that his prior declaration of New World ideals had been a vital stimulant to these peoples to declare their freedom from oppression. History should record the role of his great proclamations in the quest for freedom . . .

But an enumeration of the 'points' which the President lost at Paris is of little importance to history except as a demonstration of the hostility of Old World concepts to New World ideals. What needs to be recorded are the lasting up-surgings toward freedom and the world organization for enduring peace which Woodrow Wilson brought to a distraught world.⁶¹

Hoover saw Wilson's long-term idealism as his greatest achievement. Through his crusade, Wilson may have not secured the League of Nations, but he did indoctrinate the U.S. and the world with his new ideals. Furthermore, Wilson repositioned the President as a world leader committed to spreading American ideals to other nations of the world.

Hoover understood and fought for this as well and was arguing that any immediate failures were of little significance when compared to what Wilson's legacy did for the world. However, Hoover was handed the impossible leadership situation almost immediately upon entering office, as he was stuck with handling the Great Depression while making the politics of disjunction. As a result, it is unknown whether he would have continued Wilson's policies or

⁶¹ Herbert Hoover, *The Order of Woodrow Wilson*, excerpts from chapter 17.

have stuck by the commitments of his party coalition. But the fact remains that Wilson's ideology transcended party lines and influenced future leaders of even the Republican Party.

Wilson's influence is really seen in another future president and his true Democratic successor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. FDR first met Wilson sometime between 1911 and 1912 when he was a New York Senator, Wilson was the Governor of New Jersey, and both men were leaders of the emerging Progressive movement. While little is known about their meeting, Wilson must have left some sort of impression on FDR, as during his election in 1912, FDR tried to gain support for Wilson and even created a New York delegation for the 1912 convention.⁶² Throughout Wilson's presidency and after, FDR continued to promote Progressivism in the Democratic Party. After the loss in the election of 1920, FDR wrote, "The fact that our fight this year was conducted on high principles . . . makes me feel certain that it will bear fruit in the long run. It is of particular importance that we should keep the fight going."⁶³ As far back as 1920, FDR was already dedicated to the commitments of Woodrow Wilson, and this statement illustrates his desire to continue to campaign for Progressive ideals and the Democratic coalition Wilson had established. All FDR needed was a new opportunity to revive Wilson's ideals, and FDR would be the one to succeed in carrying out those visions.

FDR would have his chance to continue fighting for Wilson's principles upon his own election to the Presidency in 1932. FDR's presidency paralleled Wilson's in its division between domestic, economic concerns and later the crisis of World War II. Domestically, FDR saw much legislative success, as Wilson did, and was able to call upon precedent of Democratic intervention in the economy. Because of Wilson, scholar Robert Alexander Kraig observes, "Democrats became the party of reform in the twentieth century . . . the three great liberal reform

⁶² Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *F.D.R. His Personal Letters. 1905-1928*, ed. Elliott Roosevelt, 128, 191.

⁶³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Anna K. Henderson, Nov. 9, 1920, in Leonard Schlup, "The Vanguard of Politics; the Presidential Election of 1920," 307.

administrations of the century (Wilson, FDR, and Lyndon Johnson) . . . [had] to adopt their own modernized versions of Wilson's evasive defense of government."⁶⁴ Together, Wilson's New Freedom and T. Roosevelt's New Nationalism laid the foundation for mass legislative programs pushed through the economy, heavy government regulation, and an increase in the power of the presidency. In other words, Wilson's domestic policy was the precursor to FDR's New Deal and the birth of the modern welfare state.

Furthermore, Wilson's influence on the future course of action in the presidency is seen most clearly in FDR's involvement in World War II. FDR, like Wilson, attempted to maintain neutrality but was eventually forced into declaring war and entering a European conflict. Once again, this intervention was tied to a higher purpose, as FDR channeled Wilsonian ideals about America's role in the world. He declared in his message to Congress, "I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us."⁶⁵ Here, even in his declaration of war, FDR was echoing Wilson's rhetoric and notion of purpose. He was tying the U.S. involvement in the war to the greater cause of ending all wars. Only unlike Wilson, FDR now had the precedent to call upon and the benefit of his position in the recurrent pattern after the decay of the Republican Party. Finally, FDR succeeded in completing Wilson's vision with the creation of a national peace-keeping organization founded on cooperation, the United Nations. This time, FDR succeeded where Wilson failed because he had the precedent and historical tradition to point to. Ultimately, Wilson set the groundwork for FDR's later reconstruction, transformation of the Democratic Party, and redefinition of the presidency as a whole.

⁶⁴ Robert Alexander Kraig, "The 1912 Election and the Rhetorical Foundations of the Liberal State," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* Vol. 3, No. 3, (2000): 384.

⁶⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Declaration of War, Dec. 8, 1941," FDR Presidential Library, Docs.fdrlibrary.mavist.edu/tmirhdee.html.

The presidencies of Herbert Hoover and FDR demonstrate Wilson's continuing significance even after the end of his presidency and death in 1924. Hoover represents the effect that Wilson had over the presidency as a whole. His impact was not limited to Democrats alone, as he also succeeded in indoctrinating a future generation of politicians with his ideals, Republicans included. FDR, as Wilson's direct Democratic successor, inherited his legacy. Wilson, through his New Freedom legislation and foreign interventionism set up FDR and the Democratic Party for their future reconstruction. And as Hoover noted, the impacts of Wilson's crusade internationally cannot be quantified. So while many have deemed his reconstruction a failure, this overlooks the long-lasting significance of Wilson's presidency for future presidents and the Democratic Party.

CONCLUSION

As Wilson's presidency illustrates, Skowronek's typology in *The Politics Presidents Make* is poor in its handling of the preemptive presidents. Due to his strict, shallow division of political history into party regimes, he misses connections between presidents of opposing parties in the same era, as well as the importance of brief movements or eras defined by other means, such as the Gilded Age or Progressive Era. By only emphasizing short term effects of all Presidents except the reconstructive, he misses the greater significance of other presidents on their successors. By leaving out discussion of the preemptive presidents in his larger analysis of the recurrent pattern of presidential history, he isolates and removes these presidents from their rightful places in political time and thus deems their contributions insignificant or inconsequential. Lastly, by not dividing up his analysis between domestic and foreign policies, he misses the possibility that one president could occupy more than one place in political time. So while Skowronek's analysis of the reconstruction, articulation, and disjunction presidents is

for the most part cohesive and in depth, his treatment of the preemptives leaves a lot to be desired.

Skowronek's definition of party regimes, as well as his other weaknesses, limited his ability to place the preemptive presidents in the recurrent pattern of presidential leadership with the other three groups of his typology. To counter this, Skowronek had no choice but to deem them the "wild cards" of the presidency, and portray their presidencies as "third way" alternatives.⁶⁶ All of these factors make preemptives seem as though they are almost irrelevant in the scope of political time. In actuality, as Wilson's case demonstrates, these presidents have pivotal long term effects for their party, the opposing party, and the institution of the presidency. Skowronek's framework has no place for Woodrow Wilson, who occupied more than one place in political time, had to redefine his party in the context of the emergent pattern of the Progressive Era, and whose long-term significance transcends both his immediate failures and situation as an president opposed to a resilient regime. Wilson, as well as those other presidents characterized to be preemptives, does not fit in their box of Skowronek's typology. Simply put, the preemptive presidents as characterized by Skowronek's framework and typology do not exist.

⁶⁶ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*.

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