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support for Poland's labor movement, funneled through America's sympathetic unions. On a more subtle and yet ultimately more profound level, Domber illuminates the ways in which American officials (Ambassador John Davis in Warsaw in particular) offered a convenient and politically tenable hub for reformers, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and even regime loyalists to congregate and exchange ideas and, one might think, a fair share of winks, nods, and symbols of mutual disdain for the decrepit regime. Ambassador Davis stressed that those conversations gave Poles a forum and a language for discerning their own best way forward. By 1989–90, American officials even provided tutorials for Polish political activists unfamiliar with democratic processes, having already made diplomatic approaches—and deals—on behalf of imprisoned or persecuted individuals.

Ultimately, Domber assigns a hierarchy to the triad of Polish, Soviet, and American influences on Poland's political evolution over the decade of his study. "In terms of ranking the importance of various factors," he writes, "developments in the PZPR [Polish United Worker's Party] were most closely tied to domestic concerns, followed then by Soviet policies, with American and Western influences falling to third place."⁹

There is no way to know if the first or even the first two of these would have succeeded absent the third, but from reading Domber's meticulous account we learn about the lengths Poles and Americans went to in order to work together for a peaceful evolution after Gorbachev's mid-decade launch of perestroika. Washington's representatives worked in various ways with both opposition and government figures in that quest. We also see how that policy evolved less out of grand design than to meet the exigencies of each particular moment.

"I'm from the government. . . . How can I help?" apparently has no one answer. Thankfully, even Reagan's dismissive rhetoric about the power of government to be a force for good did not keep his administration from doing some.

Notes:

1. John Wilson, *Talking with the President: The Pragmatics of Presidential Language* (Oxford, UK, 2015), 98.
2. James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York, 2010).
3. James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2015).
4. V. Zubok, "Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Perspectives on History and Personality," *Cold War History* 2, no. 2 (2002): 61–100.
5. Douglas Little, *Us versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016), 59.
6. Mary Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York, 2014).
7. Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland and the End of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014), 33.
8. *Ibid.*, 30.
9. *Ibid.*, 261.

Tony Smith, *Why Wilson Matters: The Origin of American Liberal Internationalism and Its Crisis Today* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017)

Andrew M. Johnston

Tony Smith's *Why Wilson Matters* is a something of a sequel to his 1994 *America's Mission: The United States and the Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*. The story has been brought up to date since neoconservatives captured George W. Bush's imagination after 9/11 and plunged the United States into sixteen years of continuous

warfare. Today, Smith wants the fable of America's essential goodness to reflect on the dark first decades of the twenty-first century, when Woodrow Wilson's original ideals were, in his view, perverted by the hubris of a cabal of political scientists and "neo-Wilsonian" hawks, who misunderstood Wilson's insight that democracy grows only from the soil of a carefully cultivated "national character" that cannot simply be imposed by force from without. Smith provides an argument for the origins, meaning, and definition of liberal internationalism that wants to prove that however much the world may change, there is only one policy consistent with America's revolutionary heritage. Although they too are Americans, realists, neo-conservatives, and isolationists don't speak in the vernacular of the nation's destiny.

The book is divided into two parts. The first explores the origins of Wilson's ideas about democracy and foreign policy; the second takes the discussion of those ideas into the rest of the twentieth century, showing where they worked (winning the fight against illiberal demons, bringing about an open global economy, establishing multilateral institutions for the amelioration of international friction) and where they didn't (just about everything after 9/11). The historical evaluation of Wilson is invaluable, though not without its curiosities. And while the angry attack on post-9/11 neo-imperialism will be contested by its targets, the book provides an important taxonomy of the intellectual failings of contemporary American policy and political science.

Smith begins with a detailed reading of Wilson's own scholarship, exploring its attention to English history, constitutionalism, and Calvinist covenant theology and scrutinizing Wilson's Burkean comparison of the American and French Revolutions. Professor Wilson believed that democracy grew organically from particular cultures, the Anglo-Saxon one foremost. Thus, while he prized democracy as the future of the world, he did not think seriously about how to make it the basis of a new world order. The War of 1898 started to shift his view toward believing that the United States had a national security duty to instantiate democracy overseas wherever possible. Wilson came to see "progressive imperialism" (in contrast to its European versions) as providing a prototype for propagating America's pluralism wherever local conditions were receptive, the rule of law could prevail, and the reach of U.S. power was measured.

The supporting evidence is a bit mixed. Wilson's interventionist hesitations (in Mexico and Russia) are creditable, but Smith glosses over the Philippines, the Caribbean and Central America generally. Wilson's euphemisms (colonial subjects need to be taught "obedience" and "discipline") masked a rule that was racist, exploitive, and cruel. In the case of Haiti, the two-decade U.S. occupation (in fairness not all under Wilson's watch) did more to destroy Haiti's economy, environment, and social order than any other period in its twentieth-century history. Wilson's interventions were—by his own admission—probably illegal.¹ So much for the rule of law.

While Smith concedes Wilson's frequent lack of a master plan and his racism (palpable but not, in Smith's view, constitutive), he insists that global order is only consistent with U.S. interests when it is founded on an open economy and a community of democratic governments. His proof of the effectiveness of this idea lies in everything from Bretton Woods to NATO, the democratization of Germany and Japan (which of course wasn't a genuine democracy until 1989), the Alliance for Progress, Jimmy Carter's discovery of human rights, and the end of the Cold War. By this point, a lot is being squeezed into Wilsonian garments, but then came the overexacted 1990s, and America lost its head.

Smith's chapters on the rise of "neo-Wilsonian" theory and practice after the triumphalism of the Cold War offer a

scathing indictment of what happened next. Three concepts emerged in the 1990s—all claiming some Wilsonian ancestry—and synthesized into a “high octane liberal internationalism.” These were democratic peace theory (DPT), democratic transition theory (DTT), and a “just war” doctrine under the heading of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Smith provides a helpful if caustic guide to the U.S. political science literature of the 1990s and early 2000s, some of which, he concedes, is consistent with Wilsonianism. He is right, though, to mock the shallowness of much of this literature. When bound together, these three concepts drove U.S. policy toward ill-conceived interventions that were disastrous for the United States and the people being “liberated.”

Smith’s final chapter turns to the claims made by Robert Kagan, John Lewis Gaddis, and others that the Bush Doctrine was perfectly in step with U.S. foreign policy tradition. On the contrary, Smith insists, it was a perversion of the principles that had been so successful in the twentieth century; it produced a world if not hostile toward then certainly skeptical of U.S. power. Smith pins these failures on hubris, an exaggeration of U.S. power, and a refusal to admit that local resistance, affronted by U.S. arrogance (and, in the case of Iraq, theft), might be legitimate.

This carefully reasoned argument, however, rests on two related premises I found problematic. The first is Smith’s (and Wilson’s) ill-defined concept of “national character,” which is employed here in ways that carry traces of an atavistic and openly racial civilizational hierarchy. The second one is an Orientalist belief that democracy comes only from a Western political line found nowhere else in the world. Smith doesn’t offer any proof that democracy is *not* a widely shared value, even though recent scholarship has shown how many non-Western traditions of broad political deliberation, and even human rights, there are in history.²

The problem with the assumption is that it allows Americans to presume that the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the world is proof of the *absence* of Western power. Yet it’s impossible to separate these regimes from the long history of imperial destabilization engendered by the West’s liberal states. Is resistance to democracy in parts of the world a function of an atavistic cultural aversion, or the persistence of the piracy involved in an “open economy” and the “benevolent imperialism” that Wilson celebrated? The answer is assumed here, but it all gets especially awkward when Smith cites Gandhi and Mandela as examples of democratic leaders with the right “character” to form a national party without acknowledging that the greatest international obstacles to democracy and self-determination that these leaders faced were in London and Washington. Smith’s refusal to see the Janus face of liberal internationalism weakens the thrust of his argument.

There are similarly jarring moments, such as the claim that early twentieth century democracies “were by their very character less likely to be either repressive at home or imperialist abroad” (99).³ Even if we bracket America’s racial caste system at the time, or Britain’s entire history of grim violence toward Ireland, in Wilson’s day the world’s two largest overseas empires belonged to the British and the French, liberalism’s ideological heroes. The difference between the empires of democratic Europe—along with their genocidal settler colonies—and those of autocratic

states is negligible. When it comes to their empires, you simply cannot make the case that democracies contain “character” traits that promote “reasoned discussion and compromise” (97).

I read *Why Wilson Matters* a few weeks after picking up Jacques Rancière’s *Hatred of Democracy* (2006), a distillation of his argument that the global fragility of democracy at our present juncture is a function of a deeply rooted oligarchic hatred of actual equality within those very democracies. Rancière argues that all government rests on either some theory of rights granted solely by birth (the theory of the *ancien régime*), or by the organization of productive activities in society that makes some people better at ruling than others. In principle, democracy levels all people—*anyone* can rule. That’s its point. So, if it is the *organization of society* that determines who is best suited to rule, in practice democracy is always an oligarchy to the extent that any social order rests on economic, sexual, or racial hierarchies.

The American democracy of the 1780s was representative rule exclusively for white, Protestant, property-owning men: between 1 and 2 percent of the population voted in the first presidential election. The democratic exclusions in the United States (and everywhere else, of course) are being slowly overcome, but not because of any innate sense of deliberation and reasoning in the middle class, as Smith believes, but rather because of the struggles of the excluded. Most histories of the emergence of liberalism (as *the* ideology of the middle class) show the extent to which its great theorists feared and loathed the idea of political equality between classes, races, and sexes.⁴

I mention all this because I think any understanding of Wilson needs to be grounded in the political language of the turn of the century. It was the tension between licentious individualism—the driver of capitalist energy—and public order (the basis of the Calvinist covenant after all) that was at the heart of Progressive Era efforts to reformulate nineteenth-century liberalism. Greater democracy was called upon to bring corporate capitalism and labor to heel, but not *so much* democracy that the masses would make claims against the right of the meritorious to rule. The way to do this, according to Progressive liberals, was to cultivate a sense of “social control” by which individuals would internalize the demands of their social interdependence.

Lyman Abbott captured this idea perfectly in 1901: “The object of all government is to destroy the necessity of *any* government, by developing such a public conscience that no other force but that conscience will be needed to protect the rights of man.”⁵ This is why Wilson’s models of democracy are also so inegalitarian and infused with racial assumptions: governance, national or international, is about instantiating the moral authority of the correct people. Going back to the Wilsonian well in the twenty-first century is disorienting when we consider just how different the world is now, and how wrong Wilson was about many other things (the Calvinist covenant and the color line being the most obvious). Why do Americans need to embed their understanding of the world today in the Presbyterian mindset of a nineteenth-century white supremacist?

Smith’s decontextualization means that it’s not always obvious where the line is between his analysis of Wilson and his own beliefs. He quotes Wilson with such approbation that it’s unclear whether he is taking the president’s Progressive Era fantasies about America’s

providential mission, peculiar duty, and selfless rescuing of dark-skinned island nations at face value. Take this classic: “The manifest destiny of America is not to rule the world by physical force . . . but its leadership and destiny are that she shall do the thinking of the world” (75). While we can thank Wilson for anticipating Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, it’s not a recipe for reconciling global pluralism with international order. As I read Smith’s book, I tried to imagine that he was writing with neoconservative foes in mind, and in his determination to do so, he didn’t have time to consider the *actual* meaning of Wilson’s belief that the United States must bring order to the world and fill “unoccupied, unappropriated” lands for settlement and achievement.

As admirable a repost as this book is to the Bush Doctrine, it’s not, to my mind, entirely clear whether it’s better to seek our answers in these anachronistic imperial concepts or in the murky—and often highly improvised—responses of Wilson to the Great War. On the other hand, as I am writing these words on the day after the announcement of the Trump Doctrine, those who argue currently for enlightened American leadership in the world currently have, it would seem, an entirely different domestic dragon to slay.

Notes:

1. Alan McPherson, *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Chichester, UK, 2016), 90–91.

1 See, for example, Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell, eds., *The Secret History of Democracy* (New York, 2011); John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (New York, 2009).

2. On the role played by Wilson’s idea of character as a kind of racist code for global white supremacy, see John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge, 2012), 172–74.

3. Quoted in Eldon Eisenach, *The Lost Promise of Progressivism* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1994), 78.

4. Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (New York, 2006, 2011), chap. 5 especially; David Boucher, “Property and Propriety in International Relations: The Case of John Locke,” in Beate Jahn, ed., *Classical Theory in International Relations* (New York, 2006), 156–77; Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism: Theory, History, Practice* (Cambridge, 2013), 39–71.

Review of Louis Sell, *From Washington to Moscow: U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Collapse of the USSR* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016)

Henry R. Maar III

Louis Sell’s *From Washington to Moscow* offers historians a hybrid account—part memoir, part history—of the final years of the Soviet Union. A veteran Foreign Service officer who specializes in Soviet and Balkan affairs, Sell draws in part on his own experiences and observations while utilizing a variety of sources in both English and Russian. He begins his narrative in 1967, when he visited the Soviet Union over his college spring break. His first trip to the other side of the Iron Curtain opened him up to the idea that not everything was as it seems: “the underlying reality of Soviet life kept breaking through the highly embellished official version” (8) the Soviets tried to create. This observation would stick with him in the decades to come.

Sell’s work covers the major leaders and events of

the late Cold War and largely focuses on the last twenty years of the Soviet Union, 1972–1991. While early chapters cover Soviet human rights dissidents, arms control, and prominent U.S. and Soviet leaders, nearly half the work follows the rise of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and the consequences that attended his reforms. Sell does an excellent job of contrasting the “Gorbymania” that followed Gorbachev abroad with the “political chaos, economic decline, and ethnic violence” (166) that ravaged the Soviet Union at home. Although Gorbachev shared many traits with his political rival Boris Yeltsin, Sell describes the two as “oil and water” (280) and persuasively demonstrates how the rivalry between the two helped lead to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The chapters that truly stand out are those in which Sell talks about his personal role in events. In chapter 14, for example, Sell combines a survey of his time at the Office of U.S.-Soviet Bilateral Relations with a broader discussion of “the year of the spy” (1985). Here we are given insights into spy cases, including those of Vitaly Yurchenko and Nicholas Daniloff; the Soviets’ use of “spy dust”; and the bugging of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. Sell offers his personal insights into what U.S.-Soviet wrangling over the bugged embassy looked like from the inside, as well as what the diplomatic process of securing the return of human rights dissidents and their families looked like before and after

Mikhail Gorbachev. He argues persuasively that Gorbachev’s perestroika initiatives and his ultimate desire for a breakthrough in nuclear arms reductions talks with President Reagan at Reykjavik “made it imperative to end the Daniloff affair” (225).

For all the value of Sell’s personal insights and research, however, he merely repeats many of the myths of the Reagan era. Whereas the Reagan

administration (and its allies) claimed the United States was in a position of weakness during the early 1980s (the infamous “window of vulnerability”), when asked in congressional hearings whether they would agree to swap nuclear arsenals or military capabilities with the Soviets, none of America’s military leaders (including Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger) said yes. Sell further claims that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or Star Wars, as it was widely known) was a byproduct of Reagan’s abhorrence of nuclear war. This claim neglects the domestic political circumstances the administration faced over its arms control agenda and the influence of figures such as Edward Teller (then working on the Excalibur program) and Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham (founder of the High Frontier project).

Problems also arise in Sell’s treatment of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the European antinuclear activists. While Sell correctly identifies the areas a nuclear freeze would cover—testing, production, and deployment—he leaves out a keyword: “bilateral” (148). Leaving this key phrase out allows Sell to paint freeze activists as seeking unilateral U.S. disarmament—a charge the Reagan administration and its allies regularly hurled at activists in an effort to discredit the movement in the eyes of the public.

Furthermore, Sell falsely calls Jonathan Schell’s *The Fate of the Earth* the “centerpiece” of the nuclear freeze movement (149). While Schell’s book may have helped rally people against the arms race, his work did not advocate for a nuclear weapons freeze, nor did it encourage what was at the time of its publication a movement just coming into the mainstream. Given Sell’s treatment of the European peace movement and his apparent unawareness that the concept