

Woodrow Wilson and America's World Empire

by Joseph E. Fallon

Twenty-first century America is the creation of President Woodrow Wilson, who used the messianic ideology of American Exceptionalism (the belief that America is unique and morally superior to other countries) and the opportunity afforded by World War I to turn America into one of the first ideological empires of the 20th century.

To achieve this, Wilson discarded the last faded trappings of the Old Republic, which had been retained after Appomattox to preserve the illusion at home and abroad that the United States was still a constitutional government. In the process, he exposed the face of the American political system during the Progressive Era. It was still Tammany Hall—just run by a different gang of crooks and cranks posing as idealists and humanitarians.

Though a Democrat, this former president of Princeton University was a political disciple of two Republicans, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. Like them, he suffered from a messianic complex. After his election in 1912, Wilson told the chairman of the Democratic Party that God, not the Democratic Party, had made him president. Motivated by this belief, Wilson used the opportunity the 1912 elections afforded him—the Democratic Party had also won control of both houses of Congress—to expand the twin empires of Lincoln and Roosevelt.

Abraham Lincoln had established the consolidated government that Wilson inherited in 1912—an internal empire of, by, and for Northern special interests. Constitutionalism had been supplanted by crony capitalism.

Theodore Roosevelt had used the powers of Lincoln's consolidated government to create an external empire of overseas colonies, protectorates, and military bases. He achieved this by engineering a war with Spain to acquire Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico; intervening in Colombia to obtain Panama; and enforcing the "Roosevelt Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, which declared Amer-

ica's intention to act as the "international police power" throughout the Western Hemisphere.

During the first two years of his administration (1912-14), Wilson concentrated on expanding the powers of Lincoln's internal empire. Unlike Lincoln, he accomplished this through legislation—not through war, invasion, and starvation. These bloodless victories were achieved because the South was politically powerless and the North, which dominated the federal government, had sold its states' sovereignties for federal patronage.

First, Wilson established an unprecedented right for the federal government to intervene directly in the private affairs of individual Americans in peacetime. This was achieved by a double-barrel assault on traditional constitutional principles. With the passage of the 16th Amendment, the income tax, one of Lincoln's original war measures, became permanent. At the same time, the tariff rate was dramatically slashed, from 40 to 26 percent, by the Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act, which eliminated this tax entirely on clothing, steel, sugar, and wool. These two political "reforms" enabled Wilson to expand the power of the internal empire by shifting the burden of financing the federal government from businesses to citizens and by providing federal authorities with the constitutional power to engage in extortion to enforce that shift.

Wilson expanded the role of the federal government in the economy. Like Lincoln, he recognized that the independence, primacy, and continued growth of the consolidated government depended on Washington controlling the financial system—currency and banking. Lincoln had "nationalized" the economy through the Legal Tender Act of 1862 and the National Banking Acts of 1863 and 1864. Wilson expanded the nationalization of the economy by establishing the Federal Reserve System and the Federal Trade Commission.

Wilson eliminated a potential source of political opposition to his policies, at home and abroad, with the passage of the 17th Amendment, which mandated the direct election of U.S. senators. State legislatures were thereby stripped of one of their most important means of exercising control over the federal government: the right to elect the men who would represent their states in Washington. That would now be effectively decided by the power and the purse of the federal government and the national political par-

ties. This abolished the last facet of federalism and relegated the states to mere appendages of Washington.

In 1914, Wilson turned his attention to expanding Roosevelt's external empire. When he announced the objective of his foreign policy, he revealed his megalomania:

It is America's duty and privilege to stand shoulder to shoulder to lift the burdens of mankind in the future and show the path of freedom to all the world. America is henceforth to stand for the assertion of the right of one nation to serve the other nations of the world.

Wilson, like Lincoln and Roosevelt, utilized the rhetoric of humanitarianism to mask his imperial power grabs. Earlier, he had noted with approval the symbiotic relationship between foreign policy and American business:

Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful corner of the world may be overlooked or left unused.

Despite supporting such "anti-business" legislation as the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act, the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act, the Adamson Act, and the Workingmen's Compensation Act, Wilson actually favored big businesses—as long as they were "supervised" by the federal government. Supervision included deploying the American military to advance the commercial interests of American businesses overseas.

By 1914, those businesses—particularly the banking, sugar, and oil industries—had invested \$336 million in Cuba and the West Indies, \$93 million in Central America, and over \$1 billion in Mexico. To protect these investments, Wilson launched a series of military interventions in the Caribbean and Latin America—Mexico (1914 and 1916), Nicaragua (1914), Haiti (1915), the Dominican

Republic (1916), Cuba (1917), Panama (1918), Costa Rica (1919), Honduras (1919), and Guatemala (1920).

With the exception of Mexico (which by 1916, was a country in name only), Wilson established *de facto* protectorates over the rest. He called these military interventions and occupations by the Orwellian term “moral diplomacy.”

However, Maj. Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler, USMC, a recipient of two Congressional Medals of Honor, had another name for it—a “racket.” In a 1933 speech, General Butler, who served in the Marines Corps from 1898 to 1931 and authored *War Is a Racket*, an exposé of profiteering during World War I, said this of Wilson’s interventions:

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street . . . I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916 . . .

It was World War I, however, that provided Wilson with the opportunity to transcend the achievements of Lincoln and Roosevelt by establishing the foundation for the American Empire of today. After all, if America could exert enough financial, martial, and political power on Europe, she could dominate Europe and, thereby, dominate much of the world.

American Exceptionalism, which had been invoked by Lincoln and Roosevelt, furnished the necessary ideology. However, both men lacked the means to elevate the American empire of 1865-1912 to the position of a rival, let alone successor, to the European powers.

World War I supplied Wilson with the means. The Allies became dependent upon the United States for ammunition, food, and financing. By 1917, they owed the United States \$12 billion. For the first time, America was a creditor nation and exercised a significant degree of financial power over debtor governments. As America became wealthier at the expense of her imperial rivals, the financial basis for the American Empire was created.

The war soon bogged down into a stalemate. Both sides were being bled to death—physically, emotionally, and ec-

onomically. As the Allies became militarily weaker, the United States became correspondingly stronger. By 1917, the Allies needed American military intervention if they were to win. Intervention allowed Wilson to raise an army of four million. Despite the radical reduction in the size of the military after the war, the precedent had been set for future mobilizations and the maintenance of a large standing army.

Wilson’s intervention not only ensured an Allied victory but meant that, for the first time, the United States would exert political influence in postwar negotiations that would determine the fate of Europe.

As Wilson was projecting Washington’s power overseas, he was simultaneously consolidating it at home. The champion of Progressivism instituted a police state. He established the Committee of Public Information, which issued pro-war propaganda and promoted hatred of German people and their culture, resulting in the internment of German-Americans and the ridiculous renaming of sauerkraut as “liberty cabbage.”

To eliminate public opposition to his policies, Wilson effectively abolished the First Amendment. The Espionage Act of 1917 legalized government censorship, while the Sedition Act of 1918 criminalized speech critical of Wilson or of American involvement in the war.

To pay for the police state at home and the war abroad, the War Revenue Act was passed in 1917. Citizens became indentured servants of the federal government, as the highest tax bracket jumped to 67 percent the first year and 77 percent the next.

Wilson also made himself *de facto* head of the entire U.S. war machine with the Overman Act of 1918, which established the precedent for the imperial presidency and its unconstitutional usurpation of war powers.

Wilson created his empire in the name of “democracy.” But a “democratic empire” is an oxymoron. History shows that the quest for empire under any pretext is ultimately self-destructive. Athens also created an empire in the name of democracy. Her fate was described by Plutarch. In the end, Athens

fought all her battles against and to enslave herself. She erected all her trophies to her own shame and misery and was brought to ruin and desolation almost wholly by the guilt

and ambition of her great men.

The fate of Athens should be a lesson for America.

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TYRANNY

Anarcho-Tyranny, Rockford Style

by Thomas Fleming

Like many idyllic towns in Middle America, Rockford is rife with political corruption, rotten with vice and immorality, and beset by criminal gangs who control an ever-growing drug industry and, in a good year, put Rockford ahead of Chicago in the number of murders *per capita*. Residents with long memories also remember articles in *Life* and the daily *Rockford Register Star* (1984) that celebrated Rockford as a leading center of Mafia activity in the United States. They even named names.

As Jeff Havens of the weekly *Rock River Times* has shown, the mob never went away, and the deliberate negligence of the Rockford city fathers may be costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in payment for waste disposal. The usual story of no-bid contracts for companies that contribute to campaign war chests is made even richer by the fact that one of the companies is descended from a firm once owned by an identified mob boss.

So, in such a town, it was a relief to see on the evening news that someone is finally cracking down on the mounting crime wave. A joint investigation of federal, state, and local authorities has succeeded, after two years of tough law-enforcement work, in shutting down seven massage parlors probably involved in prostitution. The ghosts of Wyatt Earp and J. Edgar Hoover are probably withering in envy.

Before getting on to my main point, which is the hypocrisy of an amoral state cracking down on vice, there is another irony worth mentioning. All of the unfortunate women being charged are illegal Korean or Chinese immigrants, who *may* be deported. In two years, any one of the crusading cops could have