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AUGUST HECKSCHER: WOODROW WILSON

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Since the Civil War there have been but seven elected Democratic presidents, nearly half of whom advanced from relative obscurity directly to the White House. The first post-Civil war Democrat to run for and win the presidency was Grover Cleveland, who was the mayor of Buffalo, New York, at the time. Nearly a century later Jimmy Carter set out on his improbable quest for the Oval Office as a former one-term governor of Georgia. Between these two unlikely presidencies looms Woodrow Wilson, who waited until he was fifty-three to place himself before any electorate, and who, a scant two years later, had nearly completed his first term as the Governor of New Jersey when he wrested the 1912 Democratic presidential nomination from a small pack of better known rivals.

Cleveland, Carter, and Wilson...three gasping Democrats bobbing for political breath in a sea littered with marauding Republicans. Take away the thirty-six year New Deal interregnum between 1932 and 1968 and they are the only bona fide post-Civil War Democratic presidents (save Andrew Johnson who ran with Lincoln on the Union Party ticket in 1864). Cleveland, Carter, and Wilson...three accidental presidents whose accidental presidencies were not the result of presedential deaths.

Cleveland, Carter, and Wilson...three presidential aspirants who were the direct beneficiaries of intra-Republican squabbling. Fights between reformist Mugwumps and stand-pat Stalwarts helped elevate Mayor

Cleveland. In 1976 the one-two punch of Watergate and the Ford-Reagan fight proved slightly too much for the GOP to overcome. And in 1912 Wilson's victory was made possible by the titanic Roosevelt-Taft split.

Cleveland, Carter, and Wilson...three Democratic presidents whose presidencies punctured eras of Republican dominance. And there the similarity ends. After all, Wilson was both a forthrightly liberal president and a wartime president, while Cleveland and Carter were almost defiantly neither. Moreover, Wilson and Carter were southerners to one latitudinal degree or another; Cleveland, though sympathetic to the old Confederacy and the New South, was not.

Thirdly, to hear him tell it, the Reverend Carter lusted only "in the heart"; not so Cleveland, who fathered a child out of wedlock, and Wilson, who carried on an adulterous affair with the shadowy Mrs. Peck. And, of course, it was Carter who managed to confine all of his presidential failures to a single term; whereas Cleveland and Wilson took eight years to establish their own marks for futility. Finally, Cleveland and Carter were actually rejected by the voters; Wilson was never accorded that particular comeuppance.

But there is one other common thread. And therein lies a tale which goes beyond matters electoral, personal, and political and to the heart of what is wrong with the first single volume biography of Woodrow Wilson in better than three decades. Presidents Cleveland, Carter, and Wilson all interpreted their meteoric ascents to power to mean that they thought they had a direct pipeline to the American people. Each believed that he could safely ignore the advice of professional politicians, because each had convinced himself that he had achieved his lofty status without the assistance of professional politicians.

To one emotional degree or another, all three operated as though they personally embodied the national will. Therefore, all three possessed a significant measure of disdain for those political mortals within their own party whose misfortune it was to dwell beneath them. In sum, all three inhabited the worst of all psychological worlds in that each was a professional politician who disliked other professional politicians as a matter of course and who refused to see himself as a member of the species.

August Heckscher, however, is bent upon separating Wilson from this trio of Democrats. To him, Woodrow Wilson was a self-acknowledged and accomplished professional politician.

Wilson, of course, spent most of his adult life away from the rough and tumble world of politics and in the sometimes rougher—and often more cruel—world of academia. Therefore, Heckscher properly invests nearly a third of this biography in the pre-presidential life of his subject. Son of a Presbyterian minister, young "Tommy" Wilson lived a well-travelled life in a number of southern parsonages before finding a home within Princeton University.

After a false start as a lawyer, a professionally reborn Woodrow Wilson earned a John Hopkins doctorate and set out on the path of an academic climber, culminating with his return to his beloved Princeton. For the ensuing eighteen years Wilson taught at (1892—1902) and presided over (1902—1910) the institution which had provided him with his "magical" undergraduate years.

Driven to succeed by a doting mother and a demanding father, Wilson established a name for himself as a scholar of politics long before he became a scholar in politics. Nonetheless, the substance of his most significant work, *Congressional Government*, was, in Heckscher's view, "not new." By the time of its 1885 publication the decline of presidential power was both obvious and well-documented. What set Wilson's contribution apart was his "method and style." At base, the young professor was less a scholar than he was a writer. As Heckscher notes, Wilson has often been accused of failing to investigate Congress directly "before sitting down to describe its workings." But such critics "miss the point; the book was in essence a work of the imagination. And the imagination was that born of the statesman."

Shortly before his elevation to the presidency of Princeton, Wilson confided to friend and fellow historian Frederick Jackson Turner that he had been "born a politician." Curiously, this self-characterization was not made with an eye toward his impending promotion, but in light of a pending request for a leave of absence so that he might travel, think, and write his "philosophy of politics." For Wilson, who as a young man was wont to

distribute calling cards labeled "Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Senator from Virginia," being a "politician" was not distinct from being a "scholar." His immediate goal was to satisfy both ambitions by producing his magnum opus. Instead, he was soon to embark on a more overtly political career which would leave him no time for leisurely travel, little time for reflective thought, and not enough time to write anything of substance.

By the spring of 1902 dissatisfaction with the six-year presidency of Francis L. Patton had reached "crisis proportions." With faculty morale low and academic standards in decline, the board of trustees (one of whose members was a former President of the United States by the name of Grover Cleveland) asked for Patton's resignation and replaced him with a "beloved figure within the whole Princeton community", Professor Woodrow Wilson.

Thus ended his years as a Princeton faculty member when Woodrow Wilson had been "as close to being a happy man as would ever be the case." By all accounts (Heckscher's included) Wilson loved the academic life. And with good reason: as a teacher and scholar Woodrow Wilson was a resounding success. That rarest of professorial birds, he was both a captivating lecturer and a highly regarded published historian.

Moreover, when he was not crafting either the spoken or written word Woodrow Wilson was the compleat family man, with a wife (Ellen Axson Wilson) whom he deeply loved and three daughters of whom he was thoroughly and equally proud. It would seem that nothing could have enhanced—or disturbed—this placid and productive scene. And yet Wilson thought he could improve upon perfection by crowning his academic career, not with a literary masterpiece, but with the presidency of his treasured Princeton.

For most of the next eight years the Wilson biography is not a story of the Peter Principle in action. In fact, Heckscher judges the first half of his tenure to have been a "time of accomplishment." With the goal of placing a liberal arts education "squarely at the center of Princeton's task," Wilson moved rapidly to introduce a freshman core curriculum and to tighten all undergraduate discipline. The centerpiece for all of his plans was the much-heralded "preceptorial system," which placed a significant measure of

Princeton undergraduate education in the hands of freshly minted products of American higher education. By the fall of 1905 more than forty "preceptors" had been recruited, leading Heckscher to conclude that "no college faculty has ever received at one stroke so dramatic an infusion of new blood."

But Wilson's remaining four years (not unlike the second term of his second presidency) were far less successful. And, as would be the case in 1919, physical problems contributed to his political decline. On May 28, 1906, President Wilson awoke to find himself blind in his left eye. The loss of vision was initially attributed to a burst blood vessel, stemming from general hypertension; but subsequent authorities have concluded that this was the first of a series of small strokes, all of which were precursors to his collapse in the midst of the struggle to ratify the Versailles Treaty in the fall of 1919.

Whatever the exact cause of his illness, the Woodrow Wilson who presided over Princeton after the spring of 1906 displayed "not only a different side of his character but at critical moments (made) painful errors of judgment". Gone too frequently was the gentle, demonstrably affectionate Wilson. In its place was the "irascible" Wilson, who "never forgot that he was the son of Presbyterians." Unwilling to bend, unable to admit defeat, this Woodrow Wilson was, but his own words, "a thorough Presbyterian," and one who often felt, in Heckscher's words, "called to prove it." For the remainder of his life the oscillation between these two Wilsons continued unabated.

Other torments in Wilson's private life had begun to surface as well. Subject to mystifying bouts of depression which had long bedeviled the Axson family, Ellen Wilson a year earlier had suffered a shock from which she would never fully recover. In late April of 1905 her favored younger brother, his wife, and their two-year old son were drowned in a tragic ferry accident. In her grief and depression Ellen Wilson abruptly abandoned her role as Princeton's First Lady and gradually withdrew from her husband. In his confusion and resentment Woodrow Wilson retreated to Bermuda in the winter of 1907. There he sought rest and rejuvenation, while she remained in Princeton, much "like the fixtures in the house."

And there he met May Allen Hulbert Peck, once widowed, once unhappily married, and finally a Bermuda regular for the preceding fifteen winters. Though the friendship long remained a platonic one, the "web of circumstance had been woven...In Ellen's depression, in Mary Peck's faltering spirit, in Woodrow's emotional isolation existed elements to bring these three into a complex human relationship."

Following a second winter interlude in Bermuda, Wilson decided to reveal the friendship to his wife and without apparent remorse promised to extinguish what Heckscher calls this "glimpse of an intoxicating happiness." Two months later, as was often his practice, Wilson publicly paraded his private thoughts. In his 1908 baccalaureate address Wilson expressed a preference for self-denial over repentance: "I am not sure," he confided to his undergraduates, "that it is of the first importance that you should be happy. Many an unhappy man has been of deep service to the world and to himself." Or so Woodrow Wilson had assumed was his own fate.

Nonetheless, Heckscher believes it to be highly probable that the unhappy Wilson sought to retrieve his "glimpse" of happiness, specifically that his relationship with Mrs. Peck shifted from a romantic friendship to a love affair sometime during 1909. Unhappiness acknowledged, he moved to achieve personal happiness at the same time that his presidency—and his opportunity for service?—were grinding to an ignominious end.

Ironically, this betrayal of his wife (which years later Wilson referred to as an act of "folly and gross impertinence") came on the heels of his own feelings of betrayal at the hands of his prized Princeton protege, Professor John Hibben. At issue was the location of the graduate school, which Wilson did not want physically removed from the rest of the university. In this fight he thought that he could count on the support of Hibben only to have his longtime confidante and ally take the lead in opposing him. A simple negative vote the president might have accepted: but command of the dissidents was to Wilson an act of unforgivable treachery. A decade later, the until-then-ubiquitous Colonel Edward House stood similarly accused before meeting the same ostracized fate.

Curiously, Wilson was quick to see himself as the one betrayed, but never was he willing to admit that he might himself be the betrayer. In 1915

he would tell the soon-to-be second Mrs. Wilson, Edith Bolling Galt, that Ellen Wilson "knew and understood and (had) forgiven" his "folly" with Mary Peck prior to her death from Bright's disease in August of 1914. No more apparently needed to be—or was—said.

To Heckscher, Wilson routinely saw himself as "two different men, the one scarcely aware of what the other was thinking." Thus, he, too, seeks to absolve his subject of any responsibility for his behavior. If it was not a case of "dualism," it was simply Wilson's "New Freedom" asserting control of his private life a few years before it would surface as a campaign slogan.

Heckscher's penchant for excusing Wilson persists in his treatment of the gubernatorial and presidential Wilson. To Heckscher the New Jersey governorship was not a convenient escape from defeat at Princeton, because Wilson "simply did not see his career at Princeton as ending in failure." Nor did Heckscher's Wilson take the support of the New Jersey Democratic machine only to spurn the politicians by becoming a reform-minded governor. Such behavior was beyond the psychological pale for this ever-righteous son of Presbyterians.

If President Wilson was a reluctant gubernatorial candidate, then Governor Wilson was an equally hesitant presidential aspirant. With a biographer's shrug, Heckscher concludes that an almost apolitical Woodrow Wilson was "inclined to let matters take their course." But such nonchalance did not imply non-interest. Happy or unhappy, Woodrow Wilson was still a man of considerable ambition. Not that ambition ought to require a sacrifice of principle. As early as 1911 Wilson confided to Mary Peck his worry that the South might be too interested in his possible candidacy. In his view the South was conservative and "I am a radical." Given his "hatred" of "false colors," Wilson decided to go before an audience of prominent southern leaders to set the record straight by endorsing the initiative, referendum, and recall, which to Heckscher were then the "very symbols of radicalism in politics."

Once again Heckscher is willing to take Wilson at his word—and to note that his "radicalism" cost Wilson significant southern support at the 1912 Democratic convention. To Heckscher the Baltimore gathering was an "irresistible showpiece" of American politics—and one with a "happy

ending” as well. Not only was Wilson the nominee, but reformist progressivism was in control of the Democratic Party. Once again, Heckscher and Wilson are one.

Having taken Wilson to the doors of the White House, Heckscher permits the private Wilson a measure of reticence. The substance of the rest of the Wilson story is “less the tale of what the world did to him than of what he did to the world.” Or tried to do, all in the name of something less than unbridled Wilsonian idealism, for August Heckscher, having already humanized the previously austere-appearing Professor Wilson, is determined to politicize the often dreamily portrayed President Wilson.

In fact, Heckscher takes pains to portray Wilson as the consummate consensus politician. Borrowing from an earlier Wilson biographer, Charles Seymour, Heckscher agrees that Wilson sought to “catch the trend of the inarticulate rather than the vociferous opinion.” With a leadership style which “depended heavily on being able to interpret the national will,” Wilson invariably waited for the majority view to surface magically—or “avoid[ed] action even when his personal views and preferences were clear.”

The enactment of New Freedom legislation is a case in point. Laws were passed to “establish conditions for full and fair competition,” but forgotten was his 1912 campaign “promise of social justice” as well. Here Heckscher and Herbert Croly, founding father of *The New Republic*, are one. To Heckscher, Wilson was all too content to leave “untouched the social and humanitarian issues that had been an underlying part of the New Freedom agenda.” To Croly, Wilson was a conundrum: “How can a man of his shrewd and masculine intelligence possibly delude himself into making the extravagant claims which he makes on behalf of the Democratic legislative achievement.” Heckscher thinks that he has an answer to “Croly’s question: “Wilson’s apparent belief that progressivism had been fulfilled...was at odds with his deeper convictions.” However, Wilson the politician knew just what the traffic would bear and was quite content to settle for it.

On the foreign policy front Wilson pursued a similar strategy, his efforts to force Mexico to “elect good men” notwithstanding. Heckscher is not about to dismiss entirely the idealism that was a part of Woodrow



Wilson's nature, but he is insistent that that idealism was almost always tempered by political skill and historical knowledge. It is true that foreign policy was totally ignored in Wilson's first inaugural address. It is also true that his self-described "one track mind" focused primarily on domestic issues during the first months of his administration. And it is finally true that Wilson thought it would be a "supreme irony" if his presidency was engulfed by foreign policy.

Engulfed it became, but Heckscher argues that Wilson was "not as unprepared ... as has often been supposed." For years Professor Wilson had examined European forms of government and had pondered the "American march toward imperialism." For months President-elect and President Wilson had wondered about the fate of the previous graduate of Princeton University to occupy the White House. Woodrow Wilson, like James Madison before him, took pride in his scholarly erudition. But President Woodrow Wilson, unlike James Madison, was determined that he would never be drawn into war.

After August, 1914, Heckscher pursues Wilson's pursuit of peace, whether he was closeted in the White House with his thoughts and his typewriter, or at large on the golf course, out for a Sunday drive, or before a post-Lusitania crisis audience which learned that there was "such a thing as a man being too proud to fight." Clearly, Woodrow Wilson was not anxious to take his country into the maelstrom that was World War I. Neither were his countrymen anxious to be so led. To accomplish this peaceful end, Wilson had to steer between the Allied and Central powers and among any number of feuding advisers, from his first secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, who was too ready to sacrifice American interests, to his second secretary of state, Robert Lansing, who was too determined to join the allies on the field of battle.

Only Wilson, it seems, knew just when to urge peace, or to plot mediation, or to press the belligerents, or to begin the process of American mobilization. In fact, it was the "preparedness" issue that led Wilson to depart from his presidential practice of simultaneously listening to the people and remaining aloof from them. Until the end of 1915 and the decision to make the case for increased defense expenditures Wilson's

presidency had been "at least as taciturn as Cleveland's." Not so from that point on...until his fateful collapse in the midst of the fight for the treaty and the league.

These nearly four years of the Wilson administration mark the slow birth, the temporary triumph and the final defeat of Wilsonian idealism. They also call into question Heckscher's portrait of a President Woodrow Wilson who was instinctively reluctant to waste personal energy or invest political capital. Gone was the Wilson who would wait for a national consensus to emerge. But gone as well were "his more attractive qualities—modesty and humor, courtesy under stress." Unhappily in Heckscher's view, this "human" side of Wilson's personality was never fully revealed to the American people. Unhappily for Wilson and those around him, it disappeared from private view as the question of peace or war intensified.

Gone also was Wilson the conciliator. In his place stood Wilson the oracle, Wilson the idealist, and Wilson the victim of his enemies' treachery.

Heckscher, in fact, discovers many Wilsons, but never does he come upon a hypocritical Wilson. In 1916 Wilson ran for re-election as the peace candidate. Even the departed Bryan "join[ed] with the American people in thanking God that we have a president who does not want this nation plunged into this war." Did God—or the president—deserve such thanks? Surely not the latter, Heckscher concludes, for he did little more than "pick up the antiwar theme of the (Democratic) convention and use it with devastating effectiveness."

Wilson proceeded to use his victory to attempt once more to stop what was to him an essentially European civil war in which both sides "professed allegiance to the same ultimate goals." The Allies were angered by Wilson's moral equation, but Heckscher is not. Whether offering mediation or delivering his "peace without victory" speech, Wilson was a representative of the "noblest tradition of western liberalism" at a time of rampant "militarism" throughout the western world.

And how did the German government respond to these overtures? With an act of premeditated betrayal by announcing the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Wilson suffered a "profound shock," but neither he nor the American people were as yet ready for war.

Two months would pass before Wilson took the final "tragic" step. "Tragic" was Wilson's word, and by it he meant not just the loss of life, but the inevitable embrace of evil means to achieve what had always been his goal, namely the redemption of corrupt Europe. What he thought had been obtainable by peaceful example was now to be accomplished by force of arms.

"Tragic" might also be Heckscher's word to describe Woodrow Wilson's public life between the spring of 1917 and the fall of 1919, "tragic" not solely because of Wilson's debilitating stroke, but also because of his failure to achieve his larger vision. It is Heckscher's contention that this failure was both preventable and lamentable.

He attributes Wilson's defeats to a series of errors in political judgment, rather than to a flawed—or inevitably interventionist—Wilsonian vision. Long reluctant to enter the war, Wilson also proved hesitant to demand wartime conformity at home or to eliminate Bolshevism in Russia. If there was hysteria on the homefront, it was beyond the president's power to conjure up or to control. And if Leninism was at odds with Wilsonianism, the president preferred more watchful waiting to military action, because he wanted the Russian people to have an opportunity to work out their own political destiny. To Wilson, Bolshevism was both an expression of Russian national will and a "protest against the way in which the world has worked." Wilson, of course, did ultimately sign on with the comic opera that was the allied intervention in the Russian civil war. Heckscher, however, sees this as a minor aberration rather than a symptom of the real Woodrow Wilson at his evil worst.

Finally, Heckscher is convinced that had Wilson not suffered his crippling stroke there would have been no Palmer raids and no American Red Scare. Having denied a politically powerful and apparently healthy Woodrow Wilson responsibility for the anti-Hun excesses, Heckscher presumes that a politically weakened but physically able Woodrow Wilson would have blunted its anti-red counterpart.

But was Wilson as benign—or as powerful—as Heckscher suggests? Not when the peace settlement was at stake. Heckscher regrets Wilson's "almost inevitable" decision to go to Paris, but surmises that Wilson had an

inkling as to what was in store for him: "As martyrs before him had gone to their martyrdom, Woodrow Wilson went half-knowingly, not entirely cheerless, and ready to put up a good fight." Furthermore, this martyr went into the lion's den "an essentially modest man," uninterested in fighting alone and ready to make common cause with and left-liberals everywhere. In fact, in the early stages of the conference Wilson gave no hint of playing the martyr at all, but operated as a "model of open-minded, if determined, rationalism."

The rational approach was already at the work in the collectivity of the Inquiry, a stable of American experts on whom the "open-minded" Wilson "relied heavily." ("Show me the right and I will fight for it.") Wilson was also prepared to fall back on his well-tested skills as a persuader and negotiator. It was almost as though the old Woodrow Wilson had been born anew.

Far from being overcome by—or misreading the adulation of—the European masses, Wilson understood the French need for security and worked to form a "sincere friendship" with French Premier Georges Clemenceau. At the same time, Wilson saw the League of Nations as a "vital thing—not merely a formal thing." In his view the League was not to be restricted to enforcing the treaty. And in Heckscher's view Wilson's "overall conviction of the need for the League was certainly correct"—and not necessarily inimical to either American or French national interests.

In fact, Wilson's self-imposed task in the first phase of the conference was to imbed the League in the Treaty. That achieved, he returned to the United States in early March. But any initial success that Wilson enjoyed was not to be repeated when the conference reconvened in April.

Why? In Wilson's occasionally paranoid mind the fault lay with Colonel House, who "ha(d) given away everything (Wilson) had won before (he) left Paris." Here was Wilson betrayed yet again—and by no less than another trusted ally whom the president loved like a brother. In truth, Wilson's conference colleagues used the League to exact concessions, concessions Wilson presumed would be corrected by a "vital" League. But for the time being Wilson was at the mercy of the "extremism of French

claims,” claims which Heckscher subsequently characterized as “not unreasonable.” In any event, the French occupation of the left bank of the Rhine and of the Saar Basin were not the result of any machination on the part of Colonel House, but of the process of the negotiations themselves. If anything, House could be accused of being unwilling to placate the new Mrs. Wilson who both distrusted and despised him.

But Edith Bolling Galt Wilson was not the only member of the Wilson household who held others in disdain in the spring of 1919. For his part, the president despised and disdained both Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and the entire Republican majority of the United States Senate. According to Heckscher, such feelings left Wilson “in no mood” to address the Congress upon his return to Washington following the pause in the Paris talks. All bitterness aside, Heckscher argues that Wilson erred significantly in refusing to take this “dramatic step to assert national leadership.” And yet by not asserting presidential power Wilson was really doing no more and no less than Heckscher assures us had long been typical of this politically successful presidency. It was Theodore Roosevelt who climbed into the bully pulpit with little urging; Woodrow Wilson, on the other hand, generally preferred a more restrained approach, no matter his frame of mind. Besides, hadn’t Professor Wilson himself asserted in *Constitutional Government* of the United States that the president ought to defer to the collective judgment of the senate when the issue at hand was treaty ratification?

Presumably, President Wilson had forgotten what Professor Wilson had written. Political errors or memory lapses aside, Woodrow Wilson in the summer of 1919 was not yet a man devoured by paranoia or driven by a martyr complex. At least August Heckscher’s Woodrow Wilson was not such a man: “With a stubborn faith in the ultimate good sense of the people, Woodrow Wilson managed to avoid depression or despair...(Instead) he remained detached and integrated, hopeful but not quite fooled, either by himself or by others.”

But as of mid-1919 President Wilson was a once adept politician who had lost a step or two. An earlier Wilson might have realized that the American infatuation with the idea of the League of Nations had cooled. An earlier Wilson would surely have come to terms with the force and depth of

the "partisan passions" arrayed against him. And an earlier Woodrow Wilson, the "shrewd and practical" Woodrow Wilson, no doubt would have forged a working coalition to secure ratification of the treaty in some acceptable form. But the Woodrow Wilson of the summer of 1919 was a "depleted man." It was this Wilson who made one of the "most fateful decisions" of his political career, and a decision which Heckscher argues was out of character for him, namely the decision to take his case for the Treaty and the League directly to the American people.

According to Heckscher, Wilson's "nature" as a political leader was to stand on principle, but to "take circumstances into due account" when applying his principles to political reality. As Lodge added reservation upon reservation Wilson had to have been aware that the Treaty would not pass the Senate without some changes. Instead of accepting—and modifying—the Lodge agenda, Wilson refused to "take circumstances into due account." Instead of dealing with the Senate he took to the hustings. The result was political defeat and a personal breakdown. "I don't seem to realize it," the president told his White House physician, "but I seem to have gone to pieces." That much at least he did come to realize. The loss of the treaty, however, he refused to accept.

Isolated in battle, Woodrow Wilson grew even more remote in the remaining months of his suddenly depleted presidency. Like Cleveland before him and Carter after him, Wilson left the White House a politically broken man. Though it was not necessarily his intention to do so, Heckscher has tried valiantly to separate his subject from the failures of these two Democrats, who also rose to the presidency almost without warning, who also preferred to stand apart from their party at critical junctures, and who met failure in Washington partly because of their refusal to play Washingtonian games.

For better or for worse, Woodrow Wilson was an oracle—and an idealist—before he was a politician. Heckscher would have it the other way around, but to minimize his idealism is to deny the reality of the man. Wilson himself said it best during his fight to keep the United States out of World War I: "I know I am an idealist, because I am an American and America is the only idealistic nation in the world."

In a sense, August Heckscher has written a biography of Woodrow Wilson that is very much in keeping with America's diminished view of itself at the end of the twentieth century. The Cold War has ended and much of the world seems to be asking to be made safe for democracy. And yet America shrinks from its historic role. Providential is the opportunity, but prudential is the operative word.

It may be ironic—or more likely just a quirk of history—that George Bush was born the year that Woodrow Wilson died. A product of the Good War and the American Century, Bush's political life and professional resume have been ample preparation for a Wilsonian presidency. Every internationalist gene in his body ought to command this president in the direction of a rejuvenated Wilsonianism. Instead, we have the New World Order which places a premium on stability and leader-to-leader confidentiality. As Wilson apparently sympathized with the security needs of France, so Bush claims to understand the very different security needs of the current Chinese gerontocracy.

Nowhere in the George Bush order of things is there room for leadership on the order of a Woodrow Wilson before August Heckscher got hold of him. To be blunt, Heckscher has given us Woodrow Wilson as a considerably more articulate and slightly more principled George Bush, instead of the Woodrow Wilson who was never bedeviled by the charge that he lacked a "vision thing."

The first Democratic president since Grover Cleveland may have been a blip on the political screen of Republican dominance in the White House, but he caused a mighty stir during his eight years in power. George Bush has had a stir fall into his lap, but he seems to have little clue as to what to do with it. The president as steward, he seems to want four more years in office.

Near the end of his second term Woodrow Wilson canvassed the country to preach to Americans that the time had come to join the community of nations. Throughout his presidency George Bush has circled and re-circled the globe in search of his elusive stability and, oh yes, in search of "jobs, jobs, and jobs" for Americans. The former believed that America had something to offer the world; the latter behaves as though the

world owes Americans a living. For George Bush, this may be a politically prudent course to follow, but it is not exactly what Woodrow Wilson had in mind.