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**James Axtell: The Making of Princeton University**

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CHAPTER ONE



*The Dream Realized*

In the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON

WHEN Woodrow Wilson resigned the Princeton presidency in 1910, he was discouraged and emotionally bruised. His failure to determine the location and character of the nascent graduate school and his inability to win support for building residential colleges, or “quads,” for all of the college’s classes, which he hoped would “democratize” if not eliminate the socially restrictive upperclass eating clubs, had wounded him deeply. A recent cerebrovascular incident that had hardened the lines of his headstrong personality did nothing to prevent or repair the damage. Four years later in the White House, he still had nightmares about the troubles that drove him from the institution he had attended as an undergraduate, loved as a professor, and nurtured as president.<sup>1</sup>

His disappointment was all the keener for having envisioned a brilliant future for Princeton and having enjoyed a string of early successes in realizing that vision. At its sesquicentennial celebration in 1896, the College of New Jersey had officially renamed itself a university. But Wilson, the designated faculty speaker, had been

<sup>1</sup> Edwin A. Weinstein, *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography* (Princeton, 1981), chaps. 10, 12; John M. Mulder, *Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation* (Princeton, 1978), chap. 8. On December 12, 1913, Colonel Edward House noted in his diary that Wilson had not slept well the previous night. “He had nightmares . . . he thought he was seeing some of his Princeton enemies. Those terrible days have sunk deep into his soul and he will carry their marks to his grave” (*PWW*, 29:33–34).

scarcely any readier to recognize the larger responsibilities or opportunities of university status than had his faculty colleagues or the stand-pat president, Francis Landey Patton.<sup>2</sup> Yet within a year Wilson had sketched plans for a thorough reform. Six years later, as soon as he became president, he set about resolutely—as he did most things—to make Princeton the best university in the country. In a few short years he reorganized the administration, added trusted deans, and launched major fundraising and public relations campaigns among the alumni. He accelerated the rebuilding of the campus in “Collegiate Gothic” to signal the university’s medieval, and particularly English, heritage. He organized the faculty into departments and divisions, recruited a number of senior “stars,” hired fifty new “preceptors” to lead small-group discussions and encourage independent reading among the students, and expected all faculty to be scholars as well as teachers. He raised admission and academic standards, revamped the curriculum to balance breadth and depth and to allow only “assisted election” of upperclass courses, and sought in general to subordinate the extracurricular “sideshows” that were smothering “the spirit of learning.”<sup>3</sup>

The university Wilson helped fashion during his eight-year tenure strove to be not only *excellent*—that clichéd goal of all colleges and universities—but *distinctive*. No other American university was quite like it, as educator-journalist Edwin Slosson found when he visited and described fourteen *Great American Universities* in 1909–1910. “Here is a university,” wrote the Chicago Ph.D., “that knows what

<sup>2</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Princeton in the Nation’s Service” (Oct. 21, 1896), *PWW*, 10:11–31; Theodore J. Ziolkowski, “Princeton in *Whose* Service?” *PAW*, Jan. 23, 1991, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Stockton Axson, “*Brother Woodrow*”: *A Memoir of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton, 1993), 115; Richard J. Frankie, “Woodrow Wilson: Blueprint for Radical Change,” *Journal of Education* [Boston University] 153:2 (Dec. 1970):16–25; Robert J. Taggart, “Woodrow Wilson and Curriculum Reform,” *New Jersey History* 93:3–4 (Autumn–Winter 1975):99–114; Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, “Woodrow Wilson and His Program at Princeton,” in Raymond F. Pisney, ed., *Woodrow Wilson in Retrospect* (Verona, Va., 1978), 74–81; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), chap. 7. For Wilson’s famous metaphor of “sideshows,” see *PWW*, 19:57, 227, 344–45; on “the spirit of learning,” see *PWW*, 14:299, 317; 16:50; 18:56–57, 464, 501; 19:283, 297.

it wants and is trying to get it,” rather than drifting or slavishly imitating its larger rivals. Yet its originality consisted not in wild, untried novelties but “chiefly in going ahead and doing what others have always said ought to be done.” The advent of preceptors, the rationalization of the curriculum, the plan for the “social coordination” of the students in Gothic quads, and the raising of academic standards were all meant to shift “the center of gravity of student life” and to transform Princeton from “one of the easiest places to get into” to “one of the hardest . . . to remain in.”<sup>4</sup>

Although Wilson enjoyed considerable success in his first four years, he could not make Princeton into a first-class university as fast or in all the ways he might have liked. Slosson recognized this near the end of Wilson’s tenure when he admitted that Princeton was “not among the fourteen foremost universities of the United States if we take as the criterion age, size, wealth, cosmopolitanism, publications, graduate students, professional courses, or public services.” Not only was it the second smallest of the fourteen, with the second smallest income (only Wilson’s graduate alma mater Johns Hopkins was smaller), it had only forty-eight graduate students (mostly in engineering); no women or blacks; few Jews or foreign students; a largely regional clientele; a cramped, undersized art museum; a five-year-old university press that had yet to publish any books; a small library; and a lot of strenuous athletes. For all of Wilson’s efforts, Princeton was “still a college in spirit.” But, Slosson predicted, “if it is not a university now, it is going to become one in the fullest sense of the word.”<sup>5</sup>

A long century after Wilson assumed the presidency and set off on his path of reform seems a good time to ask, not if Princeton has become a real university—we know that it has—but how he might, from his perch in Presbyterian heaven, regard it through the pincenez of his own time, goals, and even disappointments. Would Wil-

<sup>4</sup> Edwin E. Slosson, *Great American Universities* (New York, 1910), 75, 76, 77; interview with Arthur S. Link, in William McCleery, *Conversations on the Character of Princeton* (Princeton, 1986, 1990), 77; Axson, “Brother Woodrow,” 123; George McLean Harper, “A Happy Family,” in William Starr Myers, ed., *Woodrow Wilson: Some Princeton Memories* (Princeton, 1946), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Slosson, *Great American Universities*, 98, 101, 104–5.

son, its intellectual architect, recognize the mature university as a faithful realization of his original design or as a random, even alien, product of American academic evolution?

We don't have to guess at the answer because Wilson's thoughts and values have been thoroughly documented in three extraordinary collections. The first and most indispensable is Arthur Link's sixty-nine-volume *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, published appropriately by the Princeton University Press between 1966 and 1994. The second and third troves are transcribed interviews with and written reminiscences from most of those who knew Wilson, collected by two of his biographers. Ray Stannard Baker used his interviews and memoirs from the 1920s to write the eight-volume *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, the second volume of which is devoted to the Princeton years, 1890–1910.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Henry Wilkinson Bragdon interviewed many of the same people and others for his *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years*.<sup>7</sup> Together these sources greatly reduce the need to speculate about Wilson's likely response to his alma mater a century later.

Several of the Princeton colleagues who knew Wilson best suggest that he would have had little difficulty recognizing his handiwork in the new university and would have been comfortable with most—though by no means all—of its features. Henry Fine, dean of the faculty and Wilson's major supporter, told Baker in 1925 that “Wilson *made* Princeton. . . . When he started, Princeton was an unprogressive college—of ancient and honorable tradition, but unprogressive. When he went out it was one of the strongest universities in the country. . . . It has progressed ever since along lines laid down by Mr. Wilson.” Seventeen years later, Professor of English Thomas Marc Parrott '88 still maintained that “all the developments since, except the Graduate College, have been based upon foundations

<sup>6</sup> Garden City, N.Y., 1927–1939.

<sup>7</sup> Cambridge, Mass., 1967. Bragdon's useful book must be used with caution because of its numerous factual errors. See the critical review by Arthur Link in the *New England Quarterly* 41:1 (Mar. 1968):118–21, which is reprinted in *PAW*, May 7, 1968, 11, 15.

Wilson laid.”<sup>8</sup> With due allowance for the impress of social and academic evolution and a quartet of strong new presidents, can the same be said today, and if so, would Wilson acknowledge or take pride in the continuities?

Perhaps the first thing Wilson would notice about the new university is its size and its newer architecture. Spreading over more than six hundred acres in an exurban setting no longer surrounded by working farms and fields, the campus (a word coined at eighteenth-century Princeton) has almost grown to incorporate the Graduate College, initially—to Wilson’s chagrin—isolated above the Springdale golf course and far removed from Nassau Hall, the original college building and now the administrative headquarters.<sup>9</sup> But Wilson was not put off by size alone as long as the university remained on a human scale, fostering “close and personal contact” between faculty and students, and sought the highest quality in all it did. In 1903 he had warned an alumni group in Philadelphia that “the danger to Princeton is the danger of a big, numerically big, university.” But by 1910 he boasted to their Maryland counterparts that “almost unobserved, a little Princeton has given place to a big Princeton,” in size as well as influence.<sup>10</sup> In just eight years, he had built eight new buildings and, under the guidance of supervising architect Ralph Adams Cram, had not hesitated to raze or move others to bring harmony to the campus and to open sightlines through it.

With some prominent exceptions, the buildings on the new campus probably would please him as well. Since Cram’s master plan ensured that Wilson’s favorite Collegiate Gothic continued to be used in campus buildings until the late 1940s, the former president could turn his discerning eye on the additions in newer styles. Wil-

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Henry B. Fine, June 18, 1925, Baker Papers, container 105, reel 74; Bragdon interview with Thomas Marc Parrott, Sept. 15, 1942, WWC, box 63, folder 25.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Lyttleton Savage, *Nassau Hall, 1756–1956* (Princeton, 1956); Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion* (Princeton, 1978), 328–33; William K. Selden, *Nassau Hall, Princeton University’s National Historic Landmark* (Princeton, 1995); Sean Wilentz, “Nassau Hall, Princeton, New Jersey,” in William E. Leuchtenburg, ed., *American Places: Encounters with History: A Celebration of Sheldon Meyer* (New York, 2000), 311–23.

<sup>10</sup> *PWW*, 14:410 (Apr. 15, 1903); 20: 233 (Mar. 11, 1910).

son was no tyro—he knew what he liked. According to Cram and other experts, he had “instinctively a fine sense of proportion and a keen appreciation for good architecture.” While he had no technical knowledge, “his appreciation of its quality and importance was unusual in its degree.” And he always insisted that “every building,” even science labs, “should be beautiful.”<sup>11</sup>

So Wilson probably would appreciate the witty, colorful, and curve-blending functionalism of postmodern Princeton, particularly Robert Venturi’s Thomas molecular lab (1986) and Wu Hall (1983) and the Computer Science building (1989), which make relaxed bows to the university’s architectural traditions. Far fewer would be his favorites among the self-consciously “original” modernist additions between 1950 and 1980. No more than most Princetonians and critics would he relish the relentless linearity, monotonous regularity, and boxy minimalism of the Engineering Quad (1962), the School of Architecture (1963), and Spelman Halls (1973). More to his liking might be Minoru Yamasaki’s gleaming and graceful Robertson Hall (1965)—not least because it is home to the school that bears his name—and the imposing, honey-brown, ten-story tower of Fine Hall, named for his indispensable dean. Frank Gehry’s flamboyant new science library (2007) would no doubt amaze and appall him at the same time, while Demetri Porphyrios’s subtle Gothic rendering of Whitman College (2007) would win instant approval.<sup>12</sup>

More disturbing to Wilson would be not the size of the student body but its composition. Compared to its major rivals, Princeton today is still the smallest institution; although the size of the student body has increased, a corresponding growth of the faculty, coupled with the continuity of the precepts and the addition of the senior

<sup>11</sup> Trustee Henry B. Thompson to Baker, Feb. 27, 1927, Baker Papers, container 116, reel 83; Cram to Baker, Oct. 7, 1926, Baker Papers, container 103, reel 73; Bragdon interview with Cram, May 8, 1940, WWC, box 62, folder 23, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Catesby Leigh, “Must the Minimum Be the Maximum? A Critical Look at Campus Architecture, and a Modest Proposal for a Return to Traditional Styles,” *PAW*, May 19, 1999, 18–27; Ben Kessler, “Shaping the Campus,” *PAW*, May 16, 2001, 24–31; Leigh, “Classic Redefined,” *PAW*, Oct. 9, 2002, 12–17; Fred Bernstein, “One Campus, Different Faces,” *PAW*, Dec. 18, 2002, 10–14; Raymond P. Rhinehart, *The Campus Guide: Princeton University* (New York, 1999), 64–65, 68–72, 91–94, 101–3, 109–11, 117–19, 122–24.



FIGURE 2. Gordon Wu Hall was built in 1983 as the social area and dining hall for Butler College (1980). Its eclectic and graceful postmodern lines were designed by Robert Venturi '47. The building was underwritten by Hong Kong entrepreneur Gordon Wu '58. It is the only building on campus identified by Chinese characters.

thesis, ensures that “close and personal contact” remain “the greatest good” in a Princeton education.<sup>13</sup> But the conspicuous presence of women, blacks, and international students would, from the perspective of 1910, earn his alarmed disapproval.

As a socially conservative Southerner who had presided over an institution long regarded as the most southern of the northern schools (or vice versa), Wilson would find the presence of several hundred black students particularly disconcerting because he had sedulously discouraged their application in his day. In 1904 he put off one inquiry by noting that “while there is nothing in the law of the University to prevent a negro’s entering, the whole temper and tradition of the place are such that no negro has ever applied for

<sup>13</sup> *PWW*, 14:410 (Apr. 15, 1903).

admission.” His phrasing was deliberate because the previous year a popular novel had drawn attention to the issue by speaking of the title character’s ancestor as one “who was responsible for that clause in Princeton’s charter which, unless altered, would forever prevent negroes from graduating from that famous university, and which has made it such a favourite for Southern gentlemen.” One of Wilson’s classmates who had read the book had to be assured that “the Charter contains no reference to negroes.”<sup>14</sup>

Hiding behind the social “temper and tradition of the place” allowed Wilson and Princeton to discriminate against all sorts of potential candidates. In introducing the son of a close Jewish friend, another classmate was confident that “old Doctor Tommy Wilson” would never allow any boy to be “discriminated against because of his race, color, belief or otherwise.”<sup>15</sup> Apparently he didn’t know the president very well. Although Wilson would eventually appoint the first Jew and the first Catholic to the faculty, he did nothing to halt the unsubtle blackballing of Jewish students from the eating clubs and continued actively to discourage black applicants. In 1909 G. McArthur Sullivan, a student at Virginia Theological Seminary and College, a black Baptist institution in Lynchburg, wrote Wilson, “I want so much to come to your School at Princeton. I am a poor Southern colored man from South Carolina, but I believe I can make my way if I am permitted to come.” Wilson’s draft reply for his secretary read: “Regret to say that it is altogether inadvisable for a colored man to enter Princeton . . . strongly recommend his securing education in a Southern institution perhaps completing it with a

<sup>14</sup> *PWW*, 14:380 (Feb. 27, 1903); 15:462 (Sept. 2, 1904).

<sup>15</sup> *PWW*, 15:471 (Sept. 16, 1904). For Princeton’s long history of discrimination against Jews and blacks, see Slosson, *Great American Universities*, 104–5; Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900–1970* (Westport, Conn., 1980); Synnott, “Anti-Semitism and American Universities: Did Quotas Follow the Jews?” in David A. Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), 233–71; Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston, 2005). For scathing indictments of the “snobbish” social scene by two Jewish alumni, see Leon M. Levy to Wilson, c. June 25, 1907, *PWW*, 17:222–24, and Harold Zeiss to Wilson, June 27, 1907, *PWW*, 17:233–34.

course at the Princeton Theol. Sem., which is under entirely separate control from the University.” Perhaps more sensitive to the man’s feelings than his boss, the secretary avoided any reference to the applicant’s color and helpfully advised, “If you wish to attend a Northern institution I would suggest that you correspond with the authorities of Harvard, Dartmouth, or Brown; the last named being, as you undoubtedly know, a Baptist Institution.” But he also neglected to mention the local possibility, knowing—as Wilson also knew—that a few blacks had taken graduate courses at Princeton since President McCosh’s time while enrolled at the Princeton seminary.<sup>16</sup>

Wilson would be hardly more accepting of Princeton’s nonwhite students from abroad. Compared to the literal handful of foreign students from outside Britain and Canada in his own day, the twelve hundred students from around the globe, particularly India and China, would stagger him, for they were barely on his social radar. His handling of an offer to send a number of Chinese students to Princeton on government funds resulting from the Boxer Rebellion indemnity show him once again playing the social “temper” card. To one of his trustees he gave two reasons for declining the offer. One was that “most of the Chinese students come in search of engineering and professional courses, which,” he said, “we cannot give them” (although the John C. Green School of Science offered degrees in both civil and electrical engineering). The second excuse Wilson obviously thought the more compelling. “I fear,” he said, “. . . that our present social organization at Princeton would be sure to result in making any Chinese students . . . feel like outsiders, . . . set apart for some reason of race or caste which would render them most uncomfortable. There is no door that I can see,” he admitted, “by which they could really enter our university life at all, and to

<sup>16</sup> *PWW*, 15:462n2; 19:529 (Nov. 20, 1909), 550 (c. Dec. 3, 1909), 557–58 (Dec. 6, 1909). See also Bill Paul, “Woodrow Wilson and Affirmative Action,” *PAW*, Nov. 27, 1996, 47–48; Jan. 22, 1997, 2 (letter). For two examples of Princeton’s continued problems with race, see Lawrence Otis Graham, *Member of the Club: Reflections on Life in a Racially Polarized World* (New York, 1995), chap. 9, “The Underside of Paradise: Being Black at Princeton,” and Melvin McCray ’74 and Calvin Norman ’77, producers, *Looking Back: Reflections of Black Princeton Alumni* (Princeton: video produced for the 250th Anniversary, 1996).

have them come and form a group apart would certainly be most undesirable.” During his own presidency Wilson was ambitious in wishing Princeton to “draw its students from all over the *nation*.” He was simply not ready to enlist the university “in the Service of *All Nations*” as well.<sup>17</sup>

The final group of students whose presence Wilson would regret constitutes nearly half the student population today. Although he was happily married to a highly intelligent, artistically talented, and well-read woman and doted on three independent and able daughters, he simply was “not at all in sympathy with co-education.” Indeed, although he taught for two years at the new women’s college at Bryn Mawr and sent all three daughters to women’s colleges, he may have been less than keen on higher education for the opposite sex in general. Lucy Salmon, one of his former graduate students at Bryn Mawr, was “quite sure that he never whole-heartedly believed in college education for women.” With singular lack of tact, he once told her that “a woman who had married an intellectual, educated man”—as his wife Ellen had—“was often better educated than a woman who had had college training.”<sup>18</sup> When he spoke at the graduation of his eldest daughter, Jessie, a Phi Beta Kappa from the Women’s College of Baltimore (later Goucher College) in 1908, it was fully in character that he referred to “man” and “men” throughout and said not a word about women or their educational needs, capacities, or accomplishments. Unfortunately, he seems not to have evolved far from the young suitor who had once opined that “the question of higher education for women is certain to be settled in the affirmative . . . whether my sympathy be enlisted or not.”<sup>19</sup>

Wilson’s real objection was less to college for women than to college for men and women together. His objections were essentially

<sup>17</sup> *PWW*, 14:299 (Dec. 19, 1902; my emphases); 19:120–21 (Mar. 26, 1909).

<sup>18</sup> *PWW*, 7:616 (May 4, 1892); Louise Fargo Brown, *Apostle of Democracy: The Life of Lucy Maynard Salmon* (New York, 1943), 102. Professor Salmon (History, Vassar College) was also critical of Wilson’s attitudes toward women in two letters to Baker dated Jan. 6 and 15, 1926: Baker Papers, container 115, reel 82. For Wilson’s unhappy stint at Bryn Mawr, see Bragdon, *WW: Academic Years*, chap. 8; Mulder, *WW: Years of Preparation*, chap. 4; Arthur P. Dudden, “Woodrow Wilson at Bryn Mawr College,” *Bryn Mawr [Alumnae Bulletin]* 26 (1955):6–7, 32–33.

<sup>19</sup> *PWW*, 3:499 (Nov. 30, 1884); 18:318–20 (June 4, 1908).

social. While he may have been convinced that women were “intellectually different from men” (perhaps mostly because the disenfranchised women of Bryn Mawr did not seem to share his intense interest in the history and principles of politics), he was more worried that coeducation would ruin something precious and mysterious about relations between the sexes. There was a good deal of Southern romanticism in his position, as well as some frank self-recognition. Now that “the first, experimental stage of college training for women” had passed, he worried as early as 1892, the driven, devoted pioneers were being replaced by women who go to college “of course, as young men have long done,” not for the “missionary adventure” but for “the contacts, experiences, routine, enjoyment, and incidental profit of college life.” In this new “period of danger,” these “easy going and sociable” young women were prey to the lustful attentions of the male “scapegraces” in their midst. “It must be the riotous elements in my own blood,” the passionate professor confessed to his wife, “that make me fear so keenly what even the most honorable young fellows might be tempted by mere beauty to do, where there is no restraint.” “Such an exquisite flower is safest for a long time—during all the period of immaturity,” he concluded, perhaps with his daughters in mind, “—in seclusion.” One can only imagine how many of the more than three thousand female Tigers today share Wilson’s feeling that coeducation is “demoralizing” and “fatal to the standards of delicacy” between men and women.<sup>20</sup>

If Wilson could survive the shock of seeing the polychromatic student population on parade, he might take some comfort from improvements in Princeton’s warped “social organization” and in the balance of students’ social and academic lives, despite the exponential growth of extracurricular “sideshows” to tickle every fancy. Given the historic increase in student qualifications, selectivity of admissions, and curricular demands from a hard-driving faculty of scholar-teachers, he would have less cause to worry that the extracur-

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Apostle of Democracy*, 101; *PWW*, 7:444 (Feb. 21, 1892), 467 (Mar. 10, 1892); 8:583–84 (May 29, 1894). See also Virginia Kays Creesy, “Woodrow Wilson and the ‘Demure Damsels,’” *PAW*, Mar. 4, 1975, 8; Apr. 29, 1975, 5 (letter); Judith Kaplan, “Woodrow Wilson and Women: The Formative Influences on Wilson’s Attitudes toward Women,” *New Jersey History* 104:1–2 (Spring–Summer 1986):23–35.

riculum constitutes for most students “absorbing occupations” rather than wholesome “diversions” from the strain of hard, intellectual work.<sup>21</sup> Yet two causes of legitimate concern remain: athletics and the eating clubs.

Wilson did not worry about the value of sports as such. He thought they were “in themselves wholesome,” a “safety-valve for animal spirits” and teachers of fair play. Although he didn’t play much himself, he was an ardent and often vocal fan of Princeton football and baseball, attending gridiron practices with half the student body and umpiring faculty baseball games. But as the head cheerleader for an intellectual awakening on campus, he did want to see sports subordinated to learning and the life of the mind.<sup>22</sup> To make his point, he even proposed to the alumni that honors students and members of Phi Beta Kappa “ought to wear the University P” since they were “the best players on our scholarship team.” Wisely, he hastened to add that he wasn’t trying to discredit the sports teams, only to “give the scholar as good a standing as the athlete.”<sup>23</sup>

In his own day Wilson did not succeed in preventing the few sports that were played from being “absorbing occupations,” for the players at least, if not for the student fans. Nor would he have seen much change in the sports scene today, except that so many students, male and female, play their own sports that student attendance at even the high-profile (male) sporting events is noticeably reduced and replaced, if at all, by alumni, parents, and local fans. He would regret that intercollegiate sports have become so specialized and intense that serious training often begins in grade school and is for many youngsters a year-round regimen of training and competition. Except in a few unusual sports such as fencing, rowing, and water polo, student-athletes are recruited by equally specialized coaching staffs to fill specific positions on teams; “walk-ons” and multiple-sport players are increasingly uncommon. The existence of the Ivy

<sup>21</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “My Ideal of the True University” (July 6, 1909), *PWW*, 19:300; Wilson, “What Is a College For?” (Aug. 18, 1909), *PWW*, 19:345.

<sup>22</sup> *PWW*, 8:450 (Feb. 2, 1894); 19:300, 345.

<sup>23</sup> *PWW*, 15:284; Woodrow Wilson, “The Revision of the Courses of Study” (June 14, 1904), *PWW*, 15:382–83; Wilson, “The Training of Intellect” (Mar. 18, 1908), *PWW*, 18:54.

League and the absence of athletic scholarships preserves some semblance of amateurism, but intercollegiate sports at modern Princeton have become as professionalized in their own way as many of the unregulated sports of Wilson's day.<sup>24</sup>

A bigger concern Wilson would share with one of his presidential successors, William G. Bowen, whose two longitudinal studies of elite college athletes between 1951 and 1998 for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (of which he was president) discovered alarming patterns of academic underperformance among Princeton and other Ivy-recruited athletes, male and, increasingly, female. On average, they had lower SAT scores and high school grades than their classmates; they underperformed in college, even worse than their grades and SATs predicted they would; they were more likely to rank in the bottom third of the class; they tended to socialize largely with other athletes, especially teammates; they participated in fewer extracurricular and cultural activities than other students; they majored in a narrow range of preprofessional social sciences; they were more conservative in their attitudes and values than their classmates; and when they graduated, they expressed less confidence in their intellectual abilities.<sup>25</sup> None of these findings would please Wilson, the national academic and athletic reformer.

<sup>24</sup> Craig Lambert, "The Professionalization of Ivy League Sports," *Harvard Magazine*, Sept.–Oct. 1997, 36–49, 96–98; James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, 2001), chaps. 2, 6; "The Culture and Value of Sports: A Roundtable Discussion," *PAW Online*, May 16, 2001 ([http://www.princeton.edu/~paw/features/features\\_27.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~paw/features/features_27.html)); Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, 2003); Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York, 1988); John M. Murrin, "Rites of Dominion: Princeton, the Big Three, and the Rise of Intercollegiate Athletics," *PULC* 62:2 (Winter 2001):161–206; John Sayle Watterson, "Political Football: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and the Gridiron Reform Movement," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25:3 (Summer 1995):555–64; Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Nancy E. Cantor and Deborah A. Prentice, "The Life of the Modern-Day Student-Athlete: Opportunities Won and Lost," paper delivered at the Princeton Conference on Higher Education, Mar. 21, 1996 (based on the Mellon "College and Beyond" data for Princeton, Columbia, and Amherst); Shulman and Bowen, *The Game of Life* (based on the Mellon data for thirty-two institutions, including four Ivies: Penn, Columbia, Yale, and Princeton); Bowen and Levin, *Reclaiming the Game* (based on the Mellon data for thirty-three institutions, including all eight Ivies).

Another hangover from Wilson's day is the role of the eating clubs on Prospect Avenue, "The Street," but it has shown some improvement. The clubs began to proliferate in the 1890s and 1900s because the university failed to provide sufficient dining facilities for upper-classmen. As more sons of the Gilded Age flocked to the university with the "country club" reputation, they and their fathers built increasingly posh clubhouses for elegant dining and vigorous socializing. But unlike most fraternities elsewhere (which had been banned from Princeton in 1855 on John Maclean's watch and more permanently in 1875 by James McCosh), they did not house the members, except for a few club officers and alumni who returned for football games, reunions, and spring dances.<sup>26</sup> The sticking point for Wilson was not the opulence of the clubs, or even the bibulous behavior of their members, but their admissions procedures and total lack of "intellectual purposes or ideals."<sup>27</sup>

Even with fourteen clubs by 1910, only three-quarters of the upper classes could join; the rest were consigned to culinary and social purgatory. Some men were so crushed by rejection that they left college, and many who stayed were dispirited for their last two years, feeling cut off from their privileged classmates and *in* but not *of* the university. But the social damage, as Wilson saw it, ran deeper because of the way club members were chosen in the "bicker" process. In order to ensure election to specific clubs, sophomore groups formed small eating clubs in rented houses both to avoid the unpleasantness of Commons food and mass dining and to form "hat lines" (named for their distinctive colored hat bands) that made collective election to the upperclass clubs more certain. Despite administrative fiat, these sophomore groups were often recruited from similar freshman cliques, many of which in turn consisted of selective prep school cohorts. The individual, particularly a social late-bloomer or a bookish high schooler, therefore had little chance to make his mark and to be recognized by the clubmen, with whom he

<sup>26</sup> The large size and paneled poshness of the clubs were mandated—and bank-rolled—by club alumni who sought not only to prepare undergraduates for city club life after graduation, but to provide themselves with another club in bucolic Princeton.

<sup>27</sup> *PWW*, 17:167 (c. May 30, 1907).

had virtually no academic and scant social contact (many freshmen were forced to live off campus for lack of space). Thus, not only did the upper classes foster a “sharp” and “distorted” social competition upon which a majority of the students “stake[d] their happiness,” they failed to provide academic and moral leadership to the junior classes.<sup>28</sup>

The more Wilson was frustrated in his efforts to supplant the clubs with residential quads for all four classes, the more he came to regard the clubs as “distinctly and very seriously hostile to the spirit of study.” He relished the results of a study that revealed that between 1903 and 1907 only 9 percent of the clubmen had won honors (the older, more prestigious clubs had the fewest) while 42 percent of the nonclubmen did. And as his losing battle with the club alumni anticipated and fueled his political shift toward progressivism, his academic rhetoric heralded the transition. By 1910 his speeches were studded with “democratic” talk and metaphors, targeting social exclusiveness and the unfair advantages of inherited wealth. “Learning,” he argued, “knows no differences of social caste or privilege. The mind is a radical democrat.”<sup>29</sup>

Today, however, Wilson would discover that the eating clubs, though still a distinctive feature of Princeton’s extracurriculum, are no longer its exclusive center. Five of the ten clubs have open admissions on a first-come basis, and the five that are still selective are less prestigious than they once were and have relaxed their procedures, with sophomores now calling on the clubs instead of suffering the inanities and torment of bicker committees visiting them in their

<sup>28</sup> *PWW*, 16:519–25 (c. Dec. 13, 1906); 17:167 (c. May 30, 1907), 181–84 (c. June 6, 1907). On the club system, see William K. Selden, *Club Life at Princeton: An Historical Account of the Eating Clubs at Princeton University* (Princeton, 1996); Bragdon, *WW: Academic Years*, 272–74, 317–19; Mulder, *WW: Years of Preparation*, 187–202; Leitch, *Princeton Companion*, 146–49.

<sup>29</sup> *PWW*, 16:520, 523 (Dec. 13, 1906); 17:401–2 (Sept. 26, 1907); Woodrow Wilson, “The Country and the Colleges” (c. Feb. 24, 1910), *PWW*, 20:160. In the spring of 1908, the figures in the study of honors work were questioned by Wilson’s close friend John Hibben and by a pro-club committee of trustees. The trustees concluded that the clubmen led a “cleanly, manly, and fairly studious life.” Bragdon, *WW: Academic Years*, 332, 471n32, 473n53 (my emphasis).

rooms, as depicted so fatally by Geoffrey Wolff in *The Final Club*.<sup>30</sup> A number have increased opportunities for contact with faculty, and wired club libraries do more serious business after meals. Clubs even take pride in earning the best GPA on The Street as well as in hiring the best bands and throwing the best parties. Perhaps least of all from Wilson's standpoint, but a decided improvement nonetheless, the advent of female members promotes more normal relations with the opposite sex and reduces the importation and sexist treatment of women on bacchanalian weekends.

Yet for Wilson two weaknesses of the modern club system remain: it does little to promote the good influence of the upperclasses upon the more junior, and it makes only sporadic, token attempts to bring faculty and students together outside the classroom. Both of these flaws—and the club-induced decline of Princeton's "democratic spirit"—he thought could be remedied only in four-year residential colleges. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, long after Yale and Harvard had built their colleges and "houses" with Edward S. Harkness money, Princeton built or configured from existing facilities five colleges, only one of which—Rockefeller College in Holder Court—resembled a true enclosed quadrangle on the Oxford model Wilson had idealized. There can be no doubt that he would be disappointed that they house and feed only the freshman and sophomore classes. In 1907, after the board had rained on his full quad plan, he had expressed interest in the compromise suggestion of a friendly trustee that a truncated version would at least cultivate "a partial academic spirit in the two lower classes" and break up the nefarious "hat lines." But, reported the friend, "the essential idea of having all classes living on equality with the reflex of the more mature minds of the upper classes working on the lower seems to be his corner stone."<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Wilson would see that the advent of more qualified students and a more elective curriculum, which allows

<sup>30</sup> New York, 1990. See also "Bicker Week, 1974," by Edward D. Duffield II, '58, who underwent the bicker process again as a reporter: *PAW*, Feb. 4, 1975, 10–18.

<sup>31</sup> *PWW*, 17:380 (Sept. 10, 1907). Had Wilson lingered on the scene until today, he would take much comfort from the university's plan to use a new, sixth college on the south campus and four of the existing colleges (remodeled) to accommodate members from all four classes and graduate residence assistants: *PAW*, May 16, 2001, 12–13.

bright freshmen and sophomores to take any courses they can handle, throw the young and older undergraduates together early and often, as do sports teams and other extracurricular and service activities. He would also applaud the ubiquitous faculty presence in the colleges in the form of masters, fellows, guests, speakers, and seminar teachers. For half the student body at least, this is exactly the “community of constant, general, intimate contact” he had sought and failed to provide for his own Princeton. He told a Harvard audience in 1909 that scholar-teachers must mix socially and daily with students to “make thought a general contagion,” but so far “the scholar is not in the game.”<sup>32</sup> Today, he—and she—very much is and Wilson would applaud.

Although he might swallow hard before admitting it, the fullest realization of Wilson’s idea of a residential quad is the beautiful Gothic Graduate College, dubbed in 1913 by some of its new denizens as “St. Andrew’s-on-the-Links.” Wilson had approved an early plan of it back in 1903. But in his last four years in office, he lost another battle to locate it in the center of the campus to promote the “organic” coordination of the university, although he did manage to reduce the administrative control of the Graduate *School* by “that arch-intriguer” Dean Andrew Fleming West. West had sided with Wilson for five years on every educational reform. But he crossed to the opposition when the president, after a behavior-altering arteriosclerotic incident in 1906, precipitously and without his usual careful consultation with faculty or trustees, pushed his quad plan ahead of the long-promised graduate college. In a speech to the faculty, even Wilson admitted that the quad plan was “nothing more or less” than West’s idea of the Graduate College “adapted to the undergraduate life.” That was the last straw for the impatient dean, who proceeded to raise funds on his own to build the college in splendid isolation, and—as it turned out—to drive Wilson from office in the bargain.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *PWW*, 16:214 (Nov. 9, 1905); Wilson, “The Spirit of Learning” (July 1, 1909), *PWW*, 19:284–85, 287.

<sup>33</sup> *PWW*, 17:424 (Oct. 7, 1907); 19:442 (Oct. 24, 1909). For the Wilson–West conflict, see Bragdon, *WW: Academic Years*, chaps. 16, 18; Mulder, *WW: Years of Preparation*, chap. 8; Thorp, *PGS*; James Axtell, “The Dilettante Dean and the Origins of the Princeton Graduate School,” *PULC* 62:2 (Winter 2001):239–61.

Today, however, Wilson would have precious little reason to disapprove of Princeton's highly ranked graduate school. Until 2006, the graduate dean was physically and administratively tucked into Nassau Hall, and the Graduate College is presided over no longer by the ceremony-loving West or an august faculty master but by a young "residence life" professional.<sup>34</sup> The graduate faculty, all of whom teach undergraduates as Wilson had insisted his faculty should, is even more accomplished as a group than the double-handful of senior scholars he had wooed from Great Britain, the University of Chicago, and Penn and the fifty preceptors (many of whom soon taught graduate courses) from all over the country. Of more concern to Wilson, the Graduate College is no longer run on "dilettante ideals," and even its distance from the center of academic life has diminished somewhat with new roads, cars, and campus expansion. At the same time, although the Graduate School has been increasingly recognized by his successors as a major contributor to Princeton's national and international reputation, Wilson undoubtedly would be pleased that the much larger undergraduate college continues to dominate the life and memory of the new university.<sup>35</sup> Despite his university ideals and leadership, Wilson was at heart and in practice an undergraduate teacher, who had little interest in or time for graduate students.<sup>36</sup> He just wanted them to be intellectually the best they could be so they might "infect the place"—especially the undergraduates—"with the real spirit of scholarship."<sup>37</sup>

He also wanted them to be immersed in graduate extensions of the liberal arts, "pure"—as opposed to merely professional—"studies."

<sup>34</sup> In 2006 the graduate dean and his staff moved into a reconfigured Clio Hall, one of the two debating societies' Greek temples.

<sup>35</sup> *PWW*, 19:755 (Jan. 10, 1910); Thorp, *PGS*, chap. 10; James Axtell, "Rounding Out a Century: The Princeton Graduate School, 1969–2000," *PULC* 61:2 (Winter 2000):171–216.

<sup>36</sup> Bragdon interviews (WWC) with Edwin G. Conklin, Mar. 24, 1943, box 62, folder 21, p. 2; Oscar Veblen, June 9, 1939, box 63, folder 54; Robert McNutt McElroy, Nov. 20, 1940, box 63, folder 13, pp. 1–3; William F. Magie, June 12, 1939, box 63, folder 9, pp. 5, 9; Max Farrand, May 1, 1942, box 62, folder 37, pp. 1–3; Farrand, May 11, 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 1–2; William Berryman Scott, June 9, 1939, box 63, folder 44; Luther Eisenhart, June 9, 1939, box 62, folder 35, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *PWW*, 14:158 (Oct. 21, 1902).

According to a senior scientist who knew him well, Wilson “hoped that Princeton would not undertake to develop technical or professional schools, but rather general subjects fundamental to the professions.” In his own day, he declined the offer of a forestry school (actually a forest but no endowment) and linkage with a proprietary medical school in Philadelphia. A suggestion from trustee and ally Cyrus McCormick for “industrial training” such as Harvard’s did not seem to Wilson “consistent with our system and purposes.” Neither did an ordinary law school for practitioners, but he did favor a more philosophical “school of jurisprudence,” a distinction he must have acquired during his own misapplied legal studies at the University of Virginia.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Wilson would be gratified that Princeton, after a century, is still home to only three professional schools, all based on “fundamental” disciplines in the arts and sciences. It’s equally safe to say that he would regard the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs as a fair trade for a school of jurisprudence, particularly since the former is such a direct and apposite expression of “Princeton for the Nation’s Service,” the title of his inaugural address in 1902.<sup>39</sup>

Given Wilson’s own superficial, non-lab education in science in the 1870s and his pronounced “literary” approach even to the social sciences he professed and wrote about, we might wonder how he would regard the high, Nobel-laden reputation Princeton enjoys in mathematics and science today. When he took office, the scientific side of the university had remained “relatively undeveloped” and the lab equipment was at least twenty-five years old. Unfortunately, Wilson himself was not much interested in or knowledgeable about developments in science, much less mathematics. But he knew, as he declared in his inaugural address, that “science has opened a new world of learning, as great as the old,” and now belonged to “the true patriciate of learning,” to the “fundamental studies” that every

<sup>38</sup> *PWW*, 10:69 (c. Dec. 2, 1896); 14:159 (Oct. 21, 1902); 19:76 (Mar. 3, 1909); Edwin Grant Conklin, “As a Scientist Saw Him,” in Myers, ed., *WW: Princeton Memories*, 58; Bragdon interview with Conklin, Mar. 24, 1943, WWC, box 62, folder 21, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *PWW*, 14:170–85 (Oct. 25, 1902).

university worthy of the name had to promote and teach. So he leaned on the astute judgment of his dean of the faculty, Henry Fine, a first-class mathematician, to “build up a great graduate department in the sciences” to match those in “the literary and philosophical studies of the University.” With Wilson’s blessing and some trustees’ bankrolling, Fine proceeded to hire some of the world’s best in math and science and to design with their help and build the Palmer Laboratory for physics and Guyot Hall for biology, geology, and a museum of natural history. Like the new faculty, Wilson assured the Maryland alumni in 1910, the labs were “equal to any in the university world, whether in this country or abroad.”<sup>40</sup>

Given that early head of steam, Wilson would not be surprised or displeased by Princeton’s current fame as a powerhouse of math and science. Even the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton’s independent but closely allied neighbor, would not intimidate him—provided he was steered into the studies of the historians and social scientists rather than the theoretical physicists and other number-crunchers.

While scientists have their labs, humanists and social scientists need their own workshops in the university library. In Wilson’s time, the Princeton library was “more than adequate” for a liberal arts college but not for the ever-growing research needs of a major university. In 1896, when then-Professor Wilson was trying to lure frontier historian Frederick Jackson Turner from Wisconsin, he had to admit that “the weakest part of Princeton is her library.” Although a new library building had been funded and would be ready the following year, the collection held just over 100,000 titles, “little enough material for original work” with hit-or-miss coverage of major areas.<sup>41</sup> By the time Wilson stepped down in 1910, however, the library had made considerable progress. Wilson had yet to obtain the full half-million-dollar endowment he sought for it, but several special collections had “fairly rich” endowments. With more than 250,000 volumes, the library was considered by its discerning refer-

<sup>40</sup> *PWW*, 14:180 (Oct. 25, 1902); 17:39 (Feb. 15, 1907), 61–62 (Mar. 6, 1907); 20:232–33 (Mar. 11, 1910); Conklin in Myers, ed., *WW: Princeton Memories*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> *PWW*, 10:50–51 (Nov. 15, 1896).

ence librarian “large for the size of the student body and faculty,” at least in the subject areas taught.<sup>42</sup>

Before the advent of the precept system in 1905, the library had been “very little used.” After, there was a quickening of use, though mostly to gain access to assigned readings on reserve, often available in duplicate copies. Indeed, two former preceptors suggested that the intellectual revolution wrought by the precepts was incomplete. Political scientist Edward Corwin noted that “the minimum list of reading soon became for most students the maximum list,” while his former colleague Charles McIlwain lamented that “there was less independent and original work than there should have been.” Circulation statistics seem to bear them out. At the turn of the century, the average student had checked out just eighteen books a year, less than two per semester course; ten years later, the number had climbed only to twenty-three.<sup>43</sup> Wilson would be delighted to learn that today the students lug home nearly ninety books a year—as well as consult innumerable online Web sites and databases—for their research papers in most courses, junior papers, and senior theses. He would also take pleasure in the architectural continuity of Firestone Library with his beloved Gothic campus, its vast and accessible holdings, and its abundant quarters for study, research, and writing.

Princeton’s art museum might not hold the former president’s attention as much as the rare and special collections in Firestone and its satellites, but for the memory of his talented wife, Ellen, he would regard its collections, quality, and associated research library with favor. When he was courting Ellen Axson in 1884, he confessed that he knew “marvellously little about art.” This was a somewhat daring—and challenging—admission because she had studied art privately and at a women’s college in Georgia, had earned a living doing portraits, and was then an advanced student at the highly regarded

<sup>42</sup> *PWW*, 14:155–56 (Oct. 21, 1902); William Warner Bishop, “Reminiscences of Princeton: 1902–7,” *PULC* 8:4 (June 1947):147–63, at 149–50.

<sup>43</sup> *PWW*, 16:513 (Dec. 13, 1906); 19:451 (Oct. 27, 1909); Bragdon interviews (WWC) with Harry Clemons, July 24, 1941, box 62, folder 19, pp. 1–2; Charles H. McIlwain, Jan. 2, 1940, box 63, folder 11, p. 2; Edward S. Corwin, “Departmental Colleague,” in Myers, ed., *WW: Princeton Memories*, 22; Allen O. Whipple, Jr., “Undergraduates and the Library,” *PAW*, Apr. 1, 1938, 577 (chart).

Art Students League in New York City. After marriage she continued his tardy aesthetic education. Their Princeton houses were filled with her work, which she continued to refine in annual stints at the Old Lyme [Connecticut] Summer School of Art, America's center of Impressionism. She and he took a grand tour of European art museums and architecture in 1903, which she supplemented the following year in Italy with just the girls. At home she copied important paintings in exhibitions that traveled to the burgeoning university art museum built in 1889. Although Wilson may have had "by nature" an affinity for good art, it was "Mrs. Wilson's influence," thought her knowledgeable brother Stockton, one of Wilson's closest friends, "which enabled him to discriminate and become so sure a judge of good painting."<sup>44</sup>

We have to be more tentative in divining Wilson's attitude toward the Princeton University Press today because he wrote—and perhaps thought—even less about it than he did about the art museum, and with good reason. Although the press was founded in 1905 to handle university-related printing jobs such as the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, the *Daily Princetonian*, and various publications of the Princeton Theological Seminary, it was not incorporated until October 1910, as Wilson was leaving office. In 1911 publisher Charles Scribner built Gothic-style quarters for the new press on William Street, where it published its first two scholarly books the following year: President John Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* to celebrate the past and Princeton Art Museum director Allan Marquand's *Della Robbias in America* to herald the new Princeton scholarship.<sup>45</sup>

In August 1907 Whitney Darrow, the young brain and energy behind the Press, sent Wilson a copy of the annual report to the

<sup>44</sup> *PWW*, 3:133 (Apr. 15, 1884); Frank J. Aucella, Patricia A. Piorkowski Hobbs, and Frances Wright Saunders, *Ellen Axson Wilson: First Lady–Artist* (Washington, D.C., and Staunton, Va., 1993); Frances Wright Saunders, *Ellen Axson Wilson: First Lady Between Two Worlds* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 16–17, 20, 47–54, 113, 147–56, 191–92, 196–97, 251–52, 256–59; Axson, "Brother Woodrow," 90–94 (quotation), 103.

<sup>45</sup> *PWW*, 17:351–52n2, 353–57 (Aug. 1, 1907); [Charles] Whitney Darrow, *Princeton University Press: An Informal Account . . .* (Princeton, 1951); *Letters from Charles Scribner, '75 to Whitney Darrow, '03 in the Early Days of Princeton University Press* (Princeton, 1968).

stockholders. Darrow was hopeful that future printing and “possibly” publishing work would come from New York and Philadelphia and particularly from “the growth of the Graduate School.” In order to tie the Press and the university more closely, without losing the Press’s independence, Darrow proposed three things. First, with the help of the English Department, he wanted to produce a “University Style” book to distribute to administrators and faculty, who might be persuaded to submit their manuscripts to the new press if it could show that it could “turn out work which is artistic and in good taste” and “suits the subject matter.” Second, he needed an educated editor-in-chief, preferably from the faculty, to oversee the proofreading and quality control. And finally, he wanted the Press to share some of its profits with the university to help departments afford their various printing needs, which the Press would then meet at the most reasonable cost.<sup>46</sup>

Although this is the extent, ironically, of the Press’s published paper trail through Wilson’s presidency, it is difficult to imagine that the former professor, who loved reading, writing, and buying books more than most of his species, would not take pride in knowing that PUP’s handsome, often artistic, and prize-winning books reach libraries and readers worldwide, spreading the university’s name and augmenting its reputation in the process. The only publications that might give him pause are Arthur Link’s uncompleted five-volume biography of Wilson and his immense *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, which expose his every flaw and misstep to public scrutiny, along with his many strengths and accomplishments.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the guesswork can stop as we come to the final two facets of Princeton’s modern reputation. There can be no doubt whatever that Wilson would take pardonably personal pride in his university’s ethos of distinctive excellence, and immense vicarious (if not envious) pleasure in the financial resources that make it realizable. No university president in full possession of his faculties would look askance at an endowment larger than the gross national product of many small countries. And only the most eccentric or inexperienced

<sup>46</sup> *PWW*, 17:354–57 (Aug. 1, 1907).

<sup>47</sup> Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: [various subtitles]*, 5 vols. (Princeton, 1947–1965).

executive would prefer an institution that settled for high adequacy or protean performance in a large range of centrifugal activities to one that strove for genuine excellence in a select number of centripetal endeavors.

Like most of his presidential peers, Wilson would have figuratively salivated at the thought of what he could have done with the 1900s' equivalent of eleven *billion* dollars. He could have built his Gothic quads over the objections of even the clubmen and Eastern alumni. He could have offered many scholarships to lower- and middle-class high school students to reduce the social impact of the sons of wealth. He could have financed fully the fifty preceptors and the expensive senior faculty stars he lured to Princeton. He could have built Dean West his graduate college but placed it where he, not the dean or some wealthy donor, thought it would best serve the university as a whole. He could have endowed his new science faculty and labs without going hat in hand to the Rockefellers. Perhaps he would have had enough left over to found a school of jurisprudence. In short, he could have lived without constant debt or indebtedness to a band of generous trustees and a Committee of Fifty devoted alumni whose annual gifts and subscriptions covered his worthy losses.<sup>48</sup>

The essential problem was that Princeton had to work with an endowment one-half or one-third the size of those of its natural competitors, "the largest and oldest Universities in the East." But Wilson had a dream, a "vision" as he said, and he was not about to let something as trivial as money stand in the way of realizing it. When he made his list of desiderata at the beginning of his term, he took it to alumni groups around the country. When he read the modest price-tag of the university's immediate needs, \$2.25 million, he drew whistles from the audience; but when he finished painting his dream in full color and said it would cost them \$12.5 million, there was applause.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps they were stunned, or simply impressed by his silver-tongued bravado: Wilson always knew how to charm a crowd, the bigger the better. But either way, they failed to

<sup>48</sup> *PWW*, 17:61 (Mar. 6, 1907); 19:144-46 (Apr. 1, 1909), 166 (Apr. 19, 1909), 269n1, 320 (July 27, 1909).

<sup>49</sup> *PWW*, 14:271, 275 (Dec. 9, 1902); 16:4 (Feb. 18, 1905).

respond as generously as their new leader had hoped, particularly after he indirectly impugned their country-club degrees and eating-club snobberies. By the spring of 1909, ironically (and perhaps presciently), the Secretary of the Committee of Fifty was predicting that “in the near future, Princeton may depend upon her alumni for adequate financial support.” This was the same prophet who had noted three years earlier, before Wilson raised the “quad” flag, that “the more closely in touch with Princeton a graduate is, the more readily he gives.”<sup>50</sup>

What Wilson was forced to do, as Dean West and other “enemies” behind the scenes were doing, was to seek out individual alumni who could be persuaded to part with some of their fortunes to fund his soul-saving schemes for Old Nassau. Unfortunately, as his sister-in-law Margaret Axson closely observed during his troubles, “Woodrow was no earthly good at it. He insisted that the obligation of raising funds belonged properly to the trustees, while the president should be left free to run the college.” Moreover, “he was temperamentally unfitted for the task of raising money. Normally a man of easy gracious manners, when confronted by a possible donor, he became shy, ill at ease, as embarrassed as though he were about to ask for money for himself.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, while he would not have wanted to hit the endowment campaign trails as his successors have had to do, he would applaud the focused use of their hard-gotten gains and those of the Princeton Investment Corporation to sustain and embellish his dream.

That dream was nothing less than to make Princeton “the best and most distinguished institution *of its kind* in the world.” This goal did not entail large size or trying to be all things to all men. “We can afford to be one of the lesser universities in number,” he said, “if we are one of the foremost in power and quality,” by which he meant

<sup>50</sup> *PWW*, 16:461 (Oct. 17, 1906); 19:146 (Apr. 1, 1909), quoting Harold Griffith Murray.

<sup>51</sup> Margaret Axson Elliott, *My Aunt Louisa and Woodrow Wilson* (Chapel Hill, 1944), 190–91. Margaret married Edward Elliott, Wilson’s young dean of students, who may have corroborated her assessment of Wilson’s fundraising disabilities. In 1904, Wilson remarked, in a fundraising letter to a Pittsburgh steel magnate, “To ask for money is unpalatable to any man’s spirit, even though he ask, not for himself, but for the best cause in the world” (*PWW*, 15:221 [Mar. 30, 1904]).

only “*intellectual* distinction and *intellectual* primacy.” He was, he confessed, “covetous of everything that would bring academic distinction” to Princeton because he believed that a university’s “only object is intellect.” He wanted every department to be “at the very front, not only in scholarship, but in influence and leadership.” To accomplish that, he sought faculty “whom advanced students cannot afford not to study under, men who will themselves be the only kind of advertising that a University should condescend to.” But he wanted Princeton’s search for intellectual preeminence never to be a timid imitation of any other institution’s. He wisely wanted its general purpose and defining pattern of characteristics to be “distinct to ourselves,” the university “noticeable because of her individuality, because she stands for something different.”<sup>52</sup>

If Princeton is one of the very best universities in the country, indeed the world, today, Wilson’s articulate goals, disciplined focus on its distinctive character, unlimited faith in its potential, and enduringly persuasive rhetoric are largely, though of course not entirely, responsible. In his relatively short presidency, he was able only to begin the university’s transformation and ascent to academic primacy. Six able successors and several generations of loyal Princetonians—students, faculty, administrators, staff, and alumni—have pursued the tasks he set in changing times and conditions. Though he might regard his most recent successor, as he regarded his former boss at Bryn Mawr, as a learned but misplaced woman, he would undoubtedly applaud Shirley Tilghman’s courage and leadership abilities in furthering his dream in the new millennium. That she secured—from an undergraduate alumna, no less—the gift of a sixth residential college to house (as he had wanted) members from all four classes, and some graduate students as well, would only compound his pleasure and surprise.

<sup>52</sup> *PWW*, 14:75 (Aug. 11, 1902), 385 (Mar. 8, 1903); 16:453 (Sept. 16, 1906, my emphasis); 17:117 (Apr. 24, 1907); 18:20 (Mar. 12, 1908), 55 (Mar. 18, 1908); Winthrop M. Daniels to Ray Stannard Baker, Baker Papers, container 104, reel 73, p. 49.