



The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism (Oxford Studies in International History)

By Erez Manela

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During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, while key decisions were debated by the victorious Allied powers, a multitude of smaller nations and colonies held their breath, waiting to see how their fates would be decided. President Woodrow Wilson, in his Fourteen Points, had called for "a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims," giving equal weight would be given to the opinions of the colonized peoples and the colonial powers. Among those nations now paying close attention to Wilson's words and actions were the budding nationalist leaders of four disparate non-Western societies-- Egypt, India, China, and Korea. That spring, Wilson's words would help ignite political upheavals in all four of these countries.

This book is the first to place the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, the Rowlatt Satyagraha in India, the May Fourth movement in China, and the March First uprising in Korea in the context of a broader "Wilsonian moment" that challenged the existing international order. Using primary source material from America, Europe, and Asia, historian Erez Manela tells the story of how emerging nationalist movements appropriated Wilsonian language and adapted it to their own local culture and politics as they launched into action on the international stage. The rapid disintegration of the Wilsonian promise left a legacy of disillusionment and facilitated the spread of revisionist ideologies and movements in these societies; future leaders of Third World liberation movements--Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Jawaharlal Nehru, among others--were profoundly shaped by their experiences at the time.

The importance of the Paris Peace Conference and Wilson's influence on international affairs far from the battlefields of Europe cannot be underestimated. Now, for the first time, we can clearly see just how the events played out at Versailles sparked a wave of nationalism that is still resonating globally today.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

At the close of WWI, America seemed the foe of Western imperialism, according to this probing historical study. Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points peace framework and his rhetoric of self-determination and equality of nations appeared to expectant Africans and Asians like a formula for their liberation from European colonial rule. One Indian leader hailed Wilson as another Christ or Buddha, and a Chinese academic called him the number one good man in the world. Wilson was bombarded by petitions from colonial nationalist leaders (including Ho Chi Minh), who hoped he would champion their cause at the Paris Peace Conference. But the other Allies proved unsympathetic to self-determination in their colonial domains and Wilson backed off, provoking disillusioned nationalists from Egypt to Korea to stage uprisings and turn to Soviet communism for inspiration. Manela, an assistant professor of history at Harvard, offers a well-researched, if somewhat dry, survey of anticolonial politics during this fraught period. Wilsonian principles, he contends, laid the conceptual groundwork for the 20th century's nationalist revolutions; yet Wilson's betrayal ensured that anti-imperialism would shift from a liberal internationalist ideology to a radical, anti-Western one. The author presents an enlightening analysis of a shortsighted failure whose convulsive effects are still with us. 20 photos. (July)

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Review

"Manela's book is that rare thing in good history writing: it is concise and well-argued, the kind of book that you finish knowing not only what you just read but its obvious importance to the world around you. It is also that very rare thing in U.S. diplomatic history, for the book not only covers what Wilson thought and said but also how people around the world interpreted his thoughts and actions. As much as this account is solid diplomatic history, it is equally a major contribution to a still largely inchoate field known as "America and the world'.... *The Wilsonian Moment* breaks important new ground. It is an excellent piece of history."--Ussama Makdisi, *Diplomatic History*

"Trawling through four national archives, Manela has produced an immensely rich and important work of comparative politics."--Pankaj Mishra, *London Review of Books*

"This book will undoubtedly be definitive.... Manela conclusively shows that Wilson, who had little interest in liberating colonial peoples, inadvertently planted among colonial peoples the seeds of national self-determination and disillusionment with a West that saw this concept applying to white peoples only. Essential."--*CHOICE*

"This is the new 'international history' at its best."--John Milton Cooper, author of *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*

"A probing historical study. Manela presents an enlightening analysis of a shortsighted failure whose convulsive effects are still with us."--*Publishers Weekly*

"Sophisticated in its analysis."--*The Weekly Standard*

"A carefully researched and gracefully written example of the new transnational history at its best."--Jeffrey Wasserstrom, History News Network

"Indispensable to all scholars seeking to understand the political transformation of the colonial world in the aftermath of World War I."--Wm. Roger Louis, University of Texas at Austin

"Innovative and elegantly written...Manela makes a convincing case that the disappointment resulting from the 'Wilsonian moment' shaped the future of anticolonial nationalism." --*The Historian*

About the Author

Erez Manela is Dunwalke Associate Professor of American History, Harvard University

Users Review

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