

Political Science & International Relations

MAY 2021



Congratulations

Congratulations to the PSIR class of 2021, for surviving, for conquering, their final year in college during a pandemic. I had the pleasure of teaching some of our graduating seniors in my seminar this past semester, and was ever impressed by their perseverance, patience, and ability to adapt and improvise as our semester wore on. These are skills that will serve them well in the years to come. In these pages, you will find some profiles of our graduating seniors, and a couple of essays from our faculty reflecting on the current state of affairs in the US and larger world, and some news from our alums. To all of our graduating seniors, we wish you the very best in the months and years ahead. *We hope to see the rest of you, in person, in the Fall of 2021.*

—Kathleen Dowley, Associate Professor and Chair, PSIR



Presenting the 2021 PSIR Outstanding Graduates!

The Department would like to recognize this year's winners, for their consistently excellent work throughout their careers at New Paltz. In their own words:



Aya Kikuta (International Relations)

“When I came to the United States four years ago, I never thought I would make it this far. At all times during this whole journey, I have told myself, ‘without haste, but without rest.’” I am happy that the progress I have made steadily over the past four years has now come together and been recognized. I would like to express my gratitude to SUNY New Paltz for giving me this amazing learning opportunity, to my professors and classmates for walking this journey with me, and to my family for supporting me all the way from Japan. I am proud of myself for making this big decision to come to the U.S. and working hard to come this far. With the confidence I have gained from my learning and experiences here, I will continue to work hard in my new life in Japan. Congratulations to my fellow graduates of the Class of 2021!”



Andrew Zenker (International Relations)

“I am a nontraditional student who started my college career in my late 20s in community college and transferred to New Paltz as a sophomore in 2018. I spent the prior 10 years after high school working as a mechanic but decided that it was not for me and that I needed to pursue further education. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here at New Paltz, it has made me fall in love with learning and brought me the educational experience that I had always yearned for that K–12 so sorely lacks. It has been tough with the pandemic as online learning really has left me missing the engagement that in person classes bring, but I am excited to graduate and be able to put of the skills and knowledge that I have gained to use.”

Presenting the 2021 PSIR Outstanding Graduates! *(continued)*



Jana Bergere (Political Science)

“Thank you to the Political Science and International Relations Department for recognizing me as an Outstanding Graduate! I have truly loved my experience at New Paltz and all of the Political Science classes I have taken. I can say with confidence that all of my Political Science professors were wonderful teachers and mentors and that I am very grateful for all of the insight they offered me along with all of their other students. As I reflect on all of the inspiring classes I took during my time in college, two in particular stand out for me, first, American Environmental Politics with Professor Lipson and second, International Relations with Professor Pampinella. These two courses really inspired me to pursue the advocacy work in which I got involved with, mostly through NYPIRG. This work has led me to my plans to pursue advocacy work professionally post-graduation. While a student at New Paltz I was also able to take advantage of other opportunities off-campus and still receive full credits. For one semester I had an internship in Albany doing environmental lobbying for NYPIRG. During another semester I had the chance to study abroad in the Czech Republic, studying International Relations. Although very differing semesters, they both contributed to my perspective, adding to my well-rounded overall college experience. Thank you to New Paltz for helping me grow and I’m excited to use all that I have learned here as I move forward in life.”



Elise Franck (Political Science)

“When asked what my favorite thing about New Paltz is, I always say it’s the people I’ve met. I arrived at New Paltz four years ago as an unconfident 17-year old, uncertain of where I wanted to go in life. Going to college here and deciding to major in Political Science was strange for me at first because I am from a very small conservative town, but the wonderful people at this school, both in the PSIR department and out, faculty and students, quickly helped me find my feet. The professors who taught me Political Science showed me a world beyond my own, and I’m forever grateful. I’m a very different person that I was four years ago, and I owe a lot of it to my studies and the people who challenged and supported me every step of the way.”



Congratulations!

Where Are They Now? Checking in with our Alumni:

Since we first pioneered this corner of our newsletter, we have heard back from so many of you, and it has been gratifying to hear what you've all been up to since you graduated from PSIR and SUNY New Paltz. Below is just a sampling of those who checked in this past year.

Our earliest (or latest?) check in came from **Norman Gershon, Class of 1969!**

Norman writes, "Perhaps, it will encourage your students to know that in addition to effectively utilizing the many things I learned in my regular job as the president of a small corporation, I was elected in 1988 to the Oregon State Legislature. I served one term in the Oregon House of Representatives. It was a highlight of my life's work. I'm retired now and I think back fondly to my days at New Paltz. Professors I still remember are Drs. Raff, Liem and Haffar...Dr. Haffar was distinguished because he taught part-time at New Paltz and Harvard! He used to tell us that the only difference between Harvard students and us was that they hung out in the library, and we hung out at P&G's!"

And yes, Norman, P&G's is still alive and well!

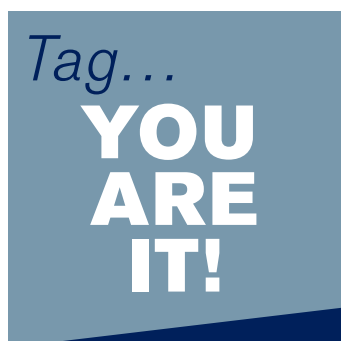
It was great to also hear from **Adam Esrig '06**, who is teaching social studies now, including a course called Global History and Global Research at the High School of Telecommunication Arts & Technology



in Brooklyn, NY (and he says he misses sitting in my classes!). Also checking in from the class of **2006** was **Melissa Newburg**, who now works on Facebook's Global Security team in D.C. She wanted to thank both Professors Brownstein and Özler for encouraging her to go to graduate school (in Tel Aviv, no less!) **Michael Brennan '09** writes that he did two years in AmeriCorps after graduating, which led him to pursue a second BA and now his MA in Social Work. He lives in Pittsburgh and works with

senior citizens in Allegheny County who have open cases with the Older Adult Protective Services. **Cleo Stern '12** says the newsletter moved her and wanted students to know that while it took her a while after graduating to "find my footing," she has now finished a dual degree program at the University of Texas' LBJ Program in Public Affairs and Public Health, specializing in International Development. **Darren Hernandez '91** wrote to say "Thank you for sharing this with me. Thirty-three years ago this fall, I arrived at NP as the first person in my family to go to college. Jerry Benjamin saw my potential and challenged me with high expectations. Jerry Benjamin changed my life. Best wishes to you and everyone at New Paltz."

Stories like these make it all worthwhile, even after a year like this has been! Keep them coming!



Fellow PSIR Alums!

Write and tell me what you are up to, at dowleyk@newpaltz.edu

Parting Shots of Some of Our PSIR Graduating Seniors!



Noorjahan Aktar



Allison Bartol



Meghan Bell



Tara Berdolt



Alexandra Crawford



Rachel Lijoi



Andrew Lopez



Simon Spindell



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THE PROFESSOR IS IN:

The Legacy of the Trump Presidency on the Lower Federal Courts

By Nancy Kassop



One of the many legacies of the Trump presidency with which we will be living for the rest of our lifetimes is the impact of his judicial appointments on the federal courts. My comments here examine Trump's impact on the lower federal courts—the 94 district courts and

the 13 circuit courts of appeals—rather than on the U.S. Supreme Court, which gets plenty of attention in the national media. It is the lower federal courts, however, that, also, merit our review because their decisions are more numerous than those of the Supreme Court (400,000 lower court decisions to 70 Supreme Court decisions per year), and thus, they affect every aspect of life across the fifty states. Republicans internalized long ago that courts are political players who can make or break policies, but Democrats have been slow to catch up to this realization and to prioritize judicial appointments, both as a campaign issue as well as a signal agenda item for a new president.

There are many factors that affect a president's opportunities to appoint federal judges. These include: 1) the number of vacancies a new president inherits; 2) whether a president's party controls the Senate; and 3) the timing of new vacancies throughout a president's term (i.e., later vacancies, especially with an opposition party Senate, can slow down the confirmation process considerably, especially, in the last year of a president's term).

The judicial gods were shining down on Trump, as he was blessed on all 3 of those measures.

He had the good fortune to find 108 federal court vacancies, as well as one Supreme Court slot, waiting for him on the day he walked into the White House; he had a Republican majority in the Senate chomping at the bit to confirm his nominees at lightning speed, and that pace only quickened during his last year in office.

Only Bill Clinton had more vacancies on Day One (111), and that was because Congress had passed a law in

December 1990 that added thirty-four new federal judgeships, which George H. W. Bush never filled. The primary reason Trump had so many vacancies to fill when he entered office was the near halt by the Senate in the final two years of the Obama administration to move almost all of Obama's judicial nominees (including the nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court) through the confirmation process, while awaiting the 2016 election.

The numbers here are staggering. In those last two years of the Obama administration (2015–2016), the Senate confirmed a total of two Court of Appeals judges and eighteen district court judges, comprising 4% and 7% respectively, of the total confirmation of Obama judges over eight years.

Contrast that with the same final two-year confirmation rates of three previous presidents (Reagan, Clinton and G.W. Bush) who each had about 20% of their total confirmations in the final two years of their two-term presidencies. That disparity in confirmation rates was not the result of coincidence, but rather, of a concerted strategy by then-Senate Majority Leader McConnell.

According to Russell Wheeler of the Brookings Institution, who tracks judicial appointments, the Obama judicial nominees who *could* have been considered during those final two years consisted of seven circuit court judges and seventy-one district court judges. That means that almost 80 of the 108 vacancies that Trump inherited could have potentially been filled by Obama nominees, if the Senate had continued the confirmation process throughout 2015–16.

Thus, Trump was in an exceptionally favorable position, with an almost record number of lower federal court vacancies at the start of his presidency, a very willing and compliant Senate of his own party, and a single-minded Senate majority leader who viewed boosting the number of conservative judges on the federal courts as one of the major accomplishments of his *own* political legacy.

The total number of Trump judicial appointments in *four* years was 245 judges, while recent presidents appointed roughly 350–380 judges in *eight* years. Thus, Trump's rate for *four* years was far higher than other presidents for the same four-year period of time. He was surpassed only by

Carter who had 262 appointments in four years—and that was only because Carter (as Clinton) inherited 97 newly created judgeships from a law that Congress passed in 1978.

Trump appointed 54 circuit court judges in four years. By contrast, Obama appointed 55 circuit court judges—in *eight* years. And G.W. Bush and Clinton appointed approximately 60 each—again, over *eight* years for each of them.

Trump appointed 174 district court judges in four years. Obama, Bush and Clinton each appointed between 260–300 district court judges—again, over an *eight-year* period.

Perhaps, the most important statistic of this whole set is the change in partisan balance of the 13 Circuit Courts of Appeals, determined by the political party of the appointing president for each judge on these courts. For a comparison: when Obama entered office in January 2009, of the 13 circuit courts of appeals: 10 had Republican majorities; 1 had a Democratic majority, and 2 were evenly split (10+1+2 = 13). When Obama left office in January 2017, 9 had Democratic majorities, and 4 had Republican majorities. In eight years, Obama had “flipped” the partisan majority on 8 of the 13 courts (i.e., he changed 6 from openly Republican to Democratic, and took the 2 evenly split ones for Democrats). Obama had a major impact on changing the partisan balance of these courts (Democrats gained 6 +2, while Republicans lost 6).

Fast forward to the end of four years of Trump. Trump “flipped” 3 of those Democratic majority courts to Republican majorities, while retaining the 4 Republican ones. Currently, the partisan control is: 7 Republican majority and 5 Democratic majority and 1 evenly split. Consider, also, that the demographic features of Trump-appointed judges are that they are overwhelmingly young (and very young!), white, male and conservative. While quite a few Trump judges replaced retiring Republican judges, suggesting that one Republican replacing another Republican might not make that much difference, that could be a misleading assumption, as the Trump judges are far more conservative than the Republican judges they replaced. For example, Judge Thomas Griffith, appointed by G.W. Bush to the D.C. Circuit Court, was replaced in 2020 by Justin Walker, a protégé from Kentucky of Senate Majority Leader McConnell. Walker had been appointed by Trump to the district court in Kentucky just

a few months earlier at age 36 (after receiving a “not qualified” rating from the ABA), and served less than a year before being appointed—at age 37—to replace Judge Griffith on the D.C. Circuit. Walker is much more conservative in his views than Griffith. And it is an open secret that Walker was elevated to the D.C. Circuit Court specifically to position him for a future Supreme Court vacancy.

The overall conclusion here is that Trump established a firm legacy with his judicial appointments which will populate the courts for at least 30–40 years to come. What had been a roughly 60%–40% split of Democratic to Republican-appointed federal judges when he took office is now a 54%–46% split in favor of Republicans.

Thus, *presidents* make a difference. It is still early to detect whether these Republican appointees will make a difference in actual decisions on the courts.

What does this portend for the Biden presidency and its chances to impact the lower federal courts? Democrats have a very brief window to try to regain some of the ground they have lost when it comes to the courts. As of now, Biden has 68 judicial vacancies—7 appellate court and 61 district court slots to fill (compared to Trump’s opening day 108). Biden recently announced his first set of 11 nominees, characterized by diversity in ethnic and racial demographics as well as by a greater variety of previous professional experiences: four of these nominees have backgrounds as public defenders at some point in their careers—a goal emphasized by Biden.

According to Wheeler, Biden has a chance to make a difference on the district courts, as 60% of the expected vacancies will be from Republican judges. But the picture is quite different with the courts of appeals, as 75% of the announced vacancies and half of the retirement-eligible judges are Democrats, so Biden-appointed judges would not change substantially the partisan balance on the circuit courts which are, after all, the end of the line for most federal court cases.

And then, there are the various proposals swirling in the ether for making major structural changes to the Supreme Court, as well as the uncertainty surrounding whether Biden will get a Supreme Court vacancy to fill in sufficient time prior to the 2022 midterm elections, when the fate of the Senate majority hangs precariously in the balance. But those are issues for another time...

Professor Stephen Pampinella: Reflections on a Biden Foreign Policy and the Liberal International Order



Mainstream international affairs writers celebrated the presidential election of Joseph Biden as an opportunity to restore a more traditional U.S. foreign policy. For them, the United States rightfully led what they describe as a “liberal international order” (LIO)

since the end of World War II. The LIO encompasses a set of benign governing arrangements defined by sovereign self-determination, free trade, and respect for international institutions and human rights. Biden has generally met their expectations, leading many to affirm that benevolent forms of US hegemony will preserve liberal values in opposition to authoritarian threats such as China.

These accounts miss an important aspect of the history of the LIO: its founding upon racialized discourses of white supremacy. The LIO’s origins lie not in World War II but in World War I, when President Woodrow Wilson used the conflict as a means of reordering world politics at the Versailles Peace Conference. As the nations of the world met to rebuild global governance in 1919, Anglo-American powers successfully prevented Asian and African diplomats and intellectuals from including norms of racial equality in the League of Nations Covenant. This history of the creation of the world’s first multilateral institution illustrates the limits of racial egalitarianism within US foreign policy.

The Anglo-American Racial Coalition at the Turn of the Century

When Wilson departed the United States for France in December 1918, he left a country that had abandoned the civic promise of radical Reconstruction in favor of somewhat novel forms of white racial domination. After the Civil War, racial exclusions targeting against Black and Indigenous US citizens were re-institutionalized within the US state.

A new racial “Other” was also specified: immigrants from Asia especially Chinese and Japanese laborers arriving on the U.S. west coast. For European immigrant laborers in

Western states, labor competition from Asian migrants was seen as a direct threat to their livelihood. Their own assimilation into whiteness was made possible by treating Asian peoples as unfit for participation in democratic citizenship on the basis of cultural difference. Racist sentiments subsequently led to the passage of immigration restrictions targeting Asian peoples at both the state and federal level.

U.S. fears about Asian immigration were shared among other white settler polities, namely the British dominion of Australia. Like the United States, its identity was grounded in fears that Asian people would undermine their cultural and political autonomy. Australians subsequently enacted the “White Australia” policy in 1901, which severely limited immigration to Australia by Asian and Pacific Islander peoples.

Australia’s anti-Asian racism was also manifest in its reaction to the rise of Japan, whose naval victory over Russia in their 1905 war heralded its entrance into the club of great powers. The combination of Asian immigration and Japan’s prominence led Australians to look abroad for partners in sustaining white racial dominance at home and abroad.

The U.S. was viewed as a willing partner. Given its founding by fellow Anglo-Saxons, the U.S. was seen as capable of white racial solidarity with the British Empire’s settler colonies. The notion that the United States could preserve the international order first established by the United Kingdom was reinforced by the worldwide voyage of the U.S. Navy’s Great White Fleet in 1908. Australian Prime Minister Deakin described the Fleet’s visit to Sydney as representative of both countries’ “distrust of the Yellow Race in the Northern Pacific, and our recognition of the ‘entente cordiale’ spreading among all white races who realize the Yellow Peril to Caucasian creeds and politics.” These sentiments illustrate how a shared Anglo-American identity enabled international cooperation in opposition to threats defined in racial terms.

Wilson at Versailles and the Rejection of the Racial Equality Clause

The emergence of an Anglo-American coalition enabled the preservation of national discrimination at Versailles in 1919. It was opposed by a nascent egalitarian coalition

that included Japanese diplomats, led by Count Makino Nobuaki, who sought to introduce a racial equality clause into the League of Nations. Makino sought to insert the clause as a way of establishing the norm of equal treatment of Japanese nationals without actually challenging the exclusionary policies of the United States and Australia. However, U.S. and Australian policymakers assumed that the clause had such implications, leading them to oppose it.

Advocates for racial equality also included African and African diasporic leaders, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. They gathered opponents of racism and imperialism in Paris during the First Pan-African Congress in February 1919. Both Du Bois and Garvey shared the same goals and Japan's rise to great power status as an form of solidarity Asian and African peoples against white supremacy.

But Du Bois and Garvey quickly became adversaries. While Du Bois gained access to Paris through his African-French colleagues, Garvey and others were blocked from attending the Congress by the U.S. and UK governments, who saw them as fostering domestic racial strife. When Du Bois sought to avoid antagonizing the Allies by publicizing the Congress, Garvey and his followers interpreted such caution as a form of collaboration with the same governments which restricted his travel. Ultimately, governmental repression contributed to miscommunication that prevented more robust cooperation around demands for non-discrimination and self-determination for African peoples.

Japan's attempt to introduce the racial equality clause into the Covenant unfolded in this context. After Japan's first attempt in February was rebuffed, Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes explained the racial ramifications of the clause to U.S. reporters, who promptly took up this narrative back home. Hughes' fearmongering was complemented by James Phelan, U.S. Senator from California, who called upon the U.S. delegation at Versailles to prevent the clause from undermining U.S. sovereignty. Wilson could not ignore Phelan, a fellow Democratic who ensured that California voted for his re-election in 1916.

Both domestic and international politics had now been mobilized against the racial equality clause. When Japan re-introduced it in April, Hughes once again objected as strongly as possible. But after a persuasive speech by Makino, the clause gained the support of a majority of delegates. Facing no other option, Wilson suddenly changed the procedural norms for decision-making. He declared that for such a controversial issue, unanimity would be needed to pass Japan's motion to amend the Covenant. Although other great powers supported the clause, they chose not to fight with Wilson about his maneuver and instead prioritized completing the Covenant and the broader Versailles Treaty.

The Lessons of Versailles

What can we learn from this instance of transnational coalition politics and great power diplomacy? It demonstrates how the maintenance of racial hierarchy is sustained transnationally, even by ostensibly liberal states. Settler colonial polities successfully worked together to preserve discrimination against peoples of color while advocates of racial equality were unable to forge their own transnational ties in support of their preferred norms.

However, the lessons we take away from Versailles are not entirely negative. Unlike in 1919, today's advocates of racial equality appear to be the dominant coalition with the United States. Their strength enables them to legitimate new foreign policies that can replicate egalitarianism at home with egalitarianism abroad. The result can be a new form of internationalism that finally sheds the white supremacist legacy which taints Wilsonian liberalism. For example, some activists note how anti-China foreign policy positions make possible anti-Asian racism in domestic politics. Others challenge the U.S.' refusal to make COVID-19 vaccines and associated intellectual property available to the developing world. As domestic advocates link up with counterparts in other countries, we can expect racial egalitarian coalitions to become a driving force in world politics.

Celebrating More Student Success: The 2021 Inductees into Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science Honors Society

The National Political Science Honors Society, founded in 1920, is open to undergraduates who have demonstrated academic excellence in their political science coursework. Specifically, students must have:

1. Completed at least 60 college credits
2. An overall GPA of at least 3.00
3. Completed at least 15 credits in political science
4. Completed at least 3 upper division political science credits
5. A GPA of at least 3.00 in political science classes



Congratulations to the 2021 Inductees:

Sarah Bale-Crowder

Allison Bartol

Elizabeth Bell

Brandon Bernard

Abigail Gonzalez

Logan Gonzalez

Shahed Herzallah

Matthew Kreuz

Hallie McCarthy

Juan Pablo Molina

Mary Orlik

Ariana Peterman

Maeve Ryan

Griffin Stockton

Kelly Talty

Adam Winne

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