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# PRINCETON ALUMNI WEEKLY

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## Wilson's Legacy: Web Exclusive Letters

In response to: [The Wilson Legacy, and What to Do About It](#)

Posted on February 18, 2016

We learn nothing today when passing through the doors of the Woodrow Wilson School about its namesake. It is time for the building to speak. Two situations come to mind that can assist the Princeton community in coming to grips with history which we must write and not rewrite. I ask that the lessons learned from these examples, rather than the examples themselves, guide us forward.

After Deng Xiaoping came to power in China, he recognized the need to grapple with the legacy of Mao Tse-tung, who both created him and did him in. Recognizing the peril of denying the past, Deng contrived a formula pulling the rug out from under a demigod, pronouncing him 60 percent good and 40 percent bad. The proportions don't signify. What matters is that imperfection trumped a charade, thereby liberating Chinese people from the straitjacket of dogma. It is easier to pay lip service to Mao than be forced to worship him.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Reichstag in Berlin. If ever there were a building burdened with history, it is this one. Add to that a stunning renovation that enabled the building's current role as seat of German government, and we can sense the complexity of the Reichstag's stature in the present. As I approached the iconic building, best remembered aflame from old black-and-white footage, I grew anxious. But before my thoughts could further deteriorate, I was well inside the building, being greeted by truth; and it was the image of the burning building itself, up front and center, which allowed me to see it beyond a singular moment in time. But the Reichstag is not named for anyone.

I propose that a narrative be prepared on behalf of all of Woodrow Wilson, which is then physically woven into the building and even allowed to spill out onto the plaza. We can all keep learning at Princeton. That's a walk in the park compared to China and Germany.

**Peter Rupert Lighte \*81**

**Princeton, N.J.**

See the original articles:

"Wilson Revisited" - Feb. 3, 2016:

<http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2016/02/03/pages/1521/index.xml>

"The Wilson Legacy, and What to Do About It" - Feb. 18, 2016: [http://](http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2016/01/13/sections/letters/7243/)

[paw.princeton.edu/issues/2016/01/13/sections/letters/7243/](http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2016/01/13/sections/letters/7243/)