

6

Long Waves in American Politics. Part One: Takeoff Presidencies

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Abstract

Relationships between long waves and cyclicalities in American politics are explored. Particular attention is paid to 'takeoff presidencies', as modeled by Edward Jayne. These presidencies occurred in the decade following a long-wave trough and brought with them visions of liberty that have negated the preceding vision. The question is raised as to whether the Obama presidency, occurring in the same long wave phase as previous takeoff presidencies will bring yet another redefinition of liberty to America.

Keywords: *Kondratieff, cycles, takeoff presidencies, Jayne, longwave clock, federalism, transcendentalism, progressivism, alienationism, Obama.*

Introduction

The reelection of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency in 2012 was hailed by his supporters as signaling 'the irreversible triumph of a new, 21st century America: multiracial, multi-ethnic, global outlook and moving beyond centuries of racial, sexual, marital and religious tradition' (Fineman 2012), heralding movement toward a European-style green welfare state secured by both legislative and executive action. Coming at the end of a deflationary depression marked by intense social turmoil and political polarization, Obama's election is not the first to have involved the reshaping of the social contract at the beginning of the takeoff phase of a Kondratieff wave, however. Edward Jayne (2005) hypothesizes that American culture has been marked by four earlier takeoff stages in which authors and intellectuals moved quickly from nonspecific dissatisfaction with declining growth to shared righteousness against established orthodoxy, radical politics and to the sense that the social contract deserves to be revised.

The primary purpose of this paper is to provide more information about these four takeoff stages, to place them in their proper location on the long wave, and to propose the closer look at the Obama case that will be addressed in Part Two of the discussion, a separate paper. Other radical shifts in America's politics occurred in different long wave phases and are better documented

Kondratieff Waves: Juglar – Kuznets – Kondratieff 2014 251–264

(Berry, Harpham, and Elliott 1995, 1998). For example, exemplifying left-right shifts precipitated by stagflation crises, Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 on a platform that rejected the premises of the New Deal and Great Society and that called for a return from statism to an individualistic, innovative, risk-taking model of governance, restricting the growth of government via tax reductions and deregulation. In earlier long waves the same phase was occupied by fiscal conservative James Monroe, Ulysses Grant and Calvin Coolidge.

Leftward shifts after deflationary depressions and rightward shifts after stagflation crises are among the alternations between public purpose (the desire to better society) and private interest (the desire to better oneself), described by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (1986) as fundamental to American two-party politics, although Schlesinger did not place them in their long wave location. Public action, Schlesinger said, is impelled by the vision of America as a nation of destiny and piles up a lot of change in short order. But sustained public action frequently produces less than is promised. Disillusion and an era of individualism follow. But in such an era not everyone succeeds. Some segments of the population fall behind in the acquisition race. People weary of materialism begin to look beyond themselves. Each public/private cycle, Schlesinger believed, lasts a generation. 'Each swing of the cycle produced Presidents responsive to the national mood, some against their own inclination', he wrote (*Ibid.*: 32).

Generational timing has been confirmed by later cyclical analyses (Merrill III, Grofman and Brunell 2008), with a suggestion that there are accompanying changes in social values, progressive stages followed by stages that are cosmopolitan and conservative stages by the parochial (Namenwirth 1973), with each accompanied by a particular type of presidency. Takeoff stage presidencies are progressive, and the first step is to properly locate them on the long wave clock.

The Long-Wave Clock

The long wave clock runs and average of $55.8 \approx 56$ years from trough to trough, repeating the cycle of deflation, reflation, inflation, disinflation and deflation shown in Fig. 1. Mode-locked within each long wave are three 18.6-year Kuznets investment cycles and six 9.3-year business cycles, as shown in Fig. 2.

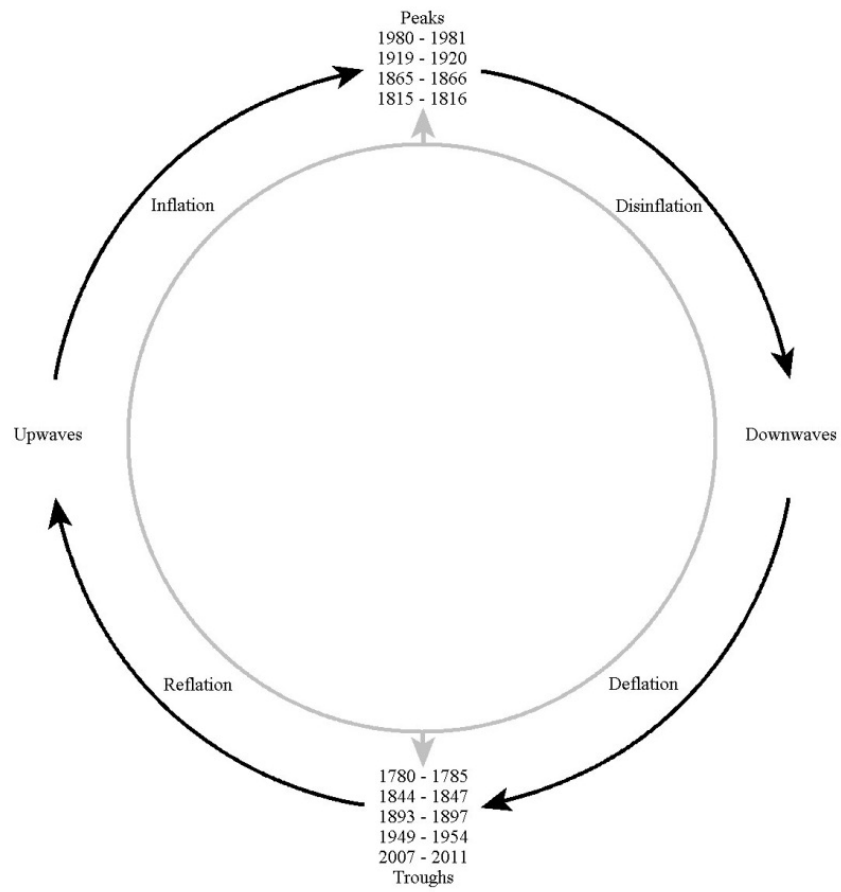


Fig. 1. Timing of long-wave peaks, troughs and inflation waves in the last two centuries

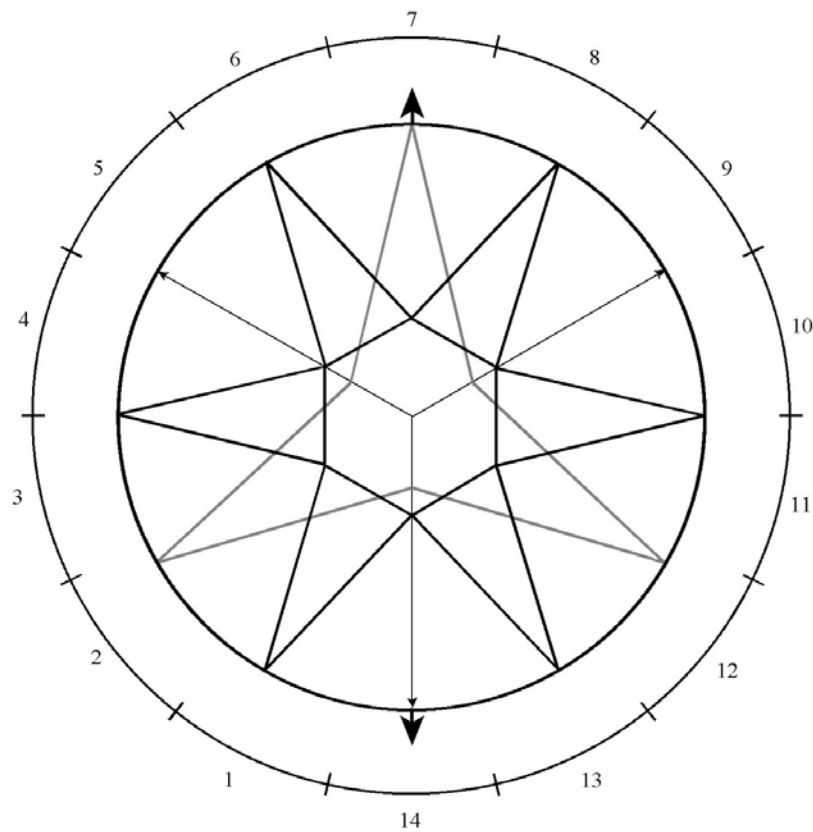


Fig. 2. Fourteen presidential terms occupy each long-wave

Upwave and Downwave Presidencies

What has been overlooked in the previous literature, and which provides a key to what follows, is that each long wave also encompasses 14 4-year American presidential terms. These also appear in Fig. 2. There are seven 'upwave' presidential terms, numbered 1 to 7 in Fig. 2 and detailed in Table 1. Seven 'downwave' presidential terms are numbered 8 to 14 and are documented in Table 2.

Table 1. Upwave Presidencies

Deflationary Depression			Inflationary Spiral			
1. Continental Congress, 1785–1789	2. George Washington, 1789–1793	3. George Washington, 1793–1797	4. John Adams, 1797– 1801	5. Thomas Jefferson, 1801– 1805	6. Thomas Jefferson, 1805– 1809	7. James Madison, 1809– 1813
1. William Henry Harrison / John Tyler, 1841–1845	2. James Knox Polk, 1845– 1849	3. Zachary Taylor / Millard Fillmore, 1849– 1853	4. Franklin Pierce, 1853–1857	5. James Buchanan, 1857– 1861	6. Abraham Lincoln, 1861– 1865	7. Andrew Johnson, 1865– 1869
1. William McKinley, 1897– 1901	2. Theodore Roosevelt, 1901–1905	3. Theodore Roosevelt, 1905–1909	4. William Howard Taft, 1909–1913	5. Woodrow Wilson, 1913– 1917	6. Woodrow Wilson, 1917– 1921	7. Warren Gamaliel Harding / Calvin Coolidge, 1921– 1925
1. Dwight David Eisenhower, 1953–1957	2. Dwight David Eisenhow- er, 1957– 1961	3. John Fitz- gerald Kennedy / Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1961–1965	4. Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1965–1969	5. Richard Milhous Nixon, 1969– 1973	6. Richard Milhous Nixon / Gerald Rudolph Ford, 1973– 1977	7. James Earl Carter, Jr., 1977– 1981
1. Barack Hussein Obama, 2009–2013	2. Barack Hussein Obama, 2013–2016					

Table 2. Downwave Presidencies

Inflationary Spiral			Deflationary Depression			
8. James Madison, 1813–1817	9. James Monroe, 1817–1821	10. James Monroe, 1821–1825	11. John Quincy Adams, 1825–1829	12. Andrew Jackson, 1829–1833	13. Andrew Jackson, 1833–1837	14. Martin Van Buren, 1833–1841
8. Ulysses Simpson Grant, 1869–1873	9. Ulysses Simpson Grant, 1873–1877	10. Rutherford Birchard Hayes, 1877–1881	11. James Abram Garfield / Chester Alan Arthur, 1881–1885	12. Grover Cleveland, 1885–1889	13. Benjamin Harrison, 1889–1893	14. Grover Cleveland, 1893–1897
8. Calvin Coolidge, 1925–1929	9. Herbert Clark Hoover, 1929–1933	10. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1933–1937	11. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1937–1941	12. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1941–1945	13. Franklin Delano Roosevelt / Harry S. Truman, 1945–1949	14. Harry S. Truman, 1949–1953
8. Ronald Wilson Reagan, 1981–1985	9. Ronald Wilson Reagan, 1985–1989	10. George Herbert Walker Bush, 1989–1993	11. William Jefferson Clinton, 1993–1997	12. William Jefferson Clinton, 1997–2001	13. George Walker Bush, 2001–2005	14. George Walker Bush, 2005–2009

In previous work we speculated about the long wave rhythms embedded in American politics, especially on the downwave, but did not tie them explicitly to presidential terms (Berry, Kim and Baker 2001; Berry and Dean 2012). Inflationary spirals, we said, elicit a response that leads to the election of fiscal conservatives who struggle to bring inflation under control and to restart the economy. Monroe, Grant, Coolidge and Reagan all were presidents who presided over the ensuing techno-economic revolutions, the Era of Good Feelings 1816–1825, the Gilded Age 1865–1884, the Roaring Twenties 1921–1929, and the IT Revolution 1981–1990 (Berry, Kim and Kim 1993). But rapid technological change produces new winners and casts aside old losers. Inequality increases – urban-rural after 1815, North-South after 1865, metropolitan-nonmetropolitan after 1921, high-tech/low-tech after 1981 (Berry, Harpham,

and Elliot 1998 103–104), resulting in reformist reactions (Jacksonian Democracy that created the distributive state, Cleveland's Early Reform that introduced regulatory state, Roosevelt's New Deal that established the redistributive state and the more recent Clinton reforms). Such reforms are overwhelmed as disinflation turns to deflation, however, and economic crises (the Panic of 1837, the Panic of 1893, the Crisis of 1950 and the market crash of 2007), are followed by deep depressions with accompanying tough wars (the Mexican war of 1846–1847, the Spanish-American War of 1897–1898, the Korean War of 1950–1954...).

It is in the aftermath of war and deflationary depression that Jayne's model takes over, providing a key to understanding the early upwave dynamics exemplified by the presidencies of Washington, Polk, T. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and, perhaps, Obama.

The Takeoff Stages: Jayne's Model

Jayne's model centers on what he terms 'American Kondratieff takeoff stages', each which achieved critical mass in the American culture in tight clusters of major publications. Four stages are described, termed the Federalist, Transcendental, Progressive and Alienationist, forming alternative pairs, the Federalist and Progressive where the presidency and dominant culture are aligned, and the Transcendental and Alienationist, where presidential actions that contributed to economic recovery diverged from a self-indulgent cultural frontier. We reproduce his argument, taking advantage of his invitation to make use of his materials so long as the use is not for material gain.

The Federalist Stage

The first takeoff stage, the Federalist was initiated by radical activism during the American Revolution, to which there was a conservative response focused on the attempt to create a strong central government to replace the British monarchy.

Critical mass was achieved in the three years that encompassed the publication of John Adams's *A Defense of Government of the United States* (1787), the *American Constitution* and the *Proceeding of the Constitutional Convention* (1787), *The Federalist Papers* and the 1789 *Bill of Rights and Judiciary Act*. Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* was published in 1791–1792 in England.

Implementation took the steady hand of founding father George Washington, and his refusal to be king of a new monarchy. Washington presided over the drafting of the U.S. Constitution and oversaw the creation of a strong well-financed national government. His vision was of a powerful nation built on republican lines using federal power, but in which the citizens had certain inalienable rights. The role of the government was seen as one preserving liberty, improving infrastructure, opening western lands, founding a permanent capital and promoting the spirit of nationalism. This view shaped the new state, but also embodied compromises on the slavery question that festered until it became the central national issue in the next long-wave.

The Transcendental Stage

The second or Transcendental Stage introduced America, according to Jayne, a creed of radical individualism inspired by the early nineteenth century romantic idealism of Kant, Coleridge, and Carlyle, which spearheaded and gave theoretical respectability to the public reaction against the eighteenth century Enlightenment led by such figures as Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Hume. In the United States this reaction both justified and necessitated a major departure from the Federalist perspective, since it featured heightened consciousness presumably superior to the relatively narrow rights and obligations established by the federal government. By most accounts, the Federalists' worst transgression was that they had created the United States based on a compromise at the Constitutional Convention that permitted slavery. This was rejected by the Transcendentalists, for whom liberty consisted of intellectual freedom devoid of such compromises, not merely the freedom to do as one pleases as guaranteed by law.

Critical mass was achieved in six peak years encompassed by Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850), Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Melville's *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), *White Jacket* (1850), *Moby Dick* (1851), *Pierre* (1852), and *Benito Cereno* (1855), Thoreau's *Week on the Concord and Merrimack* (1849), *Civil Disobedience* (1849), and *Walden* (1854), Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Parkman's *Oregon Trail* (1849), and *Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851) as the antislavery movement increased in strength and North-South conflict increased over whether new lands should be slaveholding or free.

The takeoff presidency was that of James Polk, whose fundamental belief in Manifest Destiny led, through both war and negotiation, to the creation of a coast-to-coast nation where yeoman farmers could go West and settle new lands. He also reformed the civil service, reestablished an independent Treasury System, and expanded the power of the presidency, especially with the respect to making war. But he was also a slaveholder, which led to increasing abolitionist criticism, but he only served one term and it was during his successors' presidencies that the North-South conflict escalated into the Civil War.

The Progressive Stage

The third or Progressive Stage, according to Jayne, reached its height in the culture with London's *The Sea Wolf* (1904) and *The War of the Classes* (1905), Steffen's *The Shame of Cities* (1904), De Leon's *Socialist Reconstruction of Society* (1905), Santayana's *Life of Reason* (1905), William James's *Pragmatism* (1907), *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), *The Meaning of Truth* (1909), *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), and *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912), Dewey's *How We Think* (1909), Adam's *Education of Henry Adams* (1907), Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), Mencken's *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908), Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* (ms completed in 1908),

Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (reissued in 1907), and *Jenny Gerhardt* (1911), Stein's *Three Lives* (1909), Wharton's *Ethan Frome* (1911), Pound's *Personae* (1909), and T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (written between 1910 and 1911).

The scope embraced aestheticism, muckraking, radicalism and institutional reform. The gold standard, women's suffrage, the graduated tax income, anti-trust legislation, minimum wage laws, the eight-hour working day, child labor laws, farm loans, government corruption, and the popular election of senators were only a few of the social and political issues that consumed public attention. Radical politics came to the fore, promoted by such figures as De Leon, Debs, and Haywood, respectively of the Socialist Labor Party, Socialist Party, and the IWW, and in a sequence that accelerated over a decade from theory to anarchist labor practices. From the beginning of the pragmatism of James, Pierce, Dewey, and Santayana emphasized what seemed to be an intellectual freedom that could readily be invoked to challenge bourgeois assumptions. Novelists such as Dreiser, Lewis, Anderson, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, and Faulkner told the stories of characters whose willingness to challenge these assumptions brought them into trouble with society at large, while poets such as Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Williams, Moore, and E. E. Cummings combined willingness with the use of avant-garde poetic technique to violate bourgeois aesthetic expectations.

Epitomizing the stage was Theodore Roosevelt. The classical progressive, he initiated civil service reform. An 'advocate' of universal expansion, he revised the Monroe Doctrine to allow the USA to 'exercise its international policy power'. At home, his 'Square Deal' programs included trust busting and regulation of business, plus a commitment to environmental conservation. Like Washington but unlike Polk, he epitomized the ethos of his times.

The Alienationist Stage

The fourth and most recent take off stage Jayne characterizes as 'alienationist', expressed in the years encompassed by Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), and *Pale Fire* (1962), Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), and *Herzog* (1964), Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) and *The Presidential Papers of Norman Mailer* (1963), Updike's *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), *Rabbit Run* (1960), and *The Centaur* (1963), O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), and *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1964), Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), *Mother Night* (1961), and *Cat's Cradle* (1963), Barth's *The End of the Road* (1958), and *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* (1959) and *Letting Go* (1962), Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *Another Country* (1962), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), Pynchon's *V* (1963), and Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964).

Alienationists first asserted themselves during the fifties and early sixties as existential outsiders isolated from society, later as radical activists vehement-

ly opposed to the misuse of power by the federal government. Intellectuals stirred public opinion with a fresh willingness to challenge received values. Fiction was dominated by entirely new voices explicitly or implicitly in the first-person singular. Investigative reporting became popular, as well as the 'New Journalism'. Poetry was hyper-personalized by the confessional, Black Mountain, San Francisco, New York, and deep image schools, while poets who had already established their reputations simply reinvented themselves, as did major novelists. Drugs became popular, and rock music was invented as well as psychedelic art and light shows. The sense of alienation brought freedom to the edge of social irresponsibility and sometimes over it. Meanwhile, a radical perspective was mounting that obliged political activism in response to the issues of Vietnam and militant black nationalism. As controversy escalated, individual expression was displaced by social protest too divisive to provide a safe vehicle for permanent literary insight: literary and intellectual productivity almost entirely came to a halt between 1964 and 1969 unless it stretched its connection with overt political activism.

As in the second takeoff stage, when Polk succeeded in creating a coast-to-coast nation while out of sympathy of the transcendentalism of his time, non-alienationist Dwight D. Eisenhower introduced initiatives that transformed the nation. Internationally, he led the U.S. battle against communist expansion, engaged in overseas interventions, and promoted nuclear deterrence. At home, he initiated a variety of programs that fundamentally changed the nation: the Interstate Highway System, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) which created the internet, NASA which began the space program, NDEA which began federal involvement in education, and the Atomic Energy Act which promoted the peaceful use of atomic power. He also oversaw the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 that protected the right to vote, desegregated the armed forces, and used Federal Troops to enforce desegregation of public schools.

Important Alternations

The common denominator of these takeoff periods, Jayne argues, was a commitment to liberty. In the culture at large the objective dedication to political rights emphasized by the Federalists was supported by a subjective commitment to Transcendentalist morality, then by the Progressive effort to reform social and cultural institutions, and finally by a new level of subjectively principled rebellion through what seemed a rejection of all social constraints. In other words, the guarantee of political liberties demanded by the Federalists was followed a half century later by the Transcendentalist pursuit of spiritual liberation, then half a century later by the Progressive pursuit of social, political, and economic reform, and finally, after yet another half century, by Alienationists' willingness to challenge the orthodox respectability dominant in American society after World War II.

The alternations are important. Whereas both the Federalist and Progressive takeoff stages featured the pursuit of attainable social and political modifications, the Alienationist and Transcendentalist takeoff stages put more emphasis upon the pursuit of individual freedom among those able and willing to confront authority. Jayne sees that two-century dialectic as being foretold by Hegel in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, where it was argued that the entire history of the Western civilization has rested upon a 'progress of the consciousness of freedom'. Reflecting the dialectic, the Washington and Roosevelt presidencies were attuned to the dominant cultural movements of their times, but those of Polk and Eisenhower were not.

The difference is one of belief *versus* myth. Each new takeoff stage brought to the fore a unique vision of liberty that negated the version preceding it by rejecting it as an *ignis fatuus*, a limited objective whose exclusive pursuit prevents the attainment of genuine liberty. The Federalist perspective was energized by the belief that maximum individual rights can be at least provisionally attained by a disinterested central government organized on a constitutional basis. The Transcendental perspective substituted the myth declared by Thoreau in his famous manifesto, *Civil Disobedience*, that genuine individual freedom must be imposed by individuals who are willing and able to oppose immoral government intervention. The Progressive perspective then substituted the belief that genuine freedom necessarily depends on institutional reform based on pragmatic need. And finally the Alienationist perspective settled upon, perhaps, the most extravagant myth: that since our freedoms are necessarily curtailed by government supportive of an immoral power structure, radical disobedience becomes a permanent obligation simply to prevent the excessive misuse of government authority.

The Presidency and the Long-Wave Clock

Thus, Jayne argues that American intellectual history has been marked by takeoff transformations occurring a half-century apart at the beginning of an economic long wave, each of which has been dominated by the same dialectic pursuit of freedom. He acknowledges Marx's contention that the intellectual compulsion primarily was the product of motives linked to the economic base, adding that he believes that intellectual change is organized sequentially through the agency of the Kondratieff long wave. This long-wave structuring also characterizes American political history as set down in Fig. 3. As the figure shows, four defining types of presidencies – conservative, liberal, 'takeoff' and cosmopolitan – each occupy specific locations on the long-wave clock. Takeoff presidents are elected in presidential term 2, at the beginning of an upwave. Cosmopolitan presidents are elected in presidential term 6, as an upwave approaches its end. Conservatives are elected in presidential term 9, at the beginning of a downwave. Liberals are elected in presidential term 12, as the downwave sags towards the trough. What defines each presidential type is the types of long-wave crises that precede them. These are also located on the

clock in Fig. 3. Deflationary depression precedes takeoff (progressive) presidencies. Cosmopolitans take over after a midpoint crisis. Stagflation crises lead to the election of conservative presidents, and after a primary trough liberals take over.

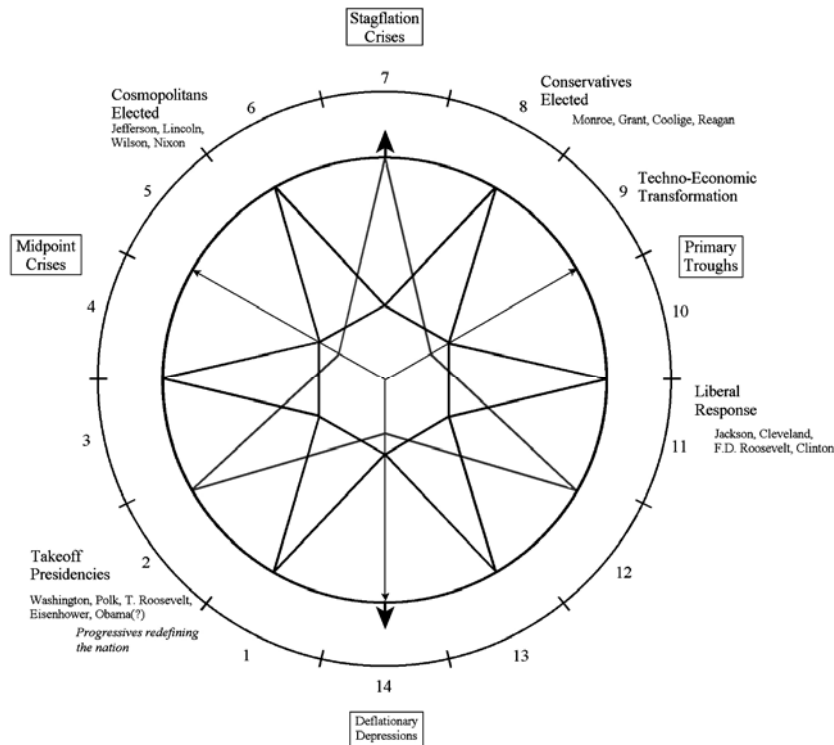


Fig. 3. The presidency and the long-wave clock

Obama Takeoff Presidency

The essential feature of the takeoff stage is that it is the long wave stage in which progressive presidents redefine the nation, either in lockstep with or in tension with a new emergent cultural paradigm. Barack Obama was reelected, like other progressives, in presidential term 2, in the aftermath of a deflationary depression and at the dialectic stage in which the presidency should be in tune with an emergent new cultural paradigm. We therefore conclude by asking what evidence might support these expectations.

Obama was elected via aggressive cultural identity and lifestyle politics that captured the imaginations of the nation's growing demographic and social groups – the young, minorities, millennials, and women – creating an emergent

Democratic majority that many have thought will prevail over declining core Republican constituencies – traditional nuclear families, evangelicals, *etc.* Obama's majority leaders have been characterized as the 'millennial gentry' who epitomize a socially liberal, east and west coast big city, ethnically diverse culture concerned with economic inequality, poverty, environmental threats and the second amendment. Their vision is one of a European-style welfare state, with national health guarantees ('Obamacare'), steep income taxation that raises the tax rates for 'the rich', expanded redistribution on grounds of 'fairness', and massive expansion of the regulatory powers of the federal government to constrain financial markets and to counter imagined personal and environmental threats, all combined with massive deficit spending – a set of initiatives that critics call 'watermelon' – green on the outside but with a red interior – producing and maintaining a permanently depressed underprivileged class firmly dependent upon welfare handed out by gentry progressives. Faced with the inability of conventional monetary instruments to ease the economy out of depression, Obama's central bank has turned to 'quantitative easing' – buying financial assets from commercial banks and other private institutions with newly created money in order to inject a pre-determined quantity of money into the economy. This easing increases the excess reserves of the banks, and raises the prices of the financial assets bought, which lowers their yield, but also introduces the possibility of massive inflationary pressures, which in previous up-waves have originated in the takeoff stages as the economy reflate and have brought takeoff transitions to an end. Whether Obama is achieving his goals or whether opposition to his policies is crafting an alternative fifth takeoff will be the subject of a follow-on essay as the Republican majority takes over in the aftermath of a devastating Obama defeat in the midterms elections of 2014.

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