

## Thomas Woodrow Wilson History

**Thomas Woodrow Wilson** (December 28, 1856 – February 3, 1924) was an American politician and academic who served as the 28th President of the United States from 1913 to 1921.

A member of the Democratic Party, Wilson served as the President of Princeton University from 1902 to 1910 and then ran and was elected as a progressive Democrat to the office of Governor of New Jersey. Wilson's victory in the 1912 presidential election made him the first Southerner elected to the presidency since Zachary Taylor in 1848.

He also led the United States during World War I, establishing an activist foreign policy known as "Wilsonianism." He was a major leader at the Paris [Versailles] Peace Conference in 1919, where he championed the proposed League of Nations. However, he was unable to obtain Senate approval for U.S. membership. He suffered debilitating strokes in September 1919; after that his wife and staff handled most of his presidential duties.

Born in Staunton, Virginia, he spent his early years in Augusta, Georgia and Columbia, South Carolina. His father was a leading Presbyterian in the Confederacy during the Civil War, and Wilson was always a devout Presbyterian and a proud Southerner.

He took a law degree and then one of the first PhDs in political science awarded by Johns Hopkins University. He served as a professor and scholar at various institutions before being selected as President of Princeton University, a position he held from 1902 to 1910. Wilson became a notable academic, arguing for the superiority of the parliamentary system. He was associated with Grover Cleveland and the conservative Bourbon Democrats until 1910, when he moved left. With the help of state Democratic bosses, Wilson won the 1910 Democratic nomination for governor of New Jersey, and was elected as a fresh reformer, holding office from 1911 to 1913.

He overthrew the same bosses and gained a national reputation. He won the 1912 Democratic presidential nomination after forty-six rounds of balloting, with support from William Jennings Bryan. Former President Theodore Roosevelt's third party candidacy split the Republican Party, which re-nominated incumbent President William Howard Taft. Wilson won the 1912 election with a plurality of the popular vote and a large majority in the electoral college.

Leading the Congress that was now in Democratic hands, he oversaw the passage of progressive legislative policies unparalleled until the New Deal in 1933.<sup>[1]</sup> The Federal Reserve Act, Federal Trade Commission Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act, and the Federal Farm Loan Act were some of these new policies.

Having taken office one month after ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment, Wilson called a special session of Congress, whose work culminated in the Revenue Act of 1913, introducing an income tax and lowering tariffs. Through passage of the Adamson Act that imposed an 8-hour workday for railroads, he averted a railroad strike and an ensuing economic crisis.<sup>[2]</sup>



Upon the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Wilson maintained a policy of neutrality, while pursuing a more aggressive policy in dealing with Mexico's civil war. Wilson staffed his government with Southern Democrats who implemented racial segregation at the Treasury, Navy and other Federal offices. In the presidential election of 1916, Wilson faced former New York Governor Charles Evans Hughes. By a narrow margin, he became the first Democrat since Andrew Jackson elected to two consecutive terms.

In April 1917, when Germany had resumed unrestricted submarine warfare and sent the Zimmermann Telegram, Wilson asked Congress to declare war in order to make "the world safe for democracy." The United States conducted military operations alongside the Allies, although without a formal alliance.

During the war, Wilson focused on diplomacy and financial considerations, leaving military strategy to the generals, especially General John J. Pershing. Through the Selective Service Act, conscription sent 10,000 freshly trained soldiers to France per day by the summer of 1918. On the home front, he raised income taxes, borrowing billions of dollars through the public's purchase of Liberty Bonds.

He set up the War Industries Board, promoted labor union cooperation, regulated agriculture and food production through the Lever Act, and took direct control of the nation's railroad system. Wilson asked Congress for what became the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, suppressing anti-draft activists.

The crackdown was intensified by his Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer to include expulsion of non-citizen radicals during the First Red Scare of 1919–1920. Early in 1918, Wilson issued his principles for an end to the war, the *Fourteen Points*, and in 1919, following an armistice, he traveled to Paris, promoting the formation of a League of Nations and concluding the Treaty of Versailles.

Following his return from Europe, Wilson embarked on a nationwide tour in 1919 to campaign for the treaty, but suffered a severe stroke. The treaty was met with serious concern by Senate Republicans, and the Senate ultimately rejected the treaty.

Due to his stroke, Wilson secluded himself in the White House, disability having diminished his power and influence, and he failed in his bid to win re-nomination at the 1920 Democratic National Convention. Wilson retired at the end of his presidency, and he died in 1924.

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