

Woodrow Wilson and His Ability  
To be an Effective President

During Woodrow Wilson's two terms in office he showed to be a great democratic leader in many areas. He managed to accomplish a lot, despite his poor health that he had to deal with since his childhood. Wilson always had a strong interest in government and was always looking for changes and improvements. As president he was never afraid to show a bit of a radical side when it came to making changes. He was constantly pushing for world peace and the avoidance of World War I. Even though he was unsuccessful in avoiding the war he showed to be a great leader during it. He never gave up on anything he was trying to do. His last years of his life were dedicated to convincing the U.S. to join his League of Nations.

Woodrow Wilson was born December 28, 1856. Through his childhood he was often sick. This did not keep him from building an interest in education. His father and him would read out loud to each other and discuss the books. If they were not reading often the two would sit and talk about recent events. He later moved onto college and studied American and British political history, public speaking, and law. After college he set up a law practice with Edward Renick. Because he had not learned the field of law thorough while in school, he showed a poor ability to be a lawyer. During this time he was in and out of sickness.

( 2 )

Wilson did not really want to be a lawyer. His main area of interest was in politics. His first taste of politics was during his term as Governor of New Jersey. He took this seat in office with sites of presidency two years later. He let this be known in a letter he wrote to a friend in June of 1910. In the letter he said this "It is immediately, as you know, the question of my nomination for the governorship of New Jersey; but that it is the mere preliminary of a plan to nominate me in 1912 for presidency."(Encarta 5).

During his years as governor he showed that he could change his political attitudes. He learned to be a little more patient with other people. Before he found it "very difficult to work with people who opposed him, and was not receptive to the suggestions of friends who approved his ideals but trusted in slower or modified processes"(Encarta 4). This was shown more during his time of presidency at Princeton University. Wilson's more conservative student body and faculty showed a dislike towards his radical ideas. They did not like the ideas of changing the teaching style and living style. Because of this many of his ideas were turned down.

When he first became president he pushed for equality of opportunity for all men, no matter if they were rich or poor (Collier's 509). He presented many new proposals to congress and often he presented these new proposals in person. Wilson also created new agencies such as the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Trade Commission. He was also responsible for the ratification of the 18th Amendment. In 1920 during his second

( 3 )

term, he passed the 19th Amendment which allowed women to vote. During this time he was also pressured by the southerners to allow segregation in Washington D.C. He said that this would be in the best interests of the blacks.

Woodrow Wilson did however show weaknesses during his presidency. During World War I he often took his time in making decisions. He wanted to make sure that there wasn't any other way to avoid the war. This was good that he was looking out after the interest of the country, but it could also have made the war worse. Wilson also was thought to be a weak president by ex-president Roosevelt (Encarta 6). During Roosevelt's time in office he helped Panama succeed from Colombia in return for rights to build the Panama Canal through their country. He thought it was very unnecessary to apologize to Colombia for helping the succession of Panama. Roosevelt believed that it showed Wilson's weaker side.

Wilson did show a strong side in one area, world peace. All through his first term he aimed to prevent World War I. This was the war that was known as "the war that would end all wars". He kept the U.S. neutral and often visited other countries trying to get them to agree on peace. Keeping the U.S. out of war was a great accomplishment and helped him win the 1916 election. But during his second term he found that he could not avoid the war any longer. The German's had said that they would attack any ship at sea.

( 4 )

It was only a matter of time until the German's attacked a passenger boat carrying war weapons. In this sinking 1100 civilians died, and in that eleven hundred 128 were Americans. Even though he believed war was wrong he could not let his personal feelings influence his decisions. He knew that this is what America had to do, and with this decision he addressed the people and gave his sympathies out to the families who had son's going to war (Collier's 510). On April 2, 1917 the United States went to war.

The U.S. was not involved in the war that long on November 11, 1918 peace was signed and the war was over. The president was quite happy with this and presented a proposal that would help prevent war in the future. This proposal was called Wilson's 14 Points. In these 14 points he suggests that a League of Nations be formed. The League of Nations would have members from several countries come together and discuss problems in the world. Many countries liked the idea of a group who would try and prevent wars from happening. Wilson pushed the United States to join but because congress did not want to get involved in current affairs, they did not. Not giving up Wilson set out across the U.S. to tell everyone about the League of Nations and his 14 points. During this time he fought sickness, his wife continuously begged him to not travel anymore and to go home and rest. But despite his poor health he continued to travel America letting everyone learn more about the League of Nations. Soon though his health finally diminished so badly that he went back to Washington. After a few days he seemed to be okay, but then he passed out. When he came back around he was

( 5 )

paralyzed. He remained in bed for half a year. When he finally became well again it was too late, his health was too poor and he had become too weak. People did not see Wilson as the same man he used to be he was weak mentally and physically. He fell into his last illness and died February 3, 1924.

Wilson was a very good leader during his terms of presidency. He showed great enthusiasm to stay out of the war and to create world peace. He showed that he cared for the people and that he would do just about anything to help them. Wilson learned to accept other peoples opinions and to be open to new ideas from others. Even though war was not avoided he learned much from the experience and helped to create the League of Nations. With the creation of the League of Nations the United Nations was formed to take its place. Wilson helped to create many new amendments, policies and agencies. All of his ideas were strong and even though some of them did not work out, they helped to create stepping-stones for the presidents that followed. Without Woodrow Wilson we may not be the country that we are today.

#### Works Cited

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2. Microsoft Encarta '97 Encyclopedia Deluxe Edition. Subject Search: Woodrow Wilson. 1-15.