

WORLD WAR I AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**Biography**

Woodrow Wilson led the United States into World War I, “to make the world safe for democracy” and to fight a “war to end war.” Although many in his own country did not share his idealism, his concept of an international peace organization lives on today in the United Nations. ♦ *As you read, note aspects of Wilson’s personality that influenced his politics. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

(Thomas) Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924)

As a child in the South, Woodrow Wilson witnessed the total destruction caused by the Civil War. Because of this, he understood how war could ruin a country and devastate its people. These early impressions never left him.

Wilson began his adult life with a law degree, but eventually turned to the study of political science, earning a Ph.D. in the subject. He then began a long career as a college professor, married, and had three daughters.

In 1902, he was invited to become the president of Princeton University. After his reforms on campus met with a mixed reception, he was happy to accept the Democratic Party’s nomination for governor of New Jersey. However, he refused to take direction from the conservative political bosses who had put him in office. His independence and progressive reforms gained him national attention. In 1912, he became the Democratic candidate for president, running against William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. Those two Republicans split the vote enough to give Wilson the victory.

In his first term, Wilson oversaw several major reforms, such as anti-trust laws, an 8-hour day for railroad workers, and an end

to child labor. In 1916, he was re-elected based on these reforms and his promise to keep the United States out of World War I.

However, by 1917, Wilson was convinced that the United States had a role to play in the war. He requested and got a declaration of war on Germany. In a speech to Congress, Wilson outlined the American goals, his Fourteen Points.

**Woodrow Wilson**

When the war ended, Wilson attended the Paris Peace Conference to put forward the Fourteen Points, and to try to forge an enduring peace. He met with limited success, but did get the League of Nations included in the Treaty of Versailles. However, when Wilson presented the treaty for ratification

by the U.S. Senate, it failed to pass by seven votes.

Wilson vowed he would personally build support among Americans for the treaty. He traveled across the nation explaining the importance of the treaty. However, this grueling effort exhausted him, and he suffered a debilitating stroke in October 1919. Although he partially recovered, his health was permanently ruined. He died in retirement a little over four years later.

Questions to Think About

1. What early experience led Wilson to be anti-war?
2. How did Wilson become president of the United States?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Wilson did not have a great deal of political experience before he became president. Do you think this helped or hurt his presidency?