

new jersey 350

innovation • diversity • liberty

Woodrow Wilson

Target Age: High School and Middle School
Time Period: 20th Century
Featured County: Mercer
NJ 350th Theme: Liberty

NJ Common Core Standards:

Social Studies: 6.1.12.A.6.a, 6.3.12.A.1
Social Studies Skills: Critical Thinking,
Language Arts Literacy: 3.1 Reading, 3.2 Writing



Courtesy of New Jersey State Archives; Department of State.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: In what ways did Woodrow Wilson expand the definition of liberty for New Jersey and the nation at the beginning of the 20th Century?

BACKGROUND:

On March 4, 1913, Woodrow Wilson became the first governor of New Jersey to take the oath of office as president of the United States. In the hotly contested national election of 1912, Wilson defeated two presidents: incumbent William Howard Taft, a Republican, and ex-president Theodore Roosevelt, who ran as a third-party candidate. He won only 42 percent of the popular vote, but captured 435 votes in the Electoral College. Wilson became the first Democratic President from the south since before the Civil War.

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was not born in New Jersey; he was born in Staunton, Virginia. He attended Princeton University as a student, and returned as a professor in 1890. A prolific writer with a national reputation, Wilson was named president of Princeton in 1902. He then became Governor of New Jersey in 1910. During his two years as governor, he overcame the political bosses of the day and put forth progressive reforms such as a Direct Primary, safer working conditions, suppression of political corruption, and revitalization of the state public utilities commission.

As president he pushed through more progressive reforms. His New Freedom Platform helped pass legislation dealing with banking, trusts, taxation, child labor, and workers' rights. The focus of this platform centered on individual liberties and freedoms for the common man. He also presided over a tragic step backwards when he ordered the segregation of the federal government's workforce and delayed the women's suffrage movement, but he is still considered an ardent and successful progressive politician. Wilson was the only Democrat to serve two consecutive terms as president in a span of nearly one hundred years.

ACTIVITY:

Place the students into three groups and distribute one of the three excerpts to each group. The excerpts are drawn from speeches delivered by Woodrow Wilson. The students will read and discuss the central message of the document and then analyze the historical context of the speech. Each group will answer the question provided, and then present the assigned speech and their findings to the class. Each group should also consider the following questions.

- In what ways is liberty an enduring American value?
- Whose responsibility is it to protect liberty for all Americans?
- Does the understanding of liberty change and evolve over time?

Group #1**Address at Independence Hall: "The Meaning of Liberty**

July 4, 1914

Liberty does not consist, my fellow-citizens, in mere general declarations of the rights of man. It consists in the translation of those declarations into definite action. Therefore, standing here where the declaration was adopted, reading its businesslike sentences, we ought to ask ourselves what there is in it for us. There is nothing in it for us unless we can translate it into the terms of our own conditions and of our own lives. We must reduce it to what the lawyers call a bill of particulars. It contains a bill of particulars, but the bill of particulars of 1776. If we would keep it alive, we must fill it with a bill of particulars of the year 1914.

Source: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=65381>

According to Woodrow Wilson, what is the meaning of liberty?

Group #2**Address to 4,000 newly naturalized citizens**

Philadelphia, May 10, 1915

... And if some of us have forgotten what America believed in, you, at any rate, imported in your own hearts a renewal of the belief. That is the reason that I, for one, make you welcome. ... You dreamed dreams of what America was to be, and I hope you brought the dreams with you. No man that does not see visions will ever realize any high hope or undertake any high enterprise. Just because you brought dreams with you, America is more likely to realize dreams such as you brought. You are enriching us if you came expecting us to be better than we are.

Source: <http://theamericanscholar.org/a-president-speaks-out-on-immigration/>

How does Woodrow Wilson define liberty for new citizens of the United States?

Group #3

Declaration of War

April 2, 1917

It is a distressing and oppressive duty, gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts - for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

Source: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/filmmore/fm_war.html

What actions must be taken in order to protect liberty from threats, both foreign and domestic?

FOLLOW-UP:

For homework, each student will read the 1912 Democratic platform.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/filmmore/fm_platforms.html

Based on the document each student will write a one paragraph answer to the following question, which will be discussed in class the next day. The students should consider the other candidates in the election of 1912, the successes and failures of the Progressive movement up until this point, and the views and attitudes of those who opposed the Progressive movement.

How does Woodrow Wilson's party's platform propose greater protections of liberty in the face of an evolving nation?

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

For More Information

Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library Website
<http://www.woodrowwilson.org/>

American Experience: Woodrow Wilson – PBS
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/>

The Papers of Woodrow Wilson at the American Presidency Project

http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/woodrow_wilson.php

Woodrow Wilson at the Miller Center

<http://millercenter.org/president/wilson>

CREDIT INFORMATION:

In Classroom Activity:

Pg. 1: President Wilson delivering his acceptance speech at Shadow Lawn. New Jersey State Archives; Department of State.

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