

*Woodrow Wilson*  
*28th President*




Terms: 1913-1921

Political Party: Democrat

First Lady: Ellen Louise Axson Wilson, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson

Vice President: Thomas Marshall

Highlights from the [Woodrow Wilson](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/> website include:

- face off against donkeys, elephants and bull mooses in the [1912 election](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf_election.html)  
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf\_election.html>
- explore poverty through the photographs and words of reformer [Jacob Riis](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf_poverty.html)  
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf\_poverty.html>
- find out what [historians](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf_legacy.html) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/sfeature/sf\_legacy.html> think of Wilson today

**Overview**

Born: December 28, 1856 in Staunton, Virginia... Wilson was the first president since [John Adams](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-adams/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-adams/> to address a joint session of Congress in person. Displaying a potent intellect and a bold vision of expanded presidential influence, Wilson successfully refined the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. A passionate defender of pacifism and America's official neutrality during the first three years of World War I, he found himself drawn into an intervention in Mexico and U.S. participation in the Great War. He also sought, and failed, to rally his countrymen toward a spirit of international cooperation in its aftermath.... Died: February 3, 1924.

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## The Era

- Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand sets off World War I (1914)
- Woman's Peace party led by [Jane Addams](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/chicago/peopleevents/p\\_addams.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/chicago/peopleevents/p_addams.html)> and [Carrie Chapman Catt](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/peopleevents/p\\_catt.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/peopleevents/p_catt.html) > (1915)
- Panama Canal opens (1915)
- *Birth of a Nation* premieres (1915)
- Russian Revolution ends the reign of the czars (1917)
- [Influenza](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/influenza/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/influenza/)> kills over 600,000 Americans (1918)
- [Prohibition](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/miami/peopleevents/pande06.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/miami/peopleevents/pande06.html)> laws go into effect (1919)
- Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer begins raids on suspected radicals: the Red Scare (1919)
- The [19th amendment](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-suffrage/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-suffrage/)>, guaranteeing universal suffrage, is ratified (1920)

*“There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power. Not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”*

– Woodrow Wilson, 1917

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## Domestic Policy

Woodrow Wilson entered the White House as a reformer. Although he disagreed with [Theodore Roosevelt](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-troosevelt/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-troosevelt/)> on several matters of policy, Wilson admired the way in which TR had used an aggressive style of leadership to champion certain causes. Wilson built on TR's notion of an expanded presidency. He led the charge to lower tariffs, regulate banking, strengthen the government's hand in breaking up monopolies, and establish a National Park Service.

## Foreign Affairs

Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy was based on an altruistic yearning to impart the benefits of constitutional democracy on other nations. To his detractors, his approach was seen as condescending and naive. His noble intentions did not prevent him from exercising military force when he ordered the seizure of the port of Veracruz as a way of aiding a counterrevolution in Mexico and later sending an expedition into Mexico in pursuit of Pancho Villa. Wilson's core belief that a "moral force controlled the relations of peace" would shape his attitude and actions during [World War I](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp\\_war.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp_war.html)>, and most definitively, in its aftermath, when he sought U.S. participation in a [world league](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp\\_league.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp_league.html)>.

## Presidential Politics

Wilson believed that the wall separating the executive and legislative branches of government was a hindrance to programs that would benefit the entire nation. He tried to work closely with Congress, especially with members of his own party. Wilson, a strong [progressive](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-progressive/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-progressive/)>, attempted to free national politics from the grips of entrenched party machines and became a strong -- though not highly effective -- advocate of the primary process.

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