President Thomas Woodrow Wilson

Thomas Wilson was born in Staunton, Virginia five years before the start of the American Civil War, on the 28th of December, 1856. As a young boy, the future president was not in good health and his eyesight required him to wear glasses from an early age. His family expected him to become a minister as was his father and his grandfather. But young Thomas had other plans. By the age of sixteen he entered a New Jersey college that one day would be known as Princeton University.

Thomas now asked his friends to call him by his middle name, Woodrow. This remained for the rest of his life. His interests were not with religious studies as his family had hoped. Woodrow found he had a passion for politics and the law. After college Woodrow attended the University of Virginia but withdrew due to health. He completed his law degree at home. Being an attorney was not what Woodrow Wilson had in mind after a few years. He returned to Johns Hopkins University earning a Ph.D. in political science.

By the time Woodrow was 27 years old he had taken a teaching position at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and married the lovely Ellen Louise Axson. After five years of teaching at Bryn Mawr and Wesleyan University, Dr. Wilson moved his family back to his first college which by then was called Princeton University. His tenure at the university was both popular and filled with his energy to insure democracy and equal opportunity. Having been elected the first non-ministerial president of the university Woodrow Wilson worked to equalize the treatment of both rich and poor students.

A well known author as well professor, Dr. Wilson was recognized across the country. In 1910 the Democratic Party of New Jersey ultimately persuaded Dr. Wilson to run for governor of the state. He won the position and led a continued push for reforms to help the less fortunate receive compensation when they were injured at work. But the Presidential election of 1912 would go down in history for the events that took place. Now Governor, Dr. Wilson became the Democratic candidate for President on the 42nd ballot at the convention. Then he took on the Republican incumbent William Howard Taft, and the popular and former President, Theodore Roosevelt who ran a very strong campaign as a third party candidate. In spite of these strong opponents, Governor Wilson became President of the United States.

President Wilson spoke forcefully and directly to Congress. An eloquent and strong speaker, the President lowered tariffs thus allowing cheaper foreign goods into the country. With it came the sixteenth amendment – individual income tax. At the time the income tax law was enacted most people made less than $900 per year and the tax was set to begin with those earning more than $3000 per year. He also caused the Clayton Anti-Trust Act to become law and the Federal Trade Commission to be created. He organized the Federal Reserve Banking System which was comprised of twelve separate special banks.
President Thomas Woodrow Wilson (Cont’d)

During those years Europe was at total war, embroiled in World War I. President Wilson tried to maintain a position of neutrality for the U.S. but America sent much needed supplies and materials to the English and the French. The Germans then retaliated by torpedoing the cargo ships as they crossed the Atlantic. The turning point for America was the sinking of the ship called the Lusitania. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding what the ship carried besides passengers on that voyage. But this act, as well as others, was enough for the President to ask Congress to declare war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. Tragically, Mr. Wilson’s wife died the same week that war was declared. The President was truly heartbroken by the loss of his beloved wife, Ellen.

For the war effort America assembled four million troops and manufactured huge quantities of war materials. The American people gave up many things they were used to having in order to support the war. The war was a terrible conflict in which millions died and in the end Germany surrendered at that famous time and date known as Armistice Day – the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year 1918.

Mr. Wilson was greatly admired around the world. He tried to create a League of Nations to prevent such a war from ever happening again. He gave a special address to Congress in January, 1918 called the Fourteen Points speech. He felt all countries would agree these Points were necessary for a peaceful world. However, the English, Italians, and the French were determined to bring down upon Germany repressive demands for repayment of the cost of the war and many other requirements. At home, President Wilson could not get his program approved through the Senate because many felt it gave away too much of America’s sovereignty to the proposed League. In the end there was no League of Nations.

President Wilson suffered a stroke during his efforts to get the passage of his bill to join this League. It took him many months to recover, but he never regained his full strength. Having remarried, President Wilson was cared for by his new wife, Edith Galt. The President had offended many in the Republican Party by not having them participate in the creation of the Fourteen Points or the creation of the proposed League of Nations. However, he would not compromise on any of his provisions with such commitment that he told his own party to vote against the bill if any amendment of the Republicans was added to it. Thus the creation of the League failed.

President Wilson lived just 3 years after his presidency. He and his wife lived peacefully in Washington D.C. where he died on the 3rd of February, 1924 at the age of 68. His wife lived until 1961, seeing many issues come to pass that her husband feared would occur without his League of Nations.
President Thomas Woodrow Wilson Questions

1. What was Woodrow Wilson’s occupation before becoming president?
   a. Lawyer
   b. College professor
   c. Governor
   d. All of the above

2. During World War I, Woodrow Wilson served in the U.S.
   a. Army
   b. Navy
   c. Marines
   d. None of the above

3. Who were the presidential candidates in the 1912 election?
   a. Wilson and Taft only
   b. Wilson and Roosevelt only
   c. Wilson, Taft and Roosevelt
   d. Taft and Roosevelt only

4. One law passed by Wilson that affects American citizens today is
   a. Income tax
   b. Fourteen Points
   c. League of Nations
   d. None of the above

5. What caused the United States to formally enter World War I?
   a. The Germans sank the ship Lusitania
   b. The French sank the ship Lusitania
   c. The Germans attacked Great Britain
   d. America maintained neutrality

6. The goal of President Wilson’s League of Nations was
   a. To end World War I
   b. To fight together in World War I
   c. To work towards global peace
   d. To punish Germany for World War I

7. While in office President Wilson became ill, suffering from
   a. Fatigue caused by World War I
   b. A debilitating stroke
   c. A severe heart attack
   d. A war injury
Multiple Choice

1. d.
2. d.
3. c.
4. a.
5. a.
6. c.
7. b.