

## 19.4 United States President Woodrow Wilson Discusses Democracy

**Background:** Woodrow Wilson was elected President of the United States in 1912. Before he entered politics, Wilson was a historian and political scientist and the President of Princeton University in New Jersey. In his 1917 war message to Congress, President Wilson cited the need to make the world “safe for democracy.” In a 1919 message to Congress, Wilson offered his view on the nature of democracy. Today Wilson is probably best remembered for the 14-point plan he proposed at the end of World War I to establish a just and lasting peace.

### Questions

1. According to excerpt A, why did President Wilson believe the United States had to enter World War I?
2. In excerpt B, how did President Wilson define democracy?
3. According to Wilson how would justice in the United States be achieved?
4. President Wilson, a Southerner by birth, is also notorious for institutionalizing racial segregation in Washington DC and the federal government. In your opinion, can someone who promoted racism still be considered a champion of democracy?

### A. Woodrow Wilson, War Message to Congress (1917)

**Source:** <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/>

“The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them . . . 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.”

### B. Woodrow Wilson, 7th Annual Message to Congress (1919)

**Source:** <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/7th-annual-message>

“We are a democracy, where the majority are the masters, or all the hopes and purposes of the men who founded this government have been defeated and forgotten. In America there is but one way by which great reforms can be accomplished and the relief sought by classes obtained, and that is through the orderly processes of representative government. Those who would propose any other method of reform are enemies of this country . . . The instrument of all reform in America is the ballot. The road to economic and social reform in America is the straight road of justice to all classes and conditions of men. Men have but to follow this road to realize the full fruition of their objects and purposes. Let those beware who would take the shorter road of disorder and revolution. The right road is the road of justice and orderly process.”