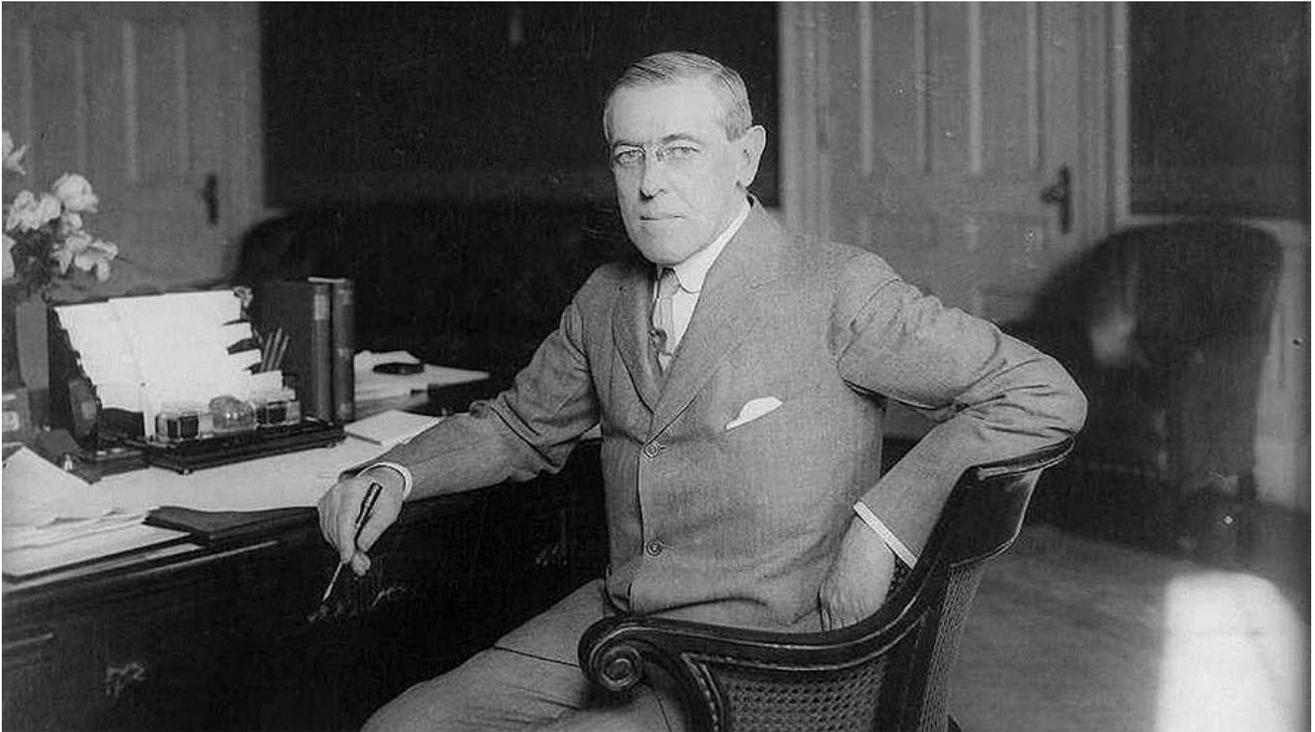


Primary Sources: Woodrow Wilson's 14 Principles to End WWI

By Original document from the public domain, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.04.16
Word Count **660**



President Woodrow Wilson at his desk in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., around 1913. Photo: Wikimedia Common

Editor's Note: On January 8, 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson gave an important speech to Congress. At the time, World War I was still raging in Europe. On one side of the war were Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Together these countries were known as the Central Powers. Wilson referred to them as the Central Empires. On the other side were Britain, France, Italy, Russia and the United States. The war had started in 1914.

In his speech, the president listed 14 principles or key demands he said the U.S. must ask for during any peace talks. Wilson's speech is below. Roman numerals were used to number the principles.

Gentlemen of the Congress:

The Central Empires have said they are willing to seek an end to the war. Talks were begun, but they have already been broken off.

The Central Empires say they are not willing to give up any of the territory they have seized. We simply cannot accept such a plan.

"Talks Can Begin Again"

However, talks can begin again. The Central Empires have not only told us what they want. They have also challenged our side to say what we want.

I believe the people of the United States would wish me to answer that question.

What we demand is that the world be made safe to live in. In particular, it must be made safe for every peaceful nation that wishes to live its own life freely.

Our program is this:

I. Any and all peace treaties must be arrived at openly. There should be no secret treaties of any kind.

II. There must be complete freedom of the seas, during both peace and in war.

III. As far as possible, all nations should be allowed to trade freely and equally.

IV. Every nation should have no more weapons than it needs to keep itself safe.

V. Control over certain territories outside Europe may need to pass from one European nation to another. It is very important to consider what is best for the people who live in these colonies. The matter must be decided fairly and openly.

VI. All Russian territory seized by enemy troops must be returned to Russian control. Russia must be given complete freedom.

VII. Enemy troops must leave Belgium as well. The country must be restored to full independence.

VIII. All French territory taken during the war should be freed and restored to French control. Alsace-Lorraine should also be returned, as it was wrongly seized from France in 1871.

IX. The borders of Italy should be reset, to make them fairer and clearer.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary should be given complete freedom to develop independently.

XI. Enemy troops should leave Romania, Serbia and Montenegro. The freedom of those nations should be restored and guaranteed.

XII. The Turkish part of the Ottoman Empire should be given independence. However, the other national groups now under Turkish rule should also be given the right to develop independently.

XIII. A new Polish state should be formed, and its independence should be guaranteed.

XIV. A new group must be formed that will allow the world's nations to work together. Its purpose should be to protect the rights of all nations, both great and small.

"Justice For All"

If we are to achieve these goals, the nations that have fought against the Central Empires must work as one. We must stand together until the end. We must be willing to fight for the demands I have laid out, but only because we want a just and lasting peace.

One central principle runs through all 14 demands I have outlined. It is the principle of justice for all peoples and nations. All must have an equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.

There can be no real justice unless this principle is recognized. To support it, the people of the United States are ready to fight and even to die.

Quiz

- 1 Based on information in the article, which of these statements is TRUE?
- (A) The reason for the 14 principles was to benefit only the United States.
 - (B) The reason for the 14 principles was to to make the world better for everyone.
 - (C) The reason for the 14 principles was to give land to the Ottoman Empire.
 - (D) The reason for the 14 principles was to start a new war with the Central Empires.
- 2 Select the sentence from the section "Justice For All" that BEST shows the main goal behind creating the 14 principles.
- (A) If we are to achieve these goals, the nations that have fought against the Central Empires must work as one.
 - (B) We must stand together until the end.
 - (C) All must have an equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.
 - (D) To support it, the people of the United States are ready to fight and even to die.
- 3 Read the following sentence from the introduction:

The Central Empires say they are not willing to give up any of the territory they have seized. We simply cannot accept such a plan.

Based on the information in the document, what does Wilson mean by "seized"?

- (A) taken by force
- (B) asked to have
- (C) given by agreement
- (D) chosen to help

- 4 Read the paragraph from principle VIII:

All French territory taken during the war should be freed and restored to French control. Alsace-Lorraine should also be returned, as it was wrongly seized from France in 1871.

Which other word from the text helps the reader understand what "restored" means?

- (A) freed
- (B) control
- (C) returned
- (D) wrongly

Answer Key

- 1 Based on information in the article, which of these statements is TRUE?
- (A) The reason for the 14 principles was to benefit only the United States.
 - (B) The reason for the 14 principles was to to make the world better for everyone.**
 - (C) The reason for the 14 principles was to give land to the Ottoman Empire.
 - (D) The reason for the 14 principles was to start a new war with the Central Empires.
- 2 Select the sentence from the section "Justice For All" that BEST shows the main goal behind creating the 14 principles.
- (A) If we are to achieve these goals, the nations that have fought against the Central Empires must work as one.
 - (B) We must stand together until the end.
 - (C) All must have an equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.**
 - (D) To support it, the people of the United States are ready to fight and even to die.
- 3 Read the following sentence from the introduction:

The Central Empires say they are not willing to give up any of the territory they have seized. We simply cannot accept such a plan.

Based on the information in the document, what does Wilson mean by "seized"?

- (A) taken by force**
- (B) asked to have
- (C) given by agreement
- (D) chosen to help

- 4 Read the paragraph from principle VIII:

All French territory taken during the war should be freed and restored to French control. Alsace-Lorraine should also be returned, as it was wrongly seized from France in 1871.

Which other word from the text helps the reader understand what "restored" means?

- (A) freed
- (B) control
- (C) returned**
- (D) wrongly