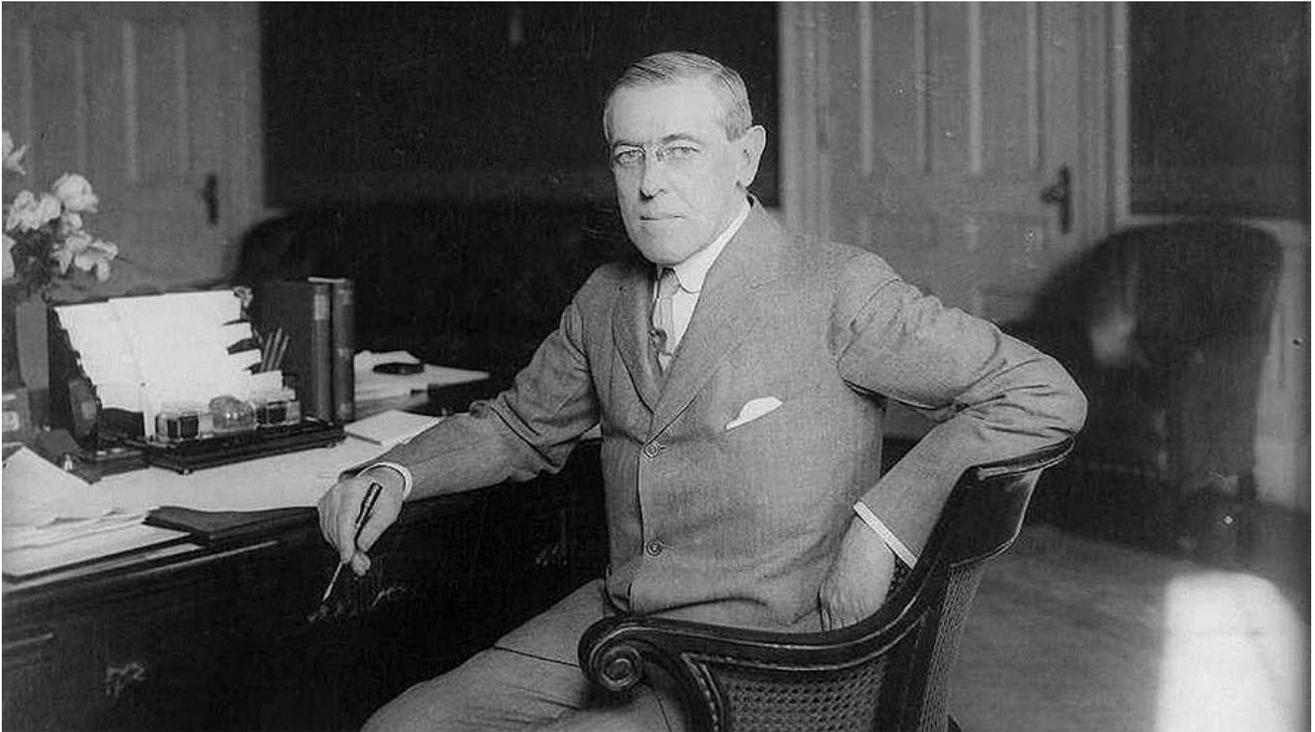


Primary Sources: Woodrow Wilson's 14 Principles to End WWI

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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 delivered a major speech to Congress. At the time, World War I was still raging in Europe. On one side of the conflict known as "the Great War" were the Central Powers — Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Wilson referred to them as the Central Empires. On the other side were Britain, France, Italy, Russia, the United States and several other allies. The war had started in 1914.

In his speech, the president outlined 14 principles the U.S. would insist on during any peace negotiations. Wilson's speech is below. Roman numerals were used to number the principles.

Gentlemen of the Congress:

The spokesmen of the Central Empires have announced their willingness to seek an end to the war. Talks have been in progress at Brest-Litovsk between Russian representatives and representatives of the Central Empires.

The Central Empires presented an outline of settlement which seemed promising at first. However, it soon became clear that they hoped to permanently keep every foot of territory their armed forces had occupied.

As a result, the negotiations have been broken off, because the Russians simply could not accept such unreasonable terms.

The Central Empires have not only laid out their goals, however. They have also challenged our allies and us to say what our goals are and what sort of settlement we would find just and satisfactory.

I believe the people of the United States would wish me to respond, and with utter frankness.

"We Demand ... The World Be Made Safe"

What we demand above all else is that the world be made safe to live in. In particular, it must be made safe for every peace-loving nation that wishes to live its own life and to be treated fairly by the other peoples of the world.

All the peoples of the world have a shared interest in achieving such a secure and lasting peace. For our own part, we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program we must support, therefore, is the one that best advances world peace, not just our own interests.

"Our Program"

Our program, which we see as the only possible one, is this:

- I. Any and all peace agreements must be openly arrived at, and there should be no private international understandings of any kind.
- II. There must be absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, during both peace and in war.
- III. As far as possible, trade and economic barriers between nations that agree to the peace should be removed.
- IV. Every nation should reduce its weaponry to the lowest level necessary to ensure domestic safety.
- V. Disputes over which nation has the right to control particular colonies must be settled fairly and openly. All decisions must give great weight to the interests of the colonial population.
- VI. All occupied Russian territory must be returned to Russian control. Russia must be given complete freedom to determine her own political development and national policy.

VII. Belgium's occupiers must leave as well, and Belgium must be restored to full independence. No other single act will do as much to restore confidence in the rule of international law. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law will be forever damaged.

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

IX. The borders of Italy should be readjusted along fair and clearly recognizable lines.

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

XI. Occupiers should leave Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the freedom of those nations should be restored.

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

XIII. An independent Polish state should be established. The new state's political and economic independence should be guaranteed by international agreement.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed. Its purpose should be to guarantee the political and territorial independence of all nations, both great and small.

"We Must Stand Together"

If we are to achieve these demands, those nations that have opposed the Central Empires cannot now be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We must stand together until the end. We must be willing to fight for the demands I have laid out, but only because we desire a just and stable peace.

One central principle runs through the whole program I have outlined. It is the principle of justice for all peoples and nations, and their equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.

There can be no international justice unless this principle is both recognized and protected. The people of the United States can accept and act upon no other principle. To support it, they are ready to lay down their very lives.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction that explains what the Central Empires planned to get when talks first began.
- 2 Select the sentence from the section "We Must Stand Together" that BEST explains the need for the countries to unite to create peace.
- (A) If we are to achieve these demands, those nations that have opposed the Central Empires cannot now be separated in interest or divided in purpose.
 - (B) It is the principle of justice for all peoples and nations, and their equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.
 - (C) There can be no international justice unless this principle is both recognized and protected.
 - (D) The people of the United States can accept and act upon no other principle.

- 3 Read the sentence from the article.

We must be willing to fight for the demands I have laid out, but only because we desire a just and stable peace.

Which option is the best definition of the word "just" as used in the sentence?

- (A) exact
 - (B) average
 - (C) fair
 - (D) easy
- 4 Read the following selection:

An independent Polish state should be established. The new state's political and economic independence should be guaranteed by international agreement.

Which word from the paragraph helps you understand that President Wilson wants to create the country of Poland?

- (A) established
- (B) political
- (C) guaranteed
- (D) agreement

Answer Key

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction that explains what the Central Empires planned to get when talks first began.

Paragraph 4:

The Central Empires presented an outline of settlement which seemed promising at first. However, it soon became clear that they hoped to permanently keep every foot of territory their armed forces had occupied.

- 2 Select the sentence from the section "We Must Stand Together" that BEST explains the need for the countries to unite to create peace.

- (A) **If we are to achieve these demands, those nations that have opposed the Central Empires cannot now be separated in interest or divided in purpose.**
- (B) It is the principle of justice for all peoples and nations, and their equal right to liberty and safety, whether they be strong or weak.
- (C) There can be no international justice unless this principle is both recognized and protected.
- (D) The people of the United States can accept and act upon no other principle.

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