

Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points



The Fourteen Points was Woodrow Wilson's plan for enduring world peace after the horror of World War I. It was part of Wilson's speech to the House of Representatives and the Senate on January 8, 1918. Wilson's goal was to establish a peace plan for Europe. Wilson maintained that progressivism had been responsible for the domestic reforms in the United States, and he believed the same principles could be applied to foreign-policy issues.

In his Fourteen Points, Wilson advocated that all future diplomacy should be open and transparent, freedom of the seas would prohibit trade barriers and boost world economies, decisions concerning colonies should be impartial, and the new communist regime in Russia should be allowed to establish its government without international interference. Wilson also wanted to right some of the wrongs resulting from the war. Wilson supported Belgium's independence, as well as French liberation and the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine. All Italians were to be allowed to live in Italy, and people in Austria-Hungary were to be granted self-determination. The Balkan states would be guaranteed independence, a Turkish government would govern Turks, and non-Turks in the old Ottoman Empire were to be independent. Access to the sea would be granted to an independent Poland. Wilson also wanted to establish a League of Nations, an international organization where international disagreements could be resolved, so warfare between nations would be avoided.

Wilson's Fourteen Points had many critics. Some stated that outlining the Fourteen Points in detail was just Wilson's attempt to improve morale in the army and to help encourage the Allied Forces to achieve victory. Copies of the Fourteen Points also were given to the opposition and encouraged the Central Powers to surrender. Prince Maximilian, Germany's Imperial Chancellor, sent a letter to President Wilson to discuss plans for peace. With this action, Maximilian demonstrated his endorsement of the Fourteen Points. The Fourteen Points were discussed at the Paris Peace Conference and were incorporated into the text of the Treaty of Versailles. England and France opposed the Fourteen Points because of its provisions on freedom of the seas and war reparations, respectively. This forced Wilson to alter the Fourteen Points, but he kept the fourteenth point intact, a League of Nations.

When the League of Nations was presented to the United States Senate for its approval, many senators objected to joining because they thought membership would obligate American soldiers to fight in foreign wars. Ultimately, the Senate rejected President Wilson's grand plan to achieve lasting, international peace. The League of Nations was established without the United States and it did have some success, especially as a model for the post-World War II United Nations.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the goal of Wilson's Fourteen Points?
2. How did progressivism influence Wilson's speech?
3. How would freedom of the seas benefit Europe?
4. What was the Russian policy in Wilson's Fourteen Points?
5. What international organization did Wilson seek to establish?
6. What were early criticisms of the Fourteen Points?

7. Why were England and France opposed to the Fourteen Points?

8. Why did the United States Senate oppose the League of Nations?