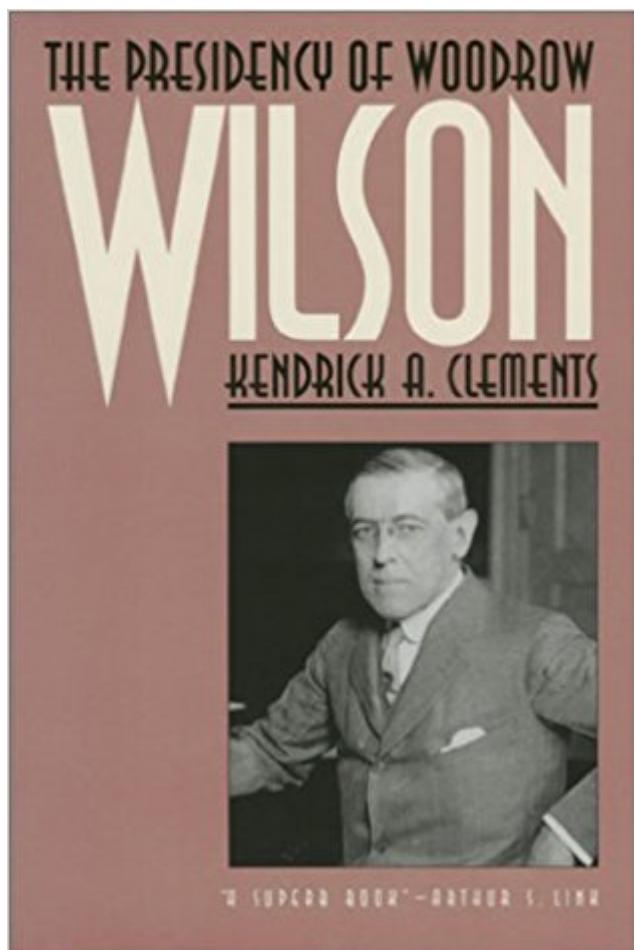


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The Presidency Of Woodrow Wilson



Synopsis

The best of presidents seem to serve in the worst of times, and Woodrow Wilson is no exception. Like Lincoln, Wilson was charged with leading the United States through a war of unprecedented scale. And like Lincoln, he is considered one of the half-dozen best presidents the country has ever had. From 1913–1921, Wilson grappled with momentous issues: domestic reform, war, and peace. His administration did much to shape twentieth century America—from establishing the U.S. as the preeminent world power to reforming banking practices, from lowering trade barriers to establishing the federal income tax. The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson is the best one-volume study available on this very productive presidency. Historian Kendrick Clements analyzes the reasons for Wilson's successes and failures in both domestic and foreign arenas, and investigates representative administrative departments to find out how the Wilson administration actually worked. Drawing upon the latest secondary literature and recently discovered medical records, Clements also reexamines the impact of Wilson's illness on his diplomatic and domestic leadership in the last year and a half of his presidency.

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Customer Reviews

Like the earlier volumes of this highly useful series, the Wilson volume summarizes recent scholarship in an integrated and readable fashion. The principal events and issues of the Wilson administration and the way Wilson and his appointees handled each is analyzed and assessed.

Clements is sympathetic toward Wilson's goals, but incisive on the counterproductive impact of many of his methods and personality traits. This is a study of an administration, not a biography, and libraries owning recent biographies (e.g., August Heckscher's *Woodrow Wilson*, *LJ* 9/15/91) will still want this excellent volume for patrons interested in serious exploration of political and administrative history.-Nancy C. Cridland, Indiana Univ. Libs., BloomingtonCopyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Smoothly written if not penetrating account of how an exceptional chief executive enlarged the presidency in a period of intense national growth and change; by Clements (History/Univ. of South Carolina). Detailed and balanced, this study makes clear Wilson's grasp of his times and his capacity for convincing other Americans of his rightness. Clements traces that sense of rightness back to a family full of practical southern Protestant ministers, believers in service--a notion Wilson expanded to connect religion with patriotism. The result was a can-do leader in domestic affairs, an extremely gifted politician able to work deals, compromise, and create respect in Congress, which by and large cooperated in a reformist agenda that created the Federal Reserve, took steps to deal with social effects of industrialization, reduced the tariff, created the income tax to replace those lost revenues, and tightened government control of business, beginning with child labor laws. But the orderly progression and style of this book do not suggest the scope of Wilson's vision, his passion, his moral stance, and how these enabled him to powerfully sway Americans, if not Europeans. The other players are a bit lifeless as well, which leads to an impersonal, sanitized study. Wilson the man was deeper, craftier, more complex, and more driven than seen here, and his leadership cannot be separated from these qualities. The harrowing failure at Versailles, the death-struggle over the League of Nations with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and Wilson's final, driving, self-destructive effort to impose his will on an America eager for Harding's ``normalcy''--all deserve deeper scrutiny and analysis. The tragic denouement following his stroke--the ``stewardship'' by Mrs. Wilson and Col. House--is as murky as ever, except in its implications regarding transfer of power in such a crisis, insufficiently explored here. A finely detailed, almost too specialized, and nonjudgmental account, not very urgent or thought-provoking. -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The Democratic Party as we know it today begins here— with the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. Until the 1912 presidential election, the Democrats had been the party of Jefferson and Jackson, of small government, states' rights, the party against

centralized banks and organized labor and, when it came to business monopolies and trusts, decidedly laissez faire. Beginning with the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, that changed. The Progressive Era started by William McKinley and took flight with Theodore Roosevelt, was embraced and expanded by our 28th president. *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* by Hendrick A. Clements, is a tale of two presidential terms--the highly successful first term involving Wilson's progressive domestic agenda, and his less-than-stellar second term involving Wilson's foreign policy. While he admires Woodrow Wilson, Professor Clements isn't bashful about examining his shortcomings. Clements' writing is crisp and brisk, ever advancing the narrative. Woodrow Wilson was a man of exceptional intellect, and the first and only president with a doctorate degree (in political science). While a bit stiff and humorless, Wilson had charisma and could be extremely persuasive. He moved up quickly through the ranks of college professors. From 1902 to 1910 he served as president of Princeton University, establishing a reputation as a reform-minded thinker. Recruited by the Democratic Party of New Jersey, he won election as state governor 1910. In 1912, a political novice just two years removed from academia, Wilson was nominated for president by the Democrats. In a three-way race with Roosevelt and incumbent William Taft, Wilson ascended to the presidency in only the second election of his life. Wilson received a heavy assist from "The People's Lawyer," crusading reformer (and future Supreme Court Justice) Louis Brandeis. If Wilson had any doubt about his progressive vision for America, Brandeis encourage his message and helped to push his reform agenda through Congress. Among the progressive bills passed: the Federal Reserve Act, which greatly enhanced the government's ability to control the nation's money supply; the creation of the Federal Trade Commission, designed to guarantee fairness in the way goods and services were bought and sold; and a law outlawing child labor. Another bill mandated an eight-hour day for railway workers and another (Underwood Simmons) reduced the tariffs on imports and established the first graduated federal income tax. On top of that, Wilson pushed through legislation to outlaw deceptive business practices and to provide low-cost long-term mortgages to farmers. Wilson also was an outspoken advocate of women's suffrage, a position that helped ratify the 20th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. Also, he instituted the first regular White House press conferences, and he inaugurated the tradition of presidents addressing Congress in person, rather than issuing a prepared written statement. Wilson's second term was dominated by the conduct of World War I and his efforts to bring lasting world peace. America's entrance into the war helped turn the tide against Germany, which surrendered in November 1918.

Wilson was alone among European allies in opposition to the punitive reparations that the Treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany. A part of the treaty included Wilson's plan for the formation of a League of Nations to adjudicate future international conflicts. In the end, the French and British allies refused to yield on the issue of reparations and the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the treaty, dooming Wilson's League of Nations. Wilson has come under fire in recent years for his racism, including his unconscionable re-segregation of several federal agencies, an act that destroyed the careers of a number of African American civil servants. This is shameful. Another dark spot on Wilson's presidency was his handling of communist advocates within the U.S. borders. His attorney general, A. Mitchell Palmer, took strong measures to crush so-called subversive activities. The Palmer Raids, along with other administration actions (such as imprisoning the socialist leader Eugene Debs) have been much reviled by civil libertarians. No president is perfect, as Wilson's presidency certainly attests. He accomplished a great deal, and made some egregious errors. Wilson was never wildly popular as president, and his reputation among admiring historians has cooled somewhat in recent years. Professor Clements gives Wilson his due, and fairly I believe. Currently, Wilson is rated eighth on the list of presidential greatness.

In his presentation of "The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson", Kendrick A. Clements has continued the American Presidency series' tradition of bringing history to life in an interesting, satisfying and informative way. As a series (this is the third in the series that I have read, Andrew Jackson and Harry S. Truman being the others) American Presidency histories are usually close to 300 pages in length, and thoroughly present the events and leadership of the subject. Clements has kept the tradition with his writing. President Wilson is presented from beginning to end as a man committed to his faith and determined to lead according to moral principles, often unwilling to compromise, sometimes stubborn almost to a fault, yet desirous of making the best decisions possible. Yet, for all his good intentions, and good ideas, Wilson was often his own worst enemy. He was often naive about the "good intentions" of business, citizens and nations. Yet, he has come to be considered one of our "near great" presidents by historians. How Woodrow Wilson went from his humble beginnings, to college presidency, to U.S. Presidency is a fascinating story, ably presented in this historical biography. How he ultimately fell victim to his own worst traits, due in large part to the massive stroke he suffered on October 2, 1919 is heartbreaking. How the nation continued to consider him at least marginally qualified to handle the job after such a physically devastating stroke, and how his wife Edith successfully fronted for him while he finished out his second term,

with the nation largely unaware of his condition, is both controversial and amazing. I found Clements' book satisfying and illuminating on all counts. If you like to read histories that present the most important stories of history in a reasonable length book, Clements' book will be satisfying and illuminating to you as well. If you like a massive amount of details, you might, like I do, wish to follow this book with a larger and more in depth presentation. I give "The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson" 5 stars.

Great book, provided in depth analysis of the Wilson Administration. I had to read the book for my US History class but I ended up personally enjoying the book. The book has a strong emphasis on economic policies of the Wilson Administration.

This book is well written and easy to read. It takes a very balanced view of Wilson's accomplishments, his philosophies, and his serious shortcomings. It convinced me to read two more books on Wilson and this era.

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