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## Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Societies need intellectually endowed leaders to progress. In order to transform societies, its leadership must exhibit wisdom, fair judgment, and enthusiasm for initiating and implementing the change. It should be noted that leadership does not work in a vacuum. Hence, a leader is a person who is strong enough to ensure that progressive change is effective despite any obstacles that often challenge the adoption of reforms. However, leaders need to exercise restraint; otherwise they will be seen as imperial figures, whose only interest is to impose their will.

Political leaders such as presidents play a significant role in influencing the developmental path that the United States take. For instance, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt are thought to have played the leading roles in influencing the development of the United States. Based on this position, the paper assesses the contribution of the two leaders into the development of the American society.

### The Presidency of Wilson

Woodrow Wilson served as the President of the United States from 1913 to 1921 (Maynard 3). Wilson was an enthusiastic advocate of a controlling presidency. This point clearly bases on his assertions that the president has the freedom to do whatever he/she pleases. He indicated that, unlike the Congress that did not have the backing of the people, the President had it (Maynard 3).

After having won the presidency, Wilson sought to change the Democratic Party to become a progressive entity (Maynard 7). The intentions were to



make the party a vehicle to be used in changing or transforming the United States. To ensure his plans succeeded, Wilson promised to choose people whose reasoning was progressive. This move later proved unpopular since Wilson employed his sycophants to help in suppressing the dissidents.

President Wilson considered the system of checks and balances to be artificial and antiquated, despite the fact that it was fixed in the Constitution. According to Wilson's views, this equated to an attempt to belittle the movement that supported the fidelity of the Constitution (Link 365 - 388). Wilson advocated for a Living Constitution, which would be elastic enough to accommodate the political realities of the time. The idea that Wilson presented asserted that the Constitution had to evolve with time, for it to address the changing societal needs. In order to introduce the reforms initiated by Wilson, the need to have a progressive leader was urgent.

It is alleged that, under the leadership of Wilson, the people considered progressive were used as the propaganda instruments. The progressives (people who worked for the Committee on Public Information) helped the Wilson's government to spread this propaganda. The Committee on Public Information (CPI), headed by George Creel, was perhaps the first ministry in the western world charged with the responsibility of developing governmental propaganda (Link 365 - 388). George Creel organized about one hundred thousand men, who were trained to deliver propaganda speeches in various towns and cities at appointed times. It appears that the Wilson's administration was focused on using fear to rule the masses since relying on propaganda, and training several operatives were not enough to influence the citizens significantly.

Regarding constitutionalism, during Wilson's time, the Sedition Act of May 1918 and Espionage Act of June 1917 were enacted (Ambrosius 509–43). The two acts illegalized any utterances intended to undermine the government or its policy. Even private criticism was unwelcome under the new legal rules. The enactments also outlined the punishment for those found guilty of criticizing the government. Those people who worked as progressives went across the United States to find out whomever that was thought to spread the anti-U.S. sentiments. Everyone who failed to support the progressives'



ideas was labeled an unpatriotic person. Clarence Darrow, the progressive attorney, brought out the ideas of Wilson in the “Monkey” trial of 1925. Darrow made it clear that supporting the president was not a choice, but a requirement. This turn of events proves that Wilson’s leadership was out to force its way instead of appealing to the masses.

Wilson managed to lobby for changes in the United States that few presidents had tried to implement (Ambrosius 509–43). Only the New Deal, which came in 1933, was of equal influence. During Wilson’s leadership, the Clayton Antitrust Act, Federal Reserve Act, Federal Farm Loan Act, Federal Trade Commission Act, and Income Tax Act were introduced. In 1916, the Wilson’s regime managed to introduce the Keating–Owen Act, which outlawed the child labor. However, the law did not last long as the Supreme Court ruled that the Act was inconsistent with the United States Constitution in 1918. Another notable act passed during this time was the Adamson Act. The Adamson Act regulated working time in the railroads, restricting it to eight hours. Another key aspect of the Wilson’s leadership could be seen in his change of position to sympathize with the women rights. Despite a promise to pursue inclusion, the Wilson’s administration did not fulfill it. It did continued supporting the segregation ideas in its employment policies. The above changes were a critical contribution to the history of the United States.

By enacting the Revenue Act of 1913, the Wilson’s administration lowered the tariffs (Ambrosius 509–43). However, the effects of lowering the Underwood Tariff were rendered ineffective following the ravages of the World War. However, Wilson’s effectiveness in mobilizing society was evident when he denounced the corporate lobbyists while addressing the Congress. This was a departure from his hard tactics of forcing his way. Further, the creation of the Federal Reserve was a landmark victory for President Wilson. The Federal Reserve System had unified money and banking systems.

After re-election, Wilson took full responsibility of taking the United States into the First World War. Thus, the negotiation of the peace treaties was the duty that the Wilson’s government handled. In his campaigns, Wilson relied on keeping the U.S. out of the war to clinch victory (Ambrosius 509–43). However, he joined the war during his second term. It is, however, noted that



entering the war was against the interests of the U.S. This becomes clear since the United States entered the war after provocation by the Germans. An aspect of neutrality in the country's foreign policy emerged soon. Despite the war raging for a long time, the United States, under the leadership of Wilson had chosen to steer clear of the confrontations. As already indicated, the U.S. joined the war after a threat to its security from the Germans.

After seeking clearance from the Congress, Wilson left the war concerns to the military (Link 365 - 388). The Wilson's administration borrowed funds to finance the war relying on the Liberty Bonds and Federal Reserve Bank. Wilson initiated other processes, among them, the one to suppress the anti-war appeals. Wilson used speeches to rally the public against Germany, a goal he achieved with great effect. This proves that, although Wilson employed hands-on leadership style, he also allowed some discretion to institutions such as military as demonstrated in this scenario.

Late into the war, Wilson took charge of the negotiations with the German leadership (Link 365 - 388). It is also true that Wilson oversaw the armistice. He was instrumental in attempts to avoid war, as he released his famous Fourteen Points. In addition, Wilson played a significant role in influencing the world peace by participating in founding the League of Nations. Moreover, Wilson played a major role in developing the Versailles Treaty, which oversaw the end of the world war. Despite the major role in founding the League of Nations, the opposition back in the U.S. blocked any attempts to join it. In 1920, the republicans won with a landslide, marking the collapse of the Wilson's presidency.

Without a doubt, President Wilson was a gifted intellectually politician. He was also a brilliant partisan campaigner and legislative strategist. Wilson demonstrated his leaning towards idealism based on his approach to internal politics. Wilson wanted the U.S. to join the world politics with the ideas of fighting for democracy.



## Franklin D. Roosevelt's Presidency

Franklin D. Roosevelt, famously known as FDR, proved to be an astute leader for guiding the United States during its most difficult times (Badger 200). Franklin Roosevelt was the President when the United States had to deal with the Great Depression and the World War Two. It is worth noting that the other comparable crisis time was that of the Civil War. Roosevelt's presidency has lasted for 12 years. The President's leadership was unique not only in its length, but also in its scope. When Roosevelt took over power, the U.S. was suffered from a devastating economic crisis, which witnessed the decline of its wealth and overall strength (Alter 23). Thus, the country was on the brink of a possible downfall, and needed a prominent leader to steer it out of the crisis. Roosevelt is known for an unmatched confidence, political savvy, and optimism. The attributes were critical given the harsh economic times that the country was facing. The astuteness of Roosevelt came to the fore when he initiated and oversaw the adoption of the New Deal. The deal is remembered for its role in reviving the American nation.

As in the case of any presidency, foreign relations form part of the leadership legacy. During the FDR's time, the United States resolved to bring down the influence of the fascist powers that reigned at the time in Germany, Italy, and Japan (Kennedy 252-268). Roosevelt is credited with leading the allied powers to pursue that objective. The exploits against the fascist axis changed the U.S.'s relations with the rest of the globe. In effect, the triumph allowed the United States to assume a position of prominence onwards.

The President was also influential on the domestic front. Roosevelt is credited with initiating several revolutionary political ideas during his leadership. Under Roosevelt's leadership, the Democratic Party's power base grew multiple-fold as the party was able to dominate the American politics until the late 1960's (Kennedy 252-268). In the governance, Roosevelt's influence came out clear when he oversaw the enactment of the New Deal. The deal redefined the strength of the American country. Specifically, the American leadership, political, constitutional, and administrative offices were changed significantly.

The New Deal was critical in turning the American economy from the threat



of the Great Depression. In the famous "First Hundred Days", Roosevelt pushed for the adoption of legislation aimed at reforming both the banking and financial sectors of the U.S. economy (Badger 23). The ultimate effect of the legislation was on jumpstarting of the American agricultural sector, which was ailing at the time. The intention was to spur industrial growth, which was affected negatively by the turn of events as a result of the financial melt-down. Of note is that, during the time, the country suffered from starvation and national unemployment. The government of FDR increased the direct cash injections into the job and other programs aimed at catering for the poor. In addition, FDR preached calm use of the national radio, an aspect that proved to be instrumental.

In 1935, Roosevelt directed the New Deal in a liberal line by taking charge of the enactment of social and economic policies that had far-reaching effects on the country's history. For instance, the Wagner Act paved the way for the labor unions to plan and engage in collective bargaining (Badger 24). Thus, the labor unions received a new mandate that was critical in championing the unionized workers' rights. Another important act was the Social Security Act, which allowed for setting up the programs, intended to help in the provision for the needs of the poor, aged, and unemployed citizens. The Act also had a bearing on the establishment of the social welfare net. In theory, the said net covered each American. When the President's term was ending, Roosevelt and his advisors were mooting for national economic stimulation through the introduction of specific spending policies. The strategy had worked for the subsequent thirty years.

Despite the measures adopted by the President Roosevelt's administration, the country's economy did not recover fully from the adverse effects of the Great Depression. Alter (45) notes that, as various observers agreed, it was not until the United States entered for war in the 1940s that it managed to get out of the economic crisis. New Deal programs reflected the biases that characterized the 1930s; hence, the programs failed to serve all people without discrimination. The programs favored a certain group of people since white men received more benefits as compared to women, Latinos, and blacks.



Despite the obstacles in the way, FDR focused on reshaping the future of the United States. For instance, Roosevelt, as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, won the 1936 elections. The victory for the Democratic Party marked a beginning of dominance and the party had dominated US politics until the 1960s. Under the leadership of FDR, the government became more involved in the American economy in a bid to safeguard the welfare of the citizenry (Alter 45). In a nutshell, it is arguable that, under the leadership of FDR, the United States was redefined for the rest of the twentieth century.

Under the leadership of Roosevelt, the Second World War issue emerged. Thus, Roosevelt played his role in country's foreign policy, as well as the economy and politics. Having learnt from the previous non-activity of the U.S., Roosevelt chose to take a proactive role. In particular, Roosevelt confronted Germany and Japan, although rather passively (Badger 34). The aim was to curtail the countries from attaining unrivalled dominance against the two world powers. Through offering support to Great Britain, Roosevelt managed to control the eastern influence as Britain suffered from the Nazi attacks in 1940 and 1941. FDR also cooperated with the allies to stop Japan from taking control over the Pacific region.

As many attempts were made to redress the economic problems facing the country, some people were dismayed (Badger 45). For instance, Senator Huey Long, the populist senator for Louisiana suggested that taking money from the wealthy and giving it to the poor could have helped alter the situation. Frances Townsend, a doctor from California, also had a ridiculous idea suggesting that spending half of the country's wealth could help resolve the problem. Other people offered different measures although they had never got to see the light of the day.

In 1941, the Japanese shocked America by its attack on the American Navy at Pearl Harbor (Badger 53). The Japanese onslaught on the American base officially signaled an active entry into the World War. During the war, FDR came out as a talented war leader. Under his stewardship, the United States and allied forces had overridden a blow of the Germans and Japanese. Unfortunately, Roosevelt died few weeks before Germany surrendered.



After the war, the United States came out as the world's superpower. Thus, under Roosevelt, the United States had assumed political, economic, and military leadership across the globe. Similarly, the contributions of Roosevelt to the domestic life of the country remain spot-on. Whereas the New Deal supported by Roosevelt did not end the Great Depression, the leadership of FDR calmed the American nation and spurred confidence in a dark hour. Thus, Roosevelt takes the credit for transforming the United States from a country on a decline to a world superpower. Roosevelt was so dominant that he almost singlehandedly positioned the Democratic Party in an undefeatable arena. It is also acknowledged that it was during FDR's tenure that the power associated with the American presidency grew dramatically. In brief, FDR's New Deal programs introduced crucial changes to the country's political, social, cultural, and economic life.

## Key Findings and Conclusion

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The paper establishes that the two leaders had a profound effect on the history of the United States. However, some peculiarities, as well as similarities are discernable. To begin with, Wilson was obsessed with the power given his preference to obtaining absolute control over the American people. To achieve his goal, he founded the CPI headed by his crony to monitor the dissent people. On the contrary, President Roosevelt relied on his unique understanding of passion for appealing to the citizens. But for Roosevelt's unmatched leadership skills, the United States could have fallen apart. It is also notable that the leaders were in charge of the country during the World Wars. During the World War One, President Wilson chose to be neutral in the conflict. Later on, it turned out that Wilson was an idealist as he tried to bring the world leaders together and strike a deal to form the League of Nations. However, Roosevelt chose to play a passive role in the Second World War as he passively supported the allies. However, the U.S. joined the war after being assaulted by the Japanese army.

The differentiating factor is the setting of policies to change the domestic lives of the Americans. Under the leadership of Wilson, the Clayton Antitrust





Act, Federal Reserve Act, Federal Farm Loan Act, Federal Trade Commission Act, Income Tax Act, and Keating–Owen Act were introduced. These policies had the far-reaching consequences for the American country. On the other hand, under the leadership of Roosevelt, the major policies changed as the New Deal was introduced. The aim of the New Deal was to restart the stalled economy following the Great Depression. Hence, life was difficult under Roosevelt since there were economic and war concerns to handle. Surprisingly, Roosevelt came out victorious as he managed to appeal to the country more than Wilson did. Moreover, Roosevelt left the country as a superpower in terms of economy, politics, and military. Based on this assumption, Roosevelt was more masterful in leadership than Wilson was.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's leadership was unique not only in its length, but also in its scope. Upon assuming power, the U.S. was suffering from a destructive economic crisis, which was characterized by a decline of its wealth and overall strength. At the time, the country was facing a downfall, and needed a prominent leader to see it out of the crisis. Roosevelt demonstrated unmatched confidence, political knowledge, and optimism. These attributes were critical in the cruel economic times that the country was undergoing. Roosevelt's astuteness came was visible when he initiated and oversaw the adoption of the New Deal.

It becomes apparent that the leadership is influenced by personality. Despite being a brilliant scholar, Wilson did not attain the kind of success that Roosevelt achieved. This is clear despite the fact that Wilson governed the country during a relatively stable time. For that reason, it is argued that personal resolve on the part of Roosevelt proved a crucial asset in leadership. While Wilson undermined the prospects of the Democratic Party, Roosevelt catapulted the party to power. In addition, due to his impeccable performance, the Democratic Party had dominated the United States politics until the late 1960s.



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