

## **WOODROW WILSON: HERO OR VILLAIN?**

This will be an eight-week course on the professional career of Woodrow Wilson as President of Princeton University (1902-1910), Governor of New Jersey (1911-1913) and President of the United States (1913-1921). Until quite recently Wilson was a respected figure in the history of American public life, but now he is widely vilified as a racist and segregationist. His alma mater, Princeton University, has removed his name from its School of Public and International Affairs, and has erected a sculpture, entitled Double Vision, to objectify what the university apparently considers the dualism of his career and accomplishments.

The course will attempt to assess Wilson's accomplishments and failures as a university president, state chief executive, and national president. Historians of higher education have noted Wilson's innovations at Princeton, where he is generally credited with guiding Princeton's transition from a small, religious liberal arts college to a major modern research university. Wilson's state legislative record is mixed, partly because the opposing political party controlled the legislature during his incumbency. Nevertheless, a modestly progressive series of bills became law when Wilson was Governor of New Jersey.

Wilson's record as President of the United States was much more distinguished, with his New Freedom agenda of progressive domestic legislation dominating the first two years of his presidency. But World War I began in Europe in 1914, and the remainder of Wilson's first term and all of his second term demanded his leadership; he negotiated the Peace Treaty and the developed the League of Nations. In recent years, Wilson's biased management of race relations in the federal civil service has caused sharp political criticism, causing other aspects of his presidency to be ignored. This course will attempt to construct a rounded account of Wilson's public life, on the theory that no one is either simply good or bad. To be sure, Wilson is a complex and contradictory figure, and we will try to see him whole, rather than through Manichean, dual lenses.

The classes will be two-hour discussions following lecture presentations, with liberal use of relevant video material. You might want to read the fine biographies of Wilson: the magisterial three-volume biography written by Princeton University's late, great Arthur S. Link; John Milton Cooper, Jr.'s fine biography (Knopf, 2009). And see especially, James Axtell, *The Making of Princeton University: From Woodrow Wilson to the Present* (Princeton, 2006).

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**LEADER:** Stan Katz is a retired university professor trained in American History and law.

**FORMAT:** Virtual

**MAXIMUM:** Unlimited

**FRIDAYS 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.** 6 sessions starting September 30<sup>th</sup> through November 4<sup>th</sup>