

"First Inaugural Address" – Woodrow Wilson (1913)

Woodrow Wilson, in his inaugural address, faced the challenge of appealing to both conservatives and progressives while asserting his presidential authority and ideological message. Furthermore, he must give meaning to the substantial governmental change in power, thus defining public will. To accomplish this, Wilson calls on his public's sense of duty and justice to garner support for his proposed policy reforms. Though most of his speech is a critique of current conditions in American society, he first offers a depiction of the abundant greatness of the country, boosting the morale and enthusiasm of his audience. This is followed with an analysis of the failings and shortcomings of the country, specifically in regards to mistreatment of the poor and the excessive waste. He notes that the previous government, though not void of morals, was "heedless" in its attempts to right the country. He offers, in contrast, a firm commitment to justice, defined as "the basis of government." He claims that it is "our duty" to become aware of and work to remedy the ills of society that have become too often overlooked by government and society alike. Thus, Wilson creates a sense of collective responsibility that works in conjunction with his conception of political responsibility and progressive reforms. The speech reflects his ideological affinity for egalitarianism, moral responsibility and strong presidential voice, while at the same time calls on the country as a whole to rally behind his appeals.

Comment [JK1]: Speaker and time is invoked here. Place should also be present although "Inaugural Address" may do that work.

Comment [JK2]: Notice the sense here of Wilson making choices about how he goes about the speech based on his goals. This also brings in progressivism as a dimension of the speech.

Comment [JK3]: Notice how the role of public will is invoked. These two sentences use the material from the lectures and set up the abstract to discuss key concepts you are learning: leadership and in this unit progressivism. They constitute a thesis that will be developed.

Comment [JK4]: This is probably a bit too descriptive. Why does he do this? The notion of "morale and enthusiasm" catches some of the why. But a discussion of progressivism's idea that they act "for the people" is appropriate here, and the need for leadership to demonstrate efficacy.

Comment [JK5]: A sentence on why "justice" is important and the invoking of government as a progressive move is appropriate here.

Comment [JK6]: Very nice summary of why Wilson uses the strategies he uses pointing to progressive rhetorical characteristics.

This is an abstract prepared by one of your fellow students. It has many of the characteristics you want in an abstract. Notice how it projects Wilson making choices

in his speech. Those choices arise from the nature of his moment and his identification with progressivism. You want to project in your abstract both the speech and the things you have learned in lecture about the needs of leadership and the rhetorical characteristics of progressivism.

