

Woodrow Wilson – Excerpts from First Inaugural Address,* March 4, 1913

THERE has been a change of government. What does the change mean?

... We see that in many things *our life as a Nation* is very great. It is incomparably great in its material aspects, in its body of wealth, in the diversity and sweep of its energy, in the industries which have been conceived and built up by the genius of individual men and the limitless enterprise of groups of men.

It is great, also, very great, in its moral force. We have built up, moreover, a great system of government ... a model for those who seek to set liberty upon foundations that will endure against fortuitous change, against storm and accident. Our life contains every great thing, and contains it in rich abundance. But the evil has come with the good ...

... **With riches has come inexcusable waste.** We have squandered a great part of what we might have used, and have not stopped to conserve the exceeding bounty of nature ... We have been proud of our industrial achievements, but we have not stopped thoughtfully enough to count the human cost ...

... **We have come now to the sober second thought.** The scales of heedlessness have fallen from our eyes. We have made up our minds to square every process of our national life again with the standards we so proudly set up at the beginning and have always carried at our hearts. Our work is a work of restoration.

This is the high enterprise of the new day: To lift everything that concerns our life as a Nation to the light that shines from the hearthfire of every man's conscience and vision of the right. It is inconceivable that we should do this as partisans; it is inconceivable we should do it ... in blind haste. We shall restore, not destroy. We shall deal with our economic system as it is and as it may be modified ... and step by step we shall make it what it should be ...

Justice, and only justice, shall always be our motto.

... **The Nation has been deeply stirred,** stirred by a solemn passion, stirred by the knowledge of wrong, of ideals lost... The feelings with which we face this new age of right and opportunity sweep across our heartstrings like some air out of God's own presence, where justice and mercy are reconciled and the judge and the brother are one.

This is not a day of triumph; it is a day of dedication. Here muster, not the forces of party, but the forces of humanity. *Our* hearts wait upon us; *our* lives hang in the balance; *our* hopes call upon us to say what we will do.

Who shall live up to this great trust? Who dares fail to try? I summon all honest men, all patriotic, forward-looking men, to my side. God helping me, I will not fail them, if they will but counsel and sustain me!

* Italics indicate word changes.

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