

# Biography Activity

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## Mass Society and Democracy

### Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931)

Thomas Alva Edison had little formal schooling. His career as an inventor began with his training to be a telegrapher. Edison had difficulty hearing, so telegraphy, which required interpretation of dots and dashes on paper, was a great career. However, when telegraphy began to rely on sounding keys, Edison started inventing. He created a way to turn electrical signals into letters and then print the telegraph messages. At his laboratory in Menlo Park, California, Edison experimented with carbon as a material to conduct (transmit) telegraph signals. One invention that resulted from this experimentation was the phonograph, also called the record player. Then came the practical lightbulb, electric power, and storage batteries. Edison was instrumental in bringing electricity into people's homes. Ultimately, he held 1,903 patents—a world record.



**More About the Image:** This photograph of Thomas Alva Edison in his laboratory was first published around 1904.

- Determining Cause and Effect** What inspired Edison to begin inventing?

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- Making Generalizations** What general statement can you make about the effects of Edison's inventions on society at the time?

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## Mass Society and Democracy

### Wilbur Wright (1867–1912) Orville Wright (1871–1948)

Wilbur and Orville Wright were encouraged as children to have confidence in their ideas. Their talent for technology surfaced when the two brothers opened a print shop and began designing and building printing presses. They also opened a bicycle shop and began building bicycles of their own design. The money from their two businesses paid for the construction of aircraft as they experimented with flight. Their first flight took place in a biplane with twin pusher propellers on December 17, 1903. By 1905, they had extended their flight time from 1 to 39 minutes. The U.S. Army was the first to buy a plane from them. The brothers created the Wright Company and spent their lives building and selling airplanes and teaching people to fly airplanes.



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**More About the Image:** This 1910 photograph shows Wilbur (left) and Orville Wright posed on their "Flyer 1."

- 1. Drawing Inferences** Why might the U.S. Army have had an interest in the Wright brothers' invention?

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- 2. Determining Cause and Effect** What are two ways the Wright brothers' invention changed society at the time?

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## World War I and the Russian Revolution

### Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924)

Woodrow Wilson was the first U.S. president to hold a Ph.D. He worked as a professor before serving as president from 1913 to 1921.

Reform marked Wilson's presidency, which introduced laws to stop child labor, make loans to farmers, and protect railroad workers. Wilson also created major government economic agencies, including the Federal Reserve and the Federal Trade Commission.

Wilson did not want to join World War I, but German submarine warfare and the "Zimmermann Telegram" left him no choice. Even as a participant, he was a major negotiator of peace, and he won the 1919 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. In October 1919, as he fought for U.S. acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles, Wilson had a massive stroke that compromised his effectiveness as president.

**More About the Image:** The Peruvian painter Gonzales Gammara (1890–1972) depicted President Woodrow Wilson addressing delegates at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919.



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1. **Summarizing** Based on the description of his presidency and involvement in the war, how could you summarize Wilson's character?

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2. **Understanding Relationships Among Events** Why did Wilson sacrifice his policy of neutrality to enter World War I?

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## World War II and the Holocaust

### Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945)

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the only U.S. president elected to serve four terms in office. He led the United States during two major crises—the Great Depression and World War II. Before Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt convinced the U.S. Congress to send “all aid short of war” to Britain and the Soviet Union to help fight the Nazis. The United States sent ships and guns in exchange for military bases in Britain. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war in earnest. Roosevelt led the war effort until his death in office in 1945.

During the Great Depression, Roosevelt defeated the incumbent president, Herbert Hoover, and began implementing a social and economic reform program called the New Deal. New Deal programs such as Social Security continue today.



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**More About the Image:** This is an undated photograph of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the longest-serving president in United States history.

1. **Inferring** How did the Great Depression prepare Roosevelt for the war effort?

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2. **Constructing Arguments** What do you think was Roosevelt's greatest achievement as president? Give reasons for your opinion.

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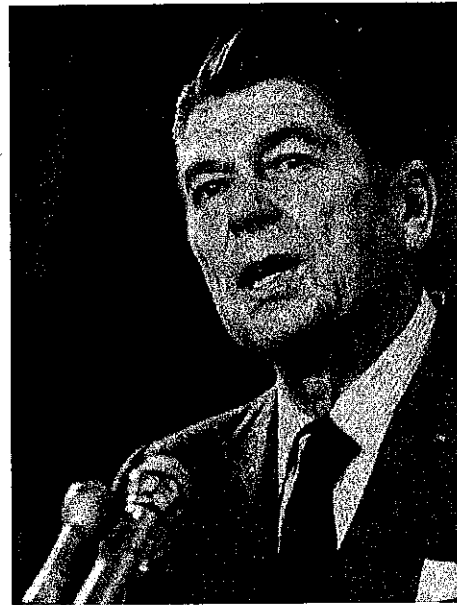
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## A New Era Begins

### Ronald Reagan (1911–2004)

Ronald Reagan, the fortieth president of the United States, was born in Tampico, Illinois, in 1911. He was first elected president of the United States in 1980. During his first term, Reagan spurred a huge military buildup. Although this buildup antagonized the Soviet Union, it also placed pressure on the Soviets to compete in the arms race. Indeed, some experts argue that the strain placed on the Soviet economy by trying to match the U.S. arsenal contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union. During Reagan's second term, he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev for the first time. They discussed reducing each country's nuclear arsenal. Although this meeting ultimately failed, in 1987 the two nations signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which eliminated intermediate-range nuclear weapons on European soil.



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1. **Determining Cause and Effect** How could President Reagan's military policy have possibly contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union?

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2. **Comparing and Contrasting** How did relations between the United States and the Soviet Union differ in Reagan's first term from his second term?

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