

# ADDRESS TO THE JEFFERSON CLUB OF LOS ANGELES

WOODROW WILSON

MAY 12, 1911

AS I WAS COMING HERE this evening and reflected upon the name of this association, my thoughts naturally went back to that great man whose name you have adopted. And I asked myself, what would Jefferson say if a number of men of the Democratic faith were gathered in the year 1911, if he were present? Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence. But the Declaration of Independence, so far as I recollect, did not mention any of the issues of the year 1911. I am constantly reminding audiences that I have the pleasure of addressing that the rhetorical introduction of the Declaration of Independence is the least part of it. That was the theoretical expression of the views of which the rest of the document was meant to give teeth and substance to. The Declaration of Independence is a long enumerated of the issues of the year 1776, of exactly the things that were then supposed to be radical matters of discontent among the people living in America—the things which they meant to remedy, to remedy in the spirit of the introductory paragraphs, but which the introductory paragraphs themselves did not contain.

Now, the business of every true Jeffersonian is to translate the terms of those abstract portions of the Declaration of Independence into the language and the problems of his own day. If you want to understand the real Declaration of Independence, do not repeat the preface. Make a new table of contents, make a new set of counts in the indictment, make a new statement of the things you mean to set right, and then call all the civilized world to witness, as that great document does, that you mean to settle these things in the spirit of liberty, but also in the spirit of justice and responsibility. If you remember how that great document calls on all mankind to witness that we are not doing this thing in the spirit of insurgents but in the spirit of free men, men who have the true interests of humanity at heart—now, in a similar spirit, how are we going to realize the conceptions of the author of the Declaration of Independence in our own day?...

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Wilson, Address to the Jefferson Club of Los Angeles, May 12, 1911, in *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (ed. Arthur Link): Vol. 23, pp. 33-34.

The question is not whether all men are born free and equal or not. Suppose they were born so, you know they are not. They may have been born free and equal, but they are neither free nor equal if the things of this sort can go on and continue to go on so that the problem of the Jeffersonian is to discredit and break up the machine. How to dissolve the partnership between the machine and the corporations—that is the problem of modern democracy....

We ought to be afraid of thinking of our own generation only, when we ought to think of the long future of America. Because I, for one, feel, as I am sure you do, that I would have reason to be ashamed of having sprung from a great race of Americans if I do not do everything in my power to make the future of America greater than her past. Born of a free people, we, above all other men, are under bonds to prove ourselves worthy of freedom. And not only that, but to hand the freedom on, enhanced, glorified, purified, in order that America may not look back for her credit upon the days of her making and of her birth, but look forward for her credit to the things that she will do in the advancement of the rights of mankind.

