

Tilden's Response to the Election

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DIRECTIONS: Read the information below and answer the questions that follow.

Samuel Tilden was asked why he did not simply declare himself President based on the popular vote. Why did he not fight more visibly to claim the post in the months between the election and Hayes's inauguration? He said, "After the electoral scheme, which I always opposed, was complete, I never entertained the idea of taking the oath of office either in Washington or in New York or elsewhere. It would have been ridiculous. I had no evidence of title then—no claim—no warrant." He also commented, "I can retire to private life with the consciousness that I shall receive from posterity the credit of having been elected to the highest position in the gift of the people without any of the cares and responsibilities of the office."

In a speech he gave at a dinner in June, 1877, Tilden stated,

"In the world's history, changes in the succession of governments have usually been the result of fraud or force. It has been our faith and our pride that we had established a mode of peaceful change to be worked out by the agency of the ballot box. The question now is whether our elective system, in its substance as well as its form, is to be maintained. This is the question of questions. ...It involves the fundamental right of the people. It involves the elective principle. It involves the whole system of popular government. The people must signally condemn the great wrong which has been done to them. They must strip the example of everything that can attract imitators. ...But when those who condemn the wrong shall have the power they must devise the measure which shall render a repetition of the wrong forever impossible.

If my voice could reach through the country and be heard in its remotest hamlet, I would say: Be of good cheer. The Republic will live. The institutions of our fathers are not to expire in shame. The sovereignty of the people shall be rescued from this peril and reestablished."

Tilden died in 1886. The inscription on his headstone is: "I Still Trust the People."

WRITE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TILDEN STATEMENTS IN YOUR OWN WORDS:

1. "I had no evidence of title then—no claim—no warrant."
2. "I shall receive from posterity the credit of having been elected to the highest position in the gift of the people without any of the cares and responsibilities of the office."

Tilden's Response

(Continued)

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3. "Everybody knows that, after the recent election, the men who were elected by the people were counted out; and the men who were not elected were counted in and seated."
4. "It has been our faith and our pride that we had established a mode of peaceful change to be worked out by the agency of the ballot box. The question now is whether our elective system, in its substance as well as its form, is to be maintained."
5. "It involves the fundamental right of the people. It involves the elective principle. It involves the whole system of popular government. The people must signally condemn the great wrong which has been done to them."
6. "...they must devise the measure which shall render a repetition of the wrong forever impossible."
7. "Be of good cheer. The Republic will live. The institutions of our fathers are not to expire in shame. The sovereignty of the people shall be rescued from this peril and reestablished."
8. It has been said that Tilden's response to the election—accepting the result even though he believed a great injustice had been done—was an example of great patriotism. Discuss whether you agree or disagree and why.