

AMERICA AND THE GREAT WAR 1914-1920

HOW WAS U.S. neutrality during World War I undermined?

WHY DID the United States join the conflict on the side of the Allies?



HOW DID the war effort threaten civil liberties?

WHAT WERE the terms of the Treaty of Versailles?



WHAT WAS the post-war backlash?



I have been traveling for nearly three weeks through six Middle Western States, talking about the war, with all classes of people: farmers, labor leaders, newspaper editors, college professors, business men, and state officials. I have been trying to get at the bedrock sentiment of the people regarding it, and to set it down exactly as I find it.

Almost without exception, even among those who favor the war most vigorously, the people I have talked with have commented upon the lack of popular enthusiasm for the war. The more closely these people were connected with the farmers or the workingmen, the more sweeping and positive were their statements.

The attitude of the people is wholly different from what it was at the opening of our Spanish War in 1898. There are no heroic slogans, no boastfulness, no excitement, no glamour of war. There is still a great deal of haziness about the real issues and a great deal of doubt about how far America should go beyond mere defensive measures. One of the foremost political leaders of the West, himself an ardent supporter of the war, told me that if a secret ballot were taken as to whether American armies should be sent to France, the vote would be overwhelmingly against it. It is noteworthy, also, that the newspapers are full of a-b-c explanations of the reasons why we are at war and why we should go forward with it. . . . And finally, there are nowhere as yet any evidences of the passions and the hatred which war engenders. People do not hate Germans or Austrians or Turks; nor do they love the British.

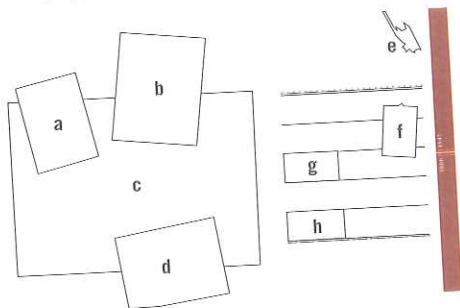
On the other hand, if there is little enthusiasm, the people everywhere are taking the war as a grim necessity, feeling that they have been forced into it by events beyond their control, and they are going forward, more or less reluctantly, with the preparations; but they are really going forward. The draft was not popular; people wished it might have been done in some other way; and in some groups of population it was hated and feared, and yet, through all this country, there has been a wonderful and complete compliance with the law. In the same way the liberty loan is not popular. There is no popular rush to subscribe, and it has required an enormous amount of organization, advertising, and pressure to sell the bonds, and yet they are being sold and will be sold. . . . And there have been no signs of any popular rush to enlist, and men have been obtained only by dint of the most vigorous advertising and pressure. It is significant also that more than half of those registered in Chicago are demanding exemption.

The only real enthusiasm that I could find was in such campaigns as that of the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., and here and there in work for the American Ambulance in France. The work of women everywhere for the Red Cross is remarkably organized and well supported. . . . Of the value of these activities, no matter what happens, the people are convinced.

This is as nearly a true statement of the general situation as I can make. I have met a good many men who think that this state of the popular mind, this deliberate and passionless method of doing what is regarded as a disagreeable duty, is the best possible method of getting into the great war. . . .

IMAGE KEY

for pages 602-603



- a. British Prime Minister Lloyd George, French Prime Minister George Clemenceau, and U.S. President Wilson in Versailles, Paris in 1919.
- b. Women war workers working in an engineering shop, 1917.
- c. The New York Times front page reports the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915.
- d. British Biplane shot down
- e. "Beat back the HUN:" American World War I Liberty Loan poster.
- f. Women draft protesters demonstrate in front of New York's City Hall on June 16, 1917.
- g. A policeman on horseback swings a truncheon at strikers on a Pittsburgh street.



On the other hand, I met a good many people, especially among the leaders of war organizations of various sorts, to whom the popular attitude is not only irritating but dangerous. They feel that the people are not fully awakened to the emergency, that they do not realize that the country is really at this moment at war, and that unless America meets with more enthusiasm and more speed the problems of raising money, producing food, and hurrying the training of men for armies in France the war may result in disaster.

Ray Stannard Baker, "West in Grim Business of War Without Passion," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 17, 1917.

RAY STANNARD BAKER, the famous journalist, thus described his journey across the Midwest in 1917, three years after World War I began in Europe and two months after the United States had declared war on Germany. The American people were reluctant participants, unconvinced that national interests were really involved.

But as Baker discovered, the nation's leaders were determined to whip up support for the war through "organization, advertising, and pressure." The goal would be not only to train soldiers but also to demonize Germany, mobilize the economy, and transform American social attitudes.

The Great War changed American life. Government authority increased sharply. Business, labor unions, farmers, ministers were all incorporated into the war effort. Women's organizational activities expanded dramatically; and often developed in unexpected ways. Journalists, too, put their skills to new and sometimes unfortunate uses; Baker, who had initially opposed the war, eventually went to Europe to file confidential reports for the State Department and then to control news at the Versailles Peace Conference.

Many of the changes in American life, from increased efficiency to Americanization, often reflected prewar progressivism, and the war years did promote some reforms. But the war also diverted reform energies into new channels, encouraged coercion impulses ("the passions and the hatred" which Baker found lacking in mid-1917 were soon widespread), and strengthened the conservative opposition to reform. The results were often reactionary and contributed to a postwar mood that curtailed further reform and helped defeat the peace treaty upon which so much had been gambled.

WAGING NEUTRALITY

With near unanimity, Americans supported neutrality when the Great War erupted in Europe in 1914. But American attitudes, decisions, and actions, both public and private, undercut neutrality, and the policies of governments in Berlin, London, and Washington drew the United States into the war.

THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICT

Since the 1870s, the competing imperial ambitions of the great European powers had led to economic rivalries, military expansion, diplomatic maneuvering, and international tensions. In central Europe, the expansionist Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II allied itself with the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. Confronting them, Great Britain and France formed alliances with Tsarist

HOW WAS U.S. neutrality during World War I undermined?



QUICK REVIEW

The Outbreak of War

- ◆ June 28, 1914: Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated.
- ◆ July 28, 1914: Austria declares war on Serbia with German support.
- ◆ Chain reaction draws all European powers into the war.

Russia. Observing this precarious balance of power in May 1914, an American diplomat reported anxiously, “There is too much hatred, too many jealousies.” He predicted “an awful cataclysm.”

On June 28, a Serbian terrorist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. With Germany’s support, Austria declared war on Serbia on July 28. Russia then mobilized its army against Austria to aid Serbia, its Slavic client state. To assist Austria, Germany declared war on Russia and then on Russia’s ally France. Hoping for a quick victory, Germany struck at France through neutral Belgium; in response, Britain declared war on Germany on August 4. Soon Turkey and Bulgaria joined Germany and Austria to form the **Central Powers**. The **Allies**—Britain, France, and Russia—were joined by Italy and Japan. Britain drew on its empire for resources, using troops from India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The war had become a global conflict, waged not only in Europe but also in Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia.

Mass slaughter enveloped Europe as huge armies battled to a stalemate. The British and French faced the Germans along a line of trenches stretching across France and Belgium from the English Channel to Switzerland. The British once suffered 300,000 casualties in an offensive that gained only a few square miles before being pushed back. Machine gunners went into shock at the carnage they inflicted. In the trenches, soldiers suffered in the cold and mud, surrounded by decaying bodies and human waste, enduring lice, rats, and nightmares, and dying from disease and exhaustion. The Great War, said one German soldier, had become “the grave of nations.”

AMERICAN ATTITUDES

Few Americans had expected this calamity. As one North Carolina congressman said, “This dreadful conflict of the nations came to most of us as lightning out of a clear sky.” Most people believed that the United States had no vital interest in the war and would not become involved. “Our isolated position and freedom from entangling alliances,” noted the *Literary Digest*, “inspire our press with the cheering assurance that we are in no peril of being drawn into the European quarrel.” President Wilson issued a proclamation of neutrality and urged Americans to be “neutral in fact as well as in name . . . impartial in thought as well as in action.”

However, ethnic, cultural, and economic ties bound most Americans to the British and French. Politically, too, most Americans felt a greater affinity for the democratic Western Allies. And whereas Britain and the United States had enjoyed a rapprochement since 1895, Germany had repeatedly appeared as a potential rival.

Wilson himself admired Britain’s culture and government and distrusted Germany’s imperial ambitions. Like other influential Americans, Wilson believed that a German victory would threaten America’s economic, political, and perhaps even strategic interests. “England is fighting our fight,” he said privately. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan was genuinely neutral, but most officials favored the Allies. Early in the war, Colonel Edward House, Wilson’s closest adviser on foreign affairs, wrote: “I cannot see how there can be any serious trouble between England and America, with all of us feeling as we do.”

British writers, artists, and lecturers depicted the Allies as fighting for civilization against a brutal Germany that mutilated nuns and babies, shaping America’s view of the conflict. Britain also cut the only German cable to the United States and censored war news to suit itself. German propaganda directed at American opinion proved ineffectual.

Sympathy for the Allies, however, did not mean that Americans favored intervention. The British ambassador complained that it was “useless” to expect any

Central Powers Germany and its World War I allies in Austria, Turkey, and Bulgaria.

Allies In World War I, Britain, France, Russia, and other belligerent nations fighting against the Central Powers but not including the United States.



“practical” advantage from the Americans’ sympathy, for they had no intention of joining the conflict. Wilson was determined to pursue peace as long as his view of national interests allowed.

THE ECONOMY OF WAR

International law permitted neutral nations to sell or ship war material to all belligerents, and with the economy mired in a recession when the war began, many Americans looked to war orders to spur economic recovery. But the British navy prevented trade with the Central Powers. Only the Allies could buy American goods. Their orders for steel, explosives, uniforms, wheat, and other products, however, pulled the country out of the recession. One journalist rejoiced that “war, for Europe, is meaning devastation and death; for America a bumper crop of new millionaires and a hectic hastening of prosperity revival.”

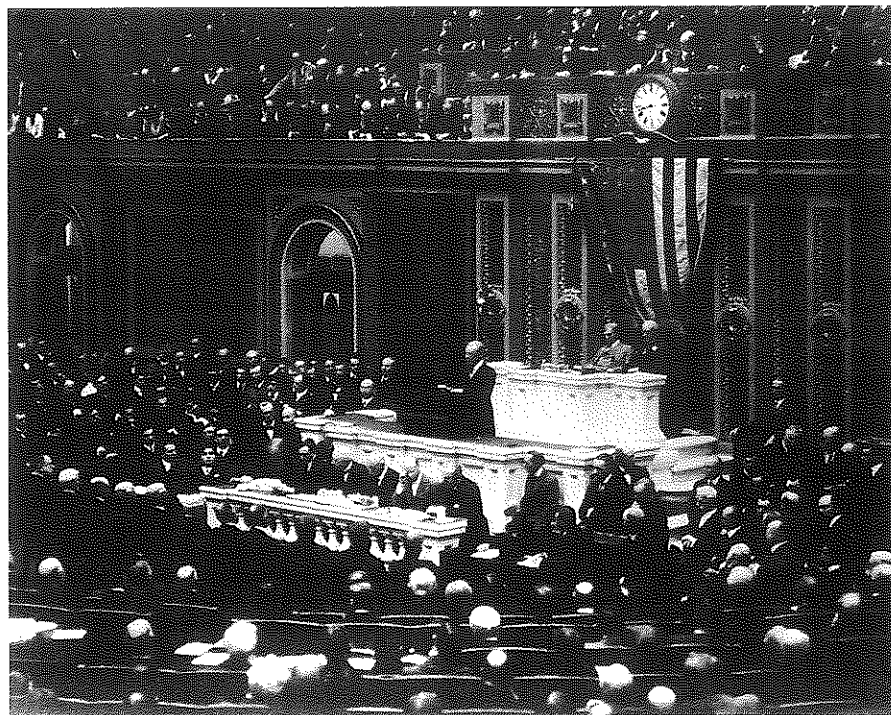
Other Americans worried that this one-sided war trade undermined genuine neutrality. Congress even considered embargoing munitions. But few Americans supported that idea. One financial journal declared of the Allied war trade: “We need it for the profits which it yields.” The German ambassador noted that American industry was “actually delivering goods only to the enemies of Germany.”

A second economic issue complicated matters. To finance their war purchases, the Allies borrowed from American bankers. Initially, Secretary of State Bryan persuaded Wilson to prohibit loans to the belligerents as “inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality.” But Wilson soon ended the ban. Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo argued that it would be “disastrous” *not* to finance the Allies’ purchases, on which “our prosperity is dependent.” By April 1917, American loans to the Allies exceeded \$2 billion, nearly one hundred times the amount lent to Germany. These financial ties, like the war trade they underwrote, linked the United States to the Allies and convinced Germany that American neutrality was only a formality.

THE DIPLOMACY OF NEUTRALITY

This same imbalance characterized American diplomacy. Wilson acquiesced in British violations of American neutral rights while sternly refusing to yield on German actions. Wilson argued that while British violations of international law cost Americans property, markets, and time, German violations cost lives. As the *Boston Globe* noted, the British were “a gang of thieves” and the Germans “a gang of murderers. On the whole, we prefer the thieves, but only as the lesser of two evils.”

When the war began, the United States asked belligerents to respect the 1909 **Declaration of London** on neutral rights. Germany agreed to do so; the British refused. Instead, Britain instituted a blockade of Germany, mined the North Sea, and forced neutral ships into British ports to search their cargoes and confiscate material deemed useful to the German war effort. Wilson branded Britain’s blockade illegal and unwarranted, but by October he had conceded many of America’s neutral rights to avoid conflict with Britain.



President Woodrow Wilson reads his war message to Congress, April 2, 1917. He predicted “many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us.”

Library of Congress

Declaration of London Statement drafted by an international conference in 1909 to clarify international law and specify the rights of neutral nations.



CHRONOLOGY

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| <p>1914 World War I begins in Europe.
President Woodrow Wilson declares U.S. neutrality.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1915 Germany begins submarine warfare.
<i>Lusitania</i> is sunk.
Woman's Peace Party is organized.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1916 Gore-McLemore resolutions are defeated.
<i>Sussex</i> Pledge is issued.
Preparedness legislation is enacted.
Woodrow Wilson is reelected president.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1917 Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare.
The United States declares war on Germany.
Selective Service Act establishes the military draft.
Espionage Act is passed.
Committee on Public Information, War Industries Board, Food Administration, and other mobilization agencies are established.
American Expeditionary Force arrives in France.
East St. Louis race riot erupts.
Bolshevik Revolution occurs in Russia.</p> | <p>1918 Wilson announces his Fourteen Points.
Sedition Act is passed.
Eugene Debs is imprisoned.
The United States intervenes militarily in Russia.
Armistice ends World War I.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1919 Paris Peace Conference is held.
Steel, coal, and other strikes occur.
Red Scare breaks out.
Prohibition amendment is adopted.
Wilson suffers a massive stroke.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1920 Palmer Raids round up radicals.
League of Nations is defeated in the U.S. Senate.
Woman suffrage amendment is ratified.
U.S. troops are withdrawn from Russia.
Warren Harding is elected president.</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/> <p>1921 United States signs a separate peace treaty with Germany.</p> |
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The British then prohibited food and other products that Germany had imported during peace-time, thereby interfering further with neutral shipping. One American official complained privately: “England is playing a . . . high game, violating international law every day.” But when the Wilson administration finally protested, it undermined its own position by noting that “imperative necessity” might justify a violation of international law. In January 1915, Wilson yielded further by observing that “no very important questions of principle” were involved in the Anglo-American quarrels over ship seizures and that they could be resolved after the war.

This policy tied the United States to the British war effort and provoked a German response. Germany decided in February 1915 to use its submarines against Allied shipping in a war zone around the British Isles. Germany maintained that Britain’s blockade and the acquiescence of neutral countries in British violations of international law made submarine warfare necessary.

Submarines could not readily follow traditional rules of naval warfare. Small and fragile, they depended on surprise attacks. They could not surface to identify themselves, as the rules mandated, without risking disaster from the deck guns of Britain’s armed merchant ships, and they were too small to rescue victims of their sinkings. Yet Wilson refused to see the “imperative necessity” in German tactics that he found in British tactics, and he warned that he would hold Germany responsible for any loss of American lives or property.

In May 1915, a German submarine sank a British passenger liner, the *Lusitania*. It had been carrying arms, and the German embassy had warned Americans against traveling on the ship, but the loss of life—1,198 people, including 128 Americans—caused Americans to condemn Germany. “To speak of technicalities and the rules of war, in the face of such wholesale murder on the high seas, is a waste of time,” trumpeted one magazine. Wilson saw he had to “carry out the double wish of our people, to maintain a firm front in respect of what we demand of Germany and yet do nothing that might by any possibility involve us in the war.”

Wilson demanded that Germany abandon its submarine campaign. But his language was so harsh that Bryan resigned, warning that by requiring more of

QUICK REVIEW

Anglo-American Ties

- ◆ 1915: U.S. give tacit support to British naval blockade of Germany.
- ◆ May 1915: German submarine sinks the *Lusitania*.
- ◆ Americans demanded a tough stand against Germany, but did not want to be drawn into the war.



Germany than of Britain, the president violated neutrality and threatened to draw the nation into war. Bryan proposed prohibiting Americans from traveling on belligerent ships. His proposal gained support in the South and West, and Senator Thomas Gore of Oklahoma and Representative Jeff McLemore of Texas introduced it in congressional resolutions in February 1916.

Wilson moved to defeat the Gore-McLemore resolutions, insisting that they impinged on presidential control of foreign policy and on America's neutral rights. In truth, the resolutions abandoned no vital national interest while offering to prevent another provocative incident. Moreover, neither law nor tradition gave Americans the right to travel safely on belligerent ships. Of the nation's "double wish," then, Wilson placed more priority on confronting what he saw as the German threat than on meeting the popular desire for peace.

In April 1916, a German submarine torpedoed the French ship *Sussex*, injuring four Americans. Wilson threatened to break diplomatic relations if Germany did not abandon unrestricted submarine warfare against all merchant vessels. This implied war. Germany promised not to sink merchant ships without warning but made its **Sussex Pledge** contingent on the United States' requiring Britain also to adhere to "the rules of international law universally recognized before the war." Wilson's diplomatic victory, then, was hollow. Peace for America would depend on the British adopting a course they rejected. As Wilson saw it, however, "any little German lieutenant can put us into the war at any time by some calculated outrage." Wilson's diplomacy had left the nation's future at the mercy of others.

THE BATTLE OVER PREPAREDNESS

The threat of war sparked a debate over military policy. Theodore Roosevelt and a handful of other politicians, mostly Northeastern Republicans convinced that Allied victory was in the national interest, had advocated what they called **preparedness**, a program to expand the armed forces and establish universal military training. Conservative business groups also joined the agitation, combining demands for preparedness with attacks on progressive reforms.

But most Americans opposed expensive military preparations. Leading feminists like Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Carrie Chapman Catt formed the Woman's Peace Party in 1915, and other organizations like the American League to Limit Armaments also campaigned against preparedness. William Jennings Bryan denounced the militarism of Roosevelt as a "philosophy [that] can rot a soul" and condemned preparedness as a program for turning the nation into "a vast armory with skull and cross-bones above the door."

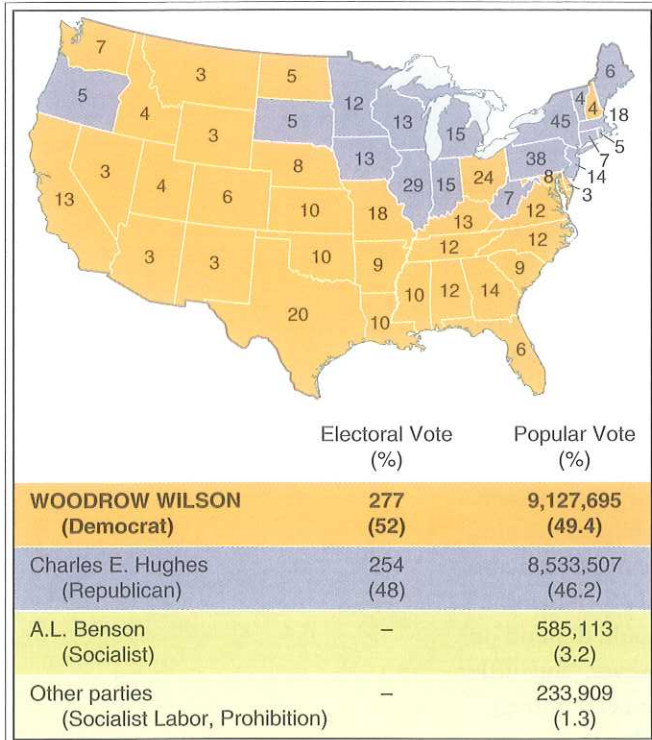
Wilson also opposed preparedness initially, but he reversed his position when the submarine crisis with Germany intensified. In early 1916, an election year, he made a speaking tour to generate public support for expanding the armed forces. Congress soon passed the National Defense Act and the Naval Construction Act, increasing the strength of the army and authorizing a naval construction plan.

THE ELECTION OF 1916

Wilson's preparedness plans stripped the Republicans of one issue in 1916, and his renewed support of progressive reforms helped hold Bryan Democrats in line. The slogan "He Kept Us Out of War" appealed to the popular desire for peace, and the Democratic campaign became one long peace rally. Wilson disliked the peace emphasis but exploited its political appeal. He warned, "The certain prospect of the success of the Republican party is that we shall be drawn, in one form or another, into the embroilments of the European war."

Sussex Pledge Germany's pledge during World War I not to sink merchant ships without warning, on the condition that Britain also observe recognized rules of international laws.

Preparedness Military buildup in preparation for possible U.S. participation in World War I.



MAP 23-1

The Election of 1916 Woodrow Wilson won reelection in 1916 despite a reunified Republican party by sweeping the South and West on campaign appeals to peace and progressive reform.

HOW WAS Woodrow Wilson able to win reelection in 1916 despite the reunification of the Republican party?

The Republicans had hoped to regain the support of their progressive members after Roosevelt urged the Progressive party to follow him back into the GOP. But many joined the Democratic camp instead. The GOP nominated Charles Evans Hughes, a Supreme Court justice and former New York governor. The platform denounced Wilson's "shifty expedients" in foreign policy and promised "strict and honest neutrality." Unfortunately for Hughes, Roosevelt's attacks on Wilson for not pursuing a war policy persuaded many voters that the GOP was a war party. "If Hughes is defeated," wrote one observer, "he has Roosevelt to thank for it."

The election was the closest in decades (see Map 23-1). When California narrowly went for Wilson, it decided the contest. The desire for peace, all observers concluded, had determined the election.

DESCENT INTO WAR

Still, Wilson knew that war loomed, and he made a last effort to avert it. In January 1917, he sketched out the terms of what he called a "peace without victory." Anything else, he warned, would only lead to another war. The new world order should be based on national equality and **self-determination**, arms reductions, freedom of the seas, and an international organization to ensure peace. It was a distinctly American vision.

But both the Allies and the Central Powers had sacrificed too much to settle for anything short of outright victory. Germany wanted to annex territory in eastern Europe, Belgium, and France and to take over Belgian and French colonies in Africa; Austria sought Balkan territory. The Allies wanted to destroy German military and commercial power, weaken the Austro-Hungarian empire, take Germany's colonies in Africa, and supplant Turkish influence in the Middle East. One British leader denounced Wilson as "the quintessence of a prig" for suggesting that after three years of "this terrible effort," the two sides should accept American principles rather than their own national objectives.

Germany now moved to win the war by cutting the Allies off from U.S. supplies. On January 31, Germany unleashed its submarines in a broad war zone.

Wilson was now virtually committed to a war many Americans opposed. He broke diplomatic relations with Germany and asked Congress to arm American merchant vessels. When the Senate refused, Wilson invoked an antipiracy law of 1819 and armed the ships anyway. Although no American ships had yet been sunk, he also ordered the naval gun crews to shoot submarines on sight. Wilson's own secretary of the navy warned that these actions violated international law and were a step toward war. Huge rallies across America demanded peace.

Yet several developments soon shifted public opinion. On March 1, Wilson released an intercepted message from the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, to the German minister in Mexico. It proposed that in the event of war between the United States and Germany, Mexico should ally itself with Germany; in exchange, Mexico would recover its "lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona." The Zimmermann note produced a wave of hostility toward Germany and increased support for intervention in the war, especially in the Southwest, which had opposed involvement. A revolution in Russia overthrew the tsarist

Self-determination The right of a people or a nation to decide on its own political allegiance or form of government without external influence.



regime and established a provisional government. Russia was now “a fit partner” for the United States, said Wilson. When submarines sank four American freighters in mid-March, anti-German feeling broadened.

On April 2, 1917, Wilson delivered his war message, declaring that neutrality was no longer possible, given Germany’s submarine “warfare against mankind.” To build support for joining a war that most people had long regarded with revulsion and as alien to American interests, Wilson set forth the nation’s war goals as simple and noble. The United States would not fight for conquest or domination but for “the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples. . . . The world must be made safe for democracy.”

After vigorous debate, the Senate passed the war resolution 82 to 6 and the House 373 to 50. On April 6, 1917, the United States officially entered the Great War, what Representative Claude Kitchin of North Carolina predicted would be “one vast drama of horrors and blood, one boundless stage upon which will play all the evil spirits of earth and hell.”

WAGING WAR IN AMERICA

Mobilizing for military intervention was a massive undertaking. “It is not an army that we must shape and train for war,” announced President Wilson; “it is a Nation.” The government reorganized the economy to emphasize centralized management, developed policies to control public opinion and suppress dissent, and transformed the role of government itself. Mobilization often built on progressives’ moralism and sense of mission. In other respects, however, the war experience withered the spirits of reformers. In many different ways, people on the home front—like soldiers in Europe—would participate in the Great War; all would find their lives changed.

MANAGING THE WAR ECONOMY

Federal and state governments developed a complex structure of agencies and controls for every sector of the economy (see the overview table “Major Government Wartime Agencies”). Supervised by the Council of National Defense, these agencies shifted resources to war-related enterprise, increased production of goods and services, and improved transportation and distribution.

The most important agency was the **War Industries Board (WIB)**. Led by financier Bernard Baruch, the WIB exercised unprecedented powers over industry by setting prices, allocating scarce materials, and standardizing products and procedures to boost efficiency. Yet Baruch was not an industrial dictator; he aimed at business-government integration. The WIB promoted major business interests, helped suspend antitrust laws, and guaranteed huge corporate profits. So many business leaders became involved in the WIB that there was a popular outcry against business infiltration of the government, and one corporate executive admitted, “We are all making more money out of this war than the average human being ought to.” Some progressives began to see the dangers, and business leaders the advantages, of government economic intervention.

Under William McAdoo, the Railroad Administration operated the nation’s railroads as a unified system to move supplies and troops efficiently. Centralized management eliminated competition, permitted improvements in equipment, and brought great profits to the owners but higher prices to the general public.

Equally effective and far more popular was the Food Administration, headed by Herbert Hoover. Hoover persuaded millions of Americans to accept meatless and

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



National Infantry Museum,
Fort Benning, Georgia
www.benningmwr.com/index.cfm



WHY DID the United States
join the conflict on the side of the
Allies?

War Industries Board (WIB) The federal agency that reorganized industry for maximum efficiency and productivity during World War I.



OVERVIEW

MAJOR GOVERNMENT WARTIME AGENCIES

Agency	Purpose
War Industries Board	Reorganized industry to maximize wartime production
Railroad Administration	Modernized and operated the nation's railroads
Food Administration	Increased agricultural production, supervised food distribution and farm labor
National War Labor Board	Resolved labor-management disputes, improved labor conditions, and recognized union rights as means to promote production and efficiency
Committee on Public Information	Managed propaganda to build public support for the war effort

QUICK REVIEW

National War Labor Board

- ◆ Federal and state governments created agencies to oversee the war-time economy.
- ◆ The National War Labor Board guaranteed the rights of unions to organize and bargain collectively.
- ◆ Labor unions sharply increased their membership under this protection.

wheatless days so that the Food Administration could feed military and foreign consumers. Half a million women went door to door to secure food conservation pledges from housewives. City residents planted victory gardens in parks and vacant lots.

Hoover also worked closely with agricultural processors and distributors. Farmers profited from the war, too. To encourage production, he established high prices for farm commodities, and agricultural income rose 30 percent. The Food Administration organized the Woman's Land Army to recruit women to work in the fields, providing sufficient farm labor despite the military draft. Most states formed units of the Boys' Working Reserve for agricultural labor. Agribusinesses in the Southwest persuaded the federal government to permit them to import Mexicans to work under government supervision and be housed in special camps.

In exchange for labor's cooperation, the National War Labor Board guaranteed the rights of unions to organize and bargain collectively. With such support, labor unions sharply increased their membership. The labor board also encouraged improved working conditions, higher wages, and shorter hours. These improvements limited labor disputes during the war, and Secretary of War Newton Baker praised labor as "more willing to keep in step than capital." But when unions like the Industrial Workers of the World did not keep in step, the government suppressed them.

These and other government regulatory agencies reinforced many longstanding trends in the American economy, from the consolidation of business to the commercialization of agriculture and the organization of labor. They also set a precedent for governmental activism that would prove valuable during the crises of the 1930s and 1940s.

WOMEN AND MINORITIES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES, OLD INEQUALITIES

The reorganization of the economy also had significant social consequences, especially for women and African Americans. In response to labor shortages, women took jobs previously closed to them. Besides farm work, they built airplanes, produced guns and ammunition, manufactured tents and cartridge belts, and worked in a wide variety of other heavy and light industries. "One of the lessons from the war," said one manufacturer, "has been to show that women can do exacting work."



Harriot Stanton Blatch, a suffragist active in the Food Administration, estimated that a million women had replaced men in industry, where “their drudgery is for the first time paid for.”

Many working women simply shifted to other jobs where their existing skills earned better wages and benefits. The reshuffling of jobs among white women opened new vacancies for black women in domestic, clerical, and industrial employment. As black women replaced white women in the garment and textile industries, social reformers spoke of “a new day for the colored woman worker.” But racial as well as gender segregation continued to mark employment, and wartime improvements were temporary.

The war helped middle-class women reformers achieve two long-sought objectives: woman suffrage and prohibition. Emphasizing the national cooperation needed to wage the war, one magazine noted that “arbitrarily to draw the line at voting, at a time when every man and woman must share in this effort, becomes an absurd anomaly.” Even Woodrow Wilson finally endorsed the reform, terming it “vital to the winning of the war.” Congress approved the suffrage amendment, which was ratified in 1920. Convinced that abstaining from alcohol would save grain and make workers and soldiers more efficient, Congress also passed the prohibition amendment, which was ratified in 1919.

The demand for industrial labor caused a huge migration of black people from the rural South, where they had had little opportunity, few rights, and no hope. Half a million African Americans moved north during the war, doubling and tripling the black population of Chicago, Detroit, and other industrial cities.

Unfortunately, fearful and resentful white people started race riots in Northern cities. In East St. Louis, Illinois, where thousands of black Southerners sought defense work, a white mob in July 1917 murdered at least thirty-nine black people. The *Literary Digest* noted, “Race-riots in East St. Louis afford a lurid background to our efforts to carry justice and idealism to Europe.” And Wilson was told privately that the riot was “worse than anything the Germans did in Belgium.”

FINANCING THE WAR

To finance the war, the government borrowed money and raised taxes. Business interests favored the first course, but Southern and Western progressives argued that taxation was more efficient and equitable and would minimize war profiteering. California Senator Hiram Johnson noted, “Our endeavours to impose heavy war profit taxes . . . have brought into sharp relief the skin-deep dollar patriotism of some of those who have been loudest in declamations on war and in their demands for blood.” Nevertheless, the tax laws of 1917 and 1918 established a graduated tax structure with increased taxes on large incomes, corporate profits, and wealthy estates.

The government raised two-thirds of the war costs by borrowing. Most of the loans came from banks and wealthy investors, but the government also campaigned to sell **Liberty Bonds** to the general public. Celebrities went to schools, churches, and rallies to persuade Americans to buy bonds as their patriotic duty. “Every person who refuses to subscribe,” Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo told a California audience, “is a friend of Germany.”

CONQUERING MINDS

The government also tried to promote a war spirit among the American people by establishing propaganda agencies and enacting legislation to control social attitudes and behavior. This program drew from the restrictive side of progressivism

QUICK REVIEW

Women and the War

- ✦ The war opened jobs in industry for women.
- ✦ New job opportunities appeared for black women.
- ✦ Middle-class women reformers achieved two objectives: woman suffrage and prohibition.



Liberty Bonds Interest-bearing certificates sold by the U.S. government to finance the American World War I effort.



Female workers stack bricks from wheel barrows at a brickyard under the supervision of a man in a suit.

National Archives and Records Administration

but also reflected the interests of more conservative forces. The Wilson administration adopted this program of social mobilization because many Americans opposed the war, including German Americans with ethnic ties to the Central Powers, Irish Catholics and Russian Jews who condemned the Allies for persecution and repression, Scandinavian immigrants averse to military service, pacifists, radicals who denounced the war as capitalist and imperialist, and many others.

To rally Americans behind the war effort, Wilson established the **Committee on Public Information (CPI)** under George Creel. Despite its title, the CPI sought to manipulate, not inform, public

opinion. Creel described his goal as winning “the fight for the *minds* of men, for the ‘conquest of their convictions.’” The CPI flooded the country with press releases, advertisements, cartoons, and canned editorials. It made newsreels and war movies to capture public attention. It hired artists to draw posters, professors to write pamphlets in twenty-three languages, and poets to compose war poems for children.

Other government agencies launched similar campaigns. The Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense established the Department of Educational Propaganda and Patriotic Education. This agency worked to win over women who opposed the war.

Government propaganda had three themes: national unity, the loathsome character of the enemy, and the war as a grand crusade for liberty and democracy. Germans were depicted as brutal, even subhuman, rapists and murderers. The campaign suggested that any dissent was unpatriotic, if not treasonous, and dangerous to national survival. This emphasis on unreasoning conformity helped prompt hysterical attacks on German Americans, radicals, and pacifists.

SUPPRESSING DISSENT

The government also suppressed dissent, now officially branded disloyalty. For reasons of their own, private interests helped shape a reactionary repression that tarnished the nation’s professed idealistic war goals.

Congress rushed to stifle antiwar sentiment. The **Espionage Act** provided heavy fines and up to twenty years in prison for obstructing the war effort, a vague phrase but one “omnipotently comprehensive,” warned one Idaho senator who opposed the law. “No man can foresee what it might be in its consequences.” In fact, the Espionage Act became a weapon to crush dissent and criticism. In 1918, Congress passed the still more sweeping **Sedition Act**. Based on state laws in the West designed to suppress labor radicals, the Sedition Act provided severe penalties for speaking or writing against the draft, bond sales, or war production or for criticizing government personnel or policies. Senator Hiram Johnson lamented: “It is war. But, good God, . . . when did it become war upon the American people?”

Postmaster General Albert Burleson banned antiwar or radical newspapers and magazines from the mail, suppressing literature so indiscriminately that one observer said he “didn’t know socialism from rheumatism.” The reactionary

Committee on Public Information (CPI)

Government agency during World War I that sought to shape public opinion in support of the war effort through newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, films, and other media.

Espionage Act Law whose vague prohibition against obstructing the nation’s war effort was used to crush dissent and criticism during World War I.

Sedition Act Broad law restricting criticism of America’s involvement in World War I or its government, flag, military, taxes, or officials.

attorney general, Thomas Gregory, made little distinction between traitors and pacifists, war critics, and radicals. Eugene Debs was sentenced to ten years in prison for a “treasonous” speech in which he declared it “extremely dangerous to exercise the right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe in the world.” By war’s end, a third of the Socialist party’s national leadership was in prison, leaving the party in shambles.

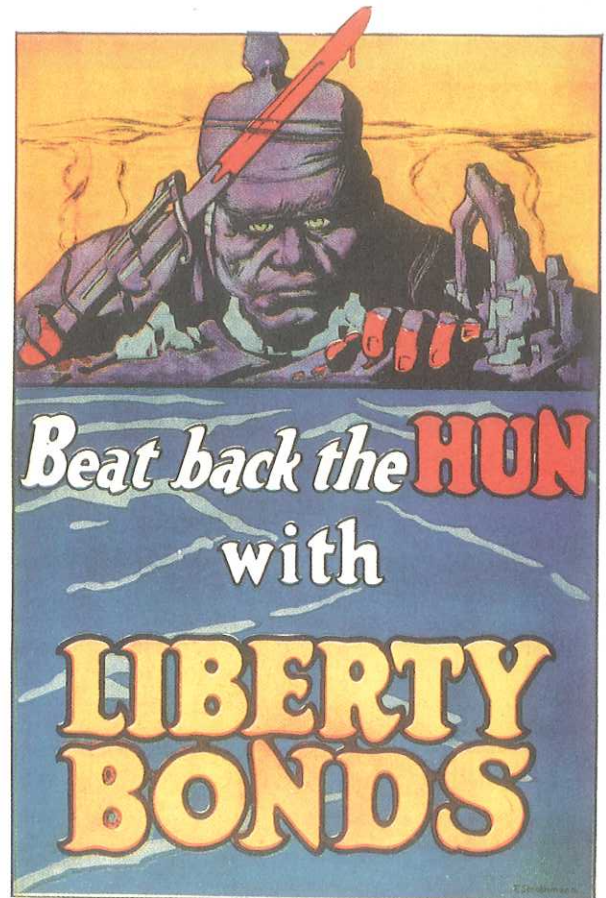
Gregory also enlisted the help of private vigilantes, including several hundred thousand members of the reactionary American Protective League, which sought to purge radicals and reformers from the nation’s economic and political life. They wiretapped telephones, intercepted private mail, burglarized union offices, broke up German-language newspapers, harassed immigrants, and staged mass raids, seizing thousands of people they claimed were not doing enough for the war effort.

State and local authorities established 184,000 investigating and enforcement agencies known as councils of defense or public safety committees. They encouraged Americans to spy on one another, required people to buy Liberty Bonds, and prohibited teaching German in schools or using the language in religious services and telephone conversations. When Oklahoma abolished German in its schools, a newspaper crowed: “German Deader than Latin Now.” (See *American Views, Mobilizing America for Liberty*.) In Tulsa, a member of the county council of defense shot and killed someone for making allegedly pro-German remarks. The council declared its approval, and community leaders applauded the killer’s patriotism.

Members of the business community exploited the hysteria to promote their own interests at the expense of farmers, workers, and reformers. As one Wisconsin farmer complained, businessmen “now under the guise of patriotism are trying to ram down the farmers’ throats things they hardly dared before.” On the Great Plains from Texas to North Dakota, the business target was the Nonpartisan League, a radical farm group demanding state control or ownership of banks, grain elevators, and flour mills. Although the League supported the war, oversubscribed bond drives, and had George Creel affirm its loyalty, conservatives depicted it as seditious to block its advocacy of political and economic reforms. Minnesota’s public safety commission proposed a “firing squad working overtime” to deal with League members. Public officials and self-styled patriots broke up the League’s meetings and whipped and jailed its leaders.

In the West, business interests targeted labor organizations, especially the Industrial Workers of the World. In Arizona, for example, the Phelps-Dodge Company armed and paid a vigilante mob to seize twelve hundred striking miners, many of them Wobblies and one-third of them Mexican Americans, and herd them into the desert without food or water. Federal investigators found that the company and its thugs had been inspired not by “considerations of patriotism” but by “ordinary strike-breaking motives.” Corporate management was merely “raising the false cry of ‘disloyalty’ ” to suppress workers’ complaints.

Nonetheless, the government itself used the army to break loggers’ support for the IWW in the Pacific Northwest, and it raided IWW halls across the country in September 1917. The conviction of nearly two hundred Wobblies on charges



“Beat Back the Hun,” a poster to induce Americans to buy Liberty Bonds, demonizes the enemy in a raw, emotional appeal. Liberty bond drives raised the immense sum of \$23 billion.

The Granger Collection, New York



◆ AMERICAN VIEWS ◆

MOBILIZING AMERICA FOR LIBERTY



he war years witnessed official and popular efforts to repress dissent and diversity. Much of this repression was aimed at America's immigrant groups and sought to create national unity through coercive Americanization that trampled on the rights and values that the nation claimed to be defending. The following is an official proclamation of Governor W.L. Harding of Iowa, issued May 23, 1918.

WHAT IS the rationale for the governor's proclamation? What do you think of his interpretation of the constitutional guarantees of individual rights? What other "inconvenience or sacrifice" might the proclamation impose on minorities? How might the proclamation incite vigilantism?

The official language of the United States and the State of Iowa is the English language. Freedom of speech is guaranteed by federal and State Constitutions, but this is not a guaranty of the right to use a language other than the language of this country—the English language. Both federal and State Constitutions also provide that "no laws shall be made respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Each person is guaranteed freedom to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, but this guaranty does not protect him in the use of a foreign language when he can as well express his thought in English, nor entitle the person who cannot speak or understand the English language to employ a foreign language, when to do so tends in time of national peril, to create discord among neighbors and citizens, or to disturb the peace and quiet of the community.

Every person should appreciate and observe his duty to refrain from all acts or conversation which may excite suspicion or produce strife among the people, but in his relation to the public should so demean himself that every

word and act will manifest his loyalty to his country and his solemn purpose to aid in achieving victory for our army and navy and the permanent peace of the world . . .

The great aim and object of all should be unity of purpose and a solidarity of all the people under the flag for victory. This much we owe to ourselves, to posterity, to our country, and to the world.

Therefore, the following rules should obtain in Iowa during the war:

First. English should and must be the only medium of instruction in public, private, denominational, or other similar schools.

Second. Conversation in public places, on trains, and over the telephone should be in the English language.

Third. All public addresses should be in the English language.

Fourth. Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their religious worship in their homes.

This course carried out in the spirit of patriotism, though inconvenient to some, will not interfere with their guaranteed constitutional rights and will result in peace and tranquility at home and greatly strengthen the country in battle. The blessings of the United States are so great that any inconvenience or sacrifice should willingly be made for their perpetuity.

Therefore, by virtue of authority in me vested, I, W.L. Harding, Governor of the State of Iowa, commend the spirit of tolerance and urge that henceforth the within outlined rules be adhered to by all, that petty differences be avoided and forgotten, and that, united as one people with one purpose and one language, we fight shoulder to shoulder for the good of mankind.

Source: B.F. Shambaugh, ed., *Iowa and War* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919).



22-2
Boy Scouts of America
from, "Boy Scouts Support
the War Effort" (1917)

of sedition in three mass trials in Illinois, California, and Kansas crippled the nation's largest industrial union.

The government was primarily responsible for the war hysteria. It encouraged suspicion and conflict by its own inflammatory propaganda, repressive laws, and violation of basic civil rights, by supporting extremists who used the war for their own purposes, and by not opposing mob violence against German Americans.



WAGING WAR AND PEACE ABROAD

While mobilizing the home front, the Wilson administration undertook an impressive military effort to help the Allies defeat the Central Powers. Wilson also struggled to secure international acceptance for his plans for a just and permanent peace.

THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

When the United States entered the war, the Allied military position was dire. The losses from three years of trench warfare had sapped military strength and civilian morale. French soldiers mutinied after 120,000 casualties in five days; the German submarine campaign was devastating the British. On the eastern front, the Russian army collapsed, and the Russian government gradually disintegrated.

What the Allies needed, said French Marshal Joseph Joffre in April 1917, was simple: “We want men, men, men.” In May, Congress passed the **Selective Service Act of 1917**, establishing conscription. More than 24 million men eventually registered for the draft, and nearly 3 million entered the army when their numbers were drawn in a national lottery. Almost two million more men volunteered, as did more than ten thousand women who served in the navy. Nearly one-fifth of America’s soldiers were foreign-born (Europeans spoke of the “American Foreign Legion”); 367,000 were black people.

Civilians were transformed into soldiers in hastily organized training camps operated according to progressive principles. Prohibition prevailed in the camps; the poorly educated and largely working-class recruits were taught personal hygiene; worries about sin and inefficiency produced campaigns against venereal disease; and immigrants were taught English and American history. Some units were ethnically segregated: At Camp Gordon, Georgia, Italians and Slavs had separate units with their own officers. Racial segregation was more rigid. The navy assigned black sailors to menial positions, and the army used black soldiers primarily as gravediggers and laborers. But one black combat division was created, and four black regiments fought under French command. France decorated three of these units with its highest citations for valor.

The first American troops landed in France in June 1917. This American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was commanded by General John J. Pershing. Full-scale American intervention did not begin until the late spring of 1918 (see Map 23–2). The influx of American troops in June and July tipped the balance toward Allied victory. By July 18, the German chancellor later acknowledged, “even the most optimistic among us knew that all was lost.”

In July, Wilson also agreed to commit fifteen thousand American troops to intervene in Russia. Russia’s provisional government had collapsed when the **Bolsheviks**, or Communists, had seized power in November 1917. Under V.I. Lenin, the Bolsheviks had then signed an armistice with Germany in early 1918, which freed German troops for the summer offensive in France. The Allies’ interventions were designed to reopen the eastern front and help overthrow the Bolshevik government. Lenin’s call for the destruction of capitalism and imperialism alarmed the Allied leaders. One Wilson adviser urged the “eradication” of the Russian government. Soon American and British troops were fighting Russians in an effort to influence Russia’s internal affairs. U.S. forces remained in Russia until 1920, but these military interventions failed.

On the western front, the Allies launched their own advance. In late September an American army over 1 million strong attacked German trenches in the Argonne Forest. Some soldiers had been drafted only in July and had spent

HOW DID the war effort threaten civil liberties?

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Fort George G. Meade Museum,
Fort Meade, Maryland



22–5

Eugene Kennedy,
A “Doughboy” Describes
the Fighting Front (1918)

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



General John J. Pershing Boyhood
Home, Laclede, Missouri
[www.mostateparks.com/
pershingssite.htm](http://www.mostateparks.com/pershingsite.htm)

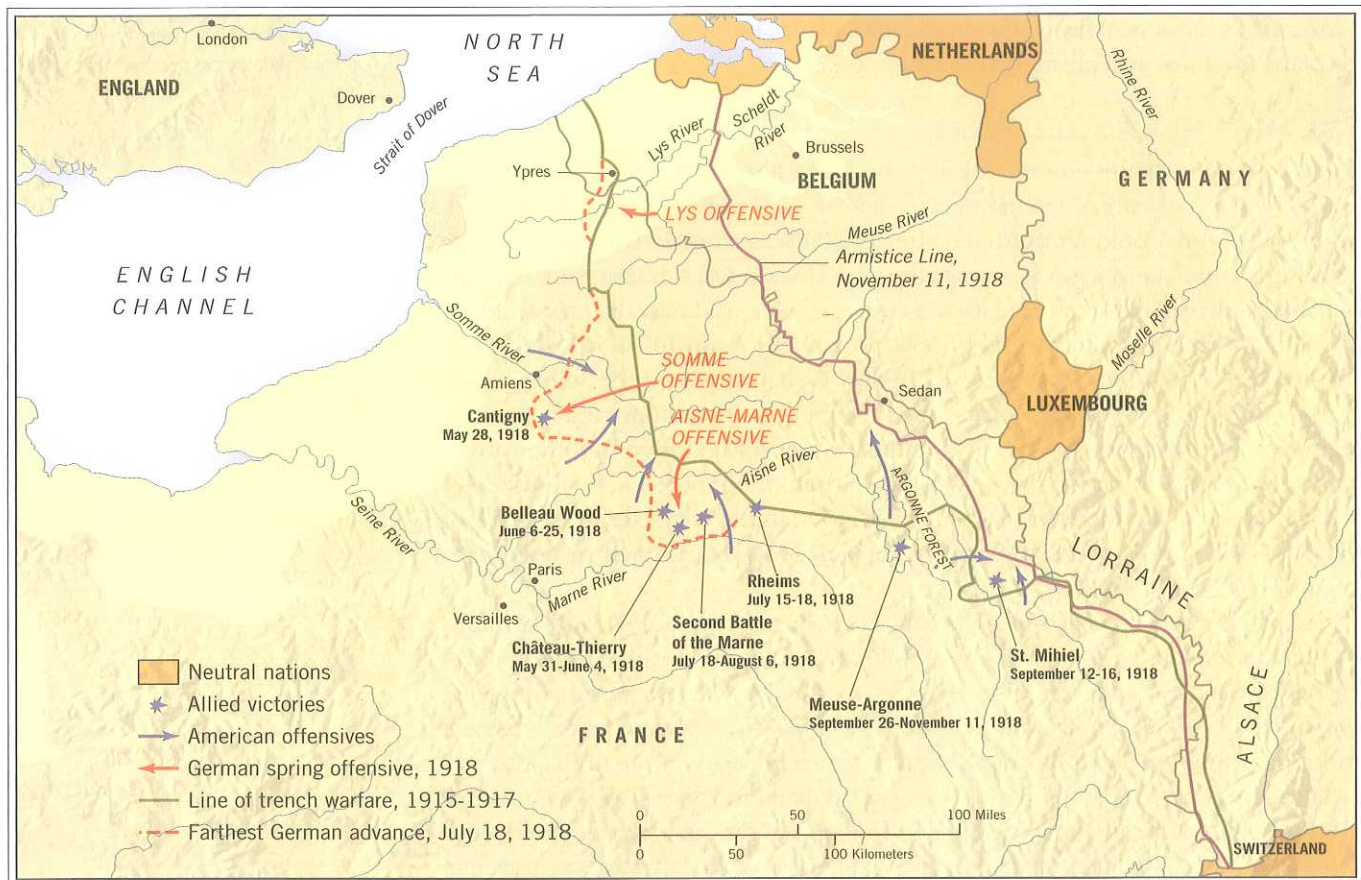
Selective Service Act of 1917 The law establishing the military draft for World War I.

Bolshevik Member of the Communist movement in Russia that established the Soviet government after the 1917 Russian Revolution.



MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to <http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map23.2>



MAP 23-2

The Western Front, 1918 After three years of trench warfare, the arrival of large numbers of American troops in 1918 enabled the Allies to launch an offensive that drove back the Germans and forced an armistice.

AT THE time of the armistice, how far back had the Germans been forced to retreat from their farthest advance?

more time traveling than training. One officer worried, “With their unfamiliarity with weapons, a gun was about as much use as a broom in their hands.” Nevertheless, the Americans advanced steadily, despite attacks with poison gas and heavy artillery. Lieutenant Maury Maverick (later a Texas congressman) described the shelling: “We were simply in a big black spot with streaks of screaming red and yellow, with roaring giants in the sky tearing and whirling and roaring.” An exploding shell terrified him: “There is a great swishing scream, a smash-bang, and it seems to tear everything loose from you. The intensity of it simply enters your heart and brain, and tears every nerve to pieces.”

The battle for the Argonne raged for weeks. One German general reported that his exhausted soldiers faced Americans who “were fresh, eager for fighting, and brave.” But he found their sheer numbers most impressive. Despite severe casualties, the AEF helped the British and French defeat the enemy. Soon thereafter, Germany asked for peace. On November 11, 1918, an armistice ended the Great War. More than 115,000 Americans were among the 8 million soldiers and 7 million civilians dead.



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- ★ Sgt. Alvin C. York Homeplace and State Historic Site, Pall Mall, Tennessee
www.alvincyork.org



- 22-6 Newton D. Baker, “The Treatment of German-Americans” (1918)



THE FOURTEEN POINTS

The armistice was only a step toward final peace. President Wilson had already enunciated American war objectives on January 8, 1918, in a speech outlining what became known as the Fourteen Points. In his 1917 war message, Wilson had advocated a more democratic world system, and this new speech spelled out how to achieve it. But Wilson also had a political purpose. The Bolsheviks had published the secret treaties the Allies had signed dividing up the economic and territorial spoils of war. Lenin called for an immediate peace based on the liberation of all colonies, self-determination for all peoples, and the rejection of annexations and punitive indemnities. Wilson's Fourteen Points reassured the American and Allied peoples that they were fighting for more than imperialist gains and offered an alternative to what he called Lenin's "crude formula" for peace.

Eight of Wilson's points proposed creating new nations, shifting old borders, or assuring self-determination for peoples previously subject to the Austrian, German, or Russian empires. The point about Russia called on all nations to evacuate Russian territory and permit Russia "an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development" under "institutions of her own choosing." Another five points invoked principles to guide international relations: freedom of the seas, open diplomacy instead of secret treaties, reduction of armaments, free trade, and the fair settlement of colonial claims. Wilson's fourteenth and most important point proposed a league of nations to carry out these ideals and ensure international stability.

Wilson and the German government had these principles in mind when negotiating the armistice. The Allies, however, had never explicitly accepted the Fourteen Points. While Wilson favored a settlement that would promote international stability and economic expansion, he recognized that the Allies sought "to get everything out of Germany that they can."

Convinced of the righteousness of his cause, Wilson decided to attend the peace conference in Paris himself. But Wilson weakened his position before he even set sail. First, he urged voters to support Democratic candidates in the November 1918 elections to indicate approval of his peace plans. But the electorate, responding primarily to domestic problems like inflation, gave the Republicans control of both houses of Congress. This meant that a treaty would have to be approved by Senate Republicans angry that Wilson had tried to use war and peace for partisan purposes. Second, Wilson refused to consult with Senate Republicans on plans for the peace conference and failed to name important Republicans to the Paris delegation. It would be Wilson's treaty, but Republicans would feel no responsibility to approve it.

THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

The peace conference opened on January 18, 1919. Meeting at the Palace of Versailles, the delegations were dominated by the principal Allied leaders themselves: Wilson of the United States, David Lloyd George of Britain, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. The Central Powers and Bolshevik Russia were excluded. Clemenceau remarked, "God gave us the Ten Commandments and we broke them. Mr. Wilson has given us the Fourteen Points. We shall see."

Wilson himself had broken two of the Fourteen Points before the conference began. He had acquiesced in Britain's rejection of freedom of the seas, and he had sent U.S. troops to intervene in Russia in violation of its right to self-determination.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Wisconsin Veterans Museum,
Madison, Wisconsin

QUICK REVIEW

Wilson's Fourteen Points

- ◆ Wilson articulated U.S. war aims in his Fourteen Points.
- ◆ The Allies did not explicitly support Wilson's program.
- ◆ Domestic political failures undermined Wilson's position at the Paris peace conference.



For months, the conference debated Wilson's other goals and the Allies' demands for compensation and security. Lloyd George later commented, with reference to the self-righteous Wilson and the assertive Clemenceau, "I think I did as well as might be expected, seated as I was between Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte." Under protest, Germany signed the **Treaty of Versailles** on June 28, 1919. Its terms were far more severe than Wilson had proposed or Germany had anticipated. Germany had to accept sole responsibility for starting the war; to pay huge reparations to the Allies; to give up land to France, Poland, Belgium, and Denmark; to cede its colonies; to limit its army and navy; and to promise not to manufacture or purchase armaments.

Wilson gained some acceptance of self-determination. As the German, Austro-Hungarian, Turkish, and Russian empires had collapsed at the end of the war, nationalist groups had proclaimed their independence. On one hand, the peace settlement formally recognized these new nation-states in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, France, Italy, Romania, and Japan all annexed territory regardless of the wishes of the inhabitants. Germans were placed under Polish control in Silesia and Czech control in Bohemia. Austrians were not allowed to merge with Germany. And the conference sanctioned colonialism by establishing a trusteeship system that enabled France, Britain, and Japan to take over German colonies and Turkish territory.

Moreover, the Allied leaders endorsed the changes in eastern Europe in part because the new states there were anti-Communist. Western leaders soon called these countries the *cordon sanitaire*, a barrier against Bolshevism. Indeed, the Allies at Versailles were preoccupied with Bolshevik Russia, which one of Wilson's aides called the "black cloud of the east, threatening to overwhelm and swallow up the world." The Allies hoped to isolate and weaken Bolshevik Russia. This hostility to Russia, like the punitive terms for Germany and the concessions to imperial interests, boded ill for a stable and just postwar order.

But Wilson hoped that the final section of the Versailles treaty would resolve the flaws of the agreement by establishing his great international organization to preserve peace: the **League of Nations**. The Covenant, or constitution, of the League was built into the treaty. Its crucial feature, Article Ten, bound the member nations to guarantee each other's independence, which was Wilson's concept of collective security. Sailing home, he mused: "Well, it is finished, and, as no one is satisfied, it makes me hope we have made a just peace; but it is all on the lap of the gods."

Treaty of Versailles The treaty ending World War I and creating the League of Nations.

League of Nations International organization created by the Versailles Treaty after World War I to ensure world stability.

WAGING PEACE AT HOME

Wilson was determined to defeat opposition to the peace treaty. But many Americans were engaged in their own struggles with the new conditions of a nation suddenly at peace but riven by economic, social, and political conflict shaped by the war experience. Wilson's battle for the League of Nations would fail tragically. The other conflicts would rage until the election of 1920 restored a normalcy of sorts.

WHAT WERE the terms of the Treaty of Versailles?

BATTLE OVER THE LEAGUE

Most Americans favored the Versailles treaty. A survey of fourteen hundred newspapers found fewer than two hundred opposed. Thirty-three governors and thirty-two state legislatures approved of the League of Nations. But when Wilson called for the Senate to accept "the moral leadership . . . and confidence of the world" by ratifying the treaty, he met resistance. Republican



opponents of the treaty raised serious questions. Nearly all Democrats favored the treaty, but they were a minority; some Republicans had to be converted for the treaty to be approved.

Progressive Republican senators, such as Robert La Follette and Hiram Johnson, led one group of opponents. Called the **Irreconcilables**, they opposed participation in the League of Nations, which they saw as designed to perpetuate the power of imperialist countries. Article Ten, they feared, would require the United States to help suppress rebellions in Ireland against British rule or to enforce disputed European borders. Most of the Irreconcilables gave priority to restoring civil liberties and progressive reform at home.

A larger group of opponents, the **Reservationists**, were led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They regarded Article Ten as eroding congressional authority to declare war. They also fretted that the League might interfere with domestic questions, such as immigration laws. Lodge held public hearings on the treaty to rouse and focus opposition. German Americans resented the war guilt clause; Italian and Polish Americans complained that the treaty did not satisfy the territorial ambitions of Italy and Poland; Irish Americans condemned the treaty's failure to give self-determination to Ireland. Many progressives also criticized the treaty's compromises on self-determination, reparations, and colonies.

When Lodge proposed reservations or amendments to the treaty, Wilson opened "a direct frontal attack" on his opponents. If they wanted war, he declared, he would "give them a belly full." In early September 1919, Wilson set out across the country to win popular support for the League. In three weeks, he traveled 8,000 miles and delivered thirty-seven speeches. He collapsed in Pueblo, Colorado. Confused and in tears, Wilson mumbled, "I seem to have gone to pieces." Taken back to Washington, Wilson on October 2 suffered a massive stroke that paralyzed his left side and left him psychologically unstable and temporarily blind. Wilson's physician and his wife, Edith Galt Wilson, kept the nature of his illness secret from the public, Congress, and even the vice president and cabinet. The administration was immobilized.

By February 1920, Wilson had partially recovered, but he remained suspicious and quarrelsome. He still refused to compromise to win Senate approval of the treaty. On March 19, 1920, the Senate killed the treaty.

ECONOMIC READJUSTMENT AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

The League was not the only casualty of the struggle to conclude the war. Grave problems shook the United States in 1919 and early 1920. An influenza epidemic had erupted in Europe in 1918 among the massed armies. It now hit the United States, killing perhaps 700,000 Americans, far more than had died in combat.

Meanwhile, the Wilson administration had no plans for an orderly re-conversion of the wartime economy. The secretary of the Council of National Defense later reported, "the mobilization that had taken many months was succeeded by an instantaneous demobilization." The government canceled war contracts and dissolved the regulatory agencies. Noting that "the war spirit of cooperation and sacrifice" had disappeared with the Armistice, Bernard Baruch decided to "turn industry absolutely free" and abolished the War Industries Board as of January 1, 1919. Other agencies followed in such haste that turmoil engulfed the economy.

The army discharged 600,000 soldiers still in training camps; the navy brought AEF soldiers home from France. With no planning or assistance, troops were hustled

QUICK REVIEW

Defeat of the Treaty

- Most Democrats favored the treaty.
- Republicans led by Henry Cabot Lodge wanted amendments.
- Wilson's refusal to compromise doomed the treaty.

Irreconcilables Group of U.S. senators adamantly opposed to ratification of the Treaty of Versailles after World War I.

Reservationists Group of U.S. senators favoring approval of the Treaty of Versailles, after amending it to incorporate their reservations.



A policeman on horseback swings a truncheon at strikers on a Pittsburgh street.

Corbis/Bettman

back into civilian life. There they competed for scarce jobs with workers recently discharged from the war industries.

As unemployment mounted, the removal of wartime price controls brought runaway inflation. The cost of food, clothing, and other necessities more than doubled over prewar rates. The return of the soldiers caused a serious housing shortage, and rents skyrocketed. Farmers also suffered from economic readjustments. Net farm income declined by 65 percent between 1919 and 1921. Farmers who had borrowed money for machinery and land to expand production

for the war effort were left impoverished and embittered.

Women also lost their wartime economic advances. Returning soldiers took away their jobs. Male trade unionists insisted that women go back to being housewives. One New York union maintained that "the same patriotism which induced women to enter industry during the war should induce them to vacate their positions after the war." At times, male workers struck to force employers to fire women. "During the war they called us heroines," one woman complained, "but they throw us on the scrapheap now." By 1920, women constituted a smaller proportion of the work force than they had in 1910.

The postwar adjustments also left African Americans disappointed. During the war, they had agreed with W. E. B. Du Bois to "forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens." They had contributed to the fighting and home fronts. Now, housing shortages and job competition interacted with racism in 1919 to produce race riots in twenty-six towns and cities, resulting in at least 120 deaths. In Chicago, thirty-eight people were killed and more than five hundred injured in a five-day riot that began when white thugs stoned to death a black youth swimming too near "their" beach. White rioters then fired a machine gun from a truck hurtling through black neighborhoods. But black residents fought back, no longer willing, the *Chicago Defender* reported, "to move along the line of least resistance as did their sires." Racial conflict was part of a postwar battle between Americans hoping to preserve the new social relations fostered by the war effort and those wanting to restore prewar patterns of power and control.

Even more pervasive discontents roiled as America adjusted to the postwar world. More than 4 million angry workers launched a wave of 3,600 strikes in 1919. They were reacting not only to the soaring cost of living, which undermined the value of their wages, but also to employers' efforts to reassert their authority and destroy the legitimacy labor had won by its participation in the war effort. The abolition of government controls on industry enabled employers not only to raise prices but also to rescind their recognition of unions and reimpose objectionable working conditions. In response, strikers demanded higher wages, better conditions, and recognition of unions and the right of collective bargaining.



The greatest strike involved the American Federation of Labor's attempt to organize steelworkers, who endured dangerous conditions and twelve-hour shifts. When the steel companies refused to recognize the union or even discuss issues, 365,000 workers went out on strike in September 1919. Strikers in Pennsylvania pointed out that they had worked "cheerfully, without strikes or trouble of any kind" during the war to "make the world safe for democracy" and that they now sought "industrial democracy." Employers hired thugs to beat the strikers, used strikebreakers to take their jobs, and exploited ethnic and racial divisions among them. Management also portrayed the strikers as disruptive radicals influenced by Bolshevism. After four months, the strike failed.

Employers used the same tactic to defeat striking coal miners. Coal operators claimed that Russian Bolsheviks financed the strike to destroy the American economy. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer secured an injunction against the strike under the authority of wartime legislation. Since the government no longer controlled coal prices or enforced protective labor rules, miners complained bitterly that the war had ended for corporations but not for workers.

Two municipal strikes in 1919 also alarmed the public when their opponents depicted them as revolutionary attacks on the social order. In Seattle in February, the Central Labor Council called a general strike to support 35,000 shipyard workers striking for higher wages and shorter hours. When 60,000 more workers from 110 local unions also walked out, the city ground to a halt. Seattle's mayor, business leaders, and newspapers attacked the strikers as Bolsheviks and anarchists. Threatened with military intervention, the labor council called off the strike. In Boston, the police commissioner fired police officers for trying to organize a union to improve their inadequate pay. In response, the police went on strike. As in Seattle, Boston newspapers, politicians, and business leaders attributed the strike to Bolshevism. Governor Calvin Coolidge mobilized the National Guard and gained nationwide acclaim when he stated, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime." The police were all fired; many of their replacements were war veterans.

RED SCARE

The strikes contributed to an anti-Bolshevik hysteria that swept the country in 1919. This **Red Scare** reflected fears that the Bolshevik revolution in Russia might spread to the United States. Steeped in the antiradical propaganda of the war years, many Americans were appalled by Russian Bolshevism, described by the *Saturday Evening Post* as a "compound of slaughter, confiscation, anarchy, and universal disorder." Their alarm grew in 1919 when Russia established the Third International to foster revolution abroad, and a few American socialists formed the American Communist Party. But the Red Scare also reflected the willingness of anti-union employers, ambitious politicians, sensational journalists, zealous veterans, and racists to exploit the panic to advance their own purposes.

The Red Scare reached panic levels by mid-1919. Bombs mailed anonymously to several prominent people on May Day seemed proof enough that a Bolshevik conspiracy threatened America. The Justice Department, Congress, and patriotic organizations like the American Legion joined with business groups to suppress radicalism, real and imagined. The government continued to enforce the repressive laws against Wobblies, socialists, and other dissenters. Indeed, Wilson and Attorney General Palmer called for more stringent laws. State governments harassed and arrested hundreds.

Palmer created a new agency, headed by J. Edgar Hoover, to suppress radicals and impose conformity. Its war on radicalism became the chief focus of the

QUICK REVIEW

Labor Unrest

- ◆ Efforts to roll back war-time gains upset workers.
- ◆ 4 million workers launched 3,600 strikes in 1919.
- ◆ The largest strike involved efforts to organize steelworkers.

Red Scare Post-World War I public hysteria over Bolshevik influence in the United States directed against labor activism, radical dissenters, and some ethnic groups.



Justice Department. Hoover collected files on labor leaders and other “radical agitators” from Senator La Follette to Jane Addams, issued misleading reports on Communist influence in labor strikes and race riots, and contacted all major newspapers “to acquaint people like you with the real menace of evil-thinking, which is the foundation of the Red Movement.” Indeed, the Justice Department itself promoted the Red Scare hysteria, which Palmer hoped would lead to his presidential nomination and Hoover hoped would enhance his own power and that of his bureau.

In November 1919, Palmer and Hoover began raiding groups suspected of subversion. A month later, they deported 249 alien radicals, including the anarchist Emma Goldman, to Russia. Rabid patriots endorsed such actions. One minister favored deporting radicals “in ships of stone with sails of lead, with the wrath of God for a breeze and with hell for their first port.” In January 1920, Palmer and Hoover rounded up more than four thousand suspected radicals in thirty-three cities. Without warrants, they broke into union halls, club rooms, and private homes, assaulting and arresting everyone in sight. People were jailed without access to lawyers; some were beaten into signing false confessions. In Lynn, Massachusetts, thirty-nine people meeting to organize a bakery were arrested for holding a revolutionary caucus. The *Washington Post* clamored, “There is no time to waste on hairsplitting over infringement of liberty.”

Other Americans began to recoil from the excesses and illegal acts. Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post stopped further deportations by demonstrating that most of the arrested were “working men of good character, who are not anarchists or revolutionists, nor politically or otherwise dangerous in any sense.” When Palmer’s predictions of a violent attempt to overthrow the government on May 1, 1920, came to naught, most Americans agreed with the *Rocky Mountain News*: “We can never get to work if we keep jumping sideways in fear of the bewhiskered Bolshevik.” Even one conservative Republican concluded that “too much has been said about Bolshevism in America.” But if the Red Scare faded in mid-1920, the hostility to immigrants, organized labor, and dissent it reflected endured.

THE ELECTION OF 1920

The Democratic coalition that Wilson had cobbled together on the issues of progressivism and peace came apart after the war. Workers resented the administration’s hostility to the postwar strikes. Ethnic groups brutalized by the Americanization of the war years blamed Wilson for the war or condemned his peace settlement. Farmers grumbled about wartime price controls and postwar falling prices. Wartime taxes and the social and economic turmoil of 1919–1920 alienated the middle class. In the words of Kansas journalist William Allen White, Americans were “tired of issues, sick at heart of ideals, and weary of being noble.” They yearned for what Republican presidential candidate Warren Harding of Ohio called “normalcy.”

The Republican ticket in 1920 symbolized the reassurance of simpler times. Harding was a genial, Old Guard conservative. His running mate, Calvin Coolidge, governor of Massachusetts, owed his nomination to his handling of the Boston police strike.

Wilson called the election of 1920 “a great and solemn referendum” on the League of Nations, but the League was not a decisive issue in the campaign.



Harding defeated Democratic nominee James Cox, former governor of Ohio, in a landslide. “The Democrats are inconceivably unpopular,” wrote Walter Lippmann, a prominent journalist. Harding received 16 million popular votes to Cox’s 9 million. Running for president from his prison cell, Socialist Eugene Debs polled nearly a million votes. Not even his closest backers considered Harding qualified for the White House, but as Lippmann said, the nation’s “public spirit was exhausted” after the war years. The election of 1920 was “the final twitch” of America’s “war mind.”

CONCLUSION

The Great War disrupted the United States and much of the rest of the world. The initial American policy of neutrality yielded to sentimental and substantive links with the Allies and the pressure of German submarine warfare. Despite popular opposition, America joined the conflict when its leaders concluded that national interests demanded it. Using both military and diplomatic power, Woodrow Wilson sought to secure a more stable and prosperous world order, with an expanded role for the United States. But the Treaty of Versailles only partly fulfilled his hopes, and the Senate refused to ratify the treaty and its League of Nations. The postwar world order would be unstable and dangerous.

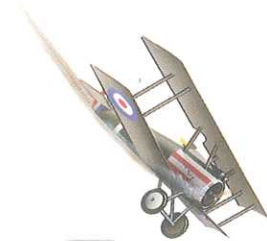
Participation in the war, moreover, had changed the American government, economy, and society. Some of these changes, including the centralization of the economy and an expansion of the regulatory role of the federal government, were already under way; some offered opportunities to implement progressive principles or reforms. Woman suffrage and prohibition gained decisive support because of the war spirit. But other consequences of the war betrayed both progressive impulses and the democratic principles the war was allegedly fought to promote. The suppression of civil liberties, manipulation of human emotions, repression of radicals and minorities, and exploitation of national crises by narrow interests helped disillusion the public. The repercussions of the Great War would linger for years, at home and abroad.

SUMMARY

Waging Neutrality Few Americans were prepared for the Great War that erupted in Europe in 1914; fewer still envisioned the United States becoming involved in the war. The Central Powers and the Allies were involved in mass slaughter and stalemate in Europe; America had no vital interest in the war, but it did not stay strictly neutral. The economy of America became closely tied with Britain and the Allies, the President sympathized with the Allied cause, and German submarine warfare tied the United States to the British war effort. The desire for peace determined the results of the 1916 election; in 1917 America entered the war as Germany decided to resume unrestricted submarine warfare and the contents of the Zimmermann Note, linking Germany to Mexico’s recovering the Southwest, were exposed.

Waging War in America In addition to mobilizing for military invention, the government reorganized the economy to emphasize centralized management and developed policies to control public opinion and suppress dissent. In response

WHAT WAS the postwar
backlash?





to labor shortages women and minorities entered the work force, obtaining jobs which had previously been closed to them; individual citizens planted victory gardens and bought Liberty Bonds to help the war effort. Government propaganda to rally Americans painted the enemy as subhuman; dissent was viewed as unpatriotic; Americans were encouraged to spy on one another; basic civil rights were violated.

Waging War and Peace Abroad The American involvement in the Great War turned the tide and ensured Allied victory. Having stopped the German advance on the Western Front, the Allies, with fresh American troops, began a counteroffensive that ended the war with an armistice on November 11, 1918. President Wilson envisioned the postwar world based on the Fourteen Points and attended the Paris Peace Conference convinced of the righteousness of his peace plans. The Allied leaders were more interested in revenge and retribution than righteousness. The Treaty of Versailles imposed harsh restrictions on Germany; the specter of Bolshevism hung over the peace conference; fear of communism impacted decisions made by the delegates.

Waging Peace at Home While most Americans favored the Versailles treaty, the senators who had to vote on the treaty were largely opposed to it. The Irreconcilables opposed participation in the League of Nations, and the Reservationists feared the power of the League and the erosion of Congressional authority. The Treaty of Versailles was never approved by the United States. The vote in the Senate was not the only war casualty: An influenza epidemic, the reconversion to a peacetime economy, housing shortages, unemployment, labor unrest, and the Red Scare wearied Americans. By 1920, Americans wanted a return to “normalcy” and elected Warren Harding as president in a landslide victory.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the major arguments for and against U.S. entry into the Great War?
 2. How and why did the United States shape public opinion in World War I?
 3. How did groups exploit the war crisis and the government’s propaganda and repression?
 4. What were the arguments for and against American ratification of the Treaty of Versailles?
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KEY TERMS

Allies (p. 606)
Bolshevik (p. 617)
Central Powers (p. 606)
Committee on Public Information (CPI) (p. 614)
Declaration of London (p. 607)
Espionage Act (p. 614)

Irreconcilables (p. 621)
League of Nations (p. 620)
Liberty Bonds (p. 613)
Preparedness (p. 609)
Red Scare (p. 623)
Reservationists (p. 621)
Sedition Act (p. 614)

Selective Service Act of 1917 (p. 617)
Self-determination (p. 610)
Sussex Pledge (p. 609)
Treaty of Versailles (p. 620)
War Industries Board (WIB) (p. 611)



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- 🏛️ **National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Georgia.** This sprawling collection of weapons, uniforms, and equipment includes exhibits on World War I. www.benningmwr.com/index.cfm
- 🏛️ **Fort George G. Meade Museum, Fort Meade, Maryland.** This museum contains unparalleled exhibits depicting U.S. military life during World War I, including artifacts, photographs, and French and American tanks designed for trench warfare.
- 🏛️ **General John J. Pershing Boyhood Home, Laclede, Missouri.** Maintained by the Missouri State Park Board, Pershing's restored nineteenth-century home exhibits some of his personal belongings and papers. www.mostateparks.com/pershingsite.htm
- 🏛️ **Sgt. Alvin C. York Homeplace and State Historic Site, Pall Mall, Tennessee.** The home of America's greatest military hero of World War I contains fascinating artifacts, including York's letters written in the trenches. www.alvincyork.org
- 🏛️ **Wisconsin Veterans Museum, Madison, Wisconsin.** The most stunning museum of its size in the United States, this large building combines impressive collections of artifacts ranging from uniforms to tanks, with substantive exhibits and video programs based on remarkable historical research. It both documents and explains the participation of Wisconsin soldiers in the nation's wars, including the Spanish-American War and World War I.



For additional study resources for this chapter, go to:
www.prenhall.com/goldfield/chapter23

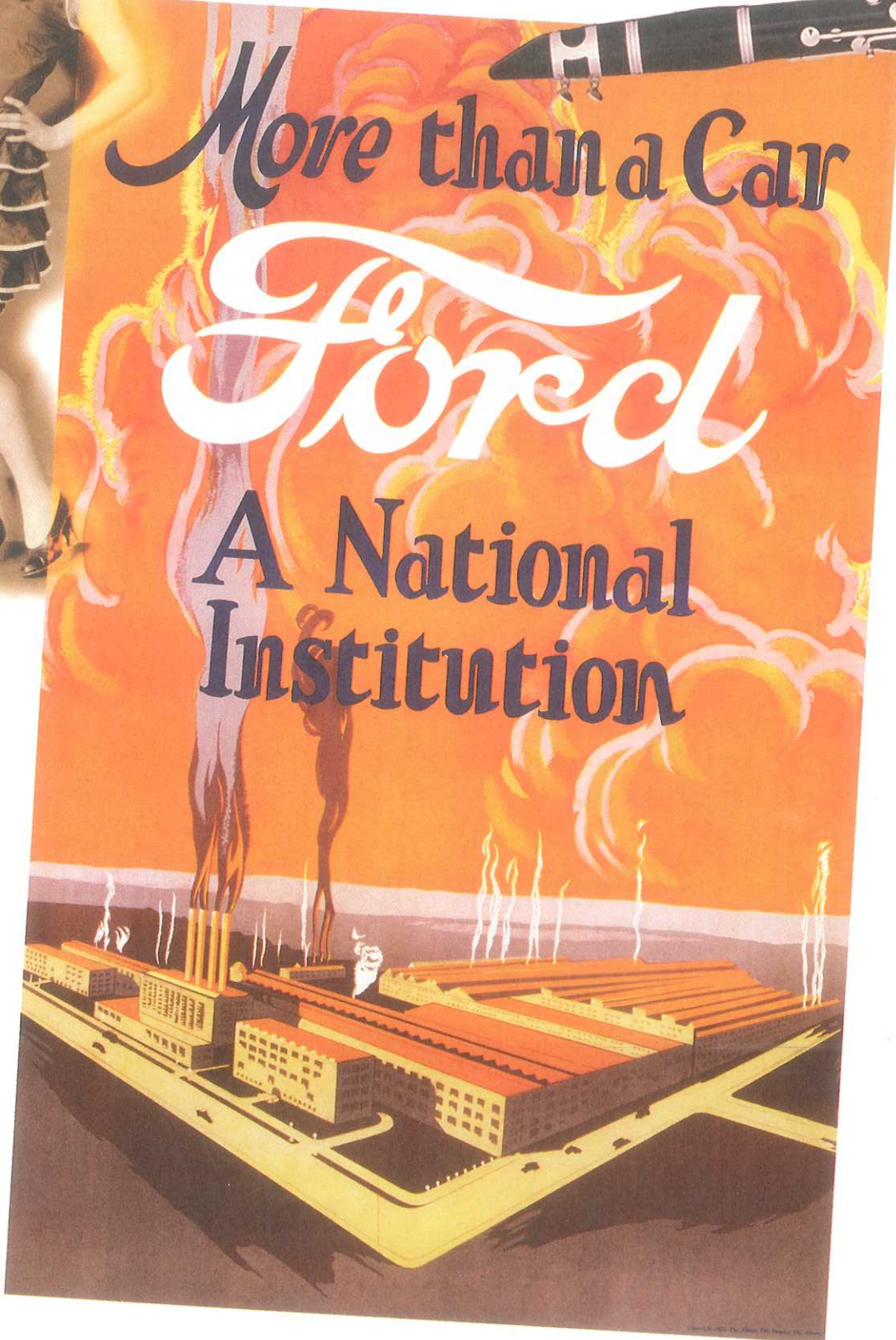
Happy times were here again.



More than a Car

Ford

A National
Institution



Toward a Modern America: The 1920's. "More than a car. FORD. A National Institution" poster, 1923.