

## Chapter 23 Outline - Americans in the Great War, 1914–1920

- I. Introduction

As the war began, America declared its neutrality. When events drew the nation into the contest, Woodrow Wilson announced that the country would fight to “make the world safe for democracy.” Although the war marked the coming of age of the United States as a great power, at home it accentuated and intensified social divisions.

- II. Precarious Neutrality

- A. Outbreak of the First World War

The war began following the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

- B. Taking Sides

Wilson sought to maintain neutrality, but objections came from German Americans and Irish Americans. Wilson’s administration had considerable sympathy for the Allies, providing another impediment to neutrality.

American economic ties to the Allies also made neutrality difficult.

- C. Wilsonianism

Wilson believed that the United States was the only nation that could lead the world into a new, peaceful era. British victory seemed crucial to these principles.

- D. Violations of Neutral Rights

Britain used its navy in an effort to sever all neutral trade with Germany and cripple the German economy.

German naval tactics relied on submarines. Wilson interpreted

international law to insist that submarines surface before firing on ships. Germany disagreed.

- III. The Decision for War

- A. Peace Advocates

A strong peace movement existed in the United States. Many believed that war drained a nation of its youth, resources, and reform impulse; that it led to repression at home; that it violated Christian morality; and that business profited from war.

- B. Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

In February 1917, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. The Germans hoped to defeat Britain before American troops could enter the war.

When British intelligence released the Zimmermann Telegram, Americans took the threat from Germany seriously because of deteriorating relations with Mexico.

- C. War Message and War Declaration

Wilson asked for war because of German violations of freedom of the seas and assaults on human rights. He wanted to “make the world safe for democracy” and to reform world politics.

- IV. Winning the War

- A. The Draft and the Soldier

Congress passed the Selective Service Act that made all men between twenty and thirty subject to the draft. Most soldiers were draftees, in their early twenties, and poorly educated. African Americans, at the urging of the NAACP, joined in the U.S. war effort.

- B. Trench Warfare

The American Expeditionary Force remained independent from the Allied forces.

The nature of World War I combat was marked by a futile stalemate in the trenches.

- C. Shell Shock

Some American soldiers experienced shell shock from constant exposure to enemy shelling and from witnessing the carnage of war.

- D. American Units in France

The availability of prostitutes in Paris helped make venereal disease a serious problem for American troops.

When American soldiers and materiel entered the war, they tipped the balance in favor of the Allies.

- E. The Bolshevik Revolution

In November 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution brought radical socialists under the leadership of V. I. Lenin to power in Russia.

- F. Fourteen Points

Wilson made public the Fourteen Points in January 1918. They summarized Wilson's international view of a stable world order based on American principles.

- G. Americans in Battle

Through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, Russia made a separate peace with Germany and withdrew from the war.

The entry of American soldiers into the war led to a series of Allied

victories. Germany accepted an armistice in November 1918.

- H. Casualties

Over 16 million European soldiers and civilians died as a result of the war. Some 53,000 Americans died in battle and another 62,000 died from disease.

The German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires were destroyed as a result of the war.

- V. Mobilizing the Home Front

- A. Business-Government Cooperation

When war began, government and industry had a strong partnership, with executives serving on war committees. Abuses, however, led to disbanding the committees and to the creation of the War Industries Board.

Government agencies were created to manage the task of shifting the nation's resources to the Allies, the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), and war-related production. The largest such agency was the War Industries Board, which coordinated the national economy.

- B. Economic Performance

Despite mistakes, the mobilized economy delivered enough men and materiel to France to defeat the Central Powers.

The government financed one-third of the war through taxes. The other two-thirds came from loans.

- C. Labor Shortage

More work during the war meant more pay, but high inflation offset the income.

To deal with the problem of labor shortages, the Department of Labor's U. S. Employment Service matched workers with job vacancies.

With much of the work force in the military and with immigration interrupted, women filled many jobs. When the war ended, women lost many of the gains they had made.

Many African Americans moved north to work in industry.

- D. National War Labor Board

The National War Labor Board (NWLB) was created in 1918 to discourage strikes and urge management to negotiate with existing unions.

- VI. Civil Liberties Under Challenge

- A. The Committee on Public Information

Headed by journalist George Creel, the Committee on Public Information acted as a propaganda agency to win support for the war.

- B. Espionage and Sedition Acts

The Espionage and Sedition Acts gave the government wide authority to crack down on dissenters. More than two thousand people faced prosecution under these laws.

Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs gave a speech extolling freedom of speech and criticizing Wilson. Federal agents arrested him; he was sentenced to ten years in prison.

In *Schenck v. U.S.*, the Supreme Court endorsed convictions under the Espionage and Sedition Acts.

- VII. Red Scare, Red Summer

- A. Labor Strikes

More than four million workers went out on strike in 1919, sparking a Red Scare.

- B. American Legion

Starting as a veterans' organization, the American Legion quickly grew to become a stalwart defender of Americanism and social conformity.

- C. Palmer Raids

Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer staged illegal raids on meeting halls and homes of alleged Communists. Four thousand went to jail, and many were deported.

- D. Racial Unrest

Whites in northern cities reacted violently to the influx of African American immigrants.

- E. Black Militancy

A new militancy among northern blacks may be seen through the ideas expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois and Claude McKay.

- VIII. The Defeat of Peace

- A. Paris Peace Conference

Wilson underestimated his task in Paris. The victors demanded reparations from Germany, and most of Wilson's Fourteen Points failed to gain Allied support.

- B. League of Nations and Article 10

Wilson worked hardest on establishing the League of Nations to provide for collective security.

- C. Critics of the Treaty

Henry Cabot Lodge led opposition to the treaty. Wilson campaigned for ratification of the treaty, but he suffered a stroke that ended any hope for a compromise.

- D. Senate Rejection of the Treaty and League

The Senate rejected the Treaty of Paris and the United States refused to join the League of Nations.

Americans preferred the tradition of nonalignment and chose to act unilaterally in world affairs.

- E. An Unsafe World

The spread of Wilsonian ideals resulted in the rise of anticolonialism. Also, German resentment of the peace treaty increased the threat of international instability.