

World War I

FL **SS.912.A.4.5** Examine causes, course, and consequences of United States involvement in World War I.

Vocabulary Builder: **wary** (WAIR ee) *adj.* cautious, watchful of danger

War Begins

Until 1914, there had not been a large-scale war in Europe for nearly 100 years. However, for some European leaders, there was no question if a great war would start. Nationalism, regional tensions, economic rivalries, imperial ambitions, and militarism made European countries constantly wary of each other.

The spark that triggered World War I was the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, who was heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. A Serbian nationalist living in the Austrian-Hungarian province of Bosnia assassinated Ferdinand. Soon after, Austria-Hungary gave Serbia harsh demands to help them investigate the assassination. When Serbia refused, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Because of a system of alliances between European countries, nearly every major power soon became involved in the war. The two alliances became known as the Allies and the Central Powers.

WORLD WAR I ALLIANCES (MAIN MEMBERS, 1914)	
ALLIES	CENTRAL POWERS
France United Kingdom Russia	Germany Austria-Hungary Ottoman Empire

American Neutrality

For the first three years of World War I, the United States was neutral and did not participate in the war. Most Americans viewed the war as a distant European conflict for land and influence. They did not think the war directly threatened their interests, so they wanted no part in it. They preferred to maintain what they viewed as traditional American isolation from European disputes. But most Americans did favor one side over the other.

Cultural Ties

In 1914, one third of Americans were foreign-born. Many still thought of themselves in terms of their former homelands—as German Americans, Irish Americans, and so on. Many of these Americans supported the Central Powers. Most Americans, however, supported Britain and France, both of which had strong historical ties with the United States. America's national language was English, its cultural heritage was British, and its leading trade partner was Britain. France had aided the American cause during the American Revolution.

World War I (continued)

Freedom of the Seas

Early in the war, British leaders decided to use their navy to blockade Germany to keep essential goods from reaching their enemy. Germany responded by attempting to blockade Britain. Since Germany did not have enough surface ships to enforce its blockade, Germany used U-boats, or submarines.

Americans had always argued for freedom of the seas, or the ability to navigate the world's oceans without restrictions. The German blockade violated this principle because Germany did not restrict, or limit, itself to only attacking warships. U-boats attacked any ship that they thought was helping their enemies.

The most famous case of a U-boat sinking an unarmed ship happened on May 7, 1915. On this date, a U-boat sank the British passenger ship *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland. Even though the *Lusitania* was carrying ammunition, the U-boat attack shocked Americans. They protested that unarmed ships should not be sunk without first being warned and provided with safety for its passengers. Germany, fearful of the United States entering the war, responded by promising not to sink unarmed ships in the future. However, the country would break its promise.

The United States Enters The War

By 1917, Germany was suffering from severe shortages. German leaders decided to take action. First, German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a telegram to Mexico. The telegram, called the Zimmermann Note, asked Mexico to form an alliance with Germany if the United States declared war on Germany. Next, Germany announced it would return to unrestricted submarine warfare against Britain.

Although most leaders knew Mexico had no intention of attacking the United States, Americans were shocked by the Zimmermann Note and angered by the return of unrestricted submarine warfare. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany. Wilson said in his request that "the world must be made safe for democracy." Most Americans now thought that the war threatened their interests.

Victory

American troops and war materials began to arrive in Europe in June 1917. However, it was not until early 1918 that American troops began to arrive in large numbers. The American troops, added to those of France and Britain, gave the Allies a military advantage. By the fall of 1918, the German front was collapsing. Both the German and Austro-Hungarian armies had had enough. Some men deserted, others mutinied, and many refused to fight. Their leaders faced little choice but to surrender. On November 11, 1918, Germany surrendered to the Allies in a railway car in France.

Check for Understanding Why did Americans join the Allies in World War I?

The United States Prepares for War



SS.912.A.4.6 Examine how the United States government prepared the nation for war with war measures (Selective Service Act, War Industries Board, war bonds, Espionage Act, Sedition Act, Committee of Public Information).

Vocabulary Builder: **bond** (bahnd) *n.* certificate issued by the government as a promise to pay back borrowed money on a set date at a fixed rate of interest; **sedition** (se DISH un) *n.* subversion or provoking rebellion against the government

On April 6, 1917, Congress declared war against Germany. Now the United States government needed to move the nation from a peacetime mentality to wartime thinking. To do this, the government assumed new powers which impacted the life and liberty of each American.

Selective Service Act

In May 1917, Congress authorized a draft of young American men. Millions registered for the military draft, and in July the process of calling up the draftees began. Although a small percentage of men objected to the draft and refused to respond to draft notices or became conscientious objectors, their resistance had little impact on the numbers. Over the course of the war, 2.8 million men were drafted. When counted alongside those who volunteered for service, the number of American men in the military came to 4.8 million, of whom over 4 million were sent to the battlefields in France and Belgium.

War Industries Board

Turning a peacetime economy into a war machine resulted in the loss of some freedoms. The War Industries Board, headed by Bernard Baruch, a Wall Street investment broker, suspended the free market system in order to control the production of war materials. The government told farmers what to grow, told factories what to produce, and determined what could be shipped on the nation's rails. The U.S. economy became focused on the war effort.

Committee of Public Information and War Bonds

The Committee on Public Information was organized by the government to shape the nation's opinion of the war. This committee produced materials designed to convince the public that the government was right, the enemy was evil, and the war was just. Run by a former journalist, the committee used advertising and education to sell Americans on the war and to whip up support for the cause. To help fund the war, the government issued a series of War Bonds. The purchase of War Bonds was often viewed as an act of patriotism and as support for America, and people were often pressured to buy them.

Espionage Act

Fear of traitors within the country led Congress to pass the Espionage Act in June, 1917. This law allowed postal authorities to ban treasonable or seditious newspapers, magazines, or printed material from the mail. In addition, people convicted of obstructing army recruiters, assisting the enemy, or interfering with the war effort in any manner could be heavily fined and imprisoned for up to 20 years.

The United States Prepares for War (continued)

Sedition Act

Freedom of speech was further curbed in 1918 with the passage of the Sedition Act. This act made it unlawful to use "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" regarding the American government, the U.S. Constitution, or the military. The government used this law to remove socialists, pacifists, and political radicals from the political scene. Although the legality of this law was challenged, the Supreme Court upheld it in 1919. However, the law would go on to be repealed in 1921.

Check for Understanding In what ways did the government curb personal freedoms during World War I?

Minority Groups and Military Service



SS.912.A.4.8 Compare the experiences Americans (African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, women, conscientious objectors) had while serving in Europe.

Vocabulary Builder: segregate (SEG re gate) *v.* to separate a one group from the rest

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the government began to gear up for war. The Selective Service Act was passed to fill the ranks of the military. Although the vast majority of the soldiers who served were young white men, minorities and women were also represented in Europe.

Ethnic Minorities

Over 367,000 African Americans served in the U.S. military in World War I. African Americans fought in Europe, serving in segregated units under the command of white officers. Hundreds died while fighting for their country. In addition, over 200,000 Hispanic Americans served in World War I. Most were of Mexican descent. Unlike the African American units, Hispanic Americans were integrated into regular army units. Several thousand Puerto Ricans also served in the U.S. military. Most were assigned to guard Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal, but some Puerto Rican forces served in France. Immigrants of Asian descent enlisted in World War I and served with distinction in the battlefields of Europe. After the war, their service was recognized as they were allowed to become naturalized U. S. citizens.

Women

Although many women stayed in the United States to fill the jobs vacated by young men who were fighting overseas, some women also served their country in Europe. Many enlisted in what became the Army Nurse Corps. Others worked with the Red Cross and the American Women's Hospital Service as doctors, nurses, clerks, and ambulance drivers.

Conscientious Objectors

Although the Selective Service Act exempted members of recognized religious groups with pacifist beliefs from active service, it was not always easy for a young man to be classed as a conscientious objector. Many men whose moral or religious beliefs prohibited them from taking part in war were treated unfairly by the local draft boards. Some were required to enlist, and some felt they were treated badly in military training camps.

Check for Understanding How did service in World War I impact Asian Americans?

Minorities on the Home Front

FL SS.912.A.4.9 Compare how the war impacted German Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Jewish Americans, Native Americans, women and dissenters in the United States.

Vocabulary Builder: migration (my GRA shun) *n.* a group of people moving from one part of a country to another; subsequent (suhb-si-kwuh nt) *adj.* following in order or succession; succeeding

German Americans

The Committee of Public Information launched a campaign to prove the justice of American participation in the war by painting Germans, particularly their leader Kaiser Wilhelm II, as cruel and wicked. This fueled public mistreatment of German Americans and other foreigners living in the United States who spoke no English or who spoke with a German accent. German Americans tried to prove their loyalty by giving up their language and otherwise hiding their heritage. The German language was no longer taught in schools, and the works of great German composers were no longer acceptable. German words or names which had entered the American vocabulary were changed into something more patriotic. Hamburger became "liberty steak," and sauerkraut became "liberty cabbage."

Other Minorities

Young men were leaving the labor pool to join the military at the same time that industry was gearing up for military production. This created job opportunities for minorities who had previously been excluded from industrial jobs. African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans filled these positions. This period saw a great migration of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North. Encouraged by African American leaders like W. E. B. DuBois to use the war as an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty and patriotism, African Americans provided labor for the growing war effort. They moved to the cities hoping to make better lives for themselves and for their children.

The loss of labor and an increased food demand opened doors for Hispanic Americans in agriculture. Large numbers came from Mexico to Texas and to the Pacific Coast states to help meet the need for agricultural workers. Many Hispanic Americans came without their families as seasonal workers. Others came with their families to begin a new life in the United States.

Women

Women also benefited from the departure of working young men and the subsequent demand for labor. They moved into positions in munitions factories, railroads, food packaging industries, and on farms. Some became telegraph operators and conductors on trolley cars. Although not paid as well as men, the efforts of women during the war convinced President Wilson to support efforts to give women the right to vote. In 1919, Congress passes the Nineteenth Amendment, and women voted in the presidential election of 1920.

Dissenters

The United States at war had no place for dissenters. Laws such as the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act gave the government power to remove dissenters from the political scene. Eugene V. Debs, leader of the Socialist Party, was arrested in June 1918 for speaking out against the war.

Check for Understanding How did World War I provide opportunities for women and minorities?

Peace Settlements



SS.912.A.4.10 Examine the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and the failure of the United States to support the League of Nations.

Vocabulary Builder: **contrast** (KON trast) *adj.* opposite to; **represent** (rep ri ZENT) *v.* to serve others in an authority role; **reject** (ree JEKT) *v.* to refuse; **eventually** (i VEN choo uhl ee) *adv.* at a later time

Following Germany's surrender to the Allies, world leaders were left to put a heavily damaged Europe back together. Allied leaders, especially France and Great Britain, were angry with Germany for starting the war. They wanted to divide Germany and other enemy lands among themselves. They also wanted Germany to pay reparations, or payment for war damages. In **contrast**, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson called for "peace without victory." He did not want bitterness to interfere with lasting peace in Europe. Wilson's goals were peace and freedom in the world, not land-grabbing, revenge, and imperialism. His plan for peace became known as the Fourteen Points.

WILSON'S FOURTEEN POINTS	
KEY IDEA	DETAILS OF IDEA
Self-determination	Wilson felt that all people have the right to choose their own form of government.
Freedom of the seas	Wilson believed countries should be able to navigate the world's oceans without restrictions.
League of Nations	Wilson called for an association of nations that would guarantee political independence of large and small countries.
Mandate system	Under the mandate system, Allied powers would control, and eventually free, certain German colonies.

Peace Settlements (continued)

In early 1919, Allied leaders held a peace conference near Versailles, France, a suburb of Paris. The treaty that they came up with was named after Versailles.

President Wilson represented the United States at the conference and presented his Fourteen Points. Allied leaders rejected many of Wilson's ideas. Great Britain and France insisted that Germany should be punished for its actions. They demanded that Germany accept responsibility for the war and repay the Allies for war damages. Even though the Allies rejected much of what Wilson proposed in the Fourteen Points, he refused to give up on a League of Nations. The Allies eventually included the League in the Treaty of Versailles. Also, the Allies, in keeping with Wilson's idea of national self-determination, redrew the boundaries of Europe, creating many new countries.



President Wilson returned to the United States and submitted the treaty to Congress for approval. Some senators did not agree with the treaty because they felt it would allow the League, not Congress, to make U.S. foreign policy decisions. They feared that Article 10 of the League Covenant could be used to require United States involvement in a war. Despite Wilson's efforts, Congress did not approve the treaty. When a new map of Europe emerged, the changed boundaries showed that Wilson's hope for national self-determination had been violated nearly as often as it had been confirmed.

Check for Understanding Why did Congress oppose the Treaty of Versailles?