

23 The United States and the Collapse of the Old World Order

1901–1920



The ironically titled “Paths to Glory,” was painted by C. R. W. Nevinson, a British artist and volunteer ambulance driver in World War I. He experienced firsthand the pockmarked, muck-filled hell of trench warfare.

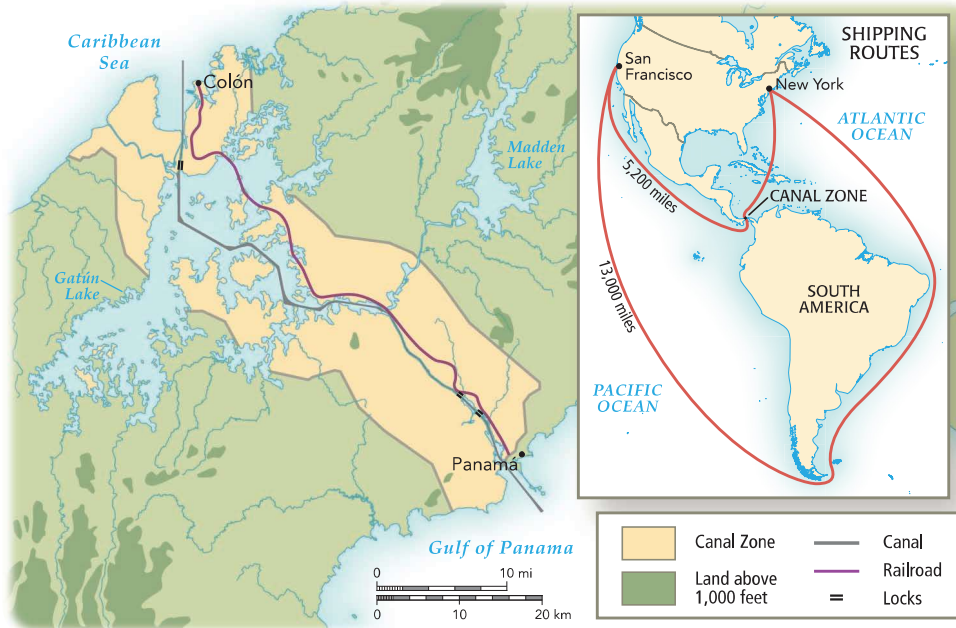
>> An American Story

“A PATH BETWEEN THE SEAS”

In 1898, as eager young Americans signed up to kill Spaniards in Cuba, the USS *Oregon* left San Francisco Bay on a roundabout route toward its battle station in the Caribbean. It first headed south through the Pacific, passing Central America and leaving it thousands of miles behind. Then in the narrow Strait of Magellan at South America’s tip, the ship encountered a gale so ferocious that the shore disappeared from sight. But the *Oregon* passed into the Atlantic and steamed north. Finally, after 68 days and 13,000 miles

MAP 23.1: PANAMA CANAL—OLD AND NEW TRANSOCEANIC ROUTES

Tropical forests cover three-fourths of Panama, including the Canal Zone. Vegetation is denser at high elevations but tightly packed even below 1,000 feet. The terrain is rugged, but the distance saved by the canal (nearly 8,000 miles) convinced Roosevelt and other American leaders that the ordeal of construction and the loss of lives were worthwhile in the long run.



at sea, it reached Cuba and helped win the Battle of Santiago Bay and the Spanish-American War.

The daring voyage electrified the nation but worried its leaders. Since the defeat of Mexico in 1848, the United States had stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific without enough navy to go around. As an emerging power, the country needed a “path between the seas,” a canal across the narrow isthmus of Colombia’s Panamanian province in Central America, to defend itself and to promote its growing trade.

“I took the isthmus,” President Theodore Roosevelt later told a cheering crowd. In a way he did. In 1903 he reached an agreement with Colombia to lease the needed strip

of land. Hoping for more money and greater control over the canal, the Colombian senate refused to ratify the pact.

Privately TR talked of seizing Panama. But when he learned of a budding independence movement there, he welcomed a revolt. On schedule and without bloodshed, the Panamanians rebelled late in 1903. The next day a U.S. cruiser dropped anchor offshore to prevent Colombia from landing troops. The United States quickly recognized the new Republic of Panama and concluded a treaty for a renewable lease on a canal zone 10 miles wide. Panama received \$10 million plus an annual rent of \$250,000, the same terms offered to Colombia.

Critics called it “a rough-riding assault upon another republic.”

The Panama Canal embodied Roosevelt’s muscular policy of respect through military strength. TR modernized the army and tripled its size, enlarged the navy, created a general staff for planning and mobilization, and established the Army War College. As a pivot point between the two hemispheres, his canal allowed the United States to flex its strength across the globe.

These expanding horizons came about largely as an outgrowth of American commercial and industrial expansion, just as the imperialist empires of Great Britain, France, Ger-

many, Russia, and Japan reflected the spread of their own industrial and commercial might. The Americans, steeped in democratic ideals, frequently seemed uncomfortable with the naked ambitions of European empire-builders. Roosevelt’s embrace of the canal, however, showed how far some Americans would go to shape the world in their interests.

Expansionist diplomats at home and abroad assured each other that global order could be maintained by balancing power through a set of carefully crafted alliances. That system of alliances did not hold. In 1914, the year the Panama Canal opened, the old world order shattered in a terrible war. <<

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PROGRESSIVE DIPLOMACY

As the Panama Canal was being built, progressive diplomacy was taking shape. Like progressive politics, it stressed moralism and order as it stretched executive power to new limits in an attempt to mold and remake the international environment. At the core of this mission lay a belief in the superiority of Anglo-American institutions and the need to spread them across the world. Every Western leader assumed that northern Europeans were racially superior, too, with a responsibility to uplift the “lesser peoples” of the tropical zones.

Economic expansion underlay the commitment to a civilizing mission. The depression of 1893 encouraged American manufacturers and farmers to look overseas for markets, and that expansion continued after 1900. Every administration committed itself to opening doors of trade and keeping them open.

Big Stick in the Caribbean >> Theodore Roosevelt liked to invoke the old African proverb “Walk softly and carry a big stick.” In the Caribbean, however, he moved both loudly and mightily. The Panama Canal gave the United States a commanding position in the Western Hemisphere. Its importance required the country to “police the surrounding premises,” explained Secretary of State Elihu

Root. Before granting Cuba independence in 1902, the United States reorganized its finances and wrote into the Cuban constitution the Platt Amendment. It gave American authorities the right to intervene if Cuban independence or internal order were threatened. Claiming that power, U.S. troops occupied the island twice between 1906 and 1923.



^ Sailors from the Japanese torpedo boat, *Sazanami*, board a Russian torpedo boat during a heated sea battle off Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War. Japan's victory, the first of an Asian over a European power, signaled Japan's new status as a great world power, as well as the country's success in “modernizing” along Western lines.

In looking to enforce a favorable environment for trade in the Caribbean, Roosevelt worried about European intentions. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had declared against further European colonization of the Western Hemisphere, but in the early twentieth century the rising debts of Latin Americans to Europeans invited intrusion. “If we intend to say hands off to the power of Europe, then sooner or later we must keep order ourselves,” Roosevelt warned.

Going well beyond Monroe’s concept of resisting foreign penetration, Roosevelt asserted American command of the Caribbean. In 1904, when the Dominican Republic defaulted on its debts, he added the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine by claiming the right to intervene directly if Latin Americans failed to meet their obligations to Europeans. Under its sweeping and self-proclaimed power, the United States assumed responsibility for several Caribbean states, including the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Panama.

A “Diplomatist of the Highest Rank” >>

In the Far East Roosevelt exercised ingenuity rather than force, since he considered Asia beyond the American sphere of influence. Like President McKinley, TR committed himself only to maintaining an “open door” of equal access to trade in China and to protecting the Philippines, “our heel of Achilles.”

The key lay in offsetting Russian and Japanese ambitions in the region. When Japan attacked Russian holdings in the Chinese province of Manchuria in 1904, Roosevelt offered to mediate. Both sides met at the U.S. Naval Base near Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and, under Roosevelt’s guidance, produced the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. It recognized the Japanese victory (the first by an Asian power over a European country) and ceded territory on the Asian mainland to Japan. Japan promised to leave Manchuria as part of China and keep trade open to all foreign nations. Both the balance of power in Asia and the open door in China had been preserved. Roosevelt’s diplomacy earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906.

Some Japanese nationalists resented the peace treaty for curbing Japan’s ambitions in Asia. Their anger surfaced in a protest lodged, of all places, against the San Francisco school board. In 1906 rising Japanese immigration led San Francisco school authorities to place the city’s 93 Asian students in a separate school. Roosevelt, fuming at the “infernal fools in California,” summoned the mayor of San Francisco to the White House. In exchange for an end to the segregation order, Roosevelt offered to arrange a mutual restriction of immigration between Japan and the United States. In 1907 all sides accepted his “gentlemen’s agreement.”

The San Francisco school crisis sparked wild rumors that Japan was bent on taking Hawai’i, the Philippines, or the Panama Canal. In case Japan or


any other nation thought of upsetting the Pacific balance, Roosevelt sent 16 gleaming white battleships on a world tour in 1907. The show of force heralded a new age of American naval might but had an unintended consequence that haunted Americans for decades: it spurred Japanese admirals to expand their own navy.

Watching Roosevelt in his second term, an amazed London *Morning Post* dubbed him a “diplomatist of the highest rank.” Abroad as at home, his brand of progressivism was grounded in an enthusiastic nationalism that mixed force with finesse to achieve balance and order.

Dollar Diplomacy >> Instead of force or finesse, William Howard Taft relied on private investment to promote economic stability, keep peace, and tie debt-ridden nations to the United States. His “dollar diplomacy” simply amounted to “substituting dollars for bullets,” Taft explained. He and Philander Knox, his prickly secretary of state, treated the restless nations of Latin America like ailing corporations, injecting capital and reorganizing management. By the time Taft left office in 1913, half of all American investments abroad were in Latin America.

Failure dogged Taft overseas as it did at home. In the Caribbean his dollar diplomacy was linked so closely with unpopular regimes, corporations, and banks that Woodrow Wilson scrapped it as soon as he entered the White House. In 1912 a revolution in Nicaragua led Taft to dispatch 2,000 marines to protect American lives and property. Sporadic American intrusions lasted more than a dozen years.

Taft’s efforts to strengthen China with investments and trade only intensified rivalry with Japan and made China more suspicious of all foreigners, including Americans. In 1911 the southern Chinese provinces rebelled against foreign intrusion and overthrew the monarchy. Only persistent pressure from the White House kept dollar diplomacy in Asia alive.

 **REVIEW**
How did Theodore Roosevelt’s policies in Latin America and Asia differ from William Howard Taft’s?

WOODROW WILSON AND MORAL DIPLOMACY

The Lightfoot Club had been meeting in Reverend Wilson’s hayloft for months when the question of whether the pen was mightier than the sword came up. Young

MAP 23.2: AMERICAN INTERVENTIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN, 1898–1930

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, armed and unarmed interventions by the United States virtually transformed the Caribbean into an American lake.

In which nations did the United States intervene for the longest time?



Tommy Wilson, who had organized the debating society, jumped at the chance to argue that written words were more powerful than armies. When the boys drew lots, Tommy ended up on the other side. “I can’t argue for something I don’t believe in,” he protested. Thomas Woodrow Wilson eventually dropped his first name, but he never gave up his boyhood conviction that morality, at least as he defined it, should guide conduct. To the diplomacy of order, force, and finance, Wilson added a missionary zeal for spreading capitalism, democracy, and the progressive values of harmony and cooperation.

Missionary Diplomacy >> As president, Woodrow Wilson revived and enlarged Jefferson’s notion of the United States as a beacon of freedom. “We are chosen, and prominently chosen, to show the way to the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty,” he said. Such paternalism only thinly masked Wilson’s assumption of Anglo-American superiority and his willingness to spread Western-style democracy, capitalism, and morality through force.

Wilson’s missionary diplomacy had a practical side. In the twentieth century foreign markets would serve as America’s new frontier. American industries “will

burst their jackets if they cannot find free outlets in the markets of the world,” he cautioned in 1912. Wilson’s genius lay in reconciling this commercial self-interest with a global idealism. In his eyes, exporting American democracy and capitalism would promote stability and progress throughout the world.

In Asia and the Pacific, Wilson moved to put “moral and public considerations” ahead of the “material interests of individuals.” He pulled American bankers out of a six-nation railroad project in China backed by President Taft. The scheme encouraged foreign intervention and undermined Chinese sovereignty, Wilson said. The United States became the first major power to recognize the new democratic Republic of China after a revolution in 1911 and in 1915 strongly opposed Japan’s “21 Demands” for territorial and commercial privileges in the country.

In the Caribbean and Latin America, Wilson discovered that interests closer to home could not be pursued through principles alone. In August 1914 he convinced Nicaragua, already occupied by American troops, to yield control of a naval base and grant the United States an alternative canal route. Upheavals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic brought in the U.S.

Marines. By the end of his administration, American troops were still stationed there and also in Cuba. Missionary diplomacy, it turned out, could spread its gospel with steel as well as cash.

Intervention in Mexico >> In Mexico a lingering crisis turned Wilson’s “moral diplomacy” into a mockery. A common border, 400 years of shared history, and millions of dollars in investments made what happened in Mexico of urgent importance to the United States. In 1910 a revolution plunged Mexico into turmoil. Just as Wilson was entering the White House in 1913, the ruthless general Victoriano Huerta emerged as head of the government. Wealthy landowners and foreign investors endorsed Huerta, who was likely to protect their holdings. Soon a bloody civil war was raging.

Unlike most European leaders, Wilson refused to recognize Huerta and his “government of butchers.” (Huerta had murdered the popular leader Francisco Madero.) Instead, he backed rebel leader Venustiano Carranza. When a bankrupt Huerta resigned in 1914, Carranza formed a new constitutionalist government but refused to follow Wilson’s guidelines. Wilson threw his support to Francisco “Pancho” Villa, a wily, peasant-born general who had broken from Carranza. Together with Emiliano Zapata, another peasant leader, Villa kept rebellion flickering.



^ General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing led U.S. forces into Mexico to catch rebel leader Pancho Villa “dead or alive.” Villa (pictured here on horseback leading a band of his rebels) eluded the Americans for several months before they abandoned the expedition. Audacious and ruthless, he was worshiped by Mexican peasants, who extolled his exploits in folktales and ballads after his assassination in 1923 by Mexican political rivals.

A year later, when Wilson finally recognized the Carranza regime, Villa turned against the United States. In January 1916 he abducted 18 Americans from a train in Mexico and slaughtered them. In March he galloped into Columbus, New Mexico, killed 19 people, and left the town in flames. Wilson ordered 6,000 troops into Mexico to capture Villa. A reluctant Carranza agreed to the American invasion.

For nearly two years, General John “Black Jack” Pershing (nicknamed for the all-black unit he commanded in the Spanish-American War) chased Villa on horseback, in automobiles, and with airplanes. There were bloody skirmishes with government troops but not a single one with Villa and his rebels. As the chase turned wilder and wilder, Carranza withdrew his consent for U.S. troops on Mexican soil. Early in 1917 Wilson pulled Pershing home. The “punitive expedition,” as the president called it, poisoned Mexican-American relations for the next 30 years.

✓ REVIEW

What was “missionary” about Woodrow Wilson’s diplomacy, and how successfully did he pursue it?

THE ROAD TO WAR

In early 1917, around the time that Wilson recalled Pershing, the British liner *Laconia* was making its way home across the Atlantic. Passengers belowdecks talked almost casually of the war raging in Europe since 1914. “What do you think are our chances of being torpedoed?” asked Floyd Gibbons, an American reporter. Since Germany had stepped up its submarine attacks, the question was unavoidable. The answer came moments later when a torpedo hit the vessel. As warning whistles blasted, the passengers abandoned ship. From lifeboats they watched a second torpedo send the *Laconia* to a watery grave. After a miserable night spent bobbing in the waves, Gibbons was rescued. But by 1917 other citizens of the neutral United States had already lost their lives at sea. Despite its best efforts, the country soon found itself at war.

The Guns of August >> For a century profound strains had been pushing Europe toward war. Its population tripled, its middle and working classes swelled, and discontent with industrial society grew. Nationalism surged and with it, militarism and imperialism. Led by Kaiser Wilhelm II and eager for empire, Germany aligned itself with Turkey and Austria-Hungary. The established imperial powers of England



MAP 23.3: THE WAR IN EUROPE, 1914–1917

When World War I erupted, few countries in Europe remained neutral. The armies of the Central Powers penetrated as far west as France and as far east as Russia. By 1917 the war in Europe had settled into a hideous standoff along a deadly line of trenches on the western front.

In which nation did the western front remain for most of the war? In which nation did the eastern front remain until 1917?

and France looked to contain Germany by supporting its foe, Russia. By the summer of 1914 Europe bristled with weapons, troops, and armor-plated navies. And these war machines were linked to one another through a web of diplomatic and military alliances—all of them committed to war, the moment someone or some nation set chaos in motion.

That moment came on June 28, 1914, in the streets of Sarajevo, the provincial capital of Bosnia in southwest Austria–Hungary. There, the heir to the Austro–Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife were gunned down. The young assassin who carried out the deed belonged to the Black Hand, a terrorist group that had vowed to reunite Bosnia with Serbia to create another Slavic nation on Austria–Hungary’s border.

Austria–Hungary mobilized to punish all of Serbia. In response, rival Russia called up its 6–million–man army to help the Serbs. Germany joined with Austria–Hungary; France, with Russia. On July 28, after a

month of insincere demands for apologies, Austria–Hungary attacked Serbia. Germany declared war on Russia on August 1 and, two days later, on France.

The guns of August heralded the first global war. Like so many dominoes, nations fell into line. Britain, Japan, Romania, and later Italy rushed to the side of “Allies” France and Russia; Bulgaria and Turkey to the “Central Powers” of Germany and Austria–Hungary. Armies fought from the deserts of North Africa to the plains of Flanders. Fleets battled off the coasts of Chile and Sumatra.

Neutral but Not Impartial >> The outbreak of war in Europe shocked most Americans. Few knew Serbia as anything but a tiny splotch on a map. Fewer still were prepared to go to war in its defense. President Wilson issued a declaration of neutrality and approved a plan for evacuating Americans stranded in Belgium.

Wilson soon came to see the calamity as an opportunity. In his mind a neutral America could lead

warring nations to “a peace without victory”—without territorial concessions or monetary reparations—and a new world order. Selfish nationalism would give way to cooperative internationalism; power politics, to collective security in which nations joined together to ensure the safety of all and to isolate aggressors. Progressive faith in reason would triumph over irrational violence. Everything hinged on maintaining neutrality. Only if America remained “impartial in thought as well as action” could it lead the way to a higher peace.

In a country as ethnically diverse as the United States, true impartiality was impossible. Americans of German and Austrian descent naturally sympathized with the Central Powers, as did Irish Americans, on the grounds of England’s centuries-old domination of Ireland. The bonds of language, culture, and history tied most Americans to Great Britain. And gratitude for French aid during the American Revolution still lived.

Germany aroused different sentiments. Although some progressives admired German social reforms, Americans generally saw Germany as an iron military power bent on conquest. Americans read British propaganda of spike-helmeted “Huns” raping Belgian women, bayoneting their children, pillaging their towns. Some of the stories were true, some embellished, some manufactured, but all worked against Germany in the United States.

American economic ties to Britain and France also created a financial investment in Allied victory. The American economy boomed with the flood of war orders. Between 1914 and 1916 trade with the Allies rocketed from \$800 million to \$3 billion. The Allies eventually borrowed more than \$2 billion from American banks to finance their purchases. In contrast, a British blockade reduced American war goods trade with the Central Powers to a trickle.

The Diplomacy of Neutrality >>

Wilson had admired Great Britain all his life. Try as he might he could not contain his British sympathies. Although he insisted that all warring powers respect the right of neutrals to trade with any nation, he hesitated to retaliate against Great Britain’s blockade of Germany.

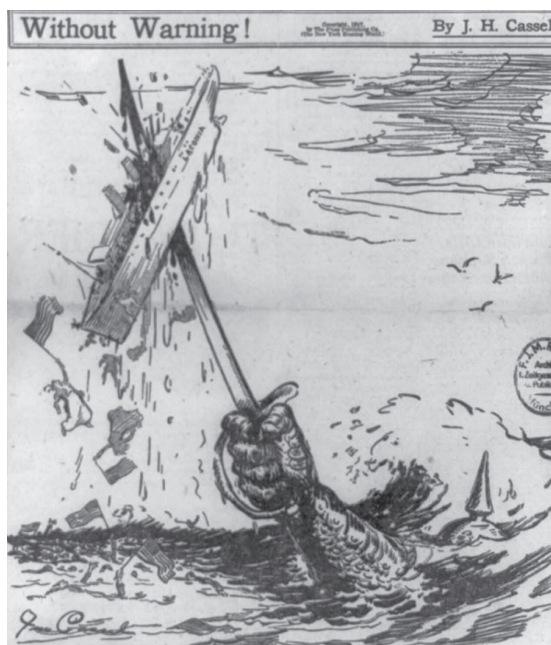
Britain’s powerful navy was its key to victory over Germany, a land power. By the end of 1915 the United States had all but accepted the British blockade, while American supplies continued to flow to England. True neutrality was dead.

Early in 1915 Germany turned to a dreadful new weapon to even the odds at sea. It mounted a counter-blockade of Great Britain with two dozen submarines, or *Unterseeboote*, called U-boats. Before submarines, sea raiders usually gave crews and passengers the chance to escape. But if thin-skinned U-boats surfaced to obey these conventions, they risked being rammed or blown from the water. So submarines attacked without warning and spared no lives. Invoking international law and national honor, Wilson threatened to hold Germany to “strict accountability” for any American losses. Germany promised not to sink any American ships, but soon a new issue grabbed the headlines: the safety of American passengers on vessels of nations at war.

On the morning of May 7, 1915, the British passenger liner *Lusitania* appeared out of a fog bank off the coast of Ireland on its way from New York to Southampton. The commander of the German U-20 could hardly believe his eyes: the giant ship filled the viewfinder of his periscope. He fired a single torpedo. A tremendous roar followed as one of the *Lusitania*’s main boilers exploded. The ship listed so badly that lifeboats could barely be launched before the vessel sank. Nearly 1,200 men, women, and children perished, including 128 Americans.

Wilson, though horrified, did little more than send notes of protest to Germany. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, an advocate of what he called “real neutrality,” wanted equal protests lodged against both German submarines and British blockaders. He suspected that the *Lusitania* carried munitions and was thus a legitimate target. (Much later, evidence proved him right.) Relying on passengers for protection against attack, Bryan argued, was “like putting women and children in front of an army.” Rather than endorse Wilson’s policy, Bryan resigned.

Battling on two fronts in Europe, Germany wanted to keep the United States out of the war. But in February 1916 a desperate Germany declared



^ J. H. Cassel’s 1915 cartoon “Without Warning!” captures the horror of a submarine attack on the *Lusitania*. A bloody saber in the hand of a spike-helmeted German knives through the ship from beneath the waves. Flag-waving Americans fall helplessly into the sea and drown.

submarine warfare on all armed vessels, belligerent or neutral. A month later a U-boat commander mistook the French steamer *Sussex* for a mine layer and torpedoed the unarmed vessel. Several Americans were injured.

In mid-April Wilson issued an ultimatum. If Germany refused to stop sinking nonmilitary vessels, the United States would break off diplomatic relations. War would surely follow. Without enough U-boats to control the seas, Germany agreed to Wilson's terms, all but abandoning its counterblockade. This *Sussex* pledge gave Wilson a major victory but carried a grave risk. If German submarines resumed unrestricted attacks, the United States would have to go to war.

Peace, Preparedness, and the Election of 1916 >>

While hundreds of young Yanks slipped across the border to enlist in the Canadian army, most Americans agreed that neutrality was the wisest course. Pacifists condemned the war, but Republicans and corporate leaders argued that keeping the nation at peace required military strength. The army numbered only 80,000 men in 1914; the navy, just 37 battleships and a handful of new "dreadnoughts," or supercruisers. Advocates of "preparedness" called for a navy larger than Great Britain's, an army of millions of reservists, and universal military training.

By the end of 1915 frustration with German submarines led Wilson to join the cause. He toured the country promoting preparedness and promising a "navy second to none." In Washington he pressed Congress to double the army, increase the National Guard, and begin construction of the largest navy in the world. Preparedness had political power, too, as the Democrats discovered early in the presidential campaign of 1916.

As the Democratic National Convention opened in June, the keynote speaker began what he expected to be a dull description of Wilson's recent diplomatic maneuvers—only to have the crowd roar back in each case, "What did we do?" The speaker knew the answer and shouted it back: "We didn't go to war!" The next day Wilson was renominated by acclamation. "He Kept Us Out of War" became his campaign slogan.

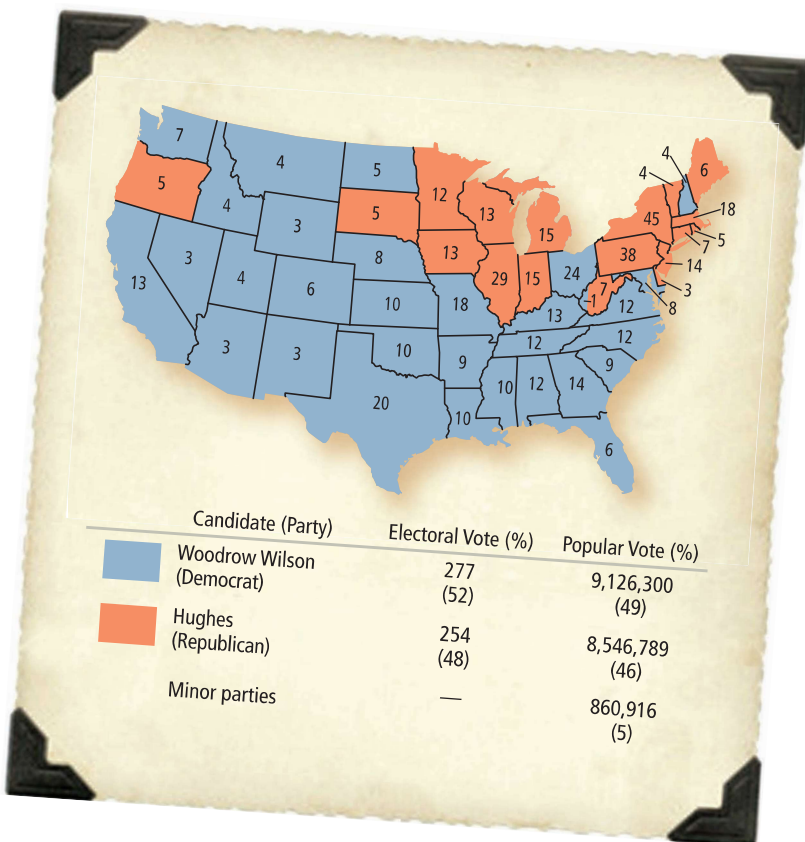
The Republicans had already nominated Charles Evans Hughes, the former governor of New York. He endorsed "straight and honest" neutrality and peace. Despite his moderate stand, Democrats succeeded in painting him as a warmonger. By the time the polls closed, Wilson had squeaked out a victory, carried again to the presidency on a tide of prosperity, progressive reform, and, most of all, promises of peace.

Wilson's Final Peace Offensive >>

Twice since 1915 Wilson had sent his trusted adviser Edward House to Europe to negotiate a peace among the warring powers, and twice House had failed. With the election over, Wilson opened his final peace offensive. When he asked the belligerents to state their terms for a cease-fire, neither side responded. Frustrated, fearful, and genuinely agonized, Wilson called for "a peace among equals" in January 1917.

As Wilson spoke, a fleet of U-boats was cruising toward the British Isles. Weeks earlier German military leaders had persuaded the Kaiser to take one last gamble to starve the Allies into submission. On January 31, 1917, the German ambassador in Washington announced that unrestricted submarine warfare would resume the next day.


Wilson's dream of neutrality collapsed. He asked Congress for authority to arm merchant ships and severed relations with Germany. Then British authorities handed him a bombshell—an intercepted telegram from the German foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmermann, to the Kaiser's ambassador in Mexico. In the event of war the ambassador was instructed to offer Mexico guns, money, and its "lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona" to attack the United States. Wilson angrily released the Zimmermann telegram to the press. Soon after, he ordered gun crews aboard merchant ships and directed them to shoot U-boats on sight.



MAP 23.4: ELECTION OF 1916

The momentum of events now propelled a reluctant Wilson toward war. On March 12, U-boats torpedoed the American merchant vessel *Algonquin*. On March 15 a revolution in Russia toppled Czar Nicholas II. A key ally was crumbling from within. By the end of the month U-boats had sunk nearly 600,000 tons of Allied and neutral shipping. For the first time reports came to Washington of cracking morale in the Allied ranks.

On April 2 Wilson trudged up the steps of the Capitol and delivered to Congress a stirring war message, calling “for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations.” Six senators and 50 House members opposed the war resolution, including the first woman in Congress, Jeannette Rankin of Wyoming. Cultural, economic, and historical ties to the Allies, along with the German campaign of submarine warfare, had tipped the country toward war. Wilson had not wanted it, but now the battlefield seemed the only path to a higher peace.

 **REVIEW**
 What steps did Woodrow Wilson take to avoid World War I, and why did they fail?

WAR AND SOCIETY

In 1915 the German zeppelin LZ-38, hovering at 8,000 feet, dropped a load of bombs that killed seven Londoners. For the first time in history, civilians died in an air attack. Few aerial bombardments occurred during the First World War, but they signaled the growing importance of the home front in modern combat. Governments not only fielded armies but also mobilized industry, controlled labor, even rationed food. In the United States, traditions of cooperation and volunteerism helped to organize the home front and the battlefield, often in ways that were peculiarly progressive.

The Slaughter of Stalemate >>

While the United States debated entry into the Great War, the Allies were close to losing it. Following the initial German assault in 1914, the war had settled into a grisly stalemate. A continuous, immovable front stretched south from Flanders to the border of Switzerland. Troops dug ditches, six to eight feet deep and four to five feet wide, to escape bullets, grenades, and artillery. Twenty-five thousand miles of these “trenches” slashed a muddy scar across Europe.



^ Trench warfare, wrote one general, was “marked by uniform formations, the regulation of space and time by higher commands down to the smallest details . . . fixed distances between units and individuals.” The reality was something else again.

Men lived in them for years, prey to disease, lice, and a plague of rats.

War in the machine age gave the advantage to the defense. When soldiers bravely charged “over the top” of the trenches, they were shredded by machine guns that fired 600 rounds a minute. Poison gas choked them in their tracks. Giant howitzers lobbed shells on them from positions too distant to see. In the Battle of the Somme River in 1916, a million men were killed in just four months of fighting. Only late in the war did new armored “landships”—code-named “tanks”—return the advantage to the offense by surmounting the trench barriers with their caterpillar treads.



Opinion

Should the United States have fought in World War I?

By then Vladimir Lenin was speeding home to Russia, where food riots, coal shortages, and protests against the government had led to revolution. Lenin had been exiled to Switzerland during the early stages of the Russian Revolution but returned to lead his Bolshevik Party to power in November 1917. Soon the Russians negotiated a separate peace with Germany, which then transferred a million German soldiers to the western front for the coming spring offensive.

“You’re in the Army Now” >> The Allies’ plight drove the army into a crash program to send a million soldiers to Europe by the spring of 1918. The United States had barely 180,000 men in uniform. To raise the force, Congress passed the Selective Service Act in May 1917. Feelings against the draft ran high, but progressives were more inclined to see military service as an opportunity to unite America and promote democracy. “Universal [military] training will jumble the boys of America all together, . . . smashing all the petty class distinctions that now divide, and prompting a brand of real democracy,” said one of them.

On July 20, 1917, Secretary of War Newton Baker tied a blindfold over his eyes, reached into a huge glass bowl, and drew the first number in the new draft lottery. Some 24 million men were registered. Almost 3 million were drafted; another 2 million volunteered. Most were white, and all were young, between the ages of 21 and 31. Several thousand women served as military clerks, telephone operators, and nurses. In a nation of immigrants, nearly one draftee in five had been born in another country. Training often aimed at educating and Americanizing these ethnic recruits. In special “development battalions,” drill sergeants barked out orders while volunteers from the YMCA taught American history and English.

Mexican Americans and African Americans volunteered in disproportionately high numbers. While Mexican Americans were integrated into regular Army units, African Americans remained segregated. They quickly filled the four all-black army and eight National Guard units already in existence. Abroad, where 200,000 black troops served in France, only about a fifth were permitted in combat. Southern Democrats in Congress had opposed training African Americans to arms, fearful of putting “arrogant, strutting representatives of black soldiery in every community.” Four regiments of the all-black Ninety-Third Division, brigaded with the French army, were

nonetheless among the first Americans in the trenches and among the most decorated units in the U.S. Army.

Racial violence sometimes flared among the troops. The worst episode occurred in Houston in the summer of 1917. Harassed by white soldiers and by the city’s Jim Crow laws, seasoned black regulars rioted and killed 17 white civilians. Their whole battalion was disarmed and sent under arrest to New Mexico. Thirteen troopers were condemned to death and hanged within days, too quickly for appeals even to be filed.

Progressive reformers did not miss the opportunity to put the social sciences to work in the army. Most recruits had fewer than seven years of education, yet they had to be classified and assigned quickly to units. Psychologists saw the chance to use new intelligence tests to help the army and prove their own theories about the value of “IQ” (intelligence quotient) in measuring brainpower. In fact, these new “scientific” IQ tests often measured little more than class origins. Questions such as “Who wrote ‘The Raven’?” exposed background rather than intelligence. The army stopped the testing program in January 1919, but schools across the country adopted it after the war, reinforcing many ethnic and racial prejudices.



▲ Movie idol Douglas Fairbanks, brandishing a megaphone, works a huge crowd during this rally in New York City to sell war bonds. When bond sales slacked, the Treasury created a publicity campaign to promote the idea that buying the bonds was a citizen’s patriotic duty.

Mobilizing the Economy >> Armed, clothed, and drilled, the doughboys sailed off aboard “Atlantic ferries”—the ships that conveyed them to Europe. (Infantrymen were called “doughboys,” most likely because of the clay dough used by soldiers in the 1850s to clean brass belt buckles.) To equip, feed, and transport an army of nearly 5 million required a national effort.

At the Treasury Department, Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo fretted over how to finance the war, which cost, finally, \$32 billion. At the time, the entire

national debt cumulative total of all previous annual federal deficits or budget shortfalls incurred each year and owed by the federal government.

national debt ran to only \$2 billion. New taxes paid about a third of the war costs. The rest came from loans financed through “Liberty” and “Victory” bonds and war savings cer-

tificates. By 1920 the national debt had climbed to \$20 billion.

With sweeping grants of authority provided by Congress, President Wilson constructed a massive bureaucracy to mobilize the home front. What emerged was a **managed economy** similar to the

managed economy economy directed by the government with power over prices, allocation of resources, and marketing of goods.

New Nationalism envisioned by Theodore Roosevelt. A War Industries Board (WIB) coordinated production through networks of industrial and **trade associations**. Rather than

trade association organization of individuals and firms in a given industry that provides lobbying and other services to members.

order firms to comply and risk lawsuits against the government, the WIB relied on persuasion through publicity and “cost-plus” contracts that covered all production costs, plus a guaranteed profit. Antitrust suits, which might have prevented corporate cooperation, were simply put “to sleep,” recalled one official. Corporate profits tripled, and production soared.

The Food Administration encouraged farmers to grow more and citizens to eat less wastefully. Publicity campaigns promoted “wheatless” and “meatless” days and exhorted families to plant “victory” vegetable gardens. Spurred by rising prices, farmers brought more marginal lands into cultivation as their real income jumped 25 percent.

A Fuel Administration met the army’s energy needs by increasing production and limiting domestic consumption. The U.S. Railroad Administration simply took over rail lines for the duration of the war. Government coordination, together with a new system of permits, got freight moving and kept workers happy. Rail workers saw their wages grow by \$300 million by the end of the war. Railroad unions won recognition, an eight-hour day, and a grievance procedure. For

the first time in decades, labor unrest on the rail lines subsided and the trains ran on schedule.

The modern **bureaucratic state** received a big boost during the 18 months of American participation in the war. Speeding trends already under way, some

bureaucratic state government run by administrative bureaus and staffed by nonelected officials.

5,000 new federal agencies centralized authority and cooperated with business and labor. The number of federal employees more than doubled between 1916

and 1918 to over 850,000. The wartime bureaucracy was dismantled at the end of the war, but it set an important precedent for the future.

War Work >> The war benefited workingmen and women, though not as much as their employers. Government contracts guaranteed high wages, an eight-hour day, and equal pay to men and women for comparable work. To encourage people to stay on the job, federal contracting agencies set up special classes to teach employers the new science of personnel management in order to supervise workers more efficiently and

welfare capitalism business practice of providing welfare—in the form of pension and profit-sharing programs, subsidized housing, personnel management, paid vacations, and other services and benefits—for workers.

humanely. American industry moved one step closer to the **welfare capitalism** of the 1920s, with its profit sharing, company unions, and personnel departments to forestall worker discontent.

Personnel management was not always enough to guarantee industrial peace. In 1917 American workers called over 4,000 strikes, the most in American history. To keep factories running, President Wilson created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) early in 1918. The NWLB arbitrated more than 1,000 labor disputes during the war, helped to increase wages, and established overtime pay. In return for no-strike pledges, the board guaranteed the rights of unions to organize and bargain collectively. Membership in the American Federation of Labor almost doubled by 1919.

The wartime demand for workers brought nearly a million more women into the labor force. Most were young and single. Some took over jobs once held by men as railroad engineers, drill-press operators, and electric-lift truck drivers. The prewar trend toward higher-paying jobs intensified, though most women still earned less than the men they replaced. And some of the most spectacular gains in defense and government work evaporated after the war as male veterans returned and the country demobilized.

Women in war work nonetheless helped to energize several women’s causes and organizations. Radical suffragist Alice Paul and others who had protested against the war now argued for women’s rights, including the

right to vote, on the basis of it. As women worked beside men in wartime factories and offices, in nursing stations at home or on the front, and in patriotic and other volunteer organizations, they could argue more convincingly for both economic and political equality. One step in that direction came after the war with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 granting women the right to vote.

Great Migrations >>

War work sparked massive migrations of laborers. As the fighting abroad choked off immigration and the draft depleted the workforce, factory owners scoured the country for workers. Industrial cities, no matter how small, soon swelled with newcomers. Between 1917 and 1920 some 150,000 Mexicans crossed the border into Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona. Some Mexican Americans left segregated barrios of western cities for war plants in Chicago, Omaha, and other northern cities, pushed out by the cheaper labor from Mexico and seeking higher-paying jobs. But most worked on farms and ranches, freed from military service by the deferment granted to agricultural labor.

Northern labor agents fanned out across the rural South to recruit young African Americans, while black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* summoned them up to the “Land of Hope.” During the war more than 400,000 moved to the booming industries of the North. Largely unskilled and semiskilled, they worked in the steel mills of Pennsylvania, the war plants of Massachusetts, the brickyards of New Jersey. Southern towns were decimated by the drain.

These migrations of African Americans—into the army as well as into the city—aggravated racial tensions. Lynching parties murdered 38 black southerners in 1917 and 58 in 1918. In 1919, after the war ended, more than 70 were hanged, some still in uniform. Housing shortages and job competition helped to ignite race riots across the North. In almost every city black citizens, stirred by war rhetoric of freedom and democracy, showed new militancy. During the bloody “red summer” of 1919, race wars broke out in Washington, D.C., Omaha, Nebraska, New York City, and Chicago, where thousands of African Americans were



^ The constraints of war brought more women than ever into the job market. These women work on a production line manufacturing bullets. The novelty of the situation seems evident from the fashionable high-heeled high-button shoes that they wear—ill suited to the conditions in an armaments plant.

burned out of their homes and hundreds injured as they fought white mobs.

Propaganda and Civil Liberties >>

“Once lead this people into war,” President Wilson warned before American entry into the conflict, “and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance.” Americans succumbed to a ruthless hysteria during World War I, but they had help. Wilson knew how reluctant Americans had been to enter the war. In 1917 he created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to cement their commitment to the war.

Under George Creel, a California journalist, the CPI launched a vigorous publicity campaign that produced colorful war posters, 75 million pamphlets, and patriotic “war expositions” in two dozen cities across the country. An army

of 75,000 fast-talking “Four-Minute Men” invaded theaters, schools, and churches to keep patriotism at “white heat” with four minutes of war tirades. The CPI organized “Loyalty Leagues” in ethnic communities and sponsored rallies, including a much-publicized immigrant “pilgrimage” to the birthplace of George Washington.

As war fever mounted, voluntary patriotism blossomed into an orgy of “100 percent Americanism” that bred distrust of all aliens, radicals, pacifists, and dissenters. German Americans became special targets. In Iowa the governor made it a crime to speak German in public. When a mob outside St. Louis lynched a naturalized German American who had tried to enlist in the navy, a jury found the leaders not guilty.

Congress gave hysteria more legal bite by passing the Espionage and the **Sedition** Acts of 1917 and 1918. Both set harsh penalties for any actions that hindered the war effort or that could be viewed as even remotely unpatriotic. Following passage, 1,500 citizens were arrested for offenses that included denouncing the draft, criticizing the Red Cross, and complaining about wartime taxes.

Radical groups received especially severe treatment. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a militant union centered in western states, saw the war as a

sedition words or actions that incite revolt against the law or duly constituted government.

battle among capitalists and threatened to strike mining and lumber companies in protest. Federal agents raided IWW headquarters in Chicago and arrested 113 members. The crusade destroyed the union. Similarly, the Socialist Party opposed the “capitalist” war. In response the postmaster general banned a dozen Socialist publications from the mail, though the party was a legal organization that had elected mayors, municipal officials, and members of Congress. In 1918 government agents arrested Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate for president in 1912, for an anti-war speech. A jury found him guilty of sedition and sentenced him to 10 years in jail.

The Supreme Court endorsed such actions. In *Schenck v. United States* (1919) the Court unanimously affirmed the conviction of a Socialist Party officer who had mailed pamphlets urging resistance to the draft. The pamphlets, wrote Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, created “a clear and present danger” to a nation at war.

Over There >> The first American doughboys landed in France in June 1917, but few saw battle. General John Pershing held back his raw troops until they received more training. He also separated them in a distinct American Expeditionary Force to preserve their identity and avoid Allied disagreements over strategy.

In the spring of 1918, as the Germans pushed toward Paris, Pershing rushed 70,000 American troops to the front. American units helped block the Germans at the town of Château-Thierry and at Belleau Wood. Two more German attacks, one at Amiens and the other just east of the Marne River, ended in costly German retreats. In September 1918, half a million American soldiers and a smaller number of French troops overran the German stronghold at Saint-Mihiel in four days.

With their army in retreat and civilian morale low, Germany’s leaders sought an **armistice**. They hoped to negotiate terms along the lines laid out by Woodrow Wilson in a speech to Congress in January 1918. Wilson’s bright vision of peace had encompassed 14 points. The key provisions called for open diplomacy, free

armistice mutually agreed-on truce or temporary halt in the fighting of a war so that the combatants may discuss peace.

to negotiate terms along the lines laid out by Woodrow Wilson in

a speech to Congress in January 1918. Wilson’s bright vision of peace had encompassed 14 points. The key provisions called for open diplomacy, free

seas and free trade, disarmament, democratic self-rule, and an “association of nations” to guarantee collective security. It was nothing less than a new world order to end selfish nationalism, imperialism, and war.

Allied leaders were not impressed. “President Wilson and his Fourteen Points bore me,” French premier Georges Clemenceau said. “Even God Almighty has only ten!” Wilson’s idealistic platform was also designed to save the Allies embarrassment. Almost as soon as it came to power in 1917, the new Bolshevik government in Moscow began publishing secret treaties from the czar’s archives. They revealed that the Allies had gone to war for territory and colonies, not for high principles. Wilson’s Fourteen Points had given their cause a nobler purpose.

Wilson’s ideals also stirred German liberals. On October 6 Wilson received a telegram from Berlin requesting an immediate truce on the basis of the Fourteen Points. Within a month Turkey and Austria-Hungary surrendered. Early in November the Kaiser was overthrown and fled to neutral Holland. On

MAP 23.5: THE FINAL GERMAN OFFENSIVE AND ALLIED COUNTERATTACK, 1918

On the morning of March 21, 1918, over 60 German divisions sliced through Allied lines. They then plunged within 50 miles of Paris before being stopped at the Marne River in July. The Allied counterattack was marked by notable American victories at Château-Thierry, Belleau Wood, Saint-Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne. Into which country did the Allied counteroffensive advance during 1918? Which Allied nation does the text indicate had the largest number of troops at the victory at Saint-Mihiel?





THE LIMITS OF FREE SPEECH

When the Socialist Party printed and distributed 15,000 leaflets attacking the Conscription Act (1917), authorities charged the party's Secretary General Charles Schenck with having violated the newly enacted Espionage Act by opposing conscription (drafting men into military service). In ruling against Schenck, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court, outlined the limits of free speech in wartime.

DOCUMENT 1

Flyer Distributed by Socialist Party

ASSERT YOUR RIGHTS!

The Constitution of the United States is one of the greatest bulwarks of political liberty. It was born after a long, stubborn battle between long rule and democracy. . . . In this battle the people of the United States established the principle that freedom of the individual and personal liberty are the most sacred things in life. Without them we become slaves. . . .

The Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States . . . embodies this sacred idea. The Socialist Party says this idea is violated by the Conscription Act. When you conscript a man and compel him to go abroad to fight against his will, you violate the most sacred right of personal liberty, and substitute for it what Daniel Webster called "despotism of the worst form."

A conscript is little better than a convict. He is deprived of his liberty and of his right to think and act as a free man. A conscripted citizen is forced to surrender his right as a citizen and become

a subject. He is forced into involuntary servitude. He is deprived of the protection given him by the Constitution of the United States. He is deprived of all freedom of conscience in being forced to kill against his will. . . .

In a democratic country each man must have the right to say whether he is willing to join the army. Only in countries where uncontrolled power rules can a despot force his subjects to fight. Such a man or men have no place in a democratic republic. This is tyrannical power in its worst form. It gives control over the life and death of the individual to a few men. There is no man good enough to be given such power.

Conscription laws belong to a bygone age. Even the people of Germany, long suffering under the yoke of militarism, are beginning to demand the abolition of conscription. Do you think it has a place in the United States? Do you want to see unlimited power handed over to Wall Street's chosen few in America? If

you do not, join the Socialist Party in its campaign for the repeal of the Conscription Act. Write to your congressman and tell him you want the law repealed. Do not submit to intimidation. You have a right to demand the repeal of any law. Exercise your rights of free speech, peaceful assemblage and petitioning the government for a redress of grievances. Come to the headquarters of the Socialist Party . . . and sign a petition for the repeal of the Conscription Act. Help us wipe out this stain upon the Constitution!

Help us re-establish democracy in America. Remember, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Down with autocracy!

Long live the Constitution of the United States!

Long live the Republic!

Source: Nancy Cornwell, *Freedom of the Press: Rights and Liberties under the Law* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2004), pp. 281–285.

DOCUMENT 2

Justice Holmes on Free Speech in Wartime

We admit that, in many places and in ordinary times, the defendants, in saying all that was said in the circular, would have been within their constitutional rights. But the character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done. The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic. It does not even protect a man from an injunction against uttering words that may have all the effect of force. The question

in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent. It is a question of proximity and degree. When a nation is at war, many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight, and that no Court could regard them as protected by any

constitutional right. It seems to be admitted that, if an actual obstruction of the recruiting service were proved, liability for words that produced that effect might be enforced. The statute of 1917, in §4, punishes conspiracies to obstruct, as well as actual obstruction. If the act (speaking, or circulating a paper), its tendency, and the intent with which it is done are the same, we perceive no ground for saying that success alone warrants making the act a crime. Indeed, that case might be

said to dispose of the present contention if the precedent covers all *media concludend*. But, as the right to free speech was not referred to specially, we have thought fit to add a few words.

It was not argued that a conspiracy to obstruct the draft was not within the words of the [Conscription] Act of 1917. The words are “obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service,” and it might be

suggested that they refer only to making it hard to get volunteers. Recruiting heretofore usually having been accomplished by getting volunteers, the word is apt to call up that method only in our minds. But recruiting is gaining fresh supplies for the forces, as well by draft as otherwise. It is put as an alternative to enlistment or voluntary enrollment in this act.

Source: *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

THINKING CRITICALLY

What actions does the leaflet call for and on what grounds? According to Justice Holmes, what are the limits of free speech in peacetime and wartime? Why are they different? Do you think that there are ever instances in war when citizen protest is permissible under the Constitution?

November 11, 1918, German officers filed into Allied headquarters in a converted railroad car in France, and signed the armistice.

Of the 2 million Americans who served in France, some 116,500 died. By comparison, the war claimed 2.2 million Germans, 1.7 million Russians, 1.4 million French, 1.2 million Austro-Hungarians, and nearly a million Britons. The American contribution nonetheless proved crucial, providing vital convoys at sea and fresh troops on land. The United States emerged from the war stronger than ever. Europe, on the other hand, looked forward—as one newspaper put it—to “Disaster . . . Exhaustion . . . Revolution.”

The Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919 >>

In the months before the armistice, a scourge more lethal than war had begun to engulf the globe. It started innocently enough at Fort Riley, Kansas, early in March 1918, when a young company cook reported to the infirmary on sick call. His head and muscles ached, his throat was sore, and he had a low-grade fever.

It was influenza, dangerous for infants and the old but ordinarily no problem for robust young men. By noon, however, 107 soldiers had reported similar symptoms. Within a week the number had jumped to over 500. Cases of the flu were being reported in virtually every state, even on the isolated island of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. And robust young people were dying from it.

The first wave of flu produced few deaths in the United States. But as the virus mutated over the next year, its victims experienced more-distressing symptoms: vomiting, dizziness, labored breathing. More and more of them died, literally drowning in their own bodily fluids from the pneumonia that accompanied the virus.

Soldiers and others living in close quarters were especially vulnerable. For reasons still unknown, so were young adults 20 to 34 years old, precisely the ages of most of those in the armed services. For every 50 people infected, 1 died. In the United States alone, the death toll rose to perhaps 600,000 more than the American battle deaths in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the war in Vietnam combined.



^ A grim specter representing the influenza virus overtakes the angel of peace in this German cartoon from 1918. Deaths from the pandemic worldwide far exceeded deaths from the war.

Ironically, the United States was the country least affected by this worldwide epidemic, called a **pandemic**. American soldiers seem to have carried the disease to Europe, where it jumped from one country to another in the spring and summer of 1918. French troops and civilians soon were suffering from it, then British and German. General Eric von Ludendorff counted the flu as one of the causes of the failure of the final German offensive in July 1918, which almost won the war for Germany.

pandemic broad outbreak of disease spreading across national boundaries.

With steamships and railroads carrying people all over the globe, virtually no place was safe. By the summer of 1918, the virus had leapt from North America and Europe to Asia and Japan; by fall, to Africa and South America. As far north as the Russian city of Archangel, officials were reporting 30 influenza deaths a day by October 1918.

Sixteen months after it appeared, the flu vanished as quickly as it had appeared. Conservative estimates placed the number of dead worldwide at 50 million, making the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 the most

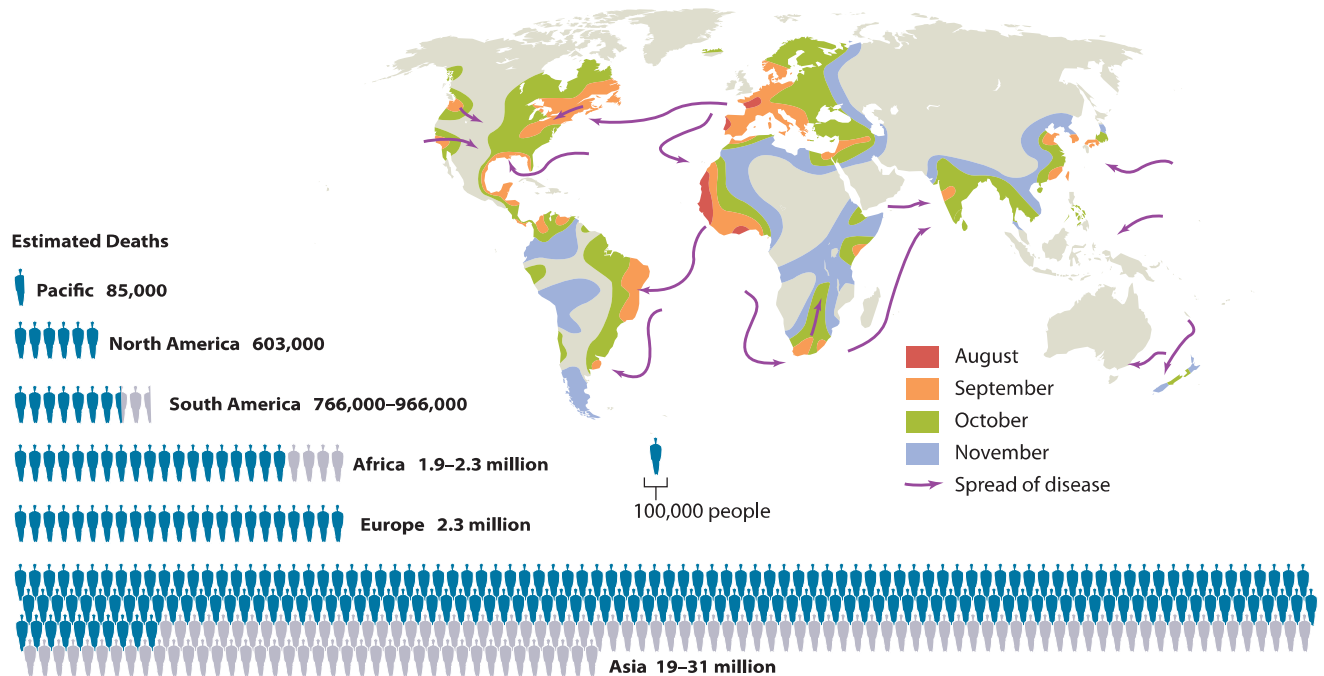
lethal outbreak of disease on an annual basis in human history. Global war had helped spread the disease, but improvements in transportation and two centuries of global migrations had also spawned pandemics. As automobiles and airplanes continued to shrink the globe, similar pandemics, though less deadly, would be repeated in years to come.

✓ **REVIEW**

How did progressivism shape the home front during World War I?

THE LOST PEACE

As the USS *George Washington* approached the coast of France in mid-December 1918, the mist suddenly lifted in an omen of good hope. Woodrow Wilson had come to represent the United States at the Paris peace conference at Versailles, once the glittering palace of



MAP 23.6: SPREAD OF INFLUENZA PANDEMIC: SECOND STAGE, AUTUMN 1918

After the milder outbreak in the spring of 1918, a more deadly form of influenza spread outward from the coast of France at the beginning of August. The worldwide transportation system quickly dispersed the disease, sending it first to the western coast of Africa (beginning at Freetown, Liberia) and the eastern coast of North America (at Boston). The disease reached virtually all continents, although Australia's strict quarantine delayed entrance of the flu there until 1919. By far, the continent hardest hit was Asia, where anywhere from 12 to 20 million died in India alone. American mortality, though serious, totaled only about 600,000.

Why might Asia have suffered so many deaths? What areas were relatively unaffected by the pandemic? Why might that have been?



MAP 23.7: EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER WORLD WAR I

The face of Europe and the Middle East changed after the First World War, as these two maps indicate. In Europe new countries were carved out of Russia, Germany, and the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, while “mandates” created by the Treaty of Versailles and destined for eventual independence in the Middle East were formed from the old Turkish Empire. Which of the changes on this map reflect the influence of Wilson’s Fourteen Points?



French king Louis XIV. A world of problems awaited. Europe had been shelled into ruin and scarred with the debris of war. More than 41 million people lay dead or maimed from the fighting. Throughout the Balkans and the old Turkish empire in the Middle East, ethnic rivalries, social chaos, and revolution loomed.

With the old world order in shambles, Wilson felt the need to take forceful action. To help him, the

president handpicked the Peace Commission of experts that accompanied him. It included economists, historians, geographers, and political scientists—but not a single member of the Republican-controlled Senate. What promised to make peace negotiations easier created a crippling liability in Washington, where Republicans were already casting hostile eyes on the mirrored halls of Versailles.

The Treaty of Versailles >> Everywhere Wilson went, cheers greeted him. In Paris 2 million people showered him with flowers. In Italy they hailed him as the “peacemaker from America.” And Wilson believed what he heard, unaware of how determined the victors were to punish the vanquished. David Lloyd George of England, Georges Clemenceau of France, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Wilson constituted the Big Four at the conference that included some 27 nations. War had united them; now peace-making threatened to divide them.

Wilson’s sweeping reforms had taken Allied leaders by surprise. Hungry for new colonies, eager to see Germany crushed and disarmed, they had already divided up the territories of the Central Powers in secret treaties. Germany offered to surrender on the basis of Wilson’s Fourteen Points, but the Allies refused to accept them. When Wilson threatened to negotiate peace on his own, Allied leaders finally agreed—but only for the moment.

Noticeably absent when the peace conference convened in January 1919 were the Russians. None of the Western democracies had recognized the Bolshevik regime in Moscow, out of fear that the communist revolution might spread. Instead, France and Britain were helping to finance a civil war to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Even Wilson had sent several thousand American troops to join the Allied occupation of some northern Russian ports and to Siberia. The Russians would neither forgive nor forget this intrusion.

Grueling negotiations forced Wilson to yield several of his Fourteen Points. Britain, with its powerful navy, refused even to discuss the issues of free trade and freedom of the seas. Wilson’s “open diplomacy” was conducted behind closed doors by the Big Four. The only mention of disarmament involved Germany, which was barred from rearming. Wilson’s call for “peace without victory” gave way to a “guilt clause” that saddled Germany with responsibility for the war. Worse still, the victors imposed on the vanquished a burdensome debt of \$33 billion in reparations.

Wilson did achieve some successes. His pleas for national self-determination led to the creation of a dozen new states in Europe, including Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Austria. (Poland and newly created Czechoslovakia, however, contained millions of ethnic Germans.) Former colonies gained new status as “mandates” of the victors, now obligated to prepare them for independence. The old German and Turkish Empires in the Middle East and Africa became the responsibility of France and England, while Japan took over German possessions in the Far East.

Wilson never lost sight of his main goal: a “general association of nations.” He had given so much ground because he believed this new world organization would correct any mistakes in the peace settlement. Members

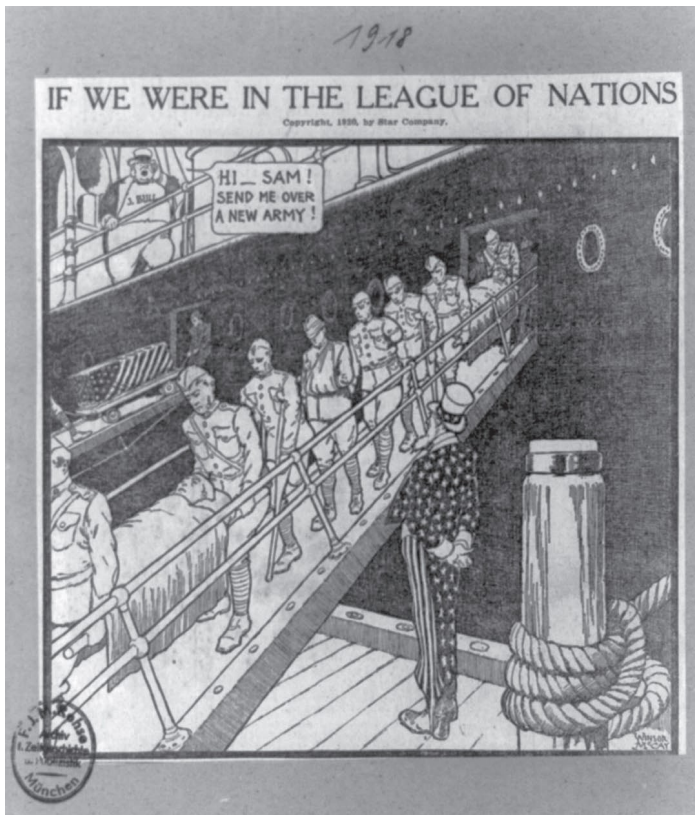
promised to submit all war-provoking disagreements to arbitration and to isolate aggressors by cutting off commercial and military trade. Article X (Wilson called it “the heart of the covenant”) bound members to respect one another’s independence and territory and to join together against attack.

The Battle for the Treaty >> Wilson left immediately for home to address growing opposition in Congress. In the off-year elections of 1918, voters unhappy with wartime controls, new taxes, and attacks on civil liberties had given both houses to the opposition Republicans. A slim Republican majority in the Senate put Wilson’s archrival, Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, in the chairman’s seat of the all-important Foreign Relations Committee.

Although most of the country favored the League of Nations, Lodge opposed it. For decades he had fought to preserve American freedom of action in foreign affairs. Now he worried that the League would force Americans to subject themselves to “the will of other nations,” including the congressional prerogative of bringing the nation into war. And he certainly did not want Democrats to win votes by taking credit for the treaty.



^ Two terms as president and a stroke in 1919 took their toll on Woodrow Wilson, as this photograph shows. When Wilson ran for president in 1912, his hair was dark and his face full of vigor. Here his hair is nearly white, his face puffy, and his jaw slack.



^ "IF WE WERE IN THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS," warns this cartoon ominously, the United States would see more wounded and dead soldiers coming home by the boatload. Uncle Sam watches silently as the remnants of the American army return, including a flag-draped coffin in the background, while "[John] Bull" (symbol of Great Britain) shouts: "Send over a new army!"

Securing the signatures of enough senators to block any treaty, Lodge offered the Senate a "round robin" resolution against the League early in March 1919.

Wilson's only hope of winning the necessary two-thirds majority lay in compromise, but he stubbornly resisted any changes. Despite his failing health Wilson instead took his case to the people in a month-long campaign across the nation in 1919. In Pueblo, Colorado, a crowd of 10,000 heard him speak of American soldiers killed in France and American boys whom the League one day would spare from death. Listeners wept openly.

That evening, utterly exhausted, Wilson collapsed in a spasm of pain. On October 2, four days after being rushed to the White House, he fell to the bathroom floor, knocked unconscious by a stroke. He recovered slowly but never fully. More and more the battle for the treaty consumed his fading energies.

Late in 1919 Lodge finally reported the treaty out of committee with 14 amendments to match Wilson's Fourteen Points. The most important asserted that the United States assumed no obligation to aid League members unless Congress consented. Wilson refused to accept any of the amendments and asked Democrats

in the Senate to vote against the treaty. Whatever ill-will Lodge bore Wilson, his objections did not destroy the treaty, but only weakened it by protecting the congressional power to declare war.

When the amended treaty finally came before the Senate in March 1920, enough Democrats broke from the president to produce a majority in favor—but not the required two-thirds. The Treaty of Versailles was dead in America. Not until July 1921 did Congress enact a joint resolution ending the war. The United States, which had fought separately from the Allies, made a separate peace as well.

Red Scare >> Peace abroad did not bring peace at home. On May Day 1919, six months after the war ended, mobs in a dozen cities broke up Socialist parades, injured hundreds, and killed three people. Later that month, when a spectator at a Victory Loan rally in Washington refused to stand for the national anthem, a sailor shot him in the back. The stadium crowd applauded.

The spontaneous violence and extremism erupted because Americans believed they were under attack by homegrown and foreign-sponsored radicals. When a rapid end to wartime controls brought skyrocketing prices and when unemployment grew in the wake of millions of returning veterans, a wave of labor unrest swept the country. Even the Boston police went on strike for higher pay. In Seattle a general strike paralyzed the city for five days in January 1919. Mayor Ole Hanson blamed radicals, while Congress ascribed the national ills to Bolshevik agents, inspired by the revolution in Russia.

The menace of radicalism was overblown. With Socialist Eugene Debs in prison, his dwindling party numbered only about 30,000. Radicals at first hoped that the success of the Russian Revolution would help reverse their fortunes in the United States. But most Americans found the prospect of "Bolshevik" agitators threatening, especially after March 1919, when the new Russian government formed the Comintern to spread revolution abroad. Furthermore, the Left itself splintered. In 1919 dissidents deserted the Socialists to form the more radical Communist Labor Party. About the same time, a group of mostly ethnic Slavs created a separate Communist Party. The two organizations together counted no more than 40,000 members.

On April 28 Mayor Hanson received a small brown parcel, evidently another present from an admirer of his tough patriotism. It was a homemade bomb. Within days 20 such packages were discovered, including ones sent to John D. Rockefeller, Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the postmaster general. On June 2, bombs exploded simultaneously in eight different cities. One of them demolished the front porch of A. Mitchell Palmer, attorney general of the

United States. The bomb thrower was blown to bits, but enough remained to identify him as an Italian anarchist from Philadelphia. Already edgy over Bolshevism and labor militancy, many Americans assumed that an organized conspiracy was being mounted to overthrow the government.

Palmer, a Quaker and a progressive, hardened in the wake of the bombings. In November 1919 and again in January 1920, he launched raids in over 30 cities across the United States. Government agents invaded private homes, meeting halls, and pool parlors, taking several thousand alleged communists into custody without warrants and beating those who resisted. Prisoners were marched through streets in chains, crammed into dilapidated jails, held without hearings. Over 200 aliens, most of whom had no criminal records, were deported to the Soviet Union.

Such abuses of civil liberties provoked a backlash. After the New York legislature expelled five Socialists in 1919, responsible politicians—from former presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes to Ohio senator Warren Harding—denounced the action. The “deportation delirium” ended early in 1920. Palmer finally overreached himself by predicting a revolutionary uprising for May 1, 1920. Nothing happened. Four months later, when a wagonload of bombs exploded on Wall Street, Palmer blamed a Bolshevik conspiracy. Despite 35 deaths and more than 200 injuries, Americans saw it as the work of a few demented radicals (which it probably was) and went about business as usual.



✓ REVIEW

What were the results of the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles?

In early August 1914 the Panama Canal opened without fanfare, but no one could miss the significance: the new American empire now spanned the globe, stretching from the Caribbean to the Pacific and linked by a waterway between the seas. There were plans for a tremendous celebration in which the battleship *Oregon*, whose 1898 “race around the Horn” had inspired the idea of an American-owned canal, would lead a flotilla of ships through the locks. But the plans had to be scrapped, for in that fateful month of August, the old world order collapsed into a world war.

World War I was rightly named “the Great War” by Europeans, because it transformed the continent and left a bitter legacy that shaped the twentieth century. In Europe, France and Great Britain triumphed, only to find their economies enfeebled, their people dispirited and fearful, their empires near collapse. Two other empires—of vanquished Austria–Hungary and Turkey—were dismembered. Revolution toppled the once-mighty czars of Russia, bringing an end to the Russian Empire and the beginning of the Soviet Union that eventually fell under the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. Germany suffered defeat, humiliation, and a crushing burden of debt, which together paved the way for Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

Elsewhere, a victorious Japan left the Paris peace table shamed by what it regarded as paltry spoils of war and determined to rise to global greatness. Japan’s flickering democracy soon crumbled as a cult of militarism and emperor worship took hold. In the Middle East, in Africa, and on the Indian subcontinent, the unfulfilled promises of a world made “safe for democracy” sparked a growing number of nationalist and

<< In September 1919 some 300,000 steelworkers struck for higher wages, recognition of their union, and a reduction in the 70-hour workweek. In Gary, Indiana, women in sympathy with the strike prepare to picket the plant.

anticolonial movements. The twentieth century, a century of global change and violence, was indeed forged in the crucible of the Great War.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The First World War marked the beginning of the end of the old world order of colonial imperialism, military alliances, and balances of power; it also marked a failed effort to establish a new world order based on the progressive ideals of international cooperation and collective security.

- Progressive diplomacy—whether through Theodore Roosevelt’s big stick diplomacy, William Taft’s dollar diplomacy, or Woodrow Wilson’s missionary diplomacy—stressed moralism and order, championed “uplifting” nonwhites, and stretched presidential authority to its limits.
- With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Woodrow Wilson saw an opportunity for the United States to lead the world to a higher peace of international cooperation by remaining neutral and brokering the peace settlement.
- However, American sympathy for the Allies, heavy American investments in the Allies, and the German campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare finally drew the country into the war in 1917.
- Progressive faith in government, planning, efficiency, and publicity produced a greatly expanded bureaucratic state that managed the war effort on the home front.
- The darker side of progressivism also flourished as the war transformed progressive impulses for assimilation and social control into campaigns for superpatriotism and conformity that helped to produce a postwar Red Scare in 1919 and 1920.
- Meanwhile, changes already under way, including more women in the labor force and migrations of African Americans and Mexican Americans from rural to urban America, vastly accelerated with the expansion of opportunities for war work.
- When the war ended, Wilson’s hopes for “peace without victory” and a new world order, embodied in his Fourteen Points, were dashed when his European allies imposed a harsh settlement on Germany and the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles.

Additional Reading

The diverse vectors of progressive diplomacy, as practiced by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, are the subject of Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (1956); and Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War, and Peace* (1968).

Why did the United States enter World War I? Early revisionist accounts emphasizing a financial conspiracy to bring the nation to war include Charles Beard, *The Open Door to War* (1934); and Charles C. Tansill, *America Goes to War* (1938). George Kennan, from the school of realism, is critical of Wilson’s moral motives in *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (rev. ed., 1971). David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (1980), surveys mobilization and the home front, but see also Maurine W. Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work* (1980); Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam’s Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917–1919* (1999); and Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion during World War I* (1999). Isabel Wilkerson provides a riveting portrait of the Great Migration in *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010) that upsets many stereotypes of those who journeyed north. Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I* (2001); and Mark Robert Schneider, *“We Return Fighting”: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (2001), look at the effects of the war on African American civil rights. Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (2001), looks at the impact of the war on soldiers and on the country. For African Americans on the battlefield, see Arthur E. Barbeau and Henri Florette, *The Unknown Soldiers* (1974). Robert Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I* (1985), analyzes Wilson’s wartime diplomacy, the peace negotiations, and the fate of the Treaty of Versailles. For the influenza pandemic, see John M. Barry’s *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (2004). For a colorful, thorough, and thoughtful account of the Paris Peace Conference, see Margaret Macmillan and Richard Holbrooke, *Paris, 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (2001). Beverly Gage’s *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (2009) takes a fresh look at the 1920 bombing within the context of class warfare and labor radicalism following World War I.