



American soldiers in World War I

# CHAPTER

19

## The Great War (1913–1920)

- I. Idealism
- II. Intervention
- III. Isolation

*“Sometimes people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American . . . America is the only idealistic nation in the world.”*

*Woodrow Wilson, defending his record, 1919*

Macy's department store had men's summer suits on sale for \$6.95, which shoppers could top off with cool straw hats for a low clearance price of \$1.59. For readers of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* on June 28, 1914, the ads were another reminder that vacation was just around the corner. Elsewhere in the paper, headlines told how the tough fists of boxing champ Jack Johnson had put yet another challenger on the canvas; the Brooklyn Dodgers made easy work of the Philadelphia Phillies in yesterday's double-header; and Kay Laurell was appearing on Broadway with the Ziegfeld Follies. The newspaper's political cartoon that day, celebrating a number of successful diplomatic initiatives, depicted a rusty, scabbarded sword over the caption "Another Business Depression." It was a comforting cartoon for that balmy summer morning in America. Halfway around the world, however, a distant disturbance on that sleepy Sunday was destined to shake an unwary America and the world off its nineteenth-century foundation. In many ways, the twentieth century began on June 28, 1914, in an obscure little city in Central Europe called Sarajevo.

The day in the Austrian provincial capital promised to be festive, a day of parties and parades, for it was the Feast of St. Vitus. In addition, Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife, Sophie, were coming for a visit. The royal couple had cause for celebration as well because that day was their fourteenth wedding anniversary.

Beneath the flags and bunting, however, a dark scene was quietly shaping. Seven Serbian youths, members of the terrorist group Black Hand, were plotting murder against the Austrians in the name of Serbian nationalism. They positioned themselves along the parade route, awaiting the archduke's motorcade. Then they launched their coordinated attack. After narrowly escaping one assassin's bomb, the chauffeur took a wrong turn into a side street, slowing the car to make the turn and coming within five feet of another of the Serbian assassins, Gavrilo Princip. Princip raised his small Belgian pistol and fired two quick shots. The world would never be the same. Franz Ferdinand was shot in the neck; Sophie, in the abdomen. As the blood ran from her husband's mouth, Sophie cried her last frantic words, "For heaven's sake, what's happened to you?" Slumping over his wife's body, the dying archduke rasped his answer repeatedly: "*Es ist nichts, es ist nichts.*" ("It is nothing, it is nothing.")

The sun that had risen over a festive city now sank blood-red over Europe. Ironically, what the archduke said was "nothing" sparked a blaze that engulfed the world. Four more summers would come and go before the bitter harvest of war was finally gathered. The body count that followed coldly quantified the death of a generation—ten million killed, another six million crippled for life.

The ominous results of Princip's actions were not readily apparent, however, either in Europe or in far-away America. The next day, the papers duly reported the murder, and President Wilson wired the nation's condolences to the Austrians. In the weeks that followed, though, the European powers, caught in a web of treaties and intrigues, stumbled headlong into war. The **Central Powers**—Germany and Austria—strad-

Woodrow Wilson's presidency began with great hope and idealism.



dled the continent against the **Allies**—France, Britain, and Russia. Despite the broad Atlantic buffer and a long tradition of isolation, not even the United States could avoid the forces of war that pulled the world into Europe's conflict. Much of Woodrow Wilson's two terms would be occupied with avoiding the war, fighting the war, and concluding the war. By the end of the decade, America was shouldered with an ill-fitting mantle of world leadership.

## I. Idealism

"It would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs," Woodrow Wilson privately remarked before his inauguration in 1913. Such irony would indeed be his "fate." The bespectacled professor, along with his secretary of state, **William Jennings Bryan**, had little knowledge of international affairs and no experience in diplomacy; yet there was much in Wilson's background and character that would leave an enduring mark on America's foreign policy. He sought to make the United States the moral leader among nations, believing that America's role in the world was to promote democracy and peace by example and persuasion.

Wilson saw America as having a new Manifest Destiny, not of territorial expansion but of sharing political ideals. In a key foreign policy address delivered in Mobile, Alabama, in 1913, Wilson declared,

We dare not turn from the principle that morality and not expediency is the thing that must guide us and that we will never condone iniquity because it is most convenient to do so. . . . It is a very perilous thing to determine the foreign policy of a nation in the terms of material interest. It not only is unfair to those with whom you are dealing, but it is degrading as regards your own actions.

I want to take this occasion to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest. She will devote herself to showing that she knows how to make honorable and fruitful use of the territory she has.

Wilson wanted to expand the United States economically by promoting trade with other nations. In helping American companies make profits, he thought that he could also promote freedom and democracy and raise other countries economically. Despite his noble goals, political realities soon challenged Wilson's ability to practice what he preached. He came to view all opposition to his views as wrong.

## The Mexican Muddle

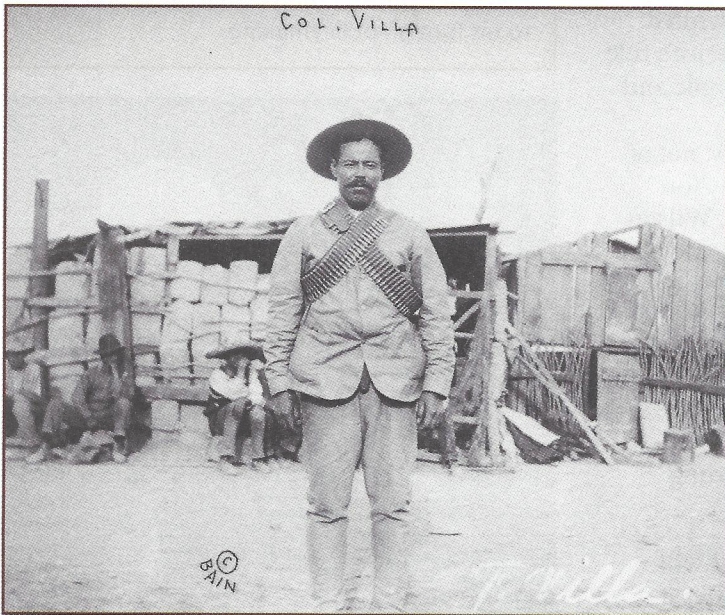
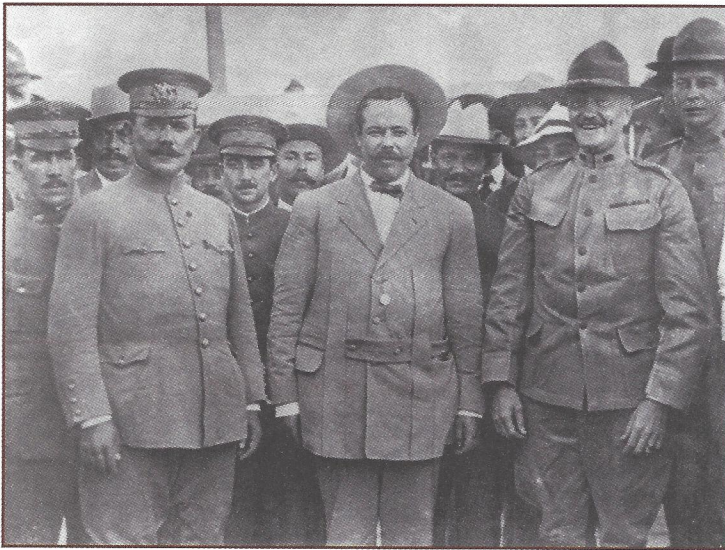
Wilson's idealism was first put to the test in Mexico. From 1876 to 1911 **Porfirio Díaz** (pohr-FEE-ryoh DEE-ahz) ruled Mexico with an iron fist toward his opposition and an open palm toward foreign investors. Dictator Díaz and European and American businessmen all profited from the petroleum and mining resources of Mexico but left the Mexican people impoverished. In 1911, a popular revolt led by Francisco Madero drove Díaz into early retirement, but the rebellion also unleashed violent rivals for power, groups that had previously been suppressed by Díaz's iron rule.

### Wilson's Background

Woodrow Wilson grew up in a Presbyterian home. His father, the Reverend Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson, instilled in his son sturdy moral convictions and a strong belief in God's sovereign direction in the universe. President Wilson brought that moral vision to his foreign policymaking.



William Jennings Bryan, Wilson's secretary of state, disagreed so much with some of Wilson's foreign policies that he resigned even before the United States entered World War I.



(top) Pancho Villa (center), shown here with General John J. Pershing (right), was a U.S. favorite in the Mexicans' struggle for control of their government.

The Robert Runyon Photograph Collection, 00196, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

(bottom) Pancho Villa became an enemy of the United States when he led his bandit army in a raid on an American town, killing several Americans. General Pershing was assigned to track him down and bring him to justice. Pershing never found him.

### He Couldn't Win

To his credit, Wilson resisted the full-scale war with Mexico that many in Congress urged. Yet in the wake of the American withdrawal, Wilson's heavy-handed idealism gained the president little more than ridicule at home and resentment abroad.

Just weeks before Wilson's inauguration, President Madero was murdered by his own military commander, the ruthless General **Victoriano Huerta** (WEHR tah). Many countries quickly extended diplomatic recognition to the new Mexican government in hopes of reestablishing profitable business relations as in the days of Díaz. Sadly, most countries, including the United States, traditionally extended recognition to a government if it simply *held* power, without concerning themselves with *how* it obtained that power. (Huerta's regime has since been described as "one of the most grotesque tyrannies in Mexican history.")

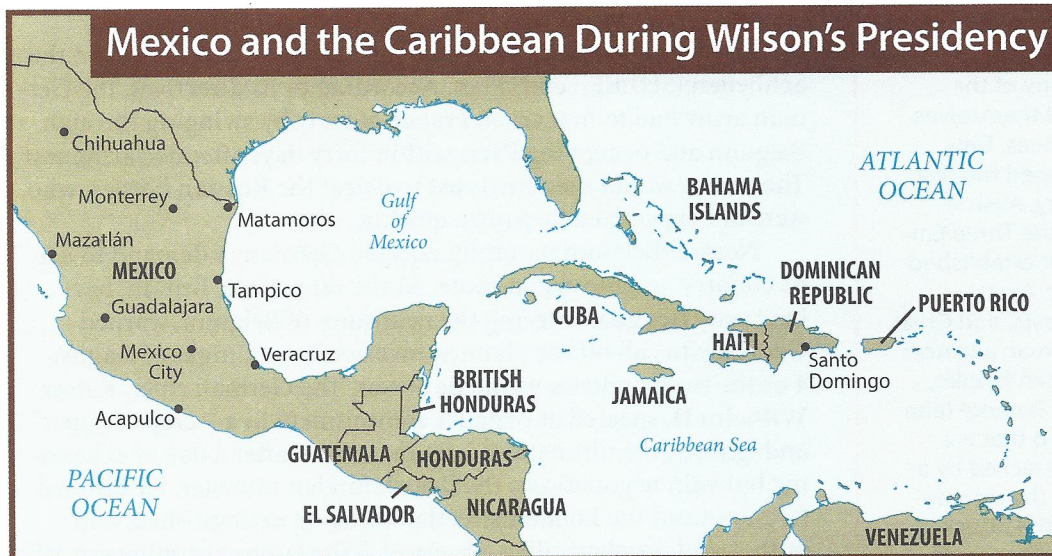
But this time it was different. Woodrow Wilson refused to recognize "government by murder." "My ideal is an orderly and righteous government in Mexico," he declared. He added, "My passion is for the submerged 85 percent of the people of that Republic who are now struggling toward liberty." The former Presbyterian professor warned, "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men!"

Determined to drive, in Wilson's words, the "desperate brute" out of office, the president began supplying arms to Huerta's challengers, Venustiano Carranza (vay-NOOS-tee-AH-noh kah-RAHN-zah) and **Pancho Villa** (PAHN-cho VEE-yah) while also cutting off arms shipments to Huerta. In April 1914, a group of American sailors enforcing the arms embargo at Tampico were arrested. Although they were immediately released and the local commander expressed regret to the American naval commander, the admiral of the American fleet demanded that the Mexicans hoist the U.S. flag and render a twenty-one-gun salute. Huerta, however, refused to grovel. Wilson, citing national honor, went to Congress and requested authority to use punitive force against the insubordinate Huerta. On April 20, 1914, Congress granted the request.

Following a bloody clash between U.S. troops and Mexicans at Vera Cruz, the "ABC powers" (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) mediated a truce between the United States and Mexico. The accumulated internal and international pressure encouraged by Wilson eventually toppled Huerta, bringing Carranza to power.

Peace, however, did not come with Huerta's exit. Villa, now vying for power against Carranza, sought to raise his popularity by becoming the chief enemy of the American "gringos." He became a legend in Mexico, with people either flocking to his banners or fleeing his bands. He was nicknamed *la cucaracha*, "the cockroach," and a song by that name praised his exploits.

But Villa was a ruthless man. He had eighteen American mining engineers murdered in cold blood, then led a raid into New Mexico, where his band killed seventeen more Americans and burned the border town of Columbus. In response, President Wilson sent General **John J.** ("Black Jack") **Pershing** into Mexico with eleven thousand troops to put the bandit out of business. After months of searching fruitlessly for the elusive Villa, and as problems with the European war loomed ever larger, Wilson ordered Pershing to call off the hunt.



## Caribbean Conflict

At the beginning of his administration, President Wilson denounced both Taft's dollar diplomacy and Roosevelt's "big stick" policies as contrary to the new moral leadership of the United States. But the need to protect the strategic Panama Canal and Wilson's desire to see America's neighbors form orderly democratic governments led to a number of military interventions in the Caribbean.

Virtual anarchy reigned in Haiti from 1914 to 1915. Bloody power struggles left the island strewn with bodies and threatened to catch foreigners in the middle. Fearing both the loss of American lives or property and European intervention, Wilson ordered U.S. Marines to occupy Haiti. American forces were there from July 1915 to 1934, bolstering the new civilian government, building roads and schools, and establishing order.

Next door to Haiti, in the Dominican Republic, civil war erupted in 1916. A U.S. Marine police force occupied that area until 1924. As in Haiti, the Dominican Republic benefited materially during the U.S. occupation, but resentment of the "Colossus of the North" remained high in Latin America.

## The Web of War

After Princip's assassination of Archduke Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, fears and friendships among the nations of Europe caused them to slide into war. The Austrian government, assuming that the Serbian government was at least passively responsible for the archduke's assassination, issued an incredible ultimatum on July 23, demanding that Serbia submit to its rule until Serbia was purged of anti-Austrian sentiments. Surprisingly, Serbia replied that it was willing to accept most of Austria's demands. But Austria was not satisfied and declared war on Serbia on July 28.

Russia, fearing that Austria intended to establish control of the Balkans, mobilized its troops on July 30. Germany, Austria's ally, declared war on Russia two days later. Since the Russians had a mutual security pact with the French, Germany demanded to know France's intentions. The French, fearing the German buildup, mobilized their troops, an act that the Germans interpreted as aggressive. Germany consequently declared war on France on August 3.

### *The Irony of It All*

Ironically, Wilson, who set out to mend fences with America's southern neighbors, conducted more peacetime interventions than any of his predecessors. Wilson's idealism often ran afoul of strategic demands and uncontrollable events, sometimes creating sharp differences between rhetoric and reality. Despite Wilson's nagging foreign policy questions over Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, a far greater crisis loomed at the same time—the threat of American involvement in a European war.

### **Alliances Led to War**

Over the years since 1873, many of the nations of Europe had aligned themselves into two mutual defense alliances. Germany, under Bismarck, developed the first alliance—made up of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia—called the Three Emperors' League. Later, Bismarck established the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. France, Russia, and Great Britain, responding to the German alliances and fearing the growing German Empire, allied themselves in the Triple Entente (ahn TAHNT). Both alliances pledged that if a member of one alliance was attacked by a member of the other alliance, the signatories would come to the aid of the attacked fellow member. Princip's assassination of Ferdinand lit the powder keg that would blow Europe to pieces and rattle the rest of the world.

### **The Start of a Long, Bloody War**

By the end of 1914, a long, bloody stalemate had settled over the front, as both sides dug into opposing trenches that stretched from Belgium to Switzerland. Between the trenches, in an ironic twist on the Kaiser's words, millions of men fell like autumn leaves.

### **British Propaganda**

After the British seized control of the transatlantic cables, they provided most of the war news available to Americans. After the war, many German "atrocities" that had been reported in the news were exposed as exaggerated products of British propaganda writers. The reality was bad enough. German troops burned Belgian homes and historic monuments, for example, and occasionally shot unarmed civilians whom they had chosen at random.

With France and Russia flanking Germany, the Germans turned to their long-standing plan for waging a two-front war, the Schlieffen (SHLEEF ehn) Plan. According to its directives, the German army had to first crush France quickly by swinging through Belgium and occupying Paris within forty days after declaring war. The troops would then turn east to defeat the Russian hordes, who were not expected to organize quickly.

Neutral Belgium naturally rejected Germany's demand to use its country as an invasion route. At the same time, Britain, having treaty ties guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium, warned Germany to call off the planned invasion by midnight of August 4 or the two countries would be at war. The German ruler, Kaiser **Wilhelm II**, sneered at Britain's commitment to a "scrap of paper" and ignored the ultimatum. Late that night, after a day of exhausting but vain negotiations, the British foreign minister, Sir Edward Grey, noticed the London streetlamps being extinguished, and sadly—and prophetically—observed, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." At the stroke of twelve, world war began.

As confident German troops marched into Belgium, the words of their Kaiser rang in their ears: "You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees." Brave Belgian and British troops, however, offered tough resistance, buying precious time for the French. By the end of August, the Germans had pushed to the gates of Paris, where their war machine ground to a halt. The French and British made valiant but costly attempts to push back the invasion. In the first month of war, the French alone lost two hundred thousand troops in battle.

### **The Slippery Slope of Neutrality**

When news of the war reached the United States, President Wilson issued a proclamation of neutrality; yet there was anything but neutral sentiment about the war. As the scope of the conflict became evident, the American people were deeply divided.

### **Melting Pot Problems**

The New World could hardly ignore the Old World's war. Many Americans had been born in Germany or were descended from German immigrants. Many Irish immigrants and their descendants also favored Germany, mainly because they opposed Britain. Most Americans, however, had their roots in Great Britain, and Americans generally admired British law, institutions, and culture. They also favored France because of her aid in America's War for Independence. As poet Robert Underwood Johnson glowingly declared:

Forget us, God, if we forget  
The sacred sword of Lafayette!

Americans who favored the Allies tended to view Germany as an autocratic, militaristic aggressor—a view that British and French propaganda naturally encouraged by portraying Germans ("the Huns") as monsters.

### **The Trade Trigger**

America's strong economic ties with the Allies increased during the war. Because of the British blockade of Germany and the Brit-

ish navy's control of the Atlantic, American trade with the Central Powers all but ceased. When the Allies used up their credit in buying American goods, Wilson allowed American loans to the Allies to avoid a collapse of American trade. In essence, the United States, while proclaiming its neutrality, was actually waging a *pro-Allies* neutrality. This policy would eventually pull the United States into the war. The Germans, suffering the effects of the British blockade, unleashed a deadly weapon on the high seas that made trade with even the Allies all but impossible.

### Submarine Warfare

Probably the most significant factor in America's entrance into the war was the violation of American rights on the sea by German submarines. Britain had blockaded Germany, prohibiting even the importation of food. A starving Germany countered by declaring the seas around Britain to be a war zone in which any ship would be liable to submarine attack.

Germany, fearing U.S. intervention, had publicly warned American citizens not to travel into the war zone on British ships. Despite a printed warning in the *New York Times* from the German government, when the British passenger liner *Lusitania* left New York on May 1, 1915, a number of Americans were aboard. When the liner entered the war zone near Ireland on May 7, no British patrol boat gave it the usual escort. The commander of a German submarine spotted the ship and fired a torpedo. Within eighteen minutes, the large liner sank, and 1,198 passengers and crewmen, including 128 Americans, perished.

### Conflicts with International Rules of Warfare

According to the rules of international law, warships were to warn and evacuate merchant ships before sinking them. Submarines, however, would not do that because it would require them to surface, making them vulnerable to attacks by deck guns or even ramming by well-directed prows.



The sinking of the *Lusitania* shocked many Americans out of their neutral attitude toward Germany.

President Wilson, though deeply moved by the tragedy, resisted the war hawks. With moral idealism, he declared, "There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right."

Although political opponents would skewer Wilson with his own words—"too proud to fight"—the president realized that the country was too divided to fight. One cabinet official remarked after the *Lusitania* incident that Californians were more concerned with their citrus crop than with fighting.

Germany replied to Wilson's demand for apology and reparations with regret for the loss of life but asserted that the sinking was "just self-defense" since the passenger vessel was also carrying

### Division Within the Cabinet

Even Wilson's cabinet was divided over how to respond to the German threat. Wilson composed a sharply worded message to Berlin demanding a formal apology and reparation, or payment for losses. Secretary of State Bryan resigned in protest, fearing that Wilson's message was too strong and might lead to war.

munitions. Whatever the Germans' justification, the *Lusitania* incident caused a change in Americans' attitude toward the Germans. As one newspaper said, "The torpedo that sank the *Lusitania* also sank Germany in the opinion of mankind."

The war issue simmered on the back burner in America until the spring of 1916. On March 24, 1916, a German submarine attacked an unarmed French passenger liner, the *Sussex*, in the English Channel. Among those killed and injured were several Americans. The furor over the *Sussex* caused Wilson to warn the Germans that another attack on passenger or merchant vessels would mean a break in diplomatic ties and likely war. Wilson's "**Sussex pledge**" quieted the seas for a time, but as one historian pointed out, Wilson handed the Germans "a blank check which he could not honorably recall."

### Election of 1916

The presidential campaign that geared up in the summer of 1916 naturally could not escape the shadow of the foreign crisis. In St. Louis, Democrats held a thunderous rally to nominate Wilson for a second term, cheering, "He kept us out of war." On the Republican side, Supreme Court justice Charles Evans Hughes left the bench to run for president.

In many ways, the election mirrored the nation's mood. In the East, where war fever was highest, Hughes carried the states handily. However, the "hyphenates," the German-Americans and Irish-Americans of the Midwest, got behind Wilson, and on the Pacific coast, where Europe's war was a distant din, Wilson's neutrality was popular. Wilson's victory over Hughes on the winning slogan "He kept us out of war" seemed to indicate a mandate for his second term. Yet the slogan was in the *past tense*—it was not a pledge at all. The future remained as uncertain as it was threatening.

### Section Quiz

1. Why did Wilson refuse to recognize the government of Huerta in Mexico?
  2. Name the two countries in the Caribbean in which the United States intervened during Wilson's presidency.
  3. The German invasion of what nation brought Great Britain into World War I?
  4. The sinking of what ship caused Wilson to declare that further attacks on passenger vessels would break U.S. diplomatic relations with Germany?
- ★ Why do you think that Wilson's initial policy of neutrality in Europe's war could be considered a "slippery slope"?

### On the Slaughter at the Somme

"Before the war it had seemed incredible that such terrors and slaughters . . . could last more than a few months: After the first two years it was difficult to believe that they would ever end."

—Winston Churchill

## II. Intervention

The Great War was going badly for both sides. New technology born of industrialization gave the armies mass-produced weapons for mass-produced death. One tragic illustration of this change is the British offensive at the Somme. On the opening day, July 1, 1916, the British suffered eighty thousand casualties—the bloodiest day in modern history. By the end of the Somme campaign, the British had gained three or four miles of mud, but the price was steep, with half a million British soldiers killed or wounded.



On the other side of the Atlantic, Wilson feared that the war would not end before America was dragged into it. Drawing on the idealism that characterized his foreign policy goals—if not his gains—Wilson appeared before the Senate and issued a historic declaration. He warned the deadlocked nations of Europe that only “peace without victory” could provide a lasting solution. Further, Wilson urged the formation of a League of Nations that would provide a forum for settling international disputes.

In Europe, where millions of men lay in untimely graves, Wilson’s “peace without victory” was not even a consideration. A week after Wilson’s speech, the Germans, sorely pressed by the British blockade, replied by declaring **unrestricted submarine warfare**. All ships in the war zone—passenger or merchant, belligerent or neutral—would be sunk without warning.

Wilson, mindful of his *Sussex* pledge yet knowing that his actions would eventually lead to war, reluctantly severed diplomatic ties with Germany on February 3, 1917. Many Americans, including the president, held out hope that war could yet be avoided. Such thinking, however, would quickly change.

## Declaring War

On March 1, tensions heightened with the revelation of a secret, though clumsy, German diplomatic plot. The German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, sought to gain Mexico’s support in case the United States joined the Allies. He sent a telegram to Mexico offering Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona in return for Mexican support. He also asked Mexico to influence Japan to join the Central Powers. British intelligence intercepted and decoded the telegram and then enthusiastically forwarded it to the United States. When the details of the **Zimmermann telegram** were first revealed, they seemed so fantastic that some people thought the entire affair was a British hoax. When the truth of Germany’s hostility toward the United States finally dawned, however, Americans were outraged. Interestingly, Zimmermann’s scheme succeeded in arousing the western United States, an area that had been indifferent to Europe’s war. Now, with their lands being “promised” to Mexico, even westerners were on the warpath.

Two weeks later, German submarines made good on their earlier threat by sinking four unarmed American merchant vessels. Wilson had run out of negotiating room. On April 2, the president appeared before a joint session of Congress and requested that the House and Senate formally recognize that Germany had “thrust” a state of war upon the United States. On **April 6, 1917**, Wilson signed the declaration—America had entered World War I.

## Over Here

### *Raising an Army*

America found itself ill prepared to answer Wilson’s call to war. At the time of the war declaration, the peacetime army and National Guard numbered only 379,000 men. Remarkably, that number increased tenfold to 3.7 million by the end of the war. This rapid recruitment to meet the tremendous manpower demands of modern war was the result of a national draft through the **Selective Service Act**. In 1917, all men ages 21 to 30 were required to register for the draft, and in 1918 the bracket was expanded to include those

### **Making the World Safe for Democracy**

“The world must be made safe for democracy,” Wilson declared in his war message. “Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.”

18 to 45 years old. Altogether, 2.8 million men were drafted into the army; half of that number eventually saw action.

When the recruits arrived at hastily constructed boot camps, they quickly learned just how unprepared the United States was for the war to which they were being committed. Theodore Roosevelt, a longtime though often unheeded champion of military preparedness, wrote disappointedly that

the enormous majority of our men in the encampments were drilling with broomsticks or else with rudely whittled guns. . . . In the camps I saw barrels mounted on sticks on which zealous captains were endeavoring to teach their men how to ride a horse.

The draft could provide the men but not the machinery of war. It took nearly a year for the nation's industry to convert to a full wartime footing. The importance of the industrial mobilization reflected the changing face of modern war. As President Wilson put it, "In the sense in which we have been wont to think of armies, there are no armies in this struggle; there are entire nations armed." All across the home front, Americans enthusiastically met the challenge to war and to win.

### *Effect of War on the Economy*

U.S. entry into the war had several profound effects, some good and some bad. For Americans young and old, the war was "fought" in backyard gardens and factory assembly lines.

But Americans also saw their national government take unprecedented control of the economy. The Wilson administration, already suspicious of the free market, did not think the market could respond quickly or efficiently enough to meet the demands of war. The administration also wanted to prevent profiteering. So Wilson created numerous government agencies to control the economy. Among these were the Fuel Administration, the Railroad Administration, and the War Industries Board.

One of the key needs was an adequate food supply for not only the American forces but also the beleaguered Allies. To address that need, Congress passed the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act of 1917, which instituted the **Food Administration**. Future president **Herbert Hoover** became its administrator and gained international attention for organizing methods of saving and producing food. "Hooverizing" became the byword as citizens joined in "Meatless Mondays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays." Many people, encouraged by the slogan "Food Will Win the War," raised their own food in "Liberty Gardens" so that more of the nation's commercial agricultural production could be sent to alleviate shortages in Europe.

Besides raising food, patriotic Americans raised money. The nationwide effort to invest in war bonds, or "Liberty Loans," reaped \$17 billion in revenue. Movie celebrities such as Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford appeared at huge rallies to boost bond sales. Even schoolchildren saved their pennies to fill Liberty Books with 25¢ stamps appropriately captioned "Lick a Stamp and Lick the Kaiser."

The war touched every area of life. Artists used their pens and paints in the war effort, producing posters to recruit men and raise money. And in a day before radio and television, families often

### *Effects by the Numbers*

Industrial production increased by more than a third between 1916 and 1919. The Gross National Product (GNP) increased from \$46 billion to \$77.2 billion during the same period. The average full-time manufacturing worker saw his annual earnings climb from \$751 to \$813 in that period.



As head of the Food Administration, Herbert Hoover helped spread Wilson's unprecedented expansion of government into Americans' daily lives.

### *Purpose of the Wartime Agencies*

The main tasks of Wilson's wartime agencies were to control prices and ensure "fair" (by the government's calculations) distribution of resources. The Railroad Administration went further and actually nationalized the rail industry, outlawing all competition and running all railroads. Thankfully for advocates of free enterprise, those agencies lasted only until shortly after the war, when the free market was once again allowed to function unhindered.

gathered around the piano in the evening to sing such sentimental ballads as “I’m Hitting the Trail for Normandy, So Kiss Me Good-bye” or George M. Cohan’s rollicking “Over There,” the unofficial anthem of the American “doughboy,” or soldier.

### Politics of Patriotism

The national fervor for the war effort understandably led to widespread anti-German sentiment. Many high schools dropped German language courses, and “liberty” replaced virtually everything connected with the hated Hun: German measles became “liberty measles,” German shepherds were renamed “liberty dogs,” and patriotic palates that had lost their taste for sauerkraut were doubtless relieved to discover “liberty cabbage.”

The anti-German attitude led to changed laws as well, often at the cost of constitutionally guaranteed liberties. For example, the **Espionage and Sedition Acts** made it a criminal offense to criticize the war effort in any way. Yet, such acts must be understood in their wartime context. A number of German spy plots, including the successful sabotage of a New Jersey munitions plant, prompted lawmakers to enact stiff laws to safeguard national security. Undoubtedly, though, some of the enforcement of the Espionage and Sedition Acts, which resulted in more than a thousand convictions, was the result of unfounded fears and hysteria. Despite examples of excessive enforcement, however, the Supreme Court ruled in the 1919 landmark decision *Schenk v. United States* that Congress *could* limit free speech, particularly during wartime, if such speech presented “a clear and present danger” to national interests. In the ruling, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes noted, however, “Free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater, and causing a panic.”

For most Americans, support for the war came not from coercion but as a matter of patriotism and idealism. None was better at defining and focusing that idealism than Woodrow Wilson. At the outset he declared,

We desire no conquest, no dominion, we seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. . . . America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her she can do no other.

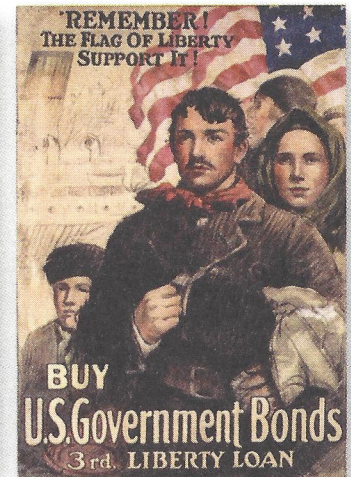
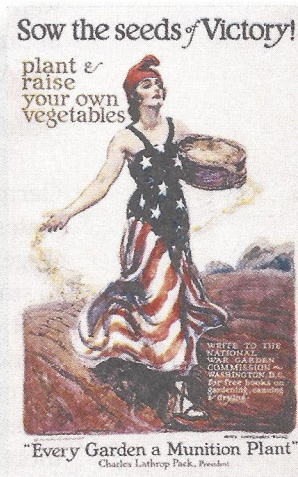
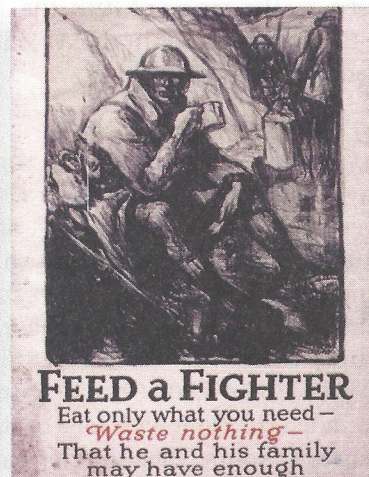
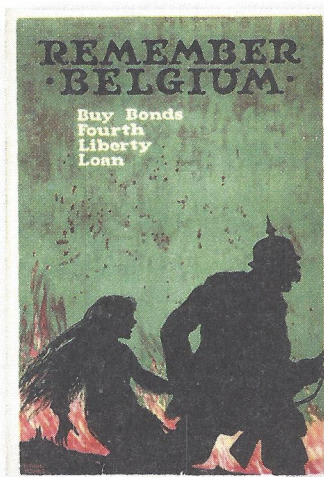
### “Over There!”

Over there, over there, send the word, send the word, over there,  
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming,  
The drums rum-tumming ev’rywhere.  
So prepare, say a prayer, send the word, send the word to beware:  
We’ll be over, we’re coming over,  
And we won’t come back ‘til it’s over over there!

### Women and the War

Women also played an important role in the war effort. For the first time, some industrial jobs became open for women as men went off to Europe. Women also figured prominently in propaganda and recruiting posters. While remaining exempt from combat roles, many women still worked near the front lines as nurses or ambulance drivers.

Wartime posters helped rally civilian support for bond drives and voluntary conservation measures for a war that did not directly involve U.S. soil.



Wilson continued his theme of America's moral leadership in formulating a plan that he hoped would produce a lasting peace. His objectives, known as the **Fourteen Points**, proposed freedom of the seas, open diplomacy, and self-determination among the peoples of Central Europe and rejected reparation demands. Wilson's Fourteenth Point renewed his earlier ideas for a **League of Nations**, urging the formation of "a general association of nations . . . for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike." In Wilson's idealist—though unrealistic—thinking, a League of Nations would prevent a recurrence of the events that ignited the 1914 conflagration. Wilson also hoped to turn the war into a crusade for Americans and to use the olive branch of the Fourteen Points as a wedge between the battle-weary German people and their warlords. As such, Wilson's Fourteen Points were widely published in Europe for everyone from kings to common laborers on both sides to consider.

While Wilson was waging war on the diplomatic front, American troops were making a timely entrance and crucial contribution on the *real* front.

## Over There

### "Lafayette, We Are Here"

On July 4, 1917, the first contingent of U.S. troops of the American Expeditionary Force marched through the streets of Paris. The French were ecstatic. An American colonel, Charles E. Stanton, recalling an old debt and capturing the timeliness of the American arrival, declared simply, "Lafayette, we are here."

The American entry was pivotal for the Allies. On the eastern front the bloody Bolshevik Revolution headed by Vladimir Lenin had swept the Communists to power in Russia in November 1917. Lenin negotiated a separate peace with Germany early in 1918, freeing hundreds of thousands of German troops to join their comrades on the western front. The Germans hoped thereby to deal a final blow to the Allies.

In addition, morale among the beleaguered Allies was miserable. They had suffered seven million casualties in the war. Weary of the face of death, French troops staged mass mutinies in May and June 1917. Some French soldiers even murdered their officers before deserting. As the Allied armies teetered toward collapse, the arrival of the Americans, led by the tough, square-jawed "Black Jack" Pershing, revived Allied spirit. Although the arriving Yanks were green, by the spring of 1918, the doughboys, a million strong, became the critical factor in the Allied recovery and ultimately in the Allied victory.

### Holding the Line

The German commander Erich von Ludendorff knew that Germany could not prolong the war when the forces of the United States were added to those of the rest of the Allies. He decided to wage a full offensive against the British and French, forcing them to surrender before the United States could give substantial support. Germany began the British phase of the offensive in northern France and Belgium on March 20, 1918, with the heaviest artillery fire ever used. Some 6,000 German guns, answered by 2,500 British guns, pounded the front with tons of steel and explosive shells for more than four hours. Then the German infantry charged across

“no man’s land,” (the area between the Allied and the German lines). Flamethrowers, poison gas, hand grenades, and machine guns were used by both sides. The Germans, aided by a fog cover, successfully broke through in some places, but the drive slowed and faltered. After several days of intense battle, the British, aided by recently arrived American troops, prevented a general collapse of the line.

## Sergeant York

A great American hero of World War I was Alvin C. York, a Christian and a shy man from the mountains of north central Tennessee. He earned several honors and medals, including the Congressional Medal of Honor, for his bravery in the Argonne Forest in France.

York was converted in a revival a few years before the war. When drafted into the army, he underwent a crisis; his church taught that killing was always wrong—even in war. He almost registered as a conscientious objector (one who refuses to fight because of religious belief). But York wanted to serve both God and country. He later wrote, “I prayed and prayed. I prayed for two whole days and a night out on the mountainside. And I received my assurance that it was all right, that I should go.”

York, one of the best marksmen in his county, impressed his superiors with his accurate shooting and soon attained the rank of corporal. He was sent to France in May 1918 as part of the 82nd Division, the All-American division.

On October 8, 1918, York’s unit was exploring an enemy position in the Argonne Forest when they found themselves behind enemy lines. They surprised a group of encamped Germans and took them prisoner. But a nearby machine gun nest opened fire on the Americans, killing several of York’s companions. The others dove for cover.

York began to use his shooting skills to good effect. One by one, as the Germans peered over the embankment to take aim, York shot them dead. Finally, York convinced a German major whom the Americans had captured to order the other Germans to surrender.

When York and his prisoners reached the Allied lines, a lieutenant asked, “York, have you captured the whole German army?”

York answered that he had “a tolerable few.” The “tolerable few” turned out to be 132 prisoners. In addition, York had single-handedly killed twenty-five other Germans and silenced thirty-five machine guns.

York was promoted to sergeant. On returning to his native Tennessee, York devoted his life to building schools for the mountain children of his home state. He built a small non-denominational Bible college as a “school for God.” When asked about his adventures in France, York replied, “We know there were miracles, don’t we? Well, this was one. It’s the only way I can figure it.”



Having failed to break the British line, the Germans opened an attack on the French line to the south on May 27, 1918. The German assault broke the lines by May 30 and reached the Marne River, only fifty miles from Paris. But on June 2 and 3, jaunty Yanks eager for a fight poured into the gaps, halting the German drive at **Château-Thierry** (SHA-TOH TYEH-REE) and **Belleau** (BEL oh) **Wood**.

### Push to Victory

On July 18, the Allies began a counterattack, slowly pushing the Germans back. The doughboys won an impressive victory at Saint-Mihiel (SAHN.mee-YEL), but the largest effort was the American **Argonne offensive** that began on September 26. It was one of the costliest military campaigns in American history. One and a quarter million U.S. troops, concentrated on a twenty-five-mile front, fought for six weeks toward the central German rail center at Sedan. The Americans suffered 117,000 casualties, including 26,000

## Four Aces

Both sides in World War I glamorized the bravery of a new breed of warrior—the fighter pilot. “Flyboys” seemed to embody the charm, chivalry, and daring of warfare that were lacking in the muddy carnage of trench warfare. Most famous were the “aces,” those who scored at least five “kills” (enemy planes shot down). Following are descriptions of the four major powers’ top aces.

**Manfred von Richthofen.** Better known as the Red Baron because of his scarlet red triplane (a three-wing Fokker Dr 1), von Richthofen was the most successful ace in the war, scoring eighty kills. On April 8, 1918, he scored his eightieth kill. The next day, he was mortally wounded, allegedly shot by a Canadian soldier on the ground.

**Paul-René Fonck.** Fonck was France’s premier ace, with seventy-five kills. He embodied the jaunty, cocky, almost arrogant attitude that many people associated with the aces. Fonck twice shot down six enemy planes in one day and once brought down three planes in ten seconds. Fonck survived the war and later, fittingly, became an exhibition pilot.

**Edward “Mick” Mannock.** The chief British ace (seventy-three kills) was “Mick” Mannock, an altogether different kind of character—moody and restless. He was blind in one eye, but he practiced his gunnery constantly to overcome his handicap. He

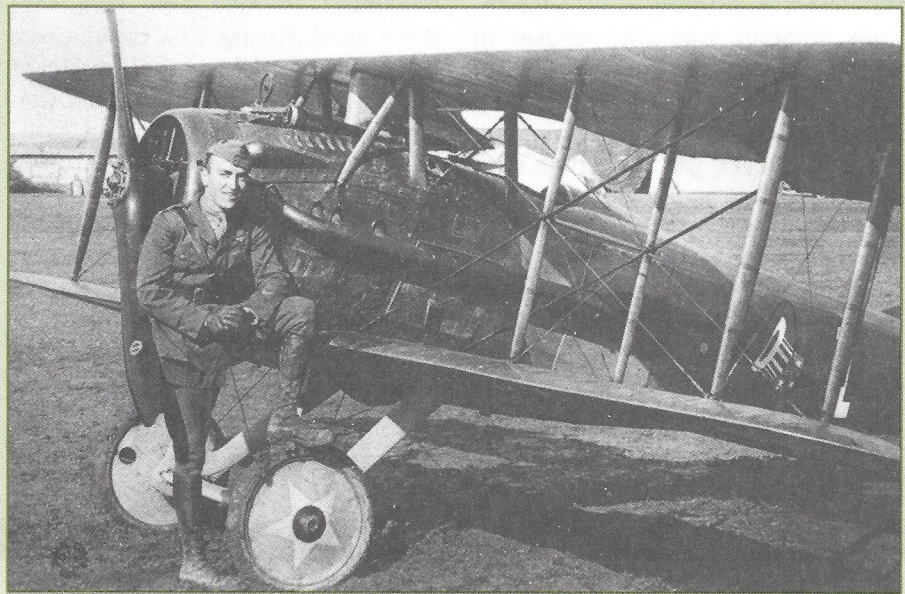
was not a carefree “knight of the air.” He took a grim delight in shooting down Germans, but he went to his quarters and wept when one of his mates was shot down. Mannock suffered from a fear of fire and was tormented by dreams of being trapped in a burning plane. Sadly, his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire in 1918, and he died in a fiery crash.

**Eddie Rickenbacker.** America’s “ace of aces,” Rickenbacker scored twenty-six kills. He was a race-car driver before the war and once held the world land-speed record. He combined his knowledge of engines with his personal bravery to become America’s leading pilot. Perhaps his most famous exploit was a solo attack on seven German planes. He downed

two of them and then escaped from the others unharmed. He won the Medal of Honor for his exploits.

During World War II, he was a military consultant. Once, the B-17 in which he was flying with a secret message to General McArthur crashed at sea. He took command of the situation and helped the crewmen survive against amazing odds for twenty-four days. Using Psalm 46, he encouraged them to turn to Christ. He and all but one of the crewmen were rescued. In later years, he was first president and then chairman of Eastern Airlines. He also spoke out against the “creeping socialism” he saw infesting the American government.

American ace Captain Eddie Rickenbacker

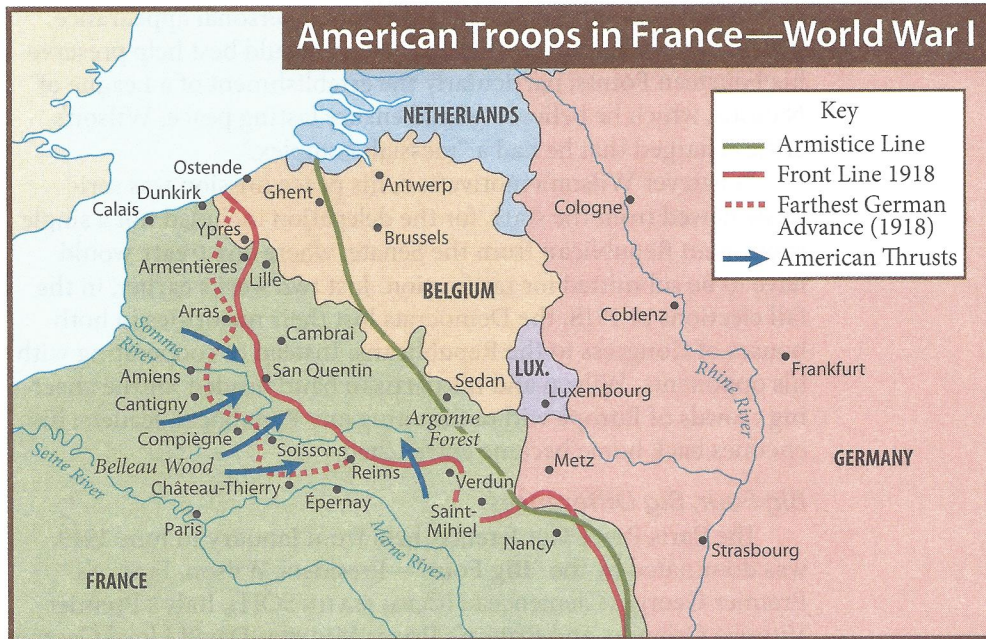


### Dark Clouds Over the Peace

One of the people who felt betrayed by the truce and was still willing to fight to the death for the fatherland was a twenty-nine-year-old German corporal named Adolf Hitler. His dark mind burned with dreams of revenge. Of course, none of that was apparent on Armistice Day, only jubilation that the fighting was over.

killed in action, but the effort turned the tide. In October, the German leadership began to negotiate for peace along the lines of Wilson’s Fourteen Points. By early November, the kaiser fled into exile; the German lines collapsed. On November 11, 1918—at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—the **Armistice** was signed. The Great War was over.

The French commander Ferdinand Foch (FAHSH) recalled the surrender signing ceremony: “I saw Erzberger [head of the German delegation] brandish his pen and grind his teeth. I was then glad that I had exerted my will . . . for the business was settled.” Hardly. The next generation would add an enlarged second edition to the volume begun in 1914.



### Section Quiz

1. What German decision caused Wilson to break diplomatic relations with Germany?
  2. Name two methods that Americans on the home front used to raise food and money for the war effort.
  3. What conditions on the eastern front in early 1918 made the entry of the United States crucial to the Allies?
  4. What World War I offensive was the largest and one of the costliest military campaigns in American history up to that time?
- ★ How great was the influence of U.S. troops on the outcome of the war?



Prominently waving an American flag, an exuberant crowd in Paris celebrates the Armistice.

### III. Isolation

With their lines collapsing, their leadership fleeing, and their people starving, the Germans asked for an armistice, or truce, in hopes of getting the best peace terms possible—peace according to Wilson’s Fourteen Points. After the Armistice, though, hopes for a favorable settlement proved empty. The German people would not be the only ones disappointed by the results of what one writer referred to as “The Great War and the Petty Peace.”

#### Treaty of Versailles

No single treaty ended the war, although the Treaty of Versailles generally receives the most attention. For example, the Austrians signed the Treaty of St. Germain, and the Ottomans signed the Treaty of Sèvres.

#### Wilson as Diplomat

Just one week after the Armistice was signed, Wilson announced that he would personally lead the peace delegation to meet at Versailles near Paris. Wilson’s decision drew immediate fire from his critics, who charged that by personally negotiating the treaty the president would be more susceptible to public pressures and

#### *Treaty of Sèvres—Sowing the Seeds of Modern Islamic Terrorism?*

The Treaty of Sèvres broke up the Muslim Ottoman Empire and founded modern Turkey, perhaps also beginning the Muslim animosity toward the West that rages today.

hasty decisions. But Wilson believed that a personal appearance, given his tremendous prestige in Europe, would best help preserve his Fourteen Points, particularly the establishment of a League of Nations, which he believed would ensure lasting peace. Wilson's critics charged that he had a "messiah complex."

Whatever Wilson's motivation, his peace mission was seriously flawed from the start, for the delegation included not a single prominent Republican from the Senate, where any treaty would have to be submitted for ratification. Just two weeks earlier, in the fall elections of 1918, the Democrats lost their majorities in both houses of Congress to the Republicans. Instead of cooperating with his opponents, Wilson and his partisan band headed for the cheering crowds of Europe without inviting any Republican leaders; his enemies back home became entrenched.

### *Big Four, Big Differences*

The Paris Peace Conference, held from January to June 1919, was dominated by the "**Big Four**"—President Wilson, France's Premier Georges Clemenceau (CLEM MAHN SOH), Italy's Premier Vittorio Orlando, and Britain's Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Each nation had distinct aims. Wilson made clear that the U.S. wanted no territory in return for its participation in the war. What Wilson wanted was acceptance of the Fourteen Points. He was interested in peace, but his Allied colleagues were interested in prey.

Clemenceau, though claiming to support the Fourteen Points, was more interested in revenge for France than in anything else. Conflicts between France and Germany over the mineral-rich coal and iron-mining area west of the Rhine River, including the area known as Alsace-Lorraine, dated to the days of the Franks and the Gauls. Germany had annexed Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, and France wanted it back. France also wanted a buffer zone east of the Rhine to ensure its future security.

The Big Four at Versailles: (left to right) David Lloyd George, Great Britain; Vittorio Orlando, Italy; Georges Clemenceau, France; and Woodrow Wilson, United States



Italy's Orlando represented a nation that had been Germany's ally at the beginning of the war but had then joined the Allies, in part because of British promises of territory in Austria. Orlando came expecting a large share of the spoils of victory to fall Italy's way at the peace table, although Italy had contributed little to the actual victory.

Lloyd George was a master politician, willing to do whatever was necessary to maintain British control of the seas. Although he professed to support the terms of the Armistice, he had campaigned for reelection in December 1918 promising that the Germans would be made to bear the entire cost of the war. "We will squeeze them till the pips squeak," Lloyd George crowed. And for good measure he promised to "hang the Kaiser!" With a strong electoral victory, Lloyd George went to Versailles armed with his mandate of revenge.

### *Petty Peace*

The **Treaty of Versailles** was signed on June 28, 1919—five long years after the Black Hand triggered a war that led to ten million



deaths. The treaty drastically changed the map of Europe and had far-reaching consequences.

The Germans were permitted no part in the treaty negotiations. They were, in effect, offered the treaty on a bayonet point and forced to sign a “**war-guilt**” clause stating that the German nation was responsible for the war. The German delegation essentially signed a blank check for the vengeful victors to fill in. If Germany was responsible, then Germany would pay the bill. As a result, Britain and France demanded huge **reparation payments** to cover not just war damages but the entire cost of the war—more than \$30 billion. Such an unreasonable demand only deepened poverty and resentment in Germany.

After all the haggling among Allied leaders was over, only two major planks of Wilson’s Fourteen Points were incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles: national self-determination for the peoples of Europe and the formation of the League of Nations. Independence and national boundaries for Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were all based on treaty provisions. While the new national identities satisfied the political aspirations of millions, they also created problems. Many of the new countries encompassed a number of ethnic groups whose own nationalist desires were further awakened by the changes. For example, Yugoslavia, composed of six major groups, was originally called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—hardly a name to inspire national unity. In addition, thousands of Germans found themselves living under foreign flags after the mapmakers in Versailles finished drawing the lines. Hitler would use that point of irritation to trigger a second world war twenty years later.

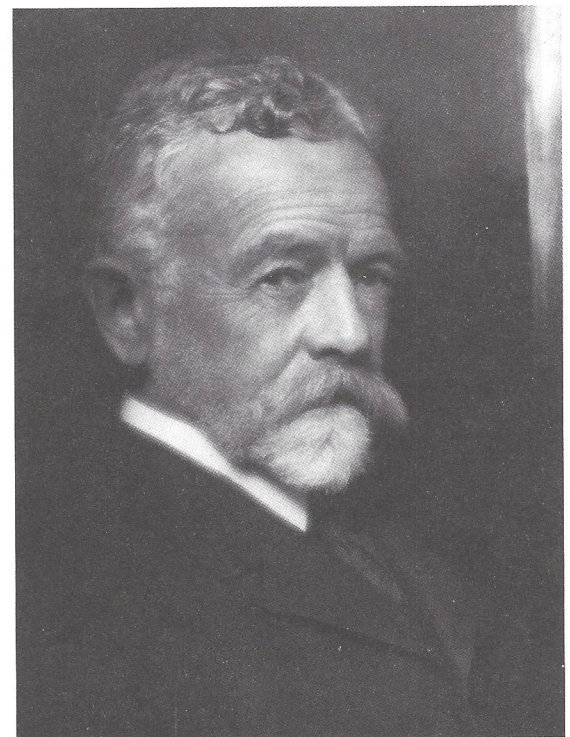
Wilson and others were not unaware of the problems of the Treaty of Versailles. They believed, though, that the League of Nations would fix those flaws. First, however, if the U.S. were to take the lead in the newly formed League, Wilson would have to find enough senators to ratify the treaty. It would be the toughest fight of his life, and, some people said, one that ultimately led to his death.

## Rejection and Retreat

When Wilson returned from Europe, his most formidable opponent against the Treaty of Versailles and its most important component, the League of Nations, was Senate majority leader **Henry Cabot Lodge** of Massachusetts. Besides stubbornness, Wilson and Lodge had one other thing in common—they hated each other.

Most Democrats in the Senate naturally sided with their party leader, President Wilson, but the Democrats were in the minority. The focus was on the Republicans, who were divided into two groups: the “irreconcilables” opposed any entanglement in European politics, and the “reservationists,” led by Lodge, would ratify the treaty but only with reservations attached that would limit U.S. commitment. The reservationists feared that unqualified support of the League could drag Americans into future European wars by tying the country to unwanted alliances. Making a deliberate jab at Wilson’s idealism, the hard-bargaining Lodge described the Versailles Treaty as “the beautiful scheme of making mankind virtuous by a statute or a written constitution.” America’s security, Lodge believed, was best protected by two oceans and a strong military force.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge led the Republican reservationists in attacking the Treaty of Versailles, especially the provision for the League of Nations.



### **Why the League Failed in the Senate**

Perhaps Wilson's attorney general, T.W. Gregory, best summarized the nature of the president's lost cause: "The League was defeated in the United States, not because it was a League of Nations, but because it was a Woodrow Wilson league, and because the great leader had fallen and there was no one who could wield his mighty sword."

As the debate over treaty ratification dragged on, public opinion, which had initially favored the ideas behind the treaty, began to shift in Lodge's direction. Wilson, who opposed compromising on any of the treaty provisions, decided to take the issue to the people. In a marathon mission of eight thousand miles in twenty-two days, the president delivered forty speeches in favor of the treaty and membership in his brainchild, the League of Nations. The president declared, "America does not want to feed upon the rest of the world. She wants to feed it and serve it. America . . . is the only national idealistic force in the world, and idealism is going to save the world."

Wilson's crusade, however, nearly killed him. On September 25, 1919, after an enthusiastic rally in Pueblo, Colorado, the president slumped over with exhaustion. His aides canceled the rest of the tour and took Wilson back to Washington, where he suffered a serious stroke that paralyzed him on one side. Wilson's wife and a few close friends shielded his condition from the public, but his fighting days were over. For seven critical months, Wilson did not meet with his cabinet. Most executive functions were performed on his behalf by his wife and his closest aide, Colonel Edward House. In November, the Senate vote on the treaty fell short of ratification.

When public and administration pressure brought a reconsideration of the treaty in March 1920, it seemed that the amended treaty would finally pass. But Wilson, who had regained some of his strength, bitterly fought any changes. Ironically, Wilson sided with the irreconcilables to defeat his own treaty in the interest of keeping it intact. The stricken president, having lost all contact with political and practical realities, became his own enemy.

The United States never joined the League of Nations nor ratified the Treaty of Versailles. Not until July 2, 1921, after Wilson's term, did Congress quietly pass a joint resolution ending the official state of war between the United States and Germany. By then, Wilson had been replaced by Warren G. Harding, a Republican whose critics said that his only qualification for the job was that he "looked like a president." Harding was no crusader, but he was an avid card player and he enjoyed cutting ribbons. Harding's striking contrast to Wilson illustrated the changing mood of the country. America had helped liberate the Old World, but now it was shifting out of the uncomfortable harness of international leadership and retreating into the 1920s.

### **Section Quiz**

1. Name the members of the Big Four and the nation that each represented.
2. What two provisions of the Versailles treaty were most offensive to the Germans?
3. What was the difference between the Republican irreconcilables and reservationists concerning the Versailles treaty?
- ★ Was the U.S. Senate correct in rejecting the League of Nations, or should the United States have joined the League?

# 10

## Chapter Review

### Making Connections

1. What event sparked World War I? How?
2. How did the British blockade of Germany actually bring the neutral Americans closer to the Allies?
3. How did the *Sussex* pledge almost guarantee that the United States would soon be involved in Europe's war?
4. Who was the main opponent of the League of Nations in the Senate and why?

### Developing History Skills

1. Place the following events in chronological order.
  - a. Great Britain declares war on Germany.
  - b. Germany declares war on France.
  - c. Austria declares war on Serbia.
  - d. Russia declares war on Austria.
2. Why did William Jennings Bryan resign as secretary of state when Wilson sent a sharp message to Germany after the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

### Thinking Critically

1. Wilson said, "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men!" What characteristic of Wilson's foreign policy does that statement reflect? Is that characteristic necessarily a benefit in conducting foreign policy? Why or why not?
2. Wilson said, "Idealism will save the world." What truths or fallacies or both are behind that statement?

### Living as a Christian Citizen

1. Should Christians try to transform their world? If yes, how do they avoid the problems of Wilsonian idealism? If no, what role should Christians play in broader society?
2. Evaluate the Treaty of Versailles from a Christian perspective.

### People, Places, and Things to Remember

Central Powers  
 Allies  
 William Jennings Bryan  
 Porfirio Díaz  
 Victoriano Huerta  
 Pancho Villa  
 John J. Pershing  
 Wilhelm II  
*Lusitania*  
*Sussex* pledge  
 unrestricted submarine warfare  
 Zimmermann telegram  
 America enters the war (April 1917)  
 Selective Service Act  
 Food Administration  
 Herbert Hoover  
 doughboy  
 Espionage and Sedition Acts  
*Schenk v. United States*  
 Fourteen Points  
 League of Nations  
 Château-Thierry and Belleau Wood  
 Argonne offensive  
 Armistice (November 11, 1918)  
 Big Four  
 Treaty of Versailles  
 "war-guilt" clause  
 reparation payments  
 Henry Cabot Lodge