The Nation at War

The United States of America in World War I
1917–1919
The United States in World War I

Shifting European Alliances and Conflict Draw America into Battle

- World War I was the war to end all wars and had major consequences for Americans both at home and abroad.

- Though many in Europe and America believed the war would be quick and decisive, it became a war of attrition, with soldiers fighting in the trenches for years ferociously attempting to move the battle lines by mere inches.

- The war was one of the deadliest conflicts in human history claiming casualties in the tens of millions.

- President Woodrow Wilson had steered the United States away from war maintaining a policy of Cautious Neutrality until 1917 when America joined the effort on the side of the Allied Powers predominantly consisting of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia.

- Domestically, the war impacted the politics, culture, and society of the United States with women gaining the right to vote while other groups of citizens remaining marginalized or subject to systematic repression.
The European March Toward War

Understanding the Context of World War I

- After the Napoleonic Wars of the early 1800s, the Congress of Vienna met in 1814 seeking to create peace and a balance of power in Europe by dismantling the French Empire and giving monarchs back their thrones.

- At the same time, a new political ideal of nationalism was sweeping through Europe with the underpinning that nations should be formed based on the people who shared common heritage, language, and customs rather than by the rule of monarchs who had gained their land by winning wars, signing treaties, and arranging marriages.

- The result of monarch rule led to Europe having empires that included many nationalities within their borders such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

- As nationalism spread across Europe it tore apart empires and built nations. By the mid-1800s Italy and Germany achieved national unity with patriotic citizens devoted to their countries. Nationalism, however, also set the stage for war as it instigated competition between nations for materials to be used in factories, markets to sell goods in, and the rush to control foreign territories in Africa and Asia.

- As distrust between countries grew, the European powers built up their militaries with rivalries leading to the creation of complex webs of secret defense agreements between nations outlining specific stipulations and obligations. This pulled many nations into war when only a few of which were aggressive. These complicated alliance networks required members to enter into hostilities if their alliance partner was attacked, but not if their partner was the aggressor (this is how Italy argued that it did not have to go to war on the side of belligerent Germany).

- In the 1880s, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Triple Alliance (which later became the Central Powers and no longer included Italy). In response to the Triple Alliance, the Franco-Russian Alliance was formalized between 1891 and 1893 with Britain, France, and Russia joining together under the Triple Entente (later referred to as the Allied Powers which included Italy).

- While the alliances were designed to keep peace, a disagreement between any two rival powers could pull the whole continent into war. In 1914, a chain reaction starting with the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne would ignite the largest war Europe and the world had ever seen.
On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was assassinated by a Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princip.

Princip and other Yugoslav nationalists wanted to be liberated from Austrian rule.

The assassination set a series of events in motion culminating in a declaration of war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

The prevailing alliance system of the time drew all major European powers into the war and global conflict.
War in Europe

The Spreading Conflict from the European Continent

- **GREEN**: Countries aligned the Allied Powers.
- **ORANGE**: Countries aligned with the Central Powers.
- **GREY**: Countries that remained neutral in the war.

[Interactive Timeline](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World_War_I_map.svg)
## Principal Combatants

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American Neutrality Evaporates

The United States Joins the Fight on the European Continent

- President Wilson sought to maintain American neutrality, however, escalating German aggression drew the United States into conflict.

- Instigating factors such as the May 7, 1915, German U-boat sinking of the RMS Lusitania ocean liner carrying over 100 Americans, the January 1917 German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, and the early 1917 interception and publication of the Zimmermann Telegram sent by Germany urging Mexico to collude against America prompted Congress to formally declare war on Germany on April 6, 1917.
Instigating Factors on the Road to War

Library of Congress
The vast scale of World War I required the American public to form an unprecedented labor force organized to support the concerted effort.

To avoid suggestion of government coercion, voluntary collaboration between government and business was encouraged by the Wilson administration.

Congress established the War Industries Board to align national interests with those of industry. The board achieved its nationalistic and financial objectives by cajoling domestic businesses, growing profit margins and threatening public shaming by labeling uncooperative businesses and their owners/proprietors as unpatriotic.
Large unions such as the American Federation of Labor capitalized on the need for organized labor to secure better wages and working conditions for American laborers.

Conflicts arose within the workforce during the war with thousands of strikes in 1917 resulting in work stoppages in the war effort dependent industries of mining, forestry, and ship building.

The war also presented more than one million American women the opportunity to move away from domestic service work and non factory textile labor as they found temporary employment in skills based jobs located in factories and offices across the country.
On the Home Front

The War Increases Labor Needs, Food Conservation, and Volunteer Efforts

- America's deepening involvement in the global war positioned **women** to play a critical role on the home front as Selective Service-age men headed overseas to serve in the Armed Forces.

- Working in factories, planting and harvesting war garden crops, and organizing volunteer services groups, **women provided domestic services** and **goods** for American troops headed overseas.

- The federal government capitalized on state and municipal activism through women's organizations to help fuel the war effort.

- While some states gave women leadership positions and the right to vote, a glass ceiling prevented full gender equality during this era.

- Despite social, political, economic barriers, and disappointments, women viewed the war as an opportunity to **expand upon their constitutional rights**.
Home Front Contributions
Volunteerism as the Fulcrum for Female Empowerment

- Active in thirty-three states by the summer of 1918, volunteer groups such as the Women’s Land Army sought to use women’s labor to address the threat of food shortages due to the war.

- The “Farmerettes” secured labor contracts guaranteeing wages, hours, and working conditions rarely seen for agricultural workers at the time.

- Victory Gardens played a pivotal role in the war by increasing the national food supply and educating the nations school aged children and general public to decrease waste as an act of patriotism.
Wartime Government Oversight

Following European Lead, America Seeks to Streamline the Economy

- To stem the tide of food waste within the country, the U.S. Food Administration launched a campaign in 1917 targeting schools, libraries, grocery stores, and public transit.

- Utilizing women’s group volunteers, the campaign and others like it highlighted the ways homemakers could plan economically and nutritionally balanced meals for their families while also supporting the national war effort.

- Other measures undertaken to increase American efficiency included the adoption of Daylight Savings Time in March 1918 as a means to conserve electricity in urban areas.
Keep Good Food Out of Your Garbage Pail and Kitchen Sink
Don't Feed High-Priced Human Food to Hogs or Chickens

WASTE NO FOOD!

HOUSHOLD WASTE ABOUT 700 MILLION DOLLARS

“Trade waste, for example, is a common occurrence. In every house there is a strong temptation to eat more than can be eaten or to estimate the quantity of food. This temptation is a constant one, and it is destined to be of considerable.”

The report of the Department of Agriculture points out that the dietary habits of our people can be traced to a number of causes. One of these is the waste of food, which is caused by lack of proper handling, and in well-to-do families, from serving an unequally number of courses and an over-abundant supply and falling to save and utilize the food that is consumed. As an instance of improper handling, it is discovered that in the preparation of potatoes 25 percent of the edible portion in many cases is discarded. —Secretary of Agriculture, March 1, 1917.

FOOD IS WASTED

When anything edible is allowed to go to the garbage pail or allowed to spoil for lack of proper handling

FOOD IS WASTED

When too much is served at a meal. Uneaten portions are left on the plate and later thrown into the garbage pail. Learn to know the needs of your family and serve each no more than you think he will want.

When too much is prepared for a meal. Unseved portions are likely to be thrown into the garbage pail or allowed to spoil. Many housekeepers do not know how to use left-over foods to make appetizing dishes.

FOOD IS WASTED

When burned or spoiled in cooking. Improperly prepared or poorly seasoned food will be left on the table and probably wasted. Buy foods only and then prepare it carefully.

When handled carelessly. Buy clean food, keep it clean until used, and be neat in all details of cooking and serving. This lessens waste and is a valuable health measure as well.

FOOD IS WASTED

When we eat more than our bodies need for growth and repair and to supply energy for our work.

Overeating tends to poor health and fat instead of brown, makes us sluggish and indolent instead of energetic and resourceful. Eat enough and no more. Eat for physical and mental efficiency.

DEMONSTRATE THRIFT IN YOUR HOME

MAKE SAVING, RATHER THAN SPENDING, YOUR SOCIAL STANDARD

Begin to save to-day. For practical advice on how to feed your family efficiently and make the most of the food you buy or raise write to-day to your State Agricultural College, to your county agent, or to the

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Funding the War
Liberty Loans, Victory Drives, and Taxation Finance National Effort

- To avoid disrupting the economic advances America made during neutrality, the Committee on Public Information engaged patriotic citizens with short, carefully worded speeches to promote the sale of critically important war bonds called Liberty Loans.

- Calling on citizens across the economic spectrum, the U.S. government raised $20 billion through four Liberty Loan drives and one Victory Loan drive with almost one third coming from Americans earning less than $2,000 annually.

- As war expenditures rose exponentially, government debt also ballooned with officials realizing borrowing alone would not sufficiently fund the war effort.

- The War Revenue Act of 1918 forever impacted American taxation by flipping three fourths of federal revenues derived from custom and excise taxes before the war to three fourths revenues coming from income, profit, and estate taxes after the war.

- To garner support for the war, celebrities exhorted civilians to buy bonds and artists stressed the potentially dire consequences of inaction by conjuring images of American liberty in ruins.

Video🔗
A Call to All Americans

Library of Congress

Do Your Part,
Be A Patriot

Buy War Bonds,
Fund the War Effort

Audio🔗
Extension Activity: The Military Lens

Doughboys, Industrialized Warfare, and the Western Front
The Yanks are Coming

European Anticipation for a Short Conflict Turns into a Global Stalemate

- While a majority of Europeans thought the war would be short and decisive, there was a vocal minority who anticipated a protracted war.

- Combat soon bogged down on the Western Front where both sides dug complex trench networks stretching across hundreds of miles from the English Channel to the border of Switzerland.

- The rise of industrialization allowed rapid mass production of artillery, machine guns, and ammunition. European railroads were utilized to transport the continuous flow of munitions along with new waves of soldiers, including Americans, to the front lines.

- To break the looming stalemate, combatants pursued emerging technological means including the use of expanded artillery, poisonous gas, tanks, and the military use of airplanes. However, some of these innovations were too new to have a dramatic effect on the outcome of the war.
The British fleet kept most of the German navy at bay in the North Sea and the United States did not engage in any major naval battles with the Central Powers.

The U.S. Navy, however, played a vital role transporting the U.S. Army across the Atlantic Ocean, escorting troop and supply convoys while under constant threat of German submarine attacks.

Ten days after America declared war on Germany, the Emergency Fleet Corporation was established under congressional mandate with the purpose of acquiring, maintaining, and operating the merchant ships needed to transport U.S. troops and their supplies to France.

Acutely short of ships, shipyards, and workers in 1917, a tidal wave of ships were constructed through 1918 and sent to Europe to aid the war.

Despite these efforts, British ships, or ships confiscated from the Central Powers carried the majority of U.S. troops and supplies to Europe throughout the war with the Allies shipping two million American military personnel to Europe by war’s end.
The successful sealift operation allowed the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) under the command of General John J. Pershing, to become the largest U.S. force deployed overseas to that point with a total strength in November 1918 of 80,004 officers and 1,849,756 enlisted soldiers.

As the first contingent of U.S. troops were nearing entry of the frontline trenches, General Pershing was promoted to the top rank in the U.S. Army due to the scale of his responsibility as the commander of the AEF.

Only George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, and Philip Sheridan previously held ranks higher than major general in the U.S. Army.

During his tenure in World War I, General Pershing would command an Army of nearly two million soldiers, known as doughboys, and oversaw battles including Belleau Wood, St. Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne.

At peak strength the AEF included three field armies, nine corps, and forty-three divisions. By war's end the U.S. Army awarded thirteen campaign streamers to the AEF and its subordinate units.
They Deserve: America’s Doughboys

Run Time: 6 Minutes

Video🔗
Tanks were introduced to the battlefield to plow through enemy lines and break the stalemate. Early tanks, however, were prone to frequent breakdown and could not navigate war-torn land, leaving soldiers exposed and vulnerable to attack. Later tanks proved more efficient in battle as they were smaller, quicker, and had mounted rotating turrets equipped with cannon or machine guns.

Heavy machine guns, capable of firing over 500 rounds per minute, greatly increased the firepower for the infantry.

Advancements in artillery brought a new level of lethality to the battlefield. Rapid-fire, breech-loading field guns and howitzers dominated the battlefields and forced the armies to seek protection in trenches.

While a relatively new use of force, airplanes were equipped with high rate of fire weaponry and pilots were trained to evade increasingly sophisticated enemy aircraft.
The Western Front
America Makes an Entrance on the Battlefields of Europe

InteractiveMap🔗 Video🔗
Text Resources


Text Resources


Image Resources


Image Resources


Image Resources


Audio/Video Resources


