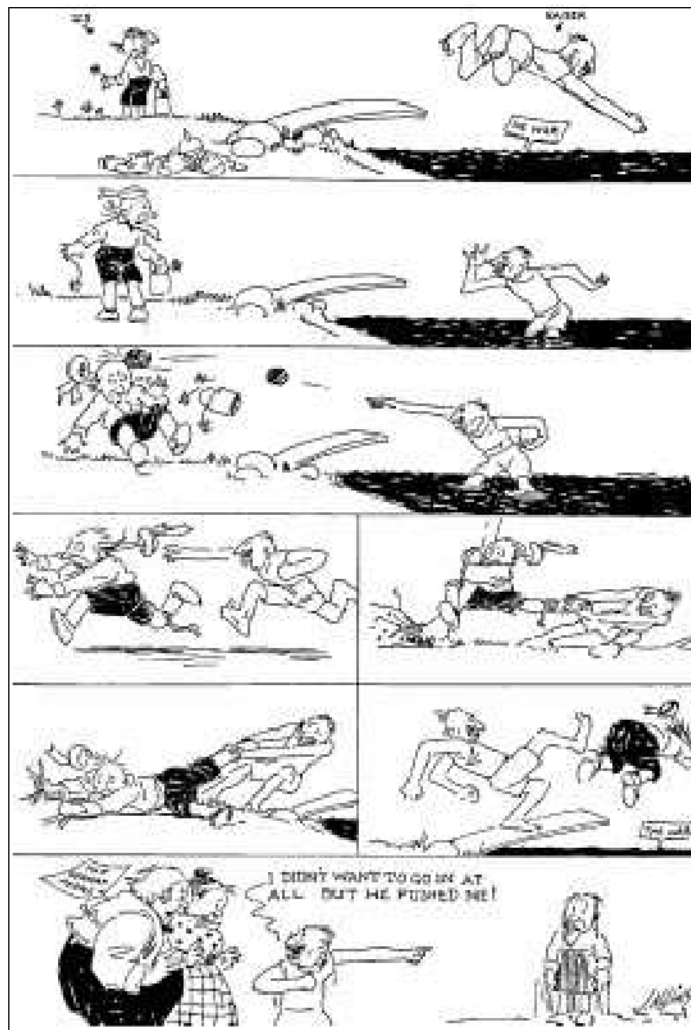


Introduction

When war broke out in Europe in 1914, the United States wanted to remain neutral. Most Americans believed that nations should not settle their disagreements through war. In addition, the war was far across the Atlantic Ocean and was not a direct threat to the United States. As the war progressed, however, the United States found itself unable to remain neutral. Once the United States entered the war, the lives of most Americans changed in some way.



From 1914 until the United States entered into the hostilities in 1917, the United States had stayed neutral. When the United States eventually did enter the war, the kaiser (ruler) of Germany represented Americans to the German people as forcing the war upon the Germany.

Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

American's Attitudes towards the War

Most Americans hoped their country would not become involved in the war. Many Americans, however, did sympathize, or side, with one side or the other. Some people favored the Allies—Great Britain, France, and Russia, and later, Italy and Japan. The United States had close trading ties with Great Britain and France. In addition, many Americans or their ancestors had lived in one of the Allied countries.



Some people in the United States sympathized with the Central Powers—Germany and Austria-Hungary—because many recent immigrants to the United States had come from that region of Europe. Some Irish-Americans hoped that Great Britain would lose the war because it had not granted Ireland independence.

Early Effects of the War on American Trade

Before the war, the United States had traded with most of the major European countries. Once the war started, however, none of the countries at war wanted the United States to supply goods to their enemies. The countries at war knew that if the United States did not sell food and military supplies to their enemies, then their enemies would become weak and be unable to continue the war.

By 1915 the British had placed a naval **blockade** around the ports of the Central Powers to prevent Americans from trading with the Central Powers. British warships forced American ships that were headed for Germany to sail to Great Britain instead. The British took the goods from the American ships and then sent the ships back unharmed to the United States.

The United States reminded Great Britain that the United States was a neutral country. Therefore, it had the right to trade with any country. The American protest did no good, and the British refused to let American ships near the seaports of the Central Powers. At the same time the United States was also selling goods to Great Britain and France.

Meanwhile, the Germans set up their own *blockade* around Great Britain. German ships patrolled the sea beneath the surface with their U-boats, or submarines. The area of the blockade was called the *war zone*. The Germans said they would sink all Allied and neutral ships that sailed into that zone.

The United States Is Drawn into the War (1914-1916)

For the first two years of the war, the United States was able to remain neutral and not enter the war. But for several reasons, President *Woodrow Wilson* finally decided that the country had no choice but to enter the war on the side of the Allies.

Americans and American Ships at Sea Attacked by Germany

One of the reasons the United States entered the war was to protect its ships and citizens traveling by sea. On May 7, 1915, the British passenger ship *Lusitania* was on its way from New York to Great Britain. The *Lusitania* was carrying almost 1,200 passengers, 128 of them American citizens. The Germans believed the *Lusitania* was carrying **contraband**, or illegal military supplies such as explosives, ammunition, and guns. A German U-boat sank the *Lusitania*. Of the 1,198 persons killed, all 128 Americans aboard died. Americans were angry that civilians had been killed in the German submarine attack. This attack on civilians made many Americans sympathetic towards the Allies.

After the sinking of the *Lusitania*, President Wilson warned the Germans not to sink American ships or ships carrying American citizens. For a while, Germany stopped, but relations between the two countries continued to worsen. Then, in January of 1917, Germany announced that their submarines again would attack merchant ships that carried contraband. They kept their word. The Germans sank several trading ships in March of 1917.

The Zimmermann Note

Another reason the United States entered the war was the discovery of a secret telegram message sent by Germany to Mexico. The message, sent in January of 1917, became known as the *Zimmermann note*. *Arthur Zimmermann* was the German foreign minister. He asked Mexico to join the Central Powers if the United States joined the Allies. In return, Germany would see that Mexico regained land lost to the United States in the Mexican-American War of 1846. Those lands included California, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The Zimmermann note caused more Americans to favor the Allies because the Germans were threatening to steal states from the United States. Those Americans already in favor of the Allies grew more committed to an Allied victory.

Economic Concerns

Economic reasons also drew the United States into the war in Europe. American banks and weapon builders had loaned large amounts of money to help the Allies fight the war. In addition, farmers had sold the Allies farm goods on credit. The bankers, builders, and farmers feared that if the Allies lost, the Allies would not be able to pay off their debt to American investors and many Americans would suffer financially. To protect their investments, the bankers, builders, and farmers urged President Wilson to enter the war in support of the Allies.



Bankers, builders, and farmers feared that if the Allies lost, the Allies would not be able to pay off their debt to American investors.

Congress Declares War

President Wilson felt he had no choice but to enter the United States into the war in support of the Allies. The American President, however, cannot declare war; only the United States Congress has that power. So President Wilson called a special session of the Congress and asked them to declare war against the Central Powers. On April 6, 1917, Congress declared war on the Central Powers.

How the War Affected Life in America

Preparing to enter the war and then supporting soldiers fighting in Europe involved most Americans in some way. Men had to be trained to fight; factories and workers had to produce military supplies; more food had to be produced to feed the military; and money had to be raised to pay for the war.

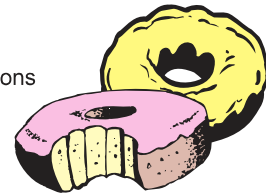
Preparing the United States Army

The United States took steps to prepare for war. First, the government increased the size of the army. Some men **enlisted**, or joined, the army, but many more were needed. In May of 1917, Congress passed the **Selective Service Act**. This act allowed the government to *draft* men, or require men to enter the military. American soldiers were nicknamed *doughboys*.

Doughboy

The expression “doughboy,” which was in wide circulation a century before the first World War in both Britain and America, referred to fried flour dumplings called doughboys, the predecessor of the modern doughnut. History is not completely clear on why our American soldiers were called doughboys, but there are several theories:

- American soldiers loved to eat the doughboys or doughnuts
- United States infantrymen wore coats with unique brass buttons that resembled the doughboy dumplings
- in cooking the doughnut, a flour-and-rice concoction was wrapped around a bayonet over the flames



More than two million men underwent the early army training. Then in 1918, they were sent to Europe. They were known as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). The AEF served under the command of General *John J. “Black Jack” Pershing*. Eventually, almost five million American soldiers served in the military during World War I.

Producing Military Supplies and Food

The government ordered many factories to produce more war goods. This meant some factories had to change what they produced. For example, bicycles were not needed, but ball bearings for wheels were necessary. Therefore, bike factories produced ballbearings. Because so many men had gone off to war, there was a shortage of workers. Consequently, many women and African Americans entered the industrial work force for the first time.

To make sure that Americans at home and in Europe had enough to eat, the government set prices and limits on food sold at home. In addition, the government told farmers to grow as much food as possible. The government asked Americans to **ration** or limit the amount of wheat, meat, sugar, and gasoline they used. Advertising encouraged Americans to serve meatless meals one day a week. On other days they were asked to not use wheat or the wheat products of bread or cereal. Rationing food allowed the United States to send enough food to the soldiers and citizens in Europe.



During the war, as men joined the armed forces, there was a shortage of workers. Many women stepped in to take on their jobs and worked in factories for the first time. By working in jobs once thought to be for men only, women changed the view that they could do only certain kinds of jobs.


Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

Raising Money for the War

The United States needed to raise money to pay for the war. First, the United States government increased taxes to help pay for the war. Taxes required everyone to help out.

A second way the government raised money was through the sale of **Liberty bonds**, certificates that were worth more several years later than at the time they were issued. When buyers purchased a bond, they were actually loaning money to the government. The government promised to repay the money with interest at a given time.

Government War Posters



A group of well known artists met in New York City on April 17, 1917 to determine how they could contribute to America's war effort. The director of the government's Committee on Public Information asked the artists to produce whatever artwork the government might need in connection with the war effort. Within a few weeks, the enthusiastic artists started working on government war posters. These war posters became a common sight throughout American cities. More than 2,000 different posters were created, and about 20 million copies of these posters were printed. The posters used strong, forceful images and simple slogans to get their messages across.

The Uncle Sam poster was very popular and has lived on in popularity long after World War I was over. The pointing Uncle Sam was created by an American illustrator, James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960), and was a self-portrait. This image has come to represent patriotic duty and pride and continues to be used on government posters and pamphlets today.

Freedom of Speech

Not all Americans wanted the United States to enter the war. The government took steps to silence those Americans who spoke out against the war. In 1917 Congress passed laws that outlawed any disagreement with the government either in actions or words. These laws which limited freedom of speech were called the *Espionage and Sedition Acts*. **Espionage** means spying, and **sedition** refers being disloyal to the government. A government committee was formed to persuade all Americans to support the war effort. Several people were arrested and sent to jail because they spoke out against the war. Congress restored freedom of speech after the war.

The United States Military Joins Allied Forces in Europe

World War I was fought on two different **fronts**, or zones where enemy armies battle. Remember that the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, were located *between* the Allied Powers—Great Britain and France on the west and Russia on the east. They had to fight Russia, on the east, or the Eastern Front. And they had to fight France and Great Britain—two more Allied Powers—on the Western Front. Fighting on two fronts was difficult for the Central Powers because it caused them to split their attention, money, men, and materials.

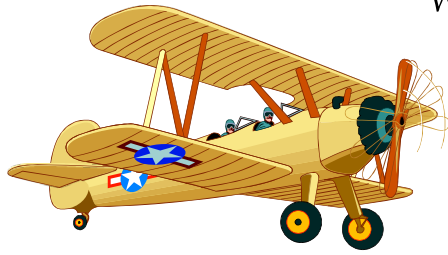
Then, in 1917, Russia's ruler, *Czar Nicholas II*, was overthrown in the **Bolshevik Revolution**. In 1918 the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with Germany and withdrew from the war. Germany quickly sent their soldiers which had been fighting Russia to fight on the Western Front. Germany now had a stronger force, and it appeared that it would win the war.

However, with the addition of American soldiers, the Allies became stronger. They were able to turn the tide of war in favor of the Allies. By October of 1918, the Allies and the United States pushed the Germans back into Germany, and the Central Powers collapsed from the long war. Germany, badly defeated, asked for a cease-fire.

On November 11, 1918, the United States, the Allies, and the Central Powers signed an **armistice**. An armistice is an agreement to stop fighting. While fighting was over, soldiers waited on the front for a treaty to end the war. Eight months later in the summer of 1919, a peace treaty was signed. The war was officially over! The United State and the Allies had won World War I, known at that time as the *Great War*.

A New Age in Weapons

The Industrial Revolution had changed the way nations fought wars. Modern weapons were mass-produced in factories. Many new weapons were introduced on the battlefield in World War I. The Germans used the U-boat, or submarine. The U-boat enabled them to carry out surprise attacks on ships from below the surface of the sea. The British invented and used the tank for the first time. In addition, the machine gun increased a single soldier's ability to wound and kill enemy soldiers at a great rate.



Warring nations also used the airplane as a military weapon. When war first broke out, warring nations used planes to observe movements on the ground. By the end of the war, those nations installed machine guns in the planes, and pilots had air battles known as *dogfights*. Chemical warfare also was

practiced. Poisonous gases, such as mustard gas, were used to kill or hurt enemy soldiers. World War I brought the United States and the world into a new and dangerous period of warfare.

Summary

The United States entered World War I for several reasons. The warring powers did not honor the position of the United States as a neutral nation. Consequently, the United States did not have freedom of the seas for its ships. There was also the danger that the United States would lose land to Mexico if the Central Powers won the war. A victory by the Central Powers would have meant a great loss of money to American businesses.

Once the United States entered the war, many changes occurred at home. Industry and agriculture had to increase production to support the war effort. To ensure that no one spoke against the war, freedom of speech was temporarily limited.

The armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, ending the fighting of World War I. The United States played an important role in the Allied victory. Now, the world waited to see what role it would play in the period to come.