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## THE BIG PICTURE

Mobilization for World War I transformed everything from the food Americans ate and the movies they watched to race relations, women's rights, and the relationship between government and business. Although the United States emerged as the world's leading economic and military power, President Woodrow Wilson was unable to turn progressives' dream of American global leadership into a reality.

**Hellfighters.** Four hundred thousand African American men served in World War I—and, following victory, the survivors returned home to claim the full rights of citizenship.



COLORED MAN IS NO SLACKER

An American flag is shown in the top left corner, waving. Below it, a group of soldiers in uniform, wearing hats and carrying rifles, are marching. The background is a light, textured beige color.

1914-1920

## WAR & PEACE

**F**or ten months in 1915, San Francisco was the site of a celebration of American and global progress. Some nineteen million visitors to the city's Panama-Pacific International Exposition wandered up the "Avenue of Progress," where exhibits traced humankind's evolution from lower primates in their jungle habitat to worker-citizens in a dynamic industrial world. Familiar Progressive Era themes about the dangers of cheap amusements and the promise of science, technology, and international cooperation suffused the exhibition palaces. A colorful pageant of nations reenacted the world's advance from the old "Spirit of War" to the "Spirit of Peace."

Yet something was amiss. Official exhibitors from the British, German, and Russian empires, which had become embroiled in armed conflict the year before, failed to show. Spectators were both thrilled and perplexed by the exposition's incongruous finale, in which a full-scale battleship anchored in San Francisco Bay was blown up in honor of the new "Age of Peace." The disconnect between the official optimism of the exhibition and the grisly reality of the war raging abroad was reinforced daily by newspaper headlines describing the carnage on Europe's numerous battlegrounds.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 horrified most Americans. The vast majority of citizens, including President Woodrow Wilson, initially wanted nothing to do with

it. But as the hostilities escalated, a small but vocal coalition of conservatives and internationally aware progressives made the case for entering the “Great War.” The president eventually agreed, calculating that U.S. involvement would generate an unprecedented opportunity to end European colonialism and reshape the global order along cooperative, progressive lines. In 1917, for the first time since the Civil War, the federal government mobilized the great mass of citizens, creating a raft of agencies to coordinate the economy, publicize the war effort, control communication networks, and raise an army of almost five million troops. As U.S. soldiers deployed to France, the balance of military power tipped in the Allies’ favor.

While the war went relatively well for the United States and President Wilson, the transition to peace fared miserably. Wilson’s plans for a new global order met with stiff opposition both at home and abroad. As U.S. war industries ground to a halt and millions of returning servicemen competed for a shrinking pool of jobs, the nation entered a violent period of racial and industrial unrest. The Wilson administration appeared to be losing control on both the international and the domestic fronts. In 1920, the Department of Justice erroneously concluded that the



U.S. government was in imminent danger of being overthrown, and undertook the single biggest mass arrest of critics, radicals, and other dissenters in American history. These tumultuous events brought the Progressive Era to an abrupt and unexpected end.

Planned at a time of widespread optimism about humanity’s capacity for peace and progress, the opening of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915 in fact coincided with the deadliest war the world had ever seen.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- + What were the causes of World War I, and how did Americans respond to the outbreak of hostilities?
- + Why did the United States enter the war?
- + What impact did U.S. participation have on the nation’s world standing?
- + What role did cinema, the press, and other culture industries play in the mobilization effort?
- + How did U.S. servicemen and women, including African Americans and other minorities, experience the war and its aftermath?
- + Why did progressive reform collapse once peace returned?

## CLASH OF EMPIRES

The European empires’ scramble for territory, resources, and prestige, under way since the 1880s (see Chapter 21), intensified after 1900 as each one raced to build large navies and advanced weaponry. The imperial powers formed two competing alliances whose members promised one another military support in the event of an attack. Both alliances also rushed to sign military treaties with Europe’s smaller, independent nations—and grew increasingly anxious that the loss of even one such country to the other side would weaken

them. Tensions eventually focused on the Balkans, where the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires vied for dominance. When nationalist Serbs, who were allied with Russia, assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian monarch in the Balkan city of Sarajevo in June 1914, a chain reaction in just a few weeks drew all of Europe’s great empires into what would later be known as World War I. Americans were appalled that modern civilizations would turn their weapons against one another.

## ARMS, ALLIANCES, AND ANXIETY

By the 1900s, Europe's imperial rivals (now joined by a rapidly expanding Japan) were engaged in a full-blown arms race. France and Germany almost doubled the size of their standing armies, and all the contenders stockpiled the lethal new weapons that the industrial revolution had made possible. These machine guns, howitzers (light mortars that could fire high enough to surmount rivers, buildings, and other obstacles in the line of fire), and powerful big-gun battleships known as dreadnoughts were capable of unleashing death on an unprecedented scale and at record-breaking speed.

Intense military, economic, and territorial rivalry put pressure on the empires to form alliances that they hoped would stabilize Europe by acting as a deterrent to war. By 1914, the British had secretly aligned with France and Russia (the Triple Entente), promising military support in the event of an attack. Germany and Austria-Hungary, which had joined forces in the 1870s, added Italy to their bloc, now called the Triple Alliance. Because individual members of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente had also pledged to protect most of Europe's smaller, independent nations, almost the entire continent was absorbed into this system—and an attack on one small nation would likely draw all the empires into conflict.

For a time, the alliance and the entente were equally strong, and this **balance of power** appeared to make war unlikely. Then, in the 1910s, as the arms buildup intensified and the ever-expanding network of alliances absorbed the remaining smaller nations, the great powers began to worry that the collapse or defection of just one smaller nation would weaken the entire bloc and render it vulnerable to attack. Consequently, in early 1914, military leaders secretly began drawing up battle plans while their governments accelerated arms-building programs. This activity further raised tensions between the blocs' leaders, who became increasingly anxious that their rivals might soon attack.

Although relations between the two sides were growing more volatile, the suggestion that Europe's empires would ever deploy their deadly weapons against each other seemed absurd to most Americans and Europeans in early 1914. Why would "white civilization," as President Woodrow Wilson put it, turn against itself? The fact that Europe had seen war as recently as 1870 (when Prussia invaded France) and that millions of people had experienced the Civil War firsthand did not shake most Americans' faith that the modern world had transcended mass violence and ascended to a more enlightened order. The hardening of segregationist culture, which had made race the key dividing line in U.S. society by the 1910s, also blinded most Americans to the possibility that people of the "same race" might make war on each other. However, the depth of the European rivalries did not escape the attention of Wilson's envoy to Europe, who warned in early 1914 that "militarism has run stark mad" and "there is some day to be an awful cataclysm."

## BETWEEN EMPIRES: CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

The most unstable region of Europe in these years was the Balkans. The Balkan peninsula was home to Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and other peoples who had long been subjects of either the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the centuries-old power known as the Ottoman Empire, based in what is now Turkey (see Map 22.1). Known to Americans and western Europeans alike as the "sick man of Europe," the Ottoman Empire had steadily weakened and contracted during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unable to compete with the industrial and military might of the other great powers. As the Ottomans gradually lost control of their Balkan territories, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires vied for influence, eager to absorb the region.

The Balkan peoples had different aspirations. As in Mexico, China, and other parts of the world subject to the interventionism of larger powers (see Chapter 21), a number of popular nationalist movements had emerged in the region. Romanian, Serbian, and other nationalist movements demanded unification of their respective ethnic groups and national independence, or **self-determination**. Balkan nationalists were particularly threatening to Austria-Hungary, whose leaders feared that the cry for self-determination would spread to their own empire and possibly spark nationalist rebellion among Poles, Czechs, and other Austro-Hungarian subjects. Eager to capitalize on the Ottomans' crumbling empire and nip Balkan nationalism in the bud, Austria-Hungary expanded into the Balkans in 1909 by annexing Bosnia, a small province with a sizable Serbian population.

Annexation only further inflamed the nationalist passions of independent Serbia, whose leaders demanded that Bosnia be liberated and allowed to unite with all southern Slavs to form an independent Serbian state. The Serbs' call fell on deaf ears, however. Their frustrations boiling over, members of a radical Serbian militia named Unity or Death took matters into their own hands on June 1914 and gunned down Austria's heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife on the streets of Sarajevo, Bosnia.

## BATTLE FOR EUROPE

Austria-Hungary immediately demanded that the Serbian government crack down on radical nationalists and issued a stringent ten-point ultimatum in late July. The Serbs, realizing that failure to meet these demands could mean war, hastily complied with all except one of them. But Austria-Hungary had in fact already resolved to invade Serbia—despite warnings by Russia's foreign minister that such an action would "[set] fire to Europe."

On the pretext of Serbia's noncompliance with the ultimatum, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28. In response, Russia mobilized troops, and Germany followed four days later, preemptively declaring war on Russia and Russia's ally, France. The chain reaction accelerated when Germany invaded Belgium a few days later, in preparation for



**Map 22.1 The Road to World War I.** In the context of Europe's system of military alliances, localized conflict over the small territory of Bosnia triggered a clash of empires.

an assault on France, leading Great Britain to declare war on the invaders. In seven short days, Europe's empires had been sucked into war by the very alliance system that was supposed to avert violence.

Throughout Europe, people poured into streets and town squares in joyous celebration. Relieved that the mounting tension between the blocs had broken, and anticipating that the hostilities would be short and relatively bloodless, the vast majority welcomed war. Many also believed that the war would reunite their peoples behind a common purpose after several years of wrenching industrial strikes and political divisions. Young men eagerly enlisted, suffragists called for women to support the war, and socialists, progressives, and conservatives forgot their differences. "This war is war to protect justice and civilization," declared one Russian socialist, echoing the thoughts of millions of Europeans. "It is a *war against war*," he insisted, and it would bring "disarmament and universal peace."

The Germans' battle plan was to take France before the Russians had a chance to attack from the east. The Germans moved quickly and effectively through Belgium in August,

reaching the outskirts of Paris in just four weeks. But after Belgium's initial collapse, a resistance movement sprang to life, sabotaging German supply lines and generally slowing the advance on Paris. The first few detachments of British troops reinforced the French army, which used every available vehicle—from Parisian taxicabs to bicycles—to deliver soldiers to the Western Front. As the Belgian resistance and French and British armies slowed Germany's advance, Russian troops attacked Germany from the east, forcing the Germans to transfer over one hundred thousand troops from the Western to the Eastern Front. Weakened in the west, Germany lost fifty miles or more of French territory by December. In the east, however, Germany and Austria-Hungary hammered the Russians, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, and drove deep into Russia. Meanwhile in the Pacific, Japan joined forces with Britain and forcibly took possession of German Samoa and parts of German-held China.

By early 1915, the war that people thought would be over by Christmas 1914 showed no signs of abating. In fact, the war was showing every sign that it would be the bloodiest military

conflict the world had ever seen. Both the Central Powers (as Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria became known) and the Allied Powers (Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and Italy—which had pragmatically switched sides) had dug in for the winter, constructing a long line of parallel trenches that acted as shelters along the fronts. Generals sent men out of the trenches in continuous waves of attack aimed at pushing the enemy back just a few hundred feet at a time. Both sides mixed the firepower of modern weaponry with old-fashioned arms and strategy to particularly lethal effect. Men armed with old technology such as bayonets, sabers, and single-shot rifles ran directly at the enemy's machine guns and rapid-fire artillery.

About 1.5 million men died in the first three months of this **trench warfare** on the Western Front alone—more than twice the number that had perished in the entire American Civil War. Millions more would die the following year as Europe's empires unleashed tanks and aerial and chemical warfare on the enemy for the first time in history. "Every foot of ground contested," one German soldier reported of the nightmarish scene he encountered every time his regiment advanced on the Western Front, "everywhere bodies—rows of them! All the trees shot to pieces; the whole ground churned up a yard deep by the heaviest shells; dead animals; houses and churches utterly destroyed . . . [a] gigantic burial ground and the reek of corpses." Life in the trenches was hardly easier, particularly as the winter brought driving snow and rain. The shelters filled up with mud, disease was rife, and men often suffered a mental breakdown over the carnage they had witnessed. Some literally shot themselves in the foot so as to be sent to the hospital and avoid being ordered back into battle.

As staggering as they were, battlefield mortality rates were not as high as they might have been. Against orders, many battalions on both sides observed an unspoken rule that battle was to be avoided if possible. "Don't fire at us," as one experienced soldier explained the arrangement to a newly enlisted man, "and we'll not fire at you." Soldiers on both sides tacitly agreed to hold fire while the enemy was eating meals, and

occasionally combatants would even play soccer together, between trenches. The two sides frequently buried their dead in one common grave.

## THE VIEW FROM AMERICA

Americans were mostly united in their shock and disgust at the turn of events in Europe. They were also relieved that a large body of water lay between themselves and the battlefields. "I thank Heaven for many things," wrote the U.S. ambassador to Britain, "first, the Atlantic Ocean." Addressing Americans on August 4, 1914, President Wilson called on the nation to remain neutral and "impartial in thought as well as action."

Drawn as they were from multiple ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds, Americans were divided in their sympathies for the antagonists. Most native-born Protestants were overwhelmingly sympathetic to Britain and its allies France and Russia. Many Americans, regardless of ethnicity, also considered Britain the "mother" of liberty and democracy and a natural U.S. ally. The tens of thousands of Serbs, Croats, and Slovaks who had settled in midwestern cities such as Milwaukee and Chicago opposed Austria-Hungary, whereas Russian Jews and exiled socialists hoped that the war might finally topple the tsarist regime in Russia that had long persecuted them. Unsurprisingly, German Americans (who numbered about 8.25 million, or 11 percent of the U.S. population) mostly sympathized with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and they mobilized to keep the United States out of a war that it would likely fight on the side of Britain. The nation's 4.5 million Irish Americans were also strongly critical of Ireland's British overlords. Regardless of Americans' sympathies, however, the great majority of people in the United States viewed the war as Europe's problem and supported U.S. neutrality.

**Chemical Weapons.** Exposure to the most commonly used chemical agent during the war—mustard gas—blinded the victim and caused the skin to bubble and blister painfully, often through clothes and usually twenty-four hours after exposure. Inhaled in concentrated form, frequently when soldiers were sleeping, it burned the troops' lungs, leading to long periods of convalescence and high cancer rates. Graphic images were strictly censored, but photographs occasionally filtered through.



## BIRTH OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Progressives watched in dismay as their European networks of reformers, progressive universities, and philanthropic societies abandoned international cooperation in favor of narrow national self-interest. In 1914–1915, American progressives generally agreed that the war was a limited, regional conflict confined to Europe and that neither U.S. interests nor progressive principles of social justice would be well served by getting involved. They also worried that American involvement would derail important reform initiatives at home, such as national child labor reform.

Progressive women were particularly vocal in their opposition, and some even attempted to stop the war. New York's suffragists staged a silent parade for peace in August 1914, drawing a diverse array of conservative, progressive, radical, African American, white, Chinese, immigrant, and native-born women. Women had a special stake in the largely male domain of war, the suffragists argued, due to their essential role as mothers and homemakers. "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" went the first antiwar song to be commercially recorded. "I brought him up to be my pride and joy."

Eager to build a peace movement, suffragist leaders called on respected reformer Jane Addams to help organize a peace convention, which was held in Washington, D.C., in January 1915 and attended by over three thousand women. Elected leader of the newly formed Women's Peace Party, Addams assembled a delegation to attend an international women's conference in The Hague and to demand peace, multilateral disarmament, and the right of all nations to self-determination. Although the initiative did not alter the war's course, it laid the foundation of the first American peace movement, for which Addams would become the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1931.

## THE CASE FOR PREPAREDNESS

Swimming against the American mainstream in 1916, Theodore Roosevelt and many other Republicans continued to be hawkish champions of a U.S. military buildup. They made the case for national **preparedness**—the position that the United States should build its armed forces in preparation for joining the fight on the side of Britain. The view of many Americans that war was a barbaric relic of premodern times was nothing but "flabby pacifism," Roosevelt argued, and the progressive idea that nations should act multilaterally, in cooperation with one another, was dangerously unrealistic. Although once the self-anointed champion of progressivism, Roosevelt had long since lost that title to Woodrow Wilson (in the 1912 election). He now railed against Wilson, gathering around himself a cohort of self-identified conservatives whose defining belief was that all nations pursued—and *should* pursue—their own national interest or else risk decline into feeble unmanliness and domination by another power. In the present case, Roosevelt argued, American self-interest dictated preparation for—and eventual entry into—the war.

Roosevelt's **conservative nationalism** appealed to military leaders, the financial sector (which had bankrolled and profited from the Spanish-American War), and Republicans of the older generation. The majority of Americans, however, preferred neutrality. Consequently, Roosevelt and other conservatives took the case for preparedness directly to consumers, publicizing it through songs, the press, and movies. Filmmakers evoked the specter of marauding German troops (pejoratively called "the Hun") terrorizing the United States and its women and exposed the folly of an unprepared military. One film, *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), depicted the imaginary destruction of New York City and its people by an unnamed navy and an army of fanatical invaders whose spiked helmets suggested German origin. In *The Fall of a Nation* (1916), a character who looks suspiciously like the pacifist secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, persuades Americans that reason and generosity are all that are needed to defeat imperial aggression—only to be proven drastically wrong. Pacifist filmmakers responded with antiwar movies such as *Civilization* (1916), in which a submarine commander intent on torpedoing a civilian ocean liner meets Jesus and devotes his life to peacemaking instead. Ironically, this and other antiwar films identified the war and its brutality with "the Hun," thereby inadvertently reinforcing anti-German sentiment.

Roosevelt's conservative nationalism soon attracted more adherents, largely among the growing and diverse communities of men and women who saw themselves as defenders of what they believed were "true" American values. Conservative women's organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (a patriotic hereditary society) abandoned their previous opposition to the war and now argued that preparedness was the best way to protect American homes. The Daughters of the American Revolution joined other conservative patriotic societies such as the American Defense Society to call upon the United States to begin arming. Most mass circulation newspapers entered on the side of conservatives, carrying lurid stories of German atrocities and remaining conspicuously silent on the carnage inflicted by Britain and its allies. One important exception was the William Randolph Hearst news corporation, whose owner's vehement disapproval of the British Empire led him to throw his weight behind Wilson and those calling for neutrality.

## THE ROAD TO WAR

Despite the growing conservative movement and widespread anti-German feeling, most Americans still supported neutrality in 1916 and believed that the war was of little consequence to them. In fact, however, the war significantly affected the U.S. economy, national security, and the country's standing in the world. Wilson began rethinking his policy of neutrality in 1916, and progressives—who retained considerable political power—grew divided on the question. Many dropped their former opposition to the war after they observed the tremendous

expansion of government power that had occurred throughout Europe as a result of war mobilization. Wilson and other progressives also now saw the war as a prime vehicle for a crusade to bring American-style democracy to a troubled world.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF NEUTRALITY

As 1916 dawned, progressives were largely united and in a relatively strong position in national politics. Congress enacted a series of laws that fulfilled key progressive aims, including the Revenue Act (1916), which raised the income tax rate for most people to 2 percent and imposed a 15-percent inheritance tax on the very wealthy (those who earned over \$2 million, or \$40 million today). The Adamson Act (1916) guaranteed railroad workers an eight-hour day—something for which workers in many industries had been striving since the 1870s. The Keating-Owen Act (1916) abolished child labor (at least until 1918, when the Supreme Court declared the law an unconstitutional interference with states' right to regulate their own internal commerce). Wilson also repeatedly affirmed the neutrality that most progressives and a distinct majority of Americans favored.

As the war escalated, however, the United States' strong cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties to Britain undercut Wilson's official policy of neutrality. Within months of the outbreak of hostilities, the war lifted the flagging U.S. economy out of severe industrial recession and drove unemployment down to historic lows. The vast majority of American arms, food, and consumer goods found their way to Britain and France, thanks in large part to the British navy's blockade of the Atlantic. Exports to the Allies quadrupled between 1914 and 1916, while exports to an increasingly hungry German populace dropped from \$354 million a year to barely \$2 million. Headed by Herbert Hoover, a major food relief operation also got under way in late 1914 for Britain's starving ally, Belgium, in the wake of Germany's devastating attack. Wilson approved massive loans (a total of \$2.3 billion, or \$48 billion today) for the Allies, but the Germans received just over a tenth of that amount. From the German perspective, it appeared that the United States had implicitly aligned with the Allies from the start.

Britain's and Germany's naval strategies also affected the United States. Almost immediately after war broke out, Britain's Royal Navy blockaded Germany in an effort to cut off its trade networks and starve it of imported food, war materiel, and consumer goods. Desperate to break the embargo but lacking the firepower of the British dreadnoughts, the German navy launched *unterseeboot* (U-boat, or submarine) attacks on British commercial ships and naval boats. Over two hundred American oceangoing passengers died between 1914 and 1917, the victims of unannounced German U-boat attacks. Among them were 128 Americans who lost their lives when a U-boat opened fire on the British passenger liner *Lusitania* in May 1915, killing 1,198 passengers. Theodore Roosevelt and fellow conservative nationalists immediately called for war, but Wilson and most Americans remained committed to neutrality.

Wilson sharply rebuked the German government and demanded (and received) an apology, but he made no threat of action. At the same time, however, he ignored the advice of Secretary of State Bryan to reassure the Germans privately that he expected a peaceful resolution of the incident. Meanwhile, Wilson began to support preparedness. He announced a navy-

building plan, designed to put the United States on par with the world's largest fleet, Britain's Royal Navy, by 1920, and called for the expansion of the army. When Bryan resigned in protest, Wilson replaced him with State Department attorney Robert Lansing, who believed that U.S. entry into the war on Britain's side was only a matter of time.

After more Americans died or were seriously injured in U-boat attacks, Wilson threatened to break off diplomatic ties with Berlin—a response the Germans mistakenly interpreted as an indirect threat to go to war. Although the Germans estimated that U.S. involvement would pose only a minor setback (because they believed it would take the United States a long time to raise and mobilize forces), they were eager to avoid even minor naval skirmishes. Consequently, the German High Command ordered U-boats to cease surprise attacks on ocean liners and other merchant vessels.

Despite his strides toward preparedness in 1916, Wilson remained unconvinced that the United States should enter the war. He was certain, however, that



**Join the Navy!** Proponents of preparedness urged American men to enlist in the armed forces in the wake of the *Lusitania* tragedy. This poster was sponsored by a chapter of the pro-militarization Navy League and a bank.





**Promising Peace.** Woodrow Wilson successfully ran in the 1916 presidential election on the slogan “He kept us out of war.” Although it referred originally to the Mexican War, many Americans misremembered it as a pledge to keep the United States out of the Great War.

he could not win the election of 1916 on a preparedness platform. Instead, he walked a line between the pacifism of most voters and the increasing popularity of preparedness. “There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight,” Wilson reassured Americans in an effort to appear both strong and resolutely opposed to war. “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.” The election was one of the closest in presidential history, with Wilson defeating Republican Charles Evan Hughes by only twenty-three electoral votes and under six hundred thousand popular votes (see Map 22.2). Women voters, who were especially likely to be pacifist, cast the decisive ballots, with ten out of the twelve states that had granted women voting rights supporting Wilson.

## PROGRESSIVE CRUSADERS

After two years, the conflict abroad had turned deadlier than any war the world had ever seen. As its effects radiated well beyond Europe, to both the United States and the great powers’ colonies, people began referring to it as the Great War (it earned the title “World War I” only after World War II). To the extent that the United States had commercial and other interests in Asia and Africa, the war’s expansion had important consequences for American foreign policy. Conservatives and progressives alike agreed that the United States should have a say in any postwar settlement over the fate of those regions and the empires that had started the war.

A growing faction of progressives began viewing the war as an opportunity to turn the federal government into a powerful engine for national reform. They saw that Germany, Britain, France, and Austria-Hungary had rapidly built good-quality workers’ housing, enacted public health care, coordinated the

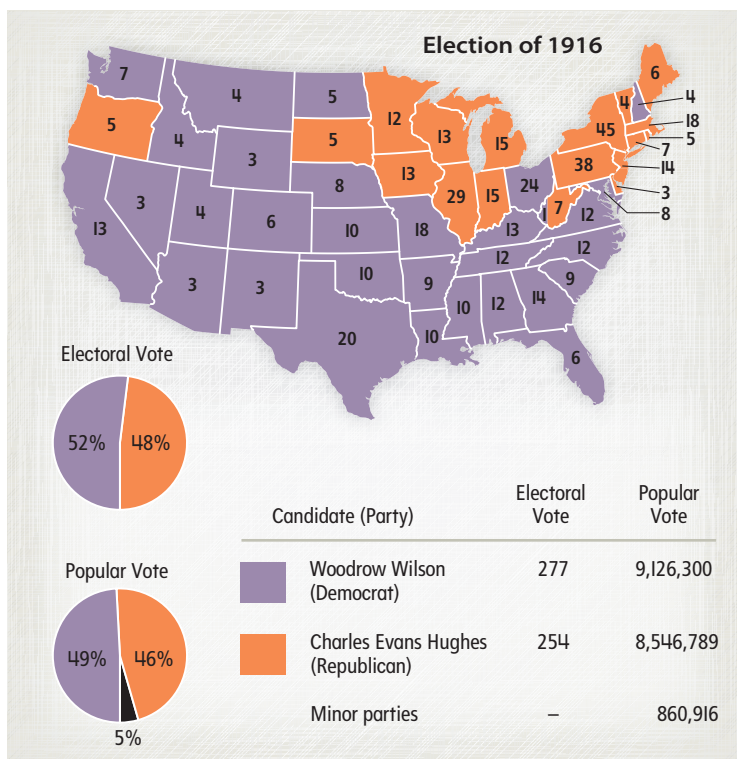
wartime economy, and mediated labor disputes in the effort to strengthen their populations’ capacity for war. U.S. entry into the war, many argued, presented an unprecedented opportunity to advance progressive causes. Above all, war mobilization would put the public’s well-being ahead of the interests of private individuals and classes.

The suggestion that progressives could both improve on European wartime reforms and demonstrate the superiority of the American democratic model was also deeply appealing. The missionary zeal that had suffused progressivism since the 1890s disposed many observers to believe that the United States had a special redemptive role in the war. President Wilson, who referred to himself as a “missionary

diplomat,” was among these **progressive idealists** who envisioned a heroic United States bringing sanity to Europe, ending the slaughter, and redeeming the world. In early 1917, he attempted to mediate between the combatants, to whom he presented a plan for a new, postwar system of international relations based on cooperation. Calling for a “peace without victory,” Wilson proposed that all nations were equal and should respect the others’ right to exist. The missionary diplomat met only with derision and silence, however. “Peace without victory,” writer Anatole France sneered, “is bread without yeast, love without quarrels, a camel without hump.” Neither side would budge, and in February the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare against American as well as British vessels.

The failure of U.S. mediation fractured the progressive consensus at home, convincing Wilson and his fellow idealists that neutrality had failed. Wilson now agreed with conservative nationalists and a growing number of progressives that the Germans were a threat to American trade with Europe and possibly posed a danger in the Western Hemisphere as well. Wilson’s turn away from neutrality led the prominent pacifist Emma Goldman to quip that she saw no difference between Roosevelt, “the born bully who carries a club,” and Wilson, “the history professor who uses the smooth polished mask.”

The United States withdrew its diplomats from Germany in early February 1917 in protest of the U-boat warfare, and goods bound for the Allies piled up on American wharves as crossing the Atlantic became too risky. Two weeks later, the British showed U.S. officials a telegram they had intercepted from German foreign minister Arthur Zimmerman and decoded. The Zimmerman Telegram proposed that Mexico and Germany join forces if the United States entered the war, and, in return Germany would help restore to Mexico all territory lost in the Mexican-American War of 1848 (including Texas,



**Map 22.2 Election of 1916.**

Arizona, New Mexico, and California). Mexico never responded, but Wilson was enraged by the leaked communiqué. He asked Congress for permission to arm U.S. merchant ships so that they could defend themselves, and released the telegram to the press in an effort to firm up popular support for the measure. Although antiwar senators Robert La Follette and George Norris filibustered the request, Wilson ordered the ships armed.

Wilson's release of the telegram inflamed popular opinion in favor of war against Germany. Subsequent events sealed the nation's fate. The Germans sank over ten U.S. ships in the following weeks, destroying three in one seventy-two-hour period alone. On April 2, Wilson addressed Congress and requested a declaration of war against Germany. Congress complied, although fifty representatives, including Jeanette Rankin—the first woman ever elected to Congress—voted against going to war. “I felt the first time the first woman had a chance to say no to war,” Rankin later recalled, “she should say it.”

In his speech, Wilson framed the country's entry as an imperative crusade—a “sacred democratic mission”—to halt imperialism and militarism and bring freedom and security to the world. The American people, he exclaimed, must wage a fight for “a universal dominion of right, by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and at last make the world itself free.” Wilson probably genuinely believed that it was the United States' holy mission “not to serve ourselves,”

as he once put it, “but to serve mankind” and make the world “safe for democracy.” At the same time, he was keenly aware that despite the Zimmerman outrage and the attacks on commercial ships, many millions of Americans still did not support war. Persuading them of the righteousness of that decision would become one of the defining characteristics of Wilson's administration—and of the entire war effort.

## WARTIME GOVERNMENT

By the summer of 1917, American soldiers were sorely needed in France, where the war had bogged down in the mud-filled trenches and desolate battlefields. The war had become an endurance race in which the victor was certain to be the nation (or bloc) that could sustain production of the vast quantities of food and materiel that were needed on the battlefronts and in Europe's towns and cities. The U.S. role would be both military and economic, therefore, and would require the government to mobilize the nation's resources fully. President Wilson convened a series of powerful committees, answerable directly to his cabinet. Thousands of progressive experts went to work for new and existing federal agencies, raising and training an army, coordinating industry and agriculture, cranking out war propaganda, and mobilizing women as factory workers and household budgeters.

## THE COLLECTIVIST STATE

The U.S. government adapted Britain's policy of **war collectivism** by which the government had taken direct control of the economy for the purpose of optimizing the war effort. Because the British government's policies of rationing and speeding up production had undermined popular support for the war and pitted employers against workers, the Wilson administration avoided outright rationing and invited union leaders and captains of industry to work together to help direct the economy. Government boards, made up of labor leaders, industrialists, and various experts, coordinated every aspect of the economy, from fuel consumption, industrial output, food production, and railroads to garbage disposal, household management, and oversight of prisons (whose inmates voluntarily donated millions of gallons of blood for Allied soldiers injured in battle). Even time was regulated, with the adoption in 1918 of daylight saving, which extended the hours of natural light and conserved the energy that would have otherwise been used to light the workplace. Standard time zones also became federal law, although most states had adopted the system in the 1870s.

Progressive experts and advocates entered government service in droves to head new agencies and serve as foot soldiers in the emerging bureaucracies. The War Industries Board (WIB, established in July 1917) played the central role in coordinating the war economy and fulfilling the needs of the Allies and U.S. military. Directed by progressive Democrat and financier Bernard Baruch, the WIB established War Service Committees



**Reorganizing the Food System.** The Food Administration implored housewives to “sow the seeds of victory” by planting their own vegetable patches and conserving the nation’s food supply. Millions complied, with the unexpected result that American consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables rose during the war years.

beginning in 1918 to make supply agreements with each of five hundred industries, from munitions to face cream. The Price Fixing Committee persuaded companies to sell their wares at an agreed-on price so that there would be no price wars or gouging (overcharging). The government paid the companies on a favorable cost-plus basis, which meant that contractors pocketed a significant profit. Although the WIB had no formal authority to punish uncooperative companies, its directors extracted cooperation by threatening to expose noncompliant industries as unpatriotic and withholding lucrative government contracts.

For the first time in American history, the government helped set wages for industrial workers. The National War Labor Board (NWLB, 1918) got workers and business leaders to negotiate mutually agreeable conditions and wages. The board mediated over 1,200 disputes and encouraged equal wages for women; it also made strikes illegal in return for allowing workers to unionize. Minimum wages and working conditions for labor in every important war industry were set, and the eight-hour day became standard, as did overtime pay (at a rate of time-and-a-half). Thanks to the board’s insistence that business work with organized labor, the unions added 1.5 million members in just two years.

Herbert Hoover returned from his highly successful campaign (to feed Belgium) to lead Wilson’s Food Administration (FA). Hoover proceeded to set the prices of household foods such as wheat, sugar, and coffee and to procure basic foodstuffs for the Allies and U.S. armed forces. In establishing high prices for wheat and other commodities, the FA encouraged an increase in production that in turn provided much-needed economic relief to farmers and enormous

profits to agribusiness. Federal agents fanned out across the rural hinterland, offering expert help to farmers and distributing fuel, equipment, and fertilizer to regions deemed wartime priorities. Scout troops, prisoners, and housewives planted vegetable gardens to boost production, and some twenty thousand urban college women joined the federal Women's Land Army as "farmerettes" who performed essential farm work in place of men who had been drafted.

At the other end of the food chain, Hoover stopped short of the unpopular British model of rationing and instead urged housewives to be patriotic and reduce household consumption voluntarily through "Wheatless Mondays" and "Meatless Tuesdays." "Food Will Win the War—Don't Waste It!" one poster declared. Curbing one's appetite would help avert "strikes, riots and disorders which would destroy our economic and financial efficiency," claimed another. Restaurants complied with the call to conserve certain foods, substituting whale (which could still be legally hunted), rabbit, and horse-meat for the beef, chicken, and pork that were needed in Europe. Over five hundred thousand volunteers went door-to-door across the United States to ask adults and children to sign pledges that they would not waste food or let mothers and wives cook uneconomically.

## FINANCING THE WAR

Wars have always been expensive, and World War I was no exception. The War Finance Corporation (WFC) drew vast sums of money from the new Federal Reserve System for loans to essential industries. The United States also loaned \$11 billion to the Allies, but because they spent most of that money on American goods, the loan amounted to an infusion

of wealth into the U.S. economy. By 1918, the United States was the world's biggest lender—a position it retained until the twenty-first century, when China took the lead. All told, the government loans to American industries and the Allies, combined with the cost of the extensive military and civil programs, amounted to over \$30 billion (see *How Much Is That?*). This huge sum was partly paid for by the War Revenue Act of 1917, which hiked the tax rate from 15 percent to 67 percent for the small percentage of top earners who made over \$2 million a year and which taxed most Americans at rates of just 4–10 percent of their income.



### How Much Is That?

#### *Paying for the Great War*

In monetary terms, World War I was the most expensive war the United States had yet fought. The country's nineteen-month intervention cost \$30 billion, or, adjusting for inflation, the equivalent of nearly \$500 billion today. By comparison, the Civil War cost \$83 billion in today's dollars. As compared with the war in Iraq (2003–2011), which cost about \$31 billion per month, the Great War cost \$26 billion per month. A notable difference between these wars, however, was that the government mobilized the entire nation for World War I, unlike the war in Iraq, with the result that Americans enjoyed rising wages and almost full employment. In the short run, the Great War was great for the U.S. economy.



**Immigrants and the War.** The government informed immigrants that there was no better way to prove their patriotism than by buying liberty bonds and conserving food. Millions of immigrants bought liberty bonds, but as immigrants' low wages rose during the war, many spent their extra income on previously unaffordable foods. **Questions for Analysis:** Why should immigrants contribute to the war effort, according to this WFC poster? How is the United States depicted? What assumption does the poster's designer make about its target audience?

The government also raised capital through the sale of liberty bonds to the public. Citizens could purchase bonds at an interest rate of around 4 percent a year and cash them in thirty years later. When the first round of bonds failed to sell out, the government hired actors, advertisers, artists, and journalists to wage a massive publicity campaign. Millions of posters, buttons, and window stickers exhorted consumers to support the fight against German autocracy. Organizations from across the political spectrum, from the Girl Scouts of America and immigrant welfare leagues to the nativist Ku Klux Klan, devoted themselves to selling the bonds. All told, bond sales raised an astounding \$23 billion for the war effort.

Although the war was costly, it also spurred economic growth. From the outset, European demand for food and materiel stimulated American agriculture and industry, leading unemployment to drop and wages to rise. By the end of 1917, business profits had more than doubled for the year. In 1918, farmers' real income increased 30 percent thanks to the federally led effort to expand the food supply, to set higher prices for grain, dairy, and meat, and to raise exports. Unemployment levels dipped to record lows of about 2 percent.

## SELLING THE WAR

No arena of activity was exempt from governmental control, including the communication networks that had been so vital to the formation of mass consumer culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although propaganda had been an important weapon of government since before 1848 and the Mexican-American War, it became particularly crucial in an age of diverse visual and print media and at the start of a relatively unpopular war. For the first time, the strategic uses to which the federal government could put the press, cinema, mass-reproduced posters, and telephone networks—promoting America's international crusade, energizing the citizenry, and demoralizing the enemy—came to light. At the same time, the war demonstrated the media's oppositional potential.

To prosecute the propaganda war, President Wilson recruited former muckraker and police reformer George Creel to head the powerful new Committee on Public Information (CPI). A small army of CPI advertisers, commercial artists, filmmakers, playwrights, and speechwriters saturated public space and mass entertainment outlets with official propaganda. Thousands of posters implored men to sign up and women to ration. Creel recruited fellow muckrakers Ida Tarbell and Ray Baker to craft hundreds of press releases vilifying the Germans as Prussian autocrats and championing the U.S. effort to liberate the world. Some seventy-five thousand "Four-Minute Men" delivered patriotic speeches to cinema audiences during the four-minute breaks between movie reels. The CPI also commissioned the first official daily government newspaper and the first government-made films. *America's Answer to the Hun* (1918), which was distributed to over six thousand cinemas, carefully documented the troops' journey to France; the distribution of food,

locomotives, and other supplies; and the U.S. infantry's triumphant charge into combat at Cantigny. Filmmakers not in the employ of the CPI soon began making anti-German movies starring well-known actresses, including "America's Sweetheart," Mary Pickford (see *Singular Lives: Mary Pickford: Actor, Producer, Entrepreneur*).

Tapping into the growing use of sex and gender in mass advertising, CPI artists crafted commercial images of women that were designed to "sell" the war effort. Under the artistic direction of Charles Dana Gibson, whose pen-and-ink drawings of the robust, liberated "Gibson Girl" had redefined American ideals of feminine beauty in the 1890s, the CPI distributed images of women as both sexually desirable and assertive. Millions of recruitment posters and magazine advertisements featured shapely and attractive women who looked the viewer directly in the eye and challenged him to "join up!" Other, less racy depictions of women as pure and devoted housewives and mothers projected an image of the home as an equally important front in the war for global progress. Still other posters and pamphlets luridly portrayed the Germans as bloodthirsty monsters intent on raping "civilization" and crushing "liberty"—which were usually portrayed as women or the Statue of Liberty.

Much of this propaganda demonized the enemy, even though the vast majority of German soldiers were no more and no less morally debased than Allied soldiers. Nonetheless, CPI publicists theorized that by portraying Germany as an anti-democratic "autocracy" and idealizing the U.S. war effort as a righteous war for democracy, Americans would be far more motivated to win. Their propaganda reinforced this idea by portraying German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II as a tyrannical autocrat who would stop at nothing to halt the spread of democracy. All things German fell under suspicion, including German language terms, which the CPI ordered removed from the vocabulary. Consumers, for example, were called upon to eat "liberty cabbage" rather than the German-named sauerkraut. Energetic allies advanced the CPI's propaganda campaign. Evangelical Christian ministers exhorted their congregations to support the American mission to save the world and claimed the war effort had the approval of God. "It is Bill (Kaiser William of Germany) against Woodrow," the Reverend Billy Sunday thundered, "Germany against America, Hell against Heaven."

## THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

The flip side of the federal propaganda machine was increased surveillance and censorship of people and ideas that the government deemed unpatriotic. Postal workers opened mail addressed to or from people with German-sounding names, and public schools stopped teaching German. Local and state government cleared German authors off library shelves and banned performances of Beethoven, Wagner, and other leading German composers. Nativists such as Madison Grant, whose best-seller *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) argued that only northern



## SINGULAR LIVES

Mary Pickford: Actor, Producer, Entrepreneur

The first and biggest female silent movie “star,” Mary Pickford defined new standards of American femininity during the Great War and was one of several celebrities whom the federal government recruited to promote the war effort. Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1892 as Gladys Louise Smith, she moved from the New York stage to the new medium of silent narrative film when director D. W. Griffith auditioned her at his Biograph Company in Brooklyn in 1909. Pickford played hundreds of Biograph roles before the company relocated to Los Angeles, where studio space was cheap and natural light plentiful. In the time before actors were identified in movie credit roles, few film actors gained recognition. However, when audiences soon began recognizing and demanding Pickford, the company launched its first publicity campaign around “the Girl with the Golden Curls.”

As war broke out in Europe, Pickford starred in the box office smash *Hearts Adrift* (1914), in which she and a stranger fall in love while marooned on a desert island, and she was one of the first actors to have her name boldly displayed on publicity posters. Whether playing a woman or a girl, Pickford turned on the same youthful charm, finding a giant fan base as the pure and wholesome “America’s Sweetheart.” With the European film industry severely disrupted by the war, American movies and actors such as Pickford became market leaders. By 1916, Pickford was earning significantly more (at \$500/week) than almost all other actors and had become the nation’s most famous and critically acclaimed screen actor.

Once the United States entered the war, Pickford further cultivated her all-American persona when she joined actors Charles Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks on the payroll of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to promote sales of liberty bonds. Drawing audiences of over fifty thousand people, she helped sell millions of dollars’ worth of bonds, wrapping herself in the American flag and even auctioning off one of her famous curls. She also starred in Cecil B. De Mille’s *The Little American* (1917), the poignant story of an American woman (Pickford) who bravely crosses the Atlantic in



**“America’s Sweetheart.”** Mary Pickford is surrounded by menacing German soldiers in *The Little American*. After the war, Pickford became the most powerful woman in Hollywood, co-founding the major film studio United Artists as well as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

search of her German American beloved, who has been inexplicably drafted into the German army. Enduring both a U-boat attack and capture by Germans intent on raping her, Pickford escapes and helps French soldiers kill all the Germans with the exception of her beloved—whom she escorts back to the United States, where he will be humanely treated as a prisoner-of-war. *The Little American* was unusual in showing a feisty young woman outwitting the German war machine.

### Think About It

1. What did Mary Pickford contribute to the CPI’s war effort?
2. How might Pickford have benefited from her work for the CPI?
3. In what ways did Pickford conform to conventional gender roles of the Progressive Era, and in what ways did she challenge them?



## INTERPRETING THE SOURCES

### Satirizing the War Effort

The Wobblies (members of the IWW) were highly critical of the war and the American role in it. The lyrics of “Christians at War” were written by U.S. Army captain and IWW sympathizer John Kendrick in 1917 and later published in the *Little Red Song Book* (1917). Set to the well-known tune of “Onward, Christian Soldiers”—a rousing Civil War-era hymn usually played to stir soldiers’ martial spirit—it criticizes the alleged hypocrisy of a war waged by Christians against other Christians. The parody enraged the proponents of preparedness, who later used it to whip up popular support for new sedition laws. Prosecutors also presented the lyrics as evidence of the Wobblies’ alleged atheism and disloyalty and as grounds for their deportation.

#### “Onward, Christian Soldiers”

##### Lyrics by Sabine Baring Gould, 1865

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as  
to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.  
Christ, the royal Master, leads against  
the foe;  
Forward into battle see his banners go!  
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as  
to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.  
...  
Like a mighty army moves the church of God;  
brothers, we are treading where the  
saints have trod.  
We are not divided, all one body we,  
one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.*

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as  
to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

#### “Christians at War”

##### Lyrics by John F. Kendrick, 1917 (Tune: “Onward, Christian Soldiers”)

*Onward, Christian soldiers! Duty’s way  
is plain:  
Slay your Christian neighbors, or by them  
be slain.  
Pulpiteers are spouting effervescent swill,  
God above is calling you to rob and rape  
and kill,  
All your acts are sanctified by the lamb  
on high;  
If you love the Holy Ghost, go murder, pray*

*and die.*

...

*Onward, Christian soldiers! Blighting all  
you meet,  
Trampling human freedom under pious  
feet.*

*Praise the Lord whose dollar sign dupes  
his favored race!*

*Make the foreign trash respect your  
bullion brand of grace.*

*Trust in mock salvation, serve as pirates’  
tools;*

*History will say of you: “That pack  
of G-- d--- fools.”*

#### Explore the Source

1. Why might Kendrick have set this lyric to the tune “Onward, Christian Soldiers”?
2. Who or what is Kendrick criticizing?
3. According to the author, what role does money play in the war?
4. From Kendrick’s vantage point, why will future generations have a low opinion of those who fought in the Great War?

European peoples were capable of assimilation as Americans, fed popular suspicion of Italians, Poles, Russians, and Germans (even though Germans were technically northern European). Although the war had slowed European immigration to a trickle, Congress passed the Literacy Act of 1917, which effectively barred entry to poorer immigrants by requiring them to pass a literacy test in their native language.

While local government and civic associations put much of the German population under surveillance, the federal government specifically targeted war critics and radical labor organizations that argued that the conflict was nothing but a “rich man’s war” over ill-begotten resources such as Europe’s income-generating colonies. Such critics presented a triple threat in the government’s eyes. For one thing, their radicalism might deter corporate leaders from joining with workers and more moderate unions to build a progressive nation. For another, these war critics might also radicalize moderate workers and undermine their willingness to cooperate with the government and corporations. Worst of all from the administration’s perspective, these dissidents could use the mass media to erode Americans’ support for the war effort.

At Wilson’s prompting, Congress enacted a suite of surveillance laws. The Espionage Act (1917) prohibited spying, interfering with the draft, and “false statements” that might impede military success. The Alien Act (1918) authorized the commissioner of immigration to deport immigrants suspected of hostile actions and beliefs, and the Sedition Act (1918) criminalized making, speaking, or printing statements that intended to cast “contempt, scorn, or disrepute” on the American “form of government” or to advocate interference with the war effort. All three laws gave the government broad latitude for the suppression of anything that could be construed as criticism of the government or its policies. The postmaster general was granted wide-ranging powers to ban from the U.S. Postal Service any material he determined to be treasonous. Anyone convicted of antiwar activities could be imprisoned for up to twenty years. The laws reverberated far beyond radical circles, prompting publishing houses and movie studios voluntarily to withdraw material that authorities might construe as unpatriotic.

The government’s principal targets, however, were the speeches, publications, and organizational activities of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Socialist Party, and

United Mine Workers (see Interpreting the Sources: Satirizing the War Effort). At first, in 1917, the U.S. Postal Service suppressed issues of radical newspapers such as the IWW's *The Masses* and the socialist *Appeal to Reason* and deprived other newsletters of the cheap second-class postage that made their circulation possible. Soon, the postmaster general ruled that no publication could question the government's motives for entering the war or say that the government was a "tool of Wall Street."

The Justice Department quickly widened the campaign by issuing tin-star badges to vigilante groups, such as the 250,000-strong American Protective League, and instructing members to report on the activities of their neighbors. Federal attorneys prosecuted over 2,200 socialists and radicals, including Rose Pastor Stokes, who received a ten-year prison sentence for writing a letter to a Kansas City newspaper stating, "No government that is for the profiteers can also be for the people, and I am for the people and the government is for the profiteers." The following year, socialist leader Eugene Debs was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for uttering the words "The master classes declare war while the subject classes fight them." Stokes and Debs were joined in prison by all 113 IWW leaders, whose imprisonment effectively crushed that organization.

The federal campaign against free speech was the most extensive the United States had ever seen. Few progressives spoke out, in part because they supported Wilson's overall program for the collectivist state and in part because the civil liberties of individuals and minorities had never been their major priority. In New York, however, a young progressive and conscientious objector named Roger Baldwin gathered together an emergency committee of attorneys to provide legal defense for dissenters. Free speech was an inalienable right of all Americans, Baldwin argued, and the American Civil Liberties Union, as the group came to be known, would "get a lot of good flags, talk a good deal about the Constitution and what our forefathers wanted to make of this country, and . . . show that we are the folks that really stand for the spirit of our institutions."

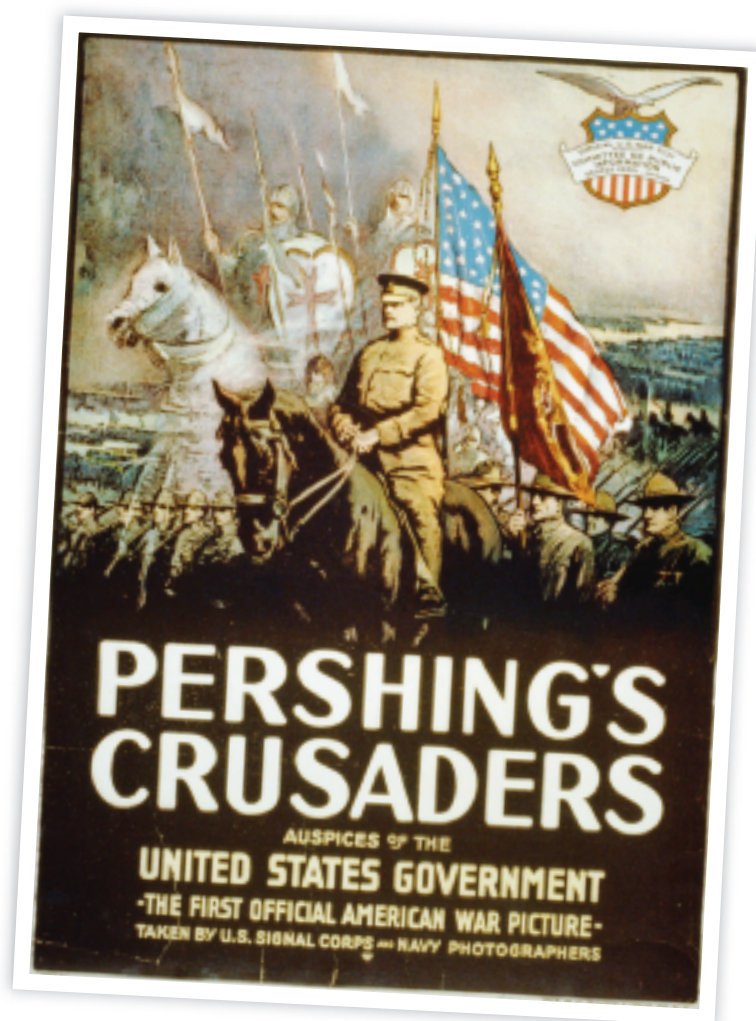
## AMERICANS AT WAR

By the beginning of 1918, the CPI's propaganda machine, the government's war collectivism, and the campaign to silence critics had helped turn an unpopular war into a wildly popular one. The peace movement had all but withered away, and even outspoken pacifists such as Jane Addams lost heart and ceased to oppose the war actively. Contrary to Germany's predictions, American forces organized quickly and efficiently, deploying to France in a matter of months. Mobilization transformed the identity and aspirations of the four million men who served, in both positive and negative ways. Although U.S. soldiers saw relatively little action at first, their mere presence in France—and their eventual entry into combat—turned a

stalewarted war into an Allied victory. Back home, meanwhile, the collectivized state and mass mobilization altered almost every aspect of American life and opened up new opportunities for women and minorities.

## FIT TO FIGHT

When it came to building the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), the United States benefited from observing the British, whose mistakes had hampered the rapid deployment and effectiveness of their forces. Instead of relying solely on a voluntary army (as the British originally had), the United States, on June 6, 1917, began conscripting all fit and healthy men aged eighteen to thirty under the Selective Service Act (1917). An amendment in 1918 would raise the eligible age to forty-five. Some 2.8 million men were eventually drafted, and another



**Pershing Arrives in Paris.** When the AEF arrived in France, the commanding general, John Pershing, rode to the tomb of the Marquis de Lafayette, who had commanded the French forces that fought on the American side during the War of Independence. "Lafayette," Pershing's French-speaking aide declared, "nous sommes ici [we are here]!"



2 million volunteered. To the dismay of the Germans, who had gambled that the United States would need months to deploy, the first of the two million soldiers who ultimately saw combat in France, sailed from New York on June 14, 1917, along with several thousand nurses. The troops departed to the rousing hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers,” while impassioned orators exhorted them to “win the world” for freedom. Arriving in Paris on July 4, the AEF was greeted as heroes who would help the French vanquish the conquering Germans and end the war.

Most recruits had received their training at a camp in their home state before deploying to Europe. Training conscripts to shoot straight and follow orders was only a small part of the trainees’ crash course in soldiering. Thousands of experts in hygiene, human relations, morale, and welfare worked with the army to help build the world’s strongest—and most virtuous—fighting force. The War Department’s Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) banned alcohol in the training camps, much to the approval of temperance advocates, in the name of making recruits both morally and physically fit to fight. The sexual practices of the soldiers (many of whom were single men) also occupied the thoughts of the CTCA and its various experts. Some worried about the potential for sexually transmitted infections—and about 10 percent of the recruits did contract an infection (probably from local prostitutes). The vast majority of CTCA authorities, however, were concerned chiefly with the men’s morals and the distinct possibility that the United States’ “crusaders for democracy” would be corrupted by the time they reached Europe.

Progressive voluntary organizations also worked with the army and navy to boost morale and promote personal morality, chiefly by structuring the soldiers’ leisure time and making camp life in both France and the United States as close to wholesome home life as possible. The YMCA organized Bible classes, and the Jewish Welfare Board sent song leaders. Major league baseball teams played exhibition games, and popular actors and musicians performed at the camps. “Onward Christian Soldiers” rang through the training centers, as did a modified version of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” proclaiming the United States’ “sacred mission” to “fight for world-wide freedom.” The army also did its own outreach to U.S. citizens, producing lavish military reviews such as Private Irving Berlin’s popular “Yip! Yip! Yaphank!” which promoted and poked fun at military life.

Consistent with previous practice, the AEF’s four hundred thousand African American servicemen were barred from certain amenities at the training camps and directed to back rows of assembly halls by



the same “Whites Only” signs that were by now planted everywhere in the South. Likewise, other minorities, including the 18,000 Puerto Ricans who served in the armed forces and the 5,700 Filipinos who served in the navy, were subjected to segregation and mostly confined to menial labor. Tensions mounted, particularly in the South, as thousands of black and white conscripts mustered in training camps in the summer of 1917. Tensions erupted, most lethally in Houston, Texas, where African American troops from the North refused to obey Jim Crow rules. Whites tormented black soldiers to the point that they rioted and opened fire, and seventeen white men and two African Americans perished in the fray. In response, the army hanged nineteen black soldiers and President Wilson temporarily suspended black recruitment.

Unlike the army, viruses did not discriminate, as the troops discovered the following year when the deadly “Spanish flu” tore through the training camps, felling thousands of soldiers. Over a thousand men died at Camp Sherman, Ohio, for instance, in three weeks. Infected soldiers then carried the virus to Europe, where it was transmitted and carried around the world by troop transports and hospital ships to fatal effect. By 1919, more than twenty-one million people around the world had died, and another thirty to eighty million would perish by 1921. All told, sixty-two thousand American soldiers died from influenza and other diseases—eleven thousand more than were killed in battle.

## HELLFIGHTERS AND DOUGHBOYS

Although the American troops began deploying to France in June 1917, it was not until the summer of 1918—four years into the war—that U.S. units entered combat. AEF commander John Pershing was adamant that the United States would remain an independent “associated” power with full control over its own troops (with the notable exception of the 369th African American regiment; see below). For reasons of national pride and because the Allied generals’ strategy had resulted in millions of deaths, Pershing did not entrust American troops to French and British command during the German advance of early 1918. Until then, Americans mostly played a support role, even as the Germans advanced to within sixty miles of Paris.

**Military Life.** Millions of enlisted men awoke to the early-morning blast of a camp bugle, one of several aspects of camp life that became a familiar symbol of wartime thanks to composer Irving Berlin, an army private at Camp Upton, New York. In the song “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning,” Berlin jested, “Someday I’m going to murder the bugler—Someday they’re going to find him dead.”



**Americans in Paris.** American “doughboys” (soldiers) proceed through the boulevards of Paris in November 1918. Although the origins of the term *doughboy* are still debated, U.S. soldiers were known to spend their “dough” liberally on French businesses and in so doing became a hit among many locals.

While they waited to deploy, the soldiers got to experience a culture that in many ways was profoundly different from their own. Paris, in particular, was an exciting and eye-opening adventure. Paid at a much higher rate than their British and French counterparts, and free of the tightly controlled training camps, American soldiers spent liberally on local wines, women, and entertainment. Unlike in America, prostitution was considered a natural if unrespectable part of urban life. Much to the consternation of U.S. officials, the troops flocked to red light districts. Army administrators pleaded with French officials to close the brothels and, when they refused, warned the soldiers that local women suffered from sexually transmitted infections. “A German Bullet Is Cleaner Than a Whore,” advised one Army poster. Ultimately, it was a losing battle, however, and AEF officers began handing out condoms.

For many troops, Paris was the first large city they had ever experienced. Men with rural roots later recalled how the freedoms possible in a large, cosmopolitan city forever changed their lives. The thought of returning to farm life after the war became unthinkable. “How ya going to keep ‘em down on the farm,” one popular song went, “after they’ve seen Paree?” The experience led hundreds of thousands of rural and small-town men to resettle in cities after the war, and this trend further accelerated the depopulation of the American countryside.

For African American soldiers, deployment to France proved an especially revelatory experience. Unlike back home, white people did not automatically segregate and exclude them, and they received tremendous gratitude for their support work. Black army bands found an appreciative audience for jazz and ragtime, which most French people had never heard before and which sparked a tremendous following for what many Europeans considered the United States’ only truly original art form. Feeling deep pride, African American servicemen grew determined to challenge their second-class citizenship at home.

On the U.S. military bases, however, the vast majority of African American soldiers continued to suffer discrimination. They found themselves barred from combat and serving strictly in labor units, hauling trash, unloading supplies, or digging trenches. When the NAACP protested, the War Department allowed some black servicemen to fight, but most African Americans still wielded many more brooms and shovels than rifles. One exception to the no-combat rule was the “Harlem Hellfighters” 369th infantry regiment from New York, which had trained as a National Guard unit before the war and was clearly ready for the front lines. After white southern officers warned General John Pershing that whites would not stand for African Americans in combat, the regiment was seconded to the French Army and went on to distinguished service on the Western Front.



**Harlem Hellfighters Cross the Rhine.** This poster reminds viewers that the 369th African American regiment was the first Allied unit to cross the Rhine River into Germany. The artist incorrectly portrayed the Americans in full U.S. uniform. In fact, they fought under French command, in U.S. uniforms but wearing the French “Adrian” helmet. **Questions for Analysis:** What connections did the artist draw between the Civil War and the Great War? Why are those connections significant? Why might the artist have chosen to show the 369th wearing U.S. helmets, even though they entered battle in French headgear?

## EQUAL PARTNERS: WOMEN, MINORITIES, AND UNIONS WAGE WAR

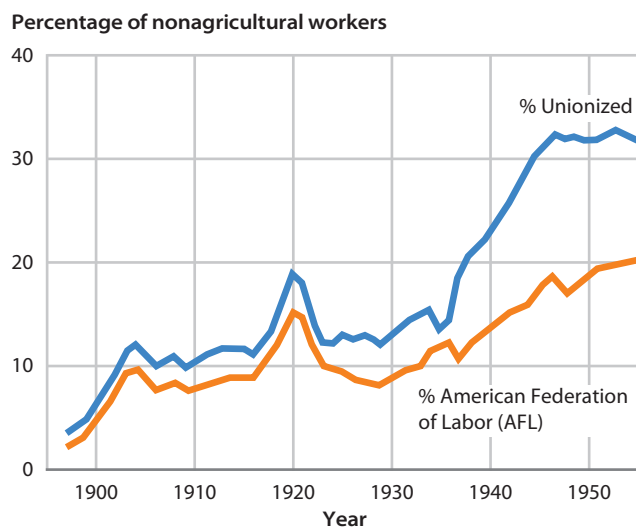
The government’s mass mobilization program, which aimed at recruiting every American into the war effort, enabled labor unions, civilian workers, minorities, and women to contribute directly to the wartime economy. With millions of men conscripted and immigration suspended, employers recruited these groups in the tens of thousands. In the West and Southwest, thousands of Mexican Americans quit their low-paying, hard-toiling farm jobs and joined the industrial workforce. Many of these

workers were American citizens, but many others were refugees from the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917).

Seeking to boost production without provoking labor unrest, employers offered many labor incentives for the first time, including employee disability insurance, child-care services, athletic programs, savings programs, and other attractive benefits. Personnel departments, which only 5 percent of corporations had established before the war, became an indispensable part of most companies. A number of corporations also introduced worker representation plans, under which employees nominated delegates to meet with employers regularly in the name of what many called industrial democracy.

Workers were happy with many of the new benefits. However, they strongly preferred their own labor unions to the worker representation system, which employers often used for surveillance purposes. Thanks largely to the government’s treatment of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) as a wartime partner, unions grew dramatically, taking AFL membership from two million in 1916 to three million in 1919. Almost five million Americans belonged to a labor union in 1919—double the number before the war—and some industries (notably train service workers) were 90 percent unionized (see Figure 22.1). Organized labor enjoyed newfound respectability as government and business attempted to work cooperatively with them. Although employers preferred their own version of industrial democracy, for the first time in American history they had firsthand experience of the advantages of cooperating with the unions.

African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American civilians enthusiastically joined the war effort. Most dramatically, the humming wartime economy gave the **Great Migration** of African Americans out of the South a tremendous boost. Between 1916 and 1919, over five hundred thousand left permanently, mostly following railroad lines northward from North and South Carolina to New York and Philadelphia or from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana to Detroit,



**FIGURE 22.1** Percentage of Unionized Workers in Nonagricultural Work, 1900–1955. A growing proportion of workers joined labor unions in the Progressive Era. Union membership rates peaked during and immediately after World War I, when the federal government actively worked with unions and employers to maximize wartime production, and again during the New Deal and World War II. Membership rates dropped significantly after the crackdown on striking workers and radicals in 1919–1920 and remained relatively flat until the New Deal (see Chapter 24).

Cleveland, and Chicago (see Map 22.3). The black population of Detroit increased sixfold; in Cleveland it tripled. In sheer size, however, the largest migrations were to New York and Chicago, both of which attracted more than sixty thousand black southerners during these years. They came for the wartime North's rising wages and in the hope of finding a freer, better life—and because they sought release from the South's unyielding culture of segregation and lynching. Men secured work in the steel, meatpacking, and automobile industries, whereas women mostly took domestic jobs as maids and cooks. When women could find industrial work, they preferred its shorter hours (about forty-eight, compared to upwards of ninety-four in domestic service) and higher wages, and the autonomy it afforded.

Much as the drain of white men out of the workforce and into the military attracted African American and other minority men, it also drew

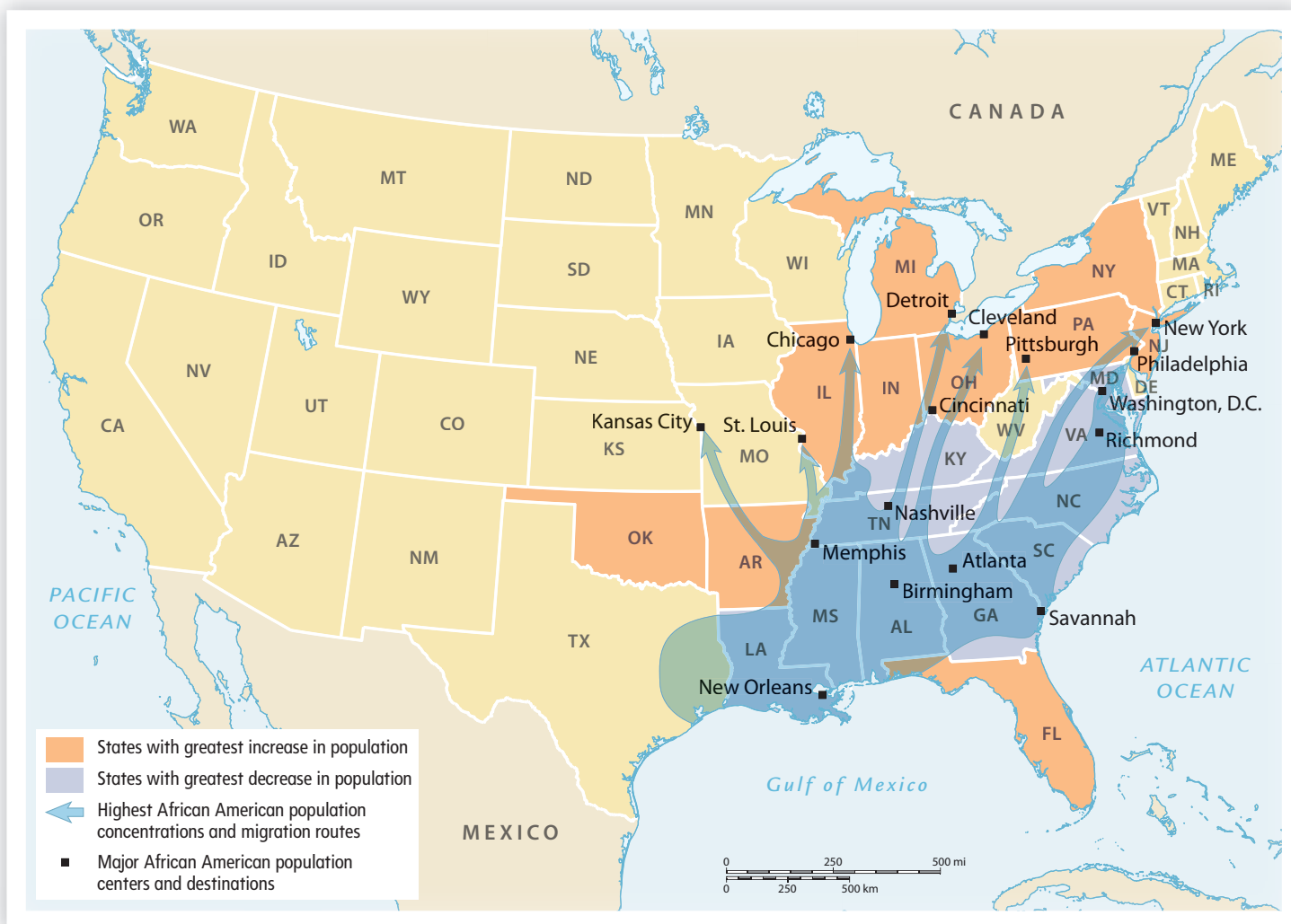
white women. Indeed, white women moved into waged work of all kinds, from clerical jobs to auto assembly. Over one million mostly single women who had never worked outside the home became wage earners, and millions more left low-paying domestic labor to take jobs as streetcar conductors, secretaries, telephone operators, and munitions makers, among others. The shortage of men in the professions also led many professional schools, such as medical programs, to admit women for the first time. In addition, thousands of “women-at-arms” bucked gender conventions by joining militias in their home states, asserting a right to take up arms in the defense of themselves and the nation. “Whether we vote or not,” Lurana Sheldon Ferris of the Maine Women’s Defense Club insisted, “we are going to shoot.” Gun manufacturers supported the clubs, but the image of women serving as soldiers—conventionally, a man’s role—proved far more threatening to most people than the idea that women were joining the war effort in factories and on farms.

Thirty-four thousand women did sign up for service in the armed forces and the navy, mostly as nurses, and they also served in the marines as clerical workers. Women eagerly applied to be “Hello Girls” (telephone receptionists) for the army near the front lines in France (450 got the job, and 10 received congressional citations for bravery under enemy fire). Some twenty thousand Navy “Yeomanettes” and army nurses worked in France, many on “moving hospitals”—trains equipped with medical supplies that could transport up to four hundred injured soldiers back from the front lines. Encountering discriminatory exclusion from official rank, nurses campaigned unsuccessfully for full inclusion in the rights and privileges of the military world.

American women also helped through private organizations such as the YWCA. Mary Borden, a wealthy college-educated



**Women Who Shoot.** Although these Yeomanettes drilled with rifles at the naval training base in San Francisco, they were not permitted to serve in a combat role and were confined largely to nursing and clerical duty.



**Map 22.3 The Great Migration, 1916–1930.** As the Great Migration gathered speed during the war, African Americans went from being an overwhelmingly rural ethnic group to a predominantly urban one.

nurse who established her own hospital near the front lines, was one of many who witnessed the relentless cycle of injury, healing, and reinjury that countless soldiers endured. “Just as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back,” wrote a disheartened Borden, “so we send our men to the trenches and mend them when they come back again. You send your socks . . . again and again just as many times as they will stand it . . . we send our men to the war again and again . . . just until they are dead.”

Back home, temperance organizations, long a magnet for women reformers, got a welcome boost from the army’s decision to ban alcohol in the camps. They now renewed their campaign to enforce temperance in American society at large. Eighteen strongly Protestant states had already prohibited the sale of alcohol (see Chapter 20), but heavily urbanized states with larger immigrant populations that were often more tolerant of alcohol consumption had not. Prohibitionists capitalized on the perception that beer drinking was German,

unpatriotic, and wasteful, and persuaded federal lawmakers to pass the Eighteenth Amendment, which banned the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. The law went into effect in 1920.

The war also led suffragists to renew their campaign for women’s voting rights. Despite their public service, in 1917 women could vote in only twelve states, mostly western, and there was but one woman serving in Congress (Jeannette Rankin of Montana). Even though Woodrow Wilson owed his narrow reelection the year before to women voters in those states, he openly opposed women’s suffrage. In the winter of 1917, as Wilson toured Europe to promote his vision of freedom and peace, suffragist Alice Paul and the newly established National Woman’s Party set up a continuous vigil outside the White House. Bearing placards that called upon the president to recognize women’s contribution to the war effort and to practice at home the democracy that he preached abroad, the protestors won extensive press coverage when



**Demanding Democracy at Home.** As Alice Paul and sister suffragists had hoped, press photographs that showed placards questioning Wilson's commitment to democracy humiliated the president and pressured him to support voting rights for women.

they were arrested and beaten for allegedly blocking traffic outside the executive mansion. Convicted and imprisoned, Paul began a well-documented hunger strike that, along with her subsequent force-feeding, became a source of mounting embarrassment for Wilson.

Women's lack of voting rights at a time when the government demanded women's full participation, coupled with police brutality against the suffragists, starkly contradicted Wilson's claim that the United States was bringing democracy to the world. Although some suffragists remained critical of the war, Carrie Chapman Catt, the leader of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, pragmatically endorsed Wilson's stand on the war while calling on him to recognize women's vital contributions. Finally, in the summer of 1918, the president dropped his opposition and announced that women's suffrage was "vital to winning the war." In the ensuing midterm elections, suffragists lobbied against the few remaining holdouts in the Senate; most of the opposing legislators subsequently lost their seats. When Congress reconvened in May 1919, both houses voted to support the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the vote. By election day 1920, three-quarters of the states had ratified the amendment. Seventy-two years after women had demanded the vote in Seneca Falls, the first women to vote legally in a presidential election cast their ballots.

## AMERICANS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Around the same time that President Wilson changed his mind about women's suffrage, U.S. soldiers finally entered combat in large numbers. In June 1918, several hundred thousand Americans joined the Allies and marched to the battle zone—and into the mud and misery of trench living. Deploying from the trenches in torrential rain, the troops

slept, ate, and fought in damp and rotting uniforms and boots, constantly battling colds, pneumonia, skin infections, and flu. When they climbed to the surface, it was to advance through woods and fields—passing by thousands of broken and dying soldiers—while under fire from artillery shells, clouds of poison gas, and a thick hail of bullets. Mortality rates were staggering. In the campaign to retake Belleau Wood, for example, five thousand of eight thousand U.S. marines fell (see *Hot Commodities: Blood*).

The first major independent American campaign took place outside Paris, where 550,000 U.S. troops helped the French retake Château-Thierry (see Map 22.4). Gaining momentum, Pershing's million-strong force punched through German lines, pushing them over one hundred miles back toward Germany. By the end of August, American forces had successfully repelled the enemy at Rheims, in northeastern France. Pelted by rain, the AEF and Allies launched a third major campaign the following month, the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which finally pushed the Germans out of France and cut them off from their supply lines.

Reeling from the thrust and convinced they could no longer win, German generals unexpectedly called for an armistice in late October. On November 11, 1918, just six months after the first significant deployment of U.S. troops, the war that had ground on for four long years and claimed nineteen million lives lurched to an end. The American death toll stood at 117,465, making World War I the third most lethal conflict in the nation's history after the Civil War and World War II. Almost all the fighting, suffering, and dying had fallen on the peoples of Europe. But American combat troops, coming at a time when the war was stalemated and both sides were nearing economic and physical collapse, gave Britain and its allies the extra push they needed to tip the scales in their favor.



**Map 22.4 The United States in Combat: Major Battles.** The Germans gained significant territory in the spring of 1918, but when the Americans began a counteroffensive in the late summer, Germany was left no choice but to call for an armistice.

## WINNING THE PEACE

When hostilities ceased in late 1918, the struggle to determine the terms of the peace began in earnest. The United States was widely credited for having financed, supported, and enabled the Allies' victory, and President Wilson stepped

confidently forward to offer his vision of a world order without empires or cataclysmic conflict. The United States was not the only country that aspired to global leadership, however. The new government of Bolshevik Russia also had plans for the world.



## HOT COMMODITIES

### Blood

**D**emand for blood leaped during the Great War as new technologies of warfare filled ambulances and hospitals with critically wounded soldiers in desperate need of blood transfusions. Hematology (blood science), however, significantly lagged behind the weapons industry. There was still no tried-and-tested way of preserving blood, a highly perishable substance, and doctors were only dimly aware of the importance of matching the patient's blood type with the donor's. Blood could be transfused only directly, via a short rubber tube connecting donor and recipient arm-to-arm. Difficult and unhygienic, a transfusion could endanger or even kill the patient.

All this changed when Oswald Hope Robertson, a British-born physician and researcher at the Rockefeller Institute, New York, volunteered for the U.S. Army and shipped out to the Western Front. Robertson had recently discovered a way of preserving blood for up to twenty-six days, by mixing it with sodium citrate. The new process made the blood storable until needed. The battlefield provided a perfect laboratory for refining and developing Robertson's indirect transfusion method, which turned blood into a commodity that could be pumped, bottled, transported, and potentially sold (as soldiers

with minor injuries learned when they traded a pint of blood for two weeks' leave). Dozens of Western Front "blood depots," hospitals, makeshift first aid camps, and ambulances used Robertson's transfuser, and the device saved tens of thousands of lives.

Stories of heroic donors sacrificing a pint of their blood for a fellow soldier filled U.S. newspapers and magazines and captured the public's imagination. Several movies lionized donors, but others explored anxieties about the possible effects of the transfusion of men's blood into women, Jews' blood into Christians, and animals' blood into humans. The possibility of transfusions from African Americans to whites drew the most attention, particularly in southern states that had legislated the "one drop (of blood)" rule in the 1910s, decreeing that only persons who had no African-descended ancestors qualified as white. (Despite a mountain of scientific evidence that African American blood was exactly the same substance that flowed in white people's veins, most U.S. hospitals segregated their blood supplies well into the 1960s.)

After the war, hospitals and research institutions lost access to the army's enormous pool of donors. So-called "canned

blood" temporarily fell out of use, and improved methods of arm-to-arm transfusion became the norm as doctors argued that fresh blood was of higher quality. (Direct transfusion also made it possible to know who—and what race—the donor was.) Hospitals and private agencies advertised for civilian donors; some donors were volunteers, but many were paid. In large cities, a highly competitive market emerged, with blood sometimes fetching as much as \$100/pint (\$1,061 in today's dollars). A lucrative source of cash, frequent blood donation proved particularly attractive to poorer people, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The first "blood bank"—modeled on Robertson's original blood depot—opened at Cook County Hospital, Chicago, in 1937.

#### Think About It

1. How did the field of hematology benefit from the Great War?
2. What threat might blood transfusions have posed to southern segregation?
3. Why might health boards have considered the unregulated market in blood to be exploitative?

## COMPETING VISIONS: PROGRESSIVES AND BOLSHEVIKS

In March 1917, a month before the United States entered the war, a revolution had swept across Russia. As a democratic parliament replaced centuries-old tsarist rule, American progressives cheered the change in regime as another sign that the forces of global democracy were destined to overcome autocracy. In November, however, Russian communists known as Bolsheviks led a revolution against their nation's fragile young democracy. Viewing Europe's war as costly and corrupt, the Bolsheviks immediately called for an armistice with Germany and withdrew from the Allied Powers. Abolishing the parliament, they constructed what their leader, Vladimir Illich Lenin, described as a "dictatorship of the proletariat," in which the workers' unions (or soviets) that made up the Communist Party would rule in the alleged best interests of all workers.

Americans learned of the **Bolshevik Revolution** largely through the reporting of progressive journalist John Reed. In his bracing account *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), Reed grasped that the Bolshevik Revolution was a working-class uprising of historic and global magnitude and that it would likely have ramifications far beyond Russia's borders. He also reported on the Bolsheviks' discovery of archival documents showing that the tsar and other imperial allies had secretly agreed to divide up the world among themselves after the war. This revelation was a stark reminder that Europe's empires had no intention of making the world "safe for democracy," as President Wilson had insisted, but that they aspired to smash Germany and the other Central Powers and tighten their hold over the globe.

Like American progressives and conservative nationalists, the Bolsheviks were inspired by a particular world view that they believed was applicable to the world at large. In certain respects, their vision of the world and methods of recruitment were



indistinguishable from those of progressives. Progressives and Bolsheviks opposed European-style imperialism and supported self-determination—the right of all nations to be free. Both tried to skirt official channels and communicate directly with other empires’ subjects and citizens. Both opposed monarchies and supported popular rule (although they disagreed about what “popular rule” was), and both had a crusading spirit, a determination to bring about global change. Key aspects of their respective visions of modernity were in conflict, however—chiefly, their economic visions. Bolsheviks were committed to the socialization (government ownership) of factories, land, and other means of production, whereas progressives opposed socialization and advocated a responsible capitalism in which the state played a mediating role between employers and workers. By the beginning of 1918, Wilson and the Bolshevik leader Lenin were locked in competition for the ideological leadership of the world.

### WILSON'S NEW WORLD ORDER

Wilson presented his ideas before Congress in January 1918. The first five of his Fourteen Points called for an “open” world in which all peoples enjoyed freedom of the seas, equal trade opportunities, arms reduction, and the end of colonialism. The right of Europe’s many minorities to self-determination was the subject of points six through thirteen. (Much to the disappointment of Indian and other subject peoples of the European empires, the right of non-European peoples to self-determination was ignored.) The fourteenth point called for a “general association of nations” that would ensure the independence and security of all the world’s states.

Two months later, the Russian government established the Third Communist International (Comintern), a global movement with an open commitment to struggle “by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State.” Bolshevism seemed to be gathering support in Germany



**Lenin Addresses the World.** Following the Bolshevik Revolution, leader Vladimir Illich Lenin emerged as Wilson’s chief rival on the global stage.

following the armistice, as well as elsewhere in Europe. In Mexico, the government had enacted a radical constitution that declared all mineral wealth the property of the nation. In the United States, a small group of American socialists broke away from Eugene Debs’s American Socialist Party and established the Communist Labor Party. Conservatives and progressives alike worried that the world was on the verge of communist revolution.

Wilson hastily publicized his peace plan as a just alternative both to Allied plans for continued empire and to the Bolshevik call for a workers’ revolution. Disinclined to liberate their colonies or consent to American global leadership, the Allied Powers initially rejected Wilson’s peace plan. However, once U.S. troops forced an armistice with Germany in November 1918 and Wilson threatened to suspend exports of American goods to the Allies, they grudgingly consented to use the Fourteen Points as a basis for peace negotiations. In December, Wilson arrived in Europe and was mobbed by deliriously happy crowds—some carrying banners with the words “Redeemer of Humanity”—at every stop. Appalled by the carnage and desperate to avert another global catastrophe, many ordinary Europeans hailed Wilson as the man who would

ensure that the Great War was “the war that will end war” (in the words of English novelist H. G. Wells). Colonized peoples from Africa and the Middle East to China and Southeast Asia also saluted Wilson, hoping that he would force the Allies to recognize their right of self-determination.

The negotiations began in Paris in January 1919 and extended to April, with the United States, Britain, France, and Italy present. Wilson entered the Paris Peace Conference buoyed by the outpouring of popular support. The Allied leaders, however, accustomed to making decisions with little regard for public opinion, worked tirelessly to preserve the old international system of colonies, secrecy, and spheres of interest. The negotiations occurred in secret, and neither Bolshevik Russia nor Germany was admitted to the table. In the end, the Allies opposed all but two principles in Wilson’s plan. They

looked to the heavily industrialized German economy as a source of reparations for the devastating costs of the war and also insisted that Germany be punished through enormous reparations of over \$33 billion (\$433 billion in today's dollars). Wilson got nowhere with the free seas and free trade points of his plan for a new world order.

The principle of self-determination in Europe was largely honored, in part because it suited the Allies to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire and parts of what had been the tsar's empire. Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Finland, Poland, and five Balkan states were given independence. Self-determination for Germany's colonies, however, fell by the wayside, with large parts of the Middle East (including Syria, Jordan, and Palestine) becoming mandates—a type of colony—of Britain and France. Chinese students launched an anti-imperialist movement as a result of the Japanese acquisition of a formerly German province, and French Vietnamese were bitterly disappointed by Wilson's lack of response to their call for self-determination.

### THE DREAM OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The other provision that survived the Paris Peace Conference was Wilson's fourteenth point. Wilson drafted the covenant for a **League of Nations**, which provided for a permanent council of the five biggest world powers and the election of representatives for the smaller nations. Consistent with progressive principles, a general assembly of all nations was to meet regularly to discuss issues of global importance, and in Article 10 the members pledged to protect all members from aggression or threat—by force if necessary.

Germany and the Allies all signed the resulting Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. For Germany, the treaty was humiliating. Not only did it deprive the country of over 10 percent of its population and colonial territory, but it also subjected the Germans to massive reparations that would cast the nation into abject depression for fifteen years. Wilson returned to the United States to seek the Senate's approval of the treaty, satisfied that at the very least he had provided the world with a means to maintain peace through the League. But conservative nationalists and Republican senators greeted the president with hostility. They worried that League membership would compromise America's sovereign right to act in its own best interests—and possibly even authorize the use of force against the United States. Some progressive senators, while applauding the League, opposed ratification because the treaty kept the Allies' empires intact.

Wilson was convinced that signing the treaty was both right and righteous, a part of the divine plan for America and the world. "The stage is set," he informed the Senate, "the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God, who led us into this way." Increasingly isolated from his more flexible supporters and enraged by his conservative critics, the uncompromising Wilson intensively lobbied senators for their unqualified support. Suffering a minor stroke, he refused to convalesce as per doctors' orders, instead embarking on a ten-thousand-mile train trip around the United States and delivering over forty impassioned and often



**Ailing President.** Some months following President Wilson's stroke, and just before the 1920 Democratic Party convention, this photo was staged as part of the administration's effort to show that the president remained in command of himself and the country. Wilson, whose right side was unaffected by the stroke, is pictured in right profile with his wife, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, at his paralyzed left side.

delirious speeches in support of the treaty. Collapsing in Colorado, he returned to Washington, where he suffered a devastating stroke that left him partly paralyzed.

With the help of his wife Edith, his personal assistant, and his doctors, the bedridden Wilson continued to serve. He remained adamant that no compromise was acceptable, and issued scathing attacks on all opponents. He ultimately lost the battle, however, when the Senate, in 1920, failed to muster the two-thirds majority needed to ratify the treaty. That vote proved the final, fatal blow to Wilson and his progressive vision of a peaceful, multilateral world.

## THE GREAT UNREST

Like the international transition to peace, the road to peace domestically was far from smooth. The Wilson administration was unprepared for the complex task of demobilization. On the day of the armistice, in November 1918, the various government boards and agencies scrambled to cancel all their contracts for food and supplies and lifted price controls. War industries wound down and wheat silos overflowed. The economic boom of the war



**Writing History with Lightning.** D. W. Griffith's 1915 film brilliantly innovated the techniques of motion picture production. At the same time, its inaccurate and racist retelling of Reconstruction sparked riots and the founding of the second Ku Klux Klan.

years continued for a short time, but in 1919 inflation set in at an annual rate of 15 percent. Wages dropped, the market for consumer goods collapsed, and recession loomed. As African Americans, white workers, and women strove to make their wartime

gains permanent, they met with considerable resistance—and a government that appeared to have lost its way.

### RACIST BACKLASH

White hostility toward African Americans had been hardening since the 1890s and had escalated in 1915 with the release of the racist motion picture *The Clansman*. Based on a novel by writer Thomas Dixon, the film portrayed the original Ku Klux Klan of the Reconstruction era as the heroic saviors of white womanhood and the nation. Lavishly produced, this first cinematic dramatization of American history was a box-office smash and the first movie to be shown at the White House. President Wilson was dazzled, according to Dixon, exclaiming that “it is like writing history with lightning . . . [M]y only regret is that it is all so terribly true.”

Shocked by the film's blatant racism and the president's positive response, Jane Addams and other progressives prevailed upon director D. W. Griffith to cut some of the film's most offensive scenes and retitle it *The Birth of a Nation*. At a time of increased black migration to northern cities, however, even the edited version galvanized many white people into “defending” their exclusively white neighborhoods, jobs, and schools. Whites in Boston and elsewhere rioted at the film's premiere. Within weeks of its debut, Southern Methodist minister William J. Simmons announced the formation of the second Ku Klux Klan (KKK), pledging to advance the causes of white supremacy and patriotism everywhere.

As the nation entered World War I, white mobs hauled African American migrants off trains headed to Chicago, and all-white draft boards disproportionately drafted African Americans (40 percent more often than whites). Lynching rates almost doubled between 1917 and 1919, and at least ten black victims were murdered in army uniform. Bloody race riots broke out in at least six cities during 1917, including East St. Louis, where black neighborhoods were burned to the ground and thirty-nine African Americans and nine whites were killed. In an NAACP-

sponsored “silent parade” down Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue in July 1917, some marchers carried placards that asked, “Mr. President, why not make America safe for democracy?” Wilson was silent.

It was to this hostile environment that African American and other minority soldiers returned after the war. Minorities returned with great hopes for a more inclusive and equal society. For instance, Chinese American veterans, who had been barred from citizenship under the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), were hopeful that, having served their country in wartime, they might at last become citizens. But these aspirations were thwarted. (Not until 1935, when Congress passed the Nye-Lae Bill, was citizenship granted to all noncitizen veterans of World War I.)

African American and Mexican American veterans were already citizens. But segregation and other forms of discrimination had deprived them of the full benefits of citizenship since the nineteenth century. Having received a generally warm welcome in France and having risked their lives for their country, black veterans were determined to reassert their rights at home. The uniform was a powerful symbol of their service and, once back home, many African American veterans would “polish everything up fine, and *strut* in the uniform of the United States Army,” as Mamie Garvin Fields, an African American living in South Carolina, recalled. At first, white people stood back. But within weeks, bands of resentful whites started assaulting the young veterans, throwing them off trains, and beating or intimidating

them. These encounters always involved desecrating the veteran’s uniform, pulling off its buttons, and tearing it to shreds—a stark reminder to African Americans that they were not full citizens. Violence against African American civilians also escalated as discharged soldiers attempted to reenter the workforce. Competition for jobs stirred further white working-class animosity toward increasingly confident African American men.

U.S. cities were seething by the summer of 1919, when no less than twenty-five urban race riots broke out. In many urban locales, black Americans fought back against the white mobs. Chicago’s deadly race riot, in July 1919, exemplified what was becoming a familiar story of American race relations. When an African American boy swimming in Lake Michigan started to drift toward a white beach, white people threw stones at him, causing him to lose consciousness and drown. Enraged black Chicagoans marched into the white neighborhoods in protest. White crowds then stormed into black neighborhoods and began shooting, beating, and stabbing black people and burning their homes and businesses. Over a five-day period, twenty-three African Americans and fifteen white Americans were killed.

That African Americans had actively struck back further enraged many white people and swelled the ranks of the KKK, not only in the South but also in the West and Midwest. Some whites even perceived such defiance as evidence of the presence of bolshevism on American soil, imagining

**African Americans March Against Violence.** Carrying reminders of African Americans’ long-standing sacrifice for their country, ten thousand men, women, and children marched in silent protest of the recent violence in East St. Louis.



African Americans' "uppityness" as part of a global communist revolution, even though African Americans had no connection with Russia and needed no prompting to defend themselves and their homes.

## WORKERS PRESS THEIR CLAIMS

Workers in general also attempted to parlay their wartime advances, such as the recognition of unions and the forty-hour workweek, into permanent progress on the grounds that these represented the "democratization of industry." Employers, however, rushed to roll back workers' gains and to eject the government from its mediating role. Women largely quit industrial work under pressure from both the government and the unions.

Industrial workers battled back against declining wages and the shrinking role of unions. Adopting the Wilsonian rhetoric of the democratic fight against autocracy, workers denounced as "Prussian" and "autocratic" employers' effort to return to the prewar status quo, in which employers typically set wages and work hours without consultation or government oversight. The unions demanded a continuation of the wartime model of cooperation between employers and unions; the 40- to 48-hour week; and union recognition as their reward for having bought liberty bonds, toiled long hours, or shipped out to Europe to risk limb and life for democracy. "For why we buy Liberty Bonds? For the Mills? No, for freedom and America—for everybody," declared one Polish mill worker. "No more work like a horse and wagon. For 8-hour day."

In the biggest labor action since the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the unions organized a series of strikes involving over four million workers. In Boston, even the police department refused to work, plunging the city into chaos and leading Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge to call out the state militia. The most paralyzing strike, that of the steelworkers, was centered in Chicago

but spread across the Northeast and Midwest in September. Some 350,000 steelworkers demanded an eight-hour day and union recognition. Employers responded violently, bringing in private armies to break up the picket lines and deliver strikebreakers to the factories. Eighteen strikers were killed in one of several riots that erupted. Eventually, the steel strike was broken, as the workers failed to shut down the steelworks and middle-class Americans signaled that they were unsympathetic to the cause.

## THE RED SUMMER OF 1919

In April 1919, as industrial strife and racial tension mounted, twelve parcel bombs were sent anonymously through the U.S. mail to prominent political leaders, judges, and industrialists. Some of the bombs exploded, and the U.S. Post Office intercepted others. No one died, although one person was seriously injured. Two months later, eight bombs in eight cities, from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., exploded within a few minutes of one another, including one at the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. The perpetrators of these campaigns were never identified. The labor unions denied having had a role and condemned the attacks. The bombers' anonymity heightened elite and middle-class fears that revolutionary bolshevism was spreading from Russia to the United States.

As more race riots and strikes broke out in the summer of 1919, the press blamed "armed revolutionaries" and a creeping international bolshevism. Although America's Communist Labor Party was very small by European standards, its existence and the possibility of an organized connection between the Bolsheviks and American radicals concerned both conservatives and a growing number of progressives. Suspicion also fell on striking workers. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* exemplified this perspective when its editor stated that the steel strike was "penetrated with the Bolshevik idea . . . steeped in the doctrines of

class struggle and social overthrow." The press and middle America seemed to forget that AFL head Samuel Gompers and many other U.S. union leaders were strongly anti-communist, not to mention antiradical and often anti-immigrant.

As the press whipped up fears of bolshevism, hysteria gripped the country. Known as the **Red Scare**, this alarm over a supposed Bolshevik plot was heightened by a number of civic organizations affiliated with and funded by big business. The National Civic Federation, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the American Defense Society (which was funded by John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan) all decried organized labor as

**Police on Strike.** The Massachusetts militia—helped by Harvard University students and faculty—guarded smashed storefronts in Boston during a two-day police strike in 1919. The strike helped to fuel middle-class fears that the nation was teetering on the edge of revolution.





## STATES OF EMERGENCY

### *The Palmer Raids*

New Year's Day, 1920, promised to be a great day in the promising career of A. Mitchell Palmer. The "Fighting Quaker" had served as Woodrow Wilson's attorney general since early 1919. A former member of Congress from Pennsylvania, known for his passionate progressivism and his defense of the idea that the government's "power of self-preservation has no limits other than the extent of [an] emergency," Palmer had announced another raid on communists and other subversives. These dangerous revolutionaries, he explained, held large caches of explosives and arms and planned to unleash them on the government.

On the appointed day, federal agents swept thirty-three cities in twenty-three states, arresting thousands of revolutionaries and seizing their weapons cache, which turned out to consist of just three handguns. Police found no explosives, no machine guns, and no bolt-action, single-shot rifles of the sort issued to millions of soldiers during the war—none of the weapons one might suppose revolutionaries would make it their

business to possess. Of the four thousand to six thousand people arrested, several hundred radicals had very probably planned or undertaken sabotage or other violent action against government officials and employers. However, many of the targeted individuals simply held radical beliefs or had spoken critically about the government. The majority had not broken any law or declaimed the government but were "guilty" only of being of eastern European or Russian extraction. Authorities deported five hundred of the detainees, many to Russia—a country most had never set foot in or had resided in only as a child. Few received trials, and those who were not deported were eventually released because of the lack of evidence against them.

Palmer, a man with presidential ambitions, was undaunted by the raids' failure to uncover evidence of a revolutionary plot. He and his assistant, J. Edgar Hoover (who would go on to direct the FBI), responded with a huge propaganda campaign against domestic radicalism in general and

bolshevism in particular. On May Day (May 1, International Workers Day), they warned, radicals would attempt a coup against the U.S. government. Tensions mounted as May approached, and the National Guard went on alert. But May Day came and went without incident. Palmer's political career and the legitimacy of his policing campaigns were in shreds. Nonetheless, the raids, undertaken in the name of emergency, had effectively strangled American radicalism and chilled free speech.

### Think About It

1. What did Palmer mean when he said that the government's "power of self-preservation has no limits other than the extent of [an] emergency"?
2. Why might Palmer have continued to insist on the existence of a communist plot to overthrow the government even though earlier raids uncovered no weapon caches?
3. Why were so many innocent immigrants caught up in Palmer's dragnet?

communistic and warned that dangerous revolutionaries were threatening American democracy. Other organizations, most notably the Ku Klux Klan (which was not backed by big business), took matters into their own hands. Vigilantes across the country sacked the offices of various socialist organizations—as well as antisocialist labor unions. Members of the IWW, which was already quite weak following the wartime crackdown, were beaten and lynched.

Suspicion spread to colleges and major research universities. Allegedly radical faculty members were fired, and radical literature was swept off library and bookstore shelves. Thirty-odd states enacted peacetime sedition laws mandating severe prison sentences for anyone convicted of fomenting revolution. By the end of the summer, over three hundred people had been imprisoned under these laws, some for simply voicing criticism of the government.

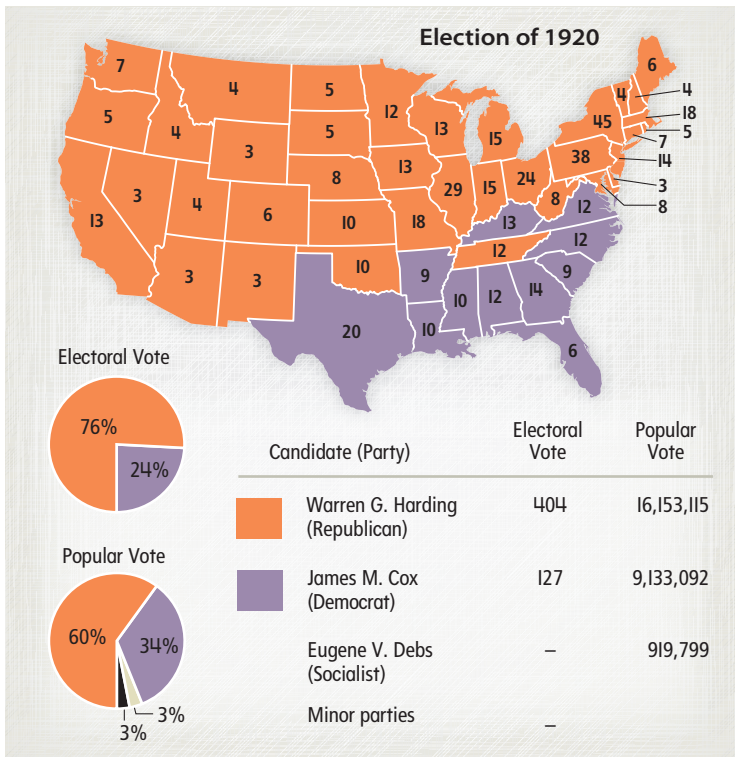
Finally, the federal government swung into action. In November 1919, Attorney General Palmer ordered federal police to conduct the first of several extensive and well-publicized dragnets of any organizations deemed radical. Most socialist, anarchist, and other leftist organizations and presses were squashed; the remainder got a powerful message that to engage in radical criticism of the government or of capitalism was to court state repression. The Palmer raids also sent an implicit warning to the labor movement, leading the AFL to harden its anti-Bolshevik stance and to distance itself further from potential

socialist allies (see States of Emergency: The Palmer Raids). Radical ideas, organizations, and advocates would be largely absent from the public sphere until the 1930s.

## END OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Although Palmer and other Wilson cabinet members had been well-known progressives, progressivism fared badly in the waves of unrest and repression that followed the war. Reformers from Jane Addams to John Dewey found themselves under sustained attack from conservatives and business leaders keen to roll back many of progressives' wartime gains. Although they tended to be fierce critics of bolshevism, progressives were now tarred with the brush of anti-communist fear-mongering, and consequently many withdrew from public life. An ironic verse captured the fate of many progressives: "So when I disagree with you I'll call you Bol-she-vik! veek! veek! It's a scream and it's a shriek. It's a rapid-fire response to any heresy you speak."

Many progressives were enraged by Wilson's dismantling of the wartime state and Palmer's crackdown. "I hated the new state, its brutalities, its ignorance, its unpatriotic patriotism," lamented Frederic Howe, Wilson's disenchanted commissioner of immigration. "I wanted to protest against the destruction of my government, my democracy, my America." Jane Addams



**Map 22.5 Election of 1920.** A majority of American voters registered their disillusionment with Woodrow Wilson's presidency and recent public disorder by delivering the presidential election to Warren Harding and the Republicans. Harding took 37 of 48 states and won 60 percent of the popular vote.

lost her once “unlimited faith in the president,” ruefully noting the disparity between Wilson's fight for freedom abroad and his government's suppression of speech at home.

A recession hit with full force in 1920, knocking 10 percent off the gross national product, bankrupting 100,000 businesses, forcing 453,000 farmers off the land, and throwing almost five million Americans out of a job. The presidential elections of 1920 served as a referendum on the fate of progressivism and the direction of the nation. The Democrats offered a continuation of Wilsonian progressivism, including the unpopular stance on the League of Nations. In place of the ailing Wilson, progressive Ohio governor James Cox won the presidential nomination, with Franklin D. Roosevelt running as his vice president. The Republicans fielded another Ohioan, little-known senator Warren G. Harding, who promised to return the country to “normalcy.” Governor Calvin Coolidge, who had won the support of business and northern conservatives for his handling of the Boston police strike, completed the Republican ticket as Harding's running mate. The Republicans won in a landslide victory (see Map 22.5).

## CONCLUSION

The years 1914 to 1919 proved to be some of the most tumultuous of the twentieth century, and they shaped American politics—and global affairs—for several decades to come. Within a few years, most Americans would look back on the war not as a crusade for democracy but as a bleak and senseless tragedy. Writers such as Mary Borden and John Dos Passos, who had themselves survived the killing fields of Europe, bemoaned the fate of their “lost generation” and condemned the war as a meaningless slaughter. “You died,” a disenchanted character in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* put it bluntly, refusing to distinguish between his commanding officers and the enemy: “They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you.” Above all, the bloodbath in Europe shattered the common progressive belief that civilized peoples no longer used violence to settle their differences.

Equally, by 1920 the progressive vision of collective security and collectivized government were lost causes. The United States never joined the League of Nations, and Woodrow Wilson died in 1924, a broken man. As a final sign of the failure of his diplomacy, Germany, which Wilson had tried to shield from the vindictive instincts of the Allies, failed to issue the usual condolences or lower its embassy flag upon the president's passing. With the election of Warren Harding in 1920, progressivism seemed in full retreat. Yet significant strains of

progressive thought and a handful of progressive-minded politicians persisted into the 1920s. When the Great Depression devastated the nation and scrambled conservative politics in the early 1930s, the progressives' wartime state would prove a rich reservoir of ideas, personnel, and practical solutions.

## STUDY TERMS

balance of power (p. 599)	<i>Lusitania</i> (p. 603)	Alien Act (p. 610)
self-determination (p. 599)	progressive idealists (p. 604)	Sedition Act (p. 610)
Western Front (p. 600)	Zimmerman Telegram (p. 604)	American Civil Liberties Union (p. 611)
Eastern Front (p. 600)	war collectivism (p. 605)	Selective Service Act (p. 611)
Central Powers (p. 601)	War Industries Board (p. 605)	Great Migration (p. 614)
Allied Powers (p. 601)	National War Labor Board (p. 606)	Eighteenth Amendment (p. 616)
trench warfare (p. 601)	Food Administration (p. 606)	National Woman's Party (p. 616)
Women's Peace Party (p. 602)	liberty bonds (p. 608)	Nineteenth Amendment (p. 617)
preparedness (p. 602)	Committee on Public Information (p. 608)	Meuse-Argonne offensive (p. 617)
conservative nationalism (p. 602)	Espionage Act (p. 610)	
Revenue Act (p. 603)		

Bolshevik Revolution (p. 619)	Paris Peace Conference (p. 620)	<i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (p. 622)
Fourteen Points (p. 620)	League of Nations (p. 621)	Ku Klux Klan (p. 622) Red Scare (p. 624)
Third Communist International (p. 620)	Treaty of Versailles (p. 621)	Palmer raids (p. 625)

## TIMELINE

- 1914** Austria-Hungary invades Bosnia  
President Woodrow Wilson calls for neutrality after war breaks out in Europe.  
British naval blockade cuts trade with Germany  
Trench warfare claims 1.5 million lives
- 1915** Panama-Pacific International Exposition opens  
Women's Peace Party demands peace and national self-determination at the Hague  
Second Ku Klux Klan is founded following premiere of *The Clansman/The Birth of a Nation*  
Wilson reaffirms neutrality but undertakes military buildup after German submarine sinks *Lusitania*
- 1916** Wilson is narrowly reelected  
Progressives divide over the question of entering the war
- 1917** Britain intercepts the Zimmerman Telegram  
United States declares war and commences mass conscription under the Selective Services Act  
Bolsheviks seize power in Russia and sign armistice with Germany  
Committee on Public Information, War Industries Board, and Food Administration mobilize the nation for war  
The National Women's Party pickets the White House  
Race riots kill dozens in East St. Louis  
Congress enacts the Espionage Act
- 1918** Wilson presents the Fourteen Points  
Congress passes the Eighteenth Amendment (instituting Prohibition; comes into force, 1920)  
U.S. troops enter combat  
The "Spanish flu" claims the first of 50–100 million lives globally  
U.S. forces overwhelm Germans at Château-Thierry  
Germany calls for armistice
- 1919** Wilson attends Paris Peace Conference while war industries and economy collapse at home  
Great powers sign Treaty of Versailles  
Race riots and labor strikes break out in dozens of American cities



Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer orders raids on suspected subversives

U.S. Senate refuses to ratify Treaty of Versailles

Congress enacts Nineteenth Amendment (women's suffrage)

- 1920** Women vote for the first time in a presidential election  
Republican Warren Harding is elected president

## FURTHER READING

Additional suggested readings are available on the Online Learning Center at [www.mhhe.com/becomingamericante](http://www.mhhe.com/becomingamericante).

Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (2008), traces the role of local authorities—from librarians to postmasters—in the drive to suppress dissent and activate citizens as volunteers in surveillance efforts.

John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (2009), comprehensively treats Wilson's life, political career, progressive vision, and segregationist politics.

Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (2005), explores progressives' messianic mission to bring peace and security to the world and the differences among them.

Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for Modern Order* (revised edition, 1997), analyzes progressives' use and understanding of the war.

Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (2008), recounts how women joined the fight on and off the battlefield with a view to claiming the full rights of citizenship.

Jennifer Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (2001), traces the draftees' experience of war, from conscription through deployment and combat to demobilization and the campaign for veterans' benefits.

Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (2003), recounts the negotiations and backroom horse-trading behind the Treaty of Versailles that ultimately thwarted most of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.

Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (2008), explores Wilson's religious convictions in relation to his crusade for peace and democracy.

Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2008), examines the colonized world's enthusiastic response to Wilson's call for self-determination and subsequent disappointment.

David S. Patterson, *The Search for Negotiated Peace: Women's Activism and Citizen Diplomacy in World War I* (2009), traces the founding of the modern American peace movement and the critical role that suffragists played.

Stephen Ponder, *Managing the Press: Origins of the Media Presidency, 1897–1933*, argues that, like Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson grasped the political importance of shaping public opinion, but that his administration also went one step further, attempting to control all news regarding government.

Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (2000), offers a comprehensive account of the experiences of women, progressives, and African Americans during the war.