

# Americans Prepare for War

## If YOU were there...

Everywhere you go people are talking about the war in Europe. The United States has just joined the fighting on the side of the Allied Powers. Many young men you know are volunteering to fight. Women are signing up to drive ambulances or work as nurses. You know that the situation in Europe is dangerous, but you want to serve your country.

## Will you volunteer for service in World War I?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** When World War I began, the United States had a long history of avoiding involvement in European conflicts. Most Americans wanted the United States to remain neutral in this war as well. But as tensions with Germany increased, it became clear that distance from Europe would not keep Americans out of battle.

## The United States Enters World War I

Millions of Americans at this time were immigrants or children of immigrants. Many came from countries belonging to the Allied or Central Powers. They naturally sympathized with their former homelands. This did not change the fact that most Americans viewed World War I as a European conflict. They did not want American soldiers sent to the bloody battlefields of Europe. Shortly after World War I began, President Woodrow Wilson announced that the United States would remain neutral. Most Americans agreed that America should stay out of the war.

## American Neutrality Threatened

Although the United States had a policy of neutrality, its merchants continued to trade with European nations. American ships carried supplies and war materials to the Allies. U.S. banks invested \$2 billion in European war bonds, nearly all of it in Allied countries.

The Germans used U-boat attacks to try to stop supplies from reaching the Allies. Sometimes they attacked ships without

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The United States entered the war after repeated crises with Germany.
2. The United States mobilized for war by training troops and stepping up production of supplies.
3. Labor shortages created new wartime opportunities for women and other Americans.

### The Big Idea

After entering World War I in 1917, Americans began the massive effort of preparing for war.

## Key Terms and People

*Lusitania*, p. 726

Zimmermann Note, p. 726

Selective Service Act, p. 727

Liberty bonds, p. 727

National War Labor Board, p. 729

## TAKING NOTES

As you read, take notes on the new laws and government programs created to prepare for World War I. In each outer circle of this web, name one new law or program. You may need to add more circles.



warning. In May 1915 a German U-boat sank the **Lusitania**, a British passenger liner. Nearly 1,200 people, including 128 Americans, were killed. The incident fueled anti-German feeling in the United States. Throughout the coming war, German Americans faced nativist attacks, including anti-German speeches, discrimination, and physical attacks.

Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned over President Wilson's handling of the affair. Bryan thought that Wilson's protest note to the Germans was designed to bring the United States into the war.

In March 1916 a U-boat attacked the *Sussex*, a French passenger ship. Several of the 80 casualties were Americans. Wilson demanded that the Germans stop attacking nonmilitary ships. German leaders responded with the *Sussex* pledge, agreeing not to attack merchant ships without warning.

### Congress Declares War

When Wilson ran for reelection in 1916, the promise to remain neutral helped him win the

election. Nearly a year after the *Sussex* pledge, however, the Germans again began launching attacks on ships, including American vessels. In response, Wilson broke off diplomatic relations with Germany.

The United States stepped closer to war when Americans found out about the **Zimmermann Note**. This secret telegram to Mexico sent by the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, was decoded and then published by American newspapers in March 1917. In the note, Zimmermann proposed an alliance against the United States. He promised that Germany would help Mexico recapture areas that Mexico had lost during the Mexican-American War.

The American public was outraged by the telegram. President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany. "The world must be made safe for democracy," he proclaimed. Congress declared war on April 6, 1917.

**READING CHECK** Finding Main Ideas What events challenged U.S. neutrality?

## Primary Source

### NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

## Sinking of the *Lusitania*

*In 1915 German U-boats sank the Lusitania, an event that pushed the United States toward entry into World War I. Newspapers quickly spread news of the disaster.*

The accounts which have so far been received are fragmentary, and give no clear idea of the disaster. There is, however, no doubt that two torpedoes were fired without warning into the starboard side of the ship soon after 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon. There were conflicting accounts of the period during which the *Lusitania* remained afloat, but the Cunard Company states that she sank 40 minutes after being struck.

—*The Register*, quoted in the *Times of London*



The ship was treated as an enemy warship.

The ship sank before enough rescue ships could arrive.

### ANALYSIS SKILL

### ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

How might this disaster draw the United States into war with Germany?



## ***Schenck v. United States*** **(1919)**

**Background of the Case** Charles Schenck was arrested for violating the Espionage Act. He had printed and distributed pamphlets urging resistance to the draft. Schenck argued that the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press, gave him the right to criticize the government.

### **The Court's Ruling**

The Supreme Court ruled that the pamphlet was not protected by the First Amendment and that the Espionage Act was constitutional.

### **The Court's Reasoning**

The Supreme Court decided that under certain circumstances, such as a state of war, Congress could limit free speech. The Court created a test to distinguish between protected and unprotected speech. Unprotected speech would have to present “a clear and present danger” to national security. For example, the First Amendment would not protect a person who created a panic by yelling “Fire!” in a crowded theater.

### **Why It Matters**

*Schenck v. United States* was important because it was the first case in which the Supreme Court interpreted the First Amendment. The Court concluded that certain constitutional rights, such as free speech, could be limited under extraordinary conditions, such as war. Later rulings by the Court narrowed the test of “clear and present danger” to speech advocating violence. The nonviolent expression of ideas and opinions—however unpopular—was thereby protected.

#### **ANALYSIS SKILL**

#### **ANALYZING INFORMATION**

1. According to the Supreme Court, when could free speech be limited?
2. How do you think this case affected other people who opposed the war?

## **Mobilizing for War**

In order to persuade the public to support the war effort, President Wilson formed the Committee on Public Information (CPI). The CPI organized rallies and parades and published posters and pamphlets. Speakers known as “four-minute men” gave short patriotic speeches in movie theaters and churches.

The U.S. government’s war effort also involved limiting some freedoms in the United States. The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 restricted free speech and allowed the government to arrest opponents of the war. Antiwar mail was prohibited and seized. About 900 opponents of the war were jailed for violating these laws. The Sedition Act was later repealed, but the Espionage Act is still in effect today.

To prepare the U.S. military, Congress passed the **Selective Service Act in 1917**. The act required men between the ages of 21 and 30 to register to be drafted. Almost 3 million Americans were drafted into service in World War I. A number of the draftees were African Americans. Altogether, about 400,000 African Americans served in the war. Their units

were segregated from white forces and were commanded by white officers. Eventually, African Americans were trained as officers. During World War I, however, they were never placed in command of white troops.

Preparations for war were very expensive. Troops had to be trained, supplied, transported, and fed. Ships and airplanes had to be built and fueled. The government raised taxes and issued war bonds. Money from the sale of these Liberty bonds provided billions of dollars in loans to the Allies.

The government took other actions to supply the troops. The War Industries Board (WIB) oversaw the production and distribution of steel, copper, cement, and rubber. The Food Administration worked to increase food supplies for the troops. It guaranteed farmers high prices for their crops. To conserve food at home, citizens were encouraged to practice “meatless Mondays” and “wheatless Wednesdays.” Many people also grew their own vegetables in “victory gardens” at home.

#### **THE IMPACT TODAY**

To conserve fuel used for lighting for the war effort, daylight saving time was first introduced in March 1918. The plan is still in effect today.

**READING CHECK Analyzing** How did the U.S. government gain public support for the war?

## Women on the Battlefield

The role of women in World War I was much like their roles in previous wars—providing support for male troops. Women drove ambulances and entered the battlefield as nurses and medics. Red Cross volunteers were often responsible for the first stage of treatment of the wounded. Today, women may also serve in the military as soldiers. They are not allowed to fight in ground combat, but they do serve as guards and pilots, and in the navy.



Red Cross volunteers in World War I



Soldier on duty in Iraq

**ANALYSIS SKILL** ANALYZING INFORMATION

How have wartime roles for women changed since World War I?

## New Wartime Opportunities

Three main factors led to a shortage of labor in the United States during the war. First, American factories were working nonstop to produce weapons and supplies for the Allied forces. Factories needed new workers to meet this huge demand. Second, the war almost completely cut off immigration. As you know, immigrants had provided a steady source of labor to American industry. And third, many of the young men who would normally take factory jobs were off fighting in Europe.

### Women's War Efforts

This labor shortage created new opportunities for many workers. American women took on new roles to help the war effort. Some 1 million women joined the U.S. workforce during the war years. For many, this was their first experience working outside the home.

Women also worked for the war effort in Europe. About 25,000 American women volunteered as nurses, telephone operators, signalers, typists, and interpreters in France. Women were not given jobs in combat, but they braved gunfire at the front lines as nurses and ambulance drivers. One female driver described her World War I experiences:

“We had our first air-raid work last night. I was the night driver on duty ... Some bombs fell very near just as I got to the [hospital] ... when shrapnel [metal fragments] whizzed past my head and there was a tremendous crash close beside ... Then an ambulance call came and I tore off.”

—Mrs. Guy Napier-Martin, quoted in *The Overseas War Record of the Winsor School, 1914–1919*

Other women, meanwhile, spoke out against U.S. participation in the war. Social reformer Jane Addams was against U.S. entry into the war. Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first female member of Congress, was one of 50 House members to cast a vote against declaring war in 1917. “I want to stand by my country,” she said, “but I cannot vote for war.”

## Labor and the War

Even with so many women joining the workforce, factories needed additional workers. New job opportunities encouraged Mexican Americans from the West and African Americans from the South to move to northern industrial cities.

Because labor was scarce, workers were in a good position to demand better wages and conditions. Union membership increased. More than 4 million unionized workers went on strike during the war. Because factory owners could not easily replace workers, they often agreed to demands.

President Wilson set up the **National War Labor Board** in April 1918. The board helped workers and management avoid strikes and reach agreements. The board settled more than 1,000 labor disputes. Its members were generally sympathetic to workers. They helped establish a minimum wage and limited work hours. They also required fair pay for women.

**READING CHECK** **Finding Main Ideas** How did war mobilization benefit American workers?

### Patriotic Posters

Posters like this one encouraged American citizens to participate in the effort to provide weapons and food to soldiers fighting in World War I.

*How does this poster inspire patriotism?*



**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** The war effort created new opportunities for women and other Americans. In the next section you will learn about what life was like for soldiers overseas.

## Section 2 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Explain** Why did the United States enter World War I?

**b. Evaluate** Do you think the United States was right to stay neutral for so long? Why or why not?
- a. Explain** How did the United States prepare for war?

**b. Recall** What was the purpose of the Committee on Public Information?

**c. Summarize** How did the government exercise control over the economy during the war?
- a. Describe** How did women help the war effort abroad?

**b. Predict** How do you think the end of the war affected labor unions? Explain your answer.