U.S. Involvement in WWI

SSUSH 15
Analyze the origins and impact of U.S. involvement in World War I.
Additional Resources

- The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History is a resource that provides teachers with lesson plans, primary documents, secondary source essays, and multimedia specific to each historical era. There is a separate section included for this Historical Era devoted to the study of World War I. Historical Era #8 - Progressive Era to New Era, 1900-1929

- PBS American Experience has a featured film entitled, The Great War. The website includes video clips and transcripts of the film, which covers all aspects of World War I.
  - [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/FILMS/GREAT-WAR/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/FILMS/GREAT-WAR/)
SSUSH 15 A

Describe the movement from U.S. neutrality to engagement in World War I, including unrestricted submarine warfare and the Zimmerman Telegram.
World War I - US Neutrality

- In August 1914, war broke out in Europe between
  - Austria-Hungary and Germany
  - France, Great Britain, and Russia
- In the United States, tensions ran high, especially as newspapers reported on the destruction and loss of life in Belgium, a neutral country.
- Americans, who mostly came from the nations at war, tended to support their native lands.
- President Woodrow Wilson was worried that supporters of each side would drag the United States into the war.
World War I - US Neutrality

- Furthermore, Wilson worried that violence might occur in the United States between Americans supporting one side or the other.
- To calm the potential for violence, Wilson went before Congress on August 19, 1914 to ask for a declaration of neutrality.
- Even with the Congressional declaration of neutrality, the actions of the United States tended to favor the Allies (i.e., the British and the French).
- The US was in a recession in 1914.
- American businessmen and farmers saw the war as a business opportunity.
World War I - US Neutrality

- The United States was eager to trade throughout Europe, but the British had established a blockade not only against German ports but neutral ports as well.
- Bethlehem Steel was soon sending munitions to England.
- Morgan Bank provided loans that were used by the French and British to pay for war goods.
  - By 1917, American loans to the Allies soared to $2.25 billion.
  - Loans to Germany stood at a only $27 million.
World War I - German Actions

- Germany also relied heavily on imported foodstuffs to feed its population and chemicals for its industries.
- The British Royal Navy outnumbered the German Imperial Fleet
  - placed an effective blockade on Germany’s Baltic Sea ports, as well as neutral ports in northwest Europe.
- By early 1915, Germany decided to expand submarine attacks from strictly Allied warships to also include any commercial ships belonging to both enemy and neutral nations.
World War I - Unrestricted Warfare

- This action began what is known as **unrestricted submarine warfare**.
- America's neutrality was in jeopardy.
- German submarines were very effective, sinking an average of two ships each day in the first quarter of 1915.
- To counter German successes, the British admiralty ordered British cargo ships to fly a neutral flag.
- The British sometimes loaded critical materials aboard fast liners and other passenger ships, believing the Germans would not dare sink a passenger ship.
World War I - The Lusitania

- German commanders ignored the ruse and sank all shipping vessels.
- In March 1915, the first American was killed off the British coast.
- The US reacted with outrage.
- Attacks on ships carrying Americans increased until May 1915, when the British liner Lusitania was sunk off the Irish coast.
- There were 128 Americans on board the Lusitania and all were killed.
- President Wilson reacted by issuing a series of notes to Germany warning against further attacks on American shipping.
World War I - German Actions

- Germany acquiesced but then on August 19, 1915 the Arabic was sunk, killing three Americans.
- The Germans feared that the United States would declare war and ordered submarine commanders to cease attacks on passenger liners.
- The year 1916 proved critical for both the Allies and Germany, who suffered heavy casualties in a series of failed offensives.
- The German High Command decided to renew unrestricted warfare to force the British to sue for peace.
World War I - The Zimmerman Note

- The Germans believed that they would have 6 months to complete operations before the US would declare war.
- President Wilson was re-elected in 1916 on a peace platform and offered to mediate peace talks between the warring nations the next year.
- Unrestricted submarine warfare was renewed in February 1917.
- Anticipating reaction by the US, the German government instructed its ambassador to the United States to approach the Mexican government:
  - ask them to join Germany in a war against the United States.
World War I - Aftermath of the Zimmerman Note

- The telegram was sent by Germany's foreign minister, Arthur Zimmerman, and was not favorably received by the Mexican government.
- The secret communication was intercepted by British intelligence and given to President Wilson.
- American neutrality was no longer prudent.
  - The security of the United States was being threatened.
- In February 1917, President Wilson responded to German attacks and threats by severing diplomatic relations with Germany.
World War I - US Enters the War

- Public opinion in the United States was split over whether to get involved.
- Some groups favored continuing the neutrality policy.
- Some groups favored war and loyalty was divided between both sides.
- However, when the Zimmerman Telegram was published in the newspapers, American public opinion turned to support war against Germany.
- The President knew after this point, war with Germany was inevitable.
- Wilson went before Congress on April 2 to ask for a declaration of war, which was granted.
Additional Resources

  - [https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/world-war-i-americ...](https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/world-war-i-america-heads-to-war)
SSUSH 15 B

Explain the domestic impact of World War I, including the origins of the Great Migration, the Espionage Act, and socialist Eugene Debs.
WWI - Domestic Impact

- America was impacted economically, politically, and socially by the nation’s involvement in World War I.
  - Increased the power of the Federal government
  - Changed the demography of the United States

Economically

- The Wilson administration moved to centrally organize the United States’ economy
  - created of a series of wartime boards
WWI - Domestic Impact

Economically

- These boards:
  - oversaw production in factories
  - mediated labor disputes
  - improved railroad operations
- The private businesses were managed more closely by the government during the war in order to ensure domestic production met the military needs.
- To finance the war, the United States borrowed from the American people by selling Liberty Bonds.
WWI - Domestic Impact

Economically

- These bonds accounted for two-thirds of the war’s cost.
- In addition to borrowing, the United States also increased income and excise taxes.

Socially

- President Wilson was correct in his assessment of the American people when he said every man would pay a penalty for non-conformity.
WWI - Domestic Impact

Socially

- In June 1917, at the request of the Wilson administration, Congress passed the **Espionage Act**.
- The law provided penalties for spying, sabotage, and obstructing the war effort.
- The law also banned the use of the United States Mail to send anti-war materials.
- On June 30, 1918 Eugene Debs was arrested after making a series of speeches against the war urging American men not to fight.
WWI - Domestic Impact

Socially

- He was a prominent Socialist, four-time candidate for the presidency, and union leader.
- The courts convicted Debs under the Espionage Act and sentenced him to 10 years in prison.
- He was also permanently disenfranchised.
- The Supreme Court later upheld Debs’ conviction after a series of appeals.
- President Harding commuted Debs’ sentence after he served three years in federal prison.
Another impact World War I had on the United States was the shift in population demographics.

The migration of Blacks from the South to the North actually began before World War I

○ Trying to escape sharecropping, discrimination, and Jim Crow violence

However, the trend accelerated during the war years and was known as the Great Migration.

One large factor in the movement North was an increase in jobs
WWI - Domestic Impact

Socially - The Great Migration

- Defense manufacturing jobs became available in the North as soldiers were drafted to serve in the war.
- Prior to the war, northern factory owners preferred immigrant workers.
  - Only used Blacks as strike-breakers.
- The war temporarily ended immigration and opened new opportunities for Blacks.
- During the period, 1.5 million Blacks from the South moved to Northern cities.
Additional Resources

- The Digital Public Library has a featured document set for the Great Migration. There are images, documents, and a Teachers’ Guide for teaching the topic.
  - [https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/the-great-migration/](https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/sets/the-great-migration/)
Explain Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the debate over U.S. entry into the League of Nations.
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- In January 1918, President Wilson spoke to Congress about the war aims of the nation.
- His plan ultimately became known as the Fourteen Points and was designed to create a lasting peace in the world.
- Once negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles were completed in June 1919, the United States was divided over whether to join the League of Nations - a vital component of the Treaty.
- Wilson’s Fourteen Points became a guide for the negotiations at Versailles to secure peace after World War I.
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- Some of Wilson's suggestions were accepted, some modified, and some rejected by the countries represented at the peace conference.

- Wilson’s Fourteen Points included the following:
  1. Open diplomacy (no more secret treaties)
  2. Freedom of the seas
  3. End international trade barriers
  4. Reduce armaments
  5. Impartial dealings with colonies and their natives
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- Wilson’s Fourteen Points included the following:
  - 6-13. Group of points dealing with the right of self-determination for the people of eastern and central Europe
  - 14. Create an international organization, the League of Nations, to help keep the peace.
- Wilson worked hard to get as many of his Fourteen Points as possible included in the treaty.
- The Fourteenth Point, which proposed a League of Nations, committed to securing world peace.
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- After much negotiation, the League of Nations was included in the final provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- The treaty drafted at Versailles had to be ratified by the United States Senate as the final step for implementation in the United States.
- Although Wilson believed strongly in the League of Nations, there was significant opposition to the concept among many Americans.
- Public opposition to the League of Nations ultimately led the Senate to vote against ratification of the treaty.
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- Isolationists in the Senate believed that by joining the League of Nations, the United States would be obligated to get involved in future European conflicts.
- One of the most vocal critics of the League was Senator Henry Cabot Lodge.
- Lodge was a Republican and Wilson was a Democrat.
- They held different ideas about the role the United States should take in world affairs.
Wilson’s Fourteen Points

- Lodge was a powerful and respected Senator who served as his party’s majority leader and was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Lodge, and others from his party, believed that he should have been involved in the treaty negotiations.
- Although Wilson traveled across the United States to try and gain public support for the treaty ratification, it was eventually rejected in the Senate.
- The League of Nations was created and made up of primarily European nations, but the United States never joined.
Additional Resources

- The State Department of the United States Office of the Historian has a comprehensive overview of the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. There is a background essay and links to documents related to the topic.
  - [https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/league](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/league)