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From the Historians: America's entry into World War I

Remini (200 – 203)

1. How did Woodrow Wilson respond to the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

2. Who was Jeannette Rankin? What was her position on entering the war?

3. What was "unrestricted submarine warfare"? How did Woodrow Wilson respond to it?

4. What was the purpose of the Selective Service Act of May 18, 1917?

5. What was the purpose of the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918?

6. How did the United States' "home front" contribute to the war?

Zinn (352 – 355)

7. What was happening to the French military when the U.S. entered the war?

8. Why does Zinn argue the U.S. was not truly neutral?

9. Was the *Lusitania* a legitimate military target? Explain!

10. What economic reasons might explain why the U.S. joined in on the side of the Allies?

11. What did W.E.B. Du Bois think of this war? Be specific?

Davis (238 – 240)

12. Why might America's immigrant population have been against American entry into the Great War?

13. How many people died on the *Lusitania*? How many were Americans?

14. Why does Davis believe the sinking of the *Lusitania* was **NOT** an important factor in drawing the U.S. into the war?

Noble (310-313)

15. According to Noble, what was Wilson's "vision of the world"?

16. Why did Wilson's Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, quit?

17. How did Wilson respond when Congress refused his request to arm merchant ships?

18. How did Germany "make it easier" for Wilson to ask for a declaration of war?

submarine torpedoed the RMS *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, and 128 American lives were lost. Wilson protested the action, and when Germany announced its intention of attacking without warning all merchantmen found in the vicinity of the British Isles, Wilson cautioned Americans against doing anything that would violate the nation's neutrality. Instead, he signed the National Defense Act, passed on June 3, 1916, which expanded the regular army to 175,000 and, over the next five years, increased its size to 223,000 and directed the enlargement of the National Guard to 450,000. It also established the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at colleges and universities.

In seeking reelection for Wilson, the Democrats emphasized his desire to maintain peace. "He kept us out of war," they contended. But the election of 1916 proved to be a very close race. The Republicans put forward the Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes, who had once served as governor of New York. The Progressives tried to induce Roosevelt to run again, but he refused and urged his followers to support Hughes. Not until the results of the California vote came in was it clear that Wilson had been reelected by an electoral count of 277 to 254 for Hughes. The Democrats retained control of the Senate, but they lost the House. Still, the number of representatives of both major parties was so close that Progressives and Independents held the balance of power. With the support of Independents, the Democrats were able to reelect Champ Clark as Speaker.

One of the new members was Republican Jeannette Rankin of Montana, a thirty-six-year-old suffragist and social worker. She said that she would represent everyone in her state but added that she felt "it was my special duty to express also the point of view of women and to make clear that the women of the country are coming to a full realization of the fact that Congress deals with their problems." It should be remembered that the Constitution had not yet been amended to grant the suffrage to women, but Montana, like many other states, had already moved in this new, progressive, direction. Not until 1918 did both houses of Congress agree to a resolution providing women's suffrage. This was the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified on August 26, 1920.

Rankin was also a dedicated pacifist and strongly opposed any action that would involve the United States in the ongoing war in Eu-

rope. President Wilson hoped to bring about a conclusion to the war without victory for either side, one that would include an international organization dedicated to maintaining peace. But events took a sudden and unexpected turn. Early in 1917, Germany unleashed unrestricted submarine warfare in an effort to bring the conflict to a speedy conclusion, even though this risked involving the United States in the war. Submarines would sink all ships, both neutral and hostile, without warning. Wilson immediately broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on February 3, 1917, and asked Congress for authority to arm merchant vessels. Congress agreed. At the same time the President revealed to the nation a telegram intercepted by the British, written by Arthur Zimmermann, the German foreign secretary, to the German minister in Mexico in which it promised to return Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to Mexico in the event of war between the United States and Germany—that is, if Mexico declared war against the United States.

After the sinking of three American merchantmen by German submarines—in one of these sinkings, there was a heavy loss of American lives—Wilson summoned Congress to a special session on April 2 and before a joint meeting of both houses asked for a declaration of war. It is a "fearful thing," he said, "to lead this great peaceful people into war. . . . But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts." After a heated debate the Senate approved the resolution on April 4 by a vote of 82 to 6. The House engaged in an even longer struggle, but on the morning of April 6, by a vote of 373 to 50, it passed the declaration, Jeannette Rankin voting against it. At 1:18 PM the same day, Wilson signed the resolution and the United States entered World War I.

One of the first things Congress did was pass the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917, which called for the registration for military service of all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. Of the more than 24 million men enrolled in the draft, almost 3 million were called up for service. Congress also passed the Espionage and Sedition Acts in 1917 and 1918, establishing fines and imprisonment for those convicted of aiding the enemy or committing other disloyal acts. It gave the postmaster general the right to exclude from the mails any materials deemed seditious or treasonable. The constitutionality of this

measure was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1919 in the case *Schenck v. United States*.

The war effort at home developed through two stages: the first, from the outset of war to the end of 1917, relied principally on volunteer efforts; the second, from 1918 to the end of the conflict, brought the administration into exercising full control. Using the authority provided by Congress, Wilson mobilized farmers and housewives through the Food Administration program, headed by Herbert Hoover, widely recognized as an expert because of his success in directing the Belgium Relief Commission. The Food Administration succeeded in increasing the food supply so that it tripled the amount of food shipped overseas. Railroads were regulated, and Bernard Baruch headed a War Industries Board, which hastened the steady supply of equipment necessary to conduct the war. To pay for the war, which ultimately cost \$33.5 billion, income taxes on individuals and corporations were increased to approximately sixty-five percent, excess profit taxes were enacted, and estate taxes were increased.

Not until the late spring of 1918 did the U.S. military forces, commanded by General John J. Pershing, join the Allied forces in France and take up a position just east of Verdun. Meanwhile the Germans had signed a harsh peace treaty with the new government of the Soviet Union, which had toppled the Romanov dynasty in Russia, executed the czar, and established a communist state. Then Germany launched an all-out assault against the Allies. On June 3, several American divisions joined the French in turning back a German drive at Château-Thierry. And at the battle of the Marne, during the last two weeks of July, the German offensive was brought to an end.

Wilson had already begun planning for the aftermath of the war, and early in 1918 he addressed Congress and outlined "Fourteen Points" that he hoped would be the basis for a just and lasting peace, once Germany had been defeated. These points included general disarmament, freedom of the seas, open covenants openly arrived at, restoration of national boundaries, establishment of an independent Poland with access to the sea, the formation of a League of Nations, removal of artificial barriers to international trade, an impartial settlement of colonial claims, self-determination for Russia, the restoration of Belgium, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, and autonomy for the subject people of the

Austrian-Hungarian empire. What the United States was attempting to do by the Fourteen Points was to establish a new world order, something Wilson and the country would soon learn was impossible.

The beginning of the disruption of Wilson's hopes and plans commenced with the Allies' decision to intervene in the civil war that had broken out in Russia between the Bolsheviks and more conservative Russians called Whites, and although Wilson believed the action was wrong and counterproductive he reluctantly agreed to it under pressure from the Allies. Then the President foolishly asked the American people to return a Democratic Congress in the midterm election of 1918 in order to forestall Europe from interpreting a defeat of his party as a repudiation of his leadership. His request and his presumption offended the electorate who responded by sending a majority of Republicans to both houses of Congress. And just as he feared, Wilson's leadership was seriously undermined by the Republican triumph. Meanwhile, the European war ended abruptly with the defeat of the German army and the collapse of the German government. By the time the armistice was signed on November 11, the Kaiser, William II, had abdicated and fled to Holland.

In late December 1918, Wilson traveled to Europe with a large body of experts to attend the Versailles Peace Conference and work for a just peace. To his surprise and chagrin there were no representatives at the conference from the defeated powers or from Russia. As matters turned out, it was Wilson (not the defeated powers) against the Allied leaders—Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Premier Georges Clemenceau of France, and Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando of Italy—who were determined to divide the territories of the conquered nations and make Germany pay for the cost of the war. By threatening to withdraw from the conference and leave Europe to stew in its own mess, Wilson did achieve a number of important concessions. An independent Poland with access to the sea was established, Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, Belgium was restored, the peoples of the Austrian-Hungarian empire won independence and self-determination, and the Allies agreed to the establishment of a League of Nations. But Germany was saddled with an impossible \$56 billion in reparations, and the Allies divided German colonies among themselves, virtually inviting future retaliation.

The war came shortly after the opening of the twentieth century, in the midst of exultation (perhaps only among the elite in the Western world) about progress and modernization. One day after the English declared war, Henry James wrote to a friend: "The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness . . . is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be . . . gradually bettering." In the first Battle of the Marne, the British and French succeeded in blocking the German advance on Paris. Each side had 500,000 casualties.

The killing started very fast, and on a large scale. In August 1914, a volunteer for the British army had to be 5 feet 8 inches to enlist. By October, the requirement was lowered to 5 feet 5 inches. That month there were thirty thousand casualties, and then one could be 5 feet 3. In the first three months of war, almost the entire original British army was wiped out.

For three years the battle lines remained virtually stationary in France. Each side would push forward, then back, then forward again—for a few yards, a few miles, while the corpses piled up. In 1916 the Germans tried to break through at Verdun; the British and French counterattacked along the Seine, moved forward a few miles, and lost 600,000 men. One day, the 9th Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry launched an attack with eight hundred men. Twenty-four hours later, there were eighty-four left.

Back home, the British were not told of the slaughter. One English writer recalled: "The most bloody defeat in the history of Britain . . . might occur . . . and our Press come out bland and copious and graphic with nothing to show that we had not had quite a good day—a victory really. . . ." The same thing was happening on the German side; as Erich Maria Remarque wrote in his great novel, on days when men by the thousands were being blown apart by machine guns and shells, the official dispatches announced "All Quiet on the Western Front."

In July 1916, British General Douglas Haig ordered eleven divisions of English soldiers to climb out of their trenches and move toward the German lines. The six German divisions opened up with their machine guns. Of the 110,000 who attacked, 20,000 were killed, 40,000 more wounded—all those bodies strewn on no man's land, the ghostly territory between the contending trenches. On January 1, 1917, Haig was promoted to field marshal. What happened that summer is described tersely in William Langer's *An Encyclopedia of World History*:

Despite the opposition of Lloyd George and the skepticism of some of his subordinates, Haig proceeded hopefully to the main offensive. The third battle of Ypres was a series of 8 heavy attacks, carried through in driving rain and fought over ground water-logged and muddy. No break-through was effected, and the total gain was about 5 miles of territory, which made the Ypres salient more inconvenient than ever and cost the British about 400,000 men.

The people of France and Britain were not told the extent of the casualties. When, in the last year of the war, the Germans attacked ferociously on the Somme, and left 300,000 British soldiers dead or wounded, London newspapers printed the following, we learn from Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*:

#### WHAT CAN I DO?

How the Civilian May Help in this Crisis.

Be cheerful. . . .

Write encouragingly to friends at the front. . . .

Don't repeat foolish gossip.

Don't listen to idle rumors.

Don't think you know better than Haig.

Into this pit of death and deception came the United States, in the spring of 1917. Mutinies were beginning to occur in the French army. Soon, out of 112 divisions, 68 would have mutinies; 629 men would be tried and condemned, 50 shot by firing squads. American troops were badly needed.

President Woodrow Wilson had promised that the United States would stay neutral in the war: "There is such a thing as a nation being too proud to fight." But in April of 1917, the Germans had announced they would have their submarines sink any ship bringing supplies to their enemies; and they had sunk a number of merchant vessels. Wilson now said he must stand by the right of Americans to travel on merchant ships in the war zone. "I cannot consent to any abridgement of the rights of American citizens in any respect. . . ."

As Richard Hofstadter points out (*The American Political Tradition*): "This was rationalization of the flimsiest sort. . . ." The British had also been intruding on the rights of American citizens on the high seas, but Wilson was not suggesting we go to war with them. Hofstadter says Wilson "was forced to find legal reasons for policies that were based not upon law but upon the balance of power and economic necessities."

It was unrealistic to expect that the Germans should treat the United States as neutral in the war when the U.S. had been shipping great amounts of war materials to Germany's enemies. In early 1915, the British liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine. She sank in eighteen minutes, and 1,198 people died, including 124 Americans. The United States claimed the *Lusitania* carried an innocent cargo, and therefore the torpedoing was a monstrous German atrocity. Actually, the *Lusitania* was heavily armed: it carried 1,248 cases of 3-inch shells, 4,927 boxes of cartridges (1,000 rounds in each box), and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition. Her manifests were falsified to hide this fact, and the British and American governments lied about the cargo.

Hofstadter wrote of "economic necessities" behind Wilson's war policy. In 1914 a serious recession had begun in the United States. J. P. Morgan later testified: "The war opened during a period of hard times. . . . Business throughout the country was depressed, farm prices were deflated, unemployment was serious, the heavy industries were working far below capacity and bank clearings were off." But by 1915, war orders for the Allies (mostly England) had stimulated the economy, and by April 1917 more than \$2 billion worth of goods had been sold to the Allies. As Hofstadter says: "America became bound up with the Allies in a fateful union of war and prosperity."

Prosperity depended much on foreign markets, it was believed by the leaders of the country. In 1897, the private foreign investments of the United States amounted to \$700 million dollars. By 1914 they were \$3½ billion. Wilson's Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, while a believer in neutrality in the war, also believed that the United States needed overseas markets; in May of 1914 he praised the President as one who had "opened the doors of all the weaker countries to an invasion of American capital and American enterprise."

Back in 1907, Woodrow Wilson had said in a lecture at Columbia University: "Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process. . . . the doors of the nations which are closed must be battered down." In his 1912 campaign he said: "Our domestic markets no longer suffice, we need foreign markets." In a memo to Bryan he described his aim as "an open door to the world," and in 1914 he said he supported "the righteous conquest of foreign markets."

With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and for loans at interest. J. P. Morgan and Company acted as agents for the Allies, and when, in 1915, Wilson lifted the ban

on private bank loans to the Allies, Morgan could now begin lending money in such great amounts as to both make great profit and tie American finance closely to the interest of a British victory in the war against Germany.

The industrialists and the political leaders talked of prosperity as if it were classless, as if everyone gained from Morgan's loans. True, the war meant more production, more employment, but did the workers in the steel plants gain as much as U.S. Steel, which made \$348 million in profit in 1916 alone? When the United States entered the war, it was the rich who took even more direct charge of the economy. Financier Bernard Baruch headed the War Industries Board, the most powerful of the wartime government agencies. Bankers, railroad men, and industrialists dominated these agencies.

A remarkably perceptive article on the nature of the First World War appeared in May 1915 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Written by W. E. B. Du Bois, it was titled "The African Roots of War." It was a war for empire, of which the struggle between Germany and the Allies over Africa was both symbol and reality: "... in a very real sense Africa is a prime cause of this terrible overturning of civilization which we have lived to see." Africa, Du Bois said, is "the Land of the Twentieth Century," because of the gold and diamonds of South Africa, the cocoa of Angola and Nigeria, the rubber and ivory of the Congo, the palm oil of the West Coast.

Du Bois saw more than that. He was writing several years before Lenin's *Imperialism*, which noted the new possibility of giving the working class of the imperial country a share of the loot. He pointed to the paradox of greater "democracy" in America alongside "increased aristocracy and hatred toward darker races." He explained the paradox by the fact that "the white workingman has been asked to share the spoil of exploiting 'chinks and niggers.'" Yes, the average citizen of England, France, Germany, the United States, had a higher standard of living than before. But: "Whence comes this new wealth? . . . It comes primarily from the darker nations of the world—Asia and Africa, South and Central America, the West Indies, and the islands of the South Seas."

Du Bois saw the ingenuity of capitalism in uniting exploiter and exploited—creating a safety valve for explosive class conflict. "It is no longer simply the merchant prince, or the aristocratic monopoly, or even the employing class, that is exploiting the world: it is the nation, a new democratic nation composed of united capital and labor."

The United States fitted that idea of Du Bois. American capitalism needed international rivalry—and periodic war—to create an artificial community of interest between rich and poor, supplanting the genuine

Marne. Ypres. Gallipoli. Verdun. Argonne Forest. Soon these fields and plains sprouted forests of crosses.

The scenes of battle were played out for the most part in Europe, especially on the flat plains in Belgium and France, where the inhuman trench warfare would eat bodies as a flame consumes dry wood. But the real prize was elsewhere. The bottom line was that the nations of Europe were fighting over the course of empire. The spoils of victory in this Great War were Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Whatever the professed reasons for going to war, it was the material wealth—the gold and diamonds of South Africa, the metals and rubber of Africa, the rubber of Malaysia, the oil of the Mideast—that was at the heart of the conflict.

By the time the Archduke lay dead in Sarajevo, the competition had long since commenced. Germany was a well established power in Africa, as was Belgium. France's empire extended into Indochina. England's empire covered much of Asia, Africa; and the Far East. British armies had already been bloodied in the Boer War for control of South Africa and in the Crimean War for control of the Middle East, where England had also taken over the Suez Canal. Supreme on the oceans, England was now threatened by a German Navy that was being built with only one conceivable purpose—to challenge that British supremacy for eventual control of the wealth of the Empire. The leaders of Europe knew their own national resources were exhaustible. Power, even survival, in the new age of industry and mechanization would come from control of these resources in the colonial worlds. The dead might pile up at Verdun, Ypres, the Marne, and a dozen other storied battlefields, but to the victor would go the riches of other continents.

Who sank the *Lusitania* and what difference did it make?

For generations of American schoolchildren, the reason America finally decided to enter the war in Europe was to protect the open seas from German raiders in their U-boats who were killing innocent Americans aboard passenger ships. The most notorious example of this practice was supposedly the sinking of

the passenger ship *Lusitania*. The problem with this explanation is that it has little to do with the facts.

Secure in its control of two continents and holding on to sufficient bits of an empire in Asia and the Pacific, America was wary of involving itself in Europe's war. Avoiding "entangling alliances" had been the underpinning of American foreign policy since the days of Washington and Jefferson. Neutralism and isolationism were powerful forces in America, where a good deal of the population was descended from the countries now at each other's throats in the mud of France. Eight million German-Americans had no desire to see America at war with Germany. Another 4.5 million Irish-Americans held no love for Great Britain, then in the midst of tightening its grip on Ireland as the Irish Republican movement was reaching its peak.

Early in May 1915, the German Embassy in Washington published advertisements in American papers warning Americans to avoid sailing on British ships in the Atlantic. On May 7, 1915, the Cunard liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland. In only eighteen minutes the huge ship went down, taking with it almost 1,200 of its 1,959 passengers and crew. Among the dead were 128 Americans.

President Wilson resisted the indignant clamor for war that followed the sinking, and dealt with the Germans through a series of diplomatic notes demanding reparations and German disavowal of passenger-ship attacks. William Jennings Bryan, the American Secretary of State, thought even these notes were too severe a response, and resigned. Although the German government agreed to make reparations, it held to its claim that the *Lusitania* was carrying armaments and thus was a war vessel. The British denied this, but it was later revealed that the *Lusitania* carried 4,200 cases of ammunition and 1,250 shrapnel cases, which exploded when the torpedo struck, speeding the *Lusitania's* demise.

While the sinking definitely increased tension between America and Germany, the incident had little to do with drawing America into the war. President Wilson continued to press his policies of neutrality while seeking to negotiate a settlement. He campaigned for reelection in 1916 under the Democratic slogan

"He Kept Us out of War." It would be April 1917, almost two years after the sinking, before America entered the war, already in its closing stages.

The stated reasons for America's involvement were freedom of the seas and the preservation of democracy. But neither side in this war had a monopoly on illegal naval warfare. Nor was the democratic ideology so powerful among America's allies that Wilson thought he should fight to maintain it as far back as 1914.

In his favor, Wilson tried admirably to restrain both sides and mediate a peace. But as in almost every other war America has fought, powerful forces in industry, banking, and commerce cynically thought that war was healthy. And if the world was going to be divvied up after the fighting was over, America might as well get its fair share of the spoils.

#### Milestones in World War I

1914

**June 28** The Crown Prince of Austria, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, is murdered in the city of Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip. Using the assassination as a pretext, the Austro-Hungarian government declares war on Serbia, its tiny southern neighbor, five days later. Russia begins to mobilize its troops in defense of Serbia.

**August 1** Allied to Austria, Germany declares war on Russia. Two days later, Germany declares war on France.

**August 4** Bound by mutual defense treaties, Great Britain declares war on Germany as German troops invade Belgium on the way to France.

**August 5** The United States formally declares its neutrality and offers to mediate the growing conflict. In America, opinions are divided three ways: neutralists want to stay out of the war; pro-Allies (France, England, Belgium, Russia) press for aid for England, France, and Belgium, who are depicted as victims of barbarous German aggression and atrocities; and pro-Germans—mostly German-Americans—who want the United States to avoid taking sides. Pro-Allies form the Lafayette Escadrille to join the French Air Force, while other Americans join the British Army

and the French Foreign Legion or, like Ernest Hemingway, come ambulance drivers. Irish-Americans denounce any assistance to Great Britain.

**August 6** Germany's Central Powers ally, Austria-Hungary, declares war on Russia.

**August 23** Japan declares war on Germany.

**September 5** The Battle of the Marne. In the first horrific battle of the war, with each side taking casualties of 500,000, a French-English repulse of the German invasion stalls Germany's plan to quickly subdue continental Europe before Allied forces can mobilize. Instead, German forces fall back, beginning three years of devastating, stalemated trench warfare. The defeat also forces Germany to step up its U-boat (*Unterseeboot*) warfare to counter British naval superiority, which threatens to cut Germany from essential war supplies. Although the German U-boats initially concentrate their attacks on warships, the submarines eventually turn to commercial and passenger shipping, a strategy that will ultimately give the United States its justification to join the Allied side.

1915

**January 28** The *William P. Frye*, an American merchant ship carrying wheat to England, is torpedoed by a U-boat, the first such attack against American commercial shipping.

**January 30** Colonel Edward M. House (1858–1938), a Texan who was responsible for Wilson's nomination and is now the President's most powerful adviser, sails to Europe to attempt to mediate a peace agreement. Each side feels that a quick victory is possible, and all parties decline to negotiate.

**February 4** Germany declares the waters around the British Isles a war zone, threatening all shipping that approaches England.

**May 1** The American tanker *Gulflight* is sunk by a German U-boat. Germany apologizes, but the ocean war is escalating as the British call for a blockade of all German ports, despite President Wilson's protest.

**May 7** The British ocean liner *Lusitania* is sunk by a U-boat. Germany claims—reliably, it turns out—that the liner carried

world: "America's duty toward the people living in barbarism is to see that they are freed from their chains and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself," declared Theodore Roosevelt. "Peace cannot be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nations." It is not surprising then that Wilson was willing to intervene in the affairs of even such a major nation as Mexico. "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men," he affirmed.

American intellectuals, after 1890, had been engaged in a dramatic reversal of their attitudes toward Germany. From 1810 to 1890, Germany had been perceived as the most modern European nation, and Americans had gone there to be educated into the most progressive intellectual currents. But the early-twentieth-century image of Germany, firmly established by 1914, was of the most reactionary European nation; stubbornly preserving the medieval and barbaric past. England had replaced Germany as the most admired country. Wilson had shared in this change of attitude. His writings were full of praise for things English, while they described German culture as "essentially selfish and lacking in spirituality."

When war came to Europe in August 1914, Wilson strongly emphasized the necessity of American neutrality. He felt that this world war might create a situation where America would have "the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world." England and France, however, in their conflict with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires were considered too compromised and corrupted by their own empires to be completely worthy of having the United States fight on their side. Wilson's vision of the world that would emerge from this conflict was one in which all empires were dissolved and the major nations imitated the pattern of the United States by pursuing a course of "Open Door" economic expansion which flowed across national boundaries.

If the United States entered the war on the side of England and France only to help them defend their empires, then the United States would have lost its soul in this imperial civil war, and "the spirit of ruthless brutality," Wilson warned, "will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man on the street." If America did not Americanize Europe, then Europe would Europeanize America, and the nation would be locked into a cycle of European civil wars.

By November 1916, however, when he was re-elected on the slogan "He kept us out of war," Wilson feared that he had become trapped in a web of circumstances beyond his control. He and his advisers had refused to take a strong stand against England when its navy violated international law. But Wilson had issued ever stronger warnings to Germany to halt its submarine warfare, also contrary to international law. Finally, in the summer of 1916, an American ultimatum forced the curtailment of German submarine activity. The nightmarish fear that descended upon Wilson was that a German decision to recommence submarine warfare would challenge American national honor and ultimately force the country to enter the European civil war. Desperately, he tried to persuade England and France and Germany to sit down and negotiate a peace settlement. But in January 1917, German leaders decided to take the calculated risk that the restoration of unrestricted submarine activity would defeat the Allies before America could mobilize its military forces.

The great power of the Presidency in foreign affairs had made it possible for Wilson to place the United States on the verge of war without the knowledge of the average voter. These voters, had re-elected Wilson because they believed he would preserve peace. The strong peace movement among women had rallied for Wilson. Many German-Americans and Irish-Americans who hated English imperialism also backed Wilson. A number of midwestern WASP "progressives," who feared the power of eastern corporations to influence foreign policy, saw the Republican party in 1916 as pro-English and prowar and supported Wilson.

Wilson shared the view of WASP leaders who had made the foreign-policy revolution in the 1890s that Germany was the chief threat to the American policy of worldwide free trade dominated by the American economy. Both the United States and Germany surpassed England in industrial production and population in the 1890s. But German leaders chose to try to expand overseas through an empire of colonies modeled after that of England. From 1895 to 1917, American naval and military leaders planned for possible war against Germany. And German leaders expected war against the United States during these years.

In February 1917, all of Wilson's advisers urged him to ask for a declaration of war. Bryan, his first secretary of state, had resigned when Wilson's eastern friends had persuaded him to bend neutrality

and allow the New York bankers to make huge loans to England and France. By March 1917, these loans totaled more than \$2 billion, whereas only \$20 million had been loaned to Germany.

Wilson would not retreat from the right of Americans and American ships to sail into the war zone. This was the revolutionary principle of free trade to which the WASP elite was committed. Wilson asked Congress to pass legislation to arm American merchant ships. When his request was blocked by such midwestern progressive Republicans as Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin and George Norris of Nebraska, Wilson armed the ships by executive order. They sailed to England and were fired on by German submarines, and they fired back. By March 1917, Wilson had involved the United States in a shooting war with Germany.

Germany made it easier for Wilson to overcome congressional opposition to the war by urging Mexico to join in a war against the United States and regain the territories it had lost in 1846. These Zimmermann Notes fell into American hands, and Wilson used them to prove the aggressiveness of the German feudal aristocracy. But when Wilson went to Congress with a war message in April, deep doubts still haunted him. "My message today was a message of death for our young men," he lamented to a friend; "how strange it seemed to applaud that."

Once the decision was made, Wilson seemed to be trying to persuade himself that it really was a crusade. "Valor withholds itself from all small implications and entanglements and waits for the great opportunity when the sword will flash as if it carried the light of heaven upon its blade," he cried out. "When men take up arms to set other men free, there is something sacred and holy in the warfare." "I will not cry peace," Wilson affirmed, "as long as there is sin and wrong in the world." Wilson still hoped, at the end of the war, that England and France would divest themselves of their empires and accept the American "Open Door" policy. Then with the end of the German and the Austro-Hungarian empires, American entry into the war would have ushered in a new era in which the entire world would become a rational space for free trade among all nations.

Wilson fiercely repressed all criticism of the war, especially by the Socialists. "This is no time either for divided counsels, or for divided leadership," he warned. "Unity of command is as necessary now in civil action as it is upon the field of battle." But as American armies tipped the balance and forced German surrender in November 1918, Wilson was faced with an overwhelming Republican vic-

tory in the congressional elections. The many Americans who opposed the war could, at least, express their unhappiness by voting for Republicans.

Just as he refused to acknowledge that England and France had not divested themselves of their imperial ambitions, he refused to admit that he was not supported by a unified national consensus on the meaning of the war and the shape of the peace. He sailed to Europe, thinking that he had it in his own power to lead the world into a new era. "I am the only person of high authority amongst all the peoples of the world who is at liberty to speak and hold nothing back," he declared. "I am speaking for the silent mass of mankind who have as yet had no place or opportunity to speak."

In Paris, however, he was forced to compromise with the imperial ambitions of England, France, Italy, and Japan. But when he came home to ask for the ratification of the peace treaty and for American membership in a League of Nations, which would guarantee the political patterns established by the treaty, he refused to listen to criticism of the treaty and the structure of the League.

Republicans demanded compromise and revision before they would support the treaty. But Wilson ordered Democratic congressional leaders to reject all compromises. In the hope of persuading the people that they must accept his treaty as the guarantee that American participation in the war had changed world history, he went on a speaking tour of the nation. Addressing the veterans in the crowds, Wilson cried out, "Boys, I told you before you went across the seas that this was a war against war, and I did my best to fulfill the promise, but I am obliged to come to you in mortification and shame and say I have not been able to fulfill the promise. You are betrayed. You fought for something you did not get."

Wilson drove himself hard on this trip; he inflicted such physical punishment on himself as he spoke several times a day, day after day, that it seemed that he was seeking martyrdom. Suddenly, he collapsed, incapacitated by a stroke. He spent the last year of his Presidency in silence and semidarkness. Meanwhile, in 1920 the voters went to the polls and elected Warren Harding, who promised a return to "normalcy."

America had refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles or join the League of Nations. Wilson's dream of world order, of a world liberated from traditional imperialism by the United States, lay silent and impotent within him. Probably the most painful thing for this invalid, however, must have been the knowledge that the self-