

CHAPTER 23

Americans in the Great War, 1914–1920

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have studied Chapter 23 in your textbook and worked through this study guide chapter, you should be able to:

1. Discuss Europe's descent into the First World War.
2. Discuss both President Woodrow Wilson's attempts and the attempts of antiwar activists to keep the United States out of the First World War, and explain the ultimate failure of those efforts.
3. Discuss the response of Americans to the First World War and to American entry into the war, and indicate the extent to which U.S. participation influenced the outcome of the conflict.
4. Describe the characteristics of draftees and volunteers in the American armed forces during the First World War and discuss their lives as soldiers.
5. Examine the impact of the First World War on the American home front, including its impact on the federal government, business, labor, women, and African Americans.
6. Explain and evaluate the record of government at the local, state, and national levels on civil liberties questions during and after the war.
7. Explain the differences and similarities between Wilsonianism as stated in Wilson's Fourteen Points and the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.
8. Examine the debate over ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and American entry into the League of Nations, and explain the Senate's rejection of the treaty.
9. Examine the impact of the First World War on America's role in world affairs.

THEMATIC GUIDE

In Chapter 23, we deal with the causes of the First World War, American entry into the war, and the political, social, and economic impact of the war on the United States and its people. The nation's entry into the war is discussed in "Precarious Neutrality" and "The Decision for War." Although President Wilson proclaimed the United States to be neutral in the European conflict, three realities made neutrality practically impossible. Those realities confirm the interrelation of domestic and foreign policy (a dominant theme in Chapter 22). Furthermore, the discussion of the tenets of Wilsonianism and Wilson's strict interpretation of international law reinforces the concept that a nation's foreign policy is based on its perception of the world community of nations and of its relationship to those nations.

Besides the underlying reasons for American entry into the war, there were obvious and immediate reasons for that decision: the naval warfare between Great Britain and Germany, the use of the submarine by the Germans, and Wilson's interpretation of international law as he attempted to protect the rights of the United States as a neutral nation. The authors' inference that Americans got caught in the crossfire between the Allies and the Central Powers is supported through the tracing of U.S. policy from the sinking of the *Lusitania* to the adoption of unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans.

Therefore, the Zimmermann telegram, perceived as a direct threat to American security by American officials, the arming of American commercial ships, and additional sinkings of American ships by German submarines brought a declaration of war by Congress. Finally, America went to war because of a special sense of mission. The country went to war to reform world politics, war being the only means that guaranteed Wilson a seat and an insider's voice at the peace table.

In spite of antiwar sentiment in the United States, the country began to prepare for war before the actual declaration, as can be seen in the passage of the National Defense Act, the Navy Act, and the Revenue Act. Once war was declared, the country turned to the draft (the Selective Service Act) to raise the necessary army. Even though American military and political leaders believed that American virtue could reshape the world, they feared that the world would reshape the virtue of American soldiers. Despite attempts to protect that virtue, venereal disease became a serious problem within the army. Furthermore, American soldiers could not be shielded from the graver threat of influenza and pneumonia, and more soldiers died from disease than on the battlefield. Another serious problem in the American army—one that government and army officials did little to combat—was racism. Not only were African Americans segregated within the army, but they were also subjected to various forms of racial discrimination.

Mobilization of the nation for the war effort altered American life. Government power increased, especially in the economic sphere. Government-business cooperation became part of official government policy. Centralized governmental control and planning of the nation's economy were largely successful, but there were mistakes and problems. Government policy caused inflation; government tax policies meant that only one-third of the war was financed through taxes; and, although organized labor made some gains, it usually took a back seat to the needs of corporations.

The war intensified the divisions within the pluralistic American society. Entry of more women into previously "male" jobs brought negative reactions by male workers. Increased northward migration of African Americans intensified racist fears and animosities in factories and neighborhoods. The government's fear of dissent and of foreigners led to the trampling of civil liberties at the national, state, and local levels. In the immediate aftermath of the war, events both within and outside the country heightened these fears, culminating in the Red Scare and the Palmer Raids. The American effort to "make the world safe for democracy" brought actions on the home front that seemed to indicate a basic distrust of democracy.

Divisions also intensified on the political front, as the debate over the Treaty of Versailles indicates. In "The Defeat of Peace" Wilson's Fourteen Points are contrasted with the actual terms of the treaty. The divergence was an issue used in the arguments of those opposed to the treaty and to American entry into the League of Nations. But the core of the problem lay in Article 10 of the League covenant. Critics charged that the collective-security provisions of this article would allow League members to call out the U.S. army without congressional approval. The *belief* of many that this was true was at the heart of the debate against the League. Fear that the United States would be forced to forgo its traditional unilateralism in foreign affairs led the Senate to reject the treaty and American entry into the League of Nations.

The American experience in the First World War influenced every aspect of American life, producing consequences for the future. The war changed America's place in world affairs to one of world prominence, and it continued to shape America's institutions and decisions both at home and abroad long after 1920.

IDENTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

After studying Chapter 23 of *A People and a Nation*, you should be able to identify *and* explain fully the historical significance of each item listed below.

- Identify each item in the space provided. Give an explanation or description of the item. Answer the questions *who, what, where, and when*.
 - Explain the historical significance of each item in the space provided. Establish the historical context in which the item exists. Establish the item as the result of or as the cause of other factors existing in the society under study. Answer this question: *What were the political, social, economic, and/or cultural consequences of this item?*
1. the *Lusitania*

 2. the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand

 3. President Wilson's proclamation of neutrality

 4. neutral rights

 5. the submarine and international law

 6. unrestricted submarine warfare

7. the Zimmermann telegram
8. Wilson's war message
9. the Selective Service Act
10. African American enlistees in the military
11. evaders, deserters, and conscientious objectors
12. General John J. Pershing
13. trench warfare and poison gas
14. the American Expeditionary Force
15. the Bolshevik Revolution

16. Wilson's Fourteen Points
17. the War Industries Board
18. African American migration
19. the Committee on Public Information
20. the Espionage and Sedition Acts
21. Eugene V. Debs
22. *Schenck v. United States*
23. the Red Scare
24. the Boston police strike

25. the steel strike of 1919

26. A. Mitchell Palmer

27. the Palmer Raids

28. the East St. Louis riot of 1917

29. the Red Summer of 1919

30. the Paris Peace Conference

31. the principle of self-determination of peoples

32. the mandate system

33. the Balfour Declaration of 1917

34. the League of Nations

35. Article 10 of the League covenant

36. the Treaty of Versailles

37. the Lodge reservations

38. collective security versus unilateralism

IDEAS AND DETAILS

Objective 1

1. Great Britain entered the First World War in response to
 - a. the Austro-Hungarian invasion of Russia.
 - b. acts of Russian terrorism in the Balkans.
 - c. the Serbian invasion of Austria-Hungary.
 - d. the German invasion of Belgium.

Objective 2

2. American neutrality in response to the First World War was never a real possibility because
 - a. Wilson wanted to enter the war and force Germany into submission.
 - b. the American press had built broad-based sympathy for Serbian nationalism.
 - c. the United States had stronger economic ties to the Allies than to the Central Powers.
 - d. Secretary of State Bryan worked secretly to bring the United States into the war.

Objective 7

3. The body of ideas known as Wilsonianism and summarized in the Fourteen Points included the belief that
 - a. secret military alliances were the best means by which to maintain world peace.
 - b. democratic nations should enter into a collective-security agreement to contain and eliminate the communist threat.
 - c. democratic nations should build more arms to demonstrate their resolve against autocracy.
 - d. empires should be dismantled and the nationalities in Europe should be free to determine and control their own destiny.

Objective 2

4. William Jennings Bryan resigned his post as secretary of state because
 - a. he disagreed with President Wilson’s refusal to ban American travelers from sailing on belligerent ships.
 - b. the American public responded negatively to his protests concerning Britain’s illegal blockade of Germany.
 - c. his pro-German sympathies became a liability to the Wilson administration.
 - d. President Wilson publicly reprimanded him for advocating American entry into the First World War.

Objective 2

5. As a result of the Zimmermann telegram, Wilson
 - a. broke diplomatic relations with Germany.
 - b. decided to rethink his position on international law in relation to the submarine.
 - c. became more convinced that Germany was conspiring against the United States.
 - d. decided that supporting the Mexican revolution was in the best interest of the United States.

Objective 2

6. President Wilson responded to the defeat of his armed-ship bill by
 - a. demanding that the antiwar senators responsible for its defeat be censured by the Senate.
 - b. ordering naval escorts for American commercial ships in the Atlantic.
 - c. arming American commercial vessels anyway.
 - d. immediately drafting a declaration of war to present to Congress.

Objectives 4 and 5

7. While serving as soldiers in France during the First World War, African Americans
 - a. were confined to their barracks due to orders by the French government.
 - b. found that they received more respect from French soldiers than from American soldiers.
 - c. were not allowed to serve alongside French soldiers.
 - d. received certificates of French citizenship from the French government.

Objective 4

8. General Pershing refused to allow American soldiers to become part of Allied units because he
 - a. disagreed with President Wilson’s decision to enter the war.
 - b. was afraid they would be corrupted by European ways.
 - c. did not want them to be commanded by Allied officers who seemed unable to develop a strategy to end the horrors of trench warfare.

- d. did not believe they were as well trained as their Allied counterparts.

Objective 5

- 9. In mobilizing the economy for the war effort, the government
 - a. rigidly enforced antitrust laws.
 - b. protected consumers by instituting a wage and price freeze.
 - c. established a partnership between government and business.
 - d. insisted on annual cost-of-living wage increases for workers in war-related industries.

Objective 5

- 10. During the First World War, women in the work force
 - a. comprised the majority of members in labor unions.
 - b. took advantage of new work opportunities, with some moving into jobs previously reserved for men.
 - c. were more valued and received higher wages than men.
 - d. often faced being fired so that their jobs could be given to unemployed men.

Objective 6

- 11. In order to achieve its objective, the Committee on Public Information
 - a. encouraged Americans to spy on each other.
 - b. encouraged a free and open debate of the American war effort.
 - c. held daily briefings with reporters to ensure the dissemination of accurate war news.
 - d. sponsored public question-and-answer forums to dispel rumors.

Objective 6

- 12. In the case of *Schenck v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled that
 - a. members of the Socialist Party could be required to register with the government.
 - b. freedom of speech could be restricted in time of war.
 - c. the Sedition Act was unconstitutional.
 - d. the teaching of foreign languages could be banned from public schools.

Objective 6

- 13. Which of the following statements is accurate in relation to the Palmer Raids?
 - a. A well-organized Bolshevik conspiracy against the U.S. government was crushed.
 - b. The attorney general, in dealing with supposed radicals, showed disregard for civil liberties.
 - c. Wilson instructed several state legislatures to remove suspected Socialists from their ranks.
 - d. Documents confiscated during the raids led the Wilson administration to declare labor unions illegal.

Objective 5

- 14. Which of the following statements accurately describes the experiences of African Americans during the First World War?
 - a. Military leaders attempted to combat racism by integrating their units.
 - b. Southern whites welcomed the northward migration of blacks.
 - c. The ideology used to justify the war was used to dismantle racial barriers within the United States.
 - d. Some northern whites reacted with anger and violence to the northward migration of blacks.

Objectives 7 and 8

15. Opponents of the Treaty of Versailles objected primarily to
 - a. the collective-security provision of Article 10.
 - b. Wilson’s acceptance of the mandate system.
 - c. the clause that blamed the war on Germany.
 - d. Wilson’s inability to secure reparations payments from Germany.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Objective 2

1. Explain Wilson’s attempts to keep the United States out of the Great War in Europe. Why was the country eventually drawn into the conflict?

Objective 5

2. Discuss the impact of the First World War on women and African Americans.

Objective 6

3. Discuss the Wilson administration’s record in the area of civil liberties during the First World War.

Objective 6

4. Discuss the fear of communism in American society in the early twentieth century, and explain how that fear manifested itself between 1917 and 1921.

Objective 8

5. Explain the foreign policy debate over ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and entry into the League of Nations. Why did those opposed to ratification and to League membership carry the day?

ANSWERS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. d. Correct. When Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia and Germany declared war against Russia and France, Great Britain hesitated. Only when Germany invaded Belgium, whose neutrality was guaranteed by Great Britain, did Britain enter the war.

- a. No. When Russia mobilized its armies to aid Serbia, Germany first declared war against Russia and then against France, Russia's ally. Through all of this, Austria-Hungary did not invade Russia and Britain did not declare war.
 - b. No. The act of terrorism that led to war was undertaken by a Serbian nationalist against Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. However, even though that event is seen as the spark that ignited the war, Great Britain did not enter the war in direct response to this act of terrorism.
 - c. No. Serbia did not invade Austria-Hungary.
2. c. Correct. Wilson's appeal for neutrality clashed with three realities: (1) ethnic groups in the United States took sides; (2) economic links with the Allies made neutrality difficult; and (3) administration officials were sympathetic to the Allies.
 - a. No. Woodrow Wilson was sincere in his desire to keep the United States out of the war in Europe.
 - b. No. The print media had not built broad-based sympathy for Serbian nationalism in the United States. Moreover, Serbian nationalism was not the major issue in the minds of most Americans.
 - d. No. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan insisted on a policy of strict neutrality.
3. d. Correct. Wilsonianism advocated decolonization (the breaking up of empires) and the principle of self-determination (the right of all people to determine their own future without outside interference).
 - a. No. Wilsonianism held that all diplomatic agreements among nations, including all alliance systems, should be openly negotiated.
 - b. No. It is true that an army made up of soldiers from fourteen allied nations, including the United States, was sent to Russia and assisted anti-Bolshevik forces. It is also true that Wilson refused to recognize the Soviet government. But Wilson was instrumental in persuading the Allies to abandon their attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Furthermore, one of his Fourteen Points stated that Russia should be allowed to determine its own form of government and its own national policy. Therefore, Wilson never explicitly included in the Fourteen Points a provision to form a collective-security agreement for the purpose of containing communism.
 - c. No. Wilsonianism advocated reducing world armaments.
4. a. Correct. Bryan believed that Germany had a right to prevent contraband from going to the Allies and faulted Great Britain for using passenger ships to carry such contraband. When Wilson rejected Bryan's advice that Americans not be allowed to travel on belligerent ships, Bryan resigned.
 - b. No. Although Bryan protested Great Britain's blockade of Germany, no great public outcry led to his resignation.
 - c. No. Bryan believed that the United States should remain strictly neutral in its relations with the European belligerents.
 - d. No. Bryan did not advocate American entry into the war.
5. c. Correct. Mexican-American relations were strained in 1917, and Wilson saw this proposal of a Mexican-German alliance as proof of a German conspiracy against the United States. Soon after he learned of the telegram, Wilson asked Congress for "armed neutrality."

- a. No. Wilson broke diplomatic relations with Germany on February 3, 1917, in response to Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1. Thus relations were severed before the Zimmermann note was given to the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain on February 24.
- b. No. The Zimmermann telegram proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico and did not cause Wilson to rethink his position on the application of international law to the submarine.
- d. No. American troops began to withdraw from Mexico in January 1917 and were fully withdrawn by February 5. Therefore, Wilson decided to change his policy toward Mexico before learning of the Zimmermann telegram on February 24. Furthermore, this change did not constitute "support" for the Mexican revolution.
6. c. Correct. After some twelve senators used the filibuster to defeat the armed-ship bill, Secretary of State Robert Lansing advised President Wilson that he had the authority under statute law to arm merchant vessels without congressional approval. Therefore, Wilson proceeded to use that authority.
- a. No. Although Wilson referred to the group of senators responsible for filibustering the bill to death as that "little group of willful men," there is no evidence that he ever contemplated asking the Senate to censure them. In fact, such a request from the executive branch would most likely have angered the Senate.
- b. No. Wilson did not respond to the defeat of the bill by ordering the navy to escort American commercial ships.
- d. No. The armed-ship bill was defeated on March 4, 1917, and Wilson did not deliver his war message to Congress until April 2, 1917.
7. b. Correct. African American soldiers who served in France were gratified by the reception they received from French civilians and French soldiers and often felt that they were better received and treated than in the United States. Upon their return to the United States, their experience in France and other European countries seems to have been a factor that led African American veterans to become more active and outspoken in the equal rights campaign.
- a. No. There was no French law that confined African Americans serving in France to their barracks.
- c. No. African American soldiers served alongside French soldiers and often did so with distinction.
- d. No. Although the all-black 369th Regiment received the Croix de Guerre, the French government did not extend French citizenship to African American soldiers.
8. c. Correct. Pershing refused to subject American soldiers to the horrors of trench warfare. For this reason the United States declared itself an "Associated" power and American soldiers, for the most part, did not become part of Allied units.
- a. No. Pershing was a good soldier. If he ever disagreed with America's entry into the war he did not say so publicly and never openly disagreed with the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.
- b. No. Although General Pershing was concerned about the virtue of American soldiers, it was not for this reason that he refused to allow American soldiers to become part of Allied units.

- d. No. General Pershing had tremendous faith in the ability of American soldiers.
9. c. Correct. Although government tax policies were designed to bring into the Treasury some of the profits reaped by business, the overall relationship between government and business was one of partnership.
- a. No. Antitrust laws were virtually suspended during the war. For example, the Webb-Pomerene Act granted immunity from antitrust legislation to companies that combined to operate in the export trade.
- b. No. Although the government did not institute a wage and price freeze during the war, it did fix prices on raw materials rather than on finished products. As a result, it lost control of inflation, and workers saw little improvement in their economic standing.
- d. No. The government did not demand cost-of-living increases for workers in war-related industries.
10. b. Correct. During the war there was a labor shortage in many key industries because so many men were in the armed forces. As a result, new work opportunities were available to women and many women took advantage of those opportunities. In doing so, some women moved into previously male domains.
- a. No. Except for unions organized by women, organized labor continued to be male-dominated and openly hostile toward women.
- c. No. With the labor shortage during the war years, women in the work force were certainly valued. However, men sometimes protested that women were undermining the wage system by working for lower pay than that received by men.
- d. No. One of the advantages of the wartime economy was full-employment, while one of the disadvantages was a labor shortage. As a result, unemployment was rare and women were encouraged by many businesses to fill job vacancies.
11. a. Correct. The CPI was organized to mobilize American opinion behind the war effort. Through its efforts it portrayed antiwar dissenters as being dangerous to national security and encouraged patriotic Americans to spy on their neighbors and report any “suspicious” behavior.
- b. No. The CPI was established by Wilson in 1917 as a propaganda agency. As such, the CPI did not encourage Americans to debate openly the American war effort.
- c. No. The CPI, established in 1917 by President Wilson, was interested in good propaganda. This goal did not always coincide with the dissemination of accurate war news.
- d. No. President Wilson established the CPI in 1917 as a propaganda agency. The committee often found that exaggeration and rumor worked to its advantage.
12. b. Correct. The Court, in a unanimous opinion, upheld the Espionage Act as constitutional. In doing so, the Court applied the “clear and present danger” test to free speech in time of war.
- a. No. There was no law requiring members of the Socialist Party to register with the government.
- c. No. The Court upheld the constitutionality of the Sedition Act by a 7-to-2 vote in *Abrams v. United States* (1919).
- d. No. The *Schenck* case did not involve the teaching of foreign languages in public schools.

13. b. Correct. In the Palmer Raids, government agents were authorized by Attorney General Palmer to break into meeting halls, poolrooms, and homes, without search warrants. Those arrested and jailed were denied legal counsel. These actions demonstrate a disregard for civil liberties.
- a. No. Although political and business leaders believed a conspiracy existed among American radicals, the evidence indicates that the American left was badly divided and not capable of a “well-organized conspiracy” against the U.S. government.
- c. No. Although the New York State legislature expelled five Socialist legislators, the expulsion was not done on instructions from President Wilson.
- d. No. Although some believed that the Boston police strike and the steel strike indicated radical infiltration of the union movement in the United States, labor organizations were not declared illegal.
14. d. Correct. The massive influx of African Americans into the North during the First World War caused anxiety among white northerners. This anxiety found expression in northern race riots in which whites terrorized blacks.
- a. No. African Americans served in all-black units in the armed forces. Some served in combat units, but most were relegated to menial jobs. Although racism was obvious in the military, military leaders did not suggest integration of units as a solution.
- b. No. The northward migration of African Americans created problems for southern white landowners and businessmen because it reduced their supply of cheap laborers. The problem was further complicated by the fact that white laborers were also moving away.
- c. No. African Americans continued to experience racial discrimination at home during and after the First World War.
15. a. Correct. The argument at the core of the debate over the treaty concerned the question of collective security versus America’s traditional unilateralism. Those who opposed the Treaty of Versailles rejected the idea of collective security contained in Article 10.
- b. No. Although some of the treaty’s opponents charged that Wilson had compromised his stated principles of decolonization and self-determination by accepting the mandate system, opposition to the treaty did not rest on this issue.
- c. No. Those who opposed the Treaty of Versailles had no problem with the “war guilt clause,” which placed most of the blame for the war on Germany and its allies.
- d. No. The treaty contained a provision that a reparations commission would determine the amount Germany was to pay the Allies. This figure was later set at \$33 billion.