

World War I and U.S. Involvement

Causes of World War I (1914-1918)

1. Nationalism (not only by country but also by region and ethnic identity)
2. Industrialization continued in many countries (need for new markets, resources)
3. Imperialism (race to create empires and acquire land even if no economic benefit existed)
4. Military buildup (due to long period of peace and industrialization)
 - no major European war was fought since the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815
 - massive arms race and building of large armies for offensive warfare (defensive tactics proved to be better as the war dragged on)
5. Pre-War Alliances (diplomatic/economic due to fear of each other and to preserve peace)

Pre-War Alliances (major countries)

Triple Alliance- Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy

Triple Entente- France, Russia, and Great Britain

Wartime Alliances (major countries)

Allies- France, Russia, Great Britain, U.S., Japan, and Italy

Central Powers- Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Ottoman Empire

Defining Characteristics of World War I

- World was not prepared for a long war nor did they even want it in the first place (countries had too much to lose)
 - militaries were set up for quick, decisive battles
 - economies of countries not prepared for a long war
- War of Attrition (kill as many enemy as possible----very little strategy)
 - *strategy became trench warfare
- Long drawn out stalemate (victory always comes to the side who can solve the economic problems of war)
- Enormous amount of casualties (due to advanced technology of weapons and continued use of Napoleonic war strategies)
 - *tanks, machine guns, poison gas, etc.
 - approximately 9 million soldiers killed
 - approximately 5 million civilians killed

U.S. involvement in World War I

- Initial reaction in 1914 was neutrality (Wilson urged Americans to remain neutral despite ethnic loyalties)---“Remain neutral in action and thought”
 - geographic advantage (separated by ocean)
 - not a member of any pre-war alliance
- 1914 to summer of 1915 (truly appeared neutral)
 - U.S. traded with both sides but at the same time began slowly putting pieces in place for war mobilization
- Summer of 1915 until Spring of 1917
 - American neutrality began to strain as Americans began to see Germany as militaristic and G.B., France as democratic (historic ethnic/cultural ties with Great Britain and France)
 - Freedom of the Seas was very important to the U.S. economy
 - Submarine warfare caused profitable ports to be closed
 - Sinking of the ships Lusitania, Arabic, and Sussex

- April, 1917 (U.S. declares war on Germany)--Contributing Factors
 1. British propaganda affecting American public opinion
 2. Sinking of Merchant ships
 3. German submarine warfare (no rules-secretive by nature)
 4. Trade affected
 5. Threat to European Security (“Making the World Safe for Democracy”)
 6. Threat to U.S. Security (Zimmermann Telegram)

Mobilization for War

- Propaganda to convince Americans a just cause (Creel and Committee on Public Information)---- billboards, 4 minutemen speeches, pamphlets, movies, songs, etc.
- Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918 (silence critics of the War)----Schneck v. U.S. upheld the right of Government to suspend certain civil liberties
- Military Preparation
 - National Defense Act (doubled the size of army and created the National Guard)
 - Selective Service Act---draft (expanded army from 380,000 to 3.7 million in 8 months)
 - Naval Construction Act (3 year program to expand Navy)
- Economic mobilization (why Allies won)
 - How would country pay for the war?
 - doubled income tax
 - created a 13% tax for those worth over 2 million
 - 12.5% tax on profits on arms building companies
 - loans (primarily war bonds)
 - Food Administration (conserve food for war effort)
 - Fuel Administration (conserve fuel for war effort)
 - War Industries Board (ineffective due to Laissez-Faire tradition)
 - National War Labor Board (chaired by Taft)---mediate between laborers and employers to keep production up
 - Role of Women (took control of home front)

Summary of U.S. Involvement

- Provided much needed manpower, energy, \$, and supplies to Allies
- Approximately 2 million soldiers crossed the ocean
- Ended any dream of U.S. isolationism in the future
- Treaty of Versailles (Wilson’s 14 points, League of Nations)