



World War I Begins

MAIN IDEA

As World War I intensified, the United States was forced to abandon its neutrality.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The United States remains involved in European and world affairs.

Terms & Names

- nationalism
- militarism
- Allies
- Central Powers
- Archduke Franz Ferdinand
- no man's land
- trench warfare
- *Lusitania*
- Zimmermann note

One American's Story

It was about 1:00 A.M. on April 6, 1917, and the members of the U.S. House of Representatives were tired. For the past 15 hours they had been debating President Wilson's request for a declaration of war against Germany. There was a breathless hush as Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress, stood up. Rankin declared, "I want to stand by my country but I cannot vote for war. I vote no." Later she reflected on her action.

A PERSONAL VOICE JEANNETTE RANKIN

"I believe that the first vote I cast was the most significant vote and a most significant act on the part of women, because women are going to have to stop war. I felt at the time that the first woman [in Congress] should take the first stand, that the first time the first woman had a chance to say no to war she should say it."

—quoted in *Jeannette Rankin: First Lady in Congress*



▲ Jeannette Rankin was the only member of the House to vote against the U.S. entering both World War I and World War II.

After much debate as to whether the United States should join the fight, Congress voted in favor of U.S. entry into World War I. With this decision, the government abandoned the neutrality that America had maintained for three years. What made the United States change its policy in 1917?

Causes of World War I

Although many Americans wanted to stay out of the war, several factors made American neutrality difficult to maintain. As an industrial and imperial power, the United States felt many of the same pressures that had led the nations of Europe into devastating warfare. Historians generally cite four long-term causes of the First World War: nationalism, imperialism, militarism, and the formation of a system of alliances.



NATIONALISM Throughout the 19th century, politics in the Western world were deeply influenced by the concept of **nationalism**—a devotion to the interests and culture of one's nation. Often, nationalism led to competitive and antagonistic rivalries among nations. In this atmosphere of competition, many feared Germany's growing power in Europe.

In addition, various ethnic groups resented domination by others and longed for their nations to become independent. Many ethnic groups looked to larger nations for protection. Russia regarded itself as the protector of Europe's Slavic peoples, no matter which government they lived under. Among these Slavic peoples were the Serbs. Serbia, located in the Balkans, was an independent nation, but millions of ethnic Serbs lived under the rule of Austria-Hungary. As a result, Russia and Austria-Hungary were rivals for influence over Serbia.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A How did nationalism and imperialism lead to conflict in Europe?

IMPERIALISM For many centuries, European nations had been building empires, slowly extending their economic and political control over various peoples of the world. Colonies supplied the European imperial powers with raw materials and provided markets for manufactured goods. As Germany industrialized, it competed with France and Britain in the contest for colonies. **A**

MILITARISM Empires were expensive to build and to defend. The growth of nationalism and imperialism led to increased military spending. Because each nation wanted stronger armed forces than those of any potential enemy, the imperial powers followed a policy of **militarism**—the development of armed forces and their use as a tool of diplomacy.

By 1890 the strongest nation on the European continent was Germany, which had set up an army reserve system that drafted and trained young men. Britain was not initially alarmed by Germany's military expansion. As an island nation, Britain had always relied on its navy for defense and protection of its shipping routes—and the British navy was the strongest in the world. However, in 1897, Wilhelm II, Germany's kaiser, or emperor, decided that his nation should also become a major sea power in order to compete more successfully against the British. Soon British and German shipyards competed to build the largest battleships and destroyers. France, Italy, Japan, and the United States quickly joined the naval arms race.

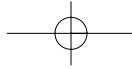
Vocabulary

alliance: a formal agreement or union between nations

ALLIANCE SYSTEM By 1907 there were two major defense alliances in Europe. The Triple Entente, later known as the **Allies**, consisted of France, Britain, and Russia. The Triple Alliance consisted of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.



◀ German Emperor Wilhelm II (center) marches with two of his generals, Hindenburg (left) and Ludendorff, during World War I.



Germany and Austria-Hungary, together with the Ottoman Empire—an empire of mostly Middle Eastern lands controlled by the Turks—were later known as the **Central Powers**. The alliances provided a measure of international security because nations were reluctant to disturb the balance of power. As it turned out, a spark set off a major conflict.

An Assassination Leads to War

That spark flared in the Balkan Peninsula, which was known as “the powder keg of Europe.” In addition to the ethnic rivalries among the Balkan peoples, Europe’s leading powers had interests there. Russia wanted access to the Mediterranean Sea. Germany wanted a rail link to the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary, which had taken control of Bosnia in 1878, accused Serbia of subverting its rule over Bosnia. The “powder keg” was ready to explode.

In June 1914, **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, heir to the Austrian throne, visited the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. As the royal entourage drove through the city, Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip stepped from the crowd and shot the Archduke and his wife Sophie. Princip was a member of the Black Hand, an organization promoting Serbian nationalism. The assassinations touched off a diplomatic crisis. On July 28, Austria-Hungary declared what was expected to be a short war against Serbia.

The alliance system pulled one nation after another into the conflict. On August 1, Germany, obligated by treaty to support Austria-Hungary, declared war on Russia. On August 3, Germany declared war on Russia’s ally France. After Germany invaded Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Great War had begun. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

B Why were so many European nations pulled into the conflict?



CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

After World War I, Bosnia became part of a country that eventually became known as Yugoslavia. Although Yugoslavia included various religious and ethnic groups, the government was dominated by Serbs.

In 1991, Yugoslavia broke apart, and Bosnia declared independence in 1992. However, Serbs wanted Bosnia to remain part of Serbian-controlled Yugoslavia.

A bloody civil war broke out. This war became notorious for the mass murder and deportation of Bosnian Muslims, a process known as “ethnic cleansing.” In 1995, the United States helped negotiate a cease-fire.

But peace in the Balkans did not last. In the late 1990s, Albanians in the province of Kosovo also tried to break away from Serbia. Serbia’s violent response, which included the “ethnic cleansing” of Albanians, prompted NATO to intervene. Today, peacekeepers in the Balkans struggle to control the continuing ethnic violence.

The Fighting Starts

On August 3, 1914, Germany invaded Belgium, following a strategy known as the Schlieffen Plan. This plan called for a holding action against Russia, combined with a quick drive through Belgium to Paris; after France had fallen, the two German armies would defeat Russia. As German troops swept across Belgium, thousands of civilians fled in terror. In Brussels, the Belgian capital, an American war correspondent described the first major refugee crisis of the 20th century.

A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

“[We] found the side streets blocked with their carts. Into these they had thrown mattresses, or bundles of grain, and heaped upon them were families of three generations. Old men in blue smocks, white-haired and bent, old women in caps, the daughters dressed in their one best frock and hat, and clasping in their hands all that was left to them, all that they could stuff into a pillow-case or flour-sack. . . . Heart-broken, weary, hungry, they passed in an unending caravan.”

—from *Hooray for Peace, Hurrah for War*

Vocabulary

refugee: a person who flees in search of protection or shelter, as in times of war or religious persecution

Europe at the Start of World War I



The Western Front 1914–1916



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Location** About how many miles separated the city of Paris from German forces at the point of their closest approach?
- 2. Place** Consider the geographical location of the Allies in relation to the Central Powers. What advantage might the Allies have had?



Unable to save Belgium, the Allies retreated to the Marne River in France, where they halted the German advance in September 1914. After struggling to outflank each other's armies, both sides dug in for a long siege. By the spring of 1915, two parallel systems of deep, rat-infested trenches crossed France from the Belgian coast to the Swiss Alps. German soldiers occupied one set of trenches, Allied soldiers the other. There were three main kinds of trenches—front line, support, and reserve. Soldiers spent a period of time in each kind of trench. Dugouts, or underground rooms, were used as officers' quarters and command posts. Between the trench complexes lay **"no man's land"**—a barren expanse of mud pockmarked with shell craters and filled with barbed wire. Periodically, the soldiers charged enemy lines, only to be mowed down by machine gun fire. **C**

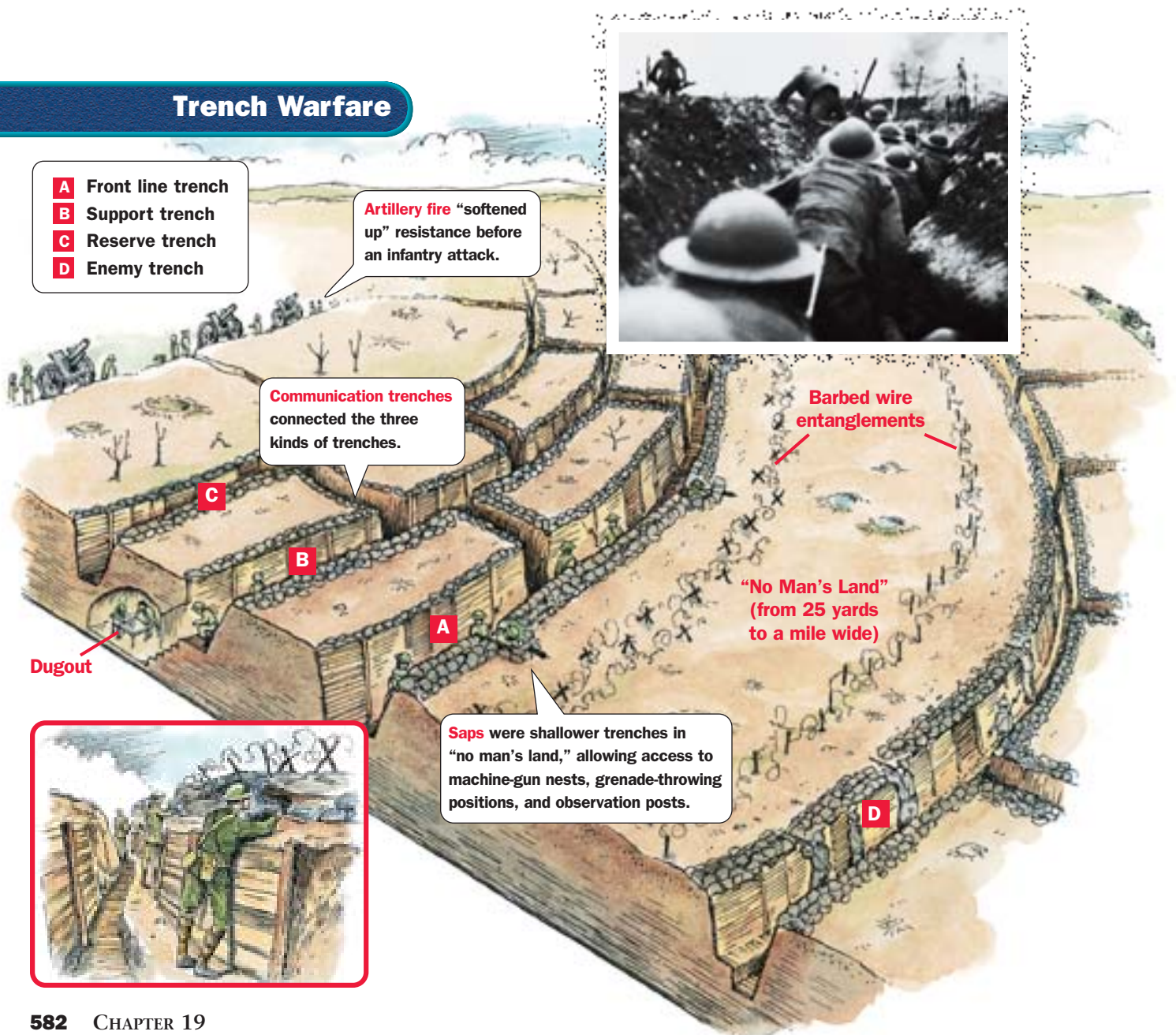
The scale of slaughter was horrific. During the First Battle of the Somme—which began on July 1, 1916, and lasted until mid-November—the British suffered 60,000 casualties the first day alone. Final casualties totaled about 1.2 million, yet only about seven miles of ground changed hands. This bloody **trench warfare**, in which armies fought for mere yards of ground, continued for over three years. Elsewhere, the fighting was just as devastating and inconclusive.

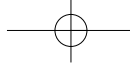
MAIN IDEA

Drawing Conclusions

C Why do you think soldiers were rotated in the trenches?

Trench Warfare





Americans Question Neutrality

In 1914, most Americans saw no reason to join a struggle 3,000 miles away. The war did not threaten American lives or property. This does not mean, however, that individual Americans were indifferent to who would win the war. Public opinion was strong—but divided.

DIVIDED LOYALTIES Socialists criticized the war as a capitalist and imperialist struggle between Germany and England to control markets and colonies in China, Africa, and the Middle East. Pacifists, such as lawyer and politician William Jennings Bryan, believed that war was evil and that the United States should set an example of peace to the world.

Many Americans simply did not want their sons to experience the horrors of warfare, as a hit song of 1915 conveyed.

“I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier,
I brought him up to be my pride and joy.
Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot some other mother’s darling boy?”

Vocabulary

emigrate: to leave one’s country or region to settle in another; to move

Millions of naturalized U.S. citizens followed the war closely because they still had ties to the nations from which they had emigrated. For example, many Americans of German descent sympathized with Germany. Americans of Irish descent remembered the centuries of British oppression in Ireland and saw the war as a chance for Ireland to gain its independence.

On the other hand, many Americans felt close to Britain because of a common ancestry and language as well as similar democratic institutions and legal systems. Germany’s aggressive sweep through Belgium increased American sympathy for the Allies. The Germans attacked civilians, destroying villages, cathedrals, libraries, and even hospitals. Some atrocity stories—spread by British propaganda—later proved to be false, but enough proved true that one American magazine referred to Germany as “the bully of Europe.”

More important, America’s economic ties with the Allies were far stronger than its ties with the Central Powers. Before the war, American trade with Britain and France was more than double its trade with Germany. During the first two years of the war, America’s transatlantic trade became even more lopsided, as the Allies flooded American manufacturers with orders for all sorts of war supplies, including dynamite, cannon powder, submarines, copper wire and tubing, and armored cars. The United States shipped millions of dollars of war supplies to the Allies, but requests kept coming. By 1915, the United States was experiencing a labor shortage. **D**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

D Why did the United States begin to favor Britain and France?

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

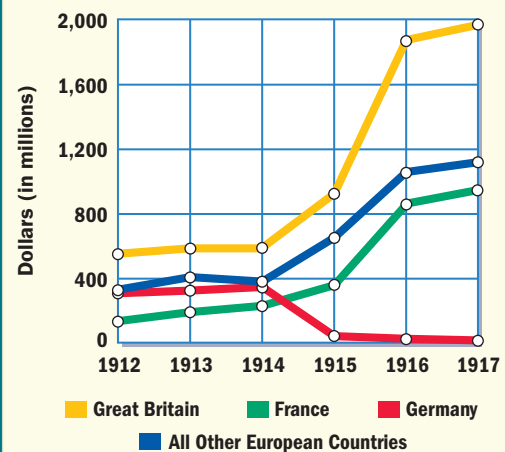
TRADE ALLIANCES

Maintaining neutrality proved difficult for American businesses. Trade with Germany became increasingly risky. Shipments were often stopped by the British blockade. In addition, President Wilson and others spoke out against German atrocities and warned of the threat that the German Empire posed to democracy.

From 1912 to 1917, U.S. trade relationships with European countries shifted dramatically. From 1914 on, trade with the Allies quadrupled, while trade with Germany fell to near zero.

Also, by 1917, American banks had loaned \$2.3 billion to the Allies, but only \$27 million to the Central Powers. Many U.S. leaders, including Treasury Secretary William McAdoo, felt that American prosperity depended upon an Allied victory. (See *trade* on page R47 in the Economics Handbook.)

U.S. Exports to Europe, 1912–1917



SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

- By how much did total U.S. exports to Europe rise or fall between 1914 and 1917?
- What trends does the graph show before the start of the war, and during the war?



▲ This image of a U-boat crew machine-gunning helpless survivors of the *Lusitania* was clearly meant as propaganda. In fact, U-boats seldom lingered after an attack.

The War Hits Home

Although the majority of Americans favored victory for the Allies rather than the Central Powers, they did not want to join the Allies' fight. By 1917, however, America had mobilized for war against the Central Powers for two reasons: to ensure Allied repayment of debts to the United States and to prevent the Germans from threatening U.S. shipping.

THE BRITISH BLOCKADE As fighting on land continued, Britain began to make more use of its naval strength. It blockaded the German coast to prevent weapons and other military supplies from getting through. However, the British expanded the definition of contraband to include food. They also extended the blockade to neutral ports and mined the entire North Sea.

The results were two fold. First, American ships carrying goods for Germany refused to challenge the blockade and seldom reached their destination. Second, Germany found it increasingly difficult to import foodstuffs and fertilizers for crops. By 1917, famine stalked the country. An estimated 750,000 Germans starved to death as a result of the British blockade.

Americans had been angry at Britain's blockade, which threatened freedom of the seas and prevented American goods from reaching German ports. However, Germany's response to the blockade soon outraged American public opinion.

GERMAN U-BOAT RESPONSE Germany responded to the British blockade with a counterblockade by U-boats (from *Unterseeboot*, the German word for a submarine). Any ship found in the waters around Britain would be sunk—and it would not always be possible to warn crews and passengers of an attack.

One of the worst disasters occurred on May 7, 1915, when a U-boat sank the British liner *Lusitania* (lōō'sī-tā'nē-ə) off the southern coast of Ireland. Of the 1,198 persons lost, 128 were Americans. The Germans defended their action on the grounds that the liner carried ammunition. Despite Germany's explanation, Americans became outraged with Germany because of the loss of life. American public opinion turned against Germany and the Central Powers.



▲ A newspaper ad for the *Lusitania* included a warning from the German Embassy.



MAIN IDEA

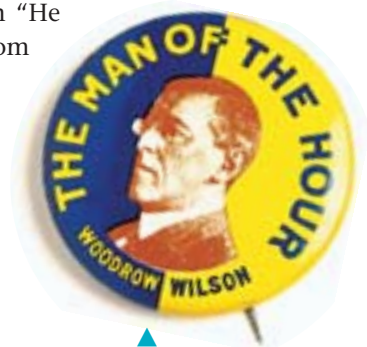
Analyzing Effects

E How did the German U-boat campaign affect U.S. public opinion?

Despite this provocation, President Wilson ruled out a military response in favor of a sharp protest to Germany. Three months later, in August 1915, a U-boat sank another British liner, the *Arabic*, drowning two Americans. Again the United States protested, and this time Germany agreed not to sink any more passenger ships. But in March 1916 Germany broke its promise and torpedoed an unarmed French passenger steamer, the *Sussex*. The *Sussex* sank, and about 80 passengers, including Americans, were killed or injured. Once again the United States warned that it would break off diplomatic relations unless Germany changed its tactics. Again Germany agreed, but there was a condition: if the United States could not persuade Britain to lift its blockade against food and fertilizers, Germany would consider renewing unrestricted submarine warfare. **E**

THE 1916 ELECTION In November 1916 came the U.S. presidential election. The Democrats renominated Wilson, and the Republicans nominated Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes. Wilson campaigned on the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War.” Hughes pledged to uphold America’s right to freedom of the seas but also promised not to be too severe on Germany.

The election returns shifted from hour to hour. In fact, Hughes went to bed believing he had been elected. When a reporter tried to reach him with the news of Wilson’s victory, an aide said, “The president can’t be disturbed.” “Well,” replied the reporter, “when he wakes up, tell him he’s no longer president.”



▲ Wilson campaign button

The United States Declares War

After the election, Wilson tried to mediate between the warring alliances. The attempt failed. In a speech before the Senate in January 1917, the president called for “a peace without victory. . . . a peace between equals,” in which neither side would impose harsh terms on the other. Wilson hoped that all nations would join in a “league for peace” that would work to extend democracy, maintain freedom of the seas, and reduce armaments.

GERMAN PROVOCATION The Germans ignored Wilson’s calls for peace. Germany’s leaders hoped to defeat Britain by resuming unrestricted submarine warfare. On January 31 the kaiser announced that U-boats would sink all ships in British waters—hostile or neutral—on sight. Wilson was stunned. The German decision meant that the United States would have to go to war. However, the president held back, saying that he would wait for “actual overt acts” before declaring war.

The overt acts came. First was the **Zimmermann note**, a telegram from the German foreign minister to the German ambassador in Mexico that was intercepted by British agents. The telegram proposed an alliance between Mexico and Germany and promised that if war with the United States broke out, Germany would support Mexico in recovering “lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.” Next came the sinking of four unarmed American merchant ships, with a loss of 36 lives. **F**

Finally, events in Russia removed the last significant obstacle to direct U.S. involvement in the war. In March, the oppressive Russian monarchy was

MAIN IDEA

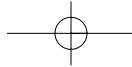
Making Inferences

F Why did the Zimmermann note alarm the U.S. government?

Alliances During WWI

Allies		Central Powers
Australia	India	Austria-Hungary
Belgium	Italy	Bulgaria
British Colonies	Japan	Germany
Canada & Newfoundland	Montenegro	Ottoman Empire
France	New Zealand	
French North Africa & French Colonies	Portugal	
Great Britain	Romania	
Greece	Russia	
	Serbia	
	South Africa	
	United States	

Although not all of the countries listed above sent troops into the war, they all joined the war on the Allied side at various times.



WORLD STAGE

REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA

At first, the Russians surprised the Germans by mobilizing rapidly. Russian troops advanced quickly into German territory but were turned back at the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914.

Throughout 1915, the Russians endured defeats and continued to retreat. By the end of 1915 they had suffered about 2.5 million casualties. The war also caused massive bread shortages in Russia.

Revolutionaries ousted the czar in March 1917 and established a provisional government. In November, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, overthrew the provisional government. They set up a Communist state and sought peace with the Central Powers.

replaced with a representative government. Now supporters of American entry into the war could claim that this was a war of democracies against brutal monarchies.

AMERICA ACTS A light drizzle fell on Washington on April 2, 1917, as senators, representatives, ambassadors, members of the Supreme Court, and other guests crowded into the Capitol building to hear President Wilson deliver his war resolution.

A PERSONAL VOICE WOODROW WILSON

“Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind. . . . We are glad . . . to fight . . . for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples. . . . The world must be made safe for democracy. . . . We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities. . . . It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war. . . . But the right is more precious than peace.”

—quoted in *American Voices*

Congress passed the resolution a few days later. With the hope of neutrality finally shattered, U.S. troops would follow the stream of American money and munitions that had been heading to the Allies throughout the war. But

Wilson’s plea to make the world “safe for democracy” wasn’t just political posturing. Indeed, Wilson and many Americans truly believed that the United States had to join the war to pave the way for a future order of peace and freedom. A resolved but anxious nation held its breath as the United States prepared for war.



ASSESSMENT

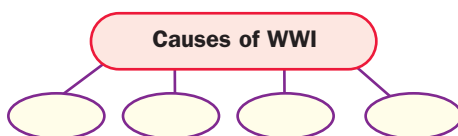
1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- nationalism
- militarism
- Allies
- Central Powers
- Archduke Franz Ferdinand
- no man’s land
- trench warfare
- Lusitania
- Zimmermann note

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In a chart like the one shown, list the causes for the outbreak of World War I.



Which was the most significant cause? Explain your answer.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. SYNTHESIZING

Describe some ways in which World War I threatened the lives of civilians on both sides of the Atlantic.

4. SUMMARIZING

Why were America’s ties with the Allies stronger than its ties with the Central Powers?

5. ANALYZING ISSUES

Why do you think Germany escalated its U-boat attacks in 1917? **Think About:**

- Germany’s military buildup
- the effects of the British blockade
- Germany’s reason for using submarine warfare