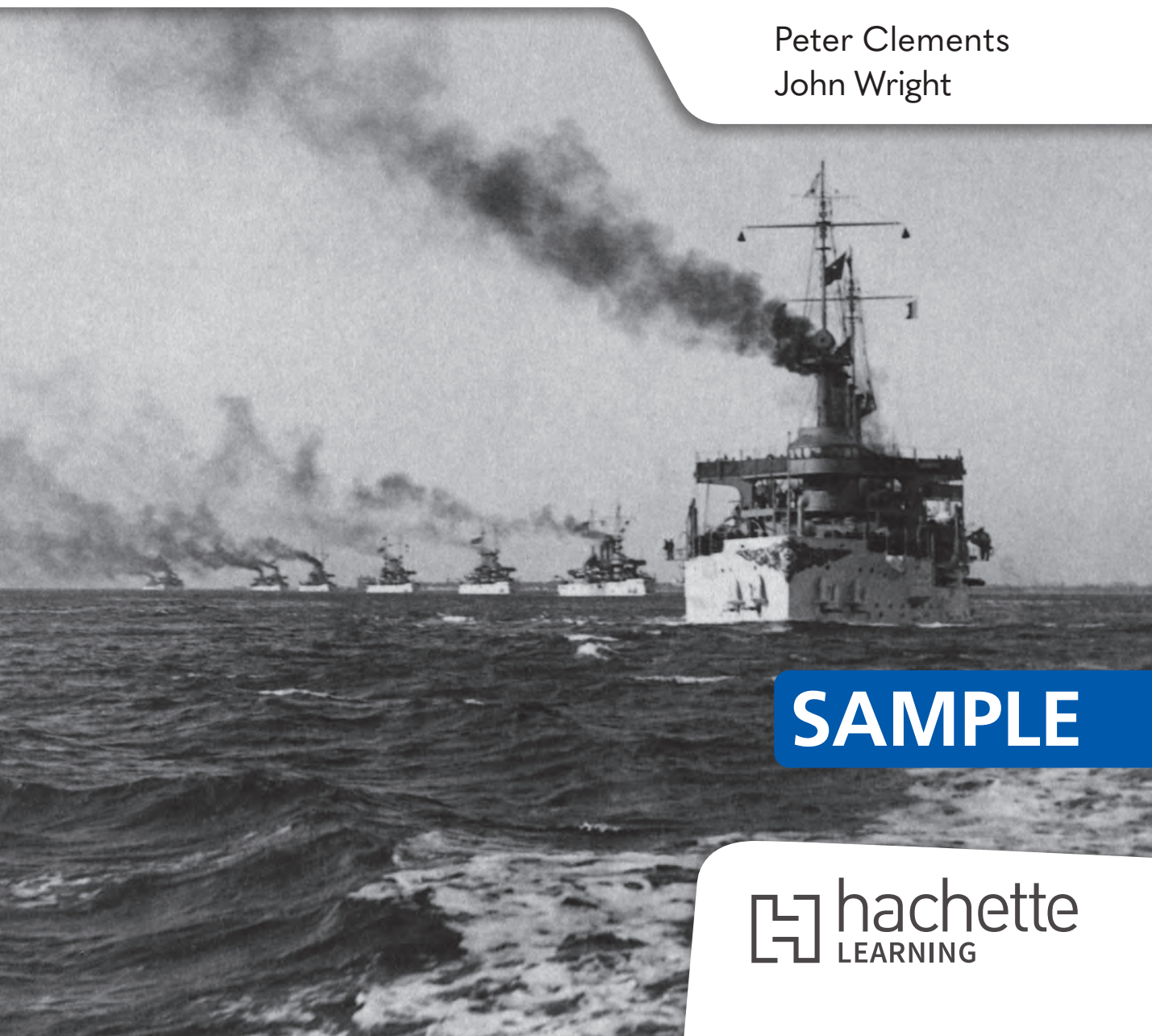


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Emergence of the Americas in global affairs (1880–1945)

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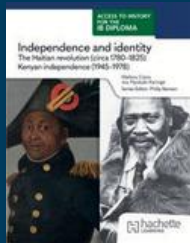
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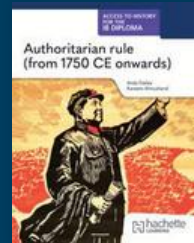
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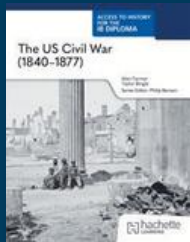
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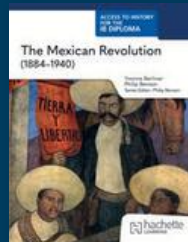
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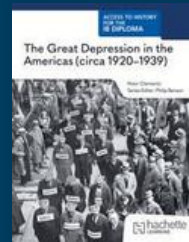
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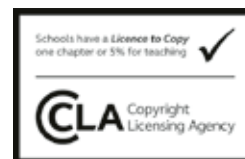
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- Glossary
- Further reading
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Changing regional and global role of the USA

This chapter considers the role of the USA during the First World War (1914–1918): how hard the USA tried to maintain its neutrality between 1914 and 1917, why it joined the war in April 1917 and how historians have interpreted the reasons for its entry. It goes on to discuss the attempts by President Wilson to convince Congress and US citizens to accept the peace settlement. Emphasis is subsequently given to relations with countries of Latin America, where US influence was considerable and growing. It discusses the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s designed to improve the relationship between the USA and Latin America and the diplomacy to facilitate this. It ends with an account of US involvement in the Second World War, fought largely in Europe and East Asia. It considers the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan and the overall contribution of the USA to the war effort.

You need to consider the following questions in the appropriate sections of this chapter:

- ★ How significant was the role of the USA in the First World War?
- ★ How influential was Wilson in the post-war settlement?
- ★ How did the USA penetrate Latin America after the First World War?
- ★ How significant was the role of the USA in the Second World War?

KEY DATES

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1914 Outbreak of First World War | 1936 Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, Buenos Aires |
| 1915 Sinking of RMS <i>Lusitania</i> | 1936–9 Spanish Civil War |
| 1917 USA enters First World War | 1938 Pan-American Conference, Lima |
| 1918 Armistice to end First World War | 1939 Outbreak of European conflict, Second World War |
| 1919 USA declines to join League of Nations | 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor |
| 1921 Knox–Porter Resolution, USA accepts peace but refuses peace treaties | 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily and Italy |
| 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria (modern-day Northeast China) | 1944 (April) Death of Roosevelt. Presidency of Harry S. Truman begins |
| 1933 Good Neighbor Policy announced | 1944 (June) Operation Overlord begins |
| 1933–45 Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt | 1945 (May) End of Second World War in Europe |
| 1935 Italian invasion of Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) | 1945 (August) End of Second World War with Japan |

1 Participation in the First World War

KEY TERM

Allies Countries such as Britain and France fighting the Central Powers in the First World War.

▶ **Key question:** How significant was the role of the USA in the First World War?

The First World War began in Europe in summer 1914 and came to dominate President Woodrow Wilson's presidency. There was a fundamental contradiction in the US stance. Officially the USA was neutral, but it increasingly sought an Allied victory. This almost certainly helped drag it into the war.

How neutral was the USA in the period 1914 to 1917?

Neutrality 1914–17

Reasons for neutrality

There were valid reasons for US neutrality.

- The USA had remained uninvolved in European disputes since the early 19th century. Many of its citizens had migrated to the USA to leave European problems behind. They saw no reason to become involved with them again.
- Nearly 12 million of its citizens had been born in Europe, many in Germany and Austria-Hungary. Wholesale support for the Allies was not guaranteed.
- US trade could benefit from neutrality by selling to all countries who were involved in the war, on both sides.
- The vast Atlantic Ocean meant a threat to the USA from Europe was unlikely.

Support for the Allies

The situation within the USA was more complex than the reasons for neutrality suggest. Most US American people, while not wanting the USA to join the conflict, supported the Allies and did not want to see a victorious Germany. This was because of links, not least a common language, with Britain and pro-British attitudes from many wealthy and influential US American people – including many in government. The ambassador to Britain, Walter S. Page, for example, worked with his host country to obtain US support for the Allied cause. British propaganda showing the brutality of Germany was far more influential than German efforts to gain US support.

KEY TERMS

Central Powers Primarily Germany and Austria fighting the Allies in the First World War.

Munitions Weapons of war.

Trade

The USA traded far more with the Allies than with the **Central Powers** and this was enhanced by the successful Allied blockade of German ports. In 1914, for example, the USA exported USD 40 million worth of **munitions** to Britain. By 1916, this figure had risen to USD 1,290 million.

It has been argued that the extent of this trade with the Allies pulled the USA out of an economic downturn in 1916.

Unrestricted submarine warfare

German submarines, or U-boats, operating in the Atlantic had begun to attack any ships sailing to Britain. This was the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare and it was justified in Germany because these ships were carrying war material to help the Allied war effort. In February 1915, the British liner RMS *Lusitania* was sunk, killing more than 1,100 passengers and crew. Germany insisted it was a valid target since it was carrying munitions. Among the dead were 128 American citizens. The USA was so angry that Germany, fearing its entry into the war, promised to abandon the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.

Entry into the war

In the 1916 presidential election, Wilson was the champion of neutrality despite his support for the Allies. His campaign focused on keeping the USA out of the war. However, in 1917 events moved quickly.

- Germany restarted unrestricted submarine warfare in the hope that it could starve Britain into surrender. It estimated that Britain was six weeks away from having insufficient food. While Wilson privately considered the Kaiser insane, and on 3 February broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, he still hoped to avoid entry into the war. However, on the same day, USS *Housatonic* was sunk, on 12 February the *Lyman M. Law*, and on 27 February the armed liner RMS *Laconia*, with the deaths of a further two American citizens. On 12 March, the US steamer USRC *Algonquin* was attacked without warning. In the following few days, three further US vessels were sunk. Wilson ordered the arming of US merchant vessels that same month.
- Britain, meanwhile, intercepted the 'Zimmermann note' in which Germany offered to support Mexico in winning back the US states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona (territory taken from Mexico after the Mexican–American war of the 1840s) in the event of a successful alliance with Mexico against the USA.
- Russia was undergoing revolution and had effectively pulled out of the war. This allowed a successful German army in Eastern Europe to be transferred west to reinforce existing forces against the Allies.

Declaration of war

In April 1917, Wilson asked Congress for the authority to make war on Germany. He realized quite simply that he had little choice – the USA had been provoked until its credibility was threatened. The Allies, moreover, were in trouble.

- In December 1917, Russia had withdrawn from the conflict after undergoing an internal revolution.

- In February and March 1917, around 1 million tonnes of Allied shipping was sunk by U-boats.

Wilson preferred to fight Germany while there were still Allies left, rather than possibly having to fight it alone in the future.

Why the USA declared war

- Wilson feared the defeat of the Allies was increasingly likely without US involvement.
- He realized that only those involved could have any influence in negotiating the post-war settlement.

The USA fought as an associated power, not as a formal ally of Britain and France. Wilson still hoped his independent status would give him a dominant role in negotiating a lasting peace based on fairness and justice for all – peace without victory.

However, not everyone supported Wilson in his wider reasons for joining the conflict. Many felt the reason should simply be the need to defeat Germany and its allies, and then bring US troops home and avoid further foreign entanglements.

SOURCE A

An extract from a speech by Senator George Norris opposing the entry of the USA into the First World War, April 1917

We are taking a step today that is fraught with untold danger. We are going into war upon the command of gold. We are going to run the risk of sacrificing millions of our countrymen's lives in order that other countrymen may coin their lifeblood into money. And even if we do not cross the Atlantic and go into the trenches, we are going to pile up a debt that the tolling masses that shall come many generations after us will have to pay. Unborn millions will bend their backs in toil in order to pay for the terrible step we are now about to take.

... By our act we will make millions of our countrymen suffer, and the consequences of it may well be that millions of our brethren must shed their lifeblood, millions of brokenhearted women must weep, millions of children must suffer with cold, and millions of babes must die from hunger, and all because we want to preserve the commercial right of American citizens to deliver munitions of war to belligerent nations [nations at war].

Others – for example, many of those of German origin – supported Germany and argued that the USA had never been neutral. German-American poet George S. Viereck had commented in 1915 that US equipment was already helping to kill Germans in the conflict.



Summarise in a few sentences what Senator Norris is saying in the first paragraph.

In the second paragraph, what does he think will be an effect of the entry of the USA into the war?

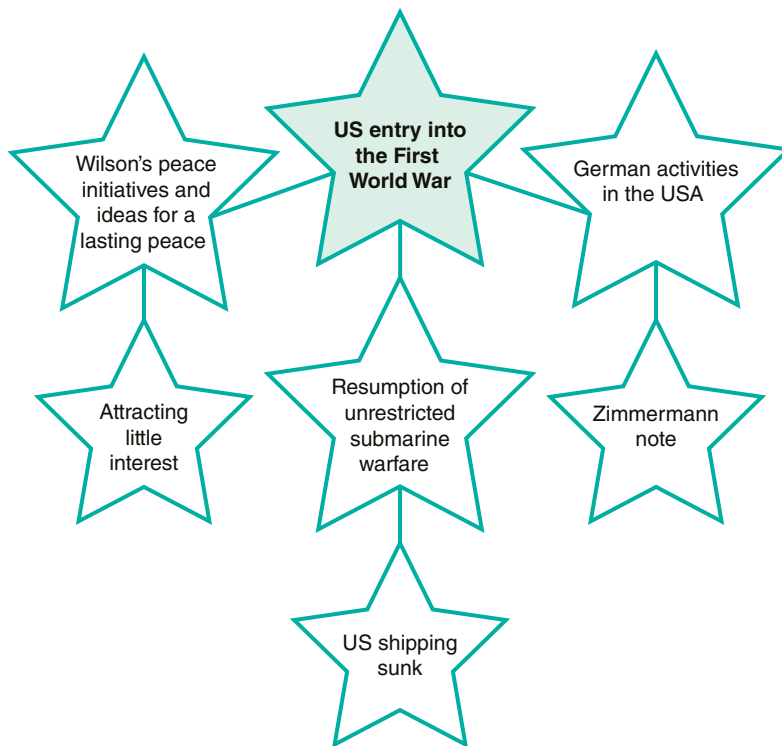
How far does this source help someone enquiring into the reasons why many people opposed the USA entering the war?

ACTIVITY **Cause and consequence**

- 1 Work with two partners. Each of you should take one reason why the USA entered the First World War:
 - Germany's return to unrestricted submarine warfare
 - the Zimmermann note
 - the possible defeat of the Allies without US involvement..
 Use the internet and other resources to research these reasons further.
- 2 You should report back to the others what you have discovered.
- 3 Finally, discuss which of the reasons do you think was the most important. How far do you agree?

ATL**Research and communication skills**

- How challenging did you find this activity? How confident did you feel reporting to your partners?
- How useful do you find activities of this type where you have to conduct your own research and explain it to others? What is the value of such a way of learning?

**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

US entry into the First World War

The USA's role in the war**Preparing for war**

General **John J. Pershing** (see page 96) was appointed commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). He was angry that preparations hadn't been made earlier to expand the American army and

← In what ways did the USA participate in the First World War?

KEY FIGURE



John J. Pershing (1860–1948)

A career soldier, Pershing fought against the Indigenous Peoples of America before spending much of the 1890s as a military instructor. He returned to active service in the Spanish–American War and went on to serve in the Philippines and Mexico in 1916. He quickly made himself unpopular with his Allied colleagues because of his insistence that US soldiers fight together as an independent army rather than within British and French forces. He remained in the army until his retirement in 1924.



- 1 What can you learn from this data about the numbers of US troops arriving in Europe?
- 2 What does this data reveal about the USA's commitment to war once the decision to enter the conflict had been made?



KEY TERM

Doughboys Name for US troops commonly adopted during the First World War. The name refers to a dumpling made of dough.

believed that, had this been done, Germany may not have risked war through the restarting of unrestricted submarine warfare. He pushed to create a bigger army, and to provide the means to transfer it as quickly and safely as possible to Europe.

Transporting the AEF to Europe

The AEF had two means of transport:

- ocean liners that could move relatively fast and zigzag to avoid submarine attack
- troopships protected by destroyers.

The transportation of military equipment and support services was more controversial. These ships were flagged for transportation of essential food and supplies for Allied use. Britain and France opposed cutting down on their supplies to get US war material over. The dispute blazed until a compromise was reached: the Allies settled for fewer supplies and made cargo vessels available to the US military. When things settled down, the USA achieved huge success in transporting forces and supplies quickly.

SOURCE B

US forces sent to Europe in 1918

Month	Numbers
March	84,000
April	118,500
May	246,000
June	278,000
July	306,000

Although the first US troops – nicknamed ‘**doughboys**’ – arrived in France to be deployed around the approaches to Paris in July 1917, they weren't able to play a significant role in the fighting until spring 1918. Pershing wanted them to fight independently as one national army. He was reluctant to see them deployed as reinforcements in the British and French armies as they arrived. He had compromised, allowing some to be used in this way, in return for making space on cargo vessels for US supplies (see above), but mainly he wanted to wait until he had a sizeable army ready and properly equipped.

Battle

The US soldiers had to learn how to fight in trench conditions, where most of the advantages lay with the defenders. In March 1918, Germany launched a massive offensive, boosted by the troops recently transferred from the Eastern Front after their victory against Russia in that sector of the war. The US troops were in the thick of the fighting, initially defending Paris. The German troops reached the town of Château-Thierry, 80 km (50 miles) from the capital. The US troops held them but at tremendous cost to their force of 27,500 dead.

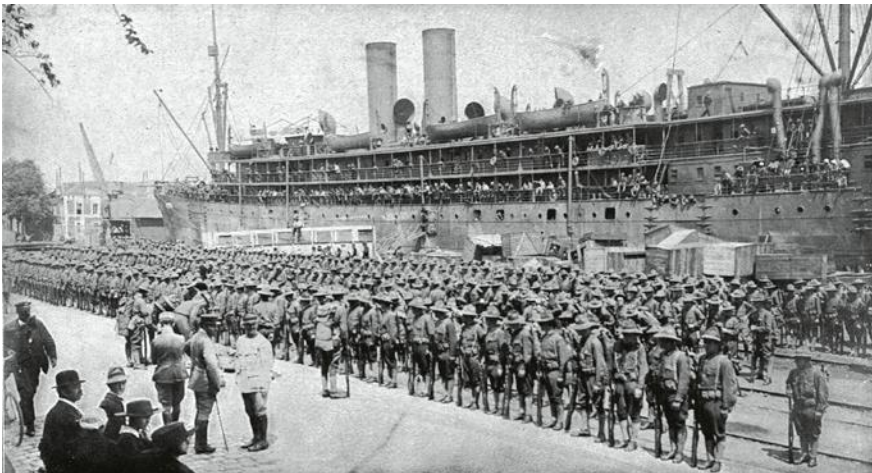
A US marines battalion attacking German positions in the town of Bouresches, advancing as they had been taught, marched in regular positions towards waiting machine guns. They were mowed down. It is said that only 20 of those marines avoided death or injury.

The US soldiers learned quickly, having played a significant role in holding the German advance wherever they were deployed:

- In mid-July, 85,000 withstood the German troops as they advanced towards the River Marne.
- When the Allies went on the offensive, 270,000 helped to defeat German forces, holding a bulge between Reims and Soissons.
- In mid-September, they wiped out the German **salient** at Saint-Mihiel.
- Later in the month, 1.2 million advanced west of Verdun into the Argonne Forest, as part of the Meuse–Argonne Offensive. Brutal fighting saw the German troops defeated. The AEF suffered 120,000 casualties, but on 1 November broke much of the German resistance.

SOURCE C

American troops arriving in France, 1917



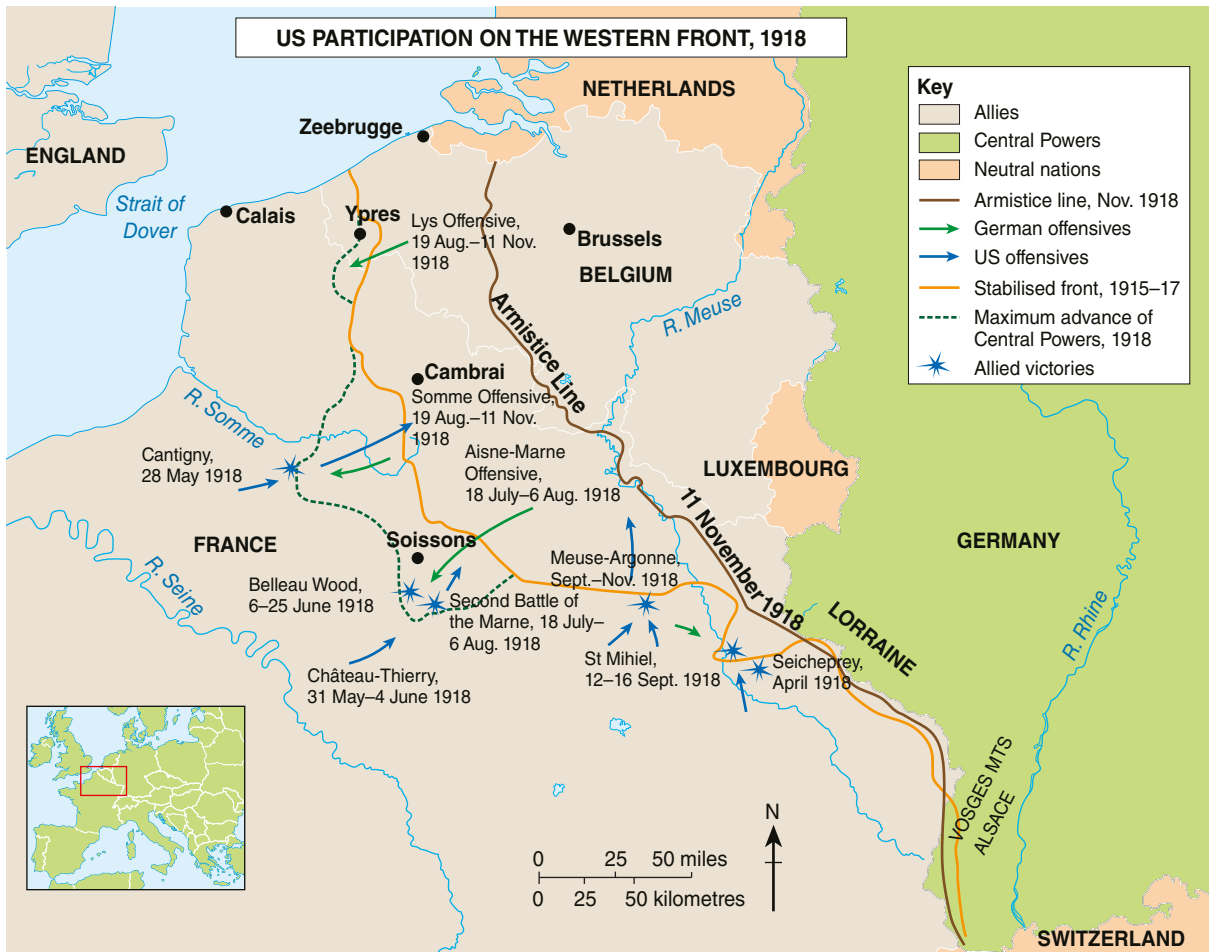
KEY TERM

Salient An area sticking out from the territory otherwise held – for example, surrounded on three sides by enemy positions.

How might this image have boosted the morale of British and French troops?



Map of US participation on the Western Front in 1918



How useful do you find this map in explaining US military participation in the conflict?

The US contribution to victory

The USA contributed to the Allied victory in three key ways:

- It provided the Allies with essential war material, particularly in the period 1914–17. Many believe that, without this help, the Allies may have been defeated before the USA entered the war.
- It provided protection for convoys and defeated the U-boat threat. In April 1917, Germany sank 884,000 tonnes (870,000 tons) of Allied shipping; in April 1918 only 305,000 (300,000).
- Perhaps more than their actual contribution in battle, which in itself was not insignificant, the American forces boosted Allied morale. To know they were coming and see them arrive, particularly in such numbers, had a huge impact. The amount they contributed to manpower was obviously very significant. One French officer reported, 'We all had the impression that we were about to see a wonderful transfusion of blood. Life was coming in floods to reanimate the dying body of France.'

The USA lost 112,432 soldiers, half to disease – notably the Spanish flu that began to rage towards the end of the conflict.

The Armistice

While many US soldiers welcomed the Armistice, others were disappointed because they felt they hadn't had the time or opportunity to really show their strength. US soldiers kept fighting until the moment of the Armistice, and in some cases beyond.

Pershing himself was angry at the Armistice. He wanted an **unconditional surrender** from Germany. Showing insightful foreknowledge, he said that if the German troops were allowed to go home in good order and refusing to believe they had lost the war, the war would have to be replayed someday.

KEY TERM

Unconditional surrender
Surrender without conditions, in which no guarantees are given to the country that is surrendering.

KEY DEBATE

What reasons have been offered by historians for the entry of the USA into the First World War?

Historians have emphasized differing reasons for the entry of the USA into the war.

The economic and isolationist debate

During the interwar period, when reaction to the horrors of the First World War had set in, many commentators, such as C. Hartley Grattan and Walter Millis, saw Wilson as a dupe. They felt he had been swayed by big business, including bankers and munitions manufacturers, into going to war so these powerful and wealthy interests could continue to enjoy huge profits. Historians such as Benjamin O. Fordham have written that the economic arguments have validity. US exports doubled as a percentage of GNP between 1914 and 1916, and 70% of them went to Europe. Within this context, the German renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare was a real catalyst for war.

However, historians no longer tend to see economic reasons as significant. By 1916, the US economy was so healthy as a result of jumping into markets no longer met by those at war that, even had Allied trade been severed, it wouldn't have made a significant difference to US prosperity.

The moral crusade

President Wilson himself saw self-interest as unimportant in his declaration of war. He saw unrestricted submarine warfare as illegal in international law – a crime against humanity. Since the mid-20th century, historians have tended to view US involvement in terms of variations on this theme.

A fair peace settlement

Historian Christopher Ray argued that Wilson entered the war in part to ensure there would be a fair peace settlement.

T O K

What are possible reasons why Walter Millis, writing in the 1930s, and Christopher Ray, writing in the 1990s, came to such different conclusions about why the USA entered the First World War? You can check your ideas by investigating the backgrounds of these two writers. (Emotion, History, Logic, Social science.)

Many historians would agree with this analysis. In the 1990s, Harold Evans argued that Wilson followed a moral principle, believing that the USA needed to fight in order to make the world a better place. Wilson went to war to introduce a new world order based on rights and respect for all peoples. Ross Kennedy, writing in 2008, developed this theme. He argued that Wilson blamed the old European reliance on the 'balance of power' for the military expansion that had led to war.

However, Wilson also recognized that the collective security he favoured could only come about if countries trusted each other. He particularly believed that Germany must return the lands it had taken and become a democracy before it could be trusted to maintain the peace. Therefore, argues Kennedy, Wilson shared the Allies' war aims. There was always a contradiction in Wilson's earlier neutrality because he favoured the Allies over Germany.

Thomas Fleming

Most historians in the later years of the 20th century concentrated on why the USA went to war, rather than on whether or not it should have. However, in 2003, Thomas Fleming wrote a revisionist work that addressed this issue. While agreeing that Wilson may have meant well, he argues that the involvement of the USA was unnecessary and prolonged the suffering. He suggests that Wilson twisted the facts to depict the war as a struggle between good and evil, and his sense of moral judgement meant that the USA entered a war it should have stayed out of.



KEY TERM

Revisionist Challenging accepted views.

Research skills

How accessible did you find this activity?
What are the benefits of discussing your ideas with others?
How far did you change your mind when you heard their arguments?

ATL

ACTIVITY

Perspectives

- 1 List all the reasons given in the key debate for the USA entering the war in 1917. Check your list with your partner.
- 2 Discuss which perspectives you find the most persuasive. You can research the particular historian(s) whose views you favour to add more detail to your reasons. The most important thing is to give well-argued reasons.

Other historians who have added to this debate over time include Charles Beard, Carl L. Degler, High Brogan and Niall Ferguson. Research these but also see if you can find any other contributions to the debate.

Use the internet and other resources to find one or two historians who support the perspective you find the most persuasive. What do they add to the particular argument?

- 3 Discuss why you find other perspectives less persuasive. Again, go on to research any historians who support these perspectives. Have they added anything which might make you change your mind?
- 4 How far are you in agreement with your partner? It doesn't matter if you continue to disagree, so long as you can argue your case.
- 5 Discuss your findings with another small group of partners. How far are you in agreement?

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