

World War I: The U.S. Enters the War

How did key events shift American attitudes about World War I?

Key Events

Wilson's neutrality eventually collapses

When World War I began in 1914 most Americans saw no compelling reason to join a conflict 3,000 miles away. The war did not seem to directly threaten American lives or property. Woodrow Wilson served as president throughout World War I. He was a staunch supporter of American neutrality, but U.S. economic ties with Great Britain and France (Allied Powers) were far stronger than those with Germany, or any of the other Central Powers. In 1917, America's neutrality and isolationism was challenged by significant events that shifted American attitudes.

Ultimately, Wilson's decision to join the war effort stemmed from the need to prevent Germany from threatening U.S. shipping, the need to assure that Allied powers could repay their debts to the U.S., and the desire to make the world "safe for democracy."

Let's review the events that led to that decision.

Key events that led to Word War I, and to the U.S. joining the war effort

Use information from these research sites to describe the events listed below and to analyze the impact of each.

- Failure of European Diplomacy Watch movies 1-4.
- Assassination in Sarajevo
- The Sinking of the Lusitania, 1915
- Milestones: 1914-1920
- The Zimmerman Telegram
- The U.S. Enters the War

	Describe the event	Explain the event's significance
June 28, 1914: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand		
August 4, 1914: Great Britain Declares War on Germany		
May 7, 1915: Sinking of the Lusitania		
January 19, 1917: Zimmerman Telegram Intercepted by Britain		
April 6, 1917: United States Declares War on Germany		

Changing Attitudes

Understanding the shift in attitudes toward war

Analyze the various messages communicated in the following speech and propaganda posters.

- 1 In the article "War Is 'a Blessing, Not a Curse'," what precedents in American history are cited for the United States joining the war?

- 2 What does Senator Norris mean when he says, "It is now demanded that the American citizens shall be used as insurance policies to guarantee the safe delivery of munitions of war..."? How does he suggest the U.S. could have avoided entry into the war?

Take a look at a few of the propaganda posters used during World War I and analyze their meaning.

	Describe the poster's message.	Discuss the emotions conveyed and the desired impact.
 "Destroy this mad brute" context		
 "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" context		
 "Sword of Justice" context		



"The Navy needs you!"
context



"Wake up, America!"
context