American Civilization

America in the World Wars I (1914-1918)and II (1939-1945)

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I America in World War I

World War I, also called First World War or Great War, an international conflict that in 1914–18 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers—mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—against the Allies—mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. The war was virtually unprecedented in the slaughter, carnage, and destruction it caused.

1. Early U.S foreign policy

Roosevelt differed from his predecessor on domestic policy, but he concurred with his foreign policy. He was, if anything, an even more devout imperialist than McKinley had been. In 1903, the Roosevelt administration strongarmed Cuba into accepting the Platt Amendment, which essentially committed Cuba to American control. Under Platt's stipulations, Cuba could not make a treaty with another nation without U.S. approval, and the United States had the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs if domestic order dissolved. A number of invasions and occupations by the Marine Corps resulted. For 10 of the years between 1906 and 1922, the American military occupied Cuba, arousing anti-American sentiments on the island. Roosevelt's actions were equally interventionist throughout Central America. During his administration, the country set its sights on building a canal through the Central American isthmus; a canal would greatly shorten the sea trip from the East Coast to California. Congress approved a plan for a canal through Panama, at the time a province of Colombia. Because Colombia asked for more than the government was willing to spend, the United States encouraged Panamanian rebels to revolt and then supported the revolution. Not surprisingly, the new Panamanian government gave the United States a much better deal. Because American commercial interests were so closely tied to the canal's successful operation, the United States military became a fixed presence throughout the region. During the next 20 years, troops intervened repeatedly, claiming that Latin American domestic instability constituted a threat to American security. This assertion came to be known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and is often referred to as the Big Stick Policy.

American foreign policy continued to adhere tothe Monroe Doctrine*, which asserted America's right to assume the role of an international police force and intervene anywhere in the Western Hemisphere where it felt its national security was at stake. It also stated that the United States wanted no part of Europe's internal disputes. American commitment to that aspect of the Monroe Doctrine would soon be tested, as Europe started down the path leading to World War I. Complicating matters was the fact that the United States and England were quickly forming a close alliance. To America's benefit, England had not opposed its many forays into Central American politics, although it could have. The British were not merely being friendly; they were trying to line up the United States as a potential ally in their ongoing rivalry with Germany, the other great European power of the era.

2. Prelude for U.S entry into WWI

Woodrow Wilson won the election of 1912, a three-way race in which the third-party candidate, Theodore Roosevelt, outpolled Taft, the Republican incumbent. Wilson entered office with less than a commanding mandate—only 40 percent of the electorate voted for him. However, with regard to the simmering European conflict, he and the electorate were of the same mind: the United States should stay out of it. When war broke out in Europe in August 1914, Wilson immediately declared the U.S. policy of neutrality.

Neutrality called for America to treat all the belligerents fairly and without favoritism. It was Wilson's hope that the United States would help settle the conflict and emerge as the world's arbiter. However, the neutrality policy posed several immediate problems, owing to America's close relationship with England and relatively distant relationship with Germany and Austria-Hungary. A number of Wilson's advisors openly favored the Allies.

The situation quickly grew more complicated. England's strategic location and superior navy allowed it to impose an effective blockade on shipments headed for Germany, particularly those coming from the United States. Protests proved futile; the British government impounded and confiscated American ships. They then paid for the cargo, reducing the pressure that American merchants would otherwise have put on the U.S. government to take action against the blockade.

Germany attempted to counter the blockade with submarines, or U-boats. According to contemporaneous international law, an attacker had to warn civilian ships before attacking. Submarines could not do this because doing so would eliminate their main advantage. Furthermore, when the Germans attacked civilian ships, it was usually because those ships were carrying military supplies. The Germans announced that they would attack any such ship, but that did not satisfy Wilson, who believed that the Germans should adhere to the strict letter of international law. Thus, when the German submarines sank the passenger ship Lusitania in 1915 (killing 1,198 passengers, including 128 Americans), the action provoked the condemnation of both the government and much of the public. That the Lusitania was carrying tons of ammunition to the British was a fact that received much less public attention than did the loss of 1,198 innocent lives. The sinking of the Lusitania, and the bad publicity it generated, led the Germans to cease submarine warfare for a while. Britain made steady gains, however, and as the Uboats were Germany's most effective weapon, the Germans resumed their use.

In 1916, while Wilson was campaigning for reelection on the slogan “He kept us out of war,” Germany sank another passenger liner, the Arabic. In response, Wilson, while still maintaining neutrality, asked Congress to put the military into a state of preparedness for war, just in case. While most Americans wanted to stay out of the war, popular support for entry was beginning to

grow. Then, in early 1917, the British intercepted a telegram from German Foreign Minister Zimmermann to the German ambassador to Mexico. The telegram, imaginatively called the Zimmermann telegram, outlined a German plan to keep the United States out of the European war. The telegram stated that if Mexico were to declare war on the United States, Germany would provide Mexico help in regaining the lands lost in the Mexican War. The telegram also suggested that Germany would help Japan if they, too, wanted to go to war against America. Published in newspapers around the country, the telegram convinced many Americans that Germany was trying to take over the world. Although the public was by no means universally behind the idea of war, the balance had shifted enough so that within a month, America would declare war on Germany.

Extra

Keep in mind

See "Th U.S in WWI"

3. U.S Contribution to WWI

American participation in the war tipped the balance in the Allies' favor, and two years after America's entry, the Germans were ready to negotiate a peace treaty. Wilson wanted the war treaty to be guided by his Fourteen Points, his plan for world peace delivered to Congress in January of 1918, before the end of the war. The Fourteen Points called for free trade through lower tariffs and freedom of the seas; a reduction of arms supplies on all sides; and the promotion of self-determination, both in Europe and overseas—in other words, the end of colonialism. The plan also called for the creation of the League of Nations, a mechanism for international cooperation much like today's United Nations. Wilson's Fourteen Points served as a basis for initial negotiations, but the negotiations soon took a different direction.

4. The End of WWI

The European Allies wanted a peace settlement that punished Germany, and ultimately they got it. Under the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to cede German and colonial territories to the Allies, to disarm, to pay huge reparations, and to admit total fault for the war, despite other nations' roles in starting it. Most historians agree that by leaving Germany humiliated and in economic ruin, the Treaty of Versailles helped to set the stage for World War II. Although much of Wilson's *Fourteen Points Plan* *(cf. p.14)* *(cf. p.14)* was discarded, the Treaty of Versailles did create the League of Nations. Nonetheless, the United States was not a signatory of the Treaty of Versailles, nor did it ever join the League of Nations, an international organization envisioned by an American President to maintain world peace. Weary of war, America was receding into a period of isolationism. The public wanted less interaction with Europe, not more, as the League would have required. Wilson tried to muster popular support for the treaty. However, while campaigning, Wilson suffered a major stroke, thereby ending whatever chance the treaty may have had for ratification. Many people wonder whether the League of Nations would have been more successful in preventing World War II had the United States been a member.

5. The Effects of WWI on America

See "WWI U.S. Domestic Policies' Legacy"

As is often the case during wartime, the government's power expanded greatly during the three years America was involved in World War I. The government took control of the telephone, telegraph, and rail industries, and a massive bureaucracy arose to handle these new responsibilities. The War Industry Board (WIB), created to coordinate all facets of industrial and agricultural production, sought to guarantee that not only the United States but also the rest of the Allies would be well supplied.

The government also curtailed individual civil liberties during the war. In response to the still-sizable opposition to U.S. involvement, Congress passed the Espionage Act in 1917 and the Sedition Act in 1918. The Espionage Act prohibited anyone from using the U.S. mail system to interfere with the war effort or with the draft that had been

instituted under the Selective Service Act of 1917 upon America's entry into the war. The Sedition Act made it illegal to try to prevent the sale of war bonds or to speak disparagingly of the government, the flag, the military, or the Constitution.

Like the Alien and Sedition Acts in the late 1790s, both laws violated the spirit of the First Amendment but were worded vaguely, giving the courts great leeway in their interpretation.

Such laws soon became useful tools for the suppression of anyone who voiced unpopular ideas. A mood of increased paranoia pervaded the era, heightened by the Russian Revolution in 1917, which placed Russia under Bolshevik control. Suddenly, Americans began to fear a communist takeover. Radical labor unions, such as the International Workers of the World, were branded enemies of the state, and their leaders were incarcerated. Eugene Debs, the Socialist leader, was also imprisoned for criticizing the war.

See "Females WWI Legacy"

Wartime also presented new opportunities for women. Although the number of women in the workforce did not increase greatly during the war, their means of employment did change. Many women quit domestic work and started working in factories; at one point, 20 percent of factoryfloor manufacturing jobs were held by women. (The symbol of Rosie the Riveter, however, belongs to World War II.) These workplace advances ended with the war, as veterans returned home and reclaimed their jobs.

See "African Americans WWI Legacy"

Southern Blacks, realizing that wartime manufacturing was creating jobs in the North, undertook a Great Migration to the big cities, like New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and Detroit. During the war, more than 500,000 Black people left the South in search of work. Many Black people joined the army; W. E. B. Du Bois encouraged Blacks to enlist, hoping that military service would provide an inroad to social equality.

See "Immigrants legacy of WWI"

6. Exercice : Choose the correct answer

choose the correct answer

○

Germany offered Mexico a chance to regain the land it had lost in the Mexican Cession if Mexico attacked the United States.

○ A British spy alter the world to the existence of mass extermination camps in German-held territories.

○

The United States assured the British that it would join the war in Europe if the war were to continue for another year.

7. Exercice : choose the correct answer

Wilson's fourteen points plan for peace after world war I included all of the following except

○ lower tariffs to promote free trade

○ promotion of self-determination

- repayment of all Allied war expense by Germany
- across-the-board arms reduction

8. Exercice

Freedom of expression | Isolationism | Civil Liberties | Non-interventionism | Civil Rights | Neutrality

The variety of laws protecting citizens from unequal or discriminatory treatment based on certain characteristics, including race, religion, gender and country of origin. In short, civil liberties protect an individual's personal freedoms	The guarantees and freedoms that governments commit not to abridge, either by constitution, legislation, or judicial interpretation, without due process	ideas of all kinds, including those that may be deeply offensive.	a policy of remaining apart from the affairs or interests of other groups, especially the political affairs of other countries.	a policy of not taking sides in a conflict or dispute	a policy of avoiding military intervention in other countries' affairs while still engaging in diplomacy and trade

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World War I marked the end of the old European order and the beginning of an era that would be dominated by other forces, including the eventual rise of the United States as a global power. The mobilization of the U.S. economy and society and the service and sacrifice of millions of Americans helped bring an end to the war, and laid the foundation for the emergence of the U.S. as a world superpower later in the 20th Century. Nonetheless, the us involvement in this war lead to an economical calamity on an unprecedented scale-known as great depression.

II America in World War II

After World War I most Americans concluded that participating in international affairs had been a mistake. They sought peace through isolation and throughout the 1920s advocated a policy of disarmament and nonintervention. As a result, relations with Latin-American nations improved substantially under Hoover, an anti-imperialist. This enabled Roosevelt to establish what became known as the Good Neighbor Policy, which repudiated altogether the right of intervention in Latin America. By exercising restraint in the region as a whole and by withdrawing American occupation forces from the Caribbean, Roosevelt increased the prestige of the United States in Latin America to its highest level in memory.

As the European situation became more tense, the United States continued to hold to its isolationist policy. Congress ***enacted*** a series of neutrality laws that legislated against the factors that supposedly had taken the United States into World War I. As Italy prepared to invade Ethiopia, Congress passed the ***Neutrality Act of 1935,*** embargoing shipment of arms to either aggressor or victim. Stronger legislation followed the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, in effect penalizing the Spanish government, whose fascist enemies were receiving strong support from Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler.

See "U.S Reason for Staying out of WWII."

1. Task01

Objectives

identifying five key reasons for U.S non-involvement in WWII reflecting on the Great Depression of 1929

The economic downturn of the 1930s caused millions to lose their jobs and many to become homeless. These hard times were not caused by one single factor but rather many elements combined to create this perfect economic storm. Complete the following task attempting to identify the relationship between the Great depression and America in WWII.

Exercice

Explain and define the following terms basing on the above audio-visual support:

- The Great Depression

- Culture of Consumerism
    - Stock market
        - Federal Reserve
            - Interest Rates
                - The Smoot Hawley Act
                    - Tariffs

Exercice

Of the factors shared in the video, which factor do you believe was the most important in causing the Great Depression and why?

2. Pre-WWII U.S Policies

Reminder

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Domestic policies in U.S. were heavily advocated toward an economic relief throughout public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations collectively know as The New Deal as illustrated in the following audio-visual learning support.

See "History Brief: The New Deal"

Note

The New Deal programs and projects were empowered by the end of WWII.

In the Pacific Roosevelt continued Hoover's policy of nonrecognition of Japan's conquests in Asia. When Japan invaded China in 1937, however, he seemed to begin moving away from isolationism. He did not invoke ***the Neutrality Act,*** which had just been revised, and in October he warned that war was like a disease and suggested that it might be desirable for peace-loving nations to “quarantine” aggressor nations. He then quickly denied that his statement had any policy implications, and by December, when Japanese aircraft sank a U.S. gunboat in the Yangtze River, thoughts of reprisal were stifled by public apathy and by Japan's offer of apologies and indemnities. With strong public opposition to foreign intervention, Roosevelt concentrated on regional defense, continuing to build up the navy and signing mutual security agreements with other governments in North and South America.

When Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 touched off World War II, Roosevelt called Congress into special session to revise the Neutrality Act to allow belligerents (in reality only Great Britain and France, both on the Allied side) to purchase munitions on a cash-and-carry basis. With the fall of France to Germany in June 1940, Roosevelt, with heavy public support, threw the resources of the United States behind the British. He ordered the War and Navy departments to resupply British divisions that had been rescued at Dunkirk minus their weaponry, and in September he agreed to exchange 50 obsolescent destroyers for 99-year leases on eight British naval and air bases in the Western Hemisphere.

The question of how much and what type of additional aid should be given to the Allies became a major issue of the election of 1940, in which Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term. Public opinion polls, a new influence upon decision makers, showed that most Americans favoured Britain but still wished to stay out of war. Roosevelt's opponent, Wendell Willkie, capitalized on this and rose steadily in the polls by attacking the president as a warmonger. An alarmed Roosevelt fought back, going so far as to make what he knew was an empty promise. “Your boys,” he said just before the election, “are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” In truth, both candidates realized that U.S. intervention in the war might become essential, contrary to their public statements. Roosevelt won a decisive victory.

Upon being returned to office, Roosevelt moved quickly to aid the Allies. ***His Lend-Lease Act,*** passed in March 1941 after vehement debate, committed the United States to supply the Allies on credit. When Germany, on March 25, extended its war zone to include Iceland and the Denmark Strait, Roosevelt retaliated in April by extending the American Neutrality Patrol to Iceland. In July the United States occupied Iceland, and U.S. naval vessels began escorting convoys of American and Icelandic ships. That summer Lend-Lease was extended to the Soviet Union after it was invaded by Germany. In August Roosevelt met with the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, off the coast of Newfoundland to issue a set of war aims known as the Atlantic Charter. It called for national self-determination, larger economic opportunities, freedom from fear and want, freedom of the seas, and disarmament.

3. U.S Entry to the WWII

Although in retrospect U.S. entry into World War II seems inevitable, in 1941 it was still the subject of great debate. Isolationism was a great political force, and many influential individuals were determined that U.S. aid policy stop short of war. In fact, as late as August 12, 1941, the House of Representatives extended ***the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*** by a vote of only 203 to 202. Despite isolationist resistance, Roosevelt pushed cautiously forward. In late August the navy added British and Allied ships to its Icelandic convoys. Its orders were to shoot German and Italian warships on sight, thus making the United States an undeclared participant in the Battle of the Atlantic. During October one U.S. destroyer was damaged by a German U-boat and another was sunk. The United States now embarked on an undeclared naval war against Germany, but Roosevelt refrained from asking for a formal declaration of war. According to public opinion polls, a majority of Americans still hoped to remain neutral.

The war question was soon resolved by events in the Pacific. As much as a distant neutral could, the United States had been supporting China in its war against Japan, yet it continued to sell Japan products and commodities essential to the Japanese war effort. Then, in July 1940, the United States applied an embargo on the sale of aviation gas, lubricants, and prime scrap metal to Japan. When Japanese armies invaded French Indochina in September with the apparent purpose of establishing bases for an attack on the East Indies, the United States struck back by embargoing all types of scrap iron and steel and by extending a loan to China. Japan promptly retaliated by signing a limited treaty of alliance, the Tripartite Pact, with Germany and Italy. Roosevelt extended a much larger loan to China and in December embargoed iron ore, pig iron, and a variety of other products.

Japan and the United States then entered into complex negotiations in the spring of 1941. Neither country would compromise on the China question, however, Japan refusing to withdraw and the United States insisting upon it. Believing that Japan intended to attack the East Indies, the United States stopped exporting oil to Japan at the end of the summer. In effect an ultimatum, since Japan had limited oil stocks and no alternative source of supply, the oil embargo confirmed Japan's decision to eliminate the U.S. Pacific Fleet and to conquer Southeast Asia, thereby becoming self-sufficient in crude oil and other vital resources. By the end of November Roosevelt and his military advisers knew (through intercepted Japanese messages) that a military attack was likely; they expected it to be

against the East Indies or the Philippines. To their astonishment, on December 7 Japan directed its first blow against naval and air installations in Hawaii. In a bold surprise attack, Japanese aircraft destroyed or damaged 18 ships of war at Pearl Harbor, including the entire battleship force, and 347 planes. Total U.S. casualties amounted to 2,403 dead and 1,178 wounded.

See "World War II: Japanese Bombing of Pearl Harbor"

On December 8, 1941, Congress with only one dissenting vote declared war against Japan. Three days later Germany and Italy declared war against the United States; and Congress, voting unanimously, reciprocated. As a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the previously divided nation entered into the global struggle with virtual unanimity.

4. Consequences and Effects of WWII on U.S.A

- Social consequences

Despite the vast number of men and women in uniform, civilian employment rose from 46,000,000 in 1940 to more than 53,000,000 in 1945. The pool of unemployed men dried up in 1943, and further employment increases consisted of women, minorities, and over- or underage males. These were not enough to meet all needs, and by the end of the year a manpower shortage had developed.

One result of this shortage was that Blacks made significant social and economic progress. Although the armed forces continued to practice segregation, as did Red Cross blood banks, Roosevelt, under pressure from Blacks, who were outraged by the refusal of defense industries to integrate their labour forces, signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. It prohibited racial discrimination in job training programs and by defense contractors and established a Fair Employment Practices Committee to insure compliance. By the end of 1944 nearly 2,000,000 Blacks were at work in defense industries. As Black contributions to the military and industry increased, so did their demands for equality. This sometimes led to racial hostilities, as on June 20, 1943, when mobs of whites invaded the Black section of Detroit. Nevertheless, the gains offset the losses. Lynching virtually died out, several states outlawed discriminatory voting practices, and others adopted fair employment laws.

Full employment also resulted in raised income levels, which, through a mixture of price and wage controls, were kept ahead of inflation. Despite both this increase in income and a no-strike pledge given by trade union leaders after Pearl Harbor, there were numerous labour actions. Workers resented wage ceilings because much of their increased income went to pay taxes and was earned by working overtime rather than through higher hourly rates. In consequence, there were almost 15,000 labour stoppages during the war at a cost of some 36,000,000 man-days. Strikes were greatly resented, particularly by the armed forces, but their effects were more symbolic than harmful. The time lost amounted to only one-ninth of 1 percent of all hours worked.

Because Pearl Harbor had united the nation, few people were prosecuted for disloyalty or sedition, unlike during World War I. The one glaring exception to this policy was the scandalous treatment of Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent. In 1942, on the basis of groundless racial fears and suspicions, virtually the entire Japanese-American population of the West Coast, amounting to 110,000 persons, was rounded up and imprisoned in “relocation” centres, which the inmates regarded as concentration camps. The Japanese-Americans lost their liberty, and in most cases their property as well, despite the fact that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had already arrested those individuals it considered security risks, had verified their loyalty.

- The new U.S. role in world affairs

The U.S. entry into World War II had brought an end to isolation, and President Roosevelt was determined to prevent a retreat into isolationism once the war was over. After a series of conferences in December 1941, Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill announced the formation of the United Nations, a wartime alliance of 26 nations. In 1943 Roosevelt began planning the organization of a postwar United Nations, meeting with congressional leaders to assure bipartisan support. The public supported Roosevelt's efforts, and that fall Congress passed resolutions committing the United States to membership in an international body “with power adequate to establish and to maintain a just and lasting peace.” Finally, in the spring of 1945, delegates from 50 nations signed the charter for a permanent United Nations. In addition to political harmony, Roosevelt promoted economic cooperation, and, with his full support, in 1944 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were created to bar a return of the cutthroat economic nationalism that had prevailed before the war.

Throughout the war Roosevelt met with Churchill and Stalin to plan military strategy and postwar policy. His last great conference with them took place at Yalta in Crimea in February 1945. There policies were agreed upon to enforce the unconditional surrender of Germany, to divide it into zones for occupation and policing by the respective Allied forces, and to provide democratic regimes in eastern European nations. A series of secret agreements were also made at Yalta; chief among these was the Soviet pledge to enter the war against Japan after the German surrender, in return for concessions in East Asia.

Roosevelt died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 12 and was succeeded by Truman. In the following months the German armed forces collapsed, and on May 7 all German forces surrendered. In the Pacific the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa in early 1945 brought Japan under a state of siege. In the summer, before an invasion could take place, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On September 2 the surrender of Japan was signed in Tokyo harbour on the battleship Missouri.

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As it turned out, after a half-decade of rationing and war privation, Americans were more than ready to splurge. And postwar U.S. industries pivoted more nimbly than expected, shifting from producing bomber jets and tanks to cars, TVs and home appliances. Here's how America made the shift.

War Mobilization Had Overtaken the Homefront

Since President Franklin D. Roosevelt's call in late 1940 for the United States to serve as the “arsenal of democracy,” American industry had stepped up to meet the challenge. U.S. factories built to mass-produce automobiles had retooled to churn out airplanes, engines, guns and other supplies at unprecedented rates. At the peak of its war effort, in late 1943 and early 1944, the United States was manufacturing almost as many munitions as all of its allies and enemies combined.

On the home front, the massive mobilization effort during World War II had put Americans back to work. Unemployment, which had reached 25 percent during the Great Depression and hovered at 14.6 percent in 1939, had dropped to 1.2 percent by 1944—still a record low in the nation's history.

Even before the war ended, U.S. business, military and government officials began debating the question of the country's reconversion from military to civilian production. In 1944, Donald Nelson of the War Production Board (WFB) proposed a plan that would reconvert idle factories to civilian production. Powerful military and business leaders pushed back, and plans for widespread reconversion were postponed.

But with the war wrapping up, and millions of men and women in uniform scheduled to return home, the nation's military-focused economy wasn't necessarily prepared to welcome them back. As Arthur Herman wrote in his book Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II, U.S. businesses at the time were still “geared around producing tanks and planes, not clapboard houses and refrigerators.”

Some economists even predicted a new crisis of mass unemployment and inflation, arguing that private businesses couldn't possibly generate the massive amounts of capital necessary to run the pumped-up wartime factories during peacetime. A report released in mid-1945 by Senator James Mead of New York took this opinion, arguing that if the war in the Pacific ended quickly, “the United States would find itself largely unprepared to overcome unemployment on a large scale.”

But history proved the pessimists wrong. Most returning veterans had no trouble finding jobs, according to Herman. U. S. factories that had proven so essential to the war effort quickly mobilized for peacetime, rising to meet the needs of consumers who had been encouraged to save up their money in preparation for just such a post-war boom.

By the summer of 1945, Americans had been living under wartime rationing policies for more than three years, including limits on such common goods as rubber, sugar, gasoline, fuel oil, coffee, meat, butter, milk and soap. Meanwhile, the U.S. government's Office of Price Administration (OPA) had encouraged the public to save up their money (ideally by buying war bonds) for a brighter future. In her book A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America, Lizabeth Cohen reported that by 1945, Americans were saving an average of 21 percent of their personal disposable income, compared to just 3 percent in the 1920s.

With the war finally over, American consumers were eager to spend their money, on everything from big-ticket items like homes, cars and furniture to appliances, clothing, shoes and everything else in between. U.S. factories answered their call, beginning with the automobile industry. New car sales quadrupled between 1945 and 1955, and by the end of the 1950s, some 75 percent of American households owned at least one car. In 1965, the nation's automobile industry reached its peak, producing 11.1 million new cars, trucks and buses and accounting for one out of every six American jobs.

People Bought Homes—And Filled Them With Appliances

Residential construction companies also mobilized to capitalize on a similar surge in housing demand, as Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans and the GI Bill gave many (but not all) returning veterans the ability to buy a home. Companies like Levitt & Son, based in New York, found success applying the mass-production techniques of the auto industry to home building. Between 1946 and the early 1960s, Levitt & Son built three residential communities (including more than 17,000 homes), finishing as many as 30 houses a day.

New home buyers needed appliances to fill those homes, and companies like Frigidaire (a division of General Motors) responded to that need. During the war, Frigidaire's assembly lines had transitioned to building machine guns and B-29 propeller assemblies. After the war, the brand expanded its home appliance business, introducing revolutionary products like clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers and garbage disposals.

Driven by growing consumer demand, as well as the continuing expansion of the military-industrial complex as the Cold War ramped up, the United States reached new heights of prosperity in the years after World War II. Gross national product (GNP), which measured all goods and services produced, skyrocketed to $300 billion by 1950, compared to just $200 billion in 1940. By 1960, it had topped $500 billion, firmly establishing the United States as the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

Complementary resources

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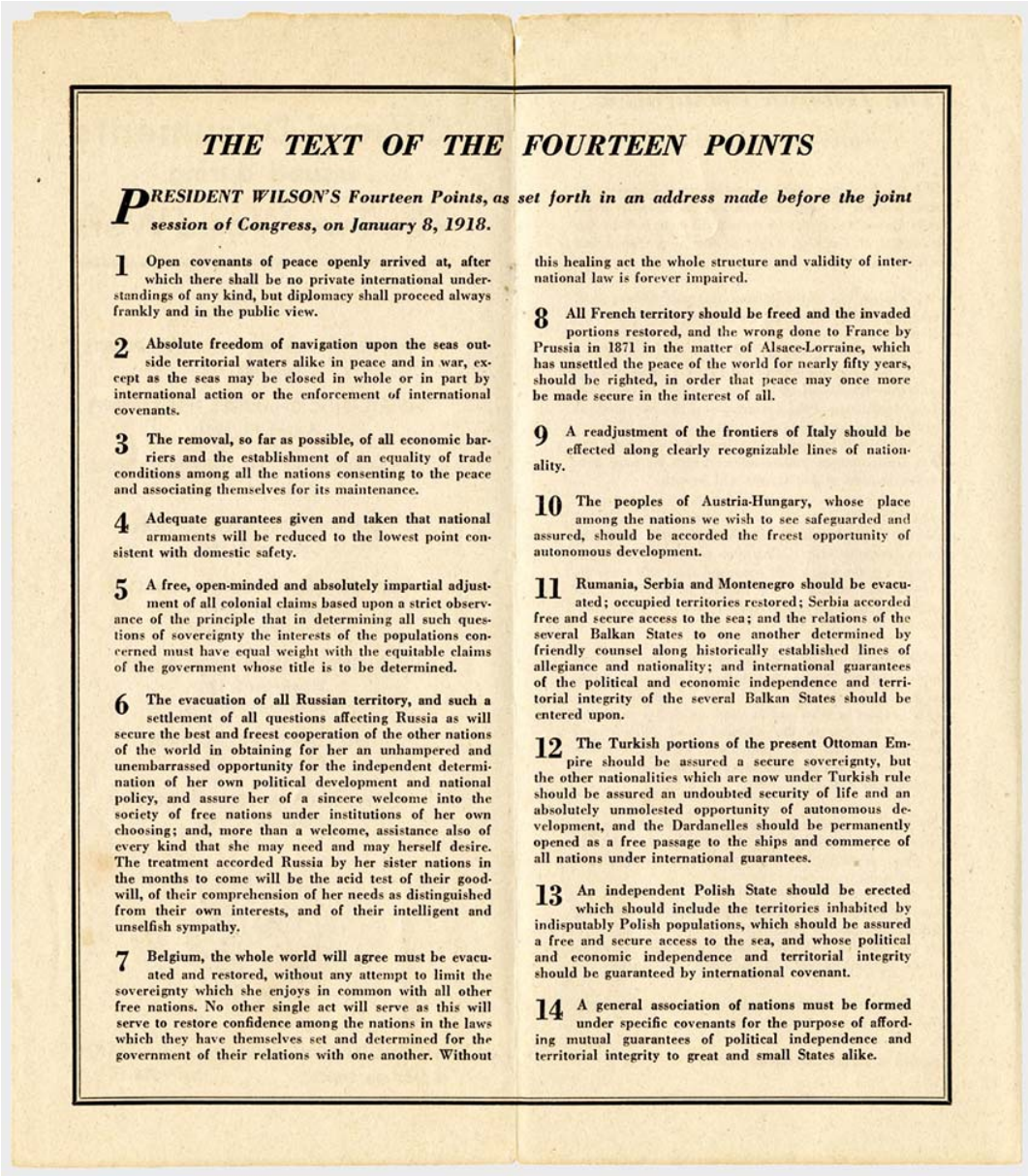

THE TEXT OF THE FOURTEEN POINTS

PRESIDENT WILSON'S Fourteen Points, as set forth in an address made before the joint session of Congress, on January 8, 1918.

1 Open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

2 Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas outside territorial waters alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action or the enforcement of international covenants.

3 The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

4 Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

5 A free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

6 The evacuation of all Russian territory, and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy, and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their goodwill, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

7 Belgium, the whole world will agree must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

8 All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

9 A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

10 The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

11 Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan States to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan States should be entered upon.

12 The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

13 An independent Polish State should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

14 A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike.

Glossary

Monro Doctrin

Monroe Doctrine, (December 2, 1823), cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy enunciated by Pres. James Monroe in his annual message to Congress. Declaring that the Old World and New World had different systems and must remain distinct spheres, Monroe made four basic points: (1) the United States would not interfere in the internal affairs of or the wars between European powers; (2) the United States recognized and would not interfere with existing colonies and dependencies in the Western Hemisphere; (3) the Western Hemisphere was closed to future colonization; and (4) any attempt by a European power to oppress or control any nation in the Western Hemisphere would be viewed as a hostile act against the United States.