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The readings presented here are drawn from World War I and America: Told by the Americans Who Lived It. Published to mark the centenary of the American entry into the conflict, World War I and America brings together 128 diverse texts—speeches, messages, letters, diaries, poems, songs, newspaper and magazine articles, excerpts from memoirs and journalistic narratives—written by scores of American participants and observers that illuminate and vivify events from the outbreak of war in 1914 through the Armistice, the Paris Peace Conference, and the League of Nations debate. The writers collected in the volume—soldiers, airmen, nurses, diplomats, statesmen, political activists, journalists—provide unique insight into how Americans perceived the war and how the conflict transformed American life. It is being published by The Library of America, a nonprofit institution dedicated to preserving America’s best and most significant writing in handsome, enduring volumes, featuring authoritative texts. You can learn more about World War I and America, and about The Library of America, at www.loa.org.

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MANY AMERICANS do not appreciate the key role the United States played in deciding the outcome of World War I, the deep impact the war had on Americans who lived through it, or the profound ways in which it continues to resonate today. While the U.S. was a belligerent for only nineteen of the war’s fifty-two months, and suffered a fraction of the losses of the other major combatants, in the climactic campaigns of the war Americans fought with ferocious intensity. In the five and a half months the American Expeditionary Forces were engaged in major fighting, the U.S. lost more than 50,000 men killed in action, a combat toll greater than that of the entire Vietnam War. Equally important, the war ushered in powerful and complex changes in American culture and society. The war helped women to finally win the vote and ushered in the permissive Jazz Age, but also led to Prohibition and a heightened fear of immigrants. Amid deadly racial violence and frustrated hopes for full citizenship for African Americans, it gave rise to the militant “New Negro” and began the Great Migration to the North. It made the United States the most powerful actor on the global stage, and brought about a dramatic debate over America’s role in the world. And it called into question the traditional meanings of glory, honor, courage, causing many to believe, as Ernest Hemingway wrote, “There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity.”

This Reader presents twenty-two selections by American participants in the conflict, written from 1915 to 1929. They are drawn from the Library of America volume World War I and America: Told by the Americans Who Lived It, and give a first-hand look at the war from different points of view. Understanding how Americans perceived the conflict at the time allows us to encounter World War I on its own terms and to draw connections with the experiences of Americans today, both combatants and civilians. The selections focus on seven
key themes. Each theme features an introduction by a distinguished scholar, questions for discussion, and suggestions for further reading. The reader is intended to help facilitate an informed and rewarding conversation about the war and its consequences.
Introduction

V. THE HOME FRONT: SELLING UNITY, SUPPRESSING DISSENT

America was not prepared for war in April 1917. This was certainly true militarily. The United States army consisted of a mere 200,000 soldiers, roughly the same number as French casualties in the recent Battle of the Somme. The nation’s lack of readiness translated to the homefront as well. Most Americans before the spring of 1917 hoped to avoid becoming directly involved in the European maelstrom. Indeed, Woodrow Wilson had won reelection in 1916 on a platform of American neutrality. The Zimmerman telegram and Germany’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare shifted public opinion and compelled Wilson to change course. His framing of America’s participation in the war as a progressive cause to make the world “safe for democracy” tapped into cherished ideals at the heart of the nation’s identity. The nation, however, was far from unified as the United States entered the war. Victory would require not just defeating a fearsome German adversary, but also overcoming, by persuasion and, if necessary, by coercion, the racial, ethnic and ideological divisions of a diverse American population.

Responsibility for selling the war effort to the American public rested on the shoulders of George Creel. Woodrow Wilson appointed the former muckraking journalist to serve as chairman of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), established just seven days after America’s entry into the war. In heading the CPI, Creel saw his principle duty to promote “the justice of America’s cause” and fight for the “hearts and minds” of the public to unconditionally support the war and embrace “One Hundred Percent Americanism.”

The CPI used every tool at its disposal to promote a vast propaganda effort. Its Division of Pictorial Publicity employed hundreds of the country’s most talented artists to produce posters, often in multiple languages, that inspired both patriotism and fear by casting the German enemy as an existential
(and often bestial) threat to civilization and the American way of life. While Creel asserted that the CPI was in no degree “an agency of censorship,” it did issue guidelines for “voluntary censorship” to the press, believing it was far better “to have the desired compulsions proceed from within than to apply them from without.” The CPI made use of 75,000 “Four-Minute Men” to deliver patriotic speeches across the country, and worked closely with other government agencies, such as the Treasury Department, to promote the selling of Liberty Bonds, and the Food Administration, led by Herbert Hoover, to encourage Americans to conserve food and grow “war gardens.” Eager to use the newest form of mass communication, it collaborated with movie studios to produce films such as Pershing’s Crusaders, The Prussian Cur, and The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin.

Nonetheless, the United States government recognized that propaganda alone would not be enough to create uniform support for the war. In his April 2, 1917 address asking for a declaration of war, Woodrow Wilson promised that: “If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression.” He was true to his word. At Wilson’s behest, Congress passed the Espionage Act on June 15, 1917, making attempts to cause “insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny” in the armed forces, or to “obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States” a crime punishable by up to twenty years in prison. The Sedition Act, an amendment to the Espionage Act passed by Congress on May 16, 1918, placed additional restrictions on speech criticizing the government. By a 7–2 majority, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the convictions of five anarchists under the Sedition Act in Abrams v. United States (1919). Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, however, offered a powerful dissent, joined by Justice Louis Brandeis, that cast the ruling as an infringement on America’s First Amendment traditions.

The war marked the birth of the modern national security state. With the unbridled power of the law at their disposal, U.S. Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory and other government and military officials set out to crush any and all dissent. Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson used the powers given him under the Espionage Act to ban newspapers and magazines he deemed subversive from the mail. Opponents of
the war, ranging from ordinary citizens to the Woman’s Peace Party in New York City, faced constant surveillance by a rapidly expanded government intelligence apparatus that was assisted by civilian groups like the American Protective League. Federal prosecutors arrested, tried and imprisoned more than a thousand antiwar activists, most notably the Russian-born anarchist Emma Goldman and the chairman of the Socialist Party of America, Eugene Debs. A newly constituted Military Intelligence Division actively investigated signs of disloyalty or resistance to the war effort both in and outside of the army, while J. Edgar Hoover, a young attorney in the Justice Department, would play a leading role in the government campaign against subversion that followed the signing of the Armistice. The legacies of this period would reverberate throughout the post-war period and into the twenty-first-century.

Chad Williams
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George Creel: The “Second Lines”

After earning his stripes as a reform-minded journalist in Kansas City and Denver, George Creel had worked on Wilson’s reelection campaign in 1916; and upon America’s entry into the war, Wilson appointed Creel as the chairman of the Committee on Public Information, a controversial organization created by executive order to spread the “Gospel of Americanism” to all corners of the country and the world. Creel considered his work “propaganda” only in the sense of the propagation of faith. The CPI kindled support for the war and then fanned the flames through articles, pamphlets, speakers (“Four Minute Men”), motion pictures, and posters. While Creel insisted that the CPI existed to share information, not impose censorship, all of the agency’s actions fell somewhere between morale-building and manipulation. One of Creel’s subordinates, Edward Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, would later become a pioneer in the field of public relations.

As secretary Baker points out, the war was not fought in France alone. Back of the firing-line, back of armies and navies, back of the great supply-depots, another struggle waged with the same intensity and with almost equal significance attaching to its victories and defeats. It was the fight for the minds of men, for the “conquest of their convictions,” and the battle-line ran through every home in every country.

It was in this recognition of Public Opinion as a major force that the Great War differed most essentially from all previous conflicts. The trial of strength was not only between massed bodies of armed men, but between opposed ideals, and moral verdicts took on all the value of military decisions. Other wars went no deeper than the physical aspects, but German Kultur raised issues that had to be fought out in the hearts and minds of people as well as on the actual firing-line. The approval of the world meant the steady flow of inspiration into the trenches; it meant the strengthened resolve and the renewed determination of the civilian population that is a nation’s second line. The condemnation of the world meant the destruction of morale
and the surrender of that conviction of justice which is the very heart of courage.

The Committee on Public Information was called into existence to make this fight for the “verdict of mankind,” the voice created to plead the justice of America’s cause before the jury of Public Opinion. The fantastic legend that associated gags and muzzles with its work may be likened only to those trees which are evolved out of the air by Hindu magicians and which rise, grow, and flourish in gay disregard of such usual necessities as roots, sap, and sustenance. In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression. Its emphasis throughout was on the open and the positive. At no point did it seek or exercise authorities under those war laws that limited the freedom of speech and press. In all things, from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world’s greatest adventure in advertising.

Under the pressure of tremendous necessities an organization grew that not only reached deep into every American community, but that carried to every corner of the civilized globe the full message of America’s idealism, unselfishness, and indomitable purpose. We fought prejudice, indifference, and disaffection at home and we fought ignorance and falsehood abroad. We strove for the maintenance of our own morale and the Allied morale by every process of stimulation; every possible expedient was employed to break through the barrage of lies that kept the people of the Central Powers in darkness and delusion; we sought the friendship and support of the neutral nations by continuous presentation of facts. We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout, for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts.

There was no part of the great war machinery that we did not touch, no medium of appeal that we did not employ. The printed word, the spoken word, the motion picture, the telegraph, the cable, the wireless, the poster, the sign-board—all these were used in our campaign to make our own people and all other peoples understand the causes that compelled Amer-
ica to take arms. All that was fine and ardent in the civilian population came at our call until more than one hundred and fifty thousand men and women were devoting highly specialized abilities to the work of the Committee, as faithful and devoted in their service as though they wore the khaki.

While America’s summons was answered without question by the citizenship as a whole, it is to be remembered that during the three and a half years of our neutrality the land had been torn by a thousand divisive prejudices, stunned by the voices of anger and confusion, and muddled by the pull and haul of opposed interests. These were conditions that could not be permitted to endure. What we had to have was no mere surface unity, but a passionate belief in the justice of America’s cause that should weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination. The war-will, the will-to-win, of a democracy depends upon the degree to which each one of all the people of that democracy can concentrate and consecrate body and soul and spirit in the supreme effort of service and sacrifice. What had to be driven home was that all business was the nation’s business, and every task a common task for a single purpose.
“FREE TRADE IN IDEAS”:
WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 1919

Oliver Wendell Holmes: from
Dissenting Opinion in Abrams v. United States

In March 1919 the Supreme Court ruled 9–0 to uphold the constitutionality of the 1917 Espionage Act in Schenck v. United States. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who had been appointed to the Court by Theodore Roosevelt in 1902, wrote the opinion. In his article “Freedom of Speech in War Time,” published in June 1919, Harvard Law School professor and First Amendment scholar Zechariah Chafee Jr. criticized Justice Holmes for having done “nothing to emphasize the social interest behind free speech, and show the need of balancing even in war time” in his Schenck opinion. In November the Court upheld the convictions of several radicals prosecuted under the 1918 Sedition Act in Abrams v. United States; but this time Holmes dissented, joined by Justice Louis Brandeis, whom President Wilson had appointed in 1916.

In this case sentences of twenty years imprisonment have been imposed for the publishing of two leaflets that I believe the defendants had as much right to publish as the Government has to publish the Constitution of the United States now vainly invoked by them. Even if I am technically wrong and enough can be squeezed from these poor and puny anonymities to turn the color of legal litmus paper; I will add, even if what I think the necessary intent were shown; the most nominal punishment seems to me all that possibly could be inflicted, unless the defendants are to be made to suffer not for what the indictment alleges but for the creed that they avow—a creed that I believe to be the creed of ignorance and immaturity when honestly held, as I see no reason to doubt that it was held here, but which, although made the subject of examination at the trial, no one has a right even to consider in dealing with the charges before the Court.

Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart you
naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition. To allow opposition by speech seems to indicate that you think the speech impotent, as when a man says that he has squared the circle, or that you do not care whole-heartedly for the result, or that you doubt either your power or your premises. But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution. It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment. Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge. While that experiment is part of our system I think that we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with the lawful and pressing purposes of the law that an immediate check is required to save the country. I wholly disagree with the argument of the Government that the First Amendment left the common law as to seditious libel in force. History seems to me against the notion. I had conceived that the United States through many years had shown its repentance for the Sedition Act of 1798, by repaying fines that it imposed. Only the emergency that makes it immediately dangerous to leave the correction of evil counsels to time warrants making any exception to the sweeping command, “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” Of course I am speaking only of expressions of opinion and exhortations, which were all that were uttered here, but I regret that I cannot put into more impressive words my belief that in their conviction upon this indictment the defendants were deprived of their rights under the Constitution of the United States.

Mr. Justice Brandeis concurs with the foregoing opinion.

November 10, 1919
Questions for Discussion and Suggestions for Further Reading

I. WHY FIGHT? / Introduction by Michael S. Neiberg

1. Alan Seeger was an American who volunteered to fight for France in 1914. How does his view of the war compare with the one presented by President Wilson in 1917?

2. Why did Americans fight in World War I? How do their reasons for going to war compare with those of the Americans who have fought in more recent conflicts?

3. What reasons did the Socialists give for opposing the war in 1917? How do their criticisms compare with those directed at American foreign policy today?

Suggestions for further reading:


Jennifer D. Keene, World War I: The American Soldier Experience (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011)


II. THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR / Introduction by Edward G. Lengel

1. How can language be used to describe modern combat to those who have never experienced it?

2. What place do traditional concepts of courage and strength have on a battlefield where even the bravest and most skilled soldiers are vulnerable to sudden, random, and unseen forces of destruction?

3. War is defined by violence, and yet much of the experience of war takes place away from scenes of violence, in moments of anticipation, recollection, or simply waiting. How do the selections portray/evoke these moments?
III. RACE AND WORLD WAR I / Introduction by Chad Williams

1. How did W.E.B. Du Bois see the role of black Americans in fighting for democracy in “Close Ranks”? When he wrote “Returning Soldiers” less than a year later, how had his vision changed?

2. How does the military of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries compare with the army of 1917–19 in regards to race? What impact has the desegregation of the armed forces had on American society as a whole?

3. What does Charles Isum’s story tell us about the US army in 1919? What were the senior officers in his division afraid of, and how would their leadership be judged in today’s US military?
IV. AMERICAN WOMEN AT WAR / Introduction by Jennifer D. Keene

1. What are we to make of the varied experiences related in the selections? Is there a “women’s experience of war”?

2. How much has changed since World War I in the roles that women play during times of national conflict? Is their support as essential on the home front as it was in World War I?

3. Does war act as a transformative force in women’s lives?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:


Jennifer D. Keene, World War I: The American Soldier Experience (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011)


V. THE HOME FRONT: SELLING UNITY, SUPPRESSING DISSENT / Introduction by Chad Williams

1. How did Justice Holmes defend the value of free speech? Do you find his arguments persuasive?

2. Are there legitimate political and moral limits to wartime dissent in a democratic society?

3. How do the efforts of the Wilson administration to win support for World War I compare with the attempts of more recent administrations to rally public opinion in wartime?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:


Celia Malone Kingsbury, For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010)

VI. AMERICA ON THE WORLD STAGE / Introduction by Michael S. Neiberg

1. Should the United States try to promote democracy internationally?

2. Can the United States best serve its interests and preserve peace by acting through international organizations, or by maintaining its national sovereignty and the freedom to act unilaterally?

3. Was Wilson foolish or wise in trying to build an international order that did not rest upon the balance of power? Is it possible to have an international system that does not ultimately depend upon the use of force?

Suggestions for further reading:


VII. AT HOME/COMING HOME: THE TOLL OF WAR / Introduction by Jennifer D. Keene

1. Was the Great War a just and noble cause for the Americans who fought in it? Were America’s interests best served by fighting in World War I?

2. Did the use of conscription in World War I result in a more fair sharing of the burdens and sacrifice of war than the all-volunteer force of today?

3. How has the experience of returning from war changed in the last hundred years? What has remained the same?
Suggestions for further reading:


Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophie are shot to death in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, on June 28 by Gavrilo Princip, a young Bosnian Serb. Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, July 28. Russia orders full military mobilization, July 30. Austria-Hungary orders full mobilization, July 31.

Germany declares war on Russia, August 1. France orders full mobilization, August 1. Germany invades Luxembourg, August 2, and Belgium, August 4. Britain declares war on Germany, August 4. President Woodrow Wilson proclaims American neutrality on August 4. Montenegro declares war on Austria-Hungary, August 5. Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia, August 6. France and Great Britain declare war on Austria-Hungary, August 12. Japan declares war on Germany, August 23. (Alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary becomes known as the Central Powers, and alliance of France, Russia, and Britain as the Entente or the Allies.)

Germans occupy Brussels, August 20. French and British are defeated in series of battles fought along the French frontiers, August 20–24.


Austro-Hungarians invade northwest Serbia, August 12, but are defeated and retreat across border, August 23.

British begin naval blockade of Germany as main body of German surface fleet remains in harbor, unwilling to risk battle with numerically superior British forces.

German troops in Togoland surrender to British and French forces, August 26. New Zealand, Australia, and Japan occupy German colonies in the Pacific, August 26–October 14.

French and British halt German advance in battle of the Marne, fought west of Paris, September 5–9. Germans withdrawn from the Marne to the Aisne River. Both sides move troops north toward the Channel coast.
Russians capture Lemberg (Lviv) in Austrian Galicia, September 3, and begin siege of Przemyśl, September 24.


Austro-Hungarians launch second invasion of northwest Serbia, September 8.

British and French capture Douala, capital of Cameroon, September 27. (Last German garrison in Cameroon surrenders February 18, 1916.)

Germans begin series of attacks on Allied forces defending Belgian town of Ypres, October 19, in attempt to breakthrough to Channel ports of Dunkirk and Calais. Belgian army retreats to west bank of Yser River and floods lowlands between Nieuport and Dixmude.

Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia relieve siege of Przemyśl, October 9.

Ottoman Empire enters war on October 29 as Turkish fleet bombards Russian ports in Black Sea.

Battle of Ypres ends November 22 as Germans fail to break through Allied defenses. Both sides entrench along Western Front, which runs for 475 miles from the North Sea coast to the Swiss border.

Siege of Przemyśl resumes on November 6 as Austro-Hungarian armies in Galicia withdraw to the Carpathians.

Garrison at Tsingtao (Qingdao), German concession port in northern China, surrenders to Japanese, November 7, after six-week-long siege.


Fighting begins between Russians and Turks in the Caucasus, November 6. Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V declares jihad against the Allies, November 14, in unsuccessful attempt to foment rebellion among the Muslim populations of the British, French, and Russian empires. British and Indian troops occupy Basra in Mesopotamia, November 22.


Serbs launch counteroffensive, December 3–6, that re-
captures Belgrade on December 15 as Austro-Hungarian
forces are driven from Serbia.
Turks launch offensive in Caucasus, December 22, and
are defeated at Sarikamish, December 29–30.

1915

Sarikamish campaign ends, January 15, after Turks lose
two-thirds of their attacking force.

Germans announce on February 4 that Allied merchant
ships in war zone around Great Britain and Ireland will be
sunk by U-boats (submarines) without warning and that
neutral shipping should avoid entering the zone. Unre-
stricted U-boat campaign begins on February 18.

Germans defeat Russians in second battle of the Masur-
ian Lakes, February 7–22.

Anglo-French naval force begins bombarding Turkish
fortifications in the Dardanelles, February 19.

Russians capture 120,000 prisoners when garrison of
Przemyśl surrenders on March 22.

British impose total blockade on Germany, including all
food imports, March 11.

Anglo-French fleet loses three obsolete battleships to
mines in unsuccessful attempt to force passage of the
Dardanelles, March 18.

Germans launch offensive at Ypres, April 22, using poi-
sonous chlorine gas released from cylinders. Battle contin-
ues until May 25 as Germans gain ground but fail to
capture Ypres. (British begin using poison gas in Septem-
ber 1915.)

Turkish police arrest more than two hundred prominent
Armenians in Istanbul, April 24. (Evidence indicates that
in March 1915 the leadership of the Committee of Union
and Progress, which had ruled the Ottoman Empire since
1913, decided to remove the Armenian population of Anatolia
by deportation and mass murder.) British, Australian, New
Zealand, and French troops land on Gallipoli peninsula,
April 25, beginning land campaign to open the Darda-
nelles. Campaign becomes stalemated, with Allied forces
confined to shallow beachheads.

French launch new offensive in the Artois, May 9–June
18, supported by British attacks at Aubers Ridge, May 9,
and Festubert, May 15–25.

Germans and Austro-Hungarians break through Russian
lines between Gorlice and Tarnow in southeast Poland, May 2–4, and recapture Przemyśl, June 3, and Lemberg, June 22, as Russians retreat from Galicia.

Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary, May 23. Italian troops cross the Austrian border and advance to the Isonzo River with objective of seizing Trieste. In the first battle of the Isonzo, June 23–July 7, Italians fail to capture high ground east of the river. (Italians will launch four additional offensives in the Isonzo valley, July 1915–March 1916, that fail to break through Austro-Hungarian defenses.)

Ottoman authorities begin deportation of Armenians from Anatolia into the Syrian desert in May as mass killings are carried out by Kurdish tribesmen and criminal gangs recruited by the Special Organization, paramilitary group controlled by the Committee of Union and Progress. (By the summer of 1916 an estimated 800,000 to one million Armenians are killed, or die from hunger and disease, in the massacres and deportations, along with at least 150,000 Assyrian Christians.)

U-boat sinks British ocean liner *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland on May 7, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans. United States protests sinking on May 13 as an “unlawful and inhumane act.” Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigns on June 9, fearing that Wilson’s continued defense of the right of Americans to travel on belligerent ships will lead to war.

German air service deploys first fighter aircraft with forward-firing machine gun in July. (British and French will introduce equivalent aircraft into service by early 1916. From the beginning of the war all of the major powers use aircraft for reconnaissance and bombing raids; Germans also use Zeppelins for bombing and maritime reconnaissance.)

Germans and Austro-Hungarians launch new offensive, July 13, that forces Russians to retreat from Poland. German forces capture Warsaw, August 5. Austro-Hungarians capture Brest-Litovsk, August 26.

U-boat sinks British liner *Arabic* off Ireland, August 19, killing two Americans. Seeking to avoid American entry into war, Germans suspend unrestricted U-boat campaign, August 27, and pledge on September 1 not to sink passenger ships without warning.

German forces in South-West Africa (Namibia) surrender, July 9.
British troops land at Suvla Bay, August 6, as part of new attempt to break stalemate at Gallipoli. Offensive ends on August 15 with Turks still holding high ground and the Allies confined to their beachheads. French launch offensives in Champagne, September 25–November 6, and the Artois, September 25–October 16. Attack in the Artois is supported by British offensive at Loos, September 25–October 19.

Germans capture Vilna, September 18. Russian retreat ends in late September along line running from Gulf of Riga south to the Romanian border near Czernowitz (Chernivtsi).

British and Indian troops in Mesopotamia advance up Tigris and capture Kut, September 28.

French and British troops begin landing at Salonika, Greece, on October 5 in effort to aid Serbs. German and Austro-Hungarian forces invade Serbia from the north, October 7, and capture Belgrade, October 9. Bulgaria invades Serbia from east, October 14. Serbian army begins winter retreat across mountains into Montenegro and Albania, November 24. (Survivors are evacuated from the Adriatic coast by Allies, January–April 1916, and later join Allied forces at Salonika.)

British begin advance up Tigris toward Baghdad, November 19, but fail to breakthrough Turkish defenses at Ctesiphon (Salman Pak), November 22–25, and retreat to Kut. Turks begin siege of Kut, December 7. Allies begin evacuation of Gallipoli in mid-December.

1916 Allied evacuation of Gallipoli is completed, January 8. Austro-Hungarians invade Montenegro, January 5, and complete occupation of the country, January 25. Russians begin offensive in the Caucasus, January 10, and capture Erzurum, February 16.

Germans begin offensive at Verdun, February 21, and capture Fort Douaumont, key French position, February 25, but are unable to breakthrough inner defensive line. Fighting extends to left (west) bank of the Meuse, March 6, as Germans continue offensive intended to exhaust French army in battle of attrition.

Germany declares war on Portugal, March 9, after the Portuguese government seizes interned German ships.

Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa raids Columbus,
New Mexico, on March 9, killing eighteen Americans. Wilson sends military expedition led by General John J. Pershing into Mexico in pursuit of Villa, March 15 (expedition ends in early February 1917 without Villa being captured).

U-boat torpedoes French passenger ship Sussex in the English Channel, March 24, injuring several Americans. Wilson warns Germany on April 18 that the U.S. will break diplomatic relations if attacks on passenger ships continue. German government pledges on May 4 that it will abide by established rules of naval warfare, which require that the passengers and crew of a ship be placed in lifeboats before it is sunk.

Allied forces begin offensive in German East Africa, April 3. (Fighting extends into Portuguese East Africa and Northern Rhodesia in 1917–18 before last German forces surrender on November 25, 1918.)

Irish republicans begin Easter Uprising in Dublin, April 24. Insurrection is suppressed by British troops, April 29.

Russians capture Trabzon, Turkish Black Sea port, on April 18. British garrison at Kut surrenders, April 29.

American volunteer pilots fly first patrol with Escadrille N. 124, French fighter squadron later known as the Lafayette Escadrille, May 13.

Sykes-Picot agreement, ratified May 16, divides postwar Middle East into zones of British and French direct control and indirect influence while envisioning international zone in Palestine under British, French, and Russian administration. (The borders established in Middle East during the 1920s do not follow boundaries outlined in Sykes-Picot agreement.)


German fleet sails into North Sea on May 31 in attempt to engage British fleet on favorable terms. In battle of Jutland, May 31–June 1, British lose three battle cruisers, three armored cruisers, eight destroyers, and 6,000 men killed, while Germans lose one battle cruiser, one obsolete battleship, four light cruisers, five destroyers, and 2,500 men killed. British retain control of North Sea and continue blockade.

Russian offensive in Galicia, June 4, breaks through
Austro-Hungarian lines and captures 200,000 prisoners by June 12. Germans make final attempt to capture Verdun, June 23.

Arab revolt against Ottoman rule begins in the Hejaz, June 10.

British and French begin offensive along Somme River, July 1, after week-long preliminary bombardment.

In sixth battle of the Isonzo, August 6–17, Italians succeed in capturing Gorizia. (Italians will launch another four offensives along the Isonzo, September 1916–June 1917, that make limited gains in the high ground east of the river.) Italy declares war on Germany, August 28.

Romania declares war on Austria-Hungary, August 27, and invades Transylvania. German, Bulgarian, and Turkish forces invade southern Romania, September 2. Germans and Austro-Hungarians begin counteroffensive in Transylvania, September 25.

British use tanks for the first time with limited success on the Somme, September 15. Russian offensive in Galicia ends, September 20. French counteroffensive at Verdun recaptures Fort Douaumont, October 24.

Wilson wins reelection on November 7, defeating Republican Charles Evans Hughes.

Battle of the Somme ends, November 18, with a maximum Allied advance of seven miles. British lose 420,000 men killed, wounded, or missing, while French casualties total 200,000; German casualties are estimated at 430,000.

Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria since 1848, dies on November 21 and is succeeded by his nephew Karl.

Herbert Henry Asquith, prime minister of Great Britain since 1908, resigns on December 5, and is succeeded by David Lloyd George. Germans capture Bucharest, December 6, as Romanian army retreats north into Moldavia. French counteroffensive at Verdun, December 15–18, regains much of the ground lost earlier in the year. French lose 377,000 men killed, wounded, or missing in battle, while German casualties total 337,000.

1917 Decision by German military and naval leadership to resume unrestricted U-boat warfare is endorsed by Kaiser Wilhelm II on January 9.

Wilson calls for “peace without victory” in address to the Senate, January 22.
Unrestricted U-boat warfare resumes, February 1. United States breaks diplomatic relations with Germany, February 3. Text of Zimmerman telegram, diplomatic message proposing a German-Mexican alliance against the United States, is published on March 1.

Germans shorten their line in France by withdrawing 12–25 miles to “Hindenburg Line,” strongly fortified position, March 16–18.

British retake Kut, February 25, and occupy Baghdad, March 11.

Food riots in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), March 8–12, result in mutiny by city garrison. Tsar Nicholas II abdicates, March 15, as provisional government is established with Prince Lvov as prime minister.

Wilson asks Congress on April 2 to declare war against Germany. War resolution is approved by the Senate, 82–6, on April 4 and by the House, 373–50, on April 6. (U.S. army has 127,000 officers and men, with another 80,000 men in the National Guard on federal service.)

British begin offensive at Arras on April 9. Canadian troops capture Vimy Ridge, April 9–12. Battle continues until May 16 as British are unable to exploit initial success; British casualties total 150,000 killed, wounded, or missing.

French launch offensive against Chemin des Dames, high ground north of the Aisne, on April 16 that fails to achieve breakthrough. Offensive ends on May 16 after French lose 130,000 men killed, wounded, or missing. Failure of attack cause widespread protests and unrest in French army, with many soldiers refusing to engage in further attacks. French commanders restore order by improving leave conditions and avoiding costly attacks.

General Pershing is appointed commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), May 10. Wilson signs Selective Service Act, May 18, making men twenty-one to thirty eligible for the draft (registration is extended in September 1918 to men eighteen to forty-five).

British capture Messines ridge south of Ypres, June 7–14.

Wilson signs Espionage Act, June 15, that includes penalties for attempts to incite “disloyalty” in the armed forces or to obstruct enlistments.

White mobs attack black residents of East St. Louis, Illinois, July 2–3, during rioting that kills at least thirty-nine African Americans and nine whites.


Germans begin using mustard gas, a liquid blistering agent, in Flanders, July 12. (Allies will begin using mustard gas in June 1918. Poison gas causes death of an estimated 90,000 soldiers on all sides, 1915–18.)

British launch offensive at Ypres, July 31, after fifteen-day preliminary bombardment.

U-boats sink almost 4.4 million tons of shipping, February–August 1917. (Germans had sunk 4.2 million tons, August 1914–January 1917.) Sinkings begin to decline as British gradually adopt convoy system, aided by increasing numbers of U.S. destroyers made available for escort duty.

Italians capture Bainsizza plateau northeast of Gorizia in eleventh battle of the Isonzo, August 19–September 12.

Germans capture Riga, September 3.

Germans and Austro-Hungarians launch offensive at Caporetto on the upper Isonzo, October 24, and force the Italians to retreat sixty miles to the Paive River. Italians lose 280,000 men taken prisoner, while another 350,000 men become stragglers or desert.

Third battle of Ypres (also known as battle of Passchendaele) ends, November 10, with maximum Allied advance of four miles; British lose 244,000 killed, wounded, or missing, the Germans 215,000. Georges Clemenceau becomes premier of France, November 16. British break through Hindenburg Line at Cambrai, November 20, in surprise attack using more than 300 tanks. German counteroffensive on November 30 recovers much of the lost ground.

British break through Turkish defenses at Gaza, November 1–6, and advance into Palestine. Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issues declaration on November 2 committing British government to “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” British occupy Jerusalem, December 9.

1918

Wilson outlines terms of peace settlement in Fourteen Points address to Congress, January 8.

Bolsheviks sign peace treaty with Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk, March 3.

Outbreak of Spanish influenza in Kansas in early March spreads across the United States and travels overseas.

Germans launch offensive against British at St. Quentin, March 21–April 5, and advance up to forty miles. Attack is most successful on Western Front since 1914, but fails to capture railroad junction at Amiens. Allies lose 255,000 men killed, wounded, or captured, the Germans 240,000. French general Ferdinand Foch becomes first Allied supreme commander on the Western Front, April 3. Germans break through British defenses along Lys River south of Ypres, April 9–29, but fail to capture supply center at Hazebrouck.

Romania signs peace treaty with Central Powers at Bucharest, May 7.

Wilson signs Sedition Act, May 16. (The Wilson administration will prosecute 2,168 individuals for their speeches or writings under the Espionage and Sedition acts and obtain 1,055 convictions; forty-one defendants are sentenced to terms of ten, fifteen, or twenty years.)

Germans launch third spring offensive, May 27–June 4, breaking through French lines along the Aisne River and advancing to the Marne. American troops join French in defense of Marne crossing at Château-Thierry, June 1–3, and drive Germans from Belleau Wood, June 6–25.


During final German offensive, July 15–18, Americans fight with the French along the Marne, then join counter-offensive that advances to Aisne and Vesle rivers in early August.

British launch offensive at Amiens, August 8–12, that captures 12,000 prisoners in its first day.

American troops land at Russian Pacific port of Vladivostok, August 16, and Arctic port of Archangel, September
4. (Troops are sent to guard military supplies and railroads and to assist Czechoslovak forces that seek to leave Russia and fight with the Allies.)

New and more virulent strain of Spanish influenza arrives in United States in late August. (Influenza pandemic of 1918–19 kills an estimated 675,000 Americans and at least thirty million people worldwide.)

In its first operation as an independent army under Pershing's command, the AEF eliminates the St. Mihiel salient southeast of Verdun, September 12–16, capturing 13,000 prisoners. Allies begin general offensive, September 26–29, attacking in Flanders, Picardy, and Champagne. AEF launches Meuse-Argonne offensive, September 26.

French, British, Serbian, and Greek forces begin offensive in Macedonia, September 15, and advance up the Vardar valley. Bulgaria signs armistice, September 29.

Eugene V. Debs, four-time Socialist candidate for president, is tried in Cleveland under the Espionage Act of 1917 for having made an antiwar speech in June 1918. Convicted on September 13, he is sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

British forces capture Damascus, October 1.

British break through Hindenburg Line, September 29–October 5. Prince Max of Baden, the newly-appointed German chancellor, sends note to Wilson on October 5 asking for an armistice and peace negotiations on basis of the Fourteen Points. Americans break through main defensive line in the Meuse-Argonne, October 14–17. German navy orders U-boats to end attacks on civilian ships, October 21. (Germans sink 4.1 million tons of merchant shipping, September 1917–October 1918; 178 U-boats are lost at sea, 1914–18.) American troops in Europe total 2,057,000.

Ottoman Empire signs armistice, October 30. Italian victory in battle of Vittorio Veneto, October 24–November 3, brings about collapse of Austro-Hungarian army. Austria-Hungary signs armistice, November 3. Allies launch series of attacks along the Western Front, October 31–November 4. Wilhelm II abdicates his throne, November 9, as German republic is proclaimed in Berlin. Germans sign armistice that goes into effect on November 11 at 11 A.M.

Czechoslovak republic proclaimed in Prague, November

1919


1920

Last American troops leave France, January 3. (American occupation of Germany ends in January 1923.) Soviet Russia signs treaties recognizing Estonian, Lithuanian,
and Latvian independence, February 2–August 11. Senate votes 49–35 to ratify Versailles treaty with reservations, March 19, falling seven votes short of the necessary two-thirds majority. (Austrian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian treaties all incorporate the League of Nations covenant, and are never submitted to the Senate for ratification.) Last U.S. troops leave Vladivostok, April 1. At conference held in San Remo, Italy, April 19–26, British and French agree that France will receive League of Nations mandate for Syria (including Lebanon) and Britain will receive mandates for Iraq and Palestine (including territory that becomes Transjordan in 1923). Peace treaty with Turkey is signed at Sévres, August 10. (United States is not a signatory to the Sèvres treaty, which is replaced by Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.) Ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment is completed, August 18. Poland and Lithuania sign peace treaty, October 7. Warren G. Harding, Republican senator from Ohio, defeats James M. Cox, Democratic governor of Ohio, in presidential election on November 2. Eugene V. Debs, who is still in federal prison, receives more than three percent of the popular vote. (Debs is released on December 25, 1921, after Harding commutes his sentence.)

1921 Poland and Soviets sign treaty in Riga, March 18, ending their 1919–20 war. Harding signs congressional resolution ending state of war with Germany, Austria, and Hungary, July 2. United States signs separate peace treaties with Austria, August 24, Germany, August 25, and Hungary, August 29. Harding dedicates Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, November 11.

More than 116,000 Americans died while serving in the armed forces during World War I; of these deaths, 53,000 were the result of hostile action and 63,000 were from non-combat causes. Battle deaths by service were approximately 50,500 in the army, 4,400 in the navy, and 2,500 in the marines; 26,000 of the battle deaths were men killed in the Meuse-Argonne campaign (September 26–November 11, 1918). It is estimated that 46,000 of the non-combat deaths were from influenza.

Great Britain and Ireland lost 74,400 military dead; India, 74,000; Australia, 62,000; Canada, 57,000; New Zealand, 18,000; South Africa, 7,000; and Newfoundland,
France lost 1,400,000 military dead, including 70,000 from its colonies; Russia, 1,800,000; Italy, 650,000; Romania, 336,000; Serbia, 278,000; and Belgium, 38,000. Germany lost 2,000,000 military dead; Austria-Hungary, 1,200,000; the Ottoman Empire, 770,000; and Bulgaria, 87,500. About 15,000 African soldiers died on both sides in African campaigns, along with an estimated 150,000 porters and laborers, mostly from disease and malnutrition. The total number of military dead from 1914 to 1918 is estimated at more than 9 million, while total civilian deaths from violence and war-related food shortages and epidemics (excluding the 1918 influenza pandemic) are estimated at 6 million, including 2,100,000 in the Ottoman Empire and 1,500,000 in Russia.
Biographical Notes

Mary Borden (May 15, 1886–December 2, 1968) Born in Chicago, Illinois, the daughter of a wealthy businessman with extensive holdings in real estate, mining, and dairy products. Graduated from Vassar in 1907. Married George Douglas Turner, a Scottish lay missionary, in 1908. Published two novels under pseudonym Bridget Maclagan, 1912–13. Used her inheritance to establish military hospital at Rousbrugge, Belgium, in July 1915; her nursing staff included the American volunteer Ellen N. La Motte. Served as director of hospital at Bray-sur-Somme, August 1916–February 1917, and at hospital in Mont-Notre-Dame during the 1917 spring offensive in Champagne before returning to Rousbrugge. Published four poems in the English Review, August–December 1917. After divorce from her first husband, married Edward Spears, a British liaison officer who had served with the French army on the Somme. Lived in Paris, 1918–21, before moving to England. Published The Forbidden Zone (1929), collection of sketches and poems based on wartime experiences, nonfiction work The Technique of Marriage (1933) and numerous novels, including Jane: Our Stranger (1923), Flamingo (1927), and Passport for a Girl (1939). Organized field hospital in Lorraine in February 1940. Escaped from Bordeaux in late June 1940 and returned to England. Reorganized hospital unit and served with Free French forces in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Libya, 1941–42, and in eastern France in 1945; spent remainder of the war with her husband, who served as the British envoy in Syria and Lebanon, 1941–44. Published memoir Journey Down a Blind Alley (1946), describing experiences in Second World War. Continued to write novels, including For the Record (1950) and Martin Merriedew (1952). Died in Warfield, Berkshire, England.

Willa Cather (December 7, 1873–April 24, 1947) Born in Back Creek Valley, near Winchester, Virginia, daughter of a sheep farmer. Parents and other relatives moved to the Nebraska Divide in 1883, ultimately settling in Red Cloud. Attended University of Nebraska, where she studied Greek, Latin, French, German, and English literature; graduated 1894. Published poetry and short fiction and began contributing reviews to The Nebraska State Journal. Worked in Pittsburgh as a magazine editor and reviewer for Pittsburgh Leader, and later as high school Latin teacher. Published poetry collection April Twilights (1903) and story collection The Troll Garden (1905). Moved to New York in
1906 as editor of McClure’s Magazine; subsequently spent time in Boston and London, and frequently returned to Nebraska. First novel Alexander’s Bridge published in 1912, followed by O Pioneers! (1913), The Song of the Lark (1915), and My Antonia (1918). Traveled extensively in Southwest. Toured French battlefields to research novel One of Ours (1922), inspired by cousin G. P. Cather, who was killed at Cantigny in 1918. Later novels included A Lost Lady (1923), The Professor’s House (1925), My Mortal Enemy (1926), Death Comes for the Archbishop (1931), Lucy Gayheart (1935), and Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940), along with story collections Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920), Obscure Destinies (1932), and The Old Beauty and Others (1945). Died in New York City.


**James Norman Hall** (April 22, 1887–July 5, 1951) Born in Colfax, Iowa, the son of a farmer and grocer. Graduated from Grinnell College in 1910. Worked for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Boston while studying for a master’s degree at Harvard. While on vacation in England at the outbreak of World


followed by novels *The Torrents of Spring* and *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926. After divorce from his first wife, married Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927. Returned to United States in 1928, settling in Key West in 1930. Subsequent fiction included *Men Without Women* (1927), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), and *To Have and Have Not* (1937); also published *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), about bullfighting, and *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), about big game hunting. Covered Spanish Civil War as correspondent for North American Newspaper Alliance, 1936–37, an experience that helped inspire novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Settled in Cuba, 1939–40. After divorce from second wife, married war correspondent Martha Gellhorn in 1944 and traveled with her to China as correspondent for *PM*, 1944–45. After divorce from third wife, married former war correspondent Mary Welsh in 1946. Published *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Won Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. Committed suicide in Ketcham, Idaho.


associate justice of the Massachusetts supreme judicial court, 1883–99, as its chief justice, 1899–1902, and as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, 1902–32. Died in Washington, D.C.

**Charles R. Isum** (May 22, 1889–March 6, 1941) Born in California. Worked as bookbinder for the *Los Angeles Times*. Drafted into army and was assigned to the medical detachment of the 1st Battalion, 365th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division. In June 1918 his regiment arrived in France, where it held the St. Die sector of the Lorraine front, August–September. Regiment was kept in reserve during opening of the Meuse-Argonne offensive before being sent to Marbache Sector along the Moselle in October. Served in battalion aid station at Pont-à-Mousson under heavy artillery fire, November 5–10, before being sent to Lesménils, where he was gassed on the night before the Armistice. Threatened with court-martial in January 1919 for violating order forbidding black soldiers from speaking with French women, but charges were dropped, and Isum was honorably discharged in March 1919. Returned to Los Angeles and job at the *Times*. Married Zellee Jones. Retired from work in 1930s as heart condition linked to wartime gassing worsened. Daughter Rachel, born 1922, began studying nursing in 1940 at UCLA, where she met star athlete Jackie Robinson and introduced him to her father shortly before his death. (Rachel Isum and Jackie Robinson married in 1946, the year before he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers.)


**Algernon Lee** (September 15, 1873–January 5, 1954) Born in Dubuque, Iowa, the son of a carpenter. Attended University of Minnesota,


Horace Pippin (February 22, 1888–July 6, 1946) Born West Chester, Pennsylvania; grew up in Goshen, New York. Developed love of drawing and painting in childhood. Worked at various jobs including hotel porter, furniture crater, and iron molder. Joined the army in 1917 and was sent to France as part of 369th Infantry (“Harlem Hellfighters”), keeping an illustrated journal of his military experiences. Was badly wounded in the right shoulder near Séchault on September 30, 1918 losing the full use of his right arm. Received Croix de Guerre. Returned to United States in 1919 and settled in West Chester, living on odd jobs and his disability pension. Married Jennie Wade in 1920. Resumed activity as an artist, executing oil paintings using his left hand to assist his injured right arm; the first of these, “The End of the War: Starting Home” (c. 1930) took over three years to complete. His work, focused on historical and political themes and scenes of African-American life, attracted local attention and was championed by painter N. C. Wyeth. Began exhibiting in galleries and major museums including the Carlen Gallery (Philadelphia), the Corcoran Gallery


Ashby Williams (June 18, 1874–May 31, 1944) Born John Ashby Williams in Stafford County, Virginia, the son of a farmer. Family moved to Washington, D.C., in 1892. Worked as clerk in government hydrographic office in Norfolk, Virginia, 1898–1901. Attended Oberlin College, 1901–3, and the University of Virginia, 1903–6, where he was awarded a law degree. Practiced law in Roanoke, Virginia, where he served on the board of aldermen, 1908–12. Published Corporation Laws of Virginia (1909), an annotated compilation. Married Eva Wallbridge in 1911. Arrived in France in May 1918, commanding Company E, Second Battalion, 320th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division. Trained behind British lines, June–July, and then served in trenches near Ransart, southwest of Arras, July–August. Assigned command of First Battalion, 320th Infantry Regiment, on August 28; led battalion at St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Returned to the United States in May 1919 as lieutenant colonel. Published Experiences of the Great War: Artois, St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne