

World War I: Evaluating America's Role in Global Conflicts

How did American ideals influence our role in global conflict?

World War I, known as the Great War at the time, broke out in 1914 with Germany and Austria-Hungary on one side and Great Britain, France and Russia on the other. Most Americans wanted to keep the United States out of the conflict and saw rivalries among European aristocracies as the cause of the fighting. While the U.S. was neutral, the country did want to continue to carry on trade with Europe. This created a problem because the warring nations did not want American manufactured products and farm goods to reach their enemies. Great Britain's navy prevented most American ships from reaching German ports. In response, Germany began using submarines to attack any vessel taking supplies to its enemies. In 1917, when German submarines began sinking American ships, the U.S. declared war on Germany and its partners. American soldiers joined the fighting.

United States Enters World War I

The United States was not prepared for war. It had to raise an army quickly and to supply it with arms, food, clothing and transportation. That required a major effort from the entire population. Young men were required to register for military service, and the army began drafting men into uniform. Iowa recruits were often sent to Camp Dodge, a hastily-built training center just north of Des Moines. Today, it is the headquarters of the Iowa National Guard. Iowa factories began making armaments and munitions (bullets and explosives) and other war equipment.

A big challenge was to feed U.S. soldiers and our allies, particularly Great Britain and France. To encourage farmers to produce more, the government guaranteed them high prices for their products and appealed to their patriotism. Posters declared "Food Will Win the War." It worked. Iowa farm production took a huge upward surge. As farms produced more, all families were encouraged to use less. Sugar, butter and meats were rationed (limited). Each family got a ration book with stamps that they could use to buy limited amounts of certain products each week. Families were encouraged to plant "Victory Gardens" to produce more of their own food, and Iowans responded enthusiastically.

The government sold bonds to pay for the war. A bond was a loan to the government that paid interest. To encourage sales, local committees in each town sponsored bond drives with patriotic rallies and door-to-door contacts. Even children saved coins and traded them in at the post office to secure a bond. The Red Cross was a semi-private organization that provided entertainment, refreshments and personal items to troops abroad. Women knitted scarves, socks and gloves for the troops with wool provided by the American Red Cross. Like the government, the Red Cross needed funds, and Iowans contributed readily to the cause.

Iowans Face Conflicted Loyalties

At the time, many Iowans still had ties to their European homelands. Germans and Irish were the two largest immigrant groups in the state, and neither was friendly toward Great Britain. The German language was still spoken in some communities, especially in western Iowa and Mississippi River cities like Davenport and Dubuque. In many communities, Germans, especially, were accused of supporting America's enemies and were treated badly. They were forced to purchase war bonds, to kiss the American flag in public or humiliated in other ways. Schools were forbidden to teach the German language and German books were burned. Iowa's Governor William Harding even issued the Babel Proclamation, which made it illegal to speak any language except English in public, but his act was not always taken seriously.

When fighting ended in November 1918, wild celebrations broke out almost everywhere with bonfires, speeches and revelries. Troops returning home had experienced a wider world than they had known before and were sometimes ready for new adventures. A very serious outbreak of the flu in November and December took the lives of more Iowans than were killed in combat. The war was over but the world was not the same as it was in 1914. The conflict had been called "the war to end all wars," but sadly, that was not to be the case.

Supporting Questions

Why did the United States hesitate to get involved in World War I?

- [“Watch Your Step,” 1914 \(Political Cartoon\)](#)
- [U.S. Neutrality Proclamation, August 6, 1914 \(Document\)](#)
- [“All Depends on the Point of View,” September 1914 \(Political Cartoon\)](#)
- [Reverend Mercer Johnston’s Letter to His Father During the War, October 12, 1914 \(Document\)](#)
- [Woman’s Peace Party Letter to President Woodrow Wilson, October 29, 1915 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Wake Up, America, 1917 \(Image\)](#)
- [“Iowa Senators Have Defenders” Newspaper Article, March 7, 1917 \(Document\)](#)

How effective were the contributions by the United States in WWI?

- [“Invasion of Belgium by the ‘Uncultured’,” 1914 \(Political Cartoon\)](#)
- [“The Battle Fronts of Europe,” 1917 \(Map\)](#)
- [“What America Has Done in Half Year of War” Newspaper Article, October 5, 1917 \(Document\)](#)
- [American Soldiers Heading into Action in the Argonne Forest in France, 1918 \(Image\)](#)
- [“From the Battlefields of France” from General John J. Pershing, 1918 \(Audio\)](#)
- [“We Laid Our Idle Pleasures Down Until We Won” Song Sheet, 1919 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Hoover the Humanitarian” Campaign Flyer, 1928 \(Document\)](#)

Why did the United States retreat from global interactions following WWI?

- [President Woodrow Wilson’s Shorthand Speech Notes for his “Fourteen Points” Address, January 8, 1918 \(Document\)](#)
- [“League of Nations” Speech by Henry Cabot Lodge, 1919 \(Audio\)](#)
- [Albert B. Cummins Speech on the League of Nations, February 1919 \(Document\)](#)
- [“Americanism” Speech by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1920 \(Audio\)](#)
- [“Readjustment” Speech by Warren G. Harding, 1920 \(Audio\)](#)

*Printable Image and Document Guide

Additional Resources

[Echoes of the Great War: American Experiences of World War I:](#) This Library of Congress exhibition considers the debates and struggles that surrounded U.S. engagement in World War I with numerous multimedia pieces to explore.

[Iowa in World War I:](#) This website from The Iowa Heritage Digital Collection focuses on Iowa’s involvement in the war effort of World War I.

[Iowa Public Television’s “Iowa in World War I:”](#) This IPTV website features photos, video and text showing Iowa’s contributions during World War I.

[The War of the Nations:](#) This Library of Congress portfolio feature military-related etchings from 1914 to 1919.

[Statistics on Mobilization of Soldiers During World War I:](#) This website is part of a Library of Congress online collection focusing on World War I. This particular webpage features mobilized strength and casualty losses by country during WWI.

“Watch Your Step,” 1914



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Rogers, W.A., “Watch Your Step,” 1914

Description

This political cartoon shows a depiction of Uncle Sam sitting on a rock with the words “strict neutrality” written on the side. Beneath the rock is a circle of bayonets surrounding the rock.

Text-Dependent Questions

- How did the cartoonist respond to the neutral stance of the president? Use evidence from the image.
- What visual imagery did the cartoonist use to illustrate the difficulty of maintaining strict neutrality? Why do you think he used those items?

Citation Information

Rogers, W.A., “Watch Your Step,” 1914. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

U.S. Neutrality Proclamation, August 6, 1914



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "U.S. Neutrality Proclamation," Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier, 6 August 1914

Description

This article from the *Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier* is a reprinting of the U.S. Neutrality Proclamation at the start of World War I in Europe. The proclamation outlines President Woodrow Wilson's acts to preserve the neutrality of the United States.

[Transcript of the U.S. Neutrality Proclamation](#)

[Printable Excerpt of U.S. Neutrality Proclamation](#)

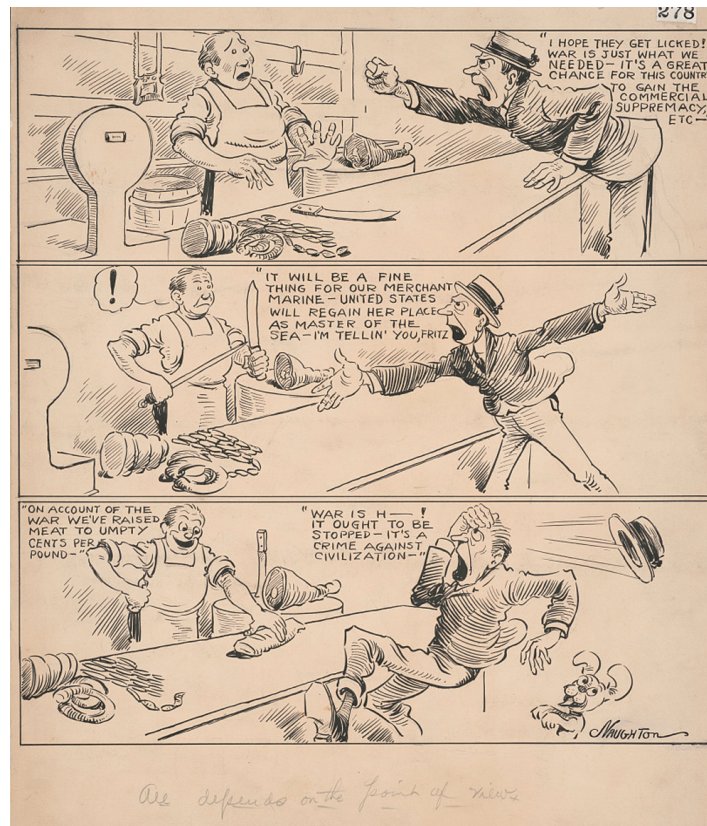
Text-Dependent Questions

- As a neutral nation, why was it possible to "lawfully and without restriction ... manufacture or sell within the U.S. arms and ammunition and other articles known as contraband of war" but yet not acceptable to "carry" armaments overseas?
- Why was a declaration of neutrality placed in the middle of the newspaper next to the obituaries? What was communicated by its placement about Iowans' beliefs at the beginning of World War I?

Citation Information

"U.S. Neutrality Proclamation," *Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier*, 6 August 1914. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

"All Depends on the Point of View," September 1914



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Naughton, Frank, "All Depends on the Point of View," September 1914

Description

Minnesotan Frank Naughton presents two arguments revealing American interests in seeing the European war continue in his three-panel editorial cartoon, which he drew for the Duluth News Tribune weeks after the war's start. Duluth, where immigrants made up more than a quarter of its population, was one of the largest shipping ports in the United States and stood to profit from wartime production.

[Transcription of "All Depends on the Point of View" Illustration](#)

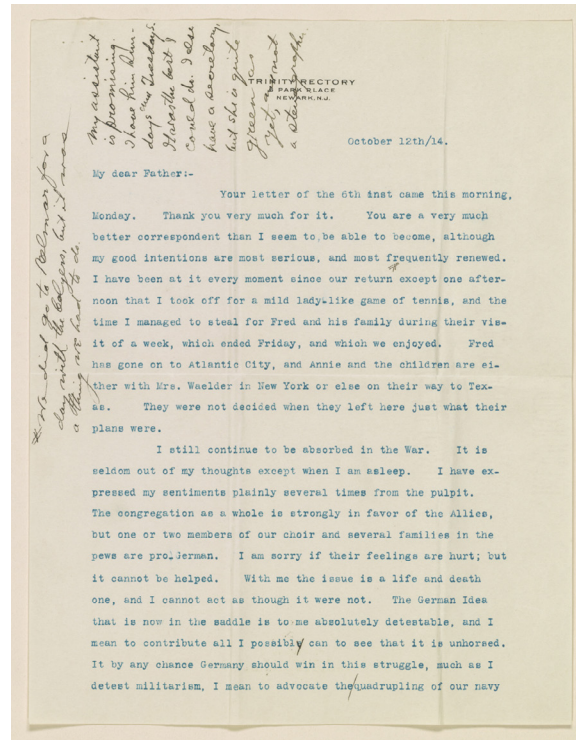
Text-Dependent Questions

- What are the two "points of view" presented in the illustration?
- According to the cartoonist, how would involvement in World War I impact American economics?
- Was economic gain a hesitation or prompt to get the United States involved in World War I?

Citation Information

Naughton, Frank, "All Depends on the Point of View," September 1914. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Reverend Mercer Johnston's Letter to His Father During the War, October 12, 1914



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Johnston, Mercer G., "Mercer Green Johnston to His Father," 12 October 1914

Description

Reverend Mercer Johnston was the rector of Trinity Church in Newark, New Jersey. In this letter to his father, Johnston expressed his strong opposition to Germany's role in the war and the desire to do what he could to "hasten Germany's day of judgment." Johnston wrote, "I could no more remain neutral towards the program that the Kaiser and his war party have put forth than I could remain neutral towards the program of His Satanic Majesty." Acknowledging that Johnston's sermons in favor of the Allies upset some of his German American parishioners and colleagues, the letter describes the divided sympathies among America's 100 million diverse people toward the warring nations.

[Transcript of Mercer Johnston's Letter to His Father During the War](#)

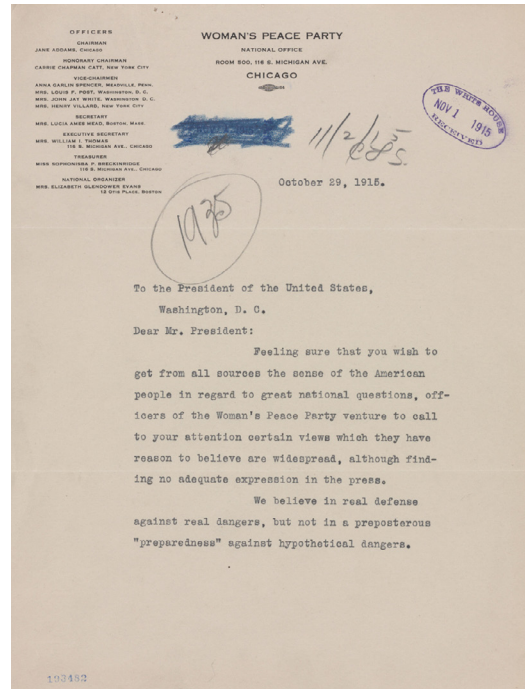
Text-Dependent Questions

- Why would Reverend Mercer Johnston state that the German ideal and American ideal would be in violent conflict?
- Thinking about the way Germany was characterized by Reverend Johnston in the letter, would not entering the war be an option? Why or why not?
- According to Johnston, how should the United States interact with the rest of the world?

Citation Information

Johnston, Mercer G., "Mercer Green Johnston to His Father," 12 October 1914. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Woman's Peace Party Letter to President Woodrow Wilson, October 29, 1915



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "Woman's Peace Party to the President of the United States," 29 October 1915

Description

The Woman's Peace Party, organized in January 1915 and led by Jane Addams, was one of the most prominent organizations opposing American military intervention and the preparedness movement. In this 1915 letter to President Woodrow Wilson, the party leaders argued that preparations against threats from Europe, through the buildup of the U.S. military, would only lead to arms races that would cause more problems than they solved. "These preparations," they wrote, "would create rivalry, suspicion and taxation in every country." They believed that, instead, Wilson should concentrate his efforts on the opportunity for the "establishment of permanent peace" that "this world crisis offers."

[Transcript of the Woman's Peace Party Letter to President Woodrow Wilson](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- What role did the Woman's Peace Party feel the United States should have had in world affairs?
- Why would the Woman's Peace Party characterize the dangers as hypothetical?
- How does the rhetoric used in the letter differ from the letter written by [Reverend Mercer Johnston](#)?

Citation Information

"Woman's Peace Party to the President of the United States," 29 October 1915. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Wake Up, America,” 1917



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Flagg, James Montgomery, “Wake up America! Civilization calls every man, woman and child!” 1917

Description

This poster shows a woman dressed in stars and stripes, and symbolizes a sleeping America. After two and a half years of neutrality, the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. James Montgomery Flagg created this poster, which was featured in “Wake Up, America” Day in New York City just 13 days later on April 19, 1917. Actress Mary Arthur was Flagg’s model for Columbia, who is a personification of Liberty and America. The woman on the print was shown asleep, wearing patriotic stars and stripes and a Phrygian cap — a symbol of freedom since Roman times. While she sleeps against a fluted column, another visual reference to western classical antiquity and civilization, sinister storm clouds gather in the background.

[Transcript of “Wake Up, America” Illustration](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- Why did the artist symbolize America as a “sleeping” nation?
- What visual imagery did the artist use to show the immediacy of the threat posed to civilization?
- How was the artist trying to create a sense of urgency for the United States with words and the imagery used?

Citation Information

Flagg, James Montgomery, “Wake Up, America! Civilization Calls Every Man, Woman and Child!” 1917. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Iowa Senators Have Defenders” Newspaper Article, March 7, 1917



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Iowa Senators Have Defenders,” *Evening Times-Republican*, 7 March 1917

Description

This article that appeared in the *Evening Times-Republican*, a newspaper from Marshalltown, Iowa, outlined support for Iowa’s senators in opposing the armed neutrality bill and opposition to the senators’ actions to not speak to Iowans in the Iowa House. The article also outlines both sides of the conflict and provides a text of the “Rayburn Resolution” proposed in the Iowa House.

[Transcript of “Iowa Senators Have Defenders” Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “Iowa Senators Have Defenders” Article](#)

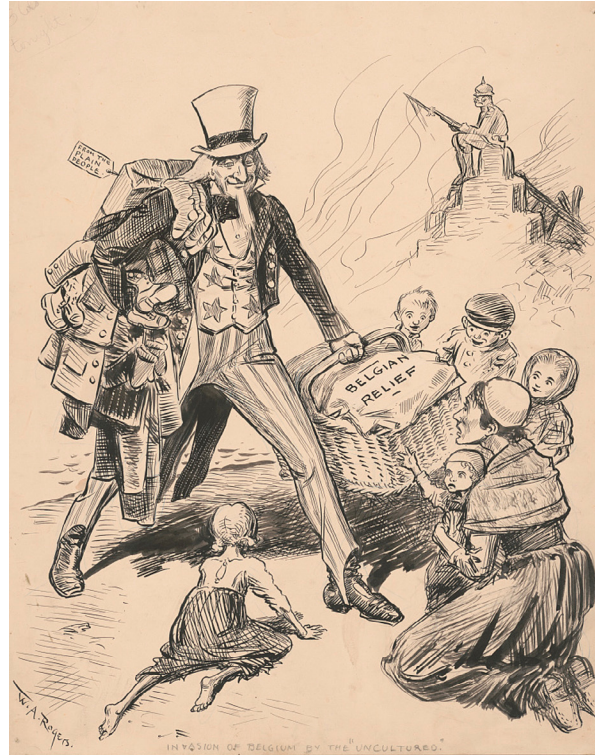
Text-Dependent Questions

- What rationale did defenders from Iowa use to support the senators’ actions?
- Why would the senators “not be supporting the majority of Iowans?”
- How did a debate like this set up conflict about the United States’ role in global conflict after the war?

Citation Information

“Iowa Senators Have Defenders,” *Evening Times-Republican*, 7 March 1917. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Invasion of Belgium by the ‘Uncultured’,” 1914



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Rogers, W.A., “Invasion of Belgium by the ‘Uncultured’,” 1914

Description

This drawing shows Uncle Sam carrying a basket labeled “Belgian Relief” and an armful of clothing labeled “From the Plain People,” taking a large step into the midst of a destitute woman and several children. These people symbolize the victims of the German invasion of Belgium during World War I. The image also shows a German soldier in the background sitting on a mound of rubble, holding a rifle with bayonet that appears to be dripping with blood.

Text-Dependent Question

- How did the artist use visual imagery to compare and contrast the United States and Germany?
- According to the artist, who was responsible for the relief being offered to Belgium? What visual imagery did the artist use to illustrate his point?
- How did the artist’s characterization of the United States’ role in this image contrast with the [previous image calling for America to “wake up?”](#)

Citation Information

Rogers, W.A., “Invasion of Belgium by the ‘Uncultured’,” 1914. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“The Battle Fronts of Europe,” 1917



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Stanford, Edward, “The Battle Fronts of Europe,” 1917

Description

This map shows the area between Europe’s western and eastern fronts overlaid over a map of the United States.

[Transcript of “The Battle Fronts of Europe” Map](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- What was the creator’s intent with positioning the battle fronts of Europe over the map of the United States?
- How effective would this visual have been in shaping public opinion?

Citation Information

Stanford, Edward, “The Battle Fronts of Europe,” 1917. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“What America Has Done in Half Year of War” Newspaper Article, October 5, 1917



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “What America Has Done in Half Year of War,” *The Daily Gate City and Constitution-Democrat*, 5 October 1917

Description

This newspaper article appeared on the front page of the Keokuk newspaper, *The Daily Gate City and Constitution-Democrat*. The article outlined the impact the United States has had on the war effort. It also focused on the country's lack of preparedness before the war and seemingly great strides it has made in six months to be ready to fight.

[Transcript of “What America Has Done in Half Year of War” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “What America Has Done in Half Year of War” Newspaper Article](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- How feasible are the author's claims that the United States went, “From a nation of peace and unpreparedness, the country in six months developed into a powerful fighting machine — the greatest factor in the war?”
- What did the article attribute the United States' success to in mobilizing so quickly? How did this impact the opinions of citizens in regard to America's involvement in global conflict after the war?
- How significant were the United States' contributions to its allies according to the article? How significant were these to the financial health of America? How did this factor into public opinion after the war?

Citation Information

“What America Has Done in Half Year of War,” *The Daily Gate City and Constitution-Democrat*, 5 October 1917.
[Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

American Soldiers Heading into Action in the Argonne Forest in France, 1918



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "302nd Eng. repairing road over trench and 92nd Div. (colored) machine gunners going into action, Argonne Forest, France," 1918

Description

This photograph shows engineers of the 302nd Engineer Regiment repairing a roadway over a trench. It also shows African-American soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division, also known as Buffalo Soldiers, in a trench headed into action in the Argonne Forest in France during World War I.

Text-Dependent Questions

- Use evidence from the image to describe what trench warfare might have been like for soldiers.
- Consider the description of roles for soldiers in the image. Why was the volume of soldiers needed significant to the war effort?

Citation Information

"302nd Eng. repairing road over trench and 92nd Div. (colored) machine gunners going into action, Argonne Forest, France," 1918. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“From the Battlefields of France” from General John J. Pershing, 1918



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Pershing, John J., “From the Battlefields of France,” 1918

Description

This recording is a patriotic appeal by the U.S. Army to Americans for “their unshrinking support” during World War I. It was delivered by General John J. Pershing, chief of the American Expeditionary Forces.

[Transcript of General John J. Pershing’s Address, “From the Battlefields of France”](#)

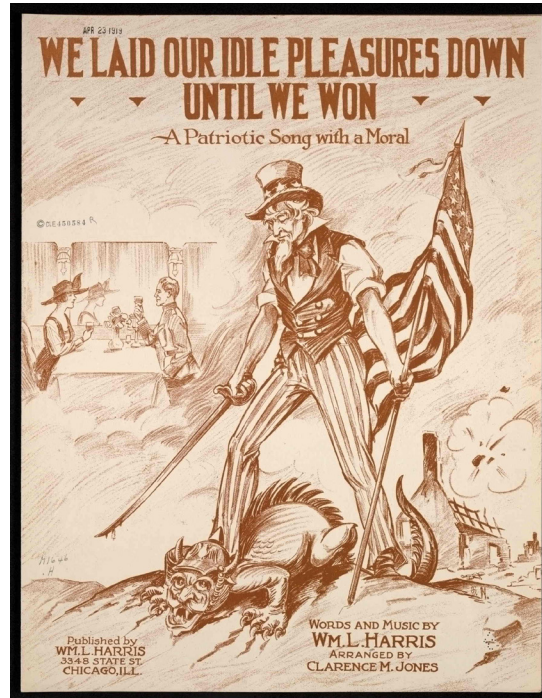
Text-Dependent Questions

- How did General John J. Pershing characterize the fight by Americans in during World War I?
- What did this assume about America’s role in the conflict? How did this perceived role influence America’s actions after the conflict?

Citation Information

Pershing, John J., “From the Battlefields of France,” 1918. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“We Laid Our Idle Pleasures Down Until We Won” Song Sheet, 1919



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Harris, W.M., “We Laid Our Idle Pleasures Down Until We Won,” 1919

Description

This sheet music is for the song “We Laid Our Idle Pleasures Down,” which was written at the end of the war in 1919.

[Transcript of General John J. Pershing’s Address, “From the Battlefields of France”](#)

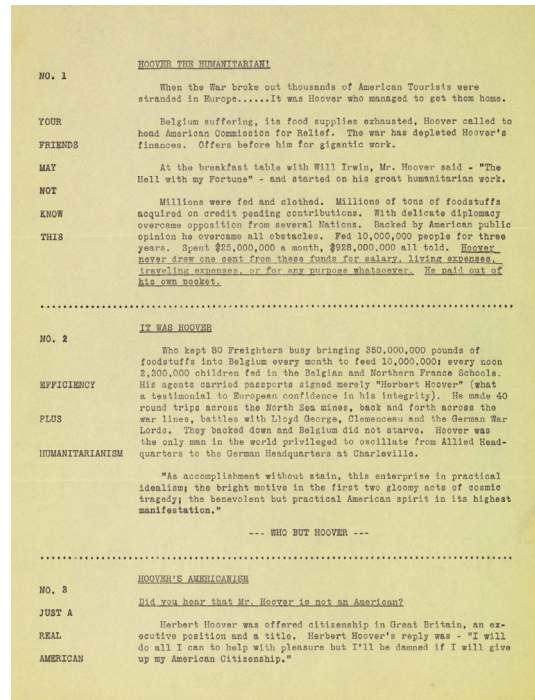
Text-Dependent Questions

- What impact does the song suggest the United States’ involvement was in the war? Use evidence from the sheet music to support your response.
- Does the song suggest the United States’ victory was final or that work still needed to be done by the U.S. in the world? Use evidence from the sheet music to support your response.
- What role might the song have played in shaping public opinion in 1917?

Citation Information

Harris, W.M., “We Laid Our Idle Pleasures Down Until We Won,” 1919. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Hoover the Humanitarian” Campaign Flyer, 1928



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1928

Description

Information on Herbert Hoover’s humanitarian efforts during World War I. This flyer was used as campaign literature for his 1928 presidential campaign.

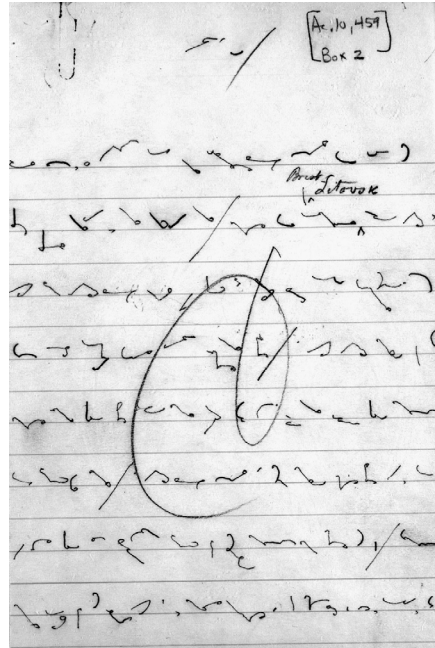
[Full Transcript of “Hoover the Humanitarian” Campaign Flyer](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from “Hoover the Humanitarian” Campaign Flyer](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- Why would Hoover’s humanitarian efforts in Belgium be backed by public opinion? What was communicated in this flyer about Americans’ desire for neutrality?
- Why was Belgium a significant location on which to focus relief efforts? Why was this region easier to engage in relief efforts than other parts of Europe?

President Woodrow Wilson's Shorthand Speech Notes for his "Fourteen Points" Address, January 8, 1918



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Wilson, Woodrow, "Woodrow Wilson Speech Notes, in Shorthand, of Fourteen Points Address," 8 January 1918

Description

In this January 8, 1918, address to Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proposed a "Fourteen Points" program for world peace. This document includes the shorthand speech notes from Wilson's "Fourteen Points" address. These points were later taken as the basis for peace negotiations at the end of the war.

[Full Transcript of President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points"](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points"](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- What was the implication for the United States' role in the world by President Woodrow Wilson's use of the term "partners" throughout his speech?
- What were Wilson's arguments for the United States continuing to have a global role in this speech? Use specific evidence from the source.

Citation Information

Shorthand Speech Notes: Wilson, Woodrow, "Woodrow Wilson Speech Notes, in Shorthand, of Fourteen Points Address," 8 January 1918. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

"Fourteen Points" Transcription: Wilson, Woodrow, "President Wilson's Message to Congress (14 Points)," 8 January 1918. [Courtesy of National Archives](#)

“League of Nations” Speech by Henry Cabot Lodge, 1919



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Lodge, Henry Cabot, “League of Nations,” 1919

Description

This recorded speech is by Henry Cabot Lodge, a U.S. congressman from Massachusetts. In the speech, Lodge voices his opposition to joining the League of Nations.

[Transcript of Henry Cabot Lodge’s “League of Nations” Speech](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- What role did Henry Cabot Lodge state America should play in world affairs with his “America First” argument?
- According to Lodge, how would involvement in the League of Nations weaken America? How was this position supported or contradicted by the rationale for America’s involvement in World War I?

Citation Information

Lodge, Henry Cabot, “League of Nations,” 1919. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Albert B. Cummins Speech on the League of Nations, February 1919

-2-

or effect. I believe it is not only the privilege but the duty of every Senator to exercise his constitutional prerogative and to advise the President before he returns to France of his opinion upon a matter which so deeply concerns not alone the people of this country but of all countries who have organized themselves into governments. As I look at it, it is of far greater importance that we discharge this duty at this time than it is to consider appropriation bills or legislation of any character. Inasmuch as we may well yield to the members of the Foreign Relations Committee after the conference to which I have referred takes place, some of us must speak now or not at all.

No greater mistake could be made than to assume that there may not be an effective compact among nations, the sole purpose of which is to prevent, so far as humanly possible, future wars, without surrendering a single necessary attribute of our own sovereignty. I cannot concur in the argument which seems to lead to the conclusion that any form of internationalism is an unwise invasion of nationalism. I cannot agree that the

Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Cummins, Albert B., pp. 2-4, 30-31, February 1919

Description

This is a copy of Iowa U.S. Senator Albert B. Cummins' speech before a joint session of Congress. The focus of the speech is about the League of Nations' constitution.

[Transcript of Albert B. Cummins Speech on the League of Nations](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- How did Cummins' stance against the League differ from other senators with respect to Americanism?
- How did Cummins reconcile his rejection of isolationism with his vote against involvement in the League of Nations? Do you agree with Cummins argument? Support your answer with evidence from this or other sources.

“Americanism” Speech by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1920



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Roosevelt, Franklin D., “Americanism,” 1920

Description

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, former assistant secretary of the Navy, is speaking of those who fell in battle. “To them we must write the binding finish: it shall not happen again. Americans demand: the crime of war shall cease.”

[Transcript of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Americanism” Speech](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- Why did Franklin Delano Roosevelt feel that the “... success on land and sea could be but half a victory?”
- How did Roosevelt see the United States’ role in the world following the war? Use evidence from the source for support.

Citation Information

Roosevelt, Franklin D., “Americanism,” 1920. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

“Readjustment” Speech by Warren G. Harding, 1920



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Harding, Warren G., “Readjustment,” 1920

Description

The audio is from a speech by Warren G. Harding. Harding is calling for a return to normalcy following the end of World War I.

[Transcript of Warren G. Harding’s “Readjustment” Speech](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

- Consider the following quotation, “It’s one thing to battle successfully against the world’s domination by a military autocracy because the infinite God never intended such a program; but it’s quite another thing to revise human nature and suspend the fundamental laws of life and all of life’s requirements.” How did Warren G. Harding characterize the United States’ rationale used for entering World War I? Is this fair considering the rationale given for fighting before the war?
- What did Harding feel was the best way “... to make democracy safe for the world than all armed conflict ever recorded?”
- What role does Harding argue the United States should take following World War I? Support your answer using evidence from the document.

Citation Information

Harding, Warren G., “Readjustment,” 1920. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)