

"Evaluate the political, social, and economic effects at home that resulted from US involvement in World War I."

The Homefront: The United States During World War I -- The first "total war" brought many short and long term changes for the US:

- Various **government boards and commissions**, created to **mobilize for the war**, virtually put the **free enterprise system "on hold"** for the duration of US involvement in the war.
- Groups that supported the war effort and those opposed continued to debate US involvement. **Pacifist organizations** such as the Women's Peace Party actively campaigned for peace while the **government**, attempting to ensure continued public support, **clamped down on civil liberties**. In short, all segments of society were affected by US involvement in "the war to end all wars."

⇒ **Mobilizing the Homefront: the President Increases Power**

- Congress gave President Wilson broad new powers that enabled him to direct the economy and mobilize the necessary funds and material to conduct the war effort.
- **Wilson oversaw the allocation of raw materials** and the institution of **strict production and purchasing controls**.
- As **commander-in-chief**, Wilson directed **the American Expeditionary Force** sent to France under the command of **General John J. Pershing**.
- In addition, Wilson, in his 1918 State of the Union Address, outlined a plan for a "just and lasting peace." Known as the **Fourteen Points**, Wilson's plan included the establishment of a **world peace-keeping organization**.

⇒ **The War Economy**

- Since it would take many months to train and deploy US troops, the **first American contribution** to the war effort was the shipping of **munitions and food to the Allied Powers**. For this purpose Wilson created a number of **war agencies**. They included the following:
 - ***War Industries Board**-headed by **Bernard Baruch**, the committee set production priorities and established **centralized control over raw materials and prices**. Essentially, the War Industries Board was the **"economic dictator" of the nation**.
 - ***National War Labor Board**-headed by **Frank Walsh and William Howard Taft**, the board **mediated labor disputes** to help prevent work slowdowns and strikes. American Federation of Labor leader **Samuel Gompers** gave loyal support to the war effort; in return labor won concessions including higher wages and an eight-hour day.
 - ***Food and Fuel Administrations**-the **Lever Act** gave Wilson broad controls over production, price and distribution of food and fuel. Voluntary programs such as "Wheat-less Mondays" and "Meatless Tuesdays" encouraged conservation of food in the US. The programs paid off; food exports to Europe tripled during US involvement in World War I. Fuel and coal production increased as well as by closing nonessential factories, initiating "Gasless Sundays" and introducing daylight savings time.
- The government **financed the war** by raising over \$ 10 billion from **increased income and excise taxes**. It also raised \$ 23 billion by conducting massive drives to convince Americans to put their savings into federal government **"Liberty" and "Victory" Bonds**.

⇒ **Public Opinion and Civil Liberties**

- The government used persuasion and intimidation to ensure public support for the war effort. Progressive journalist **George Creel** headed the **Committee on Public Information**, a successful agency of over 150,000 volunteers engaged in a propaganda effort to build support for the American cause as an idealistic crusade.

- The CPI set up volunteer **Liberty Leagues** that engaged activities such as spying on neighbors (especially those with foreign names), and encouraging citizens to "do their bit" for the war. War hysteria and patriotic enthusiasm too often provided an excuse for **nativist groups** to take out their prejudices on "disloyal" minorities. One such group, the **American Protective League**, publicly humiliated people accused of not buying war bonds and used vigilante action in attacking all things German—from the performing of Beethoven to the sale of sauerkraut and pretzels.
- A number of socialists and pacifists took the risk of criticizing the government's war policy. After passage of the **Espionage Act (1917)** and the **Sedition Act (1918)** the penalty for speaking out often meant prison. The **Espionage Act** provided for **imprisonment** for persons who either tried to **incite rebellion in the armed forces or obstruct operation of the draft**. Additionally, the Espionage Act empowered the Postmaster General to prevent treasonous materials from being sent through the mail. The **Sedition Act prohibited** anyone from making **"disloyal" or "abusive" remarks about the government**, flag, or uniform, even if there were not detrimental consequences.
- The laws sounded reasonable, but they were applied in ways that trampled on civil liberties. About **2,000 people were prosecuted under these laws**, half of whom were convicted and jailed.

⇒ **Wartime Social Trends**

All groups in American society—business and labor, women and men, immigrants and native-born—were required to adjust to the demands of war.

- **Armed Forces**-over **four million** men, including 400,000 **African-Americans** in **segregated units**, and 17,000 **Native Americans** were **issued a uniform** during the war (over 2 million were sent overseas). More than 10,000 **women** enlisted, working primarily in offices and as nurses.
- **Women**-With approximately **16 % of the normal labor force in uniform**, large numbers of women, mostly white, were hired by factories and other enterprises in jobs never before open to them. Their **contribution** to the war effort finally convinced Wilson and Congress to **support the 19th Amendment** (women's suffrage). When the **war ended**, returning **veterans replaced women** in the labor market.
- **Racial Minorities**-the labor shortage opened industrial jobs to **Mexican-American and African-Americans**.
- **W.E.B. DuBois**, the most prominent black leader of the time, supported the war effort in the hope that **service by African-Americans**, fighting to "make the world safe for democracy," would **earn them equal rights** at the conclusion of the war (a hope that was not realized). Approximately **one-half million rural Southern blacks migrated** to the **cities** in the **Northeast and Midwest** to obtain employment in war and other related industries.
 - Some white Southerners, fearing the loss of labor at a time when cotton demand was high, tried forcibly to prevent their departure.
 - Some white Northerners, fearing job competition and encroachment on white neighborhoods, resented their arrival. In 1917, there were race-riots in 26 cities North and South, with the worst in East St. Louis, Illinois.
 - Despite the opposition, there is evidence that African-Americans who migrated North generally improved themselves economically.