

The Great War: World War I and its Aftermath, 1914-1920

A Presentation Based on the
Georgia Standards of Excellence
(GSE) Objectives for High School
History Students

SSUSH15 Analyze the origins and impact of U.S. involvement in World War I.



a. Describe the movement from U.S. neutrality to engagement in World War I, including unrestricted submarine warfare and the Zimmerman Telegram.

- In 1914, war broke out among European nations
- The **Allies** (France, Britain, Russia, and, later, Italy) fought against the **Central Powers** (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria).
- President Woodrow Wilson declared the U.S. would remain neutral.

“We must be impartial in thought as well as in action.”



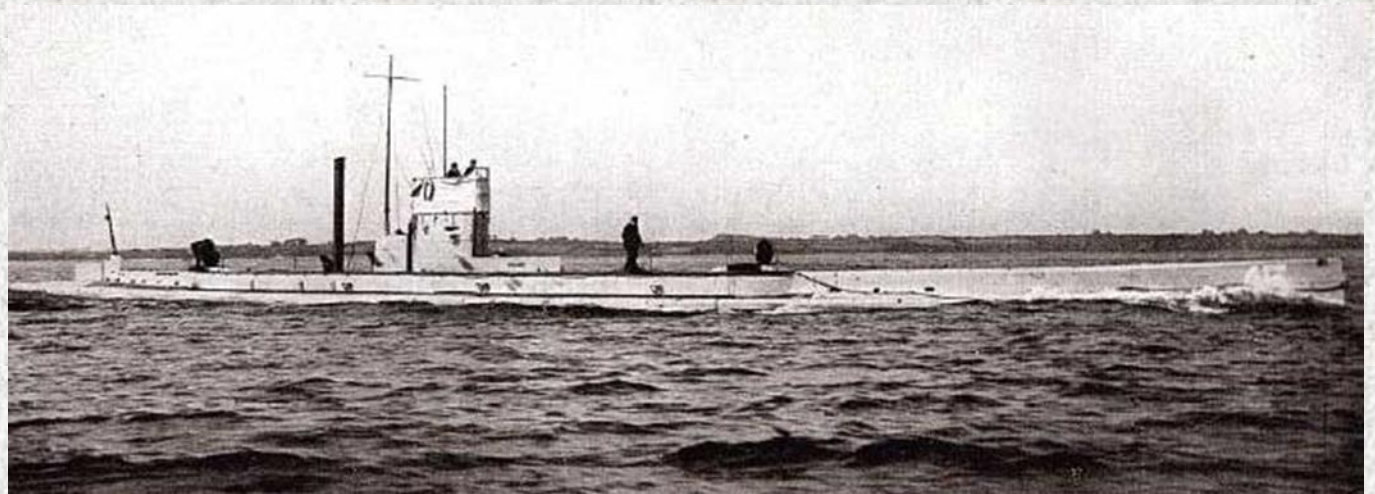
American Neutrality

- Although the President declared the U.S. to be neutral, many in the U.S. began to choose sides: most supported the Allies (Britain and France).
- Wilson's cabinet and many businesses also supported going to war on the side of the Allies.



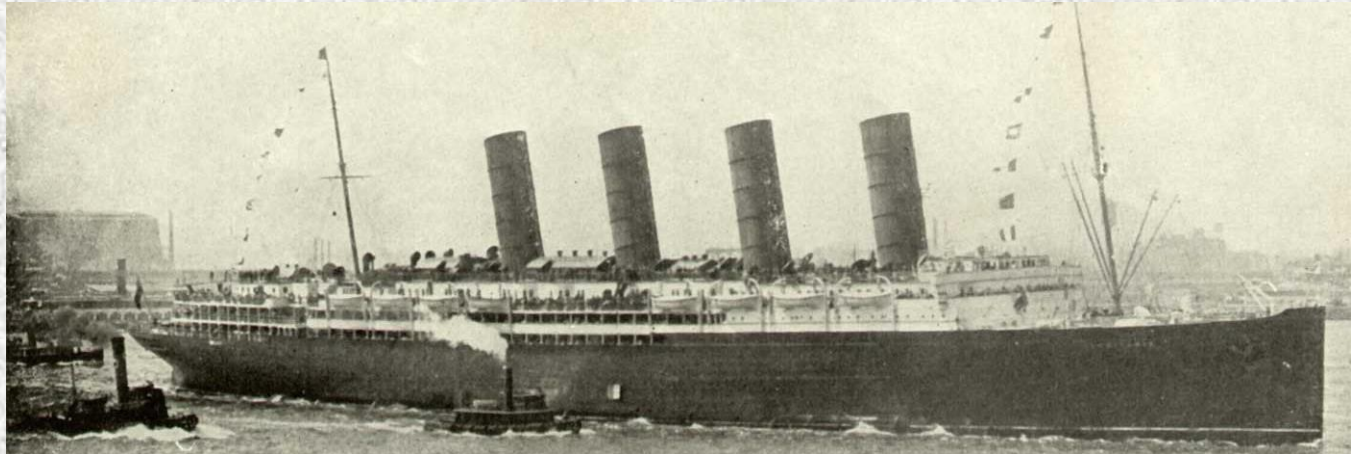
American Neutrality

- The British navy blockaded German ports to prevent supplies from getting through.
- To stop the Allies from receiving supplies, Germany announced it would use U-boats to attack all vessels in British waters, including merchant ships.
- This unrestricted submarine warfare drew protests from the U.S.



American Neutrality

- In 1915, a German U-boat sank the British passenger liner ***Lusitania***, killing almost 1,200 passengers including 128 Americans.
- In 1916, the French ship *Sussex*, was torpedoed by a German U-boat causing several American injuries.
- Subsequently, Germany and the U.S. signed the **Sussex Pledge** in which Germany promised not to sink anymore merchant ships without warning.
- This kept the U.S. out of the war, and helped Wilson win re-election in 1916.



The Zimmerman Telegram

- In January 1917, Germany tried to enlist the help of Mexico in fighting the U.S.
- In a message known as the Zimmerman Telegram, Germany suggested that if the U.S. entered the war, Mexico should ally itself with Germany, and if they did so and Germany won, Mexico would regain the western territory lost to the U.S. in the Mexican War.
- British intelligence intercepted this telegram and it became widely known through U.S. news reports.
- The Zimmerman message convinced many Americans that war against Germany was necessary.

America Goes to War

- The next month (February 1917), Germany resumed its unrestricted submarine warfare and sank six U.S. ships.
- On April 2, 1917, Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany; Congress agreed.
- Thus the U.S. joined the **Allies** fighting against the **Central Powers**.



Selective Service: The Draft

- Less than a month after the United States entered World War I, the Selective Service Act of May 1917 was passed by Congress.
- This Act, by which 687,000 men were immediately inducted:
 1. required all men aged 21 through 30 to register for the draft
 2. exempted conscientious objectors from combat
 3. gave exemptions to civil servants and clergy
 4. disallowed people from hiring substitutes (that is, paying others to fight in their place)

b. Explain the domestic impact of World War I, including the origins of the Great Migration, the Espionage Act, and socialist Eugene Debs.



Great Migration

- Northern factories needed workers during the war for two main reasons:

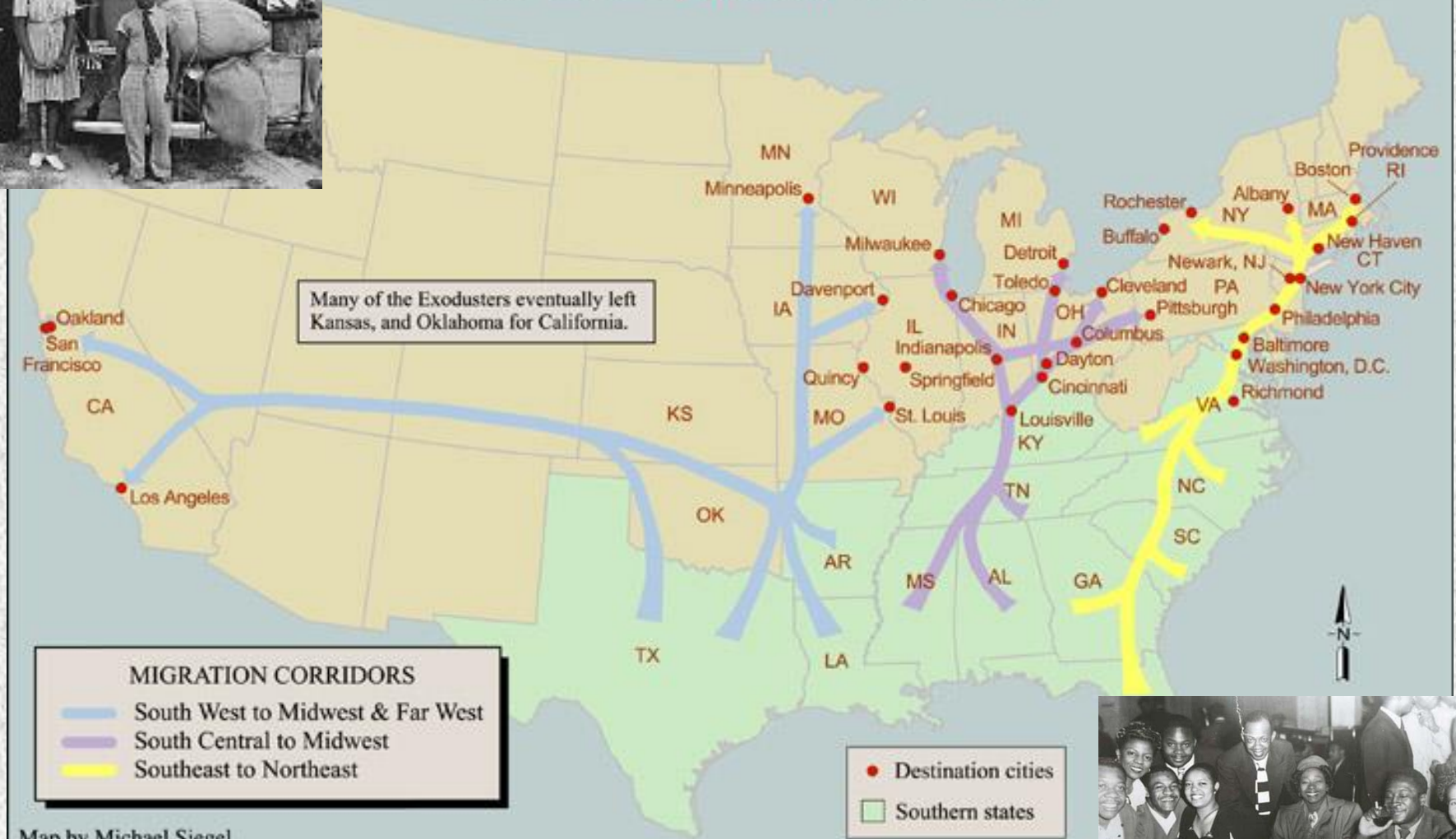
- many white workers joined the war effort or were drafted

- nearly all immigration from Europe stopped

To replace these workers, between 300,000 and 500,000 African Americans left the South and moved into many northern or western cities looking for factory jobs. This movement became known as the **Great Migration**.



The Great Migration, 1916–1930



Map by Michael Siegel
Rutgers Cartography 2005

Source: *The Atlas of A



Limits on Personal Freedoms

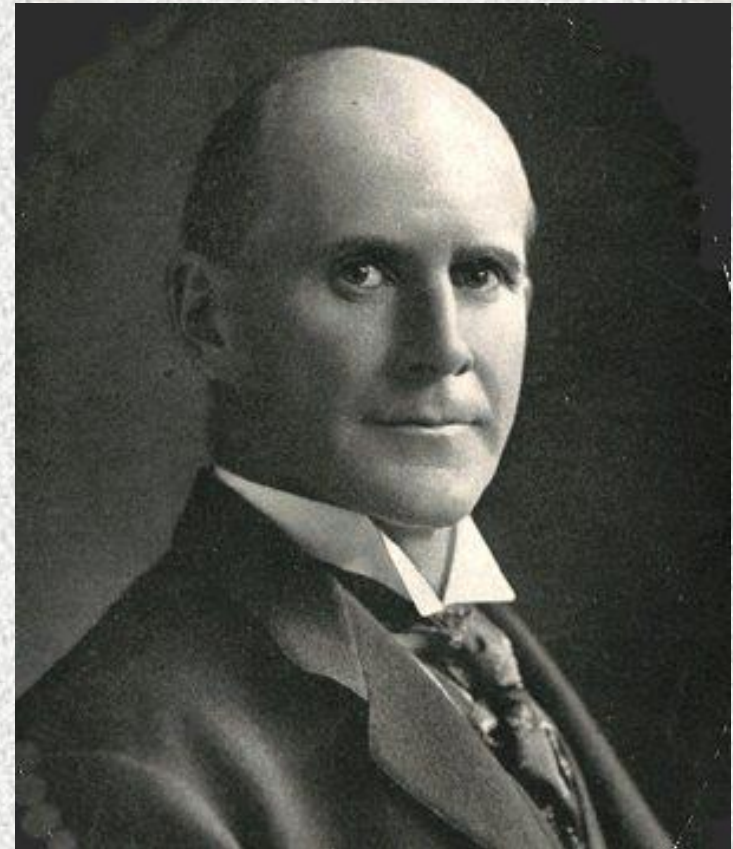
- Passed in 1917, the Espionage Act:
 - established penalties & prison time for aiding the enemy
 - penalized disloyalty, or interference with the war effort
- The Espionage Act was expanded in 1918 to make it illegal for any public opposition to the war
- In 1919, the Supreme Court also limited American's freedom of speech in *Schenck v. U.S.*, which said that the freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment could be restricted if spoken or printed remarks represented a “clear and present danger” to the country.

Eugene Debs

- American Railway Union Leader
- Socialist candidate for President in 1912

Socialists believe that democratic means should be used to distribute wealth in a society.

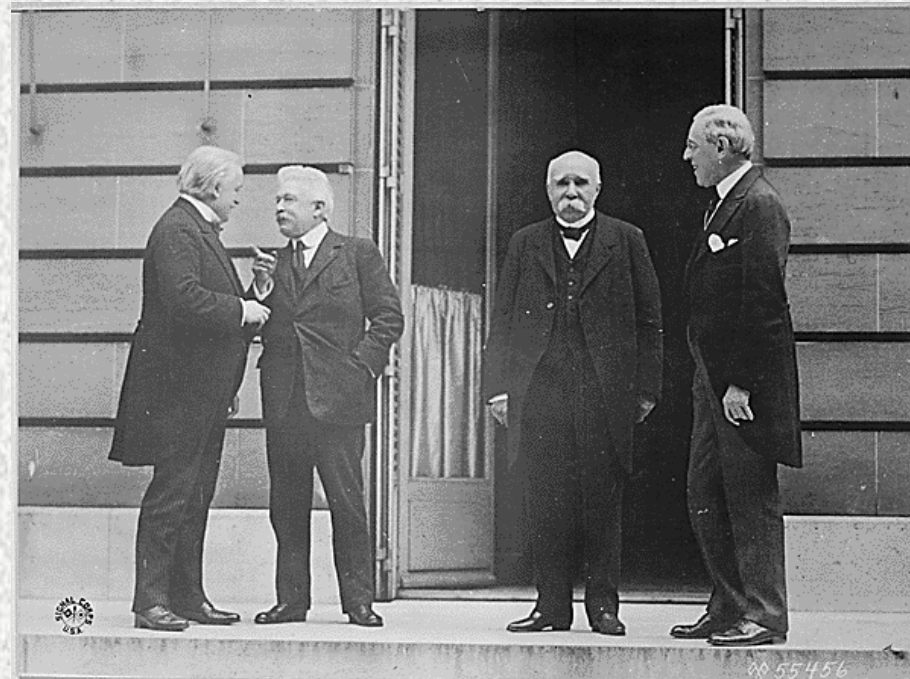
- this is often interpreted to mean that the government should own industries and other interests (railroads, utilities, etc.)
- Debs was jailed twice: once for leading the Pullman Strike, and once for criticizing the government for prosecuting people under the Espionage Act.



c. Explain Wilson's Fourteen Points and the debate over U.S. entry into the League of Nations.

- The Allies won World War I as an armistice (cease fire) was declared in 1918.
- The two sides began settling for peace.
- The “Big Four” leaders from the U.S., Britain, France, and Italy led the meetings

Which country is missing from the meeting? Why is this important?



Wilson's Fourteen Points

- Wilson presented his plan for peace, called the Fourteen Points, to Congress
- In the first five points, he wanted all countries to have:
 1. free trade
 2. freedom of the seas (in peace and in war)
 3. disarmament (weapons reduction)
 4. open diplomacy (no secret treaties or alliances)
 5. adjustments of colonial claims
- Wilson felt issues regarding these five points caused World War I.

Wilson's Fourteen Points

- The next eight points dealt with **self-determination** (the right of countries to choose their own governments).
- The final point called for the creation of the **League of Nations**, an organization which would help settle disagreements between member countries.
- Many countries viewed the Fourteen Points as too lenient on Germany.
- Most of Wilson's Fourteen Points were dismissed by the other leaders, with the exception of Point Fourteen.

The Treaty of Versailles

- The Treaty of Versailles, signed by Germany in 1919, punished Germany for “starting” the war.
- Germany would have to:
 - dismantle their army and navy
 - pay war reparations of \$33 billion (which they did not have)
 - Admit guilt for causing the war
- The terms of this treaty left Germany in shambles

League of Nations

- Wilson's League of Nations was voted down by the U.S. Congress in 1920.
- Many Congressmen worried that it made the U.S. too involved in European affairs

