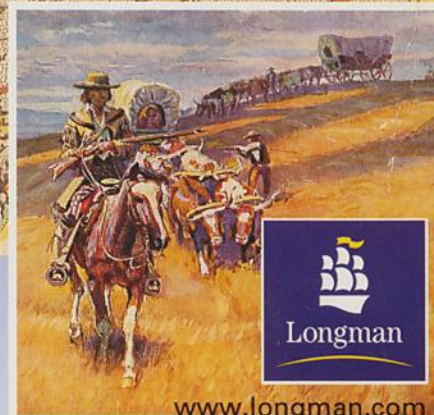
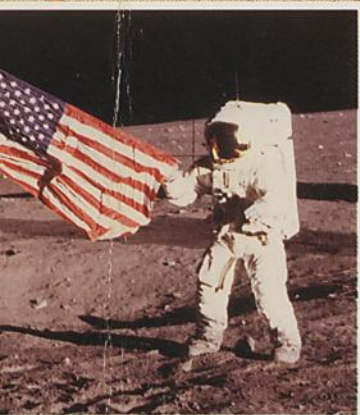
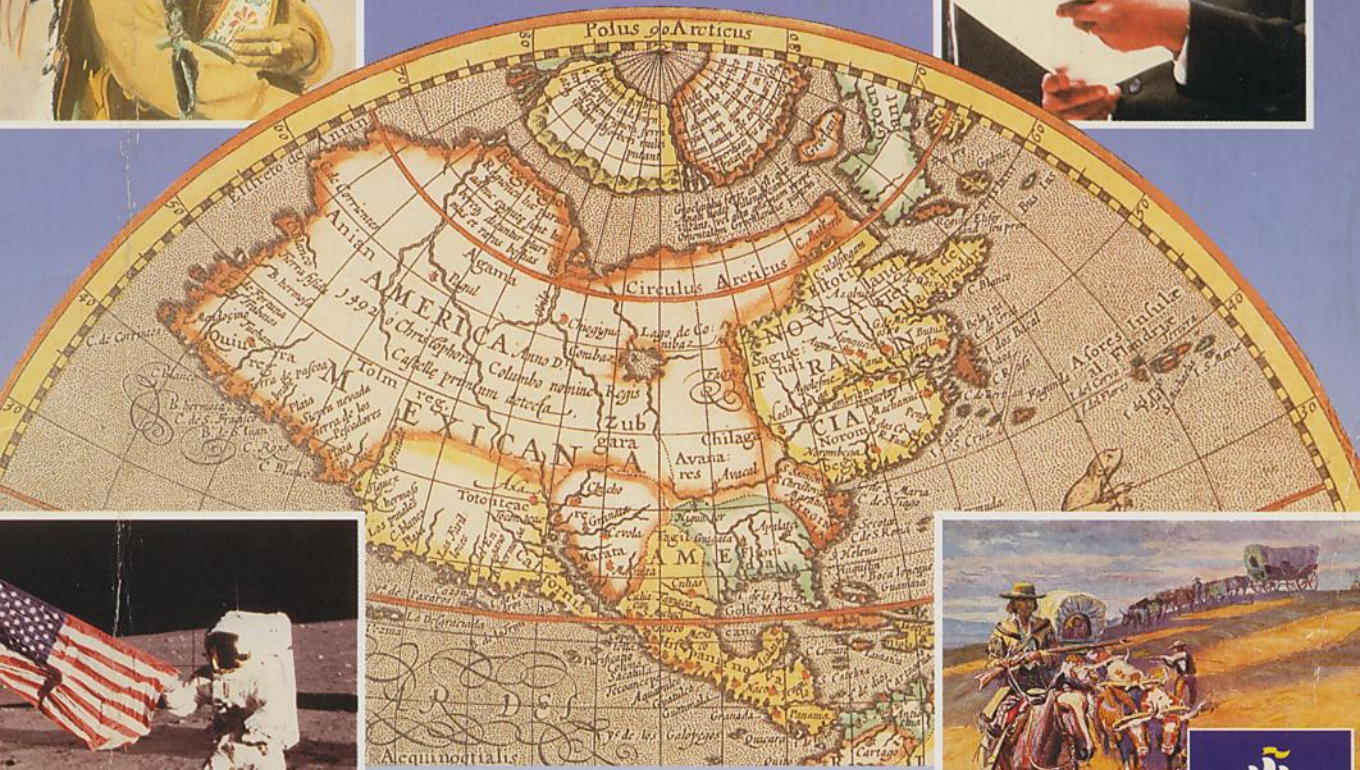
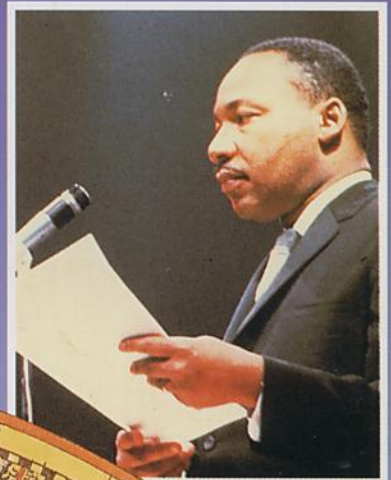
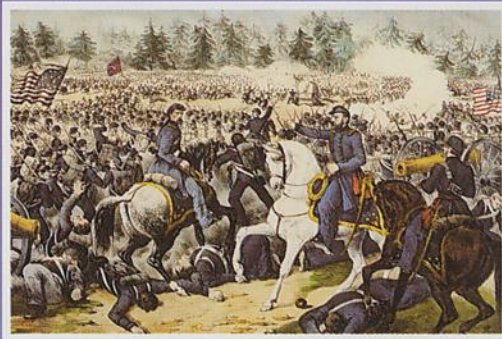


# AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE USA



Bryn O'Callaghan



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# TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICANS

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## A WAR AND A PEACE

### TAKE UP THE SWORD OF JUSTICE



A British propaganda poster.

In August 1914, a war started on the continent of Europe. It was the beginning of a struggle that lasted for more than four years, brought death to millions of people and changed the history of the world. At the time people called the conflict the Great War. Later it was called the First World War.

The main countries fighting the war were, on one side, France, Great Britain and Russia. They were known as the Allies. On the other side the main

countries were Germany and Austria, who were called the Central Powers.

Most Americans wanted to keep out of the war. They saw it as a purely European affair that was not their concern. When President Wilson said that they should be “impartial in thought as well as in action,” most people were ready to agree with him.

But Americans found it difficult to stay impartial for long. In the first days of the war the German government sent its armies marching into neutral Belgium. This shocked many Americans. They were even more shocked when newspapers printed reports – often false or exaggerated – of German cruelty towards Belgian civilians.

From the very beginning of the war the strong British navy prevented German ships from trading with the United States. But trade between the United States and the Allies grew quickly. By 1915 American factories were making vast quantities of weapons and munitions and selling them to Britain and France.

German leaders were determined to stop this flow of armaments to their enemies. They announced in February 1915, that they would sink all Allied merchant ships in the seas around the British Isles. On a hazy afternoon in May, a big British passenger ship called the *Lusitania* was nearing the end of its voyage from the United States to Britain. Suddenly, without any warning, it was hit by a torpedo from a German submarine. Within minutes the *Lusitania* was sinking. More than 1,000 passengers went with it to the bottom of the ocean. One hundred and twenty-eight of those passengers were Americans.

The sinking of the *Lusitania* made Americans very angry. Some began to think that Germany would do



anything to win the war. But most still wanted peace. President Wilson made strong protests to the German government. For a time the Germans stopped the submarine attacks.

In the autumn of 1916 American voters re-elected Wilson as President, mainly because he had kept them out of the war. In January 1917, Wilson made a speech to Congress. In it he appealed to the warring nations of Europe to settle their differences and make "a peace without victory." This, he said, was the only kind of peace that could last.

But by now American bankers had lent a lot of money to the Allies. And American military supplies were still pouring across the Atlantic. Germany's war leaders feared that, unless the flow of supplies was stopped, their country would be defeated. Only nine days after Wilson's speech they again ordered their submarines to begin sinking ships sailing towards Allied ports. This time the order included neutral vessels.



A poster recruiting soldiers to fight for "Uncle Sam."

In the next few weeks German submarines sank five American ships. With German torpedoes sending American sailors to their deaths in the grey waters of the Atlantic, Wilson felt that he had no choice. On April 2, 1917, he asked Congress to declare war on

## The Zimmermann telegram

At the beginning of 1917 many Americans were still strongly against becoming involved in the First World War. To people on the Great Plains, in Texas or in California, Europe seemed very far away. European quarrels, they believed, were none of their business.

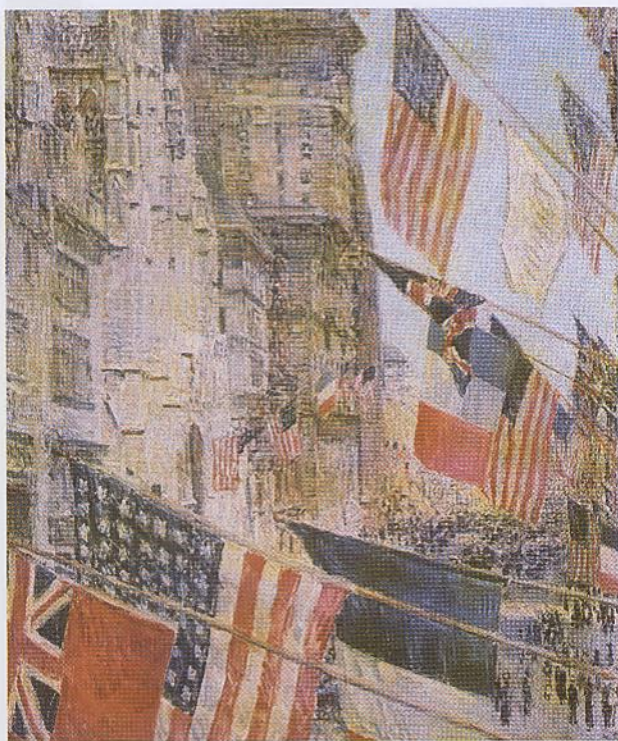
Then, on March 1, 1917, newspapers all over the United States printed a sensational story. The story claimed that Arthur Zimmermann, the German Foreign Secretary, had tried to persuade Mexico and Japan to attack the United States.

The affair had begun on January 16. Zimmermann had sent a secret telegram to the German ambassador in Mexico. The telegram told the ambassador to invite the Mexican government to sign an alliance with Germany. The idea was that if the United States went to war with Germany, the Mexicans should attack the Americans from the south. Mexico's reward would be the return of all the lands it had lost to the United States in 1848. Zimmermann also wanted Mexico to invite Japan to join the anti-American alliance.

Zimmermann's telegram was intercepted and decoded by British agents. On February 24, when Americans were already angry at Germany for starting submarine attacks again, the British gave Wilson a copy of the telegram. Wilson was furious. He told the newspapers. People who wanted to keep the United States out of the war, and those who favored Germany, said that the telegram was a forgery, a British trick. But their efforts to claim that the story was untrue collapsed when Zimmermann himself said: "It is true."

The Zimmermann telegram turned American opinion more strongly in favor of the Allies. This was especially true in the previously uninterested western parts of the country. These were the very areas that would have been threatened most if Zimmermann's plan had worked.





*Victory Won by Childe Hassam, painted to celebrate the end of the First World War.*

Germany. Wilson's aim was not simply to defeat Germany. He saw the war as a great crusade to ensure the future peace of the world. For him the war would become a war "to make the world safe for democracy, the war to end all wars."

When the United States declared war on Germany the American army was a small force of only 200,000 soldiers. Millions more men had to be recruited, trained, equipped and shipped across the Atlantic to Europe. All this took time. A full year passed before many American soldiers were available to help the European Allies.

In the spring of 1918 the German armies began a last desperate offensive against the French and the British. Their aim was to win the war before the new American army was ready to fight. By July they were within a few miles of Paris.

The Allies were in great danger. They placed all their armies under one commander, the French general Foch. Luckily for Foch, American soldiers began to arrive at the battlefield to strengthen his forces. Soon over a million of them had joined in the battles against the Germans.

In August 1918, the Allied armies counter-attacked. The German armies were driven back towards their own frontiers. In October the German government asked for peace. On November 11, 1918, German and Allied leaders signed an armistice, an agreement to stop fighting. The bloodiest and most destructive war the world had ever known was over.

By January 1919, President Wilson was in Europe. He was there to help to work out a peace treaty. He was greeted by cheering crowds in the Allied capitals and spoken of as "Wilson the Just."

But when Wilson met other Allied leaders to work out the details of the treaty, the welcome became less friendly. The French leader, Georges Clemenceau, thought that Wilson lacked experience in international affairs. Worse still, the American President did not seem to realize this. "How can I talk to a fellow who thinks himself the first man in two thousand years to know anything about peace on earth?" asked Clemenceau.

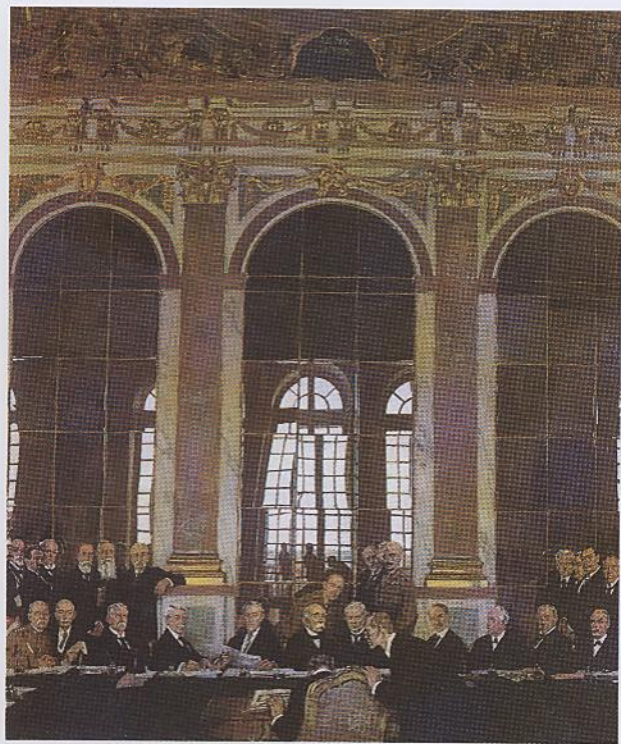
Both Wilson and Clemenceau wanted to make sure that a war like the First World War never happened again. Wilson wanted to do this by writing a treaty that did not leave the Germans with lots of grievances. He believed that if the Germans thought they had not been treated fairly, they might one day start a war of revenge. Clemenceau thought differently. He believed there was only one way to make a peace that would last. The Germans had to be made so weak that they would never have the strength to fight again.

After much arguing, and without consulting the Germans, the Allied leaders agreed on a peace treaty. They called it the Versailles Treaty, after the palace near Paris where it was signed in May 1919.

The Versailles Treaty was harder in its treatment of the Germans than Wilson had wanted. Among other things it made them take all the blame for the war. It also made them agree to pay for all the damage that the war had caused. These "reparation" payments were fixed at many millions of dollars.

Wilson was disappointed with much of the Versailles Treaty. But he returned to the United States with high hopes for part of it. This was a scheme that he believed could still make his dream of a world without war come true. It was a plan to set up a League of Nations.





*The signing of the peace treaty at Versailles.*

The League of Nations was to be an organization where representatives of the world's nations would meet and settle their differences by discussion instead of war. It had taken Wilson months of hard bargaining to persuade the other Allied leaders to accept this plan. Now he faced a battle to persuade Congress and the American people to accept it, too.

Wilson knew that this would not be easy. Many Americans were against their country becoming permanently involved in the problems of Europe. And they were suspicious of the League of Nations. Wouldn't joining such an organization mean that the United States might be dragged into quarrels, perhaps even wars, that were none of its business?

Wilson tried to remove such fears. But as the months passed it began to seem that he was failing to do so. After another trip to Europe he returned to America, tired and ill. But he boarded a special train and set off on a speaking tour of the western United States to plead for the League.

The tour was never completed. On September 25, 1919, the exhausted Wilson suffered a severe stroke.

He was taken back to Washington, his health broken for ever. In March 1920, the Senate voted against the United States joining the League of Nations, and the idea was dropped.

From his invalid's armchair in the White House a sick and disappointed Wilson spoke the last words on the subject. "We had a chance to gain the leadership of the world. We have lost it and soon we shall be witnessing the tragedy of it all."

## Wilson's Fourteen Points

President Wilson always insisted that the United States was fighting the First World War not against the German people but against their warlike leaders. In January 1918, he outlined his ideas for a just and lasting peace in a speech to the United States Senate. These ideas were called the Fourteen Points.

Among other things, Wilson's Fourteen Points required nations to stop making secret agreements, to reduce their military forces and armaments, to trade freely with one another and to draw up new national boundaries that would allow the separate peoples of Europe to rule themselves. It was in the Fourteen Points, also, that Wilson first suggested the League of Nations.

When the German government asked for peace in October 1918, it hoped that the Allies would base their terms on the Fourteen Points. But other Allied leaders regarded some of Wilson's ideas as idealistic nonsense. The French leader, Clemenceau, compared the Fourteen Points sarcastically to the Christian religion's Ten Commandments. "Mr. Wilson bores me with his Fourteen Points," he grumbled. "Why, God Almighty has only ten!"

In the end the Fourteen Points had much less influence on the terms of the Versailles Treaty than Wilson had hoped for. Some people still believe that this was a tragedy. They say that the post-war world would have been a better and a safer place if the Fourteen Points had been followed more closely. Others disagree. They believe that the world would have been safer if the Fourteen Points had been less closely followed!