CHAPTER
19
Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *The First World War*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW *After the United States enters World War I and helps to defeat Germany, President Wilson tries to fashion a lasting peace.*

❶ World War I Begins

MAIN IDEA *As World War I intensified, the United States was forced to abandon its neutrality.*

Four factors contributed to the outbreak of World War I in Europe:

- Nationalism: tensions grew as nations pursued only their own interests.
- Imperialism: rivalries increased as nations jockeyed for power around the world.
- Militarism: the nations developed strong armed forces to back up their growing empires.
- Alliances: a series of treaties grouped the nations of Europe into two armed camps.

The war broke out in 1914 when a Serb killed the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. The alliance system resulted in Russia defending Serbia against Austria-Hungary. Germany supported Austria-Hungary and then declared war on Russia's ally, France. So Great Britain, France's ally, declared war on Germany. Armies soon opposed each other across a system of trenches. Although neither side gained territory, hundreds of thousands of soldiers died.

The United States refused to join either side. Over time, though, stories of German atrocities and close economic ties to Great Britain and France moved Americans toward the Allied camp. A blockade prevented food and fertilizer from reaching Germany. As thousands of people starved, Germany struck back with submarine attacks on ships going to Great Britain.

U.S. public opinion turned against Germany when some Americans died in these attacks. Still, President Wilson resisted entering the war, winning re-election with the slogan "He kept us out of war." In January 1917, he suggested that the warring powers agree to a peace. Germany responded that submarine attacks would resume—and sink American ships. Finally, Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany. It did on April 6, 1917.

❷ American Power Tips the Balance

MAIN IDEA *The United States mobilized a large army and navy to help the Allies achieve victory.*

The United States was not prepared for war, but it launched a draft and quickly put about 3 million men in uniform. Women were not drafted, but the navy accepted women volunteers as nurses and secretaries. African Americans served in separate units; some were trained as officers.

The government took steps to increase the amount of shipping available so it could transport the soldiers and their supplies to Europe. Along with Great Britain, the United States began sending merchant ships in large convoys guarded by naval vessels. This change helped cut the number of ships lost to submarine attacks.

At first, American soldiers were scattered among other armies, replacing men killed or wounded. General John J. Pershing insisted that the American army fight as a whole. These troops—far fresher than the other Allied soldiers—helped throw back some major German attacks. By October 1918, the Germans were weakened.

New weapons made the fighting in World War I very destructive. Machine guns, tanks, and gas warfare could kill soldiers in large numbers. Fighting took to the air, as both sides used war planes. Soldiers suffered from disease and hardship as well. While 48,000 American soldiers died in combat, another 62,000 died of disease.

In November of 1918, German sailors, soldiers, and civilians mutinied, refusing to continue the war. The German kaiser abdicated his throne, and the new government surrendered.

❸ The War at Home

MAIN IDEA *World War I spurred social, political, and economic change in the United States.*

To fight the war adequately, the United States had to mobilize industry and labor, as well as soldiers. Wilson named Bernard M. Baruch to head

the War Industries Board (WIB), the main agency responsible for overseeing industrial production. It helped boost industrial output by 20 percent. But prices rose as well.

While some industries—metal work, shipbuilding, and meat packing—boomed, workers lost buying power due to higher prices. Union membership grew dramatically. The Food Administration encouraged people to change their eating habits to save food for soldiers.

The government paid for the war by raising taxes and by selling bonds, which celebrities helped sell. To support the war effort, the Committee of Public Information encouraged people to aid the cause.

The war brought an anti-German backlash that discredited things German or people of German background. Congress passed the Espionage and Sedition Acts to punish anyone who interfered with the draft or the sale of war bonds or who said anything that could be defined as disloyal. About 1,500 people were convicted under these laws. Some chief targets were socialists and union leaders.

African-American leaders were divided over the war. Some said that helping the war effort would enhance the fight for equality. Others said that without equality, blacks should not help. The main effect of the war on African Americans was to spur the Great Migration—the movement of thousands of blacks from the South to the cities of the North. They tried to escape harsh treatment in the South and hoped to find jobs and equality in the North.

Women played new roles, taking jobs that had been held only by men in the past. Their contribution helped increase support for woman suffrage and ensured ratification, in 1920, of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote. About 500,000 Americans died in a worldwide flu epidemic of 1919.

❹ Wilson Fights for Peace

MAIN IDEA *European leaders opposed most of Wilson's peace plan, and the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the peace treaty.*

President Wilson traveled to Europe to push for a peace plan—called the Fourteen Points—that he hoped would prevent future wars. He hoped to remove the causes of war by eliminating secret treaties and reducing imperialism. Other points aimed at specific adjustments to boundaries. Underlying these points was Wilson's goal of allowing ethnic groups to determine their own fate. Finally, Wilson proposed creating an international organization called the League of Nations to give nations a chance to discuss and settle their disputes without resorting to war.

Wilson lost almost all of his points: Great Britain, France, and Italy—the victors—were determined to punish Germany for the war. The Treaty of Versailles, which established the peace, created nine new nations in Europe. It carved out parts of the Ottoman Empire—which had allied with Germany—to create temporary colonies for Great Britain and France in the Middle East. It took away Germany's army and navy and forced Germany to pay war damages, or reparations, to the victors. In one provision, Germany had to admit to guilt for causing the war.

The treaty had three weaknesses. One was the harsh treatment of Germany, which weakened that nation's economy and aroused resentment there. Second, the treaty ignored the new Communist government in Russia. Third, it did nothing to recognize nationalist desires in the colonies of European powers.

Many Americans opposed the treaty, which they believed was unjust and imperfect. The main debate was over the League of Nations—the only of Wilson's Fourteen Points contained in the treaty. Many people believed that joining the League would involve the United States in foreign conflicts. Wilson refused to compromise on the League or accept amendments to the treaty proposed by Republican leaders. The Senate failed to ratify the treaty, and the United States never entered the League of Nations.

In Europe, the war created political instability and violence that lasted for decades. The unresolved issues or World War I, along with many Germans' desire for vengeance, would plunge the world into an even greater conflict.

Review

1. What factors led to war in Europe?
2. What led the United States into World War I?
3. How did the war change American society?
4. What was contained in the Treaty of Versailles and why did Americans object?