

# United States Entry into World War I: A Detailed Chronology 1914

- **June 28, 1914:** Telegram about Assassination of the Archduke
- **August 1, 1914:** Outbreak of World War I; German declaration of war on Russia
- **August 4, 1914:** Great Britain Declares War on Germany

## U.S. Policy on Loans to the Belligerents (1914–1915)

Morgan Company of New York have asked whether there would be any objection to their making a loan to the French Government and also the Rothschilds – I suppose that is intended for the French Government.

—Secretary of State Bryan to President Wilson, August 10, 1914

There is no reason why loans should not be made to the governments of neutral nations, but in the judgment of this Government, loans by American bankers to any foreign nation which is at war are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality.

—Secretary of State Bryan to J. P. Morgan and Company, August 15, 1914

- **August 19, 1914:** President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality  
The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.  
—President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality
- **September 19, 1914:** The Status of Armed Merchant Vessels (“A merchant vessel of belligerent nationality may carry an armament and ammunition for the sole purpose of defense without acquiring the character of a ship of war.”)

## U.S. Policy on Loans to the Belligerents (1914–1915)

Since the beginning of the war this bank alone has received cabled instructions for the payment of in excess of \$50,000,000 for American goods and the volume of this business is increasing. Owing to war conditions, this buying is necessarily for cash and it is of such magnitude that the cash credits of the European governments are being fast depleted. Lately we have been urged by manufacturers who are customers of the bank and, in some cases, by representatives of the foreign governments, to provide temporary credits for these purchases.

—Vice President of the National City Bank to the Acting Secretary of State, October 23, 1914

- **December 26, 1914:** U.S. Protests Against Maritime Warfare  
The present condition of American foreign trade resulting from the frequent seizures and detentions of American cargoes destined to neutral European ports

has become so serious as to require a candid statement of the views of this Government in order that the British Government may be fully informed as to the attitude of the United States toward the policy which has been pursued by the British authorities during the present war.

—Secretary of State Bryan to Walter Hines Page, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain

- Value of U.S. Exports for 1914:  
1914 – \$ 824.8 million to Allies  
1914 – \$ 169.3 million to Central Powers

## 1915

- By 1915, U.S. industry, which had been mildly depressed, was prospering again with munitions orders from the Western Allies.
- **February 4, 1915:** German Admiralty Declaration Regarding Unrestricted U-Boat Warfare
- **February 10, 1915:** President Wilson's First Warning to the Germans  
If such a deplorable situation should arise, the Imperial German Government can readily appreciate that the Government of the United States would be constrained to hold the Imperial Government of Germany to a strict accountability for such acts of their naval authorities, and to take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property and to secure to American citizens the full enjoyment of their acknowledged rights on the high seas.  
  
... It is stated for the information of the Imperial Government that representations have been made to his Britannic Majesty's Government in respect to the unwarranted use of the American flag for the protection of British ships.  
—President Wilson's First Warning to the Germans
- **March 1, 1915:** American citizen dies in sinking of first passenger ship, the British liner *Falaba*
- **August 26, 1915:** Wilson's Change of Attitude on War Loans  
My opinion in this matter, compendiously stated, is that we should say that "Parties would take no action either for or against such a transaction," but that this should be orally conveyed, so far as we are concerned, and not put in writing.  
—President Woodrow Wilson to the Secretary of State, Mr. Robert Lansing
- **May 7, 1915:** *Lusitania* sunk by German U-Boat off Irish coast  
Public outrage over the loss of civilian life hastened the United States entry into World War I. Although the cargo list of the *Lusitania* stated that she carried

approximately 170 tons of munitions and war material, this fact was not revealed to the U.S. public at the time. —American Memory: Today in History, May 7

- **May 12, 1915:** The Bryce Report in its entirety. Use if desired. Otherwise consult Commentary on The Bryce Report:  
The Bryce Report was used for propaganda purposes. Sir Gilbert Parker, who was the member of Wellington House (the British propaganda bureau at that time) charged with information and propaganda aimed at the United States, rushed the Bryce Report into print, so it was available five days after the news of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. It is obvious that part of the aim was to contribute to the effort to bring the United States into the war. —Commentary on The Bryce Report
- **June 9, 1915:** Bryan Resignation Letter (Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigns over handling of the *Lusitania* incident.)  
... we unsparingly denounce the retaliatory methods employed by her (Germany), without condemning the announced purpose of the Allies to starve the non-combatants of Germany and without complaining of the conduct of Great Britain in relying on passengers including men, women and children of the United States to give immunity to vessels carrying munitions of war without even suggesting that she should convoy passenger ships as carefully as she does ships carrying horses and gasoline. —Bryan Resignation Letter
- U.S. Policy on Loans to the Belligerents (1914–1915)  
Now, on the other hand, we are face to face with what appears to be a critical economic situation, which can only be relieved apparently by the investment of American capital in foreign loans to be used in liquidating the enormous balance of trade in favor of the United States.

Can we afford to let a declaration as to our conception of "the true spirit of neutrality" made in the first days of the war stand in the way of our national interests which seem to be seriously threatened?

If we cannot afford to do this, how are we to explain away the declaration and maintain a semblance of consistency?

—Secretary of State Lansing to President Wilson, September 6, 1915

- **October 15, 1915:** German Ambassador's Assurances About American Ships ("recurrence of incidents similar to the Arabic case is considered out of the question")
- **November 20, 1915:** Wilson researching a program of national defense (dubbed "Preparedness")
- Excerpt from "Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter" on the Emma Goldman Papers website:  
That which has driven the masses of Europe into the trenches and to the battlefields is not their inner longing for war; it must be traced to the cutthroat competition for military equipment, for more efficient armies, for larger warships,

for more powerful cannon. You cannot build up a standing army and then throw it back into a box like tin soldiers.

—Emma Goldman on From "Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter"

## 1916

- **January 27, 1916:** Wilson launches nationwide whistle-stop campaign to generate support for Preparedness with three speeches in New York.
- **February 3, 1916:** Wilson delivers final speech of Preparedness campaign in St. Louis.

Near the end of a nationwide speaking tour in February 1916, he (Wilson) not only called for creation of "the greatest navy in the world" but also urged widespread military training for civilians, lest some day the nation be faced with "putting raw levies of inexperienced men onto the modern field of battle."  
—World War I: The First Three Years.
- **April 27, 1916:** Marshal Lord Kitchener, British Secretary of State for War, asks for American military participation in Europe.
- **May 4, 1916:** Germany's Second Promise renounces submarine policy "Sussex Pledge."
- **June 3, 1916:** National Defense Act authorizes five-year expansion of U.S. Army, but at the same time drastically limits size and authority of U.S. War Department General Staff.
  - Selection from World War I : The First Three Years:

It ... contained a severe restriction inserted by opponents of a strong General Staff, sharply limiting the number of officers who could be detailed to serve on the staff at the same time in or near Washington. The bill represented nevertheless the most comprehensive military legislation yet enacted by the U.S. Congress.

The National Defense Act of 1916 authorized an increase in the peacetime strength of the Regular Army over a period of five years to 175,000 men and a wartime strength of close to 300,000. Bolstered by federal funds and federal-stipulated organization and standards of training, the National Guard was to be increased more than fourfold to a strength of over 400,000 and obligated to respond to the call of the President. The act also established both an Officers' and an Enlisted Reserve Corps and a Volunteer Army to be raised only in time of war.

... A few months later the Congress demonstrated even greater interest in the industrial aspects of defense by creating a civilian Council of National Defense made up of leaders of industry and labor, supported by an advisory commission.  
—World War I : The First Three Years
- **July 30, 1916:** Jersey City, N.J., munitions plant destroyed; German sabotage suspected.

- **October 15, 1916:** Germany resumes U-boat attacks under "search and destroy" rules.
- **November 9, 1916:** Woodrow Wilson wins re-election under the slogan "He kept us out of war."  
 In retrospect, it is apparent that the vote for Wilson cloaked profound cleavages in public opinion. At the time of his inauguration, immigrants constituted one third of the population. Allied and German propaganda revived old-world loyalties among "hyphenated" European- Americans, and opinions about US intervention were sharply polarized. More than 8 million German-Americans lived in this country, and many were sympathetic to the cause of their homeland. Meanwhile, anti-German feeling was strong among the upper classes on the Atlantic coast, and was particularly intense among those with social and business connections to Britain or France.  
 —Domestic Propaganda During The First World War
- **December 12, 1916:** Germans issue peace note suggesting compromise peace.
- Value of U.S. Exports for 1916:
  - \$ 3.2 billion to Allies 1916
  - \$ 1.2 million to Central Powers

## 1917

- Value of U.S. Loans by 1917:
  - \$ 2.5 billion to Allies
  - \$ 27 million to Central Powers
- **January 22, 1917:** Wilson addresses the Senate about Peace Without Victory  
 Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last, only a peace the very principle of which is equality and a common participation in a common benefit. —Peace Without Victory

Like an undertow, America's drift toward war was subtle and forceful. According to the outspoken pacifist Randolph Bourne, war sentiment spread gradually among various intellectual groups. "With the aid of Roosevelt," wrote Bourne, "the murmurs became a monotonous chant, and finally a chorus so mighty that to be out of it was at first to be disreputable, and finally almost obscene." Once the war was underway, dissent was practically impossible. "If you believed our going into this war was a mistake," wrote The Nation in a post-war editorial, "if you held, as President Wilson did early in 1917, that the ideal outcome would be 'peace without victory,' you were a traitor."

—Domestic Propaganda During The First World War

- **January 31, 1917:** Germany officially breaks her promise and announces resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare.  
The military situation as a whole permits us to accept all the consequences which unrestricted U-boat war may bring, and as this U-boat war is the means of injuring our enemies the most grievously, it must be begun ...  
—Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, January 31, 1917, *New York Times*
- **February 3, 1917:** U.S. severs relations with Germany.
- **February 24, 1917:** Great Britain releases Zimmermann Note to U.S.  
... we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to re-conquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona.  
—From the German Secretary of State (Zimmerman) to the German Minister to Mexic
- **February 26, 1917:** Wilson requests authority from Congress to arm U.S. merchant ships.
- **March 4, 1917:** Second Inaugural Address of President Woodrow Wilson
- **March 12, 1917:** Wilson announces arming of merchant ships by executive order.
- **March 29, 1917:** Wilson publicly calls for a national army to be “raised and maintained exclusively by selective draft.”
- **April 2, 1917:** Wilson War Message to Congress
- **April 6, 1917:** U.S. declares war on Germany
- Presidential Proclamation 1364 of April 6, 1917, by President Woodrow Wilson, declaring war against Germany