

THE UNITED STATES' DECISION TO ENTER WORLD WAR I

Brady Kondek

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The American public was divided over the issue of whether the United States should enter World War I. Groups such as the Woman's Peace Party, the American Union Against Militarism, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the American Friends Service Committee opposed the war. They argued that the whole war was immoral, and it was unjust to force people to fight. However, the government and government functions such as The War Industries Board and the Supreme Court were in favor of war. They wanted to go to war to get back at Germany for the actions they took against them. The United States' decision to enter World War I had very mixed opinions, with groups such as the Woman's Peace Part and the American Union Against Militarism arguing that the war was immoral, while the government was in full support of the war.

Groups such as the Woman's Peace Party, the American Union Against Militarism, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the American Friends Service Committee opposed the war. They argued that “the whole war was immoral, and it was unjust to force people to fight”.¹ These opponents were known as Pacifists, a person who believes that war and violence are unjustifiable. They were for peace, not for violence. Nine-hundred opponents of war were jailed for protesting the United States entering the war.²

The U.S. government and functions of the government were completely towards war. On April 2nd, 1917, President Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war

¹ “Opposition to World War I.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, November 10, 2020.
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposition_to_World_War_I.

² Unit 3 Lesson 40 Notes

against Germany. Four days later, on April 6th, his request was granted.³ With attacks from the Germans, public opinion in the United States began to turn irrevocably against Germany.³ President Wilson supported the entrance to "make the world safe for democracy." The War Industries Board supported the war and managed the distribution of steel, copper, cement, and rubber. Most Americans supported the war by doing whatever they could, and taxes were raised as well as war bonds being sold. All of these things helped to better support the United States' war efforts.

The Supreme Court ruled that war created a special set of circumstances, Congress would decide what freedom needed to be protected and which could be restricted.² The government would arrest anyone who publicly spoke against war efforts. Congress passed the Espionage Act (in 1917) and the Sedition Act (in 1918). The Espionage Act allowed the government to fine and imprison anyone who aided the enemy. The Sedition Act allowed the government to limit free speech during times in which the U.S. was in war. About one thousand people were prosecuted for breaking the Sedition Act.² Eugene V. Debs, who urged socialists to resist militarism, went to prison for nearly three years. Another Socialist, Kate Richards O'Hare, served a year in prison for stating that the women of the United States were "nothing more nor less than brood sows, to raise children to get into the army and be made into fertilizer."⁴

³ "U.S. Enters WWI." History.com. A&E Television Networks, February 9, 2010. www.history.com/this-day-in-history/america-enters-world-war-i.

⁴ "The Espionage and Sedition Acts." Digital History. University of Houston. Accessed November 12, 2020. www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2.

The United States' entrance into World War I had many mixed opinions. Those who opposed it argued that "the whole war was immoral, and it was unjust to force people to fight." Those who supported it argued that it was an important thing to do to "make the world safe for democracy." The U.S. government suppressed the opinions of those who opposed the war. Congress passed laws that limited free speech during times of war and arrested anyone who publicly spoke out against the war efforts. It was almost like another war was occurring within our country, to determine our involvement in "the war to end all wars."

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