

# Guided Readings: World War I

## READING 1

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.

—Woodrow Wilson, Message to Congress, August 19, 1914

## READING 2

There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight.

—Woodrow Wilson, Address to Naturalized Citizens at Convention Hall, Philadelphia, May 10, 1915

## READING 3

They imply, first of all, that it must be a 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. The right state of mind, the right feeling between nations, is as necessary for a lasting peace as is the just settlement of vexed questions of territory or of racial and national allegiance.

—Woodrow Wilson, Address to the Senate, January 22, 1917

## READING 4

Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people can not be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind. It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind . . . Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion.

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When I addressed the Congress on the 26th of February last, I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence. But armed neutrality, it now appears, is impracticable. Because submarines are in effect outlaws when used as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping, it is impossible to defend ships against their attacks as the law of nations has assumed that merchantmen would defend themselves against privateers or cruisers, visible craft giving chase upon the open sea.

Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power. . . . We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretence about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

. . . It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured.

God helping her, she can do no other.

—Woodrow Wilson, Message to Congress, April 2, 1917

## READING 5

Never forget that this league is primarily—I might say overwhelmingly—a political organization, and I object strongly to having the policies of the United States turn upon disputes where deep feeling is aroused but in which we have no direct interest. It will all tend to delay the Americanization of our great population, and it is more important not only to the United States but to the peace of the world to make all these people good Americans than it is to determine that some piece of territory should belong to one

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European country rather than to another. For this reason I wish to limit strictly our interference in the affairs of Europe and of Africa. We have interests of our own in Asia and in the Pacific which we must guard upon our own account, but the less we undertake to play the part of umpire and thrust ourselves into European conflicts the better for the United States and for the world.

—Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, “The League of Nations Must Be Revised,” Address to Congress, August 1919

### READING 6

To what extent was America’s war a war for business? Did Woodrow Wilson lead America into war in order to serve the selfish interests of the few? The answer is determined by looking into the essential facts. In the first place, Wall Street wanted war.

American participation in the war against Germany would constitute the most tremendous and profitable coup in the history of American finance . . . The war created 21,000 new American millionaires and during the war period, 69,000 men made more than three billion dollars over and above their normal income . . . It would have been quite impossible for President Wilson to have begun a war really intended to ‘make the world safe for democracy’ without facing the united opposition of Wall Street.

—John Kenneth Turner, *Shall It Be Again?*, 1922

### READING 7

The Hun within our gates is the worst of the foes of our own household, whether he is the paid or the unpaid agent of Germany. Whether he is pro-German or poses as a pacifist, or a peace-at-any-price-man, matters little. He is the enemy of the United States . . . The German-language papers carry on a consistent campaign in favor of Germany against England. They should be put out of existence for the period of this war. . . . Every disloyal German-born citizen should have his naturalization papers recalled and should be interned during the term of the war . . . Every disloyal native-born American should be disfranchised and interned. It is time to strike our enemies at home heavily and quickly. Every copperhead in this country is an enemy to the Government, to the people, to the army and to the flag, and should be treated as such.

—Theodore Roosevelt, “The Hun within Our Gates,” 1917

### READING 8

In the confused information that sometimes reaches the people they are compelled to ask questions which involve the reasons for my acts against the “Reds.” I have been asked, for instance, to what extent deportation will check radicalism in this country. Why not ask what will become of the United States Government if these alien radicals are permitted to

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carry out the principles of the Communist Party as embodied in its so-called laws, aims and regulations?

There wouldn't be any such thing left. In place of the United States Government we should have the horror and terrorism of bolsheviki tyranny such as is destroying Russia now . . . The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decencies of private life, to usurp property that they have not earned . . . In place of the United States Government we should have the horror and terrorism of Bolshevik tyranny such as is destroying Russia now. . . . The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decencies of private life, to usurp.

—A. Mitchell Palmer, “The Case Against the ‘Reds,’” *Forum* 63 (1920): 173–185.

### READING 9

This indictment is founded wholly upon the publication of two leaflets . . . The first of these leaflets says that the President's cowardly silence about the intervention in Russia reveals the hypocrisy of the plutocratic gang in Washington . . . It says that there is only one enemy of the workers of the world and that is capitalism; that it is a crime for workers of America, &c., to fight the workers' republic of Russia, and ends “Awake! Awake, you Workers of the World! Revolutionists.”

The other leaflet, headed “Workers—Wake Up,” . . . says . . . “Workers in the ammunition factories, you are producing bullets, bayonets, cannon, to murder not only the Germans, but also your dearest, best, who are in Russia and are fighting for freedom.” It then appeals to the same Russian emigrants at some length not to consent to the “inquisitionary expedition to Russia,” and says that the destruction of the Russian revolution is “the politics of the march to Russia.”

. . . the United States constitutionally may punish speech that produces or is intended to produce a clear and imminent danger that it will bring about forthwith certain substantive evils that the United States constitutionally may seek to prevent. The power undoubtedly is greater in time of war than in time of peace because war opens dangers that do not exist at other times.

But as against dangers peculiar to war, as against others, the principle of the right to free speech is always the same. It is only the present danger of immediate evil or an intent to bring it about that warrants Congress in setting a limit to the expression of opinion where private rights are not concerned. Congress certainly cannot forbid all effort to change the mind of the country. . . .

. . . But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas . . . I think that we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate

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interference with the lawful and pressing purposes of the law that an immediate check is required to save the country... Only the emergency that makes it immediately dangerous to leave the correction of evil counsels to time warrants making any exception to the sweeping command, "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech." Of course I am speaking only of expressions of opinion and exhortations, which were all that were uttered here, but I regret that I cannot put into more impressive words my belief that in their conviction upon this indictment the defendants were deprived of their rights under the Constitution of the United States.

—Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, dissenting opinion in *Abrams et al. v. United States* (1919)

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did the United States enter World War I? Do you find the reasons persuasive?
2. What were America's war aims? Were Wilson's goals unrealistic and misleading? Were they overly idealistic and moralistic? Did he expect too much of international law and international organization? Why were Wilson's goals not achieved?
3. Which principles should guide American diplomacy—moral and legal ideals or national interest?
4. What questions of loyalty and civil liberties were raised by the war?