

# Americans on the Home Front

## READING FOCUS

- What steps did the government take to finance the war and manage the economy?
- How did the government enforce loyalty to the war effort?
- How did the war change the lives of Americans on the home front?

## MAIN IDEA

Americans and their government took extraordinary steps at home to support the war effort.

## KEY TERMS

Liberty Bond  
price controls  
rationing  
daylight saving  
time  
sedition  
vigilante

## TAKING NOTES

As you read, prepare an outline of this section. Use Roman numerals to indicate the major headings of this section, capital letters for the subheadings, and numbers for the supporting details. The sample below will help you get started.

### I. Financing the War

### II. Managing the Economy

#### A. New agencies are founded to organize the economy.

##### 1. War Industries Board oversees production.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

## Setting the Scene

*“I hate war, because war is murder, desolation and destruction. If one-tenth of what has been spent on preparedness for war had been spent on the prevention of war the world would always have been at peace.”*

—Henry Ford

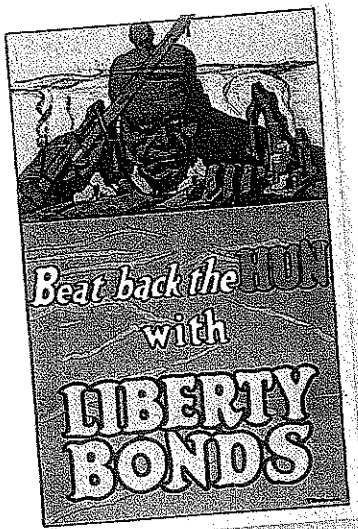
Henry Ford’s words appeared in the *Detroit Free Press* on August 12, 1915, when the United States still practiced neutrality. Ford vowed that he would burn down his factories before allowing them to make goods for the war in Europe.

Two years later, the United States was at war, and Ford had orders to build 16,000 tanks and 20,000 tractors for the United States government. A new Ford factory that would build anti-submarine ships was rising in Dearborn, Michigan, with the help of \$10 million in federal aid. Henry Ford and his workers, along with the rest of the nation, had joined the war effort.

Waging war required many sacrifices at home. Despite the efforts of the preparedness movement, the American economy was not ready to meet the demands of modern warfare. War required huge amounts of money and personnel. As President Wilson explained, now “there are no armies . . . ; there are entire nations armed.”

## Financing the War

The government launched a vigorous campaign to raise money from the American people. It borrowed money by selling **Liberty Bonds**, special war bonds to support the Allied cause. Like all bonds, they could later be redeemed for the original value of the bonds plus interest. By selling war bonds to enthusiastic Americans, Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo raised more than \$20 billion. These funds allowed the United States to pay about one quarter of its war costs and still loan more than \$10 billion to the Allies during and just after the war.



**VIEWING HISTORY** The United States government used posters to whip up sentiment against the “Huns”—the Germans—and to sell bonds to fund the war effort.

**Recognizing Bias** How does this poster depict German soldiers?

Responding to the slogan "Every Scout to Save a Soldier," Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts set up booths on street corners and sold bonds. The government hired popular commercial artists to draw colorful posters and recruited famous screen actors to lead public rallies to buy bonds. An army of 75,000 "four-minute men" gave brief (four-minute) speeches before movies, plays, and school or union meetings to persuade audiences to buy bonds.

Buying war bonds was one of several ways that civilians could support Americans at the front and demonstrate their patriotism. Patriotism is the love of one's country and the willingness to fight to defend its ideals and institutions.

## Managing the Economy

The government also called on industry to switch from producing commercial goods to war goods. In 1918, Wilson won authority to set up a huge bureaucracy to manage this process. Business leaders flocked to Washington to take up posts in thousands of new agencies. Because they gave their service for a token salary, they were called "dollar-a-year" men and women.

**New Agencies** A War Industries Board, headed by financier Bernard Baruch, oversaw the nation's war-related production. The board had far-reaching powers. It doled out raw materials, told manufacturers what and how much to produce, and even fixed prices.

A War Trade Board licensed foreign trade and punished firms suspected of dealing with the enemy. A National War Labor Board, set up in April 1918 under former President Taft, worked to settle any labor disputes that might disrupt the war effort. Labor leader Samuel Gompers promised to limit labor problems in war-production industries. A separate War Labor Policies Board, headed by Harvard law professor Felix Frankfurter, set standards for wages, hours, and working conditions in the war industries. Labor unions won limited rights to organize and bargain collectively.

**Regulating Food and Fuel Consumption** In August 1917, Congress passed the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act. This act gave the President the power to manage the production and distribution of foods and fuels vital to the war effort.

Using the slogan "Food will win the war," the government began to manage how much food people bought. Under the leadership of engineer and future President Herbert Hoover, the Food Administration worked to increase farm output and reduce waste. Hoover had the power to impose **price controls**,



## Sounds of an Era

Listen to "Over There" and other sounds from the World War I era.

**VIEWING HISTORY** At this shipyard, women workers replaced men who left to join the military. **Synthesizing Information** Based on this photograph, describe some of the changes that wartime brought to the workplace.





שפיז וועט געווינען דיא קריגע!  
 איר קומט אהער צו געפינען פרייהייט.  
 יעצט מוז איר העלפען דיא צו בעשענען  
 מיט מוזען דיא עליים פערוארנען מיט ווייץ.  
 לאזט קיין וואך ניט גיין און נודען  
 יוניסקר פרייסט שפיז פערוארנען.



**FOOD WILL WIN THE WAR**  
 You came here seeking Freedom  
 You must now help to preserve it  
**WHEAT is needed for the allies**  
 Waste nothing

**VIEWING HISTORY** The poster on the left, written in Yiddish, encouraged Jewish people who had immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe to conserve food for the war effort. It was also printed in English and other languages to appeal to as many immigrants as possible. **Determining Relevance** How does this poster link the decision to come to America with aiding the war effort?

a system of pricing determined by the government, on the sale of food. He also had the power to begin a system of **rationing**, or distributing goods to consumers in a fixed amount. But Hoover thought both these approaches went too far. He hoped instead that voluntary restraint and increased efficiency would accomplish the Food Administration's goals.

Women played a key role in Hoover's program. Writing to women in August 1917, he preached a "Gospel of the Clean Plate." He appealed:

"Stop, before throwing any food away, and ask 'Can it be used?' . . . Stop catering to different appetites. No second helpings. Stop all eating between meals. . . . One meatless day a week. One wheatless meal a day. . . . No butter in cooking; use substitutes."

—Herbert Hoover

"The American woman and the American home," Hoover concluded, "can bring to a successful end the greatest national task that has ever been accepted by the American people." Eager to take part in the war effort, women across the country responded to this patriotic challenge.

The Lever Food and Fuel Control Act also created an agency called the Fuel Administration. It sponsored gasless days to save fuel. This agency also began the practice of **daylight saving time**—turning clocks ahead one hour for the summer. By shifting an hour of sunlight from the early morning, when most people were asleep, to the evening, it increased the number of daylight hours available for work. Daylight saving time also reduced the need for artificial light and lowered fuel consumption.

## Enforcing Loyalty

News and information also came under federal control during World War I. The government imposed censorship on the press and banned some publications from the mails. Even a movie about the American Revolution was banned and its producer jailed because the film showed British troops killing American women and children, and Britain was now America's ally. The government challenged any media influences that threatened the war effort.

In 1917, George Creel, a Denver journalist and former muckraker, was appointed the head of the Committee on Public Information. His job was to rally popular support for the war. Creel's office coordinated the production of short films, pamphlets explaining war aims, and posters advertising recruitment and Liberty Bonds. Some of the slogans used were "Buy Bonds Till It Hurts" and "The Soldier Gives—You Must Lend."

**Fear of Foreigners** As in all wars, the fear of espionage, or spying, was widespread. A few months after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, a staff member of the German embassy left his briefcase on an American train. Inside the briefcase were plans for turning Americans against the Allies and disrupting the American economy.

The government feared that secret agents might try to undermine the war effort by destroying transportation or communication networks. The possibility of such acts of sabotage put the government on alert. It also generated calls for restrictions on immigration.

The National Security League, having won its battle for preparedness, began to preach "100 Percent Americanism." Early in 1917, the League got Congress to pass, over Wilson's veto, a literacy test for immigrants. This test

excluded those who could not read English or any other language. As it turned out, relatively few immigrants failed the test. Still, the test had set the stage for a vigorous revival of nativism.

**“Hate the Hun!”** Once the United States declared war, alertness for spies approached hysteria. The war also spurred a general hostility toward Germans. People began calling them Huns, in reference to a people who had brutally invaded Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. High schools stopped teaching German. Books by German authors disappeared from library shelves, and German composers and musicians were banned from symphony concerts. German measles became “liberty measles,” and a hamburger (which was named after Hamburg, a German city) became a Salisbury steak. Nervous dog-owners even renamed their German shepherds, calling them “police dogs” instead.

Anti-German sentiment had a more serious dimension. In April 1918, a mob lynched a German-born citizen named Robert Prager near St. Louis. Despite his German heritage, Prager had in fact tried to enlist in the navy. His lynching was but one of many wartime attacks on people of German descent.

**Repression of Civil Liberties** In his 1917 call for war on Germany, Wilson had claimed that the United States would be fighting for liberty and democracy. In that same war message, Wilson warned that disloyalty would be “dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression.” His efforts to unite Americans against the enemy often prevailed over his promise to fight for liberty.

In 1917, Congress passed the Espionage Act, which made it illegal to interfere with the draft. The Espionage Act was amended in 1918 by the Sedition Act. (**Sedition** is any speech or action that encourages rebellion.) The Sedition Act made it illegal to obstruct the sale of Liberty Bonds or to discuss anything “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive” about the American form of government, the Constitution, or the army and the navy. The Sedition Act violated the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of speech, but many felt that the needs of war required harsh measures.

The government pursued more than 1,500 prosecutions and won more than 1,000 convictions. Socialist and former presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs drew a ten-year jail sentence for criticizing the American government and business leaders and for urging people to “resist militarism.”

**Controlling Political Radicals** Socialists such as Debs argued that the war was merely a fight among imperialist capitalists and that workers had no stake in the outcome. This view became a rallying point for antiwar sentiment. In the elections of 1917 in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, Socialists made impressive gains.

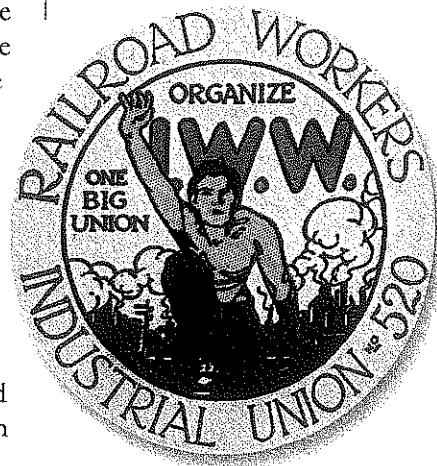
The radical labor organization Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also won new supporters from among western miners, migrant farm workers, and other unskilled laborers. They supported the IWW’s goal of overthrowing capitalism and tried to interfere with copper mining during the war.

The views of Socialists and the IWW upset moderate labor leaders like Samuel Gompers, who had promised that unions would work with the war effort. The police hounded the IWW. Raids in September 1917 led to the conviction of nearly 200 members in trials held in Illinois, California, and Oklahoma. Groups of **vigilantes**, citizens who take the law into their own hands, lynched and horsewhipped others.

## Focus on WORLD EVENTS

**The House of Windsor** Like the United States, Britain experienced waves of anti-German sentiment and attacks against individuals. The royal family’s German ancestry posed a unique problem. King George V, Britain’s head of state, carried an awkward German family name. On July 17, 1917, the king changed the name of the royal family to Windsor, after an ancient castle west of London. Today, Queen Elizabeth II leads the House of Windsor, and few remember that she could have been named Elizabeth of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

The IWW gained strength during World War I. It also became the target of the government’s effort to control political radicals.





With the help of workers in the Woman's Land Army, farmers were able to harvest crops despite a labor shortage.

## Changing People's Lives

American patriotism and war fever made military styles and activities more acceptable at home. Children joined scouting programs with military-style uniforms, marching, and patriotic exercises. Military drill became part of many school programs. By the summer of 1918, all able-bodied males in colleges and universities had become army privates, subject to military discipline.

**Social Mobility for Minorities and Women** After the war, Americans would turn away from military trends and other war-related activities. But other social changes that occurred during the war would have more lasting effects. The war virtually stopped the flow of immigrants from Europe, and the armed forces had taken many young men out of the labor pool. Businesses, especially war-related industries, suddenly needed workers. These wartime conditions drew some people into higher paying jobs. Factory owners and managers who had discriminated against African Americans and Mexican Americans now actively recruited them.

The African Americans who had left the South to work in northern factories added to a steady stream of migrants that had already started in the late 1800s. The stream turned into a flood during the war, when some 500,000 African Americans joined what came to be called the Great Migration.

The diminished work force also created new opportunities for women. Some women found jobs on farms, thanks to organizations such as the Woman's Land Army. Others moved into jobs as telegraph messengers, elevator operators, letter carriers, and similar jobs that were previously open only to men. A few earned management positions.

As a result of the war, about 400,000 women joined the industrial work force for the first time. In 1917, a speaker for the Women's Trade Union League proclaimed, "At last, after centuries of disabilities and discrimination, women are coming into the labor and festival of life on equal terms with men." Such pronouncements, while premature, celebrated what seemed to be a major social change.

## Section

## 4

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. What was the role of **price controls** and **rationing** on the home front in World War I?
2. What were three ways that the government intervened in the economy to help the war effort?
3. How did the government deal with newspapers, magazines, and movies during the war?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

4. **Drawing Inferences** (a) What was the primary purpose of selling Liberty Bonds? (b) What else did the government's efforts to sell bonds accomplish?
5. **Writing an Opinion** Write a short speech discussing anti-German sentiment. Why do you think people reacted the way they did to the use of German words in the United States?



### Take It to the NET

#### Activity: Creating a Graph

Interpret historical data to create a bar graph of the financial costs of World War I. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)