WORLD WAR I AND AMERICA

Exhibition Guide

Developed by

THE GILDER LEHRMAN INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

With generous support from

Library of America

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

THE NATIONAL WWI MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WORDS AFTER WAR

WARRIORWriters

For more information on traveling exhibitions, please visit
gilderlehrman.org/traveling-exhibitions

Contents

GENERAL INFORMATION

This exhibition was developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History as a major initiative involving public programs in all fifty states, a traveling exhibition, a multimedia website, and the publication of an anthology of writings by Americans who experienced World War I. The initiative was made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Initiative partners include the Library of America, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, the National World War I Museum and Memorial, the World War I Centennial Commission, and the veteran community of the Wounded Warrior Project, Warrior Writers, Voices from War, and Words After War.

Format

The exhibition is composed of six retractable vinyl panels. Each panel is 81 inches tall and 33 inches wide. It requires a total of 15–18 running feet and the six panels can be displayed separately or together. Detailed setup instructions are provided to the venue's coordinator upon shipment. Setup instructions can also be found on the FAQ page of the GLI Traveling Exhibitions website.

Rental Security

Exhibitions may be displayed in any open areas, but preferably not in a hallway. No exhibition is to be displayed outdoors or in a tent or other temporary structure. It is preferable that a staff member is in the room with the exhibition when it is open to students or guests. If a borrower causes damage or loss of any part of the exhibition, then that institution will be responsible for paying the replacement or restoration costs. The value of the *World War I and America* exhibition is $1,875. Some institutions choose to add a rider to their insurance.

Shipping

The exhibition is shipped in a wheeled, plastic case measuring 39 inches x 14 inches x 14 inches and weighing approximately 75 pounds. GLI will be responsible for arranging shipping via FedEx. A week before your loan period ends, we will provide a return label and instructions.

Reporting

Each site is required to complete a condition report upon receipt of the exhibition and again after the exhibition has been packed for return. Condition reports will be sent to the venue coordinator via email.

Questions

If you have questions please contact

Traveling Exhibitions Program
exhibitions@gilderlehrman.org
Phone (646) 366-9666 ext. 164

EXHIBITION CONTENT

Panel One: World War I and America

Introductory Text

World War I was a watershed event that reshaped American lives. The United States abandoned its history of isolationism and assumed a larger role in the world. In 1914 most Americans wished to avoid engagement in a European war. But by 1917 most Americans supported the government's call for unity and sacrifice to defeat enemies who threatened their future, although a few continued to oppose war on humanitarian and other grounds. Participation in the war fostered hopes of increasing rights for African Americans, women, and immigrants, but wartime legislation, including the Espionage and Sedition Acts, curtailed individual and constitutional liberties and led to a retreat from the reforms of the Progressive era. The mixed legacies of World War I shaped the direction of American society for the next generation.

How did the people who lived through America's World War I view their experiences of wartime service and sacrifices on the home front? A century later, we ask visitors to set aside modern assumptions and look at the war through the eyes of Americans who lived it.

> "Nearly 400 of our boys were gased last night and are at 102 field Hosp. some are very bad."
>
> –Ella Jane Osborn, May 31, 1918

> "One thing that I can be thankful for, and that is that I am still alive. For out of my company alone, one hundred and twenty-five were killed."
>
> –Russell S. Flynn, November 28, 1918

World War I poster, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09521.02)

Woodrow Wilson, ca. 1915. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02551.02)

> "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."
>
> –Woodrow Wilson, April 2, 1917

> "That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate."
>
> –W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis*, July 1918

Panel Two: The US: An Industrial Nation in the World

Introductory Text

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States experienced rapid growth and increasing industrialization. The new order ruptured traditional ways of life. While many Americans benefited from new opportunities, others were shut out from the economic, social, and political advances. As Americans faced disparity in wealth and opportunity at home, they also debated how to address the country's growing economic investment and military intervention in the world. Some, like President Theodore Roosevelt, believed that peace and prosperity had to be sustained through American military and economic strength. Others, like social reformer Jane Addams, argued that international relations had to be based on humanitarian principles and binding arbitration.

> "When we once surround human life with the same kind of heroism and admiration that we have surrounded war, we can say that this sense [of human solidarity] is having such an outlet that war will become impossible."
>
> –Jane Addams, 1902

Jane Addams, ca. 1910. Frontispiece from *Twenty Years at Hull-House* by Jane Addams, New York: MacMillian, 1910. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05168)

Panama Canal, ca. 1915. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-det-4a24806)

Broadside, Woman's Suffrage Party of the City of New York, ca. 1915. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08963)

"Next!" by Udo J. Keppler, published in Puck, September 7, 1904. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-25884)

Panel Three: The Road to War

Introductory Text

In 1914 most Americans were opposed to joining a foreign conflict. Isolationists, suffragists, and socialists spoke and demonstrated against going to war. Other Americans, led by former president Theodore Roosevelt, advocated military preparedness. On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat sank the RMS *Lusitania*, a British ocean liner, killing 128 Americans. The *Lusitania* brought the war from the theoretical to the practical, making the conflict about America in a way that it had not been before.

On March 1,1917, American newspapers printed the decoded Zimmermann telegram, sent from Germany to Mexico offering an anti-American alliance. The direct threat to the United States further inflamed public opinion against Germany.

On April 2, Wilson asked Congress to declare war. "The right is more precious than peace," he said, "and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts, - for democracy." Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. A small number of advocates of progressive reform opposed the war. Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin was one of six US senators to vote against war, which he argued only served the "war machine."

American delegates to the International Congress of Women for a Permanent Peace, April 1915. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ggbain-18848)

Theodore Roosevelt, ca. 1905; Theodore Roosevelt to Oscar King Davis, June 23, 1915. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00162.13.02 and GLC08003 pp. 1 and 2)

> "I am pretty well disgusted with our government and with the way our people acquiesce in and support it."
>
> –Theodore Roosevelt, June 23, 1915

"Enlist" by Fred Spear, New York: Sackett and Wilhelms Corporation, ca. 1915. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-1129)

Telegram in code from Arthur Zimmermann, German foreign secretary, to the German ambassador in Mexico City, Mexico, January 19, 1917. (National Archives and Records Administration, ARC 302025)

Panel Four: The Experience of War: Why We Fight

Introductory Text

More than two million soldiers served in Europe with the American Expeditionary Forces between 1917 and 1920. Among them were African Americans, who served in segregated regiments commanded by white officers and were assigned mostly to support services. The Selective Service boards also accepted immigrants. The two groups often viewed military service as a path to equality and citizenship.

Letters and diaries written by soldiers reflect their day-to-day concerns over food, disease, boredom, and army discipline, echoing letters written during previous wars. Eager to reassure their families about their safety and mindful of military censorship, few described the brutality and unprecedented carnage of the horrors of

war. What little people at home learned of the violence of war and Allied victories came from articles by journalists like Damon Runyon and Floyd Gibbons.

An Army nurse assists with the treatment of a patient during World War I. Army Nurse Corps photo. (Department of Defense)

Diary of Ella Jane Osborn, May 31, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06570)

> "May 31, 1918: Nearly 400 of our boys were gased last night and are at 102 field Hosp. some are very bad."
>
> –Ella Jane Osborn

Helen Belknap in Paris, France, to Mrs. Stowe, November 6, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07810.004)

> "Write often and remember that your letters are like beautiful rainbows that bridge the wide apart-ness between over here and over there."
>
> –Helen Belknap, November 4, 1918

"That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate."

–W. E. B Du Bois, July 1918

Troops resting in a trench, ca. 1918. (New York Public Library Digital Collections, 437776)

World War I poster, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09121)

Diary of William Shepp, Company A, 7th Engineers, January 5, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06888.01)

> "The last day of my boyhood. Tomorrow I'll be a man for Uncle Sammie instead of a boy. Gee, how proud I am of the fact."
>
> –William Shepp, January 5, 1918

Panel Five: The Home Front: Selling Unity, Suppressing Dissent

Introductory Text

To further inspire patriotism and sacrifice at home, the Wilson administration established a propaganda department, the Committee on Public Information. Through posters, photographs, movies, and rallies, the CPI saturated the nation with patriotic messages, played on emotions, whipped up fear, and demonized the enemy. To meet the demand for support and sacrifice, citizens and immigrants bought war bonds to show they were "100% American," conserved food to send overseas for soldiers and European civilians, and joined the American Red Cross.

Those who spoke out against the war faced condemnation. Censorship assumed official form with the passage of laws to root out and punish espionage and sedition. The postmaster general, for example, used the Espionage Act to confiscate newspapers deemed "suspect," and the courts upheld cases that severely limited free speech.

Eugene V. Debs, Canton, Ohio, June 16, 1918. (National Archives and Records Administration, 2641496)

"The working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both."

–Eugene V. Debs June 16, 1918

World War I poster, ca. 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09550)

World War I poster, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09522)

World War I poster, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09521.01)

Panel Six: Coming Home

Introductory Text

World War I ended with an armistice on November 11, 1918. While Americans had been willing to fight for their own security, Wilson failed to convince a war-weary nation that the United States should actively participate in what seemed to be unenforceable plans to help rebuild Europe. Yet his vision for worldwide democracy continued to influence the growing US involvement in the world through the twentieth century.

As the soldiers returned home, many faced an uncertain future. Jobs were scarce and labor lost ground to big business. African Americans were subject to increasing discrimination and violence, and fears of Communist

infiltration fueled the first Red Scare in 1919. Women's contributions in wartime influenced the ratification in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, giving women the right to vote.

On November 11, 1921, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated in Arlington National Cemetery. As conflicting memories over the meaning of the war endured, the nation gave ceremonial recognition to the lives lost.

Representatives of the "Big Four"—(from left) David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States—at the Paris Peace Conference, May 27, 1919. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ggbain-29038)

"That the world be made fit and safe... for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing."

–Woodrow Wilson, January 8, 1918

Public Ledger (Philadelphia, Pa.), December 15, 1918. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-10660)

Russell S. Flynn to M. J. Flynn, November 28, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07810.014)

"One thing that I can be thankful for, and that is that I am still alive. For out of my company alone, one hundred and twenty-five were killed."

–Russell S. Flynn, November 21, 1918.

The Race Problem as It Respects the Colored People and the Christian Church, 1919. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06122)

"We are here also, not only as American citizens, but as colored American citizens... with rights guaranteed to us in the Constitution, but with those rights but very imperfectly recognized."

–The Reverend Francis Grimke, 1919.

African American soldiers of the 369th Regiment homeward bound, ca. February 1919. (New York Public Library)

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, November 11, 1921. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-hec-43115)