

● The War at Home

MAIN IDEA *World War I spurred social, political, and economic change in the United States.*

To fight the war adequately, the United States had to mobilize industry and labor, as well as soldiers. Wilson named Bernard M. Baruch to head the War Industries Board (WIB), the main agency responsible for overseeing industrial production. It helped boost industrial output by 20 percent. But prices rose as well.

While some industries—metal work, shipbuilding, and meat packing—boomed, workers lost buying power due to higher prices. Union membership grew dramatically. The Food Administration encouraged people to change their eating habits to save food for soldiers.

The government paid for the war by raising taxes and by selling bonds, which celebrities helped sell. To support the war effort, the Committee of Public Information encouraged people to aid the cause.

The war brought an anti-German backlash that discredited things German or people of German background. Congress passed the Espionage and Sedition Acts to punish anyone who interfered with the draft or the sale of war bonds or who said anything that could be defined as disloyal. About 1,500 people were convicted under these laws. Some chief targets were socialists and union leaders.

African-American leaders were divided over the war. Some said that helping the war effort would enhance the fight for equality. Others said that without equality, blacks should not help. The main effect of the war on African Americans was to spur the Great Migration—the movement of thousands of blacks from the South to the cities of the North. They tried to escape harsh treatment in the South and hoped to find jobs and equality in the North.

Women played new roles, taking jobs that had been held only by men in the past. Their contribution helped increase support for woman suffrage and ensured ratification, in 1920, of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote. About 500,000 Americans died in a worldwide flu epidemic of 1919.