

# 7 Ways that Studying US History 1877 to Modern Times History Shapes the Way You Think About America's Justification to Involvement in Wars

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1. After a period of isolationist policies, America's decision to declare war during World War I highlighted the future involvement of the United States in foreign policy.

(Week 4: February 6th: Imperialism and WWI)



(PA Photos/PA Archive/Press Association Images. [Soldier at Grave]. Retrieved from [link.](#))

As seen in the image, war is juxtaposed between life and death. In the middle of a war zone this soldier visits a grave site marked by the cross, which symbolizes an eternity of peace. Due to all the horror in the war, this soldier recognizes the value of a fallen soldier and what it means for America's involvement in the war as a whole. This fight between living and dying is exactly why the United States became involved in World War I. The threat of the Central Powers to the Allied Powers pushed America to join the war in order to protect itself and its allies. Additionally, in order to remain a top power throughout the world, Americans wanted to continue Imperialistic interventions through war by spreading democracy, trading, and growing the military ([Imperialism & WWI, Feb. 6, 2019](#)). America's official decision to declare war was caused by several additional factors including the sinking of the *Louistitana*, the Zimmerman telegram,

and the fall of the Russian Tsar (Crash Course #30: America in World War I). The growing threats against America from the Central Powers created the need to join in the fight against them. While overseas during World War I, a soldier wrote home to his family, “...we are fighting a great fight and for the principles of right living” (Green, Selected Letters, 1917-1918). Stated by this soldier and shown by the soldier in the image, it is clear that there was true purpose for America’s involvement in World War I.

2. The Great Depression marked a low period of time in American history that was a result of World War I and the Stock Market crash, as well as a precursor to American involvement in World War II.

(Week 6: Feb. 18th: Great Depression and New Deal)



(Topical Press Agency/Getty Images. [Unemployment Demo]. Retrieved from [link.](#))

The Great Depression served as a symbol for the consequences and positives of war during this time. Following World War I, the Great Depression highlighted the negative energy that was felt by many individuals fighting the war and on the homefront. Nationwide, individuals were left without homes, food, and work. As seen in the image, many took to the streets to protest their beliefs. The depression and “the impact of unemployment...lead to a complete reorganization of the structure of family relationships” (Gordon & Reighlyn, Family Life). It was caused by many economic issues, several relating directly to World War I. The expansion of war involvement led to mechanization, overproduction, and under pricing in several American industries, including farming and agriculture (Crash Course #33 The Great Depression).

Additionally, it was also conspired that international war debt from the large amounts of American aid had a major cause in the depression ([The Depression & New Deal, Feb. 18, 2019](#)). After several agonizing years and attempts at programs to save the economy, America's possible involvement in World War II seemed like one of the only plausible solutions. Upon entering another world war, America's dedication to foreign policy and necessity to increase jobs and war supplies allowed for the end of the Great Depression and future success in World War II.

3. Following another period of isolationism, America's decision to become involved in World War II was shaped heavily by the periods of World War I and the Great Depression.

(Week 6: Feb. 20th: World War II)



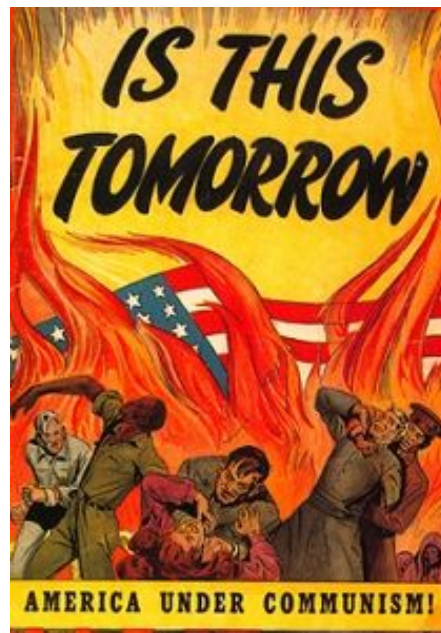
(Joe Rosenthal/AP Photo. Retrieved from [link.](#))

In addition to the many reasons for United States involvement in World War II, nationalism greatly impacted leaders', soldiers', and civilians' attitudes going into the war. As seen in the famous photo above, remembering and honoring America was a driving force for soldiers across seas. One of the main reasons for American involvement in the war was the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces. Over 2000 innocent Americans were killed and many military aircraft and vessels were destroyed by the attack ([World War II, Feb. 20, 2019](#)). This attack pushed soldiers to defend their

country to the best of their ability. Likewise, Americans on the homefront joined in to help the war cause in any way possible and many ideals were changed nationwide. Overall, government trust was strengthened, unemployment decreased significantly, organized union involvement increased, and many women joined the workforce ([Crash Course #36 World War II at Home](#)). Actions by many Americans during this time promoted a joined effort aimed toward achieving worldwide peace. As stated by President Roosevelt, “the world...we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society” ([Roosevelt, Four Freedoms at Stake in the War, 1941](#)). The involvement in World War II was justified by looking ahead to future goals. Americans at home and in combat desired worldwide peace and safety, and fighting in this war was the most efficient way to achieve this.

4. Following World War II, Communism became one of the largest fears of the United States and a driving force in the decades of tension between the Soviet Union.

(Week 8: March 11th: The Cold War)



(Catechetical Guild Educational Society, 1947, Retrieved from [link](#).)

Throughout the period of the Cold War, the fear of the spread of communism affected many of the actions and policies that America put in place in order to conserve democracy. As shown in the political cartoon, Americans viewed communism as a

spreading fire full of danger and savagery. Many Americans believed communism would take over the world and eventually destroy democracy in the United States. Due to this fear, it “changed the way many people viewed humanity” (Crash Course #37 The Cold War). Because of this, American leaders intended to combat the growth of the Soviet Union in any way possible. Policies such as the Truman Doctrine and groups such as NATO were put in place in order to ensure the life of democracy (The Cold War, March 11, 2019). The thought of not competing with the Soviet Union and its power led to fears that the United States and democracies would wide could be dangerous, as compared to the image above. In one of his speeches, Harry Truman defends the need for United States involvement in the Cold War by saying, “the free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms” (Truman, The Truman Doctrine, 1947). As a free nation, America was determined to keep freedom and democracy alive by aiding others and freezing the doomed spread of communism.

5. While previous wars were fairly supported by Americans, the decision to enter the Vietnam War sparked controversy and mistrust in the United States government.

(Week 11: April 1st: Vietnam War)



( Eddie Adams/APT, 1968, Retrieved from [link.](#))

By far, United States involvement in the Vietnam war has sparked some of the most controversy among civilians and soldiers. American leaders were desperate to join this war in order to prevent Vietnam from falling under Communism. However, many

argued that it was not our place to become involved. Media became an important role in establishing the negative aspects of the war, as depicted in the photo above. The assassination of this Viet Cong prisoner changed the way individuals worldwide viewed war and the motives behind it (Petras, Loehrke, Smith, Russell, & Moore, “The Year That Transformed the Nation”). Americans nationwide argued against the domino theory and strongly believed that involvement was immoral (Vietnam, April 1, 2019). To counteract this, presidents such as Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon believed that soldiers should be stationed in Vietnam. In a speech, Eisenhower stated that the fall of Vietnam to communism would “multiply the disadvantages” and we “would suffer through loss of materials [and] sources of materials” (Eisenhower, Dwight Eisenhower Warns of Falling Dominoes, 1954). Regardless of the public opinion, American involvement lasted nearly twenty years due to the large fears of spreading communism.

6. Similar to the Vietnam War, the Gulf War created controversy over involvement and questioned the true motives behind entering a war.

(Week 13: April 15th: Operation Freedom?)



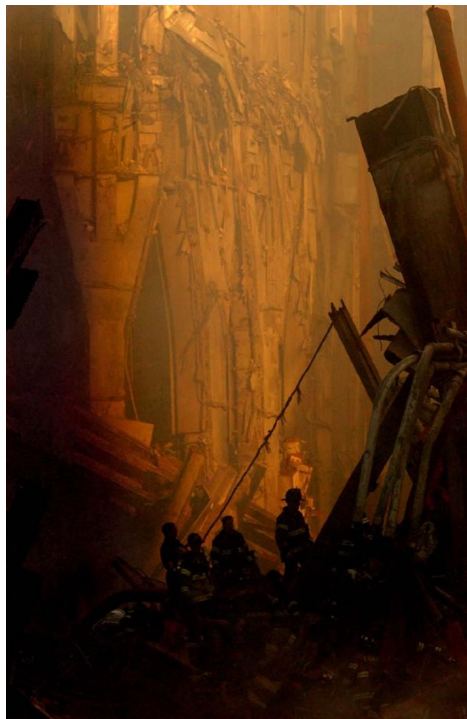
(Wikimedia, Retrieved from [link.](#))

In order to preserve resources and prove United States dominance, George H. W. Bush pushed for involvement in the Gulf War. The prime reasoning behind entering this war was the debate over oil. Americans were worried that Iraq would take over the oil supply in Kuwait and Bush sent soldier to the Middle East as a result (Globalization,

April 15, 2019). Throughout the war, the United States used techniques such as the scorched earth policy, as pictured above, which was seen as a controversial method in the war. Whether or not techniques such as these and overall involvement was necessary remained a debated topic during this time period. In fact, as stated by David Maraniss, “five of the seven agree with President Bush that [it] is...necessary. But not one wants to fight in it” (Maraniss, “It’s Their War Too”, 1991). Regardless, this mission was seen as a major military success from the United States advancements (Crash Course #44 George HW Bush and the End of the Cold War). In a short amount of time, the American military exerted its dominance in the Gulf War.

7. As a response to the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, George H. W. Bush enacted the War on Terror against Al Qaeda.

(Week 13: April 17th: 9/11 and the War on Terror)



(News 19, Retrieved from [link.](#))

After the devastating terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, inevitable safety precautions were taken by the government. As pictured, the scene at ground zero in New York City appeared to be a nightmare. With over 3000 casualties, George H. W. Bush

and American leaders were forced to take safety to another level. Throughout the country, there became a fear of lack of freedom and security. In order to combat this fear, Bush enacted the Bush Doctrine to force Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban out of power ([9/11 and the War on Terror, April 17, 2019](#)). The initial entry into the Middle East was supported among leaders and civilians. In an article posted by the New York Times, New York native Morgan Stanley claimed that if there were ever any attacks to his city he would join the military, and this is exactly what he did following 9/11 ([Kleinfield, "Getting Here From There", 2011](#)). Additionally, a soldier in combat claimed, "I feel very strongly that I have a duty to the country. It's my service to the country" ([Daake, "War on Terror-Attitudes Toward Service and the War"](#)). After the attacks, it was clear that American forces needed to invade Iraq and Afghanistan.