

The Road to War

June 28, 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sophie made a state visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Bosnia was a new province within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Francis Ferdinand was heir to the empire's throne.

That morning a bomb thrown by a terrorist bounced off the archduke's car and exploded, injuring two officers in another car. Unfazed, Francis Ferdinand attended a state ceremony and then rode to the hospital to see the wounded officers. Gavrilo Princip, a second terrorist, just 19 years old, happened to spot the car as it slowly moved down a narrow street. He pulled out his pistol and shot the archduke and his wife to death.

Princip, a Bosnian nationalist, believed that Austria-Hungary had no right to rule Bosnia. Little did he know that his act of terrorism would have such grave consequences.

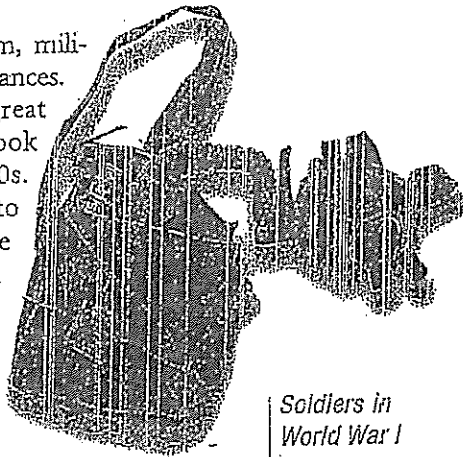
Causes of World War I

The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand ignited what was called the Great War, later known as World War I. But the main causes of the war existed well before 1914. Those

causes included imperialism, militarism, nationalism, and alliances.

(1) *Imperialism.* A great scramble for colonies took place in the late 1800s. European powers rushed to beat each other to the remaining uncolonized areas of the world, particularly in Africa and China. This surge of imperialism sharpened rivalries within Europe. Japan joined the roster of colonial powers when it won the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and acquired Korea, Taiwan, and territory on China's mainland.

(2) *Militarism.* By the early 1900s in Europe, diplomacy had taken a back seat to militarism. This policy involved aggressively building up a nation's armed forces in preparation for war. Under this policy the military gained more authority. The great powers of Europe—Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Russia—all engaged in militarism. Their endless planning for war made war much more likely.



Soldiers in World War I wore gas masks to protect against poison gas, a horrible new weapon introduced in the war.

The

World

War

I

1914-1920

(3) *Nationalism.* Two kinds of nationalism contributed to World War I. The first was the tendency for countries such as the great powers to act in their own national interest. When such action went against the national interest of another nation, warfare could result. The second kind of nationalism occurred in countries with diverse populations. In such countries the longing of an ethnic minority for independence often led to violence.

(4) *Alliances.* A complicated system of alliances developed among the nations of Europe during the late nineteenth century. Designed to bolster each nation's security, the alliances bound the great powers to come to each other's aid in the event of attack. In 1914 the fragile balance of power that had kept the peace for decades led its creators into war.

The Conflict Expands

At the time of the assassination, Bosnia was the focal point of a nationalist dispute between Austria-Hungary, which had recently annexed Bosnia, and its neighbor Serbia. Convinced that Serbia was behind the assassination, Austria-Hungary used the event as an excuse to

crush its small enemy. On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

This declaration of war set off a chain reaction that worked its way through Europe's complex web of alliances. On July 29, Russia, as Serbia's protector, began mobilization—the readying of troops for war. Germany, Austria-Hungary's chief ally, demanded that Russia stop mobilizing. Russia refused. At that point, Russia's ally, France, began to ready its troops, as did Germany.

On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia. Germany's military leaders had long prepared for this day. Their country lay between France to the west and Russia to the east. To avoid being trapped by advancing French and Russian armies, Germany had developed a first-strike strategy. Known as the Schlieffen Plan, it called for a quick sweep through France to knock the French out of the war. Then the German army would concentrate on Russia.

Germany put the plan into action. To reach France as fast as possible, the German army had to pass through Belgium. To Germany's dismay, this invasion brought Great Britain, Belgium's protector, into the conflict on August 4. Germany had hoped that Britain, with its powerful navy, would stay neutral.

One week after the war started, all the great powers of Europe had been drawn into it. The conflict divided them into two sides. Germany and Austria-Hungary made up the Central Powers. Russia, France, Serbia, and Great

The American Response

Newspapers in the United States had recorded the march toward war in bold headlines. "Austria Declares War, Rushes Vast Army into Serbia; Russia Masses 80,000 Men on Border."

Americans read the news with mounting alarm. How could all these great countries of beauty and culture be at war with one another?

Some Americans felt personally involved. More than a third of the nation's 92 million people were first- or second-generation immigrants. They still identified with their old countries. About a quarter of these were German American, and another eighth were

Irish American. Both of these groups felt hostility toward Great Britain because of past conflicts and the current war in Europe. For this reason, they favored the Central Powers over the Allies.

Most Americans, however, opposed the Central Powers. One reason was Kaiser Wilhelm, the ruler of Germany. The Kaiser, or emperor, was an autocrat—a ruler with unlimited power. Also, Americans saw the Germans as a people of frightening militarism and cold-blooded efficiency. Reporters who had rushed to Belgium in August 1914 to witness the German advance toward France fueled this view. Richard Harding Davis described the event for New York *Tribune* readers as "not men marching, but a force of nature like a tidal wave, an avalanche, or a river flooding its banks."

American Neutrality Trade strongly influenced the American position on the war. Between 1897 and 1914 United States commercial investments overseas had increased fivefold, from \$700 million to \$3.5 billion. Now German submarines and a British naval

blockade of the North Sea were putting those investments at risk. To protect the investments, President Wilson on August 4, 1914, officially proclaimed the United States a neutral country. The American government protested the actions of both sides and tried to act as peacemaker.

The Preparedness Movement American business leaders welcomed the proclamation of neutrality. Still, those who had strong commercial ties to Great Britain urged that the United States get ready for war. Their watchword was "preparedness." They wanted their country to be in a position to aid Great Britain,

if necessary. In December 1914 preparedness supporters organized a National Security League to "promote patriotic education and national sentiment and service among people of the United States."

By the late summer of 1915, the movement's leaders had persuaded the government to set up camps to train American men for combat. By the summer of 1916, Wilson had worked out an agreement with Congress for large increases in the armed forces.

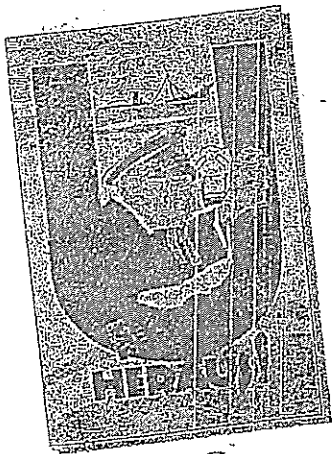
The Peace Movement When World War I broke out, a peace movement also swung into gear. Its members consisted primarily of former Populists, Midwest progressives, and social reformers.

Women were particularly active in the movement. On August 29, 1914, suffragists dressed in black and carrying a banner of a dove marched down New York City's Fifth Avenue. In November 1915 a group of female and male social reformers founded the American Union Against Militarism.

Congress also included some peace advocates. They insisted on paying for preparedness through a tax on the makers of arms and through higher income taxes. Claude Kitchin, member of Congress from North Carolina, predicted that when people discovered "that the income tax will have to pay for the increase in the army and navy, . . . preparedness will not be so popular with them as it now is." Congress did increase taxes, but the preparedness movement remained strong.



The United States Declares War



This German poster urged U-boats on their mission. The translation is, "Submarine: come out!"

From 1915 to 1917 friction between the United States and Germany increased. The preparedness movement continued to gain support in the United States, and the pressure to join in the war intensified. Ultimately, actions by the Central Powers pushed Congress and the President into entering the war on the side of the Allies.

German Submarine Warfare

One action that provoked angry calls for war in the United States was the German use of submarine warfare. This tactic was effective militarily, but it cost the Germans dearly in terms of American public opinion.

The German U-boat, short for *Unterseeboot*, or submarine, was a terrifying new weapon that changed the rules of naval warfare. Passenger and merchant ships had no defense against the submarine, which could go undetected nearly anywhere in the ocean. Submarine attacks depended on the element of surprise. Unlike other naval ships, U-boats

issued no warning to their targets. This struck many Americans as uncivilized.†

The British encouraged such anti-German feelings. Shortly after the war began, the British cut the transatlantic cable connecting Germany and the United States. All news of the European front henceforth flowed through London. Its pro-Allied bias helped shape the opinion of the people in the United States in favor of punishing Germany for its use of the submarine.

American public opinion of the Germans sank even lower on May 7, 1915, when a U-boat sighted the *Lusitania*, a British passenger liner, in the Irish Sea. Suspecting correctly that the ship carried weapons for the Allies, the U-boat fired on the liner. Eighteen minutes later the *Lusitania* disappeared beneath the waves along with its almost 1,200 passengers. Included among the dead were 128 Americans, who had

boarded the *Lusitania* in spite of German warnings to stay off British ships. Nevertheless, the American press went wild over what they called Germany's act of "barbarism."

Wilson urged patience. He demanded that Germany stop its submarine warfare and make payments to the victims' families. Germany's reply that the ship carried small arms and ammunition did not quiet American anger. Wilson sent a second, stronger note of protest. In response, Germany promised to stop sinking passenger ships without warning, as long as the ship's crew offered no resistance to German search or seizure.

Still, U-boats continued to torpedo Allied ships. On March 24, 1916, a German submarine sank the *Sussex*, a French passenger steamship. The United States threatened to cut diplomatic ties to Germany. In what came to be called the *Sussex* pledge, the German government again promised that U-boats would warn ships before attacking.

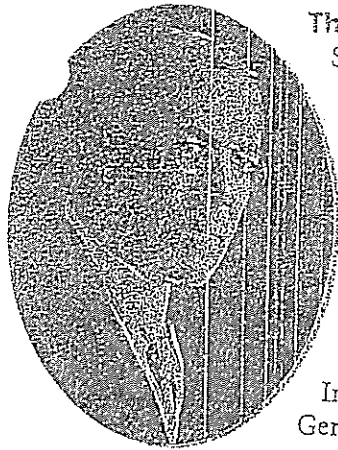
The series of demands and broken promises that led up to the *Sussex* pledge frustrated Wilson. He could not threaten force without entering the war. During this time, however, Wilson did embrace the concept of preparedness. He also authorized New York bankers to make a huge loan to the Allies. American neutrality was beginning to weaken.

Moving Toward War

In the presidential election of 1916, Wilson ran on the slogan "He kept us out of war." The Republicans, who nominated Supreme Court justice Charles Evans Hughes, criticized Wilson for not taking a stronger stand against Germany. American voters gave Wilson a narrow victory.

Germany soon tested Wilson's patience. On February 1, 1917, Germany violated the *Sussex* pledge by resuming unrestricted submarine warfare. German strategists knew that it might bring the United States into the war. But they felt fairly confident that they could defeat Britain and win the war before American entry could make a difference.

Germany's action dashed Wilson's hope of maintaining freedom of the seas—and American neutrality. On February 3 the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. Wilson asked Congress for permission to arm American merchant ships.



President Woodrow Wilson reluctantly led the nation into World War I.

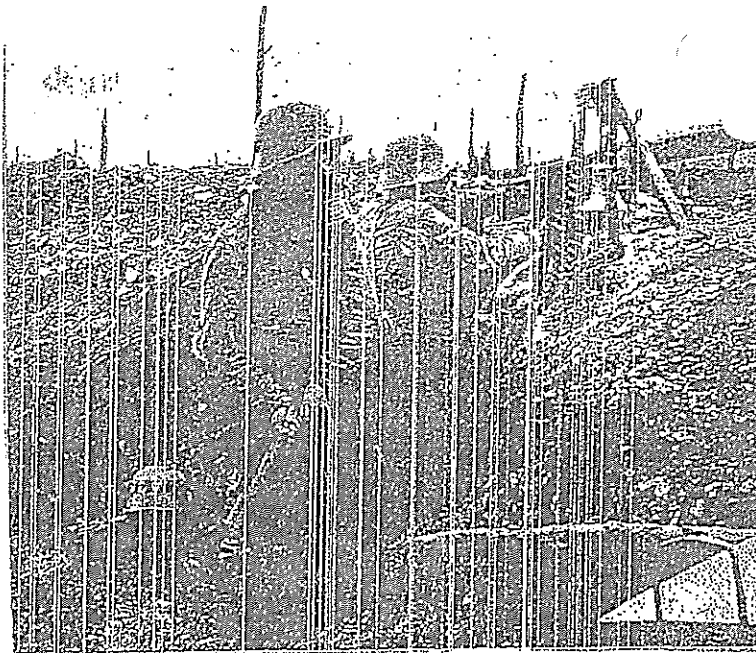
The Zimmermann Note In the Senate, a group of antiwar senators tried to prevent action on Wilson's request by using a filibuster. (A filibuster is a tactic in which senators take the floor, begin talking, and refuse to stop talking to prevent a vote on a measure.) While this was taking place, the British revealed the contents of an intercepted German telegram. In the note Arthur Zimmermann, Germany's foreign secretary, made a secret offer to Mexico.

"We shall endeavor to keep the United States neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance. . . . Make war together, make peace together, . . . and . . . Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona."

—Arthur Zimmermann

Neither Wilson nor Mexico took the Zimmermann note seriously. Its release, however, scored another public relations victory for Great Britain. The United States edged closer to war.

Revolution in Russia By early 1917 Russia already had suffered enormous casualties in the war: more than 1.5 million killed, roughly 2.5 million taken prisoner, and millions more



wounded. Austrian and German forces had advanced deep into Russian territory. Poorly fed and miserably equipped, the Russians fell back farther and farther into their interior.

Then, in March 1917, Czar Nicholas II, Russia's autocratic leader, was forced to give up power. The Russian monarchy was replaced with a republican government. This Russian Revolution elated the prowar faction in the United States. Concern over being allied with the czar had helped slow the nation's move toward entry into the war. The fall of the czar removed a last stumbling block to a full American commitment to the Allies.

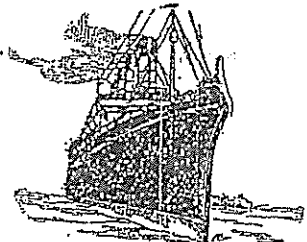
The War Resolution Between March 16 and March 18, Germany sank the United States ships *City of Memphis*, *Illinois*, and *Vigilancia*. On March 20 Wilson's Cabinet voted unanimously for war. Casting the issue in idealistic terms, Wilson told Congress on April 2 that "the world must be made safe for democracy." He stated:

AMERICAN VOICES "It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace."

—Woodrow Wilson

A war resolution passed 82 to 6 in the Senate and 373 to 50 in the House. On April 6, 1917, the President signed it.

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Pennsylvania - Fri., May 7, 5 P.M.

Luna, - - - Tues., May 18, 10 A.M.

Poland, - - - Fri., May 21, 5 P.M.

LUSITANIA, - Sat., May 29, 10 A.M.

Pennsylvania, - - - 5 P.M.

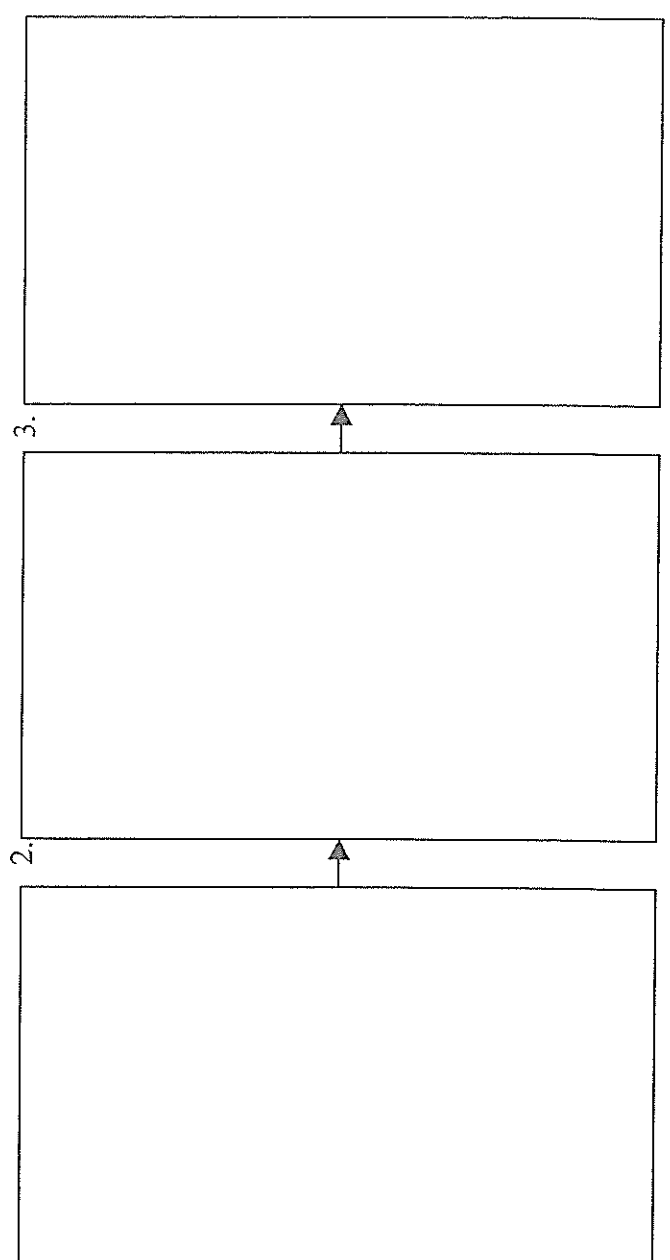
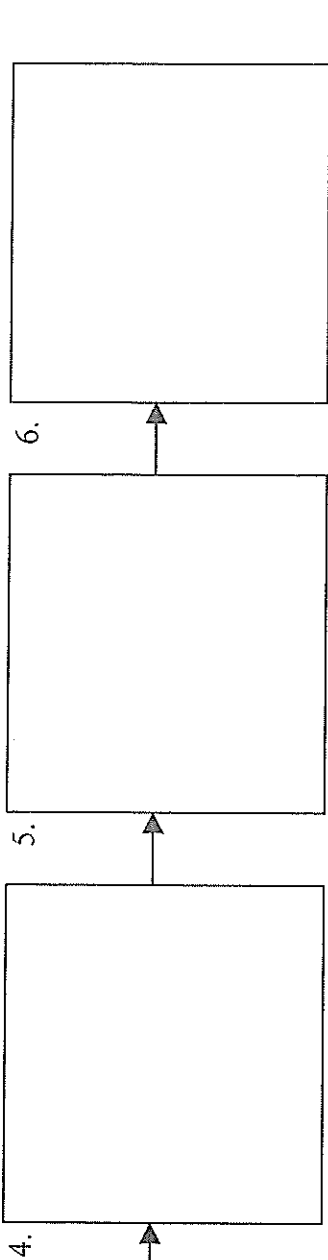
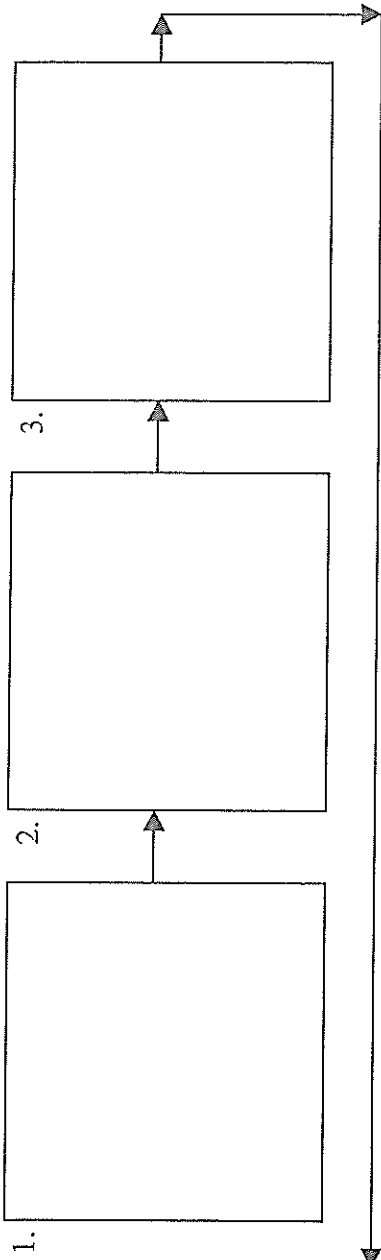
NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

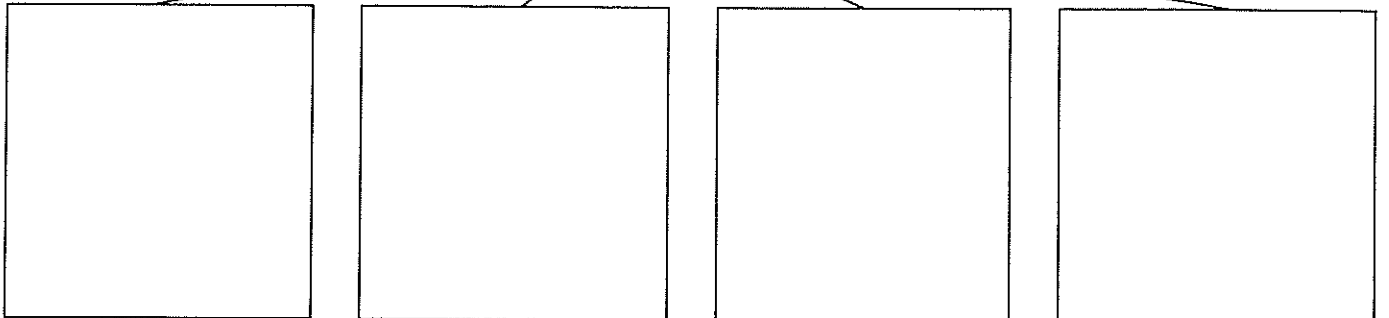
IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1916.

World War I



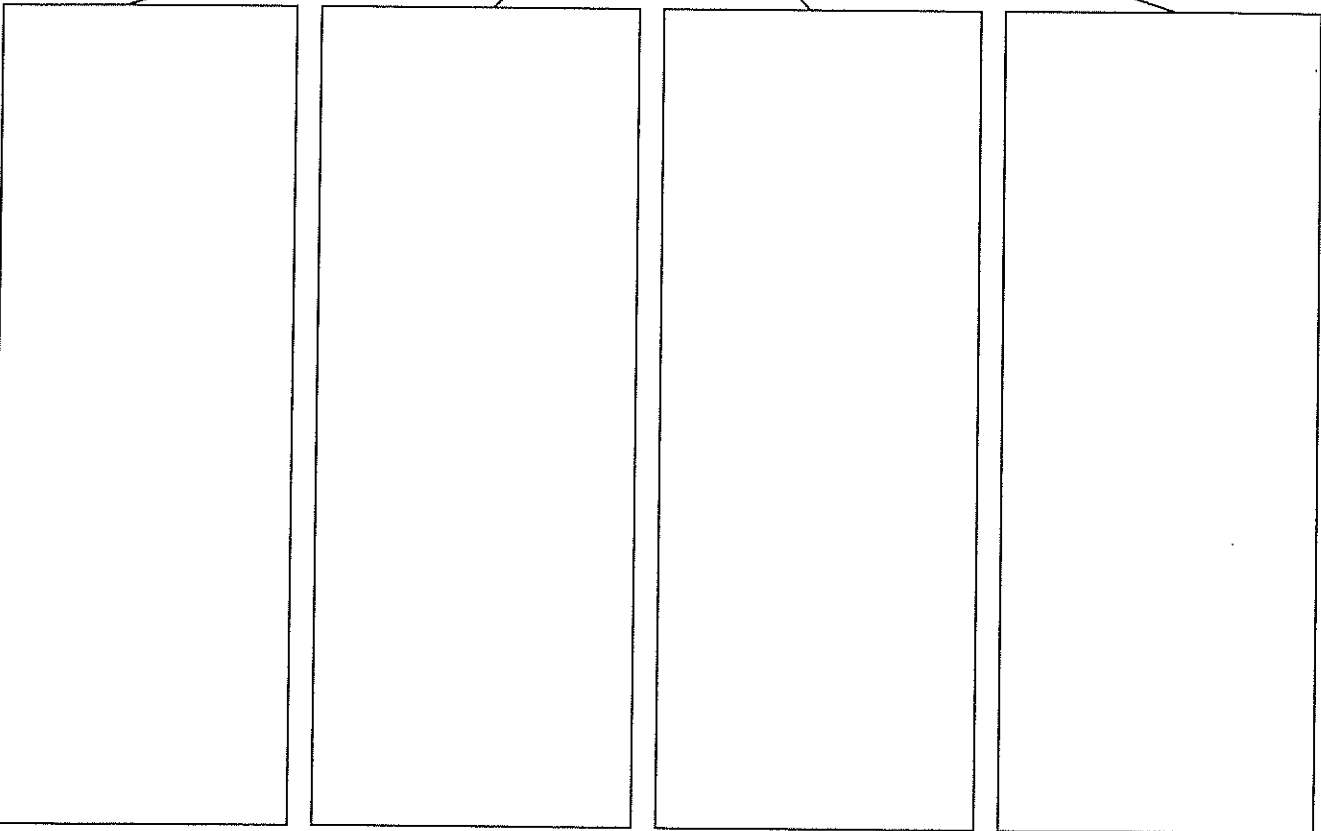
Causes



Response
By Europe

Response
By America

Reasons America Enters the War



1.

2.

3.

4.

America Acts

