

LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY IN HISTORY:

EXPLORING WORLD WAR I FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

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Teaching about World War I can be both a challenge and an opportunity for educators in the U.S. On the one hand, the Great War transformed American society. The sharpening of nationalist conflict exploded into war in July 1914, lasting for four long years. Some nine million soldiers lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands of civilians were affected by the conflict. Yet the United States did not enter the war until 1917, and in many ways its memory has been eclipsed by World War II. The story of the war is intricate and confusing at times, and it can be difficult to make it engaging for students. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the war, and gives educators the opportunity to revisit World War I and take advantage of some of the excellent new educational resources developed for the commemoration.

The 2015 National History Day theme, *Leadership and Legacy in History*, offers a valuable lens through which to explore World War I. When we consider leadership during World War I from a U.S. perspective, we may think first of President Woodrow Wilson and his path from neutrality to leading a nation at war to his 14-point program for world peace and failed efforts to convince U.S. leaders to join the League of Nations. Wilson was a layered and complex president, and his tenure in office offers numerous avenues for exploring themes of leadership and legacy, including his record on civil rights. Students can also reflect on the ways national leaders like Wilson have inspired opposition and about the many ways everyday citizens exercised their own leadership skills in response to Wilson's policies.

One of our taglines at HISTORY is "Making History Everyday." Looking at the roles of everyday people during World War I is also important from multiple perspectives. Students can research how the war unfolded in the many other countries involved in the conflict, and examine the ways people shaped and were shaped by the war in many parts of the world as well as in the U.S.

Aileen Cole, for example, became the first African-American woman in the Army Nurse Corps during World War I. While both the Red Cross and the U.S. Army prevented black nurses from joining, women like Cole were eager to join the effort and make a contribution. After the massive influenza outbreak took its toll in 1918, the Red Cross decided to accept black nurses for service. Cole was sent by the Red Cross to

West Virginia to help treat miners who were critical to providing coal for the war; she also helped establish a field hospital there. As the flu epidemic intensified, the Army Surgeon General called for nurses nationwide to join the effort. Cole officially joined the Reserve Nurse Corps as a first lieutenant and served with other black nurses at Camp Sherman in Ohio. Women like Cole never went overseas, but were critical to the war effort and left behind a legacy of service. Cole and others inspired other African Americans to push for the integration of the U.S. military, which would not finally happen until after World War II. Her story is just one among many examples of everyday citizens who used their leadership skills during the World War I era. The story of black nurses, including Cole, is featured in the documentary *Healing Others, Healing Ourselves: The Story of the African-American Nurse*. See the link at the end of this article for more information on this important project supported by the Crile Archives, a great source for NHD projects.

HISTORY® is very proud to partner with National History Day in sharing some wonderful new classroom resources devoted to World War I. The World War I sourcebook offers insights from educators about innovative and engaging ways to teach about the Great War. NHD commissioned lesson plans from teachers for both the middle and high school levels that exhibit best practices in teaching World War I with links to many primary sources. The sourcebook also includes articles that show many perspectives on World War I. Because the war affected many nations, these articles give excellent starting points for encouraging students to think about the war not just from the U.S. point of view, but from the perspective of other nations and people who experienced the Great War.

As the commemoration of World War I continues over the next four years, there will be numerous events and publications of interest to educators. I have included some links at the end of this article to keep an eye on if you are interested in exploring World War I topics. Our

website, [History.com](http://www.history.com), will be rolling out original articles, new short videos, and other interactive resources throughout the commemoration period, starting in summer 2014. I also encourage those interested in the war to tune in to our all-new four-part series *World War I: The First Modern War* airing in late July 2014 on HISTORY® and available later this year on DVD. As a war that ushered in many changes, and deeply affected generations of soldiers and their families, it is an immeasurably deep well from which to find research projects of all kinds. Whether investigating Leadership and Legacy from the angle of World War I or another perspective, this theme will inspire students to think carefully and critically about leadership qualities both in moments of crisis and in times of relative peace. Leadership is a grand historical theme that also resonates powerfully in our lives today.

RELATED LINKS:

History Classroom

www.history.com/classroom

World War I on History.com

<http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i>

Centennial Commemoration of The United States in World War I

<http://worldwar-1centennial.org/>

National World War I Museum

<http://theworldwar.org/>

First World War Centenary

<http://www.1914.org/>

Crile Archives/Aileen Cole story (search the Crile Archives for many World War I stories and sources):

<http://www.crile-archives.org/current-project.htm>

World War I Teacher Resource

<http://www.nhd.org/WWI.htm>