

*Edited by Pulitzer Prize winner*

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# **WORLD WAR I AND AMERICA**

**1917 ★ WWIAMERICA.ORG ★ 2017**

Library of America  
Project Reader

**TOLD BY THE AMERICANS  
WHO LIVED IT**

## Preface

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MANY AMERICANS do not appreciate the key role the United States played in deciding the outcome of World War I, the deep impact the war had on Americans who lived through it, or the profound ways in which it continues to resonate today. While the U.S. was a belligerent for only nineteen of the war's fifty-two months, and suffered a fraction of the losses of the other major combatants, in the climactic campaigns of the war Americans fought with ferocious intensity. In the five and a half months the American Expeditionary Forces were engaged in major fighting, the U.S. lost more than 50,000 men killed in action, a combat toll greater than that of the entire Vietnam War. Equally important, the war ushered in powerful and complex changes in American culture and society. The war helped women to finally win the vote and ushered in the permissive Jazz Age, but also led to Prohibition and a heightened fear of immigrants. Amid deadly racial violence and frustrated hopes for full citizenship for African Americans, it gave rise to the militant "New Negro" and began the Great Migration to the North. It made the United States the most powerful actor on the global stage, and brought about a dramatic debate over America's role in the world. And it called into question the traditional meanings of glory, honor, courage, causing many to believe, as Ernest Hemingway wrote, "There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity."

This Reader presents twenty-two selections by American participants in the conflict, written from 1915 to 1929. They are drawn from the Library of America volume *World War I and America: Told by the Americans Who Lived It*, and give a first-hand look at the war from different points of view. Understanding how Americans perceived the conflict at the time allows us to encounter World War I on its own terms and to draw connections with the experiences of Americans today, both combatants and civilians. The selections focus on seven

key themes. Each theme features an introduction by a distinguished scholar, questions for discussion, and suggestions for further reading. The reader is intended to help facilitate an informed and rewarding conversation about the war and its consequences.