

The United States and World War I: Perspectives and Legacies

**39th Annual Conference of the Historians in the DGFA/GAAS
(Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien/German Association for American Studies)
Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA), February 10-12, 2017**

2017 will mark the centennial of U.S. entry into World War I. The war had a profound impact on the United States and on its global role. Well before the country entered the war, the U.S. had become a key supporter of the Allies, shifting the global balance of power to set the stage for what has been called the “American century.” This conference provides an opportunity to reassess the war’s significance in U.S. history by focusing on the historical context of an emerging American commitment abroad. While we invite contributions that reflect current scholarship on any political, economic, military, social, and cultural aspect of American history during World War I, we would like to draw attention to three distinct perspectives.

The first perspective concerns a reassessment of the *neutrality period between 1914 and 1917*. While important work focuses on transatlantic diplomacy and American politics to characterize the American response to the war abroad, more recent work has also emphasized cultural and intellectual responses to the “European War” in all areas of American society. The range of issues that could be addressed here includes reassessments of policy decisions, economic issues, as well as cultural phenomena such as a contemporary celebration of France by urban elites or support efforts by immigrant communities such as German and Italian Americans. All these developments were discussed and reflected upon by an emerging and invigorated cast of public intellectuals.

A second perspective concerns a reassessment of *periodization*. While the canonized dates of 1914, 1917, and 1918 provide the traditional framework, Adam Tooze has recently pointed to 1916 as a key year during which the U.S. became both the world’s largest economy and its banker, putting the country in a position to help define the postwar world order. Taking this observation as a clue, what historical trajectories emerge from the war’s diverse economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions?

A third perspective is provided by a *global view on the United States*. As a “world war,” the conflict had implications for regions and countries around the globe - developments caused or felt by the United States. What new perspectives on the war can we open up by broadening the traditional narrative to include wartime diplomatic or cultural relations with, for example, South America and Asia? In what way do global developments such as the influenza epidemic expand the story? And what perspective on American military history may be gleaned from a global perspective?

Finally, important questions must be asked about the *legacy of World War I* in the twentieth century and beyond. What is the legacy of the war as advocated by former protagonists such as veterans? Why has the First World War received comparatively less attention in the general public than among historians? What cultural memory has been associated with World War I, and how does it deviate from memories associated with other American wars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?