

Name _____

A War to End All Wars

World War I was initially a European dispute over territory and boundaries, something that had nothing to do with the United States, and many Americans hoped that the U.S. would remain neutral. The conflict escalated from a “dispute” to a “war” when a Serbian zealot assassinated the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in 1914. In 1915, the Lusitania, a British passenger liner, was sunk by a German submarine. 128 Americans on board were killed. Still, Woodrow Wilson was elected president in 1916 by vowing to keep America out of the war. But the Germans continued to sink ships, and Americans continued to be caught in the middle.

Then the “Zimmermann Telegram” — a message from Germany’s foreign minister to his man in Mexico, intercepted and decoded by British intelligence — offered to return to Mexico land that they had lost to the U.S. if Mexico would join the war and fight on Germany’s side. This brought the war right to America’s door, and Wilson went to congress to ask them to declare war on Germany. It would be “the war to end all wars,” said Wilson, and America would be fighting to make “the world safe for democracy.” Congress passed a declaration of war, and large numbers of U.S. troops began arriving in Europe in 1918.

President Woodrow Wilson was determined to keep America out of World War I, and in fact was elected on a platform of peace. Why did he change his mind?

