The Historical Context of World War I

On April 6, 2017, the United States will mark the 100th anniversary of the country’s entry into World War I. Historians agree that this conflict represents the “primordial catastrophe” (George F. Kennan) of the 20th century, and that the United States made a crucial contribution to securing the victory of the Western Allies in the fall of 1918. It was the arrival of fresh American troops in the spring of 1918 that enabled the West to halt the German offensive and to launch a counter-offensive that finally forced Germany and Austria-Hungary to sue for peace. The City of New York played a major role in this development. Even before 1917, while the United States still officially pursued a policy of neutrality, it had become a hub from which vital deliveries of foodstuffs and other goods essential to the Allied war effort were sent across the Atlantic and where naval protection of cargo ships was assembled. New York, with Wall Street rising in dominance, was also the financial center through which the credits that were extended to Britain and France were negotiated and channeled.

This conference is intended to present both established knowledge and fresh research into these topics, and to stimulate informed exchange among scholarly panelists and the audience. In terms of genres of historical writing, it takes a comprehensive approach, concerned with larger and ultimately global issues of military and naval history as well as coalition diplomacy and national politics. In addition to a “top-down” perspective, the program is also designed to cover developments at the grass-roots level of society. It looks at the history of minorities, gender relations, charitable organizations, and of mourning and memory.

We have an outstanding group of scholars who have travelled from near and afar to contribute to this important and timely subject. Free and open to the public, the conference is aimed at stimulating discussion on this world-changing event a century ago and reminding the public of the critical place of World War I in the 21st century.

Conference Co-chairs
Professor Volker Berghahn, Columbia University
Professor Lisa Keller, Purchase College SUNY
America in a Time of War: City, Economy and Politics, 1914-1918

Conference Program

Thursday March 30, 2017

5:00–5:30 p.m. Registration

5:30 p.m. Welcome
Ann Thornton, Vice Provost and University Librarian, Columbia University

Introduction of Paul Kennedy
Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics, Columbia University

Keynote Lecture: “Grappling with the New World Order: How 1917 Altered America’s—and New York City’s—Place in Global Affairs”

Paul Kennedy, J. Richardson Dilworth Professor of History and Director of International Security Studies, Yale University

6:30 p.m. Reception
Friday March 31, 2017

8:30–9:00 a.m. Registration

9:00–9:15 a.m. Welcome and Introduction to Conference

Volker Berghahn, Seth Low Emeritus Professor of History, Columbia University

9:15–10:45 a.m. Panel I: Neutrality, 1914-1916

Moderator: Mary Nolan, Professor of History, New York University

“The Outbreak of War in Europe”
Jack S. Levy, Board of Governors’ Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University

“Wall Street and War Finance in World War I”
Volker Berghahn, Seth Low Emeritus Professor of History, Columbia University

“1917: Jewish Immigrant New York’s Response to the Year that Changed the World”
Rebecca Kobrin, Russell and Betina Knapp Associate Professor of American Jewish History, Columbia University

10:45–11:15 a.m. Coffee Break

11:15 a.m.–12:45 p.m. Panel II: Moving Toward War

Moderator: Susan Pedersen, Morris Professor of British History, Columbia University

“Wilsonian Neutrality and Submarine Warfare”
John H. Maurer, Alfred Thayer Mahan Professor of Sea Power and Grand Strategy, United States Naval War College

“A Global City in a Global War: New York’s Cultural and Industrial Connections during World War I”
R. J. Wilson, Senior Lecturer in Modern History and Public Heritage, University of Chichester
“German-Americans and Anti-Germanism”
Jörg Nagler, Senior Professor of North American History, Friedrich Schiller University

12:45–1:45 p.m.  Lunch Break

2:00–3:30 p.m.  Panel III: The U.S. and New York at War

Moderator: Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences, and Director, Herbert H. Lehman Center for American History, Columbia University

“Mobilization and War in France”
Michael S. Neiberg, Chair of War Studies and Professor of History, United States Army War College

“In Case of a Bombardment of Manhattan …”: Dr. J. Bentley Squier and the Columbia War Hospital”
Lisa Keller, Professor of History, SUNY Purchase and Associate Director, Herbert H. Lehman Center for American History

“Mourning and Memory”
Jay Winter, Charles J. Stille Professor of History Emeritus, Yale University; Research Professor, Monash University

3:30–4:00 p.m.  Coffee Break

4:00–5:30 p.m.  Panel IV: “The United States and the End of Two World Wars”

Roundtable Discussion with:

Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences, and Director, Herbert H. Lehman Center for American History, Columbia University

Jay Winter, Charles J. Stille Professor of History Emeritus, Yale University; Research Professor, Monash University

Ian Buruma, Paul W. Williams Professor of Human Rights and Journalism, Bard College
Saturday April 1, 2017

10:00 a.m.–12 Noon  “Posters and Patriotism: Selling World War I in New York”
*Museum of the City of New York*
Curator-led Tour for Conference participants and guests
Two tours limited to 25 people each and reservation required, first come-first served basis.

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, New York City's artists and illustrators were enlisted in the war effort. Many of them worked for the federal government’s new Division of Pictorial Publicity. *Posters and Patriotism: Selling World War I in New York* examines the outpouring of posters, flyers, magazine art, sheet music covers, and other mass-produced images created by these New Yorkers to stir the American public to wartime loyalty, duty, and sacrifice. From the outbreak of the European conflict in 1914, however, New York had also been a city at war with itself—a place where debates about ethnic and racial loyalty, pacifism, the right to side with France, Belgium, and England or Germany, and the very meaning of patriotism spawned impassioned art for a mass audience. In rediscovering a wartime dialogue between images of conformity and dissent, *Posters and Patriotism* showcases over 60 examples from the World War I poster collection donated to the Museum by railroad executive and financier John W. Campbell (1880-1957) in 1943, most being exhibited for the first time, as well as the work of defiant artists in such colorful publications as *The Masses, The Fatherland, and Mother Earth.*

**About the Museum of the City of New York**

Founded in 1923 as a private, nonprofit corporation, the Museum of the City of New York celebrates and interprets the city, educating the public about its distinctive character, especially its heritage of diversity, opportunity, and perpetual transformation. The Museum connects the past, present, and future of New York City, and serves the people of the city as well as visitors from around the world through exhibitions, school and public programs, publications, and collections. The Museum’s recently opened three-gallery permanent exhibition, *New York at Its Core,* has received widespread critical acclaim.