

They Spoke Against War

Before and during U.S. entry into World War 1, a number of prominent Americans spoke out against involvement in the war. Read the statements by these Americans and the song, "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" and then answer the questions.

- A. Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin: "This war is being forced upon our people without their knowing why and without their approval."
- B. Senator George Norris, Republican from Nebraska: "We ought to have maintained from the beginning the strictest neutrality. If we had done this I do not believe we would have been on the verge of war at the present time. . . . We are going into war upon the command of gold. We are going to run the risk of sacrificing millions of our countrymen's lives in order that other countrymen may coin their lifeblood into money."
- C. Eugene V. Debs, Union leader and Socialist candidate for President of the United States: "War does not come by chance. War is not the result of an accident...In all these nations, the great industries are owned by a relatively small class. They are operated for the profit of that class...The master class has always brought a war and the subject class has fought the battle. . . Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. . . .I have not a drop of blood to shed for the oppressors of the working class and the robbers of the poor."

I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier (1915) a song by Alfred Bryan and Al Piantadosi

Ten million soldiers to the war have gone Who may never return again. Ten million mothers' hearts must break For the ones who died in vain. Head bowed down in sorrow In her lonely years, I heard a mother murmur thro' her tears:	I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier, I brought him up to be my pride and joy, Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder, To shoot some other mother's darling boy?	Let nations arbitrate their future troubles, It's time to lay the sword and gun away, There'd be no war today, If mothers all would say, I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier.
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Questions:

- 1) Senators LaFollette and Norris oppose U.S. entry into World War 1. What reasons do they give?
- 2) Why does Eugene Debs say he will not support U.S. entry into the war?
- 3) Why does the song oppose World War 1?
- 4) What alternative to war is suggested in the song?
- 5) Should people have the right to make these statements before U.S. entry into the war?
- 6) Should people have the right to make these statements after U.S. entry into the war?
- 7) Eugene Debs was sent to jail for opposing the war after the U.S. entered. In your opinion, did this violate his freedom of speech? Why?