

DEFINING TOTAL WAR

Purpose

The idea of total war is central to understanding how World War I was different from earlier conflicts. Exploring this concept through the words of people who lived it will help you recognize just how deeply the war affected individuals, societies, and the world as a whole.

Process

1. Read all four quotes carefully. As you read, circle or underline any words or phrases that help you understand how war affected people during World War I.

Quote A:

"We lie under the network of arching shells... we stumble over slippery lumps of flesh, over limbs and corpses. We are little flames poorly sheltered by frail walls against the storm of dissolution and madness."

—Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1919)

Quote B:

"Women are working in the munitions factories—painting shells, packing explosives, running machines... They have become soldiers of industry."

—British factory report, 1916

Quote C:

"Posters are everywhere—urging us to enlist, to ration food, to watch what we say. They tell us this war is everyone's war, and we must give everything to it."

—French teenager's diary entry, 1917

Quote D:

"We from Senegal are told this is the 'Great War'—but it is not our war. Still, we are here, far from home, fighting and dying in the mud of France."

—Letter from a West African soldier in the French colonial army, 1916

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2. Together, these voices help explain the many ways World War I became a “total war.” Use the information you found in these quotes to write your own definition of total war. Be ready to share and explain which quotes helped shape your definition, and be sure to keep this definition handy so you can revisit it at the end of the lesson!

