

U.S. Enters World War I

On **April 6**, 1917, the United States formally declared war against Germany. Britain, France, and Russia welcomed news that American troops and supplies would be directed toward the Allied war effort. Under the command of Major General John J. Pershing, over two million U.S. troops fought on battlefields in France.

For three years, President Woodrow Wilson strove to maintain American neutrality. Anti-war sentiment ran across the political spectrum, but a series of incidents, including the loss of 128 American lives when German submarines sank the Lusitania, transformed public opinion. On April 2, 1917, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war, warning, "the world must be made safe for democracy."

American participation in the World War permanently transformed the nation. In order to meet increased demands for goods, the federal government expanded dramatically, taking an unprecedented role in guiding the economy.

Active supporters of the war to preserve democracy, women made a step towards political equality when the Nineteenth Amendment enfranchised them shortly after the war. Meanwhile, military service and wartime jobs beckoned African Americans northward. In what is known as the Great Migration, thousands of African Americans left the South and its systems of oppression to face new challenges in Northern cities.

Billie Holiday

Jazz singer Billie Holiday was born on **April 7**, 1915, in Baltimore, Maryland. She made her professional singing debut in Harlem nightclubs in 1931, and made her first recordings in 1933. Although she had no formal musical training, she became one of the greatest jazz singers of all time, and her recordings are now regarded as masterpieces.



The tension of racism was a powerful subtext to Holiday's life story. Because of Jim Crow laws, still in effect through most of her career, she occasionally found herself in the ironic situation of being the featured vocalist in clubs that refused to serve blacks.

Nicknamed "Lady Day" by musician Lester Young, Holiday often wore white gardenias fastened in her hair when performing. She worked with many jazz greats including Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and, in the film *New Orleans*, with Louis Armstrong and Kid Orey. She appeared at both small clubs and prestigious venues like Town Hall, Carnegie Hall and the Apollo Theater.

Billie Holiday not only sang but also arranged and composed. Her credits in the latter areas include "Don't Explain," "Fine and Mellow," "I Love My Man," and "God Bless the Child." She died at age 44 on July 17, 1959 in New York City.

Lee Surrenders

Lee's surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant, general-in-chief of all United States forces, hastened the conclusion of the Civil War.

"It would be useless and therefore cruel," Robert E. Lee remarked on the morning of April 9, 1865, "to provoke the further effusion of blood, and I have arranged to meet with General Grant with a view to surrender."

The two generals met shortly after noon on **April 9**, 1865, at the home of Wilmer McClean

Spring Anniversaries

in the village of Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

In the weeks following, confederate forces surrendered, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis was captured.



Major General Ulysses S. Grant

On April 14, President Lincoln's name was added to the list of over 1 million Civil War casualties, and the bloody finally was brought to a close.

Arbor Day

On **April 10**, 1872, Nebraskans planted more than a million trees in celebration of the first Arbor Day. The occasion fulfilled the dream of Julius Sterling Morton, a newspaper editor and former governor of the Nebraska Territory. Morton, an ardent proponent of forestation, lobbied for years for a holiday to encourage the planting of trees. In 1885, thirteen years after Arbor Day was first celebrated, Nebraskans changed the date to April 22 in honor of Morton's birthday. Arbor Day is now officially celebrated worldwide on the last Friday in April.

By 1907, Arbor Day was observed in every state in the Union, principally through school programs. Schoolchildren were urged, through these celebrations, to consider the planting of a tree as a patriotic, even pious, act, as well as a sound investment and a contribution to community aesthetics.

The first U.S. submarine

On **April 11**, 1900, the U.S. Navy acquired its first submarine, a 53-foot craft designed by Irish immigrant John P. Holland. Propelled by gasoline while on the surface and by electricity when submerged, the Holland served as a blueprint for modern submarine design. By the eve of World War I, Holland and Holland-inspired vessels were a part of large naval fleets throughout the world.

Designs for underwater boats date back to the 1500s. In the nineteenth century, the first truly practical submarines began to appear.

The United States used subs in both the War of 1812 and the Civil War. It was not until World War I, however, that submarines emerged as major weapons.

Tax Day

April 15 is Tax Day. From its beginnings the United States raised revenue. Whiskey and tobacco taxes provided much of the government's early revenue. But, financing the Revolutionary War was expensive and the young U.S. struggled to raise funds from the thirteen states.

An income tax was first collected during the Civil War from 1862 to 1872. During the administration of President Grover Cleveland, the federal government again levied an income tax, enacted by Congress in 1894, but the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional. Supporters of an income tax were forced then to embark on the lengthy process of amending the Constitution. Not until the 16th Amendment was ratified in 1913 was Congress given the power "to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the states, and without regard to any census of enumeration."

Earthquake!

At 5:12 A.M. on **April 18**, 1906, an 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck San Francisco.

With thousands of un-reinforced brick buildings and closely spaced wooden Victorian dwellings, the city was poorly prepared for the quake. Collapsed buildings, broken chimneys, and a shortage of water due to broken mains led to several large fires that soon coalesced into a citywide holocaust. The fire raged for three days, sweeping over nearly a quarter of the city, including the entire downtown area.

Over 3,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of the disaster. Reconstruction proceeded at a furious pace, and by 1908, San Francisco was well on the way to recovery.

U.S. Declares War on Spain

On **April 25**, 1898, the United States formally declared war against Spain. The Monroe Doctrine, which since 1823 had viewed any European intervention in the Americas as a threat to U.S. security, coupled with the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor precipitated U.S. engagement.

Within months Spain's overseas empire, which had begun with Columbus' voyages of discovery and been long in the unraveling, finally collapsed under the U.S.'s two-pronged war strategy. Commodore George Dewey sailed to the Pacific the day war was declared and on May 1st defeated the Spanish fleet in the Philippines. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the U.S. Marines and other troops, including Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders, helped defeat Spanish forces in the Americas.

The U.S. and Spain signed a peace treaty in December of 1898. Spain gave up its claims to Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Guam and, for 20 million dollars, transferred the Philippines to the U.S. By contrast, the U.S. emerged from the war as a more significant player on the world stage.

Billy the Kid Escaped

Billy the Kid escaped from the Mesilla, New Mexico jailhouse on **April 30**, 1881, killing two deputies on guard. He avoided capture until July 14, when he was ambushed and killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett at the ranch home of Pete Maxwell. Billy the Kid is buried in Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

Billy the Kid was born on New York City's East Side, in 1859 or 1860. By the time he was a young teenager, he had moved with his family to New Mexico, by way of Kansas and Colorado. While still a boy, Billy the Kid began roaming the Southwest and northern Mexico, frequently with gangs. Reputed to have been responsible for the murder of 27 men by the time he was 21 years old, he had been convicted of murder and sentenced to hang when he made his dramatic escape from the Mesilla jail.

Billy the Kid's true identity is still a matter of speculation. Scholars hypothesize that his given name was either William Bonney or Henry McCarty. There are those who believe that after he escaped, he became a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Parade under the name of "Brushy Bill" Roberts.

Muhammad Ali refuses Army induction

On **April 28**, 1967, boxing champion Muhammad Ali refuses to be inducted into the U.S. Army and is immediately stripped of his heavyweight title. Ali, a Muslim, cited religious reasons for his decision to forgo military service.

Born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr., in Louisville, Kentucky, on January 14, 1942, the future three-time world champ changed his name to Muhammad Ali in 1964 after converting to Islam. He scored a gold medal at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome and made his professional boxing debut against Tunney Husaker on October 29, 1960, winning the bout in six rounds. On February 25, 1964, he defeated the heavily favored bruiser Sonny Liston in six rounds to become heavyweight champ.

On April 28, 1967, with the United States at war in Vietnam, Ali refused to be inducted into the armed forces, saying "I ain't got no quarrel with those Vietcong." On June 20, 1967, Ali was convicted of draft evasion, sentenced to five years in prison, fined \$10,000 and banned from boxing for three years. He stayed out of prison as his case was appealed and returned to the ring on October 26, 1970, knocking out Jerry Quarry in Atlanta in the third round. On March 8, 1971, Ali fought Joe Frazier in the "Fight of the Century" and lost after 15 rounds, the first loss of his professional boxing career. On June

28 of that same year, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction for evading the draft.

At a January 24, 1974, rematch at New York City's Madison Square Garden, Ali defeated Frazier by decision in 12 rounds. On October 30 of that same year, an underdog Ali bested George Foreman and reclaimed his heavyweight champion belt at the hugely hyped "Rumble in the Jungle" in Kinshasa, Zaire, with a knockout in the eighth round. On October 1, 1975, Ali met Joe Frazier for a third time at the "Thrilla in Manila" in the Philippines and defeated him in 14 rounds. On February 15, 1978, Ali lost the title to Leon Spinks in a 15-round split decision. However, seven months later, on September 15, Ali won it back. In June 1979, Ali announced he was retiring from boxing. He returned to the ring on October 2, 1980, and fought heavyweight champ Larry Holmes, who knocked him out in the 11th round. After losing to Trevor Berbick on December 11, 1981, Ali left the ring for the final time, with a 56-5 record. He is the only fighter to be heavyweight champion three times.

Grace Kelly meets Prince Rainier

On **May 6**, 1955, actress Grace Kelly meets her future husband, Prince Rainier of Monaco, while on a photo shoot for a French fashion magazine. For Kelly, it wasn't love at first sight, but the two began corresponding and got married less than a year later.

Kelly, the daughter of a former model and a wealthy industrialist, began acting as a child. After high school, she attended the American Academy for Dramatic Arts in New York. She auditioned for Broadway plays and supported herself by modeling and appearing in TV commercials.

In 1949, she debuted on Broadway in *The Father* by August Strindberg. Two years later, she landed her first Hollywood bit part, in *Fourteen Hours*. Her big break came in 1952, when she starred as Gary Cooper's wife in *High Noon*. Her performance in *The Country Girl*, as the long-suffering wife of an alcoholic songwriter, played by Bing Crosby, won her an Oscar in 1954. The same year, she played opposite Jimmy Stewart in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*.

Kelly retired from acting after she became Princess Grace of Monaco. She had three children and occasionally narrated documentaries. Kelly died tragically at the age of 52, when her car plunged off a mountain road by the Cote D'Azur in September 1982.

Soviets to boycott L.A. Olympics

Citing fears for the safety of its athletes in what it considered a hostile and anti-communist environment, the Soviet government announces a boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympic Games to be held in Los Angeles, California.

Although the Soviets had cited security concerns, the boycott was more likely the result of strained Cold War relations due to America's generous aid to Muslim rebels fighting in Afghanistan - and payback for the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. A number of other Soviet Bloc countries and Cuba followed suit in boycotting the Los Angeles Games, which carried on without the presence of many of the communist world's best athletes. China, however, participated in the Los Angeles Summer Games in its first Olympic appearance since 1952.

"Rock Around the Clock" released

"Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets is released on **May 10**, 1954. A year later, the song became the first rock and roll number to top the charts.

When the song was first released, it barely made the pop charts, spending only one week at No. 23. A year later, though, it became a hit after producer James Myers sent copies of the song to dozens of Hollywood producers and suggested they use it in a movie. The producers of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), a controversial film about juvenile delinquency, selected the song as the movie's opening music. After the movie opened, sales of "Rock Around the Clock" skyrocketed, selling six million copies by the end of 1955. The song climbed to the top of the charts in July 1955, becoming the first rock and roll song to reach No. 1.