

# FOUR-MINUTE SPEECH

1918

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## Committee on Public Information

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After the United States declared war on Germany on April 2, 1917, Woodrow Wilson appointed George Creel (1876–1953) a liberal journalist to head the Committee on Public Information (CPI) in order to raise public support and money for the war effort. One CPI program sent 75,000 Four-Minute Men to “carry the flaming arrow into every corner of America” by delivering speeches in movie houses. Other divisions formed and the combined groups delivered about 1 million speeches.

### READING FOCUS:

How did this Four-Minute speech use exaggeration to sway public opinion?

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While we are sitting here tonight enjoying a picture show, do you realize that thousands and thousands of Belgians, people just like ourselves, are *languishing in slavery* under Prussian masters?

Driven into slavery, after they were lured back home by Prussian promises—Prussian scraps of paper.

Read the stories of deliberate *governmentally ordered* brutalities as told in the book, *German War Practices*, recently published by the Government’s Committee on Public Information.

Read how the Prussian war lords robbed Belgium, pilfered and stole. How they extorted fines of millions of francs for trivial reasons—e.g. 5,000 francs (5,000,000?) (\$1,000,000) in Brussels because of an attack by a policeman; 200,000 marks at Tournai for refusal to send a list of citizens. Taxes went to 50,000 francs a month and more in Belgium.

Prussian “Schrecklichkeit” (the deliberate policy of terrorism) leads to almost unbelievable besotten brutality. The German soldiers—their letters are reprinted—were often forced against their wills, they themselves weeping, to carry out unspeakable orders against defenseless old men, women, and children, so that “*respect*” might grow for German “efficiency.” For instance, at Dinant the wives and children of 40 men were forced to witness the execution of their husbands and fathers.

Now, then, do you want to take the *slightest* chance of meeting Prussianism here in America?

If not, then you’ll have to help in summoning all the resources of this country for the giant struggle. For resources will win the war.

Here’s the way you can help save our resources. Instead of throwing money away on unnecessary things, buy Thrift Stamps, 25 cents, and War-Savings-Stamps, \$4.12, worth \$5 in five years, 4 per cent compound interest. They’re good as government money; like a mortgage on the U.S.A. Here’s one of the War-Savings Certificates, and here’s a Thrift Card. Ask at any post office, any bank, or store wherever you see a W.S.S. sign.

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It is up to us. We, the people, must win the war.

*Words That Won the War* by James R. Mock and Cedric Larson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), pp. 123–124.

### **Analysis Questions:**

1. What does the speech equate with “Prussianism”?
2. What does the speech encourage Americans to do?