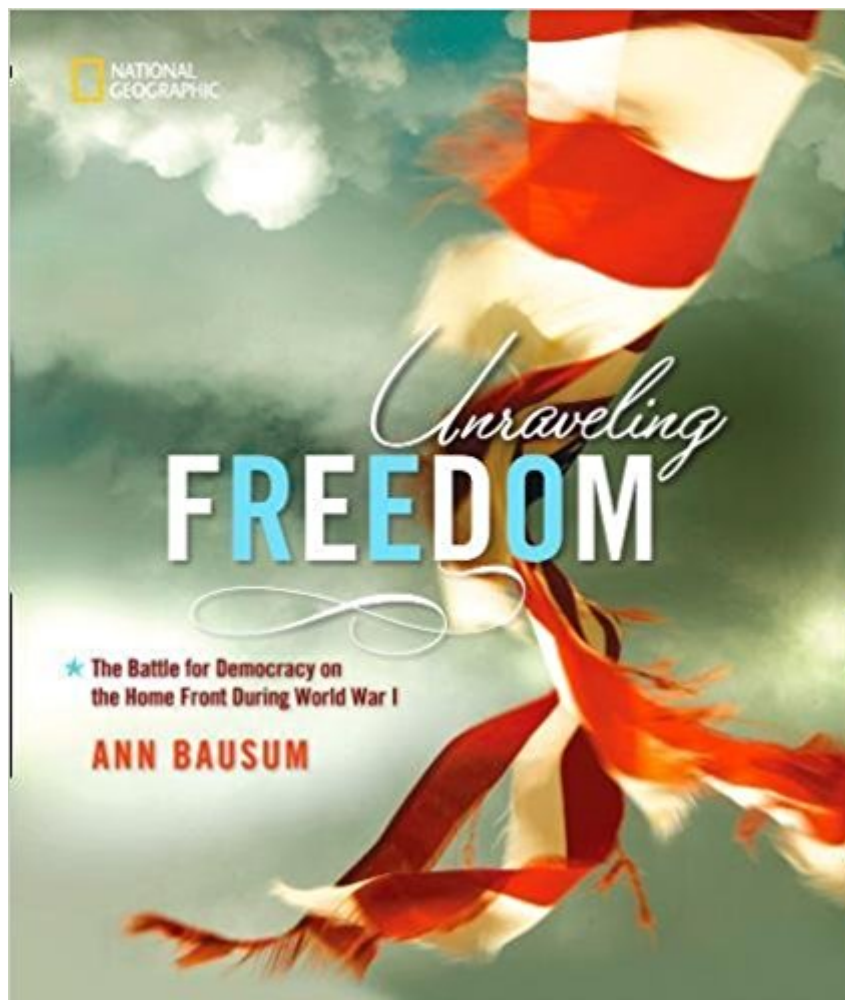




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Unraveling Freedom: The Battle For Democracy On The Home Front During World War I



Synopsis

In 1915, the United States experienced the 9/11 of its time. A German torpedo sank the Lusitania killing nearly 2,000 innocent passengers. The ensuing hysteria helped draw the United States into World War I—the bitter, brutal conflict that became known as the Great War and the War to End All Wars. But as U.S. troops fought to make the world safe for democracy abroad, our own government eroded freedoms at home, especially for German-Americans. Free speech was no longer an operating principle of American democracy. Award-winning author Ann Bausum asks, just where do Americans draw the line of justice in times of war? Drawing thought-provoking parallels with President Wilson's government and other wartime administrations, from FDR to George W. Bush, Bausum's analysis has plenty of history lessons for the world today. Her exhaustive research turns up astonishing first-person stories and rare images, and the full-color design is fresh and stunning. The result is a gripping book that is well-positioned for the run-up to the World War I centennial. National Geographic supports K-12 educators with ELA Common Core Resources. Visit www.natgeoed.org/commoncore for more information.

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Gr 7-10—Comparing the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 to the 9/11 attacks, Bausum describes the events that would eventually lead the U.S. into the European conflict that ultimately became World War I. She then turns her attention to describing the destruction of civil liberties by President Wilson, Congress, and those in control of political power during the country's campaign to

“make the world safe for democracy.” Freedom of speech was especially limited by the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. Various government agencies and the courts encouraged citizens to spy on one another. Socialists such as Eugene Debs were tried, convicted, and given long prison sentences for speaking out against the war. Specific attention is also paid to the efforts of Edith Wilson and the president’s cabinet to deceive the public and hide his debilitating illness. Black-and-white archival photos and political cartoons are arranged in an artistic manner with informative captions. Red and blue backgrounds create a dramatic effect in the layout of the text. Appropriate quotations by various people of the time are displayed in elegant fonts. Make this unique and timely offering a definite first purchase. Eldon Younce, Anthony Public Library, KS. (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Starred Review Writer of the Sibert Honor Book *Freedom Riders* (2006), Bausum looks at America during the WWI period, when fear and intolerance led to the persecution of German Americans, socialists, and peace activists. Beginning with the sinking of the passenger ship *Lusitania* by a German submarine, she discusses government propaganda and the mounting public intolerance, outrage, and violence against all things German. New sedition and espionage acts enabled officials to intimidate or imprison those who might disagree with their positions. Without belaboring the point, Bausum connects the dots between responses to the 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania* and the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center. Although much of the detail in Bausum’s chapter on the *Lusitania*’s sinking seems irrelevant to the main theme, the book as a whole is well focused, well reasoned, and clearly written. Handsomely designed, it features color reproductions of period photos, drawings, paintings, and documents. Back matter includes citations, notes, a bibliography, lists of recommended resources, a detailed time line, and a useful “Guide to Wartime Presidents,” which identifies eight wartime periods in America and, for each, discusses whether (and how) freedom was curtailed and provides a presidential quote. A fascinating, informative book on a topic of perennial concern. Grades 8-11. --Carolyn Phelan

This book wasn’t all I thought it would be. It kept talking around the subject in many ways. Sometimes it was very direct, and sometimes it would sneak up on a point in a very annoying way. It was good - we finished it and I am loaning it to a friend, but I wouldn’t pay that much for this book again based on what I got out of it.

Who could have predicted that WWI would become the hot literary topic for child readers in 2009-10? I remember when I was a kid and WWI was glossed over in the midst of my time-pressed teachers' efforts to explain about WWII. WWII was always the war that got more attention, and for good reason. What is there to say about a war that was fought for no good reason and left a nation ripe for the rise of Hitler? Lately, though, a couple authors have found ways to present WWI for young readers in ways that not only explain the war but also delve into its deeper meanings. There was *Truce* by Jim Murphy, which talked about the first year of the war and how close the soldiers on the home front came to ending it on their own. Then there was *The War to End All Wars: World War I* by Russell Freedman which may be the most thorough examination of the war as written for young readers yet. I like both of those books, but the title that has particularly captured my heart is "Unraveling Freedom" by Ann Bausum. Taking the war away from the reader's focus, Bausum places her attention not on the front, but at home. Why does America fight for freedom while simultaneously denying its citizens their own freedom at home? This is more than just a single war Bausum is talking about. When examined under the right circumstances, WWI is just a standard operating plan for a lot of wars fought before the 20th century, and a lot of wars since. Thousands of Germans lived in America on the eve of WWI. Then the hysteria began. It is easy to forget that even as the United States fought abroad for freedom, back at home many of its citizens were oppressed for their beliefs, customs, language, and heritage. Mobs created to "root out spies and enemies" ended with 70 dead and lynched Americans (and not a single one a true spy). Businesses died, the German language was no longer taught, and lives were destroyed. Ann Bausum chronicles with amazing clarity what happens to a country when freedoms are allowed to disappear in the name of war. The parallels between WWI and what's happening today are unavoidable, and teach a definite lesson about what we should remember when we find ourselves fighting. Backmatter includes a Guide to Wartime Presidents, a Timeline, a Bibliography, and a Resource Guide. As I mentioned earlier, WWI got kind of glossed over when I was in elementary/middle/high school. As such, I was a bit sketchy on the whole Lusitania business. Even after reading the aforementioned "Truce" I was still unclear. I knew it was a big boat and it was blown up by Germany but did anyone actually die? Did Germany mean to blow it up or was it an accident? Bausum rightly gives over a full chapter to the Lusitania disaster. And though she mentions 9/11 in passing, the parallels between Lusitania's sinking and the destruction of the World Trade Towers is remarkable, both in terms of life lost and how small elements contributed to a gigantic disaster. Kids are often so wrapped up in how the Titanic sank that they might never know how much worse, in some ways, the Lusitania's sinking was. As a result, you would have expected

America to immediately enter in the WWI fray. What is remarkable is that the U.S. didn't go in for another two years. With that in mind, it's hard not to wish that we hadn't entered the war at all. Clearly, there was a moment there where it was possible to stay out entirely. At the end of this book is a remarkably clever Guide to Wartime Presidents that should be required reading of every schoolchild in America. In it, Bausum lists each war America has fought, both officially and unofficially, and lists the presidents that served during that time. She then breaks everything down to the dates, the President, the adversary, and the way in which we witnessed "unraveling freedom on the home front." Prepare to be disillusioned, people. While the book lists some facts that we already know (FDR and the Japanese internment camps, the Cold War and Senator Joe McCarthy) there are a couple here that may shock you. Having recently watched and enjoyed the HBO *John Adams* miniseries, I was appalled to learn that during the Quasi-War of 1787-1800, Adams passed the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, deported "suspicious" immigrants, and silenced the media. The worst part? Abigail Adams was all for it, saying, "a more careful and attentive watch ought to be kept over foreigners." The Lincoln acts are terrible but less surprising. In fact, out of all the Presidents listed here, the fellow who ends up smelling like roses is the too little lauded but awfully smart James Madison. The War of 1812 was booming and Madison didn't repress a soul. As Bausum writes, "The War of 1812 represents the rare instance in U.S. history when conflicts abroad did not foster the unraveling of freedom at home." Non-fiction gets a bad rap, partly because folks have only relatively recently figured out how to make informative books for children accurate AND interesting. [You could probably make the argument that this applies to adult non-fiction as well, but let's not go into that right now.] Part of this is based on the writing found within the books from the get go. Take "Unraveling Freedom". In this book you open it up and the first sentence, the VERY FIRST SENTENCE, reads "In the Spring of 1917, as the United States prepared to declare war on Germany and enter the fight that would become known as World War I, nearly one quarter of all Americans had either been born in Germany or had descended from Germans." Right there, page one, Bausum has you hooked. You are hers to toy with. She has hit on a true fact that is also a little known fact, and also happens to be a fact that will set up the entire point of this book. Now read any book on WWI for kids written more than twenty (heck, ten) years ago and find me a title that begins that well. Can't be done. We are truly in a golden age of good informative texts for youth. The pretty pictures don't hurt any either. Bausum is always smart enough to know that if you include blocks of pure text for long periods of time, you may continue to interest the die hard history fans, but those just dabbling their toes in truth are going to get scared away mighty quickly. Fortunately there are ways to overcome this problem. First off, there's the size of this

book. At 10.3" X 8.9" it comes off as big, which is fun, and thin, which is even more fun. Though she packs a punch in her slim 88 pages, this book looks like a suspiciously quick read. Add in the multiple photographs, editorial cartoons, propaganda, and newspaper articles and you've got yourself one enticing looking title. Bausum does a brilliant job of finding the right materials too. I don't know where she located the amazing editorial cartoon that precedes the Foreword, but nothing could begin the book better. Where else will you find messages to our allies, troops, Congress, and oppressed people, alongside a surprisingly ecumenical message to the German people abroad and a surprisingly vicious (not to say insulting) message to "pacifists and meddlers" at home. You could teach an entire unit on WWI based on that cartoon alone. Bausum's books are always good. I mean that. Each and every last one of them is good. Obviously this applies to her best known books like *With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote* and *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. But it also applies to some of her lesser known books like *Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration* and *Muckrakers: How Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens Helped Expose Scandal, Inspire Reform, and Invent Investigative Journalism*. When you walk into a Bausum title you know that you're going to get information on an old topic now seen in a new light and written in a style that isn't just accessible but entrancing as well. Ms. Bausum makes you want to know more. To grab ahold of her Bibliography with both hands and just read everything in there. That is as fine and noble response as any non-fiction author of child and teen fare could hope for. And in *Unraveling Freedom* you have one of Bausum's best works yet. Necessary reading for ages nine to ninety.

I learned a lot about world war 1 especially but I found myself wishing there was a more enjoyable way to learn this information

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