

Document A: Woodrow Wilson Speech #1 (Modified)

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle.

Such divisions among us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one nation ready to play a part of mediator and counselor of peace.

The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action.

Vocabulary

mediator: someone who helps two groups reach an agreement

impartial: taking no sides

Source: *President Woodrow Wilson, in a speech before Congress, August 19, 1914.*

Document B: Woodrow Wilson Speech #2 (Modified)

Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

The German policy has swept every restriction aside. Ships of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom of the ocean without warning. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken.

I advise that the Congress declare the recent actions of the Imperial German Government to be, in fact, nothing less than war against the Government and people of the United States.

Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved.

The world must be made safe for democracy. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek not material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind.

It is a fearful, but right thing to lead this great peaceful people to war. We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy, for the right of [people] to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations.

Vocabulary

commerce: trade

feasible: possible

dominion: control or domination

material compensation: money

Source: *President Woodrow Wilson, in a speech before Congress, April 2, 1917.*

Document C: Historian Howard Zinn (Modified)

President Woodrow Wilson had promised that the United States would stay neutral in the war. But in April of 1917, the Germans had announced they would have their submarines sink any ship bringing supplies to their enemies; and they had sunk a number of merchant ships. Wilson now said he must stand by the right of Americans to travel on merchant ships in the war zone.

This was a flimsy argument. The British had also been intruding on the rights of American citizens on the high seas, but Wilson was not suggesting we go to war with them.

The United States claimed the *Lusitania* carried an innocent cargo, and therefore the torpedoing was a monstrous German atrocity. Actually, the *Lusitania* was heavily armed: it carried 1,248 cases of 3-inch shells, 4,927 boxes of cartridges (1,000 rounds in each box), and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition. The British and American governments lied about the cargo.

Prosperity came from doing business in foreign markets, it was believed by the leaders of the country. In 1897, private companies had invested \$700 million in foreign nations. By 1914, they had invested \$3.5 billion...

With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and for high-interest loans. In 1915, Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies, and bankers could now begin lending money in such great amounts as to both make great profit and tie American finance closely to the interest of a British victory in the war against Germany.

Source: Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, New York: HarperCollins, 1980. Howard Zinn is a historian and activist who is best known today as the author of A People's History of the United States, a book that tells American history from the perspective of minorities, women, and poor people, and that is very critical of the United States government.

Guiding Questions for Textbook:

1. What are TWO reasons that the textbook gives for why the U.S. entered the war?
2. Based on the reasons in Wilson's 1917 speech and in the textbook, do you think the United States had good reasons for entering WWI?

Guiding Questions for Howard Zinn:

1. Sourcing: Before reading the document, what do you predict Howard Zinn will say about the United States' reasons for entering WWI?
2. Close reading; Why does Zinn claim that Wilson made a "flimsy argument?"
3. Close reading: What does Zinn suggest are the *real* reasons the United States entered the war?
4. Close reading: What evidence does Zinn provide to support his claims that the United States was motivated by other reasons (besides German attacks on U.S. ships)?
5. Do you find Zinn's argument convincing? Why or why not?