

## US Entry into World War I Document Analysis

**Essential Question: Why did the United States enter World War I?**

Directions: Read and annotate each document, and answer each question. Then answer the essential question in the space provided citing specific evidence from the documents.

### **Document A: Woodrow Wilson Speech #1**

Source: Modified excerpt of Wilson's speech before Congress on August 19, 1914

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.

1. Based on this speech, does Wilson think the United States should enter World War I? Why does he feel that way?

### **Document B: Woodrow Wilson Speech #2**

Source: Modified excerpt of Wilson's speech before Congress on April 2, 1917.

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 of liberties of small nations.

2. Wilson's opinion of whether the US should enter the war changes between the first speech and the second. Based on this speech, what is his opinion now?
  
3. What happened to make his opinion change between August 1914 and April 1917?
  
4. Why do you think Wilson added the last two paragraphs of his speech? How do you think these words made Americans feel?

### **Document C: Textbook Excerpt on US Entry into WWI**

Source: *The American Journey*, New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2003.

In January 1917, Germany reversed its policy on submarine warfare. It announced that it would sink on sight all merchant vessels, armed or unarmed, sailing to Allied ports. While realizing that their policy might bring the Americans into war, the Germans believed they could defeat the Allies before the United States became heavily involved. An angry president Wilson broke off diplomatic relations with Germany.

A few weeks later, a secret telegram - intercepted by the British government - set off a new wave of anti-German feeling. In late February, the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmerman, sent a telegram to Mexico with an offer to the Mexican government.

Newspapers published the secret Zimmerman telegram on March 1, and the Americans reacted angrily to the German action.

5. What are two reasons that this textbook excerpt gives for why the US entered the war?
  
6. Based on the reasons in Wilson's 1917 speech and in this textbook excerpt, do you think the United States had good reasons for entering World War I? Why or why not?

## Document D: Historian Howard Zinn

Source: Excerpt from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, 1980

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

As Richard Hofstadter points out (*The American Tradition*): "This was rationalization of the flimsiest sort... 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 each box), and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition....

Prosperity depended much on foreign markets, it was believed by the leaders of the country. In 1897, private foreign investments of the United States amounted to \$700 million dollars. By 1914, they were \$3.5 billion...

With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and loans at interest. J.P. Morgan and Company acted as agents for the Allies and when, in 1915, Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies, Morgan 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.

7. What does Zinn suggest are the *real* reasons the United States entered the war?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What evidence does Zinn provide to support his claims that the United States was motivated by other reasons besides German attacks on US ships?

