

NAME: _____ PER. _____

The United States Declaration of Neutrality (1914)

War in Europe broke out in August 1914. Shortly after the start of the conflict, President Woodrow Wilson sent the following message to Congress .

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned.

The spirit of the nation in this critical matter will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits, and men proclaim as their opinions upon the street.

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 there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle.

It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to **allay** [soothe] it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility, responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honor and affection to think first of her and her interests, may be divided in camps of hostile opinion... .

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a **partisan** [a person or party who is not impartial], but as a friend.

I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. 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, must put a curb upon our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be **construed** [seen as] as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.

1. Why has the U.S., since the presidency of George Washington, sought to maintain neutrality in European affairs?
2. Why is it natural that many people in America will have strong feelings about the war?

The Zimmermann Telegram (1917)

On January 16, 1917, German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a telegram to the German minister to Mexico stating Germany's intention to reinstate unlimited submarine warfare on the world's oceans in an attempt to bring World War I to a close. Such a policy was sure to infuriate the United States, which had maintained its neutrality in the conflict up until this point. Zimmermann also directed the minister to forge a German-Mexican alliance in case the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies. British intelligence decoded the telegram and handed its contents over the U.S. State Department, which in turn announced it to the American press on March 1, 1917. U.S. outrage over Germany's dealings with Mexico served to heighten the calls for American entry into the war, which were answered when the United States declared war on Germany on April 6.

Berlin, January 19, 1917

On the first of February we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this it is our intention to keep neutral the United States of America.

If this attempt is not successful we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left for your settlement.

You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above in the greatest confidence as soon as it is certain there will be an outbreak of war with the United States, and we suggest that the President of Mexico on his own initiative should communicate with Japan suggesting adherence at once to this plan; at the same time offer to mediate between Germany and Japan.

Please call to the attention of the President of Mexico that the employment of ruthless submarine warfare now promises to compel England to make peace in a few months.

Zimmermann.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why would Germany want the U.S. to fight a war with Mexico?
2. How realistic was the plan for Mexico to recapture land it lost in the 1846-1848 war with the United States?
3. Japan, which had a treaty with the Entente (Britain, France, and Russia) had captured the German island colonies in the Pacific Ocean. What could Germany realistically offer Japan as an incentive to switch sides in the war?

U.S. Declaration of War

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson sent this message to a special session of Congress, asking it to declare war against Germany and thus bring the United States into World War I. Relations between the two countries had been deteriorating for years, and Wilson's request was not unexpected by either Congress or the American people. On April 6, Congress complied,

We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling toward them but one of sympathy and friendship. It was not upon their impulse that their government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval. It was a war determined upon as wars used to be determined upon in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellowmen as pawns and tools.

One of the things that has served to convince us that the Prussian autocracy was not and could never be our friend is that from the very outset of the present war it has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies and set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot against our national unity of counsel, our peace within and without, our industries and our commerce. Indeed, it is now evident that its spies were here even before the war began.

But they have played their part in serving to convince us at last that that government entertains no real friendship for us and means to act against our peace and security at its convenience. That it means to stir up enemies against us at our very doors the intercepted note to the German minister at Mexico City is eloquent evidence.

The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities [money demanded from a defeated country] for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

1. Should Wilson be surprised that nations were engaged in espionage (spying)?
2. To what event does Wilson specifically refer when mentioning Prussian actions?
3. Why is the U.S. entering the war?
4. Do his reasons seem convincing to you? Explain your answer.

A German Propaganda Appeal to Black Soldiers

In an effort to undermine morale, both the Allied Powers and the Central Powers distributed propaganda tracts among the opposing troops.

This piece of German propaganda was directed toward black soldiers in France. According to scholar Charles Williams — who, with the cooperation of the secretary of war, the Federal Council of Churches, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund [a foundation set up to assist African-Americans in the South], investigated conditions for black recruits — the reaction of African American soldiers who read the propaganda was clear: “We know what they say is true, but don't worry; we're not going over.”

To the Colored Soldiers of the U.S. Army,
September, 1918
Vosges Mountains [eastern France]

Hello, boys,

What are you doing over there? Fighting the Germans? Why? Have they ever done you any harm? Of course, some white folks and the lying English-American papers told you that the Germans ought to be wiped out for the sake of humanity and democracy.

What is democracy? Personal freedom, all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law. Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and democracy? Or aren't you rather rated over there as second class citizens? Can you go to a restaurant where white people dine, can you get a seat in a theatre where white people sit, can you get a Pullman [railroad sleeper car] seat or berth in a railroad car, or can you ride in the South in the same street car with white people? And how about the law? Is lynching and the most horrible cruelties connected there- with a lawful proceeding in a democratic country?

Now all of this is entirely different in Germany, where they do like colored people, where they do treat them as gentlemen and not as second class citizens. They enjoy exactly the same social privileges as every white man, and quite a number of colored people have mighty fine positions in Berlin and other big German cities.

Why, then, fight the Germans only for the benefit of the Wall Street robbers to protect the millions they have lent to the English, French, and Italians? You have been made the tool of the egotistic and **rapacious** [greedy] rich in England and America, and there is nothing in the whole game for you but broken bones, horrible wounds, broken health or-death. No satisfaction whatever will you get out of this unjust war. You have never seen Germany; so you are fools if you allow people to teach you to hate it.

Come over and see for yourself. Let those do the fighting who make profit out of this war; don't allow them to use you as cannon food. To carry the gun in their defense is not an honor but a shame. Throw it away and come over to the German lines. You will find friends who will help you along.

A German Propaganda Appeal to Black Soldiers (continued)

[Note: Germany was the first of the belligerents to put black troops into battle. Black soldiers in the German colony of Kamerun, commanded by German officers, (modern-day Cameroon) fought against French and Belgian troops in Africa from 1914-1916. Undermanned and outgunned, the Germany colony was overrun.]

Questions:

1. In the United States, calling an African-American male "boy" was a common practice, but was derogatory in nature (few, if any, African-American males, no matter what their age, were called by full names or addressed as "Mister"). Here, is the use of the word "boys" racist? Explain your answer.
2. Are there any statements in this pamphlet that are not true?
3. If the information within this pamphlet is factual, can it rightly be called "propaganda"? Explain your answer.
4. According to Williams, who published a book on African-American soldiers after World War I, Black soldiers accepted the validity of this harsh description. Therefore, why were there virtually no defections by Black soldiers to the German side?

African-American Soldiers Return from War (1919)

W. E. B. Du Bois was an outstanding African-American writer, scholar, and leader. When black soldiers returned from service in World War I, Du Bois made a strong call for them to reject racism in America and demand equal treatment.

Here is an excerpt from that call. It appeared in *The Crisis*, the publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in 1919.

We are returning from war! . . . For bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us and humanity and against the threat of German race arrogance, we fought gladly and to the last drop of blood; for America and her highest ideals, we fought in far-off hope; for the dominant southern **oligarchy** [rule by a small group] **entrenched** [firmly in place] in Washington, we fought in bitter resignation. For the America that represents and **gloats** [brags; self-promoting] in lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult — for this, in the hateful upturning and mixing of things, we were forced **by vindictive** [vengeful] fate to fight, also.

But today we return! . . . We stand again to look America squarely in the face. . . . we sing: This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land.

It *lynches*. . . . It *disfranchises* its own citizens. . . . It encourages *ignorance*. . . . It *steals* from us. . . . It *insults* us.

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is *our* fatherland. It was right for us to fight. . . .

But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not **marshal** [pull together] every ounce of our brain and **brawn** [strength] to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

1. What does Du Bois mean when he says that African-American soldiers fought for “far-off hope” in America?
2. Why was it right for African-American soldiers to fight, according to Du Bois?
3. What is DuBois’s cautionary warning?

Schenck v. United States (1919)

Vocabulary

abridging Lessening, interfering with.

neutral Not allied with or supporting either side in a war or dispute.

draft To select people for required military service.

insubordination Unwillingness to accept orders from someone in authority.

affirm To agree or support, as when a higher court agrees with the earlier decision of a lower court.

Reviewing the Case

The First Amendment guarantee of free speech and expression reads: "Congress shall make no law . . . **abridging** the freedom of speech. . . ." But, at several different periods in the history of the United States, Congress has passed laws limiting how much citizens can criticize or resist government actions. Is this an abridgment of free speech? In the case of *Schenck v. United States*, the Supreme Court established a guideline that is still followed.

In 1917 the United States was still officially **neutral**, but its entry into World War I was imminent. To build up the army, Congress passed an act on May 18, 1917, that established a military **draft**. To encourage national unity in the war effort, Congress also passed several laws that limited criticism of the government and opposition to its policies. On June 15, 1917, Congress passed the Espionage Act. Sections of the Espionage Act prohibited any attempt to cause **insubordination** among military personnel or to interfere with the draft or with military recruitment.

Three days later Charles Schenck was arrested for violating the Espionage Act. He was accused of printing and mailing antiwar pamphlets to some 15,000 to 18,000 men who had been accepted for induction into the military under the Selective Service Act. Schenck was the general secretary of the American Socialist Party and, like most other members of the party, he strongly opposed the war. He

claimed it was being fought for the benefit of Wall Street investors who would profit from the sale of merchandise to the military.

The U.S. District Court for Pennsylvania ruled that the pamphlets were designed to cause men to resist the draft. Therefore, the court decided, Schenck had violated the Espionage Act. Schenck claimed there was not enough evidence to convict him of the charges that had been brought against him. He said

that his actions were a form of free speech and claimed that the Espionage Act abridged the rights of free speech. Thus, according to him, the act was unconstitutional. Convicted in the district court, Schenck appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The issue before the Court: Does the Espionage Act violate the First Amendment in respect to Schenck's freedom of speech?

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously to **affirm** the decision of the district court against Schenck. Writing for the Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes laid down a standard that would become famous:

We admit that in many places and in ordinary times the defendants in saying all that was said in the circular would have been within their constitutional rights. But the character of every act depends on the circumstances in which it is done. The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre, and causing a panic. . . . The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive [actual] evils that Congress has a right to prevent."

In the Schenck decision, the Supreme Court established clear limitations on freedom of speech. The guideline is the existence of a "clear and present danger," a situation in which free speech could bring harm to the general welfare. In such cases, Congress has the power to pass laws to protect its citizens

and the national security of the United States even if those laws abridge free speech. The "clear and present danger" test is a way to balance the rights of the individual with those of society.

According to Justice Holmes, it made no

difference that Schenck and the others had failed to interfere with military recruitment. ". . . We perceive no ground for saying that success alone warrants making the act a crime," he concluded.