

Reason 1: Economic Ties

Background: In 1914, Americans were interested in making money, and Europe had become a key place to sell US goods, including war materials, and to give loans that would be paid back with interest (interest is the extra money someone who borrows money has to pay to the person who gives them the loan). If the Allies were defeated by the Central Powers, they probably wouldn't be able to repay their debt to their US lenders. Many businessmen therefore supported the 'Preparedness Movement,' arguing the US should prepare to enter the war on the side of the Allies. The US economy benefited greatly from doing business in Europe.

Document A: US Economic Ties

Even though the United States was officially a neutral nation, its economy was in a recession and many saw the war as a financial opportunity to trade. The US economy profited greatly from orders for war supplies from the British, French AND Germans...The US was eager to trade with all European nations, but the British blockaded Germany to block their ability to trade, so US economic support largely went to the Allies instead.

Value of U.S. exports (items sold to other countries) for 1914:

- 1914 - \$824.8 million to Allies
- 1914 - \$169.3 million to Central Powers

Value of U.S. exports for 1916:

- 1916 - \$3.2 billion to Allies
- 1916 - \$1.2 million to Central Powers

Value of U.S. loans for 1917:

- 1917 - \$2.5 billion to Allies
- 1917 - \$27 million to Central Powers

Additional Loans made by JP Morgan (a US businessman & banker):

- 1914 - \$100 million to France
- 1914-1917: \$500,000,000 to all Allied powers to buy weapons and war goods

Document B: Historian Howard Zinn on the importance of US economic interests in WWI. (*interest is the extra money someone who borrows money has to pay to the person who gives them the loan)

"With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and for loans at interest. In 1915, Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies, and JP Morgan and others could now begin lending money in such great amounts and charge interest on repayment...If the Allies did not win the war, the US knew they would not be able to repay these loans and the US economy could be ruined"

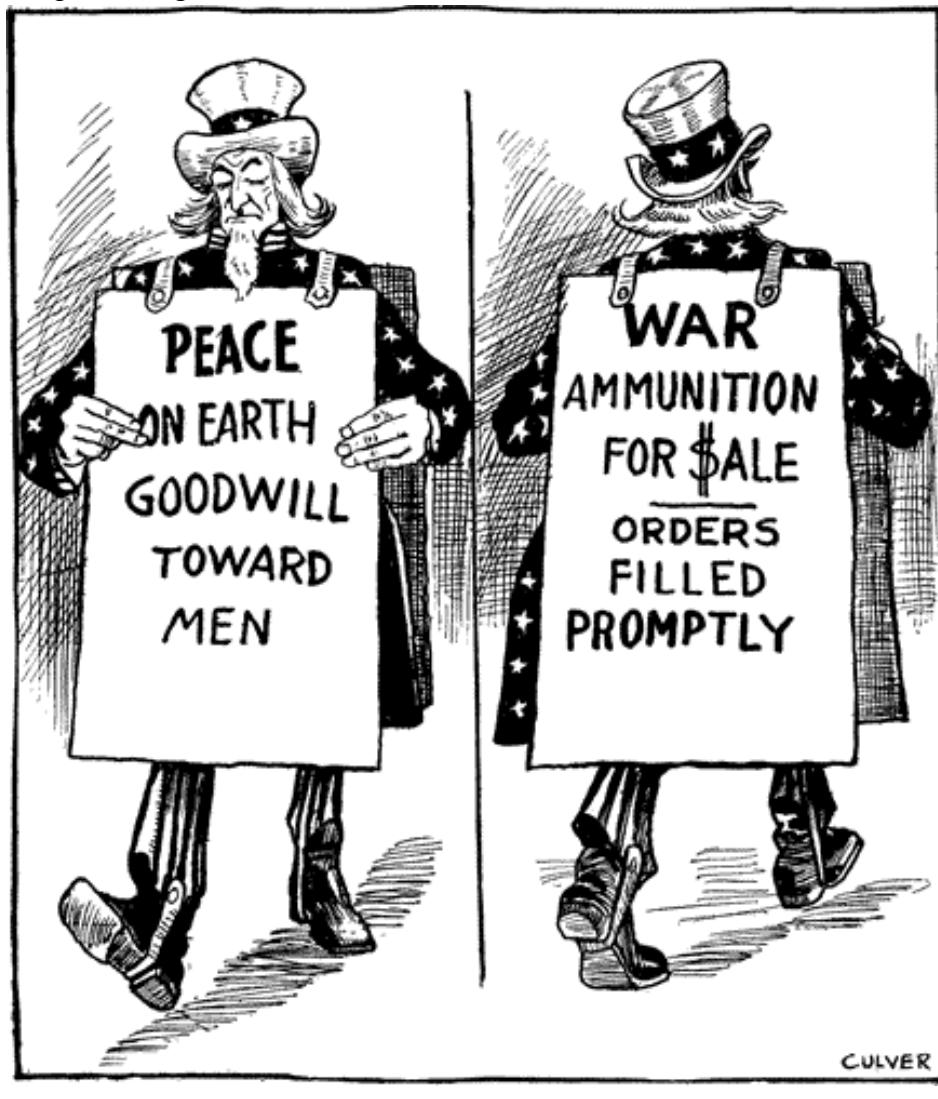
--Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, 1980.

Document C: A War for Business?

"Wall Street wanted war. American participation in the war against Germany would constitute the most tremendous and profitable success in the history of American finance... The war created 21,000 new American millionaires...There are individuals who have made millions out of the war in the manufacture of munitions [ammo] and weapons"

-- John Kenneth Turner, Shall It Be Again? 1922

Document D: A political cartoon entitled "The Sandwich Man" shows Uncle Sam as a hypocrite, advertising his desire for peace on the front board of his two-sided advertising board and promoting the sale of ammunition to both the Allies and Central Powers on the back.

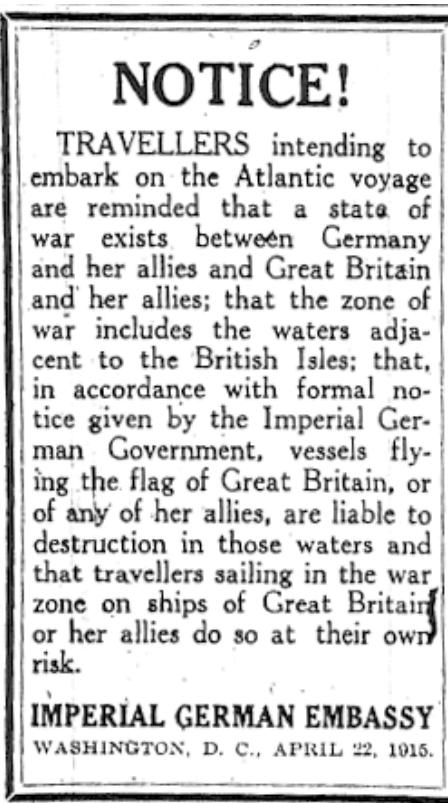


Reason 2: Unrestricted Submarine Warfare & Violating US Neutrality

Background: During WWI, Great Britain's navy very effectively blockaded Germany, preventing them from receiving needed supplies and food. In response, Germany started a policy of **unrestricted submarine warfare**. Under this policy, German U-boats (submarines) attacked and sank ships, even those from neutral countries like the US, angering many Americans.

Document A: The Lusitania

In 1915, German submarines sank a British passenger ship called the Lusitania, killing 128 Americans on board. In addition to civilians, the Lusitania was carrying thousands of



US manufactured weapons for the Allies.

Left: Before the sinking of the Lusitania, Germany issued warnings such as these, informing citizens that ships flying the British flag, or the flag of any of her allies, were subject to attack as they passed through the waters off the British Isles. The warning is the article on the right, while the post on the left is an advertisement for passengers to travel on the Lusitania.



Left: *The Seattle Star* reporting the sinking of the Lusitania:

Document B: Public Opinion

There was widespread public outcry against the sinking of the Lusitania, and many Americans demanded an apology. However, despite this anger toward German actions, when New York newspapers asked editors around the country how the United States should respond to the *Lusitania* sinking, only six out of the thousand who responded (6%) said the US should enter the war.

The editorial below appeared in an American newspaper the day after the Lusitania sank.

New York Times editorial

WAR BY ASSASSINATION!

...In the history of wars there is no single deed comparable in its inhumanity and its horror to the destruction, without warning, by German torpedoes of the great steamship *Lusitania*, with more than 1800 souls aboard, among them more than 100 Americans.

--*New York Times* editorial, 1915

Document C: The Sussex Pledge

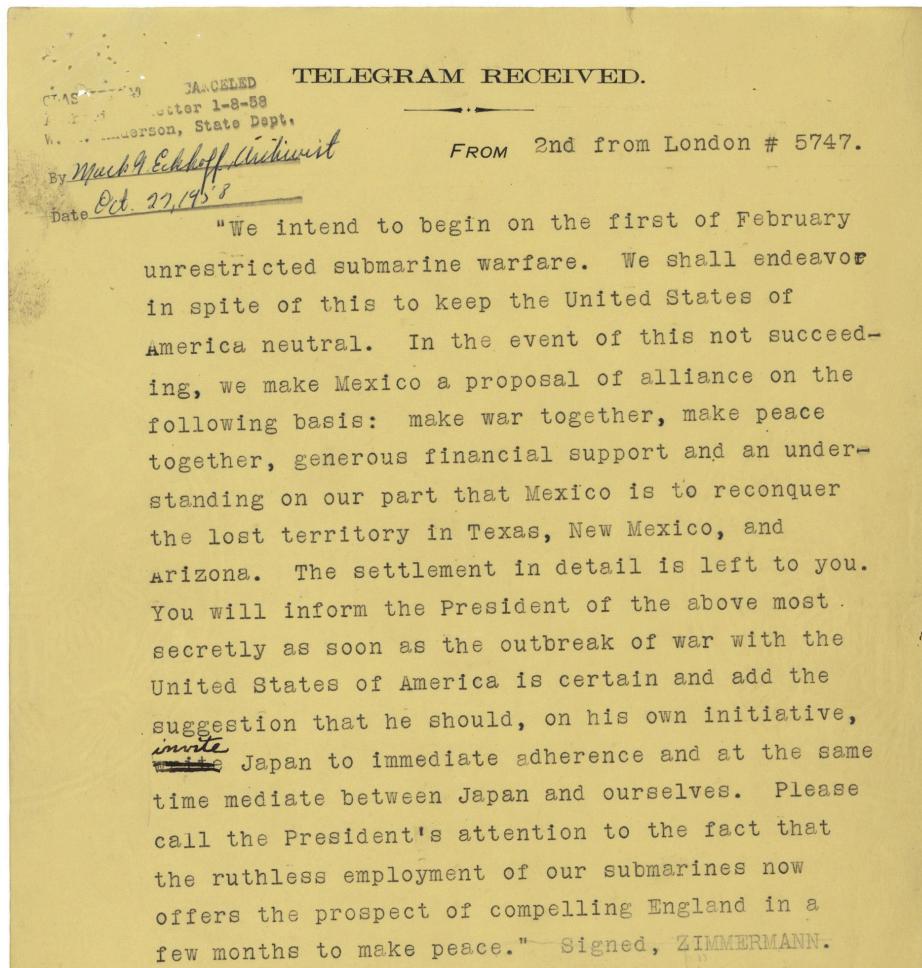
President Wilson threatened that if Germany continued attacking neutral ships, the US would take action. Fearing the entry of the United States into the war, Germany tried to appease (calm) the United States by issuing the **Sussex pledge in May 1916, changing their policies about unrestricted submarine warfare**. In the Sussex Pledge, Germany promised:

- Passenger ships would not be targeted
- Merchant (trade) ships carrying weapons would be given a warning before being sunk in order to allow the crew to evacuate safely

Germany repealed (canceled) the Sussex Pledge in January of 1917 because Germany believed it could win the war before the US entered. Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare against US ships in February. In April 1917 (2 months later), the US declared war on Germany.

Reason 3: The Zimmerman Telegram & Plots against the US

This telegram was sent by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the President of Mexico in 1917. The Germans promised they would help the Mexicans reclaim New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona from the United States (land which they had lost during the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848). Relations between the US and Mexico had been tense since President Wilson sent troops into Mexico to "stabilize" the country in 1914.



Doc B: "When the Zimmerman Telegram was published in the newspapers, American public opinion turned to support war against Germany. Wilson reluctantly knew after this point, war with Germany was inevitable."

--Historian Barbara W. Tuchman, 1966



Left: A US newspaper reporting on the release of the Zimmerman Telegram.

Reason 4: German & Ottoman Brutality & The War as “Good vs Evil”

Background: Even before World War I began, American opinion had been more negative toward Germany than toward any other country in Europe. By 1917, many Americans felt that a German victory would be a threat to American ideals and freedom. After reports of German brutality in Belgium in 1914 and German attacks on neutral ships, the American citizens increasingly came to see Germany as the aggressor in Europe. In 1914 Germany invaded Belgium and attacked the civilian population, destroying property and killing over 23,000 Belgians. In the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Turks massacred millions of Armenians, who were an ethnic minority in the empire.

Document A: Bryce Report into German Atrocities in Belgium, May 12, 1915

During the war, the German Army occupied neutral Belgium. There were widespread reports that the Germans were mistreating civilians in Belgium, including this report by a British official.

“Individual acts of brutality treatment of civilians, rape, plunder, and the like - were very widely committed...there is evidence that intoxication was extremely common among the German army...Many of the worst actions appear to have been committed by men under the influence of drink [alcohol]...”

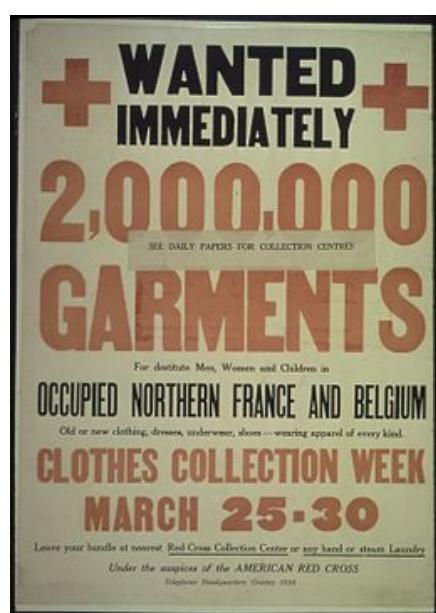
Document B: Theodore Roosevelt, Letter to the Duke of Earl [a British royal], 1915

Theodore Roosevelt wrote a letter describing how German actions in Belgium impacted US public opinion about the war.

“There is such a thing as international morality...There have been [changes] in American opinion about the war. The actions of the Germans in Belgium have created feelings in favor of the Allies.”

Document C: Humanitarian Efforts (humanitarian aid refers to welfare/assistance to people or places in need)

After Germany invaded Belgium, future president Herbert Hoover created a massive relief organization, the Commission for Relief in Belgium. The organization sent 6 million tons of food and millions of dollars worth of clothing and supplies to just about every European country, saving close to 10 million lives.



Special trucks and ships were operated by the CRB to distribute rations to more than 2,500 villages and towns. Posters were made to encourage participation in the relief effort.



Document D: Headlines from *The Washington Herald* and *The New York Times* about the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. During WWI, the Ottoman Turks, allied with Germany, massacred millions of Armenians in Turkey because they were a different ethnic group. (The Ottoman Empire is present day Turkey).



American Committee on Relief
Says Victims of Turks Are
Steadily Increasing.

POLICY OF EXTERMINATION

More Atrocities Detailed in Support
of Charge That Turkey Is
Acting Deliberately.

Reason 5: Propaganda & Public Pressure to Join the War **Propaganda is information, statements or ideas used to influence the way people think or to promote a certain belief or point of view.

Document A: Public Opinion & Propaganda

"The American people enthusiastically launched themselves into the war in part due to the power of propaganda in generating common action...newspapers have been controlled and used to create favor for the war as our duty to humanity...the war was framed as good vs evil, democracy vs German autocracy (a system of government with one supreme leader holding power)."

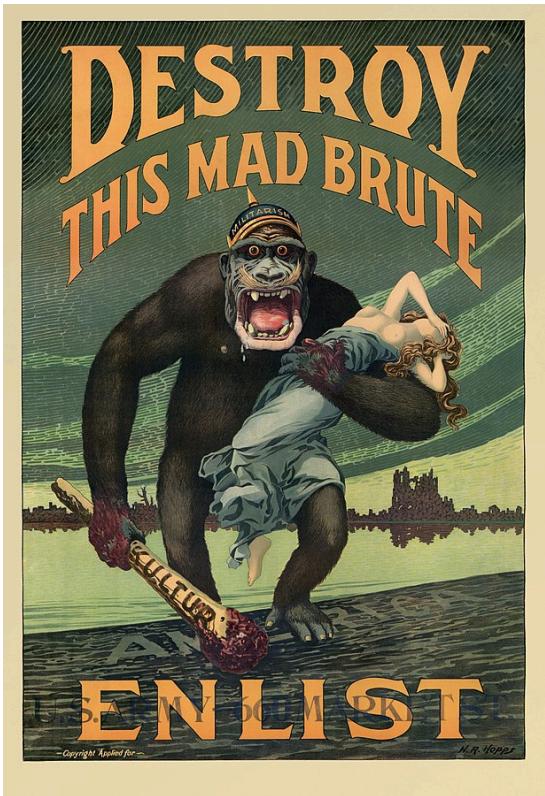
--James Duane Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States*, 1935

Document B: The term "The Rape of Belgium" was used in the United States as a propaganda device to describe the brutality Germans were using in Belgium.



Document C: British Propaganda

Even before the US entered the war, British and American newspapers created Propaganda poster such as they one below to turn public opinion against the Germans:



The Ape represents German soldiers. His helmet says "militarism," while his club says "kulture," the German spelling of culture. Germans were seen as uncivilized animals (brutes) who were trying to force their version of "culture" on others.

Document D: The Preparedness Movement

The Preparedness Movement was started by US leaders who wanted the US to prepare to join WWI. They created movies and posters like the one on the left that sent the message that being prepared was the only way to stop the Germans and keep America safe. In 1916, the movement pressured President Wilson to sign the National Defense Act, doubling the size of the US Army.

