

Name:
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Excerpts from President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality (August 19, 1914)

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 . . .

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 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 . . . may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion if not in action.

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 . . .

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 as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.

Question	Answer
Why does the variety of the national origins of Americans present a challenge to neutrality?	

Why would differing views toward the war be dangerous for America?	
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Excerpts from September 19, 1914 instructions from the U.S. Department of State regarding the arming of merchant ships registered to nations at war

A. A merchant vessel of belligerent nationality [a nation at war] may carry an armament and ammunition for the sole purpose of defense without acquiring the character of a ship of war.

B. The presence of an armament and ammunition on board a merchant vessel creates a presumption that the armament is for offensive purposes, but the owners or agents may overcome this presumption by evidence showing that the vessel carries armament solely for defense.

C. . . . Indications that the armament will not be used offensively are:

1. That the caliber of the guns carried does not exceed six inches.
2. That the guns and small arms carried are few in number.
3. That no guns are mounted on the forward part of the vessel.
4. That the quantity of ammunition carried is small.
5. That the vessel is manned by its usual crew, and the officers are the same as those on board before war was declared
6. That the vessel intends to and actually does clear for a port lying in its usual trade route . . .
7. That the vessel takes on board fuel and supplies sufficient only to carry it to its port of destination, or the same quantity substantially which it has been accustomed to take for a voyage before war was declared.
8. That the cargo of the vessel consists of articles of commerce unsuited for the use of a ship of war in operations against an enemy.

9. That the vessel carries passengers who are as a whole unfitted to enter the military or naval service of the belligerent whose flag the vessel flies, or of any of its allies, and particularly if the passenger list includes women and children.

10. That the speed of the ship is slow.

D. Port authorities, on the arrival in a port of the United States of an armed vessel of belligerent nationality, claiming to be a merchant vessel, should immediately investigate . . . in order that it may be determined whether the evidence is sufficient to remove the presumption that the vessel is, and should be treated as, a ship of war....

Question	Answer
Briefly explain why merchant ships of nations at war might arm themselves.	
Tell your classmates some (not all) of the ways in which armed merchant ships can prove to neutral nations that they are not warships.	
Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.	

November 13, 1914 letter from Sir Cecil Spring-Rice to Sir Arthur Nicolson [both were British officials] describing U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan's thoughts on the war

Bryan spoke to me about peace as he always does. He sighs for the Nobel Prize, and besides that he is a really convinced peaceman. He has just given me a sword beaten into a ploughshare six inches long to serve as a paper-weight. It is adorned with quotations from Isaiah [a book in the Bible] and himself. No one doubts his sincerity, but that is rather embarrassing for us at the present moment, because he is always at us with peace propositions. This time, he said he could not understand why we could not say what we were fighting for. The nation which continued war had as much responsibility as the country which began it. The United States was the one great Power which was outside the struggle, and it was their duty to do what they could to put an end to it. I felt rather cross and said that the United States were signatories to the Hague Convention [a 1907 conference in which delegations from the world's nations attempted to create a set of rules for warfare], which had been grossly violated again and again without one word from the principal neutral nation. They were now out of court. They had done nothing to prevent the crime, and now they must not prevent the punishment.

He said that all the Powers concerned had been disappointed in their ambitions . . . Why should they not make peace now, if they had to make peace a year hence after another year's fruitless struggle. It would be far wiser if each said what it was fighting for and asked the United States to help them in arriving at a peaceful conclusion.

I asked him if he thought that under present circumstances Germany would give up Belgium [the German Army had occupied most of Belgium since August] and compensate her for her suffering. If not, how could the United States Government go on record as condoning a peace which would put the seal on the most disgraceful act of tyranny and oppression committed in modern times . . . ?

He got rather angry and said that if that was what we wanted, why did we not say so. He added, "Who can tell who was really responsible for what had happened in Belgium or whether the treaty wasn't only a pretext?" I reminded him that he was a great admirer of Gladstone [a famous British politician from the 19th century], who was like him, a great lover of peace, and that Gladstone had always maintained that if we had gone to war for Belgium in 1870, we should have gone to war for freedom and for public right and to save human happiness from being invaded by a tyrannous and lawless power, and that in such a war as that while the breath continued in his body he was ready to engage. This rather surprised him as he had read in the newspapers that Gladstone had always maintained that the Belgian Treaty was not binding.

Question	Answer
<p>Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.</p>	

Excerpts from a letter from Secretary of State Bryan to Walter Hines Page, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, December 26, 1914

The present condition of American foreign trade resulting from the frequent seizures and detentions of American cargoes destined to neutral European ports has become so serious as to require a candid statement of the views of this Government in order that the British Government may be fully informed as to the attitude of the United States toward the policy which has been pursued by the British authorities during the present war . .

The Government of the United States has viewed with growing concern the large numbers of vessels laden with American goods destined to neutral ports in Europe, which have been seized on the high seas, taken into British ports and detained sometimes for weeks by the British authorities . . .

It is needless to point out to His Majesty's Government, usually the champion of the freedom of the seas and the rights of trade, that peace, not war, is the normal relation between nations and that the commerce between countries which are not belligerents should not be interfered with by those at war unless such interference is manifestly an imperative necessity to protect their national safety, and then only to the extent that it is a necessity . . . [the United States] is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the present policy of His Majesty's Government toward neutral ships and cargoes exceeds the manifest necessity of a belligerent and constitutes restrictions upon the rights of American citizens on the high seas . . .

This Government believes and earnestly hopes His Majesty's Government will come to the same belief, that a course of conduct more in conformity with the rules of international usage, which Great Britain has strongly sanctioned for many years, will in the end better serve the interests of belligerents as well as those of neutrals.

Not only is the situation a critical one to the commercial interests of the United States, but many of the great industries of this country are suffering because their products are denied long established markets in European countries, which, though neutral, are contiguous to the nations at war.

Producers and exporters, steamship and insurance companies are pressing, and not without reason, for relief from the menace to transatlantic trade which is gradually but surely destroying their business and threatening them with financial disaster.

In conclusion, it should be impressed upon His Majesty's Government that the present condition of American trade with the neutral European countries is such that, if it does not improve, it may arouse a feeling contrary to that which has so long existed between the American and British peoples. Already it is becoming more and more the subject of public criticism and complaint. There is an increasing belief, doubtless not entirely unjustified that the present British policy toward American trade is responsible for the depression in certain industries which depend upon European markets . . .

Question	Answer
Tell your classmates what Britain is doing to American ships and why.	
Explain why the United States wants fair access to European ports even though there is a war. .	
Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.	

Sinking of the Lusitania, May 7, 1915

. . . In view of recent acts of the German authorities in violation of American rights on the high seas which culminated in the torpedoing and sinking of the British steamship Lusitania on May 7, 1915, by which over 100 American citizens lost their lives, it is clearly wise and desirable that the government of the United States and the Imperial German government should come to a clear and full understanding as to the grave situation which has resulted . . .

[The United States] assumes . . . that the Imperial government accept, as of course, the rule that the lives of noncombatants, whether they be of neutral citizenship or citizens of one of the nations at war, cannot lawfully or rightfully be put in jeopardy by the capture or destruction of an unarmed merchantman, and recognize also, as all other nations do, the obligation to take the usual precaution of visit and search to ascertain whether a suspected merchantman is in fact of belligerent nationality or is in fact carrying contraband of war under a neutral flag.

The government of the United States, therefore, desires to call the attention of the Imperial German government, with the utmost earnestness, to the fact that the objection to their present method of attack against the trade of their enemies lies in the practical impossibility of employing submarines in the destruction of commerce without disregarding those rules of fairness, reason, justice, and humanity which all modern opinion regards as imperative. It is practically impossible for the officers of a submarine to visit a merchantman at sea and examine her papers and cargo. It is practically impossible for them to make a prize of her; and, if they cannot put a prize crew on board of her, they cannot sink her without leaving her crew and all on board of her to the mercy of the sea in her small boats.

Question	Answer
Explain why the United States wants Germany to stop using submarines to destroy the merchant ships of its enemies.	
Explain why the United States wants fair access to European ports even though there is a war. .	