

Background Information

The Anti-War Movement During WWI

Public opinion on WWI was divided in the U.S. Some Americans, notably socialists, Christian pacifists, anarchists, women's groups, unionists, and intellectuals, opposed the war. Some of these pacifists believed war was immoral, while "radicals" believed the government was entering war not to "make the world safe for democracy," as Wilson claimed, but rather to serve the interest of capitalists. Other Americans strongly supported U.S. entry into the war in light of the Zimmerman telegram and the sinking of the Lusitania.

In 1916 President Wilson won re-election running on the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War." After the revelation of the Zimmerman telegram and Germany beginning a program of unrestricted submarine warfare that threatened U.S. commercial shipping, Congress declared war in April 1917. That same month Wilson established the Committee on Public Information, a propaganda agency that galvanized public support for U.S. war aims. The president pushed through Congress the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, which suppressed anti-British, pro-German, and anti-war opinions. Over 1,500 people were prosecuted and over 1,000 convicted under these laws, many for small acts of dissent. His administration saw the arrest and deportation of many foreign-born, antiwar radicals and drew closer to pro-war unions.