

US History World War I

Learning Target:

I can identify the challenges the US faced while trying to remain neutral and analyze why we failed to stay out of war.

4. United States Neutrality

Wilson Proposes Neutrality –

- Many Americans viewed WWI as a European matter
- Wilson urged Americans to be “neutral in fact as well as in name . . . impartial in thought as well as action”
- Wilson hoped to negotiate a settlement to the conflict and tried in 1915 and 1916

Text Question: Was the US truly neutral? Give two reasons.

Yes – Socialists criticized the war as a capitalist and imperialist struggle and pacifists thought it was evil

No – German American and Irish Americans supported the Central Powers and most supported the allies due to trade and British propaganda

Challenges To U.S. Neutrality –

- US neutrality first challenged with incidents revolving around the ocean

Events Challenging U.S. Neutrality –

1. British Naval Blockade

- Blockaded Germany and laid mines in North Sea
- Stopped US ships bound for neutral countries and searched them
- Wilson protested this violation of US neutrality

2. German “War Zone”

- 1915 Germany formed a so-called war zone around Britain
- Any ship entering this zone, including neutral ones, were subject to attack by German U-Boats (submarines)
- Wilson warned Germany they would be held accountable for any injury to American lives or property on the seas

3. Sinking of the Lusitania

- May 7, 1915 – German U-Boats sank a British passenger liner, the Lusitania
- 128 Americans that were onboard were killed
- Americans outraged with this action by Germany
- Wilson demanded German pledges to halt attacks on civilian ships
- Germany defended itself by saying it warned Americans in newspapers about sailing in the war zone and that the Lusitania had arms going to Britain (true)

4. *Sussex Pledge* -

- Issued by Germany pledging to stop attacking merchant vessels
- Germany wanted to keep the US out of the war

Text Question: How did the British blockade impact Germany?

American trade with Germany practically became zero and 750,000 Germans starved to death since food was blockaded.

Text Question: How did the sinking of civilian passenger liners like the Lusitania impact American public opinion about WWI?

American public opinion shifted strongly against the central powers

Text Question: What was the motivation behind the Sussex pledge for Germany? What condition did they place on their pledge?

Germany did not want the United States entering the war. Tried to make us happy. U.S. had to get Britain to lift the blockade on food and fertilizers or unrestricted submarine warfare could continue.