

Document A: *New York Times* articles related to the sinking of the *Lusitania*; May 1915

Note to students: These articles appeared in the *New York Times* in early May of 1915. The first source is a notice published by the German government shortly before the *Lusitania* embarked on her voyage. The second is an editorial, which appeared after the sinking of the ship

German Warning: May 1, 1915

GERMAN EMBASSY ISSUES WARNING

Advertises Notice of Danger
to Travelers in the
War Zone.

BUILDING UP A DEFENSE?

Suggestion That Notice May Be
Cited Against Possible Claims
for Damages—Cunard Agent
Says Travel Is Safe.

The following advertisement was received last night by THE TIMES and other newspapers throughout the country. It came from an advertising agent in Washington, who said it had been brought to him by the Counselor of the German Embassy:

NOTICE!

Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travelers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.
IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY,
Washington, D. C., April 22, 1915.

Source: *New York Times*

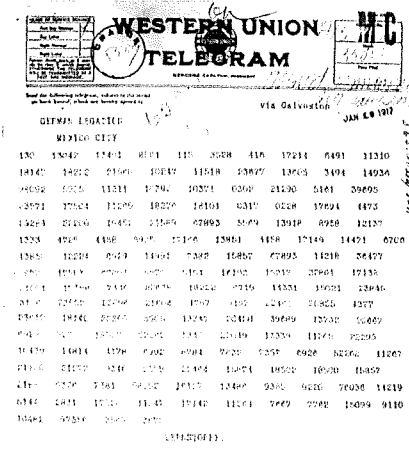
Editorial: May 8, 1915

WAR BY ASSASSINATION.

From our Department of State there must go to the Imperial Government at Berlin a demand that the Germans shall no longer make war like savages drunk with blood, that they shall cease to seek the attainment of their ends by the assassination of non-combatants and neutrals. 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 1,800 souls on board, and among them more than 100 Americans. Our demand must be made, and it will be heeded, unless Germany in her madness would have it understood that she is at war with the whole civilized world. For many hours yesterday the hope was cherished that the passengers and crew of the ship had been saved, but later it was made certain that there had been an appalling loss of life, and then there was here full realization of the extreme seriousness of this latest act of barbarity and of its effect upon our relations to the war. It will stir the American people as they have not been stirred since the destruction of the *Maine* in the harbor of Havana, and Government and people will be united in the resolve that Germany must be called upon to bring her practices into conformity with the usages of civilized warfare.

Document B: Zimmermann Telegram; January 16, 1917

Note to students: This telegram was sent by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the President of Mexico. Once the message was decoded by the United States, it was learned that the Germans proposed a military alliance with Mexico against the United States. In return for their support, the Germans 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).



Translation:

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace."

Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration

Document C: President Woodrow Wilson Asks Congress to Declare War; April 2, 1917 (excerpts)

On the third of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the first day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe...

The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium...have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle....

I am now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken...The ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way.

Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances...

The world must be made safe for democracy. We desire no conquest, no dominion. 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.

It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration

Guiding Questions

Document A - *New York Times* Articles

1. According to the German warning on May 1, why should American passengers be cautious about riding on the *Lusitania*?
2. How did the *New York Times* editorial writer react to the *Lusitania* sinking?
3. Although the *Lusitania* was sunk in 1915, and it angered many Americans, the government refused to go to war. Why do you think the country remained out of the war for two more years?

Document B - Zimmermann Telegram

1. What were the Germans proposing to the Mexicans in this telegram?
2. Why do you think the Germans resorted to sending this message? What can it tell us about their situation in 1917?
3. How might this telegram anger the American government?

Document C – Woodrow Wilson Speech

1. What was the main purpose of this speech?
2. What reasons does Woodrow Wilson give for going to war?
3. Does it seem like the United States is entering the war for political or economic reasons? Explain.