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American “Neutrality” in World War I DBQ

Directions: Read each of the documents below and answer the questions that follow. When you have finished, use your knowledge from the documents and other prior knowledge to write an essay that answers the following question.

Historical Context: The nations of Europe break out in to full scale war in 1914. Countries with long nursed grudges have finally taken the gloves off and have come out swinging. What was thought to be a quick little war would soon turn out to be the most costly and destructive war in the history of the world earning it the title: The War to End all Wars. At its onset the United States under the leadership of President Woodrow Wilson declared Neutrality until finally entering the war in April 1917.

Essay Question: How “neutral” was the United States before entry in to World War I?

Definition:

Neutrality: *n* The state or policy of being neutral, especially nonparticipation in war.

Document 1

Woodrow Wilson: Declaration of Neutrality (1914):

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.

1. In what ways may Neutrality be breached?
2. Why must the United States remain Neutral?

Document 2

Professor Munsterberg Cambridge, Mass., November 19, 1914 in a letter to President Wilson:

The United States permitted the violation by England of the Hague Convention and international law in connection with conditional and unconditional contraband. The United States, for instance, has not protested against the transference of copper from the conditional to the absolute list, although on former occasions the United States has taken a spirited stand against one-sided interpretations of international agreements.... The United States, moreover, insisted that conditional contraband can be sent in neutral or in American bottoms even to belligerent nations, provided it was not consigned to the government, the military or naval authorities or to any contractors known to represent the belligerent government. By permitting this new interpretation the United States practically supports the starving out policy of the Allies. The nation by reversing its own policy thus seriously handicaps Germany and Austria in their fight for existence....

3. What is the United States accused of doing against the spirit of Neutrality?
4. What is the author accusing the United States of supporting?

Document 3

Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 20, 1915

Change of policy in regard to loans to belligerents. War loans in this country were disapproved because inconsistent with the spirit of neutrality. There is a clearly defined difference between a war loan and the purchase of arms and ammunition. *The policy of disapproving of war loans affects all governments alike, so that the disapproval is not an unneutral act.* The case is entirely different in the matter of arms and ammunition, because prohibition of export not only might not, but in this case would not, operate equally upon the nations at war., a war loan, if offered for popular subscription in the United States, would be taken up chiefly by those who are in sympathy with the belligerent seeking the loan. The result would be that great numbers of the American people might become more earnest partisans, having material interest in the success of the belligerent whose bonds they hold. On the other hand, contracts for and sales of contraband are mere matters of trade. The manufacturer, unless peculiarly sentimental, would sell to one belligerent as readily as he would to another. No general spirit of partisanship is aroused -- no sympathies excited. The whole transaction is merely a matter of business.

5. Why are war loans considered an “unneutral act”?
6. Why are the selling of arms and ammunition not considered “unneutral”?

Document 4

Letter from William Jennings Bryan to J.P. Morgan August 15, 1914

Inquiry having been made as to the attitude of this government in case American bankers are asked to make loans to foreign governments during the war in Europe, the following announcement is made:

There is no reason why loans should not be made to the governments of neutral nations, but in the judgment of this Government, loans by American bankers to any foreign nation which is at war are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality.

7. What does this letter address?
8. What does Mr. Bryan see as inconsistent with Neutrality?

Document 5

President Woodrow Wilson: First Warning to the Germans February 10, 1915

This Government has carefully noted the explanatory statement issued by the Imperial German Government at the same time with the proclamation of the German Admiralty, and takes this occasion to remind the Imperial German Government very respectfully that the Government of the United States is open to none of the criticisms for unneutral action to which the German Government believes the governments of certain other neutral nations have laid themselves open; that the Government of the United State has not consented to or acquiesced in any measures which may have been taken by the other belligerent nations in the present war which operate to restrain neutral trade, but has, on the contrary, taken in all such matters a position which warrants it in holding those governments responsible in the proper way for any untoward effects on American shipping which the accepted principles of international law do not justify; and that it, therefore, regards itself as free in the present instance to take with a clear conscience and upon accepted principles the position indicated in this note

9. What is the USA accused of by Germany?
10. How would the USA respond to Germany if certain actions are carried through?

Document 6

President Woodrow Wilson's Protest to the Germans July 1916

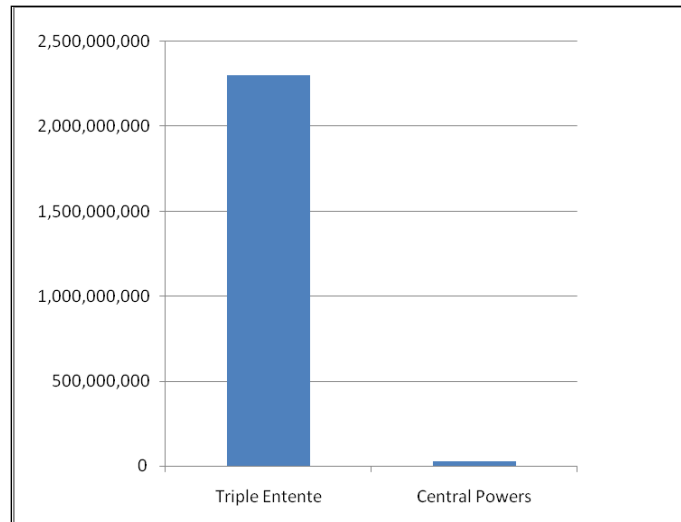
The Government of the United States is not unmindful of the extraordinary conditions created by this war or of the radical alterations of circumstances and method of attack produced by the use of instrumentalities of naval warfare which the nations of the world can not have had in view when the existing rules of international law were formulated, and it is ready to make every reasonable allowance for these novel and unexpected aspects of war at sea; but it can not consent to abate any essential or fundamental right of its people because of a mere alteration of circumstance. The rights of neutrals in time of war are based upon principle, not upon expediency, and the principles are immutable. It is the duty and obligation of belligerents to find a way to adapt the new circumstances to them. . .

The Government of the United States, while not indifferent to the friendly spirit in which it is made, can not accept the suggestion of the Imperial German Government that certain vessels be designated and agreed upon which shall be free on the seas now illegally proscribed. The very agreement would, by implication, subject other vessels to illegal attack, and would be a curtailment and therefore an abandonment of the principles for which this government contends, and which in times of calmer counsels every nation would concede as of course. The Government of the United States and the Imperial German Government are contending for the same great object, have long stood together in urging the very principles upon which the Government of the United States now so solemnly insists. They are both contending for the freedom of the seas.

11. What is Germany accused of doing?
12. How will the United States respond to Germany?

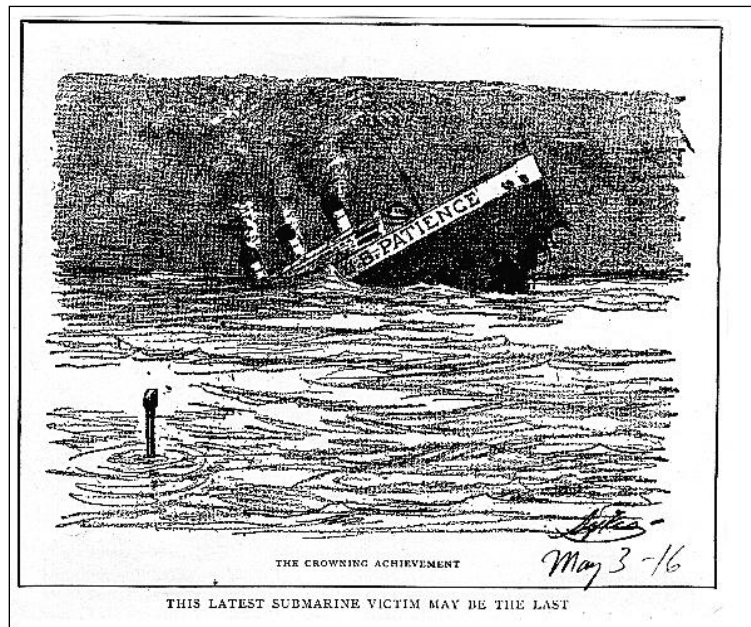
Document 7

Prewar Sells to War Alliances



13. Who were the Triple Entente?
14. Who were the Central Powers?

Document 8



15. What does this cartoon say about the American People?
16. What does this attack?