

Document C: Historian Howard Zinn (Modified)

President Woodrow Wilson had promised that the United States would stay neutral in the war. But in April of 1917, the Germans had announced they would have their submarines sink any ship bringing supplies to their enemies; and they had sunk a number of merchant ships. Wilson now said he must stand by the right of Americans to travel on merchant ships in the war zone.

This was a flimsy argument. The British had also been intruding on the rights of American citizens on the high seas, but Wilson was not suggesting we go to war with them.

The United States claimed the *Lusitania* carried an innocent cargo, and therefore the torpedoing was a monstrous German atrocity. Actually, the *Lusitania* was heavily armed: it carried 1,248 cases of 3-inch shells, 4,927 boxes of cartridges (1,000 rounds in each box), and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition. The British and American governments lied about the cargo.

Prosperity came from doing business in foreign markets, it was believed by the leaders of the country. In 1897, private companies had invested \$700 million in foreign nations. By 1914, they had invested \$3.5 billion...

With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and for high-interest loans. In 1915, Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies, and bankers could now begin lending money in such great amounts as to both make great profit and tie American finance closely to the interest of a British victory in the war against Germany.

Source: Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, New York: HarperCollins, 1980. Howard Zinn is a historian and activist who is best known today as the author of A People's History of the United States, a book that tells American history from the perspective of minorities, women, and poor people, and that is very critical of the United States government.