

Walter Millis

(Road to War, 1935)

President Wilson was swayed by big business interests to declare war against Germany, including bankers and munitions manufacturers seeking profit.

C. Hartley Grattan

(Why We Fought, 1929)

Pro-Ally propaganda and American economic interests (particularly regarding American banking and the stock market) were a significance factor in swaying Wilson towards supporting entry into the war as early as 1915.

Carl N. Degler

(Out of Our Past, 1959)

Wilson was following the letter of the law when he interpreted and responded to Germany's violation of neutral maritime rights. Unrestricted submarine warfare was seen by Wilson as illegal and a crime against humanity, and he responded as such.

Christopher Ray

(History Today, 1993)

Wilson had the United States enter World War I to ensure that a fair peace settlement would be agreed upon after the war. For this reason, the U.S. entered as an associated power in order to have more latitude in post-war negotiations.

Harold Evans

(The American Century, 1998)

When Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war, he was following moral principles – the U.S. would have to enter the fight in order to make the world a better place and introduce a new world order based on rights and respect.

Ross Kennedy

(The Will to Believe, 2009)

President Wilson realized the old power structures of Europe and their preoccupation with maintaining a "balance of power" was a reason for militaristic fervor prior to the outbreak of the war. He shared Allied war aims and believed Germany needed to become a democracy to maintain peace.

Hugh Brogan

(1960s)

U.S. entry into the war coincided with the timing of Germany's actions, including their resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. The U.S. did not necessarily share Allied war aims and the wider moral aims claimed by Wilson were developed after U.S. entry.

Niall Ferguson

(American Colossus, 2004)

Wilson was deeply idealistic – he sought to construct a new international order based on fairness and justice. Although the sinking of the *Lusitania* and unrestricted submarine warfare were triggers, Wilson had deeper goals in mind that pushed him to ask for a declaration of war.

Thomas Fleming

(The Illusion of Victory, 2004)

U.S. involvement in World War I was unnecessary and avoidable. Wilson's idealism was destructive – he was not neutral from the start and twisted the facts to win support by depicting the war as a struggle between good and evil. He was duped by French and British interests.

Barbara Tuchman

(The Zimmermann Telegram, 1958)

The Zimmermann Telegram was part of a well-planned scheme to incite hostilities with Mexico and keep America distracted from the European war. It posed a threat as Germany was attempting to gain a foothold in the Western hemisphere.

Thomas Boghardt

(The Zimmermann Telegram, 2012)

A study of German diplomatic records reveals that the Zimmermann telegram was a spur-of-the-moment decision rather than part of a larger plot. Germany was preoccupied with fighting Britain and did not seek to antagonize the United States.

Justus Doenecke

(Nothing Less Than War, 2014)

When war broke out in 1914, U.S. officials were swayed by public opinion to remain neutral. Public opinion would be shaped by the public media and propaganda, and less than three years later, U.S. officials were once again swayed by the public and declared war.

Michael Neiberg

(The Path to War, 2016)

The American people were ahead of Wilson in desiring war with Germany. "War fever" was an expression of American nationalism. Public opinion would shape the actions of a president who desired to remain neutral, or at most play the role of mediator in the European conflict.

Engelbrecht and Hanighen

(Merchants of Death, 1934)

The U.S. emerged from WWI with a more thriving economy than it had before entry into the war. This demonstrates that the main motivation for entering the war was financial gain. Financiers and arms manufacturers influenced President Wilson behind the scenes.

Bernard Baruch

(American Industry in the War, 1941)

Financial interests were not a motivation for declaring war. Post-war prosperity is due to the work of the War Industries Board in efficiently managing resources and production.

**Office of the Historian, U.S.
Dept. of State**

(website accessed 2020)

The primary motivations for Wilson's declaration of war were Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and their attempt to entice Mexico into an alliance against the United States.

WWI Historiography Tea Party

(Cards are repeated – if you come across your “twin”, say hello and move on to someone else.)

1. What does your historian emphasize is the reason the United States entered the First World War?
2. Find a historian that somewhat agrees with your historian’s perspective. What do they agree on? What is different about their interpretation?
3. Find a historian that disagrees with your historian’s perspective. On what issues do these historians disagree?
4. Find a historian that is writing close to the same time period or decade as yours. Are your arguments more similar or different? Why? Can you think of any social, historical, political, or economic context that may explain these interpretations?
5. Find a historian that is writing in a very different time period than yours. Are your arguments more similar or different? Why? Can you think of any social, historical, political, or economic context that may explain these interpretations?
6. Find one more historian (anyone else) to talk to. With this last person, discuss the historical evidence (based on the documents you’ve read and facts you’ve gathered in class) that supports each historian’s position. Which historian does the evidence best support?

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