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From Neutrality to War:

Woodrow Wilson, *Message to Congress,* 63rd Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. No. 566 (Washington, 1914), pp. 3-4.

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned. The spirit of the nation in this critical matter will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits, and men proclaim as their opinions upon the street.

The people of the United States come from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and unavoidable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to avoid it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility, responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honor and affection to think first of her and her interests, may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion if not in action.

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend.

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. According to Wilson, what is the true spirit of neutrality?
2. What role does the media play in this spirit of neutrality? What role does the every day citizen play in this spirit of neutrality?
3. In the last paragraph, Wilson gives the American people a “solemn word of warning.” What does he warn the American people to avoid?

Woodrow Wilson, *Message to Congress,* Jan 22nd, 1917

“ I have sought this opportunity to address you (speaking to the US Congress) because I thought that I owed it to you, as the council associated with me in the final determination of our international obligations, to disclose to you without reserve the thought and purpose that have been taking form in my mind in regard to the **duty of our government in the days to come, when it will be necessary to lay afresh and upon a new plan the foundations of peace among the nations.**

It is impossible to imagine that the people of the United States should play no part in that great enterprise (referring to the peace to end the war). To take part in such a service will be the opportunity for which they have sought to prepare themselves by the very principles and purposes of their polity and the approved practices of their government ever since the days when they set up a new nation in the high and honorable hope that it might, in all that it was and did, *show mankind the way to liberty*….”

“…**It must be a peace without victory**. . . Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. **Only a peace between equals can last. “**

1. What is the duty of the US government that Wilson is referring to? Do you believe the US has the duty to fulfill this obligation?
2. Wilson states it is the United States opportunity to show mankind the way to liberty? Do you agree with Wilson?
3. By the time of this speech, Europe had been at war for well over 3 years. At this point in the conflict, after millions of lost lives, do you believe peace without victory is possible? Why or why not?

Woodrow Wilson, Address of The President of the United States Delivered at a Joint Session of The Two Houses of Congress” *April 2, 1917*

…. **The new policy (unrestricted submarine warfare) 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, though the latter were provided with safe conduct through the proscribed areas by the German Government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle.

**Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be**. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is warfare against mankind. It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind. Each nation must decide for itself how it will meet it…

With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragically character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it, and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defense but also to **exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war.**

1. According to this speech, what is the main reason that the United States entered WW1?
2. Do you believe this is an effective and persuasive speech? What makes it an effective speech? What make it ineffective?
3. If you were in the Congress, would you vote to enter the War? At this point in the conflict, was it necessary and appropriate for the United States to enter WW1? Why or why not? (3-5 sentences)