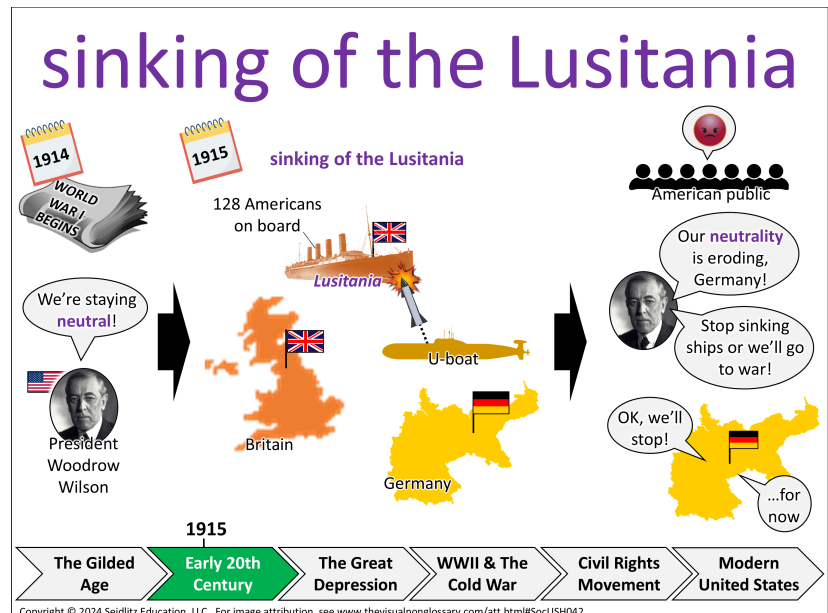


The Sinking of the Lusitania: How the U.S. Moved Toward War

The purpose for reading is to understand how different events, like the sinking of the Lusitania, influenced America's decision to enter World War I.

Pay Attention To:

- reasons the U.S. stayed neutral at first
- details about the sinking of the Lusitania
- how Americans reacted to the attack
- President Wilson's response
- events that changed public opinion



In 1915, **World War I** was happening in Europe. The United States was not in the war. It wanted to stay out and be neutral. This is called **neutrality**. But staying neutral did not keep Americans safe.

A British ship called the **Lusitania** left from New York. It was heading to England. A German submarine saw the ship and shot a torpedo at it. The torpedo hit the **Lusitania**, and the ship sank very quickly. About 1,200 people died, including 128 Americans. People in the U.S. were shocked and angry.

President Woodrow Wilson was under pressure. Some people wanted the U.S. to fight in the war. Others wanted to stay out. Wilson chose to send a strong message to Germany. He told them to stop attacking ships. But he did not ask Congress to declare war. He wanted to keep the country peaceful.

Germany stopped the attacks for a short time. But in 1917, they started again. Around the same time, the U.S. found out about a secret message called the

Zimmermann Telegram. Germany asked Mexico to help them fight the U.S. If Mexico joined them, Germany would help Mexico get back Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Americans were very upset when they learned this.

That same year, the U.S. joined the war. President Wilson said the world needed to be safe for democracy. The U.S. created the **American Expeditionary Forces**. These were American soldiers sent to help fight in Europe. They worked with the Allied powers.

The **sinking of the Lusitania** was not the only reason the U.S. joined the war, but it was very important. It showed that **neutrality** could not always keep the U.S. safe. It was a big step toward entering the war.

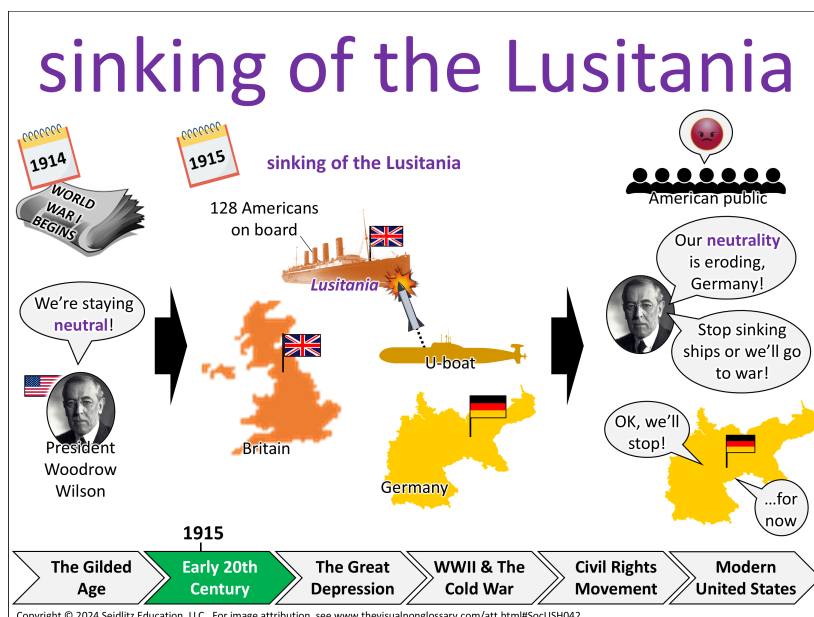


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In May of 1915, during the early years of **World War I**, the British passenger ship **Lusitania** sailed from New York toward Liverpool. Although the United States had declared **neutrality**, hoping to stay out of the conflict, the Atlantic Ocean was a dangerous place. Germany had declared the waters around Britain a war zone and warned that ships, even civilian ones, could be targeted by submarines.

The **Lusitania** was struck by a German torpedo off the coast of Ireland. Within just eighteen minutes, the ship sank, taking with it nearly 1,200 lives. Among the dead were 128 Americans. News of the tragedy spread quickly and sparked outrage across the United States. Many Americans saw the attack as a violation of international law and a threat to innocent lives.

President Woodrow Wilson faced growing pressure to respond with force. But Wilson believed that war should be a last resort. He sent strong diplomatic protests to Germany and demanded that they end their submarine attacks on civilian vessels.

He hoped to preserve peace and protect the country's policy of **neutrality**, believing the U.S. could influence the outcome of the war without joining it.

Germany briefly changed its tactics, but tensions remained high. Two years later, in early 1917, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, targeting ships without warning. Around the same time, British intelligence revealed the **Zimmermann Telegram** to the U.S. public. In it, Germany encouraged Mexico to join the war against the United States and promised to help Mexico reclaim lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. This direct threat, combined with the continued loss of American lives at sea, shifted public opinion.

In April 1917, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany. He claimed that the world must be made "safe for democracy." Congress agreed, and the U.S. officially entered **World War I**. To support the effort, the U.S. created the **American Expeditionary Forces**, a large group of soldiers who were sent to fight in Europe. Their involvement helped strengthen the Allied powers and played a significant role in the final outcome of the war.

Though the **sinking of the Lusitania** had not led to immediate war, it marked the beginning of a turning point. It challenged the idea that the U.S. could remain isolated from global conflict. Over time, Americans came to see that **neutrality** might not protect their safety or values in a rapidly changing world.

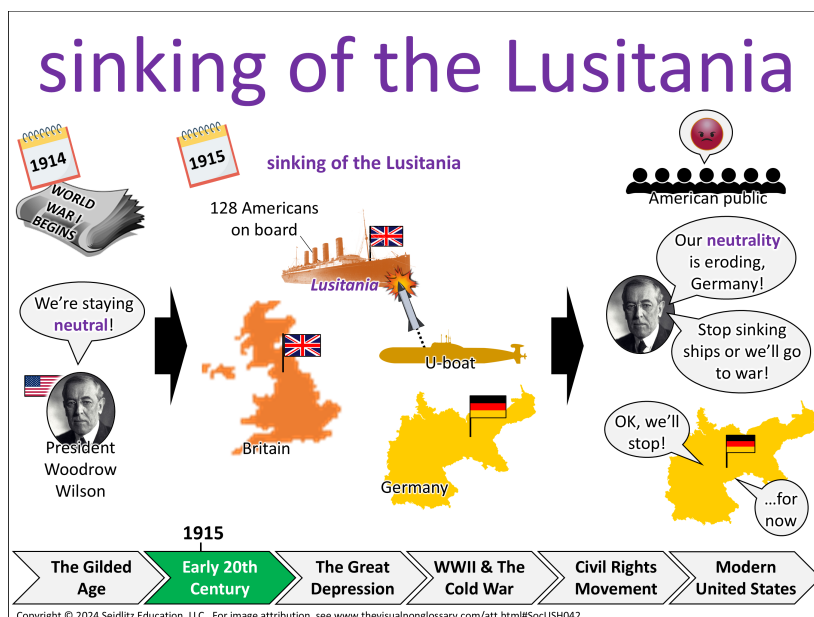


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The tragic sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 signaled a dramatic shift in America's position in world affairs. At the time, the United States had taken a firm stance of **neutrality** in **World War I**, with many Americans believing the conflict in Europe was not their concern. However, the realities of global warfare soon proved impossible to ignore.

The *Lusitania*, a British passenger liner, departed from New York with nearly 2,000 people onboard. Though it was a civilian vessel, Germany claimed it was carrying weapons and warned that any ship entering British waters was at risk. Despite these warnings, the ship continued its journey. A German U-boat torpedoed it near the coast of Ireland, and it sank in under twenty minutes. Nearly 1,200 people died, including 128 Americans. The attack shocked the U.S. public and stirred demands for retaliation.

President Woodrow Wilson responded cautiously. He issued strong diplomatic notes to Germany, demanding they halt attacks on civilian ships. He hoped to avoid war and preserve America's peaceful stance. Wilson argued that by maintaining **neutrality**, the U.S. could help bring about a just peace in Europe. Still, public opinion grew more divided as the war dragged on.

By 1917, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, once again targeting ships without warning. That same year, British intelligence intercepted the **Zimmermann Telegram**. In this secret message, Germany encouraged Mexico to join the war against the United States. In return, Germany promised to help Mexico regain territories it had lost to the U.S., including Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. The message was a clear threat and sparked national outrage.

Wilson concluded that the time for peace had passed. In April 1917, he asked Congress to declare war on Germany. He stated that the world must be made "safe for democracy." Congress agreed, and the U.S. entered the war. To support the effort, the military formed the **American Expeditionary Forces**, led by General John J. Pershing. These forces were deployed to Europe and played a crucial role in turning the tide in favor of the Allies.

Although the **sinking of the Lusitania** did not immediately lead to war, it was a catalyst that exposed the risks of isolationism. It awakened Americans to the fact that events abroad could have a direct impact at home. Ultimately, the incident helped move the United States from a position of cautious distance to one of global engagement and responsibility.

