

World War I Lesson Plan: Restrictions on Freedom during World War I

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will:

- Understand the multiple ways freedoms were restricted during World War I
- Analyze a primary source related to freedom during World War I focusing on it's main message, purpose and connection to other primary sources during the era
- Share their interpretation of a primary source related to freedom during World War I with their classmates
- Form an opinion and defend their position about whether or not freedoms should be restricted during times of war

Time

Between 3 and 4 Days. (I spent about 4 days on this lesson)

Grade Level

This lesson involved 11th grade students in a regular U.S. history course. My school also offers an A.P. U.S. history course. However, the students I teach have decided for various reasons not to take that course. The lesson could easily be used or adapted for students at all levels in middle and high school.

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards Addressed in the Lessons

B.12.1 Explain different points of view on the same historical event, using data gathered from various sources, such as letters, journals, diaries, newspapers, government documents, and speeches

B.12.2 Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion

B.12.3 Recall, select, and analyze significant historical periods and the relationships among them

B.12.5 Gather various types of historical evidence, including visual and quantitative data, to analyze issues of freedom and equality, liberty and order, region and nation, individual and community, law and conscience, diversity and civic duty; form a reasoned conclusion in the light of other possible conclusions; and develop a coherent argument in the light of other possible arguments

B.12.6 Select and analyze various documents that have influenced the legal, political, and constitutional heritage of the United States

B.12.18 Explain the history of slavery, racial and ethnic discrimination, and efforts to eliminate discrimination in the United States and elsewhere in the world

Content-Based Theme

Restrictions placed on freedoms and liberties during World War I with a particular focus on the restrictions in civil liberties as manifested in the Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918, ethnic discrimination against German Americans, expectations of immigrants during the War to support the War effort, discrimination against women and African Americans during the War.

Historical Methods Utilized

Primary source document analysis and interpretation

Resources Utilized (see Appendix A for actual resources)

- “Get the Rope!” Anti-German Violence in World War I-era Wisconsin: A Statement made by John Deml of Outagamie County, Wisconsin, at Madison, Wisconsin, Tuesday, October 22, 1918. Taken from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/1/>
 - Photograph of Suffragist with "Kaiser Wilson" Poster. Taken from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage/kaiser-wilson.html>
 - Propaganda leaflet “To the colored soldiers of the U.S. Army.” Taken from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6655/>
 - War Bond Poster- “Do you Remember Your First Thrill of Liberty.” Taken from <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/at0058a.4s.jpg>
 - Excerpt from Eugene V. Debs: The Canton, Ohio, Speech - June 16, 1918. Taken from http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Socialism/E_Debs_Canton_OH_1918.html
 - WWI Document Analysis Sheet
 - PP.388- 395 of students’ textbook.
- (Danzer, G.A., Klor de Alva, J.J., Woloch, N., & Wilson, L. E. (2005). *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st century*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell)
- World War I Project : Creating your own Primary Source Document related to Freedom

Exercise

- Students are asked to read their textbook’s explanation of World War I on the home front for homework (pp.388-395). Then, students answer the following question in writing and the teacher leads a class discussion about students’ responses to gauge their prior knowledge and opinions:

Should the freedoms and liberties of Americans be restricted in any way during times of war? If so? Which freedoms and liberties and why? If not? Why not?

- Students are divided into 5 different groups and assigned one of the following primary source documents to read: **1)** A statement by John Deml about violence against German Americans **2)** A photograph of a woman suffragist during World War I **3)** A leaflet to black soldiers during World War I **4)** A War Bond Poster encouraging immigrants to buy bonds to protect freedom **5)** An excerpt from Eugene Debs’ anti-war speech in Canton, Ohio- June 16, 1918.
- Students are given a WWI Document Analysis Sheet that they must fill out in their groups to help them understand their document’s purpose, main message, the way people in the United States and other countries might have responded during this period of time, and the way this document contributes to their understanding of World War I. When they finish, students can sit in a pentagon formation with each group comprising one side of the shape or students can simply sit in the front of the room as they present their documents. Students are asked to read any of the documents they did not analyze for homework.

- The teacher writes the term *nativism* on the board and asks students to define the term and discuss any examples of this term. The teacher explains that nativism in our country has traditionally meant protecting the interests of the early white settlers to the United States, particularly White Anglo-Saxon values, against the influence of immigrants and newcomers. Many forces have influenced these nativist sentiments for decades in our country. (Here is where I shared a number of the examples from John Higham's *Strangers in the Land*. For example, I explained that although business interests often clashed with immigrant laborers over work related issues, they also allied themselves with the newcomers when it served their interests to keep cheap labor in the country, especially prior to World War I. I also pointed out that prior to World War I, many Americans had a favorable opinion of German immigrants. However, the onset of World War I and America's subsequent involvement changed this.)
- Students who analyzed the statement by John Deml discuss their analysis using the answers they came up with from their WWI Document Analysis Sheet. The teacher makes the connection between the concept of nativism previously discussed and this document to explain how ethnic groups like the Germans had their freedoms restricted during the War. (This is where I also pointed out how the names of buildings were changed and other examples of the way German Americans became a target in Milwaukee).
- Students who analyzed the War Bond Poster discuss their analysis using the answers they came up with from their WWI Document Analysis Sheet. The teacher makes a connection between this document and the previous one analyzed that expectations were placed on immigrants to support freedom by helping to fund the war but some immigrants (particularly Germans) like the man in the previous document had some of their basic liberties restricted or denied.
- Students who analyzed the Eugene Debs speech discuss their analysis using the answers they came up with from their WWI Document Analysis Sheet. The teacher explains that Debs was arrested and convicted under the Espionage Act of 1917 for obstructing the draft due to this speech. The teacher writes the word *civil liberties* on the board and asks students to define this term. The teacher explains that these are the basic rights that are guaranteed to us by the Bill of Rights like the freedom of speech and engages students in a discussion about whether or not Debs should have been arrested. The teacher proceeds to explain that Debs was convicted based on the idea that his speech presented a "clear and present danger" to the country as viewed by the Supreme Court. The teacher explains that in addition to the fear that Germans might interfere with the war effort in being loyal to Germany, the government took these measures to prevent dissent against the war and ensure the citizens' support. The teacher asks students if they think this was justified or an unnecessary restriction on civil liberties.
- Students who analyzed the leaflet dropped to black soldiers discuss their analysis using the answers they came up with from their WWI Document Analysis Sheet. The teacher asks about the restrictions on freedom placed on African Americans during the War and the way these were similar and different to other groups like political dissidents or German Americans. The teacher emphasizes that African Americans were a target of discrimination

long before the War even began and would remain targets well after the war ended by reminding students of segregation and lynchings that occurred before, during and after the War.

- Students who analyzed the photograph of the woman suffragist discuss their analysis using the answers they came up with from their WWI Document Analysis Sheet. The teacher asks about the restrictions on freedom placed on women during the War and the way these were similar and different to any of the other situations previously discussed. The teacher emphasizes that although they had extra restrictions placed on their civil liberties or became targets based on their ethnicity, like African Americans, discrimination against women was not necessarily an effect of the war. However, the teacher points out that their efforts during the war did assist them with gaining the right to vote.
- Once again, students answer the following question in writing and the teacher leads a final class discussion about students' responses to determine what they learned from the primary sources that they analyzed and the class discussion:

Should the freedoms and liberties of Americans be restricted in any way during times of war? If so? Which freedoms and liberties and why? If not? Why not?

Assessment

Students' understanding of the content and skills taught in this lesson was assessed in three ways:

1. Through formal discussion of the topic, I gained an understanding of students' knowledge and understanding of restrictions on freedom and liberties during World War I
2. An exam on World War I included some questions related to restrictions on freedoms and liberties during World War I. The following are some of the exam questions included:

Multiple Choice

Write the letter of the best answer in the blank provided.

1. ____ All of the following are true about the Espionage and Sedition Acts **except**:
A) they clearly violated the spirit of the First Amendment
B) they were upheld by the Supreme Court
C) they gave the government the right to fine and imprison anyone saying anything disloyal about the government or war effort
D) they were never used during the war
E) all of the above are true

2. _____ What message did the Wilson administration drum into American citizens during World War I?

- A) if you weren't in the armed forces, you'd better be buying war bonds or rationing food and otherwise, you were pro-German
- B) the war for democracy could best be won in an atmosphere of complete free speech and thought
- C) voluntary purchase of bonds were the only way to finance the war, not through taxing since some Americans opposed the war
- D) government should not be involved in running the war effort since it was the people's war and volunteer organizations should take command

3. _____ During the war, Americans' civil liberties were:

- A) increased
- B) diminished
- C) remained the same
- D) were not affected

Short Answer

Answer the following questions. **BE SPECIFIC !!!**

(3 POINTS) Explain the similarities and differences between the discrimination endured by African Americans and German Americans during World War I.

(2 POINTS) Explain how nativism became evident during World War I?

(4 POINTS) Choose any two of the primary sources that we discussed in class related to freedom during World War I and explain how they revealed both similarities and differences in the ways freedoms were restricted during the War.

3. Students were required to complete a project (**see Appendix A**) where they had to create their own primary source document related to freedom during World War I. Students were given a number of options to choose from that allowed them to use either their writing, artistic, or speaking talents. Since each project option was different in topic and method, it would have been too difficult to create a single rubric for the project. However, I did create a sheet clearly outlining the requirements and the way students would be graded. This criterion included having: **COMPLETE AND ACCURATE INFORMATION, CREATIVITY, NEATNESS /PROFESSIONALISM, AND PROPER WRITING MECHANICS.**

Teaching Experiences

Sitting students in a pentagon formation for the round table discussion on the documents only occurred to me in the middle of our class discussion. The next time I teach this lesson I would do

this at the very beginning of the class discussion. As I taught this lesson, I realized that this lesson works best if students have had some previous experience working with primary source documents. I am fortunate to have students who have worked with primary sources throughout middle and high school. When I share this lesson with other teachers, I will point out that this might be a difficult lesson to teach if students have never or seldomly worked with primary source documents. I found myself referring back to the background information from the textbook quite a bit during the discussion of the document and wasn't sure if students were exactly following me when we talked about some of the textbook information. In the future, it would probably be best to have a brief quiz or discussion about the background information presented in their textbooks first to ensure that students have the essential context to have a more sophisticated conversation about the primary source documents they analyzed in this lesson.

Appendix A: World War I Teaching Materials

Get the Rope!” Anti-German Violence in World War I-era Wisconsin¹

In the early 20th century, German Americans were the nation’s largest immigrant group. Although they were regarded as a model of successful assimilation, they faced vicious—and sometimes violent—attacks on their loyalty when the United States went to war against Germany in 1917. The most notorious incident was the lynching of German-born Robert Prager in Colinsville, Illinois, in April 1918. Other incidents stopped just short of murder. In a statement made on October 22, 1918, John Deml, a farmer in Outagamie County, a heavily German and Scandinavian area of Wisconsin, described the nativist mob that had visited him two days earlier. Suspected of not strongly enough supporting the war effort, he was narrowly saved from lynching.

A Statement made by John Deml of Outagamie County, Wisconsin, at Madison, Wisconsin, Tuesday, October 22, 1918.

About half-past twelve (continuing for more than an hour) Sunday morning October 20th, my wife awaked me, saying, that there were a large number of men on the front porch, pounding and rapping on the door, besides talking in a loud tone of voice. I was upstairs; then I came downstairs and went to the front door, where they were, and I asked them, who was there! Several answered at once, “The Council of Defense.” I then asked them, “What do you want?” and they replied, “We want you to sign up.” I replied, “I have done my share.” And they asked me when, and I replied, “I did my share in the spring.”(That is, I meant to say I had done my share in the third loan, when I subscribed for \$450 in bonds.) To make it plain, on the 28th of September, at the opening of the fourth drive, I was notified by letter that my bond assessment would be \$800. When Henry Baumann came to see me, I told him I could not possibly take \$500 now but would take some, meaning a substantial amount, that is all I could afford; and he replied, “My orders are you must take \$500 or nothing.”

¹ The following was taken from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/1/>

After I had replied that I had done my share in the spring, they demanded that I open the door and let them in. I told them I didn't have to open the door; then they undertook to force the door open, and went so far as to tear the screen door open; then they threatened to break down the door, and I said, "Come on then, boys." Then they appeared to be planning, and while they were doing that, I took the time to put my shoes on. By that time they were at the kitchen door, and they made a demand that I let them in through that door; then I went to the kitchen door and opened it and found a crowd of men (much larger than I expected) around the door, and then reaching out two by two around towards the front of the house. I left the door and walked to the front porch to see if they had done any painting (as they had previously painted a neighbor's mail-box); I walked to the road to see if they had painted my mail-box. And then I turned around to return to the house when they all at one time closed in on me like a vise; some grabbing my fingers or wrist, others my legs, and several of them were shouting, holding a paper before me, "Sign up." I said, "I will not sign up at this time of night." Then a man shouted, "Get the rope!" The first I knew was when the rope was about my neck and around my body under my arms. Someone then gave a sharp jerk at the rope and forced me to my knees and hands; at the same time some of them jumped on my back, and while bent over someone struck me in the face, making me bleed; then a man (whom I recognized) said, "Boys, you are going to far"; and then, as they got me away from them a little, I heard a man say, "You can't scare him." I answered, "I am not afraid of the entire city of Appleton." Then a man (whom I knew) got me to one side, and he said, "Let's go into the house and talk between ourselves." Then two men (whom I knew) went with me into the house, and we sat or stood around the table, and they still demanded that I sign up. I said, "I will not sign up for any man after being abused like this." Then a man (whom I knew) told me I would have to go with them, or, if I didn't go with them, would have to come to town that Sunday morning at 10 o'clock to see Mr. Keller. I told them that I would be there; they left; as they left, I noticed, and so did my family and neighbors, that they rode away in seven automobiles. I did not go to see Mr. Keller. Signed, JOHN DEML.

Source: "Prussianizing Wisconsin," *Atlantic Monthly*, [NEED VOLUME/DATE] pp. 101–102.

**Excerpt from Eugene V. Debs
The Canton, Ohio, Speech - June 16, 1918²**

...Wars throughout history have been waged for conquest and plunder. In the Middle Ages when the feudal lords who inhabited the castles whose towers may still be seen along the Rhine concluded to enlarge their domains, to increase their power, their prestige and their wealth they declared war upon one another. But they themselves did not go to war any more than the modern feudal lords, the barons of Wall Street go to war. [Applause.] The feudal barons of the Middle Ages, the economic predecessors of the capitalists of our day, declared all wars. And their miserable serfs fought all the battles. The poor, ignorant serfs had been taught to revere their masters; to believe that when their masters declared war upon one another, it was their patriotic duty to fall upon one another and to cut one another's throats for the profit and glory of the lords and barons who held them in contempt. And that is war in a nutshell. The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, while the subject class has had nothing to gain and all to lose- especially their lives. [Applause.] They have always taught and trained you to believe it to be your patriotic duty to go to war and to have yourselves slaughtered at their command. But in all the history of the world you, the people, have never had a voice in declaring war, and strange as it certainly appears, no war by any nation in any age has ever been declared by the people. And here let me emphasize the fact- and it cannot be repeated too often- that the working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace.

Yours not to reason why; Yours but to do and die. That is their motto and we object on the part of the awakening workers of this nation. If war is right let it be declared by the people. You who have your lives to lose, you certainly above all others have the right to decide the momentous issue of war or peace... [Applause.]

² Taken from http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Socialism/E_Debs_Canton_OH_1918.html

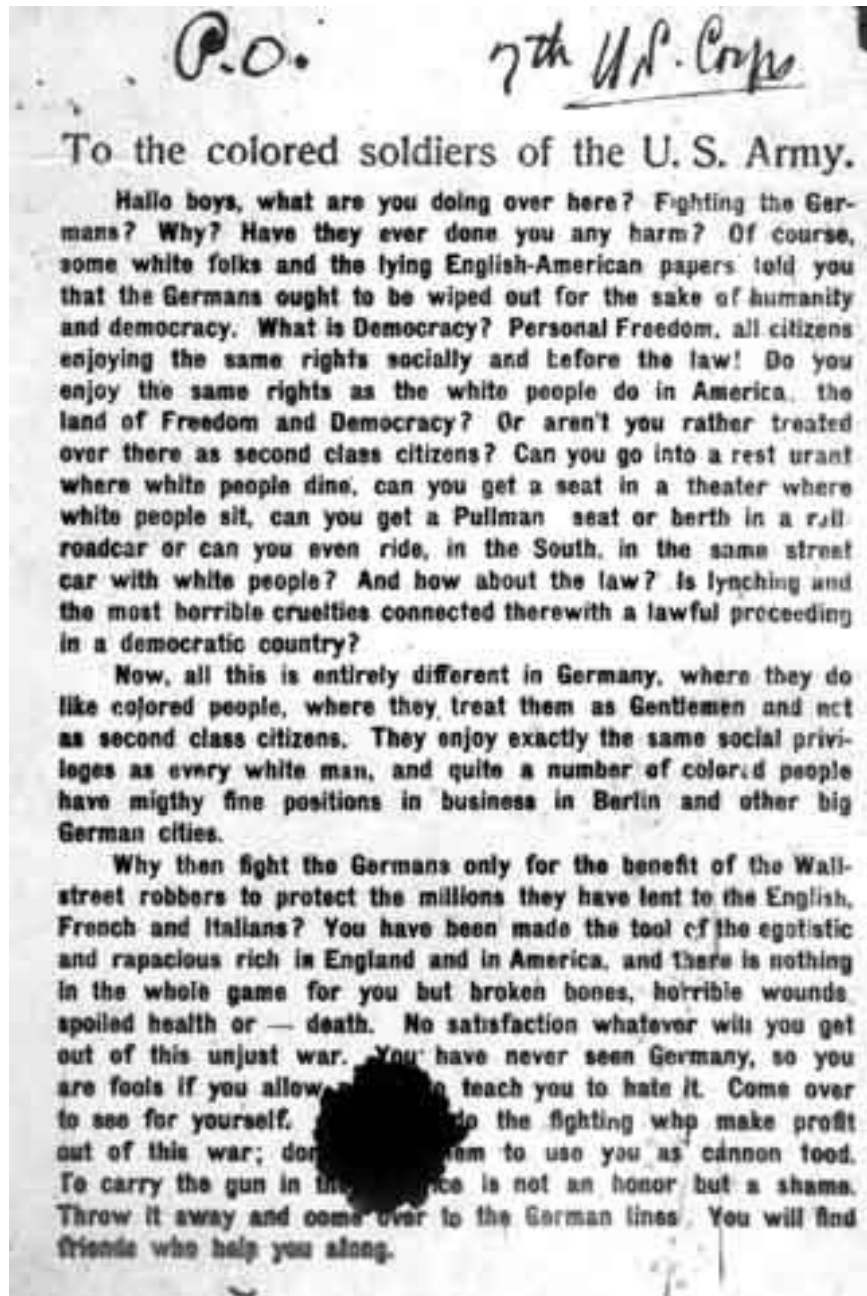
War Bond Poster –
New York: Sackett & Wilhelms Corp., 1917
Color lithographic poster
[Prints & Photographs Division](#) (58A.4)³



³ Taken from <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/at0058a.4s.jpg>

“To the colored soldiers of the U.S. Army.”⁴

This propaganda leaflet was dropped by German airplanes behind American lines during World War I. Nearly 370,000 African Americans were drafted into the U.S. Army starting in the fall of 1917 (they were not allowed to join the Marines, and the Navy took African Americans only as cooks and kitchen help). Although more than half of the black troops were in combat units, they remained segregated from white troops. Subjected to racist harassment (including demeaning insults from white officers), black troops were continually reminded of their second-class citizenship. By stressing racist conditions in the United States, leaflets such as this attempted to destroy morale and encourage desertion among African-American troops.

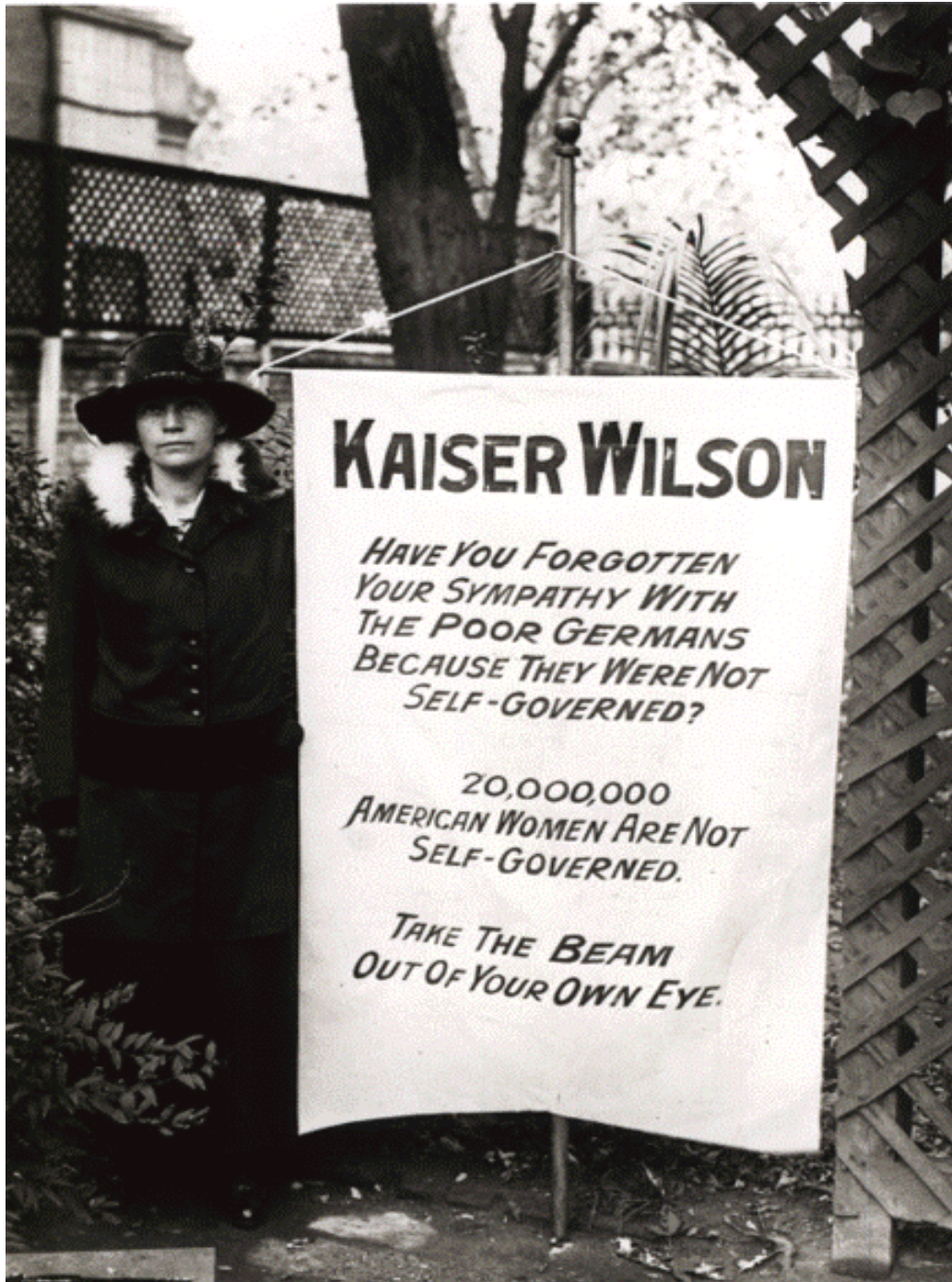


⁴ Taken from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6655/>

Photograph of Suffragist with "Kaiser Wilson" Poster

Record Group 165

Records of the War Department General and Special Staff
National Archives and Records Administration ⁵



⁵ Taken from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage/kaiser-wilson.html>

Look closely at the primary source document you have been given. Then answer the following questions...

1. What do you think is the purpose of this document? Why was it created? Explain.

2. What is the main message of the document? Explain.

3. How do you think citizens of any country other than the U.S. that were involved in World War I would have reacted to the main message of this document during this time period in history? Provide an example and explain. This may have multiple answers.

4. How do you think citizens of the United States would have reacted to this document during this time period in history? Provide an example and explain. This may have multiple answers.

5. What is one question left unanswered by the document? Where might you find an answer to that question?

6. How does this document contribute to your understanding of World War I?

U.S. History 2

World War I Project:

Creating Your Own Primary Source dealing with Freedom during World War I

25 Points

Now that we have studied primary sources related to freedom during World War I, create your own primary source related to this event addressing the issue of freedom during the War. Complete **one** of the following projects.

- Make a propaganda poster encouraging Americans to ration food or other supplies for the war effort or buy war bonds or do other things to support the war effort. You must relate the poster to the idea of preserving American freedoms during the War in some way. You must include a description of about one page that explains the message you are trying to convey and the limited perspective(s) of your document.
- Write a letter from President Wilson to Eugene Debs attempting to justify why he was arrested under the Espionage and Sedition Acts and the need to limit freedoms during times of war like World War I.

OR

Write a letter from Eugene Debs to President Wilson explaining why you feel you were justified in violating a federal law by delivering your speech and your view of freedom during times of War.

Make sure to include strong arguments that defend your stance.

- Write a series of diary entries from the perspective of a German-American about his or her reaction to the treatment of German-Americans during the War...**OR**...Write a series of diary entries from the perspective of an African-American or woman explaining how the war has affected his or her lives. In particular, focus on the way they might have viewed the idea of freedom during the war.
- Create a radio broadcast (on tape) that explains what the average American can do to help the war effort succeed and what the government is doing (e.g War industries Board and Committee on Public Information) to help protect democracy and freedom. You must hand in a script with your tape.

- Draw a political cartoon dealing with any major issue concerning freedom during the War. Include a one page written description of your drawing explaining the main message and limited perspective(s).

You will be graded on the following criteria:

Neatness / Professionalism : Your project should be orderly and neatly assembled. I prefer writing to be typed, but if you must write, make sure it is extremely neat and legible. If you have difficulties drawing, you may want to choose a format that involves more writing. If you choose to make a tape, make sure you are loud enough and that it's done in a professional manner.

Complete And Accurate Information: Your project should include details from the text or other sources about World War I that incorporate the main ideas of the chapter or the other sources you use. All drawings or performances should include a written explanation of about one page. All written projects should be at the very least one and a half pages typed (double-spaced and 12 point font) or two pages (single-spaced) written. As a general rule, more is better than less. If you include another source of information outside of the textbook, please hand in the name of that source with your project.

Creativity/Critical Thinking: Merely copying information directly from the textbook or another source is not acceptable. You should approach the project with your own creative ideas and write things in your own words. Be unique in balancing your presentation of historical information with your own style in dealing with your topic.

Writing Mechanics: All writings should include proper spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar. Points will be deducted if this requirement is not met.